

GoodStart Training College

CHC50908 Diploma of Children's Services
(Early Childhood Education and Care)

MODULE 4 Management Training Booklet

Incorporating

CHCORG506D	Coordinate the work environment
CHCIC501A	Manage children's services workplace practice to address regulations and quality assurance
CHCORG614A	Manage a community sector organisation
CHCPOL402B	Contribute to policy development

Acknowledgements

**This Module Training Booklet is part of a Set of Materials
produced by the GoodStart Training College**

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Enquiries should be addressed to the College Manager, GoodStart Training College,
43 Metroplex Avenue, MURARRIE QLD 4172
RTO Number 32215
Centrelink Course Approval Ref Number 4P043

Email: goodstart@goodstart.edu.au
Web: www.goodstart.edu.au
GoodStart Childcare Limited ABN 69 139 967 794
Brisbane Campus
43 Metroplex Avenue
MURARRIE QLD 4172
Postal Address 43 Metroplex Avenue, MURARRIE QLD 4172
Telephone: 07 3220 3232
Facsimile: 07 3908 2527
Free call: 1800 617 455

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Resource Information

Introduction

When working as an early childhood professional it is a requirement that you have knowledge and skills to provide individualised care for children aged 0 – 12 years of age.

This resource outlines the guidelines in the provision of care for children relevant to the Children's Services Sector and focuses on the following topics:

- Relationships
- Professional Practices
- Quality Processes

This cluster module incorporates four units of competency from the CHC50908 Diploma of Children's Services (Early Childhood Education and Care):

- CHCORG506D Coordinate the work environment
- CHCIC501A Manage children's services workplace practice to address regulations and quality assurance
- CHCORG614A Manage a community sector organisation
- CHCPOL402B Contribute to policy development

Training Package: CHC08 Children's Services Training Package

Information About this Resource

This resource is designed to help you develop your knowledge and skills in two ways.

First, you will be provided with information about the topic. You are encouraged to read all of the information so that you are able to broaden your knowledge.

Second, you will be required to reflect on the information you have read and to complete activities and/or work-based tasks which demonstrate your ability to apply your new knowledge and skills in your workplace.

If at any stage of this learning opportunity you are having difficulties with this resource, please contact your Trainer. Your Trainer will be able to assist you with any concerns that you may be experiencing. It is important to ask for help and please remember that there are no silly questions.

The following are examples of how this resource is formatted. You will see these titles and colour codes throughout this resource.

Readings

READING

Occasional readings have also been included. These readings provide you with further information about the topic.

You will be able to access the link directly from the reading within the training booklet.

Reflection

REFLECTION

Reflections provide an opportunity for you to think about a concept and relate it to your prior or current work or personal experience.

Hints

HINT

Hints are designed to point you in the right direction.

Activities

ACTIVITY

Activities have been included within the content of some topics. These activities are not assessable, but you are urged to complete them to benefit your own learning process. Many of these activities display model answers when you submit your responses.

Some activities are interactive and you can follow the link to complete them online. Where possible, a written version of the activity is available directly beneath the activity.

Further Guidance

FURTHER GUIDANCE

Further Guidance provides extra snippets of information complementary to the content.

Other Important Information

Source

A source is the reference to where material in the content was found. Sources are displayed throughout the content and on some occasions at the bottom of the page within the footnotes.

Resources

Resources such as interactive learning activities, readings and templates can be downloaded from the GoodStart Training College website at www.goodstart.edu.au/resources

Topic 1

Relationships

A relationship is an association with another person, and when we connect or interact with another we are relating. Relationships begin as early as infancy and, through relationships, knowledge, skills, understanding, values and beliefs are shaped and defined.

In infancy we begin to make connections with the world around us, and develop our sense of belonging in our family unit — creating bonds with our parents, siblings, and family members is just the beginning. As we grow we continue to extend our network of people we are drawn to form relationships with. We connect with educators, teachers, fellow peers, neighbours, and people within our community from childhood through to adulthood. Within these relationships we make meaning in our world



There are many relationships in a children's service, including the relationships between:

- a child and an early childhood professional
- an early childhood professional and the families
- a child and their peers
- service professionals
- the service and the community.



The foundation of relationships within a children's service is based on a common bond: children.

Internal and External Relationships

There are two main types of relationships within a children's service: internal and external relationships.

1. Internal relationships

When we reflect on our relationships as professionals, our internal relationships are our bonds with our children, the relationships we form with our families, and our fellow service professionals. These are the links that create our internal harmony, and our strengths, to ensure we are all working together to meet the ongoing needs of our children

2. External relationships

Our external relationships are the connections we make with services and groups within our community. These relationships add elements of positive support not only to our service, but support that we as a service can return, ensuring we are facilitating our belonging to a greater community.

In making and sustaining these connections, as professionals we need to be confident in our practices. Within this topic, we will explore our working relationships and reflect on our own participation in demonstrating these practices. We will discover how our relationships with new and existing professionals within the services can be supported, and identify skills in dealing with issues along the way. We will recognise the art of networking, and ways in which, as educators, we can use methods of consultation to develop your children's service. This will also be supported by identifying methods of planning and presenting group meetings.

This knowledge as a professional will advance your understanding of relationships within our internal and external communities, and offer guidance in demonstrating holistic practices within your service environment.

Effective Workplace Relationships

The internal community of your workplace relies on efficient and effective workplace relationships. Children's services rely heavily on a collaborative working environment, as a positive team is crucial to the effective operation of any children's service. Working together and toward a common goal is the foundation of positive, productive and meaningful working relationships.



When employees work in an effective workplace environment, they are more motivated and inclined to participate in work goals and objectives. To facilitate this in our own service, leaders need to be aware of strategies in creating a positive team environment.

Creating a Positive Team Environment

Ways we can create a positive team environment are to:

- have policies and procedures outlining best practices and behaviours to be implemented by staff
- involve staff in the review and creation of new or existing policy
- maintain and encourage ethical processes and practices such as respect, fairness and professionalism in the workplace.
- reinforce that staff are valuable members of the decision-making processes
- ensure all staff are informed of decisions made by management and have opportunity to voice concerns or ask questions
- facilitate discussions and meetings between management and staff in order to improve service operations and team development
- ensure codes of conduct are made available to staff and management
- inform staff of grievance and complaints procedures
- inform staff of the outcomes of grievances and complaints as required
- have an open door policy for staff where they are encouraged to sit with the service leader to discuss issues and concerns any time they wish
- network and provide professional development opportunities to all staff
- foster positive and effective communication when dealing with issues as they arise.

All of these strategies will assist in creating a workplace that is positive and cooperative, therefore increasing the morale of service professionals, as each member of the team feels valued and supported in their role.

We also need to be aware that, within a workplace environment where we have varying people in different positions and roles, at times there will be factors that contribute to negativity within the service. These are instances where poor work practices, environments and relationships can lead to factors such as high staff turnover and stress, which in itself can have many implications on the service.

As leaders we need to be aware of and develop skills in fostering these internal relationships. To assist in gaining this knowledge, and having the ability to deal with varying situations, we will explore areas of health and morale, work plans, staffing, communication and conflict resolution. These are all key components and foundations of building workplace relationships that are positive and effective.

Health and Morale

Health cannot be defined by a person's physical state alone. Our health is a combination of body and mind, our overall wellbeing. Morale is our confidence and enthusiasm toward our work, our overall attitude and perception, and our role in the work environment. We perform our best when under positive guidance, and being surrounded by positive people, but how do we manage when negative aspects creep in?

Negativity within the service environment can heavily impact on a service professional's health and morale. Part of our responsibility within our workplace relationships is to have the knowledge and skills in effectively identifying, and creating strategies in dealing with, negative circumstances.

The following tools can enable leaders in identifying factors that contribute to service professionals' health and morale:

- Staff appraisals
- Safety checks
- Orientation programs and ongoing training
- Discussions about job roles and responsibilities
- Supervision of staff
- Exit interviews
- Feedback received from clients

- Assessing and evaluating figures relating to injuries
- Assessing and evaluating figures relating to absences and lateness of employees
- Assessing and evaluating figures relating to staff turnover
- Risk assessment and identification.

Once leaders can identify possible factors of positive and negative health and morale within the service, they can actively develop strategies of how to promote or address them effectively.



Implementing effective strategies will not only enhance the wellbeing of individuals, but the service as a whole. Fostering the service's health and morale directly contributes to performance and professionalism, and assists in the delivery of high quality care for our children.

Work Plans

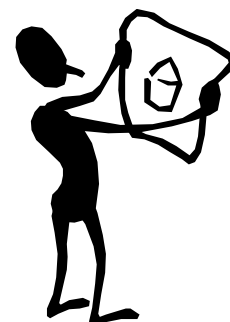
A work plan is a common business management tool. A work schedule is another term for a work plan. A work plan provides structure or a system to ensure outcomes are met in an organised and effective manner.

In order to maintain effective, positive relationships, leaders have to be aware of staff responsibility, skills and practices. Being aware of individuals prioritising and working together will ensure the best outcomes for our children, families and fellow staff.

Communicating priorities in the workplace is very important, with so many people involved, all with different personalities and varying levels of understanding. Communicating priorities can sometimes be difficult and misunderstandings can arise. When people communicate effectively, workplace relationships become more efficient — as we all understand each other's roles, obligations and expectations. Through understanding we can work together to support each other's role work together effectively. A strategy for assisting this process is to devise a work plan for each member of the service.

Our work plan is an order of tasks; a way in which we can efficiently perform duties within our job responsibility. As professionals, we are familiar with work plans which involve the use of skills such as planning and analysis as within our job role. This is due to the fact that we are required to perform these skills on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis within the realms of:

- planning educational experiences
- evaluation of the learning environment
- involvement in the development and maintaining of policies and procedures.



When working as a service leader, you are required to develop and implement work plans for the service, and may assist in developing and implementing work plans for fellow staff.

Work plans detail how the service and its staff plan to meet the ever-changing needs of our clients and stakeholders. They must outline:

- the needs of clients and stakeholders who use the service and how staff and the service intend to meet these needs
- the outcomes of the service and how staff and the service intend to meet these outcomes
- the objectives of the service and how staff and the service intend to meet these objectives
- timeframes of duties which are required to be completed within the work plan
- laws and regulations which affect the compliance of the service and which will govern the duties as stated within the work plan
- duty of care responsibilities
- how the service intends to meet the needs of clients in an ethical and non-discriminatory fashion

Work plans give a service direction and purpose. They allow us to use our knowledge and skill in not only caring for children, but by allowing the service to be a key component within the community.

