

Safe sleep and rest requirements for children in preschool – procedure and guideline

Department of Education and Training

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Read this document with the preschool specific policy.

1. Policy

This document outlines how preschools must ensure that the sleep and rest arrangements for children are appropriate for the risks and factors relevant to the ages, developmental stages and individual needs of children enrolled in preschool. The *Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* adopts the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* (Vic) (National Law) and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (NSW) (National Regulations) in the Northern Territory. This procedure and guideline are informed by the National Quality Framework (NQF) as developed by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and supports preschools to comply with the National Law and the National Regulations. The relevant legislation is listed under section 6.1 of this procedure and guidelines.

All NT Government preschools are expected to operate to the standards established by the NQF and must consider the safety, rights and best interests of children as the paramount consideration in all decisions and actions. Preschools must ensure each child's comfort is provided for and that there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child's sleep, rest and relaxation needs.

This document includes procedures and guidelines for preschools including carrying out a risk assessment.

2. Procedures

2.1. Risk assessment procedures

The National Regulations requires preschools to carry out a risk assessment relating to sleep and rest annually. The sleep and rest risk assessment template is to be used to guide and document the risk assessment process.

The risk assessment must consider the following:

- number, ages and developmental stages of preschool children
- individual sleep and rest needs of the children, including specific health care needs, cultural preferences and requests from families
- suitability of staffing arrangements to supervise and monitor children during sleep and rest periods
- level of knowledge and training of the staff supervising children during sleep and rest periods
- location of sleep and rest areas, and the arrangement of the beds within the areas
- the safety of the beds and bedding equipment, having regard to the ages and developmental stages of the children who will use them
- any potential hazards to a child during sleep and rest periods
- the physical safety and suitability of sleep and rest environments, including the temperature, lighting and ventilation of the areas.

Preschools must ensure a copy of the current risk assessment is available for review by the regulatory authority and to support discussions with parents. An electronic copy is permitted. It is also recommended that previous years' risk assessments are kept on file, to demonstrate that previous risks have been addressed.

3. Guidelines

The following outlines the considerations preschools should make regarding their sleep and rest practices.

3.1. Meeting children's sleep, rest and relaxation needs

Preschools must take reasonable steps to meet the needs for sleep and rest of preschool children. Individual children's needs must be met, including:

- specific needs based on a child's age or development stage
- specific health care needs
- cultural preferences and requests from families.

Preschools must establish a process for how children's individual needs, cultural preferences and requests from families are considered and addressed. Preschool staff must also ensure information about the preschool's sleep and rest practices are clearly communicated and consulted on with parents, families and carers.

Preschools must provide a comfortable, safe area for children to rest when they request it or are showing clear signs of tiredness. It is important that opportunities for rest and relaxation, as well as sleep, are provided. Preschool staff must look for and respond to children's cues for sleep, for example, yawning, rubbing eyes, disengagement from activities, crying, decreased ability to regulate behaviour and seeking comfort from adults.

3.2. Safe sleep and rest practices

Preschools must incorporate best practice guidance into its safe sleep and rest practices. This includes having processes in place to ensure preschool staff are inducted, trained and maintain current knowledge on best practice guidance on sleep and rest.

Best practice includes ensuring that:

- children sleep and rest with their face and head uncovered
- a quiet place is provided for rest and sleep, away from interactive groups. The location must meet children's sleep and rest needs. If designated for rest, the space should allow for a calm play experience
- children's sleep and rest environments are free from cigarette or tobacco smoke
- sleep and rest environments and equipment are safe and free from hazards.

Preschools must plan the placement of educators across a service to ensure they are able to adequately supervise and monitor sleeping and resting children. This planning must be documented, including the method and frequency of checking children's safety, health and wellbeing.

Educators must check and inspect sleeping children at regular intervals. They must be within sight and hearing distance of sleeping and resting children to assess a child's breathing and the colour of their skin.

Preschools should consider the risk for each individual child, and tailor sleep and rest practices, including the frequency of checks and inspections to reflect the levels of risk identified for children. Factors to be considered include the age of the child, medical conditions, individual needs and history of health or sleep issues.

3.3. Safe environments and equipment

Preschools must ensure that a safe environment and equipment is provided for children to sleep and rest. This includes ensuring:

- any bedding and bedding equipment are safe and appropriate for the ages and developmental stages of the children who will use them
- a safety check of sleep and rest environments is undertaken on a regular basis
- potential hazards in the sleep and rest area and to the children are eliminated. If hazards are identified, action must be taken to remove or reduce the risk along with documenting any residual risk, in writing and reporting to the principal as appropriate
- the physical safety and suitability of sleep and rest environments is checked regarding temperature, lighting and ventilation of the areas
- hanging cords or strings from blinds, curtains, mobiles or electrical devices are away from sleeping children
- children are not sleeping in walkways or in a place where access to emergency exits, resources or equipment is obstructed.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1. Early Childhood

Early Childhood must develop, review and maintain department policies, procedures and guidelines relating to early childhood education and care to ensure the ongoing compliance of preschools with the National Law and National Regulations.

