Module 3
Relationships and children’s mental health

What will participants learn from this module?
When you have completed this module, participants will:
▪ understand how educator-child relationships affect children’s social and emotional learning and mental health, now and in the future
▪ develop a shared understanding of warm, responsive and respectful relationships and what these look like with young children.

Preparation for this session
You will need:
▪ Component 2: Professional Learning Participant Workbook
▪ Video 3.1: Why relationships are important to children’s mental health
▪ Video 3.2: Relationships in action
▪ Video 3.3: What positive relationships can look like in practice

Connections to the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standard
Relationships are the foundation for educators’ practice, as described in the EYLF. Children’s sense of belonging builds from their relationships. “Experiencing belonging – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence” (EYLF, p.7).
Principle 1: Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships highlights the critical importance of educators building strong, positive relationships with children in order to support their sense of wellbeing and their learning.
In the NQS, Quality Area 5 focuses on educators’ relationships with children and how educators can support children to build and maintain relationships with other children and adults.
Suggestions for how to run this module

1. Talk about ‘Making a difference’ in Module 2

   This was a reflective question:
   Think of a child you consider to be mentally healthy. What evidence of this do you see in their social and emotional learning and development?
   As a group, discuss the evidence that you each thought of, and how this may influence your practice from now on.

2. Introduce the module to the group

   Module 3 focuses on why positive relationships are important for children’s mental health and wellbeing and what they look like in action in an ECEC service.
   Content includes:
   - a video that explains why relationships are so important to children’s mental health
   - an activity that will help your team to start thinking about what positive relationships between educators and children actually look like at your ECEC service
   - an activity where your team will watch and reflect on some footage of a child interacting with an educator
   - a video about the characteristics of positive educator-child relationships
   - an activity where your team will set some personal and group goals around building positive relationships with children at your ECEC service.

3. Video 3.1: Why relationships are important to children’s mental health

   Time: 5 mins 19 secs

   This video covers:
   - an explanation of mental health in early childhood
   - how positive relationships form the foundation for young children’s social and emotional learning and development, now and in the future
   - how positive relationships support mental health and wellbeing in early childhood.

   Tip for watching this video
   - There is space for participants to make notes about the video in the Participant Workbook on page 27.
4 Activity: What do positive relationships look like between children and educators?

This aim of this activity is to have participants identify characteristics of positive relationships and how these apply to their relationships with children.

Instructions

Ask participants to work through the following questions in pairs or small groups:

1. Think of a positive relationship you have (for example, partner or spouse, sibling, friend or parent). What are the characteristics of that relationship?

2. Which of these characteristics apply to the relationships you have with the children in your care and which ones don’t? Of those that don’t apply, why don’t they apply in this case?

3. Which characteristics are easier to achieve in your relationship with children and which are more difficult? How do you understand these differences?

Tips for this activity

- If groups need some help compiling a list of characteristics, they may find it useful to look at KidsMatter Early Childhood: A framework for improving mental health and wellbeing, p.40-43.

- Remind participants that the relationship they share with each child is unique.

- Groups might also find it useful to think about the relationship from this perspective: “What makes the relationship positive? What do we do or say that makes it satisfying for both of us?”

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 28.

- This activity links with the next video, where the group will watch a positive relationship in action and work through a set of questions.
5  Video 3.2 and Activity: 
Relationships in action

Time: 3 mins 3 secs

This aim of this activity is for participants to reflect on what positive relationships with children actually look like in everyday practice.

This video covers:
- a child who is upset being comforted by an educator
- how a strong relationship with an educator can support children at times when they are upset, challenged or provoked.

Instructions

There are several options for the reflection aspect of this activity:

Option 1
A whole-team activity where everyone reflects on all of the questions and discusses them as a group.

Option 2
In small groups where smaller groups reflect on all of the questions and discuss them as a big group.

Option 3
In small groups where each group is responsible for two or three questions and reports back to the large group.

Questions

- What did you see?
- What does the educator do to support the child during this interaction? Think about physical, verbal and non-verbal actions.
- What do you think this experience might have been like for the child?
- How does this experience, and the educator’s response, support the child’s social and emotional learning and development?
- How did the educator support the children’s sense of agency?

Optional extended questions

Below are extra questions to extend the conversation. Participants can also use these questions to reflect further after the activity.

