

Agency, children's needs, ethics

The Early Years Learning Framework has been a powerful document to support educators to think more deeply about their practices.

One of several words that is used more frequently is the word 'agency'. The *Early Years Learning Framework* defines agency as 'being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 45).

I would agree with these sentiments but sometimes find myself worrying about them in the day-to-day reality and practices in a children's service.

Sleep time is one part of the day that I sometimes I struggle with.

A parent does not want the two-year-old to sleep for more than an hour (as they won't go to bed on time at home). The educators find that when they 'wake him' as requested he is really unhappy and struggles most of the afternoon with peers and relationships.

Another parent says on arrival 'Jenny (four years) really needs to sleep today. Can you ensure she does?' Jenny has not slept at the centre for some six months and none of her friends sleep so resists and does not go to sleep, although rests quietly for 20 minutes.

The 14-month-old cries, kicks and throws his bottle as educators try to give him a choice of the cot, the low bed or the pram. He has two sleeps at home.

Early Childhood Australia's *Code of ethics*, with its over-arching statement 'that the protection and wellbeing of children is paramount' may or may not help educators

to resolve matters. It also says in relation to children I will 'act in the best interests of all children' and in relation to families I will 'develop partnerships with families and engage in shared decision making where appropriate' and 'acknowledge the rights of families to make decisions about their children'.

If I allow the child to sleep beyond one hour will the child be punished if he does not follow the 'time for bed' routine at home?

When the older pre-schooler refuses to stay on her bed and does not sleep how might this impact on the child later that evening and the educator's relationship with the family?

How will the day be when the baby cannot be soothed and where there is an over-tired baby, worried educators and maybe unhappy parents?

When I, as an educator, take the view that the wellbeing of the child is paramount, does that negate the view of the child and that of the family?

Resolving these situations is never simple. For educators it is about making the best decisions each day for each child, based on what we know about the child in partnership with the family. It is about professional judgement. Yes, choices for children are important but does that mean all choices? It's about getting the balance right. Perhaps it's thinking more about who are the education and care service's clients? Is it the child? Is it the parent? Can it be one or the other? Nothing is ever that simple—just more to think about and to understand that nothing is certain!

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References

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