

Working with Multi Age Groups in Mobile Care

One of the main benefits to offering Mobile Care is that it allows you to make your settlement services accessible to a greater number of newcomer families. By bringing your settlement service(s) to different locations in the community while at the same time providing child care at those locations you can reach a greater number of families and positively impact their settlement experience.

Mobile Care is available to mixed age groups of newcomer children. The multi age facet of Mobile Care allows parents to bring the children in their family who require care to the session. Knowing their children are well cared for in a safe environment gives newcomer parents the much needed peace of mind to learn as much as they possibly can in your settlement programs.

Understanding Key Aspects of Newcomer Multi Age Groups

Supervision is more challenging in multi age groups and it is essential to ensure that all the children work well together. Having clear policies and procedures will support you and your caregivers in this.

Mobile Care is often attended by several children from the same fam-



ily. This can be advantageous to your staff, as the older siblings will naturally help with their younger ones. In terms of developing policies around behavioural guidance though, it is important to consider what would be appropriate for the older children, as well as the younger ones.

The children may be at different developmental levels and have a wide assortment of interests. Even at the same developmental stage they will not all have the same interests. While one 12 year old may enjoy a complex puzzle another 12 year old may find it dull. It is best to purchase toys and equipment that meet the range of all the developmental levels and interests in the group.

You will need to choose safe materials that are open ended, interest a wide range of age groups and are appropriate to their abilities, while at the same time considering the safety of younger children. For example, what are choking hazards for younger children? (Please see the Toys and Equipment Resource Sheet).

Understanding the Requirements for Mixed Age Groups

- The ratios for multi age groups are different from a regular program because the range of ages between younger and older children is greater. In mixed age groups of children the requirements for



caregiver to child ratio and group size are determined to ensure the safety for the youngest children in the group.

- Staff must have child care experience. This will help them in working effectively with newcomer children of mixed age groups.
- Supervision and risk in caring for mixed age groups requires different approaches and perspectives from regular care. Supervision must be a primary focus due to the wide range of ages. (Please see the Managing Risk Resource Sheet)
- Toys and equipment must be safe and appropriate for a wide range of ages. (Please see the Toys and Equipment Resource Sheet)

Hiring Caregivers for Newcomer Multi Age Groups

Mobile Care may be new to some of your staff and they will draw upon certain skill sets that are not usually necessary in regular child care. Not all caregivers have experience working with newcomer multi age groups. There may be very young children to preteens requiring care during any given session. It is prudent, therefore, to try and hire caregivers that have experience working with newcomer children in multi age groups.

How You Can Support Caregivers Working with Mixed Age Groups

The distinctive nature of Mobile Care makes it necessary for you and your staff to view this service from a different perspective than regular child care programs. Your staff will need to consider a variety of questions such as:

- How do I keep both the young and the older children safe?
- How do I set up activities that can appeal to such a large range of ages and interests?
- How can we structure our roles to best determine which children each of us works with ensuring that we look after all the children in the room?
- How do I respond to the varying needs of the children when I do not speak their language?

You can help to support them in this by:

- Understanding that it is a challenge to plan and supervise mixed age groups in Mobile Care.
- Providing resources and materials that can work for a wide variety of age groups.
- Working with the Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in the selection of toys and equipment.
- Purchasing a variety of toys in sufficient quantities for different age groups to support caregivers in keeping the children engaged and have the sessions run smoothly.
- Communicating clearly with caregivers. Ensuring they are aware of all the policies, procedures and requirements.
- Making sure caregivers are prepared to offer activities to a wide age group.

Please visit our website for further resources and support.
www.cmascanada.ca

