



Insight

A Publication for Child Nutrition Professionals from the National Food Service Management Institute

Child Care Providers Partner with NFSMI, ARD to Develop a Best Practice Wellness Resource for Child Care Centers

O 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. The demand for high-quality child care services has increased over the years, and quality services and facilities that include wellness standards have become a concern for parents, children's advocates, and lawmakers. Because the well-being of children is critical to the social and economic structure of local communities, child care providers play an important role in the health and development of these children. Therefore, it is important that the promotion of a healthy wellness environment create early childhood experiences that support the overall development of children.

W To help child care providers identify, implement, and sustain wellness practices, the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD) conducted two nationwide research projects to identify perceptions, practices, and barriers to providing a healthy wellness environment in child care programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and develop a best practice resource for child care professionals. For the first study, *Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, researchers conducted interviews and focus groups to gather qualitative information for developing a survey instrument which was distributed nationwide to child care center (CCC) directors. The findings from this study were used to provide the foundation for developing a best practice resource in the second study, *Creating and Maintaining a Wellness*

Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP: Best Practices. In this project, child care professionals participated in an expert panel work group discussion and review panel to develop the Web-based, best practice resource for child care center directors and administrators to implement, assess, and improve wellness programs in their child care centers.



OBJECTIVES

The objectives of these studies were to:

- Describe current practices for providing a wellness environment in CCCs participating in the CACFP;
- Identify child care directors' attitudes toward providing a wellness environment in CACFP CCCs;
- Identify the barriers to providing a wellness environment in CACFP CCCs;
- Define recommendations necessary for establishing a healthy wellness environment in CACFP CCCs;
- Identify training needs as related to providing a healthy wellness environment in CCCs participating in the CACFP;
- 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; and
- Evaluate and validate the usefulness of the best practice guide.

METHOD

Phase I

- NFSMI, ARD conducted a multifaceted survey-based study identifying the perceptions, practices, and training needs necessary for creating and maintaining a wellness environment in the centers participating in the CACFP.
- Interviews and focus groups were conducted with child care experts, state agency personnel, and CCC directors to collect qualitative information about wellness initiatives in child care centers. This interview/focus group data were then used to develop a survey instrument.
- The survey, Creating a Healthy Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), 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.
- The majority of respondents were women (99%) who served as CCC directors (78%) operating centers eight hours or more per day (99%). They also reported that all meals and snacks were cooked and prepared on site (86%) for children of variable ages, with children three to five years of age (98%) being the group most served.

Creating a Healthy Environment in Child Care Centers
Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Completely fill in the circle of your answer. Use a #2 pencil.
Correct ●●● ← Use No. 2 Pencil Only → Incorrect ⊕ ⊖ ⊗ ⊘

SECTION I: Your Opinion on Creating a Healthy Environment in Child Care Centers

INSTRUCTIONS:
Please read the following statements related to CREATING A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT in child care centers. As you respond, use the phrase, "To create a healthy environment in child care centers" before each statement and then indicate your level of agreement by using the scale 4 (STRONGLY AGREE) to 1 (STRONGLY DISAGREE).

To create a healthy environment in child care centers...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Opportunities for active play are a part of the child care day.	①	②	③	④
2. Healthy food is served to children.	①	②	③	④
3. Meals and snacks meet CACFP meal pattern requirements.	①	②	③	④
4. Nutrition education is provided to the children.	①	②	③	④
5. Age-appropriate serving sizes are provided.	①	②	③	④
6. Active play activities are age-appropriate.	①	②	③	④
7. Indoor and outdoor active play areas are safe.	①	②	③	④
8. Children feel safe.	①	②	③	④
9. Children view the child care center as friendly.	①	②	③	④
10. Staff model appropriate mealtime behaviors.	①	②	③	④
11. Age-appropriate educational activities that promote life-long healthy behaviors are used.	①	②	③	④
12. Parents participate in child care center events that promote health.	①	②	③	④
13. Staff provide information to parents promoting wellness.	①	②	③	④
14. Staff engage in active play activities with children.	①	②	③	④
15. Staff support health-related activities and special events involving the community.	①	②	③	④

