### CHCECE003 Provide Care for Children

**Topic Four | Assist children with change**

#### Relevant Frameworks

<table>
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<tr>
<th>QA3</th>
<th>Physical environment</th>
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<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of a service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td>Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, furniture, equipment, facilities and resources are suitable for their purpose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1.2</td>
<td>Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.</td>
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<td>3.1.3</td>
<td>Facilities are designed or adapted to ensure access and participation by every child in the service and to allow flexible use, and interaction between indoor and outdoor space.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2.1</td>
<td>Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2.2</td>
<td>Resources, materials and equipment are sufficient in number, organised in ways that ensure appropriate and effective implementation of the program and allow for multiple uses.</td>
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<tr>
<th>QA5</th>
<th>Relationships with children</th>
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<td>5.1</td>
<td>Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1.1</td>
<td>Interactions with each child are warm, responsive and build trusting relationships.</td>
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<td>5.1.2</td>
<td>Every child is able to engage with educators in meaningful, open interactions that support the acquisition of skills for life and learning.</td>
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<td>5.1.3</td>
<td>Each child is supported to feel secure, confident and included.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Each child is supported to work with, learn from and help others through collaborative learning opportunities.</td>
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<td>5.2.2</td>
<td>Each child is supported to manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2.3</td>
<td>The dignity and rights of every child are maintained at all times.</td>
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Quality Areas related to Physical environment and relationships with children
Preparing children for change

Types of change

There are many types of change and changing situations that children may experience in their lives. Change is a necessary part of growth and development, both physically and emotionally. Some people thrive on change whereas others find change frightening, stressful and prefer to avoid it. Children are the same, with some managing and coping well with change while others will experience a high level of difficulty. Whether we like it or not, change is a part of life that we need to learn to manage. Likewise, children need to learn to cope emotionally with change.

Strategies to help children manage change

In order to help children manage change, we, as educators, need to be sensitive to the needs of the children and implement strategies which will allow children to feel some type of control over the change so it can become a positive experience, rather than always negative. We need to bear in mind that sometimes changes are unpleasant, very difficult to deal with and are unable to be reversed.

Routines and change

Consistent and predictable routines are important when preparing children for change. A stable and consistent base provides a sense of comfort, predictability and security and makes it easier for children to move into new or unfamiliar situations. When a child moves into the 3-5s room for the first time, it is much easier to cope if he/she knows the general progress of the day. The same can be said for learners attending adult study as often one is unsure what to expect, but if given a timetable or agenda to follow, life is easier. Predictability makes it easier to cope.

Managing transitions

Moving from one experience to another through the daily routine of an Education and Care service can also cause children stress and anxiety. Children may fear that someone else will take their toy if they go in to wash their hands. Children can also worry that they won’t be able to continue or finish the experience they are involved in. The transition from one experience to another can also trigger a resurgence of separation anxiety if the child is still having difficulty settling into care.

It is vital that we give children warning about transitions and allow them to finish off their experience or provide a way it can be left and returned to later. Don’t leave children waiting and unoccupied during transition times. Individual or small group rather than whole group transitions work most effectively.

Letting children know of changes in the room and providing opportunities for them to complete tasks helps children to develop feelings of competence, value, achievement and control.
Scenario

Luke, five years old and Scott, five and a half years old, have been in the block area for the last hour building skyscrapers.

Together they have constructed two large buildings connected by a suspended walkway and four other smaller buildings. They are talking and planning how to build more towers and a helipad for the helicopter to land on.

Rosie comes over and explains to them that it will soon be time for lunch and she would like them to finish the bit they are working on now and then go and wash their hands.

When Luke complains that the city is not finished, Rosie tells him that there is no need to pack the blocks away - they can stay there for the boys to return to later. She helps the boys to move the cupboard out a bit so the blocks are protected from being knocked over.

Can you identify the strategies that Rosie used?

