



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

Topic 4: Responding to children experiencing  
mental health difficulties

# Leadership team guide



### **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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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.

# Responding to children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties

## What will participants learn from this topic?

When you have completed this topic, participants will:

- understand the considerations, including the advantages and disadvantages, to a mental health diagnosis and the effects this has on families
- understand that getting help and support early is important for children and families
- have the knowledge and skills to recognise and support children who are experiencing mental health difficulties
- have a shared understanding of their role and its boundaries in addressing the needs of children experiencing mental health difficulties
- understand the importance of developing effective working relationships with support services and families when a child has a mental health difficulty.

## Preparation for this session

### Resources

- Component 4 Topic 4: Professional learning *Participant Workbook*
- Video 4.1: Responding to children with mental health difficulties
- Video 4.2: Working together to support children with mental health difficulties

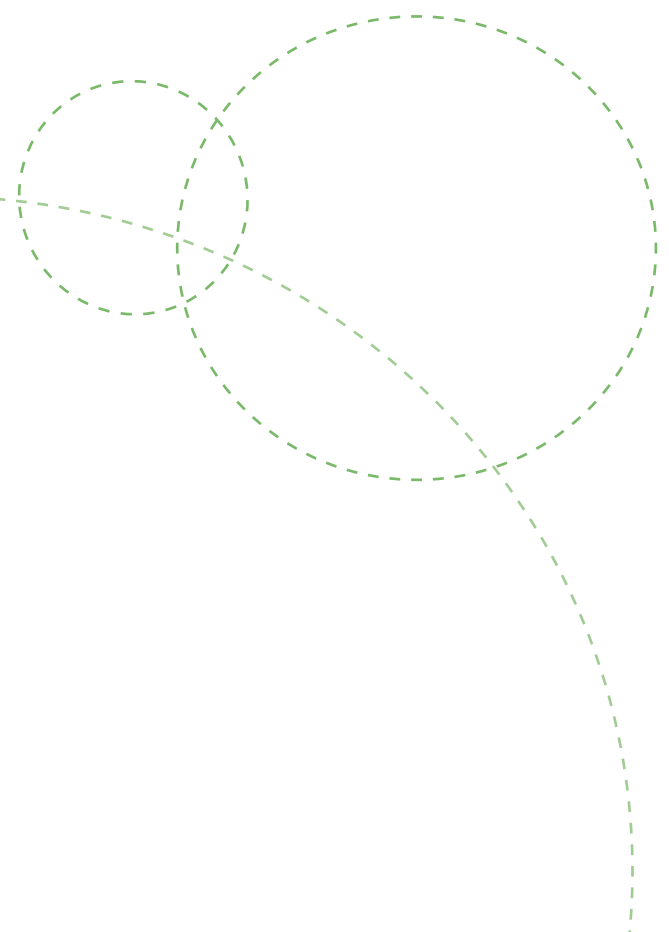
# Suggestions for how to run this topic

## 1 Introduce the topic to the group

This topic is about responding to children with mental health difficulties. Recognising mental health difficulties and intervening early is important. It can help prevent problems from becoming worse and improve mental health outcomes for children. Early childhood services are in an ideal position to recognise and support children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties, as they interact with children and families on a regular basis. Within collaborative relationships, educators, families and support services can share information about how to best support a child who is experiencing difficulties.

### Content includes:

- a **video** about responding to children with mental health difficulties
- a **discussion** about the advantages and disadvantages of a child having a mental health diagnosis
- a **video** about how working together supports children with mental health difficulties
- an **activity** about developing service procedures to support children with mental health difficulties.



## 2 Video 4.1: Responding to children with mental health difficulties



### The video covers:

- the advantages and disadvantages of a mental health diagnosis for children and their families
- responding to, and supporting a child who has a mental health diagnosis
- things services need to keep in mind when a child has been given a diagnosis.

### Tips for watching this video

- There is space for participants to make notes about the video on page 3 of the *Participant Workbook*.

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## 3 Discussion: What can we do to support children with mental health difficulties?



The aim of this discussion is for participants to understand that having procedures and practices in place for responding to children with mental health difficulties help educators know what to do and feel supported.

### Instructions

Facilitate a discussion around the following points:

- What would you consider to be some of the advantages and disadvantages of a child receiving a mental health diagnosis?

- What processes does your service have in place when a parent advises the service that their child has a mental health diagnosis?
- What are some of the ways educators can support children who have mental health difficulties on a day-to-day basis? How is this the same as, and different to, supporting all children at the service?
- What resources and community links does your service already have to support children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties?
- What does your service need to find out in order to support children with mental health difficulties more effectively?

### Tips for this discussion

- There is space for participants to write notes on pages 4–5 of their *Participant Workbook*.

## 4 Video 4.2: Working together to support children with mental health difficulties



### The video covers:

- the importance of services and educators finding out who/what supports are available in their local community
- how working together with families and external agencies promotes a shared understanding and supports children who are experiencing mental health difficulties
- recognising boundaries in providing specialist support for children who have mental health difficulties.

### Tips for watching this video

- There is space for participants to make notes about the video on page 6 of their *Participant Workbook*.

## 5 Activity: Our service's procedures



The purpose of this activity is for participants to discuss and clarify their service's procedures for dealing with concerns about a child. Participants respond to a list of questions in the *Participant Workbook* to ensure that there is a shared understanding among staff about what the service procedures are when someone is concerned about a child.

### Instructions

1. Ask participants to form groups and to discuss the following questions (They can write notes on pages 7–8 of their *Participant Workbook*):
  - Who should educators speak to when they have a concern?
  - When should they approach their colleague? How should the concern be communicated?
  - Who else needs to be involved in the discussion?
  - How are conversations documented and confidentially stored?
  - Are there policies and procedures in place for addressing the way our service supports children's mental health and wellbeing?
  - How are individual educators supported?

