

FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* extract

The following preambles have been extracted from the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) *Quality Practices Guide* (2nd edition, 2004). The preambles underpin the Indicators in each Principle and provide the context and intent of each aspect of care. The preambles will ensure a greater understanding of the desired outcomes for children and their families. For more information regarding the quality Indicators, please refer to the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide*.

Interactions

Positive interactions between children, families, carers and coordination unit staff are integral to a successful program and should support the development of trusting relationships, partnerships and teamwork within the scheme and with the wider community.

Partnerships with families are promoted by responsive and supportive carers, coordination unit staff and management and are fundamental to all aspects of the program, from orientation to ongoing information sharing. It is particularly important that children experience interactions that make them feel valued, respected and capable. By modelling courteous, considerate and effective communication, adults support children as they develop their communication and problem solving skills.

Interactions should ensure that all stakeholders in the service feel valued and respected and should take into account the different backgrounds, requirements and communication skills of individuals. Effective communication strategies can be developed through ongoing consultation between all stakeholders and should be reviewed regularly. Interactions that are founded upon respect, empathy, cooperation and professionalism ensure that all communications are successful and positive.

- Principle 1.1:** Carers and coordination unit staff interact with all children in a warm, friendly and respectful way
- Principle 1.2:** Communication between coordination unit staff and families is effective and supports the child's placement in care
- Principle 1.3:** Communication between carers and families is effective and supports the family and child to settle into care
- Principle 1.4:** Carers' personal and family arrangements provide a positive home environment that supports the provision of family day care
- Principle 1.5:** Relationships within the scheme value diversity, teamwork, mutual respect, understanding and professionalism

Principle 1.1

Carers and coordination unit staff interact with all children in a warm, friendly and respectful way

The family day care environment reflects a sense of happy involvement between children, carers and coordination unit staff. When carers and coordination unit staff take time to genuinely listen to and talk with children, they get to know each child well. These genuine interactions play an integral part in demonstrating an appreciation for children's unique backgrounds and capabilities.

Carers and coordination unit staff consider all children as equal communication partners, including those who are non-verbal or have unique communication needs. Carers and coordination unit staff who may be experiencing difficulty in communicating with a child in their care, seek information and support from the child's family, their colleagues and other agencies.

Children who experience relationships in the family day care setting that are built on respect, fairness, acceptance, cooperation and empathy learn to display these qualities themselves.

Children need to be able to trust the family day care environment as a safe, secure place where they are accepted unconditionally. By showing a genuine interest in and respect for children, carers and coordination unit staff assist them to feel valued, capable and confident.

The transition from home to the family day care setting can be stressful for a child. Many children may find the transition difficult for a long period of time. Carers and coordination unit staff need to work with families to develop strategies that acknowledge the child's discomfort, and ease the transition from home to care.

For example, by:

- Ensuring that the care environment and routines are predictable
- Using the language, communication styles and traditions that are familiar to the child
- Developing routines that are similar to those used by the child's family. For example, routines for separating from the family member, reuniting at the end of the day, settling children to sleep, feeding
- Being warm, approachable and responsive

Principle 1.2

Communication between coordination unit staff and families is effective and supports the child's placement in care

The structure of family day care makes it challenging to maintain strong relationships between the coordination unit and families. Coordination unit staff often take the lead in establishing and maintaining open communication with families. The enrolment process provides a valuable opportunity to initiate this process and coordination unit staff talk with families at this time about the best ways of maintaining communication with them.

Families seeking care for their child may be unclear about what to expect from family day care. It is important that coordination unit staff are able to clearly articulate how family day care operates and the ways in which the scheme can meet the family's child care needs.

Coordination unit staff consider what information the family needs to know immediately and what can wait until a later time. Following up initial discussions with a handbook allows families to find additional information as they require it.

Coordination unit staff have a plan in place to ensure they are able to provide information about the family day care scheme and maintain communication with families for whom literacy is an issue or for whom English is not a first language.

Families gain confidence in the scheme when:

- The coordination unit staff monitor the placement closely
- They can have ongoing support and contact with coordination unit staff
- Their feedback about the quality of the service is welcomed and valued
- They are assisted to find alternate care at times when their child's carer is unavailable

To work successfully with families, coordination unit staff continually reflect on their relationships with them and take opportunities to learn more about communicating effectively.

Families' responsibilities for providing current, accurate information to support the care placement, for example, contact details and immunisation, are clearly articulated.

Principle 1.3

Communication between carers and families is effective and supports the family and child to settle into care

The partnership between families and carers is based on mutual respect and trust.

It is important that carers never underestimate this level of trust when a child is in their care. Establishing a partnership with families may take time and relies on open and honest communication. When carers take the lead in initiating communication, empowering families and promoting trust, they are generally rewarded with strong supportive partnerships that have positive outcomes for children.

To develop and maintain a trusting partnership with families the carer:

- Provides information about themselves and their family, their care routines, practices and expectations
- Listens to families and encourages them to share their thoughts, ideas, concerns and questions
- Learns about the child from the family's perspective
- Treats all families equitably, without bias and respects their decisions without making judgement
- Regularly exchanges information about the child's experiences in care and at home
- Recognises that each family, and therefore each relationship, is unique

Issues may arise that cause concern for the family and/or the carer. It is important that these issues are discussed openly and at a time when both parties can give them their full attention.

The stronger the relationship between carer and families the easier it is to bring up sensitive issues. However, in situations where the carer and family are finding it hard to find a solution, it is helpful to include the coordination staff in the discussion.

Forming a professional partnership with families is not the same as forming a friendship. Even though partnerships and friendships share some similar characteristics, the child is always the focus of the partnership between carers and families.

Principle 1.4

Carers' personal and family arrangements provide a positive home environment that supports the provision of family day care

The main care environment is also a family home. The decision to use the family home as a professional child care environment should be based on sound advice and made in consultation with the carer's whole family.

Coordination unit staff have a responsibility to clearly describe what will be required of the carer and their family in providing a family day care service in the home. This information, in written form, may be a useful resource for the whole family in making their decision.

The carer and her/his family may need to work with coordination unit staff to develop strategies to manage the shared environment. For example, strategies to manage:

- Time
- Space
- Resources such as the television, computer, personal toys, beds, car and belongings
- Roles and responsibilities
- Family privacy
- Balancing family and professional commitments and responsibilities
- Facilities such as bathrooms, toilets and bedrooms

Members of the carer's family play an important role in the children's experience of family day care. It is important that all interactions with the children in care and their families are positive and respectful. It is also important that interactions between the carer and their family members role model respect and consideration.

Carers use a variety of strategies to manage and maintain an appropriate balance between professional and home or family activities. These strategies will be developed in consultation with the carer's family, families using the service and coordination unit staff.

Principle 1.5

Relationships within the scheme value diversity, teamwork, mutual respect, understanding and professionalism

Carers and coordination unit staff are a team of people committed to the provision of quality care for children. Establishing effective communication between carers and coordination unit staff helps to ensure a supportive, trusting approach that facilitates genuine teamwork between carers and coordination unit staff.

When carers and coordination unit staff feel valued and consider themselves to be equal partners, they will work collaboratively on shared goals leading to positive outcomes for children and their families.

