Connecticut After School Network – Best Practice Guidelines

**Human Relationships Section:**
The relationships shared by staff, children, youth and families are vital to the successful achievement of a program’s mission and goals. This section includes both staff to child/youth and staff to staff guides. It asks if the children and youth are happy in the program. Do they feel welcome? Do staff know what each child or youth’s interests are and do staff encourage children and youth to pursue those interests within the program? How can you see that the staff serve as role models? Review each item carefully to determine how you meet these goals.

1. **Staff relate to all children and youth in positive ways:**
   a. Staff relate to children and youth in positive ways:
      • Staff treat children and youth with respect and listen to what they say.
      • Staff encourage children and youth by using supportive language and showing appreciation of their efforts and accomplishments.
      • Staff take children and youth’s comments seriously.
      • Staff do not intrude or interrupt children and youth.
      • Staff do not belittle children and youth.
   b. Staff make children and youth feel welcome and comfortable.
      • Staff project a welcoming tone in their voices and gestures.
      • Staff acknowledge children and youth when they arrive and depart.
      • Staff respond appropriately when children and youth show affection.
      • Staff stay calm in all situations. They handle conflicts in ways that reduce fear or disruption.
   c. Staff respond to children and youth with acceptance and appreciation.
      • Staff are kind and fair to all children and youth.
      • Staff include all interested children and youth in activities and events.
      • Games and sports are open to all regardless of their athletic skill.
      • Staff do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, family structure, appearance, disability, etc.
   d. Staff are engaged with children and youth.
      • Staff are energetic, enthusiastic and upbeat.
      • Staff talk and play with the children and youth.
      • Staff show interest in what the children and youth say and do.
      • When youth speak, staff listen actively, attentively and patiently.
      • Staff encourage attendance.

2. **Staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of children and youth:**
   a. Staff respond appropriately to the individual needs of children and youth:
      • Staff know that each child and youth has special interests and talents.
      • Staff are able to spend time with individual children and youth.
      • Staff bring in materials related to participants’ interests: pets, music, sports, computers, chess, etc.
• Specialists are used for certain activities and to address particular programmatic needs of participants.
• Staff are eager to hear about events in participants’ lives outside the program.

b. Staff recognize the range of participants’ abilities.
• Staff vary their responses to match participants’ ages and abilities.
• Staff help children and youth become focused and engaged.
• Staff help children and youth pursue their interests and improve their skills.

3. Staff encourage children and youth to make choices and to become more responsible:

a. Staff offer assistance in a way that supports a child and youth’s initiative.
• Staff help children and youth find ways to pursue their own interests.
• Staff say “yes” to children and youth’s reasonable requests and ideas for activities.
• Staff help children and youth plan and gather resources.

b. Staff encourage children and youth to share control and responsibility and to take leadership roles.
• Staff give clear directions so that children and youth can proceed independently.
• Children and youth help prepare snacks, serve themselves, set out materials for projects, etc.
• Children and youth are encouraged to take the lead in selecting and initiating activities.
• When asked or needed staff step in to help.
• Staff encourage children and youth to proceed on their own.

c. Staff give children and youth many chances to choose what they will do, how they will do it and with whom.
• Children and youth have frequent opportunities to choose their companions.
• Children and youth can independently gather resources, materials and information, or take steps on their own to get help from peers or staff.

d. Staff help children and youth make informed and responsible choices.
• Staff remind children and youth to think about how their actions may affect others in the program.
• When providing assistance to children and youth, staff help them think through problems themselves rather than offer answers (e.g. asking “how,” “why” and “what-if” questions) and brainstorm potential solutions.
• Staff help children and youth understand the impact of their decisions on others.
• Staff engage participants in structured time for reflection on how an activity went, what they learned and what next steps are necessary.

4. Staff interact with children and youth to help them learn:

a. Staff help spark children and youth’s interests/curiosity and encourage them to think for themselves.
• Staff pursue children and youth’s ideas.
• Staff start discussions by asking open-ended questions (e.g. “what if . . . ?” or “how can we . . . ?”) that pose a challenge and encourage participants to experiment and take risks.

• Staff encourage use of journal writing, art projects and group discussion as a way to express ideas.

