CHCECE003 Provide care for children

Topic Five | Settle new arrivals

Relevant Frameworks

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<th>QA6</th>
<th>Collaborative partnerships with families and communities</th>
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<td>6.1</td>
<td>Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained</td>
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<td>6.1.1</td>
<td>There is an effective enrolment and orientation process for families.</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td>Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.</td>
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<td>6.2.1</td>
<td>The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child’s learning and wellbeing.</td>
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<td>6.3.2</td>
<td>Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.</td>
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Quality Areas related to collaborative partnerships with families and communities

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<th>Belonging, being &amp; becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia</th>
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<td>Outcome 1</td>
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<td>Children have a strong sense of identity</td>
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Observe children and families for signs of stress on arrival

Arrival times in education and care can be stressful and require careful management. Parents and children are usually in a rush after a busy morning routine at home. They may both be tense about the impending separation and educators are often quite busy greeting and settling other children.

Begin interaction with the child while the family is still present to minimise abruptness of separation.

Encourage the family to take as much time as needed to have a relaxed, unhurried separation from their child.

Respond to the child’s distress at separation from the family in a calm reassuring manner.

Parents’ stress - identifying the signs and reasons for their stress

Signs of parents’ stress may include:

- Direct admission - the parents tell you that they are experiencing distress
- Frequent and repetitive question asking
- Several visits prior to starting
- Changes of mind with added information about their stressors, about such as if educators knowing the child well, if a child cries for parents, if they don’t eat.

Strategies to alleviate parents’ stress

Let's consider some practical strategies that can help ease the troubled minds of parents as they leave their precious offspring in our care.

- Have an open-door policy so that parents always feel welcome to visit if they are able and if they wish
- Encourage parents to phone throughout the day to check on their child or perhaps offer suggestions of good times to call
- Ask parents about their child’s likes and dislikes and how they settle down when distressed at home
- Ask for parental input into the program
- Guide parents as they settle their children for the day by having them participate in a consistent routine or ritual. This will help the child feel more secure and will also help the parent get more involved in the service. This may include nappy change for the younger children or interacting with a favourite experience, reading a book or completing a puzzle for the older children.
- Offer an orientation program where children and parents can visit the centre prior to starting care officially. This will diminish fears of the unknown and build up familiarity whilst creating a sense of belonging for both child and family.
Stress in children – identifying the signs and reasons for the stress

Infants may show signs of stress due to a number of things, including being rushed through breakfast, having morning floor play at home interrupted to be dressed, strapped in the car too quickly for the child and rushed off to care, when often a morning in the security of home is what the child may prefer. The infant who is used to this rush will still go through stages where this routine stresses them, even those who enjoy the educators and other children.

An Education and Care service is a noisy and busy place, especially when compared to home where often just the immediate family reside. As we strive to make care seem more home-like, we need to consider the fact that it’s highly unlikely that any family has, say 8 as per 1:4 children under 2 years of age. Care is still an unusual situation for infants, toddlers and preschoolers because they are at a stage in their development where cooperation and sharing an educator’s time, attention and centre equipment is difficult. Education and care can also equate to a long day of interactions and stimulation, which can in itself cause stress.

Infants may show distress by:

- Crying, whimpering and fussing
- Being clingy to their primary carer at the service as well as parents on arrival and departure
- Crying when other children approach
- Being withdrawn
- Startling easily or appearing ‘jumpy’
- Disturbed sleep and/or feeding patterns.

Toddlers may show distress by:

- Crying
- Being withdrawn
- Crying when other children approach
- Not playing
- Unusual levels of aggression
- Physically clinging to and constantly following a particular carer
- Regression - e.g. needing nappies again sometime after successful toilet training.

Preschoolers may show stress by:

- Crying and whimpering
- Refusing to talk or participate in the program
- Clinging to adults
- Watching other children playing and refusing to join in
- Uncharacteristic, inappropriate or undesirable behaviours.
Promoting positive separation times

Security or transitional objects

As each family arrives, we should always greet both the parent and the child by name. We can then initiate a 3-way interaction where we can share information about the child with the parent as well as making eye contact and smiling at the young child. At this point a transitional object may be used to comfort the child and ease the transition.

Many older infants adopt an object to help calm them. Toddlers and preschoolers may continue with the security items from infancy or they may adopt new ones. The variety of possible comforters is almost endless. They can range from ‘purpose-built’ items, such as dummies (pacifiers) or manufactured security toys, to pieces of satin on blankets, cloth nappies or a pillow. They can literally be anything. These items are usually called security objects or transitional objects.

Many infants become attached to items kept in their beds. The reflux baby who has slept elevated with a cloth nappy under their head to catch any spillage, may have a strong attachment to the cloth nappy. Infants enjoy tactile stimulation so a common security item is a blanket or a pillow with something special about the texture, such as a satin edge. From birth, babies are comforted by sucking so the appeal of dummies or thumbs is quite obvious in light of this.

