Delivering a children’s program in a family day care service
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Introduction

Family day care educators’ work is important. When they support children’s learning and development, educators are helping families to lay the foundations for children’s lives.

Family day care is recognised as a professional education and care service, along with centre-based, preschools (kindergartens), long day care, and outside school hours care services.

Although each education and care service is different, there are some important guiding documents that highlight that all services have a lot in common.

Three approved learning frameworks guide the work of family day care services and individual educators in Victoria:

- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)
- Belonging, Being & Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)
- My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (FSAC)

A brief description of each of these approved learning frameworks follows.

The VEYLDF guides all early childhood professionals, including those in family day care, who work with children birth to eight years in Victoria.

The EYLF is a national framework document for early childhood educators who work directly with children birth to school age in education and care services. Since the EYLF uses the term educators to refer to anyone who works directly with children in education and care services, this is the term that will be used in this Guide.

The FSAC is a national framework that guides the work of educators who provide before and after school and vacation care to school age children.

Services receiving funding from the Commonwealth are required to use the EYLF or the FSAC. Services funded by the Victorian Government are required to use the VEYLDF. Most services will use both the Victorian and the appropriate National Framework.
All education and care services including family day care services and each family day care educator must meet the requirements of the National Quality Framework including the National Quality Standard (NQS). The NQS provides details of all the requirements for providing a quality education and care service to children in Australia.

Although there are some differences in the three approved learning frameworks, the main ideas are similar and they fit well together. They share the same five learning outcomes for children. This Guide offers advice about program decision-making that is consistent with all three approved learning frameworks and the NQS. Throughout the Guide there are links to particular parts of the NQS and some quotes from the approved learning frameworks.

The three approved learning frameworks are useful resources for you to refer to over and over again as you complete your self-assessment against the National Quality Framework and you develop your Quality Improvement Plan. They will also assist you in meeting the requirements of the National Quality Framework and to reflect on ongoing quality improvement.

The approved learning frameworks and the NQS can be accessed on the websites listed in the back of this document.
Purpose and structure of this Guide

This Guide has been written to help family day care educators to think about, plan for and deliver a program that helps children progress in their learning and development in five learning outcome areas that are in the approved learning frameworks. These learning outcomes are central to the NQS. [See next sections for a brief description of each of the learning outcomes.]

The Guide contains a number of different sections. Before focusing on areas of practice, there are sections on:

- the concepts of belonging, being and becoming
- the five learning outcomes
- educators’ practice and the VEYLD
- some of the particular strengths and challenges of family day care
- a brief look at the image of children that it is important for educators to adopt and use in their work with children and families.

The main focus of the Guide is to provide information about the range of areas to consider in relation to offering a program to children, including:

- the curriculum or program
- play and other learning opportunities
- daily living experiences (routines)
- organising time and structuring the day
- assessing and recording children’s learning
- planning and recording the program
- the indoor and outdoor environment
- relationships between educators and children, children and other children and with other adults
- helping children learn positive behaviour
- partnerships with families
- the importance of having a strong and relevant statement of philosophy or vision statement to guide your practice.
These areas overlap and connect with each other, and you will think of them together as you go about your work.

The final sections of the Guide are about what it means to be a professional educator and the relationships between co-ordinators and educators.

At the end of this Guide is a list of selected resources that are easy to access and some organisations that can provide you with useful resources for your work.

For each topic there are some questions to reflect on and discuss with others as a basis for taking action and improving what you do. Hopefully you will think of other questions and things to think about.

Family day care includes children from very young babies through to children in primary school. As you read this Guide and think about and discuss its contents, keep in mind that the NQF and the ideas in the VEYLDF and the EYLF apply to all children including very young children – that is, babies and toddlers as well as children over three years of age.
Belonging, being and becoming and the Learning Outcomes

The title of the EYLF – Belonging, being and becoming - is a vision for childhood and describes three broad areas of the important learning that happens in childhood.

Belonging

Children belong from the time they are born, and even before birth. They belong to their family, culture, community and heritage. Belonging reminds us that relationships are the foundation for learning and living. Children learn about belonging as they participate in their families, in the community and in the family day care service.

You support children’s sense of belonging when you:

- encourage children and families to express their cultural heritage
- use their first language, even a few words
- make sure that the environment and some of the experiences you offer relate to children’s lives in the family and community
- welcome children and families
- show that you value children and families for who they are and for what they contribute
- talk about a child who is absent
- help children learn how to get along with each other
- involve every child in meaningful ways in real tasks such as preparing a meal, packing away, welcoming a new child or comforting a baby.

Children’s sense of belonging to their family is strengthened when they see and hear you showing respect for their family.

Children’s sense of belonging to the community grows when you take part in it with them – for example, by going to the library or a nearby park.

Example

Moya invited families to bring a family photo. She placed them at child height, and she notices that the children often look at them.
Being

*Being* is about who we are now and who we were. For children it’s closely related to developing a strong sense of identity.

*Being* refers to valuing children as human beings in the present, rather than for who they will be in the future. It’s also about focusing on their strengths – what they do know and can do – rather than what they don’t know and can’t do.

*Being* also reminds us that children’s learning is valuable and meaningful for the present as well as for the future and that the best way to prepare to be three years old is to be two years old for a whole year and do what two year olds need and want to do. The best way to prepare for school is to have a great year of learning that matches who you are in that year before starting school.

*Being* also reminds us that educators need to help children hold on to those wonderful capacities that they are born with – for example their passion for learning, the confidence and drive to be creative, the capacity to lose themselves in the present, their sense of wonder and awe about many things. Educators don’t have to teach those things – they just need to help preserve them.

Educators acknowledge children’s sense of being when they show that they trust them and respond to children telling them what they need to do.

The idea of children’s being reminds us to sometimes just let children be – give them space and time to dream, to relax and enjoy themselves.

Belonging and being are closely related. Who you are is in part about who and what you belong to.

Becoming

Children’s becoming refers to all the learning and development that happens in childhood.

*Becoming* is also about the unique individual that each child is from birth.

Awareness of children’s becoming reminds us that although there is no point pressuring children to learn things earlier than they would without the pressure, it is important to provide challenges and to build on children’s interests.

Educators who appreciate children’s becoming pay attention to children’s progress, celebrate it and share the appreciation with families.

Example

*Billy, who has been in family day care with Sally since he was a baby, is a very physically active child. Now three, he loves nothing more than kicking a footy, throwing a ball, or shooting hoops. Fortunately for Billy, Sally has a teenage son who also enjoys these activities and is very skilled at them. He and Billy have built up a strong relationship over the years, and Billy’s skills are outstanding for his age.*
The Learning Outcomes

Each of the three approved learning frameworks includes the same learning outcomes for children, and these Outcomes are a focus of the NQS.¹ [Element 1.1.1]

These learning outcomes describe the areas or categories of learning that matter. Educators need to be very familiar with these areas of learning and be able to describe each child’s progress in these areas. The learning outcomes also help educators plan as they think about the best kinds of equipment, materials and experiences they can offer to encourage progress in these areas for all children, including young babies. The learning outcomes are that children:

- have a strong sense of identity
- are connected with and contribute to their world
- have a strong sense of wellbeing
- are active and involved learners
- are effective communicators.

