



Policy and Procedures Mental Health and Wellbeing

Purpose

The educators, staff and management acknowledge the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing that contributes to good health and overall development. This policy confirms Acacia's 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.

As a health promoting service, Acacia 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.

Whole service engagement

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

Policy statement

Values

Acacia is committed to:

- supporting children becoming strong in their social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing
- strengthening early childhood teachers and educators understanding of the importance of wellbeing and are sensitive to the impact of abuse and trauma on children.
- providing an educational program where children are supported to explore, learn, and engage with health and wellbeing.
- creating an environment that supports, reflects, and promotes positive social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

Scope

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of Acacia, including during offsite excursions and activities.

Background

Many young Australians have mental health issues which can have lifetime impacts. In Australia one in seven 4 to 17 years olds experience a mental health condition every year¹.

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 their ability to engage in close and positive relationships. 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.

¹ The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2015)



Early intervention can improve children's mental health, and in turn, their lifetime outcomes. Good mental health in early childhood also provides a solid foundation for managing the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. 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.

The Early Years Learning Framework (the Framework) was developed to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years. Outcome 3 of the Framework talks about children having a strong sense of wellbeing. It guides early childhood practitioners in facilitating a learning environment that supports both physical and psychological development.

Obligations under Child Safe Standard 8 requires staff and volunteers to be trained and supported to effectively implement the organisation's child safety and wellbeing policy. This Standard links to Standards 1 and 5, with all three Standards placing obligations on organisations to provide training and information for staff and volunteers on building safe environments for children and young people.

Legislation and Standards

- Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:
- National Quality Standard: Quality Area 2
- The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

- Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
- Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

Definitions

Family-centred practice: Practice which:

- uses families' understanding of their children to support shared decision-making about each child's learning and development.
- creates a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment, where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development.
- actively engages families and children in planning children's learning and development.
- provides feedback to families on each child's learning and provide information about how families can further advance children's learning and development at home and in the community.

Mental health and wellbeing: For the purposes of this policy and for the Healthy Early Childhood Services Achievement Program, the 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' health priority area focuses on social and emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Mental health in early childhood can be understood as a young child's ability to 'experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community, and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development.



Procedures and responsibilities

The Approved Provider and Persons with Management or Control, Nominated Supervisor and person day-to-day charge are responsible for:

- Ensuring that the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, families, and children are active participants in the development and implementation of the whole service *Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy*
- Ensuring that the service provides a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment which celebrates diversity through positive, respectful, and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families (*refer to Code of Conduct Policy and Interactions with Children Policy*)
- Actively supporting and facilitating participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families at Acacia
- Embedding social and emotional learning in the service program and practice, and teaching children to care for their own mental health and wellbeing.
- Embedding opportunities to learn about healthy eating and oral health and the importance of physical activity in the educational program, throughout the year (*refer to Nutrition, Oral Health, and Active Play policy*)
- Ensuring that quiet and reflective spaces are provided for children, educators, and families.
- Implementing appropriate programs and practices to support vulnerable children and families, including working co-operatively with relevant services and/or professionals, where required (*refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing*)
- Ensuring a safe, inclusive, welcoming environment is created for all community members. There is a culture of respect, fairness, and equity.
- Encouraging collaborative, family-centered practice (*refer to Definitions*) at the service which facilitates the positive mental health and wellbeing and active participation of both the child and the family at the service.
- Ensuring that cultural values and expectations about health and wellbeing are respected.
- Ensuring that children's diverse circumstances are understood, and those who are vulnerable are responded to and provided with support.
- Understanding each child's unique developmental journey of which mental health being a continuum will be different to others in their space.
- Attending to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children (*refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy*)
- Strategies are used to promote positive and responsible behaviour, and to prevent and respond to hurtful and unsafe behaviour (*refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy*)
- Educators and staff are supported to access ongoing professional development and resources about mental health and wellbeing education and to understand when and how to refer children to additional support.
- Educators and staff are supported to learn about and care for their own mental health and wellbeing (*refer to Occupational Health and Safety policy*)
- Ensuring mental health and wellbeing information and policy requirements are included in educator and staff orientation/induction.
- Ensuring leadership practices and on-the-ground support, enable a work environment that minimises stress and promotes mental health and wellbeing for educators and staff.
- Implementing strategies to promote positive conflict resolution and to prevent and respond to bullying, discrimination, and harassment (*refer to Compliments and Complaints policy*)
- Providing mental health and wellbeing information to families and the wider community, such as information about local support services and resources about social and emotional learning



