

# **HOW FAMILY FRIENDLY IS YOUR CENTER?**

**An Audit Tool for Child Care Centers**

## **Scoring Instructions**

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### Why do this?

Child care centers that want to know how to provide better child care from the perspective of families (their customers) may consider using this tool. This tool offers a way to look at the strengths, needs, and resources of the center. It can show whether there is an information gap between your center and the families it serves. It can help your center understand and respond to family needs.

### What is included?

The three documents needed to use the family-friendly tool are the survey, this manual, and the Excel spreadsheet used for scoring the surveys. This manual includes:

1. ***a one-page introduction*** to the survey that discusses the idea of family friendliness as it applies to child care centers. This can be handed out with the survey and/or used to talk about the concept of family friendliness with those you want to fill out the survey.
2. ***scoring instructions*** on how to tabulate surveys, to be used in conjunction with the Excel spreadsheet that automatically calculates the results.
3. ***interpretation instructions*** that will assist you in thinking about and using the results.

### How is the tool used?

How you use this tool depends on what you want to know and how much time and effort you are willing to invest.

- ◆ **THE FULL SURVEY** – The results from using the whole survey will give you a well-rounded picture of the family friendliness of your center.
- ◆ **PART OF THE SURVEY** – You can also choose to use only part of the survey, depending on what aspects you want to know about. If you are most interested in the overall perceptions among your members – parents, teachers, director(s) – but you don't want to raise parental expectations about the center offering other services, then you may want to omit the last section on "Other Services." Or, if you want to focus only on communication between the center and families, you could use only the communication sections of the survey.
- ◆ **DISCUSSIONS** – You could use the survey (one or more parts of it) to guide a discussion among parents, led by parents. Or you could use it to have a discussion among teachers, led by teachers. It is important to use this tool in ways that will make honest discussion and real answers most likely. For example, no matter how good a relationship there is between directors and parents, having a director lead a discussion group for parents on these issues might make some parents feel unwilling to express their true feelings.
- ◆ **WORKSHOPS** – You could use the survey in a workshop format. Each part of the survey could be the subject for different parent meetings. You could discuss the parts of the survey in staff meetings. You could offer an option such as 'parents helping parents' to complete the survey; parents could interview each other using the survey, or they might fill it out in pairs at a parent

meeting. If there are language differences within your center, one-to-one methods might be helpful in overcoming these differences.

### **How much time will it take?**

- ◆ It will probably take each person who fills out the entire survey about 10-12 minutes to complete it.
- ◆ Someone at the center will need time to tabulate all of the surveys. WFD has created an Excel spreadsheet that you can use to enter the data, and the spreadsheet will automatically calculate the summary numbers.
- ◆ If you decide to use a discussion group or workshop format, it will probably take about 3-4 hours to cover all of the parts of the survey. Tabulation is not necessary, but having someone take good notes will be essential.

### **Issues of anonymity**

When you are deciding who should fill out the survey, you should be mindful of issues of anonymity. You want to ensure that people who fill out the survey are confident that their answers cannot be traced back to them. It is important that people feel that they can give honest and candid responses. Make sure that your group size is large enough for people to feel “anonymous” and make sure your collection of surveys is done in such a way that prevents identities from being known.

### **Encourage participation**

Response rate is one measure of the quality of the results of any survey. It is a percentage calculated by dividing the number of people who filled out the survey by the number of surveys that were distributed. For example, if you distribute 75 surveys and 39 are returned, your response rate is 39 divided by 75, or 52%. Most people would agree that a good response rate is anything over 50%. To increase participation and get a good response rate, you might encourage parents to fill out the survey by offering a slice of pizza and a beverage while they complete it or some other incentive. You could set aside time in a staff meeting to let teachers and other staff fill it out.

### **What do the results mean?**

There is no absolute “scale of family friendliness.” When you look at the final scores in the Excel spreadsheet, you will see similarities and differences in *perceptions of family friendliness* of your center seen from the perspective of three groups: parents, teachers, and directors. These similarities and differences should become topics of conversation among these groups in the center. The goal of these conversations is to discover what issues and concerns are important, and which ones can be addressed to increase the family friendliness of the center.

# HOW FAMILY FRIENDLY IS YOUR CENTER?

## Introduction

The term ‘family friendly’ comes from the business world. Companies that are family friendly train their supervisory managers to be sensitive to family needs when making decisions about whether to give employees time off, whether to recognize child illness as a valid reason for being absent or late, how much time off to allow when there is a new child in the family, and other personnel matters.

Applied to child care, ‘family friendly’ has several meanings. One is adopting policies that put family needs ahead of the convenience of the child care center. Staff at a family-friendly center can put themselves in the parents’ shoes and make decisions from that perspective, by making policies and offering services that help parents manage their multiple work and home demands and help them feel more confident about parenting. Family-friendly centers balance family friendliness with common-sense limitations regarding cost and resources, but they continually re-think where to set the boundaries.

