Background

Responsive and reciprocal relationships are the foundation of quality early childhood education and care programs. Teachers and educators who are attuned to children's needs, ideas, thoughts and feelings, support their learning, development and wellbeing. *"When children feel safe, secure and supported they grow in confidence to explore and learn". (The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia V2.2022, pg. 30)*

Children learn best when they have secure relationships with caring and responsive adults, in environments where they feel safe and free to explore and learn. These partnerships are formed by people who work responsibly together to achieve common goals. Collaborative partnerships involve teachers and educators working with children, families, and other professionals to support every child to flourish.

Rich relationships, connections and partnerships are promoted when:

- Teachers and educators intentionally work to build, develop and sustain respectful, secure and trusting relationships with every child and family. Take time to reflect on your personal judgments and biases and discuss with your leadership team when feeling uncomfortable or challenged. *"Educators who are culturally responsive, respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, doing and being and celebrate the benefits of diversity". (The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia V2.2022, pg. 23)*
- Each child's story and lived experience is respected and valued, and families are empowered to act on behalf of their children within and beyond the early childhood setting.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are embedded in centre philosophy and practice. Providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in their environment is crucial to growing a strong identity and key to advancing reconciliation.
- Teachers and educators understand that relationship building takes time and so they slow down, make themselves available and create environments that support the development of reciprocal relationships with children, their families and local communities.
- Children experience warm, authentic, secure, predictable and respectful relationships with teachers and educators.
- Teachers and educators promote children's understandings of connections with others, responsibilities, independence, interdependence and collaboration.
  (Listening and Learning Together – C&K Curriculum Approach 2019. Pg 10)

This procedure outlines the responsibilities of C&K employees, teachers, educators, students, volunteers and external contractors when interacting and developing relationships with children, families and communities. This procedure also outlines responsibilities of families when interacting and developing relationships with teachers and educators.

Responsibilities - Interactions with children

- Behave and act in a professional manner consistent with the *C&K Code of Conduct.*
- Demonstrate care, respect, dignity and empathy towards children by responding openly and positively to their comments, questions, and requests for assistance, and providing comfort to children who are upset or showing signs of distress.
- Be emotionally available for children. Respond sensitively to children's cues, expressions, movements, sounds, body language, behaviour and words. Be receptive to children who may not be able to put their feelings into words.
- Spend time with and listening to every child to gain an understanding of their ideas, likes, dislikes, feelings and opinions. Children have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think, and feel, by talking, drawing, writing, or expressing, in any other way, that keeps them and others around them safe.
- Support children's secure attachments through consistent and warm interactions that show appropriate affection, are unhurried and predictable.
- View children as capable and competent and approach each interaction and situation from a strengths-based perspective i.e. what they can do now, what they can do when supported and what it could look like in the future.
- Encourage and support children to use a range of communication strategies to resolve conflict and express their needs, wants and feelings safely.
- Listen and support children to ask for help, speak up, share their concerns, and make complaints when they are unhappy, feel unsafe or disrespected. Children have the right to share their feedback, concerns and complaints on issues that affect them. Listen, take children seriously and respond in a sensitive and timely manner.
- Support children to explore reciprocal rights and active community participation, as well as fostering independence and agency. Listen and involve children in developmentally appropriate participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- Help children understand the concept of consent. This can be supported by modelling or demonstrating asking for and giving consent in play-based and everyday social scenarios where children can practice.

- View personal care routines and/or rituals (e.g. mealtimes, dressing, sleep, rest, toileting, nappy changing) as rich opportunities where relationships between children and teachers/educators can be strengthened. Empower children with choice for their personal care routines using 'Invite', 'Suggest' and 'Engage'. For example, changing a child's nappy:

INVITE
'Would you like a nappy change?'
Wait for child's response. If child signals 'no', wait

SUGGEST
'I think we should change your nappy now. Let me know when you are ready.'
Wait for child's response. If child signals 'no', wait

ENGAGE
'It is time for a nappy change now. Would you like to walk to the change area or shall I carry you?'
Talk about what is happening

- Build welcoming, culturally safe, inclusive and secure learning environments for all children and their families, by:
  o Being respectful regardless of background, ethnicity, languages spoken, religion, family makeup or gender.
  o Being culturally responsive by critically reflecting on situations that can arise from diversity and taking action to redress unfairness.
  o Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all aspects of the curriculum and working collaboratively with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families to make decisions that uphold all children's rights to have their cultures, identities, languages, capabilities and strengths acknowledged and valued.
  o Recognising and affirming children's home languages and cultural identities.
  o Being responsive to the diverse needs of all children including children with disabilities, developmental delays, medical conditions and children who have experienced/are experiencing trauma and/or vulnerability.
- Engage in relaxed and unhurried conversations with children about what is happening around them and what they are learning.
- Support children's self-regulation by helping them to make sense of their feelings and recognise these same feelings in others. This can assist children to build friendships and respect the rights of others while being appropriately assertive and caring.
- Support children to develop a sense of social responsibility, so they become aware of how their actions and behaviour impact others. Model respectful language, compassion, care for others and kindness.
- Model and positively reinforce pro-social behaviours such as sharing, turn-taking, cooperation, initiating interactions and building empathy.
- Display delight and enthusiasm in children's attempts and encourage them to persevere when faced with challenges.
- Encourage 'turn taking' communication by responding and adding to interactions initiated by children.
- Respond to children when they practice and play with language, by repeating the words, sounds and gestures that children use.
- Identify and understand certain learning environments, circumstances and experiences, routines and rituals may be challenging for some children. Seek support and guidance from your Early Childhood Education Manager and/or Early Childhood Pedagogy Advisor when needed.
- Be responsive and watch for signs of children withdrawing or struggling to participate positively in small or large groups. Children who appear independent and do not seek adult help, may need support in building positive relationships with others.
- Recognise all behaviour as an attempt to communicate. Be respectful and considered when responding to children's behaviours by maintaining a calm voice and demeanour. Ask a colleague for support and/or where practical, take a short break if feeling overwhelmed. Implement positive behaviour guidance strategies as outlined in the _Supporting Children's Behaviour Procedure_.
- Never implement any form of physical or corporal punishment e.g. hitting, slapping, kicking, biting, squeezing, or pinching a child, throwing an object at or towards a child with the intent of physically hurting a child.
- Unless there is an immediate threat to a child or another person's safety, never make physical contact that holds or restricts a child against their will to force compliance e.g. restraining, pulling, pushing, dragging or grabbing.

