MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

QUALITY AREA 2 | ELAA version 1.1

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidelines for South Kingsville Preschool to:

- ensure the service environment is safe, inclusive and empowering for children, families, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, volunteers and visitors
- embed social and emotional learning in the educational program
- ensure families, children, early childhood teachers, educators and staff are key partners in mental health initiatives
- engage in partnerships with community networks.

POLICY STATEMENT

VALUES

South Kingsville Preschool 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 South Kingsville Preschool, including during offsite excursions and activities.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Ensuring that the nominated supervisor, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, families and children are active	**R**				

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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)*	**R**	√	√		√
Actively supporting and facilitating participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families at South Kingsville Preschool	**R**	√	√		√
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		√	√		√
Embedding social and emotional learning in the service program and practice, and teaching children to care for their own mental health and wellbeing	**R**	√	√		√
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)*	**R**	√	√		√
Ensuring that quiet and reflective spaces are provided for children, educators and families.	√	√	√		√
Ensuring diversity, cultural practices and mental health and wellbeing practices are considered when implementing the learning program at the service	**R**	√	√		√
Supporting educators in implementing trauma-informed practices *(refer to Definitions)* by providing resources, ongoing training, and guidance to enhance their approach to educating and caring for children	√	√			
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)*	**R**	√	√		√
Ensuring a safe, inclusive, welcoming environment is created for all community members. There is a culture of respect, fairness and equity.	**R**	√	√		√
Encouraging collaborative, family-centred 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	√	√	√		√

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Attending to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children *(refer to Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy)*	**R**	√	√	√	√
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)*	**R**	√	√		√
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)*		√	√	√	√
Children are supported to develop social and emotional skills and learn about and care for their own mental health *(refer to Curriculum Development 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 *(refer to Sources)*	√	√			
Educators and staff are supported to learn about and care for their own mental health and wellbeing *(refer to Occupational Health and Safety policy)*	**R**	√			
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)*	**R**	√			
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 *(refer to Sources)*.	√	√	√	√	√
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	√	√	√	√	√

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BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

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 year[1].

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.

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.

Trauma-informed practice in early childhood education and care is crucial as it recognises and responds to the impact of traumatic experiences on young children. This approach fosters a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment, which is essential for healthy development and learning. By understanding and addressing the unique needs of children who have experienced trauma, educators can help mitigate the adverse effects, promote resilience, and create a foundation for positive emotional and cognitive growth. This compassionate and informed strategy is directly linked to the mental health and wellbeing of young children, as it helps to stabilise their emotions, build a sense of security, and encourage healthy coping mechanisms.

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

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

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DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the PolicyWorks catalogue.

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

Trauma Informed Practice: A strengths-based framework where trauma survivors are seen as individuals, who have experienced extremely abnormal situations and who manage the best as they can.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Alannah and Madeline Foundation, Trauma Informed Practice A guide to early Childhood Organisations: www.alannahandmadeline.org.au
- 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.ccyp.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
- Early Childhood Resource Hub, Trauma-informed practice: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/Trauma-informed%20practice.PDF
- Headspace: www.headspace.org.au
- KidsMatter: www.beyou.edu.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 and Wellbeing
- Code of Conduct
- Educational Program
- Interaction with Children
- Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Privacy and Confidentiality

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EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- Encourage 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))*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Nil

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the approved provider of South Kingsville Preschool on [Date].

REVIEW DATE: May 2028

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