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22 Safe Sleep in Family Day Care

Why is safe sleep and rest so important?

We know when children have optimal rest and sleep, this greatly impacts their ability to learn, regulate their emotions, engage with peers in a social manner, participate in their learning environments and achieve developmental outcomes in a positive way. Just like adults, children depend on sleep to achieve their full potential.

As Family Day Care educators, we have a duty of care to ensure we do everything possible for the health, safety, and wellbeing of children. The safe sleep practices that are mandated in early childhood education and care are based on years of evidence-based practice and extensive research.

The compliance around safe sleep is to assist us in protecting children from the known risks associated with sleep and rest. As a sector, we are becoming more aware and more proactive around ensuring safe sleep practices, with more and more fantastic support and education available for educators and services.







What do the Laws, Regulations and NQS say?

A good starting point is to review the compliance that is required. The National Laws and Regulations should always lay the foundations for your practice, service management, and personal conduct as a Family Day Care educator.

This also sets clear expectations for the families in your care. As you may already be aware, Red Nose Australia is the National Authority on safe sleep for babies and children.

Approved Providers, Nominated Supervisors and Educators should always design their policies and practices in consultation with the recommendations, guidelines and advice from Red Nose.

The NSW Regulatory Authority and ACECQA work closely with Red Nose to ensure all guidelines and requirements are backed by evidence-based practice and research. A few of the key laws and regulations that relate to safe sleep and rest include:

Section 167 (3) of the Law – A family day care educator must ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect a child being educated and cared for as part of a family day care service from harm and from any hazard likely to cause injury.

Regulation 81 (c) – A family day care educator must take reasonable steps to ensure that the needs for sleep and rest of children being educated and cared for by the educator as part of a family day care service are met, having regard to the ages, development stages and individual needs of the children.

Regulation 168 (2) (a)(v) – Requires services to have policies and procedures relating to children's sleep and rest.

Other regulations that relate to safe sleep and rest that you should be aware of include:

- ▶ Section 115 & 165 of the Law (supervision)
- ▶ Regulations 103 & 105 (equipment)
- ▶ Regulation 110 (ventilation and natural light).

When looking at compliance we must also be guided by the National Quality Standards. The two quality areas that are most relevant to sleep and rest are Quality Areas two and three.

QA2

- ▶ 2.1.1 – Wellbeing and comfort: Each child’s wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child’s need for sleep, rest and relaxation
- ▶ 2.2.1 – Supervision: At all times reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.

QA3

- ▶ 3.1.2 – Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean, and well maintained.



How to achieve adequate supervision

The NSW Regulatory Authority defines adequate supervision as the following key points:

1. That you can respond immediately, particularly when a child is distressed or in a hazardous situation
2. Knowing where children are at all times and monitoring actively and diligently
3. Actively monitoring each child during sleep and rest with the ability to see and hear each child.

How can we achieve adequate supervision? There are many effective strategies that can be used, depending on the age group of the children.

- ▶ The recommendation for checking sleeping infants and children is at 'Regular intervals'. Each child's individual needs and risk factors will determine the frequency of checks required. A check should include looking at the rise and fall of their chest, taking note of their skin and lip colour. This should be done without disturbing the child.

- ▶ It is important that we do not substitute physical checks with audio monitors, video monitors or motion sensors. A sufficient check includes being physically next to the child's cot or bed (not checking from a distance/through a window and not via camera or audio monitors).

- ▶ Always be within sight and hearing distance of sleeping children.

- ▶ Prepare for additional supervision that may be needed for children with medical conditions, developmental needs, or sleep issues. Children who are recovering from an illness will also need closer supervision.

Another strategy Family Day Care educators can implement is a risk assessment for sleep and rest. This will soon become a requirement under the amended regulations. In the same way we do risk assessments for events such as excursions, a risk assessment can assist us in identifying risks that could occur specifically in your service and personalised to the needs of the children in your care.



