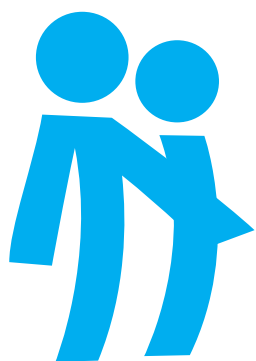


Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

Guide to emotional maturity

Resources for Queensland
early childhood education
and care services



Guide to emotional maturity

This document has been designed to support early childhood education and care services to understand the AEDC domain 'Emotional maturity' to inform curriculum programming, planning and quality improvement.

Children develop their emotional skills through their social interactions and relationships. These emotional skills include the capacity to express, recognise and regulate their emotions; and recognise and understand other people's emotions. As children's emotional skills develop they are more able to engage productively in tasks, have positive experiences, feel confident, and cope with setbacks and frustrations. This is central in organising and motivating children's behaviour and the development of children's sense of self and social skills. (KMEC, 2012a)

The AEDC reveals four specific areas of emotional maturity related to children's development, learning and engagement as they start school:

Emotional maturity

Pro-social and helping behaviour

Anxious and fearful behaviour

Aggressive behaviour

Hyperactivity and inattention

Protective factors

Families and early childhood educators can help increase protective factors and reduce risk factors in a child's life.

Children who have good experiences and are in supportive relationships develop the tools to have positive emotional skills like resilience. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships with other children, families and educators are essential to a child's emotional wellbeing and positive developmental pathway towards emotional maturity. The more protective factors there are in a child's life, the lower the chances of them developing difficulties.

Other examples of mental health protective factors for children include: having support from a wide circle of family, friends and community members and achieving developmental milestones.

When children are raised in supportive environments (e.g. at home and at their early childhood education and care service) that offer loving, safe, consistent care and support, children have the opportunity to develop close relationships and build resilience. Close relationships with family and peers give children a sense of trust and are important for children's positive mental health and wellbeing. (KMEC, 2012b)



Supporting children's emotional maturity

Young children communicate their feelings in many ways, through their facial expressions, body, behaviour, play and words. Through warm and supportive relationships, educators can assist children to make sense of and manage their feelings. They might help children think about how these feelings could be expressed. In this way, educators can utilise their relationships with children to intentionally help them develop an understanding of their own emotional experiences. (KMEC, 2012a)

When educators have an understanding of and are 'in tune' with children's emotional development they are able to scaffold experiences that assist children in becoming confident learners placing particular emphasis on:

- play as a vehicle for young children's emotional and social learning
- helping children to understand and manage their emotions
- supporting children to develop the capacity for positive separations
- the skills involved in getting along, friendships and empathy
- fostering curiosity and confidence
- developing a love of learning
- learning to manage life's ups and downs
- understand how their emotions affect others.

Reflection

- What do the AEDC results reveal about children's emotional maturity in your community?
- How does your service plan for relationships to develop in your early childhood service?
- How does your service help children to settle in and feel connected with your service?
- How does your service provide a positive and supportive environment to aid the development of children's skills, for example social and emotional development; managing emotions; relating to others; solving problems and managing conflict; and focusing on their strengths?
- How does your service help each child to develop a positive and realistic sense of self through encouragement?
- How do educators at your service observe children's behaviour to identify any concerns about their emotional wellbeing?
- How does your service encourage children to help others needing assistance?



Partnerships with families and communities

Collaborative partnerships have a positive impact on the emotional wellbeing of children and families. Working together can help families and educators trust one another and communicate openly. When information is shared constructively, families and educators are able to gain a deeper understanding of:

- how to work together to support children
- children's behaviour at home and at the early childhood education and care service
- the most effective ways to support children's learning
- what children enjoy and what their strengths are
- resources for addressing children's difficulties (KMEC, 2012c).

Listening to the concerns of children, parents and carers without judgement is the first step to helping them think through their problems.

Early childhood services can also form partnerships and help families to access community services. Some of the services families and staff can access for support include:

- general practitioners
- community health services
- maternal and child health nurse
- counsellor
- psychologist
- child and adolescent mental health service
- playgroups
- parent support groups.

Tracey's story

Silky Oaks Child Care Centre found that the AEDC results for children in the local area showed vulnerability in the emotional maturity domain. Tracey worked with a therapist to implement a program to support the emotional regulation of children, with professional development for staff.

After talking with the neighbouring school, both the school and centre recognised that it was important for children to feel confident and have a sense of belonging to the school before they arrived. Tracey arranged for the children to make excursions to the school so that they could get used to the larger environment.

Reflection

- How does your service build partnerships with parents and carers to provide effective support for children's emotional development?
- How does your service support families who are experiencing difficulties? (e.g. provide access to relevant information, details of health professionals)
- What opportunities does your service provide to build understanding in supporting growth in emotional maturity? (E.g. guest speaker at parent information evening)
- How does your service encourage families and children to come to another's assistance when it is needed?

Resources for educators and families

Australian Psychological Society, *Tip sheets*, available at www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets. Information on a range of topics related to children's mental health.

Beyondblue, *Find a professional*, available at www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=107.1007. Information on accessing health professionals.

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI), *Family talk*, available at www.copmi.net.au/images/pdf/family-talk.pdf. A booklet providing tips, information for answering children's questions about their parent or carer experiencing mental health difficulties as well as ideas about where to seek help.

Hunter Institute for Mental Health, *Connections*, available at education.gov.au/news/connections-resource-early-childhood-educators-about-children-s-wellbeing-0. A resource for early childhood educators to support young children's wellbeing.

KidsMatter Early Childhood, *Information sheet index*, available at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood/resources-support-childrens-mental-health/information-sheet-index-0. Information for families and early childhood educators.

KidsMatter Early Childhood, *Programs*, available at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood/programs. A list of programs designed for use in early childhood education and care services and for parents of young children.

NSW Department of Community Services, *Risk, protection and resilience in children and families*, available at www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/researchnotes_resilience.pdf. A paper defining the concepts of risk, resilience and protection in relation to children and families.

Women's and Children's Health Network, *Grief and loss*, available at www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=141&id=1662. Information on children experiencing grief and loss.

References

- KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC). (2012a). *KidsMatter Early Childhood: A framework for improving children's mental health and wellbeing*. Component 2: Developing children's social and emotional skills. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.
- KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC). (2012b). *KidsMatter Early Childhood: An overview*. Risk and protective factors in early childhood. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.
- KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC). (2012c) *Building partnerships between families and early childhood staff*. Retrieved 4 November, 2014, from www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/role-families/partnerships/building-partnerships-between-families-and-early-childhood-staff.



To access further AEDC resources please visit www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood.

To access the AEDC data please visit www.aedc.gov.au.

