

Podcast 1 Documentation

TOPIC: An Introduction to Documenting children's learning and development in children's education and care services

Hello and welcome. Today I'll provide you with an introduction to documenting children's learning and development in children's education and care services.

In this session I will be covering a range of issues, including:

- Getting the balance right in documentation
- Common misconceptions and myths around documentation
- Different ways to document
- Important points around documentation
- Who to contact for support

So, let's get started. Documenting children's learning and development can be, but doesn't need to be challenging.

Ongoing reflection on our practices and processes is required to ensure we:

- get the balance right,
- identify what is most relevant and meaningful to document, and
- effectively use the documentation to plan and evaluate children's learning.

Today, I'm also going to cover some common misconceptions around documentation, to emphasise that there is not one mandated method of documenting, and revisit the purpose of documentation in education and care services.

There are a number of myths circulating about the expectations of documentation. For example, it's a myth that you need to write a report on every child, every day.

Another common misconception about documentation is that links must be drawn to the quality areas, or that the best way to document is to provide numbered plans or to colour code them.

To get a realistic understanding of what documenting really involves, there are a number of useful resources on the ACECQA and Early Childhood Australia websites.

For example, both websites include myth-buster sections that dispel many of the myths circulating about documentation.

It's important to acknowledge what research and experience have shown us – that documented plans and the recording of children's assessment and evaluations, when properly used, are effective methods to promote and extend children's thinking, learning and development.

However, it's equally important to recognise that there isn't one set method of documenting. In fact, none of the approved learning frameworks, the National Quality Standard or any of the regulations, prescribe a set method on how to document.

This is because we recognise that each and every service is unique and therefore, any one-size-fits-all approach, would be problematic.

While templates and programs may be helpful to organise information, there is a risk that they can be limiting and in some cases they can result in unnecessary administrative burden.

Resist the temptation to reduce your documentation to a 'tick and flick' approach. The purpose of documenting is to, as far as possible, capture the richness of the children's programs and learning that occurs in your service.

There are many ways to document children's learning and the cycle of observing, planning, reflecting and evaluating. Some examples I have seen include reflective journals, photographs, videos, children's work, observations, portfolios, narratives and learning stories.

It is important to decide what works best for you, your service and your children, to meet the National Quality Standard and underpinning legislative standards.

The key thing to remember is that it is not the amount of documentation you have, or how immaculately or colourfully the information is presented or scrapbooked, but how the documentation is used.

Ask yourself whether your method of documenting and planning effectively captures children's current and future learning, and whether it adequately communicates children's learning and progress.

The information on page 17 of the *Early Years Learning Framework* and page 16 of the *Framework for School Age Care* is helpful to remind us why we are assessing or evaluating and documenting children's learning and development.

Educators should feel empowered to explore a range of styles and methods to determine what works best for them and their children, families and communities.

Having said that, there are some points about documentation you should note. It is important to remember:

- documentation is an important part of your work with children and families
- children's voices and ideas should be captured in planning, documentation and evaluation
- even experienced educators need to try different methods to find what is realistic, achievable and relevant for their children, families, educators and their setting
- educators should establish achievable benchmarks that are regularly reviewed
- to be selective in what you choose to document, because it is not possible to capture all of the rich experiences and learnings that occur every day
- to share your documentation efforts and experiences and continue to learn, grow and develop
- to be open to change as the dynamics of the children's group or team change
- to constantly review and remind yourself why we are documenting and for whom, and
- to be clear about what the standards, learning frameworks and, if relevant, the funding agreements are asking us to do.

If you are unsure about something, refer to the National Quality Standard, approved frameworks and related resources; access journal articles and research; or participate in professional development activities or action research projects that assist you to reflect on practice and make informed decisions about documenting.

It is useful to contact your peak organisation or the Professional Support Co-ordinator in your state or territory for more information about the opportunities available.

Your documentation will evolve and be enhanced when you are open to critical reflection, as this will allow you to focus on areas that need improving as well as to identify and celebrate your achievements.