the Program for infant toddler care

Infant/Toddler Caregiving

A Guide to Creating Partnerships with Families

Second Edition

Developed collaboratively by the California Department of Education and WestEd
Sacramento, 2010

WestEd

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Notice

The guidance in *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Creating Partnerships with Families (Second Edition)* is not binding on local educational agencies or other entities. Except for the statutes, regulations, and court decisions that are referenced herein, the document is exemplary, and compliance with it is not mandatory. (See *Education Code* Section 33308.5.)

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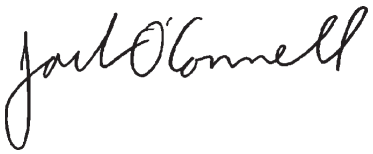
A Message from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction

As families increasingly rely on child care outside the home to meet the demands of work and school, many more infants and toddlers spend significant amounts of time in child care settings. It is more critical than ever for our youngest and most vulnerable children to receive care that is safe, healthy, and that nurtures their optimal growth and development. When families enroll their infants and toddlers in high-quality programs, they enter into partnerships that are responsive to the developmental needs of their children. High-quality programs work closely with family members to provide children with environments, materials, and relationships that enrich learning and development.

During the past 25 years, the California Department of Education and WestEd have collaborated to create the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC), a state-of-the-art training system with a comprehensive library of resource materials. These PITC resources help infant care teachers and providers implement high-quality, relationship-based care in child care centers and in family child care homes. A central, guiding principle emphasized throughout these PITC resources is the importance of family involvement, starting in infancy and continuing through the school years.

This second edition of *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Creating Partnerships with Families* provides both vision and practical guidance on developing partnerships with families. It encourages staff members to share information, build trust, address concerns, and create a positive atmosphere in which parents and family members feel welcome and involved in program activities—and in the process of making important decisions about their children's care. Special attention is given to issues that may cause tension for caregivers and family members, including attachment and separation, family stress, and caregiving preferences.

Our children's future is our future, and the benefits of helping families start their children on a path to success will extend to our communities and our state. I encourage child care programs to use this publication to help create caring partnerships with families and to offer young children the best care and education possible.



JACK O'CONNELL
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Acknowledgments

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This publication was developed by WestEd, under the direction of J. Ronald Lally. Special thanks go to Peter L. Mangione, Carol Young-Holt, and Kathleen Bertolucci for editorial assistance; and to Virginia Benson, Patricia Gardner, Emily Louw, Janet Poole, Mary Smithberger, and Kathryn Swabel of the Child Development Division, California Department of Education (CDE), for their review and recommendations on content. Gratitude is also extended to the members of the national and California review panels for their comments and suggestions. The national panel members were T. Berry Brazelton, Laura Dittmann, Richard Fiene, Magda Gerber, Asa Hilliard, Alice Honig, Jeree Pawl, Sally Provence, Eleanor Szanton, Yolanda Torres, Bernice Weissbourd, and Donna Wittmer. The California panel members were Dorlene Clayton, Dee Cuney, Ronda Garcia, Jacquelyne Jackson, Lee McKay, Janet Nielsen, Pearlene Reese, Maria Ruiz, June Sale, Patty Siegel, and Lenore Thompson.

This second edition offers expanded information on working with infant/toddler families of diverse backgrounds and cultures. Additionally, it incorporates two important concepts that are changing the way programs relate to families as partners: family-centered care and protective urges. Family-centered care views and embraces families as equally competent partners in children's care, learning, and daily experiences. Family-centered care also honors the primary role of the family in the child's life and brings families and their cultures, interests, values, and practices into the child care program to support the child's connection with his or her family. The concept of protective urges rests on the assumption that families and infant care teachers alike experience heightened emotions as they share the responsibility of caring for infants. This publication offers strategies for teachers to ease family members' mixed feelings about using out-of-home infant care and to address their own feelings about infant care teaching.

Sheila Signer revised this guide under the direction of J. Ronald Lally and Peter L. Mangione, Codirectors of the WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies and developers of the PITC, and

in collaboration with the CDE's Child Development Division. Special thanks are extended to the contributing writers and advisers for this project: Janet Gonzalez-Mena, Janis Keyser, Senta Greene, Rebeca Valdivia, Deborah Greenwald, Alicia Tuesta, Janet Poole, and Cathy Tsao, of WestEd; and to Mary Smithberger and other staff members of the CDE's Child Development Division for their review and recommendations on content. Sara Webb-Schmitz and Eva May Gorman, both from WestEd, provided editorial assistance.

Note: Historically, the most important people in children's lives have been referred to as "parents." Recognizing the diversity of families that raise and nurture infants and toddlers in the United States, this guide uses the terms *families*, *family members*, and—less frequently and more specifically—*parents*. In this way we hope to offer teachers a different and more inclusive way of thinking about all the people who are important in a child's life.

**The names, titles, and affiliations of the individuals listed in these acknowledgments were current at the time the publication was developed.*

Introduction

When a very young child enters a child care program, both the infant and the infant's family experience dramatic changes in their lives. The infant is faced—usually for the first time—with the challenge of adapting to a strange environment, different routines, and new relationships. The infant's parents and family members must make an often-difficult adjustment to sharing the care of their child with someone outside the family. When a family enrolls an infant in child care for the first time, family members almost always worry: Will the infant care teacher genuinely care for and about their child as they would? Families seek a person to whom they can entrust their infant; they want to know that their child will be safe and nurtured. They also need someone who will understand and respect their feelings and choices about the infant's care, and who will provide the consistency between child care and home care that every infant needs.

Closeness between an infant and his or her family members is essential for the healthy emotional development of the child and for the family's emotional well-being. Infant care teachers need to actively support existing family bonds—particularly during the first few months of care, when the family and child are adjusting to the new situation. Expressing support for the infant's attachment to family members will help ease parental anxieties about using out-of-home care. Family members who see that a relationship between their child and an infant care teacher complements, rather than competes with, the family's values and functioning will be more likely to discuss child-rearing concerns with the infant care teacher; they will become confident that their child's infant care teacher respects their parental role.

Families of infants entering child care often experience a variety of emotions, such as anxiety and worry. Thoughtful infant care teachers learn to not take it personally when parents or other family members express concerns. Those teachers recognize that the family, as well as the child, needs reassurance. Infant care teachers who intend to support families rather than act as substitute parents provide that reassurance. Program teachers and leaders who promote children's familial bonds can create a sense of community among all program families

and staff members; they can do so by implementing activities that encourage families to interact with each other and that address families' shared needs and interests.

Cordial, personal interaction between infant care teachers and family members is important for developing trust in those relationships. Daily interaction such as friendly conversation during drop-off and pickup times can help family members feel welcome and valued in the child care program. Likewise, kind gestures from infant care teachers—for example, offering coffee, tea, or other refreshments to family members at the end of a day—can encourage family members to ask questions about a child's behavior. Establishing supportive give-and-take relationships with families requires skill and planning, but infant care teachers whose words and actions welcome family members can foster family involvement in the child's care and lay the foundation for effective partnerships.

Section One:
Establishing Partnerships

Partnerships between infant care teachers and families are central to high-quality care for all infants and toddlers, across settings and life circumstances.

A true partnership between infant care teachers and the children's families makes good sense. Each partner has an essential yet distinctly different role to play. Renowned child development expert Ed Zigler points out that in this partnership, the family must be seen as the senior partner because the family's influence in the child's life is much greater and longer-lasting than that of the program.* Working as partners, family members and infant care programs have an invaluable opportunity to support and strengthen each other. Together they can create a rich child care experience that blends harmoniously with the child's life at home. Infants and toddlers thrive when they have the consistency and predictability that result from the partnership between child care programs and families. But partnerships do not just happen automatically. They require a shared concern for the well-being of the child, a desire to develop relationships of trust, and the capacity to collaborate.

Infant/toddler partnerships are not limited to families and program staff. They also include extended family, friends and neighbors, specialists, infant/toddler health professionals, and community partners such as family-support agencies. All partners benefit from the expertise of the others and from an understanding of the critical role each plays in the child's life. This understanding develops through two-way and multiway communication.

*From the California Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines Advisory Panel meeting, May 2003.

Two-Way and Multiway Communication

Two-way communication between families and programs is an essential element in building partnerships with families. It occurs in open interchanges where each person's contribution is sought and respected. Two-way communication provides crucial information to both parties and builds the trust necessary to share the care of the child. The concept of two-way communication may seem simple, but inviting and encouraging families to participate and communicate freely in program activities can be challenging.

Traditionally, many programs have shared information through one-way communication. For example, a program may communicate information to families through various means, such as daily check-in charts, newsletters, handbooks, articles and books, bulletin boards, family conferences, and meetings with families. These one-way forms of communication need to be modified to include families' perspectives, concerns, and contributions. Verbal interaction in which both or all parties express their points of view fosters two-way and multiway communication. Here are a few strategies for expanding one-way communication into two-way communication:

- Create newsletters that include items written by family members.
- Develop a handbook for families that includes family members' input and home languages (if possible).
- Use bulletin boards that include sections for families' ideas, issues, and needs.

Multiway communication is important, too. It sets the stage for creating a sense of community in infant/toddler programs—which helps strengthen programs. Here are a few examples of multiway communication:

- An infant care teacher meets with two or more family members to learn about their cultural child-rearing practices. Each person has a chance to describe his or her approach.
- Teachers bring two or more families together to exchange information or to work together on a project. The teachers spend most of the time listening.
- Multidisciplinary teams include family members when meeting to discuss a child who has special needs. Each participant contributes information that helps clarify the situation.

Initial Contact with the Program

Family–program partnerships begin with two-way or multiway interchanges during a family's first contact with a program. The quality of the first contact can set the tone for a deeper relationship between teachers and family members if or when the family decides to enroll their child in the program. Introductions may begin with a phone call from a prospective family or through an e-mail. In any

case, the family's first concerns likely will be practical ones: whether there is space in the program for their child, the ages and number of children served, how much the program charges, and the hours of service. Families also may ask if the program welcomes children with disabilities or special needs, has the capacity to care for children with severe disabilities, or can communicate using languages other than English. If a family that inquires about a program feels encouraged by the initial contact, they will likely take the next step: a visit to the program.

Partnerships emerge with time and patience, in programs that are committed to serving and nurturing families and children.

The First Meeting

If you are a program staff member or infant care teacher, your first meeting with a child's family is an important opportunity to lay the groundwork for a relationship of trust. Set aside a time and place where you and the family member(s) can sit comfortably and talk with few interruptions. Then you can move into the child care environment to show your program in action. If you are a family child care provider and have no one else to care for the children while you talk with families, you might ask families to visit toward the end of the day so they can observe you while the children are present. Then you could sit down to talk after the children have left for the day. During these visits, you and the family members will be exploring whether the program matches the family's needs and preferences closely enough to pursue the possibility of enrollment.

The first visit is a good time to offer information about the program and to learn about a family's expectations and desires. A discussion of the program's philosophy, policies, and practices should highlight your family-centered approach to infant/toddler care. As you talk, be sure to encourage two-way conversation, and give the family members time to ask questions, offer opinions, and share information. During the meeting time, you may want to communicate the following:

- Your interest in learning about the child through the family's eyes
- The program's commitment to inclusion of all children and their families
- Information about the program's day-to-day operations

You may also want to reassure the family about using infant/toddler care. Here are some points you might make:

- In family-centered care, family members are fully involved in the child's care through a process of collaboration and partnership.
- The role of child care is complementary to the family's care. Your role is to support the family in caring, nurturing, and educating their child—not to be a substitute for the family.
- In contrast to the idea of "giving up" their child, families who use child care are often strengthened in their parenting. Their network of support and influence expands as they become members of the child care community.
- Enrollment in child care broadens a child's social and educational experiences.

Reinforce initial conversations by providing family members with clearly written materials that present the program's policies and practices and that emphasize the importance of the family's role in their child's care. Make sure the written materials clearly state that your program welcomes diversity of cultures and individual abilities. The materials should also explain the program's philosophy on guidance and socialization. Emphasize that your program and practices are a work in progress, committed to ongoing dialogue and to growth of relationships with families. Remember to stress the program's commitment to collaborating fully with families.

Words can be tricky. No matter how carefully you prepare your written materials, families may misunderstand your communication. During the initial conversations with families, be sure to discuss each important topic and point out the most significant information in the written materials. Listen carefully to family members' responses to see if they have understood your points. This will help prevent future misunderstandings.

The Grand Tour

A good way to show a program's dedication to the well-being of children is to walk with the family through the child care environment. Families may not know what to look for, so be sure to highlight the features of the environment that encourage children's exploration and interaction. Point out the furniture, equipment, and toys you provide that support children of different abilities, developmental stages, and interests.

The "grand tour" of the child care environment provides a valuable opportunity to address common concerns of families that have infants and toddlers—particularly health and safety issues. Note that the environment is arranged to ensure safety and hygiene. For example, in a center-based program, point out an infant care teacher who is using proper sanitation procedures while changing a diaper. If you are a family child care provider, you can demonstrate this yourself. Families

A child enrolled is a family enrolled.

will be reassured when they see a clean environment that promotes health and safety. You can also show families that the program is prepared to administer first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Drawing attention to these and other features (such as safety gates and allergy charts) will help relieve some of the concerns family members may have about leaving their children in your care.

If you have outdoor space, be sure to show it to family members. Emphasize that fresh air, natural light, and contact with nature are essential to children's growth and development. Show how the outdoor space is arranged to maintain safety and encourage exploration, and describe how outdoor playtime is offered and supervised. If you have limited or no outdoor space, explain how you maximize the use of available space and that you provide outdoor playtime for the children at a local park or playground.

The Entry Process

After the family members have visited and observed your program, read your materials, and clarified any remaining questions, they will decide whether your program is a good match for them and their child. If they choose to enroll the child, the next step is the entry process—the child's introduction and transition to the program. You will need a plan to help the child and family with this process.

Families' Expectations and Requirements

In a meeting with the family members, ask about their requirements and expectations for the child's care. Describe

to them your program's philosophy of easing the child into care and ask how they would like to proceed. Some families need child care more urgently than others do; nevertheless, explain that a gradual entry process can help the child and family adjust to the program more easily. Avoid an unyielding approach or tone when you explain that philosophy. If you sense that the family is anxious to start care as soon as possible, offer a plan for the child's entry that accommodates the family's time constraints but still aims for a gradual entry. A suggested timeline is offered in Section Three.

Developing a plan for supporting the child's adjustment to the new setting presents families and programs with an important opportunity to collaborate. Family members and infant care teachers will benefit from exchanging information. For example, many teachers understand the different temperaments of infants. They know that some children adapt more easily than others and that a cautious child will resist if pushed to join in with the group. The family can tell the teacher how their child reacts to new situations. When family members add knowledge of their child to the teacher's general knowl-

edge of children, transitions to child care can be easier.*

Addressing Special Concerns

Families often have special requests and concerns. Understanding those concerns and accommodating families, particularly during early stages of the family's enrollment in the program, are important steps toward the development of a relationship of trust. For example, a child may have special dietary needs or may have allergies to certain foods. Families may request special arrangements for diapers (cloth instead of disposable), late arrival or early pickup, medical appointments, family vacations, or adaptations to the environment for a child with a disability. Ideally, you and the family will be able to address these issues before the child enters the program. However, family situations may change after a child is in the program for a while—for example, when an infant or toddler is determined to have a disability that had not been identified at the time of enrollment. Under such circumstances, agreements between a family and a program will have to be altered as situations, schedules, and support systems evolve. Starting with clear agreements can help limit many potential sources of tension between families and the program.

*You can learn more about this topic from the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) DVD *Flexible, Fearful, or Feisty: The Different Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers.* Further information about the DVD is listed at the end of this section.

Business and Program Arrangements

Business matters must be discussed and agreed upon before a child enters a program. If clearly defined agreements are not established, problems are likely to arise in the following areas:

- Fee arrangements
- Arrival and pickup times
- Health policies and emergency planning

Fee Arrangements

It can be challenging to discuss business matters with families. Explain information about fees in a clear, friendly manner and provide families with written policies. If the program has a policy that late payments may be cause for terminating a child's enrollment, the policy should be stated clearly at the time of enrollment. See Appendix B for a sample family–infant care program agreement.

Arrival and Pickup Times

In an era of working families, long commutes, and lengthy bus rides, issues related to drop-off and pickup times can create tension. One common source of tension is lateness—by family and program staff members. Working parents who have to wait for a tardy early-shift teacher to unlock the child care center, or for a family child care provider who is not home, can become frustrated. Similarly, infant care teachers often feel frustrated when a family member arrives 20 or 30

Parents need to know that you can help them with specific concerns about their child.

minutes after closing time or expects to receive care prior to the program's normal opening time.

Families and teachers sometimes have different ideas about appropriate drop-off and pickup times for children. Teachers may prefer that children arrive at about the same time each day, while family members may want a more flexible schedule. A family member whose schedule changes frequently may be unable to come at regular times, or a mother may want to spend as much time as possible with her baby.

In general, a program should try to accommodate the family's preferred drop-off and pickup times whenever possible, as long as those times fall within regular program hours. Although infant care teachers may feel that it is better for a child to have a consistent schedule, a commitment to family-centered care means putting the family's priorities first.

Health Policies and Emergency Planning

Families and program staff members need to be clear about how they will work together to support each child's health. You can help family members feel less anxious by letting them know what to expect from your program and the ways in which you can offer support. Encourage each family to express their concerns and, as needed, offer information as follows:

- Explain the program's health policy and its capacity to adapt to different families' issues.
- Express your commitment to work closely with health professionals and specialists.
- Without violating confidentiality, discuss ways in which other families and children have coped with various illnesses or conditions.
- Share information about support networks, community resources, and other help available to families.

In this critical area of partnership, infant care teachers and families have to rely on each other to ensure the health and safety of each child. Both partners should plan for emergencies, and the plans must be coordinated. Procedures must be developed to manage situations such as these: A family child care provider gets sick; a child gets hurt or becomes ill during the day; a child with a chronic health condition has a crisis; a family member's car breaks down; or a major event such as an earthquake or flood occurs and requires the evacuation of the children. The family should have a plan that includes a minimum of two individuals who can step in at a moment's notice to assume the parental role. For families who are new to the area or isolated from friends and rela-

tives, the program can offer extra support such as a plan for handling unexpected developments.

Time Considerations for Family Participation

It is also important to discuss the amount of time a family can expect to spend participating in their child's program. There are many ways in which families can become integral parts of the program. Here are the most important opportunities and responsibilities for families to think about during the enrollment process:

- Daily information exchanges
- In-depth discussions about their child
- Participation in program activities

Daily Information Exchanges

Infants and toddlers develop so rapidly that there are new things to report almost every day. Explain to family members that daily, face-to-face exchanges of information are important to a successful experience in child care—for the child, the family, and the infant care teachers. Explain that drop-off and pickup times are particularly valuable because they offer personal, immediate ways of exchanging information and because they can lead to spontaneous conversations. For example, at drop-off time, a family member could let the teacher know that the infant had a bad night and needs an extra nap. Another child may need medicine, and a family emergency or other event may have impacted a different infant. At the end of the day, the infant care teacher can tell the family members about each child's day in care.

If the family members are unavailable for direct communication at drop-off and pickup times, the information exchanges can take place in other ways—for example, through a family–program journal, which is a "book in progress" that has alternating pages for the family member and the child's teacher. The journal is usually kept in the sign-in area. Sometimes the journal is taken home by the family and returned to the program in the morning with observations or notes. Family members and teachers can also communicate through regular phone calls or e-mails.

Ask family members about their preferred ways of communicating with you. Some teachers check in with family members by e-mail or cell phone (or even cell-phone photographs) to keep the family connected with the child's experiences throughout the day.

Whatever form they take, daily information exchanges should include subjects such as these:

- Family observations of the child in the home setting, and any changes in the child's care at home
- Teacher observations of the child's discoveries, interests, and exploration in the child care setting.
- The child's achievements (such as progress toward toilet learning)
- The child's mood and social interactions

Families cherish comments or notes from the primary infant care teacher about their child, especially ones that describe special moments—for example, when the child learns a new word or does something humorous. It is important for teachers to share the enjoyment they experience when caring for each child, and their appreciation for the child's emerging skills. Whenever possible, point out to family members the important role they play in their children's learning. Although family members may sometimes be in a hurry, they usually appreciate daily communication; they recognize it as a sign of a coordinated effort to support the child's growth.

Families enjoy hearing about their children.

In-Depth Discussions

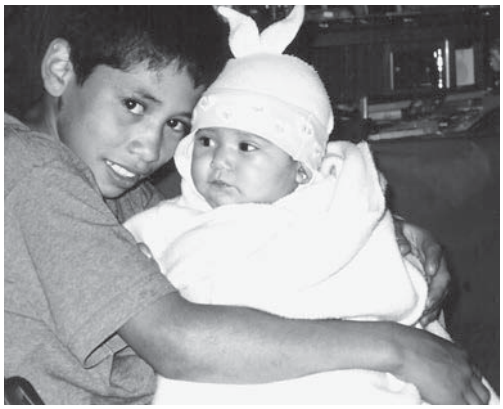
Although drop-off and pickup times are important opportunities for communication, it usually works best to agree on one or the other of these times for more extensive discussions. The end of the day is better for some families because at that time they are not rushing to get to work. However, at the end of the day the child may be tired, anxious to go home, or unwilling to wait for parental attention. If the child cannot wait comfortably while you talk with the family member, or if you need to discuss the child's behavior, try to schedule another time for an open-ended conversation. Topics may include the cause of a child's recent behavior, a new policy in the program, the support a parent needs to take on a leadership role, or help with filling out required forms. If the child is able to wait comfortably, absorbed in his or her own play, you may be able to talk with the family member while you pick up toys together or do other small tasks. These times help reinforce the child's awareness of your close relationship with the family and can strengthen the family's trust of the child care setting.

Family Participation in Program Activities

Based on funding requirements and/or the program's philosophy, some child care programs—particularly parent cooperatives and Head Start programs—ask family members to observe, help out in some way, or work with children in the child care setting. Before a child is enrolled in a program it is important to talk with families about how much time is involved. Throughout your discussions, seek as close an alignment as possible between the requirements of your program and what the family is willing and able to do. In a true family–program partnership, staff members understand that they best nurture a child when they make efforts to accommodate the family's circumstances and preferences.

Setting the Stage for Developing Trust in Relationships

Getting to know family members and earning their trust are essential parts of the enrollment process. In a program that has only one teacher, such as a small family child care program, the family member, child, and provider begin to develop a relationship from the start. In center-based programs, there is often a two-step process wherein the program leader or enrollment manager introduces the family to the program, gives and gathers information in the early stages of enrollment, and then introduces the family to the infant care teacher who will have primary responsibility for the child's



care. In this situation, the program leader provides support as the teacher begins to assume the role of primary contact for the child and family. These new relationships are easier to develop if the family and the assigned teacher speak the same home language.

Getting to Know Each Other

In family-centered care, when the family and child arrive for preenrollment visits—or, if necessary, on the first day of care—they will know that the primary infant care teacher will be their special advocate. The teacher will have enough information about the family's lifestyle, schedules, preferences, and concerns to begin to build a relationship. Many two-way conversations can be sparked by the information that was exchanged during the enrollment process: service plans, family-history forms, and the program's written materials. Yet, as well-prepared as the family and program staff may be, getting to know each other and developing comfortable, trustful relationships will take time.

If you do not speak the family's home language, learn some terms and phrases to help the family feel more at ease. During the initial stages of the child's enrollment, you may need a cultural mediator (for example, an adult who speaks the same language and is of the same culture as the family) to be available at drop-off and pickup times. Here are some other ways to build your relationships with families:

- Show respect for the family's cultural values, child-rearing practices, and preferences.
- Make the child care environment "family-friendly" and reflective of families' interests, lifestyles, cultures, and languages. Ask families for input and contributions.
- Recognize the importance of the child's relationships with each family member.
- Find common interests and build on them to encourage friendly conversations. For example, learning that both you and the family member enjoy camping could help build a cordial relationship.

Deepening the Relationships

Allow time for relationships to grow. Do not expect immediate trust or friendliness. Here are a few ways to build trust with family members:

- Listen carefully to family members and strive to understand the thoughts, beliefs, and emotions they express.
- Demonstrate to families your competence, your understanding of their feelings, and an attitude of openness and honesty.*
- Be fair and consistent in carrying out policies.
- Honor your commitments and follow up with family members when you promise to do something for them. If you are unable to comply with a family's wishes, explain the reasons.

*To learn more about this topic, see the PITC DVD *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers, Part I.* Further information about the DVD is listed at the end of this section.

- Point out family strengths and express appreciation for their parenting skills.
- Acknowledge and celebrate the learning that occurs while the child is at home.

Communicating About Sensitive Issues

With extra care and thought, you can approach sensitive issues in a way that will help develop trust between you and families. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind:

- Say "yes" whenever possible. Be accommodating and supportive; for example, offer flexible hours and services and incorporate each family's child-rearing practices.
- Avoid discussions about sensitive issues until the child and family have become comfortable in the program, unless the issue is urgent.
- Acknowledge to yourself and to the family that it can be stressful to leave one's infant or toddler in the care of another person.

Questions to Consider

1. When a family member first asks you for information about your program, in what ways can you communicate the philosophy of family-centered care and of establishing true partnerships? In what ways can you communicate the program's policies and practices so the family can make an informed decision about enrolling their child in your program?
2. When communicating information about your program, how can you promote and improve two-way communication with families? Do you have updated written materials such as a family handbook or a brochure to distribute? Do your written materials express the tone you wish to convey about your program, including the importance of family–program partnerships, two-way communication, and shared decision making?
3. Do you make daily efforts to talk with family members about their child? What are the most important things to communicate to families? What are some things to ask families that might contribute to your care of each child? Are you sensitive to the families' schedules, and do you reserve longer conversations for times when family members are not in a hurry?
4. In what ways can you reinforce parents' or other family members' understanding that they are the most important adults in their child's life? How do you recognize signs of concern in families about this issue? How do you express appreciation to family members for their child-rearing and family-building skills? In what ways can you acknowledge learning that is taking place at home? What are some ways in which you can support family bonds?
5. Do you include parents and family members in decisions about the program's care for their child? To what extent do you accommodate families' preferences, even when those preferences may not coincide with your usual approach to child care?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Boyce, Carol Gratsch. "Trading Control for Partnership: Guidelines for Developing Parent Ownership in Your Program." *Child Care Information Exchange* 144 (March/April 2002): 75–78.

Explains the importance of promoting parent ownership in a cooperative early childhood program. Touches on decision making, classroom involvement, friendly interactions, goal setting, and staff attitudes.

Brazelton, T. Berry. *Working and Caring*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman, 2000.

Provides helpful information for working parents and caregivers on the stresses that working parents experience.

Brazelton, T. Berry, and Stanley I. Greenspan. *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn, and Flourish.* Boulder, CO: Perseus Book Group, 2000.

Explores seven needs of infants and young children, emphasizing that when those needs are met by families and professional caregivers, children have the fundamental building blocks for higher-level emotional, social, and intellectual abilities.

Carter, Margie. "Communicating with Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 110 (July/August 1996): 80–83.

Offers five strategies for enhancing communication, including keeping parents well-informed, helping parents to introduce themselves in the classroom, and creating dialogue in newsletters and bulletins.

Copeland, Margaret Leitch, and Barbara S. McCreedy. "Creating Family-Friendly Policies: Are Child Care Center Policies in Line with Current Family Realities?" *Child Care Information Exchange* 113 (January/February 1997): 7–10.

Addresses current issues such as corporate downsizing, flextime, blended families, and effects on emerging child care needs. Suggests that child care programs update policies by examining staff attitudes, by evaluating enrollment policies, and by offering more flexibility and support to parents.

Cunningham, Bruce. "The Good Business of Being Father-Friendly: Does Your Center Welcome Male Customers?" *Child Care Information Exchange* 135 (September/October 2000): 70–71.

Offers suggestions for making child care programs welcoming to fathers and other men involved in the care of young children. Describes six areas of father-friendly service.

Dodge, Diane Trister. "Sharing Your Program with Families." *Child Care Information Exchange* 101 (1995): 7–11.

Offers guidelines for child care providers on working with parents to achieve mutual goals. Focuses on using the program environment to express the philosophy and goals of the curriculum and stresses the importance of establishing ongoing communication with families.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Dianne W. Eyer. *Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers: A Curriculum of Respectful, Responsive Care and Education,* 8th ed. McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.

Combining a child-centered philosophy with problem-solving strategies and a thorough discussion of diversity, this book offers an introduction to curriculum and care for infants and toddlers. Based on a combination of the late Magda Gerber's philosophy and that of her colleague, Emmi Pikler.

Greenman, James. "Beyond Family Friendly: The Family Center." *Child Care Information Exchange* 114 (March/April 1997): 66–69.

Advocates the creation of family-care centers that focus on (a) the family's economic and psychological security and the relationships that promote well-being; and (b) the child's security, health, and development.

Miller, Karen. "Caring for the Little Ones—Developing a Collaborative Relationship with Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 135 (September/October 2000): 86–88.

Discusses the benefits of having collaborative relationships with parents and provides suggestions for developing rapport and offering support.

Parlakian, Rebecca. *The Power of Questions: Building Quality Relationships with Infants and Families.* Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2001.

Focuses on direct service work with parents and children and explores how leaders and staff members can use reflective approaches to establish quality relationships with families. Strategies for boundary setting and for managing one's relationships with families address the complex decisions that staff face every day.

Petersen, Sandra, and Donna Wittmer. *Infant and Toddler Development and Responsive Program Planning: A Relationship-Based Approach*. Indianapolis, IN: Prentice Hall, 2006.

A comprehensive introduction to infant and toddler development, responsive program planning, and responsive, relationship-based curriculum. It incorporates all of the themes crucial to providing quality education and care to our youngest members of society.

Phillips, Deborah, and Jack Shonkoff, eds. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000.

Extensive review of scientific research and child policy centered on child development from birth to age five. Contains ten core concepts, including one that states, "Human development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience."

