

Outside School Hours Care Resource

# **Encouraging Parent Involvement**

## **Learning Guide**

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### **Learning Outcomes:**

- To identify effective means of communicating with parents
- To explain the importance of developing partnerships with parents
- To determine appropriate response to parent complaints

*Funded by Professional Support Co-ordinator Western Australia*

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## Using this Learning Guide

### Encouraging parent involvement through:

- Partnerships with parents
- Relationships based on trust and mutual respect
- Dealing with problems and conflict

## References

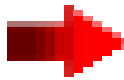
## Learning Guide Feedback Form

## Using this Learning Guide

This guide has been written to assist you to learn through self paced study and facilitated professional development sessions held at your children's service.

It is recommended that a senior staff member is nominated to facilitate the PD sessions, however each individual has a responsibility for their own learning, and to assist the team as a whole to work and learn together.

Each person should individually read through the information provided, and then come together with their work colleagues to discuss their understanding of the information and work together to complete the "Putting ideas in practice" exercises. These exercises are always identified with the following symbol:



### Putting ideas in practice

Write down your answers to the exercises where you see this symbol:



Many of the practical exercises can be implemented at your centre, and should be used to add to and enhance your professional practice.

If you wish to provide feedback to the developers your comments would be most welcome. Please complete and return the feedback sheet at the end of this package.

## Partnerships with parents

The child benefits when important adults in his/her life relate comfortably to each other in a respectful and friendly manner.

Developing a strong partnership between parents and staff:

- helps the parent to feel assured the practices you follow at the centre are compatible with their own expectations for their child;
- helps children to feel secure knowing that both centre staff and their parents care for them;
- helps staff to feel confident that they are providing a program that is founded on a complete picture of the child.

Parents have a lot of information to share about their child:

- Factual details required on the enrolment form
- Information about special care needs – i.e. allergies; medical conditions; disabilities
- Information about court orders relating to the child's welfare, residence or contact arrangements – child's acceptance of changes in family structure
- Relationships with other family members – number of siblings; special relationships; other care arrangements e.g. grandmother
- The child's personality, sensitivities, fears, likes and dislikes
- How the child adapts to new situations, people or routines
- What the family's interests are at weekends and the child's out of school activities
- The child's energy levels, and what the child does to relax
- How the child copes with stress, disappointments or frustrations
- Information about specific events that have had significant impact on the child's life
- *The list is endless ....*

Partnerships are a two way process. For them to be successful, each partner has to contribute to the partnership, and value the input of the other partner.

OSHC staff can share interesting and positive information about the child with the parent, to support the parent's parenting role, and help them to bridge the gap between home and OSHC. This can include:

- Activities they really enjoy
- Areas they find frustrating or unappealing
- Particular talents or skills
- How the child responds to particular situations or events
- How the child expresses their feelings
- The child's usual routines at the centre

### Exchanging information

- Enables staff and parents to use similar caring approaches and routines.
- Allows staff and parents to make sense of the child's behaviour.
- Assists to identify interests, strengths and additional support needs.
- Enables staff to learn about the family's cultural background and individual skills. (OSHCQA Principle 3.1.11)

Exchanging information enables us to develop a greater understanding of each child. It also enables us to meet our professional responsibilities.

Informal exchanges:

- enables information to be shared frequently in a friendly and caring manner;
- sidesteps the fear of the 'formal' interview;
- allows us to share observations and ask questions as a natural response to caring for the child, without making it into an issue;
- are easier to organize than more formal exchanges.



### Putting ideas in practice

In your staff team answer the following questions:

**Q** When is information informally exchanged between family members and centre staff at your OSHC service?



**A** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Q** How often does this type of information exchange occur?



**A** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Q** Is it effective? Why/Why not?



**A** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Frequency of information exchange

In determining the frequency of information exchange we should take account of:

- **the age of the child** – older children are usually able to communicate their own needs and interests in ways that younger children cannot;
- **the amount of time the child has attended the service** – during the settling in period parents may wish to communicate regularly with centre staff; and during this time staff may need to gather further information as they get to know the child;
- **parent's interest in the service** – a parent's level of interest is dependent on other priorities in their life – you should never assume that parents that don't take an interest are 'uncaring' or 'not interested in their child';
- **the frequency of the child's attendance** – if the child attends daily you will have greater opportunity to share information with the parent, and encourage on-going communication in other areas relating to the centre.

