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AUTHOR Bellm, Dan; Whitebook, Marcy
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ABSTRACT

Addressed to teachers, administrators, resource and referral workers, and substitutes, this booklet offers advice about finding and retaining good substitute child care workers. Sections concern (1) causes of the "crisis" in substitute care, including the expansion of child care, provider turnover, shortage of elementary school teachers, low pay, and lack of training; (2) how child care programs and community agencies are responding to the crisis by defining responsibilities, developing hiring procedures and policies, providing orientation and supervision, and improving the work environment for substitutes; (3) establishing a substitute referral system that includes recruiting, advertising, screening, interviewing, training, referral, feedback, updating, the use of existing child care substitute registries, and efforts to obtain financial support from foundations and corporations; and (4) rights and responsibilities of substitute child care teachers. (RH)

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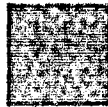
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GOOD SUB is hard to find:

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Recruiting and Retaining Temporary Staff for Child Care Programs



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Prepared by Dan Bellm with Marcy Whitebook

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Child Care Employee Project
P.O. Box 5603
Berkeley, CA 94705
(415) 653-9889
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The Child Care Employee Project (CCEP) advocates for improved wages, status and working conditions of child care providers in order to ensure high quality child care available to all families regardless of economic status. The CCEP is a non-profit agency that provides resources, training, and consultation to the child care community. For more information, please call (415) 653-9889 or write CCEP, P.O. Box 5603, Berkeley, CA 94705.



GOOD SUB is hard to find:

*Recruiting and Retaining
Temporary Staff
for Child Care Programs*



Prepared by Dan Bellm with Marcy Whitchook

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Introduction

Finding and keeping good substitute child care workers is a problem that touches everyone in the field: teachers, administrators, resource and referral workers, and of course, the subs themselves. This booklet is addressed to all these groups in the hope that coordinated efforts can lead to better practices and new solutions. Inside you will find information on: what's causing the substitute "crisis"; how child care programs and community agencies around the country are responding; tips for working with substitutes; and rights and responsibilities of substitute child care teachers.



The roblem

It's 7:10 in the morning and two teachers have called in sick. Next week, another teacher will go on vacation and still another has given notice that she will be leaving the job in thirty days. Next to the phone, a list of possible substitutes is taped to the wall, but you've already called all six of them: three have found permanent teaching jobs, one is already substituting elsewhere for the next two weeks, and two have moved out of town. What next—short of abandoning child care and moving out of town yourself?

Child care programs throughout the country report that their problems in finding reliable substitutes are increasing. In many areas the lack of substitutes is the most visible sign of a larger problem: a steadily worsening shortage of trained teachers.

Directors speak of job openings that remain vacant for months, and of spending unreasonable amounts of time and energy locating substitutes or subbing in the classroom themselves.

Teachers hesitate to stay home from work because of illness, convincing themselves that they are really "not that sick." They feel pressured to work extra hours to cover for absent co-workers and are drained by the constant need to orient and train one new co-worker after another.

Substitutes, for their part, often feel under recognized and unwelcome (as well as underpaid). At a recent meeting in Oakland, California, an after-school teacher director admitted that, "A lot of subs just won't come back. I don't have the time to orient them when they come in, I need them to be there with the kids right away. Often they walk out of here in a daze, like they're thinking, 'What happened this afternoon?'"

Apart from the obvious cost of paying substitutes an hourly wage, centers pay enormous "hidden costs" for substitute care which are not calculated in creating a "sub budget."

Consider:

- 1) The number of hours the administrator or other staff members spend looking for subs each month or year, or substiting themselves instead of doing their regular jobs.
- 2) The number of staff days per year for which subs are hired; the cost of paying a staff member for working overtime when no sub can be found.
- 3) The cumulative and disorienting effect on both children and parents.
- 4) The drain of energy and resources which caregivers could so much better devote to children-- and to each other.

What's causing the teacher and substitute shortage? Several trends at once:

Child Care Expansion.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a growth rate for preschool teachers in the coming decade of 37.9% to 43.9%, compared to a total projected labor force growth of 23% to 28% (Whitebook, 1986). As birth rates rise and mothers continue to enter the workforce, the demand for child care can be expected to keep increasing. So can the competition among programs for trained, qualified teachers.

