

# POLICIES & PROCEDURES

## Using our Service Policies and Procedures in Everyday Practice

Providing a childcare service involves the service provider in a whole series of quality related matters in terms of good practice and compliance with legislation. One of these areas, which will unify and support practice in all other areas, is the development and implementation of Policies and Procedures which provide the best fit for the service provided.

To develop effective and usable policies and procedures, we must first understand the terminology involved and the importance of having policies and procedures to guide our services.

### A Policy

*“A guiding principle, a rule, strategy, a plan of action adopted or pursued by an individual, government, party, business, etc. “*

A policy is a collective, agreed statement of beliefs by an organisation or individual on a topic related to the childcare service provided and a commitment to their implementation.

### A Procedure

*“A process, system, method, a way of acting or progressing in a course of action, especially an established method.”*

A procedure is the practice by which a policy is implemented in the childcare service – the way of doing things. It provides detail on the actions to be taken to ensure realisation of the policy in a sequential implementation process.

### Practice

*“To carry out, operation, follow, observe, a habitual or usual customary action or performance.”*

Practice is the actual and customary application of a policy as outlined in the policy and procedure.

## **Why do we have Policies and Procedures?**

The objective of any childcare service should be the provision of the best possible care for the children, parents and staff of your service while guaranteeing that they are exposed to a positive experience in a safe and caring environment.

Policies and procedures support the *foundation of quality practice*. They help to *guide the actions of everyone* involved in the service and guide the daily work and decision making of childcare professionals to *promote the best outcomes for all stakeholders in the service*, including children, families and themselves.

Providing the policy and procedure in written format will provide your service with clear *explanations of the practices* that need to be implemented *consistently by everyone* at the childcare service *every day*.

They will provide the road map for your service in every day practice and *will outline not only what should happen, but how and why it should happen*.

The *clarity and understanding* that policies and procedures provide *promotes teamwork*.

Policies and procedures provide *a record of accountability* to support protection of children, families, staff and management in addition to allowing for *clear communication* about what is expected.

Policies and procedures support *development of confident and professional practice*. For example, if a service sends a child home with a suspected case of gastroenteritis, the staff at the service can feel confidence in their actions, knowing they have a clearly written Illness Exclusion Policy to support their decision.

## **Using our Policies and Procedures Effectively**

Policy and procedures need to reflect the service mission, values and principles and should also be based on what the service can and intends to deliver in reality.

Policies and procedures should be based on recommendations from recognised authorities and frameworks. Recognised authorities have the expertise to research theories, and to test and validate best practice. By using current recommendations, services ensure that their policies and procedures reflect the most reliable and up to date information. While it is acknowledged that every service is unique and policies should reflect the individual needs of their children, families and staff, it is vitally as important that the policies reflect the current health, safety and wellbeing of children. These needs should not be compromised to meet individual participant needs.

Everyone who is involved in the childcare service should be involved in the development of the policies and procedures. This includes the children, parents, staff, managers, directors, co-ordinators, management committees, community members, students and childcare and health professionals.

Once developed and written, policies and procedures must be communicated and put into practice, otherwise they remain ineffective and a waste of time and energy that was used to develop them.

While most services have policies and procedures that are developed with recognised recommendations and best practice in mind, some childcare services experience difficulties in translating the policies and procedures into their everyday practice. The service policies and procedures can become lost in the actual day to day operations of the childcare service for a number of reasons, such as:

- A high turnover of staff and carers that interferes with their understanding and implementation of the service’s policies.
- Lack of professional development.
- Rushed or, in some cases, no induction processes, particularly when services use casual or volunteer staff.
- Overly detailed or inflexible policies that are not practical for daily application.
- Complacency about reviewing policies and keeping up to date with current practice. This can lead child care professionals to assume that inappropriate practices are correct. This can be exacerbated when services do not facilitate professional development opportunities for child care professionals.
- Having a high level of inexperienced child care professionals who may not have the expertise or knowledge to identify when poor practice occurs or the confidence or ability to mentor colleagues.

### Overcoming Barriers to Effective Use and Practice

These challenges can be overcome when child care professionals develop approaches to regularly reflect on best practice. *Siolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education, Standard 10: Organisation, identifies that “organising and managing resources effectively requires an agreed philosophy, supported by clearly communicated policies and procedures to guide and determine practice”.

#### *Design and Development of Policies and Procedures*

- Ensure that policy guidelines are simple and able to be genuinely implemented in daily practice. Avoid unnecessary, complex or unworkable procedures.
- Match the information in policies to what the service already does or would like to do, but in combination with relevant recommendations.
- Consider the abilities and strengths of staff and what the policy practice may look like in everyday situations.
- Make the information in policies clear, practical and easy to read.
- Involve families in policy development and review. This is also helpful where policies need to be translated into community languages.
- Explain to child care staff why policies are a vital aspect of quality practice and clearly describe how policy and everyday practice should interconnect.
- Test and review the policy and related practices to make sure they are feasible and meet the service’s needs.



#### *Increasing Accessibility*

- Ensuring that the service’s policies are physically accessible to child care staff is important because policy and procedure specifics can be forgotten over time.
- Having policies and procedures easily available to read regularly



encourages child care staff to think about their daily work practices and about why they implement these.

