Component 2: Developing children’s social and emotional skills

Key messages of Component 2

- Social and emotional skills are important for good mental health and wellbeing, learning, motivation to achieve and cooperate, and the development of values.

- There are core social and emotional skills that children of different ages develop through their relationships and everyday experiences with others.

- Through their responsive, warm and trusting relationships with children, staff nurture children’s social and emotional skill development.

- When staff use intentional teaching and make the most of spontaneous opportunities, children’s social and emotional learning is enhanced.

- Staff can be supported in a range of ways to develop and integrate their own skills in fostering children’s social and emotional development.
Social and emotional development in the early years

Development is a continual process of growth and change that occurs across the lifespan. Early childhood is a unique period when the structure and functions of the rapidly growing brain are organised through a child’s early care experiences. Early childhood development provides the blueprint for all future development and learning.

From the moment children are born, they develop and learn social and emotional skills through their social interactions and relationships with others. In the early years, children progress from being highly dependent newborns, to becoming more independent preschoolers with increasingly sophisticated skills and capabilities. We now know that children are born motivated and wired to relate to other human beings. They actively interact with others to create experiences to develop the skills and rewarding relationships that are fundamental to their mental health and wellbeing.

Children whose early care experiences have been positive expect that their relationships with others and their world will be similar. Positive early care experiences organise a child’s brain so they have the ability, skills and confidence to engage in satisfying, positive relationships and experiences. On the other hand, stress and challenging early experiences have been shown to be detrimental to children’s developing brain structure and function, with potentially negative consequences for their developing social and emotional skills. However, development and learning is lifelong, and research shows that subsequent positive experiences can help to buffer any early setbacks.

When a child’s signals are responded to by an adult within their social interactions and relationships in a reliable, predictable and meaningful way over time, the child and adult become ‘in tune’ with each other. Being ‘in tune’ with an adult helps the child to regulate emotions and learn what it is like to be calm. Over time the child becomes skilled at regulating their own emotions, a major developmental task of early childhood. Brain imaging has revealed that the emotion regulation areas and the thinking and planning areas of the brain are extensively interconnected. Research shows that children who can regulate their emotions effectively are better equipped to engage in thinking such as problem solving and decision making.

The growing body of early brain and early childhood development research highlights the critical importance of the positive relationships we develop with children. It is within these relationships that children’s social and emotional development and learning is supported and enhanced, and children are given the opportunity to reach their greatest potential.

This section has emphasised the importance of the early years in laying the foundations for children’s social and emotional development. It has demonstrated that early relationships and experiences have lifelong implications for mental health, wellbeing and also relate to how children function as contributing members of society. The next section will expand on why it is important to optimise children’s developing social and emotional skills.
Why social and emotional skills are important

It is widely accepted that the development of social and emotional skills in early childhood benefits all aspects of children’s lifelong learning and development. Children’s developing social and emotional skills in the early years form the foundation upon which subsequent learning and development depends, including life skills such as thinking, planning and decision making. Notably, social and emotional skills are a protective factor for present and future mental health and wellbeing.

Children who have developmentally appropriate social and emotional skills are more likely to have better outcomes than children who are less skilled. For example, children who regulate their emotions are empathic, relate to peers effectively, respect the rights of others, and perform better at school. Children who are less skilled tend to have more negative experiences with peers and adults. This can have lifelong impacts. For example, some children may have limited social skills to join in group play, and that can lead to feelings of isolation or rejection and undermine self-confidence.

As with other areas of learning, children develop socially and emotionally at different paces. Children have different temperaments, opportunities and experiences, and a variety of risk and protective factors in their lives. Children continue to develop and learn these skills over time. High-quality care, that purposefully fosters children’s developing social and emotional skills through children’s positive relationships with staff, has been shown to benefit children’s mental health and wellbeing, learning, motivation to achieve and cooperate, and the development of values.

Developing social and emotional skills in KidsMatter Early Childhood

Component 2 focuses on the following three areas which contribute to developing social and emotional skills:

**Relationships between children and educators**
This involves developing warm, responsive and trusting relationships between children and educators. This provides a foundation for children to learn and develop social and emotional skills and is a protective factor for mental health.

**Children’s social and emotional skill development**
When educators have an understanding of social and emotional development, this can assist them to support children’s social and emotional development through intentional teaching and making the most of everyday opportunities and interaction.

Staff development and support
Educators are best able to form positive relationships and support social and emotional development when they participate in regular staff development and support. This can occur through a range of different types of development including mentoring and reflective practice.

**Social and emotional learning is linked to good mental health and better life outcomes.**

Children’s social and emotional development can be nurtured and enhanced through relationships with the adults in their lives.

What social and emotional skills develop in early childhood?

Early childhood is the period of greatest growth and development, including children’s social and emotional skills. Early childhood can be divided into three developmental periods that overlap:

- babies (birth to around 18 months)
- toddlers (around 18 months to three years)
- preschoolers (around three to five years).

Children are born social beings with a preference for social interaction and the capacity to experience and express emotions, explore their world, develop and learn. In the first 18 months of a child’s life, this development and learning occurs at an astounding rate due to the rapid growth of the baby’s brain. Babies progress from being highly dependent newborns to walking, self-assertive individuals with growing language skills.

Children’s social and emotional skills are constantly developing at different ages and stages. Skills build upon earlier skills, are often inter-related and affect other areas of development such as language, thinking, planning and decision making. Children’s development of social and emotional skills is also dependent upon development in these other areas and associated brain growth. Babies and toddlers engage in more concrete thinking based on what they can see. Preschoolers begin to have more conscious control and use abstract thinking, such as understanding of the past and the future to guide their thoughts, feelings and actions. However, it is useful to remember that these skills are just beginning in preschoolers and that they may find it difficult to make responsible decisions and ‘do the right thing’ on their own.
KidsMatter Early Childhood has organised children’s social and emotional skills into three core areas that are considered essential for children’s development of good mental health and wellbeing. These provide a useful way of conceptualising, organising and planning social and emotional development across the early childhood period. The core KidsMatter Early Childhood social and emotional skill areas are:

**Sense of self:** Children’s developing capacity to feel positive about themselves and their capabilities.

**Social skills:** Children’s developing capacity to interact successfully with others.

**Emotional skills:** Children’s developing capacity to recognise, express and regulate feelings.

As this diagram shows, these areas overlap and some skills may fall into more than one area. Children may also sometimes demonstrate different skill levels at different times or in different situations. For example, a child may demonstrate unexpected patterns of behaviour and operate at a younger level at times of increased stress, such as during transition and change. These three skill areas are now described in more detail for babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

**Sense of self**

Children’s sense of self includes recognising that they are individual beings separate from others and have their own thoughts, feelings, wants and goals. Children become more independent and autonomous as they grow and develop. Children are predisposed to interact with others to create experiences that enable them to feel good about who they are, to see themselves as capable, to build self-confidence and to continue to be motivated to learn and engage in new experiences.

