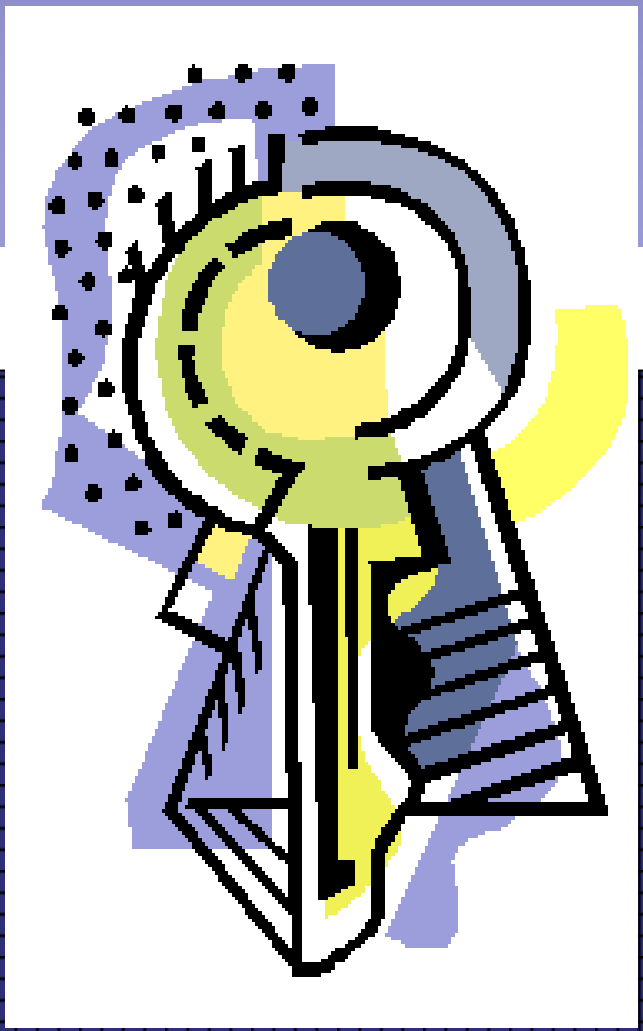
Keys to Quality Afterschool: Environments, Relationships, and Experiences

A Best Practices Guide



Laurie Ollhoff and Jim Ollhoff
with additional narrative by
Roberta Newman

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Introduction

When school-age practitioners view themselves as professionals who facilitate the growth and development of children in partnership with families, everyone benefits. The practitioners benefit from an enhanced sense of professionalism when they take pride and ownership of the environments they create for children and families. Families benefit from the relationships established with the practitioners who care for their children. Children benefit when practitioners work with families to provide for their varied and ongoing needs through experiences and opportunities.

School-age practitioners can and do positively impact the lives of school-age children and their families. Sharing a warm greeting daily, transitioning children from school to out-of-school time to home, offering positive stories about the child's development and learning, and sharing ideas about how to cope with challenges all help to create an atmosphere of caring about each other and build support and respect.

Working with school-age children is not always easy. Practitioners are always searching for resources that will support the environments they create for children; the relationships they build with families, children, the community and each other; and the experiences they provide for the children in their care.

Structure

These terms have been used synonymously throughout this document:

- School-Age Care
- Out-of-School Time
- Afterschool Care
- Child
- Children
- Youth
- Kids

Anatomy of a chapter: This toolkit consists of ten chapters. The first chapter introduces the Generations approach to understanding school-age care and identifies how Environments, Relationships, and Experiences (ERE) influence children's growth and development. Each subsequent chapter highlights a specific content area related to "best practices" and engages the reader in transfer of knowledge and reflection through stories, examples, inquiries, charts, and strategies for implementation. Each chapter can be used as a stand-alone resource for professional development, staff meetings, and independent research or study by

practitioners. Look for guidelines, concrete activity ideas, and unique strategies for supporting children's development and best practices in program design.

Supplementary material was written by Roberta Newman, and real-life examples from the experience of Laurie Ollhoff.

Discussion questions engage practitioners in stepping back and slowing down in order to think carefully and learn from their experiences by celebrating strategies that are working well and reflecting on challenges with an eye for improvement. This section includes questions specific to the chapter content. Additionally, individuals are encouraged to examine the chapter content in the context of the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) or other program assessment tools. Finally, practitioners are encouraged to identify areas for improvement and to create a plan of action to make improvements.

Resources and further reading appear at the end of each chapter. These include suggestions for research that supports the content areas and/or opportunities to learn more about the specific content.

We recommend beginning your reading with chapter one, since it details the concepts and vocabulary that will be used throughout the book.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this resource is to provide school-age care/out-of-school time program practitioners with a tool to examine program practices, explore their roles and responsibilities in facilitating children's positive growth, development, and learning, and to engage in a process of reflective continuous quality improvement. It incorporates the Ollhoff Theories, including the Generations Approach, the Five Foundations of Childhood theory, and ERE theory (Environments, Relationships, and Experiences). All focus on deepening the understanding necessary to develop quality out-of-school time programs that are grounded in the presence of the Search Institute's identified protective factors.

This toolkit is offered as a resource to school-age practitioners, directors, or others in leadership roles, including professional development instructors, technical assistance consultants, Keystone STARS specialists, youth development coordinators, school district personnel, and others interested in the growth and development of school-age children. The information in this toolkit is aimed at all levels of learners including beginning, developing, and mastery level school-age care practitioners. Although each chapter integrates concepts introduced in chapter one, each chapter has been written as a stand-alone resource if individuals wish to address one component at a time. Feel free to customize the information to meet your specific programming and staff development needs. For example, you may decide to use this resource in staff meetings, for independent study opportunities, or in a community of practice.

We envision this toolkit supplementing existing out-of-school time, school-age care, and afterschool professional development resources and materials including the School-Age Professional Credential Coursework. It is our hope that the implementation of this toolkit will enhance and enrich opportunities for all school-age children and provide a framework for continuous quality improvement.

Chapter 1: Examining Perspectives on Out-of-School Time

What is the Purpose of School-Age Care?

School-age care is a place for growth, nurturing, and life skill development.
It is a sad fact that, as a nation, we are losing our children in sizable numbers. Every day, children and youth experiment with at-risk behaviors and begin negative developmental pathways. The school-age care professional can be a powerful force for a child's growth.

School-age care facilitates positive development in children.
Professionals in SAC are in the premiere place to guide and mentor the optimum development of life skills. There is no better place, outside the home, where adults can be attentive to the child's growth and, when necessary, intervene so that the child continues to learn and grow.

School-age care teaches social skills and life in a community.
School-age care is a microcosm of community. All the things that happen in life happen in school-age care. As adults, we need to get along with others, resolve conflict, communicate effectively, cope with disappointment, make decisions and take responsibility for our own actions. These social skills are learned, to a large degree, in childhood. The learning of social skills doesn't just happen. We must be intentional about teaching these skills.

School-age care is a place to learn peaceful living skills.
When we lose a child or youth to delinquency, addiction, or other life-destroying problems, we not only lose a future productive citizen; we also add to our societal costs by trying to rehabilitate the child, and by protecting the community from destructive influences.

School-age care works with families, schools, care providers, and the community to build a safety net for children.
School-age care professionals should be critical partners in facilitating the positive development of children and youth. Parents cannot do it alone. Schools cannot do it alone. But all of the community's influences together can create an environment where children have a better chance to grow up positively.

School-age care plays a part in the efforts of the community to ensure our future.
If our society does not have the systems in place to ensure the next generation's workforce, then we cannot secure our future. We are assured a societal future by having children with peaceful living skills, who will grow into productive adults. We not only support the current workforce, we develop its future.

School-age care programs are intentional.
Quality school-age care programs don't happen by accident. They are intentionally constructed by people who have a vision for quality and a passion for children. They are socially and recreationally rich programs that provide children the opportunity to practice real-life skills.

A Generations Approach to Out-of-School Time

The first school-age care programs were created to meet a recognized need to establish safe environments for children while parents were working. As the school-age profession has developed over time, three levels of staff understanding have been defined, which are described as "Generations."

The generational model is a tool for understanding the way school-age care is perceived. The three phases or generations in which the profession has progressed are described below. This is not just a historical perspective; this is an attitudinal perspective. The different ways people understand school-age care is identified by each generation.

Generation One: "Let's Keep the Kids Safe"

This is the most elementary level of understanding of school-age care; it is usually the first level of understanding for adults. This level is associated with the following beliefs:

- The goal of school-age care is to provide a safe place for kids to wait until their parents pick them up. SAC is a holding place.
- The ideal site is a polite, quiet atmosphere with obedient children. Safety is held up as the key reason to have children in SAC.
- The job of adult caregivers is to supervise the children so that no one gets hurt. Adults usually do not get involved in the children's activities. Adults are the police officers.

Many school-age care staff begin working with children at Generation One. "We have to keep them safe" is the only concern. The Generation One staff see themselves as babysitters. They don't see the need to interact with kids. They feel like they need to position themselves in the room so that they can see everything to make sure no one is doing anything unsafe. Their job, as they see it, is to make sure kids don't get in fights and don't get hurt. If they keep all the kids safe, they feel like they've had a good day.

Are all the children accounted for? Do the staff count children regularly? In some Generation One settings, staff are expected to keep their backs to the wall so that they can see everything. Because they are constantly watching, they don't interact with kids, except perhaps to give kids permission to get out a game or to go to the bathroom.

"Babysitters" and "police officers" are the words with which staff might describe themselves. The adults don't provide many activities. Kids have access to crafts and games, but if the kids don't initiate them, then they never happen. In Generation One, adults may or may not encourage kids to play, but mostly the adults are there to make sure kids don't get hurt while playing.

To evaluate child care centers at this stage, adults ask the question, "Are the kids safe?" If the answer is "Yes," then the Generation One adults feel good about what they have created.

The good thing about this generation, of course, is that kids have a safe place. But little long-term development or learning of social skills takes place.

Why do adults move on to Generation Two? Usually because they get bored. Standing and watching kids play without interacting with them, day in and day out, gets old. Further, kids are bored in these programs, too. Kids don't like coming, and this provides new problems in the child care.

So, the adults start to get a glimmer of hope that something new is possible. They begin to think that they could have not only a safe place, but a fun place, too. The adults begin to plan for ideas where kids can have a fun, exciting, time. Kids will want to come! When this happens, the adults have entered Generation Two.

Generation Two: "Let's Help the Kids Have Fun"

Because Generation One tends to be sterile and boring, most adults who stay in the field achieve a new level of understanding with Generation Two. New understandings are characterized by the following beliefs:

- The goal of SAC is to provide a fun and exciting curriculum so that kids will want to continue in the program.
- The ideal site is a fun site with lots of learning activities. Giving kids a choice of activities is the primary value.
- The job of the adult caregivers is to create environments that foster creative choice. Adults lead activities and think of new ideas to entertain children. Adults are activity leaders.

The Generation Two attitude solves some problems. In Generation One, children didn't want to come, and so they fought with their parents and brought that conflict into the SAC setting with them. Now, in Generation Two, children mostly enjoy coming, and so there is a more peaceful setting already.

Adults in Generation Two want to help the kids have fun. They arrange lots of activities, lots of fun things, and lots of choice. Daily schedules are critical to keep kids moving. There are lots of field trips, lots of games, and lots of exciting things going on. Weekly themes help adults plan activities around common issues. Kids are kept on the go, so that they don't have time to be bored.

Adults in Generation Two want a safe place for kids, to be sure. However, they also want kids to have fun. School-age settings should be a fun place for kids. Children would fill

out surveys to identify which activities they like, and then adults would schedule those activities.

The program is evaluated with the simple question, "Are kids having fun?" A program director could walk through the setting and evaluate the program based on how many smiles they see. According to Generation Two, "Happy children means the program is successful."

Most parents like a Generation Two program. They no longer have to fight with their kids about going to the child care. Many parents mistakenly equate "lots of activities" with "children's educational growth" and so they like the Generation Two ideas.

Since kids are happy, caregivers are happy, and parents are happy, SAC settings will frequently stay at a permanent Generation Two. It is sometimes difficult to convince the adults in Generation Two that something more is possible. There is often a resistance to set the bar higher, when everyone views Generation Two as successful and effective. Some adults will firmly be rooted in Generation One their entire career, but even more adults will be permanent Generation Two.

Generation Three: "Let's Build Lifelong Skills"

Adults who continue to have a passion for children's welfare often discover SAC as an opportunity for children to learn life skills. Staff reaching Generation Three hold the following beliefs:

- The goal of school-age care is to create a network of families, school, and community to guide and mentor the optimum development of life skills.
- The ideal site is where children learn peaceful living skills. Children and their social and emotional growth is the primary value.
- The job of the adult caregivers is to teach social skills. This is usually done through the process of games and spontaneous play. Adults are facilitators of positive development.

So why do some adults move to Generation Three?

Some adults begin to get restless in Generation Two. They wonder, "Is this all there is?" They see kids who are programmed constantly, and wonder if the kids are really, truly learning anything. Over a long period of Generation Two, doubts emerge in the adult that constant stimulation and new experiences produce healthy gains. Adults begin to wonder if kids might be missing out on emotional and social development.

Education, be it in workshops, college courses, or on one's own, makes adults reflect on children's growth. Some adults become suspicious that Generation Two is maximizing children's emotional growth. Some adults begin to look for something more.

Realizing that perhaps there might be better ways to help children grow is the beginning of Generation Three.

In Generation Three, children have a safe place. They also have a fun place where they enjoy playing. However, the bar is placed higher than that. In Generation Three, the goal is creating a place where children can have positive emotional and social growth.

In Generation Three, adults are trained in how children's development happens, and how to facilitate that development. Adults know how to create warm and positive relationships, because they know that growth happens through these relationships. Adults schedule activities—not because they are safe, and not because they are fun, but because they will build skills. In Generation Three, adults are always attentive to the activities and the processes that can build long-term skills.

In Generation One or Two, adults might separate two kids who don't get along. In Generation Three, adults will teach conflict resolution skills.

In Generation One or Two, adults will put out enough scissors for each child during the craft, to minimize potential conflict. In Generation Three, adults might intentionally put out too few scissors, so that kids can practice sharing. Sometimes adults will need to remind kids to share. In some cases, adults may have to teach the skills of sharing.

In Generation One or Two, children who disobey the rules get punished. In Generation Three, kids are certainly held accountable, but the adults take it to the next step. The adults know that when children are pushing past a boundary, they are trying to meet a need. The adult will ask, "What need was the child trying to fill by disobeying the rule?" Children try many ways to get their needs met—sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Understanding why a child misbehaved is more important than simply punishing the child. Once we understand the "why" we can help the child move beyond it and discover the skills he or she needs.

Cultural awareness has also changed over the generations. Generation One didn't address culture. In Generation Two, cultural awareness came through special events. A taco day would be used to celebrate Hispanic culture. Pictures showing ethnic diversity hung on the wall. These are not bad, but they don't go far enough in celebrating and embracing all cultures. In Generation Three, cultural awareness is not relegated to a picture on the wall—cultural awareness is embedded in everything that happens. In Generation Three programs, there is recognition that we are all stronger when we celebrate and embrace a rich cultural diversity.

The Three Generations Matrix

	What is the Purpose of SAC?	What is the Role of Adults In SAC?	What are the Questions that Drive Programming?
Generation One	A *safe* place for kids to be until their parents pick them up	Police officers/ babysitters in a setting where adults are in charge; they control behavior and the agenda	How can we keep kids safe?
Generation Two	A safe, *exciting* place, where kids can have fun	Activity leaders; they supervise the play and create fun experiences with opportunity for choice.	How can we create fun, cool, exciting programs so that kids will want to participate?
Generation Three	A place for growth, nurture, and building long-term life skills	Facilitators of positive development, they provide a safe, engaging environment and intentionally support positive social, emotional, logical thinking, moral, and life skills development; they teach social skills and nurture healthy interactions	What kind of interactions and activities will facilitate positive growth in children?

What Children and Youth Need

The question "What do children and youth need?" should begin the discussion concerning the purpose of out-of-school time. This is not a discussion about what children want, but rather what they need from their participation in an afterschool program. Their needs drive our programs, not their wants.

Do children always know what they need? Of course not. Can they give us insight into their needs? Of course! But when a huge piece of children's time, namely out-of-school time, is focused on what children want, children's perception of the world and of themselves becomes skewed.

The opposite error is to suggest that adults always know what children need. This view suggests that since children don't know what they need, and adults do, then adults should make all decisions for children. This view could lead to viewing children as objects that can, and should, do the bidding of the omniscient adult. If this happens, we will fall into an adult-child relationship where the adults do 99 percent of the talking, telling, and commanding. When we see children in a role of recipient of our good intentions, we could send hidden messages about their lack of worth.

Our hope is always that children and adults will cooperate to discover children's needs. Our goal is that children and youth will become their own best resource. In other words, our program design and our adult-child interaction intentionally nurture children's skills and abilities. During out-of-school time, children must be part of a program that is developed with them, not at them. These co-evolving programs (developed with both children and adults) are staffed with professionals skilled in guiding children to a positive view of the limitless possibilities for their future.

In broad strokes, children's needs can be categorized into five foundations: empowerment, play, community building, maturity, and self-discipline.

1. **Empowerment. Children and youth must feel respected and honored.**
   They must be invited to contribute in an emotionally safe setting. This is their program, so they need a sense of ownership. This is empowering for children. When kids have dignity and know that they belong somewhere, they are strengthened and empowered. In order for this to happen, kids need to see that adults listen, care, and guide. Adults care rather than judge, and see children as individuals who are worth getting to know.

2. **Play.**
   Children need a playful, fun, accepting community where a positive atmosphere is nurtured and positive strategies are taught. Play involves problem-solving, risk-taking, creativity and persistence, and this can only be learned in a playful and non-judgmental environment. Children need adults who have an ability to connect with the world of children, and they need adults who can laugh and play themselves.

3. **Community building.**
   Children and youth need their out-of-school time community to celebrate their contributions to the group. Our programs need to recognize traditions from within the community. Kids always need to hear messages of love, care, and acceptance. Community means that life is not always about me, it's also about we. Children and youth need adults who can build a trusted community, and can teach the skills of collaboration and teamwork on a daily basis.

4. **Maturity.**
   Children and youth need programs that teach them to think beyond themselves, and reason what would be good for the larger group. Maturity involves developing greater sensitivity to the needs and desires of others. Kids need to develop social skills and make friends. Children need adults who respect themselves and others in a non-judgmental, no-strings-attached pattern.

5. **Self-discipline.**
   Children need programs that teach skills of self-control, of calming oneself and accepting oneself. Adults should help children set boundaries for themselves, and give kids the opportunity to practice those boundaries. We want children to learn responsibility and self-management, so they can act appropriately even when adults aren't watching. Adults need to teach these skills, and not simply assume that children "come with those skills."

Sixteen Principles of Effective Out-of-School Time Programs

If we were to construct the perfect place for kids to learn social skills, it would have three characteristics: 1) a high amount of interaction between adults and children; 2) a multi-age setting, where older kids and younger kids mix freely; and 3) a high degree of interaction and spontaneity. Most child care settings already have these characteristics in place. Out-of-school time might be the best place in children's lives to learn social skills!

Out-of-school time plays an important role in children's process of growing up. In our programs, we have the potential to influence children's development and growth, giving them a better chance for a healthier, happier life.

The following sixteen principles are tools for guiding program development. When we are attentive to these principles, we ensure children reap the benefits of childhood time. For the socialization process to work for children, we must develop programs that are responsive to the changes, while adhering to our mission.

1. **SAC time is valued as the child's time.**
   Their needs and ideas drive the program. Out-of-school time is a dynamic time, full of potential, when children's growth must occur. Our programs can mightily contribute to healthy development. When we listen and observe the children, we can get a sense of what their needs are. If adult care providers are skilled listeners and observers, they uncover children's needs. We are committed to children's needs—not necessarily their wants. Children don't always know what they need. Educated staff must look beyond wants and meet the needs of growing children.

2. **In out-of-school time, movement is life, learning, and living.**
   Research shows us that children involved in daily physical education experiences demonstrate greater academic performance and a better attitude toward school, life, and family. We also know that children involved in music and arts develop better thinking and problem-solving skills, better language skills, and more creativity.

3. **The role of adults is to facilitate rather than direct.**
   We don't need to herd children from place to place. We don't need to constantly bark at them to move here or there when the schedule changes. Our role should be facilitation rather than direction. We encourage interaction among children and between children and adults. It's that social interaction that leads to discovery and application of great ideas.

4. **Our programs are miniature societies.**
   Practicing self-discipline gives children an opportunity to be self-governing, a skill necessary for life in society. Our democratic society requires thoughtful citizens who practice participation with social skills. We can practice all those skills in our programs.

5. **Out-of-school time is a link to education, families, and community.**
   When networking with schools and communities, school-age care professionals can identify goals and work together with families. Together they can build a program that serves children and families. By serving families, we serve the community as well.

6. **Individual choice and community building are equally important.**
   Out-of-school time is not about self-indulging. Out-of-school time is like a group of children who decide to play ball together—they will have to negotiate issues, such as who goes first and how to play fair. Out-of-school time is a great place to practice life skills. Life requires us to be both independent and interdependent.

7. **The staff's individual gifts and talents are a celebrated part of the program.**
   Leading clubs is a way to empower staff to incorporate their gifts and talents into our programs. Clubs help children interact with different groups, learn new skills, and build relationships with adults.

8. **Management and budgets are devoted to supporting staff and program standards.**
   Budgets should not be used simply as a way to allocate money. When running through each budget line item, the mission of the program must be central. How will this spending meet the needs of the children, their families, or the staff? Will this purchase help advance the level and quality of programming? Can this resource be shared with another group? Will this expenditure help children with their life skills?

9. **Programs grow and evolve with kids.**
   Children have an ever-changing role and purpose within the program. Since an out-of-school time program might serve a child for five or more years, the program must grow with the child. Out-of-school time programs have the opportunity to reintroduce children to rites of passage and other developmentally appropriate roles.

10. **Programming helps provide balance in a child's day.**
    Balance deals with the types of activities in which children are engaged, how time is spent in a given activity, and how children are grouped.

11. **Intentionality is the key to adult-child interaction.**
    Intention is a determination to act in a specified way, or to do something by design. All the things that we do for children should be intentional and thoughtful, to guide and support children as they grow.

12. **Families are cherished partners.**
    Since SAC parents are onsite daily, often year-round, they develop a strong sense of ownership and connection with the program. Parents value and depend on the quality, continuity, and commitment of school-age care staff.

13. **Our programs are a social setting where social skills are taught and practiced.**
    Out-of-school time is unique to other settings because it provides children with an environment to practice social skills, and to have an opportunity to interact with various people. Our programs have extended time to discover, invent, and play.

14. **Issues of diversity and sensitivity are championed by staff and children.**
    Part of the adult's role is to prepare children for an ever-changing world. Understanding and acceptance are products of a genuine relationship with people of other traditions, cultures, and ethnic groups. Through respectful exchange of ideas, the stories and cultures of various traditions can be celebrated.

15. **SAC has access to appropriate facilities and equipment, thus allowing for flexibility and enrichment in programming.**
    When resources are low, sharing equipment is in the best interest of all parties. This collaboration creates an opportunity for school-age care staff to work with the school or community to develop plans to purchase equipment and develop curriculum for school programs, as well as out-of-school programs. Collaboration and cooperation can be huge benefits for children.

16. **The space is kid-friendly.**
    Out-of-school time must be a time when children discover themselves. This works best when the space itself is not a barrier. Our programs must allow children to create these special transforming places.

It's important for school-age care workers to understand children and their needs. School-age care settings, when they are at their best, work to reclaim relationships, adventure, and spontaneity. When we create settings that reclaim those things, we can build lifelong skills in children. Adults can make a huge difference in the lives of children, and help to set them on the path to growth and maturity.

We live at a time when kids are under enormous pressure to do well in school. High-stakes testing creates pressure for schools and teachers, and that is passed down to kids. Should child care settings create more school after school? Should we focus on remedial education? Should child care settings be homework time?

Or perhaps children will be better served by creating time for kids to be kids, to provide opportunities for positive social, emotional, logical thinking, moral, and life skills development. Adults in school-age care settings have a unique opportunity to help children grow and develop lifelong skills.

Environments, Relationships, and Experiences: Three Ways We Influence Children

There are unlimited ways that we influence children. We can nurture them with a smile; encourage them with a kind word. We can help them understand boundaries with a gentle rebuke. We can support their confidence, we can trust them with freedoms, and we can give them experiences that will generate positive self-regard.

Generally, we can group those unlimited influences into three broad categories: we influence children with the environments we create, the relationships we establish, and the experiences we provide.

The environments we create: These are all the non-verbal messages we send. Is the setting warm and welcoming? Is the room decorated in an age-appropriate way? Is the physical space inviting?

The way the environment is structured can facilitate or hinder relationships. I consulted with staff at a school-age site who said that they had uncomfortable relationships with the parents. We discussed the variety of things they had been trying. Then I saw the actual space. There was the parent table near the doors, then a coat room, then a long hallway. At the end of the long hallway was the school-age care space. This set-up was like an invisible barrier. We moved the parent table into the school-age room, and within a few weeks the parent tension was gone.
—From Laurie Ollhoff

The relationships we establish: The relationships we establish with the children are the foundation for their growth. Without warm and positive relationships, children won't grow very much. Relationships are the engines for growth.

