

Communicating Development Concerns to Parents

When you suspect a child in your care has special needs

Where to begin?

Sharing concerns with a parent about their child's behavior can provoke an array of responses. The parent may have one or many of the following reactions: become angry with the provider; suddenly remove the child from care; cry or become hysterical; deny the problem; express their appreciation for the information; or thoughtfully consider the provider's advice. Being prepared for any of these responses is the best way to cope with a potentially challenging situation.

While it is not the role of a child care provider to diagnose, he/she can make observations and voice concerns. Providers have the unique opportunity to watch children interact in a group setting. A child's behavior may differ in the family home. Therefore, it is important to validate a parent's experience.

A parent who has been approached with concerns about their child may face a variety of emotions including fear, guilt and/or anger. Parents may fear their child will be expelled from your program, especially if the child's behavior has led to this situation in the past. In fact, many children who attend "special needs" preschools have been removed or expelled from one or more mainstream settings prior to being referred for special services. A strong provider-parent relationship may help to ease this uncomfortable situation. Let the parent know you are there to support them.

Ways to help prevent a parent feeling singled out:

- Give parents information to help their children succeed.
- Prepare an assessment of each child's progress over the year.
- Let the parent know what they can expect in the coming year.

- Avoid jumping to conclusions about the child.
- Be ready to serve as a sounding board for parents - show care and respect for families.

Resources for providers and parents:

Resources are available for providers to identify if a child requires more than just extra hugs and attention. While both the providers and parents should avoid making a diagnosis, certain behaviors may determine if assessment is needed. Your local R&R Inclusion



Specialist can help parents and providers understand that some undesirable behaviors a child may exhibit do not necessarily mean that the child has a disability. However, some behaviors may indicate that there is a special need.

The California Department of Education (CDE), in collaboration with the California Child Care Health Program, produce a brochure entitled, "Reasons for Concern That Your Child Or A Child In Your Care May Need Special Help". This brochure provides resources and referrals to services for child care programs and parents with special needs concerns.

The “Reasons for Concern” brochure reminds us that children develop at different rates and in different ways. However, if a child does have special needs, early detection and intervention are essential to future development.

www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/orderinfo.asp

www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/fp/concerns.asp

For additional information and support in Alameda County contact the **Family Resource Network**
510.547.7322

www.frnoakland.org.

The Bottom Line

The child care provider is doing the right thing by addressing concerns with a parent if a child in their care appears to need more help than he/she can give. Remember to be as sensitive, supportive and understanding as possible. A provider should take care that they appropriately communicate their observations to parents. Every parent wants their child to be successful and happy; breaking the news that there may be a problem can be earth shattering. However, the provider’s observations may make the difference between a frustrated child struggling through his early years and a happier child on the road to successful treatment. A provider who feels there is a need to approach a parent about concerns should consider the following:

Does the child care provider even have the right to discuss their observations and suggest that the child is assessed? Absolutely. Providers not only have the right to discuss a child’s needs with a parent, some would say that he or she has an obligation. According to the California Department of Education and California Child Care Health program, early detection and intervention are crucial to prevent serious issues later in life. As difficult as it may be, the provider must be able to speak openly and honestly with the parents. Refrain from describing a child as special needs, abnormal, emotionally disturbed, or any other label, when speaking with the parent. Focus on the individual behaviors and avoid making assumptions about a diagnosis. Perhaps there is some information not previously known that would greatly help the situations. The provider should speak with the parent before seeking outside advice, and only do so with parental permission.

Are the child’s special needs too much for the provider to handle? It is important for child care providers to know their own limitations and abilities. A provider may end up having to discontinue care if the behavior is extremely disruptive and the parent is unwilling to seek advice from their pediatrician or other professionals. In this case, providers should write a termination letter to the parent which includes appropriate referrals and what reasonable efforts were made to accommodate the child.

By law, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires child care programs to provide reasonable accommodations for children with special needs. Programs cannot refuse to take children based on special needs. If a program cannot provide reasonable accommodations, they must document what has been done to serve the child and why they cannot provide accommodations.

Is the provider willing to obtain outside advice or training to deal with the child’s behavior?

Sometimes, reassuring support for a parent can make a big difference. Support may consist of anything from “check-ins” to taking some training to assist in giving the child the specialized care they need. However, special training is not always required for providing excellent care. A nurturing, caring environment may be all a child needs to thrive.

The three Alameda County Resource and Referral agencies, Child Care Links, 4Cs of Alameda County and BANANAS, have Inclusion Specialists to help parents of children with special needs find child care, and to support child care programs serving children with special needs. To access services in Dublin, Pleasanton, Livermore or Sunol, contact **Child Care Links** at **925.417.8733**



“ Family Resource Network,” frnoakland.org 2014