- Survey findings indicated that wellness in CCCs is a comprehensive approach that includes nutrition, safety, and physical activity for children. "Opportunities for active play" as part of the child care day was the most agreed upon statement (3.94 ± .23). "Healthy food is served to children" was the second most agreed upon statement (3.92 ± .31), followed by these statements: "children feel safe" (3.91 ± .31); "meals and snacks meet CACFP meal pattern requirements" (3.89 ± .36); and "indoor and outdoor active play areas are safe" (3.88 ± .33).
- General wellness practices that had the highest agreement ratings were the following: "parents are encouraged to communicate children's allergies and special nutrition needs" (3.89 ± .31); "children are receiving healthy beverages throughout the day" (3.88 ± .35); "children are encouraged to eat fruits and vegetables" (3.86 ± .35); "nutritious foods are purchased for all meals and snacks" (3.84 ± .39); and "children receive healthy snacks" (3.83 ± .39).
- Respondents identified essential training issues, addressed the roles of CCC directors and staff in providing care for children and communicating with parents. The training statement with a mean rating greater than three related to training for CCC directors was "acquiring additional funding sources (grants, community organizations) to support a healthy environment" (3.50 ± .75). Child care directors' level of agreement to this statement confirms focus group participants' responses related to their need to secure and maintain funding and other resources to support wellness initiatives in CCCs. There were four statements with mean ratings greater than 3.0 for CCC staff. The highest mean rating for training child care staff addressed the acquisition of funds to support a healthy environment (3.15 ± .94). Respondents also agreed that child care staff needed training for the following skills: "addressing the needs of children with special food and nutrition needs" (3.04 ± .79); "communicating nutrition education information to parents" (3.01 ± .78); and "addressing the needs of children with disabilities" (3.01 ± .79).

Top Five Issues Identified by CCC Directors for Creating a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers

Opportunities for active play are a part of the child care day.
Healthy food is served to children.
Children feel safe.
Meals and snacks meet CACFP meal pattern requirements.
Indoor and outdoor active play areas are safe.

- The findings from this research 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 the findings of this study 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.
- Six child care directors/administrators, child care experts, and sponsoring organization and state agency representatives attended a day-and-a-half meeting 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.
- Pre-meeting documents were developed and sent to expert panel members to review prior to the meeting. The goals and best practice statements were provided in a checklist format for expert panel members to review each draft statement; determine if each statement was either a goal or best practice; determine if each identified goal or best practice could be assessed; and identify missing goals and best practice statements not included on the pre-meeting assignment and add them to the list.
- The panelists were instructed to bring the completed pre-meeting assignment forms to the work group session. The work group session was facilitated by three NFSMI, ARD researchers.
- Panelists participated in group discussions and consensus building activities to review the wording of each goal and/or best practice/quality indicator statement. Panelists considered not only the child care operations in which they worked, but also the diversity of child care programs across the country.

- Panelists reviewed the wording of each best practice statement and took an action, choosing one of the following four options: accept the goals and/or best practice statements they agreed was necessary; delete the best goals and/or best practice statements they believed should not be included; modify the wording of any goals and best practice statements needing revision; or add any best practice statement that has not been included.
- Once the wording of the statements was agreed upon, the panelists categorized each statement into one of the two practice categories: “Resources and Partnerships” and “Healthy Environment.”
- Panel members offered suggestions, and came to agreement on the preferred format for the best practice resource. The expert panel recommended a Web-based, self-assessment checklist format with five themes under the two research-based practice categories encompassing the goals and best practice statements identified and confirmed by the expert panel. A plan of action section was also suggested for each subcategorized section of the resource. 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.
- 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 the previous NFSMI, ARD study.
- Researchers e-mailed 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.
- Twenty-one child care professionals and expert panel members recommended by state agency child nutrition directors and members of the State Agency Committee reviewed the best practice resource. They 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.



National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi



Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP

Applied Research Division • The University of Southern Mississippi

FINDINGS

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

PRACTICAL USE OF THIS INFORMATION

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 child care professionals, including child care directors/administrators, sponsoring organization representatives and state agency representatives, who have played an active role in child care operations. The resulting resource will assist other child care professionals and stakeholders in implementing and assessing wellness practices in child care centers participating in the CACFP.

RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS				
PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES				
Goal: Partnerships are established between the child care director and other professionals to obtain resources and assistance in promoting wellness and healthy behaviors in the centers.				
BEST PRACTICES:	CURRENT STATUS			
	Addressed	Not Addressed	Plan to Address	Not Applicable
Partnerships are established with the CACFP sponsoring organization and state agency to facilitate wellness practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child care director partners with the state and sponsoring agency for guidance on serving children with food allergies and other special food and/or nutrition needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child care director partners with local health agencies regarding training, resources, and issues related to environmental health inspections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child care director partners with local health agencies and their sponsors regarding training in proper food handling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child care director establishes a partnership with community organizations to develop and implement a wellness plan that promotes health-related activities in their child care center.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The child care director partners with community agencies to develop a comprehensive emergency readiness plan (e.g., weather, safety, disaster, and medical).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- This resource can be used to identify supportive roles of child care providers in implementing and assessing wellness practices.
- Child care professionals can use the resource to evaluate the roles and contributions of staff performing wellness practices.
- This resource can be used to identify specific roles of stakeholders and resources necessary for planning and implementing wellness practices in child care centers.
- This resource can aid in identifying child care standards and practices needed for a healthy wellness environment.
- Child care professionals can use this resource to establish goals for continuous quality improvement.

For More Information

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GY 2007 Project 2
GY 2008 Project 4

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