Effective communication is a key to establishing genuine partnerships and working as a team. Genuine partnerships between carers and coordination unit staff are strengthened by:

- Mutual respect and trust
- Ongoing open, two-way communication
- Shared decision making
- Empathy and consideration
- Recognition and use of each other's strengths and skills
- An absence of rivalry and competition
- Access to information

While in some ways carers work in isolation they do not work alone. Family day care is part of a local community whose membership holds a wealth of resources to support families and children. Establishing and maintaining strong vigorous links with other agencies can be a resource for carers and coordination unit staff as they work with children and their families.

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Physical Environment

Environments that are welcoming, safe, well resourced and aesthetically appealing support children and their families to access and settle into family day care and enhance effective learning settings for children. When planning a physical environment that supports children's play and development, carers and coordination unit staff work together to provide a safe environment which allows all children to explore, experiment and make decisions according to their individual needs and ability levels.

When planning and obtaining resources for the physical environment, carers and coordination unit staff consider factors such as the needs and backgrounds of individual children and their families, the existing family day care home, coordination unit environments and costs.

Carers foster children's learning experiences by using inexpensive resources and aspects of the family day care home in flexible and innovative ways. Relevant professional development opportunities and opportunities to network with other carers, support carers in developing their skills and strategies for creative planning.

Regular consultation between families, children, carers and coordination unit staff and knowledge of current safety recommendations, support the provision of functional child and family friendly settings.

- Principle 2.1:** The indoor and outdoor areas of carers' homes and play session* venues are welcoming, comfortable and child friendly
- Principle 2.2:** All children have access to a variety of interesting materials and equipment
- Principle 2.3:** Facilities used by the coordination unit are welcoming and accessible

*For the purposes of FDCQA, the term "play session" is used to describe the situation where two (or more) carers join together with their children for child focussed play experiences. Play sessions may be organised by the carers themselves or by coordination unit staff

Principle 2.1

The indoor and outdoor areas of carers' homes and play session* venues are welcoming, comfortable and child friendly

Carers' homes and scheme play session venues provide a safe, stimulating and challenging environment which maximises learning opportunities for all children.

Typically in family day care, children of different ages share the same play spaces. Carers and coordination unit staff consider ways in which the environment can be organised to meet the diverse needs of babies, toddlers, pre-school and school aged children.

Adequate space and furnishings enable children to make choices about what they do and allow independence in appropriate ways.

Good environments for children:

- Have sufficient space to minimise overcrowding, frustration, conflict, accidents and mess
- Are physically comfortable, for example, the temperature, ventilation and lighting are appropriate
- Have comfortable and appropriate furniture and furnishings such as child-sized tables and chairs, rugs and pillows, a couch or easy chair
- Allow for variety in play: active, messy, quiet, noisy

- Provide spaces to be alone or with others
- Provide easy access to materials allowing children to get what they need independently
- Provide space for children to store and have access to their belongings
- Foster a sense of belonging throughout the home environment. For example, visual images of the children and their families are displayed respectfully throughout the home environment
- Have spaces where works in progress can be stored to show families or return to at a later time
- Are organised in ways that are easily and safely supervised

Creating a home environment that works for the children in care enables carers and coordination unit staff to spend important time interacting with the children, rather than constantly setting up and packing away experiences and materials.

The family day care environment is also a family home. The boundaries for those spaces which can be used by the children in care need to be clearly defined and easily recognised. This assists the children in care to respect the privacy of the carer's family.

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Principle 2.2

All children have access to a variety of interesting materials and equipment

Access to a variety of resources allows children to choose the ones that interest them and match their level of competence. For example:

- Creative materials such as paint, glue, dough, clay, sand, fabric and fibre
- Musical instruments, including drums, bells, shakers
- Functional equipment for pretend play, such as telephones, keyboards, stethoscopes, empty cartons, safe kitchen and eating utensils
- Equipment that extends gross motor skills such as balls, bats, skipping ropes, balance boards and safe garden tools
- Mathematical tools such as rulers, tape measures, calculators, scales, jugs, bottles and measuring cups
- Construction materials, commercially produced and home made blocks, junk materials and off-cuts
- Materials to collect, sort and group such as stones, shells, animal figures
- Books and other reading materials such as magazines, newspapers, menus, phonebooks, timetables, calendars

Carers and coordination unit staff respond positively to children's reasonable requests for additional equipment and materials to extend their interest in an experience, and to provide a sense of success.

In carer's homes and play session venues, attention is given to the ways in which materials are organised and presented so that children can self select. For example, writing and painting materials, scissors, glue and paper are kept close to the area used for art experiences and a book shelf is placed in a cosy area conducive to reading. Open shelves, and storage containers such as ice cream containers, buckets and baskets make it easier for children to select and return the items of their choice.

Where the family day care scheme has a toy library, the acquisition of new resources is carefully planned. Preference is given to open ended materials that can be used in a variety of ways and those that reflect the diversity that exists in Australian society and the wider world. For example, materials could include artwork, photographs, posters, signs, books, dolls, puzzles, music, musical instruments, art materials, fabrics and artifacts.

The scheme's resources are evaluated carefully to ensure that they do not promote stereotypical images of gender roles, cultural groups, race, age or ability. Staff assist carers to select and use materials and equipment in ways that will enhance children's learning and appreciation of diversity.

Principle 2.3

Facilities used by the coordination unit are welcoming and accessible

The coordination unit facilities accommodate the administrative functions of the service and provide a welcoming, child friendly and safe environment for carers, families and children.

The coordination unit environment provides a powerful message about what is valued, who is welcome and the scheme's approach to working in partnership with families and carers:

- A welcoming entrance, thriving plants, smiling faces, prompt attention, comfortable places to sit and the provision of toys and play materials for children all indicate that families, carers and their children are a welcome priority
- A place for confidential discussions demonstrates to carers and families that the coordination unit staff welcome and are interested in listening to questions and concerns
- Positive images of children and examples of their work highlight the importance of children in the organisation
- Pictures, furnishings and artifacts that reflect a range of lifestyles and cultures send a clear message that the scheme respects and embraces diversity
- Well maintained notice boards with current information, brochures and other resources in languages used in the local community help demonstrate that the scheme is in touch with what is happening locally and has strong links with other community activities and services

Some families' or carers' geographical locations or difficulties with mobility may inhibit their access to coordination unit facilities and staff. Coordination unit staff develop and implement appropriate strategies for contact with families and carers in these circumstances.

The coordination unit is also a workplace. Coordination unit staff and management share a responsibility to keep up to date with current occupational health and safety legislation and its implications for all those who may enter and/or use the premises. An annual audit of the scheme's facilities and equipment together with a costed plan for ongoing maintenance and improvement will assist the scheme in meeting its health and safety obligations and responsibilities.

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Children's Experiences, Learning and Development

Successful learning environments recognise the value of play and positive social interactions in the promotion of children's learning and development. Children's learning and development is enhanced through opportunities to make choices and guide their own experiences according to their individual interests, personalities and skills. Children's learning occurs through planned and spontaneous experiences, during their participation in daily routines and through their experience of positive modelling by adults and peers.

A supportive learning environment is underpinned by behaviour guidance strategies which respect individual children's needs and abilities, and which foster the development of children's self-management skills.

A holistic approach to children's learning and development recognises the significance of creative and child-initiated play to the growth of children's self esteem and personal competence.

Carers and coordination unit staff ensure that the balance between planned, spontaneous and routine experiences allows time and opportunity for children to engage in learning through a range of play and other learning experiences.

