

Podcast 2 Documentation

TOPIC: Why do we need to document and what is the most effective way to document?

Hello and welcome. In our first podcast on documentation,

I spoke about the importance of documentation as well as the principles behind documenting, planning and evaluating a child's learning.

I also emphasised that there is no one set method for documenting, and nor should there be, given that each service and child is unique.

In this session, I'm going to talk about the reasons behind documenting and refer to specific sections of the learning frameworks that will assist you in documenting.

But first, let's go over why we need to document.

Gathering and analysing information about what children know, what they can do and understand, is part of an ongoing cycle that is crucial to helping educators in partnership with children, families and other professionals.

For example, documenting will help to track a child's progress, allowing children and families to celebrate achievements, as well as assisting you to identify the children who may need additional support to achieve certain outcomes.

One of the practices supported by the *Early Years Learning Framework*, is assessing and monitoring children's learning - in other words - gathering and analysing information as evidence about what children know, can do and understand.

Documentation is key to assessing and monitoring children's learning and is a powerful tool to make the process of learning visible to children and their families, educators and other professionals.

The *My Time, Our Place Framework* for school aged care also recognises the importance and value of evaluating children's wellbeing and learning.

Key to this practice is documentation, which allows educators to gather knowledge about children's wellbeing and learning as they reflect, monitor and analyse information about how children feel and what children know, can do and understand.

When documenting, it's important that you identify and set achievable and manageable benchmarks.

Again, I'd like to emphasise that there is not one mandated method of documenting. Approved providers, educators and educational leaders need to identify ways to document that are suitable for their setting and context.

Think about what method of documenting would be most relevant for your children and their families, your educators and your community.

To promote ownership and commitment, it is important that educators and service leader's work collaboratively in this decision making process. Talk to families and children and involve them in the decision making process.

If your service provides school age care, then it's important to recognise that school age care has a recreation or leisure focus and children often only attend for short (or irregular) periods of time. We also need to think about the capacity of children to be co-collaborators in describing their learning.

Also, planning in an educator's home in family day care is likely to be focused on activities and experiences that take advantage of the relatively small number of children, the home based setting, and the opportunities and experiences in their local community.

Documenting is a key part of the cycle of planning, implementing and evaluating depicted in this diagram from page 11 of the *Educators Guide for the Early Years Learning Framework*.

Page 12 of the Framework for School Age Care also reminds us that planning is an ongoing cycle underpinned by reflective practice.

The Framework suggests that "Effective forward planning will enable the success of any service. It operates as a continuous 'cycle of inquiry' which includes stopping to think about how and why we're doing things the way we are, examining our answers to these questions from different perspectives, and using the deeper understandings we develop as a reference point for deciding what actions or changes we want to make".

This ongoing and cyclic planning is demonstrated in Figure 3 and links to the service's Quality Improvement Plan.

The Frameworks also introduce and define terms that may be unfamiliar to some educators, terms like agency, scaffold and pedagogy. It is important to understand these terms to understand the requirements for documentation.

To summarise, some key points to remember regarding documentation are:

- There are no mandated templates or programs
- Resist the temptation for shortcuts – the 'tick and flick' or 'fill in the box' approach
- Identify for your service an achievable, meaningful and relevant way of meeting the standards
- It's not the amount of documentation you have, or how well it is presented, but how it's used
- Ask yourself – how does it assist in planning effectively for children's current and future learning, and communicating this
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach – explore a range of styles and methods to determine what works best for your children, families, educators, setting, service and community.

Enjoy your documentation journey, and don't forget to look back on your documentation to identify and celebrate the achievements and successes of your children, your families and your team.

In my next podcast, I'll explore what the learning frameworks, National Quality Standard and regulatory standards require in regard to documentation.