



Putting
Children
First®

NCAC

Embracing quality child care

A collection of NCAC's
Family Factsheets

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A message from NCAC

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It's a new, exciting yet challenging experience when you're a parent who is thinking about using child care — especially if it's the first time that you've considered entrusting your child with someone other than yourself, a relative or family friend.

Your child care journey often begins when choosing a child care service. You may be asking questions like: How do I find a child care service? How much will it cost? How will I know if the service is safe, clean and comfortable? What will my child learn? Who will be caring for my child? Are they suitable and qualified to work with children?

We suggest you read NCAC's *Choosing and using quality child care: A guide for families*. It may answer many of the questions you have about what quality child care looks like and the types of things you should ask a service when choosing child care.

NCAC has produced a series of *Family Factsheets*. These *Factsheets* can provide you and your family with information about aspects of child care including advice and tips which will assist you to prepare for and recognise quality child care practice. This booklet includes extracts from some of these *Factsheets*.

We also encourage you to visit our website (www.ncac.gov.au) where you can access the full version of our *Family Factsheets*.

Remember, all of your questions about child care are important. This booklet will only answer some of them and we encourage you to talk with your service about your child's care.

A quality child care service is one that works with you to ensure that your child is safe, happy and protected; and that you feel confident with the decision you made to use child care.



Using child care

Child care professionals and families share a common goal — for children to be cared for in safe, happy and supportive environments.

Children benefit most when these environments include trusting and supportive partnerships.

Quality child care services are places where child care professionals build strong relationships with children — and support each child's learning and development through positive experiences.

The relationship between you and your child care service is also crucial to your child's wellbeing.

This means that the partnerships between families and child care professionals are unique. They should be built on trust and respect, and are characterised by active communication, consultation, and dependent upon the specific needs and interests of each person.

The following two *Factsheets* in this booklet will help to build and support these partnerships when using child care:

- Building a partnership with your child care service
- Dressing for child care.

Other *Factsheets* in the series can be found on our website and include:

- Bridging the gap between home and child care
- Preparing for child care
- Settling your child into care.



Building a partnership with your child care service

Children's learning and wellbeing are enhanced when families and child care professionals work together in partnership to promote the best outcomes for children. Quality care occurs when child care professionals understand each child's family, culture and community, and when they use this knowledge to provide experiences in ways that are meaningful to the child.

What is a partnership?

A partnership between families and child care professionals involves sharing information, ideas, concerns and questions about the child. Developing an effective partnership requires families and child care professionals to take responsibility for providing information to each other, and to consider and respect each other's views and ideas.

Creating a partnership takes time and effort and occurs where two parties share 'an influence' or 'a power'. In child care services this means that decisions about the child result from discussion and negotiation between families and professionals. This partnership is strengthened where each party is supportive and appreciative of each other's role and influence in the child's life.

It is important to remember that developing a partnership does not require families to 'do things' in the service, such as joining a parent committee, or helping with fundraising activities. Partnerships are about relationships rather than activities.

What are the benefits of partnerships?

When families and child care professionals work in partnership, their combined knowledge of the child leads to decision making that genuinely reflects the needs and interests of the child. Working closely with families also allows child care professionals to gain a clear picture of the child and their family, which supports them to plan experiences that are meaningful to the child.

What is parent participation?

Participation can be an important way for families and child care services to build a relationship. Families are invited to contribute to child care services in many ways. Some families may be able to assume a role on the service's parent committee; others may contribute by offering resources, equipment or their time by taking part in the service's program.

How do services support partnerships with families?

- Families are given clear information about their child by the service including regular information about their child's experiences. They can participate in decision making about their child and aspects of the service that will affect their child such as policies and procedures.
- Families are invited to share information about their child's experiences and interests outside of the service.
- Families are encouraged to discuss ideas, issues or concerns that they have with child care professionals and/or asked to provide feedback about the service, and this is valued and acted upon.
- The service has an 'open door' policy, in which families are welcome to visit the service at any time.

How do services share information with families?

It is important that families are given clear information about the service's philosophy and operations. This background information can assist families to feel confident to be involved in decision making about their child's care and education.

Services also need to provide families with information about the service. This can be provided through newsletters, noticeboards, meetings, family resource libraries and family handbooks, and daily information exchange with families when children are dropped off or collected from the service.

