

Why have a family handbook?

A family handbook tells families all the basic information they need to know about an OOSH service. It is a way of letting the family know about important policies that may effect their interactions with the service- such as policies on late fees, behaviour management, sign in/ sign out procedures etc. Having a family handbook informs families of the mutual obligations off all involved in the OOSH service. Access to a full policy manual should still be made available for families should they be interested in seeing more detailed explanations of the way the OOSH operates.

This information package is designed as a guide and suggested list of content to use when developing your centre's Family Handbook. Sections should be modified/ omitted/ expanded upon dependant on the individual centres needs. When developed it is a good idea to give the Family Handbook to all families currently using the service and then to new families on enrolment.

1. Welcome and introduction to OOSH

A typical starting paragraph for your family handbook could sound like:



"The Out of School Hours (OOSH) service offers centre based care for children aged 5-12 years for before and after school during the term, (all day during school holidays). Its purpose is to create a safe and caring environment where children can freely choose amongst the program of activities."

Perhaps add a few lines of welcome to new families at your centre and a few lines about what makes your centre unique, i.e. the schools it services, and details about the organisation who sponsors (owns) the service.

2. Address and phone number details

In this section state:

- the centre's location
- postal address if different to street address
- phone number; land and/or mobile
- fax number if you have access to a fax machine
- also state your CCB Customer Reference Numbers for all components of your service

3. Philosophy / aims / objectives

By stating the centre's philosophy, families are provided with a background of the service's commitment to children's needs, interests, happiness and safety. A philosophy also provides families with an idea of the centre's programming style.



4. OSHC Quality Assurance

Specify what OSHCQA is about and why the Centre is registered as apart of the process. Inform parents of the importance of their role in accreditation and encourage their involvement.

5. Hours of operation

Specify the opening and closing times for the morning, afternoon and vacation care sessions. Remember centre times may be different for Term 1, then to the rest of the year, due to kindergarten finishing times. It would also be appropriate to identify the days throughout the year in which the centre will be closed, e.g. public holidays and any usual period of closure over the Christmas break. Indicate the centre's policy for pupil free days, teacher strike days or other less predictable events. Note the appropriate times at which the Co-ordinator can be contacted throughout the day.

6. Service management structure

This is where you state how your centre is managed. Clearly indicate whether the sponsor is:

- An Incorporated Association lead by a volunteer management committee
- A council operated service managed by council staff and or a parent advisory committee
- A church group
- Umbrella sponsor lead by an administrator
- A sub-committee of an umbrella sponsor body, e.g. P&C Association
- A private for profit service

Indicate the management's commitment to manage the service according to the National Standards for Out of School Hours Care. If appropriate encourage parent involvement in the centre's activities and participation in general parent meetings or family events.

7. Staffing / staff ratios

It may not be appropriate to name the staff working at the centre, as this changes from time to time. Identify whether staff are qualified / trained or experienced.

For example:

"This centre operates with appropriate staff to child ratios of 1:15. Experienced and/or qualified supervisors and assistants are employed to provide quality care for our children. Staff are committed to programming and implementing a variety of activities that facilitate fun, excitement and discovery within a safe and caring environment. This service complies with the Working With Children Check as required by the Commission for Children and Young People."

8. Schedule of fees

Points you need to consider and inform families of are as follows:

- Provide some basic CCB information for the families – stating that they need to contact the Family Assistance Office for further help with CCB.
- The morning, afternoon and vacation care session fees, which apply to your centre.
- Whether the centre has different charges for casual and permanent bookings.
- Late fees and how they will apply, e.g. \$10.00 for every 10 mins or part thereof. Will this be charged to the families' account or will they have to pay up front when collecting their child? This needs to be clearly stated.
- Any other fees, e.g. a non-notification fee for when children are booked in but the centre is not informed of their absence on that day.
- Will you be charging parents separately for the Association Membership Fee and the Personal Accident for Children Insurance? If so don't forget to include GST.
- When and how will the fees be paid? Will fees be accepted only on certain days of the week? Will you only accept cheques? Is Eftpos available? Are you going to have a fees box for cheques to be deposited or which staff member should be handed any fee payments?
- When receipts will be issued.
- It is important to note that fees are payable for all advance bookings whether the child attends or not.

