



Build Strong Partnerships with Families

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Disclaimer

This resource is based on the most current information available in December 2011.

In developing this resource we have referred to legislation and regulations, sought advice from professional organisations and reviewed contemporary research. This document should be used as a guide to compliment and develop service's existing practices, policies and procedures. Services should always check the currency of information at the time of use and consider the information in this booklet in the context of their particular service.

This booklet can be accessed online at:

www.pscalliance.org.au

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About the *How To* series

The **How To** series has been created to offer professionals working in the education and care sector in Australia practical support to implement the National Quality Framework. The **How To** series consists of seven booklets promoting key areas of quality provision. Throughout each booklet, there are references to national legislation (the Act and Regulations), the National Quality Standard, the Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming) and the Framework for School Age Care (My Time, Our Place). The **How To** series can be used by a variety of professionals working in education and care services across Australia.

The introduction of the National Quality Framework marks a significant change in the way we, as a community, see children and their place in society. All professionals working in the education and care services are responsible for continuous improvement to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.

Whāia te iti kahurangi - Ki te tūohu koe, me he maunga teitei.

‘Pursue excellence – should you stumble, let it be to a lofty mountain’ (Māori proverb)



Introduction

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

More recently, research highlights the vital role that families play in promoting children's early brain development. By the time a child is three years old, 90% of their brain is developed – therefore the quality of relationships and learning environments for babies and toddlers is critically important. (MCEECDYA, 2011). Children are much more likely to reach their full potential in life when their family and education and care provider work together to foster children's learning and holistic development. This places responsibility on all professionals working with children to build strong partnerships with families to achieve the best long term outcomes for children.

“Partnerships are based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, and building on the strength of each other's knowledge”. (The Educator's Guide to the EYLF, p.11)

For education and care professionals, building partnerships with families involves establishing and maintaining positive relationships. A strong relationship is based on understanding and respect for each other roles, lifestyle choices, culture and expertise. To establish this relationship you need to find genuine ways to listen to and speak with families. (Educators Guide to the EYLF, p.17).

Forming a partnership with families requires a 'whole team' approach where all staff consistently and proactively engage with families in their children's learning and holistic development. This partnership approach is underpinned by your service's philosophy, policies, procedures, environment, curriculum and everyday practices.

How can this resource help you?

This booklet will help you understand some of the key concepts that underpin strong relationships with families. It will also identify some barriers to family involvement in your service and provide you with a range of ideas and practical suggestions to build effective partnerships with families. Throughout this booklet, concepts and practise ideas are linked to the National Quality Standard (NQS).

Definitions

Learning outcome

A skill, knowledge or disposition that educators can actively promote in early childhood settings, in collaboration with children and families. (p. 46 EYLF).

Disposition

The tendency to respond in characteristic ways to situations, for example, maintaining an optimistic view, approaching new experiences with confidence.

EC setting

Education and care setting which includes long day care, family day care, sessional and outside school hours care services.

Abbreviations and Acronyms used in this booklet

ACECQA - The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority established under the National Quality Framework www.acecqa.gov.au

Legislation - In this booklet, the term legislation encompasses the Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010) and Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011) as applied in each State or Territory through an applied law system. This sounds a little complicated but is explained on the ACECQA website www.acecqa.gov.au

Law/Act - Education and Care Services National Law Act (2010)

Regulations - Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)

NQF - National Quality Framework www.acecqa.gov.au

NQS - National Quality Standard www.acecqa.gov.au

EYLF - Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming)

