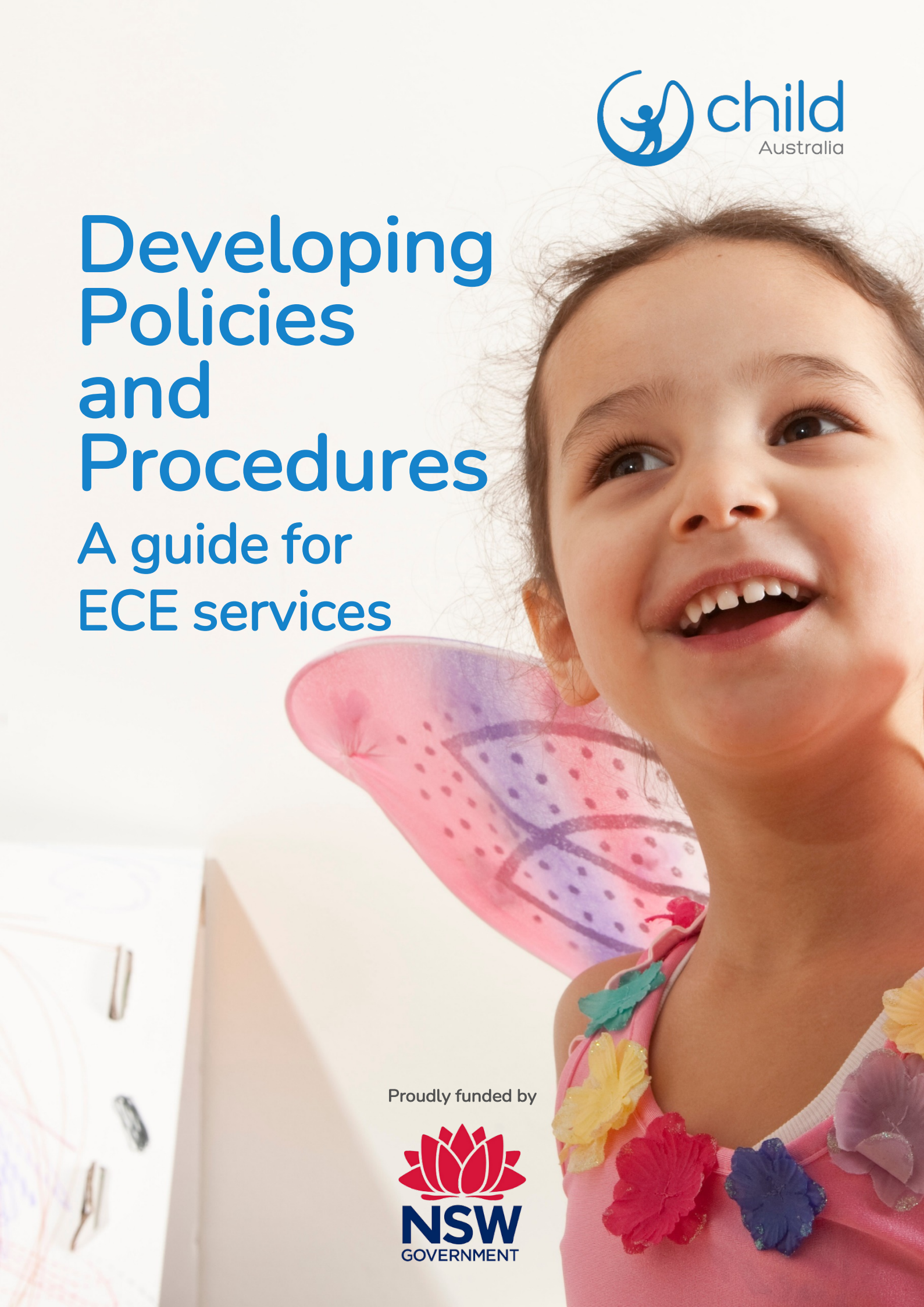# Developing Policies and Procedures

A guide for ECE services

child
Australia

WELCOME

At Child Australia we work with children, their families, early childhood professionals and the community to raise the status of children in our society. As one of the leading early years not for profit organisations in Australia, we dedicate ourselves to improving children's developmental outcomes through advocacy and leadership, building the capacity of the sector and delivering exemplar programs and services to children and their families.

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INTRODUCTION

Developing policies and procedures is a very important task for every education and care service.

This guide to developing policies and procedures has been created to support education and care services in this task, and to assist services in meeting the requirements of the National Quality Framework. This guide applies across all service types and for educators working with children of all ages.

When policies and procedures are developed, updated and implemented effectively on a regular basis, they are a powerful demonstration of what happens in your service and what your service believes.

Policies and procedures detail the expectations the service has of individuals involved in the day-to-day practices of the service. This includes all staff, educators, management and families.

