

# Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

## Supporting children with complex needs

Presented by Sally Gissing and Natalie Fanariotis (of Beyond Blue) and Emily Berger (Faculty of Education, Monash University)

### Sally Gissing

Hello everyone. We will be starting in a few minutes. It's starting off at 4:00. But for those of you who are new to go to webinar a few bits and pieces to be aware of. We are expecting a few attendees today and given the numbers, we've placed everyone into listen-only mode. This just means that you are not able to use your mics or your web cams, but you're certainly able to use your questions box. Your questions box is as highlighted on the slide here on the right-hand side, you can use that questions box to ask questions of course and you can also share your ideas and thoughts as we go through the slides today. We'll have a few reflection questions as we go. Please we very much encourage you to get involved, we want to make today's session as interactive as possible.

If you have any technical questions, we've got our moderator here so do give us a shout out on the questions box. We have got some pre reading material that we provided last week if you haven't had a chance to look at yet, we will have this available during the webinar as well. If you go to your control panel and check out the handout drop down menu, there's the downloadable PDF where you can find the case study for Jack and Maria so you can refer to these, we will be referring to these case studies as we go through today's session. Today's session will be recorded, so if you want to refer back to it later, you will be able to. You will be provided with a certificate of attendance which will be available in a few weeks' time along with the recording.

We have a dedicated Q&A session towards the end of our webinar, but if we don't get a chance to answer your question we will also endeavour to do so in the post webinar handout that will be available on our Be You events page along with the recording of today. We'll kick off in a couple of minutes, please remember there are lots of ways to get involved today using the questions box, asking questions, sharing your thoughts as we very much acknowledge you also come with a lot of expertise and ideas and we very much want to share that amongst the greater group today and the other way that you can get involved is through the poles. We have a few pole questions as we go through. Remembering that today's session will be recorded and there will be a post webinar handout, summarizing some of the key points from today and ideas for further reading.

Good afternoon and welcome everyone to our InFocus webinar for today supporting children with complex needs. I am Sally Gissing, I'm one of the implementation managers here in the Be You team at Beyond Blue. I've worked in education for over 10 years, as a primary and secondary school teacher as well as a manager for a range of different School based education and mental health initiatives. I'll be your chair today and I'll be introducing our presenters in just a moment. Because we have a fairly high number of

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expected attendees today, we have placed everyone into listen-only mode. This just means you are not able to use your mic or your webcam, but you're certainly able to use your questions box to ask any questions that you have. Please let us know if you're having any technical difficulties, but also share your ideas. We will have a number of reflection questions as we go through but if there's different strategies and thoughts that you're having throughout the presentation, we certainly encourage you to share those ideas and create that community of practice.

A little bit about Be You if you're new to this initiative. It is an online and free National Education initiative. It is funded by the Commonwealth government led by Beyond Blue. We work closely with our delivery Partners Early Childhood Australia and Headspace. What is Be You all about? It's really about empowering you as educators along with your early learning services and schools to promote the positive mental health of the children and young people in your care by building and creating mentally healthy learning communities.

Together we really want to work with you to grow a mentally healthy generation. It is the norm to actively look after your mental health and seek help when needed. Today myself and my fellow presenters are coming to you from Melbourne, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land of which I stand today which are the Wurundjeri Peoples of the Kulin Nation and pay my respects to Elder's past, present and emerging and given we come together from across the country on behalf of Beyond Blue, Be You and Monash University, I'd like to extend my respect to all elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia. I invite you all to think about which lands you're joining us from today and reflect on what that connection means to you. We certainly recognize the importance of continued connection to culture country and community to the health and social emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. Without further ado allow me to introduce you to our presenters today, Emily Berger and Natalie Fanariotis.

Emily is an educational and development tool developmental psychologist and lecturer in educational psychology within the faculty of education at Monash University in Melbourne. She's worked in schools as a psychologist and now works in a Consulting capacity with schools. A very warm welcome to you, Emily.

Natalie Fanariotis leads the Be You Implementation team at Beyond Blue ensuring that the design and delivery of Be You resonates with educators, like yourself across a range of diverse learning communities. She's a schoolteacher by trade and former director of student services. A warm welcome to you Natalie.

As I mentioned a little bit earlier, we recognize you already come with a wealth of expertise and knowledge and we'd love to hear from you today and encourage you to get as involved as possible. There are a few ways that you can do that, you can ask questions or answer questions via the questions box, which is in the bottom right hand corner of your screen. Also, look out for the live polls and let us know what you think using them. If you are having any technical difficulties do give us a shout out using the questions box and we'll be able to moderate and help you. We do hope to respond to as many questions as possible during today's session. We've got a dedicated Q and A opportunity towards the end of the webinar, but if we don't get to your question, we will certainly endeavour to answer them in our post webinar handout.

