

{Embrace}

Winter 2022 | Your inclusion support magazine



How to build positive relationships with families



Practical strategies to promote inclusive play

BONUS

We break down what it takes to teach children self-regulation!

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.

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Life is an interesting journey, with twists, turns, and new opportunities arising from sometimes unforeseen places. While COVID-19 continues to challenge our sector, we, as children's educators, leaders and advocates, are beginning to settle into a new kind of 'normal'.



This edition of *Embrace* touches on the pandemic – but it also looks at moving forward, rebuilding and strengthening our inclusive practices through planning and implementation.

First up, you'll find food for thought regarding outdoor learning and how it can support children's behaviour management and health in our new COVID-normal world. Spoiler alert: outdoor learning spaces can lift children's moods, allow for sensory development and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission all at the same time.

This edition is full to the brim with practical strategies and activities to support the inclusion of all children and families at our services. Head to **page 6** for some reflections and actions educators can use to ensure your rooms and other learning spaces are inclusive and accessible.

For more simple actions that will spark positive reactions, **page 8** has our top tips for building relationships with families. On **page 19**, we break down the key foundations to teaching children self-regulation and offer strategies to implement at your service.

Looking for some fun activities to help educators promote inclusive play? The search is over – flick to **page 14**. You can even make this resource come to life by cutting it up and using it in your next team meeting!

I hope this copy of *Embrace* finds your service well, and trust that it has something for everyone in your pursuit of inclusion.

Jane McCahon

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The Inclusion Support Program (ISP) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. 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.

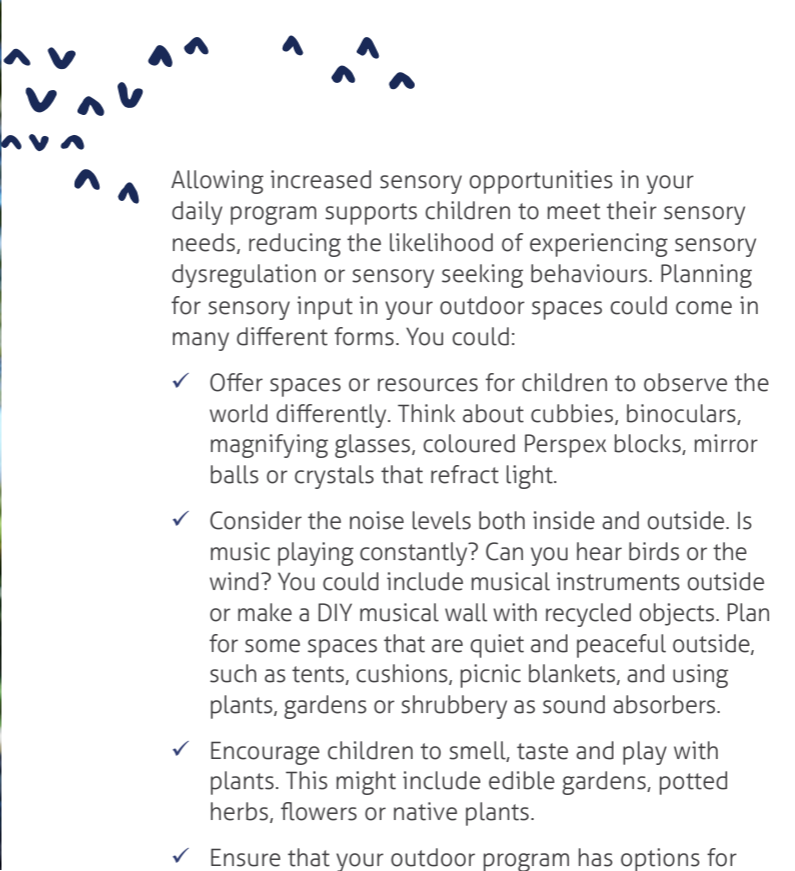
How outdoor learning can support behaviour management in a COVID-normal world

For over two years, we've grappled with the challenges of living through a pandemic. Even as we edge closer towards normality, we're still seeing educators experience burnout and COVID-19 spread in services. Educators are noticing a significant increase in children presenting with challenging behaviours, causing an additional layer of stress.

What if there was a way to create calmer environments, protect educators and children from COVID-19 and encourage positive behaviour all at the same time? Inclusion Professional Letishia Cole assures us there is!

Turn the page to find out more...





Outdoor learning, nature play, bush kinder, forest schooling – these aren't recent concepts. However, it is a new way of thinking to consider outdoor learning as a way to respond to the pandemic and reduce COVID-19 transmission between educators and children.

Research demonstrates that outdoor spaces are a safe environment for children to learn and play in post-pandemic, both in schools and early childhood services. We know outdoor environments increase the likelihood of social distancing, have better ventilation and can increase wellbeing and strengthen the immune system. But how can spending time outdoors improve children's behaviour?