More importantly, policies and procedures reflect your partnership and collaboration with children, families, educators and the wider community. Shared decision making with families demonstrates your respect for their role in children's lives and gives consistency across all areas of service delivery.

Policy development is an ongoing process for management and all stakeholders and is an integral part of the quality improvement journey.

Integrating a policy and procedure review framework alongside your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) or self-assessment ensures that these documents are part of your ongoing commitment to overall quality practice.

DEFINITIONS

POLICY

Describes a guideline or rule to be followed. A policy states your agreed beliefs on a range of topics relating to the service provided, gives a framework for decision making and ensures consistent practice.

PROCEDURE

Details the action to be taken to address the policy and outlines the implementation process. It facilitates decision making, provides consistency and enhances effective management and teamwork.

PRACTICE

The activities carried out to apply the policy as outlined in your policies and procedures.

5 STEPS IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

There are 5 key steps in policy development. Understanding the process of developing effective policies allows you to think more deeply about what is necessary, how to approach the task and how to plan and coordinate the resources you might need.

1 **Step one**
Form a policy team

2 **Step two**
Start with your philosophy

3 **Step three**
Draft the policy through collaboration

4 **Step four**
Agree, inform and implement

5 **Step five**
Policy currency, monitor, review and revise

A smart way to approach policy and procedure development and review is to consider the process as an ongoing, continuous cycle. Updates and reviews of policies and procedures are best conducted as a regular feature of ongoing practice, rather than a one-off occasional project.

STEP 1: FORM A POLICY TEAM

Consider who your stakeholders are and how you are including them. Delegate portions of the work to an individual, working group, sub-committee or staff members, according to the expertise required and their availability.

STEP 2: START WITH YOUR PHILOSOPHY

Start with the service philosophy as it guides all aspects of the service's operations. Policies should be informed by the service's philosophy as this provides a frame of reference for policies developed to remain consistent with the beliefs, values and principles of the service.

STEP 3: DRAFT THE POLICY THROUGH COLLABORATION

Including many stakeholders in the development and review of policies allows contributions and comments from a number of perspectives. This helps to ensure that the policies meet the needs of your service.

STEP 4: AGREE, INFORM AND IMPLEMENT

Consider how the policy and procedures are to be approved, communicated to audiences, implemented by educators and staff, and evaluated. This includes considering the training required for staff, how you organise the documents, and whether they are accessible to all audiences.

STEP 5: POLICY CURRENCY, MONITOR, REVIEW, REVISE

Monitoring, reviewing and revising policies and procedures is important to ensure they remain relevant to your service and continue to underpin good quality practice. Set monitoring systems and reminders, implement regular review opportunities, and subscribe to newsletters and announcements from recognised authorities to stay up to date.

STEP 1: FORM A POLICY TEAM

Best practice policy development requires a team approach, through accessing the skills and time of others. Consider who your stakeholders are and how you are including them. Forming a policy team or working group brings more perspectives to the work. This is important so that the policies and procedures meet the needs of all stakeholders in your service.

To ensure that such an approach is successful consider the following:

Nominate someone to lead the work from a project point of view. Identify who has the knowledge, experience, expertise or interest to be involved. Consider educators, families and other key stakeholders and invite them to be part of the policy team. Break down the project into manageable portions with defined timeframes, and consider the systems, technology and supports that the policy team might need to be successful. For example, having systems in place to remain informed about legislation changes, and updates in best practice guidance from recognised authorities.

This approach must be planned and managed by the lead person to be effective. Usually this person will be the nominated supervisor or approved provider, or coordination unit when thinking about family day care.

STEP 2: START WITH YOUR PHILOSOPHY

The statement of philosophy for your service is a statement about the beliefs, attitudes, core principles and values that underpin practices in your service.

A clear, well thought out statement of philosophy is an important declaration of how your service sees itself, what it aims to achieve and where its priorities lie.

It should demonstrate your commitment to work in partnership with families to ensure the best possible outcomes for children, and it should reflect the guiding principles outlined in the Education and Care Services National Law and the approved learning frameworks. It guides everything that happens at the service and supports:

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Partnerships with families
- Quality inclusive practice
- Equity and respect for diversity; and
- Ongoing learning and reflection.

A review of your philosophy provides the opportunity to reflect and rethink 'what we do and why we do it'. This provides an important frame of reference for the development of policies and procedures that remain consistent with the beliefs, values and principles of the service.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

Quality Area 7 - Governance and Leadership

Standard 7.1 - Governance supports the operation of a quality service.

Element 7.1.1 - A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service's operations.

The NQF outlines the importance of the service philosophy. It also suggests services provide families opportunities to contribute to the development and review of the statement of philosophy, policies and procedures, and QIP or self-assessment information. This is critical evidence required to show your service is meeting the requirements of the NQS.

