



Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

Behaviour and wellbeing

Presented by Maree Kirkwood, Nikki Edwards, Shona Doyle and Sandy Clark on 29 April 2020

Maree Kirkwood:

Hello everyone and welcome to our InFocus Be You webinar: Behaviour and Wellbeing.

My name is Maree Kirkwood and joining me are Nikki Edwards, Sandy Clark and Shona Doyle. Be You is a national initiative led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace and is funded by the Australian Government. Be You aims to transform Australia's approach to supporting children and young people's mental health in early learning services and schools. Our vision is that every learning community is positive, inclusive and resilient – a place where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health.

Be You is a collaborative learning community for educators who are supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Being part of this community means your early learning service or school has access to the Be You Consultants to assist you in turning your learning into action. Is your school or service registered with Be You? If you haven't already registered do so for yourself and your service today.

Participate today in our online learning community to learn and be inspired by the ongoing process of embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy ways of being, knowing and doing to focus on and make mental health matter. We'll head over to Nikki now who will be doing the acknowledgement of country.

Nikki Edwards:

Thanks, Maree. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians from all the lands on which we gather today, to not only acknowledge but also pay my respects and the respects of my colleagues to Elder's past, present and future and all those who continue to hold the memories, traditions and ways of being for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise the importance of the continuing connection to culture, country and community for the health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. It's never been more important than now to tune in and turn to country and cultural ritual for reconciliation, healing, recovery and the togetherness of community. Throughout today's webinar we invite you to consider how the ways that we can support educator and family wellbeing are informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders perspective and pedagogy. Thank you. Shona is going to have a conversation with us about self-care.

Shona Doyle:

So we're all here today to consider, learn and reflect about early childhood wellbeing and education. On our screen are the Be You ways for today. Remember looking after yourself is very important. Sense of safety is the most foundational requirement for positive mental health, for sense of security and for forming relationships.

Helplines will be posted in the chat throughout this webinar. Please use them to talk to someone if you or someone you are with is experiencing difficult feelings. Sometimes unexpected feelings can emerge, even difficult ones, so be aware of feelings that come up for you today and make sure you talk to someone if difficulties or difficult feelings occur. Have a yarn.

A safe environment means people are safe to be who they are, are able to work to their strengths and express their opinions and beliefs and that they feel heard and respected, even where there are opposing views.

Children learn from what adults around them do and being aware of how to look after ourselves and support each other can make a huge difference to each of us and to the wellbeing of our team and to the children in our care. Children build a picture of who they are by observing adults and modelling what they do.

During the webinar today, there will be the opportunity for you to reflect on your own practices through polls and reflective questions. Please remember to take care of yourself today as we go through this webinar. Thank you. Now I'll introduce Sandy who will take you through some of the tips for getting the best out of this online space today

Sandy Clark:

Thanks very much for that, Shona. Yes, look here are some technical tips to maximise your learning online today. For those of you who aren't familiar with the webinar platform, this is what your screen will typically look like with the webinar here on the left and the control panel on the right. You can use your control panel to manage your phone or your computer audio today. Everyone is placed in listen-only mode and your microphones have been muted today as we've got a very large number of attendees here.

The control panel has a text box, which you'll see highlighted in blue. The responses in green are public responses and the ones in red are private responses. Throughout the webinar you can ask questions using the chat function. Technical support is available if you're experiencing any other difficulties at any time, please note the customer care details that are on the screen and just contact the team directly.

In the webinar today, we encourage you to get involved as much as you feel comfortable. It's important that everyone feels like this is a safe place to learn and everyone's contributions matter. We invite you to participate in the polls that we'll be launching throughout the session and you can also ask questions via the question box. We hope to respond to as many queries as we possibly can during today's session. For those that we don't get to, we will follow up after the event concludes.

At this stage, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the team behind the scenes. We have Dino, Steph, Maria, Juanita, Susan and Emma.

They will also be involved with posting links, resources or references that we use in the content. You can copy these as we go if you would like to but please don't worry if you miss them. You'll find that there's also a downloadable handout which you can find on the control panel that has all the links and also the reflective questions that you might like to consider with your team.

