

# EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM DISCUSSION AND IMPROVEMENT PLANNING GUIDE

In the process of creating the Community Healthy Living Index (CHLI), the development team examined numerous previously developed tools and resource documents that support building a healthy living environment. For a list of these tools and resources, visit [www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex](http://www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex).

YMCA association/CHLI number: \_\_\_\_\_ DIPG Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name of Community team: \_\_\_\_\_

CHLI point person: \_\_\_\_\_

CHLI coordinators assigned to early childhood program: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Early childhood program name: \_\_\_\_\_

Names and titles of individuals participating in the discussion and improvement planning process:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## INTRODUCTION

Having completed your CHLI assessment, you should have a better understanding of your early childhood program environment and its level of support for healthy eating and physical activity. You may have gained a new appreciation for aspects of your environment that strongly support healthy lifestyles and noticed some distinctive gaps in how you are serving infants and children in your community.

When we uncover opportunities for improvement, the steps we need to take to turn our ideas into reality are sometimes unclear. However, thoughtful discussion and development of an improvement plan can lead to efficient and effective changes.

This Discussion and Improvement Planning Guide, facilitated by a CHLI coordinator, will lead you through a thinking process aimed at formulating actionable suggestions on how to improve and setting your site on a course for change. When it is complete, your major concerns, ideas, and recommendations will be used by the Community team to develop an improvement plan for the community.

## CORE ELEMENTS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence of obesity among children aged 2–5 years was nearly 15% in 2008 up 20% from the previous five year period.<sup>1</sup> Obese children are more likely to develop risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease.<sup>2</sup> The good news is that building healthy lifestyle habits in young children, including healthy eating and physical activity, can lower the risk of becoming overweight and developing related diseases.

Early childhood programs play a vital role in children’s health and well-being. Parents and guardians entrust their infants and children to early childhood providers and expect their children to be kept safe, happy, and healthy. In 2005, 61% of children aged 0–6 participated in an early childhood program.<sup>3</sup> Given this reach and critical time in children’s lives, early childhood programs are pivotal to set learning and behavior preferences for a child’s life by intentionally promoting the health and well-being of children through policies and practices that support healthy choices.

The core elements listed below by assessment area identify the characteristics of an early childhood program that strongly supports healthy eating and active living.

- **Physical activity opportunities:** Children participate in fun, physical activity and play daily (60 accumulated minutes for part-day early childhood programs and 120 minutes for full day programs). Age-appropriate and supervised activities are guided by staff who have special training or education in providing guidance for children’s physical activity, motor skill practice, and safety. A research-based curriculum is in use for children to have opportunities for physical activity indoors and outdoors, including gross motor skill development activity. Staff model positive behaviors related to physical activity by participating in and demonstrating physical activities with children. Children are given equal opportunity to participate, regardless of ability or skill level.
- **Physical environment related to physical activity:** Indoor and outdoor facilities and equipment are provided and maintained to allow for safe, age-appropriate, and accessible physical activity and play. The program is free from the use of television, video, and computers unless they are being used for occasional instructional/educational purposes and less than 30 minutes per half-day or one hour per full-day program. The program site is free of products or displays that encourage sedentary lifestyles.
- **Healthy eating opportunities:** A research-based curriculum is in use for children to learn about healthy eating. The site provides meals and snacks in age-appropriate portion sizes and offers water during meals and/or snacks and throughout the day. The site encourages children to serve themselves while providing oversight on portion sizes and encouraging children when they demonstrate healthy eating behavior. Seasonal produce is included in meals or snacks. Staff avoid offering food as an incentive or reward. Children and staff wash their hands after activities and before eating. Staff model healthy eating behaviors during meal and snack times by eating healthy meals and snacks themselves and avoiding eating or drinking unhealthy foods.

- **Physical environment related to food/nutrition:** The early childhood program provides pleasant, clean, safe, and comfortable eating environments for children to sit and enjoy meals and snacks with others. Menus for meals and snacks are posted or made available to parents/guardians. Posters and pictures depicting healthy food and good nutrition are visible in classrooms and/or common areas. Clean drinking water is always visible and available indoors or outdoors for self-serve at any time.
- **General healthy living:** The early childhood program regularly inform children and their families about community-based health and safety programs related to physical activity and recreation. The early childhood program has written guidelines that meet or exceed those of the licensing agency covering physical activity opportunities and environment. Staff have been trained by a qualified professional to effectively instruct children regarding physically active living and healthy eating. The program has funding to support physical activity opportunities through a research-based curriculum, staff training, and appropriate spaces and equipment.

<sup>1</sup> Polhamus B, Dalenius K, Mackentosh H, Smith B, Grummer-Strawn L. Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance 2008 Report. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Freedman DS, Mei Z, Srinivasan SR, Berenson GS, Dietz WH. Cardiovascular risk factors and excess adiposity among overweight children and adolescents: the Bogalusa Heart Study. *J Pediatr.* 2007 Jan;150(1):12–17.e2.

