

Children's Trust Fund

PEER REVIEW PROCESS FOR FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

A self assessment for Wisconsin family resource centers based on family support best practices and guidelines

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Acknowledgements

A voluntary group of Children’s Trust Fund grantees and staff, in consultation with FRIENDS, developed the four-part peer review materials. They relied heavily upon the following self-assessment models:

- “How Are We Doing?” developed by the Family Resource Coalition of America
- “Peer Review Instrument,” a two-part tool developed by the Children’s Trust Fund and based on Wisconsin family resource center “Program Requirements” document
- “Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education” developed by the Center of the Study of Social Policy

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OVERVIEW

Children's Trust Fund's Peer Review Process for Family Resource Centers

Family support best practices and guidelines are the foundation for the Children's Trust Fund's Peer Review Process. This self-assessment model is built upon the understanding that all participating family resource centers adhere to the philosophy of strength-based approaches and family support principles outlined in the Children's Trust Fund's Best Practice Guidelines and Program Requirements.

The Children's Trust Fund's Peer Review Process for Family Resource Centers is a powerful tool that enables programs to own the evaluation process and create a vision for improvement. It is a flexible, yet structured quality assurance vehicle that promotes quality practice as follows:

- Provides leadership in developing model best practices and key concepts for all Wisconsin family resource centers.
- Reviews and discusses each center's self-assessment results with peers to:
 - Examine aspects of day-to-day operation and identify strengths.
 - Examine achievement of individual family resource center goals and objectives.
 - Clarify areas for program improvement.
 - Develop long-range plans to enhance program practices.
- Implements detailed, self-assessment tools that focus on the center's work as it relates to four areas of community impact:

- 1) Promoting children's social and emotional development through strengthening parenting skills
 - 2) Responding to family crises
 - 3) Valuing and supporting parents and fostering a sense of community
 - 4) Observing and responding to early warning signs of child abuse and neglect
- Promotes quality improvement (evaluation) and establishes accountability of the family resource center with:
 - 1) Family resource centers in the Wisconsin network sharing a similar reputation
 - 2) Funding agencies that support programs within the center
 - 3) Communities and families that the center serves
 - Provides an opportunity for technical assistance, mentoring, and information exchange between centers.
 - Provides professional and emotional support to center directors and staff.
 - Provides an opportunity for family resource centers to showcase their successes to peers who will fully appreciate them.
 - Provides staff development opportunities.

How It Works

The Children's Trust Fund's Peer Review Process for Family Resource Centers is a useful tool for program development, support, and quality assurance. The process allows centers to examine their work and receive feedback from peers in a non-threatening, supportive environment.

The following is an overview of how the peer review process works:

- Peer reviews are comprehensive, face-to-face, reciprocal onsite visits by a team of peers that allow ample time for review and occur with regular frequency. They use the four-part peer review tools on pages 3 to 18.
- Each comprehensive peer review team consists of members that the programs deem to be appropriate. Team members may include, but are not limited to, family resource center directors, staff representing the center's core components of services, parents, community partners, and board members. Programs are matched for the reciprocal visits during peer review training. Program directors from centers not involved in the review may observe any of the reviews.
- At least 4 weeks before the scheduled peer review, all team members from the program hosting the site visit independently complete the peer review tools on pages 3 to 18. Next, the host team members meet as a group to reach consensus on what final responses should be sent to the review team. Detailed comments may be included as needed. Additional background documents for review may include current Application for Continued Funding and quarterly reports since the last peer review.
- The review team examines the completed peer review tools and any additional background documents before the site visit.
- The peer review process begins with the host and review teams meeting informally the evening before the site visit (typically over dinner) so the review team can become familiar with the target geographic area, tour the center, and become acquainted with the host staff.
- Typically, the review team members participate in discussions with parent advisory board members, program staff, volunteers, participants, and collaborators. In addition, they observe and may participate in a variety of programming. They conduct an exit dialogue with all staff members to summarize immediate observations and develop a detailed outline of program strengths and recommendations for improvement.
- Follow-up is completed in three parts:
 - 1) Both the family resource center being reviewed and the review team record the highlights of the peer review as per their group's experience, and attach the reports to their Children's Trust Fund quarterly progress report.
 - 2) The family resource center being reviewed identifies and incorporates two goals that are the result of the peer review process into their annual Children's Trust Fund's Continuation Funding Application.
 - 3) One year after the peer review, the family resource center being reviewed submits a report to the Children's Trust Fund indicating how the peer review process has led to better outcomes for children and families.
- In addition, all family resource centers participating in the peer review process join in a debriefing session to give collective, statewide feedback on the process, to outline best practice recommendations for the Wisconsin family resource center model, and to highlight needs for quality improvement in the areas of training, technical assistance, and evaluation. Tips learned through the peer review process are shared with other centers via the listserv.