Uttall, Lynet. *Making Care Work: Employed Mothers in the New Childcare Market.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Reveals that mothers are often reluctant to meet directly with their child care providers to discuss concerns.

Shows how mothers walk a fine line between wanting to believe in the quality of care they have chosen, and the possibility that they made a mistake with their decision. Catalyzed by their concerns about quality of care, mothers develop complex relationships with the providers (most of whom are women) who look after their children.

Audiovisuals

Flexible, Fearful, or Feisty: The Different Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org.

Explores various temperamental styles of infants and toddlers. Groups nine identified traits into three temperamental styles (flexible, fearful, or feisty) and describes techniques for dealing with infants and toddlers of different temperaments. Available in English and Spanish.

Partnerships with Parents. DVD. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. http://www.naeyc.org.

Produced by South Carolina Educational Television, this DVD dramatizes the importance of the parent–teacher relationship for children. It also addresses how to establish and maintain positive communication and handle common problems teachers face when working with parents.

Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org.

Parents speak candidly about their concerns and discuss the high emotionality and conflicting feelings they experience when bringing very young children to child care. Offers caregivers ways to ease parents' concerns by expressing competence, honesty, and understanding. Caregivers are also encouraged to address their own feelings of discomfort by using a four-step process of awareness, exploration, gathering information, and taking steps to deal with issues. Available in English and Spanish.

References

Petersen, Sandra, and Donna Wittmer. *Infant and Toddler Development and Responsive Program Planning: A Relationship-Based Approach.* Indianapolis, IN: Prentice Hall, 2006.

Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). *Flexible, Fearful, or Feisty: The Different Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers.* DVD. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, 1990.

———. *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers.* DVD. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, 1996.

Section Two:
Sharing Information with Families

What can infants learn?
How do I know my child will be safe?
What do you do when one child hits another?
Why aren't you teaching my toddler his letters and numbers?
How soon will she be toilet-trained?

Families have a strong desire to know how you will care for their children and to have a say in the way you provide care. Communicating the philosophy, goals, and practices of an infant/toddler program is an important part of the program. This is done through two-way communication (face-to-face and written) as well as through the program's welcoming atmosphere.

A Positive Program Atmosphere

The overall atmosphere of an infant/toddler program communicates important information. Thoughtful family child care providers, program leaders, and teachers recognize the impact of a program's emotional climate; they work to maintain an open, friendly atmosphere by addressing staffing issues and misunderstandings in a timely, compassionate, and fair manner.

Program leaders help create a positive atmosphere when they show a commitment to the well-being of family members, staff members, and the children. Program leaders demonstrate this commitment when they express interest in each person and provide opportunities for all the adults to learn and grow. Everyone involved in a child care program is essential, including family members, teachers, aides, accountants, secretaries, cooks, janitors, and bus drivers. Showing consideration and respect for each member of the "child care family" communicates a caring attitude that spreads throughout the program.

One way of communicating with families about the program is to let the child care setting speak for itself. When parents or family members walk into a child care center or family child care setting, they immediately form impressions by answering questions such as these:

- Is the program accessible to people with disabilities?
- Does the environment seem clean, orderly, and well cared for?
- Is the temperature comfortable?
- Is the lighting good?

- Are the smells and sounds pleasant?
- Does the environment reflect the cultures of the families and staff members?
- Is the program arranged so that infants and toddlers can enjoy both active and quiet play?
- Does the setting offer comfortable seating for adults and children?
- Do the adults and children in the environment seem to be relaxed and enjoying themselves?

Communicating the Program's Philosophy and Practices

There are many more things that families need to know about the program and about their children's care. Infant care teachers sometimes handle the challenges of teaching and caring for children more easily than they can explain their caregiving practices and philosophy. Often, this is because they have not had the opportunity to reflect on their philosophy of care or to find the words they need to describe it. Whether they work in large, center-based programs or in small family child care homes, teachers need to be prepared to communicate about the significant issues

First impressions are important.

of infant/toddler care and education. Every program needs written documentation of its philosophy, policies, and practices. When program staff and family members meet to discuss the program's focus and practices, the conversations are rewarding—but to successfully form a consensus about the program's philosophy, you will need ample time to engage in dialogue about your beliefs and practices.

Compiling a Consensus of Information

Even if you already have written information about your program, you can build on it by reviewing, rethinking, and adding to the existing material as needed. If you do not yet have written materials, it can be difficult to know where to begin. Here is a strategy that has worked for many programs:

1. Think about the goals, values, and expectations expressed by families in your program and by you and your coworkers. Write down ideas that come to mind. This will help you gather your thoughts.
2. Organize your thoughts and compare them with your coworkers' ideas. Compile the information you wrote down in step 1 into a four-column chart. In the far-left column, write down topics such as daily routines, culture and language, guidance and discipline, toilet learning, and health policies.
3. In the second column, write what you know about the beliefs, values, concerns, and preferences of program families for each category listed in the first column.

4. In the next column to the right, write down your coworkers' values and ideas of for each category.
5. In the far-right column, write down your own preferences and values for each category.

After you complete your chart, share your ideas with other program staff members or family child care providers, and with family members. Make sure your representation of their views is accurate. Then, work together to come to an agreement about goals, policies, and practices for the program. By including family and staff members in these discussions and in decision making, you can enrich the process and help prevent future dissension. For additional help with this process, you may want to use a good research-based reference such as the California Department of Education's *Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines.* Visit the Department's Web site at http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/rc/ for more information.

When you have a common understanding of your program's approach to infant/toddler care, decide which written materials you want to create first, and choose the information to be included.

Brochures

Brochures are effective tools for introducing people to programs. A brochure or flyer that briefly states the purpose and special qualities of your program gives people something to hold on to, file for later use, or share with a friend who is seeking the services offered. Brochures can:

- Provide information to people who inquire about your program.
- Increase public awareness of your program (for example, through postings on bulletin boards or distribution to community organizations).
- Supplement other materials submitted with applications for grants or other funding.
- Serve as a foundation for other written materials.

You can create a brochure inexpensively with a computer and a photocopy machine. Fold an 8½ by 11 inch sheet of paper into three sections to give the brochure a more professional look. To make the brochure eye-catching, use photographs of children, children's artwork or drawings, and other visuals. Although it is more expensive to use color print and graphics, doing so will greatly increase the brochure's appeal. Keep the text short and easy to read. Include basic facts and information such as the following:

- A brief statement of the program's philosophy and goals
- Ages and number of children served
- Program fees
- Eligibility requirements, if applicable
- Hours and days of operation
- Licensing information
- A brief statement of teacher or provider qualifications
- Contact information (physical address, telephone number, e-mail address, Web site, and so on)

Before you print copies of the brochure, have someone review it and provide feedback. Ask the person if the brochure is well organized, visually appealing, and if its overall feel and messages are attractive. Keep in mind that a well-designed brochure can be welcoming and informative, but it will not tell families everything they need to know about a program. For families who are seriously considering a program and for those in the process of enrolling, a handbook with more detailed information is essential.

A Handbook for Families

Developing a handbook for families is a valuable way to document your program's policies and practices. The handbook should begin by affirming that a child's family members are the most important people in his or her life. It should also state your philosophy of care. Let families know that staff members welcome questions, discussions, and opportunities to get acquainted. The handbook should state the program's general goals, such as supporting child–family bonds; providing high-quality, culturally appropriate care; welcoming all children and families, including those with disabilities or other special needs; and developing mutually supportive relationships in the community. You also might use the handbook to communicate the program's understanding of how infants and toddlers learn. A handbook for families is a very effective tool that can:

- Explain the value of a child care environment and describe practices that adapt to each child's culture, abilities, age, development, temperament, family style, and so forth.

- Discuss how daily routines offer opportunities for many types of learning and relationships, and that they are an important part of an infant/toddler curriculum.
- Describe how your program will provide children with guidance and socialization, and support for toilet learning. It can also explain how the program will promote other skills.
- Emphasize the importance of intimacy and close relationships in the daily care of infants and toddlers, and describe how these are fostered in the program.
- Let families know that their values, preferences, and concerns are essential to the program and that the program is committed to providing care that is consistent with the child's family, culture, and language.

Although families who are new to a program may not think they need written statements of the program's philosophy, policies, and practices, few will be able to remember all of the information they hear during an initial enrollment interview. Emphasize that the handbook can be a helpful reference for answering future questions about the program, and that it may help prevent common misunderstandings that arise between programs and families.

A handbook for families may be as elaborate or as simple as you choose. In a family child care or other small program, the handbook can be fairly short because the staff is usually small and the program organization is not complicated. A handbook may not be required for every program; a one- or two-page statement of the program's philosophy, policies, and practices may be sufficient.

Regardless of the handbook's format, it should cover the following topics in addition to the program's philosophy:

- Admission and enrollment procedures
- Information about program staff members
- Health and emergency procedures
- Fee policies
- Family participation
- Program organization

Admission and Enrollment Procedures

Explain that the program collaborates with families to ease the child's adaptation to the program. If the program's entry process involves specific requirements for a family, the handbook should state those expectations clearly. Family responsibilities at the time of admission into a program typically include:

- Preenrollment visits and interviews.
- Compliance with health requirements such as providing immunization records and ensuring their child has a preadmission health screening.
- Completion of child and family information forms.
- Review of the handbook and the program's fee policies.
- Participation in the initial child–family separation process.

Information About Program Staff Members

The handbook should describe the qualifications of program leaders and teachers in a general way and should state the criteria used by the program when hiring new staff members. Families will also appreciate information about individual infant care teachers' attributes, experience, education, and special contributions; however, personal profiles that introduce and honor staff members may be better suited to a program newsletter than to a handbook that is updated only every year or two. In any case, the handbook can help a program highlight its best qualities, such as its inclusive, personalized care and continuity; its assignment of a primary infant care teacher to each child and family; its use of small groups; and its policy of supporting the home culture and language through representative staffing (whenever possible). Attributes such as these define a high-quality program.

It is important to provide families with a written statement of your philosophy of care and to give specific information about your program.

Health and Emergency Procedures

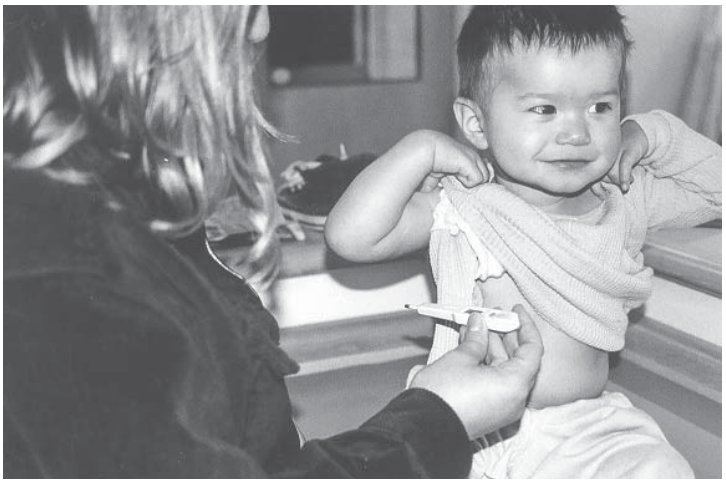
Inform families of the steps they and the program should take to prepare for emergencies such as earthquakes, fires, floods, and so forth. Sample listings of program and family responsibilities are shown below.

Program Responsibilities

1. Maintain emergency supplies of food, water, and flashlights.
2. Practice evacuation procedures on a regular basis.
3. Make arrangements for extended care of the children until each child can be picked up by a family member.

Family Responsibilities

1. Keep contact information current so the family can be reached immediately in an emergency.
2. Maintain current information about other adults who can take responsibility for the children if family members cannot be reached.



The handbook should also state the program's policy for excluding children from the program when they are or have been sick, the steps that are taken if a child is injured or becomes ill during the day, procedures for occasions when the provider or teacher is absent or otherwise unable to provide care, and procedures for instances when families are unable to pick up their children on time.

Fee Policies

One section of the handbook should outline the program's fee policies and related issues. The handbook should cover the following topics:

- Child care fees, including fees for late pickup of children
- Monthly due dates for fees
- Policies for late payments
- Program hours and days of service
- The program's holiday and vacation schedule
- Availability of scholarships or fees on a sliding scale, if applicable

Family Participation

Daily information exchanges between family and staff members are the most significant way for families to participate in the program, but there are other ways for families to become involved as well—for example, by helping with the maintenance of the program environment or by working in the program with children. The handbook can discuss these types of participation. It can also encourage families to get to know each other. For instance, it could include information about family-to-family activities such as a "buddy system" in which new families are paired with families who have been enrolled in the program for some time. Additionally, the handbook is a good place for the program to express its commitment to welcoming all family members, including significant caregivers who are male.

Program Organization

The handbook for families should present information about the history of the program, how the program is funded, and the program's approach to decision mak-

ing. Include opportunities for families to create or influence program policies, (e.g., by participating on a board of directors or family council). Be sure the handbook includes any policies or procedures required by funding or licensing agencies.

Other Possible Topics

There are many other subjects that could be included in a handbook for families. Some topics, such as schedules for classes, are worthy of inclusion but become outdated rather quickly. Other information may require an unwieldy level of detail that would make the handbook overly challenging to create or to read. The amount of information that families will appreciate, read, and use will vary from program to program. Talk with program families to identify other subjects to include in the handbook. You might also give a questionnaire to families to ask them for additional suggestions. Here are a few common topics:

- Items to bring to the program (for example, diapers, extra clothes, family photographs)
- Parking issues
- Nutrition information
- Emergency plan
- Toilet-learning policy
- Birthday-party policy
- Guidance and discipline
- Biting policy
- Additional resources for families
- Staff members to consult for specific needs

There are other ways to communicate about these topics as well. Programs may include them in the family–program agreement or on a one-page information sheet. Additionally, programs can distribute copies of relevant articles to family members. Providing the handbook for families in a loose-leaf binder—and using three-hole-punched paper for updates and additional information—is a convenient way to help families keep information together, but that option may be more expensive than other formats.

Listening is as valuable as talking.

In the past, infant care teachers often thought of "sharing" information with families as a one-sided activity; that is, families needed to receive information but not share anything with teachers. However, sharing refers to something that all parties give and receive. Since family members are often unsure about what they have to contribute or how to do so, it is worthwhile to present a variety of effective, nonthreatening ways to exchange knowledge and information with families.

Conferences and Meetings

Conferences and meetings can provide meaningful opportunities to learn about the values and preferences of individual family members and to gather ideas for including those preferences in the child's care. In a conference or meeting there are few interruptions, and the family and staff member can focus on conversation. The tone of the conference or meeting will vary depending on whether it is a regularly scheduled conference or a special meeting addressing a particular issue raised by the family or staff member. Regardless, it should begin with a welcome that reinforces the program's philosophy of family-centered care. You should also express appreciation to the family member(s) for coming to the meeting. Whenever possible, add a brief, positive statement about the child—such as "We enjoy watching him toddle" or "He loves to paint with a brush and a bucket of

water." This guide includes many examples and strategies for using family conferences and meetings to address issues in a sensitive manner.

Effective Ways to Share Information

Family Journals

The family–program journal described in Section One is one way for families and teachers to keep a comprehensive record of insights and observations about children, at home and in the program setting. You may also suggest that family members gather and document additional information about their own or other children by taking photographs or by keeping a journal of what they observe; information can then be shared with teachers. Another idea is for family members to take notes over time about their child's progress in a specific area of development. These family photographs, journals, and other forms of documentation contribute valuable information for family–teacher conferences. Family journals and family–program journals also make precious mementos of a child's early years; family members will be more apt to use journals if they are allowed to keep them when the child completes his or her time in a program.

Family Exhibits

Another popular way of sharing information is to invite families to display some of the important objects in their lives on a special shelf or other space in the child care setting. These exhibits should be out of the children's reach but within the children's view. The choice of objects is entirely up to each family—they might share photographs, clothing, utensils, musical instruments, or other items.

Family Bulletin Boards

Family–teacher bulletin boards are another effective way to exchange information. Boards should have plenty of space for meeting notices, health alerts, workshop and other opportunities, interesting articles, photographs, recipes children would enjoy, upcoming events, and com-

munity resources. In large programs, it may be best to have separate family and program bulletin boards to avoid having an overwhelming amount of information in one place. Family members may also feel more comfortable about using a bulletin board specifically designated for them.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have written materials that explain the program's philosophy, policies, and procedures? How well do your materials represent your program and the goals and views of families and staff members? Are the materials current, or do they need to be updated?
2. Are families welcomed whenever they come to the child care setting? Do they feel free to arrive without calling first? Are they included in the development of strategies for their children's care and activities in the program?
3. What are some ways to encourage families to have informal discussions with you (or their children's teachers, if applicable) about child care issues? What are some ways to engage them in program activities?
4. How can you use family meetings to address sensitive subjects?
5. What are some ways to create a nurturing atmosphere for families, staff members, and the children in the program?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Anderson, M. Parker. *Parent-Provider Partnerships: Families Matter.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 1998.

Advances the concept of family-centered child care by addressing the development of the child and family together. Offers family-support principles that build on family strengths and the community's culture and resources.

Balaban, Nancy. *Everyday Goodbyes: Starting School and Early Care—A Guide to the Separation Process.* New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.

Addresses a critical aspect of child development in a follow-up to *Starting School: From Separation to Independence.* Emphasizes the need for parents and teachers to collaborate in phasing children into a child care, preschool, or kindergarten program. Offers many sensitive, practical suggestions to ease the separation process for everyone involved.

Brazelton, T. Berry, and Stanley I. Greenspan. *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn, and Flourish.* Boulder, CO: Perseus Book Group, 2000.

Explores seven needs of infants and young children, emphasizing that when those needs are met by families and professional caregivers, children have the fundamental building blocks for higher-level social, emotional, and intellectual abilities.

Bredekamp, Sue, and Carol Copple. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs,* rev. ed. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997.

Provides comprehensive guidance for early childhood programs. Advocates best practices for learning and development, including the promotion of creative discovery and cultural consistency.

California Department of Education. *Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 2006.

Presents information about how to provide high-quality early care and education, including recommendations for program policies and day-to-day practices that will improve program services to all infants and toddlers (children from birth to thirty-six months of age).

Carter, Margie. "Communicating with Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 110 (July/August 1996): 80–83.

Offers five strategies for enhancing communication, including keeping parents well-informed, helping parents to introduce themselves in the classroom, and creating dialogue in newsletters and bulletins.

———. "Developing Meaningful Relationships with Families: Ideas for Training Staff." *Child Care Information Exchange* 130 (November/December 1999): 63–65.

Presents strategies for improving relationships between child care providers and families, such as creating family-friendly environments, rethinking parent meetings, and making memory books and videos.

Deangelo, Diane, et al. *Engaging Parents: Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community*. Alexandria, VA: RMC Corporation, 1995.

Designed to help Head Start programs increase collaboration between parents and staff members. Contains three modules, each with two activities designed for workshop presentation, followed by two or more coaching activities. Modules cover parent involvement, ways to individualize parent involvement, and parent involvement as a shared responsibility. The final sections contain activities and supplemental information that can help supervisors extend learning opportunities.

Dodge, Diane Trister. "Sharing Your Program with Families." *Child Care Information Exchange* 101 (1995): 7–11.

Offers guidelines for child care providers on working with parents to achieve mutual goals. Focuses on using the program environment to express the philosophy and goals of the curriculum and stresses the importance of establishing ongoing communication with families.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Diane W. Eyer. *Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers: A Curriculum of Respectful, Responsive Care and Education,* 8th ed. McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.

Includes sections on parent–caregiver relationships, the nine-month separation in child care, and providing culturally responsive care.

Hohmann, Mary, and Jaclyn Post. *Tender Care and Early Learning: Supporting Infants and Toddlers in Child Care Settings.* Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press, 2002.

Describes HighScope's infant/toddler learning approach, including the elements of active learning; key experiences for sensory-motor learners; the organization of space and materials; children's daily schedules and caregiving routines; and adult support based on child observation, team planning, and partnerships with parents.

Phillips, Deborah, and Jack Shonkoff, eds. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000.

Extensive review of scientific research and child policy centered on child development from birth to age five. Contains ten core concepts, including one that states, "Human development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience."

Stone, Jeannette Galambos. *Teacher-Parent Relationships.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987.

A booklet that focuses on a difficult but essential aspect of caregiving: developing working relationships with parents. Features practical guidance and photographs. Available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC. http://www.naeyc.org/. Telephone: 202-232-8777.

Audiovisuals

First Moves: Welcoming a Child to a New Caregiving Setting. DVD, 27 minutes. United States: The Program for Infant/Toddler Care (developed collaboratively by the California Department of Education and WestEd), 1988.

Demonstrates practical steps infant care teachers can take to help children feel comfortable in new settings, making family–child separations easier for everyone. The DVD is available in English and Spanish and can be purchased at http://www.pitc.org/.

Section Three:
Preparing Together for Separations

"It took me several months to adjust to being back at work and being a mother of an infant . . . but incorporating him, and lack of sleep, and the stress of leaving him at a day care with more or less a stranger, was really hard."

From the Program for Infant/Toddler Care DVD *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers*

More tears have been shed over the separation of children from their families—especially infants and toddlers—than over any other area of child care. The tears are not limited to the children; they may be shed by anyone who has spent many hours caring for the child, such as mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or foster parents. By working together and preparing thoughtfully for the separation process, program staff members and families can ease the transition for the infant or toddler and the family.

Understanding the Concerns of Family Members

The child's separation from his or her family during the first weeks of enrollment is often very stressful for family members. No matter how carefully parents, family members, infant care teachers, and program leaders plan, it is typical for the separation process to cause some discomfort. Infant care teachers can be more helpful to the family and child when they understand the mixed feelings that make separations so difficult for families. Here are some feelings that family members have expressed:

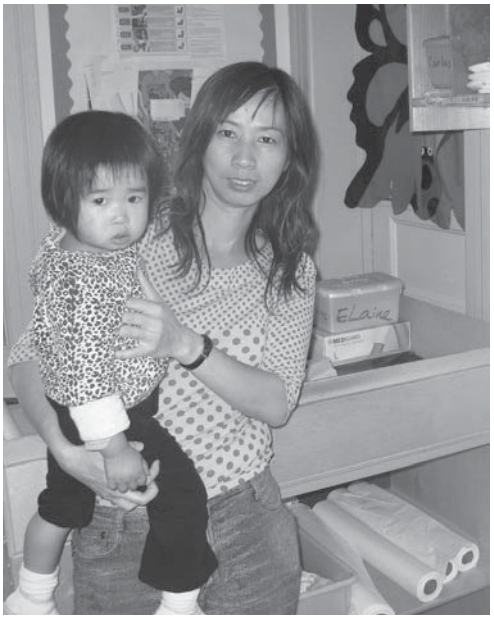
- Grief at not being able stay home with the child
- Concern that infant care teachers will not be truthful about how the child is doing in the program
- Fear that another child will hurt their child

Families might also experience these feelings:

- Fear that they will be criticized if they expose their child-rearing practices to public scrutiny
- Fear that their child may come to love and enjoy the infant care teacher more than he or she loves them
- Worry about their child losing his or her home language and culture in a program that does not reflect the family's culture

- Reluctance to leave children who have disabilities or other special needs in the care of others
- Worry about how their child will be treated
- Concern about what the child will learn
- Anxiety about the safety of their child
- Worry that the infant care teacher will dislike their child if he or she has difficulty adjusting to the program
- Discomfort about what neighbors, friends, and other family members will think about the family leaving their child in the care of others
- Confusion about values—for example, a mother wondering, *Am I being selfish by putting my job ahead of staying home to care for my baby?*

It is understandable that the process of separation can be stressful for everyone involved. As an infant care teacher or program director, a family's expression of their concerns could lead you to experience your own feelings of defensiveness, anxiety, or even guilt at not being able to solve the family's or child's distress.



However, try to remember that most families experience heightened emotions related to separation.

Once you understand that a child's family members may be concerned, anxious, or even grieving over the child's entry into care, you can begin to find ways to support the family. One way to do this is to share relevant child development information with family members. It may help a family member to know in advance that children—starting at around six to nine months of age—are likely to exhibit reluctance to be with strangers. Knowing that a child's discomfort is a typical development and that it actually signals an intellectual milestone can make the experience less alarming.

Talking with family members about small details of the child's daily care will help families feel close to their children and will reassure them that their children are receiving good care. Providing reports about a child's appetite, bowel movements, napping patterns, and general state of being can comfort family members who are worried about and miss their child.

Keep in mind that parents and other family members often love to hear about their child's "events of the day," such as making friends with another baby, rolling over, making new sounds, or taking first steps. However, hearing about a child's first steps or first words from an infant care teacher can be painful for a parent, especially one who would prefer to be at home with the child. The infant care teacher's expressions of understanding about a child should always complement, rather than overshadow, the family's knowledge. As the teacher–family relationship progresses, you can demonstrate this by frequently asking the family members for their insights about the child.

Working Together to Ease the Separation for the Child

Children's reactions to separation vary greatly. Some infants and toddlers seem to adjust to new settings with relative ease; others show signs of distress for weeks or even months after entering child care. Sometimes, children may seem fine when they first enter care and then become very upset a few weeks later. A child or family may need more time to adjust if any of these circumstances are present:

- The child is in the "stranger anxiety" stage.
- The infant care teacher speaks a different language, is of a different culture, or looks and acts quite differently from the child's family.
- The child has a cautious or "slow-to-warm" temperament.

You can reassure families about the well-being of their child when you explain how the program–family partnership functions in the separation process. Work with family members to define the roles each of you might play in the adjustment process. For example, program staff members need to develop a relationship with the family and reassure both the child and his or her family members that they will be respected and cared for. The family needs to assist the child with the adjustment to the program and should work with the program to make decisions about how best to ease the child's entry into care. When family members see that they have the ability to help their child, their feelings of anxiety can change to feelings of confidence.

Parents of infants have a strong need to be reassured that their child's caregiver provides appropriate care.

Affirm the Family as the Primary Collaborator

Sharing decision making with the family and providing the kind of care the family prefers (to the extent possible) will help ease the family's feeling that they are "losing" their child. Make clear your wish to incorporate the family—including its culture and language—into the program's caregiving and teaching style. Ask for information about the child's special needs, state of health, habits, and preferences. These types of questions will help reassure the family that they are still able to "protect" their child and provide the style and quality of care that they desire. Family members can also play a significant role by working with the program to develop a timetable for the entry process and by preparing the child for the separation.

Develop a Timetable for the Separation Process

The entry process begins with the initial visits made by a family before they decide to enroll their child in care. Those visits should be occasions for informal conversations between program staff members and the family. Hearing laughter and friendly conversation between the family member(s) and the infant care teacher can help a child feel at home in the new setting, especially when she or he is not being urged to leave the family member or to interact with the teacher or other children.

After the enrollment decision has been made, it is up to the family members, in collaboration with the program, to develop a timetable for the child's full entry into the program. This is a sensitive issue

for families who are not able to spend the amount of time recommended by the program to ease the child into care. Other families may wish to spend more time than the program recommends. To help form a responsive relationship with the family, the program should be flexible. A timetable might look something like this:

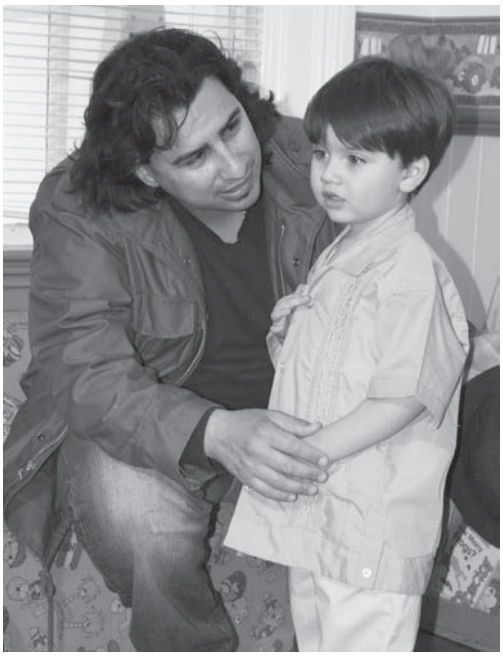
1. Including preenrollment visits, the child visits the setting two or three times with a family member present.
2. On a few occasions, the family leaves the child in care for an hour or so.
3. During the first week or two in the program, the child is left in care for increasing periods of time. If possible during this time, the family member stays longer than the typical five or ten minutes when dropping off the child.
4. Until the child feels comfortable in the new setting, the family arrives early to pick up the child at the end of each day (if possible). It can be stressful for the child to watch other children going home before he or she does.

If the child's parent or closest family member cannot take time off from work, ask if another family member could stay with the child during the first two weeks of the entry process. If not, you will need to support the family members as they balance the demands of their jobs and the needs of their child. Let them know there are other things they can do to help ease their child's transition to child care, such as bringing photographs, favorite toys, or other familiar items from home. You can also reassure family members that even if they are unable stay with the child during the adjustment period, the child will be okay. Additionally, a visit by the teacher to the child's home might help the child feel the connection between the teacher and his or her family.

Prepare the Child for the Separation

Family members can help prepare the child for the transition to child care by talking about what will happen. The ways in which families talk to their infants or toddlers—and how far in advance they do so—will depend on each child's age, development, temperament, and other considerations. With a young infant, the family member might wait until the first morning of enrollment and, on the way to the child care setting, say something like, "I'm taking you to Bonnie's house and she's going to take care of you for a while. I think you'll like Bonnie." The baby may not understand the words fully, but the idea of something pleasant will be planted.

An older toddler may be interested in hearing that there will be other children to play with or that "Bonnie has a rocking



horse just like yours." He or she could be told about the start of child care a day or two ahead of time, as well as on the first day of care. The words that are used are less important than the tone of voice, which can convey confidence to the child that everything will be okay and that he or she will be safe and happy.

