

Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Enhancing everyone's wellbeing – one transition at a time

Presented by Patricia Osgood and Iwande Suvanmani

Patricia Osgood

Hi, everyone. Welcome to today's session on enhancing everyone's wellbeing, one transition at a time. My name is Trish Osgood and I am a Be You consultant, and I'm joined today by Dee, who is the Assistant Director and Educational Leader of (UNKNOWN) daycare centre in Melbourne. So, Hi, Dee, how are you going?

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, good, really excited to be here, you know, it's great that we are talking about mental health and wellbeing in our community. You know, I've been in the sector for 20 years now. You know, I'm looking back, you know, perhaps 10 years ago, you know, we don't talk about mental health and now, let alone we're talking about mental health in a community, so, it's really exciting.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, well it's great to have you here today. So, we're just going to start off with an acknowledgment to country. So, today, we would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the Boon Wurrung and Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to the Elders, past, present, and emerging, and welcome anybody who's joining us today, to please share in the chat if you'd like to also acknowledge where the lands that you're sitting on. So, yeah.

So, you can see our slide here, our Make Safe at the moment. We have that for a reason. Today, we may be discussing some topics that potentially, may feel difficult or stir up emotions. So, if you feel that you need to talk to somebody, we do encourage you to talk to somebody that you can trust, or a professional, such as on the slide that is in front of you. We have some, well reputable organisations for you to contact, if you need to speak to anybody. So, just a little bit about Be You today before we start. Be You is all about growing a mentally healthy generations.

The aim of Be You is to equip educators across Australia, and we do offer educators online professional learning, fact sheets, webinars, and a whole lot of other resources, so, it's, there's a range of resources that you can access on the Be You website, and we do encourage you to look into those, and have a look to be equipped yourself, as an educator or as a leader to support a mentally healthy generation. We, Be You, offers Early Learning Service and schools, tools, and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing. Be You consultants, such as myself and others that you'll listen to today, can guide you through Be You resources, and connect you with educator networks, as well.

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So, a little bit about our conference. We have two days, it's going over two days. Day one is today, and that is on the educator wellbeing. So, across the two days we do have 10 sessions. So, we do encourage you to get along to those. Some of these are consecutive sessions, as well concurrent sessions. So, today, our session is aimed at the early years around educator wellbeing, but also the wellbeing of everyone. Day two, tomorrow, is around inclusion. So, if you'd like to join us tomorrow, please register and tune in. So, a little bit about what we're going to speak about today. So, we are going to talk about what are transitions and define those. We are also going to explore that transitions do create a sense of belonging.

We're going to talk about transitions for recovery. And then, we're going to talk about change and the impact on transitions. And finally, strength-based transitions, which I'm sure that you all have in your services and your settings already. So, we're going to actually start with a poll. So, if we can open up that poll, that would be great. Our conversation today is going to be focused on transitions, so, we thought that we could start off with a poll to get an understanding of what they are and what you think they are. So, up on your screen, you have the question, What do transitions mean to you? So, we can choose from a couple of options there - A, a process or a period of change, B, a way to move from one activity to another, C, something that assists change, and D, something that assists routines, or E something else. And if you have something else that you'd like to define transitions as, please put that into the chat, we'd love to hear from you. But while we're waiting for the results, Dee, I am going to ask you to speak briefly about your understanding of transitions in your service and what they include.

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, sure, I guess for me, the first thought of transition is, it could be a flow of moving from one stage to another. But you know, if we look at early childhood perspective, it could be, we usually really transition as a routine, or moving from one goal to another. But look, if we step back and look from a holistic perspective for the children, it could be transition from one emotion to another, you know, when they're angry or sad, and getting really frustrated, or perhaps, a milestone to another milestone. And for the families, it could be, you know, a lot of families are going to orientation at the moment, it could be orientating into a new setting, or, you know, towards the end of the year, slowly transitioning out into school environment. And for the educators, it could be transition into a new work environment, or internally, into a new role, so, there's lots of ways that you can look at transition. But if we put on a wellbeing lens, it's basically providing a really sense of belonging for everyone, for the children, the families, and the educators, and is supporting them and each other through those transitions, whatever it may be.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, thanks so much, Dee. So, we're going to close off that poll now, if that's OK, and just bring up those results and have a look at them. So, let's have a look at those. I've got them on my iPad here. So, wow, whopping 75% have said that transitions mean to them, a way to move from one activity to another. A couple of people have said, a process or period of change. So that's really interesting there, Dee, because we're gonna talk about both of those in depth today.

