

{Embrace}

Summer 2024 | Your inclusion support magazine



Helping children
to connect
with Country



How an inclusion focus
helped a children's service
to excel in their A&R

VICTORIAN
INCLUSION
AGENCY

One For All

{ Acknowledgement of Country }



The Victorian Inclusion Agency acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the strength of family connection and kinship within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their ongoing dedication to educating and caring for children. Sovereignty of these lands was never ceded.

{ Contents }

03 People and place: Helping children to connect with Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is more than just words. Find out how you can create a meaningful Acknowledgment with children at your service, as well as how to strengthen their connection to land.



06 Getting all staff involved with your SIP

Having a SIP is a great first step toward improving inclusivity at your service, but how do you ensure all staff are on board?



09 FEATURE SIPs and QIPs: How an inclusion focus helped an OSHC service to excel in their A&R

We got in touch with The Loop OSHC service to see how connecting their SIP to their QIP helped them blitz A&R. Read on for more.



12 Trauma, attachment and supporting connection in the early years

If you've ever stopped and wondered what 'trauma' and 'attachment' really mean in practice, you're not alone. Consultant Bryony Catlin explores what these concepts mean and shares tips for success!

16 Educator wellbeing after a traumatic event

It's hard to put yourself first when you're looking after children. Learn more about prioritising your own wellbeing after a traumatic event in this article from Be You.

19 FREE RESOURCE Talking about disability and chronic conditions

Using respectful and informed language is an inclusive practice. Check out this printable resource to remind everyone at your service how and why to use inclusive language when talking about disability and chronic conditions.



Contributors

We would like to thank the following people for their contribution to this edition of *Embrace*:

Zoe Kaskamanidis – Editor
Bryony Catlin
Jacinta Butterworth

Lara Speirs
Courtney Butterworth
Region 1, KU Children's Services

With the turn of a fresh new year can come mixed feelings of achievement, exhaustion, excitement and reflection, especially in the education and care sector. Even though these feelings can be a lot to hold all at once, they are all valid, and show the depth of care you each have for the children you support day to day. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the huge impact of your passion and care in shifting the inclusion dial for children all across Victoria, both now and well into the future.



In this edition of *Embrace*, we cover a broad range of topics from inclusive language when talking about disability, to getting all staff involved with your SIP, to the complexities of trauma and attachment. As always, we've been sure to include lots of practical tips so that our content is relevant and helpful for you and your service.

First up, the wonderful team at Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) explore the significance of an Acknowledgement of Country, how you can create a personalised Acknowledgement with children at your service, and how to encourage children to connect with the land they live, learn and play on.

Check out [page 12](#) to read about the role of attachment in trauma-informed practice from Community Child Care Association (CCC) Consultant Bryony Catlin. This article is jam-packed with practical strategies, tips and suggestions for simple games to promote attachment at your service.

Make sure to check out [page 9](#) to discover how an OSHC service worked with an Inclusion Professional (IP) to bridge the gap between Assessment and Rating (A&R), inclusive practice and inclusion support to achieve an incredible A&R result.

As always, thank you for your unwavering passion for inclusion and for working hard to ensure that all children feel supported, worthy and celebrated. I hope this edition of *Embrace* finds you well, warmed up in the summer sun and finding little moments to rest and recuperate.

Jane McCahon

Jane McCahon
Victorian Inclusion Agency Program Manager
Community Child Care Association

The Inclusion Support Program (ISP) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education. As part of the ISP, the Victorian Inclusion Agency is led by Community Child Care Association and is delivered in partnership with Yooralla and KU Children's Services.

People and place: Helping children to connect with Country

By the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)



An Acknowledgement of Country is more than just words. It is about understanding and connecting to the land we live on and respecting its custodians. Anyone can give an Acknowledgment of Country – even children! Here, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated shares how you can involve children in creating a meaningful Acknowledgement of Country.

Continued on next page

Children are often curious about their environments. They may have favourite places, special places, or places they feel a connection to. It is an important part of every child's development to learn about the land that they live, learn and play on.

VAEAI often gets questions from educators about how to help children develop their understanding of where they live and the history of that place.

To help children learn more about the land they are living on, a starting point for educators is doing an Acknowledgement of Country.

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country is a simple statement that anyone can give, taking note of the Traditional Aboriginal Owners of an area and paying respect to Elders past and present.

An Acknowledgement of Country is different from a Welcome to Country, which is given by a Traditional Owner of that area.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia, the land is often referred to as being like a mother. Being on Country, on the land of your ancestral forebears, is considered by Aboriginal people to be healing and good for the spirit.

How to build an Acknowledgement of Country with children

Sometimes it is easy to forget that an Acknowledgement of Country is as much about place as it is about people – the two are linked. In the early years, the best way that young children can start Acknowledging Country is through their senses.

What do you see, hear, taste, feel and smell?

