

The Organisation's Philosophy and Goals

All services will have in place a written philosophy which states the broad vision or underpinning beliefs of the organisation. The organisation's philosophy and goals are translated into objectives and policies that provide guidelines for practice. Everyone in the organisation must be committed to working in a way that contributes to the achievement of these objectives. Translating this philosophy into practice in the workplace requires careful thought and a conscious commitment to the values of the organisation.

A service philosophy is usually developed as a collaborative effort by key stakeholders. It will typically reflect the cultural and social context of the organisation and its members. While most early childhood service philosophies have common elements, each service will have unique elements that reflect the unique features of their service.

Aspects that may be typically included in a service philosophy:

- acknowledgement and respect for the parenting role
- acknowledgement and respect for the child and family's culture
- acknowledgement of the rights of children
- the critical role of relationships – carer/child/parent
- the image of children as capable learners
- the importance of a child-centred **physical environment**
- the role/qualities/knowledge of the educator.

Consider the following example of a service philosophy:

'To ensure all staff, families and children experience a sense of belonging that is a result of respectful, trusting relationships and opportunities to participate in decision making.'

An example of how employees can translate this statement into practice may include making sure that each child and parent is personally greeted on arrival and that information about the child's day is shared with the parent at the end of the day. It may also include working collaboratively with parents to develop goals for children's **learning** and development.

Consider another example:

'To acknowledge and celebrate the Indigenous cultural heritage of children and families attending the program.'

This statement is very clear and can easily be translated into practice – for example, by providing children with stories, songs, games and artefacts that reflect Indigenous culture and employment of Indigenous child care workers.

Ideally, everything that happens at a service, including the way employees carry out their work, should reflect the service philosophy, goals and objectives. Employees should constantly remind themselves of the values embodied in the service philosophy.

Working As a Member of a Team

Most children's services consist of small, medium or large teams of people with different training, skills and expertise who must work together in a way that enables the service to achieve its goals.

For an organisation to run smoothly all team members must have a clear understanding of their role, duties and responsibilities as well as those of other team members.

physical environment

external physical factors that affect development; for example, health, nutrition, safety and geographic location.

learning

refers to a permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience; occurs as a result of maturation and environmental factors.



FIGURE 1.2

Effective teamwork is essential for quality care.

planning

using recorded information gathered from a variety of sources to develop a written program of experiences to support children's learning and development.

'All the ladies at preschool.' Emma 4 years 7 months. Teamwork requires each member of the team to understand how their role contributes to the big picture.

Effective teamwork depends on every member of the team taking responsibility for carrying out the work described in their position description to the best of their ability. How well an individual can carry out their work in an efficient and consistent manner is influenced by their understanding of:

- the organisation's philosophy and goals
- work roles, duties and responsibilities
- how their role contributes to the team and the smooth operation of the service.

What is Teamwork?

In child care, 'teamwork' is often mistakenly interpreted as all team members sharing all tasks equally. 'We all do everything – we are all equal.' While in theory this may seem ideal, in practice it is not the best use of each person's expertise and experience. Teamwork is not about sharing every task; it is about assigning roles and responsibilities that reflect the knowledge and expertise of each team member and having systems in place that support each team member in carrying out their assigned roles.

Sharing all tasks does not allow each person to contribute their particular skills to the organisation. For example, the trained nurse can take responsibility for the overall monitoring of health issues, while the qualified staff can take primary responsibility for **planning** children's programs.

Every role is important to the smooth running of a service and each member of the team contributes to the overall day-to-day operation of the service.

It is important that the role and responsibilities assigned to each staff member are appreciated and respected. After all, if the cook didn't prepare the meals or the clerical assistant didn't attend to administrative and financial matters or the cleaner didn't clean each day, the service could not function.

Assigning roles and responsibilities in accordance with qualifications and experience is sound business practice. It ensures that the organisation is making the most effective use of its human resource pool. As in any organisation, wages reflect the position, level of qualifications, skills, experience and level of assigned responsibility of each employee. It makes sound economic sense to use each person to the best of their ability and to assign tasks that reflect competence and remuneration. Consider the following scenario.

By 'sharing' all roles, unqualified or less qualified child care workers are being asked to take on a role that is beyond their skill and training level. Without the advantage of drawing on formal training in child development, learning theory and pedagogy, programs for children are unlikely to be of the highest possible standard.

Effective teams are made up of individuals who are committed to performing their role to the best of their ability in order to achieve good outcomes for everyone.

Teamwork skills

Effective teamwork depends on individual team members developing and using a range of specific skills including the following:

- **Co-operation.** Whether you are a member of a very large staff in a 60–90 place long day care centre, one of two staff members in a small centre-based service or a member of an extended network of family day carers, co-operating with other team members is essential. Being a co-operative team member in a child care setting includes:

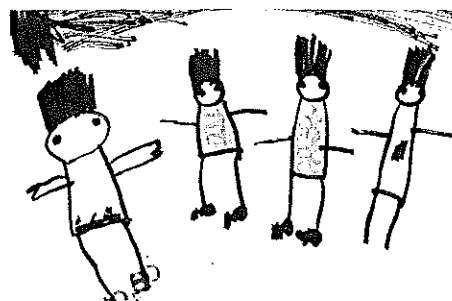


FIGURE 1.3

WE SHARE ALL THE WORK



Adele, a qualified early childhood teacher, was very surprised to find at her new centre that carers without formal qualifications were being given responsibility for program planning. Adele decided to raise her concerns with the director who became quite annoyed, saying, *'Everyone shares the role of planning for the children. All the staff are treated as equals!'*

Adele responded that while she was able to recognise that carers without formal qualifications certainly had a great deal to offer, they did not have the training in child development and learning theory. Adele expressed her view that it was reasonable to include these carers in the planning process, particularly in relation to their observations of individual children, but felt it was unfair to expect these carers to be actually responsible for planning. The director reluctantly agreed to raise the issue at a team meeting.