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, definitely.

Patricia Osgood

So that's really interesting that people have a totally different way of saying it. So, I guess we've just spoken about what you think transitions mean to you, but you just spoke about having a wellbeing lens, so, I really like to hear a bit more about that, and how that relates to your community and their sense of wellbeing, or transitions, you know, relate to wellbeing.

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, you know, I guess a lot of early learning centres do really well, is having that really nice sense of belonging for the children. Lots of photos, you know, spaces that they can call their own, you know, little locker spaces, bag tags, is really popular, but also having pictures of families, it's really, really nice for these children, especially those 0-2 really young children, for them to have that visual recognition of, you know, this is my safe sense of belonging space, and people that I know that I can reach out to. You know, I guess for us as a service, we, you know, have, you know, we move to and from into a new room beginning of the year but what we do really well at the end of the year, around November, is that we support these children to transition into these new spaces, but also, having a familiar educator moving out with them beginning of

the year, so that they have that recognition of, you know, this is a comfortable environment to be in, and also, a safe educator to be with.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, that's great, Dee. So, I guess, orientation, it's a huge process. Particularly for families, you want to tell us a bit about that?

Iwandee Suvanmani

Oh, definitely, you know, especially families who've, you know, it's their first child, it's really, really overwhelming. You know, it's that trusting relationship that you have to deal with educators, essentially. So, we often tell families that it's gonna take really, it's gonna be a slow process, there's gonna be lots of short days, but really having that constant communication with families, but also, a really nice base for parents to wait. Somewhere that's quiet, somewhere, that is, you know, natural neutral colours. But you know, a nice cup of tea would definitely go a long way when parents are, you know, having that nice quiet time for themselves.

Patricia Osgood

Also, Dee, I know that you said the educators move up with their children, but I guess, you know, they're moving up with age, you know, requirements and different demands in their programs and it's a whole lot of things that will change for them, so, they're transitioning, as well. So, how is the impact on them?

Iwandee Suvanmani

Definitely, you know, and I think it's the same thing for families and the children having a really nice space to unwind and relax, you know, I guess common areas, like staff room. You know, ensuring that it's uncluttered, neutral colours, you know, but also one thing that we do really well in our service, is to have a well researched centre. And that means that, it's less stress for these educators, more focus on the children, and an opportunity to step away off the floor, if needed. So, having those less stress for the educators is really important for us.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, that's great. So, Dee, as a consultant I've worked with you for a few years now, and I know that, sadly, your community experienced some loss and grief a couple of years ago. I just want to talk about transitions and responses to this. Are you able to firstly take us through how have your experiences from this loss in your community, influenced or changed your processes or chains or transitions, you know.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yeah, definitely. Look, you know, I guess our first point of action as we process the initial shock and trauma, is really to reach out to our networks and resources, and I called you personally, Trish, you actually asked me, am I OK, and I think those are really, really important questions to ask as we go through that critical incident situation, that can be quite overwhelming, or it could be a trigger. So I guess looking back now, having a critical incident management plan established is really, really crucial for services, and it's just about coming together as a community, to come up with a clear plan on, if a critical incident do happen, what do we do?

Who do we reach out for? What support do we have around us? Having Be You consultant, contact details or perhaps your council or your pre-school officer on those plans is really, really important. And I guess for our educators, it's obviously they were deeply affected, and were really, really I guess worried about their mental health and wellbeing. So for us it quite quickly we actually organise an EAP counsellor to come in to the service. And for those of you who are not familiar with EAP, it's actually employee assistance program, and that's great because it's a service for supporting employees. and it could be a confidential counselling support, that they do offer for our educators. But also basically rostering extra educators during those periods of time, so that they can step out the room, when things become too overwhelming for them.

Yes, and for the children, it's a lot of research around books and the language that we could use around the children, and we were really lucky that we had an educator with art therapy background, and that really helped processing those emotions for the children. She did lots of work around art and utilising art as a tool for a release for these children. And one of the examples that she provide the experience was, using colours perhaps. You know, different shades of blue, how does that make you feel, when you think about

colour blue perhaps? Or can you remember when you feel, you know, sad, or anxious perhaps, and lots of sensory experiences just like play-doh lots of, you know, rolling and squishing, and that was really, really helpful for the children.