Also included in there will be some ideas for further reading and a bit of a summary of some of the information that we'll go through today. You will also receive a certificate of participation for attending today which will be available in a few weeks. Today's session will also be recorded so do keep an eye out for this on our website on our Be You events page in a few weeks.

As an educator we know we are very good at spending a lot of time looking after others, but it's really important that we make sure that we practice self-care and look after ourselves as well. It's good to remember when talking about mental health in any context including complex needs, it can affect us all very differently and we all come with our own experiences and if there is anything that is covered today that raises some uncomfortable feelings for you at all, please feel free to opt out of the session. It will be recorded, and you can watch it at a later time. At Be You we recognise the importance of educator self-care and if you want to know more about how to look after yourself and your own well-being there's lots of information on the Be You website including where you can go if you'd like to chat with someone and check out the link in the questions box so you can you can find that information.

Like any good educator, I love a good learning outcome. Here are our learning outcomes for today. First off understand the term complex needs and outline examples you may encounter when working with children in your learning community and then understanding ways to provide practical support. As an educator we really want to focus on the practical strategies, Emily will be able to unpack a lot of these a little bit later on and also considering those practical strategies within the scope and capacity of your role. You know the idea of self-care and making sure that you don't feel like it's all up to you and that you have to know all the answers. Thirdly, following on from that, understanding where to go to for additional information and support if required, because you're certainly not alone. There's a lot of information and the support out there that you have access to.

A breakdown of how today will run, firstly I'll soon hand over to Nat. She'll give us a bit of an introduction about complex needs and what we mean by that term and then Emily will unpack some practical strategies for us. Then we'll have our Q&A session, I'll talk about some next steps including where you can find some additional information and support as well as a little bit more information about Be You, before we wrap up. So without further ado I'll hand you over Nat to give us a bit of an introduction about understanding complex needs.

## **Natalie Fanariotis**

Thanks Sally and thanks all of you for joining us today. I just want to talk a little bit about what complex needs are and how we are defining them and determining them as part of our presentation today. Just so we're all on the same page with this. You will see on this Slide the interconnectedness of each of these elements that were looking at today. The term complex needs can often be associated with disability, but for today's purpose were using this term more broadly to describe a collection of needs a child may have due to a presence and possible interplay of multiple chronic and interrelated health and social issues. These chronic issues may be associated with additional health and developmental needs such as a physical and intellectual disability and learning difficulties as well.

They may be related to mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder along with adversity and hardship such as trauma, financial stress or a family member experiencing a mental health condition. Each issue in isolation may not be complex, but it is the interaction between these factors that grows in complexity and then becomes more challenging for educators and support services to negotiate and respond to.

Looking at complex needs in your learning community, it's really important as we go through this presentation that you think about this in your context. As Sally said, we have some case studies that we will look at but relating them back to what you're doing at your place is really important to get the most out of today's session. A child's complex needs will depend on individual situation and the various health and social issues at play. These can present in various ways, very different for each child and within each learning community, such as what we have listed on the slide today. As an educator, you are not expected

to be a social worker, a counsellor or a clinician so it's really important to point that out right now or use the points that are listed here to make any diagnosis. Instead it's about understanding a child's individual needs and responding to these the best way you can in the context of your learning community to support their learning and well-being.

We know and I know as a previous educator too, that it can be really tricky to balance that line of responsibility, knowing when to step in and when to refer internally, when to refer externally, and when to involve families in the conversation. It is a really challenging space and we really recognise that, but we hope that as we move through this presentation it becomes much clearer about what you can do within your role and within your context. You might be interested in, and as we go through this presentation, we might highlight some Be You specific tools that are there to really support you in your work. One of those such tools is our BETLS observation tool which some of you might be aware of. The BETLS tool stands for Behaviour, Emotions, Thoughts, Learning and Social relationships. This is a great tool to use in assisting you to gather and document the information and observations about the children and young people in your care. It also helps you really reflect on what the best call of next action could be, including informing relevant staff within your setting as a first point of call.

As I said, it's called complex for a reason and it can be a really challenging space. Sometimes supporting children with complex needs can be very challenging and overwhelming at the same time. However it's really important to know the experience that you may have yourself, is shared with other educators too and that's why we're all here today. It's a really tricky space to navigate for anyone and I know in my classrooms, I've definitely experienced that. Sometimes it feels that you can take one step forward and two steps back and that's the complexity of it. I'd like to start a Poll; this is the first level of interaction you will have as well as the chat box to find out what you find is most challenging.

I'll give you a moment to respond to this poll about what you find most challenging in supporting children with complex needs. We have a range of options there.

