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## Introduction

Early childhood is a period of rapid learning and development. The quality of a child's learning environment has a profound impact on that child's life opportunities and outcomes.

The Children's Services Act 1996 (the Act) and the Children's Services Regulations 2009 (the Regulations) specify the minimum standards children's services must meet in their day-to-day operation. These standards work together to:

- protect the children enrolled in services
- ensure the children's health, safety and wellbeing
- promote consistency in the standard of service delivery
- raise community and parent confidence in children's services.

The Act contains important standards that relate to:

- protection of children from hazards and harm (section 26)
- educational or recreational programs available for children (section 26B)
- adequate supervision of children (section 27)
- discipline of children (section 28)
- maintenance of premises (section 29)
- child/staff ratios (section 29A).

The Regulations describe the requirements for:

- records (part 3)
- provision and display of information (part 4)
- staffing (part 5)
- health and welfare of children (part 6)
- equipment and facilities (part 7)
- complaints (part 8).

The educational or recreational program you provide for the children in your care makes an important contribution to laying the foundation for later success at school and throughout life. You are responsible for providing each child in your care with an educational or recreational program that:

- is based on the child's developmental needs, interests and experiences
- is designed to take into account each child's individual differences
- enhances their development.

A program for children (sometimes called a curriculum) refers not only to planned learning experiences provided for children but to all experiences, both planned and unplanned, that children have throughout the day.

A Children's services licence is granted subject to the condition that the children's service is operated in a way that ensures the safety of the children being cared for or educated and that the developmental needs of children are met.

## Purpose of this guide



This guide has been written to help all educators (that is, staff members and volunteers) in limited hours services to think about what is involved in making decisions about the educational or recreational program. The decisions made will inform practice so that it contributes to good outcomes for children.

The areas for program decision making covered in the guide are:

- educators' practice
- learning and development outcomes
- relationships and interactions
- the physical environment
- routine times during the day
- how to organise time
- play and learning experiences.

In addition, there is discussion of the process of program decision making, ways to record aspects of the program and writing up or documenting the program.

At the end of the guide there is a list of organisations where educators can access useful resources for their work.



## Early Years Learning Frameworks



Your work with children in early childhood settings will be informed by the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and the National Early Years Learning Framework. The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (“the Victorian Framework”) is for all professionals working with children from birth to eight years; the National Early Years Learning Framework (the National Framework) is for all educators working with children from birth to five years. The two Frameworks are consistent.

Services receiving funding from the Commonwealth are required to use the National Framework. Services funded by the Victorian Government are required to use the Victorian Framework. Most services will use both Frameworks. The Frameworks can be accessed on the websites listed in the back of this document. This document provides advice about program decision making which is consistent with both the National and Victorian Frameworks.

## Educators’ practice and the Victorian Framework

Educators’ practice in limited hours services, like all early childhood education and care services, is essential in making a good experience for children. The Victorian Framework identifies eight Practice Principles for Learning and Development which describe the best ways for early childhood professionals to work with children and families to advance their learning.

The Practice Principles include:

**Family-centred practice:** that educators will make decisions about the program which take into account families’ values and expectations about children’s learning and development. In limited hours services this might include talking to the children’s families to understand what is important to them about their child and using this information in the program decisions that you make.

**Partnerships with other professionals:** that educators will work with other professionals. This might involve your knowing whether the child attends another service, encouraging parents to see the maternal and child health nurse; or talking to the other educators in your community to understand more about the other learning experiences for children available locally.

**High expectations for every child:** that every child has the ability to learn and develop and that having high expectations for children’s learning recognises that all children learn every day, all of the time, from birth. Educators need to provide for every child to be able to participate in a range of learning experiences.

## Educators’ practice and the Victorian Framework...continued

**Equity and diversity:** that children’s previous experiences, their family and culture shape their learning and development. This might involve helping children to become comfortable with differences and modelling behaviour which respects these differences.

**Respectful relationships and responsive engagement:** that positive relationships are the foundations of secure attachment for children from birth. Strong attachments 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 important. Relationships are developed as you get to know the child, show pleasure in the child’s company and respond to the child. Talking, singing and playing with children, even young babies, is a good way 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 the things they say. Meaningful conversations are one of the most important parts of a good early childhood program.