Family-friendly child care gives parents what they most need and want: high-quality care for their children – care that recognizes the uniqueness of each child. The center will be familiar with the research findings about what parents want when they look for quality – teachers who are warm and who know each individual child well, and a program that emphasizes learning and social skills. Family-friendly child care strives to create a supportive community among parents, staff, and children that helps parents feel good about the care their children receive.

Family friendly also means the time-honored traditions in child care: to work in partnership with families, to support but not supplant parents, to involve parents in the program, to empower parents, to offer parenting education, and to provide needed information about community services that will help parents manage their work and family responsibilities.

Family friendly, similar to the term ‘user friendly,’ means the center’s staff use clear, simple language to communicate, avoiding professional jargon. Staff at a family-friendly center plainly say what they do, why they choose the activities that are offered to children, and how and what children are learning from them. Also a family-friendly center may provide services other than child care that families need such as a toy and book lending library or information about community family events.

This survey is designed to assess the ‘family friendliness’ of a particular child care center, from the perspectives of its parents, teachers, and directors. The survey was developed by WFD Consulting, a firm that works with employers to create workplaces that recognize and support the multiple demands on employees’ time. The survey was developed using several sources: direct observations of child care centers that were nominated as being good examples of family-friendly places; focused discussions with parents and staff in child care centers; and feedback from individuals who took a course on family-friendly child care offered at a local university.

## Scoring Instructions for the Center

WFD has developed an Excel spreadsheet called “family friendly scoring v 1.xls” to simplify the scoring process for you. The file has a summary worksheet with pre-programmed calculations that will automatically summarize the data as you enter it. You need only a basic understanding of Excel in order to use the spreadsheet. Data entry will probably take a few hours but will depend on whether you use the entire survey or just a subset of all of the questions, and it will depend on the number of surveys returned.

### Organize the surveys

First you should organize your surveys into three groups: director(s), teachers, and parents. Using the first question on the survey that asks the participant what role s/he has at the center, sort the surveys into the three groups. Within each group, assign a number to each survey and write it at the top of the survey to help you can keep track of which ones have been entered into the scoring sheet. For directors, number them as D1, D2, D3, etc. For teachers, use T1, T2, T3, etc., and for parents, use P1, P2, P3, etc. If you have only one or two directors, you may prefer to enter their data in the teachers’ sections instead of the directors’ sections in order to preserve the anonymity of their responses.

### Save the Excel spreadsheet file with a new name

The contents of the Excel file have been “protected” so that you cannot delete anything critical to the pre-programmed calculations. It is a good idea, however, to make a copy of the file with a new name, and then enter your data into the new file instead of the original one. TIP: You may want to save the file with a filename that includes the year the survey was completed to help with your record keeping (for example, family friendly data 2004.xls).

### Overview of the Excel spreadsheet

Next, review the Excel file and notice that there are six worksheets in this file. Look near the bottom of the screen where you will see six tabs, or worksheets, labeled as follows:

- ❖ Grand Summary
- ❖ Directors—Pages A-F
- ❖ Teachers—Pages A-F
- ❖ Parents—Pages A-F
- ❖ All—Communication Page G
- ❖ All—Other Services Pages H-I

The first worksheet, labeled “Grand Summary,” will automatically summarize the data you enter into the other worksheets; you do not need to enter any data into this worksheet. The other five worksheets are set up for you to enter individual survey responses. Pages A through F of the survey are entered into the same worksheet (by group), and the last two sections of the survey, “Center Communication Methods” and “Other Services,” are scored on separate worksheets.

When you enter individual survey responses, you will be entering a number that corresponds to the answer a person gave to a particular question. Each type of question has its own easy numbering system and we have placed these numbers in “small windows” when you click on a cell to help you as you enter the answers (a drop-down menu). Here is an example of a numbering system: one set of questions asks for responses that range from “excellent” to “poor.” For these questions, you will enter these numbers in the spreadsheet: 5 for “excellent”; 4 for “very good”; 3 for “good”; 2 for “fair”; and 1 for “poor.” As you will see later in this document, each different type of question will have its own numbering system – and hopefully we have made it easy for you to learn them in the spreadsheets. It’s probably a good idea to start entering the surveys to see just how the spreadsheets work and how easy it actually is once you have a little experience!

### **Entering the information on the surveys**

You will be entering the information from each completed survey into the Excel spreadsheet. It is easiest to do this one survey at a time – completing each of your three groups (directors, teachers, and parents) before proceeding to the next group.

