CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Tip Sheets

The Director as an Inspired Leader: Vision, Intention, and Growth as a Leader

A healthy early childhood organization begins with leadership that prioritizes emotional safety, wellbeing, and strong relationships. Directors play a vital role in shaping environments where children, families, and staff feel supported, respected, and valued. By grounding their work in calm, reflective leadership and balancing vision with daily management, directors create the conditions for learning and high-quality care to flourish.

HOW INSPIRED DIRECTORS SHAPE POSITIVE CHILDCARE ENVIRONMENTS

1. LEADING WITH CALM AND INTENTION
2. BALANCING VISION AND MANAGEMENT
3. KNOWING ONESELF
4. GROWING AS A LEADER
5. SUPPORTING STAFF
6. DEDICATION TO PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Leading with Calm and Intention

Promoting stability and sturdy well-being

A leader's sense of calm sets the tone for the entire program. When directors regulate their own stress and model thoughtful decision-making, they help create emotionally secure environments for staff, children, and families.

- Pause and reflect before responding, especially during challenging situations.
- Prioritize their own wellness through realistic scheduling, boundaries, and support systems.
- Model respectful communication, emotional regulation, and curiosity.
- Remember that calm leadership fosters trust, stability, and psychological safety for others.

Leading and directing are distinct competencies. Developing management skills takes time; however, once proficient, programs operate more efficiently and cultivate a harmonious environment.

Balancing Vision and Management

Holding the big picture while managing the day-to-day

Inspired directors balance long-term visioning with the practical work of running a program. Both are essential to organizational health.

- Keep mission, vision, and values visible and actively referenced in daily decisions.
- Use management systems and clear policies to reduce uncertainty and stress for staff and families.
- Revisit priorities regularly, asking what matters most right now while keeping long-term goals in mind.
- Recognize that strong management supports quality teaching, relationships, and care.

Know Oneself

Success through values and leadership style

Clarity creates unity. Success as a director requires clearly identifying values, a leadership style, and learning one's blind spots.

- Create well-defined core values.
- Define a leadership style and learn to adapt and develop new ones to meet program needs and best practices.
- Provide a written values statement to serve as a guide for the organization and its culture.

Staff members can align their decisions and actions with the organization's core principles and standards.

Growing as a Leader

Committing to continuous learning and reflection

Healthy organizations are led by directors who continue to learn and adapt.

- Identify professional development goals based on current challenges and program needs.
- Seek learning opportunities related to leadership, emotional intelligence, organizational climate, and child development.
- Regularly reflect on personal strengths, challenges, and areas for growth.

Investing in personal development benefits the entire community.

Supporting and Growing Staff

Creating a culture of trust and professional growth

Staff thrive in environments where expectations are clear, relationships are respectful, and growth is encouraged.

- Provide clear job descriptions, onboarding processes, and regular feedback.
- Schedule consistent one-on-one check-ins and team meetings to build connection and clarity.
- Foster joy and belonging through shared rituals, recognition, and opportunities for leadership.
- Encourage reflective practice and ongoing professional development.
- Approach difficult conversations with honesty and care—clarity supports safety and growth.

Primary Responsibilities

Building respectful and collaborative relationships

A director's primary responsibility is to establish a physically and emotionally secure educational environment that fosters learning and care for children, staff, and families.

- Duties and tasks must be prioritized on an ongoing basis, focusing on what is most important with an eye on the long term.
- Strong directors engage teachers, children, and families in building trust through listening, transparency, and nonjudgmental communication.

Leading a high-quality early childhood program is vital work and an act of love. It is demanding work that requires strong dedication and the resilience of joy.

Additional Resources

NAEYC | Strategic Direction
https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/about-us/people/NAEYC_Strategic_Direction.pdf

Habits of the Mind Institute | Resources
https://habitsofmindinstitute.org/resources

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