

Best and Promising Practices in Family Resource Center First 5 Kern Position Statements

Introduction

Family Resource Centers (FRCs) play a unique and vital role in supporting children and families in Kern County. Since 2000, First 5 Kern has funded FRCs in the county as another mechanism of reaching children ages 0 to 5 and their families. First 5 Kern currently provides funding support for seventeen FRCs. Twelve FRCs are funded under First 5 Kern Strategic Plan Early Childcare and Education; the remaining five FRCs are funded under Parent Education and Support Services.

With the diversity of backgrounds and wide range of experiences represented by service providers, the importance of developing a formal statement for First 5 Kern to define best and promising practices in FRCs was recognized. The development of the FRC “Best and Promising Practices” Statement came about as a group effort, with participation from a cross-section of the FRC providers and First 5 Kern staff.

This document represents key areas of best and promising practices for First 5 Kern’s funded FRCs to improve family stability. The intent of this document is to serve as a guide for all FRC sites in providing quality practices that will contribute to the success of children and families. It is maintained that positive outcomes for children and families are realized when programs and social service providers are committed to quality best and promising practices in family support services.

Vision

Family Resource Centers work to improve family stability by providing tools and resources to enable families to become productive and contributing members of society.

Definition of Terms

Evidence-based Practices are clearly conceptualized, well-defined, and are supported by empirical research that documents their effectiveness. These practices are supported by implementation studies, but may lack randomization and/or control groups as required by Scientifically Based Practices. Evidence-based Practices have been implemented, monitored, and evaluated to demonstrate effectiveness.

Promising Practices have some evidence - anecdotal, case studies, etc., which consistently report effectiveness, but not enough evidence to sufficiently prove effectiveness. However, Promising Practices should have also been implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

Family Stability Rubric is a survey designed to help programs evaluate changes in the condition and stability of families. The system is based on advocate or case manager observation, and periodically tracks a family's status in six functional areas or variables.

Anti-bias is an approach to challenge prejudice, stereotype and bias. In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism, racism, and handicapism; it is not sufficient to be non-biased, nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice is based on the knowledge of how children develop and learn. Therefore, providers’ choices about their practices and actions need to be based on the understanding of children’s developmental changes that typically take place from birth to age five and beyond. Guidelines by which providers do activities, interact, and create environments that meet the needs of young children according to their age level and individual strengths, weaknesses, and interests. These guidelines are described in the following publication: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8* edited by S. Bredekamp and C. Copple. Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2009.

Family Resource Center Best and Promising Practices Position Statement

The first five years of a child's life is a time of enormous development. From prenatal to five years of age, the child is in a continual state of growth, learning, and relationship building. It is imperative that each child have access to the best possible care to optimize his/her development. Appropriate support systems

(i.e. parents, caregivers, service providers, and others) play a tremendous role in ensuring that the child is supported medically, physically, mentally, socially, and developmentally. The following statements summarize Best and Promising Practices within Family Resource Centers:

A. Partnership and Collaboration

The Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change, 2000, suggests that a FRC is a “natural vehicle for building a strong and healthy community. It is the ideal position to develop collaborative partnerships with all facets of the community [and its partners].” To improve the outcomes for families and their community, a quality center provides a safe and positive environment where families, individuals, and community partners feel accepted while working to kindle and support local efforts that engage all facets of the community. FRCs should work with partners to link families to resources and advocate with families to strengthen the community. A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will continue to participate and be involved in Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT), local collaborative meetings, and other partnership building activities. The FRC will work to build and strengthen positive working relationships with partners to further articulate service delivery efforts (e.g. schools, government/public agencies, non-profit organizations, social service providers, private agencies, for profit companies, and others), to ensure that adequate systems of care are in place. A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will ensure that partners are active participants in the community with certain levels of responsibility. All participants and partners will have a shared vision and common level of support for the community, its residents, and the FRC.

