



Before recommending additional support

As an educator, your knowledge and experience of children and young people, and your relationships with them and their families, put you in a position to notice when additional support may be helpful.

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing can shift back and forth along a [continuum](#). It can change depending on circumstances and can do so over the course of a day, week, year and across their lifespan.

Notice the signs

One of the challenges of noticing the signs of potential mental health issues is deciding if, and when, to act. Some of these signs include when a child or young person is showing changes in their behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and social relationships or when they are not progressing developmentally as expected.

When you notice a child or young person is having more difficulty participating in learning experiences and social interactions than usual – or has become more withdrawn or reactive than usual – it's time to follow your setting's plan to identify what sort of support might be useful.

Any signs need to be considered alongside your knowledge of the child or young person's life. Often there are circumstances or events, such as the death of a family member, a house move or divorce, where some emotional or behavioural reactions could be considered reasonable.

When noticing the signs, also consider developmental and cultural norms and other factors such as a child or young person's abilities, preferences and learning styles.

Remember that it's not your role to diagnose or make conclusions about a child or young person's state of mental health, and context is important.

The [Be You BETLS Observation Tool](#), a template for gathering and documenting objective information, can help you keep a record of your observations.

Be You Professional Learning

Learn more about how to objectively observe children and young people in your care in the Notice module of the [Early Support](#) domain.

Inquire – gather information

Gathering more information about what you have noticed is useful for clarifying your concerns and will help you to have [conversations with families](#).

Making observations, discussing these with an appropriate colleague and reflections are excellent ways to identify children and young people's strengths and needs.

Together with your knowledge of the family, this information can help to show whether behaviours are developmentally appropriate or signs of a mental health issue.

Use the [Be You BETLS Observation Tool](#) to document your information and observations. This information supports decision making and will be valued by mental health professionals if you do need to recommend additional support.

Be You Professional Learning

Find out more about gathering information and your role and in the context of your learning community's policies and procedures in the Provide module of the [Early Support](#) domain.

Follow a plan

When learning communities offer a clear plan to follow where concerns about a child or young person are raised, educators can feel confident in their role and the steps they might take.

A plan incorporating the learning community's policies and procedures on supporting children and young people should be readily available for all educators and include:

- Roles and responsibilities – who is responsible for each step in the plan? Who can you consult regarding your concerns?
- Gathering information – what information will be helpful in determining next steps? Who will be involved in this?
- Internal supports – what supports are available from within your learning community?
- Talking to children, young people and families about support – when, where and whose role is it to be involved?

- Confidentiality – consider what are the limits of an educators' confidentiality, and what is the right balance between sharing sufficient information and respecting the privacy of individuals?
- Mandatory reporting – consider when is this applicable. (Refer to the relevant state or territory legislation.)
- Mental health services and supports in your area – what is available and how do you access them? (For a quick guide, see the [Overview of Mental Health Services](#) fact sheet.)
- Working with external services – who, how, and when should you collaborate?

Be You Professional Learning

There's more information on a coordinated approach in the Provide module of the [Early Support](#) domain.

Know what supports are available

One aspect of effectively supporting a child or young person and their family, is for the learning community to be aware of what external supports and services are available in the broader community.

Learning communities can develop a list of health and community services to understand what's available.

It may take some time and effort to gather all the relevant information but, once completed, it will be a valuable resource for the whole learning community.

Service availability can change, so regularly updating the list helps ensure it stays relevant.

Some ideas to help with this:

- Check with your local council, which may already have regularly updated information on local services.
- Find out which community organisations and cultural groups operate in your area – arrange a meeting to learn more about their services.
- Make a list of private providers (for example, psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists), detailing the age range they work with, any areas of specialisation, waitlists and fees.

- Form relationships with your local National Disability Insurance Scheme Local Area Coordination (LAC) and Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) partners.
- Contact your region's Primary Health Network (PHN) to check what services they have available.
- Identify online and telehealth services.
- Attend local networking opportunities.
- Invite mental health providers and community organisations into your learning community to talk about their services.
- Understand more about the mental health system.

For a quick guide to the mental health system in Australia, see [Overview of mental health services](#).

References

Anderson JK, Ford T, Soneson E, Coon JT, Humphrey A, Rogers M, et al. A systematic review of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of school-based identification of children and young people at risk of, or currently experiencing mental health difficulties. *Psychological Medicine*. 2019;49(1):9-19.

Helen Baker-Henningham, The role of early childhood education programmes in the promotion of child and adolescent mental health in low- and middle-income countries, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Volume 43, Issue 2, April 2014, Pages 407–433, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyt226>

External links

[It takes a village: Understanding the drivers that facilitate interagency collaboration for improved mental health outcomes for children aged 0–12](#) (Emerging Minds)

[The SAFEMinds program](#) (headspace)