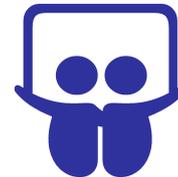


TALKING QUALITY: REFLECTING ON PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND CARE



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Thank you to our
education and care
workforce.

You are maintaining places for
families and children where they
can *Belong, Be and Become* at a
time when these attributes are
priceless.

Keep up the great work.

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of Talking Quality for 2020. We plan to distribute this publication three times during 2020 to promote a culture of inquiry and collaboration across the ACT Education and Care sector. It aims to regularly engage stakeholders with the guiding principles of the [National Quality Framework \(NQF\)](#) and connect these with goals for continuous improvement.

Guiding Principles of the NQF

- *The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.*
- *Children are successful, competent and capable learners.*
- *Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework.*
- *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.*
- *The role of parents and families is respected and supported.*
- *Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.*



Acknowledging the strength and resilience of the people in the education and care sector.

Services have had many challenges throughout the beginning of 2020, from dealing with air quality issues from local bushfires, to the trauma and clean up from hailstorms, and now the challenge of adapting service operations during the Covid-19 pandemic. During these challenging times the flexibility, resilience and creativity of the education and care sector in supporting children, educators and families is evident. CECA has been working to try to support services with current information from reliable sources in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. The websites below may assist services to manage operational and health issues at this time.

[ACT Education - Early Childhood - Information on Covid-19](#)

[ACT Government - Covid-19](#)

[Australian Government - Department of Health - Covid-19](#)

[World Health Organisation \(WHO\) - Covid-19](#)

[ACECQA - Covid-19 Information](#)

[Australian Government - Covid-19 Information](#)

[Australian Government - Department of Education, Skills and Employment - Covid-19](#)

[Australian Government - The Treasury - JobKeeper payment](#)

[Australian Government - Australian Taxation Office - JobKeeper Payment](#)

[Australian Government - Department of Education, Skills and Employment - Community Child Care Fund \(CCCF\) Special Circumstances Grant Opportunity](#)

[Early Childhood Australia - ECA Response: Covid-19](#)



Highlight on educator wellbeing

The importance of educator wellbeing, especially in the current time of Covid-19.

The direct impact of educator wellbeing on the wellbeing of children is significant, this is not news to anyone who works in the education and care sector. We acknowledge that during this time of Covid-19 difficult decisions have had to be made by services and that the whole sector has felt levels of stress and uncertainty. The wellbeing of our educators and staff is more than ever before directly linked to quality education and care and outcomes for our children, our families and our communities. As a team, by focusing on the wellbeing of our colleagues we can influence the resilience, the confidence and overall wellbeing of all of those around us. By embedding positive wellbeing practices and by building positive wellbeing spaces and environments during this pandemic, we will all benefit now and into the future. The strategies developed, and the culture created, will outlive the virus.



The purpose of the information provided here is to share ways to build and support your team's wellbeing. For every team, what works for them will look different. As a starting point it is important for us all to take a moment to reflect on and review the current practices and strategies, we use to support wellbeing. This, along with staying informed with current, accurate information, will debunk misinformation and empower all educators and staff. On this foundation, along with some acts of kindness and looking out for each other, it is possible to build a positive wellbeing culture during this pandemic.

Some simple no/low cost practical ideas to enhance educator wellbeing in the education and care sector.

(Taken from a variety of sources)

- * Think about ways to create a sanctuary for educators and staff.
- * Chalk the pathway with words of encouragement
- * Leave notes on your colleagues' lockers to tell them how appreciated they are.
- * Share your ideas and things you are good at and encourage others to do the same. When you're really good at something, it's easy to forget just how much wisdom you can share.
- * Notice when your colleagues go above and beyond.
- * Host appreciation weeks. One for educators, one for children, one for parents. Pool together some of these ideas and ask your team which ones they like best. It can become an annual event. People on your team and in your community will look forward to it every year.
- * Call out the small accomplishments — whether in a meeting, an email to families, or some other creative way.
- * Share a takeaway coffee togetherreach out to a local business. By supporting them you are also supporting your team members.

Educator wellbeing article continued...

