



COMBINED CARE: IN ACTION

Kelli (of “ABC Organization”) has been responsible for her ISO’s Combined CNC program for some time. Since ABC has been offering Combined Care for a few months now, she is getting used to organizing her days. From the beginning, she has tried to plan ahead and has encouraged her staff to plan as well. Since they never know exactly how many children they will have, or who they will be, it is a challenge to prepare. She likes her job, though, and finds it interesting to meet new people, especially the children. She is glad to meet their parents as well.

Mostly, parents are happy to be making a new beginning, but some are a little worried, too, about their own future and about their children. Some have never left their child with someone they have not met before and they worry their child will miss them; but when parents see the other children enjoying our program, they usually become more comfortable with the idea of leaving their own children. As a result, the child usually senses their confidence and is more willing to stay. It is rewarding to see the parents when they pick up their child, especially if they have benefitted from the services they have received and their child seems happy. The next time they bring their child, it will be much easier for parents to leave and the children are likely to have little or no difficulty joining the other children.

Sometimes, however, the parents and children have a difficult time. If the child is very upset at drop-off time, parents are allowed to stay for a while until the child is comfortable. If the child does not settle, the CNC Staff suggests the parent keep the child and try again another time.

Here are some facts about Kelli’s program:

ORGANIZING

- Relating to Adult Services – Kelli is lucky. The coordinator and other administrators at ABC have always included her in their discussions as to how their services would be organized. Since CNC is based on the adult services being offered, it is important to ensure CNC is available when clients need the services.
- Scheduling the Week– ABC provides Long Term CNC for parents in LINC classes five days a week. They have recently decided to change their Long Term program into a Combined Care program and offer short-term, drop-in care for up to five children on Wednesdays and on other

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days, as needed. That means all workshops are scheduled for Wednesdays, as much as possible. At other times, Short Term care will be available to a smaller number of children, as needed, for example to parents receiving counseling or some other appointment at the location. So far, that arrangement is working out well. On Wednesdays, when workshops are scheduled, children are grouped differently and additional staff are on duty to meet combined CNC child to staff ratios. On other days, the 20% rule means they can accommodate a few short-term children while maintaining the child to staff ratios and group size requirements they have been meeting for their Long Term CNC program.

- **Timing the Session** – One of Kelli’s most important tasks is making sure ABC allots sufficient time for CNC, especially when providing workshops or other group activities. When advertising services, ABC must allow enough time before the workshop starts to ensure all parents can sign their children into CNC and be ready at the workshop location before it begins. If an ISO requires pre-registration or early enrolment, the process of leaving a child for care will be much simpler and take less time (although each child will still have to be signed in and out).
- **Registering the Children** – Kelli also works with others to make decisions about the registration process. If CNC is available to all on a drop-in basis and a child has not already registered for CNC, the parent will have to complete a Registration Form. If several parents with children arrive at once, Kelli’s CNC staff may need assistance from other ISO staff for a brief period to ensure the required Registration and Attendance Forms are completed for all children before they receive care.

STAFFING

- **Meeting Requirements** – Staffing needs depend on how the children are grouped. Obviously, enough CNC Staff must be on duty to meet the CNC Requirements. But since the number of children who need care is likely to be unpredictable, it is important to have additional qualified staff “on call” who can arrive for duty quickly. If it is not possible to add staff on short notice, the ISO will need a policy for prioritizing who can receive Short Term Care and procedures for informing parents that care is not available at a particular time.
- **Selecting Staff** – It is important to select CNC Staff who are suited to Combined CNC and, in particular, enjoy the flexibility and challenge of frequent changes and providing care to new children. CNC Staff in combined programs must be able to collaborate and work in teams. They need as much experience as possible and should include permanent staff members who can give additional stability to a changing program.
- **Relating to Long-Term Children** – Precaution should be taken to ensure all of the CNC Staff’s attention does not focus on the short-term children. Efforts should be made to provide long-term children with as much consistency as possible for the time they are participating in the



program. This is especially true for children who attend for a full day. Their experience may change several times during one day. For example, it will change when some half-day children leave at noon and again when new children arrive after lunch. Throughout the day, it will also change each time a short-term child arrives and leaves. Relating to the same staff member will help bring stability to their experience.

- Interacting with Other ISO Staff – Often, CNC Staff need to work closely with other ISO staff. This includes staff responsible for the adult services being used by parents (as they can provide information such as where the parents are located and how long their children will require care) and administrative staff who may be able to assist with registration.
- Developing and Supporting CNC Staff – Because CNC Staff in Combined CNC programs have additional challenges, they need opportunities for professional development. They may also benefit from the experience of others through mentoring arrangements in the workplace.

