

# Whole Service Approach

## About a Whole Service Approach

The term **whole service approach** is used here to describe a coordinated and systematic way of incorporating a particular idea or practice into all aspects of an early childhood service.

This means establishing and acknowledging a particular service goal or philosophy in all relevant documents and incorporating it into staff roles. This goal or philosophy is used to guide strategic directions, policies, day-to-day practices and relationships throughout the service.

In order for a whole service approach to work it must be an agreed course of action that is understood and supported by everyone. This includes children, staff, families, other professionals and the community.

## Why is this important for mental health and wellbeing?

Mental health can also be called social and emotional wellbeing. It is a key element of human health and happiness. Mental health is our capacity to manage our thoughts, feelings and behaviour so that we can maintain happiness and wellbeing, manage stress, work toward goals, solve problems or challenges and enjoy positive relationships.

When working with babies, children and families, children's services staff have an important role to play in supporting children's wellbeing and promoting positive health and learning outcomes for the future. Staff and services can do this by:


- Providing environments that support children's optimal development, especially their social and emotional development and
- Identifying children or families with additional support needs and helping them to access other professionals and agencies.

Promoting optimal social and emotional development and supporting early intervention for those with additional needs are consistent with the principles of quality early childhood care and education. You will see social and emotional development or wellbeing in many key documents that define quality early childhood practice, such as *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, the National Childcare Accreditation Council quality practice guides, and the CHC08 competencies for children's services training. Mental health and wellbeing in an early childhood service needs to be implemented through a whole service approach, to make sure that the practices adopted will be sustainable and effective.

## What should I look for?

The principles of promoting mental health, or social and emotional wellbeing, should ideally be reflected across all aspects of the service, in the following ways:

- A philosophy or vision statement that includes social and emotional wellbeing
- Documents, procedures and daily practices that support social and emotional wellbeing
- The way the physical, social and emotional environment of the service is set up
- The inclusion of activities designed to support social and emotional development
- The inclusion of children's social and emotional wellbeing in staff orientation and training
- Positive relationships between all members, including staff, children and families
- Partnerships with the broader community, including other professionals and services that can assist in promoting community participation, wellbeing and early intervention.



A service may not necessarily use the term 'whole service approach' to describe how it operates. Staff may instead discuss their approach in terms of a planning process and the philosophy statement for the organisation. Documents may also use terms like 'social and emotional wellbeing' or similar phrases rather than 'mental health' as described here. Whatever the terminology used, you should see a coordinated approach that is designed to support the optimal development and wellbeing of all babies, children and families involved the service.

### What should I do?

As a team member, you need to be aware of and understand all the policies and practices that support the whole service approach. Ideally, there should be clear links between your position description, day-to-day practices, and the philosophy statement of the service as a whole.

It is also important that you actively contribute to the development of policies and practices. This means taking time to research and ask questions so you can understand the issues and contribute to discussion. It also means being prepared to act as an advocate on behalf of babies, children and families. For more ideas, read the handout *Advocacy and Mental Health*.

In an early childhood organisation that embraces a whole service approach to mental health and wellbeing, all staff will be encouraged to support mental health and wellbeing. Staff need to:

- C** Create caring environments that support children's optimal wellbeing and development.
- H** Help children to learn social and emotional skills and manage their own behaviour.
- I** Identify babies, children and families who may be in need of additional support.
- L** Link families with support and information services for mental health and wellbeing.
- D** Develop broader organisational and community strategies that support wellbeing.

### Where can I find out more?

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