

# a risk management approach to practice

A message from the  
National Childcare  
Accreditation Council

Family day care is a unique and rewarding experience which offers a range of learning opportunities for children, families, carers and coordination unit staff. From building respectful partnerships and celebrating diversity to meeting children's individual needs and interests, these experiences contribute to providing positive outcomes for children.

Family day care is also a delicate balancing act and can be, at times, challenging. Each stakeholder group relies upon the other for support and guidance so that the scheme can continually improve its standard of practice.

## Collaborate with each other

Ensuring that recommended practices are consistently implemented and reflected in the scheme's policies and procedures is one of these challenges. Every family day care home is different and each carer brings their own perceptions and understanding of what quality child care looks like and how it should be implemented.

Coordination unit staff and carers should work collaboratively when reflecting on, reviewing or improving the scheme's practices. This can help to ensure that each person's voice is heard and their ideas respected, because people take responsibility for what they do every day when they contribute to making decisions about their practice.

Adopting a risk management approach is one way to ensure everyone's needs are being met. Commonly used when assessing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) risks in the workplace, this approach identifies, assesses, eliminates, minimises or controls risks which can potentially cause harm to people or damage to the carer's home.

## Implement a risk management approach

Staff and carers are encouraged to read NCAC's *Sample Occupational Health and Safety Policy Template*<sup>1</sup> and adapt the information to meet the scheme's unique circumstances:

### 1. Find recommendations

- Are the recommendations up to date and from a recognised authority?
- Do the recommendations meet with standards outlined in the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) *Quality Practices Guide*?

### 2. Identify risks <sup>2</sup>

- What types of risk such as an object, situation, event, material or substance can be identified in the carer's home? For example, a carer who has pets, transports children to school or whose home has a flight of stairs.
- What is the nature of the risk and can it be influenced by external factors such as the environment or weather? For example, flowering plants which attract bees or outdoor areas exposed to direct sunlight.
- How often is the risk likely to occur? For example, a carer who lives on a main road which may be busier at certain times of the day.

### 3. Assess risks

Schemes can assess risks by considering the likelihood of them occurring in normal or abnormal conditions. For example, by referring to past incident reports or near misses, schemes can assess when risks may be more likely to happen.

### 4. Control risks

Schemes can decide whether each risk can be eliminated or minimised from occurring. For example, a poisonous plant in a carer's garden can be removed

(eliminated) or isolated (minimised). Controlling risks also includes using protective equipment such as wearing gloves when changing nappies to maintain hygiene standards.

### 5. Evaluate the management of risks

Schemes should evaluate the effectiveness of their risk management strategies. For example, regularly reviewing policies or recording control mechanisms such as building and equipment safety checks, reporting incidents and documenting evacuation drills.

## Use scenarios in a risk management approach

Developing scenarios can help coordination unit staff and carers to adopt a risk management approach to practice. The following examples illustrate this process:

### Scenario 1:

**Our scheme has a carer who does not feel confident in going out with children. How can we help the carer meet FDCQA indicator 3.1.3 – There is a balance between staying at home and going out?**

The intent of this indicator is to ensure that children have a balance of positive home and going out experiences which are safe and meet the children's interests and needs. 'Going out' does not have to involve a full scale outing or excursion. It can involve walking to the carer's letterbox, watching the garbage truck emptying the bins or visiting the next door neighbour. These simple experiences provide lots of interesting things to see and talk about.

The coordination unit staff should discuss with the carer the types of experiences the carer can implement which can help to build her confidence

<sup>1</sup> NCAC's Sample Occupational Health and Safety Policy Template is located on the NCAC website ([www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)).

<sup>2</sup> A near miss should also be identified as a risk. For example, if a child stumbles over loose carpeting but does not fall over it should be identified as a potential risk because if not controlled, another child may stumble, fall and hurt themselves. If the risk had been eliminated, the second child may not have been harmed.

and protect children. For example, there may be opportunities for the coordination unit to collect the carer and children and transport them to a play session; or another carer may be able to visit and together they can go on an outing to the park. Schemes can reinforce the types of safety strategies that the carer can implement which help to protect children such as supervising children, being aware of the environment and knowing the behaviours of individual children.

#### Scenario 2:

The scheme has a policy on separating domestic pets from areas where children play. Some carers like to include their pets in children's play experiences. How can we effectively manage the risks involved?

There are several safety and hygiene issues relating to children and animals coming in contact with each other. It is essential that any risk to a child's health and safety be minimised to ensure their protection and wellbeing. This also includes protecting animals from harm because children may not always understand how their actions may potentially hurt an animal. For example, pulling a cat's tail or poking a dog in the eye.

The range of pets that carers may have will vary greatly and there is no one way to keep children and animals separate. It may be useful for carers to consider the following questions when developing a risk management approach:

- How will I supervise my pets when they are involved in a children's experience? How far from the pet's area are experiences set up for children? Can children come into contact with the animal's food, drinking water, urine or faeces?
- What is the likelihood of a child being alone with my pet?
- What types of physical barriers currently separate the children from my pet? For example, can children put their hands or fingers through the barrier? How can these be improved to ensure children are kept safe from harm?



- If the pet has access to the children's play area when children are not in care, how is the area checked and cleaned before children arrive?
- What strategies are in place if a child is harmed by a pet or animal? For example, do I have a first aid plan?


#### Scenario 3:

The carer's backyard is adjacent to a local park and rubbish is often thrown over the fence. How can the carer ensure that she is meeting FDCQA indicator 4.1.7 – Premises, grounds, equipment and furnishings are maintained in a safe, clean condition and in good repair at all times?

The intent of this indicator is that the scheme ensures that the family day care indoor and outdoor environment is safe and hygienic. Staff and carers should discuss how they can implement regular safety checks and that enlisting the help from carers' families to maintain a safe environment is an important step. In the above scenario, the carer has identified the risk but cannot eliminate it. She needs to develop strategies which control the risk from becoming a hazard to children such as checking the backyard each morning before children arrive in care.

#### Conclusion

Adopting a risk management approach does take time and a commitment by staff, carers and their families and the families who access care, if it is to succeed. The outcomes can ensure the health and safety of children, which should be everyone's first consideration.

For further information about developing a risk management approach to practice, telephone a NCAC Child Care Adviser on 1300 136 554, e-mail ([qualitycare@ncac.gov.au](mailto:qualitycare@ncac.gov.au)) or access NCAC's Factsheets or *Putting Children First* magazine from the NCAC website ([www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)). 

#### Sources and further reading:

- McFarlane, J. (2006). A collaborative approach in family day care. *Family Day Care Quality Assurance Factsheet #10*. Sydney, NSW: National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.
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- Owens, A. (2007). Animals and domestic pets. *Family Day Care Quality Assurance Factsheet #11*. Sydney, NSW: National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.