Learning on Country—what do ya know?

Did ya know Country owns you?
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While the resources are available freely for these purposes, to realise the full potential of KidsMatter Early Childhood, it is recommended that the resources be used with the appropriate training and support under the KidsMatter Initiative.
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Did ya know ... the way we do things around here

A Story

I learnt from an Elder and traditional owner of the Country I am on that Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country should reflect traditional ways—visitors explaining their business on this country, then being welcomed, then committing to leaving the land and its people the way you found it. There are variations to these traditions and customs in different places and I need to learn these. Sometimes I feel discomfort if I don’t know local custom but if I don’t ask I’ll never know.

My experience has been that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are very patient as I learn.

Customs, rituals, traditions, respect and predictability—for adults and children

- There are different ways of knowing, being and doing
- There is no one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander way of knowing, being and doing in relation to mental health and wellbeing
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have different perspectives on relationship to land, mob and family that impact on mental health and wellbeing
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members can help with links and understanding some aspects of community but they should not be expected to do and know everything related to community
- It takes connectedness not just a connection to make, develop and nurture relationships with community.

‘My experience has been that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are very patient as I learn.’
Check on protocols for working with, and in, particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Ask questions—starting with families and staff in your early childhood education and care service.

Who are? Where are? What are? When are?

- Community leaders
- Elders
- Traditional owners
- Local Lands Council
- Community Working Party
- Language group
- Who are the contacts?
- When do they meet?

In your space

Who do you invite?

How do you invite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members?

Do you have community meetings?

What are the expectations of community service providers informing community leaders about work in this community?

In finding out about protocols, you also find out about:
- Country
- Nation
- Mobs
- Community
- Languages
Did ya know ...

rethink and redo

You learn more about understanding protocols and different ways every time you engage—it’s not an exact science.

It’s a commitment and it’s relationships with people and places.

Wise words ... ‘If you watch, listen, rethink and redo with different lenses you find new ways.’

About time

Identifying, understanding and applying protocols to practice is a commitment that takes time.

Identifying, understanding and applying ways of knowing, being and doing is a commitment that takes time.

Presenting professional learning, planning or staff meeting procedures needs preparation in order to make it accessible to everyone:

- Consider the audience—respect culture, skills, interests
- Consider the content:
  - make it engaging for others, not just you
  - more yarning, less talking at people
  - less print, more stories
  - connect to other work in the service so that the big plan is clear
  - make links to country and community.
Learning on Country—what do ya know? Did ya know Country owns you?

Presenting professional learning, planning or staff meeting procedures need preparation in order to make it accessible to everyone.
Connecting for connectedness and relationships

To make connecting for connectedness and relationships effective:

- make time and take time
- apply ‘giving, generosity and patience’
- introduce all staff and families (even if it is repetitive)
- always use people’s names
- consider what it feels like to be the other person/people
- shake off assumptions about others
- know that connecting is two-way
- learn about connectedness by connecting first
- start with those closest—children, families and staff
- invite people to have a yarn
- go out as well as expecting others to come in
- commit to regular contact to build connectedness
- recognise that communication is different for different people
- do what you say you will
- understand that all relationships have ups and downs.
Wise words ...‘Take time. Make time.’
‘Relationships, connectedness and readiness at the front end pay off at the other end.’
Cultural safety

The term ‘Cultural safety’ was first defined by the Maori nursing fraternity in New Zealand and is expressed as:

An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening. (Williams, 2008).

Culturally safe places:

- hold culture in high esteem
- recognise Country and its people
- look like individuals belong
- provide spaces for Belonging, Being and Becoming together
- reflect everyone’s culture
- involve people and things that are important to individuals
- are welcoming
- connect to supports.
Wise words ... ‘All children are born equal. Then, their surroundings and life begin to influence them.’

‘What kind of influence do you wish to be?’

‘How will you influence the children in your place?’

It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.
Did ya know ... about cultural competence

Honest talk—the forever journey

As we consider culture and commit to respect, connection, knowledge and action, it is important to recognise that we can slip and slide on the continuum depending on time, space, place and people.

The journey and goals are forever.

