Module 5
Curriculum decisions and social and emotional learning

What will participants learn from this module?

When you have completed this module, participants will:

- have an understanding of the curriculum decisions that have an impact on children’s social and emotional learning
- reflect on the features of an ECEC service that support children’s social and emotional learning.

Connections to the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standard

The Principles and Practices in the EYLF outline the important considerations that educators make in planning and implementing the program for children. The focus is always on supporting children’s learning in the five Learning Outcome areas. The EYLF defines curriculum very broadly as encompassing the child’s whole experience: “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, Early Years Learning Framework p.45). This inclusive definition means that decisions about all aspects of the child’s experience need to take account of opportunities for social and emotional learning.

The NQS encourages educators to think about all of the curriculum decision that are made individually or at the service level in terms of the impact on children’s learning and development. In outlining critical elements in program planning and implementation, Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice acknowledges implicitly the importance of considering social and emotional learning opportunities that support children’s progress in the Learning Outcome areas. Quality Area 2: Health and Safety sets out obligations that ensure that children have a sense of safety and that there is attention to their physical wellbeing. Quality Area 3: Physical Environment includes environmental considerations that promote desirable social and emotional learning. Quality Area 4: Staffing Arrangements has implications for educator-child relationships and social and emotional learning. Quality Area 5: Relationships with Children prioritises relationships with children and Quality Area 6: Partnerships with Families and Communities prioritises relationships with families and communities, which have direct implications for children’s social and emotional learning.

Preparation for this session

You will need:

- Component 2: Professional Learning Participant Workbook
- Video 5.1: Impact of curriculum decisions on children’s social and emotional learning
- Butcher’s paper
- Markers
- Relevant service policy documentation for reference
- Participant Feedback Forms (available on the KidsMatter website)
Suggestions for how to run this module

1 Talk about ‘Making a difference’ in Module 4

This prompted participants to notice how the relationship they share with a child allows them to intentionally support their social and emotional learning.

Discuss the following as a group:
- What kind of examples did you write down that describe times when you feel able to intentionally support a child’s learning through your relationship with them?
- If there is a child who is new to the group or who you don’t know very well, how does that affect your capacity to support that child’s learning?

2 Introduce the module to the group

This module focuses on how educators’ curriculum decisions influence children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Content includes:
- a video that outlines the variety of ways curriculum decisions can impact on children’s opportunities for social and emotional learning
- a discussion about how educators can enhance children’s social and emotional learning through the decisions they make
- reflections about how some of the ideas covered in this module might apply to participants’ day-to-day practice.
Video 5.1: Impact of curriculum decisions on children’s social and emotional learning

Time: 7 mins 17 secs

This video covers:

- Educators have many opportunities throughout the day to support children’s social and emotional learning.
- These opportunities can be incidental or planned.
- Policies and practices at the service level also have an effect on children’s social and emotional learning.
- Curriculum in an early childhood setting means: “All the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in the environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (adapted from Te Whariki, Early Years Learning Framework, p.9).

Tips for watching this video

- As your team is watching the video ask them to reflect on some of the comments made. What stood out? Is there anything new that they haven’t thought of before?
- Keep in mind that curriculum decisions might impact on children’s social and emotional learning either directly or indirectly.
- There are many opportunities throughout the day that educators can use to support children’s learning and development. As well as capitalising on incidental opportunities to support social and emotional wellbeing, educators can plan to provide appropriate learning opportunities.
- Be aware of how existing policies in your service may impact on children’s social and emotional learning.
- There is space for participants to make any notes about the video in the Participant Workbook on page 47.
Activity: The decisions we make: how curriculum decisions influence children’s social and emotional learning

The aim of this activity is to explore the key areas of curriculum that can have an impact on children’s social and emotional learning experiences.

Instructions

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

1. Choose the curriculum areas you would like to focus on from the list below:
   a) Partnerships with families
   b) Structuring the day
   c) The physical environment (indoors and outdoors)
   d) Routines
   e) Planned learning experiences
   f) Policies

2. For each area of the curriculum you choose to explore, divide one sheet of butcher’s paper into two columns with the following questions as headings:
   ▪ How do decisions we make in this area impact on children’s social and emotional learning opportunities?
   ▪ How can we modify decisions in this area to enhance children’s social and emotional learning opportunities?

3. There are several options for this activity, depending on the size, priorities and preferences of your team.

Option 1: Working individually
Set up six stations with butcher’s paper representing each of the curriculum areas. Invite participants to write two ideas (one for each column) for each of the curriculum areas on a sticky note and place it on the butcher’s paper in each of the relevant stations.

Option 2: Working in small groups
Split the team into smaller groups and have each discuss one or two of the curriculum areas, recording ideas for each column on butcher’s paper.

Option 3: Working as a whole team
Working as whole team, choose the curriculum areas of particular interest to your service and list ideas on butcher’s paper.
4 Activity: The decisions we make: how curriculum decisions influence children's social and emotional learning (continued)

The following prompts and questions can help guide the activity if participants need inspiration or more information.

**a) Partnerships with families**

Consider:
- welcoming procedures, enrolment, flexible and responsive orientation
- families feel that they belong at the ECEC service
- open communication with families
- opportunities for families to share information about their children
- families can contribute to decision making
- families feel connected to the service
- relationships between educators, children and families form the foundation of children's social and emotional learning.

Prompt questions:
- What processes support developing relationships with families?
- How do we strengthen existing relationships with children?
- Can we tweak some of the ways we do things to develop stronger partnerships with our families?

**b) Structuring the day**

Consider:
- staffing arrangements (rosters, part time/full time staff)
- opportunities for children to chose to play alone and in small or larger groups
- building in one-to-one time
- small group opportunities
- provisions for long periods of uninterrupted play
- flexibility
- opportunities for children to make choices about things that affect them
c) **The physical environment** (indoors and outdoors)

Consider:
- how the arrangement of environment provides opportunities for children’s social and emotional learning
- how the environment reflects the families and lives of the children attending the service
- providing soft, comfortable and quiet areas
- spaces for children to be safely on their own or with one other child
- areas that allow for different noise levels
- use of the outdoor environment
- aesthetics
- the level of stimulation, ‘busyness’
- spaces for families and for children of different ages.

Prompt questions:
- How does the way we arrange the physical environment impact on children’s social and emotional learning?
- In what ways could we enhance our environment to support children’s social and emotional learning?

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d) **Routines**

Consider:
- arrivals and departures
- rest and sleep
- meal and snack times
- toileting and nappy changing
- transition periods.

Prompt questions:
- What social and emotional learning opportunities do routine experiences, such as lunchtime, offer children in your service?
- How do you balance the routines and predictability children need with flexibility within the curriculum to support and extend children’s learning?
- What changes would improve or increase the learning opportunities?

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e) **Planned learning experiences**

Consider:
- books and stories
- dramatic play
- soothing sensory play
- involving children in setting limits
- respect for diversity and difference.

Prompt questions:
- Why do we offer particular learning experiences to children?
- What’s the purpose of providing them?
- How do they support children’s social and emotional learning?
f) Policies

Service policies underpin curriculum decisions made by the service and educators, and can support children's social and emotional wellbeing.

Important documents might include:

- service Statement of Philosophy
- code of conduct for staff members
- service policies, including policies related to health and wellbeing, enrolment and orientation, communication with families, governance and management of the service and environment
- policy decisions regarding staffing arrangements and rosters, and professional development
- policy decisions regarding how children move from one room to the next, family grouping and meal time arrangements
- service guides and handbooks for staff, educators and families.

Prompt questions:

- How does your service Statement of Philosophy reflect the development of children’s social and emotional wellbeing?
- How do policies in your service impact on your practice and on children’s social and emotional learning?
- Are there service level decisions that impact on your ability to support children’s social and emotional development? (e.g., a decision regarding opportunities to access the outdoor environment influences children’s range of experiences).

4 Debrief: Groups that chose Option 1 or 2 may come together as a whole group to discuss the areas that are most relevant, interesting or pertinent to them. Some questions that may guide the discussion are:

- How do the decisions in these areas impact on children’s social and emotional learning?
- Are there any areas that stand out for our service?
- How could we go about implementing some of these ideas in our service?
- With the areas that are more challenging in mind, how can we make the best of the opportunities and resources we have?

Tips for this activity

- Regardless of which option you choose for the activity, it is useful to remind your team of the six key areas of the curriculum and to establish a shared understanding of how practice in each of these can influence children's social and emotional learning.
- Leadership Teams may want to take the ideas from the discussion for further review at KidsMatter planning meetings. It is likely that there won’t be enough time to fully plan and make decisions about implementing these ideas during the session. You may also place the butcher’s paper in a shared area, such as a staff room, so educators can continue to contribute.
- You may need to redirect the discussion at times so it is more positive and focuses on what you do well as a service to support children’s social and emotional learning and suggestions to overcome any challenges.
- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on pages 48-49. Participants may wish to transfer key points from butcher’s paper into the Participant Workbook for their own records.
5 Activity: Moving forward

This aim of this activity is to have participants set some short- and long-terms goals to support children’s social and emotional learning through curriculum decisions.

Instructions

1. Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
   - What is one thing that I could do to support children’s social and emotional learning through the curriculum decisions I make over the next week?
   - What is one thing that I could do to support children’s social and emotional learning through the curriculum decisions I make over the next 12 months?

2. Ask participants to answer the following questions as a whole 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 children’s social and emotional learning through the curriculum decisions you make over the next week?
   - What is one thing that you could do as a service to support children’s social and emotional learning through the curriculum decisions you make over the next 12 months?

Tip for this activity

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 50.

6 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 social and emotional learning opportunities does a routine experience, such as lunchtime, offer children in your service? What changes would improve or increase the learning opportunities?
6 Introduce and discuss reflections (continued)

- Consider a recent planned experience you provided for children at your service. What was the intention and purpose you had in mind? What do you think they learned about themselves, their relationships and how others see them?

- Consider an experience that occurred more spontaneously or where a planned experience changed in response to children’s initiative. What opportunities did this present for social and emotional learning?

Tip for this reflection

- Reflective questions are in the Participant Workbook on page 51.

7 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.

Participants are encouraged to explore a change that will have an impact on children’s mental health and wellbeing at the service.

- Decide on one change that you would like to make in the curriculum areas discussed during this module. (Try and think of something that won’t be too difficult to implement).

- What are your aims in making the change?

- Can you make this change individually? If not, who will you need to consult? (e.g., educators in your room, Director, Educational Leader, families, children).

- What will be the first step in making the change?

- How might this change influence children’s mental health and wellbeing?

Tip

- There is space for participants to record reflections in the Participant Workbook on page 52.
8 Note the readings in You might also be interested in…


9 Distribute Participant Feedback Forms for completion

These can be downloaded from the KidsMatter website. Completed forms should be forwarded to your Facilitator.

10 Planning your next Professional Learning module

Module 6: Putting it all together is scheduled for:

Date:

Time:

Venue:
Plan for Module 5: Curriculum decisions for social and emotional learning

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Content from previous session to come back to

Total time