Patricia Osgood

Yes, great. Strategies there and transitions to help them move through that process as well. What about the families? How did they, how did we go about that?

Iwande Suvanmani

Yes, I mean, families were great. I think that really brought us together as a community. We open up great conversation about loss and grief, and what does that look like for each family and what the trigger points for different families are, and sharing those resources to them essentially. And I guess for us in our surveys, we actually move into COVID within less than six months. So we were already talking about wellbeing and mental health as a community. So it became quite a fluid transition into lockdown.

Patricia Osgood

Wow. That's amazing. You've been through a lot. So, and I know the Melbourne lockdown, particularly was huge for all of us down here, but, I know it brought in a whole new aspect that has influenced your transitions and processes. So I guess what practices or transitions have changed or been reinforced as a result of this. And I know that that went on for a long time, I was (UNKNOWN) in that. So let's break it down and talk about the children first.

Iwande Suvanmani

Look, I guess for us personally as a service, there were a lot of quick changes, for us to transition into from grief and into COVID, but that really gave us the opportunity focus on mental health and wellbeing. In all aspects looking at the practices that we have embedded, reviewing our policies, and really looking at the resources. Are they up to date for our community? But really allow us to listen to the need of our community and reflect on what works really well and what we can do better. And for the children, I guess it's the biggest priority for us, because they went through a lot of emotions, but also they could see people around them who were safe, we're going through all these emotions.

And so for us, we really wanted to support their understanding of what the world is going through. And especially COVID as well, it's that physical changes, it's that mass restrictions around places that they often do go to. So for the children, it's just having a safe space for them, to talk about all of the changes, but also for them to help, for us to support their emotions and regulating these emotions. Yes, and one thing that really stick for us as a community, is our emotion project. And basically, it's about labelling emotions, you know, things that they feel, things that they see, and what do they do as they regulate through or transition through to these emotions.

All of the skills and the tools and the resources that we've learned from our art therapy colleague, that was really helpful, because it's practical examples that we could use the language that we could use around children that was safe, but also that really helped our educators, because they were going through all of these shock and trauma as well. So it was really, really helpful for all of our community. And one thing that we have embedded practice that I really want to share and really excited about, is our zen time. And that's one thing that we've put in place probably for five years now. It started off from the kinder children, being that we (UNKNOWN) their care setting, we wanted to break the day apart, it's such a long day for these young children, and so zen time was created so that they could have a space and time to relax.

So we created this little zen bag, that had little tools and trinkets, quiet trinkets, for them to explore with on their mat. It's really short period of time, but it was really, really handy for these children, to have something quiet to explore during a short period of time. And now looking back, we reflect that on perhaps offering different options. So we've got books that they can draw or perhaps having small little groups, that they can read within the educator. That's been really nice. Smiling Mind app is really, really handy. They've got children, meditation recording. One of our favourites is the starfish, you imagine being a starfish floating through the ocean, and literally we did this yesterday, and one of the kids was lying down and she's like, Oh, I can feel it's cold. And it's so important because, children are checking in with themselves, they're checking with what that feels like, during that moment in time.

And it's so important for them, to having these options so that they can listen to their body. We want to give them the tools to connect with themselves, and it's been really successful. One of the feedback that we've heard from parents, is that they've actually create a zen den at home, so that they've got all these different tools, this little nook and corner in their house, so that when emotions run high at home, their child could go into this space, and that's really nice.

Patricia Osgood

Yes, I'd love to hear more about the zen bags later. We might talk about that at the end. So, I guess, how did the transitions change the families Dee? Families was a very different ball game for them.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yes, definitely. Look, I guess for families it was really difficult, especially being in a lockdown with really young children, and then working from home, and still having to process all these emotions, was really difficult for families definitely during COVID. But we did lots of zoom check-ins, and I'm sure a lot services do that during that period of time and lots of virtual check-ins with families and children, but we had different activities planned out. We had games like Bingos, Home Bingo, where they have to look for, perhaps look for something that starts with letter B, or something with that has a yellow colour in your home. And that was really fun for the children.

