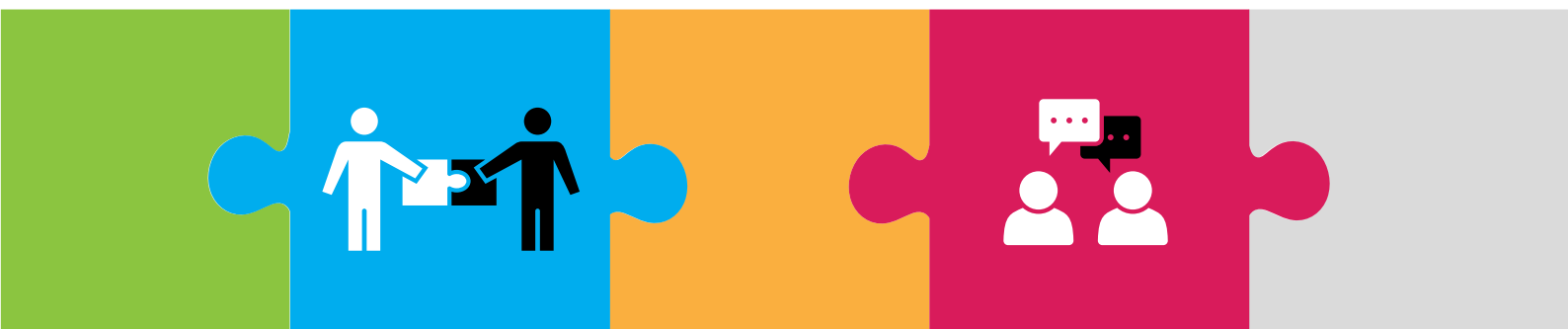


# HR GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE FOR PRESCHOOLS

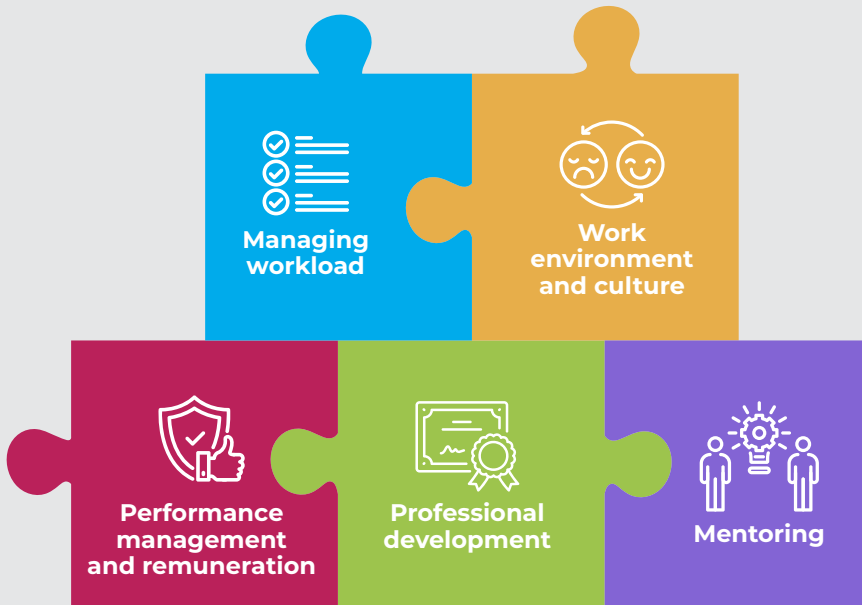
Developed in collaboration with Korn Ferry.

Special thanks to Agape Little Uni, Bright Kids School House, E-Bridge, My First Skool, NurtureStars, Preschool-by-The-Park



# Introduction

The HR Good Practices Guide for Preschools is a resource that complements existing HR practices to improve attraction and retention of educators in preschools. It covers five good HR practices that preschools can implement to enhance the working experience for early childhood (EC) educators:



The practices in these five areas are curated to address key concerns from perception surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs) with in-service professionals, students and job seekers, conducted by Korn Ferry, a consulting firm, appointed by ECDA to look into manpower trends in the early childhood sector.

