



INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN POLICY

SUB CATEGORY: Communication and Consultation

POLICY GOAL

To ensure positive, trusting and respectful relationships between educators and children. To provide an environment where interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.

RATIONALE

Positive communication and interactions with children at our service are crucial to supporting children's growth and development. Many recognised authorities confirm the importance of positive adult interactions with children.

"Quality Area 5 of the National Quality Standard focuses on educators developing responsive, warm, trusting and respectful relationships with children that promote their wellbeing, self-esteem, sense of security and belonging. Relationships of this kind encourage children to explore the environment and engage in play and learning.

All children need a sense of connection with others to support the development of their identity and social and emotional competence. From birth, children begin to explore how the social world works. Exploring and learning to socialise appropriately with others, and to manage feelings, behaviours and responsibilities is a complex process. When educational leaders, co-ordinators and educators take a positive, strengths-based approach to guiding children's behaviour, they ultimately empower children to regulate their own behaviour and develop the skills needed to interact and negotiate effectively with others.

Relationships with peers take on increasing importance for older children. Supportive relationships with educators enables older children to develop confidence in their ability to express themselves, work through differences, engage in new experiences and take calculated risks.

Standards, elements and concepts

Quality Area 5 has two standards that focus on relationships between educators and children, and between children and their peers. These standards are crucial to delivering quality outcomes for children under the National Quality Framework because supportive and respectful relationships enable children to:

- *develop their confidence and a strong sense of identity*
- *develop effective communication skills and the ability to express themselves effectively*
- *participate in collaborative learning and build meaningful relationships with others*
- *regulate their own behaviour and learn to negotiate complex social situations and relationships.*

When children experience nurturing and respectful reciprocal relationships with educators, they develop an understanding of themselves as competent, capable and respected. Consistent emotional support contributes to children developing a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging. Relationships

are the foundation for the construction of identity, and help shape children's thinking about who they are, how they belong and what influences them (Early Years Learning Framework, p. 20; Framework for School Age Care, p. 19).

Constructive everyday interactions and shared learning opportunities form the basis of equitable, respectful and reciprocal relationships between educators and children. Educators who are actively engaged in children's learning and share decision-making with them, use their everyday interactions during play, routines and ongoing projects to stimulate children's thinking and to enrich their learning. These relationships provide a solid foundation from which to guide and support children as they develop the self-confidence and skills to manage their own behaviour, make decisions and relate positively and effectively to others.

Positive interactions between educators and children involve educators viewing each child as capable and competent, with a right to a voice and able to contribute to decisions that affect them. This enables educators to focus their education and care practices on children's strengths and inclusion in the group environment. Educators who are responsive to children's thoughts and feelings are supporting them to develop a strong sense of wellbeing. By interacting positively and meaningfully with children, educators help children to feel accepted and to develop a sense of attachment and trust. Children who are supported to understand themselves experience a sense of belonging that fosters self-esteem. Self-esteem contributes to the development of identity and is critical to children's capacity to understand their own strengths, abilities and interests. When children feel safe, secure and supported, they develop confidence to explore and learn (Early Years Learning Framework, p. 20; Framework for School Age Care, p. 19).

Positive and responsive one-on-one interactions, especially with children under three years old, are important to children's wellbeing and their future development. Secure relationships with educators encourage children under three years to thrive and provides them with a secure base for exploration and learning. As children grow and develop they continue to rely on secure, trusting and respectful relationships with the adults in their lives.”¹

“Positive two-way communication is essential to building your child's self-esteem. Children thrive with words of encouragement and praise. It is important to set up clear and open communication patterns early on. Pay attention when your child speaks, respect their feelings and watch your tone of voice.”²

“Talking with children involves the exchange of words, ideas and feelings. Communication is what we say and how we say it. We communicate with looks (scowls and smiles), with actions (slaps and hugs), with silence (warm or cold), as well as with words (kind and unkind).

Good communication leads to

- warm relationships,
- cooperation, and
- feelings of worth.

¹ “Guide to the National Quality Framework” Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority Jan 2010

² “Parenting – Communicating with Children”, Better Health Channel – State Government of Victoria
http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/uploaded-files/Parenting-communicating-with-children_1327282497.pdf
(accessed on-line March 2020)

Poor communication leads to

- kids who “turn off” adults,
- conflicts and bickering, and
- feelings of worthlessness.”³

“Interactions with children should:

- encourage children to express themselves and their opinions
- allow children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
- maintain the dignity and rights of each child
- give positive guidance and encouragement to each child
- consider the family and cultural values, age, and physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child.”⁴

“Research shows relationships are central to children developing acceptance, self-esteem and higher functioning thinking skills that contribute to positive learning and life outcomes (KidsMatter Early Childhood). Educators can take an active role in nurturing, supporting and promoting children’s relationships and social skills.

WHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

Good relationships early in life help children to connect with others, build positive friendships and support children to self-regulate their emotions.

Meaningful interactions

For relationships to be meaningful, interactions need to be warm, caring and responsive. When attention is given to building connections and maintaining them over time, children are more likely to feel a sense of security, well-being and belonging.

Social competence

To build positive relationships with others, children need to develop ‘social competence’ and the ability to interact with others with care, empathy and respect. Social competence is the foundation that allows children to understand and self-regulate their own emotions and negotiate their interactions with others

OBSERVATIONS, STRATEGIES AND SUPPORT

It is important educators observe how individual children approach and interact with peers and adults. Educators can develop strategies to assist children to form healthy attachments, relationships and friendships. These observations and strategies can also be discussed and shared with colleagues, families and children. Challenging times Certain times of the day can be challenging and emotional for some children as they separate from their families, make the transition from home or school to care, and settle into playing with their peers. By ensuring you are available and receptive to children’s needs, you can help children to ease into interactions with others. Signs and signals It is important to be responsive and watch for signs that children are becoming isolated or withdrawn or finding it difficult to interact positively and participate in groups. Educators who acknowledge children as individuals with a range of capabilities, temperaments and behaviours, respond by providing tailored support for children. Children who appear to be independent and do not seek adult help may also need support in building positive relationships with others. Being available Educators also need to be ‘emotionally available’ to assist children. Being aware of and clear about your feelings and relationships with children and others shows empathy and can help children recognise and manage their feelings. Making sense of feelings Children often need help to make sense of and to organise

³ “Winning Ways to Talk with Young Children”, University of Maine, (accessed on-line March 2020)
<http://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4077e/>

⁴ “Guide to the National Quality Framework” Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority Jan 2020

intense and confusing feelings such as anger, sadness, disappointment and jealousy. By helping children understand and manage their own feelings and recognise these same feelings in others, you can assist them to build friendships and participate and express themselves appropriately with individuals and in groups.

INTENTIONAL AND INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

Educators can support children by:

- *being aware of children's abilities, challenges and unique needs, as well as supporting transitions*
- *creating physical environments, programs and routines that allow children the time and resources needed for positive interactions with their peers*
- *supporting children to explore reciprocal rights and active community participation, as well as fostering resilience and agency through activities that recognise children as capable and competent learners*
- *considering the pace and flow of the program that allows a balance of play experiences such as individual and group, quiet and noisy, active and passive experiences*
- *being intentional in planning and support to scaffold learning*
- *promoting a range of social skills such as group entry skills and negotiation as a way of considering expectations, diversity and democracy*
- *implementing flexible arrangements centred around children's routines, interests and offering extended periods of uninterrupted play*
- *encouraging children to take on different roles within groups*
- *inviting children to collaborate with educators.*¹⁵

IMPLEMENTATION

Educators at our service acknowledge the importance of establishing and maintaining open, respectful and positive interactions with children. Strategies used by educators and other adults working with children include, but are not limited to;

- Communicating in a warm, supportive way and using active listening
- Being responsive to children's needs and demonstrating understanding
- Encouraging children to express themselves and their opinions and share stories
- Providing positive behaviour guidance (refer to Positive Guidance Policy)
- Monitoring children's play to pre-empt potential conflicts and provide support where needed
- Talking to children about what is happening with their routines and transitions
- Communicating with respect and acknowledgement of similarities and differences
- Encouraging children to engage with others in meaningful, open interactions.
- Supporting babies' early attempts to communicate by acknowledging and responding sensitively to their cues and signals
- Being patient, gentle, calm and reassuring even when children strongly express distress, frustration or anger
- Acknowledging children's efforts and achievements and supporting children to experience success
- Respectively participating in children's play and using children's cues to guide their level and type of involvement
- Listening actively to children and responding appropriately

⁵ ● *"Relationships with Children"* ACECQA Quality Area 5 Factsheet Oct 2016 (accessed on-line March 2020) <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/acecqa/files/QualityInformationSheets/QualityArea5/QualityArea5OrangeRelationshipsWithChildren.pdf>