In the scenario you just read, Rosie achieved this in the following ways:

- Rosie gave the children warning that it would soon be lunchtime.
- She did not insist that the activity be packed away.
- She proposed a solution that would allow the children to return to the activity later.
- Rosie’s responses demonstrated respect for the children’s work and acknowledged their need to continue to develop their play.
Managing major changes and crises in children's lives

Most adults will agree that children will encounter times of change and that there will need to be some adjustment to meet the change. However, few actually recognise that children may go through a range of feelings and emotions that are intense and difficult to manage. Adults often feel, and many will openly state, that children are adaptable and cope with change better than adults. This is not necessarily so. Sure there are some children who do manage change well and cope easily just as there are adults who do, but there are also large numbers of children who find change stressful, scary and hard to manage (just like some adults).

Adults have the added benefit, that when they are experiencing difficulty coping with change, they have the language skills and the emotional knowledge to put their feelings and concerns into words, to let others know how they are feeling and the amount of help needed. This is not the case for children. Children need help to recognise their feelings, strategies to help them manage change successfully and the words and messages to be able to use to let others know about the situation.

The most effective way, as educators, we can help and support children to manage change successfully, is to acknowledge that change is difficult for children. Also acknowledge that children have feelings and their fears and anxieties associated with change are real and should be addressed.

Practical ideas for preparing children for change

Some of the simpler ways to prepare children, are to read stories about changes in life, use picture discussions and talk about events happening with the families in the service. As with all emotional needs, it is vital that educators and families accept children’s feelings about change, whether they are positive or negative. Change can be exciting (like getting a new car for an adult or toy for a child), but it can also be scary (like moving house)!

Remember that children view things a little differently.

As adults we need to take time to explain all aspects of change that may affect the child carefully. Of course, there will be times when children may not need every single piece of information during major changes. All major changes need to be discussed with families in advance so that all stakeholders are aware of the most appropriate information to give the child.

*Reading stories can be a good way to prepare children for changes to their lives*

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Helping children recognise and accept major changes

How can we help children to recognise and accept change? It's not easy, but one of the most effective ways is to help children predict when major changes will occur in their lives and plan for these changes throughout the year. Children in the 3-5s room or a preschool are told throughout the year, and especially into the last three months of the year, that next year they will be going to big school. Parents do the same.

Educators need to talk to children about changes that occur in their lives and implement strategies to help children manage these.

Individual responses to change

Children are unique and not all will respond the same way to change just as not all adults embrace change happily. Educators need to ensure that at all times children's individual needs and responses are addressed.

There is no right or wrong way for children to act during times of change. Working with children, I have been continually surprised by their reactions over time. A responsive educator will tailor responses to the situation and the child. It is important that educators monitor the child’s emotional status in times of major change and match care strategies to the child’s individual needs.

Understanding the emotional needs of children

Emotional development is an area which is vital to how a child perceives themselves and formulates an approach to life and the relationships throughout it. Emotional development is the area relating to how we feel about ourselves in relation to others and the world, and how we manage and cope with stress, pressure, change and circumstances beyond our immediate control. Healthy emotional development is dependent on resolving issues in a positive manner, when we feel in control and secure about ourselves and where we are going. It allows us to initiate and maintain relationships with those around us, in both personal and social settings.

Stages in emotional development

Emotional development and wellbeing centre on feelings and our responses to them. The actions and responses of others can influence how children feel and respond. As children move through recognisable stages or milestones, it is the experiences they take part in, their interactions with others and their own unique, individual personalities that shape their emotions and their view of themselves.

Educators who are knowledgeable of and sensitive to these stages and milestones can positively affect the emotional wellbeing of children. Positive, supportive responses and relationships in early childhood can make a lifelong contribution to how children develop as adults and in turn form relationships and function in society. Children who have negative emotional experiences can experience difficulty adjusting to new situations, as well as managing change and initiating and maintaining relationships.

Two behaviours or stages that are frequently observed in young children are refuelling and anchoring.

