

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY

PURPOSE

The educators, staff and management acknowledge the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing that contributes to good health and overall development. This policy confirms our commitment to:

- providing our staff with a safe, healthy and supportive environment in which to work
- recognising that the health and wellbeing of our staff is important, and that it not only benefits the individual, but also children, families and the wider community
- providing a supportive workplace culture where healthy lifestyle choices are valued and encouraged.

As a health promoting service, we will promote positive social and emotional wellbeing for children, educators, staff and families through learning, policies, creating a safe and healthy physical and social environment, and developing community links and partnerships.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. BACKGROUND

Mental health and wellbeing for young children is about their emotions, what they experience and how they learn to manage and express them, the relationships they form and the child's ability to engage in close and positive relationships. It also covers their engagement with the environment and if they have opportunities to explore and discover.ⁱ A strong sense of wellbeing and positive mental health provides children with confidence and optimism, which maximises their learning potential, gives them a greater chance of long-term success, and helps them build stronger relationships.^{ii iii}

Early childhood services play a key role in promoting mental health and wellbeing in children^{iv} and can affect children's long-term mental health, relationships and learning.^v

2. WHOLE SERVICE ENGAGEMENT

It is recognised that every member of the service impacts on the children's health and can contribute to creating an environment that promotes positive mental health. All members of our kinder, including educators, staff, children, families and volunteers, will be supported to meet this policy.

3. DEFINITIONS

Mental health and wellbeing: For the purposes of this policy and for the Healthy Early Childhood Services Achievement Program, the 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' health priority area focuses on social and emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Mental health in early childhood can be understood as a young child's ability to 'experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.'^{vi}

PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Leadership and commitment

- Educators, staff, families and children are active participants in the development and implementation of the whole service Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy.
- Educators, staff and families are provided with information about policy requirements, with opportunities to provide feedback and input.

Healthy physical environment

- Buildings, grounds, furniture, play equipment and resources are safe and accessible for every child.
- Quiet and reflective spaces are provided for children, educators and families.

Healthy culture

- Diversity and cultural practices are considered when implementing this policy and mental health and wellbeing practices.
- A safe, inclusive, welcoming environment is created for all community members. There is a culture of respect, fairness and equity.
- Strategies are used to promote positive and responsible behaviour, and to prevent and respond to hurtful and unsafe behaviour.
- Warm, responsive and trusting relationships are actively developed and maintained between children, families and educators.
- Educators and staff model respectful interactions with each other, children and families. A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is also role modelled.

Child teaching and learning

- Children are supported to develop social and emotional skills and learn about and care for their own mental health.
- Educators and staff are supported to access professional development and resources about mental health and wellbeing education and to understand when and how to refer children to additional support.

Supported staff and educators

- Educators and staff are supported to learn about and care for their own mental health and wellbeing.
- Mental health and wellbeing information and policy requirements are included in educator and staff orientation/induction.
- Leadership practices and on-the-ground support enable a work environment that minimises stress and promotes mental health and wellbeing for educators and staff.
- Strategies are implemented to promote positive conflict resolution and to prevent and respond to bullying, discrimination and harassment.

Families and community partnerships

- Mental health and wellbeing information is provided to families and the wider community, such as information about local support services and resources about social and emotional learning.
- Partnerships are established with relevant organisations and health professionals to support mental health and wellbeing practices where appropriate.
- There are clear referral options and pathways for children, staff, educators and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing.

4. LEGISLATION AND RELATED POLICIES

Relevant legislation and policy documents

- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

- PART 4.2—CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY 97 Division 1—Health, safety and wellbeing of children—Regulations 77, 78, 79, 80
- PART 4.7—LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE MANAGEMENT Division 2—Policies and procedures—Regulation 168 (2) (a) (i)
- ACECQA National Quality Standard 2018 – Quality Area 2
- Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework For all Children from Birth to Eight Years. Department of Education and Training, 2016

Related service policies

- Staff Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play Policy

MONITORING AND REVIEW

This Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy will be monitored and reviewed by educators, staff, families and the Committee of Management at least once every three years.

AUTHORISATION

The policy was adopted by Hughesdale Kindergarten on 11 November 2021.

REVIEW DATE: 11/11/2024

ⁱ Be You, 2020 <https://beyou.edu.au/>

ⁱⁱ DET, Mental health – for early childhood professionals (last updated 1 October 2018) <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/health/Pages/environments.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Victorian Government, Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning: An initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019

^{iv} Victorian Government, Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning: An initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019

^v Be You, 2020 <https://beyou.edu.au/>

^{vi} Zero to Three, 2002 <https://www.zerotothree.org/>