Role of the Program

Program staff members are responsible for supporting the child's adaptation to child care. They can do so by taking the following actions:

1. Designate one infant care teacher to be the primary source of support and familiarity for the child and the family.
2. Share with families research-based techniques for easing separation.
3. During the child's first few weeks in child care, be especially supportive of children and families when it is time to say good-bye (at drop-off times).

Provide a Primary Infant Care Teacher from the First Day

A true family–program partnership is only possible when the family and the child's infant care teacher(s) have the opportunity to know each other well. Family members will feel more secure if they can talk with the same person each day and get to know that person well. Children usually adapt to the setting more smoothly if there is one special teacher who attends to their needs during the day, especially if they also see the teacher interacting cordially with their families. During the early days of the child's enrollment, it is also important to introduce families to the teachers, floaters, and substitutes who may care for the child when the primary infant care teacher is not available.

Share Research-Based Techniques for Easing Separation

Another way to ease family members' concerns about separation is to share with them techniques for helping children during the early stages of enrollment. Here are a few of those techniques:

1. Before the child makes contact with new people, give him or her time to get comfortable in the program with a parent or family member nearby.
2. Respect the child's personal space by using toys or other objects as a way of maintaining distance while still interacting.
3. Avoid eye contact with the child. Instead, focus on a toy or other item that the child is interested in.
4. Observe the child's cues. Follow the child's interests and pay attention to the child's reactions.

To learn more about this topic, view the Program for Infant/Toddler Care DVD *First Moves: Welcoming a Child to a New Caregiving Setting.* Information on the DVD is listed at the end of this section.

Well-planned good-byes build trust.

Helping Families Know How and When to Say Good-bye

Sometimes, family members are not sure how or when to leave their child. They may prefer to leave without saying good-bye, hoping to avoid a situation in which the child becomes upset. Other family members start to leave and then come back if their child expresses discomfort. It is natural for family members to be reluctant to leave when a child is crying or wants to leave with the family.

Infant care teachers can help by being sympathetic with and listening to the family. They can also mention these points:

- Lingering at the point of leaving can be confusing to children.
- A quick exit with a cheerful farewell of words, gestures, or both will often reassure the child that he or she is in good hands.
- Saying good-bye helps the child learn to trust that the family member will not disappear without warning.
- A teacher can stay near and reassure the child until the child becomes comfortable enough to join the group or to play.

It is sometimes helpful for the family to hear from the primary infant care teacher that it is time to go. If family members are visibly distressed, you might offer to call them later in the day to let them know how the child is doing.

Addressing Families' Feelings About Separation

Below are some examples of how you and other infant care teachers can help families cope with their feelings about using infant and toddler care:

- Acknowledge that families often experience powerful feelings of grief, anxiety, or guilt during the adjustment period. Parents are often comforted by the knowledge that other families have similar feelings.
- Be generous in communicating information about the child's experiences in care, even when it includes telling family members about the child's distress.
- Assure families that infant care teachers are caring, compassionate individuals who are capable of handling separation, and that children are not harmed by the adjustment process.

- Acknowledge that separation might not be easy for children.
- Talk with families about behaviors to expect from their children during the early days of separation, and encourage family members to be patient with the adjustment process.
- Check in with the family to see how they are feeling about the separation process.
- If you have had similar experiences with your own children, share your feelings with family members.
- Suggest that a parent or family member seek out another family that has overcome feelings of guilt, grief, or anxiety.

You can also point out cues to family members that indicate a child is happy, healthy, and growing, and you can express your certainty that the program is a good place. Good feelings are contagious; the families and the children will catch those feelings.

Two Families' Experiences of Separation

Rosa carefully fastens the strap to Tonito's car seat. Feeling guilty as she looks toward the back seat, Rosa heads

toward the home of the family child care provider she has chosen to take care of her baby. The home is only a mile away from her own. She drives slowly, almost as if she doesn't want to go there. She is close to tears.

"Am I doing the right thing?" she asks herself. *"Maybe I should have stayed home with Tonito, but I need to work. Will he cry when I leave? Will he remember me when I come back? I hate to miss seeing when he first starts to crawl, when he takes his first step. How can I do this? What do I really know about Maria's infant care program, anyway? Well, here we are, Tonito. Let's try it for a week, anyway."*

These are the thoughts that preoccupy Rosa on her way to Maria's house. In order to win Rosa's trust, as well as that of three-month-old Tonito, Maria will need to show an awareness of Rosa's difficulty in leaving him. Rosa's feelings of anxiety and ambivalence may have little to do with Maria or the quality of care she provides. Rosa has chosen infant care for Tonito because she sees no other option. She is in no way certain that it will be good for him.

During this early stage of separation, Maria can help put Rosa at ease in a variety of ways. "This is a big day for you and Tonito, isn't it?" she says when they arrive. Maria's tone conveys an understanding of Rosa's conflicted feelings; her voice expresses empathy without talking directly about the sensitive issue.

Maria continues, "It's great that you can stay for a couple of hours this morning. Tonito will feel better if he can make this change in his life in little steps." This statement tells Rosa that she will be able to help Tonito with his adjustment. It also reinforces the importance of Rosa's role as parent. Rosa begins to see that Maria cares about her and her baby's feelings.

Adjustment to child care is an ongoing process.

At three months of age, Tonito will probably separate from his mother without much distress. This may be difficult for Rosa to experience. Maria explains that babies of Tonito's age do not yet realize that things still exist after they disappear, so they do not fully grasp the concept of the absent parent. By the time he is six months old, he may develop "stranger anxiety," and could be upset by being left with someone else—but by then, Maria's house will seem like another home to him. She will no longer be a stranger; she will be one of his "people."

In the later stages of separation, new issues might arise when they are least expected. Rosa will feel more relaxed at having found a caring person to whom she can entrust Tonito while she is at work. Rosa will become comfortable with Maria's home and will see that Tonito is developing well and seems to love child care. But the pangs of separation can arise for a family member or a child long after the entry period is over. The crisis may come when Tonito is 11 months old and Rosa finds that he does not want to go home with her when she comes to pick him up. He may cry when he has to leave Maria's home.

This may awaken the uncomfortable feelings that Rosa experienced before she realized she had found good infant care for her baby. She may wonder if Tonito's behavior is telling her that he feels neglected. She may ask herself, *"Does Tonito love Maria more than he loves me?"*

At that point, Maria has another opportunity to help Rosa and Tonito adjust to

her child care program. She can tell Rosa that Tonito's behavior is typical for a child who is learning about separation. Perhaps Rosa can play with Tonito in Maria's living room for a few minutes before attempting to take him home. He may need time to wind down from the play he was engaged in when his mother arrived.

Maria can support the bond between Tonito and his mother in many ways. She can ask Rosa to provide a recent photograph of herself to be displayed in Tonito's cubby. She can talk about Rosa during the day, pointing out Rosa's photo and reminding Tonito how much his mother loves and thinks about him. Maria also might call attention to the food Rosa makes for Tonito's lunches or the clothes she packs for him. Additionally, Maria might suggest that this is a good time in Tonito's life for him to visit Rosa's workplace. In these ways and others, Maria can reaffirm for Rosa the importance of both home and child care in Tonito's life, and she can emphasize that a caring partnership between them will support Tonito's well-being.

Jackie and Beverly

In contrast with Rosa, who would rather not work but is forced to by economic need, Jackie is dedicated to her career as an attorney and to her baby daughter, Beverly. When Beverly was six weeks old, Jackie felt she needed to go back to work.

Jackie has conflicting goals. She wants Beverly to have the best in life, but she is not sure what that "best" is. She does not want to stay at home full time to care for Beverly. She enjoys working as a lawyer, yet she wonders if Beverly is losing out on an important part of life by not having her mother's care every day. Now that Jackie has returned to work, these conflicting feelings cause her to be distracted at work, irritable at home, and anxious at Maria's house when she picks up Beverly from child care. Because of the tension Jackie feels about her parental role, the time she spends with Beverly is not as rewarding as it could be.

Maria's role with this mother will be quite different from that with Rosa. In this family situation, she needs to help Jackie understand that it is not necessary for a mother to be available to her baby 24 hours a day in order to develop and maintain the important mother–child bond. Maria may suggest that Jackie spend some time talking with another mother who has experienced similar feelings. Books, videos, and other resources that Maria can recommend (or lend) may also help Jackie see that having a career need not conflict with having a family. In addition, Maria might refer Jackie to a community resource that specializes in helping mothers like Jackie who are struggling with their feelings.

Helping Families That Have Conflicting Feelings

Infant care teachers can best help children and families during transition times by actively supporting the bond between the child and family, and by developing their relationships with the family and child. Here are a few strategies for supporting families:

- Talk frequently with the child about his or her family.
- Show the child photographs of his or her family.
- Remind the child that his or her family will return to take the child home.
- Talk about the transitional objects (such as a blanket, stuffed animal, food, and so forth) that the child brings from home.
- Consider addressing a family member's pain of separation directly, as the infant care teacher does in the following vignette:

> *Eleven-month-old Johanna was clinging to her grandmother's clothes, about to cry. Her infant care teacher, Charlyn, tells Johanna's grandmother,* "As you get ready to leave, Johanna may be upset. This is just her way of telling you that she loves you and doesn't want you to go. You might feel like crying for the same reason, but don't worry. It will get easier with time. It's hard to say good-bye to the people we love."

Each family has different feelings about using child care, and family members may feel uncomfortable about using child care for many reasons. Listen carefully to family members and use your observation skills to learn about each family's specific circumstances and feelings.

Questions to Consider

1. Before the entry process begins, do you think of some things—specific to each family—that family members can do to help their children accept separation?
2. If your program has more than one infant care teacher, is a teacher chosen at the time of entry to be the primary infant care teacher for the newly enrolled child? Is that infant care teacher given primary responsibility for communicating with the child's family?
3. What are some ways in which you can help families and their children during moments of saying good-bye?
4. Do you encourage parents and other family members to spend some time in the child care setting when they are dropping off or picking up their child? How can you help prepare family members for this step?
5. Do families fully understand the entry process that you proposed at the time of enrollment? When a family is unable to spend much time with their child during the entry process, are you supportive and resourceful in helping them do what they can?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Balaban, Nancy. "The Role of the Child Care Professional in Caring for Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families." *Young Children* 47 (July 1992): 66–71.

Addresses major elements of the infant care teacher's role, such as comforting a child, sharing knowledge of appropriate expectations, and facilitating parent–child separations.

Brazelton, T. Berry. *Working and Caring*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman, 2000.

Explores the psychological issues faced by parents who choose child care for their infants and toddlers. Particularly useful are the sections covering the development of parent–infant relationships and suggestions for choosing and adjusting to child care.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Nava Peshotan Bhavnagri. "Cultural Differences in Sleeping Practices: Helping Early Childhood Educators Understand." *Child Care Information Exchange* 138 (March/April 2001): 91–93.

Focuses on ways in which infant care teachers can provide developmentally and culturally appropriate care. Discusses the role of cultural values, beliefs, priorities, and goals, and the importance of communication between infant care teachers and parents.

——— "Diversity and Infant/Toddler Caregiving." *Young Children* 55 (September 2000): 31–35.

Suggests reflective dialogue to learn the cultural reasons for a family's practices, with the goal of finding creative solutions that satisfy caregivers and families. Offers examples and questions.

Jarvis, Kathy, ed. *Separation.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987.

Informative resource for child care personnel and parents. Available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC. http://www.naeyc.org/. Telephone: 202-232-8777.

Leavitt, Robin L., and Brenda K. Eheart. *Toddler Day Care: A Guide to Responsive Caregiving*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985.

A comprehensive guide to various developmental aspects of toddler caregiving. Includes a chapter on working with parents to handle separation.

Lerner, Claire, and Amy Laura Dombro. *Learning and Growing Together: Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Development.* Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2000.

Offers four sections on how to support parents in their learning process: "How Parenthood Feels"; "Tuning in to Your Child"; "The Amazing First Three Years of Life"; and "In Conclusion: Thoughts to Grow On."

McCracken, Janet Brown. "So Many Good-byes: Ways to Ease the Transition Between Home and Groups for Young Children." Washington, DC. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995.

Brochure for parents on helping children adjust to a new child care program. Available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC. http://www.naeyc.org/. Telephone: 202-232-8777.

Osborne, Sandy. "Attachment and the Secondary Infant Care Teacher." *Day Care and Early Education* 13, No. 3 (Spring 1986): 20–22.

Discusses the problems that separation anxiety in young children poses for secondary infant care teachers. Offers strategies to facilitate separation from the parent or primary care teacher and to lessen the intensity of the child's anxiety response.

Phillips, Deborah A. "Infants and Child Care: The New Controversy." *Child Care Information Exchange* 58 (November 1987): 19–22.

Argues that research does not support Jay Belsky's position that infant child care for more than 20 hours per week is a risk factor for infants' insecure avoidant attachment and children's maladaptive social behavior. Suggests that quality of care and family characteristics are major influences.

Provence, Sally, et al. *The Challenge of Daycare.* London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.

Describes "The Children's House," an infant/toddler service and research project. Shares clinically based information on relationships between infant care teachers and parents; separation; appropriate curriculum; and nurturing environments for young children. Contains practical information and forms to use for observations and curriculum planning.

Stone, Jeannette Galambos. *Teacher-Parent Relationships.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1987.

A booklet that focuses on a difficult but essential aspect of caregiving: developing good working relationships with parents. Features practical guidance and photographs. Available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC. http://www.naeyc.org/. Telephone: 202-232-8777.

Stonehouse, Ann, and Janet Gonzalez-Mena. "Working with a High-Maintenance Parent: Building Trust and Respect Through Communication." *Child Care Information Exchange* 142 (November/December 2001): 57–59.

Describes how child care staff helped one mother handle separation difficulties with her eighteen-month-old. Emphasizes the value of empathy in understanding and supporting each family.

Viorst, Judith. *Necessary Losses*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

A comprehensive discussion of the losses people experience from infancy to old age. The first section of the book is about infancy and childhood. The separation that must occur during the first two years of life is seen as part of a continuum and thereby gains more meaning. The cover has an appropriate definition of losses: "The loves, illusions, dependencies and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow."

Audiovisuals

First Moves: Welcoming a Child to a New Caregiving Setting. DVD, 27 minutes. United States: The Program for Infant/Toddler Care (developed collaboratively by the California Department of Education and WestEd), 1988.

Demonstrates practical steps that infant care teachers can take to help children feel comfortable in a new setting, making family–child separations easier for everyone. The DVD is available in English and Spanish and can be purchased at http://www.pitc.org/.

Section Four:

Working with Families in Their Cultures

Although we sometimes think of cultures in terms of traditional food, music, customs, and ways of dressing, the most important aspects of culture, and those that endure the longest within families, are not so obvious. Culture is the set of values, beliefs, and practices that families grow up with, live, embrace, rely on, and use to define who they are and how they should interact with others. Most families living in multicultural societies have more than one culture. In some cases, their children are bicultural or multicultural and learn to function, in varying degrees, in all the cultures of their families.

The Power of Culture

Culture has a powerful impact on every family. Aspects of culture are expressed in the ways family members communicate with each other, in the choices they make about their babies' care, and in how they participate in their children's infant care program. Culture is always present, and each of us lives within at least one cultural realm.

Some people are more aware of culture than others are. Those who live in areas where the people around them have the same cultures, language, and, for the most part, beliefs, customs, and behaviors, are sometimes less aware of the influence of culture on their lives. They may assume that everyone should behave in the ways that they do. However, every culture and approach to life represents only one way of living. People from other cultural backgrounds behave in ways that are different from, but just as valid, as our own.

Supporting Children's Connections to Family and Culture

Children who enter child care as infants or toddlers are at a critical stage of cultural and identity formation. They are not born with culture; they absorb it from those around them, incorporating what they see and hear. The cultural messages that infants and toddlers receive from their teachers have a strong impact on the children. When a teacher's or program's culture is different from that of a child's

family, the child may get conflicting messages about how to behave and how to communicate with others. In extreme cases, this can result in the child's alienation from his or her own family, culture, and language. This is especially true when teachers reinforce the messages a child receives from the predominant culture in the country where his or her family lives. For children to establish a healthy sense of cultural identity and of belonging to their own family, infant/toddler programs must acknowledge, support, and include the cultural practices of the families they serve.

Most families care deeply about the identity their infants develop, and they want to keep their children closely linked to their family and culture. Families often seek programs where the child care providers (or program leaders and teachers) speak their language and come from the same cultural background that they do. When there is a linguistic cultural match, families usually feel more confident that the connection with home will be supported. This type of care also supports a child's cultural-identity formation, feelings of security, and ability to learn.

Some families may prefer a program that offers their infant or toddler early exposure to another culture or language. Other families may not have the option to choose a program that represents their roots. When an infant or toddler is cared for in a language and culture different from his or her family's, the program's role is to continually support the child's connections with the family. To the greatest extent possible, the family's culture and language should be honored and brought into the child care setting. Children and families need this type of care to support the child's connection to his or her family, home language, and culture.

You can include families in the program in many ways. Begin by inviting family members to share their perspectives with you. With respect, interest, and sensitivity, you can learn about their customs, attitudes, and expectations for their children. For example, how do they regard individuality, responsibility, and physical and verbal expression? What are their views on how to respond to, address, or think of young children? Infant care teachers and families should discuss these issues so the teachers can learn about the values underlying family practices, not just the practices themselves. Family members often talk about these issues in the context of concrete examples. For instance, during a conversation about how and when they would like you to handle toilet learning, they can give you a glimpse into their perspectives on independence and autonomy.

You can support children's connections with their families and cultures in other ways, including how you use the environment. Remind children of their families and homes in the following ways:

- Play CDs or DVDs that feature singing or talking in their family's language.

- Post pictures of family members, friends, and pets.
- Display familiar objects from the children's homes in the child care setting.

You can also talk about the child's family members throughout the day to keep them "present" in the child's mind. For instance, "Mommy made lunch for you. Let's see what she packed." Or, "Your Mema [grandmother] said you like to be wrapped in your blanket like this." Talking about the significant people in children's lives helps keep them connected to their families despite physical separation. This approach to care should be incorporated naturally into daily routines and activities.

Including families and their cultural practices in the program supports children's healthy development and learning in many ways:

- Children feel more secure when they see and hear reminders of home and family.
- Children know more about what to expect and what is expected of them.
- Children understand more of what is said and what is happening.
- Children experience less stress that can negatively affect their brain development.
- Children feel more free to explore and to interact with other children and adults.
- Children's learning at home is supported by what they learn in the program setting, and vice versa.
- Children learn to feel good about who they are and where they come, and they develop a positive sense of identity.

Differences Within Cultures

Talking with families from different cultures about their attitudes, values, and

practices will help you understand the diversity of cultures and cultural practices. However, it should not lead you to lump people together in simple categories. Families from the same culture may have very different worldviews, experiences, customs, and child-rearing practices. Within a particular culture, variations between one family and another may be greater than between two families of different cultures. Socioeconomic factors also influence family cultures. Even in communities that seem to be homogeneous, you can find differences. Some families are more deeply rooted in their cultures or more observant of cultural rules than others are.

Each family is a culture in itself, and each family member is a unique individual.

It is also important to avoid stereotyping cultures from the same region. For example, although some Korean, Japanese, and Chinese people may feel

a connection with each other and share aspects of their cultures, each of these national cultures has its own customs, language, and historical experience. The same is true of the countries and cultures of Latin America. Not only does each country have unique cultural beliefs and values, but different regions within each country also may have distinct languages or dialects, religious practices, or attitudes toward education.

Concepts of Independence and Interdependence

The values, priorities, and assumptions of a culture are the foundation on which all other cultural differences lie, and they profoundly influence child-rearing practices. Yet cultural assumptions are not always obvious, and some may be almost invisible. One way to highlight different cultural values in child rearing is to examine people's values of independence and interdependence.

Below is an illustration of two families that have different perspectives on these values. In the example, the program staff members share with one family the belief that early independence is important. A second family emphasizes the importance of interdependence.

Imagine that two families, each with an 18-month-old child, enroll their children in the same infant/toddler program. One family feels comfortable with the program because the infant care teachers and the family share a very similar approach to meeting children's needs. The family members have learned from the teachers that the program emphasizes individual development (independence) and that it aims to help children be outgoing, friendly, informal, vocal about their feelings, and willing to explore. Personal achievement is applauded, often literally. The infant care teachers stress self-help skills just as the family does at home.

The other family feels that the program's goals and expectations are strange. Rather than focusing on self-help skills, independence, and personal achievement, this family emphasizes the importance of an atmosphere of harmony and mutual support (interdependence). They expect their child to be reserved rather than to express feelings vocally. Teachers who applaud individual accomplishments work in opposition to this family's goal of teaching interdependence and modesty about personal achievement.

If you were an infant care teacher who, like the first family, values independence, how would you work with a family that values interdependence? If you were an infant care teacher who shares the second family's emphasis on interdependence, how would you work with a family that values independence? In each case, it would be your responsibility and the responsibility of the program to support the family's values as much as possible. Although the first family's value of independence would be reinforced by the predominant culture in the United States, the second family's value of interdependence would be challenged daily. The support of the program would be crucial for the second child to maintain a close connection with his or her family and their values.

Support of a child's full participation in his or her home culture is vital to optimal development.

From *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care*

There are clear preferences for independence or interdependence in homogeneous cultures, but in daily life in the United States, these preferences often intermingle. For example, a father might want his young daughter to assert her feelings and needs (independence) and also be supported by the adults in the environment (interdependence). Each child care program and family has a unique "culture" of independence versus interdependence. In a program, that culture varies according to the cultures of the staff members and to the program's philosophy. Historically, an "early childhood culture" of independence has been predominant. However, an increase in the number of infants and toddlers in care, growing multiculturalism in U.S. society, and a heightened awareness of the importance of culture in children's early development have resulted in a gradual philosophical shift toward adapting to the cultural patterns of the children's families. Addressing this issue and other cultural values should be central to a program's efforts to be culturally responsive. It is at this deep level—even more than at the level of cultural artifacts, foods, and celebrations—that programs need to focus.

When Differences Cause Discomfort

It is common for people to feel ill at ease or threatened by others who seem different from them. When infant care teachers and families in a program come from different backgrounds, they may have feelings, at least initially, that make it difficult to treat each other with empathy and respect. Language and cultural differences may pose significant challenges in communicating with families from other cultures, but those challenges can be overcome. The goal is to show respect and appreciation for each family's ways of doing things and, at the same time, to share what you know about infants and toddlers. Here are a few ways to help you understand people who are different from you:

- Take time to learn about cultural attitudes, expectations, and values—but do not expect to know everything about someone else's culture.
- Take the risk of acknowledging your feelings of discomfort.
- Try to empathize with others—"walk in their shoes."
- Use tact in sensitive situations to prevent negative feelings from developing.
- Be as flexible, respectful, and accommodating as possible.

When cultural issues arise between family members and teachers, you may benefit from using a process called "Acknowledge, Ask, and Adapt." This process consists of the following steps:

- Acknowledge to yourself—and, if appropriate, to the family—that there is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Ask for information to understand the family's perspective and to clarify your point of view.
- Adapt by communicating about the issue, exploring, and negotiating a mutually agreed-upon resolution.

To learn more about this topic, consult the Program for Infant/Toddler Care publication *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care.* See the Suggested Resources at the end of this section for further information about the publication.

Becoming culturally aware and responsive is a lifelong process. Recognize that building mutual trust may take time, but an atmosphere of acceptance, fairness, and goodwill will help that trust develop. Being open to people who are different from you can help you create a lively, harmonious child care program that fosters cultural exchange.

Families That Come from Difficult Circumstances

Families' past experiences will influence how you can best approach them and collaborate with them. Many families have faced harsh experiences before arriving at your program. Some may have lived in the United States with poverty and disadvantage for generations. Others may have recently fled war-torn countries or regional famine, or may have experienced domestic violence or family disintegration. Some families adapt relatively quickly to new lives. Others carry with them bitter memories and traumatic losses that influence their daily lives.

Working with families that come from difficult circumstances requires sensitivity and genuine concern. Teachers can have a positive impact on family members' adjustments to their present lives, on their self-image and how they feel about life, and on what they communicate to their infants and toddlers. The child care program may be the first community contact the families have sought voluntarily. Thus, the feelings family members develop about the program are likely to set the tone for their trust or lack of trust in other community agencies. If the family members are treated with warmth and respect, they may feel encouraged to look for other sources of support.

As family members begin to develop relationships with you, they may share personal information about themselves and the events affecting their lives. This information can help you understand them and the circumstances under which they have lived since arriving in the United States, but the information should not be asked of them—and if it is offered, it should be treated as confidential.

Ways to Help Families Feel at Home

Here are some ways you can help families from diverse cultural heritages—both longtime U.S. citizens and recent arrivals to the country—feel at home:

1. Make every effort to recruit staff members who represent the cultures and speak the languages of the families in the program.
2. If staffing is not representative of families' cultures, find out what languages the families speak at home. Try to learn a few common words such as *hello, good-bye, thank you, family, baby, diaper, bottle, eat, hungry, apple, cracker, milk, happy, sad,* and so on.
3. Study a language other than your own. Bilingualism benefits everybody!
4. Involve family members by inviting them to share their skills.
5. Pay attention to news about the families' countries of origin so you can show interest and awareness if families want to talk about their homelands.
6. Make a room available for family socializing and conferences.

7. Ask family members to teach you a lullaby or favorite nursery rhyme in their home language to help their children feel more comfortable in your program. Share lullabies and nursery rhymes from your own cultural background.
8. Create an environment that reflects the cultures of the program families.
9. Be aware that people have different preferences regarding interaction. Some family members prefer to interact with a person of the same gender. Others may feel more comfortable interacting with someone in a position of authority. Some may feel uncomfortable if a person with whom they have not previously established a rapport asks them questions.

Culturally Based Issues That Arise in Child Care

Certain cultural differences are more likely than others to require sensitive attention in child care programs. The following types of differences may raise issues that need to be addressed:

- Family structure
- Discipline of children
- Daily routines and self-care
- Religious beliefs and rituals
- Attitudes toward property
- Health practices

Family Structure

Family structures can vary greatly from culture to culture. A "nuclear family," the family structure often idealized in the United States, is a family unit composed of a parent or parents (or parent figures) and a child or children. However, many U.S. citizens and residents, as well as a large proportion of the world's population, live in extended families. An extended

family unit can include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as parents and their own children. In another structure based on a network of kinships, the family unit can include all of the above plus close friends and other people who are not related by blood or marriage.

How a family makes decisions can also vary greatly. In some families, the adults make decisions jointly. In others, children are included in the decision-making process. Both of those systems differ from families in which the head of the family, male or female, makes all the important decisions. The head of the family may also be the oldest person or a group of related or unrelated elders.

Here is a vignette that shows how an infant care teacher's lack of awareness of family structure can cause a misunderstanding between the infant care teacher and the family:

> *Kim is a two-year-old Korean boy who likes to wander. His infant care teacher is anxious about his safety because he fails to respond when she goes after him. She reports this to Kim's mother.*
>
> *INFANT CARE TEACHER:* You know, I'm worried about Kim. He wanders off frequently, and when I go after him, he runs away. I'm afraid he'll get hurt.
>
> *MOTHER:* I will take care of it.

The mother's way of addressing the issue is to tell her husband about it—and because the husband believes it is his responsibility to respond to his son's behavior directly, he disciplines Kim with a lecture about the shame Kim is bringing to the family.

This is not the outcome the infant care teacher hoped for. An awareness of different family structures might have led the teacher to frame the problem differently, to include the father in the original discussion about Kim's behavior, and ultimately to foster a different outcome.

Discipline of Children

A family's approach to disciplining children—when, by whom, and how children are disciplined—reflects the family's structure and their value system. Many cultures allow children a long time to grow into responsibility for their actions, rarely punishing them before age five. When young children are disciplined, the method may be gentle and persuasive rather than punitive. For example, a Hopi mother may say in a soft voice, "No, no, that is not the Hopi way," as she gently withdraws her young son's hand from something he must not touch.

In some cultures, the mother and father share responsibility for disciplining young children, whereas in other cultures the responsibility falls to the male head of the household. In the Hopi culture, the disciplinarian is traditionally the mother's brother. In some regions of the United States, the father is the final authority and children are disciplined severely from a very young age. How you socialize a child is always important and should be a part of family–teacher conversations.

Daily Routines and Self-Care

The infant or toddler is considered a part of the mother in many cultures; she carries the child with her wherever she goes. A child may not be weaned from the breast until another child comes along. When a new baby displaces the emerging toddler from his or her mother's side, the adults and older children often share

responsibility for the toddler's care and safety. In many cultures, infants and toddlers are not expected to learn self-care in their early years of life. This conforms to the interdependent pattern of family cultures.

In interdependent cultures, families are more likely to include infants and toddlers in almost all of their daily activities. The idea of having an unrelated "babysitter" while the family goes out for the evening is foreign to them. Additionally, in some families, infants do not sleep alone; they may sleep with their mother, grandmother, other relative, or a sibling.

Family routines also differ. In highly industrialized countries where the family's day may be planned around time constraints, a common cultural view is that children should be put to bed at a specific hour. Other cultures are less structured. In these cultural contexts, families accommodate infants' natural sleep rhythms and do not adhere to a schedule; when the infant or toddler gets sleepy, she may find a cozy corner in which she can fall asleep, or the child may be put to bed. As one Native American mother complained to her toddler's teacher, "At the program, you always talk about time!" The mystified infant care teacher asked the mother what she meant. "Well, you have mealtime, snack time, naptime, and outdoor time, just to name a few." "Oh," responded the teacher, "I never thought about those labels." The mother replied, "I think you're trying to get me to do that at home, and that's not my way at all."

Families and infant care teachers sometimes have very different ideas about toilet training or toilet learning. Some families put babies on a potty during the first year of life. In other families, there are times when babies do not wear diapers; if weather permits, a child might wear a shirt only and be allowed to go outside and eliminate when necessary. Cleanliness, especially to the degree required in infant and toddler care settings, may be less important than other values.