Ultimately, families should be made to feel that their contribution to the partnership with child care professionals is sought and valued. Families should never feel pressured or obligated to be involved in ways that are unsuitable to their circumstances, needs or beliefs.

The following questions may assist families to think about the effectiveness of their partnership with their child care service:

- Do I feel welcome to contribute to my child's care and experiences?
- Do I believe that the child care professionals listen to and understand my concerns or ideas?
- What opportunities do I have to provide the child care professionals with information about my child?
- How do I find out about my child's day, relationships and unusual circumstances/events?
- Does the service ask for my opinions or feedback about its operations and decisions that affect my child?
- Have I been given information about the service's philosophy, policies and procedures?



Dressing your child for care

The clothes your child wears to child care can make a difference to the quality of their experiences there and can even affect how and how much your child gets involved in the experiences at child care. What they wear can also influence your child's health, safety, comfort, and wellbeing.

Temperature — it is important that children are not over or under dressed, and that clothing suits the temperature. The smaller children are, the more easily they can become chilled or overheated. Natural fibres such as cotton are generally cooler than acrylic fabrics. It is a good idea to send spare clothes for unexpected changes of weather, especially during change of season, when the weather can be unpredictable.

Footwear — children need to wear safe, comfortable shoes that fit well. Shoes must provide support as well as protection for the feet. Shoes with soles that grip make climbing and other physical activities easier and safer for children. Shoes that give little protection or that have raised heels or soles can cause accidents.

Sun protection — children need protection from the sun. Tightly woven fabrics such as t-shirt material, long sleeves and long trousers offer good protection. Hats are essential and should have soft brims to allow for movement and to provide for maximum protection. Talk to your child care professionals about the clothing they would like you to provide to protect your child from the sun and the information in their sun protection policy.

Clothing and accessories — the design and fit of clothes and accessories can affect your child's safety, and younger children tend to be more vulnerable to clothing related safety hazards. For example, long hems can cause tripping, and items such as necklaces, long drawstrings and ribbons can also be risks. Children can also be sensitive to 'scratchy' fabrics, and some may have an allergic reaction to certain treatments on clothes, including particular detergents.

Respect for children

Showing respect for children and appreciation of their individuality is important to their self-concept. You show respect for your child when you allow them to make some decisions about the clothing that they wear by offering them choices from several acceptable options.

Young children sometimes have definite clothing preferences. For example, they may insist on wearing a particular colour, refuse to wear certain colours or want to wear the same item of clothing for days on end. You will need to decide what really matters about your child's clothing. If your child succeeds in putting on a shirt without help, it matters less if it is back to front or inside out than it matters that your child has succeeded in helping to dress themselves.

Dressing to support children's play and learning

Some types of clothing can tend to hinder children's participation in some activities. When clothes fit properly and are not too loose or tight, children can move freely and comfortably and participate in experiences.

The clothes children wear can affect the development of their self-help skills and independence. For example, trousers that fit comfortably and have an elastic waist are easier for young children to pull down and up than tighter fitting clothes, or ones with zips and studs. Tops with large necks, cardigans, slip-on shoes or shoes with Velcro fasteners are easier for children who want to dress themselves. Bigger buttons or toggles are also easier for children to manage than small buttons or press studs.

Child care professionals may make requests about your child's clothing, including that you:

- label all clothing with your child's name
- provide spare clothes in case your child has an accident (especially during the time when your child is learning to use the toilet) or if there is a change in the weather
- supply one or more sun hats
- encourage your child to dress appropriately for the weather.

It is important for the service to know what you think and about what matters to you in relation to your child's clothing. For example, there may be cultural and religious issues related to the clothing your child wears that child care professionals need to be aware of.

When differences arise, get them out in the open. Honest, respectful, two-way communication can help families and child care professionals learn about each other's perspective, and can increase the knowledge and understanding of both. Working together with child care professionals at your service will help to ensure that clothing and dressing practices support the best outcomes for your child.



Programs and experiences

Children are fascinated with their world.

They want to explore it, make sense of it and have control over it.

Time to play, share ideas, interact with others and make connections with the environment are all important elements to children's learning.

As children experiment with language, relationships, ideas, equipment and materials they learn about themselves, the world they live in and how they can contribute to their community.

This makes the planning and programming of children's experiences, and the choosing of resources to support those experiences, an important component of a child care service.

The following two *Factsheets* in this booklet will help you understand the importance of programs and experiences in child care:

- Value of play
- Programs for children in child care.