We spend lots of time and energy thinking about safety, schedules, and activities, and that's all well and good. However, children's growth happens primarily on the engines of relationships. Our programs need to be rich in all kinds of warm and positive relationships. Adult-child relationships are perhaps the most critical, but other kinds of relationships are also important: older children to younger children, child to child, staff to staff, and staff to parents.

As any experienced school-age professional knows, a good relationship with parents will help give kids more belonging and significance in the site. And good relationships begin with listening. In my school-age program, there was a new child whose mother seemed stern and angry all the time. The staff would avoid her because they were scared of her. I hadn't met the mother yet, so I made a point to greet her, and ask her how she was. She stopped and glared at me, and then said, "Did you just ask me how I was?" Suddenly I felt a little nervous, and simply said "Yes." She unloaded about how she was new in the area, and her doctor just told her she might have cancer, and she didn't know anyone, and how she spent most of her time just terribly frightened. Suddenly, she no longer seemed stern and angry anymore.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

The experiences we provide: The third way we influence children is by the experiences we provide them. We schedule activities, field trips, art projects, and free time. We have repeated activities and new activities. We schedule quick activities and long-term projects. We plan some activities in detail, and other activities emerge spontaneously. Variety is the spice of activities.

At a program where I worked, we had kids planning the days with us. We worked to cultivate that leadership, and it really paid off. One year the kids wished that full days with us could be more like Saturdays—where kids slept in, ate a leisurely breakfast, etc. So, we started full days wearing pajamas. We used electric frying pans to make pancakes. It took us hours to feed everyone, but the kids didn't mind the leisurely "Saturday pace." Planning with kids will always give a different experience than planning for kids.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

The Role of Adults in a Generation Three Program

So what does the staff do in a Generation Three setting?

Of course, they make the place safe. That's a responsibility of every organization in every public setting. Of course, they create a place that's fun—or at least not boring. Adults need to provide programming for kids.

But the highest goal of the adult in an SAC setting is to care for the development of each individual child. Helping to build social skills and creating warm and positive relationships is the highest goal for the adults in a Generation Three setting.

Almost every culture of the world has some kind of a proverb like "it takes a whole village to raise a child." This was present for much of the history of the United States, too. Everyone knew that Grandma and Grandpa helped raise the children. The schoolteacher, the police officer, and the extended family all helped to guide the child's development.

Today, adults in school-age care have a fantastic opportunity. We connect with parents on an almost daily basis. Kids spend a lot of time in our care. Sometimes, kids spend more time in our care than anyone else's care. We are in a position to help struggling kids and families connect with school and community resources. Children are often in a multi-age setting, which has the potential for growth when the older kids mentor younger kids.

Perhaps most importantly, children often spend multiple years with adults in the SAC setting. We can get to know children and their families. We can not only watch them grow, we can help them grow. Adults in before and after school care are in a wonderful position to be facilitators of positive development in the children under our care.

Discussion Questions

1. From your perspective, what is the purpose of school-age care? How do you understand it?

2. What aspects of your program are reflected in the generations approach? Which generation do these reflect?

3. Do staff in your program have varied levels of understanding of school-age care? If yes, what problems or issues can be traced to differences in understanding?

4. What can you do to help staff develop a shared level of understanding?

5. What understandings would you like to develop in those who lead and care for children in your program to maximize the quality of services provided? What steps can you take to be more intentional about supporting positive social, emotional, logical thinking, moral, and life skills development of the children in your program?

6. Thinking about the five foundations of children's needs described in this chapter, discuss which are strengths of your program and why. Which need improvement?

7. Thinking about the sixteen principles of effective out-of-school time programs described in this chapter, discuss which are strengths of your program and why. Which need improvement?

8. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to environments, relationships, and/or experiences? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Improving environments, relationships, and/or experiences

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to move toward improving environments, relationships, and/or experiences in your program.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

Afterschool Alliance: Facts and research at http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm

Bender, J., Flatter, C. & Sorrentino, J. (2005). *Half a childhood: Quality programs for out of school hours, 3rd edition*. New Albany, OH: School-Age Notes.

Click, P. & Parker, J. (2011). Caring *for school-age children, 6th edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Dougherty, N. (2004). Ollhoff theories #4: Generations of SA/OST, *Effective practices in SA/OST; Developing a Profession*. Retrieved June 3, 2011, from http://www.fiddlehouse.com/images/Eff_Practices_2004.pdf

Forum for Youth Investment. Ready by 21: *Making quality count*. http://forumforyouthinvestment.org/content/ready-21-making-quality-count-0

National Institute on Out-of-School Time. *2009 fact sheet on out-of-school time*. Retrieved May 27, 2011, from http://www.wcwonline.org/component/option,com_virtuemart/Itemid,477/category_id,422/flypage,flypage-niost.tpl/page,shop.product_details/product_id,1640/

Harvard Family Research Project. *Overview of out-of-school time* at http://www.hfrp.org/out-of-school-time/overview

Chapter 2:
Children's Development

Caring About Children's Development in a Generation Three Setting

In a Generation One setting, adults are not concerned about understanding child development, because their only role is to keep children safe. In Generation Two, adults are busy doing things at children and for children, and so child development is still of little importance.

But in a Generation Three program, the role of the adult is to promote the development of children. Adults see their job as teaching kids important skills, and fostering new social skills in kids. In Generation Three programs, everything is about the children and their growth. Consequently, adults and children benefit when adults understand stages of growth and development. Adults can be more attentive to what's going on in the child's growth, and can be more effective at helping those life skills to emerge.

What is Development?

Physically, children are genetically programmed to mature into adults. However, that growth can be stunted by poor nutrition or disease. That growth can be supported, too, with good nutrition, exercise, and health.

Social and emotional growth can be supported or stunted as well. When children constantly receive shaming messages, harsh discipline, and conditional relationships ("I will like you if…"), then they usually don't grow as easily or as fast as others.

But children's social and emotional growth can be nurtured as well. Children's growth is nurtured with messages of unconditional acceptance, surrounded by adults who care about them. Children's growth is supported when they have appropriate boundaries with logical consequences for misbehavior. Children's growth blossoms when they feel like they have a place within their social network. When children have these things, they typically grow up to be socially and emotionally healthy.

However, children's development never happens incrementally. Growth and development always happen with long plateaus and sudden growth spurts. Physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally, growth is a meandering path of stops and starts.

This chapter discusses stages of children's development. However, there needs to be a word of warning. While the stages of development fit most children, they will not fit every single child. Some children will lag behind where they "should" be; others will have jumped ahead of where they "should" be. There is no one perfect path for everyone.

The important thing in children's development is not to assess which level children are at. The important thing is to understand the process of that growth. It's to understand that giving positive messages to children will help them grow. Every message of love and acceptance will help the child take a tiny step on the long road of growth.

Understanding this process of growth from a culturally responsive perspective often means to think outside what is "normal" for you. When we stop ourselves from imposing our "normal" on others, we are gaining culturally responsive understandings. This means as caregivers we step back and review how children are responding and interacting in the program. We are still here to help children grow, but that doesn't mean that we take away their culture and have all children behave and act the same. Some children are helped by one kind of expression; others are helped by another kind of expression. We can help children best when we are attentive to how they respond.

Cognitive Development, Five-to-Nine-Year-Olds

Young children have a different kind of thinking than adults. One of the early classic theorists, Jean Piaget, called their style of thinking "concrete." Young children are not good at thinking abstractly. They need to operate with concrete ideas and easily observable facts. They like to work with manipulatives—things they can see and touch.

Concrete thinking might be seen when a child observes a police car with its lights flashing and then says, "Oh, they must be after a bad person." An adult can simply help the child extend his or her thinking by tapping into the child's curiosity. Just ask the child, "What else could it be?" This same questioning technique is a good tool for brainstorming and problem-solving.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

One of the components of concrete thinking is a difficulty in thinking through to the consequences of an action. So when the adult asks, "Didn't you know that if you played baseball in the room, it might break a window?" The actual answer is, "No, they didn't." Young children have difficulty thinking about what might happen. For this reason, it becomes important for adults to set boundaries and help the children understand why those boundaries are in place.

Another component of thinking at this age is what psychologists call "irreversibility of thought." This is a difficulty in thinking backwards and starting a thought over. For example, a group of children are playing together. Another child comes in later and asks,

"Can I play?" The latecomer is snubbed with a "No, you can't play with us." Often times, this is not an act of cruelty. This represents an inability to "restart" the play with the new person. The children are not being nasty; they simply can't start their thinking over to incorporate the newcomer. Again, gentle intervention by an adult might give them some ideas on how to restart and include the new person.

Children at this age usually have vivid imaginations and are experts at sharing them. Children create and participate in joint fantasy. Imagination builds self-esteem and curiosity, and helps create skills for relationships. While this is an important aspect of development, it can be a double-edged sword. They can be truly afraid of the imaginary monsters in the closet or the turtleheads under the bed.

Imagination is the foundation for curiosity and creativity. Curiosity is the inquisitive drive to figure things out. Creativity is the ability to come up with new solutions to problems. Curiosity and creativity are plentiful in young children, and tend to decrease in most children as they get older. Any activity that helps children use imagination, curiosity, and creativity will be helpful.

How to Support Children's Cognitive Development in Your Program

- Allow kids to dabble in various activities and topics.
- Allow kids to explore doing things their own way.
- Avoid challenges where kids are pitted against each other.
- Keep learning stations out for more time to allow kids to experiment.
- Monitor children's ability to practice good choices and have effective boundaries.
- Ignite their curiosity with direct teaching in art or science, and follow-up with manipulatives or field trips so they can experience the topic.
- When kids are working on an engaging project, give them ample time to close it down when the time comes to an end. If possible, allow for storage space so kids can return to the project.
- Teach the strategy of board games. More importantly, teach that playing games is first and foremost about "having fun," rather than "winning."
- Give them reminders to take breaks—to stretch, to get a drink, or to gain perspective.
- Give children the opportunity to explore leadership and community service opportunities.
- Give children the opportunity to have fun with dramatic arts and theater.

Cognitive Development, Ten-to-Fourteen-Year-Olds

As children grow, they develop the ability to think more abstractly. This allows them to think about concepts. It allows them to reflect on how they are feeling, and understand what they are thinking.

They grow in their ability to think beyond themselves. They begin to understand the perspectives of others. This is an essential skill for making friends—the ability to understand how someone else is feeling.

They begin to think about whether an action is right or wrong, rather than "Will I get caught?" They begin to form ideas about ethics, and begin to understand that some things are wrong even when no one is watching. Again, this is a critical skill that they will need for the future. It emerges as their cognitive ability grows.

As they begin to think about the world outside their own skin, they go through cycles of reflection and sociability. One week they might be unusually quiet, as new cognitive skills become available to them. The next week they might be unusually outgoing, as they experiment with their new cognitive skills. Whoever they are today—allow them to be that and celebrate with them.

Curiosity deepens as children work harder to understand how things work. Their work may slow down as they take more care in getting things right. Some children's creativity may blossom at this point, becoming a wonderfully irrepressible gift for wondering how the world works.

Unfortunately, some children let go of their curiosity during this time. They are told over and over, "just do it," or "just learn it," or "do it because it's going to be on the test." They never get a chance to learn what they want to learn, and so the impulse to be creative becomes an annoyance rather than a gift. Some children will let go of their curiosity because they never get a chance to use it.

The same is true for creativity, the skill for putting things together in new ways. Some children never have a chance to use their creativity, and so they let go of their creative impulses. Other children find outlets to be adventurous, spontaneous, and creative, and they blossom in those skills and capacities.

How to Support Children's Cognitive Development in Your Program

- Give them outlets to nurture their curiosity and creativity.
- Give them more time to use logic and to understand their world. Encourage the cognitive skills that help them think through deeper issues.
- Children at this age like to problem-solve. However, they often don't know the mechanics of how to solve problems. Help them talk through issues and problems, whether they are interpersonal problems or more abstract global problems.
- Children at this age can participate in the adult world for the first time. Invite them into your world with humor and laughter. Children begin to understand puns and sarcasm. Help them understand the difference between hurtful jokes and positive humor.
- Patience is a key skill for adults who are around kids this age. Kids will try on different personalities, struggle to find the brainpower for projects, and take a long time trying to figure things out.
- In all your interactions, remind them through your behavior, your nonverbals, and your actions that you care about them.

- Add opportunities to develop talents, do group work, and explore new topics.
- Create opportunities for older children to tutor and mentor younger children.
- Reinforce their new abstract thinking skills with brain teasers, mind-bender games, riddles, etc.
- Provide opportunities for kids to use their new understandings of the world. Have them write letters to organizations, collect items for a food shelf, or help a community organization. The more "real" the activity, the more meaning it will have. Help them understand the issues and research solutions to the problem.

Emotional Development, Five-to-Nine-Year-Olds

The emotional center of the brain is sometimes called the limbic system. It includes a number of different brain structures. These structures control whether we feel happy, angry, sad, fearful, shameful, and other emotions. The emotional structure of the brain grows faster than the rational part of the brain. In other words, emotions come faster than the cognitive ability to control them.

As children move from one stage to another stage in their development, the natural tendency is emotional instability. They may be aggressive, rude, or uncooperative. It is important for adults to realize that this is normal and natural, even though it's unacceptable. Caregivers need to teach children the skills of appropriate behaviors, and how to control impulses. Children need to know that they can have an angry feeling, but still not act out on it. Children cannot be punished out of this emotional instability. They must be taught the skills to cope with feelings. In normal development, any instability is typically short lived, and kids quickly go back to being themselves.

One of the unique things about the human brain is that stress or threat changes how the brain functions. When a child feels threatened or stressed, the learning ability of the child is dramatically reduced (this is also true for adults). We have a difficult time learning new skills, knowledge, or concepts when we are stressed. We have difficulty remembering things when we are stressed. Adult caregivers should be attentive to the emotional needs of the children. When the children feel stressed (whether the stress is real or imagined), that will change the dynamics of the group. This is a critical time for the adult caregivers to manage their own stress so they do not contribute to the stress of the group. In a school-age setting, children can become stressed when it is lunch time and they suddenly realize they forgot their lunch at home. This is an opportunity to teach the child to realize this is not a crisis. They won't go hungry. Stress can creep in during any transition as a child feels anxious about when and who they will be with next. The hope is that the longer the child is in the program, the more they will trust the staff and how schedules are managed. The more trust is in place, the less likely a child is to become stressed.

When staff sense that a child is becoming stressed, we can help them be aware of that, rather than just countering the child's emotions. Respond in a calm voice, talk slow, remind the child to breathe, etc. The adult caregiver will have to repeat this over and over, since children often bounce back into behavior patterns that have worked in the past.

It is also important to realize that different cultures respond differently to stress. Remember to be culturally sensitive to students. It is important to let the students express their concerns. The adult caregiver's role is to help children to not escalate a situation.

A child in our program had difficulty managing his emotions in competitive situations. He loved competition, but if he lost a race, he would also lose his temper. He loved choosing to go to the gym, but he had constant difficulties with his emotional control. The first step to helping him manage his emotions was giving him a breather: we'd ask him to walk and get a drink. As he realized his tendency to lose control, and how taking a breather calmed him down, he started to realize his problem. Over time he learned to feel the emotional explosion coming—so he'd go intentionally stop his play and walk to get a drink. Sometimes we had to guide him (with a cue like a look, or saying his name quietly) to help him with his awareness, so he could see the coming explosion. We need to remind kids that sometimes emotions can get in the way of thinking clearly—but only when we allow our emotions to take over. Some kids are easily made aware with movement—like walking and getting a drink. Other kids might be cued with saying their name, or some kind of code word. For other kids, picturing a favorite image might calm them down.

--From Laurie Ollhoff

How to Support Children's Emotional Development in Your Program

- Decrease stress and reduce threat whenever possible.
- Provide opportunities for children to practice emotional skills, like delayed gratification and making choices.
- Children can quickly lose their sense of humor, and can turn a small issue into a crisis. Caregivers can be patient and guide better thinking.
- Laugh with children. It makes life more fun and more interesting.
- Teach children that there are always many options in situations. "Hitting Johnny" for "stealing my pencil" is not the only option.
- Help children see that problems are not crises. Model interactions that are full of humor and patience.
- Teach brainstorming, creating options, and sharing of ideas.
- Help children practice emotional control through games.
- Watch for children making hurtful or bullying comments. While one hurtful comment usually doesn't create long-term damage, consistent hurtful messages over the long term can be detrimental to mental health (for adults, too).

Emotional Development, Ten-to-Fourteen-Year-Olds

As children mature, they become more emotionally stable. They learn that they can have feelings, rather than become their feelings. They learn that they can have a feeling without acting on that feeling. They learn ways to cope with unpleasant emotions.

Their self-esteem, or how they feel about themselves, becomes more stable. They are no longer tossed into elation or despair by a compliment or a biting quip. They still care about what others think, and in many cases, are more attentive to it than ever. However, over time stability in their sense of self emerges.

The way they define themselves becomes more complex and sophisticated. They understand that they have many needs, and others have needs too. They begin to see that one friend cannot fill all their needs. They begin to see that what makes one person mad might have no effect on another.

Adult caregivers can help children by allowing them to feel whatever they want, but reminding them that they don't need to act on their feelings. We want to be able to legitimize their feelings, but still help them understand that they don't have to be controlled by those feelings. We don't need to talk them out of being sad. We can allow them to be sad, but remind them of the adults who they can talk to and who care about them.

Sometimes groups develop an emotional life of their own. When we wanted to have the kids plan a party, we started with a debriefing and evaluation of the last party. The kids' emotions went up and down—happy one minute and sad the next, angry one minute and calm the next. It was like watching waves on an ocean. Just when we thought we would need to insert ourselves into the conversation, they would calm themselves. Adults need to watch and observe the group process, and if necessary, gently insert themselves into the conversation. If the group becomes tense and hostile, the adults may need to get involved. If the group discusses difficult issues but still has a sense of humor, they will often not need adult intervention.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

How to Support Children's Emotional Development in Your Program

- Let the children know that they are important to you.
- Provide opportunities for them to practice skills in a non-competitive setting.
- Give them opportunities for leadership within the program. This shows the children that you have trust in them.
- Create ways for children to give back to their communities in service projects.
- Play with them.
- Teach them to enjoy life, even the mishaps.

- Provide opportunities for them to discuss societal and global issues in which they are interested.
- Create segments of your program where kids can do what they want to do, learn what they want to learn, and explore what they want to explore.
- Remember that roles and emotions that are acceptable vary from one culture to the next.
- Our role is not to punish or shame a child for their emotional outbursts, rather our role is to support a healthy view of self, and teach the skills that are necessary for life together.

Social Development, Five-to-Nine-Year-Olds

Social development is the capacity to enter relationships. The relationships might be with family, with a one-on-one friend, with several friends, or with an entire group. Children who are developing socially will grow in the give-and-take nature of relationships.

Preschool children exhibit what is called parallel play. They don't so much play with their friends as play next to them. They only loosely play "together." As children enter the five-to-nine age bracket, they begin to play together. They can get involved in each other's imagination, and engage in shared play.

Young children are still learning the give-and-take nature of social interaction. Young children still struggle with understanding why it cannot always be their turn, or why they have to play by the rules. Adult caregivers can reinforce these simple rules of shared play.

Children in the five-to-nine age group begin to use triangles. They realize that "If mom won't let me do this, I'll ask dad, because he might let me do it." The children don't understand why it's wrong to ask dad when mom already said "no." While parents and caregivers find this annoying, it's actually an important step for children in understanding the complex web of social relationships. Of course, some older children get good enough at these triangles that they use them for deception, which is a different issue.

Another step in understanding relationships is when children learn that they can put off one friend to spend time with another friend. This, too, is an important step in their development. They are understanding how to be independent, and how to exercise control over this new-found environment. Unfortunately, this kind of action can cause hurt feelings. Adult caregivers can mitigate the potential conflict with gentle intervention and suggestions.

Some of the warning signs of delayed social development include extreme isolation and a lack of desire for friends. A child who is rude and thus chases away friends exhibits another warning sign. Another warning sign is called hovering. This is the child who watches other children play, and hovers on the outside of the group, waiting and hoping to be invited to play. Adult caregivers can watch for these signs and encourage them to make friends, to be nice, and to approach a group and ask, "Can I play?"

How to Support Children's Social Development in Your Program

- All children want friends, but they differ in the amount of friends and the style of friendship.
- Encourage children to follow the basic rules of group life—taking turns, expressing themselves assertively, and recognizing the give-and-take of relationships.
- Start friendship clubs for children to learn friendship skills. Play games so that kids can practice friendship skills.
- Help them to not be possessive of friends. Challenge ideas such as "if you're his best friend, you can't be my best friend."
- The out-of-school program might be a strange and threatening place to a five-year-old. Do whatever is possible to make them feel accepted, warm, and welcome.
- Days spent listening and following directions are exhausting for children. Balance your program so that kids can play, feel important, and experience the warmth of relationships.
- Children will test boundaries and authority (adults do this as well). They may display temper tantrums. Never give in, but don't go head-to-head in the power struggle, either. Try saying, "I don't do power struggles, but I am here and I will listen."
- Children begin this stage with impulsive actions. Help them to understand that impulsivity without thought can lead to bad or even dangerous situations.
- Develop a sense of community and team spirit in your program. "We are in this together" should be a common theme.
- Invite children to play games with you.
- Children sometimes get locked into thinking there is only one thing to do in a given situation. Guide children's awareness to the many choices available.
- Get to know children, and what they like, and what they don't like. Remember those likes and dislikes can change from day to day.
- In all things, in as many ways as possible, help children feel a sense of belonging and significance.

Social Development, Ten-to-Fourteen-Year-Olds

Children in this age group develop a sense of self, although this newly independent self is verified through interactions with others. They are still very attentive to what other people think about them, but they couple that information with their own sense of self. This gives their social capacity more stability than earlier.

Social interaction becomes critically important for this age group. They need to talk about everything. They talk about school, music, parents, Internet videos—everything under the sun. This active social interaction is not only a way for them to express their development. It is also the way that they continue to learn the rules of friendship and interaction. They learn about themselves as well as others as they chat about endless topics. Adult caregivers

can support children in this age group by providing many opportunities for them to chat, work in groups, and engage in social interaction.

If children are moving through this stage in a healthy manner, they will develop confidence. They develop an "I can do it" attitude. Maybe they can't do everything, but there are some things they will recognize that they enjoy and can do well.

Sometimes at this age, friendships becomes very intimate. Secrets flow back and forth, and the friends become inseparable. With that, sometimes emotions become extreme. Adults can watch for warning signs, and try to mitigate impending drama.

When spring hit many of our young boys wanted to play baseball. One day a group of boys were trying to play baseball, but one boy didn't seem to understand the rules and didn't have the skill level of the others. One of the older boys came to our staff and asked us to remove him. We reminded him that this boy didn't have anyone to teach him how to play. If they excluded him, how would he ever learn baseball skills? We suggested that they have "Spring Training Camp," where they taught each other skills. By tapping into their desire for leadership skills, they were able to mentor less-skilled children.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

How to Support Children's Social Development in Your Program

- Allow plenty of time for peer interaction. Create space for kids to interact in small groups.
- This is a great time to use children's natural tendency for chattiness to debate bigger issues. Perhaps rules and boundaries for the program could be discussed. Additionally, discussion could turn to problems (and solutions) in the community or world. Engage in community service projects.
- Help kids see that the best friendships are ones that last through thick and thin, through conflict and resolution.
- Watch for problems that emerge from tight friendships. Cliques, while normal for this age group, can become destructive when the clique is allowed to exclude and alienate others. Use cooperative team building exercises to build a sense of community among the group.
- Provide opportunities for art, music, and poetry. Give kids a chance to express who they are, what they like, and the values that are important to them.
- Encourage kids to participate with others, and adapt activities so everyone can participate.
- Teach the skills and attitudes for accepting others. Model a non-judgmental attitude.

- Establish clubs and groups: leadership groups, art or science groups, citizenship groups, big brother and big sister groups. Learn the kinds of clubs that the kids want.
- As much as possible, develop a strong sense of caring and community decision-making in your program.

Summary

Remember that all kids develop differently. Some kids are slow in some areas of development; other kids excel in other areas of development. Adults who create warm, inviting spaces and give kids messages of unconditional acceptance will find kids blossoming before their eyes.

Cognitive, emotional, and social development are a complex web of skills. It's never just one skill, it's a skill set. Children have the same desire that adults do—they try to get their needs met. Sometimes, they have ineffective or dysfunctional ways of getting their needs met. If a child, for example, only gets his or her needs met by whining at nearby adults, then he or she can quickly become a master of whining. We need to teach kids that there are other options besides whining. Generation Three out-of-school time caregivers are there to teach skills for life.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a child in your program and how you have supported his or her development. What else can you do to support it?

2. How do you identify where children are in their development?

3. What questions do you have about child development?

4. How do your space and learning activities support children's cognitive growth? What are some ways you can improve?

5. How do your space and learning activities encourage and cultivate creativity and curiosity? What else can you do?

6. How do your space and learning activities support social/emotional learning?

7. Do you have enough places and times for kids to chat and interact?

8. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices to support child growth and development? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Supporting child growth and development

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to move toward supporting child growth and development.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

Ashcraft, M. (2007). *Best practices: Guidelines for school-age programs*. Farmington, MN: Sparrow Media Group.