As an educator, you will need to be able to show evidence you have recorded each time a check has been done. This should be done at the time of the check, not retrospectively.

If you are responsible for supervising sleeping or resting children or doing checks, ensure you are not distracted by other activities or try and complete multiple responsibilities at this time. It is easy to get distracted and lose track of time.

Also, although we hope it never does, make sure you know what to do if something does go wrong. Ensure you are up to date with your first aid training, including CPR.

The importance of safe equipment and bedding

The second key area we must focus on is safe sleep equipment. As a Family Day Care educator, this may include cots, beds, mattresses, and bedding. Unfortunately, tragic events have occurred with children in care due to inappropriate equipment being used and poor-quality sleep environments provided. Key points to remember:

- ▶ Cots and portable cots must meet Australian standards
- ▶ No sleeping in prams, bouncers, car seats, capsules
- ▶ Pillows are only provided for children over the age of two
- ▶ Floor mattresses are best for children who have outgrown a cot – not couches or adult beds
- ▶ Cots need to meet the Australian safety standard AS/NZS 2172 – label should be displayed on the cot
- ▶ Portable cots should meet Australian safety standard AS/NZS 2195 – label should be displayed on the cot

- ▶ There is a voluntary safety standard for mattresses AS/NZS8811.1:2013 Mattresses should be firm and flat, with no more than a two centimetre gap between mattress sides and ends when fitted inside the cot.

“If an educator elects to use a porta cot, it must meet the Australian Safety Standard and must be used in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions with no additional padding added. The use of porta cots is also limited for use by a child of no more than 15 kg in weight” – Red Nose

When putting children to sleep...

CHECK THE ROOM:

Don't position the cot too close to curtain cords or decoration such as bunting that small fingers could reach, grip onto and pull down or get caught up in. Also, consider keeping your cot away from anywhere that might have potentially dangerous objects that could be pulled and fall in.

CHECK THE COT/BED:

A sleeping bag or single tucked in sheet is all that is needed in a cot for children 0–2yrs. No pillows, sheep skins, soft toys, doonas, or bumpers should be present. Child should be placed with their feet at the bottom of the cot.

CHECK THE CHILD:

Remove all choking hazards from the child such as hoodies, tops with cords, dummy cords, teething necklaces and hats. They could tighten during sleep and make breathing difficult or become a choking hazard if swallowed.



Positive environments for sleep and rest

We can look at environments by using a simple checklist like the one below:

- ▶ Adequate light to see the children
- ▶ Adequate ventilation
- ▶ Uncluttered space
- ▶ No hanging cords, wall hangings that could fall, decorations like canopies that could be pulled down
- ▶ Separate dedicated sleep area that is still easily accessible
- ▶ For older children being mindful of personal space – can they have space away from peers to relax, not all squashed together in rows, rather dispersed around the room.

The temperature of the room and of the child is another important factor for safe sleep and rest, especially for infants. Babies control their temperature through the face and head; therefore, it is imperative educators sleep babies on their back with their head and face uncovered to prevent them

overheating. Children should be dressed suitably for the room temperature, and it is important for educators to observe, monitor and make changes where required to ensure the sleep environment remains safe and comfortable for children.

As a guide, it is recommended you dress a baby as you would dress yourself when going to sleep, comfortably warm, not hot or cold. A good way to check baby's temperature is to feel the baby's back or tummy, which should feel warm. Child should be placed with their feet at the bottom of the cot.

If the baby is showing signs of heat stress, remove some bedding or clothing. Also keep in mind that if a child is unwell, this can impact their ability to regulate their body temperature. They may have a fever or feel chills.

Educators should always follow their illness and exclusion policies, as sick children should be resting at home.

Knowing each child as an individual plays an important role

As Family Day Care educators, you are in a great position to develop genuine and respectful relationships with each of the children in your care. This closeness and insight can play a valuable role in providing safe sleep and rest.