It's important for children to feel a sense of freedom. Just like adults, children want to have rights, responsibilities and choices in their daily lives. Often, in indoor spaces, children are constrained by adult rules or expectations – from how they move around the space, the volume they can talk or how they are allowed to play with the resources.

How often does a child hear 'slow down, walking feet, no running, indoor voices, no climbing, no jumping, that's too loud...' each day? Being outdoors, children can be loud, climb, run and move their bodies however they feel like it. The noise of other children playing loudly isn't ricocheting off the internal walls, which helps to reduce noise overload. This alone can be enough for educators to feel calmer, and we know that when educators are calm, there is a higher chance children will feel calm too.

Outdoor learning – ideally in natural or wild spaces such as the bush or parklands – offers children the opportunity to experience healthy risk-taking. Healthy risks might be exploring things like heights, speed, tools, rough and tumble, impact or dangerous elements. Whilst these ideas might sound scary at first, they actually provide children with the opportunity to develop skills in managing risk and increase their awareness of safety.

With some scaffolding and role-modelling, children can learn to take notice of their environment and consider what might be safe or unsafe. They can trust that their educators will listen to and collaborate with them rather than say no to their ideas. All of a sudden, the child who was feeling bored or has low self-esteem might now feel connected and valued as a problem-solving member of the team. This can positively transform children's behaviour – children who feel challenged are less likely to be challenging!

To increase healthy risk-taking in your outdoor space, consider shifting the phrase 'be careful' to a more curious approach, such as 'how are you going to stay safe?'. Listen, observe and wait to see how children approach the task for themselves. If you notice unsafe behaviours, you can intervene, give children a chance to explain their motivations and provide a safer alternative. For example, 'I can't let you throw rocks. That isn't safe. But if you feel like throwing, we can find the heavy basketballs and the hoops'.

Outdoor play provides a plethora of sensory experiences that support children's emotional regulation and sensory integration, which in turn, supports positive behaviour. After two years of lockdowns and restrictions, which have meant more screen time and fewer movement opportunities, encouraging diversified sensory input is more important than ever.

Allowing increased sensory opportunities in your daily program supports children to meet their sensory needs, reducing the likelihood of experiencing sensory dysregulation or sensory seeking behaviours. Planning for sensory input in your outdoor spaces could come in many different forms. You could:

- ✓ Offer spaces or resources for children to observe the world differently. Think about cubbies, binoculars, magnifying glasses, coloured Perspex blocks, mirror balls or crystals that refract light.
- ✓ Consider the noise levels both inside and outside. Is music playing constantly? Can you hear birds or the wind? You could include musical instruments outside or make a DIY musical wall with recycled objects. Plan for some spaces that are quiet and peaceful outside, such as tents, cushions, picnic blankets, and using plants, gardens or shrubbery as sound absorbers.
- ✓ Encourage children to smell, taste and play with plants. This might include edible gardens, potted herbs, flowers or native plants.
- ✓ Ensure that your outdoor program has options for water, mud and sand play. Add loose parts and tools to extend children's play. Things like paintbrushes, different-sized containers, durable shovels, large buckets, spray bottles, watering cans, hoses, pipes, pebbles, gems and mirrors can spark curiosity or be an accessible entry into sensory play for children who are hesitant.
- ✓ Allow for loose parts play that result in 'heavy work' – pushing/pulling bikes or carts, using wheelbarrows, thick ropes, planks of wood or large wooden blocks to build with. Provide heavy blankets to build forts or hide under, tunnels to crawl through, spaces to jump/crash and play rough and tumble.
- ✓ Provide opportunities to balance, spin, swing and rock. For example, balance beams, uneven surfaces, swings, hammocks, hula hoops, trapeze rings and yard space to do summersaults, spin in circles or roll down hills.

Some children may need adult support to build their confidence outside, which is why it is vital that educators are actively programming for the outdoors. Start by observing and reflecting on the outdoor space, noting where educators are positioned and what type of play children are engaged in. Think about what challenges children might need and how an educator might support them to feel a sense of belonging outside.

Educator-facilitated activities like scavenger hunts, insect observational drawing, superhero obstacle courses, problem-solving to build a fort together (use clipboards to gather children's ideas and encourage planning), painting leaves outside and digging a river in the sandpit, might be enough adult support to ignite children's curiosity for outdoor learning. Even simple steps to bring everyday indoor experiences outdoors, such as rest time or mealtimes, can be enough to reset children's moods and increase everyone's wellbeing – including educators.



What to delve further into the benefits of outdoor learning?

