Sample policy 2: Promoting positive self-image and encouraging self-expression

**Policy**
A positive self-image and the opportunity to express one’s self is vital to the continued development, wellbeing, and happiness of children.

The needs of each individual child will be given first priority while they are at the Centre.

**Philosophy**
The Children Play Program believes that self-concept, self-esteem and self-confidence at a developmentally appropriate level are vital for children to grow into and through developmental stages. Although each child attends the Children’s Program for a limited time each week we note Corkille Brigg’s (1970, p 41) comment that ‘…as little as one hour a week, filled with positive reinforcement and a nurturing climate can make a significant difference to a child’s self-image’. The Children Play Program believes that the needs of each child should be given first priority. This means that workers need to be accessible to children while they are at the Centre.

The Children Play Program believes that children should receive a consistent, positive response from all workers. One way to ensure this is through regular communication with parents. The parent’s knowledge of their child is superior to that of the worker. A two-way interaction means that they can share their knowledge of their child and the worker can share their own knowledge about age appropriate play and activities and methods of meeting the child’s needs if required. The Children Play Program believes children learn to make sense of the world and to better understand themselves through their play experiences. A number of experts have described the importance of play. Play is the child’s natural medium for self-expression, experimentation, learning and problem solving. Children are not instructed or directed but given a supportive environment where they can choose the activities that will allow them to play out and explore their feelings and problems. This allows them the opportunity for rehearsing their life skills, reality testing, gaining competence and a sense of self through taking charge and make choices and developing mentally, physically and socially. By being able to use play as a medium for communicating and expressing their emotions children are provided with a socially acceptable outlet for managing their stress and can move into a happier state. Thus as noted by Schmidt Neven (1996, p 110) ‘Play almost always has a strong reparative and integrative function’.

The Children Play Program believes that a non-directive play program provides the best opportunity for developing positive self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept and for encouraging self-expression. Given acceptance and permission and space to be themselves and make their own choices, each child has the ability to solve their own problems satisfactorily. The worker does not attempt to direct the child’s actions or conversation but simply recognises the feelings that the child is expressing and uses reflection or mirroring to demonstrate that they have heard and understood the child. A non-directive approach reduces the tendency to get the child to tell us what we want to hear rather than hearing what the child wants us to hear. Children present their feelings and emotions through their play and a non-directive program provides more opportunities for this to occur. Providing this type of non-directive program in a group setting assists each child to share their experiences and to consider the reactions and feelings of others. In this way they can ‘…rehearse social skills, gain a better idea of the nature of the give and take in relationships…[and] to think ahead, to anticipate the consequences of their own actions’ (Slee, 1993, p 204).

The Children Play Program also recognises that a program in which children can make choices, express their own opinions and views and have these given high regard is essential for their positive
self-image and self-esteem. This has also been recognised in The UN Convention Article 12.1 (UNICEF, 1998) which reads that ‘State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child’. The Children Play Program chooses to provide a play program that mixes children of all ages between 0-5 years in the same setting. This reflects the immediate home environment and often the extended family structures. By replicating the home environment in this way, a sense of familiarity is offered to the child as well as an opportunity to practice social skills in surroundings similar to that of their daily lives.

The Children Play Program has learned that some children use compliance as a means of survival. They may have learned to attach personal worth to approval or for good work whereas children should be cherished regardless of their competence. This means that as adults we need to remain conscious and mindful of our power to influence children simply because of our status as adults. The Children Play Program believes that without the freedom and the safety to explore, a child’s potential to develop self-concept is limited. Moyles (1989, p 146) has noted how a poor self-concept or self-image may ‘…be created by inconsistent handling, personality, lack of opportunity to gauge self against peers and lack of occasion to explore one’s own feelings and emotions’. Consequently the child does not have the opportunity to establish itself as a unique individual. It has also been noted that a child’s self-concept ‘…is closely related to their perceptions of the competence of their own bodies in physical activities’ (Shipley, 1993, p 171), thus highlighting the importance of providing a broad range of physical activities through which children can further develop their self-concept.

Objectives

- To be available to children and to provide a consistent response to children.
- To provide activities that foster the positive self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept of each child.
- To provide play activities are free from censorship, influence or direction.

Strategies

Centre guidelines will be given to all families attending the Centre.

Workers will be skilled in communicating with parents to ensure a continual exchange of information and a consistent response to children by both parents and workers.

A worker will be available to children at all times to ensure a consistent response to their needs. Workers will ensure the majority of group preparation and packing up occurs outside group times, thus ensuring that the children receive the full attention of the workers during their stay at the Centre.

Workers will provide freedom and safety to explore so that children will have the opportunity for developing self-esteem, self-confidence and self-concept.
Workers will avoid imposing adult influences on children by using neutral or reflective language and ‘I’ statements. For example: - We don’t say ‘this is lovely’ or ‘that isn’t finished’ or ‘why don’t you fill up the page’. We do not try to guess what something is. We might ask a child to tell us the story of this sculpture or painting or collage or sand play activity. We try to avoid commenting on the child’s work. If a child asks, ‘Is this nice?’ we might say ‘I like these colours’ or ‘I like the shape of this’. We might also add, ‘what is your favourite part of this?’ or ‘Tell me about this’. Stonehouse (1994, p 92) has described how when children ‘…are in the important stages of exploring and experimenting, they are done when they are done’. She notes how the tendency to focus on a finished product, to be preserved by the child may unintentionally give them the message that the product is more important than the process of learning.

Workers will model and encourage children to participate in games that elicit laughter. These activities aim to build self-esteem.

Group activities will be used for peer involvement in feedback. These can include activities such as playing with a large parachute, rolling a large ball, group singing and dancing or playing with musical instruments. The activities are provided and children can choose to engage in group activities as they wish.

Activities that promote the use of imagination, self help skills, interaction with others and role-playing will be used to build a positive self-image and to encourage self-expression.

The program focuses on allowing children to self direct and to involve other children and workers in their play if they so choose. They can also make choices about their own equipment and express their own needs and wants. Shipley (1993, p 350) says that children benefit most from play ‘…that is hands on, sensory based, freely chosen, undertaken for its own sake, responsive to their own actions, meaningful and relevant to their daily lives’. In their interactions with children workers will try to reflect their actions, and language. In stimulating children to try something different workers will use the language ‘I am’, rather than ‘You could’ so that the child is left with the choice of copying or creating their own variation of the worker’s idea, dismissing the idea or doing something completely different. When a child asks us to join a game workers will use language such as ‘What can we do now?’ rather than ‘Now we could…’.

Shipley (1993, p 326) has noted how ‘…important affective characteristics such as emotional control, self-confidence and self-esteem are acquired by children as a result of their successful experiences in the environment’. However as Stonehouse (1994, p 93) suggests, workers need to ‘…facilitate play, encourage, suggest, extend without dominating’. This includes avoiding the use of frequent praise. Praise by someone else cannot replace the child’s own experience of competence. Often praise by someone else simply sets up expectations for the child that they may fear they cannot meet. Workers must provide opportunities for children to experience and recognise their own successes.

Workers will ensure play activities are free from censorship or influence. Strategies for avoiding censorship can include placing a child’s name on the back of their work so as not to deface their work. Given the age ranges in the program and the diversity of equipment provided it is essential that workers strive to refrain from exerting undue influence on the children’s play. This can be done by providing the opportunity and appropriate assistance and support as required, for children of different ages to be able to access and utilise the full range of equipment and activities. Children’s interests and suggestions will be consistently incorporated into the program.