Click, P. & Parker, J. (2011). *Caring for school-age children, 6th edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Wood, C. (2007). *Yardsticks: Children in classrooms, ages 4-14*. Northeast Foundation for Children.

Chapter 3: Health and Safety

Health and Safety in a Generation Three Setting

In Generation One care, health and safety not just the most important concern, it is the only concern.

In Generation Three, adults understand that their role is to facilitate the positive development of children. However, we must never lose sight of the fact that parents have allowed us to work with their children, with the expectation that we will attend to their health and safety.

In Generation One, adults monitor and control the health and safety of children. They tell the children what they can and can't do. Adults do health and safety "at" the children.

In Generation Three, adults monitor, but also teach the skills of health and safety. Part of helping facilitate positive development in children is to teach them skills so that they can always live safe and healthy lives, not just when they are being monitored by adults. As adults move to Generation Three, they become concerned not only with looking for safety and health hazards, but become attentive to helping children develop the skills and habits needed to stay safe and healthy.

When teaching children skills for health and safety, adults might picture themselves as coaches. The coach teaches, supports, and nurtures the development of the skill. Every coach hopes that someday his or her students will know enough and be skilled enough that they can function without the coach.

Role	Generation One	Generation Two	Generation Three
Role of the adult	Adults monitor and create the health and safety of children	Adults control health and safety with rewards (treats and sticker charts)	Adults teach, support, and nurture the development of healthy and safe habits
Role of the child	Children listen and follow adult direction	Children earn treats and stickers	Children learn healthy and safe habits and monitor themselves

Creating an Environment that is Safe and Healthy

It's the nature of humans to push boundaries. And children, as all care providers know, are especially good at pushing boundaries. Kids love to know how fast they can run, how far they can jump, and how high they can climb. It's the nature of children to push those boundaries to the edge.

Of course, that desire to push boundaries frequently hits up against our ideas of health and safety.

When I started having discussions about health and safety with the kids I found out that they saw safety differently than the staff. The kids felt the developmental need to take risks and physically push themselves. They did not find our "rules" developmentally appropriate. While we did not change our safety rules, we did become more attentive to providing developmentally appropriate challenges done safely. For example, our older kids would set up obstacle courses in the gym. Once they had set up a course, they would give me a tour and model how the children were to go through it. I would ask about the five-year-olds—is this course going to work for them? Will this be safe? At times they would modify the course or they would realize that rules for younger children needed to be different.

When we had reckless kids, sometimes the idea of letting them participate in an obstacle course became frightening. A Generation One adult might forbid the children from using the obstacle course. A Generation Two adult might set more rules. A Generation Three adult might teach the children skills so that they can do a better job of monitoring themselves. The Generation Three adult never abdicates their responsibility to monitor the children. However, the adult also knows that it's safer for children to have self-management skills with adult supervision, rather than relying only on adult supervision.

--From Laurie Ollhoff

Help Children Develop Habits to Stay Healthy

Teach children strategies for keeping themselves healthy. In his book, Get Balance, pediatrician Craig B. Liden, MD, stresses that healthy habits involve eating well, staying active, getting rest, being centered, and taking responsibility for one's health and fitness. Listed below are examples of ways school-age programs can provide children with many opportunities to learn and practice life skills and habits that support a healthy lifestyle.

- Provide nutritious snacks and meals and encourage children to eat healthy.
- Provide opportunities for daily vigorous exercise and outdoor play.

- Provide opportunities for children to center themselves and relax their bodies while their minds stay focused (e.g., reading or listening to others read, listening to quiet music, balancing as they move to slow music, etc.)
- Provide opportunities for children to rest and pace themselves after active work and play.
- Help children develop personal hygiene habits and lifestyle choices that help them take responsibility for staying healthy.

NOTE: According to the PA Position Statements for the SACERS, foods served at meal/snack must meet at least 50 percent of the meal/snack component requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Foods served at meal/snack must meet all nutritional components of CACFP or USDA. For free copies of the USDA recommended food and other nutrition guidelines for children, visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov.

—From Roberta Newman

The Most Important Health Step: Handwashing

When it comes to germs, the dirtiest parts of the body are the hands. We touch everything with our hands, so hands pick up all kinds of germs and viruses.

Our skin is germ-proof, but when we touch our eyes or nose, we can push germs into those moist mucusy areas. Germs love the soft, wet tissues of our nose and eyes. And the average child touches his or her own face one hundred times an hour (adults touch their own face about half that often). That's plenty of chances to push germs into the eyes or nose.

Fortunately, handwashing removes the germs very effectively (providing we wash as directed in the "Handwashing Guidelines" box). People who wash their hands regularly—about six times a day—have a greatly reduced incidence of sickness.

At home, the germiest places are the ones that are touched the most. For example, the television remote control has more germs than anywhere else, because a lot of people touch it and we usually don't think to clean it. In a classroom or out-of-school time setting, think about the places that are touched the most. That's where germs will reside.

Handwashing Guidelines

(Adapted from the Center for Disease Control, Atlanta, Georgia)

Use this list to create posters for bathrooms and sink areas, or display handwashing posters produced by local or state health agencies.

Steps for proper handwashing

1. Use soap and running water.
2. Rub your hands vigorously as you wash them.
3. Wash all surfaces: backs of hands, wrists, between fingers, under fingernails; spend at least 20 seconds washing.
4. Rinse your hands well. Leave the water running.
5. Dry your hands with a paper towel.
6. Turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands.

Staff should wash hands

- Before the first child arrives
- Before preparing or handling food
- Before and after handling body secretions (wiping your nose, caring for a child who is vomiting, helping stop a nose bleed, cleaning a wound)
- Before and after administering medication to a child
- After helping a child who may have a contagious condition
- After using the bathroom

Children should wash hands

- When they come into the program each day
- Before and after preparing or serving food
- Before and after eating
- After a nose bleed
- After vomiting
- After handling animals
- After touching a child who may have a contagious condition
- Before participating in water play, using play dough, or handling other program materials that may transmit germs
- After playing or working outdoors

—From Roberta Newman

General Health and Safety Concerns

General health and safety concerns can fall into a variety of areas.

Eating. Are the snacks healthy and nutritious? Are they free of too much sugar and salt? Are the staff aware of the eating needs of the children, such as food allergies, or foods that are religiously prohibited?

Fitness. Are the children getting the amount of active playtime that they need? Are there plenty of opportunities to run and move?

Accidents. Most accidents in programs are caused by simple things—ill-fitting shoes, untied shoelaces, baggy clothing, etc.—most of which are easily avoided. Are staff and children aware of these kinds of simple fixes? Are children taking responsibility for these things? Do staff always look for broken equipment and accidents waiting to happen? Is the furniture and equipment placed in ways that won't get in the way of children's traffic flow?

Monitoring children's stress. Are children aware of their own stress levels? Do they know how to manage it and calm down? Do they have adults they can talk to when their anxiety gets out of control?

Hygiene. Are children aware that they need to wash their hands regularly? Are staff aware and observant of the warning signs of sick children? (see the "General Signs and Symptoms of Illness and Contagious Diseases" box)

Water. Are children staying hydrated, especially on hot days or during strenuous activity? Are adults aware of the symptoms of dehydration (crabbiness may be one of the first signs)?

Children's safety. Are adults aware of who can (and who cannot) pick up children? Do they know the proper procedure if someone who is not authorized wants to take a child home?

Emergency plans. Is there an emergency plan for natural disasters, such as dangerous weather conditions? Is there a plan for lockdowns, fires, or other dangerous situations? Are the plans practiced with the children?

Medical emergencies. Is there a plan for medical emergencies, like a severe allergic reaction or complications from diabetes? On field trips, does someone have a first aid kit, with emergency information on the children?

General Signs and Symptoms of Illness and Contagious Diseases

Be alert for the following symptoms when taking attendance and greeting children:

- Difficulty breathing
- Yellowish skin or eyes
- Unusual spots or rashes
- Feverish appearance
- Severe coughing (red in the face, high-pitched croup or whooping sound)
- Pinkeye (tears, redness of eyelid lining, irritation, swelling, discharge of pus)
- Infected skin patches or crusty, bright yellow, dry, or gummy skin areas

- Unusual behavior (child is cranky, less active than usual, or more irritable than usual; child feels general discomfort or just seems unwell)
- Frequent trips to the bathroom
- Complaints about difficulties going to the bathroom
- Sore throat or trouble swallowing
- Headache or stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Frequent scratching of the body or scalp

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Health and Safety Throughout the Day

At least one assigned staff member should greet the children and check their attendance into the program. This person should watch for any health concerns that the children might have. Any health concerns should be discussed with the parent.

Transitions between activities are times when some children get lost in the shuffle. Often times, children who grow up in adult-led environments tend not to think for themselves. They might not be self aware and careful enough to not get hurt. They get accustomed to the adults doing the thinking for them. Help kids learn how to manage those transitions so children can be thoughtful about moving from one activity to another, and doing it safely.

During clean-up times, adults and children should be attentive to broken or dirty equipment. The adults should know whom to tell or how to make note of that equipment so that it can be cleaned, repaired, or replaced.

There is no substitute for good planning. When going on a field trip, for example, there should be a group meeting before leaving. Safety procedures should be reviewed. Children should not only hear about the destination and what behavior they will need to practice. They should also have a chance to express their hopes and dreams for the trip.

If your program operates in multiple rooms, there should always be a system in place for locating and alerting a child. How will you know which room the child is in? Make sure you have a way to quickly find the child.

Creating Protocols for Your Program

It's a good idea to write protocols so that you can monitor your own program. Below are a series of sample lists to get you started. Use the lists as they are or recreate them to fit your particular program.

Health and Hygiene.

- Activity areas are clean and free of clutter and hazardous materials.
- Staff conduct daily health checks as children arrive.

- Fresh air is available daily. Water is available to children throughout the day.
- Shade is available when children play outdoors.
- Sunscreen is available to protect children during hot weather months.
- Children help wipe off tables used for eating and messy activities.
- Food is dated, labeled, and stored to prevent spoilage.
- Garbage is stored in metal or plastic containers with lids; containers are lined with plastic bags and emptied daily.
- Tissues, paper towels, and soap are accessible to children.
- Bathroom is clean and well stocked with toilet paper, soap, and paper towels.
- Schedule is flexible and meets children's needs to eat, rest, and get exercise.
- Procedures are established and followed to notify parents and request pick up when children are ill.
- Medical/allergy information about children is posted or stored according to regulations.
- If children nap, sheets and blankets are laundered daily.
- Fresh bleach solution is made daily.
- Facilities, equipment, toys, and other objects used by children are washed and disinfected weekly.
- Brooms, dustpans, mops, and rags are rinsed in bleach solution after cleaning bodily fluid spills.
- Routines are established to maintain a healthy environment (e.g., staff and children follow proper handwashing guidelines).

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Safety

Check daily:

- ☑ Room is free of clutter.
- ☑ Tables and chairs are in good repair.
- ☑ Furniture is free of sharp edges and splinters.
- ☑ Storage units are stable and secured; drawers and doors are closed.
- ☑ Extension cords are not used near water or placed where someone might trip over them.
- ☑ Steps, platforms, and lofts have padding underneath and protective railings.
- ☑ No highly flammable furnishings or decorations are present.
- ☑ Each area has enough space for children to work and play safely.
- ☑ Hazardous chemical and equipment (e.g.,

woodworking tools, specialized knives), cleaning materials, and other dangerous substances are stored only in locked cabinets and are not used by children without adult supervision.
- ☑ Floors are dry.
- ☑ Rugs are in place and securely fastened.
- ☑ Exit doors are clearly marked and free of clutter.
- ☑ Exit signs are in working order.

Check monthly:

- ☑ Blocks and other wooden items are smooth and splinter-free.
- ☑ Moving parts (wheels, knobs) are securely fastened and working properly.
- ☑ Scissors and knives used by children are sharp enough to cut easily.
- ☑ Hinges, screws, and bolts on furniture and equipment are securely fastened.
- ☑ The smoke detectors are working properly and the fire extinguishers are properly located and fully charged.
- ☑ Electrical wires are not frayed.
- ☑ Radiators and hot water pipes are covered or insulated.
- ☑ First aid kit is stocked with required items and stored securely.
- ☑ Evacuation procedures are established and posted.
- ☑ Emergency policies and procedures are up to date and observed.
- ☑ Fire drill routes are established and drills conducted as required.

— From Roberta Newman

Managing Arrival

A staff member takes children's names as they arrive.

- When children walk through the door, they know what is expected of them.
- They know how to get engaged in the program.
- The children have an opportunity to connect with staff and friends.
- Each child has a designated specific space (cubbies, baskets, shelves, hooks, etc.) to place belongings.
- Children have transition activity choices. These choices might include: 1) Go to the snack area for self-service snack and conversation with friends or a staff member; 2) Meet a friend to talk or play a quiet game; 3) Join a group of children and staff

member for free play outdoors or in the gym; 4) Go to the library corner to start on homework or relax with a book or magazine.

- There are opportunities for handwashing as needed.
- After transition activities, there is a brief "What's Happening Today" meeting to announce the day's activity options, solicit children's ideas and questions, and give children directions on how to get involved with different activities.
- Staff watch for signs of illness as they interact with children.
- Staff inform parents when children become ill during the program. There is a secluded, comfortable area where ill children can rest until parents arrive.

—Adapted From Roberta Newman

Safe Dismissal

Staff understand the importance of dismissal policies and procedures that ensure children's safety as they leave the program and make the transition back to home.

- Children are released only to authorized persons. The program maintains a list of authorized persons, including emergency contacts for each child and any required legal documentation.
- Sign-out procedures provide a record of when and to whom children are released.
- Staff help children conclude and clean up activities safely in advance of dismissal. Staff provide help and support as needed as children gather their belongings.
- All entrances and exits are secure. Procedures are established for monitoring entrances and exits to ensure children do not leave without authorization and that strangers do not have access to removing children from the premises.
- Parents are informed in a timely manner about children's health and/or injury issues.
- Appropriate documentation is maintained for any health or injury incidents.

—From Roberta Newman

Summary

For health and safety, there is no substitute for good planning. Planning identifies potential scenarios, and how the adults and children will operate during that scenario. Children are aware of the scenarios and policies, and practice them when necessary.

Adults in out-of-school time programs are always attentive to health and safety. But more than that, they must be attentive to teaching children those skills and attitudes. Children need to know how to be healthy and safe all the time, and not just when adults are watching.

Discussion Questions

1. What are you already doing well in terms of health and safety in your program?

2. What safety issues do you find most challenging?

3. What health issues do you find most challenging?

4. How would you rate your program's health and safety issues?

5. What is your system for tracking health and safety incidents? How do you analyze information to identify a cause or contributing cause?

6. What is the most important issue that you face with regard to health and safety? How are you dealing with it?

7. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform your current practices related to health and safety? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Supporting health and safety best practices

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to support health and safety best practices in your program.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

Active Play. Self-*learning professional development modules.* Available at http://www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org/content/safe%20active%20play%20slm%20all10-9-08.pdf

American Academy Of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. (2011). *Caring for our children: National health and safety performance standards; Guidelines for early care and education programs. 3rd edition.* Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; Washington, DC: American Public Health Association. Also available at http://nrckids.org

Preventing childhood obesity in early care and education programs. (2010). Developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety. Available from http://www.nrckids.org/CFOC3/PDFVersion/preventing_obesity.pdf

Healthy eating at http://www.mypyramid.gov/

Let's Move at http://www.letsmove.gov/

Liden, C. (2001). *Get balance: The guide to living a balanced healthy lifestyle*. Pittsburgh, PA: Transhealth, Inc.

Playground Information to Use with the Environment Rating Scales. Available as a part of the PA Position Statements from http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/ERS/ERS-SACERS%20Position.pdf .
Based on information from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Handbook for Public Playground Safety, Pub. No. 325 and other national safety guidelines. These guidelines are a basic overview of areas to review when scoring playground and safety items in the SACERS (and other rating scales).

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). (November, 2010). Handbook *for public playground safety, Pub. No. 325*. Retrieved on May 27, 2011 from http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf

Chapter 4: Schedules, Programming, and Transitions

Schedules Support the Mission in Generation Three Settings

When creating schedules and programs, the most critical thing to keep at the forefront of your discussions is the mission of your program. In a Generation Three program, the mission revolves around facilitating positive development in children. A Generation Three mission is the goal—and all the programming and activities are ways to achieve that goal.

No schedule will work for every group of kids. Schedules will always need to be modified to meet the changing needs of the unique children in your care. Change schedules, activities, and routines—but never change the mission.

It is critically important for staff in school-age programs to understand the relationship between space, activities offered, and the program schedule. A well-designed schedule allows staff to provide a quality program that offers an array of diverse activities, experiences, and choices in a well-organized, yet flexible environment. Overall, quality schedules provide a combination of freedom and structure, spontaneity and predictability. How the schedule is designed often determines the extent to which a program achieves its vision of quality programming.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Characteristics of Effective Schedules

In a wonderful mix of children's desires and needs, the physical space, the day's energy levels, and the skills of the staff, we create schedules that help children. Much more of an art than a science, the schedule makers look at a complex web of variables and do their best to create a program that still fills the goals and meets the mission.

In short, an effective schedule is anything that teaches social skills and facilitates positive development in children.

We influence children in three ways: through the environments that we create, the relationships we build, and the experiences we provide. These three areas become the vehicles for promoting healthy children. When we are attentive to balancing all three of these areas, the program is healthy.

The environment is the messages we send to kids through the place—the arrangement of the rooms, the pictures on the wall, or anything that we do without words. If we only emphasize environment, then it becomes clear to children that the adults are in charge, and the child's only role is to be directed by adults.

Relationships are the messages we send to kids through our interactions with them. If we only emphasize relationships, then we just hang around all day. We end up trying to teach social skills out of context.

Experiences are the messages we send to kids through our schedules and programming. If we only emphasize experiences, then we are only looking to provide the latest, newest, coolest activity to entertain kids. Kids can get self-indulgent, leaving tired staff and unsatisfied children.

However, when staff are grounded in a Generation Three mission, they know they need to balance the three vehicles—environments, relationships, and experiences. Balance is the key that puts school-age programs in the prime location to impart children with the skills that they will need for the rest of their lives.

The question is always this: What can we do with our environments, relationships, and experiences to support the positive development of the children in our care?

Guidelines for Scheduling

- The schedule is paced to meet the needs of school-age children.
- The schedule provides simultaneous opportunities for both active and quiet experiences throughout the program hours.
- The schedule is flexible and allow for changes in plans.
- The schedule allows children to choose from a variety of simultaneous, diverse activities and varies from day-to-day: one day choice is early, next clubs, etc.
- The schedule is reviewed to reduce the need for too many transitions.
- Staff are taught the skills to help make transitions smooth, fun, timely, and stress free.
- Clean-up songs trigger a helping mindset and sense of community.
- Line games make moving from one area to another fun and interesting (i.e., Simon Says, memory games, I spy, I'm thinking of someone who, etc.).

- The schedule uses traditions and rituals, which help kids feel connected to the school-age community.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Sample Elements of Programming

- Daily, varied group and individual activities (short-term activities, long-term projects, life skill development)
- Group meetings
- Nutritious, tasty snacks
- Visiting with friends
- Talking one-on-one with staff
- Enjoying private time
- Doing homework
- Special events and program visitors
- Clubs and related activities
- "Down time" for staff to greet and chat with children, monitor routines
- Clean-up activities

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Sample Schedule

3:00 PM	• Arrival/check-in/greeting/store belongings • Self-service snack while visiting with friends and staff • Group meeting to explain afternoon options: outdoor or indoor informal physical activity
3:30 PM	• Group gathering (possible activities: announcement of session activity options, sharing news, reviewing rules or expectations, brainstorming new ideas for projects and activities, discussing or role-playing problems, playing a group game, singing a group song, etc.)
4:00 PM	• Varied activity options: set one (as follows) o Outdoor activities: free choice options and organized games o Indoor free choice: small group and independent activity options o Planned activities (e.g., special art project, science experiment, drama, game, life skill activity) o Club meetings (one or two clubs, staff or child led) o Homework (as needed) o Special visitor (optional; one or two days per week or month) o Community activities (optional; one or two days per week. Scouts, service projects, walking field trips, site beautification projects, etc.)
4:45 PM	• Varied activity options: set two (as follows) o Outdoor activities: free choice options and organized games o Indoor free choice: small group and independent activity options (new or continued) o Club meetings (one or two clubs, new or continued, staff or child led) o Special projects (e.g., individual hobbies, collections, etc.) o Homework (as needed) o Special visitor, continued (optional; one or two days per week or month) o Community activities (optional; one or two days per week, new or continued)
5:20 PM	• Begin end of day clean-up (as needed for various activities)
5:30 PM	• Finish clean-up • Quiet activities • Departure/parent pick up and greetings (if parents pick up)

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Considerations and Issues to Address when Planning Schedules

There are a number of factors that will influence the program schedule. To plan a workable schedule, staff must consider the program's staff-to-child ratio, the type of space available, the layout of the space (floor plan of interest and functional centers), and the kinds of activities that will take place. Effective schedules help all these elements of the program to function harmoniously.

Effective schedules are much more than a general list of activities planned for the day. Planning for quality schedules addresses the following issues:

- WHAT activities, experiences, and routines will happen
- WHEN activities, experiences, and routines will happen
- WHERE activities, experiences, and routines will happen
- WHO will supervise activities, experiences, and routines

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Dangers of Schedules

Anything that's valuable has dangers, pitfalls, and things to watch out for. There are a few dangers of schedules.

Caring more about the schedule than the children.
We are there for the children, not to maintain a schedule. Children must always take precedence. Schedules may need to be changed under many circumstances — such as if the group is bored, if the group is excited about a different thing than what's on the schedule, or even when a child's crisis interrupts the schedule. When our focus is to adhere to the schedule, it becomes more likely that we will miss children's needs.

Relying on a schedule.
If you think finding the right schedule will solve all your problems, then you'll probably be disappointed. While a schedule change can sometimes solve a problem here or there, putting too much faith in a schedule is typically a mistake.

Thinking you've found the perfect schedule.
A schedule might work great for one set of kids for one year, but probably will not be so perfect next year. A schedule that works one month may not work the next month. Children (and adults!) are dynamic and changing, with interests, needs, and energy levels that come and go. Always remember to reevaluate the schedule on a continuing basis.

Preparing a Generation Two schedule.
A schedule that overemphasizes whatever is fun, exciting, cool, and thrilling will work for a day or a week. Afterwards, staff will need to keep cranking up the excitement level to keep kids interested. This will create tired staff and bored children.

Making a schedule for its own sake.
What is the purpose of a schedule? Schedules give us the "experiences" part of the environments-relationships-experiences way to influence children. Schedules help us with balance and with communication. However, we cannot rely on the schedule to do these functions alone. It is also important to realize that an effective schedule is only as good as the staff who manage it, and only as long as it helps children.

Does Your Schedule Have Anchors?

There are various ways to organize your programming. One way is to have something that your schedule revolves around. It's something that keeps a schedule anchored in some way.

Caution: One of the most common anchors is a theme. One week is fire safety week, and so all the activities revolve around fire safety. Another week the theme is "hats," so kids wear hats, make a hat as an art project, etc. While themes are common, and give adults some guidance for activities, there might be more useful anchors for children.

Play skills might be another anchor. In all the activities, we try to have a balance between large motor skills and small motor skills. Staff would think in terms of finding times in the day for all types of motor skills.

Another anchor might be a balance between creative and structured learning. Staff would spend some times in structured, traditional learning, and other times in creative tasks, designed to help children's creativity and curiosity bloom.

Perhaps discovery is an anchor. Everything in the program is about discovering—from discovering how things work to discovering things about other people. Discovery needs to be child-led and child-pursued, in order to make for meaningful learning.

Project-Based Learning Activity

In out-of-school time we want to engage children in project based learning, rather than traditional academic learning. At times a project idea might come from the kids as they learn about things in school. For example, the students in second grade are learning about spiders. They are talking about spiders and are fascinated with the topic. It would be a good idea to have books on the topic in the library. Ask the kids what they want to know and where they want to go with their learning. Some want to focus on the environments that spiders thrive in, others want to explore helpful activities of spiders. Listen to the children, and hear what they want to learn. Be a resource for them. Engage a wider audience. What do the older children know about spiders, and how might they help the younger kids explore their fascination with spiders? Ask the kids what questions they have about spiders—then follow their lead.

If the kids do not have ideas for project-based activities, plant some seeds. See if they are interested in environmental issues, or raising funds for a program, or seeing how much a million of anything looks like.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

Strategies for Easing the Transition from School to the Program

The first fifteen minutes of the afterschool program are critical. During that time, kids should be calmed down and transitioned into the program. Usually, it is better not to rush the kids into more programming. If possible, take some time to laugh with them, make eye contact with them, find out about their day, and listen to their stories. Take your cues from them, while at the same time teaching them to engage in conversations and enjoy the moments.

Respect that kids will have different transition needs. Some will need some time alone to re-energize. Others will need to interact to re-energize. The best tools you have to help with transitions are your eyes and ears. Being a good observer will give you hints about the best ways to help your particular, unique kids transition into the next part of the day.

