

# Best Practices for Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program



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## OBJECTIVES

- Identify research-based goals and best practices related to the two practice categories (Resources and Partnerships and Healthy Environment) identified in previous NFSMI research.
- Compile a best practice resource that can be used to implement or assess child care wellness practices in child care centers (CCCs).
- Validate and evaluate the usefulness of the best practice resource.

## METHOD

A review panel of 19 child care professionals evaluated the draft best practice resource and provided comments on the format of the resource as a self-assessment tool.

### Phase I

- An expert panel of six child care professionals from five USDA regions convened to identify and confirm draft best practice statements under the two practice categories identified in previous NFSMI research.
- In a facilitated workgroup session, the expert panel reviewed best practice statements; decided if any were missing; and provided feedback on the content, scope, and wording of goals and best practices.
- The expert panel completed a post-workgroup session review to reach consensus on the placement of sub-categories, goals, and best practice statements and provided formatting suggestions for the development of the resource into a Web-based, self-assessment tool.

### Phase II

- A review panel of 19 CCC directors, nutrition and child care consultants, and state agency representatives followed a process to evaluate the draft resource.
- As part of the review process, review panel members were asked to:
  - assess the content, scope, and selection of goals and best practices based on their own school programs;
  - complete an evaluation form validating the placement of goals and best practice statements under the seven practice categories; and
  - provide comments on the format of the resource as a self-assessment tool.



## RESULTS

- The final version, *The NFSMI Best Practice Resource for Child Care Professionals Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP*, is a Web-based, user-friendly, self-assessment checklist for child care professionals.
- The resource is designed around two research-based practice categories. Within the practice categories, best practice statements are grouped by sub-categories based on prevailing themes. There are goal statements listed within each sub-category.
- Each best practice statement is assessed following the 3-point assessment scale (Addressed, Not Addressed, Plan to Address) with Not Applicable as an option to select should the best practice statement not address specific roles of the child care provider or the child care center. Additional space is provided for recording plans to meet specific goals and best practices or record new ones.
- Child care directors may use sections or the entire resource to assess their child care wellness practices or identify staff training needs related to child care wellness practices.

## SUGGESTED USE OF THE BEST PRACTICE RESOURCE

- Identify supportive roles of child care providers in implementing and assessing wellness practices
- Evaluate the role and contributions of child care center staff who perform wellness practices
- Identify specific roles of stakeholders and resources necessary for planning and implementing wellness practices in child care centers
- Identify child care standards and practices needed for ensuring a healthy wellness environment
- Establish goals for continuous quality improvement related to wellness practices

## BEST PRACTICE CATEGORIES

**RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS** – Research-based practice category that contains sub-categories, goals, and best practices that support the acquisition of resources and networking with community organizations to sustain wellness practices in child care.

- Partnerships with Other Agencies
  - Relates to the partnerships established with sponsoring agencies and community organizations to promote wellness for the children in CCC
- Parent Involvement
  - Relates to collaboration between the CCC and parents to support child care wellness efforts
- Staff Training
  - Relates to the training of CCC staff in health and wellness practices

**HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT** – Research-based practice category that contains sub-categories, goals, and best practices related to scheduled opportunities for active play, healthy eating practices, and socialization opportunities for children and staff.

- Healthy Meals
  - Relates to the child care center's commitment to provide healthy meals and snacks according to CACFP guidelines
- Emergency Preparedness
  - Relates to the CCC's plans to respond to emergency situations and maintain the safety of CCC staff and children

- Hand Washing
  - Relates to the CCC's handwashing policy and procedures to prevent illness and the spread of communicable disease in the CCC
- Food Safety and Sanitation
  - Relates to the CCC's commitment to provide healthy meals and snacks to children under safe and sanitary conditions
- Mealtime Environment
  - Relates to creating and maintaining a dining environment in the CCC that encourages healthful eating and positive socialization
- Staffing and Curriculum
  - Relates to trained child care staff meeting children's health and nutrition needs and teaching while role modeling good healthy behaviors to children
- Safety
  - Relates to the CCC's efforts to meet and maintain the center as a safe environment that promotes the growth and development of young children
- Infants
  - Relates to the CCC director's and staff's efforts to meet the nutritional and developmental needs of infants in the CCC
- Child Care Facility Management
  - Relates to assessing and maintaining a safe environment that supports wellness in the child care facility
- Special Food and/or Nutrition Needs
  - Relates to meeting the special food and/or nutrition needs of children in the CCC

## APPLICATION

The NFSMI Best Practice Resource for Child Care Professionals Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP is a Web-based, self-assessment resource for child care professionals that could be used to monitor existing wellness practices or identify new practices to implement.