

Supporting the role of carers' families

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The involvement of the carer's family is an important aspect of the family day care experience. Families using care often build relationships with members of the carer's family. The children in care also learn about the everyday rituals and behaviours of the carer's family through the conversations they hear, the relatives or friends who visit, and the family celebrations that occur. All of these experiences help to build children's sense of belonging and extend their skills and knowledge.

Families who are new to child care or entrusting the care of their children with another person can find it comforting to see that the types of experiences and practices in family day care are similar to those in their own home. Children can participate in experiences in the family day care home and the local community in much the same way as if they were at home with their own families, for example, helping to prepare meals or visiting the local library.

Carers' families can provide opportunities for children in care and their families to explore different cultural beliefs, diverse languages, job roles or sporting interests. Families often develop trusting partnerships with members of a carer's family, and there can be many opportunities to exchange knowledge and ideas about caring for children and supporting their development.

A carer's own children can also bond with children in care and there may also be opportunities for people of different generations, such as a carer's parents or grandparents, to enrich children's experiences.

Roles and responsibilities

Recognising the need for everyone to work together to build a quality family day care experience for children and their families is an important first step in understanding each person's role.

Carers need their family members to:

- value the professionalism of family day care
- support the carer's decision to use the family home as a child care environment
- value the diversity of children and their families using care
- adhere to the scheme's policies and procedures
- comply with quality assurance and, where applicable, licensing standards.

Carers have a responsibility to consistently reinforce their role with their own families and set boundaries about the type of practices that are acceptable. This may include explaining why their responsibilities to children in care, at times, may take precedence over the needs of their own family. It may be useful

for carers to talk about quality child care with their family to gain their support and agreement that the carer's first priority should be the needs, safety and protection of children when they are in care.

Carers need to explain to family members how the home needs to be maintained safely. For example, keeping dangerous products out of reach, keeping doors to unsafe areas locked and ensuring pathways to evacuation exits are kept clear. Carers also need to talk with their family members about the appropriate supervision of children in care, and they may need to explain to their children that their friends may not be able to visit the home if this will compromise the carer's supervision of the children in care.

When a carer's children are also in care in the family day care home, there can sometimes be conflicts because young children may not understand that they have to share their toys or their parent. It is very important that carers recognise that their own children need space and toys which are their own, while also discussing with their children that there will be some toys and experiences that need to be shared with other children.

Considering the following questions may help carers to plan and balance family life and the provision of child care in the home:

- How will family day care impact on my family? For example, when my child needs help to complete their homework or is unwell?
- How can I manage our home space and resources to meet the needs of my family and my role as a carer?
- What types of family commitments require my attention which could mean children's needs are compromised?
- What strategies can I put in place to meet my family's needs without compromising quality care? For example, if a family member wishes to play a computer game which portrays violence, they can have the choice of using the game in the privacy of their bedroom or wait until the end of the day when children in care have gone home.

Developing strategies to support the role of carers' families

When there is a clear understanding of each person's role, family day care can be a rewarding experience for everyone. This can be strengthened when the carer and their family have regular discussions about what is working and what may need to be changed to maintain the balance between family life and the provision of child care.

Coordination unit staff can prepare carers and their families for operating family day care from their home and inform them about the possible changes to their lifestyles during recruitment. Staff also have a responsibility to maintain a positive momentum about the family day care experience and support carers and their families. This can be achieved if schemes consider the following questions:

- How do we communicate to carers about the role of carers' families during the recruitment process?
- How can we inform carers and their families about changes to policies and procedures which may affect the integration of family day care into the home?
- How do we support carers and their families when there are challenges or times of change?

The following strategies can help to develop and promote positive partnerships between staff, carers and carers' families:

- openly discussing the implications of family day care with the carer's family before the carer starts work
- clearly explaining what is expected of the family in a positive home environment that supports and protects children

- talking through any concerns the carer's family may have and suggesting that the carer visit another carer's home to learn about the strategies they use to manage issues and challenges
- including carers' family members in training about behaviour guidance and child protection
- identifying who is responsible for certain practices. For example, carers should communicate clearly to their families about the scheme's supervision policy
- supporting carers and their families when there are additional demands. For example, the scheme can plan for activities or excursions for school aged children in care during the school holidays as this can relieve some of the additional pressure placed on carers during vacation periods
- providing a forum for carers to share their experiences and strategies
- encouraging carers to designate areas in the home that are 'out of bounds' to children in care and their families
- identifying ways the privacy of the carers' family can be protected
- acknowledging the changing needs and interests of family members such as when a carer's partner retires. Develop strategies to support and promote the best outcomes for both the carer's family and children in care.

Family day care is a rewarding experience for carers' families as they watch children develop and grow. By recognising and respecting the different needs of carers and their own families, schemes can ensure that the outcomes for everyone involved are positive and valuable ■

Family Day Care Quality Assurance

Principles: 1.2 - 1.5

References and further reading

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