

# Ready, Set, Go!



## The Development of a Research-Based Resource for Child Care Professionals Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

### OBJECTIVES

#### Primary objectives of these studies were as follows:

- Describe current practices for providing a wellness environment in child care centers (CCC) participating in the CACFP.
- Define recommendations necessary for establishing a healthy wellness environment in CACFP CCCs.
- Determine the quality indicators (best practices) as related to the practice areas identified from previous NFSMI, ARD research.
- Compile a best practice guide that can be used as a Web-based assessment tool for child care centers participating in CACFP.
- Evaluate and validate the usefulness of the best practice guide.

### METHOD

#### PHASE I

- NFSMI, ARD conducted interviews and focus groups with child care experts, state agency personnel and CCC directors to collect qualitative information about wellness initiatives in child care centers. Interview/focus group data were then used to develop a survey instrument.
- The Creating a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Survey, was developed, piloted by a review panel of child nutrition professionals, revised and formatted into a scannable survey. The survey consisted of four sections. Sections one through three focused on issues associated with creating and maintaining a wellness environment in CCCs with survey statements anchored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Section four addressed demographics.
- Following a three-step process, surveys were distributed to a national sample of 700 CCC directors representing seven United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regions across the U.S. A total of 363 surveys were returned (52%), and proportional representation was achieved from respondents in all seven USDA regions.
- Survey findings indicated that wellness in CCCs is a comprehensive approach that includes nutrition, safety and physical activity for children.
- The findings from this phase of the study identified two practice areas and training issues/needs essential to creating and sustaining a wellness environment in CCCs: "Resources and Partnerships" and "Healthy Environment." It was determined that additional research was needed to build on these findings to identify goals and best practices or quality indicators for creating and maintaining a wellness environment in CCCs.

#### PHASE II

- Research and practice-based resources related to wellness in child care were reviewed prior to drafting the best practice statements. The initial draft of the child care wellness best practice document was comprised of 227 best practice statements/quality indicators which focused on the two practice areas identified in previous research.
- Six child care directors/administrators, child care experts and sponsoring agency and state agency representatives participated in an expert panel work group session to assist with the development of a best practice resource for creating and maintaining a wellness environment in child care centers participating in the CACFP. Panel members offered suggestions and came to an agreement on the preferred format for the best practice resource.
- After the session, researchers reviewed the work group results and combined them into a summarized report. The summary included 194 best practice statements within 12 goals and 13 subcategories under the two practice areas identified in a previous NFSMI, ARD study. Researchers emailed the summary with instructions to expert panel members to review. Researchers then utilized panel members' responses and suggestions to develop the draft best practice resource, as well as the evaluation questionnaire for the review phase of the project.
- A review panel of child care professionals (n = 21) and expert panel members recommended by state agency child nutrition directors and members of the state agency reviewed the best practice resource. Reviewers completed the resource as a self-assessment of their child care program, and then they completed an evaluation form of the resource itself. Space was provided for additional comments and suggestions on the assessment scale, formatting and usefulness of the resource.
- Researchers used qualitative research methods to identify and confirm subcategories, goals and best practices under the two research-based practice categories. Descriptive statistics were calculated and consisted of frequencies and percentages of the total responses from the review panel's evaluation form.

### RESULTS

- The resource, Ready, Set, Go! Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP, is a user-friendly self-assessment checklist to assess wellness and develop a plan of action to implement, assess and improve wellness practices in child care centers across the country.
- Ready, Set, Go! Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP is designed around 155 best practices that contribute to the achievement of 15 goals listed under the two practice categories and 13 subcategories. A four-point assessment scale was developed (addressed, not addressed, plan to address and not applicable) so that the user could assess each statement and develop a plan of action section.
- Each best practice statement is assessed following the three-point current status or assessment scale (addressed, not addressed, plan to address) with not applicable as an option should the best practice statement not pertain to the child care provider or the child care center. A plan of action section is included for each subcategorized section of the resource.
- The resource also contains additional sections with abbreviations and definitions, instructions on how to use the resource, and a list of child care wellness resources. Child care directors may use sections or the entire resource to assess wellness practices in child care or identify staff training needs related to child care wellness practices.

### APPLICATIONS

The *Ready, Set, Go! Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP* resource was designed with the assistance of school nutrition (SN) professionals, including child care directors/administrators, sponsoring agency representatives and state agency representatives, who have played an active role in child care operations. The resulting resource will assist other SN professionals and stakeholders in implementing and assessing wellness practices in child care centers participating in the CACFP.

#### Child nutrition professionals can use this resource to accomplish the following:

- Identify supportive roles of child care providers in implementing and assessing wellness practices
- Evaluate the roles and contributions of child care staff performing wellness practices
- Identify specific roles of stakeholders and resources necessary for planning and implementing wellness practices in child care centers
- Aid in identifying child care standards and practices needed for a healthy wellness environment
- Establish goals for continuous quality improvement



*More than 60% of America's children attend child care facilities during their formative years. Research indicates that quality child care contributes to the positive development of a child's sense of identity, trust of others, and opportunity to acquire successful learning characteristics.*



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