



Obligations and expectations of Family Day Care educators

Overview

A Family Day Care (FDC) service that is approved under the family assistance law to administer Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR) delivers child care to families by engaging educators to provide education and care in a residence (usually the educator's own home) or at an approved family day care venue.

As an educator, you are engaged by a service and the care that you provide is provided on behalf of that service. This is true regardless of whether you are, for example, employed by the service or if you are self employed and engaged under a contract with the service. You are part of a FDC service, and as such there are a number of important requirements that you must meet to ensure the service remains compliant with its obligations under the law.

Details on where you can find more comprehensive information on your responsibilities are provided at the end of this fact sheet.

Operating as a FDC educator

Insurance

The *Education and Care Services National Regulations* (National Regulations) requires every FDC educator to have public liability insurance of a minimum of \$10 million for the family day care residence or family day care venue, if applicable. You must be able to produce evidence of this insurance for inspection by the Regulatory Authority or an authorised officer under the National Law.

Suitability of educators

As an educator you must be, and continue to be, a suitable person to provide approved child care.

Under the National Law you, and if applicable, your assistant, must have an approved first aid qualification. After 1 January 2013 you must also have undertaken approved anaphylaxis management training and emergency asthma management training.

All jurisdictions except Tasmania have laws regarding persons working with children or working with vulnerable people. You must comply with these laws. These laws apply not only to you but also to anyone regularly in contact with the children you care for.

Under the National Quality Framework in the National Law, by 1 January 2014, you will also be required to have (or be actively working towards) at least an approved Certificate III level early childhood education and care qualification.

Quality of care

As an educator, you must meet the minimum standards identified in the National Law and National Regulations. These standards require that children have a safe, nurturing and developmental experience. They address, among other things, facilities, health and safety, programs and administration, and the suitability of the people providing the care.



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You should be familiar with the Early Years Learning Framework and Framework for School Age Care, as these are essential resources for implementing the National Quality Standards.

You must ensure your home or the approved venue where you are providing care meets the required standards for home-based care, including health and safety requirements for children. If providing family day care in an approved day care venue, you must ensure the venue meets the relevant standards.

Each state and territory may have additional requirements or slightly different requirements. Further details about this can be accessed via the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Their website is <http://acecqa.gov.au>.

Number of children in care

The National Law limits the number of children you may care for at any one time. Generally speaking, you may not provide approved care for more than seven children at a time. If your own children or other children in the premises are present during the periods you are providing care, these children count towards the limit of seven if they are under the age of 13 and there is no other adult caring for these children. You must also provide care to no more than four children at a time who are preschool age or under. These limits take effect:

- from 1 January 2012 in the ACT, SA and Vic, and
- from 1 January 2014 in NSW, NT, SA, TAS and WA – the applicable state ratios apply prior to this date.

When on an excursion you must meet the requirements in the National Law about the number of children you are allowed to care for. You must also consider if you will need extra people to provide adequate supervision at all times. A risk assessment should be completed before an excursion. A template excursion risk management plan is available on the ACECQA website.

You must abide by the Priority of Access Guidelines when filling vacant places.

Making a care arrangement with a family

Because you are part of an approved FDC service, the care you are providing is being provided by the service. This means that any arrangement you have with a family to provide care should be an arrangement made through the service or by the service. You should not make your own care arrangements without involving your service. At an absolute minimum, your service should have a full understanding and knowledge of the contract for care between you and the family, including the agreed fee and hours of care.

It is best practice for families to approach the service to make or change care arrangements rather than do this directly with you.

Keeping Records

Your service has an obligation to keep a range of records relating to the care provided within the service, under both the family assistance law and the National Law. This includes enrolment forms, evidence of insurance, and most importantly for educators, sign-in sheets or attendance records.

Every day when parents drop their children off for care, you should have each parent sign the attendance record showing that the child attended.



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The National Law and Regulations require that attendance records:

- record the full name of each child being educated and cared for and that date and time each child arrives and leaves, and
- are signed by the person who delivers/collects the child at the time this occurs, or where the signature of this person cannot be reasonably attained, by you.

You must not ask families to sign attendance records for days their child would not normally have attended, for days before their child starts care or after they cease attending care.

You should be regularly providing copies of your attendance records to your service. You should also be providing copies of all records you keep to your service. This is because your service is required to provide copies of any records to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) if they are asked.

Privacy

Information you collect or obtain through the delivery of education and care may be considered 'protected information' under the family assistance law and/or 'personal information' under the Commonwealth's *Privacy Act 1988*. In handling such information, you are required to comply with these laws.

As an example, information you have about a child in your care, such as their name, date of birth or Customer Reference Number, should not be disclosed to others except where required under the law. Please note that the family assistance law has penalties for unauthorised use or disclosure of protected information.