**Integrated teaching and learning approaches:** that children’s learning benefits from having a combination of learning experiences which are both initiated by them and responded to by an educator, or are educator-led and respond to the child’s abilities and interests. You might do this by providing children with a range of materials to explore and create, or build on their interests and skills to teach them about new things, or ask them questions to extend their own thinking and knowledge. You might help children to learn to guide their own behaviour in positive ways through modelling good behaviour, talking with them, setting limits and helping them in other ways to learn about looking after themselves, others and the physical environment.

**Assessment for learning and development:** that educators assess children’s learning and development continuously to identify what the child knows and what other opportunities may help them to build their knowledge and understanding. Understanding children’s knowledge, interests and skills and the values of their family helps inform your decisions about the program.

**Reflective practice:** that you can improve your professional practice by reflecting on (or thinking about) your practice – thinking about what has worked, what hasn’t and what else you can try.



# Learning and development outcomes

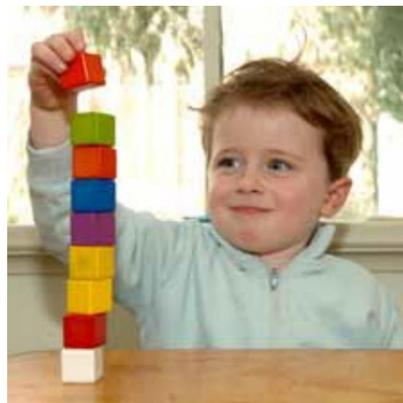
The Victorian and National Frameworks identify five learning outcomes for children. These include that children:

- 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.

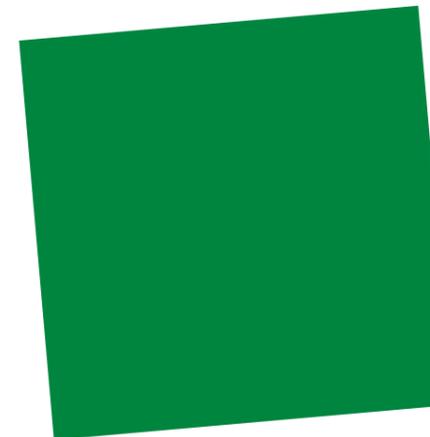
Children's learning and development occurs in all of these areas at once. Children's learning and development can be advanced in the five learning outcomes when they are provided with opportunities to:

- use large muscles and the whole body
- use their hands
- be creative in many ways
- think, experiment, explore, problem-solve, figure things out
- learn about themselves, their culture, their family, other cultures and the community in which they live
- communicate with others
- be with others.

It's important to think about how the learning program aligns with the learning outcomes so you can be assured that the program you provide (even for a few hours) is balanced and appealing to children and will enhance their learning and development.



# Factors affecting good programs



Think about a good weekend away or a holiday you've had recently. What are all the things that made it successful?

Your answer to that question probably is about what you did – maybe shopping, going to a show, having a swim, or going for a walk in a beautiful place. However, you probably thought about more than what you did – maybe who you were with, how everyone got on with each other, where you went, where you stayed, the weather, having enough time to do what you wanted to do, and how relaxed you were at the time. It's 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 a strict plan in the end. You probably discovered interesting things along the way.

Think about each of the following in the service you work in:

- your practice, that is, what you do with the children on a day to day basis
- your relationships and interactions with children and families
- the physical environment, both outdoors and indoors
- routines
- the organisation of time
- play and learning experiences

Now think about:

What works well?

What might need changing?

How do these parts of the program affect children's experiences?

In some ways, creating a good time away is similar to a good program in a child care service. Whether or not the experience works well for children depends on a lot of factors. Planning and offering a few special activities isn't enough. While play and learning

experiences or activities are an important part of the program, they are just one part. The children's program is everything children experience in your service from the time that they arrive to the time that they leave.

The program includes:

- your practice: including the relationships and interactions between children, between children and educators, between educators and families
- the physical environment: the space, how it's organised, and the things in it
- routines: ordinary everyday activities, such as eating and drinking, resting, toileting and nappy changing, washing hands, arriving and leaving
- organisation of time: how time flows, the pace, how big or small the 'chunks' of time are
- play and learning experiences and opportunities: those that children start and direct as well as those that educators initiate; those that are planned ahead of time; and those that happen spontaneously.

Making decisions about how the program is structured and the opportunities provided to each child is necessary to make these parts of the program come together to make a good experience for children. This guide contains some important information about the ways that thinking and making decisions about your program can contribute to:

- your own enjoyment of your work
- families' feelings of security and satisfaction about leaving their child in the service
- most importantly, the quality of children's experiences in the program.

