

+ FROM THE SOURCE

Seek Collaboration/Peer Support

When thinking about *seeking collaboration and peer support*, it is easy to think only of other early childhood caregivers/teachers. However, one of the rewards of inclusion frequently identified by child care providers is the opportunity to network with early childhood professionals from other fields.

Often, working with early intervention and special education team members results in learning that enhances your work with all of the children in your program as well as opening the door for future consultation as questions arise. Here are some knowledge areas that specialists can offer:

Occupational Therapists: brain development, activities to promote fine motor development.

Physical Therapists: activities to promote large motor development, equipment that promotes practice and development of balance.

Speech Therapists: information about language development milestones, ideas for promoting children's listening skills.

Child Psychologist: ideas for making home to school transitions easier for children, activities to promote positive social interactions, information about children's development of self-esteem. + SHW

+ MAKING IT WORK

Self-Assessment

Mark the point on the scale where you would rate your current practice of each disposition.

Disposition	always	never
I delight in and am curious about children's development.	<----->	
I value play and its role in the teaching/learning process.	<----->	
I expect change and challenge as a member of the early childhood profession.	<----->	
I am willing to take risks and make mistakes.	<----->	
I build in frequent and regular reflection and self-evaluation.	<----->	
I look for opportunities for collaboration and peer support.	<----->	
I am a confident and active advocate for children and for appropriate teaching practices. +	<----->	

You probably discovered areas of strength as well as opportunities for growth. Self-awareness is the first step; making your own plan for is next. + SHW

+ NOTES FROM HOME

Making Connections

Doralee is five years old and has been in two different child care programs since I went back to work part-time. She's been diagnosed with autism, and it takes real effort from the teacher to meaningfully include her in the program. However, this last teacher seems to have a special knack at connecting with Doralee that the previous teacher did not have. She seems to be thinking about Doralee—and what would make her successfully included—all the time. She watches her closely and notices little things, like her newly acquired ability to button her coat or add another color besides red to her painting. She knows the IEP goals as well as I do and made a suggestion at a team meeting that the therapist said was "brilliant." She does the little "get ready" routine we use with Doralee to let her know what's coming next in the day.

I appreciate that she will bring up an idea we discussed in a previous conversation and ask me how I feel Doralee is doing now. She listens to my response, and often I see my suggestions used in the program. For example, Doralee needs a definite routine with little variation. Any time there is going to be a shift or change in the schedule, the teacher asks me what I think would be the best way to help Doralee adjust. It is wonderful to feel that she genuinely likes my child.

I've become pretty good friends with another mother in the program, and she told me that she feels the same way I do. That was the first time I realized that this teacher isn't just treating Doralee this way, she gives each child the same special attention. +

+ SPOTLIGHT:

Dispositions: What do they look like?

To give you a picture of what each early childhood disposition might look like in practice, the following descriptions were developed. For each disposition, there is first, a description of what it looks like when you have it, and second, a description of what it might look like when you don't have it.

➤ DELIGHT IN—AND BE CURIOUS ABOUT— CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT 🐾

If you have acquired this disposition, you exhibit a mind set that includes curiosity about children, and you delight in getting to know each child in your care.

Professionals without this disposition report "liking" children but they are not sure why, and they find themselves approaching children only when correction or direction is needed.

➤ VALUE PLAY 🐾

If you have developed this disposition you provide materials and arrange the environment to promote children's play, plan for uninterrupted periods of play, and observe children at play closely.

Behaviors of professionals without this disposition include using play times as an opportunity to attend to other chores or cutting play times short to conduct teacher-directed activities.

➤ EXPECT CHANGE AND CHALLENGE 🐾

If you have this disposition, you demonstrate flexibility in following children's interests, questions, and needs.

When this disposition is not developed, professionals focus on getting through planned activities "in spite" of children's responses, expressed interests, or needs.

➤ BE WILLING TO TAKE RISKS AND MAKE MISTAKES 🐾

If you have developed this disposition, you are willing to try new strategies or activities and to take risks for the benefit of the children *and* for your own growth and learning. You see mistakes as important opportunities to learn.

Without this disposition, providers tend to stay with their own way of doing things and to resist actually using what is learned through participation in professional development.

➤ REFLECT AND SELF-EVALUATE 🐾

If you have acquired this disposition, you continuously reflect on your day-to-day experiences in search of new understanding and learning opportunities.

