

1 — HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The *Action Guide for Child Care Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies* addresses comprehensive nutrition and physical activity policies to create the healthiest possible environment for infants and children in child care settings. It is intended to help local and community child care, early education and afterschool programs establish and implement policies and practices that encourage healthy lifestyles in children. The action guide includes best practices for promoting healthy eating and physical activity based on current science, public health research, and national recommendations and standards.

The action guide can be used in a variety of settings, including Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) facilities (child care centers, family day care homes, at-risk afterschool centers and emergency shelters); Head Start centers; School Readiness programs; child care programs; early care and education programs; licensed centers; school-based preschool programs; and afterschool programs. It can also be used by sponsoring agencies, community organizations, local early childhood coordinating councils, municipalities and other groups interested in improving local nutrition and physical activity practices. For more information, see section 2.

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) recommends the following strategies to help child care programs use the action guide effectively.

- ▶ **Understand Program Requirements:** This guide includes best practice policy recommendations that often exceed federal or state requirements (e.g., CACFP and Head Start regulations, School Readiness legislation, and state licensing regulations for child care centers and family day care homes) and recommendations or accreditation standards from national organizations, e.g., the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC).

At a minimum, all CACFP facilities must meet the requirements specified by USDA regulations. CACFP facilities must also meet other applicable federal, state and local requirements. Accredited programs must comply with the standards of their accrediting organization. For more information, see *Step 2 — Identify Local Policy Development Process* in section 3.

The CSDE's *Nutrition Policies and Guidance for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* describes the CACFP requirements. It includes comprehensive information on a variety of menu planning topics, including CACFP meal pattern requirements, avoiding common menu problems, nutrition guidance, feeding infants, and accommodating children with special dietary needs. *Nutrition Policies and Guidance for the Child and Adult Care Food Program* is available on the CSDE's Web site at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=322326>.

- ▶ **Understand Policy Development:** Before policy writing can begin, the child care program should understand why policy is important and the steps involved in developing policy. Sections 2 and 3 of the action guide assist child care programs in understanding the purpose and steps for policy development. These sections also identify key resources to assist in developing policies.

Policies can be developed by an individual site or a community-level organization that works with multiple child care programs. For simplicity, the term “child care program” is used throughout this document to denote all programs that could be involved in developing nutrition and physical activity policies, including:

- CACFP participants (child care centers, family day care homes, at-risk afterschool centers and emergency shelters);
- local and community-level early care and education programs;
- afterschool programs;
- organizations and agencies, e.g., sponsoring agencies, community organizations, coordinating councils and municipalities; and
- other interested groups.

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- ▶ **Review Policy Components:** Sections 4 through 9 of the action guide address the six policy components for creating a healthy child care environment. These include:

- Nutrition Standards
- Eating Environment
- Nutrition Education
- Physical Activity
- Communication and Promotion
- Evaluation

The six policy component sections include recommendations, not requirements, for policy language. Note that some policy language is required due to federal or state regulations (e.g., CACFP, Head Start and state licensing) or accrediting requirements (e.g., NAEYC and NAFCC).

Each policy component section contains policy recommendations, rationale, implementation strategies and resources. These sections do not need to be read all at once or in order. The child care program can start with any of the six policy component sections that are most relevant, based on local needs and existing policies and practices. For more information, see *Summary of Policy Components and Areas* in this section.

- ▶ **Understand Policy Terms:** Having a common understanding of policy terms is important for staff members involved in the policy development process. Consult the Glossary for definitions and additional information.

Note: Throughout this document, “*infants*” means children from birth through 11 months and “*children*” means ages 1 and older, including toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children. These definitions are based on the age groups defined in the CACFP meal patterns for infants and children. The words “*parent(s)*” and “*family(ies)*” are used in the broadest sense to mean those adults with primary responsibility for children. The CSDE prefers the use of “family” to “parent” because not all responsible agents are parents, but most are family, either by relationship or function.

- ▶ **Use Applicable Recommendations and Strategies:** Due to Connecticut’s diverse child care settings, the action guide provides general policy recommendations for child care centers that can be adapted for other programs. Most policy recommendations in this guide are applicable to all child care settings, including centers, school-based preschool programs, afterschool programs, family day care homes and emergency shelters participating in the CACFP. For example, the policy recommendations for nutrition standards, meal schedules, healthy eating practices and screen time limits are the same for all children, regardless of the type of child care setting. However, some recommendations may not apply to all programs. If the policy language is not applicable to a specific child care setting, it can be eliminated. For example, child care programs that do not serve infants can disregard the policy recommendations for infants, and child care programs that do not conduct fundraisers can disregard the policy recommendations for fundraisers.

Policy recommendations can be adapted to meet the local needs of different child care settings. For example, the policy recommendation for a health advisory team is not applicable to family day care homes. However, a family day care home might choose to include alternate language about consulting with appropriate organizations, such as their sponsoring organization, provider organizations, community groups or state health and education agencies. Additionally, an emergency shelter may not provide a formal nutrition education program, but its policy might address the provision of informal nutrition activities, as appropriate.

