

Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

Play for Wellbeing

Presented by Renee Wright, Su Garrett, Sue Jarrett and Blair Aldrich on 3 March 2021

Renee Wright:

Hi everyone, and welcome to our In Focus Webinar, Play for Wellbeing.

My name is Renee Wright, one of the State Managers. And I'm so happy that you're joining us today. Before I tell you about Be You, I'd like to introduce you to our panel members that will come on briefly.

Now, firstly, we have Su Garrett who's the Director of Explore and Develop, Annandale in New South Wales. So, welcome Su. And we're really lucky today. We've got two Sue's. So, I'll just affectionately refer to as Su G.

We also have Sue J, so Sue Jarrett you're an Educational Leader and you're from Gorokan Preschool in New South Wales as well, so welcome, we're really excited to have you, and we've also got one of our very own Be You consultants Blaire Aldrich so, welcome Blaire nice to see you as well.

We look forward to connecting with you shortly. So, for those of you that are unfamiliar with Be You, I'd like to share a little bit about what we do, and for those of you that are already Be You advocates, here's a little bit of a refresher.

So Be You is a national initiative led by Beyond Blue, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, and we're funded by the Australian Government.

Our aim is 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, resilient, and 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.

So being a part of a community means your early learning service or school has access to Be You consultants, and we've got quite a pool that you can draw upon, and they will support you in undertaking your learning and action.

So if you aren't with them, and came to learn more, make sure you follow the links in the chat to learn more. And, of course, we're always here to help out.

I'll just get you to move to the next slide.

Ok thank you. My screen's doing lots of fun things.

So I would now like to take a few moments and acknowledge we are meeting on diverse lands across Australia and acknowledge and thank the traditional owners for sharing their lands with us.

Please join me in paying our respects to elders, past, present, and emerging and recognising the importance of the continued connection to culture, country and community to the health, social and emotional wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. And this is particularly true for our children and young people who we are entrusted to care and teach.

In the spirit of exploring play and wellbeing in today's webinar, I invite you to consider how your learning environments and teaching are already, and can be further enhanced, by incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

I think we can move to the next slide and see what's happening in that space. Fantastic - time to talk a little bit about self-care. At Be You, we really are champions for educators, and we are committed to educator wellbeing.

Be You's vision, as mentioned before, is for every learning environment to be positive. So apart from equitable systems and processes to support the entire learning community, it is you, the educators, that make this vision a reality so we really want to acknowledge and pay our respects to the wonderful work that you do with children and family.

So, you'll notice on the screen are our Always Be You ways for today so please remember to look after yourself in today's webinar. And we'd really love to hear from you through the chat: we really hope that you'll let us know your thoughts and ideas. Please feel free to contribute as much or as little as you feel comfortable in today's webinar.

Helplines will be posted in the chat throughout the webinar.

Please use them to talk to someone if you or someone you know is experiencing difficult feelings.

With the next slide, I'll look to guide people. So we've got some information now just to support you to navigate this online world.

I'll put the script here, I'm just going to read so that so I get the information to you correctly. So, some technical tips for maximising your learning online today.

So, for those unfamiliar with the webinar platform, this is what your screen would typically look like with the webinar, on the left, and the control panel on the right.

Throughout the webinar, you can ask questions about using the webinar function, and we will have some technical support available.

So, the control panel, as you can see with the question box, is highlighted in blue, the responses in green are public responses, and the ones in red are private responses.

You can also use your control panel to manage your phone or computer audio.

Today, everyone is being placed in listen only mode and your microphones have been muted, as we have a large number of attendees.

Throughout the webinar today, we encourage you to get involved as much as you feel comfortable, as I've mentioned before, so it's really important to us to everyone feels that this is a safe space to learn, and that everyone's contribution matters.

So again, you can ask questions via the question box and we hope to respond to as many of your queries as possible during today's session.

But for those of you that we might not be able to follow up, we will definitely get back to you after the event.

So just keep that in mind.

Okay I think, it is time to talk: Play and wellbeing.

What do you think?

So you will see the next slide has a little bit of an outline about what we're going to be looking at specifically.

Let's see, what do we have? We will be unpacking the role of play in supporting the wellbeing of children. We've got considering the educator's role in play and looking at play as being a part of wellbeing for the entire learning community and educators in particular.

Okay. Let's move to the next slide.

And I think it's time to re-acquaint ourselves with our panel members.

Great, I can see Blaire and I can see our two Sue's. Welcome back.

Lovely to see you, so I can see everyone there ready to roll.

Let's start by looking at the role of play in supporting the wellbeing of children. So I think it might be nice to do a little bit of a refresher and think about what we already know about play and please feel free to add your thoughts in the chat box, as well. So, as I'm sure many historians would attest, it doesn't matter what historical period or ancient civilization we're studying, children and play have always been apparent.

