



Sleep, rest, and relaxation and the National Quality Standard

Babies and toddlers

Recognising the connection between health, development, learning and wellbeing in the early years of life, the *National Quality Standard* (NQS) promotes a holistic and integrated approach to quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

Sleep, rest, and relaxation are explicitly addressed in Quality Area 2 under Children's Health and Safety.

2.1.2 "Each child's comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation".

However, ensuring quality sleep practices requires educators to critically reflect on all of the quality areas and how these come together in everyday practice.

Routines such as sleep and rest provide authentic opportunities for educators to get to know individual children, build genuine partnerships with families, and to promote child agency and holistic learning. As with other aspects of professional practice, a good starting point for reflection on sleep and rest practices is Quality Area 1: Educational programs and practices.

Sleep as part of the curriculum

"In the early childhood setting curriculum means all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (EYLF, 2009, p. 9).

Designing and implementing curriculum with babies and toddlers requires a particular mindset. At this age, it is all about the individual, everyday life and, most importantly, care and education.

How educators view very young children is particularly important. Babies and toddlers need educators who see them as competent and capable learners, but who also recognise their vulnerability and dependence on others for care and protection. Using sleep as an example, young children need educators who can work with both of these images; who are able to support children's agency and growing autonomy while providing guidance and keeping them safe.

Babies and toddlers need qualified, knowledgeable and caring educators who appreciate the teaching and learning possibilities of everyday experiences and routines, such as sleep, rest, and relaxation. They need educators who recognise sleep, rest, and relaxation as opportunities for warm and sensitive interactions that contribute to the learning outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework (e.g., children's sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing; self-regulation; cognitive development and learning capacity) (See NQS 1.1.3).

A pedagogy of care

"The term pedagogy refers to the holistic nature of educators' professional practice (especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships), curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning" (EYLF, 2009, p. 11).

How can educators promote healthy sleep development and maximise learning during these routines? One approach is a 'pedagogy of care'. This places emphasis on nurturing relationships and recognises care as educational. During sleep and rest, educators make time to get to know individual children, engage in one-one interactions that promote learning and provide sensitive and responsive care. Educator practices are individualised, flexible and not rushed, and prioritise secure and trusting relationships above the most efficient completion of daily tasks and routines.

The principles in the EYLF offer another framework to critically reflect on and enhance sleep, rest, and relaxation practices:

- *Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships* – educators are attuned to individual children, able to read and respond to their cues and provide sensitive and responsive caregiving.
- *Partnerships* – educators engage in two-way information sharing and actively encourage families to collaborate in curriculum decision-making that impacts their child.
- *High expectations and equity* – educators support children's agency, create learning contexts that support success and hold high but not unrealistic expectations for learning and behaviour.
- *Respect for diversity* – educators honour the child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families and value children's different capacities and abilities.
- *Ongoing learning and reflective practice* – educators continually reflect on their practice, taking into account multiple viewpoints (e.g., children, families, colleagues; relevant safety guidelines and community standards) to inform and enrich decision-making about children's learning and development.

Keeping children safe

Working with very young children requires specialised knowledge, a balanced pedagogical approach and the capacity to exercise professional judgment. Educators strive to create an interesting environment that promotes exploration and learning, and keeps babies and toddlers safe. Services maintain responsibility for ensuring that educators have the information and training to fulfil their role, and remain up-to-date with relevant community standards (e.g., SIDS Guidelines) which are periodically reviewed and may change over time. While seeking to be responsive to different family preferences and child rearing practices, educators need to feel confident and able to explain these standards and to negotiate ways of working with parents to ensure that these are never compromised.

Questions for reflection

Below are some key questions for consideration and reflection when assessing and identifying appropriate and optimal sleep, rest, and relaxation under the National Quality Standard, focusing on babies and toddlers.

Quality Area 1 Educational programs and practices

- Do sleep, rest, and relaxation practices recognise babies and toddlers as competent and capable in expressing their needs while also providing for their care and protection?
- How do educators promote children's agency and decision-making during sleep and rest routines?

Quality Area 2 Health and safety

- How do educators cater for individual sleep, rest and relaxation needs within diverse groups of children?
- How does the service ensure that educators maintain currency with health and safety standards (e.g., SIDS Guidelines)?

Quality Area 3 Physical Environment

- Is the physical environment comfortable, well ventilated and conducive to sleep?
- Are there spaces and places available for children throughout the day for rest and relaxation, including outdoors?

Quality Area 4 Staffing Arrangements

- Does staffing throughout the day support individualised, flexible and unhurried sleep and rest routines?
- How do educators supervise children during sleep and rest times, including those who may be in a separate sleep area?

Quality Area 5 Relationships with children

- Do all educators have the knowledge and skills to build secure attachments with children and provide sensitive and responsive care?
- How do educators maximise children's learning during sleep and rest routines?

Quality Area 6 Partnership with families and communities

- How do educators communicate with families regarding sleep and rest routines?
- How do educators share decision-making about sleep and rest with families?
- When might a service decide that it is unable to follow family preferences for the provision of sleep and rest? How do educators discuss this with parents?

Quality Area 7 Leadership and Service Management

- Are current sleep, rest, and relaxation practices for babies and toddlers reflective of the service's educational philosophy?
- How do service policies and procedures guide and support educators to recognise and respond to individual sleep, rest and relaxation needs?

The SLEEP program is funded by the Queensland Government Department of Education and Training