Age and developmental abilities:

A child's developmental ability and age can be an important factor when providing equipment, and placing children to sleep. Babies protect their airways by swallowing. When they are on their back, regurgitated milk from the oesophagus pools at the back of the throat and can be easily swallowed.

It is actually difficult for the fluid to work against gravity and be pushed up and into the respiratory tract when babies are lying on their back. Hence, the risk of choking is reduced when baby is sleeping on the back.



Babies should always be placed on their back when first put in the cot. Once a baby has been seen to repeatedly roll from back to front and back again on their own, they can be left to find their preferred sleep position. This usually happens around 5–6 months.

Babies younger than this who are not known to be able to roll from front to back again on their own should be repositioned onto their back. Tummy time should always be encouraged during waking hours to support babies' physical development.

Educators should also stop wrapping or swaddling babies that can roll, instead leave their arms free.

Children should move out of a cot when they are looking like they can successfully climb out by themselves. This is proven to prevent sustaining injuries either by getting limbs stuck, or falling out.

Individual needs and circumstances of the child:

This can be particularly important for children in the vulnerable age group between 0–12months.

Babies in this age group can vary greatly in terms of development, so one of the best things you can do as a Family Day Care educator is to get to know the child as an individual by ensuring open communication with the family.

At the time of enrolment, you can find out details such as:

- ▶ Birth weight
- ▶ Gestational age at birth/was the child premature?
- ▶ Any history of illnesses that may impact sleep, such as respiratory conditions
- ▶ Is the baby formula or breast fed
- ▶ Is the baby exposed to risks in the environment, such as tobacco smoke in the home
- ▶ Can your baby roll over in their sleep, and do you practice tummy time?
- ▶ Does baby have a teddy or comforter in the cot? This will need to be managed in your care.

Be mindful that different families will be willing to share different amounts of information. All these factors may require the child to be monitored with additional supervision at sleep time as they may be at higher risk of SUDI. Remember, a child will always settle with greater ease when they are comfortable in their surroundings and have a positive bond with their educator. As a Family Day Care educator, you can ensure your home provides this.

When should sleep and rest be provided?

As an educator, we should never deny a chance to or force a child to rest. Although you will most likely have a set time within your daily routine for sleep and rest, another important thing to consider is that if a child requests rest, or is showing clear signs of needing sleep (such as falling asleep in other parts of the day such as meal times or group activities), there should always be a space available within your Family Day Care for the child to have quiet time and relax.

This might be a safe and quiet space with pillows and books – ensuring supervision is still always maintained. If a child does fall asleep unexpectedly, ensure they are moved to a cot or bed depending on the child's age.

Common cues of children experiencing tiredness include:

- ▶ Yawning
- ▶ Rubbing eyes
- ▶ No longer wanting to participate in activities
- ▶ Crying

- ▶ No longer regulating their emotions
- ▶ Impulsive behaviour
- ▶ Wanting comfort.

“Children who do not wish to sleep should be provided with alternative quiet activities and experiences.”
ACECQA



Tips for preparing required policies and procedures around sleep and rest

Policies:

Your safe sleep and rest policies and procedures should reflect the unique layout of your Family Day Care.

As with all policies, it is important they are regularly reviewed as part of your self-assessment processes, to ensure they still reflect the practice that is happening day to day, and that they are up to date with current industry standards and compliance expectations.

Make sure that as an educator you understand what the policy requires you to do, and seek additional training where needed. Your policy should:

- ▶ Reflect your services philosophy on sleep and rest
- ▶ Include a background statement on why this policy is in place
- ▶ Include all legislative requirements as specified in the Education and Care National Laws and Regulations
- ▶ Explain how your service meets each requirement

- ▶ Contain links to other relevant policies such as administration of first aid, enrolment and orientation, Child safe environments
- ▶ Summarise how the policy will be monitored, evaluated, and reviewed.

