PARENTAL ACCESS AND INVOLVEMENT

QUALITY AREA 6– COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidance for the involvement of parents/guardians within Sparkways services.

POLICY STATEMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sparkways is committed to:

- Promoting parent/guardian involvement in service delivery and the management of the service
- Fostering a spirit of co-operation between the parents/guardians of children attending the service, the staff, community and Sparkways
- Compliance with all funding and legislative and regulatory requirements

Whilst Sparkways acknowledges that parent/guardian access and involvement is an integral part of the operation of the service, our duty of care to the children is of prime consideration and takes precedent over parent/guardian participation if this is assessed as creating or posing a potential risk.

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.

PROCEDURES

Sparkways will:

- Provide access for parents/guardians to the service at any time their child is attending
- Encourage and support parent participation and involvement in all aspects of the service. Participation will be welcome at all levels, be it active involvement on the Parent Support Group/Committee, support at working bees or involvement in the children's program.
- Encourage communication between families, the staff and Sparkways.
- Review the programs provided (i.e. the sessions and times that children attend), taking into account feedback from families/guardians in the development of future program models, and what is feasible in circumstances where a local government centralised enrolment process applies.

Staff will:

- Welcome families at the service whenever the program is operating.
- Provide parents with information on how the educational program at the service is developed and the philosophy it is based on.
- Develop the educational program, in consultation with parents incorporating the children's strengths, needs, interests, cultural and community background, physical, emotional, intellectual, social and creative development.
- Offer a variety of opportunities for parents to directly participate in the children's program, including spending time with the children, preparation of food and drink, assisting with experiences, excursions and special events, sharing special skills with the children.
- Provide information regarding the educational program through displays and regular newsletters, which will show an understanding of, and consideration for, the relevant languages and cultural diversity of the families using the service.

Parent Helpers (attending infrequently to support their own child's group) are strongly encouraged to hold a current Working with Children Check (WWCC). Volunteers (attending regularly) must hold a current WWCC *(refer to Definitions).*

NOTE: Parents/guardians must work under the direct supervision of service staff at all times and not provide any toileting/bathroom/changeroom assistance to any child but their own.

In alignment with the National Model Code for Taking Images and Videos of Children, Parent Helpers and Volunteers must not be in possession of personal electronic devices (that can take images or videos) *(refer to Definitions)* while providing education and care to children, except for authorised essential purposes.

Additionally, Sparkways has a **'no phone use'** policy for all visitors, contractors and parents/guardians in children's areas. Visitors, contractors and parent/guardians who are not working with children, but are within children's areas whilst children are present, must not use their phones, except under staff supervision when authorised by the Nominated Supervisor/Responsible Person. E.g. To take photos of facilities works completed.

Sparkways will provide opportunities for parents/guardians to:

- Offer feedback to the staff concerning the program and make contributions to the children's individual learning.
- Contribute suggestions regarding any aspect of the program through discussion with the staff, Area Manager and/or the Executive Operations Manager.
- Communicate about their child either informally before or after the program, or by appointment during the staff member's non-contact time with the children and encourage parent/guardians to take up these opportunities.
- Discuss their child's individual learning records

Any information gained by a parent/guardian during their time at the service either via a staff member or a child, is to remain confidential.

IDEAS FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Sparkways understands that many parents/guardians are working or have other commitments that limit their time to be involved in the service.

However, if able to, involvement can provide opportunities for parents/guardians to:

- Spend valuable time with their child (children look forward to these occasions)
- See the program in progress
- Get to know the staff and their child's friends

Ways in which parents/guardians can be involved include:

- Sharing special skills
- Sharing cultural knowledge
- Reading stories
- Attending working bees
- Attending excursions
- Preparing newsletters
- Fundraising
- Collecting useful material (paper, cartons, shells, cane baskets, pot plants, scarves or dress ups)

  Note: please do not send food boxes or egg cartons as they may contain traces of nuts or have been produced alongside such containers.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA):
- The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia: Belonging, Being, Becoming:
- A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation (The Commission for Children and Young People)
- Working with Children Check unit, Department of Justice & Regulation – provides details of how to obtain a WWC Check: www.service.vic.gov.au

- National Model Code - Taking images and videos in early childhood education and care: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/national-model-code-taking-images-early-childhood-education-and-care

RELATED POLICES

- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Code of Conduct
- Compliments and Complaints
- Delivery and Collection of Children
- Inclusion and Equity
- Interactions with Children
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Participation of Volunteers, Students and Contractors
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Safe Use of Digital Technologies and Online Environments
- Staffing
- Supervision of Children

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.

Child-related work: In relation to the WWC Check, child-related work includes work with children which may involve physical contact, face-to-face contact, oral, written or electronic communication.

Parent Helper: A parent or guardian who provides unpaid support to their child's group on an infrequent basis, e.g. once or twice per term at most. **Note:** A Working with Children Check is strongly encouraged for Parent Helpers.

Volunteer: A parent/guardian, family or community member who provides unpaid support to the service on a regular basis, generally with a set schedule and routine. These activities may include child-related work *(refer to Definition)*, administrative tasks, or preparing materials or food. **Note:** A Working with Children Check is mandatory for volunteers.

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 12/09/2025

REVIEW DUE: September 2026