Thanks everybody for doing that. It's interesting to see what people are seeing as their most complex. So we see that addressing behaviours in the moment is 40% there, but it's ranging very differently again depending on your context, your experience and the type of young people you have in the care and the complexity that they might be bringing from their homes as well. It's great that we have a mix because we will definitely be touching on each of these elements as we go through the presentation.

Your Role is really important and it is challenging but it's important to recognize that progress will occur, but it may be slow and it's really incremental and sometimes it's very difficult to recognize when things are going really well. It's really important to remember just to take those small steps, continuously and that's going to be the biggest impact that will create and sustain change. It's also about taking the time to reflect and recognizing what's working and maybe what's not, and what support might be needed. That could also include thinking about what partnerships you might need to engage in to support the child and take that collective approach and what strategies you need. Like Sally was saying, to look after yourself and prioritize your own well-being.

It's important to recognize whatever role you have here today, know that you play a really important role in an influential role in the lives of the children and young people that you're caring for. Thank you for that.

This slide also shows the other important elements to consider in your approach in supporting children with complex needs. Ongoing professional development, like today's webinar and like the Be You professional learning modules can certainly help to build your capacity to notice, inquire and provide the support to children with complex needs and the support needed for their families. Remember again, you don't have to and won't have all the answers to each of the different children that you're supporting and how to support them. But that's normal as well. It's important to recognise this and ask for support when it's needed.

I would just like to highlight again the two case studies that you have available to download through your questions panel and also have been provided. Let's just take a look at each of these case studies starting with Jack. I'll go through these before I hand over to Emily to unpack the different practical strategies to support the children with complex needs in your setting.

If we look at Jack, and again thinking about does this resonate with you in your learning community or can you associate some of these characteristics with some of the kids that you're teaching or looking after. Jack's age 4 and he's experiencing adversity in the family. He has a mother with a dual diagnosis of mental health condition and substance use disorder. Recently Jack has been placed into kinship care with a grandparent. There are also significant issues with learning and behaviour, and Jack has a hearing impairment. I'd like you to think and reflect in your learning community if Jack was attending what that support would look like? What are the policies, what are the practices and resources that would be in place to support Jack with his specific needs? This is a really good time to think if those policies, practices and processes and resources are not in place, what can you do to further increase your capacity and the capacity of your learning community?

Now let's have a look at Maria too. This case study provides an example of a child with a developmental disability that may also be experiencing a mental health condition. A really tricky space to navigate. For this example, it's important to recognize that a child with a developmental disability such as autism spectrum disorder may be more susceptible to experiencing a mental health issue. From a clinical lens this may be really difficult to identify because their disability and mental health issue may present in very similar ways. This in turn makes it equally and somewhat more difficult for an educator to recognize the different behaviours that might be presenting in the learning environment.

It's really important to recognize these as two separate issues at play and a child with a developmental disability won't necessarily experience a mental health condition. I'm sure you're all starting to really appreciate the term complex needs and what this looks like and the complexity behind it, but that's why we're all here today to unpack those strategies to support you. I'd now like to hand over to Emily, who's going to be able to share some of those practical strategies you can put in place within your learning community.

## Emily Berger

Thanks so much Nat and thank you Sally as well and the wider Beyond Blue team as well for the opportunity to speak with you today, and thanks everyone for attending as well. I think this is a really important topic and something that I talk a lot about with educators both as a psychologist when I worked in schools and obviously as a consultant now with schools. I am really excited to have these conversations on a larger scale than the individual conversations that I have in meetings with educators and teachers. Today I'll be covering a number of different strategies and really trying to keep it nice and practical and reflecting on my work in schools and schools and education settings around these strategies and approaches. I'll be covering very much evidence based approaches, which is very important.

I'll try and mention how these strategies are interrelated because that can help to take some of the pressure off when we feel that we've got so many things we have to do within our learning community. It can be helpful to remember that these strategies are interrelated. Also that these strategies are useful for our learners with complex needs but they're also useful for the learning community as a whole. For other children as well these strategies are definitely things that I recommend for all Learners.

I'll be speaking also about how they relate to the case studies that were just presented to you (you also will have the handout as well) hopefully you've managed to access that. I'll be speaking about how some of these strategies along the way relate to the case studies and then Nat will also take you through some of the strategies and how they relate to the case study.

The first thing I'm going to start off with is to discuss the first strategy which is Instructional Support. On to the next slide, what I wanted to mention is that the slides been uploaded as well as with all of these strategies, they are interrelated but also they rely on clear, consistent, predictable, engaging language within our learning settings. I'll also be emphasizing very heavily understanding the Learners that we work with and understanding the families that we work with as well. And identifying triggers as well and I'll have specific instructions and ideas about how to identify triggers but really, it's a collaborative approach and lots of observation and time working with others. They are just two things to keep in mind as I'm talking. For the actual strategies that I've got mentioned on this presentation slide, I wanted to start off by talking about learning environment rules, and making sure they are in line with consistent strategies, approaches and consistent language and that there's positively worded rules or guidelines for your learning community that are understood by the whole Learning Community.