# Challenges of limited hours services

How do you plan currently?

How satisfied are you with the way you plan?

Does your planning cover all the areas or components listed?

Does it place more importance on one or some than others?

Providing a good experience for a group of children is always challenging. A limited hours service offers some particular challenges, including:

- often not knowing in advance which children and how many will attend, or their ages
- children arriving and leaving throughout the day

- often having children participate for the first time and/or not on a regular basis. You may not know them or their families and they may not know you
- the possibility of a wide variety of ages, including school-age children.

What other challenges to providing a good experience does your service face?

- Children contribute to their own learning and experience from birth. It is important to give them choices and let them make some decisions
- Knowing how children develop, and understanding that each child learns and develops in her or his own way, informs the program decisions you make
- One of the most important things children are learning in the early years is about themselves – who they are and where they fit in. Their identities are closely connected with their family, culture and community. They learn about themselves from the messages they get from others. Developing a strong and positive sense of self-identity is crucial.

The decisions that you make about the program will link back to the service's vision statement.

One of the priorities in Acacia Centre is to create interesting environments that encourage children to pretend, to create, and to do dramatic play. Educators have seen how children learn many new things through this kind of play.

- The foundation for children being able to play and learn and enjoy themselves is in feeling secure, knowing that someone will comfort and help them when needed
- Children can learn many valuable lessons from play
- Children learn a lot from other children, as well as through exploring, experimenting and finding things out themselves
- Children are interested in interacting with and relating to other children and, over the early years, they learn ways of getting along and interacting with other children. Young children need a lot of help from educators to get on well with other children

## Vision statement

Are you familiar with the vision statement for your service? If yes, how does it form the foundation for what you offer children and families

– in other words, how does it link in practice to your daily work?

What is in the Act about program planning?

The proprietor of a children's service must ensure that there is made available to all children cared for or educated by the children's service an educational or recreational program –

- a) that is based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child; and
- b) that is designed to take into account the individual differences of children; and
- c) that enhances each child's development.

A vision statement is set of principles or beliefs and values about children and about what you hope to achieve in your program. A vision statement grows out of shared discussion, debate and reflection among the service's management, educators and families about what matters in children's experience in the service.

Beliefs about children are at the heart of a vision statement. The most important ideas about children from birth to early childhood that should be reflected in the vision statement and the program include:

- Each child is a unique individual, which shows in their strengths and interests as well as in ways of learning, interacting and doing things. From a very early age children have different styles; for example, some plunge right in while others stand back and watch for a while



## What is a limited hours service?

A limited hours service is a children's service that may care for or educate children under three and children three and over, including school aged children. Typically, limited hours services provide occasional care for children and include sports and leisure services and neighbourhood houses. Places for school-aged children can comprise up to 30 per cent of the total number of places.

A limited hours type 1 service is a service where each child is cared for or educated for not more than 2 hours a day and not more than a total of 6 hours a week. These services must meet a child/staff ratio (section 29A and regulation 55(1)) as follows:

- for children under three, a child/staff ratio of one staff member or volunteer for every five children
- for children three years or more, a child/staff ratio of one staff member or volunteer for every 15 children

A limited hours type 2 service is a service where each child is cared for or educated for not more than five hours a day and not more than a total of 15 hours a week. These services must meet a child/staff ratio (section 29A and regulation 55(2)) as follows:

- for children under three, a child/staff ratio of one staff member or volunteer for every five children and one qualified staff member for every 15 children
- for children three years or more, a child/staff ratio of one staff member or volunteer for every 15 children and one qualified staff member for every 30 children.

# Relationships and interactions

Supervising children is critical, which means always trying to make sure they are safe and happy, but interacting and talking with them is equally vital. Positive relationships and interactions between staff and children, children and other children, and staff and families form the foundation for a good program. Every family and child needs to feel welcomed and know that everything will be done to ensure that the child has a good experience. Children need to feel respected and to know that warm, caring adults will look after them.

Helping children settle in and make the transition from being with family to being in the children's service is essential for their wellbeing.

