

## ▲ PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES AND PROTECTIVE PRACTICES

### ▲ NQS

**Element 4.2.2.** Professional standards guide practice, interactions, and relationships

**Element 5.1:** Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child.

**Early Childhood and Care Services National Regulations: 155, 156.**

### ▲ PURPOSE

FROEBEL education and care professionals rely on the fostering of positive relationships between adults and children. To support the development of respectful and responsive relationships with children it is important to have an awareness of boundaries and practices that support our role as early childhood professionals. The purpose of this policy is to outline procedures that educators and other employees at FROEBEL ought to follow to protect individual and collective professionalism.

### ▲ DEFINITIONS

- **Duty of care**

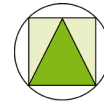
In the education and care context, 'Duty of Care' is a common law concept that refers to the responsibility of educators and staff to provide children with an adequate level of protection against harm. In their relationships with children, FROEBEL employees are required to ensure that the physical and emotional welfare of children is safeguarded, and that their own behaviour is guided by this duty of care both within and beyond the education and care setting. In working with children and families it is important that practices are focused on providing a duty of care to children.

- **Professional Boundaries**

Professional boundaries are effective and appropriate interactions between the educators, employees, families and communities they engage with. Professional boundaries are in place to protect children, families, and community members.

- **Professional Boundary Practices**

It is of utmost importance for educators and other employees to be aware of and reflect on the practices that are associated with each 'boundary' to ensure that a boundary is not violated. The following table has been adapted from the reference: 'Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people', released by the State Government of South Australia and provides *examples* of practices that support professionalism in an early childhood context.



Boundary	Examples of good practice with children, birth to school age
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Be aware of what you say and how it might be interpreted by a child.</li><li>● Use age-appropriate language in the presence of children.</li><li>● Always give feedback to children that relates to their learning or experience not their personality, appearance, or gender.</li><li>● Always call children by their given name rather than a 'pet' name or 'nick' name (Unless a parent or caregiver has advised you otherwise).</li><li>● Always intervene in situations of sexual harassment of children and young people.</li><li>● Focus on communication that is progressive and non-stereotypical.</li><li>● Ensure communication between adults is respectful and carried out at appropriate times and places.</li></ul>
<b>Personal disclosure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ensure that discussion with educators, children and families focuses on learning topics, children's experiences, development and wellbeing.</li><li>● Discussion about personal lifestyle details of self, other educators or staff members or children must be directly relevant to the learning topic and only occur with the individual's consent.</li></ul>
<b>Physical contact</b>	<p><i>Staff working in early education and care settings are often involved in supporting children with toileting, changing their clothes, and comforting them in a range of circumstances. Some physical contact in these circumstances is therefore necessary and all precautions are taken to uphold child safe standards to ensure minimal opportunity for abuse or harm to occur. Staff working with children will ensure:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● When children indicate they want comfort, ensure that it is provided in a public setting.</li><li>● Always ensure that physical contact with children is initiated, and ended, by the child. If it is not possible for a child to initiate (due to upset or distress) ask if they would like a hug and then respond to their answer.</li><li>● When children are settling in, try to stick to verbal reassurance, or very simple contact, such as handholding or a pat on the back, until the boundaries of the relationship have been established by that child.</li><li>● For infants, respond sensitively to the non-verbal cues. e.g.: when you cuddle or hug the child does the child's body relax or does it stiffen up and pull away?</li><li>● Playful forms of physical contact such as tickling games must be initiated by a child and be imbedded in a learning situation.</li></ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that physical contact takes into context the child's cultural background and family traditions.</li></ul>
<b>Place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It is not appropriate for an educator or staff member to invite/allow/encourage children to attend their home.</li><li>• Educators and staff members will only attend children's homes or their social gatherings if there is a legitimate reason and the parents/carers are present.</li><li>• Educators ensure that they are never alone with a child outside of their responsibilities.</li><li>• Educators supervise children in toileting situations when supervision is required or appropriate. If a situation arises where an educator is alone with a child to give support with toileting or changing, there is always a 'line of sight' between educators. This means that a second educator has visibility of the other educator and is aware of the situation.</li><li>• Educators and staff members ensure that they never transport a child or young person unaccompanied.</li></ul>
<b>Targeting individual children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forms of 'tutoring' only ever occur with the knowledge or direction of FROEBEL management.</li><li>• If situations arise where gifts are given (for example from an educator or staff member) the gifts are inclusive of all children attending the centre.</li><li>• Opportunities for children to take on a special duty or responsibility are organised in an equitable and fair way to ensure that all children are able to participate, and individual children are not 'singled' out.</li><li>• It is not the practice of the service to offer overnight/weekend/holiday care of children and young people as respite to parents. Alternative options are discussed and suggested to parents.</li></ul>
<b>Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When a child or family needs support that is beyond the scope of an educator or staff members position/role they are referred to the appropriate community contact person.</li><li>• In this situation the educator or staff member consults with the centre director to ensure the appropriate direction is taken.</li></ul>
<b>Possessions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educators may document or record information about a child attending the service, but this is always in the context of their role and the child's learning and development experience.</li><li>• Any photographs, correspondence, or communication (via any medium) must occur (and be stored) on equipment provided by FROEBEL not on personal devices.</li></ul>