After the event all participants will be able to access the certificate of participation and a recording of the webinar. As a final note, we will be making the attendee list public for you now. I'll move back to Maree to introduce the focus of today's session.

Maree Kirkwood:

Thank you, Sandy. Today we'll be exploring children's behaviour and wellbeing through the lens of the Be You BETLS observation tool. We'll be discussing how a child or young person's behaviour can indicate a concern with mental health and wellbeing, how observing children and young people can deepen our understanding of their wellbeing and how the BETLS observation tool can support educator wellbeing. All

behaviour has a meaning. Many of us are familiar with the iceberg analogy where the part of the iceberg we can see can represent the behaviour we see, and the part of the iceberg we cannot see, represents what might be motivating that behaviour underneath. Nikki, what does it mean for you when we say all behaviour has a meaning?

Nikki Edwards:

I guess what we wanted to make sure that we launched into today was the concept of behaviour being everything about us. We're always behaving. We don't want to limit our thinking about behaviour to be about just challenging behaviours or behaviours that we find confusing or we don't understand. That's why we want to use that Iceberg analogy to think about how all behaviour is communicating something.

Sometimes it's communicating something that's external that we are not aware of until we see the behaviour and if we're not thinking about it in the iceberg analogy, sometimes we misconstrue the behaviour based just on what we can see.

So what we want to launch into is thinking about having that perspective and perception of behaviour as something we're doing all the time and we want to be able to think what's underneath the water, what's underneath that tip of the iceberg, and not necessarily to make assumptions about what we're seeing.

Maree Kirkwood:

So how does a child's behaviour indicate to you that there might be a concern with their mental health and wellbeing?

Nikki Edwards:

I think that's the thing isn't it? We spend so much time with children we start to know what their tips of the icebergs generally look like. Most of us have normal patterns of being, in the sense of we're predictable or at least people who know us well and take care of us, know and understand that behaviour, and it's not unexpected.

Sometimes our responses can be changed and modified. As an example, we're in a pandemic situation or epidemic at least here in Australia, and children might be having different responses to their normal ways of being right now. They might be having responses in regard to feeling that sense of crisis or anxiety or just changing routine, their life might look so different.

I guess that's what we're thinking about when we then become concerned. It's often when the behaviour is unpredictable or it's a change in the way that children usually behave and their usual ways of being. We know that behaviour can change in response to a crisis or to a change, but it can actually return as well, it doesn't mean that the way that they're now behaving is the way they are going to behave from here on, it just depends on what our windows of tolerance are, how long we're exposed to the change or the difficult times and then we can actually return to our previous ways of being. Once again, we want to remind ourselves as the adult not to panic and not to make assumptions but to just to notice it, notice that we think there's been a shift to the change in what's happening.

Maree Kirkwood:

You have made some good points Nikki around behaviour as our usual way of being and the patterns that we notice and when those patterns might be disrupted. I think that really emphasises why doing observations is so important not only for the ways of being but also when there might be concerns present. We are going to do a poll to start off today with asking you a question about why you take observations.

Is it to inform planning? Is it to keep a developmental record? Do you have curiosity about the development of behaviour of a child? Is it because it is a part of your job or all of the above? If you could select one or many of those and we can have a look at those results in a moment.

Nikki, why do you think observing children deepens our understanding of their behaviour?

Nikki Edwards:

I think one thing that comes into play when we're able to take observations in a professional sense is that they allow us time. The biggest thing I think of as a professional for myself is the time that we're gifted through taking observations. The way that we think about that is not having to know necessarily or to be solution-focused or think about behaviour as if it is an equation. A plus B equals C, therefore I'm going to respond this way.

I think the beauty of observations for me is always been that gift of time when you're collecting observations, things you've noticed over time, so that you can actually put your professional wisdom on those and share with others. It's that beauty of not needing to know right away.

Maree Kirkwood

The poll results show all of the above shot through at number one with 91%. It is really interesting because it very much does encompass all of those areas. It is part of our job, a part of the regulations and national law, but also that curiosity and to inform our work. So Sandy and Shona, what are your thoughts about why we observe children's behaviour?