Refuelling is when the child is playing, often in a new or unfamiliar environment, but regularly returns to the parent or carer to gain reassurance and a sense of security. The child ‘fills’ up on security which enables him/her to move back into the new or unfamiliar environment (One World for Children, 2009).

Anchoring behaviour occurs when the child is gradually becoming more secure and confident and less anxious, but is unable to completely let go of the attachment figure for long periods so they check back for reassurance. The child will happily be playing away from the carer but will regularly...
look at (or for) the educator or carer for reassurance that he/she is still there (One World for Children, 2009).

Theoretical perspectives

A number of theorists, including Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow, have found emotional development an absorbing and compelling area of research.

Maslow did not develop a stage-based theory but a hierarchy of needs that individuals must meet in order to reach self-fulfillment.

These needs revolve around basic or bodily needs, security, belonging, esteem and self-actualisation. Humans develop emotionally by meeting these needs or having them met. It is essential that lower level needs be met before we can strive for self-fulfillment. Development is hindered by poor response or lack of response from others. More information about Maslow can be found here: [http://www.education.com/reference/article/work-Abraham-Maslow/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/work-Abraham-Maslow/)

Erik Erikson developed a stage-based theory centred on the needs that occur at particular times of life. With each stage and need comes a ‘crisis’ that the child needs to resolve in order to develop a positive sense of wellbeing and move on to the next stage. The stages correspond to particular age groups and help explain common behaviours of children at different ages and stages. Even if a crisis is not resolved positively during the associated stage, the crisis may continue to surface until a positive resolution is reached. Thus, issues from early childhood may re-emerge in middle and later childhood years. As educators it is vital that we are aware of the particular stages/crises children move through and provide opportunities and support for children to resolve each ‘crisis’ in a positive way. More information about Erikson can be found here: [http://www.education.com/reference/article/erikson-erik-1902-1994/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/erikson-erik-1902-1994/)

Development of self concept and self esteem

A child’s emotional wellbeing can be influenced by how they perceive themselves, including physical characteristics, skills, abilities, and their sense of worth and value. These are part of a child’s self-concept and self-esteem. Children with positive self-esteem and a clear self-concept are more likely to be positive in their outlook to life and the world around them, able to attempt new skills and tasks and accept both success and failure. A child with positive self-esteem will continue to learn a new skill even when faced with limited success and may adapt the attempts to take on board newly discovered information gained during previous attempts. This development of self-esteem also reflects Erikson’s stage of industry.

You can foster positive self-concept and self-esteem through respectful interactions with children

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Empathy

In our society, empathy is considered a valued and worthwhile emotional characteristic. Children develop this characteristic at a relatively early age, about 12 or 18 months. Think about the small child who, on seeing another person hurt and/or crying, will offer their dummy. The child knows that when he or she is feeling hurt the dummy helps them to feel better.

You can learn more about the stages in development of empathy below.

Stages in the development of empathy (Bee, 2000)

1. Global empathy - children match their emotions to those around them. If another infant cries they cry. Usually up to 12 months of age.

2. Egocentric empathy - children respond to the distress of others by displaying similar distress and they may attempt to comfort the other by offering a toy, cuddle. Usually 12 to 18 months of age.

3. Empathy for another's feelings - children notice the feelings of others, match these feelings and respond to the distress of others. The responses of children in this stage are less egocentric. Usually around the ages 2-3 years through to 12 years.

4. Empathy for another's life condition - children notice and respond to feelings and distress but may feel particularly sad or distressed if they know the situation is grave or tragic. This usually occurs in adolescence.

Developing autonomy in toddlers

To develop autonomy, educators need to provide children with opportunities to practice and develop skills associated with independence. Children have the desire to be independent and to do things for themselves, especially around the age of two and the ‘me do it’ stage, but often lack the physical, social and language skills required to make it happen in a competent and capable manner.

One of the difficulties that educators and parents face is that the best intentions of children do not always have the best or most appropriate outcomes. As educators, we need to acknowledge that children’s efforts and desires to complete tasks for themselves are valid and necessary for them to become competent, as well as emotionally well adjusted.