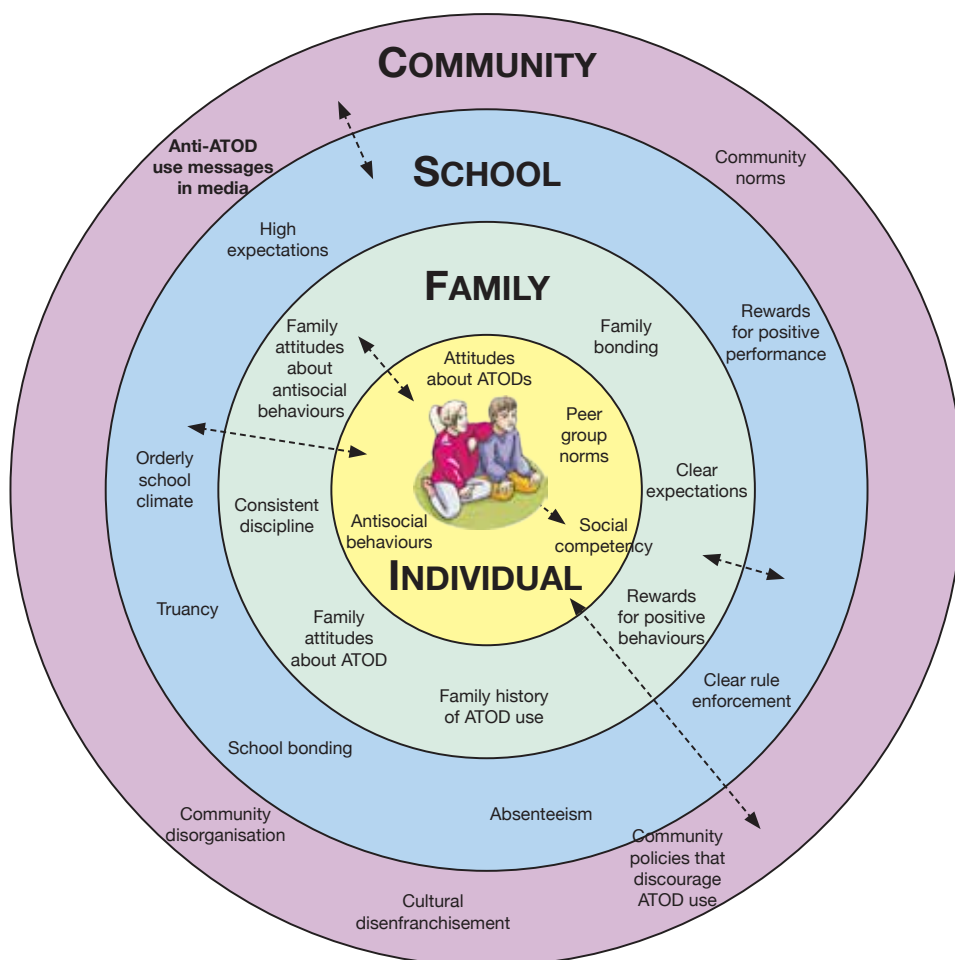
FSAC - Framework for School Aged Care (My Time, Our Place)

Partnership in Theory

The EYLF and FSAC views families as partners (Principle 2) in their children's learning and development. Both learning frameworks state that a partnership with a family is about:

- ✓ Understanding family perspectives.
- ✓ Supporting family aspirations (hopes).
- ✓ Planning for equitable (fair) outcomes for children.

True partnership with family's means giving families some level of control and influence in their child's education and care setting. (See NQS, Quality Area 6) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory reminds us that children's development is influenced by their relationships with parents, family and friends; their experiences in settings such as childcare and school; and by the customs, laws and the cultural values of the community. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)



What do strong partnerships look like?

To work effectively with families you need to be aware of **what they want** for their child as well as their expectations of you and your setting. Strong partnerships with families are based on:

- ✓ trust
- ✓ open and respectful communication
- ✓ shared information about their child
- ✓ shared understanding of perspectives and expectations
- ✓ involvement in children's learning and development
- ✓ shared decision making

(Adapted from the EYLF, p. 12)



Benefits of working in partnership

Working in partnership with families has benefits for children, the family, your service and the wider community. Some of these benefits are shown in Table 1.

Children	Families	Early Childhood Setting	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ greater consistency between home and education and care setting ✓ children's learning and development is better supported ✓ children can feel more confident and secure in new setting ✓ aids the attachment between children and staff at the service ✓ any concerns about the child may be shared and therefore appropriately supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ feel valued and respected ✓ better understand their child's learning and development ✓ feel supported and empowered in their role as parents ✓ are comfortable to ask questions or to express concerns ✓ understand more about the role of EC staff ✓ have increased confidence in the service and their own parenting skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ learn from families' skills and expertise ✓ information gained from families can be used to support children's learning and development ✓ understand some issues affecting families ✓ gain family feedback that helps staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their practices and overall service ✓ families understand your role better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ the setting becomes a hub for families within the community ✓ families can network and support each other through shared experiences and child rearing practices ✓ children can develop friendships with other children in their community ✓ promote awareness of support services available to families

