

Five Simple Steps to Inspire Positive Change

High quality early childhood programs are making news. U.S. News & World Report notes that teachers hold the [key to high quality](#) and can make a difference – especially for low-income children. The [National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#) also highlights the contact point with children that makes an impact: High-quality teaching. When you unlock the front door to your program and begin each day, you can be sure your hard work matters.

Child Trends shows that program leaders [create a pathway](#) to high-quality by fostering a culture of continuous quality improvement. [Continuous Quality Improvement \(CQI\)](#) is a “process which ensures that organizations and their partners are systemic and intentional about improving services and practices, and increasing positive outcomes for children and families.” There are four ingredients to CQI: Create a shared vision for quality, build your staff’s skills, determine what else needs to be done, and celebrate your successes. So where do you start?

As you begin or continue in the CQI process, you will explore professional development opportunities and participate in your state’s quality rating and improvement system. With so many priorities, where should you focus? With so many choices, what should you do first? Have you wondered what you can do daily to inspire positive change? The answer is to begin with small steps that have high impact.

Everything you do with teachers should accomplish two basic goals. First – what you do should motivate teachers to engage. Second, the most motivating strategies are those that have immediate impact. What you do first should bring about positive change teachers can see and feel good about accomplishing. In this way, positive change feels “doable,” rather than a lofty goal that might be reached some time down the road.

The following five strategies will jumpstart and inspire positive change. Start with the first strategy and add one more each week. In five weeks, your program will be buzzing with fresh conversation and increased engagement. Change doesn’t need to be complicated. Simple approaches are reassuring and can be fun. Get ready, get set – and make a difference!

1. **Ask teachers to share high-impact strategies.** Introduce the following questions: What new strategies did you use that made a difference? What approach worked well? What small changes had a big impact? Share these teacher tips in a weekly e-mail blast. Put them on the agenda at your staff meeting to build on teacher’s strengths. Focusing on teacher’s successes has double-strength impact: It highlights effort and excellence and encourages ongoing and shared reflection.
2. **Use a simple two plus one feedback strategy.** Observe each classroom for 20 minutes. Notice two aspects of spaces, routines, materials, or interactions that really make a difference. How do teachers make the most of an opportunity to engage children? Write what you see on a 4x6 card in one or two sentences.
 - “It is amazing how the children respond when you add character voices and simple props to book reading.”

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- “When you ask children where their food comes from, it inspires awesome snack conversation.”
 - Next, write one practical suggestion that relates to missed opportunities:
 - “I noticed one child standing alone for a while as other children were engaged. Be sure to scan the room during center time to support engagement of all children.”
 - When two plus one feedback strategies are shared frequently, teachers find this practice to be encouraging and useful. Co-teachers can use this helpful reflective strategy with each other, as well.
3. **Consider spaces through the eyes of children.** Ask teachers to sit with you just inside the doorway of each classroom on the children’s eye-level. What do children see when they enter? What can you add, shift, or modify to better use spaces, materials, organization approaches, and resources? What changes will increase play and learning spaces? What changes will enhance learning opportunities?
 4. **Consider spaces through the eyes of families.** Pair teachers to evaluate each classroom setting. What physical aspects of spaces look familiar and welcoming? Are cultural, family, and language of the community reflected in books, materials, play areas, and displays? What positive changes can be made?
 5. **Build on family strengths and knowledge.** Provide a clipboard with a sentence starter in each classroom with a slip of paper for families to complete. “Today, my child is feeling ___ and needs___.” “Something I want you to know today about my child is_____.” Provide a check box on the bottom that says, “I want to schedule a call,” or “I just wanted you to know.” [High-quality teaching](#) depends on deep, shared knowledge with families.

As you introduce these strategies, provide time at staff meetings to discuss the impact. Ask teachers to brainstorm additional ideas for improvement and celebration. As you build on these simple steps, you will find that teachers step up to take ownership of growth. Invite them to talk about opportunities and needs they experience. These vital conversations will provide a rich and fertile ground to introduce other elements of CQI as you lead your program forward to ongoing positive change.

Once you set the stage for growth, take the next steps. McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership offers a three-part series that will jumpstart your journey. The training modules include [Moving Forward with Continuous Quality Improvement](#), [Supporting Leadership through Collaborative Learning](#), and [Coaching for Success](#). In addition to earning 9.0 professional development clock hours, you will renew your vision and sharpen your leadership skills. Please [contact us](#) at the McCormick Center and let us know how we can help you achieve your quality improvement goals.

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