The Cultural Competence Continuum is here to help with reflection, planning and honest talk.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CULTURAL COMPETENCE CONTINUUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Destructiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Incapacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Blindness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Pre-competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Proficiency</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Characterised by

- Intentional attitudes, policies & practices that are destructive to cultures and consequently to individuals within the culture.
- Lack of capacity to help minority clients or communities due to extremely biased beliefs and a paternal attitude toward those not of a mainstream culture.
- The belief that service or helping approaches traditionally used by the dominant culture are universally applicable regardless of race or culture. These services ignore cultural strengths and encourage assimilation.
- The desire to deliver quality services and a commitment to diversity indicated by hiring minority staff, initiating training and recruiting minority members for agency leadership, but lacking information on how to maximise these capacities. This level of competence can lead to tokenism.
- Acceptance and respect for difference, continuing self-assessment, careful attention to the dynamics of difference, continuous expansion of knowledge and resources, and adaptation of services to better meet the needs of diverse populations.
- Holding culture in high esteem; seeking to add to the knowledge base of culturally competent practice by conducting research, influencing approaches to care, and improving relations between cultures. Promotes self-determination.

Source: The diagram draws from work done by VACCA for the Aboriginal Cultural Competency Framework and Marial Ramdall's keynote speech at SHAACC 2007 National Conference in Adelaide, which is in turn drawn from work by Terry Cross of the National Indian Child Welfare Association [LJ].

Learning on Country—what do ya know?

Did ya know Country owns you?
Did ya know ...

identity—know yourself

Know yourself

- Who are you?
- What are your multiple identities? (the gender/groups/family/community that you belong to and identify with)
- What are the foundations for your identity?
- What are your beliefs?
- Where do your beliefs come from?
- It is important to get to know yourself before acknowledging and engaging with other people’s cultural identities.
- There are links between having a strong sense of your identity and having a strong sense of wellbeing.
- Make time to yarn with others about your individual identity then yarn about your group identity.
- Expect that it will be hard to answer questions about identity.

Wise words ...
‘If we were all the same it would be a little dull.’
‘Celebrate difference, ability, diversity and everything that makes children individuals.’
‘By valuing and experiencing the richness of diversity and difference, they will have a lifetime that is anything, but dull.’
‘Make time to yarn with others about your individual identity and then yarn about your group identity.’
Did ya know ... about Yarning up

Wise words ... ‘Get in and have a go—the worst thing you can do is to do nothing!’

Yarning

Conversations about family, kinship, culture and country are all part of a solid foundation of mental health and wellbeing. Yarning is a way of introducing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s story and description of how they see and experience something.

In this case, it was aspects of mental health and wellbeing in their community and for their little fellas.
KidsMatter Early Childhood—Yarn-Up

*Bringing another lens* to KidsMatter Early Childhood

**Preparation**

Document all you can about your place including:

**What’s your community?**

Are there local protocols and procedures for working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

Who can tell you more about your community through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eyes, knowledge and wisdom?

What questions do you need to find answers to about your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

**AND ...**

Draw a map of *connections with community* and staff, children and families in the service.

Find a way to document every staff member’s personal and professional learning experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and learning.

Reflect on how you listen and respond as individuals and as a group. How good are you at listening?

How good are you at considering other perspectives?

‘Conversations about family, kinship, culture and country are all part of a solid foundation of mental health and wellbeing.’
Did ya know ...

KidsMatter Ways community mentoring

Come from a place of respect

Being respectful:
- start the dialogue and work in collaboration, adapting your own views as you progress
- identify and engage with community protocols
- listen, really listen
- engage with different perspectives
- include different families and mobs
- commit to recognition for mentors’ time
- acknowledge your own ways of knowing, being and doing
- engage with self-awareness activities
- enhance community connectedness.

A community focus on mental health and wellbeing

- It’s real, it’s inclusive!
- It’s embedded in, not bolted on.
- It’s an ongoing cycle of being, doing and understanding.

Why?

Good mental health and wellbeing comes from:
- respect for and learning about this place on this Country
- respect for all the mobs and their history
- bringing multiple perspectives to all the work we do.

What?

- Authentic relationships.
- Two-way conversations and actions—dialogue and collaboration.
- Enriched environment, experience and programs.
- Different and multiple outcomes in each place and space.

How?

