

Name:

Service:

Date:



**Professional learning: Helping children who are  
experiencing mental health difficulties**

Topic 2: Using observation to inform practice

# Participant Workbook



### **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*.

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# Using observation to inform practice

Observation is an important way of gathering information about children, their mental health and wellbeing.

## Observing children

Observation is a tool that allows us to tune in to children's behaviour. Observation helps us to notice children's strengths as well as behaviours that might suggest possible signs of mental health difficulties.

Once you have identified behaviours that are concerning you, observations can provide information about why this behaviour may be occurring. It is important that we build an understanding of factors contributing to a child's behaviour so that we can work towards a plan about how best to support the child and their family.

Making observations and understanding a child's behaviour is a subjective process. This means that it is not possible to understand a child's experience based on a single observation by any one person. To build a fuller picture and better understanding of a child's behaviour, observations will occur across different contexts, tasks, time, as well as from different educator perspectives.



# Discussion

## Observation within your early childhood service

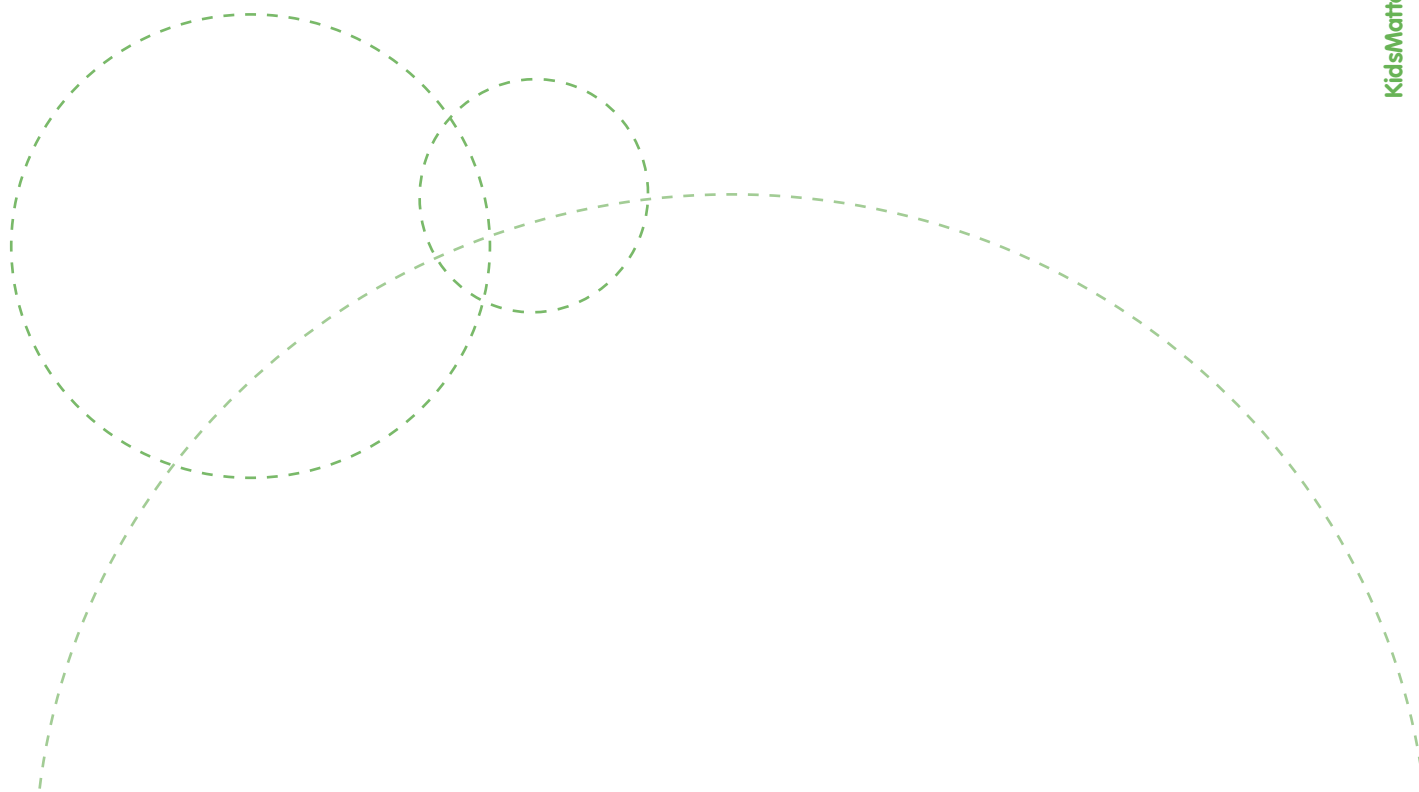
Thinking about your observations of children within your service, identify a few behaviours that might suggest a child is experiencing a mental health difficulty. What was it about these behaviours that concerned you?

Blank space for writing responses to the first question.

Why is it important to observe a child's strengths in their social, emotional and behavioural functioning? What can be some challenges to noticing these strengths?

Blank space for writing responses to the second question, featuring a faint grey speech bubble icon in the bottom right corner.

