

Director Mentoring Program Manual

Introduction to CAECTI's Director Mentoring Program

Philosophy and Definition

The Capital Area Early Childhood Institute is a community-based initiative designed to provide training and information to parents and child care providers of children birth through three years of age. The Institute currently serves child care providers and selected centers in Dauphin, Cumberland and Perry counties. In 2000, the Institute created a mentor program to provide on-going intensive on-site technical assistance to selected caregivers of infants and toddlers in child care centers. In 2001, the Institute expanded the infant/toddler mentoring program to include caregivers in Centre county and York County. Also in 2001, the Institute created a Director Mentoring program for directors in Cumberland, Dauphin and Perry counties.

The Institute proposes that a mentoring program will fill the gap between training and improved caregiver practice. The Institute focuses its mentoring program on infant and toddler caregivers because there are fewer opportunities for training or education in the special needs of infants, toddlers and their families. Additional support is also being offered to directors for one-on-one intervention concerning administrative issues.

The Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute's Mentoring Program has utilized research from numerous disciplines that address the needs of infants, toddlers, parents, caregivers, and directors. The principles that guide the Institute's Mentoring Program are described below.

Effective training for infant and toddler caregivers includes core knowledge of appropriate child care practices; direct observation; individualized reflective supervision for relationship building and collegial support from the mentor, the director and the other staff at the child care center.

Effective training for directors include core knowledge of appropriate child care practices, the development of a reciprocal partnership between the mentor and the director and offering technical support for a director's issues, needs and concerns.

The relationship-based training approach defines the mentor-protégé relationship. A relationship-based approach is one that fully acknowledges both the complexity of relationships that exist within child care centers and the trust that develops between the mentor and protégé. Mentors take the time to get to know the protégés in their environment, as well as becoming familiar with the staff working in the program. Trust is built upon clear expectations about how the

protégé and the mentor will work together and what each hopes to accomplish during the mentoring sessions. Mentors focus on the strengths of the protégé and builds upon his or her knowledge about what is best for the center. Mentors do not judge the protégés or their actions. Instead, they lead the protégés to self-awareness and guide them toward their professional best.

Change is a process that takes time and initiating changes means taking a risk. Change is a highly personal experience with its own timeline. The protégés will more likely persevere despite barriers and anxieties when they understand the benefits of change, can anticipate the problems, know their feelings will be accepted, and know that their goals and objectives are clearly defined.

Policies that Structure the Mentoring Program

Specific polices are designed to help mentors establish and maintain professional boundaries.

Mentors will:

- Meet with the director to discuss expectations, goals and objectives
- Model behaviors and interactions, demonstrate techniques and make suggestions during observations
- Meet with each protégé at a time that has been prescheduled
- Meet only on the grounds of the center and within the protégé and mentor's normal working hours
- Negotiate with the director to develop a schedule of observation and meeting days to occur weekly and at different times of the day including drop off and pick up times
- Call to confirm day and time of each visit, ensuring that the director and the mentor are responsive to the scheduled visits while showing respect for unexpected events that may occur
- Attend all Institute sponsored training events that the protégé may attend
- Not engage in gossip about children, families, or center staff and will, while allowing the protégé to vent feelings, guide him or her towards professional strategies for resolving problems
- Not contribute to performance reviews of the protégé
- Share conflicts with the Training Coordinator, and/or Statewide Coordinator, who will assess the situation and intervene when necessary
- Adhere to the ethical standards outlined by NAEYC in Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment
- Maintain confidentiality concerning issues and information about children, families, staff, and programs.

Goals of the Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute's Mentoring Program

- To improve the quality of care that infants and toddlers receive by providing their caregivers with on-site training and technical assistance through a mentoring relationship with an early childhood professional
- To collect initial and ongoing data to provide analysis of the success of this type of training intervention
- To utilize the data collected as quantitative evidence that on-site, intensive training is an effective method to improve caregiving behavior in infant and toddler classrooms
- To improve the quality of care provided in child care centers through focused, one-on-one mentoring of directors.

Relationship Building

Building Initial Relationships

The key to the success of our mentoring program, and what differentiates mentor training from other methods, is building a trusting relationship between mentor and protégé. The ability of the mentor to initiate and develop the relationship is of as much importance as the information and resources that the mentor has to offer. Adults, like children, learn best in the context of a positive, trusting relationship.

It is important for the mentor to spend time before meeting with the protégé to define what he/she is expecting from the mentoring process. Because of the one-on-one nature of the training, the mentor should understand what skills/knowledge/experience that he/she brings to the relationship, and also what he/she hopes to gain from the relationship.

The approach that the mentor takes when working with the protégé needs to be supportive, effective, and respectful. In supporting the protégé as a learner and a professional, the mentor should be open-minded and should work to find a common ground for collaboration. The mentor needs to support new ideas and attempts and be willing to assist in non-judgmental evaluation of success.

The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: A Handbook for Mentors has some helpful information about relationship building in the mentoring process on pages 64-71. Topics covered include: establishing expectations and setting goals, the structure of the relationship, and the stages of the mentor/protégé relationship.

Our intervention resource is *Blueprint for Action* by Dr. Paula Jorde Bloom. It has helpful information about administrative topics. Sections covered include staff management, policy-making, financial strategies, assessing organizational and

individual needs, setting goals and implementing an individual model for staff development.