I prefer, and I like to use strategy rules such as, we allow other people to learn and we allow ourselves to learn. When I was thinking about the case studies, I was thinking about this in relation to Jack for example, so Jack might be disrupting other students and so he's not allowing other people to learn but also he might be disengaged and so he's not allowing himself to learn. It's about directing the children about how we want them to behave. One of the other approaches that I talked about is telling children with complex needs how to behave, rather than focusing on how not to behave and I talked very much about expected and unexpected behaviour. Rather than talking about right and wrong behaviour, children with complex needs need to be told when their behaviour is an expected behaviour and when it's an unexpected behaviour because they won't have the social understanding to understand what they've done wrong in a certain social situation.

So I'll always talk and say, "Jack, was that an expected or an unexpected behaviour?" and based on that how do you think that made other people feel? As I said, it's really important to talk about how to behave, rather than how not to behave. It is really important as well to keep our language very neutral and consistent. Children with complex needs might come from a really harsh background and so sometimes with our approaches we need to be careful that they are not triggering for the young people that we are working within our learning community.

The other strategy that I just want to talk about in relation to this slide was around practicing and modelling and observing and praising pro-social behaviours. I'm also going to talk about pre corrective statements in a moment. We might move on to the next slide because I'm also going to talk about praise as well in a moment. The next slide talks a little bit more about instructional support and really this strategy of defining short-term goals having an idea of the longer-term goals, but defining shorter term goals and the steps to achieving those goals is really important for the learner themselves so that they can feel that it's achievable but also they can have a sense of achievement when they achieve those small goals, but also really

important for educators self-care as well. So we are not putting unrealistic expectations on ourselves or also on our children in our care.

It's important to define and measure goals as well and be very defined in what goals you do have and making them very specific and achievable and easily communicated so we don't overload ourselves and we don't overload the young person with too many goals. When I talk to educators about goals, I talk about the zone of proximal development. There's a zone at which the child potentially has that ability to achieve that goal, they're not ready to launch into achieving this bigger goal, but they can achieve one small step and then one small step and one small step. We work within a child's zone of proximal development.

As I said before I spoke before about pre corrective statements and this can be done through queuing. We of course always provide statements to the young people and the learners within our learning community with directions of how we want them to behave. As I said telling them how to behave and telling them explicitly what you want them to do. But also we can do this through pre corrective statements. By pre corrective statements, what I'm saying is that we will give a statement and a directive to the community as a whole, but then we would also que, verbally and non-verbally as well possibly the young person with a complex need with the direction again. For example, for Maria, she might need a que to go and sit on the mat because she might have struggles, she might struggle with transitions, for example. Or you might que Jack (our other case study) to come with you and have a look at the visual schedule after a break time or at the beginning of the day. So that's what I mean by pre correcting behaviour. Also you need to know what the triggers are, as I said with Maria if it was her triggers are related to Transitions, you would know that beforehand. So you would know to provide a pre corrective statement before any behavioural outbursts or anything else occurs.

The other strategies which I'm sure as educators you do a lot of around visual schedules, making things nice and visual and fun and engaging, but also using finished boxes and envelopes for the older students that you have in your community and reward charts as well making these really visual, making sure that they're achievable, they're engaging and they are tailored to the child as well. So needing to be tailored to the child and really targeted as well. Not trying to focus on changing too many behaviours at once, really focusing on one behaviour at a time and that way it's nice and targeted. Next slide.

We have a reflection actually on the next slide and the reflection reads 'how would more clear and consistent instruction and routines be helpful for Maria, Jack and the other children within your learning community?' So just as I'm talking, and I've already spoken a little bit about clear and consistent language you might think to yourself, how that might be helpful in your learning environment.

Research is telling us more and more that incorporating body movement, visualization and really engaging the whole learning community in activities is really helpful to encourage emotion regulation. We know that children with complex needs, particularly all children do, but children with complex needs particularly have problems with emotion regulation and regulating what's going on inside them. They also struggle with co-regulation as well and co-regulation means understanding other's emotions, understanding the impacts of behaviour on other people's emotions, understanding if I behave in this way, this is going to be the emotional reaction of someone else. So by engaging in body movement and visualization, it allows a co-regulation of children.

It also allows greater pro-social behaviours, children with complex needs to observe the pro-social behaviours, they are always observing and always watching others doing and learning. It's not that they can't learn those social skills, they're just maybe a little bit behind and so it's about really encouraging

greater connectedness. You might reflect for example on Maria's case, she's got poor social connectedness and how engaging greater classroom participation might help her to develop those connections. So body movement and routine are really important for self-regulation for children with complex needs particularly, and we understand this because we understand that body movement and routine are important for children who have developmental disorders and they're actually a part of our diagnostic criteria that we use when we see repetitive movement so we can actually flip that and use that as a strategy to know that that's something that they really like and they use to regulate themselves. Linked into instructional support and consistent language, I think I have already mentioned about creating visuals that are predictable and engage in engaging routines for young people.

