

5 Simple Ways to Create a Pleasant Work Environment

BY LESLIE GILBERT

As an early childhood program leader, you already know that having consistent teaching staff is important for young children and families. Research from the [Association for Childhood Educational International](#) indicates that teacher turnover affects child outcomes. Turnover is associated with three basic causes; low compensation, high teacher-child ratios, and difficult working conditions. Let's explore five ways to combat the latter.

1. **Order materials that have been requested and approved.** A common practice in early care and education programs is for teaching staff to submit their lesson plan for the month with a list of needed supplies. Creating a basic [materials request form](#) can make this an easy process for teachers. Routinely ordering supplies needed for lesson plans (i.e., making sure teachers have enough red paint and Q-tips to add to the art table) is a real way to show how much you appreciate teachers following procedures and implementing great activities for children.
2. **Use individualized professional development plans.** [Here is an example](#) of a form used in the Illinois professional development system. Individualized professional development plans can include educational goals, areas, or topics a teacher wishes to learn more about. When you and teachers meet to discuss goals collaboratively, it lets teachers know their interests and learning goals are appreciated and promotes a norm of professional growth.
3. **Be aware of individual needs.** Consider small changes in your routines to show teachers how much you appreciate them. For example, teachers may be in the classroom for many hours before they are able to use the washroom or get a drink of water. Schedule a few moments during your day to offer teachers an unscheduled break. Another example is recognizing that transition times can be difficult for some staff. Offering extra support by being on hand during transitions lets staff know you are aware and supportive of their individual needs. There may be times during the day when five minutes of your help can make a big difference.
4. **Acknowledge skills.** Consider the skills that convinced you to hire a teacher. If a teacher is great at reading and telling stories to children, he could model those skills by being a guest reader in another classroom. This is a free and easy way to highlight a teacher's skill as well as giving other staff some examples of fun storytelling. Putting notes of appreciation on paychecks or sticky notes with "I noticed..." statements can also reinforce the positive things you are seeing.

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5. **Involve staff and be bold with appreciation.** Instead of quietly saying thank you and giving a thumbs-up, create a bulletin board with easy access to writing materials so everyone can get in on saying, “I’m glad you work with me!” Encourage co-workers to celebrate with each other on special days by keeping your staff roster current with birthdays and work anniversary dates.

These are all simple and free ways to create a positive work environment. When program leaders model these practices, their staff may, in turn, be motivated to demonstrate behaviors that encourage efficacy, collaboration, professional growth, supporting colleagues, getting to know one another, and demonstrating appreciation of co-workers.

If you’re looking for more resources on this topic, here are some suggestions:

- [Early Childhood Work Environment Survey](#) (ECWES), which helps directors gain insights into staff perceptions and discover which components of the work environment to address to help motivate and retain staff
- [Great Place to Work: Creating a healthy organizational climate](#) by Paula Jorde Bloom, Ann Hentschel, and Jill Bella
- [Leading with Heart and Soul](#) by Toni Christi, the closing keynote speaker at the 2017 [Leadership Connections](#) national conference

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