Feeding practices also vary from culture to culture. The manner in which infants and toddlers are fed—and when, what, and how foods are prepared—may be very different. Some families do not want children to touch food with their hands. Others encourage self-feeding and offer finger foods. Weaning and the introduction of solid foods are areas that reflect cultural differences, including issues of independence versus interdependence. Families often have strong feelings about food and feeding.

Many family–teacher misunderstandings arise from unacknowledged differences in cultural perspectives about toileting, self-feeding, cleanliness, and other aspects of personal-care routines. Infant care teachers can help prevent these misunderstandings by getting information from the family members in advance and by being open to their ways of caring for their children. In the context of a child's

family and culture, the family's practices are usually appropriate and supportive of the child's growth. In most cases, child care practices can be modified to be as consistent as possible with routines at home. Remember that each family's cultural perspective must take precedence over the program's beliefs. This does not mean your own perspective is unimportant, but it does mean that the family's cultural priorities take precedence for their child. To provide this enlightened type of care, infant care teachers must learn how to be culturally responsive, understand their own cultural perspectives, and be able to put aside personal preferences for the benefit of the child and family. To learn more about this topic, refer to the Program for Infant/Toddler Care publication *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care,* and the DVD *Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care.* See the Suggested Resources at the end of this section for further information.

Religious Beliefs and Rituals

Infant care teachers sometimes encounter religious practices that are very different from their own. Examples include following dietary rules, fasting, wearing clothing that covers particular parts of the body, using amulets or tokens for protection, and having different expectations of men, women, girls, and boys. Families may not want their children to celebrate religious holidays different from their own, and they may keep their children home for holidays that are unfamiliar to the infant care teachers. Absences related to religious practices may be extensive. For example, an immigrant family may return to their country of origin for a religious holiday lasting several weeks. These cultural practices are very important to families and should be respected and supported whenever possible.

Attitudes Toward Property

Some cultures do not recognize individual property; possessions belong to everyone, and items are dispensed to individual family members according to need. If your cultural pattern focuses on independence, you may find that although you teach the children the difference between what is theirs and what belongs to someone else, their families downplay personal property and teach even their youngest children to share everything. Problems may arise if a child takes home a small toy and the family thinks of it as community property. Recognizing the meaning of the behavior and the importance of this cultural value to the family will help you respond to the situation with sensitivity.

Health Practices

Infant care teachers have a great deal of responsibility for the health of the children in their care. You may be legally bound to meet requirements such as tuberculosis tests, physical examinations, and vaccinations. In addition, you may have other responsibilities related to hygiene, nutrition, or referrals for medi-

cal treatment. Some of these requirements and practices may be difficult for families from other cultures to understand or fulfill.

One example is drawing blood. This common medical practice is frowned on in many cultures. If a child is legally required to have a blood test, the male head of the family may have to give his consent. Additionally, recently arrived immigrants may be fearful of hospitals and of the medical profession in general. Because of this, they may hesitate to sign a permission slip authorizing a program to call for an ambulance in an emergency.

Keep in mind that many people who have arrived in the United States as refugees have had extensive physical examinations before being allowed to enter the country. Tuberculosis tests required for child care enrollment may be positive as a result of previous medical procedures and may not indicate the presence of the illness. When working with families in these situations, find out the types, extent, and dates of tests performed as part of the immigration process.

Finally, some cultures rely on rituals or alternative health practices for curing illness. To some infant care teachers these customs may seem to endanger the child. For the families involved, they are a way of holding on to traditions of their past. They believe their practices work and they are not comfortable with modern medical practices. The following actions may be needed to address situations in which families and teachers have different views on medical issues:

1. Discuss with the family their thoughts, concerns, and wishes about the medical issue. Listen to their point of view with respect and understanding.
2. Remain open to the family's concerns, but let the family know that your program has certain requirements that you must negotiate together.
3. Bring in a medical professional from the same culture as the family to help work out an acceptable solution for everyone involved.
4. If appropriate, contact community resources for support.

In areas with large immigrant and refugee populations, family associations and social service agencies are often available to help recently arrived families make the transition to life in the United States. Being aware of each family's cultural background will help you resolve health-related issues and find solutions that are acceptable to the family, the program, and relevant regulatory agencies.

The Opportunities of Diversity

Regardless of the differences in customs or cultural backgrounds among families and program staff members, you can find shared experiences and values. Discovering common concerns, hopes, and goals will strengthen your relationships with families and will support families' relationships with each other.

Strong relationships between teachers and families—and among the families themselves—will make a program stronger and will help staff members, families, and children feel more comfortable.

Questions to Consider

1. What are some positive ways of relating to families who are different from you?
2. If a family is from another culture and speaks a language different from yours, do you have someone who can interpret important information about the child and the program and who can help you build a relationship of trust with the child's family?
3. What are some ways to learn about the cultures of the families you serve? Do you express genuine interest in each family's culture?
4. How does the child care environment reflect the cultures of families in the program?
5. Are you aware of different cultural values, family structures, and child-rearing practices that affect the children in the program? How can you communicate acceptance, respect, and openness to cultures and practices different from your own?
6. How can you become more aware of the ways in which your cultural values and practices influence the children in your program?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Anderson, M. Parker. *Parent-Provider Partnerships: Families Matter.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 1998.

Advances the concept of family-centered child care by addressing the development of the child and family together. Offers family-support principles that emphasize building on family strengths and on the community's culture and resources.

Bandtec Network for Diversity Training. *Reaching for Answers: A Workbook on Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. Oakland, CA: Bandtec Network for Diversity Training, 2003.

Based on an original framework, this workbook guides the exploration of practical ideas that individuals, trainers, teachers, and administrators can implement in their work.

Barrera, Isaura, and Robert M. Corso. *Skilled Dialogue: Strategies for Responding to Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2003.

Presents "Skilled Dialogue," a field-tested model for respectful, reciprocal, and responsive interaction that honors cultural beliefs and values. Practitioners will improve their relationships with the children and families they serve and better address developmental and educational goals. Gives readers a model for meeting one of their biggest challenges: honoring the diverse identities of the children and families they serve.

Bernhard, Judith K., and Janet Gonzalez-Mena. "The Cultural Context of Infant and Toddler Care." Published in *Infants and Toddlers in Out-of-Home Care* (pp. 237–267), edited by Debby Cryer and Thelma Harms. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2000.

Relates the increased need for out-of-home infant/toddler care to the importance of early care and intervention that addresses the child's cultural context. Reflects a research-based perspective. Available from the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), 25 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20001; telephone 1-800-233-1200 (toll-free). CDF publications include a monthly newsletter on federal legislation, an annual analysis of the federal budget, and a free publications catalog. The CDF offers education about and advocacy for the needs of children, especially low-income and minority children and those with disabilities.

Comer, James P., and Alvin F. Poussaint. *Black Child Care: How to Bring Up a Healthy Black Child in America—A Guide to Emotional and Psychological Development*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976.

Discusses common concerns and offers advice for helping children to learn positive ways of dealing with racism.

Derman-Sparks, L., and the A.B.C. Task Force. *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1988.

Offers suggestions on helping staff and children respect each other as individuals, transcending and eliminating barriers based on race, sex, or ability. Available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1313 L Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005; telephone 1-800-424-2460 (toll-free).

Derman-Sparks, Louise, and Patricia Ramsey. *What if All the Children Are White? Antibias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.

Distinguished educators tackle a frequently asked question about multicultural education: How do I teach about racial and cultural diversity if all my students are white? Proposes seven learning themes to help white children resist messages of racism and build identity and skills for thriving in a multicultural world. Includes strategies, resources, and classroom examples for implementing the learning themes in early childhood settings.

Diffily, Deborah, and Kathy Morrison, eds. *Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005.

Offers 93 brief messages for parents on topics ranging from biting to developing children's literacy. Teachers can use the messages to strengthen communication between programs and families and can adapt the messages for use in newsletters, family packets, parent–teacher conferences, bulletin boards, parent handouts, and so forth. Includes dozens of innovative strategies for engaging and involving parents in your program.

Duffy, Roslyn, et al. "Parent Conferences: Beginnings Workshop." *Child Care Information Exchange* 116 (July/August 1997): 39–58.

Presents six workshop sessions on parent conferences. Chapter 3 focuses on meeting with parents of infants. Chapter 6 addresses how to work with non-English-speaking families.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet. *Multicultural Issues in Child Care,* 3rd ed. Mountain View, CA: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2000.

Centering on respect for cultural pluralism, this publication aims to increase caregiver sensitivity to different cultural practices and values. References numerous research studies.

———. "Resolving Disagreements." *Coordinate* (1992): 12–14.

Presents strategies for resolving cultural conflicts through understanding and negotiation, caregiver education, parent education, and conflict management.

———. "Taking a Culturally Sensitive Approach in Infant/Toddler Programs." *Young Children* 47 (January 1992): 4–9.

Provides suggestions to caregivers for improving their sensitivity to cultural and individual differences and for increasing communication. Includes strategies such as becoming clear about one's own values and goals, and using problem solving rather than a "power approach" to resolve conflicts.

———. "Working with Cultural Differences: Individualism and Collectivism—The First Years Ngä Tau Tautahi." *New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education* 1, (2002): 13–15.

Examines different cultural perspectives on early identity development in relation to other people. Should the emphasis be on the infant developing an identity as an independent individual or as a member of a group? Effective caregiving practices adapt to the emphasis that families place on independence versus group membership.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Dianne W. Eyer. *Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers: A Curriculum of Respectful, Responsive Care and Education,* 8th ed. McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.

Combining a child-centered philosophy with problem-solving strategies and a thorough discussion of diversity, this book offers an introduction to curriculum and care for infants and toddlers. Based on a combination of the late Magda Gerber's philosophy and that of her colleague, Emmi Pikler.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Nava Peshotan Bhavnagri. "Cultural Differences in Sleeping Practices: Helping Early Childhood Educators Understand." *Child Care Information Exchange* 138 (March/April 2001): 91–93.

Focuses on ways in which infant care teachers can provide developmentally and culturally appropriate care. Discusses the role of cultural values, beliefs, priorities, and goals, and the importance of communication between infant care teachers and parents.

———. "Diversity and Infant/Toddler Caregiving." *Young Children* 55 (September 2000): 31–35.

Suggests reflective dialogue to learn the cultural reasons for a family's practices, with the goal of finding creative solutions that satisfy caregivers and families. Offers examples and questions.

Greenfield, Patricia M., Blanca Quiroz, Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, and Elise Trumbull. *Bridging Cultures Between Home and School: A Guide for Teachers.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001.

Helps teachers understand the norms of both the mainstream culture of schools and the diverse cultures of their students. Provides a framework for learning about culture and presents teacher-created strategies for making classrooms more effective, particularly for students with immigrant Latino backgrounds.

Grieshaber, Susan, and Gaile Sloan Cannella. *Embracing Identities in Early Childhood Education.* New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.

Drawing on the work of early childhood teachers and teacher educators, this publication provides examples of creative ways in which practitioners and theorists are rethinking their work. Grounded in principles of equity, difference, and the recognition of racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity, the contributors discuss issues such as equity and fairness in observing young children, gender identities in the early years, and working with nontraditional families.

Lynch, Eleanor W., and Marci J. Hanson. *A Guide for Working with Children and Their Families: Developing Cross-Cultural Competence,* 2nd ed. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 1998.

Offers practical advice for working with children and families of diverse heritages. Includes examples and helpful appendixes explaining culturally diverse courtesies, customs, events, practices, and vocabulary. Available from the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), 1313 L Sreet NW, Suite 110, Washington, DC 20005; telephone 202-833-2220. NBCDI publications include a newsletter and calendar featuring issues and important historical dates related to the development of black children.

Mangione, Peter L., ed. *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1995.

A guide to help infant/toddler caregivers (1) improve their understanding of themselves and discover how they are influenced by their cultural beliefs; (2) improve their understanding of the children and families they serve; and (3) learn to relate to cultural issues and thereby become more effective caregivers.

Marshall, Hermine H. "Cultural Influences on the Development of Self-Concept." *Young Children* 6 (2001): 19–22.

Discusses issues related to self-concept development in light of a more sophisticated understanding of cultural influences. Examines the construction of a self-image as independent or interdependent and evaluates the impact of self-image on development and socialization. Suggests ways for early childhood practitioners to increase their sensitivity to the values and practices of families whose children are in their care.

McLoyd, Vonnie C., Nancy E. Hill, and Kenneth A. Dodge, eds. *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity.* New York: Guilford Press, 2005.

Offers new perspectives on the cultural, economic, and community contexts of African American family life. Recognizing the diversity of contemporary African American families, leading experts from different disciplines present the latest knowledge on topics such as family formation, gender roles, child rearing, care of the elderly, and religious practices. Particular attention is given to how families draw on cultural resources to adapt to racial disparities in wealth, housing, education, and employment, and how culture is shaped by these circumstances. Explores factors that promote or hinder healthy development and discusses research-based practices and policies for supporting families' strengths.

Morrison, Johnetta Wade, and Tashel Bordere. "Supporting Bi-Racial Children's Identity Development." *Childhood Education* 3 (2001): 134–138.

Discusses stages of identity development in early childhood and ways teachers can support that development. Addresses components of identity development in young children, parental preferences, valuing diversity, and curriculum recommendations. Provides suggestions appropriate for children of any racial combination.

Powers, Julie. *Parent-Friendly Early Learning: Tips And Strategies For Working Well With Parents.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 2005.

A resource for classroom teachers seeking to create positive relationships with the parents of young children. Addresses specific challenges in working with parents, including improving parent–teacher communication, developing and upholding policies, and discussing child development. Contains examples of real-life experiences from early childhood teachers.

Rogoff, Barbara. *The Cultural Nature of Human Development.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Identifies patterns of differences and similarities among cultural communities, such as children's opportunities to participate in child- or adult-focused community activities. Examines aspects of development from a cultural angle: child rearing, social relations, interdependence and autonomy, developmental transitions across the life span, gender roles, attachment, and learning and cognitive development.

Small, Meredith. *Our Babies, Ourselves: How Biology and Culture Shape the Way We Parent*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998.

Explores ethnopediatrics, an interdisciplinary science that combines anthropology, pediatrics, and child development research to examine how child-rearing styles across cultures affect the health and survival of infants. Describes the parenting styles of several cultures, including (but not limited to) the nomadic Ache tribe of Paraguay, the agrarian !Kung San society of the Kalahari Desert in Africa, and American society.

Sturm, Connie. "Creating Parent-Teacher Dialogue: Intercultural Communication in Child Care." *Young Children* 52 (July 1997): 34–38.

Highlights the Parent-Teacher Dialogue Project of the San Francisco Bay Area to encourage open dialogue between parents and caregivers.

Audiovisuals

Conversations for Three: Communicating with Interpreters. VHS, 60 minutes; includes 32-page booklet. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Presents situations that show how mistakes in interpretation and a lack of awareness of cultural differences often result in ineffective communication. Discussion booklet provides objectives, key terms, questions, and activities.

Culturally Diverse Families. Video, 28 minutes. New York: Young Adult Institute, 1987.

Three professionals discuss approaches that help sensitize caregivers working with culturally diverse families. Includes training guides for instructor and staff. Available from the YAI Network, 460 West 34th Street, New York, NY 10001; telephone 212-273-6100.

Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care. DVD, 36 minutes; includes a video magazine. Sacramento: California Department of Education.

Explores the meaning of culture in the lives of young children, and the role of culture in the development of a child's self-esteem. Emphasizes the importance of providing culturally consistent child care and of learning about each child's family and culture. Available in English and Spanish.

Section Five:

Listening and Responding to Families

There are many types of families who need child care, and they have a wide range of lifestyles and circumstances. They include single-parent families headed by working mothers or fathers, families in which one or both parents are in college, young parents living independently or with other family members, homeless families, families whose members have disabilities, migrant families, blended families, two-career families, divorced parents who share custody and child rearing, and families with a variety of lifestyles. In addition, some families may have arrived recently from other countries and may speak little English.

Today's infant care teachers also work with an increasing number of children at risk of neglect, abuse, illness, and extreme poverty. Many families experience ongoing hunger or are affected by drug problems or AIDS. Whatever the family's situation, infant care teachers need to understand the unique child-rearing practices and child care expectations of each family. Being open and responsive to the preferences and concerns of each family in the program is important for every infant care teacher.

Active Listening

Because infant care teachers work with so many different families, clear, two-way communication is essential. This requires skill and, at times, special thought. One proven technique for listening and responding to families is called *active listening.* Active listening is paying respectful attention to the family's messages, both spoken and unspoken.

Although these messages are not always communicated directly, they offer valuable information that requires sensitive, honest, and precise responses. Below are a few active-listening strategies.

Reading Body Language

Reading body language is an important part of active listening. It can help you become more aware of a family member's true feelings. The following situation is an example of teacher–family communication that could have been improved if the infant care teacher had used the strategy of reading body language:

> Robert is a child in an infant care program. His foster mother arrives at the end of the day to pick up Robert and has a conversation with Rosanne, the infant care teacher.
>
> *ROSANNE:* Robert seemed unusually fussy and irritable today. Do you think he's coming down with something?
>
> *MOTHER:* He often acts that way at the end of the day. Are these Robert's clothes? I've got to hurry or we'll miss our bus. I have to get my other kids.
>
> After catching the bus, picking up her two other foster children, shopping for groceries, and cooking supper for the family, Robert's mother felt his forehead and realized he was hot. She thought, *Why didn't Rosanne tell me Robert was ill?*

Rosanne was aware that Robert's mother had not fully received or acknowledged the question about Robert's health, but by the time she realized she needed to say something more, Robert's mother had rushed out the door. If Rosanne had

noticed the mother's body language—she had a deep frown and was moving abruptly—she would have realized that Robert's mother was in a hurry and that she wanted to leave the center as soon as possible. Rosanne could have assessed the situation quickly and said, "I have something important to tell you about Robert. I think he may be getting sick. He was really fussy, irritable, and tired today." The rushed mother probably would have heard the words "something important" and "getting sick" and would have been more attentive to Rosanne's concerns.

Using "Door Openers"

The more family members talk, the more you can learn about them and their children. Family members will be more open to talking if the infant care teacher shows genuine interest in what they have to say. To the contrary, family members will be less likely to talk if they feel that a teacher will respond with a lecture or unsolicited advice.

Sometimes it is helpful to use "door openers" to encourage family members to express themselves. Door openers are phrases that invite family members to share their ideas and feelings, or that

demonstrate interest in what a family member is saying. Here are a few examples of door openers:

1. "I'd be interested in hearing your opinion."
2. "Interesting!"
3. "It sounds as if you have something to say about this."
4. "I've noticed that you . . ."
5. "Would you like to talk about it?"
6. "Please, tell me more."

Phrases such as theses encourage families to elaborate and to keep talking. Door openers are especially effective when you and the family members are first getting to know each other; families hear that you really want to know what they think. Door openers reassure family members that they can talk safely without being taught, advised, or lectured by an infant care teacher.

Repeating What You Hear

By repeating in different words what a family member has said, you can test your listening skills and assure the family member that you have heard his or her message. This technique is especially effective when dealing with potentially controversial or sensitive subjects. In the following example, an infant care teacher repeats what she hears, which gives her enough time to offer a thoughtful response to a father's concerns.

FATHER: I wish the children had a few more big toys, like wooden trucks and buses.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: You feel the children need more large, wheeled toys?

FATHER: Yes, I do. I think children need to be able to sit on wheeled toys, and to be able to push and pull them. Plastic doesn't give them the same sense of security.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: You're suggesting that we invest in some wooden, wheeled toys big enough for toddlers to ride on?

FATHER: Yes, that's right.

As the conversation continued, the father opened up and gave more details about what he wanted. The infant care teacher was able to think of how to meet the father's concerns as she listened without arguing or interjecting her own opinions. The teacher was careful to avoid being defensive.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Perhaps we could organize a fund-raiser specifically for these types of wheeled toys. Do you think you could help?

By suggesting an action that could meet the father's concerns, the infant care teacher acknowledged that the father's concerns were valid. The father agreed to assist with the fund-raiser and began to make plans with other families. The next time he had concerns, he felt more relaxed and open about discussing them

because he knew the infant care teacher would listen and respond with respect.

Respecting Confidentiality

Although infant care teachers are not expected to counsel parents or family members, they often find themselves in the role of empathetic listener. Family members may share very personal concerns with you, trusting that you will understand their need for confidentiality. It is not always easy to know what information should or should not be shared with coworkers. Sensitive information should be shared only with those people for whom the information is necessary to care for the child or work with the family. Being able to judge what to share and what to keep confidential is one of the many skills that an infant care teacher needs.

Self-Awareness When Relating with Others

Throughout life, people carry feelings and attitudes they acquired during their childhood, many of which are linked to their families' cultures. Like everyone, each infant care teacher has a unique perspective, set of preferences, state of health, and family history—and a teacher's feelings and experiences have a strong impact on his or her behavior. For example, a person who was accepted and supported in childhood is more likely to be accepting and supportive with an infant or toddler. On the other hand, someone whose childhood was unhappy, deprived, or harsh may tend to neglect, reject, or harshly discipline a child.

Your childhood, too, has influenced the ways you think and behave. To be responsive to each family, become aware of how your personal feelings, values, and beliefs affect the way you care for infants and toddlers. Consider your own childhood:

1. What were you like, how did you feel, and how were you treated as a small child?
2. What was your family life like, and how were your relationships with your parents and siblings?
3. Were there any crises, illnesses, divorces, deaths, or moves to new places that put unusual stress on you or your family?
4. How do you feel now about your childhood?

Recall early memories and ask older members of your family what you were like. This information can help you understand the attitudes and feelings that affect the way you care for children. You may discover that you have a particular affinity for certain infants and toddlers in your program. For example, a child may remind you of a favorite younger sibling, or even of yourself when you were a child. Or you may come to realize that you have a negative feeling toward a certain parent because he or she reminds you of a person you disliked as a child.

One way to understand how your childhood influences the way you relate to infants and their families is to write down the things you still resent or regret from your childhood. You will find that these are almost always unresolved issues that you still carry in the present—and because these issues are unresolved, they can lead you to overemphasize them in your relationships with families.

Next, consider your present attitudes. Reflect on your current feelings and preferences. Specifically, spend some time thinking, writing, or talking with coworkers or friends about these two issues:

- Your feelings about yourself as an infant care teacher
- Your likes and dislikes in life

Being aware of your feelings and preferences, and how your past affects them, can help you understand and better empathize with the families in your program. For example, you may have an opportunity to tell a parent that you know how he feels about a certain problem because your family experienced similar difficulties when you were a child. This common experience could become the basis of a connection between you and that parent. Awareness of your current attitudes can also help you deal with feelings about being an infant care teacher.

Accepting Your Role as an Infant Care Teacher

Infant/toddler care and teaching is filled with intrinsic rewards, including the captivating company of small children, the companionship of coworkers, and the friendship and deep appreciation of family members who know their baby or toddler is being cared for by a capable, devoted professional. However, the job does involve tasks that are sometimes considered menial, such as changing diapers or cleaning up after meals. From time to time, teachers may feel sensitive about their status, especially around more affluent families or a family member who seems unaware of the value of a teacher's work and skills. Sensitivity about how infant/toddler care providers are sometimes undervalued can interfere with a teacher's ability to offer empathy and understanding to families and children. Other aspects of infant/toddler caregiving that may cause discomfort for a teacher are noise levels, emotional stress associated with significant responsibilities, low pay and lack of benefits, and the feeling that the work is never done. Sometimes it is difficult to avoid feeling angry, exploited, or exhausted. Under these circumstances, maintaining good will and energy to nurture caring partnerships with families can be a challenge.

Share with family members the lighthearted side of infant care teaching.

Below are a few suggestions for handling the demands on your time, energy, and emotions:

- Know your limits, and be clear with families about what those limits are. This can help minimize situations in which you feel you are giving more than what you are capable of.
- Know when to stop worrying about a child or family. Worrying too much about work-related issues will lead to burnout and can decrease your ability to be helpful.
- Express your concerns to family members in tactful but straightforward terms.

To handle sensitivity about low professional status, try taking these measures:

- Join with others, including concerned family and staff members, to advocate better funding for programs.
- Maintain a sense of humor and a healthy perspective.
- Remember how much the children and their families benefit from your care.

As in all endeavors, infant care teachers must learn to live with partial success. Neither you nor the families and children in your program can be perfect. Having a friend to talk with can be a much-needed outlet for the intense work of caregiving and teaching. Talking with a friend can also give you another perspective on the many decisions you have to make as an infant care teacher.

Know Your Likes and Dislikes

Everyone develops certain preferences and aversions in the process of growing up. Sometimes, preferences change. For example, children often dislike foods that they learn to enjoy later in life. Other likes and dislikes remain throughout our lives. Lifelong aversions may be based on negative early experiences—such as when a person dislikes a vegetable he was forced to eat as a child—or on positive early experiences, such as a woman who loves pink because it reminds her of a beloved aunt's pink dresses. Share with family members the interests, preferences, and ties that you have apart from your professional life. When you find that you have common interests with families, your work can be more enjoyable. This will also help you establish trust and build partnerships that foster the well-being of the children, the families, and you.

Sharing with family members your likes and dislikes, even seemingly insignificant ones, can add a bit of humor to the child care environment. Suppose that as a child you were required to eat peas even though you disliked them. You share that story with family members in your program. One lunchtime, a grandfather visits his grandson at the child care program. The grandfather sees that you are serving peas to the children, although he knows from your story that you don't like them. He also knows you are too professional to reveal your true feelings about peas. Through a raised eyebrow or other subtle sign, the two of you can share some amusement as you cheerfully and enthusiastically serve peas to the children.

Dealing with Prejudgments

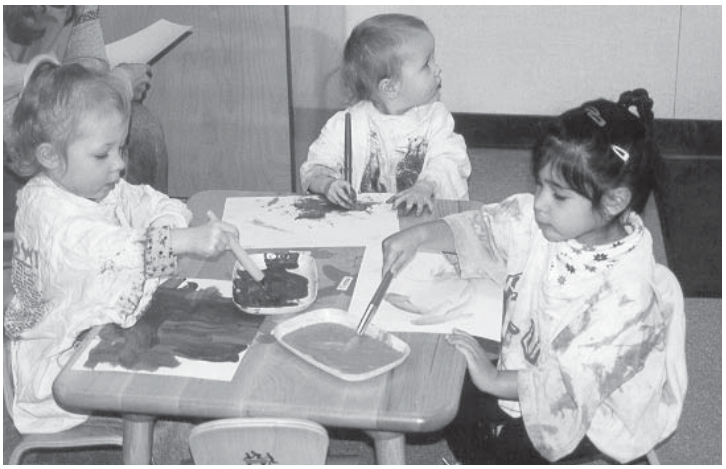
Our expectations of situations and people are usually based on what we have learned in the past. Whether we acquire expectations from personal experiences, books and movies, or the opinions of relatives and friends, it is normal to prejudge new experiences based on those expectations.

Problems arise when preconceived attitudes and opinions interfere with our perception of reality. If prejudgments keep us from seeing certain people as they really are, then we may treat those individuals inappropriately. For example, we may believe that girls do not like to play with trucks, and as a result we may fail to notice a toddler girl who is longingly eyeing a truck that a boy is playing with.

Avoid making assumptions about people based on their outward appearance, their name, the way they talk, or where they come from. Stereotyping people can lead you to erroneous attitudes and inappropriate behavior—and it can prevent you from getting to know who people really are.

The first step in dealing with prejudgments is to be honest with yourself. Be open to the possibility that you may have standards and expectations that, when not met, affect your feelings about people. For example, if you are unable to admit that you judge people who use bad language, you have no way of examining or finding an appropriate way to handle your feelings.

People who deny that they make prejudgments often come across as insincere. For example, Tyler's uncle uses bad language. Even though you do not express disapproval directly, he seems to sense it without knowing what is causing it. He avoids you and may assume you do not like him, or that you are prejudging him for some reason—perhaps because of his ethnicity or gender. A first step toward creating a better relationship with Tyler's uncle is to acknowledge the source of your discomfort. With this acknowledgment, you will be better able to make a conscious decision about how to relate to Tyler's uncle, and you will be less likely to let your feelings seep out indirectly. Even if you still find it difficult to deal with the uncle's bad language, you may recognize that your dislike is limited to that one aspect of his behavior, and you may be more open to appreciating his other qualities. Remember that you do have common interests with Tyler's uncle and with every person in the program—most notably, the concern you share for the children and their families.



Addressing Differences

Lifestyle differences require openness on the part of the infant care teacher. Be flexible and accommodating whenever possible so families see that you take their wishes seriously. As you get to know families well, you will be aware of the lifestyle preferences that represent their core values. Discuss with families why they want you to do certain things, such as using cloth diapers, providing certain types of foods, dressing their children with specific clothing, and guiding their children's behavior in particular ways. Gathering information of this sort will help you decide the best way to meet each family's needs, as well as your own.

Example of Differences

Parents or family members may not want their toddlers to finger-paint because the children might get paint on their clothing. These family members need the opportunity to fully express their views and to have their concerns respected. At some point, the infant care teacher might share knowledge about the value of messy play, but only if the family members seem interested in hearing more about the topic.

As another example, you may hold views about how to conduct mealtimes that differ from the views of families who are vegetarians or who have other food restrictions, but it is your job to feed the children according to each family's desires. Similarly, babies who are accustomed to being held most of the time or fed frequently can require a lot of your

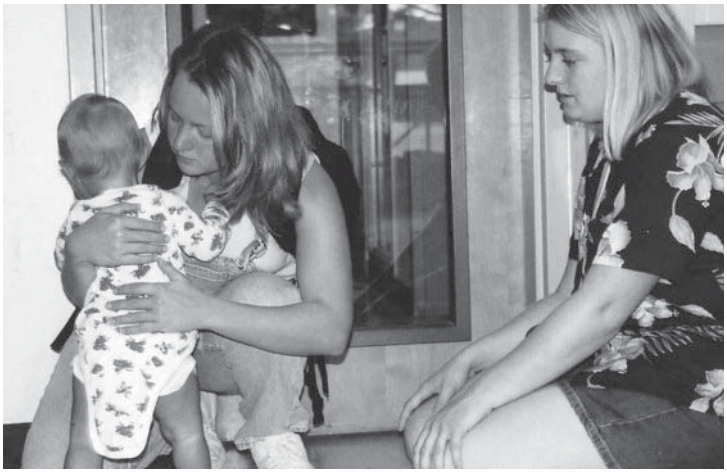
time, and you might believe that it would be better if they were handled differently. Nevertheless, the families' lifestyles must be respected and, when possible, the program should accommodate family preferences.

