

#### Introduction

Relationships impact children’s social and emotional wellbeing and lay the foundation for quality education and care programs. Educators have a professional responsibility to intentionally work to support and develop deep and trusting relationships with every child.

Relationships are the foundations for the construction of identity - ‘who I am’, ‘how I belong’ and ‘what is my influence?’ (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p.20).

Relationships turn into partnerships when people share the responsibility of working together to achieve common goals. Collaborative partnerships involve educators working with families, other educators and professionals to improve understanding and expectations about children’s learning and development.

#### Definitions

<b>Key educators</b>	Key educators are responsible for developing, establishing and maintaining close reciprocal relationships with a small group of children and families. This is not an exclusive relationship, children establish attachments with multiple educators. (C&K Practice Guide: Birth to Three, 2017)
<b>Cultural competence</b>	Cultural competence is the way in which individuals and services work more effectively to support, promote and embrace cultural difference. Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honor differences. (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p.16)

#### Principles to guiding relationships and partnerships

- Children’s identity, learning, thinking and development occur when they have consistent, reliable, secure and predictable relationships with their key educators.
- When adults make decisions that affect children, children have the right to have their opinions considered. This requires adults to listen closely and involve children in decision making. (Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 12)
- To consolidate secure relationships, educators value and take time to build relationships with children, their families and education teams.
- When families and educators work together, they can share information and can focus on meeting each child’s needs and progressing their development.
- Collaborative partnerships between educators and professionals from other disciplines can improve outcomes for children and families.
- Utilise guiding frameworks such as the *Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics (2016)*, *C&K’s Inclusion Practice Guide (2018)* and *C&K’s Code of Conduct (2018)* to inform strengthening relationships with children, families, colleagues and communities.

#### Educators responsibilities

##### Interactions with children

- Spend time interacting with, listening and talking to every child. Ask children thoughtful and respectful questions in order to better understand them e.g. their ideas, likes, dislikes.
- Be emotionally available and respond sensitively to children’s cues, signals and attempts to initiate interactions and to be ‘close.’

- Support children’s secure attachment through consistent and warm interactions that show appropriate affection and are unhurried and predictable.
- Focus on what a child can do now, what they can do when supported and what it could look like in the future. This *strengths-based approach* builds a child’s sense of identity and wellbeing.
- Model pro-social behaviours such as sharing, turn taking, co-operating, initiating interactions and building empathy.
- Talk with children about their emotions and their reactions to situations to support their understanding of emotions and self-regulation.
- Mediate and assist children to negotiate their rights while respecting the rights of others.
- Support and scaffold children’s engagement and enjoyment in interactions with others through promoting social justice, equity and fairness.
- Include intentional teaching opportunities by sensitively responding to and extending on children’s ideas and thinking.
- Create time and opportunities to listen to children’s ideas and perspectives. Use small or whole group collaborative experiences for children to be heard and engaged in a democratic learning environment.
- Use professional and age-appropriate language when communicating with children. Demonstrate an understanding of children’s individual needs, and social and cultural backgrounds.
- Understand that all children, including those with disabilities and medical conditions, have the capacity to think and act for themselves. Ensure children have access to the required resources to grow and develop optimally.
- Be respectful and considered when responding to children’s behaviours by maintaining a calm voice and demeanour. Where practical, take a short break if feeling overwhelmed and / or ask a colleague for support. Refer to *Procedure Guiding Children’s Behaviour*.
- Display delight, encouragement and enthusiasm in children’s attempts and encourage them to succeed when faced with challenges.

### Interactions with families

- Support parents in their role as primary caregivers.
- Invite families to contribute to the program and share in children’s investigations, interests and discoveries.
- Keep families informed and encourage them to contribute to decision making about their child’s learning. Communication strategies include informal interactions at arrival and departure times or more formal engagement through pre-arranged meetings.

**Formal meetings with families should occur at least twice per year to share children’s progress and discuss goals for future learning.**

- Acknowledge and honour family diversity by building trusting relationships that respect cultural, spiritual and lifestyle choices.
- Take practical steps towards cultural competence:
  - Recognise how your own beliefs, values, bias and attitudes are shaped by your background and acknowledge how these factors impact others.
  - Increase knowledge and develop positive attitudes towards cultural differences by taking an interest in what is happening and is important to people in your community.
  - Embrace cultural celebrations as a way to learn about each other.

- Respect cultural differences and each other's identity and stand up to actions that erode these rights.
- Consult with families regarding the cultural appropriateness of the learning community.
- Give careful consideration and support to families who may feel isolated and alienated. Demonstrate understanding that past experiences may affect a family's ability to develop and contribute to relationships.
- Actively seek family feedback about their child's experiences and learning (e.g. Quality Improvement Plan contributions, feedback box, surveys).
- When required, provide families with relevant information regarding support agencies, training, specialists, counselling and / or funding to enable access and participation.

### Interactions with community

- Gain local knowledge (including traditional knowledge) and work collaboratively with the local community.
- Advocate and raise awareness of issues impacting children, families and the education and care sector.
- Utilise the *Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)* (and other community data) to inform curriculum planning and strengthen local community networks.
- When appropriate, mentor other educators, students and volunteers.
- Collaborate and build partnerships with local agencies, professionals and schools to support positive experiences, transitions and outcomes for children and families.
- Ensure information regarding support agencies / community services is accessible and shared with families.
- When available and appropriate, participate in community stakeholder meetings and respect the diverse perspectives and knowledge of other professionals.

### Responsibilities of families

- Share relevant information with educators about their child's experiences, interests and needs.
- Respect the diversity and differences of other children, families and staff.
- Carefully consider the advice and support of educators and other professional partners.
- At all times, follow the *C&K Parental Code of Conduct*.
- Respect and comply with reasonable educator requests.
- Follow the *Procedure Complaint Management* when providing feedback.

### Acknowledgements and references

- Association for Child Education International, 2018 [Children's Rights and ACEI's Love Me, teach Me campaign](#)
- Commonwealth of Australia [Australian Early Development Census, 2014-2015](#)
- Australian Government: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace, 2009. *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. 1st ed. Canberra: Australian Government.
- [Early Childhood Australia \(2016\) Code of Ethics](#).
- ECA, 2012. National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program. *Relationships with Children*. Australian Government DEEWR
- [Early Childhood Resource Hub](#)
- The National Quality Standard, Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)
- UN, 1990. Convention on the Rights of the Child