*The act of sharing short anecdotes about a child's day  
with a parent sends a strong message  
that you view the child as a valued individual.*

However, be mindful that it is not necessary to exchange information every day – be sensitive to the parent's needs and time constraints.

### Other strategies to communicate with parents

- telephone
- pin-boards/notices/message board – for general information
- displays of photos, children’s art work and creations
- opportunities for parents to share information at social events or working bees
- personal notes about a child’s special achievements
- newsletters
- individual communication book
- parent handbook
- questionnaires and surveys
- feedback on centre philosophy and policies

### Confidentiality

When exchanging information with parents it is important to ensure that personal information is not unwittingly divulged to unauthorized persons. It is also important to clearly explain to parents how you maintain confidentiality of their personal details. (OSHCQA Principle 8.1.3)

- Ensure you are in an area where you cannot be overheard.
- Do not discuss or divulge children’s personal details to other families.
- Confirm the person is authorized to receive the information before giving personal details about a child or other personal matters such as unpaid fees etc.
- Ensure written records are stored in a place where unauthorized access is not permitted.

## Diversity

Families that enroll in your service will be from a broad range of ages, races, backgrounds and experiences.

Communicating appropriately with culturally diverse families presents a challenge. Whilst it is not expected that you must learn to speak other languages, it does help if you can memorise key words and phrases, learn to pronounce their names correctly, and find out about the cultural norms of the families that use your service. (OSHCQA Principle 2.2.5; 3.1.10)

There are many support services that will assist you in this:

- Inclusion Support Facilitators – PSCWA – 1800 783 768
- Migrant Resource Centres
- Departmental Advisors – Office of Multicultural Interests – [www.omi.wa.gov.au](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au)
- Translator and Interpreter Services (TIS) – telephone interpreting – phone 13 14 50

Contact the Professional Support Co-ordinator on the PSC Helpline 1800 783 768 for information about specific agencies.

Refer also to Directory of Services for New Arrivals in Western Australia – Office of Multicultural Interests



### Putting ideas in practice

As a staff team:

List at least 4 ways in which you communicate with families at your service.



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Identify how you ensure the issues of confidentiality and communicating appropriately with culturally diverse families are addressed in these communication strategies.



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## Relationships based on trust and mutual respect

Relationships with families are based on:

- The roles and responsibilities of your position at the service
- Your professional knowledge about child development
- Your professional attitude towards staff and families
- The legal, ethical and moral responsibilities related to caring for children.

You should aim to develop positive professional relationships with families, as opposed to friendships.

### Relationships based on trust

As OSHC staff you should never undervalue the level of trust a parent gives you when they enrol their child at your centre. Some families will take longer to fully trust you than others, but most parents will trust you to:

- be respectful of them as clients
- provide an environment that is safe for children, staff and families
- employ staff that are competent, appropriately qualified and experienced
- ensure appropriate screening of all adults that will be caring for the child
- offer a program that is developmentally appropriate
- ensure children will not be exposed to inappropriate or dangerous activities or people
- always have the best interests of the child at heart
- listen to the family's requests and concerns
- keep the family informed about any incidents or issues concerning the child
- ensure the child's wellbeing
- listen to the child
- treat the family and child with respect

- maintain high levels of confidentiality regarding the family's personal information

## Respect

As OSHC staff you will work with many different families from a wide range of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Each of these families will have their own attitudes, values and beliefs about child rearing. For instance, some families will strongly believe that children should do as they are told, whilst others will want their children to be able to explore their world without restraint.

Families are different and have their own strengths and weaknesses. The important issue is not whether you agree with the way a particular family lives, but whether a child is loved and cared for.

Respecting families involves:

- accepting that each parent has their own set of values, beliefs and expectations about what is best for their child;
- understanding and appreciating the others points of view, rather than letting your own values and beliefs limit your perception of what is possible;
- accepting that there are many different, acceptable and successful child rearing practices;
- being prepared to openly discuss differences, to clarify perspectives when you don't understand, listen to the other person's point of view, and then honestly consider, "Why not do it differently?".

Where your professional opinion varies with a parent's beliefs you must be able to explain why you need to approach a particular issue differently within the OSHC service. Such explanations must be communicated in a respectful way that does not make judgment on the parent's parenting skills, but explains the

issue in relation to the centre philosophy and specific requirements of the group care environment. For instance you may need to adhere to specific legislation, regulations, centre policies or quality assurance principles.