Also coupling those visual prompts and visual classroom routines with verbal prompts. I like to use First, Next, Then or for the children who really struggle with attention or maybe they're a little bit younger, First and Then. So what you're doing is you're not saying no, because for children with complex needs saying no can actually be misinterpreted as never, so, can you imagine if you say no and it is misinterpreted as no that will never happen. That's very triggering and so if there's something they desire, an activity or a toy, they're feeling never, I'm never going to get that toy. They are very black and white thinkers in some instances. For the younger ones, First, we're going to do this and Then you'll get to play with that toy. It's just another verbal reminder. It's a schedule. It's a routine remembering that children with complex needs can like routine. So, you've got a visual and you've got a verbal routine to sit beside it. Consistent language, I think I'm going to say this all the way throughout is consistent language redirection back to the visual schedules and assistance during transitions. And as I reflected with Maria, and giving her a verbal prompt to go to the mat or Jack our other case study, to go back to his visual schedules during a time of transition.

The next slide is talking about Triggers. This is probably the most important strategy that I'd like to talk to you about today. What this slide really talks about in terms of triggers is emphasizing that we need to understand what's triggering our young people and we need to emphasize the flight or fight response of our young people.

What we need to do is when a child perceives a threat or if they perceive a challenge or an uncontrolled situation, they feel that they've lost a sense of control. They might perceive that, and sometimes these perceptions of a threat or a challenge or an uncontrolled situation is something you wouldn't expect so it can be, quite out of the blue, but what happens is their flight or fight system kicks into gear. Alarm bells start ringing and they're either going to flight which means they might abscond from the learning community, but also they might become physical or verbally upset and angry and it's that alarm bells in their flight or fight and I'm sure we're all aware of fight or flight.

It's really important to identify the triggers earlier and one of the Poles earlier you identified as an audience, that you identify that 'dealing with issues in the moment is really challenging' and I would completely agree with you. Definitely the other educators I work with the schools would agree, (and also the families I work with), dealing with issues in the moment is really really challenging. So if we understand the triggers, then we can help to prevent that and stop that from happening to a certain extent. Identifying the triggers takes time, lots and lots of time. It takes observation, observing the child. Consulting with other professionals, consulting with family, consulting with say a psychologist that is involved or a social worker or someone else is involved and understanding the family history as well.

There could be things like noises, sight experiences, touch, someone touching them or touching their toys a loss of control. A loss of control is a big one for young people. When we are trying to identify the triggers we very much talked about an ABC of the behaviour. The A being what is the antecedent. What is the cause of the behaviour? For example, Jack. Jack might be yelled at by his educator to stop his disruptive behaviour.



That's his trigger. So that's the antecedent. The B is the behaviour. So that might be Jack hiding under the table and barking at the other children and the consequences in the sea of that behaviour and the outcome of that behaviour is that Jack's educator might yell at him more to come out from under the table, which you would understand and the other children might tease and make fun of him, but what it's actually doing is its circular and it's causing more distress and causing more behavioural issues.

So if we can focus on limiting the triggers as much as possible and when a trigger is occurring or has occurred if we can limit those negative consequences to avoid that cycle of behaviour and outcomes.

Onto the next slide. I'm happy to talk more about triggers because I do think it's an important one. The next slide what I'm going to talk about is behaviour specific praise and this is something that we as educators and psychologists do a lot of and we model this as well for families. I think we do a really great job of modelling this for families. When we do it, we're praising achievements but we're also encouraging expected behaviour. If you remember when I was talking about instructional support, we tell a child what is the expected behaviour? We can't expect that children with complex needs to understand what the right social behaviour is. They need to be explicitly taught what the right social behaviour is so we can use cues such as praise or other forms of cues to tell them, 'well done', 'that was really great', 'well done Jack you shared that toy', I want you to share that toy again next time you play and so we use the child's name. We tell them exactly what they did right, and we tell them how to behave in the future because as I said, they lack that social awareness and so they can learn with those verbal prompts.

Also, things like good news notes and communicating, so there's other forms as well. Communicating back to families and communicating achievements back to families and sharing strategies and approaches between the learning setting and the home setting. I think that's really important and some of you might have noticed this as educated as well, those times that the strategy will really be working at the home, but it's not necessarily communicated to the learning setting and also vice versa. If something is working really well, good news notes are a good way to continue that conversation and also to continue the conversation about what our goals are so that everyone's on the same page about what the goals are.