Ongoing Maintenance

As our mentoring program progressed, the mentors found it beneficial to meet on a regular basis to share information about how things were progressing, triumphs and difficulties, and to keep everyone informed and "on the same sheet of music". We chose to meet bi-weekly, in order to allow the mentors to have more time in the programs.

Just as it was important for the mentors, training coordinators, and directors to touch base, it is important for the mentors and the protégé to periodically evaluate where they are in the training process and how close they are to meeting the goals and objectives that they initially set for themselves. It may also be necessary in the process to reassess the initial goals and objectives and change direction. In order to be most effective, the process must be flexible.

The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: A Handbook for Mentors has a tool entitled "Taking the Pulse of Your Relationship: A Checklist for Mentors" on page 74, which may be helpful.

We found it helpful to use the bi-weekly meeting of the mentors and Institute staff as a forum to bounce some of these issues off the whole group as a method of problem solving. We also realized that this intervention would not solve every issue encountered at a site, and the mentors worked as effectively as possible with the tools that they had.

Challenges

Turnover

The biggest challenge that we faced in the infant and toddler mentoring program, which parallels the childcare industry nationwide, was staff turnover. From June 2000, when we selected our initial group of 40 caregivers at 24 centers, to December 2000, when we collected our first round of post-test data, we lost 25-30% of our program participants (the turnover of directors was at the same rate as the turnover of caregivers).

Because of the research component of our mentoring program, our intervention targeted and followed one caregiver in each classroom selected. This limited our ability to replace the caregivers who left the program once the initial data collection phase ended. Of course, the larger concern and impact of this rate of turnover is for the infants and toddlers in the classrooms.

The only positive aspect of the turnover in the program was the increased amount of time that the mentors had to work with the remaining protégés.

Although we found no solutions to the issue of turnover, our demographic data indicated that turnover was drastically reduced in programs where staff salary was significantly higher.

For more information about the results of our research, refer to the Report section of this manual.

Accountability

Director and caregiver accountability proved to be another challenge that we faced throughout our infant and toddler mentoring program.

In coordinating the program and the research component, we had difficulties with directors and caregivers completing/returning the data collection tools and directors informing the Institute when participating staff left employment

In addition, the mentors faced issues of caregiver absence for scheduled visits and caregivers not following through with agreed upon readings or "assignments".

In our second round of mentoring interventions, we hoped to address some of the issues we found in the first phase. Our first approach was to be more diligent in our follow-up with programs on materials and paperwork that we require. In addition, the mentors have worked to improve the communication with their caregivers and program directors on matters of absence and expectations.

Reportable Issues/Role of the Mentor

Prior to working with centers and protégés, it is important to clearly define the role of the mentor with regard to regulatory issues. Although the mentor is there to support and work with the director, the mentor will also occasionally observe the classrooms in the center and may see situations that are in conflict with regulations.

We found it helpful to discuss the mentor's role upfront with both the center administration and the caregivers involved in the program. The mentors and training coordinator were clear that although the role of the mentor was not a supervisory or regulatory one, the mentors are mandated reporters. In addition, because our program is funded partially by the PA Department of Public Welfare, we have a responsibility to make the program directors aware of regulatory violations.

When issues do arise, the mentors and/or the training coordinator will address them with the program director, and will document both the issue and the discussion.

It is essential that the mentors be familiar with state childcare regulations, and have a copy that they can refer to.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The curriculum of the Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute's mentoring program is based on the concepts of developmentally appropriate practice for the care for children birth through eight years of age. Although the mentors tailored the curriculum and topics to the needs of each protégé, there were a few curricula and resource books that were utilized extensively. These resources include:

- The Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers, developed by Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development

This curriculum is a comprehensive series that includes videotapes, resource guides and trainer's manuals. It was selected because of the high quality of the materials and because it provides a curriculum framework to cover most topics important to providing good infant and toddler care.

- The Creative Curriculum for Infants & Toddlers, by Amy Dombro, Laura Colker, and Diane Trister Dodge (Teaching Strategies, 1999)

This curriculum is a very practical, user-friendly guide for infant and toddler caregivers. It was selected because of the combination of good information that it provides, and its easily applied planning tools.

- Caring for Infants & Toddlers in Groups, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, developed by Zero to Three

This manual was selected because it provides excellent information about the kinds of care and experiences that are important for high quality infant and toddler care and development.

- Prime Times, A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs, by Jim Greenman and Anne Stonehouse (Redleaf Press, 1996)

This is a very reader-friendly resource book for infant and toddler caregivers. It provides a wealth of information on everyday situations in a child care setting and mixes situational anecdotes with practical solutions.

- NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practices (I need to include bibliography info)

The mentoring program focuses on relationships and interactions between children and their caregivers. Since we know that children, as well as adults, learn best in the context of trusting relationships, the mentors emphasized the importance of:

- Providing care that is sensitive and responsive to children's needs
- Interactions that are respectful and supportive
- Opportunities for children to explore and discover
- Enhancing everyday routines to provide one-on-one interaction and "learning moments"
- Environments that are warm, inviting, and stimulating
- Learning through play

The mentors encouraged their protégés to plan their environments and experiences to address the cognitive, physical, social, emotional and creative development of the children in their class.