

BUILDING BLOCKS

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CCTV IN CHILDCARE

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In a world with Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) just about everywhere, it is not surprising that so many childcare centres in Australia are installing it.

This article discusses the advantages and lists some of the concerns about the use of CCTV in childcare centres. It focuses on those CCTV systems which can only be viewed by centre staff and management, and by parents while they are at the centre. It does not consider CCTV which has the capacity for parents to log in remotely.

Advantages include:

Parents' peace of mind – CCTV affords parents an increased sense of security to know that, in addition to having their children cared for by qualified and experienced educators, the actions of these educators and others, including children, are continuously monitored (i.e. whatever happens to their child while ever the child is in the centre can be seen, excepting nappy change and toileting). Centres use this security and peace of mind as selling points when advertising vacancies.

Children's security and safety – CCTV minimises the likelihood of children experiencing abuse while at the centre. However, the centre's child safety and protection practices should be adhered to as strictly as if the centre did not have CCTV. CCTV does not eliminate unacceptable behaviours but is more likely to lead to discovery and curtailment. As seen in the press.

Similarly, it enhances the ability of staff to monitor arrivals at and departures from the centre and, in the event of any dispute, to clearly identify the adult accompanying them at these times. Of course, centres already have policies and procedures in place to ensure that children are only given into the care of authorised adults.

Protecting educators – CCTV affords educators protection. Their practices are recorded and can be used to vindicate them in the event of any untoward allegations of misconduct involving a child. In addition, the recordings can confirm the centre's compliance and protect the reputation of educators and thereby the centre.

Help determine the cause of accidents – It can provide pertinent information in the event of injury. It can evidence exactly what happened and how, where, why and when the injury occurred, and the information used to avert such incidents in the future.

Inform behaviour guidance strategies – CCTV provides that welcome 'third eye' to capture the context of a child's behaviour that concerns parents and educators. This information can be

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used to inform discussions about the child, the behaviour and the behaviour guidance strategies that could be used. The footage should not be the only identifier of the behaviour. Instead it should be a starting point to more closely monitor the behaviour and to find out the reasoning behind it.

To review or troubleshoot the rooms – CCTV can also be used to improve the program by answering questions such as: Do children spend too much time in one area or on one activity? Does conflict arise more frequently in certain situations? Where do children play and learn best together? These insights are invaluable.

Male educators – The use of CCTV can result in more male educators being accepted for positions as it can counter any reticence parents or centres hold about employing male educators. Male educators are usually extremely popular with the children in centres and can bring that long needed male perspective and approach to the sector.

Centre security – CCTV can witness theft from the centre throughout the working day or identify vandals or those breaking in after hours. It can also assist police investigations and prosecutions.

However, the use of CCTV in childcare centres has its concerns. Factors to consider include:

- Confidentiality, storage and use of recordings
- The use of CCTV does not have the confidence of all educators and parents
- Some educators' fears that CCTV in their room means that they do not have the full confidence of management and parents
- Educators may unwittingly reduce their level of pre-CCTV vigilance
- Recordings can be misinterpreted as they are not accompanied by sound and the camera angles may not be ideal in all instances

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- Propensity for misunderstandings because parents:
 - o believe (mistakenly) that they should be entitled to view recordings of an incident that involves their child and others
 - o hold unrealistic expectations (e.g. requesting staff undertake time-consuming reviews of recordings of minor incidents involving their child)

In summary, CCTV offers many advantages. It is a powerful tool and if used correctly can bring a new professionalism to centres' practices. However, it is not meant to replace the skills of educators but rather to enhance them. Its use does raise some concerns (e.g. confidentiality, accessibility) which have not yet been fully explored or tested. Introducing CCTV into your centre needs more than a cursory examination, especially if it is an established centre where educators and parents have been with the centre for some time and may feel uneasy about it.



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