For children to develop their sense of self, it is invaluable for them to have opportunities to make choices, explore, develop and practise new skills. Skilled caregivers act as a secure base from which children can venture and explore but to whom they can also return for security, comfort and reassurance when needed.

Supporting children’s developing sense of self links KidsMatter Early Childhood with the underlying Principles that support the Learning Outcomes in the *Early Years Learning Framework*. For example, the Principles of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships assist children to feel safe, secure and supported. When children trust their environment, they are able to learn about themselves and how they relate to their world, feel safe to explore and develop self-confidence. This is one way that educators can integrate the *Early Years Learning Framework* with Component 2 of KidsMatter Early Childhood. Connections between the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the *National Quality Standard* related to Component 2 are explored at the end of this section.
Babies

In their first few months, babies actively interact with others but do not have the understanding that they exist as a separate person from their caregivers until they are around nine months old. At this stage, babies may begin to experience separation anxiety when they are apart from their caregivers as they are adjusting to their new level of understanding and resulting feelings of fear that perhaps their caregiver may not return. At this early stage of developing a first sense of self, babies think that others have the same thoughts and feelings as they do.

Children between one and two years:

- begin to distinguish ‘me’ from ‘not me’
- begin to have their own thoughts, desires and feelings
- practise their skills and begin to see themselves as capable
- use responses from others to build a positive sense of self
- may experience increased separation anxiety.

From birth, Jamie’s parents responded to her needs quickly, smiled at her and held her close when she was upset.

This helped Jamie feel secure and develop a sense of trust in the world. As she grew, Jamie gradually began to experiment with making things happen through her own actions. When she smiled at her mother, her mother smiled back at her. She liked to reach out and touch the bumblebee on her play mat and make it move with her hand over and over again. By the age of one, her parents discovered that Jamie responded differently to situations compared to her older brother, and she was developing her own individuality. By 18 months, Jamie also began to assert her independence by often refusing to do things and shaking her head to things she did not like. She displayed curiosity about people and her surroundings by pointing out things to her parents that she found interesting, such as dogs or birds when she was playing in the park. Jamie showed she felt confident in her ability to do some things, like taking the lid off a cup, without any help.
**Toddlers**

Toddlers are becoming more self-aware and are building on the skills they developed as a baby. Relationships with caregivers continue to play a vital role in developing a sense of self. Toddlers are sensing how others feel about them, which influences how they feel about themselves. As they become more capable and more aware of themselves as individuals their self-confidence in their own abilities grows. Toddlers’ sense of self is concrete and based largely on what they can see and do. Although they recognise themselves as being separate from others in the physical sense, toddlers still think that others have the same thoughts and feelings that they do and that adults can read their minds.

Toddlers are:

- developing their self-control
- learning about making choices
- recognising that they have their own thoughts, feelings and preferences (‘my way’)
- exploring their world and seeing themselves as capable individuals (‘me do it’)
- building confidence through positive interactions
- increasing their autonomy and independence through language and their increased mobility (that is, walking or running).

As toddlers are developing their sense of self, they can struggle between their drive for independence and autonomy, and needing to feel safe and secure. Sometimes they may want to be independent and at other times they may want to be a baby again. This can be overwhelming for them.

Toddlers can find it difficult to make choices, sometimes wanting more than one thing at a time. Caregivers can help toddlers to make sense of these feelings and choices by limiting the number of available options and talking to the toddler about how they are feeling.

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**Now at 24 months, Jamie is learning even more about what she can do, and is developing a sense of personal control.**

Having clear and consistent limits from her parents and educators has helped her feel safe to explore and discover who she is. Jamie can display her emotions strongly and can let her parents know what she wants. At the moment she wants to wear her fairy costume every day and protests strongly about wearing different clothes. Jamie has started calling her favourite toys ‘mine’ if others try to play with them. She likes sitting on her dad’s knee and naming the people in family photos, and especially enjoys pointing herself out.
Preschoolers

Preschoolers are becoming more independent and see themselves as ‘doers’ with their own goals. Preschoolers have learned their minds are separate from others’, and that their own thoughts and feelings may be different from those around them.

Preschoolers:
- are becoming better at making decisions independently
- enjoy solving problems
- feel proud of their accomplishments and like to receive frequent encouragement and acknowledgement from adults
- are developing better self-control with increased ability to manage changing moods
- are building their self-esteem and confidence through their relationships with other children.

Preschoolers will often insist on doing things independently but may get frustrated and annoyed when they cannot do it themselves. At times they might find it difficult to ask for help.

Jamie insisted to her preschool teacher that she could help set the tables for the special family morning tea.

With permission from her teacher, she helped carry some plastic cups that were on the table. She was very excited when she saw her family arrive. Her two-year-old sister, Carlia, wanted to help set up too. Jamie knew Carlia would get upset if she wasn’t able to help her big sister so she gave her a cup to carry. Throughout the morning Jamie also helped with the plates and decorating the tables. She also remembered to show her family her artwork that was posted on the board and was very pleased when her family admired what she had done.

Social skills

Effective social skills enable children to establish and maintain rewarding relationships. Children’s developing social skills include:
- empathetic emotional involvement with others
- appropriate expressions of emotions
- active listening
- initiating and maintaining verbal conversations
- using and understanding non-verbal communications such as facial expressions and body language
- considering that others may think and feel differently to themselves
- cooperating, sharing and taking turns
- using a variety of skills to join social groups
- negotiating and saying ‘no’
- seeking help.

Supporting children’s social development links KidsMatter Early Childhood with the underlying Principles that support the Learning Outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework. For example, the Principles of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships and reflective practice support children to develop their social skills. When children experience warm, trusting and predictable relationships it builds their capacity to relate to others, their sense of empathy and respect for others, and their ability to participate in their own learning. Educators can look for opportunities to interact with children in ways that support their social development. This is one way that educators can integrate the Early Years Learning Framework with Component 2 of KidsMatter Early Childhood. Connections between the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard related to Component 2 are explored at the end of this section.
Babies

Babies develop their social awareness skills by venturing into the world of social interaction. Their communication exchanges and social interactions become increasingly complex as they develop and learn what to expect from others and how to behave appropriately in a range of situations.

