

# Making health and safety a priority

by Phillip Rowell

The recent NCAC *Quality Trends Reports* (1 January 2010 – 30 June 2010) have identified that a significant number of child care services are not meeting Child Care Quality Assurance standards relating to health, safety, hygiene and child protection. These *Reports* reflect an ongoing trend where some services are not consistently implementing recommended health and safety practices, and are therefore not meeting the Satisfactory standards required for Accreditation.

## Maintaining service policies

A key way to maintaining quality is for educators to regularly review and update service policies so that they reflect current best practice. When a service has effective health and safety policies they:

- Inform and guide daily practice so that everyone has the same understanding and expectation about what happens
- Ensure that quality practices are occurring consistently, in the same way and for the same reason
- Provide a record of accountability of educators' actions and supports their decision making.

## Critical reflection

Reflecting on your service's practices is crucial when reviewing your policies. Doing this encourages you to think critically about what your current practices are and to consider ways to change or improve them. Policy review includes checking that your practices meet with recommendations from recognised authorities and making sure that they are being consistently implemented everyday.

The following strategies can help when reflecting on your practices and reviewing your policies:

- Invest time and energy in the process. Develop a timeline for when your service will review each policy. While this can be challenging, when policies are well researched, well written and regularly reviewed, they help to maintain your service's quality practices.
- Engage in conversations with educators, families and children and ask questions about why you do certain things and why you do these in particular ways. For example, are the practices based on perceptions, values or beliefs? Do they reflect the service's philosophy?

### This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 4.1, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.6

OSHCQA Principles: 6.2, 6.3 and 7.2

QIAS Principles: 5.3, 5.4, 6.2-6.4 and 6.6

Do they meet the needs of the service and its stakeholders, while also meeting the Satisfactory standards required for Accreditation?

- Acknowledge the skills and experience of your colleagues. Your service will achieve greater success in implementing consistent quality practices when the opinions of educators and staff are valued and included in the decision making process. Use their expertise and interests by matching tasks with their strengths or use reflective journals to assist educators to engage in ongoing reflection.
- Recognise the importance of sharing ideas and opinions between educators and families through daily interactions, meetings, surveys or attaching hard copies of policy reviews to service newsletters. Developing trusting relationships is an important step in creating a collaborative approach to improvement.

Families entrust their children's wellbeing to educators. They assume that there are policies and practices in place which reflect the service's commitment to quality child care. Ensuring that the service's health and safety practices are up to date and are being consistently implemented is essential to maintaining the Satisfactory standards required for Accreditation. This will also help services prepare for future success when participating in the National Quality Framework.

For further information and support:

- Telephone a NCAC Child Care Adviser on 1300 136 554
- Visit NCAC's website ([www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)), go to the 'Resources' page and download relevant *Putting Children First* magazine articles, *Service Factsheets*, *Policy Templates* and *Quality Companions* ■