Acknowledgement:

KidsMatter Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative has been developed in collaboration with beyondblue, the Australian Psychological Society and Early Childhood Australia, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and beyondblue.

Disclaimer:

While every care has been taken in preparing this publication, Beyond Blue Ltd, The Australian Psychological Society Limited, Early Childhood Australia Inc. and the Commonwealth of Australia do not, to the extent permitted by law, accept any liability for any injury, loss or damage suffered by any person arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the content of this publication.

Important Notice:

KidsMatter Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative and any other KidsMatter mental health initiatives are not to be confused with other businesses, programs or services which may also use the name ‘Kidsmatter’.

Copyright

© Commonwealth of Australia 2014

This work is copyright. Provided acknowledgment is made to the sources, early childhood education and care services are permitted to copy material freely for communication with teachers, staff, parents, carers or community members. You may reproduce the whole or part of this work in unaltered form for your own personal use or, if you are part of an organisation, for internal use within your organisation, but only if you or your organisation do not use the reproduction for any commercial purpose and retain this copyright notice and all disclaimer notices as part of that reproduction. Apart from rights to use as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968 or allowed by this copyright notice, all other rights are reserved and you are not allowed to reproduce the whole or any part of this work in any way (electronic or otherwise) without first being given the specific written permission from the Commonwealth to do so. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights are to be sent to the Communications Branch, Department of Health, GPO Box 9848, Canberra ACT 2601, or via e-mail to copyright@health.gov.au.

While the resources are available freely for these purposes, to realise the full potential of KidsMatter Early Childhood, it is recommended that the resources be used with the appropriate training and support under the KidsMatter Initiative.
Belonging

What will participants learn from this topic?

When you have completed this topic, participants will:

- understand how a sense of belonging is connected to mental health
- understand what belonging looks like for children, families and educators
- understand how a sense of belonging can be promoted in an early childhood service
- have reflected on how their service environment promotes a sense of belonging for children, families and educators.

Preparation for this session

Resources

- Component 1 Topic 3: Professional Learning Participant Workbook
- Whiteboard or butcher’s paper
- Video 3.1: A sense of belonging
- Video 3.2: Belonging in action
Suggestions for how to run this topic

1. **Introduce the topic to the group**

Topic 3 focuses on promoting a sense of belonging in early childhood services.

**Content includes:**
- a **video** about what belonging looks like and how it supports children’s mental health
- a **discussion** about understanding the experience of belonging for everyone at the early childhood service
- a **video** about how services can commit to inclusive practices and begin the journey of helping all members of the early childhood community belong
- an **activity** for participants to reflect on how their service environment promotes a sense of belonging for children, families and educators.
2 Video 3.1: A sense of belonging

The video covers:
- the idea of belonging as a fundamental human need
- how a sense of belonging supports children’s mental health
- how belonging can be addressed at a service level to ensure children, families and educators feel valued, accepted, respected, cared about by others, and happy to be a part of the community
- what a service that promotes a sense of belonging might look and feel like.

Tips for watching this video
- There is space for participants to make notes about this video in their Participant Workbook on page 2.
- After the video, participants will explore what belonging looks like for different people in the early childhood service community.

3 Discussion: Thinking about belonging

Instructions
- Ask participants to think about and discuss what it might look like for:
  - children
  - families
  - educators
when they feel like they do and do not belong.

Tips for this discussion
- There is space for participants to write notes on page 3 of their Participant Workbook.
5 Activity: Checking out our service environment

The aim of this activity is to encourage participants to reflect on how their service environment promotes a sense of belonging for children, families and educators.

Instructions

1. Introduce the activity by explaining to participants that they are going to take a virtual tour of their service, but will do so from the perspective of someone else at the service.

   Allocate participants to one of three groups:

   » Group 1: A child who has had trouble separating from their parent during drop-off time.

   » Group 2: A parent who speaks English as a second language.

   » Group 3: A new staff member coming to their first job in a service.

   Adapt the profile of each group to best suit the service’s context.

2. Ask participants to imagine stepping into the shoes of the person whose role they have been allocated. Encourage participants to then fill out the questions on page 5–7 of their Participant Workbook.
3. Ask for general feedback from each group or participant about what they noticed about the sense of belonging at their service from the perspective of another person.

4. Suggested follow up questions:
   - What did you notice about a sense of belonging at your service from a new perspective?
   - What things in the service helped you to feel like you belong?
   - Was there anything you would have liked to see or know which would have enhanced your sense of belonging?

Tips for this activity
   - There is a space for participants to record notes and observations for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 5–7.
   - This activity highlights that even subtle aspects of the service environment can make a difference to how much people in the service feel they belong. Conclude this activity by explaining that this topic is about understanding that belonging underpins all aspects of a service and its community.

6 Activity: Moving forward

Instructions
   - Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
     - What is one thing that I could do to promote a sense of belonging at our service over the next week?
     - What is one thing that I could do to promote a sense of belonging at our service over the next 12 months?

The aim of this activity is to have participants set some short and long-term goals for promoting a sense of belonging at their early childhood service.
Reflective questions

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.

- 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 promote a sense of belonging over the next week?
  - What is one thing that you could do as a service to promote a sense of belonging over the next 12 months?

Tips for this activity

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 8.

- Think about a child you feel has a strong sense of belonging at your early childhood service. Why is this sense of belonging so strong? What does it look like?

- Think about a parent you feel has a strong sense of belonging at your early childhood service. What do you think helps them feel like they belong?

Tips for this activity

- Reflective questions can be found in the Participant Workbook on page 9.