PART 1

Promoting Children’s Social Emotional Development through Strengthening Parenting Skills

Overview of Best Practices and Philosophical Approaches

Family resource centers offer an array of ways for parents to access parenting support and information, including classes, workshops, support groups, home visits, and resource lending libraries. Materials are convenient to access, easy to understand, and comprehensive to fit many common parenting situations.

Strategies, services, and approaches are consistent with developmental learning principles for parents and their children and stress interactive learning techniques. Educational materials and core curricula include, at a minimum, information on child growth and development, stress and anger management, promoting alternatives to corporal punishment, effective communication and strengthening family support networks. Other topics about personal and social competencies may also be part of the curricula.

Family resource centers promote strength-based philosophies and practices for working with families. Staff engages parents and other caregivers as partners in learning more about the capabilities of their infants and toddlers. The parents’ role in developing healthy self-esteem in young children is

articulated through a variety of programming formats. Centers incorporate information about children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, early brain development research, and appropriate caregiver expectations in their curricula and educational materials.

Families can access individual support and information on a drop-in basis, through home visitation or by appointment, as well as through group-based formats. Staff is well trained and experienced in handling challenging behaviors and work with parents to identify a variety of positive techniques for each situation given, allowing parents to choose which option is best for their child at a particular time.

Family resource center staff focuses their efforts on the individual’s, family’s, and community’s strengths. Strength-based approaches help families to use fully their existing skills and to acquire new ones. These approaches build self-esteem and confidence within families, and encourage them to use a variety of community resources to maximize their overall functioning.

PART 1 – TOOL

Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development through Strengthening Parenting Skills

PART 1 – Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development through Strengthening Parenting Skills	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
1) Parents and other caregivers have access to a comprehensive array of programs and activities that offer a variety of ways to learn and build skills.					
2) Information on parenting is available through toy, book, and resources lending library, parenting education courses, support groups, topical workshops, parent-child interactions, and resource and referral.					
3) Parenting information is available in the language spoken by families.					
4) Staff is sensitive to the parenting practices of different cultures and ethnic groups and approaches are inclusive of all families.					
5) Parenting curricula core component include, at a minimum, information on child growth and development, stress and anger management, positive discipline, promoting alternatives to corporal punishment, effective communication and strengthening family support networks.					
6) Opportunities are created for parents and other caregivers to explore their own personal experiences of having been parented, including cultural practices, and how this affects the way they currently parent.					
7) Staff share parenting tips and discuss parenting issues that build on positive parenting practices.					
8) Information is provided on regular developmental challenges such as bed wetting, potty training, appropriate discipline, eating, sleeping, and aggression.					

PART 1 – Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development through Strengthening Parenting Skills	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
9) Family activities provide opportunities to strengthen bonds between parents and their children, such as listening to each other, playing together, and cooperative games.					
10) Programs and activities provide opportunities for parents to become more confident and competent at parenting.					
11) When staff talk with parents and other caregivers about discipline, they:					
a) Explain why physical discipline is not allowed in the center.					
b) Explain why the center promotes alternatives to corporal punishment.					
c) Provide information on age-appropriate discipline and reasonable expectations.					
d) Offer ideas for alternative forms of discipline and how to recognize and reinforce desired and appropriate behavior.					
e) Encourage them to discuss discipline challenges they may have at home.					
12) When staff are concerned about parenting techniques or behavior, they:					
a) Proactively and respectfully reach out to parents and other caregivers and share their concerns about the children or about the parenting practices.					
b) Acknowledge young children’s frustrating behavior and recognize parents’ efforts.					