The more you and parents share the care, the more likely parents will understand and appreciate your work as a staff member, and become informed advocates of out of school care. Better understanding will also lead to a greater willingness to get involved and actively support the service.

When conflicts arise, as they surely will, you will have a trusting professional relationship with the parent from which these issues will be more easily addressed.



### Putting ideas in practice

In your staff team discuss how you try to establish trusting and respectful relationships with parents in your service.

Identify 3 barriers to establishing trusting and respectful relationships with parents.



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Identify 3 strategies to promote trusting and respectful relationships with parents.



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## Dealing with problems and conflict

Procedures for resolving conflicts need to be clear and known by everyone. The best way to achieve this is to ensure they are included in your Centre Policy Manual, and in the Parent Handbook. (OSHCQA Principle 8.6.3)

Conflicts are inevitable, but when they are dealt with constructively they will have positive outcomes.

When you need to discuss difficult issues with parents:

- consider how the parent may be feeling, or how they may accept what you are saying i.e. vulnerable, angry, defensive, overwhelmed etc;
- be both honest and supportive;
- choose the time and place carefully, away from the main group;
- consider how best to communicate the issue;
- get issues out in the open – don't skirt around the edges;
- be reassuring about the child whenever you can;
- be cautious about giving advice;
- make sure you refer parents to appropriate support organizations when an issue is beyond your professional expertise

Refer to the Conflict Resolution Chart at the end of this section.

Try using the chart as a guide the next time you are faced with dealing with a conflict situation.

## Handling Complaints

One of the key features to providing a quality service that is valued by your customers (i.e. parents), is to ensure that you are not just meeting their needs, but exceeding their expectations.

The objective of good service is to make your customers want to stay with you. A side benefit of good service is that customers who are very happy with the service they're getting will spread the word.

It is generally found that there are only 2 reasons why customers will talk about a service:

***They'll tell their friends and relatives if the service is absolutely out of this world, or on the contrary if they are unhappy with the service they receive.***

It is really important therefore to discover when your customers are unhappy. Most businesses look at complaints the wrong way. They find them confronting and would prefer not to have to deal with them. This is wrong. You should welcome complaints. Here is why:

- On average only 4% of dissatisfied customers will complain,
- 5% of your dissatisfied customers simply won't say anything, and
- a staggering 91% will simply stop doing business with you without saying why.
- The typical dissatisfied customer will tell on average 8-10 people; 1 in 5 will tell 20; 7 out of 10 will do business with you again if you resolve their problem; and 95% will do business with you again if it is resolved on the spot.
- In fact, complaints dealt with appropriately will result in increased loyalty.

***Many customers do not complain because they feel it won't make a difference.***

What this means is that there could be a lot of unsatisfied customers out there you don't know about. These people talk, and usually not in good terms about you or your service. When a customer complains he or she is giving you the opportunity to not only rectify the problem for him/her, but will also draw your attention to a problem that may be shared by other customers who are not so outspoken.

### **Dealing effectively with complaints**

- Explain to your customers that you welcome complaints. Use surveys, suggestion boxes, publicised contact numbers for complaints, open communication policies, clearly stated complaints procedures. Make it easy for your customers to vent their problems.
- Try using a satisfaction card – ask parents to tick box YES or NO if they are satisfied with the service, and if there are any areas of concern provide a couple of lines for their comments.
- When first receiving the complaint, thank them for letting you know and explain why you appreciate the complaint.
- Apologise for the mistake.
- Ask for information from the customer regarding how the situation could be rectified to their satisfaction.
- Correct the problem on the spot if you can, or promise that you will deal with it as soon as possible.
- Make sure that you follow through with this promise.
- Check your customer's satisfaction by calling a few days later to find out whether everything is fine, and if they are happy with the way you have resolved the problem.

- Prevent future mistakes by finding out how the problem occurred and making the necessary corrections. Try not to blame your staff, instead change the process. Understand that your staff will be more likely to pass along complaints to you if they know this is the centre’s approach to complaints.

Your customers will expect that you will correct the mistake, that is why they complained. If you respond in an outrageously generous way, however, you will turn the unhappy parent into a delighted, surprised and very satisfied parent who will not hesitate to tell everybody about what you did and refer more people to you than if you did not make the mistake in the first place!

### Putting ideas in practice

In your staff team brainstorm ways to surprise and delight parents that have a complaint about your service.



