

SHORT COURSES FOR VACATION CARE WORKERS

Course Number 1: Orientation to Vacation Care

Course duration 1.5 hours

Aim

This course aims to provide new vacation care workers with a basic understanding of their roles and responsibilities in vacation care.

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will gain an understanding of vacation care and the role of vacation care workers.
- Participants will discuss how to form a positive relationship with children and communicate with children on an ongoing basis.
- Participants will be given information on respecting similarities and differences among children and how to encourage children to respect these similarities and differences.

Topic One - Roles and Responsibilities of Vacation Care Staff

Staff must know what their responsibilities are prior to the start of the program and if unclear they should ask their coordinator.

The following points are a guide for all staff working in vacation care:

- Arrive at the centre on or before time rostered on duty.
- Do things that need to be done without having to be asked.
- Step in and help if other staff are busy
- Be consistent with other staff in the treatment and guidance of children
- Attend staff meetings
- Try to know the areas of strengths and weaknesses of all staff members

The staff of vacation programs have a vital role to play in ensuring the program operates effectively and safely and that the children receive a high quality of care and experiences.

Vacation Care staff are responsible for/and have a duty of care for the children while they are at the centre and need to:

- Follow all the rules and regulations of the centre
- Ensure that all possible precautions are taken to avoid accidents
- Remember to regularly look around (scan) to see what the children are doing
- Guide and supervise activities and implement daily routines
- Establish and apply appropriate guidelines that encourage positive behaviour
- Communicate effectively with other staff
- Assist in the planning, implementation and evaluation of a program to meet the needs of all children in attendance



Activity 1

In small groups complete a 'Who Is Responsible?' checklist for your vacation care service.

Topic 2 - Supervision and Safety

Staff must do whatever they can to make sure that the children are safe at all times. Staff need to work together as a team and to remain aware of the children's whereabouts.

Staff have a duty to adequately supervise children. If the group is large and involved in a number of activities in different areas, it is important that staff are able to see all children at all times. The amount of supervision varies according to the activity taking place. Children conducting a science experiment may require close and constant attention. While others painting or playing card games are less likely to have an accident. Staff can keep an eye on them from a distance and periodically stop to see if they need assistance.

Basic Guidelines for Supervision

- Stand near equipment when it is in use and pay attention to the children
- Provide constant, close supervision over active sports and games and activities using hazardous materials or equipment.
- Participate with the children, not in conversations with other staff members
- If children are spread out in a large area, be sure one staff member can move from place to place to view the entire area and monitor what everyone is doing
- Make sure you can see all of the children you are supervising
- Face children you are supervising (don't turn your back on a group of children)
- If children are both inside and outside, place staff inside and outside
- Intervene immediately if children are in potentially dangerous situations
- Ensure children are supervised in the kitchen, storeroom or areas where dangerous appliances are kept
- Follow service procedures for children going to the toilet
- Plan the environment to minimise potential danger - separate active ball games from quieter activities.

Duty of Care

Vacation care staff have a duty to appropriately care for children attending the program. In legal terms this is called a Duty of Care. Staff must ensure that their behaviour with, and supervision, the children is more than adequate and that they do everything in power to make sure that accidents are prevented.

Staff must ensure that they take precautions to cover their own actions, as well as providing a safe environment where the chances of accidents are minimised.

The following basic guidelines should be observed (note they are only an indication of what is expected)

- Children should never be placed in a potentially dangerous situation, such as being asked to retrieve a ball from the roof
- All appliances and equipment used by the children must be maintained in a safe condition
- Staff should be aware of, and prevent where possible, situations wherever children may injure each other

- Staff should exercise particularly rigorous care with children away from the centre

The bottom line is: YOU must be responsible NOT to place yourself or your fellow workers in a position of possible neglect.

It is the responsibility of all staff to be aware of all children and parents in their area of supervision.

Activity 2

List four things that can affect the safety of the children in your vacation care centre.

How can staff help in making the centre a safer place for children? Discuss this in a small group.

Topic 3 - Communication for Positive Relationships

Staff who are successful in vacation care work hard at building positive relationships with all children in their program. Relationship building starts the first time you interact with a child.

Effective communication between staff and children is vital for relationships to grow and flourish. It is important that:

- Messages to children are clear, realistic and appropriate
- Language used is age appropriate
- Children have the opportunity to ask staff questions and clarify staff decisions
- Children have a say in decisions that will directly affect them
- Children are informed about the daily routine, program and any changes at the centre
- Staff role model effective communication skills with each other
- Staff and children listen to each other
- Children are encouraged to express their feelings and ideas in a safe, non-judgmental environment
- Positive body language is used at all times - eye contact if appropriate, facing children when you talk, smiling etc
- When staff are working with children who are exhibiting challenging behaviour, they role model the behaviour they want the child to adopt. Role model new skills, new ways of dealing with conflict and difficult situations
- Staff consistently assess messages they are giving children, both verbal and non-verbal

Strategies for Effective Communication for Positive Relationships

Relationships are built on basic foundations of respect, honesty and equality - treat children as you would like to be treated. Staff need to provide a supportive environment for children to feel confident, to try new skills, to make new friends and to enjoy themselves.

Consider the following do you:

- Provide a fun, active program
- Provide choices
- Be enthusiastic
- Speak to all children as equals
- Learn the names of all children and call them by name
- Establish a relationship with each child
- Avoid making judgments or labeling children

- Involve yourself in games and activities
- Encourage
- Bring a sense of humour

If the program is variable and exciting and the staff are enthusiastic, fun and sensitive to the needs of individual children, there is a good chance the children will have a good time and so will the staff.

Respecting Differences

While school age children have many things in common, they are also different from each other.

- They have different interests. They like to choose what they will do in vacation care. To support different interests, staff need to provide a mixture of activities.
- They have different abilities, talents skills and learning styles. Staff can help children make the most of their unique capabilities
- They come from different backgrounds. Children in vacation care program come from many different cultures, races and socio-economic groups. Each family represented in your program has its own beliefs, values, traditions and lifestyle.
- It is also likely that many different family structures are represented in your program, some families are headed by a single parents. Others may be where both parents work, outside the home. There may also be families headed by a foster parent or by a family member such as a grandparent or an uncle or aunt.

Remember diversity matters!

Activity 3

In small groups develop a brief profile of the children in your vacation care program, consider their ages, interests, abilities and backgrounds.

Thinking about the centre you work at, list different ways you feel staff build positive relationships with the children in their care (eg. All staff know the children's names).

What kind of play environment do you want children to experience? How can you as a vacation care worker make a positive influence in a child's day?

Recommended Resource

Vacation Care Training and Resource Kit available from Network

Useful publications available from Network

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

Code of Professional Conduct

Play Rights and responsibilities