Rediscovering joy in our work

There are times when caring for children can be exhausting, stressful, confusing, and challenging. When the work we do as educators and caregivers seems to lose its joy, it may be time to “rediscover the joy!”

It happens to everyone

There are moments when we just don’t know what to do, and the work we hold so very important doesn’t feel important or worthwhile. It happens to all of us, for whatever reason. It might be challenging behaviors, differing opinions, low funds, or simply a tough day that takes our joy away.

The good news is there are opportunities to rediscover the joy. Often the joy hasn’t disappeared entirely; it’s just covered up with the details of the challenging moments at hand. Sometimes all it takes is a fresh look or time for reflection. Reflection provides the first step in rebuilding the joy.

What do you enjoy and value in your work?

Each one of us values individual aspects of our profession; under stressful times, we may have forgotten what they are. Make a list of the things you enjoy (or that bring you joy) in your work. Why are these important to you? It may be simple things, such as getting a hug from a child, seeing a child gain a new skill, or it may be something more intentional, such as attending professional development opportunities. Remembering what we enjoy and value in our work guides us to revisiting many of our joys.

Review your program

It may be possible that you need to “tweak” something in your program: schedules, materials, environments, observations, attitudes, goals, mealtimes, etc. Take a look at what might need to be adjusted and brainstorm possible adjustments.

Continue professional development

Are you growing as a professional? When you know and understand elements of your profession, you are better able to offer what children need. This contributes to a well-run program, which in return adds to the joy in your work. Try finding opportunities to receive training in early childhood education, read early childhood articles, explore Web sites focusing on early childhood, and pool resources with other early childhood educators.

TIP:
Start with small adjustments. Children and adults may be overwhelmed by too many changes at once.
Develop relationships

Joy is often found through our interactions with others. It is on this personal level that we often give and receive joy: collaborating with a co-worker, giggling with the children, showing excitement for a child’s accomplishments, sharing humor with staff, or simply enjoying the time together. Take time for each other and joy will soon follow. Ask yourself the following:

• What do we (children, staff, families, community) do together that is joyful?
• Do I give children my full attention (or am I always doing multiple tasks)?
• Am I available to families; do we have times to be together?
• Do I meet with staff members; find opportunities to plan, share, discuss?
• What do I need from those I work with? What do I offer those I work with?

Discovering opportunities to embrace joy in our work and in our lives is ultimately up to each one of us and allows us to be “joy keepers.”

Find support

There may be larger issues contributing to your stress or loss of joy in your work. Consider what those issues may be and address them in a positive, constructive light. Find support to help you make good decisions. This may be through resources such as directors, professionals in the field, co-workers, or support groups in the community.

You are your joy keeper

We are all accountable for our own joy. Discovering opportunities to embrace joy in our work and in our lives is ultimately up to each one of us and allows us to be “joy keepers.” Sharing that joy, particularly with children, is one of our greatest gifts.