PLANNING THE PROGRAM

- Establishing a Consistent Program Structure – Kelli’s goal is to develop a consistent staff and program structure. The children are new only once but the CNC Staff have to relate to new children many times, on any given day. Even though the children will be different each day, it will help staff know what to expect by establishing a daily routine for the same time periods each day.
- Planning Group and Individual Activities – Within those time periods, staff can plan activities for both the group and individual children. If a variety of activities are planned ahead of time, CNC Staff can implement them based on the needs of the children in the group. Some that don’t seem appropriate on one day are likely to be useful on another.
- Assembling Play Materials and Equipment – When planning activities for Combined CNC, it is necessary to plan more activities for a given day than will actually be implemented to allow for flexibility and depending on the children who need care. Similarly, it is necessary to have access to more play materials and equipment than is required for Long Term CNC to accommodate the variety of activities that might occur. One way to ensure the program has the needed materials is to plan activities as individual modules and to develop “activity kits” – like mobile kits – that include everything necessary for an activity and can be stored but ready to use as they are needed. The decision to use them will be based on the nature of the group and staff observations of individual children.
- Arranging the Environment - When planning the environment, Kelli included a welcoming area, where CNC Staff can meet parents and children and complete the registration information. A welcoming area should also include a cubby or other spot where each child can leave his or



her things. When a short-term child arrives, the cubby might be personalized with a sticker or some other identifying feature that lets the child know it belongs to him or her (the program might use the same symbol used to identify the child and parent on the Attendance Form).

PROVIDING COMBINED CNC - A SHORT-TERM CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

It is likely that by the time a child needs Short Term care, Kelli's combined program is already in operation. The following are some steps you might take from the time you welcome a short-term child until you say "good-bye":

Arriving for CNC

- Greet parents and children warmly but do not overwhelm the child. The child who seems to need time to get used to the program should be given an opportunity to observe what is happening from a bit of a distance. If the child is keen to join the other children immediately, follow the child's lead and take the next steps in the order that is most appropriate.
- If a number of children arrive at the same time, you may need to have one CNC Staff person checking forms and signing the children in and another interacting with the children and parents, as necessary. In some cases, it may be helpful to have administrative help with the forms for the brief period when many children are arriving at once. During this period, care must be taken to continue to supervise the children already in the program (including both long- and short-term children).
- Complete the registration process with the parent and sign the child into the program.
- Before the child joins the other children, show the child to the cubby or special spot where his or her things will be kept.
- While you are doing all of the above, observe the child, first to determine the child's health status and then to get an idea of whether the child is likely to be comfortable joining the other children and the types of activities that might be most suitable for the child.
- Give the child and parent the special identifier that will help staff know who each child is and connects the child with the parent. A similar identifier might also be placed on the child's cubby or special spot so that the child feels that he or she belongs. (This step may not be meaningful for very young children – it is something you can judge as you observe the child.)
- Help the child feel in control by telling the child what will happen next and what to expect during the time the child is participating in the program.



- Escort the child to the activity space.

Interacting with Parents

Children will be arriving for care in basically two situations. There is the situation when care is being provided while parents participate in a group activity (such as a workshop) and several sets of parents and children will arrive at the same time. In the other situation, a parent arrives to drop off a child or children for a counseling appointment at a time when no other parent needs care. The suggestions below relate to interactions when one parent arrives. They illustrate the importance of having sufficient CNC Staff available to support each parent and child even when several arrive at once.

Issues to consider include:

- Many newcomer parents will be anxious about leaving their child with caregivers they do not know. You may be able to find out more about their feelings by observing the child and, taking the lead from the child, doing what seems appropriate to make the child comfortable. You may be able to learn about the parents through the child because the child is likely to sense and reflect the parent's feelings and the parent will feel better if the child is comfortable.
- As part of the orientation process, give parents a brief tour of the CNC space. Help them feel connected to their child and reassured about leaving the child by showing them where their child will be and describing what their child will be doing. Seeing other children happily engaged in activities is likely to make parents feel better.
- Many newcomer parents may be unfamiliar with the type of questions on the CNC Registration Form. Using simple language, help them to understand the questions and their importance. Also help them understand why they must sign both the CNC Registration Form and the CNC Attendance Form.
- Parents may not have been to the building before. When parents are ready to participate in their activity, it is helpful if someone associated with their adult program is available to escort them to the part of the building where their service is being offered.
- Separation may be painful for the child and/or parent. When it seems difficult, be patient and allow the parent to remain in the CNC space until the child is calm. Ask the parent to leave something of his or her own with the child (like a scarf or a sweater) to reassure the child and to indicate that the parent intends to return. Also, ask the parent to teach you a few words in the child's home language so you are able to comfort the child in a familiar way.



