

Chatham Child Care News

Monthly Newsletter

June 2002

Paying Attention to the Outdoor Environment Is as Important as Preparing the Indoor Environment

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Many of our fondest childhood memories involve making messy mud pies, swinging in the park, playing hide-and-go-seek, or camping with family. We know that play and nature make a unique combination for supporting young children's learning.

But in the early childhood profession, there is a growing need to learn how specific adjustments can enhance the effectiveness of outdoor learning environments. A few assessment instruments address outdoor play areas, but their primary use has been for planning and evaluating playgrounds. None are broad-based, comprehensive, and specific to child care environments, nor have they been held up to scrutiny of peer review or trial use (Achenbach, McConaughy, Howell 1987; Brown, Odom & Holcombe 1996; Harms, Clifford & Cryer 1998; Frost, Wortham & Reifel 2001).

A new assessment tool. After an extensive literature review and an expert engagement process, a group of practitioners and researchers designed a new instrument, the Preschool Outdoor Environment Assessment Scale, to assess the quality of outdoor preschool child care environments. A one-year development process included input from professionals in the fields of child development, playground safety, and landscape design.

The design team is field-testing the instrument with two observers at each of 50 sites. Their goal is to establish reliability and validity before introducing it to the early childhood community.

The current version of the scale includes five domains and 57 items. Descriptions of exemplary characteristics of the five domains follow.

Physical environment. The physical environment includes both the context of the outdoor play area and how the building and play area are situated on the site. A well-designed outdoor environment allows children to test their abilities through many types and levels of challenge and stimulation. The physical surroundings engage and entice children's sense of inquiry, stimulate their imaginations, invite exploration, communicate a

sense of belonging and cultural identity, and support their sense of developing competencies over time.

The outdoors is integrated with the building and other facilities such as parking and entrance areas. Designers consider pathways and traffic patterns and other factors such as air quality (dust and fumes) and safety (proximity to highways, for example).

Interactions. Children learn outdoors by interacting with other children, with adults and with objects and natural materials (such as play props, toys, small animals, plants, pebbles, water, and sand). The outdoor environment gives children opportunities to explore, question, and develop theories about how things work. Diverse opportunities for socializing with other children and with adults support development of negotiation, language, and cooperation skills.

A rich interaction environment creates a positive tone that supports children's natural curiosity. The benefits of outdoor time are maximized through an intentional, well-planned approach to arranging space and using time. The site is free from hazards and scaled to a child's size while offering choices and the freedom to select safe materials to use outdoors.

Adults follow the lead of the children; they avoid being overly intrusive yet stay involved enough to notice what children want to explore and learn about. Children have enough time to engage in meaningful and elaborate play. They can take parts of the outdoors inside and bring typical indoor materials outside.

Activity areas. Defined spaces support specific activities or groups of activities with a common theme. Examples of activity areas include an active play area, a storytelling circle, sand and water play, a tricycle path, and a vegetable or flower garden. Items such as pinecones, smooth stones, tubs, large blocks, birdhouses, banners, and sand toys engage children's interest. Large, anchored equipment and open play areas alone limit children's experiences and opportunities for well-rounded development.

Program. Teachers view the outdoors as an extension of the classroom, an environment that addresses the child as a whole (physical, emotional, cognitive, and social). Diverse settings within the environment extend child investigation, encourage spontaneous exploration and movement, and enrich interactions. Many types of materials (textures, colors, smells, shapes and so on) provide stimuli for new discoveries and ways of

expression. Planned activities as well as those evolving from children's interests form the curriculum.

Teachers closely observe children playing and learning. They listen to children's questions and discussions. Choices in an outdoor environment tend to expand children's experiences into broader areas of curriculum. Seasonal activities and special events enhance a connection with the natural environment (including plants, animals, meteorological phenomena) and neighborhood/family culture (architecture, customs, and so on).

Teacher/caregiver role. Knowledge about development and individual needs creates effective outdoor programs and improves the physical environment.