Don't ever be too busy to greet kids and interact with them. One way to make sure kids get some quality adult contact is to assign a small number of kids to an adult. It's the job of the adult to initiate some contact with each of the kids in his or her small group. The kids don't even need to know about this arrangement, or which group they're a part of. The job of the staff member is to send messages of belonging and significance to the kids on their list. It might be as simple as a fist bump or as deep as a long conversation about their day. Every kid, however, needs and deserves positive adult interaction.

Once routines are established, kids tend to have less issues struggling with transitions. Most kids will eventually get in the flow. For kids who continue to struggle, you might consider pairing them with an older child who can help them stay grounded and connected. Essentially, to the degree we build a strong community with strong relationships and positive interactions, transitions can become adventures rather than obstacles.

Strategies for Easing the Transition from School to the Program

One of the most important transitions is the transition from the school day to the program day. Listed below are general guidelines for supporting children as they enter the program each day.

- Respect the diverse needs among children. Provide varied simultaneous opportunities for children to relax, unwind, burn off pent up energy, chat with friends or staff, have snack or other activities that help children settle in after school (see Sample Schedule).
- Anticipate the needs of children who have difficulty with transitions. Provide individualized support to these children when they arrive before or after school (e.g., help children store belongings, facilitate interactions and friendships with other children, help children find a place to relax and settle in, assist children with making a decision about what to do first, etc.).
- When children come to the program from home in the morning, identify activity options that would help them prepare for the transition to the school day.

Strategies for Managing Transitions During Program Hours

As children change from one activity or experience to another, they often need assistance in making the transition. The following strategies can help children when they are starting or ending an activity, when they are participating in routines such as snack or bathroom visits, and when they are in transit from one activity or routine to the next.

- Provide supplementary short-term self-service activity centers to engage children when they finish activities before others.
- Develop pocket games and activities to facilitate movement from one activity to another or to engage children while waiting.
- Plan to maximize activity when playing games. The overarching goal is to keep all children involved and engaged in games as long as the games continue. Plans lead to greater participation per child, more positive play experiences for both staff and children, and less waiting around.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Strategies for End of Program/Program Close

How do you help children prepare to leave? Staff can help to create a peaceful transition time—a remarkable gift to families!

The mother arrives to pick up her child. The mom is stressed from a long day—her boss yelled at her, and she got a pile of work to do right before she left. She's already hungry, doesn't have anything planned for supper, she has a school meeting later, and she's fought traffic for the last thirty minutes. She arrives and flags down a staff member. The staff doesn't know which room her child is in, and the child's belongings are spread out over three different rooms. It's easy to imagine how a program can add to a parent's stress.

In a different scenario, the mother arrives, and receives a warm greeting from the staff member. The staff member tells the mom which room the child is in. One of the jobs of the older kids had been to station themselves at cubbies to make sure everyone puts their belongings away. Kids put their finished arts and crafts projects directly into their backpacks. The end-of-the-day activities required little or no cleanup. The child had only to grab the backpack and they were ready to go. The transition is easy and peaceful for the child and the parent.

Parents and children spend the parts of the day when they have the most energy apart from each other. Programs and staff can make a remarkable gift to families with a peaceful and easy transition.

Stress-Free Transitions for SAC to Home

In most school-age programs, parents pick children up at the end of the session. The following strategies are helpful in preparing children to make the transition from program to home:

- Greet parents and ask, "How are you doing?"
- Give parents an authentic strength-based comment about their parenting skills such as, "You are really doing a wonderful job of parenting!" Or, "Today Jimmy helped Charlie calm down when he was really upset." The practitioner could provide an example of how the child did something wonderful that day.
- Give children ample notice for ending activities that require extensive clean-up, calm-down time, or take-down procedures before the close of the program.
- Help children gather items to take home so that they are ready when parents arrive to pick them up.
- Provide engaging, no-prop activities and games for children during the last segment of the program; keep children involved in productive experiences until parents arrive.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Summary of Scheduling Considerations

A Generation Three perspective and the mission of your program.
As we've said before, the mission of your program must be central to your thinking as you plan out your schedule. The activities, the field trips, the play time—everything must be strategies make tiny steps toward fulfilling your mission. A Generation Three perspective—that children's positive development is the most important thing—is an important lens with which to view the program.

Before and after school is childhood time.
Childhood time is the time kids need to unwind, to play, to explore, and to spend time with friends. We need to think twice before making before and after school time just another adult-directed set of activities. Kids need time to be kids, and their ideas should help to drive the program. Allow adults to facilitate, rather than direct children 100 percent of the time.

The clock should not run your program.
Learn to be careful observers of kids. Learn to interpret kids' behavior. Sometimes misbehavior of children is simply a way of saying, "I'm bored" (this is also true of adults). Sometimes misbehavior of children is a way of saying, "I need attention." Learn to interpret what kids are really saying beneath their actions. What times are most stressful?

Programming can provide some balance in the children's day.
School days are largely sedentary and isolated from other kids. Recess, if kids get one, is probably twenty minutes or less. Physical education is usually not available every day for kids. Programming for out-of-school time can provide time with friends, play time, exploring time, and time to break a sweat.

Watch for the interests of the kids.
Keep a careful eye out for what your particular kids enjoy. Do they like creating plays? If so, create a stage where the kids can perform and practice. Do the kids like being outdoors? Plan regular time where they can go to a nearby forest or park. Maybe they can adopt a park, or help create a trail, or clean up an area. Work on being good listeners and careful observers of children.

We must always make schedules with the mission in the forefront of our minds, and the needs of the children in our hearts. Good schedules change as the kids change. The process of scheduling, programming, and transitioning is always more of an art than a science. However, good, attentive observers of children will never go too far wrong in their scheduling.

Try This

During your summer program, pretend you're at a restaurant for your meals. Have children sit down at round tables. Have older children act like waiters and waitresses. Have the waiters and waitresses bring a glass of water and juice, and then later take their order. Have staff and older children be the cooks, and prepare the meals and plates. Have a fun, relaxing time.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, describe your program's mission and how it supports positive child development.

2. What can we do with our environments, relationships, and experiences to support the positive development of the children in our care? Which do we emphasize most—environments, relationships, or experiences?

3. Where might our schedule need to be changed to reflect the changing nature of the kids in our program?

4. Based on your observations, which transitions work well and which do not? Why do you think this is? Where might the transitions be improved?

5. How do we effectively communicate our schedule to children, families, staff, and host facilities?

6. How do we use anchors for our schedule? Are they appropriate and useful? What other anchors should we include?

7. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to schedules, programming, and transitions? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Supporting best practices for schedules, programming, and transitions in your program

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to support best practices for schedules, programming, and transitions in your program.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

National Institute on Out-of-School Time (2000). *A place of their own: designing quality spaces for out-of-school time* (Video and Handbook).

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Chapter 5: Using Environments to Support Children

How Do We Affect Children?

The role of the school-age care provider is to help children grow and develop. We can explore three ways that we have an influence on children. We affect children in the environments we create, the relationships we cultivate, and the experiences we provide.

The environment is the physical space—from how the room is arranged to the pictures on the wall. The environment includes color, light, sound, and texture, and always sends messages to kids. The message should be that this is a welcoming, inspiring place for kids to learn. A diversity of toys and games, pictures at eye level, and a welcoming arrangement are components of an environment that can send positive messages to kids.

Unfortunately, environments can send negative messages. If sections of the room are cordoned off, with lots of breakables in the room, the message to kids might be "this is a place for adults, and you better not mess anything up."

When designing and organizing the physical environment, it is important to ensure that the environment respects individual differences among children. Here are some important child-centered considerations when creating the program environment:

- **Interests.** Provide an array of different activity areas (e.g., board and table games, arts and crafts, library corner, dramatic play, music and dance, blocks and construction, science and nature, homework support, group sports and games, and more)
- **Abilities, talents, and skills.** Provide equipment and materials that offer a range of challenges. Organize materials in ways that help children choose activities that are both challenging and achievable for them.
- **Learning styles.** Develop activity centers that allow and encourage children to learn in different ways.

- **Temperament.** Recognize that the level of visual stimulation and sound in the environment may be overwhelming to children who are very sensitive, have difficulty focusing, are easily distracted, tend to withdraw from new experiences, or act impulsively. Think about ways to create environments that are attractive, inviting, and interesting but also send a message that the program is well-organized, stable, and calm.
- **Backgrounds.** Decorate the program with displays reflecting the backgrounds of children in the program. Provide props, music, and other materials that reflect racial and cultural diversity.
- **Ages.** Recognize that school-age children in different age groups have widely varying different interests, needs, and skills. Provide varied equipment and materials that are appropriate for different age groups (e.g., a wide range of board, table, and card games, different types of manipulatives like Legos and K'nex that are suitable for different age groups). Provide special spaces for children of different age groups to gather. Provide areas where older children can help, teach, and mentor younger children.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

A Generational Understanding of Environments

How do we create a welcoming space for everyone?

In your out-of-school time, you have kids of all kinds. Fast kids, quiet kids, those who need intellectual stimulation and those who need to move. You'll have kids who are studious and focused, and kids who need space to build wild inventions and role-play in huge forts. The trick is to create a space that meets the needs of kids, and still is a place where community is fostered. We need to work hard to create a space where adults and kids can work and play together.

In the First Generation of out-of-school time, we wanted to create a safe indoor space for kids. We wanted to make sure that children didn't get hurt while they were in our care. We tried to eliminate anything that might cause the child to get hurt—rickety chairs, bulletin boards that were unsecured, or boxes with toys that were too high for kids to reach. In the First Generation, staff were evaluated on their ability to watch kids and know where all the children were at all times. Space changed little from year to year.

While these were all good things, the Second Generation of out-of-school time added new dimensions to the space. We wanted space that was fun and engaging, where kids could play at one station, and then move to another place. Choice was important and kids' freedom and fun were paramount.

Again, all good things. But in the Third Generation, we want to make sure we understand how the space affects the relationships. We still need a safe place, and we still need engaging and inviting spaces for kids. But we also want to ask how the spaces can help

kids grow. How can we create a space where all kids, regardless of their needs and personalities, can feel welcome?

How Environments Affect Growth and Relationships

Just because children are of the same age doesn't mean they need the same things to help them reach their full potential. Attentive caregivers know that kids need a variety of environments. After a long day of being in school, some kids will need noisy, big areas to run and play. Some kids will need quiet time at a desk to relax and unwind. Some kids will want to play alone, others will want to run with a crowd.

If your out-of-school time program is in a school, it might be useful to think how the space is used during the school day. For example, kids are used to running and shouting in the gymnasium. Do you have trouble getting kids to quiet down in the gymnasium? In the school day, kids often have only a few minutes to eat their lunch, before they run off to their next class. Do you have trouble getting kids to relax in the lunchroom? Think if there is a mismatch between how kids normally use the space, and what you are doing in the space. Sometimes, the physical space gives kids mental images. Are there lots of pictures of people doing wild and crazy things in the quiet space? Is it possible to have quiet pictures in the quiet place?

An out-of-school time program I worked at was in a school building, and we used a large multi-purpose room for our meeting area. After school, kids would check in at a table, and then go down a long hallway, which had three steps down, opening up into the large room. Kids loved running down the hall and leaping over the steps into the room. The adults would remind kids not to run down the hall every day, but no amount of cajoling could stop them.

So we took a closer look at the hallway. The hallway was long and dark, with increasing light as it approached the room. The kids were used to being active in the multipurpose room. The hallway, in fact, looked like a runway. It was incredibly fun for kids to race down the hall, leaping into the room with a "ta da" effect. Recognizing the physical image looked like a runway, and knowing we didn't want children leaping into the room, we simply changed the position of the table. We put the table at the bottom of the stairs, so there was no longer any way to leap into the room. It no longer looked like a runway. While we could have endlessly cajoled and punished kids, a simple change in the physical space eliminated the problem.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

Another aspect to look at is behavior problems. Where do kids get in trouble the most? Take a map of your location and mark down the places where misbehavior occurs. Are there patterns? More often than not, misbehavior occurs at central places. Take a look at those places to see what is contributing to the misbehavior. Often, a simple shift in the furniture or environment can eliminate some of the problems.

Environments have the power to affect behavior of children and staff in both positive and negative ways. When environments are attractive, comfortable, and inviting, both children and staff feel welcome, valued, and interested in what the program offers. Environments that are well-organized, clean, and free of clutter make it possible for children and staff to become engaged in program activities with ease and to function with competence, confidence, and independence. Well-planned environments provide well-defined, comfortable spaces that encourage children and staff to work together in productive ways throughout the program day. They promote a spirit of community that fosters positive relationships.

Environments that are disorganized, messy, unattractive, dirty, barren, uncomfortable, and have no accommodations for personal belongings also send powerful messages to children and staff. These poor conditions are like billboards that announce: "No one cares whether you enjoy being here." "No one cares if you are comfortable here." "No one cares about your health or well-being while you are here." "No one cares about your personal needs or belongings." When these are the messages sent by the environment, it is not surprising when children fail to engage in activities or show a lack of respect for program equipment, materials, facilities and others in the program. When staff receive these environmental messages it is unlikely they will be motivated to plan and implement exciting activities or to perform as professionals who are positive role models for children and families. In these environments, neither children nor staff experience a feeling of community where needs of both individuals and the group are valued.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Arranging Indoor Space

Overall, try to create spaces for different kinds of activities. You probably won't have the space for all of these places all of the time, but if possible, try to have spaces, at least some of the time, for:

- Active areas
- Quiet areas
- Study areas
- Areas for single individuals
- Social areas, for talking quietly
- Areas for kids who want to learn
- Areas for kids who want to role-play
- Areas for kids who want to be spontaneous

Some great ideas for inside spaces are interest centers, where kids can choose to explore a variety of interests. Below are some checklist ideas for some interest centers.

Typical School-age Activity Areas

- Board and table games
- Manipulatives (small construction toys)
- Quiet area (comfort zone with soft items)
- Blocks and construction
- Gross motor (sports, yoga, jump rope, etc.)
- Sand and water
- Arts and crafts
- Dramatic play/theater
- Science/nature/technology
- Homework/computer
- Math/reasoning
- Language/reading/library
- Writing and journaling
- Woodworking
- Music and movement
- Projects and hobbies
- Cooking

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Linking the Environment to Supervision

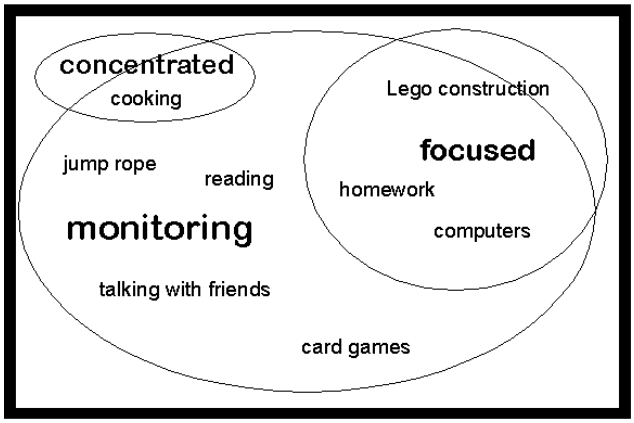
After-school professionals indicate that one of their biggest challenges in working with groups is connecting with individual children and youth. Developing skills to manage quality group activities takes experience, patience, and good observation skills, as well as spontaneity. The key to successful group activities is planning and providing supervision to children and their activities.

One sample way of both planning activities and providing supervision to the program is based on a model with varying degrees of supervision dependent upon the activities being conducted (see graphic on next page).

- **Monitoring** – staff is centrally positioned within visual and hearing range of activities. Staff's attention is focused on the overall safety and supervision of the children.
- **Focused supervision** – staff is within close visual and hearing ranges of two or three different activities; is available for children to ask questions; and may facilitate discussion.
- **Concentrated supervision** – staff is directly involved in the activity due to the complexity of materials, equipment, and tools.

By offering a combination of variety and choice, the program can design activities that require varying degrees of staff involvement. The introduction of a new game may require the direct involvement of staff for a concentrated period of time, but as children become more familiar with the game and the game evolves, staff may be able to step back into a less focused level of supervision.

After-School Program Space

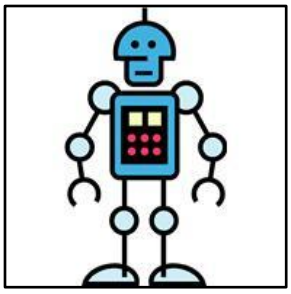


Of course, there are activities that always require concentrated supervision of children. An art, or cooking activity using real tools or heat would require smaller groups and more direct supervision than a drawing activity or a marshmallow sculpture. Instead of trying to work with the entire group all the time, children can work in smaller groups based on their interests or activities. For example, three to four children create a "study group" to work on homework together. Five children sit together and play an exciting, no holds barred game of Uno.

Strategically placing staff within the program offers opportunities to spot restlessness or potential conflict and redirect children to other activities. It also increases the ability of staff to shift gears if an activity is not working well. Teamwork between staff allows staff to move in and out of the supervision levels as the dynamics of the program and activities change.

From *Too much of a good thing: Tips for working with large groups of school-agers* by Diane P. Barber. Published by Southeastern Pennsylvania SACC Project/Montgomery Early Learning Centers.

"AdVentors" Interest Center



Description

The "AdVentors" interest center combines the adventure of discovering new interests with the opportunity to apply these new interest to invent new objects. It could also easily be called the "Imagination Station". The intent of the center is to provide access to materials that prompt exploration with the end result being an invention of sorts. It helps children develop small muscle skills as they learn to use a variety of tools and supplies. The area appeals to school-age children's interest in using real materials and tools to make things that are beautiful, as well as useful in the "real world." For example:

- They can use their imaginations and take personal pride in creating objects such as clothing, jewelry, masks, robots, sculptures, and statues.
- They can use their thinking skills to design, plan, and build many different objects that are used in the "real world" such as: bridges, bird feeders and bird houses; cars, trucks, boats, and planes; or musical instruments to use in other interest areas or at home.

- They can work cooperatively with others to design and build props and stage sets for plays and puppet shows put on by themselves or their friends.
- They can problem solve solutions to designing and creating projects with other children.
- They can talk about what they have achieved or noticed during the process of disassembly, assembly, and creation of a new object.

Recommended Furniture and Equipment

- Sturdy woodworking bench or all-purpose industrial table and size appopriate chairs.
- Shelf or containers for storing supplies
- Acoustic panels to reduce noise levels, if needed

Recommended Materials and Supplies

- Small pieces of wood and wood scraps (preferably soft wood like pine and balsa)
- Large pieces of wood for special projects
- Old appliances with cords removed
- T-square
- Protective eye goggles
- Saws
- Hand drill and bits
- Pliers and wire cutters
- Youth-sized hammers and assorted nails
- Assorted screwdrivers and screws
- Vise grip, bench vise,and c-clamps
- Dowel rods
- Wood glue
- Craft sticks, tongue depressors, tooth picks, and straws
- Bottle caps, wooden wheels, leather scraps, fishing line
- Sandpaper
- Books and kits with instructions for easy projects
- Tri-wall cardboard sheets
- Cardboard from appliance cartons
- Binoculars, magnifying glasses, microscope, telescopes
- Petrie dishes, pestal and mortal, flasks
- Barometer, thermometer, prisms

Safety & Supervision Considerations

- Before children use any tools, show them how to use them correctly and safely. Don't be tempted to substitute for "real" tools – for example, a plastic knife instead of a saw to cut a dowel.
- Involve children in developing a set of safety rules and post them in the area. Talk with children about the consequences if they do not observe safety rules.

- Provide close, concentrated supervision; limit the number of children who can work in the area to ensure children's safety. Provide a sign-up sheet if needed.

Tips for Managing the AdVentors Interest Area

- When locating the AdVentors interest area in the environment, keep it away from areas where quiet activities take place (e.g., quiet area/comfort zone and the library/computer/homework interest area). Also, avoid placing it near other activities associated with higher noise levels (e.g., music area and large movement interest area).
- If possible, locate the AdVentors interest area near the arts and crafts interest area so that children can have easy access to paints, markers, fabric scraps, and many other materials they might like to use to enhance and elaborate on their creations.
- Establish a AdVentors club. Invite parents and volunteers from the community with woodworking skills to visit the program and share their skills with children.

If noise levels from the AdVentors interest area is a serious problem, consider taking the following steps:

- Cover the top of the workbench or taable with carpet to cut down on noise.
- Reserve use of the AdVentors interest area for times when some of the children are outside or in other parts of the building.
- In good weather, move the AdVentors interest area outdoors.
- Use acoustic panels to create a more secluded area for the AdVentors interest area.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

How to Assess Space

Is the physical space meeting the needs of your kids? Here are some different ways to look at space and its effectiveness.

Assessment #1: Important Spaces

Think about the space of your program.

- Do you have a parent area; do the parents find important information and resources helpful?
- Is the snack area clean and inviting?
- Do you have appropriate places for quiet activities?
- Do you have places for large-motor activities?
- Are there places where groups can play together?
- Do you have places where kids can invent new games, or explore new ideas? Are you seeing this happen? Why/why not?
- Do you have interest centers? Is there a process in place for new areas?

Assessment #2: Places for Children

Sketch out the floor plan of your program. You may want a different floor plan, or a different color, for the different ages of your children.

- Which spaces are used most frequently?
- Which spaces are used the least?
- Where do kids create their own play?
- Where do kids hang out and socialize?
- Where does most misbehavior happen?

Assessment #3: Color-Coding Kid-Friendly Spaces

Sketch out the floor plan of your program. Then, color-code the drawing using the following code:

- Blue: Active spaces, large motor spaces.
- Red: Quiet space for two or three kids to visit or play a quiet activity with some privacy.
- Yellow: Activity centers.
- Green: Space for creative activities.
- Orange: Space for homework.
- Purple: Space that can be set up and changed by the children.

After you color-code your drawing, answer these questions.

- Count the number of spaces of each color. Is there a balance?
- Do you have more than one space for each?
- Redraw the space with the changes you would make if you could.
- What do you need to do to make the desired changes?
- What skills would you need to teach the children if you made the desired changes to your program environment?
- Who would you need to talk to make the desired changes?
- Mark an "X" over the problem areas where the most misbehaviors occur. Why do misbehaviors happen there?

Assessment #4: Observing Children

Observe how the children interact within the program environment.

- Are children moving, creating, and exploring?
- Do you see and hear children who are engaged in different elements of the program environment?
- Are children wandering aimlessly?
- Must children ask an adult for items they want to play with?
- Do they create their own play groups?
- Is anyone excluded?

- How does the environment extend the learning in the classroom?
- Can children practice skills of self-discipline?
- Is the environment stimulating enough? Over stimulating?
- What are most of the arguments and conflicts about?

Assessment #5: Children's Needs

Growing Physically

- Does the space offer areas for diverse physical activities?
- Does the space offer a place to rest, relax, and unwind?
- Does the environment offer equipment and materials that encourage children to use small and large muscles?
- Does the space offer equipment and materials that challenge them to develop new physical skills?

Developing Competencies and Skills

- Does the environment provides materials and equipment that provide opportunities to explore, investigate, experience, ask questions, test out ideas, experiment, focus attention, and use imagination and creativity?
- Does the environment provide space and equipment that help children learn and practice new skills through sports, games, clubs, or individual activities?
- Are there materials and equipment available for children to develop arts and crafts skills such as weaving, calligraphy, painting, origami, etc.?
- Do you have complex board games available to promote thinking skills?
- Do you have a homework center that offers materials and equipment to support development of study skills?

Developing Social Skills

- Does the environment offer areas where children can interact as they learn and build social skills such as listening, cooperating, problem-solving, negotiating, compromising, and exercising self-control?
- Do you have clear boundaries in play areas to promote positive interaction among children?
- Are areas available for group meetings?
- Do you have a program environment that provides materials and visual displays that reflect cultural diversity? Example: photographs, posters, and books portray men and women in a wide variety of societal roles; roles depicted are not stereotypical.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does our environment positively influence children's growth and development?

2. How do you identify the strengths and interests of the children in your program?

3. What are the strengths and interests of the children in your program? In what ways does the program environment build on those strengths?

4. What are the unspoken expectations that are reinforced by the room arrangement or design?

5. What aspects of our environment are the best for creating community and social development?

6. What about our environment should be changed? What could be changed?

7. In what ways does our program environment respond positively to various cultures?

8. In what ways does our program environment reflect and celebrate various cultures?

9. What parts of the environment sustain you and which parts of the program environment drain you? Why? Do you think this is the same for the children as well?

10. How could varying the levels of supervision (monitoring, focused and concentrated) assist you in offering different kinds of activities?

11. Using the AdVenture Center as an example to guide your thinking, select an interest area and describe how you would manage it.

12. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to environments? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Focusing on how environments support children

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to focus on how environments support children.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

National Institute on Out-of-School Time (2000). *A place of their own: designing quality spaces for out-of-school time* (Video and Handbook).

