

# Minimizing the Impact of Staff Changes

by Cathy Abraham

What are the main things parents want to know when there is a change in staffing at the center? First, that their child will still be well taken care of.

Second, that the management team is capable and competent and will select and train the best candidate for the job.

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[www.childcarelounge.com/diva/DIVA.htm](http://www.childcarelounge.com/diva/DIVA.htm)

Staff turnover is inevitable, but there are steps we can take to set the tone and to minimize the impact on the children,

families, and remaining staff at the center.

## Relationships with families

- If you only get one thing from an exiting staff member, make it a nice goodbye letter to the parents. Regardless of the circumstances, this is the professional, appropriate way for staff to leave a center and the families in their care. Offer your help, if necessary, with the letter.

Have parting employees give you a copy of their letter to look at prior to distributing it to parents.

- Ensure that new staff members are properly introduced to staff and parents. Post photographs of all staff including relevant background information so parents know a little about them and will feel more comfortable. Emphasize new staff's education and experience with young children.
- If you have a gap in staffing as a result of an employee leaving, and are asked about it, inform parents that you are going to select only the best candidate for the job. Assure them that your priority is hiring the best candidate for the position and that you will take the time necessary for this process. Give the impression that you are in control of the situation. Ensure that curriculum, lesson planning, accountability, and overall quality do not lapse in this classroom. Have a designated contact person in the interim (the Teacher's Assistant?) to minimize confusion and to foster consistency and daily communication with families.
- Remain calm about being short-staffed or unexpected staff changes.

It happens. You will get through it. Your attitude — calm or frantic — will permeate the center.

- Don't refer to classrooms by teachers' names, for example, "Miss Lisa's Room." You're in trouble if or when Miss Lisa leaves!
- Create a warm, friendly, and inviting environment for families. **All** staff should be greeting and interacting with parents and children. This helps when teachers are reassigned to new classrooms, or when classrooms are combined for certain activities or at different times.

## Happy endings

- Do not try to talk people into staying. If they have decided to leave, then it is unlikely that anything you say will change their mind. If you feel your employee is just feeling discouraged or overwhelmed, and the situation can be resolved, probe and problem-solve with the employee. Ideally situations can be addressed prior to escalating to this point.
- Try to end things on a positive note with staff who need to leave. It is

much better to have someone quit — for many reasons — than to be fired. Sometimes offering someone the opportunity to quit completely changes the tone of the experience.

- If you think an exiting staff member will attempt to create problems, breach confidentiality, or convey negative things, be mindful of leaving them alone with parents. Although, thankfully rare, this kind of employee can cause many, many problems that can last long after they have left. Your job sometimes becomes one of damage control in this situation.
- No matter why a staff member leaves, the director needs to remain professional and “take the high road.” If you imply anything negative, parents wonder why that person was allowed to work at the center. In addition to losing your credibility, you risk breaching confidentiality. Don’t allow yourself to get baited or drawn into a discussion with parents about exiting staff. Develop a neutral, positive standard line, for example, “We wish her well” and then speak to actions you are taking to address the situation.
- If possible, when a good staff member is leaving, offer them a substitute position. This conveys to parents that this person still holds the director and center in high esteem. Leave the door open for good staff; many people will return at some point in the future when their situation changes, if they know that this is an option.

### Resiliency During Change

Five personal qualities:

- Being proactive
  - Being flexible
  - Being focused
  - Being positive
  - Being organized
- Children should always be allowed to say goodbye. If there is a situation in which they cannot do this, the departure should be explained simply and discussed with children. It’s unsettling to have someone that you care about and have seen every day just disappear with no explanation. Children should be able to express their feelings on an on-going basis. Missing someone and talking about him or her should be okay. Goodbyes due to happy life events should be celebrated and recognized.
  - When you are short-staffed or going through staff changes, let your current staff know that they are appreciated. This is often when they really need a boost.

### New beginnings

- Don’t announce new hires in advance. If they make other choices and don’t start, you have to explain this, and you lose some of your credibility.
- Have staff wear name badges.
- Let new employees know it is their responsibility for the first few weeks to introduce themselves to every parent that they have not met. Ideally, long-term staff will make introductions, but this doesn’t always happen. Convey the importance of this piece.
- Invest the time in orienting, training, and checking in with new staff. They will feel more comfortable, and this will show. It never looks good when a parent asks about where medicine is stored or about the “lost and found” and a staff member says, “I don’t know.”
- Do not have the disgruntled, exiting employee train his/her replacement. Entrust the orientation of new staff to positive, knowledgeable mentors.
- Prepare for and accept change. It’s inevitable. Your attitude and your actions will determine how the center fares during these times — and overall.

*The optimist expects it to change;  
The realist adjusts the sails.*