We know that there are numerous theories and philosophies that relate to play from the great philosopher Socrates, who argued for play to be included in learning and he actually argued you can't separate the two. And then we have Piaget and Vygotsky who most of us are very familiar with and they both posited that play supports children's intellectual capacities and social development as well.

So really, important figures there and I guess, in particular, when we're looking at wellbeing, it's kind of interesting, I think, to look at the work of Bruner, another educational psychologist and Freud, as well. And they really paved the way for us to think about play and how that relates to therapeutic practice.

We know that in contemporary times, play continues to make headlines, so to speak. It's something we're really passionate about in our field and we advocate for. We recognise that play is children's work and you know the most effective way to support learning and wellbeing.

Right, so I'm going to turn to the panel right now, and I'd love for you to share: What does play mean to you, and how does play support wellbeing?

So I'm going to start with the person closest to me, Su Garrett.

Su Garrett:

Thanks, Renee.

I always just start with play, it's everything for children.

It's, yes, it really is how children make sense of their world and I think it really should be joyful for them and it should be as much as possible about their choice.

I know in our service at the moment, we are really looking at the anti-bias goals, and I think goal number one really looks at children developing self-awareness, confidence, pride in themselves, and pride in their families.

And I think that really is wellbeing in an essence, and they learn that a lot through play.

Renee Wright:

Absolutely and I really like how you link that to inclusion. I think here, we talk about it in the latest edition, but, to be honest with you, I've got some of the others in a bookshelf and I haven't had a chance to look at it.

But really interesting, play - how that supports identity and you've really touched base on the kind of identity of families and how that can be really nurtured. Sue J, did you want to add anything? What does play mean to you, and how does it support wellbeing?

Sue Jarrett:

I'm going to refer back to the United Nations Rights of the Child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and say play is their right as a child. It's essential to their mental health, their emotional wellbeing and their learning, and I really believe it's the medium through which all social emotional wellbeing, and how they thrive best. It is their world, and it is how they learn, and it is about them being I suppose in their best mental health, it really does enhance their mental health, being able to immerse themselves in play.

Well put, and thank you. A really good reminder about that it isn't just a nice thing we do it's actually entrenched in children's rights. So, really good point, I think it's the Article 31. Only know this because you shared that with me earlier. But quite useful to have a look at...maybe see if we can unpack it in a staff meeting.

Thank you, Sue, and Blaire did you want to add anything?

Blaire Aldrich:

Just building on what Sue and Su have both said that play is integral to what children do and how they learn.

I've heard it referred to as children's work, and so it's not something additional that children do.

It's central to their learning and their development and all areas of development: so their social development, their emotional development, the physical development, their cognitive development. So it's something that we need to take seriously...their everyday work.

Renee Wright:

Yes, and I really like how you're kind of actually doing a bit of a break down that sometimes when you say, learning, people think about it as top heavy. It's almost that top-down approach and it's about cognition and thinking and patterning, and sequencing and it is all of that. But we actually know that if children don't find that the play is soothing, Su G I think you used the word joyful, you can't actually learn. Like that whole pre frontal cortex is completely shut down. And so yes, you've just made me think, Blaire, like, we actually need to do some advocacy there.

When we talk about play supporting learning, it's the holistic learning of children, not just one particular sub area, if you like, yes, I'm reading this book at the moment, I don't know if you're a bit like me. I have so many books I haven't finished. I'll just show you the Cover. It's titled Trauma Informed Practices with Children and Adolescents, and it's quite a nice read because it's not too thick but it's like 90% looking at sensory interventions, through play, like sand play, play dough, singing, drumming. So yes, to actually re-iterate, you know, all of our comments, how play is really important, but it's actually really healing and supports recovery.

Okay, I think we could go on and on, but I think it's time for a poll.

Very good - so the role of play in supporting the wellbeing of children. So, we've got a question here. We want to know, how important do you consider these?

- important
- not very important
- somewhat important
- extremely important.

At least, we didn't have a response that they're not important at all, that was a worry, because you already know that it's important.

But it would be great to hear what you think.

And panel members, it seems that you definitely think that it's very, very important, it might be interesting to actually take that to your teams. Both Sue's in particular, I know that you've got different leadership roles, and see what some of your staff think.

Oh, look, there you go, popped up on my screen, what have we got? So 15% say it's important, 85%, extremely important. Fantastic! That's great. 1%. Somewhat important, okay, good, good.

That's actually so encouraging, isn't it? The majority of us really understand and acknowledge how important play is, and as a precursor to wellbeing.

Anyone have any comments or thoughts about the poll?

Was it surprising to anyone?

Sue Jarrett:

I thought it was great that it was such that it was, 85%, was excellent. So it shows that people really, all attendees are really valuing play.

It's for children's emotional wellbeing as well, so that's excellent.

Renee Wright:

Yes, that is really exciting, isn't it?

