Pre-Service Educators Handbook:

Early Learning Services

be you

Beyond Blue

With delivery partners

Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

headspace

Funded by

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Welcome

Educators are all about helping children and young people to flourish. **So are we.**

If you're currently studying early childhood at a vocational institution or university, this Handbook is for you. As you move through your career and work closely with children, you'll be in a great position to help drive positive change and promote mental health.

How to use this Handbook

This Handbook is designed to launch you on your Be You journey. You'll get an overview of Be You, the benefits to you as a pre-service educator, and information on how you can get involved. At the end of the Handbook you'll find tips on how to integrate Be You into your experiences on practical placement. This is when you'll see first-hand how learning communities can work together to help children and young people achieve their best possible mental health.

If you're studying education and intend to work in primary or secondary schools, take a look at the Pre-Service Educators Handbook: Primary and Secondary Schools. And if you've finished your studies, we also have handbooks specifically for educators in both early learning and primary and secondary schools.

What is Be You ?

Be You is a national initiative for educators, including pre-service educators like you, aimed at promoting and protecting positive mental health in children and young people. Our vision is for an education system in which every learning community is positive, inclusive and resilient, and where every child, young person, staff member and family can achieve their best possible mental health.

Be You empowers educators by supporting them to develop their mental health skills and knowledge, while also providing guidance on how to implement a whole learning community approach. It offers a range of online, evidence-based tools and resources aimed at improving the skills and knowledge of educators to foster and support mental health and wellbeing in children and young people. It's completely free, and available to every educator and pre-service educator, early learning service, and school in Australia.

To learn more about the background to Be You, visit beyou.edu.au/about/about-be-you.

At the heart of Be You is a content framework that provides a structure for both Professional Learning, and the actions schools and services can take to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing.

There are five domains in the framework, and each domain contains two or three modules. These modules delve deeper into the domain topics, helping educators and whole learning communities to increase their understanding of mental health and wellbeing and enact meaningful change in the ways they support and nurture children and young people.

The Be You framework is non-linear and allows educators and services to start at the point that suits them best. Usually this depends on the educator's level of experience and their learning community's unique circumstances.

Family Partnerships

Partner with families through purposeful and positive relationships

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Assist families to support and promote mental health and wellbeing

Learning Resilience

Affirm the importance of social and emotional learning and resilience

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Embed evidence-based social and emotional learning strategies

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Empower children and young people to look after their mental health and wellbeing

Mentally Healthy Communities

Understand mental health and wellbeing in learning communities

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Connect through strong relationships

• • •

Include by embracing diversity within the community

Early Support

Notice the early signs of mental health issues

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Inquire sensitively about the child or young person's circumstances

• • •

Provide support within and beyond the early childhood service or school

Responding Together

Recognise the potential impact of critical incidents

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Respond collaboratively to critical incidents

Why should I get involved?

Enhance and reinforce your current studies

Taking the opportunity to reinforce what you're learning means you'll be even better prepared for future roles.

Be You is designed to enhance what you're already learning in your course, and to give you meaningful knowledge and practical advice on how educators can support the mental health and wellbeing of children.

With Be You, there's no such thing as one size fits all.

Be You offers a suite of Professional Learning aimed at building your skills and knowledge around mental health and wellbeing for children, young people and families.

One of the biggest advantages of Be You is that your Professional Learning journey can be fully customised. You set the pace. You decide where to start and which domains and modules are most relevant to you and your needs. The flexible structure allows you to dip in and out according to your interests and schedule. Each learning module includes reflective questions to enrich and extend what you're learning in your course.

Shared understanding

It helps when we're all on the same page.

By providing a single, integrated initiative across early learning services and primary and secondary schools, we're helping to create a shared understanding among educators of mental health and about how to build mentally healthy learning communities. Here, you have a common language to use when speaking with colleagues about mental health and the best strategies to improve wellbeing.

Transferable across settings and locations

Be You goes with you, wherever your career may take you.

Be You is a national initiative spanning early learning services and schools. So what you learn in each module is transferrable across settings and locations. This consistent approach better supports children and young people as they move from early learning to primary school, and on to secondary school. It can also help you professionally, if you decide to transition into other areas of education — the knowledge and skills you learn can go with you. Be You Professional Learning is a valuable element to add to your resume.