- Collaborating with children about routines and experiences and providing opportunities for them to make decisions and choices
- Provide children with choices where possible
- Getting children's attention before communicating and getting down to their level
- Using positive messages instead of negative, eg; "Please use your walking feet inside" instead of "Don't run inside".
- Using routine times, such as nappy changing, as an opportunity to communicate one-on-one with children
- Using appropriate techniques to communicate to meet all children's needs, this may include sign language, picture or words in the child's first language.
- Sitting and engaging in a relaxed and unhurried way with children
- Supporting children to feel safe and secure and acknowledging their feelings
- Being patient, gentle, calm and reassuring even when children strongly express distress, frustration or anger.
- Engaging in two-way conversations with children
- Using positive, respectful language, including
 - Choice of words
 - Tone and volume
 - Facial expressions and body language
- Being aware of children's abilities, challenges and unique needs, as well as supporting transitions
- Creating physical environments, programs and routines that allow children the time and resources needed for positive interactions with their peers
- Supporting children to explore reciprocal rights and active community participation, as well as fostering resilience and agency through activities that recognise children as capable and competent learners
- Considering the pace and flow of the program that allows a balance of play experiences such as individual and group, quiet and noisy, active and passive experiences
- Being intentional in planning and support to scaffold learning
- Promoting a range of social skills such as group entry skills and negotiation as a way of considering expectations, diversity and democracy
- Implementing flexible arrangements centred around children's routines, interests and offering extended periods of uninterrupted play
- Encouraging children to take on different roles within groups
- Inviting children to collaborate with educators
- Allowing children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
- Maintain the dignity and rights of each child
- Consider the family and cultural values, age, and physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child

Nominated Supervisors will ensure that rosters and grouping will support quality care by ensuring adequate staffing numbers and regular educators who are familiar to children.

All adults who enter our service are asked to communicate in a respectful and caring way to all children at all times, including their own. Families are not to speak to other children at the service about their behaviour at any time, any concerns should be raised with the educators or the Nominated Supervisor for follow up, refer to the Client Service Charter.

Educators should systematically reflect on their interactions with children across the service both individually and as a team.

COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION

- Educators and families will have access to this policy at all times.
- Educators and families will be provided with opportunities to be involved in the review of this policy.
- Educators will be provided with information on interacting positively with children upon commencement and will be provided with professional resources and opportunities to participate in professional discussions and training opportunities to assist them in meeting the goal of this policy.

RELATED FORMS AND DOCUMENTS

- Educator Code of Conduct Policy
- Positive Guidance Policy
- Induction Checklist
- Client Service Charter

SCOPE AND ENFORCEMENT

The Failure of any person to comply with this policy in its entirety may lead to;

- Performance management of an employee which may lead to termination
- Termination of child enrolment

RECOGNISED AUTHORITIES AND DOCUMENTS WHICH GUIDE POLICY

- “Code of Ethics”, Early Childhood Australia (2016)
- “Parenting – Communicating with Children”, Better Health Channel – State Government of Victoria
http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/uploaded-files/Parenting-communicating-with-children_1327282497.pdf (accessed on-line March 2020)
- “Winning Ways to Talk with Young Children”, University of Maine,
<http://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4077e/> (accessed on-line March 2020)
- “Guide to the National Quality Framework” Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority Jan 2020
- “Relationships with Children” ACECQA Quality Area 5 Factsheet Oct 2016 (accessed on-line March 2020)
<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/acecqa/files/QualityInformationSheets/QualityArea5/QualityArea5OrangeRelationshipsWithChildren.pdf>

DATE CREATED: November 2011

REVIEW DETAILS:

Review Date	Details of Changes
January 2013	No changes made, sources updated where applicable
January 2014	No changes made, sources updated where applicable
June 2015	No changes made, sources updated where applicable
April 2016	No changes made, sources updated where applicable
May 2017	Sources updated, inclusion of information under implementation about family’s communication with other children at the service.
April 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Updated source to “Guide to the National Quality Framework” Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority Feb 2018, quotes in rationale updated ● Updated latest versions for other sources ● Updated educator practises to align with 2018 National Quality Standards

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inclusion of reference to the Client Service Charter ● Educators should systematically reflect on their interactions with children across the service both individually and as a team.
March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Updated sources
March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Updated sources ● Added additional information from ACECQA factsheet QA 5 in Rationale ● Added additional educator responsibilities in Implementation ● Expanded statement around families communications with children to include their own... "All adults who enter our service are asked to communicate in a respectful and caring way to all children at all times, including their own." ● Included termination of child enrolment under Scope and Enforcement