- Principle 3.1:** Carers respond to the interests and abilities of all children in ways that support learning in a home environment
- Principle 3.2:** Coordination unit staff support children's learning through home visits and/or play sessions*
- Principle 3.3:** Carers and coordination unit staff guide children's behaviour in positive ways
- Principle 3.4:** Carers and coordination unit staff promote resilience and social competence in all children
- Principle 3.5:** Carers and coordination unit staff promote physical competence in all children
- Principle 3.6:** Carers and coordination unit staff foster all children's language, literacy, curiosity, mathematical thinking and scientific exploration
- Principle 3.7:** Carers and coordination unit staff support all children's creative expression

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Principle 3.1

Carers respond to the interests and abilities of all children in ways that support learning in a home environment

Children learn through play and their interactions with people and materials. They are active learners, constructing meaning as they manipulate, explore and experiment. However, learning doesn't just happen. It takes thoughtful planning to provide opportunities and experiences that are child focussed and promote and extend each child's learning and development.

Children come to family day care with their own strengths, interests, experiences and unique family background. By watching, listening and talking with each child and their family the carer learns about the child as a person and their current thinking and understanding. Combining this information with a general understanding about the way children grow and develop helps the carer to predict what skills are likely to emerge next and make decisions about how that development can be facilitated.

Planning is a continuous process that involves thinking clearly about what is being done and why. In the family day care home, the carer starts by closely observing each child and thinking about some of the following:

- In what situations does the child feel most or least comfortable?
- What things does the child do well?
- What does the child like to talk about?
- Is there a particular activity or a particular child in the group that the child seems drawn to?
- What are the main themes of the child's dramatic play?
- What things does the child most enjoy or find exciting?
- What questions does the child ask?

Observations of children assist the carer to think about and plan subsequent experiences for the children that build on their earlier successes and interests.

To make the day flow as smoothly as possible for the children, carers also plan for routines or regular events such as mealtimes, rest and/or sleep or walks to school. Thought is given to:

- Group dynamics – who else will be in care today?
- Equipment or materials – what is needed?
- Space – indoors or out?
- Time – what else needs to happen today?

Documenting observations and stories about children and the children's planning ideas helps carers to clarify their thinking and assists them in regularly sharing information about the child with families and coordination unit staff. There are many ways to record the information gathered about each child and the ideas for experiences to support each child's learning. Carers consider a recording method that best suits their particular talents and the time they have available.

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For example:

- Writing things down in a notebook or diary
- Keeping notes on the computer
- Using photographs, especially to record works in progress such as block construction, sand and dramatic play experiences
- Using a video camera to record children's development over time
- Collecting samples of the child's work. It is important to label and date each sample so that families, carers and coordination unit staff can note the child's progress over time
- Creating a folder or scrap book for each child. The child can be involved in selecting what is included. By dating and adding to these records, carers, staff and the child's family note the child's progress over time in the family day care home

Written plans remain flexible to take advantage of some unexpected change to routines or the spontaneous interests of the children.

Evaluation is something that occurs every day in the form of comments such as "that was great" or "I won't do that again". In the family day care setting reflecting or thinking about what happens each day and why helps carers make informed judgements about the quality and effectiveness of their programs:

- How did the children respond to the experience? Why?
- Was there enough space? Enough time? Enough resources or materials?
- What unexpected things did the carer learn about the children or themselves?
- What new understanding might have occurred for the carer?
- How can this experience be improved or extended next time?

Regularly reflecting on the effectiveness of planned and spontaneous experiences makes it easier to decide what to do next time. Evaluation also provides useful information about children's learning to share with families and coordination unit staff.

Television, computers, electronic games or other similar technology used as experiences for children are appropriate when they are child focussed, carefully planned, monitored and evaluated by carers. By sharing and discussing these experiences with children the carer is able to ensure that children are not exposed to violence, stereotypes or adult themes.

Carers' professional growth can be nurtured through activities that stimulate reflection and the development of new understanding.

Principle 3.2

Coordination unit staff support children's learning through home visits and/or play sessions*

Coordination unit staff visits to carers' homes provide opportunities for informal learning and encourage reflection on practice. Carer home visits are an opportunity to share information about individual children in care, child development and early childhood practice. In planning visits to carers' homes, coordination unit staff focus on:

- Helping carers to interpret their observations of children and plan for children's interests and abilities
- Supporting carers to develop programs and experiences which reflect the culture and home languages of the children in care and celebrate diversity
- Providing assistance and access to resources such as reading material, equipment and play materials
- Assisting carers to identify their own individual training and professional development needs

Home visits and play sessions provide coordination unit staff with an opportunity to observe the children in care in both large and small group settings. An effective family day care scheme has a systematic process in place to ensure these observations are documented and are regularly shared with families.

Play sessions provide an opportunity for carers and the children in their care to interact with coordination unit staff, other children and adults. Play sessions also provide an informal training opportunity, where carers and coordination unit staff can model and share their early childhood knowledge, experience and skills.

Those carers and staff responsible for the provision of play sessions plan each session carefully to ensure that it provides a positive experience for all the children who will attend. Play session plans take into account:

- The number and different interests of babies, toddlers and older children
- The play session venue and the indoor and outdoor spaces available
- The available equipment and learning materials
- The roles of carers and coordination unit staff

Play sessions provide a stimulating learning environment for all children when planning:

- Takes into account observations and information about the children gathered from families and carers and during visits to the carer's home by coordination unit staff
- Recognises children's strengths and interests
- Fosters creativity, curiosity, self help skills, decision making, cooperation and negotiation
- Incorporates a variety of content areas and offers a balance across a variety of types of experiences
- Celebrates diversity

Planning for the play session is made available to participating carers and coordination unit staff, to enable them all to contribute to the program and to evaluate it.

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Principle 3.3

Carers and coordination unit staff guide children's behaviour in positive ways

Children learn by exploring and experimenting, testing the limits of their environment and experiencing the consequences of their behaviour. Learning to manage feelings and behaviour is a developmental process just like any other, and children need time and practice to master the skills associated with positive behaviour. They also need adults to help them avoid harm to themselves or others and to begin to learn what personal and social behaviour is expected of them.

Positive strategies for guiding children's behaviour are based on respect and the premise that all children, in individual ways, can learn to manage their emotions regardless of the presence or absence of an adult. Children benefit most when the adults who care for them adopt a consistent approach to guiding their behaviour. Therefore it is important for carers, coordination unit staff and families to talk about their different approaches to guiding children's behaviour and to reach agreement about the way the carer will respond to the child in care. Developing a clear, consistent policy regarding the family day care scheme's expectations in relation to positive guidance also assists carers and coordination unit staff in this area.

Taking a positive approach to guidance requires that adults try to understand why a child behaves in a particular way. To do this effectively, carer and coordination unit staff need to know and understand the children in care, and be aware that a particular behaviour is probably affected by a combination of factors. For example:

- The child may be tired, hungry, upset or unwell
- The environment may be cluttered, too small for the number of children in care or may invite unwanted behaviour

- There may not be enough resources or materials, or those that are provided may be too challenging or not challenging enough for the particular competence and interests of the children in care
- The child may be responding to the actions of other children in the group
- The child may be reacting to the carer or staff person's response to the situation
- The routines or experiences may require children to wait, queue, or to watch and listen rather than being directly involved
- The children and the care environment may be inadequately supervised

Positive guidance is very much about being pro-active and preventing behaviour difficulties wherever possible. Carers and coordination unit staff think in advance, about how they can best meet the needs and interests of each child and, if necessary, make subtle adjustments to the environment and care routines to minimise confrontation and conflict.