Here is what the Korn Ferry study found:

## Factors Affecting Attraction and Retention of EC Educators

The illustration shows a woman with long black hair, wearing a purple top, pointing her right index finger towards a computer monitor. The monitor displays the following information:

- Top Pull Factor**  
Opportunity to teach and guide children
- Push Factors**
  - Heavy workload
  - Dissatisfaction with the work environment
  - Poor working relationships

**Note:** Click on the [underlined text](#) in this guide for access to more resources.

# 1

## Managing EC Educators' Workload

Did you know that an EC educator can have a very heavy workload? The bulk of an EC educator's work involves working with children in class (or contact time). However, there are also many other tasks that have to be done after programme hours, outside classroom and even at home or during weekends.

### An EC Educator's Workload

#### Tasks to do in the classroom:

- Lesson activities
- Interaction with children
- Routine care

#### Other tasks to do:

- Lesson and materials preparation
- Administrative duties
- Communication with parents
- Events planning and preparation (e.g. field trips, concerts)
- Portfolio preparation




The heavy workload and poor work-life balance are reasons why EC educators leave the sector! Hence, it is important to help them manage their workload.

Here are 3 ways you can help:



Use technology to speed up processes such as attendance-taking and improve educators' productivity with e-portfolio.


You can refer to [The Early Childhood Industry Digital Plan \(EC IDP\)](#) to find pre-approved solutions and funding support.

 **TIP: Don't forget to provide the necessary training and support for educators to use these tools in a safe and efficient way!**



Allocate non-contact time (NCT) e.g. during non-programme hours for educators to work on administrative tasks.


Communicate clearly to parents about the time norms for educators to respond to queries during or after working hours.

 **TIP: Provide a conducive space for educators to focus on their work during this time!**



Create a centralised library of resources that educators can use when preparing lesson or activity plans. This will help reduce the time needed for lesson preparation.

Review and rotate staff's responsibilities and administrative duties to balance their workload.

 **TIP: You don't need to start building this from scratch. Look online for various [existing resources](#) to get the ball rolling!**

## Be Inspired!

### Case Study on Non-Contact Time

Improving Staff Well-Being at E-Bridge Pre-school Bukit Batok West with Centre Leader, Ms Sallini Kamari



#### Challenge

Ms Sallini observed that many educators were staying beyond working hours to complete their other tasks such as lesson preparation, newsletter submission and student portfolio updates. Some would even bring work home with them. This practice was causing poor work-life balance, which led to staff attrition.



#### Good Practice in Action

Dedicated non-contact time was scheduled for educators to complete administrative duties (e.g. during children's nap time, once a week, in allocated non-classroom spaces within the centre).

Guidelines were developed to ensure centre operations are not affected, while educators were asked to be flexible. Parents were also reminded to contact educators only during working hours to support the latter's work-life balance.

Educators without fixed classes and teaching aides were roped in to help meet the centre's manpower needs, where feasible.



#### Outcome

After a period of adjustment, educators were able to work within guidelines to schedule their own non-contact time.

They reported being more productive during working hours, which helped to reduce the need to bring work home. There were also fewer occurrences of having to attend to parents' queries after working hours.



#### Takeaways

- Set guidelines for non-contact time that specify timeslots educators can use, and spaces they can work without distraction
- Check in regularly to hear feedback from educators
- Communicate the need to be flexible about adjusting non-contact time when manpower is tight

## Be Inspired!

### Case Study on Digitalisation

Digital transformation using Preschool Management System at NurtureStars with General Manager, Mr Ng Kuan Wei



#### Challenge

NurtureStars applied successfully for the Productivity Solutions Grant under the [EC IDP](#) as it wanted to digitalise its operations. However, there were parents and educators who were less tech-savvy and needed more time to adapt.



#### Good Practice in Action

NurtureStars chose to digitalise in phases, working closely with centre staff and vendor to understand the requirements.

