


**hunter institute**  
of mental health  
Putting Prevention First

**Building awareness, capability and competency: lessons from *Response Ability and Connections***


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**“You don’t achieve mental health by relying only on the health care system”**

Allan Fels, Chair of the National Mental Health Commission  
National Press Club Address 2012




**“Every system that touches the lives of children offers an opportunity strengthen the foundations and capacities that make lifelong healthy development possible. “**

Centre on the Developing Child




**What do we know?**

**Dimensions of wellbeing**



**Figure 2.1: Dimensions of mental well-being**



Source: Lynne Friedl



**Figure 2.2: A dynamic model of mental well-being for assessing mental well-being impact**

The four protective factors are influenced by population characteristics, wider determinants and the core economy. All of which are influenced by health equality and social justice.



Source: Lynne Friedl

## Key Points



- Wellbeing and Mental Health are complex and multi-determined, and no one strategy will so provide solution to the issues of health promotion and prevention
- Effective solutions are ones that increase protective factors and reduce risk factors
- It is most effective to address multiple levels of influence, and design efforts to work in synchrony
- There's no "one-size-fits-all" solution

## Targeted capability development for Mental Health and Wellbeing



- **What is abundant?** – People and systems that are in contact with children
- **What is scarce?** – Health promotion and mental health professionals
- **Issue:** How do we make knowledge, skills and attitudes about mental health promotion and wellbeing more accessible to more people in contact with children?

## Exploring an example



## What is it?




- Connections is a pioneering methodology for guiding children's services to focus on wellbeing outcomes and determinants
- Connections outlines the skills and practices of educators that are associated with positive mental health and wellbeing for children. It also provides practical examples and tips to help educators adapt these ideas to fit their service, and meet the unique needs of their children and families.

## Aims



- Develop **shared understanding**
- Assist educators to feel more **comfortable, confident and capable**
- Assist educators to **promotive wellbeing**
- Assist educators to **support children and families** with additional mental health needs
- Guide educators to **identify when a child or family may benefit from additional support**




### Structure

Connections has 3 main components:


- Key Concepts
- 5 Areas of Practice
- Fact Sheets

- Connections can be used in many ways:
  - Read as a whole
  - Explored in sections
  - Used as a reference point




### Supporting knowledge

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing
- Attachment and Mental Health
- Child Development, Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Children of Parents with a Mental Illness
- Communicating with Children
- Communicating with Families and Other Adults
- Managing a Mental Health Emergency
- Mental Health Problems and Challenges
- Referral Agencies and Professionals
- Reliable Sources and How to Find Them
- Risk and Protective Factors for Mental Health
- Stress and Self-Care
- Supporting Children with Mental Health Problems
- Supporting Refugee and Migrant Families
- Trauma, Loss and Grief




### Main benefits of Connections

- Raises **awareness and understanding** of *mental health and wellbeing*
- Raises **awareness and understanding** of *contribution practices, policy, and services* can make to mental health and wellbeing
- Efficient use of limited resources – **encourages linkages**
- **Support change and growth** in practice and services




### How do we know Connections makes a difference?

- Evidence based and practice lead
- Engages stakeholders and increases awareness of wellbeing
- It influences the ways practices and services are implemented
- It has translated into practice
- Professionals are using it in their work


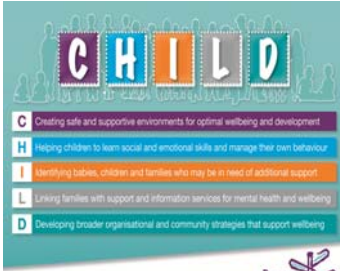


Exploring another example







Response Ability is designed to firstly **empower teacher educators** and students; secondly to **build capacity in their professional capabilities** and finally to **transform the behaviour and culture of the university profession** so that the inclusion of mental health in education and care becomes a regular feature of professional teacher preparation.

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.

[www.responseability.org](http://www.responseability.org)



**Lessons Learnt:**

- Difficult to teach
- Content is not enough
- The difference between supportive in principle and taking action
- Perceptions of mental health and mental ill-health
- It is hard to change beliefs
- Graduates not experts
- Cross disciplinary change is challenging – it needs a common ground
- Implementation AND fidelity is the key
- MHPPEI is not always intuitive




Other approaches



**Principles: Interactions that lead to healthy social and emotional development**

- Responsive care that contributes to the child's developing sense of self
- Affection and nurturing that builds the child's developing self esteem
- Protection from harm and threats of which they may be unaware
- Opportunities to experience and resolve human conflict cooperatively



- Support to explore and develop new skills and capabilities
- Exchange through which children learn the give-and-take of satisfying relationships with others
- The experience of being respected and of respecting others

*Source: National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2000)*

**Essential qualities of the helper**

- Respect
- Genuineness
- Empathy
- Humility
- Quiet enthusiasm
- Personal strength and integrity
- Intellectual and emotional attunement

*Source: Family Partnership Model*



**Skills**

- Concentration/Active listening
- Prompting, exploration and summarising
- Empathic responding
- Enthusing and encouraging
- Enabling change in feelings, ideas and actions
- Negotiating
- Communicating and making use of technical knowledge, expertise and experience
- Problem management

*Source: Family Partnership Model*



**Partnership**

- Working together with active participation/involvement
- Developing and maintaining genuine connectedness
- Sharing decision making power
- Recognising complementary expertise and roles
- Sharing and agreeing aims and process of helping
- Negotiation of disagreement
- Showing mutual trust and respect
- Developing and maintaining openness and honesty
- Communicating clearly

*Source: Family Partnership Model*



**Resources:**

- [www.himh.org.au/connections](http://www.himh.org.au/connections)
- [www.responseability.org](http://www.responseability.org)
- [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)
- [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)
- [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
- [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)
- [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)
- [www.copmi.net.au](http://www.copmi.net.au)



**APPENDIX - CONNECTIONS**

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**Useful Skills and Practices**

- Useful skills and practices for **all staff**, eg
  - Establishing and maintaining a regular routine. Children feel more secure in their environment if they can predict what will happen next.
  - Being sensitive to and respectful of diversity. By demonstrating these principles in our daily interactions, attitudes and language, we encourage children, their families and other educators to reflect this behaviour.