4.2. Senior Directors Education

Senior Directors Education must ensure that all preschools within their regional areas comply with the requirements of the National Law, National Regulations and departmental policies, procedures and guidelines.

4.3. Principals

Principals must:

- ensure the preschool is compliant with the regulatory requirements under the National Law and National Regulations by implementing the required procedures to manage the safe sleep and rest requirements for children
- ensure sleep and rest practices, based on current research and recommended evidence-based principles and guidelines, are in place. Refer to advice provided on the [ACECQA website](#).
- approve the annual risk assessment, ensure it complies with the requirements of these procedures and ensure risk mitigation strategies are implemented
- ensure preschool children with specific medical and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form or their preschool health care plan, are managed and catered for
- support families whose children have cultural preferences regarding sleep and rest, and ensure these needs are met.

4.4. Preschool teachers and educators

Preschool teachers and educators must:

- ensure the preschool complies with regulatory requirements under the National Law, and National Regulations and all related department policies, procedures and guidelines
- regularly review and update sleep and rest practices to ensure they are maintained in line with these procedures and guidelines
- undertake a risk assessment relating to sleep and rest every 12 months
- exercise a duty of care to ensure all children are provided with a high level of safety when sleeping and resting and every reasonable precaution is taken to protect them from harm and hazard, including performing regular checks of children and recording all checks at the time they occur
- consult with families about their children's individual needs and exercising sensitivity to different values and parenting beliefs, cultural or otherwise, associated with sleep and rest
- ensure preschool children with specific medical and health requirements, as indicated in their enrolment form or their preschool health care plan, are managed and catered for.

5. Definitions

Term	Definition
Approved provider	A person or legal entity who holds a provider approval under the National Quality Framework (NQF). This approval is a prerequisite for a provider before commencing to operate an approved education and care service. The Department of Education and Training (department) is the approved provider of all Northern Territory (NT) Government preschools. Responsibility for this role has been delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive Schools.
Children	For the purposes of these guidelines, refers to children in and attending preschool.
National Quality Framework	A regulatory system agreed to by all Australian governments, through the Council of Australian Governments, to raise the quality of and drive continuous improvement in early childhood education and care services, including preschools.
Nominated supervisor	For the purposes of these guidelines, the school principal is the nominated supervisor. The department has nominated all principals of government schools that operate a preschool in scope of the NQF, as the nominated supervisor for the preschool. It is considered that in their role as school principal, they are responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the preschool service.
Parent	Refers to a child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for the child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal and Torres Strait customary law or tradition. The definition of a parent does not include a person standing in place of the parent on a temporary basis.
Preschool teacher or educator	A person who is involved in the planning or instruction of an education and care program in a preschool setting.

6. Related legislation, policy, resources and documents

6.1. Legislation

Education and Care Services (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011

<https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/EDUCATION-AND-CARE-SERVICES-NATIONAL-UNIFORM-LEGISLATION-ACT-2011>

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Vic) – <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-care-services-national-law-act-2010>

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011 (NSW) - <https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2011/653>

6.2. Policy, guidelines and procedures

Enrolment and orientation of new children in preschool guidelines -

<https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care/preschool-specific-policy#enrolment>

Managing health care needs in preschool guidelines - https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care/preschool-specific-policy#managing_health_care_needs

Preschool specific policies - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care/preschool-specific-policy>

6.3. Resources

National Quality Standard - Quality Area 2 – Children's Health and Safety

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard/quality-area-2-childrens-health-and-safety>

- Element 2.1.1 – Each child's wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.

Preschool risk assessment template - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care/preschool-specific-policy>

Acronyms	Full form
ACECQA	Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority
Department	Department of Education and Training
NQF	National Quality Framework

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3.1	September 2023	Teaching and Learning: Early Years and Primary	Updated template and incorporating regulatory amendments regarding sleep and rest (Education and Care Services National Amendments Regulations 2022) commencing 1 October 2023.
3.2	April 2026	Early Childhood	Updated to new template. Administrative, editorial and minor updates including links.
3.3	July 2026	Operational Policy Unit	A full review of this procedure has been conducted. The content has been updated to reflect recent legislatively changes around paramount consideration. Document updates also included a current template and minor administrative amendments.