

How to talk about early childhood education and care

The early childhood education and care sector in Australia is complex, and it's easy to get lost in unfamiliar words or phrases. It's also easy to accidentally use terms that do not reflect the importance of the early childhood sector to the developing child.

The early years are critical for lifelong learning and wellbeing. In the first five years of life, children's brains are wired to learn quickly. Quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) helps to amplify their natural skills and abilities.

Everyone has a part to play in building recognition for the importance of ECEC. By choosing words carefully, you can show that you value the ECEC sector and respect educators' professionalism. You can also be a role model for others to do the same.

Words may not seem important, but many words used to talk about ECEC have a long history of being used to diminish the importance of what educators do. When people talk about 'child care' or 'looking after little kids', they reinforce outdated views that undervalue ECEC practice. We all need to work together to change these views.

The use of consistent, affirmative, inclusive and sector-accepted language about ECEC supports the professionalism of the sector.

Why early learning matters

Young children learn best through play-based experiences that are suited to their interests and developmental stage. Qualified early childhood educators support and extend play to maximise learning through exploration, inquiry and problem-solving. Educators partner with families in understanding and supporting their child's learning, wellbeing and development.

Shifting the terminology

REPLACE	EMBRACE
Kids	Children
Child care worker	Educator or early childhood teacher
Centre	Service or setting
Day care	Early childhood service
Industry	Sector/profession

Key terms

Early childhood is the period of a child's life from birth to eight years of age. Children grow and develop most rapidly in their first five years of life.

The **early childhood sector** includes a range of early childhood education and care settings such as, long day care, kindergarten, preschool, family day care, in-home care, mobile services, occasional care and outside school hours care.

Early childhood education and care refers to the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical abilities in a way that meets each child's needs, to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Early childhood education refers to the component of early childhood education and care that is focused on brain development and cognitive growth. It involves qualified educators planning experiences that will help children to learn while they are playing.

Early learning and development is the result of early childhood education and care, and occurs when qualified educators plan and deliver quality programs, and then observe the changes in children's social, emotional, cognitive and physical abilities.

Play is essential to children's learning and development. Play enables children to make decisions, learn, take risks and have fun.

Quality refers to the standard of education and care provided at an early childhood education and care service.

Ratios are the number of educators working directly with children, based on the ages and numbers of children in a service.

Approved providers are persons/entities approved under Family Assistance Law to provide education and care in one or more services and receive and pass on Child Care Subsidy payments to eligible families.

Types of early childhood education and care services

The following service types are required to be approved by a state or territory regulatory authority and meet prescribed standards of education and care (this is not an exhaustive list).

SERVICE TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Centre-based care	Education and care for children up to school age, including long day care, kindergarten/preschool, children's centres, occasional care and outside school hours care.
Family day care (FDC)	Education and care provided by a family day care educator in their own home as part of a service.
OSHC	Education and care provided ('meaningful leisure') before and after school hours, and during school holidays for children who normally attend school (under 13 years of age).
Vacation care	A type of OSHC service provided for school-aged children during school holidays.
In-home care	Education and care provided in the home of a child by an educator where a family meets particular eligibility criteria, such as working non-standard hours, or being isolated.
Mobile children's services	Education and care provided 'on wheels' in isolated, rural and remote communities. May include preschool, toy libraries and playgroups.
Kindergarten/Preschool	Education and care provided for children in their year before primary school, which meets specific requirements and is delivered by a teacher with a degree. Some states and territories fund preschool for three-year-old children (two years prior to primary school). Preschools might be stand-alone services, or sessional programs within long day care.

Early learning is a continuum. Early learning doesn't begin at preschool and doesn't end when a child transitions to school.

Early childhood workforce

Qualifications: every person who works directly with children must hold an early childhood qualification or be actively studying Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care, or Early Childhood Teaching.

Coordinator is a broad term used to describe a lead educator in OSHC; or a team member who provides leadership and support to educators in FDC.

Director/manager is responsible for the overall planning of staff, administration, marketing and resourcing of the service, and ensuring government requirements are met.

Early childhood teacher (ECT) is a person who holds an approved early childhood teaching qualification. All education and care services must employ one or more ECTs (depending on number of enrolled children).

Educator is a person qualified to work in the field of early childhood and who provides education and care to children. They may hold:

- Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care level qualification
- Diploma of Early Childhood Education and Care level qualification
- Early childhood teaching qualification (also called an Early Childhood Teacher).

