Government of South Australia
Department for Education

Safe sleeping and resting for infants and young children policy

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This document is mandated under the operational policy framework. Any edits must follow the process on the creating, updating and deleting operational policies page.

1. Overview

This policy sets requirements for safe sleeping and resting practices in the department's early childhood education and care services to protect children's safety, health and wellbeing.

It supports the department's obligations under the:

- *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011*, including the *Education and Care Services National Law*
- *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011*
- *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Regulations 2025* (SA) for residual early childhood services.

It is consistent with Red Nose recommendations and helps services provide appropriate opportunities for each child to sleep, rest and relax.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the following department services that are responsible for education or care to infants or children:

- preschool services
- occasional care
- rural care
- department long day care
- integrated children's centres, where child care educators are employed by the department or the child care program's management committees and line managed by the site leader)
- out of school hours care (OSHC) services delivered on a department site where the approved provider is the department, the governing council or a third-party provider.

This policy is not mandated for the long day care component of integrated services, where the department is not the approved provider. However, it is recommended child care management committees adopt this policy for consistency.

Crèche, playcentres and playgroup services are out of scope of the National Law and the National Regulations. However, they are expected to promote and model best practices for safe sleep and rest.

Family Day Care (FDC) staff, registered FDC educators and approved FDC educator assistants must comply with the Family Day Care health and safety policy (PDF 716KB). Educators can also access further guidance materials to meet the National Regulations via the FDC Hub.

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3. Detail

3.1 The legislative and policy context

Education and care services must comply with provisions related to children's sleep and rest under the *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011* (EECSRS Act). This includes the National Law and the National Regulations (including the National Quality Standard (NQS)), which are elements of the National Quality Framework (NQF).

The NQS sets a benchmark for the quality of education and care services. Standard 2.1 (element 2.1.1) of the NQS requires education and care services to ensure each child's wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child's need for sleep, rest and relaxation.

The department is an approved provider of education and care services that fall within the NQF. The department also provides residual early childhood services which are regulated under the EECRS Act and the *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Regulations 2025* (EECSRS Regulations). The EECSRS Regulations provide that Chapter 4 of the National Regulations applies to certain residual early childhood services E.g. occasional care, including the requirement for services to have policies and procedures in place under regulation 168 of the National Regulations.

Under the National Regulations:

- the approved provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that the sleep and rest of all children are met, having regard to the ages, developmental stages and individual needs of the children (regulation 84A)
- the approved provider must ensure that education and care services have policies and procedures in place for sleep and rest (regulation 168) and take reasonable steps to ensure the service follows the policies and procedures (regulation 170)
- a service's sleep and rest policies and procedures must address the matters set out in regulation 84B, and risk assessments for sleep and rest must consider the matters set out in regulation 84C(2) (these matters are detailed in the safe sleeping and resting for infants and young children procedure (PDF 237KB))
- the approved provider must ensure that a sleep and rest risk assessment is conducted at least once every 12 months, and as soon as practicable after becoming aware of any circumstance that may affect the safety, health or wellbeing of children during sleep and rest (regulation 84C(1))
- as soon as practicable after conducting a risk assessment, any necessary updates must be made to services' policies and procedures for sleep and rest (regulation 84C(3)), and a record of each risk assessment must be kept (regulation 84C(4)).

Sleep and rest provisions in the National Regulations were introduced in the context of concerns around the death of infants due to sudden and unexpected death in infancy (SUDI). Safe sleep and rest practices are also important for the development, wellbeing, health and safety of young children and older children, whose sleep and rest needs should be considered separately to the needs of infants.

Educators who care for infants under 12 months of age must comply with the South Australian Safe Infant Sleeping Standards (PDF 732KB) in all circumstances unless medically indicated reasons dictate

otherwise. The standards are informed by available evidence about risk factors in the infant sleeping environment and outline essential safe infant sleeping practices to reduce the risk of SUDI.

3.2 Policy principles

The following principles must be applied by education and care services for the safe sleep and rest of children at the service.

