OUTCOME 3: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING

Learning about healthy lifestyles, including nutrition, personal hygiene, physical fitness, emotions and social relationships is integral to wellbeing and self confidence. An integrated and holistic approach to learning in early childhood takes account of the importance of these aspects of life and living.

Research suggests that there is a strong correlation between children’s physical activity and their brain activity. Hence, opportunities to be physically active are a major factor in early development and essential to children’s ongoing learning. Physical activity and attention to gross and fine motor skills as well as movement patterns provide children with the foundations for their growing independence and satisfaction in being able to do things for themselves. These skills enable older children to play games with peers, work together to construct objects, use tools, assist others and teach younger or less experienced children.

Healthy lifestyles contribute to children’s ability to concentrate, cooperate and learn. Good nutrition is essential to healthy living and enables children to be active participants in play. Early childhood settings provide many opportunities for children to experience a range of healthy foods and to learn about food choices from educators and other children.

Enhancing children’s understanding of their emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing is an important component of holistic learning. By acknowledging children’s identities, their cultural and spiritual worlds and responding sensitively to their emotional states, educators build children’s confidence, sense of wellbeing and willingness to engage in learning.

Health and safety are important areas for learning in early childhood. As children become more independent they can take greater responsibility for their health, hygiene and personal care and become mindful of their own and others’ safety. Routines and rules such as hand washing, toileting, packing away and walking safely outside the setting provide opportunities for children to learn about health and safety. In these daily experiences children can learn about their responsibilities to themselves and others.

3a. Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing

Wellbeing is the result of children feeling safe, secure, healthy and happy. It underpins and determines children’s responses to the environment, people and new experiences. Children demonstrate their wellbeing when they:

- behave in ways that show a feeling of belonging (in their family, in their peer group, in the early childhood setting)
- engage eagerly in learning
- respond with interest to the initiatives or play ideas of other children
- show affection and enjoyment in their relationships with others
• exhibit positive dispositions when faced with conflict or challenges
• show a sense of purpose.

Wellbeing gives consideration to the connectedness of mind, body and spirit, and an holistic view of the ways that children learn and grow.

Social wellbeing refers to the ways children relate to adults and other children; form and maintain friendships; are able to empathise with others or ‘read’ the behaviour of others and respond appropriately.

Emotional wellbeing includes: participating in close, warm and emotionally supportive relationships; being able to express feelings such as joy, sadness, frustration, hurt and fear; responding to others’ emotions; drawing on own or other resources when faced with new, challenging or stressful situations.

Spiritual wellbeing means different things to different people. It includes: experiences of wonder, love, compassion, beauty and joy; personal and moral codes of conduct; religious beliefs and practices; and for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander peoples a sacred connection to land and sites of spiritual significance. Spirituality can be seen as an individualized, inner process, or as a group experience of the activities and practices that construct everyday life and culture.

The role of the educator to support children’s social and emotional wellbeing

The promotion of child wellbeing is a characteristic of an environment where children have the opportunity to form trusting relationships with adults and other children, and to engage in a rich and varied array of experiences. When educators recognise and encourage children’s potential and provide a rich environment, children’s daily experiences can be deeply enjoyable and sustaining.

Children, from a very early age, can experience stresses, and the degree to which they are able to manage these stresses has a direct impact on their wellbeing. Educators can help children learn to cope with stress by forming supportive, caring relationships with adults and close friendships with peers. Educators can also ensure children have access to ‘down time’ when they can rest, calm themselves, or observe rather than actively participate. Regular experiences that encourage children to use their creativity and imagination, as well as opportunities to learn about and practice relaxation and quietness can strengthen children’s wellbeing.