How does observation inform your practice? What do you do after you notice a child's strengths? What do you do after you notice possible signs of a mental health difficulty?

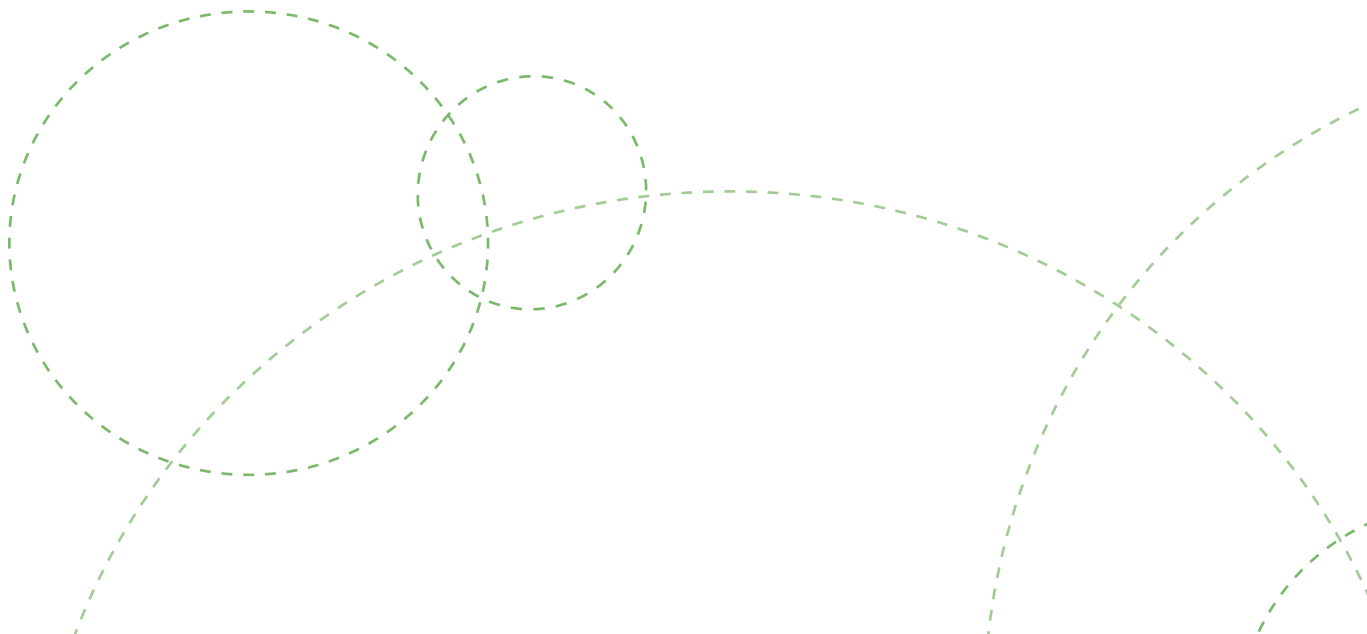




# Video 2.1

## The role of observation in an early childhood service

Our observations help us to notice and understand children's strengths as well as those that are sources of concern. Once we understand why a child behaves in a particular way, we can make informed decisions about how to respond.



# The BETLS Tool

The BETLS Tool is a way to record and organise your observations about a child's behaviour that may be a concern to you.

The BETLS Tool helps you to gather information about a child's behaviour across five broad areas of a child's functioning.

- Behaviours:
  - » What is the child doing?
- Emotions:
  - » What might the child be feeling?
- Thoughts:
  - » What might the child be thinking?
- Learning:
  - » What learning areas are being affected?
- Social relationships:
  - » What social areas are being affected?

The Tool also provides a framework to help decide when your concerns might be significant enough to take further action. Issues to consider here are:

- Pervasiveness:
  - » Who is present at this time?
  - » Where do these things occur?
  - » When do these things occur?
- Frequency:
  - » How often does this happen?
- Persistence:
  - » How long has this been happening?
- Severity:
  - » How much is this influencing a child's day-to-day experiences?

