
~ TRAINING SOLUTIONS ~

An e-newsletter supporting effective adult learning practices

September 2010

MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT

Issue #28

Healthy By Design and Training Events

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The first year a caregiver works with children he/she may be sick more than any other time in his/her life. Working in child care exposes you to a wide variety of germs. Also, child care is a potentially stressful occupation. Caregiver burn-out is a very real problem. Therefore, self-care and stress reduction are very important.

INTRODUCTION

You may have heard of a Yellowstone County initiative called "Healthy By Design." Healthy By Design "encourages, recognizes, educates, and creates a standard of excellence for promoting healthy lifestyles by encouraging active living and healthy choices that will shape the future of our community."

The Healthy By Design brochure points out that "Obesity rates in the United States are alarming. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1 in 5 people are obese. This includes 21.8% of Montanans. Promoting good lifestyle choices at the local level is one big step towards empowering people to take control of their own health."

Early childhood trainers may be interested to know that applying healthy-by-design principles to early childhood training events can also serve to model best practices for caring and educating young children. Here's how it works using the five health standards espoused by Healthy By Design.

- ✘ Environmental Stewardship
- ✘ Nutrition
- ✘ Physical Activity
- ✘ Prevention and Overall Wellness
- ✘ Safety

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- ✘ Recycle

- ✘ Use electronic documents instead of paper
- ✘ Use the same materials for multiple presentations

The standard of Environmental Stewardship is primarily a matter of creativity and purposeful planning. For example, when PowerPoint slides are used for a handout, the content of the slides may be printed in various formats. One way of saving paper is to print the slide outline, instead of individual slides. If slides are limited to key points of the presentation, there may be no reason to print the slides at all. The PowerPoint presentation could also be posted on an accessible web site or e-mailed directly to participants. These options and others may not be the first thing that comes to mind unless you make a deliberate effort.

Other ways to apply this healthy-by-design standard to your training event include:

- ✓ Recycle leftover handouts rather than popping them into the trash bin. Use leftover handouts for another presentation, organize surplus handouts in a resource area, or recycle the paper.
- ✓ When realistic, allow participants to choose the handouts they really want to take with them instead of handing the same packet to everyone.
- ✓ Reduce the number of vehicles traveling to your event by encouraging participants to car pool, utilize public transit, or provide shuttle service. You might give participants who car pool recognition or an incentive of some kind.

- ✓ Borrow decorations or props from another activity or event.
- ✓ Use reusable dishware and table covers rather than disposable items.
- ✓ Offer water in pitchers rather than in plastic bottles. When you do have to use plastic bottles, provide suitable disposal so participants can easily recycle empty bottles.
- ✓ Encourage individuals to bring reusable water containers or tea/coffee cups.

- ✓ Achieve portion control during preparation by cutting bagels in halves or even quarters, providing small sized bananas/apples, etc., and using small serving dishes and cups.
- ✓ Providing water and 100% fruit juice. Information is better retained by hydrated brains. Here's where portion control must be noted - provide plenty of water but limited fruit juice. It's water that the brain needs to function at its best.

NUTRITION

- ✗ Serve healthy meals and snacks that promote a balanced diet
- ✗ Limit meals to recommended portion sizes
- ✗ Provide water and juice instead of sugary sodas

Nutrition is a primary focus of meals and snacks in early childhood programs. Healthy By Design provides an opportunity for you to model good nutrition options at the same time you are teaching and modeling developmentally appropriate practices. Ways to apply this healthy-by-design standard to training events include:

- ✓ While meals are only occasionally served at training events, with a little planning, you can serve healthy foods. It can be as simple as serving vegetarian pizza instead of pepperoni or serving baked chips instead of fried with sandwiches.
- ✓ Snacks and beverages are often served at training events. This is where a big difference in nutritious offerings can be made. Bagels can be selected over donuts and sweet rolls. Nuts and popcorn are healthier options than brownies or cookies.
- ✓ Serve fruit, perhaps whole fruit in a lovely basket, instead of candy. When chocolate is necessary, you can choose dark chocolate over milk chocolate (less sugar) and offer smaller amounts of the really good stuff.
- ✓ Think outside the box, literally! Serve bowls of vanilla yogurt, unsweetened, slightly mashed berries, and granola, and let participants mix up their own nutritious and delicious snack.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- ✗ Schedule walking breaks
- ✗ Lead stretches or aerobics during the event
- ✗ Provided educational materials about active lifestyles