Under each Learning Outcome is information that gives more detail and explains how learning in that area looks and how educators can support that learning. It is important for educators to understand the detail about the learning outcomes, not just what the headings are.

The learning outcomes describe a broad idea of learning. They help us see that important learning includes much more than what is thought of as cognitive or academic learning – for example learning shapes, colours, numbers and letters.

Also, emphasis in these Outcomes is much more on children making progress than it is on reaching certain milestones. This idea is referred to as the ‘distance travelled’.

Children’s learning and development may occur in all of these areas at once. In other words, any example of learning in one Outcome area is likely to be an example of learning in one or more other areas as well. Belonging, being and becoming weave throughout discussions of the learning outcomes.

A brief general description of each Outcome follows. Remember that the specific behaviours that are evidence of children’s learning depend on children’s experience, abilities, skills and understandings.
Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Having a sense of identity is knowing who you are and being comfortable with who you are. Our sense of identity comes largely from our belonging. Relationships are the foundation for building a sense of identity – ‘who I am’, ‘who I belong to’ and ‘what effect do I have on others’.

Relationships and connections give us powerful messages about who we are and who we might become.

Signs of children’s developing sense of identity include:

- showing that they feel safe, secure and supported
- becoming more independent, making choices and decisions
- talking about their family, culture, community
- sharing information about themselves – what they are good at, what they are interested in, their feelings
- learning to interact with others with care, empathy and respect
- have strong positive relationships with others, both children and adults.

Educators help children develop a sense of identity when they:

- build strong relationships with them
- talk to them about their families and cultures
- let them know that they value and respect them
- make sure that they have many successes and positive experiences.

Example

Mali makes a point of letting each of the children, even the baby and toddler, know when she sees them helping another child or even making someone else smile or laugh, which the baby does often. She believes very strongly that it is important for children to learn that they can make a positive difference in other people’s lives.
Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Signs that children are making progress in this Outcome area include:

• showing that they feel a sense of belonging to the group
• gaining understanding of their own and others’ rights and responsibilities
• learning to be comfortable with and respect diversity and difference of many kinds
• increasing understanding of fairness
• learning to take care of the environment
• making new relationships
• communicating and connecting with others
• showing care and empathy.

Educators help children learn to connect with and contribute to the world when they:

• show children respectful ways to relate to each other
• include all children as valued members of the group
• talk with children about fairness and respect for diversity and difference, and plan experiences that support that learning
• show respect for the environment and involve children in experiences and everyday practices that help them to learn to take care of the environment
• help children to have positive interactions and experiences with other children
• help children learn to identify and accept their feelings and deal with them in constructive ways.

Example

Toby, age two, gets very frustrated easily, and often this results in temper tantrums. His educator tries to help him when she sees him becoming frustrated and before he loses control. She talks to him about how he is feeling and helps him to recognise these feelings. Rather than just distracting him, she asks him if he would like to do something else, and if he doesn’t have any ideas she makes suggestions and helps him find something to do where he can be successful.
Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

Signs that children are making progress in this Outcome area include:

• beginning to take responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing
• showing confidence
• being resilient, able to cope with everyday challenges and setbacks
• persevering, trying hard
• developing physical skills.

Educators help children develop a sense of wellbeing when they:

• show that they respect and value each child
• build warm trusting relationships
• help children feel secure and safe
• let children know that they can get help when they need it
• show empathy when children are distressed
• encourage children to do things for themselves and develop self-help skills.

Example

Bella accepts only one new child at a time, unless siblings are coming together. She believes that it is important to focus especially on children who are new to help them settle into family day care. She says that the reward is that once they feel secure and settled, they are more independent and self-reliant.
Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Signs that children are making progress in this Outcome area include:

- developing dispositions for learning such as curiosity, confidence, creativity, enthusiasm
- demonstrating a range of skills such as problem solving, experimenting, seeking help
- transferring learning from one situation to another.

Educators support children’s learning in this Outcome area when they:

- help children feel secure
- offer many chances to try out new ideas, explore and experiment
- connect family experiences with those in family day care
- encourage children to initiate their own learning, play and exploration
- actively support children’s learning whenever and however they can identify children’s interests and build on them.

Example

The children in Margaret’s family day care service often do projects. They decide together on something to work on over a few days or even weeks. They make a plan, decide who will do what, and each day they review the plan. They are currently preparing a small area in Margaret’s back garden and will plant a vegetable garden. Margaret sees that these more complex longer-term projects give everyone a chance to be involved and offer many challenges and problems to be solve.
Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

This Outcome focuses on verbal and other kinds of communication.

Signs that children are making progress in this Outcome area include:

• interacting verbally and in other ways with others for a range of purposes
• engaging with a range of texts and gain meaning from them
• expressing ideas and making meaning using a range of media
• beginning to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.

Educators help children progress in this Outcome area when they:

• initiate conversations and respond to children’s efforts to communicate
• show that they value children’s and families’ home language and they encourage them to use it
• offer a variety of literacy and numeracy related experiences
• set up a language-rich environment.

Example

Con, age three and a half, is currently learning English. His educator can see that he understands much of what is said, but he is not talking much. She gives him lots of opportunities to draw and paint; activities that he enjoys and is very good at. She has learned to ‘read’ his work and sees that the colours that he uses and what he draws or paints are an indication of how he is feeling.
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

How can you use the ideas of ‘belonging, being and becoming’ to think about each child in your service? How can you use those ideas to plan for children’s learning?

Which Learning Outcome areas do you think you pay most attention to currently?

Are there Learning Outcome areas that you need to pay more attention to in your planning and practice?

How do you strengthen children’s belonging to culture, family and community?

What do you know about each child’s sense of identity?

What more can you do to make sure that you are using the Learning Outcomes to guide the experiences that you provide for children?

Educators offer children opportunities to learn in all of these areas. In general, all children need opportunities to:

- learn who they are and who they belong to – their identity
- learn about their culture and community and those of others
- develop a strong sense of belonging to groups and making a positive contribution
- strengthen their relationships with family, culture and community
- be physically active
- use their hands, large muscles and whole body
- create
- communicate in various ways
- play
- think, experiment, explore, solve problems, figure things out
- learn how to get along with others
- learn to respect and value many kinds of diversity
- find out about the world around them, learn to respect and take care of it
- gain some skills that allow them to take some responsibility for their own health and safety.

It is important to think about how the learning program you offer fits with the learning outcomes, whether it is balanced, how appealing it is to children and how it helps them to progress in the Outcome areas.

The more familiar you are with the approved learning frameworks, particularly the key components of the learning outcomes, the more they will become the way you see children, families and learning. The ideas in the approved learning frameworks become a kind of lens or frame of reference that informs all aspects of your practice.
Educators’ practice and the VEYLDF

Educators’ practice – what you do is the most important consideration in making family day care a good experience for children. The basics and essentials are:

- ensuring that children feel secure and content
- creating and maintaining a safe and healthy environment
- supervising children at all times
- helping children avoid hurting themselves and others.

The key to good quality, however, depends very much on educators’ interactions and relationships with children. The VEYLDF lists eight Practice Principles for Learning and Development that describe the best ways for early childhood professionals to work with children and families to advance children’s learning. A number of these Practice Principles link directly to interactions and relationships with children.