Imagine that a young father says to a toddler teacher, "I think some teachers like to keep children in diapers because they don't want to be bothered with potty training. I don't want my son to still be in diapers at the end of this year, when he turns three."

This father wants his child to be toilet trained but seems uncertain that his concerns will be taken seriously. The infant care teacher listens carefully and hears the father's message clearly. Then the teacher follows up on the father's comments. The two meet to share ideas and develop a plan for cooperative toilet learning that includes the teacher's commitment to watch diligently for signs of the child's readiness. The teacher also mentions that it sometimes takes three years or so for a child to be ready for toilet learning.

Approaching Differences with Sensitivity

Sometimes, the most difficult people for infant care teachers to accept are those who struggle greatly in caring for their families. At times you may feel puzzled or uncomfortable with a family's way of doing things. Although it is usually easier to relate to a person whose lifestyle is similar to one's own, teachers need to develop and maintain cordial relationships with all the families in their programs. When you view diverse values and behaviors as sources of interest and variety rather than as problems, you can create opportunities to enhance your relationships with families whose lifestyles differ from yours.



Here are some things you can do when your views and preferences differ from a family's:

- Seek subjects of common interest to talk about.
- Ask family members to tell you more about their way of doing things.
- Express your interest in and enjoyment of the family's infant or toddler.
- Before discussing issues with family members, think about and discuss your feelings and concerns with coworkers or friends.
- Be tactful but direct when discussing what bothers you about a family's way of doing things, and work to negotiate solutions with the family.

Below is an example of how you might interact with a mother whose lifestyle and philosophy of infant care is different from yours:

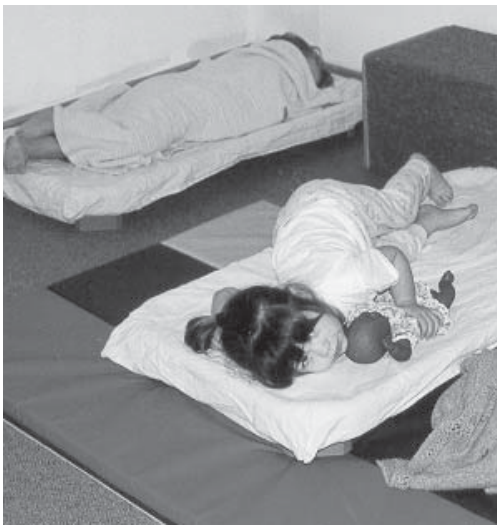
> As a young child, Catherine received little love from her mother, and as a result she found it difficult to show love for her newborn baby, Lisa—even though Catherine had been told that close nurturing is one of the most important factors in a baby's development. Catherine says things

such as, "I don't pick Lisa up when she cries because that will spoil her. I learned from my mom that crying wouldn't get me anywhere. I don't want Lisa to be a crybaby." Catherine has also talked about spanking her older toddler, Thomas: "Well, my father spanked me when I was bad, and I turned out all right. I spank Thomas to teach him right from wrong."

Rather than give the mother advice or a lecture, such as saying, "You really should hold Lisa more," you might focus at first on being a good listener, and let her witness your nurturing behavior with Lisa and the other babies. You also might mention how much you enjoy holding babies. On another occasion, you might mention how uncomfortable it is for you to hear babies crying. And you could take another opportunity to point out that an infant's need to be held diminishes as the child grows.

If Catherine asks questions or seems to be interested, you might tell her about research that links a mother's responsive care to a child's high performance on tasks at age four.* You could offer a handout or article that she might like to read. Generally, it works best not to address the issue directly, but to continue to build a trusting relationship with the family while modeling appropriate teacher–child interaction. Family members will be more open to your feedback if you have developed a level of trust and mutual understanding.

*M. H. Bornstein and H. G. Bornstein. "Caregivers' Responsiveness and Cognitive Development in Infants and Toddlers: Theory and Research." In *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Cognitive Development and Learning.* Peter L. Mangione, ed. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1995, p. 12.



Before you talk with family members about their care of a child, consider the following suggestions:

- Be aware of your tone of voice as well as your words. Carefully chosen words expressed in a disapproving tone will put off a person in much the same way that tactless statements do.
- Keep in mind the distinction between individual differences or cultural styles and inappropriate care.
- Ask the family members for their opinions about the child's behavior and the reasoning behind their responses to the child.
- Work with the parents or family members toward mutually acceptable ways to handle situations.

Remember that another person's way of doing things may be just as valid as your way. Although families may behave in ways that seem irrational to you, your ways of doing things may seem just as irrational to them. Even in situations where families genuinely lack knowledge of appropriate care for children, understanding the possible causes of their behavior

can make your efforts to help them more effective. Attitudes and habits learned in childhood are not easily modified. Even when a parent or family member wishes to change a certain child-rearing behavior, developing new habits takes time, and stressful situations tend to bring out old patterns of response. Offering a positive alternative is often the most effective way to influence behavior.

If you feel uncomfortable about your interaction with a family, try using the four-step process for working with your feelings that is demonstrated in the Program for Infant/Toddler Care DVD *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers.* The process is described fully in Appendix D. The following example shows how to use the process in a situation where you are worried about a child who is tired.

The situation: Each Monday morning, Tricia, a toddler, arrives at child care so tired that she is unable to stay awake through the morning. You are concerned about Tricia and her teenage mother, Joyce.

Step 1: Explore your feelings. Think about the influence of past experiences on your response to the situation. You may realize that you are touchy about parents who do not care for their children properly. You feel that you need to address Joyce and Tricia's situation, so you proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Check out your feelings with others. You discuss your feelings about the situation with another infant care teacher. (You also could have spoken with a trusted confidante, supervisor, presenter at a relevant workshop, or someone from a family child care association.) As a result of your discussion you realize that Joyce's behavior shows that she, like you, cares deeply about Tricia and works hard to provide good care for her. You decide that Joyce might appreciate some assistance with balancing her lifestyle needs and Tricia's need for rest. You are ready to take the next step.

Step 3: Seek the parent's point of view. You ask Joyce to meet with you at a mutually convenient time to learn about how she sees the issue you are raising. You recognize that this is a sensitive subject and that it is important to set a tone of friendly concern. Practicing active-listening techniques, you prepare to ask Joyce about her point of view. You begin by sharing your view of the situation in a nonjudgmental way:

"Tricia is having a great time in child care," you begin, "but on Monday mornings she is often too tired to play. She ends up missing a lot of fun because she needs a nap earlier than

the other toddlers. Is there any special reason that Tricia is so tired after the weekend?"

Joyce explains that she is in high school and that she has to study every evening during the week. On weekend evenings, she enjoys playing music and socializing with her friends. Tricia is difficult to put to bed on those nights. The music and the company stimulate Tricia, so Joyce lets her stay up until she falls asleep on her own.

Step 4: Develop an action plan. At this point, you know more about the situation but you are not ready to try to resolve it. You need time to think and to develop a plan, which will be based on what you learned from Joyce and on additional information you gather from other sources—such as talking with other teenage mothers about how they find time for recreation while ensuring their infants and toddlers get enough sleep. You decide that the issue bothers you but that it is not a serious problem; however, you want to find some ways to ease your stress, perhaps by finding a new way to relax, by talking with someone about your worries, or by setting boundaries. If you decide to meet with Joyce again, make sure you acknowledge and express appreciation for the good job she does with Tricia. Tricia is a happy, healthy, well-developing child, and much of the credit belongs to her mother. You know that Joyce works hard to be a good parent and student. Approach the meeting thoughtfully and bring some potential solutions to negotiate with Joyce. You also might bring information from outside resources such as the Program for Infant/Toddler Care DVD *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers.*

Relate with acceptance to the lifestyles you encounter.

Infant care teachers who are sensitive to the challenges faced by families often find that the support they offer is deeply appreciated. Cultivate a positive relationship with every family in the program by listening carefully and by responding thoughtfully to each family member. Although it takes time and energy to develop cordial relationships, the effort will be worthwhile.

Questions to Consider

1. How can you encourage family members to communicate more freely? Do you make a point of listening more than talking? What makes listening "active"?
2. Do you take time to get to know family members and to let them know you?
3. Are you aware of your personal prejudices and preferences? How do these affect your relationships with families?

4. How do you feel about your role as an infant care teacher? How do these feelings affect your ability to hear and respond to family members' concerns? What steps can you take to become more comfortable in your relationships with parents?
5. What are some of the lifestyle differences among families in your program? How do you feel about the differences? Are there steps you can take to work with uncomfortable differences?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Bruno, Holly Elissa. "Hearing Parents in Every Language: An Invitation to ECE Professionals." *Child Care Information Exchange* 153 (September/October, 2003): 58–60.

Presents five articles on multilanguage programs in early childhood education: "Bilingualism/Multilingualism and Language Acquisition Theories" (Evienia Papadaki-D'Onofrio); "Training and Supporting Caregivers Who Speak a Language Different from Those in Their Community" (Joan Matsalia and Paula Bowie); "Language Immersion Programs for Young Children" (Francis Wardle); and "Hearing Parents in Every Language: An Invitation to ECE Professionals" (Holly Elissa Bruno). Includes training suggestions by Kay Albrecht.

Carter, Margie. "Communicating with Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 110 (July/August 1996): 80–83.

Offers five strategies for enhancing communication, including keeping parents well-informed, helping parents to introduce themselves in the classroom, and creating dialogue in newsletters and bulletins.

Copple, Carol, ed. *A World of Difference: Readings on Teaching Young Children in a Diverse Society.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003.

Presents ways of working with young children and their families that are truly responsive to people's differences and are effective at combating bias. Forty-five readings invite self-reflection and discussions with an emphasis on building respect and understanding. Covers a wide range of issues, such as culture, language, religion, inclusion, and socioeconomic status.

Delpit, Lisa, and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy. *The Skin that We Speak: Thought on Language and Culture in the Classroom.* New York: The New Press, 2002.

Offers firsthand perspectives on the issue of dialects in the classroom, a controversy sparked by the notorious Ebonics debates of the 1990s. Delpit and Dowdy, education professors at Georgia State University, present new and previously published pieces by distinguished educators such as Herbert Kohl, Jules Henry, and Victoria Purcell-Gates.

Dodge, Diane Trister. "Sharing Your Program with Families." *Child Care Information Exchange* 101 (1995): 7–11.

Offers guidelines for child care providers on working with parents to achieve mutual goals. Focuses on using the program environment to express the philosophy and goals of the curriculum and stresses the importance of establishing ongoing communication with families.

Eggers-Pierola, Costanza. *Connections and Commitments: Reflecting Latino Values in Early Childhood Programs.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005.

Focusing on four key values shared by many Latino cultures, this publication provides a framework for teaching Latino students more responsively.

Galinsky, Ellen. *The Six Stages of Parenthood*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman, 2000.

Based on interviews with a broad cross section of American families, this book discusses various stages of parenting that require different skills.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Dianne W. Eyer. *Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers: A Curriculum of Respectful, Responsive Care and Education,* 8th ed. McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.

Combining a child-centered philosophy with problem-solving strategies and a thorough discussion of diversity, this book offers an introduction to curriculum and care for infants and toddlers. Based on the pioneering work of Magda Gerber and that of her colleague and mentor, Emmi Pikler.

Leavitt, Robin L., and Brenda K. Eheart. *Toddler Day Care: A Guide to Responsive Caregiving.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985.

A comprehensive guide to various developmental aspects of toddler caregiving. Includes a chapter on working with parents to handle separation.

Miller, Karen. "Caring for the Little Ones—Developing a Collaborative Relationship with Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 135 (September/October 2000): 86–88.

Discusses the benefits of collaborative relationships with parents and provides suggestions for developing rapport and offering support.

Modigliani, Kathy. *Parents Speak About Child Care,* 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Wheelock College Family Child Care Project, 1997.

Examines parent and family attitudes through 23 focus-group discussions of parents' child care experiences in nine U.S. cities. Analyzes videos resulting from the project.

O'Brien, Marion. *Inclusive Child Care for Infants and Toddlers: Meeting Individual and Special Needs.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 1997.

A resource for infant/toddler caregivers in inclusive settings, and a training guide for students and beginning teachers. Chapter 3 deals with parents as partners and suggests ways to communicate with and involve family members in their children's care.

Schweikert, Gigi. "I Confess, I've Changed—Confessions of a Child Care Provider and a Parent." *Child Care Information Exchange* 111 (September/October 1996): 90–92.

Explores challenges in the communication between child care providers and parents through the eyes of a child care educator who is also a parent.

Schweikert, Gigi. "Remember Me? I'm the Other Parent—Insights for Meeting the Needs of Both Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 126 (March/April 1999): 14–17.

Presents tips for meeting the needs of parents who are unable to see their children's teachers regularly. Focuses on the importance of providing accurate information and relying on various methods of communication.

Stanley, Diane. "How to Defuse an Angry Parent." *Child Care Information Exchange* 108 (March/April 1996): 34–35.

Offers a four-step plan for defusing a parent's anger: Listen carefully; make sure the problem is well understood; acknowledge the parent's feelings; and explain the plan of action.

Stonehouse, Anne, and Janet Gonzalez-Mena. "Working with a High-Maintenance Parent: Building Trust and Respect Through Communication." *Child Care Information Exchange* 142 (November/December 2001): 7–59.

Describes how child care staff helped one mother handle separation difficulties with her eighteen-month-old. Emphasizes the value of empathy in understanding and supporting each family.

Sturm, Connie. "Creating Parent-Teacher Dialogue: Intercultural Communication in Child Care." *Young Children* 52 (July 1997): 34–38.

Highlights the Parent-Teacher Dialogue Project of the San Francisco Bay Area to encourage open dialogue between parents and caregivers.

Audiovisuals

Building Bridges Between Teachers and Families. DVD. Seattle, WA: Harvest Resources.

Two experienced providers—from very different economic and cultural settings—dialogue about how they changed their focus from educating parents to becoming allies with parents. Classroom scenarios present ideas for designing environments that bridge the worlds of parents and teachers and create family-oriented, home-away-from-home communities.

References

Bornstein, Marc H., ed. *Maternal Responsiveness: Characteristics and Consequences.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989.

California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers.* DVD. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd.

Section Six:
Family Participation in the Program

The need for a strong family–program connection is even greater when children spend most of their waking hours in child care. The types of family involvement discussed in previous sections have been generally related to the care of the child. Families can also benefit from activities that reflect the talents and skills of family members and that contribute to feelings of connection between families. This section offers suggestions to help families participate in the infant/toddler program as a community.

Setting the Stage for Family Involvement

Many families in today's society look for full-time care for their children, as opposed to half-day enrichment programs. They are often occupied on weekends and evenings with family responsibilities that used to be handled during weekdays. Program leaders and teachers need to pay close attention to the circumstances, interests, needs, and cultures of each family to encourage family participation in programs. Activities and other opportunities for participation need to be highly interesting to family members for them to make time to attend. The best way to achieve family involvement is to have family members fully engaged in the design and implementation of activities. Without this collaboration from family members, activities may seem irrelevant or even objectionable to program families.

Family-involvement policies and strategies need to fit the families in a program, adapting to changing family patterns

and to the cultural makeup of the group. Policies and events created to encourage family participation must be flexible and should be accessible to everyone. For example, when family members speak different languages, a program may need to recruit translators or use other methods of multilingual communication.

Encourage Feelings of Involvement

Using words such as "our" and "we" shows that you value the families in your program and that you honor them as the most important people in their children's lives. Speak of "our" program or "our room," not "my" program or "my" room. Ask family members to help you strengthen connections between the program and the children's homes. For example, you could ask Lisa's father, "How can we work together to help Lisa feel more connection between her home and child care?" By showing concern for Lisa's connection with her family, by asking Lisa's father what he thinks the program should do, and by listening carefully to his response, you highlight the program's commitment to a full partnership with families. Engaging families in this way will invite fuller involvement by family members in all aspects of the program.

Help Family Members Feel at Home

Family members sometimes feel uncomfortable in the child care setting. They may fear they are intruding or that they lack skills the teachers possess. A smile, a friendly greeting, and an offer of a cup of tea, coffee, or other appropriate refreshment can assure family members that they are welcome. It is especially important to think of ways to make the traditionally female-dominated early childhood domain welcoming to men who are involved in their children's care. One way to do this is to make sure the program has male teachers. Another way is to ask the men in the program about their interests and to build on those interests when developing group activities.

Design the physical environment so that men, as well as women, feel welcome in the program. Set up a corner area, even if it is small, in which family members can relax. Furnish it with at least two comfortable, adult-size chairs, good lighting, and some or all of the following items:

- Attractive posters that include images of men with infants and toddlers
- Books and articles about relevant child-rearing issues
- Children's portfolios

Programs should work continuously to build consensus and a team spirit. People often see things in different ways, and we must take time to discover, appreciate, and learn from our differences.

- Photographs of children in the program
- Photographs of the children and their families at home

Setting up a comfortable place for parents and family members sends a strong message of inclusion—and that can help motivate families to ask questions, participate in events, and offer help.

Opportunities for Family Participation

Opportunities for family participation in an infant/toddler program will differ according to program type. Each child care setting, from small and large center-based programs to family child care, has distinctive characteristics that make some types of participation more feasible than others. For example, family child care, which takes place in a provider's home, is less likely to offer space in the evenings for classes. A large, center-based program is more likely to have a family coordinator who works with staff and family members to plan activities. Regardless of program differences, the most important considerations for family participation are the same in every program: Family members are viewed as an integral part of the program, they participate in their children's care and contribute to the program in different ways, and activities are tailored to families' interests and needs. Here are some ways for families to participate that enhance connections between children, teachers, families, and the program community:

- Create or contribute to a program newsletter.
- Arrange family events.
- Use the center during off-hours for other activities.
- Participate in home visits.
- Help with program maintenance and improvements.
- Volunteer in the classroom.
- Provide program leadership.
- Participate in fund-raising activities.

Program or Classroom Newsletters

A program newsletter is a valuable tool for keeping families and staff members in touch with each other and for fostering a sense of community. It can be as simple as a one- or two-page letter photocopied onto either white or colored paper. A catchy name and childlike drawing at the top of the newsletter will increase its appeal. Almost anything of interest to families and teachers of infants and toddlers can be included in a newsletter. Humor, when used with sensitivity, can be a great contribution. If a family member in your program enjoys writing, ask him or her to help with the newsletter. Make it a cooperative venture with items contributed by anyone in the program who is interested.

A well-written newsletter can keep families and staff members updated about what is happening in the program and with each other. Use the newsletter to welcome new staff members and families and to say farewell to those who leave. Information about current health issues, policy changes, and social events, or reminders about timely payment of fees, can be communicated in a newsletter. However, a newsletter should not be a program's only source of important notices. Always discuss policy matters with families directly, to make sure everyone is clearly informed. A newsletter may also include these elements:

- A "Spotlight on Staff" column featuring an interview with a different staff member each month
- A "Family Column" written by a different family member each month
- Important family events such as births, graduations, and reunions

- Information about infant or toddler development
- Ideas for activities that infants and toddlers can engage in at home
- Recipes
- A column presenting amusing words that program children are using as they begin to talk
- A "Help!" section asking for volunteers to fix toys, organize fund-raisers, and so forth
- Notices about community events that may be of interest to families and staff members

Family Events

Many parents, especially teenage parents, miss the fun they had before their baby was born. Because many parents cannot afford frequent babysitting, they often feel tied down. Activities that can include the whole family—such as a pancake breakfast, picnic, video night, or party—may attract teenage parents and others who would not be able to attend a meeting or an adults-only social event. In programs large enough to have a family coordinator, the coordinator usually works with family volunteers to plan these enjoyable, team-building events. In family child care or small-center programs, child care providers or program leaders and teachers can share the planning with interested family members.

Off-Hours Use of the Child Care Facility

In addition to being used for family social events, the child care facility could be made available during evenings for other activities that interest families. One or more participants could take responsibility for opening and closing the facility and for ensuring it is ready for the children and teachers the next morning.

For example, learning English is a high priority for many immigrant families. In the evenings, the facility could be used for classes in English as a second language, exercise, sewing, cooking, or crafts. Additionally, the child care setting might provide space during off-hours for the tutoring of older children by community volunteers. The possibilities are limited only by the interests and needs of the program families.

Home Visits

Most families will feel more comfortable about a visit from their child's infant care teacher or another staff member if they have had some time to become familiar with the program. If they feel respected and accepted, they are likely to appreciate your personal interest and the effort you make to reach out to them at home. Programs benefit greatly when staff members take time to visit families in their homes.

Making home visits is an excellent way to learn more about the families in your program. The family will get to know you better, too. Your ability to be at ease in their home will increase their ability

to feel at ease in the program setting. A toddler may enjoy showing you his or her room and favorite toys, and you will see the toys the child plays with as well as the space in which the child can explore at home. Seeing the interaction, attitudes, and habits of family members will enhance your understanding of the child's behavior, and therefore your suggestions to the family will be more appropriate. Informal visits with families at their homes can lead to deeper relationships and stronger partnerships. Here is how one infant care teacher expressed what a home visit meant to her:

> During the first visit, I wasn't sure how to relate to the family, but I decided to be as open as possible. I found that by allowing the family to set the tone of the relationship, rather than pushing my attitudes on them, I gained a lot from the visit. I think everyone had a good feeling about it. I learned a lot just by listening. The family sensed that I was genuinely interested in them. I hope to continue making these types of visits to strengthen our bonds of friendship.

Program Maintenance and Improvements

All of the types of work that keep a home in good repair are also necessary in a child care center—but a child care environment requires even more maintenance than a home because it is used heavily by numerous children and adults. Family members whose schedules or preferences keep them from volunteering with children during the day may be willing to help maintain the facility at other times, with activities such as these:

- Planting flowers and shrubs or reseeding grass areas
- Creating climbing mounds and paths
- Building new play structures
- Repairing play equipment
- Reorganizing closets and shelves
- Doing laundry
- Sanitizing toys and furniture

If it is difficult for family members to leave their homes, they may want to do something at home to contribute to the program in other ways. Here are a few things these family members can do:

- Make new toys from recycled materials
- Repair books or toys
- Make doll clothes
- Alter dress-up clothes for dramatic play
- Cut out pictures from magazines for collages and displays

Volunteering in the Classroom

Volunteering in the classroom is another way for family members to contribute to a program. For example, a parent could hold a crying baby or prepare a snack. Other family members might prefer to help with recordkeeping or be a "bilingual buddy" for a new family. Many family members have skills in art, music, interior design, or cooking, and each of

those skills could enhance the program experience for children, families, and teachers.

Although most working parents and other family members will be unable to volunteer in the classroom on a regular basis, some may be able to visit the program from time to time. Let families know they are welcome in the program and that it is important for children to see their parents and other family members talking, laughing, and working with the infant care teachers in the child care environment. Classroom volunteering is a valuable parent-education tool. Families can learn about appropriate interactions with children by observing teachers. They also have the opportunity to observe typical behaviors of other children, and this can help them have age-appropriate expectations of their own children and ease concerns about their children's development. Additionally, participating occasionally in the program's daytime activities, even if only for an hour or so, can help family members who feel uncertain about using child care to become more relaxed with the situation.

A large program often has a few family members who are available to volunteer regularly with children in the program. Volunteers can contribute right from the start if the infant care teachers help the volunteers prepare for their role. The following are some ways to facilitate participation of classroom volunteers:

- Ask family volunteers what they would like to do, and be sure to assign them their chosen tasks.
- Set aside time to give volunteers an overview of what they are to do and when the tasks should be done.
- Offer simple tasks and be ready to help with them if necessary.
- Post a weekly sign-up sheet so volunteers can choose schedules and roles.
- Encourage volunteers to try different roles so people are not limited in the ways they can contribute.
- Suggest that volunteers take time to get familiar with the setting and the children before interacting with children.
- When volunteers have become acclimated, invite them to sit on the floor with a child, following the child's lead in stacking cups, looking at books, and so on.
- Express appreciation for the volunteers' contributions to the program.

Family-centered care is a strength-based approach. The infant care teacher thinks about and promotes the personal strengths, positive resources, and abilities of families from all backgrounds and life circumstances.

If appropriate, point out to family members any special abilities they may have in working with young children. Some may begin to see child care as a career opportunity. You can help interested parents or family members move toward a career in infant care teaching by suggesting workshops, community college classes, and other resources.

Program Leadership

In a family-centered program, families are encouraged to be fully involved partners who help make policy decisions. Many federal and state programs must include family councils. Helping family members develop their leadership skills and confidence is a challenging and rewarding task. From the beginning, make it clear that the program's goal is to have a fully functioning council with many participants. Some family members may not feel confident about serving on a family council, so the program leader and staff representatives may have to settle for the participation of only one or two families when a council is first established. One of the family members' first roles, with support from program staff, can be to generate interest and encourage greater involvement in the family council. Eventually, other families will join in.

The development of a family council might be a primary goal for a program during its first year of operation. During that year, the program will make several decisions concerning the council, such as these:

- Identifying the specific role of the council
- Determining the number of council members and the length of their terms
- Setting up procedures for the selection of members
- Arranging to stagger terms so change occurs incrementally
- Ensuring representation of all groups
- Establishing meeting times, frequency, place, and procedures
- Dealing with issues suggested by families

While the council is taking shape, other interested family members could be trained in how to participate on a council, conduct business meetings, and so forth.

Fund-Raising Activities

An essential activity in many programs is to supplement income from child care fees and other sources by raising additional funds for program operations or improvements. These efforts usually depend on the energy and commitment of families and staff members, and they offer opportunities for creativity, community spirit, and hard work. Some programs have events such as an annual holiday party that become both the social highlight and major fund-raiser of the year. Other programs raise money for a specific purpose, such as building a new child care center or improving the current site. One program raised money by creating an illustrated catalog of necessities (for example, cribs, rocking boats, and diaper tables). Family participation and leadership are often stimulated by innovative efforts such as these.

Questions That Family Volunteers May Have

Family members often have many questions about what to expect if they volunteer. Think about how you would respond to these questions from family members who are interested in volunteering:

- In what ways can I participate?
- Will the infant care teachers accept me?
- Is it okay to bring my other children when I volunteer? Sometimes? Always?
- Am I really needed?
- Will I be treated with respect?

- How well will the infant care teachers listen to me?
- Will staff members take advantage of my willingness to help?
- Is my participation really going to help my child?
- Will I be working directly with my own child?
- Will I be able to talk with the teachers about my child's development?
- Is there a specific job for me to do?
- Will I have choices about the roles in which I will serve?
- Will someone tell me exactly what I am supposed to do?
- Will I be able to change my assignments without criticism from staff?
- Will I be wasting my time?

Suggested Activities for Volunteers Who Work with Children

- Observe an infant and document observations with detailed notes.
- Interact with a young infant, responding to the child's babbling and other sounds.
- Carry a baby around the play yard, stopping to look at things of interest.
- Bring old hats and decorate them with help from toddlers.
- Be one toddler's friend for the day.
- Bring a set of plastic nesting bowls and watch what the infants do with them.
- Tell or read a story to one child or a small group.
- "Paint" outside walls or sidewalks with toddlers, using big brushes and buckets of water.
- Make mud pies with a toddler.
- Sing a new song or do a finger-play with the children.
- Develop a simple art project appropriate for toddlers.
- Bring a device to record children's voices.
- Listen to the young toddlers who are beginning to talk, and write down the words they say. Share the words with the children's families.
- Use bottles and cans of different shapes and sizes to practice pouring with the children.
- Plant a sprouted avocado seed and watch it grow.
- Sit with infants on a blanket in a protected area outside, and respond to what they notice (such as leaves moving on trees or birds flying overhead).
- Sit on the floor with infants and play with them.

Helping with Toys and Materials

Volunteers could also offer assistance by participating in these activities:

- Sorting puzzles, removing incomplete ones, and making new pieces
- Repairing books
- Taking photos in the child care setting
- Gathering collage materials
- Making beanbags
- Making a "smelly" jar or a "feely" box for sensory exploration

- Making a set of sock puppets
- Mixing paints or cleaning easels
- Doing a group observation and sharing notes with the infant care teachers
- Gathering cardboard boxes of different shapes and sizes for children to play with

The suggestions listed above are only a starting point. Programs always benefit when they involve family members in the process of choosing activities.

Teenage-Parent Participation

Teenage parents are special. They are often working to complete their high school education while juggling the responsibilities of parenting. Many have limited incomes, and some teenage mothers may have had inadequate health care and nutrition during pregnancy. Although each teenage parent has a unique situation, most are single parents. Typically, teenage mothers live at home with their families, but some seek legal emancipation—a designation which, in the case of a teenage mother, means she is able to care for her baby on her own. Teenage parents often bring a special enthusiasm and determination to their new role.

In one program, teenage parents were asked to write a letter sharing what they would say to a young girl who was about to have a baby. The following letter expresses the way many teenage mothers feel:

> *Now you are going to be a mother, and it is time to put away childish things. You will be quite lonely and afraid, but all this will vanish when they show you your precious bundle. If you are going to keep your baby, remember that your job will be filled with many lonely and fear-filled times. But all things can be accomplished when you believe in yourself. Try to remember that you need a night out. This helps to keep nerves and tension at a minimum and makes a better relationship for your child and you. Try to do as many things as possible with your child.*

The experience of giving birth often changes the way teenage mothers see themselves. Many feel that they have entered adulthood by becoming parents. Being treated as immature often offends teenage parents, and they may deeply resent the expression "Babies having babies." Teen parents have dreams and goals just as all people do, and it is important to offer them respect and compassion.

