

# Michigan Child Care Expulsion Prevention Program

## The Most Important Things Consultants Do

Survey Summary No. 7 • August 2008

### Introduction

In February and March 2008, 29 Michigan Child Care Expulsion Prevention Program (CCEP) consultants from 16 CCEP programs across Michigan participated in a survey administered by the Michigan State University evaluation team.

CCEP consultants address the social-emotional needs of children presenting with challenging behavior to prevent their expulsion from child care and promote the social-emotional development of all children in the care setting. As part of the survey, consultants were asked what the most important things are that they do for children, families, and providers, and the most important ways they do these things. Services that consultants provided were not clearly separated into what they do for children, families, and providers, but were part of a system of partnership among all the participants in the process. For this report, we have separated the answers into areas most relevant to children, families, and providers separately.

**This fact sheet provides information on:**

- The most important things that consultants say they do for children, families, and providers.
- The most important ways that consultants say they support children, families, and providers.

### For Children

#### *Most Important Things Consultants Do...*

- **Educate the important adults in children's lives about children's behavior.** Consultants reported that they help parents and providers understand the children's challenging behavior and learn the needs expressed through such behavior. They help adults see each child as a unique individual with strengths and good qualities and build reasonable expectations for that child. Consultants guide the adults to spend time with children to better understand their temperament.

*"I think the most important thing I do for children is to help adults understand the 'meaning of their behavior.' I attempt to surround their situation with hopefulness that distressed and exhausted adults sometimes lose sight of."*

*"I help adults see children more accurately. I help adults reflect on their own experiences and think about, 'Am I seeing this child as s/he is, or am I seeing something else when I look at this child?' and 'How can I best respond to the child in front of me?' I help adults recognize that children are people who have feelings and experiences (good days and bad days) just like they (the adults) do. I encourage adults to have realistic expectations of children—to keep in mind the children's developmental capabilities, temperament, experiences, etc.--when responding to children throughout the day. In other words, I work to promote more responsive and reflective caregiving practices for children."*

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## *Most Important Ways They Do So...*

- **Support the adults.** Consultants work to have parents and providers remain positive and optimistic about their children and offer support in seeking out the most reasonable means to meet the children's needs or to work with children's temperament. They address adults' needs by helping them reflect on their own early experiences and how those affect their caregiving.

*"I first attempt to offer support to the adults around them. As a matter of fact, most of what I do for the children happens through the important adults in their lives."*
- **Advocate for children.** Consultants speak on behalf of children about their needs and help adults around to listen to children's voices.

*"Try to give them a voice...speak for them and help the adults to listen to what it is their behaviors are saying. I help the grown-ups to hear together and think as a 'team' about how to best meet the child's needs."*
- **Provide encouragement and support to children.** Consultants play and talk with children at their level, look for ways to help them with success, and affirm their ability to solve problems or conflicts. They also model positive ways to deal with everyday conflicts or feelings.

*"Play with them, affirm them, demonstrate genuine concern and caring."*

*"Accept, acknowledge who they are, and build on strengths."*
- **Conduct assessment and observations.** Consultants observe the children in childcare and home settings, use various tools, such as the Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment Infant/Toddler or Devereaux Early Childhood Assessment behavior instrument, to assess children, and provide valuable information about children's developmental level and social-emotional problems.

## **For Families**

### *Most Important Things Consultants Do...*

- **Provide emotional support.** Consultants listen to families and encourage them to share their experiences with their child. They acknowledge parents' stresses and frustrations and empathize with their struggles. Consultants remind parents of the children's strengths and help them build hope and confidence about parenting. They validate parents' feelings and experiences and help them reframe those feelings in an empowering way.

*"I try to support them by listening to their concerns about their child. I listen for the things they are doing well and try to build on these as a means of encouragement."*

*"I think that I offer them a non-judgmental space to give them the emotional safety to explore several facets of their lives that ultimately impact their child(ren)."*

*"Listening to them. Providing information specific to their child, honesty that nobody has all the answers. Really just developing a relationship based on mutual respect so there is the opportunity for learning."*
- **Help parents understand their children.** Consultants help families gain perspective about their children's behavior and understand the social-emotional development of their children and their individual child's needs.

