

Momentum

by Lynne Meservey

“The Center Newsletter”

The center newsletter is a key factor in establishing good parent relations. The quality of your newsletter, therefore, is very important to your success and the retention of families in your program. The newsletter is a written reflection of your center's *personality*.

Objectives

While parent retention is a key goal in writing newsletters, there are other important purposes to your in-house publication:

Communicating: Informing parents about your calendar of events, changes in the center, menus, program milestones, etc.

- Explain what's happening at the center, what's different, what's coming up, and what's expected of the parent.
- Notify parents of change or anticipated change.
- Report on things the *children learn* not what *children do*. Avoid listing activities by focusing on how children benefit from the things they do.

Educating: Providing parents with knowledge and skill building ideas to use in parenting roles. This presents you as an authority and adds to the parents' confidence in your abilities.

- Help parents understand what is expected of children at each developmental level.
- Provide activities that parents can do at home to enhance the child's growth and development.
- Share ideas that will help working parents cope and relieve guilt about leaving children in care.

- Share articles or quotations from child care professionals.

Giving Recognition: Using the newsletter to give public recognition to parents contributing to your program. It is also an avenue to highlight outstanding staff contributions and the things that children have done.

Obtaining Feedback: The newsletter is a vehicle for surveying parents about program quality and performance.

Building Public Awareness: We usually think of newsletters as internal publications, but parents may show the newsletter to friends. A good newsletter is one that can be distributed to a mailing list of child care advocates, potential enrollments, and other friends of the center.

Selling Yourself and Your Staff as Professionals:

- Present yourself in ways so that parents will view you as a professional manager.
- Mention ways you are improving your skills — classes you take, workshops you attend, books you've read, etc.
- Offer recognition for yourself or staff.
- Highlight participation in professional organizations.

Policies

An established policy for your newsletter helps you ensure that it lives up to your quality standards.

Some of the policies to consider for inclusion are:

Suggested Format for Newsletter

Newsletters can contain a variety of articles and information. Some sections may be regular features while others may be included to correspond to seasonal interests. Here are some suggestions for sections to include:

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| Cover Story | Educational emphasis like why two year olds bite or how children learn. Other topics can include safety information or child care issues like licensing regulations or tax credits for parents. |
| Profile | Feature story about a staff member. Interview the employee to learn interesting or unusual facts. The format might be something like the profiles you see in Sunday newspapers or in magazines. Include a statement about why she/he has selected child care as a career. |
| Menu | Parents like to know what children have to eat so they can do their menu planning at home. It lets parents see that you are organized and that you provide nutritious food. This section can also include recipes from your cook which busy parents can use. |
| Calendar | Sharing the upcoming events helps parents plan family schedules as well as reinforcing the organization and benefits of enrollment at your center. |
| Classroom Highlights | Themes, activities, field trips, visitors, developmental activities, or a new learning center are all important items to share. They are great <i>if they are well written</i> and contain good subject matter. Not all of your teachers will be writers. Perhaps you can find one who is and ask that teacher to be the classroom reporter for all classes. |
| Selling | Always include something that demonstrates why your center is good for the family. |

Newsletters are an opportunity to show parents how good your center is. Feel free to toot your own horn and to thank parents for being part of your center family. Sharing humorous anecdotes or incidents that occur at the center and including lots of parents' and children's names will have them reading every line. If newsletters are worth doing, they are worth doing well.

- The newsletter will not divulge confidences of parents, staff, or children. (Consider here whether the full names of individuals will be printed.)
- The newsletter will not be used for the purpose of enforcing company policies.
- The newsletter will not be used for the purpose of collecting receivables.
- The newsletter will refrain from making statements that might insult or harm any parent, child, or staff member.
- A positive approach will be used in the wording of all copy.
- Each newsletter will be proofed by at least three people to insure correct grammar and spelling. Editing will include check-

ing facts and giving credit when quoting others.

Establishing Your Target Audience

“Our customers are not all the same.”

You must determine who your audience is before you begin to write the newsletter, e.g., you may have a Masters in early childhood education, but many of your parents may not have attended college. You will write differently for this audience than you would for a parent group with highly technical backgrounds.

Consider the demographics of your parent audience and strike a balance in the scope of the material you include in your newsletter. This doesn't mean that you don't *stretch* the readers' knowledge to some degree, but it does mean that you watch the use of technical terminology and sophistication of the copy. When your target audience is mixed, you may wish to provide a mix in the scope and type of articles in the newsletter.

Outline two to six main points that you want to cover in the article. This is called writing a *direction sheet*. Here is an outline for a direction sheet:

- Objective of the article.
- Description of the audience.
- What does the audience need and want in relationship to the topic?
- List individual points you want to make in priority order.
- Call to action — What do you want the audience to do? (optional — depends on the topic)
- Mechanical details — How do you envision the layout of the article, how long can it be, will you use photos or drawings, will it be the lead article, etc.?

Writing Copy

Choose a main topic for each issue of the newsletter as well as other topics you want to cover in shorter pieces. Start writing only after you've thought through what you want to say. You can't say

everything in one article. Break down most topics into manageable pieces. For instance, rather than discussing the broad issue of guidance and discipline, you may want to write about why two year olds bite and what you do about it. Each issue has as many different slants as there are people thinking about it. The key to good writing is finding a topic that you are enthusiastic about, so that you will enjoy researching the information. Once a topic really interests you, you'll be able to make it sound interesting.

If nothing appeals to you about the topic, talk to other people to learn more about it. If you've still got nothing, maybe the topic isn't worth doing.

Lynne Meservey's career includes teaching preschool children, multi-unit center management, consulting, training, and operating child care programs in 12 states. Her specialties include infant care, school-age programs, center management, and marketing child care services. She is currently president of Apple Tree Children's Centers in Des Moines, Iowa.