**Fleur sees helping children separate from parents and get involved with what's going on as one of her most important jobs. She makes a point of welcoming each child and parent, and either holding the child or taking the child's hand to make personal contact.**

**Jack makes a point of getting down to the children's level, sitting with them on the floor, at a table, or outdoors and having a conversation and being available to the children.**

Sometimes children will be upset about coming to care and being away from their families and home. They and their families need to be confident that you understand and will help them. Sometimes, at the start both families and children need gentle, caring support from staff to separate. Encouraging family members to stay with the child for a time while the child gets familiar with the place and people can help alleviate children's separation anxiety. Being with children when parents leave, holding and comforting them and then helping them find something interesting to do can make it easier. When children first start coming, it's best if they stay only for a short time, but long enough to settle and get involved with what's going on. The time they stay can be gradually extended until they feel comfortable with staying.

The program needs to support staff to give priority to interacting with children by talking with them, reassuring them, helping them play and learn, and generally being there for them. Building a relationship with each child over time is a priority in a good service. This comes from getting to know the child, showing pleasure in the child's company and being responsive to, and respectful of, the child.

Talking with children, even young babies, is important because 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.

Are you able to give priority to interactions and relationships in your service?

How do you try to make sure all children feel secure and cared for?

What are all the ways you help families and children feel welcomed?

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 the things they say. Meaningful conversations are one of most important parts of a good child care program. Talking to children on a one-to-one basis is much better than talking to the whole group. Take advantage of every opportunity to have a one-to-one interaction with a child, even if it is brief.

Responsiveness and respect are particularly important when helping children learn behaviours that are valued and acceptable. It is helpful to keep in mind that most of children's behaviour that is unacceptable is children being children and trying to figure out how to get along. One of your most important tasks is to help children learn to guide their own behaviour in positive ways through modelling good behaviour, talking with them, setting limits and helping them in other ways to learn about looking after themselves, others and the physical environment.

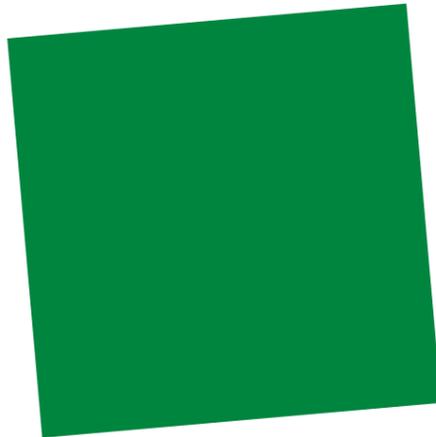
Children enjoy company and learn a lot from each other, and one of the most important experiences a service can offer is the opportunity for children to spend quality time with other children. Learning to socialise and get along well with each other is one of the challenging areas of learning for young children, and they will need your help to develop these skills.

Are you able to give priority to interactions and relationships in your service?

How do you try to make sure all children feel secure and cared for?

What are all the ways you help families and children feel welcomed?

# The physical environment



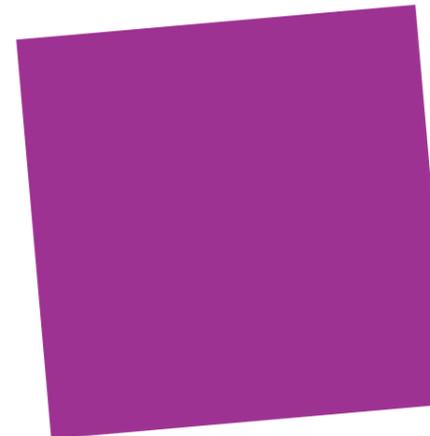
The physical space and everything in it make a big contribution to what and how children learn and how successful their learning experience is. One of the roles of the educator is to set up an environment that is vibrant and flexible. An environment should be both responsive and challenging to children's interests and abilities.

Some important points to consider in relation to the environment:

- Be sure that most toys and other play and learning materials are accessible for children to choose (keeping safety in mind, of course), and make sure children have choices from a range of materials and equipment.
- Display materials in an organised and attractive way, for example on shelves instead of in baskets or boxes, so that children can choose. Place materials in interesting combinations, for example toy animals with blocks.
- 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 bricks, construction toys, balls, paper and crayons or Textas. Also make materials for dramatic play available, such as dolls, a home corner and dress-ups. While children enjoy single-use toys, such as jigsaw puzzles, they usually only suit children in particular age ranges.

