

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

A Guide for Children's Services Educators



Social and emotional wellbeing may also be called mental health, which is different from mental illness. Mental health is our capacity to manage our thoughts, feelings and behaviour positively so we can enjoy life, maintain positive relationships and work toward our goals.

○○○○●●● Introduction

Early childhood mental health and wellbeing is seen in the capacity of a young child - within the context of their development, family, environment and culture - to:

- participate in the physical and social environment;
- form healthy and secure relationships;
- experience, regulate, understand and express emotions;
- understand and regulate their behaviour;
- interact appropriately with others, including peers; and
- develop a secure sense of self.



Early childhood mental health and wellbeing is related to healthy physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Early childhood development and life experiences contribute strongly to a person's mental health and wellbeing during childhood and later in life.

There are a number of developmental disorders and mental illnesses that can affect a person's thoughts, feelings, relationships or behaviour. Examples include autism, attention deficit disorder, anxiety, depression and schizophrenia. Children who experience a developmental disorder or a mental illness will need additional support to help them manage their health needs and achieve their optimum academic and life outcomes.



To support children's social and emotional development and wellbeing, and promote mental health and wellbeing later in life, early childhood educators need to:

- C** - Create safe and supportive environments for 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.



○○○●●● How Can I Promote Wellbeing?

●● Create safe and supportive environments that promote wellbeing and development.

- Develop an awareness of children's interests and achievements.
- Set clear guidelines for behaviour and relationships in your service and enforce them consistently.
- Develop honest and respectful partnerships with other staff members, parents and families.
- When guidance or discipline is needed, focus on changing behaviour rather than blaming or labelling the individual.
- Set high but achievable expectations that are tailored to a child's development and abilities and help them identify how they can work toward these.
- Acknowledge each child's strengths and abilities and support their capacity to improve and achieve.



●● Help children learn social and emotional skills and manage their own behaviour.

- Model effective social and emotional skills in your behaviour and relationships.
- Set practical tasks and cooperative activities that promote problem-solving, social skills, negotiation and communication.
- Help children to develop an understanding of their own emotions and empathy for the feelings of others.
- Teach children skills for managing difficult emotions, such as going to a safe quiet place, relaxation, talking about feelings, etc.
- Help children to identify, plan and work toward their goals, both individually and in group activities.

●● Develop broader organisational and community strategies that support wellbeing.

- Contribute to team discussions about promoting social and emotional wellbeing and development in your service.
- Participate in programs adopted by your service designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of babies, young children and staff.
 - Participate in professional development on social and emotional development, resilience, mental illness, etc.
 - Work in partnership with parents, families and community members to promote positive social and emotional development and wellbeing.
 - Advocate for the social and emotional needs of children, families and communities.



○○○●●● What Should I Look Out For?

●● Identify children and families who may be in need of additional support.

Some babies and young children need additional support in relation to their development or wellbeing. You might see a difference in a child's capacity when compared with their peers, or you might notice changes in feelings or behaviour.

A minor or short-term change, or an isolated incident, may not be a problem. A children's services educator should be more concerned if the behaviour or issue seems to be severe, persists over time, or if there are several problems occurring together.

●● Early Childhood

- Attachment problems with parents or caregivers such as persistent difficulty in separating.
- Not reaching developmental milestones.
- Poor quality play that seems limited and repetitive.
- Being anxious, withdrawn, fearful or upset much of the time.
- Not talking or communicating appropriately (consider culture and language at home).
- Difficulty with social interactions.
- Significant changes in feelings and behaviour.
- Behaviour that is out of step with peers at a similar age and stage.
- Difficulty in paying attention, following instructions and completing tasks.
- Difficulty managing anger and frustration, persistent temper tantrums or aggression.

●● Family and Community Context

- Parenting styles that are overly controlling, harsh or critical.
- Parenting styles or family situations involving inconsistent supervision.
- Lack of involvement in children's health, activities or development.
- Experiences of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.
- Experiences of trauma, or unresolved loss and grief.
- Mental illness in a carer.
- Substance abuse by a carer.
- Serious physical illness or disability in a carer.
- Conflict, violence or criminal behaviour in the family or community.
- Unemployment and socioeconomic disadvantage.

