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Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

1A Interacting with children

1B Gathering information from secondary sources

Gathering information about children

In your daily work as an educator, you will make observations about the strengths, interests and development of children. Observing children in their usual play patterns and daily interactions can help you to understand their individual strengths, interests and needs as they develop.

Collecting information from secondary sources, including families, colleagues and specialists, is another way to find out vital information about children.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
✓	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

The following examples illustrate how an educator may learn about individual children by observing them:

- ▶ Lisa demonstrates she doesn't understand the rules of the game when she runs away with the ball and starts her own game.
- ▶ Jo demonstrates an understanding of friendship when she tells others that Kiera is her friend and they like each other because they both play with dolls.
- ▶ Vera demonstrates that she understands the rules of indoor time when she explains to Sally that they need to use a quiet voice and walk inside.
- ▶ Frederick demonstrates his ability to communicate socially when he discusses his new little sister at group time.
- ▶ Reece demonstrates an interest in bugs and spiders during playtime.

Developmental aspects

You can learn about children by observing their behaviour.

Whatever the age of a child, you should notice:

- ▶ aspects of their development, including physical, social, emotional, cognitive and communication development
- ▶ the child's interests, ideas and abilities
- ▶ the child's knowledge, skills and understanding
- ▶ how they react in the play environment.

It is recommended that skills, abilities and knowledge are a focus of your program. In this way, you are providing children with a positive environment that they feel capable of participating in.

The following tables provide an overview of developmental aspects, and the skills and abilities you may expect to observe in children of different ages and stages of development.

Age	Physical aspects
0–3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Brings hand to mouth ▶ Takes swipes at dangling objects ▶ Opens and shuts hands ▶ Raises head momentarily while lying on stomach ▶ Reflexively grasps finger or object placed in their hand
3–6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Can reach for things voluntarily ▶ Holds head upright in a sitting position ▶ Holds head upright for longer periods while lying on stomach

Age	Communication aspects
0–6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Coos back and forth with caregiver ▶ Capable of responding to their own name (4–5 months) ▶ Pays attention to human voices more than any other noise ▶ Gives and receives communication ▶ Imitates and responds to someone speaking
6–12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Until 8–12 months, communicates by crying, cooing, babbling, imitating, making facial expressions, using body language and gestures ▶ Can respond to simple verbal requests ▶ Begins to imitate spoken words ▶ First words may be spoken
12–24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Has a vocabulary of approximately 5–20 words ▶ Vocabulary is made up chiefly of nouns ▶ May repeat a word or phrase over and over ▶ Is able to follow simple commands
2–3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Can name a number of objects common to their surroundings ▶ Is able to use at least two prepositions, usually 'in', 'on' or 'under' ▶ Approximately two-thirds of what the child says is intelligible ▶ Has a vocabulary of approximately 150–300 words ▶ Can use two pronouns correctly; for example, 'I', 'me' or 'you', although 'me' and 'I' are often confused ▶ The words 'my' and 'mine' are beginning to emerge ▶ Can respond to commands such as 'show me your nose'
3–5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Uses clear speech with only a few grammatical errors ▶ More complex speech patterns and vocabulary emerge ▶ Asks questions ▶ Tells stories and recalls past events ▶ Understands advanced concepts such as 'same' and 'different' ▶ May be capable of reciting their name and address
Age	Cognitive aspects
0–12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Gains information through all senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch ▶ Explores objects in a variety of ways; for example, by shaking, banging or dropping them
12–24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Recognises own facial features ▶ Acquires the notion of object permanence ▶ Begins to sort shapes and colours
2–3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Problem-solving skills increase ▶ Can complete a four-piece puzzle ▶ Participates in make-believe play ▶ Can sort by shape and colour

f. What did the child tell you?

g. What did you ask the child?

h. What did you find out from interacting with the child?

2. Read the case study, and then answer the question that follows.

Case study

Peter, an educator, is observing four-year-old Lisa, who is playing in the sandpit.

Karen, another educator, is helping a different child build a sandcastle as Lisa watches.

