

When the Validator visits a carer's home

By Jan McFarlane

The Validation process has been developed to obtain a 'snapshot' of the care provided for children attending a family day care scheme. Waiting for the Validation Visit to happen can be a nerve racking time and Validators report that most carers relax quickly once the visit is underway. Ensuring quality practice happens every day for every child is the best way to prepare for a Validation Visit.

As a carer you may feel apprehensive about what to expect and how to prepare for a Validation Visit. However, it is important to remember that the purpose of the Visit is not to 'catch' you out. While it is understandable that you may initially feel anxious about being observed by a Validator, you are encouraged to regard the Validation Visit as an opportunity to demonstrate your skills and professionalism.

Will the Validator visit me?

The number of carers visited by the Validator during a Validation Visit is determined by the number of places being used in a family day care scheme. In a very small scheme this might be three carers and in larger schemes up to fifteen.

The carers to be visited are randomly selected from a list provided to NCAC by the scheme with its *Self-study Report*. All carers who are working during the days on which the Validation Visit takes place are eligible to be visited by the Validator.

How much notice will I get if I am chosen to be visited?

NCAC will advise the coordination unit of the date(s) of the scheme's Validation Visit. On arrival at the scheme, the Validator will advise the coordination unit staff which carers will be visited on each day of the Visit. The Validator will spend two to three hours in your home.

Can I have support during a Visit?

Yes. NCAC recognises that it can be difficult for a carer to interact with and supervise a group of children and talk with the Validator. Although the Validator will take care not to disrupt your normal routine, if you would find it helpful to have a coordination unit staff member, another carer or a family member present during the Visit, you may do so. It is your choice.

The support person should try to stay in the background during the majority of the Visit so that the Validator can observe the way that you and the children normally go about your day. If you need to show the Validator around your home you can ask the support person to supervise the children while you do this.

Similarly, if you need to concentrate on answering any questions the Validator might have towards the end of the Visit, the support person can be asked to assist by supervising the children at this time. If English is not your first language you may also like to use your support person as an interpreter.

What should I have ready?

In a caring environment evidence about quality practice is all around. It can be seen in the way you respond to children and their families, the materials and experiences that are available to children and the environments you create for them. Ensuring that quality practices are in place every day means there is nothing new or extraordinary that you will need to do when being observed by the Validator.

When the Validator is not able to validate an indicator by observing what is happening, they will ask you for some help. For example, the Validator is unlikely to be there when a new child and their family start care and so will need to ask some questions about what usually happens. Each carer essentially operates their own unique service and it is important that you are able to describe what you do and why you do it that way. Having regular conversations with other carers and coordination unit staff about your everyday practice can help you to feel more confident about explaining how you run your service.



If you are unsure of a Validator's question, it is helpful to ask which indicator they are validating by referring to your copy of the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) *Quality Practices Guide* and the Preamble associated with the indicator. Reading the indicator and the examples included in the *Quality Practices Guide* can help you to understand the sort of information the Validator requires.

You do not have to develop additional documentation in preparation for a Validation Visit but it is a good idea to think about the documentation you use every day and to have it ready for the Validator to look through if necessary. Documentation might include:

- A display folder or business book that is usually shared with new families seeking care
- Photographs of excursions, projects or events
- Communication books used to share information with families
- Routines, programs, menus and evacuation procedures on noticeboards and walls
- Examples of children's artwork, scrapbooks, and photographs of works in progress.

How will I be rated and how will I know if the visit went well?

The Validator needs to observe practice, ask questions and look at any available supporting evidence to gather enough information to validate the indicators in the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) *Validation Report* as 'Occurring' or 'Not Occurring'. These are the same indicators that appear in the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide*.

Before the Validator leaves your home it is important that you ask them if there are any Satisfactory indicators that have been marked as 'Not Occurring' and if further evidence or examples of practice are required. Read the indicator in your copy of the *Quality Practices Guide* to help you to understand the sort of information the Validator is looking for.

Can I comment on the Validator's performance and the Validation process?

It is important that you discuss any concerns about the Validation Visit with your scheme's coordinator or manager. They are able to discuss the *Validation Report* with the Validator and provide additional information before it is posted to NCAC.

The family day care scheme also has the opportunity to complete a *Validation Evaluation Form* which asks for specific feedback about the Validation Visit and the Validator's performance.

Conclusion

The Validator that comes to your home understands family day care and, before becoming a Validator, may have been a carer or coordination unit staff member themselves. The advice from other carers who have already participated in a Validation Visit is that you should relax and be yourself by just going about your normal daily routines. If you are relaxed the children in care are more likely to be settled and the Visit will go smoothly ■

Validation Visit Tips

- Become familiar with the *Quality Practices Guide* and keep a copy within reach during the Visit.
- Focus your energies on ensuring that Satisfactory indicators of care are being met. It is only when these practices are not in place that a Principle will be Unsatisfactory.
- Look carefully at the environment you have created for the children and conduct a safety check of indoor and outdoor areas. Ensure all items that could pose a risk to children are stored safely and that child-proof locks and barriers are in place.
- Ask another carer or a coordination unit staff member to observe your care environment with 'fresh eyes' as they may be able to identify areas that have been overlooked.
- Ensure you are familiar with the scheme's policies and procedures, and that your practice is consistent with them. This is particularly important in relation to nappy changing, handwashing and sun protection.
- Think carefully about the experiences you plan for the day of the Visit. Choose materials and experiences that you know children are familiar with and which you can supervise easily. This is not the day to introduce a new experience!



For more information on FDCQA please contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser.

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