Other *Factsheets* in the series can be found on our website and include:

- Quality child care for babies
- Quality child care for toddlers
- Quality child care for preschool age children
- Quality child care for school age children
- Transition to school
- Including children with additional needs in child care.



The value of play

Professionals working in child care may tell families that they use a 'play based' approach for children's learning and development. Families may be unsure what this approach is and why it is considered to be an appropriate way to provide learning experiences for children.

Learning through play is accepted by child care professionals and education experts as one of the most important ways that children learn and develop.

Play is an activity where children show their remarkable ability for exploration, imagination and decision making. While play is often described as 'children's work' it is intensely enjoyable for them. The type of play children engage in and its purposes change over the course of childhood from infancy to adolescence.

Parents do not generally have to make children play or provide incentives to play. This is because children seem to have a natural urge to play and playing brings a level of pleasure and interest which means it can be maintained without external rewards.

How does play support children's development and learning?

Physical development — this is active play using large and small muscles such as climbing, running, ball games, digging, jumping, and dancing. It supports children's overall health and sense of wellbeing, physical growth, appreciation for the benefits of active lifestyles and skills for independence in self-help such as dressing or feeding.

Social and emotional development — dramatic and imaginative play including dressing up or role play can help to develop positive social and emotional skills and values by providing opportunities for children to:

- practise how to work with others, learn negotiation skills, and make choices and decisions which are life skills
- develop confidence through experiencing feelings of success in play
- learn to control emotions, reduce impulsive behaviour, or reduce stress as they act out feelings and events that might be worrying them
- develop qualities such as empathy and fairness as they learn to get along with other children.

Intellectual development — playing alone or with others and with toys such as construction sets, dolls, digital games, and pretend play supports children's intellectual development because their brains are very active in this type of play. From this play children learn:

- problem solving skills
- the power of imagination and creativity
- concepts such as shapes, colours, measurement
- dispositions such as concentration and persistence which are important for life long learning.

Literacy and numeracy development — play supports literacy and numeracy development because it requires thinking, language, interactions, and exploration. Specific literacy or numeracy skills and understandings include:

- increased understanding of words and their use
- listening and speaking skills
- writing skills through scribbling, painting, drawing
- how stories work (plot, characters, structure, purpose)
- learning that objects can stand for something else (a block can be a symbol for a telephone) which is foundation learning for formal reading, spelling and numeracy because letters, words or numerals are part of symbol systems
- learning that letters, words, symbols, numerals and signs have a purpose and are meaningful to others.

How can families contribute to children's learning through play?

- Sharing information about children's interests which helps child care professionals plan play experiences around those interests.
- Being playful with children at home because play is an excellent way to foster close bonds as well as for learning.
- Discussing play based learning with child care professionals in order to understand why it is important for children at every stage of their development.
- Advocating with child care professionals for safe and interesting play spaces in local communities.



Programs for children in child care

A child care program provides children with a variety of experiences that are designed to promote and extend their development. A good program is responsive to the needs and developmental ranges of all children in the group. To plan programs that cater for individual children, child care professionals need to get to know each child well by observing them and learning about their interests and experiences through conversations with them and their families.

All planned experiences should also recognise the value of play in children's learning and development, with a strong focus on planning experiences that are based on children's current interests and strengths.

While all child care services are required to plan for children, the way this is done will look different in each service. In some services the program will be a written plan. Other services will plan for children through a constant process of thinking clearly about what experiences are being provided for children and why. Regardless of whether or not they are written, all good quality programs plan for children in ways that build upon children's previous experiences, interests and successes.

Programs are not about child care professionals planning 'lessons' or doing formal 'teaching'. Quality programs in child care are developed to support and guide children in all areas of their development in ways that take into account each child's interests, strengths, experiences and needs.

What should a program include?

There is no set way a program must look. However, all programs should involve planning for all areas of children's development, including their:

- physical skills (large and small muscles)
- language and literacy skills
- personal and interpersonal skills
- creativity and the expressive arts
- problem solving, thinking and mathematical abilities.

Depending upon the age or stage of each child's development, there may be a different focus for the experiences that are planned for children.

How can families find out about the service's program?

The best way for families to find out about the program for their child is to speak with child care professionals in the service. Some useful questions that families can ask include:

- What activities and experiences are provided for children in the service?
- Are these written down, and if so, can families see these plans?
- How is the daily program displayed for families?
- How do child care professionals in the service decide what activities, materials and experiences are provided for children?
- How do child care professionals find out whether children are benefiting from and enjoying the program being provided?
- How can families be involved in planning and evaluating programs for children?