Staffing

As a leader within children's services, you may hold or share the responsibility of maintaining the service staffing levels. You may participate in the recruitment process, and ensure that both new and existing staff holds a clear understanding of the service operation, and their role and responsibilities within this.

Depending on the service type and size, the way that employees are informed of what is expected of them may vary. Regardless of the method used, it is extremely important that every staff member is informed of exactly what is expected of them.

Staff must be informed of:

- the service aims, visions, goals and plans, and the role they play in achieving these
- the service philosophies, policies and procedures
- legal health and safety requirements
- training and professional development they must undertake
- their employment status, hours of work and job description
- relevant legislations and standards they must comply with
- organisational structure for reporting purposes
- documentation they must complete.

The process of keeping staff informed of expectations is ongoing; it begins with the orientation or induction when the staff member is first recruited within the service. This is their first formal introduction to the service operation, and a time where many of these important expectations, rights, and obligations are clearly communicated.

Orientation

The process of orientation can be the first opportunity in developing positive workplace relationships between a new staff member and the service. During the orientation process, new staff must be introduced to all aspects of their new position as soon as possible. These will include:

- meeting other members of the service
- an explanation of the new staff member's roles and responsibilities
- training in evacuation and emergency procedures
- using emergency equipment
- the service's philosophy and goals
- the policies and procedures of the service
- the arrangements in place for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)
- details of their position, e.g. hours of work, pay, title of position, employment category (full-time, part-time casual) etc.



The children's service standard and quality of care depends on all staff being aware of these aspects. Knowledge of these leads to staff feeling that they are in control of their actions, their responsibilities, and being confident key professionals within the work environment.

To ensure that the orientation process remains relevant to current Regulations and service practices, it needs to be reviewed and maintained regularly. Ongoing evaluation of this knowledge can occur during the staff appraisal process also, to ensure employees have continuity of their expectations in their work role.

ACTIVITY

Referring to your organisation's policies and procedures, in the text box below, provide a summary of the orientation process for new staff employed at your service.



Communication

As leaders in the early childhood profession, we have the opportunity to model and promote effective communication in the workplace, using methods such as open discussion and active listening. Effective communication techniques should always be used positively in the service to enhance workplace relationships and service productivity.



As service professionals, communication is a key part of the day as you communicate with staff, children, parents, professionals and leaders. It is of extreme importance that you model and use communication that is both positive and effective.

Let's look at an example of positive and effective communication between a parent and an early childhood professional.

Children's service professionals can relate to the busy time of pick up and drop off (this could almost be compared to two freight trains crossing in different directions). This small window of time is an opportunity where an educator can communicate with the parent, but is more often than not just everyday conversation of "Hi, how are you, and have a great day, bye". The parent can come and go with no more information than when they arrived — and this is far from effective.

We can initiate effective communication, though, simply and effectively — for example:

At Arrival....

"Good morning, lovely to see you and (child's name) this morning, I'm absolutely positive we are going to have a fabulous day today. I'm sure you and (child's name) will have a lot to talk about this afternoon, have a great day."

At Departure.....

"Hi there, how was your day? We enjoyed today, we have this displayed/photos of within the room if you have a moment on your way out to have a look, I'm sure (child's name) will tell you all about it, have a lovely evening and we'll see you tomorrow"

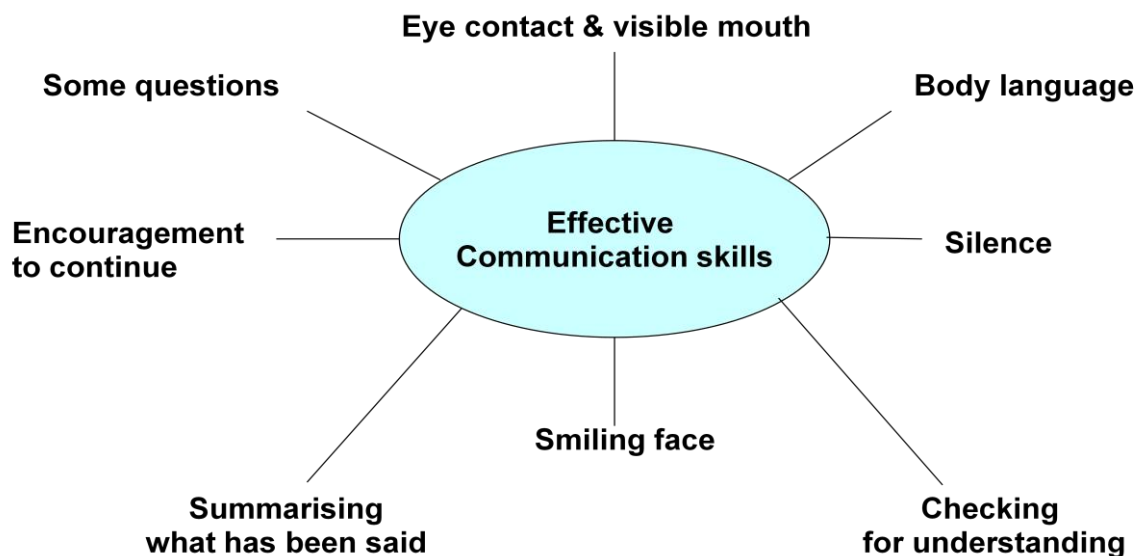
Both of these scenarios can only take a minute, but can have a lasting effect on parents and children within your care. Think about how a parent will feel after leaving their child after a warm greeting and the knowledge that their child's educator has their child's best interest for the day as their priority; or that in the evening, although the parent has been away from their child, they can connect with them and have the ability to be involved in talking about their child's experiences from the day with them.

This is an example of effective communication between an early childhood professional and a parent, and the difference it can make in building a great relationship between the service and the family.

Effective Communication

Effective and positive communication involves the successful sending and receiving of information.

Effective communication looks like:



National Quality Standard

The role of parents and families is respected and supported

Parents and families are recognised as the child's primary nurturers and teachers. They have both a rights and a responsibility to be involved in decision making affecting their child. Respectful, collaborative relationships strengthen the capacity and efforts of parents and families and of early childhood education and care and school age care services to support their children and promote each child's learning and wellbeing.

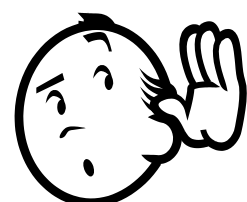


In promoting a respectful and collaborative relationship, it is important to ensure your language matches your target audience. When speaking with a family member, you would avoid the use of formal industry jargon.

Active Listening

“If we were supposed to talk more than listen, we would have been given two mouths and one ear.”
Mark Twain

Active listening involves a variety of strategies we can use to encourage the speaker to give us more information. It also demonstrates to them that we are attentively taking in the information they are sharing with us. As for the listener, we are more likely to increase our chances of taking in the information correctly the first time around. Active listening techniques include the following:



Encouraging
This method conveys our interest and encourages the other person to keep talking. For example, "Can you tell me more?"
Clarifying
This method clarifies what is being said as well as encouraging the speaker to give you more information. For example, "Are you saying..", "Would you say more about that?", and "What does that look like?"
Restating
This method shows that you are listening and understanding what is being said, but it also allows you to check the meaning and your interpretation of what is being said. For example, "I thought I heard you say...", "We may need to check this out further.", "So you would like to know more about child development. Is that right?", "So let me clarify, are you saying..."
Reflecting
This method shows you understand how the other person feels about what they are saying. For example, "You seem quite passionate about this idea."
Summarising
This method allows you to gather all the important facts together and establish the chance for further discussion. For example, "I hear you are saying this, is it about....", "Let me make sure I understand you."
Validating
This method allows you to acknowledge the value of the speaker's feelings and show appreciation for their efforts and actions. For example, "I think I understand why you would be confused", "I appreciate you looking into this matter for me."
Building
This method helps to build and continue the discussion. It also allows you to ask questions and offer ideas. For example, "Have you considered..."

Active listening is a skill which is required to be used when open discussions are taking place between staff, children of families. Open discussions may be formal or informal, depending on what the discussion is about.

ACTIVITY

In your Certificate III studies you would have studied about informal and formal opportunities for communicating with your stakeholders. In the text box below, list examples of informal and formal opportunities for discussions.



Informal Discussions	Formal Discussions

Conflict Resolution

Conflict is when two or more values, perspectives or opinions are contradictory in nature and haven't been agreed about yet.

As a leader in an early childhood service it is important that you have an understanding of how to identify potential and actual conflict in the workplace. As you form relationships with colleagues and families you will get to know the different personality types of individuals, which will assist you in indentifying conflict. In many cases, conflict in the workplace just seems to be a fact of life. We've all seen situations where different people with different goals and needs have come into conflict, and we've all seen the often intense hostility that can result.



The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing, as long we can resolve it as professionals. Conflict, when managed effectively, can lead to personal and professional growth.

In many cases, effective conflict resolution skills can make the difference between positive and negative outcomes. However, if a conflict is not handled effectively, the results can be damaging. Conflicting goals can quickly turn into personal dislike. Teams can break down and people can disengage from their professional practices.

As leaders of a children’s service, we must have the ability to identify potential and actual conflict, and develop and implement appropriate strategies in dealing with these. Potential and actual signs of conflict in the service environment may include:

- verbal conflict between people due to different values, beliefs, interests, differing personalities, misunderstandings and communication
- staff continually taking time off, arriving late or avoiding others
- negative reactions to change
- poor work performance
- gossiping
- negative use of body language when communicating with others
- mood changes
- stress
- visible signs of distress such as crying
- withdrawn behaviour
- staff stating that they are unsure of roles and responsibilities.



As professionals and leaders in the service, it is your responsibility to ensure you have made every effort to resolve issues that may disrupt staff workflow and activities, and address problems using procedures that assist in ensuring resolution.