- Try to provide some experiences for children who want to be active, even if you don't have an outside play area. Some examples include a simple obstacle course, appliance cartons to crawl through, cardboard boxes or baskets into which to throw soft balls.
- 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 overwhelming. You can judge whether there's too much or too little available, or whether it's just right, by how engaged children are.
- Aim to offer each child opportunities for both easy successes and challenges.
- Look at the overall environment and ask yourself how interesting it is for children. A rich environment is much more than activities on tables and play toys. Ask yourself what there is to do in the space if you took all the toys away. For example, are there interesting pictures on the wall at child height for children to look at and talk about?

Look at the points in this section and use them to evaluate the environment in your service.



- If possible, divide up the space into smaller spaces, while still ensuring good supervision. Smaller spaces help children concentrate and allow children to interact with one or two children at a time. Use portable barriers for times when older children are doing something that isn't safe for babies and toddlers. In other words, set up the space to encourage children to get along well with each other and to reduce the amount of directing children.
- Be aware of the noise level. Use music for a purpose and for children's benefit, rather than as background that contributes to the noise level.
- Think about whether the space is attractive. A kaleidoscope of primary colours is unattractive and can interfere with children concentrating and feeling relaxed.
- Understand that when children play and can choose things to do and get very involved in their learning, the space that they are in will become somewhat messy and disorganised. This is a good thing. A very tidy environment where mess isn't allowed isn't a good learning environment. Try to maintain a balance between keeping the space and materials organised enough that children can find things and concentrate, and accepting that messiness and 'disorganisation' happens when children play.
- Change things around occasionally, but not too often. How often you change things around depends, of course, on children's interest and engagement. Children can become bored if nothing ever changes, but at the same time there is security in a level of sameness. So if you keep getting new children and/or younger children and the space seems to be working, that is, children are engaged and settled, then you don't need to change things. 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 of the families using your service. Ask yourself if the children and their families feel at home in the environment.

The community in Faheem's program contains families from a variety of cultural backgrounds. He put a notice up asking families for suggestions or donations of props that reflect something about their lifestyle for the home corner. He had a wonderful response. Children tell other children about what items are used for, and what food packets contained. It's a rich source of conversation.

Oula makes sure that the play materials available to the children include some that can be used alone and many that allow more than one child to play together. For example, she often puts up a very large sheet of paper and encourages children to create a mural together rather than individual paintings. She monitors the situations when children are playing together, because she knows getting along with others is a challenging part of learning in the early years.

If children can choose, play and engage on their own in a rich environment, then the educators are free to interact and talk with individual children and each other, which helps create a secure and nurturing environment.

# Play, learning experiences and opportunities



You can see from the discussion so far that opportunities to play and learn should be available to children all the time they are in a limited hours service.

These opportunities come mostly from:

- rich environments that build learning, that offer children choices and let them take the lead in their own play and learning
- educators who design programs that respond to children's interests and abilities and reflect the values and expectations of their families
- caring and respectful interactions and communication between educators and children, sometimes initiated by adults, at other times by children.

In other words, educators should see the child's whole experience as offering opportunities for learning rather than focusing on a few special activities.

When educators build programs around a few special activities and little else, the risk is that ongoing play and learning experiences in a rich environment may be neglected.

Sometimes, the need to supervise and help children with these kinds of activities can interfere with the quality of the children's interactions and the supervision of children who are not participating in the activity. Often, the simplest experiences are the best – a collection of cardboard boxes, some new props to go with the blocks, a few empty food packets in the home corner, a few new hats in the dress-up corner, a fresh batch of play dough, looking at a book with a few children, singing a song together. It's not always easy to predict what children will choose to play with, but when making decisions about the program it's important to try to balance the activities so that they are all equally attractive to the children and they won't all want to do the same thing at the same time.

Although special activities such as group times or craft, (if offered in a flexible way as one choice among several for children), can enrich the program, there is little value in making children stop what they are doing and all participate in an activity that an adult initiates. This is especially inappropriate when there is a wide range of ages, abilities and interests in the group.

# Routines



Routines or daily living experiences are arriving and leaving, toileting and nappy changes, eating, dressing, hand-washing and resting. They are an important part of the program and not separate from it. Routines are opportunities for conversations and interactions; for learning important skills and moving toward independence.

Arriving and leaving are particularly important routines in a limited hours service, and need to be given 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 care and being away from their family and home. They and their families need to be confident that you understand

and will help them. Sometimes, at the start both families and children need gentle, caring support from staff to separate. Encouraging family members to stay with the child for a time while the child gets familiar with the place and people can help with lessening children's separation anxiety. Being with children when parents leave, holding and comforting them and then helping them find something interesting to do can make it easier.