Turnover

Studies conducted by the Child Care Employee Project and local groups across the country have found teacher turnover rates (the number of staff leaving their jobs) ranging from 15% to 50% a year. In 1983 the Child Care Information Service of NAIYC estimated that, "Between 1980 and 1990, 42% of all child care workers in educational and service positions . . . will need to be replaced each year, just to maintain the current supply of child care providers. These rates are more than double the average replacement rate of 19.4% for all occupations. Low pay, lack of benefits, and stressful working conditions are the major reasons child care providers leave their jobs in such high numbers." (NAIYC, 1986).

A recent Bureau of Labor Statistics study ranked child care among the ten job categories with the highest turnover in the nation; dishwashers, peddlers, and gas station attendants shared the top "honors."

Shortage of Elementary School Teachers

School enrollment is on the rise at a time when more than half the nation's teachers are approaching retirement age. Cutbacks in recent years have eliminated many younger teachers from the profession, and the current low wages and low professional status of the education field leads college students to prepare for more lucrative careers.

Nationwide, the average starting salary for public school teachers was \$14,100 in 1984, more than many child care teachers earn after years on the job (NAIYC, 1986). Public school jobs, therefore, are an attractive option for early childhood staff with bachelor's degrees and/or credentials, creating a further drain on the pool of trained personnel available to work in child care programs.

Low Pay

If child care providers typically make an annual wage at or below poverty level, substitute providers are on an even lower rung. In the San Francisco Bay area, the average sub pay is about \$5 an hour—a wage most temporary clerical or domestic workers would consider unacceptable—but in many areas of the country the average is much lower.

A resource and referral worker in Iowa says she tells subs to

expect "minimum wage and little more." A substitute child care program in Pennsylvania asks potential subs for five references, conducts a structured interview of up to fifteen questions ("What strengths would you bring to the position?", "What is the most important ingredient in working with children?")—then asks, "Are you willing to work for \$5.55 an hour?"

Lack of Training.

In most parts of the country, where unemployment rates are high, the problem is not so much a shortage of workers as a shortage of *skilled* workers. Child care programs themselves typically have few resources to train substitutes, as we have noted; subs often do not receive even the basic orientation they need to get their bearings.

Many programs rely on their local child care resource and referral agency or another community group for a current pool of substitutes, but feel frustrated by the minimal child care training—or even screening—subs undergo before entering this pool. In the last-minute desperation to find a sub, inadequately trained people are often hired sight unseen, hired once, and rejected.

If even a minimal training program were available, many subs could be better prepared for the job. They might even be motivated to pursue child care as a career option instead of giving up in frustration.

HOW

Centers Cope:

□ Improving Your Center's Substitute Policies

Substitute child care workers are in short supply, but your child care program can take several steps to make the best use of available subs. Clarifying your center's policies regarding substitutes is a useful starting place.

Defining Responsibilities

First of all, whose job is it in your program to arrange for substitutes when a staff member is sick? Make sure all permanent staff members agree on the answer! We strongly recommend that it *not* be the sick person, he or she should be resting instead of taking on more work duties, especially one that can be so difficult and stressful. A common result of asking teachers to arrange for their own substitutes is that teachers go to work sick rather than face such an ordeal. Whether the responsibility for arranging for subs falls on one person or is rotated periodically, the "dispatcher" should be thanked and encouraged to let off steam.

The sub shortage often discourages both staff and administrators from using earned and needed leave time. An adequate

sub budget -- one that allows for a decent sub wage and clear procedures for finding substitutes, encourages staff to use sick time and vacation time when they need it. Allowance for paying subs should be specifically included in a center's operating budget and should only be spent for other purposes if there is a surplus at the end of the year. The alternatives may be staff reduction of a serious illness which should keep them covered for a year.

Some child care programs find it very helpful to have a rotating sub with one or more other local centers. This allows each center some guaranteed coverage, and provides dependable employment for the sub. If someone is absent on your scheduled day, the sub could allow the regular staff time off to attend to planning or parent conferences, or to take long overdue vacation days.

Hiring

When hiring a sub for the first time, be sure to have some questions ready, especially if you do not have a detailed sub list, or if subs on the list have not been screened or trained by a referral program. Arrange a brief meeting and/or a classroom visit before the sub works, ideally, the person should be paid at the regular sub rate for assisting.

If a visit is impossible, conduct a brief interview over the phone. Ask about the person's education and experience, which age groups they have worked with and which they prefer, and what kinds of activities they like to do with children. Keep the questions simple and few; this is not an interview for a permanent staff position!

Also be sure to give the sub information he or she needs: the name and location of the center, the hours or days when the sub will be needed, the pay procedure, the age group the sub will work with, and the person to report to upon arrival. Scheduling a sub to come even a few minutes early allows for important communication that may improve the course of the entire day or shift.