PART 1 – Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development through Strengthening Parenting Skills	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
c) Connect parents and other caregivers to resources and supports that may help to address the parenting issues.					
13) The program teaches parents and other caregivers about children’s social and emotional development in parenting classes and informal discussion with parents.					
14) Parents and other caregivers have opportunities to observe their child interacting with other children and staff in the program.					
15) Staff coaches parents and other caregivers about how to interact effectively with their children (listening appreciating ideas, efforts, and feelings, and creating a non-threatening environment).					
16) Staff encourages children to express their feelings through words, artwork, and expressive play.					
17) Staff model behavior toward children that encourages social and emotional expressiveness.					
18) If staff is concerned about a child’s social and emotional development they:					
a) Discuss concerns with the parents or other caregivers.					
b) Connect the parents or other caregivers to resources that can support the child’s social and emotional development (such as play therapy, mental health services, or parenting classes)					
c) Help the parents and other caregivers develop strategies for addressing the issue at home.					

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PART 1 – Promoting Children’s Social and Emotional Development through Strengthening Parenting Skills	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
19) Parents and other caregivers report changing their parenting techniques based on gaining knowledge about normal child growth and development.					
20) Parents and other caregivers report using discipline methods other than hitting and spanking.					
21) Parents and other caregivers report improvement in behavior issues at home.					
22) Parents and other caregivers report that information from programs and activities have strengthened their family relationships.					
Notes:					

PART 2

Responding to Family Crises

Overview of Best Practices and Philosophical Approaches

Family resource centers offer or provide access to a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary range of voluntary parent education and support services.

Family resource center staff work extensively in the areas of community planning and collaboration to ensure that comprehensive parent education and support services are provided within the community. Family resource centers coordinate with, are supported by, and collaborate with other agencies that represent different disciplines, and work with families of children who are 3 years of age or less. Staff is knowledgeable about community resources and available to help families find access the services they need.

Because these programs are grounded in strong partnerships, and promote voluntary participation, staff is in a unique position to develop positive, trusting relationships with parents. Staff members, including directors, are available to speak with parents informally on a regular basis. The message that parents can turn to the family resource center in any situation is conveyed through all interactions with staff.

Staff members work as a team to identify potential family crises. They reach out to families when signs of parental or child stress are evident, and ensure that the family receives the information and support they need to prevent further distress.

Family resource center staff is trained to respond to family crises effectively, and can access their supervisors and community partners for additional information and support. Current information on community resources is readily available at the center and staff is continually informed of changes in available services, including agency contact information.

Providing support to families through crises can have emotional implications for staff as well. Family resource center directors recognize that for staff members to provide an emotionally supportive environment for parents, they must receive adequate support for themselves. They encourage staff to take personal time when needed, and allow for access to the same resources available to parents, including mental health consultation, stress management and reduction workshops, and support groups.

PART 2 – TOOL
Responding to Family Crises

PART 2 – Responding to Family Crises	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
1) Staff develops personal relationships with parents and other caregivers to get to know them individually – listening, learning about their interests, families, and current activities.					
2) The message that parents and other caregivers can turn to staff in any situation is conveyed through all interactions:					
a) Informally in the regular interactions that staff members have with parents and other caregivers and sharing some of their own personal challenges or desires when appropriate.					
b) Formally through strength-base program philosophy and public interactions.					
3) Staff responds to family crises immediately, respecting privacy, and providing the information and resources needed.					
4) The programs ensure that a staff person is available to respond to a parent and family needing crisis support during program hours.					
a) Program maintains up-to-date information about emergency resources in the community such as food pantries, domestic violence services, respite care, AODA, mental health, and legal assistance, including hours of operation.					
5) Staff knows how to respond appropriately to family crises and receive training on:					
a) Maintaining confidentiality					
b) Resolving conflicts					

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PART 2 – Responding to Family Crises	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
c) Talking to families about difficult issues					
d) Recognizing issues such as poverty, domestic violence, depression, developmental delays, mental illness, chronic health problems, substance abuse, and other signs of imminent crisis					
6) If parents or other caregivers bring up issues that staff members feel are beyond their ability, they refer them to the appropriate professional within or outside the organization.					
7) Staff proactively responds to signs of parent or family distress by supporting them and connecting the family to needed resources.					
8) Staff receives support when working with families under stress through appropriate supervision.					
9) Parents and other caregivers report knowing where to find resources in the community when they need help.					
10) Parents and other caregivers report feeling that program staff respects them.					
Notes:					

PART 3

Valuing and Supporting Parents and Fostering a Sense of Community

Overview of Best Practices and Philosophical Approaches

Family resource centers recognize that a child's well-being is grounded in the well-being of his or her family. Helping families meet their social, psychological, economic, and career goals, either directly or indirectly, is an important part of the work that these programs do. This awareness is a cornerstone to the family support philosophy under which they work.