Sandy Clark:

I think it's important to recognise just how critical the role of observation is. It sounds simple but it's actually not and educators really have a unique opportunity to objectively observe what's going on for a child. I think we also have to remember the scope of the observations and the professional boundaries because it's not the role of the educator to diagnose, to label or to treat mental health issues or conditions.

I was reminded of this actually, as recently there was a Be You Facebook post which had new information about anxiety and it did it reinforce that as an educator it's not your role to diagnose a mental health issue. What you can do is notice children or young people who might be experiencing anxiety and act appropriately, which is so true.

So in collaboration with colleagues I think those first steps are critical, trying to notice, enquire and provide support. What do you think, Shona?

Shona Doyle:

I think they are very useful when you're observing the behaviour of children and especially when there are changes in the community. I mean, we've had the bushfires and right on the back of that we've had the coronavirus, which will affect children's behaviour because they sometimes don't understand what's going on.

They sometimes just get snippets of the news and they become really anxious and that comes out in their behaviour. Children learn how to behave just like they learn any other skill and sometimes what they're feeling doesn't come out appropriately and it's our job as educators to understand what's happening for them. They're feeling overwhelmed, they may be stressed, they're anxious; it could be that they're tired, withdrawn, all different changes that can happen for children. Get support from your colleagues.

Consult with your colleagues, leaders and the families if you're unsure if what you're witnessing is a negative change in behaviour, or if you think the child in your care needs extra support consult with the relevant leaders in your early learning service. Consider using the Be You mental health continuum to recognise where you're sitting on that continuum and where that child might be sitting on that continuum.

As Nikki said earlier, behaviour isn't constant. It changes. You can be fine one day, anxious the next day, very overwhelmed the next day and how we react as educators brings that child back. Using the BETLS

observation tool on the Be You website is an excellent way to collect information and observations on children.

Sandy Clark:

Just to follow up with what the BETLS observation tool actually is, you can find it on the Be You website but it is an acronym to think about Behaviour, Emotions, Thoughts, Learning and Social relationships. It's a fantastic tool.

It's an information gathering tool for guiding further discussion and decision making to support the child's developmental wellbeing and once again, just emphasising that it's not a diagnostic tool but it does give us a really good framework for really respectfully recording our observation of children's behaviour. It helps us to think about what might be motivating that behaviour and how that behaviour influences areas of a child's life.

It's also good for educators to use to think about and reflect about their own reactions to children as well. I really love the fact that it has a strength-based focus and approach to it.

Nikki Edwards:

I was just going to say that too, Sandy. We've indicated some of the difficulties that we might have with understanding behaviour and I'm hesitant to call it challenging behaviour, but for the most part that's what we've talked about the noticing being about in observations, but the BETLS tool is also for us to be able to start to observe children doing well, functioning well, having a really great social situation where there's been great successes for them as well.

It gives us the ability to also observe what we did well as educators and also what children are doing well and I don't mean when they're behaving well or when they're being good children, I mean when something goes really successfully for them. For example, when they interact with a friend or a peer and it goes really well and you can observe why it went so well, when sometimes it doesn't. It gives us the opportunity to collect that type of information as well which we would use with that strength based program.

Shona Doyle:

We sometimes forget that behaviour can be on one end of the spectrum or the other end of the spectrum too when we're observing children, don't we?

Maree Kirkwood

Thank you, panellists and that brings us to our next point thinking about how observing children has supported our practice. We have all been educators previously in varying roles, so the panellists wanted to share as educators when observations might have supported your practice.

Nikki Edwards:

I had an example that I would like to share when I think about the time when I was an educator and observation really supported me in my pedagogy. It was when I was working with a child who I'd known since he was an infant and he was now in the kindergarten room.

He was now four so I knew him very well, but I was having a hard time convincing my colleagues that some of his behaviour was what I would have considered to be help seeking. I'd observed it over time and I felt that he was really clearly help seeking in really non-functioning, disruptive ways. That's probably why my colleagues were having a challenge with it. I just couldn't work out how to convince them that this is what was happening and therefore we should interact and respond as if he's help seeking and as if that was really clear to us.

