

# Ask a Child Care Adviser: Policies and procedures in everyday practice

While many services have written policies and procedures that are based on current recommendations from recognised authorities, some services experience difficulties in translating the recommended practices in their policies into their everyday work. Phillip Rowell spoke with Child Care Adviser Lorna Hughes about how services can develop practical strategies to ensure that their everyday practice is guided by their policies.

Clearly written, sourced and current policies are extremely important because they form the foundation of quality practice. They support child care professionals to make informed decisions about their daily practices. Policies need to be developed in collaboration with all stakeholders to help everyone to understand why a practice is necessary, who is responsible for it, when and where the practice should occur and how it happens. Policies also need to be made easily accessible to everyone.

## Why is the relationship between a service's policies and daily practice important?

A service's policies should provide a clear explanation of the practices that need to be implemented consistently by everyone at the service each day. They outline not only what should happen, but how and why it should happen. Using the service's policies to guide their daily work and decision making helps child care professionals to promote the best outcomes for all stakeholders in the service, including children, families and themselves.



## Why are recommendations from recognised authorities important?

Recognised authorities have the expertise to research theories and to test and endorse best practice. When services use current recommendations they ensure that their policies reflect the most reliable and up to date information. This also assists services to refer back to the relevant authority when reviewing policies so that child care professionals can be made aware of any changes to recommended practice and to improve their practice if required. This also supports the process of self-study and continuous improvement.

While every service is unique and its policies should reflect the individual needs of children and their families, it is important that policies outline practices which protect the health, safety and wellbeing of children. This means that current health and safety recommendations should not be compromised to meet individual stakeholder needs. When services ignore health or safety recommendations it potentially places the wellbeing of children at risk. For example, while some families may place pillows or doonas in their baby's cot at home, the service's policy and practices must reflect the safe sleeping recommendations from the SIDS and Kids organisation.

## Why can services find it difficult to translate policy into practice?

Services may be challenged in effectively translating their policies into practice due to reasons including:

- A high turnover of staff and carers that impedes their understanding and implementation of the service's policies.
- Lack of professional development.
- Hurried or, in some cases, no induction processes, particularly when services use casual or volunteer staff.
- Overly detailed or inflexible policies that are not practical for daily implementation.

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- Complacency about reviewing policies and keeping up to date with current practice. This can lead child care professionals to assume that inappropriate practices are correct. This can be exacerbated when services do not facilitate professional development opportunities for child care professionals.
- Having a high level of inexperienced child care professionals who may not have the expertise or knowledge to identify when poor practice occurs or the confidence or ability to mentor colleagues.

These challenges can be overcome when child care professionals develop strategies to regularly reflect on best practice.

### **How can services ensure that their policy information is available?**

Ensuring that the service's policies are physically accessible to child care professionals is important because policy and procedure details can be forgotten over time. Having policies and procedures easily available to read regularly encourages child care professionals to think about their daily work practices and about why they implement these.

Policies and procedures can be displayed on noticeboards or filed in a policy manual which is located in the service's foyer, coordination unit, family day carer's home or children's play area. Policies and procedures can also be posted in areas where particular practices generally occur. For example, handwashing procedures should be displayed in bathrooms and/or near nappy change areas. Having policies available to families also helps them to understand what happens in the service and why.

### **How can policies be communicated to casual staff and volunteers?**

Casual staff and volunteers need a comprehensive orientation to relevant service policies before they begin working with children. It is beneficial to have a summary or list of essential policies and practices that casual staff or volunteers need to know. These may include:

- child protection and supervision
- hygiene, food safety and handwashing
- signing children in and out of care
- sun protection
- the use and storage of dangerous products.

### **How can policies be developed for easy translation into daily practice?**

- Ensure that policy guidelines are simple and able to be realistically implemented in daily practice. Avoid unnecessary, complicated or impractical procedures.
- Avoid matching the information in policies to what the service already does or would like to do, irrespective of relevant recommendations.
- Consider the skills and strengths of staff and carers and what the policy practice may look like in everyday situations.
- Make the information in policies clear, practical and easy to read.
- Involve families in policy development and review. This is also helpful where policies need to be translated into community languages.
- Explain to child care professionals why policies are an essential aspect of quality practice and clearly describe how policy and everyday practice should interconnect.
- Test and review the policy and related practices to make sure they are workable and meet the service's needs.

The service's policies and procedures may also be communicated through flow charts or pictures displayed in main areas such as bathrooms, sleep areas or kitchens.

When orienting casual staff and volunteers it is important to show them where the service's policies are located and to initially team them with an experienced staff member who can mentor them. Encourage casual staff and volunteers to ask questions about any aspect of the service's policies and procedures that they are unsure of or don't understand.

### **What strategies can services use to monitor child care professionals' understanding of policies?**

- Encourage child care professionals to read policies and discuss whether the service's current practices meet with recommendations. Where necessary, identify how they can be improved.
- Have policy discussions as a regular agenda item at staff and/or carers' meetings so that the whole team can raise concerns and be involved in policy review. This may be done as a practical exercise. For example,



one team member may perform a practice such as handwashing while another reads the procedure out loud. This can build an understanding of the link between what is written and practical implementation. It can also identify where inconsistencies exist between the policy and actual practice.

- Develop a plan to review each policy every 18 months to two years as this will assist services to keep up to date with current recommendations from recognised authorities and encourage consultation with stakeholders.
- Identify a 'champion' of policy who is enthusiastic about a practice or has the skills and knowledge to mentor peers. This may include providing them with training so that they can share their knowledge with others. Invite professionals such as paediatricians and maternity nurses to the service to demonstrate and inform child care professionals about best practice.
- Encourage child care professionals to monitor each other's practice, ask questions and seek clarification. This includes service representatives monitoring child care professionals' practice and establishing guidelines which encourage positive feedback. This might involve rephrasing

statements such as "I think you should guide children's behaviour this way" to "Would you consider using this strategy to guide children's behaviour". The latter is more constructive and beneficial to individuals learning a new skill.

- Team new or inexperienced staff and carers with experienced and skilled child care professionals who can monitor the formers' understanding of policy and practice and role model appropriate practice.
- Plan professional development opportunities for child care professionals to learn about current best practice and to share the information with their colleagues.
- Provide professional resources about recommended practice in common areas such as staff rooms and play session venues.

### Conclusion

Translating policy into practice is sometimes difficult. To overcome challenges in this area services need to ensure that their policy requirements are practical and effective in everyday settings. They also need to implement strategies to monitor and ensure that child care professionals understand and can comply with policy procedures ■

### References and further reading

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