

A plan is an important part of providing a professional family day care service. Planning provides an opportunity for carers and coordination unit staff to think about practice, plan what to do in the program and consider new ideas.

It gives a starting point on which to base decisions about day-to-day practice. This includes decisions about the role of the carer, how the environment is arranged and the development of relationships between carers, staff, children and families. It takes thoughtful planning to provide an environment that is child focussed, creative, flexible, peaceful and collaborative.

## A plan is not a timetable

While managing time is an important factor to consider when planning for children in family day care, it is not the most important. Many learning opportunities will also require spontaneity, patience and unhurried time. For example, the chance discovery of a snail in the yard is an experience not to be rushed. This is an opportunity to watch, explore, manipulate, question and nurture the snail. The children's responses to this event lead to future opportunities to extend on children's interests. A plan must be flexible to take advantage of unexpected changes to routines and spontaneous events.

## Where to start

Everything that happens in family day care should be guided by the scheme's philosophy. The philosophy is



a written statement of the values and beliefs that are important to staff, carers and families. The starting point for planning is to consider statements in the philosophy that refer to relationships, the ways in which children learn and the type of environment that is important for children. Values and beliefs

about these areas will guide the type of information carers and staff collect about children and how they will use it for planning.

### An example of focusing on the philosophy

The following questions can act as a starting point for planning and developing relationships with children:

- what does the philosophy state about the type of relationships that the scheme values for children?
- how are carers and staff currently going about developing positive relationships with children?
- how do the current practices relate to the scheme philosophy?

Watching, listening, talking and interacting with children will help carers and staff to develop understandings of children's learning and relationships and inform planning. The following points can also strengthen the planning process:

- finding ways to help children trust the environment and relationships which also help them to feel confident to participate and explore
- focusing on children's strengths, interests, characteristics and experience makes plans more relevant to the children
- gaining valuable information from families helps carers to better understand and know the children
- reflecting on carer and staff practices is as valuable to planning as gathering information out children

## Planning the physical environment

Gathering information about children and the practices of carers and staff is an ongoing process. The following questions can be used as a way of analysing information and thinking about its implications for practice.

- how does the information affect the way carers and staff understand and relate to children?
- what type of experiences seem relevant for the children?
- what implications does the information have for arranging the physical environment?



of place. Thoughtful planning also helps to capture children's sense of wonder, playfulness and natural curiosity.

The arrangement and atmosphere of the physical environment is important because it can help children feel comfortable and give them a sense

As carers plan the physical environment they need to consider the following:

- ongoing access to materials – Is there a variety of materials that children can access independently?
- complexity of materials – Are the materials open ended, inviting to children and able to be used collaboratively with other children?
- organisation of space – Are there spaces to be alone, to be with others and to have messy experiences? Is the space arranged in a way that allows children to make choices?
- aesthetics – Is the space attractive and does it contain visually appealing and sensory items?
- safety – Are the materials safe for children?
- the people in the environment - Are there places and resources that reflect the things that children find familiar, exciting and enjoyable? What is in the environment that reflects the interests and cultures of the children in care and the carer?
- relationships – Does the space invite children to be with others? Does it contain things that allow children to have a connection with their home? Do children have a safe place for personal items that they can access easily?

## Experiences and opportunities for children

Experiences should enhance children's self-esteem, competence and desire to become independent.

Carers and staff can think about the following questions when planning experiences for children:

- what do children want to know about you as the carer?
- what can you share about yourself with the children?
- will children have a role in planning the experience and control over how it progresses?
- what things do children like to talk about, find exciting and enjoy most?
- what questions are children asking?
- will experiences be 'open ended' and allow them to make decisions and choices?
- how do experiences provide opportunities for children to experiment, practice, explore and discover "what will happen when I...?"

## Flexible resources

Flexible resources suggest ideas to children, allow them to test their theories, promote relationships and can be used in a variety of ways. An example of a resource that is flexible and can be used in many

ways is a picnic blanket. In the morning it may be the roof of a cubby house made with two small chairs, later it may be used in a quiet corner with books and cushions and still later it may become a substitute parachute for ball and singing games.

Other examples of flexible resources include:

- an assortment of dress up clothes and props
- sand play with a choice of tools
- construction materials
- large cardboard boxes
- drawing materials, paints, a variety of brushes, a range of papers and fabrics

## Open ended experiences

When children are provided with paste, small boxes, cardboard rolls and a variety of other similar resources and materials one child may experiment by feeling the paste in his hand, another may question why the material falls off (when they have missed putting the paste on the material), another may stack the boxes to create whatever takes their imagination and another may solve their problem of falling boxes by asking for tape because the paste will just not hold them together.