I created observations over time around what happened before and what happened after because I really wanted to try to work out what need he had and how he was looking to have that met so that I could share that with my colleagues. I really think he was trying to play with so-and-so, I really think he was becoming frustrated that it wasn't working, and at that point we could have stepped in to be some hands above and help.

It was really successful because I had those recorded observations over time. They were really structured and they did show what happened before the incident or the challenge and then what happened after and it was a really successful way to develop my pedagogy to actually meet this child where he was at. I always think of that as a successful observation story.

Maree Kirkwood:

Thank you, Nikki. Shona, do you have anything that you would like to share?

Shona Doyle:

I do, I find that taking observations supported me in my professional resilience and it gave me a way to demonstrate to parents and to my colleagues the child's development and some of the wellbeing strategies we could share and practice together when we were facing challenges. Just like Nikki, it really gave me a great insight into what was happening for the child and be able to share that appropriately.

Maree Kirkwood:

Sandy, how about yourself?

Sandy Clark:

Look, I did have a few anecdotes, or occasions when I was aware that reflecting on my observations really did lead me to seek more information and to talk with colleagues to think about new strategies and changes to my practice.

I've decided to choose actually a very recent example from my role as a Be You Consultant. I introduced the BETLS tool to a service and they were actually all working through it. I noticed that once everyone was using the tool, they started sharing a really different conversation about the children which was much more focused and less anecdotal. I think that really reinforced other comments that I had heard back from other educators who have been using the tool that it has really prompted them to think about the underlying reasons for the behaviour and to look more closely at the strength of the child.

Maree Kirkwood:

Lovely, thank you.

The BETLS tool does support our observations as Sandy has mentioned and she also shared previously what BETLS actually means. It supports our observations but it also provides us with a tool for having conversations with our colleagues and families through the BETLS tool. We can collect and record information in those five broad areas, so the behaviour – what the child is doing; emotions – what the child might be feeling; thoughts – what the child might be thinking; learning – what learning areas are being affected and what social relationships are being affected.

Sandy Clark:

It is a really consistent tool for everyone to be using when you want to document evidence in a reliable, consistent and very objective manner. That's something that we will go into a bit later on though. One thing I also really ask you to think about and to consider is what strategies have been used. Who has implemented them and what is the outcome?

This is really good to record over time because you end up with a record of different things that have been tried. You can think about progress and you can use it to evaluate strategies as well. I think following on from what Shona said, you also are able to record what other people have noticed, remembering that it's not possible to understand what's going on for child following a single observation just by one person.

A different set of eyes can bring a new perspective and new information but it also gets us to consider other factors. Are there cultural factors to consider for this child?

Are there any recent changes in the child's life or at the service? It is important to be aware of these factors and you can bring up other options for support. I think that's particularly applicable at the moment too, given that children will be returning to services and schools following some time away as well and have experienced quite different situations and they will be experiencing quite different responses, too.

Nikki Edwards:

I think that it's really clear that the tool is very thorough and I think I just wanted to make a point here of thinking around the connections that we make perhaps to something like trauma-informed practice or the basis of that and the thing that is really important about the BETLS tool is while the first thing it asks us is what is the child doing, which as Shona has already identified, the intention of that is to be really objective. The BETLS tool then beautifully doesn't cut out the skill, knowledge and experience that educators have which can be cut out sometimes in observations system. It actually does ask you what might and just the word might leaves us open to that idea of you're not always going to know, but with really good intention putting your skill and your pedagogy to that observation, you're going to have a think, it could be, how will we know? and of course that's when you obviously want to be able to share because you don't want to be just thinking about it yourself and coming up with the answer yourself, but actually talking to your colleagues and saying I've noticed this, what have you noticed?

To my mind that sits really beautifully with trauma-informed practice because so often in our day-to-day work with children, we don't know. There are so many things we don't know and as often as we'd like to know them, we'd like all the context and all of the systems and how this is impacting that, sometimes we just don't know and we don't actually need to know in order to be really good, responsive educators and to be really professionally curious and wonder about what's happening there.