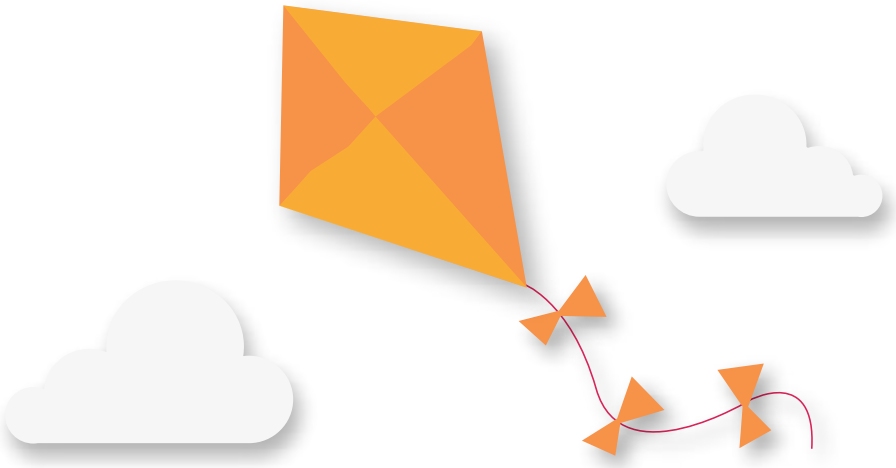
What are the ways I can get involved?

You can start your Be You journey any time as an **individual** with the Professional Learning modules, enhancing your knowledge and understanding of how to promote mental health and support children and young people. If you're looking for ideas on where to start with Professional Learning, see some suggested pathways below.

Change starts with individuals, but it doesn't end there.

Be You is for individual educators, but it's also for whole learning communities. Lots of things influence mental health and wellbeing, and often they're interrelated. So the most effective approaches to mental health promotion are those that involve everyone in the community — staff, children and young people, and families. When an entire service decides to work on mental health and wellbeing collectively we call this a **whole learning community approach**. The implementation of a whole learning community approach is driven by an Action Team, who are supported by Be You Consultants from **headspace** and Early Childhood Australia.

You may hear about whole learning community approaches or Action Teams if you do a professional placement at a Be You service.



Where do I begin?

Signing up online

Signing up with Be You is quick, easy — and free! We just need some basic information about who you are and where you're studying. Go to beyou.edu.au/register to get started.

Once you've signed up, your Dashboard gives you full access to the Professional Learning modules, and allows you to track your progress.

Getting started with Professional Learning

Every educator is different. So is every Professional Learning experience.

There's no right or wrong place to start with Be You Professional Learning. Read through the module overviews at beyou.edu.au/learn and see which resonate.

Remember, this is your learning journey; you can start with whatever modules are most meaningful and relevant for you. **If you're still not sure where to start, or you need more inspiration, take a look over the page at some possible pathways through the Professional Learning you could consider.**

Pathways through the Professional Learning

Situation	Suggested modules
I would like to build a strong understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and feel confident to share this with communities during my career. *Perhaps you'd like to know how educators can raise concerns about a child with their family, and work collaboratively to get the best possible outcome for everyone.*	**Understand** will support you to better understand mental health and wellbeing in children and young people across a range of developmental stages. **Connect** will develop your skills in building strong relationships with children, families, the community and your peers. **Include** will help you to embrace the diversity of the children and their families you will encounter in your early learning career.
I want to develop my skills in identifying children who may be experiencing mental health issues, as early as possible. *Maybe you've observed a child who seems to be withdrawn and reluctant to join in activities. Or during placement, you've noticed a child who's displaying aggressive behaviour and you'd like to know more about how educators can address situations like this.*	**Notice** will help you to identify early signs of mental health issues. **Inquire** will enhance your learning on how educators inquire about children and family circumstances in a sensitive way. **Provide** will give advice on how learning communities support children, and the role of external services in responding to risk, harm or critical incidents.
I want to know how communities are supported after a critical incident. *Perhaps there has been a recent critical incident — for example, the death of a child, young person or current or former staff member, an accident or serious injury, or a natural disaster.*	**Recognise** will help you to recognise what critical incidents are and their impact on the whole learning community, including children, families and educators. **Respond** will help you to understand how educators can respond to critical incidents, and how they work together to create mentally healthy communities.
I would like a better understanding of how to work together with families to support positive mental health. *Working with families is a central part of any early learning role. But perhaps you'd like to know more about how to encourage conversations and activity around mental health, and create stronger collaborative partnerships.*	**Partner** will build your confidence in working and communicating with families more purposefully, respectfully and collaboratively. **Assist** will show you how educators can assist families to foster mental health and wellbeing, and to access timely help when required. **Connect** will develop your skills in building strong relationships with children, families, the community and your peers.
I'd like to explore what I can do to build the resilience of children, and to help them deal with situations that arise that affect their learning. *Maybe you'd like a deeper understanding of resilience, or are curious about the evidence base for strategies that empower children and young people to better manage situations that affect their wellbeing and learning.*	**Affirm** will help you to understand key concepts related to resilience including respectful relationships, and social and emotional learning. **Embed** will show you how to use evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies. **Empower** will give you strategies to enable children to exercise resilience and awareness in their everyday learning and activities.