Resolving Conflict

There are various strategies to reduce and address conflict in a service, with some of these including:

Discussion of Priorities	Leaders should encourage team members to openly discuss team priorities. This will decrease the instance of hidden agendas, and help everyone be more aware of what is important to each team member and why.
Develop Staff Conflict Management Skills	It is very useful to evaluate staff on how they handle conflict and difficult situations. While some professionals embrace conflict and are solution orientated, others will avoid conflict and be stuck on the problem rather than focusing on a solution. This should be included in processes such as staff appraisals, and feedback should be provided in a supportive manner to professionals.
Switch Perspectives	Leaders should ask staff who are in conflict to consider each other’s view, change perspectives, and to discuss the other person’s point of view.
Avoid ‘The Blame Game’	Professionals should be encouraged to focus on solutions without putting

	the blame on others. Who did what is less important than what they are going to do about it.
Be Solution Orientated	Being intent on finding a solution also means shifting focus from the past to the present. When professionals have the ability to shift their focus to the future, they become more positive and less resistant. It's not about what they should have done, but what they can change for the future to achieve different outcomes.
Communication	More often than not conflict is brought on by miscommunication. In order to avoid misunderstandings, staff should be given the opportunity to explain their actions prior to speculation, and other people interpretations of what has occurred.
Building Strong Workplace Relationships	Being consistently active in building and maintaining positive workplace relationships is fundamental. These friendly and open relationships will not only assist, but can be the foundation for, resolving conflict as it arises.
Always Acknowledge the Positives	Leaders should make 'good news' a recurring item within staff meetings. Professionals should be given the opportunity to celebrate successes, and to recognise individuals in their achievements.
Define boundaries	Leaders need to be professional, empathetic and compassionate without crossing the line of professional/friendship. This is especially important when there's a power difference between two people.
Focus on the problem, not the individual	As a leader managing conflict in the workplace, it is essential to focus on the behaviours or issue rather than the person

Remember, many teams can head into a downward spiral when conflict arises. The difference between a workplace team that moves off track and one that does not, comes down to the awareness of conflict situations, and actively and effectively dealing with it so it does not become destructive.

When managing conflict between two people in the workplace:

1. Keep impartial.
2. Find out what the problem is.
3. Steer the conversation between the people, not yourself.
4. Clarify what each person did, how they felt, and the effect it may have had on the other person.
5. Brainstorm what needs to happen from now on.
6. Build agreement between the two people.
7. Do not accept inappropriate behaviour. Take "time out" if necessary.



It is important to use active listening techniques throughout the course of managing conflict. Ways to ensure active listening include:

- stop talking and listen without interrupting
- make eye contact
- empathise
- seek clarification
- don't criticise or judge
- mirror feelings
- ask open questions.

ACTIVITY

Referring to your organisation's policies and procedures, in the text box below, summarise the steps you would follow given the given scenario.

Scenario: You are the centre Director. An Assistant in the nursery approaches you and informs you that they have been doing all the cleaning in the nursery. They feel that their Group Leader is not contributing to the cleaning in the room.

Networking

In the previous topic, we investigated ways we can foster effective relationships within our work environment. In this topic, we will explore growing and maintaining our partnerships by using methods of networking with vital groups and communities related to our children's services. These partnerships ultimately improve our quality of services.

Networking can be defined as *"a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest"*.¹

Networking can be fun, inclusive and productive, as you share your visions with others. Opportunities for network within our service and our community are limited only by your imagination — there are opportunities everywhere.

REFLECTION

Community connections and networking should never be limited to particular services. Think for a moment about which are the 'usual' services we discuss with children — our emergency services, ambulance, fire fighters, police ... but what about the people in the community that the children see every day?



When a child goes to the local shopping centre with their family to buy food for the week, are they seeing people in the community? Think of how we can extend on this everyday occurrence within our service. The local fruit and vegetable shop owner may be invited to the service for a talk with children about how the fruit and vegetables end up on the tray. This is a rich educational experience for the children. We could also communicate with the owner about an upcoming morning tea for parents, and would they be interested in providing a range of fruit for the occasion? This then incorporates advertising for the local shop, promotion of healthy foods within the service, all while making connections between parents and the community. Everybody wins!

We have now made a partnership with a member of our community, and contributed to networking for our service.

¹ Sourced: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/networking>

Making human contacts, face-to-face interaction and communication are three vital elements in our endeavour to establish and maintain partnerships within our service's community. Networking through consultation with our stakeholders, conducting focus groups, and events like meetings and conferences are great examples of collaborating with others to create and maintain open communication.

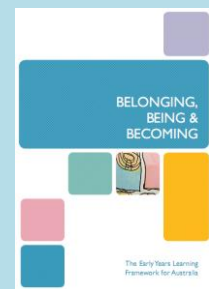
Throughout this topic we will explore all of these elements to help you understanding networking, which is an important aspect to any children's service. When we exercise our ability to interact, share information, and create new ideas with those around us, we progressively become more capable to create a greater future for our children.

Early Years Learning Framework – Belonging, Being & Becoming

Principle 2: Partnerships

Partnerships are based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, and build on the strength of each others' knowledge. In genuine partnerships, families and early childhood educators:

- value each other's knowledge of each child
- value each other's contributions to and roles in each child's life
- trust each other
- communicate freely and respectfully with each other
- share insights and perspectives about each child
- engage in shared decision making.



Consultation

In order for leaders to become effective at networking with our stakeholders, we need to understand how, and who we are consulting. Consultation is by definition a process of gathering information using varied communication methods. The most effective methods of consultation can include discussion, focus groups, questionnaires and meetings. But remember, none of these can be effective if we don't understand how to do them!

Throughout times of consultation, the expertise of individuals may be called upon to suggest ideas or improvement strategies for the continuing improvement of our service. This is ultimately to ensure the service is of the highest possible quality to benefit the children we provide care, and to adapt to the needs of our service's community. The consultation of service stakeholders is vital, and we must never underestimate the wealth of knowledge that stakeholders of the service may have to share.

The following are examples of who may be stakeholders of the service, and how they may contribute to the effectiveness and everyday operation of a service.

Staff

Staff is employees of the service and can include:

- educators who directly care for the children
- cooks
- management and leaders
- maintenance staff
- bus drivers
- cleaners
- support staff.

Service staff should always be provided with both formal and informal opportunities to contribute to the evaluation and continual improvement of their service. Some of the more common methods of consultation can be through scheduled interviews, staff meetings, committee meetings, daily communication books and conversations.

In larger corporations, methods such as emails to central communication areas may be used to gain feedback and suggestions. It is always important to remember that each person's contribution is to be valued and respected.

Clients

Clients of the service are the people who regularly use the service, and may include:

- parents and families
- children
- prospective enrolments.



As with staff, many of the same methods of consultation can be implemented with clients such as meetings, which are a great way to gain feedback and engage in discussions. Remember, it may not always suit families to attend meetings held in the evening, so services should be mindful to provide meetings at alternative times and be flexible to better suits families.

Children are directly affected by all of the service's policies and practices, and we should never underestimate the value of their contributions. They can provide valuable feedback and suggestions when consulted in an age appropriate way.

Other consultation methods such as feedback forms, suggestion boxes and newsletters are all effective ways for clients to have the opportunity to participate.

Government Departments

These are the departments that do exactly that — govern the service — and may include:

- community service groups
- COAG
- local councils
- Work Cover (occupational health and safety)
- health departments.

Governing bodies are a valuable resource, and consulting these are of utmost importance.

Consultation through reports and evaluations of the service is an effective way to gain contributions from these groups. For example, in some states and territories, services may participate in a local council food safe program. As part of this program they will receive regular evaluation from a nominated health science advisor that can be used to contribute to a service's ongoing improvement and development.

Government departments provide regular training programs to support continual improvement and best practice. Participation in the training programs by early childhood professionals can demonstrate a service's commitment to quality.

Board of Directors

Boards of Directors are selected by the shareholders of the company to oversee and manage the service. The Board of Directors may meet on a regular basis to discuss the business and operation, and may consist of:

- owners
- shareholders
- solicitors
- Chief Executive Officers
- business managers.



Boards of Directors participate by providing information to services on legal, ethical and financial aspects. They can be consulted through written correspondence, such as monthly newsletters, emails or company letters. It is important that there are avenues for clear two-way communication at all times.

Local Community

Stakeholders are also present within our local community. These partnerships offer valuable contributions for children's services. Such community networks may include:

- service providers such as other children's services, schools, family day care
- health groups including local doctor, hospitals, early intervention, inclusion support
- cultural and community support groups
- local retail, news, community services
- community sporting/hobby groups.

Consultation with the local community helps services to be an integral part of the community. An example of community participation may include inviting cultural groups into the service and consulting them in development of policies and programs.

Fostering methods of consultation with these groups are a great opportunity to gain support of the local community, another 'win-win' for your service and the children.

Funding Bodies

Funding bodies applicable to your children's services may include:

- Family Assistance Office
- support group funding — early intervention groups offer funding to provide support for child/children within a service
- government — services may receive grants
- church or community groups.

All of the above may be stakeholders in any one particular service (remembering that stakeholders will vary for service types and locations).



Remember, not only are stakeholders integral in the process of consultation, children's services also hold a responsibility to ensure that all stakeholders are given the opportunity to contribute to the service's operation as part of continual quality improvement, which we will investigate throughout Topic 3 in *Quality Processes - Compliance*.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are groups of stakeholders who are brought together for purpose of evaluation and ultimate improvement for your service. These groups are established to consult, evaluate and discuss changes and issues regarding the service — this will include changes to and development in relevant legislation, curriculum, policy and procedure, quality improvement and best practice.

Focus groups may be created for short or long term development and/or evaluation. In whichever case they are created, it is important to ensure that all participants are aware of their responsibilities, for example, of maintaining confidentiality and sensitivity with regard to varying topics, and of the time frames for the processes they have agreed to be part of.

There are many benefits of focus groups. They can be a vital tool for continual improvement and self-evaluation. It is always important for each focus group to be made up of a variety of contributors. This will assist in ensuring holistic perspectives and shared insights.

Once a focus group is created they can be managed in many ways. They may attend regular meetings at the service in which key areas are reviewed, they may provide individual written feedback, or they may participate in the completion of surveys or questionnaires, both in paper form or online. Whichever the method, the emphasis should be on what the organiser wants to achieve from the focus group.



When developing a focus group, it is important to establish clear guidelines on how the focus groups will work to ensure the group stays focused on the topic at hand. If you are unable to manage the group yourself, you may like to have a chairperson or overseer who attends to monitor the group's progression.

Today's technology fortunately allows us to move beyond the general meetings and paper distribution of surveys, and to open up a whole new world of networking with others. For example, you may have a group of stakeholders eager to be involved; however, they do not have a lot of time to attend meetings or to talk on the phone. They may be more than happy, though, to use the internet to view information, and discuss their views and opinions online within a timeframe that suits the individual. You may therefore create a focus group that you communicate with in an online forum environment. This is an alternative but effective method. When the information gathered by or with focus groups is critical in forming the results of the self-evaluation for the service, it is always important that clear meeting minutes or notes, attendance records, questionnaires and surveys or any other forms of documentation relating to the meetings is retained as evidence.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be an extremely valuable tool for gathering information from others on particular topics. Questionnaires are a relatively inexpensive, quick and informative tool for a service to gather clear information from stakeholders on, for example, the service practices and procedures. Examples of questionnaire may be:

- a rating scale in which a participant rates the service on a scale based on either numerals or options
- multiple choice in which a participant chooses from a series of answers
- a participant writing their own responses to the questions asked.