I do think that an important piece of BETLS, to know that it's actually asking you to make really good use of your skills. You're not cut out by using this chart; you're actually put deeply right into the middle of it. You need to put your skills and knowledge onto that. It's okay not to know. We have that feeling like we want to be the one to work out what's under the iceberg, but we're not always going to work that out.

What we are going to do is, with good intention, use the BETLS tool because that's really important. What our intention is when we use the tool is to deepen and develop our understanding so we can be responsive in the best way and sometimes where we're going to think it's something and it may turn out not to be, and that's okay because we have tried with really good intention to work it out.

Sandy Clark:

I agree with you, Nikki. I think the tool does really honour educator's skill and expertise and what we see throughout it are prompts to bring forward that knowledge.

It does continue to look at some areas about pervasiveness, frequency, persistence and severity, too. Pervasiveness is thinking about when and where this occurs. Is it across one setting or across multiple settings? What about the time of the day? Who's present at the time? What's happening before and what's happening after?

The frequency is about how often the behaviours, the emotions and the thoughts are observed. So that might be just occasionally. Think about maybe something is happening at that time to trigger it off. It might be all the time or at specific times.

I think this also highlights if the environment or the routines need to change or maybe a child needs support with further strategies if perhaps it is always happening at a transition time or maybe in a large group setting. The idea about persistence is really about how long the behaviour has been happening for.

Is it always just in a setting where you are? Has it just started? Has it built up over time? Finally the severity, the last one I referred to, is about how severe these emotions thoughts and behaviours are: mild, moderate or severe. How they are influencing a child's day-to-day experience can also lead to understanding in terms of how the child is behaving in relationship to other children of the same age.

I think educators are really well placed and experienced in understanding all of this so that these things combined really just help to give us a clearer picture of what really was happening and what's going on.

Nikki Edwards:

I love these four points because it does fit with that idea of developing our understanding over time. There's no sense of rushing in or needing to know. I love the point that you made about how it influences the child's day-to-day experience because that fits again with that idea that we can change from day-to-day, moment-to-moment depending on what's happening around us and the ability we have to cope and respond to that and it reminds me that resilience is built by sometimes having a hard time sometimes.

It's not our job as educators to solve or eliminate hard times. It's about supporting children when they're having them to understand them and to know how to recover from them, but also that sometimes you are just actually going to stay in them.

It's okay to stay in being angry and frustrated or embarrassed or whatever the hard feeling is that you're having. It reminds me that our functioning is affected differently. Some of us can function really well with really hard emotions over time and we operate well under stress, thinking about that in an adult sense obviously, but some of us not so and we shouldn't as educators assume that a child who's having a hard time is not functioning well.

They don't necessarily correlate with each other that they're therefore having a terrible time of life because something's hard right now and we only know that by knowing the children, because without knowing the children well, how do we know when this child has reached their threshold? They're not coping or managing or regulating now they're somewhere else. I really love that the BETLS tool allows us to pick up on something that happens over time, not a one-off that we then decide our programming or our interactions around.

Shona Doyle:

I love that, Nikki, and it reminds us that as educators we provide that safe space for children to fail now and again.

Nikki Edwards:

I was thinking of the word acceptance. It's accepting feelings, naming them, acknowledging them and that's part of why we want to identify that all behaviour has a meaning because we don't want there to be negative behaviours and positive behaviours because they're actually all just behaviours that healthy, whole people feel.

Shona Doyle:

For reflecting together the BETLS observation tool has a section for looking at the behaviour from the educators perspectives and it gives an opportunity for reflection. It gives you an opportunity to ask what additional support you may need and ask yourself do you fully understand what is occurring for the child here and if not, what can assist you with gaining this understanding and what can support you in that journey.

Using the Reflection tool that's available on the website is a good way as it has some really good prompting questions for that. Discussing with your colleagues who know the child a little bit better or has taken another observation and comparing the observations together can assist you to come up with the picture of what is happening together. You can help your colleague and yourself to explore your own feelings about this behaviour.

