



Building genuine partnerships

Babies and toddlers aged birth to 3 years

Sleep, rest and relaxation needs of young children vary considerably. A child's sleep will be affected by their individual developmental path, daily circumstances such as family work schedules, and disruptive events such as illness or family stress. For this reason ongoing communication between parents and educators is critical in supporting sleep, rest and relaxation across the home and the early education and care setting. Good communication helps educators and families to be responsive to children's individual and changing sleep, rest and relaxation needs.

Working together to support sleep rest and relaxation

Establishing positive communication between educators and parents is critical to support young children's ongoing and changing sleep and rest needs. Regular and open communication can also help to sustain positive relationships with families. The issue of sleep management is one that can be a focus of conflict. Certain sleep patterns such as late bedtimes and night waking can impact on parents' well-being and be a source of anxiety. Parents and educators may also have different beliefs and expectations of the child's sleep needs.

Context can make a difference and explain differences in expectations. The child's day in an ECEC setting is typically more social as the child is surrounded by many more children and adults, than when at home. This may be more tiring and require different sleep and rest practices from a day at home with a parent. The task for educators and parents is to work together to ensure that a child's sleep and rest needs are met across their home and their ECEC setting. Key to achieving this goal is the development and maintenance of a positive working relationship, where accurate information is shared to guide expectations.

The following are some key principles that may assist educators when communicating with families about sleep, rest, and relaxation:

Seek sufficient information from parents:

- Consider what questions to ask at enrolment.
- Consider key questions to ask on an ongoing basis about amount, timing of sleep, and any circumstances that may affect sleep and rest need, such as illness, changes in routine or disruptions to sleep at home.

Does your child need to sleep today? is not enough. Seek more detail through questions such as:

- How did your child sleep last night?

- How many sleeps per day does your child currently have?
- What settling strategies are working well for your child at the moment?
- What signs does your child usually show when they are sleepy?
- Is there any circumstance in your child's life at the moment that may be affecting their sleep?

Consult about best options for regular communication with parents:

- There are a variety of ways to communicate e.g. email, phone, informal chats, and communication booklets. The type of communication that is most effective may be different for different families.
- Encourage parents to discuss their child's sleep routines, sleep needs and any problems that emerge.

Have evidence based information on hand to support decision making:

- Make service policies on sleep rest and relaxation available to families.
- Service policy should reflect current evidence for sleep, rest and relaxation and be consistent with the National Quality Standard requirement of meeting individual sleep, rest and relaxation needs.
- Refer to resources including those available for families and educators on the Queensland Department of Education [website](#).

Share observations of children's sleep, behaviour, and experiences in ECEC:

Telling a parent if their child slept and for how long is not enough.

- Share observations of the child's sleep needs – for example, was the child tired earlier than usual? Did they fall asleep very quickly?
- Share observations of how the child responded to sleep – for example, did they seem to be tired after waking up?
- Share strategies that are working to support sleep for their child at the service.

Deal with emerging issues as they arise:

- Engage in shared critical thinking and data information gathering to support solution of the problem.
- Utilise research based resources about children's sleep and rest needs.

Please see the next section for key questions for reflection when dealing with, and negotiating solutions to, conflict regarding sleep rest and relaxation.

Sleep rest and relaxation can be an area in which conflict can arise. When reflecting on ways to resolve issues that arise, it is important to consider the perspectives of the child, the family and the educator. Considering different perspectives helps to identify the reasons that underlie a conflict and can support a positive resolution. Below are a number of key questions to reflect on when issues arise, with consideration of the perspectives of the child, parent, and educator.

Child

Are current and proposed practices:

- Safe for the child?
- Meeting the child's individual needs?
- Maximising the child's learning opportunities?
- Fostering a positive relationship between the child and educator/s?
- Supporting a positive relationship between the child and other children?
- Minimising distress or discomfort for the child?
- Realistic for the developmental stage of the child?
- Respecting the agency of the child?
- In the best interest of the child?

Educator

Are current and proposed practices:

- Aligned with obligations and expectations under the National Quality Standard?
- Compliant with sleep, rest and relaxation policies at the service?
- Consistent with safe sleeping principles and guidelines?
- Aligned with current evidence based information on sleep, rest and relaxation?
- Feasible within the physical environment of the service?
- Feasible taking into account adult: child ratios?
- Respectful of the needs of other children or families at the service?
- Consistent with the philosophy of the service?

Parent

Are current and proposed practices:

- Respectful of family beliefs and values?
- Sensitive to family work patterns?
- Considerate of variation in care arrangements for the child across the week?
- Easing hardship and/or stress for the family?
- Informed by regular communication with parents?
- Supporting the development of genuine partnerships and shared decision-making?

A note on sleep safety

One issue that arises for educators is a request for a sleep practice that does not align with current evidence-based safety guidelines. These relate to safe sleep environments, safe sleep positioning and safe sleep apparel (e.g. swaddling an older baby, putting a baby to sleep on their tummy or using amber necklaces). The educator should be confident to refer to policy guidelines if parents make requests that are contrary to the safety of the child. Child safety is always the first priority and family requests should never be placed above the safety of the child.

Please see the DOE website for examples of some key issues that can emerge regarding sleep rest and relaxation and how educators have worked together with families to negotiate a solution.