

Behaviour Support Policy



For Early
Childhood
Services

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Introduction

Children, families and educators are entitled to policy and operational guidelines that support a consistent approach to behaviour support and management. The *Behaviour Support Policy for Early Childhood Services* applies to departmental preschools, child parent centres, play-centres and occasional care services (referred to as preschools) and Family Day Care Coordination Units. Departmental employees are bound by the policy which is also recommended for adaptation by other early childhood education and care providers.

The policy describes the roles and responsibilities of departmental personnel, identifies relevant legislation and describes the department's approach to the support and management of children's behaviour. The *Behaviour Support Policy for Early Childhood Services* requires that educators support children in accordance with their age and stage of development and cultural background to:

- express their wants and needs in ways that respect the rights and safety of others
- interact positively with individuals and the group
- care for themselves, others and their environment
- recognise the consequences of their behaviour
- choose positive behaviours
- develop problem solving skills.

These behaviours are described as *appropriate behaviours*.

The policy addresses the needs of children with emerging and established challenging behaviours. Challenging behaviours endanger the safety or emotional wellbeing of the child or others, impede the child's capacity to participate in learning and may lead to social isolation. Challenging behaviours may be internalised (eg withdrawal and reluctance to participate) or externalised (eg hitting, biting or damaging property).

The *Behaviour Support Policy for Early Childhood Services* and the *School Discipline Policy* (1996) support the management of children's behaviour on departmental sites from the time they enter early childhood education and care services, through the compulsory years of schooling, and include Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) services on school sites. The latter are required to comply with the *OSHC Standards* (1998), developing behaviour management strategies consistent with those of the school.

Rationale

Research into early childhood development, education and care provides the foundation for the policy. The following statements articulate the principles and beliefs that underpin educators' approach to supporting and managing children's behaviour.

- Children's behaviour is a form of communication and is purposeful. Children's capacity to choose appropriate behaviour is influenced by their developmental ability,

temperament, interactions, life experiences and environmental factors.

- Children have a right to respect and consideration as individuals, and to be supported in their learning to develop appropriate behaviours for group settings.
- Children's learning is most successful when:
 - it builds on children's prior experiences, skills and knowledge, encouraging positive dispositions towards learning and providing for individual children's learning styles
 - behavioural expectations are explicit and take into consideration children's culture, age, stage of development, life experiences and the context of the setting
 - the environment is safe, inclusive, supportive of learning and free from harassment and bullying
 - families and educators work to develop consistent expectations to support the child's learning
 - children co-construct meaning and knowledge through purposeful, challenging and interesting activities that build on their prior knowledge and experiences.
- Early behaviour intervention is effective in preventing and minimising the development and long-term effects of ongoing challenging behaviours.

Policy outcomes

1. Sites provide a safe, secure and supportive environment in which children are successful in learning appropriate behaviours.
2. Sites use a positive approach to behaviour management that takes into account child and contextual factors.
3. Educators work in partnership with families to address children's learning needs.
4. Challenging behaviours are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner.

Policy statements

1. The learning environment supports children to be successful in developing appropriate behaviours

A supportive environment is evident where:

- the site is safe, well-planned and promotes a sense of belonging, trust and respect
- there is recognition of the importance of play in children's learning and support for them to develop the capacity to imagine, experiment, problem solve, role-play and express a range of feelings and ideas
- the program is enriching, varied and includes developmentally appropriate behavioural expectations
- staff are aware of their occupational health and safety



responsibilities, including the identification of potential hazards, seeking advice and resolution as appropriate

- children are effectively supervised at all times
- interactions are positive, recognising and valuing children as individuals and are responsive to external factors that may influence children’s wellbeing (eg illness, changes in family circumstances).

2. Expectations of children’s behaviour take account of their age and stage of development

Expectations that consider children’s age and stage of development are evident where educators:

- demonstrate a broad understanding of child development and developmentally appropriate behaviours in young children
- modify their behaviour and programming to address the needs of individual children, including those with disabilities or developmental delay
- are familiar with and utilise relevant professional reports and family information.

3. Children’s behaviour is supported using a positive approach

A positive approach to supporting children’s behaviour is evident where educators:

- model verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are respectful and inclusive of all children and families
- model and encourage problem solving, negotiation and conflict resolution
- notice and acknowledge appropriate behavioural responses by children
- actively engage children in understanding and developing behavioural expectations and consequences and in goal setting
- provide opportunities for skill development throughout the program, such as resilience, social, coping and communication skills and protective behaviours
- explicitly teach appropriate behaviours and play skills, building on children’s strengths and prior knowledge
- provide opportunities for children to practise appropriate behaviours
- use assessment, monitoring and reporting procedures that focus on children’s progress and achievements
- work together as a team, using a consistent approach.

