

Child Safe Environment: Supervision, Child Protection & Hazard Prevention

Policy/Procedure Number: C 5

Policy/Procedure Requirement: National Quality Standards 4, 6 & 7; Regulations 100-102 & 168

Policy Statement

The Service takes reasonable precaution to protect children from harm or hazard likely to cause injury.

Rationale

Prior to the commencement of FDC (and also annually), a safety and risk assessment of the FDC residence will be undertaken by the Service. The assessment will consider matters relating to the premises, furniture, equipment, fencing, lockable gates, glass doors and windows, laundry, toilet and hygiene facilities, ventilation and natural light, suitability of residence and nappy change arrangements, water hazards/features/swimming pool, and animals.

This policy covers some key aspects for child safe environment not covered elsewhere in the Service's Policies and Procedures, including adequate supervision, equipment, animals and pets, glass doors and windows, and child protection.

Strategies and Practices

(a) Adequate Supervision

Effective supervision is a key priority in the prevention of accidents and injury to children in the FDC environment. Every child must be signed in and out by parents, guardians or authorized persons, and the **Educator assumes responsibility for the child for the period the child is in care.**

Educators:

- have a duty of care to ensure that all children in their care are adequately supervised
- are responsible for the **direct and effective visual and/or aural supervision of children at all times** to respond to their needs and able to immediately intervene to protect a child from hazards or harm
- will arrange play areas so as to ensure children can be effectively supervised
- will be alert to, and aware of, potential hazards and risk of injury to children and will use their knowledge of each child to ensure children are adequately supervised at all times
- will foster children's independence and competence by supporting children to undertake some activities that involve risk taking, but should intervene to prevent harm where necessary
- must consider the design and arrangement of children's environments and the potential risks in all environments to support active supervision
- should make **regular checks of sleeping children** to assess the child's breathing and colour of their skin to ensure their safety and wellbeing

- must **supervise children at all times when they are eating and drinking** and in situations that present a higher risk of injury e.g. in a highchair or on a nappy change table
- should identify, assess and manage/minimise any risks that an excursion or routine outing away from the FDC premises may pose to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child
- undertake, where practical, a visit to the proposed excursion site prior to actual excursion to gather information about the site suitability and details can be checked such as mobile phone coverage and access for emergency services
- **must never leave children alone or with an unauthorised person under any circumstances.** This includes leaving children in a car while paying for petrol, or collecting other children from school / kindergarten (even if the vehicle remains in sight of the Educator and/or Educator Assistant)

However, if there is an emergency situation that involves serious harm or is life threatening, the Educator may call upon the assistance of a responsible adult to supervise the children

(b) Equipment

There are number of equipment that the Educators will require in the education and care of children. There are also some different types of equipment (e.g. play equipment) that the Educators may have in the residence for their own children and/or the children they care for as Educators. With regard to the equipment used in FDC residence:

- FDC Coordinators will regularly monitor the availability and safety of all equipment in a FDC residence
- Use of certain equipment such as bouncers and playpens must be assessed and approved by FDC Coordinators
- Equipment such as baby walkers and baby slings are NOT allowed by the Service to be used for FDC children
- All FDC equipment must be maintained in a safe, clean, hygienic condition, in good repair at all times and stored indoors or covered in a shed / garage
- All equipment must only be used for its intended purpose

Vehicle Child Restraints

All vehicle child restraints must comply with Australian Standards (AS/NZS 1754). Vehicle restraints must be disposed of after being involved in a collision or ten years after manufacture. Educators must keep the equipment instructions and have a clear understanding of the safe assembly, use and potential hazards. Educators must, as part of their annual review, access the free service provided by *KidSafe ACT* to check their vehicle child restraints and also whenever a new child restraint is fitted to their vehicle.

Educators using their own car restraints for FDC children will ensure that:

- Restraints and accessories are not purchased second hand
- Restraints and accessories are less than ten years old
- A copy of instructions is retained for reference

Baby Equipment

Cots, high chairs, strollers, and change tables sold with instructions. A copy of the instructions must be retained for reference and available at all times. If new equipment is purchased after the annual safety check, Educators must notify the Coordination Unit so that it can be checked by the Coordinator at the next visit.