Helping children to learn to behave positively takes time and understanding as well as firmness. It means not only preventing unacceptable behaviour but also assisting children to develop new social skills and ideas of fairness. Carers and coordination unit staff have a responsibility to show children how to express all sorts of feelings in an appropriate way. When carers and coordination unit staff accept children's behaviour on 'good days' as well as 'bad days', without judgement, they are role modelling patience and tolerance. When they are honest, open and state their own needs clearly and calmly, carers and staff are demonstrating an acceptable way of responding to emotionally challenging situations.

Principle 3.4

Carers and coordination unit staff promote resilience and social competence in all children

Resilient people have a positive outlook on life and cope well with the inevitable ups and downs of life. They find support from the relationships they have with others and can seek the help of others when they need to. They have self-respect and a strong sense of worth. They also demonstrate respect for others and value relationships with others.

Children who have sensitive, responsive, warm and consistent caregivers develop a view of themselves as lovable and worthy. They come to view the world as a place that can be trusted and are able to feel and say:

I have

- People around me I trust and who love me, no matter what
- People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble
- People who show me how to do the right things by the way they do them
- People who want me to learn to do things for myself
- People who will help me if I need it

I am

- A person people can like and love
- Able to identify, understand and accept others' feelings
- Respectful of myself and others
- Willing to be responsible for what I do
- Sure things will be alright

I can

- Talk to someone or take action about the things that frighten or bother me
- Find ways to solve problems
- Control myself when I feel like doing something that is not right or dangerous

Carers and coordination unit staff promote resilience in children when they:

- value and accept all children unconditionally and view them as competent and capable
- are patient, gentle, calm, reassuring and clear—even when the child strongly expresses distress, frustration or anger
- encourage children to express their own feelings and recognise feelings in others
- provide opportunities for children to learn to work together, to discuss and negotiate rights and fairness
- model and encourage optimism, caring, empathy, cooperation and respect for others
- include experiences that incorporate the unique characteristics of each child and which celebrate diversity
- avoid being overprotective and encourage children to try new things and do things for themselves with minimal adult help

Principle 3.5

Carers and coordination unit staff promote physical competence in all children

Children have an innate urge to explore and master their environment. The physical activity involved in moving around and manipulating objects facilitates learning and progress in all other areas. A child's developing physical competence also impacts on the development of confidence, self-concept and emotional wellbeing.

There is a growing awareness and concern for the general health and wellbeing of Australian children. Children who are less active and become overweight risk developing serious disease and illness later in life. Consequently, they need opportunities to develop the skills and positive attitudes that nurture and promote physical growth, development, health and wellbeing.

Carers and coordination unit staff plan, prepare and provide experiences that refine physical competence including coordination, agility, balance, flexibility, motor skills, hand-eye coordination and overall muscle strength and endurance. The mere provision of an outdoor area for free play is not sufficient to adequately promote children's physical development.

The scheme ensures that children have access to a wide variety of materials to challenge and develop fine and gross motor skills. For example, climbing frames; stilts; balance beams; balls; wheeled toys; different sized implements such as spades, brooms, rakes, scoops, dough, hammers and pegs; dump and fill equipment; push and pull toys; construction pieces; building blocks; and sand and water. In addition to including commercial materials and equipment, carers and coordination unit staff make simple resources to meet the particular skills and interests of the children.

When equipment is flexible, it can be rearranged or adapted to meet the particular skills and interests of the children, providing more variety and challenge as children's skills increase. Wherever possible, the children in care are encouraged to be involved in setting up physical resources and to offer ideas for activities, experiences and materials.

Opportunities for physical activity are included throughout the day, indoors as well as outside. Fine motor activities are incorporated into language and music experiences, and a wide range of movements are involved in music, dance, games and walks around the local area.

Children are encouraged to develop skills at their own rates and in their own ways, as they test their own abilities and limitations. While children need enthusiastic adults and encouragement to participate in physical activities, the sensitive adult waits until the child indicates that they need assistance before offering it.

For school aged children there is provision to practise the motor skills required for successful participation in school and sporting activities. For example, ball handling, running, jumping, use and care of sporting equipment, writing, drawing and use of appropriate tools.

Principle 3.6

Carers and coordination unit staff foster all children's language, literacy, curiosity, mathematical thinking and scientific exploration

Children are tireless investigators, explorers and problem solvers who are curious to find out about and understand how the world works. They construct meaning and develop the ability to think in increasingly complex and sophisticated ways through their interaction with adults, other children and the environment. Language and other forms of communication play a vital role in children's learning, allowing them to seek and understand information, express opinions and convey feelings. Carers and coordination unit staff provide plenty of opportunities for one to one communication with children and encourage children to initiate conversation as well as listen to others.

Each child's language reflects cultural and social background. Since language is such an important tool in thinking and learning, the use of each child's home language is respected and encouraged wherever possible.

For some children, a language other than English is spoken at home. Not being able to communicate in a shared language can be very isolating and can make the transition from home to family day care difficult. Hearing even a few words or phrases from a home language is comforting and can provide the child reassurance during this time. Carers and coordination unit staff are supported in learning important words and phrases from the child's home language and in understanding issues relating to being bilingual.

The family day care setting provides an environment that is rich in signs, symbols, words and numbers and provides access to resources that help children develop foundational concepts of mathematics, reading and writing.

Carers and coordination unit staff consider:

- including resources that foster children's thinking. For example, counting and rhyme books; games that use numbers, such as

cards and dominoes; or equipment that relates to shape, colour, pattern and weight

- providing opportunities for children to match, sort, arrange things in sequence, count things, measure, recognise and create patterns
- including mathematical tools such as rulers, tape measures, calculators, scales and measuring cups
- providing a variety of books and other reading materials. For example, books that explore diversity in roles for both genders, family types or abilities, magazines, newspapers, catalogues, flyers, menus
- including songs, rhymes and finger plays to stimulate children's developing language skills
- providing activities that take account of and extend children's cultural understandings. For example, looking at books and listening to songs in community languages
- ensuring writing materials are available throughout the day indoors and out, to enable children to include writing in their play. For example, making lists, signs and labels
- providing opportunities for children to learn new skills by solving problems through trial and error, knowing they can ask for adult help if wanted.

The foundations of children's literacy and numeracy are laid when children see adults using written language and mathematical concepts for 'real' purposes. For example, making and using shopping lists, following recipes, using timetables, telephone directories and calendars.

Opportunities are provided for school aged children to complete homework tasks and carers show particular interest in and support for children's experiences and successes at school. By taking an interest in each child's schooling, carers can ensure that they provide complementary experiences and opportunities for further learning in family day care.

Principle 3.7

Carers and coordination unit staff support all children's creative expression

Creativity describes a way of thinking, experimenting, making and doing that involves some originality of thought or expression. While typically we focus on music, movement and the visual arts when discussing creativity, it is important to remember that creativity also occurs in areas such as language, maths, science and technology, problem solving and relationships.

Carers and coordination unit staff play an important role in developing children's creativity when they provide opportunities for children to manipulate materials to represent things, to construct things, to make music and to express and communicate their ideas and feelings. By providing open ended resources, unhurried time, genuine interest and appreciation for what children are doing, carers and coordination unit staff support the development of creative expression.