Using that Reflection tool as the starting point can develop comfort with the complexity of some situations. It will assist you as a service and your team to support your own wellbeing through this which really is a great aspect of that BETLS tool.

[Maree Kirkwood:](#)

Thanks, Shona. I have an example I'd like to share from working with services using the BETLS tool. The story I have is told that after reflecting together, the educators identified that the child that they had these concerns about didn't really have and wasn't really an experiencing any positive relationships with any of their educators.

When those educators were getting together, and knowing that positive relationships are protective factor for children's mental health and wellbeing, they made a decision to make sure that that child could have one warm, trusting and nurturing relationship with at least one educator to support them with that secure base to go to.

They use that risk and protective framework to inform those decisions about what to do next so they were focusing on what they could enhance and have influence over but furthermore, they also recognised the importance of each other's wellbeing when putting this strategy into place and so when working with the educator who would be working with this child, it was to support that educator at the same time if they started to struggle with what was happening or feeling really challenged. It was also so other educators would be in tune with that educator, to be able to almost tap in and let that educator step out for a little bit to regulate themselves as well.

That eventually became a bit of a cultural norm at that service as well. That was just the standard of practice across the educators.

[Nikki Edwards:](#)

It takes a certain amount of preparedness for that because it's something that you want to have discussed, shared and agreed on before you have that moment, which once again is what observation allows us to do: to be prepared for our own triggers or challenges and the things that we find more difficult to be present for. It's nice that services are working in such a non-judgmental, safe way to actually recognise that all educators have wellbeing also. We also have wellbeing needs.

You're still a professional if you identify that you're having a challenge or that you need help. You're seeking help in the same way. I think that would make a big difference for a lot of people if they had that already agreed upon, that sometimes I reach here and I want to be present but I need to be mindful and once I've been mindful I'll be back and be able to be my best self again.

[Maree Kirkwood:](#)

So we do all acknowledge that children's behaviour does impact on educator wellbeing, but today we really want to look at how the BETLS tool can support educator wellbeing so for our second poll today.

We are asking how you build your professional wellbeing. You can choose as many answers as you wish from the following which are: relationships and partnerships, confidence in my knowledge and skills as a professional, knowledge of policies and procedures, children's behaviour and leadership support.

Some questions we might consider – and this is for the panellists to consider as well, has your professional wellbeing ever been impacted by misunderstanding a child's behaviour and have you ever at one point taking a child's behaviour personally and what might influence your response to a child or young person's behaviour?

Panellists, do you have any responses to those questions or anecdotes you would like to share?

Nikki Edwards:

I just want to say yes, yes, yes, yes and yes.

Shona Doyle:

I think your cultural background also expects the way that you were brought up to have children behave in a certain way and when they don't, you may take that personally as a reflection on the way that child feels about you. You then have to put that aside and explore some the child's cultural background.

How were they brought up? What does it look like in their household? Explore this so that you don't take it personally and you do it very professionally.

Nikki Edwards:

Such a good point, Shona. I was just thinking when you spoke about cultural ways of being around things such as what's identified as respectful behaviour, for example, making eye contact, culturally for me, is incredibly important to show that I'm listening and being respectful.

Of course, you can make eye contact and not be actively listening to somebody at all, but for whatever reason that's something that I've carried with me. I often think that a child is not respecting me if they're not showing me those sorts of behaviours.

Shona Doyle:

Another one is when you put your hand on a child's head just to let them know you there and they flinch away from you. You take that personally, but in their culture, it may not be appropriate to be touching them on the head.

Maree Kirkwood:

The poll results are in. Relationships and partnerships is the top response at 93% but all of those responses are quite high anyway. We are now going to go right into our final poll for today which is about how you ensure your own wellbeing when you engage in difficult conversations with families or colleagues.

What do you do? Do you make sure you're prepared? Maintain professional boundaries? Debrief after with an appropriate person? Engage in mindfulness strategies or other self-care strategies?