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## Conflict Resolution

We often have emotional responses to conflict that can prevent us from dealing with the situation professionally. Our anger or resentment can blind us to positive ways of dealing with the situation. If we are to resolve a conflict we must look at the needs of all concerned and not just concentrate on our own needs. Cooperation and common goals should be the focus rather than competition and individual goals.

Conflict can lead to positive change and dealing with conflict positively and professionally can enhance our teams and workplace generally. Constructive conflict exists when there are common goals and an atmosphere of cooperation rather than competition. Cooperation reinforces the strengths of the group and results in better decisions and a greater commitment by all to the decisions that are made.

If you believe that a conflict has arisen the following process may assist you to resolve it constructively.

All interactions and documentation pertaining to the conflict must be kept confidential. If anyone involved in the conflict believes that they need outside support the support person must also agree to keep matters confidential.

*It is important to remember that conflict resolution can be a delicate matter. Be aware of the energy and emotions that are invested in conflict situations. Good, effective communication skills are needed when assisting to resolve conflicts as situations that may seem trivial to some are extremely important and highly emotive for others. Ask for guidance or input from professional, impartial negotiators when necessary.*

It is intended that the chart over leaf be used as a guide only.

# Conflict Resolution Flow Chart

## Test and Clarify the Perceptions of Both Parties

Do both parties believe that there is a conflict?

If the answer is **no**

If the answer is **yes**

Follow through with the flow chart refer back to your grievance procedure as needed.

**Grievance Procedure Guidelines**

All employees should have a copy of their duty statement, conditions of employment, staff handbook and grievance procedure.

If the behaviour of one staff member interferes with the work of another that person should be made aware of the problem, and attempts made to mutually resolve the problem.

If the problem remains unresolved approach the coordinator/supervisor and discuss the issues.

**Evaluate The Success**

Meet to determine the success of your resolution.

If success is achieved, communicate regularly to ensure the goals are continuing to be met

Continual evaluation is important

If conflicts arise again ensure that you have a process in place that will assist.

If the conflict remains unresolved start the process again or refer to your grievance procedure and appeals process

**Points to Remember Throughout the Process**

Encourage cooperation not competition

Examine your own communication skills (This may be an area where you need assistance)

Ask for outside help form from a mediator. *(A mediator is an independent, non-biased person acceptable to both parties)*

Document agreed points and any follow up action.

Abide by the following ground rules for resolving conflicts:

- Confidentiality*
- Respect for each other's points of view*
- Co-operation*
- Win/Win Goals*

**Discuss the issues**

Write down what is being said

Speak calmly

Call for a break if needed

Practice listening

Avoid charged language

Let some hostile remarks pass

Ask a question

Reflect on your own contributions to the conflict

**Implement the Solution**

Be realistic, it takes time to implement change

Develop a time line

Determine what resources you will need to implement the solution

**Agree on Issue to Be Resolved**

List problems in order of difficulty

Try to resolve the least controversial issues first (you'll feel you are getting somewhere)

Focus on the positive and areas of agreement

Agree to discuss some Issues later

**Generate Possible Solutions**

Brainstorm Ideas

Encourage participation

Respect each other's ideas

**Decide on the Best Solution**

Involve all parties to ensure that there is commitment to the decision

Focus on common goals

Promote collaboration

Listen, reflect and clarify what has been said to ensure that all parties are in agreement

Choose a solution that provides some positive outcomes for both parties (*win/win*)

Find solutions that can be easily implemented

## References

Other learning guides in this series:

*Effective Communication Learning Guide* by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

*Building Trust and Confidence through Leadership Learning Guide* by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

Other relevant resources:

*Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance – Quality Practices Guide*, by National Childcare Accreditation Council 2003

*Lets Discuss – Effective Communication* resource sheet by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

*Lets Discuss – Evaluation* resource sheet by Christine Cross & Sandy Morton Consultancy, published by PSCWA 2006

## Learning Guide Feedback Form

Your feedback will help us to improve our learning materials so they are more useful to you. Please rate the following criteria on a sliding scale of 1 (good) to 5 (poor) by circling the appropriate number.

	Good					Poor	
clear language	1	2	3	4	5	language unclear	
easily understood	1	2	3	4	5	confusing/difficult	
relevant	1	2	3	4	5	not relevant	
exercises useful	1	2	3	4	5	exercises of no use	

Please add any other comments you wish to add about the learning guide:




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Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to:**  
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