Okay, want my computer just to behave at once. But that's okay because we've got each other and we can continue rolling. So the role of play in supporting the wellbeing of children, let's have a look at, we've got a new poll.

Yes, we do.

So what do you think is the educator's role in play? An interesting one, because we've had a look at what we mean by play and how it links to wellbeing. 85% of you said, Yes, absolutely I agree. So what is the educator's role in play?

We've got some options: supervising children, observing and documenting, facilitating learning, or something else.

And whilst you are having a think about that, and again we'd love to hear from you, on to our panel members. I'm really curious about what you think about how the role of the educator differs depending on the age of the child and might start with you, Blaire.

Blaire Aldrich:

Yes, of course. I think that it just says a lot. You think about the different developmental stages that children are in, if you're thinking about very young children, babies, and toddlers. How they interact and engage with the world is very different to school age children who have developed their social and emotional capacities.

So, we really need to consider our role in that space. So with younger children, it may be much more one-on-one and more directed. Whereas with older children, it's more there is that facilitator and support role.

But I think we also need to think about, not just the age of the child, but the child as an individual, where they are in terms of their own development, not just they're in Year two therefore they're going to behave this way. We need to actually look at that child as an individual, and support them so that they can have capacity and succeed.

Renee Wright:

Yes, that's really interesting, you've went through a few points there for me,

And, you're right, just to kind of complement some of your thinking about the latter point, I think it depends on your worldview of children. So we often are really influenced by child development and kind of maturational theory. But I think what you've really highlighted, is actually, let's say, the top, where they're at, rather than okay they're two years of age and so, you know, this is the right kind of method.

I can see the results have popped up, so we might continue that conversation in a moment. But let's look at our results. So what do you think is the educator's role in play?

Let's see, facilitating, learning, 90%, followed by observing and documenting, yes great, supervising children.

Su G, what do you think about the poll results?

Has anything kind of surprised you, if we could have the poll results up again, because I can't quite remember what the percentages were, thanks so much.

Sorry, Su G or Blaire or Sue J? Any thoughts?

And yes, Su G, we'd love to hear from you.

Su Garrett:

All right. I think my microphone slipped down for a sec.

I'm pretty happy that it says that 90% of people think that it's important to facilitate play, and hopefully facilitate learning, and hopefully that's through play, then observing and documenting, because we can sometimes get caught in having to document or do those other tasks. And I think, if we're going to facilitate learning through play, for wellbeing, we need to, as educators, create safe places for children where they can feel safe to play because, as you said before, if children are not safe, they won't learn.

Renee Wright:

So absolutely, yes quickly, Sue J and Blaire, any other kind of thoughts about the poll?

So I think it was 90% of participants, said, yes, supporting learning is a really important strategy that they're using.

Sue Jarrett:

I think that the facilitating was key, really that the educators see themselves as scaffolders really of play, which ties in with Vygotsky's theory. I also really think the observing, and documenting to really engage in play and to get to know the children you do have to observe, and really listen to the children as well, so I think that's a really important part. I think that's actually a part of the facilitating play. It's not us driving the play. It's not us being the voice of the play. It's actually us scaffolding and being engaged. The children want to step in and out of the play, as well. So being really aware of where the children are to resource them and support them the best way we can.

Renee Wright:

It's so true. So there were a few options. I kind of agree with where you're going that. I think all of those options are really valid, and we would be doing all of those things, and many other things. So, you're right. In terms of being a facilitator of learning and scaffolding, absolutely, but also on observing and, you know, that kind of listening and watching and wondering is actually really, really important. So, yes, that's a good pick up. And the other thing that comes to mind is that intentionality as well.

Blaire Aldrich:

I just add Renee, I'm just going to jump in, and building on what everyone else is saying, I think it goes back to, when we're thinking about the educator role; we need to think about why we believe.

Going back to that question of why play supports wellbeing and how it supports children's agency and children of all ages. Agency, particularly with regard to their social and emotional well-being because play is an opportunity for children to make sense of the world around them gives them an opportunity to trial, new or difficult scenarios and also, in that safe space that was mentioned earlier as well.

And, you know, and that's not just in social or socio-dramatic play, but also things like constructive play and object play also provide these opportunities because children have choice and control and they get to make those choices and those decisions that have influence on what's happening and their immediate world around them.

I think part of that role of educators is giving children the opportunity to have that autonomy and have that agency in the various ways that they are engaging in play.

Renee Wright:

Yes, definitely. I think what really stands out for me is when we're thinking about play, not merely putting an activity out or setting something up there's this beautiful dance. So the interplay with the human environment, the educators, children and the physical environment, including the actual micro or whatever they, the experience or resources are in. So, you know, having a table and some puzzles, and to test the support side, parallel play doesn't actually really support while it can support agency, but only if you have the right conditions and the human environment, allows us.