Educational leader is the educator responsible for leading, mentoring and guiding other educators in an ECEC service.

Nominated supervisor is the person in charge of day-to-day operation of a service.

Trainee/Apprentice is an educator who is studying early childhood education and care while working.

Australian school-based trainee is a high school student who is also undertaking vocational training.

Ancillary staff support the daily operations of services.

‘Child care’ is a generic term used to describe the ECEC sector and doesn’t reflect the importance of education and development for young children.

Quality

The **National Quality Standard (NQS)** sets a national benchmark for ECEC services. It includes seven Quality Areas:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children’s health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Governance and leadership

Assessment and rating: Services are assessed and rated by their regulatory authority against the NQS.

Quality ratings: Services are given a rating for each of the seven Quality Areas and an overall rating based on these results.

NQS RATINGS

Significant Improvement required

Working Towards *National Quality Standard*

Meeting *National Quality Standard*

Exceeding *National Quality Standard*

Excellent

Guiding documents

The **National Quality Framework (NQF)** provides a national approach to regulation, assessment and quality improvement for ECEC services. It includes:

- *Education and Care Services National Law 2010*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*
- NQS
- assessment and quality ratings process
- approved learning frameworks.

The ECA **Code of Ethics** is a set of statements about appropriate and expected behaviour of early childhood professionals who work with or on behalf of children and families in early childhood settings.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. **National Agreement on Closing the Gap** (Area 3): Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Child Safety Principles provide a nationally consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing and reduce future harm in organisational settings.

Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early childhood education and care services provides simple and effective methods for minimising the spread of disease in ECEC services.

Legislative requirements that apply to ECEC services include Work Health and Safety, Child Protection, Child Safety, Health Protection Services, Reportable Conduct, Working with Children/Vulnerable People

Approved learning frameworks are developed for educators to support children's learning in ECEC services.

- *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF)—for children aged birth to five years.
 - *My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (MTOF)—for children in school age care
 - *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*
- State and territory frameworks:
- *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline*
 - *Western Australia kindergarten curriculum guidelines*
 - *Northern Territory Preschool Curriculum*
 - *South Australia Reflect Respect Relate*

Key stakeholders

The **Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)** is the independent national authority that assists governments in administering the *National Quality Framework*.

Regulatory authorities administer the NQF in each state and territory.

Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) is responsible for national early childhood policy, administers provider approvals and operates the Child Care Subsidy helpdesk for providers.

Centrelink (Services Australia) administers Child Care Subsidy payments to families.

Federal government funding

Child Care Subsidy (CCS): a subsidy for fees charged by approved providers, available to eligible families. CCS eligibility is based on family income and parent's employment, study or other recognised activity.

Additional Child Care Subsidy: provides extra help with fees under certain circumstances, e.g. grandparents caring for grandchildren, transitioning from income support, temporary financial hardship, at-risk or vulnerable children.

Community Child Care Fund: a competitive grant program for services in disadvantaged, regional and remote communities. Three categories of funding include sustainability support, community support and capital support.

Inclusion Support Program: provides funding to support services to care for children with additional needs. Inclusion agencies in each state and territory work with services.

Subsidised care: allows families who earn \$69,390 or less a year (adjusted to CPI annually) to access 24 hours of subsidised care each fortnight for their child/ren without an activity test.

National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood (UANP): sets out funding provided by the federal government to state and territory governments to support children's early learning and development and transition to school through universal preschool access for children in the year before full-time school. Children living in Indigenous remote communities and children living with disadvantage and vulnerability are a focus.

USEFUL LINKS

ECA: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

ACECQA: www.acecqa.gov.au

AITSL: www.aitsl.edu.au/teach/standards

Closing the Gap: www.closingthegap.gov.au

DESE: www.dese.gov.au/early-childhood

NQS ratings: www.acecqa.gov.au/assessment/assessment-and-rating-process

Reconciliation Australia: www.reconciliation.org.au

Regulatory authorities: www.acecqa.gov.au/help/contact-your-regulatory-authority

SNAICC: www.snaicc.org.au

UNCRC: www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

Why has this resource been developed?

ECA recognised that terms and descriptions used in early childhood education and care are inconsistent. This resource provides terms and descriptions to support consistent, affirmative and accurate language.

About ECA

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is a not-for-profit organisation that has been a voice for children since 1938. Our vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school.

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