You can use the following questions to reflect on your philosophy:

- How do you ensure that staff and families are familiar with your service's philosophy?
- What does it say about partnership and collaboration with community?
- What practices demonstrate your service philosophy?

STEP 3: DRAFT THE POLICY THROUGH COLLABORATION

Policies are most effective if those affected are consulted, are in agreement and have the opportunity to consider and discuss the potential implications of the policy. Depending on whether you are developing policies to govern the internal working of your service or external policy positions, you may wish to consult, for example:

- Staff, students and volunteers
- Management committee members or owners
- Children
- Service users and/or families
- Community representatives
- Partnered services (e.g. schools).

Including many stakeholders in the development or review of policies allows contributions and comments from a number of perspectives. This assists in finding the right language, reduces jargon, ensures the policies are comprehensive and achieves a better overall understanding of the policies.

Ensure the wording, length and complexity of the policy are appropriate to the audience and those who will be expected to implement it. Consider whether procedures are required to support internal operational policies, and whether clear written guidance is needed regarding how the policy will be enacted and by whom within the service (e.g. a policy regarding hygiene will require a set of procedures detailing how your service adheres to requirements). Ensure accurate interpretation of legislative requirements by discussing with colleagues or recognised authorities to check your understanding.

When drafting the policies, remember they should be informed by your service's philosophy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, codes of ethics and current models of good practice.

CHILDREN

"Children are important. They bring their own value and influence to the world, as well as being shaped by the world around them…Children are also important for their future contribution to society, as the next generation of leaders, workers, parents, consumers and members of communities …in a global society."

(COAG, National Early Childhood Development Strategy, 2009, p.7)

Policy development provides an opportunity to consult with children to capture their voice in this process and across service operations. This recognises children as competent humans and supports their contribution to decisions that affect their lives, their agency, their learning and development, and the service's commitment to quality outcomes for children.

Consider for instance your health and hygiene policy – discuss with children the steps for handwashing, and consider their own experiences with this process. You may include a commitment to encouraging children's understandings of the associated links to illness, and even how children may learn to identify when they feel unwell within the policy.

Authentic approaches to children's voices lie at the heart of consulting with children. Support children's expression of meaning through a range of mediums such as voice, visual arts, song, music, drawing and writing, and try not to impose adult frames of reference or put words in the children's mouths.

Refer to the hints in 'Additional Resources' at the end of this booklet to assist with developing a children's consultation approach.

FAMILIES

Including families in policy development builds their understanding of your philosophy and service approach. It gives you insight into their needs so that policies are better able to reflect the current needs of families that use your service.

Families using your service are likely to come from a varied background of experience and are often more than willing to use their skills to assist where they can. Consider forming a parent working group, or simply invite feedback to policies drafted.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Standard 6.1 - Supportive relationships with families

Element 6.1.2 - Parent views are respected

"In a service environment where families are respected and share in decision-making, families and educators are supported to value each other's knowledge and roles, and communicate freely and respectfully."

(p.258 - Guide to the National Quality Standard)

COMMUNITY

Involve community members in developing or updating relevant policies. For example, you might involve the local child health nurse, dietician or nutritionist when updating a healthy eating and nutrition policy for your service. Accessing community in this way assists in presenting the most current information related to your policy while providing a platform for shared decisions.

Collaborative structures encourage ongoing supportive relationships that contribute to a sustained social network. This further supports the protection of vulnerable families as well as promotion of your service in its efforts for quality outcomes for children.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnership with families and communities

Standard 6.2 - Collaborative partnerships

Element 6.2.3 – The service builds relationships and engages with its community.

STAFF

The most effective approach to creating or updating policies is to include all staff as they will be implementing the policies on a daily basis. This is particularly important for the procedures within policies as often current practices are not accurately represented within the document. Involving staff allows a service to monitor practices and recognise the need to adjust and reflect on emerging practice approaches.

It may not be possible to have the entire team involved but, at a minimum, all current staff members should sign-off on the final document to ensure their awareness and understanding of the content. Keep a record of this sign-off.

Effective staff involvement in policy development will promote a sense of ownership, accuracy of documented practices, greater satisfaction, much greater commitment to implementation, increased understanding as well as overall compliance.

MANAGEMENT/MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Proactive leadership is critical to the development of quality policies and procedures. coordinators/directors and/or committees can allocate staff to review and comment on relevant policies and procedures. Consulting with other coordinators/directors in a similar service type may also be helpful.