Providing recognition for attempts and successes at independence and offering support, encouragement and appropriate aid for all attempts, will allow children to become more autonomous. We need to recognise that in order to gain skills we must first try them and then practice them, until we master them. Expectations of children’s abilities need to be realistic and allow for success as well as failure. It is important that educators portray the message that it’s okay not to get it right first time. Children should never be made to feel incompetent if or when they don’t experience success.

Encouraging and supporting a child when they try a new task is important to make it a positive experience.
Developing initiative in preschoolers

In this stage based around children aged 3 to 5 years of age, the crisis that needs to be resolved is for the child to develop a healthy sense of initiative and conscience without the educator being excessively strict or the child feeling guilt ridden. This crisis is generally explored and resolved through play experiences. Play allows children to find out about themselves, explore who they are and try out new skills and roles in an environment of low risk and limited criticism.

Developing initiative in pre-schoolers

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Play is a safe environment for children to practice decision-making and take on control, direction and responsibility of the play experience and their peers.

Children in this age group need to be supported in trying new things and attempting more complex and challenging tasks or social situations. Children need to develop the ability to take control of situations and make decisions without being made to feel guilty.

When educators support and help children to try new things, make choices (agency) and initiate actions independently, this provides children with feelings of success and competence. If educators are critical of children’s choices and decisions, the children will become more worried about their ability to do things and often will stop trying. Their sense of agency will diminish.

Identifying emotional characteristics of children

In order to know where children are in terms of emotional and social development, you need to develop sound theoretical knowledge, to observe and monitor children, to consult with families and to know the children as unique individuals.

The information and knowledge you have as an educator allows you to respond in the most appropriate manner to each child.

As with all decisions about children’s development, it is unwise to base a judgment on one or two brief observations. If we are to draw valid and accurate conclusions about a child’s emotional development, we need to gather a range of details and facts. Children’s emotions can be directly influenced by other situations which may be transient.

Characteristics of emotional wellbeing in children

There are a number of common emotional milestones or characteristics that children display at different ages.

The information below will inform you about the common emotional milestones or characteristics that children display at different ages.

Two to three years of age

- Initial development of self-concept and self-esteem
- Can distinguish own intentional from unintentional acts
- Instrumental aggression - aggressive attempt to gain possessions but without intention to harm; the intent is purely to gain the item
- Displaying simple understanding of causes and consequences of behaviour
- Displaying understanding of behavioural signs of basic emotions - knows when and why a person is happy, for example
- Increased empathy for others
- Displaying gender stereotyped beliefs - difficulties with kilts (‘boys don’t wear skirts’)
- Increased gender stereotyped behaviour - girls play with dolls

Three to four years of age

- Developing a few preferred friendships
While still using familiar adults as a secure base for play and exploration, children can be more accepting of the absence of primary caregivers if they feel secure in the environment.

- Beginning to develop greater understanding of other people’s feelings by interpreting facial expressions and tone of voice.
- Able to verbally express what they are interpreting, i.e. “The girl is sad, she’s crying”
- Beginning to regulate emotions to a degree, where the child is less likely to engage in instrumental aggression due to frustration such as hurting others or property.
- The reduction of frustration can be facilitated by children beginning to express their own emotions verbally and what the emotion is based on, i.e. “I like it when we sing. I feel happy”
- Stereotyped gender ideas are likely to continue.
- Can be eager to please adults and engage in behaviour they believe adults will approve.