## ▲ PROCEDURES

When working with families the procedures below guide and manage the professional boundaries outlined in this policy and therefore assist educators and other staff to appreciate these social connections without compromising their professional responsibilities.

- Educators and other employees avoid being alone with children in social situations that they may attend due to their relationship with a child's family.
- Educators and other employees conduct themselves in a way that will not give others reason to question their suitability to work with children and young people and that will not create discomfort for children in their learning relationship with them.
- Consuming alcohol in these situations may lessen an employee's capacity to judge when a professional boundary is at risk.
- Educators and other employees politely refuse to discuss matters relating to the workplace, Educators only discuss children's learning or social progress at times specifically set aside for that purpose (for example at drop off or pick up or at a set meeting time allocated for the child's parent/carer).
- Sharing or discussing personal lifestyle details of oneself, other educators or centre staff or children only occurs if directly relevant to the learning topic, or child's experience. This discussion only occurs with the individual's consent. Any conversations about matters related to the child's learning at FROEBEL must happen within working hours.
- Children will not (in any situation) be given access to an educator's personal internet locations (e.g. social networking sites).
- Educators and other employees do not take still/moving images or audio recordings of children on personal equipment or kept in personal locations such as car or home that have not been authorised by the parent, centre director or FROEBEL management.
- Educators will not upload or publish any still/moving images or audio recordings of children to any location, without the permission of the child's parents.
- Any concern an educator or staff member has about whether a situation may be compromising or breaching a professional relationship should be discussed with the Centre Director and/ or FROEBEL management and an approved plan of action followed. For example, a staff member may want advice about transporting a friend's child to and from the centre or how to manage his/her own child's enrolment at the site.
- When a FROEBEL employee's child is enrolled at their place of employment all parties are to establish professional boundaries practices that align with FROEBEL professional boundaries and protective practices
  - Any discussion about the child's learning, development and care are to be discussed at times mutually agreed to. This would include pickup/ drop



**FROEBEL**

Competence for Children

off or during set organised meeting times. Discussions are not to be held during lunch breaks or in team rooms.

- Should you need to contact a parent who is an employee when they are not on site, to discuss any concerns with the child ensure you use FROEBEL communication channels such as storypark, email through FROEBEL email address or the land line to make a phone call. If discussion is required whilst the employee is onsite a protocol is to be established with the Centre Director.
- Any discussion about an employees child in relation to curriculum planning, learning and development is to occur between the relevant educators for that child and the parents/ guardians.
- Parents who are employees are to respect the educators professional dialogues and should any concerns arise, these are to be discussed at mutually agreeable times with the educator or with the centre director outside of the parents working hours.