Ensuring your own wellbeing when having difficult conversations may be very different depending on who you might be talking with. It's important to make space and time for expressing distress or feelings in safe and appropriate ways, reflecting about and planning for what you could do next time and for practicing self-compassion.

As challenging as it can be at times, we also need to be careful about taking things too personally as we just had a discussion about before.

Shona Doyle:

I have an example of that where an educator felt distressed and anxious for several months after sharing a recorded observation with a parent. The child was around 18 months old and had started to demonstrate some concerning behaviours and the educator had recorded these and shared them with the parent appropriately but the parent had not accepted these observations and accused the staff member of bias and just withdrew the child with no notice.

Now maybe if educator approached the parent with observations taken by different staff members at different times of the day, perhaps some of this anxiety would not have occurred for her because it was a different approach in practice and it would have avoided the accusations of bias because maybe the observations of other educators would have confirmed that for the family, or it could have even just made the educator think again, well am I putting this observation there and it doesn't really fit that child?

The educator's wellbeing was definitely not looked after in that situation, through no one's fault – in hindsight it gives you 20/20 vision I suppose, but definitely when having difficult conversations with families, you've got to ensure you maintain your professional boundaries and your professional distancing to safeguard your wellbeing and gauge your family's willingness to connect and what is the response of the collective where not one educator should be left to deal with this on their own. Think about what support you have in place as an educator so that kind of thing would not occur for you, too.

Sandy Clark:

I agree about professional boundaries that you're talking about there, Shona, and I think that professional values can be supported by using the BETLS tool, too. I was just reflecting on what would have happened if they had that opportunity because in the conversations with families about children's behaviour can be difficult and documented observations can be a really good starting point for these discussions and really supportive of those meetings.

Maree, we will go back to you because you've got the results from the poll here now.

Maree Kirkwood:

So the poll results are in and we've got being prepared at the highest at 88% and that's where the BETLS observation tool can really support that preparedness and having that documentation there, but also those professional boundaries as Shona discussed, having a debrief with an appropriate person and those self-care and mindfulness strategies.

Panellists, did you want to talk anything more to those results or the conversation around wellbeing?

Nikki Edwards:

It's interesting to see that self-care strategies have a low percentage there.

We're feeling like we're not able to think about ourselves and the impact on our own wellbeing but perhaps it's because people are prepared so they don't feel like they need to use those self-care strategies. Maybe those two results are linked.

Sandy Clark:

That's a really valid point as well, Nikki, because preparation is great isn't it, and that preparation could include those self-care strategies even in terms of thinking about afterwards who am I going to talk to about this and how and where I'm going to do it and how am I going to do it and maintain confidentiality and professionalism as well.

Nikki Edwards:

I think as well part of that preparedness for me would always be around accommodating all those other options that we had on the poll, and because of that it would be about me checking in with my intention.

Intention to me is such a big word. I think about it when I think why would I use the BETLS tool? What's my intention professionally?

I'd be the same when I went into a conversation, thinking what is my intention? Well, my intention is to share what I've noticed about the child's experience or what I think the child is experiencing and what I think is happening because I think there's a fine line between maintaining professional boundaries and being able to be really clear that our intention is grounded in care and compassion.

I don't think that's unprofessional, to be clear in your conversation that this is coming from a place of me wanting to understand your child and therefore to meet their need. Sometimes we don't need to be so cut and dried and that's the beauty of this tool, that it brings us in so we're able to say I'm doing this because I really care and I'm not a hundred percent sure so I really need to engage with you about it.

I think knowing your intention clearly before you step into those moments is also protective because you're saying I'm professional, I'm doing this out of good intention.

Sandy Clark:

I agree, and I think that the BETLS tool does really demonstrate that you do really care about the child and that you've been really giving it a lot of thought as well. It's such a thorough tool. I think many families will recognise the care and concern that you're taking about it. Other families may be in a different space at the time and not in a space to actually be able to discuss it or have other reasons that they don't want to actually have that discussion at that time, too.

