

Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

Infant and toddler wellbeing - laying the foundations for lifelong mental health

Presented by Be You Consultants Tanya Burr and Janelle Bowler on 25 July 2019

Tanya Burr: Hello everyone and welcome to our InFocus Be You webinar: Infant and toddler wellbeing – Laying the foundations for lifelong mental health. My name is Tanya and joining me here is my colleague Janelle and we are Be You Consultants with Early Childhood Australia. Be You is a national initiative led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace and funded by the Australian government.

Janelle Bowler: Hello everybody. Our vision is that every learning community is positive, inclusive and resilient; a place where every child, young person, educator and family can achieve their best possible mental health. Be You is a collaborative learning community for educators who are supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Being part of this community means your early learning service or school has access to Be You Consultants to assist you in undertaking your learning and action.

Is your school or service registered and participating with Be You? If you aren't, register yourself and your school today through our website. As we begin this webinar about infant and toddler wellbeing, we're going to move to our next slide where Tanya will give an acknowledgement of country. Thanks, Tanya.

Tanya Burr: Thanks, Janelle. So we would first like to acknowledge the traditional custodians from all the lands on which we are able to gather on today to not only acknowledge but also pay our respects to Elder's past, present and future and all those who continue to hold the memories, traditions and ways of being for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise the importance of the continued connection to culture, country and community to the health and social emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Throughout today's webinar, we invite you to consider how the ways that we can support infant and toddler wellbeing are informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Janelle will now provide some thoughts on self-care.

Janelle Bowler: So we're all here today to consider, learn and reflect about early childhood wellbeing and education. On our screen are The Be You Ways for today. Remember, looking after yourself is really important. A sense of safety is the most foundational requirement for positive mental health. This means that people are safe to be who they are, people are able to work to their strengths, express their opinions and beliefs and feel heard and respected, even when there are opposing views.

During the webinar today, they'll be the opportunity for you to reflect on your own practices through polls and reflective questions. Please remember to take care of yourself as we talk about mental health today. Sometimes unexpected feelings can emerge, even difficult ones, so be aware of feelings that come up for you and make sure you talk to someone if difficulties or difficult feelings occur and have a yarn with somebody. Now Tanya is going to give us some information about our online space today. Thanks, Tanya.

Tanya Burr: Thanks, Janelle. So before we begin some fun technical tips for maximizing all of our learning online today. For those unfamiliar with the webinar platform, welcome. This is what your screen will typically look like with the webinar viewer on the left and the control panel on the right. Throughout the webinar, you can ask questions about using the webinar function and we will have some technical support available. Our colleagues Maria, Rita and Stephanie are working away in the background to support Janelle and I today – thank you team. So as you can see the control panel with the question box is highlighted in blue. The responses in green are public responses and the ones in red are private responses. You can use your control panel to manage your phone or computer audio. So today as mentioned everybody has been placed on a listen-only mode and your microphones have been muted as we have a large number of attendees.

If you are experiencing any other difficulties at any time, please note the customer care details on the screen and contact this team directly. Throughout the webinar today, we encourage you to get involved as much as you feel comfortable. It's important that everybody feels like this is a safe space to learn and that everybody's contributions matter. You can ask questions by the questions box and we hope to respond to as many of your queries as possible during today's session, but for those that we don't get to will follow up after the event concludes. Any links to resources or references we use in the content will be posted in the chat for you to copy if you wish, but they will also be available in the handout that you can download along with some reflective questions that you might like to consider within your own learning community, perhaps with your team. These will all be available post webinar.

We also invite you to participate in the polls that we will be launching throughout the session. All event participants will be able to access a certificate of participation and a recording of the webinar. Over to you Janelle to begin our discussion today.

Janelle Bowler: Thanks, Tanya. So today we're exploring the important role the early years play in laying the foundations for lifelong mental health and wellbeing and how to optimize infant and toddler mental health and wellbeing and most importantly, what we as educators can do. As we explore these, we will be looking at the overarching influence relationships and the environment play in positive future mental health for infants and toddlers.

We hope when you leave this webinar you and your team will reflect about the mental health of infants and toddlers in your early learning service. Now we will move onto the next slide, thanks Steph.

So why is toddler and infant wellbeing important?

So let's explore what infant and toddler mental health means to you. Maria, could you please put our first poll up? You can respond to as many questions as you like with these polls. The question is: which language do you currently use when discussing the mental health of infants and toddlers?

So while we give you time to answer the question...

Tanya Burr: It's an interesting question Janelle. I think mental health often isn't considered in relation to our youngest children. We often use different terminology. But what does mental health mean to us? I think that's sort of an important reflection in this space.

