Social and emotional learning and development: KidsMatter and Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

This document is part of the reading for Module 2: Social and emotional learning in early childhood which is part of the Professional Learning for Component 2: Developing social and emotional skills.
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Social and emotional learning and development: KidsMatter and the Early Years Learning Framework

Section 1: Introduction

The information that follows integrates KidsMatter concepts and language, focused on a mental health perspective and social and emotional development, and the Learning Outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). It can be used to support your participation in Module 2 of KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 2 Professional Learning.

Combining familiar and not-so-familiar ways of thinking and talking about children’s learning and development can help you to see and hear more as you work with children and increase your awareness and appreciation of what and how children are learning. Knowing children well is crucial for robust, positive relationships. Knowing about development and learning helps you to be aware of evidence in order to note progress, celebrate achievements and support further learning.

This resource will be most useful if it is used as a basis for educators sharing questions, insights and perspectives with their colleagues and with children and families. Questions for reflection are included to prompt these discussions.

Definition of mental health in the early years:

“Early childhood mental health and wellbeing is seen in the capacity of a young child – within the context of their development, family, environment and culture – to:

- participate in the physical and social environment
- form healthy and secure relationships
- experience, regulate, understand and express emotions
- understand and regulate their behavior
- interact appropriately with others, including peers; and
- develop a secure sense of self.

Early childhood mental health and wellbeing is related to healthy physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Early childhood development and life experiences contribute strongly to a person’s mental health and wellbeing during childhood and later in life.” (HIMH & CH&ISC 2012, p 13)
The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) has social and emotional learning and relationships front and centre as critically important areas of learning in the early years.

In addition to the five Learning Outcomes, there are a number of concepts that relate directly to social and emotional learning. These include the following:

**Belonging, being and becoming:** From before birth children are connected to family, community, culture and place. Their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships, particularly within families, who are children’s first and most influential educators. As children participate in everyday life, they develop interests and construct their own identities and understandings of the world. (EYLF, p.7)

**Belonging** acknowledges children’s interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become. (EYLF, p.7)

**Curriculum** is defined as: ‘all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development’. [adapted from Te Whariki] (EYLF, p. 45). This definition of curriculum highlights the importance of educators planning for children’s social and emotional learning and wellbeing throughout their time in the early childhood education and care service.

**Intentional teaching** is educators’ practice that is deliberate, thoughtful and purposeful. The concept of intentional teaching highlights the need for educators to have children’s social and emotional skills and knowledge in mind as they plan for and work with children.

The Principle of **high expectations** is about being optimistic and open to possibilities in relation to children’s learning. This Principle is not suggesting that educators pressure children or have unrealistic expectations. Knowledge of child development milestones and typical ages at which they occur should expand rather than limit educators’ ability to see children’s learning - their capacity to be surprised by what children know, can do and understand - and to be open to possibilities and appreciate what children are capable of. Most of the information about social and emotional learning that follows is described as trends rather than specific milestones. Summaries of significant milestones are listed within a broad age range rather than at a particular age.
Links to the National Quality Standard

KidsMatter Early Childhood, the National Quality Standard and the Early Years Learning Framework have much in common. They all have relationships at their core and aim to develop children’s social and emotional wellbeing and competence.

Concepts and processes included in KidsMatter Early Childhood closely align with those in the National Quality Standard and will support and assist educators and early childhood education and care services undertake a self-assessment process and develop their Quality Improvement Plan.

The implementation of KidsMatter, the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard will each support children’s social and emotional learning and mental health. The seven Quality Areas within the National Quality Standard reflect the importance of social and emotional learning and relationships as outlined below.

**Quality Area 1** focuses on ensuring that the educational program and practice is stimulating and engaging and enhances children’s learning and development. Standard 1.1 identifies that curriculum decision making contributes to children’s outcomes in relation to the Learning Outcomes and is based on each child’s current knowledge, ideas, culture, abilities and interests. This standard also highlights how programs can be organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child’s learning and that ensures every child is supported to participate in the program. These programs can allow each child’s agency to be promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world. Standard 1.2 highlights the importance of educators being focused, active and reflective in designing and delivering the program for each child.