The Practice Principles include the following:

Family-centred practice: Educators collaborate and work in partnership with families and children. They make decisions about the program that take into account each family’s values and expectations about their child’s learning and development. This includes, among other things, talking with families to understand what is important to them about their child’s experience and using this information to make decisions about the program. [Standards 6.1 and 6.2]

Partnerships with other professionals: Educators work collaboratively with other professionals and organisations in the community that support children and families. This might involve encouraging families to see a maternal and child health nurse, sharing information (with the family’s permission) with another service the child attends, such as a kindergarten, finding out more about an organisation in the community or being part of a community network of educators and/or other professionals. [Standard 6.3]

High expectations for every child: Educators operate with the idea that every child has the ability to learn and develop. They recognise that children learn every day, from all their experiences, from birth. Educators who have high expectations for children don’t pressure or push them, but neither do they limit or set low standards for what a child may be able to achieve. Educators make sure that they provide a program that includes every child and takes account of their abilities and interests. [Standard 1.1 and 1.2]
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

Which of the Practice Principles are most important to you in your work?

Which Practice Principles do you need to pay more attention to?

What support do you need to use the Practice Principles more to guide and inform your work? [Discussing these with your co-ordinators would be a good first step].

**Equity and diversity:** Children’s previous experiences, their family and culture help to shape their learning and development. Educators need to acknowledge and respect diversity among children and families and build on what children know and can do. They also support children to learn to respect and be comfortable with various types of diversity, including cultural background.

**Respectful relationships and responsive engagement:** Positive relationships are the foundation for children’s feelings of security from birth. Strong positive relationships provide a secure base that helps children to feel safe and confident to try new things and to learn. Positive relationships and interactions between educators and children, children and other children, and educators and families form the foundation for a good program. Building a relationship with each child over time is a priority in a good service. Building relationships involves getting to know the child well, showing pleasure in the child’s company, showing respect and using your knowledge of that child to offer meaningful experiences that build on strengths and interests. [Quality area 5]

**Integrated teaching and learning approaches:** Children’s learning benefits from having both opportunities to initiate their own learning and take the lead, with an educator responding, and having some educator-led experiences that build on their abilities and interests. Providing children with many different kinds of materials that can be used in a variety of ways and giving them time to play, explore and create in their own way encourages them to initiate their own learning. Building on children’s interests and skills by offering new or more complex learning opportunities, asking them questions that make them think and introducing new ideas are all ways to promote learning.

Most good learning experiences are like a dance, with both educators and children leading and following, initiating and responding.

**Assessment for learning and development:** Educators collect information about children’s learning and development continuously and in a variety of ways to identify what the child knows, can do and understands in order to plan opportunities to help them build their knowledge, skills and understanding. Educators assess children’s learning with families and children. [Standard 1.2]

**Reflective practice:** Educators can improve their professional practice by reflecting critically – that is, thinking about what works well, what doesn’t and how they can improve. Reflective practice isn’t about being negative but rather about always aiming to learn more and do better. [Element 1.2.1 and 1.2.3]
Example
Aisha has been doing family day care for 12 years. Over that time there have been four families who have had more than one child coming to Aisha’s service. She says that she has of course come to know those families very well over the years, and that although that is an important positive, she has to be careful to maintain a professional relationship with those families and not to show any favouritism.

Questions for reflection, discussion and action
What are the particular strengths of your family day care service? What challenges do you face in working as a family day care educator?

What are some examples of ways that you take advantage of the strengths?

In areas where your practice is good quality, what can you do to make it even better?

What are some positive changes you can make in the ways you work as a family day care educator?

Strengths and challenges of family day care

Providing a good experience for a group of children is always challenging, whatever the type of service.

Family day care has many characteristics in common with other types of education and care services. Family day care also has some special characteristics, some of which are strengths or positives and others that offer challenges. These include:

- Many educators work alone most of the time.
- Generally groups are smaller than in centre-based services.
- There may be a broad age range of children in the group.
- Educators may be raising their own children while providing family day care.
- Children may be in the same family day care service over many years, and strong relationships may develop with the educator and the educator’s family.
- The flexibility of family day care and the inclusion of the educator’s children and children attending school means that the size, age range and composition of the group may vary from day to day and during the course of the day.
- The program may take place in a home, a physical environment that must cater both for the educator’s personal and family life, and the family day care service.
- The program may occur alongside the educator’s family life.

Providing quality family day care demands that educators are aware of what quality looks like in any type of education and care service, take full advantage of the strengths of family day care and working to overcome or minimise the challenges.
The ways we see children

The approved learning frameworks and the NQS are based on a particular image or picture of children. The image educators have of children affects the ways they interact and talk with children and the learning opportunities they provide.

This image comes in part from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which states that:

All children have the right to an education that lays the foundation for the rest of their lives, maximizes their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. The Convention also recognizes children’s right to play and be active participants in all matters affecting their lives.²

The VEYLD adds to these ideas that children are ‘full members of society’.³

Educators who offer quality services base their practices on an image of children as human beings who deserve dignity and respect and who are:

- capable and competent as well as vulnerable
- active contributors to their own and others’ experiences
- teachers as well as learners.

The concept of agency is particularly important for educators to understand if they want to practise in ways that fit this image. Agency refers to children’s capacity and need to make choices and decisions and influence the physical and social world around them.
The curriculum or program

Think about a good weekend away or a holiday you’ve had recently. Think about everything that contributed to it being successful.

You may think first about what you did – maybe shopping, eating a delicious meal (one that you didn’t have to prepare!), going to a show or a sporting event, having a swim, or going for a walk in a beautiful place. You probably also thought about more than what you did – perhaps you thought about who you were with, how everyone got along with each other, where you went, your accommodation, the weather, the pace and having enough time to do what you wanted to do and how relaxed and comfortable (or excited) you felt.

It’s also likely that the planning you did and the information you gathered ahead of time helped to make the time away a success, even though you may not have stuck to your original plans as you discovered interesting things along the way.

In some ways creating a good time away is similar to what it takes to provide a good family day care experience for children. Many factors contribute. Offering a few special activities isn’t enough. Special activities can be an important part of the child’s experience, but they are only one part. It’s important to think of the children’s program in a much broader way.

The curriculum or program is the child’s whole experience. It includes interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events. This definition means that educators need to think about, pay attention to, plan for and evaluate all of the children’s experience in the service, from the time they arrive until they go home. Educators need to plan the children’s program but things will happen that are unplanned, and children will learn from these spontaneous events too.
Play and other learning opportunities

[Elements 1.1.2 and 1.1.3]
Children need interesting and worthwhile things to do whilst in family day care. They are learning all the time. You can see from the discussion so far in this Guide that the most valuable learning experiences happen when environments are well set up, educators know children really well and plan in response to their needs and interests whilst taking account of the family, cultural and community contexts of their lives.

These educators:

- know and respond to children
- sometimes initiate new learning opportunities
- appreciate the importance of conversations
- see opportunities for enjoyable and worthwhile learning experiences in the everyday.

A few special activities offered occasionally at the right time can add interest to the children's day. Sometimes, however, these ‘special’ activities require the educator to supervise closely and sometimes they are structured and offer little flexibility for children to engage with them at their own level. When educators focus on the activity, this may interfere with having quality interactions and conversations with children. There is often little value in stopping children from what they are doing to participate in an activity that the educator initiates.