Teen fathers are often interested in being involved with their babies, although they face unique challenges in being fully involved parents. These challenges may include peer pressure, lack of role models, limited financial resources, difficulties balancing school and work, stereotypes about teen fathers, and the perception that the parenting role applies only to mothers. Teachers who are sensitive to these issues can support fathers by inviting and encouraging them to participate

in all parent functions, including daily check-ins, classroom visits and events, parent conferences, and parent photos in the classroom. Teen fathers can play a significant role in their babies' lives.

Whether your infant/toddler program is specifically designed for teenage parents or one that also serves older parents, teenage parents require special consideration. In addition to caring for their babies, teenage parents need to finish their high school education. In order to balance both of these responsibilities, teenage parents need high-quality child care that fosters their baby's development as well as their own. Through collaborative relationships that express respect and caring, programs can support teenage parents and help their babies have a good start in life.

In programs that are located on high school campuses, teenage parents often visit their babies during breaks from class. This provides programs with many opportunities to:

- Develop close relationships with the teenage parents through two-way communication.
- Model and inspire parenting skills.
- Promote the attachment between parents and their babies.
- Support teenage parents in pursuing their education.
- Share information on resources and services that may help teenage parents.

Like most people, teenage parents thrive on positive feedback, encouragement, and acknowledgement of their skills. In the following vignette, an infant care teacher supports a teenage mother's desire to help her baby learn to talk:

MOTHER: My little Sefarina is making lots of sounds lately. She seems like she's trying so hard to talk. How can I teach her to say words?

TEACHER: Well, let's see. Have you noticed anything different lately when she makes her sounds?

MOTHER: Well, when I look at Sefarina and make sounds at her, she seems to answer me back, kind of babbling.

TEACHER: That's great! You know just what to do. She really likes to hear your sounds and words, and she's learning how much fun it is to communicate. She's practicing conversations with you, making sounds and gestures back and forth. I've noticed how you talk to her about whatever you're doing. That's exactly how to help her learn words.

Interaction like this can encourage the young mother to keep talking with her baby. In future conversations, the teacher might acknowledge other language-building skills she has observed and offer more details about using songs and nursery rhymes, connecting words with objects, and so forth. A personal exchange between a teenage parent and a teacher is often more effective than a formal training session in which parents are taught that "Babies learn language when you talk and respond to them."

Involving Grandparents and Other Family Members

Since most teenage parents live at home, other members of the family—such as the child's grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members—are often involved in the child's care. Getting to know the family, learning about each family member's relationship with the child, and finding out the child's name for each person will show your appreciation for every family member in the child's life.

One issue that can arise when teenage parents participate in a child care program is that they may learn approaches to caregiving that differ from those of their other family members. This can create disagreements about how to handle discipline, health, feeding, and other issues concerning a child. The best way to deal with conflicting approaches to caregiving is to create opportunities for communication between everyone involved in the child's care: parents, other family members, and infant care teachers. If a teenage parent and his or her family members are not willing to communicate in this way, teachers still can develop trusting, mutually respectful relationships with each person involved in the child's care and development. This will ensure that all of the significant people in a child's life are involved in the caregiving decisions that are made for the child.

In some situations, grandparents have full-time responsibility for their grandchildren. As with all parents and family members in a program, it is important to work in a close partnership with grandparents who have assumed a parental role. In addition, grandparent guardians may appreciate support that acknowledges their dual role as parents and grandparents and that connects them with others who are living with a similar situation.

Programs sometimes create opportunities for grandparents and other relatives involved in a child's daily care to meet as a group with infant care teachers or a counselor. Groups such as these can provide a setting for discussion of issues and challenges that are unique to these types of extended families. Meetings might include a child's parents as well, if they are available and wish to participate. Opportunities such as these can help families develop good communication skills and can assist them in resolving conflicts.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways can you help parents or family members feel comfortable in your program? Are your words and demeanor welcoming? Is there a special place for parents and family members to sit, observe, read, or visit with their children? Do you help create opportunities for staff members and families to socialize?
2. How can you encourage families to become involved in child care? Do you include family members when making decisions related to their child's care? Do you practice active listening so you can learn about activities that interest families? When you set family-participation goals, do you take into consideration the families you serve?
3. How often do you communicate to families that you need their help? Do you think of asking a family member for help when a toy is broken, a baby needs holding, or another family needs support or information?

4. In what ways do you foster a sense of community among families, and between families and staff members? Are important events and changes that impact the program communicated through a newsletter or in some other effective way? Do you nurture a feeling of concern among families for all the children in the program?
5. Does your program have a place where families can find articles or books on child development? Is the child care setting used in the evenings to show videos or hold meetings about child care issues?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Baker, Amy, and Lynn Manfredi/Petitt. *Relationships, the Heart of Quality Care: Creating Communities Among Adults in Early Care Settings.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2004.

Describes attitudes, strategies, and policies that support quality care. Based on observations, interviews, and personal stories, this publication emphasizes the importance of positive family–caregiver partnerships, primary caregiver systems, policies and schedules that put children's needs first, and family perspectives.

Boyce, Carol Gratsch. "Trading Control for Partnership: Guidelines for Developing Parent Ownership in Your Program." *Child Care Information Exchange* 144 (March/April 2002): 75–78.

Explains the importance of promoting parent ownership in a cooperative early childhood program. Touches on decision making, classroom involvement, friendly interactions, goal setting, and staff attitudes.

Carter, Margie. "Developing Meaningful Relationships with Families: Ideas for Training Staff." *Child Care Information Exchange* 130 (November/December 1999): 63–65.

Presents strategies for improving relationships between child care providers and families, such as creating family-friendly environments, rethinking parent meetings, and making memory books and videos.

Cunningham, Bruce. "The Good Business of Being Father-Friendly: Does Your Center Welcome Male Customers?" *Child Care Information Exchange* 135 (September/October 2000): 70–71.

Offers suggestions for making child care programs welcoming to fathers and other men involved in the care of young children. Describes six areas of father-friendly service.

DiNatale, L. "Developing High-Quality Family Involvement Programs in Early Childhood Settings." *Young Children* 57 (September 2002): 90–95.

Discusses the need for early childhood programs to develop strong partnerships with families, to support each parent's role as his or her child's primary educator, and to provide a foundation for family involvement. Presents steps for establishing high-quality parent-involvement programs and offers examples of how parents can contribute in the classroom and outdoors.

DeJong, Lorraine. "Using Erikson to Work More Effectively with Teenage Parents." *Young Children* 58, no. 2 (March 2003): 87–95.

Provides suggestions to help early childhood teachers work more effec-

tively with teenage parents and become significant adults in teenage parents' lives. Suggestions include (a) fostering teenagers' positive identification with early childhood caregiving practices by sharing experiences with the teenagers; and (b) addressing individual teenager needs. Presents Erikson's stages of psychosocial development as a basis for recommendations to develop teenage parents' trust, autonomy, initiative, industriousness, and a positive identity. Includes strategies for involving teenage fathers with their children.

Fisher, Roger, and William Ury. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Offers a concise, proven strategy for resolving conflicts, whether they involve parents and children, neighbors, bosses and employees, customers, corporations, tenants, or diplomats. Based on studies and conferences conducted by the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Gonzalez-Mena, Janet, and Dianne W. Eyer. *Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers: A Curriculum of Respectful, Responsive Care and Education,* 8th ed. McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.

Includes sections on parent–caregiver relationships and nine-month separation in child care and multicultural situations.

Greenman, James. "Beyond Family Friendly: The Family Center." *Child Care Information Exchange* 114 (March/April 1997): 66–69.

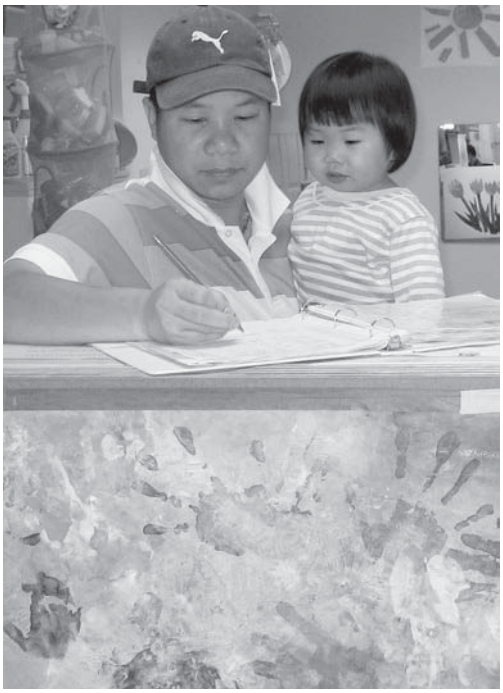
Advocates the creation of family care centers that focus on (a) the family's economic and psychological security, and the relationships that promote well-being; and (b) the child's security, health, and development.

Lombardi, Joan. *Time to Care: Redesigning Child Care to Promote Education, Support Families, and Build Communities.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003.

Provides documentation about the current child care "landscape" in the United States, and what needs to be done to improve it. Citing statistics and vignettes, the book emphasizes that providing affordable, high-quality child care for all children will be difficult. It also stresses that discussions about the public school system should include the issue of high-quality child care.

Mangione, Peter L., ed. *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1995.

A guide to help infant/toddler caregivers (1) improve their understanding of themselves and discover how they



are influenced by their cultural beliefs; (2) improve their understanding of the children and families they serve; and (3) learn to relate to cultural issues and thereby become more effective caregivers.

Miller, Karen. "Caring for the Little Ones—Developing a Collaborative Relationship with Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 135 (September/October 2000): 86–88.

Discusses the benefits of having collaborative relationships with parents and provides suggestions for developing rapport and offering support.

Schorr, Lizbeth B., and Daniel Schorr. *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage and Despair.* New York: Doubleday and Co., 1989.

Reviews intervention programs created in the United States for young children at risk. Maintains that America already has the answers for providing appropriate educational intervention and support and that it does not need to reinvent strategies or approaches. Describes various methods of working with difficult issues and dysfunctional families.

Schweikert, Gigi. "I Confess, I've Changed—Confessions of a Child Care Provider and a Parent." *Child Care Information Exchange* 111 (September/October 1996): 90–92.

Explores challenges in the communication between child care providers and parents, through the eyes of a child care educator who is also a parent.

Schweikert, Gigi. "Remember Me? I'm the Other Parent—Insights for Meeting the Needs of Both Parents." *Child Care Information Exchange* 126 (March/April 1999): 14–17.

Presents tips for meeting the needs of parents who are unable to see their children's teachers regularly. Focuses on the importance of providing accurate information and relying on various methods of communication.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau. *A Head Start Handbook of the Parent Involvement Vision and Strategies.* Washington, DC, 1996.

Head Start's detailed guide for setting up the family component of any early childhood program. Covers planning and preparation, parent-involvement strategies, and managing transitions.

Audiovisuals

Grandparenting: Enriching Lives. Video (VHS). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. http://www.naeyc.org.

Provides grandparents with the latest information on child development, as well as guidance, ideas, and support for their essential role in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Hosted by Maya Angelou in English and by Don Francisco in Spanish.

Section Seven:
Conducting Business with Families

Business matters related to the care of infants, toddlers, and their families are an important part of your program. In every program, someone must ensure that families and staff members adhere to agreed-upon policies and fulfill their respective responsibilities. Someone also must ensure that the program has enough money to pay the rent or mortgage, maintain the facilities, and buy necessary materials.

Child care professionals do not usually see themselves as business people. Many have expertise in fields such as child development and social services, with minimal business training. For that reason, the financial and legal aspects of infant/toddler programs can be challenging. Nevertheless, having sound business practices will demonstrate to families that your program is reliable and well organized.

In family child care, the provider often fulfills the roles of infant care teacher, program leader, custodian, "chief cook and bottle washer," and business manager. It is also common for program leaders in small child care centers to handle all business and programmatic matters. This section will be of particular interest to family child care providers, center-based program leaders who also serve as business managers, and individuals who are starting new programs.

Note: If you are setting up a new program, it is a good idea to seek advice from your local child care resource and referral agency or family child care association, applicable regulatory bodies, and potential funding agencies. The following information will help you get started.

Planning for Financial Returns

Some aspects of the child care business do not involve families directly, but must be worked out before a program is launched. One such issue is deciding how much to charge families so the program can cover its costs and yield a reasonable financial return. A good starting point is to find out how to apply for public funding to subsidize food or child care fees for low-income families. You will also need to gather information and make decisions about these issues:

- The number and ages of children in your program

- Group size and ratios*
- Whether you will hire other staff members
- Whether you will provide children's meals
- Costs of insurance, taxes, and possible audits
- Costs of supplies and child care equipment
- Whether to rent or purchase program space

A good way to establish a realistic budget is to learn about the financial arrangements and policies of existing programs that are similar to the one you envision. Find out what types of services families are looking for. Gather information about how to offer expanded services such as after-school care for older children, evening or weekend care, or sick-child care. The research you conduct should help you gain a realistic view of the current market for the services you intend to provide. Many programs serve a combination of families, some whose child care fees are subsidized by the state and others who pay full fees. The information you gather will help you explain your program's fee structure to families. For instance, you might give them a breakdown of how much of their fees cover insurance, salaries, taxes, equipment, facility rent and maintenance, and so on.

Legal Issues

Laws and licensing regulations mandate many of the details of your program. You must comply with all state and local requirements for programs of your type and size. These legal requirements deal with issues such as zoning, taxation, insurance, adult–child ratios, square footage required per child, and more. Knowing that your program complies with these requirements will help you feel more confident in your business dealings with families. You will be certain that you are fulfilling your professional responsibilities.

Effective, two-way communication that takes place regularly helps infant care teachers develop warm, open relationships with families.

There is no substitute for the two-way, back-and-forth conversations that take place during the entry process, at which time you exchange information and points of view with families. Discussing business matters in a friendly and respectful way is invaluable. However, it is essential to have a written contract between you and each family in the program. (For a sample contract, see Appendix B.) The contract should be signed and dated by you and the appropriate family member and should address your considerations and concerns as well as the family's. It should cover the details of your responsibilities to each other, including issues such as these:

- Fees for child care services
- Due dates and late fees
- Time periods covered by the contract
- Penalties for not meeting provisions of the contract

*For more information on this subject, see the Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) recommendations in the DVD *Together in Care: Meeting the Intimacy Needs of Infants and Toddlers in Groups,* or refer to the PITC *Module II Trainer's Manual.* Both are available at http://www.pitc.org.

Finally, the contract should include a statement similar to the following: "If for any reason either of us cannot honor the terms of this agreement, we will communicate that fact to the other party immediately. We look forward to having the same openness of communication concerning business affairs as in other areas of our relationship." An attorney or other expert should check the final version of your contract to make sure it meets legal standards. Be prepared to seek legal advice from time to time. Some organizations specialize in providing legal support for child care programs. For example, in California, infant care teachers and programs can turn to the following agency for legal help:

Public Counsel
610 South Ardmore Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90005
Telephone: 213-385-2977

Recordkeeping

One of the responsibilities of a child care provider or program leader is to maintain program records. The most important aspect of recordkeeping is having a system that allows you to add, change, and find information easily. All business transactions should be documented carefully and kept in hard-copy and/or electronic (computer) files. Be sure to clearly document all payments received from family members, and to offer receipts for payments.

Many providers will find it easier and more efficient to computerize their business records and may want to consider investing in software specifically designed for use in child care settings. There are several commercially available software packages designed for child care programs to manage accounting functions, administrative records, forms, and so forth. By keeping orderly records, you will be able to relax and pay more attention to the heart of your work: caring for infants, toddlers, and their families. In addition, you will be prepared if any questions or problems arise.

Common Business Issues

Even with careful thought and planning, financial problems are bound to arise. The most common problems occur when families are consistently late in paying fees or in picking up their children. These families often have good intentions and explanations for their difficulties in complying with agreements; for example, they may be experiencing high levels of stress.

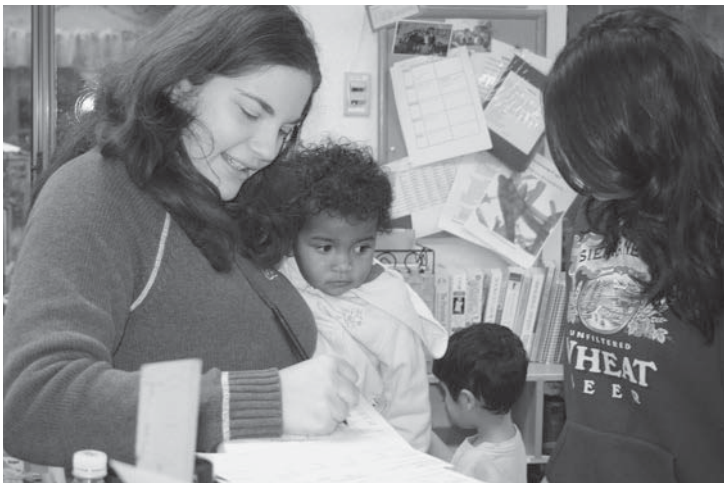
Nevertheless, if at the time of enrollment you have carefully communicated your program's business policies, both verbally and in writing, family members will be well informed and will know what is expected of them. Program policies should clearly state the family's financial obligations and should address issues such as penalties for not picking up their child at the agreed-upon time. Although a family may have to make special payment or pickup arrangements from time to time, consistent lateness in paying fees or in picking up a child are serious problems, especially in a small-center or family child care program. In these types of situations, be sure to talk with the family members before the problem becomes chronic, and make sure your demeanor conveys your commitment to two-way communication. Here are a few strategies for handling these situations:

1. Ask the family member to explain the reasons for the problem, and explore whether the program can provide help. For example, a family's financial situation may have changed such that they will

not be able to remain in the program without assistance. If a family sincerely wants to meet its financial obligations, creative solutions may be possible. There may be a scholarship fund available, or a loan might be arranged. You also might know about an employment opportunity for a family member, or perhaps he or she could cover part of the fee by doing a job for the program.

2. Emphasize the sense of community and partnership in the program. Explain that each person's contribution is essential. Remind the family member that everyone in the program is affected when money is not available to buy materials or pay the program's bills.
3. If a family is repeatedly late in paying fees, explain that timely receipt of payment is necessary for the program's financial stability and that late payments cannot be tolerated.
4. If the situation does not improve, you will have to take the difficult step of terminating the child's enrollment. In that case, the bonds you have worked to develop will be broken. Infant care teachers often feel bad about the impact this can have on the infant or toddler and the family—however, allowing families to continually neglect their financial responsibilities will not help them manage their lives.

Occasionally, a family's economic problems may be so severe that the family withdraws from the program without giving notice, or leaves without settling their accounts—which could result in a financial crisis for the program. There are steps you can take to avoid these unpleasant situations. One is to require an initial payment of the first and last month's fees.



Advance payments will give you time to replace a family that has left the program with another family that is seeking infant/toddler care. Charging a late fee or changing the payment due date also may help you deal with a parent who is continually tardy with payments. Most important, every program should have a reserve or contingency fund to cover emergency expenses and unavoidable circumstances. If your program receives public funds, check with your funding source to ensure your emergency-fund practices comply with regulations.

Assistance with Business Operations

Some center-based programs receive assistance with business operations from a board of directors composed of family members and community representatives. The board advises the program on procedures and problems and offers an excellent way for families to participate in policymaking. The board may be responsible for determining the program's hours of service, fund-raising activities, potential for program expansion, health and illness policy, and so on.

Smaller center-based and family child care programs usually manage business matters without additional assistance. If you are a family child care provider, program leader, or staff member who is responsible for handling business issues, consider your style of operation. You may benefit from developing a friendly but more assertive style. Try to be straightforward, honest, and specific. If you struggle with being assertive, you can work to develop that attribute by participating in a support group or assertiveness-training workshop. This type of help is available in many local areas and can be well worth the investment of time and money.

As you improve your ability to be friendly, flexible, and firm, families will know you care about them but will also know that you are committed to enforcing your business policies.

Questions to Consider

1. Are you flexible and fair in business dealings with families? Do you offer friendly reminders to family members so they know what you expect of them? Do you include families in decisions about program policies so that they understand the importance of the policies and are more likely to agree with them? Are you fair and consistent in implementing policies?
2. Are you assertive as well as compassionate when dealing with families about business matters? Do you talk with the parent or other responsible family member before an issue such as late pickup of a child becomes a serious problem? When necessary, do you face in a timely way your responsibility to terminate a family's enrollment?
3. Having done research, do you have realistic expectations of financial returns on your child care business? Have you considered expanding services to include school-age children or evening, weekend, or sick-child care? Are your fees reasonable compared with other programs of the same type and quality?
4. Have you consulted with a legal expert about your contract or family–caregiver agreement? Do you have someone you can call for legal advice when necessary?
5. In what ways can you improve your ability to be flexible but firm? How can you more effectively include families in the establishment, communication, and implementation of business policies?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Cunningham, Bruce. "The Good Business of Being Father-Friendly: Does Your Center Welcome Male Customers?" *Child Care Information Exchange* 135 (September/October 2000): 70–71.

Offers suggestions for making child care programs welcoming to fathers and other men involved in the care of young children. Describes six areas of father-friendly service.

Fisher, Roger, and William Ury. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Offers a concise, proven strategy for resolving conflicts, whether they involve parents and children, neighbors, bosses and employees, customers, corporations, tenants, or diplomats. Based on studies and conferences conducted by the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Greenman, James. "Living in the Real World—Parent Partnerships: What They Don't Teach You Can Hurt." *Child Care Information Exchange* 124 (November/December 1998): 78–82.

Presents examples of difficulties faced by child care providers when developing parent partnerships, and offers suggestions for establishing successful relationships.

Modigliani, Kathy. *Parents Speak About Child Care,* 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Wheelock College Family Child Care Project, 1997.

Examines parent and family attitudes through 23 focus-group discussions of parents' child care experiences in nine U.S. cities. Analyzes videos resulting from the project.

Parlakian, Rebecca. *The Power of Questions: Building Quality Relationships with Infants and Families.* Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2001.

Focuses on direct service work with parents and children and explores how leaders and staff members can use reflective approaches to establish quality relationships with families. Strategies for boundary setting and for managing one's relationships with families address the complex decisions staff members face every day.

Stanley, Diane. "How to Defuse an Angry Parent." *Child Care Information Exchange* 108 (March/April 1996): 34–35.

Offers a four-step plan for defusing a parent's anger: Listen carefully; make sure the problem is well understood; acknowledge the parent's feelings; and explain the plan of action.

Audiovisuals

Partnerships with Parents. DVD. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. http://www.naeyc.org.

Produced by South Carolina Educational Television, this DVD dramatizes the importance of the parent–teacher relationship for children. It also addresses how to establish and maintain positive communication and handle common problems teachers face when working with parents.

Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org.

Parents speak candidly about their concerns and discuss the high emotionality and conflicting feelings they experience when bringing very young children to child care. Offers caregivers ways to ease parents' concerns by expressing competence, honesty, and understanding. Caregivers are also encouraged to address their own feelings of discomfort by using a four-step process of awareness, exploration, gathering information, and taking steps to deal with issues. Available in English and Spanish.

Section Eight:
Supporting Families Under Stress

Many families deal with struggles without the help of extended family members or their community. Additionally, they often face economic instability and world events that add anxiety to their lives. Combine these factors with the vulnerability of infants and toddlers, the nearly constant care they require, and the lack of sleep that is common among parents of very young children, and the result is that many families live with a lot of stress.

If infant/toddler care is to be a true support for families, programs must work to avoid being another source of stress for families—and, when possible, they should help families find ways to ease their stress. The role of a program is not to solve all the problems with which parents and families struggle, but to work collaboratively with families and to support their well-being. Teachers can ease family members' worries about their children by acknowledging their efforts to be good parents. Programs can also work with families on some of the practical issues that cause stress. Most important, programs can bring families together as a community to address common problems.

Some of the common causes of stress experienced by families enrolled in infant/toddler programs are time pressure (which is sometimes called "hurry sickness"), financial worries, concerns related to their child's development, fears about the child care program itself, and family crises. In each of these areas, there are steps programs can take to help families. Some situations may also require outside assistance from intervention or support agencies. Learning more about common causes of stress is the first step toward knowing the types of assistance your program can offer. The most valuable assistance enables families to take charge of their own problems; after all, taking action is an effective way of dealing with stress. But there are specific ways that infant care teachers can help families as well.

"Hurry Sickness"

A common stressor among families who use infant/toddler care is known as hurry sickness, which is caused by

having insufficient time to manage multiple responsibilities. People who struggle with hurry sickness often feel inadequate as parents and experience related guilt and anxiety. They feel overwhelmed by responsibilities, experience physical tension, and sometimes distance themselves emotionally from other people. Since a significant element of hurry sickness is the feeling of being inadequate as a parent, it can help to reassure an overloaded family member that he or she is doing something well. Here are some ways to encourage parents and other family members:

- Acknowledge the strengths and successes of the family.
- Show respect for and interest in the family.
- Acknowledge family members for working and caring for their children.
- Express appreciation to family members for thoughtful or helpful things they do.
- Honor the child-rearing expertise that families bring to the child care setting.
- Help families feel valued and welcome by celebrating their cultures, languages, lifestyles, and abilities.
- Support families in handling their responsibilities—for example, by having their children ready to leave at the end of the day and by giving clear, consistent reminders about payments and other program obligations.

Program staff members can also encourage families to think of ways to manage their time more effectively, especially if the parents are very young or if families are new to full-time work. For example, many families struggle to leave their homes on time in the mornings. A workshop in which family members exchange tips for making mornings go more smoothly could help families feel more competent and could introduce new ideas that make a difference. One helpful suggestion is for families to make preparations on the night before each workday. They might handle these or other tasks:

- Laying out the children's clothes and shoes
- Letting older children help younger children pick out what they want to wear
- Getting the diaper bag ready with a change of clothes
- Preparing breakfast items (e.g., coffee) and setting the table in advance

Sharing ideas will help families manage their time better and will encourage connections between families. You can mention that small changes can make a big difference. Families will see that planning in advance with help from the whole family can create a positive, cooperative atmosphere and can limit stress each morning—and just as morning routines can become more efficient, the hours after work can be organized with help from the entire family.

Tight Budgets

Financial matters are a major source of stress for many families with infants and toddlers. Often, families that participate

in early care and education programs must make sacrifices to afford quality care. Additionally, families that qualify for state or federal subsidies generally have limited incomes. Furthermore, infant care teachers and providers, many of whom are parents themselves, often have the same difficulties that program families do in trying to stretch their salaries to meet living expenses.

Programs can help families set up a babysitting exchange or buy food and other supplies in bulk, at discount prices, to divide among families. In addition, families and program staff members can benefit from learning more about managing money. Money-management sessions led by an expert on the subject will be most effective if family members choose the topics and collaborate in planning the sessions. Families might want to learn more about these and other topics:

- Making nutritious, low-cost meals
- Purchasing discount clothing and household equipment
- Using community resources to find affordable housing
- Repairing household items
- Discovering creative, low-cost ways to furnish and decorate living spaces

Infant care teachers can encourage families to help each other.

Families will undoubtedly have a rich variety of ideas. Program staff members may want to participate with families in some activities, such as a clothing and toy exchange or a community garden. For some family members, working with other families may be the most effective way to help them feel connected to the program community and to feel less stress in their lives.

Family Concerns About Their Child's Development

Families of infants and toddlers often experience anxiety about their child's development. Those who arrive at the program with children who have been identified as having a disability or special needs often feel anxious about the program's willingness and ability to help their children thrive. When a very young child has a disability or other special needs, the child's family may still be in a stage of adjustment, experiencing grief, denial, or other strong feelings, and trying to process the idea that their child might need early-intervention services. Protective urges and other emotions may be even more heightened for families in this situation, as the infants and toddlers they are entrusting to unfamiliar caregivers are often more vulnerable than typically developing children.

Uncertainty about a child's well-being can be extremely stressful for family members. Every program should have a plan for supporting both the child and his or her family when there are concerns

about the child's development. In addition to sharing information and perspectives, family members and infant care teachers should have access to specialists who can provide additional consultation when necessary. You can also assure families that you and the other program staff members will be available to help them and that you can work as a team with medical and developmental specialists if necessary.

A family of a typically developing infant or toddler also may have heightened emotions and anxieties about their child's development. Mixed feelings about placing the infant in child care may amplify the family's concerns about the baby's development. You can help anxious parents and other family members by sharing information about the ages and stages of infancy and by pointing out that developmental levels vary among children of the same age. However, in your desire to comfort and reassure family members, be careful not to gloss over the possibility that a child may be developing atypically or might have a disability.

Another common source of stress for the family is the need to adapt to changes in the child's behavior. Families are often unprepared for the next stage in their child's development. For example, when children grow out of infancy, they display a new array of behaviors; they tend to cuddle less frequently, and they often become explorers who get into everything. As infants become two-year-olds and gain a measure of independence, family members must adapt to their children's advancing abilities. This new stage can be hard for families to endure, especially if they believe their two-year-old is the only child behaving "that way." They may feel something is wrong with the child, their parenting, or both.

You can help families learn more about the typical stages of child development

by providing information in a variety of ways. Videos and DVDs are a popular source of information because families can view them at their convenience in their homes. (Several DVDs that may interest families are listed at the end of this section.) Short articles can also be helpful to families. However, it is important to provide more than just reading materials, videos, or DVDs. The most effective learning comes through shared activities and insights—for example, a conversation that occurs between a teacher and a family member while they observe the children in the program. Another effective way to share with families information about child development is to form discussion groups, which can provide valuable support and information to families under stress.

Child development is an area in which infant care teachers and providers are uniquely qualified to collaborate with families. Experienced infant care teachers and providers know about typical and

atypical child development and may have years of experience working with children of different abilities, temperaments, and characteristics. They also know the value of obtaining information about the children from the children's parents and other family members.

