



# COMBINED CARE: INTERACTION WITH CHILDREN

## Interacting with Short-Term Children

In Combined Care programs, CNC staff must be able to interact with short-term children, respond to the needs of individuals who may be in distress, while also attending to group activities. This places a unique burden on CNC staff in combined programs. For that reason, staff in combined programs will benefit from professional development opportunities including training in fostering and modeling resiliency.

It is important to establish a relationship and earn the trust of each child. Even if a short-term child is only present for a brief period of time, a staff member who is consistently available to assist the child can make a big difference to the child's experience.

When caring for short-term children, staff must be able to observe a child and assess his or her needs quickly. A staff member with experience and training is likely to know very soon whether a particular child needs quiet, personal attention or will happily join the other children without delay.

One way to help new children enter a group while simultaneously assisting children who have been in the program is to establish a "buddy" system in which children in the program are introduced to a "special friend". Even if the new friendship lasts only a few minutes, it is a point of entry for the short-term child and gives the long-term child a sense of participating fully in the program and the satisfaction of helping someone else.

When interacting with short-term children, it is important to let them know, on arrival, what will be happening to them in the program. They will feel more in control of their experience if they know what to expect.

## Interacting with Long-Term Children

Combined Care changes the experience of long-term children. Depending on how the children are grouped, their program activities will be changed to varying degrees because of the presence of short-term children.

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On the one hand, their experience may be less predictable and consistent. Staff attention may be directed to unforeseen situations involving short-term children. On the other hand, they will learn to respond positively to change. They are likely to become more resilient in the face of challenges and learn interpersonal skills that will be valuable as they socialize with others at school and in other situations. Staff can help them by modeling resiliency as new situations arise.

Long-term children will also have opportunities to reach out to short-term children, show them how things are done and generally help them become more comfortable in the CNC setting.

It will be important for staff to manage the transitions of short-term children effectively so that staff attention is not directed to short-term children at the expense of long-term children. It will be important to build consistency into the experience of long-term children and ensure that a familiar staff member is always present and building relationships with them.

It is also important to tell long-term children what to expect during their day. If the program operates as a combined program every day, they should be told from their first day that while they and some of the other children will be staying for a while, other children will be coming and going after a short period of time. If the program provides combined care only on selected days, they may need to be told at the beginning of the combined day that other children will be joining them. The long-term children will then be prepared for the coming and going t