- actively engage in social exchanges and interactions with peers and adults
- enjoy social play and connections with their caregivers
- look to their caregivers for clues on how to behave and react
- seek connections with their caregiver when feeling uncertain or overwhelmed
- become more skilled in communicating their needs to caregivers.

Beginning from birth, Sienna was people-oriented and preferred looking at people and faces rather than objects. When her father changed her nappy he also smiled at her and talked to her about what he was doing. Sometimes he would play games and make funny noises that made both of them laugh. During her nappy changes Sienna often showed that she preferred to look at her father’s face rather than the animal mobile above her head. Through her facial expressions, gestures and vocalisations, she was already interacting and communicating with others. One time when three-month-old Sienna was crying at the childcare setting, Kala, her room leader, discovered that all she needed was to be held and to be with someone. When her father came to pick her up, Sienna showed she recognised his voice by turning her head towards him. It seemed she could tell the difference between people she knew and didn’t know. Sienna was developing more ways to communicate with others and, within a few months, she was making different sounds and babbling. Ten-month-old Sienna was sometimes fearful and wary of strangers. By 18 months, Sienna really enjoyed being with people she knew, including other children, and she liked to ‘talk’ even though she couldn’t use many words.

Toddlers

Toddlers continue to develop and expand their social skills. During this period toddlers are thinking in the ‘here and now’ about themselves and their world and assume that others are thinking in the same way. Toddlers’ interactions and relationships are based around what they want, need or enjoy. This begins to change around the age of three, when children begin to develop the ability to understand that others may not see things in the same way that they do.

- enjoy playing alongside other children
- continue to develop and learn social skills through imitation and referring to adults for guidance
- use caregivers’ responses to their behaviour to build understanding of how to behave across a range of situations
- are beginning to learn how to resolve conflict
- are developing social skills, such as tolerance and cooperation
- are beginning to engage in pro-social behaviours, such as helping and comforting others.
As a toddler, Sienna enjoyed connecting with adults and loved giving hugs and kisses.

She continued to build on her social skills and learnt about appropriate social behaviour through her experiences with her parents and carers. Often she would look to them for reassurance about how to act in new situations. She didn’t like having to wait—when she really wanted something, she wanted it now. Sienna was also now interacting with others by expressing herself more with words. When her parents asked her what she had done during the day while at child care, she was able to tell them about some of the games she liked to play. Sienna was also becoming more aware of other children and their needs. She didn’t always have to have things her way. She would offer toys to other children and try and comfort them if they were upset, but would sometimes keep her favourite toy just for herself to play with.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers’ social-skill development continues through relationships and social interactions with their caregivers; however, friendships with peers become increasingly important. Preschoolers are beginning to engage in pro-social behaviours that benefit others. They are also beginning to develop their own standards, values and goals with parents, caregivers and peers.

Preschoolers:
- consider how peer values and opinions fit in with their own
- learn to take turns, cooperate, communicate and respond appropriately
- develop their relationship skills by widening their social network, developing preferences and forming friendships
- want to be liked and may experiment with new behaviours to please their friends
- can need help in managing their sometimes ‘over the top’ or ‘bossy’ behaviour
- begin to negotiate solutions to conflicts using words to describe their feelings.

Exploring and learning skills through play, such as decision making, problem solving, managing stress and forming relationships with others, is a key feature of preschoolers’ social and emotional development.

Sienna was spinning with excitement at the prospect of another day at preschool.

She was developing many friendships and learning to understand her friends’ feelings and wishes better. If she saw that one of her classmates was upset, she would ask them, ‘Are you okay?’ or give them a hug. She might also offer her favourite toy to comfort them. She enjoyed having conversations with anyone who would listen to her, and looked forward to participating in group experiences. She tried very hard to play cooperatively with others in the sandpit. She especially enjoyed spending time in the home corner with other children. Sometimes she and her friends would disagree over who was going to play ‘mummy’ and who was going to be the ‘baby’. With the help of their preschool teacher, they agreed to take it in turns. She would often have her special friends, Caleb and Nadia, over to her house to play.
Emotional skills

Children develop their emotional skills through their social interactions and relationships. Children’s developing emotional skills include the capacity to express, recognise and manage their emotions. Children also begin to recognise and understand other people’s emotions. As children develop their emotional skills they are more able to engage productively in tasks, have positive experiences, and cope with setbacks and frustrations. This is central in organising and motivating children’s behaviour and the development of children’s sense of self and social skills.

Supporting children’s emotional development links KidsMatter Early Childhood with the underlying Principles that support the Learning Outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework. For example, the Principles of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships and reflective practice support children to develop their emotional skills. Young children communicate their feelings in many ways, through their facial expressions, body, behaviour, play and words. Through warm and supportive relationships, educators can assist children to make sense of and organise their feelings. They might help children think about how these feelings could be expressed. In this way, educators can utilise their relationships with children to intentionally help them develop an understanding of their own emotional experiences. This is one way that educators can integrate the Early Years Learning Framework with Component 2 of KidsMatter Early Childhood. Connections between the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard related to Component 2 are explored at the end of this section.

Babies

Research has shown that babies are born with the ability to express a wide range of primary emotions such as sadness, anger, contentment, disgust and interest. They are also sensitive to emotions expressed by the adults who care for them, including parents, carers and staff. In the first 12 months, when babies have not yet formed a separate sense of self, they experience others’ emotions as their own. Babies move from being highly dependent on adults to help them organise and regulate their emotions to becoming more emotionally independent.

Through social and emotional interactions with their primary caregivers, babies are learning how to:

- engage in emotional interactions and communications with significant others
- interact with their world and begin to organise their experiences and feelings
- be calm and engage in self-soothing behaviours
- communicate with caregivers about their feelings (for example, by crying, vocalising, making facial expressions and raising their arms)
- respond to emotions expressed by others (for example, by mirroring facial expressions).

From the time he was born, Edin was feeling and expressing emotions.

