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

OBJECTIVES
- Identify research-based goals and best practices related to the two practice categories (Resources and Partnerships and Healthy Environments) identified in previous NFNSM 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 NFNSM research.
- In a facilitated workshop 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-workshop session review to reach consensus on the placement of subcategories, 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 NFNSM 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 subcategories based on prevailing themes. There are goal statements listed within each subcategory.
- 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.

BEST PRACTICE CATEGORIES

RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS – Research-based practice category that contains subcategories, 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 subcategories, 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 staff and children

SUGGESTED USE OF THE BEST PRACTICE RESOURCE
- Identify supportive roles of child care providers in implementing and assessing wellness practices
- Evaluate the roles 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

APPLICATION
The NFNSM 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.

BEST MANUFACTURING PRACTICES

Hand Washing
- Relates to the CACFP’s handwashing policy and procedures to prevent illness and the spread of communicable disease in the CCC
- Food Safety and Sanitation
- Relates to the CACFP’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 healthy 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 healthy behaviors to children
- Safety
- Relates to the CACFP’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 CACFP’s efforts to meet and maintain the center as a safe environment that promotes the growth and development of young children
- Child Food Safety 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