Creating outdoor spaces – Considerations, strategies and tools: greenschoolyards.org/creating-spaces

Outdoor learning environments: best practice principles – Information sheet: [esb.sa.gov.au > Resourses > Outdoor learning environments: best practice principles](https://esb.sa.gov.au/Resourses/Outdoor%20learning%20environments%3A%20best%20practice%20principles)

Promoting children's risky play in outdoor learning environments – Article: bit.ly/3Ju74OY

Quality Area 5: Supporting children to regulate their own behaviour – Information sheet: [acecqa.gov.au > Resourses & research > Meeting the NQS > Supporting children to regulate their own behaviour](https://acecqa.gov.au/Resourses%20&%20research/Meeting%20the%20NQS/Supporting%20children%20to%20regulate%20their%20own%20behaviour)

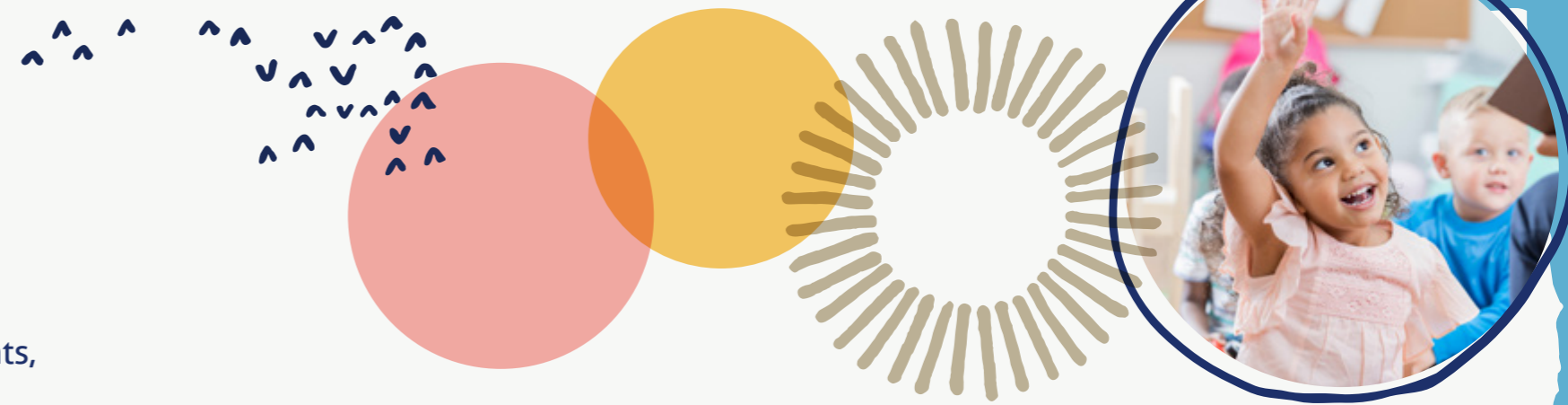
Rewild your kids: why playing outside should be a post-pandemic priority – Article: bit.ly/3JsHBFQ

Teachers can maximise outdoor learning to prevent COVID transmission in school – Audio interview with expert Karen Malone: ab.co/3jmZ7ka

Understanding changes to children's connection to nature during the COVID-19 pandemic and implications for child well-being – Research article: bit.ly/3rf9wCY

CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS: Reflections and actions

How inclusive are the environments at your children's service? Use the reflective questions on the left to identify aspects of inclusive environments, then implement the actions on the right to start creating them!



Reflections

Actions

Do all children learn new skills as they confidently participate in activities that match their strengths, interests and abilities?

✓ Reflect on families' 'about me' forms when planning activities, to ensure they match children's individual strengths, interests and abilities

Does the physical environment support the needs and abilities of all educators, children and families that access the space?

✓ Utilise conversations with families and children and your observations to ensure children are confidently participating in activities and learning new skills

✓ Ensure your spaces cater for wheelchair access

✓ Provide a range of activities and resources at different levels and abilities

✓ Reflect on your indoor and outdoor program. Do all children have the opportunity to meaningfully participate?

Do all children have a voice and input in the program? Can you see evidence of this when you look around your environments?

✓ Engage children in reflective conversations about the program. Do they enjoy the activities? Are their needs being met?

✓ Collaborate with children to make the space reflective of their engagement in the program (e.g. display children's art on the walls)

Reflections

Actions

How is feedback sourced and incorporated into the program?

✓ Survey children and families about their experience with the service and program

✓ If children or family members give you feedback during a casual/incidental conversation, make sure to note it down

✓ Dedicate time for your team to reflect on feedback and make changes

Is your environment reflective of the cultural diversity of your children and families?

✓ Stock your spaces with music, books, art, food and visual tools that are reflective of all children's and families' cultural backgrounds

✓ Invest time into getting to know families and their individual backgrounds and ask them about their needs

✓ Check out this resource for guidance: **Cultural connections – Booklet:** bit.ly/3usHVQE

Do your environments reflect the values and beliefs of all children and families?

✓ Speak to all families about the significant dates and events they celebrate

✓ Research significant dates and events and incorporate celebrations into your program

✓ Reflect on your indoor and outdoor program. Do all children have the opportunity to meaningfully participate?



Contact your local Inclusion Professional on **1800 177 017** to start a larger conversation about creating inclusive environments at your service.



How to build positive relationships with families

What do partnerships with families look, feel and sound like in your children's service? Here are Senior Inclusion Professional Michelle Boudrie's top 7 tips to help educators build and nurture robust relationships with families.