Adult support helps children cope with powerful feelings that can threaten their emotional wellbeing, including distress, anger, fear, and frustration at being unable to complete self-chosen tasks. Educators who share a close relationship and have a detailed knowledge about the children are able to provide appropriate guidance and support when children are overwhelmed by strong emotions. This includes helping children to use language as a means to manage strong feelings and to talk about the consequences of their actions.
Sensitive early childhood professionals understand toddlers’ needs for choice and decision making opportunities. They understand that a two year old might even say “no” when she means “yes” and are tolerant of toddlers’ changes of mind. They provide opportunities for toddlers to cooperate by not demanding compliance with a demand but rather by offering simple alternatives for how the needs of the situation might be met. ... If children do not feel that they are autonomous and independent beings, they may display developmentally immature and dependent behaviours and will find it difficult to display initiative later. (Rodd, 1996).

To facilitate children’s social and emotional wellbeing educators can:

For babies and toddlers in particular:
- celebrate achievements
- provide suggestions and guidance to organize tasks into small, manageable steps
- provide a secure base to support babies’ and toddlers’ exploration
- provide enough equipment to avoid disputes with peers
- introduce equipment that encourages shared or ‘give and take’ play, such as balls, wagons
- introduce paired activities to encourage participation with others.

For all children:
- maintain high expectations of each child’s capabilities
- challenge and support children to engage in and persevere at tasks and play
- build upon and extend children’s ideas
- value children’s personal decision making
- give children appropriate responsibility
- provide opportunities for children to make decisions and choices, and to learn from experience, even when this involves errors and mistakes
- collaborate with children to establish rules and guidelines for acceptable behaviour
- mediate and assist children to negotiate with others in times of conflict
- discuss emotions with children and acknowledge their feelings
- encourage children to think about the feelings of others and to see things from their perspective
- talk with children about their emotions and responses to events with a view to supporting their understandings of emotional regulation and self-control
model strategies for seeking assistance from peers and adults, and prompt children to use these as needed

- provide time and private spaces for relaxation and rest
- encourage children to appreciate the strengths and talents of others
- give shy and quiet children strategies for talking and interacting with others such as asking questions, and sharing information about themselves
- introduce group games to encourage structured participation with others
- collaborate with children to document their achievements and share their successes with their families
- ensure that all children experience pride in their attempts and achievements
- invite children and families to share aspects of their culture and spiritual lives as they feel comfortable
- make daily time available for aesthetic and artistic experiences, including art appreciation as well as art making
- include art work, natural and created objects to stimulate wonder and aesthetic appreciation

Discussion starters

1. Gina is a support worker, working with children with additional needs in a preschool. She has been frustrated by the forms she needs to fill in for the funding bodies, which seemed to her to take a deficit approach which was at odds with the preschool philosophy. “We’ve just had so many battles with working with the original funding forms and evaluation forms, and we kept persevering because we felt that this was the right way to work with children … to look at them in the strength based model, and not looking at children as having deficits”.

Gina felt she could use the learning outcomes in the EYLF to really make a difference to children’s overall wellbeing. She was able to look at each child more holistically, but still being able to identify the child’s challenges and set goals; for example, zipping up his lunch box and using scissors to cut were identified as helping him to develop his emerging autonomy.

Consider how you could set goals for children with additional needs that reflect a strengths-based holistic approach.

2. Maria Montessori believed that educational experiences for young children can be designed to support the ‘inner life of the spirit’ through a series of everyday moments, events and routines. These daily practices, such as welcoming into a familiar environment, creating order and beauty, appreciating silence and tranquility, caring for others and being hospitable, reveal and support the spiritual dimension of the early childhood setting as “everyday spirituality” (Bone, Cullen & Loveridge, 2007).
This example speaks to the ways that educators can work with children to create harmony in the early childhood setting. Reflect on the dimensions of the physical and social environment that contribute to calmness, beauty and care and how these can support children’s wellbeing.

3b: Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing

Good health and physical wellbeing are fundamental to a child’s capacity to participate effectively in learning. Enjoying active physical experiences, along with good nutrition and preventative health care, contributes to children’s feelings of wellbeing and confidence in their abilities.

Early childhood settings offer many opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles and habits. The diversity of Australian cultures and the vast geographical differences between communities in which children live mean that children will encounter healthy lifestyles in a variety of ways. This will depend on the availability of open spaces, the climatic conditions and the suitability for extended periods of outdoor play, the availability of fresh food and the lifestyle choices of the families and communities in which they live. There is no ‘one right way’ to be healthy. Educators need to be familiar with local conditions and contexts and take these into account when planning for the health and physical wellbeing of the children.