Five to six years of age

- Developing a stronger awareness of what they believe is right and wrong.
- Displaying “reasoning” and engaging in questions and answers about situations where they may be feeling frustrated, sad.
- Children are developing an increased awareness of their own characteristics and skills and can gain heightened self-esteem from demonstrating these skills.
- The ability to express own emotions verbally increases. Children may begin to use more complex sentences to express their feelings, such as “I want to go on a swing but I’m scared”.
- Able to distinguish reality and fantasy more clearly and may use imaginative play and resources to act out situations to explore their emotions.
- Stereotyped gender ideas can become more flexible, i.e. not only girls wear pink.
- The desire to be liked and accepted by peers grows.
- Play is a safe environment for children to practice decision making and take on control, direction and responsibility of the play experience and their peers.
- Children in this age group need to be supported in trying new things and attempting more complex and challenging tasks or social situations. Children need to develop the ability to take control of situations and make decisions without being made to feel guilty.
- When educators support and help children to try new things, make choices (agency) and initiate actions independently, this provides children with feelings of success and competence. If educators are critical of children’s choices and decisions, the children will become more worried about their ability to do this and often will stop trying. Their sense of agency will diminish.

Understanding attachment

Many people consider that attachment is a consideration for infants only, but it is also important to the emotional wellbeing of those older than two. The relationships formed in the first few years of life are not only important but also strong. Children and people of all ages form attachments and...
relationships with others and we often rely on these attachments in times of stress or need. Infants who are securely attached to their parents and educators grow into children who are secure and able to face changing and unfamiliar situations (Colmer, Murphy & Rutherford, 2011). Older children may still “refuel” (use attachment figures as a secure base from which to explore but still return to the parent or caregiver periodically to gain reassurance and a sense of security when exploring a new or unfamiliar environment.)

When children have secure attachments they are able to develop further relationships. For children, this includes developing friendships. Children who were secure as infants display more positive responses to unfamiliar peers and people than those with insecure attachments.

Emotional security is important to the development of many skills in life, including forming and maintaining friendships and relationships. Educators need to ensure that they provide opportunities and time to establish and maintain secure and positive attachments with children but also for children to establish and develop friendships with their peers.

Separation anxiety

Separation anxiety and stress is not restricted to infants and younger children. Children of all ages can feel anxious in unfamiliar situations or when faced with new and unfamiliar people. In fact, many adults can experience the same feelings in these circumstances! On some occasions, a child may experience feelings of distress when separating from families due to other influences rather than an unfamiliar situation or person. These influences can be family changes, the child feeling unwell or a response to another stress in the child’s life.

Often children who are experiencing emotional distress or are upset will be more reluctant than usual to separate from their parents on arrival at the centre. Monitoring children for signs of separation anxiety at arrival time will give educators an indication of the children’s emotional wellbeing. Educators should also respond to the child’s distress at separation from the family in a calm and reassuring manner.

When children display signs of separation anxiety, it is an indicator that they are feeling uncomfortable with the situation or even powerless. As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure that the children in our care are given opportunities and guidance in establishing a sense of control in their lives and associated happenings. Even older children will experience anxious feelings at times and need adult support to cope.

One way of helping children to feel secure is to provide them with a consistent and stable environment.

It is also important that educators begin interactions with the child while the family is still present in order to minimise abruptness of the separation. In this way, we are encouraging the family to take as much time as needed to have a relaxed, unhurried separation from their child.

Children who display persistent and severe anxiety at separation, despite all attempts to minimise this, may need additional support and it is wise to discuss it with the child’s parents and encourage them to seek additional help for the child.

Identify and respond to children's feelings openly, appropriately and with respect

Responding to children’s emotional needs can mean many things to different people. For those who work with children, it will inevitably involve being there for children, offering comfort in times of hurt and distress, anticipating and responding to children’s needs (both physical and emotional) and providing children with the skills necessary to function as caring and sensitive members of society.

We particularly need to encourage children aged 2 to 6 years to identify their own feelings, express them appropriately and develop coping strategies to deal with change and stress in their lives.
Developing supportive relationships enables children to explore, develop and practice skills in a secure and trusting environment. Supportive relationships provide the basis for children to discover who they are emotionally, feel confident and secure about who they are and explore and cope with new and challenging situations throughout their lives.

### Developing supportive relationships

Humans are social beings; our world revolves around interactions with others on daily, personal, community, national and global levels.