Later that evening Adele reflected on the director's comment that *'all the staff are treated as equals'*. Adele wondered how this could possibly be true when people were on different rates of pay and were either qualified or not qualified. She wondered if the director really considered herself as 'an equal' within the team.

- accepting and respecting all team members as unique individuals
- understanding how you can help
- being willing to help out
- using your initiative
- being flexible and open to change
- supporting other workers by assisting them with their duties especially when people are busy
- communicating effectively and sharing information about completing tasks.

■ **Initiative.** Good child care workers are able to use their initiative about the right time to complete duties. To be able to use your initiative you have to have confidence and know what you are expected to do and how to do it. Using initiative requires a carer to:

- be alert to what your co-workers are doing
- ask if co-workers need help before you start a routine task
- look at daily timetables and plans to see routines and how the day runs
- read any printed material your workplace gives new parents
- use your common sense.

.....
Whether working with a large or small team, or as an individual in a family day care scheme, developing a sense of teamwork can provide carers with much needed professional support.

CONNOR



Connor is new to the service and is anxious to please. He is a little overwhelmed by the efficiency of the other carers and worries that he will 'not come up to scratch'. Connor decides to keep a list of his duties taped to the wall so that he can remind himself of what he should be doing at any point in time. While Connor's diligence is to be commended, the senior carer in the room feels that Connor is not very flexible and should use his initiative more. He doesn't seem to be able to see that there are times when helping with other tasks would be more useful than focusing on completing his own duties.

- **Being flexible, adaptable and open to change.** Being organised is an essential skill for carers; however, anyone who has worked in child care knows the ability to be flexible is critical.

In children's services, it is often the unexpected or unplanned events that take much of our time and leave us wondering how to get everything done. Programs should not become so organised and structured that there is little or no room for flexibility. Children's behaviour is influenced by many things, including 'the atmosphere' in the room, the weather, moods, tiredness, and what happened before they arrived. Children certainly do benefit from the predictability of consistent routines; however, programs must be designed to fit children's needs and not the other way around. In the following scenario, the needs of the carers are being placed before the needs of the child.



IT'S TIME FOR BED!

The toddler room at Sunbeam Child Care Centre runs to a strict schedule. Play, meals, nappy change, outdoor time and afternoon sleep occur in the same sequence every day. Staff rosters and breaks have a major influence on the design of the daily schedule for the children.

Ming Li (15 months) is new to the centre. At home she usually has both a morning and an afternoon sleep, but her mother responds to cues from her daughter that show when she is ready for a sleep.

Ming Li has not settled in to the program. She refuses to sleep at the designated time and the carers are becoming very frustrated with her. One of the carers voices her opinion that *'Ming Li's mother has to accept that there are more children than just Ming Li and children who attend long day care have to learn to fit in'*.

Working with Diverse Colleagues

There are many benefits to having a team which reflects a diversity of qualifications, training, experience and cultural backgrounds. Such diversity can enrich the workplace environment and create team dynamics which promote innovation, creativity and lively debate. Diversity in a children's services team may include:

- **Life experience.** Each member of the team brings with them a unique set of life experiences that can enrich the team.
- **Work experience.** Team members will have a range of work experiences that have contributed to their skills and knowledge. These experiences may come from a range of workplaces which may or may not be related to children's services. Nevertheless, these experiences have given individuals the opportunity to develop a range of important workplace skills.
- **Qualifications.** In children's services there is usually a diversity of formal qualifications among team members such as teaching, child care, nursing or administration. Even where qualifications are similar, each team member will have gained some unique outcomes from undergoing a process of formal education. How each person translates the skills and knowledge gained from formal training into practice may vary greatly.
- **Social/cultural background.** The social/cultural background of team members should ideally reflect the broader community and families which use the service.
- **Philosophy.** Each team member will also have a philosophy in relation to children's services that has been shaped by their individual social/cultural background, life experiences, work experiences and formal training.

- **Age.** Team members may range in age from 18 years upwards. Diversity in ages can add an important dimension to a team and serves to provide a balance of views which can be considered and debated.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Today's team meeting focused on how to set and meet workplace priorities. Team members are given 10 items to prioritise. When each person numbered their priorities on the whiteboard Jovana is surprised to see that there are a great many differences among the team. This came as quite a shock to Jovana as she had always believed that everyone at work had the same priorities.

The activity made Jovana stop and think about her own priorities and start to really think about individuals within the team and how their values and priorities might be different from her own. Jovana realised that up until now she had made a great many assumptions about other team members without giving any real thought to individual differences.

Respecting diversity requires each team member to:

- show tolerance for the opinions and beliefs of others
- be open to new or different ideas and innovations
- treat all members of the organisation with consideration and respect.

BRIGHT IDEA

Tanya is pleased that her idea about changing the lunchtime routine was given such careful consideration by other team members. The outcome of the discussion resulted in a range of changes that will benefit the children.

Tanya feels confident in raising any ideas, issues or concerns with the team, as she knows she will always be listened to with professional courtesy and respect, even if others don't necessarily agree with her point of view.

Accepting and respecting individual differences is very important if you are to build good working relationships with other team members.

individual differences

the wide range of differences that are still considered as within normal development.

Roles in the Organisation

The roles in an organisation are usually determined by the structure of the organisation. Organisational structures in children's services typically include:

- not-for-profit services – community-based
- sponsored services – such as church or council
- work-based services
- for-profit services – privately owned and operated
- corporate child care services – shareholders
- government managed services – preschools operated by state education authorities
- services owned/operated by peak organisations such as Lady Gowrie Children's Services.