What importance do you place on routines in your program?

Are there ways that you could integrate them into the program and take more advantage of them as part of a good experience for children?

# The organisation of time

How is time organised in your service?

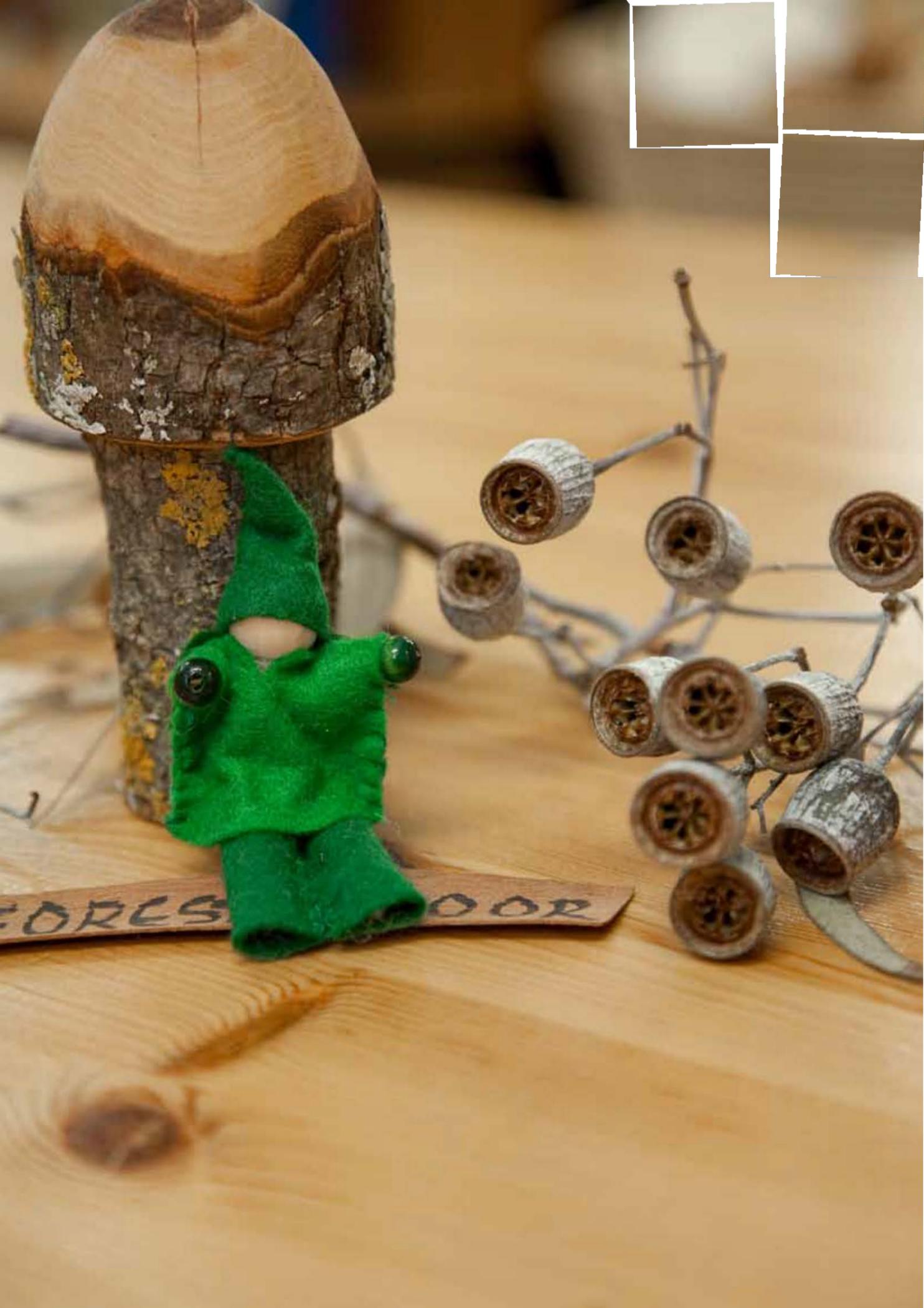
Are transitions smooth?

Are there times when children are waiting, doing nothing? If yes, what can you do to avoid or fill in these periods?

In a limited hours service, children will be coming and going most of the time, which means that having a relaxed, easy flow to the day or session is critical, so that children can enter and leave easily. A good guide to follow is to minimise the times when children are waiting with nothing to do (for example, queuing) and when everyone has to do the same thing.