STEP 4: AGREE, INFORM & IMPLEMENT

AGREE AND INFORM

1. Agree on the final policy documents and follow your service's policy endorsement procedure. (This will vary depending on your service type and governance structure).
2. Inform staff, families and other relevant stakeholders when new or modified policies and procedures are available and where they can be accessed.
3. Provide training to ensure staff are aware of, and implement, the updated policies and procedures in daily practice. Ensure training on policies and procedures is provided as part of induction processes and ongoing training, including for relief/casual staff.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

1. Test your policies to make sure that procedures and practices are realistic and achievable. Remember to include children and families particularly in policies directly affecting them. See the 'Additional Resources' section of this booklet for guidance on testing your policies.
2. Have clear guidelines for implementing policies and procedures.
3. Draw attention to specific policy requirements by placing a copy of the policy next to a task relating to that policy, for example displaying your health and hygiene policy and nappy changing procedures in the nappy changing area.
4. Provide staff and families with a way to give feedback on the policies and procedures, for example consider providing a sheet of paper for comments.
5. Monitor implementation, and review the policies and procedures as necessary.
6. Update your staff and parent handbooks and any other documents that might refer to the policies.

ORGANISATION OF POLICY DOCUMENTS

1. Prepare a policy folder (hard copy and electronic) and a list of required and proposed policies. Hard copies respect the need to access policies quickly due to limited access by staff to technology when supervising children.
2. Group the policies in a logical way to develop a table of contents. For example, by topics such as administration, management and staff or quality area.
3. Develop a policy document template with headings and styles for document consistency and incorporate a version control table.
4. Have each policy on a separate page for easy updating and distribution.
5. Consider a policy and procedure management software option which may help you integrate policies to your service website and also assist your policy team in automating policy review reminders, feedback and acknowledgement.
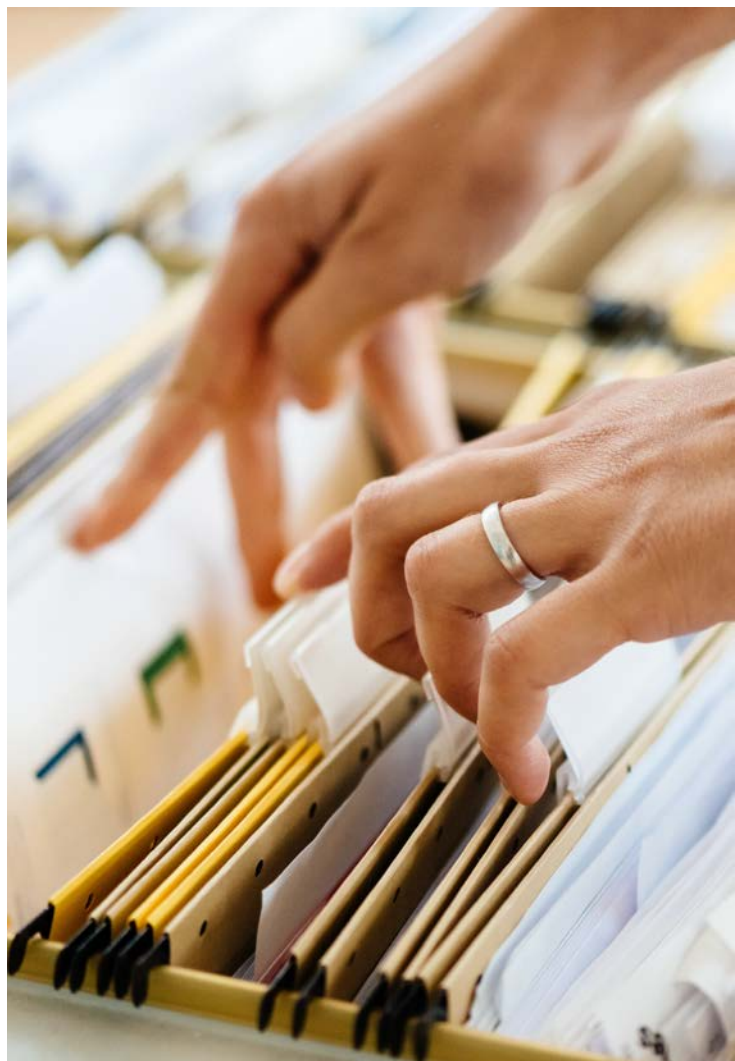
ACCESSIBILITY

1. Ensure the policy folder is well organised and easy for all stakeholders to access and follow.
2. Translate relevant sections for families who do not have English as a first language. Translation services are available from tis@immi.gov.au or www.naati.com.au at a cost. Free translation services may also be available online, for example, Google. Ask families about the clarity of translated documents after they have read them. Policies and procedures should be non-judgmental and use language and images that reflect the children, families and staff involved in the service and its community.
3. Include the current relevant policies (with an online version readily available) in the parent handbook, for example, behaviour guidance, fee collection and infectious diseases.
4. Include in the staff handbook details as to how staff can access the relevant policies, including an overview of the policy framework.

