

INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN



POLICY STATEMENT

Children's safety and wellbeing are paramount at our service and will be fostered through our safe culture, inclusive practices, positive and consistent relationships through attentive, caring and quality interactions, engaging experiences and provision of a safe and healthy environment.

We believe that every child has a right to access, participate meaningfully and experience positive outcomes from our early childhood education service. The articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* are integral to our daily practice.

We believe the cornerstone of our high-quality teaching practice is relationships that are built on trust, respect and recognition of the child as a capable human being.

We value the important role our educators play in children's education and care. We equip educators with the necessary knowledge, skills and professional support to interact positively with children.

This policy is developed within the Christian understanding that each child is uniquely made in the image of God and is loved by Him.

Our educational program encourages children's self-expression, promotes self-reliance, maintains their dignity and rights, gives positive guidance, and recognises their culture, values and abilities. Interactions within our service are greatly enhanced when children's rights and family and cultural values are given due consideration and respect. Our programs are regularly reflected upon and refined in response to the above aspects.

BACKGROUND

This policy content reflects an ongoing growth within our service in relation to our relationships and interactions with children. It has been important to reflect and consider where we are now as a service, to reframe old ideas, old knowledge and beliefs, our previous experiences, and traditional approaches and practices. This policy draws upon several approaches, some of which are new to us, and all with the consistent theme of *looking beyond the behaviour of the child* and seeing *all behaviour as a form of communication*.

This policy aims to focus on how to build relationships with children to best support them, especially during times when they are dysregulated and present with behaviours that can be seen as challenging. We recognise that self-regulation plays a key factor in children's wellbeing, learning and development and that well-developed social skills will enable a child to successfully engage in positive behaviours.

Our current team have, and continue to engage with, a variety of professional development opportunities such as conferences, webinars, training sessions, readings, Sector Capacity Building support, and reflective team discussions. These combined resources are deepening and developing our knowledge and skill base to support each other as professionals and best support the children in our care.

STRATEGIES

The following strategies are supported by the Interactions with Children procedure documentation.

Establishing Relationships – Attachment Theory

Following the principles of Attachment Theory, drawn from the *Circle of Security*, will enable educators to build secure attachments and strong relationships with all children in their care. Attachment theory has led to a new understanding of child development – it is crucially important in the early years.

Self-Regulation and Managing Emotions

Educators assist in the development of children's self-regulation skills by being a 'safe person' that always supports and guides children to co-regulate their emotions and behaviour when they become overwhelmed or distressed.

Every behaviour is an unmet need. It is important to consider what emotion is driving the child's behaviour. Some children experience emotions more intensely and have a different sensory threshold to others.

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Challenging behaviour

All children, educators, volunteers and students have a right to feel safe in our service. We want children to know that everyone is valued and all feelings are valid, but not all actions and behaviours are acceptable.

We will ensure that each room and our outdoor environment will provide a safe place for children to go to when they feel overwhelmed. A 'chill out' space can be beneficial for some children, or using headphones, ear muffs, pillows, books, sensory toys, music and visuals of emotions.

We adjust our environment to suit the children's needs, ie: reduce bright lighting, noise, smartboards and digital interference.

Key concepts and language examples for daily practice

Our Interactions with Children Procedures outlines appropriate language and phrases for educators to use to assist children in identifying their emotions.

Rather than educators trying to fix the issue for the child, or jump into problem solving, they will show empathy to validate the child's feelings and consider the child's perspective.

Once educators make a connection with the child, this will reiterate that their educator is a 'safe person'.

Inappropriate and Appropriate Discipline

It is never acceptable to attempt to control children's behaviour in an inappropriate manner.

The word 'discipline' is historically associated with punishment; seen as an action taken by adults towards children to stop or change behaviour that is inappropriate or not desired. It is never

INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN



appropriate to attempt to control children's behaviour. The preferred term, behaviour guidance, indicates positive and effective ways to support children, to help them gain understanding and learn skills to manage their behaviour.

If a child becomes a risk to themselves or others, they may need to be physically removed from a situation or physically restrained to keep them and others safe. This should only be done in emergency situations.

If it is necessary to physically restrain a child to keep them or others safe, they should never be isolated or left alone. If a child is restrained, an incident report is to be completed detailing the circumstances of the situation (on our usual Incident / Injury / Trauma / Illness records), the Director is to be notified, and parents notified of the situation and outcome.

Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting is the legislative requirement for selected classes for people to report suspected child abuse and neglect to government authorities.

In NSW, mandatory reporting is regulated by the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (the Care Act).

Mandatory reporters are people who deliver services, wholly or partly, to children as part of their paid or professional work. These include Healthcare, Welfare, Education, Children's services, Residential Services, Law enforcement.

Refer to Interactions with Children Procedure for Reportable Conduct and Procedure for a Child at Risk of Harm.