He displayed happiness and sadness through eye contact, facial expressions, body movements and by smiling or crying. Through his interactions with his mother and father he was learning a lot about emotions. Edin responded to his mother’s facial expressions by making eye contact and smiling back at her when she looked into his eyes and smiled at him. He also began cuddling his blanket to help him feel calmer. From around eight months of age, Edin started to display his emotions more strongly and in different ways, including squealing when he felt happy, and crying out when angry or frustrated. Edin also started to show his strong feelings for his mother by holding his arms up to her and clinging to her when she dropped him off at child care.
**Toddlers**

Toddlers continue to develop their emotional skills by working together with their carers to make sense of, organise and regulate their emotions and behaviours. Skills develop in complexity and range. The more complex emotions that emerge at this time have developed from children’s primary emotions when they were babies. Toddlers may experience their emotions intensely as they learn more about how to express and manage them.

Toddlers’ emotional skills include the developing ability to:

- experience a wider range of feelings such as jealousy and embarrassment
- label and express their feelings using words (‘Me angry!’) and gestures, such as foot stomping to convey anger
- use make-believe to explore and organise emotional ideas, such as excitement or competition
- control and manage their feelings
- be aware that others may not feel the same way they do
- recognise feelings in others and begin to respond accordingly, mostly using gestures and some simple language.

Now that he is a toddler, Edin’s feelings have become more complex and he is displaying a wider range of complex emotions, including defiance and jealousy.

When his mother talks to other children at playgroup, he crawls into her lap and tries to get her attention, showing that he wants his mother all to himself. He is also learning how to express and control his feelings during play using words. When he accidentally knocked over his glass of water at dinner time, he said ‘Uh oh’ and looked to his mother for help with what to do. Edin is also beginning to understand that others have feelings too. Once, when one of his playmates fell over and was crying, he gently patted her to help her feel better. Edin is also now able to imagine his mother in his mind to help him cope with his feelings of separation while he’s away from her. At child care, Jenny encouraged him to bring in photos and a favourite toy to help him feel a strong link to his home and family while he is away from them.
Preschoolers

Children become more independent in the preschool period. Supported by their increased language, thinking, planning and organising capacities, their emotional skills also become more advanced. Preschoolers’ emotional skills include the developing ability to:

- wait and show patience for things they want
- manage a range of feelings such as anxiety, sadness and frustration
- become more tuned in to the feelings of others
- use language to express how they are feeling and to acknowledge the feelings of others
- make judgements about themselves and feel pride and shame.

At the age of four, Edin can now express more complex emotions depending on the situation.

He loves to play outside and often laughs when he is running around the garden. He hid his face in his hands when he didn’t quite make it to the toilet in time. He can use words to describe his feelings, telling his mother how excited he was when his uncle was coming over for a visit. Edin can wait for things sometimes, like when his father takes him to the supermarket and buys him a treat for after dinner. Edin has a few different ways to make himself feel better when he feels sad or worried, including hugging his favourite teddy and seeking out his parents for a cuddle.
Social and emotional skills continue to develop as children grow and interact with adults and other children. Development remains influenced by children’s early experiences. This highlights the importance of quality experiences in the early years.

“We carry our infant story inside and live it in our close relationships.”

**Getting ready for school**

Social and emotional skills of children who manage well in school include:

- having positive attitudes about themselves and their abilities
- being able to understand their feelings and those of others
- regulating their feelings and behaviours
- getting along with peers and adults
- cooperating, following directions, and concentrating where necessary
- being motivated to solve problems with others
- becoming respectful and contributing members of the community.

**Children are primed to learn core social and emotional skills.**

Core social and emotional skills enable children to:

- feel good about themselves
- recognise and manage their feelings
- interact successfully with others.
The four following tables provide an overview of the three core areas of social and emotional skill development in early childhood, and provide examples of these skills for babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

### OVERVIEW OF CORE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

#### SENSE OF SELF
In early childhood, children are forming their sense of self in relation to others and developing skills such as:

- being able to recognise their own thoughts, desires and feelings
- feeling good about themselves and their abilities
- seeing themselves as capable individuals
- becoming independent
- being curious and motivated to solve problems and seeing themselves as ‘doers’ with self-initiated goals.

#### SOCIAL SKILLS
Social skills refer to children’s developing capacity to interact successfully with others and include:

- experiencing enjoyable, pleasurable interactions and relationships
- pro-social behaviours such as learning to take turns, cooperating, appreciating diversity, communicating effectively, and responding appropriately to people and situations
- developing their relationship skills by widening their social network, developing preferences and forming friendships
- beginning to negotiate solutions to conflicts using words to describe their feelings and listening to others.

#### EMOTIONAL SKILLS
Emotional skills refer to children’s developing capacity to recognise and regulate feelings, and include:

- developing their ability to recognise, express and understand their own feelings
- moving from regulating their emotions in partnership with others, to self-regulating their feelings and behaviours, including being able to manage negative feelings such as anxiety, sadness and frustration
- learning that others have feelings too
- developing their ability to recognise and label others’ feelings and responding accordingly.
### Babies (birth to around 18 months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENSE OF SELF</th>
<th>SOCIAL SKILLS</th>
<th>EMOTIONAL SKILLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children become able to distinguish themselves from others.</td>
<td>▪ Children are born tuned in to social stimuli.</td>
<td>▪ Children display and appreciate primary emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children increasingly engage in goal-directed behaviour.</td>
<td>▪ Initially they show a preference for communication with their primary caregiver.</td>
<td>▪ Children use simple methods to comfort themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children become aware of their relationships with others.</td>
<td>▪ Later, children become increasingly attuned to the wider social world around them and enjoy social interaction with more people.</td>
<td>▪ Children initially rely on caregivers for emotional support and regulation, becoming more independent as they grow and develop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children are becoming aware of their growing skills.</td>
<td>▪ Children display and appreciate primary emotions.</td>
<td>▪ Children use simple methods to comfort themselves.</td>
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</table>

### SOME TYPICAL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Expresses emotions such as happiness, anger, contentment, interest and surprise
- Social smiles and vocalisations (for example, laughter)
- Responds to their name
- Responds preferentially to primary caregivers
- Engages in self-soothing behaviour
- Lifts arms up when wanting to be picked up
- Shows wariness, and sometimes fear of strangers
- Enjoys a game of peek-a-boo
- Shows awareness of others’ emotional reactions by reacting themselves
- Shows increasing eye contact
- Shows resistance when separated from close adults
- Uses parents or carers as a secure base from which to explore
- Holds objects up to others
- Looks at the reactions of their caregivers to gauge how to react when faced with new situations (social referencing)
- Imitates others
- Plays independently
- Becomes excited when greeted by a familiar adult who loves to play with them.