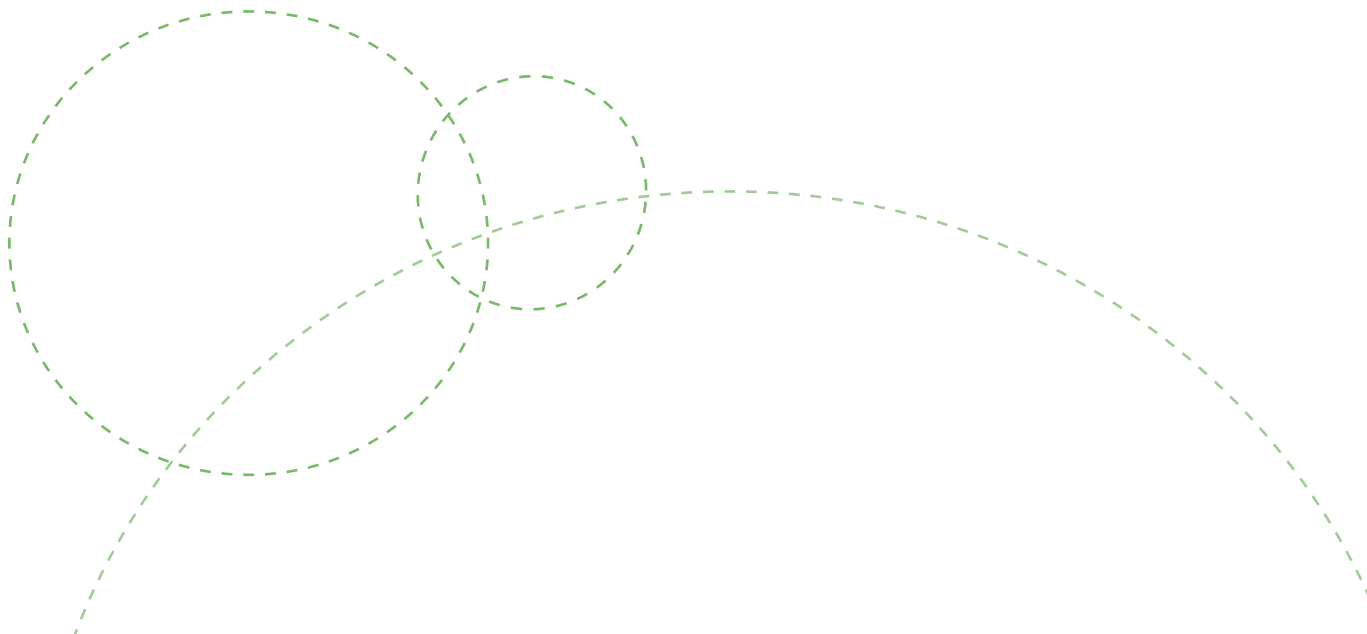
Once you have understood the nature of a child's difficulties and the reasons behind their difficulties, the BETLS Tool provides a record of your responses to these concerns across time.



# Video 2.2

## BETLS in action

You will observe a child's behaviour within an early childhood service, and hear an educator talk about her observations. It may be helpful to record your own reflections and observations in the BETLS Tool whilst you are watching the video.







Child's name:

Child's age:

Date of observations:

Child's strengths:

Concerns:

### Behaviours



What is the child doing?  
(for example, unsettled at sleep time)

### Emotions



What is/might the child be feeling?  
(for example, sad)

### Thoughts



What is/might the child be thinking?  
(for example, I'm missing my mum)

### Learning



What learning areas are being affected?  
(for example, difficulty concentrating)

### Social Relationships



What social areas are being affected?  
(for example, avoids group situations)

#### Pervasiveness

**WHO** is present at this time? *Staff? Parents or carers? Other family members? Other children?*

**WHERE** do these things occur? *One setting? Multiple settings?*

**WHEN** do these things occur? *Times of the day? What's happening before? What's happening after?*

#### Frequency

**HOW OFTEN** does this happen? *Times per day/per week?*

#### Persistence and severity

**HOW LONG** has this been happening? *Always? Just started? Built up over time?*

**HOW MUCH** is this influencing the child's life? *Mildly? Moderately? Severely?*





## Staff self-reflections



**Your feelings:** How does this situation make you feel? What additional support may you need?

**What have others noticed about this child?**

**Strategies:** What things have been tried with the child? Who implemented these strategies? What was the outcome?

**Other factors to consider:** What cultural factors might be playing a role in this situation? Have there been any changes in the child's life or in the service?

**What might you do next?** Talk to a colleague? Talk to the Director? Talk with the child's parent or carer?

**What other information do I need about this child?** Where could I get more information?




# Activity

## Practise using the BETLS Tool

What was your overall impression of the BETLS Tool as a way of organising and recording your observations? How was it useful or valuable?

Is there additional information that you would need in order to complete all sections of the BETLS Tool? How would you gather this information?



**How concerned are you about the behaviour you observed? What is the reason for your concern?**

**If you observed a similar pattern of behaviour within your service, what would your next step be?**





# Activity

## Moving forward

This activity has been designed for you to take away and do before you move on to the next topic. It will help integrate what you have learned during this session.

**What is one thing that I could do to incorporate the concepts of BETLS into how I observe, understand, record, and plan action when working with children in my service?**

Over the next week?

Over the next 12 months?

**What is one thing we could do at a service level to incorporate the BETLS Tool, or concepts from the Tool, into our procedures for observing and evaluating children's behaviour?**

Over the next week?

Over the next 12 months?





# Reflective questions

**Is there anything that might be a barrier to using the BETLS Tool? Consider factors across the following areas: child, family, educator and early childhood service?**

**What can we do to minimise the impact of these barriers? (Consider each of the specified areas.)**

How can we use the BETLS Tool to facilitate communication amongst educators at our service so that we all have a shared understanding of individual children in our care?

How can we use the BETLS Tool to help families communicate with other professionals?

## Wrapping up

Congratulations on completing Topic 2 of KidsMatter Component 4 Professional learning *Using observation to inform practice*. For further information and resources about KidsMatter Early Childhood, please visit: [www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec).



**Australian Government**  
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