



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

Topic 2: Using observation to inform practice

# Leadership team guide



### **Acknowledgement:**

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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.

# Using observation to inform practice

## What will participants learn from this topic?

When you have completed this topic, participants will:

- recognise the ways in which observation can help us to notice and understand children's behaviour, both their strengths as well as any signs of a mental health difficulty
- be introduced to the BETLS Tool to support educators to record their observations when they have concerns about a child's mental health
- develop an understanding about how to determine the level of concern associated with a child's behaviour
- explore how BETLS might be applied within an early childhood service.

## Preparation for this session

### Resources

- Component 4 Topic 2: Professional learning *Participant Workbook*
- Video 2.1: The role of observation in an early childhood service
- Video 2.2: BETLS in action

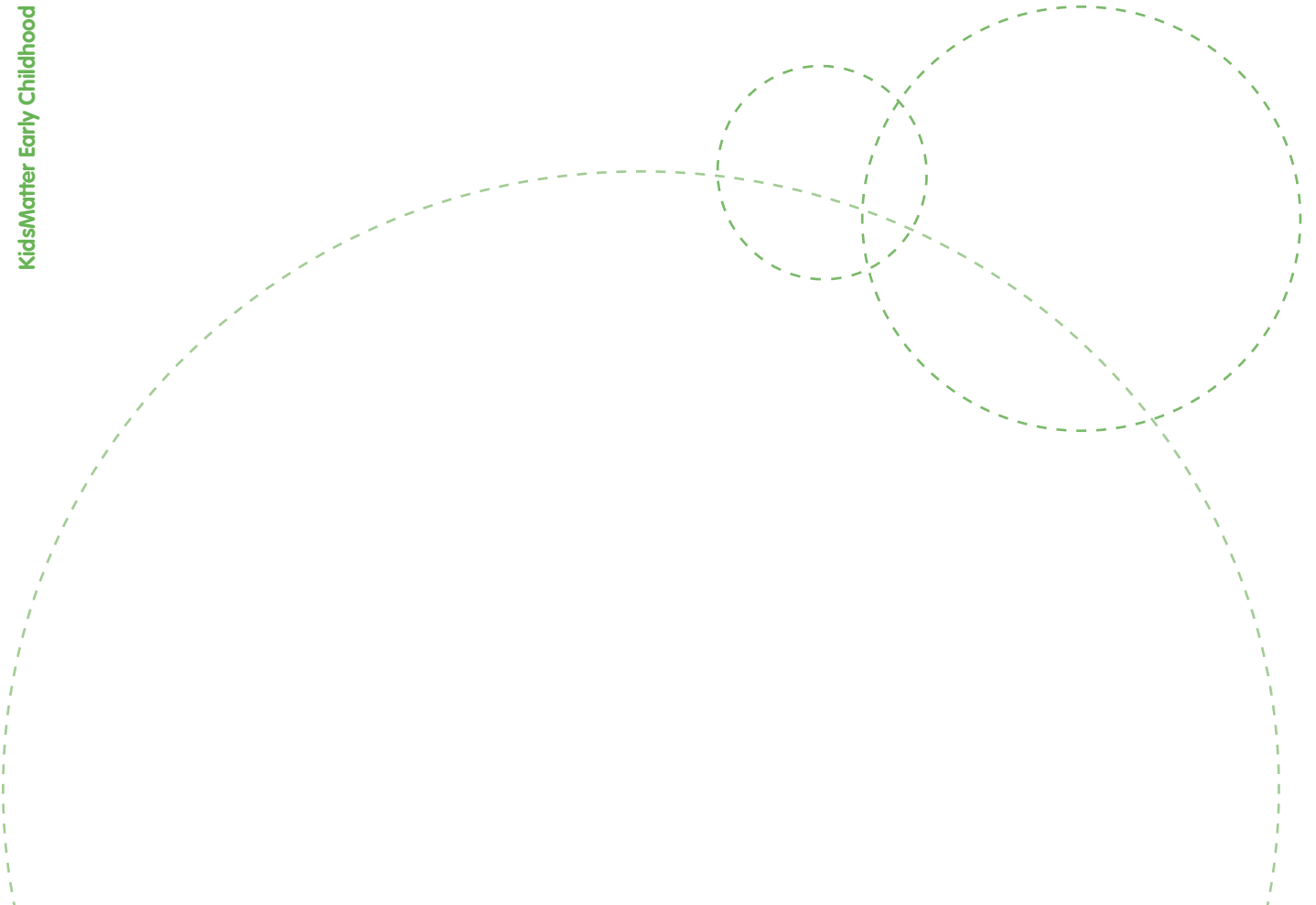
# Suggestions for how to run this topic

## 1 Introduce the topic to the group

**Topic 2 focuses on how observation might help participants to identify children's strengths as well as behaviours that might suggest a mental health difficulty. Participants are introduced to the BETLS Tool to help them record their observations about behaviours identified as a concern, and to plan their response.**

### Content includes:

- a **discussion** about how participants currently use observation within their early childhood service
- a **video** that explores the purpose of observing children's behaviour in the context of their mental health and wellbeing
- a **video** that introduces the BETLS Tool, and a case scenario for using this Tool
- an **activity** and **discussion** to practise applying the BETLS Tool when there are concerns about a child's mental health and wellbeing.



