

Supporting children's mental health: Suggestions for families and staff

Suggestions for families

- ▶ Spend time with children by having fun playing games, going to the park or going somewhere together as a family.
- ▶ Try to maintain routines as much as possible. Routines and consistency help children feel secure.
- ▶ Build and maintain supportive relationships with family, friends and early childhood staff. Talk with them about how they can best support you and your child during hard times. Tell staff about any concerning behaviour you are noticing at home.
- ▶ Try to help children to understand and manage their feelings; this can help them develop coping skills.
- ▶ Help children learn to cope with loss and change by providing support and reassurance, honesty and clarity; help them also to understand that loss and stress are a normal part of life.
- ▶ Acknowledge children's feelings and try to understand and respect them, especially when they are going through a difficult time. Offer support and reassurance by asking questions and letting them talk about their feelings.
- ▶ Try to support children in building their internal protective factors (e.g., good communication and problem-solving and social skills) by acknowledging and encouraging their skills when guiding their behaviour.

Suggestions for staff

- ▶ Become aware of how to address common risk factors and promote protective factors in early childhood.
- ▶ Help children feel connected with your service by taking an interest in their wellbeing, and by relating to them in ways that are consistently respectful and caring.
- ▶ Listen to the concerns of children, parents and carers without judgement and help them think through their problems. Show empathy when parents and carers talk about things affecting them and their children.
- ▶ Provide a positive and supportive environment to aid the development of children's skills, for example social and emotional development; managing emotions; relating to others; solving problems and managing conflict; and focusing on their strengths.
- ▶ Build partnerships with parents and carers to provide effective support for children by being open to support children's developmental and mental health needs.
- ▶ Observe and note children's behaviour to identify any concerns about their mental health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Help families who are experiencing difficulties by providing them with support, relevant information or details of health professionals.
- ▶ Provide help for families early to prevent or reduce the impact of children's mental health difficulties. When significant concerns are identified, provide support and suggestions for families to seek support from health professionals.



This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. The KidsMatter Early Childhood team also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



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