It is important to remember, when using this method, that the questionnaire itself must be carefully designed in order to ensure it is going to gather the information the service is requiring. Think about what you want to achieve from the questionnaire and always reflect on the questions, asking yourself what type of information you will receive by asking this question, and what type of information you would like to receive.

This is a great way to develop your questionnaire to be a valuable tool that is efficient, and provides the right information you set out to find.

Meetings

As a leader of a children's service it is essentially going to be your role to support and facilitate meetings within the service. Meetings may take place between staff, service leaders, outside community groups/organisations, parents and families.

Meetings are a valuable tool in the operation of a children's service as they provide valuable opportunities for networking, consulting, sharing and distributing information between groups and individuals. Meetings also allow for effective and collaborative decision making as well as the opportunity to gather feedback, provided they are managed effectively.

Managing and organising a meeting is not an overnight task. In order to be effective, they require preparation and planning so that the desired outcome can be achieved.

Planning a Meeting

The first step in the meeting process is to establish what the purpose of the meeting is. The purpose will need to be communicated to all parties that will be requested to attend. For example, the purpose of the meeting may be to discuss the service's occupational health and safety, the review or introduction of new policies and procedures, work-related issues such as staffing, job roles or responsibilities, or community objectives such as fundraising.

Attendees

If a meeting is required in order for the service to meet a goal or devise a plan, then attendance of the individuals who are required to be part of the process is essential.

In most cases, it is better to postpone the meeting rather than holding a meeting without critical members in attendance. If a representative attends in the place of a crucial decision maker, make sure the designated person has the authority to make decisions on behalf of the required attendee. This is essential if the purpose of the meeting is to be fulfilled.

Venue and Time

Details such as time and venue are important factors to consider when organising a meeting, as they can severely impact on attendees' availability and willingness to be represented at the meeting. A time should be picked based on feedback from attendees. Depending on the personal and professional commitments attendees have, time of meetings may vary from very early in the morning through to late in the evening. If attendees will be phoning in due to the fact that they live some distance from the meeting venue, differing time zones must also be considered.

When selecting a venue, be sure to choose an appropriate setting and ensure your meeting is conducted in a place which promotes communication and privacy. Try to avoid locations with loud noises or distractions. You may need to communicate with other staff and/or stakeholders that you are busy for the duration of the meeting and that you are only to be distracted in the event of an emergency.



Agenda

Once the purpose, attendees, time and venue of the meeting have been established, an agenda for the meeting can be set and notice of the upcoming meeting posted.

The notice of meeting and meeting agenda will detail:

- the purpose of the meeting
- participants expected to attend
- time of meeting
- venue where the meeting will be held
- associated correspondence or information — for example, information on Regulation or legislation changes
- time line for points of discussion
- description of how the meeting will be conducted.

The notice and meeting agenda should be communicated to potential attendees a reasonable length of time prior to the meeting so they have the opportunity to add points to the agenda. For example, the agenda may be placed in the staffroom the week prior to the meeting, so staff can have the opportunity to add to the agenda items or change the order in which the meeting will proceed based on importance.

Presenting

Once the meeting starts you, as the facilitator of the meeting, will be required to assist the flow of the meeting to ensure the agenda is maintained and the meeting does not get off track. As each topic in the agenda arises, clear discussion steps must take place.

These steps may include:

- an explanation of the desired outcome
- an explanation of where the service or individuals are currently at in relation to the goal
- a discussion of what changes need to take place for groups and individuals to be able to reach the desired outcome and goals
- a discussion of what the procedure for change would include
- a discussion of how this can be achieved
- a discussion of the roles and responsibilities of individuals and the group
- a discussion of the time frames for desired results and evaluating techniques.

It is important that each member has an opportunity to be heard, and has a clear understanding of the goals and objectives. This is key in order to understand how the relevant topic impacts and/or relates to the service goals and objectives being achieved, and must be encouraged within meeting discussion.

A good facilitator will be able to support this process by encouraging all participants to express their views and opinions on all topics. The facilitator should also encourage contributions by using effective questioning, and stimulating debate for issues that may have varying options for outcomes. Maintaining the participation of all members is essential in ensuring that shared decision making occurs, and that feedback is encouraged and offered.

Where to From Here?

All information that is discussed throughout the meeting should be noted within the minutes, including the final decision, and roles and responsibilities for individuals and the group.

This will clarify exactly what needs to be done for the future so the outcomes of the meeting are properly addressed and achieved.

Every single person should be seen as a valuable participant in the act of networking, as each and every one of us has something to contribute. Meetings are the perfect opportunity to share your ideas, gather information, and learn new practices and procedures. They do take time, organisation, professionalism and commitment from all parties, but are well worth it when you think of what can be achieved!

Topic 2

Professional Practices

As professionals, our practices are how we demonstrate our knowledge and abilities in relation to our role as an educator. Our professional practices include our actions, our thought processes, our philosophies and our pedagogy.

Early Years Learning Framework

The term *pedagogy* refers to the holistic nature of early childhood educators' professional practice (especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships), curriculum decision making, teaching and learning. When educators establish respectful and caring relationships with children and families, they are able to work together to construct curriculum and learning experiences relevant to children in their local context. These experiences gradually expand children's knowledge and understanding of the world.²



Early childhood professionals working in a children's service are fortunate to have their own individual pedagogy. This is not a service policy or document which tells us exactly the steps we must take to deal with a situation or carry out a procedure, but rather looks at our personal values, beliefs and philosophy — and how we demonstrate these in practice.

Pedagogy is an early childhood professional's individual standard of practice and professionalism, and is developed by knowledge, beliefs and values in collaboration with reflection of theories and philosophy. As an early childhood professional and an advocate for children, it is important you clearly understand and demonstrate professional practices and standards when working effectively with all families, children and stakeholders.

Professional standards can guide an early childhood professional in working holistically, fostering internal and external relationships, in practices that not only reflect your own pedagogy, but with continual consideration to your service's philosophy.

Service Philosophy

All quality children's services have a unique service philosophy; this can be known as a vision of the service. The service philosophy is a written statement of the values, beliefs and vision for education and care within the service. Its purpose is to set the tone of the service, with stakeholders following the same views, and working towards the same goals.

According to the **Education and Care Services National Regulations**, *each approved provider of an education and care service must ensure that the service –*

- (a) *Has a statement of philosophy designed to guide the operation of the service and the delivery of its education and care program; and*
- (b) *Makes the statement available to the staff members of the service and parents of children attending the service.*³

All philosophies vary with regard to the service type, and the curriculum approach the service delivers. Regardless of this variance, it is common practice for the philosophy to be always reflected upon and used in conjunction with designing and developing policies and procedures. It is vital that **all** stakeholders (leaders, educators, children, parents and families and community members) contribute to the development of a service philosophy, as well as its continual evaluation. The practice of stakeholders working together and sharing visions is an important element for a service to have the ability to establish achievable goals.

The visions and goals of the service in relation to children's development and care practices will always depend greatly on stakeholders' views and values. As the beliefs of the stakeholders depend largely on family, cultural, community and social expectations, these are all factors that can shape and vary contributions in developing and evaluating the service philosophy.

² Sourced: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009) *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*

³ Sourced: PCC Draft (28/04/2011) Education and Care Services National Regulations



Remember, the service philosophy is a collaborative effort and must reflect the service community, otherwise – *who's philosophy is it?*

ACTIVITY

Access the philosophy from the service where you are working, summarise the philosophy in the text box below.



Industry Specific Knowledge

In order to provide a quality and compliant children's service, it is essential for early childhood professionals to be familiar with relevant industry specific practices and information. Some industry specific information may include:

- national legislative requirements
- state and territory specific legislative requirements
- service policies and procedures
- code of ethics
- occupational health and safety
- services within the community
- programming and planning to meet individual needs
- child development.

Legislation

The term legislation refers to a law or set of laws. In most cases, these laws have been determined and set by government or licensing bodies which are responsible for assessing and ensuring quality and consistency within the children's services sector. Maintaining knowledge of these laws is an ongoing task, and is essential to our operation and practices. Not only must we have current knowledge regarding these laws, we must also be aware of amendments to them as they occur.

In Australia, the Council of Australian Government, known as COAG, establishes the legislation which guide children's service overall operations, procedures and responsibilities.

This body of legislation covers requirements such as:

- record keeping
- child/staff ratios
- number of children licensed to attend the service
- programming
- staff qualifications
- equipment and resources
- buildings and facilities

- rosters
- emergency care
- disclosed information for clients/stakeholders
- health and safety.

The National Quality Framework

In December 2009, all Australian Governments through COAG agreed to a partnership between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to establish a National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care.

The new framework aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement in early childhood education and care, and school age care services through three component:



- Streamlined regulatory arrangements
- A national Quality Standard including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and quality rating system
- A new national body jointly governed between the Commonwealth and the states and territories⁴

The National Quality Framework contains compulsory, national standards to ensure high quality and consistent early childhood education and care across Australia.

The new national framework will replace the current licensing and accreditation processes undertaken by states and territories and the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Maintaining knowledge of legislative requirements is an ongoing task and is essential to our operation and practices. Not only must we have current knowledge regarding these laws, we must also be aware of amendments to them as they occur.

Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures are unique to each service. A policy is “a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome”.⁵ In relation to a children’s service, the outcomes in the policies and procedures are based on the legislative requirements and government standards. Policies and procedures ensure consistency in practice and correct alignment with legislative requirements.

