

POLICY TIP SHEET:

Including family input

- **Children and families are the primary stakeholders of your service.** If they are respected and their opinions on service policies are genuinely sought, this will lead to policies that are more likely to be accepted and supported by the people most affected by them.
- **When collaborating or consulting with families** about their needs and expectations of the service, there will often be a wide range of opinions about particular issues in any education and care service. The key to developing relevant and meaningful policies is being able to coordinate all these viewpoints to reach a common consensus.
- **Understand that family members are often busy people** that are trying to juggle the responsibilities of work, home and family life. This may leave little time for families to consistently participate in policy review or other needs of the service. So be prepared to be inventive and flexible in your strategies for gaining family feedback and involvement.
- **Talk to families** about the importance of their input to ensure the service is moving forward in a way that is able to continue to meet their needs. Talk to them about how they prefer to be communicated with and how they prefer to provide feedback.
- **Ask families about their needs** in relation to their children, their work, and their family.
- **Communication is the key.** Remember that different people prefer to communicate in different ways, so use a variety of strategies to encourage family feedback:
 - Ask them to complete a **short written survey**. Consider using email as a means of obtaining feedback, or include a survey in your newsletter, or attach one to their next fees invoice.
 - **Chat to families** when they come to enrol, collect or deliver their children. This will help you to understand their reasons for using education and care. The more you get to know your families the clearer their specific needs will become. Keep a printed sheet of questions relating to the policy area currently under review, and note down individual comments after speaking to families.
 - **Phone** at a time when families are able to have a chat. Ask them what time is best for them. This can be a more relaxed opportunity for families to more fully explain their needs and expectations. Again have a printed sheet of questions and note down the parents' comments.
 - Arrange to **meet them to discuss their needs**. Remember to write these needs down either during or after the meeting.
 - **Use a range of other feedback strategies** including: suggestion boxes; interactive noticeboard displays; online website feedback;
- **Highlight policies under review** by:
 - Featuring the relevant policy or parts of the policy in your **newsletter** and ask families for their comments and feedback;
 - Setting up a **display on the family noticeboard**;
 - **Placing a copy of the policy near the 'sign in' area together with a feedback sheet** on which families can record their comments;
 - Children's **educators talking to their families** about the current policy review;
 - **Sending out notices to families** through emails, fliers, letters or SMS messages.

- **It is important to listen** to what families are saying. Don't jump to conclusions. Hear them out and try to see their perspective. Don't be defensive if their feedback is negative or their expectations seem unreasonable. Try to put yourself in their shoes and understand their point of view.
- **Don't be upset if only a few families respond to your requests for feedback.** If you use a wide range of strategies as discussed above, and are open and flexible in your methods of accepting feedback, you will be giving all families the opportunity to contribute, and those families that wish to respond will.
- **Give feedback to those families that have given you input.** Let them know how their feedback has been incorporated into the policy review. There may be cases where current ideologies and the philosophy of your service differ from the ideas or wishes of some families. You must be prepared to explain why the service is adopting a particular decision. Referring to the recommendations of a recognised authority, or being able to refer to a professional document that supports your approach may assist in your explanation. (Refer to Policy Tip Sheet – Identifying reliable sources.)
- **Publicise policies to families** as this will help them to appreciate the importance of policies and will in turn encourage greater interest in having input into policy review. Use a number of strategies to publicise policies to families:
 - Include policy overviews and explanations in the **Parent/Guardian handbook**.
 - Include policy updates, reminders or recurring issues related to policy in the **service newsletter** i.e. as summer approaches remind families of the need to provide a suitable hat for their child, and highlight significant aspects or changes to the sun protection policy.
 - Draw attention to specific policy requirements by **placing a copy of the relevant policy next to a task related to that policy** i.e. display policy on late collections of children next to the signing in and out book, to remind families about the need to contact the service if they know they will be late.
 - Explain certain practices at the service by **displaying the relevant policy in the appropriate area** i.e. the nutrition policy is displayed next to the menu, or the excursion policy is put up next to details about a forthcoming outing.
 - Help stakeholders to understand the rationale behind certain policies by **making copies of supporting materials available** to them i.e. pamphlets from the SIDS Foundation will help families to understand your babies sleep policy, so make them available next to a copy of the policy, or give a pamphlet to new families when they first enrol their baby and you are explaining the sleep policy to them.
 - Draw attention to a new policy or change in policy by establishing a **space on the family noticeboard for NEW POLICIES**. Ensure the board is in a central location, where families will see it. Refer families to the board when new information has been put up. You may also provide a plain sheet of paper for their comments, or invite families to put their comments in a suggestions box located nearby.
 - Send out **individual flyers or letters** to inform stakeholders of specific policy changes. Include a tear off signature slip for stakeholders to sign to confirm they have read the new policy. Always invite them to provide feedback on the impact of any changes.

References

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