**Note:** This table is illustrative and is not exhaustive. Ages at which skills appear are approximate and skills may emerge earlier or later for individual children. Some skills fall into more than one area.
### Toddlers (around 18 months to three years)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Children are becoming aware of characteristics of themselves (for example, body parts).</td>
<td>- Children can identify others by name, especially close friends and relatives.</td>
<td>- Children display more complex emotions, and use emotions intentionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children’s sense of self is concrete and based on things that they can see and do.</td>
<td>- Children show increased interest in interacting with peers and other adults.</td>
<td>- Children show awareness of more complex emotions of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children can express and assert themselves.</td>
<td>- Children are learning appropriate ways to behave in different situations.</td>
<td>- Children are becoming more skilled at regulating their own emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children can anticipate behaviour of others based on their past experiences with them.</td>
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</table>

#### SOME TYPICAL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Says ‘no’ to indicate preferences
- Becomes more able to cooperate with directions
- Recognises self in the mirror
- Explores and makes sense of their physical and social worlds, such as by dropping or throwing objects and organising their caregivers’ responses to their behaviour
- Engages in ‘helping behaviours’, such as gardening, shopping and cleaning
- Expresses more complex emotions, such as pride, jealousy, embarrassment and guilt
- Plays alongside other children (‘parallel play’)
- Demonstrates empathy towards others through affectionate pats and hugs
- Communicates the emotions of others (for example, says ‘Mum sad’)
- Can say their own name
- Uses personal pronouns (for example, I, me, she, he, you) during social interactions
- Identifies friends and family by name.

**Note:** This table is illustrative and is not exhaustive. Ages at which skills appear are approximate and skills may emerge earlier or later for individual children. Some skills fall into more than one area.
Preschoolers (around three to five years)

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children become aware of the groups that people belong to.</td>
<td>▪ Children display more voluntary control over behaviour and emotions and engage in more complex play.</td>
<td>▪ Children are learning to express, label and regulate a wider range of emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children’s sense of self includes more abstract aspects, such as likes and dislikes.</td>
<td>▪ Children begin to develop longer-lasting friendships.</td>
<td>▪ Children increase their understanding of the feelings of others and use this when forming and developing friendships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Children can identify their feelings and needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Children continue to develop their self-concept.</td>
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### SOME TYPICAL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Displays empathy towards others and may use language (for example, comforts a peer with a hug or favourite toy and words, or alerts caregiver to help)
- Shares
- Waits and takes turns
- Displays more self-control
- Compares self with others
- Develops a more complex self-concept (based on characteristics, attitudes, emotions)
- Develops their self-esteem
- Has an increased sense of competence
- Shows self-confidence
- Shows awareness of a broader range of emotions (for example, understands, recognises and labels emotions in self and others)
- Forms friendships and wants to please, and be liked by peers
- Expresses emotions during pretend play
- Resolves conflicts using language (for example, around toy or game choices, or when making everyday choices)
- Solves problems alone and with others using trial and error, with increased patience and imagination
- Engages in more sophisticated play that includes cooperating and negotiating with peers
- Creates and follows rules
- Makes more responsible decisions (for example, on behaving appropriately, playing safely, including others).

Note: This table is illustrative and is not exhaustive. Ages at which skills appear are approximate and skills may emerge earlier or later for individual children. Some skills fall into more than one area.
Social and emotional learning and development involves children:
- learning and developing new skills through a wide range of social and emotional experiences
- refining and adjusting existing skills and patterns, including adapting to new and more complex experiences.

Caregivers can promote social and emotional development in children of all ages and stages by:
- spending time with them
- being warm and responsive
- being emotionally and physically available to children most of the time
- acting as a safe, secure base (a comforting and familiar presence) from which children can explore their world and retreat to when needed
- arranging developmentally appropriate experiences, routines and interactions that promote social and emotional development
- having two-way conversations
- talking to children about what is happening now and what is going to happen next
- describing and labelling emotions and linking emotions to events and behaviours
- modelling effective social and emotional skills
- being predictable, genuine and engaging in meaningful interactions
- being aware of the child’s signals and preferences and following these
- seeking to understand the meaning of a child’s behaviour
- singing, dancing, playing games and having fun
- telling and reading stories about emotions and social situations.

The way in which children learn and develop their social and emotional skills changes as they grow.
The following outline gives some developmentally appropriate ways caregivers can promote social and emotional development in babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

1. **Babies**

   Babies develop and learn their social and emotional skills through their daily interactions and emotional relationships with their caregivers. They imitate and internalise these early social and emotional experiences which lay a foundation for all future development.

   Caregivers can optimise babies’ developing social and emotional skills by:
   - engaging in frequent face-to-face interactions, including smiling, laughing and showing joy
   - being affectionate and warm
   - holding and cuddling the baby
   - talking to the baby about what they are doing
   - establishing responsive routines to help the baby become regulated
   - starting to play simple and predictable games together, such as finger play and imitating noises
   - calming the baby when they are upset by holding, rocking and patting, and using a calm, gentle voice and a kind face.

2. **Toddlers**

   Toddlers continue to develop their social and emotional skills through their close relationships and use imitation to learn from others. Toddlers want to be like adults and enjoy engaging in ‘helping’ behaviours around everyday experiences, such as cooking, cleaning, gardening and shopping. They also begin to test their capabilities and their caregivers’ responses to their behaviour and thus begin to organise and manage their behaviour and learn about limits and boundaries and their need to adapt.

   Caregivers can optimise toddlers’ developing social and emotional skills by:
   - facilitating experiences and interactions for toddlers to explore and play
   - allowing toddlers to attempt new things for themselves (such as negotiating a physical obstacle, or discovering how a new toy works)
   - facilitating the child’s development and practice of their conflict-resolution skills
   - encouraging and acknowledging positive behaviour
   - helping toddlers manage their internal struggle between their growth and development and their need to feel safe, secure and supported (for example, by giving limited choices).

3. **Preschoolers**

   Preschoolers’ social and emotional development continues through their social interaction with others. Interactions and friendships with their peers and wanting to be liked are features of preschool social and emotional development.