Maree Kirkwood:

For today's webinar, Behaviour and wellbeing, we explored how a child or young person's behaviour might indicate a concern with mental health and wellbeing, why observing children and young people deepens our understanding of their behaviour and how the BETLS observation tool can support educator wellbeing.

So I'm going to ask the panellists one last question for today, I'll start with Shona. What's your takeaway message from today?

Shona Doyle:

I think for me today, it's important to use a consistent tool when recording examples of concerning or disruptive behaviours or positive behaviours and that more than one person should be assisting and taking those observations to avoid any stress and anxiety for educators, especially when those difficult professional conversations have to occur, and having that preparedness, is really important for educators to look after their own wellbeing in all aspects of their work.

However, at times when emotions may become heightened, it's particularly significant, especially around about now when we have the pandemic situation and we've had the bushfires where people out within the child care service, the parents and other support services may be feeling that stress, too.

Maree Kirkwood:

Thank you, Shona. Sandy, how about yourself?

Sandy Clark:

Simply recognising the value of observation, that it can really help us to look at what's going on with a child with new eyes and a new understanding of their behaviour, but not necessarily trying to change behaviour as the ultimate goal. If you change your approach, you can feel differently about your interaction with a child and really get a greater sense of what the child is doing, it's like blowing cobwebs off your eyes, really.

I think that idea that when you become in tune with a child it really can be inspirational.

Nikki Edwards:

I love that phrase. I carry that with me wherever I go, the idea of blowing cobwebs off my eyes.

Obviously we're here to champion the BETLS tool because we believe in it so much, but I think genuinely what its intention is, is to remind us to keep looking, keep sharing and keep reflecting. It reminds me to reframe or to see it again in a fresh way or especially if we're feeling challenged as educators that we can take a moment to be mindful, to blow the cobwebs off our eyes and think is this an assumption I'm bringing? How do I know this? And take it to someone else.

My takeaway is I just wanted to remind educators out there that we're entitled to joy in our work. I think sometimes we can forget that actually it's okay for us to want to feel good at work, to want to have a good sense of wellbeing at work.

That doesn't mean that there won't be days that are hard and that we're working incredibly hard physically and emotionally, but we get that sense of joy that needs in us are met around being professionals and enjoying our work. I think that's more likely to happen when we feel really confident, skilled and capable and that's why the BETLS tool is so beautiful. I am not a systems person and anyone who's ever worked with me before will know, so I tend to keep things in my head and my heart and you can't really share that. It becomes really difficult if you've noticed something you've wondered about a child and you sit in here, it's really valid, but until you put it somewhere where it's shareable and it can become a foundation for reflection in others it means that I'm not making the best use of the great things that sit in here.

For me, that's a big part of the joy my work, to be able to take those things that I know and that I feel and that I'm thinking and put them in a shareable format so that I can see what my colleagues think. What were you thinking? How did it look for you? What would you do differently next time? How are we going to meet this need?

To that mind, our children are always help seeking and so are we as adults. It's actually totally appropriate for us to be able to seek help through our observations and I need some help to articulate, to understand, to dig deep into my observations. Seek help because you're entitled to it.

Maree Kirkwood:

Thank you, Shona, Sandy and Nikki. They were lovely anecdotes. My last takeaway message would be the BETLS tool not only has the power to support the individual child, but it also has the power to nurture whole learning communities as well. Thank you for participating today. When you exit you'll be prompted to complete the exit survey.

Please remember to complete this and please include the names of anyone that might be watching today's webinar with you. As many of you know, these webinars are great ways to not only learn, reflect and put learning into action; they also assist in demonstrating an individual commitment to continued professional development with Be You.

They also guide a whole service or school professional learning and continuous improvement so you can contact our team today and we can assist you. For anyone who service or school is already participating, please contact your Be You Consultant. If your service or school isn't a registered participating service as yet and you would like to know more about what is involved, check out how to start the experience and join today. You can see the link in the chat to get started. You can also join one of our many National Check In events and talk about what you have learned and done today.

Often Consultants spot really great learning in action that's being done without educators noticing and it's often easier for a pair of outside eyes and ears to notice. So once again, thank you for your time.

End.