Roles in most children's services organisations will include some of the following: a management team (committee or board), owner/manager, licensee, director or co-ordinator, team leaders, administrative staff and child care workers.

The Role of Manager

- The overall management of the service is usually the responsibility of owners, sponsors, boards or committees. Responsibilities include: ensuring that the service meets all regulatory and licensing requirements, provision and care of physical facilities and equipment, employment of staff and financial management.
- In children's services many of the management functions are delegated to the service director/ authorised supervisor. Day-to-day management responsibilities will vary from one service to another. The director/authorised supervisor will carry out these functions by delegating duties to members of the team.
- Team leaders or room leaders will generally have the responsibility for ensuring that the daily program in the room and all duties are carried out in accordance with service policies and procedures. Other team members are assigned or allocated roles depending on training/qualifications.
- As in any other workplace there are specific tasks, duties and responsibilities linked to each role. The following scenario illustrates the difficulties that can arise when workers are unsure of their roles or do not understand how their role fits into 'the bigger picture'.



PAT'S HELPING!

Pat is team leader in the toddler room at a large child care centre. Pat is generous, creative and energetic and is well liked by children and parents. Pat does not worry too much about who is responsible for tasks. She says, *'So long as everything gets done it's okay'*.

In order to give the staff in her room a break from what Pat described as the 'rotten jobs', this week Pat has taken on the task of putting the nappies into the machine to wash. Today the staff on early shift arrive to find that the nappies have not been washed.

The staff are frustrated and upset. They feel that Pat should stick to her role and let them get on with their tasks. They are also feeling a little guilty as they know that Pat is only trying to help, but in doing so she is making things difficult and uncomfortable for everyone.

Tina, the trainee, is feeling particularly anxious. Washing the nappies is one of her assigned tasks and she wishes that Pat would just let her do her jobs as normal.

Erin, who is second-in-charge, takes Pat aside and explains to her that the team is feeling uncertain about what they should be doing each day and asks if things can go back to normal. She acknowledges Pat for trying to ease the workload but explains that in fact supporting people to do their assigned tasks is much more effective than trying to take on extra tasks herself.

Later Pat reflects on Erin's comments. At first she felt annoyed and unappreciated but on reflection realised that she was just making things more difficult for everyone by not allowing them to do their work.

Individuals in a work group contribute to successful service operation by doing their own job effectively and being team players.

Work Roles, Duties and Responsibilities

Depending on your role, your job description will specify the tasks and duties for which you are responsible, based on your training and experience. It may also include some general requirements about behaviour or other aspects of your role.

You are responsible for carrying out your duties:

- in a positive, courteous and co-operative manner
- according to the service policies and 'rules' to the standard expected in a children's service workplace
- in a well-organised, efficient and effective way, including identifying the resources needed to carry out your own work duties and reporting any shortages of resources according to service policies
- with an awareness of your obligations to keep the environment clean, tidy and safe.

What is a Job Description?

A job description typically outlines the duties and responsibilities to be undertaken, the standard to which work must be carried out and the person (or position) to whom the employee is responsible.

Job descriptions will include:

- a job title, for example, 'Child Care Worker'
- essential requirements; for example, a Senior First Aid certificate or a Working with Children declaration
- duties and responsibilities – these may be divided into specific areas such as:
 - general responsibilities:
 - compliance with state/territory regulations
 - compliance with an OHS Act
 - compliance with ECA Code of Conduct
 - general duties such as supervision of children, assisting in the day-to-day care of children, ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of children, maintaining a safe environment in accordance with OHS policy, working co-operatively as a member of the team, attending team meetings as required, working co-operatively with families
 - specific duties such as setting up equipment and experiences under direction, packing away equipment/activities and cleaning, cleaning the children's bathroom, undertaking a daily safety check of the outdoor play area, setting up and packing away outdoor equipment, assisting with children's meals, putting out and packing away children's bedding, preparing craft materials, washing and folding.

.....
All carers must ensure that they understand, and are familiar with, their roles and responsibilities in accordance with duty statements and regulatory requirements.

The details of the job description will vary according to your role, service type and the duties of other members of the team.

In addition to a job description you may also be issued with a contract of employment or terms and conditions of employment. You are usually required to sign a statement that you will agree to abide by these conditions. Typically a job contract will include:

- a job title
- to whom you are directly responsible (your supervisor)
- hours of employment – whether the job is full time, part time or casual (including any requirement for after hours work such as attendance at team meetings)
- the place of work and name of employer
- the award – this will set out holiday leave, sick leave and other entitlements

- work standards and grounds for dismissal – such as misconduct or breach of regulations
- the salary – the amount you will be paid, the frequency and method of payment (e.g. fortnightly by direct credit), the employer's contribution on your behalf to a super fund and any additional remuneration associated with your employment.

It is important to read job descriptions and employment contracts carefully and seek clarification if required. Once a contract is signed you are bound by the stated conditions unless there has been a deliberate misrepresentation on the part of the employer.

Being Organised and Getting the Job Done

What does 'being organised' mean in the context of a children's service? The answer to this may well vary from person to person and service to service. Generally, people who are well organised at home are also well organised at work. Organised people tend not to procrastinate and can usually achieve more in a limited time by having a range of 'mini routines' or systems that they stick to each day.

Being well organised comes naturally to some people. For others it requires careful thought and planning. Children's services, large or small, are always busy places; being organised does not make them less busy but it certainly makes the work more manageable. Being organised shows respect for yourself as well as for other team members.



CHALK AND CHEESE

Clara always arrives at work 15 minutes before her shift time. She uses this time to check the communication book and think about the day ahead. Clara is always well organised and is able to get through her daily duties without any real problems.

Kirra is always running late; she often oversleeps and misses breakfast. Kirra finds it difficult to get through her duties each day. She is easily side-tracked and spends too much time on trivial tasks.