The other day, you had this really gorgeous example of what I call kind of almost private space in a lot of early learning services. And I admitted that I had a storage room with lots of equipment, and children would readily say to me, oh today we want this, da-da-da, and I'd help them to access that, or help them to problem solve and go, okay, you want that? You want the mini trampoline now, perfect. Where are we going to put it, because this room is already looking pretty crowded? And then, he said, Oh, that's interesting.

Actually, at the service I worked in, we had a really, kind of detailed conversation about this and engaged with children and families, and said actually, why do children need to be so disempowered, that they're constantly asking us, you know, can we go into the storage room? Can we get the bike out of the shed?

And do tell us a little bit about that because I think it's such a great example.

Blaire Aldrich:

Yes.

So this is going back to when I was an educator in a kindergarten, and we noticed that we were often gatekeepers to children's play; children would be engaged in a particular experience, and then have to stop and ask for additional resources that were contained in the storeroom or our shed.

And it was really disruptive to the momentum that they gained. And so we had a conversation with the children. We had a conversation with each other, and we decided that we would actually open up those spaces to the children, so that they had control over what they needed and when they could go and get it. And it made such a difference to the environment and the way the children were engaging with the space and with each other, because they had, instead of coming to us, to kind of negotiate and decide what they needed. They were doing that with each other, and we were just there to support.

And that was a really valuable lesson that, you know, we need to give children that autonomy.

Renee Wright:

Yes, and it just sounds so empowering doesn't it. And, again, you can say that marriage between the human environment and the way you supported children in that, you know, you can actually access it. And I guess these are some parameters, but also by having it sort of set up so it's safe and accessible as well. So yes, I think it's great actually because sometimes we throw these words "play supports well-being" and "supports resilience", like what does it actually mean though? And I think that's such a beautiful example of illustrating that. So that leads us to our next question, which I'm really excited about.

Because we would like to survey educators, and we are so grateful when our Be You community, you know, provides us with feedback and ideas. And we understand that you want some practical strategies as well as us talking about philosophy and deepening your thinking.

Looks like we've got a poll, but the next question I'm going to introduce anyway is how can educators support children's social and emotional learning and we'll be looking at some practical strategies

But before hand, it looks like we are going to have a poll, so that will be nice.

So the next poll is looking at who is play for. You know what we're going to do is actually hold that thought, because I really want to chat about some practical strategies. So let's, let's do that instead.

Sue J, we might start with you this time. What are some practical strategies that educators can use to support children's social and emotional learning?

Sue Jarrett:

I was thinking about what I thought of this question was different ways to empower children in.

So to show that we value their thinking and their ideas and their opinions, so that they can build confidence and that strong sense of identity in who they are, which then follows through to their social emotional well-being. Giving an example of what, how I like to approach children say we're in a play scenario and you might have a sloped board or going into a sandpit where one of the children is running a car down it. I like to put a suggestion forward to the children, I like to say things like: Oh, I wonder what would happen if we made that slope, lifted the plank and made it steeper. What would happen then? Or I wonder what would happen, would the car go faster or slower? So we engage the children in the conversation.

So, we're getting these, I suppose I'm just starting conversations off and giving children some ideas of where to go, and then hopefully then they actually take ownership of it in the way that they will go. Oh, yes! I know the answer to that! Oh, yes, this is going to happen or that's going to happen. So the children are really empowered in me believing in them, and me trusting them to know the answer and to work that out without a teacher directing. Like this is what's going to happen: leave it open and let the children direct learning and play themselves, and I think that's really good for their wellbeing, because it builds feelings of competency in themselves. And for us, to see them as being really capable, and we trust them to work out the answers, and for them to teach us.

Renee Wright:

That is such a rich example and again if you were to unpack that when you started talking, I was like, okay, you're supporting some science concepts here, math concepts. You're questioning, thinking divergently,

you know, all of that. But actually if you underscore that you're exactly right, you're actually saying, you know what, I trust you, I want to know what you think, you know, let's learn together: I'm not the expert that is so empowering.

Thank you.

How about our other Sue? Su G?

What do you think? Did you have any strategies or stories?

Su Garrett:

Maybe some stories. Yes. You know. In early learning, we work in teams. We, we as educators - we don't work alone. We work in either at least pairs, but sometimes in a classroom their might be 3 or 4 or 5 educators and I know this is what we do at our service.

We have a culture of sharing and having some really strong structures around how we support children's emotional and social being and their wellbeing through that. So, you know, that means at our team meetings, and in our critical reflection, we're talking about how we include children, and how would we support children. And giving one another the permission to spend time with children whether that is in play, or whether that's with a child who is having trouble self-regulating. So, I think it's very important for the whole team to have a really planned and consistent approach. And then children can feel safe to be able to do the things they wanted to. They know that they're going to get a similar response from all the educators in the service.