Many services will explain the program to families during the enrolment and/or orientation process. Other services may share this information with families at a later stage, to avoid overwhelming them with too much information when they start using child care. However, all families have the right to seek information from the service about the program that is planned for their child. Services should also share information with families about their child's development, achievements and any needs that may be identified.

How can families be involved in planning the program for their child?

A good program will incorporate information from families about their child's interests and experiences outside of the child care service. Some of the ways that services may seek this information include:

- daily conversations with families at the start and/or end of the day
- formal meetings with families
- communication books that are used for families and the service to exchange information about the child at home and in care (these are more commonly used for babies and younger children)
- daily diaries that families can write in
- a space on the written program where families can write down information about their child's current interests or special experiences outside of care.



Health and safety

Many of the habits relating to health and safety that people use throughout their lives are learned during the early childhood years.

Handwashing, using the toilet, looking after teeth, learning how to handle food safely, choosing healthy eating options, wearing protective clothing such as hats outdoors, and having opportunities to rest and recuperate.

A quality child care service provides a learning environment where careful guidance and role modelling by child care professionals can help children become competent, independent and develop valuable life skills.

It is also crucial to understand that child care is group care — this means that there is a higher probability of infections spreading in child care than in the home.

A quality child care service implements effective policies and procedures to reduce the risk of cross infection, promote immunisation and exclude unwell children from child care when necessary.

The following three *Factsheets* in this booklet will help you understand the importance of health and safety in child care:

- Hygiene in child care
- Nutrition in child care
- Illness in child care.

The other *Factsheet* in the series can be found on our website:

- Managing children's special health needs in child care.



Hygiene in child care

Good hygiene in child care services is essential for reducing the risk of cross infection and helps children to develop hygiene habits that they will use throughout their lives. Families should be able to see standards of hygiene used by child care professionals that minimise the spread of infection. Families can also assist services to maintain a hygienic environment by practising good hygiene with their children at home.

Why is good hygiene important in child care?

Infection can be spread through direct physical contact between people, coughing and sneezing or from contact with surfaces and objects. Children in child care come into contact with many other children and adults, and with toys, furniture, food and eating utensils. This high degree of physical contact with people and the environment creates a risk that children will be exposed to and spread infectious illnesses.

What hygiene methods should child care services be using?

Families should expect to see a range of hygiene methods being used by services that minimise cross infection. These will include procedures and specific practices that are carried out by child care professionals and children on a daily basis. Many of these should also be supported by written hygiene policies and procedures. Hygiene strategies that services should be using include:

- supporting adults to use thorough washing and drying hands
- encouraging children to follow simple rules of hygiene such as handwashing and basic dental care
- ensuring equipment and toys are regularly cleaned and maintained
- keeping facilities such as bathrooms, kitchens, sleep and rest areas, and play areas clean
- using hygienic toileting and nappy changing methods
- having hygienic procedures for wiping children's noses
- displaying clear written signs about the service's hygiene procedures such as handwashing, nappy changing and toileting

- implementing hygienic food handling, preparation and storage, and rubbish removal
- providing written information for families about the service's hygiene practices and about recommended immunisation schedules for children
- developing clear procedures for handling and disposing of body fluids such as blood and any contaminated items such as used wound dressings
- excluding ill children from care
- encouraging families to keep unwell children at home.

How is children's hygiene encouraged?

Child care professionals can reduce the spread of infection by encouraging children to follow simple rules of hygiene. Children's self-help skills can also be promoted by supporting them to develop hygienic habits. Hygiene should be reinforced at the service through the children's program as well as daily routines such as mealtimes, nappy changing and toileting.

Child care professionals should be supporting children's hygiene by role modelling hygienic practices such as thorough handwashing and drying and using serving utensils to handle food. By setting hygiene rules with children and providing positive feedback and support, child care professionals can help children to develop personal hygiene skills.

What can families do to support service hygiene?

Families can greatly assist their child care service by following simple hygiene procedures when they are at the service and by using good hygiene at home with children. One of the best ways to stop illness from spreading is through thorough handwashing and drying. By washing hands with their child upon arrival and departure from the service, families can minimise infections that are brought into and leave the service. Thorough handwashing and drying at home can also reinforce good hygiene habits with children and minimise cross infection.