VAEAI's Early Childhood Specialist Representative, April Clarke, is a Gunditjmara Kirrae-Whurrong woman who has written a series of books for children about connecting with Country. The first two in the *Walking on Country* series are *What do you hear?* and *What do you see?*

'How often are we in a hurry and ignore everything around us?' April asks.

April encourages her grandchildren to connect with Country through their senses by taking them out foraging, looking at birds and plants, and developing their awareness of the environment through mindful interaction. Nowadays, her grandkids are so familiar with the practice they command her to stop, look and listen!

Once children start to build this awareness of the natural environment, they are ready to start acknowledging Country.



Tips for educators to get started

Find out what Country you are on

There are online resources that can help identify what Country you are on, such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies webpage, [Whose Country am I on?](#)

You can also get in contact with your [Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group](#) (LAECG). LAECGs are VAEAI's local constituent units, and there are thirty across the state of Victoria.

Take an excursion around your local area

Take children out to a local park or waterway. Get them to take note of what they observe, using all their senses. For younger children, you can write down the things they notice to discuss later. This can help children develop a deeper interest in and understanding of their surroundings.

Invite Aboriginal community members to your centre

In any education and care centre, there will be varying levels of awareness of Aboriginal history and culture. By inviting community members to your centre, you can introduce children to Aboriginal identities. For some children, this may be the first time they have met an Aboriginal person.

You can [contact VAEAI](#) for some guidance on who to get in touch with.

Create a group project

This could be something simple in your centre, such as making a poster. It could also be something more involved, like creating a garden with native plants.

These kinds of projects can be built over time, which helps children reinforce their understanding and learning as a group.

Display a commemorative plaque

Commemorative plaques that Acknowledge Country can help to visually communicate your centre's values and intentions to families, staff and children upfront. Many organisations such as [Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation \(ANTAR\)](#) and [Kinya Lerrk](#) have commemorative plaques, stickers and signs available in their online shop. Or, you can make your own!



Why we Acknowledge Country

With children, it's important to talk about why we Acknowledge Country. Children often ask their caregivers why things need to be done. And once you answer one 'why' question, you are bound to get many more.

Acknowledging Country is all about building a relationship between the person and the place.

April Clarke says that 'anything that grows has a spirit: the waterways, the fish, the plants, the insects, the reptiles. And everything grows with acknowledgement and love... This is our heartbeat and our healing.'

What are the benefits?

There are many benefits of connecting with Country for all children, including:

- Developing an understanding of how crucial it is for people to protect the environment
- Helping to regulate moods and emotions
- Encouraging children to have time away from screens
- Promoting connections between children and their caregivers through a shared activity
- Building children's confidence so that they can interact in the environment with purpose and understanding.

Doing an Acknowledgement of Country is about every child (and adult!) feeling welcome and connected, with a deeper understanding of history and the environment. Anyone can do an Acknowledgement. It's really about saying, 'Right now I am on this land, where people have come before me for many thousands of years. I respect their care and custodianship, and I am grateful for the gift of being part of the natural world.'



Getting all staff involved with your SIP

DAMIEN BENNETT, DI BEWSELL, SANDY MATTHEWS AND KRISTABEL FITZGERALD
Inclusion Professionals
KU CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Having a SIP is a great first step toward improving inclusivity at your service. But how do you ensure all staff are on board? Here, Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) Region 1 Inclusion Professionals talk us through how to make your SIP a living, breathing document for all staff.

Embrace: What is a Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) and who is it for?

Region 1: A SIP is a self-guided assessment and planning tool for education and care services accessing the [Inclusion Support Program](#). It documents goals and helps services track progress to ensure all children experience a sense of belonging.

SIPs are developed in collaboration with your Inclusion Professional (IP), who will help you to identify potential inclusion barriers and map out strategies to improve inclusive practice in line with the [National Quality Standards \(NQS\)](#). These strategies outline what is going to happen, who is going to make it happen, how and when it is going to happen and what resources will be required.

It is up to your service to decide who is responsible for developing the SIP with your IP. The director, coordinator or person who has access to the online [Inclusion Support \(IS\) portal](#) (the online platform where SIPs are uploaded) often takes overall responsibility. Care environment teams are then responsible for tailoring the SIP to their environment and their group of children.

While you might elect certain people to be responsible for your SIP, all staff at your service should be engaged with it!