Renee Wright:

I really love that kind of team and systems approach, and I'm also thinking, just even from a workforce strategy, because well-being in general, what we're talking about, is everyone in the community. And so, we often talk about who's the team around the child, especially when you're thinking about early intervention or a child needing some additional support.

But we also need to be asking ourselves as leaders; who are the team around the educators? And I think as you you've been talking, I'm thinking, I would feel supported going, actually, you know, it's everyone's responsibility.

It's not just, you know, not just Mary's responsibility to support these children in the kindy room and that culture of sharing. And I think that must be very empowering.

Su Garrett:

Yes, I think also, we were talking about this the other day, where, when educators know what their role is, and whether it is to spend time in play or it is to do some of those tasks that have to be done. Like, changing nappies then when you know what your role is, then you can actually properly engage with children: both physically, and in your brain. And you're not thinking, oh, I've got to go off and fill out that form, or whatever, you can actually really engage, and that supports children. So, I think communication between educators is vital to support children's wellbeing.

Renee Wright:

Definitely, but I think really strong leadership, and you're right, just in terms of it doesn't matter what job you have, role perception is really, really important: people are not clear what's expected and what to do. It's actually disempowering. You often see in any kind of profession, retention can be an issue when people don't feel that mastery and competence.

I just want to continue talking to you just for a little bit more. Because I think other people will be very interested so you spoke about having team meetings and processes to support children's social and emotional well-being.

Can you see any other examples, or can you maybe elaborate, like do you have a wellbeing policy or something along those lines, or if I was a new educator working in your service. Would you do some sort of onboarding with me and talk about, these are the expectations or? What that looks like?

Su Garrett:

Yes, totally, yes, we definitely have an inclusion policy and a wellbeing policy. We also have a lot of induction we do with our educators and they have a buddy or a mentor.

We have, we have a bit of a - it's hard to articulate, but it's to just be really inclusive with children and give children time. And I think there's, because, at our service, our whole team has done a lot of the old KidsMatter training, which is now, Be You.

There's some really good resources to unpack, how to support one another as educators, and how to support children. So we have our team, our whole team, and I think this is the thing, not just having one educator do something, but the whole team. Do the Be You modules around the social emotional learning, and supporting children, is it. It's, yes they're amazing.

Renee Wright:

Thank you, yes. I think so, as well. But that's good to know, we can pay you - later that's good to know.

Yes, and again, there's that systems approach, like you want to have meaningful, sustained change. It can't just be 1 or 2 people.

Maybe I'll need to do a visit in New South Wales visiting both your services. I'd love that. It'd be very energising.

Blaire Aldrich:

Renee, I just wanted to add in I think that systems approach and really thinking about structures to support educators are really important. Also, because I'm aware we've got lots of time, so I really wanted to take the time to unpack the educators' role in supporting social and emotional wellbeing of children, of different ages, and how you can't just use blanket strategies.

For us you know, thinking about, you know, very young children, so babies and toddlers, the types of strategies that you use to support their social and emotional wellbeing. So, you know, using things like narration. So for example, if she's got a baby who's just beginning to crawl and they're reaching for an object on the floor, you know, saying what it is that you're reaching for, you're nearly there are, you've touched it, and so supporting them.

Through that and also through everyday routines, you know, during, things like nappy changes that happen all the time in services that have very young children. And, you know, using that opportunity to build those relationships.

Whether it's through games like peekaboo or singing songs and that's supporting not only their social emotional wellbeing but also making that a really positive physical experience for the child as well. And then, you know, I know that I'm taking all the time now, but thinking about, you know, our children as well, particularly those in school age care. And I think it goes back to really knowing your children and who they are as individuals. So, because you often, for example, in school age care, you've got mixed age groups so you might have five year olds and twelve year olds.

So, thinking about them individually and how they can engage with different activities and experiences so that they're going to succeed and not feel overwhelmed and being there to support them in that space.

Sue Jarrett:

Can I just add something there, just to support Blaire, you brought up relationships? And I think that that is something that is so important in emotional wellbeing and mental health. Having strong, healthy relationships within your early childhood school, setting, the relationship between home, and the early childhood service, or school settings, those relationships is what strengthens children's mental health and wellbeing - as well as family. So I think that that's a really good point that you have that you brought up today with the relationships?

Renee Wright:

Yes, definitely.

People know at Be You, that I'm a writer; I like to write things down as I come to mind. And a few things I think in terms of leading change, going back to your service, going, you know, talking to some of your

educators, is what we mean by strong relationships because I totally agree with you, do we know that the protective factor and learning is going to happen without relationships. We're primed for relationships. What do we actually mean by a strong relationship? What does that look like, sound like, feel like? Like how fantastic is it with some butcher's paper out, and do some kind of a brainstorming and thinking.