Other helpful hygiene practices that families can do include:

- reminding your child about when they should wash their hands. For example, before eating, after toileting and after touching an animal.
- providing your child with a supply of spare clothes from home in case of toileting accidents and food and liquid spills
- keeping your child at home when they are ill until they are no longer contagious and are well enough to return to care.



Nutrition in child care

Promoting children's health is an important aspect of quality child care. Some child care services provide all or most of children's meals while they are in care, while others may only supply snacks, or require families to provide all of their child's food. Your child care service has a responsibility to promote good nutrition for your child while they are in care, and they should provide your family with current information about healthy eating.

Why is nutrition important for my child?

It is important for both services and families to supply children in care with food that meets their nutritional needs. By providing children with the nutrients that their bodies need to grow, they are able to develop and reach their physical and mental potential. Alternatively, poor food choices and unhealthy eating habits adopted during childhood can lead to a range of diseases and health related problems in later life.

How can my child's nutritional needs be met?

The National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia (NHMRC) recommends that children and adolescents maintain a varied diet which includes the five main food groups. According to the NHMRC, children and adolescents need to be encouraged to eat plenty of:

- vegetables, fruit and legumes
- cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles)
- lean meat, fish, poultry
- milk, yoghurt, cheese.

The NHMRC also advises that children be encouraged to drink plenty of water throughout the day and to choose water as a preferred drink.

Can I breastfeed my child in care?

The use of expressed breast milk for feeding babies can easily be accommodated in services when there are clear policies and procedures for the correct storage, warming and provision of expressed breast milk to children. Some services may also be able to support mothers to return to the service to breastfeed their child throughout the day.

It is essential that child care professionals recognise that families have the right to decide whether they will breastfeed their child while they are in care, and each family's decision should be accepted and respected.

How can the service help me to provide healthy food for my child?

When families provide all or most of children's food while they are in care, services can provide families with information to assist them to make healthy food choices for their children. The service's healthy eating policy should provide families with clear guidelines about the types of foods and snacks that are appropriate. Some children may have very specific food requirements due to issues such as allergies/food intolerance, cultural background or their family's lifestyle preferences. All child care services need to be prepared to work with families to make sure that individual children's needs are met.

How will positive meal time experiences be provided for my child?

Services need to encourage the idea of meal times as an opportunity for social interaction in a relaxed atmosphere. Strategies that can promote positive mealtime experiences include:

- providing children with an interesting variety of foods, and allowing them to make choices about what they eat
- allowing children plenty of time to eat and to interact with others
- encouraging children to help with preparing the eating area, and to assist with serving food and drinks and tidying up after the meal
- ensuring that child care professionals take time to eat and talk with children during mealtimes in a sociable way
- involving children in planning menus and in food preparation
- including foods and eating rituals that are reflective of diverse cultures.

Tips for providing healthy food for children

- Choose a variety of foods, using the Healthy Eating Pyramid as a guide.
- Mix and match healthy bread fillings such as ham, chicken, beef, tofu, eggs, cheese, tuna, salmon, tomato, celery, carrots, sprouts, lettuce, cream cheese spreads and sandwich pastes.
- Provide a variety of healthy snacks, including fresh fruit, cheese cubes, vegetable sticks, healthy dips, rice cakes, pikelets and dried fruits.
- Provide water bottles, which can double as cool packs by being frozen and placed in the lunch box.



Illness in child care

Children in child care come into contact with many other children and adults and in this environment they can contract infectious illnesses. It is not possible to completely prevent the spread of all illnesses in child care, and it is likely that you need to keep your child away from child care at some point due to illness.

It can be difficult for families to know when their child is sick enough to stay at home. Families can experience problems when trying to take time off work or study to care for an ill child at home. They can also experience guilt when they send a child to care who is not well. However, it is important that families maintain a focus not only on the wellbeing of their own child, but also upon the wellbeing of other children and the child care professionals in the service.

Families should follow their service's policy for the exclusion of ill children. Child care services also need to implement specific strategies to minimise the spread of infectious illnesses.

Why should my child be excluded from care when they are ill?

Health and licensing authorities recommend, and in some cases require, child care services to exclude ill children from care. For example, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) provides child care services with guidelines for the exclusion of children with specific illnesses. Child care services are also required to inform their state or territory health authority if a child at the service has a notifiable disease.