Responsibilities - Interactions with families
- Welcome families and create a sense of belonging by considering:
  o _Is your attitude, manner and approach welcoming to children and families? Are you responsive to familial relationships, beliefs, culture, customs, and approaches to child rearing?_
  o _Are family partnerships evident and embedded in your centre's philosophy, environment, curriculum and everyday practice?_
  o _Do you invite families to contribute to the program, share in children's investigations, interests and discoveries and contribute to decision-making about their child's learning?_
  o _Do you consult with families about preferred communication methods e.g. informal interactions at arrival and departure times, emails, online newsletters, Storypark?_

- Actively seek family feedback about their child's experiences and learning e.g. via Storypark, Collborative Teaching and Learning Journal, informal chats at arrival and departure, formal meetings, feedback box and surveys, Quality Improvement Plan contributions etc.
- Consult with families regarding the cultural appropriateness of the learning environment and encourage their ideas and contributions.
- Honour family diversity by building trusting relationships that respect cultural, spiritual and lifestyle choices, and stand up to actions that undermine their rights.
- Carefully consider and support families who may feel isolated. Understand that past experiences may affect a family's ability to establish and contribute to relationships.
- Support parents/guardians in their role as primary caregivers by providing appropriate and current information relating to child development, learning, child and family support agencies, training, specialists, counselling and/or funding to enable access and participation.
- Manage complaints from families as per the _Complaint Management Procedure_.
- (Branch centres only) Facilitate formal teacher/educator and parent meetings (e.g., twice a year or as needed) to share children's progress and discuss, review and plan goals for future learning.

Responsibilities - Interactions with community

- Develop and maintain local knowledge (including traditional knowledge) and work collaboratively with the local community. Seek Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidance to ensure that the authentic voices of traditional Owners, Elders and community members are highlighted in planning and practice.
- Take an interest in what is happening and is important to people in your community and embrace cultural celebrations to learn about each other.
- Advocate and raise awareness of issues impacting children, families and the early childhood education and care sector.
- Utilise the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (and other community data) to inform curriculum planning and strengthen local community networks. Possibilities include collaboratively planning transition programs to support children as they enter school.
- When appropriate, mentor other teachers, educators, students and volunteers.
- Collaborate and build partnerships with local agencies, professionals and schools to support positive experiences, transitions and outcomes for children and families.
- When available and appropriate, participate in community stakeholder meetings and respect the diverse perspectives and knowledge of other professionals.

Responsibilities of families

- Share relevant information with teachers and educators about your child's experiences, interests, and needs.
- When appropriate, include teachers and educators in relevant multidisciplinary stakeholder meetings relating to their child.
- Consider the advice and support of teachers, educators, and other professional partners.
- (Branch centres only) Follow the _Parent and Community Code of Conduct_
- Comply with reasonable staff requests and respect the diversity and differences of other families and staff.
- In the first instance, share concerns or complaints with the centre Director or the Responsible Person in Charge. If you feel your concern or complaint has not been adequately addressed:
  o Branch centres - Contact the centre's C&K Early Childhood Education Manager/Consultant (refer to Centre Profile displayed in centre foyer/near ICheckin for their name and contact details) OR C&K Central (3552 5300 | feedback@candk.asn.au).
  o Affiliated centres – Contact a committee member (refer to Centre Profile displayed in centre foyer for their name and contact details).

Acknowledgements and references

- _Listening and Learning Together (2019) – C&K Curriculum Approach_
- _ACECQA (2023) Information Sheet Quality Area 5 – Relationships with children._
- _ACECQA (2023) Information Sheet Quality Area 5 – Supporting children to regulate their own behaviour._
- _ACECQA (2023) Information Sheet – Inappropriate Discipline_
- ACECQA (2016) _Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children_ and _Building partnerships with families_
- _ACECQA (2022) Belonging, Being & Becoming- The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia V2_
- _ACECQA (2022) My Time, Our Place- Framework School Age Care in Australia_
- Commonwealth of Australia (2021) _Australian Early Development Census_
- Early Childhood Australia (2016) _Code of Ethics_
- _United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child_