3.2.1 Sleep and rest practices

- Approaches to sleep and rest practices will consider child safety as paramount.
- Sleep and rest practices will follow best practice guidelines and information to reduce the risk of SUDI, including Red Nose Australia guidelines and guidance from ACECQA (as the national authority under the National Quality Framework).
- Best practices for sleep and rest will be adopted and maintained through induction and ongoing training for educators, including creche workers, playgroup coordinators and playcentre leaders

3.2.2 Meeting sleep and rest needs

- The ages, developmental stages and individual needs of children will be considered to inform how each child's sleep, rest and relaxation needs will be met.
- Services use the department's Culturally Responsive Framework to ensure that cultural protocols are followed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- All children will be given choices and opportunities for sleep, rest and relaxation to ensure their individual comfort and wellbeing.
- The circumstances and needs of each child at the service will be assessed to determine any risk factors that may impact the child's safety and wellbeing while sleeping and resting.

3.2.3 Physical environment and sleep and rest equipment

- All children will have the opportunity to sleep and rest in a safe environment, including adequate ventilation, with safe and suitable bedding equipment which is appropriate to the age, developmental stage, and meets the individual needs of the child.
- Children will be dressed appropriately for the room temperature ensuring they are comfortably warm but not hot, eg remove all beanies and hats for sleeping. Note: there is no specific room temperature recommended for safe sleep and rest.
- Every reasonable precaution will be taken to protect children from harm and hazard while sleeping and resting.
- In relation to services caring for infants, relevant Australian standards for cots (AS/NZS 2172:2013), portable folding cots (AS/NZS 2195:2010) and testing sleep surface firmness (AS/NZS 8811.1:2013) will be met.
- In compliance with the National Regulations, there will be no bassinets present at the service.

- The physical environment in the service will cater for non-resting children as well as sleeping and resting children.

3.2.4 Supervision and monitoring

- Processes for supervision and monitoring of children during sleep and rest at the service will accommodate the needs of individual children (ie where children are ill or are at higher risk of harm).
- There will be adequate lighting in the sleep and rest environment of the service to ensure children are effectively supervised. Children who are sleeping or resting will be within sight and hearing distance of educators.
- Active supervision will be maintained by visually checking the child's breathing and the colour of the child's lips and skin tone, and the rise and fall of the chest, at appropriate regular time intervals and making appropriate records.
- A physical check is required at least every 15 minutes, where an educator enters the sleep space.
- At out-of-scope services where parents are present, parents maintain responsibility for the supervision and care of their children.

3.2.5 Partnership with families

- Services will engage with parents and carers to understand a child's sleep and rest routine at home, their family's cultural preferences, and the child's health care needs to support the child's sleep and rest needs at the service, noting the prevailing safe sleep practices advocated by Red Nose and ACECQA.
- Services will communicate sleep and rest policies and procedures with parents and carers, and model and promote safe sleep and rest practices to support families' understanding and adoption of safe sleep and rest practices for their children.
- Support for families to adopt safe infant sleeping practices will be culturally responsive.
- Families' requests relating to sleep and rest arrangements for their child at a service will be reasonably accommodated unless they are inconsistent with current recommended safe sleep practices advocated by Red Nose, SA Health and ACECQA.

3.3 Safe sleep and rest procedure

Services must develop their own local (site-specific) procedures for safe sleep and rest which address the requirements in the National Regulations and the service's specific context. A template for safe sleep and rest local procedures (DOCX 166KB) is available to support early childhood services' compliance with the National Regulations.

If services are in scope of the department's safe sleeping and resting for infants and young children procedure (PDF 237KB), their local procedures must be consistent with the department's procedure.

OSHC services must have a local sleep and rest policy and procedure to meet regulation 168 of the National Regulations.

3.4 Risk assessment for sleep and rest

Risk assessments for sleep and rest must be conducted at least once every 12 months and as soon as practicable after becoming aware of any circumstance that may affect the safety, health or wellbeing of children during sleep and rest. The safe sleeping and resting for infants and young children procedure (PDF 237KB) includes procedures which address the risk assessment requirements in regulation 84C of the National Regulations.

Completing the department's template for sleep and rest risk assessment (PDF 291KB) ensures compliance with the National Regulations.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 Child Care Management Committees (long day care)

Child Care Management Committees (long day care) who are the approved provider of the long day care component of an integrated service are encouraged to adopt this policy.

