INTERACTION WITH CHILDREN

QUALITY AREA 5 – RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

PURPOSE

This policy provides a clear set of guidelines to ensure:

- the development of responsive, warm, trusting and respectful relationships with children that promote their wellbeing, self-esteem, sense of security and belonging at Sparkways
- each child at Sparkways is supported to learn and develop in a secure and empowering environment.

POLICY STATEMENT

GUIDING PRINICIPLES

Sparkways is committed to:

- maintaining the dignity, agency and rights of each child at the service
- promoting fairness, respect and equity
- encouraging children to express themselves and their opinions, and to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem
- considering the health, safety and wellbeing of each child, and providing a safe, secure and welcoming environment in which they can develop and learn
- maintaining a duty of care *(refer to Definitions)* towards all children at Sparkways
- considering the diversity of individual children at the service, including family and cultural values, age, gender, and the physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child
- building collaborative relationships with families to improve learning and development outcomes for children
- encouraging positive, respectful and warm relationships between children, families and educators/staff at the service.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of Sparkways, including during offsite excursions and activities.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Developing and implementing the *Interactions with Children Policy* in consultation with stakeholders, and ensuring that it reflects the philosophy, beliefs and values of the service	**R**	√	√	√	√
Ensuring all stakeholders are provided with a copy of the *Interactions with Children Policy* and comply with its requirements	**R**	√	√	√	√
Actively supporting and facilitating the participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families.	**R**	√	√		√
Ensuring all staff are aware of the service's expectations regarding positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour, and acceptable responses and warm, trusting and reciprocal interactions when working with children and families *(refer to Code of Conduct Policy)*	**R**	√			
Ensuring children are adequately supervised *(refer to Definitions)* and that educator-to-child ratios are maintained at all times *(refer to Supervision of Children Policy)*	**R**	√	√		√
Ensuring the environment at the service is safe, secure, free from any hazards *(National Law: Section 167)* (*refer to Child Safe Environment Policy, Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Supervision of Children Policy)* and promotes the active participation of every child	**R**	**R**	√		√
Ensuring the size and composition of groups is considered to ensure all children are provided with the best opportunities for quality interactions and relationships with each other and with adults at the service *(Regulation 156(2))*. Smaller group sizes are considered optimal, to promote intentional teaching strategies and responsive engagement opportunities.	**R**	√	√		√
Developing and implementing educational programs that are delivered in accordance with an approved learning framework *(refer to Definitions)*, are based on the developmental needs, interests and experiences of each child, and take into account the individual differences and strengths of each child *(refer to Inclusion and Equity Policy)*	**R**	**R**	√		√
Ensuring the educational program contributes to the development of children to have a strong sense of wellbeing and identity, and to be connected, confident, involved and effective learners and communicators *(Regulation 73)* *(refer to Educational Program Policy)*	**R**	√	√		√
Ensuring that the service provides education and care to children in a way that: • encourages children to express themselves and their opinions • allows children to undertake experiences that develop self-reliance and self-esteem	**R**	√	√		√

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
• maintains the dignity and the rights of each child at all times • all children to feel safe when interacting with educators and other children • offers positive guidance and encouragement towards acceptable behaviour • has regard to the cultural and family values, age, and the physical and intellectual development and abilities of each child being educated and cared for *(Regulation 155)*					
Providing a range of opportunities for children to feel valued and empowered to make choices and solve problems during their time at the service		√	√		√
Listening to and respecting children's voices and non-verbal cues		√	√		√
Supporting children to raise concerns if they feel unhappy or unsafe and acting upon their concerns		√	√		√
Demonstrating positive communication, like using calm voices, respectful listening, and acknowledging feelings		√	√		√
Acknowledging children's feelings and helping them name emotions using resources, pictures, feelings charts etc		√	√		√
Developing strategies to help children understand appropriate interactions with educators and know who to tell if something feels wrong or uncomfortable		√	√		√
Creating, promoting and modelling a respectful, child safe culture, where children's views are always listened to, including their right to say 'no'		√	√		√
Teaching children body safety and respect for personal space		√	√		√
Ensuring appropriate physical contact *(refer to Definition)* is maintained at all times		√	√		√
Facilitating children's ability to express their culture, enjoy their cultural rights and are encouraged and actively supported	**R**	√	√		√
Providing opportunities that promotes a culture that facilitates children's participation and is responsive to their input	**R**	√			
Ensuring children are informed about all of their rights, including to safety information, complaint handling process and participation	**R**	√	√		√
Ensure that Sparkways provides children with opportunities to interact and develop positive relationships with each other, and with the staff and volunteers at the service *(Regulation 156(1))*	**R**	√	√		√
Recognising the importance of friendships and encourage support from peers, to help children and young people feel safe and be connected	√	√	√		√
Ensuring clear documentation of the assessment and evaluation of each child's:	**R**	√	√		√

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
• developmental needs, interests, experiences and program participation • progress against the outcomes of the educational program *(Regulation 74)* *(refer to Educational Program Policy)*					
Ensuring that procedures are in place for effective daily communication with parents/guardians to share information about children's learning, development, interactions, behaviour and relationships	**R**	√	√		√
Supporting ECT/educators/staff to access resources and gain appropriate training, knowledge and skills for the implementation of this policy, including promoting social, emotional and mental health and wellbeing	√	√			
Ensuring all staff, students and volunteers are respectful and appropriate when responding to requests/approaches of physical comfort from children, or when providing comfort to children who are distressed. Expectations include: • Obtaining children's permission before providing physical comfort, such as holding hands or giving a hug (where they are able to provide it) • Respecting indications that children do not want physical comfort, such as stiffening, pulling away or walking away • Providing physical comfort only in public areas • Where children seek to sit on a staff members lap for comfort, being mindful to limit this to a short period of time and then supporting them back into the group activities • Note: It is not appropriate to kiss children	√	√	√		√
Ensuring all staff, students and volunteers are respectful and appropriate in their verbal interaction with children. Expectations include use of appropriate: • Language – Should be positive and strengths-based. Inappropriate language includes negative labelling, criticising, swearing, discouraging, blaming or shaming, making fun of or laughing at, and excessive use of negative language such as 'no', 'stop that', 'don't' or 'you never' • Tone of voice – ensuring this is positive, being mindful of volume, pitch and rhythm. Yelling at children is not acceptable. • Avoiding overly familial or affectionate language that could be misconstrued, for example using pet words such as 'sweetheart' or 'chicken' or referring to children as 'mine', e.g. 'how's my little Liam today? How's my princess today?'	√	√	√		√
Ensuring that staff members at Sparkways who work with children are aware that it is an offence to subject a child to any form of corporal punishment, or any discipline that is	**R**	**R**	**R**	√	√

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
unreasonable or excessive in the circumstances *(National Law: Section 166)* *(refer to Sources – DE Supporting Children's Behaviour Guidelines)*					
Promoting collaborative relationships between children/families and program support groups (if required) *(refer to Definitions)*, to improve the quality of children's education and care experiences	√	√	√	√	√
Ensuring all educators and staff have undertaken current child protection legislation training, including for the mandatory reporting requirements and obligations	**R**	**R**	√		√
Ensuring notifications of serious incidents *(refer to Definitions)* are made to the regulatory authority (DET) *(refer to Definition)* through the NQA IT System *(refer to Definitions)* as soon as is practicable but not later than 24 hours after the occurrence *(National Law: Section 174(2)(a), Regulations 176 (2)(a))*	**R**	√			
Notifying DET within 24 hours of becoming aware of a notifiable complaint *(refer to Definitions)* or allegation regarding the safety, health and/or welfare of a child at the service *(National Law: Section 174(2)(b), Regulations 176 (2)(a))*	**R**	√			
Ensuring that where the service has been notified of a court order prohibiting an adult from contacting an enrolled child, such contact does not occur while the child is on the service premises	**R**	**R**	√		√
Ensuring all staff, volunteers and contractors use positive and respectful strategies to assist children to manage their own behaviour, and to respond appropriately to conflict and the behaviour of others	**R**	√	√		√
Developing links with and referral pathways to services and/or program support groups *(refer to Definitions)* to support children experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and their families	√	√	√		√
Ensuring that there is a behaviour guidance plan *(refer to Definitions and Behaviour Guidance Policy)* developed for a child if educators are concerned that the child's behaviour may put the child themselves, other children, educators/staff and/or others at risk	√	√	√	√	
Ensuring that parents/guardians and program support groups *(refer to Definitions)* (as appropriate) are consulted if an individual behaviour guidance plan has not resolved the challenging behaviour *(refer to Behaviour Guidance Policy)*	√	√	√	√	
Working collaboratively with educators/staff and program support groups *(refer to Definitions)* to develop or review an	√	√	√	√	√

