

Programs for children

Building programs for children in child care involves collecting lots of various pieces of information to write a curriculum plan. This means that children's daily activities are structured with specific learning outcomes. Programs should take into account each child's interests, strengths, experiences, culture and needs. Quality programs in early education and care services are developed to support and guide children in all areas of their learning and development.

How are programs planned?

Planning programs for children is a process in which staff design experiences and activities aimed at developing and extending each child's thinking, skills, interests and abilities.

The program will:

- be a written plan based on documented records of observations and interactions with children
- often use the written profiles of children's needs, interests and abilities
- plan for children through a constant process of understanding what experiences are being provided for children and why
- be unique to the service and often different from programs in other services.

Parents can request their child's program to help them understand how educators plan to build upon their child's previous experiences, interests and successes.

What should a program look like?

Programs should involve planning for all areas of children's learning and development, including their:

- physical skills (large and small muscles)
- language and literacy skills
- personal and interpersonal skills
- creativity and skills in expressive arts
- problem solving, thinking and mathematical abilities.

The activities and experiences to build these understandings and skills will look different, depending upon the age or the developmental level of the child.



+ Babies

Programs for babies will generally be individualised, focused on routines and on one-to-one interactions between the baby and the educator. These could include:

- meal and nappy change times
- sleep and settling routines.

+ Toddlers

Programs for toddlers generally have a strong focus on supporting them to develop their language, independence and social skills. Planned experiences will often focus on:

- supporting toddlers to engage in play where they can practice and develop these skills
- one-on-one and small group interactions, which allow children to engage in experiences that best suits their interests and abilities.

Here staff will act as guides and role models, helping children to negotiate with others and express their emotions appropriately.

+ Preschool age children

Programs for preschool age children build on foundational skills, focusing on reading, writing, science and mathematics. Their knowledge and skills are developed through:

- programs that are planned, play-based and focused on children's interests
- a mix of individual, small and larger group activities
- making choices about the experiences they participate in.

Staff will learn about children by observing them and talking with their families. They will also get to know children through everyday conversations.

+ School age children

Programs for school age children attending services outside school hours need to be responsive to their formal school program. Planned experiences focus on:

- children's extracurricular, recreational and social activities
- time to relax before and after the school day and during school holidays
- encouraging children to participate in decision-making about the experiences that are planned.

With school-age children, staff will emphasise recreation, leisure and the further development of social and life skills.

How can families find out about the service's program?

The best way for families to find out about the program planned for their child is to speak with staff in the service. Some useful questions that families can ask include:

- What activities and experiences are provided for children in the service?
- Are these written down, and if so, can families see these plans?
- How is the daily program displayed for families?

- How do staff in the service decide what activities, materials and experiences are provided for children?
- How do staff find out whether children are benefiting from and enjoying the program being provided?
- How can families be involved in planning and evaluating programs for children?

Many services will explain the way they structure programs to families during the enrolment and/or orientation process. Other services may share this information at a later stage, to avoid overwhelming families with too much information at the start. Information should also be shared with families about their child's learning, development, achievements and any issues that may be identified.

How can families be involved in planning the program for their child?

A good program will incorporate information from families about their child's interests and experiences outside of the service. Some of the ways that services may seek this information include:

- Daily conversations with families at the start and/or end of the day.
- Formal meetings with families.
- Communication books that are used for families and staff to exchange information about the child at home and at the service (these are more commonly used for babies and younger children).
- Daily diaries or spaces on the program documentation where families can write their ideas, suggestions and information about their child's interests and experiences.