Services will usually have a policy for the exclusion of sick children. To stop illnesses spreading, services implement specific hygiene procedures such as hand washing, cleaning toys and sanitising surfaces. They also encourage families to immunise their children.

All children, staff and families at the child care service benefit from the practice of excluding ill children. Unwell children require additional individual comfort and attention that is difficult to provide in a child care environment. Ill children are also better able to recover if they can rest and be cared for at home. In addition, the infection is less likely to spread to other children, families and child care professionals.

What illnesses will my child be excluded for?

To decide when a child needs to be excluded from child care, it is recommended that services follow the national exclusion guidelines provided by NHMRC's publication *Staying Healthy in Child Care: Preventing Infectious Diseases in Child Care* (4th edition). Families can download a copy from NHMRC's website (www.nhmrc.gov.au). This resource also includes a list of symptoms that may assist families to identify whether their child may have an infectious illness.

How can I protect my child from becoming ill in child care?

Immunisation is the most effective way to prevent some serious childhood illnesses. Services should have information available for families on child immunisation. Families can also contact their local doctor or find out about the Australian Government's Immunise Australia Program by visiting the following website: www.immunise.health.gov.au

How do I know if my child is not well enough to go to child care?

A child should not attend child care if they have an infectious illness or if they have an illness that prevents them from comfortably participating in activities at the service. Sometimes children have ongoing medical needs that can be accommodated in the child care service such as asthma or anaphylaxis. In these situations, services usually document the child's general health and behaviour status at enrolment.

What happens if my child gets ill at the child care service?

Child care professionals are not medical practitioners and are not able to diagnose whether or not a child has an infectious illness. However, if an infectious illness is suspected, the child care service may ask the family to collect their child from care as soon as possible or not to bring the child to child care. They may also ask the family to seek medical advice. Sometimes the service will request that the family obtains a medical certificate stating that the child is no longer infectious before they allow the child to return to the service.

Do I still have to pay for child care when my child is absent?

When children do not attend child care due to illness, it is usual practice for services to charge the normal attendance fee. This is generally because child care services need to plan their budget according to a certain occupancy or usage rate over a set period of time. The loss of fees due to unexpected absences can impact significantly upon the service's operation. If a family has difficulty paying fees they should discuss this with the child care service director or operator.



Behaviours in child care

Children face many challenges throughout their lives. These include learning acceptable behaviours and being able to regulate their behaviours in social settings or when interacting with others.

Social relationships are an important source of learning for children. Over time, these interactions enable children to develop attachments and empathy, and have an understanding of socially acceptable behaviour. They also help children to understand turn-taking and conflict resolution.

Taking a positive approach to behaviour guidance means trying to understand why a child behaves in certain ways. It also means encouraging acceptable forms of behaviour by using strategies that build children's confidence and self-esteem.

Children need to be supported and guided so that they can learn to manage their own behaviours. Families need to be consulted in relation to the specific behaviour guidance strategies the child care service endorses.

A quality child care service responds to children's emotions and interests, As well as comforting children when they are distressed, unhappy or fearful, and helping children identify and deal with feelings such as anger, frustration and jealousy.

The following three *Factsheets* in this booklet will help you understand the importance of guiding children's behaviours in child care:

- Guiding children's behaviour in child care
- Biting in child care
- Managing bullying in child care.



Guiding children's behaviour in child care

Guiding children's behaviour can be challenging for both families and child care professionals. For children, learning to take control of their own emotions and responses, and understanding how their behaviour impacts on others is a life long learning process. It is important that families and child care professionals work together to support children to develop these skills.

Why does children's behaviour need to be guided?

Each child is unique and they have different temperaments. Some are active while others are quiet; some adapt easily to change while others resist or react uneasily to change. Some give clear signals about what they want and need while others are harder to read. A sensitive behaviour guidance approach requires awareness of the uniqueness of each child when supporting them to develop positive and prosocial behaviour.

There are many factors that contribute to children's behaviour. These factors include routines, the physical environment, interactions between children and adults, inadequate rest and any medical conditions. Factors at home might include the birth of a sibling or moving house.

Children will require different levels of support and adult intervention at different times. A toddler who is not yet able to verbalise and uses biting as a way of exerting some control over their environment will need a different level of support to an older child who demonstrates inconsiderate behaviour by interrupting other children's play to gain attention.