Legislation requires that licensed children’s services maintain current policies and procedures. According to the **Education and Care Services National Regulations**, *policies and procedures are required in relation to the following:*

- Governance and management of the service, including confidentiality of records;
- Staffing, including –
 - a code of conduct for staff members; and
 - determining the responsible person present at the service; and
 - the participation of volunteer and students of practicum placements;
- Enrolment and orientation;
- Payment of fees and provision of a statement of fees charged by the education and care service;
- Delivery of children to, and collection of children from, education and care service premises;
- Excursions
- Interactions with children, including the matters set out in regulation 85;
- Dealing with infectious diseases, including procedures complying with regulation 99;
- Dealing with medical conditions in children, including the matters set out in regulation 101,

⁴ Sourced: Early Childhood Development Steering Committee (2009) *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care*. Council of Australian Governments

⁵ Sourced: <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>

- (j) *Emergency and evacuation, including the matters set out in regulation 108;*
- (k) *Health and safety, including matters relating to –*
 - (i) *nutrition, food and beverages, dietary requirements; and*
 - (ii) *sun protection; and*
 - (iii) *water safety; and*
 - (iv) *the administration of first aid;*
- (l) *Providing a child safe environment;*
- (m) *Incident, injury, trauma and illness procedures complying with regulations 95;*
- (n) *Procedures for dealing with complaints.*⁶

You can access a copy of the **PCC Draft (28/04/2011) Education and Care Services National Regulations** from the resource section of the GoodStart Training College website: www.goodstart.edu.au

The relationship between legislation, Regulations and policies and procedures can be demonstrated as such:



It is your responsibility as an early childhood professional to be aware of the relevant Childcare Regulations, service policies and procedures and your position description, as these create structure, organisation and consistency in workplace practice.



You wouldn't drive a car without knowledge of the road rules. Similarly, when working in a children's service, you need to be familiar with the laws that govern the service.

Monitoring Change

Each and every day, sector leaders put forward changes to improve our systems. These changes are driven by new research, improved knowledge, better understanding and new situations that arise. Just as we continually strive to improve our services, they continually strive to improve our sector, and for this reason changes have and will always occur.

As we have identified, within Australia we have set legislation and Regulations to ensure our services are delivering at least a minimum standard of consistent care for our children. As an early childhood professional working in a licensed children's service, keeping up-to-date with this information, as well as any changes that have occurred or will occur, is of vital importance as our compliance with the law is essential.

Early childhood professionals must be able to interpret the laws in order to monitor changes and demonstrate evidence of compliance with these laws. Importantly, stakeholders of the service must also have an understanding of the requirements and expectations under current legislation. Meetings and discussions, training, regular memos and notices in common areas of the service, may be necessary to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the Regulations and understand the terminology to interpret these laws.

We need to know what is required by Regulations and legislation in order to demonstrate compliance. To help keep that knowledge up-do-date, we must also have consistent methods in monitoring change as it happens.

⁶ Sourced: PCC Draft (28/04/2011) Education and Care Services National Regulations

There are a variety of methods early childhood professionals and services can use in order to monitor change. These may include:

- subscribing to sector publications, magazines and e-newsletters
- referring to websites or organisations and government departments, such as the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- sourcing information externally
- networking with other services
- training and professional development opportunities.



Remember, if we don't keep up-to-date and informed about changes within our sector, we increase our chances of breaching the laws, which could result in a suspension of licence in addition to a financial penalty.

In the event that a serious accident or situation was to occur, you or your service could face legal action. This is why it is essential that you know and understand your duty of care requirements in complying with legislation related to your children's service, and to you as an early childhood professional.

'Duty of care' is a term we have heard countless times within our services. But what does it mean, and how does it affect us as professionals?

Within our professional capacity, we have a duty of care to the children we provide education and care for, the families, and the stakeholders of the service. The way we fulfil this duty of care is by complying with the legislation applicable to our sector.

It is essential to all elements of our service that we have an understanding how our duty of care contributes to our work practices, and our responsibilities within the work environment.

As well as monitoring change, early childhood professionals must also identify and review our current practices prior to implementing changes of new procedures. We can commence this identification and review by using methods of reflection and evaluation to assess current practices.

According to Marilyn Hopkins (2006), *'ongoing discussions, self-evaluation, critique of practices and professional development will help to ensure that policies and procedures are thorough, up-to-date, understood by all and most importantly that they translate into sound daily practice'*.⁷

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management

7.3.2 Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.



Assessing Current Practice

Reflection is a method of evaluation; when we reflect, we compare what *was*, to what *could, should, or would* be. Reflection is part of our everyday life. We reflect on situations, actions, people, things we have and haven't done, changes we make, things done differently — most times we are practicing methods of reflection and we don't even know it. As early childhood professionals, we must continually reflect and evaluate our practices.

When it comes to our role as an early childhood professional, we must also be proactive in reflecting on and evaluating service policies and procedures, in addition to the service's philosophy. After all, these elements directly affect our everyday practices and essentially guide the overall operation of the service.

⁷ Sourced: Hopkins, M. Duty of Care, what do we mean by "Duty of Care" Childcare and children's health Vol 9.1 March 2006



Legislation requires an approved provider to ensure that policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and, if necessary, updated.

Stakeholders should always be involved in the process of evaluating the service's practices. This gives all parties the opportunity to understand the practices, question procedures, and express their own views on current practice is effective or if they believe it requires change.

Reflection of the service and its practices can be done on an individual level, through methods of evaluation such as observing, one on one discussion and questionnaires. On a group level, it can be in settings such as meetings, focus groups, forums and so on.

It is important to note that early childhood professionals who are involved in reflection and evaluation of their service and find there *are* areas for improvement, see this as a valuable opportunity to engage in further professional development. In a profession where continual research is identifying new ways to provide quality care and education for children and families, it is essential for early childhood professionals to remain current with new theories and practices.

Professional development guides an early childhood professional's growth within their role and these opportunities can also assist educators in gaining further knowledge in differing or new requirements, which in turn provides endless benefit to the service community and, of course, the children.

Professional Development

Effective early childhood professionals continually strive to improve and build onto current practices. Through a commitment to continuous improvement, early childhood professionals continually seek resources and information to assist in acquiring valuable strategies and best practice for the educational and care of needs of children.

Early childhood professionals working within a children's service all have a level of accountability to areas of operation. In order to fulfil our responsibilities, a certain level of understanding is required of relevant laws and standards which govern the service operation. As a leader or supervisor, you will be required to identify the level of understanding of various responsibilities held by fellow early childhood professionals at the service.

Identifying the level of understanding of colleagues can involve:

- checklists to identify strength and needs
- observation and effective questioning
- review of written records
- interviews
- staff appraisals
- surveys/questionnaires.



Once you determine the level of understanding of a colleague with regards to service practices and responsibility, areas requiring improvement may be identified. You can then planning professional development for the particular need.

Once a need for professional development is identified, training can be conducted in many ways:

- **In-service training** – this type of training is conducted by a supervisor/member of staff/pedagogical leader within the service.
- **Local community training** — where a number of services within the local community gather for training within a particular topic they may all require further knowledge about.
- **Mentoring training within the workplace** – in this situation, an experienced staff member is teamed with a less experienced staff member. Training occurs on the job through role modelling and guidance.
- **Formal professional development** — which may include conferences, workshops, and outside service training.
- **Industry professional development** — this includes networking with sector professionals, engaging in professional conversations, and the completion of tertiary and higher education studies and qualifications.



Remember, engaging in professional development isn't always attending face-to-face training sessions. Reading professional journals and researching websites can be just as important in gaining knowledge and growth.

After engaging in professional development, it is imperative that all attendance records and certificates of completion are documented and filed appropriately. For individual staff, these records can be used for reference when planning future professional development, or when planning follow-up activities for staff that were unable to attend the training when it was offered.

Methods of recording this information can be on an attendance record, and also within a staff appraisal or professional development form. These records can then be used when monitoring performance and skill development, as well as identifying any further training needs.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management

Effective leadership contributes to sustained quality relationships and environments that facilitate children's learning and development. Well documented policies and practices that are developed and regularly evaluated in partnership with educators, coordinators, staff and families contribute to the ethical management of the service.



- 7.1 *Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community*
- 7.2 *There is a commitment to continuous improvement*
- 7.3 *Management and administrative systems enable the effective provision of a quality service*

Quality Area 7 of the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care focuses specifically on continuous improvement.

Service Performance and Leadership

One of the most important factors within a children's service is effective leadership. Leaders within the service environment must have skills and knowledge that promote professionalism and mentoring of colleagues, in order to help the service provide high-quality education and care. The basic principles of effective leadership come down to the ability to assess your own leadership style, an understanding of your obligations and dedication to your practice, being positive and motivational toward colleagues, and proactive in the organisation.

In assessing your own leadership style, it is important to be aware of varying styles:

An Authoritarian Leadership (Autocratic)

Authoritarian leaders provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. With authoritarian leaders you can clearly see a line between the leader and the followers. This type of leader tends to make decisions independently with little or no input from others in the organisation.

Research has shown that this style is usually viewed as a leader who is controlling, bossy, and dictatorial. Authoritarian leadership is best applied to organisations where the leader is the most knowledgeable and experienced, or where decisions need to be made quickly with no time for discussion or debate.

Democratic Leadership (Participative)

Research has shown that this is generally the most effective leadership style. Democratic leaders offer guidance to others, while also participating in the group and allowing input from other team members. Democratic leaders encourage group members to participate, but still retain the final say when making decisions. Teams under this type of leader tend to feel more inclusive and are more motivated and creative.

Delegative (Laissez-Faire)

Researchers found that teams that work under leadership of this style were the least productive. Delegative leaders tend to offer minimal guidance to the team and leave the decision making up to the group. Teams are found to be more demanding on the leader, and were at times uncooperative and less able to work independently.

This style can work for teams who are highly qualified in their field; on the other hand, it can often lead to poorly-defined roles and a lack of motivation in the group.

Transformational

The leadership style that is best aligned with children's services is what we call Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is a leadership style that tends to lead to positive changes in those who follow. These types of leaders are generally energetic, enthusiastic and passionate about their field.

A transformational leader in practice:

- encourages others to explore new ways of doing things and new opportunities to learn
- focuses on helping every member of the team succeed
- through their strength and vision, inspires others in the team to change their own expectations and perceptions in order to work toward a common goal
- fosters supportive relationships, keeping lines of communication open so that others are free to share ideas and leaders can offer recognition of each team member contributions
- has a clear vision and goals — through inspiration and motivation, these leaders have the ability to help others experience the same passion in order to fulfil their own individual goals.



With trust and respect for the leader, others are influenced to follow their role model and mentor.

This type of leadership can clearly be defined based on the impact that it has on the people they lead, and for the leader, the respect and admiration from their team. Combining good leadership skills with a healthy workplace culture will support not only positive health and wellbeing, but will assist in maintaining a strong, united and effective team.



