

## Guidelines for a flexible, creative, inclusive mind-set

# Implementing Change With Understanding and Respect

by Joan Weaver

Change. It's ever with us. Approached with understanding and respect, the process of implementing change can be a powerful opportunity for personal growth and center development. If your center is planning a change, do you have a plan for its implementation? Your thorough preparation and thoughtful approach will help ease the process for everyone involved. And if your center has recently made a change, you might consider the questions and suggestions below in light of your experience. With hindsight, would you approach it in the same way? What might you do differently?

### What Type of Change?

How you respond to and implement change in your center will depend on what type of change it is.

### What is the Source of the Change?

Is it from within your center, such as suggestions from staff or parents? Perhaps you or a staff member have just returned from a workshop or conference

with new ideas you are eager to share and implement. Perhaps you want to address a specific situation of concern. Sometimes changes are imposed upon your center from outside, such as a new licensing requirement or change in funding.

Various changes could include (or affect):

- Staffing relationships
- Curriculum
- Physical environment

- Grouping of children
- Center philosophy
- Record keeping
- Parent relationships
- Specific problem resolution
- Health guidelines
- Safety regulations
- Change of facility/location

### Who is Affected?

Families, children, and staff members all have their own ways of reacting to and dealing with change. Considering and respecting the needs and opinions of those affected by the change is essential in defining your approach. You and your staff each might want to make notes, to gather your thoughts and reflections about the nature of the change, and then discuss. What would be an ideal outcome as a result of the change you are considering?

**Staff Members** — Are your staff members eager to make this change? Is the change controversial?

What concerns have staff members expressed or are they likely to encounter?

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What would be effective ways to involve staff in implementing this change?

**Children** — Will caregivers or routines change? Will the change affect some children more than others? How will this change affect each child in your center?

As you observe the children, consider how they might benefit from a change such as you are considering. What adjustments will the child(ren) be required to make?

What are some concerns, from the children's point of view, that need to be addressed in implementing the proposed change?

How might the children participate in implementing the proposed change?

**Parents** — Are parents likely to see this change as beneficial to their child and to them? Does the change involve asking something more of parents in terms of money, time, and/or involvement?

Many parents feel stressed to maximum already. What concerns of parents need to be addressed?

How will parents be informed of the change, and/or involved in the planning? (See: Julie Powers, "Preparing Parents for Change," *Child Care Information Exchange*, September 2001.)

## Practical Considerations

Are there a number of different ways that this change could occur over time? Could your desired outcome be achieved in stages?

What will it cost? Will it save money in the long run? Do you have the budget? Do you have support from your super-

## Center Philosophy

Does your center have a philosophy to unite the focus of caregiving and to explain to parents how the children will be cared for?

- Knowing the philosophy, parents can decide if your center is a place where they feel comfortable leaving their child.

- The philosophy can be articulated to prospective staff members at the interview stage and any questions regarding its implementation can be addressed before hiring.

- With the overriding principles accepted and internalized, staff members provide more consistent care, and conflicts among caregivers are minimized.

If your center doesn't have one, this is one change you might consider! For an example of a center philosophy, see [www.sctcc.org/philosophy.htm](http://www.sctcc.org/philosophy.htm).

In the development of a philosophy, it may be helpful to use a comprehensive self-study process similar to the one used in the NAEYC accreditation process, so that caregivers come to "own" the approach. See National Association for the Education of Young Children: [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org).

visor or board of directors? If not, what steps might you take to enhance organizational support for the change?

What additional information or advice might you gather from books, other centers, or the Internet?

As you work through these questions, the steps toward implementation will begin to take shape.

## What is a Reasonable Timetable?

Brainstorm options, allow free exchange. Critique pros and cons of various alternatives. Agree on first steps. Analyze how first steps are to be implemented.

## Resistance to Change is Natural

People resist change, even when it's *good* change. We are all comfortable in what is familiar. Children, too, thrive on predictability and routines. Whatever our stage in life, change can feel threatening. Caregivers may resist changing the way they have been doing things because they truly believe they have been doing the best for the children. Consider how your staff members can support each other in learning new skills. (See: Karen Miller, "Motivating Adults to Learn," *Child Care Information Exchange*, January 2002.)

And the truth is, ultimately we cannot change other people. People change when they themselves are motivated to change, and even with commitment to changing, it may still be difficult. As you consider how each person would be affected by the proposed change, see if you can also figure out, and describe, what would make it in that person's best interest to want this change.

## Assessing Progress

Even with the best planning, change doesn't always come quickly or smoothly. Especially when behaviors and relationships are involved, be willing for change to take a while. Acknowledge progress toward your goal, and let one change build on and reinforce the next.

## Staff Training and Development

Videotaping provides opportunities for staff development. Although at the beginning there may be some self-consciousness about videotaping in your center, if you do it regularly, videotaping can become a valuable tool for change that improves the quality of care. Staff can learn to pick up on the *positive* rather than the *negative* of what they see. Studying video footage of themselves, on their own, caregivers are able to observe and improve their skills in interacting with the children.

Video footage of the children can be used for staff training sessions in sharpening observation skills. Learning more about individual differences and each child's cues makes for more responsive caregiving.

### Workshop example: **Thinking About Change**

Once when I was observing in a center, in preparation for a workshop I was scheduled to present, I watched a caregiver diaper three different infants while she and another caregiver, who was feeding an infant a bottle, discussed what they had each done on the weekend. There was very little interaction between the caregivers and the infants. What were the infants learning during these caregiving moments? What change or changes might support a shift from diapering or feeding as something done *to* the infants to diapering and feeding as important activities *involving* the infants as participants?

Some possibilities to get you started: Give staff a chance to talk with each other about their weekends without babies around. Have staff observe a *no personal chit-chat* rule while caring for the babies. Videotape the interactions, have staff observe from baby's point of view. Consider a different arrangement of furniture or space.

What will you do if (when) you find resistance? Acknowledge feelings, and LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN. If you can be open and receptive to the concerns expressed, you can return to the planning process to address them.

## Flexible, Creative, Inclusive

A friend and colleague of mine has identified three qualities that she believes are essential as we evaluate various courses of action in our lives: flexibility, creativity, and inclusiveness. As you plan and implement change in your center, consider the process outlined here in light of these qualities. Your willingness to explore options, to respect and respond to a diversity of viewpoints, and to involve the people who are affected by a change, will help ensure your success. Good luck!

### Is Your Space Completely Safe?

One exception to the recommendation, *change takes time*, is when safety is involved.

Take a moment to ask yourself:

- Is there any safety concern in the children's environment which has not yet been remedied?
- If no adults were available (hypothetically), to watch or to intervene, would the children still be safe?

If you have something you know needs to be taken care of, DO IT NOW. We have a responsibility for the children in our care. Safety MUST be a priority.

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