<sup>3</sup> Forum on Child and Family Statistics. America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2009. Available at <http://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/famsoc3.asp>. Accessed January 14, 2011.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As a team, review your responses to the Early Childhood Program Assessment alongside the Core Elements for Early Childhood Program on the previous page of this guide. What areas of your assessment come closest to reflecting the core elements, and what areas need work? Use this Discussion Questions section to stimulate thinking and record observations.

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### A. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

#### 1. Does our early childhood program support infant and children's physical activity opportunities?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always/ almost always supportive	Usually supportive	Neutral/ in the middle	Sometimes supportive	Rarely/never supportive

Questions for discussion:

- What from the Early Childhood Program Assessment leads us to this conclusion?
- What is our site doing right, and why is it working well?

#### 2. How likely is our site to make improvements in this area?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very likely	Likely	Neutral/ in the middle	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Questions for discussion:

- What should we do first?
  - Who else needs to be part of this process?
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### B. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT RELATED TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

#### 1. Does our early childhood program's physical environment support physical activity?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always/ almost always supportive	Usually supportive	Neutral/ in the middle	Sometimes supportive	Rarely/never supportive

Questions for discussion:

- What from the Early Childhood Program Assessment leads us to this conclusion?
- What is our site doing right, and why is it working well?

#### 2. How likely is our site to make improvements in this area?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very likely	Likely	Neutral/ in the middle	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Questions for discussion:

- What should we do first?
- Who else needs to be part of this process?

## C. HEALTHY EATING OPPORTUNITIES

### 1. Does our early childhood program support infant and children's healthy eating opportunities?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always/ almost always supportive	Usually supportive	Neutral/ in the middle	Sometimes supportive	Rarely/never supportive

Questions for discussion:

- What from the Early Childhood Program Assessment leads us to this conclusion?
- What is our site doing right, and why is it working well?

### 2. How likely is our site to make improvements in this area?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very likely	Likely	Neutral/ in the middle	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Questions for discussion:

- What should we do first?
- Who else needs to be part of this process?

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## D. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT RELATED TO FOOD/NUTRITION

### 1. Does our early childhood program's physical environment support healthy eating?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always/ almost always supportive	Usually supportive	Neutral/ in the middle	Sometimes supportive	Rarely/never supportive

Questions for discussion:

- What from the Early Childhood Program Assessment leads us to this conclusion?
- What is our site doing right, and why is it working well?

### 2. How likely is our site to make improvements in this area?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very likely	Likely	Neutral/ in the middle	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Questions for discussion:

- What should we do first?
- Who else needs to be part of this process?

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## E. GENERAL HEALTHY LIVING

### 1. Does our early childhood program support healthy eating and active living through policies, practices, and communications?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Always/ almost always supportive	Usually supportive	Neutral/ in the middle	Sometimes supportive	Rarely/never supportive

Questions for discussion:

- What from the Early Childhood Program Assessment leads us to this conclusion?
- What is our site doing right, and why is it working well?

### 2. How likely is our site to make improvements in this area?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very likely	Likely	Neutral/ in the middle	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Questions for discussion:

- What should we do first?
- Who else needs to be part of this process?

## GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss the following questions and record your responses in the spaces provided. These questions will help you prioritize your ideas, identify barriers and opportunities, and think about what resources you'll need to take action.

1. Across the major areas of healthy eating and physical activity in our early childhood program, can we identify three areas where we could make improvements immediately? What about three priority areas that may take us longer to accomplish?

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2. Can we identify the areas where we are most ready to make changes and start from there? What are those areas? What programs, policies, promotion ideas, or projects (physical environment) in each of those areas will most likely lead to advancement?

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3. What barriers will we need to overcome to advance our priorities for change?

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**4. What resources will be necessary to make these changes?**

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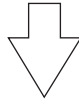
## IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Once your stakeholder team has completed the Discussion Questions section of this guide, you're ready to form the foundation of an improvement plan: a list of concerns and a list of ideas for improvement. In this Improvement Plan section, list the areas where you want to make changes, barriers to supporting healthy eating and active living, and other opportunities for improvement your team identified through the discussion process. Write your ideas in the boxes labeled Concerns.

Next, make a list of potential solutions to each concern. Record your ideas in the Improvement Ideas boxes that correspond to each concern.

### A. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OPPORTUNITIES

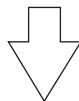
Concerns



Improvement Ideas

### B. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT RELATED TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Concerns

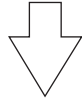


Improvement Ideas



**C. HEALTHY EATING OPPORTUNITIES**

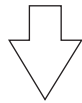
Concerns



Improvement Ideas

**D. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT RELATED TO FOOD/NUTRITION**

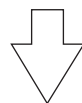
Concerns



Improvement Ideas

**E. GENERAL HEALTHY LIVING**

Concerns



Improvement Ideas