- * Put some board games or a puzzle in the break-room.
- * Have a pizza party.
- * Have a mid-week treat. Waffle Wednesdays?
- * Ask to hear more about your colleagues' experiences.
- * Start a mentoring program.
- * Start a gratitude wall and encourage everyone (including children) to add to the wall with notes of who and what they are grateful for.
- * Say it with flowers.....from your garden if you have some.
- * Celebrate the small things.
- * Ask for input — what do your colleagues want to do?



Questions you may like to ask:

How do we currently promote the positive wellbeing of our team members?

How can we utilise our community to support the positive wellbeing of our team?

How can we enhance our environment and spaces to support the development of positive wellbeing in our team?

How can we include children and families in the development of a culture of positive wellbeing for all?



Suggested Links

[ACECQA Information Sheet - Supporting Educator Well-being](#)

[Be You - Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): Supporting educators, children and young people](#)

[Red Cross - How to prepare for coronavirus - resources in a range of languages](#)

[Australian Government - Department of Health - Head to Health - Covid-19 Support](#)

[Dial down Covid-19 anxiety and dial up positivity](#)

[Department of Health - Free Covid-19 Infection Control Training](#)

[Beyond Blue - Looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

[The Sector - Calm not chaos](#)

[Lifeline Australia - Mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

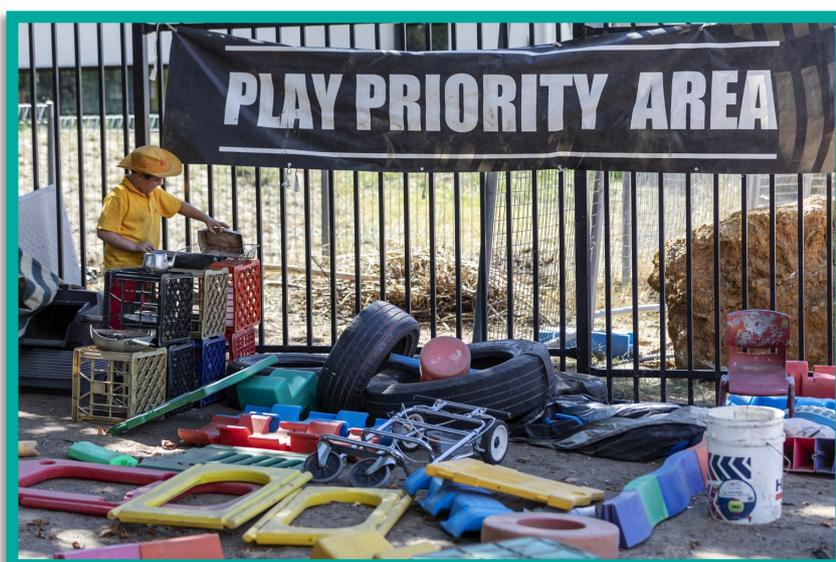
Committing to Continuous Improvement

Policy development and change to meet the current situation

Advice in the current situation

The current health emergency in relation to Covid-19 has prompted many services to reflect on particular policies including those that are used for enrolments, children's medical conditions, health and hygiene and managing infectious diseases. This has highlighted the importance of being responsive and regularly reviewing policies to ensure best practice at the service reflects the needs of the service community. Education and care services may choose to utilise the [Infection control during the COVID - 19 pandemic model policy \(84kb\)](#) developed by CECA and adapt this for use in the context of their setting. Services will find a range of credible organisations and government bodies recommendations and information on our website. This material assists services in referring to a reliable and appropriate source in policy development. Our website can be found at -

[Education Directorate - Early Childhood - Information on Covid-19 for early childhood](#)



Some more general advice

Service policies should be reviewed regularly to ensure educators and families are aware of policy content and that the policies reflect the context of the service. Of course, some policies need to be reviewed more regularly than others and this will also depend on the service community and environmental factors. Introducing educators to service policies at induction is important, however, it is important to give educators time to embed these

policies. Having educators read all the service policies and sign to say they are understood in their first week at a service is often not effective. It is important to consider that educators have different learning styles and therefore policy knowledge should be developed over time and in a range of ways to support understanding.

During an assessment and rating visit, authorised officers will often ask for copies of particular policies. When an authorised officer observes inconsistent or questionable practice, they will refer to the relevant policy to determine whether educators are aware of policy content and are following the service policy. Authorised officers are aware that each service has a unique context and referring to service policies supports the authorised officer to gain a deeper understanding of the service community. At times, minor adjustments can be given to allow service leadership to refresh educators' knowledge of particular policies. However, this will depend on the impact of the inconsistent practice on the overall quality of education and care.

