

Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

Quick reference: mental and emotional wellbeing | social and emotional learning | healthy routines | sharing information with families | monitoring and assessing health and wellbeing | leisure and relaxation | social connections | being in nature | culture and social identity | belonging | mental illness | neurodevelopmental disorder | staff wellbeing | stress | inclusive | diversity | trauma

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

- (1) To set out how we promote and support the mental health and wellbeing of children and their families, staff and visitors at our service
- (2) This policy aligns with the National Quality Standard related to children's health and safety and is based on guidelines from recognised authorities

SCOPE

- (3) This policy applies to:
 - 'Staff': the approved provider, paid workers, volunteers, work placement students, and third parties who carry out child-related work at our service (e.g., contractors, subcontractors, self-employed persons, employees of a labour hire company)
 - Children who are in our care, their parents, families and care providers
 - Visitors to our service who carry out child-related work, including allied health support workers

DEFINITIONS

- (4) The following definitions apply to this policy and related procedures:
 - 'Mental health and wellbeing' refer to a person's psychological, social and emotional wellbeing. Mental health and wellbeing are related to thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and are viewed within the context of children's development, family, environment, care setting and culture. People have different beliefs and understanding of mental health based on their culture, education and life experiences

- 'Mental illness' is a medical condition that impacts upon a person's thoughts, feelings or behaviour (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- 'Neurodevelopmental disorder' is a condition in which there is a difference in the way the brain develops, which can also affect thoughts, feelings or behaviour (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum disorders)
- 'Parents' includes guardians and persons who have parental responsibilities for the child under a decision or order of court
- 'Staff' refers to paid employees, volunteers, students, and third parties who are covered in the scope of this policy

POLICY STATEMENT

A mentally healthy community at our service

Support for staff's professional practice

- (5) Educators are trained in, and participate in professional development activities related to, children's mental health and wellbeing, including how to support children and family members who have mental illness or neurodevelopmental disorders
- (6) Professional development opportunities for staff may include:
 - Attending seminars, workshops or conferences about children's mental health and wellbeing
 - Participating in relevant training or programs
 - Reading and reflecting on newsletters, magazines and other relevant material
 - Mentorships with other staff members
 - Opportunities to discuss mental health and wellbeing in staff meetings
- (7) We maintain connections with external professional and support services to provide advice, referrals and collaborate on tailored support plans for children and families
- (8) Staff are encouraged to care for themselves and to be mindful that their own mental health and wellbeing can affect their ability to care for and educate children
- (9) Staff who feel stressed or overwhelmed at work should speak to their supervisor/room leader and/or the nominated supervisor to get additional support

Social connections and belonging

- (10) Staff are aware that social connection and a sense of belonging play a critical role in shaping children's emotional wellbeing, resilience and overall development
- (11) Staff follow relevant service policies and practices to guide their interactions with children and actions to support children's positive relationships with each other
- (12) Staff model positive relationships and effective communication. They treat each other, families, visitors and children with care and respect
- (13) We encourage social connections in our educational program and in our day-to-day routines

An inclusive and diverse environment

- (14) Educators understand that when children have a sense of self and belonging, they have greater self-esteem, resilience, meaning and purpose
- (15) Educators learn about each child's unique characteristics and circumstances formally at enrolment, and informally throughout the year by asking questions, and interacting with and observing the child
- (16) Educators learn about cultural safety for children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. We acknowledge and teach their histories, cultures, languages, traditions, religions and spiritual beliefs
- (17) The diverse backgrounds, languages and identities of children and their family, staff and communities are reflected in our environment and activities

Family partnerships

- (18) We provide families with general information regarding mental health and wellbeing from reliable sources through our usual channels (e.g., on social media, in our newsletter, in the brochures and posters we display)
- (19) Parents and educators regularly share information with each other (formally and informally) about the child's development, including their strengths and abilities, and their psychological, social and emotional development and needs
- (20) We can also provide specific advice and referrals for children and families who need support from our network of external support agencies, child health/development specialists, and mental health groups and professional associations
- (21) If a child is being assessed or supported by a health professional or service (and their parent asks us to), we will collaborate on and implement any management or support plans that are needed

Social and emotional learning for mental health

- (22) Educators help children feel secure, meet their needs, and teach them the skills they need to regulate their emotions and behaviour
- (23) Educators are attuned to children's feelings and learn how each child expresses what they need or want in their own unique way. They acknowledge children's emotions, and respond with genuine warmth, empathy and understanding
- (24) Children are offered consistent support during challenging situations. Educators use positive communication, reinforcement and reassurance
- (25) Educators must follow our Positive Relationships with Children Policy and Procedures, which cover our principles and practices for social and emotional learning for children in our care

A holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing

Promoting healthy eating and drinking to stay hydrated

- (26) Staff are aware of the connection between nutrition and mental health and wellbeing
- (27) Staff follow our Nutrition and Dietary Requirements Policy, which sets out how we promote healthy eating and ensure children are offered food and drinks that are appropriate to their needs

Encouraging physical activity

- (28) Staff are aware that physical activity is a major contributor to mental health and wellbeing
- (29) Staff follow our Physical Activity Policy, which sets out how children are given regular opportunities throughout the day to participate in both structured and unstructured physical activities

Being in nature

- (30) We promote being in nature due to its ability to reduce stress, improve mood, enhance focus and calm, provide connection and meaning, enhance cognitive function, increase vitamin D production, and improve physical fitness and health
- (31) Children have time to freely investigate the natural environment during regular unstructured outdoor time
- (32) Our program includes nature-based activities to connect children to the natural environment (e.g., gardening/growing plants, collecting leaves and flowers, observing birds and insects,

nature walks, scavenger hunts, nature-based excursions and incursions). We also use natural materials in play and learning, such as stones, leaves, sticks and shells