For example, a teacher had a two-year-old boy, Miguel, who had a cautious temperament and who came from a home where Tagalog was spoken. The teacher was bilingual in English and Spanish. She noticed that Miguel was not yet talking in the classroom and seemed quite withdrawn. Through ongoing conversations with Miguel's aunt, the teacher learned that Miguel talked a great deal at home in Tagalog and that he loved to play with water. Knowing that Miguel was verbal at home, she stopped worrying about whether he had a developmental delay and realized he needed to feel more comfortable before he would communicate freely in the program. She invited native Tagalog speakers to visit the classroom and she worked to learn a few words and phrases in Tagalog. Gradually, she was able to get Miguel to open up by using the simple words and phrases she had learned and by playing with Miguel at a water table, which she used to connect Miguel with other children.

By combining your expertise with each family's knowledge of their child, you can create a collaborative effort that fosters each child's healthy development.

A Mother is Worried About Her Baby

Below is a vignette in which a family child care provider helps a mother who is experiencing stress during the first visit to the child care program.

Susan arrives at Kelly's family child care home carrying her infant, Carrie. Kelly sees that Susan is under severe stress. She greets both Susan and Carrie cordially. Carrie does not seem to respond.

KELLY: Maybe you'd like to let Carrie sit on the floor and play with this toy?

SUSAN: No, I'll just hold her. She's kind of clingy.

Kelly guesses that Carrie is about nine months old. She reassures Susan that at nine months old, many babies like to stay close to their mothers. Susan seems a little more relaxed to hear that her baby's clingyness is typical.

Kelly thinks there is something more that may be troubling Susan, but she waits until Susan feels ready to talk about it.

Several weeks later, Susan has developed enough trust in Kelly to express a deeper anxiety: She

believes Carrie's development is slow. Carrie is not yet turning over, crawling, or showing interest in toys. Kelly agrees that these developmental milestones do usually appear by nine months, but not always, and she reassures Susan that early attention to developmental concerns is important.

Kelly also suggests steps that she and Susan can take together to learn more about Carrie's development. Kelly offers to observe Carrie carefully in child care; Susan agrees to contact Carrie's doctor and share Kelly's observations, as well as her own, with him. Susan also plans to ask the doctor if a referral to a specialist is warranted. Although Susan had been reluctant previously to think about meeting with a specialist, she now feels encouraged by Kelly and wants to do everything she can to help her daughter. She relaxes a little and loses some of her anxious look.

Worries About the Child Care Situation: Understanding, Competence, and Honesty

Families that use infant/toddler care often experience anxiety about their children's health and safety. They might ask questions like these: Is my baby getting enough attention, or is he left alone in his crib? Will the infant care teachers remember my child's food allergy? Will the teacher respond to my baby promptly when she cries?

As an infant care teacher, you need not take these strong feelings personally, but you should take them seriously. The stress that families feel about placing their infant or toddler in care can hinder the development of trust between families and caregivers—and that trust is very important for the well-being of the child, the child's family, and program staff members. Infant care programs need to adopt practices to deal with each family's feelings in a reassuring way. (See Appendix E for further information.)

When infant care programs employ the research-based strategies of understanding, competence, and honesty every day, they help lessen families' anxieties about using infant/toddler care. These strategies are effective with all families—those who have been in the program for a while and those who are worried about their children at the time of entry into the program.

The first practice, **understanding**, includes the recognition that families often continue to feel uneasy about using child care even though they may not express their anxiety directly. You exhibit understanding when you listen with sensitivity to a family's concerns about their child's development and when you respond with compassion. For example, if you offer to a concerned family the name of a clinic that screens for disabilities, you are displaying understanding and competence.

Ongoing signs of your **competence** will reassure families. Make sure they have the opportunity to look around the program environment when dropping off their children. Point out any new or updated health and safety precautions that you have introduced. Give family members specific examples of how you keep children safe—such as the barrier of pillows you placed on the floor to protect infants, and how the older infants love to peer over the barrier to "talk" with the younger children. Continue to welcome unscheduled visits beyond a family's initial adjustment period, and always report and explain the bumps and bruises

toddlers are apt to get as they become more mobile.

You can display **honesty** by telling family members about incidents that did not go smoothly. For example, tell a mother who just returned from a long vacation with her family that her baby did cry a little after being dropped off at the child care program that morning. Mention that things got messy when you cleaned out a pumpkin with the children, but that everyone had fun. These are expressions of your honesty. (To learn more on this topic, see the Program for Infant/Toddler Care DVD *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers.*)

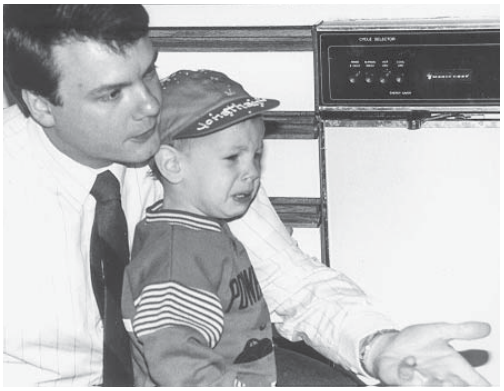
Conscientious teachers may feel that it is asking too much of them to do a good job and to talk with families about daily details. However, the good will and trust that come from reassuring families are worth the effort. Families do not necessarily lack trust in the teacher, but they often express their strong desire to ensure that their children are protected. The more information the teacher voluntarily provides, the fewer doubts the family will have about the care their child receives.

It is important to note that infant care teachers should *express* understanding, competence, and honesty, not just *possess* those qualities. For example, when a mother is afraid that her son will not receive his medication, the teacher can ease the mother's anxiety by remembering to give the child his medicine, by expressing understanding of its importance, by being competent to give the right dosage at the appointed time, and by recording honestly the time at which the child received the medicine. This expression does not necessarily have to be verbal; the teacher could show the child's mother that there is a system for keeping track of each child's special needs (displaying competence)—such as a note on a corkboard posted on the inside of a cupboard door to protect confidentiality (showing understanding)—and that she made an entry in the child's daily journal to document that she had trouble getting the child to take his medicine (exhibiting honesty).

No one is perfect, and infant/toddler care professionals have many things to remember and manage each day. An infant care teacher might make a large mistake such as forgetting a child's allergy to milk, or a small mistake such as losing a baby's sock. Even in the safest and most exemplary settings, accidents and mistakes happen, although they should be few and minor if infant care teachers are attentive. In situations where things have not gone perfectly, your honesty about them will reassure families that you are not withholding information and that you can be trusted.

Family Crises

Family life can be demanding, especially for people who have to balance multiple responsibilities. Sometimes, family members want to talk with someone who sees them as individuals and not



simply as parents. They will often appreciate the friendly support of their child's infant care teacher—a person who can recognize them as human beings who are trying hard, slipping sometimes, carrying too many responsibilities, and are deserving of compassion even if they occasionally arrive late to pick up their child. Listening to parents and family members talk about their feelings is a great way to help reduce their stress. In addition, infant care teachers and program leaders can help families by taking these actions:

- Put families with similar concerns in touch with one another, making sure that the program does not violate anyone's confidentiality.
- Encourage a group of families with similar problems to meet informally.

Maintain contacts with mental health professionals who can help children, family members, or staff members who appear to be especially sad, under stress, unpredictable, or short-tempered over a period of time.

- Offer a family support group led by a mental health professional at the program site.

Many families are able to function and stay together until a crisis occurs. Occasionally, a situation such as a serious illness, the death of a close family member, or the loss of a job can escalate into a crisis that threatens the family's ability to stay together. The crisis can act as an emotional valve through which suppressed feelings are released. When an infant care teacher senses that a family is undergoing a crisis, the best thing to do is refer the family to a specialist in crisis counseling. Connecting families with people who can help them is an important part of being an effective infant care teacher.

Agencies Helping Families

Telephone and Internet directories usually include lists of services for families and children under "Social Service Organizations" and "Welfare Agencies." You can search most telephone books or the Internet to find the following resources:

1. **Emergency services.** See the inside front cover of the telephone directory, or dial 9-1-1.
2. **Child care services.** Search under these headings:
   - Child Care Centers
   - Child Care Consulting and Information Services
   - Social Service Organizations
   - Welfare Agencies
3. **Child guidance or family-relations counselors.** Search under these headings:
   - Marriage and Family Therapists
   - Marriage, Family, and Child Counselors

- Mental Health Services
- Physicians (Sub-heading: Psychiatry)
- Psychologists
- Social Service Organizations
- Social Workers
- Welfare Agencies

4. **Childbirth preparation or pregnancy counseling.** Search under these headings:
   - Educational Consultants
   - Family Planning Information
   - Maternal Child Health Services
   - Social Service Organizations
   - Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program
5. **Divorce assistance.** Search under these headings:
   - Attorney Referral Service
   - Attorneys
   - Personal Services
   - Social Service Organizations
6. **Legal aid.** Search under these headings:
   - Attorney Referral Service
   - Attorneys
   - Legal Aid Society
   - Social Service Organizations
7. **Economic guidance or family-budget consultants.** Search under these headings:
   - Social Service Organizations
   - Welfare Agencies
8. **Telephone hotlines.** The following (or similar) telephone services are available in many localities:
   - Alcoholism Intervention
   - Attorney Referral Service
   - Child Abuse Lifeline
   - Child Health Information and Referral
   - Children's Protective Services
   - Domestic Violence Hotline
   - Families Under Stress
   - Legal Aid Society
   - Legal Assistance for Children
   - Mental Health Information and Referral
   - Sexual Trauma Center
   - Substance Abuse Hotline
   - Suicide Prevention
   - Youth Crisis Line

Caring for Infant Care Teachers

The stressors that program families often experience can also take a toll on infant care teachers. Feelings of worry, anxiety, compassion, and fatigue are just some of the emotions infant care teachers experience as they nurture children, provide support to families, and manage their own lives. In addition to encouraging teachers to talk with colleagues and use a four-step process for dealing with their feelings—refer to the PITC DVD *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers*—programs can benefit by offering staff members opportunities for reflective supervision and access to mental health services if needed. Family child care providers can participate in network or family child care asso-

Providing care to children and families who have had (or are having) traumatic experiences can be challenging, but your assistance is valuable. Families in crisis need safe, caring places for their children.

ciation support groups. Similarly, families and teachers can meet to discuss ways to support each other.

Working as a community, program staff members and families can find resources to support everyone who is linked to the program. As you work together to manage stress, you and the families will experience renewed feelings of competence, comfort, and connectedness.

Questions to Consider

1. Why is it important for programs to support families that are experiencing stress? How can you help family members develop the self-esteem they need to deal with stress? Realizing that many parents and family members may have no one else to talk to, how can you become a better listener?
2. What are some ways to involve family members in the program to ease the pressure they feel? How can you build on the strengths of the families in your program? In what ways can you encourage families to help each other?
3. How can you help families under stress find effective ways of managing time and money?
4. Do you offer information and discussions about child development to family members? Are you generous in reassuring family members who feel anxious about your child care program? Do you suggest that family members sit down and talk with you whenever there may be unresolved tension or a problem?
5. Is the program environment open, friendly, and conducive to relaxation? Is it accessible to people with disabilities? Could you make it more comfortable—for example, by displaying photos and other items that represent the homes and cultures of program families, by using soothing colors, by providing cozy furniture, and by installing soft lighting?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Brazelton, T. Berry. *Working and Caring.* Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman, 2000.

Provides helpful information for working parents and caregivers on the stresses that working parents experience.

Brazelton, T. Berry, and Stanley I. Greenspan. *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn, and Flourish.* Boulder, CO: Perseus Book Group, 2000.

Explores seven needs of infants and young children, emphasizing that when those needs are met by families and professional caregivers, children have the fundamental building blocks for higher-level emotional, social, and intellectual abilities.

Copeland, Margaret Leitch, and Barbara S. McCreedy. "Creating Family-Friendly Policies: Are Child Care Center Policies in Line with Current Family Realities?" *Child Care Information Exchange* 113 (January/February 1997): 7–10.

Addresses current issues such as corporate downsizing, flextime, blended families, and effects on emerging child care needs. Suggests that child care programs update policies by examining staff attitudes, evaluating enrollment policies, and offering more flexibility and support to parents.

Greenman, James. "Living in the Real World—Parent Partnerships: What They Don't Teach You Can Hurt." *Child Care Information Exchange* 124 (November/December 1998): 78–82.

Presents examples of difficulties faced by child care providers when developing parent partnerships and offers suggestions for establishing successful relationships.

Lee, L. *Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education.* San Rafael, CA: Parent Services Project, 2006.

A nationally field-tested curriculum developed by the Parent Services Project to help caregivers support young families. Practitioner leaders learn to change the way they and their programs assist families. Focuses on developing strong relationships between early child care providers and parents, understanding that the family is the constant in the child's life.

Pawl, Jeree, and Amy Laura Dombro. *Learning & Growing Together with Families: Partnering with Parents to Support Young Children's Development.* Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2001.

Designed to help practitioners promote healthy child development by working with parents to build respectful, collaborative relationships. Based on a previous book, *Learning & Growing Together: Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Development,* this publication emphasizes the need for practitioners to reflect on their work, become aware of the influences that have shaped their views, and understand the people with whom they are working.

Stanley, Diane. "How to Defuse an Angry Parent." *Child Care Information Exchange* 108 (March/April 1996): 34–35.

Offers a four-step plan for defusing a parent's anger: Listen carefully; make sure the problem is well understood; acknowledge the parent's feelings; and explain the plan of action.

Warren, R. M. *Caring: Supporting Children's Growth.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 1977.

Suggests ways to help children deal with the challenges of growing up, including divorce, abuse, and death. Available from the NAEYC, 1313 L Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005. Telephone: 202-232-8777. http://www.naeyc.org.

Audiovisuals

The Ages of Infancy: Caring for Young, Mobile, and Older Infants. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Educa-

tion and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org/.

Divides infancy into three age-related stages of development: young infants (birth to eight months); mobile infants (six to eighteen months); and older infants (sixteen to thirty-six months). Describes ways caregivers can help infants with issues of security, exploration, and identity in each of the three stages of development. Available in English and Spanish.

Discoveries of Infancy: Cognitive Development and Learning. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org/.

Illustrates six discoveries of infancy: things don't disappear, cause and effect, the use of tools, imitation, space, and the way things are best used. Offers suggestions about how caregivers can support cognitive development. Available in English and Spanish.

Early Messages: Facilitating Language Development and Communication. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org/.

Describes an infant's inherent potential to learn language, and underscores that early communication is rooted in the child's family and culture. Presents ten strategies for facilitating language development. Available in English and Spanish.

Flexible, Fearful, or Feisty: The Different Temperaments of Infants and Toddlers. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org/.

Explores various temperamental styles of infants and toddlers. Groups nine identified traits into three temperamental styles (flexible, fearful, or feisty) and describes techniques for dealing with infants and toddlers of different temperaments. Available in English and Spanish.

The Next Step: Including the Infant in the Curriculum. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org/.

Offers research, theory, and proven caregiving practices that support optimal learning in children under age three. Available in English and Spanish.

Respectfully Yours: Magda Gerber's Approach to Professional Infant/Toddler Care. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org/.

Presents an interview with infant care expert Magda Gerber. Gives an overview of Gerber's philosophy of care, which emphasizes respecting and giving full attention to infants and toddlers. Available in English and Spanish.

References

California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). *Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers.* DVD. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd.

Section Nine:
Addressing Difficult Issues

Many uncomfortable situations can be avoided by using the strategies recommended in previous sections of this guide. Nevertheless, challenging issues can and will arise in any infant/toddler care program. The most serious issues generally do not occur on a daily or weekly basis, but when they do occur, they must be dealt with promptly. To handle them successfully, an infant care teacher needs sensitivity, clarity of thought, solid communication skills, and good will. In addition, the program must ensure that it complies with all state and local requirements.

The ability to address and discuss delicate topics in a constructive way is a necessary skill for child care professionals. The most common issues concern the child's health, well-being, development, and behavior. If you share good feelings and positive information with families on a daily basis, you will build a foundation of mutual trust and concern that makes it easier to discuss difficult issues. Remember that whenever you have strong feelings about a parent or family member, your chances of successfully resolving those feelings will increase if you use the four-step process discussed in Section Five and in Appendix D of this publication.

Minor Injuries and Illnesses

One responsibility that can be very uncomfortable for infant care teachers and providers is informing family members that a child has been hurt or has become ill in the child care setting. Any significant accident—especially one that results in a lump on the head, swelling, profuse bleeding, or a child crying hard for more than a minute or two—should be reported to the parent or responsible family member immediately. The family should also be called whenever a child has symptoms of illness, such as a fever, rash, diarrhea, excessive fussiness, or other signs of serious discomfort or distress. Except in an emergency situation, a responsible family

member is required to make the decision about whether a child should receive medical attention. The family member will also need to take the child home unless the program is capable of providing care for sick children.

A working parent may be upset when called about a child's illness or injury; he or she may respond with anxiety, anger, impatience, or depression. Do not take it personally if a parent or family member has a negative response to this type of information, and do not assume that the reaction means the family member does not care about the child. Working families are under pressure to maintain a balance between caring for their family members and meeting the demands of their jobs. Although a family member's first concern is usually for the child's welfare, some family members may also be worried about keeping their jobs. They may be in the middle of an important project, may have run out of sick leave to cover such emergencies, or might have been warned by their employer about taking too much time off. Your call may seem like the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back—one more thing to deal with that is almost intolerable.

In the case of an accident, the program staff person who is most familiar with the incident should be prepared to explain in detail how it occurred. The best approach is to reassure the family member about the situation and follow with a statement expressing empathy for his or her situation at work. For example, you might say something like this: "Emma is okay. This isn't an emergency, but she fell off the small slide and has quite a bump on her head. I'm sorry to have to call you at work. She seems fine, but I thought you should be informed in case you want to take her to the doctor." Your statement shows concern for both Emma and her mother and gives Emma's mother the information she needs to decide what to do.

You can express genuine concern and regret that the child has been hurt, but remember that excessive apologies are not required. As long as the children were well supervised and in a safe environment at the time of the incident, most families will understand that accidents happen and that there is no need to assign blame. Of course, if you find yourself making weekly or monthly telephone calls to report accidents, it may be a sign that your safety procedures or the environment need improvement. Additionally, if the same child has frequent accidents, it may indicate that the child has an issue that requires looking into and that he or she may need extra support.

Concerns About Health and Development

Infant care teachers see many babies move through the stages of infancy. As a result of working with so many children, experienced infant care teachers often have a keen awareness of when a child may have a developmental concern. For example, if a baby has not yet learned to turn over by nine months of age, the infant care teacher should consult with the child's family members. Here are some steps to take before and during this type of meeting with the family:

- Establish a process for conducting regular developmental assessments of each child. These should be done jointly by families and program staff members.
- If a teacher or the family has a concern, schedule a meeting that includes the family and the program staff members who work most closely with the child. Any serious discussion of the child's development should include both

parents (if possible and appropriate) and any other adults responsible for the infant.
- Arrange for a quiet meeting place where you and the family members can exchange information and ideas without distractions.
- Reflect on the uniqueness of the family, and think about how you can support the child with your knowledge of the family's strengths and point of view.
- Remember that active listening demonstrates respect and gives you the best opportunity to gather key information.
- Begin the discussion by asking the family members for their thoughts about the child's development.
- When raising questions about the child's progress, emphasize the benefits of early attention to potential developmental issues.

Often, parents or family members are already concerned about their child's development when a teacher asks to meet with them, and the family is relieved to have a chance to address the situation. However, a family may feel that no intervention is necessary and that the child does not need any special assistance. In that case, you must accept the family's position but you should continue to share information and build trust with its members. The family may wish to discuss the concern at a later date.

If the family members share your concerns about the child's development, they will probably want to know what they can do. You should prepare in advance to provide details about resources such as contact information (telephone numbers, addresses, and so forth); program costs, eligibility, and availability; and so on.

Families in these situations are often unaware of the legally mandated special education services available to them. You can suggest that they contact the appropriate agency for screening or a developmental assessment. Depending on the community, this agency may be a family resource center, a regional center for persons with disabilities and other special needs, or the local school district. You may also suggest that the family members discuss their concerns with their pediatrician and ask if a referral to a specialist is warranted. Assure the family that you understand the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty that accompany these situations. Additionally, you can help families find resources if they have concerns about any of these areas of their children's health or development:

- Vision
- Hearing
- Neurological, speech, or cognitive development
- Social or emotional challenges
- Physical impairments
- Chronic illness
- Previously diagnosed conditions

In many cases, specialists may not find a specific diagnosis for a child. In those instances, the family members and infant care teachers can continue to observe the child and provide the responsive, personalized care that supports the development

of all children. If a situation continues to concern the child's family and teachers, the best option is to persist in seeking assistance. The child's needs may become clearer as he or she grows.

If a special need or disability has been identified and the family receives appropriate services, an early-intervention specialist may design a program to foster the child's development at home and in child care. Express your readiness to carry out the specialist's recommendations. Working together, families, infant care teachers, and specialists can provide the consistency and expertise needed to support the child's growth and development. With a collaborative approach, initial concerns can be converted to positive results for everyone involved.

Behavioral Issues

Programs are often able to handle children's behavioral issues without involving family members. For example, snatching toys, pushing, and hitting are typical behaviors for toddlers who are in the process of learning rudimentary social skills. Helping young children find acceptable ways of expressing feelings and desires is a basic part of the toddler curriculum.

Occasionally, however, infant care teachers need to talk with family members about a child's behavior. Try not to label the behavior before considering possible explanations and talking with the child's family members. The problem might involve a teacher's lack of understanding of family or community child-rearing practices; you may learn that the child's behavior is considered appropriate within the context of the child's culture or of the family's expectations. To bring up an issue without preparing carefully could alienate a family. Using the four-step process for dealing with your feelings (refer to Section Five and Appendix D) may help you decide whether to address an issue with a family member. If after exploring your feelings and gathering as much information as possible you decide that you need to discuss a child's behavior, following these guidelines may lead to a productive conversation:

1. Schedule a meeting with the child's family at a mutually acceptable time rather than bringing up concerns about the child's behavior at the end of the day.
2. Present the information as a challenge to be solved together.

Families and infant care teachers are important sources of information for each other.

3. Remember to handle tactfully any information about the child that the family members may perceive as negative.
4. Assure the family of confidentiality, within whatever boundaries are necessary and appropriate.
5. Be sure to ask the family members what they think about the child's behavior and what might enhance the child's experiences in the program.
6. Allow family members to respond completely to your questions; do not interrupt them.
7. Develop an action plan that benefits the family, the child, and the infant care teachers.
8. Use a "door opener" (see Section Five) to encourage the family member to initiate a conversation.
9. Respond appreciatively.

Below is a vignette in which an infant care teacher talks with a family member about a child's behavior. Joshua, age two, has been in the child care program for six weeks. He lives with his five-year-old brother and his grandmother.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Hello, Joan. Thanks for coming. How are things going for you? Have you settled in at your new apartment?

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, yes. It's fine. Not so many stairs to climb.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Joshua really seems to like being here with the other toddlers, but he doesn't settle down and play with them very much. What's he like at home?

GRANDMOTHER: Well, he keeps me running. He never settles down.

The teacher pays careful attention to the information that Joshua is very active at home. This suggests that his behavior is not just a reaction to being in the new situation.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Does he seem happiest when he has lots of space to move in?

GRANDMOTHER: That's a good description of Joshua. His five-year-old brother can hardly keep up with him.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Has he always been very active?

GRANDMOTHER: Oh, yes. Joshua came out of the womb kicking and waving his little arms!

INFANT CARE TEACHER: You know, I would guess Joshua doesn't like to sit down with a book very often.

GRANDMOTHER: Well, it's true that he doesn't sit down very often, but now and then, when no one's looking, he picks up a book and walks around with it. I think he likes books but just can't sit down.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: You know, it might just be his temperament. How much active play does he get at home?

GRANDMOTHER: Not very much. I can't take both boys to the park. They run in opposite directions and I'm afraid I'll lose them or they'll get hurt.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Hmm. Can you think of any ways we can help Joshua to be active in appropriate ways at home?

GRANDMOTHER: I don't know. Maybe I could take Joshua to the playground when his brother is at soccer practice. Can you help him more at the program?

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Yes, I think we can. The children have access to outdoor play most of the day, and we could handle meals and naptimes in ways that work better for him. We can also be sure to be available when he shows interest in a book.

GRANDMOTHER: That sounds good. He sure runs around that apartment of mine. On rainy days, it's a mess!

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Well, you might think about getting some kind of indoor play equipment that doesn't take up much space, like a rocking horse or a rocking boat or a small climber. We might have one in storage that you can borrow. Sometimes people donate them to us after their children outgrow them. Or you might find something at a garage sale.

Conversations like this, in which you ask a family member to help identify specific reasons for the child's behavior and to describe their way of dealing with it, should take place regularly with the family of a child whose behavior is persistently troublesome. This type of communication supports the family's role as the primary influence in the child's life. You may also learn that a change in the child's life, such as the arrival of a new infant in the family, has triggered an episode of biting or other difficult behavior. You can help by assuring the family members that biting and other aggressive behaviors are typical for children around two years old, and those behaviors do not mean their child is "bad." If they express frustration

and do not know what to do, suggest that they can help the child learn more acceptable ways to express his or her needs, and give examples of how they might do that. You will probably want to follow up with the family if your suggestions do not help the situation or if it seems the child might need more assistance or intervention.

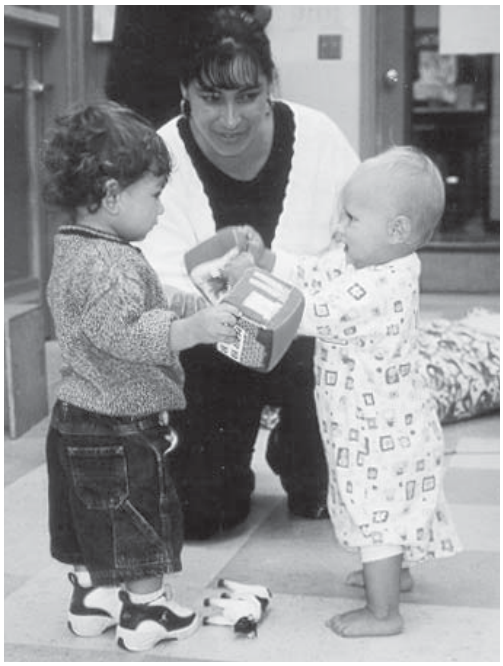
Families and infant care teachers can meet to discuss any type of behavior they observe in a child, not just "disruptive" behaviors. For example, an infant care teacher may notice that a toddler seems fearful of other children, or that a four-month-old seems listless. To learn about these children and to find effective ways of caring for them, the teacher would need to gather information from the family. By working together, infant care teachers and family members can form a more complete picture of the child and explore strategies for enhancing the child's experiences and growth.

When Other Families Become Involved

Some behaviors, such as hitting, shoving, pulling hair, and especially biting, can be so upsetting that they become a serious issue for a program. When parents

or families become angry with a child in the program who has hurt other children, they may request that the child care provider or program leader take immediate action, such as removing the child from the program. If several families become unhappy about a child's hurtful behavior, set up a meeting for the families and the program staff members to express their concerns and propose solutions. Make sure the family of the child in question is included, and provide the family with a staff member to support them during the meeting. Here are some steps to take:

1. Begin by setting a positive tone for the meeting. Emphasize the importance of working together for the good of every child and family. In bilingual programs, make sure a bilingual or bicultural staff member or family-support person is present.
2. Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation.
3. State your openness to hearing everyone's point of view.
4. Express your commitment to addressing the issue in a constructive way.
5. Ask if any parents or families at the meeting have children who previously bit or hurt others but who eventually stopped the behavior on their own.
6. Guide the conversation so that everyone present has the opportunity to share his or her thoughts.
7. After the parents, family members, and other staff members (if applicable) have had a chance to speak, offer to share what you know about the problem.
8. Explain that toddlers sometimes go through a stage of biting or other aggressive behavior and that they usually outgrow the behavior—but acknowledge that this is not very comforting while the child is going through the stage.



Next, explain that you work to prevent biting and other hurtful behavior. Highlight the strategies you use to prevent behavioral problems:

- Maintaining a calm environment
- Helping children to get enough rest and to avoid overstimulation
- Providing more than one of each of the program's most popular toys
- Assigning a primary teacher to stay near a child when necessary (anticipating and shadowing, without expecting an incident)
- Blocking a child's attempts to hurt other children and offering an alternative object for the child to bite, hit, pull, or shove
- Acknowledging the child's impulses and celebrating the child when he or she resists the impulses
- Inviting the child to play in well-supervised activities

- Redirecting the child to other vigorous, but not hurtful, activities
- Getting support from other program staff members who have handled challenging behaviors in the past
- Inviting specialists to work with children who display challenging behaviors
- Working with families to identify a child's frustration points, such as fatigue

You should also discuss what you do after a hurtful behavior occurs, including comforting the child who was bitten and helping the aggressor understand how his or her behavior has hurt the other child. Acknowledge that prevention methods are not always successful, and offer to closely supervise children who have shown tendencies to bite or hurt others.

Aggressive behavior in toddlers is a common concern for families and infant care teachers. Ask program staff members and families if they would like to learn more about this topic by attending a workshop or by meeting with a specialist in infant/toddler behavior. You can also gain more knowledge by referring to two Program for Infant/Toddler Care resources: the publication *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Social–Emotional Growth and Socialization,* and the DVD *The Ages of Infancy: Caring for Young, Mobile, and Older Infants.*

Problem behaviors such as biting are usually short-lived and can be resolved by a cooperative effort between family members and infant care teachers. However, there are times when a child's behavior is very disruptive to the group and does not improve even after exploring various options with the child's family. In these cases, termination of the family from the program may be necessary. Behavioral issues that are serious enough to lead to possible termination from the program require thoughtful attention. There are two questions to ask yourself before coming to the difficult decision to terminate a family's enrollment:

1. Is it in the child's best interests to stay in the program?
2. Are other children or staff members being harmed?

Dealing with Mistreatment of Children

Some adults hurt their children with excessive yelling, with name-calling ("bad boy" or "bad girl"), with repeated threats that induce fear, by depriving the child of food as a form of punishment, or by exposing the child to adult behavior that is damaging for the child to witness. Situations like these do not have easy solutions. However, if a respectful partnership with the family has been established, discussions about these issues are more likely to be helpful. Being aware of each family member's temperament, lifestyle, and sensitivities will help infant care teachers to approach subjects tactfully. The following example shows how a sensitive infant care teacher might handle a delicate situation.