I feel that there is a way that things become conscious, because of the jargon that we use, and I've seen a range of different industries and we do know, again, in early childhood, in the social sciences, in general. But, there's often this mismatch, it takes a lot of time, for the theory to catch up to the practice. And so, I think really kind of interrogating. What do we mean by these words? What does this actually look like? Like for me, a strong relationship, and I know when I was in the nursery room, would be okay, do each of these people, infants, do they have, are they showing secondary attachment? Kind of indicated with either myself or my colleague so they're making eye contact.

Are they putting their hands out to be to engaged in interaction? If I do little language games with them are they mimicking that? If I smile do they smile back? So there were things that I was looking for, that we're on the right track: children are feeling safe, they're feeling secure. So, when something happens, do they end up feeling insecure, like when the electrician comes in, a bit of stranger anxiety? Do they come and do some anchoring or actually come back to either myself or my colleague. And so, I think it's really important to think about what do we mean by well-being and what are some of those indicators?

Otherwise, you know, maybe this is the performance and evaluation side of me coming through. But I think that, yes, it just supports us to be really reflective.

Su Garrett:

Renee, can I jump in there for a second?

So, in our service, we have sixteen birth to two year olds, and that is most of those children starting, obviously in January. So, reflecting back on the last eight weeks in our service, it's such a tricky time for children, for families, for educators, because you are trying to build those relationships with families.

And I think it's really important to acknowledge how hard that is for educators and families, but also to take the time to really understand and for educators to feel confident that they can take the time to build the relationships that you're saying with children and to share that with families right now. In a baby's room, it's not about so much whether you get the paint or the playdough out. It's about how many cuddles these children are getting and getting sleep routines right and having children re-assured that it's safe to have their nappy changed and sitting at a table and having their lunch. All these really day-to-day task things in effect are vital to ensure they feel safe, and they have strong relationships which will allow them to play later and play successfully later.

Renee Wright:

Absolutely.

We obviously support enabling environments and I like that beautiful environments show a lot of respect to children and educators but, absolutely, if you cannot get your relationships right children don't feel safe and secure with you. So I think yes and your other message is almost like be kind to yourself.

Yes and you know I say I used to do teaching in higher and higher Ed area and I say to students, you know, it can take a whole year, it can take a long time for children to feel comfortable and secure. And, actually, for some children, long day care or school age care may not be the right environment for them, and that's okay as well. But, you know, at least a term or at least, you know, the first six weeks can be challenging, but, it can be a term where children go, okay: this is my home away from home, though, you know, I feel safe. I know Renee. I know that she's, you know, got my back so to speak, and I'm feeling okay. Now for some children it's much more rapid but what's the rush.

And I think it's that pressure, because you want to do the right thing and we want children to fundamentally feel good, but you think about it as adults who don't go to a party, a dinner party and be best friends with someone straight away. Like, it takes a month, doesn't it? Yet with children we almost expect that immediacy which, when you think about it, it's actually a little bit odd.

Sue Jarrett:

In saying that, the play is the medium to build really good relationships. Because when you play, that's, when you're connecting. So play can connect. And then that brings that relationship into it. So I think really, we're looking at connections, attachment and connections through play in, all, ways.

Blaire Aldrich:

Yes, and I think to build on that, as I was just going to say and I think to build on that, particularly in those orientation and transition moments, play, can be really useful for supporting both self-regulation and also co-regulation for children as well. And I think that that's something that we really need to consider because these environments can often be very busy and very stimulating. So, thinking about how we can support children, regulation, through the types of play they can engage in, in that space and we educators.

Renee Wright:

Hmm, that's such a good point. Just quickly going back to your point about play and connections, you just reminded me how play can be used in a more symbolic quiet and going back to kind of Child Development 101, using it as almost the handle of attachment. I know, this is a little while ago and she's in primary school now. But one of my girlfriends had a baby - beautiful Charlotte and the parents are going out, my friend and her husband have been going out and she wasn't very happy about it. And she didn't want to, you know, be soothed by me physically and I think my voice was tolerable, but you know, she wasn't very happy. And so, what I did was I got one of the toys that she really likes and she was teary and crying. It looked like an abacus and I just started playing with it and talking about what I was doing. So, that was actually the handle of attachment, and then she came and approached me, and that sort of helped to soothe her. So, you're right, play has so many functions, and it's quite complex.

Blaire, you just introduced regulation, and I think that's a really, really good point, and I'd like to extend on that a little bit, or you like about self-regulation co-regulation.

Do you want to just refresh us what you mean by that, and maybe some examples of what that looks like in the play environment?

Blaire Aldrich:

Yes, of course.

Co-regulation, obviously working with, it could be an educator; it could also be appearing to support regulating a state of being. So, that can look very different for different ages, again. So for very young children going back to babies and toddlers that can be that physical comfort or, you know, supporting them to use self-soothing techniques that they developed.

