

Preschool Field Officer Service

Integrated Child, Family and Youth Services



Small Group Experiences

Why have small groups?

In the Early Years Learning Framework intentional teaching is defined as 'educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions'. The best learning outcomes for children occur when there is a balance between child-directed play, guided play and adult-led learning.

In Practice Principle 6:- Integrated teaching and learning focuses on connecting child-directed play and learning, guided play and learning, and adult led learning. Early Childhood Educators build opportunities in their programs for children to interact with their environment and to interact with children and educators to extend their learning. Research has shown that when Educators have planned outcomes and goals for children, with a variety of pathways available, goals can be achieved, and children are more likely to remain engaged with the curriculum for longer and with more insight.

Small groups involve active engagement between the child and the adult. It involves being 'in tune' with children, shared sustained conversations and intentional teaching.

What is the benefit of having small group experiences?

- Children are able to participate when there are fewer children; without having to compete for the educator's time
- Small groups provide the educator with opportunities to assess children's individual needs and abilities
- Children can understand more easily when there are fewer distractions
- The educator has the time in small groups to pause and wait for children to respond
- The educator can build on what a child is saying, and help to support children to extend on their conversation skills
- Children have more of an opportunity to get to know each other
- Children are supported by the educator to build on their sharing and turn taking skills
- Small groups build the children's confidence to speak in a larger group at a later time
- Provide an opportunity to practice friendship skills e.g. friendship games, role playing or reading books, then acting them out
- Provide an opportunity to reflect on and practice a child's use of a social skill or emotional competency

- Consider the timing of the group – a group is more likely to achieve the desired outcome when children are tired or watching others out at play while they are left inside for a small group experience

What does a small group look like?

- Small groups can be planned inside or out
- Conduct small groups within the session, while other children are playing
- The educator models, elaborates and rephrases children's language
- The educator listens to children and allows them sufficient time to answer
- Preferably keep groups no larger than 6 children, ideally about 4 children
- Planned at a location where there will be minimal disruption from other children playing
- The educator encourages the children to take the lead
- The educator considers the duration of the group – a maximum of 20 minutes, less if the children are not developmentally ready for a 20 minute period
- Educators are seated at the child's level
- Educators use each child's name first, before speaking to the child.
- If children have difficulty taking turns consider an appropriate prompt; for example, if the children are cooking, the child having a turn may hold a special spoon, signalling it is their turn
- The children are pre-warned prior to finishing the game. A timer may be used to identify the length of time left
- Educators need to be flexible, if children are completely engaged in the activity, and showing no signs of inattention, consider playing a little longer
- Children's efforts are respected, if it is a shared activity, the finished product may be kept on display for children to show their family, or a photo taken to allow the children to share what they have done
- A small group will have more child talk than teacher talk

Please Note: Be sure to communicate to other educators your intention to have a small group; to inform them they will be responsible for working with and supervising the remainder of the group.

What types of activities are suitable for small groups?

- Cooking
- Board Games and card games
- Discussions
- Group Games e.g. 'Kangaroo Skippy Roo', 'Doggie, Doggie, who's got the bone?'
- Music sessions
- Role Playing
- Storytelling and reading stories
- A child directed activity – e.g. making a garage out of boxes for the cars, with an educator to extend and support

Please Note: Small groups need to be developmentally appropriate, they are not the time to plan structured activities such as 'work sheets' or an activity where children follow a step by step process to create a final product.

References:

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/australasian-journal-early-childhood/index-abstracts/ajec-vol-38-4-2013/1850-2/>

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