Orientation and Supervision

Once your child care program has found good substitutes, how do you keep them? Recently, a group of subs from the Berkeley, California, area got together and talked about what they have liked and disliked about their subbing experiences.

When committees present one thing, many other things could improve their substantive policies.

Several subs need their liked the flexibility of the sub: the variety, the perspective that comes from working on a variety of different programs, being considered in an ideal form of child care training. There was considerable staff turnover as well they decided.

- ☐ "a sense of involvement"
 - ☐ "a sense of not belonging to the center"
 - ☐ "low respect"
 - ☐ "lack of encouragement"
 - ☐ "feeling overwhelmed"
 - ☐ "asked to do too much"
 - ☐ "excluded from decisions as well as professional discussions"
- And of course: "low pay"

Tips for Working with Subs

Just remember extra for empty classroom compliance of each situation. Make sure you greet a substitute with a friendly welcome, introduce him or her to the staff and the children, perhaps even come in on a few extra days of the "same game" of being. All this may sound obvious, but it's startling to find how often these basic gestures are not made. Taking subs for granted or sending them to work without resources or a how-do-you-do sets a negative tone which may never be overcome. The sub may already be mentally crossing your program off his or her list.

Develop a brief handout on each classroom for substitutes and give them a few minutes to look it over. Preferably each sub should also have a liaison person he or she can go to throughout the day with any questions. Your handout should include:

- ☐ the daily schedule
- ☐ the basic goals and any absences of parents unique to program (dietary restrictions, projects before meals, etc.)
- ☐ emergency procedures
- ☐ where to find first aid equipment, emergency forms, toys, and other supplies

- a list of all the children in the classroom with notes on any children who have special needs or who need particular attention
- important rules about safety and the use of equipment

You may also want to suggest a few simple “sure success” activities and give some examples of the kind of guidance and discipline you use with the children. Revise the handout periodically so that subs aren’t given outdated instructions. The more orientation you provide, the better the sub’s chance of handling things smoothly and efficiently. This minimizes change in the children’s routine and lets subs know that their time, energy, and talents are valued. And tell subs when they can take a break—they shouldn’t have to ask!

Introduce subs to parents at the beginning or end of the day. A name tag for the sub is an easy way to make everyone feel more comfortable. Be sure to inform parents about your substitute policies and the kind of orientation or training that subs receive. Parents will appreciate your care and attention in this area, because seeing unfamiliar faces among the staff can be unsettling.

When the day is through—and if you want subs to return—thank them and let them know you enjoyed working together. And pay the sub promptly! It’s also a nice procedure for someone on the staff to make a follow-up phone call to subs to discuss how the day went, offer some constructive feedback, and to ask which things could be changed or improved.

As much as possible, include subs in staff discussions; a frequent sub might be invited to attend staff meeting or in-service training. Invite subs to events and parties at the center, too. These gestures foster a sense of belonging and make subs feel appreciated—encouraging them to stay on your sub list.

Periodically evaluate your sub policy. Talk about activities or instruction that’s particularly easy (or hard) for temporary staff to handle. Certain regular routines may have to be adjusted if they prove too demanding for a novice. Identify subs you think are qualified to become permanent teachers and develop a plan to recruit them to your program. Make time for the permanent staff to talk about the enervating (but inevitable) process of continually orienting new people and adjusting to

new faces and different teaching styles. This discussion may include developing responses to complaints from children and parents, as well.

Subs are entitled to common courtesy, but more than that, they are entitled to professional courtesy. A sub cannot do his or her best work without proper instructions and guidelines. It is up to you as a colleague or administrator to help the sub function optimally in an unfamiliar workplace. Take the time to give substitute caregivers the care *they* need; in the long run it will make your work less stressful and more pleasant. And when it's your turn to take a day off or a vacation, you'll be able to take the time *you* need—without worry.

Most importantly, develop realistic expectations. Remember, there is an industry-wide shortage of trained personnel for child care, requiring strategies that go beyond individual center policy. Turn to the next section for ideas that may be applicable to your community.



HOW

Communities Respond:

- Establishing a
Substitute Referral System**
-

How are communities coping with the shortage of substitutes? In order to study the situation and to generate new approaches, the Child Care Employee Project interviewed dozens of people around the country who have been tackling the problem in various ways—resource and referral staff members, teachers and subs, consultants and trainers. We talked to people who are just now establishing a substitute system in their area, and others who have had a system in place for years; people who feel their current arrangement works well, and others who are dissatisfied and experimenting with new approaches.