DID YOU KNOW? If you want to access the IS portal, your local IP can help. However, you don't need access to the IS portal to develop a SIP. Check out these handy paper-based SIP templates you can use to start documenting your inclusion goals, strategies and actions:

- [Template: Centre-based day care and out of school hours care](#)
- [Template: Family day care coordination units](#)
- [Template: Family day care educators](#)



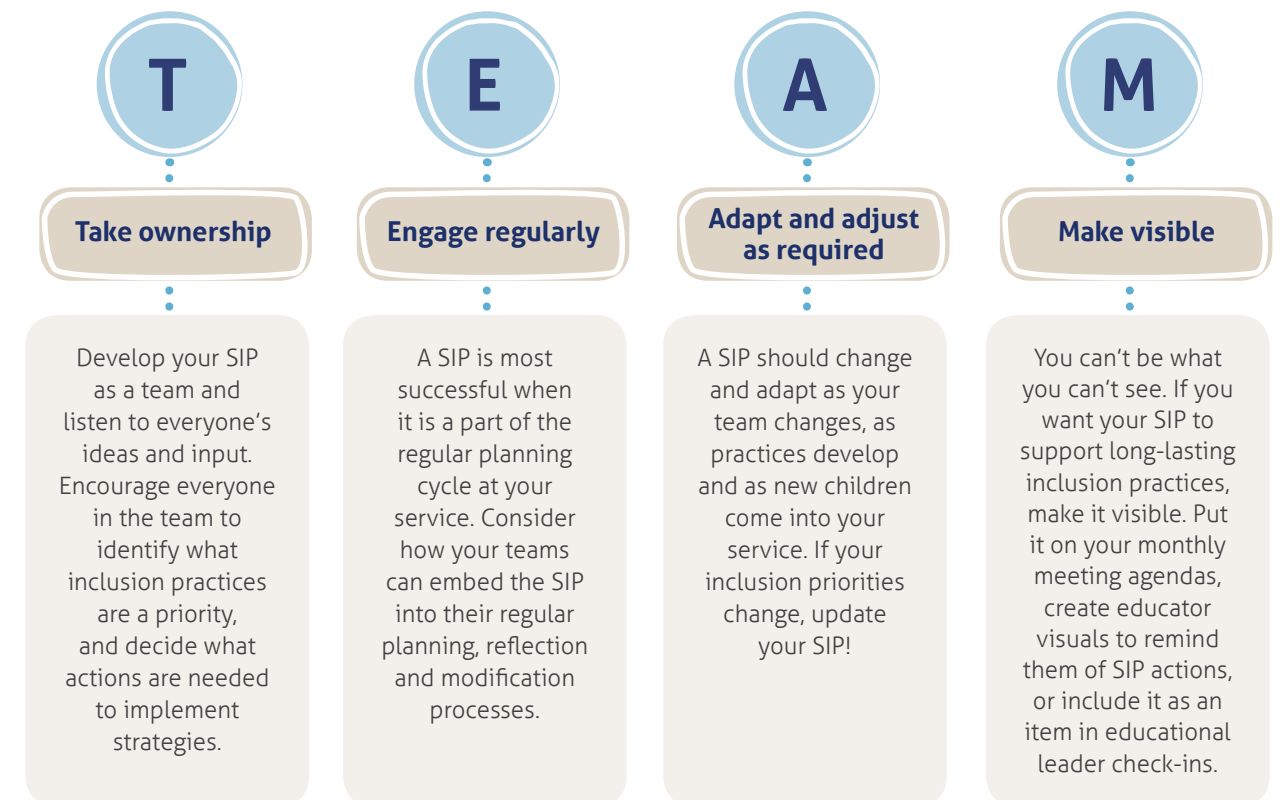
DID YOU KNOW? All services receiving support through the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) **MUST** develop a SIP for their service, in collaboration with their local Inclusion Professional.

[We are here to help!](#)

While SIPs can be developed to help with particular accessibility and inclusion needs, they can also be used as a support for whole-of-service reflection and improvement. Whole-of-service SIPs may focus on, for example, building your team's knowledge and confidence in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, creating culturally safe spaces, or developing inclusive policies to support services to implement Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) goals.

Embrace: What are your top tips for services to ensure that their SIP is a living, breathing document that all staff are across?

If you want the SIP to engage your team, put your TEAM into the SIP!



Remember, you can always contact your local IP to talk through how to develop TEAM engagement with your SIP. If you're not sure who to contact, call VIA on 1800 177 017 for some guidance on who to get in touch with.

Continued on next page



Embrace: Is developing a SIP hard?

Region 1: Well actually, no – it's not! SIPs are shaped to fit your service and we can support you through the processes. If you don't know where to start, that's what we are here for – we will assist you all the way. If you don't have access to the IS portal, we'll help you develop a paper-based SIP.

Embrace: You might think your service doesn't currently have children with additional needs attending. So why do you still require a SIP?

If this is the case, why not be prepared for tomorrow, next month, or next year and celebrate the inclusive practices you already implement? We want to support you and your service to be 'inclusion ready' and a SIP is the tool to help you to do this.

The key thing to remember is that a SIP is not a polished statement that you look at once a year; it is a living, breathing planning tool. As you engage with the process, your SIP will develop, expand, and change focus as your educators, your inclusion practices and your groups of children change.

Embrace: We all know that inclusion needs in the early and middle years can look quite different day-to-day. New enrolments, program changes and staff absences can throw a good plan out the window. How can services ensure that their SIP comes along with them through these kinds of changes?