9. Sign in / sign out procedure

Child Care Benefit regulations require families to sign attendance records as proof of attendance. Outline the centre's sign in and sign out procedures. Also advise families that:

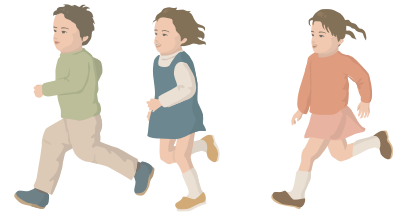
- Children are only released from the centre to persons nominated by the family on the enrolment form.
- The family must let the centre know when someone different will be picking up his or her child.
- Family members must notify the centre of any custody arrangements or court orders that impact on the collection of children.
- Children are not to leave the centre unaccompanied unless written permission from their family has been negotiated with the Co-ordinator.
- Families must be notified that responsibility for their child only begins once the child has entered the centre.

10. Medication policy / unwell children / accident policy

Centres will establish their own guidelines as to whether or not prescribed medication will be accepted and administered to children. If yes, centre procedures will include:

- Written consent form detailing the date, child's name, name of medication, dosage and time to be given to accompany the medication.
- Medication must be in its original container and usage date must be current.

As a general rule the centre has the right to exclude children or notify family members to pick up their child, if children have symptoms of a contagious infection or are ill. The centre may wish to list the symptoms for exclusion and the number of days in which a child should be kept at home with respect to certain infectious diseases such as Chickenpox, Measles, Conjunctivitis, Head Lice, etc. CCB policy requiring children to be immunised in order to access full benefits could be included in this section.



In terms of administering first aid, upon enrolment, the family must give signed consent enabling centre staff to administer First Aid when a child is in need of immediate medical attention. Outline the procedures to be followed. For example:

"Qualified first aid staff would attend to child, medical attention and/or ambulance would be called to attend or transport the child, family would be notified of action, the incident would be recorded in the accidents record book. Every care will be taken and without delay to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child."

11. Sun safe policy

Centres tend to apply similar rules here as for school. No Hat! No Play! Or "No hat, play in the shade!" You may also like to note whether the centre will supply sunscreen for the children or whether families are required to supply their own.

12. Discipline policy / procedures

The purpose of a discipline policy is to provide reassurance for all children, families and staff of the centre. This section would be as detailed or as brief as necessary. It may include:

- An explanation of what steps staff will undertake to encourage positive behaviour
- What is expected of the children
- Which type of behaviours will not be tolerated
- Procedures for a child's exclusion and/or suspension

Where appropriate centres may adopt similar discipline policies and procedures as set by the school. It would be advisable to confirm that staff will continually provide positive guidance towards acceptable behaviour and that centre rules will be reinforced through signs, group meetings etc.

13. Centre Rules

Again this section will differ from centre to centre. To include the centre rules as part of your family handbook every new family will receive a copy of the current behavioural expectations of the children. Be aware that every time you revise the centre rules, the Handbook will need to be also updated and families informed.

14. Centre Routine

This section may be useful in order to inform families of the centre daily routine and assist them with their drop off and pick up times.

15. Meals

One of the first questions families will ask when enrolling their child, "do you provide the children with a snack after school?"

Therefore it is necessary to make a statement regarding what food is offered at the centre, ie.

afternoon tea and/or breakfast during both the school terms and vacation care periods.

It is advisable to note that the centre will provide for children's nutritional needs, will foster good eating habits and take into account cultural considerations and children with food allergies.

Examples of what is usually served could be stated.



16. Homework Session

If the centre plans to include a homework session in the afternoon routine, it would be advisable to compile a homework policy and include it in the family handbook. Indicate that whilst the completion of daily homework is encouraged, children will not be forced. Families are also reminded that individual tutoring by the childcare staff is not appropriate.

17. Grievance/Complaints Procedure

Inform families of their rights to express any concerns they may have in relation to the Centre. Encourage families to approach staff to discuss issues. Provide steps available for grievance issues.

18. Policies Book

Inform families of the availability of all centre policies and procedures for their perusal, and whom to ask about reading / getting a copy of specific policies.

Refer to Network's 'Policies in Practice' manual for more information.

19. Family Agreement

The purpose of the family agreement is to obtain the parent's signature as a confirmation that they have read, understand and agree to abide by the centre's policies and procedures.

For example:

I agree to abide by the Policy Statements and Procedures of this centre, a summary of which I have received, read and understood. I understand that casual care is subject to availability at the Centre.

SignedDated

Other comments you may wish to include in a Family Handbook are:

- Permission for administering Panadol.
- Permission for the child to be observed or photographed by staff or Tafe students for study or publicity purposes.

Signed permission forms can be included as part of the centre's enrolment form so that the centre has on record signed family consent / refusal.