Children will use all sorts of materials, not just art materials, to represent things and to express and communicate their ideas. When they are able to make their own discoveries and to develop different ways to be creative, children come to understand that their ideas are important and are valued. Providing an environment and resources that interest children and invite their curiosity will provoke their questions, awaken their imagination, and inspire them to explore. For example, an environment where:

- They are introduced to the tools and materials used in the visual arts and allowed to experiment with them to produce their own work and to express themselves in their own way, rather than using stencils and colouring in books
- They are given ample time to get the feel of and to pound, pinch, squeeze, roll and flatten dough or clay without using cookie cutters or rolling pins
- They are encouraged to explore the colours, textures, sights and sounds in the natural environment. For example, using magnifying glasses to examine leaves, trees, stones and shells, listening to the rain and wind, talking about the effects of light, seasonal changes and weather
- They are offered opportunities for listening, singing, creating, dancing and experimenting with sound. Markets and second hand stores are a good source of a range of commercial and home made musical instruments. These are arranged so that children are free to explore and engage with them in their own way
- They are exposed to a wide range of music and dance, from classical to rap, and from many cultures, genres and eras. Audio and video tapes make a good substitute where cost or distance precludes access to visiting musicians and dancers
- Their imaginative thought and play are encouraged through told stories, puppets, and role plays. The garden or park is an ideal setting for 'a bear hunt' or 'a walk in the jungle', while the sandpit can become the starting point for an archaeological dig or a source of hidden 'treasure'
- They are provided with dress ups and props for imaginative play that reflects the social and cultural diversity in the community
- They are provided with resources such as boxes, cartons, cardboard cylinders, empty containers, bottles, blocks and timber off-cuts that invite children to experiment with three-dimensional construction
- They are given time and opportunity to complete longer term projects and there is space to store them
- Their work is displayed in ways that value each child's efforts. Photographs can be used to record works in progress and temporary works such as block construction or sand creations. Recordings of singing and music created by children can be shared with families

FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* extract

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Health, Hygiene, Nutrition, Safety and Wellbeing

Family day care homes constitute a unique child care setting as they have the dual functions of both family home and child care environment. To ensure that children receive quality care, coordination unit staff and carers share a responsibility to keep up to date with current research and recommended practice in relation to child health, hygiene, nutrition, safety and emergency procedures.

It is essential that scheme staff and carers are aware of and meet all State or Territory legal requirements for children's safety and wellbeing, particularly in relation to child protection.

Regardless of their individual skills or backgrounds, all children have the right to experience quality care in an environment which is clean, safe, healthy and where their wellbeing is a paramount consideration in the program. In exercising their duty of care, carers and coordination unit staff consider the unique aspects of the family day care environment, and the individual needs and cultural backgrounds of children and families. This is of particular importance when planning for children's mealtimes, their sleep or rest requirements, their dressing requirements and their personal hygiene.

- Principle 4.1:** The environments provided for children are safe
- Principle 4.2:** Food and drink are nutritious and culturally appropriate
- Principle 4.3:** The health and safety of all children are protected
- Principle 4.4:** Nappy changing, toileting and bathing are positive experiences for children
- Principle 4.5:** Children's needs for rest, sleep and comfort are supported
- Principle 4.6:** Current State or Territory legislation relating to child protection and wellbeing is implemented consistently

Principle 4.1

The environments provided for children are safe

As the care environment is also a family home, carers and coordination unit staff have to recognise and manage the fine balance between respecting the carer's family's right to privacy and comfort and creating a safe place for children.

Young children do not understand the potential dangers that may exist in the home. Management, coordination unit staff and carers have a legal and ethical obligation to ensure that potentially dangerous products, plants and objects are made inaccessible to all children at all times.

State and Territory licensing legislation, public health laws and occupational health and safety laws, as well as *National Standards for Family Day Care*^{*}, outline acceptable safety standards in family day care settings. There are many other recognised health and safety authorities that also offer advice about assessing and minimising risks in care environments and the selection and installation of play materials and equipment that meet recommended safety standards.

Management, coordination unit staff and carers have a responsibility to develop a systematic process that ensures that care environments and equipment are regularly inspected and, where safety risks are identified, these are addressed promptly.

Many factors need to be considered when maintaining a safe environment in family day care. These include:

- Safely storing cleaning materials, disinfectants, poisons, toiletries, first aid equipment and other dangerous, flammable and hazardous substances
- Safely using heaters, fireplaces, stoves, cooling units and fans

- Minimising the risk that a child can be trapped, pinched, crushed or struck by toys, equipment or furniture
- Ensuring that all equipment is kept clean, maintained in good condition and meets appropriate Australian safety standards. For example, cots, high chairs, car seats, prams and strollers
- Isolating potential hazards in the outdoor environment, such as pools, ponds, sheds, animals and poisonous vegetation or plants with sharp prickles or prominent thorns
- Planning and conducting excursions safely
- Travelling safely in cars or on public transport
- Protecting the safety of younger children while recognising the need for older children to create and take on new physical challenges
- Directly supervising children's interactions with animals. For example, unless the interaction between the children and the animal can be directly supervised by an adult, animals must be kept in an area separate to where children are playing

Carers and coordination unit staff ensure that children are appropriately dressed for indoor and outdoor activities and conditions. In consultation with coordination unit staff, carers and families, the scheme develops, and keeps up to date a policy on sun protection that takes into account the recommendations of State and Territory cancer organisations.

Carers and coordination unit staff have a responsibility to ensure the policy is implemented consistently and that they model sun protection practices at all times. Regularly providing families with information about sun protection promotes continuity between home and the family day care setting.

^{*}In States and Territories where no licensing regulation exists for family day care, the *National Standards for Family Day Care* provide a baseline standard for services to implement to ensure the protection and safety of children in their care. Please refer to the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) *Child Care Services Handbook* (accessible on FaCS website www.facs.gov.au/childcare)

Principle 4.2

Food and drink are nutritious and culturally appropriate

The food children eat affects their growth and development, overall behaviour and wellbeing. It is therefore important that the food provided for children is nutritious and is provided in adequate quantities to promote their normal development. Children may spend long periods of time in family day care and therefore carers and coordination unit staff need to work cooperatively with families to ensure that each child's daily nutritional requirements are provided.

Eating is also a source of enjoyment and it is important that carers and staff do not become so concerned about nutrition and manners that they lose sight of children's enjoyment of food. Many of the eating habits and attitudes to food developed in childhood continue throughout life.

Carers ensure that mealtimes are relaxed social occasions when they:

- Provide a pleasant and attractive place to eat
- Create an unhurried, relaxed atmosphere
- Engage children in interesting conversation
- Model acceptable behaviour and model their own enjoyment of mealtimes
- Respect each child's right to choose food and to feed themselves

When food is provided by the service, carers work with families to ensure that it is culturally appropriate. Carers also need to be sensitive to the meal time practices in each child's family. Where these differ from the practice in family day care, carers and/or coordination staff openly discuss the issue with families and negotiate an acceptable solution.

Carers balance their efforts to create pleasant mealtimes against the need for safe food handling practices. Whether the family or the service provides food, carers and coordination unit staff follow proper food handling procedures to ensure that the food eaten by children is safe and retains its nutritional value.

Food safety information from recognised health and safety authorities in each State and Territory can be used by the management, coordination unit staff, carers and families to develop clear policies and procedures around food handling, transportation and storage. The quality of the scheme's practices in these areas is improved when carers and coordination unit staff participate in appropriate training.