Karen asks Lisa if she would like to build a sandcastle. Lisa smiles, so Karen hands her a bucket and shovel. Lisa turns away from Karen and sits with Charles, a boy she often interacts with. She uses both hands to grasp the shovel to fill her bucket with sand. Once the bucket is full, she turns it upside down.

Peter has never observed Lisa building a castle before, so he is quite interested.

The sand pours from the bucket as Lisa turns the bucket over; at least half of the sand pours from the bucket before Lisa can fully turn it upside down. Lisa begins to scowl and Charles starts to laugh. Lisa screws up her face and lets out a sob. She then throws her shovel, which hits Charles on his leg. Charles continues to laugh as Lisa stands up and kicks the bucket out of her way.

As she leaves the sandpit, Lisa picks up her doll.

Write down what you notice about Lisa's behaviour with regard to the following areas:

- ▶ Aspects of her development
- ▶ Her interests and skills
- ▶ Her needs
- ▶ Social interactions
- ▶ Her knowledge, skills and understanding

To communicate effectively with families you may:

- ▶ ask parents and family members to fill in forms, such as enrolment forms
- ▶ provide opportunities for parents and family members to participate in feedback methods, such as suggestion boxes or surveys
- ▶ involve parents and family members in discussions at drop-off or pick-up times
- ▶ develop methods where parents and family members can write or record information, when necessary
- ▶ ask specific questions about their child
- ▶ share the information you have gathered about the child and ask them to add any further details or clarify the information.

Watch this video about interacting with children's families.

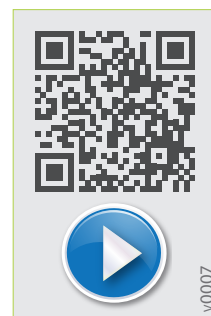
Sharing information with families

When families provide information, ensure that you show interest and encourage them to continue. To facilitate the effective exchange of information with parents, you must make yourself available to speak with them at appropriate times. This availability may vary according to the structure of your service, and your role and responsibilities.

You can make yourself available to communicate and share information with parents and family members when:

- ▶ children and parents arrive at the service at the start of the day
- ▶ parents arrive to collect their children
- ▶ talking on the phone
- ▶ having organised care review meetings
- ▶ parents participate in activities
- ▶ chatting informally in a tea and coffee area
- ▶ parents and/or family members drop in during the day.

By planning to share information at these times, you show that your service values communication. Parents appreciate this knowledge transfer as it demonstrates that you are willing to meet the individual needs of their child.



Learning checkpoint 1

Gathering information about children

Observe, listen to and interact with **three** different children during their normal pattern of play and daily interactions.

1. Interact with each child to identify a point of interest. The point of interest might:

- ▶ identify a key topic of interest they have
- ▶ be an idea they express about an item, issue or situation
- ▶ demonstrate their knowledge about an item or issue
- ▶ show a skill that the child demonstrates.

Describe the interactions you had with the children, including:

- a. What you said
- b. What the children said

2. Gather information from a secondary source, such as co-workers or a child's parents. Focus on one child and include details about all of the child's developmental aspects, including their:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| ▶ interests | ▶ family |
| ▶ likes | ▶ religion |
| ▶ dislikes | ▶ culture |
| ▶ routines | ▶ cultural practices |
| ▶ language | ▶ social interactions. |
| ▶ reactions to the play environment | |

Ensuring confidentiality

All documentation about children is confidential. It is for the purpose of supporting curriculum planning. Ensure parents give permission to use these records within the service for programming purposes.

Parental permission must be obtained prior to the records being shown to any person outside the service or being used for any purpose other than for program planning. You must also store your records in a place where unauthorised people can't read or access them; for example, in a lockable filing cabinet.

Methods of recording observations

There are various ways you can gather and record your observations of children. Some common methods are outlined in the following information.