Flexible, relaxed transitions from one part of the session to another are easier to manage for educators and children.

Letting children know in advance that a change is about to happen allows them to finish what they are doing.



# Recording the program



This section explains the recorded or written information required for making decisions about the program. Recorded information is sometimes called documentation.

Documenting (or writing down) the program and the actual program decision making process are two different things, although related. Recorded information, including your program, contributes to offering a good experience to all children and is essential. In addition to the program, this information can include:

- the vision statement
- notes about the program and children's experiences (either individual children or groups of children)
- information about individual children – their development and learning, interests, achievements, experiences in the service and in the family, concerns or questions
- evidence of children's play, work and learning (photographs of children at work and play, records of children's comments and conversations, paintings, drawings and other created products)
- thoughts and reflections about any aspect of the program or a child or several children's behaviour.

While educators do most of the documenting; children and families can and should contribute. In other words, the program should reflect everyone's contributions and ideas.

Recording information is important for a number of reasons. It helps you:

- remember things you might otherwise forget

- make sure the operational program, what happens on a day-to-day basis links to the vision statement
- get to know children better, learn about their individual differences, development, interests and needs
- share information with families and children and invite their input
- talk with other educators
- be accountable to sponsors and management
- provide experiences that cater for children's interests
- demonstrate that your program is intentional and purposeful.

All documentation or recorded information needs to help you get to know children better and feed directly into the decisions about the program. One of the important things to ask yourself continually is 'how is this information reflected in the program decisions that we make and provide for children every day?'

What kinds of documentation do you do now?

How does it link to what you plan and provide for children every day?

Are there additional kinds of documentation or changes to current documentation that would contribute to a better program?

What is in the Act and Regulations about program planning?

The Regulations require that children's services have an outline of the educational or recreational program displayed at the service and that the educational or recreational program be available at the service (Regulations 40 and 41).

## Recording the program...continued



The Regulations also state that each child cared for or educated by the service has to have access to furniture, materials and developmentally-appropriate equipment suitable for the educational or recreational program provided to that child (regulation 93).

Some of the kinds of recorded information that services should have include:

- information provided by the parent each time the child attends the service
- information about the child provided at enrolment and updated regularly. Children develop and learn at a rapid rate, and relying on old information can get in the way of providing a good experience
- feedback from families and children (surveys, questionnaires, notes from interviews and conversations) about the program
- brief notes or records you make as you work – anything that you notice that tells you something about a child or about an aspect of the program – anything that's happening; that a child says or does; what's working well and what's not. Even if you don't know if it's significant, if it catches your attention it's worth jotting down a note about it. Keeping a small note pad in your pocket to take down notes as you work with the children is useful. You need to watch, listen and talk with children to learn about what to offer and how to offer it. These notes can then be used later to build up knowledge of individual children and to inform program decisions. Photos are another good way of making a brief record

- collections of children's work, including photos
- more detailed notes with reflections and implications for the program if time permits. This is evidence of ongoing assessment of what's working, how it's working and how it can be improved. These notes might come out of informal discussion with colleagues and families.

It is important to have an efficient way of sharing information with families each time the child attends, both when they arrive and before they leave. While welcoming the child and parent, helping the child come into the program and having a friendly informal conversation with the parent, is important, having a notebook, folder or sheet on which parents write any information that educators need to know about the child that day will contribute both to parents' peace of mind and to the child having a good experience. Similarly, when the parents return to pick up their child, they will appreciate not only hearing from you a bit about the child's time but having that backed up with a brief written note. Sharing something positive about their child's experience with parents contributes to their feelings of trust.



## Decision making about the program

Quality early childhood programs are responsive to children's abilities and interests. Making decisions about the program requires a combination of thinking ahead of time about the program, preparing for it and responding to children spontaneously. Some people who work in a limited hours service may ask 'why prepare a program?' or 'how can you possibly prepare a program with all the uncertainties?' Good questions, but there are good answers to those questions.

The first thing to say is that if your program works well for children and for the service, you have prepared and made program decisions. You just may not think about it that way. Making program decisions means being ready, being responsive and being prepared. It doesn't mean following the program no matter what. In fact, being responsive to children's interests and abilities and building on their knowledge will often require program decisions to be made spontaneously. Other factors such as staffing, weather, an unexpected interest or novel event (for example, bulldozers and cranes operating next to the service), or the number and ages of children attending will also require you to make spontaneous program decisions. You can prepare for possibilities. Preparing can support rather than interfere with flexibility and being responsive to children.