Teachers/caregivers enhance creative learning opportunities by being involved but not too intrusive, and by not making judgments or focusing on rules. Uninvolved teachers miss opportunities to engage with children in play and learning activities, and they cannot provide safe supervision.

Teachers who are willing to explore and share a personal sense of wonder draw children into learning.

Conversely, those who pass on fears or inhibitions can constrain children's exploration. Less time is devoted to teacher-led activities and more to opportunities for individuals, pairs, or larger groups of children to engage in self-directed learning.

The Preschool Outdoor Environment Assessment Scale is expected to be available in spring 2003. The instrument can be used for self-study, teaching, and research. It will help raise the bar so teachers and directors can learn what constitutes a quality outdoor environment.

Reprinted from the May 2002 issue of Young Children, the journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

FOCUS ON CHILD CARE CONFERENCE 2002

This year's Focus on Child Care Conference will be held on Saturday June 8 at CCCC in Pittsboro. The hours will be 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. As you know if you have attended before, this is a day full of training, gifts, and good food. It is planned for Chatham County child care workers by the Focus on Child Care committee, which includes representatives from the Chatham County Partnership for Children, Child Care Networks, child care providers, and other child care professionals. The agenda for the conference is still being finalized, and the committee is using your feedback from last year's conference to provide topics you want to learn about. Because of cuts in state funding, there will be a fee of \$10.00 each for Chatham County participants, and \$35.00 for people from other counties. Watch for registration information from the Partnership!

Subsidy News

New Subsidy Allocation

Child Care Networks' Complaint Policy

Occasionally a parent will call us with a complaint about the treatment of a child at a child care facility. We are required by law to take these complaints very seriously. Where complaints involve personal disputes between parents and providers such as differences in style, child-rearing philosophy or business disagreements, we encourage the parties involved to clarify and resolve the matters themselves. If, on the other hand, we receive complaints, which indicate licensing violations or child abuse or neglect, we will both report them to the Division of Child Development and/or the Department of Social Services ourselves. The details of the complaint are documented, which begins the investigation procedure. We will also urge persons with such complaints to report them directly to the appropriate authorities. The complainant may however wish to remain anonymous.

Child Care Networks reserve the right to suspend or remove providers from our files about whom serious questions arise concerning the quality of care and safety provided for children, or who practice unlawful discrimination. We act immediately to protect children, which means we may temporarily suspend referrals to providers about whom we have received serious complaints. Once we receive notification from the Division of Child Development that a child care facility is under investigation for inadequate supervision or care, we will write a letter to the parents of the children in that facility to advise them that an investigation is ongoing and offer them assistance if they want to choose a different facility.

If you think a parent has filed a complaint against you, you may verify it with the Division of Child Development. We cannot release information about a complainant without the complainant's consent. If however you have questions about our policy, you may contact Child Care Networks' Executive Director.

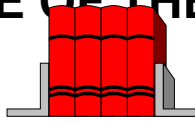
Claudette Womble

MONTHLY PROVIDER MEETINGS

You are invited to meet with other child care providers on the first Monday of each month, to share ideas on activities and discuss whatever is on your mind. The meetings are in Siler City, at the Community Building beside the Paul Braxton gym. The next meeting will be Monday, June 3, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., and the group will share ideas for food and nutrition activities. For directions or more information, call Sylvia Johnson at 663-2656 or Linda Elkins at 898-4133.

CHILD CARE NETWORKS RESOURCE LIBRARY

FEATURE OF THE MONTH



This month's feature: AT THE ZOO AWARD WINNING VIDEO SERIES!

At the Zoo guides children age 2-8 on an entertaining journey through the home of exotic animals with original toe tapping, hand clapping songs written by two-time Emmy Award Winning children's musical team, Mitran Mitran Music. Children as well as adults will love exploring and singing along to lively, educational songs. This video gives children a fun visit to the zoo with lots of songs and wonderful animals starring: monkeys, zebras, elephants, bears, dolphins and many more.