Principle 4.3

The health and safety of all children are protected

The policies that are developed by the scheme, in consultation with staff, carers, families and recognised health and safety authorities, provide the framework for good practice and a safe environment for children and adults. Management supports and assists coordination unit staff and carers to protect children's health and act responsibly in emergency situations by providing clear guidelines for:

- Minimising the spread of infectious diseases
- Managing illness
- Administering medication
- Planning for fire and other emergencies
- Promoting dental health

When young children are together in a group, the risk of infection becomes higher. In addition to causing stress for the child, the regular spread of infection in the family day care home can cause stress for working families, particularly if it requires them to take extended time off work. It can also cause stress for carers who may also require time off work whilst they or their family members are infectious or recovering from infection.

Simple infection control measures, such as regular, thorough handwashing can significantly reduce the spread of many infections and diseases. In situations where handwashing is not possible, 'wet wipes' containing antiseptic may be used or some other tested procedure, approved by a recognised health authority.

As young children can become sick in a very short time, carers and coordination unit staff must also be alert to and aware of the common signs of illness. Carers closely monitor a child with early signs of illness, atypical behaviour or development, and consult with the child's family and/or coordination unit staff. Carers and coordination unit staff administer medication and other remedies to children only with written permission from the family and in accordance with a clear scheme procedure.

For a child with additional medical needs, the scheme has an individual health management plan prepared by the child's family in consultation with the child's doctor or medical specialist. Carers and coordination unit staff know how to implement the plan.

Carers and coordination unit staff develop and practise procedures for the efficient emergency evacuation of children and themselves from carers' homes, play session venues, and coordination unit facilities. It is important that emergency plans include planning for emergencies out of normal working hours. For example, having access to emergency services and evacuation of children during overnight care.

Carers and coordination unit staff are given appropriate training in using relevant emergency equipment, such as fire extinguishers and fire blankets. Training in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is also an important aspect of ensuring the safety of children in care.

Principle 4.4

Nappy changing, toileting and bathing are positive experiences for children

Familiar, unhurried, regular routines that children can anticipate provide reassurance and minimise stress on children and the adults who care for them. Carers and coordination unit staff take time to talk to families about what happens in the child's home around bathing, toileting and nappy changing and to share decision making about how these things will be managed in family day care.

Nappy changing

Nappy changing provides an opportunity for playful interactions with babies and toddlers. Carers develop familiar, relaxed routines that convey respect for the child and the family's child-rearing practices by:

- Talking with families about routines at home and the child's preferred schedule to ensure consistency and continuity of the experience
- Changing nappies frequently to ensure babies' and toddlers' health, hygiene and comfort are maintained
- Asking toddlers to allow checking of their nappy and interacting with them in a positive way about nappy changing
- Explaining why a change of nappy or clothes is needed

Carers' homes and play session venues have an area set aside for nappy changing. A changing bench or mat with an impervious washable surface is used and cleaned after each use. In consultation with staff, carers and families the scheme develops, and keeps up to date, a comprehensive nappy changing procedure that considers:

- Current advice from recognised health authorities
- The appropriate use of gloves and hand washing
- The safe disposal of soiled nappies

- The ways in which soiled clothing and linen can be stored safely and hygienically pending laundering or disposal
- Procedures for minimising the spread of infection

Toileting

As children grow, they develop an increasing understanding of their bodies and how they function. Carers encourage toddlers to show an interest in imitating other children using the toilet. Observing a toddler helps the carer to assess readiness for toilet training. Discussions with the child's family also help to determine whether toilet training should be started. Carers adopt a supportive and unhurried approach to toilet training by:

- Considering the child's developmental level in regard to toilet training
- Approaching toileting in a relaxed way
- Helping children to use the toilet and positively supporting their efforts
- Reminding and assisting children to use the toilet as needed
- Recognising that toileting skills may be unreliable
- Responding calmly to toileting 'accidents'
- Encouraging children to wash their hands after toileting

Preschoolers and School Aged Children

Preschoolers are usually responsible for their own toileting and hand washing, but some still need modelling and encouragement in good hygiene practices.

When older children are in care, carers and coordination unit staff will need to develop strategies for supervising children's toileting, bathing and dressing that protect their dignity and respect their privacy. Particular attention needs to be paid to this area when children are in family day care for extended hours or overnight.

Principle 4.5

Children's needs for rest, sleep and comfort are supported

The scheme has current safety information relating to cots, beds, bedding and sleep time procedures. Using this research, and in consultation with coordination unit staff, carers and families, the scheme develops clear guidelines for carers about children's sleep and rest time in family day care.

The scheme's policy and procedures include:

- Using safe cots that meet Australian Standards
- The safe placement of cots, for example, away from windows where there are blinds and/or curtain cords
- Practices that reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)
 - babies are placed on their back to sleep
 - babies' faces and heads stay uncovered during sleep
 - babies' feet are placed at the bottom of the cot and bedclothes are tucked in securely
 - there are no quilts, doonas, pillows and cot bumpers in the cot
 - electric blankets, hot water bottles or wheat bags are not used for babies and young children
 - the area used for sleep is smoke free and not overheated

Carers adapt sleep and rest procedures to meet the needs of individual children. Children who want to rest or sleep should be able to, and children who do not want to sleep are not forced to. Quiet experiences such as reading, talking and listening, writing and drawing, solving puzzles or playing board games are provided for children who do not need to sleep. Carers talk with the child's family about each child's sleep and rest routines to maximise continuity between routines at home and in care.

For some children, particularly when they are settling into care, going to sleep and waking up in an unfamiliar place can be frightening. Carers spend time settling each child, rocking or patting them if needed and perhaps providing soft music.

Regularly providing families with information about safe sleeping equipment and practices promotes continuity between home and the family day care setting.

Principle 4.6

Current State or Territory legislation relating to child protection and wellbeing is implemented consistently

Children's wellbeing is of paramount importance. Carers and coordination unit staff ensure that all children are free from sexual, emotional and physical maltreatment and that they receive sufficient food, shelter, medical attention and supervision while in family day care. Carers and coordination unit staff are sensitive to the risks children face if they are witness to, or victims of, violence, abuse and intimidating behaviour in the home.

Children are further at risk when the adults who care for them are aware of abuse and either handle the information inappropriately or take no action. The scheme has a responsibility to protect the wellbeing of the children using the service. This duty of care is held by all those involved in the scheme including owners, sponsors, management committees, licensees, coordination unit staff and carers.

The scheme documents its child protection policies and procedures to assist all stakeholders to understand and comply with their legal responsibilities and effectively manage child protection issues when they arise. Child protection policies include information about:

- The scheme's commitment to the protection of children
- The responsibilities of management, coordination unit staff and carers in child protection matters
- Reporting procedures
- Confidentiality and record keeping

Establishing an environment that protects children can minimise the risk to children in care. The scheme considers:

- Including child protection policies in staff, carer and family information handbooks
- Including information about child protection policies and procedures in the orientation and induction processes for coordination unit staff, carers and their families
- Using criminal record screening when recruiting coordination unit staff and carers (This is a requirement in some State or Territory legislation)
- Strategies to ensure children are appropriately supervised at all times
- Strategies to ensure children are placed in environments free of smoke, drug and alcohol
- Supervision of volunteers, students, casual staff and visitors to the scheme
- Providing training for coordination staff and carers so that they understand the scheme's policies and procedures regarding child protection and are clear about their responsibilities and the process of reporting child protection issues
- Providing resources and information about child protection that is easily accessed by coordination unit staff, carers and families
- Ensuring child protection information is regularly updated and that policies and procedures are reviewed and updated
- Including protective behaviours programs for older children

FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide* extract

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Carers and Coordination Unit Staff

Coordination unit staff are responsible for ensuring there are procedures, policies and systems in place to maintain quality in the scheme's activities, programs and organisation. Coordination unit staff work with carers, families and other professionals to ensure that the scheme's personnel policies and procedures are effective and meet all relevant legislative requirements, including occupational health and safety regulations. Acknowledging and promoting the value of professional development and effective recruitment practices is fundamental in advocating for the scheme and the professionalism of its staff and carers.