To get started, we recommend that you start with the directors’ surveys because this worksheet is the smallest and most compact and you can get your bearings most easily. Start with the first director’s survey that you numbered “D1.” Turn to page A of the “D1” survey. Now, go to the Excel spreadsheet and click on the tab labeled, “Directors—Pages A-F.” Now you are in the Directors’ worksheet. On this worksheet, you will only enter responses from directors – and only for pages A through F of the survey. As you scan this worksheet, you will notice headings that indicate each section of the survey in bold - for example, **PAGE A: OVERALL RATINGS**. On the line directly below these identifiers, you will notice the column headings for each question in that section. Using the Page A example again, you will notice there are 3 questions in this section of the survey: Q1, Q2, and Q3. Look at the director’s survey that you have open and find the three questions there. The answers to these questions will go in this area of the worksheet.

You are now ready to begin entering data. Because you have survey “D1” which stands for “Director #1,” you will be entering the responses for this survey in the lines for Director #1. For Page A, this means you will be entering the responses in line 3. Click on cell B3 and you will see a drop-down

menu that prompts you to enter a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. As we described above, each response is given a number – and you can see the possible numbers in the drop-down menu. In this set of questions, an “excellent” is coded as a 5, “very good” as 4, “good” as 3, “fair” as 2, and “poor” as 1. If the person completing the survey marked the “don’t know” category or if s/he skipped the question completely, then leave the corresponding cell in the Excel worksheet blank.

Looking at question number 1, “Support from center staff for family needs,” identify which box the director checked. Using the drop-down menu, identify which number should go in this cell. You can then enter the appropriate number by clicking on the arrow that appears next to cell B3 and choosing from the drop-down menu, or you can manually type the number in the cell. Continue by entering the responses to Questions 2 and 3 in the worksheet along the same row under the appropriate question number. When you’re done, turn the survey to Page B.

Page B has questions for “A Child-Centered Place” and notice that this set of nine questions has a different set of responses than the last section. Go to the Excel worksheet, move your cursor to the next section to cell B13. Notice the drop-down menu once again provides responses with their respective numeric labels and notice these are different than the previous labels. Enter the responses for this section and continue entering the responses for survey “D1” in this manner until you finish entering Page F. Remember to leave the cell blank if someone skipped a question or marked “don’t know.”

Next you will move to the worksheet labeled, “All—Communication Page G.” You’ll notice that this spreadsheet works a bit differently because directors’ and teachers’ surveys are entered together in the top portion of the worksheet, and parents’ responses are entered in the lower portion of the worksheet. Move your cursor to cell B3 where the information for the first question should go. Notice the change in responses and numbers. If the person answered “yes and I find it valuable” then you will enter a 4, “yes but I do not find it valuable” a 3, “no, but I would find it valuable” a 2, and “no and I would not find it valuable” a 1. Working with survey D1, enter the response to Question 1 on Page G in cell B3 and continue until you have entered all of the responses for Page G on the same row.

After entering the responses to Page G, move to the worksheet labeled, “All—Other Services Pages H-I” and enter the responses for survey D1 in line 3. You will notice the responses are different in this part of the survey: if the person answered “the center offers this now” then you will enter a 4, “I would use this and I think the center should offer it” a 3, “I would not use this and I think the center should offer it” a 2, and “I do not think the center should offer this” a 1. Working with survey D1, enter the response for Question 1 on Page H in cell B3, and continue along that row until you have entered all of the responses for Pages H and I.

Now you will enter the information for the rest of the directors starting with survey “D2” in the same manner, continuing with survey “D3” and “D4,” until you have no more directors’ surveys left. If you have fewer than five directors’ surveys, leave the extra rows blank. If you have surveys from more than five directors, you may add as many lines as you need by clicking on the cell that says, “[insert additional rows here if needed].” Then click on the Insert menu at the top of the page and choose the first option, “Rows.” Repeat as many times as needed.

After you finish entering the data for the directors, you will then enter the teachers’ responses. Their responses for Pages A through F should be entered into the worksheet called, “Teachers—Pages A-F.” Responses for Pages G, H, and I should be entered below the directors’ data in the last two worksheets. As with the directors, add as many lines as you need if you have surveys from more than fifteen teachers.

Enter the parents’ data in the same fashion, using the “Parents—Pages A-F” worksheet and then the “All—Communications Page G” and “All—Other Services Page H-I” worksheets for those survey questions. Note that the parents’ information is entered *below* that of directors’ and teachers’ information in the last two worksheets. If you have more than 20 parent surveys, add as many lines as you need.

Remember to work with one survey at a time and enter all the data for that survey. Be sure to use the response category in the drop-down menu that matches the response marked by the parent/teacher/director on the survey, leaving the worksheet cell blank if the person skipped the question or checked the “Don’t know or does not apply” box.