Simple strategies in fostering this may include:

- ensuring staff have adequate rest breaks for meals throughout the day
- encouraging staff to take leave throughout the year
- developing policies which support best practice
- providing training and professional development opportunities
- ensuring a safe working environment
- identifying support networks
- recognising, praising and encouraging efforts
- involvement in decision making or changes
- providing information on healthy eating, active lifestyles and the effects of drugs and alcohol
- being supportive of the needs of early childhood professionals outside of their work place.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management

7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community



As a leader within a children's service, you are going to want your team to see you as both a team player as well as a competent and professional leader. The way you conduct yourself within both roles plays a large part in delivering positive outcomes for the service.

Best Practice

We, as early childhood professionals, are not only role models to and advocates of the children and families for whom the education and care is provided; we are also role models to each other. The way in which we conduct ourselves within the service and as professionals can clearly demonstrate our commitment and understanding of Quality Standards. The highest of quality with regard to these standards is referred to as *best practice*.



Best practice is a goal we should continually strive to achieve and maintain. It is often demonstrated by the leaders of our sector. We look to these leaders as they are our guides and mentors toward educating ourselves in the highest of standards, and toward the most professional demonstration of children's education and care.

REFLECTION



Think about your experience in the early childhood education and care sector. Who is it that inspires, encourages and supports you in best practice? This may be a colleague, an industry expert or even someone that looked after and educated you or your family...

What is it about this person that inspires you? Write your thoughts in the text box below:

Early childhood professionals need to ensure best practice is the focus of their everyday work role. Best practice can be achieved through:

- Fair, ethical and lawful practices being followed
- Fostering anti-discrimination and acceptance of cultural diversity and equal opportunity
- Abiding by and following Service Philosophies
- Maintaining confidentiality and privacy
- Implementing service policies and procedures
- Following occupational health and safety guidelines
- Adhering to sector Legislation and Regulations
- Maintaining a commitment for the best interests of children
- Continually reflecting on current practices and finding ways to improve

All of these practices can not only demonstrate your own, but also demonstrate the service's commitment to the delivery of best practice. And a service that delivering within the realms of best practice, will always remain compliant with Legislation and Standards.

National Quality Standard

Under the assessment and rating system, services will receive one of five ratings for each of the seven quality areas of the seven quality areas for the National Quality Standard.



The ratings will indicate whether the service is meeting, exceeding or not meeting the National Quality Standard. They are designed to provide parents with a comprehensive understanding of the quality of a service. They will allow services to highlight areas where they perform well, even when they may be unable to meet a particular standard in a quality area.

The five ratings are:

Unsatisfactory: indicates that a service is not meeting the National Quality Standard and the regulator is working closely with the service to immediately improve its quality. Otherwise the centre will need to be closed.

Operating Level: indicates that a service is working towards meeting the National Quality Standard. All new services will commence operation with an Operating Level rating.

Nation Quality Standard: indicates that a service is meeting the National Quality Standard

High Quality: indicates that a service is exceeding the National Quality Standard

Excellent: indicates that a service demonstrates excellence and is recognized as a sector leader. Services will need to apply to be assessed against this rating.

Best practice is essential for a high rating! It is a collaborative process involving all early childhood professionals

Performance

As a leader, one of your responsibilities is to develop and implement strategies in assisting to maximise the performance of others in the service. This is an important element of your role and can sometimes be challenging. Communicating to another person about an issue you may have with their performance is at times a difficult process. The use of a performance appraisal can emphasise the growth and development of an employee, and not just to make a formal decision about their performance.

It is important that early childhood professionals receive opportunities to either evaluate themselves, or be evaluated by others. Appraisal can be used both ways, but remember that it is often difficult to use effective methods of reflection and evaluation of your *own* practices in an open and honest manner, as we can tend to overlook key elements of our own performance. Managing the performance of staff through performance appraisals can also assist in monitoring their understanding of the service's Quality Standards.

Information discussed in an appraisal of a staff member should include, for example:

- the service's Quality Improvement Plan, and their role within this
- the creation of clear individual performance standards
- review of the performance of the individual over a previous period
- learning and development that has occurred over previous months
- future learning and development
- professional goals for the future.

This is often a great opportunity for a leader to support fellow early childhood professionals in not only improving their practices, but in setting up clear individual goals for the future.

This is but one of the positive outcomes that come from an effective performance appraisal. There are many reasons for the process of reflection and evaluation of an early childhood professional's practices. Some of these reasons may also include:

- to ensure that the early childhood professional involved is providing high quality care and education
- for recognition of an individual's skills and strengths
- to facilitate positive relationships within the team, which in turn can lead to motivated and confident professionals
- to enable staff to identify what they do and analyse how they actually do it, therefore providing the opportunity to modify, correct or change behaviour
- to measure effectiveness and improve performance
- to determine future professional development
- to determine if goals are being met
- to ensure individual objectives are being achieved
- to determine if activities are planned and completed to the standard expected.

It is always important for early childhood professionals to reflect and evaluate their own work practices; this is to ensure that they are participating equitably, actively and appropriately as professionals.

Performance Management

The process in which the performance of a staff member is measured can often be described as the process of performance management. The use of such a term is often referred to in the negative sense. After all, performance management only occurs when someone is not doing their job correctly, right?

Well, the answer to that is no, this is not always the case. Performance management is usually a positive process of improving an individual or a team performance, and is often used to increase the effectiveness of the working environment.

There are many methods that can be used to gather information regarding an individual's performance, including:

- performance appraisals
- discussion/meetings
- observation
- self reflection.

Not only can these methods provide information, but can also assist in creating strategies to increase the skills, knowledge and performance of individual early childhood professionals, and of the professional team.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements

4.1.4 The performance of educators, coordinators and staff is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.



Position Descriptions

All roles within the children's service are important and contribute to the effective running of the service. A job or position description is a document that outlines the duties, responsibilities and tasks associated to a specific position. All position descriptions are designed to link the various roles together to ensure consistency and effectiveness of the service provided.

When offered a position in a service, an early childhood professional will be provided with a position description outlining:

- who to report to
- a role summary
- duties and responsibilities.

ACTIVITY

Refer to your job/position description, or ask your Manager for a copy of your position description. In the text box below, write down a list of tasks that are specific to your role.



In the event of a professional not performing as they should within their work role, a position description will outline the areas clearly, allowing for discussion and development of strategies, which will encourage these areas to be addressed. On the other hand, in the event of an individual or group performing as they should, position descriptions can outline areas for greater improvement, and the provision of a higher quality of practice and performance.

Barriers and Constraints

To ensure a quality service, early childhood professionals within the service environment must work together effectively. In achieving this, we must not only be mindful of our roles and positions within the service, but be active in identifying barriers and constraints that may contribute to the performance of others.

When conducting performance management, we must be aware of any underlying issues that may be hindering performance. Barriers and constraints may be the reason for the lack of performance or a change in the implementation of work practices. Service and individual constraints must be assessed prior to the performance management process being carried out.



Service constraints may include:

- lack of resources
- limited time
- limited finances
- lack of training and professional development
- conflict within working relationships.

Individual constraints may include:

- medical or health concerns
- personal situations, issues, and difficulties.

Such barriers and constraints should be addressed and included when devising strategies during the performance management process, as each will require different strategies in overcoming these contributing issues. Addressing barriers and constraints may not always create instant results; it may take some time for both parties to develop strategies that are effective and supportive. It will, however, ensure that performance management processes are carried out in a fair and unbiased way, and allow for the opportunity for improvement and development of the people involved.

Discussion Time

Communicating performance issues is a skill that as a leader you must acquire, and as discussed in *Topic 1 – Effective working relationships*, the key to successful and effective teamwork can come down to effective communication skills. If communication is effectively carried out, an individual and group have the opportunity to walk away from a performance management session feeling motivated, energised and excited in moving forward. On the other hand, if communicating performance is not handled well, staff may be feeling extremely negative and upset.

When addressing performance, it is vital that positive aspects of the person's job performance are identified and discussed, as well as the aspects which require improvement. This reassures that, although there may be an area that needs addressing, there may be many other areas within the role at which they may excel.

An effective communication technique is known as the 'sandwich effect'. As you know, a sandwich has three main layers — a slice of bread, the filling, then another slice of bread. In the sandwich effect, early childhood professionals use three main layers of communication — identification of positives, identification of challenges, then further identifications of positives

Positive - *slice of bread*
Negative - *the filling*
Positive - *slice of bread*



The sandwich principle in summary:

1. Start with a positive.
2. Discuss your concerns.
3. Conclude the conversation with another positive!

Using this tool can help to ensure a performance management discussion always begins and concludes on a good note — overall looking to be a positive process.

Positivity in the Service

Positivity within the service is essential, as the symptoms of negativity can often lead to:

- increased client complaints
- high staff turnover
- poor quality of work practices
- increased staff absences
- loss of morale and motivation
- lack of creativity and innovation
- loss of loyalty to the organisation.

It is commonly thought that those in a leadership role are in the ideal position to model positivity and have an effect on the service, but in fact **all** staff have the ability to make a positive difference. A positive attitude in the face of a negative culture will help lift fellow staff morale. It's also contagious, and when a fellow staff member simply asserts a positive attitude, the environment can be refocused toward the positive. Researchers have found that positive people are overall happier, healthier, more creative, and more productive than those who are drawn toward negativity. Positive leaders tend to unknowingly motivate those around them, just by their very nature.



The ability to overcome negativity in the workplace comes down to role modelling a positive attitude and showing respect for fellow employees. As a leader, being proactive and solution orientated towards the symptoms of negativity will bring the team back on track. Professionalism is the fundamental key to success.

Topic 3

Quality Processes

Quality processes are the procedures we undertake to ensure the service is consistent, compliant and facilitating continual improvement. These processes are essential to the ongoing commitment of delivering a quality service for our stakeholders. Professional practices within your service will compliment the quality processes.



Familiarity of service policies and procedures is essential for all early childhood professionals employed in a service!

Service Policies and Procedures

In the same way that Regulations are unique to each state and territory, policies and procedures are unique to each service. A policy is “*a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes*”.⁸ In relation to a children’s service, the outcomes in the policies and procedures are based on the legislative requirements and government standards.

The relationship between legislation, Regulations and policies and procedures can be demonstrated in this way:



Organisations cannot operate productively or legally without policies. Policies and procedures provide a framework for the service to work efficiently, and within the laws and standards relevant to the industry. Policies and procedures are initially developed to safeguard the service’s compliance with applicable legislation, and thereafter guide the practices and processes of the service.