Table 1: Benefits of working in partnership with families

Key things to consider

It is important to reflect on what you currently do to build strong partnerships with families and identify your strengths and areas for improvement. Here are some things to consider:

- ✓ Do all staff understand the legal requirements of the National Quality Framework for working in partnership with families to better support children's learning and development? (National Law and Regulations, NQS and learning frameworks)
- ✓ When and how do you establish a positive relationship with families?
- ✓ How can this relationship improve to better support children's learning and development? (NQS, Quality Area 1)
- ✓ What opportunities are there for shared decision making with families about the overall service? (NQS, Quality Area 6)
- ✓ How is partnership with families valued and reflected in your philosophy, policies and every day practices of staff? (NQS, Quality Area 6 and 7)
- ✓ Do staff show respect for the lifestyle choices and cultural traditions of families attending your service? (Staff bias should be addressed promptly and appropriately.)
- ✓ What message does your entrance and overall environment give to families (new and existing)? How does it reflect your partnership with families?

QIP TIP

When developing your service's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), use the strengths and areas for improvement identified when answering these questions. Explain what your service will do to improve any identified areas for improvement. Assess yourself against the standards and elements outlined in Quality Area 6 in the NQS. Gather evidence that highlights the progress your service is making. Remember your QIP is about continuous improvement. If staff practices are to be consistent with the evidence provided in your QIP, ALL educators need to be involved in its creation and development. (See NQS, Quality Area 7)

(For information go to pages 17 – 20 of the *Educators Guide to the EYLF*)

The National Quality Framework

Knowing what is expected of your service under the NQF is crucial and all services must understand their legal obligations of working with families (See the Education and Care Services National Law / Act and the National Regulations for more information at www.acecqa.gov.au). The framework recognises that a child's family is their first and most influential teacher. It promotes partnerships that build on the strengths of family's and service's knowledge. This can be achieved by creating a welcoming environment where all children and families are respected, relationships are built on trust, open communication and shared decision making.

Various parts of national legislation and regulations support collaboration with families but Quality Area 6 of the National Quality Standard (NQS) emphasises working in *partnership* with families and communities. (Minimum requirements are outlined below).

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 6 - Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities

You must:

- provide families with information about your educational program / curriculum
- document and share with families your assessments and evaluations of their children's development, needs, interests, experiences and participation in the program / curriculum and your assessment of the child's progress against the learning outcomes of the EYLF/FSAC
- maintain enrolment records and procedures that provide information about the family and children's health needs
- display or provide a range of information to parents
- enable families to access and have input into reviews of policies and procedures
- provide an administration space to consult with parents

(See NQS Quality Areas 1 and 7)

Partnership in Practice


Getting to know your families

A child's home environment has significant impact on their learning and development. To build your relationship with families, it is important to learn about their family background, cultural needs and other matters that influence the home environment. This knowledge helps you think about *how* you can best engage with that family and what staff *practices* might be adapted (for example, to increase other educators knowledge of cultural competency). This also gives you an opportunity to find out about different family perspectives and expectations.

Families can be very diverse and frequently include more people than the child's biological parents (who may or may not live with the child). Some examples include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (skin groups, kinships, tribes)
- Nuclear families (married couples with children)
- Extended families with several generations of the same family or close relatives all living together
- Blended families with step-parents and step-siblings
- Single parent families
- Children living with their grandparents
- Cohabiting parents with children
- Gay or lesbian families
- Households shared between multiple families who are not related to each other





“Consideration should be given to when, where and the way in which we engage with families, not forgetting that we are striving for a sense of belonging for all our families.”

(The Educators Guide to the EYLF, p.17)

Understanding expectations

Family background, values, culture and life experiences influence each family's expectations for their children in your service. Knowing what families want for their children is important if you are to support their child's learning and development in your setting. Use your policies and procedures as the backbone of your service to help families understand what your service can do to support their child's learning and development and what it can't. You need to know the extent to which your service can meet their expectations and clearly communicate this to them. Expectations should be respectfully discussed at or **before** enrolment to prevent any future confusion and to provide a basis for ongoing conversations.