Kirra wishes she were not working with Clara, as this only highlights her poor organisational skills.

Clara finds working with Kirra very difficult. Clara often takes on some of Kirra's duties out of sheer frustration – she cannot understand why Kirra can't be more organised.

Some specific strategies to increase your effectiveness at work and to ensure that you are able to complete your duties to the expected standard in the time available include:

- Have a thorough knowledge of your job description – understand your responsibilities, roles and associated tasks and be clear about your supervisor's expectations.
- Be aware of the roles and duties of others within the organisation.
- Understand all timetables, rosters and associated duties.
- Be aware of the equipment and resources available to you and ensure all resources used during the day are returned to their designated storage area.
- Work with others to ensure an effective system is in place that enables equipment and resources to be easily accessible, properly cared for and stored in the designated place.
- Prioritise – know what is important, and don't waste time on trivial tasks.
- Use a diary or an organiser to forward plan known commitments.

- Have a 'to do' list to ensure extra tasks are carried out as required.
- Arrive at work on time by making sure that you are up early enough to prepare yourself for the day.
- Ask for direction when needed.
- Ask for support when needed.
- Use 'time-saving' techniques whenever possible.
- Do not take on the work of others when your own jobs are incomplete.
- Pace yourself and keep an eye on the time throughout the day without becoming a 'clock watcher'.
- Know when you are becoming 'snowed under'.
- Learn to say 'no' when you need to.

PRIORITIES

Jemma was finding her role as a carer in the toddler room very stressful. She never seemed to be able to get through all of her work and was constantly flustered.

She asked her director, Peter, for help, expecting that she would be given a timetable of tasks to follow. Instead, Peter arranged to relieve Jemma in the room so that she could observe the other members of the team. Peter asked Jemma to pay particular attention to how and when tasks were completed. She was also asked to identify tasks that were done only if time permitted.

Jemma observed that the other team members did things calmly and without rushing. They did not become flustered if tasks were interrupted or not completed. Their main priority was the children and in many cases they incorporated the care of the children into the tasks. For example, one carer engaged some toddlers in sorting a basket full of bibs and washers. The toddlers also helped to 'fold' and put away the washing. This activity kept the toddlers absorbed for quite some time and the carer was able to engage in a lot of conversation with the children.

Jemma saw that the other carers would interact with the children and then as the children moved on they would quickly tidy the area so that the room did not become cluttered.

The carers made games of many routine tasks, singing and talking to the children as they went about these tasks.

Observing other team members proved to be a very valuable learning experience for Jemma. It wasn't so much about getting the jobs done, it was how you went about it.



Time Management

Time is a limited resource. Juggling competing priorities and demands for our time has become an ongoing challenge for most people. Every day we have to make decisions about how our time will be divided between our various roles. Being able to set priorities and manage time are essential skills for carers faced with the multitude of tasks that must be completed daily in addition to caring for the children.

There are many things that can impact on our ability to get the job done in a timely and efficient manner. Common 'time stealers' which can interfere with the 'best laid plans' at home and at work include: unforeseen interruptions, procrastination and indecision, acting with incomplete information, poor communication, unclear goals and priorities, poor planning, taking on too many tasks (the inability to say 'no') and poor organisational skills.

procrastination
means a delay
in meeting
commitments
or getting the
job done.

Of all the time stealers listed above, one of the most common is **procrastination**. Everyone will, at some time, procrastinate over a task or decision. Many people use procrastination as a strategy to allow time for further thought and consideration. However, when procrastination occurs regularly in relation to daily tasks, it can become a real problem.

Putting off 'must do' small tasks can quickly lead to an overwhelming 'mountain' of tasks. For example, putting off tidying the storeroom, sorting out the collage trolley or putting away small bits and pieces that have accumulated on top of cupboards. Even though we put these tasks off, they are still there, waiting to be done, and we are constantly reminded of them each day, which often results in feelings of guilt and anxiety.

If you are a procrastinator you need to make a list of all the tasks that you need to do, set a time frame and identify a realistic amount of time each day to 'attack' one task. To manage your time effectively you can try creating a daily/weekly 'to do' list, be realistic about what you can achieve each day, delegate tasks where possible, learn to be assertive – it's okay to say no!

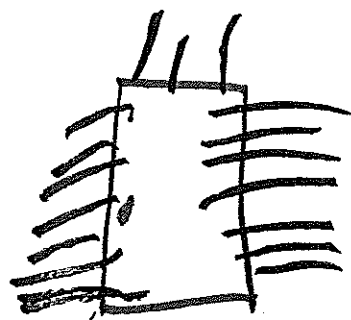


FIGURE 1.4

'My dad says when the door's shut DO NOT DISTURB.'

Sarah 4 years.

Time management is critical for staff in children's services.

Communicating

Effective communication skills are the foundation for successful teamwork. In workplaces where there is good communication between team members there is:

- open communication – people say what they mean
- a co-operative, happy and relaxed atmosphere
- an environment where problems are 'nipped in the bud' and solved to everyone's satisfaction
- acknowledgement and respect shown for differences
- support for each other
- a workplace with generally better work practices, resulting in a better service.

Effective communication involves much more than simply exchanging verbal or written information. Effective communication involves understanding the factors that influence how we communicate and developing skills to facilitate good communication. Many types of communication take place between team members in a child care setting, including:

- **verbal communication** – informal chats, conversations about workplace issues, discussions about children's needs and interests, giving information to other staff or using the telephone
- **non-verbal communication** – body language; for example, facial gestures, standing too close, folding arms, giving or avoiding eye contact, or standing with hands on hips can have a powerful effect on what is communicated



PRIORITIES

Carlie is feeling frazzled. It's been a busy week and the children have been particularly demanding. At lunch time Carlie reviews her 'to do' list. She has managed to complete three-quarters of the tasks on her weekly list and it feels great to be able to tick them off!

