

# Understand mental health and wellbeing within learning communities

You play a central role in building mentally healthy learning communities.

This module introduces core concepts relating to mental health and wellbeing in early learning services and schools.

It explores the role of educators in promoting mental health and wellbeing for themselves, the children and young people in their care and other educators. It also offers strategies to help educators apply this knowledge within the boundaries of their role.

## Mental health and wellbeing

This module introduces the Mental Health Continuum. People may shift back and forth along this continuum throughout their lives.

**Mental health issues** encompass various cognitive, emotional and behavioural issues that may cause concern or distress. They affect how a person thinks, feels and behaves.

When an individual has seen a health professional for their mental health, they might be diagnosed with a **mental health condition**. This is a clinical diagnosis (such as depression or anxiety) relating to a condition that significantly interferes with a person's cognitive, emotional or social abilities.

We know that almost 1 in 7 children and young people will experience a mental health condition in a 12-month period. Mental health conditions are associated with lower learning outcomes, more absences, poorer connectedness and poorer engagement.

## Mentally healthy learning communities

A mentally healthy learning community is critical to children and young people achieving their best possible mental health, no matter their developmental stage.

Learning communities are a place of socialisation, where social and emotional needs, including the need for belonging and connectedness, can be met.



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It's helpful to appreciate the benefits of working within a collaborative whole learning community approach that brings together children, young people, families and educators to achieve systemic change. Promoting mental health and wellbeing in everyday practice is an integral step in creating a mentally healthy learning community.

We know that the most effective way to achieve the aims of promotion, prevention and early intervention is by using a whole-setting approach where everyone is involved.

## How can you contribute to a mentally healthy learning community?

As an educator, you have a central role and can make a big difference in influencing children and young people's mental health and wellbeing through positive mental health promotion.

Your main role is to observe and support children and young people. Rather than trying to diagnose or solve mental health issues or conditions, approach your work in a way that supports positive mental and health wellbeing.

This may include having a conversation with someone you're worried about, linking families to health professionals or support services, becoming involved in community-based mental health initiatives, and seeking support for yourself if required.

### By completing the Understand module, you will be able to:

- appreciate the importance of developing mentally healthy learning communities
- understand mental health and wellbeing as it relates to your role as an educator
- apply strategies to support the development of mentally healthy learning communities
- begin to take actions that support the development of mentally healthy learning communities.