- What is the educator doing to establish or strengthen the relationship?
5 Video 3.2 and Activity: Relationships in action (continued)

- Do you think the educator was consistent and predictable when interacting with the child? If so, what approaches did she use?
- What did the educator do to anticipate and respond to the child’s communication, needs and interests?
- How did the educator make herself emotionally and physically available to the child?
- What did the child bring to this interaction?
- Did you see moments where the educator was in tune with the child’s emotions?
- Do you think the children’s and educator’s experience of this interaction was similar?
- Did you see any moments where a different response from the educator would have strengthened the interaction?

Tips for this activity

- If possible, try to connect the characteristics observed in this video with the characteristics of positive relationships the team identified in the previous activity.
- This activity extends the discussion of characteristics of positive relationships. Participants might like to add to their list from the previous activity.
- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on pages 29-30.

6 Video 3.3: What positive relationships can look like in practice

Time: 4 mins 11 secs

This video covers:

- what positive educator-child relationships look like in everyday practice in terms of how children and educators interact, communicate and respond to each other.

Tips for watching this video

- There is space for participants to make notes about the video in the Participant Workbook on page 31.
- This video links to the next activity, which focuses on applying an understanding of relationships with children to educators’ own practice.
7 Activity: Moving forward

This aim of this activity is to have participants set some short- and long-term goals for supporting the development of positive relationships with children.

This module has focused on the importance of positive relationships for children’s social and emotional learning and development, and their mental health and wellbeing. How positive relationships look in practice has also been explored. This activity involves your team applying these ideas to practice, through setting personal and group goals related to relationship formation with children and their families.

Instructions

- Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
  - What is one thing that I could do to support the development of positive relationships with children over the next week?
  - What is one thing that I could do to support the development of positive relationships with children over the next 12 months?

- Ask participants to answer the following questions as a large group or in smaller groups if there are a lot of people:
  - What is one thing that you could do as a service to support the development of positive relationships with children over the next week?
  - What is one thing that you could do as a service to support the development of positive relationships with children over the next 12 months?

Tip for this activity

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 32.
8  Introduce and discuss reflections

Reflecting on new content is a good way to wrap up each module and summarise what has been covered. The following questions can support reflection, although you may wish to add your own to suit your team. Reflective questions can be considered during the module, at the end of the module or at a separate time. Reflective questions can be completed individually, in pairs or as a group.

More information on using reflective questions can be found at the start of this manual on page 5.

- What approaches do you currently use to build positive relationships with children?
- Think about a colleague you feel has developed positive relationships with children in their care. What do these relationships look like?
- Think about a child you have strong relationship with. What words best describe this relationship? Why is this relationship so strong?
- Think about a child with whom you don’t have such a strong connection. Why do you think you don’t have a strong relationship with that child? What would help you to build a stronger, more positive relationship with them?

Tip for this reflection

- Reflective questions are in the Participant Workbook on page 33

9  Making a difference

This section provides an opportunity for participants to connect learning from this module with their daily practice outside of the Professional Learning. Participants are asked to engage with the content between modules through reflection, observation or action. There will be an opportunity to discuss experiences at the start of the following module.

More information can be found at the beginning of this manual on page 6.

Ask participants to notice a more challenging interaction they’ve had with a child (e.g., they had to stop or redirect a child).
9 Making a difference (continued)

Participants can use the following questions to guide their reflection:

- What happened in this interaction that may have strengthened your relationship with that child?
- What made those interactions significant to you as an educator?
- How did the relationship you have with the child influence the way you responded in that particular moment?
- Working with a colleague, observe an interaction and identify the aspects that support the development or maintenance of a warm, positive relationship.

Invite participants to share their thoughts at the next Professional Learning session if they feel comfortable.

Tip

- There is space for participants to record reflections in the Participant Workbook on page 34.

10 Note the readings in You might also be interested in...


11 Planning your next Professional Learning module

Module 4: Relationships as a foundation for social and emotional learning is scheduled for:

Date:
Time:
Venue:
Plan for Module 3: Relationships as a foundation for social and emotional learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Time allocated</th>
<th>Covered</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of Module 2 ‘Making a difference’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to the module</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Reflections</td>
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Content from previous session to come back to

Total time