Click, P. & Parker, J. (2011). *Caring for school-age children, 6th edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

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Harms, T., Jacobs, E. & White, D. (1996*). School-age care environment rating scale (space and furnishings)*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Kaiser, B. & Rasminsky, J. (2007). *Challenging behavior in young children (Understanding the child's family and culture, preventing challenging behavior with the right physical space and program)*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

PA Position Statements for the SACERS, Keystone STARS from http://www.pakeys.org/uploadedContent/Docs/ERS/ERS-SACERS%20Position.pdf

Chapter 6: Using Relationships to Support Children

The Relationships in a Generation Three Program

There are three ways we influence children. We've been calling it the ERE—Environments, Relationships, and Experiences. We influence children through the environments we create, the relationships that we nurture, and the experiences we provide. This chapter talks about relationships—both the relationship between the adult caregiver and the child, as well as the relationships among the children. When we talk about the children's relationships with each other in the program, we often refer to it as "community."

In a Generation Three program, relationships are always central. Facilitating positive development in children is the mission of Generation Three programs, and relationships are the way that happens. Whether we are an adult or child, warm, positive, accepting relationships help to open our hearts. And it's that open heart that allows us to grow, to mature, and to develop. Cold, defensive, alienating relationships cause us to become cold, defensive, and alone.

In a Generation Three program, the most critical component is a warm, positive relationship between the adult caregiver and the child. Activities are important, toys are important, physical space is important, and schedules are important. However, central to a quality program is a positive relationship between the caregiver and the child. It is the relationship that will have the biggest chance of creating lifelong development.

The next biggest component that will have an impact on the child are the peer relationships in the program. When the group gets the idea that "we are in this together," then they have formed a community. One of our tasks is to actively and intentionally build community.

Unconditional Acceptance

When we are born, we don't know that we are lovable and acceptable. Through the miracle of bonding, we learn to realize that. We need to be convinced that we are lovable

and acceptable. This is not something that is part of our genetic make-up. We need to have others convince us that we are worthwhile people.

The good news is that this is fairly easy to do. It takes just a few adults who send messages of unconditional love and acceptance. When children have this, accompanied by firm but not rigid boundaries on their behavior, chances are that they will grow up to be socially and emotionally healthy.

The bad news is that many children don't get those early messages of love and acceptance. So, they continue to seek that approval. Some kids seek that kind of contact through misbehavior—their misbehavior is actually a misguided attempt at attention from an adult.

Some kids in your programs need those messages, and virtually all kids will benefit from messages like:

- We care about you.
- You are important.
- You're good the way you are.
- I accept you.
- You are valuable.
- I believe in you.
- I trust in you.
- I know you can handle it.
- We are in this together.
- I will listen to you.

These messages are critically important for children. Everywhere in our society, kids get the opposite messages. They are bombarded with messages constantly that say, "You would be more acceptable if you were thinner." "You would be more valuable if you were smarter." "You would be okay if you were prettier." These are called "conditional messages," because they have a condition: "I would like you if…"

Messages that say, "I like you because…" are also conditional messages. If an adult says, "I like you because you are such a good athlete," then the child has to keep winning athletic contests. The child's belief follows, "If I stop being a good athlete, then he won't like me anymore." It's important to give messages without conditions. We can and should celebrate with them when they win the race, but kids really need to know that we like them and accept them whether they win or not.

Our messages of unconditional acceptance are powerful messages that can cut through the conditional messages children constantly hear.

Relationships continue to play a critical role in our life throughout childhood. We tend to learn more from teachers who we like, and tend to learn much less from teachers we dislike. We find role models from the people we like. We don't misbehave as much when we're around adults that we like. When we like the adults we are around, and we believe that they value us, we tend to be more comfortable, more social, and more self-confident.

Why We Build Community

There are three ways we influence children: through the environments we provide, the relationships we nurture, and the experiences we create. Relationships have the most potential for a positive, lasting influence on children. When there are relationships in the whole group, that is what we call a community.

Is there acceptance, appreciation, and trust of others? Do individuals have opportunities to practice these qualities? Then community is being built. How well do the children know and care about each other? Are there some children who are outside the group? Some who are not allowed in? Why? When these questions are answered, community can be built.

As the world changes, this current generation of children will need more tolerance for one another than ever before. Within your program, you probably have a variety of cultures, ethnic groups, and religions present. We have greater needs today to get along well with those of differing backgrounds.

Of course, "tolerance" is only the first and simplest step. We need to move past "tolerating diversity" to "enjoying diversity" and finally to "embracing diversity." Everyone's inclusion—with their dignity intact—is an important goal in our world today. We haven't succeeded until each child has been included and embraced.

On a larger scale, building community includes examining the societal, cultural, and institutional beliefs that create or empower discrimination and prejudice. There are still beliefs and practices that maintain racial and ethnic injustices. As we seek to build community, we need to move past tolerance to work for justice.

Before and after school care programs are a great place to learn and practice all these skills. Learning to live together and play together is a profound gift to children and a necessary skill for their future.

Children need a safety net. Studies show that most children will avoid at-risk behaviors if they have one adult that they know cares for them and wants them to succeed. We must intentionally build social support systems in schools, afterschool programs, and anywhere that kids are found. The students need to know they are not alone—that we are on their side. The messages we send build the foundation that will help the children develop resiliency and other social skills so that they can have a successful future.

Foundations for Building Community

Just having a group together doesn't make a community.

Just putting a group of children geographically together does not make them a community. Relationships make a community. When kids see themselves as part of this group—that "this is our group"—then community begins.

Community involves belonging.
When a sense of community is present, children feel a part of something. They feel a belonging. It is a basic human desire to be a part of something larger than oneself—even if that "larger thing" is just a group of kids after school. We are social beings, and we need people around us who make us feel like we belong.

The success of other initiatives often rests on community.
Many of the programs and skills that we try to provide are most successful when community is present. For example, if you are teaching the skills of conflict resolution—a very worthwhile and important process—but don't have a community, then it's likely children won't care about the new skills. Why bother resolving conflict among people I don't care about? But when the children have a sense of community, the conflict resolution skills become an important part of our life together.

Members help create the community.
Members of the community bring their voices together to create the sense of "us." It might be adults who started the group, but the members are the ones who contribute to how the group is structured. Community is rarely created for people; community emerges when members begin to care about each other.

It is through relationships that we impart life skills.
The relationships that form in a community transmit the skills of coping, conflict resolution, communication, and more. Life skills ride the vehicles of relationships. Without relationships, few life skills can be nurtured in children.

Tips on Building Community

Use homemade rituals and traditions.
Rituals and traditions are routine actions that we do the same each time they happen. For example, many Americans eat turkey on Thanksgiving. This is a ritual—and it lets us know that there is something important about the Thanksgiving holiday. One of the main ways we learn values is through rituals and traditions. Traditions keep us centered and grounded. The traditions don't even have to be elaborate. Programs can create rituals and traditions that are specific to the program. The rituals don't have to be connected to a national or religious holiday. Have an egg drop day. An anniversary celebration for the program. Celebrate the anniversary of the day that each child came into the program. Have a morning song or group game to start off the day. Have a ritual when the schedule moves from one activity to another.

Celebrate rituals and traditions from the children's ancestry.
Find holidays or traditions to celebrate the wide variety of descents, heritages, and beliefs representative of the children in your program. This celebration of diversity can help to build community when children learn to recognize and embrace the diversity in a program.

Create opportunities for dialog and self-disclosure.
Create opportunities for conversation, where children can get to know others and talk to those with whom they wouldn't normally talk. Design the daily schedule to foster community—take the time you need for children to dialog with each other. More time may be required at the beginning of the year, or when new children join the program.

Value the time together. Schools have very structured schedules.
Schools have mandated amounts of time that they must spend on this discipline or that topic. Before and after school programs have the freedom to be different. When adults see that children are having a good time together, perhaps it's worthwhile to extend that time. When children are bored and annoyed with an activity, consider shortening its duration. Never let the schedule run the program. Allow the needs of the children—and the community—to run the program.

Observe children and teach social skills.
No community is perfect. In groups of children, there will always be social skills that are poorly implemented or skills that are simply not known. Observe children carefully. When you see a missing social skill, make note of it. Keep watching—and if your early ideas are confirmed, then consider taking some time to teach that missing social skill. You can teach it directly, or simply teach it on the fly, as children need it. You can also encourage it and acknowledge children when they show the skill.

Value each individual.
In a community, every member is valued. It becomes the job of the adult to ensure that everyone is valued. Teach children how to value all ideas, even if the idea isn't accepted. Support the efforts to bring every child into the group. Encourage children to help incorporate the tangential members. Help each child to find their voice, and develop the courage to use it in the community.

Have fun. Humor binds us together.
Playing together and laughing together are strong bonds in the weaving of community. Showing children that adults can have fun—and still get the job done—is a powerful message about optimism for the future.

Rituals

In our morning meetings, our group would end with a group song. We did this to help the students feel calm and together. One morning we were running out of time and we thought we'd skip the group song. One child overheard this and exclaimed, "But I can't do school without our song first!" It was then we realized that ritual was indeed helping the students feel like they we part of a group.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

The following are examples of strategies school-age staff employ to foster positive relationships and create a positive social climate and inclusive program community:

- Act as a positive role model for respectful communication and behavior.
- Set boundaries for acceptable behavior and communication.
- Promote involvement in cooperative, team-building activities.
- Promote involvement in open-ended activities, projects, and games.
- Provide children with opportunities to shape the program. Involve children in program planning.
- Teach children social skills, social graces, problem-solving skills, and conflict management skills.
- Help children see mistakes as opportunities to learn.
- Acknowledge, interact with, and exhibit genuine caring for each individual child. Inquire about children's interests and concerns. Look for opportunities to have informal conversations with children.
- Engage staff and children in opportunities to participate in respectful interactions and group meetings where they have opportunities to learn self-discipline, cooperation, responsibility, resilience, resourcefulness, problem-solving skills, and other social and life skills.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Two Keys to Healthy Relationships: Nurturing and Boundaries

The key relationship in a school-age program is between the adult caregiver and the child. When we have a healthy, positive relationship with children, we can go a long way to impart social skills and nurture the positive development of the next generation. Research suggests that growth in academics, maturity, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving are built from the foundation of warm, healthy relationships.

Children need adults in their life. They don't need adults who have the maturity of children. It is important that adults remain adults. If the adult loses their "adultness" and becomes a child, then the adult will be unable to set boundaries and discipline children. Adults can and should have fun with kids, be silly with kids, laugh and play with kids—but they still must be the adults.

A way to look at the role of the adult is in terms of nurturing and setting boundaries. In order to have a warm, positive relationship, the adult needs to do two tasks: nurture children and set boundaries for children.

Key #1: Nurturing Children
Nurturing children involves everything we do to build children up. We support them, we encourage them, and we comfort them. We dialog with them, we play games with them, and we laugh with them. Any interaction that is meant to be warm, positive, and supporting is a nurturing behavior.

Picture the spectrum of nurturing: On one end is too much nurturing, and on the other end is too little nurturing. In the middle is healthy nurturing, which is what we aim for. On the "too little nurturing" end of the spectrum, the adult is cold, aloof, and doesn't notice when the child is sad or happy. On the "too much nurturing" end, the adult is constantly goopy and syrupy, always babying children and rescuing children. In the middle is healthy nurturing, where we are attentive to their mood and disposition, and we work to build them from where they are. When they cry we sit with them, when they succeed we high-five them. When they are in a good mood we laugh with them, and when they are in a bad mood we are patient with them. These nurturing behaviors are in the "just right" part of the spectrum.

Key #2: Setting Boundaries for Children
Humans are natural boundary-pushers. It's built into our DNA. It's the reason that we've explored the ocean depths, the polar ice caps, and the moon. So, it should come as no surprise that children sometimes push boundaries. These children are not trying to be nasty, they are just doing what comes natural to all humans.

Again, picture the process of setting boundaries as a spectrum line, with "too strict" on one side and "too lenient" on the other side, and the effective, healthy setting of boundaries in the middle. On the "too strict" side, the adult will demand strict obedience, no matter what the cost. Control is the ultimate goal, and keeping those misbehaving kids in line is the objective. Studies show that children who endure strict discipline grow up with a lot of personal and interpersonal problems.

On the "too lenient" side of the spectrum, the adult lets children run wild, and rarely does anything. The adult is laissez-faire or hands-off, and doesn't want to set or enforce boundaries.

In the middle of the spectrum is effective, healthy boundary setting. Adults here follow through on enforcement, calmly and respectfully. They have reasonable but firm boundaries, and have reasonable consequences for misbehavior.

Children who have been nurtured and taught boundaries will display a remarkable sense of resilience. Resilient children bounce back from adversity and stress. Non-resilient children get hit with stress or bad news, and they can wither away into depressive moods or helplessness. Resilient children are more apt to come back fighting, to see the hope in situations, and to have the courage to keep on keeping on.

Tips on Setting Boundaries

Kids who misbehave are trying to get their own needs met. They are not trying to push your buttons. They are not trying to be nasty or evil. Kids who misbehave are trying to get a sense of belonging, or a sense of value, or get noticed. However, they are trying to get those needs met in a dysfunctional way. Of course we need to enforce the boundaries, but

if we can figure out what the child needs, and help them get their needs met in a more effective way, then the problem behavior may go away altogether.

Boundaries are better if everyone helps set them.
In many cases, the whole community of adults and children can set the boundaries together. Adults can ask the kids, "What boundaries are needed so we can play and live together happily?" "How will this rule help?" "What behaviors are we trying to stop?" "What behaviors and consequences are negotiable?" There is less argument when the community sets the boundaries and the consequences.

The goal is self-discipline, not punishment.
We want kids to learn self-discipline, so that they will behave appropriately all the time, not just when an adult is watching. One of the tricks children (and adults!) do is to avoid responsibility. Children have ways to keep adults in charge, so that they can absolve themselves of responsibility. In fact, most children have been taught over and over that adults are the final word on behavior (e.g., "Because I said so!"). So, children have ways to put the adults back in charge. When we say, "Tommy, you threw the rock. What is the rule about throwing blocks?" Tommy will frequently say, "I don't know," rather than admit he knows. If the adult replies, "Well, why don't you sit there until you remember what the rule is," then Tommy will probably remember the rule very quickly. The goal is always for the child to take the responsibility that is theirs.

Consequences should be expressed calmly and respectfully.
If we get angry, then it's the adult who is in charge again. It's helpful to phrase it in terms of the child's choices. "I'm sorry you chose to throw the blocks, but you know what the consequences of that are, right? So, you are choosing the consequences." That interaction can be done calmly and respectfully, and as such the child has little room to maneuver out of the responsibility. If we become angry, then the consequences become punishment, and punishment breeds a desire for revenge.

Setting boundaries should always be done in the context of community.
In a community, no one is successful unless all are successful. The reason for rules and boundaries is so the community can live and play well together. Crowd control is not the goal; living peaceably together is the goal.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe what you are doing to effectively cultivate/build community in your program.

2. Are we more attentive to nurturing or boundary setting? Give examples. What can we do to be more nurturing?

3. When it comes to boundary setting, do the adults err on the side of being too strict? Too lenient? Or are they just right? How do you know?

4. What strategies do you use to build relationships? What else can you do?

5. What are three things we could do to create more community?

6. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to relationships? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Focusing on building relationships in your program

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to focus on building relationships in your program. .

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

California Tomorrow. *Equity and Diversity in Afterschool and Youth Programs Initiative*. http://www.californiatomorrow.org/publications/print/index.php?cat_id=3

Click, P. & Parker, J. (2011). *Caring for school-age children, 6th edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Derman-Sparks, L. & Edwards, J. O. (2009). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Haber, J. & Glatzer, J. (2007). Bullyproof *your child for life*. New York, NY: Perigee Trade.

Henderson, N. (2007). *Resiliency in action: Practical ideas for overcoming risks and building strengths in youth, families, and communities*. Ojai, CA: Resiliency in Action, Inc.

Jenson, W., Rhodes, G. & Reavis, H. K. (2010). *The tough kid toolkit, 2nd edition*. Eugene, OR: Pacific Northwest Publishing.

Kaiser, B.& Razminski, J. (2008). *Challenging behavior in elementary & middle school*. Allyn & Bacon.

Search Institute. http://www.search-institute.org
The Search Institute seeks to help families, schools, and communities make the world a better place for kids.

Seligson, M. & Stahl, P. (2003). *Bringing yourself to work: A guide to successful staff development in after-school programs*. New York, NY: Teacher College Press, and Boston, MA: National School-Age Care Alliance.

Chapter 7: Using Experiences to Support Children

Experiences in a Generation Three Program

There are three ways we influence children: In the environments we provide, in the relationships that we nurture, and in the experiences we create.

In a Generation Three program, experiences are all the things that we do with children. Are we doing art and drama, science, free play, clubs, and groups? What's on the schedule that the children will experience?

Experiences are opportunities for learning and growth. And so the single most important question of experiences is this: Does your program keep kids busy, or does your program help kids grow?

With the experiences we provide for children, we need to look at the short term as well as the long term. What will help children today, but also what will help children in their future? What kind of experiences can we give them today that will give them the skills they need for the long term?

Does your program provide experiences for the short and long term for children? Does it provide for kindergarteners as well as older children? Does it provide experiences for children who are developmentally self-focused as well as those who want to contribute to the world and make lasting changes? These are no easy tasks!

Drawing On Our Own Experiences

When adult staff draw on their own experiences of growing up, it can be a powerful way to enhance the experiences we provide. Think about and complete the following statements:

- My favorite place to play as a kid was…
- When my friends and I looked for adventure we…
- The scariest thing I ever did was…

- The funniest thing I ever did was…
- The silliest prank I ever played was…
- My favorite group game was…
- The thing I wish adults knew about me then was…

These thoughts can certainly be a source of ideas for things to do in the schedule. But more importantly, think how these things made you feel. What kind of emotions did you have as you did these? What did you learn? How did the experience help you grow? What were the good memories—and why were those memories good?

These questions can be a source of "emotional ideas" for kids. In other words, how can the staff plan activities that will recreate the same kind of emotions? What activities can help the kids grow? How can we recreate for children the positive feelings we adults had when we were kids?

Making Use of the Community for Experiences

Throughout all of human history, kids have generally lived in multigenerational settings. These settings allowed kids to watch older children and adults, giving them important role models for learning social skills. In today's world, school-age programs are often the only place kids are in a multi-age setting. In these settings, kids have opportunities to watch social skills in action—how to delay gratification, how to be leaders, how to practice patience. Younger kids can learn that not only adults can help them, but older children can be helpers, too. This is the beauty of community.

Same-age grouping has a few benefits, too. The presence of other kids with the same level of social skills can make some kids push harder. They might think more deeply, take more risks, work harder to get along with peers, and make lasting friendships.

Experiences are better created when the community of children participates. When we get ideas from everybody, the experiences are typically more varied and often more fun. You might want to put together a team of children who will express the needs for the program. Have them share their perspectives about what is working well in the program and what is not.

We can also create experiences that develop community. We help to weave community when kids get to know each other and care about each other. Community happens when we become aware of the needs, feelings, and thoughts of others. As children develop the skills of community building in their program, they become better able to think of the needs of the community at large—and even the world.

We have an excellent opportunity to help kids practice those skills. Learning to care about each other is great practice for learning to care in the world.

Some ideas for large group activities that can incorporate everyone in the program:

- Write a song together, with smaller groups writing their own verse.
- Write a story together, with smaller groups writing their own chapter.

- Provide opportunities for children to help each other with homework, with playtime, or with interpersonal issues.
- Create a reality show, like Survivor—but no one survives unless we all survive.
- Create a big brother, big sister program.
- Create program rituals, like send-off parties when children go on to middle school.
- Make some clubs a rite of passage—kids have to wait to join until they're a certain age.
- Make kids responsible for morning announcements, group meetings, explaining schedule opportunities, and preparing for events.
- Create talent shows or performances for the children (or their parents!). Have older children serve as waiters, bringing food to the "audience."

After reading this list, try creating a list that you know would interest the children within your community.

Some Ideas for Experiences in Art and Drama

The arts provide a way for children to express themselves in visually, musically, and theatrically. These experiences could be offered via free choice where adults lead, or where children self-lead. It can be as simple as drawing and scribbling or as complex as developing a musical.

With the arts, you don't need a rulebook. In fact, the arts are better without rules. Let the adults and children wander down the creative road with only their curiosity. While adults can give guidance in how to use the supplies, it is better to play with art than to direct art. Give children a blank sheet of paper rather than a coloring sheet. Give them a clown mask rather than a directors' cap.

Many adults think that they are unprepared or unable to teach art projects, drama, or other similar activities. But the process of teaching kids to be creative is not so difficult. Here are a few tips to help children excel in the arts.

- Teach children that they cannot get it wrong.
- Limit choices and supplies. This forces them to share and take turns.
- If you have one sample—show it then put it down. If you have ten samples—leave them up, let kids explore.
- Don't worry if kids copy a project from the sample. Artists do it all the time. In fact, they go to college and spend years learning to copy the great masters.
- Be dramatic and expressive. Sing songs and make up songs. Sing loud.
- Laugh out loud. Be exuberant. Show your soul. Have fun.
- Teach that play isn't something you just do in the gym or on the playground. Play is something you do while experimenting with art and drama, as well. You can even play while cleaning up.

- Choose projects that are open-ended and process-oriented.
- Teach children how to set up their workspace, care for materials, and clean up.

Children learn how to express themselves through the arts. It gives them a voice, an identity, and a language. It allows them to discover, explore, create, and pretend. Through pictures and stories, the arts help us to understand our world. Studies show that the arts can also help children learn to take the perspective of another, and in so doing develop empathy. The arts can help children learn to express emotions and ideas.

One final thought about expression: The human brain needs to work, to solve puzzles, to grow by doing new things. True artistic expression can accomplish those things. However, giving out pre-made sheets to color or filling in answers on worksheets doesn't push the brain. In order to stimulate creativity, the brain needs to do the work. So, instead of pre-made coloring sheets, maybe ask them to create their own templates, which they (or someone else) can color in.

Some ideas for experiences in drama, art, and literature:

- Provide a drama corner and change the themes each month.
- Have a drama club, and let the club develop their shows and sets.
- Ask the staff to perform skits for the whole group.
- Encourage talent shows where children develop their own presentations for the whole community.
- Provide story-telling opportunities. Create your own stories or use events that happen within the program to tell a story.
- Bring a favorite book to life—one or more children could narrate a story while the others act it out.
- Write a script and make a movie with a video camera.
- Have kids create a magic show.

Some Ideas for Experiences in Science

Science learning and school-age programs are a great fit. Our programs often have more time and freedom to create experiments and watch them progress. Kids can learn better how the world works, and how things have an effect on other things. Kids can ask "I wonder what would happen if…" Hopefully, kids will learn to ask the next questions about how to make the world a better place. Curiosity is a critical component of science, and school-age programs are a great place to cultivate curiosity.

Science is about observing an experiment. Discuss beforehand what the kids think will happen in the experiment. Allow plenty of time for that observation, and then discuss it afterwards. What did they see? What did they think would happen? Did it? It is common for children to get excited about tangential questions while doing an experiment. When possible, follow their lead and their interests. Never get so committed to the experiment that you think would be interesting, that you can't follow *their* interests.

In science, questions are the starting point. You may or may not have answers to the questions. You might have to design an experiment that will answer the question. In fact, it's better if you don't have all the answers—then the children can find out for themselves. Good science is about asking interesting questions, and then creating a way to answer that question.

Some ideas for science experiments:

- Find a dust ball under some furniture, and look at it through a microscope. Figure out what's in dust.
- Grow plants in different conditions. What will happen under high or low light? High or low temperatures? Different kinds of soil? Will plants grow with a weak electric current running through them?
- Why don't oil and water mix? Do they ever mix? Under what conditions might they not separate?
- Can you make quicksand in a sandbox?
- Stand at the top of the stairs with a toy person and try to make it float down with a parachute. What fabrics work and why? What has to happen for a parachute to work?
- How long does water take to freeze? Which freezes quicker—cold water or hot water? Do different liquids take different times to freeze? Why?
- Why do some paper airplanes fly and others crash?
- Can you make your own static electricity? Can you measure static electricity like you would the charge of a battery?
- Can you make musical instruments out of objects from around the room? Can you find enough instruments to create a symphony?

The limit is the blue sky! In fact—that's another one: find out why the sky is blue!

The only thing you need to begin a process is to have a question that is interesting for kids.

Some Ideas for Experiences in Fitness and Sports

Before and after school child care is a great place to engage in fitness and physical education activities. We often have the time and space for kids to run, jump, and play. In a society where far too many children are overweight and underfit, anything to get kids moving is welcome. We can help kids learn sports skills. More importantly, we can help kids learn the skills of sportsmanship, fairness, and teamwork. Perhaps most importantly, we can teach kids the role of fitness, and how to care for their own bodies.

Studies show that exercise not only builds healthy bodies and burns calories. It also makes kids more alert and attentive. Kids are better learners when they have had exercise. When kids sit too much, as they tend to do during the school day, they can get lethargic and irritable (this is also true for adults). Exercise puts people in a better mood, with their mind more attentive and their body healthier.

Some ideas for fitness and sports:

- Teach children how to play hard—for fun!
- Teach the correct way to throw, run, and perform other basic sports skills.
- Provide kids with plenty of opportunity to practice new skills.
- Provide non-competitive ways to have fun learning and using the skills.
- Make sure children have time to get plenty of water before and after exercise.
- Teach them a new game, and then change the rules of the game every few minutes. Warn them that this will happen!
- Have sports camps—a whole day where kids can learn and practice sports skills.
- Teach them new games frequently.