Planning for such experiences involves thinking about the following questions:

- why have these resources been provided?
- how have they been presented to the children?
- in what way did the children use them?
- how have the problems that children encountered been solved?
- how have the carers' interactions with the children influenced the direction of the experience?
- how does this experience fit with the scheme philosophy?
- how will this experience inform other experiences and interactions?



Combining a general understanding about the way children grow and develop with knowledge about individuals helps carers and staff to predict what might interest and challenge children. In whatever way experiences and opportunities emerge they must be meaningful to children. These experiences do not have to be structured according to time or days of the week. They will arise from children's and adult's interests and questions, from aspects of the environment and from everyday events in the community.

### Routines and the flow of the day

Routines are important to children because they provide a chance to develop rituals that give children a sense of security. To make the day flow as smoothly as possible, carers need to include in the plan routines and regular events such as mealtimes, nappy changing and toileting, rest periods and walks to school. Planning takes into consideration the importance of these routines, the way in which they are carried out and the interactions that occur with children.

The group dynamics of who will be in care will change each day and therefore routines will vary. For example,



when there is a young baby in care who requires morning and afternoon naps the opportunities to go to the park may be limited. However careful planning will provide windows of opportunity to provide interesting and enjoyable experiences

for the other children in care. Plans need to be flexible to accommodate unexpected events or the evolving interests of the children.

### Documenting the program

Documenting information about each child and about the significant experiences that happen during the course of the day will help carers and staff develop a useful and effective plan.

This documentation will also:

- provide an opportunity to revisit planned experiences that have worked well and that the children enjoyed
- be a reminder of everything that happens each day and a tool for confidently and accurately sharing this information with families
- develop into a history of children's progress, achievements, questions and discoveries during their time in family day care

The process of writing down a story can have the effect of creating new meanings of that experience. This is because the documentation provides a stimulus for discussion and allows families and others to share in the event. In other words the documentation creates an opportunity to hear different points of view and interpretations of an experience.



Examples of what to document:

- projects that children have been involved in, such as planting a garden
- creations that children have produced, such as paintings, drawings and constructions
- stories of significant experiences, such as a walk in the rain or a visit to the park
- stories of relationships, such as children caring for each other and adults interacting with children

## Ways to document

There is not a right or wrong way to document or plan. However any documentation must be a useful and effective tool and should be kept simple. Carers need to develop a documentation method that best suits their particular talents and the time they



have available. However, creating documentation with children will make it more meaningful. This might mean writing stories with older children about significant events or

recalling and talking about past events with younger children. Tools such as photographs help children to remember and discuss.

Ways in which to create documentation might include:

- jotting notes down in a book or diary
- keeping notes on the computer
- using photographs to record works in progress such as block constructions, sand play and dramatic play experiences

## Evaluation

Carers and staff will begin this process with comments such as "that was great" or "I won't do that again". Evaluation is thinking about why something was good or bad. Reflecting on what happens each day and why can help carers and staff make informed judgments about the quality and effectiveness of their plans.

The following questions provide a starting point for the reflective process:

- how did the children respond to the experience and why?
- was there enough space, time, resources and materials?
- what unexpected things did the carers and staff learn about the children and themselves?
- what new understanding might have occurred for carers and staff?
- how can this experience be improved or extended next time?

Evaluation of what happens today provides carers and staff with new understandings of children, families and themselves. It is also an opportunity to value the ideas, thinking and contributions of the children and to share this with families and others.

## The joy of caring for children

Carers' professional growth can be nurtured through experiences that stimulate reflection and the development of new understandings of the children in care. Fascination will come from understanding children's individual idiosyncrasies and incorporating these into each day's plan. By taking time in the day to listen intently to children's conversations and watch them in their play and routines carers and staff will better understand children's view of the world and people in it. A great sense of satisfaction can be achieved for carers and staff by using effective planning tools to provide a rich learning environment for children and for themselves.



## Further Information

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**For more information on FDCQA please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.**

Telephone: 1300 136 554 or (02) 8260 1900  
E-mail: [qualitycare@ncac.gov.au](mailto:qualitycare@ncac.gov.au)  
Level 3, 418a Elizabeth St  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

[www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)