We did lots of music and singing, and definitely a lot of cooking and sharing recipes through Zoom, and that was fun. We even did yoga or meditation, and that was really nice for the children. And we also did acknowledgement to countries. So, just those practices that we had, and just as normal as we can at home, and just reaching out to families, on all the amazing education program that we have for for these children. But I guess for the families, one thing that we've just recently started, is to, and have a primary educator for documentation, and basically it's really looking at ways to check in with families, and building that consistent relationship, so that we can have a positive outcome for children. So we've got an educator, who is assigned with small groups of families, that they're familiar with, and they pretty much check-in beginning of the year, and just to see how they progress and grow, and what the developmental milestone is at, and building that goal with families essentially.

Patricia Osgood

That's great.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yes, and for the kinder children, because they are able to articulate what their goals are, they could perhaps come up with a personal goal, It could be I would like to learn to use scissors, or I would like to climb up to the top of the climbing tree. And then we as educators, we build educational goals with families, and that could be supporting resilience, or having more problems solving skills around that.

Patricia Osgood

See what differences in transitions were there for the educators? I mean, that was a very different way of, you know, teaching their children. So...

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yeah, yeah, definitely. Yeah and I guess for educators, it's about recognising that, you know, we're all different, mental health looks really different. You know, we've got different tools, the way how we rest and recharge is really different. I know that some days, you know, yoga and meditation works, some days, doesn't, you know. I can't sit still and you know, having podcast, so it's really recognising what's for you. So I guess for a service, we would like to offer a variety for these educators, we recognise that it's really important for them to recharge and so we'd sometimes offer a wellness break and that could be extended break that they can go off and listen to a podcast, or a meditation recording.

Patricia Osgood

Our Be You webinar.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yes, that's right, our Be You webinar, most definitely, you know, we've got walk and talk with appear as well. You know, having pit stop (UNKNOWN), you know, that mental health check in essentially. And also, I guess, as a management, you know, it's providing healthy tea breaks for these educators to recharge your energy, it's such a long day for these educators, you know, emotions do run high. So it's really important that we recognise that. And also, we've got lots of positive affirmations around common areas for these educators, you know, in the bathrooms, a great one, that's a quiet moment that we get often. But also, you know, having those quiet moment to be able to take in deep breath and checking in for yourself is really important. Yeah, and I guess we were really lucky during COVID, we were able to have a wellness PD for our educators, we did it virtually, and that was share, show and tell session, essentially, we share the tools that we use that make us happy and that was in hope to spark others on different types of tools they could be using, and especially it's just supporting each other really, yeah.

Patricia Osgood

One big happy family.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yes, exactly, yes.

Patricia Osgood

So, Dee after going through so much as community, take us through some of the strength based approaches that your services implemented with transitions and wellbeing routines. You have so much happening in your service. So I would just love you to share it with everybody.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yeah, you know, look, one thing that we do really well in our sector is, you know, harnessing children's sense of belonging, you know, it's part of our framework, it's the first, you know, outcome for framework. And I think it was centres to look at ways, different ways to harness that, you know, that feel of that safe and security and that sense of belonging for these children. But, you know, it's also about that recognition of development and exploration of the environment, you know, lots of research around nature and sensory experiences as well that offers a holistic opportunity to connect itself. So looking at that, and, you know, recognising the importance of self.

And, you know, I guess nature is really important for us, we, you know, prioritise outdoor education as well going to outdoor educated our service and really looking at the, you know, significance in positive transition and building that resilience for these children as they expose themselves when they connect the country or, you know, when they take race and challenge themselves, really. And I'm sure a lot of surveys have, you know, bush gardens and bushtucker plants in your service. You know, it's also about, you know, being with nature, with the ground, digging and, you know, smelling the ground, smelling the different types of, you know herb that you can have in your garden, you know, mint and basil, you know, it smells completely different, it feels different, and it looks different.

And going through these, what I see, what I feel, what I, you know, hear, perhaps in our environment, it's really, really important for the children to be grounded. And one thing that will probably really good at in our early learning centres is creating quiet nooks. Now, indoor spaces can be, you know, having a nice perhaps a reading corner, we've got an outdoor environment, we've got a fairy garden that offers a quiet space for the children to go to. We also do have a few climbing trees at our centres. So you know, it's about risk taking and, you know, for these children, it's about challenging themselves and be autonomous with their learning. Yeah, but basically what we wanna do is just different options for these children to connect with their body and express themselves in a safe environment. We know that you know, it can be whelming and just you know, we want it to offer different spaces essentially that they can go to, that it could be indoor, it could be outdoor essentially that they can have that quiet time.

