MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

QUALITY AREA 2 – CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

PURPOSE

This policy provides guidelines for Sparkways to:

- ensure the organisational and service environment is safe, inclusive and empowering for children and young people, families, staff, volunteers and visitors
- embed social and emotional learning and development in the organisation's programs
- ensure families, children and young people, early childhood teachers, educators and program staff are key partners in mental health initiatives
- engage in partnerships with community networks

POLICY STATEMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sparkways is committed to:

- creating an environment that supports, reflects and promotes positive social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing
- supporting children and young people becoming strong in their social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing
- strengthening early childhood teachers, educators and program staff understanding of the importance of wellbeing and sensitivity to the impact of abuse and trauma on children and young people
- providing an educational program where children are supported to explore, learn and engage with health and wellbeing

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, managers, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children and young people, and others attending the programs and activities of Sparkways, including during offsite excursions and activities.

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
R indicates legislation requirement, and should not be deleted					
Ensuring that the staff, volunteers, families, children and young people are active participants in the development and implementation of this policy	**R**				
Ensuring the organisation and its services/programs provide a safe, inclusive and empowering environment which celebrates diversity through positive, respectful and appropriate behaviour when working with children, young people and families *(refer to Code of Conduct Policy and Early Learning Interactions with Children Policy)*	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Actively supporting and facilitating participation and inclusion of Aboriginal children, young people, and their families at Sparkways	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Embedding social and emotional learning and support in program and practice, and teaching and supporting children and young people to care for their own mental health and wellbeing	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Embedding opportunities to learn about healthy eating and oral health and the importance of physical activity in the educational program, throughout the year *(refer to Early Learning Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play policy)*	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that quiet and reflective spaces are provided for children and young people, families, staff and volunteers	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring diversity, cultural practices and mental health and wellbeing practices are considered when implementing learning and support programs	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Supporting educators and program staff in implementing trauma-informed practices *(refer to Definitions)* by providing resources, ongoing training, and guidance to enhance their approach to educating and caring for children	✓	✓			
Implementing appropriate programs and practices to support vulnerable children, young people and families, including working co-operatively with relevant services and/or professionals, where required *(refer to Child/Young Person Safe Environment and Wellbeing)*	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring a safe, inclusive, welcoming environment is created for all community members. There is a culture of respect, fairness and equity.	**R**	✓	✓		✓

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
Encouraging collaborative, family-centred practice *(refer to Definitions)* which facilitates the positive mental health and wellbeing and active participation of both the child/young person and the family at the service	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that cultural values and expectations about health and wellbeing are respected	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring that children and young people's diverse circumstances are understood, and those who are vulnerable are responded to and provided with support	✓	✓	✓		✓
Understanding each child's/young person's unique developmental journey of which mental health being a continuum will be different to others in their space	✓	✓	✓		✓
Attending to any adjustments to provide equal protection for all children and young people *(refer to Child/Young Person Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy)*	**R**	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strategies are used to promote positive and responsible behaviour, and to prevent and respond to hurtful and unsafe behaviour *(refer to Child/Young People Safe Environment and Wellbeing Policy)*	**R**	✓	✓		✓
Educators and staff model respectful interactions with each other, children, young people, volunteers and families. A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is also role modelled *(refer to Early Learning Interaction with Children policy)*		✓	✓	✓	✓
Children and Young People are supported to develop social and emotional skills and learn about and care for their own mental health		✓	✓		✓
Educators and staff are supported to access ongoing professional development and resources about mental health and wellbeing education and to understand when and how to refer children and young people to additional support *(refer to Sources)*	✓	✓			
Educators and staff are supported to learn about and care for their own mental health and wellbeing *(refer to Occupational Health and Safety policy)*	**R**	✓			
Implementing strategies to promote positive conflict resolution and to prevent and respond to bullying,	**R**	✓			

RESPONSIBILITIES	Approved provider and persons with management or control	Nominated supervisor and persons in day-to-day charge	Early childhood teacher, educators and all other staff	Parents/guardians	Contractors, volunteers and students
discrimination and harassment *(refer to Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment, EEO and Anti-Discrimination Policy)*					
Providing mental health and wellbeing information to families and the wider community, such as information about local support services and resources about social and emotional learning and development.	✓	✓			
Establishing partnerships with relevant organisations and health professionals to support mental health and wellbeing practices where appropriate.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ensuring there are clear referral options and pathways for children, young people, staff, educators, volunteers and families to access support services for mental health and wellbeing *(refer to Sources)*.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ensuring that the staff, volunteers and families are provided with information about policy requirements, with opportunities to provide feedback and input	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

Many young Australians have mental health issues which can have lifetime impacts. In Australia one in seven 4 to 17 years old's experience a mental health condition every year[1].