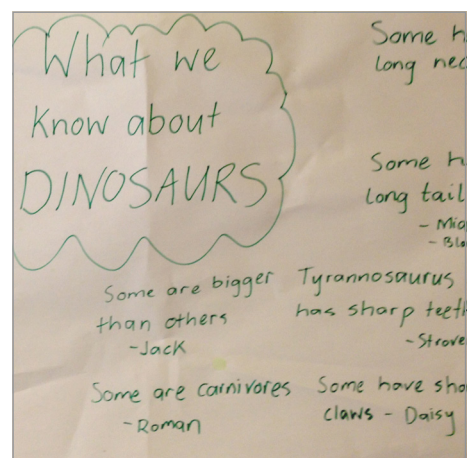
Discussion with families

Orientation is a time to collect documentation about children and their families, and to develop open verbal communication. Most services update their documented information regularly, but the daily discussions you have with parents are where most of your important information should come from as you ask questions and listen to the details parents share with you.

Questioning

Questioning is useful, particularly when working with older children. You can question children directly, or you can develop a questioning method that allows children to consider and reply in their own time.

Daily evaluation sheets, surveys, questionnaires and forms are some examples of questioning methods. A daily evaluation sheet asks others to evaluate how the day went by providing specific questions, such as what activities were enjoyed most, what could be extended or what ways the curriculum can be improved.



'Graffiti sheets' can also be used to brainstorm: ask a question and have various people add their ideas to it.

Not all questioning is useful; sometimes children respond inappropriately or provide a response that they think you or their peers would like to hear rather than responding honestly.

Verbal questioning may be recorded in a variety of ways; for example, you may use a jotting or anecdotal record, tick off a checklist, or make notes against an anticipated set of responses.

Identifying objectives

Learning stories lead you to identify objectives. The things you notice about children when creating learning stories help you plan objectives for them. Objectives are essential as they help you to plan programs for children that are realistic and within their abilities.

As you become more skilled at writing learning stories, you will start to develop more expressive comments in your recording.

Digital images

Photographs take a snapshot of a child in action and can be used to show a sequence of events or a particular outcome. They may also be valuable in promoting a child's self-esteem because they can share their photos with others and be reminded of attempts and successes.

Photos also help you to document a child's play and peer relationships. Most educators who use photos add written information to make it clear what is being shown.



Remember that children may change their behaviour when being photographed, so consider this when trying to observe particular behaviour. If you take photos frequently, the children may react less to having their picture taken, and this record will become more accurate.

Video recordings can be used in a similar way to photographs, although they are more difficult to access and show. They make excellent displays of work, especially when a process is being recorded; for example, you could record some children building a sandcastle and play the video in the room for children and parents to look at and talk about. Videos are also useful in that they record sound to complement the visual component.

Photographs and videos are also excellent for recording memories. For example, you could record the child's or the group's achievements over a week, term or year. You could also record special events that occur in the service or for a particular child.

Example

Using photographs to record information

A small group of children are working in the sandpit. They have moved most of the sand into the centre of the pit and are creating a huge sandcastle. Two children have cars and toy people moving over the sand. Two other children are using feathers and shells to decorate the edge of the castle. Other children are negotiating where to place the flag.

The weather begins to change, and you say that it looks like it might rain. The children are disappointed and concerned that the rain will destroy the castle before their parents get to see it.

You suggest taking a photo so their hard work can be recorded and shown to others.

After taking the photo, you attach it to the noticeboard, and children excitedly show their parents what they have achieved.

2B Writing objective and accurate records

Observation records are created to provide information about a child. It is important that you record all observations clearly, objectively and accurately.

Objective records

An objective record reports what actually occurred, rather than what you think has happened or how you feel about what you have observed. It requires a non-judgmental approach to ensure that the child is not labelled in a negative or positive way. By doing this, your report will be free from bias. To provide a fair and factual account, an objective record must not include personal opinions.

When a record is neutral or objective, the reader can easily understand what has occurred. There is no need to record why you think the child did something or what you expect they were thinking.



Example

An educator records an objective observation

Isa is writing a record based on her observations of five-year-old Jessica. Isa thinks that Jessica has been a bit naughty today, but she knows that the word 'naughty' is subjective, negative and describes what she thinks, not what she sees. Instead, she writes the following.