### ▲ **Social Connections with Children and Families**

As early childhood educators a major element of practice is to form connections and strong bonds with children and families. It needs to be acknowledged that social relationships and friendships with the parents of the children with whom educators work may occur. This means they will have legitimate reasons, on occasions, to attend social events with the children with whom they work, in the company of their parents, for example, and not limited to the end of year celebration or an organised lantern walk. These social engagements are an important part of community life and a positive contribution to children and families as well as the wellbeing of educators working in an early childhood centre community. In all social situations involving educators, other employees, and parents/carers the principles of privacy and confidentiality are paramount as outlined below.

### ▲ **Babysitting and Specialist Care Situations**

In early childhood education there has been a long-standing debate about the way early childhood education is viewed in society.

To further support the view that our work in early childhood centres is an essential foundation - FROEBEL places utmost importance on the professional status of all educators. For this reason, to maintain the professionalism of the work that educators do at FROEBEL, there needs to be a focus on the care and education of children while they attend the service, rather than in the child's home in the form of out of service hours babysitting. We ask that there is a shared understanding from both educators and families that FROEBEL has taken a particular stance on this matter as a commitment to the principles outlined in this policy. Educators and other staff may be approached by parents/carers to provide out of hours babysitting services to the children who attend FROEBEL however we do not allow this for the key reasons outlined below:

- **Equity and Diversity Principles**



**FROEBEL**

Competence for Children

To ensure all children are treated in the same manner while part of the FROEBEL community, it is important that the actions of educators support the best practices for equity and diversity for all children attending the service. There could be a professional conflict to these principles if for example, an educator provides a babysitting service to one family but cannot (even if there is a valid reason) on another occasion to a different family.

- **Privacy and Confidentiality**

- It is an essential requirement that employees at our service uphold the privacy and confidentiality principles outlined in our policy. However, when employees develop relationships beyond their role in the centre (such as in the event of babysitting or due to the nature of working in the centre where their child is enrolled) they may at times hear sensitive information that could compromise their professional position as an educator/employee, as well as the integrity of FROEBEL to the wider centre community.
- As a FROEBEL employee with an enrolled child, you may attend social gatherings such as birthday parties when children form friendships. In these circumstances it is essential that as a parent you uphold the privacy and confidentiality and do not discuss matters of FROEBEL at such events.
- Parents of children enrolled at FROEBEL who are in attendance of a social gathering with an employee from FROEBEL as a parent, must continue to respect the privacy and confidentiality clauses that the employee is bound to uphold and not discuss their concerns or ask questions about FROEBEL. Should questions or concerns need to be raised follow the appropriate feedback and grievance procedures in place.

- **Accidents and Incidents – Supervision Responsibilities of Children**

Centre policies related to the prevention of incidents and accidents as well as the supervision of children are upheld by educators while caring for children at the centre. It could be difficult to establish who is deemed responsible if an employee were undertaking babysitting outside the centre or collecting a child from the centre and an incident or accident occurred.

- ▲ **Internal communication Internal communication**

FROEBEL employees have a range of communication pathways that are used to ensure everyone has access to the most relevant and current information for their day-to-day duties. This includes:

- Email
- Storypark
- WhatsApp group messages
- Communication books within rooms / centre

Communication between Head Office and each employee occurs through email. Should urgent communication need to take place, a suitable time will be made to have a phone conversation or a team's meeting.

Within each service the Centre Director will use email to communicate matters relating to the day-to-day operations of the service and how it relates to their individual roles and responsibilities.

Each service has established WhatsApp message groups for the team and then for smaller room groups. This messaging platform is to communicate urgent matters to team members when they cannot be relayed during the day face to face.

The Centre Director will provide each team member the protocols of the use of WhatsApp messages within their team.

For example, this form of communication may be used to share an urgent roster change that is required to be relayed before arriving for a shift.

The Centre Director will establish the Centre WhatsApp and individual room groups as the WhatsApp Admin. Should educators decide to create their own groups for personal messaging and not related work conversations it is at the discretion of the individuals.

The Centre Director will monitor work group messages and will provide a warning when discussions are not appropriate for that platform and redirect the individual to the appropriate space for the discussion.