Region 1: Educational leaders can play a guiding and supportive role as a 'constant' in a world of change. The SIP cycle is up to the service itself and how your team works best. Educational leaders can ensure that the SIP is reflective of changing circumstances by assisting educators with documenting their progress and adapting their strategies where needed. This can be done alongside

or independent of your IP. The educational leader also has an influential role in motivating, affirming, challenging and extending the practice and pedagogy of educators.

Note: There is an annual process that is required to be undertaken by services with support from their Inclusion Professional. This is to review the whole SIP (yearly review) which enables your service's SIP to stay active.

Embrace: If you had one piece of advice for services that might feel a little overwhelmed or stuck with their SIP, what would it be?

We would like to draw your attention to NQF Quality Area 6 'Collaborative partnerships with families and communities'. This Quality Area invites you and your team to consider your partnerships beyond the service. If you're feeling a bit overwhelmed or stuck, it can help to think outside the box and remember that the child, the family and your service are all an important part of a wider community.

Partnerships within the community can enable you to better support families, as well as encourage them to support children's learning and participation in your program. Your SIP can support you to document this journey – so, don't delay! Pick up the phone or send us an email. [We are here to help](#), and will always offer a strength-based approach to supporting you to develop a SIP that meets the unique needs of your service.



DID YOU KNOW? Your SIP links well with **National Quality Framework (NQF) Quality Area 6 'Collaborative partnerships with families and communities'** as well as **NQF Quality Area 1 'Educational program and practice'**? Having a SIP comes in handy for Assessment and Rating time!



SIPs and QIPs: How an inclusion focus helped an OSHC service to excel in their A&R

Inclusive practice does not exist in a vacuum. In fact, strong inclusive practice can broadly benefit your service in ways you may not expect. We got in touch with The Loop OSHC service and their Inclusion Professional Lara to see how connecting their SIP to their QIP helped them blitz A&R.

The Loop is a 60-place outside of school hours care (OSHC) service based in Kyabram, Victoria. Their inclusion journey kicked off when their educational leader, Sharelle, and director, Claire, attended Community Child Care Association (CCC)'s OSHC Conference in 2019 and met with the Inclusion Professionals (IPs) who would help them get the ball

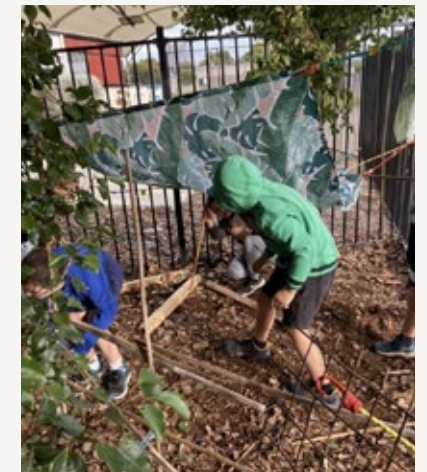
rolling. Since then, with support from their current IP, Lara, they have grown their understanding of inclusion and worked hard to identify a broader range of areas for improvement.

'Back in 2018, I knew we needed help with inclusion at The Loop – but being in our first year of operation, we had little knowledge of how to source it. Five years later and our inclusion needs have moved from children to families to cultures and everything in between,' says The Loop director, Claire.

A key area of focus for The Loop more recently has been to utilise support from Lara to build a strong connection between their Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) and their Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to prepare for Assessment and Rating (A&R).

'Prioritising inclusion has a very natural follow-on effect for Exceeding practice, as so many of those Exceeding themes are linked to flexible and holistic approaches which are able to provide an environment that diverse individuals can thrive in,' says Lara.

Continued on next page



“ Linking your SIP and QIP and using them as the live documents they are intended to be, results in an “inclusion ready” service. When critically reflecting on these two documents, services have a clearer picture of how accessible their service is and needs to be. ”

Drawing these connections has involved deep collaboration between the service and their IP – both to shift staff’s understanding of the supports available to them, and to put practical strategies into practice.

‘We know now that our understanding of the connection between A&R, inclusive practice and inclusion support before working with Lara was very two-dimensional and lacked flow,’ Claire explains. ‘We had limited knowledge of the depth of support there was out there for services, families and children. We also didn’t realise the symbiotic relationship between these areas.’

Lara has supported the service to identify beneficial funding opportunities (such as Innovative Solutions funding), supported their ‘Statement to the commitment of inclusion’, facilitated online and face-to-face network meetings that The Loop has attended, attended the service to provide recommendations and resources, and completed SIP reviews to improve both inclusive practice and quality service delivery.

‘Lara has been there to strengthen our SIP and help with its reflection. Leading up to A&R, Lara reminded staff about the relationship between the SIP and our QIP, and the importance our SIP had on a positive A&R outcome,’ says Claire.

In their A&R review this year, the service scored an impressive Exceeding rating in six out of seven quality areas, with an overall rating of Exceeding – a significant improvement since their first review in 2019. Along with their fantastic A&R review, staff have also achieved a strong sense of improved confidence and skill development at a personal level.

