



Excluding Children

Legally, there is nothing prohibiting OOSH services from excluding a child, except in cases where the Human Rights Act protects individuals (including children) from discrimination solely on the grounds of their ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, etc.

There can be a number of reasons why children may be excluded from an OOSH service, including:

- ★ Because their behaviour is a danger to themselves or others
- ★ Because their behaviour requires extensive supervision from staff that may be to the detriment of other children (for example, a child constantly going out of bounds and staff required to leave the area to retrieve him/her)
- ★ Because they are extremely insolent, disruptive, persistently disobedient or violent

Apart from the above reasons, there may be reasons that are not related to a child's behaviour that may warrant a child's exclusion or temporary suspension, for example:

- ★ Repeated and frequent late collection of the child by the parent/guardian
- ★ Fees consistently unpaid by the parent/guardian

In relation to children's behaviour, expulsion and/or suspension should be considered as a last resort. The OOSH service needs to ensure that there is a clear policy and procedure for excluding a child; that the grounds for exclusion are documented and that all parent/guardians are aware of the policy. The policy should include the procedure for the parent/guardian's right of appeal.

The following information outlines a general approach for dealing with situations where a child's behaviour is causing the staff concerns.

BEFORE THE FINAL STEP

Excluding children should be the last step and before doing so, staff need to give careful consideration to what is happening with the child in question. Consider the following:

- ★ Is their behaviour really a problem? How disruptive is it to the other children? Can it be



redirected? Can the program be planned more effectively to cater for the child's needs and interests?

- ★ What do the other staff members think about the child's behaviour? If there is conflict between one particular staff member and the child, how can this be diverted?

- ★ What is the nature of the conflict staff are having with the child? Is it a case of the child testing the staff member's limits, or is the child genuinely dissatisfied with being at the centre? What has been done about this?

- ★ Could a temporary suspension or a reduction in the number of enrolled days help ease the situation?

- ★ Talk to the child about the situation. Try and find out how the program could provide for them. For example, if the child is an active and disruptive 9-10 year old boy and all staff members are female,

would a male staff member or volunteer be a positive role model?

- ★ Make sure the child understands that, no matter how much disruption they are causing, the staff have confidence in his/her ability to change their behaviour and that the staff want to help them do so.

- ★ When the staff have worked through the above points and are clear about what the problem is, it is then essential to bring the parents/guardian into the picture.

TALKING TO PARENTS/GUARDIAN

This may not be the first time staff have spoken to the parents about a child's behaviour, but it may be the first time a parent realises the seriousness of the situation and the consequences of their child's behaviour.

It is important to look at it from the parent's perspective – a casual comment by a staff member about their child 'playing up' may be noted by the parent, but they may not consider further action is required – and generally, most staff members may not expect further action from the parents.

However, if a staff member has had to sit the child down and give them a 'serious talking to', then parents need to know this, otherwise it can cause problems if a child gives their version of the incident at home.

When talking to parents, keep in mind the following:

- ★ Always start with the positive points of the child's behaviour that was observed throughout the day.
- ★ Prepare what you want to say beforehand. Be specific and comment on the behaviour that was observed. Avoid making generalisations like "he always", "she never"... and keep to only one or two of the most serious behaviour problems, rather than a long list that can seem very daunting to a parent.
- ★ Give parents time to respond and get their view across, but do not let them turn the responsibility back onto the centre by blaming the program for how their child is behaving.
- ★ If the child's behaviour is serious enough to consider expulsion or suspension for a short period, make it clear to parents that the behaviour must cease in order for the child to be allowed to return to the centre.

- ★ Discuss the option of drawing up a contract that the child and parents agree to. The contract should list the undesirable behaviour and a deadline by which the behaviour should improve. Very serious behaviour may have no deadline – it may be a case of 'if it happens again' - the child will be excluded.
- ★ Stress your confidence in the child's ability to change, but also stress that the safety of other children and staff must not be jeopardised.
- ★ Advise parents how and when you will follow up with them about their child's progress.



OTHER RELEVANT OOSH DEVELOPMENT FACTSHEETS:

- ★ #12 FAMILY HANDBOOKS
- ★ #39 HARD ISSUES
- ★ #38 STAYING CALM



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