## 2 Discussion: Observation within your early childhood service



**With a mental health and wellbeing focus, the aim of this discussion is to encourage participants to share their knowledge and experience of using observation within their early childhood service.**

### Instructions

Guide a discussion around the following questions:

- 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?
- 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?
- 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?

### Tips for this discussion

- There is space for participants to write notes on pages 2–3 of their *Participant Workbook*.
- It may be helpful to break into smaller groups to discuss the above-mentioned questions before bringing everyone back together for a large group discussion.
- Look for opportunities to validate participants' current skills and capacities for observing children's behaviours.
- Encourage participants to describe behaviours in clear, specific, and observable terms. For example, if a participant identifies a behaviour and considers it to be 'difficult', ask them, '*What was the child doing that was difficult?*', '*What did you actually see?*'

### 3 Video 2.1: The role of observation in an early childhood service



#### The video covers:

- the value of observing children's behaviour within early childhood settings
- using observation to attend to children's strengths as well as behaviours that might suggest a mental health difficulty
- how observation can help us to identify factors contributing to children's behaviour
- the importance of developing a plan to respond to educators' concerns about a child's behaviour.

#### Tips for watching this video

- There is space for participants to make notes about this video in their *Participant Workbook* on page 4.
- During the video, participants can refer to the BETLS Tool in their *Participant Workbook* on page 7.

### 4 Video 2.2: BETLS in action



#### The video covers:

- the BETLS Tool
- a fictional case scenario of a child presenting with behaviours that require observation and recording using the BETLS Tool.

#### Tips for watching this video

- Before playing the video it might be helpful to:
  - » introduce the BETLS Tool (page 7 in the *Participant Workbook*)
  - » let participants know that the video contains a fictional case scenario of a child displaying behaviours identified as concerning by the educator depicted in the video
  - » encourage participants to have the BETLS Tool at hand so that they are able to make notes as they watch the video.
- If you are facilitating a large group you may choose to break participants into smaller groups. Ask each group to focus on one section of the BETLS Tool during the video (i.e. Behaviour, Emotions, Thoughts, Learning and Social relationships).

## 5 Activity: Practise using the BETLS Tool



The aim of this activity is for participants to practise completing the BETLS Tool.

### Instructions

1. Break into small groups and invite participants to share their ideas about information relevant to each section of the BETLS Tool.
  - » Ask participants to start the activity by describing the behaviours of concern in the B column.
  - » Encourage participants to consider what the child may be feeling (Emotions) and thinking (Thoughts), and to draw some conclusions about this from what is observable. They can also consider their own impact on the child's behaviour.
2. Bring everyone back together in a large group and discuss each section of the BETLS Tool. The following questions might be helpful to facilitate this discussion:
  - » 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?

### Tips for this activity

- There is space for participants to write notes on pages 9–10 of their *Participant Workbook*.
- Encourage participants to think how they might test out some of their ideas about factors contributing to behaviours of concern (i.e. thoughts, feelings, external factors). For example, how could we work out whether a change in morning routine is contributing to some of the observed behaviours?
- When discussing *What might you do next?*, help participants to think about what they could do to gather more information about the child's behaviour and why it's occurring (e.g. further observation, a discussion with colleagues, and/or a discussion with a parent).

## 6 Activity: Moving forward



**The aim of this activity is for participants to set some short- and long-term goals for integrating the principles and concepts of the BETLS Tool into their practice and service delivery.**

### Instructions

1. Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
  - » 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?
  - » 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 12 months?

2. 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 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?
  - » What is one thing that 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 12 months?

### Tips for this activity

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the *Participant Workbook* on page 11.
- Some participants within their service may wish to plan for implementing the BETLS Tool as a whole while others may prefer to apply one or more concepts from the Tool.
- When thinking about implementing BETLS at a service level, participants may find it helpful to consider how the Tool could be incorporated into their service's operational manual and/or strategic plan.



## 7 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 in a group.**

- 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?

### **Tips for this activity**

- Reflective questions can be found on pages 12–13 in the *Participant Workbook*.



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