Understanding each family's expectations will assist you to form a good working relationship, and highlights the importance of having a systematic and intentional approach to building and maintaining partnerships with families.

Establishing the relationship

First impressions count. Your attitude, manner and approach are important so treat all families with a friendly smile, courteous manner and show them that their child is your most important concern. Take every opportunity to greet families, consider facial expressions and body language too!

The common goal between you and your families is wanting the best for their children, so make sure that your practices demonstrate this shared goal. Although all family's needs will vary, treat all families with equal respect and remember that it is not your responsibility to judge their lifestyle choices or child rearing practices. If you have good relationships with families then their children are better placed to form a secure attachment with you. (Remember John Bowlby's Attachment Theory)

Share some information about your staff team with families. For example, their names, interests, hobbies, reasons for working in your setting, personal philosophy and qualifications.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Standard 6.1 – Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.



Making families feel welcome

When families are warmly welcomed into your service, they are more likely to feel valued and experience a sense of belonging. Creating this sense of *belonging* for children and their families is a key element of the EYLF and FSAC. This means thinking about your environment, practices and attitudes of educators and consider the messages you give to children, families and local community. Does your service reflect different family structures and cultures as well as the wider community? Begin a conversation to identify effective and culturally appropriate processes for consultation and communication with families.

Barriers to effective partnerships

Often families *want* to be more involved in their child's EC service but they do not understand how they might do this. While some families may appear to be disinterested in their children's learning and development in your service, extensive consultation with families suggests that this is **not the case**. (Whalley, 2005).

Some common barriers to building strong partnerships with families are:

- lack of opportunity to get involved;
- fear of being judged by staff;
- fear of discrimination;
- previous negative experiences;
- time constraints;
- family stressors such as separation, divorce, and illness;
- cultural customs and traditions, for example, traditional gender roles in some cultures where the husband makes decisions on behalf of the family;
- uncertainty about the level of involvement expected by your service;
- feelings of inadequacy or low self esteem;
- lack of cultural identity in your service;
- feeling disrespected or not valued;
- not understanding what they CAN contribute;
- fear of negative feedback about their child; and
- grief or denial about their child's (known or possible) developmental or learning difficulties.

Sometimes families may not understand the information that is shared with them for reasons that include:

- language barriers;
- low literacy levels;
- learning difficulties or disabilities; and
- new parent.

Therefore, it is critical that you reflect on family needs first particularly when it comes to giving them important information about your service. Does everything have to be in written form? Why? Is this same information available in other languages? What other alternative communication methods are in place?

TIPS to break down the barriers

- Roll out the red carpet! Use your environment to give families the important message - YOU ARE WELCOME HERE.
- Be positive about families and avoid making judgements about them.
- Make your information accessible for ALL families.
- Identify goals with each family during enrolment, for example, encouraging independence (toileting, meals, self-help).
- Explain to families what your expectations are for them. Ask about and listen to their expectations too!
- Be professional at all times. Never discuss one family with another.
- Involve the whole staff team. Make sure every team member knows what is expected of them to actively promote partnership with families.
- Be flexible in your approach. Consider each family's needs and adapt your practices where it's practical or reasonable to do so.
- Use staff meetings to brainstorm ways to better engage families who may seem a little reluctant.
- Use your policies and procedures to address some of the barriers to involvement for families in your service. Outline the ways in which they may be overcome. (See the **How To** series on *Update Policies Successfully (Without the Stress)* for more information).

Partnerships with vulnerable families

It is particularly important to build strong partnerships with vulnerable families. There is undeniable evidence that quality education and care can improve life outcomes for children who come from a vulnerable or disadvantaged background. Factors which can cause families to become vulnerable include:

- Poverty – social and economic background
- Abuse (E.g. domestic, physical, emotional)
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Divorce/separation
- Illness (mental or physical)
- Migration and visa status (E.g. asylum seekers and refugees)

Children coming from vulnerable families are exposed to a wide range of poor social outcomes. Poor living conditions, financial hardship, marital breakdown, low education or literacy levels and unemployment all go hand in hand and can create high levels of stress for a child living in this type of home environment. In such circumstances, families are in “survival mode” and may not have the time or energy to actively foster their children’s learning and development at home. While it is important for you to be respectful, sensitive and non-judgemental as you build your relationship with ALL families, it is especially important with vulnerable families. (Whalley, 2005)



When working with vulnerable families

- Make every effort to develop a supportive and respectful relationship.
- Ensure that your program is flexible and supportive of family needs.
- Know what support services are available to families and share this information with them in sensitive manner (relates to NQS element 6.2.2).
- Send an open invitation to come and look around your service or speak with you.
- Offer useful, relevant snippets of information regularly on a range of different topics (promote community education when and where possible).
- Ensure a safe, relaxed environment for inclusion of all children and families.