Favourite security items

As educators we want our charges to feel secure and comfortable. We want them to know that they can access the things they need to feel calm, things that remind them of home or things that help them to settle. It is imperative that comforter items are not confiscated or withheld from children. Children should be able to easily access them or to indicate when they need them. A responsive educator allows the child to decide when they want to give up these items or sets reasonable boundaries on their use.

It is important to understand that security or transitional objects provide comfort during the transition from dependence to independence, so these are the times when they are needed most.
This child is comforted by sucking her thumb
© Patrikanny (CC BY)

This child feels comfortable and secure with her blanket
© Sean Dreilinger (CC BY)
The arrival routine

Emotional wellbeing goes hand-in-hand with feeling that you belong. This is important to children and allows security and trust to grow. Children need to feel welcome and that they ‘belong’. Ways that we can do this is to ensure that we greet each child and family on their arrival at the centre and that we make a point of farewelling them at the end of the day. Settling children when they arrive at the centre is also important for establishing a foundation for future comfort and belonging. Some strategies may include:

- Establish a safe routine-based environment which ensures the children know what to expect that day
- Assist children to establish a sense of security and trust in their educators
- Encourage laughter, joy, play and exploration
- Support and encourage children when they cry or withdraw
- A gentle touch
- Set up activities that correspond with their interests
- Be available to offer positive praise as children arrive
- Express interest in children’s conversations
- Acknowledge concerns and support them as they problem solve solutions to the concern.

Policies for arrival and departure procedures

Below are Sample Policies that you may find in policies to guide educators in handling the arrival and departure of children and family members each day.

Sample points for a policy on the arrival procedure

Arrival time experiences can set the tone for the whole day for children and their parents. It requires special attention because both educators and parents can be rushed at this time of day. Also, educators may still be settling children who arrived earlier.

The parent or other authorised person brings the child in to the centre and signs the child in on the attendance record.

- If part of an infant’s ‘ritual’, the parent changes the infant’s nappy.
- The parent takes the child to the locker area and assists them to store their belongings.
- The parent takes the child to an educator and information is exchanged between parent and educator
- Educators make every effort to greet each parent and child warmly and to spend a few moments with each arriving family
- The child is taken to a morning activity or play area by the educator and assisted in saying goodbye to the parents
- If the child is distressed, educators are encouraged to take the child to a window to wave goodbye and are comforted in a manner appropriate to each child

Sample points for a policy on the departure procedure

- Children must be collected by their parent or other authorised person
- The parent or other authorised person signs the child out on the attendance register in the foyer before collecting the child
- The parent or other authorised person collects the child’s bag from their locker
- Educators greet parents and information is exchanged about the child’s day. ‘Good news’ should be given about the child.
- If educators are unsure about the authorisation of a non-parent collecting the child, they should check the child’s enrolment form, the message book or seek verbal permission from the parent. Educators must then check the identification of the non-parent.
- If a person is authorised, the child may be released. If a person is not authorised, educators must take whatever reasonable measures they can to keep the child at the centre and notify the parent of the situation. However at no time should educators endanger themselves or other children at the service.
- The parent or other authorised person is responsible for the child as soon as the child leaves the front door of the centre.
Policies for settling new children

A well-organised education and care service has a range of policies and procedures to guide educators, to ensure good practice and quality control and to maintain consistency. Educators who are settling new children into care need the guidance of a policy document in this area too.

Settling new arrivals means paying close attention to building new relationships with the child and family members. Each child will come into care with a background of different care practices which must be taken into account when planning their settling-in period.

Relationship between families and the service

It is vital to remember when providing a high quality Education and Care service that we are not only providing for the child but also the family to which he or she belongs. Families are diverse and may not always look the same as ours but each and every one is valuable and important. We cannot provide quality care to a child without including the family.

High quality care programs encourage parent involvement and partnerships in care. We must work together with the family to learn about and care for their infant.

Whilst we as educators work continually at building the parent and educator relationship, so do parents. The majority of parents recognise the work done by educators and value it. Parents who are committed to the education and care partnership and are aware of the importance of creating a feeling of security know that bonding is important and will be prepared to accept and strengthen the child–educator bond.

The following strategies could be used to build and maintain the parent–educator relationship:

- Greet both parent and child at arrival
- If busy when they arrive, still acknowledge the child and parent (don’t just ignore them!) and let them know you’ll be with them soon
- Look for cues from parents in a hurry and help them leave quickly if they are in a hurry
- Make the room inviting ready for children’s arrival
- Help parents feel comfortable in the centre and make spaces for them to breastfeed, stay and play or just observe if they wish
- Communicate openness by displaying essential information and inform them of educator changes. In other words, make them feel a part of the centre organisation
- If you are too busy to talk, make a time to talk later

Rituals in education and care

Rituals are set patterns of behaviour that generally allow the child to feel more secure and in control of a situation.

Most people have small rituals that they perform each day often without being aware of them. Some of the interesting rituals I have seen are:

Putting tea into the teapot and then adding boiling water followed by turning the pot three times in a clockwise direction and then five times anti-clockwise Stirring the sugar into coffee (or tea) in the clockwise direction eight times and then tapping the spoon twice on the rim of the cup.
Rituals are fine to have as the majority of people have set patterns or ways that they complete a task but the world doesn’t fall apart if the ritual is incomplete.

Rituals generally don’t cause us huge amounts of stress if we can’t complete them but their completion helps us to feel secure. There is a sense of security in familiar actions and patterns.

Think about your life and any rituals you may have, e.g. the order in which you do things when you wash your hair, take a shower or wash clothes.

Most people have one or two rituals that allow them to feel more secure in unfamiliar situations. Infants and young children are the same.

Rituals are very important in the lives of infants and young children as they are often placed in many unfamiliar situations and environments and need to have a successful way of comforting themselves and promoting feelings of security.

There are many times throughout the day in education and care when a child’s ritual helps him or her to settle and self comfort. Some of these times might be:

- Arrival
- Sleep time
- Nappy change/toileting
- Meal times
- Transition from one experience to another
- Departure

Think Time

Do you know any rituals that people have?

Do you have a set pattern of behaviour or ritual that you follow in new situations?

How do you feel if you are unable to complete this ritual?
Rituals in the arrival routine

One of the first things educators need to establish for a new child in care is a positive arrival routine. This routine should be worked out in consultation with the family. Establishing a ritual or pattern of behaviour that reflects the child’s needs is helpful.

The ritual will allow the child to know what’s coming next and not be subjected to daily surprises. The child begins to gain a sense of what’s going to happen and when a similar event occurs each day the child begins to not only expect it but trust the situation as well. The child will become aware that the parent will return after the day’s activities.

Think carefully about the ritual and routine you wish to establish. Make sure that you consider the child’s transitional or security objects. If there is a favourite toy or item, ensure it is included as part of the ritual.

Rituals at transition times

There are other times of the day where rituals can be used effectively to aid security. One of the main times where infants and young children may feel a little stressed can be transitioning to sleep.

Importance of rituals

Infancy can be a stressful time, especially when infants and pre-schoolers have to cope with new people and situations. Having an understanding of the role that rituals and transition objects play in children’s lives can make these situations easier to cope with. Working closely with parents is one way to ensure that we learn as much as possible about the rituals, transitional objects and handling techniques that will make these times easier for all.

Developing secondary attachments

A lot of what we do when we are trying to promote trust and security in infants and toddlers in our care has to do with the way we interact with the children as well as the way we interact with the child’s parents. Infants will often sense that a person is OK by the reaction the parents have to that individual. This is called social referencing in which the children read the emotional reactions of parents (or others) and use this information to guide their own behaviour in situations. For example, if a parent greets a visitor to the home enthusiastically, the infant or young child will usually react in a similar manner. Likewise, the infant will imitate a negative response if that is what has been observed. In other words, when the child is unsure of how to respond to a person or situation, they take their cue from the reaction of the parent or carer.

A lot of our interactions with parents can seem rushed, but it is very important to try to engage the parents in conversation in an unrushed, open and friendly manner if we are to help the new infant settle into our program.

Some parents will appreciate an information sheet about planning for a good start in care. Many services have a brochure or information sheet on what to expect when starting a new child in care and gives ideas about how to help them settle in.

A gradual start is always best if possible. Parents should be encouraged to visit the service with the child a few times before first leaving them. These visits are a wonderful opportunity for parents, children and educators to get to know one another in a relaxed manner and to start building the relationships that are so vital to good infant care. A primary educator should be assigned to each new child as soon as possible.

Once enrolled, parents should be encouraged to spend some time playing with their infant or toddler in the centre environment with an educator present so the child has time to build up some trust.
They will get to know the educators, and especially their primary educator, while they feel happy and relaxed because their parents are nearby.

Games such as Peek-a-boo, Round and round the garden and other tickle rhymes, nursery rhymes and body games are a great way to connect with a new child and gradually build up trust and a sense of mutually enjoyed fun. Children can also bring in a toy or comforter from home so they can be comforted at the service when they attend.

If possible, it is best if parents can leave their child for short periods of time at first, perhaps beginning with an hour on the first day and gradually building up the length of time over a period of a week or two. This may help the child to cope and they will realise quickly that their parents will be returning soon and that the educators in the service will care for them until then.
Strategies for reducing separation anxiety in parents and children

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- Explain that separation anxiety and stress are normal and healthy
- Separation and goodbyes need to be as unhurried and relaxed as possible but if the parents or child are anxious tell them to limit their arrival and goodbye routines to about 10 minutes. Don’t prolong the experience
- If parents are anxious and upset when they leave, suggest that they spend some time to calm down. The drive to work, a cup of coffee or time with a friend can put things in perspective
- Discourage parents from returning to their child after saying goodbye. This affects trust and confuses the child
- Encourage them to phone and check how their child is doing later in the day
- Take photos of the child engaged in activities through the day to share with the parent and family

Whatever the situation may be, carers and parents need to talk about the best ways to settle individual children into the child care environment. Implementing appropriate arrival strategies and dealing with separation in a calm and reassuring manner will do much to minimise the anxiety of both the children and their parents.