‘Working with Lara has enabled our educators to have a stronger voice troubleshooting new ways to ensure inclusivity in all facets of life,’ says Claire. ‘Our confidence supporting families with the right information has grown exponentially, allowing staff to tailor-make information to suit each family’s path.’

Lara has also highlighted Claire’s success in supporting and inspiring other educators through her shared contributions in networks, to show what is possible for services to achieve if they prioritise an inclusive lens and innovate.

Lara and The Loop are now working on extending the reach of their inclusive practice even more widely, through an Innovative Solutions project with a focus on embedding Indigenous perspectives through art form. This new project will tie into The Loop’s Reconciliation Action Plan, QIP and SIP.



Want to find out more about how your IP can support your way forward with inclusive practice, and how that could build your capacity for your next A&R? Call us on **1800 177 017**.

Trauma, attachment and supporting connection in the early years

As an educator, words like 'trauma' and 'attachment' may be familiar to you. But if you've ever stopped and wondered about what these words really mean in practice or how they relate to your day-to-day work, you're not alone. Here, CCC Consultant and Circle of Security classroom facilitator, Bryony Catlin, explores what these concepts mean and offers a gold mine of simple tips and strategies.



While 'trauma', 'attachment' and 'connection' are all significant concepts in education and care settings, they are often words that we are more likely to hear in professional development or further education contexts. Understanding how these terms connect to the work you already do, or could do differently, can help you as an educator to ensure your approach to supporting children is informed and effective.

So, what is trauma? Is it any different from distress?

Although trauma and distress can sometimes look similar from the outside, they are two distinct experiences with profoundly different impacts on a person's brain and development.

Experiencing **distress** can feel upsetting, stressful and anxiety-provoking. Distress can be triggered by things like short-term separation from a caregiver or changing care settings with new people and new environments.

Experiencing **trauma** can feel like there is a direct threat to a person's safety that overwhelms a person's ability to cope with a situation. A traumatic response has a significant biological effect on our brains and our bodies. So, when a child experiences trauma repetitively it can impact all areas of their development, including attachment, relationships and social-emotional development.

Examples of trauma can include repetitively being put in unsafe situations such as neglect, exposure to domestic violence or child abuse.

Understanding attachment and 'relational templates'

In education and care settings, **attachment** refers to the emotional and relational bond that a child has with their caregiver. Trauma can create a 'rupture' in a child's experience of consistency and safety, which are both important aspects of children's healthy development. As educators, you have a special opportunity to help mend this rupture by creating new relational templates through reciprocal, nurturing and attuned interactions.

When a child is exposed to adverse relationships or environments that are unsafe or do not consistently meet a child's need for nurturing, caring responses, they can develop a sense of distrust with adults and may even cause a child to feel unsafe expressing their needs.



When this happens, children need support to develop new understandings (i.e., a new relational template) that show them they can trust adults, and that they are worthy of nurturing and commitment from carers, and of being with carers that enjoy being with them just because they are who they are.

When children experience environments that are consistent, predictable, promote a sense of physical, cultural and emotional safety, and focus on supporting nurturing and genuine connection, we are providing them with what they need to succeed. This type of experience builds a child's sense of self-worth, emotional regulation, empathy and positive relationship skills for the rest of their lives.

Supporting attachment through your relationships

Your job as an educator is to focus on the quality of your relationships with children and communicate a physical and emotional sense of safety. Children who have experienced relational trauma may have a hypersensitive fight or flight threat response and can often feel distrustful, apprehensive, or perceive interactions as unsafe.



It is important to consider how tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and nurturing interactions can convey a feeling of security and comfort.

Continued on next page

Some examples of this in practice might include:

- 1 Positioning yourself at or lower than a child's eye level and using a soft or warm tone of voice. **This can send a response to their brain that you're not a threat and can communicate a sense of safety.**
- 2 Following the child's relationship cues. Ideally, we want children to use their caregiver as a secure base to **go off and explore their world, as well as a safe haven to come back to** when they want connection, protection, security or their emotional cup filled through things like a cuddle or a simple check-in.
- 3 Always following the child's lead. You may not know what could trigger a child's trauma response. Some children will only feel safe enough to be in an interaction with a caregiver for a short amount of time. Responding sensitively to children's rhythms of engagement and their need to withdraw is important. This requires an attuned and sensitive response from yourself as an educator about when to step in and when to step out
- 4 Be intentional about making time to play with children. Play between a caregiver and a child can have a profound impact on the relationship. It can also create new pathways in the brain that **support emotional regulation, positive relationships and self-esteem.** This then helps children build new relational templates in their brains that they are worthy of caregivers wanting to and enjoying taking care of them.
- 5 Most importantly, demonstrating interest and enjoyment in being with the child just because they are who they are, and not because they've achieved anything or are behaving a certain way.