There is no “one strategy” to build strong partnerships so it is important to think about things that may be preventing your families from developing an effective relationship with your service. By carefully considering each family’s perspective, and understanding their needs and aspirations for their child, you can develop strategies to increase their involvement and participation.



Challenges for your service

Occasionally there are challenges for your setting in developing partnerships with families. Things that may be a challenge include;

- opening service delivery and practices to scrutiny by families
- time constraints
- inconsistent staff practices in family engagement
- maintaining professional relationships and boundaries, for example, where staff have relationships with families outside of your setting
- inconsistent contact with family members, for example, where many family members drop off and/or collect the child on behalf of the family.

When you think of the children and families in your setting, you might see other challenges to building strong partnerships. In meeting these challenges, remember that the benefits that arise for the child, their family, your service and the wider community by far outweigh the difficulties. Ensure that all educators in your service are working from the same value base. Consider updating your philosophy if it does not currently reflect the importance of partnership with families.

QIP TIP

If you have thought of challenges for your service, document them in your Quality Improvement Plan now. As you develop strategies to overcome these challenges, record them too! Showing where you have come from is an integral part of your QIP.

Summary of key points

Partnership in practice:

- ✓ Spend time getting to know your families
- ✓ Make families feel welcome
- ✓ Give families relevant information
- ✓ Discover their expectations
- ✓ Respond to individual family's needs



Partnership in Action

The *Partnership in Action* section of this booklet offers ideas for educators **and** families to build strong partnerships. The *Ideas for Families* sections offered here are intended to be a resource which educators can share with their families on how they can be more involved in your service and also supporting their children's learning and development at home.

Partnerships with families underpin many aspects of service provision and are not limited to a single Quality Area. This section offers you ideas for practice across four areas where partnership with families is crucial. They are:

- 1. Supporting children's learning and development**
- 2. Sharing information**
- 3. Contributing**
- 4. Making joint decisions**

Other Elements in different Quality Areas in the NQS relate exclusively to further involvement with families (for example, QA1 - Element 1.1.4 and QA 7 – Element 7.3.5). Some Standards and Elements in the NQS require on-going collaboration with families.

The *Ideas for Families* sections can be photocopied and shared *with* your families.

1. Supporting children's learning and development

Children's learning is more meaningful when their experiences are based on their own interests, abilities, strengths and cultural values – both in the education and care setting and the home environment.

Ideas for Educators

- ✓ Update families on the topics, activities and experiences that currently interest their children. Find out what interests them at home and use this information to inform your curriculum, environment and intentional teaching strategies.
- ✓ Share examples of children's work (send portfolios home regularly for families to look at in their own time with their child).
- ✓ Provide families with both verbal and written feedback about their child, preferably in the children's home language.
- ✓ Use your notice board to let families know what play experiences interest their children and what opportunities will be offered in the coming days or week. Pictures may be a useful way of sharing this type of information.