No matter how you make program decisions, it's important to keep in mind that it:

- needs to cover all dimensions or elements – not just 'special activities'
- doesn't have to be a timetable

- doesn't have to be organised by developmental areas or 'activity areas'
- doesn't have to limit choice
- doesn't have to include everything every time. It can focus on changes or additions.

It is also important to keep the five learning outcomes in mind when you are making decisions.

Program decisions need to reflect assessments of previous decisions and encourage ongoing assessment to inform decisions in the future. It needs to include answers to questions about 'why?' and state the goals or purposes of what is being offered. This comes from linking the program to documentation about your knowledge of the children as well as to the vision statement.

Services will benefit by having:

- a longer-term (say fortnightly) general program
- a more detailed daily program
- a 'big picture' daily program to display for families and older children.

As discussed in the previous section, it's in the children's best interests to document or write up the program. It also lets others know what's happening. There is no one right or best way to do it. As you continue to gain experience working in children's services you will no doubt change the way you document the program. Documentation might include charts and photographs as well as your notes. The best programs come from educators working together with families and children, sharing ideas, insights, concerns, and knowledge about children.

## Decision making about the program...continued

The formal program that you make public and display for families and older children will most likely form the basis of a more detailed working or operational program that you and your colleagues use on a day-to-day basis. 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 in the child's experience. Think about what they will want to know, and document the information so that it's easy to understand and gives them a picture of what will happen.

How do you plan currently?

How do you ensure that there is a link between other documentation and the plan?

Are there some ideas in this section that you can incorporate into your planning process and ways of documenting the plan?



## Conclusion

All the parts of a program fit together to contribute to a good limited hours service. What matters most is that there is evidence in the program that:

- children feel secure and are engaged in 'worthwhile' ways
- there are diverse opportunities that cater for all areas of learning and development
- children make choices and contribute to decisions
- there is a balance of child and educator-initiated experiences
- 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
- all families are welcomed
- educators communicate with families, seeking their ideas and using them.

Families want their children to be safe, secure and happy in care. Supervising children at all times and staying aware of what is happening is essential. Learning about children and 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 a limited hours service will do much more than keep children safe, secure and happy.



## Where to find more information and resources



### Department of Education and Training– Licensed Children's Services

Additional resources for licensed children's services may be found on the Department of Education and Training website. [www.education.vic.gov.au/licensedchildservices](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/licensedchildservices)

Children's services advisers are authorised officers of the Department of Education and Training who monitor and enforce the legislation and provide advice and support to children's services. Services may contact a children's services adviser for information or advice and to discuss any questions about their individual circumstances. Children's services advisers are located at the regional offices of the Department of Education and Training. Addresses of regional offices are found at: [www.education.vic.gov.au/licensedchildservices](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/licensedchildservices)

### Community Child Care Victoria

Community Child Care is an independent non-for-profit organisation that provides training, resources, advice and advocacy for educators and families. [www.cccinc.org.au](http://www.cccinc.org.au)

### Early Childhood Australia (ECA)

ECA is the peak national, non-profit, non-government organisation for early childhood in Australia. It acts in the interests of young children aged from birth to eight years of age to secure the best range of options and outcomes for young children as they grow and develop.

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

### Early Years Learning Frameworks

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework is a framework designed to assist early childhood professionals to guide children's learning and development in the first 8 years of life.

[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears)

The National Early Years Learning Framework is the first national learning framework for all educators working with children from birth to five years.

[www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood](http://www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood)

### FKA Multicultural Resource Centre

FKA aims to foster positive attitudes amongst providers and staff in children's services towards the development of multicultural perspectives in their services and programs and promote the maintenance and development of languages other than English in children's services and assist children to learn English as a second language. The FKA Multicultural Resource Centre is a state-wide service that provides advice, consultancy, training and resources to children's services.

[www.fka.com.au](http://www.fka.com.au)

### Gowrie Victoria

Gowrie Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation providing services to support the development of excellence in early childhood education and care. The Gowrie has a number of resources for the sector and runs training programs for early childhood workers.

[www.gowrievictoria.org.au](http://www.gowrievictoria.org.au)

### National Childcare Accreditation Council

The National Childcare Accreditation Council assists child care professionals to deliver quality child care by providing services with advice, support and resources.

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

