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HIRING A SUBSTITUTE CAREGIVER

Introduction

Substitute caregivers are a valuable resource to the child care field. Without them, child care programs would regularly find themselves facing multiple challenges including staff shortages and non-compliance with licensing regulations for child/staff ratios. A qualified and well-prepared substitute caregiver can save the day. The experience substitute caregivers have in your program will affect their performance. Making them welcome and acknowledging their value to your program will contribute to positive outcomes.

This package includes information about:

- Hiring a Substitute Caregiver
- Finding a Substitute Caregiver
- Employer Roles and Responsibilities
- Tips for Working with a Substitute Caregiver
- Preparing a Substitute Caregiver Information Packet

Hiring a Substitute Caregiver

- Before substitute caregivers arrive at your program, decide what they will and will not be asked to do in areas such as giving medication, driving, taking phone calls, communication with parents, working alone, walking kindergarten children to and from school and program planning.
- Give substitutes practical information on the phone that they will need on their first day. For example: bring lunch, clothing needed for the day's activities, break times, how, when and how much they will be paid, and relevant program information.
- Think of substitutes as short term consultants. They can bring new perspective and observations about your program, as well as new enthusiasm and ideas to program planning. Be aware that a long-term substitute caregiver will have different needs than one that is only short-term.
- Identify who is responsible for calling substitutes. Keep in mind that several staff should know how to arrange for a substitute in case the ill/absent child care provider is unable to call a substitute herself.

- Tune in to how substitute caregivers may be feeling. They may be anxious or nervous about your expectations. Check in after the first day to de-brief about the situation and thank them for their work.

Finding a Substitute Caregiver

1. Regularly post information in your community to let potential substitute caregivers know that you keep a list of on-call caregivers.
2. Talk with other child care providers in your community about sharing substitute lists.
3. Sometimes the local Child Care Resource and Referral program can provide names of substitutes for family child care providers. Caregivers interested in exploring substitute opportunities and providers looking for substitutes should contact their local Child Care Resource and Referral.
4. The employer is solely responsible for verifying substitute information, references and credentials. When hiring a substitute caregiver, employers should follow the program's hiring process and ensure a criminal records check has been done.

Employer Roles and Responsibilities

As an employer, it is important that you do everything you can to give your substitutes a positive experience. Knowing your roles and responsibilities as an employer will help you provide your substitute caregivers with a good experience and ensure on-going quality for the children in your program. Try the following:

- Interview potential substitutes prior to their first day of work. Show them around and introduce them to other adults and children. There is some benefit to paying substitutes to work a short shift in order to become more familiar with the child care setting before you actually need them.
- Welcome the substitute and introduce her/him to children, parents and other adults.
- Provide detailed information about job expectations and who can answer program and/or administrative questions.
- Clearly state expectations regarding the substitute's conduct in the child care setting, how to interact with children (and parents, if applicable), and appropriate dress.
- Make sure the substitute knows about emergency procedures, children's allergies, custody/access issues, special needs of children and guidance strategies.
- Provide a Substitute Information Packet to give an overview of your program, philosophy, policies and procedures and daily routine.

Tips for Working with a Substitute Caregiver

When substitute caregivers arrive, they need to feel valued and be properly equipped to do their job. You can do your part in ensuring their needs are addressed.

Ensure your substitutes:

1. Understand the context.

Orient substitute caregivers to your program. Provide a tour and a review of your philosophy and your centre policies and procedures.

2. Realize success in your working environment.

Make sure your substitutes know where to find and store supplies and equipment. Detail expectations for daily procedures such as clean up. Be sure everyone knows your substitute caregivers. When parents and others know there is a substitute, they can adjust their expectations and respond supportively.

3. Can refer to a schedule.

Outline the daily routine. Post a list of anticipated activities and times.

4. Come prepared.

Inform substitutes, in advance, of what they need to bring. If there is a change, be sure to give your substitute ample opportunity to prepare.

5. Know your expectations.

Clearly define your expectations of substitute caregivers.

6. Experience respect.

Once you have hired substitutes, be sure to offer encouragement, support and feedback on their work in your program.

Preparing a Substitute Caregiver Information Packet

Whenever possible, mail or email an Information Packet to substitute caregivers prior to their first day of work so that they can arrive well prepared. A Substitute Information Packet typically includes the following information:

- *Expectations*
 - Schedule of days and hours to be worked
 - Break schedule
 - Pay rate and schedule
 - What to do upon arrival (who to report to, where to store personal items)
 - Age group/range of children
 - Necessary clothing and footwear

- *Basic rules*
 - No smoking
 - Telephone privileges (when and for how long the phone may be used, where messages will be posted)
 - Food (restricted foods; breaks, meals and snack times)

- *Guidelines*
 - Discipline policy
 - Drop off and pick up procedures
 - Health issues (include a list of children with special health considerations such as food allergies or medication and when, what and how to administer any medications)
 - Curriculum plan (be sure to denote any flexibility in your program schedule)

- *Responsibilities*
 - Daily routine
 - Clean up
 - Program planning role

- *Directions*
 - How to get to the program by car or bus
 - Which door to enter
 - Where to park

References

Child Care Information Exchange: Sept/Oct 2003. *Setting the Stage for A Substitute's Success*
Child Care Information Exchange, Nov/Dec 1991. *Substitutes We're the Real Thing*
Westcoast Post, August 2001. *Substitutes: A Valuable Resource*

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