Supporting attachment through curriculum planning and play

There are many ways you can incorporate secure attachment building into curriculum planning and play at your service. From planning games and forms of play that bolster connection, to creating safe, secure and familiar physical environments, there are lots of things you can do to set yourself and the children at your service up for success.

Environment

Use the physical environment to support a sense of welcome, predictability and belonging. One way to do this is by displaying objects at your service that hold importance or familiarity for specific children. These can include things like physical photos, story books, portfolios or artefacts of significance to a particular child.

If possible, consider having a consistent space at your service where children can keep things that are important to them (like a locker or basket) or allow children to leave their work somewhere safe to come back to. Knowing that they have something to come back to at the service helps children feel a sense of belonging – that there's something or someone waiting for them to return.

Try to also ensure you have spaces at your service where a child can 'just be', or where they can relax with educators comfortably and closely. This could be through story time, playing with toys or simply talking about their interests. Cushions, couches and soft furnishings are ideal for creating a comforting environment.

Connection

Focus on games and types of play that communicate interest, delight and a coming together between yourself and a child. Games and play should be reflective of the child's age and abilities, but some examples could include:

- Bubble play, where one person blows a bubble and the other catches the bubbles or tries to catch them on a bubble wand
- Tapping a balloon back and forth to one another without letting it touch the floor
- Games that mirror the other person's actions and support shared attention. Examples can include back-and-forth ball games, Simon Says, or call-and-response play such as drumming
- Games that support proximity and model the child going out and coming back to the care giver. These types of games can mimic the 'going out to explore and then coming back' attachment cycle. Examples can include games like Hide and Seek, and What's the Time Mr Wolf.



Touch and proximity

The importance of the need for healthy and safe touch and **its significance to bonding and attachment** is well understood about infants. Touch is a form of communication and when done in a respectful way that is supportive of a child's cues and consent, it can communicate a sense of soothing (like a cuddle when a child is upset), and a sense of comfort and safety (like holding a child's hand to climb on an A-frame).

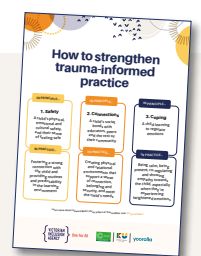
Games and play that can support positive touch include:

- Clapping games for older children
- Songs and nursery rhymes like 'Round and Round the Garden' or 'This Little Piggy Went to Market'
- Painting each other's faces (you can do this with water and paintbrushes if paints are not appropriate)
- Thumb wrestling
- Giving each other a pretend manicure and nail painting (with a paintbrush and water)
- Playing hairdressers (gently brushing and caring for someone's hair)
- Using a doctor's kit with pretend bandages to wrap each other with care
- Tracing each other's handprints.

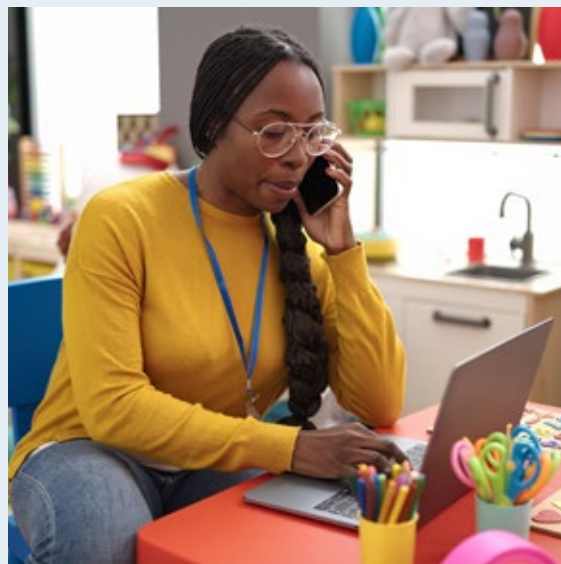
REMEMBER

Touch, even in games, can be triggering for some children in some cases. It's important to be aware, reflective and pay attention to the way the child responds. With some children, it can be the best to wait for them to initiate physical touch or play themselves.

Need a visual reminder?
Print out this **FREE** poster '[How to strengthen trauma-informed practice](#)' and display it at your service where staff can see it.



In your next staff meeting, reflect on the practical tips in this article and discuss with your colleagues how you can continue to support children's sense of security and attachment at your service. How can you apply the above ideas to existing or new programs and curriculums?



FIRST RESPONSE

If you are working with children that you believe have been impacted by attachment and trauma, it's important to remember that it's not your role as educators to diagnose attachment issues or trauma behaviours in children. Reach out to your Inclusion Professional and support services to refer the family or caregiver for help.



Educator wellbeing after a traumatic event

As an educator, you are well-placed to support children's recovery from traumatic events by nurturing relationships and routines, creating a safe environment and using play experiences to foster safety and connection. However, it's critical to also be aware of your own needs and to look after your wellbeing. Learn more about prioritising your own wellbeing after a traumatic event in this article from Be You.

