

The Facts....

The NSW Department of Community Services under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and the Children's Services Regulation 2004, has decided that children who have not yet commenced school but who are enrolled to attend school may access Vacation Care services in the January school holidays for that year.



The Decision...

Vacation Care services can choose to grant access to preschool children in the January school holidays under the condition the children are enrolled to start school in the current year.

Once a service elects to accept preschool children in the January holiday period, the service needs to understand and consider the implications required to meet the Duty of Care of these specific children. These include policies, procedures, staffing issues, resources, and transition.

The following information is designed to highlight the considerations and strategies for a Vacation Care service that elects to accept these children in their Vacation Care service.

The Considerations:

1. Policy Development

Once the service has determined they will accept preschool children in the January period, a policy will need to be developed outlining access, inclusion, programming and procedures.

2. Staff/Child Ratios

Services need to recognise that a lower ratio may be required to supervise the preschool age child and this should be factored into the centre's budget, fee scale, staffing numbers, resources and supervision.

3. Staff Experience

Establish the level of experience the members of staff have with working with preschool aged children. Plan rosters to balance experienced staff with less experienced, arrange training for staff and include all staff in developing strategies for supervision, programming and care.

4. Transition

Preschool aged children are the youngest of the group and will therefore bring with them individual needs, fears, experiences and abilities. Services need to incorporate specific transition arrangements to cater for preschool children. Refer below for examples of transition tools.

5. Program Implications

The program and activities, including excursions, will need to accommodate the age ranges of both new and existing children attending. Planning considerations include the number of resources, the time of day, routines, peer groups, meal times, energy levels and social/emotional development of the children.

Essential Preparations

Transition Tools

- Invite the children to visit the centre, meet the other children and staff, and familiarise themselves with their new surroundings before their first day
- Design an information booklet about things the child might need to know on their first day, such as
 - What to bring, including provision of food and lots of little snacks throughout the day.
 - Where to put their bag
 - Who they can ask for help
 - Where are the toilets and how to use them (never assume!)?
 - Access to drinking water
 - Possible activities on offer
 - General routine of day
 - Name of staff
 - Rules of centre
 - Buddy system
- Include in the enrolment package a one page sheet "All About Me!" asking about the child's likes, dislikes, hobbies, etc.
- Even the most careful of children may have accidents so ask all families to pack spare underpants and a change of clothes.

Programming and staffing

- Most preschoolers are accustomed to routine, however they may require additional direction, patience and tolerance from the staff and children
- Plan a program with a variety of interesting activities that can be easily adapted to suit their needs and abilities
- Find out what the children enjoy doing to help plan the activities
- Children may be tired at the end of the day and quiet activities or areas provide an opportunity to rest.
- Schedule a quieter afternoon to encourage rest for the little ones.
- Have regular times throughout the day for preschoolers to have a drink and go to the toilet to avoid accidents and dehydration.
- Allocate a staff member to oversee younger children including assistance with regular toileting routines throughout the day, encouraging participation in activities, assistance with lunches and snacks and reminder regarding routines.

Resources

- Preschool children come with their own skills, abilities and limitations and resources should reflect the individual needs of these children
- Remind children they can access available resources as they wish
- Have a spare couple of sets of size 6 underpants and shorts and tops for accidents.
- Provide additional resources so older children aren't frustrated by younger children taking a longer time.
- Set up two tables for some activities so younger children can participate at their own level without disturbing the process for older children.

Excursions

- When planning excursions consider the additional requirements that may be required such as, excursions to public areas will require extra staff to assist with supervision, or catching trains or buses may require smaller groups, etc.
- Limit excursions that involve complex transport or venue arrangements to older children or save for the next set of holidays.
- Be sensitive to children's physical limitations particular on long day excursions and hot days.
- Investigate in-house excursions and visitors particularly for afternoon sessions and in the heat of the day.