Patricia Osgood

And so Dee, sounds like a lot of your transitions and routines are really closely connected to space, A lot of spaces, you've also got a lot of programs. So you've got your art therapy program, and you've got your four-year old bush tree kingdom.

Iwande Suvanmani

Yes.

Patricia Osgood

And you go out to the community can just tell us a little bit about that.

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, look, you know, we call it tree kingdom because we don't have bush in our community.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah.

Iwande Suvanmani

So you know, I guess it's pretty similar concept where we take the children out, for your Kinder program. In a small basically, it's just, you know, having the same experience within our community, within our centre, we wanna extend that into the community essentially. It's about exploring different natives, you know, plant in our area, it's about climbing different trees, it's about all looking at, you know, homes, or parks, or, you know, roads, or, you know, that tune off quite familiar with and that they can share together is that sense of community and sense of connecting together but also connecting with the country is really important for us.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, that sounds amazing. And so, just for asking the next question, I'm just gonna invite anybody in the audience. If you are thinking of strategies or ideas that are happening in your service, and you'd like to share that, please share that in the chat now. We'd love you to be sharing that with each other and having, you know, conversations about your practice. We know that in the early years, we do an amazing job at these programs, and I'm looking at different ways to support you and families and educators. So if you do have something that's happening in your service, we'd love you to share in the chat now. And so I am gonna ask you a little bit more about those zen bags now too Dee, are you able just to expand on that a little bit more, what's the Zen time and zen bag? You know, that they're part of your transitions in the day, to break up the day, tell us a bit more about that.

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, so you know, I, you know, usually zen time happens right after lunch, or, you know, perhaps half an hour after lunch you know, where they pretty much where that's quiet time for them to just break the day apart. We know that the older children don't have naps. And but it's really important for them to rest their body, essentially. So these zen bags are created so that they could, you know, I mean, you know, not forced to lie down, but to have little trinkets to explore, and perhaps an option, they could lie down or not and then they can reach out to different options in the zen bag. So usually what we have in the bags, it could be perhaps Legos, or magnets, or little connectors, so really quiet things that they can explore by themselves within their little small space.

So, all the children have a little mat that they are spread out throughout the indoor-outdoor space, essentially. But I guess now what we'll be doing is extending that zen bag with different options. So, you know, having, you know, quiet moments and you know, and it could look really different. We could have small little groups that they can read with the educator. I guess, you know, chapter books is really popular for the children, the older children, you know, and you know, Enid Blyton so popular one, you know, in our centre at the moment. So, you know, reading those kind of books together with an educator, snuggling in by having that quiet moment on the couch is also really nice for these children, yeah.

Patricia Osgood

So I know that our theme today is really centred around educator well-being. So I know we've covered that a little bit Dee but when we do speak about transitions, we do often focus on transitions for children and families. So I guess I really specifically just want to ask you, how do your transitions cater to educator well-being?

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, look, you know, I think, you know, our sectors specifically went through a lot emotions during COVID. There was really difficult for us, you know, emotions still run high, there was a lot of fear, anxiety around COVID. But yeah, we, you know, had to be with and for the children. So, I guess now it's really just, you know, recognising that, you know, that shows of professionalism in our sector, but also the amazing work that we've done as, you know, as early childhood educators on prioritising children's well-being, connecting with families. It's just been really creative and amazing to see that in our community. But also worth noting that, you know, there's a lot of research out there that children are very attune and mimic emotions of the adults around them essentially.

So for us, educators mental health and well-being is definitely the biggest priority. We want them to be well, we want them to be present. And so, you know, it's really important for us to look after them so that then they could, you know, support and regulate and look after the children and educate the children as well, but also most importantly, supporting families. We educators we often are the first point of contact for these families, when families are worried they come to us. So, it's really important that we are fully prepared, I guess and grounded, I would say when we actually do support our community. One thing that we do really well in our centre is we check in with each other, in our educators. So some of the educators to check in with me as an educational leader or they perhaps they could check in with another colleague that they feel safe with and have built relationships with, or they could check in with their room leader. And so it's really looking at, having that open communication. And we've got pit stops.