Often the simplest experiences are the best. Some examples include a collection of cardboard boxes, some new props to go with the blocks, a few new utensils in the home corner, some new hats or dress-up clothes, involving children in tasks such as getting ready for a meal or folding washing, a fresh batch of play dough, looking at a book with a few children or singing a song together.

It’s not always easy to predict, but when making decisions about the program it’s important to balance what is provided so that a number of possibilities appeal to children and they won’t all want to do the same thing at the same time.
Sara is a family day care educator in a community that has people from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. She asked families who use her service for suggestions or donations of props for the home and dress-up areas that reflect something about the family’s lifestyle. She had a wonderful response – clothing and accessories that reflect particular cultural groups, as well as a bike helmet, an apron, a fishing vest, crockery, food packets and cooking and eating utensils. Children talk about what the items are called and their uses and what the food packets contained. These items are a rich source of conversation.

Some of the most inviting kinds of materials and experiences that children of different ages enjoy, and that should be available in any education and care service, include:

- books and stories
- music
- visual arts – drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, finger painting
- cooking and food preparation
- movement and dance
- block play
- construction
- sensory play (sand, water, mud)
- dramatic play (dress-ups, a home corner, dolls)
- water play
- sand and dirt play
- everyday excursions (walks to the shop, the park or the local school)
- physically active play (obstacle course, climbing, running, jumping)
- manipulative play.

Play is a particularly valuable way for children to learn. The EYLF says about play:

Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other’s thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems, and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children’s thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn.

Play is led and directed by the child. Educators can contribute to play in many ways: by offering interesting props and play materials, talking with children in and about their play, allowing big chunks of time so that children get really involved, making suggestions and sometimes playing with children (but without taking over). Educators help children solve conflicts that come up during play and ‘help children recognise when play is unfair and offer constructive ways to build a caring, fair and inclusive learning community’. [Element 1.2.2]
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

What kinds of activities do you do with children?

How do you build learning opportunities into the environment?

How do you balance offering everyday learning opportunities and special experiences for children?

How do you encourage children to play, and what roles do you have in their play?

Educators make sure that over the day there is a good balance of play and learning opportunities that are child led, child initiated and educator supported and that every child is included. [Element 1.1.5]

One kind of experience that many educators offer is every day and special excursions. It’s great for children to have the chance to go out into the community – to the library, the local park, the shops, the local kindergarten or school, for example. There is so much to see and do! Linking what the children experienced in an excursion or by talking about it or following up in some way adds to its value and interest.
Daily living experiences (routines)

Routines or daily living experiences include arriving and separating, reuniting with and leaving family, eating and drinking, resting and sleeping, nappy changing and toileting, dressing and undressing and hand washing. Routines take up a lot of the children’s and your time. Educators can turn them into important learning experiences with thought and planning. They can be times for conversations and interactions, for building a sense of being part of a group, learning to do some things for yourself, learning skills and moving toward independence.

Finding ways to involve children actively in these daily routines – doing them with children instead of to them—can result in valuable learning opportunities. Some examples include taking time to let younger children feed themselves, letting children put on their own shoes or encouraging them to butter their toast. [Element 1.13 and 1.16]

As mentioned previously, arriving and leaving are particularly important routines in a family day care service, and need to have priority when making decisions about the program. Helping children settle in and make the transition from being with family to being in the service is essential for their wellbeing. Sometimes children will be upset about coming to family day care and being away from their family. The children and their families need to feel confident that you understand and will help them.

Sometimes, at arrival and departure times, both the family and the child need gentle caring support from you in order to separate. Encouraging family members to stay with their child while the child becomes familiar with you helps the child build a relationship with you. Holding and comforting children and then helping them find something that interests them can make it easier to separate. [Elements 5.1.1 and 5.1.3]

Questions for reflection, discussion and action

How much importance do you place on routines in your program?

How do you help children make the transition into family day care when they arrive and back to family and home when they are leaving?

What changes can you make to routines to make them better learning experiences for children?
Example

Nina had always encouraged the children to stay at the table at lunchtime until everyone had finished. She was reflecting on the time between finishing lunch and rest or sleep. Children were tired, there was a queue for the toilet, and she was hurriedly getting mats ready. Children were standing around waiting for her to finish. She decided to try letting children leave the table as they finished, getting them to scrape their plates into the bin and then asking them to go to the toilet, wash their hands and begin to set up their mats – or to set them up first and then go to the toilet. Giving them the opportunity to decide made the transition much smoother, and freed her to interact more with the children as they took care of their own routines.

Organising time and structuring the day

A relaxed flow to the day is critical for children’s wellbeing. A good rule to follow is to minimise the times when children are waiting with nothing to do (for example, waiting for lunch) and when every child has to do the same time (for example, queuing up to wash hands).

Flexible relaxed transitions from one part of the day to another are easier to manage for you and the children than ‘all-at-once’ and ‘all-of-a-sudden’ ones. Letting children know in advance that a change is about to happen gives them a chance to finish what they are doing - letting them know, for example, that it is almost time to walk down to collect children from school, or that lunch will be ready soon.

Allowing children to transition individually from one part of the day to another rather than in a group means less waiting and more opportunities for children to take some initiative in their own experience. [Element 1.1.3]

Questions for reflection, discussion and action

How do you organise time?

Are transitions from one part of the day to another smooth and relaxed?

How do you make sure you build in choices and have as few times as possible when all children have to do the same thing?

What are the challenging times of the day? Why do you think this is so?

Are there times when children are waiting, doing nothing? If so, what can you do to reduce or remove those times?

Are there some changes you could make to the way you organise time and structure the day to create better learning experiences for the children you care for?
Assessing and recording children’s learning

Recording information about children’s learning and development is necessary for several reasons. It helps you:

• get to know children better – learn about their individual differences, development, interests, needs
• keep each child in mind
• provide experiences that cater for children’s interests, encourage new interests, build on strengths and address needs
• work with families and children to build a detailed picture of each child’s learning and development
• discuss children with your co-ordinator and other professionals
• be professional and accountable.

It is important to notice and record not only individual children’s learning but also interactions, conversations and children playing together.

Evidence of children’s play, work and learning can include:

• photos of children at work and play with some notes about why that’s worth recording
• children’s comments, questions and conversations
• paintings, drawings and other things they have made
• your observations of the child
• information from the children’s families.

Information provided by the family about the child at enrolment and ongoing (updated regularly) is very valuable. As you build a mutually respectful relationship with the family you will learn more about the child. It is good to get into the habit of talking daily, even if the conversation is brief, and updating each other about the child.

Getting information from families is important. Much of that happens through friendly informal conversations at the beginning and end of the day.

It can help to have a notebook or folder where parents can write anything they think you need to know that day and you can do the same. You can make jottings about something you want to tell the family or ask. This kind of ongoing sharing is very important.
You can make brief notes as you work – anything that you notice that tells you something about the child. It might be something he or she says or does, a milestone or even signs of progress in an area of learning. Even if you don’t know if it’s significant or what it means, if something a child says or does, or something about their behaviour, catches your attention, it’s worth jotting down. You can look for it again, and think later about what it might mean. You can also keep notes about things you want to discuss with a co-ordinator. [Standards 1.1, 1.2, 6.1 and 6.2]

Having a system of making notes ‘on the run’, as you work may mean having a notepad and pen (or an iPad) handy, or using post-it notes. These notes can be used later for critical reflection to build up knowledge of children and to inform program planning.

All the recorded information about children needs to help you get to know children better and contribute to decisions about the program. One of the most important things to ask yourself continually is ‘how is this information about this child (or these children) reflected in what I plan and offer to children every day?’ In other words, ‘how do I use what I know about each child and the children as a group to plan my program?’ It is so important that all the information you record helps you plan the program and supports improvements. Your time is precious, so finding efficient ways to record information, which works well for you, is very important.

Remember that when it comes to records of children’s learning, more is not necessarily better! What makes a positive difference is your analysis of what you record – the meaning you make of it.

**Questions for reflection, discussion and action**

What are all the ways you find out about children’s learning and development?

How do you involve children and families in getting information about children’s learning and development?

How do you record information about children’s learning and development?

How do you use the information you have about children’s learning and development to plan your program?
Planning and recording the program

Educators make decisions about the program ahead of time and as they work. These decisions are necessary to make the parts of the program come together to create a good experience for children.

Reflecting on, discussing and recording plans can help you to:

- be more intentional – that is deliberate, thoughtful and purposeful in what you do
- enjoy your work more
- let families and children know what is going to happen and what you are thinking about
- build on earlier successful plans and alter those that haven’t worked so well
- improve the quality of the program you deliver.

Demonstrating that you plan ahead and are prepared for the work you do and having a record of that process is evidence that you are a professional educator.

Planning is making decisions about the program, thinking ahead of time about individual children, the children as a group and the program you want to offer, and then preparing for it. Sometimes referred to as curriculum decision-making, planning needs to happen ahead of time and as you work with children. Educators are always engaged in an ongoing cycle of planning, implementing the plan, reflecting and evaluating. Alongside this are ongoing efforts to get to know children better.

Having a planned program means being ready. It doesn’t mean that you have to or that you should follow it no matter what. There are many reasons that you would vary a program – for example the weather, an unexpected event (a bulldozer operating nearby or a child bringing in a bird’s nest), the number and ages of the children attending and their mood and energy level.

You can program for possibilities. After all, a program or plan developed ahead of time is really a best guess about what will work. Planning can support rather than interfere with flexibility and being responsive to children.

[Standards 1.1 and 1.2]
An important question is how you decide what you are going to do and decide what learning opportunities you are going to offer children. Things to take into consideration include the following:

- what you know about the children, their abilities and interests
- the concepts of belonging, being and becoming and the learning outcomes in the approved learning frameworks
- what families value and want for their child
- that the broad definition of curriculum or program planning and decision making can occur in relation to special activities, but also about the environment, the routines, interactions and relationships
- any external factors that will affect the children’s experiences – for example the weather, events occurring in the community, the presence in your home of additional people (for example during school holidays)

Planning needs to include not just what you are doing but why and how as well.

The decision making process and recording the program, although they are related, are not the same thing. The program decision-making process includes all the thinking and preparation you do.

Recording information about the program contributes to providing all children with a quality experience. It is essential for a number of reasons. It helps you:

- remember things you might otherwise forget
- make sure the program – what happens on a day-to-day basis – links to the service and/or your statement of philosophy
- provide experiences that cater for each child’s strengths, interests and needs
- plan together with families and children
- discuss your work with your co-ordinator
- demonstrate that you are working with purpose and intention
- be accountable.
What matters is the reflection that you do about your plans, about what has and hasn’t worked in the past and what you can do better. [Element 1.2.3]

Educators who reflect critically on what they are doing plan at designated times – for example fortnightly – and they also plan and record thoughts about the plans on an ongoing basis. Educators make brief notes as things happen about what is working well and what is not. They watch, listen to and talk with children to learn about what to offer and how to offer it.

Writing up the program helps you to offer a better experience and also to let others know what’s happening. The ‘working plan’ that you use can be different to the one you display for families and older children. In writing up the program for them you will need to think about what they want to know and write up the information so that it’s easy to understand and gives them a picture of what’s happening. Displaying a program for families and children gives a powerful message to them about their ‘place’ in the program – it tells them that you see them as important partners.

As suggested in the previous section, making brief notes as you work – including questions and things you are wondering about – about both children’s development and learning and the program – can be helpful when you refer to them later and have discussions with your co-ordinator.

There is no one best or right way to write up or document a program. Rather there are many good ways. As you gain experience you will no doubt change the way you do it. It can be relatively brief or more detailed. It can include graphics and photos. The most effective programs come from you working collaboratively with children and families and sharing ideas, insights, concerns and knowledge.

Criteria for assessing the ways you record your program include the following questions:

Does the way you record your program

• encourage reflection and evaluation?
• link closely to your assessment of children’s learning?
• reflect the importance of belonging, being and becoming and the five learning outcomes?
• take account of the practices and principles in the approved learning frameworks and the NQS?
Questions
for reflection, discussion and action

How satisfied are you with the way you make decisions about the program?
Does your program decision making cover all the curriculum or program areas?
How do you ensure that there are links between your documentation of children’s learning and your plan?
Might it be useful to ask families and children what information they would like to have about their child’s daily experience?
Does the way you record your plans help you to reflect critically on all parts of the program/curriculum?
How does the record of your plans link to the approved learning frameworks and the NQS?
Does the record of your program help you to reflect? How do you use your reflections about what has worked and hasn’t worked in the past to make improvements?
What changes can you make to the ways you record your program to show that it links to the approved Frameworks?

Most importantly, does it contribute to your good practice and to continuous improvement?

[Element 1.2.1]

Regardless of how you record or write up your program, it’s important to keep in mind that the plan:

- needs to cover all parts of the child’s experience, not just ‘special activities’
- can be recorded in many different ways— it doesn’t have to be in the form of a timetable or schedule
- can be organised under different kinds of headings— belonging, being and becoming, the five learning outcomes or different components of the curriculum (physical environment, routines, etc.) or a combination of those
- can help you give children choices rather than restricting them
- doesn’t have to include every detail of the curriculum— rather it can focus on changes or additions— not what’s always there or always a part of the day.

Most importantly, the plan needs to reflect:

- your assessment of previous program decisions
- your knowledge of the children you are planning for
- input from families and children.

Ongoing evaluation of the program can feed into future plans.

Plans need to be intentional; that is, they need to have a purpose and reflect your goals. These purposes or goals usually take the form of what you want children to learn, as reflected in the learning outcomes. This is a major reason that plans need to link to your documentation and knowledge of children. Plans also need to reflect the statement of philosophy.

You will benefit by having:

- a longer-term (maybe fortnightly) general plan
- a more detailed plan for the day.

In addition, it may be useful to display a ‘big picture’ daily plan that highlights the main features of the program for that day for families and older children.
The indoor and outdoor environment

The physical space and everything in it, both indoors and outdoors, makes a big contribution to what and how children learn and whether or not their experience is positive. One of the important roles of the educator is to set up environments that are engaging and flexible and that allow children to have an impact. In addition to being safe, environments should:

- respond to children’s interests and spark new interests
- encourage children to do things for themselves
- include enough space so that children can be together or spread out.