There is no expectation from FROEBEL that employees are engaging in reflective discussion or general team discussions through WhatsApp during their days off, after hours or on the weekends.

Each service uses Story Park for curriculum planning, documentation, and reflective practice. Active engagement with this platform is expected during work hours and individuals planning and programming time. There is no expectation to be working on this during weekends, after hours or on days off.

FROEBEL ensures each team has opportunities for large and small team meetings as well as meeting times during the day for any conversations that need to take place relating to the curriculum for children and the day-to-day roles and responsibilities of each team member.

FROEBEL encourages the use of in service/ room communication books / diaries, where important information can be shared and checked by each team member. If a team member needs to urgently relay a message and has been unable to put it in the communication book, this may lead to someone sharing important information via other channels such as WhatsApp or email when it cannot wait until the next day to share with the relevant person (s).

### ▲ **Difficult conversations**



**FROEBEL**

Competence for Children

At times we will be tasked with having a more 'challenging' conversation with a parent and/ or a colleague. We encourage you to approach difficult conversations with consideration for the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics, FROEBEL's Equity and Diversity principles and the principles outlined throughout this policy.

FROEBEL families and employees may be in a situation where they must address their colleague as the parent who has an enrolled child, likewise a parent / guardian will have to speak to a FROEBEL employee who has become a 'peer' as their children are in the same room.

In all circumstances it is important to be aware of your context and the topics of conversations. When addressing each other as a parent/ colleague or as an educator to parent you are encouraged to apply the same strategies with difficult conversations. Below are suggestions for approaching a difficult conversation:

- **Be Confident with your Concerns**

It can be easy to stop ourselves from raising concerns by minimising their importance. For example, we may tell ourselves we are "just being silly" or we are "being too sensitive" or "it's not such a big deal really". If it is impacting on you or someone else negatively, it is important. Be clear with yourself about the reasons why you are initiating the conversation.

- **Focus on the Behaviour**

Let the person know that it is their behaviour which is upsetting or concerning to you. Be careful not to label the person, for example instead of saying "you are selfish and lazy" you could say "when you leave me to clean up everything I feel let down because I am doing it all alone without any help".

- **Be Clear and Specific**

Anxiety about how someone might react can lead to messages being "watered-down". We may give a lot of positive feedback in amongst the negative, or we might talk generally to a group about behaviour that bothers us without speaking directly to the person involved. The risk is that your message will not be heard by them.

- **Listen**

This can sometimes be the hard part because people can be defensive or angry after hearing your concerns and your feedback. They may attack. They may deny that there is an issue. They may even convince you it is "all in your head". Let them talk. Do not interrupt, explain, justify, or defend. First, listen. There will be time to respond later.

- **Respond Calmly**







**FRÖBEL**

Competence for Children

Depending on how the person has reacted to your concerns remaining calm can be tricky, however, focus on clarifying the factual accuracies of what the person has said. Their feelings are subjective, and you cannot change these. The person may be angry with you for some time. Confidently re-state your concerns. If you can, come to a resolution or compromise. You may need some time to think about what each other has said.

Should your conversation not be resolved by applying the above strategies, please follow the pathways for raising an unresolved concern in the associated policies stated below.

### ▲ SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

- Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people: Government of South Australia, Department of Education and Children's Services  
<http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/ProtectivePracticesforSta.pdf>
- Education and Care Services National Regulations
- National Quality Standard
- Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia  
Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics
- <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ECA-COE-Brochure-2016.pdf>
- Access EAP  
<https://accesseap.com.au/newsletters/courageous-conversation-tips>

### ▲ ASSOCIATED POLICIES

- Bullying, Discrimination, Harassment and Workplace Violence
- Code of Ethics and Conduct
- Equity and Diversity Principles
- Grievance and Feedback Management
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Service Commitment
- Accidents and Incidents
- Accident Prevention

### ▲ POLICY REVIEW

- FROEBEL (together with educators/carers) will review this policy every 12 months.
- Last review: 1.2.2023
- Next review due: 1.2.2024