

IMPACT



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“Child Friendly” Child Care Policies Please Children, Parents, and Staff

The Situation

People who work with children have an opportunity to have a lasting impact on their lives. According to studies, the most important influence in a child’s life is having a loving, caring adult role model. Equally important to a child’s future is learning to make healthy decisions. Gaining experience in making choices prepares children to make wise choices when faced with substance abuse opportunities.

Decision-making is a skill that can be learned, and is learned by the actual process of making choices coupled with positive direction and encouraging feedback. This loving, caring adult in a child’s life is in a prime position to give the opportunity to learn decision-making.

Our Response

Practices at an afterschool child care site supported by grant funding were evaluated in terms of the positive or negative effect on children and the relevance to giving children opportunities to gain healthy decision making skills.

As the practices were evaluated, a mission statement was developed: **It is not the children’s job to behave well so our lives are easier. It is our job to set up an environment where the children’s needs are met so they don’t have to behave badly trying to meet their own needs.** A set of 13 guidelines were developed that give children opportunities for

personal growth. The emphasis was on teaching children how to control themselves, rather than relying on external control from the staff. Free choice activity centers were set up. Children could participate as they desired in a vigorous or calm activity, or relax with a book.

Before the new policies were initiated, snack time had been a regimented one-per-child sit down event. Children bickered over who got served first, and there was often unhappiness over being refused seconds. As the policies were evaluated and implemented, this evolved into a relaxed offering of a variety of healthful snacks. With the new policies, snacks were set out so that children could partake freely when and how often they desire, and snacks were prepared that could be portable to allow snacking while participating in activities. Feeling that the child knows if he or she needs seconds, the restriction on seconds was eliminated.

Some of the 13 guidelines included: giving a child two acceptable choices rather than giving an order; giving encouragement and specific praise for healthful choices; acknowledging feelings and the reality of feelings; stating the expected behavior; using natural consequences rather than controlling through fear; and providing numerous “low risk” decisions throughout the day. As the policies evolved, they were expanded to be “staff friendly” and “family friendly” also.

Program Outcomes

On the first day of the school year, copies of the new policy were distributed to every parent. One parent read them through and exclaimed, "This is what child care should be."

After eight months a survey was distributed to the parents to assess their satisfaction with the child friendly policies over time. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 the highest, 92% checked "5" on a satisfaction scale for child friendly policies. On this same scale, 83% checked "5" and another 8% checked "4" in improvement of their child's attitude about coming to the child care site since the child friendly policies were implemented.

After a year with the new policies, a survey was given to the teachers. The survey asked for their attitudes (on a scale of 1-5, with 1 representing low satisfaction and 5 representing high satisfaction) before the child friendly policies, and after a year of having them in place. They were asked to rate their satisfaction with their job; how the attitudes of others at their workplace affected their ability to perform their job effectively; their satisfaction with their co-workers; their own personal feelings while being at work; and the likelihood that they would continue with this job under these circumstances. The mean score of their rankings before the change was 2.8. The rankings after the new policies were a 5 in all categories.

The Future

With the change to the new policies, the name of the center was changed from "Kids After School Help", to "Kids' Discovery Center" to reflect the emphasis on children's learning, rather than childcare. Children needing a safe place to be will continue to be mentored by caring adults whose vision is that Kids' Discovery Center is a consistently child friendly, family friendly, and staff friendly activity center.

For More Information

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