



WORKING WITH YOUNG
CHILDREN WITH TRAUMA —
APPLYING PRACTICE
PRINCIPLE 5 RESPECTFUL
RELATIONSHIPS AND
RESPONSIVE ENGAGEMENT



Case study

A supported playgroup included several children with additional needs. The facilitator held an informal interview with each family to find out what outcomes for their children and themselves they hoped for. The parent of one child with a vision impairment said that she wanted more than anything for her child to have a friend and to be invited to a birthday party. She also told the facilitator that the family was very musical, and that her daughter had a keen interest in and enjoyment of music. The playgroup facilitator kept this in mind and decided that although she could not make a friendship happen, she would organise a group birthday party four times a year for all children who had had birthdays in that quarter. She also worked hard to help other children recognise this child's incredible attunement to sounds and music by offering *guess that sound* games and singing experiences.

How did the facilitator demonstrate respect and responsiveness??

Notes



Reflective questions

Think about your current practices for getting to know a child and family when they enrol or begin participating in your early childhood setting.

1. Why is it important that you get to know the children and families?

2. Are relationships considered a priority in your setting? What are some examples that illustrate your answer to that question? What are some steps you can take to give greater priority to relationships with children and families?

3. When there are *gaps* in your knowledge, what do you do and who can help you? What do you do to get to know new children and families?

4. How does the physical environment where you work support and encourage respectful relationships and responsive engagement between you and children or between you and families? How could you make the environment more welcoming?

Notes



discussion starter

A Prep teacher said:

You can't ask about everything at an intake interview. Once you have a strong relationship, information just flows naturally. Sure, some families are more private than others, but once they know I can be trusted and that I respect them they are more willing to be open and honest with me. When I think about it, I'm like that in my personal life. I don't share a lot of personal stuff unless I really know and trust someone.

Consider examples of information that families have shared because of your relationship with them.

1. Do you think early childhood professionals put too much pressure on families to share information about their lives? How much do we really need to know?

2. What is important to know and how do we use that knowledge in our interactions with children and their families?

3. How much do or should professionals share with families and children about their own personal and family lives?

Notes



Reflective questions

1. Do you know what families think about the role of play in learning? If not, how could you find out about their understanding of play?

2. How do you help families understand the importance of play for children's learning?

3. How could you encourage ongoing conversations with families about play and its benefits for children from infancy?

4. How could the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework support your conversations about play?

Notes



discussion starter

In making decisions about how to group children the main priority in some settings is continuity of relationships for very young children.

Think about what happens in your setting in relation to grouping children.

1. To what extent does it take account of the importance of continuity in experiences, expectations and relationships?

2. What are the benefits or outcomes when families and children experience continuity of relationships with professionals?

Notes



MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNICATING WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

a MYTH

the reality

Babies and toddlers should be left to cry when they are new to an early childhood setting as they have to learn to separate from their families.

Separation from their family is usually an emotionally challenging experience for a young child. It can take a long time before a child understands that this loved person will return. Children's daily transition to an early childhood setting requires very sensitive practices to reassure and comfort them so that they come to understand over time that their family will return and that in the meantime they are safe.

Babies and toddlers should be left to cry and not picked up when they are crying, as they have to learn to amuse themselves.

Crying is a young child's way of expressing strong feelings related to pain, distress, discomfort or frustration. If adults ignore this signal they place the child at risk of being overwhelmed by these feelings. If that happens often it can lead to significant negative outcomes for a child. Older children who are fearful or distrustful of others or who have difficulty regulating their emotions in appropriate ways may well have experienced too many early episodes where they were distressed and no one provided comfort and reassurance. Resilience and social competence develop through experiences of warm, consistent, loving, inclusive and reciprocal relationships rather than through being ignored, neglected or rejected.

Babies and toddlers should be left to cry and not picked up so that they don't become spoilt.

No babies or toddlers have been spoilt by being comforted when they are distressed. It is a normal human response to comfort another person who is distressed, whether that person is a baby or an adult. Children are social beings. Very young children find adults the most interesting things to look at, play and engage with. Some of the best learning for babies and toddlers happens when another person interacts with them and not when they are left to *amuse themselves*. Educators need to find a balance between playing and interacting with babies and toddlers and allowing them time to explore their environment alone or with other children.

There isn't much point in talking to very young children, as they cannot talk back or

Babies and toddlers do enjoy conversations with others from birth, even though initially they do not understand the words. Young children need to be



a MYth

the reality

have a conversation and they do not understand what others are saying.

immersed in language every day by the people who care for them. Language immersion is an important factor in supporting children’s development as communicators. The more adults show their enjoyment and interest in talking or communicating with babies and toddlers throughout the day, the more they will talk back to the adults through non-verbal ways such as smiles or gestures, later with words and much later in sentences. Singing songs, chanting rhymes or poems, playing finger games, telling stories, sharing books together and having conversations are good ways to immerse babies and toddlers in language.

Notes

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines for notes.



Reflective questions

1. If you filmed your interactions with children over a day or a week, would there be significant time spent in meaningful conversations with children? If not, how could you change your practice to allow for those types of interaction?

2. How do you use questions to motivate children to think about their learning?

3. How could the concept of *sustained shared thinking* support improved learning outcomes for children in your setting?

Notes



DISCUSSION STARTER

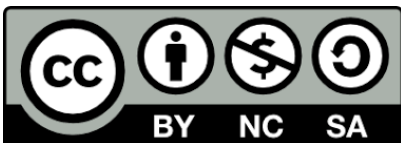
Read the information in the following table and think about what actions you would plan for the blank boxes.

Reflect on the questions and add your own examples and action plans that would help support improvement in this aspect of your practice.

In planning your actions, think about who or what might help improve this aspect of your practice as well as what you could do as an individual.

QUESTION	PRACTICE	ACTION TO IMPROVE
Do I/we really listen to children? How do I/we know?	Educator: Sometimes at the end of the day I can't recall any meaningful conversations with individual children.	<i>I am going to try 'on the couch time' which I heard about. It means spending 15 minutes each day sitting on the couch and inviting a couple of children to join me for an informal conversation.</i>
Do I/we really listen to families? How do I/we know?	MCH nurse: Occasionally when I am rushed, I partly tune out to what a parent or family member is telling me and just focus on the baby and the examination.	<i>I think I need to allow longer for some visits so that there is time to listen carefully to what a parent is telling me. I could re-organise the appointment schedule to help this. I will check with other nurses how they manage the need to have time to really listen to families.</i>
Do I/we respond respectfully to each child's unique ways of communicating? How do I/we know?	Educator: A student mentioned recently that she had noticed that Cassie always thumps the high chair tray when she wants to 'tell us' something or when she means 'yes'. I hadn't noticed that with all the busyness that is going on at lunchtime. I wonder if there are others I haven't noticed or heard?	<i>I plan to...</i>
Do I/we respond respectfully to families	Teacher: I have found it difficult to share	<i>I could...</i>





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