STEP 5: POLICY CURRENCY, MONITOR, REVIEW & REVISE

Monitoring, reviewing and revising policies and procedures is important to ensure they remain relevant to your service and continue to underpin good quality practice.

Policies can be reviewed, revised and updated:

- In anticipation of need (e.g. upcoming changes to legislation), and
- In response to need (e.g. following an incident or event occurring at your service).

Services should not rely on the minimum policies required under legislation. The service should constantly assess its activities, responsibilities and the external environment in order to proactively identify the policies and procedures it needs and why.

To ensure your policies and procedures remain current:

1. Set a date in your service's calendar/planner for an annual or biannual review of your policy folder. Develop the review schedule by considering how often the content needs updating.
2. Keep informed by subscribing to the ACECQA newsletter and investigate subscribing to announcements from your local regulatory authority and other reputable education and care organisations.
3. Discuss policy revision annually with your coordinator, nominated supervisor or approved provider.
4. Plan a policy discussion within your regular team meeting agenda. Review a different policy at each meeting.
5. Develop a policy issues log to track issues or events that necessitate updates. Consider this as a step within your handling of incident reports. Events which might trigger a new review are changes in legislation, or a serious incident at the service. This can then form part of your QIP or self-assessment information under the NQF.
6. Develop a process to update and record changes (e.g. version control and issues log).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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 (2010) and Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011) as applied in each State or Territory through an applied law system. This is explained on the ACECQA website - www.acecqa.gov.au

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

Regulations - Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)

NQF - National Quality Framework
www.acecqa.gov.au/national-quality-framework

NQS - National Quality Standard
www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard

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

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

QIP - Quality Improvement Plan

WHY ARE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IMPORTANT?

Policies and procedures are important in education and care settings because they:

- Are a legal requirement under the National Quality Framework.

- Identify and minimise risk for the children, staff, families and the service.

- Establish the service as a professional and effective organisation.

- Enable consistent practice to support staff, families and children.

- Provide information for families to clearly explain how particular situations are handled in the service. For example, if behaviour guidance differs between home and the service, families understand the service's practices.

- Support staff to understand their role and responsibilities in the service. This can be particularly useful for new and recently qualified staff members and leads to more efficient, efficient and clear service practices.

- Provide ongoing working documents to guide high quality practice and reflection across all aspects of your service.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING, REVIEWING OR UPDATING POLICIES

When developing, reviewing or updating policies, there are various considerations to keep in mind throughout the process, including:

Your context, such as:

- Service type
- Organisation/business structure
- Location
- Profile and needs of families and the community
- Strategic direction and future plans of your service.

The legal requirements under the NQF.

- Check the minimum policy requirements for your service type against your current policies. To review requirements, use current information from ACECQA and the NSW Department of Education.

The components and content of policy documents. While there is no exact format to follow, consider including the following components in your policy documents:

Policy title

Policy statement
How the policy relates to your service philosophy. This can also include objectives/aims – what you are hoping to achieve.

Background
Why the policy is in place.

Legislative requirements and links to the NQF

Definitions of key terms used in the policy

Principles that inform the policy

Procedures
Including roles and responsibilities, expectations and how the policy will be implemented.

Links to other policies

Sources
Any reliable websites, resources, and agencies that were used as references when developing the policy, or which may be useful for further reading, should be cited.

Version control
The date the policy was created, reviewed, or changes were made; and when the policy will be next reviewed and who will be responsible for this.

The continued relevance of your service philosophy.

- A review is an essential starting point
- Ensure it accurately represents what your service stands for.

Stakeholder engagement in the policy development/review process.

- Who has additional skills or experience with policy development?
- Who needs to be involved and how will they be engaged in the process?
- Your stakeholders will include all educators, directors/coordinators, management committee, families, children and community members.
- Are there any other stakeholders you need to include?

Your service's approach to equity and inclusion.

- What is your commitment to equity for children, families, employees (prospective and current) and the wider community?

Your service's approach to working with children.

- How are educators' beliefs and theoretical perspectives linked with practice?

Current research and contemporary best practice.

- How does this guide your policy development?
- Do your policies reflect best practice principles and learning frameworks?

The audience who will be reading your policies, when writing take note of:

- The language of terms used and complexity of words used
- The tone of writing which conveys the attitude of the writer to the topic
- Prior knowledge of the reader on the terms and concepts related to the topic.

MEETING LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Most aspects of service delivery need to be underpinned by or linked to relevant policies and procedures to meet the requirements of the NQF.

You should review the Law, the Regulations, the National Quality Standard and the approved learning frameworks, particularly the sections shown below.

NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Children (Education and Care Services) National Law (2010)
Parts 5 and 6

Education and Care Services National Regulations (2011)
Regulations 168 – 172 and Chapter 4 - Operational Requirements

The National Quality Standard
Quality Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7

The Early Years Learning Framework (Belonging, Being and Becoming) and the Framework for School Age Care (My Time, Our Place)
Principles, practices and outcomes.

To access current resources, go to:

www.acecqa.gov.au (for the ACECQA resource kit and related articles)

www.ecrh.edu.au (Early Childhood Resource Hub)

www.education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education

Good governance in operating a business often requires further policies and procedures beyond those of service provision. Policies of a general business operation nature (i.e. recruitment, human resources, financial authority, risk management etc.) are not discussed within this guide. However, guidance for these types of policies can be found by visiting www.business.gov.au.

ACECQA has published the Guide to the National Quality Framework which outlines the minimum policies required by all services to comply with legislation and support requirements of each quality area in the NQS.

Some services may combine policies or have more policies depending on the context of the service, sector type or needs of children and families. The minimum policies required under national legislation and regulations are detailed in the following table, with further details available within the Guide to the National Quality Framework.

NQS Quality Area Standards	Link to National Regulations
7.1	Regulation 18 – Education and Care Services must have policies and procedures.
2.1 and 2.2	Regulation 168 (2) (a) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to health and safety, including matters relating to: i. Sleep and rest; and ii. Nutrition, food and beverages, dietary requirements; and iii. Sun protection; and iv. Water safety, including safety during any water based activities; and v. The administration of first aid
2.1 and 2.2	Regulation 168 (2) (b) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to incident, injury, trauma and illness procedures complying with Regulation 85.
2.1	Regulation 168 (2) (c) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to dealing with infectious diseases, including procedures complying with Regulation 88.
2.1	Regulation 168 (2) (d) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to dealing with medical conditions in children, including the matters set out in Regulation 90.
2.2	Regulation 168 (2) (e) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to emergency evacuation, including the matters set out in Regulation 97.
2.2	Delivery to and collection of children from the education and are service (Regulation 99 and 168 (2) (f)*

NQS Quality Area Standards	Link to National Regulations
2.2	Regulation 168 (2) (g) – Policies and procedures are required in relations to excursions, including procedures complying with regulations 100 – 102.
2.2	Regulation 168 (2) (ga) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to transportation, including procedures complying with regulations 102A -102D.
2.2 and 7.1	Regulation 168 (2) (h) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to providing a child-safe environment.
4.1, 4.2 and 7.1	Regulation 168 (2) (j) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to staffing including: i. Professional standards/code of conduct for staff members ii. Determining the responsible person iii. Participation of volunteers and students
5.1 and 5.2	Regulation 168 (2) (j) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to interactions with children complying with Regulations 155 - 156.
6.1	Regulation 168 (2) (k) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to the enrolment and orientation of children and families.
7.1	Regulation 168 (2) (l) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to the governance as well as management of the services including the handling of confidential records.
7.1	Regulation 168 (2) (m) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to the acceptance and refusal of authorisations.
7.1	Regulation 168 (2) (n) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to payment of fees and provisions of a statement of fees.
7.1	Regulation 168 (2) (o) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to the processing and handling of complaints.

Additional policies and procedures for a family day care service	
3.1	Regulation 116, 169 (2) (a) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to assessment, approval and reassessment of family day care venues.
7.1	Regulation 169 (2) (b) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to engagement or registration of family day care educators.
7.1	Regulation 153, 169 (2) (c) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to keeping a register of family day care educators, coordinators and assistants.
4.2, 7.1 and 7.2	Regulation 169 (2) (d) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to monitoring, support and supervision of family day acre educators.
7.1	Regulation 163, 169 (2) (e) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to fit and proper assessment of family day care educators, family day care educator assistants and people living at family day care residences.
2.2 and 7.1	Regulation 165, 169 (2) (f) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to handling of visitors to family day care residences and venues while children are being educated and cared for.
4.2, 7.1 and 7.2	Regulation 169 (2) (g) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to provision of information, assistance and training to family day care educators.
7.1	Regulation 154, 169 (2) (h) – Policies and procedures are required in relation to engagement or registration of family day care educator assistants.
*Approved providers may restrict who can be nominated to collect a child, for example by a person under the age of 16 years. This should be documented in the policy about collection of children. Authorised officers may talk to approved providers about whether they have taken into consideration that some parents may be less than 18 years of age. Adapted from The Guide to the National Quality Framework. Available from www.acecqa.gov.au	