- (33) We use the natural environment for relaxation and sensory exploration (e.g., sitting under trees, listening to birds, touching different textures, watching leaves being blown about)

Sleep and rest

- (34) Educators understand children need enough quality rest and sleep so they can manage their emotions, and reduce irritability, frustration and dysregulation

- (35) Educators follow our Sleep and Rest Policy to ensure that children's individual sleep and rest needs are met, and they can engage in learning and play

Early support for children's mental health and wellbeing

- (36) We maintain open and supportive communication with families about their needs and their child's needs, or the potential impact of a family situation (e.g., physical or mental illness, family separation, violence or financial disadvantage)

- (37) Educators observe and document the development and wellbeing of children. They are trained to identify if a child is showing possible early signs of mental health difficulties or developmental disorders (e.g., changes in behaviour, developmental differences, or concerning emotional or behavioural difficulties)

- (38) Educators refer any concerns they have to their room leader and/or nominated supervisor, who will help determine whether a child or family may need information or extra support (either from within the service or from external support services). Educators communicate any concerns they have about a child to their parents in a respectful, empathetic and caring way

- (39) Staff keep information about children's mental health and wellbeing, behaviour or family situation confidential. They only discuss it with the people who need to know – that is, those who are directly involved in the child's care

- (40) If a child has been diagnosed with a mental illness or neurodevelopmental disorder, educators respond to their individual needs and develop, implement and maintain management plans and support strategies where required

Supporting children after traumatic events, including natural disasters or community trauma

- (41) Staff are resourced and trained to support children who have experienced trauma, including natural disasters or collective trauma
- (42) When a child experiences a traumatic event (e.g., the death of a loved one, illness or accidents, violence, natural disaster, war, crime etc), educators respond sensitively to the individual preferences and needs of the child
- (43) Educators support children by following our procedure for helping children through difficult times (in our Positive Relationships for Children Policy)

PRINCIPLES

- (44) Everyone at our service – leaders, educators, children and their families and the community – is involved in creating a positive culture and environment
- (45) We have a respectful, safe, predictable, calm and welcoming environment
- (46) We work collaboratively with families, professionals and support services to understand and support children’s individual needs
- (47) We recognise that staff wellbeing is critical to a mentally healthy environment for the children in our care
- (48) We promote a holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing
- (49) We are committed to helping children to develop emotional regulation, resilience, self-esteem and social connection
- (50) We value and celebrate diversity and our practices are inclusive. We want everyone at our service to feel valued and a sense of belonging

LEGISLATION (OVERVIEW)

National Quality Standard

Standard / Element	Concept	Description
2.1	Health	Each child’s health and physical activity is supported and promoted
2.1.1	Wellbeing and comfort	Each child’s wellbeing and comfort is provided for, including appropriate opportunities to meet each child’s need for sleep, rest and relaxation
2.1.3	Healthy lifestyle	Healthy eating and physical activity are promoted and appropriate for each child

Standard / Element	Concept	Description
5.1	Relationships between educators and children	Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child
5.1.1	Positive educator to child interactions	Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included
5.2	Relationships between children	Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships
5.2.1	Collaborative learning	Children are supported to collaborate, learn from and help each other
5.2.2	Self-regulation	Each child is supported to regulate their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts
6.1	Supportive relationships with families	Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role
6.1.3	Families are supported	Current information is available to families about the service and relevant community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing
6.2	Collaborative partnerships	Collaborative partnerships enhance children's inclusion, learning and wellbeing
7.2	Leadership	Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community

My Time, Our Place (MTO) V2.0

MTO Outcome	Key component
1: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people feel safe, secure and supported • Children and young people develop their autonomy, interdependence, resilience and agency • Children and young people develop knowledgeable, confident self-identities and a sense of positive self-worth • Children and young people learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect
2: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary as active and informed citizens • Children and young people respond to diversity with respect
3: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing • Children and young people become strong in their physical learning and wellbeing • Children and young people are aware of and develop strategies to support their own mental and physical health, and personal safety

National Principles for Safe Organisations

Most relevant principles

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Key Policies	Child Safe Environment Policy Positive Relationships with Children Policy Physical Environment Policy Work Health and Safety Policy Enrolment Policy Nutrition and Dietary Requirements Policy Physical Activity Policy Additional Needs Policy Education Curriculum Policy Parental Interaction and Involvement Policy Medical Conditions Policy
Resources	Connections Decision Making Tree, Fact Sheets and Child Wellbeing Plan template BeYou – Beyond Blue Learning Program Head to Health – Supporting Children in early learning following a disaster or community trauma Raising Children - Mental health resources for professionals SEED Program Early Childhood Educator Wellbeing Project Smiling Mind – mindfulness and meditation programs The Achievement Program – Victorian Government

SOURCES

National Quality Standard | Connections – A resource for early childhood educators about children’s wellbeing – Hunter Institute of Mental Health 2014 – Australian Government Department of Education | Be You – Educators Handbook: Early Learning Services – Beyond Blue | Raising Children - Mental health resources for professionals

POLICY INFORMATION

Approval Dina Kahn



Review Reviewed annually and when there are changes that may affect this policy or related procedures. The review will include checks to ensure the document reflects current legislation, continues to be effective, or whether any changes and additional training are required

Last reviewed: 25th March 2026 Date for next review: 25th March 2027