A mother has been threatening her two-year-old boy by saying, "If you hit your baby sister again, a monster is going to do something awful to you." She says a monster will take away his favorite teddy bear. The infant care teacher knows the threats are affecting the child, but she also knows the mother really loves her son. The teacher has chosen to discuss the issue at a time when the mother seems more relaxed than usual; the mother did not have to go

to work today and is visiting her son at child care. Mother and teacher are sitting in a quiet place in the yard.

MOTHER: It is so good to sit down and not feel that I have to jump up to tend to something.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: That is a great feeling, isn't it? I feel that way, too. Have you been feeling a lot of pressure lately?

MOTHER: Have I ever! There's so much to do with these kids, and my job is stressful. I have to do everything on my own. Sometimes my heart pounds like I'm going to have a heart attack. Just panic, I guess.

INFANT CARE TEACHER: That sounds terrible, but I know what you mean. Do you think your son ever feels that way?

MOTHER: Oh, I doubt it. He's too young. Why would you ask that?

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Well, He seems kind of tied up in himself and nervous sometimes. He starts to do something and then he looks around as if he thinks maybe he shouldn't, as if someone is watching him. Is there something we could do that would help him be more comfortable?

MOTHER: I do have to correct him a lot. He seems bent on misbehaving. He's always hitting his baby sister. When I correct him, I'll find him in a corner tearing up a book. Then I have to scold him again. I get so frustrated with him. I wish I knew how to get him to behave!

INFANT CARE TEACHER: Why do you think he wants to hit his sister? Is he trying to say something?

MOTHER: I'm not sure. Maybe he's jealous of her. What can I do about that?

INFANT CARE TEACHER: He might be having a hard time sharing your attention with his baby sister. I wonder what we could do to help him. Maybe you and I could come up with a plan together to help him feel better.

The mother and the teacher talked more about the toddler's possible feelings and behavior and then worked out a plan. The mother would invite her son to help feed his baby sister once a day for a few minutes. She would talk with him about what he does in child care. She would also make sure to tell him how much she loves him, spending a few minutes alone with him as she puts him to bed, and she would try to ignore minor infractions for the time being. The infant care teacher agreed to work along the same lines; she would take special time to support him in his favorite play activities, avoid saying "no" unnecessarily, and encourage his feelings of pride about being a "big brother." In two weeks, they would talk again to see if there was any improvement.

When family members express a desire to learn more about their child's challenging behavior or about parenting, you can recommend appropriate books or videos on infant and toddler development. You can also post information that encourages families to share knowledge and air concerns in parenting workshops or in a family support group. Large programs sometimes develop their own family

meetings at which family members can share knowledge of their children with other program families and with the infant care teachers.

Invite family members who are treating their children harshly to spend time in the program. This can be valuable, so encourage the family members to visit the program. Those experiences can allow family members to observe alternatives to yelling at, threatening, and scolding children—and teachers can often learn about how to comfort and engage children in the program by observing how the family members interact with their children. Families generally have a good understanding of how to support their children.

Abuse or Neglect

If you suspect that a family member or anyone else is abusing or severely neglecting a child in your program, you must take immediate action. Most states require teachers and providers who suspect child abuse to report it. You do not have to decide whether the child has actually been abused; the only requirement is that you have sufficient reason to suspect it. Laws define abuse and neglect very specifically, and the procedures for dealing with abuse or neglect are also specific. Programs should have a clearly written statement about the laws concerning mandated reporting of child abuse or neglect. It should be readily available to families and program staff members.

Be aware of possible signs of abuse or neglect, especially during the quick health inspection you give children when they arrive at the child care setting each day.

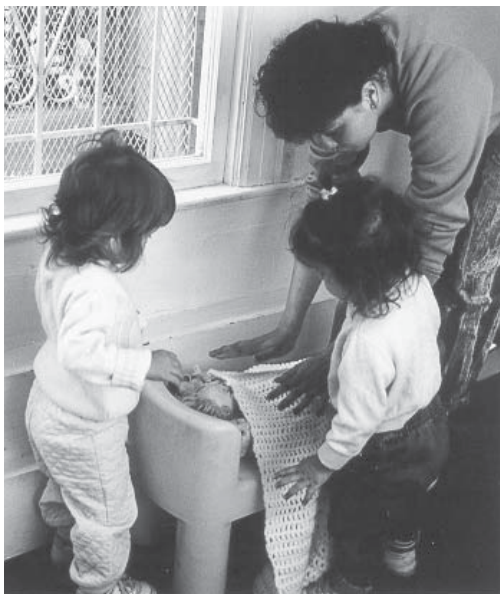
Be aware of signs of child abuse, and keep records of possible abuse.

Children with infectious diseases should be sent home immediately, of course. Signs of neglect or abuse also may be evident at that time, or they may become visible later, when the child is undressed. When considering a situation involving possible abuse, remember to keep in mind the child's culture. Some cultures have medical or religious practices that may be mistaken for abuse. One such practice is "coin rubbing," which is generally not harmful but may leave bruise-like marks on the skin.

Documentation is very important in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. If you see any sign of bruises, burns, or severe neglect, make a note of it with a description and the date. If it is your program's policy, you will then need to ask the parent or other appropriate family member about what you have noticed. Usually, there will be an explanation such as "She fell down the stairs" or "She ran into my cigarette as I was holding it." Make a written note of the condition of the child, the family member's explanation, and the date. Whether or not your program's policy is to talk with the family member, you should continue to observe the child carefully to watch for unusual

behaviors. If the signs of possible abuse occur repeatedly or if a sign of abuse is severe, you need to inform the local child protection agency immediately. Your role is to protect the child. However, you also need to maintain confidentiality; people in the program who are not directly involved should not be told about the incident.

Some individuals may report suspected child abuse anonymously, but "legally mandated reporters" such as child care professionals are required to give their name when making a report. You may be tempted to delay reporting what the evidence suggests—either because of concern for the family member or fear of his or her reaction—but this is dangerous for the child. In some programs, the program leader makes the call to the child protection agency so that the relationship between the family member and the child's primary infant care teacher is not compromised. In other programs, where relationships with families are strong, the approach to the reporting process may be very open. The child care provider or teacher tells the family member that the program is going to report suspected abuse and invites the person to be present during the call. There are many situations in which this approach is not feasible, but this strategy can help prevent a rupture in the relationship between the family and the program.



After the report is made, the child protection agency investigates the situation and sometimes takes actions to protect the child. At that point, when agencies outside the child care program have become involved in the matter, the process can be very uncomfortable for child care professionals. For example, a law enforcement officer may have to come to the program. You also may have to face the feelings of anger and betrayal of the suspected abuser, particularly if the person has not been included in the process. This is a possible consequence of fulfilling your obligation to protect the children in your program.

Questions to Consider

1. With sensitive issues, do you avoid making hasty decisions by using the four-step process for dealing with your feelings?
2. Do you take time to consider the consequences of every approach you might take? On the other hand, are you prepared to act quickly when you suspect that a child is in immediate danger?
3. Are you careful to handle situations quietly, keeping information confidential? What steps can you take to deal with the problem of gossip among staff or family members?
4. To handle difficult situations, do you take into account the personality of the parent or other family member and keep fairness in mind? When necessary, are you able to

take difficult actions such as terminating a family's enrollment or reporting child abuse?

5. Do you remind yourself that no one is perfect and that people sometimes have conflicts with each other? Are you able to apologize when appropriate, or offer to have a sit-down chat to clear the air?
6. What are some ways to handle situations that cannot be resolved? Do you keep your sense of humor? Do you remember the importance of making the program constructive and fun for everyone involved?

Suggested Resources

Books and Articles

Anderson, M. Parker. *Parent-Provider Partnerships: Families Matter.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project, 1998.

Advances the concept of family-centered child care by addressing the development of the child and family together. Offers family-support principles that build on family strengths and the community's culture and resources.

California Department of Education. *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Social–Emotional Growth and Socialization*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1990.

Presents an overview of infant temperament, emotional milestones, responsive caregiving, nurturance, guidance, and socialization. Explores the meaning of children's fantasy and make-believe play and the relationship between cognitive development and social–emotional well-being.

Fisher, Roger, and William Ury. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In.* New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Offers a concise, proven strategy for resolving conflicts, whether they involve parents and children, neighbors, bosses and employees, customers, corporations, tenants, or diplomats. Based on studies and conferences conducted by the Harvard Negotiation Project.

Gordon, Joel. "Separation Anxiety: How to Ask a Family to Leave Your Center." *Child Care Information Exchange* (January 1988): 13–15.

Offers practical information on how to set a limit with a family for whom the program is not a good match, and on how to help staff deal with this uncomfortable situation.

Greenman, James. "Living in the Real World—Parent Partnerships: What They Don't Teach You Can Hurt." *Child Care Information Exchange* 124 (November/December 1998): 78–82.

Presents examples of difficulties faced by child care providers when developing parent partnerships and offers suggestions for establishing successful relationships.

Hohmann, Mary, and Jaclyn Post. *Tender Care and Early Learning: Supporting Infants and Toddlers in Child Care Settings.* Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press, 2002.

Describes HighScope's infant/toddler learning approach, including the elements of active learning; key experiences for sensory-motor learners; the organization of space and materials; children's daily schedules and caregiving routines; and adult support based on child observation, team planning, and partnerships with parents.

Honig, Alice S. *Secure Relationships: Nurturing Infant/Toddler Attachment in Early Care Settings.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002.

Focuses on aspects of attachment that caregivers need to understand in order to nurture early, positive mental health in young children. Offers suggestions to help caregivers foster infant and toddler relationships in child care settings.

Lerner, Claire, and Amy Laura Dombro. *Learning and Growing Together: Understanding and Supporting Your Child's Development.* Washington, DC: Zero to Three, 2000.

Offers four sections to support parents in their learning process: "How Parenthood Feels"; "Tuning in to Your Child"; "The Amazing First Three Years of Life"; and "In Conclusion: Thoughts to Grow On."

Mangione, Peter L., ed. *Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1995.

A guide to help infant/toddler caregivers (1) improve their understanding of themselves and discover how they are influenced by their cultural beliefs; (2) improve their understanding of the children and families they serve; and (3) learn to relate to cultural issues and thereby become more effective caregivers.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). *Building Circles, Breaking Cycles—Preventing Abuse and Neglect: The Early Childhood Educator's Role,* Section 9. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2004.

Written for early childhood professionals who work with children and families every day. Focuses on how these educators can help prevent child abuse and neglect and promote healthy social and emotional development in children.

O'Brien, Marion. *Inclusive Child Care for Infants and Toddlers: Meeting Individual and Special Needs.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 1997.

A resource for infant/toddler caregivers in inclusive settings, and a training guide for students and beginning teachers. Chapter 3 deals with parents as partners and suggests ways to communicate with family members and to involve them in their children's care.

Phillips, Deborah, and Jack Shonkoff, eds. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2000.

Extensive review of scientific research and child policy centered on child development from birth to age five. Contains ten core concepts, including one that states, "Human development is shaped by a dynamic and continuous interaction between biology and experience."

Powell, D. R. *Families and Early Childhood Programs.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 1989.

Describes how early childhood programs should respond to changing family structures and lifestyles. Offers an in-depth review of literature covering rationales for working with parents, relationships between families and early childhood programs, and strategies for addressing home–school relations. Available from the NAEYC, 1313 L Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005. http://www.naeyc.org.

Schorr, Lizbeth B., and Daniel Schorr. *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage and Despair.* New York: Doubleday and Co., 1989.

Reviews intervention programs created in the United States for young children at risk. Maintains that America already has the answers for providing appropriate educational intervention and support, and that it does not need to reinvent strategies or approaches. Describes various methods of working with difficult issues and dysfunctional families.

Stanley, Diane. "How to Defuse an Angry Parent." *Child Care Information Exchange* 108 (March/April 1996): 34–35.

Offers a four-step plan for defusing a parent's anger: Listen carefully; make sure the problem is well understood; acknowledge the parent's feelings; and explain the plan of action.

Turnbull, Ann, and H. Rutherford Turnbull. *Families, Professionals, and Exceptionality: Collaborating for Empowerment.* 4th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2001.

Text and accompanying instructor's manual offer many activities related to family-centered practices. Covers topics such as historical and current roles of parents, family functions, and referral and evaluation. Includes ideas for student projects and class discussions, assignments, and discussion questions. Also provides a course syllabus.

Audiovisuals

The Ages of Infancy: Caring for Young, Mobile, and Older Infants. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org.

Divides infancy into three age-related stages of development: young infants (birth to eight months); mobile infants (six to eighteen months); and older infants (sixteen to thirty-six months). Describes ways caregivers can help infants with issues of security, exploration, and identity in each of the three stages of development. Available in English and Spanish.

Essential Connections: Ten Keys to Culturally Sensitive Child Care. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org.

Explores the meaning of culture in the lives of young children and the role of culture in the development of a child's self-esteem. Emphasizes the importance of providing culturally consistent care in child care settings and learning about the child's home through the family. Available in English and Spanish.

Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers. DVD with accompanying booklet. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and WestEd, Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC). http://www.pitc.org.

Parents speak candidly about their concerns and discuss the high emotionality and conflicting feelings they experience when bringing very young children to child care. Offers caregivers ways to ease parents' concerns by expressing competence, honesty, and understanding. Caregivers are also encouraged to address their own feelings of discomfort by using a four-step process of awareness, exploration, gathering information, and taking steps to deal with issues. Available in English and Spanish.

Appendixes

A. Family-Centered Care
B. Sample Family–Infant Care Program Agreement
C. Sample Questions for Families at Time of Enrollment
D. Protective Urges: Working with Caregivers' Feelings
E. Protective Urges: Working with Parents' Feelings

Appendix A
Family-Centered Care

Family-centered care offers a very effective way to work with families and build relationships with them.* It is based on the idea that families are the most important people in their children's lives. Diversity is honored, networks are built, and two-way communication is fostered. Traditionally, teachers have used a variety of strategies when working with families, but most of those strategies—such as parent involvement or education—have included only one-way communication. For example, teachers would assign specific jobs to parents and would provide information about child development and parenting skills. As well-intentioned as traditional approaches have been, most have missed important opportunities for authentic, two-way communication between families and teachers because the emphasis has been on teachers giving information. Family knowledge and wisdom have not been valued as highly as teacher expertise. This may be a result of the historical view that teachers are "educators" of children whereas families are primarily "nurturers" of children.

This traditional interpretation of the roles of families and teachers lacks the understanding of how families and teachers can learn from one another, form effective partnerships, and support children's well-being. To establish these partnerships, families and teachers need to recognize and act upon the skills, knowledge, and experience that both partners bring to the relationship. Clearly, creating partnerships with families is central to high-quality programming for infants and toddlers across all settings and life circumstances.

An important aspect of forming teacher–family partnerships is showing families that they play a vital role in the care and education of their children. Teachers can help families in this area by:

- Acknowledging family strengths.
- Inviting and respecting each family's ideas and efforts.
- Asking about family experiences, history, culture, and beliefs.

Teachers need to honor each family's choices and decisions about their children. A teacher's role is not to "allow" families to make decisions but to share

*Galinsky, E.; C. Howes; and S. Kontos. *The Family Child Care Training Study.* New York: Families and Work Institute, 1995.

in the decision-making process. Asking family members about their children acknowledges that families have a crucial role in the education of children. Teachers may find it valuable to ask about the child's early experiences, development, health information, likes and dislikes, and favorite activities, as well as the family's learning goals for the child.

Teachers often have extensive knowledge about children's typical development, but families have specific knowledge of their children. Teachers may not feel comfortable about sharing decision making with some families, and vice versa. However, when teachers and families understand that family input and participation are essential to providing quality care for infants and toddlers, authentic, effective partnerships can develop.

Families have many different structures, speak a variety of languages, and hold unique beliefs about how children learn, what keeps children healthy, and what constitutes appropriate discipline. Learning about and honoring this diversity of families are both challenging and enriching for teachers. Self-reflection, observation, and dialogue can help teachers to meet the challenges that may arise when serving families of diverse backgrounds. Regardless of the circumstances or cultural background of each family, the development of a true partnership is an essential ingredient of quality care for the child. Infant care teachers who are successful at engaging families in their children's care will create a positive child care experience for everyone involved in the program.

Appendix B

Sample Family–Infant Care Program Agreement

Welcome to my (our) family child care home (child care center). We look forward to working closely with you to support the health, growth, learning, and happiness of your child. The purpose of this agreement is to define the terms for child care services. Please inform me (us) of any changes to the contact information listed in this agreement (addresses, telephone numbers, etc.).

Child's name: _____

Other name used for child (if any): _____

Parent or family member's name: _____

Home address: _____

Home telephone: _____ Cell phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

Occupation: _____

Name of workplace or school: _____

Workplace or school address: _____

Telephone: _____

Emergency contacts and telephone numbers (please list two people):

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Hours and Days of Operation

Child care services will begin on _____, 20____.
(month) (day) (year)

The hours for care will begin at _____ and end at _____ on the following days:

☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐ Saturday ☐ Sunday

If the child is going to be absent or late, please call (___) _____ in advance.

Child care will not be available on the following holidays: _____

_____

Family Child Care Home Only

My vacation periods will be _____.

You will be responsible for making other child care arrangements during these times.

On occasion, I may find it necessary to use the services of a substitute infant care teacher.

My substitutes are: _____.

Rates

$_____ per week for full-time care (7 hours or more each day).

$_____ per hour for regular half-time care (4 hours or fewer each day).

$_____ per hour for drop-in care (if space is available).

$_____ fee for late pickup of child. This fee will be charged each time a pickup occurs _____ minutes or more after the scheduled pickup time, unless special arrangements have been made.

$_____ per meal.

Parents or other family members will bring food for infants under _____ months old.

Child care fees are due no later than the _____ day of each month. An additional fee of $_____ will be charged for each late payment.

Fees may be paid: Weekly _____ Biweekly _____ Monthly _____

An advance deposit of $_____ must be paid at the time of enrollment. This amount will be returned when services are terminated.

When illness or vacation by either party results in services not being rendered, fees may (will not) be adjusted.

Child care fees will be paid by: Cash _____ Check _____ Other _____

Advance Notice Required for Changes Affecting Services

A written notice must be submitted at least 14 days prior to any of these occurrences:

- Termination of the agreement by either party
- Increases in child care fees
- Vacation periods for both family and infant care teacher

Food

I (We) do (not) participate in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Meals will be:

_____ prepared by the program

_____ provided by the child's family

Meals served will be:

_____ breakfast _____ snack(s) as follows: _____

_____ lunch _____ supper

Please list any special dietary needs or allergies for the child: _____

Food for Infants

Infants will be fed according to the family's instructions. Please notify me (us) of any changes in feeding schedules, formulas, or foods. Milk will be provided for all infants who no longer take a special formula. Breast-fed infants should have an adequate supply of expressed milk stored in bottles.

Medical Information

Your child is required to have a physical examination:

_____ before enrolling in this child care program

_____ each year while enrolled

Before your child can be enrolled in this program, you must submit immunization records showing that your child is up-to-date on immunizations for his or her age.

Please notify me (us) if your child will be absent because of illness.

If your child is home for _____ days or more because of illness, you must bring a signed physician's note giving clearance for the child to return to the program.

Contagious diseases must be brought to my (our) attention immediately. All families involved with the program will be notified. Medication will be administered only if there is a signed permission form from a licensed physician.

If your child becomes ill while present in the child care program, you will be asked to pick up the child immediately. If you cannot be reached, I (we) will call one of the emergency contacts you have listed in this agreement. Your child will be allowed to return to the program in accordance with generally accepted practice for the specific medical condition involved. Depending on the condition, a signed physician's note may be required to readmit the child.

Clothing

- Your child's clothing and other items must be labeled with his or her name and brought to the program in some type of storage bag.
- Families will supply at least two complete sets of play clothes, outdoor clothing, and the following:

_____ disposable diapers	_____ baby wipes	_____ bibs
_____ cloth diapers	_____ training pants	_____ plastic pants

Note: If you have questions about or need assistance with any of the above, please speak with me (your child's infant care teacher).

Field Trips

We may take trips away from the child care setting to provide children with special experiences. You will be notified in advance when trips are being planned, and I (we) will request written permission for your child to ride in a car or take public transportation.

Our state requires a proper infant seat for car travel. _____ You _____ I (We) will provide the seat.

Please remember that families are welcome to visit the program at any time!

I (We) fully understand and agree to the terms of this contract. This agreement may be renegotiated at any time.

Printed name of parent or other responsible family member: _____

Signature of parent or family member: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Sample Questions for Families at Time of Enrollment

Note: These questions may be asked either in writing or in a conversation

Please answer the following questions to help us learn more about you and your family. You are not required to respond to these questions, but any information you share will help us provide better care for your child.

1. Who are the people living with you in your home? Please provide each person's age and relationship to the child who is enrolling in child care.

2. Who are the other people (not living in your home) who take care of your child or are important in his or her life?

3. What is your country of origin? How long have you lived in the United States?

4. What is the primary language spoken in your home? Do you speak any other languages?

5. What child care arrangements have you used prior to enrolling your child in our program?

6. How does your child react to separation from you and other important people in his or her life?

7. What are some of your child's favorite activities?

8. How often does your child play alone? With other children?

9. How would you describe your child? For example, is he or she active? Quiet? Easy-going? Strong-willed?

10. What are some of your family's techniques for soothing the child?

11. What are some of your family's techniques for providing guidance or discipline for the child?

12. Do you have any special interests or skills that you would like to share with the program? If so, what are they, and how would you like to share them?

Appendix D

Protective Urges: Working with Caregivers' Feelings

J. Ronald Lally, EdD
Co-Director
WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies

Just seeing a baby brings out feelings of tenderness and the desire to shield the infant from harm. This is a primitive, protective urge that we find in the adults of most species.

When caregivers suspect that a family is not treating one of "their" children in this warm and protective way, they often experience an explosion of emotions. Rage, fear, frustration, and sadness are just a few of the ways they respond. Nothing seems to make a caregiver more angry than if they feel that a parent is not treating a young child well.

Unfortunately, what most caregivers do when they feel these feelings is either deny them or feel so overwhelmed by them that they believe that they must act on them at once. Society has put the caregiver of young children in a tight box. The accepted role model is a combination of Mary Poppins and Mother Teresa. There is no room for feelings like these and no established way to deal with them. That is a weakness in our field that must be addressed. Know that these are normal feelings. In order to do effective work with infants and toddlers, caregivers need to acknowledge these feelings and deal with them.

At the Program for Infant/Toddler Care, we have developed a process for helping caregivers deal with feelings of this sort. It is a new version of the old advice, "Count to ten before you act." I hope you will find it useful. The process has four steps:

- Explore your feelings
- Check out your feelings with others
- Seek the parent's point of view
- Develop an action plan

Explore Your Feelings

The first step, though it sounds easy, often is the most difficult. When I talk with caregivers who are having trouble with parents, I find that they often have difficulty focusing on their feelings. When I ask them to do so, a typical response is for them to talk about what the parent is doing that bothers them instead of talking about their own feelings—about *how* they are bothered. A common response to the question "How does this make you feel?" is often an action statement like "I should tell the mother that she needs to wash her own child!" The key to this step is understanding why it is important. Until you know what you are feeling, you can't know how it is affecting your actions. One goal should be to stay with your emotions and watch them. Often, you will find that you have many feelings about the situation rather than just the first one you uncovered. The key is to focus on your own deep feelings rather than on the behaviors of others. Once you find out what they are, try to accept them.

Check Out Your Feelings with Others

Talk about your feelings with colleagues, your program manager, or even

a spouse to get more clarity about them. Sharing with colleagues will almost always help you clarify your feelings and give you other perspectives on the situation. Colleagues might help you to see that this is an issue you always seem to get disturbed about more than others, or help you to accept your feelings. Sometimes just thinking about our feelings with friends or colleagues allows us to see anger turn to fear, or sadness or depression turn to hurt. This step can be brief, but it is important because you may gain some valuable perspective.

Seek the Parent's Point of View

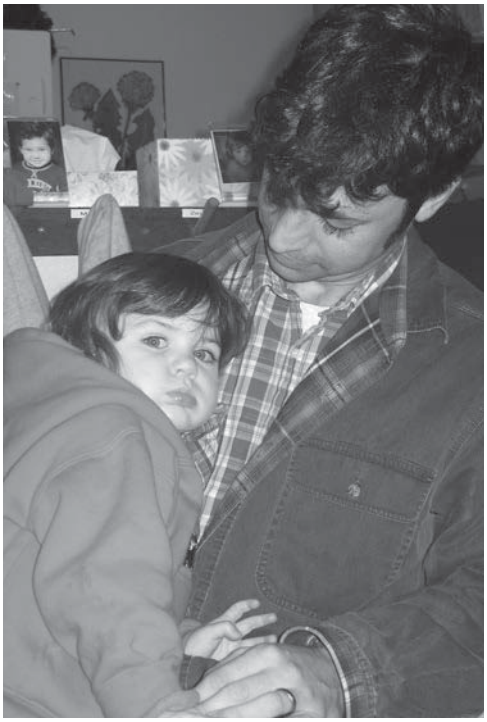
Before you start to work on a problem with a parent, it is best to make sure you are certain about what the problem is. This step is one last information-gathering attempt before you confront the parent with your issues. During drop-off, pickup, or general conversation, collect more information about the parent and the parent's actions. Spend most of your time listening. Avoid being critical, arguing, disagreeing, or trying to solve the problem. You might find that what the parent tells you is quite different from what you imagined was happening, or you might confirm what you already thought. At least you will have a more complete picture.

Develop an Action Plan

After you have gone through an exploration of your feelings, checked them out with others, and gone back to the parent to gain more clarity about things, it becomes time to put your action plan together. Our suggestion for the planning process is to divide it into three topic areas. The first area is what you will do for and about yourself.

Addressing Your Own Issues

- **Get support.** If in examining an issue you uncover fears, resentments, and biases in yourself that you need to work on, seek support. For example, you might want to talk with a counselor or someone who has specialized training.
- **Manage your stress.** If you are experiencing stress, set aside time for yourself. Find an activity that will help you relax—such as taking a walk or a hot bath, or stretching.
- **Set boundaries.** If you feel you are doing too much to meet families' needs, or you find yourself worrying about a child all the time, set limits on what you will do. Reflect on what you can realistically do as a caregiver and work on accepting the idea that you can't do everything.



Interacting with the Parent

Before you meet with the parent about the problem, it is a good idea to plan how you will introduce the concern, what issues you will address, and how you will address them.

- **Reflect on the relationship.** How will you be received by the parent? Is there already tension between the two of you? Assess your relationship for signs of how to approach things. Do you need someone else to intercede because things are already strained?
- **Decide on the content.** What do you know about the parent's sensitivities that can help you avoid bringing up provocative issues? How many issues will you bring up? On what issues can you comment positively, and what issues central to your concern must be addressed?
- **Plan the interaction.** How will you approach the subject? What kind of an icebreaker will you use? Where and when will this conversation happen? What do you think the next steps might be?

Finding Outside Help

You may find that the problem is too big for the parent and you to work on alone. All caregivers should know that they do not have to solve every problem on their own. Here are some actions to consider.

- **Contact a resource and referral agency.** Could a local child care resource and referral agency help you or the parent address the problem? Would the agency know about services you might not be familiar with?
- **Seek programmatic help.** Is there a child care mental health professional available to your program for consultation? Is your child care program part of a larger agency that has staff with special skills? Could you tap their skills?
- **Identify specific services.** Should your plan include referring the parent to services in the community that you already know about? (For example, family support services, drug and alcohol counseling, food banks, or health clinics.)

Finally, you should come to grips with the fact that this plan is just a beginning. It will change as the situation changes. The point of the work is that if you follow this four-step plan when you start to have strong feelings about the parents you serve, you will probably help yourself and them. Remember the four steps when strong emotions come up.

Appendix E

Protective Urges: Working with Parents' Feelings

From the Program for Infant/Toddler Care DVD
Protective Urges: Working with the Feelings of Parents and Caregivers

In every species, there is a fundamental drive to protect the young, particularly the very young. Because infants are so vulnerable, they need this protection for their survival. Adults instinctively respond to an infant's need for survival. Just seeing the baby brings out feelings of tenderness—and the desire to shield the infant from harm. An awareness of the power of protective urges can help infant care teachers work with family members. A key to working with family members is learning about what they look for in an infant care teacher. Research has shown that, of all the infant-care-teacher attributes that families identify as important, understanding, competence, and honesty go the furthest in quieting their fears.

The Need for Understanding

An infant's family members have an intense need for an infant care teacher who appreciates what they are going through. Even though family members may not always show it, their emotions are often close to the surface. An infant care teacher who understands family members' vulnerability can give them the support they seek.

The Concern for Competence

An infant's family members often have an overwhelming need to be reassured that their child's infant care teacher clearly knows what he or she is doing. Their questions are more often a reflection of their anxieties and fears than an assessment of the infant care teacher's competence. Their heightened emotions can keep them from seeing the good job that an infant care teacher is doing. When family members express anxieties and fears, it usually helps to not take offense. As an infant care teacher, the best way to deal with family members' worries is to help them see your competence.

- Provide family members with written statements of your philosophy of care, and give specific information about your program.
- Highlight your health and safety practices.
- Reassure them that you have thoughtfully and effectively addressed their issues.
- Communicate your desire to learn from them about their child.

The Importance of Honesty

Family members place a high priority on having a teacher who is trustworthy. Honesty means letting family members know about things that happen during the day, even if they are hard to talk about. Straightforward communication helps family members form an accurate picture of you and other staff members in action. Encourage family members to visit the program at any time and stay for as long as they wish.

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