- Establishing partnerships with relevant organisations and health professionals to support mental health and wellbeing practices where appropriate.
- Ensuring there are clear referral options and pathways for children, staff, educators, and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing.
- Ensuring that the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, and families are provided with information about policy requirements, with opportunities to provide feedback and input.

Educators and other staff are responsible for:

- Encouraging children to actively consider risks within the service and involving them in the development of guidelines to keep the service environment healthy and safe for all.
- Educators and staff model respectful interactions with each other, children, and families. A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is also role modelled (*refer to Interaction with Children policy*)
- Ensuring that the service provides a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment which celebrates diversity through positive, respectful, and appropriate behaviour when working with children and families (*refer to Code of Conduct Policy and Interactions with Children Policy*)
- Actively supporting and facilitating participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families at Acacia
- Embedding social and emotional learning in the service program and practice, and teaching children to care for their own mental health and wellbeing.
- Embedding opportunities to learn about healthy eating and oral health and the importance of physical activity in the educational program, throughout the year (*refer to Nutrition, Oral Health, and Active Play policy*)
- Ensuring that quiet and reflective spaces are provided for children, educators, and families.
- Implementing appropriate programs and practices to support vulnerable children and families, including working co-operatively with relevant services and/or professionals, where required (*refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing*)
- Ensuring a safe, inclusive, welcoming environment is created for all community members. There is a culture of respect, fairness, and equity.
- Encouraging collaborative, family-centered practice (*refer to Definitions*) at the service which facilitates the positive mental health and wellbeing and active participation of both the child and the family at the service.
- Ensuring that cultural values and expectations about health and wellbeing are respected.
- Ensuring that children's diverse circumstances are understood, and those who are vulnerable are responded to and provided with support.
- Understanding each child's unique developmental journey of which mental health being a continuum will be different to others in their space.
- Attending to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children (*refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy*)
- Strategies are used to promote positive and responsible behaviour, and to prevent and respond to hurtful and unsafe behaviour (*refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy*)
- Children are supported to develop social and emotional skills and learn about and care for their own mental health (*refer to Curriculum Development policy*)
- Establishing partnerships with relevant organisations and health professionals to support mental health and wellbeing practices where appropriate.
- Ensuring there are clear referral options and pathways for children, staff, educators, and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing.



Families and community responsible for:

- Ensuring that the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, and families are provided with information about policy requirements, with opportunities to provide feedback and input.
- Ensuring there are clear referral options and pathways for children, staff, educators, and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing.
- Educators and staff model respectful interactions with each other, children, and families. A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is also role modelled (*refer to Interaction with Children policy*)
- Attending to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children.

Relevant legislation and policy documents

Sources

- Be You, Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au
- BlackDog Institute: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- Child First and family services: www.services.dffh.vic.gov.au/families-and-children
- Commission for Children and Young People, Child Safe standards: www.cryp.vic.gov.au
- Cancer Council Victoria, Achievement Program: www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au/education/early-childhood-services
- Department of Education and Training and Early Childhood Australia: Wellbeing webinars
- Early Childhood Australia, Code of Ethics: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics
- Headspace: www.headspace.org.au
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: www.unicef.org.au
- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority: [The Wellbeing Practice Guide](#)

Related Policies

- Child Safe Environment
- Code of Conduct
- Curriculum
- Interaction with Children
- Nutrition, Oral Health, and Active Play
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Privacy and Confidentiality

Evaluation

- To assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:
- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to identifying and responding to child safety concerns
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints, and incidents in relation to this policy.
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy, and best practice.
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required.
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk (*Regulation 172 (2)*).

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