Recruiting and Advertising

When you undertake a recruitment effort, begin by targeting all the groups who may be interested and identify how best to reach them. Consider students, parents of young children who may want only part-time or occasional work, retired seniors, and job training program participants. Where can these groups be found? Where do they gather, work, or shop? What newsletters or newspapers do they read? What other agencies serve

them? What are the best times of year to reach them?

The most important step is to make and maintain personal contacts with agencies, colleges, and other institutions. For example, you can alert a great number of students to substitute work if you arrange to include information in their fall registration packets.

Most groups coordinating a substitute program find that they need to advertise regularly to keep the system going. Even a program that has been active for years can dwindle if outreach efforts slacken.

Although the Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, had been producing a monthly substitute teacher list for about ten years, by the summer of 1985 the number of listings for subs had shrunk to less than ten per month. CCRC sent flyers and information packets to every college student placement office, vocational training program, senior citizen group, and community agency in the Boston area. CCRC also placed ads in neighborhood and student newspapers, which were less costly than city papers and produced better results. After this increased outreach effort throughout the fall, CCRC's list now includes more than twenty subs per month and continues to grow.

It's important to make sure that you are reaching all the major sources of potential subs in your community, using every possible means of low-cost advertising at your disposal. Don't be afraid to advertise—it may cost less than you expect. Child Care Connections, a new resource and referral agency in Boise, Idaho, has obtained free ongoing space in the Boise newspaper to publicize its substitute placement and other services. Check with your local newspapers, radio, and TV stations about the possibility of free advertising, calendar listings, and public service announcements.

Screening and Interviewing

Substitute programs vary widely in the amount of screening and interviewing they conduct before referring subs to child care programs. Most referral programs disclaim any liability for sub placement. Instead they offer a centralized service that saves child care centers a few steps without eliminating the necessity of carefully checking potential employees. Child care providers, on the other hand, are often unable to screen a sub

carefully when they need someone to cover a classroom right away. Hence, many communities feel a conflict over where the role of screening lies: within each child care program, or at a community agency level. Centers feel rushed and needy; referral workers are reluctant to become employment agencies.

Whatever level of screening they conduct, most substitute referral programs have developed an application form—the simpler, the better—to elicit basic information about a substitute's experience and work preferences. Applications should include:

- education level
- experience with children (which age groups, what kinds of settings, how many months or years, which age groups preferred)
- special interests or skills (music, sports, other languages spoken)
- when and where available for work (which time shifts, limits on transportation)
- recent employment or experience
- names, addresses, and phone numbers of two or three references, preferably those who have seen the applicant's work with children

Many cities and states—especially in the wake of recent accusations of child abuse in child care programs—also require fingerprinting or criminal background checks. Although the practical value of such safeguards is extremely limited, substitute referral programs can save child care centers valuable time by gathering this kind of information centrally, if it is required by law. Medical exams and TB tests may also be required by law in your state, and again, the referral program can save centers time and assist potential subs by researching where to secure these services easily and cheaply.

Frequently an application form and any required criminal and health checks are all the substitute program collects before placing subs on its availability list. Child care providers are then completely responsible for interviewing the sub and checking references.

Some sub programs, however, have become dissatisfied with this minimum approach and have started to screen subs more

thoroughly before referring them to centers, largely because of complaints from child care providers and concern about safeguarding the quality of care. The Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, now interviews applicants and checks their references. CCRC has found that people who are inappropriate for subbing tend to "screen themselves out" by not following through on all the required steps.

Such interviews should be brief and simple; this is not the time to ask the soul-searching questions you might pose for a permanent position. Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) in Rochester, Minnesota, for example, typically asks substitutes two questions in a group interview: "What kinds of things do you like to do with children?" and "How do you handle misbehavior?" CCRR also invites several directors at a time to meet a similar number of potential subs. This group screening helps subs to get more information about "what they're getting into" as well as providing directors with an unpressured screening mechanism.

One of CCRR's special features is its recruitment and training budget, supported by parent fees for child care referral and fees for community training sessions (\$2.50 per training hour). This allows CCRR to pay potential subs, after an initial interview, either \$10 for a three-hour visit to a day care center or a family day care home, or \$20 for both. The provider then sends an evaluation of the sub to CCRR so that other providers will know that, at the very least, some concrete, on-the-job screening has taken place. Although \$10 is low pay for a three-hour visit, it's a great improvement over the unpaid initial visits that many programs ask subs to make.

