

# Identifying emotional and behavioural problems



## Fact Sheet

### What are emotional and behavioural problems?

Children continually develop new skills and abilities, including how to manage their feelings, thoughts, behaviour and interactions with others. Children differ in how much they:

- Consider the feelings of others and share;
- Lose their temper, argue or act aggressively;
- Are restless or overactive;
- Play alone or avoid others;
- Worry or fear things;
- Cry or are unhappy, or calm down after an upsetting situation;
- Are nervous or clingy in new situations;
- Follow instructions or are distracted from activities;
- Stop to think before they act;
- Lose confidence when doing things.

Children may be better able to manage feelings and behaviour at different times, depending on their developmental stage, or if they are unwell, tired, or their family is experiencing difficulties. Difficult feelings and behaviours are more concerning if they:

- Occur most of the time, over a long time (weeks or months);
- Occur together (e.g. often worries, cries, avoids others and loses confidence easily);
- Are severe or a large change from the child's usual behaviour;
- Are not age appropriate or culturally appropriate;
- Happen in multiple settings (e.g. in the early learning centre and at home);
- Are upsetting to the child or others around them, or if other educators and their caregiver are worried about the child's behaviour; and

- Do not change with guidance and support from educators and caregivers.

In these cases, further support and professional intervention may be necessary.

### Why is it important?

Good social and emotional wellbeing in early childhood can positively influence a child's future health, education and development. Children experiencing emotional and behavioural problems can benefit from additional support to help them participate fully in the education and care setting, and to achieve these positive outcomes. Educators are skilled in observing children and can often pick up early signs of difficulties.

### What can educators do?

Observe the child during different activities and at different times of the day and document specific examples of the child's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and interactions with others. Talk with the child's caregiver to see if they have noticed similar behaviours and if there is anything going on that may explain the child's behaviour.

Discuss the patterns with your supervisor, coordinator or service director, and develop a plan to support the child's wellbeing and manage their behaviour. Consider whether referring the family to an external agency may be helpful.

#### Further Information

KidsMatter Early Childhood (n.d.). Responding to children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties. Available from: [www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/about-mental-health/should-i-be-concerned/responding-children-who-may-be-experiencing](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/about-mental-health/should-i-be-concerned/responding-children-who-may-be-experiencing)

Centre for Community Health. (2006). Behaviour problems. Available from: [www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PR\\_BehProb\\_all.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PR_BehProb_all.pdf)

