

Scenario One: Little Mitts

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Instructions: Read the scenario. At the end, you will find related questions for reflection based on your role. Take a moment to reflect on each question.

It is afternoon nap time in this Early Head Start child care center, and a small number of infants are asleep in cribs. A teacher is sitting close by at a table completing paperwork while her colleagues are busy in other areas of the classroom.



One of the infants begins to move around in his crib. The teacher at the table sees that he has rolled out of the "safe sleep" position, from his back to his stomach. She watches the child closely to see if he will return to his back on his own. He appears to have fallen back to sleep on his belly. The teacher walks to the crib and gently repositions him on his back. She watches him until she feels confident that he will remain on his back and then turns to walk back to the table.

As she passes the next crib, she notices the 2-month-old child sleeping there in snugly fitted yellow pajamas is wearing cotton mitts covering her hands. They look like small fitted bags or gloves without fingers that are held in place at the child's wrists with sewn-in elastic. She is surprised to see the child's hands covered this way and gently removes the mitts.

She walks toward her colleagues, asking, "Does anyone know anything about these mitts?" She explains that she found them on the sleeping 2-month-old, Amelia, who is new to the group. Her colleagues do not reply and the teacher appears frustrated. She looks toward the teacher who placed the infant in the crib to sleep. "Why did you put these on Amelia?" The teacher looks confused. "I didn't put them on her," she says. "I've never seen them. I don't know where they came from."

As they are talking, the parent volunteer watches the interaction between the teachers. She hesitates and then says, "Excuse me. I don't want to interrupt, but I put them on Amelia when I saw that she had fallen asleep." She pauses as both teachers look toward her. She explains, "Her mother gave them to me when they arrived this morning. She asked me to be sure to use them on her daughter to protect her from scratching her face."

The parent volunteer feels uncomfortable. The teachers seem frustrated with her. She learned about the program's "safe sleep" practices as part of her classroom orientation. The cribs and children are prepared for sleep at the center in ways that are different from what she knows at home. Many of the mothers in the volunteer's community put mitts on their infants to protect them from leaving scratch marks on their skin while they are sleeping or playing. As they talk, Amelia begins to stir. She has moved her hands toward her face as she is waking up, pulling one fist toward her mouth. The volunteer worries that Amelia might scratch her cheek with her fingernails.

The parent volunteer is not sure what to say or do. She likes volunteering twice a week in her son's classroom and enjoys her role with the children. She also values the relationships she has built with staff. She looks again toward Amelia in her crib, wanting to pick her up before she might scratch herself with her hands.

Reflections

Program Staff

- How might this situation be managed so that:
 - Parents and staff feel reassured that the children are safe
 - Decisions reflect center policies and procedures
 - Family and community practices are acknowledged and respected
- Can you think of an example from your own experience that illustrates a situation where family expectations, perspective, practices, or customs differed from those of the program staff or conflicted with center policy and procedures?
- What aspects of your personal culture or traditional practices differ from those of your colleagues or the families in your program?

Program Managers and Leadership

- What opportunities do families have to learn about and provide feedback on classroom policies and practices? Do parents have a role in creating and approving center policies and procedures?
- What opportunities do staff have to talk with parents and family members and learn about their caregiving practices and cultures?
- Do staff include individuals who belong to, or have knowledge of, the communities, cultures, and languages of families enrolled in your program? Do they feel comfortable sharing what they know about their cultures and communities with other staff?

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