What is a traumatic event?

A traumatic event is any incident that causes physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological harm. Trauma can be an individual or collective experience. [Community trauma](#) describes shared experiences that affect a whole community rather than an individual or small isolated group of people. Trauma can also be experienced vicariously, as a result of being exposed to someone else's trauma.

Following a shared traumatic event, such as a natural disaster or the death of a community member, you may identify children at your service displaying changes in behaviour, such as non-compliance or disengagement from learning. These behaviours may indicate that a child or young person is experiencing community trauma.

As an educator, you draw on your skills to set professional boundaries when exposed to a traumatic event. However, there may still be a personal impact on you.



Following a traumatic event in your learning community, you may feel:

- Overwhelmed by what you have heard or seen
- Helpless, anxious, depressed or even cynical about the situation
- Physically and emotionally drained and not able to function in your role as usual.

Your reaction to a traumatic event will likely depend on the degree of stress you are feeling at the time, your own [risk and protective factors](#), past experiences, personal support in your life and at your workplace, and your level of resilience.

Your wellbeing matters. You are in a unique position to provide care, support and safety to others after a traumatic event. To be able to do this, however, you also need to recognise, and reflect on, the impact of the event on you. Seeking support from colleagues, your workplace, or a mental health professional will aid your recovery and support your resilience.



Watch the webinar recording, [Critical incident responses – Professional and personal](#) to learn more.

Recognising and reducing stressors

The behaviours we use to self-regulate and respond to stress are stress behaviours. Stress behaviours look different for everyone, but may include things like overeating or withdrawing from social connections. Following a traumatic event, stress behaviours may affect your relationships and everyday interactions with children, colleagues and families.

Being aware of your own signs of stress and stress behaviours, and having strategies in place can help you to manage these feelings when they come up.

Simple strategies to manage stress:

- **LISTEN TO YOUR BODY** and address health and environmental factors through exercise, relaxation, sleep, mindfulness, meditation, breathing techniques, or making changes to your environment
- **FIND WAYS TO IDENTIFY, CHALLENGE, AND REFRAME** unhelpful thoughts; remember or experience moments of joy, gratitude or hope
- **SEEK SUPPORT** from trusted people, access your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or professional help
- **KNOW YOUR CAPACITY** – grow your understanding of mental health; identify the best times and spaces for you to process information, and use them. Learn to identify when stress or fatigue is affecting your thinking
- **CONNECT TO OTHERS** – feeling connected is a protective factor for mental health. Connect socially with family, friends and colleagues but also make time to be alone and recharge
- **ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES** around your capacity at work and in your relationships with others. Be clear to yourself and others about your time and your priorities.

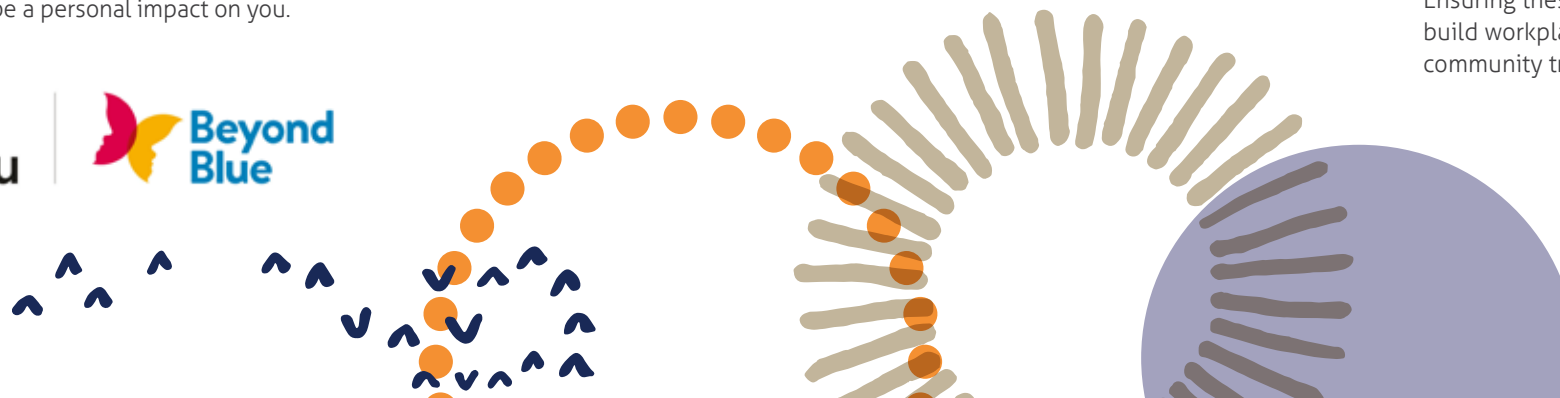


See [Planning for wellbeing: Mine, yours, ours](#) to learn more.

