

Getting out and about in family day care

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Family Day Care is a home-based child care service and there is an expectation that children will spend the majority of time in their carer's home. However, family day care is uniquely placed to help young children connect with, and be part of, the community in which they live. Smaller groups of children make it easier to venture outside the usual care environment and to participate in authentic and purposeful experiences. The key is for children to have a balance of experiences that help them feel both secure and confident to explore and learn more about the world in which they live.

Getting out and about in family day care

Outings and excursions help children become aware of the similarities, differences and connections between people and to understand the purpose of different contexts. Children also learn that people are expected to behave differently in different places and spaces. For example, a visit to the park or playground means that you can run and jump, climb and be noisy, while in a library there is an expectation that people will walk and use quieter voices.

Striking a balance between staying at home and going out.

Some carers may not feel confident in going out with the children in care, particularly if it involves crossing busy roads, driving in heavy traffic or using public transport. Families may also request that the carer stay at home when their child is in care. In these situations it is important that carers and families discuss their concerns with the support of staff in the coordination unit. Everyone should seek a mutually agreeable solution that ensures all the children in care can have a balance of safe experiences both in and outside the family day care home. These might include:

- Limiting outings to walking around the local neighbourhood until the children are settled and the carer knows them well
- Having the coordination unit provide transport for the carer and children to attend playgroup
- Buddying up with another carer for a walk to the park
- Planning more complex excursions for days when there are mainly older children in care
- Taking the children to venues/places of interest that are already familiar to them and their family.

Being child-focused

All outings and excursions need to be primarily focused on the interests of the children. Getting to know children and their interests well, and thinking about how the learning outcomes of the excursion will meet or extend these interests, will help to ensure that the excursion is child-focused. Taking children to your medical appointment, placing them in your gym's crèche while you participate

in a fitness class or making them stand in line at the bank, are not acceptable children's outings or excursions.

Routine excursions or local outings

These are regular outings around the local community, such as trips to school, play sessions, the park or local shops. These simple experiences provide lots of opportunities for exploration and discovery.

- Trips to school and preschool with older children help younger children to become familiar with an environment that they will eventually be part of.
- A local park offers many possibilities that may not be available in the home environment. As well as the usual swings, slides and climbing equipment, parks offer room to run and chase and play with balls. Many parks also have natural elements such as grassy slopes, trees, bushes and rocks that invite exploration. By talking with children about their discoveries, carers can support children's growing awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and the need to protect it.
- Trips to the shops, post office or library can extend on everyday routines and contribute to children's learning and development; writing a letter or making a card and posting it; making a list of ingredients for a cooking experience and shopping for them; or finding some books at the library to build on children's interests and discoveries.
- A walk around the local neighbourhood provides an opportunity to notice and talk about a myriad of interesting things: houses, gardens, letterboxes, street signs, cars and trucks, perhaps a building site. Children will soon begin to notice and make predictions about the patterns of regular routines and the passing of time. For example, the day on which the garbage truck comes or the time that letters are delivered each day.
- Visiting another carer or a neighbour in their home can also enrich the family day care experience. Both carers and the children in their care benefit from opportunities to interact with and build relationships with other adults and children.

Excursions

These are more complex than local outings and may be to a specialised venue, such as a bowling centre, animal park or children's activity centre, with which the carer may be unfamiliar. These excursions require greater planning and management, as they often involve more travel and children are usually away from the care environment for a longer period than on a routine outing. The excursion destination may also be a busier environment than the children and/or carer are used to, and the carer will need to consider supervision issues in these settings.

When planning for more complex excursions, it is essential to think about:

- Meal and snack times, and how these will meet children's nutrition and hygiene needs (including children who are bottle fed)
- Children's sleep and rest requirements
- How the children will be transported safely to and from the excursion venue
- Children's toileting requirements.

Safety First

It is important that carers let families know what types of regular trips and excursions they will be making with children. Most family day care schemes require that families provide written permission for their children to participate.

It is also important to make sure that the environment that the carer is taking children to is safe and secure as possible. Upon arrival (or during the trip if walking), the carer should check for potential hazards such as broken glass, syringes or damaged playground equipment. This should occur for each visit, even if the carer is familiar with the setting.

Other important health and safety issues to consider on all outings and excursions include:

- Ensuring that full attention is on the children at all times, as the carer is directly responsible, and owes a duty of care while the children are under their supervision
- Carrying a First Aid kit and emergency information such as families contact details, information about children's allergies or special medical requirements
- Sun safety
- Road safety
- Checking to ensure that there are no unsafe bodies of water, such as ponds, pools or lakes that may pose a hazard to children.

Conclusion

Getting out and about in family day care can enrich children's learning. To ensure that outings and excursions are truly valuable experiences for children, carers need to plan these well, and to work with children, families and coordination unit staff to consider all aspects of children's health, safety and wellbeing ■

Family Day Care Quality Assurance

Principles: 2.2, 3.1–3.7 and 4.1–4.6

References and further reading

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