Child: Jessica	Age: 5 years, 1 month
Date: 18.01.18	Time: 2.10 pm
Setting: Outdoors at climbing frame Jessica played with Mallory on the climbing frame. They raced to the top of the frame, and then Jessica pushed Mallory down the steps. Jessica watched Mallory lying on the ground and said, 'What a sook you are!' An educator approached to see if Mallory was okay and Jessica ran to the cubby. Occasionally she looked out the door and poked her tongue out at anyone who passed by.	
Recorded by: Isa	

Isa finds that she can discuss this objective record with other educators to gain ideas about how to support Jessica and guide her behaviour positively. This would not have been possible if her record was limited to describing Jessica as 'naughty'.

Practice task 4

Rewrite the following record to remove any biased, inaccurate or negative language. Make up any details you need to.

Child: Johannes	Age: 4 years, 3 months
Date: 28.02.18	Time: 12.45 pm
Setting: Outdoors at climbing frame Johannes is completing a puzzle, but it is too hard for him. The kid from Afghanistan, Asa, comes to see what Johannes is doing. They start wrecking the puzzle. They are very cheeky and won't let Noma, the infant, come near the table. Johannes pushes Noma away and hurts her. These boys are very naughty.	
Recorded by: Pam	

Summary

- ▶ Ensure that you have parental permission for each child prior to recording observations.
- ▶ Ensure you follow your organisation's policies, procedures and requirements for recording observations.
- ▶ It is valuable to use a range of recording methods to discuss information relating to the interests, skills, developmental needs and cultural background of each child.
- ▶ You must be able to write observation records that are factual, non-judgmental, and free from bias and negative labelling.
- ▶ Documenting accurately involves giving clear examples and precise details for objective recording.
- ▶ Objective, clear and accurate observation records can be used easily by other authorised people.



Topic 3

In this topic you will learn about:

3A Discussing information with relevant people

3B Using observations to plan programs

Using observations to inform practice

You need to use the observations you have collected to provide the best outcomes for children. If you need to discuss information with others, you must follow all guidelines for doing so and discuss the information with appropriate people.

Your observations will also influence the service program. Your program is influenced by the records gathered about each child, as well as by your pedagogy (professional practice). You can use the information gathered to provide appropriate experiences, routines and interactions that reflect the interests and needs of individual children and the group. This recorded information also ensures quality program planning and educator interactions for children.

3A Discussing information with relevant people

By involving relevant people in discussions about your program, you can make it richer and more dynamic, as discussions may generate fresh ideas for activities and experiences. You will also feel supported as others offer their ideas, participate in preparation and implementation, and contribute to evaluations. You must always maintain confidentiality in your discussions.



Relevant people to involve in these discussions may include:

- ▶ parents
- ▶ members of the child's extended family, such as grandparents and other relatives
- ▶ other educators
- ▶ carers
- ▶ education providers, such as preschool teachers
- ▶ specialists
- ▶ neighbours and family friends.

Maintaining confidentiality of information

When a family or other secondary source provides you with information, it is essential that you handle it confidentially. Confidentiality applies to all types of shared information and may include details held on enrolment forms, developmental information or day-to-day information shared at drop-off and pick-up times.

To maintain confidentiality, you must never leave any documentation where others can access it, such as on benchtops, in staff rooms or in your car. It must be stored appropriately; for example, in a lockable filing cabinet, where access is restricted to authorised people.

The information you gather, record and work with must be available to parents at their request, and their permission must be obtained before any records or information is shared with any person outside your service.

Relationships grow through respect and trust. Making and sharing judgments with others not only breaches confidentiality, but is also unprofessional and may compromise your relationship with families and children. For example, if you overstep these boundaries by involving yourself in casual conversation about a family or child, it can be damaging to your reputation and may even cost you your job.

The Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Code of Ethics provides you with guidance regarding confidentiality and your responsibilities to families, children, colleagues, communities, students, employers and yourself.

When you are interpreting documentation and other records about children, you need to identify specific information to help you plan appropriate experiences for the child or group of children.

The following table outlines some of the factors you should take into consideration.

Challenges

The play environment should offer appropriate challenges. If it is too challenging, children may become frustrated as they are not able to master play activities.

