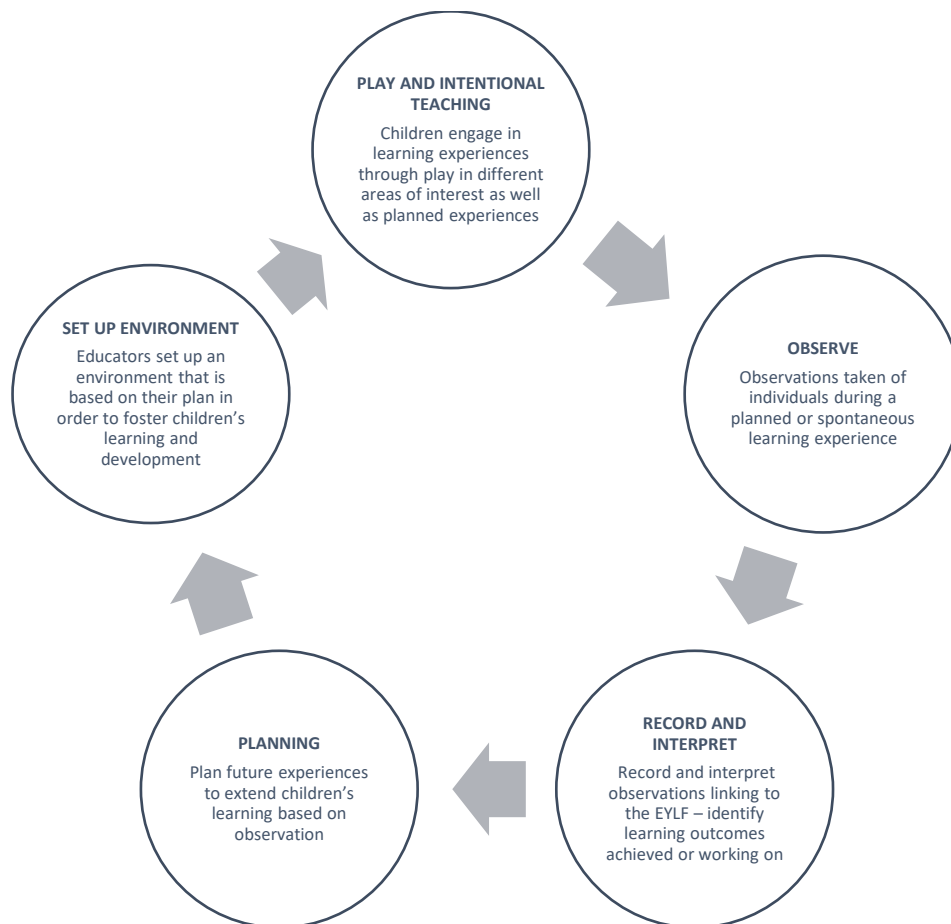


Programming for Complex Needs in In Home Care

A brief overview of programming and planning

You are probably already doing many important skills that make up programming and documentation. Think about how you plan your day or week. How do you document your program and observations? What activities do you do on a regular basis? Educators are deliberate and purposeful in the planning of the program ensuring all children's interests and needs are considered.

- Use your knowledge of child development to inform your environment and your practices
- Use information you have about the child and their family
- Use resources and plan activities that support the child's wellbeing and learning
- Refer to the EYLF principles, practices and outcomes when planning your program



Working with families, carers and communities to support disabilities

Once you commence caring for a child, if you feel you need additional support, you can consult your IHC support agency, your service provider, or ask the families permission to access information provided by other professionals working with the child. For example, you may ask to see strategies provided by the child's health professional, such as an occupational therapist, to see if you can incorporate any of those strategies in your programming.

Expect to be briefed and get information on the child's needs. If the family is comfortable, you can provide access/ exchange contact details so that you can ensure consistency in care strategies.

- Set goals with the parents
- provide feedback through observations
- provide opportunity for parents to input in program: gauge the parents interest in this – some may be enthusiastic, some may be reluctant, they may just want time out. Parents may already be overwhelmed by people involved in the child's care and advice given
- You may also discover there are unique requirements on resources. This might be equipment or facilities – you should become familiar with the use and understanding of all of these.
- It is ok not to feel 100% confident or experienced straight away. Some educators lack knowledge or experience on some needs. We need a collaborative approach. The information you document can also be sought by other professionals, and observations can be a great tool for educators if they wish to address developmental concerns.