They started digitalising simple but time-consuming processes like temperature taking and check-in/out to build confidence and convince educators of the benefits of digitalisation, before moving on to invoicing and portfolio preparation. Staff were given training, while educators had time to transition from hardcopy portfolios to e-portfolios.

To help those less tech-savvy, NurtureStars started a WhatsApp group for more experienced educators to share their knowledge and support their peers. They also reached out to parents to answer any queries and smoothen the transition.



#### Outcome

There has been more than 10% reduction in time spent on administrative tasks like attendance-taking and portfolio writing. Educators are able to quickly update documents in the Preschool Management System for parents to access.

The digitalisation drive also facilitated the shift of more preschool operations online during the COVID-19 pandemic and made it easier for the centre to communicate quickly with parents.



#### Takeaways

- Consult with the team to determine the most suitable solutions
- Provide support throughout the journey to adopt technology
- Review regularly the implementation of new hardware and software to minimise issues for users
- Work with vendors that can provide flexible and timely support

# 2

## Fostering a Positive Work Environment and Culture

While EC educators are driven by their passion to work with children and serve the community, a supportive and nurturing work environment also plays an important part to motivate them to do their best. How can centres achieve this?

### A positive working environment is one with:

#### Good Leadership



Leadership shapes the work experience and inspires educators to excel.

#### Key traits of a good EC leader:

- Cares for people
- Leads with vision and leads by example
- Champions innovation

You may also refer to the [Early Childhood Leadership Development Framework](#) for more details.

#### A Culture of Collaboration



A culture of collaboration gives educators a safe space to explore, grow together and improve their abilities.

#### Key traits of a collaborative culture:

- Colleagues who offer support, look out for one another and step in to help each other when possible
- Encourage the team to take charge of their personal and professional development
- Open communication channels for feedback

#### Recognition and Appreciation



Recognition and appreciation affirm the value of educators' work and motivate them.

#### Key steps to show recognition and appreciation:

- Offer words of affirmation
- Nominate awards for excellence or contributions
- Give meaningful recognition such as Long Service Award

## Be Inspired!

### Case Study on Transforming Work Environment and Culture

Creating a Supportive Culture at Agape Little Uni @ Jurong West with Mdm Lee Chin Yen



#### Challenge

When Mdm Lee Chin Yen joined the centre as its Principal, she noticed the team's morale was low. Many educators reported feeling very stressed, and several went on to resign. There were also educators who were not carrying out tasks as instructed.



#### Good Practice in Action

Mdm Lee decided she needed to understand her team better and build a functioning relationship with her staff. She found that there was a need for educators to be heard, supported and cared for so she began adjusting her leadership style and spent more time listening.

To improve the work culture, she included feedback on teamwork during classroom observations. Educators were also encouraged to observe their colleagues at work and share the lessons they learned from each other. In addition, they were empowered to lead projects to build a sense of achievement.

Finally, Mdm Lee sought to increase appreciation for educators through talent shows and celebrations like Mother's Day. Parents who participated in centre activities were encouraged to express their appreciation either verbally, or through evaluation forms.



#### Outcome

Teamwork in the centre began to improve and educators became more willing to step up to help each other overcome challenging situations.



#### Takeaways

- Focus on creating a safe environment where educators are comfortable voicing their opinions and trying new things
- Leaders should lead by example to encourage buy-in of new initiatives
- Be patient, as it will take time for educators to adjust to the new way of working

# 3

## Engaging EC Educators with Performance Management and Remuneration

A clear and structured performance management framework helps organisations to recognise and reward employees in a fair and transparent manner. It aligns individual goals with the organisation's objectives and sets performance expectations. A good framework should motivate employees to achieve good performance and identify areas of development.

Preschools can consider the following three steps to make performance management effective and meaningful:



### STEP 1 Set Clear Goals

Use the SMART goal tool to set goals at work and communicate organisational targets.

