

## **Practice**

### *Multilingualism – Staff and Family Communication*

Communication between early childhood staff and families is often stated as one of the most difficult areas for child care professionals. Increases in diverse cultural and linguistic communities in Australia as a whole, reflected in the child care industry, have made this area even more challenging. Practitioners are now in a position where cross-cultural communication is becoming one of the most pressing skills needed. Knowing how to deal with multilingualism, that is, more than one language spoken by one or a number of people is easier when planned. Ad hoc or “shooting from the hip” can lead to misunderstanding or offense and a breakdown in communication.

This information sheet aims to provide some guidance and tips to help child care educators navigate through the waters of multilingualism, enhancing communication techniques and outcomes. These outcomes are more likely to be achieved when based on principles of inclusion, that is, where all participants or all persons present feel that best efforts are being made to assist in their understanding and they feel encouraged to contribute. This is an important part of being „culturally competent“.

#### **Some ideas to help you approach your own workplace:**

- Share member“s linguistic backgrounds and celebrate diversity by developing communication skills that interact across cultures. Use the presence of multiple languages for diverse linguistics as an integral to enriching the learning environment.
- Have open discussions about communication and multilingualism amongst early care and education setting stakeholders (children, parents and staff) as this will ultimately result in a collaborative environment that enhances learning in a social context.
- Have a communication framework with an agreed common language that represents part of an inclusive communication practice. This ensures that all participants can contribute and partake in the essential conversations between children, families and educators.
- Make sure that principles of an inclusive communication strategy are aligned with your service philosophy and support the outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as well as represent a strength based approach.

#### **Some of these principles might be:**

- we value each other“s knowledge and contributions we believe that everyone has a right to be heard and contribute
- we believe that all people are important we know that all people have strengths and resources (known and unknown)
- we encourage free and respectful communication by sharing insights and perspectives
- we encourage shared decision making

### **Agreeing which language and when**

Deciding when a common language is used can often receive more compliance when decided democratically amongst all the participants. Here are some examples where some services' staff have come to an agreement on use of the common language:

- Parent meetings: All participants speak the same language at all times when sharing information on a child's strength, abilities and interests during a parent meeting.
- Professional matters: Educators always use the agreed common language in the workplace this includes communicating professional matters with each other and families.
- Non-English common language: Educators may encourage the development of a home/ second language as part of a learning strategy in particular settings with a particular group of children.

**Note:** Be open about the fact that not all parties involved in the sharing of information have the same level of competency in the agreed common language. Prepare yourself and/or participants by helping with translated materials, visual aids and interpreter services to minimise barriers to communicating effectively.

### **Be reflective**

Here are some questions you might ask yourself looking at your communication:

Have we insured that all persons present have an opportunity to contribute to the information sharing?

Are resources available and accessible (e.g. visual, translated material, audio etc) to support the contribution and inclusion of all participants in the dialogue?

Are processes and guidelines in place that support and respect all persons in the early care and education setting?

Have we shared our communication strategy with all participants?

Have we considered a variety of scenarios in which the use of the agreed common language would enhance inclusion and encourage contribution to the dialogue?

### **References**

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