In planning the overall environment think about the following points:

- Look at the overall environment and ask yourself how interesting it is for children. A rich environment has much more than activities set up on tables and toys for children to play with. Ask yourself what there is for children to play with if you took all the toys away.
- Most family day care residences give children access to a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces.
- Divide big spaces into smaller spaces, whilst still ensuring good supervision. Smaller spaces help children concentrate and allow them to interact with one or two children at a time, or be safely on their own. Use furniture or portable barriers for times when older children are doing something that isn’t safe for babies or toddlers. In other words, set up your space to encourage children to have a choice about being close to each other. This will help them learn to get along with each other and reduce the amount of redirecting you have to do.
- Be aware of the noise level. Use music and TV for a purpose and for children’s learning, rather than as background that does little more than add to the noise level.
- Think about how inviting and peaceful the environment is. The physical environment can play a big role in helping children concentrate and feel relaxed.
• Understand that when children play and get very involved in their learning, the space that they are in will become somewhat messy and disorganised. A very tidy environment isn’t always a good learning environment. Try to keep a balance between having an organised space and materials so that children can find things and concentrate, and accepting the messiness that happens when children play and learn. [Element 3.2.1]

• Change things around occasionally, but not too often and not too much. How often and much you change things depends on children’s needs and interests. Children can become bored if nothing ever changes, but at the same time there is security for children when things stay the same and become familiar, especially for younger children. If the space seems to be working – that is, children are playing, settled and getting along well with others – then you probably don’t need to make changes. Keep in mind that a little change can make a big difference, especially for young children.

• Try to create an environment that reflects the communities and cultures that the children and families come from. Ask yourself if the children and families feel at home in the environment.

Outdoor spaces offer so much more than just a place to run around and use energy. Even small outdoor spaces can be excellent environments to offer many of the kinds of experiences you offer indoors. As well, think about how you can use whatever outdoor space you have to help children learn to appreciate nature and learn how to care for the environment. Something as simple as a few plants in pots for children to take care of, setting up a bird feeder, checking a rain gauge or thermometer and recording the weather, looking for insects or picking flowers can interest children of different ages. [Element 3.3.2]

Some important points to consider in relation to the equipment and play materials include:

• Be sure that a variety of materials and equipment for play and learning, including toys, are accessible for children to choose (keeping safety in mind of course). Keep in mind that natural and ‘real’ objects are just as valuable and interesting, often more so, than commercial toys. Some examples of natural materials include seashells, pinecones, gum nuts and smooth stones. Real objects from around the house could include a set of keys, handbags and other dress-ups and kitchen equipment and utensils such as small saucepans and plastic containers.
- Display materials in an organised and attractive way. Use shelves instead of piling everything in baskets or boxes, so that children can choose. Place materials in interesting combinations that suggest possibilities, for example, toy animals with blocks or toy cars and trucks in the sand pit.

- Provide lots of open-ended materials that can be used in different ways by children of different ages and with different interests. Some examples of open-ended materials include blocks, Duplo and Lego, construction toys, balls, blank paper with crayons or Textas (instead of colouring in books), and materials for dramatic play such as dress-ups. Children enjoy single-use toys such as jigsaw puzzles, but they are usually interesting only for children in a particular age range.

- Invest in play materials that engage the child, give them something to do, rather than those that simply entertain.

- Offer active large motor experiences for all children. Some examples include a simple obstacle course, appliance cartons to sit in or crawl through, cardboard boxes or baskets to throw soft balls into, chances to run outdoors, catching and throwing games with balls and going for walks.

- Have a good supply of picture books accessible for children of different ages, including sturdy ones with cardboard pages for babies and young toddlers.

- Guard against having too much or too little available. The aim is a rich and interesting environment that isn’t too overwhelming. You can judge whether there’s too much or too little available, or whether it’s just right, by how engaged children are. It can be a good idea to put some toys away and swap them over from time to time.

- Aim to offer each child opportunities for both easy successes and challenges.

Of course the most basic concern is that the environment is safe and supports children’s health. [Element 3.1.2] Beyond those concerns though, the environment makes a big contribution to the quality of children’s experience. If the children can choose, play and engage on their own in a rich and varied environment, then educators are free to interact and talk with individual children.
**Example**

Kylie has figured out that three-year-old George, upon arriving, likes to be greeted and then left alone to find something he wants to play with. He will then say goodbye to his dad, separate easily, and play on his own for a while. He will then be ready to talk with Kylie and interact with the other children.

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**Relationships between educators and children**

*Standard 5.1 and 5.2*

Responsive respectful relationships help children feel secure and create a sense of belonging. These relationships are crucial in order for children to feel confident to explore, play and learn. *Quality Area 5*

Educators work to establish warm and respectful relationships with every child and to build trust. They do this by:

- being friendly and welcoming
- responding positively to children’s efforts to communicate
- showing interest in what children are doing and saying
- comforting children when they are unhappy.

The better you know a child the stronger the relationship can be.

Talking with, singing and playing with children, even young babies, are good ways to build respectful relationships. You can talk to them about what’s happening and about the things they like. It’s just as important to encourage them to talk by being a good listener and responding to what they are saying or trying to communicate (even when you’re not quite sure!).

Meaningful conversations between educators and children are one of the most important parts of any good program. And talking to children on a one-to-one basis is much better than talking to a group. Educators in quality services take advantage of every opportunity to have a one-to-one interaction with a child, even if it is brief.

Talking with children, even young babies, is important for many reasons. It:

- helps children learn language and how to communicate
- builds your relationship with them
- adds to their feelings of security
- helps them learn about the world around them.
Supervising children is critical, which means ensuring they are safe and content. However, quality family day care goes far beyond keeping children safe and happy. The most important part of a good experience for children in family day care is the relationships and interactions between you and children, children and other children and you and the children's families.

Every family and child needs to feel welcomed and to know that you will do everything you can to ensure that the child has a good experience. The child’s family needs to know that you will work closely and respectfully in partnership with them and the child. Children need to feel respected and to have a warm, caring family day care educator who will look after them. Relationships with children and their families are built on the interactions and conversations you have with them.

Helping children settle in and make the transition from being with their family to being with you is particularly important when they first come to you, but it continues to be important as long as they come. Sometimes both families and children will need help from you to separate from each other and to reunite and leave at the end of the day.

It is important to plan so that you can give priority to interacting with children by talking with them, reassuring them, helping them play and learn and generally being there for them. Building relationships with each child over time is a priority. This occurs through getting to know the child, showing pleasure in the child’s company and being responsive to and respectful of the child.
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

What do you plan that helps children feel a sense of belonging to the group?

Do you plan intentionally to encourage children to work together and learn from each other?

How do you make sure that children have a choice about being together as a group or doing something on their own or with one other child?

Example

Kym is aware that Emma and Katherine, two four year olds, want to spend as much time as they can with ten-year-old Polly. They love her to help them with craft activities. Polly enjoys doing this sometimes, but Kym can see that she gets frustrated at times when the two younger girls won’t leave her alone. She spoke to Polly about this and together they decided that Kym would plan a special activity just for Emma and Katherine several times a week to give Polly a break.

Relationships between children and other children and with other adults

[Standards 5.1 and 5.2]

Children enjoy being with other children and learn a lot from each other. One of the most important experiences you can offer is the opportunity for children to spend quality time with other children who are older, younger or a similar age.