Our Resource Library is available to Chatham County child care providers. To check out items, call Brenda Foxx at 542-6644, extension 16 or Marilyn Grubbs at extension 21. We may be able to deliver items if you have trouble coming to pick them up.

Items in the Resource Library were purchased with funding from the Chatham County Partnership for Children.



Preschool Outreach Program Presents... 2002 Child Care Provider Workshop Series

June 5: Enhancing Play Skills in Preschoolers

Presenters: Jennifer Rotella, Preschool Outreach Program & Jean Whicker, KidSCOPE Program

To register: Call Jennifer Rotella at 542-4422 one week prior to the workshop. Time: 6:00 – 8:00 pm. Location: CCCC, Pittsboro; Conference Rm, Bldg. 1. *Training credits available!*

In addition to the training listed here, we have information about workshops in nearby counties sponsored by other agencies. Call Marilyn Grubbs at 542-6644, extension 21 for this information.

CPR AND FIRST AID



CPR or First Aid classes are taught by Sue Morrow, RN, monthly at Child Care Networks. Here is the upcoming schedule:

- | | | |
|----------------|-----------|-------|
| • June 10 | CPR | \$22* |
| • July 2 | First Aid | \$15 |
| • August 6 | CPR | \$22 |
| • September 24 | First Aid | \$15 |

**Classes are \$3 each for programs currently on contract to upgrade their quality. Funding for this reduced fee is provided through Chatham County Partnership for Children.*

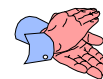
All classes begin at 6:00 p.m. at our office, 117 E. Salisbury Street in Pittsboro. **Call Brenda Foxx to register for classes. Register early, since classes fill up quickly.**



PROVIDER APPRECIATION DAY THANKS*

A Special Thanks to the **Chatham County Partnership for Children** for use of the **Smart Start Outreach Trailer** and to the following **Homes and Centers** for their participation on May 10, 2002 from 10am – 12 noon.

There were 21 adults (home and center staff) and 64 children in attendance. (31 homes and 33 centers) Because of all of you and the hard working staff at **Child Care Networks**, Brenda Foxx and Marilyn Grubbs would like to thank you for making **Provider Appreciation Day 2002 a great success.**



A Bonnie Day Care---Bonnie Rardin
CCCC Preschool---Angela Leonti
Palmer's Child Care Home--- Nora Palmer
Patsy's Babyland---Patsy Tickle
Chatham Academy--- Genita Franks
Zip's Child Care---Zylphia Marsh
La-La Kids---Sophia Williams
Kids 1st---Debra Bright
Buttons and Bows---Dorothy Harris
Crib and Cradle---Cynthefer Alston

Cultural Diversity Menus

A good way to introduce children to different cultures is to include a variety of ethnic foods on the menu.

African American

Barbeque Beef on a Roll
Cole Slaw – Apple
Milk

Asian

Chicken & Vegetable
Stir Fry Rice – Kiwi
Milk

Central American

Beans and Rice
Lettuce Salad with Tomatoes
Peaches - Flan
Milk

Resource from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

CACFP Income Eligibility Application

Chatham, Lee and Orange County Providers

It will soon be time for new eligibility applications from the parents of children attending your child care program. We will need new applications on all children by July 1, 2002. Food Program Staff will bring application out to your child care home or mail them to you. Please give to your parents, and ask them to return the application to Child Care Networks in the envelope provided with attention to Pat Alston. They also can give the sealed envelope to you and you can send it to Child Care Networks. All applications must be returned to Child Care Networks' office in Pittsboro before July 30, 2002. If you have any questions, please call me at 542-6644, ext 13 or call your program manager.

- Pat Alston

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CHATHAM CHILD CARE NEWS is a resource publication for caregivers, parents, and other persons interested in child care. It is published monthly by Child Care Networks. Suggestions, information, and articles are welcomed and printed as space permits. Mail information to:

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Pittsboro, NC 27312

or call (919) 542-6644, extension 21.

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A Child Care Resource and Referral Agency

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