Training

All of us in child care know that money and resources for training are scarce. Yet sub programs around the country have developed some low-cost models. Following are some examples:

Child Action, Inc. in Sacramento, California, combines screening of applicants with some basic training. Every two months, using guest presenters from the local Infant/Toddler Network and other provider groups, Child Action conducts a three-hour training and screening session to provide basic information on health and safety, first aid, child development, and practical suggestions for classroom activities. Each applicant

is then briefly interviewed (the typical format is four situational questions), asked for references, and promptly notified by pre-printed postcard whether he or she has been accepted onto the sub list.

Family and Children's Services of Kansas City, Kansas, formed an ad hoc group with two other organizations early in 1985 and worked with their local NAEYC affiliate to develop a "Substitute Provider Training Program." A small one-year Membership Action Grant from NAEYC helped them publicize the program and develop a training manual, a 100+ page anthology of basic child care readings from a variety of sources. Three-hour training sessions are held monthly, and subs are then encouraged to observe at centers before they begin work.

Although the Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, does not conduct ongoing training for subs, each person who signs up on the sub list receives the excellent orientation booklet "Guidelines for Day Care Substitutes." The booklet includes a brief form that subs can use to get written references on their work.

Community colleges may also be a resource for training substitutes. The Early Childhood Education department at Cabrillo College in Santa Cruz, California, has held a six-week series of three-hour Saturday classes for subs. These classes give an overview of child care work including health and safety and communication skills.

In Corpus Christi, Texas, the Coastal Bend Child Care Administrators' Association—a group of about 40 directors—worked with the Early Childhood Specialist Department of Del Mar College to set up a 12-hour non-credit course during the summer of 1985. The course included information on child growth, child abuse, discipline, handling emergencies, and the state minimum standards. The 28 participants who completed the course were placed on a substitute list sent to local child care centers. Their training costs were reimbursed by the administrators' association, and they also obtained a food handlers' card, job references, a TB test, and a training certificate. The course was so successful that the organizers plan to repeat it. An information packet describing the development of the course is available for \$5 from Glenda Stanton, YMCA, 3166 Reid Dr., Corpus Christi, TX 78404.

In other communities, such as Oakland, California, local child

care directors' associations are considering conducting occasional training sessions specifically for substitutes. Association members would rotate the responsibility for teaching the sessions, and by pooling their efforts they would each decrease the amount of time spent training and orienting every sub they use.

Referral/Feedback/Updating

Many substitute programs produce a substitute list monthly or bi-monthly for members or subscribers. The Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for instance, mails a monthly list to subscribers who pay \$15 per year. The list contains the basic information from each sub's application: name, address, phone number, best time to call, education, length of experience with different age groups and in different kinds of programs, languages and other skills, times available for work, and any transportation limits or needs.

CCRC reminds its subscribers that, "We have not evaluated the work of these substitutes. We ask that you, the provider, fill out the enclosed evaluation form for each substitute concerning their performance and return it to us. All evaluations will be reviewed to determine if a person's performance is satisfactory, or whether removal from the list needs to be considered. Evaluation forms will be kept on file at CCRC and may be read by providers and the substitute." Providers have found this evaluation system helpful, but CCRC admits that they tend to receive only the extremes—the very positive or very negative evaluations. Substitutes who wish to remain on the list can simply re-register by phone each month.

Child Action in Sacramento, California, goes a step beyond printing a disclaimer on its substitute list; before child care or family day care providers can subscribe to the list, they themselves must receive a brief orientation to the sub program from the Child Action staff. To keep their list up-to-date, Child Action periodically sends postcards out to its registered subs.

Other programs, such as Cariño in Albuquerque, New Mexico, or Child Care Resource and Referral in Rochester, Minnesota, give substitute referrals to providers over the phone instead of mailing out a list. Providers then maintain their own sub lists and call the substitute program only when they need new referrals.

Broader sponsorship of a substitute program can be very beneficial. The Office for Children (OFC) in Fairfax County, Virginia, has a unique network of 52 school-age child care programs sponsored by the county government, and has a staff member at its central office to coordinate the referrals. OFC budgets nine permanent "floating sub" positions, and also keeps a list of about 35 on-call subs who are hired as needed.

The University of California at Berkeley, which provides space and student fee support for six state-funded child care centers, holds free in-service training—a one-week series of workshops on subjects such as infant/toddler curricula, health and music—every six months. Subs are *paid* to attend! Moreover, University sponsorship of these centers allows an unusually high rate of pay for subs. As of Spring 1986, starting pay was \$9.47 an hour for those with early childhood education credentials and \$8.36 an hour for non-credentialed subs. Although subs aren't guaranteed daily employment, the size of the University system, combined with the high rate of pay, creates a pool of eager, well-trained temporary teachers.