For example, if climbing frames are provided for infants who are just mastering the ability to walk, this may cause them frustration as they do not have the necessary fundamental movement skills to use the frames. Climbing frames are also inappropriate for this age group as they are a falling hazard.

Stimulation

The play environment should be appropriately stimulating. If it is not, children may become bored.

Only providing a few toys and books is not enough. Equipment, toys and activities that are appropriate to both age and developmental stage should be provided to stimulate children's development and keep them happily occupied.

Interests and needs

Children should have the opportunity to engage with their interests and needs in the play environment. When you have information about a child's needs and interests, you must apply this to provide the children with a stimulating and rewarding environment that they are happy to spend their time in.

For example, if you observe that a child enjoys water play activities, ensure this is part of the program.

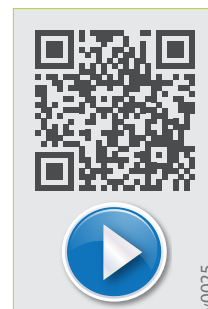
Reactions

Take children's reactions to the play environment into consideration. These may be negative or positive.

If many children race to the home corner in the morning to start their play, this indicates a positive and valuable play environment that should be maintained.

If you identify and use this information, you can then determine appropriate ways to enhance children's play and physical experiences. You can also ensure your interactions with children meet their individual requirements. Children should enjoy and benefit from the experiences you choose.

Watch this video about considering individual children.



Planning stage	Details	Example
4. Planning an activity or experience	<p>Activities are basic tasks that are completed in a specific way.</p> <p>Experiences occur when resources are provided that encourage agency, including choice, creativity, interaction and learning.</p> <p>The objectives you set help you plan your activities and experiences.</p> <p>When setting objectives, think of experiences, activities and interactions you can use to help achieve the goal.</p> <p>When planning experiences, think about interactions or communication associated with your activity.</p> <p>Ensure they remain positive and encouraging, include scaffolding and demonstrate respect for the child.</p> <p>Communication can initiate play or an activity, encourage a child, help them feel comfortable and safe, and introduce new language, skills or knowledge.</p>	<p>Sam develops a number of activities and experiences to enable Felicity to extend on and share her interest in cars.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ For Sam to start a conversation about cars at snack time ▶ For Sam to set up a car mat, blocks and dolls in the sandpit ▶ For Sam to make a memory game that matches makes and models of cars, and include sedans and four-wheel drives as a way to introduce the new concept
5. Implementing	<p>Put your ideas into action. Where possible involve the children in altering and setting up the environment.</p>	<p>Sam asks Felicity and other children to help him set up the car mat and a matching game. This gets them involved with the change and also piques their interest in what activities are available.</p>

Reviewing the plan

Once you have completed this process, review your plan by observing again. This involves reviewing the goals and objectives that you have developed to ensure they have direction and purpose.

There are two methods for developing useful objectives, as outlined in the following.

1. Use the SMART acronym:

- ▶ Specific – the objective must specify what you want to achieve.
- ▶ Measurable – you should be able to measure whether or not you are meeting the objectives.
- ▶ Achievable – the objectives you set must be achievable and attainable.
- ▶ Realistic – the objective must be realistically achievable with the resources you have.
- ▶ Time-framed – specify when you want to achieve the set objective or the period of time you wish to take to achieve this objective.

2. Use a task analysis:

Break the task down into small steps that show how a child may complete the task, and then identify your realistic objective for the plan.

- c. The child has constructed a building project with a group of friends. It is quite complex and the children are excited.

- d. You suspect the child may have been abused while staying with a neighbour over the weekend. You notice a burn mark on the child's leg and a bruise in the shape of a hand on their back.

2. Access the following documents and write down where you would find the requested information.

- a. Which element of the NQS highlights that any documentation about a child must be made accessible to families at all times?

- b. Which article from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the goals of education?

- c. Which ECA Code of Ethics responsibility relates to including families in program decision-making?

Part B

1. Document a point of interest you notice about a child using an observational record of your choice. The recorded information should identify a point of interest relating to the child's development, knowledge, ideas, abilities, interests, social interaction, reactions to the play environment or cultural practice.

- a. Include the child's age, the time and date of observation, and the setting.