Mental health and wellbeing for young children is about their emotions, what they experience and how they learn to manage and express them, the relationships they form and their ability to engage in close and positive relationships. A strong sense of wellbeing and positive mental health provides children with confidence and optimism, which maximises their learning potential, gives them a greater chance of long-term success, and helps them build stronger relationships.

Early intervention can improve children's mental health, and in turn, their lifetime outcomes. Good mental health in early childhood also provides a solid foundation for managing the transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. Early childhood services play a key role in promoting

[1] The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2015)

mental health and wellbeing in children and can affect children's long-term mental health, relationships and learning.

The Early Years Learning Framework (the Framework) was developed to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years. Outcome 3 of the Framework talks about children having a strong sense of wellbeing. It guides early childhood practitioners in facilitating a learning environment that supports both physical and psychological development

Obligations under Child Safe Standard 8 requires staff and volunteers to be trained and supported to effectively implement the organisation's child safety and wellbeing policy. This Standard links to Standards 1 and 5, with all three Standards placing obligations on organisations to provide training and information for staff and volunteers on building safe environments for children and young people.

The Social Services Standards are a consistent set of obligations that social service providers in Victoria must meet. Standard 1 - Safe Service Delivery, and Standard 6 - Safe Workforce, incorporates protecting and supporting the mental health of service users and staff, using current evidence based practice, including trauma-informed practice.

Trauma-informed practice in is crucial as it recognises and responds to the impact of traumatic experiences on children and young people. This approach fosters a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment, which is essential for healthy development and learning. By understanding and addressing the unique needs of children and young people who have experienced trauma, educators and program staff can help mitigate the adverse effects, promote resilience, and create a foundation for positive emotional and cognitive growth. This compassionate and informed strategy is directly linked to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, as it helps to regulate their emotions, build a sense of security, and encourage healthy coping mechanisms.

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

National Quality Standard: Quality Area 2
The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Social Services Standards
Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the Sparkways policy catalogue.

Family-centred practice - Practice which:

- uses families' understanding of their children to support shared decision-making about each child's learning and development
- creates a welcoming and culturally inclusive environment, where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to children's learning and development
- actively engages families and children in planning children's learning and development
- provides feedback to families on each child's learning and provide information about how families can further advance children's learning and development at home and in the community

Mental health and wellbeing: For the purposes of this policy and for the Healthy Early Childhood Services Achievement Program, the 'Mental Health and Wellbeing' health priority area focuses on social and emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Mental health in early childhood can be understood as a young child's ability to 'experience, regulate and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; and explore the environment and learn – all in the context of family, community and cultural expectations for young children. Infant mental health is synonymous with healthy social and emotional development

Trauma Informed Practice: A strengths-based framework where trauma survivors are seen as individuals, who have experienced extremely abnormal situations and who manage the best as they can.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- Alannah and Madeline Foundation, Trauma Informed Practice A guide to early Childhood Organisations: www.alannahandmadeline.org.au
- Be You, Beyond Blue: www.beyondblue.org.au
- BlackDog Institute: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- Child First and family services: www.services.dffh.vic.gov.au/families-and-children
- Commission for Children and Young People, Child Safe standards: www.ccyp.vic.gov.au
- Cancer Council Victoria, Achievement Program: www.achievementprogram.health.vic.gov.au/education/early-childhood-services
- Converge International Employee Assistance Program: https://convergeinternational.com.au/
- Department of Education and Training and Early Childhood Australia: Wellbeing webinars
- Early Childhood Australia, Code of Ethics: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics

- Early Childhood Resource Hub, Trauma-informed practice: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/Trauma-informed%20practice.PDF
- Headspace: www.headspace.org.au
- KidsMatter: www.beyou.edu.au
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: www.unicef.org.au
- Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority: The Wellbeing Practice Guide

RELATED POLICES

- Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment, EEO and Anti-Discrimination
- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Code of Conduct
- Interaction with Children
- Nutrition, Oral Health and Active Play
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Privacy and Confidentiality

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- seek feedback from people affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk *(Regulation 172 (2)*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Nil

AUTHORISATION

This policy was confirmed by Sparkways on 24/11/2025.

REVIEW DUE: November 2026