The diversity of the Australian context can also offer children the opportunity to engage in experiences that might not be familiar to them but are a part of the cultural experience of other children and families. This diversity can expose children to a wide range of activities and events that can spark an interest in a sport, a style of dance, interest in foods or a variety of games. When educators get to know families and provide opportunities for them to share their knowledge and experiences, the scope for healthy living options expands and enriches learning.

As well as a focus on large muscle physical activity, educators give attention to children’s small muscle development and their ability to work effectively with a range of tools and media, which can include, for example, pens, pencils, scissors, small safe implements, switches and locks. Incorporating daily experiences that are meaningful and purposeful enables children to use their fine motor dexterity and provides them with practice assisting them to master these skills and enjoy greater autonomy in managing more complex physical tasks.

As children grow they develop greater independence in taking care of their physical health. The level of this autonomy will vary from child to child and will depend on beliefs and values of families. There is no perfect age to master using the toilet nor is there an ideal time for children to eat independently. These skills and many other elements of personal care depend on children’s individual temperaments, dispositions and motivations along with the cultural expectations and desires of their families. Families’ views, perspectives and expectations relating to personal care are varied. Educators who are sensitive to the variety of approaches and expectations of families can work collaboratively with all concerned to devise successful strategies for children to master their physical and personal care in their own time.
There are also community expectations and ‘experts’ who can influence thinking about these things. Children will benefit when educators are reflective and thoughtful about how this information relates to their settings, curriculum and the communities in which they work.

**The role of the educator to support children to take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing**

Beginning with a strong understanding of the local contexts and conditions, educators work in partnership with families to identify ways to make learning about health and physical wellbeing relevant and meaningful. Educators are well placed to model and provide a framework for healthy eating at the early childhood setting. Nutrition policies should take account of research and latest thinking as well as the conditions of the community in which the setting is situated.

Educators recognise the importance of physical activity for children who are able to participate and consult with families and specialists to involve children with disabilities in physical play. Using a range of approaches, educators are able to provide children with physical experiences that fit the context and conditions of the early childhood setting. They focus on building children’s skills and confidence to use their bodies and achieve a sense of satisfaction and the ‘buzz’ that comes from physical work, movement, dance and drama.

Drawing on the experiences and expertise of families, educators can build a repertoire of familiar and new experiences that will engage children in play-based physical activity. These types of activities are generally more relevant and enjoyable for children than commercial programs or activity kits that prescribe ways to ‘keep fit’. It is essential that educators view their responsibilities about children’s health and physical activity as just as important as other aspects of the curriculum and give equal time to physical play and other forms of learning. Educators who are skilled and knowledgeable about a range of experiences will be able to engage and motivate children to participate.

In working with children to develop growing independence in personal care routines, educators take time to talk with families about their expectations, and develop goals and strategies that fit with those used at home. Educators provide children with the resources and time to practise and master the skills of personal care.

To facilitate this learning educators can:

*For babies and toddlers in particular:*

- provide equipment for physical play both indoors and outdoors
- provide a safe yet challenging physical environment that is responsive to rapid changes in development and abilities, for example low platforms to step/crawl up and down, tables and benches that can be used to gain balance while cruising, small indoor/outdoor steps and slides

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Educators belonging, being and becoming: Resources CD

Material drafted by Charles Sturt University (CSU) Early Years Learning Framework Consortium, 2009
• give attention to small muscle development and dexterity – nesting toys, posting boxes, dough, sand and pencils / paintbrushes.

• view eating as more than an everyday routine. Present food that is attractive and inviting and talk with children about what they are eating today, their likes and dislikes and enjoy the social aspects of eating with young children

• model health and hygiene practices and talk with children about what is happening during the routines of hand washing, nappy changing, nose blowing and keeping the environment clean and safe.