Using Be You tools and resources

Professional Learning is central to Be You, but there's a lot more to explore — tools, resources and events that you can use to put what you've learnt into practice.

Always Be You

Bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and ways of doing to Be You.

Important mental health and wellbeing messages should be accessible to everyone. Always Be You includes resources that can assist schools and services to begin an ongoing process of embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing and doing.

These resources are for everyone in every context in Australia, and can assist all schools and services to reflect on how culture is acknowledged, considered and celebrated in their learning community, and how and when we all learn.

Fact Sheets

Learn more about topics that are especially important to learning communities.

Be You Fact Sheets provide information about a range of topics and issues connected to the Professional Learning. Think of them as quick reference resources, with factual information about a particular issue. Many people come to Be You with a particular question or issue in mind, and the Fact Sheets are a great starting point to get answers.

Programs Directory

See how programs can enhance what learning communities are doing with Be You.

The directory provides a searchable database of external mental health programs available across Australia. You can feel confident that every one of them has been thoroughly reviewed and evaluated to determine its relevance to education settings. This allows educators to make informed decisions about the inclusion of any program within a curriculum.

Organising Speakers Guide

Inviting speakers to share personal stories can be a great way to give children and young people 'real-life' insights into mental health.

Hearing about the challenges a speaker experienced and their pathway to recovery can increase awareness and reduce stigma. It also encourages people to talk about how they're feeling and to seek help.

The Organising Speakers Guide provides a detailed run-down on what educators need to consider when engaging an external speaker, including how to ensure a safe and meaningful environment for everyone involved.

Wellbeing Tools for You

Taking care of yourself helps you take care of others.

Paying attention to your own mental health ensures you're better able to support children and young people. Wellbeing Tools for You outlines a range of online tools and resources designed to support educators' mental health and that of other members of your learning community.

You'll also find a range of helpful information on self-care in the Your Wellbeing Fact Sheets.

Wellbeing Tools for Students

As 'digital natives', children and young people will often look online for help with the problems they're facing, and educators play a vital role in directing them to the best resources.

There are lots of great mental health and wellbeing tools available. The trick is to find the best tool for the job. Wellbeing Tools for Students is your essential guide to the online tools and other resources that will best support children and young people in taking care of their own mental health.

Be You while on placement

Being in a service brings valuable new perspectives and opportunities to learn from experienced educators.

At some stage, you may be placed at a registered Be You service. You might hear from their Action Team, and observe some of the ways they go about implementing Be You. This is a fantastic opportunity to be involved in Be You at a whole-service level, and to see the difference it can make within a learning community.

If your placement service hasn't signed up to Be You, don't worry; you can still see first-hand the many ways that learning communities work together to help children achieve their best possible mental health. All services are working towards nurturing and supporting their children and families in a myriad of ways.

Completing Be You Professional Learning before your placement will help you get the most out of your experience. Not only will the leadership team and other educators appreciate the effort you've made, but you'll also be better able to identify effective approaches to mental health promotion within your placement service, equipping you with proven strategies to use throughout your career.

As a pre-service educator, you're not expected to implement these strategies immediately — and certainly not when you're on placement. But having an early awareness of these topics can only benefit you and the children and families you'll work with during your career.

Here are some questions you might want to think about while on placement:

- What is the service doing to support the mental health and wellbeing of their children and families?
- How do staff support each other and work together to address mental health issues?
- What is the service doing to create an inclusive learning community, and to build collaborative relationships with families?
- If a critical incident occurs, what processes and plans are in place to help children, staff and families?
- What processes have you identified for supporting a child once potential mental health concerns have been identified?
- What level of engagement do you notice between families and staff?
- What visible displays or other tangible demonstrations of mental health promotion can you identify?

When you're on placement, the Wellbeing Tools for You and the Fact Sheets on Your Wellbeing will be fantastic resources. It's always important to take care of your own wellbeing, especially when dealing with the challenges that placements can present. The guide gives you practical advice on how to look after yourself so that you are able to make the most of your placement.

Time to get started

Be You is for educators, but its impact goes far beyond the individual.

By getting involved you're making a powerful commitment to supporting and enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people throughout your career.

- **Ready to get started?** Sign up online now.
- **Still have questions?** No problem. Get in touch with us at beyou.edu.au/contact

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