Learning to be with each other is one of the challenging areas of learning for young children, and they will need your help to be comfortable together. Positive interactions are more likely to happen when children have a choice about being together.

When children are different ages, try to create times and situations when children can be safely on their own, with one other child or with children their own age. This is especially important for school-age children. Too much forced togetherness can be a recipe for unpleasant interactions!

One advantage of many family day care services is that children get to spend time with members of the educator’s family. It is important that their interactions and relationships are respectful and positive.
Helping children learn positive behaviour

Elements 5.2.2 and 5.2.3

One of your most important tasks is helping children learn to manage their feelings, behave in positive respectful ways and guide their own behaviour. This is one of the most challenging areas of learning, and if you think about it, it takes a lifetime. Some adults still struggle with managing their behaviour! Children need a lot of understanding and help to learn these things.

You help children learn by:
- explaining
- setting limits
- talking to them
- allowing them to express their feelings and opinions and listening to them
- encouraging them
- setting rules and limits
- modelling the behaviours you want children to learn
- helping them in learning to look after themselves, others and the physical environment.

Responsiveness and respect are particularly important for the many times when you help children learn behaviours that are positive and valued.

One of the most challenging areas of learning for children is learning how to get along with others, control their behaviour, respect others’ feelings and rights, resolve conflicts and care for themselves and the environment.

It is to be expected that children will sometimes hit, bite, leave other children out of their play, swear, hurt other children’s feelings, not take turns, refuse to wait, run away, not share, not co-operate and damage or break things in the physical environment.

Many of the ways that educators help children to learn to manage their feelings and guide their behaviour are the same as the ways that they help children learn in other areas.

The clear aim that educators need to have in mind is that children will eventually learn to control and guide their behaviour (self-discipline in the old language). To do this well, educators need to have in mind what they know about teaching and learning.
The approved learning frameworks include discussion of preventing, minimising and responding to negative or destructive behaviour as one area of teaching and learning. The ways educators teach anything – for example the names of shapes, how to climb safely to the top of a climbing frame, washing hands, what a rainbow is, baking cupcakes, how to keep paint from dribbling down the paper – are exactly the same as the ways to teach children to look after and care for themselves, others and the material world.

The most powerful ‘teaching tool’ that educators have is a respectful relationship with each child, one based on knowing the child in context, one that communicates always ‘I know you, I trust you, I know it will be difficult at times to get along well here, I’m here to support you’. Educators communicate messages such as ‘I expect the best of you and I’ll help you when you mess up’.

The approved learning frameworks adopt a strengths-based approach to supporting children’s learning.

Some guidelines for dealing with challenging or ‘undesirable’ behaviour include:

• Keeping in mind that often this behavior is the child trying to express a need or a want – a need for attention for example. The need is reasonable, but they may try to communicate that need in inappropriate ways. Help them learn to communicate what they need in positive ways.

• Having reasonable expectations about children’s behavior. It takes a long time to learn to get along with others. Take care to avoid labeling behavior. It is helpful to keep in mind that most of children’s unacceptable behavior is them acting their age and trying to figure out how to get along.

• Thinking about the developmental stage of the child. Some behaviors are normal for the child’s age – for example, it’s normal for some two year olds to bite, and it’s normal for some ten year olds to tease others. Even if it is normal you need to deal with it, but it helps to understand it and respond more effectively when you put things into perspective. The developmental stage of the child affects their understanding of what they are doing. A baby who pulls someone else’s hair has no understanding that he is hurting someone, while an older child would understand this.
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

Look at your service’s statement of philosophy and your individual one if you have one. What guidance does it give about how to deal with challenging behaviour?

How closely aligned is the statement of philosophy with ideas in the Frameworks and the NQS?

How do you incorporate helping children learn to respect and care for each other, themselves and the physical environment into your planning and practice? Should it be more prominent, more visible?

Most importantly, what more can you do to support children to learn positive behaviour?

- Thinking about the reasons for the behavior. Is the child bored? Is the child frustrated? Is there too much going on – too much noise, too many people in too small a space? Is the child saying he wants me to spend time with the child, to pay attention?

- Giving brief explanations, even to babies, even when you’re not sure they understand what you’re saying.

- Talking to children and show them how to resolve conflicts with words, how to negotiate and compromise.

- Setting up environments that are engaging and that give children choices about being close to each other or being safely on their own.

- Getting in the habit of reading moods. Defuse situations before they become conflicts.

- Helping children accept their feelings and learn positive and effective ways to manage them.

- Setting reasonable rules and limits. Involve children in setting them. Help them to stay within the rules and limits and be consistent about requiring children to behave within the rules and limits.

- Preventing conflict or undesirable behavior when you can.

- Being sure that you are modeling the kinds of behavior you want children to learn. For example, it doesn’t make sense to shout at children for being noisy!

- Helping children learn to ‘read’ and respect others’ feelings by talking about them.

- Keeping in mind that knowing what you should and shouldn’t do does not always mean that you have the self-control to do it. There will be many times when you have to step in and help children.

- Avoiding over-reacting.

- Discussing issues with children and families. Families differ greatly in their approaches, values and attitudes towards children’s behavior. The more continuity there is between what is allowed at home and in family day care the more readily children will learn positive behavior. It is important for there to be absolute consistency on important issues – for example that a child is never allowed to physically hurt others. It may not be possible to have total consistency between what is allowed at home and in family day care. When that is the case it is important to know about the differences and to help the child understand them. It will take longer for a young child to figure out the ‘right’ thing to do when there are differences in rules and limits at home and in family day care.
Example

Inaya gives simple explanations even to babies when she redirects their behaviour. For example, she might say in a very gentle way to a baby ‘Touch her hair softly – pulling hair hurts’. She knows that babies may not understand the words, but she thinks it’s important to start early and through her manner and expression to help even very young children begin to learn good ways to interact with others.

- Staying calm and in control of your own emotions. Children may at times make you angry. If you feel that you are about to lose control, walk away until you calm down, whilst ensuring that children remain safe. Keep in mind that the aim is that eventually children will:
  - be motivated from inside to behave in positive and respectful ways
  - have the skills and control to behave that way
  - need less help from you and other adults.

These ways, which use the caring respectful relationship that you have with a child to help children learn, are a stark contrast to ways of responding to children’s behaviour that can be described as punishment.

- Never use physical (sometimes called ‘corporal’) punishment – hitting or physically restraining a child.
- Never use time out – putting a child in a room by her- or himself or making them sit in a ‘naughty chair’ or the ‘naughty corner’ for example.
- Never humiliate or embarrass a child, either on their own or in front of others.
- Keep in mind that at all times what is most important is the dignity and rights of the child.
Partnerships with families

Respectful relationships with families are an important part of quality family day care. There are several reasons for this:

- You have to know a child really well in order to provide them with a quality experience in family day care. In order to know a child really well you need information from families about the child.
- Families are the child’s first educators and the people who have the greatest influence on the child.
- Families can benefit from knowing how you see the child, just as you benefit from knowing how they see the child.
- Children learn best when there are connections between their experience with their family and their experiences in family day care.

Sharing information and concerns, encouraging families to tell you what they want for their child, and making decisions together contribute to families feeling secure and respected and children having a good experience.

