

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY

Quality Area 2

Purpose

Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS) acknowledge the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing that contributes to good health and overall development in children. This policy confirms BKS commitment to:

- ensure the service environment is safe, inclusive and empowering for children, families, educators, staff, volunteers and visitors
- embed social and emotional learning in the educational program
- ensure families, children, educators and other BKS staff are key partners in mental health initiatives engage in partnerships with community networks.

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

Policy Statement

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 incorporates their engagement with the environment and if they have opportunities to explore and discover (1). 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 (2). Early childhood services play a key role in promoting mental health and wellbeing in children (3) and can affect children's long-term mental health, relationships and learning (4).

Scope

All members of our service, including educators, other BKS staff, children, families and volunteers will be supported to meet this policy.

Definitions

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' (1).

Procedures

Health Policies

- Educators, other BKS 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.
- If a child is suspected of being at risk of or experiencing social, emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties BKS will engage with the family and raise the concerns; offer support through known local agencies; engage the Preschool Field Officer and/or the BKS Kindergarten Services Manager.

Healthy Physical Environment

- The service environment is inclusive and safe.
- The diversity and interests of children, families and staff are reflected in the physical environment.
- Outdoor and indoor spaces, furniture, play equipment and resources enable access and active participation for every child.
- A range of opportunities are provided in the outdoor and indoor spaces and the natural environment, for children to engage in physical, explorative and creative experiences.
- Service facilities are accessible and used for family and community activities where appropriate.

Healthy Social Environment

- The service provides a safe, inclusive and empowering social environment, through:
 - a culture of respect, fairness and equality
 - a sense of belonging and connectedness being created through inclusive and participatory practices
 - children, families, educators and staff contributing to a positive service environment
 - respectful and supportive relationships being fostered between children, educators, staff and families
 - strategies promoting positive and responsible behaviour, and preventing and responding to bullying, discrimination and harassment.
- As role models educators, staff and families are encouraged and supported to demonstrate respectful relationships and a positive approach to mental health and wellbeing.
- The service works together with families and professionals to support children experiencing social, emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties.
- Educators and staff have appropriate knowledge and skills for recognising and supporting children who may be at risk of or experiencing social, emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties, including how to access support and make appropriate referrals.

Learning and Skills

- Social and emotional learning is embedded in the service program and practice through:
 - spontaneous and planned learning opportunities supporting the development of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship skills
 - opportunities for children to make choices, accept challenges, take considered risks, manage change and cope with frustrations and the unexpected
 - collaborative learning opportunities being encouraged and supported with peers and being balanced with opportunities for children to engage and persevere in individual activities
 - educators taking opportunities to broaden children's perspectives and encouraging consideration of the social and emotional wellbeing of others and an appreciation of diversity and difference.
- Educators are supported to access resources, tools and professional learning to enhance their knowledge and capacity to promote mental health and wellbeing.

Engaging children, educators, staff and families

- Families, children, educators and staff are key partners in developing and supporting mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Information, ideas and practical strategies are provided to families, educators and staff, on a regular basis to promote and support mental health and wellbeing in the service and at home.
- Educators and staff engage children and families in developing and implementing mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Families and children from culturally diverse backgrounds are engaged to ensure cultural values and expectations about mental health and wellbeing are respected.

Community partnerships

- The service engages local health professionals, services and other organisations to increase educator and staff capacity to deliver and promote mental health and wellbeing.

- Referral policies, procedures and pathways to local mental health services have been developed collaboratively with local providers.
- Cultural groups within the community are encouraged to participate in the service's mental health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Information is provided to families about local mental health and wellbeing services, parenting and family services, and other resources that are available to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and families.
- Partnerships have been developed with other education and care settings to enable children to move successfully from one setting to another.

Related Legislation and Policies

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010: Section 167

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011: regulations 114, 168 (2) (a) (ii)

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) (Part 2: Principles for children)

National Quality Standard 2011

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 Early Childhood Development, 2009

Related BKS Policies:

- Active play and physical activity
- Educational program
- Behaviour guidance
- Staff health and wellbeing
- Healthy eating/nutrition
- Safe environments

Monitoring and Review

This mental health and wellbeing policy for children will be monitored by BKS staff. This policy was adopted by BKS on 13 May 2015 and was last updated on 1 July 2017.

Review: 1 July 2019

References

1 Zero to Three 2002 in KidsMatter Early Childhood Understanding mental health in early childhood

http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/sites/default/files/public/KMEC_201109_C4_02-Understanding.pdf

2 DEECD Environments – early childhood settings

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/health/Pages/environments.aspx>

3 Victorian Government Promoting healthy minds for living and learning An initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2011

4 KidsMatter Early Childhood: An Overview. Commonwealth of Australia, 2012

Appendix 1

Agencies that may assist in matters related to Mental Health & Wellbeing

Beyond Blue

www.beyondblue.org.au

1300 22 4636

Lifeline

Access to crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health support services.

www.lifeline.org.au 13 11 14

Bethany Community Support

Bethany offer a wide range of services for families and carers including financial assistance and advice, housing support, parenting skills, behaviour management and counselling. They can support children experiencing separation. Contact Barwon Child FIRST 1300 55 1948 for Bethany Family Services.

Diversitat

Phone: (03) 5221 6044

www.diversitat.org.au

Barwon Health Mental Health Service

Psychiatric triage (information, assessment and referral) 24 hours per day, 7 days per week Ph: 1300 094 187