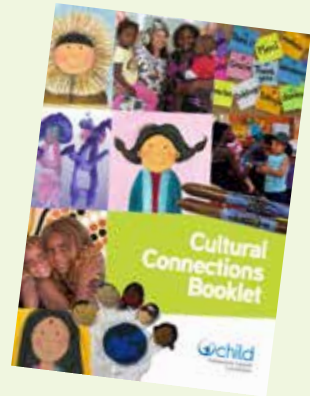
- ✓ Send home photos, scrapbooks or portfolios of the children engaged in experiences with captions describing what or how they are learning, link to the EYLF / FSAC (See NQS - Element 1.1.4).
- ✓ Invite families to share information about their *cultural* values and traditions. This is an opportunity to develop your cultural competency and think of ways to value and reflect diversity in your setting.
- ✓ Provide information sessions for families on issues affecting them or their children. This is especially important for children who are new to your setting. You might focus on how children learn through play, or understanding the EYLF or FSAC Learning Outcomes.
- ✓ Encourage families to look at the EYLF or FSAC for ideas about what they can do to support their children's learning and development at home.
- ✓ Give families the address of the ACECQA website so that they can find out more about the EYLF/FSAC and the National Quality Agenda (See <http://acecqa.gov.au/>).
- ✓ Provide information about local community resources and facilities, for example public libraries, family and parenting support programs, health services or initiatives and immunisation programs.
- ✓ Invite families to spend time in the setting to see the practices of staff and learn what their children do.
- ✓ Provide useful information in your newsletter including words of songs and rhymes, important dates, information updates (policies, procedures), snippets of theory and fun ideas for low cost home activities.
- ✓ Share resources with families to support children's learning and development at home. Set up a system for families to borrow resources such as CDs, books, and musical instruments.



An example of communicating children's learning to family.

What resources might you share with families?

- ✓ Simple tip sheets. Provide these in home languages where possible. (See *Cultural Connections Booklet* by Child Australia for links to translation services)
- ✓ DVDs, easy to read books, information and websites on child development and recent childhood research
- ✓ Prop boxes that accompany stories and rhymes
- ✓ Learning kits with ideas for activities
- ✓ Musical instruments



Ideas for families

- ✓ Spend time talking to your child (from birth).
- ✓ Ask your child's Educators for suggestions of activities and things to do at home with your child.
- ✓ Read about recent research and the messages for families to support children's development. (See *Engaging Families in the Early Child Development Story* available from www.mceecdya.edu.au).
- ✓ Involve your child in everyday activities like cooking, shopping, gardening, travelling by car or bus. Talk to your child about what they see, hear, and smell, and how they feel.
- ✓ Allow time and opportunities for children to explore and use their senses – to see, taste, smell, hear and touch (especially for babies).
- ✓ Encourage early numeracy and literacy skills through play experiences at home
- ✓ Sing songs, play games and tell stories regularly.
- ✓ Visit www.natureplaywa.org.au for ideas on how you can promote nature play at home.
- ✓ Limit the amount of time spent watching television.
- ✓ Ask educators questions about what your child enjoys doing at the service.
- ✓ Look at the Early Years learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming) or the Framework for School Age Care (My Time, Our Place) for other ways to support your child's learning and development (available from www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework www.education.gov.au/my-time-our-place-framework-school-age-care-australia)

2. Sharing information

The saying “a stitch in time, saves nine” applies to the information you share with families. It is important to think carefully about the information that families need, and the best way to give it to them. Timely and regular information can prevent misunderstandings and difficulties arising between families and your setting. A common example is families not knowing or not adhering to your healthy eating policy when bringing food from home. By providing information to families on a regular basis, and explaining your policy, you can help them understand that your “rules” are designed to ensure children’s safety, health and well-being.

Essential information for families

To help families understand your service, have a thorough family orientation where you explain:

- Your philosophy, values and beliefs
- Your curriculum – highlighting the importance of play in supporting children’s learning and development
- Service contact details and hours of operation
- Your facilities
- Adult to child ratios
- Policies and procedures affecting families such as behaviour guidance, healthy eating, settling in (see NQS Elements 6.1.2, 6.1.3)
- How families can be involved in the setting and your expectations about their involvement
- The names of staff and who they can talk to about their child

Ensure that families have signed to say they have understood this information.

Think about providing this information in alternative ways. For example, a non English speaking family may find it extremely difficult to interpret your written handbook. You could translate written information for families into their home language, use interpreters or even photos to improve communication. If families have difficulty understanding your policies or adhering to required practices, they may not fully understand them or see the need for them. Similarly, it is unrealistic to expect families to read your entire set of policies or family handbook all in one go. Explain simply what you do, and why you do it. (Stagger information over time).



National Quality Standard

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Element 6.1.1 - There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.

Element 6.1.3 - Current information about the service is available to families.

“Culturally competent educators acknowledge the diversity of communities and are inclusive of all family groups. This will ultimately impact on the wellbeing of children and families as a whole.” (The Educators Guide to the EYLF, p.17)

(For more information on working with CaLD Families – see *Welcoming Conversations with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) Families*, Child Australia.)