For all children:

Promote physical activity and play:
• give time, attention and provide easily accessed equipment for physical play in planning for each day
• ensure that all children participate in physical activity that is fun and appropriate to their abilities
• participate in physical activity with children with enthusiasm and delight
• ask families to make suggestions for games and activities that they enjoy with their children
• plan daily experiences in movement, dance and drama that increase children’s special body awareness, co-ordination and balance.
• explore the local environment for safe and convenient places to go to run and climb in larger spaces
• provide a range of safe small tools and utensils that encourage fine motor dexterity and enable children to undertake fiddly and complex construction works.

Promote healthy eating and good nutrition:
• involve children and families in the development or review of health and nutrition policies, drawing on local expertise about how to incorporate community and cultural contexts
• provide children with a broad range of foods that encourage them to learn about food choices and possibilities to extend their experiences
• talk with and model healthy eating habits with children
• engage children in informal conversations over lunch or snacks to discuss and reinforce their understanding of good eating habits
• accept children’s suggestions for recipes and food favourites that might be incorporated
• encourage cooking and food preparation experiences that reinforce good nutrition and the pleasure of preparing fresh foods
• teach children to appreciate food aesthetically, by taking care with presentation, and by drawing children’s attention to textures, colours, smells and tastes
• teach children to read and critique media, including how food and eating is represented, and how advertising works.

Promote hygiene and consideration of safety:
• use visual prompts and supervision when children are learning about personal care routines like hand washing. Ensure that children receive support and guidance until they are competent in taking care of their personal care needs independently.
• involve children in establishing rules and guidelines for keeping the setting healthy and safe, ensuring that they understand the expectations and supporting them to keep to the rules and guidelines
• encourage children to identify and report risks, dangers and unsafe practices in the setting taking increasing responsibility for their own and others safety.

Discussion starters
1. You are about to review your centre’s food and nutrition policy. What aspects of the local community and family contexts will be important to consider in this review?
2. What are the range of views and expectations in your setting about children learning to use the toilet? How do these match with your personal and professional beliefs? How are families’ views on these and other aspects of children’s personal care taken into account?
3. What games and experiences could be introduced to enhance the physical wellbeing of children at your setting?

Staff at an early childhood family support centre decided to promote discussion about healthy eating to the supported playgroup they ran on a weekly basis. Many of the parents were bothered by their children’s repeated requests for junk food and refusal to eat a range of fruit and vegetables. It was agreed that playgroup could be a good place to introduce children to more nutritious options where the peer modeling and involvement of adults and children together might provide an environment to promote key messages about nutrition. Staff involved families and children in preparing nutritious foods and encouraging children to help with setting tables and serving the food.

The introduction of healthy eating activities was a success. Parents shared in preparing simple, yet nutritious meals and snacks, such as stewed apple, mashed sweet potato, and fried rice. The food was presented in an inviting, easy-to-eat way. Staff noticed that the children responded well, readily trying and enjoying the new foods. Further proof of success was demonstrated by the healthy snacks parents began to bring along to playgroup and by
listening to parents talk about how they were cooking the meals for their families at home. They also shared thoughts on how to persuade children away from less healthy food options.

1. How can the staff continue to reinforce the healthy eating messages that the families have taken?
2. The success of the healthy eating activity was largely led by the children, who responded well to the nutritious food, and who were willing to try new things. How can this 'child-led' approach be incorporated into other aspects of conveying healthy lifestyle messages to children, and families?

**Assessment for learning**

Educators might look for children’s learning in the following areas:

- seek out and accept new challenges, make new discoveries, and celebrate their own efforts and achievements and those of others
- increasingly co-operate and work collaboratively with others
- recognise the contributions they make to shared projects and experiences
- enjoy moments of solitude
- recognise their individual achievement
- experience individual and group success frequently
- contribute their ideas and experiences in group situations in their home language/s or Standard Australian English
- make choices, accept challenges, take considered risks
- manage change and cope with frustrations and the unexpected
- share their cultural and spiritual experiences freely and confidently with peers and educators
- show an increasing capacity to self-regulate and manage their emotions in ways that reflect the feelings and needs of others

**References and resources**


(For further references and resources, see Document 17 in ‘Linked resources - CSU 2009’ folder.)