

Bridging the gap between home and child care

by Georgia McKay

Maintaining consistent routines and experiences for children across home and child care is important for a range of reasons. This is especially true for babies and young children, who may be entering care for the first time. Having elements of familiarity can relieve children's anxiety about separating from their family, particularly while they are settling into care.

Continuity helps children to predict what is going to happen next and encourages them to feel as though they have a sense of control over what is occurring in their environment. This empowers children and supports their developing independence.

How can I help to support consistency in my child's care?

Before starting care, it is a good idea to try to imagine the types of routines your child is likely to have in child care, and to think about how these might differ from what happens at home. You can then consider how your child's routines at home might be modified to ease your child's transition to child care. For example, if your child always has their meal while sitting on your lap, consider gradually modifying this routine at home before your child starts care, as this is unlikely to be a practical routine for a child care setting.

You should feel comfortable about sharing information with the service about the experiences that are important to your child's daily routine. Your child's enrolment and orientation at the service is a good time to share your expectations with the service, and to find out about how the service will get to know and support your child's experiences and routines at home.

You should also tell the service about any particular words, phrases or visual cues that you use at home with your child for routines such as feeding and toileting. For example, your family may use a certain word to describe going to the toilet or to identify body parts.

How can the service and I reach agreement about the care provided for my child?

While child care services should try to accommodate your child's specific needs, it is important to understand that the individual attention that your child receives at home cannot always be replicated in a group care environment. Child care professionals must consider how a particular practice will affect the wellbeing of the whole group of children, as well as that of individual children. The practices that child care professionals implement must also comply with licensing regulations, Child Care Quality Assurance standards and what is current recommended

best practice for children. As such, child care professionals may not be able to meet all requests from families for specific, individualised practices.

By working together with child care professionals to combine the knowledge that you can offer about your child with the experience and formal training of the professionals at your service, a range of routines and strategies can be developed that will work both at home and in child care. If you have differing opinions about a particular practice, you and the child care professionals at the service should be able to work collaboratively to negotiate a mutually agreed solution that promotes the best outcomes for your child.

What types of routines and experiences should be consistent?

Managing children's behaviour is one area where it is particularly important to promote continuity between home and child care. Having consistent behaviour guidance strategies establishes clear boundaries and helps children to understand limits. It is important that appropriate behaviour is role modeled by both your family and child care professionals to ensure that your child receives consistent messages about what is appropriate. For children who have specific behaviour guidance needs it may be essential for consistent strategies to be used across all settings including home and child care.

Sleep and rest is another area where maintaining consistency is important. You should tell the child care professionals who work with your child about the routines you use at home for sleep and rest, such as the settling techniques you use and if your child has a comfort item such as a blanket or special toy. It is important to note that child care professionals may not be able to implement some routines or practices that are used at home for rest and sleep time because they are not practical in a child care setting, or because they breach the service's compliance with regulations or best child care practice. For example, babies will not be able to have a pillow for sleep due to the risks

associated with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The service should work with you to develop alternative strategies where possible.

Other areas of practice where continuity should be maintained include:

- sun safety. For example, ensuring that the 'slip slop slap' message is emphasised at home and child care.
- toilet training routines and strategies. For example, identifying signs that indicate the child needs to use the toilet, and using the same routines and strategies used to assist the child's toilet training at home and in child care.
- effective hygiene practices. For example, promoting correct handwashing practices.

How does effective communication promote consistency in your child's routines and experiences?

The key to maintaining consistency across home and child care is open communication between families, child care professionals and children. Effective consultation provides a strong foundation upon which the service can develop programs and routines that meet the abilities, needs and interests of your child and family.

It is also important for you to provide the service with current information about your child's experiences at home, as well as with information about any requirements that you have or issues that are affecting your child. This will help child care professionals to understand what is happening with your child outside of care and to follow up on this during your child's daily experiences and routines at the service. Information about your child that it is helpful to share with the service on an ongoing basis includes:

- any concerns you have about your child's behavior, and the strategies you are using to manage this
- issues relating to your child's health or wellbeing. For example, if they were ill over the weekend.

- significant events that are happening at home such as a visit from relatives, or moving house
- any new interests or skills that your child is developing
- one-off events that have significantly affected your child. For example, the loss of a pet or witnessing a traumatic event such as a traffic accident or natural disaster.

Child care professionals should also regularly share information with you about your child. This can help you to understand why your child may be doing certain things or behaving in certain ways, and can help you to talk with your child about their child care experiences. Information that the service can share with you includes:

- if you have a younger child, details about their sleeping, meals/feeding and toileting
- your child's daily experiences, including any unusual events that have affected them. For example a special activity that has taken place, such as a visit from the fire brigade, or something that may have upset them, such as an altercation with another child.
- details about your child's relationships with other children and the adults at the service
- feedback about your child's learning, development and interests in child care
- any health concerns or details of accidents or injuries.

When you and the service share important, everyday information about your child effectively, it helps you and the service to adjust your child's routines and activities so that their experiences are consistent and balanced.

Conclusion

Children benefit when their routines and experiences at home and child care are similar and supportive of each other. Encouraging consistency between home and child care will help you and the child care professionals at the service to work collaboratively to promote positive outcomes for your child ■

References and further reading

- Bickley, M. (2008). *NCAC Family Factsheet - Building a partnership with your child care service*. NSW: NCAC.
- Elliot, R. (2007). 'Engaging families: Building Strong Communities.' *Early Childhood Australia Research in Practice Series*. ACT: Early Childhood Australia
- NCAC. (2007). 'Ask a Child Care Adviser: Collaborating with families to implement quality practice'. *Putting Children First*, 23, 4-5.
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