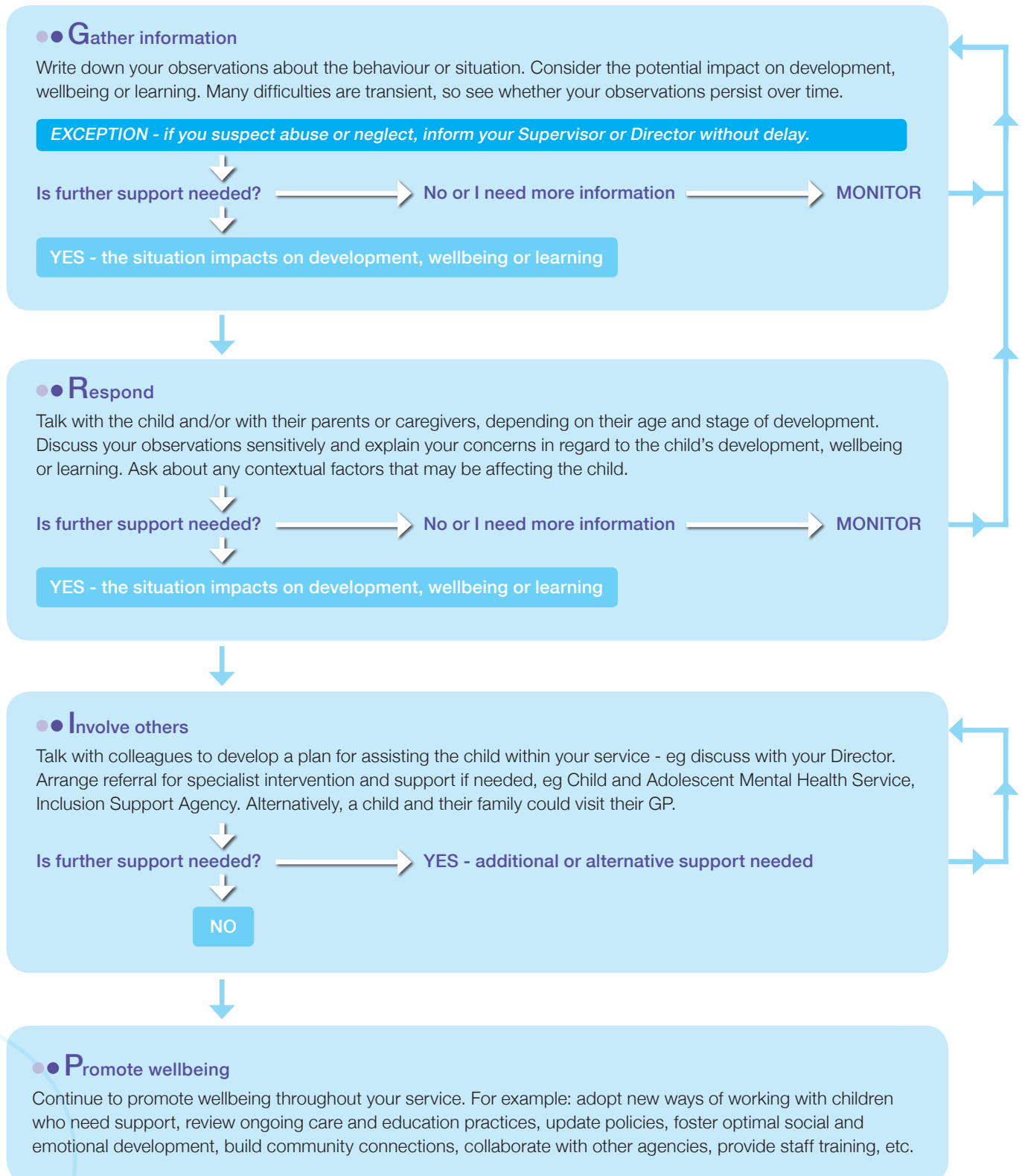


○○○●●● What Can I Do to Help?

●● Link families with support and information services for mental health and wellbeing.

Health professionals and early intervention services can assist with the assessment and management of emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties in babies and young children. Some professionals and agencies also provide information and support for early childhood services about working with those who have additional needs. When you join a new service find out about support options and referral pathways in your area and refresh this information regularly.

If you become concerned about a possible emotional, behavioural or mental health problem in a child, use the **GRIP** framework.



○○○●●● Looking After Myself and Others

Promoting mental health and wellbeing in your service means not only caring for babies, young children and families, but also looking after yourself and your colleagues.

Mental health problems and difficult life events can affect anyone, including children, parents, educators, directors, or community members.

Working with children is a complex task with many important responsibilities. It is very rewarding but it can also be challenging.

You need to maintain your own wellbeing in order to work effectively with children and provide support for your colleagues.

●● Here are some tips to help maintain wellbeing:

- Look after yourself physically, through a healthy diet, regular exercise and adequate sleep.
- Foster and maintain your personal relationships, such as your connections with friends and family.
- Develop interests and friendships outside of your work environment.
- Make time for positive activities for yourself that will help you to relax and have fun.
- Strive for balance between your professional role and your personal life; try to leave work issues at work.
- Limit the use of alcohol and other substances; don't rely on these for relaxation.
- Learn how to monitor and manage your stress in positive ways, eg through exercise, relaxation, breathing, etc.
- Find a mentor through your workplace or professional networks and use that person's support to help you grow professionally and personally.
- Provide support and encouragement for colleagues, give constructive feedback and be a role model.
- If you have spiritual beliefs, make time for regular spiritual practice, or relationships with others who share your philosophy.
- Reach out for support when you need it – from colleagues, friends, family, your GP, a psychologist, or an employee assistance program through your workplace.

For more tips on looking after yourself go to: www.au.professionals.reachout.com/self-care-for-professionals

○○○●●● Help Lines

Lifeline – 24 hour telephone counselling **13 11 14**
Mensline Australia – support for men **1300 789 978**
Parentline – find your Parentline number at:
www.kidshelpline.com.au/parents/parentline-services

SANE Australia Helpline – mental illness information **1800 187 263**
beyondblue info line – information and referral **1300 224 636**
Suicide Call Back Service – 24 hour counselling **1300 659 467**
National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence
Counselling Service **1800 737 732 (1800RESPECT)**

○○○●●● Web Links

• **Mental Health**
www.lifeline.org.au
www.beyondblue.org.au
www.sane.org
<http://au.reachout.com>

• **Early Childhood Information**
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>
www.zerotothree.org

• **Early Childhood Education**
www.responseability.org
www.himh.org.au/foundations
www.kidsmatter.edu.au
www.education.gov.au
www.himh.org.au/connections

• **Specific Early Childhood Information**
www.copmi.net.au
www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au
www.snaicc.org.au
www.aifs.gov.au

A publication of the Response Ability initiative: www.responseability.org



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