For more information on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families contact your local IPSU provider and visit www.snaicc.asn.au

Ideas for educators

- ✓ Have regular informal conversations with families.
- ✓ Use phone calls to stay in touch with families. This is convenient for many families as it overcomes time constraints. Don't neglect face to face communication for electronic communication.
- ✓ Use text messages to remind families of special events.
- ✓ Have a clear and concise voice message that can be accessed after hours or at family convenience.
- ✓ Let families know if there is scheduled time to talk with a staff member either in person or by telephone. Remember that it is better to have a face to face conversation, especially if you have any concerns.
- ✓ Make extra efforts to reach vulnerable or hard to reach families.
- ✓ Make special efforts to engage fathers in their child's learning and development.
- ✓ Arrange events that encourage families to network with each other and the wider community.
- ✓ Collaborate with local adult education groups and make their literature available to families.
- ✓ Provide information on local community resources including parenting support agencies, local support groups.

- ✓ Discreetly share information about agencies able to provide financial assistance to families experiencing hardship.
- ✓ Invite a public/community health nurse to visit.
- ✓ Network within your local community to learn about community services and resources, particularly any new programs and services.
- ✓ Organise events like service birthdays and invite existing and past families (where possible) as this will help strengthen the relationship with families as well as providing them with an opportunity to network, share experiences and expertise.

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Element 6.2.2 – Current information is available to families about community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.



Ideas for families

- ✓ Talk with educators about your child's daily experiences at drop off or pick up time.
- ✓ Notice displays of your child's work, or photographs of them engaged in activities. Talk with your child and the educators about them.
- ✓ Tell educators if your child is excited about something they did in the setting. Perhaps you could try it out at home.
- ✓ If you are "time poor", think about using a diary for daily communication with your child's educators and make appointments for personal meetings.
- ✓ Share information that affects your child's mood or behaviour, for example, the death of a pet, changes in residence, family illness.
- ✓ Share your culture and traditions with educators to build their knowledge of different cultural values and help your child develop a sense of belonging in the setting.
- ✓ Talk with educators about your child rearing practices and preferences - especially where they differ to those of the service (refer to their policies and procedures).
- ✓ Share with educators any concerns you may have about your child's development. Share information about your child's needs and specialist advice and equipment that may assist them. For example, speech and language strategies, mobility aids, visual supports.
- ✓ Share information about the support your child might need to join in activities or engage in their environment.
- ✓ Ask educators or management to explain policies and procedures if you do not understand them.
- ✓ If you are unsure of anything, ask for more information and share how you would like to receive this information.
- ✓ Share your skills and abilities to help new families settle in, for example, offer to translate or explain procedures to families who share your home language.

NOTE: All information shared by families and educators is confidential however, families and educators must be aware that relevant information can and will be disclosed to legitimate authorities where there are child protection issues.

3. Contributing

To build a quality environment, families must be valued and involved as equal and respected partners who, together with staff, contribute their skills, knowledge and ideas.

Ideas for Educators

- ✓ Invite feedback from families and involve them in reviewing policies and procedures.
- ✓ Invite family input into your Quality Improvement Plan. Ask their opinion of your service's strengths and areas for improvement. Measure their feedback against a different NQS Quality Area every few weeks or months.
- ✓ Reflect on what family feedback tells you about aspects of service operations that families may not fully understand.

Ideas for families

- ✓ Share a learning activity with the children in the EC setting, for example, playing an instrument, painting, woodwork, origami, gardening, playing a game, demonstrating a cooking activity or telling a story in your own home language. (Share this with Educators as they may be unaware of your skills and talents).
- ✓ Come in and talk to the children about your work or favourite hobby.
- ✓ Offer your skills, for example, help develop an outdoor play space or garden, assist in event organisation.
- ✓ Share your knowledge of the local community with the staff, children and other families.



4. Making joint decisions

Families bring important information and perspectives to the decisions made by EC services that affect their children's learning and development. To contribute effectively to service decisions, families must understand what is expected of them and their role in decision-making.