Partnerships begin the very first time educators and families meet or even before they meet. When the enrolment process and settling in procedures are thorough, with lots of time for families’ questions and a real interest from the educator and co-ordinator in their questions and what they want for their child, this sets the stage for partnerships. When educators are welcoming and when there is two-way sharing of information families are more likely to feel valued and respected.

Educators tell families about the experiences the child will have when in family day care and encourage families to share what they know about their child – interests, likes and dislikes favourite toys or activities and personality for example. Educators encourage families to share information about their family life and child rearing practices, but without pressuring them to share more than they are comfortable sharing.

The relationship builds on this sharing at the beginning. When educators let families know that they are getting to know the child and that they value having the child in the group, families feel more secure about leaving the child. Families want to be reassured that you are doing everything you can to make sure the child has a good experience. [Standards 6.1 and 6.2]
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

What are all the ways you help families feel welcomed?

How do you help families and children settle in when they first begin coming to your service?

What are examples of decisions that families make about their child’s experience in family day care?

How do you encourage families to share information about their child and to ask you questions?

How can you make the relationships you have with families even stronger?

Educators not only encourage families to share information, they use that information to plan the program. They also involve families in making decisions about the child’s experience. [Element 6.1.2]

Families need to feel respected and to know that you are not judging them.

The key to a good partnership is open informal communication.

Families need to know that they are welcome in the family day care service. Sometimes families and children need your help and support to separate from their child and again to reunite and leave together.

A strong relationship means that most times if tensions occur between you and families you can sort them out together. However, sometimes it may be necessary to bring in your co-ordinator to help if there is a conflict.

Educators can also support families by telling them about other resources in the community that they can access for help. [Element 6.2.2]
The importance of a statement of philosophy

Family day care services are required by the NQS to have a statement of philosophy. As an individual educator you may want to have your own statement that builds on the service’s statement. [Element 7.2.1]

A statement of philosophy is the foundation for your practice. It sets out principles, values and beliefs about children and what you want to achieve in your work each day. Educators and co-ordinators base their policies as well as what they do every day on that statement. It is crucial that you are familiar with the statement of philosophy and that you are able to link your work with children back to what is documented in it.

Beliefs about children and their learning and development are the heart of a statement of philosophy. Some of the most important ideas about children that should be highlighted include the following ideas from the approved learning frameworks and the NQS:

- Relationships are crucial for learning. In order for children to play, learn and enjoy themselves they must feel secure and care for and know that someone support them when they need it. Educators’ relationships with children enable them to be more effective teachers. [Elements 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3]

- Each child has strengths, interests and their own ways of learning, being with others and behaving. From a very early age children have different styles – for example, some plunge right in while others stand back and watch for a while. [Elements 1.1.2, 1.1.5, 1.2.2]

- Children make a big contribution to their own learning and experience from birth on. They need choices and opportunities to make decisions and exercise some control over their daily lives. They also need adults who help them to learn to guide their own behaviour. [Elements 1.1.5, 1.1.6]

- Children are capable teachers of other children and adults. [Elements 1.1.6, 5.2.1]
Questions for reflection, discussion and action

Are you familiar with the statement of philosophy for your service? If so, how does it influence what you offer children and families – in other words, how does it relate to what you do every day?

Do you have your own statement of philosophy? If so, does it highlight what you think is important for children? Does it reflect what you do? How does it link to the ‘big ideas’ in the approved Frameworks and the NQS?

What action can you take to link your work as an educator more closely to the service’s and your own statement of philosophy?

- Children are interested in interacting with and relating to other children from birth, and in their early years they learn ways of being with other children. Young children need a lot of help from adults to get on well with other children. [Elements 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3]

- Knowing how children develop, and understanding that each child learns and develops in their own way informs the program decisions you make. [Elements 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3]

- Much of children’s significant learning happens through their family life. [Element 6.2.1]

- Children learn many valuable lessons from play. [Element 1.2.2]

- One of the most important areas of learning in childhood is learning about yourself – learning who you are. Children’s identities are closely connected with their family, culture and community. They learn about themselves through the messages they get from others. Developing a strong and positive sense of identity is crucial. [Elements 1.1.1, 1.1.6]
What does it mean to be a professional educator?

Being a professional educator means accepting that your work is complex, and that every day you have to make important judgments and decisions about many things, including what is ethical.

Professionals think critically about what they are doing in an effort to improve. They are open to changing and keen to learn new things. They never believe that they know everything they need to know. They are able to identify what they need to know more about and areas where they need to increase their skills. They actively seek to learn. [Element 7.2.3] They recognise that change is inevitable.

In family day care one of the critical ingredients for quality is that positive mutually respectful relationships exist between educators and co-ordinators. [Element 4.2.2] Each is clear about their role. Co-ordinators are at least diploma qualified and often have a lot of experience in family day care and/or other education and care services. Their role goes beyond troubleshooting and safety checks. They can be partners with educators in curriculum decision-making. [Element 7.1.4] Educators and co-ordinators can reflect together, always with a focus on providing the best possible experiences for children.

Critical reflection is something professional educators do both on their own and with others (see example).

Educators and co-ordinators benefit from being part of the broader education and care community, learning from professionals outside of family day care and beyond the education and care sector.

Example

Aness keeps a journal that contains mostly questions – things she wonders about – sometimes in relation to what a child’s behaviour means, at other times in relation to the way she goes about her work. Currently she is wondering about a three year old who comes to her service who is very quiet and hardly ever initiates any interactions or conversations with other children. She is wondering if it’s just because he prefers his own company or if he lacks the skills and confidence to approach other children.

She enjoys very much the monthly discussion sessions with four other educators and a co-ordinator. They take turns each month deciding on the topic. This month they are going to talk about how they celebrate children’s birthdays, and whether there is room for improvement. One of the things they enjoy about these sessions is finding out how other educators do things, and how many different ways there are to do good practice.
Conclusion

All the parts of the program fit together and interconnect to contribute to quality family day care. What matters most is that there is evidence in the program that:

- all families are welcome
- children feel secure and are engaged in worthwhile ways
- there are diverse opportunities that cater for all areas of learning and development
- there is a balance of child- and educator-initiated experiences
- children make choices and contribute to decisions
- interactions and relationships between children and educators are warm, inclusive and respectful
- children are encouraged and helped to interact positively with other children
- the environment is rich and organised to encourage children’s engagement
- the environment and experiences reflect children’s interests, as well as their families, cultures and communities
- you communicate with families, seeking their ideas and using them.

Families want their child to be safe, secure and happy. Supervising children at all times and staying aware of what is happening is essential. Learning about children, what they need and enjoy, being enthusiastic and committed, really paying attention to what’s going on and reflecting to make improvements will mean that family day care can do much more than keep children safe, secure and happy.
Where to find more information and resources

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Practice Guides

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework 4 modules

Early Childhood Australia National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Early Years Exchange

Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
www.acecqa.gov.au

Family Day Care Australia
www.familydaycare.com.au

Victorian Professional Support Coordinator – Gowrie Victoria
www.gowrievictoria.org.au

Community Childcare
www.cccinc.org.au

The Department also has further information and resources available regarding education and care services on its website at www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood

Regional offices of the Department can be contacted for assistance. Contact details for Regional Offices can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au/about/contact

Furthermore assistance can be sought from the Children’s Services Regulations Enquiry Line on 1300 307 415 or licensed.childrens.services@edumail.vic.gov.au