

Case

Valuing Inclusivity and Privacy

On a warm, sunny August morning, a young family walked into the early learning and child care centre. They asked one of the parent volunteers, working with a child near the entrance doors, if there was space for their toddler Yusaf to attend the centre in September. The volunteer brought the family over to me and introduced me as Maggie, the centre supervisor.

Mr. and Mrs. Zaid introduced themselves and their young son, Yusaf. I welcomed them warmly and invited them into my office. I gave Yusaf a picture book and some toys from the shelf. Yusaf smiled and said, “Thank you for the toys.”

Mr. Zaid explained that he and his wife had just been accepted into the local community college. “Classes will be starting in two weeks,” he said with excitement. Mr. Zaid said that they had completed an application for fee assistance with the region and were waiting for approval. In the meantime, he and his wife would like Yusaf to start attending a child care program as soon as possible. They were willing to pay the regular fees until they heard back from the county.

I confirmed that one spot had just become available and that Yusaf could start immediately. “Would you like to see our program?” I asked. I took the family on a tour of the centre and explained the regular childcare fees in detail.

After Yusaf started the program his family was pleased to see him adjusting well and developing relationships with the educators at the centre. Both Mr. and Mrs. Zaid commented on how much their son was learning and how happy he seemed to be. “We are so fortunate to have found this centre and that Yusaf was able to be enrolled so quickly. We are very thankful.”



Two weeks later, Saba, the RECE in the toddler room, asked me if the county's fee assistance office had approved the Zaid family's application. Apparently Saba had become aware that paying full-fees was causing financial stress on the family. I hesitated because this was not information that I generally shared with staff. "I have not received any notification from the county about fees," I responded.

About six weeks later Saba said to me that it was great that Mr. and Mrs. Zaid had finally received their fee assistance and that it was a huge burden off the young family's shoulders. "I asked them to bring in their college class schedule to help us plan our beginning and end of the day schedule for child-staff ratio purposes," said Saba.

Puzzled, I asked, "Do you ask all families for their schedules?"

"No only subsidy families so that they don't abuse the system," replied Saba.

I felt Saba was discriminating between full fee paying families and families who received fee assistance. As supervisor, I didn't recall receiving a correspondence from the county stating for how many hours per day any family had received approval. I went back to my records to verify the specifics of approval for the Zaid family and several other families receiving fee subsidies. Applicants to the county were not required to provide any information about school, work or personal schedules.

I was confused about why Saba would make a comment to the family about the beginning and end of the day. As a supervisor, I had always staffed the program according to the number of children registered in each age group and the hours of centre operation. I had also tried to be careful not to disclose to the educators which families were receiving fee assistance. If families chose to share that information with other staff, as sometimes happens, that was their decision.

The next morning Mrs. Zaid phoned me to ask, "Is it mandatory to provide our class schedules? More often than not we will have to stay after class for study groups or need to complete homework before we pick up Yusaf. But we don't want the educators to be mad at us for being late."

I assured Mrs. Zaid that, no, she did not have to provide their schedules to any member of staff at the centre and that the only time they would be considered late is if they came after the centre closed.

I put down the phone and had an unsettled feeling in my stomach. I felt that perhaps the centre's philosophy wasn't effectively being communicated and embraced by all staff. I also thought that the centre's values about being inclusive, sensitive and building responsive relationships with families were being compromised. Did Saba actually believe that families like Mr. and Mrs. Zaid would abuse the system and that it was the centre's responsibility to ensure that this did not happen?

Perhaps Saba didn't realize the potential implications that her attitude and comments might have for the children and their families, centre staff members and the trust that the community placed in the centre program. Did other staff members share Saba's view? How many families had been asked for schedules? How could I find out? What could I do to rectify this misinformation and, perhaps more importantly, any misperceptions about the role of the centre?

Reflecting on the Case

1. What are the key facts in this case?
2. Analyze the case from the perspectives of the Maggie, Saba and Mr. and Mrs. Zaid. How do their perspectives differ?
3. What are the main issues in this case? What impact might these issues have on the children and families of the centre?
4. In what ways and to what extent does the case writer fulfill, fall short of or exceed your expectations for professionalism? If applicable, to what extent do you think her actions can be justified?
5. Going forward, what are some steps that staff could take to ensure that the centre's values about being inclusive, sensitive, and building responsive relationships with families is effectively communicated?
6. How are the ethical and professional standards reflected (or not reflected) through this case?
7. The case writer wants to find out how many other families had been asked for their schedules in the past to rectify any misperceptions about the role of the centre. What advice would you give this RECE?