Some of the suggested policy implementation strategies may not be appropriate for all child care programs, depending on the type of program and ages of children served, e.g., infants, preschool or school age. Some implementation strategies are appropriate only for younger or older children, while others are

suitable for all ages. The child care program can select implementation strategies as appropriate, based on local needs.

- ▶ **Review Additional Resources:** This guide identifies key resources for each policy area. Additional resource categories are listed in section 10 and include links to the relevant sections of the CSDE's regularly updated online resource lists, *Healthy School Environment Resources* and *Nutrition-Related Resources*. The appendices include the CACFP meal patterns, the Connecticut Child Care Nutrition Standards, guidance on reading food labels, suggestions for healthy celebrations, and national physical activity guidelines for infants and children.
- ▶ **Review Sample Policies:** Reviewing sample policies can be helpful in identifying potential language and formats. It is important to ensure that the policy language is based on current science and national health recommendations and is appropriate to the facility. For a collection of CSDE sample policy templates, see <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&Q=322562>.
- ▶ **Check for Updates:** The contents of this guide are subject to change, based on new science, public health research and national health recommendations. The CSDE will update the online version of the action guide as needed. The most current version is available on the CSDE's Web site at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2678&Q=322562>.

GETTING STARTED

The policy development process can seem overwhelming, especially when staffing and resources are limited. However, it is important to recognize that all child care programs can take immediate action by writing simple policy statements that improve their nutrition and physical activity practices. These policy statements can have a big impact, even while the child care program is working toward developing more comprehensive policies.

Take a look at the child care program's current policies and practices and consider what changes might be made to:

- offer healthy foods and beverages;
- create a positive mealtime environment;
- increase physical activity and active play;
- limit screen time; and
- teach children, families and staff members about healthy eating and physical activity.

Many changes can be made without any cost or much effort, such as modeling healthy behaviors, eliminating food rewards, increasing outdoor play and limiting screen time.

Start small. Review the policy areas in *Summary of Policy Components and Areas* (see next page). Identify one or two things that can be done right now, for example, including more fruits and vegetables on snack menus, eliminating food rewards or adding more active play in the daily schedule. See the Smart Steps strategies throughout the guide to help get started.

Enlist staff members to help with different areas, as appropriate. For example, the head teacher might take the lead on identifying strategies to incorporate more physical activity throughout the curriculum. The food service director could identify cost-effective seasonal fruits and vegetables for snack menus. The registered dietitian or health consultant could identify nutrition handouts for families. The educational consultant could identify appropriate strategies to promote desired behavior, instead of food rewards.

For more detailed information on the policy development process, see section 3.



SMART STEPS

The Smart Steps strategies highlight actions that will improve the child care program's nutrition and physical activity practices.

SUMMARY OF POLICY COMPONENTS AND AREAS

This guide includes detailed information on the steps, strategies and resources for developing and implementing child care policies and practices to promote healthy eating and physical activity. It addresses six policy components and related policy areas for creating a healthy child care environment. Each policy area includes policy recommendations, rationale, implementation strategies and resources. The CSDE encourages child care programs to start with the policy components most relevant to local needs.

Child care programs may choose to adapt the policy recommendations to meet local needs and priorities. (Note that some policy language is required due to federal or state regulations or accrediting requirements). When developing nutrition and physical activity policies, child care programs will need to take into account their unique circumstances, challenges, opportunities and available resources. Policies should meet local needs and be adapted, as appropriate, to the health concerns, food preferences and dietary practices of local cultures and customs.

Component 1 – Nutrition Standards

CACFP Meals and Snacks

- Menu Planning
- Nutrition Guidelines for Children
- Nutrition Guidelines for Infants
- Special Dietary Needs

Other Foods and Beverages

- Parent-Provided Meals and Snacks
- Celebrations
- Functions, Events and Meetings
- Fundraising
- Access to Drinking Water

Component 2 – Eating Environment

- Meal Schedules
- Pleasant and Healthy Eating Environment (Physical, Social and Emotional)
- Modeling Healthy Behaviors
- Food Rewards and Punishments
- Food Service Personnel Qualifications and Training
- Food Safety
- Staff Wellness

Component 3 – Nutrition Education

- Standards-Based Nutrition Education
- Appropriateness of Nutrition Materials
- Connecting with Planned Learning Experiences
- Nutrition Promotion
- Professional Development

Component 4 – Physical Activity

- Daily Physical Activity
- Play Space and Equipment
- Connecting with Planned Learning Experiences
- Standards-Based Physical Education
- Screen Time
- Physical Activity and Punishment

Component 5 – Communication and Promotion

- Health Advisory Team
- Consistent Health Messages
- Promoting Healthy Foods
- Engaging Families
- Partnering with Community Organizations

Component 6 – Evaluation

- Monitoring
- Policy Review