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## Useful Skills and Practices

- Useful skills and practices for **coordinators, supervisors and managers, eg**
  - Planning and creating opportunities for children and families to connect with diversity in their community, through local agencies, networks and special events.
  - Supporting and guiding other educators in adapting programs to promote inclusion.

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## Supporting Knowledge

- Supporting knowledge and links to fact sheets, *eg*

### Supporting Knowledge

The physical, cognitive, social and psychological development of babies and children



### Fact Sheet

Child Development, Mental Health and Wellbeing

Attachment theory and care practices that encourage the formation of secure attachment in babies and children



Attachment and Mental Health

Verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that foster warm, positive relationships with babies and young children



Communicating with Children

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## Checklists

- Checklists for all educators and for coordinators, supervisors and managers, *eg*

### Environment Checklist for All Staff

- I am aware how a person's physical environment, such as the look, feel and use of a space, can affect how they feel and behave within that environment.
- I monitor the service environment to make sure it encourages positive interactions.
- I provide responsive and consistent care for the infants and children at my service.

### Additional Checklist for Coordinators, Supervisors and Managers

- We have policies and procedures in place to promote a sense of belonging and connectedness for the children, families and educators who participate in our service.

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## Case Study

- Case study for each domain with questions, *eg*

Quan is a four year old boy who has just started coming to your service. Until now he has been at home every day with his mum, Lien, but she is now returning to work. Lien seems upset about leaving Quan and says she feels like a bad mum. When Lien leaves, Quan screams, kicks and cries for over an hour.

1. What could you do to help Quan calm down?
2. What could you do to help Lien feel comfortable about leaving Quan?
3. What daily routines could you put in place to make this process easier for Quan and his mum?

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## Helpful Hints and Tips

- Translating useful skills and practices into practical suggestions, *eg*
  - Ask parents or caregivers how they would like their culture represented in the service, *eg* "Are there any Vietnamese words you would like us to use with Quan?" or "Are there any special Vietnamese events that we can celebrate here at our service?"
  - If a child misses their family, suggest they bring in a toy from home, a photo or a piece of their parent or caregiver's clothing.
  - For children with separation anxiety, put in place a routine such as a kiss, cuddle and wave from the window before diverting their attention to something else. Encourage mum or dad to leave at this point and when the child has settled, you could give them a call as they may be upset too.

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## Reflective Questions

- Reflective questions for all staff, *eg*
  1. How do you help children and families from different cultural backgrounds to feel welcome at your service? How about children with additional needs?
- Reflective questions for coordinators, supervisors and managers, *eg*
  1. How do you and your staff members monitor the service environment and improve it for children and families?

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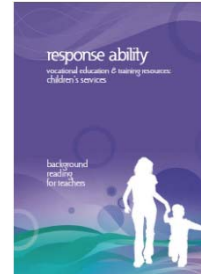
## Links to Quality Practice

- Links to NQS, EYLF, MTOP?
  - Links with each useful skill and practice
  - Links with subsection of useful skills and practices
  - List of relevant quality areas, standards, outcomes etc. in separate box

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## Hard Copy Design

- Colour coded sections
- Separated by tabs
- Spiral bound
- Thick, durable paper
- Similar to Response Ability; Background Reading for Teachers



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## Guiding Principles

### Ranked top 5 by NRG:

1. Empowering and enabling tone
2. Practical in nature and lead educators to action
3. Seen as simple and accessible, not overwhelming
4. Aim to build confidence, provide reassurance
5. Multidimensional resource with layering

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## Principle 1

- **Empowering and enabling tone:**
  - Key messages
  - Language
  - Providing practical strategies alongside skills and practices
  - Reflective questions
  - Checklists

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## Principle 2

- **Practical in nature, lead to action:**
  - Provides practical strategies
  - Other practical elements, *eg*
    - Reflective questions
    - Checklists
  - Language
  - Hard copy design
  - Key messages

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## Principle 3

- **Seen as simple and accessible, not overwhelming:**
  - Hard copy
  - Bullet points in domain
  - Linking skills and practices to practical strategies
  - Language

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## Principle 4

- **Aim to build confidence and provide reassurance:**
  - Key messages
  - Language
  - Reflective questions
  - Checklists
  - Practical suggestions

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## Principle 5

- **Multidimensional resource with layering:**
  - Structure, *ie* domains, fact sheets, links to more information

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## Resources to support leadership for SEW

Response Ability is an initiative of the Department of Health. We aim to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

We do this by supporting the pre-service training of school teachers and early childhood educators by:

- providing free multi-media teaching resources;
- providing additional information through conference presentations, websites, and one-on-one meetings; and;
- providing professional support to help integrate mental health into their programs.



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## The Educator's Guide

The Educator's Guide is a practical and accessible tool which encompasses the key information and strategies that can be used when working with children and families to support social and emotional wellbeing and development.

This resource is available to download and save online at the Response Ability website. [www.responseability.org](http://www.responseability.org)



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