Carlie ponders the tasks she has yet to complete. With only one day left before the weekend she will need to be realistic and try to complete only the most important jobs. Carlie circles her priorities and then seeks out her supervisor so that she can confirm that she is making the right decision about her priorities.

- **written communication** – memos, notes, records, diaries or communication books.

Communication also occurs on several different levels (NSW Department of Health, 1987):

- **Casual level.** At this level you relate in a casual way – there is little or no exchange of information. For example, 'How are you?', 'Nice day', etc.
- **Exchanging information and opinions level.** Communication may include casual remarks, exchanging opinions or commenting on an event. For example, 'The bushfires have been devastating, haven't they?'
- **More personal level.** Communication includes sharing personal beliefs, judgements or decisions. For example, 'I really find it difficult when parents get angry over the children getting dirty'.
- **Very close personal level.** Communication at this level includes sharing feelings and emotions – it is the deepest level of communication. For example, 'I'm feeling really lost and lonely since my brother died'.



FIGURE 1.5

The staffroom noticeboard is an easy way to communicate with team members.

Factors Influencing Communication

There are a number of factors that will influence how we communicate with others. These factors may include: personal space, individual communication style, a person's role or status, body language, different languages and accents, assertiveness, unclear messages, emotions and effective listening.

Personal Space

Various factors such as personality, mood, culture and experience affect the amount of personal space we need to feel comfortable when communicating with others. Generally we need less space and feel more comfortable with people we know well. Most children enjoy close contact with carers; however, some children (often for cultural reasons) feel uncomfortable with close physical contact. Pease and Pease (2006) in their book on body language suggest that there are four zones of physical contact common in western cultures:

- **intimate zone** – reserved for family and close friends
- **personal zone** – used at social functions
- **social zone** – used when mixing with strangers
- **public zone** – used when someone is presenting to an audience.

Individual Communication Style

Each person has an individual communication style which has been developed over time and is shaped by family, culture, age and personality. For example, some people are bubbly and outgoing, others are more reserved, some people are shy or find it difficult to communicate with the opposite sex. Consider the different communication style used to convey a similar message.

'I'm wondering if I can talk to you about a problem I have in regards to your work.'

'I'm fed up with you. You are so lazy and thoughtless.'

'We need to talk. Your work is not up to scratch!'

'You don't seem to have been your usual efficient self lately. Is something wrong?'

'You need to get your priorities in order. It's affecting your work!'

'I hate to be negative but I'm finding your work is not up to the usual standards.'

'You're wastin' your time if ya think I'm gunna put up with you!'

Our choice of words may affect communication. For example, if jargon or slang is used it may not be understood by everyone. Sometimes we will change or adapt our individual communication style to suit the situation. We may feel that in order to be seen as an early childhood professional we need to use jargon to convey a simple message. Consider the following very different ways of communicating a simple message.

'It has come to my attention that Tom has an articulation problem which may profoundly impact on his ability to socialise with his peers.'

'I'm a little worried about Tom's speech. It's hard for other children to understand him and it may make it hard for him to make friends.'

Which communication style do you think a parent might prefer?

Roles, Status and Communication

A person's role or status can have a significant impact on their communication style. A very good example of this is the way in which police officers will report a crime or an accident for a news coverage. For example, *'Police proceeded to the alleged offender's home where a person of interest was apprehended after a search of the alleged offender's vehicle and premises'*.

Body Language

Non-verbal communication can be very powerful. Often, much more can be conveyed by what is not said rather than by what is said. There is a strong relationship between the use of body language and culture. In most western cultures it is considered polite to look directly at the speaker. In contrast, other cultures such as those of Japan, the West Indies and some Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal groups regard making direct eye contact as disrespectful. In these cultures lowering the eyes is a sign of respect.

Being aware of how body language is used to communicate and being sensitive to cultural differences in the use of body language will assist in effective communication. Where possible, try to avoid hand gestures, standing too close to others or touching others when communicating. Often this type of body language can make others feel uncomfortable.

Different Languages and Accents

Some English speakers have strong accents that make communication difficult. People for whom English is a second language may also have difficulty in being understood by the listener or are not able to understand what is being said to them by the speaker. Where this occurs the following strategies can be helpful:

- using simpler words and short sentences
- repeating what you have said
- demonstrating meaning if you can
- using facial expressions or gestures
- speaking more slowly
- pausing so the other person can digest what has been said and frame an answer or question
- taking advantage of an interpreter if needed.

Assertiveness

Our self-image affects how we communicate; for example, if we feel confident this will carry over to our communication; if we have poor **self-esteem** we may not communicate in a positive or confident manner.

As an adult working with young children it is extremely important that you regard yourself as a worthwhile and valued individual. Being able to assert your needs and rights in a positive manner will lead to a positive self-esteem as well as contributing to effective teamwork.

self-esteem

a concept involving the way that you evaluate yourself.

Assertiveness is not about being demanding or aggressive; rather, it involves achieving your own needs and rights while at the same time respecting the needs and rights of others. In simple terms assertiveness is about achieving a positive outcome for everyone.

Being assertive means getting your message across without placing blame on others. To do this you need to use words that don't label others.

A good strategy is to put yourself in the shoes of the other person. Would your comment encourage them to co-operate or would it make them defensive and unco-operative? There is sometimes a fine line between being aggressive and being assertive. For example, an assertive statement such as: *'I was upset this morning when I saw you had changed tomorrow's roster. I would appreciate a day's notice in future as I have to organise a lift for early shift'*, is more likely to get a positive response than *'Changing the roster without notice was pretty thoughtless of you!'*

In this example, the assertive statement uses language that gives the other person more exact information about:

- how the speaker feels
- what the speaker wants
- what can be done to change the situation.