- Many ways—start with families, then community, then make it your own.
- Make relationships—grow them.
- Listen to different voices and respond.
- Keep mentoring going, even as relationships and people change.
### KidsMatter Ways Community Mentor Programs purposes

#### Ways and Possibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The mentor brings a perspective</th>
<th>To respect and connect with community knowledge and community ways</th>
<th>To develop understanding of different perspectives</th>
<th>To enrich the culture of the service environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish knowledge of this community and their mob—people and history.</td>
<td>Represent a voice for different ways of knowing, being and doing.</td>
<td>Share stories of place and people from the past and the present.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The mentor’s role | Provide a community perspective to KidsMatter concepts. Encourage connection to local knowledge and culture. | Engage in KidsMatter professional learning. Provide advice about how KidsMatter applies to this community and in particular their mob. | Maintain and develop connectedness with the service. Provide advice about practice and planning while understanding the limits within the service. |

| Inviting a mentor | Connect with families and community to find mentor/s. Consider the wisdom and experience of people. | Acknowledge wisdom of different generations. Consider all possibilities. | Develop a relationship through inviting people in and going out into community. Invite a mentor into other aspects of the service as well. |

| The role of those in the ECEC service | Commit to acknowledging children’s cultural identity and that of the traditional owners of the land. | Listen and consider how the different perspectives might influence new ways of doing so that children and families’ mental health and wellbeing is as strong as possible. | Work together to develop a strong foundation for KidsMatter Ways culture which reflects this place, space and country. |

| The relationship | Respect the community and family responsibilities of a mentor. Respect the responsibilities and commitments of the ECEC service staff. | Invite others in at appropriate times and understand that relationships will change over time. The cycle of relationship is accepted—no matter the length of time. | The relationship will continue to grow over time and is recognised as part of the service community and KidsMatter team. |

| Recognition of the mentor | Let people know that the mentor is working with the service. | Recognise that the mentor’s time is valuable as is their knowledge and commitment. | Include funds in the budget to recompense mentor’s time and commitment. Gift giving in the form of something they value, a voucher or a one-off payment. |

‘It’s real, it’s inclusive! It’s embedded in, not bolted on. It’s an ongoing cycle of being, doing and understanding.’
Did ya know ...

ways of knowing
—8 Ways

Learning on Country—what do ya know?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols and images</th>
<th>Story sharing</th>
<th>Non verbal</th>
<th>Deconstruct/reconstruct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘We keep and share knowledge with art and objects’</td>
<td>‘We connect through the stories we share’</td>
<td>‘We see, think, act, make and share without words’</td>
<td>‘We work from biggest to smallest, watch then do’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maps</th>
<th>Community links</th>
<th>Land links</th>
<th>Non-linear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘We picture our pathways of knowledge’</td>
<td>‘We bring new knowledge home to help our mob’</td>
<td>‘We work with lessons from land and nature’</td>
<td>‘We put different ideas together for new knowledge’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is it? Make a plan.</td>
<td>What is it? Share with others.</td>
<td>What is it? Take it outside.</td>
<td>What is it? Two different paths meeting at a point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing it: Map out experiences, the environment and relationships.</td>
<td>Implementing it: Make the new knowledge benefit the community.</td>
<td>Implementing it: Talk about local community features regularly.</td>
<td>Implementing it: Discuss and act on different viewpoints.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KidsMatter Early Childhood acknowledges the influence of 8 Ways in developing different ways of being, thinking and doing.

8ways.wikispaces.com
Many ways … different ways

KidsMatter Ways uses symbols to check in on all the ways we do things.

It means we unpack our ways of doing and consider if we are including different perspectives.

You can use the 8 Ways and KidsMatter Ways symbols to reflect on your practice too.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KidsMatter Ways</th>
<th>Key Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grow</td>
<td>Intentional, transformation, change, continuum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect</td>
<td>Inclusivity, whole of population, whole person, relationships, others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn many ways</td>
<td>Plan, explore, problem solve, experiment, take risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be, feel, think, do</td>
<td>Head, heart, hands, feet. Respect, commitment, emotional balance, spiritual wellbeing, mindfulness, reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make safe</td>
<td>Self care, cultural safety, supports, strength-based.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Listen, hear, talk, share stories, yarn up, learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge, consider, celebrate</td>
<td>Self-awareness, identity, community, history, people, culture, place and space, others, knowledge and the unknown, progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**For early childhood mental health and wellbeing**

Use the symbols and see if you are using all of them in Planning + Doing + Reviewing.

Use symbols with children to start a conversation about the way that they are doing something. This adds depth to everyone’s understandings of processes. It shows you and them just how clever they are!
Did ya know ... from where the wise words came

Our wise words have come from various discussions and yarn ups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are reflective of the voice and thoughts of many who have contributed to the development of KidsMatter Ways.

References, resources and contributors


KidsMatter also acknowledges the materials and other works used by SNAICC to develop the Cultural Competence Continuum.


KidsMatter Ways
A commitment to bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and ways of doing to the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative.