

Recommending additional support

Plan ahead for conversations with children and young people, their families, support people and your colleagues.

All families want the best for their child/young person and while talking about their mental health isn't always easy, there are a few important areas to cover that can help the child, young person and family access support.

Conversations with children, young people and families

Conversations are an important step in helping to ensure children and young people get the support they need. This includes conversations with family members or young people, and may also include conversations with appropriate colleagues.

Preparing for a conversation

Before having a conversation with a child, young person or their family, consider the following:

- Check your learning community's policy and procedures on having conversations with families, child protection and mandatory reporting.
- Consider the relationships between educators and service or school leaders to determine who might be the most appropriate person to lead this conversation and who else might need to be involved.
- Check in with a member of the wellbeing or leadership team to be clear with your concerns and observations.
- Summarise information that has already been gathered, focusing on what you see and hear, rather than what you think about the child or young person's behaviours, emotions and thoughts. You can use the BETLS Observation Tool for guidance.

- Consider the knowledge of the family, along with other information available (for example, if you know their attitudes and beliefs about mental health, cultural context, or connectedness with the learning community). This can help guide the language and approach for the conversation.
- Have the conversation in a comfortable and confidential space. Take some simple steps such as offering water and having tissues on hand in preparation for a potentially challenging conversation. Consider the provision of an interpreter if this would be helpful.
- Consider whether the young person will be present during the conversation - considering their age, maturity and confidence.
- Ensure the family is given due notice of the meeting and its purpose. Emphasise that the conversation will be about providing the best support for the child or young person.
- Provide the family with the opportunity to suggest how they would like the meeting to be held, including the time, location and who will be present. Consider that the family might like to invite a trusted support person or other members of their kinship group.
- Inform families they will be encouraged to share information about their child, including their strengths as this will help guide next steps.

Having the conversation

Keeping a few key strategies in mind can help the conversation to go smoothly:

- Reassure the family or young person that they are welcome, included and valued in the learning community, and that the educators are there to support them.

- Collaboration is key – remember to share information (rather than telling) and seek the family's perspective.
- Listen and be empathetic – consider how tone of voice, body language, verbal prompts, clarifying and summarising can show an understanding of the family's perspective.
- Focus on observations and interactions of the child or young person to provide specific examples to help clarify the concerns and strengths that have been noticed.
- It's ok to pause and reflect before responding. Provide the family or young person the opportunity to do the same.
- Answer questions simply and without judgement. If you don't have an answer let the family know and consider how you might find out together or gather the information required.
- It's ok to have different perspectives. There may be lots of reasons why the family doesn't agree with your perspective or want support initially. If this is the case:
 - acknowledge their perspective and let them know support is available if needed
 - agree to monitor or carry out further observations and get back together at a later date
 - provide information on supports available and give the family or young person time to consider their options
 - ask if there is someone else they would like to speak with (e.g. from your leadership or wellbeing team)
 - enquire whether they would like an interpreter present or First Nations Liaison/Education Officer.
- It may be helpful to debrief with leadership or a trusted colleague when considering your next steps.

Be You Professional Learning

To learn more about collaborating with families to support children and young people, see the

Assist module of the [Family Partnerships](#) domain.

Where to find additional support

In discussions with the family and consulting with an appropriate colleague you may find that there are suitable support options within your learning community.

Within the learning community

In your own learning community, there may be a range of support roles, depending on your context. These include early childhood advisor, educational leader, family support worker, First Nations Liaison/Educator officer, interpreter service, area manager, inclusion support person, school psychologist, state or territory regulatory authority or member of a pastoral care team.

If you bring in one or more support person, consider your own role and professional boundaries, which may include organising the information you have gathered, completing an internal referral form and even offering to arrange the first appointment for the child, young person or family.

External referrals

At times, a referral to an external agency or professional is more appropriate. Most referrals can be arranged through a family's GP, or National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The family may benefit from support to start the process, so consider offering to make an initial phone call to a service if appropriate or assisting the family or young person to make an appointment. For more considerations when it comes to accessing external mental health services, see the [Overview of mental health services](#) fact sheet.

After a referral

Once a referral is underway, you and your learning community can continue to support the child, young person and family by:

- checking in to make sure the family has connected with support, and respecting their choice not to share this information if they prefer not to do so

- liaising where appropriate with other professionals and implementing any suggested support strategies where the family has provided consent for this communication
- monitoring the child or young person's progress and continuing to communicate with their family or chosen professional
- ensuring the child or young person and their family continue to feel a sense of belonging to the learning community.

Critical incidents

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a critical incident is a sudden, unexpected and overwhelming event, that is out of the range of expected experiences.

Critical incidents may include but aren't limited to:

- the death, suicide or terminal illness of child, young person, current or former staff member, or associated community member
- accidents or serious injury of a member of the learning community
- natural disasters such as drought, bushfires, flood and cyclones
- serious assault of a child, staff member or member of the learning community
- the disappearance of a child, or staff member, a hostage situation or abduction.

It's important to be aware that when such incidents occur, an immediate response is required to help support the safety of everyone affected.

Learning communities need to implement their critical incident management plan. This ensures educators and other staff know what to do in the immediate, short and longer-term following a critical incident. They need to understand their roles and responsibilities, and how to best respond to children, young people and families who've been affected.

Make sure you understand your learning community's policies and procedures, including

those relating to child protection and mandatory reporting. If you are unsure about the correct process to follow, promptly involve a member of the wellbeing or leadership team to support you.

If you are concerned a child or young person in your care is at risk of immediate harm, call triple zero (000).

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about how to recognise and respond to critical incidents in the [Responding Together](#) domain.

Educator wellbeing

Early learning services and schools that prioritise educator wellbeing can have a positive impact on an educators' capacity to support a child, young person or their family experiencing difficulties. It can also support educators to look after their own wellbeing. When you need additional support, look within and outside the learning community, considering options such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), mentors, wellbeing staff, leaders and close colleagues.

Be You Resources

Learn more about how educators can support their mental health and wellbeing in [Wellbeing tools for educators](#).

Learn more about how leaders can support their wellbeing and the wellbeing of staff in [Wellbeing tools for leaders](#).

Bibliography

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

External links

[Communicating with families about children's learning](#) (Early Childhood Australia)

[Effective communication with parents: for professionals](#) (Raising Children Network)

[How to facilitate difficult conversations](#) (ReachOut)