Want participants to be in peak learning form? Provide multiple opportunities for physical activity throughout the session. Paying attention to this healthy-by-design standard could add new meaning to the term "active learning." Primarily, trainers think of active learning as keeping participants involved and actively using their brains—actively using their bodies, not so much. Infusing more physical activity into training sessions could have a serious and positive impact on learning outcomes. There are so many innovative and meaningful ways to build in movement throughout the session:

- ✓ Use warm-up and icebreaker activities that get participants moving. For example, have them line up according to how many years they have been in the early childhood field, or post ideas for kid-friendly snacks (or whatever) on a single flip chart at the front/back of the room, or stand in the place on a line of masking tape where they would rate their ability in some early childhood practice, etc.
- ✓ Take breaks seriously. A break does not have to be a certain amount of time; it just needs to be a break from being on task. If the activity can relate to the topic in some way, so much the better.
 - Play music for a few minutes while participants listen and relax, maybe even close their eyes.

- Set up the snacks/water in another room. Ask participants to go there, get their snack, and come right back.
- Demonstrate or display two or three full-body stretches on your PowerPoint. Ask everyone to do the stretches together before they take a break.
- Play a game that gets people moving.
- ✓ Schedule stress/tension breaks. Take several minutes to teach participants to massage their neighbor's neck and shoulders.
- ✓ Encourage spontaneous as well as planned opportunities for laughter.
- ✓ Sing familiar children's songs together, perhaps as a transition to another activity.

Don't say there is no time for movement because there is so much information to convey during the session. What's the good of conveying information if participant's brains and bodies are too overwrought to absorb it!

PREVENTION AND OVERALL WELLNESS

- ✗ Promote proper handwashing
- ✗ Lead yoga or meditation exercises
- ✗ Provide educational materials on health screenings

If you are committed to modeling quality early childhood practice, then you will plan ways to do it across sessions, not just in sessions on that particular topic. Preventing exposure to germs and promoting wellness are quality early childhood practices that need to be encouraged as much and as often as possible. A healthy and happy early care and education professional is going to be a much more productive teacher/caregiver. And he or she will not have to skip the training event to stay in bed!

It's not that hard to embed this standard in training events when you view it from a fresh perspective. You might:

- ✓ Encourage participants to wash their hands before coming into the training room and before eating break snacks.
- ✓ Add hand sanitizer to the supply or resource table.

- ✓ Ask a participant who practices yoga to teach a simple pose or two during a break.
- ✓ Use visualization during the session. For example, ask participants to close their eyes and visualize the ideal early childhood environment before you talk about creating learning environments for young children.
- ✓ Encourage individual well-being by offering information about community resources.

SAFETY

- ✗ Designate a safety officer for the event
- ✗ Map evacuation routes and exits
- ✗ Follow food safety requirements when serving meals and snacks

At first glance, the components of this standard may seem unnecessary or even silly to try to apply at most training events. And yet, the trainer is likely the one person who can have an impact on the safety of participants in a crisis or emergency situation. Consider what it might take to comply with this healthy-by-design standard. It doesn't really take that much effort to

- ✓ Check the training room for safety hazards
- ✓ Ensure you know what to do if the fire alarm goes off during the training
- ✓ Check evacuation routes and exits when you use a new classroom
- ✓ Let participants know about exits as well as bathrooms
- ✓ Follow food preparation and handling guidelines for serving whole fruit, water in pitchers, etc.

CONCLUSION

You are likely to think of additional ideas for applying these simple standards in training events once you put your mind to it. As you let participants know what you are doing, they may come up with even more inspirational and useful ideas. The goal is to begin thinking about how applying these principles can model appropriate and healthy practices and enhance the learning experience for everyone.

Healthy By Design offers recognition for individuals and agencies in Yellowstone County that complete an online application and plan events that follow these principles. The Yellowstone County Healthy By Design

Review Team is also available as a resource for any-one planning events that occur outside Yellowstone County. Further information about Healthy By Design may be found at www.riverstonehealth.org. ~

TRAINING SOLUTIONS was established by the Early Childhood Project at Montana State University in 2004 with monies from the federal Child Care and Development Fund administered through the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Early Childhood Services Bureau. It is designed to support positive and effective training strategies for use in early childhood professional development.

TRAINING SOLUTIONS is published four times a year. Individuals on the Montana Early Childhood Trainer Directory receive the e-newsletter as a benefit through the ECP Trainer Listserv. If you are not currently subscribed to the listserv, or are unsure if you are or not, please check your status by e-mailing ecp@montana.edu.

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If you have stories to share about implementing the ideas described in this issue, please address your comments to your training colleagues at trainerdirectoryexchange@listserv.montana.edu. If you have comments about the topic of this newsletter or ideas for topics to address in future issues, please contact:

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