Joining the Group of Children

When you escort a child to the activity space, there are a number of ways the child can join the group:

- The child may wish to remain slightly outside the group, quietly on the sidelines with a single toy or other item, or by nervously moving around the room, touching everything and not settling to anything. As long as the child is safe and not disturbing others, it is best to give the child time to adjust to the new environment.
- The child may choose to participate in an ongoing activity. You may have materials for a craft project available on a nearby table for anyone who wants to use them.
- The child may immediately join an activity in progress story time, or a game, or other physical activity. Particularly on days when you know in advance that several short-term children will be participating in your program, you may wish to plan blocks of time that include group activities and games that children can start and stop, join and leave, without disturbing the flow of activities.
- To help a child join others, you might implement a “buddy” system. Joining the group may mean being introduced to a long-term child who will be a special friend to the new child. The “friendship” may last for only a few minutes or for some time. This provides a link between children receiving the two types of care and gives the long-term child an opportunity to experience the rewards of showing the new child around, sharing toys and participating in activities together.

Note: It is important to prepare long-term children for the presence of short-term children and tell them what will be happening during the day. For example, the “buddy” system will only work effectively if the long-term children recognize that they have a “job” to do – e.g. helping the short-term children feel welcome. In all cases, CNC staff must use their observations of individual children and their knowledge of child development to determine the most appropriate ways to foster relationships among the children.

DEVELOPING ACTIVITIES FOR COMBINED CARE

Many characteristics of activities for Combined CNC have already been mentioned above. Here is a summary with some new ideas:

- Prepare a variety of activities that can be implemented on short notice according to the needs and interests of the children.



- Think about organizing activities in a modular format, possibly as activity kits that can be immediately available for use, as needed.
- Have an ongoing activity in place so new children can choose to do something immediately on arrival.
- Focus on group activities like story times, sing songs and games that are flexible and children can join in and leave without disturbing others.
- Include activities that foster relationships and interactions with other children (e.g. between short-term and long-term children). If an organized buddy system is not appropriate, try to encourage interactions through the sharing of toys or alternate seating at snack time.
- Be relaxed about activities. If a short-term child does not wish to participate, let the child be quiet and amuse himself or herself with a few toys – not too many to be overwhelming – but support efforts to interact, taking your cue from the child. If this is the child’s first experience with group care, the child may be frightened or may have “enough to do” just getting accustomed to the new situation.
- Allow for the fact a child may be tired, particularly a young child and especially in the afternoon. If a child seems cross and tired, let the child rest.
- If possible, include an activity that results in a “take home” souvenir for the child. For example, the craft on the ongoing activity table may involve making something to show the parent and to take home. A take home object will provide a link between the child’s experience and the parent and reassure the parent the child has participated in activities. When a parent needs to use CNC again, the object will be something a parent can use to remind the child that he or she enjoyed participating in CNC.
- Take care when children are leaving, especially if several are leaving at the same time, activities are in place for the long-term children to ensure that they do not feel neglected while attention is focused on the departing children.

SAYING GOOD-BYE

Separating from CNC may be a second challenge for the children, particularly if they have been in the program for several hours and have become involved in activities. Here are some tips for saying “good-bye:”

- Know when the parent activity is scheduled to end. The start and end times of all services for which care is being provided should be identified on the CNC Attendance Form. When you



know what time a child is likely to leave the program, start the process of withdrawing the child a few minutes ahead of time. If several children are leaving at the same time, you may gather the group into a circle and sing a song. You can explain to the group the circle will get smaller as children leave.

- Help the child have a positive separation experience and be prepared to welcome the parent.
- Make sure the parent “signs” the child out by indicating with an initial when the child was withdrawn from the program.
- Discuss with the parent any concerns you have about the child or any observations that might be helpful for the child (e.g. “Your child really seemed to enjoy himself. He made a pretty butterfly at the craft table.”)
- Make sure the child’s belongings are removed from the cubby, and if necessary, all identification tags are returned to the program.
- If several children are leaving at the same time, make sure it does not leave before all children are signed out and on their way.

EVALUATING AND PLANNING

When you have offered Combined Care, it is time to evaluate your program and start planning again. You will have good ideas about what worked and did not work and you can incorporate what you have learned into the services and support you will offer in future.