Content of Information Provided:

- Learning and play needs
- Using specialised equipment e.g. - hearing devices, prosthetic limbs
- How to appropriately respond to specific behaviours – e.g. if a child has sensory processing how to respond
- Specific care requirements e.g.- if a child has cognitive developmental delay, they may be behind in toileting and may need additional assistance

Sources of Information:

- Support Agency
- Service provider
- The child's family
- Other professionals working with the child e.g. therapists, physios, paediatrics, Occupational Therapists

When we begin caring for a child with complex needs, keep in mind that the parents/carers may be well into the journey – already having diagnosis and workings with health care professionals on a regular basis. As an educator, we must acknowledge parents as a wealth of knowledge that we can learn from. Most of the time, families will already have a great deal of information to share. Listen to this information and set common goals with families for the child which you can use to direct your programming. Respect a family’s right to confidentiality. They do not have to share information about their child’s needs, development, disabilities.

Educator	Parent
Long term goals	Knows history
Objective	Emotionally invested
Development focused	Needs focused
networking	Best knowledge of child
Professional Knowledge	Deep understanding

It is important when working in IHC to understand that everyone is on their own journey.

THE PARENT/CAREGIVER MAY...

- Be afraid of the educator’s acceptance of their child
- Be grieving over the child’s diagnosis/ disability
- Reluctant to share personal information
- Relieved to be receiving help and support
- unsure of others’ ability to meet the child’s individual needs
- guilty asking others to care for child

THE CHILD MAY...

- Have difficulty participating in activities
- Have difficulty communicating needs
- Become frustrated or distressed if they are misunderstood
- Be anxious about meeting someone new
- Be self-conscious about their differences

THE EDUCATOR MAY...

- Be feeling nervous or inexperienced
- Anxious about their lack of knowledge or experience with a complex need
- Be feeling unsure of their place in someone’s home
- Feel hesitant introducing a child to new experiences

Inclusion strategies and strength-based practice

A great way to overcome many of these initial anxieties is to program for the child focusing on their abilities – look at what they enjoy and what they are good at. This is what we refer to as strength-based practice.

By starting your programming journey with strength-based practice, it can set a positive tone, and encourage positive relationships. Focusing on strengths and abilities for children with additional needs is also a support factor, for the child, family, children's services professionals and other children and families. It is more relevant to focus on what the child with a disability can do, rather than their weaknesses. Always keep this in mind when programming. Educators who practice a strengths-based practice are more successful in planning and providing for further learning and development. A way of working with children, families and colleagues that can build skills through focusing on what we all can do, rather than what we cannot do. An emphasis on strengths means that adults are more likely to provide effective scaffolding for children's learning and development.

Capturing teachable moments and planning for:

Physical/ Motor disability

- Provide tools that children with motor disabilities can use for grasping, holding, transferring and releasing.
- Be sure objects are age appropriate. For example, a bean bag made from fabric is much more appropriate for a 5-year-old than a rattle or a baby toy.
- Plan activities to encourage all children to move all body parts. Work with parents and specialists to choose special exercises for the child
- Add tabs to books for turning pages.
- Place tape on crayons and markers to make them easier to grip.
- provide paint brushes with large knobs on the ends.
- Consider buying scissors that open automatically when squeezed, or scissors that do not require children to use finger holes.
- Provide spray bottles to practice the squeezing motion needed to use scissors.
- Keep items contained. Roll a ball inside a hula hoop placed on the floor. Play with blocks on a tray or the lid of a cardboard box.

Sensory processing issues

- Provide materials of different textures such as playdough, fabric swatches, ribbon, corrugated cardboard and sandpaper to stimulate the sense of touch.
- Engage in games and experiences that involve all the children's senses as much as possible
- When creating visual cues, use high contrasting colour such as black and white
- Create textures using glitter, sand and add scents to paints and playdough to engage the child
- Children with hearing impairments work well with close quiet interactions
- If a child is tactile sensitive, you can still provide experiences such a painting by putting pain clear sheets of plastic or under cling film, and then allowing the child to move the paint around with their fingers without getting paint on their skin

Cognitive Delays/Learning Disability

- Ensure activities are age appropriate and relate to the child's interests
- Provide choices and let the child direct the play
- Still allow for challenges – find a nice balance so the child feels a sense of achievement without being bored. When children feel successful, they become more independent
- Be aware of children's different learning styles
- Break down tasks into simple steps
- Visual cue cards
- Allow for longer uninterrupted play