So, basically what we doing pit stops is, we'll ask questions, like how are you? Is that how are you, actually are you OK? or share something that you'd like to celebrate. And really just, focusing on the positive, essentially and you know then we talk about how can we build goals and what would you like to achieve in the next month perhaps? So having that supportive relationship among the educators is really important for us. But more importantly, just recognising that everyone's mental health and well being looks really different. And that is OK, that it's OK, that some days can be quite overwhelming, we've got supportive network within our community. And it might look a little bit different to different people on different days as well.

But I think one thing that I like to, you know raise or, you know bring forward is just having a supportive management and community. Because essentially it really is really important for us to create a system in place that we are showing to this educators that we value you. We value the important work that you do. We value important, that your mindset and your mental health well being is really important. So having supportive management and committee is really, really important, I think more services.

One thing that we've used in our service is having planning for well-being, my, yours and ours too. And you can find that on Be You resource on the website. And that's great, we use that to listen what our educators really need and how we can support each other as a team, and knowing what works for each educator. Some educators really like the walk and talk coffee chat, some educators really prefer the longer breaks, or they would like more on PDs on well being or having easier access to AP. So as management, we will be able to know that we can individualise the support essentially. And I guess for us, an action plan to move forward for us, we're trying to create a wellness team in our community, in our centre.

Basically having different educators who are passionate about mental health and well being. And that for other educators to reach out to different people. Also we're looking at, I guess establishing a well-being policy that really shows that we value mental health, and that we've got, these embedded practices that we wanna strengthen. And also we were looking at having a mentoring system, ways that we can empower and motivate each other and building on that strength Cause essentially happy educators means effective teams, which means quality and a positive outcome for these two. And that's the biggest priority for us.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, absolutely. And I know that you as a service do professional learning really well, your management are very supportive of releasing your staff to do that which is so important to have them equipped and just be prepared as well.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yeah.

Patricia Osgood

So, you've mentioned a couple of the Be You tools today. So, just for anybody out there who is interested in learning a bit more about those. So, I know Dee mentioned that we've got some well being tools for you. And one of them that they have used is that planning for well being, yours, mine, and ours that can be found in the well being tools for you. We also have some really great news articles and some fact sheets on connection to nature. We've got some on well being policies as well and connecting to the outdoors and different spaces, and also on how to create those spaces, those safe places and spaces in your setting as well. If you're coming along to this conference today, and it's the first time you've heard about Be You, there are ways that you can learn more about Be You as well, so you can definitely register as a whole learning community to receive support.

So, if you register as a whole learning community, you will get allocated a consultant to support you in your journey, through a variety of ways, phone call, email, online meetings, as well as promoting the Be You events. So, we have lots of events that you can attend online that are free for you. You can visit beyou.edu.au for resources on critical instance and more. So, our responding together. Domain is all about developing critical incident management plan. So, if that's something that interests you today, I highly recommend starting with that as your domain area. There's two modules in that. So, it's a great place to start. But you can also just follow Be You on our social media channels as well, to keep up to date. We have Facebook and we have Twitter accounts as well. So, you can find the one that relates to your setting and follow along with those as well. Now Dee, we have some time now, we've got lots of stuff coming through.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Fantastic.

Patricia Osgood

So, we're just going to ask you a couple of questions that have been coming through. So, a couple of comments first. So, we've got lots of people sharing about what they do in their spaces as well. somebody, a participant was saying that, one of the biggest challenges is a quiet space for educators to withdraw.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Definitely.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, it's a bit of a challenge.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Definitely.

Patricia Osgood

So maybe we'll start with that one and ask how you went about setting up your withdrawal area for your educators.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yeah look we don't really... We are a small old building centre. So, having quiet spaces is a tricky one most definitely. It's either the staff room where it gets really busy or the courtyard that pretty much is next to the

under two's play spaces. And that can be quite noisy for us as well, but we've got a planning room at the back that we can free up for these educators. It's just having these spaces available for the educators. But also I think it's that supportive community feel for us. We know that alright. If someone actually needs a quiet space, everyone are able to step out that planning room for example and give that supportive space for our colleagues. So, I think it's just more of the understanding and just having a space for them to just have different tools that they can reach out to. Yeah, essentially.