*"I help support families to better understand their child (temperament, message behind the behaviors) which often leads to families seeing a child through a new 'lens.'"*

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## *Most Important Ways They Do So...*

- **Train parents to interact with their children.** Consultants talk with families about their parenting practices and validate their experience. They help develop the Positive Guidance Plan to create new strategies to interact with children, highlighting parent-child interaction and positive responses. They use modeling and positive reinforcement. Consultants also give parents handouts relevant to childcare strategies and offer phone support to the families.

*"I ask them how they have dealt with their child's concerns or behavior and what has worked and what has not worked. I try to give them some new ideas or tools to help their child."*

*"Attend home visits, offer personal in-home training and support."*
- **Provide resources and coordination of services.** Consultants provide opportunities for parents to receive support from other parents via support group or training groups and encourage teamwork between parent and provider. Consultants provide referrals to appropriate resources such as occupational therapy, special education programs, or therapists.
- **Bridge parents with providers.** Consultants work with parents to advocate for their children and build strong communicative relationships with providers. They help build parent-teacher partnerships by facilitating meetings and acting as a go-between to help foster the relationship.

*"Provide a safe base on which to build a partnership between the child care center (and parent) – especially under tough circumstances."*

*"I am always attempting to bridge families with their providers so that eventually their communication is more direct with each other--and so that the parents can experience themselves as effective advocates for their child."*
- **Be accessible.** Consultants report that it is important to families that they be readily available to them. Consultants emphasize their accessibility through phone contacts, visits at home or the center, group meetings, and being available at times that are feasible for parents.

## **For Providers**

### *Most Important Things Consultants Do...*

- **Provide emotional support.** As with families, consultants provide emotional support to providers by listening and reflecting on providers' work, their contributions, and their feelings about their work with families and children. They validate providers' perspectives about children and help them grow in their relationships with the children.

*"I listen to their stories, empathize with their struggle and validate their experience."*

*"Listen. Most providers feel like they are not heard and are not supported."*

*"Support and recognition of how hard their jobs can be--that they are doing work of incredible value and they want the best for children."*
- **Improve skills.** Consultants help providers recognize better ways to cope with challenging behavior.

*"Recognize their strengths and build on these to help in areas where they don't feel as comfortable or struggle with."*

*"Support them through their interactions with the child and give them skills to change some of the ways they are interacting with some children and reinforce some of the ways they interact with children, affirm their concern."*

## Most Important Ways They Do So...

- **Provide training, reflection and feedback.** Consultants help providers recognize their strengths and weaknesses, identify areas to work on, brainstorm new ideas, and develop a Positive Guidance Plan. They offer professional development and help them adjust their actions, tone of voice, and program to meet the needs of the children in their care. Consultants model the appropriate interaction with children and help providers with the appropriate expectations for children's behavior. They provide feedback after observations and give suggestions about ways to change.

*"I often ask questions in a way that helps them realize and verbalize that they have the tools and knowledge to work with a child. Together we come up with some new ideas or resources to try."*

*"I use 'teachable' moments--so that providers can see the relevance of child development information."*

- **Reframe.** Consultants suggest new ways for providers to view situations and help them reflect on their existing perspective.

*"I challenge their views while respecting them and where they are coming from. I give them an opportunity to think about things differently.... to 'wonder' about possibilities they might not consider on their own."*

*"Re-framing and perhaps renaming: for example, 'time out' to become 'time in' and the related changes and slightly different purposes."*

- **Seek resources for teachers.** Consultants talk to the directors to help teachers get resources. They also lend resources and support materials related to social-emotional health (e.g., handouts and tapes).
- **Help develop relationships.** Consultants work on the relationships among staff or between teachers and parents that can affect childcare quality.

*"I focus much of the work on 'bridge-building' between staff-to-staff and parent-to-staff hoping that the centers will become a more solid and supportive environment."*

- **Connect with the director.** Center director buy-in is critical for provider improvements to be successful and sustainable. As one consultant described:

*"I always begin my work with the director and I consult with her/him during every visit. The building and sustaining of that professional relationship is the primary 'tool' I use to facilitate the work."*

- **Be available and attentive.** Just as consultants are available to parents, they are also available to providers. Consultants check in regularly and are accessible when questions need to be answered. Additionally, consultants provide special attention and recognition that many providers may not often get:

*"Showing up to spend time with them, noticing them, and the conversations I have with them. I see providers in a way they are not used to being seen...as capable individuals who have chosen to work in a difficult field."*

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