2. Ask participants to share responses as a whole group, if the activity was done in small groups.

### Tips for this activity

- The questions for this activity are on pages 7–8 of the *Participant Workbook*.

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## 6 Activity: Moving forward



The aim of this activity is to have participants set some short- and long-term goals for responding to children experiencing mental health difficulties at their early childhood service.

### Instructions

1. Ask participants to answer the following questions individually:
  - » What is one thing I could do to support children and families who may be experiencing mental health difficulties over the next week?
  - » What is one thing I could do to support children and families who may be experiencing mental health difficulties 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 we could do as a service to support children and families who may be experiencing mental health difficulties over the next week?
  - » What is one thing we could do as a service to support children and families who may be experiencing mental health difficulties over the next 12 months?

### Tips for this activity

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the *Participant Workbook* on page 9.

## 7 Reflective questions

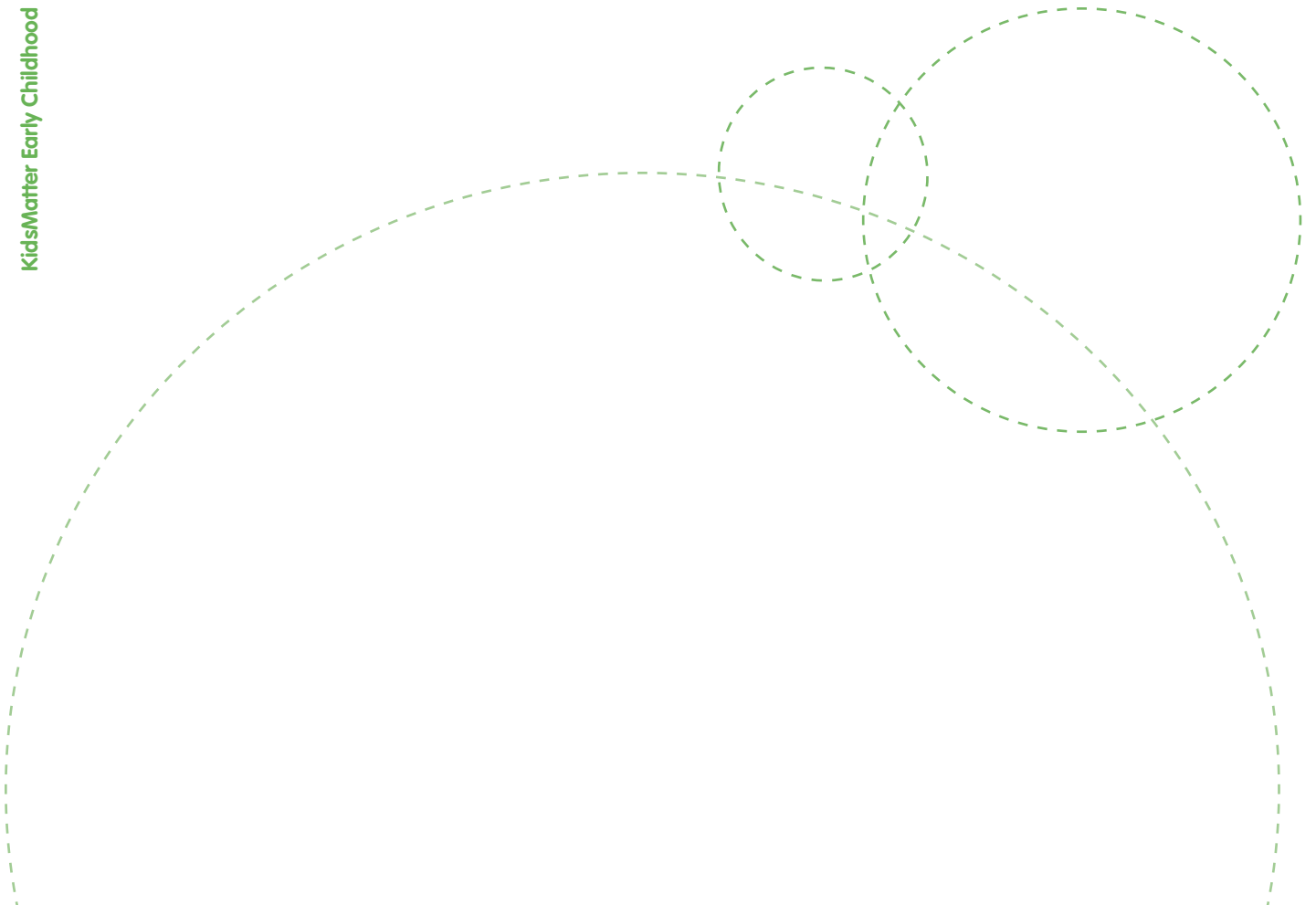


Reflecting on new content is a good way to wrap up each topic and summarise what has been covered. The following questions can support reflection, although you may wish to add your own questions to suit your team. Reflective questions can be considered during the topic, at the end of the topic or at a separate time. Reflective questions can be completed individually, in pairs or as a group.

- Brainstorm a list, or map out where your service can source help for different kinds of concerns.
- Brainstorm which agencies your service has had contact with in the past. What prompted this contact?
- How do we find out about other referral agencies in our area, who follows up on this and how do we develop links/relationships with them?
- Do we need to have a policy or set of procedures about mental health and wellbeing including our definition and how we address promotion, prevention and early intervention?

### Tips for this activity

- Reflective questions can be found on pages 10–11 in the *Participant Workbook*.







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