Developing strong relationships between parents and staff is an essential ingredient in the programs' ability to connect with parents. Family resource center staff works with families in partnerships based on respect and equality. When parents and other caregivers feel valued and supported in the context of a learning relationship, the likelihood of their taking responsibility for and making use of new information increases.

The commitment of family resource center staff to care about and support parents and other caregivers serves as an important model for parents as they make choices about raising their own children. For parents, who themselves may not have been adequately nurtured as children, the experience of being cared for in a relationship is an important factor in helping them break the cycle of abuse and develop new patterns with their own children. Often, these parents are struggling with a host of issues associated with abuse and neglect, including alcohol or substance abuse, domestic violence, or depression. Family resource centers connect families to the services they need while offering caring, supportive relationships that promote parental resiliency.

Family resource centers offer opportunities for parents and other caregivers to get to know each other, develop mutual support systems, and take leadership. Staff works proactively with families who are isolated or seem most in need of encouragement and support, drawing them into the social networks and activities available at the center. Centers welcome equally all parents and children sending a message of inclusiveness and equal social value.

Family resource centers are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community building process through strength-based approaches. They act as advocates with families for services and systems that support families, and are responsive to emerging family and community issues. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including opportunities for parents and other caregivers to contribute to program planning, governance, and administration. Family resources centers affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multi-cultural society. Family resource centers staff members are reflective of the cultures and ethnicity within the community. In addition, family resource centers convey a clear message that both parents are an important and valued part of their children's lives.

PART 3 – TOOL

Valuing and Supporting Parents and Fostering a Sense of Community

PART 3 – Valuing and Supporting Parents and Fostering a Sense of Community	Excellent	Good	Fair	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
1) At first contact, parents and other caregivers are universally welcomed into the center’s safe, warm, and inviting environment.					
2) Efforts are made to ensure that all family members are welcome and invited to participate.					
3) Parent and children are introduced to other parents, children, and staff as much as possible.					
4) Leadership and staff reflect and are knowledgeable of the cultures located within the community.					
5) Cultural competence is reflected through staff and celebrated through cultural customs, potlucks, and other opportunities for parents to share and learn about each other’s home lives and cultural backgrounds.					
6) Additional family support programs, such as autism support groups, are developed as needs in the community are identified.					
7) The program provides opportunities for families to socialize, build relationships, and foster a sense of community through a variety of family fun events and special programs for dads, grandparents, teen moms, and other caregivers both at the center and in the community.					
8) The program helps parents and other caregivers develop informal support systems, network, and gain information on community resources for families.					

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PART 3 – Valuing and Supporting Parents and Fostering a Sense of Community	Excellent	Good	Fair	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
9) The program assists and facilitates ways to help an individual family in times of need such as new baby, moving, ailing grandparent, and injury or death.					
10) Parents and other caregivers have leadership opportunities including input on development, operation, and governance of the program to meet their personal and community goals.					
11) The program has specific activities that get fathers involved.					
12) The program provides supports such as childcare, food, transportation, and other resources to facilitate parents’ participation in education and social events and programs.					
13) Program staff reaches out to isolated families by introducing them to other parents, inviting them to participate in family events, and connecting them to resources in the community.					
14) The program models positive social skills and community building.					
15) Staff recognizes and values parent contributions and encourage them and other caregivers to volunteer and contribute to the program:					
a) Suggest a variety of activities related to program operation, such as outreach, children’s activities, family events, materials review, advisory committees, and boards, where parents and caregivers can assist.					
b) Encourage parents to gain skills and knowledge and assume more responsibility.					
16) When staff make referrals to outside services they:					