4. Approaches to behaviour support value the diversity of children’s backgrounds and experiences

Valuing of diversity is evident where educators:

- demonstrate awareness that children’s behaviour is influenced

by their temperament, abilities, experiences, culture and family context

- encourage children to understand factors that may influence other children’s behaviour and to respond using appropriate strategies
- encourage families to contribute their ideas and experiences about children’s behaviour.

5. Children’s behaviour is supported in partnership with families and local communities

Effective partnerships are evident where:

- site behaviour codes are developed, through the management committee or governing council, in partnership with families and the community and are reviewed annually
- site behaviour codes are provided to and discussed with enrolling families
- families and educators communicate effectively and work together to ensure that children’s behavioural and developmental needs are met
- confidentiality is observed in discussions with families and in exchange of information with other services
- transition to another setting is carefully planned and monitored with staff from the new setting and families for children with challenging behaviours (eg preschool to school).

6. The response to emerging challenging behaviours is timely and appropriate

A timely and appropriate response is evident where:

- early identification of challenging behaviours occurs
- communication with families about challenging behaviours takes place at the earliest opportunity and is framed as a positive opportunity to address children’s behavioural needs within the group setting
- support from departmental support services and/or other agencies is sought
- children’s behaviours are assessed across a range of informal and formal learning activities and contexts (eg small and large groups)
- planning, implementation, monitoring and review of individual behaviour plans occurs in partnership with families and support services
- program planning considers behavioural needs as part of planning for individual children and groups.

Behavioural approaches should encourage and reinforce appropriate behaviours, ensuring the safety of the child and others.

- Children are always treated with dignity and respect and directly monitored. Physical, verbal or emotional punishments are not



used (ie smacking, shaking, verbal reprimands, shouting or any punishment that frightens, humiliates or threatens the child).

- Consequences for inappropriate behaviours may include time-limited withdrawal of attention, which is non-emotional and followed by redirection (ie time out).

Strategies to manage challenging behaviours exclude corporal punishment, abolished in South Australian government schools by 1991 in response to the International Court of Human Rights ruling (1982) that corporal punishment is a violation of the basic human rights of children.

Responsibilities

Preschools will use the *Behaviour Support Policy for Early Childhood Services* to further develop site behaviour codes. Site behaviour codes describe a positive and proactive approach to supporting children's development of appropriate behaviours and the site's behavioural expectations and consequences. Site behaviour codes are developed in partnership with governing councils and management committees, families and relevant members of the local community. The governing council approves the site behaviour code.

District Directors support the implementation of the policy across departmental sites, while preschool directors/school principals and educators

are accountable for the implementation of the policy on their sites. Family Day Care Coordination Unit personnel are responsible for supporting the implementation of the adapted *Guiding Children's Behaviour Policy* by Family Day Care care providers, whose conditions of approval require them to implement this policy.

The primary responsibility of educators is a duty of care to children whenever the relationship of child/educator applies.

Duty of care includes:

- supervision of children in the range of education and care contexts provided by early childhood settings
- designing and implementing programs and procedures to promote safe environments
- warning children about dangerous situations or practices
- ensuring that premises and equipment are safe.

Duty of care varies according to factors including the child's age, maturity, experience and the nature of the activity. Generally, the duty of care is greater the younger the child, the more complex the learning, the health and care needs of the child and the more hazardous the situation.

A breach of duty of care occurs where there has been a failure to exercise the level of care required in any particular situation. In order for a liability in negligence to be established, it must be proved that:

- a duty of care was owed in the circumstances
- the duty of care was breached, because of an act or omission on the part of the person owing the duty
- a loss or injury is suffered as a result of the breach
- the type of loss or injury suffered was a reasonably foreseeable consequence of the act or omission.

If such a liability is established, a parent or student may make a claim for 'damages' as financial compensation for all foreseeable loss (both economic and non-economic) arising from the negligence.

In the event that injuries result from an educator's negligence in the course of his/her employment, the Minister for Education and Children's Services is vicariously liable and is required to indemnify the educator for any liability incurred, unless the action constitutes serious or wilful misconduct.

Directors, State Office

Relevant State Office directors have a responsibility to:

- ensure the provision of services for children with challenging behaviours
- ensure professional development opportunities for educators
- encourage review and innovation in behaviour support/management
- engage in interagency agreements to improve service provision
- monitor the implementation of the policy.

District Directors

District Directors have a responsibility to:

- support site managers to develop site behaviour codes and high quality programs
- implement accountability measures through performance management and other methods to ensure that sites' practice is linked with the policy outcomes and statements
- work cooperatively with departmental services and other agencies to support the provision of behavioural services for children with challenging behaviours
- assist in resolving concerns and conflicts between departmental staff and families or members of the community, as appropriate
- support the management of critical incidents.

Support services

Support services have a responsibility to:

- provide high quality behavioural support that is responsive to the needs of children, families and DECS sites
- support a coordinated approach to service delivery
- evaluate and improve models of service delivery
- maintain up to date professional knowledge
- provide professional development to departmental educators.



