

SHORT COURSES FOR VACATION CARE WORKERS

Course Number 5: Running Group Activities

Course Duration 1.5 hours

Aim

This course provides you with an opportunity to learn more about what is required to successfully work in a Vacation Care program. Participants will be shown how to set up and run group activities with both small and large groups of children.

Learning Outcomes

- Participants will have the opportunity to learn how to develop a cooperative approach in running group activities
- Participants will be shown how to communicate guidelines to both children and staff
- Participants will be shown how to establish relationships with the group

Resources

The organisation of resources is essential to the success of any group activities or project. Centres need to know that they have the necessary resources on hand before staff can commence any group activity whether it be games, craft or an excursion.

Equipment and Materials

Funding for vacation care is limited making it difficult to purchase equipment. Materials can often be obtained cheaply and children can have lots of fun with a variety of inexpensive resources. To purchase more substantial items of equipment, it may be worthwhile to try to establish an equipment purchase reserve from the occasional times when the centre has a surplus of funds.

Beg and Borrow

It is a good idea to try and obtain local donations of equipment, tools and materials from parents, local business and organisation, and the local council. The same local groups may lend you tools and equipment that you would otherwise have to buy. Also look to community groups and other vacation care services that may have equipment for a specific activity that the centre could borrow.

A Choice of Group Activities

It is important to remember that the vacation care program is not school. It is the children's free time. They are on holidays and should be able to choose what they want to do. Choices and options should be available to all children.



Within any week, there may be some activities, events and excursions that have been pre-planned and some times when vacation care assistants will be required to organise and run some activities themselves.

Have some 'simple - no fuss' activities ideas at hand for those frustrating times like waiting in a queue at an excursion venue, waiting for the bus or afternoon tea, or when filling in time between activities.

Activity 1

What specific skills and interests do you possess that may help you run a group activity?

Where can you find out about new activities suitable for groups?

Where do you keep information and ideas on activities and games suitable for groups of school age children?

Excursions

Excursions are an essential part of vacation care programs. For children they make for a real holiday.

Excursions need not be expensive and some of the least costly can be the most fun. It is important to include all children and low income families should not be excluded because of cost. Consider this carefully when planning your excursions.

Excursions offer a break from the centre and provide an opportunity to widen children's experiences of the non-school world. Consider providing a balance in the day's outing, between concentration and 'letting off steam' - follow a visit to the museum with a visit to the park.

The following publications contain information and policies and procedures for excursions:

Excursions Policy and Guidelines NSW Department of Community Services (1993)

The Voluntary Code of Practice for OSHC Services in NSW NSW Department of Community Services and Network of Community Activities (1993)

National Standards for OSHC (1995)

Policies in Practice Network of Community Activities (2000)

Some important points to consider:

Excursions should be well planned and organised in advance.

- Try to check the venue beforehand.
- Permission notes for each separate excursion are essential so that parents know the itinerary and times of return.
- Arrange times carefully so that excursions are completed and the group is back at the centre by closing time. If children walk regularly to a local park or library one general permission note can be obtained.
- Staff should be actively involved with children at all times. Children should never be left alone, It is a good idea to allocate staff to small groups. Ensure that staff are visible to the children at all times.
- Call the roll or do a head count before moving to a different excursion area and/or going on to the bus or other transport.
- If an excursion venue is going to be crowded, nominate a meeting point in case a child becomes separated from the group.
- Remember that specialists who may be contracted by your service to run an activity or as a guide are not responsible for the safety of your group unless specific arrangements have been made. Staff should always remain responsible for the group.

- Outings with a purpose add interest and variety to the program and are especially desirable in areas of restricted space and play opportunities.
- Take into account: weather, times and seasons, accessibility of transport and costs involved.
- Have contingency plans if an excursion has to be called off at short notice because of: impossible weather conditions, sudden hazards (bush fires, road blocks), epidemics (flu, measles).
- Bring the world to the centre - use videos, CD's, photos, books, reference materials and build models.
- Do not put individual name tags on children - you can put the centre's name and phone contact, some older children may like to have this on a card.

Activity 2

Develop a brief contingency plan in case an excursion had to be cancelled at short notice. Include the following - who would you notify? What would be an alternative activity?

How could you easily identify children in your group on an excursion?

Establish Group Rules and Responsibilities

A common goal of vacation care programs is to provide children with a safe and healthy environment that supports their social and emotional development. A positive environment must be maintained for effective group work.

A positive group environment is one where:

- We feel respected
- Our contribution is valued
- We are encouraged to contribute
- We enjoy working with others

After experiencing a negative group environment, we feel less confident and less capable, and we often feel angry or upset or worthless after our experience.

Children have similar feelings yet may not be able to express them. It is important for vacation care workers to maintain a positive group environment for children at their centre.

In a negative group environment, children develop skills in the abuse of power, by bullying and manipulating other children. Bullying may take the form of physical abuse or verbal abuse such as name calling and put downs. It is the workers responsibility to watch for signs of a negative group environment and to take effective steps to change a negative environment into a positive experience.

Guidelines for establishing centre rules

- ✓ Have as few rules as possible
- ✓ State rules positively
- ✓ Have rules that describe observable behaviour
- ✓ Involve children in devising rules
- ✓ Include consequences for breaking rules
- ✓ Display rules for all to see

Activity 3

What are the benefits to children of being in a positive group environment?

Think back to a time when you had a positive experience of working in a group. List some of the rules that helped you to feel comfortable with the group and to feel that the group valued you.

Community Resources

By involving the community in the vacation care program staff can create a wider support network for the centre. Children and staff benefit by having others involved which in turn helps to enrich the community. There are an infinite variety of skills and expertise out there so use them.

Hold a Brainstorming Session

Every community is different and has its own profile. Get together with other staff, committee members, parents and community members and on large sheets of butcher's paper write down ideas of where in the community the service may be able to gain assistance. The results of the session can be divided into sections and formed into registers providing a valuable resource for the service. If compiled into loose leaf format information can always be updated.

Children are also an excellent resource for ideas and what they would like to do on their holidays. Hold brainstorming sessions with children from the centre or community and you will quickly be able to write your vacation care program.

Activity 4

Make a note of places and/or people in your community where you can go for assistance and resources.

Recommended Resource

Vacation Care Training and Resource Kit available from Network

Useful publications available from Network

see Network's website www.netoosh.org.au

Accentuate the Positive

Play Rights and Responsibilities

National Standards for Out of School Care