Educator wellbeing is about more than individual self-care

[Research](#) has shown that while self-care and individual strategies are beneficial, educator wellbeing is a shared responsibility between individual educators and the whole workplace, including leaders.

Workplaces should find ways to identify and reduce stressors where possible, put strategies in place to manage unavoidable stressors and actively promote a thriving culture that will contribute to educator wellbeing and a [mentally healthy workplace](#). Ensuring these strategies are routinely applied can build workplace resilience after a traumatic event or community trauma.





Talking about disability and chronic conditions

The language we use when talking to and about children and each other can impact a person's sense of belonging and their experience of the world around them. Using respectful and informed language is an inclusive practice.

Whether you're aware of someone's disability or not, regardless of their age or condition, it's important to make sure you're using respectful language. Even if your intentions are good, the words you use can still have an effect on someone's sense of self, how they are perceived by others and how they navigate society.

Phrases used to refer to and describe disability and chronic conditions can vary greatly from one group to another, and from one person to the next. In Australia, terminology typically falls into two categories: identify-first language and person-first language.

Identity-first language positions disability and chronic conditions as an identity category. For example, the phrases 'Khalid is disabled' and 'Peter is autistic' use identity-first language because they describe a person as 'being' their condition. Identity-first language can also symbolise membership of a wider cultural group, i.e., autistic and deaf communities.

Person-first language focuses on the person, not the disability or chronic condition. Examples may include

'Khalid *has* disability' and 'Peter *has* autism.' Person-first language avoids unnecessary focus on a person's impairment and is more widely accepted as appropriate and respectful language.

People with disability will sometimes have preferences for how they describe their own disability.

Keep in mind that what is acceptable for one person may not be acceptable for another.

Some people may have specific language they use to describe their own disability or chronic condition. If you are unsure, it's okay to ask! For adults and older children, this can mean asking them directly. For younger children, you can ask families.

Here is a list of terms that are generally preferred when talking about disability and chronic conditions, and those that can be offensive, outdated or discriminatory.

What leaders can do

As a leader, you can take action to improve wellbeing by developing a healthy culture and environment within your learning community. You can also identify and address factors that hinder educator wellbeing, including:

- Unsupportive leadership
- Discrimination
- Competition
- High or low workload
- Lack of role clarity
- Remote or isolated work
- Emotional labour
- Feeling undervalued
- Job insecurity
- Toxic culture.



You can read more about whole-of-setting approaches to educator wellbeing in **Beyond self-care: An educator wellbeing guide.**

What educators can do

As an educator, you will be able to attend to and support children's needs and behaviours following a traumatic event when you:

- Understand how the traumatic event has impacted you
- Can reflect and talk to your colleagues
- Are supported by strategies at a service-wide level
- Seek individual support when you need to.

Be You is the national mental health in education initiative that equips educators with knowledge, tools and resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people from birth to eighteen years. Be You can support your learning community to adopt a whole-of-setting approach prioritising educator wellbeing. Learn more at the [Be You website](#).



If reading this article has raised any difficult feelings for you, please reach out to your support networks. There is also always someone you can talk to on the end of these phone lines:

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Lifeline: 13 11 14

More mental health services and support helplines

Dos and don'ts:

Talking about disability and chronic conditions

Language to use

✓ 'Has ADHD'	✗ 'Hyper'
✓ 'Has autism/is on the autism spectrum'	✗ 'Aspie'
✓ 'Has a learning disability'	✗ 'Slow learner/stupid'
✓ 'Has a cognitive disability/ intellectual disability'	✗ 'Handicapped/special needs/ mentally disabled'
✓ 'Has acquired brain injury'	✗ 'Brain-damaged'
✓ Without disability'	✗ 'Normal/healthy/able-bodied'
✓ 'Non-verbal'	✗ 'Mute'
✓ 'Has a mental illness'	✗ 'Mentally ill/crazy'
✓ 'Uses a wheelchair'	✗ 'Wheelchair-bound'
✓ 'Person with disability'	✗ 'Disabled person'
✓ 'Has reduced mobility'	✗ 'Slow'



Interested in reading more? Looking for an example not mentioned above? Check out these great inclusive language guides:

Australian Broadcasting Corporation, [How to talk about disability in an inclusive way](#), 2021.

People with Disability Australia, [PWDA Language guide: A guide to language about disability](#), 2021.

Telethon Kids Institute, [Inclusive language guide](#), 2022.



You've got mail

Fancy a carefully curated, digital dose of educator resources in your inbox between issues? Our **monthly newsletter** for early childhood and OSHC offers just that.

To receive our newsletter straight to your inbox (with the opportunity to opt out at any time), visit viac.com.au/resources/via/inclusion-news

Hurry, 4,000+ educators have already subscribed!



Have a story of
your own you'd
like to share?

Send your pitch to
via@cccinc.org.au

*Talk to us today about the ways we can help you remove barriers
and support the inclusion of all children.*

www.viac.com.au



One For All