USEFUL HINTS FOR IMPLEMENTING CHILDREN CONSULTATIONS

Useful Hints for Implementing Children Consultations Adapted from Children's Voices, a principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners (Harris, P. & Manatakis, H. 2013)		
Build mutual respect and gain consent In order to foster mutual respect, it is important for children's participation to be voluntary and for children to be invited rather than expected to participate in the consultations. For particularly young children or where photos, audio, visual footage or artistic works are to be shared publicly, it is also necessary to obtain parental consent.	**Explore questions as themes** When undertaking consultations with children, it is important to frame the questions as themes to be explored and allow adequate time for exploration of the subject matter. Young children in particular may not be able to verbally articulate themselves in a way older children and adults may be able to, so direct, on the spot questioning is not likely to engage young children and ascertain their views in the most authentic manner.	**Break down subject matter into its various elements** It should be kept in mind that children may not have prior experience or understanding of the theme being explored and therefore a process whereby children are able to develop an understanding and a view on a particular matter is important. The subject matter should be broken down into its various elements to ensure a deeper understanding of the issues.
The process is just as important as the outcome It is important to recognise that the consultation process is just as significant as the information received. All children should feel valued and their views listened to; and feel they are sharing their views in a safe and secure situation where those around them have a genuine interest in what they say and do.	**Involve children in the shaping of the consultation process** Provide information to children as to how and why they are being invited to express their views and provide the opportunity for them to shape consultations in a way they would find most engaging and enjoyable. This is very important because it helps to develop shared understandings among children and adults as to the purpose of these activities, and gives children an opportunity to shape situations in which these activities occur.	**Use visual references or visit locations being discussed** Showing photos of your community taken from the eye level of a child may be a good visual reference for children. A walk or drive around the community to discuss local landmarks, places and spaces is also recommended.

Useful Hints for Implementing Children Consultations Adapted from Children's Voices, a principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners (Harris, P. & Manatakis, H. 2013)		
Take care to capture children's authentic views Write down what children say verbatim, in large print exactly as they say it to ensure we don't put an adult spin on their words. In doing so, we need to be careful that this scribing is not intrusive and that adults can keep up with what children say without breaking the flow of children's ideas.	**Provide children with tools to express their views** Support and enable children to express their views by asking leading questions, providing concrete stimuli (e.g. photos) and handing the tools of expression to the child. These 'tools' might be a camera, paints, or crayons, or having the floor to have their say. Scaffold children's views by extending and re-formulating what they say to check for shared understanding and more fully draw out what they are expressing; and prompt them to elaborate where they can.	**Use language that invites genuine input** Show you are handing the agenda to the child by expressions such as: 'Tell me, what do you think about…?' 'How do you feel about…?' 'What do you like about…?' 'What makes you think that?' 'What makes you feel that way?'
Use reflective language Use reflective language in your conversations with children e.g. 'I see you have taken lots of outdoor photos. Is that because you like doing things outside?'	**Consider messages conveyed through body language** Tune into children's body language – not just what they say but how they say it. Attend to their tone, facial expressions, gestures, gaze and so on.	**Acknowledge the power difference** Acknowledge the power difference between children and adults. Are the children expressing how they feel or what they think adults want to hear?
Consider the dynamic of children in a group setting Also acknowledge the dynamic amongst children when engaging in group discussions and activities. Are some children dominating while others sit quietly on the sidelines? Are children saying what they think or seem to be just agreeing with what their peers are saying? Are all children being given the opportunity to express what it is they mean?	**Explore themes in a way that is meaningful to each child's experiences** It may be best to ask children what they like to do or would like to do in their communities, rather than what facilities or services they would like. Be as concrete and specific as you can about the questions and prompts you use to engage children's views. Other examples include asking about places children like going to and any favourite places they might have, people they like seeing, talking with, playing with, spending time with, and where.	**Ascertain children's feelings as well as their views** Bear in mind, too, that these consultations also seek to find out what children might not like in their communities, so provide opportunities to find out about the 'downside' too, in specific and concrete terms as above.

Useful Hints for Implementing Children Consultations Adapted from Children's Voices, a principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners (Harris, P. & Manatakis, H. 2013)		
Take the time to understand the real meaning behind what is being expressed If drawings are used as an artistic medium for children expressing their views, then always ask for more detail on what a child has drawn. It is important not to assume we understand what has been drawn, why it has been drawn, or what it represents. Children often communicate as they draw, including non-verbal communication (such as scribbling or drawing very quickly). Tune in to the comments children make as they draw and the gestures they make and note these down carefully for later references to enrich records of what children conveyed.	**Provide feedback about the value of children's input** Provide feedback to children about what will happen after their participation in the consultation strategies, and how their views are important in helping to shape their world. This helps to show children that their views are valued and respected.	**Most importantly, participation by children should be voluntary, engaging, challenging and rewarding**

TESTING YOUR POLICY

Here is a process you can follow to test if your policy is going to be effective:

1. Choose 2 or 3 draft policies.

2. Apply the policy to a practical scenario and see if the policies are realistic in your environment.

3. Reflect on the usefulness and validity of the policy.

4. Identify the strengths and weaknesses in the policy.

5. Assess what is understood by those who will implement the policy.

6. Change or update the policy as necessary (this can be part of your QIP or self-assessment working document – See National Regulations 55 & 56).