Part of our opportunity with kids is to teach them the skills of health and fitness. If we teach them those skills, it will be a lifelong gift. If adults don't teach those skills to children today, we will have another generation of children who are unhealthier and have shorter life expectancy then their parents.

Often parents have to choose between having their child home alone or in a program that supports active social development of their child. We need to be about improving the quality of health and the quality of life for those in our care. And that includes knowing how to play ball.

Some Ideas for Experiences in Leadership Skills

As children grow up in the program their role often needs a shift. To ensure they keep growing, they may need to move from participant to a more active leadership role. They may need to make more contributions to the overall program. This is a great way to help kids learn important, lifelong skills.

Not every child wants to be a leader, and not every child has the skills to be a leader. One way to start the process is to identify those children that might make good leaders. Observe the kids carefully. Being loud and bossy are not leadership skills. The best leaders are those who are thoughtful and those who care about others. Those who care about the experience of others will typically make good leaders.

Select those children. You might want to pair them up with an adult mentor or an older child. Then, teach them leadership skills, and give them opportunities to practice those skills.

Some ideas for growing children's leadership skills:

- Have them plan a tournament for a favorite game.
- If you plan by themes, have the leadership kids plan games or activities that matches the theme.
- Let them pick, plan, and lead an art project each week.

- Give them choices about ways they can be a helper, set up snack, hold doors, or help with lines.
- Have them help the younger children with homework or other tasks.
- Have them read to younger children.
- Have them help put out supplies and arrange the equipment for the day.
- Teach the leadership kids how they can help the younger kids (i.e., don't do the tasks for the younger kids; help them help themselves).

Not every child will have the skills to be a leader at the present time. In the same way, not all adults have the skills to work with children who want to be leaders. These adult mentors need a different skill set than simply working with kids. The adult mentors need an extra measure of patience, because kids who are learning leadership roles don't always perform the skill well. Adult leaders need to be able to see the child who knows a leadership skill but hasn't had the practice to perform the skill well. The adult mentor needs to help children grow in their assertiveness, confidence, and leadership skills. It takes time, and the skills often don't come out looking pretty. The adult mentor needs to recognize the awkward skills, and look forward to the future to see the potential of the child.

The adult mentor has to coax new skills out of the developing leader children. Above all, the adult mentor needs to guide while still maintaining the children's dignity. Adult mentors who work with developing leaders might try these things:

- Be a coach. Stand on the sidelines and give direction.
- Remember that each child is an individual with different strengths and interests. Get to know each child, find out his or her interests, and include these in programming.
- Allow natural roles to emerge. Guide and teach as needed.
- Show respect at all times. Show that you trust the children.
- Listen. Listen to them talk. Listen to their ideas and thoughts. Remember things they tell you.
- Remind them that the program is a community. All kids are important.

Some Ideas for Experiences in Clubs and Groups

Discovery Clubs

Discovery clubs are child-led, adult-facilitated groups. The children can define the club and what it means to be part of it. This helps meet their need for ownership, while building a sense of belonging and significance.

Discovery clubs are organized and purposeful groups of children and adults working together to discover, create, and develop adventures true to the club's purpose. So while children define the group and give leadership to the group, an adult works with the group to keep it on track.

An example of a discovery club (for a program in a school building) might be kids who want to help their teachers after school. Kids could contact teachers to see which ones need help. A schedule of which kids should help which teacher could be created. Regular meetings, with the help of an adult, could keep the group on track. This kind of group not only helps the teachers, but it helps the kids learn responsibility and other skills.

Begin a club by discussing the purpose of the club. Then, give kids an opportunity to figure out what skills are needed to ensure the club's effectiveness. You might have the group come up with a mission statement or a list of duties. The kids could brainstorm ideas for activities and things the club could do. After the group has a good list, let them vote on their favorite ideas. Then plug their favorite ideas into the calendar and begin planning.

Quest Time

Quest time is simply time where children can choose their own learning task. Children are allowed to explore, create, and dabble at a variety of choices. As you observe the children or chat with their teachers or parents you will uncover many new and exciting interests of the children. Then, quest time becomes an opportunity for children to explore their understanding of the world. Typically, an adult would accompany the group to teach the children the skills they need to further explore the issue.

Possible quest time activities could be anything that interests children. It could be puzzles or chess clubs. It could be movie making or some kind of film creation. It might be drama centers with changing themes and props (settings might be restaurants, post offices, travel centers, or banks). Quest time could be learning, planning, and action on how to save the rainforest or create a park in the community. It might be a fitness group, a sports group, or a drawing club.

It's useful to teach others about quest time and what the children are learning. You might take photos and put them up for parents to see. You might submit articles to the local newspaper. You might post the pictures on the program's website. If the project is oriented to some kind of service in the local community, you might tell the mayor or city council—maybe they will award the children with a plaque or some other kind of recognition.

Summary

One of our tasks, of course, is to provide children in our programs with the appropriate activities and experiences. But the most important question is, "Why do we do what we do?" Are we working to keep kids busy? Or are we providing experiences that will nurture relationships and lifelong skills?

With all the things that go on in the course of the program, it's easy to get focused on the short-term. However, it's important to remember that those short-term things have a purpose: to facilitate positive development in children. Everything we do in before and after school care should be a piece of that purpose.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways does your program plan experiences for all kids? How do you ensure all age groups are considered?

2. Go back to the section "Drawing on our own experiences." Talk through the questions. What did you do and how did it make you feel? What did you learn? What were the good memories and why?

3. Describe how your program gets input from the whole community of children on experiences and activities.

4. What are the favorite activities of the children?

5. In what ways have you provided leadership opportunities for kids in your program? How are you consistently intentional about providing these opportunities (formal or informal)? What kind of discovery clubs or quest time might go well in your program?

6. In what ways might we improve our planning to be more attentive to the long-term development of children?

7. Go back to the bulleted list in the section, "Making Use of the Community for Experiences." From what you know of your children, continue the list so that it makes sense with your particular group.

8. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to experiences? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Focusing on how experiences support children

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to focus on how experiences support children.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

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Chapter 8: Promoting Staff Collaboration, Creativity, and Communication

Working with Staff in a Generation Three Program

Leaders and administrators don't just have to manage children. They have to manage the adult staff, too. And more than just "manage"—leaders have to encourage staff collaboration, facilitate staff creativity, and create a place where communication happens freely.

In a Generation Three program, staff feel empowered to work with children and help them grow. In a Generation Three program, staff get along well, communicate constantly, solve problems collaboratively, and foster each other's creativity. When staff members respect each other and work well together, children see the joy of working together. Staff members who work and play well together become powerful role models for the children in their care.

Managing Your Staff

Most people in organizations today are overmanaged. When leaders are paranoid or fearful, they overmanage and micromanage their staffs. This creates a terrible boredom among workers. They lose motivation, they lose the excitement and zest they once had, and they simply go through the motions. When staff are overmanaged, they lose their will to collaborate; they have no use for creativity or communication. Someone else will take care of it, they reason, so why bother? Why bother caring when someone else overmanages me?

Below are some tips to avoid overmanaging or micromanaging. This not only shows staff you care and you trust them, it fosters a zest for the job. When adult caregivers want to be there, and enjoy being there, they are invariably good for kids.

Respect, trust, and honor your staff.
Show them that you respect them. Always. Relentlessly. You can trust them with decisions, you can trust their perception of things, you can praise them in front of children—but always seek to respect, trust, and honor them. Truly care about your staff, or get out of the business. Suspicion, retribution for bad decisions, and not being authentic will create an atmosphere of disrespect and distrust.

Don't hoard decisions.
Allow staff to make the decisions that affect them and the children in their care. In the best-run companies, top-level managers resist making decisions. They want front-line people to make the decisions that will affect them. It's almost as if decisions go out in search of someone who will make them. Spread the decision-making out—and whenever possible, allow the staff member closest to the issue make the decision.

While many leaders agree with this idea, the rubber hits the road when the decision-maker makes a decision that the leader doesn't like. A horrendous mistake leaders make is allowing staff the freedom to make decisions only until they make a decision the leader doesn't like. Then the leader takes back the decision-making power (this is called choker-chain management). This style will bring an end to anyone making a decision.

Learn how to work with them.
You can never rely on one leadership style to manage everyone. Great leaders work hard to see the strengths of people. They don't try to put people in positions; they find people with a great talent and put people where they belong. Each of us has a unique set of skills, talents, and blind spots. Great leaders take advantage of those unique skill-sets, rather than employ cookie-cutter approaches to management.

Listen, listen, listen.
Unfortunately, many leaders like the sound of their own voice. Great leaders listen to others, even when the messages are uncomfortable to hear. They listen to others, even when they disagree with the message. Listening doesn't mean you will act on every message, or that you believe every interpretation. However, it does mean that others will know they will find in you a listening ear.

It's also important to listen to what is not said. Careful attention to small clues can give great insight. How do the adults in your charge joke about things? Is the subtle message of their jokes that they are tired or angry? What kinds of things do the children say to each other? What kind of non-verbal atmosphere is present in group meetings? This kind of "listening" is called environmental scanning, and it is a critical piece of information.

Sweat the small stuff.
Crises and huge problems never come out of the blue. They are always a result of tiny, usually unnoticed problems that build up over time. If enough of those unnoticed problems line up and interact, we have a crisis, and then we exclaim, "Where did that come from?" The problem is that we never saw the signs.

Usually, when we have a tiny problem, we thank our lucky stars that it wasn't worse, and then go on with our business. It's better to examine that problem to find out why it happened. Treat every small problem as a window into the workings of your organization. Find out why it happened, and what you can do to make sure that tiny problem doesn't escalate.

Be comfortable with a diversity of thoughts and ideas.
School-age care providers are typically comfortable with controlled chaos when it comes to children. But often we have trouble with a diversity of ideas. Too often, we want everyone to think alike. Counter-intuitively, this breeds stagnation and a slow discomfort with the way things are.

Surround yourself with people of different ethnic backgrounds, different educational backgrounds, and different ways of thinking. Don't surround yourself with like-minded people. Choose lots of diversity to get a lot of new ideas and new perspectives. Be comfortable with a diversity of thought, and teach others to do this.

Strategies for Promoting Collaboration, Communication, and Teamwork

Creating a quality infrastructure for school-age programs requires collaboration and close communication among program staff. Listed below are some ways program managers can give staff the support and guidance they need to work together as an effective, performing team.

- Provide training and materials that help staff develop a commitment to the program's philosophy, vision, mission, and goals.
- Provide time and space for staff planning and teamwork.
- Provide staff with a wide range of resources to use as they develop plans for daily, weekly, and monthly activities—activity books, research-based articles and books, DVDs, etc.
- Provide staff with guidance and tools for creating daily and weekly plans—planning sheets, calendars, activity evaluation forms, and other forms related to programming.
- Set expectations for effective, cordial communication and cooperation among staff.
- Encourage staff to plan for and play diverse roles while working with children and colleagues (e.g., activity leader, play facilitator, helper, participant, problem-solver, mediator, observer, listener, collaborator, teacher/mentor, role model, coach, cheerleader, etc.).
- Provide opportunities for professional development and leadership on an ongoing basis—program sponsored workshops, state and national conferences, seminars and institutes sponsored by local or state organizations or agencies.
- Create a program environment that incorporates areas where staff can store personal belongings and organize program information and materials appropriately.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

What is Collaboration?

Collaboration is when people work together to solve problems, create strategies, or to manage a project. Collaboration is best when people respect each other and recognize each other's strengths. Collaboration is bound for failure when individuals have an alternate agenda, or refuse to acknowledge each other's skills.

Collaboration usually produces better results for complex projects. However, it's not very efficient. It takes a lot more time, and discussion often wanders and people often get off track. Managing a collaborative session is often like herding cats—it takes patience and a recognition that when human beings discuss something, it gets off track. In fact, the closer a group is, the faster they shoot off track.

Still, collaboration is almost always preferred, even with its inefficiency. Collaboration brings people closer, creates interpersonal bonds, and provides solutions that are more effective.

Managing to Encourage Collaboration

We are always on the lookout for something that is the latest, newest, coolest activity to entertain the kids. Staff attend workshops seeking to learn about one more activity, and spend their funds buying "idea" books. This can become a preoccupation with fun activities, which is a Generation Two view of child care.

How do we move beyond a preoccupation with activities? How do we move forward, as a staff, into Generation Three thinking? How do we support each other's growth? Do we have the skills as a staff to create a program that focuses on growth? Do we have the desire to grow? Do we understand that the more skills we have the better we will be able to help the children?

We can accomplish these things through collaboration. When we work together for a common cause, we can accomplish anything. We collaborate best when we understand our purpose with children, and when we know our role with children. Collaboration allows us to work with intensity and intentionality as we create a program that meets the needs of children.

Observation is one of the best tools of the collaborator. When we get together and share observations, we can better understand which skills kids have, and which skills need work. We can observe who plays with whom, what toys attract the most children, which areas are getting too crowded, and whether children have the skills to continue to play within that space.

We are all teachers of life and social skills. We take what we learn from our observations and decide what changes are needed in the environment, the relationships, and the experiences.

Collaborating on Observations

We are at our best when we can use our senses to notice and become aware of our environment. It is even better if we can incorporate children's perceptions and observations to inform our understanding of what is going on in our program. When we share these observations with each other and then make plans, we can become better teachers, guiders, and nurturers. We can watch children play, and observe the children interacting. The idea is to look for repeating patterns of interaction—what kind of interactions keep replaying? We can also look for social skills and see what is being displayed and what is not.

The purpose of observation is not to judge or label children. We need to look beyond the negative and see the positive. We need to see how the environment, relationships, and experiences affect the children.

Tips and ideas for observing:

- Look for skills of problem-solving (or lack of those skills). Don't intervene unless it's absolutely necessary.
- Look for skills of conflict resolution (or lack of those skills).
- Consider the attitudes of the children.
- Observe the children's breathing. Are they tense or stressed?
- Notice what kind of mood the children are in. Chat with them and engage them. Do the same for parents.
- Be aware of what's going on and the connection between a child and the environment, experiences and relationships with other children and adults.
- Watch interaction between children.
- Write down notes for parents and teachers.
- If you're in a school building, talk to the children's teachers.
- Go to outside activities and see how the kids act.
- Have staff in all areas of the room and compare notes from different vantage points.
- Watch to see what children's interests are.
- Notice how new experiences and schedule changes affect the child.
- Observe body language.
- Note time of day of misbehavior and keep a log to see if a pattern emerges.
- Play games and activities with children and see how they react and interact.
- Participate in activities, to get a close up look at kids.
- Watch how the children and parents interact.
- Watch transition times. Do patterns emerge?
- Watch for how children express their feelings.
- Do not rush to intervene at the first sight of interpersonal conflict (unless safety is an issue). Allow the children to problem-solve and work through the issue on their own.

- Observe children to identify what makes them unique. Use this information to plan activities, provide materials, converse with them about it.

What is Creativity?

Creativity is thinking of new solutions to problems. Typically, this comes from seeing the problems in a new way. Creative people bring a new perspective to an issue—they ask new questions.

Creative solutions often come from bringing knowledge from a different discipline. Bringing the perspective of an artist to a business problem. Bringing the perspective of a database designer to a public policy problem. A famous example was when an American car company was frustrated with the slow process in reporting problems on the assembly line. They brought in people from the Centers for Disease Control—famous for quickly clamping down on deadly viruses—to help them design a new process.

Creative thinking is different than random thinking. Random thinking is simply ideas that are "outside the box." Creative thinking has a focus—it's very purpose-driven. Creative thinkers come up with new solutions or new perspectives to the problems at hand. Random thinkers simply come up with new ideas, which may or may not fit the issue.

Managing to Foster Creativity

Adventure, flow, and serendipity breed creativity. Creativity facilitates a bigger worldview, and thus better problem-solving abilities. Creativity builds curiosity and a desire to learn. Creative people explore.

Knocking people out of their routine (if it's in a fun way) breeds creativity. Do unexpected things. Make people laugh with unexpected gifts, notes, or activities. Create an atmosphere where people laugh a lot.

Be aware that creative people are sometimes hard to manage. They do things differently, in their own way, in their own time. Sometimes managers need to give creative people a broader space with which to work. If the manager tries to confine them with too many specifics, deadlines, and policy-following rules, the creative person can quickly become claustrophobic.

Ideally, a creative atmosphere for staff will spill over to a creative atmosphere for the children as well. It is an exciting program that is alive, growing, and changing. All the staff can contribute to the children's experience in a creative atmosphere. The process can be creative, but the goal must always be to create a program that connects with the hearts of the children.

One way to tap into staff's creativity is to ask everyone to share their favorite play space as a child. It might have been a place on vacation, or in their backyard. What was it like? Why do you remember it? How did if feel? Who played in that space with you? Then, use the memories as inspiration for designing space for kids. It also helps us remember what and

how we want kids to enjoy and interact with the indoor and outdoor space. It is also remarkably fun for kids and adults.

Another way to generate creative thoughts and ideas is to listen to the kids. Interview them, and chart their interests and see how you can use their interests as inspiration for program development. Some of these ideas will be a game that is played, or a redesign of the space.

Try this

Collect smooth, round rocks which will inspire all sorts of outdoor play. Each day the children can arrange the rocks to create the outline for the walls of house, a trail in the woods, or whatever they want. Their imagination will take over. At the end of the day, the rocks are just piled up out of the way. It's a simple and inexpensive way to facilitate children's creativity.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

What is Staff Communication?

Communication is the free exchange of ideas and information. We all need communication to get our jobs done. Good communication is timely, authentic, and unburdened with personal agendas. Good communication is listening to the message as well as sending the message.

Some people think that poor communication is a problem at their organization. People complain that they don't know enough about what's going on, or why certain policies are being put in place. However, communication typically is not the real problem. Typically, poor communication is a symptom of the problem. The real problem is why. Why is there poor communication? With so many ways to communicate these days, why is communication poor? We need to learn to ask questions like, "Who's hoarding the information?" "Who's keeping secrets?" "Who's trying to control others by only passing on select bits of information?"

Managing to Promote Communication

Remember that communication is both sending and receiving messages. It is important to track your own ability to be both a listener and a sender. Are you really, truly listening? Or are you just waiting for a break in the conversation so you can interject your information? Are you sending messages honestly and authentically? Or is there some personal agenda or point-scoring in the communication?

Staff need to be skilled in managing their own emotions. This is always true when working with children, but also true when talking with parents. Families may sometimes be nervous about leaving their children, and always anxious to find out how their child behaved, and usually exhausted from a long day at work. Sometimes, we see parents at their worst. As a staff, we need to offer comforting, reassuring words. And when we need to report to them something about their child, we can do that honestly and factually, without judgments or

opinions. It's worthwhile for the staff to consider the protocols for communicating with families. What is the most important message you want to communicate?

It is also important to realize that we all communicate a bit differently. People of different cultures express their needs differently. People of different maturity levels receive and send messages differently. People of different socioeconomic or professional backgrounds express their needs differently. We have to work together—staff, children, and parents—in a way that helps us to set boundaries for children, nurture children, build their social skills.

A staff member asked me about a boy in her class. He was acting up a lot. As we talked about our observations, we realized that he was just beginning to develop the skills to be a leader. Sometimes, when we are at the very beginning stage of a social skill, we perform the skill very poorly. This boy was learning to be a leader, but failing at this brand-new skill. We agreed to help him with the skills needed to be an effective leader, and made a long-term plan for him to succeed.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

Promoting Staff: Tips for Being an Effective Communicator

Communicate in person whenever possible.
Person-to-person communication allows participants in a conversation to see facial expressions or sense body language that helps them tune in to what the other person thinks and feels.

Create a positive listening environment.
Eliminate distractions and barriers. For example, go to a quiet place and avoid placing desks or tables between you and the other person unless you want to maintain a distant feeling or a power stance. Welcome your partner in conversation by exchanging pleasant greetings before the conversation begins.

Maintain eye contact when appropriate.
In Western culture, people often equate trustworthiness with looking someone in the eye. However, there are cultures around the world that view looking someone in the eye as a sign of disrespect. There are also individuals who are shy or withdrawn and find it uncomfortable to maintain eye contact. Learn about those with whom you are communicating so that you can tune in to their preferred communication styles and customs.

Avoid negative body language or facial expressions unless you think they truly promote understanding.
Folded arms can communicate that you are unapproachable, unwilling to listen, or unwilling to yield power or position. Finger tapping can communicate impatience or nervousness. Frowning can communicate

displeasure or confusion. Smirking can communicate contempt, ridicule, or arrogance.

Use simple, direct language.
Avoid the use of professional jargon that may be confusing or unfamiliar to people.

Motivate yourself to listen.
Remember the following: 1) It is impossible to talk and listen at the same time; 2) You cannot plan what to say next and listen at the same time. Use self talk to help you use good communication techniques: "Let her finish; don't interrupt." "Stay calm." "Listen for his main message." "Be kind."

Motivate yourself to participate appropriately.
Take an active role in exploring ideas and promoting understanding. Take turns talking. Avoid monopolizing the conversation. Avoid interrupting. Stay on the topic.

Be sensitive to emotions.
Hear emotions out; avoid cutting them off. Tune in and politely acknowledge the emotions behind the other person's words. Stay objective. React to the message, not the person. Withhold judgment and criticism. Try not to escalate the other person's anger by responding with anger yourself.

Take notes if important data is too confusing, complicated, or lengthy to remember.
When people are angry or upset, communication often becomes muddled with accusations or disjointed comments. It can be very helpful to slow down the pace of the conversation by taking notes. Politely tell the person you want to remember the important things they are saying. Ask them to repeat what they've said so that you can write it down accurately. This helps people think before they speak and focus on important points. It lets people know their ideas and feelings are being heard and taken seriously. It encourages people to state their points respectfully because they know their words are being written down.

Do not talk when you are too busy or distracted.
Set up a special time to talk instead.

—Adapted from Roberta Newman

Discussion Questions

1. Is our staff best at collaboration, creativity, or communication? What might be some ways for the staff to grow in collaboration, creativity, and communication?

2. In what ways does our staff help children to be collaborative? What might be new ways to foster collaboration?

3. In what ways does our staff help children to be creative? What might be some new ways to foster creativity in children?

4. In what ways does our staff help children to be communicative? What might be some new ways to help children with the skill of communication?

5. For your program or you personally, what's the most important idea or insight of this chapter?

6. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to staff collaboration, creativity, and communication? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Focusing on promoting collaboration, creativity, and communication to support children.

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to focus on how our program promotes collaboration, creativity, and communication to support children.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

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Chapter 9: Families, Host Facilities, and Community Resources

Note: This chapter was written by Roberta Newman, except where otherwise noted. Small changes were made in Roberta's narrative.

Reaching out to Families and Community in a Generation Three Setting

Children are not alone. Children are always part of a complex web of family, extended family, and community. In Generation Three out-of-school time programs, these interrelationships are vital. We are part of the web of relationships that work to support the child. Of course, in our society, not all parts of the relationship web support the child. Sometimes families are not functioning well; sometimes the extended family is absent. Sometimes community resources aren't available. We can't control all parts of the relationship web, but we can control our own. We can be supportive to children. We can help support families. We can encourage community institutions to help support a safety net for children. Our work should always see the growth and development of children as our central focus.

Reaching Out to Families

Strong, positive, cooperative relationships with parents and families are at the heart of quality school-age programs. Quality programs strive to work with families as active partners who communicate regularly to share important ideas, news, feelings, and concerns. The ways in which families connect with programs may vary widely because of individual differences among families and the ages of their children. But one thing is certain: when programs connect with families in positive ways, school-age children are more likely to grow and thrive through their out-of-school experiences.

Parents come from diverse backgrounds and have different ideas, values, concerns, knowledge, pressures, lifestyles, plans, dreams, resources, and constraints. Staff who are successful in building positive relationships begin by recognizing the importance of accepting parents as the most important people in children's lives, regardless of differences among them. In quality programs, accepting, supportive staff members help parents feel welcome and valued as partners. These programs recognize that in order to succeed with children, they must constantly reach out to parents. In successful programs, staff take the initiative in relationship building. If things do not go well or there is no response from parents, staff assume that there are things they can do to alter the situation. If one thing is not working, staff vary their approach and try something else. Listed below are examples of ways school-age staff can reach out effectively to parents and families.

Communicate, communicate, communicate.
Find every way possible to get to know parents and families. Communication will develop the trust necessary for parents and families to feel comfortable allowing you to care for their child.

Help parents identify and get to know program staff.
Post staff photos and biographies, wear nametags or badges, and wear staff shirts with program logo.

Provide parents with a place to gather.
Create a welcome or comfort center near the entrance. Provide one or two comfortable chairs, a family bulletin board, a table with helpful brochures and community information, a place to share business cards with other parents, occasional treats prepared by the children, parent mailboxes, perhaps with coffee or tea.

Encourage parents to participate in program activities and events.
For example, invite family members to share talents and skills, volunteer for field trips, recruit special visitors, attend children's performances and events sponsored by the program, and gather recyclable resources.

Assess the unique needs and wants of parents and families in your program
Develop parent/family information forms and conduct interviews to collect important information from families.

Host family social events.
These might include fun events such as potlucks, pizza parties, "Taste of the Program" with kid-prepared treats, talent shows, kids' performances, picnic and game festivals, roller or ice skating parties, kids' art shows, white elephant auction nights, and mini-mall night with "products" made by the kids.