1. Be genuine

Greet families each morning with genuine warmth. After all, you are taking care of their precious family member. If families see you as welcoming, approachable and as someone who has made an effort to get to know them, they will be much more likely to develop a positive relationship with you.

Actions:

- ✓ Keep a list of family members on the door of the storeroom for quick reference
- ✓ Work as a team to ensure an educator is available to greet families by name each day
- ✓ Lead your team by example

2. Communicate effectively

Effective communication is the foundation of strong partnerships. Benefits include improved relationships, educators having a better understanding of what's happening at home, and families developing a greater appreciation for the important role you play in their children's education.

The diversity of families means you will need to use a variety of strategies, adapted to the needs of individuals, to ensure you're getting your messages across.

Actions:

- ✓ Ask each family how they would prefer you to communicate with them (for example, via email, phone or in person)
- ✓ There are many ways to communicate – you might like to use a noticeboard, notes in lockers, or perhaps you could make the most of technology by holding virtual meetings, sending email newsletters or using apps like Storypark
- ✓ Be mindful of timing (for example, when a family is too busy to stop and chat at pick-up time, acknowledge how stressful it can be when time is limited)
- ✓ Ensure families have clear channels to provide feedback and suggestions

3. Be curious and ask questions

You can build rapport with families over time by showing interest, sharing anecdotes about their child's day or providing updates on areas their child is excelling in.

Actions:

- ✓ Enquire about a child's weekend activities
'Lilly mentioned she likes to go fishing with her grandfather...'
- ✓ Comment on a child's interests
'Ari talks a lot about dinosaurs...'
- ✓ Ask family members about themselves
'I read your 'about me' form and would love to know more about...'
- ✓ Share information about yourself
'Michael tells me you're a football fanatic. I play football during the week...'
- ✓ Ask about languages spoken at home, cultural traditions or extended family
'Do you have family close by?' or
'How do you like to celebrate the holidays?'



4. Create clear channels of communication

No family likes to hear that their child needs help. However, challenging conversations are sometimes necessary to develop a common understanding and work together to support a child's development and wellbeing.

Actions:

- ✓ Set times for deeper conversations without distractions
- ✓ Prepare for these conversations by creating an agenda, and sharing notes and handy resources
- ✓ Clearly communicate important information, such as examples of developmentally appropriate behaviours, your team's expectations and practices, and additional supports that may be helpful
- ✓ For deeper conversations, lead the discussion with understanding and seek information sensitively. For example, *'Can you tell me a little about Billy's bedtime routine at home?'*
- ✓ Set a time to follow up and create opportunities for the family to share their thoughts or concerns

Continued on next page



5. Listen actively

To listen to someone properly, you need to tune in and give them your full attention. Create space and time for families to share information with you and be respectful of each family's varying degree of openness to share.

Actions:

- ✓ Understand that sharing personal information may only occur once the family has built trust in you
- ✓ Consider privacy and where might be a good place to have a sensitive conversation
- ✓ Share your professional knowledge and provide families with the 'why' when explaining any concerns you may have about a child
- ✓ Offer websites with educational resources that could help families support their children, such as Raising Children Network (raisingchildren.net.au)
- ✓ Share how the information a family provides is vital to your work. For example, *'That information has really helped me to understand how I can support Yasmin during play with her friends'*

6. Prioritise connection

It's important that families understand you are their partner in their child's success. For families to be involved in and contribute to their child's learning, they need to feel part of what you and your team do.

Actions:

- ✓ Connect with families through fun Zoom night events that allow more than one family member to attend
- ✓ Introduce family home activities such as *'How many red items can you see from your dinner table?'*
- ✓ Set mutually agreed times to meet and talk

7. Respect diversity

Every child and family deserves to feel they belong in your service. You can champion inclusion by acknowledging and appreciating differences and seeking further information to build your cultural understanding.

Actions:

- ✓ With consent from families, create maps of the world with their children's faces to celebrate the diversity of your community
- ✓ Embed culturally appropriate resources in the room, such as puzzles, home corner equipment, musical instruments, etc.

- ✓ Seek keywords in home languages to use for greetings, food references, simple songs, etc.
- ✓ Provide specialist equipment, where appropriate, to ensure children with additional needs are meaningfully included (learn more at viac.com.au > How we can help > Borrow specialist equipment)
- ✓ Link with external organisations, including the Victorian Inclusion Agency, to increase your knowledge and support educator team practices
- ✓ Utilise bicultural support and/or translation services
- ✓ Incorporate pre-enrolment and post-enrolment resources to support communication
- ✓ Critically reflect on your current practices and adopt new ones
- ✓ Develop a Strategic Inclusion Plan to identify your goals and improve your inclusion practices – it's free! Call **1800 177 017** to get started



Pop the relevant actions for your service in your Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) under 'strategies to build positive relationships with families'.



