

# Choosing Quality Outside School Hours Care

## Information for Families

### What is outside school hours care

Outside school hours care provides care for school age children before and after school, on pupil free days and/or during school holidays (vacation care). Outside school hours care services provide children with a variety of supervised play opportunities and recreational activities in a safe, supportive and relaxed environment. Services may also organise excursions, particularly in vacation care.

Outside school hours care staff provide a wide range of activities that are planned in consultation with children and their families, and reflect each child's needs, interests and abilities. Outside school hours care presents children with choices and challenges and encourages them to develop life skills, independence and friendships. In recognition of the age group attending outside school hours care, children take an active role in decision making to ensure the environment and experiences are child-focussed and fun.

### How can I find outside school hours care?

Families can ask their local school if they have an outside school hours care service on site, or if there is a service nearby that can provide outside school hours care for children attending their school. Families should contact the service to check availability and the logistics of supervised travel between school and the service.

To assist families searching for care, the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) provides the names of child care services through an easy search facility on our website ([www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)) or by telephoning NCAC on 1300 136 554.

### What should I be looking for?

Your choice of child care service may be influenced by a number of different factors and families seeking quality care for children are encouraged to consider what the best questions to ask are and what to look for in a child care service. You may also wish to ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the service Accredited? Ask to see its *Certificate of Accreditation* and *Quality Profile*.
- Do carers speak with children in a warm and friendly manner?
- What orientation process is available to my family? What will happen on my child's first day?
- How will I be made aware of staff changes? Who

do I speak with about my child?

- How will my child be supervised?
- What activities will my child be doing? How are these activities decided?
- What feedback will I be given about my child's day and how will this information be communicated?
- Is there a written program on display? How can my family be involved in the planning and evaluation of the program?
- How does the program cater to the individual needs or additional needs of my child?
- How will my child's ideas and opinions be listened to and acted upon?
- Do toys, equipment and activities available offer my child choice and meet his/her interests and abilities?
- Are the older children interested and challenged by the activities and materials provided?
- Are there opportunities for my child to participate in activities where they can explore real life tasks? For example, personal hygiene and mealtimes?
- Are there spaces for my child to be involved in active noisy play as well as space for quiet play?
- Are the outdoor and indoor environment and equipment interesting, secure, safe and clean?
- What is the behaviour guidance policy and how do carers handle situations where children are fighting, crying, or being uncooperative?
- Who is responsible for providing food and drinks for my child? Is the food provided adequate and nutritious? How will my child's special dietary requirements be provided for?
- Is there written information on policies and procedures available for families? How can my family access this information?
- What happens if my child requires medication? What if my child becomes sick or has an accident whilst in care?
- What process is in place for my child to be involved in planning, decision making and in developing the rules and consequences?
- Are there procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviours such as bullying?
- How will my child be dropped off and picked up from school? How will my child be made aware of these procedures?

- What safety requirements are considered when transporting my child to and from school and on excursions?

### **What is Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA)?**

OSHCQA aims to provide school age children with high quality care that promotes learning and development. The emphasis is on play, social interactions and recreation.

The broad objective of OSHCQA is to ensure that children in outside school hours care have stimulating, positive experiences that foster self esteem and confidence. It does this by defining quality in outside school hours care and providing a way to measure the quality of care provided.

Services that meet the standards of OSHCQA are Accredited by NCAC. Accredited services are issued with a *Certificate of Accreditation* which they must display prominently. They also receive a *Quality Profile Certificate* which shows the service's achievements against each of the Quality Areas. Families can request to see this *Certificate*.

The standards for Accreditation are based on 8 Quality Areas of care which ensure that services are providing children with the best possible experiences.

### **The 8 Quality Areas of OSHCQA**

- 1. Respect for Children** - staff support each child to build confidence and self esteem by demonstrating respect for children's backgrounds and abilities.
- 2. Staff Interactions and Relationships with Children** - staff build relationships with each other and with children to ensure they meet the play and care needs of the children.
- 3. Partnerships with Families and Community Links** - families and staff work together to build links with the broader community.
- 4. Programming and Evaluation** - effective programming in consultation with staff, families and children, is reviewed to ensure it meets the needs, interests and abilities of each child.
- 5. Play and Development** - services recognise the unique requirements of each child and programs are developed to support their play.
- 6. Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing** - services promote wellbeing, healthy eating and implement effective hygiene procedures through handwashing and immunisation.
- 7. Protective Care and Safety** - management and staff put the children's safety first at all times, and have procedures for ensuring this.
- 8. Managing to Support Quality** - management is smooth, effective and ethical.

For more information on Quality Areas please see the OSHCQA *Quality Practices Guide* (2003).

### **The role of families in OSHCQA**

OSHCQA encourages each service and its families to work together to develop and review the service's philosophy, policies and procedures. This will help shape the children's experiences and the interactions between staff and children.

It is also important that families can speak freely with their child's carers or service staff about such issues as the service's policies on discipline, hygiene, excursions, vaccination, sun protection and safety.

OSHCQA encourages families and community members to become involved in the service's activities. This helps children to understand their community and build their social skills.

### **How to Learn More About Quality Child Care**

NCAC is keen to assist families in learning more about quality child care. Information about Child Care Quality Assurance is available on the NCAC website. Copies of QA publications should also be available in services and schemes.

Families with concerns about the quality of care provided by an outside school hours care service are encouraged to discuss these issues with the service. Quality services will have clear, transparent grievance and complaints handling procedures. If you have raised concerns about a quality issue with an outside school hours care service, but your concerns remain unresolved, NCAC has a complaints handling procedure, a copy of which is available on our website or by telephoning NCAC. For more information about child care and choosing a quality service, please contact NCAC on **1300 136 554**.

**Office Hours:** Mon to Fri 8:30am - 5 pm, NSW time

**Postal address:** Level 3, 418a Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills Sydney NSW 2010

**Phone:** 1300 136 554 **Fax:** (02) 8260 1901

**E-mail:** [qualitycare@ncac.gov.au](mailto:qualitycare@ncac.gov.au)

**Website:** [www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)

**Telephone Translating Service** for calls in languages other than English - 131 450

**National Relay Service** for hearing or speech impaired callers - 131 677

### **Other Useful Contacts**

**Child Care Benefit** - payments for families to assist with child care costs. Phone the Family Assistance Office on 136 150 or your local Centrelink or Medicare office.

**Fair Trading and Consumer Affairs** - if you have concerns about child care fees or contracts, contact your State or Territory department responsible for fair trading and consumer affairs.