Relationships are important to adults and we spend much time in establishing and maintaining these in our lives. Relationships are also important to children. There are many relationships throughout their lives from family, friends, community, education and care, school and sporting and social groups. Some of the relationships we form in childhood are life-long. There are many adults who formed friendships in preschool or school which are still important to them and still active many years later.

Admittedly, new friendships and relationships may be formed, but lost relationships and broken friendships hurt children just as much as adults. A supportive educator will recognise this and provide opportunities to build new relationships, maintain current relationships and cope with changes to relationships and friendships.

Think about your own close personal friends. How long have you known them? Did you start school or preschool with them? Do you maintain friendships with people from your earlier life? Have you stayed close to, or in contact with, people from previous years or places you have lived? If you have maintained these relationships then they are important to you and it shows that the friendships and relationships formed early in life as children are important and valid and should be taken seriously by adults. So when circumstances in a child’s life change it is important to consider these friendships and provide opportunities for these to be maintained and not dismissed as ‘they’ll get over it and make new friends’.

Think Time

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Monitor and respond to emotional distress

Monitoring children’s emotional status

Routine times are ideal to observe children and get a quick snapshot of their emotional status. A child who is crying at arrival is indicating that all is not well. A generally happy child who becomes upset or uncooperative during routine times is indicating a need for support.

Responding to children’s emotional status

Educators are responsible for monitoring and recording all manner of developmental information. Emotional status is one of these. It’s important that, if a child is experiencing a sad day and easily prone to being upset or tears, all educators working with that child are aware.

Educators can gather information on the child’s emotional status by observation, discussion with parents, discussion with other staff and discussion with the child. A standard greeting many educators and indeed people use is, ‘How are you today?’ To which most reply, ‘good’. When educators ask how children are or how they are feeling the educator needs to listen, show attention to what the child is saying and respond appropriately.

It is important to keep simple records on children’s emotional status so an overall picture of their emotional wellbeing can be gained.

When educators are aware of the feelings of the child, they are able to meet the child’s needs more successfully. If the educator knows the child is feeling sad today, they can provide more opportunities to talk, offer comfort and allow for the child to have quiet private time. Interactions need to not only meet the needs of the child but also be sensitive and caring.

Implementing culturally sensitive strategies

As educators we need to be aware of the needs of all children in our care and offer opportunities to all children. We need to respect the practices and beliefs of children and families in the service and ensure that our interactions reflect this. All strategies that educators use should ensure that children are made to feel valued and worthwhile and enhance their self-esteem. There is no magic experience or activity or special equipment to place into our centre environments that allows us to ‘capture’ cultural diversity. It is not one thing but a collection of ways.

Educators need to be aware that it is easy to stereotype families and make judgments about their cultural practices and that this knowledge influences the interactions with children and families. The only way we can find out about the particular cultural practices of a family is to talk to the family and learn more about who they are and what they value.

Culture is a broad concept but often educators only consider it in relation to ethnic background. Culture is the way families operate as well as their everyday practices and beliefs. There are cultural differences within ethnic groups and differences between urban families and rural families. As an educator you need to ensure that you gather information about the family practices, beliefs and values from all families in your care and that you use these to guide your care practices.

Use communication to express feelings and emotions

It is important to ensure that positive communication skills are used.

Educators are responsible for ensuring that children develop positive communication skills to enable them to function effectively and express their needs, interests and feelings. As with many things, one of the most effective ways of showing children positive communication skills is to model them. Educators should always use positive language.
Positive communication means ensuring that all interactions and situations where we pass on information, feelings and comments to children and others, including verbal and non-verbal communication, is phrased in a positive manner. Even though it can be difficult, educators need to remove negative language, sayings and non-verbal gestures from their interactions with children, families and other educators.

Praise and encouragement given to children needs to be sincere and realistically reflect what has happened - it is inappropriate to just say ‘well done’ or ‘good boy/girl’. Educators need to ensure that children know what they did and why it is valued. Creative with kids website lists 64 things you can say to children to help them feel esteemed and valued. Observe the positivity in the wording that would combine with the child’s name to enable them to feel loved and a sense of belonging.

http://creativewithkids.com/64-encouraging-things-to-say-to-kids/

Expressing emotions through play

Educators need to not only identify and respond to children’s emotional needs but also develop strategies for meeting these needs that involve play and play with other children.