   Caregivers support preschoolers’ developing social and emotional skills by:
   - providing opportunities for children to engage in storytelling, games, play and creative, hands-on experiences
   - arranging opportunities for children to be involved in meaningful decision making (for example, discussing possible places to go for an outing)
   - giving children control over their environment and routines (for example, making choices around meal times and equipment)
   - facilitating children’s interactions and developing friendships with their peers
   - reflecting and discussing children’s experiences with them
   - providing opportunities for independent and group problem solving.
What ECEC services can do to foster children’s developing social and emotional skills

There is growing evidence that high-quality care enhances children’s social and emotional learning and has both short- and long-term positive mental health outcomes. Services can enhance children’s social and emotional learning generally by providing an environment that builds and sustains positive relationships between all people at the service. This aspect of promoting children’s mental health is the focus of KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 1: Creating a sense of community.

The three areas that KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 2 focuses on to foster children’s developing social and emotional skills are:

- relationships between children and educators
- children’s social and emotional skill-development opportunities
- staff development and support.

These areas are consistent with the Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and are described in more detail below.

Relationships between children and staff

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.

Warm, responsive and trusting relationships between children and educators:

- optimise children’s development and learning
- provide comfort and support to minimise feelings of stress children may have as they learn to negotiate their world
- provide children with first-hand experiences of social and emotional skills when modelled by educators and staff, and offer opportunities to learn through imitation
- help children maintain a sense of connection to their parents and carers whilst at the service.

Educators can help parents and carers be in the child’s mind and help the child know they exist through the use of photos, objects from home or conversations at the service. This is also considered further in KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 3: Working with parents and carers.
What do warm, responsive and trusting relationships look like?

Being ‘in tune’

Sani, a new member of staff, was spending the day with Kay, the toddler room leader, to help her get to know the children, families and routines in the centre.

Eighteen-month-old Tim arrived looking teary and unsettled. His mum explained that Tim’s Gran was unwell and had been rushed to hospital. Kay sat quietly with Tim on the couch reading a story until he felt much more relaxed. Tim cuddled into Kay and then fell sound asleep. Kay explained to Sani that Tim was usually happy coming into the centre but was probably feeling tired and upset about events at home. Sani was impressed that Kay knew exactly what to do. Throughout the day, Sani noticed that there were particular children who always singled out Kay if they wanted comfort, needed help or even needed their nose wiped. Sani also noticed that Kay made a special effort to connect with these children and their families.

Being ‘in tune’ is the caregiver’s ability to be emotionally connected with the child and engage in coordinated interactions with them. This includes sharing positive emotions as well as reading the child’s cues, responding to the child and helping to regulate the child’s distress. For example, a caregiver is ‘in tune’ with a baby when they respond to the baby’s cries with soothing behaviours, which settles the baby. This reduces the baby’s stress, helps them learn how to feel calm and enables them to experience positive interactions.

‘To truly attend and be there emotionally is not a skill but a way of being.’

Relationships consist of periods of being ‘in tune’ or ‘in step’ with others and also periods of being ‘out of tune’ or ‘out of step’. A carer can be ‘out of tune’ in a number of ways, such as being unavailable, getting frustrated or not being sensitive to the child’s signals. Being ‘out of tune’ with each other is a normal part of relationships and offers opportunities for children and carers to learn:

- that being ‘out of tune’ is part of life and there are many ways to reconnect
- how to manage emotions in the ‘out of tune’ phase
- how to reconnect and get the relationship back ‘in tune’.

Two-year-old Kate, arriving at the long day care centre, looked around expectantly for Sam, the room leader.

Sam was usually waiting with a smiling face to greet the children, parents and carers—however, today he was nowhere to be seen. Kate looked around the room for Sam and then went to play by herself at a table. Later, Sam came in and went to say hello to Kate. However, Kate turned away and moved to play in the construction area. After a short time Sam joined Kate at the construction area and sat down next to her. ‘I can see you feel sad and cross because you couldn’t find me this morning,’ said Sam gently. ‘I’m sorry I wasn’t here when you arrived.’ Sam sat patiently beside Kate and in a little while she gave Sam some building blocks, inviting him to join in her play.
‘How you are is as important as what you do. Don’t just do something, stand there and pay attention.’ – Pawl and St John, 1998.

Communicating
Effective communication is important for developing warm and responsive relationships.

This includes:
- spending moments with the child
- talking with the child
- active, responsive listening, including demonstrating that the child has been understood
- appropriately open body language
- physical affection and touch
- meaning what you say, saying what you mean and keeping your word.

Adara, who worked in the preschool room, and Charlotte, who worked in the baby room, were sitting having a chat in the staff room.

Adara was saying to Charlotte that she was glad she didn’t have to change nappies all day. Charlotte laughed and pointed out that her day involved a lot more than changing nappies. She also explained, to Adara’s surprise, that she enjoys changing nappies. ‘It’s often a good time to talk to the babies,’ explained Charlotte. Initially Adara was a bit confused, but Charlotte explained that when she changes the babies’ nappies there lots of opportunities to make eye contact, copy noises and have fun with them. Charlotte enjoyed this aspect of the nappy changing and she also knew she was helping the babies with the development of many key skills.
Being consistent and predictable over time

Relationships are built from having many interactions over time. Children learn to predict behaviour from their primary caregivers based on their previous experiences with them. Consistently positive experiences increase children’s anticipation that something good will happen and encourage continuing engagement. Children benefit from caregiving that is consistent and predictable as this helps children to make sense of their world and gives them the motivation, confidence and skills to engage with others, explore their world and learn.

Engaging in interactions that reflect individual knowledge and understanding of the child

Individual knowledge of the child includes educators being aware of a child’s:
- emotional and physical needs
- likes and dislikes
- thinking and learning styles
- usual behaviour including their signals, moods, triggers and facial expressions
- experiences that they have shared together.

Educators can develop individual knowledge of children in their care by:
- taking time to observe them carefully
- considering possible meanings for children’s behaviour
- spending one-on-one time with each child, every day
- seeking more information from children, their parents and carers, and other staff
- reflecting on observations and previous outcomes alone and with others
- working with children in small groups.

Being self-aware

It is important for educators to be aware of how their interactions with children affect children’s developing social and emotional skills. Children learn about themselves through interactions with others. How adults interact with children forms a large part of the story children have about themselves and influences children’s developing social and emotional skills. With increased self-awareness, educators can maximise their positive interactions with children and support children’s mental health and wellbeing, and their own reflective practice.

Self-awareness includes educators being aware of:
- their own strengths and limitations
- the skills and knowledge they bring to their role with children
- how they ‘sound’ to children and how children are experiencing them
- what behaviour and situations ‘push their buttons’ and could create negative thoughts or feelings; and how this could affect their interactions with children.