It's important to always be mindful of what achievement looks like though for each individual child. We need to stay mindful as educators and psychologists that every child particularly those with complex needs have their own individual steps and need to sit at one individual step before achieving a larger goal and getting to the larger goal. So achievement for Jack might be sitting down for five minutes and engaging in learning and so for him, he gets a high five you gets a really great job. That's achievement for him.

Onto the next slide. We are going to talk more about Emotional awareness and regulation. Children with complex needs, as I said before, they have difficulty recognizing and understanding triggers of their own and other's emotions. They have difficulty understanding their own emotions and what the triggers are for those, and then how to deal with them. Then equally what other people's emotions are what the triggers are and then how they're dealing with those emotions as well. For example a child like Jack who has a hearing impairment, he might miss some of the verbal cues of emotions and what's going on in his environment.

For Maria, with her Autism spectrum disorders she's going to have difficulty recognizing both the verbal and non-verbal cues that are telling her how people think and how people feel. There's obviously focus in learning settings more and more to talk about emotions and to engage as a whole learning community to talk about emotions and how to manage emotions and there's great resources available out there in the form of storybooks to talk to children about this. Also, there's great strategies as well, which I'll talk about in a moment around using visual reminders of emotions and regulation of emotions in children with complex

needs. On the next slide, I'll be happy to cover those. As I said children with complex needs need to be provided with support around their emotion regulation, both to become aware of their emotions and regulate their emotions, but also to become aware of other people's emotions as well.

How to become aware of their own emotions, this can be done through things such as worksheets, you can have things such as something on a board or something visually displayed in your learning environment because we always love visuals and we love something fun and interactive that the kids can continue to engage with. It allows a child to recognize emotion and then have a really specific strategy and we want to make sure that the strategies are really specific. It's one strategy because of course when a child is in the height of anger, they won't necessarily be able to go to that strategy. We therefore need to provide support and I've just noticed there's a question that's come up around specific suggestions of books around stories and so I'm happy to talk about that and also equally I can communicate that after today's webinar.

I did want to talk quickly about zones. Red zones and orange zones and green zones, or you might call them blue zones. Really clear language, so you know a child can say I'm in the red zone or I'm in the orange zone or the green zone or sometimes you might use the blue zone, also visual such as anger volcanoes for example, and there's other activities as well. You would have a worksheet and a child would have a picture of being in the red zone and one strategy next to it on your worksheet would give them the one thing that they have to do when they're in the red zone. The orange zone is your warning zone, it's your triggers. The slide that I just went through, when they have that trigger, this is what they should do to deal with that trigger.

Then the green zone, of course everything is really great. They're learning they're engaging in appropriate expected behaviour so all that needs to happen is a prompt to say, 'Hey you are doing an awesome job and engaging well with your peers in your learning community', and so a child just might need scaffolding around using that school because as I said, if you can probably think about this for yourself when you're in the red zone and quite angry, you might have made some prompts as well and some help to remember your strategy to then go and cool down. As I said, with triggers, it's always important as much as possible to grab them in the orange zone. If you can see those triggers grab them in the orange zone, far better to grab them in the orange zone then let them go up to the red zone and have that height of anger. That would be far better.

The ways that we can help to strategize around getting them, not escalating from the orange zone to the red zone, or indeed to pull them down from the red zone to the orange zone and then hopefully into the green zone sometime soon, is to use again, think about what they like. Think about repetitive actions think about routines what you know, the things that they really engage with, then finding safety and security and routines. Think about sensory interests and repetitive actions through sensory toys and sensory experiences. Any other interests might have, like dinosaurs or horses or something, you know that they really like and then this is providing a sense of control and essence of security for them.

On the next slide, what I wanted to talk about and actually I believe it's the last thing I wanted to talk about today before I hand back over to Nat and then I'll be back to answer your questions as well as much as many as I can. This next approach is looking at attachments and connectedness and what I really want to say and what I say to a lot of or all of the educators that I work with when we talk about the challenges of working with children with complex needs is that we need to remember that children come with a history and our learners come with a history and they come with an attachment style and this might be an impaired attachment style. Indeed, the families that we work with might come with an impaired attachment style as well. Sometimes we can have limited control over that style of attachment they come with.

So, you might have for example impaired attachments such as the case studies like Jack and Maria. Things that can trigger, a history of trauma and adversity. Adversity due to developmental disorders such as in the case of Maria and family adjustment as well to those challenges of having a child with a developmental disorder. So this is the history that children are bringing into the learning environment.

