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CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE
OF WELLBEING



The social, emotional, creative, cultural, physical and cognitive wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is linked to their positive relationships with their early childhood educators, their family and their community.

IN THIS FACT SHEET EDUCATORS WILL:

- Find out more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples connection to nature.
- Discover the importance of a strong transition to school program.
- The significance of partnerships with other services such as dental care and health screenings
- Find out more about tokenism.
- Learn more about the protocols for engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Read about strategies for enhancing the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Consider educators roles in promoting secure relationships with children.



HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO DIFFERENT NEEDS

Working collaboratively with schools to support children and families is crucial to assisting in the transition process. Building child and parent capacity as they transition to school helps them feel 'secure, confident and connected' (EYLF, 2009).

Evidence demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can face particular challenges through the transition process, largely due to higher levels of disadvantage, lower participation in early childhood services, and a lack of cultural competence across education providers.

KEY FEATURES ACROSS EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONS INCLUDE:

- high quality programs and experiences
- meaningful and respectful partnerships between and participation of all stakeholders
- a strengths based approach that draws on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children families and communities
- flexibility within program approach and design
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- A culturally competent approach

For more information on supporting transition to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children:

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/product/the-journey-to-big-school-supporting-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-childrens-transition-to-primary-school/>

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/product/supporting-transition-to-school-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-what-it-means-and-what-works/>

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/training/training-programs/early-childhood-education/journey-big-school/>

<https://www.littlejandbigcuz.com.au/educators>

https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/ey_prep_indigenous_brochure.pdf



HOW CAN PARTNERSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS ASSIST CHILDREN'S WELLBEING?

The Early Years Learning Framework explains that, 'partnerships are based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, and build on the strength of each other's knowledge' (EYLF, 2009)

Early childhood settings can demonstrate social responsibility by building partnerships with the local Aboriginal community.

In many cases a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services means that vital early education services can only be accessed through mainstream service providers. However, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may also choose to access a mainstream service provider rather than an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander one. Where this is the case, mainstream organisations have a responsibility to support the capacity and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.

Keep in mind that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had negative experiences of tokenistic relationships labelled as partnerships. This has led to a level of distrust that governments and mainstream services may use partnerships to 'tick boxes' of cultural competence and engagement with Elders and community members without engaging with the deeper commitment to sustainable relationships and local community empowerment.

A NOTE ON TOKENISM

Tokenistic involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture in early childhood programs doesn't lead to better services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Achieving better outcomes requires a shared commitment to building deeper, respectful and more genuine partnerships.

PROTOCOLS FOR NON-INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ENGAGING WITH AN ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues or people from a local community will be able to assist you in finding out which specific protocols you need to consider. If there is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation/s in the community you will be engaging with, contact them and ask whom you should be talking to and what the appropriate protocols are.

Examples of common protocols for engaging with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

- Protocols for introductions are important – describing who you are and where you are from.
- Be patient when asking questions
- Remember that different families may have different values and cultural beliefs, even if they are from the same community.
- In some communities, direct eye contact may be accepted, however in others it may be considered offensive.
- Do not force a point of view. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities have knowledge that differs from yours. Remember you are consulting them to see their knowledge and opinions.

For more information on partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/training/training-programs/workforce-development-partnerships/opening-doors-to-genuine-partnerships/>



WHO EDUCATORS AND SUPPORT STAFF ARE IS REALLY IMPORTANT.

Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and support staff is vital for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and understanding the local community and each child's family and home situation. (see Fact Sheet Outcome 1 - Identity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and staff table)

HOW CAN WE PROMOTE HEALTH AND DENTAL SERVICES TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/Pages/Resources-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-people.aspx>

<https://www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-programs/hfhs>

<http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/clinical+resources/clinical+programs/oral+health+programs/aboriginal+oral+health+program/aboriginal+oral+health+program>

HOW CAN WE PROMOTE NUTRITION TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES?

Form a partnership with another organisation to help deliver nutrition programs to your families and children- for example the South Australian Start Right Eat Right program, or draw on useful resources like the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's Tucker Talk Tips.

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/02167.pdf>

<http://www.vaccho.org.au/resources/npa/tts/>

<http://www.vaccho.org.au/wd/nutrition/tts/>

For information on training on partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/training/training-programs/workforce-development-partnerships/opening-doors-to-genuine-partnerships/>

HOW CAN EDUCATORS SUPPORT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE, HEALTHY EATING HABITS?

Cooking with bush foods

<http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/02478.pdf>

<http://www.maarima.com.au/pdf/documents/bush-tucker-cookbook.pdf>

<http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/media/30798/understanding-bush-foods>



TIPS FOR ENGAGING WITH PARENTS ABOUT CHILDREN'S NUTRITION

- Share information about children's food likes and dislikes
- Send copies of recipes that the child liked home with families.
- Where applicable, encourage families to send healthy food and drink options to the early learning service
- Presenting a photo diary of cooking sessions showing parents how capable their children are and encouraging them to try cooking activities at home.



HOW CAN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES SUPPORT PARENTS?

Supporting the emotional wellbeing, skills and knowledge of parents has huge benefits for children. Additional parenting programs include playgroups, sessions on first aid, positive parenting, child protection, budgeting, sexual health, learn to swim, cooking and nutrition and arts and crafts, or resource libraries that allow families to borrow parenting resources and toys.

It is crucial that programs and initiatives designed to support the parenting skills and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, are based on an understanding of the impact that colonisation and child removal practices have had on parenting capacity, and how this continues to affect parenting capacity to this day. Furthermore, it is important these programs are

respectful of, and consistent with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to raising children.

Parenting programs that are based solely on European biases and beliefs about parenting and child rearing will not only be unappealing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, but extremely detrimental to the self-esteem, parenting capacity and strength of families.

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/161039/good_for_baby_mum.pdf

<http://www.earlywords.info/aboriginal/materials.html>

<http://www.families.nsw.gov.au/resources/aboriginal.html>

<http://www.vaccho.org.au/resources/maternity-early-years/bb/>

<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/kindergarten/professional-topics/inclusion-diversity/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-children/strategies-encourage-enrolment-aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-children-kindergarten>

A Maori nursing fraternity defined cultural safety as:

“An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.”



HOW CAN SERVICES PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING?

Educators can utilise resources such as strengths cards for discussions with children about self-esteem and identity

<http://www.snaicc.org.au/product/talking-up-our-strengths/>

Reflect on the environment at the service and reflect on whether it sends out a message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that it is a secure, stable and nurturing space.

It is important to ensure that ECEC services are inviting, warm and friendly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It is very alienating to walk into a service and not see any images or photographs, such as posters, that acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures.

Additionally, educators need to have an understanding of cultural safety.

Aboriginal children, families and educators should feel supported to feel free to be who they are and express their cultural, spiritual and belief systems.

More information around creating culturally safe environments:

https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/qklg_pd_atsi_welcom_kindy_tscript.pdf

HOW DOES THE RELATIONSHIP THAT EDUCATORS HAVE WITH CHILDREN EFFECT A CHILD'S WELLBEING?

Supporting young children's wellbeing is possible when the early childhood service is a consistent environment, with familiar faces that are responsive to the child's needs including the need to express their culture.

In episode 3: New Tricks of ACER's Little J & Big Cuz series Little J is supported to share his interests.

Further educator resources related to this episode: https://www.littlejandbigcuz.com.au/uploads/files/EP3-New_Tricks.pdf