I'm thinking for slightly older children that can be things like introducing things like games with rules because that creates those boundaries and they create such safety. To be able to know this is, is the framework I work within, which I'm working in at the moment.

But then also things like having, going back to the environment, having those quiet places to retreat to other corner, or a copy or something with nice, soft texture, drawing back into that sensory approach.

Renee Wright:

Yes. I think, I like how you've touched on with babies. You know co-regulation. Like, you cannot soothe a crying baby by popping them in the bassinet. But we don't really use them that much, but just going off and playing with the blocks is probably not going to work very effectively, nor should it, but actually, as children mature, and it's not just about age, but it's like wherever they are at, they may have greater confidence to actually know what their body needs, and, and this is where, I think, some really intentional teaching can really help.

Earlier we spoke about, and I think you've mentioned either today or we were having a conversation some time ago how - actually you did mention it today - about narration. So narrating what children are doing, but also, as an extension, narrating their feelings, and I get that younger children, you might keep it more simple: happy, sad, scared.

As they get older, you would want to be expanding their vocabulary, and I like as an extension or so, talking about that kind of mind body connection. What does it feel to be, to feel, calm? And I feel really light and fluffy. And then, you know, if I'm feeling really nervous so if I feel like there's something in my tummy and I

can't, it doesn't feel really quite well and, you know, giving those kind of rich descriptions. But I think as an extension, and then you'd go okay: well if your legs go really jittery and you can't sit still, what is that saying? And maybe having that space in the quiet corner actually isn't what they need. That child needs to potentially down-regulate and go for a little run if they can outside, or I used to do brain breaks and little workouts with my children.

I once had a very busy kindergarten group. They were predominantly, in terms of a gender balance, boys that would do, like, wall push ups, little lunges, star jumps. And it was a way of actually down-regulating them a little bit because they were often quite busy and energetic. So I think it's really important.

I think you've touched on it so well, Blair, to think about the sensory profile with children and going okay, how are they feeling? What's happening for their body? What might they need? And as they get older, they should really be supported through that kind of mental health literacy to identify that for themselves and identify what's happening with their body and what might be appropriate.

Blaire Aldrich:

And just to expand on that, in a previous conversation we had, preparing for this webinar, to Su G. I believe, who was talking about your outdoor experiences, and how that, that change of environment in going to the local park. That can really support that regulation and the change in children.

Su Garrett:

Yes, I was just thinking about that, actually, because, when you take children out and we will take not a whole class, but a smaller group. So we might have eight children and two educators, if that's a preschool group. First of all, in terms of the educators, they can actually be with the children without doing anything else which is just lovely.

But, yes, the children have the access to really, really open-ended spaces when they're in a park with no built resources. They can use, whatever is there in nature to have, as long as it's respectful, however they would like.

But it's very interesting when you see the real equilibrium of children's roles in the outdoor space when we're out the gate. And, you know, some children who may be quieter will have a different role outside. Maybe a child that really likes insects becomes the expert when you're there, or a child who knows about birds can spot the birds, but you know they can't see that when they're inside the preschool. So the relationships they have with each other, they can become quite different. And I think also in terms of what you were saying, Blaire, about self-regulating.

You know, when they are climbing trees and the educators say to them, how do you feel when you're there; how does your tummy feel? Do you feel safe there? You know, can you go higher or is your body telling you know that you need to come down?

So, I think it's lovely, too. I love that term, that mental health literacy; I really, really like that and I think that it's really important for us to support children, to learn that feelings are what they're feeling and their body means.

Renee Wright:

Fantastic. Would anyone else like to add any other practical strategies?

That they think is quite helpful?

Blaire Aldrich:

I am aware, I'm aware of the time, and I know that we do need to move on. And I guess it does lead into the response to the next question.

But I do just want to point out that it keeps coming back to how educators situate themselves in the play experience and also the environment and thinking about how they're actually being with the children. Which I know I'm pre-empting answering the next question.

Renee Wright:

Well, let's have a look at the next one and thank you Blaire you're a very good, timekeeper. You have been warned that we go off track some times.

Before we look at a take away, because we've still got a bit of time let's have a look at our poll now, I think that some people might responded already.

So, we can have a quick chat about who is play for, Yes.

I do want to just summarise what you can see on the screen there.

Blaire Aldrich:

Yes, this is fantastic to see, because this really goes with what I believe as well. That play is for everyone, you know. It's, it's not something that is only for children, and we all need a little bit of play in our day, and I think when we have that, view, that play for everyone. And, that goes back to our role as educators and really embedding ourselves in children's play when we're invited, of course.

And being and you know, noticing and listening for those cues from children that support that relationship building. But then also all those areas of development that I was talking about earlier, social, emotional, cognitive, or physical.

