

Rationale

SDN is committed to the establishment and maintenance of strong and positive working relationships with families across all of our services and in the community. Effective communication is critical for these relationships to happen.

SDN is committed to promoting the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children. We place children's best interests at the centre of everything we do and their safety, welfare and wellbeing are always our paramount consideration. Evidence shows that supporting families to feel more confident, capable and connected helps to overcome barriers for children and families that can prevent them from accessing the resources they need and want for their own wellbeing and learning. SDN has committed to:

- being consistent, responsive and as hassle-free as possible
- listening and responding to families
- using our knowledge to provide our programs and advice
- being a trusted adviser and sharing our knowledge
- being an honest broker and advising about other services.

Scope

This policy, and its associated documents, applies to the entirety of SDN Children's Services and the entirety of its wholly owned subsidiaries.

This policy applies to all SDN Board members, permanent and casual staff members, volunteers and students.

Policy

SDN takes a person-centred and place-based approach which is referred to within SDN as the Pathways approach. It outlines the methods that we use to engage with families, to facilitate their access to services and to support their transitions into, within, and out of SDN.

SDN families should be empowered to feel confident, capable and connected in their parenting and all communications with families should support this approach.

Pathways for families

SDN's Pathways approach commits us to communicating with families based on the following principles:

- maintaining respectful, reciprocal and supportive relationships
- supporting families in their parenting role

- respecting diverse beliefs about childrearing
- going to families, not waiting for families to come to us
- engaging families as equals
- understanding family and community priorities
- creating child and family-friendly, inclusive and non-stigmatising services and environments
- communicating in a personal and genuine way
- supporting understanding of SDN services and options in the community
- establishing key relationships early to support consistency and reliability
- knowing the community and staying informed
- activating a Team around the Child when multiple agencies and/or multiple professional disciplines are involved with a child or when a family is facing specific challenges
- developing 'family-held' material that they can use to share information about their child's abilities and learning needs with others.

Meeting individual families' communication needs

Staff will engage with families in ways that meet their individual communication needs, demonstrating empathy and understanding of each family's unique circumstances and context to ensure communication is respectful, effective and meaningful.

Staff will encourage families to discuss their communication needs, and make families aware of the methods of communication currently used by the service.

The organisation's philosophy, vision, purpose and values will be clearly displayed in services, and families will be made aware of how to access policy information.

Where possible, SDN will support communication for families whose first language is not English by utilising staff members who speak the same language as the family, or by using professional translation and interpreting services when these are needed to support a child and family's access to an SDN service.

Where possible, SDN will utilise professional sign interpreters to support access to an SDN service by a family who uses sign language as their primary means of communication.

Staff will be sensitive to the literacy levels of each individual, taking time to pass on information verbally where there is a risk that families might not fully understand a written document.

Listening to families

SDN will seek regular formal feedback from families and welcomes unsolicited feedback. Families will be encouraged to submit their feedback through SDN's website, by phone, through email or directly to the service's staff in person.

Feedback that is a complaint will be recorded and managed in line with SDN's *Complaints Management Policy* and associated *Procedure*.

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All research including family surveys will be conducted in accordance with our *Research and Evaluation at SDN Policy*.

Family engagement

SDN engages with families in a range of ways including:

- through service specific software applications
- regular reports to families on their child's activities, program and progress
- notification to parents about incidents or events that may impact their child
- service-specific updates and information required by legislation to be displayed or made available
- participation in community events
- SDN organisational messages, policies, strategic plans and social media.

Managing personal, sensitive and health information

SDN staff members may collect, use, store or disclose personal, sensitive and health information about individuals in order to provide an effective service to a child, family or another service. This information will be managed in line with SDN's *Privacy Policy* and *Records Management Policy*, and their associated *Procedures*.

Related SDN Documents

Policies

- GI-HLP-1.01: Policy Framework
- GI-HLP-1.04: Equity, Social Justice and Social Inclusion
- GI-HLP-1.05: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement
- GI-HLP-1.09: Privacy and Protection of Information
- GI-HLP-1.10: Code of Conduct
- GI-HLP-1.11: Social Media and Electronic Communications
- GI-OP-1.13: Complaints GI-OP-1.19: Complainant Conduct
- LGL-HLP-8.03: Records Management

Procedures

- GI-PRO-1.01-01: Policy Development and Review
- GI-PRO-1.13-01: Complaints Management
- GI-PRO-1.14-01: Feedback Management

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Other SDN Documents

- GI-ADD-1.11-A: Social Media and Electronic Communications Protocols
- Pathways for Families Discussion Paper
- Confident, Capable and Connected family communication framework

Relevant Legislation/Regulations

- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators
- Privacy Act 1988

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