Results of Parent Focus Groups

Parent Suggestions for Partnering with Child Care Providers to Address Childhood Obesity and Healthy Weight

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Talk with me about my child’s weight

- Parents want providers to have a caring attitude about the child as their motivation for talking about a child’s weight.

- To protect a child’s privacy, parents want providers to use private face-to-face interactions when discussing a child’s weight (definitely not in front of other parents or staff).

- When talking with a parent, match the appropriate staff qualifications with the type of information to be shared with the parent. For example, the teacher could give parents healthy eating tips or tips about how to get children involved in active play. The director of the program could bring up body weight issues. Medical professionals could help decide what to do about the health of the overweight child. The dietitian could provide an evaluation of how the child is eating.

- Providers should chose words carefully, and be approachable, sensitive, respectful, and gentle with the parent.

- Staff could provide information about how much a child is eating at the program (not enough food, or too much food), and what kinds of play they engage in during the child care day.

- In a private conference about child’s body weight, staff could ask the parent about the child’s eating away from childcare; address issues about healthy eating, and health issues associated with a child being overweight.

- Staff should know when and how to suggest referrals to a doctor.

The project was supported by the National Research Initiative of the USDA National Research Initiative Grant # 2006-55215-16726

Help me understand ways to support my child’s healthy weight
• Offer written information in the form of a letter or information sent home to all parents, an article on healthy eating, a weekly newsletter, or a progress report.

• Routinely provide general information to parents: facts about sugar; healthy choices at fast food restaurants; how parents can be strong in practicing healthy eating with children in the face of food commercials; how much physical activity children need; and ideas about providing or increasing active play.

• Offer written information to the parents, such as learning materials, weekly newsletters, and websites. Offer various resources on a regular basis so parents can read and learn independently.

  Assure me that the child care program is doing everything possible to address healthy weight for children.

• Be certain that the program mealtimes, procedures and activities support healthy weight.

• The program can develop obesity prevention policies: make it clear at enrollment that the program addresses weight issues with children; require yearly medical exam to handle weight issues.

• Have staff encourage parents to improve healthy eating by talking with parents about how the program supports a child’s good health.

• Request personalized information about eating habits from the parents to develop a positive approach for parent-staff interaction: have parents fill out a questionnaire when they enroll their child.

• Maintain provider’s knowledge and skills in relation to healthy eating and active play. (Provide training and education.)

• Use procedures where communication about a parent’s individual child is routine. Give reports or print-outs of patterns of behavior, and note concerns. Personalize the information to the child and family.

• The program can contract out for resources that help parents and are accessible and affordable to all families: bring in low cost produce/food; partner with local recreation center or preschool gym for free physical activities, or roll the cost of special programs into tuition; or partner with community resources for square dancing and social events for parents in the center.

• Parents and providers can do activities together: share ideas back and forth, perhaps in a workshop about health of children, including healthy weight; get together for a Saturday family walk or other active play for the family and staff.