

Introducing KidsMatter Early Childhood



Do kids matter? Of course they do!

They matter to families, to the early childhood education and care services they attend and to the community. These are the groups that KidsMatter Early Childhood wants to bring together to improve children's mental health.

Good mental health is vital for learning and life. Some people may be surprised to hear the term 'mental health' being applied to young children. Mental health like physical health is something we all have and like physical health it can range from good to poor and can also change over time. Children who are mentally healthy are better able to meet life's challenges. They also learn more successfully and have stronger relationships with family members, peers and other important people in their lives.

But what does being mentally healthy mean for babies, toddlers and young children? It's about their developing social and emotional skills, being able to form good relationships and to explore and discover the world around them. Research has found that some mental health problems can be identified much earlier than previously thought. This means prevention programs starting in early childhood can improve outcomes for children and families.

KidsMatter Early Childhood is a national mental health initiative for Australian early childhood education and care services. It is adapted from the KidsMatter Primary schools initiative which has been shown to help improve children's mental health. KidsMatter Early Childhood has been developed in collaboration with *beyondblue*, the Australian Psychological Society, Early Childhood Australia and, with funding from, the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and *beyondblue*.



The KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative aims to help early childhood education and care services use evidence based strategies that will:

- a. improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age
- b. reduce mental health problems amongst children
- c. achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties and their families.



To achieve these aims KidsMatter Early Childhood has identified **four key areas** where early childhood education and care services can make a difference to children's mental health and wellbeing. These make up the four components of KidsMatter Early Childhood that each service will be working on.

The Four Components

1. Creating a sense of community:

Building a sense of community within the early childhood education and care service promotes feelings of belonging and connectedness for all children, families and early childhood educators. This has been shown to have a positive effect on children's mental health.

2. Developing children's social and emotional skills:

Research shows that the development of social and emotional skills is key to many parts of children's lives, including their mental health, self esteem, learning and relationships.

3. Working with parents and carers:

Early childhood education and care services are well placed to help parents and carers access information and education about parenting, child development and children's mental health. Building supportive relationships between staff and families is crucial to the implementation of KidsMatter Early Childhood.

4. Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties:

Effective support at the first sign of difficulty can mean that children and families get the help they need before problems become worse, improving the quality of life for children and their families. Together, families and early childhood education and care services can pick up signs that children may be at risk and link with appropriate services.

Look out for more information on KidsMatter Early Childhood at your service.

This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at www.kidsmatter.edu.au. The KidsMatter Early Childhood team also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



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