Committing to Continuous Improvement

Policy development and change to meet the current situation
Continued...

Questions for reflection

- Do you have a schedule for policy review?
- Who are the key stakeholders that should be consulted when policies are reviewed?
- How do you ensure new educators are aware of policies and have time to develop their understanding of how to apply them?
- Do you discuss policies at staff meetings to support educators to understand how they should be embedded in practice?
- Could procedures, linked to certain policies, be developed and displayed to support consistent practice?
- Have you engaged in networking with other services to support policy development and review?
- Are there resources your service could access to seek information relating to best practice when reviewing policies?

Useful links in policy review processes

[Staying Healthy: Preventing infectious diseases in early education and care services](#)

[Red Nose](#)

[Australian Government Department of Health](#)

[ACT Government Health](#)

[ACECQA Information Sheets](#)

[Reconciliation Australia](#)

[Nutrition Australia](#)

[Cancer Council - SunSmart schools and early childhood programs](#)

Critical Conversations

Supporting children during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Many things have changed for children in 2020, both at home and at their education and care service. We know that children's learning is impacted when they are stressed or anxious and children's responses to change vary. It is important to have strategies in place and resources available to support children's wellbeing and to help them understand changes that are happening in the world around them.

Practical ways educators can support children during the Covid-19 pandemic

Ideas taken from "Caring for children in times of trauma" presented by Beth Macgregor as part of the Covid-19 Conference recently provided by Semann & Slattery.

- * Be patient and kind.
- * Create predictable daily routines— this could be achieved through visual routines to ensure children know what is happening next.
- * Slow down- Sit and spend time with children, join in their play.
- * Be in charge— showing children that they can trust and rely on you.
- * Social stories may help children to feel safe.
- * Help children to find things to be grateful for.
- * Support children to be of service to others— this could be making cards for Grandparents or friends they are missing, drawings for medical professionals.
- * Provide reassurance and let them know that its OK to feel scared and that they are not alone.



Questions you may like to ask:

- * Have you considered having a check-in with children each day to give them an opportunity to share how they are feeling?
- * What strategies have you got in place to gather information from families about each child's needs and the impact of Covid-19 on their family?
- * How are older children supported to ask questions and research to learn more about Covid-19 and the impact of strategies used to contain the spread?
- * How can routines within the service be adapted to include regular opportunities for relaxation, mindfulness and wellbeing?



Critical Conversations continued:

Resources that may be of assistance in supporting children during Covid-19.



Suggested Links

The resources listed below may be useful to services as they work to support children and families.

[Emerging Minds - Supporting children during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

[How to help children cope with the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

[Unicef Australia - How to talk to children about coronavirus](#)

[Black Dog Institute - Coronavirus: Reassuring children about the unknown](#)

[ACT Government - Education - Covid-19 - Wellbeing Resources for Students and Families](#)

[Tweddle - Play, reassurance and mindfulness during isolation](#)

[Libraries ACT - Online Storytime - Giggle and Wiggle](#)

[ABC Kids - Early Education - Covid-19 Special - Handwashing songs - Mindfulness](#)

[Little J - Handwashing](#)

[Nosy Crow - Coronavirus - a book for children](#)

[Manuela Moina - Children's book - "Hello! I am the coronavirus" \(free in community languages\)](#)

[Scholastic Australia - Free Resources - Coronavirus](#)



Stories from the Sector

We are featuring some of your stories of positive and unexpected outcomes, and reflections that have resulted from this period of change.

As a part of Children's Education and Care Assurance's role in this Pandemic we have been calling services to offer our support and inviting people to let us know about the positive and unexpected outcomes that have resulted from the changes forced upon us by this unusual and unexpected circumstance.

We have received some wonderful stories that highlight the good that can result from difficulties. We would like to encourage all services to reflect on this time of change, and to see what valuable learning could be carried through into the new world post Covid-19.

This edition of our publication will feature some of the stories, strategies and reflection that services have shared with us. Because we value strongly hearing from the sector, we may continue to share stories with everyone in the months ahead. Services can choose to share anonymously. Our first story is a reflection from a service who wish to remain anonymous.