Children with adverse experiences such as those in our case study, they are more attuned to insecure attachments. Research tells us they are more attuned to having insecure rather than secure attachments. As I said their parents, or their parents and families might be in the same situation as well. It's really important, and I do this as well as a psychologist, to practice patience and give it time when you're trying to develop an attachment relationship and connectedness with a child with complex needs. You can draw on all of the strategies that I've spoken about in terms of been consistent, having routines. Children are looking for a sense of control and so providing them that safety and security through these strategies I've spoken about and praise and telling them how you want them to behave rather than how not to behave and not triggering any behaviours unintentionally can all be really great strategies.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was about Carl Roger's idea of unconditional positive regard. Unconditional positive regard really talks about showing high regard for learners regardless. If I could just refer back to the other slide, talking about unconditional positive regard so showing high regard for learners regardless, and sometimes that can be really hard. It really challenges me as a psychologist. It really challenges you as educators I'm sure to have high regard for our learners and have high regard for the families that we work with even though they behave in ways that are very disruptive to you and to your whole community. The other strategies are things around empathy and active listening, so validating the feelings of others, the perceptions, the experiences. They are validating that these are their experiences, and these are their perceptions. You might not see the world the same way, but this is how they see the world. So, it's about being really attuned to that.

The other strategy is congruence. This very much links into that consistent language and behaviour when managing learners with complex needs. Being congruent, doing as you say and having that consistency.

If we can bring up the pole for this slide in particular. The pole speaks about what do you think are the most important attachment relationships for learners. What do you think are the most important attachment relationships for learners? All you need to do is select one and I'll give you a moment to select one. We've got Family, Peers, Educators and the Learning environment.

Let's see how we've gone with our poll. Family, yes, absolutely very much links into what I was talking about. Family is such a big influence. We do know, and there is an acknowledgement through this as well, and I'm sure even those who selected family thought about the other relationships as well. Obviously, we know as children get older that peer relationships become very important relationships for young people. This changes and adjusts, as the children get older they learn new skills, they learn new strategies, but also they change as well so there triggers change as well. This can sometimes be really concerning for us as educators and psychologists when we feel like we've just gotten the right strategy and all of a sudden, we need to readjust. It's important to remember this when you're practicing your self-care as well.

For my final slide I still want to keep talking about attachments and connectedness and really draw it all together as well. What I'm going to discuss is, in addition to the other approaches as spoken about, unconditional positive regard, congruent, showing empathy and being predictable in our approaches and also the approach of using a collaborative problem-solving approach.

I encourage the children that I work with to be detectives, to be thought detectives or feeling detectives or to be detectives in finding solutions to problems. We can actually do experiments to find out how behaving in a certain way or doing a certain action will actually result in a different action and then obviously you can give praise it, you can give back behaviour specific praise and telling them again how to behave, rather than focusing on how not to behave. Get nice and positive neutral language as we've spoken about, of those expected and unexpected behaviours. These strategies can all help to create those relationships and that attachment as well. We have to be very intentional though, we know that it's not easy with attachments. We have to be really intentional in our strategies and to promote the self-actualization of the children that we work with.

What I'm going to do is thank you again for attending today. I'm going to hand it back over to Nat who's going to go back over the case studies.

### **Natalie Fanariotis**

Thanks very much Emily. What a wealth of information that you've just unpacked with all those practical strategies. I'm sure everyone is watching away, writing things down and then seeing how you can actually translate that learning into your own context. I know a couple of things for me that I was jotting away was thinking about with Jack in particular, what are those strategies that I could apply to support Jack but that would also support the other learners in the context. I would also be thinking about creating those specific learning goals for Jack and making sure that's communicated and in a partnering way as well, especially with the grandparent that's looking after Jack to make sure those goals are really clear and achievable. I'd also be thinking about what are those potential triggers, thinking about what the cause is, the behaviour that results and then the outcome. Making sure that I'm catching those moments in (as you said Emily) the orange zones.

I would also think about what Jack's attachment might look like for me, as his educator and what I would need to be mindful about that. We will now jump into the last poll for the session and I'd really like you to think about which of the strategies that Emily has just outlined which you could use to support Jack. I'll give you a moment to think about. Is it the instructional support and routines and rhythm, behaviour specific praise, might be looking at that attachment and connectedness and maybe just to an awareness of the triggers for fight, flight or freeze.

We will close that poll now and have a look at the results. There is a really good mix of what you could use and I'm sure many of you have thought, well it might be an interplay of each of those different strategies together, maybe a little bit of instructional support and the routines and rhythm. Maybe, it's a bit of praise and maybe it's also looking at those triggers and understanding them better. Thank you everyone for completing and contributing to that. If we do a really quick recap on Maria's case study too before we get into some question and answer time with Emily. Some of the key takeaway messages for me and I'd ask you to reflect on this is making sure I'm providing cues and those pre-corrective statements like Emily was talking about to make sure we're kind of setting up the children for success and look at praising those behaviours of Maria and refer to any of those behaviours as expected or unexpected.