Summary

Service structures, policies and staff practices can enhance children’s social and emotional learning by enabling staff to provide warm and responsive care for children. This includes educators:
- being ‘in tune’ and emotionally connected
- communicating effectively and appropriately
- being consistent and predictable
- engaging in interactions that reflect individual knowledge and understanding of each child
- being self-aware.

Children’s social and emotional skill-development opportunities

Children benefit from having plenty of opportunities to develop, learn, and practise their social and emotional skills in their everyday experiences with educators and peers. When educators purposefully arrange experiences or respond to spontaneous opportunities with children in their care, they support children to develop and enhance their social and emotional skills. This plays a key role in children’s ability to make and maintain positive relationships, now and throughout their lives. A balance of holistic approaches to teaching, intentionally planned and child-initiated experiences enhances children’s social and emotional learning.
**Educator-supported experiences**

By adopting a purposefully nurturing and non-directive relating style when interacting with children, arranging the environment and harnessing everyday opportunities to foster children’s social and emotional development, educators can help build children’s social and emotional skills over this crucial developmental period.

Educators can foster the development of children’s social and emotional skills through:

- intentional teaching of core social and emotional skills
- making the most of everyday experiences.

**Intentional teaching of core social and emotional skills**

Educators can help children learn social and emotional skills by:

- having plans and curriculum for developing and monitoring children’s social and emotional skills
- arranging developmentally appropriate experiences for social and emotional skill learning
- having developmentally appropriate expectations
- arranging the physical environment for social and emotional skill learning
- using concrete examples to show how and when to use a skill
- building on children’s existing skills
- providing regular, spontaneous encouragement and feedback
- commenting on and labelling what children are doing
- scaffolding children’s learning through suggestions and demonstration
- providing many opportunities for practice across familiar and new situations
- modelling social and emotional skills through their own behaviour with children, families and other staff in the ECEC service.

Some ECEC services may decide to use an existing social and emotional learning program. These can provide guidance, tools and resources to target the development of one or more skills. If you are thinking about implementing one of these programs, you may like to discuss the use of programs to assist children’s development of social and emotional skills at your service with your KidsMatter Early Childhood Facilitator.
Making the most of everyday experiences

Children learn most effectively through their engagement in meaningful experiences during their day at the service. Staff can make the most of the many incidental social and emotional learning opportunities that arise each day in their interactions with children.

Examples of incidental learning opportunities include:

- making eye contact and naming what is happening during routines with babies, such as nappy changing and feeding
- talking with children about events and their feelings and the feelings of others (for example, one child knocking over another’s block tower)
- moving close to children when events are escalating and sitting down with them while talking about what is happening and how everyone may be feeling
- helping a child who is finding it difficult to separate from their parent or carer
- helping an isolated child to come up with some ideas for approaching a group of children they would like to play with and staying close while they try it out
- acknowledging a child for comforting an upset friend and labelling what they did.

Four-year-old Kamir complained loudly as three-year-old Shannon gripped the red fire engine he was playing with and forcefully attempted to pull it away from him.

A loud tug-of-war commenced. Melanie, the kindergarten teacher, moved close, bent down, touched the backs of each child and positioned herself so they could see her face. ‘Shannon, you really want to play with the fire engine. Look at Kamir’s face. He’s upset because it’s his turn now. Let’s see how we can solve this problem. What’s your idea Kamir?’ Kamir said, ‘When I’m finished!’ Melanie asked, ‘Shannon, what do you think?’ ‘No, I want a turn now!’ replied Shannon. Melanie picked up a yellow truck and started pushing it along the track close by. Shannon and Kamir watched. Kamir gently pulled the red fire engine back and started pushing it along the track. He picked up another fire engine and gave it to Shannon. Shannon started pushing it along the track behind Kamir. Melanie moved back slightly and said, ‘Kamir and Shannon are both pushing fire engines on the track,’ then continued to observe them playing from a distance.

Kieran had fallen over in the outdoor area and, although not injured, was feeling a little upset and went to sit on a cushion in the book corner.

Stefan, his friend, noticed he was upset and quietly went to sit beside Kieran and gently stroked his arm. Paul, the room leader, was standing nearby and noticed what had happened. He joined the boys to offer some comfort too. When Kieran was feeling a little better Paul turned to Stefan and said, ‘You noticed Kieran needed a friend and you helped him to feel better.’ Kieran smiled at Stefan and the two boys went to play in the sandpit together.

When developmentally appropriate, children’s social and emotional skill development can be enhanced when experiences are discussed and reflected upon with staff and peers. This also benefits children’s learning in other areas.
**Child-initiated experiences**

Children create valuable learning opportunities for themselves through their interactions with their world and the people in it. For example, young babies stare longer at people and things they are interested in. When they have had enough they look away. They frown, fuss and cry when they are distressed. A sensitive caregiver will pick up on babies’ cues and respond in a warm and sensitive way. When they become toddlers, children are very busy exploring and making sense of their social and physical world. This can bring them into conflict with their caregivers and peers. Defiant behaviour or tantrums in this age group can be understood as a response to a situation that the child is not yet able to handle, such as dealing with frustration or tiredness. Caregivers who are able to respond consistently and calmly will help toddlers to develop their social and emotional skills. As preschoolers, children learn to generalise their social and emotional skills to new situations through play and interactions with their peers. They benefit from opportunities to make decisions and predictions and solve problems. While there are general developmental similarities, each child is unique and has their own temperament, developmental history, learning style, interests and preferences.

Ava, who worked in the baby room, noticed that playing some gentle music seemed to help soothe six-month-old Sophie when she was unsettled or upset.

Ava, following Sophie’s lead, made sure that she always had some music available and often used it to help calm Sophie. When the music was playing Ava also spent some time talking gently with Sophie about the music.

Staff can foster children’s social and emotional skill development by:

- following each child’s lead
- being sensitive and responsive to children’s needs, preferences and interests
- arranging experiences that allow children to choose their own learning opportunities.

Four-year-old Lewis was full of news about the house that was being built next door to his.

He was particularly excited today because a digger truck had arrived. Heather, the kindergarten assistant, had been looking for an opportunity to help Lewis build more friendships and this gave her an idea. Heather put out some trucks and diggers in the construction area. Soon Lewis was having a great time playing with the trucks and using the blocks to show Heather what the house looked like. Some other children, Taylor and Jack, began to show interest in what was going on and Heather invited them to join in. With support and encouragement from Heather, Lewis showed Jack and Taylor how the digger moved things around to help build the house.