On her way to work one morning, the educational leader at our centre noticed an illuminated sign outside a local school which read

"Look after yourself and each other"

The 'each other' part of this quote provoked her thinking. Observing that it is often easy to get caught up in looking after ourselves, she reflected on the fact that there was no better time to start thinking about others. This fits with our centre philosophy, a core element of which is relationships.

How do we maintain relationships with children who are temporarily not attending our centre?

How do children maintain relationships with each other when they don't see their friends regularly?

When the world eventually returns to normal, how quickly or slowly are the children going to settle back into care?

After reflecting on these questions with senior educators at a regular weekly pedagogical meeting, they decided that each group would make and share a video with children at home. Educators in each room decided on the content. Stories were read by some, others sang, others talked about what they were working on in their group. Rather than content, sending greetings and connecting with children who had been absent was the most important part.

Families responded with delight. Some sent return videos of their children watching the video, their faces full of wonder at the magic of seeing their teachers on screen.

The following week, leading into Easter another video was sent, this time with instructions on how to make an Easter basket, recipe for hot cross buns and more stories and singing. Then after the Easter Bunny had noticed that a number of children were absent, a box was left by the front door with small bags of Easter eggs for families to come and pick up over the weekend. For some families, coming to collect these eggs was the first time they had been out in the car for a number of weeks, so it was a big event.

The effort involved in making and distributing these videos was well and truly worth it. They were a great reminder to all of us about the importance of having a living philosophy and how relationships can be nurtured in these extraordinary times.

Stories from the sector continued

Other services have shared strategies used to enhance wellbeing and relationships across all areas of their program and some have provided suggestions for activities for children and things that educators can undertake when numbers may be low.

Nicholls Early Childhood Centre

Educator wellbeing –

Educators and staff have been accessing the BeYou programs to provide them with mental health support. This link may be helpful - [Be You - Covid-19 -resources to support early learning communities](#)

Educators have been able to find time to complete tasks that are sometimes difficult to get to, this has resulted in the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) being updated, approved and published.

Family connections –

Families isolating at home have been sending in photos and updates to allow children to keep in touch. Strategies such as using Storypark, letters, emails and videos has supported families and children in staying connected.

Strategies and children's responses -

"We now greet families at the front gate because we cannot accommodate social distancing inside the building. This has led to children developing a stronger sense of agency in that they separate easier from their parents and now walk into the centre by themselves. The children are very proud of themselves, knowing which room to go into and greeting their peers without their parents being there. Their improved self-confidence is so evident."

"We have Grandparents who usually attend the centre to read stories to the children. Instead, staff have been meeting them in the vacant preschool next door and have been filming them reading the stories. Those have now been posted onto Storypark for all families and children to watch."

YWCA Family Day Care Service

Educator wellbeing –

Educators have been given the message "to be kind to yourself". This can be especially important as educators often have their own families to assist with home schooling. It was noted that the good side of this has been the interactions between the younger and older children who are enjoying learning and working together.

Strategies and children's responses –

"We have implemented some changes to pick up and drop off routines at our Educator's homes, asking that Educators greet families at the door rather than have people coming through the house. They have everything set up at the entry with hand sanitizer for the families to use before they sign in or out, having individual clipboards and pens for each child's family and practising social distancing. Children have been joining in the ritual with their families "policing" this with their knowledge about germs."

Resources –

Several social stories that have been helpful for educators are:-

["My name is Corona Virus" by Manuela Molina](#) and ["Many Ways to Share a Hug. Hugs are Great"](#)

Stories from the sector continued...

Lollipop Early Childhood Centre

Social distancing strategy

Instead of sitting the children on mats for snack time the educators are using milk crates to ensure distance between children is maintained. Educators have been using puppets to help explain the changes to the children.

Narrabundah Children's Cottage

This service has found the following online activity links useful –

[Kids Activities - 100s of screen free activities](#)

[Meet the new baby otters at Melbourne Zoo](#)

[Fizzics Education - 150 Science Experiments](#)

[ABC Kids - Early Education](#)

Communities@Work Illoura Child Care and Education Centre

Educators have used this time to refurbish furniture, such as shelving, to make learning spaces more inviting and the furniture easier to clean. See the outcome in the photographs below.



We have more stories and ideas and we will share these with you in the months ahead.



If you would like receive this publication at another email address or individual educators would like to sign up to receive this publication please send contact details to CECA.EducateandInform@act.gov.au.

General enquiries to Children's Education and Care Assurance can be made to CECA@act.gov.au.