I'd also be really looking to engage in some movement in the classroom and thinking about how that can support Maria to self-regulate and also having some visual clues in the learning space to I think would be really fantastic. Can I ask you again to reflect on what you would do to support Maria and Jack but also thinking about the children in your care and what that might look like. I am going to ask Emily back onto the stage so we can have a little bit of a chat about any potential questions that have come through the chat box. Emily, if you've got a couple of questions we might have time for one question and then if we've got time for another we'll see how we go. But if you've got a question that you'd like to respond to?

## Emily Berger

Yes, absolutely.

I've just had a quick think about while you were talking about the strategies and suggestions for story books about emotions. There's so many out there, it's impossible to choose. I was thinking about when I'm feeling, so there are books about 'when I'm feeling'. There are books, 'when I'm feeling the way I feel', there's books about an anger volcano as well and you can get so many different and 'worry monster' books. I'm sure if you had a look, you'd be able to find some really great resources and the zones as I was speaking about the zones of regulation as well.

There was another question as well about the specific rules that I referred to. The rules that I referred to are that we allow others to learn, and we allow ourselves to learn. So for those of you that didn't catch that, we allow others to learn and we allow ourselves to learn and it really just captures everything, it just includes every behaviour you could ever imagine, so they would be the two that I would address.

## Natalie Fanariotis

I also think that's really important with those resources there's a real opportunity to share them with families too. When Educators find a resource that really resonates with them and reflects the needs and the support for that child, I just would encourage you to have that conversation with families so that you are sharing that knowledge and having that collective and consistent support around the child like you were talking about Emily. Consistency is so key so I think that really supports that as well.

Thanks' so much Emily.

I am going to pass over to Sally just to close us off for today and to provide some additional information as we move on. Thanks Sal.

## Sally Gissing

Thanks Nat and thank you very much for that rich discussion in all that unpacking all those strategies, such a wealth of information. In finishing up for today with our next steps.

Our next slide is not an exhaustive list of examples of where you could go for additional support, but certainly some good ideas here and let us know in the questions box if you have some other examples or additional ideas of support that would be useful that we can share. It is also good to keep in mind that cultural groups, community leaders and elders can be a great help in ensuring diversity is valued in your learning community and working with families from a range of communities when additional support is needed is also a really important consideration. And if you're keen to learn more about this do check out the Be You professional learning, particularly the Early Support domain.

Let's have a look at what we've covered today. If we go to the next slide, first off, Nat gave us an outline of what do we mean by complex needs and what your role is. Then Emily was fantastic in unpacking all those evidence-based strategies and really stressing that this can be an integrated approach. Hopefully making you really be able to see how you can integrate this into your practice as an educator in your learning community. Finally we had a few questions and answers, apologies if we haven't got to your question yet, we will definitely endeavour to do so in the post webinar handout that will be available within a couple of weeks after today.

In terms of next steps before we go, we definitely encourage you to go to our Be You website and check out more about this online free national initiative. Find out more and register as an individual educator, but also as a whole learning community as well. As I mentioned at the start Be You is all about empowering you as educators as well as your early learning services and schools to promote positive mental health of the children and young people in your care by building those mentally healthy learning communities and making it so that it's the norm to actively look after your mental health and seek help if needed.

This free online national education initiative offers a number of different benefits. First, the professional learning modules and learning opportunities for individual educators, you can definitely register as an individual educator to access those professional learning modules. Then also considering the framework that Be You offers to guide a collective approach in your learning community as we know that's where we can really get real change by that whole learning community approach. There are lots of resources and tools available through Be You that can definitely support this. It is also really important to note that Be You is backed by a trained workforce of over 70 Be You consultants. If you are a registered Be You learning community, you do have access to a Be You learning consultant that can take you through and help you with implementing Be You celebrating your successes.

If you would like to register as a whole learning community just take note of the steps that are up on the screen now, but certainly find out more information on the Be You website. You've got the URL down the bottom left-hand corner <https://beyou.edu.au/login?returnUrl=/dashboard>

We might start wrapping up here, however I certainly want to thank our presenters today Nat and Emily. Thank you for sharing your wealth of experience and expertise. It's been fantastic hearing from you. And thank you to you all who have attended and have posted questions and shared your ideas. We very much appreciated your contributions today. Remember to have a lookout for the post webinar handout that will be available a couple of weeks after today. We've also got the audio recording that will be on the Be You events page.

Once we exit out of this webinar, you'll be prompted to complete a short five question survey and we really encourage you to fill out this survey as it helps us to know what you liked, what are some things that we can improve on, and also other topics that you are be interested in learning more about and we certainly love hearing that so we can craft our future In Focus sessions to make sure we are providing you with information that you are really after.

That's all from us today. We hope to see you again next time until then take care. Let's continue to work together to build and grow a mentally healthy generation. Bye for now everyone. Thank you very much. Bye.