

Relationships and Interactions with Children

Policy Statement

Within the Meerilinga community many different relationships are negotiated. The way in which these relationships are established and maintained, and the way in which they remain visible, impacts on how our community functions as a whole. Relationships directly affect how children form their own identity, whether or not they feel safe and supported, and ultimately, their sense of belonging.

The underlying principles related to this policy reflect adherence and commitment to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics, The National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework;

- Children are active in constructing their understanding of their world.
- Children's autonomy and initiative must be respected.
- Children must be empowered to express their views and to expect that their views will be taken into account.

Any adults interacting with children in a professional or personal role should adhere to principles that reflect respect for children's rights.

Policy Purpose

We aim to create a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere in which children experience equitable, friendly and genuine interactions. We will build positive and meaningful relationships with community members through collaboration and interactions, which is reflective in our Philosophy and the Early Years Learning Framework.

Educators will encourage positive relationships between children and their peers as well as with educators and families at the service, ensuring children feel safe and supported. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the service.

Scope

This policy applies to the Board of Governors, Executive, all workers, volunteers, students and those employed on a fee for service or contract basis while conducting Meerilinga business.

Exclusions

Policy Review

Biennial or from time to time when the organisation may make changes to this policy to improve the effectiveness of its operations and customer service.

Policy Reviewed	28 August 2022	By	Advisor Policy & Compliance
Approved By	CEO		
Previous Review	12 April 2021		

Implementation

The policy encourages warm nourishing relationships between children and staff that support and view children as strong, powerful, competent, complex and full of possibilities. Children need positive relationships with adults that they can trust and who respond to them.

This is the basic foundation that they need in order to feel good about themselves and their being in the world, and secure enough to take pleasure in actively exploring and learning about themselves, people and things around them.

Article 12 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child expresses the view that children have a right to give their opinion and for adults to listen and take it seriously. The underlying principal is concern and respect for the child's views and opinions in all matters affecting them. The process by which they are consulted must reflect commitment to maintain the dignity and welfare of children and their families. All those consulting children must adhere to the accepted guidelines of professional and ethical practice.

Professional and ethical practice includes consideration of each situation with reference to context, time, environment, acknowledgment of key players and their values, legal aspects, professional and ethical principles.

Respectful and equitable relationships with children are maintained in a way that encourages children to express themselves and their opinions. When children have positive experiences of interactions they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging.

Children's Learning and Development

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships are one of the basic principles of *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* that provides a vision for the children's learning at this service. Relationships between staff and children can have an impact on other relationships and can dictate the mood of the group, or the whole group environment.

From birth a child is capable of expressing views and is able to make them known, especially to those attuned to interacting with children.

Children from birth are very sensitive to what is going on around them and are continually trying to make sense of their environment, to discover new ways of relating to it. As they develop, their ability to understand other people, to take account of others' feelings, and to modify their behaviour, increases. However, even when they are five, they are not yet very experienced or skilled in the complexities of social and communications skills.

Emotional development and social relationships are enhanced through thoughtful and sophisticated approaches to conversation, discussion and promotion of children's language and communication. Children who experience relationships that are built on respect, fairness, cooperation and empathy are given the opportunity to develop these qualities themselves.

The value of other skills like observing, planning and organising the environment depends upon the extent to which educators are able to develop these relationships. Children who are secure in the relationship with their educator/s are confident in their learning and are able to enjoy and feel relaxed in their time at the preschool.

Interactions with children must be based on sound knowledge, research and theories that assist adults to understand the best approach given the age group and the context of the situation.

All adults, and especially experienced educators, are more able than young children to empathise, adapt and modify their behaviour. One of the basic principles of communicating with children is that educators need to approach children in their care in a child-centred way. Children under five are still very much the centre of their own universe.

Children's Rights, Family and Cultural Values

Interactions within the setting are greatly enhanced when children's rights and family and cultural values are given due consideration and respect. Administrative procedures, initial conversations, documentation and ongoing communication with children and families are a reference point for interactions and a foundation for genuine and respectful communication.

Advocates for children must be authentic representatives who value and honour individuality and diversity. Any interpretation of data gathered from consultation with children must be done based on a sound understanding of contemporary childhood theory.

At times children are not able to speak for themselves which may have an impact on their future experiences. In these situations groups and individuals who represent children must have the opportunity to speak for them. In order to be a voice for children, advocates must consult with children and their families.

Consent must be obtained from children and their families in order to include them in any process of data gathering. The purpose of the consultation must be made clear to the children and their families. Children involved in any process must have it explained to them at a level which they can understand.

The privacy of all children must be respected at all times. Information collected in the process of consultation must not be used inappropriately. While confidentiality can never be absolute, information must be treated in a professional, legal and ethical way.

Listening

Educators and staff must use listening as a foundation for interactions. Listening is based on observation and in leaving spaces in conversations and communication, suspending judgement and in giving full attention to children as they communicate. Truly attending to children's communication promotes a strong culture of listening.

Every effort must be made to ensure that it is the voice of children that is heard. Adults must acknowledge the children's perspective in any representation they make on their behalf. When interpreted or presented to others this information should maintain the truth as viewed by the children consulted. A child's opinion must be valued for its validity to their perspective.

Children and Families

Children's views must be valued and treated with respect. Due consideration must always be given in any situation where a child expresses themselves. In the process of consultation and consequent representation these views and a child's perspective is to be valued.

A culture of respectful interaction is promoted when children's attempts to communicate are valued. Turn taking and regulating children's conversations promotes active engagement. Respectful communication with families generates greater confidence in interacting.

Children must not be intimidated or interrogated in any way and must be given sufficient time to respond. No form of deception or bribery should be involved in consulting with children.

Children must not be placed in any environment that represents a threat to their health or wellbeing. In consulting with children, adults must consider the children's health and well-being at all times.

Reflection and Consideration

Time is dedicated to reflecting upon interactions within children.

Reflections should consider how to spend extended periods engaged in interactions with children that comprise communication and listening.

Role Modelling

Educators and staff model positive interactions when they show care, empathy and respect for children, families and colleagues. Educators learn and use effective communication strategies.

Children under five are learning communication and social skills. The way in which educators relate and interact with them and to other people is an important source of information about how they should communicate and interact with others.

Therefore, educators should relate to children in a positive way which responds to each child's individual needs and enables the child to develop the ability to relate in a similar positive way to others. Children also need adults who actively teach them communication skills, by relating to them in ways which build upon their existing and emerging social and interactive communication skills, and by providing them with opportunities, and activities to exercise and develop these skills.