Coordination unit staff, carers and families evaluate the scheme's achievements and identify future areas for improvement from the perspectives of all individuals involved. All stakeholders have regular opportunities to contribute to reviews of the scheme's quality practices and procedures and to collaborate in the development of ongoing improvement plans. Encouraging families, carers and coordination unit staff to work together on continuing improvement strategies supports the development of practical and relevant approaches to all scheme operations.

- Principle 5.1:** Recruitment, selection and orientation processes for carers and coordination unit staff encourage and support the provision of a quality service
- Principle 5.2:** The scheme has a systematic process in place to monitor current practice and identify areas for continuing improvement
- Principle 5.3:** Professional development opportunities are accessed by carers, coordination unit staff and others involved in management
- Principle 5.4:** The scheme promotes occupational health and safety

Principle 5.1

Recruitment, selection and orientation processes for carers and coordination unit staff encourage and support the provision of a quality service

Effective recruitment and induction processes ensure that the best possible coordination unit staff and carers are attracted to and retained by the scheme and that quality standards and continuity of care are maintained.

Children and their families develop trusting relationships with carers and coordination unit staff. These are achieved when children and their families have access to the same carers and staff and when they experience care practices that are consistent with home routines. Accomplishing continuity between care and home routines is supported by the recruitment of suitably qualified carers and coordination unit staff whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds reflect those of families and the local community.

The induction process for new carers and coordination unit staff may need to continue over weeks or perhaps months. However, as part of initial orientation to the scheme, all new carers and coordination unit staff benefit from:

- Written information about the scheme, its philosophy and goals
- A job and/or role description and, where applicable, conditions of employment

- Written information about relevant State or Territory licensing legislation or *National Standards for Family Day Care** where there is no family day care licensing regulation
- Copies of current scheme policies and procedures
- Information about safe work practices

Providing a handbook to all new staff and carers helps ensure that the information provided to all carers and coordination unit staff is consistent.

In many instances new carers and coordination unit staff benefit from the opportunity to work alongside a more experienced staff person or carer before commencing work independently.

*In States and Territories where no licensing regulation exists for family day care, the *National Standards for Family Day Care* provide a baseline standard for services to implement to ensure the protection and safety of children in their care. Please refer to the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) *Child Care Services Handbook* (accessible on FaCS website www.facs.gov.au/childcare)

Principle 5.2

The scheme has a systematic process in place to monitor current practice and identify areas for continuing improvement

By encouraging debate, reflection on work practices and providing each other with constructive feedback, management, coordination unit staff and carers work together to identify ways in which the scheme can be improved.

In consultation with carers and coordination unit staff, the scheme develops a systematic process for monitoring its current practices and ensuring compliance with State or Territory child care legislation or *National Standards for Family Day Care** where there is no family day care licensing regulation. The monitoring process, including an agreed procedure for addressing any inadequacies that are identified, is documented and included in the materials provided to all new carers and coordination unit staff.

A policy regarding visits to carers' homes by coordination unit staff clarifies the professional yet comfortable manner in which visits are conducted. This policy outlines the rights and responsibilities of both coordination unit staff and carers, and takes into account:

- The purpose and outcome of visits;
- The frequency and time of visits;
- A balance of scheduled and spontaneous visits; and
- The records that will be kept about visits.

All stakeholders, including representatives from the local community, are given the opportunity to be involved in regular discussions about the scheme. To facilitate this, the scheme identifies and addresses any barriers that prevent individuals or groups from having their opinions heard.

The results of the evaluations of current practice gathered from families, carers, staff and management create a 'snapshot' of the scheme, highlighting areas of strength and those needing improvement. This 'snapshot' becomes the baseline against which future improvements can be measured.

A written continuing improvement plan assists management, carers and staff to clearly identify what it is they want to achieve and helps them stay focussed on the task. Such a plan typically identifies the goals to be achieved, the strategies to be used, the people who will be involved, the resources and/or training required and the timeframe in which the tasks are to be completed.

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Principle 5.3

Professional development opportunities are accessed by carers, coordination unit staff and others involved in management

The knowledge and skills of the scheme's staff, carers and management are reflected in the quality of the service.

While a comprehensive and structured induction program is essential to ensure new carers and coordination unit staff feel confident and well prepared for their respective roles in family day care, ongoing professional development plays an integral part in ensuring skills and knowledge are maintained, extended and kept up to date.

Carers, coordination unit staff and management have a joint responsibility to identify training needs and plan for professional development that will assist the scheme to maintain and make continuing improvements to the quality of care provided for children and families.

Training needs and priorities are identified through an analysis of information gathered from the scheme's self-study, family feedback and staff and carer appraisals. Training plans need to be informed by the scheme's ongoing improvement plans and by current information and research from the early childhood and health and safety fields.

The different learning styles and backgrounds of carers, coordination unit staff and others involved in management and issues such as distance and the availability of resources are taken into account when planning training and development activities. The scheme may need to consider a range of professional development opportunities to meet the particular needs of its stakeholders. For example:

- Carers, staff and others involved in management sharing their expertise, providing their support and acting as mentors for their colleagues
- Encouraging carers to form small support groups to help each other and share ideas
- Using home visits as informal one to one training opportunities
- Using play sessions to model best practice

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- Networking with other schemes and sharing the expertise of carers, coordination unit staff and others involved in management
- Inviting people from diverse cultural backgrounds from the local area to share their experiences, perceptions and views about the needs and issues facing culturally diverse and indigenous communities
- Inviting professionals working with children in the scheme, or family members with relevant expertise, to run in-house professional development sessions for carers and staff
- Offering short courses provided by resource and training agencies, professional development agencies, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions or universities
- Encouraging attendance at conferences and seminars to gain new information, network and exchange ideas with others in the field
- Encouraging staff and carers undertaking formal studies at university or TAFE to share what they have learnt with others
- Providing videos, journals and other professional resources for staff and carers to borrow
- Developing self-paced training packages on relevant topics.
- Maintaining a current list of useful websites that carers and staff can access to research topics of interests relevant to child care

Effective training is varied, useful, relevant and challenging for carers and coordination unit staff and focuses on particular areas of family day care provision. For example, small business management, children's learning and development, current theory in childhood learning and care, risk management and 'caring for the carer'.

Evaluation of professional development experiences by carers, coordination unit staff and others involved in management assists in planning future training opportunities that are relevant and effective.

Principle 5.4

The scheme promotes occupational health and safety

Working in any child care setting is physically and emotionally challenging. Compliance with relevant occupational health and safety legislation is integral to maintaining a safe working environment for carers and coordination unit staff.

Scheme management has a responsibility to provide carers and staff with information, training and supervision to ensure their safety and the safety of children, families and visitors to the scheme's facilities. Occupational health and safety must always be considered in the development and review of the scheme's policies, procedures and practices.