B. Community Contribution and Responsibility

A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will seek to provide opportunities where partners, including families, will take a leadership role in the community and have ownership of the FRC. A FRC program will seek opportunities for families to give back to the community through volunteer work or other general community strengthening functions. Families will be involved in decision making, planning, coordinating, processes for service delivery, and other community strengthening efforts. A FRC program engaged in best and promising practices will seek continuous feedback from parents on how to better serve children and families in the community through activities such as: focus groups, advisory group meetings, collaborative and community meetings, parent-support activities, and others.

C. Relationships with Parents

A FRC program engaged in best and promising practices will seek to partner with parents, understanding that they are the child’s first and most important teacher. The FRC will seek to partner with parents through case management, parenting education, parent-child activities, and other activities to assist parent’s roles as the primary teacher and caregiver for the children. A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will seek opportunities for parents and child to interact, play, and learn together.

D. Parenting and Life Skills Education

A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will provide opportunities for parents and adults to learn skills to improve family stability. FRCs will offer evidence and promising practices based parenting and life skills education based on what is deemed by the families and staff as beneficial.

E. Case Management

Please refer to Best and Promising Practices for Case Management.

F. Child Development

Children’s experiences during early childhood influence their functioning in school and throughout life. Research on the long term effects of early childhood indicates that children who participate in high quality early child development programs engage in more complex play, demonstrate more secure attachments to adults, and score higher on measures of thinking ability and language development. A FRC that provides child development services should focus their early childhood

education programs on promoting standards of high quality and developmentally appropriate practices. A high quality developmentally appropriate program or service should have the following components:

- Provides a safe and nurturing environment.
- Provides an environment that promotes physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, intellectual, and language development.
- Provides programs through play based curriculums and promotes the development and learning of the individual child.
- Demonstrates an understanding of, and responsiveness, to cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Makes reasonable accommodations to provide access for children with disabilities or developmental delays.
- Is staffed by those with knowledge and training in early childhood development.

G. Diversity

A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will value the diversity of families. A FRC will work to affirm and strengthen families cultural, racial and linguistic identities and enhance ability of families to function in a multicultural society. Staff will be reflective of and sensitive to the cultures and languages of families served, using day to day experiences as a way to ensure the program is culturally relevant and promoting anti-bias.

H. Quality

A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will follow *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* developed by the Family Resource Coalition of America. A FRC will seek opportunities to elevate and to enhance quality services by ensuring that such guidelines and principles are articulated in the day to day operations of the FRC. This will help to ensure that all families served through the FRC are receiving optimal quality care.

I. Sustainability

Sustainability is a critical component to continuity of services in the community and the FRC. A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will individually and with its partners work to identify and seek additional sources from public and private funding that will result in long term sustainability of services. The Family Resource Centers: Vehicles for Change, 2000, recommends that a FRC should work to ensure that both public and private partners continue to provide resources and support for the FRC, and share funding responsibilities for infrastructure, services, staffing, and capacity building.

J. Assessments Tools

A FRC engaged in best and promising practices will utilize assessment tools and strategies that contain indicators that examines the areas of child/family functioning and the progress of the children and families. Assessment tools will be based on evidence-based practices or assessment tools approved by program evaluators. The following are approved assessment tools.

- Ages and Stages Questionnaire- III
- Nurturing Skills Competency Scale
- New Beginnings Court Approved Assessment
- Family Stability Rubric

Guidelines for Family Support Practice

Guidelines for Family Support Practice refer to a set of principles for best practices in family support, published by the Family Resource Coalition of America:

- I. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
- II. Staff enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members – adults, youth, and children.
- III. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.

- IV. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
- V. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
- VI. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
- VII. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
- VIII. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
- IX. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

Conclusion

It is believed that the overall quality of services for children and families will be greatly improved as funded Family Resource Center service providers adhere to the above position statement. It is also believed that this will assist in providing assurance that funding awards made by First 5 Kern will be well utilized and promote optimal growth and development for young children and families.

End Notes:

¹ Family Stability based on the variables as measured by the Family Stability Rubric

Resources

Bredekamp, S.; Copple, C. (2009). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*. Revised Edition. Washington DC. NAEYC.

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Mason V. (1998). *Discernable Characteristics*, W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Family Resource Center Coalition of America.

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Strategies. (2008). *An Appreciative Inquiry: Reflections from Family Resource Centers in California*.