

Before recommending additional support

As an educator, your knowledge and experience of children and young people, and your relationships with them and their families, put you in a good position to notice when additional support may be helpful.

Additional support may include suggestions to the family, school counsellor, wellbeing officer, or external support.

Mental health

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing can shift back and forth along a continuum. It can change depending on circumstances and can do so over the course of a day, week, year and across their lifespan.

Notice the signs

One of the challenges of noticing the signs of potential mental health issues is deciding if, and when, to act. Some of these signs include when a child or young person is showing changes in their:

- behaviour
- emotions
- thoughts
- learning; or
- social relationships.

Other signs include when they are not progressing developmentally as expected.

When you notice a child or young person is having more difficulty participating in learning experiences and social interactions than usual – or has become more withdrawn or reactive than usual – it's time to follow your setting's

plan to identify what sort of support might be useful.

Any signs need to be considered alongside your knowledge of the child or young person's life. Often there are circumstances or events, such as the death of a family member, a house move, new baby or divorce, where some emotional or behavioural reactions could be considered reasonable.

When noticing the signs, also consider:

- developmental stages
- family and cultural background
- preferences and learning styles.

Remember that it's not your role to diagnose or make conclusions about a child or young person's state of mental health.

The Be You BETLS Observation Tool, a template for gathering and documenting objective information, can help you keep a record of your observations.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about how to objectively observe children and young people in your care in the Notice module of the Early Support domain.

Inquire – gather information

Gathering more information about what you have noticed can help you clarify your concerns and guide your next steps. It can also support you to have conversations with families.

Start by making observations and reflecting on them with an appropriate colleague. This can help you identify children and young people's strengths and needs.

As part of this process, it can also be helpful to reflect on any strategies or supports that have already been tried and consider what worked well, what didn't and how the child or young person responded.

Where appropriate you could check in with the child or young person about what you've noticed. Giving them an opportunity to share what's going on for them and discuss what they might find helpful.

You could say something like:

- "I've noticed you've been a bit quieter than usual lately, is everything OK?"
- "You don't seem like yourself at the moment. Want to talk about how things are going?"

Together with your knowledge of the family, these insights can help you consider whether behaviours are developmentally appropriate or signs that further support may be required.

You might find the [Be You BETLS Observation Tool](#) useful to:

- guide conversations with students and families
- support your decision making
- provide useful insights for mental health professionals (providing consent is obtained).

Be You Professional Learning

Find out more about gathering information and your role and in the context of your learning community's policies and procedures in the Provide module of the [Early Support](#) domain.

Follow a plan

When learning communities offer a clear plan to follow where concerns about a child or young person are raised, educators can feel confident in their role and the steps they might take. The plan should include things like:

- Roles and responsibilities – who is responsible for each step in the plan? Who can you consult regarding your concerns?
- Gathering information – what information will be helpful in determining next steps? Who will be involved in this? Consider the child or young person's cultural context and invite participation from family members and kin where appropriate.
- Internal supports – what supports are available from within your learning community?
- Talking to children, young people and families about support – when, where and whose role is it to be involved?
- Confidentiality – consider what are the limits of an educators' confidentiality, and what is the right balance between sharing sufficient information and respecting the privacy of individuals?
- Mandatory reporting – consider when is this applicable (refer to the relevant state or territory legislation).
- Mental health services and supports in your area – what is available and how do you access them? For a quick guide, see [Overview of Mental Health Services](#).
- Working with external services – who, how, and when should you collaborate?

Be You Professional Learning

There's more information on a coordinated approach in the Provide module of the [Early Support](#) domain.

Know what supports are available

One aspect of effectively supporting a child or young person and their family, is for the learning community to be aware of what external supports and services are available in the broader community.

To aid this, learning communities can develop a [stakeholder list](#) of health and community services to understand what's available. Be sure to include key First Nations community

members and organisations that support families whose first language isn't English.

Service availability can change, so regularly updating the list helps ensure it stays relevant.

Some ideas to help with this:

- Check with your local council, which may already have regularly updated information on local services.
- Find out which community organisations and cultural groups operate in your area – arrange a meeting to learn more about their services.
- Make a list of private providers (for example, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists), detailing the age range they work with, any areas of specialisation, waitlists and fees.
- Form relationships with your local National Disability Insurance Scheme Local Area Coordination (LAC) and Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) partners.
- Contact your region's Primary Health Network (PHN) to check what services they have available.
- Identify online and telehealth services.
- Attend local networking opportunities.
- Invite mental health providers and community organisations into your learning community to talk about their services.
- Check out this [Overview of mental health services](#) in Australia to help familiarise yourself with the system.

Be You Resources

Learn more about [building culturally respectful engagement with First Nations Communities](#).

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about recommending additional support in the [Early Support](#) domain.

Bibliography

Visit [Before recommending additional](#) support for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

External links

[It takes a village: Understanding the drivers that facilitate interagency collaboration for improved mental health outcomes for children aged 0–12 \(Emerging Minds\)](#).

