

## A Newsletter from your Technical Assistance Center, PCA-NJ

### Building Positive Relationships and Creating Supportive Environments

Now that summer is in full swing, hopefully staff have had some time to recuperate and enjoy the slower pace that typically comes with summer days. As we think about preparing for September, consider the importance of building positive relationships and creating supportive environments for all members of your center's community. There are a number of ways to create a culture that promotes positive social interactions and a sense of community where everyone feels welcome and comfortable.

By setting the tone early on for positive relationships, we can support the social-emotional development of children, build partnerships with families, and create a professional culture of mutual respect. The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) provides a number of resources to help create supportive environments. One tool provides starters on giving children positive feedback. The list includes:

- ◆ "You must feel proud of yourself for..."
- ◆ "Excellent idea for..."
- ◆ "WOW!! What a fabulous job you've done of..."

Think of ways to include these starters in your interactions to create a supportive environment in your classroom and set the tone for the culture of your center. Remember that back-to-school time can be stressful; any efforts to ease into the school year will help children, staff and parents to get started on the right foot!

Visit the CSEFEL website for additional resources: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/strategies.html>

How will you inspire your staff to put their best foot forward this Fall?



#### Tips for a smooth transition in September:

- ◆ Designate a time for staff to meet for team building activities, to plan for the upcoming year, and to develop strategies to create a supportive environment.
- ◆ Create a vibrant welcome area with relevant information for new families.
- ◆ Review parent handbook/materials to include community resources, methods of communication, and participation opportunities at the center.
- ◆ Prepare cubbies, labels, name tags, and class lists so teachers are able to welcome children and parents by name.

### Turning Challenges into Opportunities

#### Challenge

Getting to know the unique needs of the children



Ask parents to fill out an "All About Me" form that explains their child's unique needs and interests.

Helping new staff to adapt to the culture of the center



Establish a mentor system where seasoned staff are paired up with new staff. They can meet regularly, formally and informally.

Shortage of classroom supplies and materials



Ask for donations from businesses or families for items that they are no longer using, and be sure to dive into closets and storage areas!

# Taking Stock of your Classroom Environment

Now is the time when classroom teachers are busy preparing for a new school year. This is the perfect time to reflect on what worked well for you last year and consider where improvements can be made. Taking stock of your classroom environment is an important step in this process.

Consider the general space of your classroom as identified in the Space & Furnishing Subscales of the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS).

Does the current room arrangement provide enough furniture for routine care, play and learning? As you look over the physical space, check to see if the indoor space and furnishings are in good repair or need to be replaced. Review the Activities Subscales in the ERS and decide if some interest centers, like blocks and dramatic play, could use

a larger space for play. Is the water table conveniently located near a sink? Have you considered the sight lines across the room to allow for adequate supervision?

Additionally, look for ways to make spaces cozy and inviting by including soft seating in the book area or adding an area rug in the dramatic play space.



*This block center is stocked with many blocks on labeled shelves to help children learn how to self-manage materials; accessories are added to the shelves as soon as this skill is accomplished and throughout the school year.*

*To help children feel more confident in their abilities, limit the materials on the shelves, initially, and use group time to introduce new items. This approach will also set the pattern and expectation that all new materials will be introduced and explained as themes and interests develop throughout the year.*



*Start slowly when stocking materials in the art area; children will gain confidence and control making center management a task where they can be successful.*

Once the centers are arranged, take time to evaluate what materials you will introduce first. When introducing interest centers and materials, be sure to organize and label materials and be sure that they are appropriate for your class by considering the age and developmental levels of the children.

Next, review your daily schedule.

Some things to consider:

- ◆ Is your schedule meeting the children's needs?
- ◆ Are mealtimes appropriately spaced?
- ◆ Is there enough time for active play outside?
- ◆ How is rest time working?

Take stock of what has worked in the schedule, what times are more fixed and where there may be some flexibility for adjustments. Create a classroom environment where staff and students alike can experience success by taking time to reflect on how your students experience the day, and then planning intentionally.

### **Additional Resource:**

Vogel, N. (2012). Arranging the Active Learning Environment: Setting Up the Preschool Environment. *ReSource*, 31(1), 11-14. Retrieved from Reprints from HighScope ReSource, a magazine for educators: [http://www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/ReSourceReprints/Spring2012/ReSourceSpring2012\\_LearnEnvironment.pdf](http://www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/ReSourceReprints/Spring2012/ReSourceSpring2012_LearnEnvironment.pdf)

### **Helpful Hints from Early Childhood Vendors**

- ◆ Many early childhood vendors' websites offer free resources. For example, the Environments website has a free label maker! This handy tool can help teachers create materials' labels, center signs, schedules, and more: <http://www.environments.com/community/landing.aspx?campaignid=1993>
- ◆ Other vendors offer various resources on their websites that often include guides to correlate items in their catalogues to ERS or state standards. Take some time to visit these websites: <http://www.shopbecker.com/class-lists-correlations/>  
<https://www.kaplanco.com/resources/LabelMaker.asp>  
[http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/general\\_content/free\\_resources/planners.jsp?f=m](http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/general_content/free_resources/planners.jsp?f=m)
- ◆ Teaching Strategies for Early Childhood Educators encourages a back-to-school checklist in their video, "Beginning the Year in a Preschool Classroom" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfqPr8CWb98>

**Related GNJK Standards- 1.2.1; 1.3.1; 1.3.5; 1.4.1; 1.5.3**

# Ways to Welcome and Engage Families from the Start

Sending families something from your center **before the new school year** can help **forge the connection** between home and center life and help children and families to feel welcome when they arrive on their first day.