Family Day Care Coordination Units

Family Day Care field workers and team leaders have a responsibility to ensure:

- the environment and work practices of care providers are safe
- a site behaviour code is developed and reviewed regularly
- care providers demonstrate good practice in supporting and managing children's behaviours
- support to manage children's challenging behaviours is sought.

Governing councils/management committees

Governing councils/management committees have a responsibility to ensure:

- opportunities for the community to contribute to the development and review of the site behaviour code are provided
- the site behaviour code considers the cultural and social diversity of the community
- policy implementation is adequately resourced.

Site managers

Preschool directors and principals of child parent centres have an additional responsibility to ensure:

- implementation of the Behaviour Support Policy
- the environment and work practices of educators are safe

- a site behaviour code is developed and reviewed regularly
- educators demonstrate good practice in supporting and managing children's behaviours
- support to manage children's challenging behaviours is sought.

Educators

Preschool teachers, ancillary staff, occasional care staff and preschool directors/school principals have a responsibility to:

- model, plan and implement behaviour management practices consistent with the principles and intent of this policy
- critically reflect on and articulate behaviour support and behaviour management practices
- seek information from families and advice from other professionals
- undertake professional development, as appropriate
- contribute to the development, implementation and review of the site behaviour code.

Expectations of families

Families are expected to:

- support the child's regular attendance
- provide information that will assist departmental personnel to understand their child's needs and support their learning
- contribute to their child's learning and care program (eg if relevant, providing assessment reports from other agencies).

Implementation, support and review

Departmental professional development courses will incorporate the *Behaviour Support Policy for Early Childhood Services*.

Preschools will use this document as the basis for the development of site behaviour codes, in partnership with management committees / governing councils, families and the local community.

The policy will be evaluated in conjunction with any review of the *School Discipline Policy*.

Relevant information

The *Behaviour Support Policy for Early Childhood Services* should be considered in conjunction with the following legislation, Department of Education and Children's Services policies and action plans.

Legislation

- Children's Services Act 1985
- Education Act 1972 and Regulations under the Act
- Equal Opportunity Act (SA, 1984)
- Occupational Health and Safety Act (1986)
- Disability Discrimination Act (Commonwealth, 1992)

Policies

- *School Discipline Policy* (1996)

- *Family Day Care Guiding Children's Behaviour Policy*
- *Preschool Enrolment Policy*
- *Child Protection* (1998)
- *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework* (2001)
- *Antiracism* (1996)
- *Multiculturalism in Schooling and Children's Services* (1995)
- *Assessment and Reporting for Schools and Preschools* (1995)
- *Occupational Health and Safety* (1997)
- *Students with Disabilities Policy* (1991) – under review

Departmental guidelines

- *DECS Administrative Instructions and Guidelines*
- *Aboriginal Education Plan in Early Childhood and Schooling* (1999-2003)
- *Fair and Reasonable: Disability Discrimination Act Implementation Kit* (2000)
- *ADHD: Teaching and Managing Children and Schools* (1999)
- *Including Children with Disabilities and Developmental Delay in Preschools* (1999)
- *Health Support Planning in Schools, Preschools and Childcare Services* (2001)
- *Negotiated Education Plan* (2003)

Related documents

- *National Family Day Care Standards*
- *National Childcare Standards*
- *Family Day Care Quality Practices Guide*

Glossary



Ancillary staff

Early childhood workers, school services officers, bilingual assistants, preschool support and occasional care staff

Appropriate behaviour

Children are encouraged, in accordance with their age and stage of development, to:

- contribute to a positive personal and group identity
- respect the rights, feelings and needs of individuals and the community
- develop and enhance positive relationships
- support individuals' contributions as members of a group, promote children's autonomy and motivation to learn.

Challenging behaviours

These behaviours may be internalised (eg withdrawal and lack of participation) or externalised (eg aggression, bullying).

They include behaviours that endanger the safety of the child or others, impede children's capacity to access or participate in the curriculum.

Developmentally appropriate practice

The use of knowledge and understanding of child development to make thoughtful and appropriate decisions about early childhood program practices; reflect an understanding that programs for young children should be based on what is known about young children's learning, development and their family context.

Educators

Teachers, early childhood workers, school services officers, preschool directors and principals of child parent centres

Family Day Care Coordination Unit staff

Family Day Care field workers and team leaders

Other agencies

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, the Crippled Children's Association, Intellectual Disability Services Council, the Autism Association of SA and Down Syndrome Society

Preschools

Departmental preschools, child parent centres, play-centres and occasional care services

Site manager

Preschool directors, principals of child parent centres

Support services

Departmental support services personnel providing behavioural support include psychologists, guidance officers, special educators, social workers, behaviour support and disability consultants.

Transition

The process of moving from one early childhood service to another (eg preschool to school).

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