

# Include by embracing diversity within the community

**Inclusive practice for educators relates to creating opportunities for everyone in a learning community to be who they are and to achieve their best mental health.**

## Inclusion and diversity

**Inclusion** is about removing barriers to make sure everyone, including your colleagues, can fully participate and has equal access to opportunities. Inclusion occurs when everyone in your learning community feels valued and respected, has access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute their perspectives and talents. If people feel invisible or experience bullying, harassment or discrimination, this can affect their sense of self-worth. It can also interfere with learning and may impact on their mental health and wellbeing. It also empowers people to contribute their experiences, skills and perspectives so that everyone can benefit.

**Diversity** is about different ways of thinking and being. Differences can include age, religion, gender and gender identity, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ethnicity and culture, education

level, family arrangements and circumstances, personality, interests and abilities, mental health status, disabilities and physical attributes.

## Core inclusion principles

Educators should aim to provide children and young people with a sense of belonging and connection within a safe environment (emotional, social and physical). This, in turn, can motivate them to participate actively in their learning and the broader life of their community.

**Core principles your learning community can use to build an inclusive community include:**

- building resilience across the community
- building and maintaining strong connections with families
- creating and maintaining safe learning environments
- following policies and procedures that acknowledge diversity
- adopting targeted strategies to reduce discrimination.

## Attitudes and barriers

The World Health Organization defines **stigma** as: “a mark of shame, disgrace or disapproval which results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from

participating in a number of different areas of society”.

Stigma can result from both actual and perceived differences. It can be any form of difference, including gender, race, religious belief, sexuality or mental health status. Discrimination based on stigma may be obvious and deliberate, or it may be subtler and more unintended.

**Discrimination** happens when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favourably than another person or group because of their background or certain personal characteristics. Discrimination is against the law if it's based on a person's age, disability, race, pregnancy, marital or relationship status, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status.

## Diversity of experience

**As an educator, you have contact with people from many different settings and circumstances.**

Evidence shows there are a number of groups within Australia at increased risk of mental health issues and conditions. It's likely at least some of these groups are part of your community, as they include:

- rural and remote communities
- people impacted by trauma
- older people
- people impacted by eating disorders
- people with disability
- veterans
- people impacted by substance misuse
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- multicultural and culturally and linguistically diverse people
- gender and sexually diverse people.

## Inclusive early learning services and schools

At its heart, inclusion is about encouraging everyone to participate. As an educator, you can do the following:

- **Get to know children, young people and their families.** Trusting relationships and partnerships can help you notice when a child or young person doesn't seem to be connected or their behaviour changes. Ask families how they wish to be involved.
- **Support self-esteem.** When you show respect for a child or young person's uniqueness, you reinforce their sense of belonging, support identity development and boost their self-esteem.
- **Empower all children and young people to participate.** Some individuals need extra help to access everything on offer. Identify and make appropriate adjustments to ensure people with a particular need can participate like everyone else.
- **Actively teach inclusion.** Talk with children and young people about the way they understand difference. Support them to recognise and respect its value. You can start this process by celebrating key dates of significance for various groups.
- **Challenge prejudice, assumptions, generalisations and discriminatory comments.** Be attuned to subtle as well as overt exclusion.
- **Consider the environment** and what it looks and feels like to all children, young people, families and educators.
- **Facilitate connections.** Find opportunities to encourage relationships between children and young people who identify as different from each other.
- **Be aware of policies.** A whole learning community approach to inclusion should, for instance, promote cultural competency training and professional development, and develop targeted strategies to reduce discrimination.