By purposefully planning experiences and engaging in nurturing, non-directive interactions with children, staff can optimise social and emotional skill learning.

Children’s learning is most effective when staff members are responsive and make the most of the spontaneous social and emotional skill learning opportunities that arise in children’s everyday experiences.

All children are born ready to feel, learn and be active participants in their own development.
Staff development and support
The educators and staff within an ECEC service are the most valuable and influential resource for developing children’s social and emotional skills. When educators feel confident that they have the knowledge, skills and capacity to foster children’s developing social and emotional skills within a supportive environment, they are better able to provide appropriate experiences and opportunities which can benefit children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Diep had only been working at the kindergarten for a few weeks. Josh, one of the teachers, noticed that while Diep was building great one-on-one relationships with the children, she sometimes seemed unsure of what to do when she was with a larger group of children.

Josh mentioned to Chris, the head teacher, what he had noticed about Diep. Josh said, ‘I’ve been a mentor for new staff before, and I was wondering whether it would be okay if I offered the same opportunity to Diep?’ Chris said that she had also noticed that Diep seemed less confident in larger groups but hadn’t had a chance to think about how to support her and that sounded like a great idea. Diep was grateful for Josh’s offer as she knew he had been a teacher for ten years and being mentored by him would give her a chance to learn a lot from him. Together they set up regular times to talk, giving Diep many opportunities to ask Josh lots of questions, start developing her own ideas and try new things with the children.

Some of the educator skills that can foster children’s social and emotional development include having:

- current child-development knowledge
- current best-practice knowledge
- observation and interpretation skills
- relationship skills
- self-awareness
- confidence
- enthusiasm and a positive outlook.

In addition, knowing when and how to refer children who are experiencing difficulties developing adaptive social and emotional skills to other professionals is also important. This is considered further in KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 4: Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

It takes ongoing commitment and effort to increase and support educators’ knowledge, skills and confidence. ECEC services can build educator and staff capacity to foster children’s developing social and emotional skills by providing:

- professional development opportunities
- a supportive environment.

Joe and Liz were sitting in the staff room waiting for the staff meeting to start.

The other staff all filed in and Rayna, the director, started the meeting. Rayna had said she was going to talk about staff support, so Joe and Liz were very curious about what she had in mind. Rayna began talking about setting up a ‘buddy system’ where members of the team support each other, have opportunities to attend workshops, and the idea of ‘reflective journals’. She wanted to get all the staff’s input into the centre’s new guidelines. Joe thought to himself, ‘Reflective journals—that sounds like extra work. When would we have time for that?’ Liz then leaned over to Joe and whispered that she had done a reflective journal at her last workplace, and it had been great, really helping her to cope better when work was stressful. Joe asked if he could talk to Liz about it a bit more after the meeting—less stress sounded great!
Some ways in which educators’ knowledge, skills and confidence can be enhanced include:

- building relationships amongst educators to enable:
  - knowledge sharing
  - skill development
  - increasing confidence.
- engaging in reflective practice to increase:
  - understanding
  - insight
  - awareness.
- formal professional learning
- access to up-to-date, best-practice resources.

Educators also benefit from building relationships with mental health professionals outside the service. This aspect of staff development and support is considered further in KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 4.

**Staff support**

Children’s social and emotional development is optimised when they experience warm, responsive and positive relationships with others. Providing children with positive experiences is enhanced when educators are feeling positive and confident. Early childhood staff work in a challenging environment. Receiving support from others and sharing experiences improves staff wellbeing and benefits children’s social and emotional development.

Some of the ways ECEC services can provide a supportive environment include providing educators with:

- leadership and ‘on-the-ground’ support
- time to:
  - engage in professional conversations
  - reflect by themselves and with others
  - plan
  - develop relationships with children, other educators, and key contacts and professionals outside the service.
### Target Areas of Component 2

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<th>TARGET AREAS</th>
<th>GOALS</th>
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| **1**

**TARGET AREA**  Relationships between children and educators

- Warm, responsive and trusting relationships between children and educators provide a foundation that allows children to learn and develop social and emotional skills.
- Service policies and practices are in place so that the opportunities for children and educators to form these relationships are maximised.
- Educators are able to help children deal effectively with a variety of feelings and behaviours.

| **2**

**TARGET AREA**  Children’s social and emotional skill development

- Educators have an understanding of the core social and emotional skills that are developing from birth to five years.
- Social and emotional learning is systematically considered in all experiences provided for children.
- The service creates opportunities for children to develop and practise social and emotional skills in their daily interactions with educators and peers.
- Educators intentionally teach core social and emotional skills.
- Educators make the most of spontaneous interactions that arise in children’s everyday experiences as skill development and practice opportunities.
- Services provide information to families about the service’s social and emotional curriculum and work collaboratively with families to assist children’s development of social and emotional skills.

| **3**

**TARGET AREA**  Staff development and support

- Educators’ knowledge, skills and capacity to foster children’s developing social and emotional skills are enhanced at the service.
- The service has a systematic approach to staff development and support.
- Educators share knowledge and develop their skills through mentoring, professional conversations and reflective practice.
Some examples of links between Component 2 and the NQS Quality Areas:

- **1.1.1:** Curriculum decision making contributes to each child’s learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, and confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.

- **3.2:** The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.

- **4.2:** Educators, coordinators and educators are respectful and ethical.

- **5.2.2:** Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.

Component 2 of the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative relates to four Quality Areas of the National Quality Standard: Educational program and practice; Physical environment; Staffing arrangements; and Relationships with children. When educators have an understanding of children’s social and emotional development, they are able to scaffold experiences to assist children to become confident learners. Play provides an opportunity for children to experience, express, regulate and learn about their emotions in genuine, meaningful ways. When service policies and practices reflect and model respectful relationships, the social and emotional wellbeing of the whole service community (that is, children, families, educators, staff and service directors) is supported. Finally, educators are able to use intentional teaching to support the development of children’s social and emotional skills through their relationships and experiences.

Developing an understanding of children’s social and emotional development links KidsMatter Early Childhood with the underlying Principles that support the Learning Outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework. For example, the Principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships and reflective practice supports children as they develop their social and emotional skills. Children learn and practice their problem-solving skills through their play and peer relationships. Educators create learning environments that encourage children to explore, construct, create and solve problems. This is one way that educators can integrate the Early Years Learning Framework with Component 2 of KidsMatter Early Childhood.