A wide variety of open-ended play experiences should be available to children and educators need to be involved in the play. The involvement of the educator should enhance and facilitate the play, NOT take it over.

Where children have emotional needs, play can often provide a forum for working through or resolving issues and feelings. Play therapy is used by child psychologists to identify areas of concern and provide a way for children to manage and resolve their needs and feelings.

Educators should observe children at play and be aware of the play themes. Where play becomes violent or hurtful, it is important that the educator redirects the play and supports the feelings of all the children. Encouraging children to put their feelings into words and identifying the behaviour as unwanted, rather than the child, allows for the child to take some control over what’s happening and aids the development of a positive self-esteem.

If a child who continually hits others due to frustration, anger or feelings of helplessness, is labelled as ‘naughty’ or ‘bad’, the child will soon learn to believe this. If the child is clearly told by other children that they don’t like being hit and it hurts and to please stop, the child learns that it is the behaviour (hitting) that is unwanted, not him/her.

A program, which is responsive to children’s emotional wellbeing, will be rich in play experiences that provide opportunities for children to explore their feelings, relationships and place in the world.

Signs of stress

Signs of stress and distress

When children are experiencing stress or distress, there is no neon sign that lights up above their head but there are a number of cues they give to indicate their distress. For infants, signs and cues of distress can be crying, screaming, pushing away and becoming withdrawn.

Older children may also display these cues but often the signs of stress will appear to be something else. Many children who are stressed often present as having social problems. They may be aggressive or attention seeking or unresponsive, withdrawn and lacking peer relationships.

Monitoring children for signs of stress
As with all indicators of concerns in children, stress and associated signs and behaviours need to be observed and monitored. Educators routinely keep developmental observations and summaries on children in the service so there is already a written way for recording behaviours.

Educators need to know the children in their care and notice when changes in behaviour occur. These changes should be discussed with the family and with the other room staff so possible causes can be explored.

Sometimes stress and associated behaviours are short term and can be easily managed whereas long term concerns need to not only be addressed and strategies developed to manage the stress but also monitored on a regular basis.

Oppositional behaviour and tantrums

Toddlers, and to a lesser extent pre-schoolers, may sometimes engage in oppositional behaviour (i.e. behaviour that is oppositional to the behaviour of others).

Oppositional behaviour:

- Is an expression of autonomy and independence
- Ranges from direct (physical active, aggressive, saying no) to indirect (persistent whinging, ignoring) and passive (withdrawn and non-responsive)
- Can be contradictory with no clear goal
- May be self-assertive, which involves fulfilling own goals
- May be defiant, which is behaviour aimed at resisting the adult

Tantrums are an extreme type of emotional outburst that signals loss of control or inability to negotiate. Tantrums involve the direct and extreme release of tension and can be viewed as the child's emotional inability to deal with the situation. The child is so overwhelmed by their emotions that they are unable to process them. Tantrums are usually followed by a peaceful wake.

When dealing with tantrums:

- Do not punish the child
- Make sure that you, the child and others do not get hurt
- Accept the child’s feelings but not their actions
- Keep the child comfortable (e.g. cool damp cloth gently stroked over forehead)
- Encourage the child to calm themselves
- Stay with the child

Managing emotional outbursts

Children may have emotional outbursts for a number of reasons. Sometimes seemingly trivial events may trigger crying, acting out and aggression, while at other times these disruptive behaviours may be related to particularly traumatic events or experiences. Children who are experiencing ongoing stress may have mood swings, combining excessive withdrawal with highly disruptive acting out or aggressive behaviours.

A gentle touch can provide more comfort than words.

Include some experiences appropriate for emotional needs development such as playdough to support anger; water play or finger painting which is calming and bubbles for soothing for example.