

***Discussing concerns and possible referrals with families during COVID-19
if the child is not currently attending the program.***

Working with families during the COVID-19 period is posing many challenges to educators. Every educator continues to strive to offer a quality service that meets the needs of the individual child.

Term one is generally the time where educators are getting to know each child and where they are at developmentally. Relationship building with the child and their families/carers is a key factor in achieving this. Heading into term two is when many educators begin to consider moving forward in discussing concerns they have regarding an individual child's development with the family/carer. These discussions may include whether there is a need for the family to seek further advice or referral onto other services e.g. discussion with a GP or Maternal Child Health Practitioner, referral onto a Paediatrician or PSFO, or a call to Community Health services.

At present educators are facing unusual circumstances. Maybe they were ready to meet with families/carers but now the child is not attending due to COVID-19. Should they then leave the discussions until the child recommences? Or, should they move forward and try to engage with the family about their concerns?

When considering these questions educators may need to think about the following:

- *Have I gathered enough observations (recorded) throughout term 1 to share with the family that demonstrate my concerns?*
- *Have I established a solid relationship with the child? Enough that it has allowed me to see where the child is managing independently and where they need support?*
- *Have I taken enough time to get to know the family/carer so that they and I can feel comfortable in having a difficult conversation?* Remembering that the conversation will more than likely have to take place over the phone or via video conference if the family are trying to isolate (due to COVID-19). If the relationship between the family/carer is not strong then the educator may need to consider taking more time to build that relationship e.g. general phone calls about how the child is managing at home, sharing activity ideas and anecdotes of what has been happening at home with the child. When the educator feels the relationship is strong enough, this could be time to move forward in discussing concerns and possible referrals.

All sectors are experiencing changes in service models at present. Before recommending a referral to a particular service it may be valuable to contact that service and establish expected wait times for that service. Also, if there are any significant changes to their service provision during the COVID-19 period. This information can then be shared with the family/carer at the time of the discussion.