Patricia Osgood

Right. And some people have shared some strategies that they're using as well, and they just found what you shared really validated what they were already doing, which was much the same things. So, music and movement bookings and bags, yoga. Ways to transition up the day, but also to support well being and the process. So, got lots about that. So, one participant said, do you have any thoughts about transitions to meal or snack times that might support positive meal time?

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, definitely. I think that is always a biggest transition for children, but I think it was just listening to what the children really need. And also having age appropriate activities to break that transition apart, it could be songs, it could be that dance or movement, or it could be just having yoga. We do have a quiet space at the corner in our outdoor space with mats and yoga (UNKNOWN) with the children. But it's really about inviting these children, come in to join if they feel like they would need that. But also allowing children to make those choices, I think letting them know, communicating to them that, look, we're going to have lunch soon, but I'm doing yoga session right now. If you want to join me before we wash our hands and have some yoga time. So, you know giving children choices I think is really important. And they will come, they know that, that this is a common practice that they're quite happy to join in. But yeah different options really for them. I think it's really important.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah great. And we've got somebody who's asked, how to support really active children who feel like they will never... Sorry I just lost that one (LAUGHS). ..Feel like they will never want to have a quiet time and feel a bit unsettled at those times. You know, struggle a bit with that, that downtime or that quiet time?

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, yeah. We used to have children who are very, a group of children actually who are very active. So, and we acknowledged that, that it's really important to be active in I guess in the early years for them. So, it's just about recognising that, alright, well quiet moments or zen time or meditation, is not working for them, do yoga outside, but physical movement, could be running laps so we can pretend to be a lion, or giraffe. in the Safari, you know, it's all about being creative, and that's one thing that we do really well in early childhood, being creative.

But you know, I guess it's important about listening to the children, listening to your cohort, we know that certain practices might work well this year, and then you got to reinvent the wheel again next year, so really being flexible, really listening to these children and also be kind to yourself, you know, and it takes time for, you know, the children to grasp the concept, you know, it might take, you know, weeks, it might take a few sessions really so you know, having the first session as a failure, it's OK, you know, it might not work, but you know, keep trying essentially, and be creative around that.

Patricia Osgood

And I know that you support really well risky play in your service, but you know, I guess as educators, you can observe those children too, and monitor their own well being and we have a really great tool on the Be You website, the BETLS tools which is an acronym for behaviour, emotions, thoughts, and learning relationships, so that's a great tool to use as well. So it sounds like, you know, we've got lots of feedback here, we have a participant who said we have a new educator in our services completed the Be You training.

Iwande Suvanmani

Well done.

Patricia Osgood

And she's loving exploring the community with the children, and something that we really missed last year with restrictions, we're also blessed to be in a large open outdoor space so that's a really important learning resource for us, so which is something you touched on today was the outdoor environment and having those spaces to support your transition, and they have created a relaxation space for the children, they encourage children to feel their heartbeat, and if their heart is beating fast, we talk to them about slowing down. So that sounds great.

Lots of people do kinder room, daily meditation, podcast and mindfulness exercises. So you mentioned the smiling mind app that you use as well in the stories, and there's some really great mindfulness stories for young children out there too. So we have also had somebody who's asked, do you have any suggestions about where to find out about more progressive meal times? So that is children who are not necessarily used to having different, you know, the set times for eating, so how do you support that?

Iwande Suvanmani

Yeah, I guess it's also about listening to the children. So obviously, you know, sitting down altogether might be quite overwhelming for certain children, but also recognising that perhaps that's not something that they're used to at home, so I guess it's just about offering that to the children, you know, and communicating with the children, letting them know that look, we're having lunch right now, would you like to join us for lunch now, or do you wanna continue, you know, building the blocks, perhaps, but letting them know that, look it's not rush, it's you know, I'm saving some lunch for you, and when you're ready, you can come and join us. Because I think, you know, if you actually step back and look from a child's perspective, it can be quite overwhelming, it's loud, it's noisy, you know, you're sharing this tight space with you know, your peers who, you know, perhaps they're really messy eaters as well sitting next to you, and that could be really overwhelming for some children.

So I guess it's just giving them the options, progressive meal times are something that I really enjoy because I know for the fact that I'm a grazer, I eat at different times as well, and so it's just recognising that this is a normal thing for some children, and it's OK, you know, if they choose to have meal times now or later, but also recognising that children are able to really have that sense of, you know, that being connected to their body, they know when they're hungry, they know when they're not, they know when they're ready to move on to the next activity, essentially. Yeah, and we've actually had another participant responding and put some suggestions in there as well.