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
individual behaviour guidance plan for their child, where appropriate.					
Setting clear timelines for review and evaluation of the behaviour guidance plan.	√	√	√		
Providing information, ideas and practical strategies to families, educators and staff on a regular basis to promote and support health and wellbeing in the service and at home	√	√	√		
Consulting with, and seeking advice from, DET if a suitable and mutually agreeable behaviour guidance plan cannot be developed	**R**	√	√		
Investigating the availability of extra assistance, such as Kindergarten Inclusion Support *(refer to Definitions)* or training, by contacting the regional Preschool Field Officer *(refer to Definitions)*, specialist children's services officers from DET or other agencies working with the child Funded Kindergarten specific	**R**	√	√		
Investigating the availability of extra assistance, financial support such as Inclusion Support Program *(refer to Definitions)* or training, by contacting their regional Inclusion Agency *(refer to Sources)* Long day care specific	**R**	√	√		
Ensuring that additional resources are sourced, if required, to implement a behaviour guidance plan	**R**	√			
Ensuring that educators/staff at the service are provided with appropriate training to guide the actions and their responses to a child/children with challenging behaviour *(refer to Behaviour Guidance Policy)*	√	√			
Informing educators/staff of concerns, events or incidents that may impact on their child's behaviour at the service (e.g. moving house, relationship issues, a new sibling)				√	
Maintaining confidentiality *(refer to Privacy and Confidentiality Policy)*	**R**	√	√	√	√

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each individual, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, wealth, birth status or ability. When children experience nurturing and respectful reciprocal relationships with educators, they develop an understanding of themselves as competent, capable and respected. Relationships are the foundation for the construction of identity, and help shape children's thinking about who they are, how they belong and what influences them [Early Years Learning Framework, p. 20; Framework for School Age Care, p. 19]

'Constructive everyday interactions and shared learning opportunities form the basis of equitable, respectful and reciprocal relationships between educators and children. Educators who are actively engaged in children's learning and share decision-making with them, use their everyday interactions during play, routines and ongoing projects to stimulate children's thinking and to enrich their learning. These relationships provide a solid foundation from which to guide and support children as they develop the self-confidence and skills to manage their own behaviour, make decisions and relate positively and effectively to others.' *(Guide to National Quality Framework – refer to Sources)*

Child Safe Standard 3 requires services to have strategies to empower children about their rights, ensure children can participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously. When children feel respected and valued, they are much more likely to speak up about issues of safety and wellbeing. Enabling and promoting empowerment and the participation of children within a service has multiple benefits in addition to enhancing the safety of children, including demonstrating a commitment to upholding the rights of children, checking that what the service is doing is what children want and building the communication and leadership skills of children.

In developing an *Interactions with Children Policy*, early childhood education and care services must review and reflect on the philosophy, beliefs and values of the service, particularly with regard to the relationships with children. The development of this policy should also be informed by the service's *Code of Conduct Policy*.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015 (Vic)
Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
National Quality Standard, Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the Sparkways policy catalogue.

Adequate supervision: entails all children (individuals and groups) in all areas of the service, being in sight and/or hearing of an educator at all times including during toileting, sleep, rest and transition routines. Services are required to comply with the legislative requirements for educator-to-child ratios at all times. Supervision contributes to protecting children from hazards that may emerge in play, including hazards created by the equipment used.

Adequate supervision refers to constant, active and diligent supervision of every child at the service. Adequate supervision requires that educators are always in a position to observe each child, respond to individual needs and immediately intervene if necessary. Variables affecting supervision levels include:

- number, age and abilities of children
- number and positioning of educators
- current activity of each child
- areas in which the children are engaged in an activity (visibility and accessibility)
- developmental profile of each child and of the group of children
- experience, knowledge and skill of each educator
- need for educators to move between areas (effective communication strategies).

Appropriate Physical Contact: Refers to physical interactions between an educator and a child that are respectful, nurturing, and developmentally suitable. Such contact supports the child's safety, wellbeing, learning, and emotional development. Where possible, the child consents to or initiates the contact.

It includes actions such as:

- comforting a distressed child,
- holding a child's hand for safety,
- providing assistance with personal care in a respectful and hygienic manner,
- giving first aid, and
- supporting children who have hurt themselves.

All physical contact MUST be observable by to another staff member. It must always align with the service's policies, maintain professional boundaries, and uphold child safe standards.

Examples of appropriate physical contact include:

- Placing a hand or gently patting a child on the back or shoulder to comfort or reassure them
- Holding a child's hand while crossing the yard, during group transitions and crossing a road/carpark
- Sitting a child on your lap if they are upset and seeking comfort; only when initiated by the child and in view of others, and until the child is no longer distressed
- Helping a child blow their nose, clean up, or change clothes when needed, using respectful hygiene practices
- Administering first aid with care and sensitivity when a child is injured
- Offering a side hug or placing a supportive hand on a child's shoulder (if welcomed by the child), and reciprocating affection from the child in an appropriate and respectful manner.

