Early Intervention for Mental Health

Celia Rae, Senior Project Officer

E: celia.rae@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au  P: (02) 4924 6900
What are we talking about?

- Mental health
- Mental illness
- Neurodevelopmental disorders
- Mental health difficulties
- Social and emotional wellbeing
Mental health

• Psychological, social and emotional wellbeing
• Refers to our ability to manage thoughts, feelings and behaviour so that we can:
  – Experience satisfaction and happiness
  – Cope with stress and sadness
  – Achieve our goals and potential
  – Maintain positive connections with others
• Changes over time
Piecing the puzzle together

- Mental health ≠ mental illness
- Mental health ≡ social and emotional wellbeing
- Mental health ≡ wellbeing
Mental health in early childhood

• Context of development

• Capacity to:
  – Participate in physical and social environment
  – Form healthy and secure relationships
  – Experience, manage, understand and express emotions
  – Understand and manage behaviour
  – Interact appropriately with others, including peers
  – Develop a secure sense of self
Mental illness

- Impact on thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- Diagnosed by health professionals
- Eg. Anxiety and depression
- No single cause, combination of factors
- Can be a single episode or ongoing
- Common – 45% of the population
Neurodevelopmental disorders

- Difference in the way the brain develops
- Neurodevelopmental disorders:
  - Thoughts, feelings and behaviour
  - Diagnosed by health professional
  - No single cause, combination of factors
- Eg. Autism, ADHD
Mental health difficulties

• Difficulties with thoughts, feelings and behaviour
• Emotional and behavioural difficulties
• 100% of people experience mental health difficulties
• Most will resolve in time
• Additional support may be required
Mental health difficulties in children

- Externalising behaviours – tantrums, defiance, aggression, impulsivity, overactivity
- Internalising behaviours – fearfulness, anxiety, sadness, guilt, numbness, withdrawal
The role of educators

• Promote positive mental health
• Prevent mental illness
• Identify children needing extra support and linking families with services
Why is it important?

• Early relationships, experiences and environments shape the developing brain
• Brain development influences our future mental health, physical health, relationships, success at school and work
• Up to 50% of mental health difficulties in adults can be prevented by supporting children and adolescents*

* WA Mental Health Commission 2010
Promoting positive wellbeing

The CHILD framework summarises the practical strategies that teachers and educators can use to support children’s optimal social and emotional development and wellbeing, ultimately supporting their mental health.

C - Creating safe and supportive environments for optimal wellbeing and development
H - Helping children to learn social and emotional skills and manage their own behaviour
I - Identifying babies, children and families who may be in need of additional support
L - Linking families with support and information services for mental health and wellbeing
D - Developing broader organisational and community strategies that support wellbeing

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Monitoring children’s wellbeing

• Observing and documenting development and wellbeing
• Being aware of what’s happening in a child’s life. Communicating openly with their family
• Identifying when there is an issue
• Discussing concerns with other staff and the child’s family
What to keep in mind

- Normal part of child development
- Influenced by temperament, culture, relationships, health, their family situation etc.
- Some mental health difficulties are temporary and have no major long-term impacts
Early intervention for mental health

• Occurs in early stage of mental health difficulties, illness or disorder
• Aims to prevent mental illness or reduce its impact
• Early intervention for mental health can occur at any age
Support within service

• What is the behaviour needing guidance?
• What influences this behaviour?
• Thoughts and emotions?
• Influencing relationships with others?
• What strategies could be used to support the child within the service?
• Developing a plan in partnership with parent/caregiver
Examples...

• Group strategies:
  – Relaxation activities
  – Read funny books or tell jokes
  – Talk about emotions and behaviours
  – Maintain predictable routines

• One on one strategies:
  – Provide physical and verbal reassurance
  – Allow children to observe group activities rather than participate
  – Give children choices instead of demands
  – Reward positive behaviour when you see it
When is it more serious?

• Extreme behaviour
• Ongoing
• Unchanged despite guidance
• Across multiple settings
• Interfering with development, learning or progress
Who can help?

- GP
- Paediatrician
- Psychiatrist
- Psychologist
- Social worker
- Other health and welfare professionals
How can they help?

• Assessment and diagnosis
• Developing support plans
• Implementing support plans
• Talking with children
• Providing medication
Talking with families

• Challenging but **critical**
• Allows educators, families and other professionals to work together
• Achieve the best possible outcomes for the child and family
Preparing for the conversation

• Discuss situation with supervisor or colleague
• Role play the discussion in advance
• Make an appointment with the family
• Organise for an interpreter
• Find a private area for discussion
• Put together a list of websites etc.
Talking with families

- Explain purpose of meeting
- Talk about specific behaviours or changes
- Explain why this behaviour is a concern
- Share support strategies
- Recommend a family makes contact with support services
- Agree on next steps
- Maintain professional boundaries
There’s nothing wrong!

• Continue to record observations
• Inform their supervisor
• Raise concerns again at a later date
• How can you support the child?
Self-care

- Reflect on the situation
- Debrief with others (maintain confidentiality)
- Be kind to yourself
Questions?

Response Ability provides resources and support for vocational education trainers to prepare early childhood educators on their road to fostering the social and emotional wellbeing of Australia’s children.

Response Ability: The national mental health promotion intervention that prepares early childhood educators to promote mental health in their day-to-day practice.

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