A number of useful resources are available online for Educators (listed under 'Resources and Further Readings') that will assist them to understand hazards, know what to look for, and learn safety habits for each piece of equipment, particularly when there are voluntary / no standards (e.g. high chairs, bassinets, change tables, playpens and rocker chairs). Educators are required to regularly check equipment in their home to ensure they are maintained in clean, safe condition.

Trampolines

Educators must obtain written parental permission prior to a child being allowed to use the trampoline.

Trampolines must:

- comply with the current Australian Standard
- only be used on a flat soft surface, and must not be used on hard surfaces such as concrete or bricks
- have safety netting in good condition
- have Educator (adult) supervision provided at all times while the trampoline is in use
- have only one child on it at any one time
- have pads around the trampoline's side springs. Frame padding should be a of a different colour to that of the bed
- be used in a way that the child is encouraged to stay in the centre of the bed during its use
- remain upright on its legs even if it is not being used for FDC purposes, and
- be used only when other children are at a safe distance from it

Skateboards, Roller Blades, Roller Skates and Scooters

- Skateboards, roller blades, roller skates and scooters (roller blade style) are not developmentally appropriate for children aged 0 - 4 years, and shall NOT be accessible to or used by a child in that age group
- Children aged more than 4 years of age must wear helmets, knee & elbow pads for protection
- Only used when younger children are not in the play area where these are being used by the older children

(c) Animals and Domestic Pets

Animals in an appropriate environment can be both educational to children and promote a sense of caring and responsibility. However, birds and animals can in certain situations pose a health and safety risk, therefore children in FDC must be allowed only supervised and limited access to animals. When animals and domestic pets are present in the FDC home:

Coordination Unit will:

- Provide resources and education to Educators and families on health and safety practices for pets and other animals
- Monitor the compliance of the policy and help Educators develop risk management plans for animals when required
- Inform families of the Service requirements and the Regulations for managing pets in FDC when required

Educators will:

- Domestic pets and farm animals are generally kept in an area separate to the children's play space and inaccessible to children
- Ensure that certain breeds of dogs (e.g. Bull Terrier, Doberman, German Shepherd, Rottweiler, Blue Heeler dog breeds, sheep dogs, part breeds) which are identified from time to time as dangerous to children, must be kept in an enclosure separate and apart from any area used by the children in care. Children must have no access and no ability of contact at any time to these animals
- Ensure that cats are not present, nor have access to the same area in which a child is sleeping and in areas used for food preparation and eating
- Birds are to be in an inaccessible enclosure. Reptiles must be inaccessible in a locked enclosure
- Inform families of what animals are kept on the premises at the initial home visit. Families are to be advised what measures are put in place for dogs, cats and birds to remain inaccessible to children. To be documented on the parent/Educator agreement form
- Inform the Coordination Unit and families immediately of any new animals on the premises
- Report to the Coordination Unit and family any injury caused to a child by an animal. Any animals that have shown any forms of aggression towards a child will be required to remain permanently isolated and inaccessible to children
- Ensure children are educated about correct handling techniques and acceptable behaviour when handling animals
- Ensure all pets are kept clean, well-cared for and in a healthy condition and do not have any diseases that can be transmitted to children. Pets should be kept vaccinated, de-wormed and free of fleas or other pests or infections
- Animals that are ill should be treated promptly by a vet. An animal that is irritable because of pain or illness is more likely to bite or scratch
- An initial risk assessment must be conducted before children have access to rabbits, guinea pigs, mice/rats and small reptiles and approved by families
- Keep animal food bowls, beds, toys and litter trays inaccessible to children at all times
- Clean fish tanks regularly and fish tanks are to be covered e.g. with safety glass, shade cloth
- Where dogs and cats are present, the environment is to be managed in a hygienic manner with floors vacuumed and washed/cleaned daily, prior to the children accessing the area
- Ensure all areas accessible to children shall be free of animal faeces, animal fur, feathers, saliva and food scraps. Cat faeces can be the source of toxoplasmosis, which is of particular risk to pregnant women and can also cause mild illness in children. Animal hair, saliva and skin flakes can trigger Asthma and allergic reactions

- Bird cages must be cleaned with appropriate disinfectants weekly. Cage base to be covered and the cage inaccessible
- Keep animals away from food preparation, sleeping and, nappy change areas
- Obtain informed consent from the parent/guardian prior to children visiting animal farms, sanctuaries or zoos. Controlled and supervised access to animal farms on excursion is to be planned and a risk assessment completed

(d) Glass Safety

Injuries to the head and face by colliding with glass doors, coffee tables or cabinets is a common type of injury for children aged under 4 years. Injuries through contact with pieces of glass such as broken shards are also common.