However, all children have a great capacity to learn and need opportunities to practice their problem solving and negotiation skills and they can be supported to find a way and come up with their own solutions. Each situation is seen as a 'teachable moment' where children can learn, develop empathy, understand the consequences of their behaviour and actions and build their own strategies for responding to challenging situations.

Why do children need adult support?

Adults need to support children by anticipating where they may have difficulties, preventing situations from occurring, reminding children of what they can do and creating a supportive environment which is inclusive and accepting of individual differences and capabilities. This would be

no different to what child care professionals do to support children in any other area of learning. It requires time, patience, active listening skills and a commitment to supporting children to problem solve rather than simply directing their behaviour and actions.

How should children's behaviour be guided?

The behaviour guidance approach is a two way learning process that involves both the child and the adult. It is not something that adults 'do' to children. This approach is empowering and respectful of children. The guidance approach also recognises that a child displaying inappropriate or inconsiderate behaviour at times is 'normal'. It emphasises that the motivation for behaving considerably comes from within the child.

Developing positive relationships with children is the most powerful tool that child care professionals have guiding their behaviour. It is the day-to-day interactions that lay the foundations for the child's development of self, attitudes, values and behaviour patterns. In your service you should see child care professionals:

- being consistent, fair and understanding and supporting and guiding all children's behaviour positively
- recognising that their own values and stresses will affect how they respond to children's behaviour
- setting an example by being in control of their own emotions, being clear about their expectations and giving positive instructions
- minimising circumstances that may lead to challenging behaviour occurring by ensuring that there are enough resources to engage and challenge children and that the program meets individuals' needs and interests
- ensuring that noise levels do not interrupt purposeful activity and that individual children's needs for food, sleep/rest, quiet and active play are accommodated
- assisting children to understand why certain behaviour is not acceptable and providing opportunities for them to consider other strategies for dealing with difficult situations
- listening attentively to children, showing genuine concern and providing them with the option of voluntarily removing themselves from the situation/activity until they are ready to return
- sensitively and actively involving families in developing joint strategies to support children who have behavioural issues.



Biting in child care

One of the most distressing reports that you can receive from your child care service is that your child has been bitten, or that they have bitten someone else. Biting can also be challenging for even the most experienced of child care professionals, as biting incidents often cause strong emotional reactions in families. An ongoing biting issue can be frustrating as there is no magic solution to prevent it occurring.

If your child has bitten someone you may feel guilty, or concerned that there is something wrong with your child, and you may also be worried about the reactions of others. If your child has been bitten, you may feel concern about your child's safety and wellbeing, and you may perhaps feel anger toward the child who bit and/or toward the child care professionals for not protecting your child.

When biting occurs in child care, particularly when the issue is ongoing, you may have concerns about the level of supervision of children. Unfortunately, however, biting can happen very quickly and quite often without warning, and is not necessarily a sign that children not being adequately supervised. It's important to know that biting is a normal behaviour, and is not generally a sign that something is wrong with the child, wrong at home or wrong with the child care service.

Why do children under three years of age bite?

- The child is teething and it feels good to bite down on something.
- Limited understanding of the effects of their behaviour on others and they don't appreciate how much biting hurts.
- Toddlers can be impulsive. Sometimes they cannot stop themselves from doing something even though they may know that it isn't acceptable.
- Older babies and toddlers frequently use their mouths to explore and investigate the world around them, and at times this can result in biting.
- To express frustration or anger, or when feeling tired or hungry.
- Boredom. Biting can be like an 'action-reaction' game in that when a child bites, the reaction from the child who has been bitten, as well as the reactions of adults, are usually dramatic.

- Lack of attention. Biting almost always brings significant attention from adults. There are times when children may figure out that the best way to get an adult's attention is to do something that isn't approved of.

What can child care professionals do about biting?

There are no magic solutions to stop toddlers biting in child care. However, child care professionals use a range of strategies to manage biting incidents and to support children and families during this challenging phase of development. One of the most valuable strategies they use to help children to learn not to bite is to acknowledge and show approval of children's behaviour when children play with their peers in desirable ways.

Typically, child care professionals reserve their sternest reactions for hurtful behaviours such as biting. They communicate to children using their words, tone of voice and manner that biting is not acceptable. At the same time they realise that children who bite need help to stop, and are not 'bad' or 'naughty' children.