Behaviour guidance: a means of assisting children in a positive and effective ways to help children gain understanding and learn skills that will help them learn to manage their own behaviour.

Behaviour guidance plan: A plan that documents strategies to assist an educator in guiding a child with diagnosed behavioural difficulties or challenging behaviours to self-manage their behaviour. The plan is

developed in consultation with the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, parents/guardians and families, and other professional support agencies as applicable.

Challenging behaviour: behaviour that can be described as:

- infringes on the rights of others
- disrupts others or causes disputes between children
- causes harm or risk to the child, other children, adults or living things
- is destructive to the environment and/or equipment
- inhibits the child's learning and relationship with others
- a chid presenting as shy, withdrawn or excessively passive in a way which is inhibiting their learning and/or development
- is inappropriate relative to the child's developmental age and background.

Dignity and rights of the child: Element 5.1.2 of the National Quality Standard ('Dignity and rights of the child') aims to achieve the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards and obligations founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each child, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, religion, opinions, origins, wealth, birth status or ability. Article 19 of the Convention states that children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically, or mentally.

Inclusion Support Program (ISP): is a key component of the Government's Child Care Safety Net. The program provides support for eligible mainstream Early Childhood Education and Care services to build their capacity and capability to include children with additional needs, alongside their typically developing peers, so all children have genuine opportunities to access, participate and achieve positive learning outcomes. For more information visit: www.dese.gov.au

Kindergarten Inclusion Support Program (KIS): Supports funded kindergartens to plan and implement a program that is responsive to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with a disability, developmental delay or complex medical needs. Long Day Care services can apply for the KIS program for their Victorian Government-funded kindergarten programs.

Mental health: In early childhood, a child's mental health is understood as a child's ability to 'experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development. https://beyou.edu.au/

Positive interactions between educators and children: Involves educators viewing each child as capable and competent, with a right to a voice, and able to contribute to decisions that affect them. This enables educators to focus their practices on children's strengths and inclusion in the group environment. Educators who are responsive to children's thoughts and feelings are supporting them to develop a strong sense of wellbeing. By interacting positively and meaningfully with children, educators help each child to feel accepted and to develop a sense of attachment and trust. Children who are supported to understand themselves experience a sense of belonging that fosters self-esteem which contributes to the development of identity and is critical to children's capacity to understand their own strengths, abilities, and interests. When children feel safe, secure and supported, they develop confidence to explore and learn.

Program Support Groups (PSG): A program support group brings together key people to support the inclusion of children with disability or developmental delay, or complex medical needs, from the time of enrolment at kindergarten until they move to school. The group may include:

- the early childhood teacher
- the child's parent/carer(s)
- early childhood intervention professionals
- a preschool field officer
- medical practitioners, therapists or other allied health professionals
- a support person – if the child's parent/carer(s) chooses to use one.

Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) Program: The role of the PSFO Program to support the access and participation of children with additional needs in their kindergarten program. For more information visit: www.education.vic.gov.au

Relationships between children: When educators create supportive environments in which children experience mutually enjoyable, caring and respectful relationships, children respond accordingly. Positive relationships provide children with the confidence and agency to explore and learn about their world. As their relationships become more complex and far-reaching over time, children's interactions with others also help them to extend their knowledge, thinking and ability to apply what they already know in new and unfamiliar contexts. Developing effective relationships with others is a key part of children's social development and these relationships also provide a base for children's learning.

Relationships between educators and children: When children experience nurturing and respectful reciprocal relationships with educators, they develop an understanding of themselves as competent, capable and respected. Consistent emotional support contributes to children developing a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging. Relationships are the foundation for the construction of identity, and help shape children's thinking about who they are, how they belong and what influences them.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Child Safe Standards: www.ccyp.vic.gov.au
- Department of Education – Supporting Children's Behaviour in Early Childhood Services: https://www.vic.gov.au/supporting-childrens-behaviour-early-childhood-services
- Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
- Guide to the National Quality Framework, ACECQA: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Inclusion Support Program: www.dese.gov.au
- Kids Matter, an Australian mental health and well-being initiative set in primary schools and early childhood education and care services: https://beyou.edu.au
- The Kindergarten Funding Guide (DET): www.education.vic.gov.au
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: www.unicef.org
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: www.acecqa.gov.au
- Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA): www.viac.com.au

RELATED POLICES

- Behaviour Guidance
- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Code of Conduct
- Compliments and Complaints
- Educational Program
- Inclusion and Equity
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Supervision of Children

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- seek feedback from people affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk *(Regulation 172 (2))*.

AUTHORISATION

This policy was confirmed by Sparkways on 09/10/2025

REVIEW DUE: October 2026