**Quality Area 2** focuses on safeguarding and promoting children’s health and safety. In particular Standard 2.3 focuses on ensuring that each child is protected. This standard acknowledges that children who are unsafe are at risk of having their physical health and wellbeing negatively impacted on, which in turn, can negatively affect their experiences, learning and wellbeing in the present and throughout their future lives.

**Quality Area 3** has a focus on the physical environment and element 3.2.1 ensures that outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments. These quality experiences can be designed to extend children’s social and emotional learning.

**Quality Area 4** focuses on the provision of qualified and experienced educators. This supports the development of relationships with children and their active engagement in the program. Standard 4.1 requires that educators are able to promote children’s learning and development in the five Learning Outcomes, and Standard 4.2 focuses on the development of respectful relationships between educators, which allows children to develop positive attachments with educators.

**Quality Area 5** links very strongly with the principles of KidsMatter and highlights the importance of relationships that are responsive, respectful and promote children’s sense of security and belonging. Standard 5.1 focuses on how everyday interactions and shared learning opportunities form the basis of the relationships that educators build with each child to provide a solid foundation from which to guide and support children. Standard 5.2...
focuses on the development of effective relationships with others and highlights the importance of these relationships for children’s learning.

**Quality Area 6** focuses on collaborative relationships with families that are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children. The expertise of families is recognised and they share in decision making about their child’s learning and wellbeing. (Element 6.2.1) and continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities. (Element 6.3.2).

**Quality Area 7** highlights the link between effective leadership and service management and the quality of education and care provided. Element 7.1.4 requires a suitably qualified and experienced educator or coordinator who leads the development of the curriculum and Element 7.2.1 ensures there is a statement of philosophy which guides the services operations. This quality area focuses on a positive organisational culture and a commitment to continuous improvement.

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**Perspectives on learning**

- Children are active contributors from birth to their own experiences, interactions, learning and development (concept of agency).
- Every child’s learning and development trajectory is somewhat unique. Although there are some commonalities, each child will progress and show evidence of their learning and development in different ways.
- Although there is an age range during which most children acquire particular skills, and knowledge, learning and development do not always progress in a linear and smooth way. There will be bursts, stops and starts, and perhaps even backwards steps.
- Learning is integrated and complex. It is important to view children’s learning and development holistically. Any specific example of learning and development is likely to fit a number of categories. This is illustrated by the repetition of some items in the information that follows.
  - Children become increasingly able to transfer and adapt learning and knowledge from one context to another. They generalise from one situation to another and try out strategies that have been effective in the past in new contexts.
- All learning is influenced not only by children’s past experiences, but also by:
  - temperament, abilities, health status, dispositions and learning preferences
  - educators’ practice
  - the physical environment in the early learning setting
  - the curriculum
  - family
  - community
  - culture
• Evidence of learning in all areas includes ‘children applying their understandings in a range of contexts and developing dispositions to sustain, expand and deepen their enjoyment in learning and relationships, their capabilities and their ways of learning’ (EYLF Educators’ Guide, p.43).

**Social and emotional learning**

• **As is true of all learning, social and emotional learning in the early years is important in part because there are future payoffs** – that is, early learning lays the foundation for later learning. Social and emotional learning also benefits children in the here and now. In other words, learning affects children’s ‘being’ as well as their ‘becoming’.

• **Social and emotional learning occurs from birth.** Children are social beings when they are born. They have a preference for social interaction and the capacity to experience and express emotions.

• **Social and emotional learning occurs through interactions, relationships and everyday experiences with others** – it contributes to and is affected by children’s *belonging* (as well as their *being* and *becoming*). Particularly important are the interactions and conversations children have with trusted adults with whom they have secure positive attachment relationships.

• **Early experiences shape the architecture of the developing brain and provide the foundation for mental health.** The definition of early childhood mental health above highlights the connection between mental health and wellbeing and healthy physical, cognitive, social and emotional development.

• **Experiences that support mental health, including positive relationships are important to ensure good mental health now and in the future.** This provides an essential foundation that supports all other aspects of development—from the ability to develop friendships and build resilience to cope with adversity to success in school, work, and community life.
Section 2: Evidence of social and emotional learning

About this document

The following section provides information about the development of a sense of self and social and emotional skills in the first five years and the evidence you might see of this development. This is discussed in relation to the Learning Outcomes identified in the Early Years Learning Framework.