Janelle Bowler: People have different beliefs and understandings of mental health, don't they Tanya, for all sorts of reasons, so part of our job here today is to promote this awareness and understanding of mental health in toddlers and babies.

Tanya Burr: Yeah, definitely.

There we go. So we have some results coming up. Wonderful, thanks Maria. Yeah, so not surprisingly, I think the majority of people really connected with the term social and emotional learning which is what we have used very often in this space.

Janelle Bowler: And I have to say that's a term I've used in the past as well. But I'm now saying the words mental health more intentionally as well. The Early Years Learning Framework also uses the social and emotional wellbeing terminology.

Tanya Burr: It does, yeah. I'm drawn to also just a small number of people indicated other. I'd be interested to hear what that terminology is. If you'd like, please feel free to share in the chat box – if you feel comfortable.

Janelle Bowler: Yeah, interesting results. So mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or to his community. Whereas when we talk about wellbeing, wellbeing relates to all aspects of a person's health; physical, emotional, and spiritual and this can change over time depending on what's happening in people's lives. So I kind of look at mental health as being part of wellbeing so there are lots and lots of similarities, but they are different.

And you can check out more about this mental health continuum on our notice module on The Be You website.

So now we're going to do another poll, Maria. So while Maria puts the poll up, this one is more about mental health with toddlers and babies. So what do you think is the most important aspect of mental health for toddlers and babies?

Oh, there we go. It's up.

Tanya Burr: And I think I'm really sort of connecting with all of these here and I guess sort of different times in different contexts, I think they would be very relevant. What do you think Janelle?

Janelle Bowler: Yeah, I agree. I think all of these are part of infant and toddler mental health.

Tanya Burr: Definitely, it's a key age to be developing these skills and these senses – as one of them says a sense of self and they're all interconnected in a way I see.

So overwhelmingly, '*form positive and secure relationship*', so the relationships are key at this stage.

Janelle Bowler: It's good to see isn't it? Because that's absolutely right. The secure relationships is where a lot of what happens to us comes from really, and all of our other learning. But all of the other areas do play a part in infant and toddler mental health and in our own mental health.

Tanya Burr: Very much so. So it's really good to see that all of those things are considered when people are thinking about infant toddler mental health.

Janelle Bowler: So anecdotally, when asking educators to describe a mentally healthy child, they'll usually describe children in terms of their self-regulating behaviour, their emotions and thoughts, such as a child being able to express how they're feeling, being able to calm themselves or play happily with other children. But I think it's important to remember that we're not actually diagnosing children, rather we're beginning to understand what positive and concerning mental health and mental ill health looks like so we can support and refer more effectively to the experts. Be You does have an observation tool that may be useful to learn perspectives about children that we will talk about a little bit more later. It's called The BETLS observation tool.

So there's a growing body of Australian research about the importance of the early years that you'll find in the chat. ARACY's, which is the Australian Research Alliance For Children and Youth, research on the first thousand days is particularly interesting as is the work of the Australian Early Development Census, which is AEDC, have done and the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health. The links will be in the chat for that as well.

So ARACY's research has increased our understanding of the environmental and biological factors that shape babies and toddlers development and shows us how much these early years influence future outcomes for development, health, and wellbeing and for learning.

The AEDC Census also provides insight into all domains of development. Again, you'll find links in the chat to read more about this.

So what a child experiences in these very early years lay the foundations for lifelong mental health and wellbeing. The first three years of a child's life are critical to development, and research has shown early experiences within infants nurturing relationships plays a crucial role in the development of their social and emotional health and wellbeing.

So now let's find out a little bit more about brain development. Tanya is going to be looking at that. Thanks, Tanya.

[Tanya Burr](#): Thank you, Janelle. So as we've defined, mental health in babies and toddlers is the optimal social, emotional and cognitive wellbeing of children aged from birth to three years.

It depends on the quality of a child's environment and their relationships with family and educators. These have a significant impact on brain development with the foundations for future brain functioning being embedded in the brain structure at this stage. As we can see on the slide, the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University talks about how building a strong foundation in the early years provides a good base for a lifetime of good mental health and better overall health.

Brains are built over time from the bottom up. The basic architecture or structure of the brain is built through an ongoing process that starts before birth and continues throughout our life. It provides a foundation for social and emotional development. Brains also build from the most simple to the most complex.

The simple part keeps us alive; breathing and temperature control and other things like that, and the complex area is where we think and make decisions, while emotions are processed in the middle. The kind of experience determines the kind of hormone that is released. Positive experiences release hormones that promote brain growth and negative experiences can release stress hormones that inhibit growth. The emotional area plays a pivotal role in that all experiences are attached to an emotion and the emotional area in the brain is connected in some ways to all other areas.

The more repetitions of experience types, the greater the intensity and the earlier these occur in a child's life, the stronger the connections are. So we've learned the way the connections between brain cells develop in the first few years of life are affected by the quality of the child's early relationships and their environment. Brain development depends on how a baby or toddler is feeling during events. The more safe and secure our baby feels, the more likely healthy connections will be made in their brain.

When adults build secure relationships within a supportive environment, they are promoting children's mental health and wellbeing now and for the future. A major part of this developmental process is the interaction between children and their parents or significant others in the family or community.

Without responsive interactions and caring, or if responses are unreliable or inappropriate, then a brain's architecture will not form as expected which can lead to issues with wellbeing, development, learning and behaviour.

We learn from babies as much as they learn from us. We just need to know what to look for. A common term is 'serve and return' and it's very much like a dance. This also may be referred to as 'cueing and responding'. Research shows how important it is for educators to recognise these encounters as reciprocal and for educators to see the infant as an active participant; they are not a passive receiver of care, and to recognise infant's agency by allowing the infant to develop a strong sense of self and wellbeing.

When adults respond appropriately, neural connections which promote social and emotional learning are then strengthened and these interactions, when repeated frequently in the early years, positively shape brain architecture and form strong foundations for the future.

However, if a child is exposed to abuse, neglect, poverty or trauma and receives unreliable nurturing than the developing structures in the brain do not form as expected and will certainly be fragile. These adverse experiences are sometimes described as toxic stress and may be detrimental for social and emotional development and for future wellbeing.

I will leave you with this question now to take away and discuss with your team. In your daily interactions with children, how do you help to influence their brain architecture and social and emotional skills to develop in a positive way? Over to you Janelle to discuss attachments in relationships.

Janelle Bowler: Thanks Tanya. So we know mental health and wellbeing is influenced by the quality of a child's early relationships, and early attachment experiences lay the foundation for mental health and wellbeing throughout childhood and into adulthood. This is partly because the quality of early relationships influence the development of the child's brain, the nervous system and the level of stress hormones in the body. But before we look at attachment, let's define what we mean in this context. So if we talked about primary caregivers, that is usually, but not always, a family member or parent to the child – so it's a caregiver usually from the child's family.

A key educator is the educator who holds a particular child in mind and heart, not necessarily physically being with the child at all times, but that they hold the child in mind. This allows continuity of care and communication with families as well as a special connection with that child.

So let's look at what attachment theory tells us. Everyone has developed a certain pattern of attachment. The pattern of attachment a child develops has a direct impact on the architecture of their brain and is a blueprint for all future relationships. Research in attachment theory has direct implications for the work we do with groups of children in early learning services.

So what is attachment? Attachment is a deep and enduring – they are key terms, deep and enduring – emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. As you can see on the slide, infants and toddlers rely on adults to meet their physical and emotional needs. To survive, infants instinctively develop attachment relationships with key adults in their life, and children also have important secondary attachments with other key people, other family members and educators. The quality of these attachment experiences is also important for future relationships, but the child has to form an attachment with one person first before they can move on to secondary attachments. The pattern that's established between the primary caregiver and the child is a blueprint the child uses with other people in their life.

So why is it important? The Early Years Learning Framework - Outcome One tells us warm, responsive and trusting relationships help children feel safe and secure to explore their world and this secure attachment, deep and enduring emotional bond provides that home base from which a child begins to explore their new environment. As children grow and change, these attachment relationships do remain significant.

However, attachment patterns can change with other significant relationships later in life. Educators will never be a child's primary attachment figure, but they can help a child experience a different relationship pattern.

Attachment patterns influence a person's interactions, personality, cognitive ability, values, morals and beliefs and their sense of identity. Research also tells us that in a population, about 60% seem to be securely attached with their attachment pattern being securely attached and insecurely attached people usually amount to about 40% of the population. There's a whole range of types of patterns even within those insecurely attached people and some people see that as different personality types. So that's 40% of the population.

So the next slide talks about relationships and self-regulation. Thanks Steph.

So we know that Principle 1 of the Early Years Learning Framework is secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships and this is number one for a reason. Relationships between an infant and caregiver must be sensitive and responsive. Relationships are central to the self-regulation process and secure attachment is the most effective type of attachment relationship for promoting mental health and wellbeing.