The Australian Building Code requires glass used in school and child-care buildings that is less than 1000mm from floor level or a climbing foothold shall be Grade A safety glass (for fully framed panels) and Grade A safety glazing material (for unframed panels).

Many homes built before 1989 do not meet the Australian safety standards for glass, exposing families and children to unnecessary risks and splintering.

The Service therefore requires glass in internal and external child care areas, entrance areas and exit areas (includes tables, sliding doors and cabinets) that is less than 1000mm from floor level or a climbing foothold to be:

- Grade A safety glass, or
- Safety filmed to Grade A safety glass, or
- Protected by a solid secured barrier that prevents a child from striking or falling against the glass (i.e. Perspex, timber [not slatted])

Areas used for child care including entrance and exit areas are to be identified and listed in the home safety check. If areas listed above comply with this policy, and the glass is stamped to indicate that it is safety glass, the glass management plan can be signed off by the FDC Coordinator.

If it is certain that any glass used in the listed areas does not comply with the policy, glass is to be brought up to the standard listed in this policy. If re-glazing or film has been used, a certificate of compliance from an Accredited Glazier certifying compliance is required. The certificate should be forwarded to the FDC Co-ordination Unit.

Safety Measures

- Place easy to see stickers at adult & child height on large glass panels or sliding doors
- Ensure glass areas are well lit at all times
- If there is uncertainty as to whether glass complies with the policy, an audit is to be completed by an Accredited Glazier to assess whether it is safety glass or not, and the audit report forwarded to the FDC Co-ordination Unit
- Other methods (solid barrier) can be checked for compliance and signed off by the FDC Coordinator

(e) Child Protection

The Service provides guidance and strategies for Educators and parents on the risks and forms of child abuse and how a child safe and child friendly environment will be maintained in the Service. The Nominated supervisor must have undertaken appropriate child protection training.

Coordination unit staff will:

- Ensure their knowledge of Mandatory Reporting is current and regularly attend approved child protection training
- Notify the *ACT Care and Protection Services* (Phone: 1300 556 728) if they reasonably suspect that a child has been or is being abused or neglected, and the suspicion is formed in the course of their work (whether paid or voluntary) or in carrying out official duties
- Where suspicion of child abuse relates to an individual in the home of an Educator, follow the compliance procedures
- Document all areas of concern in relation to child protection matters
- Maintain confidentiality at all times
- Protect the wellbeing of the children by acting sensitively in matters of child protection
- Work in collaboration with other agencies and organisations to ensure children's safety and wellbeing is supported
- Support Educators, and/or families when a child protection incident occurs
- Conduct any processes in a sensitive and respectful manner
- Provide Educators with access to '**Keeping Children & Young People Safe: A Guide to reporting child abuse and neglect in the ACT**'
- Conduct themselves professionally, as a role model and in the best interest of the protection of children from harm at all times
- Offer professional development opportunities and support on child protection to Educators

Educators will:

- Ensure their **knowledge of Mandatory Reporting is current**, and keep the Mandatory Reporting Line (1300 556 728) to the *ACT Care and Protection Services* on or near their phone
- **Notify the Care and Protection Services** if they reasonably suspect that a child has been or is being abused or neglected and the suspicion is formed in the course of their work (whether paid or voluntary) or in carrying out official duties
- Seek advice from the Coordination Unit staff or other professionals in matters relating to Child Protection
- Report to the Coordination unit where there is reasonable grounds to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm
- Document all areas of concern in relation to Child Protection
- Maintain confidentiality at all times
- Protect the wellbeing of the children by acting sensitively in matters of child protection
- Conduct themselves professionally, as a role model and in the best interest of the protection of children from harm at all times

- Work in collaboration with the Coordination Unit and other agencies as outlined in the 'Keeping Children & Young People Safe: A Guide to reporting child abuse and neglect in the ACT' document
- Attend approved training in responding to suspected child protection issues
- Consider regular professional development to assist with empowering children to respond to issues that may threaten their sense of personal safety
- Ensure that a criminal clearance is obtained (Working with Vulnerable People Card) for themselves and any adult residing at the approved premises
- Keep a record of visitors, including the name, signature and time of arrival and departure
- Ensure visitors are not left alone with any child being educated and cared for
- Ensure children do not leave their care unless accompanied by a parent, authorised nominee of the parent or if an emergency exists
- Ensure young people do not leave their care unless accompanied by a parent or authorised nominee of the parent