Individuals without this disposition often fail to see their own role in program dynamics—usually blaming parents, children, other staff members, or even the weather when issues arise!

➤ SEEK COLLABORATION AND PEER SUPPORT 🐾

If you have this disposition, you actively look for opportunities to brainstorm and problem-solve with colleagues and eagerly participate in staff meetings, informal networking, and organized early childhood meetings.

Without this disposition, individuals tend to work alone without seeking or offering collegial support.

➤ ADVOCATE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN AND THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSION 🐾

If you have developed this disposition, you are alert and active in addressing the rights of children and appropriate practices in the early childhood field.

Professionals without this disposition tend to be unaware of the rights and needs of children. Or, they hesitate to speak up about children and the early childhood field—fearing confrontation or discomfort.

Opportunities to learn about and practice these dispositions should be provided during every early childhood course and professional development experience. You can develop them yourself by practicing them in your daily work with young children. Developing these dispositions makes a career in early childhood rewarding and fulfilling. Not having them makes a career in early childhood something else! + SHW/SLM

+ What do I do when . . . ?

Question: *I still teach almost exactly like I did when I started five years ago! I'm so afraid to "experiment," especially in front of my supervisor. I'm discouraged; what I know and believe about teaching doesn't match what really happens in my program. Any ideas?*

Answer: You have effectively engaged in *self-reflection and evaluation* and discovered a need to explore another core disposition—the *willingness to take risks and make mistakes*. This disposition may be one of the most challenging to develop. Society tells us it is *not okay* to make mistakes. School and work experiences often focus on "perfection" or a good product—rather than rewarding hard work and mistakes along the way. For example, picture the traditional spelling test. Two second-graders get a list of ten spelling words. Jason looks at the list and thinks, "Yes! I already know these words." Joey looks at the list and not one word is familiar. All week, Jason relaxes while Joey works to master one new word each night. Jason breezes through the test, produces a perfect paper, and is rewarded with an "A", or a star, or *Great Job!* Joey proudly writes the 4 new words he learned, but 4 out of 10 is not a passing grade. Joey receives an "F", or ⊗, or *Try Harder*. Perfection and lack of effort are rewarded; true learning which involves hard work and mistakes is punished. When this occurs, learning is seriously limited, because mistakes are essential to the learning process. Is it any wonder many adults feel a desire to be "perfect" and avoid the risk of trying something that might result in some mistakes during the learning process?!

Developing the disposition to take risks and make mistakes is remarkably rewarding because true growth and learning emerge when you can try something new, fail, reflect, and try again. Just identifying your desire to

overcome the fear of making mistakes is an important first step. Have a frank discussion with your supervisor. Request support as you implement one new idea, and identify your need for constructive feedback even when your first efforts are imperfect. Sometimes, learning a brand new skill as an adult (like watercolor painting or rope-climbing) can help you "unlearn" old ideas about perfection and celebrate mistakes as part of learning. Accepting the risks and mistakes inherent in real learning opens the door to the growth and change you desire in your early childhood practice. + SHW

+ RESOURCE REVIEW

Noted early childhood educators and authors, Deb Curtis and Margie Carter, present practical ideas in this thoughtful and beautiful handbook: *Reflecting Children's Lives: A Handbook for Planning Child-Centered Curriculum*. Discover activities for both you and the children, and map your own thinking as you consider new possibilities for your curriculum planning. Includes charts, assessment tools, resource lists, and practice sheets. Published by Redleaf Press and distributed by Gryphon House for \$21.95. +

CHILD CARE plus+ is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

CHILD CARE plus+ is published quarterly. Subscription price is \$ 5.00 per year (four issues). Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include reference.

CHILD CARE plus+: The Center on Inclusion in Early Childhood
Rural Institute on Disabilities, 634 Eddy Avenue
The University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812-6696
1-800-235-4122 (406) 243-6355
<http://www.ccplus.org>

EDITORIAL BOARD: Sarah A. Mulligan; Sandra L. Morris; Susan Harper-Whalen; and Amy Hill.

Child Care plus+

Rural Institute on Disabilities
The University of Montana
634 Eddy Avenue
Missoula, MT 59812-6696

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Missoula, MT
59812
PERMIT NO. 100