For information about the typical pattern of social and emotional development for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, you can refer to *KidsMatter Early Childhood: A framework for improving children’s mental health and wellbeing* pages 34-37.

It is important to note that some of the examples provided are behaviours that are present from birth and that manifest themselves in different ways as children get older, while others emerge during the early years. In other words, all evidence of social and emotional learning is either present at birth, begins in infancy or has precursors in infancy.

Some of the examples of evidence are included under a number of headings; this is done intentionally and demonstrates the inter-connectedness of different categories of learning.

Keep in mind

Items in the lists that follow could have been placed under different headings. As you work through the information, choose items from the list and discuss the rationale for their placement under a particular Learning Outcome. In other words, why might they have been placed there? Where else might they fit?

In your practice, look for specific examples of some of the items that follow. The question ‘What evidence do you see as you work with children?’ could follow every point listed. The purpose of providing the information is to encourage you to look for evidence, recognise it, appreciate its significance and use your understanding to support further learning.

Do you agree with where the item has been placed? Reflect and discuss with colleagues why this item is evidence of learning in that Outcome area? If you don’t think it fits, discuss why.

The evidence of children’s learning listed in the resource is not exhaustive. You will see and hear additional examples. What would you add?

Sense of self: Children’s developing sense of identity

In the early years, children develop a sense of identity or sense of self, which is the basis for identity throughout life. A positive sense of self, captured in part in the concept of *being* in the EYLF, is crucial as a foundation for effective learning in all areas. Social and
emotional learning and development affect and are affected by the sense of self that children bring to their learning opportunities.

Developing a positive sense of self includes:
- being able to recognise one’s own thoughts, desires and feelings
- feeling positive about oneself and one’s abilities and capacity to make a constructive contribution
- becoming increasingly independent
- being curious and motivated to solve problems
- seeing oneself as a ‘doer’ with self-initiated goals.

The information that follows demonstrates the strong links between a sense of self as discussed in the KidsMatter Early Childhood literature and the Learning Outcomes in the EYLF.

Examples of evidence of sense of self and EYLF Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Children will increasingly be able to demonstrate:
- self awareness, recognition that they are separate individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, wants and goals
- awareness of belonging to culture, family and community
- confidence in new situations, with new people and in new environments
- ability to make judgments about themselves
- capacity to feel pride and shame
- sensitivity to how others see them
- independence and autonomy, including physical separateness that is possible with mobility
- self control
- capacity to wait
- making choices without being overwhelmed
- persistence when faced with challenges
- balancing independence and interdependence
- knowing when and how to seek help
- willingness to take considered risks and cope with the unexpected
- skills and motivation to explore different identities in play
- capacity to share aspects of their culture and family lives with others.

What would you add?
Examples of evidence of sense of self and EYLF Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Children will increasingly be able to demonstrate:
- reaching out for company and friendship
- thinking critically about what is fair and unfair
- contributing to fair decision-making about matters that affect them and others.

Examples of evidence of sense of self and EYLF Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

Children will increasingly be able to demonstrate:
- autonomy and independence
- self control
- skills in communicating needs and feelings both verbally and in other ways
- tendency to seek out and accept new challenges
- perseverance when faced with challenges
- variety of ways to self-soothe effectively
- capacity to seek out and enjoy moments of solitude
- resilience — ability to deal constructively with setbacks and frustrations
- ability to make choices
- flexibility and capacity to cope with change
- acknowledgement and acceptance of affirmation from others
- recognition of their contributions to shared projects and experiences
- recognition of and ability to communicate bodily needs
- ability to address their own bodily needs independently (less reliance on adults)
- capacity to wait
- use of a variety of skills, capabilities and dispositions to explore the world
- awareness of healthy lifestyles and good nutrition and skills to put this awareness into practice in the choices they make
- independence and competence in personal hygiene, care and safety for themselves and others — for example hand washing, noticing safety hazards and communicating them to others
- a range of skills to participate in physical play.
Examples of evidence of sense of self and EYLF Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Children will increasingly be able to demonstrate:

- abstract thinking (babies and toddlers concrete thinkers, three-to-five year olds are beginning to use abstract thinking)
- remembering the past and using those recollections to inform learning in the present
- anticipating and taking account of the future (implications or consequences of behaviour)
- confidence and skills to explore, experiment and try out new ideas
- variety of skills and strategies to solve conflicts and problems
- identifying and extending their interests with enthusiasm, energy and concentration
- initiating and contributing to play experiences emerging from their own ideas
- persisting when faced with challenges
- recognising and showing satisfaction in persevering and achieving
- using different thinking strategies to engage with situations and solve problems
- thinking reflectively to consider why things happen and what can be learned from experiences
- taking responsibility for their learning
- taking responsibility for regulating their emotions and behaviour
- contributing in a positive way to the social environment
- concentrating deeply and focusing on what interests them
- having preferred learning styles
- making responsible decisions
- planning ahead and organising or being organised.

What would you add?
Examples of evidence of sense of self and EYLF Learning Outcome 5: Children are confident communicators

The ability to communicate using language -- both understanding and using it -- enables children to express what has been learned (that is, it reflects that learning) as well as contributes to new learning.

**Children will increasingly be able to demonstrate:**
- using their knowledge, understanding and skills to convey meaning in at least one language
- communicating effectively non-verbally in a variety of ways
- using language effectively to communicate feelings, assert selves, negotiate with others and resolve conflicts
- sharing stories and symbols of their culture
- [if they have had the opportunity to learn a second language] communicating in more than one language and shifting appropriately from one language to another
- a variety of creative arts skills to express ideas and make meaning.

What follows are some examples of evidence of social skills that relate to each of the five EYLF Learning Outcomes.

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

Social skills reflect children’s developing capacity to interact successfully with others. Social skills include;
- capacity to experience 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
- capacity to widen their social network and form friendships based on developing preferences
- beginning to be able to negotiate solutions to conflicts
- using words to describe their feelings
- listening to others and taking their perspectives into account

**Examples of social skills and EYLF Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity**

**Children will increasingly be able to:**
- be appropriately assertive
- identify their rights, others’ rights and their obligations to others, and act accordingly
- recognise their achievements and those of others
- be aware of and sensitive to how others see them
- celebrate and share their contributions and achievements with others in a variety of ways
• share aspects of their culture and family lives with others.

What would you add?

Examples of social skills and EYLF Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

**Children will increasingly be able to:**

- initiate interactions with others, both children and adults
- interact with others in a variety of ways
- engage in more complex social interactions
- initiate and maintain conversations using language
- ‘read’ situations and others’ feelings and behaviour and adjust their own behaviour accordingly
- ‘read’ non-verbal communication (for example, facial expressions and body language)
- be increasingly aware of the needs and rights of others
- play with other children in more sustained and complex ways
- have a greater number of friendships and more sustained friendships
- look to others for clues about how to behave and respond
- resolve conflicts constructively and use words to do so
- co-operate, negotiate roles and relationships and work collaboratively with others
- assist other children to participate in social groups
- show awareness that others may think and feel differently to themselves and may see situations differently
- help and comfort others, show empathy and concern
- share and take turns
- use a variety of strategies to join in groups or others’ play effectively
- be more effective at both leading and following
- demonstrate greater awareness of connections, similarities and difference between people
- display respect for diversity – that is, begin to appreciate that diversity presents opportunities for choices and new understandings
- show respect for different ways of being and doing
- recognise unfairness and bias and act with compassion and kindness
- show awareness of the variety of ways that people are included or excluded from physical and social environments
- reflect on actions and consider consequences for others
- listen actively.

### What would you add?

**Examples of social skills and EYLF Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**

**Children will increasingly be able to:**
- seek help in a variety of ways
- recognise and celebrate own and others’ efforts and achievements.