Families will:

- Read the Child Safe Environment Policies of the Service
- Report any concerns of a child being at risk of harm whilst in care to the FDC Coordination Unit or Nominated Supervisor
- Maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of those involved in any incident that may occur
- Seek support and advice from the Coordination unit staff if required

Approved Provider will:

- As required, undertake an internal investigation to determine appropriate action to be taken in relation to a report against an Educator, Coordination Unit staff member or visitor, and report to the *ACT Children's Policy and Regulation Unit; ACT Care and Protection Services* and/or police

(f) Educator Reportable Conduct

The ACT Government has introduced a "Reportable Conduct Scheme", which require 'designated entities' to report to the ACT Ombudsman about allegations or convictions of reportable conduct by employees. The scheme commenced on 1 July 2017.

Family Day Care Services are 'designated entities' for the purpose of the scheme, and FDC Educators who are self-employed and registered with a FDC service, are deemed to be employees for the purposes of the scheme.

Broadly, the reportable conduct scheme covers 'allegations' or 'convictions' of child 'abuse' or 'misconduct' toward children. The scheme does not interfere with reporting obligations to ACT Policing or Children and Youth Protective Services. **If criminal conduct is suspected**, the Service and the Educators are required report to police in the first instance.

Reportable Conduct:

Reportable conduct includes allegations, offences or convictions relating to child abuse or misconduct including:

- **ill-treatment** of a child (including emotional abuse, and inappropriate use of force and restrictive intervention)
- **neglect**
- **psychological harm**
- **misconduct of a sexual nature**
- **sexual offences** and convictions where a **child is a victim** or is **present**
- **physical offences** and convictions where a **child is a victim** or is **present**
- **inappropriate discipline** or offences relating to **protecting of children from harm** in accordance with the provisions of the Education and Care Service National Law.

Reportable Conduct vs Mandatory Reporting:

Reportable conduct covers a broader range of conduct than the types of child abuse which can form the basis of a mandatory report to Children and Youth Protection Services.

This means that the **Service may have to report to the Ombudsman** of allegations or conduct, which is not required to be mandatorily reported Children and Youth Protection Services.

The Service will:

- file a 17G report to notify the Ombudsman about any reportable conduct allegations or convictions involving an Educator, staff, student or volunteer as soon as possible but no later than 30 days of becoming aware of the conduct
- investigate any allegations of reportable conduct and provide a report to the Ombudsman along with any additional information as requested
- report to other entities as required (i.e. Children's Education & Care Assurance (CECA), ACT Policing, Children and Youth Protection Services, Access Canberra, Human Rights Commission)
- adjust policies and procedures and educate FDC Educators and staff

The Ombudsman will:

- work with employers under the scheme to build on existing misconduct procedures and reporting obligations
- monitor employers' investigations into allegations of child abuse and misconduct and analyse trends
- share information with police and/or key organisations to better protect children from the risk of abuse
- take complaints about the handling of reportable conduct
- provide guidance and support to entities on best practice and conducting investigations as procedurally fair
- investigate an allegation or conviction of an employee, or the response of the Service into such an allegation or conviction, and making recommendations
- monitor the policies, practices and procedures of the Service for the prevention of child abuse and child related misconduct

Day-to-Day Service Management of Health and Safety Policies

- Reviewed quarterly and as required

Resources and Further Readings

- ACT Reportable Conduct Scheme
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- ACECQA National; Quality Framework Resource Kit www.acecqa.gov.au
- Childcare Service Handbook 2013-2014
- *Keeping Children & Young People Safe: A Guide to reporting child abuse and neglect in the ACT*
- Child Wise (www.childwise.org.au)
- KidSafe ACT
- Produce Safety Australia
- www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Baby care – safety issues (Better Health Victoria)

Related FDC Policies, Procedures & Documents

- Assessment, Approval and Reassessment of Approved Family Day Care Residences
- Assessment of Family Day Care Educators, Educator Assistants and Persons Residing at Family Day Care Residences
- Visitors to Family Day Care Residences during Family Day Care Hours
- Health & Safety: Excursions and Regular Outings
- Risk Assessment Form

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