- Policies and procedures can be displayed on noticeboards or filed in a policy manual which is located in the children's care rooms and areas, service's office and foyer, and staff room.
- Policies and procedures can also be displayed in areas where particular practices generally occur. For example, hand washing procedures should be displayed in bathrooms and/or near nappy change areas.
- Having policies available to give and on display to families also helps them to understand what happens in the service and why.



### *Communicating*

- Casual staff and volunteers need a complete orientation to relevant service policies before they begin working with children. It is beneficial to have a summary or list of essential policies and practices that casual staff or volunteers need to know.
- The service's policies and procedures may also be communicated through flow charts or pictures displayed in main areas such as bathrooms, sleep areas or kitchens.
- When orienting casual staff and volunteers it is important to show them where the service's policies are located and to initially team them with an experienced staff member who can mentor them.
- Encourage casual staff and volunteers to ask questions about any aspect of the service's policies and procedures that they are unsure of or don't understand.



### *Monitoring Understanding*

- Encourage child care professionals to read policies and discuss whether the service's current practices meet with recommendations. Where necessary, identify how they can be improved.
- Have policy dialogues as a regular agenda item at staff meetings so that the whole team can raise concerns and be involved in policy review. This may be done as a practical exercise. For example, one team member may perform a practice such as hand washing while another reads the procedure out loud. This can build an understanding of the link between what is written and practical implementation. It can also identify where inconsistencies exist between the policy and actual practice.
- Identify a 'champion' of policy who is enthusiastic about a practice or has the skills and knowledge to mentor peers. This may include providing them with training so that they can share their knowledge with others.



- Invite professionals such as paediatricians and maternity nurses to the service to demonstrate and inform child care professionals about best practice.
- Encourage child care professionals to monitor each other's practice, ask questions and seek clarification.
- Team new or inexperienced staff with experienced and skilled child care professionals who can monitor their understanding of policy and practice and role model appropriate practice.
- Plan professional development opportunities for child care professionals to learn about current best practice and to share the information with their colleagues.
- Provide professional resources about recommended practice in common areas such as staff rooms.

### Reviewing

- Effective policies and procedures are regularly monitored, reviewed and updated. Updates are generally required in response to new legislation or regulation, a request from a parent, child or staff member, a previous omission, an unforeseen incident, or a change in the organisational structure of the setting. (Moloney, 2006)
- Develop a plan to review each policy.
- There are no set time frames for how often policies should be reviewed; however they should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are effective and up-to-date.
- Services may find it useful to develop a schedule for when policies will be reviewed. You may find that some policies and procedures need to be reviewed more regularly than others, due to changes in legislation or practice.
- Other policies may not change at all or very little over time, but it is necessary to at least take the time to review all of your policies to see if changes may be required.
- When reviewing policies you may like to consider the following points:
  - What are the current trends, beliefs and information from within the sector? Will any of these trends impact on the practices within your service?
  - Have there been any recent changes to legislation and/or regulation? If so, are these changes covered in your current policies?
  - How effective is the current practice of your service? Is there anything you could or should improve?
  - Review records and notes from previous meetings, parent feedback forms and incident/accident forms. Are there any issues or ideas from these that require you to make changes to current practice?



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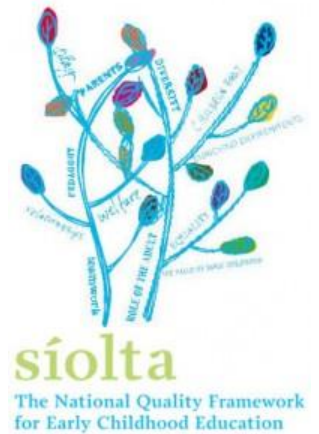


Childcare services need to ensure that their policies and procedures are practical and effective in everyday settings. Policies and procedures should be 'living' documents that must be regularly reviewed to ensure that they meet all the needs of those working in the service, and take into account the possible changes that have happened in the service and within the wider community. The Policies & Procedures written for your service should be a working reference with the documents well-thumbed and constantly in use.

In summary, to achieve the most effective results and use of your service policies and procedures you must ensure that they are:

- Familiar to all adults within the setting
- Used as the basis for routines and everyday practice
- Reviewed regularly to ensure relevance to practice

Translating policy into practice is sometimes challenging. As outlined in the Siolta, Research Digest, Standard 10: Organisation, “The translation of policies and procedures into practice is highly dependent on effective organisation within a setting. Clearly documented, well-developed and functioning management structures and operating processes should provide the backbone of this organisation. Good management and support mechanisms ensure that policies are actively implemented and yield results which enhance the overall quality of the setting. These mechanisms include relevant stakeholder input, the efficient and effective management of financial resources, support and encouragement of all adults working within the setting, a strong ethos of teamwork, accurate administration records, and opportunities for continuing professional development”.



#### References and Further Reading:

- Supporting Quality: Guidelines for Professional Practice in Early Childhood Services, Book 1 Policy & Governance, G. French, Barnardos, 2008
- Siolta Research Digest, Standard 10 Organisation, CECDE, 2009
- A Guide to Developing Policies and Procedures in a Childcare Setting, ADM Ltd., 2003
- Childcare Services Paperwork Checklist, Wexford County Childcare Committee
- Effective Policy Development, Vanessa Peacock, Children’s Services Central, 2009
- Ask a Childcare Advisor: Policies and Procedures in Everyday Practice, Putting Children First Magazine, National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), Issue 30, 2009, (pages 6-8)