Child Care Substitute Registries

People in many other professions—such as public schools, hospitals, and business offices—have long had centralized "registries" or employment agencies which simplify their search for substitute help. Several child care agencies around the country are now investigating the possibility of adapting such a model to our profession. The Western New York Child Care Council in Rochester, New York, is seeking start-up funds for a "child care personnel service." So is a group of about 30 child care centers in the Fremont, California, area.

Public school districts, for example, have operated substitute registries for years. Once substitutes have enrolled in the registry, they call in for assignments, usually at least one day before they are available. A central school district office typically arranges subs on both a daily and a weekly basis. Schools call in for subs as soon as they identify a need; even after office hours they are often able to leave a recorded message. The school district, not the individual school, is liable for any provable negligence or wrongdoing by a substitute.

In the San Francisco (California) Unified School District, between 100 and 2,000 subs are typically available, and work

an average shift of four hours per day. Wages are quite high, especially since 1984 when subs organized a union—the San Francisco Substitute Teachers' Organization. As of September 1986, subs receive a starting pay of \$11.43 an hour; after 75 assignments the hourly pay increases to \$12.14.

A substitute registry for child care centers is an appealing possibility. Individual centers could save considerable time and money getting subs, even if they had to pay a significant annual subscription fee; training and orientation could become standardized, and hence more reliable; and sub wages could improve—although not, most likely, to public school district levels!

Yet there are still some unresolved dilemmas, especially concerning such issues as liability and insurance. In the current child care insurance crisis, liability coverage for a central registry office would most likely be prohibitive. Child care registries may need to modify their systems so that the liability remains with the individual centers.

The Fremont, California, area Directors' Council is offering to manage a substitute registry and dispatching service for 150 local child care centers. A staff member would be responsible for recruitment, interviewing, training, evaluation, and referral of subs. Local centers would pay an annual subscription fee based on their size, and an additional fee each time they used the service. Policies, procedures, and pay would be standardized, with built-in pay increases to reward subs for length of service. Individual centers would assume liability as the employers of each sub they hire. For insurance purposes, the registry's role would be similar to that of a resource and referral agency in giving child care referrals to parents. The registry would save centers several steps, but each center would retain the responsibility for making careful choices in hiring.

Foundation and Corporate Support

In breaking new ground to improve the substitute teacher situation, child care programs need all the allies they can find. Start-up funding may be available from a variety of sources. Don't overlook foundations and corporations in your area, although they may prefer to support a child care project that benefits the entire community rather than a single center. A number of the resource and referral programs described above

obtained small grants from a Substitute Last Fund established by **Work/Family Directions**, a corporate-funded resource clearinghouse in **Boston, Massachusetts**. The National Association for the Education of Young Children has also awarded Membership Action Grants for local affiliate groups to create such programs.

Working as a



ubstitute:

□ Your Rights and Responsibilities

Children cannot be left to care for themselves. Without substitutes, child care programs would come to a screeching halt. People who work with children are prone to frequent illnesses, creating an ongoing need for temporary child care personnel. Teachers need to take vacations, too, and centers require subs for pre-arranged leave time as well as last-minute absences. Following are some tips we hope will make your experience as a sub a good one for you and the children you work with.

Deciding to Become a Sub

If you are interested in becoming a substitute, check your local newspaper for ads or contact your local child care center, agency or community college early childhood department to find out what orientation or training programs are available. If no such programs exist, you can contact child care centers listed in the yellow pages of the phone book to let them know you are interested in temporary work. Most centers accept substitutes with little or no prior training or experience in

early childhood education, but subs with preparation are in greater demand. Moreover, beyond providing a needed service to child care programs, many people find that working as a sub is a good way to determine whether or not they want to pursue a career involving young children.

Once you have contacted the proper agency, you will learn what is required by law to work as a substitute teacher in your community (Different regulations govern child care in each state). Most communities require a sub to get a TB screening test. Medical examinations, criminal record checks, and fingerprinting are often also required by law to help ensure children's health and safety. Since these can be costly, it is worth shopping around for the least expensive sources for these services. In some areas, there may be an agency with funds to subsidize your costs.

Many child care resource and referral agencies operate a substitute placement service to inform interested centers about people who are available for temporary work. To join such a program, you will probably need to be interviewed, provide character references, and perhaps participate in an orientation or training program which may involve a visit to a center. This may seem like a lot of work to get a temporary job — especially one with such low pay — but these are important steps! People operating child care programs must take precautions to ensure that adequately prepared people work with young children.

