

Keeping Developmental Records

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Documenting information about children's interests, achievements, discoveries, ideas and questions can assist carers and staff to develop an understanding of the whole child, and to work in partnership with families to plan appropriately for children's emerging interests and skills.

Observing, considering and responding to the daily experiences, comments, ideas of children and their interactions with others is the essential first step toward providing appropriate child-focused learning experiences for children.

Demonstrating an understanding of individual children's development through written records and being able to show evidence of how plans for children's experiences have been formulated are important aspects of being a professional carer.

What is a written record?

A record is a documented account of something that has happened. When documenting information about children's interests and experiences, records may include written entries such as anecdotal observations, stories about events that occurred, written analyses of events, photos of works in progress or special events, examples of children's work, or jottings of children's questions and conversations.

Well maintained records can assist staff, carers and families to track children's progress and interests, and support future planning for children.

Keeping documented records of children's experiences and progress does not need to be a time consuming or difficult task. It is the quality of the information rather than the quantity of information which is most important.

Simple jottings in a notebook can provide carers, staff and families with as much information as a decorative scrapbook or profile folder, and will not impose upon the time that you spend with the children in your care.

Why should we keep records?

Keeping records assists schemes to demonstrate accountability and supports communication and shared decision making between staff, carers, families and other professionals.

Keeping records of children's progress can:

- help you to share information with others including children, families, and coordination unit staff
- provide information about how children have been involved in experiences over time

- help you to see a pattern of individual children's achievements over time
- allow for different perspectives of the child to be documented
- help you to make decisions about the experiences you may plan for children
- support a collaborative approach to the care of children by families and carers

Do records need to be kept for all children?

While it is good practice to keep progress records for every child, it is reasonable to expect that records kept on children attending care full-time will be more detailed and more regularly updated than records for children who attend part-time or infrequently.



How can records be kept?

It is important that carers consult with families to determine how to best share and record information about children. Personal two-way message books can be an effective and simple way to share 'stories' from the home and care environments. These stories can be simple jottings about something that the child has experienced or shown an interest in.

For example, a family may share a story about a trip to the zoo, or their child's interest in watching the machines being used for road works. A carer may share with families a story about a conversation they have had with a child or about a child's efforts to master a new skill.

When deciding how to keep written records, each carer needs to consider the time they have available and their own skills. For example, one carer may find it easiest to keep notes on a computer, while another may prefer to keep diary style written notes.

How can I show the link between records and plans for children?

When considering how to demonstrate the link, you may find it useful to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the records I keep? What do they tell me?
- How do the records I keep help me to understand individual children?
- How do the records I keep help me to interact with children?
- How do I use the information from written records to help me to plan experiences for children?
- How do I use records to involve and communicate with families?

Reflecting upon records of children's experiences and achievements should assist you to plan meaningful experiences for children that extend or build upon their current interests and skills.

For example, a recorded observation of two children making a construction using empty cardboard boxes may inspire a carer to provide the children with large household appliance cardboard boxes the following week. These two children may be joined by another child, and the play experience may turn from construction play to dramatic play, pretending that the boxes are rockets. By keeping a record of each play experience the carer can 'track' children's experiences and development and can use these records to support planning.



Practical strategies for keeping records include:

- Introducing personal message books for two-way exchange of information with families
- Creating an individual record for each child and encouraging children to be involved in selecting what is included
- Recording simple observations of events and conversations on 'post-it' notes to be placed directly into the each child's record
- Keeping brief reflective notes of observations of children's progress
- Keeping a 'daily diary' which highlights the experiences of the day - this may be a sheet of paper where you dot point the events that occurred and the children involved to display for families. Keeping these sheets on file may assist your reflection on experiences provided for children over time
- Introducing photo albums where photographs from children's home and care environments can be used to depict changing interests and experiences

What other written records am I required to keep?

There are some written records that schemes need to keep about children, families, staff and carers to help ensure their safety and wellbeing. These records include information such as contact details and emergency contact information,

children's immunisation, details of children's health requirements and records of illness and critical incidents affecting children while they are in care.

Schemes in states and territories where licensing regulations exist may also be legally obligated to maintain certain written records such as medication records and registers of children's attendance.

Can children be involved in record keeping?

Older children often enjoy the opportunity to be involved in keeping records about themselves, and even younger children will enjoy having the information that is kept in their records shared with them.

Where appropriate, it is important to involve children in record keeping quite simply because the records are about them. Talking with children about what is contained in the records and involving them in the documentation process can help them remember experiences and ideas they have explored in the past.

Another benefit of involving children is that it can encourage children to continue to explore their interests and ideas over time. Even very young children like to look at photos and hear stories about things they have done, both at home and in the family day care environment.

Strategies for involving children in keeping records include:

- Writing stories about events or experiences that have affected them. Older children may be able to write some accounts for themselves, while younger children may describe what they think should be recorded
- Encouraging children to use creative activities to record their experiences
- Encouraging children to choose their own photographs and work samples for inclusion in folders or scrapbooks and to dictate comments about what happened
- Asking older children to play the role of 'roving reporter' and to record on cassette other children's ideas about the experiences they enjoy or would like to engage in during care
- Talking with children about their interests and strengths to help complete profiles, or encouraging older children to complete these themselves

Why do families need access to their children's records?

Every family should have access to any records kept about their child. Encouraging families to regularly read and contribute to their child's records and to offer ideas for the activities and experiences helps to keep families informed, involved and reassured about their child's progress. Family contributions can also provide staff and carers with information about how to best support the families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and interests.

Documenting the things that children can do and enjoy as opposed to what they cannot assists staff and carers to provide families and children with records they will be proud to share with others. It also shows families and children that you value each child's achievements and that you recognise the importance of these to their development.

How should records be stored?

Records should be stored in ways that ensure:

- information can be readily accessed by relevant parties;
- sensitive and confidential information is kept secure; and
- they are kept current and up to date

Carers must ensure that any records of children's progress are shared only with the individual child's family. Carers may need to carefully consider strategies for keeping each child's records inaccessible to other families.



How can children's records be used by coordination unit staff?

Just as written records assist communication between carers and families about children, they can also support information sharing between carers and staff. Moreover, documentation of children's development and their current issues and interests can enhance coordination unit staff's ability to support and resource carers to meet children's needs. For example, a record which indicates that a child frequently bites other children may prompt the staff member to provide the carer with some relevant professional development resources and with some practical strategies for managing this issue.

Coordination unit staff should also keep records of children's experiences and development through their observations and information they receive during home visits and play sessions. This has two main advantages: coordination unit

staff can model their record keeping strategies for carers and their records will complement documentation maintained by carers to build a well rounded picture of each child's experiences and development.

Most carers already make plans for children in their care. They think about the experiences and environments they provide for children and why they do this. To take this to the next level, written records should provide a meaningful account of children's achievements, experiences and milestones over time. Keeping records which detail children's ideas, interests, experiences and skills can support carers and staff to plan for children in ways that will enhance all areas of their experience and development. Maintaining written records about children and their experiences can also facilitate partnerships between carers, staff, families and other professionals and provide proof of a scheme's accountability in relation to the care and education of children.

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