Module 3
Relationships and children’s mental health

Relationships have an effect on children’s social and emotional learning and mental health now and into the future. Warm, responsive and respectful relationships allow children to learn:
- about themselves
- about their feelings
- how to relate to others
- how to negotiate and problem-solve.

“Without being in a relationship in which you feel someone is going to protect you, that someone loves you, someone’s available to you, you can’t possibly be available to learn and explore and develop any of the other skills one needs for life.”
Nichola Coombs, KidsMatter
Component 2 Professional Learning

Connections to the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standard

The EYLF describes relationships as the foundation for educators’ practice. Children’s sense of belonging develops from their relationships. Principle 1 (Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships) highlights the critical importance of educators in building strong, positive relationships with children in order to support their sense of wellbeing and their learning.

The NQS (Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children) focuses on educators’ relationships with children and how educators support children to build and maintain relationships with other children and adults.

“When the development of warm, responsive and trusting relationships between children and educators provides a secure base from which children can explore and learn about their world and other people in it. This secure base is the foundation from which children learn and develop social and emotional skills. Positive relationships with educators help to build children’s resilience – that is, their ability to handle life’s ups and downs. Within their relationships with educators and other staff in ECEC services, children can experience and learn key social and emotional skills to help them develop close and meaningful relationships with others.”
Activity
What do positive relationships look like between children and educators?

Think of a positive relationship you have. Reflect on this relationship as you work through the following questions.

What are the characteristics of this relationship?

Which of these characteristics apply to the relationships you have with the children in your care and which ones don’t? Of those that don’t apply, why don’t they apply in this case?

Which characteristics are easier to achieve in your relationships with children and which are more difficult? How do you understand these differences?

Video 3.2 and Activity
Relationships in action

The video for this activity shows some footage of an educator comforting a child who is upset at an ECEC service. Keep the questions below in mind while watching.

What did you see?

What does the educator do to support the child during this interaction? Think about physical, verbal and non-verbal actions.
What do you think this experience might have been like for the child?

How did the educator support the child’s sense of agency?

How does this experience, and the educator’s response, support the child’s social and emotional learning and development?

Children learn through relationships. Positive relationships between educators and children are warm, affectionate and responsive. Children are able to communicate their needs, while educators can read their cues and respond. Record any observations or questions you may have in the space below.

Relationships are important to each Component in the KidsMatter framework.

**Component 1** highlights the importance of building a sense of belonging and connectedness for children, families and early childhood educators.

**Component 2** focuses on how relationships are established and maintained to support children to learn social and emotional skills and have a sense of wellbeing.

**Component 3** explores the critical importance of working with parents and carers and forming relationships with families.

**Component 4** looks at helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties through the ECEC service forming relationships with external community supports.
What is one thing I could do to support the development of positive relationships with children?

Over the next week?

Over the next 12 months?

What is one thing we could do as a service to support the development of positive relationships with children?

Over the next week?

Over the next 12 months?

What approaches do you currently use to build positive relationships with children?

Think about a colleague you feel has developed positive relationships with children in their care. What do these relationships look like?

Think about a child you have a strong relationship with. What words best describe this relationship? Why is this relationship so strong?

Think about a child with whom you don’t have such a strong connection. Why do you think you don’t have a strong relationship with that child? What would help you to build a stronger, more positive relationship with them?
Making a difference

This activity has been designed for you to take away and do before you move onto the next module. It will help integrate what you have learned during this session.

Notice a more challenging interaction you had with a child (e.g., you had to stop or redirect a child).

What happened in this interaction that may have strengthened your relationship with that child?

What made the interaction significant to you as an educator?

How did the relationship you have with the child influence the way you responded in that particular moment?

Working with a colleague, observe an interaction with a child and identify the aspects that support the development or maintenance of a warm, positive relationship.

“Each child needs very different things, we know that each child is an individual and every relationship we have with every child is very different.”

Janet Williams-Smith, KidsMatter Component 2 Professional Learning Video 4.3

You might also be interested in...


Module 4 is scheduled for:

Date: Time: Venue: