Professional learning: Creating a sense of community

Topic 1: A community that promotes mental health

Leadership team guide
Acknowledgement:

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A community that promotes mental health

What will participants learn from this topic?

When you have completed this topic, participants will:

- have a common understanding of the importance of mental health in early childhood
- further understand the contribution of early childhood services in promoting good mental health in early childhood
- develop an understanding of risk and protective factors and their influence on children’s mental health
- further understand the role of an early childhood service in creating a sense of community
- understand how a positive sense of community benefits the mental health and wellbeing of children, educators, and families.

Preparation for this session

Resources

- Component 1 Topic 1: Professional Learning Participant Workbook
- Whiteboard or butcher’s paper
- Video 1.1: What is mental health?
- Video 1.2: Risk and protective factors
- Video 1.3: A community that promotes mental health
Suggestions for how to run this topic

1 Introduce the topic to the group

Topic 1 focuses on understanding early childhood mental health, how early childhood services can promote mental health and wellbeing, and the importance of building a positive sense of community to support children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Content includes:

- an introductory reflection for participants to think about mental health
- a discussion and video about understanding mental health in early childhood
- a discussion and video about risk and protective factors in early childhood
- a video that explores the benefits of a sense of community for children’s mental health and how services can promote a positive sense of community
- a discussion and activity for participants to explore the factors that influence a sense of community at their service.
2 Reflection: Thinking about mental health

The aim of this reflection is for participants to start thinking about how they define mental health and to stimulate discussion about mental health.

Instructions

- Ask participants to spend one minute writing on their Participant Workbook on page 2 any words or associations that come to mind when they think of mental health. Encourage them to write freely, without filtering their thoughts too much.
- Return to the whole group, and ask volunteers to share what they’ve written. Write responses on a whiteboard or butcher’s paper.
- Play Video 1.1

Tips for this reflection

- There is space for participants to make notes about this video in their Participant Workbook on page 3.
- Ensure participants only share information if they feel comfortable doing so. Remind participants about the self-care information available under the professional learning resources for each Component on the website.

3 Video 1.1: What is mental health?

The video covers:

- definitions of mental health and mental health in early childhood
- the importance of creating a service culture where mental health is part of the everyday language and work at the service.

Tips for watching this video

- There is space for participants to make notes about this video in their Participant Workbook on page 3.
- Following this video, participants will discuss what the video has added to their understanding of mental health.
Discussion: What is mental health?

The aim of this discussion is for participants to develop a shared understanding of mental health.

Instructions
- Following Video 1.1, facilitate a whole group discussion with participants.
- Compared to what was written on the whiteboard/butcher’s paper, ask:
  - What stood out to you in this video?
  - What do these perspectives add to your understanding of mental health?
- Suggested follow up questions as appropriate:
  - Did we tend to focus on the negative side of mental health or the positive side?
  - Why might that be?
  - Is having good mental health about always being happy? Why? Why not?
  - How important are the relationships we have with other people to our mental health?

Tips for this discussion
- There is space for participants to make notes about the discussion on page 4 of their Participant Workbook.
- Mental health is complex and developing a shared understanding as a whole group may take time. This discussion is a starting point for an ongoing conversation across the early childhood community.
5 Video 1.2: Risk and protective factors

The video covers:
- definitions and examples of risk and protective factors in early childhood
- how risk and protective factors interact and influence children’s mental health.

Tips for watching this video
- There is space for participants to make notes about the video on page 5 of their Participant Workbook.
- Participants may like to refer to the ‘Risk and protective factors’ diagram on page 6 of their Participant Workbook during the video.

6 Activity: Risk and protective factors

The aim of this activity is for participants to identify potential risk and protective factors, think about how these influence a child’s mental health and wellbeing, and to reflect on what they can do to build and strengthen protective factors.

Instructions
1. Ask participants to read the vignette about Nakita on page 7 of their Participant Workbook.
2. Ask participants to work through the questions on page 7–9 of their Participant Workbook about the risk and protective factors in Nakita’s life and discuss as a group.

Tips for this discussion
- There is space for participants to make notes about the discussion on page 7–9 of their Participant Workbook.
- Highlight to participants that there are no right or wrong answers and that the factors in the scenario can be interpreted in many ways.
7 Video 1.3: A community that promotes mental health

The video covers:
- the meaning of the term ‘community’ in relation to early childhood services
- how creating a sense of community promotes children’s mental health and wellbeing
- how everyday relationships at the early childhood service help create a sense of community.

Tips for watching this video
- There is space for participants to make notes about the video on page 10 of their Participant Workbook.

8 Discussion and activity: Our sense of community

Instructions
Facilitate a discussion using the following discussion points:
- Introduce the idea that every early childhood service has a ‘feel’, and it is something that members of the service community and visitors pick up on.
- Ask participants to think about the positive early childhood service communities they’ve worked in or visited, and how being at that service made them feel.
- Then invite participants to think about what things were happening in these positive service communities that helped create that feeling – for example, how visitors were greeted, welcoming signage out the front of the service, a particular quality in the interactions between educators and children.

The aim of this discussion and activity is for participants to begin thinking about the makeup of their early childhood service community and to explore the factors that influence a sense of community at their service.
9 **Activity: Moving forward**

The aim of this activity is for participants to set some short and long-term goals for promoting mental health and a positive sense of community at their service.

- Participants then read through the list of ‘Factors which enhance a positive sense of community’ on page 12 of their *Participant Workbook* and circle the two most significant factors that they feel will enhance a positive sense of community and promote mental health at their service.

- Discuss in larger group.

**Tips for this discussion**

- There is space for participants to make notes about the discussion points on page 11 of their *Participant Workbook*.

- Highlight that small things often have a powerful impact on the feeling people get from being in a service. KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 1 is about becoming consciously aware of the elements that contribute to the feel and positive sense of community at an early childhood service.

**Instructions**

- Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
  
  » What is one thing I could do to promote mental health in early childhood over the next week?

  » What is one thing I could do to promote mental health in early childhood 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 you could do as a service to promote mental health in early childhood over the next week?

  » What is one thing you could do as a service to promote mental health in early childhood over the next 12 months?
Reflecting on new content is a good way to wrap up each topic and summarise what has been covered. The following questions can support reflection, although you may wish to add your own questions to suit your team. Reflective questions can be considered during the topic, at the end of the topic or at a separate time. Reflective questions can be completed individually, in pairs or as a group.

10 Reflective questions

There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 13.

- Consider an experience you have provided to a child recently. How did this experience contribute to the mental health and wellbeing of the child?
- How will you use the risk and protective factor framework going forward when working with children/thinking about their mental health?
- How does a sense of community support your wellbeing?

Tips for this activity

- Reflective questions can be found in the Participant Workbook on page 14.