Other reasons why policies and procedures are of benefit to a service include the following:

- Policies guide the actions of everyone involved in the service's operations, therefore maintaining consistency.
- Policies ensure that the wellbeing of children, families, educators, and other stakeholders is considered and maintained.
- Policies ensure operations within the service can be clarified, evaluated and reviewed.
- Policies help to clarify the expectations of the service for its stakeholders.
- Policies and procedures can assist in the orientation of new staff, or for relief staff to familiarise themselves with the service's practices.
- Policies create common understandings on how procedures are practiced at the service for all stakeholders.
- Policies can clearly define what procedures must occur in relation to a particular issue or practice. The procedures attached to these policies provide 'step-by-step' instructions about what and when practices should occur.
- Policies provide all stakeholders with information about what to expect from a service.
- Clear expectations and practices of a service can be provided to families interested in using the service.

Policies and procedures are 'living' documents that should be regularly reviewed to respond to the individual needs of those working with them, and to reflect new knowledge and meet changing trends in the service sector, and the wider community.

⁸ Sourced: <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>

Writing a policy and procedure is more than putting pen to paper. Developing and writing policies and procedures is the responsibility of all relevant stakeholders within a children's service.

Step 1: Involves determining the policy. What policy does the service require? This will involve Regulations, best practice, childcare quality assurance, the concerns raised by stakeholders or accidents/incidents that may have occurred requiring a need for a policy to be implemented.

Step 2: The service needs to identify and clearly define the goal for the policy. This step will need to take into consideration the philosophies, goals, aims, strategies and objectives of the service. It must also involve collaboration and communication with stakeholders.

Step 3: In order for the development of a policy or procedure to run smoothly, the delegation of roles and responsibilities will need to be determined. This may involve identifying individuals who will be responsible for gathering or researching information, the formation of committees or parent groups or possibly the need for networking or attending workshops.

Step 4: A plan will need to be developed for the research and sourcing of information. This will need to define the Regulations and legislation the policy must be compliant with, as well as the standards for the service.



Step 5: Once the information has been researched and the information gathered, the policy can begin to be formulated and developed.

Step 6: The service needs to write a policy statement. A policy statement clearly identifies what the policy is going to cover. For example to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children and staff at the service the following nappy changing policy and procedure must be followed.

Step 7: Determine the procedure or plan of action required to achieve the goal of the policy for the service. This may include a step-by-step procedure on how the policy will be implemented.

For example: the nappy changing procedure may include steps as follows:

- Wash hands.
- Prepare the change area with wipes, gloves and necessary items.
- Collect child from play area.

This would continue all the way through the whole process.

Step 8: By this stage the service will have formed a draft policy with a name, policy statement, the procedure to follow and the resources the service has used to create policy. The service will trial the policy for a period of time, usually four to six weeks. During this trial period the service will implement the policy and clearly identify any areas that may need to be amended, and may make necessary adjustments to the policy and process. If amendments have been identified, the process of trialling starts again until the service has a policy which ensures compliance and is workable by all stakeholders.

Step 9: The service can now endorse the policy and share this with all stakeholders. This can be achieved by placing a copy of the policy on notice boards, in newsletters, posting/emailing copies to families, sharing it at meetings or displaying on the services website if applicable.

Step 10: The policy will now be an operational policy for the service, which will require regular review by the service to ensure the policy remains current within standards, Regulations and legislation.

HINT

Policy Format

Policies are formal documents and so must be written and presented in a professional manner. The information should be typed, sourced, dated and on a service letter head if applicable. Most policies follow a framework which ensures that all information which should be presented in a policy is evident.



Click on the interactive learning object '**policy format**' for more information on how a policy is formatted. You can access the interactive learning activity via the resource section of the GoodStart Training College website: www.goodstart.edu.au

Compliance

Compliance within the realms of children's services is a service's ability to maintain and demonstrate practices in line with all current legislation, Regulations and Quality Standards. When a service is maintaining these standards, they are deemed to be compliant.

National Quality Standard

Approval to operate

All services will be required by legislation to obtain an approval to operate.

For centre based services, an approval will be issued once, nationally, enabling providers to operate many services across multiple jurisdictions. The service manager, or person who has on-site responsibility, is also subject to approval, as is each service's venue and operations.

Family day care schemes, rather than individual educators will require approval.

Where a service satisfies the requirements of the National Quality Standard, an approval to operate will be issued without a fixed term of approval. This will mean that an 'approval to operate' will be ongoing.⁹



With compliance being a fundamental component of everyday operations, there are times where situations of non-compliance may occur. These situations should be seen as valuable opportunities to develop skills, knowledge and understanding for ensuring compliance in the future.

Area of compliance may be identified through:

- observation
- communication
- routine checks
- reviewing documentation
- audits
- departmental visits
- feedback
- reflections
- evaluations.

⁹ Sourced: Early Childhood Development Steering Committee (2009) *National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care*. Council of Australian Governments

Consequences of Non-Compliant Behaviour

Depending on the seriousness of the issue(s) identified at the service, the consequences of non-compliance can range from education for the more minor issues through to prosecution for criminal offences. The graduated responses to non-compliant activity are listed below:

- Education
- Warnings
- Sanctions, including meeting additional conditions, or suspension or cancellation of a service's child care benefit approval
- Civil penalties and infringement notices
- Prosecution where criminal offences are involved
- Recovery of fraudulently received payments through legal proceedings.

In most cases, services will simply require further education and guidance so they can meet their responsibilities under the family assistance legislation or a child care funding agreement. However, when serious issues of non-compliance are identified further investigation and follow up compliance action will be undertaken.¹⁰

Self Evaluation

Self-evaluation is a process of collecting and analysing a range of information directly related to your service's practices and procedures. Throughout this process, it is essential to have the ability to 'see both sides', and have a non-judgemental and unbiased approach. There are several ways in which self-evaluation of a service can be completed. Self reflection is the beginning. As we identified previously, reflection is essential in evaluating ourselves and is a skill that should be used when evaluating the service.

Collecting feedback is an important method of gathering information for an evaluation of your service. The collection of feedback is used regularly in children's services to obtain the views, feelings and thoughts from stakeholders on various areas. These areas include curriculum, service practices and delivery, buildings, resources, and overall operation. Gathering feedback is essential for a service as it is an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input that can assist in creating positive change in the service when it is taken on board and used effectively. Stakeholders are a valuable source of information as we will explore in greater detail further on.

Feedback should always be viewed as an opportunity to both give and receive information in order to monitor progress, improve on practice, implement much-needed change, or seek assistance. It has been found that, within the workplace, leaders who gather feedback regularly and consistently will have a far greater understanding on how a group or individuals are progressing, what areas are working well and what areas may need improvement.

Feedback can be obtained through a variety of methods and strategies:

Surveys and Questionnaires

Knowing what a client wants is the key factor to success in any type of business, and children's services are no different. Services need to know what their stakeholders want and how they feel, and one of the best ways to find this information is to conduct a survey or questionnaire. Surveys and questionnaires are effective as they can come in many shapes and forms and can cover a range of information topics.

Verbal Communication

The most common method of receiving feedback is through verbal communication.

Informal conversation, phone calls and formal meetings can all be a means of sharing and discussing thoughts, ideas and suggestions regarding an array of topics. It is important to note, however, that if feedback is being offered via verbal means, the feedback must be documented. As easy as it is to use this method of obtaining feedback, information is reliant on memory. By writing the information down, the service will have an accurate record of the feedback gained, which can then be used to develop strategies or change within the service.

¹⁰ Sourced: Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relationships.
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Programs/ChildCareforServices/Operation/Pages/ComplianceActivities.aspx>

Email

In today's technological age, email is becoming the preferred method of communication.

Most homes have a computer with internet access which allows for instant communication to take place in any setting, or any time of day. Most organisations use email as the preferred method of communication, as it is more time efficient and common practice for effective communication on a larger scale.

Meetings

As previously discussed, meetings can facilitate effective feedback. By encouraging individuals and groups to share and discuss their ideas, feedback can be collated in order to gain a better understanding of perceptions, ideas and suggestions regarding the service and its practices.



Consultation

Evaluation is a continuous and ongoing part of our quality process. As service leaders, it is vital we manage the process of evaluation in a professional manner. Failure to do so can result in stakeholders of the service becoming upset or confused about future or current changes. This in turn will affect their perception of our service and we run risk of losing their loyalty, and their business.

When evaluating a current practice or negotiating an upcoming change, stakeholders of the service should be consulted. These stakeholders should include the following:

- **Children attending the service**

Children are capable and when asked effectively can contribute ideas to programs and facilities of the service. Policies and procedures at times may also be required to be considered from a child's perspective. This process of gathering information from children is an important part of our commitment to improve our services for our little clients.

- **Families of the children attending the service**

Evaluating policies and procedures, care practices, and perhaps even suppliers is important for families and caregivers as users of the service. They have the ability to clearly identify whether their needs are being met.

- **Employees**

Employees are pivotal people in any evaluative process, regardless of role or frequency of work; they can offer feedback on how the policies and procedures actually work on a daily basis. Employees can also provide a variety of perspectives, as they fulfil varied roles and what may be not an area of concern for one, may be for another.

- **Community organisations**

These organisations can provide information from the diversity of the community that is being serviced by the children's service. As visitors to the service they can provide valuable feedback during evaluative processes on policies, practices, resources available, and feedback that may have been received from other community members.

- **Management committees**

A management committee can have a full overview of all aspects of the service, including finances, quality, suppliers and so on. This knowledge and input is important when evaluating effectiveness within a service.



To obtain a holistic consensus of the service, the evaluation of only one party will not do. All stakeholders must be consulted in order to provide the service a balanced perspective on others' thoughts and ideas. Services can use a variety of methods when conducting evaluation of the service, including questionnaires, interviews and surveys in various shapes and forms.

Analysis

The continual practice of self-evaluation enables the development, change and improvement to a service, as strategies are collaboratively devised from the feedback gathered. As a service leader you may be required to assist in not only deciding upon what changes will need to occur, but when, with an adequate timeframe to support this process.

When collaborating with other stakeholders involved in changes, further feedback may be required to support the process; if feedback is telling you change needs to occur, the same individuals who offered the feedback should have the opportunity to be involved in development the strategies of change. Once information is gathered it is time to reflect on the centre's current practices against the relevant standards previously identified. This is where your skills, knowledge and understanding of these come into play, as you analyse the information gathered against the standards in order to outline your service's performance.

The overall process of self-evaluation can assist in clearly identifying where the service sits in relation to the Quality Areas. This is the basis for the service's next phase of continual improvement being the *Quality Improvement Plan*.

