2014

Growing Ideas - Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Parents and Guardians)

University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies

GROWING IDEAS

Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Parents and Guardians)

All children, including children with disabilities, benefit when quality inclusive child care settings provide an equal opportunity to participate. Admissions policies and practices that reflect this inclusive philosophy can help parents and guardians evaluate whether the program will be a good match for their child.

Why is a child care admissions policy important to families? The policy:

- describes and clarifies a program's philosophy, values, beliefs and practices;

- shows the program's commitment to quality improvement and professional practice;

- explains how the program provides for the needs of diverse learners; and

- shows compliance with state and federal laws, such as the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**, which grants children the right to be included.

What might an admissions policy reflecting an inclusive philosophy contain?

- Essential **eligibility criteria**, such as ages served, and ability to participate in group care, for example. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guarantees that children with disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria cannot be excluded simply because of a disability.

- Program's commitment to provide **reasonable accommodations** when needed.

- A description of program activities, discipline/guidance, transition/dismissal, confidentiality, medication administration, emergency management, family involvement and communication strategies to support a child's inclusion and participation.

- Nondiscrimination and confidentiality statements.

Please note: terms in bold are defined in the glossary on page 3 of this tipsheet.

Review the program's policies and practices:

- Are program admission policies and practices clearly and completely explained?

- Is the parent and/or guardian invited to visit so he or she can decide, "Does what I know about my child's temperament and learning style match the setting, schedule, and group size?" "Are there reasonable modifications that can be made so my child can attend this program and be successful?"

- Is an enrollment meeting planned to share useful information about the child? (Examples: "She likes soft music and a back rub at nap time" or "He wears hearing aids.")

If you believe your child needs a reasonable modification:

- In order to receive protection under the ADA, parents and/or guardians have an obligation to identify their child's disability and need for reasonable modifications, especially if the child's disability is not obvious.

- The parent and/or guardian can obtain input from the child's doctor and/or therapists regarding modifications (example: a child with diabetes may need a strict snack schedule) and to gather relevant medical documentation to share with the program.

- The parent and/or guardian request a meeting with the owner/director to discuss the needed modifications as well as staff qualifications and ability to implement a plan of care.

> Modifications necessary to include a child with a disability must be made if they are reasonable and would not **fundamentally alter** the program.

Considerations during the admission/enrollment process:

- Complete admissions paperwork and child/family survey information.

- Give permission to involve the care and education professional in any support team meetings to ensure that consistent positive strategies that work best for the child are part of the child care routine.

- Plan with the director and/or teacher for the child's transition into the program.

- Let the care and education professional know about any community agencies, state or national organizations that may provide useful resources and information.

- The admissions process is a give-and-take experience. Parents and/or guardians know their child best. Providers know their program and the benefits and challenges of group care. When admissions policies work well, parents/guardians and providers find common ground to determine what is best for each child.

Disclaimer: This information is for broad educational purposes only. It is not and does not take the place of legal advice for any specific situation nor is it offered as such.

Where to learn more:

See "Admissions Policies and Practices that Build Inclusive Child Care Communities — Learning Links" online at http://ccids.umaine.edu/resources/ec-growingideas/admissionsll/

Please note: terms in bold are defined in the glossary on page 3 of this tipsheet.

Glossary

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) - a federal civil rights law which was passed in 1990. Among other things, the ADA prohibits discrimination by both public entities such as school districts and places of public accommodation, including after school programs and family child care homes. The ADA Amendments Act of 2008, which took effect January 1, 2009, strengthens protections for people with disabilities. It reinforces the focus of the ADA on whether covered entities complied with the statute and not on simply whether a person has a disability.

eligibility criteria - those requirements imposed by a child care program to determine admission to the program for all children. Example: ages served.

fundamentally alter - a change in the basic nature of the services offered by a program. A program does not need to change the nature or mix of goods that it typically offers to the public to allow access by an individual with a disability. For example, a bookstore must be physically accessible to individuals with disabilities, but is not required to stock large print or Braille books.

reasonable accommodations - a modification in policies, practices, or procedures necessary to afford such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations. An example of a reasonable modification could be a program's modification of their toileting policy to accommodate the needs of a child with a disability. This would not fundamentally alter the nature of the program.

Department of Health and Human Services
Maine People Living
Safe, Healthy and Productive Lives

Paul R. LePage, Governor   Mary C. Mayhew, Commissioner

D R C **DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER**