

6 WAYS TO REDUCE CHILD
ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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Enhance Parental Resilience

②

Develop Social Connections

③

Build Knowledge of Parenting
and Child Development

④

Offer Concrete Support in
Times of Need

⑤

Foster Social and Emotional
Competence of Children

⑥

Promote Healthy
Parent-Child Relationships

Ten great reasons to partner with Preschool Staff

For child welfare caseworkers, building relationships with staff of quality preschools makes sense. The teachers and other staff with whom young children spend their days make a positive difference for kids and families who are in the child welfare system or at risk of entering it. By working with these staff—including them in our processes and decisions and vice versa—we can maximize that positive effect. The staff of quality preschools can be an invaluable resource in:

1. Keeping an eye on kids

Preschool staff are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. They see children every day and monitor their physical and emotional well-being formally and informally. When child welfare and preschool staff have good relationships, preschool staff can be an “early warning system” for possible abuse and neglect as well as monitoring kids already in the system and giving caseworkers feedback on them. And that keeps our kids safer.

2. Getting kids ready for school

Getting our kids ready for kindergarten needs to be at the center of our strategy for keeping young children safe. Doing well in school is critical to success in life, and many of our kids start out behind and never catch up. Quality preschool staff are the experts in preparing children for school. When we work with them and are aware of what our kids are learning in preschool, we can help foster and biological parents reinforce it at home.

3. Providing families with resources and support

Foster and biological families get crucial support from quality preschools. Preschool staff care for their children and partner with them to address challenging behavioral issues. Many also provide family support services, supervised visits, and therapies on-site. Caseworkers and preschool staff need to work together to plan and provide supports that promote permanency plans (including family preservation efforts) and keep foster care placements stable.

4. Making informed decisions

For any given child in a quality preschool, at least one teacher and numerous other staff know all about that child and his or her family and community. Talking with them can help caseworkers better understand and best meet the needs of a child and his or her family. When caseworkers ask, staff of quality preschools are usually willing to share their perspectives, opinions, and advice, because they care about our kids.

5. Keeping kids stable

Children are at preschool for many hours a day, and they form friendships with other children and strong, caring relationships with their teachers. When a child's life is in turmoil and he or she is

removed from home, going to a familiar place and having these consistent relationships can be a buffer against trauma. When a child is moved, it can take some effort to keep him or her in the same quality preschool. Having a relationship with staff at the preschool creates a team of caring adults who can work together to make that happen.

6. Reducing stress

Being involved with the child welfare system is stressful for everyone involved. Broken lines of communication between preschool staff and caseworkers can add to that stress, hampering efforts to keep kids safe and families strong. But when communication channels are open among families, preschool staff, and caseworkers, stress is decreased, and everyone can do their jobs more successfully and keep the focus on the kids.

7. Building a team of allies around the child

The fact that preschool staff have close relationships with families is well known. But these staff are also great collaborators and allies with caseworkers and other experts involved in keeping the child safe. Because they are devoted to the best interests of the children enrolled at their centers, staff of quality preschools go beyond neutrality and objectivity: they are truly on everybody's side and are committed to resolving problems to benefit the child.

8. Building bridges to families

Quality preschool staff generally have good, trusting relationships with the parents of the children enrolled at their centers, whereas families often react to the staff of child welfare agencies with fear and anger. Having quality preschool staff bridge the gap between caseworkers and biological parents can be especially helpful in intact family cases or when a report of abuse or neglect has been reported but a determination has not yet been made.

9. Making good educational placements

Different preschools provide different services. A caseworker who knows the staff at quality preschools and understands what different preschools provide can make better recommendations for educational placement.

10. Keeping kids safe!

Children benefit when all of the caring adults in their life collaborate to keep them happy and healthy. Taken together, all of the above amount to keeping kids safe from abuse and neglect while providing the supports that they need.

Convened by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Strengthening Families Illinois is a collaboration among more than 40 agencies, organizations, and individuals working with young children and their families across the state