<b>Specific</b>	Clearly defined and unambiguous
<b>Measurable</b>	Progress of goal can be measured
<b>Achievable</b>	Attainable and within reach
<b>Realistic</b>	Relevant to one's role
<b>Timeline</b>	Clearly defined timeline set to it



### STEP 2 Provide Regular Feedback through Formal and Informal Platforms

Encourage communication! Ensure managers understand framework so they can engage and evaluate employees fairly. [Read more here!](#)



### STEP 3 Link Performance to Rewards

Reward those who perform well and encourage them to keep up the good work! This can be achieved through performance bonuses, merit increments or other variable components that are tied to an educator's contributions or performance. No matter what you choose, it is important these rewards are structured, fair and objective.

**TIP:** Organisations typically set the midpoint of the salary range as the 'market value' for each job role' i.e. pay level for those competent on the job.

In designing the merit increment matrix, the two common factors to consider are the *individual's performance rating* and *their pay position in the salary range* (sample matrix below).

Performance Rating	Pay Position in his/her Salary Range	
	Below Midpoint	Above Midpoint
A	7%	5%
B	5%	2%
C	2%	1%
D	0%	0%



## Be Inspired!

# Case Study on Performance and Management Remuneration

Developing a Structured Performance Appraisal Framework with Mr Teo Beng Lee at Bright Kids School House



### Challenge

Performance appraisals were typically done in an informal setting based on conversations with educators. However, educators often raised concerns about their remuneration structure and the way their bonuses were calculated. Bright Kids decided to put in place a structured framework to ensure performance appraisal could be conducted objectively, reward good performers and identify areas for educators to develop professionally.



### Good Practice in Action

The centre chose performance, skills and core values as the key components of the performance appraisal framework. Educators would be rated on each component and descriptors for each component were provided to guide assessors on what to look out for.

The assessment process was designed to involve the educator being appraised, the principal, and a second assessor who had observed the educator in the classroom.

Input from all three sources were used to determine the final appraisal score. This score would form the basis for the educator's bonus and promotion, as well as to chart his or her development plan. A performance appraisal software system was adopted to help document and analyse data on staff performance.



### Outcome

The performance appraisal framework was reviewed and refined over time. The employee engagement score improved and educators became more interested in attending courses for upskilling.



### Takeaways

- Clear communication is critical for the successful implementation of a performance appraisal framework
- Regular reviews are needed to ensure the framework remains relevant to the centre's changing needs
- Technology can help document and analyse data on staff performance

# 4

## Enhancing the Professional Development of EC Educators

Professional development for educators is important to support their career development and skills upgrading. It is equally important to operators for achieving the preschools' growth and objectives. To best support the needs of both educators and operators, it is beneficial to practise professional development in a structured manner in the listed steps below.

### Four Steps to Set-Up an Effective Professional Development Programme

1



**Establish a career framework**

This should detail the roles and corresponding skills needed to achieve your centre's objectives. Refer to the [Skills Framework for Early Childhood Educators](#) and customise it to fit your unique needs.

2



**Conduct a Learning Needs Analysis (LNA)**

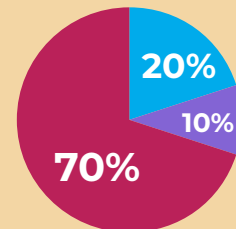
Identify learning needs through performance dialogues with educators and by talking to their peers and supervisors.

3



**Develop Individual Development Plans (IDPs)**

70% of learning and development can be achieved on the job; 20% through learning from others; and 10% from formal training via courses.



#### Experiential Learning

Hands-on experience enables employees to discover and refine their job-related skills, make decisions, address challenges and build relationships.

**Example:** On-the-job assignment, new projects, rotational assignments

#### Learning Through Others

Allows employees to benefit from the cumulative experience of others and provides them with exposure to a variety of scenarios to accelerate professional development.

**Example:** Coaching, mentoring, job shadowing, networking

#### Formal Learning

Provides a controlled and structured training environment that is organised and delivered with specific objectives in mind.

**Example:** Formal courses, professional certifications, advanced education

4



**Evaluate the effectiveness of the programme**

It is important to measure the effectiveness of the development plans and evaluate the learning and development programme's effectiveness. Click for useful tools including [Skills mapping illustration](#), [Kirkpatrick model evaluation tool](#), and [CPD Roadmap](#) and [prospectus](#).