Carers and staff must be informed of:

- Their responsibilities, and those of management, in relation to occupational health and safety issues
- Potential hazards, such as electricity, chemicals, buildings and equipment
- Back care and correct manual handling techniques

- Strategies for managing stress and burnout
- Appropriate responses to the many challenging situations that can arise in family day care which may place the staff, carer, children in care or the carer's family at risk
- Adult immunisation
- Responses to natural/environmental disasters and critical incidents
- Emergency procedures including evacuation and first aid

This information must be provided to all new carers and staff during the orientation/initial training process. The appointment of an appropriately trained occupational health and safety representative assists the scheme to identify and effectively manage occupational health and safety risks.

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Management and Administration

It is the role of scheme management and coordination unit staff to establish effective and ethical management policies and procedures. Scheme policies and procedures must be informed by relevant legislative requirements, current 'best practice' in management and also reflect an awareness of community needs and issues.

Comprehensive written policies and procedures provide clear guidance to coordination unit staff, carers and families in relation to management issues. Involvement of all stakeholders in policy review and development fosters an atmosphere of trust and teamwork and helps ensure that policies and procedures address real needs and are implemented consistently and effectively.

An essential element of quality scheme management is ensuring that clear and consistent procedures for the maintenance and confidential management of family, child, carer and staff records are implemented.

Decision making, grievance and complaints handling policies and procedures are transparent and clearly define accountability.

- Principle 6.1:** Management practices are ethical and operate within relevant legislation
- Principle 6.2:** The scheme consults and works collaboratively with all stakeholders
- Principle 6.3:** The scheme has an efficient, effective and ethical process for the management of records
- Principle 6.4:** The scheme has simple, transparent grievance and complaints handling procedures
- Principle 6.5:** Carers and coordination unit staff are effective advocates for their service within the community and actively seek to build links with other agencies to benefit children and their families

Principle 6.1

Management practices are ethical and operate within relevant legislation

While the structure and operation of family day care varies across Australia, all scheme/service operators are required to meet a range of legal and accountability responsibilities fundamental to the provision of a quality service for children. These may include:

- Compliance with State or Territory child care legislation, where it exists, or *National Standards for Family Day Care** where there is no family day care licensing regulation
- Accountability for Australian Government funding
- Ensuring management committee members, staff and carers are suitable persons to operate and work in the scheme
- Meeting obligations under association or corporation laws
- Compliance with relevant industrial awards and agreements
- Compliance with relevant privacy legislation
- Compliance with relevant health records legislation
- Adherence to occupational health and safety legislation and guidelines

Management has a responsibility to ensure that carers and coordination unit staff are provided with accurate and timely information on all matters affecting their working environment and are offered support in meeting accountability requirements. Coordination unit staff also have a responsibility to provide information to families on the range of entitlements that may be available to them.

The scheme has an agreed code of conduct that applies to carers, coordination unit staff and management. This code clearly articulates the responsibilities of all parties in relation to one another and to the families and children using the scheme.

*In States and Territories where no licensing regulation exists for family day care, the *National Standards for Family Day Care* provide a baseline standard for services to implement to ensure the protection and safety of children in their care. Please refer to the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) *Child Care Services Handbook* (accessible on FaCS website www.facs.gov.au/childcare)

Principle 6.2

The scheme consults and works collaboratively with all stakeholders

A scheme may be managed by an owner, a manager, management committee, local government or other organisation. Effective management of the scheme is facilitated when management representatives have sound knowledge and understanding of child care service delivery and work in true partnership with coordination unit staff, carers and the families of children in the scheme.

A scheme's philosophy is a written statement of the values and beliefs that are important to management, coordination unit staff, carers and families. It underpins decisions made by management and staff, including goal-setting and the development of policies. A scheme's philosophy guides its day to day practice.

A statement of philosophy sets out the scheme's values and beliefs about:

- children - their development and the way they learn; the way in which children will be cared for and how their learning will be promoted; the way in which children with additional needs and disabilities will be included; and the desired outcomes of the care for all children
- families - their importance in the lives of their children; their involvement in the scheme; and the scheme's understanding, acceptance and value for their cultures and beliefs
- coordination unit staff and carers - their role in the service and in children's lives
- management - relationships with coordination unit staff, carers, children and families and the local community
- issues such as equity and social justice

The scheme's philosophy, policies and procedures are most likely to meet the values and expectations of families if management, coordination unit staff, carers and families contribute to their development and regular review.

To be effective, the scheme's statement of philosophy, policies and procedures needs to be known, accessible, understood and used by all stakeholders.

Principle 6.3

The scheme has an efficient, effective and ethical process for the management of records

Just as there are requirements for individuals and businesses to keep taxation and other records for specified periods of time, there are requirements for family day care records to be kept to ensure that the scheme is meeting its legal obligations and to protect carers, coordination unit staff and children in the event of legal action.

An effective scheme develops clear policies and procedures relating to the records kept by the scheme, including information about:

- The type of information to be collected
- The periods of time records must be kept
- Where records are to be kept
- How records may be accessed
- How records can be amended
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Compliance with relevant legislative requirements
- How media enquiries will be dealt with

It is important that carers, staff and families are informed about the scheme's policies and procedures in relation to records. Coordination unit staff, carers and families are advised that they may access and obtain copies of records kept about them and their children.

Principle 6.4

The scheme has simple and transparent grievance and complaints handling procedures

A culture of open communication, in which carers, coordination unit staff and families are able to comment on scheme practice and influence management decisions, allows the scheme to become aware of potential concerns before they turn into formal grievances and complaints.

Complaints are best dealt with and resolved at the service level. Families and carers can feel very anxious about raising concerns, fearing that they or their child may be disadvantaged if they complain. Simple, transparent grievance and complaints handling procedures that are clearly documented and implemented consistently can assist in alleviating these anxieties.

Grievances and complaints need not be viewed in a negative way. In fact, discussing issues as they arise provides an opportunity to gather a range of views about the scheme's practice and contributes significantly to improving the service.

Steps for effectively handling complaints and grievances include:

- Dealing with the problem as early as possible
- Deciding who should be involved. For example, giving carers and staff authority to resolve informal complaints as far as possible
- Clearly defining the problem
- Formulating actions and possible solutions
- Weighing up advantages and disadvantages
- Deciding on a course of action
- Determining a date to review progress
- Evaluating the outcome and making any necessary adjustments to the scheme's policy and procedures

Characteristics of effective complaints handling procedures:

- Carers and staff have a positive approach and view complaints as an opportunity to understand families' attitudes and needs
- Families trust that their concerns will be dealt with confidentially, promptly and without disadvantaging their child
- Staff and carers explain and share a copy of the scheme's complaints handling procedure with families
- Families are helped to identify and clarify their concerns
- All complaints are accepted
- Discussions between families, carers and staff are documented at every step

Principle 6.5

Carers and coordination unit staff are effective advocates for their service within the community and actively seek to build links with other agencies to benefit children and their families

A family day care scheme does not exist in isolation and is often just one of many services in the local community working with children and their families.

Well targeted information and promotional strategies can encourage a diverse range of families from the local community to use the family day care scheme and attract interest from prospective carers and staff. Effective promotional materials are written in clear simple English and, where appropriate, translated into the main home languages used in the local community.

Changes in employment patterns, age distribution and the number of new families moving into the local community can affect demand for child care. By developing links, sharing information and working in collaboration with other community organisations, the scheme can ensure a coordinated and flexible response which meets the constantly changing child care needs in the local community.