Procedures:

To support your policies and to put them into everyday practice, you must then develop clear procedures with step-by-step instructions on how you intend on implementing the requirements set out in your policy. When developing procedures, think about the following:

- ▶ Supporting documents that may need to be developed, such as sleep and rest supervision check record, and risk assessments of sleeping environments and equipment
- ▶ Where the procedure will be kept
- ▶ How you share procedures with families and include them in consultation

- ▶ Do you need multiple procedures for different age groups e.g.
– safe sleep for 0–1 year; safe sleep for 2–3 years
- ▶ Clearly define who is responsible – the ECEC Regulations clearly state who is responsible for what (Approved Providers, Nominated Supervisors, educators, etc)
- ▶ Always identify and document any areas of improvement required as part of self-assessment and quality Improvement processes.

Within your procedures, you will have clear statements that specify exactly what needs to be actioned. An example of a clear and detailed procedure for Family Day Care educators monitoring sleeping children 0–2 years is below:

“The educator will maintain adequate supervision of sleeping and resting children. This involves being always within sight and hearing distance, and physically checking children’s breathing by observing the rise and fall of their chest and their lip and skin colour every 10 minutes, or **as determined by individual children’s needs**. All checks will be conducted in person at the cot side/floor mattress/toddler bed. Each check will be recorded at the time they occur including child’s name, educator’s name, date and time”.



Supporting families in your care

Family Day Care educators should always be forthcoming in sharing information around their sleep and rest policies and practices.

Common questions that families may have for Family Day Care educators include:

- ▶ Can I see where the children sleep?
- ▶ What do they sleep on?
- ▶ Can they bring something from home to comfort them?
- ▶ Is furniture moved around?
- ▶ How do you ensure all the children are safe? Do you stay with them?
- ▶ How can you accommodate my child's individual needs at sleep time?
- ▶ How is the environment made comfortable? (factors such as noise, light and temperature.)

Like with all areas of care and development, families should be engaged in conversation about their child's individual sleep and rest needs. As educators, we need to be considerate of different cultures and values when it comes to sleep and rest, however educators need to be careful when a family's requests or expectations clash with professionally recommended advice.

If you are ever concerned that a family's request is going to cause risk or harm, or goes against your service policies and practices, ensure you seek guidance from your provider or coordinator and find a resolution that meets the needs of the family in a safe and ethical way.

As an early childhood professional, you are encouraged to support your families by sharing advice and resources from Red Nose and the NSW Regulatory Authority.

If you are in a conflicting situation with your families, it is essential to remember the following advice:



making up baby's cot

- ✓ Use a **safe cot** that meets the current Australian Standard AS2172
- ✓ Use a **safe mattress: firm, clean, flat** (not tilted or elevated), right size for the cot
- ✓ **Sleep baby on back**
- ✓ Keep **head and face uncovered**
- ✓ Position baby's **feet at the bottom** of the cot
- ✓ **Tuck blankets** in firmly or use a safe baby sleeping bag



Do not use pillows, doonas, soft toys, cot bumpers, or lambswools anywhere in the cot

Do not put your baby to sleep on a water bed or bean bag

✓ **Breastfeed baby**

✓ **Keep baby smoke free**

✓ **Safe sleeping environment night and day**

“Approved providers and educators should always follow the Red Nose safe sleeping guidelines, even when a child’s parents or carers request otherwise. The requirements under section 167 of the National Law cannot be avoided by an agreement with families.

The only situation in which safe sleeping practice may be modified is when the parents or carers have a certificate from their doctor in which the baby’s doctor recommends in writing that a baby sleep on their tummy or side. In such cases the service should consider conducting a risk assessment and formulating a risk minimisation plan for that baby.”

– NSW Regulatory Authority

If you have concerns, you should feel comfortable to speak with your coordinator or service provider to resolve issues, and ensure you stay true to your service procedures and best practice. In return, service providers must be available to support educators in their conversations with families regarding safe sleep practices.

When showing new families around your service, take the

time to explain your service’s policies and procedures around safe sleep and assure them that babies will practise tummy time when they are awake.