Further resources

Building partnerships between families and early childhood staff – Information sheet: bit.ly/Building_partnerships

Family partnerships – Online learning module: beyou.edu.au/learn/family-partnerships

Quality Area 6: Building partnerships with families – Information sheet: acecqa.gov.au > Resources & research > Meeting the NQS > Building partnerships with families

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities – Information sheet: acecqa.gov.au > Resources & research > Meeting the NQS > Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Partnerships with families – Online learning module: learninghub.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au > Topics > Partnerships with families – Anne Stonehouse AM

Professional partnerships for early childhood inclusion – Online learning module: learninghub.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au > Topics > Professional partnerships for early childhood inclusion



Why it's important to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources at your service (and where to find them)

CANDACE WILLIAMS,
Koorie Inclusion Consultant
Victorian Aboriginal Education
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Our children have the right to learn the full history of Australia and deserve to be able to engage in learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures (*Walking Together*, p. 7). One of the ways we can engage children at a young age is through meaningful and culturally appropriate resources and content. This could be through connecting with your local Aboriginal community and exploring what resources are specific to the land and country you are on, or engaging with Aboriginal organisations such as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI).

Education and care services are a place of belonging and first learnings, and also replicate the community where children engage in authentic learning, playing out important social roles and learning social responsibility (Hill 2006). These first years are a time for our children to absorb information that will carry them through their schooling years and community interactions. Therefore, it is crucial that we encourage children to be accepting of all cultures and treat each other with kindness and care. Introducing children to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through meaningful resources and content will allow them to explore, learn, develop, gain knowledge and ask questions (Hill 2006). We want our children to be inquisitive and to have the starting blocks of being culturally accepting, curious and wanting to learn more.

We understand that some services might be further along than others when it comes to incorporating and embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in their curriculum. This does not mean you can't start from the beginning or ask questions about how to be more culturally inclusive – we encourage you to ask these questions and receive the correct information so you can include culture and perspectives in your service while being culturally respectful.

You might also be asking how you can evaluate what resources and content are meaningful and appropriate. This is what VAEAI are here to assist with. We have numerous resources you can access, as well as our Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group who can assist and guide you, and give meaningful advice to your local area. Our website (vaeai.org.au) has many links to information that can help you explore and learn at your own pace.

It's important for all education and care services to have cultural representation, not only for the possible Aboriginal children who might attend your service, but for all children and families to see your service being inclusive of this nation's First Peoples.

This could be through your Acknowledgment of Country plaque at your reception, flying the Aboriginal and Torres Islander flags out the front, cultural artwork from local artists hanging in your service or inviting local elders and community members to come and share stories.

In the beginning phases, toddlers like to explore by touch, feel, taste and smell, while also listening to words and stories and scribbling and drawing (Hill 2006). This is a great age for them to touch and smell gum leaves, learn about native plants, learn about connection to country and how we take care of the land, read books by Indigenous authors and learn about Indigenous stories. They could also learn about art and symbols from a local Aboriginal artist or even by looking at our Aboriginal flag and learning about what it represents. With some further research, you will come across many other educational and interactive resources that are available such as Aboriginal puzzles, ochre kits, children's songs and nursery rhymes sung in language and many more. These special activities will help enrich the children's young minds and make them excited to learn more.

We also encourage services to celebrate and acknowledge our significant dates with us such as NAIDOC Week (naidoc.org.au), Reconciliation Week (reconciliation.org.au/our-work/national-reconciliation-week) and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (aboriginalchildrensday.com.au) to name a few. This could be an opportunity to learn why these dates are so important and how you can engage your service to be inclusive of these dates, acknowledgements, and celebrations.

Our children deserve to have many culturally diverse experiences that expand their knowledge and hearts and further their learnings about the world around them. It is through these experiences that our country and our little ones will grow strong while feeling a sense of belonging and being proud of the land they call home.



References

Walking Together – Inclusion support and protocols resource for education and care services: viac.com.au > Educator resources > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources for educators > *Walking together – A guide*

Hill, S. (2006). *Developing Early Literacy Assessment and Teaching*. 2nd ed. South Yarra: Eleanor Curtain Publishing, pp. 3-7.



Practical strategies to promote inclusive play

Play is often called 'children's work'. Considering the number of complex skills children have to use to enter and maintain play, it really is hard work. For many children, these skills don't come naturally or easily. Explore these strategies and activities designed by Inclusion Professionals Monica Solomon and Dani Campbell to foster all children's social skills and promote inclusive play.

Watch, wait and wonder

Many children need support to be included in play and to bridge the gaps when play progresses and changes. Educators play an important role in creating inclusive learning environments that provide all children with the opportunity, modelling and time to practice their play skills. Focusing on children's learning and building knowledge of developmental norms – particularly as we emerge from a challenging two years for children due to COVID-19 – will enable educators to make sound pedagogical decisions to support children's social skills.

To help skills develop, educators can play alongside children, prioritise time for relationships with and between children and purposefully teach approaches to play.