Centers that do not use a placement agency may ask to meet with you themselves before they hire you as a sub. It's okay to decide that you prefer some centers over others. And it is also reasonable to ask if you will be reimbursed for the time you spend visiting a center, especially if you are asked to work during this visit. In the end, these procedures benefit you by helping you determine whether or not you want to be a sub and preparing you for what is a very rewarding, but taxing, job.

Subbing for the First Time at a Center

Once you are on a list or have been accepted to work as a sub by a particular center, be ready for your first call. Since it may come very early in the morning or late at night, it may be useful to keep a written list of questions by the phone. Dealing with a new employer can be exciting and nerve-wracking, and if the call is unexpected or comes at an unusual hour it is easy

to forget to ask for important information. You will probably want to know:

- ☐ the address of the center and any special instructions for locating it (centers often are housed in basements or other difficult-to-find sections of buildings)
- ☐ the number of hours you will be needed and what time to arrive in order to be ready to work with the children (some centers may want you to complete paperwork so they can process your paycheck, others may want to give you a tour, etc.)
- ☐ age group of the children you will work with (to help you be mentally prepared for your day)
- ☐ name of the person you should report to on arrival, and, if different, the name of the person you will be working with and can rely on for help
- ☐ schedule of activities and anything you should know about the center (if you will be outside, whether you need to bring your lunch)

Your First Day at a Center

Be sure to allow plenty of time to get to the center when requested—even enough time to get lost! Better to be early and look around than to arrive late. Report to the person whose name you received over the phone. If none has been mentioned about the payment procedure, ask that person about forms to sign, etc.

Once you meet the person you will be working most closely with you can ask about how the center operates and where things are. Most people will probably offer this information and some centers even have a handout for subs that includes such information as:

- ☐ emergency procedures, location of first aid kit
- ☐ schedule of the day
- ☐ special rules (kids can't ride bikes in certain areas, no toys on the climbing structure, grace is always said before meals)
- ☐ location of supplies
- ☐ special needs or concerns of individual children (allergies, physical restrictions)

If any of the information is unclear on the handout or the first time it is mentioned to you, don't hesitate to ask for clarification. Confusion later on might be dangerous.

Responsibilities

Entering a child care center filled with lots of children and adults busily working and playing can be overwhelming and disconcerting. Don't get frazzled. Below are some guidelines to help you keep a clear head while working at a center:

You are there first and foremost to insure children's health and safety. Always make sure there is an adult present before you leave a room or the yard. Children should not be left alone even when sleeping.

Avoid physical force or abusive language in managing children's behavior. If you feel out of control, ask another adult for help.

Observe good health practices. Avoid smoking or the use of any drugs or alcohol when you are responsible for children. Wash your hands after assisting a child with a diaper or at the toilet and before preparing any food. Be careful when drinking hot liquids like coffee or tea; a fast moving child can cause a spill leading to a potentially serious injury.

You are there to assist other staff in caring for and teaching children. Pitch in and help when there is a need for an adult (helping take off jackets or putting on smocks).

If you initiate activities with children, select sure successes. Playdough is much easier to supervise than fingerpainting. A story is always a winner. Take your lead from the other staff you are working with.

Be friendly to parents. They are often as nervous as their children about seeing an unfamiliar face at the center. Introduce yourself: "I'm Sue and I'll be subbing for Joe who is sick today." Feel free to tell parents about positive events during the day, but leave negative or troubling feedback to the permanent staff.

Leave the room tidy and help with clean-up as needed.

You are there to provide nurturing and support to all children. Responses from children will vary. Some may readily attach themselves to a new adult; others will be upset by the presence of a stranger. Try not to take children's negative reactions

personally. If one child attaches to you, you can say gently that you need to help all the children while you are at the center.

Rights

The program you are working for has certain responsibilities toward you as an employee, even if you are working on a temporary basis. You have rights to:

Clear directions about what is expected of you. Sometimes in the rush of dealing with children, other staff will fail to convey important information. You can assist by asking for clarification and finding out who you can go to with questions.

Appropriate job descriptions. You should never be left alone to supervise children, nor should you be expected to plan the program or conduct parent conferences. However, if you sub for a long time at one center, your feedback on children and curricula may be sought.

Working conditions and pay required by law. Federal law mandates that all people working in child care earn at least the minimum wage. Additional state and federal laws govern overtime pay, breaks and frequency of pay (write to CCEP for information about these laws). You have a right to be paid for all the time you are required to be at a center, even if you are not in a classroom. You have a right to know how you will get paid and when you can take a break.