Renee Wright:

Yes, really, really well put and I could see that the majority of people said it - that play benefits everyone and you're right Blaire, this is really specific to supporting children in their place space. I also think play and a term that some of you might be familiar with is that play ethic. If any of you have ever googled, like Google headquarters or I know that some start-ups based in Melbourne, that you go into their offices and there's like a table tennis set up. You know, I've seen some other kind of creative spaces or even just in their staffroom, they've got lots of puzzles and sand trays and so on.

Definitely, it's a relatively new field of work, but I wanted to read something that just highlights this so give me a second. I'm doing a bit of a plug for this guide, but the book is titled Play and this psychiatrist Stewart Brown. He actually compares play for adults to oxygen and he writes it is all around us yet goes mostly unnoticed or unappreciated until it is missing.

I was just about to think, gosh that was true during COVID. I was like, oh, I need to go out and play or be more creative at home. So this might seem surprising until you consider everything that constitutes play: play is art, books, movies, music, comedy, daydreaming and he goes on. But he's a real advocate for play for everyone.

And I guess that leads me to a question. I guess I'm kind of curious what do you do for play? Like, what do I do? Well actually, I go to the park with my dog and there are swings, so if it's late at night and if there are not too many people around, and if there are I don't really care, but I'll go on the swings. It's really relaxing. The vestibular sense is activated. But that's an example of being playful.

Or I play tennis, but with a friend, that doesn't take it very seriously like me. So when a ball is like rolling, I can. We can laugh and have a giggle. That's what I do and I'm intentional about it. It can be in my head a little bit and, you know, I think work and pressure, it's easy to be quite focused on that.

Sue J, what do you do to play?

Sue Jarrett:

Well, I like to play golf - only because its outdoors. I think that with golf or with anything outdoors, you, all your senses are focused on what you're doing. There's no other distractions I do play bad golf by the way but that's okay. It doesn't matter, because I'm outdoors, I'm with other people who've got the same interests. But it does enrich your wellbeing. Just being out and being engaged and focused on something that you really love to do.

And that's what play does - our minds can get so busy and overwhelmed, children and adults. So, if you can have that space to be doing something that you enjoy it's actually really good for you for your mental health and your wellbeing. So that's what I like to do.

Renee Wright:

Fantastic. Su G I'm going to ask you a slightly different question: put your leadership hat on. How do you create a playful culture as we know play is really important for children and we recognise that play is really important for adults so you know you want to create that playful culture. What, how do you go about that?

Su Garrett:

Yes, so that's been a very big question that we've asked ourselves over the last 12 months during COVID too, because people have not been able to play outside of work very easily. So we've done some things like organise games nights at our service. We have boggle in our staff room, so people play that at lunch time. Like you said before, we have some puzzles, too.

But overall, I think we have a culture of being a playful, happy service. The educators must be happy for the children to be happy. So, you know, when we go to the park, we will roll down the hill with the children always, occasionally take a ball and kick the ball around and try to organize some social events for educators as well.

Renee Wright:

Great, great, fantastic. I'm looking at the time, so we do need to wrap up. Just before we do though, just a quick takeaway from you about today's webinar session.

I think you've just on mute, just pop the button when you've got a sec.

Sue Jarrett:

Very good, sorry about that. My takeaway is really empowering children, and believing in them, and trusting them, and really seeing them as capable and just showing them that, you know, you are beside them, to support them, and for them to feel good about themselves. I want children to have that wonderful sense of self and that sense of identity.

And I think if we can play with them, alongside them, set them up for success, and for that social and emotional capacity, then I think that sort of helps them to have that sense of belonging and feel confident and happy. And that's probably what I want to see more: just the happiness that children can invoke when they are in an environment that is rich in play.

Renee Wright:

Mmm, OK, so beautifully put and Sue G. Do you want to just finish us off a key takeaway from you?

Su Garrett:

Yeah, sure, so.

We all agree that play is essential for well-being.

And I think, we need to, as educators, make sure that it's, we know that that's important for us as well, and we create spaces in places where children can be safe and feel they can be themselves, and that we're all happy to play together.

Renee Wright:

Beautiful, thank you. Thank you so much to our panel, Blaire, Su J and Sue G. Please stay on because we have a pause break, and our panel members, you can maybe have a glass of water or have a little stretch and then we'll all come together for a 30 minute Q and A but before we do, just a few of our key messages. So, thanks again everyone for participating today.

So, when you exit, you will be prompted to complete the exit survey, so just please remember to complete this, and please include the name of anyone watching with you. As many of you know, these webinars are great to connect, and hear from your peers like today: listening and sharing with our two Sue's and Blaire and they can also support your Quality Improvement Plans and Professional Learning accreditation requirement. So, just remember Be You is here to help, so please get in contact with asking today if you want to know more, and you might be interested in how to register so please see the link in the chat to get started.

So if you're already participating in Be You, please just remember your consultants that can support you, and to get in contact.



Okay, I think it's Q&A time.

END TRANSCRIPT