There is a fine balance when joining children in play, as educators shift their role from observer to play partner. The goal is to be guided by the children to support and build on their skills and ideas, rather than shift the focus entirely. A strategy that can be used by educators is 'watch, wait and wonder':

Watch

Sit alongside and watch what the children are doing. Where is their focus? What resources are being used and how are they using them? Notice how the children navigate the space and interact or don't interact with each other. What communication strategies are they using?



Wait

Wait for the children to initiate play with you. Follow their lead. Take a break from admin – be present and connected. Consider the tone of your voice and your body language. How do the children know you're interested in playing with them?



Wonder

Delight in the children and the play. Support the children to feel worthy of play. Enjoy the connections and relationships you're fostering. What have you learnt from and about the children through play? What play skills might you model or teach next time? How will you do this?



Continued on next page

Steps to enter play

As mentioned, there are many micro-skills children of all ages need to develop to successfully enter and maintain group play. For younger children, these skills are emerging and need a lot of support to develop. We expect older children to have social skills already, yet some may have missed out on vital years of early learning to lay these foundations.

Use this table to reflect on the steps to join in on play. How do your teaching practices, learning environments, routines and transitions support skill development for all children to start taking these steps?

Steps	What might a child in my program be thinking or feeling?	As the educator, how do I purposefully teach children these micro-skills? Use this column to jot down your strategies and then use them in your Strategic Inclusion Plan
Understand that other children can be used as a resource in play	I don't notice other children. I can play how I like and take my time.	
✂ Recognising the feeling of wanting to join in	I see other children and what they are doing looks interesting. I'm anxious about how to join in.	
✂ Watch the play	This looks fun but it looks confusing too. How will I know what to do?	
✂ Understand what the play is about	I need to figure out who is doing what. What are the rules to this play? How will I keep up?	
✂ Consider a few courses of action	I could follow what the others are doing, or I could tell them what I know. I could bring something with me to join in.	
✂ Choose a course of action	I will take my shovel. That will get their attention and they might like my help.	
✂ Wait for a natural break in the play	Do I go slow, or jump in?	
✂ Begin to behave in the same way as the others in the group	If I do the same thing as the other kids, I will look like I fit in.	
✂ Ask relevant questions about the play	If I ask questions, they will think I am interested.	
✂ Bring something to the play	I need something special that will show them I want to play too. Wow, I've joined in. This feels good!	

Steps to maintain play

Once children are engaged in play, they then need to stay in the play. There are a lot of factors to consider in maintaining play with other children. Some children have similar ideas, while some will share differing ideas which may change how the play evolves. There are nine steps for maintaining play.

Steps	What might a child in my program be thinking or feeling?	As the educator, how do I purposefully teach children these micro-skills? Use this column to jot down your strategies and then use them in your Strategic Inclusion Plan
Be able to take turns in leader/follower roles with others	Can I understand and keep up with the play? Can I take on the role they want me to?	
✂ Understand that there are rules to the play	I'm not sure if I understand what the leader is expecting me to do.	
✂ Be able to share	I want to keep using my shovel, but Kirra wants to use it too. What if she doesn't give it back?	
✂ Be able to take turns in action and conversation	Will they hear my ideas?	
✂ Understand the roles of each of the other players	What is Kirra doing?	
✂ Understand that other children may have a different point of view	Kirra is using the shovel in a different way from me. Is her way wrong?	
✂ Cooperate with other children	I really want a turn.	
✂ Be able to cope with changes to the rules as the play goes on	If we did it this way, does my role change?	
✂ Be able to contribute to making or changing the rules as the play goes on	I will try out my idea again. Working together is good.	

📖 Flip over to find out how you can turn this into a team activity!



Reflection

As a reflective exercise, consider using the steps to enter and maintain play as a staff activity. Cut up each step, and in small teams of educators, give each team two strips. Ask the team to reflect on the steps and place them in order.

It's important for educators to know what children need to consider when playing with their peers. When your team is aware of just how complex finding a way to play can be for children, they may re-consider using language like 'go and find something to do'. Giving educators opportunities to discuss and reflect on their modelling and teaching strategies will support shared understanding and consistency in their practice. In a team meeting, you could pose questions to encourage further reflection and strategic planning.

Reflective questions:

- How do I and my team find a balance between prioritising relationships and engagement with children and the other tasks of our day?
- How do I purposefully plan for and consider group sizing?
- How do I and my colleagues reflect on and review explicit teaching strategies for individual children?
- What might I learn about children from adopting the 'watch, wait and wonder' approach?
- How will the practice of 'watch, wait and wonder' give a voice to children and give me an understanding of their learning processes?



Hint

In previous editions of *Embrace*, we explored inclusive learning environments (*Embrace* magazine #9 – Winter 2021, page 4) and sensory awareness (*Embrace* magazine #8 – Summer 2021, page 8). Check out these awesome resources and use them to aid your reflections on supporting inclusive play! You can find all past editions of *Embrace* at: viac.com.au/resources/inclusive-practice-resources

Teaching children self-regulation

We all know how important it is to teach children self-reg – it's a formative skill that will support their social, emotional and physical wellbeing now and into the future. But how do we do it? Well, self-regulation can't be taught without first understanding how co-regulation, educator self-care, environments and relationships intersect to support it. Use these tools with your team to strengthen your approach to teaching self-reg!

