

QA6 COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES POLICY

SCOPE

This policy and its associated documents provide a framework to guide all actions for the Approved Provider, Nominated supervisor, all team members, children, parents, volunteers, contractors, suppliers, and any visitors to the Service.

Failure to adhere to this policy, or any of its associated documents, may result in disciplinary action being taken up to and including termination of employment for personnel, refusal of service for clients, and / or the dissolving of contractual agreements with suppliers and individuals outside of our Service.

INTRODUCTION

“Families are the primary influence on children’s development and the most important people in children’s lives. Children learn about their world and their place in it through everyday experiences, conversations and routines with their families. Research has shown us that when families are involved in their child’s early education and care, their child achieves more regardless of their socioeconomic level, ethnic or racial background, or the parents’ educational level” (McDermott, 2010, as quoted by Child Australia, 2011, p. 3).

It is critical that we create and maintain collaborative, supportive and respectful partnerships with our families, and community. These partnerships will ensure that we can best support the needs of the children in our care and assist our community to flourish.

This policy will discuss:

- Relationships between educators and families
- Service support available for families
- Families’ rights, and
- Service partnership with the local community.

This policy relates to the National Quality Standard (NQS) Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

POLICY STATEMENT

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Our service understands partnerships with families occur when there is shared power, responsiveness, positivity and sensitivity. Our partnerships between educators and families are reciprocal, resulting in new understandings and information being formed collaboratively. Leading to *“a shared space in which neither sets of understanding are privileged, but there is a new common*

understanding that has been mutually derived, through a valuing of each other as an expert” (Rouse and O’Brien, 2017).

We view the child at the centre of an ecological social system. We acknowledge the child’s right to a strong relationship with their family as an integral part of this system. This influences our practice as we value all those close relationships important to the child, and understand that to build positive relationships with children we must strive to build strong partnerships with families.

Our educators have a responsibility to foster the empowerment of children, and to develop and implement pedagogies reflecting a holistic understanding of each individual and their learning. This is achieved through respecting parental input, and familial and cultural backgrounds. Our educators articulate the importance of a common mission and raising families’ awareness of their valuable contribution to the learning program and ownership of their child’s early education. Educators acknowledge it is their role to initiate this interaction, engaging families early in conversations regarding goal setting and partnership expectations. We are mindful of each families’ perspectives and attitudes, including cultural perspectives and unique family structures as important influences on decision making regarding children’s education.

We strive to create an inviting staff team, a pleasant centre environment to welcome families, and an adaptive curriculum that provides an excellent arrangement for engaging parents. We appreciate that parents and families are more likely to engage with the service when they are active participants in shaping learning experiences. Our educators understand that while parents might be willing to participate in their child’s early learning program, some may lack confidence or feel they do not know how to. As a result, our team highlights the importance of providing equitable access for parental engagement through a range of methods and contexts. This individualised approach to partnerships with families works to eliminate stereotypes, enabling us to serve our community in a meaningful way.

We understand and respect that each family offers a unique and valued perspective, and holds information pertinent to their child’s learning. This understanding is demonstrated through a variety of active engagement strategies, and regular discussion with families. We then form plans and educational commitments regarding the child using this information.

Information communication technology offers opportunities to tailor information to the needs of parents, however our service is mindful that these resources may not be accessible to some families, and provide appropriate alternatives.

Families are supported by the service by providing access to education programs, regular parent-teacher communication, and information about community access programs. These experiences are codesigned with input from parents, from our knowledge of risk factors evident in the community, and we employ the use of preventive resources to address child and parent health and educational needs.

Aspects of our staff professional development place focus on the acquisition of strategies to promote and support parental involvement. This enables our educators to assist parents in attaining the skills needed to support their child’s learning and development, and become advocates on their behalf. Our educators identify familial strengths and avoid assumptions that they require particular resources or types of assistance. Rather, educators listen to parental concerns and provide information and supports based on their requests and in a form preferred by and accessible to the family. Our service provides families with current and comprehensive information in a way that the family can understand and use to make informed choices and decisions.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Positive transitions between home and educational environments for children are characterised by collaborative practices between families and our service, such as sharing verbal and written information on child development and children's experiences in each setting. Our educators acknowledge that some children may require additional emotional support during this transition, ensuring individualised strategies are in place to provide emotional security and wellbeing. Similarly, children are supported through transitions within the service as part of the daily routine. Educators make expectations for transitions clear to children, having in place opportunities to maximise children's agency and emotional security at these times.