As you enter your data, you will see that summary information is being created for each question. For Pages A through F, the summary number below each question is the group average for that question. At the end of the summary row is an average summarizing the responses for all the questions in that section (except for the “Overall Ratings” section). The section average is displayed on the Grand Summary worksheet allowing you to compare the groups to see if there are different perceptions about the center.

For Pages G, H, and I, each question has a summary that allows you to see the number and percent of people who answered each question and how they answered it. The percentages appear on the Grand Summary worksheet which is designed to allow you to easily see how directors and teachers compare to parents in their responses to each question.

## **Interpreting the Results**

### ***Page A: Overall Measures of Center Quality***

The three questions on the bottom of Page A of the survey are general items of center quality. For each question, an average score for directors, parents, and teachers is provided on the Grand Summary worksheet. Higher scores (closer to 5) indicate that people in that group rate the center high on the measure of quality, while scores closer to 1 mean that people rate the center low. By comparing the group scores, you can identify similarities and differences in *perceptions of the particular quality measure* from the perspective of parents, teachers, and directors.

Look first for differences in scores among groups. Do parents rate the center lower or higher than teachers? Are teachers' and directors' scores similar or different? If group scores are fairly close, say between 3.5 and 4.0, this is a small difference. Smaller differences among groups may indicate compatible views about center quality. If the differences are large among groups, look at which groups are different and how much they differ. Discuss differences and similarities.

### ***Pages B - F: Measures of Family Friendliness***

There are five categories of family friendliness that are probed in this section of the survey: Child-Centered Place, Building Quality Relationships with Families, Respect and Culture, Anticipating Family Needs, and Family-Friendly Communication. Summary scores for each category are presented by group on the Grand Summary worksheet. Higher scores (closer to 5) indicate that people in that category perceive the center to be more family friendly. Lower scores (closer to 1) indicate that people in that category perceive the center to be less family friendly. There is no absolute "scale of family friendliness." What these scores show are similarities and differences in *perceptions of family friendliness* seen from the perspective of parents, teachers, and directors. Once again, examine the scores of the groups to identify where there are similarities in views and where there are differences. Are the groups compatible in their views or do they hold differing views of some categories?

### ***Page G: Center Communication Methods***

The sixteen items on Page G ask parents, teachers, and directors to indicate whether or not each type of communication method is available at the child care center and whether it is (or would be) valuable. The Grand Summary worksheet displays the staff responses (directors and teachers) on each item as well as parents' responses. Of those types of communications currently offered, which do parents find most valuable? Least valuable? What about staff? Among types of communication not currently offered, which would parents find most valuable? What about staff? Do parents and staff generally agree about the ways the center communicates? Does the center use methods of communication that parents don't even know about?

Similarities across groups show agreement on how to communicate. Differences may point out better ways to communicate, or identify ways that don't work and can be changed. Discussion about these types of communication is the key to making sense of the results.

## ***Pages H - I: Other Services***

Pages H and I list a variety of services, and parents and staff are asked to indicate if the center currently offers the service or not. If the center doesn't offer a service, parents and staff are asked to indicate if they would use the service and whether or not it *should* be offered.

First, how well do parents and staff know which services are available? If the percentages are roughly the same across both groups, then everyone understands that a particular service is currently offered. If the percentages are very different, then one group is less aware. This may mean there is a communication problem or misunderstanding. For example, if the directors and staff show a high percentage on 'Care during any center vacations,' then they recognize that the center offers care during center vacations. But if only a small percentage of parents know that this service is available, there may be a breakdown in communication.

Which services are not offered but parents think are worth considering? Analyze parent responses in the category "I would use, center should offer." The center should consider these services in light of resource constraints, and also consider how the center might be able to connect families with these services even if they are not offered by the center. Also identify those services that would have low value to parents – found in the column "Center should not offer." It is important to understand the services that parents are less likely to value so that your center can put its resources toward best meeting the needs of parents.

Question 15g on Page I is a question that asks parents and staff about other types of services either offered or services they would like to have offered. Typically few participants fill in this "Other" item. Peruse all of your surveys to see whether there are common responses for a service not mentioned elsewhere on the survey that indicate a change should be made to offer, modify or drop the service.

## **Final Notes**

Be cautious in your interpretation of the results if very few people responded to the survey. The higher the number of people who responded, the more confident you can feel about the results. Be aware that when few people respond to a survey, the strong feelings (positive or negative) of very few people can greatly influence the results and give you a false impression of general opinion.

Consider the "don't know/does not apply" responses. The scoring system does not capture these responses, but it would be helpful to glance through the surveys to find out how many people are unable to answer the survey's questions. Pay particular attention to Page G, "Center Communication Methods" and to Pages H and I, "Other Services." If parents do not know about certain services and communication methods offered by the center, it would be useful to spread the word!