Post notices that invite parents and families to let you know about their needs.
Have a way for parents and families to give feedback, interests, ideas, and concerns. Provide a way that they can do it anonymously if they desire.

Develop a variety of information vehicles.
Share information with parents and families in as many ways as possible. Parents and families have varying needs, interests, and lifestyles, and so parents and families need different ways to hear about the program. Different information vehicles might include newsletters and memoranda, bulletin boards, email, websites, parent/family meetings, and parent education workshops.

Provide opportunities for parents to help shape the program.
School-age programs may offer a variety of opportunities for parents and families to take an active, positive role in shaping the program. Some examples might be to form a parent/family advisory group, or involve families as members of a community-wide steering committee or advisory panel. Always encourage parents and families to speak up on behalf of the program. Parents and families might testify on behalf of the program at budget hearings or policy meetings, or write letters supporting the program to local newspapers or politicians.

Constantly develop new strategies for soliciting ideas and feedback from parents.
These should include daily conversations. Be sure that at least one staff member is available to interact with parents and families when they arrive to pick up children. You might consider special meetings, conferences, focus groups, web surveys, and telephone surveys. Consider formal and informal surveys about the program with questions like, What do you like best? What do you like least? What would you change? What do you hope never changes?

Family-to-Family Supports

Families are in need of support just like the children need support. Support for families might look a little different than support for children.

We had a father in our program who suddenly had sole custody of his sons. He did not yet have the skills to be an instant dad. He was far too impatient, far too nervous….He would shout for his boys as soon as he entered the room, frightening the other children. It is sometimes difficult to know when and how to discuss issues like this. However, you rarely can go wrong when you approach with a sense of caring. "How are you?" "How is it going with the boys?" "How are things going at home?" You might let the parent know that you know this is all new for him and he has you for support. Perhaps you can offer to help the boys get ready before he arrives. Invite parents to relax and let them know how you can help.

When working with families who have special needs, it is important to listen to their needs and concerns. One thing that is typically important is for their child to be included in as much as possible. This sends the message that their child will have relationships within the program and will not be left out. For physically impaired children, you can let parents know that you will make adaptations for participation. If there is a high sense of community in the program, the children will notice when an adaptation needs to be made before the adults.

We had a family that enrolled two of their sons in our program. One was in second grade, the other was in kindergarten. The kindergartener was visually impaired, and had cognitive delays. At first, the kindergartener followed the elder brother around wherever he went. However, it didn't take long for the children to ask the new kindergartener to join them. Before long, he no longer needed to follow his brother. When the group played games, the group came up with adaptations to include the younger brother. The older brother had other opportunities to play and did not need to be overly protective of his younger brother.

We will always have children from a variety of family forms—two parent families, single parent families, families where grandparents are the primary caretaker, families with same sex parents, etc. Our programs can function as one more place to be warm, welcoming, and supportive. All children—and adults!—need more places that are warm, welcoming, and supportive. That's our role—to invite the children and families into a warm and supportive environment.

School-age programs are a great place for English Language Learners to gain confidence in their conversational skills. Most often these children are surrounded by family and extended family who continue to speak their native languages. It is good to have a social setting where skills can be taught and practiced. Adult staff can even learn a new language from the children!

When communicating with non-English-speaking families, it is good to have pictures that accompany the daily schedule, the process for enrollment, and highlights of the program. For example, have a picture of a person writing a check or handing in cash. When release days come up, have pictures for how to make sure their child is enrolled. It is also good to get to know their cultural background, celebrations, and religious holidays. Staff can always use the Internet to help gain more knowledge about different cultures.

However, culturally responsive care doesn't begin with knowledge of another culture, and it doesn't begin with a cultural food fair. It begins as all responsive care begins—sending a clear message that the family and their child are welcome and celebrated members of the community. If you don't know something—for example, whether shaking hands is appropriate—then ask if it is okay. If you are a part of a culturally rich setting you might seek advice from cultural liaisons at the school or county level.

—From Laurie Ollhoff

Creating a Partnership with Program Hosts

It is critical for school-age leaders and staff to build positive relationships and partnerships with program hosts, such as school personnel and other facility managers.

The members of the partnership each have a need, goal, interest, or concern that can be met through the partnership. In successful partnerships, the people or groups involved have shared concerns and goals that unite them and keep them going when things get difficult. At the outset, the participants in the partnership explore and identify areas of mutual concern and acknowledge the "common ground" that brings them together. When the host is a school, the common ground usually revolves around shared concerns about children's needs for a safe, nurturing, enriching place to go during out-of-school hours.

Building positive relationships with school personnel or other shared space host partners requires school-age staff to initiate and maintain channels of communication that foster understanding, cooperation, and collaboration. Even if host personnel are not receptive to close communication at first, it is important for school-age staff to continue making an effort to promote communication and cooperation. Trust and relationships take time to develop.

In addition to the building manager, there are usually many other key people at host sites that can have an impact on the operation of a school-age program. It is valuable for lead school-age staff to arrange meetings to introduce themselves and the program to key host facility stakeholders (e.g., school principal, building manager, administrative assistants, classroom teachers, custodians, librarian/media specialist, cafeteria manager, school nurse, school counselor, physical education teacher, etc.). It is helpful to develop templates to document the results of meetings with various host personnel.

Host Relations

Whenever communicating with host personnel, be sure they understand the following:

- Who you are
- What the school-age program is all about
- You are interested in their goals, needs, interests, and concerns
- You are willing to help in any way you can
- You need their help and support to provide a quality program

Consider inviting all school personnel (or other host personnel) to attend a school-age program open house at least once a year. Serve refreshments, display materials that illustrate program activities, and let them know what a great program they have in their facility.

School Principal

Set up an appointment to meet with the principal to discuss your plans and needs for the year and to learn about the principal's needs, interests, and concerns related to your program. Discuss the following items and document the results.

- Introduce yourself and share your educational background and experience.
- Provide the names and professional background of additional school-age staff.
- Re-confirm the program hours of operation and calendar.
- Share your Handbook for Hosts if one exists.
- Request a copy of school regulations and review them together. Clarify any regulations you do not understand.
- Discuss any regulations that appear to conflict with established school-age program policies and procedures. Resolve any related problems.
- Discuss the transition children will make between school sessions and school-age care.
- Develop a procedure that ensures children will be safe and accounted for during transition.
- Request permission to use the copy machine, if needed. (Indicate that the school-age program will provide its own paper.)
- Request a mailbox for school-age staff to receive school memoranda, etc.
- Request permission to place school-age newsletters and memoranda in school personnel mailboxes to keep school staff informed about the program.

- Request use of auxiliary space and services as needed. Discuss procedures for reserving these facilities and equipment.
- Ask the principal how you can be helpful.
- Discuss any concerns the principal has regarding the school-age program. Discuss ways to address and monitor these concerns.
- Request a time to meet with teachers to give a brief presentation about your program.

Administrative Assistants

Set up a meeting with administrative staff and discuss the following items.

- Introduce yourself and your role in the school-age program.
- Provide a list of children enrolled in the program.
- Provide the hours of operation and calendar for the program.
- Verify you have completed all forms required by the school/host.
- If permitted to use the copier, ask for a demonstration of how to use it properly. Ask for a place to store paper, if possible.
- Ask how you and your staff can be helpful.
- Discuss any concerns and work out solutions to any problems.

Custodians

Set up a meeting with the head custodian and discuss the following items.

- Introduce yourself and your role in the school-age program.
- Ask for instructions on disposing of trash and maintaining an environment that will be easy for custodians to clean (e.g., put chairs up on tables at the end of the day).
- Ask if there are additional storage spaces that may be available to the program.
- Discuss any concerns and work out solutions to any problems.

Identifying and Respecting Concerns of Program Hosts

Program hosts often have concerns about the impact a school-age program may have on their facilities and on other programs operated by the host organization. School-age leaders and staff can take the initiative in building positive relationships with program hosts and managers by identifying potential host concerns and providing assurances that the school-age program will respect those concerns. Examples of assurances commonly requested by program hosts are:

- Staff are qualified and competent to work with school-age children.
- Staff will maintain effective control of children's behavior.
- Facilities will not be damaged or misused.
- Host materials or equipment will not be used without permission.

- Children's varying needs will be met appropriately. Appropriate activities and guidance will be provided. In school settings, the host may want assurances that children will have opportunities to get homework finished.
- The environment will be maintained to ensure children's health and safety. Policies and procedures will be established and implemented to ensure children's health and to keep children safe in emergency situations.
- Food service will adhere to proper nutrition, health, and safety standards. Food will be stored appropriately and the food service area will be thoroughly cleaned after each serving.
- Host facility will not be liable for what happens in the school-age program.
- Host facility staff will not be called upon to solve program problems.

Facility hosts and managers in your program may request additional assurances. Before implementing a program in a host facility, be sure to communicate with program hosts to identify and address their concerns.

To facilitate communication with the program host the program might want to develop a handbook. Following are some examples of items that may be included. Other items unique to your program should be added.

Program Handbook for Hosts

- Introduction to the handbook (purpose, overall contents, how it was developed)
- Copy of the partnership agreement between the school-age program and host
- Contact information for the school-age program
- History of the school-age program and its relationship to the host
- Statement of the school-age program's vision, philosophy, mission, and goals
- Summary of school-age program services (including calendar and hours)
- Description of school-age program staff qualifications
- Description of parent/family involvement opportunities in the school-age program
- Guidelines for minimum facilities requirements for the school-age program (size and location of base room, use of other space such as gyms, cafeterias, multi-purpose rooms, media centers, etc.)
- Guidelines for routine maintenance of host facilities by the school-age program
- Description of required host support services (custodial, plowing, etc.)
- Tips for hosts to promote ongoing communication with the school-age program
    - Meet regularly to talk about program operation, review host regulations and policies, identify and solve problems
    - Provide information about host facilities: how to arrange for use of auxiliary services, facilities, or equipment

- Invite school-age program staff to present an overview of the program to school or other host personnel and to participate in meetings or other host facility programs and events
- Provide school-age staff with school publications, memos, notices, and newsletters and asking for school-age program publications in return
- Description of joint program advisory group (if one has been established)

Typical Elements of Written Partnership Agreements

To promote cooperation and collaboration between program hosts and school-age program staff, it is advisable to develop written guidelines and contracts that clarify the roles and responsibilities of each organization. In all collaborative efforts, the key to success is the clear delineation of responsibilities of the hosts and the organization sponsoring the school-age program.

When responsibilities are not spelled out, conflicts often arise around operational issues. Written agreements provide a helpful reference for staff who implement the program and for the host facility staff. Partnership agreements energize people to think in new ways, to stretch their imaginations and come up with new ideas and solutions that might never have emerged without the partnership in place.

Providing written guidelines and information to program hosts promotes mutual understanding of the school-age program goals and operation and can help prevent problems and conflicts. A handbook can serve as a useful reference that can be used to clarify policies and procedures as well as roles and responsibilities of both the host and the school-age program. It provides a tool for ensuring continuity when individual program or host staff move on to other responsibilities.

When developing a handbook for program hosts in school settings, it is advisable to get input from school principals. When the handbook is a joint project, strengthens the partnership because it reflects the goals, needs, interests, and concerns of everyone involved.

The school-age program will assume responsibility for:

- Operation and management of the school-age program, including budget, personnel, payroll, accounts payable, program development and evaluation, and marketing
- Recruitment, training, and supervision of qualified school-age staff
- Maintenance of liability insurance to cover all school-age program activities
- Reimbursement to the host for janitorial services and supplies, if required
- Reimbursement to the host for bus transportation if host buses are used by the school-age program
- Reimbursement to the host for any damage to host facilities or equipment, and reimbursement for unauthorized use of host materials and supplies

- Purchase of additional furniture and equipment required for the school-age program over and above furniture and equipment provided by the host
- Purchase of all school-age program materials, supplies, and food
- Arrangement for telephone installation and payment of telephone bills
- Collection of fees for services
- Participation in ongoing meetings with host representatives to foster communication, cooperation, collaboration, and problem-solving

The host will assume responsibility for:

- Providing indoor space near bathrooms and convenient entrances and exits for the school-age program where it is not needed by the host, including access to telephone lines
- Providing daily use of classroom space, media center, and gymnasium or multi-purpose room
- Providing access to food storage and service areas for program snacks and meals
- Providing outdoor space for the school-age program where it is not needed by the host/school, including daily use of playgrounds and playing fields
- Making space available three to five days before scheduled operation to allow for the school-age staff to set up the central area the program will use
- Providing normal maintenance and custodial services for the school-age program
- Providing utilities for normal use of the school-age program
- When host is a school: providing information about children's mental and physical health and special needs to school-age staff upon written request from a parent
- Loaning furnishings and equipment to the school-age program when available and not needed elsewhere by the host
- Participating in ongoing meetings with the school-age program staff to foster communication, cooperation, collaboration, and problem-solving

Planning for Community Connections

Connecting with community resources is very important to school-age children. As they grow toward independence, school-age children want to explore the world beyond school, home, and family. They want to be part of the "real world." There are at least four major ways children in school-age programs can connect with their communities:

- They can interact with people in the community who are willing to visit the program and share special talents, knowledge, and skills through one-time visits or performances or ongoing mentoring.
- They can participate in field trips that allow them to explore community resources at museums, parks, recreation centers, business establishments,

service organizations, etc. and follow up on these visits through program activities.

- They can participate in service projects that help make their community a better place to live, work, and play.
- They can discover and explore community resources by searching the Internet to learn about community events and services.

Think about the community connection possibilities for children in your program and take a systematic approach to planning a variety of community connection opportunities and experiences. Listed below are suggestions to help you get started.

Assess the availability of community resources.
Brainstorm a list of individuals, organizations, places to visit, etc. that would be of interest to children. Involve children in the brainstorming process. Create a "Catalog of Community Resources" with contact information. Involve children and families in creating the catalog. Scan your local yellow pages and explore your community newspaper to jumpstart your brainstorming. Contact local community organizations and information agencies and request lists of programs and services.

Recruit community adults. Recruit adults with special talents, skills, expertise, and knowledge to share with school-age children.
Request help in recruiting from families or others you know who may have access to local celebrities, artists, sports figures, etc. Once you've made contact, explore ways each community adult might be interested in connecting with children in your program. Consider developing an ongoing mentoring program.

Use the Internet to connect with the greater community.
If kids have access to the Internet in your program, help them learn about their community by visiting websites of government agencies, recreational facilities, parks, arts organizations, businesses, and more. Be sure to monitor children's use of the Internet and ensure that children do not visit inappropriate sites or share personal information with strangers while using the Internet. Research resources for protecting children on the Internet before implementing its use in your program.

Engage children in service projects.
School-age children want to make a positive difference in the world. They want to participate in meaningful projects and activities that can help others in the community and in the broader world community. Look for organizations in your community and national or worldwide organizations that can provide opportunities for children to be involved in service learning.

Plan mini-field trips to locations within walking distance of the program.
Even if your program does not have the resources or capability for organizing frequent field trips requiring transportation, there may be many field trip possibilities within walking distance of your program. A walking field trip doesn't have to involve a point of interest or destination. But, it is helpful to choose a focus for the trip (e.g., How many different birds can we hear singing on the walk? What kind are they? Listen for the most interesting sound you hear on our trip and then write a poem or story about it when we return. Look for places of business on our trip. What are they? What do people do who work there? How much trash is strewn on the ground where we take our walk? Does it need to be removed? How could we help keep our neighborhood free of litter?)

Plan occasional bus field trips to off-site locations.
Lack of time, financial resources, and program vehicles may limit the program's ability to take regular field trips. However, with resourcefulness, creativity, and advance planning, it is usually possible to plan and implement a few field trips each year. Popular trips in school-age programs include recreational parks, nature reserves, museums, concerts, tours of factories and large businesses, cultural festivals, celebrations of local heritage and history, and sporting events. Explore the possibilities in your community. When planning field trips, it is critical to do careful planning and to prepare the children for what will happen and what is expected of them.

Ideas for Special Events

Special events are a great place to use community resources and volunteers from the community. This is good for the children, and it gives the community sponsor some free publicity.

- Multicultural celebrations (featuring volunteers from community groups)
- Art demonstrations (featuring painters, potters, fiber artists, glass blowers, sculptors, and others)
- Sports demonstrations (presented by local teams and individual athletes)
- Nutrition clinics (presented by extension departments or other local nutrition experts)
- Cooking demonstrations (provided by local restaurant chefs)
- Fitness clinics (presented by local fitness organizations, businesses, or recreation departments)
- Cheerleading demonstrations (presented by local college and high school cheerleading teams)
- Gardening demonstrations and projects (conducted by local garden clubs)
- Flower arranging demonstrations (provided by florists, hobbyists, or garden clubs)
- Building and design festivals (demonstrations and building activities conducted by local architects, builders, planners, and/or skilled workers (brick masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc.))
- Pet care festivals (provided by trainers, Humane Society, breeders, veterinarians—with live pets)
- Health festivals (featuring demonstrations by dentists, physicians, and other health professionals)
- Toast of the town family fest (sample dishes provided by local chefs and restaurants)
- Concerts (presented by local musicians and music groups)
- Bird watching festival (demonstrations, exhibits, and activities conducted by nature and bird watching clubs)
- Book fair (provided by the library or commercial book vendors)
- Film-making and photography demonstrations and hands-on activities (led by local film-makers, photographers, and video producers)

- Drama presentations (plays, skits, mime artists, street theater, puppetry and marionettes—presentations provided by local actors and theater groups)
- Magic and clown shows (performed by local talent)
- Local celebrity days (presentations by well-known people in the community with interesting stories to tell and talents to share)
- Career fairs (exhibits and demonstrations from selected organizations and businesses in the community)
- Mini-museum festivals (featuring small traveling exhibits from a variety of museums, nature centers, etc.)
- Animal fairs (demonstrations and exhibits provided by local nature centers and/or zoo keepers)
- Public servant days (presentations, exhibits, and demonstrations by local government officials and agency representatives)

Discussion Questions

1. When it comes to family relationships and communication, what are our strengths?

2. What area of family relationships and communication could we improve?

3. Do we have a written agreement with our host provider? What would you include in such an agreement?

4. In what way can we create better relationships with our host providers?

5. What community resources have we made use of and what other resources can we use? What kind of community resources would be most fun for our kids?

6. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to families, host facilities, and community resources? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Focusing on promoting relationships with families, host facilities and community resources

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to focus on how our program promotes relationships with families, host facilities and community resources.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

Epstein, J. (2008). *School, family and community partnerships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Newman, R. L. (2008). *Building relationships parents and families in school-age programs: Resources for staff training and program planning*. New Albany, Ohio: School-Age Notes.

Young, P. G. (2009). *Principal matters: 101 tips for creating collaborative relationships between after-school programs and school leaders*. New Albany, Ohio: School-Age Notes.

Zenub, K. et al. (2006). *Focus on families! How to build and support family-centered practices in after school.* Boston, MA: Harvard Family Research Project and Build on Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet) Available from http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/focus-on-families!-how-to-build-and-support-family-centered-practices-in-after-school

Chapter 10: Seven Social Skills

Social Skills in a Generation Three Program

In previous generations, kids learned social skills as a part of growing up. They had access to extended family; they worked and went to school in intergenerational contexts; they spent three to four hours a day in contact with adults, usually doing chores. Learning social skills was a natural part of growing up.

Today, however, kids have little access to extended family, and spend most of their time with kids their own age. Kids spend three to four hours daily in solitary activities such as television and video games. While social networking can virtually connect lots of people together, it is not a replacement for multi-generational environments where social skills were taught by adults or older, more mature children. Children no longer learn social skills as a natural part of growing up.

The good news is that kids can learn social skills fairly easily, if adults put forth the effort. Studies show that when adults have a little bit of knowledge and some intentionality, children learn social skills.

A Generation Three school-age program always keeps the learning of social skills at the forefront. Social skills can be taught on field trips, while doing activities, or when working on homework. Social skills can be taught in virtually any setting, as long as the adults care about teaching social skills. When Generation Three programs help kids learn social skills, the programs give kids a gift that will last a lifetime.

What is a Social Skill?

Social skill has many definitions. An informal way to define social skills is "any interaction skill that helps us get through the day." That includes effective social skills, like good communication and coping with stress. It also includes misfunctioning social skills—skills that are an ineffective or wrong way to get needs met.

An example of a misfunctioning social skill is whining. Yes, whining is a skill. You probably know many children (and adults) who have mastered this behavior and honed it into a fine art. Whining is typically a way for a child to get what they want. For example, if a child wants a toy, they may whine to the parent, "Pleeeeeease, I neeeeeed that toy! I want

it! I want it!! Pleeeeeeease!" The more mature way to get that need met is to ask a parent, in a confident an assertive manner, "I have wanted that toy for a long time because I think it would be fun. Would you be able to buy it for me today?" Most kids, of course don't have the skills for the latter, and it probably wouldn't work as well as whining anyway. Whining is an example of a misfunctioning social skill that gets in the way of truly effective social skills.

The interaction skills that children and youth practice every day affect their relationships—either positively or negatively. Some well-meaning adults might introduce a child with, "This is Bob. He's shy." It's possible that this will make the child become more withdrawn. Even with simple things like introductions, adults have a chance to help influence social skills, either negatively or positively. No single introduction or interaction will create a skill or create a problem for children, but repeated messages over time will help to influence the construction of a skill or the misfunctioning of a skill.

Sometimes adult caregivers, teachers, or parents will identify a child as "mischievous," or "attention-deficit," or even "bad." It is important to remember that terms like these describe a current skill set—not the identity of the child. Children learn ineffective skill sets just like they learn positive skill sets. Through teaching, through expectations, and practice.

Social skills are the skills with which we interact with others, and how we see ourselves interacting in the world. When people have effective social skills, they can take cues from others and adjust their behavior. Social skills develop over time. We are not born with these skills. They are learned.

The profession of school-age care has deep and rich potential to provide a promising future for children in our care. When we engage in creating rich environments, supportive relationships, and engaging experiences, children have the opportunity to learn life-skills needed for optimum development.

What are the Skills?

There are many ways to identify all the various social skills. One way to divide them up is into two broad categories: intrapersonal skills and interpersonal skills. The intrapersonal skill set helps us know ourselves. While these skills are influenced by others, they happen, more or less, inside our own skin. Intrapersonal skills makes us unique individuals with our own identity and help us answer the questions, "Who am I? What makes me tick?" These skills include confidence, control, coping, and curiosity.

The interpersonal skills are the ways of interacting with other people. These skills help us to facilitate our connections with and value others. We need these skills to get along peaceably in our world. These skills include communication, community building, and conflict resolution.

We call these seven skills *The Seven Cs*. Below are some synonyms and subskills for each of the Seven Cs.

Confidence (Intrapersonal Skill)

- Self-esteem
- Sense of capableness
- Sense of being loved and loveable

Control (Intrapersonal Skill)

- Internal locus of control (understanding I, not outside sources, am in charge of my behavior)
- Self-discipline
- Responsibility
- Impulse control

Coping (Intrapersonal Skill)

- Dealing with stress
- Anger management
- Dealing with crisis

Curiosity (Intrapersonal Skill)

- Intrinsic motivation
- Desire to learn and explore
- Desire to create adventure

Communication (Interpersonal Skill)

- Expressing feelings
- Listening
- Assertiveness and standing up for oneself

Community Building (Interpersonal Skill)

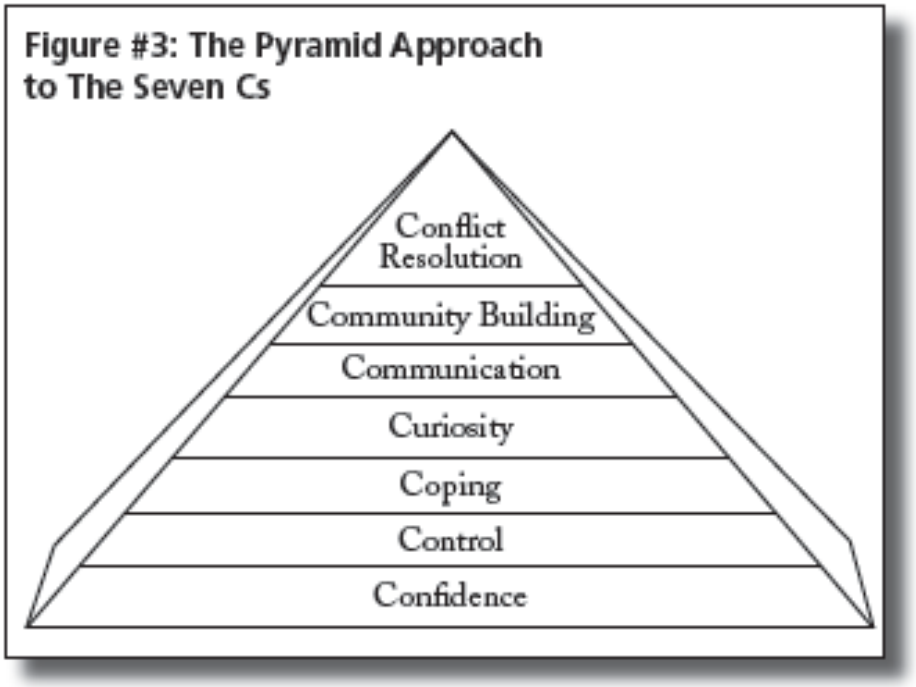
- Friendship skills
- Working in groups
- Cooperation
- Empathy

Conflict Resolution (Interpersonal Skill)

- Aversion to violence
- Thinks solutions
- Negotiates
- Understands the importance of peaceful living

We need all these skills simultaneously. Ideally, these skills will grow as the children grow. We practice these skills through interactions and social situations. Adult caregivers can give guidance and feedback on the effectiveness of those skills. Through the simple act of being attentive to the social situations that children are in, adults can make a profound impact on these lifelong skills.