• Staff take time to think about children and youth’s questions.

b. Staff share skills and resources to help children and youth gain information and solve problems.
   • Staff provide individualized help to children and youth.
   • Staff answer children and youth’s questions, explain how to do something, help find resources and help think through problems.
   • Staff show children and youth how complex skills can be broken into smaller steps.
   • Staff encourage children and youth to practice basic life skills.
   • When children and youth face problems they cannot solve themselves, staff pay attention and offer suggestions.

c. Staff vary the approaches they use to help children and youth learn.
   • Staff teach children and youth a new task or game by showing the steps as well as telling about them.
   • Staff write down instructions for activities so that children and youth can remember what to do.
   • Staff pay attention to variations in learning styles.
   • Staff recognize non-verbal as well as verbal responses.
   • Staff encourage children and youth to try new activities.
   • Staff help children and youth move beyond gender stereotypes in their choices.
   • Staff use pictures and visual aids to reach out to non-readers and speakers of other languages. Staff modify activities as needed so that all children and youth, including those with disabilities, can participate.

d. Staff help children and youth use language skills through frequent conversations and find effective ways to communicate with all children and youth.
   • Staff speak to children and youth on a level they can understand.
   • Staff are actively engaged in activities with children and youth.
   • Staff listen patiently as all children and youth try to express themselves.
   • Staff take extra time with children and youth who speak another language at home or have difficulty listening or speaking.
   • Staff sometimes use non-verbal signals to help children and youth understand.

5. Staff use positive techniques to guide the behavior of children and youth:
   a. Staff acknowledge children and youth when they cooperate, share, care for materials or join in activities.
      • Staff often show appreciation and encouragement.
      • Staff teach children and youth how to communicate and cooperate.
      • Staff celebrate children and youth’s efforts and progress.
b. Staff set appropriate limits for children and youth.
   - Staff set limits to prevent children and youth from hurting each other physically or verbally.
   - If children or youth tease, scapegoat, threaten or exclude others, staff intervene.
   - Staff take steps to ensure that each child and youth understands the limits that are set.

c. Staff use discipline methods that are respectful in their interactions with children and youth.
   - Staff consistently use a neutral (or positive) tone of voice.
   - Staff quickly and positively gain children and youth’s attention and cooperation when needed.
   - Staff use simple reminders to redirect behaviors.

d. Staff encourage children and youth to resolve their own conflicts. Staff step in only if needed to discuss the issues and work out a solution.
   - Staff listen and observe carefully.
   - Staff use negotiation, reasoning and redirection to help children and youth find alternatives. Staff do not impose their solutions on children and youth.
   - Staff do not lecture children and youth.
   - Staff help children and youth express their feelings.
   - Staff help children and youth understand how their behavior affects others.
   - Staff teach children and youth specific skills to work through conflicts (e.g., peace table or conflict resolution skills).
   - Staff intervene when negative peer interactions occur and are not resolved.

6. **Children and youth interact with one another and with staff in positive ways:**
   a. Children and youth are comfortable and engaged with each other and with staff.
      - Peer interactions have a positive affect and tone.
      - Children and youth listen to one another and listen to staff.
      - Children and youth interactions with staff have a positive affect and tone.

   b. Children and youth show respect for each other and for staff.
      - Teasing, belittling or picking on particular children or youth is uncommon.
      - Children and youth show empathy for each other and help each other.
      - Children and youth are respectful toward staff.

   c. Children and youth cooperate and work well together and with staff.
      - Children and youth willingly share materials and space.
      - They suggest activities, negotiate roles and jointly work out the rules.
      - Children and youth include others with developmental, physical, cultural or language differences in their play.
      - There is a strong sense of community among children, youth and staff.
d. When problems occur, children and youth often try to discuss their differences and work out a solution.
   - Children and youth listen to each other’s point of view and try to compromise.
   - Children and youth know how to solve problems. Their solutions are reasonable and fair. They do not try to solve disagreements by bullying or acting aggressively.
   - Children and youth will seek help from staff when unable to resolve a conflict on their own.

7. **Staff work together to meet the needs of children and youth:**
   a. Staff communicate with each other while the program is in session to ensure that the program flows smoothly.
      - Staff communicate with each other to meet the needs of children and youth.
      - Staff check with each other to make sure all areas are supervised.
      - Conversations about personal matters are brief and appropriate, and do not interfere with transitions and activities.

   b. Staff cooperate with each other.
      - Staff are flexible about their roles. They pitch in to help each other with the children as needed. Work is shared fairly.
      - When problems occur, staff discuss their differences and work toward fair solutions.
      - Long or complicated discussions are saved for times when children are not present.

   c. Staff are respectful of each other.
      - Respect is shown to all.
      - Staff communicate their needs in a way that promotes cooperation.
      - Staff are aware of how their tone and demeanor convey respect.
      - Staff manage tense situations in a way that shows respect for other staff members.
      - Staff exhibit appropriate professional conduct around children, youth and families.

   d. Staff are role models of positive adult relationships.
      - Staff check in with each other and stay in touch throughout the day.
      - Staff model positive adult interaction through cooperation, caring and effective communication.
      - Staff notice and respond supportively to non-verbal cues and gestures.