Growing Knowledge Base

The process of ongoing learning and growth, and critical reflection, is the responsibility of individual educators, the Educational Leader, and the Director (Nominated Supervisor) of the service. This policy is not static – it will adapt to meet the needs of the current cohort of children and families, and new knowledge and research when it becomes available.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Approved Provider responsibilities

- I. Ensure that obligations under the *Educations and Care Services National Law and National Regulations* are met
- II. Ensure that the service provides education and care to children in a way that;
 - a. Encourages the children to express themselves and their opinions
 - b. Allows the children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
 - c. Maintains at all times the dignity and rights of each child
 - d. Gives each child positive guidance and encouragement toward valid behaviour
 - e. Has regard to the family and cultural values, age, and physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child (Reg 155)

- III. Ensure that the service provides children with opportunities to interact and develop respectful relationships with each other and with educators, staff and volunteers, having regard to the size and the composition of the groups in which children are being educated and cared for (Reg 156)
- IV. Ensure the service meets minimum educator and staff requirements, such as qualifications and educator to child ratios.
- V. Ensure all educators and staff including volunteers and students, have undertaken current child protection legislation training, including for the mandatory reporting requirements and obligations in their jurisdiction
- VI. Ensure that no child is subjected to any form of corporal punishment, or any discipline that is unreasonable or inappropriate in the circumstances.
- VII. Take reasonable steps to ensure that nominated supervisors, educators, staff and volunteers follow the *Interactions with Children* policy and procedures.
- VIII. Ensure that copies of the policy and procedures are readily accessible to nominated supervisors, coordinators, educators, staff, volunteers and families, and available for inspection.
- IX. Notify families at least 14 days before changing the policy or procedures if the changes will;
 - a. Affect the fees charged or the way they are collected or
 - b. Significantly impact the service's education and care of children or
 - c. Significantly impact the family's ability to utilise the service.

Nominated Supervisor responsibilities

- I. Implement the *Interactions with Children* policy and procedures
- II. Devise methods to lead the development and implementation of quality practices across the service that ensure that the requirements Reg 155 and Reg 156 are met.
- III. Support educators to promote quality practice approaches to interactions with children
- IV. Ensure minimum educator and staff requirements are met, such as qualifications and educator to child ratios.
- V. Ensure all educators and staff including volunteers and students have undertaken current child protection legislation training, including for the mandatory reporting requirements and obligations in their jurisdiction
- VI. Ensure that no child is subjected to any form of corporal punishment, or any discipline that is unreasonable in the circumstances.

Educators responsibilities

- I. Be responsive to all children's strengths, abilities and interests, showing genuine interest in each child's unique interests and abilities
- II. Value and build on children's strengths, skills and knowledge to ensure their motivation and engagement in learning
- III. Recognise children as competent and capable beings who have autonomy / agency in decisions that affect their daily lives.

INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN



- IV. Respond to children's expertise, cultural traditions and ways of knowing, the multiple languages spoken by some children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children.
- V. Be supportive of the strategies used by children with additional needs to negotiate their everyday lives.
- VI. Recognise that young children may not always manage their emotions and the capacity for self-regulation has to be learned and actively supported.
- VII. Engage in inclusive practices across all learning domains and experiences.
- VIII. Take all reasonable steps to protect a child from harm or hazard likely to cause injury.
- IX. Build responsive learning relationships that are strengthened by educators and children learning together and sharing decisions, with respect and trust.
- X. Commit to reflective practice and ongoing professional development and awareness of current research to deepen their skill and knowledge base.
- XI. This policy is developed within the Christian understanding that each child is uniquely made in the image of God and is loved by Him.

RELATED GUIDELINES, STANDARDS, FRAMEWORKS, LEGISLATION

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

National Quality Standards

Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children
 Quality Area 2: Children's Health and Safety
 Quality Area 4: Staffing Arrangements

Child Safe Standards

Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in the organisational leadership, governance and culture.
 Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
 Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved.
 Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported.
 Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused.
 Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.
 Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.
 Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.
 Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe.

Legislation

Education and Care Services National Regulations: Regulations 73, 84, 115, 117A, 118, 123, 126, 145, 155, 156, 168, 170, 171, 172

Sources

ACECQA – Inappropriate Discipline, April 2020
 ACECQA – Quality Area 5, Supporting Children to Regulate their own Behaviour, February 2018
 Circle of Security
 Alicia Dawson, Clinical Psychologist
 Dr Louise Porter, Beth MacGregor, Dr Kathleen Henderson, Heather Irvine-Rundle, Stuart Shanker, Nathan Wallis, Nic Russell (Prosody article)

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This policy will be monitored to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and unless deemed necessary through the identification of practice gaps, the service will review this Policy every two years. Families and staff are essential stakeholders in the policy review process and will be given opportunity and encouragement to be actively involved. In accordance with R. 172 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations, the service will ensure that families of children enrolled at the service are notified at least 14 days before making any change to a policy or procedure that may have significant impact on the provision of education and care to any child enrolled at the service; a family's ability to utilise the service; the fees charged or the way in which fees are collected.