4.2 Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Early Childhood Education and Care services in scope of this policy must comply with this policy and the safe sleeping and resting for infants and young children procedure (PDF 237KB).

4.3 Executive Director, Preschools and Early Childhood Services

The Lead Director, Preschools and Early Childhood Services has approved provider responsibilities under the EECS Act.

4.4 Out of School Hours Care

OSHC services must comply with this policy and develop their own local policy, procedure and risk assessment to comply with regulation 168 of the National Regulations.

4.5 Family Day Care

FDC staff, registered FDC educators and approved FDC educator assistants must comply with the Family Day Care health and safety policy (PDF 716KB) which addresses Safe sleep practices as per the National Regulations. FDC also has related operational guides which are available to FDC educators through the FDC Hub.

4.6 Quality Preschools

Quality Preschools must monitor, review and evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in accordance with the department's operational policy framework requirements.

5. Definitions

Term	Definition
Guardian	A person who has legal guardianship or custody of a child.
In loco parentis	A person acting in a parental style relationship with a child, where the person has intended to place themselves in the position of a parent toward a child and has assumed the same duty and authority as a parent with respect to the nurturing, control and protection of a child. A person in loco parentis may include a person: in a de facto relationship with a child's biological parent where they have assumed responsibility for the child who has taken over care of a child after the death of both biological parents, or where there has been a family breakdown and the child is estranged from both biological parents in an informal fostering arrangement. This person does not have to assume any or all financial responsibility for a child to satisfy this definition.
Infant	A child under 12 months of age.
Integrated service	A children's centre for early childhood development and parenting or a rural integrated service with a long day care service where day to day responsibility for the long day care is delegated to the department site leader by the child care management committee.
Parent	For the purposes of this procedure, the term parent refers to all persons responsible for the child. A person responsible for the child means a person who is the child's: biological parent, adoptive parent or other person recognised as a parent if the child was conceived following a fertilisation procedure or under a surrogacy arrangement guardian step-parent person standing in loco parentis. This does not include a person who has had their legal custody, guardianship or responsibility for the child removed by a Court, Act or Law. As an example, a biological parent who has had their custody, guardianship or parental responsibility for the child removed by a parenting order made under the Family Law Act 1975 is not a person responsible for the child.
Sudden and Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI)	SUDI is defined as the death of an infant between birth and 12 months of age, which is unexpected, sudden, and not anticipated due to any known pre-existing medical conditions.
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)	SIDS is a subset of SUDI. SIDS is defined as the sudden unexpected death of an infant less than 12 months of age, with onset of the fatal episode apparently occurring during sleep, that remains unexplained after a thorough investigation, including performance of a complete autopsy, review of the circumstances of death and clinical history.

6. Supporting information

6.1 Forms and tools

Template for sleep and rest local procedures (DOCX 166KB)

Template for sleep and rest risk assessment (PDF 1MB)

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority – Sleep and rest risk assessment template (PDF 195KB)

6.2 Resources

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority – Information sheet on safe sleep and rest legislative requirements

Red Nose Australia – First Nations resources

6.3 Policies

Culturally Responsive Framework

Safe sleeping and resting for infants and young children procedure (PDF 237KB)

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority – Sleep and rest for children: Policy and procedures guidelines (PDF 230KB)

SA Health – South Australian Safe Infant Sleeping Standards (PDF 732KB)

6.4 Legislation

Education and Care Services National Regulations

Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011 (SA)

Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Regulations 2025 (SA)

7. Record history

7.1 Approvals

OP number: 330
File number: DE25/12802
Version: 1.1
Policy Officer: Principal Policy and Program Analyst, Quality Preschools
Policy Sponsor: Director, Quality Preschools
Senior Executive: Executive Director, Preschools and Early Childhood Services
Approved by: Director, Quality Preschools
Approved date: 20 October 2026
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7.2 Revision record

Version: 1.1
Approved by: Director, Quality Preschools
Approved date: 20 October 2026
Amendment(s): Strengthened instructions for preschool staff checking on sleeping and resting infants and children. Updated titles and links. Scope expanded in consultation with relevant programs and services.

Version: 1.0
Approved by: Lead Director, Preschools and Early Childhood Services
Approved date: 23 September 2027
Amendment(s): New policy.

8. Contact

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