We understand transitions to school from early childhood services are more likely when partnerships between families, services and schools exist to ensure a balance between new and continuing experiences. An integral part of the transition from our early learning setting to school is collaborative dialogue regarding the values and understandings of all stakeholders across each setting, including home, our centre, and the school. We take the lead on establishing opportunities for this dialogue to ensure this transition is a shared process. Through effective engagement of parents in active and reciprocal support of their child's education, children have a source of support that lasts from year to year across a variety of settings. We recognise that successful transitions between educational settings occur when educators participate in professional development to understand and align pedagogical practices. This forms part of our training focus for relevant educators.

In a family-based approach, parents are considered as key active stakeholders in their child's education. Our educators formulate approaches to working with children and families that consider the cultural and personal perspectives of the child's familial background. Continued partnerships between families and the service encourage shared understanding of cultural and social values, enabling educators to plan experiences relevant for all children. This ensure all children are included in the educational program, and provides increased opportunity for each child to be motivated to participate in learning experiences.

Programs, strategies and policy to increase parent participation in the service are used and are carefully monitored and modified, or eliminated in response to changing needs, allowing for effective inclusion of all children and consequential increased participation in the program. When appropriate, effective parent-professional partnerships are utilised to further support child access and inclusion. This is achieved by establishing dialogue, common practices and understandings that combine the expertise of a multi-disciplinary team to support the child's learning, development and wellbeing. This may include the insight of parents and other key stakeholders, combined with the knowledge of educators, health-care providers, and other professionals.

Our centre strives to increase community engagement and relationships with our setting through acknowledgement of cultural beliefs, experiences and celebration relevant to the community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. We understand that by having mutually respectful partnerships with these key community groups we are better able to meet the needs of our children and their families.

As part of the program, educators develop curriculum and learning experiences that provides for children to make connections within the community as an extension of their service. These learning experiences engage the support of parents, extended family and caregivers, and community members to acknowledge, recognise, affirm and nurture students' identities, languages, abilities,

and talents. It is these partnerships formed between the centre and the local community that contribute to children’s strong sense of belonging.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Agency - being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one’s world (DEEWR, 2009)..

Curriculum - all interactions, experiences, activities routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development (DEEWR, 2009).

Ecological social system - how the inherent qualities of a child and his environment interact to influence how he will grow and develop. Through the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory, Bronfenbrenner stressed the importance of studying a child in the context of multiple environments, also known as ecological systems in the attempt to understand his development.

Pedagogies - All the actions and processes that educators use to translate philosophy and curriculum approaches into practice (Arthur et al, 2015).

Program – the documentation showing children’s educational goals, the learning opportunities that are provided by our educators to achieve these, and the related educator practices to support learning.

Wellbeing – being comfortable, healthy, or happy.

LINKS TO STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS

This policy relates to the National Quality Standard (NQS) Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

| Standard/ Elements | Concept | Descriptor |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| QA6 | | Collaborative partnerships with families and communities |
| 6.1 | Supportive relationships with families | Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role. |
| 6.1.1 | Engagement with the service | Families are supported from enrolment to be involved in the service and contributes to service decisions. |
| 6.1.2 | Parent views are respected | The expertise, culture, values and beliefs of families are respected and families share in decision-making about their child’s learning and wellbeing. |
| 6.1.3 | Families are supported | Current information is available to families about the service and relevant community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing. |
| 6.2 | Collaborative partnerships | Collaborative partnerships enhance children’s inclusion, learning and wellbeing |
| 6.2.1 | Transitions | Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing information and clarifying responsibilities. |

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| 6.2.2 | Access and participation | Effective partnerships support children’s access, inclusion and participation in the program. |
| 6.2.3 | Community engagement | The service builds relationships and engages with its community. |

This policy relates to the following law and national regulations:

| Standard/ Elements | Concept | Related law and national regulations |
|--------------------|--|---|
| QA6 | | Collaborative partnerships with families and communities |
| 6.1 | Supportive relationships with families | Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role. |
| | | Regulation 157 Access for parents Section 175 Offence relating to requirement to keep enrolment and other documents |
| 6.2 | Collaborative partnerships | Collaborative partnerships enhance children’s inclusion, learning and wellbeing |
| | | Section 175 Offence relating to requirement to keep enrolment and other documents |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS, REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

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