So what is self-regulation? Self-regulation is the ability to manage emotions and behaviour or reactions, and it's a process that depends on learning and maturation. A child's ability to develop the skills needed for self-regulation is influenced by internal factors such as their age, their temperament and experience and external factors like the environment and interactions with others. Learning self-regulation begins in the womb and progresses from external to internal self-regulation with gradually decreasing support necessary from adults and the environment. Infants firstly need to co-regulate with another, within a responsive caregiving relationship

As people grow, they generally need less co-regulation as they develop the skills and the capacity to do it themselves. However, most people will never totally self-regulate. There are always times where they will need to co-regulate.

The greater a sense of wellbeing, the more likely someone is able to regulate. Using Circle of Security language, you as an educator act as a child's secure base and safe haven in your place of work with children and this means children will move out from you to explore their world while you watch over them, you share their delight, you help them and you enjoy what they are doing. They know they can return to you when they need comfort, protection, help organising their feelings and again to share their delight.

A secure safe base is always bigger, stronger, wiser and kind, follows the lead of children and takes charge when needed. When children are able to use this circle effectively, they generally have a positive sense of wellbeing and experience positive mental health and responsive regulation. Some children and caregivers have strengths while exploring their world and others have strengths while protecting or comforting and this can distort their ability to regulate.

The younger a child, the closer they are to the hands. When holding a baby, for example, gazing into their eyes, the baby will self-regulate by looking away or exploring their world and then looking back and cooing. Toddlers will spend more and more time exploring but still return to fill up their emotional cup regularly, even if they just look back to check that you're still there. While self-regulation is an important goal, it's not the end goal and we all need to be able to self-regulate and co-regulate. Your influence, in terms of regulation, is being aware that children learn self-control and appropriate emotional expression and behaviour by watching and experiencing how other people manage their emotions and form their own experiences of how others behave.

You can help contain children's stressful experiences, such as when they feel overwhelmed unsure or frightened, by showing them how to become calm to get their needs met. This might include sitting with the child, using soothing language, helping them take a few deep breaths and providing reassurance that they're safe. Using the Circle of Security language, this is when the child returns or is close to the hands when the caregiver can help organise the child's feelings.

So we've got a couple of examples of what this can look like. One example from a colleague of mine is a story of her working with a toddler who found regulating her anger really tricky. The child got angry really

quickly and stayed angry for a really long time and it was really hard for her to process the moment and move on. She couldn't do it by herself.

As her key educator, my colleague worked together with this child to have big, strong hugs every time she got angry and this took a long time to establish. At first the last thing she wanted was a hug and sometimes the last thing my colleague felt like doing was giving her a hug, but they persisted with big, strong hugs where they wrapped their arms around each other and slowed breathing down, breathing loud and slow, and using a strong rhythmic pat on her back. Neither spoke in these big, strong hugs.

One day the little girl ran to my colleague and asked for a big, strong hug. My colleague hadn't noticed anything that had indicated that she was angry. This time she really didn't seem angry and she wasn't. She thought she might be getting angry so she sought out my colleague for that big, strong hug independently before she got angry. She was starting to read those internal signs.

I think that's a really nice example of what co-regulation could look like and then self-regulation. Tanya has an example too.

Tanya Burr: It really is, it was a beautiful story. Thanks for sharing that, Janelle. I often think about when I was often in infant toddler rooms and watching when the educators actually stopped being busy and they just stayed still and they sat down in their environment. I watched as the infants and toddlers became calmer. I could actually see it happen in front of me. They didn't need to stay close or cling to their educator all of the time anymore. They went out and explored the space and just looked back at them occasionally to connect in because they knew that educator would be there.

This is essentially the picture of Circle of Security which you were mentioning before. I think it's a great example of how it shows that we all need to co-regulate before we can self-regulate.

So now let's move on to look at socio-ecological influences for infants and toddlers. Thanks, Steph.

So experiences in the early childhood years can affect the way people respond and react to the world they live in for the rest of their lives so a positive start is crucial. We've talked about relationships and the environment as being one of the greatest influences on infant and toddler current and future wellbeing. Connections between brain cells developing in the first few years of life are affected by the quality of the child's early relationships and their environment.

A quote that I love and I think speaks to infant's developing sense of identity is from D.W Winnicott. He was a paediatrician in the UK and a lot of the founding work around attachment relationships is accredited to Winnicott. He often said "There is no such thing as a baby, there is a baby and someone". For me this quite highlights an infant's formation of a sense of identity through close connection with a significant attachment figure. As they grow, their sense of self will develop independent of others, and co-regulation, which Janelle just discussed, is a very important aspect of this process – co-regulation before self-regulation.