*Information provided by Inclusion Professionals
Damian Bennett, Di Bewsell, Kristabel Fitzgerald
and Sandy Matthews.*



➔ Keep reading on the next page...

The key foundations to teaching self-regulation

Model > Educators should model the behaviour they wish to see in children, e.g., responding to challenges in a calm and collected manner.

Teach > Like a coach on a sports team, educators should first teach skills, and then create situations that allow children to practice and use them.

Problem-solve > Difficulty with problem-solving is often the reason for children's frustration or outbursts – educators can support children to solve their own problems by providing options and having children make choices and reflect on outcomes.

Co-regulation

Co-regulation means modelling and teaching skills and supporting children to solve problems, to lay the foundations for self-regulation.

Environment

Children need consistent routines, to connect with nature and time for practicing mindfulness and meditation in their everyday environment. This allows them to process their feelings and begin to regulate their own behaviour.

Routines > Consistent, predictable routines support children to feel secure. When children feel secure, they are more able to regulate their feelings and behaviour.

Connect with nature > Natural environments and outdoor play support behaviour management. Don't believe us? Flick back to **page 3** to find out more!

Mindfulness and meditation > Practicing mindfulness and meditation can help keep both educators and children calm. This helps educators be better co-regulators and supports children to begin to self-regulate.

Check-in > Regularly checking in with each other supports peer relationships and develops supportive teams.

Check-out > Ensure educators take regular breaks – educators need time away from children and the education and care environment to recharge.

Plan > Appropriate time for educators to plan their programs outside of time spent with the children enhances the relationships and wellbeing of both educators and children.

Educator self-care

Educators' wellbeing supports children's wellbeing. Educators who can properly check-in, check-out and plan have a greater capacity to support children to develop self-regulation skills.

Relationships

Self-regulation is deeply embedded in children's social relationships. Supporting children to name their emotions, using appropriate body language and having regular interactions with them will foster your educator-child relationships.

Emotions > Being aware of one's emotions with support from a trusted adult in a responsive and comfortable environment will promote self-regulation.

Interactions > Responding to children's cues and interacting with them regularly will support strong relationships between children and educators.

Body language > Using appropriate body language can do wonders for building positive relationships with children. Make eye contact, un-cross your arms and get on children's level.

Now, tick all that apply to your service! Use the blank space to jot down one more strategy you could use...

CO-REGULATION	To MODEL self-regulation, our educators:	<input type="checkbox"/> Behave as they would like children to behave	<input type="checkbox"/> Give clear instructions through the use of visuals
		<input type="checkbox"/> Set clear expectations through the use of schedules, procedures and an established routine	<input type="checkbox"/> Display and reinforce self-calming strategies
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
CO-REGULATION	To support PROBLEM-SOLVING skills, our educators help children to:	<input type="checkbox"/> Clearly define problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose an option based on the positives and negatives and carry it out
		<input type="checkbox"/> Think of two options for resolving a problem, and write a positives and negatives list for each option	<input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on how successful the option was in addressing the problem
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
CO-REGULATION	To support children with self-regulation, our educators TEACH :	<input type="checkbox"/> Age-appropriate rules and expectations	<input type="checkbox"/> Peer mediation skills
		<input type="checkbox"/> Social skills, and provide opportunities to practice them	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
EDUCATOR SELF-CARE	To support educators to CHECK-IN , our service has:	<input type="checkbox"/> A culture of team building and shared responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/> Time for check-ins with leaders as a regular part of an educator's week
		<input type="checkbox"/> An accessible Employee Assistance Program or equivalent, which is regularly referred to in educator meetings	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
EDUCATOR SELF-CARE	To support educators to CHECK-OUT , our service has:	<input type="checkbox"/> A dedicated outdoor space for educator breaks	<input type="checkbox"/> A practice of valuing breaks – breaks are not used for catching up on paperwork or discussing operational issues
		<input type="checkbox"/> A culture of discussing the mental and physical wellbeing of educators as an important part of service philosophy and pedagogy	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	
EDUCATOR SELF-CARE	To allow for appropriate PLANNING , our service:	<input type="checkbox"/> Supports educators to develop an understanding of the importance of self-care	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensures educators' strengths and interests are reflected in their work with the children
		<input type="checkbox"/> Allows time for educators to plan their programs and relationship-enriching experiences with the children	
		<input type="checkbox"/>	