Assertive statements allow opportunities for discussion and the exchange of ideas rather than accusations and 'put-downs' that leave people feeling angry, hurt or defensive.

Being assertive is a valuable communication skill that can be used to achieve a sense of both parties being 'winners' rather than one party being powerful and 'winning' while the other person is the 'loser'.

Unclear Messages

Avoid Misinterpretation

Making sure your message is clear so that it will not be misinterpreted is very important for open communication in a child care setting. A common problem in communication occurs when one person misinterprets the message being given. For example, *'That's not what I mean'* or *'You're putting words in my mouth'* or *'You never listen'*, are common complaints. Often what occurs is that the person receiving the message places a different interpretation on the meaning than was intended by the person giving the message.

Another reason misinterpretation may occur is the manner in which the message is delivered.

Hidden Messages

It is very confusing when facial expressions, body language and tone of voice do not match the spoken message. Mixed messages are often given when using a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication.

HIDDEN MESSAGES

Jack

Jack, a carer, has been quiet and moody all day, but when asked if there is a problem he responds with, *'What do you think?'*

Molly

Molly has spent several weeks rearranging the storage areas to make them safer and more user-friendly. This morning when she enters the storeroom she sees that equipment has been dumped on the floor. The storeroom is a real mess. Molly turns to her team members, saying, *'Thanks so much for keeping the storeroom tidy!'* Molly then storms away.



.....
We tend to hear what we expect to hear – people often have a mind-set of what a person will say or how they might say it.

.....
Unclear or
ambiguous
communication
can lead
to conflict.

This type of communication can be very confusing for the person receiving the message who is hearing a verbal message that does not correspond to the non-verbal cues. For example, while placing hands on hips the speaker says, 'It's okay, I've already put the bin out... again!' What the speaker is saying is clearly very different from what they are feeling.

Emotions and Communication

Strong feelings often prevent people from communicating effectively. Some people react emotionally when confronted unexpectedly about an issue. When a person is angry or upset, their emotions often influence their response. Being able to verbalise feelings in an assertive manner that provides clear feedback is a difficult but important skill to develop.

Think back to the last time your anger or frustration affected how you communicated with people. How did you address your feelings? How did you handle the incident? Did you express feelings such as anger, hurt, frustration, sadness or anxiety? Did you slam doors, yell at others, become quiet and withdrawn, or blame others? What messages did your behaviour convey to others involved?



SAY WHAT YOU MEAN

Shona

Shona is worried that she will not be able to manage her responsibilities at work as well as do observations for her assignment. *'Sometimes I think I'm just so hopeless. I never seem to manage things right!'*

Mary

At the team meeting Mary sits with her head bowed and her arms crossed. The other team members are discussing changes to the roster. After the meeting Mary walks away, slamming the door behind her.

Gelina

Gelina has hardly spoken a word since being told by the director that she needs to improve her supervision skills.

Do these adults manage to effectively express their feelings and frustrations?

Receiving the Message: Listen Carefully

.....
Good
communicators
have effective
listening skills and
also look for non-
verbal cues when
communicating
with others.

Effective Listening

Effective listening is an active process that requires the listener to listen carefully, to try to pick up on how the speaker is feeling and show by gesture and facial expression that they as the listener are focused and interested in what is being communicated. Attentive listeners give the speaker their full attention. This can be difficult in a child care setting where there are many interruptions and demands for a carer's attention. Listening involves four key elements:

1. **Hearing the message** – listening to both verbal and non-verbal information
2. **Interpreting the message** – matching the meaning between the speaker and the listener
3. **Evaluating the message** – asking questions to ensure that all of the available information is delivered
4. **Responding to the message** – giving an appropriate verbal and/or non-verbal response.

Reflective listening

Reflective listening is an effective communication strategy because it allows the listener to give some feedback to the speaker, show attention to what is being said, encourage expression of ideas and

emotions, talk about difficulties and keep the speaker on track. It also gives the listener the opportunity to clarify what the speaker is saying by paraphrasing; for example, 'You are really worried about your mother'. Strategies for reflective listening can also include nodding of the head, utterances such as 'Mm Mm', 'Oh' or simple comments such as 'That must have been awful for you'.

LISTEN

Mark has had a long day. The children were very unsettled and he had the unpleasant task of telling a parent that her daughter had been bitten on the face by another toddler. All Mark wants to do when he gets home is sit down and relax before facing the evening ritual of dinner, homework and various other family tasks.

As soon as Mark arrives home he is greeted by his teenage daughter, Amy, who is waiting for some collage materials that Mark has been promising to bring home so she could complete her art project, which is due in tomorrow. Mark has forgotten the collage materials and this news results in an abusive tirade from his daughter: 'You never listen to me. You're always thinking about other things when I'm talking to you. I may as well talk to the wall!'

Mark starts to get angry with Amy and then realises that she is right – he doesn't really listen to her. He tends to switch off or think about all the things that he needs to get done at work.



Remember, team members who fail to listen to their colleagues run the risk of becoming alienated and out of touch with the views of the team and individuals within the team.

Blocks to Effective Communication

There will be times when, with the best of intentions, our responses will block communication. Some common examples, as listed by the NSW Department of Health (1987), of blocks to effective communication include:

- **giving orders** – telling the other person what to do, implying that they need to act differently: 'Don't be so negative'
- **warning** – making assumptions about unpleasant consequences which will happen unless the other person changes: 'You'll end up with no friends'
- **preaching** – telling people what they should or ought to do, and implying that they are not behaving in the 'right' or 'correct' way: 'You ought to take a long-term view, and shouldn't just think about yourself'
- **lecturing** – implying that 'I know it all, you need to take notice of what I say', 'I've been through all this before, I'm telling you, it'll never work'

.....
Successful communicating is about effective listening. On average, most people only hear 25% of a message being conveyed verbally. Careful listening includes 'picking up' on the feelings of others.