PART 3 – Valuing and Supporting Parents and Fostering a Sense of Community	Excellent	Good	Fair	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
a) Brainstorm with families about what resources would be helpful.					
b) Help parents and other caregivers address barriers to using services, such as transportation or childcare, language difficulties, and fees.					
c) Identify services and opportunities within the program that may help them achieve their goals and use their skills and talents.					
d) Identify other community resources and opportunities that may help them achieve their goals, continue their learning, and provide other avenues for involvement.					
e) Follow-up with families to see if they used the referral and ensure that they were satisfied with the services they received.					
17) The program provides parents and other caregivers opportunities to share skills, talents, and cultural traditions with children and other parents through:					
a) Leadership development through organizing gatherings at community events or local resources such as libraries or parks.					
b) Input into programmatic decisions, marketing and outreach activities, fundraising, and long-range planning.					
18) Families build relationships that provide support when they need it.					
19) Parents and other caregivers gain confidence in their ability to parent and take care of their children.					
20) Parents’ ideas and opinions are welcomed and included in the program.					

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PART 3 – Valuing and Supporting Parents and Fostering a Sense of Community	Excellent	Good	Fair	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
21) Parents and other caregivers report feeling respected by program staff.					
Notes:					

PART 4

Observing and Responding to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse or Neglect

Overview of Best Practices and Philosophical Approaches

The Wisconsin family resource center model incorporates strength-based philosophies and practices for working with families. These approaches lend well to an environment of support and advocacy for families across a spectrum of issues. Family resource center staff believes that developing relationships with parents based on equality and respect contributes to a family's willingness to look to the program for support and continue to participate through even the most difficult situations.

Regular interactions between family resource center staff, parents, and children provide opportunities for early identification of concerns and immediate assistance. Staff views signs of parental stress as opportunities to reach out to families and connect them with needed support.

When concerns of potential child abuse or neglect are identified, family resource center staff address the parents immediately and proactively to remedy the situation. Staff works to ensure that parents understand the concern and explain the impact that the issue could have on the child's development.

When family resource center staff members suspect or witness instances of child abuse or neglect, they follow their agency's protocols for reporting child abuse and neglect and provide continuity and support to families who are the subject of reports. Staff members explain the reporting process and act as advocates for families with the child protective service system. If a child is placed in custody, staff strives to maintain contact with the parent and continues to provide advocacy and to assist in facilitating the parents' reunification with the child.

Maintaining strong relationships with parents and advocating through the reporting process may be difficult for family resource center staff, and sometimes may be met initially with hostility from the family. Staff members receive ongoing comprehensive training and support from supervisors and outside organizations throughout this process to assist them in overcoming personal issues they may encounter. Though these situations can be challenging for both staff and families, effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated when these families frequently return to the center and continue to be involved with the program.

PART 4 – TOOL

Observing and Responding to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse or Neglect

PART 4 – Observing and Responding to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
1) All staff are trained and sensitive to recognizing the universal early signs of child abuse and neglect such as the following:					
a) Physical signs (such as bruises), acting out, distress, challenging behavior, fearful behavior, inappropriate language and behavior (such as sexual acting out), or other child symptoms					
b) Unusual parent behavior or inappropriate parent-child interactions, as well as family transitions or crisis					
2) Staff has regular contact and maintains positive relationships with local child protective service staff.					
3) All staff members are trained to follow the program’s protocols for reporting child abuse and neglect					
4) Staff is oriented to the state’s child welfare reporting guidelines and how cases are generally handled once a report is made.					
5) Information is shared with all parents about the program’s policies for child abuse and neglect.					
6) When staff members suspect or become aware of a child abuse or neglect issue, they address it with the parents or caregivers and act as an advocate while following their center’s policies on reporting:					
a) Explain the center’s policy on reporting.					
b) Explain the reporting process to the family and how the child protective services system typically responds.					

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PART 4 – Observing and Responding to Early Warning Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect	Excellent	Fair	Poor	Not Applicable	Comments and Examples
c) Strive to be calm, caring, and supportive during the reporting process.					
d) Act as advocates, when possible, for families with the child protective services system.					
7) If a child is placed in custody, staff strives to maintain contact with the parent or caregiver, provide advocacy through the process, and help the parent connect with resources necessary for them to be reunited with the child.					
Notes:					