### What would you add?

**Examples of social skills and EYLF Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners**

**Children will increasingly be able to:**
- mirror others’ behaviour – that is, repeat and practise the actions of others, either immediately or later
- experience the benefits and pleasures of shared learning experiences
- use feedback from themselves and others to further their learning
- challenge and extend their own thinking and that of others
- create new knowledge in collaborative interactions and negotiations
- be aware of when they need help and use an increasing number of ways to seek help
- learn through imitation and modelling
- understand that others may think and feel differently to themselves and see situations differently – for example, older pre-school-aged children can compare different perspectives
teach others using an increasing variety of strategies.

What would you add?

Examples of social skills and EYLF Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

Children will increasingly be able to:
- communicate in a variety of ways
- interact with others to explore ideas and concepts, clarify and challenge thinking, negotiate and share new understandings
- engage in more sustained and complex interactions using verbal and non-verbal communication
- convey and construct messages with purpose and confidence, building on home/family and community literacies
- exchange ideas, feelings and understandings using language and representations in play and in other interactions and conversations
- use language and representations from play, music and art to share and project meaning
- contribute ideas and experiences in play and in small-group and large-group discussions
- begin to see patterns in their feelings, ideas, words and actions and those of others and make connections
- initiate conversations and move between Standard Australian English and home language as needed
- express ideas and feelings and understand and respect the perspectives of others
- respond appropriately to emotions expressed by others
- give culturally appropriate cues that they are listening to and understanding what is said to them.

What would you add?
Emotional skills: Children’s developing capacity to recognise, express and regulate feelings

Emotional skills refers to children’s developing capacity to recognise and regulate feelings. Emotional skills include:

- developing the ability to express and understand their feelings
- moving from needing support from others to regulate emotions to regulating their feelings and behaviour more independently, including being able to manage negative feelings such as anxiety, sadness and frustration
- learning that others have feelings too
- developing their ability to recognised and label others’ feelings and responding accordingly

Examples of emotional skills and EYLF Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

Children will increasingly be able to:

- regulate their emotions and calm themselves
- identify their feelings and express them appropriately
- communicate needs and feelings, both verbally and in other ways
- experience a wider range of feelings (such as jealousy and embarrassment)
- display more complex emotions
- use emotions intentionally.

Examples of emotional skills and Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Children will increasingly be able to:

- use trusted adults for comfort and security
- act on their emotions appropriately
- be aware that others may not feel the same way they do
- engage in emotional interactions and communications with others
• show awareness of more complex emotions of others
• respond to emotions expressed by others.

Examples of emotional skills and Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

Children will increasingly be able to:
• identify, describe and experience an increasing range of emotions
• regulate and control emotions
• express emotions appropriately
• use make-believe to explore and organise ideas about emotions, such as excitement or competitiveness
• be emotionally independent
• share humour, happiness and satisfaction
• cope with frustrations
• be flexible, cope with the unexpected
• identify feelings and express appropriately
• show pleasure in a variety of ways
• use sophisticated ways to comfort themselves.

Examples of emotional skills and Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

Children will increasingly be able to:
• demonstrate dispositions for learning (for example, curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination, reflexivity)
• cope effectively with frustration and overcome obstacles constructively
• react to failure in constructive ways to support future achievement
• assess their own abilities and learning realistically.

What would you add?

Examples of emotional skills and Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

Children will increasingly be able to:
• use words to express feelings, both positive and negative
• be intrinsically motivated to exchange ideas, thoughts, questions and feelings
• use a range of tools and media, including music, dance and drama, to express themselves, connect with others and extend their learning
• communicate needs and feelings constructively, both verbally and in other ways (including through visual arts, dance, creative movement and drama.

What would you add?

Conclusion

Hopefully using the information in this resource reminds you of the breadth of social and emotional learning in the early years and the inter-relatedness of these two areas of learning and learning about self. Perhaps you are now more aware of evidence of learning in these areas and better equipped to recognise and support it.

So much of what children do and say is related to social and emotional learning and development. We need to look and listen attentively and think deeply about what children are telling us in their behaviour and communication about their social and emotional learning and development.
Reflection

• As you work with children over an extended period, look for at least one example of each item. You could choose one for your team to look for examples of.
• What new learning has happened for you through using this resource? Has its use increased your awareness of children’s social and emotional learning?
• If so, how?
• How will you use this information to support your practice with children?
References


This resource is part of the KidsMatter Early Childhood Initiative. The KidsMatter team welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au