So what does it look like for infants and toddlers? Feeling a sense of belonging and building connections with others is a protective factor for mental health from the time they're born; infants rely on the adults around them to meet their physical and emotional needs.

As we've mentioned, families are the first and most important influences on children's social and emotional development. They do this by responding effectively to infants and toddlers, providing examples of how they manage their own feelings and talking with children about feelings and how to manage them. As we all know, educators can provide very similar support and you do during your everyday work with infants and toddlers.

So there are many other influences in the social environment and if we look at the diagram on the screen, which is Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological Model, the people in settings most closely involved with the child's family, community and learning settings are shown at the centre of the diagram. Through their

relationships with others and growing awareness of social values and expectations, children build a sense of where they fit in the social world. Developing an understanding about self and others is integral to social emotional learning.

Then outside of the immediate family, learning communities have the most significant developmental influence. Active participation in positive learning environments influences the ability of infants to understand and cope with the world around them. It's critical that a mentally healthy learning community models respectful interactions, promotes inclusion and values diversity.

Having a strong cultural identity enhances self-concept and promotes a sense of connectedness and belonging. Children's identity is nurtured when they learn about their cultural traditions and when they are respected for their cultural values. Through positive interactions, babies and toddlers learn to feel good about themselves and enjoy interacting with others. They learn how to manage a range of feelings and to communicate effectively to get their needs met.

Next slide, please Stephanie. So moving on now and thinking about how we can optimise infant and toddler mental health.

To do this we can assist infants and toddlers to develop a positive sense of self and identity. We can look at relationships and the environment through a risk and protective factor lens and we can apply this factor model to our practice focusing on our relationships that are caring and responsive to children, promote inclusion and connectedness and establish family partnerships.

How might we do this? Well one way is what Janelle referred to before - The Be You BETLS Observation Tool. We can use this observation tool to notice and record behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and social aspects of the environment and then we can start to intentionally plan. We can provide a supportive learning environment conducive to the development of positive mental health and wellbeing.

In this we need to look at our everyday practices that increase protective factors and that will decrease the impact of risk factors in our relationships and our environments. We can assist infants and toddlers attending early learning services to develop a positive sense of self and identity through the promotion of inclusive practices, and we can establish family partnerships to promote a sense of identity and belonging.

So let's look at how we work with infants and toddlers. Often work with infants and toddlers is considered care only. But what takes precedence: care or curriculum? It's time to bring up the next poll. Maria if you can set that up, please.

Beautiful. Thank you. So care and curriculum are inherently related. In everyday practice, how often do you find that care and curriculum are interconnected? Janelle, what are your thoughts on this?

Janelle Bowler: I think they're absolutely inherently connected, I think they absolutely go together, but you have to have the care before the curriculum can take off. Children need to feel secure and safe before they can learn.

Tanya Burr: Yeah. It is a very crucial aspect of our practice. There's research commenting that care maybe being devalued in our society and curriculum is the more valued at the education side. This can create a disconnect between what knowledge we value as educators to build our professional identity and the care skills that infants require to meet their needs. So how do we recognise and value care more in this space?

Beautiful. I've got the results and just like you mentioned, Janelle, 'always' was very much the popular response. It's very much always in the practice.

Janelle Bowler: I think the younger the child the more likely the 'always'.

Tanya Burr: Yeah, definitely.

Right, so I'll move on a bit more and go back to the risk and protective factors. So the diagram on the screen lists a range of different risk and protective factors that might be present in a child's life

The more protective factors that are in a child's life, the more resilient they are. It's important to recognise too that risk factors can occur at an individual, family or community level. So when adults help to reduce risk factors and enhance protective factors, children are better able to build positive relationships with those around them.

So back to you now, Janelle.

Janelle Bowler: Thanks, Tanya. So there's a nice quote on the screen that comes from Jack Shonkoff, who's the Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. This is a really powerful statement for everyone involved with young children. Positive relationships are the foundation of children's mental health and wellbeing. It's also generally agreed and supported by research that relationships are at the heart of quality early childhood education and care and that environment and relationships are crucial for the development of a child's brain architecture.

In the first years of life, children rapidly develop the social and emotional capabilities that prepare them to be self-confident, trusting, empathetic, intellectually inquisitive, and communicative and enable them to relate well to others. Some great examples of positive relationships between adults and children show adults responding to children in a timely manner, showing what they know, are accepting of the child as an individual and are available for that child.

Using the Circle of Security language, we also see these as examples of relationships involving adults who are bigger, stronger, wiser and kind. When talking to a colleague recently about a child who was struggling, we talked about strengthening the educator hands, so being even more consistently bigger, stronger, wiser and kind. Stronger hands mean added security and safety for the child to be able to move in and out from them. I know Tanya has an example of bigger, stronger, wiser and kind on scales, Tanya, so if the kind is missing...