TESTING YOUR POLICY: CASE STUDY – BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE

SCENARIO

There are ten children and two educators at Hootville Early Learning Centre. The children are aged between eighteen months and three years. Hayden is twenty months old and Terry is thirty months old. For no apparent reason, Hayden bites Terry on the nose. Terry cries loudly yet Hayden appears unconcerned. This is the second time that Hayden has bitten another child at the service.

- How should educators react?
- As Coordinator or Director, what will you do?
- How will this be communicated to families? Do you have a policy to guide you?
- How will educators respond to Terry?
- How will educators respond to Hayden?
- What do you say to Hayden's and Terry's families when they come to collect their children?
- What do you do, should Terry's family:
    - Suggest that Hayden be excluded?
    - Seek assurance from you that it won't happen again?
    - Threaten to remove Terry from the service?
- How will you help Hayden to stop biting?

POLICY AND PROCEDURE TEST

Look at your policy and procedures. Does it give you guidance? What does it tell you about:

- How educators and directors/coordinators should respond to each child
- What to do next and follow up action - curriculum and environment review, observations
- Working in partnership with families and joint planning
- Sharing information with families
- Exclusion of children, and
- Managing risks.

Your policy and procedures should guide how you manage biting in your service. Your procedures should enable educators to consistently respond to biting episodes and work in partnership with parents to reduce the incidence of biting.

Do you need to update your policy?

PITFALLS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Poorly developed or implemented policies and procedures can lead to poor practice. Some common problems and possible solutions include:

Conflicting approaches to educating and caring for children amongst staff with staff disagreeing with the policies.

This highlights the importance of all staff participating to develop or review policies and procedures. By working together, conflicting views can be discussed to reach shared understanding and approaches.

Differences in practices between home and the service.

It is critical to ensure that parents understand how the educators work with children and guide children's behaviour in the service. Ensure policies clearly state the approaches taken within the service and provide information by which parents can assess whether the service is the right one for them.

Families have not read or understood the philosophy, policies and/or procedures and do not understand service practices.

This is a communication issue that is easily addressed by:

- Increasing accessibility to policies (online, newsletters and noticeboards)
- Building positive relationships with parents to enable regular and honest communication
- Invitations and opportunities for parents to comment, and
- Critically reviewing the family enrolment/orientation process and Parent Handbook.

Policies and procedures are out of date, fail to meet the needs of the children, families and staff or are not implemented because they do not accurately describe the values, beliefs or practices within the service.

This highlights the importance of currency of information. This is assisted with an ongoing review/writing process outlined throughout this booklet taking into account:

- The context (families, community, service type)
- Current best practice principles, and
- Current legislative and regulatory environment.

Policies and procedures are only looked at when they are developed and updated, and then filed away and forgotten until they are due for review.

Policies and procedures will only ever be useful when they are implemented and central to practice. It is the responsibility of all staff members to ensure this happens. Developing policies and procedures using the approach described here will assist to build reflective practice within your team. This critical reflection and cycle of continuous improvement mean that policy development drives and reflects quality practice.

OUTCOMES OF EFFECTIVE POLICIES

It is important that all educators know and understand your policies and procedures, put them into practice and can describe them effectively to families, authorised officers from your local regulatory authority, and the wider community. Ensuring that the whole staff team understand your policy framework underpins the provision of high quality inclusive education and care.

As well as guiding daily practice, relevant policies should be included in:

- Your Parent Handbook
- Your Staff Handbook.

Well-written policies, developed with stakeholders:

- Ensure consistency of approach and service operations (See Quality Area 7 – NQS)

- Promote collaboration and partnership with families through their involvement in the development process (See Quality Area 6 – NQS)

- Reflect the diversity of children, families and staff attending the service (See Quality Areas 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 - NQS)

- Help educators and all staff members understand their role and responsibilities (See Quality Areas 4 and 7 - NQS)

- Promote a sense of worth for all parties as their input is valued and respected (See Quality Areas 4, 6 and 7 - NQS)

- Support the vision, principles and practices of the EYLF and the FSAC (See Quality Areas 1 to 7 – NQS)

- Result in policies and procedures that staff agree with and implement fairly (See Quality Area 7 - NQS).

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USEFUL WEBSITES

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)
www.acecqa.gov.au

Child Australia
www.childaustralia.org.au

Early Childhood Australia
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Food Standards
www.foodstandards.gov.au

Kidsafe
www.kidsafe.com.au

Nutrition Australia
www.nutritionaustralia.org

World Health Organisation
www.who.int

Red Nose Australia
www.rednose.org.au

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