

Module 6: Building Relationships with Parents and Colleagues

Section B: Communication and Professionalism

Introduction

In the section on brain development it was determined that young children need consistent, secure, and positive relationships for optimal development. Creating respectful relationships among adults in the program is also part of your responsibility as a professional. A major element in a positive work environment is effective communication between staff and administration. In this section you will learn how basic communication strategies may assist you in developing positive work relationships. You will also be introduced to the field of early childhood education (child care) as a profession.

Learning Objectives

After you complete this section you will be able to:

- Describe 3 actions you can take to develop and maintain communication with colleagues.
- Name 3 characteristics of early childhood professionals.
- Describe how diverse staff can improve the quality of the program.
- Summarize the value of a cooperative work environment.

Guiding Your Learning

As you work through this section reflect on a colleague relationship that was positive and professional. What were the characteristics of that relationship? How did you feel about that person?

Summary of Key Arizona Child Care Licensing Regulations

Child care licensing regulations do not apply for this topic.

Effective Workplace Communication

Successful child care programs depend on an open and honest sharing of information, ideas, and feelings. Child care is a relationship based business that relies on the communication ability of the staff and administration to develop a positive and effective environment. Communication between parents, staff, and administration in the work environment eliminates barriers, helps keep small problems from escalating, and keeps everyone moving toward the same goals. The following communication skills are effective in early childhood programs:

- Be clear about what you want to accomplish before you begin a conversation.
- Avoid generalities when describing people or things. Words such as good, bad, aggressive can be misinterpreted. It is better to use a specific example to illustrate what you want to say.

- Differences in perceptions can create a barrier to communication. Everyone looks at the world in a different way and has opinions, beliefs, and values. Keeping an open mind to new or different ideas improves communication and understanding of others.
- Check your tone. Often people can misinterpret our message due to our tone of voice.
- Your words and your non-verbal communication should convey the same message. For instance, rolling your eyes when someone is talking to you will send a negative message even if your words relate a different message. The conflicting message can create confusion and cause a breakdown of communication.
- Personal contact is the best way to share information that may be misinterpreted or misunderstood.
- Ask for clarification if you do not understand what the other person is saying. For example you can rephrase: "I want to make certain I understand the points you just stated."
- Avoid over communication. Be clear and concise. Rambling, providing too much detail, or forgetting the point takes away from the topic you were discussing.
- Respect people's time and space. Ask "Is this a good time for us to talk..."
- Be an active listener. Acknowledge what the speaker is saying and restating what the person has said are ways to maintain focus and avoid miscommunication.
- Avoid making incorrect assumptions by actively listening and asking questions that clarify facts or information.
- Different languages can impact communication. Words can be misunderstood or unclear. Asking for clarification is one way to prevent confusion and misunderstandings.

(Adapted from *Effective Communication: The Mortar that Holds the Team Together* by Paula Jorde Bloom)

Talk to your Center Director about communication methods at the center.

Working with Others: Cooperation

Developing cooperative working relationships with colleagues is an essential component of a positive early learning and care work environment. Teachers working together in cooperative relationships have the ability to improve the program quality for children, staff, and parents. Cooperative work relationships require being open to diverse ideas and varying methods or procedures to accomplish a goal. Everyone has routines and practices that have been successful. Teachers with diverse backgrounds and teaching experience provide a wealth of information to improve teaching practices. Being open to improving your classroom and interactions with children requires exchanging ideas and experiences and a willingness to try different methods. Cooperative and collaborative interactions and relationships provide a supportive environment to try new ideas and improve teaching practices.

The following practices facilitate the development of cooperative relationships:

- Recognize the strengths of colleagues and work with them in creating learning experiences for young children.
- Demonstrate respect for colleagues by sharing concerns or problems regarding their professional behavior with them and attempting to resolve the issues in a friendly and confidential manner.
- At meetings, listen to other ideas.
- When disagreeing with others, focus on disagreeing with the idea not the person presenting the idea.
- Encourage other staff members to share differing opinions and ideas.
- Demonstrate respect for fellow staff members by recognizing their special abilities by asking them for suggestions and input on projects.
- Compliment other staff members when they share ideas, assist in a project, or provide support.
- Share information with colleagues and supervisors.
- Remain open to new ideas and learn from other's suggestions.
- Seek out co-workers who excel in areas that you would like to improve and model their techniques.

Talk to your Center Director about the ways that teachers collaborate and work cooperatively at the center.

The Early Care and Education Profession

Early care and education is a profession. There is a distinction between a job and a profession. A profession is defined by the following:

- individuals who work in the field to participate in prolonged and on-going training that is based on a specialized field of knowledge and expertise
- follow agreed upon standards or practices
- follow accepted principals of quality
- demonstrate a commitment to providing a service with significant social value

As a person who works in early care and education you are a professional. What does it mean to be a professional? What is professionalism?

M. Parker Anderson, an educational leadership coach, defines professionalism as “a reflection of a person’s desire to meet the minimum expectation levels of excellence in a job and in meeting their responsibilities.” Individuals that exemplify professional behavior demonstrate the following qualities and characteristics:

- Dresses with appropriate attire that communicates a readiness to work.
- Has a positive and motivated attitude and disposition that is demonstrated by the ability to “get along” with colleagues and supervisors in order to accomplish the work of the organization.
- Is knowledgeable about early childhood education, acknowledges the need for continual learning and is willing to share knowledge with others.
- Takes personal responsibility and accountability for own behavior and actions.
- Strives for excellence in all areas of responsibility.
- Makes allowances for others and practices forgiveness.
- Brings out the talents in others by acknowledging their skills and strengths with compliments and positive comments.
- Maintains integrity between beliefs, values, and actions.
- Is gracious and responsive to others.

We all have thoughts on how people demonstrate professionalism. Think of a person you consider a professional. What are characteristics of professionalism you would like to add to the list?

(Adapted from *Professionalism: The missing ingredient for excellence in the workplace*)

Developing all the aspects of professionalism is not an easy or fast process. To begin the process, self-reflect on how you can improve your professional behaviors. Reflect on the characteristics of professionalism. What are your strengths as a professional? What is one characteristic you would like to improve?

Applying Your Knowledge

How does this information affect your work with young children?

A professional and friendly environment is essential in influencing the program for young children. Early childhood professionals recognize the importance of cooperative and collaborative working relationships in the implementation of an effective program for young children. Awareness of how your attitudes and interactions impact the work environment is an important consideration in being part of an organization and a team.

Check for Understanding

- ✓ List 3 methods to effectively communicate with colleagues.
- ✓ Name 3 characteristics of early childhood professionals.
- ✓ Explain how a diverse staff can improve the program quality.
- ✓ Summarize the value of a cooperative work environment.

References

- Anderson, M. P. (2006, January/February). Professionalism: The missing ingredient for excellence in the workplace *Exchange*,
- Bloom, P. J. (1993, January). Effective communication: The mortar that holds the team together. *Child Care Exchange*, 5-7.

Module 6-Section B Worksheet

List 3 methods to effectively communicate with colleagues.

1.

2.

3.

Name 3 characteristics of early childhood professionals.

1.

2.

3.

Explain how a diverse staff can improve the program quality.

Summarize the value of a cooperative work environment.