Some social skills are more foundational than others. On the pyramid below, the skills on the bottom often need to be built before teaching skills at the top. For example, it is easier to teach conflict resolution when there is a sense of community. Skills of communication are easier taught when a sense of confidence is already present.



Why Teach Social Skills?

As was mentioned earlier, learning social skills used to be a natural part of growing up. A generation ago, school-age children learned social skills naturally through the interconnection between the structures of the family, school, and community. Children had to learn negotiation skills when there were six siblings in one bed. Children had to learn sharing when there were only hand-me-downs to wear. Children had to learn responsibility when it was their job to milk the cows in the morning (if they forgot, then no one had milk). A couple generations ago, children spent an average of three to four hours a day one-on-one with an adult, usually doing chores. Children learned maturity and social skills by interacting with adults constantly. A couple generations ago, children learned social skills by just going through life.

Each generation of children and youth have had continuously more access to new and different technologies. A choice that each generation of parents have had to make is access—how much of the new technology do we allow our children? Today, families need to make decisions about the amount of time children watch television, participate in video games, or surf the Internet. Interestingly, a study a few years ago said that families spend more time negotiating television watching than any other discussion. Many families watch television more than any other activity. Unfortunately, sitting and staring at the television does not build social skills. Only social interaction builds social skills.

It is also important to note that children use the social skills that work in their environment. As caregivers we need to be careful that we make sure that we allow kids to have the skills that they need elsewhere, while teaching them the skills they need in our program. If they use shouting and yelling at home, you might not want to say that shouting is bad. You can simply say that shouting is not appropriate here. Remind all the children regarding the skills used in your program and then work to develop these skills.

Children know that there are different behaviors required in a library than in a loud party restaurant. Learning to read the environment and matching skills to the environment needs to be taught—not just expected.

When children move from one community to another, they will try to make friends and interact the same way they did in their own community. It is important to realize they are using skills that worked where they lived before. The skills children use have worked somewhere. Their skills may be inappropriate in your program, but they used to work somewhere! Children don't just pick up social skills by osmosis; children must be taught social skills.

That's worthy of repeating: *Children must be intentionally taught social skills*.

An environment that supports teaching social skills will have the following three components: 1) multi-age groups (so the older kids can help the younger kids, or practice their patience as they assist or wait for a younger child); 2) adults who are attentive to kids' social needs which includes good observation skills (so the adults can teach skills); and 3) many opportunities for adult-child interaction (so that adults can help kids learn the skills at the moment when they need them). The place with all three components is in out-of-school time.

We are not taking over the job of the parents. Even the best parents can only do so much. Children need a variety of voices to help them build life skills. They need the influence of coaches, teachers, extended family, and many other voices in order to build these skills. The job of teaching life skills is simply too big to say it should only be done by a parent. School-age providers are playing their part in helping children grow into responsible adults.

Benefits of Teaching Social Skills

Grades. Kids with better social skills learn more in school and test better. In fact, research suggests that spending more time learning social skills, rather than more time on academic content, helps kids do better in learning and on standardized tests.

Relationships. Kids who have effective social skills have better relationships, less adversarial confrontations, and work and play better with other kids.

Peaceful living. Kids who have effective social skills can think through social situations better. Because of this, they have a much broader range of actions that they can try before resorting to aggressiveness. Kids with effective social skills have more empathy, and can better understand others' points of view.

Self-monitoring. Kids with effective social skills are better at taking cues from others and their environment. They can see when their behavior isn't matching their goals, and so can change their behavior. Kids with low social skills lack awareness, and so persist in behaviors that aren't meeting their goals because they can't see that their behaviors aren't working.

Long-term success. Despite our country's preoccupation with standardized testing and intelligence quotients, studies say that social skills are much more important. Children with

high social and emotional skills have much more long-term success than children with high IQs. Kids who have effective social skills grow up to do better in college, and are more employable.

How to Teach Social Skills

Use as many voices as possible.
For best results, social skills should be taught by more than one adult. Think about the social structures in place a generation or two ago: Grandparents lived in the same house or next door. Cousins, aunts, and uncles lived within walking distance. All these adults and older children reinforced social skills. Kids respond best when a variety of voices reinforce the same message.

Teach in as many places as possible.
This might sound strange, but our sense of learning is tied into our sense of place. So, when people learn something in one place, it's not always easy to act on that skill in another place (this is why you can't remember the parent's name when you see them in the grocery store). So, for best results, social skill instruction should happen in more than one place. It should happen in the gym, on the playground, in the art room, and anywhere else you can think of!

Use the teachable moment.
Kids learn social skills best in a social setting when and where skills are needed. The best time to teach conflict resolution is during an argument. The best time to teach leadership skills is when there is a new leader. The best time to teach community building is when there is a new community.

Use many methods.
Social skill development happens best when there are many ways to reinforce it. Teach the skill directly. Then reinforce it later. Then congratulate someone who did the skill well in a real-life situation. Then correct a child (privately) who performs the skill poorly. Talk about the skill when it is needed in a real life encounter. Create experiences where the children will need the skill. The more ways kids can see a social skill—the more routes the social skill takes into their brain—the better chance the kids will learn it.

We can't punish the lack of social skills out of children.
Many adults try to punish kids when they misbehave. Certainly, kids must be held accountable. However, punishment does not teach new skills. Kids are using old, misfunctioning skills because it has worked for them in the past (or more likely, they thought it worked for them). Kids have to be helped to see that their old behaviors aren't working. Boundaries and consequences must be set on the old behaviors. But that will do no good if they are not taught new behaviors.

Give feedback. Help kids see what went well and what didn't go well.
Sometimes children cannot see whether their interaction was effective or not. After an interaction that went poorly, you might ask, "How could that have been better?" Or after an interaction that went well, you might compliment them on a specific aspect they did well, such as, "I liked that you said exactly what you needed without getting aggressive or snotty."

Prepare kids for a skill before they'll need it.
For example, before leaving on a field trip to the zoo, talk with the children about the skills they will need. It's typically not very effective to lecture at the kids, because kids will probably tune you out. Let the kids brainstorm the skills they'll need for a successful trip. Do a role-play that shows which skills are acceptable and which are not.

Some Ideas for Confidence

Confidence is the belief that we have in ourselves, that we can be successful. When we are confident, we don't need to be boastful, we don't need to brag. We just have a calm belief that if we try, we can do it. We know and believe in ourselves. We believe we have talents, gifts, and skills to succeed in the future.

If we try and can't do it, we don't give up. We can go back to the drawing board, and try to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it. We will try again and again, because we have a belief that if we try hard enough, and work at it, we'll eventually be successful.

Someone like Thomas Edison embodies the skill of confidence. He is reputed to have tried and failed at building the light bulb hundreds of times. At each "failure," he is reported to have said that it was not a failure—it was simply one more way not to build a light bulb.

When a child has the skill of confidence,

- They'll approach a new experience with excitement and curiosity.
- They'll say, "I can do this!"
- They'll make plans for themselves and for their future.
- They'll try lots of new things.

When a child lacks the skill of confidence,

- They'll constantly find fault with others.
- They'll blame others and other things, like blaming their shoes when they trip.
- They are terrified of being wrong or failing in public.
- They may protect their fragile self-esteem by not wanting to try new things, and so will say, "This is stupid" and "This is boring."
- They may protect their fragile self-esteem by withdrawing—never raising their hand, never initiating play with others, never self-starting.

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Knowing what the child is good at, and engaging them in discussion about it.
- Helping them to make plans—not doing things for them.
- Helping them to discover the joy of new things.
- Helping them to know they are significant and worthwhile by the way you treat them.

Some Ideas for Control

Control is the belief that what we do means something. The actions we take have an effect on our future. When we have the skill of control, we take responsibility for our own actions. When we have this skill we know that we have choices to make, and we will have to live with the consequences of those choices.

When we lack this skill, we think that everything that happens is a matter of good luck or bad luck, or fate, or just simple random chance. Children without the skill of control may say things like, "Tommy took my pencil, I had to hit him!" Children without this skill may say things like, "The bus left without me." In their mind, it's the bus's fault that it left, rather than "I didn't organize my time well enough to be on the bus when it was time for it to leave."

An exemplar for lack of control might be Homer Simpson. The fictional cartoon character never takes responsibility for himself or his own choices. He constantly blames others for all his foibles. He blames his son, his neighbor, or the crayon lodged in his forebrain. Nothing is ever his fault, and so, he is careless about his health, careless about his relationships, and careless in his job as a safety technician in a nuclear reactor.

When a child has the skill of control,

- They will admit when they have made a mistake.
- They will take responsibility for the things they do.
- They can honestly say, "I can do better."

When a child lacks the skill of control,

- They will immediately exclaim, "It's not my fault!"
- They will blame others for their actions, and make excuses.
- They will skirt the truth because they have the opportunity to do so.

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Helping children understand that they make choices; they are not controlled by other's behavior.
- Helping children understand that they can take time before they make an angry or bad choice.
- Helping children understand that we can't always control what happens to us, but we can control how we react to things that happen to us.
- Helping them rephrase their thinking. When the child says, "Tommy took my pencil, I had to hit him!" you can say, "Do you mean, 'Tommy took your pencil, and so you made a choice to hit him'?"
- Reminding them of the consequences. "I'm sorry you made the choice to hit Tommy, but you knew the rules about hitting. So, you have chosen the consequences, too."

Some Ideas for Coping

We don't always get what we want, so we need the skill of coping. Life isn't always good to us, and so we need ways to survive, cope, and maybe even thrive. People with the skill of coping can take situations ranging from mildly annoying to life-threatening, and find a way to make it through.

Children without the skill of coping will have temper tantrums, pity parties, and be overly dramatic. Children who exhibit these behaviors typically do not have the skills to behave differently—it's the only thing they know how to do. Therefore, it doesn't help to punish children (although punishment might stop the behavior temporarily). Children need to learn new behaviors.

An exemplar of coping might be Frederick Douglass. He was an African-American born in the early 1800s. He spent time as a slave, and saw and experienced all the horrors of slavery. He escaped and became one of the most eloquent orators to abolish slavery. He became a statesman, counseling Abraham Lincoln on how to manage abolition. He took the pain and the dehumanizing experiences of slavery, and turned it into a profound source of strength.

When a child has the skill of coping,

- They say things like, "Life happens," but they can remain calm, and take the challenge in stride.
- They seek out adults who can help them cope, when needed.
- They are flexible with changes and unexpected schedules.
- They talk about how they coped. "Yeah, I was frustrated, but then I took a deep breath and looked at what else I could do."

When a child lacks the skill of coping,

- They will shout, "It isn't fair!"
- They will cry, scream, and throw temper tantrums.
- They will experience the smallest problem and escalate it into a full-blown catastrophe.

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Supporting kids without babying them.
- Modeling calmness and a sense of humor when faced with unexpected obstacles.
- Teaching kids how to relax, how to de-escalate, and how to de-stress.
- Talking through frustrating scenarios with a brainstormed list of responses. "What else could you do when that frustrating situation happens?"

Some Ideas for Curiosity

Curiosity is a life skill that helps us develop and sustain our motivation. This skill helps us want to learn about others and the world around us. This skill helps us look for patterns and connections. This is the skill that helps us keep a fresh outlook on life, always wondering "How?" and "What if?"

When we teach children to be curious we provide opportunities for kids to wonder, to create, and to explore. When you hear kids asking questions, wondering how things work, and noticing things about the world, then you are seeing curiosity. When you see kids observing, when you see kids with a focused attention, then you know you are seeing curiosity.

An exemplar of curiosity might be Marie Curie. Born in Europe in 1867, she got degrees in physics and mathematics, and developed an interest in biology. She began to study radioactivity, realizing it could be used for healing. She helped to develop and install x-ray machines, so that doctors in WWI could find shrapnel in soldiers. She won two Nobel prizes in physics and chemistry, discovered elements, and overcame barriers in a male-dominated scientific establishment. She never stopped asking questions like "Why?" and "How?" and "What if?"

When a child has the skill of curiosity,

- They will spend a long time with a single project. For example, they might spend all day setting up dominoes so they can tip them. They'll explore whether the dominoes can go uphill, or around corners.
- They will have many interests, and enjoy many things.
- They will be interested and excited to try new activities.

When a child lacks the skill of curiosity,

- They will seem bored with everything.
- They will only be interested in things that "artificially" engage them, such as television or video games.
- They will be afraid or unwilling to try anything new, because everything is boring.

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Providing a wide variety of new activities where kids can explore new ideas.
- Helping kids understand the interconnectedness of nature.
- Encouraging the interests of children with statements like, "That sounds really interesting, tell me more about that."
- Giving kids opportunities for focused attention. If they are working and having fun with a particular activity, consider letting them continue the activity until they have fully explored it.

Some Ideas for Communication

Communication is a process that happens on many levels. It's about sending and receiving messages. It's about communicating in a way that identifies one's own need without being too passive or too aggressive. Body posture and tone are also important when sending and receiving messages.

Most children are better at sending messages than receiving them. They often mimic the tone and wording of messages they see at home or on television. Depending on what they have watched, that may or may not be helpful.

Martin Luther King, Jr. could be used as an exemplar for nearly all of these social skills, but he is known for being a great communicator. He knew how to communicate a vision and inspire people with that vision. He knew how to listen and negotiate. He knew how to send a message that identified a need, pointed out injustice, and called people to a peaceful mission.

When a child has the skill of communication,

- They will listen attentively to peers as well as adults.
- They will know how to communicate their own needs, without being wishy-washy or aggressive.
- They won't always have the right words or know how to say things, but they are patient with trying to say things.

When a child lacks the skill of communication,

- They are bored and impatient when having to negotiate or communicate back and forth.
- They only want to send messages, not receive them. The sent messages are typically curt and aggressive.
- They miss important messages because they are too consumed with their own issues to hear the nuances of conversation.

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Providing activities where they have to share about themselves.
- Rephrasing comments for them, when they have phrased the communication aggressively. "Did you mean, 'May I have the glue when you're done, please'?"
- Giving kids a chance to help make their own decisions and express their own choices.
- Helping them express their own needs when someone is trying to exert power over them.
- Helping them with the appropriate words, or standing behind them for emotional support, but not doing it for them.

Some Ideas for Community Building

Community building is the sense that we are part of a larger group. Actions that we take within that group make the group closer or alienate people in the group. People need groups—it helps us identify who we are. From our historical roots when we were part of a clan or tribe, to the present when we are part of a variety of social networks, groups help to tell us who we are and where we belong. People feel a part of a community when they know someone has their back.

Teaching children to be part of a community isn't difficult, but it happens on many layers. We have to help them understand how to treat others with respect and dignity. We have to help make sure kids feel a part of the community. We have to help kids know how to make others feel a part of the community. There is a give and take to community, just like there is a give and take to communication.

A great example of a community builder was Cesar Chavez. Born in 1927, he was an advocate for poverty-stricken farm workers in California and the southwest. He helped group after group organize so that they could demand wages that were humane. He knew how to build community, and give people a sense of mission so that they could be a part of something larger. Through his activities, countless individuals became networked into groups, and gave them a sense of something larger.

When a child has the skill of community building,

- They care about engaging into the group. They use words like "us" and "we" and "together."
- They watch and take notice of kids who are alienated from the group.
- They are interested in organizing, leadership, and group activities.

When a child lacks the skill of community building,

- They have a general disinterest in the group, and focus on themselves.
- They ask things like, "What's in it for me?"
- When faced with a group activity, they ask, "Why should I do that?"
- They say things like, "He's ruining it for me!" or "Why should I want him on my team, he's terrible at this game!"

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Organizing them to write letters for important causes in the community.
- Providing activities where kids get to know something about each other.
- Reminding kids of their responsibility to the group ("We are all in this together")
- Modeling talking, discussion, and negotiating among the staff.
- Providing spaces and activities for small groups to play and interact.
- Providing opportunities for leadership of projects for the group.

Some Ideas for Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is the skill of being able to fix interpersonal problems or heal broken relationships. It involves listening and taking the perspective of the other person. The skill includes identifying our own needs. It involves keeping control of anger and frustration, and not deteriorating into point-scoring and insults. The skill involves creatively coming up with new ideas to solve situations.

Frequently, conflict arises from an inability to think through social situations. In other words, people are constantly faced with ambiguous social situations. Among most people, conflict and aggression may be the last resort to get their needs met. However, aggressive and easily conflicted people don't have the ability to come up with a lot of possible solutions. Consequently, they jump to aggressiveness, not because they like to be aggressive, but simply because they don't know what else to do. Adult caregivers can help situations by helping conflicted kids think through other opportunities for action when in situations.

While not everyone agrees with his political stances, it would be hard to argue that Jimmy Carter isn't a great example of the skill of conflict resolution. His foundation works all over the world, trying to bring conflicted groups together to talk. He and his colleagues travel in sometimes very dangerous areas, and work to build peaceful relationships where conflicts and wars exist.

When a child has the skill of conflict resolution,

- They can diagnose the problem.
- They are flexible, and can come up with new ideas to solve the problem.
- They are less bothered when a problem arises—they instead begin looking for solutions.

When a child lacks the skill of conflict resolution,

- They will walk away from the conflict, pout, or sit in the corner.
- They will quickly become aggressive or ready to fight.
- They will resist listening. They will stubbornly hang on to a single idea and keep repeating it over and over.
- They have an unwillingness to admit they're wrong, and a resistance to voluntarily, truly apologize.

Adult caregivers can help children build this skill by:

- Helping them understand social situations, and understand the wide variety of options they have for acting in a situation.
- Resisting the temptation to swoop in and rescue children in conflict (unless someone is in physical danger); rather, intervening so that you can help them develop the skills to solve it themselves.
- Not saying, "You're being stubborn." Instead say, "Knowing what you want is a good skill, but you need more than just that skill to get along with people here."

- Playing games in which kids need to practice flexibility. For example, play a game where everyone has to stop, and then change the rules. Make it fun.
- Forcing kids to negotiate and share resources. When doing projects, don't provide enough resources for everyone. Make the kids figure out how to share.

Summary

School-age programs are not just about keeping kids busy until their parents pick them up. If we assume that is our role, then we'll miss an entire generation of children's development.

School-age programs, when they are at their best, function to help kids grow in their social skills. That's the gift that we can give to kids that will last forever. We have the potential to have a permanent impact on kids and their development

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways have we emphasized the seven social skills in the past?

2. Which of the seven social skills are your strengths?

3. Which of the seven social skills do our children excel at?

4. Which of the seven social skills do our children seem to need the most?

5. How might we better prepare our staff to be social skill experts?

6. How might we emphasize social skills in the future? How can we be more intentional about teaching social skills? Give examples.

7. How might culture impact the teaching of social skills?

8. How can you use the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACER) and/or other program assessments and/or standards to inform current practices related to social skills? Identify specific items or standards that apply.

Supporting the Seven Cs in your program

Using the chart below, identify next steps you will take to focus on supporting the Seven Cs in your program.

Next Steps	Who	When	Review of Effectiveness

Resources and Further Reading

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). http://www.casel.org

Durlak, J. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2007). *The impact of after-school programs that promote personal and social skills*. Chicago: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. Available at www.casel.org.

Edutopia. George Lucas Educational Foundation. www.edutopia.org

Hall, G., Yohalem, N., Tolman, J., & Wilson, A. (2003). *Promoting Positive Youth Development as a Support to Academic Achievement: A Report Commissioned by the Boston After-School for All Partnership*. Wellesley, MA: National Institute on Out-of-School Time with Forum for Youth Investment.
Retrieved May 27, 2011 from http://www.forumfyi.org/files/Promoting%20PYD.pdf

Henderson, N. (2007). *Resiliency in action: Practical ideas for overcoming risks and building strengths in youth, families, and communities*. Ojai, CA: Resiliency in Action, Inc.

Miller, B., PhD (2005). *Pathways to success for youth: What counts in afterschool. Massachusetts Afterschool Research Study (MARS)*. Boston, MA: United Way of Massachusetts Bay. Available at http://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/MARS-Report.pdf

Ollhoff, J., & Ollhoff, L. (2004*). Getting along: Teaching social skills to children and youth*. Farmington, MN: Sparrow Media Group.

Search Institute. http://www.search-institute.org
The Search Institute seeks to help families, schools, and communities make the world a better place for kids.

Responsive Classroom. http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/

Yohalem, N. & Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. (January, 2009). *Measuring youth program quality: A Guide to assessment tools Second Edition*. Forum for Youth Investment. Retrieved on May 27, 2011 from http://www.forumfyi.org/content/measuring-youth-program-quality-guide-assessment-tools-2nd-edition

About the Authors

Laurie and Jim Ollhoff

Laurie has ten years of experience working in a school-age program. She spent most of these years as a site coordinator in Minnesota, with hundreds of children coming through her program every year. During her tenure in SAC, her site received an award from the Minnesota governor for being a "Star Youth Service Program."

Laurie spent almost ten years on the university level, creating a certificate, bachelor's, and master's program in out-of-school time and child development resulting in hundreds of students earning certificates and degrees.

Laurie continues to do extensive writing and speaking in the out-of-school time field. Her interests and expertise are quality school-age program settings, school-age child development, the teaching of social skills, behavior guidance, and the role of adults during out-of-school time. She currently works as an assistant principal and as part-time faculty at Walden University.

Jim Ollhoff has a PhD in Education, and has been a youth worker, an out-of-school time professional, and a family life educator. Jim was a university professor, working as a dean of human services, overseeing more than twenty degree programs.

Jim and Laurie have written Getting Along: Teaching Social Skills to Children and Youth. Laurie has written School-age Care Planner. Jim has written Strategy 101: An Introduction and Guide, Stepping in Wholes: Introduction to Complex Systems, and a number of other works.

Jim currently works as a writer, researcher, consultant, and a part-time university professor.

Jim and Laurie are married, with one son and a variety of animals.

Roberta L. Newman

Roberta L. Newman has worked with children, youth, and families in a variety of roles for over thirty-five years. She has been a classroom teacher, an administrator of arts and music programs for preschool through high school students, a preschool director, a high school administrator, and a director of school-age programs for elementary and middle school children. As director of the Fairfax County, Virginia, School-Age Child Care Program, she guided the growth and development of over sixty school-based before and after school programs.

Since 1987, Roberta has been a management and training consultant focusing on the creation, development, and improvement of local and national programs for children, youth, and families. She was a lead author and developer of the Department of Defense

(DoD) training and credentialing program for school-age staff. Building on the development of the DoD school-age training and credentialing program, Roberta has also developed college certificate programs and credentialing programs for school-age staff in Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and South Dakota. Recently, Roberta designed three interactive courses on school-age care for the Internet for Learning Options, the online campus of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

Roberta is the author of several books including Training New After School Staff, Building Relationships with Parents and Families, Helping Children and Youth with ADD Succeed in After School Programs, Caring for Children in School-Age Programs, and others.

Roberta is a graduate of the American Conservatory of Music where she earned bachelor's and master's degrees in music education. She is a founding board member of the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA), now called the National AfterSchool Association (NAA).

General Resources

Afterschool Alliance http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm & http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/publications.cfm

Bender, J., Flatter, C., & Sorrentino, J. (2005). *Half a childhood: Quality programs for out of school hours, 3rd edition*. New Albany, Ohio: School-Age Notes.

Bumgarner, M. (2011). *Working with school-age children*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Harms, T., Jacobs, E., & White Romano, D. (1996.). School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Harvard Family Research Project. http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources

Little, P. M. D., Wimer, C., & Weis, H. B. (2007). *After school programs in the 21st century: Their potential and what it takes to achieve it*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Available at http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/after-school-programs-in-the-21st-century-their-potential-and-what-it-takes-to-achieve-it

Little, P. M. (2007). *The quality of school-age child care in after-school settings (Research-to-Policy Connections No. 7)*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty at the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. Retrieved from http://www.researchconnections.org/childcare/resources/12576/pdf

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Vandell, D., Lowe, E., Reisner, R. & Pierce, K. M. (2007). *Outcomes linked to high-quality afterschool programs: Longitudinal findings from the study of promising afterschool programs*. Policy Studies Associates, Inc. 1718 Connecticut Avenue NW Suite 400, Washington, DC 20009. Tel: 202-939-9780; Fax: 202-939-5732. http://www.policystudies.com

Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., & Yohalem, N., with Pittman, K. (March, 2007). *Lessons from three emerging efforts in youth serving sectors. The Forum for Youth Investment*. Available from http://www.forumfyi.org/files/Building_Quality_Improvement_Systems_0.pdf

Yohalem, N., & Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., with Fischer, S., & Shinn, M. (January, 2009). *Measuring Youth Program Quality: A Guide to Assessment Tools, Second Edition*. The Forum for Youth Investment. Available from http://www.forumfyi.org/files/MeasuringYouthProgramQuality_2ndEd.pdf