For Educators

- ✓ How can I involve families in making important decisions which affect their children?
- ✓ What structures does my service have in place? (Management Committee, Board of Management, Parent Advisory Committee, family reference group)
- ✓ What can I do to encourage families to get involved in our service?

For families

- ✓ How can I be more involved in decisions that affect my child?

National Quality Standard

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

6.1.2 – Families have opportunities to be involved in the service and be involved in service decisions.

What next?

Building positive and caring relationships with children and their families is absolutely *necessary* if children are to feel confident and secure in your setting. (NQS, Quality Area 5). Working in partnership with families assists you to provide a quality inclusive environment where children are cared about, and feel physically and emotionally safe. In an environment where relationships are central to everything you do, a child's learning and development can be truly nurtured and supported.

One way to enhance outcomes for children is to support and improve the ways that families function, reduce their social isolation and help them connect with the wider community. Australian migration patterns, changing family structures and our growing urban sprawl result in many people relocating to new areas where they have few existing networks or social supports. Your setting may be the primary support and link to local community for isolated families. Quality services work collaboratively with families **and** community services to improve family wellbeing.

Building partnerships with families is a dynamic and ongoing process. For these partnerships to be strong, you need a “whole team” approach. There is no doubt that children's wellbeing and development is best supported when the major influences in their life work together to meet the child's needs and also to provide children with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

When educators respect the unique strengths of each family, collaborative partnerships are strengthened and the continuity of learning between homes and educational settings is enhanced. (Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Harrisons, C., & Morandini, C., 2003).

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Useful websites

- www.acecqa.gov.au – Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
- www.pscalliance.org.au - PSC Alliance
- www.childaustralia.org.au - Child Inclusive Learning and Development Australia (Child Australia)
- www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au – Early Childhood Australia

Contacts

For information on jurisdiction specific provisions that apply, contact:

Australian Capital Territory:

Children's Policy and Regulation Unit
Community Services Directorate
GPO Box 158
Canberra City ACT 2601
Phone: (02) 6207 1114
Fax: (02) 6207 1128
Email: OCYFSCchildrensServices@act.gov.au
Website: www.dhcs.act.gov.au

New South Wales:

NSW Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate
Department of Education and Communities
Locked Bag 5107
Parramatta NSW 2124
Phone: 1800 619 113
Fax: (02) 8633 1810
Email: ececd@det.nsw.edu.au
Website: www.dec.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory:

Quality Education and Care Northern Territory
Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 4821
Darwin NT 0801
Phone: (08) 8999 3561
Fax (08) 8999 5677
Email: qualityecnt.det@nt.gov.au

Queensland:

Department of Education and Training
PO Box 15033
City East QLD 4002
Phone: 1800 637 711
Fax: (07) 3234 0310
Email: ecec@deta.qld.gov.au
Website: www.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood

South Australia:

Department of Education and Children's Services
Licensing and Standards
Level 15, 31 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000
Phone: (08) 8226 0085
Fax: (08) 8226 1815
Email: decchildcarelicensing@sa.gov.au
Website: www.decd.sa.gov.au/ybsproviders/

Tasmania:

Department of Education
GPO Box 169
Hobart TAS 7001
Phone: 1300 135 513
Fax: (03) 6233 6042
Email: childcare.comment@education.tas.gov.au
Website: www.childcare.tas.gov.au

Victoria:

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
GPO Box 4367,
Melbourne, VIC 3001
Phone: 1300 307 415
Fax: (03) 9651 3586
Email: licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au
Website: www.education.vic.gov.au

Western Australia:

Department for Communities
Childcare Licensing and Standards Unit
Level 1, 111 Wellington Street
East Perth WA 6004
Phone: (08) 6210 3333 or 1800 199 383
Fax: (08) 6210 3300
Email: ccluinfo@communities.wa.gov.au
Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Professional Support Coordinators National Alliance
www.pscalliance.org.au

Australian Capital Territory
Communities@Work
www.actpsc.com.au

New South Wales
Children's Services Central
www.cscentral.org.au

Northern Territory
Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Queensland
Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc.
www.pscq.org.au

South Australia
Lady Gowrie Child Centre
www.pscsa.org.au

Victoria
Gowrie Victoria
www.gowrievictoria.org.au

Western Australia
Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Tasmania
Lady Gowrie Tasmania
www.psctas.org.au