POLICY TIP SHEET:

Ensuring policies are consistently implemented

There is no advantage in having the most professional and comprehensive policy manual if the policies contained within are not being implemented. A manual that stays on the shelf and is not referred to on a daily basis by the staff that run the service, is of no value at all. Policies must be seen to be important from top management down to the most inexperienced member of staff. Everyone within your service needs to be fully informed, and understand the importance of consistent policy implementation.

There are a number of strategies that will assist your service to support staff to consistently implement service policies:

- **Remember that educators/staff are key players in policy implementation.** Most policies developed for children's services are implemented by the staff team or educators. These people therefore should have input into policy development, to ensure policies are clearly understood and support educators/staff to complete the daily requirements of the service. This is important because when the staff team or educator is actively involved in the development of the policies they will take ownership of the process, and fully support it and understand why it is important.

- **Hold meetings with educators/staff to discuss changes to policies** and facilitate debate about the implementation of these changes and any perceived difficulties. Opportunities to clarify meanings and openly discuss the implications of policy changes will help to allay misunderstandings, and may also highlight an issue that you have overlooked. This involvement in policy review and development is a key to ensuring policies actually work.

- **Highlight policies within the service and at staff meetings** by using the following strategies:

    - **Make policy review a standard agenda item for your staff meetings**, and review a different policy at each meeting. Use this agenda item to either discuss a policy that is up for review, or to remind staff about a policy that they need to be particularly focused on due to the time of year, or because of recurring issues related to the policy.

    - Draw attention to specific policy requirements by **placing a copy of the relevant policy next to a task related to that policy** i.e. display policy on health and hygiene and nappy changing procedures, in the nappy changing area, to remind staff about the procedures required to ensure hygiene standards are maintained whilst changing nappies.

    - Confirm certain practices at the service by **displaying the relevant policy in the appropriate area** i.e. the nutrition policy is displayed next to the menu, or the excursion policy is put up next to details about a forthcoming outing.

    - Draw attention to a new policy or change in policy by establishing a **space on the staff noticeboard for NEW POLICIES**. Refer staff to the board when new information has been put up. You may also provide a plain sheet of paper for staff to add their comments.

    - **Trial the introduction of new policies and procedures** and seek staff and family feedback prior to accepting changes

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■ **Use reflective questions[1]** to assist staff to identify issues and critically reflect on the effectiveness of their current daily and professional practice:

– Why is the practice in place?

– Is the practice fair and equitable?

– Is the current practice effective?

– Is the practice relevant to the service as a whole and to individual staff, educators, families and management?

– How does the practice affect children, families and other stakeholders?

– Have any concerns or issues been raised about the practice?

– Is the information sourced for the practice still current/relevant?

– Is there recent research, trends or legislation that needs to be added to the policy regarding the practice?

■ **Establish an environment that supports consistency of policy implementation.** Make sure you support your staff to implement your policies through**:**

– **Inducting new staff members to service policies and code of ethics** – it is important to ensure new staff are carefully introduced to your service's policies and procedures, and code of ethics during the orientation process. Providing a mentor or buddy that will support the new staff member, be available to answer questions or clarify standard procedures and role model best practice, will assist the new staff member to become familiar with service policies, and help to ensure consistency of implementation.

– **Setting achievable tasks and realistic workloads** – it is important to give clear explanations about new policies or procedures and to ensure that staff members have sufficient time and skills to implement the policies effectively. On-going monitoring and supportive supervision will provide staff with clear expectations, immediate and honest feedback and positive encouragement, as they work to implement new initiatives.

– **Ensuring policies and procedures are unambiguous and are clearly written** – your policies and procedures are the guiding force in how all aspects of the work of your service will be conducted. Make sure that you have clearly written procedures that all team members fully understand as this will support consistent implementation of policies. (Refer to Policy Tip Sheet – Writing Policies.)

– **Providing clear roles and responsibilities** – being clear about who will take responsibility for what, and who staff should report to is also essential. Ambiguity in the scope and responsibility of the job and the expectations of others, can lead to confusion. Clearly stated roles and responsibilities will assist staff to see where they fit into the day to day running of the service and who is responsible for policy implementation.

– **Encourage educators/staff to monitor each other's practice**, raise questions about policy implementation through nonthreatening and inclusive interactions, and support each other to implement best practice standards.

– **Effective communication** – ensuring opportunities for ongoing feedback and two way communication between management and staff is essential as this will facilitate raising any issues or concerns about policy implementation from both management and individual staff members. Educators/staff are in the best position to provide feedback to management about any difficulties or issues that policy implementation may create. This is an important strategy to ensure policies are effectively and

[1] NCAC Policy Development Guide for Services, page 2, accessed from www.ncac.gov.au

consistently implemented. Educators/staff are in daily contact with families and can also provide feedback on any difficulties that service policy is creating for families, as well as encouraging families to raise their concerns personally.

– **Plan professional development opportunities** for educators/staff to learn about current best practice. Support new ideas and encourage educators/staff to research their understanding of different practices. Well trained staff gain the expertise and knowledge to identify when poor practice occurs and the confidence to mentor their colleagues to value best practice.

– **Providing relevant resource materials in support of policy implementation** – providing additional resources that back up and support policies, and provide staff with further information to implement policies successfully will encourage consistent implementation of policies.

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