## Be Inspired!

### Case Study on Professional Development

Creating a Structured Individual Development Plan with Dr Geraldine Zuzarte-Teo at Pre-school By-The-Park



#### Challenge

Dr Geraldine Zuzarte-Teo shared how a structured Individual Development Plan could improve employee engagement and offer educators professional development opportunities.



#### Good Practice in Action

Each year, centre leaders and educators would jointly chart out their development plan and goals for the year.

Educators were given time to reflect, research and propose areas of development, before meeting with their centre leaders to discuss the support needed and finalising their development plan and goals. Newer teachers were paired with senior ones for regular check-ins to ensure they had the support they needed.

Progress was tracked through two formal classroom observations. The first was held a month or two after the goal setting exercise, to establish a baseline. The second, close to the year-end performance appraisal, was to assess the progress and achievement of the goals. A mid-year check-in was carried out to monitor the progress and goals could be adjusted if necessary.



#### Outcome

An annual employee engagement survey showed that educators felt acknowledged and supported in their professional development journeys.



#### Takeaways

- Leadership is crucial to guide, coach and provide necessary support for educators to grow
- Educators should take ownership of their development, and have regular conversations with centre leaders and peers to determine their professional trajectory
- Documentation of feedback throughout the year will help educators keep track of their progress and can serve as a useful reference for performance appraisals

# 5

## Supporting EC Educators with Mentorship Programmes

Mentorship supports educators in their professional growth and development. Many EC organisations appoint experienced educators as mentors to guide new educators over a period of time to help accelerate their learning as they assimilate into the work environment. This helps to support new joiners and lower their attrition. However, mentoring is less emphasised after educators have been oriented to the centre or have had some years of experience.

Findings from the FGDs suggest that educators, regardless of experience, place high value in having a mentor to support their professional growth. Research has also shown that mentorship enhances retention and productivity among employees. Hence, having a structured mentoring process for every educator across different stages of their career is vital.

### Four *Do's* for an Effective Mentorship Programme:

Set clear objectives of the programme with an agreed timeline



Consider and select suitable mentoring format



Assign a coordinator to keep track of progress



Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts mentors put in



### One-on-one Mentoring



- A more personal setting for mentees to share about their challenges and learn the ropes
- Fosters strong relationships between senior and junior employees

Which mentorship format should you use?

### Peer Mentoring



- Involves mentor and mentees who are at a similar career level
- Allows for them to learn about the varied career experiences applicable to their roles

### Group Mentoring



- Useful if there are few available senior educators or senior leaders
- Improves cohesiveness and teamwork among mentees

### Need a hand?

Refer to the [E-Mentoring Guide](#) for tips and resources you can use to make your mentorship programme even more meaningful for both mentors and mentees.



## Be Inspired!

### Case Study on Mentoring

Building an Effective Mentoring System with Ms Pearlyn Tan at My First Skool at Buangkok Crescent



#### Challenge

Centre Leader Ms Pearlyn Tan noticed a high percentage of new joiners to the wider EC sector as well as her centre who needed support to transition to their new roles.



#### Good Practice in Action

A core team was developed to spearhead mentorship efforts and work with the newer educators. This team was formed based on the educators' experience and leadership capabilities.

Ms Tan stepped in to mentor the core team through monthly meetings, which can discuss issues ranging from parents' feedback, curriculum reviews to staff issues. She also checked in frequently with team members to offer guidance.

A buddy programme was another initiative established to provide newcomers with additional support. More experienced staff were paired with newcomers to share the centre's practices.



#### Outcome

With these initiatives in place, the attrition rate dropped in 2021. The 2021 Parent Satisfaction Survey indicated over 90 percent of parents were happy with the centre's staff and programmes.



#### Takeaways

- Mentoring can benefit all educators, regardless of their experience
- Regular monthly meetings for educators to share their challenges and ideas can help them feel supported
- It is important to offer avenues for educators to speak one-on-one to an experienced member of staff about their challenges without the fear of being assessed



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