Developing children’s social and emotional skills

KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC) is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed for early childhood services. The four components of the KMEC framework (KMEC, 2010) are creating a sense of community; developing children’s social and emotional skills; working with parents and carers; and helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Early childhood pilot services are supported in implementing the framework by identifying their strengths before working together to articulate their goals as part of their planning around developing children’s social and emotional skills. Social and emotional skills develop from the moment a child is born and continue in the course of their lifespan through their social interactions and relationships. During the early years, a child’s experience of relationships organises the structure of their rapidly developing brain. This largely determines how children act, interact, view themselves and their world, and learn.

The following three target areas of Component 2 contribute to the capacity of early childhood services to foster children’s social and emotional development.

TARGET AREA 1—RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHILDREN AND STAFF

High-quality relationships with a small number of adults provide a safe, secure base so children can explore their world and learn. As this cycle repeats over time so does the children’s capacity to feel good about themselves, interact successfully with others and recognise, express and self-regulate their feelings.

Goal
To increase staff self-awareness and capacity regarding positive child–staff relationships

Strategy
Use staff meeting time to explore what positive, responsive relationships with children look like and what we see happening when they are working well

Courtesy of Wellington Community Children’s Centre, NSW

TARGET AREA 2—CHILDREN’S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Relationships and children’s social-emotional learning should be considered while planning the environment, routines and experiences, and balanced with meaningful staff responses to children’s interactions and engagement. There are many daily opportunities to practise social-emotional skills that will assist children to develop and maintain relationships.

Goal
For the centre to audit its resources around social and emotional development and increase resources if needed

Strategy
To assess the resources for their usefulness and to organise them for simple and easy access

Courtesy of Brenbeal Children’s Centre, Vic

KidsMatter Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative has been developed in collaboration with beyondblue: the national depression initiative, the Australian Psychological Society, and Early Childhood Australia, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and beyondblue: the national depression initiative.

Reference