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- Encourage the child to do mindful breathing, mind-body connection activities
- Teach them to have realistic expectations of themselves and ask for help when needed
- If you are reading a story and sounds from the outside captures their attention, relate it back to the story to shift their focus back to where it is supposed to be
- Allow them to play in natural open areas as much as possible
- Use visual reminders to provide routines and structure
- Provide hands-on learning experiences
- Always get the child's attention first before giving an instruction; keep instructions simple, short and clear
- Minimise visual distractions and noise
- Shorten the task or break one task into smaller parts to be completed at different times
- Provide closer supervision and support (e.g. use hand signals to remind the child what they should be doing, and stay near the child)

Speech/Language/ Communication Disorders

- Books can be used in many ways to develop language and early literacy skills. Evidence shows that children that have more exposure to books prior to schooling often develop literacy skills earlier.
- Be a good model – speak clearly and slowly and face your child when speaking. If your child says a word or sentence incorrectly, rather than correct them or ask them to repeat it, just say the word / sentence back to them correctly to show you have understood. This way your child always hears the correct version. This is how children learn language.
- Songs and rhymes contain rhythm and rhyme, skills that help with speech and literacy development.
- Simple games with wooden blocks involve all sorts of language and play skills – turn-taking, joint focus, sharing, listening, attending, observing
- Get children to participate in planning
- Speak clearly and slowly, using familiar words
- Allow time for children to listen and respond

As an ECEC educator, you play an imperative role in demonstrating positive interactions with children who have complex needs. Like with any programming, your focus should be on strengths and developmental areas of need.

Building independence with self-help skills

All children, including those with learning difficulties or developmental delays, can greatly benefit from learning self-help skills. These skills develop their autonomy and allow them to feel a great sense of achievement. It can assist in promoting their self-esteem, which in turn can build confidence in other areas of learning. Here are some ideas for self-help skills that all children can participate in. Educators can program for these all through the daily program and embrace these tasks as valuable teachable moments:

0-2 years	2-3 years	3-6 years	6 year + School age children
Throw own bib in laundry hamper	Serve self a snack from a shared plate onto own bowl or plate	Help to pack their own bag – remembering essential items such as hat, water bottle etc	Dresses and groom's self completely
Clean face and hands with damp wash cloth	Comb or brush own hair	Explore cooking skills and assist in preparing food	Preparing simple meals (e.g. cereal, sandwich).
Put away own shoes away in regular spot	Put rubbish in bin	Help set table	Takes care and is responsible of their own belongings
Begin exploring self-feeding with finger food or child's spoon	Assist in dressing themselves	Explore concept of making bed	Will choose what activities they want to engage in and assist in setting up/ packing away
Assist in packing away toys – into a big basket	Practice wiping up spills	Put on their own shoes, jacket, hat and sunscreen	Enjoys the responsibility of practical tasks such as gardening or washing car

Reflective questions for educators

Benefits to Educators working with children with complex needs:

- It can be rewarding and challenging
- It can be a great way to develop professional skills and knowledge develop bonds with family, and provide opportunity to network with other professionals involved in the child's car
- Differences are to be recognised and valued. Avoid labelling or stereotyping. Never refer to the child by the disability.

Some great questions an educator can ask themselves on what to base their programming on:

1. When is the child most at ease, most comfortable?
2. What makes the child smile?
3. What does the child do well – when do they feel a sense of accomplishment?
4. What does the child like to talk about?
5. What do they gravitate towards during unstructured play e.g. – what do they draw, dress up as, create, build, paint?
6. When do they appear most confident?
7. How does the presence of other people influence their behaviour – do some people make them shy? Does the presence of some people make them more confident?

Overview

- Work with families and specialists to support the child's specific needs including social, emotional and physical development and how these can be supported
- Respect and accept your child for who they are
- See the whole child, not just their needs or disabilities
- Take the time to get to know the child's their strengths and interests and plan for these in your program
- Adapt your expectations to meet the abilities of the child
- In a sensitive way, help other adults to understand how to best provide for the child, and share your professional observations
- Acknowledge and uphold your family's and children's rights to confidentiality
- Ensure there is regular two-way communication about the child's progress and experiences, as well as any concerns or issues that arise
- Always use the correct terminology
- Remember no two children are the same – even if you have cared for a child with the same condition before, do not expect the same outcomes from the same diagnosis- all children are unique

Resources for educators

These online stores have a great range of educational resources for children with a range of developmental delays or additional needs:

www.thetherapystore.com.au

www.resourcesathand.com.au

www.specialneedsresources.com.au

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