Family Day Care: Its Impact on Providers

Roseann Teglia
Katherine Simone

Jeremy was eleven-days-old at the time his working parents contracted with Helen to furnish child care. He spends as long as twelve hours a day in the comfort and security of this caregiver's home. The nurturing experiences Jeremy receives from Helen match those given by his parents. Helen is directly accountable for this child during the greatest part of his waking hours. Can Helen's impact on Jeremy be denied? Helen is a mutual participant in assuring his healthy maturation. In effect, Jeremy has three parents, his natural parents and his family child care provider.

Shared parenting evokes uncomfortable images. Yet, each day, some two million children participate in child care arranged by their parents. The majority of these children remain with providers such as Helen. The verbal and written agreements that define the terms of family child care do not describe the impact of this responsibility upon those of us entrusted as caregivers.

Just as the reasons we become providers vary, so do the consequences of our decisions. Impact can be measured by declining numbers of family child care providers in many neighborhoods. There is a lack of awareness of the way in which day care parents, their children, our families and each of us influence the level of satisfaction we derive from this job.

Family child care is an occupation with specific job responsibilities that are enhanced and complicated by the fact that we work in our homes. How do we occupy the long hours spent living with our day care children? The degree to which we organize our home contributes largely to our ability to cope with children.

It is easy to find oneself rummaging for diapers in one room, changing a child in another room, dashing outside to check on a child and running back to answer the phone in time to hear the caller hang up. Try to imagine an office worker returning home and going to bed with five of his coworkers desks in his bedroom. Even when day care children are not present in our home, we stare at shelves of toys, rows of trikes and numerous cribs and high chairs.

Family child care can engulf a household. It is essential that space be available for children as well as family members. A strategically placed gate blocks off a room containing frequently used supplies and equipment for the children. A discarded mattress and several sturdy boxes offer an alternative to children who enjoy jumping on the couch. Parents can be requested to enter thru the backyard gate so that the front room remains cleaner. A critical look at the need for space and privacy insures that our environment will not tire us physically or leaves us psychologically depressed.

Were we employed outside the home, the continual demands made by family members would not be made. The wishes and wants of our loved ones often conflict with the tasks we perceive to be part of our job responsibilities. When we encounter tension, jealousy, interruptions and a lack of cooperation from our family, we should voice our concerns.

It is not only family members, but day care parents who also bring expectations into our homes. Parents may hesitate to share information concerning the daily habits of their children and themselves. The confusion and guilt that parents experience when they separate from their children can cause our interaction with parents to be frustrating. We must be insightful about what is occurring in each child's home.

Erin's behavior had changed drastically over a period of several weeks. Nothing the provider tried seemed to lessen the negative actions of the child. Conversation between Erin's mother and Andrea intensified the parent's defensiveness. When the mother did blurt out that she and Erin's father had separated, she remarked that Erin was too young to comprehend such matters. Erin can barely speak, but from the moment Andrea was able to reassure the toddler by word and gesture that she sympathized with the extent to which Erin missed her father, much of Erin's anger disappeared.

Daily communication nurtures the

Roseann Teglia and Kathy Simone are family child care providers associated with UCLA Child Care Services. They are founding members of C.A.P.E., Children and Providers Enriched, a Los Angeles Association serving parents and caregivers.
ongoing parent-provider relationship and clarifies our responsibility to the child. In an effort to be accommodating, we care for sick children and allow children to remain in our homes well past our regular operating hours. Resentment towards parents should serve as a warning signal to us to be frank about our programs, even to the point of suggesting to parents that ours may not be the program that is most suitable for them. The fastest way to burn-out is to bury our emotion. Honesty is less stressful.

Life experiences are a valuable part of ourselves to share with parents. As people have fewer children, our role as a model to parents increases. Life’s pressures have a limiting effect on the amount of attention parents give to their children. A child’s needs are but one among a multitude of pressing responsibilities the single parent attempts to fulfill. The needs of a child become an overwhelming obligation to be balanced along with the demands of work, home, other children and spouse for the two-parent family in which both parents are employed outside of the home. As women avail themselves of expanding educational and career opportunities, it is no longer fathers but mothers as well who direct the greatest part of their energy to the demands of their occupation and not their children. Knowing that a child’s needs for attention are no less, parents seek caregivers who will complement the parent’s efforts.

Michael’s parents complained to Ruth about the lack of sufficient time to feed Michael breakfast. They hoped that Ruth could provide Michael with breakfast in addition to the lunch and dinner she usually prepared. Ruth spoke with the parents about the importance of planning enough time to share a relaxed meal with their son even if it involved a change in everyone’s schedule.

We laugh and cry about “our” kids. Their unceasing demands make it hard for us to get up off the floor some days. We do not fully appreciate the amount of energy required to deal with children. If we are not compelled to look each child in the eye and share a few words and a hug just with him or prepare a routine on which the child can depend, what is it we do have time for? No less than his parents, we are a predominating model for the child. An infant’s first words and gestures mimic our own. Each moment spent in our companionship is influential. In our eagerness, we overestimate our energy and become overworked, losing sight of the pleasures of our occupation. We risk exhausting ourselves totally and quitting as caregivers, or if we continue, it may be simply to go through the motions of caregiving without developing an intimate relationship with each child.

It has been said that we cannot meet anyone else’s needs until we have first met our own needs. Judy had not taken a vacation in two years. Her day care parents protested each time she began to make plans. This year she was certain she had satisfied everyone. She hired a substitute who would care for all of the children in Judy’s home. Judy went out for a few hours each day but was generally available. During her vacation, Judy worked more than she relaxed. She is wearily anticipating another year of family child care.

We attend to our day care families and our own families, but we forget ourselves. Instead, we develop chronic headaches, overeat and become short-tempered with everyone around us. The morning light of a bathroom mirror vividly reflects the physical and mental toll that child care exacts from us.

Extreme fatigue prompted Denise to communicate her apprehensions about her health to her husband. They have decided to allot a portion of Denise’s income to a person who will handle the heavy housework on a regular basis and to pay a reliable friend to substitute one afternoon for Denise while she exercises at the gym.

We need nurturing as much as the children in our care. Where can we find support? Day care parents, neighbors, friends and our families can be encouraging but may not appreciate the special nature of our work. It is dangerous to isolate ourselves from others. We should not expect our day care children to support...

Continued on Page 24

Interested in Montessori?

Apply for IMS membership to receive the following benefits:

- 8 issues of the Montessori Observer
- Montessori publications at discount
- IMS training and certification information

BONUS!

- FREE copy of The Essential Montessori, a recent book about Montessori education;
- FREE “Montessori” bumper sticker.

Send in This Coupon Today.

Membership Application

Name ____________________________
Street ____________________________
City ____________________________
State/Zip ____________________________

Complete correct mailing address above and send with $10 membership fee to:
International Montessori Society
P.O. Box 4338
Washington, D.C. 20012

Bonus offer guaranteed only to first 100 applications received after September 15, 1980.