It is to be expected that from time to time we will have families with personal or cultural preferences that may not align with the Red Nose recommendations. They may ask for their child to be put to sleep in their favourite rocker, or have their children wear teething necklaces.

Sometimes conversations can be challenging. In this case, you can always refer to your safe sleep policies and procedures which will reinforce how you manage sleep and rest and your service, and that your practice is evidence based and guided by professional advice.

Changes coming for sleep and rest policies and procedures

There has been a noticeable reduction in Sudden Unexpected Death in Infants (SUDI) deaths across Australia in recent decades, however, this continues to be a high-risk area, and a lack of awareness and knowledge about safe sleep is an ongoing challenge for the sector as a whole.

A key risk factor of SUDI is the vulnerable development period of a baby 0–12 months of age. As we continue to see an increase in the number of children under the 12 months attending education and care services nationwide, the risk of SUDI is also increasing. Therefore, we will soon see amendments to the National Laws and Regulations, as well as associated guidance documents such as The Guide to the NQF.

There are three key changes for providers and their educators regarding sleep and rest policies and procedures. Most changes are expected to commence from mid-2023 in all states and territories, however as you see in this session, there

has already been an abundance of supportive documents published by the NSW Regulatory Authority and ACECQA to support educators in achieving compliance with the amended legislation:

The expected changes are below (these have been sourced directly from the [NQF Review 2019 Decision Regulation Impact Statement](#)):

1. Specifying in the National Regulations what must be included in a service's policies and procedures for sleep and rest.

- ▶ While services are already required to have policies and procedures in place relating to sleep and rest, this change means the legislation will specify the minimum content that must be included in these policies and procedures.

2. Requiring that a risk assessment be conducted in relation to sleep and rest.

- ▶ This means services will be required to conduct a risk assessment, including specific matters that must be considered as a minimum in the assessment.

3. Legislative change to require compulsory training on safe sleep practices for all Family Day Care educators, subject to governments undertaking further research, costing and impact analysis of any proposed training and implementation options.

- ▶ This will improve educators' knowledge of safe sleep practices and better prepare them to deliver these practices on a day-to-day basis. Improvements in daily practice will result in greater safety for children, especially infants who are at higher risk of sudden unexpected death.



Further support available for Educators and current initiatives

There is an abundance of resources and knowledge available for Family Day Care educators, and the sector, to support safe sleep and rest. The NSW Regulatory Authority has released a series of great resources in 2021–2022 including:

- ▶ [Sleep and rest for children – Policy guidelines for early childhood education and care services Regulatory Guidance note on safe sleep and rest 2022](#)
- ▶ [Sleep and rest for children – Procedure guidelines for early childhood education and care services Regulatory Guidance note on safe sleep and rest 2022](#)
- ▶ [Regulatory Guidance: Children’s Safe Sleep and Rest 2022](#)
- ▶ [Family Day Care Safe Sleep Resources \(in Partnership with Red Nose\)](#)
- ▶ [Safe Sleep Poster \(in Partnership with Red Nose\)](#)

In August 2022 the NSW regulatory body launched a safe

sleep and rest regulatory priority program. The desired outcomes of this program are to provide an extensive range of guidance and resources to the sector specifically on safe sleep and rest. It also aims to minimise common risks in services and encourage quality practice to ensure and promote the health and safety of all children in care. These resources can assist Family Day Care educators to ensure they are meeting compliance and safety standards, and greatly benefit children in achieving the most out of their learning environments and educational programs by achieving adequate sleep and rest.

Resources can be found on the NSW Department of Education [Safe sleep and rest](#) website.

Red Nose contact details:

- ▶ Website: https://rednose.org.au/section/professionals_hub
- ▶ Phone: 1300 998 698 – 9–5 Mon to Fri
- ▶ Email: education@rednose.org.au

This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This topic – **Safe Sleep in Family Day Care** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the topic with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket



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