

# Mental Health and Wellbeing Protocol

## Purpose

The educators, staff and management acknowledge the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing that contributes to good health and overall development. This protocol confirms our commitment to:

- Ensure the service environment is safe, inclusive and empowering for children, families, Educators, staff, volunteers and visitors
- Embed social and emotional learning in the educational program
- Ensure families, children, educators and staff are key partners in mental health initiatives
- Engage in partnerships with community networks.
- By building strong, trusting relationships with children and families

As a health promoting service, we will promote positive social and emotional wellbeing for children, educators, staff and families through learning, policies, creating a safe and healthy physical and social environment, and developing community links and partnerships.

## Protocol

Mental health and wellbeing for young children is about their emotions, what they experience and how they learn to manage and express them, the relationships they form and the child's ability to engage in close and positive relationships. It also covers their engagement with the environment and if they have opportunities to explore and discover. A strong sense of wellbeing and positive mental health provides children with confidence and optimism, which maximises their learning potential, gives them a greater chance of long-term success, and helps them build stronger relationships.

## Children's voices a principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners 2013

Children's wellbeing is paramount and children will be actively involved in decision-making to provide an environment that encourages them to reach their potential.

A safe environment is a place where children feel comfortable and safe to play, talk, or relax. A safe environment is also a place that is safe from neglect, physical, sexual or emotional harm or abuse.

Children's safety and wellbeing are paramount at our service and will be fostered through responsive relationships, engaging experiences and a safe and healthy environment.

Children's right to be heard and have their views taken seriously was established via Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) and is embedded in practice.

Allowing children to have a voice fosters the development and understanding of: social development, democracy, independence, resilience, and self-esteem and confidence

Early childhood services play a key role in promoting mental health and wellbeing in children and can affect children's long-term mental health, relationships and learning. By promoting positive protective factors. This can reduce the influence of negative stress factors and improve resilience

It is recognised that every member of the service impacts on the children's health and can contribute to creating an environment that promotes positive mental health. All members of our service, including educators, staff, children, families and volunteers, will be supported to meet this protocol.

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## Principles to inform policy practice:

- Viewing the child as a valued citizen and social actor
- Educators ensure a safe and secure context in which interactions and conversations occur, and demonstrate a genuine interest in what the child is expressing
- Planning will include an understanding about why and how the child is being invited to take part, what the purpose is, and how the child might contribute
- Children have the right for their privacy and confidentiality to be maintained
- Educators will have meaningful conversation with and among children through give-and-take dialogue. Exploring with children what they mean
- For inclusivity and cultural considerations, it is important to understand the environment children have come from and what they deem as safe and accessible spaces
- When engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, educators will seek advice from the local community, elders or family members about the best ways to be culturally safe, relevant and respectful
- When engaging with children whose first language is not English, educators will engage translators
- Educators will ensure all language is respectful, inclusive of all races, sex, gender, age, sexual identity and religion.

## Procedures and responsibilities

### Leadership and commitment

- Educators, staff, families and children are active participants in the development and implementation of the whole service Mental Health and Wellbeing Protocol.
- Educators, staff and families are provided with information about the protocol requirements, with opportunities to provide feedback and input.

### Healthy physical environment

- Buildings, grounds, furniture, play equipment and resources are safe and accessible for every child.
- Quiet and reflective spaces are provided for children, educators and families.

### Healthy culture

- Diversity and cultural practices are considered when implementing this protocol and mental health and wellbeing practices
- A safe, inclusive, welcoming environment is created for all community members. There is a culture of respect, fairness and equity
- Strategies are used to promote positive and responsible behaviour, and to prevent and respond to hurtful and unsafe behaviour
- Warm, responsive and trusting relationships are actively developed and maintained between children, families and educators
- Educators and staff model respectful interactions with each other, children and families. A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is also role modelled
- Opportunities are provided for families to discuss their children's mental health with educators and plan together to optimise positive mental health and well-being strategies.

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## Child teaching and learning

- Children are supported to develop social and emotional skills and learn about and care for their own mental health
- Educators and staff are supported to access professional development and resources about mental health and wellbeing education and to understand when and how to refer children to additional support
- Educators are encouraged to plan for and intentionally teach strategies that support strong, positive mental health and well-being with children and identify ways to reduce stress.

## Supported staff and educators

- Educators and staff are supported to learn about and care for their own mental health and wellbeing.

## Mental health and wellbeing information and protocol requirements are included in educator and staff orientation/induction.

- Leadership practices and on-the-ground support, enable a work environment that minimises stress and promotes mental health and wellbeing for educators and staff
- Strategies are implemented to promote positive conflict resolution and to prevent and respond to bullying, discrimination and harassment
- All educators have access to regular supervision where they have opportunities to set goals and gain support that will strengthen their mental health and well-being
- Employee Assistance Program – To access the EAP program contact Converge International on 1300 687 327 for a confidential session - [Converge International](#)

## Families and community partnerships

- Mental health and wellbeing information is provided to families and the wider community, such as information about local support services and resources about social and emotional learning
- Partnerships are established with relevant organisations and health professionals to support mental health and wellbeing practices where appropriate
- There are clear referral options and pathways for children, staff, educators and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing.

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## References / Sources

### This policy should be read in conjunction with:

Uniting Child Safety Policy – Uniting adopts the Uniting Church Australia National Child Safety Policy Framework, 2019 and the principles of this Policy Framework.

This protocol is shared with the whole service community with opportunities to provide feedback/input

- [Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010](#)
- [Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005](#)
- [Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011](#)
- Part 4.2—Children’s Health and Safety 97 Division 1—Health, safety and wellbeing of children—Regulations 77, 78, 79, 80
- Part 4.7—Leadership and Service Management Division 2—Policies and procedures—Regulation 168 (2) (a) (i)
- [ACECQA National Quality Standard 2018 – Quality Area 2](#)
- [Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009](#)
- [Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework For all Children from Birth to Eight Years. Department of Education and Training, 2016](#)
- Educational Program and Practice policy
- Nutrition, Oral Health and Active play Policy
- Child Safety Policy
- WHS & wellbeing Policy
- Managing stress and resilience resource on the Uniting Intranet
- [Zero to Three-Early connections last a lifetime.](#)
- [Be You](#)
- [The Achievement Program](#)

**Authorisation** This Protocol was adopted by Uniting Early Learning on 24/010/2022

**Review** This Protocol is due for review on 24/10/2023

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