Routines to support learning and wellbeing

It’s easy to focus your attention and energy on activities in OSHC, and forget that some of the most valuable and pleasurable experiences of the session can happen around routines such as arriving, leaving, setting up, eating and packing away. In addition, there are health, hygiene and safety issues related to these parts of the day and other routines, such as toileting. Such routine activities take up time during the session and they are important for a variety of reasons, so you might as well make the most of them.

**Arrivals and departures**

These set the scene for a child’s experience. Greet each child individually. In large services this may not be possible as children arrive, but staff should make a point of trying to ‘catch up’ for at least a brief chat with as many children as possible during the session. You can learn a lot about a child by paying attention to how they are when they come in: Half asleep? Bursting with energy? Lively? Happy? Reluctant? Alone? With others? Excited? Talk with colleagues about how to maximise the possibilities of a friendly warm welcome for each child.

Similarly, there are some things to think about in relation to the end of the session. Some children may not mind being the last to leave, but others may. It may be tempting to start packing away, removing activities and equipment as the session nears its end, leaving those children who are there until the end with little to do. By the end of the day energy and resilience may have been used up, and some children may want extra attention or quiet relaxing things to do.

**Moving from one place to another**

Depending on the set-up of your space, there may be times the whole group moves from one space to another, for example, to the gymnasium or to an outdoor area not adjacent to your indoor space. Your natural inclination may be to have children line up and move in an orderly way. Stop and think about whether or not this is necessary. Whenever possible, carry out a routine activity informally and individually or in small groups.

Similarly, waiting time is usually wasted time for children, and a time when children may begin to annoy each other out of boredom, impatience and frustration.

**Eating**

Eating nutritious tasty food in the company of others in a comfortable relaxed atmosphere is one of life’s pleasures. The potential in this routine should be exploited to the maximum in OSHC. Get children involved in planning food, preparing it and serving it in such a way that hygiene and regulations are still maintained. What can you do to make eating a more social experience for children and staff? Consider how you can use the experience of eating and sharing food to broaden children’s horizons, expose them to other cultures, and increase their appreciation of sound nutrition.

Preparing food can be one of the most satisfying experiences available in OSHC. It involves a range of skills, such as planning, organisation, maths (measuring, figuring out how much food is needed for the group), following instructions, as well as practising sound health and safety procedures. Learning to cook and prepare food can teach principles of good nutrition as well as encouraging healthy eating practices. Sharing food that has been prepared in the service can expand children’s horizons about food. Sharing recipes from home can also be a very satisfying way to link the children’s family life and culture to the service. It has been said that the best way to achieve appreciation of different cultures is through the stomach! Knowledge of the principles and practices of good nutrition, sound eating habits, and appreciation of good food are important for life, and OSHC can play a big role in ensuring that children acquire these early in life.
Setting up and packing away

In some services the environment has to be set up and packed away each day. In all services there is some setting up and packing away during the session. Each child should feel some responsibility for maintaining the environment in good order. Rather than forcing children to do this, engage them through encouragement and expressions of appreciation when they do help out. The sense of belonging that children should feel comes from taking responsibility for the environment and the wellbeing of others.

The physical environment and organisation of the program contribute to the quality of the routine experiences. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there a place for each child’s belongings so that they don’t become all jumbled up together?
- Is the space arranged to prevent bottlenecks as children arrive?
- Are there interesting opportunities ready for children when they arrive?
- Are there interesting things at the end of the day for those children who are picked up last?

The single most significant factor that determines the quality of an OSHC service, as well as the quality of the experience for children, is the quality of the relationships and interactions between staff and children, and among children. Think of routines as vehicles for conversations and interactions and opportunities to work towards program goals, rather than time away from the program. Routines will make life easier for you, and children will benefit as well.