

Tip Sheets

Building HOPE Through Teamwork in Childcare Settings

The Importance of Leadership

Leadership is essential in early child care. Creating a positive workplace is crucial to reducing stress and forming sustainable partnerships with staff. It also boosts collaboration and productivity. When we give staff the support and resources to thrive, we provide children with the best possible services and care. This creates confidence in our work and promotes the integrity of our practice.

HOPE

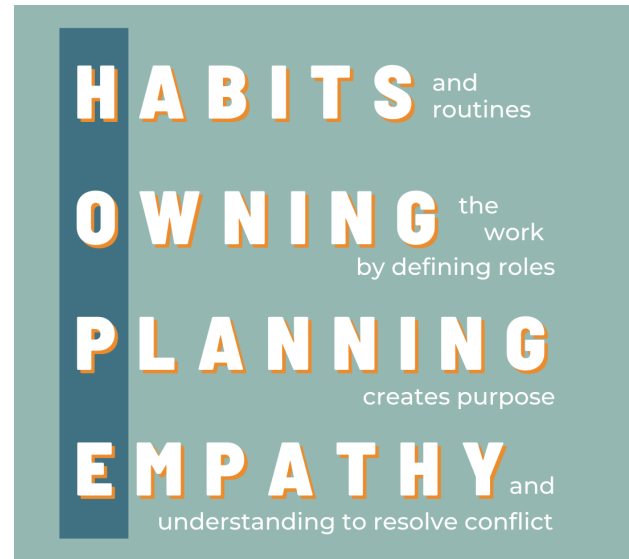
The foundational principles outlined in the HOPE acronym can naturally encourage teamwork and collaboration to promote a positive and enriching environment to benefit children, families, and staff.

Habits and Routines

Developing and clarifying positive workplace policy minimizes daily decision-making fatigue for staff. The most important step in creating habits and routines is to model your expectations. For example, checking with staff at the beginning of the day shows we value their punctuality and opens a line of communication for feedback on whether their needs are met. Being present and attentive to the needs of our staff also allows us the chance to coach staff and demonstrate our expectations.

Tips for implementing habits and routines

- Discuss routines face-to-face.
- Write down workplace practices/expectations in your staff handbook.
- Honestly assess your current habits/routines, and identify potential problems in need of a fix.



- When something isn't working, the best course of action is to simply adapt and change it.
- Incorporate staff feedback.

Owning the Work by Defining Roles

A positive workplace fosters a sense of pride and ownership amongst coworkers. To ensure that our message is delivered with clarity and consistency, we must build a foundation to support deep, sustainable connections within our programs.

Everyone has a role, make sure it's defined

A **job description** is more than an official title or designation. Ensure that each person understands what is expected of them and the expectations are measurable. We cannot quantify whether someone is doing a "good job" unless we can measure results. Clearly define the roles of staff and associates by outlining the tasks, functions, responsibilities, and competencies required of each person in that role.

Establish open communication

Open communication is crucial to a successful and productive work environment. Sharing new ideas works best when it can be done freely and without fear of negative reaction. It is also important to allow our ideas to evolve and change. Additionally, we have a responsibility to connect and collaborate with the families in our programs to make sure they feel heard, valued, and understood.

Planning Creates Purpose

Success doesn't happen by accident. You need to know where you are going, and devise a plan to get there. Planning includes:

- Setting a goal, endpoint, or purpose.
- Sharing info and intent so staff feel prepared.
- Creating a starting point to begin work and adapting as needed.
- Comparing progress to remaining obstacles.
- Identifying in advance where issues may arise.

Priority areas for planning

Finding the time to plan may feel overwhelming. Focus on a few priority areas to get started.

- **Scheduling:** People feel more confident and in control of their situation when their daily activities are predictable and familiar. Scheduling also ensures time is used as efficiently as possible. Time is a finite resource!
- **Planned agendas for team meetings:** Meetings should be memorable, inspiring, and offer the opportunity for feedback and guidance. Review your list of program and individual goals so that the support you provide aligns with any licensing and other accreditation requirements.
- **Professional development:** Close your center for dedicate professional development days. Create shared understanding by reviewing

health and safety mandates, presenting fresh ideas, and meeting yearly requirements.

- **Program Improvement Plans (PIP):** Internally motivated PIP may be initiated by something you noticed when analyzing existing policies, procedures, and environment. Externally motivated PIP may come from participating in a state quality rating system or national accreditation process. In either case, it is important that your PIP template includes measurable goals and realistic timelines that will hold you and your staff accountable for achieving the desired outcomes.

Empathy and Understanding to Resolve Conflict

The work we do with children and families relies on our ability to develop relationships and respectfully communicate across different value systems and beliefs. The [MN Knowledge Competency Framework](#) states that we will:

- Develop policies and explain issues related to establishing professional relationships with families and co-workers.
- Evaluate multiple perspectives and values while paying particular attention to unintended, culturally based assumptions.
- Promote and support self-reflection on personal privilege, cultural awareness, and implicit bias for ourselves and program staff.

To accomplish these ideals, we need to foster group empathy and a shared understanding of differences amongst our team members. This has been associated with more favorable attitudes and readiness for reconciliation when conflict arises.

Laying the foundation for team collaboration

Effective teams understand they are dependent on each other's skills and talents. When staff work together to identify the roles that match their skills,

we can avoid redundancies, improve efficiency, and create positive workplace habits and routines.

Laying the foundation for team respect

People collaborate better and feel more fulfilled when they are able to work without fear or stress. Learning about each other's identities helps welcome the differences between beliefs, ideas, communication abilities, backgrounds, religions, workstyles, and cultural traditions. If we fail to create an environment of acceptance, we risk ostracizing others—making it difficult to create trust and encourage a positive environment.

Team buy-in to the mission/creating common goals

Having a clearly stated mission that your team can fully support is key your organization's success. When employees value a goal, they see themselves as an integral part of the team and are encouraged to work toward a shared vision and set of values.

Team problem solving and conflict management

Always be prepared to navigate conflict. No two people are alike, so disagreement is an eventuality. Often, we learn the best ways to manage conflict by actually managing conflict. Listen to feedback, remain respectful, and continue creating a positive work environment to resolve most issues informally. Addressing a conflict/problem is an opportunity to identify potential changes needed and evaluate how to better assist your team in the future.

6 common differences that might lead to conflict

Leaders must understand how the following contribute to a positive workplace and limits our ability to foster a team dynamic when unaddressed. Instead of criticizing someone for their worldview, empathize and try to learn from them.

1. Communication styles
2. Personality differences
3. Temperament differences
4. Cross-cultural awareness

5. Learning styles
6. Generational differences

Conclusion

When we are able to weave the talents of our individual staff together, we can create a team dynamic built on a foundation of trust, respect, and acceptance. Effective leaders work with their team to achieve the shared goal of creating a community where everyone feels valued and appreciated.

We can set community engagement practices in our policies that create predictability and stability through our habits and routines, the ability to own our work through clearly defined roles, intentionality in planning that creates purpose and develop empathetic relationships that lay the foundation for understanding each other.

Content contributed to by: Jamie Bonczyk, MA

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

Copyright © 2024 Center for Inclusive Child Care

These materials may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. Information in this tip sheet has been modified from multiple sources.

Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.