Tanya Burr: Yeah, I've often seen the diagram around the Circle of Security talking about bigger, stronger and wiser being at one end of the seesaw and kind being at the other. We need to make sure the seesaw is very balanced because if it sort of tips too much in one favour, we maybe come across as sort of weak in our support for a child, but if we're not kind enough then we come across as mean, so it's very important that we try and sort of keep that balance. Reflective practice is very helpful for that as well.

Janelle Bowler: So educators can actively build those positive relationships by; being really conscious and using both their verbal and nonverbal signals, especially for infants, reading the verbal and nonverbal signals of infants, being responsive and in tune with what's happening for children and giving children time to explore but then to take comfort and seek comfort when they need it. Communicating with families, I think is critical with young children.

Tanya Burr: Yeah, I think too, I often talk a lot about rituals for babies and toddlers as opposed to routines. I guess an example of a ritual I often remember witnessing was an educator sitting with her group of toddlers on the mat before lunchtime and one by one she was calling their name and they came over to her and she washed their hands with a warm washcloth while she sang to them and then they walked away to the lunch table. This was not hurried in any way and it was just beautiful to witness. It was also amazing to see the group of toddlers watching her so intently and waiting for their turn as they knew when their name was said, they would get this incredible, calm, intimate moment with their educator and fill their emotional bucket.

A ritual is carried out with love and care and creates a connection and warm memory. We can all think of rituals we were part of growing up or even now perhaps. Whereas in contrast, routines are often carried out quickly in large groups and provide no space for emotional connection.

Janelle Bowler: Educators cannot replace a primary caregiver, but they have the opportunities for that child to experience a different relationship with another. I heard Jude Cassidy, who's another attachment guru, talk about a boat being attached to a jetty and aligning this with a relationship.

So you imagine the jetty are the hands of the caregiver and the boat is the child. Jetties are designed to have some flexibility and the boat is sometimes joined to that jetty and sometimes goes out to do what it has to do, only to return to the jetty. When it's at the jetty, it is sometimes really close and sometimes a little way away and they kind of bounce around accordingly – they have a little dance really. It then moves in and out as long as it needs to, just as people in relationships do.

Tanya Burr: Thanks, Janelle. The key educator approach which you mentioned earlier is a great example of responsive practice which nurtures these relationships and builds the protective factors for mental health. It also supports connection and partnership with families and has been shown to be beneficial for educator wellbeing due to increased work satisfaction from deeper relationships between infants and educators. I think you found the Dan Siegel quote that I love about “Relationships are not the icing on the cake. They are the cake”.

Janelle Bowler: I love it. That's one of my favourite quotes.

Tanya Burr: Thanks, Janelle. Next slide, please Stephanie.

So we'll begin to look at environments here and from our knowledge of brain development architecture, we know that information about our environment travels through the nervous system to the brain which interprets the input as sight, sound, touch, etc.. An environment where children grow up and learn influences their development, mental health and wellbeing and outcomes for later life.

So a quote from Anne Stonehouse talks about infants and toddlers. “They (meaning educators), set up rich environments that invite exploration and experimentation. Educators take advantage of learning opportunities in ordinary everyday experiences, including routines. Their conversations and interactions of the children are authentic and genuine, their cues are subtle. They are more vulnerable, you have to be clever about building learning into daily routines and rituals. Strong family educator partnerships and more critical and culturally based child-rearing practices are more prominent”.

I used to talk a lot also about being in the bubble with infants during caregiving moments such as nappy changing, feeding, dressing and going to sleep. This refers to being completely present in the moment with a child, being in tune and giving one hundred per cent of your attention.

Many educators shared with me after our conversation that this was a lightbulb moment for their practice in realising the emotional impact on a young child being treated as a task to complete. In contrast, educators also shared in feedback over the next few months how connected and enjoyable care moments had now become for both the child and educator when they gave their full attention and engaged fully.

So supportive environments are where children are given responsive care to be able to explore independently yet are comfortable coming back for comfort and security if needed. They are places where children feel safe to be themselves.

Janelle Bowler: So as I've mentioned previously, knowing how the Circle of Security works really does assist with that sense of wellbeing and positive mental health for everybody, including children. We know supportive environments include adults responding to infants and toddlers consistently and sensitively so they feel safe and secure, and are consistent and predictable. Environments that are really inclusive support infants' and toddlers' mental health, and reflecting on the family context and the broader community are all really key factors.