NO SLEEPS

Nora has requested that Pete not be made to have a rest as he is staying up very late at night. The carer replies, 'Look, we've been asked to do this by parents before. What usually happens is that the child gets overtired and is really cranky. Sometimes they even fall asleep on the way home in the car and then they are up even later!'



- **giving advice** – suggesting 'I know better, I'm superior': *'Instead of listening to the others I suggest that you look at my report and then make a decision'*
- **blaming** – implying that it's the other person's fault.



NEW POLICIES

The family day carers are meeting with their co-ordination team to discuss problems with the implementation of new OHS policies. The carers have found the whole process overwhelming and one carer says to the co-ordinator, *'I think it's your fault. You wanted to introduce the whole thing too quickly. We all wanted to introduce things one at a time'*.

- **interpreting** – implying that you know the real cause of the problem and dismissing the speaker's concern: *'You're just tired after a bad day at work'*
- **labelling** – telling people they have a bad characteristic that will always affect everything they do: *'You are always such a pessimist'*
- **asking questions** – a common response when people are upset. Questions can block communication – instead of letting off steam, the other person has to stop and try to answer: *'How did you come to owe so much money?'* Asking a question often implies that you have the answer to the other person's problem. People rarely appreciate being told what to do, even when they actually ask for advice.
- **praising and reassuring** – also unhelpful responses when people are upset even though you are usually trying to help. These remarks often come across as either non-acceptance of the other person's feelings or as patronising. For example: reassuring – *'Don't worry, everything will be okay'*, praising – *'You're so good at what you do, you'll get the new job'*.
- **distracting** – *'Let's go for a walk and not worry about it until tomorrow.'*

Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback gives people information about their behaviour and how their behaviour affects others. It is a useful strategy for achieving the response you want or to have your needs met.

Characteristics of Constructive Feedback

- Feedback is **descriptive**. For example, *'I feel confused'* or *'I feel you ignore my point of view'*.
- It is **specific** rather than general. To be told that one is 'dominating' will probably not be as useful as to be told, *'Just now when we were talking you didn't seem to listen'*.
- It takes into account the **needs of both the receiver and the giver** of the feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs and fails to consider the needs of people at the receiving end, including their emotional state at the time: *'I know this is difficult for you, but we need to talk about it'*.
- It is directed towards **behaviour which the receiver can do something about** – otherwise it only increases frustration: *'I would really appreciate it if you could ring me if you're going to be late'*.
- It is **well timed**. In general, feedback is most useful when given as soon as possible. This will depend, of course, on factors such as the person's readiness to hear it.
- The other person shows a **willingness to listen** to your feedback.

- The person giving the feedback checks to make sure that the message has been understood:
'Do you understand what you need to do?'
- Feedback is given in a calm manner.

The following scenario demonstrates how important it is to give feedback in a constructive manner.

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK?

Max, the director, has concerns about the way Paula interacts with some parents. She seems unfriendly and at times quite rude. Max doesn't like confrontation and has been stewing about the matter for quite some time.

This morning a parent arrived at the service an hour late after her car had broken down. She looked harassed and anxious. Paula's response to her apology was, *'It's very disruptive when children are late. Come on, Chloe, let's get you settled'*. Seeing the parent's distress Max spoke quietly to the parent who left for work feeling a little better.

Later, just as Paula was returning from her lunch break, Max called her into the office. He abruptly said, *'Paula, I'm sick of your rudeness to parents. The way you spoke to Chloe's mother this morning was disgraceful'*.

Perhaps Max was justified in his concern in relation to Paula's treatment of the parent; however, the timing and the manner in which he conveyed his concerns was completely inappropriate. Max should have spoken to Paula alone, at a time when they could sit down and talk without interruption. His comments were unprofessional and did not help Paula to improve her skills. Instead, Paula became distraught and very little was achieved.

A more effective response from Max may have been:

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

'Paula, I overheard your comments to Chloe's mother this morning and I am concerned about the way you managed the situation. Your comments didn't show any empathy. Chloe's mum was obviously upset and what you said made her feel more stressed. Most of the time you are very friendly but there have been times, like this morning, when I have heard you speak to a parent in a way that is not appropriate. I would like to make a time where we can sit down and discuss service expectations about interacting with parents.'

Constructive feedback is only effective if the listener 'hears' what you are saying.

Problem-Solving, Decision Making and Resolving Conflict

Problem-solving and resolving conflict depend on the ability of those involved to communicate effectively about the problem and then make a decision about how to resolve the issue. Working in child care requires you to constantly make decisions about day-to-day issues and about matters with more long-term consequences.

Decisions are often made on the basis of what we believe to be true. On many occasions we base our decision on what we know about the people involved rather than on the facts about what actually happened.

problem-solving
the ability to use a range of thinking strategies to find a solution.

.....
 Every day carers
 will need to
 make on-the-spot
 decisions that
 require sound
 communication
 skills and a
 willingness to use
 problem-solving
 strategies.

Working with young children and families can at times be emotionally, as well as physically, exhausting. Our capacity to make decisions is often affected by our emotional state at the time.

Reference to written policies and licensing requirements can guide many of the decisions made in a service. Unfortunately, policies cannot cover the huge range of issues that confronts early childhood professionals on a daily basis. When confronted with major issues or conflict situations, it is helpful to be able to work through a formalised process that allows everyone involved to examine the problem objectively and work towards making decisions that lead to a successful resolution for all parties.

Conflict Habits

Cornelius and Faire (1989) suggest that reactions to conflict may be as a result of four common 'conflict habits' – withdrawal, suppression, win/lose and compromise.

