



HOME-BASED PROGRAMS: RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE PROGRAM QUALITY

Recommended Practices

Recommendations for practices that strengthen early childhood programs are proposed based on findings from two studies. In one study, researchers in the Midwest Child Care Research Consortium conducted a study to assess program quality. In the second study, observations were conducted using the Environment Rating Scales as part of the Missouri Quality Rating System Pilot Study. The Family Day Care Rating Scale is widely used to assess program quality. A total of 223 home-based programs in Missouri were observed for these studies and provide the basis for information in this recommended practices document.

Items from the Environment Rating Scale that were consistently rated as below average were divided into two program components: health and safety issues and programming. Specific recommendations for improving programs are outlined below.

Health and Safety Issues: The majority of programs need improved procedures for hand washing and tooth brushing, as well as emergency evacuations.

Recommended Practice: Children need help to remember to wash hands after toileting or being diapered, and before and after meals. They also need guidance in how to wash their hands (using soap, rising and drying their hands). Almost 3/4 of the providers did not have the children brush their teeth at least once during the day. All young children need support in developing good self-help skills.

An important safety issue is emergency evacuations. The majority of the providers either did not post evacuation procedures or practice the evacuation drills on a monthly basis.

Programming: Many programs need to work on the following areas to improve the learning environment for the children.

Recommended Practice:

TV/Video Viewing - Television and video/DVD viewing can be used in a developmentally appropriate way to enhance children's learning. However, this often requires adults to do more than select a movie or TV show and set up equipment. They should interact with the children to extend learning from the TV or video by being actively involved, such as singing or exercising with children to a video, showing children books related to the content of TV programs, stopping a story video periodically to ask children what they think will happen next, or following-up with a field trip to further explore the content being viewed. Adults should preview videos before showing them because many videos made for children have violent content. TV and videos should be used infrequently as part of the children's experiences.

Language - Adults need to encourage children to explain their reasoning when problem-solving throughout the day. Examples of this include having the child explain why the tall tower of blocks fell when another block was added or why the wind chimes are making noise. Through games and materials, teachers can determine if children understand related concepts such as sizes, shapes, colors, and numbers. Teachers should encourage reasoning by giving clues and asking questions without directly instructing children. Based on children's explanations, teachers can guide children to easier or harder games, projects, and activities based on the same concepts. It is especially important that infants are introduced to familiar objects, talked to, sung to, and read to every day.

Child-Related Displays – In order to ensure the program environment is a part of the learning experience, teachers should be aware of what children can see from every area they use. Photographs of the children, their families, and pets should be displayed at children's eye-level or lower half of the wall. For infants and toddlers, their work and pictures of their families may be laminated or placed behind Plexiglas, so that they can be displayed for easy viewing. In addition to photos, art work of all the children should be displayed.

Materials and Activities – Programs observed needed improvement in the following two areas.

Sand and water play can help children learn about science concepts and how to share and get along with others. Even though this can be messy, children need to learn the boundaries about how they can use these materials safely and appropriately. Sand and water play should be offered both indoors and outdoors.

Young children should be exposed to multicultural, multiracial, and non-sexist materials and activities. This can be done using resources from the community, as well as pictures, books, dolls, CD's, and musical instruments from other cultures.

Sources

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(Scott, J., Snyder, L., & Thornburg, K., 2007)

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