Quality Improvement Plan

As we have established, children's services regularly undertake the process of self-evaluation. From this information, services have the ability to continually add to their Quality Improvement Plan. Quality Improvement Plans set the foundations for change and improvement. They are essential in the organising and prioritising of tasks that are required to improve a service's delivery and practices.

National Quality Standard

Quality Improvement Plans

The National Quality Framework will emphasise the importance of ongoing improvement. Each service will develop a Quality Improvement Plan which outlines how the service is, or is not, meeting the National Quality Standard. Services will be required to develop and/or update their Quality Improvement Plan annually and keep it on site and available for review by the regulator.



Services will be required to submit their Quality Improvement Plan to the regulator prior to full assessment which will be carried out dependent on the service's history in meeting the National Quality Standard.

When developing a service's plan for improvement, it is important to firstly identify the areas where the service is performing well, so that stakeholders can receive positive feedback. This not only fosters good morale within the workplace, but assists in proving to employees that their effort does not go unnoticed.

A plan for improvement can begin by making a list of the Quality areas and legislative requirements that are in need of improvement, or which are not currently being fulfilled as identified through evaluation, stakeholder feedback, changes in policies and recommendations.

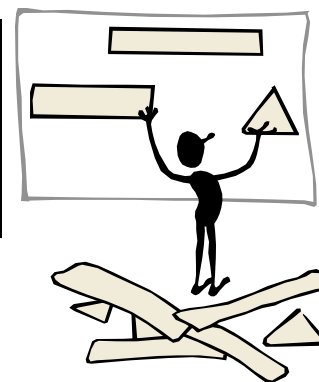
An example of a Quality Improvement Plan

Summary of issues as identified in the self assessment process

Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
Identified strengths	
Key improvements sought	

Quality Improvement Plan
Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

Standard / Element	Goal and Priority	Strategies	Evidence/Deliverables	Target Date	Progress / Status



Strategies for improvement should be developed for each area identified. The development of such strategies can be achieved in a number of ways that best suits the service. Please remember, it is imperative that all stakeholders are involved in the process of change.

Change

Change is a process that some enjoy and others fear. As a leader in a children’s service, it will be your role to promote change in a positive light. Be prepared for others to voice a grievance when a change occurs, as some find it difficult to cope with. Try to understand their perspective, and take time to discuss and work with them to help ease the transition.

It is important to prepare staff for the process of change **before** it happens; this will assist them better deal with the change. Others may relish change, and sometimes their enthusiasm helps those who find it difficult to adapt as quickly.

Once you have become aware of and clearly identified potential changes within your Quality Improvement Plan, the process of change has already begun. Now the service must begin the next phase in order to decide upon the level of modification that is required.

The Process of Change

The process of change is as follows:

1. Identify the need for change

This may come through a change to legislation which governs the service or guides the quality expectations of it. The need for change may also come through an incident which has occurred within the service. For example, a child may have been injured due to the fact that the service did not have an effective policy on supervision. Sometimes, the need for change may arise through new research outcomes and technology changes and improvements. Stakeholder feedback and community attitude can also affect the need for a change within the service, and the practices which occur within it.

2. Proposed changes and improvements

During this step, the changes and improvements are decided upon.

An example of this is:

A change has occurred within the Regulations regarding the qualifications required by educators within the service. The service must first understand what the legislation means, and what the proposed changes require. It is then determined which educators fulfil the new requirements and which ones require qualification upgrades.

If the change is not due to legislative requirements but to a change in workplace culture, the service may need to review its organisation’s core values, service philosophy and objectives.

During this stage of the process, services will need to decide upon when these changes are to occur, although there will be times that this will be decided for you. For example, the government may require practices to change by a certain date. Also, what other areas will be affected by this change? There may need to be a review of policies and procedures, and others not involved previously such as educators and families, may now need to be involved in the change process.

If others are to be involved in the change, you may be required to research and prepare briefing information for these stakeholders to become aware of, and up-to-date with, the process. This is a summary of the information gathered or identified as the reason behind the review or change.

Briefing information must be written in a comprehensive language and must clearly identify the reason behind the need for change. Stakeholders of the service will want to know why change is happening, especially if the current practice has been working well to date. Services should be prepared for any questions which may come their way.

3. Implementation

Once a change has been decided upon and strategies have been put in place, the change is now at the stage of implementation. During this time of implementation, the changes should be monitored to ensure that it does cover the requirement which brought about change in the first place, and that it serves its purpose to the service. It is strongly advised that the service delegates a time in which stakeholders can discuss whether the change has proven successful and fully review the process. The timeframe for this will vary depending on how much change has needed to be implemented. However, all stakeholders should consent to an agreed time.

4. Review

At this stage the new change is reviewed and assessed on its effectiveness. Outcomes, strategies and the method of delivery should all be analysed and discussed to ensure the needs of all stakeholders have continued to be met. If the change has been a success and approved by all, the change can continue to be implemented until the need for change arises again. On the other hand, if the change is not successful, stakeholders will need to start the process again until compliance is agreed upon and effective.

Although this may appear to be disappointing, it is important to look upon this process as an opportunity to continually learn and develop strategies for a Quality Service. Previous strategies that may not have worked for one particular area may be perfect for another. It is for this reason that services must document and report any process for future reflection.

Preparation of Reports

Preparing reports and documentation are an important aspect of working within a children's service. Reports and documentation are regularly provided to all stakeholders. Some of these include:

- quality improvement plans
- financial reports
- proposals
- supporting documentation.

Quality Improvement Plan

As the service progresses through a Quality Improvement Plan it is vital for the service to communicate the process with stakeholders, and to report progress on a regular basis. Once any type of evaluation on the service has taken place, a timely response to stakeholders must occur. If we fail to do so, we delay the opportunity for stakeholders to have input, or delay the implementation of change which may be much-needed within the service.

During the consultation process, stakeholders can agree on a timeframe that reports are to be drafted, and proposed changes are to be decided upon. In most cases, a report will be developed to outline information which will be needed to make decisions regarding the process of change.

It is essential that reports we supply to stakeholders must be:

- clear
- accurate
- logical
- factual.



These reports will ultimately be the guiding factor for decisions and processes within the service, so must be presented in an unbiased and professional view of the information.

The preparation of reports which outline the findings of a self-evaluation process and a Quality Improvement Plan are essential to the implementation of the process of change, and overall improvement within a service. Preparing a written report to share with stakeholders regarding the improvement of the service, however, is a skill that requires practice. Report writing involves the ability to communicate information that can be easily understood and comprehended by the reader, and at times information will need to be adjusted to do so. It also needs to ensure that the information is accurate and objective.



Upon the completion of your report, it is important to take the time to consider each of the following four points:

- Is the information in the report appropriate to the audience it is aimed for?
- Does the report share the required information accurate but easy to understand?
- Is the format of the report user-friendly?
- Can the information be changed to better meet the needs of the audience? And if so, how?

It is recommended that you always run the report past another person in order to get a second opinion before distributing the information. Sometimes a 'fresh pair of eyes' on the document can pick up errors which would not have otherwise been pointed out until it is too late.

Professionalism is not just in our appearance or actions; it is also in the way we formulate written materials and articulate ourselves in formal documents. It is of most importance that, as early childhood professionals, we are professional in every area of our work practices, written documentation included.

The way in which reports are distributed and shared with the relevant stakeholders will depend on the best means of communication for the individual group, whether it be families, staff or community members. Reports may be shared in many forms, for example, via email, within a meeting, distributed through communication boards, and newsletters. And remember, you must always allow receivers of this information the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback regarding the reported information and the service's progression of Quality Improvement.



Ensure within your report you always provide contact information for a reader to access further information, and for comments and questions to be expressed.

Budget Increases

As stated in previously, Regulations, legislation and Quality Standards will change. Such changes will result in a service having to change their practices in order to remain compliant. In order to remain compliant, however, services may also need an increase to the service budget, as changes may require the purchase additional equipment or replace materials which are no longer in line with relevant requirements.

In cases where costs will be high and budgets cannot extend to include these costs, proposals for additional funding may need to be prepared and submitted. Funds may be offered through the facilitation of a grant or a loan. Grants are funds which are provided by external sources or organisations (sources will vary depending on the state or territory your service operates in).

Proposals

A proposal is an application that is documented in writing. These are usually submitted to foundations, government grant programs, or corporations who may support children's services programs. Proposals are very detailed, and require the reason for the resources and their costing. They may involve research into a variety of suppliers, as well as the submission of past and current financial records in order to prove the need. Records may be included such as receipts of when equipment was last updated, accident report forms, recent audit reports, photographs, and stakeholder feedback.

A proposal needs to clearly state both the benefits and the disadvantages of not proceeding with the required or desired change, and should list short and long term aspects with regard to both factors. A clear time line should also be considered that reflects the costing and the process of the change or upgrade.

A proposal should be realistic. If your proposal has unrealistic expectations or is for an unnecessary resource, there is more chance that it will be overlooked. Look at what is essential, what needs to be addressed, and complete your proposal for these requirements only.



Remember, just as the Quality Improvement Plan is developed and shared with stakeholders, the same processes need to be followed when formulating reports and proposals.

Retention of Documentation

When maintaining of records within a children’s service, we must ensure we continually conduct audits on documentation that is retained and maintained by the service. These audits must be conducted by the service as part of maintaining compliance, and to ensure that records and documentation are kept as required.

Supporting documents may include, but are not limited to:

- staff meetings, training and appraisals
- policies and procedures including modifications and reviews
- community meetings, partnerships and networking
- purchase of equipment and resources
- environment safety audits
- staffing, including appropriate qualifications and rostering
- programs and plans of children’s learning and experiences including individual records of children’s progress
- records of children including immunisation status, allergies and illnesses
- communication with families such as newsletters or notification of diseases
- emergency evacuation plans and evidence of the procedure being practiced
- maintenance logs.

ACTIVITY



Children’s services are legally required to retain certain service records. Referring to your centre’s policies and procedures, in the text box below, outline the record retention requirements pertaining to your state or territory (including the required retention period) for ten records relevant to a children’s service.

It is imperative that the service's documentation is continually updated to reflect legislative changes and best practice, as well any professional changes within the children's services sector.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management

7.2 There is a commitment to continuous improvement

Once a change has been implemented, continuous monitoring is essential. Just as it was discussed in the identification of compliance, and within self-evaluation, all of the methods used to evaluate the service initially are how a service can effectively monitor the Quality Improvement Plan. Monitoring is an ongoing cycle, and a quality process that demonstrates a service's commitment to continuous improvement.