- **Withdrawal** refers to either physically or emotionally withdrawing from the conflict. For example, you may stop talking to the other person, storm out of the room, sulk, or only speak to the person when absolutely necessary and then only in a formal manner. This strategy is often used to force the other person to change their mind.
- **Suppression** refers to a decision not to address or acknowledge the conflict. For conflicts of a minor nature this is sometimes a useful strategy as it may defuse the situation and the conflict may be resolved. However, suppressing conflict may also lead to the other person feeling confused or unsure in relation to the other party's feelings. It may also mean that the other party is unaware of any feelings of conflict that the other person may have.
 Suppression manifests itself in behaviour such as 'acting as if nothing is wrong', quietly 'stewing' and becoming resentful, or saying nothing and then bringing up the conflict at a later time as a 'weapon' to prove a point.
- **Win/lose** is a conflict habit in which one person must 'win' at all costs. It usually means that one person has used power or authority to resolve the conflict at the expense of the other. Such a strategy can include shouting, becoming violent, 'laying down the law', getting others to back you up or using threats.
- **Compromise** may result in a positive outcome for both parties, but it may also mean that one person gives up more than the other and never really has their needs met.

Compromise can often lead to one person feeling that they are always the one to 'give in'. Often compromise is used because it is less stressful, to avoid arguments or to preserve a relationship.

Conflict Resolution Strategies

- **Win/win** is a strategy that can be used effectively with colleagues, parents and children. The process of win/win involves the following steps:
 - Find out why each party wants a particular outcome so that you can better understand the situation from the perspective of others. This step includes defining what each party wants.
 - Find out where there might be agreement about outcomes. Be objective and don't allow personalities to get in the way of solving the problem.
 - Consider options – reach a compromise that all parties are able to accept – always try to be fair.
 - Work co-operatively to reach a mutually agreed outcome.
- **Using 'I' statements** makes it possible to describe how you feel and what you need without blaming others. For example, 'I feel as though you don't respect my needs when you get back late from

lunch. In future, please be back on time so that I can have my break'. In this example the person is stating what they are unhappy about, how it makes them feel and what they want to happen in the future. 'I' statements avoid placing blame; instead, they are factual and give the recipient a clear message about your needs and desired outcomes.

TO SHOW AND TELL OR NOT

Athena and Simon were at loggerheads about 'Show and Tell'. Athena says, *'We've been doing it for 15 years and the children love it'*. Simon argues that 'Show and Tell' is not developmentally appropriate and serves no real purpose in the program. He feels it is a waste of valuable time and that the children would benefit more from small group language sessions, which would allow more opportunities for interaction. The two cannot reach agreement and it is causing growing tension in the team.

Alanna, the director, encourages Athena and Simon to work through the steps in the conflict resolution process. When they still cannot agree, she assists, by helping them to use 'I' statements, listen to each other's point of view, and to compromise in order to reach a solution.



Summary

Child care workers are not just people 'who look after children' or 'who love working with children'. Caring for children in settings outside the home is becoming an increasingly complex and demanding role requiring specific professional knowledge and skills and the ability to work as a productive team member.

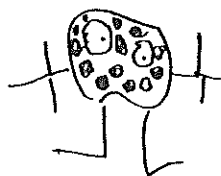
Your statement of duties or job description can be used to help monitor your known workplace performance. Depending on your workplace, you may have a supervisor or colleague who can assist you to develop work practices that will ensure that you perform your work effectively.

Some of you may work in services that have a formal process of performance review and constructive feedback to help you maintain a high standard of work practice. In reality, many carers must take responsibility for monitoring their own performance and productivity.

Carers who are committed to being professional and implementing 'best practice' in their work recognise the need to have professional knowledge, to take responsibility for self-evaluation and to continually improve their practice.

This chapter explored the importance of examining your own attitudes and beliefs about early childhood care and education and developing a personal philosophy as strategies for becoming a professional. You have been introduced to the personal, work and communication skills that will assist you to be a successful early childhood worker.

Everyone who works in child care must be committed to providing the best possible care and education for children. In early childhood services every carer plays an important role and every carer must work efficiently and effectively to enable the service to provide quality care that meets the needs of children and their families.

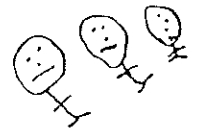


Think About

1. 'Good quality care must be reflected in attitudes as well as actions.' Think about your own attitudes and values in relation to the care and education of young children. How do you feel about infants under six months in long day care? How do you feel about very young children being in care five days per week? Is child care becoming a substitute for parenting?
2. What does being a professional mean to you? What attributes, skills and talents do you have that would contribute to your role as a child care professional?

Discussion

1. Re-read the scenario 'We Share all the Work' and discuss the meaning of teamwork in the context of children's services.



WE SHARE ALL THE WORK

Adele, a qualified early childhood teacher, was very surprised to find at her new centre that carers without formal qualifications were being given responsibility for program planning. Adele decided to raise her concerns with the director who became quite annoyed, saying, *'Everyone shares the role of planning for the children. All the staff are treated as equals!'*

Adele responded that while she was able to recognise that carers without formal qualifications certainly had a great deal to offer, they did not have the training in child development and learning theory. Adele expressed her view that it was reasonable to include these carers in the planning process, particularly in relation to their observations of individual children, but felt it was unfair to expect these carers to be actually responsible for planning. The director reluctantly agreed to raise the issue at a team meeting.

Later that evening Adele reflected on the director's comment that *'all the staff are treated as equals'*. Adele wondered how this could possibly be true when people were on different rates of pay and were either qualified or not qualified. She wondered if the director really considered herself as 'an equal' within the team.



2. Discuss why effective communication is the key to avoiding workplace conflict.

Activities

1. Think about your role, as either a student or a worker. Write down the strategies you use to prioritise your work. Identify areas for improvement.
2. List as many strategies as you can that might be used by staff to communicate with each other. Note the information that might be shared using each strategy.