So we've had a couple of questions, one from a family daycare educator as well as somebody in another centre that's a little challenged by I'm not having enough staff to give the staff these extra break times or just to release them, so they're just asked if there were any other suggestions for giving them that time out or that break or... Yeah, yeah, I think that's, and that's going back to having supportive management and committee, you know, obviously budget does play a big part in having extra educators, and we acknowledge that, but I think if you are in a service that really values that, you know, really well ratio and supporting educators to step out, you know, even to go on toilet breaks, it's really important, then you know, I guess perhaps, you know, looking at budget and making sure that you know, down the track that you can have the extra educator within the short period of time, so that educators have that choice to step out of the room if needed really.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, yeah, that's great. I even heard of, you know, some educators who have like in their teams in the mornings, they get together and have their morning tea or coffee together to just give them that space, and as part of that transitioning to the day and part of their routine, they do that together to just talk about things, and just prepare for the day, so I've heard that that's a really great transition in routine that a lot of people do put into place as well. Just that, beginning today and just really significant ending to the day as part of their transition to going, moving into their home environment as well. So look, lots have come through the chat.

Iwande Suvanmani

And it's so good to see that a lot of services are doing almost or somewhat similar to what we're doing, and it's so good to see that services are being creative, and really, you know, I guess recognising that you've

actually tuned in today because you know that is really important for, you know, our mental health and wellbeing so that we can be there for the children, to support their mental health and wellbeing as well. So it's really nice to see that we've come together and share all these knowledge together.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah, people are doing, it's nice to validate that people are doing just a great job as well.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Most definitely, yeah.

Patricia Osgood

So here's one last question for you to end off our session today. I know that you're the assistant director as well as the educational leader, so you know, as somebody who's in a leadership position, and management position, you know, how do you cater for that? Because I know that a lot of the directors that I speak to are just so time poor and they're so busy supporting their educators that they forget about their own wellbeing as well. So can you talk to us a little bit about how you manage your own wellbeing as well?

Iwandee Suvanmani

Oh look, I can be the biggest hypocrite to be saying this, but look, I think it's really having supportive management team. I'm very lucky that I've got great, you know, directors that really support our well being, but also having that positive relationship. I know the educators often do come and say, Dee you know, you look like you need a break, you look like you need a coffee or a walk, or let's go for a walk, so I think building that relationship with your team is really important, but I guess for me, it's just I've done a lot of work for myself, I recognise that mental health is really important, and that makes a difference to my work performance, and I know that I've got different tools, you know like I said, certain days, sitting down and meditate does not work for me, cause my head is buzzing a million miles per hour, so I know that alright I'm gonna go out for a walk, I'm gonna listen to a podcast, that's absolutely nothing to do with leadership or early childhood and I think that makes a huge difference having different options, and you know, that you can reach out to in your little pocket essentially, yeah, undergo, yeah.

Patricia Osgood

Great, thanks so much for joining us today, Dee, it's been lovely just chatting with you and sharing and hearing about all the wonderful things you're doing in your service, and hopefully in the chat we've seen all the wonderful things that other people are doing as well in their services and validate that you're doing an amazing job. Yeah, so thank you so much.

We are going to finish up very soon, but yeah, the one thing that I just wanted to, I've just had a request is that we can just repeat the BETLS tools, so if you are a registered whole learning community please reach out to your consultant, and they are able to show you where that is located, but we can find that in our resources, and that's under the mental health continuum, so there is a mental health continuum that you can explore, and that has a little checklist as well as ways to respond that you can look as well, and just an understanding of what you're observing in children's behaviours as well, and that also has a link to the BETLS tool, the BETLS is an anecdotal observation template that you can use, it's a blank template you can download and use to observe children and that can really help you get a greater understanding of what might be happening for them and understanding of their view point as well So yeah.

Iwandee Suvanmani

Yeah, thank you for having me, it's been really exciting to share and have this conversation, and yeah, like I said, it's just great to see that our sector is thriving and prioritising mental health, so I think it's an exciting time for us, I think. Yeah, most definitely.

Patricia Osgood

Yeah definitely.

Iwande Suvanmani

Thank you.