

strengthening families

THROUGH EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Partnering with Child Welfare Agencies

Leadership Team Discussion

Action Plan Goals for Working with Child Welfare Agencies

- Make the case for Strengthening Families to child welfare agency staff
- Increase the focus on the developmental needs of children served by child welfare agencies
- Train child welfare staff on the initiative
- Shift approaches to mandatory reporting
- Build local collaborations between early childhood education staff and child welfare agencies
- Integrate initiative into child welfare initiatives

Why Build ECE and CW Linkages?

- Children 0-5 are the largest proportion of child welfare cases and need high-quality developmental support to avoid lifelong barriers to success
- Some children in ECE settings have experienced child abuse and neglect; staff caring for these children need guidance and support
- Linkages allow staff in both systems to support each other

Qualities of Positive Linkages in ECE Programs

- Staff understand how the child welfare system works for families, their own roles in reporting child abuse and neglect, and the CPS social worker's role
- Staff have established relationships with protective services staff who provide guidance/feedback on child welfare issues
- Staff have a knowledge of community prevention and intervention resources
- Staff can play a continuing supportive role with families who enter the system

Qualities of Positive Linkages in Local Child Welfare Agencies

- Child welfare workers have established relationships and regular contact with ECE providers in the community
- ECE staff, where appropriate, are involved with coordinated service teams when developing a family's case plan
- Child welfare workers serve as a resource to ECE programs when concerns arise or a family is in need of services

Qualities of Positive Linkages in Local Child Welfare Agencies

- Child welfare workers see ECE as an additional resource in the community to provide support to families
- Early care and education enrollment is taken into account when placement decisions are made, to maintain the stability of the child's caretaking environment when feasible

What Early Care and Education Programs Gain

- Better understanding of how to reach families at risk before abuse or neglect occurs
- Better practices around reporting alleged child abuse and neglect in ways that can help sustain relationships with families
- Increased ability to support children and families involved in the child welfare system

What Child Welfare Agencies Gain

- Stability and continuity for children involved with the child welfare system
- Developmental support for children and foster and biological parents involved in the system
- New community resources for prevention, monitoring and follow-up
- More effective mandated reporters who are also resources for families

Strategies from SFI States

- “Case Making” for child welfare staff
- New policies that focus on the developmental needs of young children involved in the child welfare system
- Training for child welfare workers on Strengthening Families and protective factors
- Cross-training of ECE and CW workers together

Strategies from SFI States

- Shifts in approaches to mandatory reporting
- New local level approaches to ECE and CW collaboration
- Embedding of Strengthening Families in child welfare initiatives

Lessons Learned

- Collaboration has to take place at two levels: practice at the local level and policy-making at the state level
- Start where the child welfare system is already invested in building community partnerships
- Start with mutual concerns about supporting children in foster care
- Support linkage efforts with clear communications, training and many opportunities for relationship building