Reporting attendance

Your service is responsible for submitting the attendance reports from all its educators to the Child Care Management System (CCMS). These reports determine how much CCB, CCR or Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) is paid by the Australian Government for eligible families, so the accuracy of these reports is essential.

As an educator, you should be giving attendance reports to your service about the care you provide each week. You must make sure you report attendance correctly. This means only reporting attendance for sessions that the child actually attended. You can report absences, but only if the child would otherwise have been in care and only if the family was charged a fee for that care.

Your service is ultimately responsible, under the family assistance law, for the accuracy of the attendance reports it submits to the CCMS, and it is reasonable for them to contact you if your attendance records need clarification. Accordingly, if you, as an educator, submit attendance reports that are inaccurate, the service may decide not to submit the information to the CCMS until they are satisfied the report is correct. They do not have to submit exactly what you provide to them, indeed it is their responsibility to check and verify attendances before they are submitted for the payment of Commonwealth funds.

Even though your service is responsible for the accuracy of the attendance reports, particularly in relation to the calculation of CCB and CCR, if, for example, an educator provided false attendance records to their service and gained a financial advantage, this could be a crime and they could be subject to criminal prosecution for fraud.



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Providing care for the full session

If you are claiming CCB for a session of care, you must be able to provide care for that whole session. For example, you cannot report sessions of 8 hours per day, unless you are actually able to provide care for the full 8 hours. A child may not actually attend for the full 8 hours, but you must be able to provide care for the whole period of 8 hours, if the family requires it.

If you cannot provide care for the full session, for example when you are not available for the full session, you must reduce the length of the sessions you claim to reflect the period in which care was able to be provided.

Charging fees

Each service is responsible for setting their own fee schedule and charging policies. Most services will have a fee charging policy, and should review each educator's fee schedule to ensure that it meets their policy.

In order for CCB to be payable, there must be a direct commercial relationship between the family that is paying for the care, and the service that is providing it. Importantly, for the purposes of the family assistance law, it is the service, and not you as the educator, who is charging the family for the care.

Your service may allow you to set your own fees, but it is important to remember that under the family assistance law these fees are being charged by the service, not by you. Your service does not have to allow you to set your own fees.

The fee your service charges a family must be a real fee – that is, it must be the fee that the family is actually liable to pay. As an educator, you must not provide care and report a fee to the service that you know the family won't actually be charged.

If you have a family receiving JETCCFA, Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) or Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB), the service (including you acting on behalf the service) must not charge a higher fee than you would have charged this family if they were not eligible to receive one of these payments. It is an offence to charge a family a lower fee, for example if you claim that a family simply couldn't afford your usual fee, and then to charge a higher fee once SCCB, GCCB or JETCCFA is approved.

Money arrangements

As outlined above, under the family assistance law it is the service, not the educators that charge families for care. Also, after CCB is calculated if there is an outstanding gap fee for a family, the family owes that money to the service. When CCB is paid to the service, the service passes that CCB on to the family, usually by reducing the fee.

It is a common practice for a service to pass on to the educator most of the CCB payments made to the service, with the family paying the educator (on behalf of the service) the gap directly. If a family pays the educator directly, the money is being paid to the service through the educator, who is acting on behalf of the service. Although this is a common practice, services are not required to operate in this way. The details of these kinds of arrangements are matters for the operator of a service to decide.



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Statements and receipts

Your service is required, at a minimum, to provide families with a statement at least once every three months. This statement tells them what care has been provided, the fees that have been charged and the CCB that has been paid. As an educator, it is also good practice to provide receipts whenever you receive payments from families and provide a record of those receipts to your service.

Reporting suspicious or fraudulent behaviour

Fraud against the Commonwealth is an extremely serious matter and may constitute a criminal offence. Making false statements and/or providing misleading information has serious consequences such as criminal investigation.

If you find or have suspicions that a service or another educator is behaving fraudulently, you should contact the DEEWR's Child Care Support Line 1800 664 231.

More information

The main laws governing your family day care service's obligations are set out below.

Commonwealth family assistance law:

- *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999*
- *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999*
- *Child Care Benefit (Eligibility for Approval and Continued Approval) Determination 2000* and other legislative instruments made under the two acts above.

All these are available at: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Home>

The National Law (administered by your state or territory):

- *Education and Care Services National Law Act*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations*

Further general information on your obligations can be found in the *Child Care Service Handbook*, located on the www.deewr.gov.au website.

For further information on the following items, visit the ACECQA website www.acecqa.gov.au:

- National Quality Framework
- Quality Improvement Plans
- Early Years Learning Framework
- State and Territory licensing, including the details for your state or territory

DISCLAIMER

This fact sheet is a general guide to some of the legal obligations of FDC educators when providing education and care to children. This fact sheet is not a complete description of your legal obligations. This fact sheet also does not cover all the legal obligations of FDC educators. You should consult the relevant legislation for full details of your legal obligations. You may also wish to obtain your own independent legal advice.