Knowing what causes or what triggers biting in a particular child enables child care professionals to take steps to prevent the behaviour to avoid or minimise the triggers. They also recognise the times of day or situations when biting is most likely to occur. Child care professionals can also reduce the incidence of biting by stepping in when a toddler is having a dispute with another child. This not only helps the child to resolve the conflict before biting occurs, it also allows the child care professional to model appropriate negotiation and conflict resolution.

The partnership is critical

Child care professionals should tell you if your child has been bitten, and they should also talk with you if your child has bitten someone else. Families should not be made to feel a sense of blame or guilt and professionals should take responsibility for guiding children's behaviour positively.

It is important that you don't punish your child for a biting incident that has happened in care, as it will have been dealt with at the time. Talking about how biting hurts and that it isn't a good thing to do, without dwelling on it, may help. If your child has been bitten you may want to know who has bitten them. However, confidentiality in such a situation is crucial to protect the child who has bitten and their family.

When there is a problem such as biting happening, the partnership between families and child care professionals is most important. A situation in which your child is bitten or has bitten another child is one that requires families and child care professionals to work together with mutual trust, open communication and respect for each other.



Managing bullying in child care

Families and child care professionals want children to develop a sense of physical, social and emotional wellbeing. This wellbeing can be challenged if children experience bullying by another child or a group of children – which is why families and child care professionals share concerns about how to prevent bullying and how to deal with bullying when it occurs.

Disagreements or conflicts between children in group care settings are a normal part of learning how to live together. Sometimes conflict can become more serious and entrenched if a child or a group of children use behaviours which intimidate or are intentionally hurtful. This type of persistent, negative behaviour towards another child or group of children is called bullying.

Learning to be a group member

Learning how to become a valued member of a group takes time for children and requires:

- ongoing support from adults who model social skills as a way to show children how to live respectfully and inclusively with others
- learning over time that having strong feelings is normal and children gradually learn how to regulate those feelings appropriately
- having daily opportunities to be a helpful group member and being acknowledged by adults for that behaviour.

Types of bullying

- Physical bullying such as hitting, pushing or punching, which tends to be more common in younger children
- Verbal abuse which might include name calling, teasing, spreading negative rumours about a child, or using racist or sexist insults
- Social isolation which excludes individuals or groups of children from play or social situations, which may occur with older children
- Cyber bullying where technologies such as texting are used to taunt, insult, intimidate or harass.

Strategies for families

Adults need to take action when they suspect or are aware that a child is being bullied as children are not able to solve the problem of being bullied by themselves. There are several strategies you can adopt to help your child if you believe they are being bullied:

- Encourage your child to talk about what is happening and listen carefully to what they say. Affirm their feelings and make it clear that you believe them and that you will help them to deal with the bullying.
- Discuss your concerns with the professionals who care for your child and work with them to find ways to address the issue. Solutions may involve actions by parents, child care professionals and the child themselves.
- Continue to listen to and talk with your child. Support them to decide on appropriate actions to challenge or stop the bullying.
- Help your child to regain confidence and wellbeing by affirming their positive behaviours and focusing on the things that they do well.

Strategies used by child care professionals

Child care professionals use a range of age appropriate strategies to prevent bullying from occurring and managing it when it does occur, including:

- adopting a policy of zero tolerance for bullying and consistently maintaining that policy with all children
- modelling respectful ways of interacting with colleagues, children and families in order to show socially and culturally appropriate ways of getting along with others
- ensuring children are supervised adequately
- teaching children strategies to challenge bullying type behaviours before they become entrenched. For example, expressing their disapproval of verbal insults: "I don't like it when you call me by that name".
- communicating openly and sensitively with the families of children who bully or are bullied and working with them to find appropriate solutions and strategies for supporting the child involved both at home and at the service.

Note: There are a range of behaviours across different aspects of children's development which might indicate your child is being bullied. Go to the Kids Help Line website (www.kidshelp.com.au) or talk with your medical doctor for more information about the signs of bullying.

Contact NCAC

If you would like more information, please contact NCAC:

Telephone: 02 8260 1900
1300 136 554

Fax: 02 8260 1901

Address: Level 3, 418a Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

E-mail: qualitycare@ncac.gov.au

Website: www.ncac.gov.au

For an interpreter, contact the Translating and Interpreter Service on 131 450.

References for NCAC's Family Factsheets in this booklet are:

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NCAC also provides information to families in 24 community languages. For these translations and the complete versions of NCAC's *Family Factsheets* and other resources for families, please visit our website (www.ncac.gov.au).