- ◆ Send a letter home, addressed to the child, to reveal something about yourself and/or the new classroom.
- ◆ Invite families to respond to a specific question so you can learn something about them as well, i.e. “What is your favorite family activity?”
- ◆ Mail song lyrics or a favorite poem to families to share with their child. When school starts add these songs/poems into your plans for the first days of school.
- ◆ Ask parents to send pictures of their children and families to be displayed throughout the center.

Once you have begun to **build relationships with families**, how will you continuously engage them throughout the year?

Consider ways to incorporate the

## Strengthening Families Framework:

- ◆ Back to school night/open house
- ◆ Family survey to understand different cultures, language, customs, values etc.
- ◆ Parent to parent support group
- ◆ Parent advisory group
- ◆ Community resource binder
- ◆ Regular parent meetings/educational workshops
- ◆ Opportunities for parent involvement/volunteering in classrooms and center-wide

Strategies in this framework encourage families to feel welcome at the center, have a better understanding of the importance of their child’s early education and help to develop and maintain a strong connection between families and staff. Providing extra support for families by exploring the resources available in your community can help to meet their needs and support their involvement in school activities.

Reference: More Than a Letter Home: Activities to Send to Families Before the Year Begins | National Association for the Education of Young Children | NAEYC TYC | Teaching Young Children Magazine | <http://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/more-than-a-letter-home-activities>

## Center Spotlight: Middlesex County



Cranbury Presbyterian Nursery School is a NAEYC accredited school that was founded in 1984 by the First Presbyterian Church of Cranbury. They aim to develop happy, adjusted, secure individuals in an environment with discipline, affection and positive reinforcement. They have been part of Grow NJ Kids since 2014.



To prepare for the new school year the Director, Janice Parker, invited all staff to a luncheon and “Open Box Party” to learn more about the materials in the 6th edition of the Creative Curriculum. Technical Assistance Specialist Jennifer Riche and Senior TA Specialist Barbara Thornton walked the team through the contents of each box and answered their questions. Staff members are in the process of completing Curriculum training through GNJK and will discuss topics on the curriculum at upcoming staff meetings. They are looking forward to the new school year using Creative Curriculum.

Related GNJK Standards – 3.2.1; 3.3.2; 3.3.3; 3.4.1;3.4.2; 3.5.1



# Need to Know!

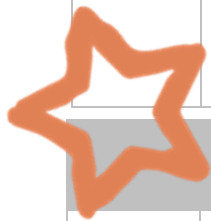


*Save the date for these upcoming opportunities...*

## Webinars

*Open to all GNJK programs*

Date	Time	Topic	Presenter(s)	Description
8/30/16	1:00	<b>Quality Interactions</b> <a href="https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7100618979991644419">Registration Link: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7100618979991644419</a>	Guest Speaker: Linda Carter from the Coalition of Infant/Toddler Educators (CITE)	This webinar will provide participants with an overview of how to provide quality interactions in an infant/toddler classroom.



## GNJK Peer Learning Communities (PLC)

*County-specific*

Date	Time	Location	County
9/13/16	1pm-3pm	Child Care Connection, Trenton	Mercer
9/14/16	12pm-2pm	Union City Public Library	Hudson
9/21/16	1:30pm-3:30	DCF Training Academy, New Brunswick	Middlesex, Somerset
9/21/16	12pm-2pm	Prevent Child Abuse NJ-Newark	Essex
10/25/16	6:30-9pm	Children's Home Society, Tom's River	Ocean



## Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey™

PCA-NJ operates a broad range of preventative services designed to support the improvement and quality of professional workforces and programming, resulting in significant positive impacts on family functioning and health in all 21 counties. **PCA-NJ programs include:**

- ◆ Grow NJ Kids TAC
- ◆ Middlesex County Council for Young Children
- ◆ Healthy Families
- ◆ Human Trafficking
- ◆ Parents as Teachers
- ◆ Essex Pregnancy & Parenting Connection
- ◆ Parent Linking Program
- ◆ Parent Education & Technical Assistance
- ◆ Enough Abuse
- ◆ The Period of Purple Crying

### *Needs Assessment Survey*

Please help us cater to YOUR needs by completing our Needs Assessment survey. Follow this link and share your thoughts about PLCs.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/gnjkneedsassessment>



### *Training*

Click on the link provided below to view all currently offered professional development opportunities specifically designed for GNJK centers.

[Trainings](#)

**Central Region TA Center** 103 Church Street, Suite 210 New Brunswick, NJ 08901 732.246.8060

**Northeast Region TA Center** 550 Broad Street, Suite 1105 Newark, NJ 07102 973.371.5301

[www.preventchildabusenj.org/programs/growtac](http://www.preventchildabusenj.org/programs/growtac)