ENVIRONMENT

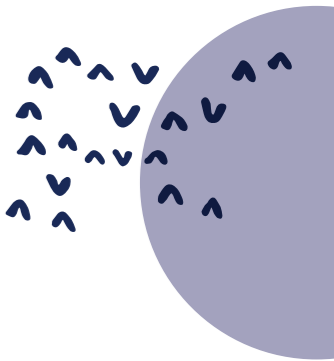
ROUTINES at our service look like:	<input type="checkbox"/> Consistent and predictable environments	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear and accessible visuals that support children to understand the structure of their day, sequence of events and prepare children for transitions
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
CONNECTING WITH NATURE at our service looks like:	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular opportunities to engage with natural environments through outdoor play	<input type="checkbox"/> Connecting with nature through natural materials like plants, water, sand, mud and more
	<input type="checkbox"/> Talking to children about what the natural environment makes them feel/hear/see/smell	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
MINDFULNESS/ MEDITATION techniques at our service look like:	<i>For educators:</i>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mindful breathing – breathe in for five seconds, hold the breath for five seconds, breathe out for five seconds, repeat	<input type="checkbox"/> Body scan – stand still, start from your toes and move up your body. As you reach each body part, think about how it feels in this moment
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mindful listening – focus on the sounds around you (birds, wind, rain...)	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<i>For children:</i>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Breathing buddies – as part of daily routine, have children lie down with their toy of choice on their stomach and watch as the toy goes up and down as educators count their breaths	<input type="checkbox"/> Connect to country – ask children to think of an outdoor place they love. Ask, what does the place look like? What sounds can you hear? What does it smell like? How do you care for it?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Tucker Turtle Technique (bit.ly/3ror3sh)	
<input type="checkbox"/>		



RELATIONSHIPS

To support EMOTIONAL awareness, our educators:	<input type="checkbox"/> Support children to acknowledge and name their emotions	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure emotional connections, like using facial expressions, are made with children
	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide a warm, responsive and nurturing environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Speak calmly and provide physical and emotional comfort during times of distress
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
To utilise appropriate BODY LANGUAGE , our educators:	<input type="checkbox"/> Make eye contact with children	<input type="checkbox"/> Crouch down to get on children's level to appear as their equal
	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Our educators allow children to have appropriate social INTERACTIONS by:	<input type="checkbox"/> Crouching down to get on children's level	<input type="checkbox"/> Always having educators on the mat or tables where children are playing
	<input type="checkbox"/> Being responsive to children's emotions and building trust in a nurturing environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Greeting each child and family in the morning in a warm and friendly manner
	<input type="checkbox"/>	

How your local Inclusion Professional can support your service



Your children's service needs support ensuring all children can actively and meaningfully participate in your program. You've been told you could contact your local IP – but what do IPs actually do?

IPs can help services understand barriers to inclusion and work towards building educators' capacity to plan and implement inclusive practices. Let us take you through the vital role of an IP on the next page!



The Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) works with children's services to build their capacity to include all children, irrespective of their individual learning and support needs. Inclusion Professionals (IPs) are experienced in supporting services to address factors impacting inclusion in learning and care environments. These factors might relate to a child's needs, educators' level of confidence when supporting inclusion, a lack of resources, or something else entirely. Whatever the barrier to inclusion at your service may be, your local IP is here to provide support.

IPs try to understand not just children's behaviours, but the other factors that may be contributing. Your IP might ask questions like:

- What barriers to inclusion does your service face?
- How do you identify the needs of the children in your service?
- What are your biggest challenges as educators in your service?
- What is unique about your local community?
- When do you notice challenging behaviours in the children at your service?
- Is there a pattern?
- Can you tell me more about what's going on in your environment?

IPs use their knowledge and experience to deliver tailored support to strengthen your inclusive practice, in response to barriers to inclusion. Learning delays or previous trauma may impact children's speech, communication and even behaviour. When children, even those of school age, are experiencing a heightened state of emotion, they may be unable to articulate their needs. A child's heightened emotional state can contribute to difficulties interacting with their peers and educators, and thus, can be considered a barrier to inclusion.

While there are some prevalent concerns IPs hear from services, each service's barriers to inclusion are unique. By discussing the specifics, IPs can get a greater understanding of the challenges your service is experiencing in supporting inclusion. To start receiving inclusion support from the VIA, including accessing funding, services need to work with their IP to develop a Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP).

With the support of your IP, your SIP can be used to build a collaborative team approach to strengthening inclusive practices throughout your service.

IPs can provide clear, achievable suggestions to support educators in implementing practical ideas and activities in your individual environment, which you will document in your SIP.

SIPs can also be used as a support for whole-of-service reflection and improvement. Whole-of-service SIPs may focus on building your team's knowledge and confidence in areas like understanding and embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, creating culturally safe spaces, or ensuring the development and implementation of inclusive policies.

IPs are aware of the additional strain and pressures on educators over the last two years due to COVID-19. Through developing and implementing a SIP, your IP can help you break down seemingly large challenges into more manageable tasks. Together, you can find strategies to support your work with all children.



Inclusion support is available for all eligible family day care, long day care and outside school hours care programs across Victoria. Start developing your Strategic Inclusion Plan now by contacting your local Inclusion Professional on **1800 177 017**.



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One For All