But why is environment important? Because it can foster that sense of belonging and connectedness and it helps children develop that really strong sense of identity and promotes feelings of safety and security.

Social emotional learning is enhanced through a balanced, planned and holistic approach that embraces a range of learning experiences and environments.

Tanya Burr: Thanks, Janelle. I also want to mention that you can't discuss an environment for infants and toddlers without discussing the adults who are in it to create it and maintain it. Infants do best when their caregivers encourage them and provide safe opportunities to explore, play and learn. Joy, laughter and having fun are important to their learning.

Infants and young children are affected by stressful events, even those they don't understand. They are very sensitive to how their parents and caregivers react to stress. Stressed infants and young children may develop emotional problems, behaviour issues, developmental delays or physical health effects that can last for a long time.

So to sum up, a supportive, inclusive environment with children responding to infants and toddlers consistently and sensitively will support the development of secure attachment and lead to quality relationships. This will support their social and emotional learning, enabling the development of self-regulation and a positive sense of self.

We're coming up to the last ten minutes and I'll just pass over to Janelle now to talk more specifically about family partnerships in our environment.

Thanks, Janelle.

Janelle Bowler: Thanks. It's probably one of the most critical areas of our work with babies and toddlers. So I'm acknowledging that and trying to make it as important as it should be. We have an understanding that working in partnership with families and other professionals is that really important part of children's development. Partnerships involve trust, communication, really respecting diversity and including families in collaborative decision-making.

You can also go to our website within the Family Partnership domain to find out more about this, but I'll just read Anne Stonehouse's comment who says *"providing good quality programs for the under threes, strong family educator partnerships are more critical. Culturally-based child-rearing practices are more prominent and open communication supports understanding."*

And we know there's currently a lot of discussion around increased stresses in the home environment for young children things like electronic devices, how busy adults are, how children are surrounded by a lot of stressed people.

So if we think of that in terms of considering it a risk factor and the way to work with that is to increase protective factors and increase work on things that we do have more control over like being inclusive, like keeping communication open, like being aware of the impact of family situations on children and helping identify potential external sources of support where appropriate.

So I think we can move on to the next slide, Steph, where we're talking about professional practice.

So the Early Years Learning Framework offers pedagogical guidelines, like using the holistic approach and being responsive to children, planning and implementing learning through play and balancing this with intentional teaching and creating physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children while valuing the cultural and social context of children and their family, and while also assessing and monitoring children's learning – it is really important to keep a track on children's learning.

So Anne Stonehouse says *"In really good programs educators are intentional in their practice. They tune into children. They try really hard to understand what they are attempting to communicate and they always try to respond sensibly, respectfully and with warmth... They know a good quality of program for babies and toddlers is not simply a matter of watering down elements of a curriculum for over threes."* I think that's something we all need to remember.

We do have another poll, Maria. So this I think this is our last one.

Tanya Burr: We're just going to skip that one, Janelle.

Janelle Bowler: Thank you. Okay, we'll move on.

Tanya Burr: I think it's just important to reflect before we go to the next slide about the question which was: how often do we see ourselves supporting the mental health of infants and toddlers in a professional practice? All of the time, often, sometimes or not as much as we would like? Maybe you would like to all reflect on that individually as we go on. I think almost to the next slide I think thanks, Stephanie.

So I'm just catching up here.

Janelle Bowler: So I think that you were going to talk to that slide, Tanya, I think.

Tanya Burr: Beautiful. So I think we want to talk a bit more about environment. As it says on the slide, infants and toddlers benefit from having plenty of opportunities to develop and learn and practice their social emotional skills within their environments with educators and other children as well.

So we talked about planning environments and this doesn't just refer to the physical space, but also the temporal space and that means how fast or slow things may happen, when they happen and how they happen in the environment.

An example of this I heard from an educator was, in realising their babies spend a large part of their day on the floor and were hearing and feeling fast moving feet and the click and clunk of shoes, and thinking about how this may be causing their babies some unsettledness and stress. This reflection changed their environment. They took off their shoes when entering the room and they consciously slow down – no more fast feet.

So there's a lot of incidental learning opportunities that happen through the day and that educators can take advantage of as well.

We can be encouraging a child to express what they're feeling in the moment as they experience positive or difficult feelings. We might label an emotion with an infant so they can make the connections and develop the ability to recognise and name emotions as they grow.

We may notice and acknowledge when a child uses social emotional skills such as empathy, and in building relationships, we can be getting to know children by observing that interest in behaviour and by sharing information with families and carers; being an interested and skilled observer during children's play, be on the lookout for different cues both nonverbal and verbal from infants and toddlers, using effective listening skills, showing warmth and interest in children's feelings and experiences especially during their care moments like feeding and toileting as well as during play and other learning experiences, creating different opportunities for children to explore and play and learn and, as the Circle of Security teaches us, encouraging exploration while being there to provide assistance if needed.

So we might move on to the next slide, please Stephanie.

So we'll just focus a bit on play here. The Early Years Learning Framework has a specific emphasis on play-based learning and the principles and practices that determine our pedagogy. It defines play-based learning as a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds as they engage actively with people, objects and representations.

Engaging and responsive environments and play are crucial to the developing brain architecture and social and emotional development in children.

When we say that play is a vehicle for children's learning and development, how do we consider infants and toddlers in this space? So we all know that play is important for physical development but it's just as

important for their mental development. It provides children with opportunities to practice and make sense of what they have seen around them and learn new ways to be thinking and doing things. Play can stimulate various parts of the brain, strengthening brain development and activating memory, language, sensory motor skills, self-regulation, planning and organisation, learning and attention.

Even as infants and toddler educators, we have a responsibility to plan for play. It is not a haphazard occurrence where we might put material and equipment out and stand back to watch what happens or might not happen.

We plan and implement learning through play. We intentionally teach. We develop an understanding of what children know and how they can further support their learning and development. We do this by observing children and documenting and monitoring their learning.

Infants love playing with adults and engaging in joyful interactions. Families take an active role in babies' play, for example, with touch and in simple rhymes, and in building partnerships with parents we make the most of the moments at the beginning and end of each day to model and encourage play and parent participation in play based experiences. Play can involve movement, for example, holding the baby while singing, swaying or gently dancing, play can involve simple rhymes, animal noises, books, blowing raspberries and playing peek-a-boo.

For infants and toddlers music is especially important; using our own voices when we sing builds connections, we use eye contact and facial expressions in finger plays. Our own voices are so powerful when we sing instead of using auditory stimulus such as CDs. It's all about connections between educators and children.

With toddlers, they may start to take an interest in other children and often like to play near another child. They may not interact with the other child much, but they play side by side. Play with older children often involves the older child making the toddler laugh without expecting the toddler to share or cooperate.

Janelle, over to you just to finish up.

Janelle Bowler: Thanks, Tanya.

So this slide is our Always Be You symbol called our Connect symbol. I just want you to have a think about how this relates to infants and toddlers and between you and your infants and toddlers. Let's have a think about how that works for you.

And that is our Always Be You symbol. Next slide Steph.

So it's almost time to finish our webinar. Have a think about what you will take away from this webinar for further discussion with your teams. You have access to lots of links and quite a few reflective questions as well that are posted in the chat and are available as a downloadable handout.

Tanya Burr: What will be your take away, Janelle?

Janelle Bowler: My take away? Good question Tanya. So my take away I think is how closely immersed babies and toddlers and families are with educators when babies and toddlers are babies and toddlers. We're all in it together rather than us and them. It has to be together. What about yours, Tanya?

Tanya Burr: Yeah. I guess being a part of this webinar has really made me think about using the term mental health. It's something that traditionally I haven't done; I've more used social emotional learning. But when are the appropriate times that we can think and focus more about the mental health of infants and toddlers and how will that support their mental health at this age?

Janelle Bowler: Good reflection. We might move on to the final slide now, thanks Steph. So Tanya, I think you were starting with this one.

Tanya Burr: Yes, I was just on a roll. Thank you so much everybody for participating today. It's so wonderful to see so many of you online with us and to really promote the importance of infant and toddler wellbeing within your learning communities.

When you exit, you'll be prompted to complete the exit survey. Please remember to complete this and please include the names of anyone watching with you. We really appreciate that feedback.

Janelle Bowler: As many of you know, these webinars are a great way not only to learn, reflect and put learning into action; they also assist in demonstrating our individual commitment to continued professional development with Be You. But have you heard they can also support documentation and guide whole of service or school professional learning and continuous improvement?

So contact our team today and we can assist you with this. For anyone already with a participating service or school, simply contact your Be You consultant like Tanya or myself. If your service or school isn't a registered participating service, or if you'd like to know more about what's involved, check out how to start the experience and join today. See the link in the chat to getting started.

Also join a check-in event and talk about what you've learnt and done soon. Often consultants spot great learning and action that's being done without educators even noticing and it's often easier for a pair of outside eyes and ears to notice.

So, thanks again everybody for coming today and for listening and for contributing through chat. We hope you can take some really valuable learning and actions away from today. Thank you, bye-bye.

End.