

# Provide support within and beyond the early learning service or school

**If a child or young person requires support because of a mental health condition, you need to understand your role and the role of others.**

## A coordinated approach

The earlier a child or young person receives support for emotional, behavioural or social difficulties, the better their chance of overcoming those issues, and of reducing the likelihood of more serious mental health conditions. As an educator, providing support doesn't mean you to need to be a mental health professional or to find a solution to the problem yourself, but there's a lot you can do to help if you have concerns about a child or young person.

Your responsibility is to understand the policies and procedures relevant to your role. But to effectively support the children and young people in your care, it's also useful to have a good understanding of the supports available, and the most appropriate time for you or your community to call on them.

## Mental health services

Learning communities can provide support through the following:

- **Prevention strategies** – teaching daily strategies for mental health (such as eating well, sleeping well, keeping active, and nurturing supportive social networks).
- **Stress management strategies** – teaching strategies to support children and young people through stressful situations (for example, conflict resolution skills, relaxation and mindfulness strategies).
- **Universal (or primary) services** – you're part of the universal service system, which includes student wellbeing coordinators, school counsellors, early learning service support staff, child and family health nurses, school nurses, and general practitioners (GPs). These services can provide assistance themselves or determine whether someone might need more specialised support.

External supports may include:

- **Secondary services** – such as psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, social workers, family support workers and allied health professionals. These health professionals provide a range of services, such as face-to-face counselling, play therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) or medication.

- **Tertiary (or specialist) services** – such as specialist paediatric clinics, family therapy services, Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS or CAMHS) or hospital inpatient services. These services are for children and young people experiencing complex and severe mental health issues or are at high risk of harm.

A child or young person may receive support from multiple services. They may also move up and down the tiers, depending on their needs at the time. If you're not sure where an individual fits and what support they need, speak with your wellbeing team or lead educator.

## Support help-seeking

Creating a mental health support network for your early learning service or school means you'll have support on hand when you need it. This also ensures that your knowledge is current, well researched and of high quality. Help-seeking in this context means actively seeking help from other people. It involves communicating with others to get help – including understanding, advice, information, treatment and general support – in response to a mental health issue, condition or distressing experience.

**You support children and young people's mental health when you:**

- are aware of relevant health services – who's available and what they offer – so that you can speak with credibility about the help available
- assist with referrals and offer to attend sessions, if needed
- work to clarify issues with children, young people and families to determine if professional support is needed.

## Know your community

Learning communities are an important entry point for family access to mental health services.

More than half the children and young people who receive mental health support are referred through the education sector. It makes sense, then, to build relationships with service providers outside of crisis situations.

By being aware of available options, your early learning service or school can facilitate appropriate supports, reducing the distress to

you, children, young people and families. It also improves their experience and longer-term prospects. By linking and mobilising their resources, learning communities and health and community services can achieve significant positive outcomes for children and young people.

## Ongoing support

**Enabling children, young people and their families, to become more mentally healthy is a process, and supporting an individual with a mental health condition can often be challenging.**

Ongoing training and professional development for those who work with children, young people and their families is very important, helping them develop non-judgmental attitudes and identify when to follow up on observations.

Risk factors and protective factors change over time and according to the situation – by understanding their interplay, you can help promote protective factors in the life of an individual experiencing a mental health issue or condition.