

Typical practice in child care services

By Jan McFarlane

What is typical practice?

'Typical practice' can best be described as practice that is exhibited consistently or practice that happens most often.

In children's services, typical practice relates to both the routines and experiences provided for children and can be described at three levels:

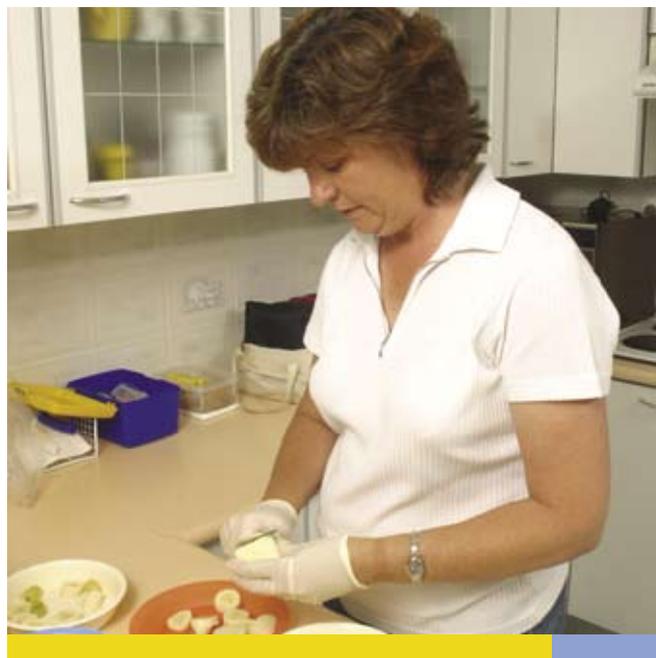
- What typically happens every day, across the whole service, for all groups of children and their families;
- Practices typical of all of management and child care professionals in the service; and
- The usual practice of individual child care professionals.

The importance of typical practice for children's services

To ensure the best outcomes for children, it is important that quality practices across the service are consistently maintained, monitored, reviewed and updated. The service has a responsibility to ensure that every day:

- The health and safety of each child attending the service is protected;
- All children experience consistently respectful, sensitive interactions with the adults who care for them;
- All children have an equal opportunity to access appropriate experiences and resources;
- Effective strategies are used to share information with all families using the service; and
- Service policies and procedures are implemented consistently.

When a staff member or carer is engaged in the same practice daily it can be easy to miss a crucial step in a procedure. Similarly, when staff and carers are tired, rushed or stressed it is easy for interactions with children to unintentionally become less inclusive and more directive. Therefore, even though the service may have very detailed written procedures, every child care professional has a responsibility to continually monitor their own and others' practices. Members of a team working collaboratively will be



confident in monitoring each other and giving constructive feedback, especially if it means improving the quality of experiences provided for children.

Team leaders and supervisors also have a responsibility to monitor the performance of the staff and carers reporting to them, and to support and encourage them to ensure their daily practice reflects the service philosophy and complies with the service's policies and procedures. For example, the team leader may provide staff and carers with a checklist for monitoring the safety of the outdoor environment.

Staff and carer meetings provide good opportunities to discuss typical practice. The reflective questions included in the *Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) Quality Practices Guides and Supplementary Resources* provide a stimulus for discussing how child care professionals currently meet and will continue to meet the CCQA standards for all groups of children at the service. For example, in what ways do staff and carers help all children to understand and accept similarities and differences between people? In answering this question, child care professionals will need to think about a range of different strategies that can be used with infants, toddlers, pre-school and school age children.

The role of the Validator

During a Validation Visit, NCAC requires Validators to determine whether each indicator in the *Validation Report* is 'occurring' or 'not occurring', based on what is typical practice at the child care service. The Validator needs to determine whether what they have observed during the Validation Visit is typical of what happens on other days and whether practices are consistent for all groups of children.

Validators understand the importance of not basing their validations on isolated incidents that may occur during the Visit. They will observe how all child care professionals at the service are involved in greeting families, interacting with children, and in facilitating both indoor and outdoor experiences. Validators will use cumulative evidence to determine the occurrence of each indicator.

How Validators determine typical practice in a service

The recruitment and selection of Validators values the professional skills, knowledge and experience they bring to the role. Validators are expected to observe practice, ask questions and view documentation in order to gather sufficient evidence to validate the indicators in the *Validation Report*. They are also required to use their professional judgment and instincts to determine if what they are observing and/or hearing is typical practice. By observing staff, carers and children's responses to routines, materials and equipment, an experienced Validator can determine if these things happen or are available every day.

Similarly, the Validator may be provided with materials such as newsletters and/or photographs of children's experiences as evidence that the service meets some of the indicators in the *Validation Report*. The Validator needs to determine the validity and reliability of this documentation in demonstrating typical practice at the service.

If the service believes that the Validator did not observe typical practice during the Validation Visit, they have the opportunity to add their perspective to the *Validation Report* and again in the *Validation Evaluation Form* which is submitted to NCAC.

Viewing activities to identify typical practice

For example:

In a family day care home, a Validator observed that when the carer indicated that it was time to go outdoors, the children ran to get their hats and asked the carer to put on their sunscreen. The Validator concluded that, although they had only observed that the children wore hats and sunscreen on this occasion, the children's responses suggested that what happened that day was typical of other days.

Viewing documentation to identify typical practice

For example:

The Validator was presented with one copy of a long day care centre's newsletter containing two photographs of children's artwork as evidence that the centre was meeting the indicator: *Staff records and displays of children's artwork demonstrate appreciation and interest*. On its own the newsletter provided insufficient evidence that staff typically meet this indicator. However, throughout the Visit, the Validator also observed:

- staff asking children's opinions about how and where they would like to display their paintings and drawings
- children asking staff to take photographs of their sand creations and block constructions
- staff found spaces to keep children's works in progress and wrote signs to alert the cleaner that they should not be disturbed.

These observations provided sufficient evidence for the Validator to determine that staff at the service typically demonstrated an appreciation and interest in children's creative expression.

Instances where typical practice will be disregarded

While the Validator is observing what typically happens throughout the whole service, they are also taking note of the practices of individual staff and carers.

In some instances, the actions of one person can significantly affect the outcomes for children attending the service. For example, if one staff member or carer did not wash their hands after any of the nappy changes performed during

the course of the Validation Visit, the Validator would determine that it was typical practice for this person not to wash their hands after nappy changing.

While the practice of all of the other staff members or carers in the service may have been exemplary, the actions of the individual staff member or carer are significant and may pose a serious health risk at the service. Therefore the Validator would mark the relevant indicator as 'not occurring'.

There are also times when a Validator will not wait to observe typical practice before validating an indicator. For example, a Validator may witness a child being left unsupervised, or being subject to physical force, isolation or verbal threats. When incidents relate to child protection or to children's safety, one observation is enough to determine that quality practices are not occurring in the service.

Identifying what typically happens in a child care service each day is an important aspect of the CCQA systems. Being able to recognise typical practice assists both Validators and services to create a clear picture of the quality of care experienced by children every day ■

References and further reading

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- Stonehouse, A. (2005). *Dimensions – excellence in many ways*. Gosford: National Family Day Care Council of Australia.
- Stonehouse, A., & Gonzales-Mena, J. (2004). *Making links: a collaborative approach to planning and practice in early childhood services*. Sydney: Pademelon Press.