The protection of certain health and safety regulations. The most common violation is of the legal adult-to-child ratio (the number of children each adult is responsible for). Your local child care resource and referral agency or state department of health or social welfare can tell you what is legal in your area. It's a good idea to be aware of these laws and how they affect you. If you are asked to supervise more children than the legal limit, you have the right and the responsibility to say you consider it unsafe and you are uncomfortable with the situation. If the employer doesn't change the situation (and/or if you are asked not to return to the center) you may want to report the situation to the licensing agency. As a child care employee, you also have the right and the responsibility to report any adult behavior that is abusive to children.

Kind treatment and feedback on your performance. You can communicate your interest in learning from your experience

as a sub by saying that you would like to know if something you are doing is helpful or if there is something you should stop doing. Sometimes staff are too busy at the end of the day to share their reactions. You can tell them you would appreciate a call and that you are available to return as a sub. Be sure to leave your phone number. If you don't hear from a center again, you might contact the local resource and referral agency to see if they received an evaluation of your performance. You can also provide feedback for a center by writing a letter or making a phone call.



Conclusion

Unfortunately, because of the many pressures on people who work in child care, few subs ever hear that their energy and talents have made a tremendous difference to other child care workers, parents, and children. This causes many subs to downplay the value of their work, overlooking some of their rights and responsibilities in the process. However, by recognizing your rights and by being well prepared, you can ensure that you receive the information and help you need to do your job well and to experience the many rewards of working in child care.

We hope this information, gleaned from so many dedicated child care people, will assist you in your efforts to make good subs easier to find and keep. We encourage you to discuss your policies and ideas and to share them with us at CCEP so that we can pass them along to others around the country.



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- BANANAS—6501 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609; Arlyce Carrac
Carrión—PO Box 27748, Albuquerque, NM 87125, (505) 884-0291; Sheila
Bolger, director; Barbara Quintana, coordinator of sub program
Child Care Connections—PO Box 6736, Boise, ID 83707, (208) 342-4666
or 343-8112; Sharon Stahy
Child Care Information Exchange—(206) 362-3066; Roger Neugebauer
Child Care Resource Center, Inc. (CCRC)—512 Massachusetts Ave.,
Cambridge, MA 02139
Child Care Resource Center, San Fernando Valley—14410 Sylvan St.,
Suite 116, Van Nuys, CA 91401, (818) 761-7099, 989-8297, 989-8679,
Marjorie Morris
Child Care Resource & Referral—903 W. Center St., Suite 200, Rochester,
MN 55902, (507) 287-2020; Totti Skerlock, director; Lorraine Wickel,
coordinator of sub referral
Children's Services of Morris County—2 W. Hanover Ave., Mt. Freedom,
NJ 07970, (201) 895-2676; Kathy Ross
Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) of Dane County—1200 Montrose
St., Madison, WI 53711, (608) 238-7338; Diane Adams
Community Services for Children—431 E. Locust St., Bethlehem, PA 18018,
(215) 691-1819; Joyce Lang
Exceptional Persons, Inc. (R&R)—2530 University Ave., Waterloo, IA
50701, (319) 232-6671; Joanne Lane
Jagers, Will—San Francisco, CA
Klepp, Maggie (Instructor at Cabrillo College)—301 Center St., Santa
Cruz, CA 95060, (408) 425-8668
Marsh, Mike (Pacific Oaks College)—PO Box 20136, Oakland, CA
94620-0136
Miller, Paul (Tri-Cities Children's Center)—41100 Idle Royal St., Fremont,
CA 94538, (415) 657-2920
NALYC Child Care Information Service—(800) 424-2460; Deborah Philips,
Leo Bonner
Office for Children, Fairfax County—11212 Waples Mill Rd., Fairfax, VA
22030, (703) 691-3175; Eileen Harahan, sub coordinator
San Francisco Unified School District—135 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco,
CA 94102, (415) 365-9268; Sherry Korn, sub coordinator for children's
centers
Substitute Provider Training Program—3501 W. 98th St., Overland Park,
KS 66206, (816) 753-5260; Kathy Hermes
University of California Child Care—(415) 642-1847; Sue Dove
Western N.Y. Child Care Council—121 N. Fitzhugh St., Room 425,
Rochester, NY 14614, (716) 232-2330; Barbara Ann Mattie, director
Work/Family Directions—100 The Riverway, Boston, MA 02215, (617)
734-0001; Johanna Schulman