KidsMatter Early Childhood is divided into four components to ensure the efforts of early childhood education and care services (ECEC) are focused and involve the significant people influencing children’s mental health and wellbeing. Each component concentrates on identified target areas that help ECEC services promote children’s mental health and wellbeing.

- Component 1: Creating a sense of community
- Component 2: Developing children’s social and emotional skills
- Component 3: Working with parents and carers
- Component 4: Helping children experiencing mental health difficulties

How do the components work?

ECEC services begin their KidsMatter Early Childhood journey with Component 1, where they create a sense of community to promote feelings of belonging and connectedness for all children, families and early childhood educators. The four components are interrelated and influence each other.

Where do health and community services fit into the KidsMatter Early Childhood framework?

KidsMatter Early Childhood encourages ECEC services to engage health and community groups, and especially mental health services, within and across all four components – and not just in the context of early intervention.

As a local health and community service you may be able to offer specialised support to ECEC services by implementing specific interventions to strengthen relationships with families (Component 3), developing children’s social and emotional skills (Component 2) or creating a sense of community (Component 1). Here are some suggestions for how you might approach, assist and develop partnerships with ECEC services.
Health and Community Survey

Component 1: Creating a sense of community
Component 1 focuses on ECEC services creating a sense of community that promotes feelings of belonging and connectedness for all children, families and early childhood educators. This has been shown to have a positive effect on children’s mental health. It emphasises the importance of inclusion, positive relationships and collaboration within ECEC services.

Your health and community service could help ECEC services achieve this goal by:

- having a presence at your local ECEC services (e.g. attending events)
- offering information sessions or training for early childhood educators on various mental health and wellbeing topics
- supporting ECEC services to find ways to be inclusive of the diversity within their community.

Component 2: Developing children’s social and emotional skills
Component 2 focuses on children’s social and emotional development, including the ability to recognise and manage emotions, show care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships and handle challenging situations effectively. Research has shown that the development of social and emotional skills plays a critical role in influencing and enhancing children’s quality of life, relationships and lifelong learning. High quality care that purposefully fosters children’s social and emotional development through relationships has been shown to benefit children’s mental health and wellbeing, learning, motivation to achieve and cooperate, and development of values.

Your health and community service can help ECEC services achieve this goal by:

- facilitating groups for children and families that develop children’s social and emotional capabilities
- offering training sessions for early childhood educators on children’s social and emotional development
- providing materials for ECEC staff about social and emotional learning and how they can make the most of everyday moments with children
- supporting ECEC services to engage families to learn about social and emotional skills
- supporting discussions with early childhood educators about developmentally appropriate experiences for social and emotional learning.

Component 3: Working with parents and carers
Component 3 focuses on building collaborative partnerships with parents and carers based on how they help support children’s mental health and wellbeing. It looks at how to strengthen communication skills to help build partnerships and how ECEC services can provide opportunities for families to connect with each other.

KidsMatter Early Childhood recognises that families are central to children’s mental health. ECEC services play an important role in supporting parenting, which can enhance children’s social and emotional skills and by extension their mental health and wellbeing.

Your health and community service could support ECEC services by:

- facilitating parenting groups at ECEC services or your local premises
- streamlining referral processes for parents by providing ECEC services with information about the services you provide
- collaborating with ECEC services to disseminate information to families about your service (e.g. through newsletters or the ECEC service’s website).
Component 4: Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties

Component 4 focuses on experiences in early childhood that have the potential to affect long-term health. It acknowledges that ECEC services are in a unique position to support children’s mental health as they have frequent and regular access to families. Early recognition and intervention for children showing signs of mental health difficulties can prevent problems from impacting on their development. Having policies and practices in place to support children who are experiencing mental health difficulties can assist families to get access to the help they need.

Your health and community service could help ECEC services to recognise signs that children may be experiencing mental health difficulties and offer extra support by:

- consulting with ECEC staff when they have concerns about children’s mental health and wellbeing
- facilitating referral pathways by meeting with early childhood educators and providing information about what external support you can offer children and families
- offering training to educators about common mental health issues in early childhood and how ECEC services can be supportive
- providing specialised knowledge and support to staff on areas that might affect children’s mental health and wellbeing (eg intellectual disability, grief and loss, and family violence)
- attending regular meetings with families and educators if a child is receiving support from your service to share information and decision making strategies
- maintaining regular contact with educators if families have provided consent.

For more information

KidsMatter has an information sheet especially for health and community services about what to consider when making connections with a school or early childhood education and care (ECEC) service: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/hcpartners

KidsMatter health and community online resources contain tips and strategies to help you generate fruitful partnerships between your service and KidsMatter ECEC services. There are videos, eLearning packages, a programs guide and mental health information sheets which you are free to use in your practice: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community

You can also subscribe to the bi-monthly KidsMatter health and community newsletter at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/newsletter, join our Twitter conversation at www.twitter.com/KidsMatterAus or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/KidsMatterForFamilies