Respect for Children

Self-Guided Learning Package

About Self-Guided Learning Packages

Self-Guided Learning Packages can be completed in your own time and convenience and offer an alternative to attending training sessions. This package aims to develop skills and knowledge that will be valuable to you in providing quality education and care programs. Packages are often used for professional development by staff teams, networks and other groups of children's services professionals. You can work through the package with colleagues by reading the package together, discussing the information and collaborating to complete the one assessment task.

Gowrie Victoria Leadership and Learning Consultants are available to support you while working through the package. Feel free to phone or email if you require any assistance completing the tasks within the package. Phone 1800 103 670 (freecall) or (03) 9347 6388 or email psc@gowrievictoria.org.au

Respect for Children

You have chosen to complete the 'Respect for Children' package. The aim of this package is to develop an understanding of the importance of fostering children's self-esteem. The learner will be able to describe and implement a range of positive strategies to enhance children's self-esteem within a Children's Service. The package is also designed to develop an awareness of diversity and assist the learner in creating a responsive and inclusive environment that reflects the individual needs, abilities and background of each child.

Introduction

As children get older, they begin to develop a sense of their own abilities, skills and characteristics. When a child feels good about who they are, they are more likely to be confident and cope with frustrations. As children advance through their childhood, particularly middle childhood, children frequently compare themselves to others and are constantly given feedback about their skills and abilities by teachers, educators, peers and other family members. This feedback has a significant impact on how children feel about themselves (self-esteem) and therefore contributes to the 'picture' they have of themselves (self-concept)

Self Help Question 1

Who am I? List ten to fifteen words that you feel describe yourself. This is your 'picture' of yourself.

What is self-esteem and self-concept?

What is self- esteem and self-concept?

Self-Concept
- The 'picture' we have of ourselves
- Evolves from a combination of feedback from others and our own self evaluation
- Affects our behaviour, attitudes and how we interpret situations
- Influences other areas of development

The Ideal Self
- A set of beliefs about how we 'should be'
- These beliefs are learnt through social comparison and judgements made by significant people in our lives

Self-Esteem
- How we 'feel' about ourselves`
- The value we place on various aspects of our self
- Our judgement about whether our abilities and characteristics meet the 'ideal self'
- Develops when you regularly experience success, acceptance and receive positive feedback from others

'Self-concept is a descriptive set of ideas each person forms about him or herself,' (Kostelnik et al, 1998, p. 101). This concept of self begins during infancy and gradually evolves throughout childhood and adulthood. Young babies do not have a concept of self as they are unable to differentiate themselves from the primary caregiver(s). As the infant moves though childhood, they begin to see themselves as being distinct from others. In these early years, the child tends to focus primarily on differences in physical attributes such as skin colour, hair colour, height and weight. However as they move through middle childhood (primary school years), they begin to include other aspects such as personality traits and activities, eventually leading to a self-concept that is predominantly focused around internal characteristics.

'Self-esteem is the evaluative component of the self and includes perceptions related to competence and control,' (Kostelnik et al, 1998, p. 101). Children who judge these aspects in a positive way feel good about themselves and usually have high self-esteem. As with self-concept, self-esteem evolves throughout childhood and tends to remain constant during the individual's life. The interactions children have with others play a vital role in the judgements they make about their self worth. Therefore, educators caring for and working with children need to consistently foster feelings of confidence and self worth to develop the children's self-esteem.

It is also important to remember that an individual's self-esteem is not simply a constant 'high' or 'low'. Depending on the circumstances, an individual may experience temporary feelings of one or the other. Educators working with children need to be aware of the many experiences and issues that may be impacting on the way a child feels. If a child is experiencing a temporary low in their self-esteem, it is important for educators to find positive ways of acknowledging the child's feelings and providing the support they need. A healthy self-esteem and self-concept is also based on a mixture of both positive and negative self evaluations. However, individuals with a good sense of self are aware of their limitations and accept these together with their strengths.

Self Help Question 2

Describe an incident in your life that enhanced your self-esteem.
How did it enhance your self-esteem?

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Children develop a healthy self-esteem when they have a realistic view of themselves and their abilities. This enables them to approach tasks with confidence, show initiative, interact positively, tolerate frustration and control their behaviour. Consequently, it is important for adults to use positive communication and behaviour management strategies that make children feel good about themselves. This enhances children's self-esteem as they feel valued and respected.

Characteristic behaviours of children with healthy self-esteem
When children have a healthy self-esteem they:
- Make transitions easily
- Approach new and challenging tasks with confidence
- Set goals independently
- Have a strong sense of self control
- Assert themselves easily
- Trust their own ideas
- Initiate activities with ease
- Show pride in their work and accomplishments
- Cope with setbacks and criticism
- Tolerate frustration and mistakes
- Describe themselves positively
- Make friends easily
- Lead others spontaneously
- Accept the opinions of others
- Cooperate and follow rules   (Porter, 2003)

Self Help Question 3

Describe a situation when you have observed a child displaying one or more of the characteristics listed above. How did you support or encourage the child in this situation?
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Promoting self-esteem

- Greet and address children by name
- Acknowledge and reinforce children's efforts and successes
- Acknowledge and support the individual needs, abilities and contributions of each child
- Demonstrate respectful communication and interactions with children
- Listen attentively and show genuine interest in children's conversation
- Respond to children's ideas and suggestions
- Give children opportunities to make decisions
- Provide opportunities and experiences that enable children to be responsible and take on leadership roles
- Acknowledge children's feelings
- Be sensitive and responsive to diversity
- Provide opportunities and experiences that enable children to experience success
- Encourage independence and the development of self help skills – allow children to attempt tasks themselves
- Encourage persistence and concentration
- Support children when they make mistakes and experience setbacks
- Encourage children to have realistic goals and expectations of themselves
- Foster children's friendships
- Assist children who are having difficulty joining in play
- Offer authentic feedback
- Encourage children to accept themselves
- Avoid comparison and competition
- Provide experiences that encourage cooperation, negotiation and the development of conflict resolution skills
- Encourage safe risk taking
- Reinforce positive behaviour

When educators actively support and encourage children to feel confident and empowered, their self-esteem is naturally enhanced. A healthy self-esteem enables children to feel a sense of belonging within the service as they are able to maintain friendships and be a positive member of the social group.

Self Help Question 4

Describe a situation when you have encouraged a child's self-esteem

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Responding to individual needs, abilities and backgrounds

Children attending children's services come from many varied and diverse backgrounds. This diversity forms the basis of children's identity and actively contributes to how children feel about themselves .Viewing children as active participants and decision makers opens up possibilities for educators to move beyond pre-conceived expectations about what children can do and learn. This requires educators to respect and work with children's unique qualities, abilities and interests. When children are given choices and control they experience connections between actions and consequences. It is crucial to plan intentionally for individual children (FSAC, 2010, p. 7). When the individual background and abilities of each child are valued and reflected in the service children develop a positive sense of self identity and self worth. Educators need to ensure that the service is inclusive of all children and actively discourages discrimination and bias. When children are consistently excluded, they receive messages that they are less valued and not welcome in the service. This makes it difficult for children to establish their own identity and feel good about themselves. When educators consistently model equity in their interactions, children also have the opportunity to learn appropriate and respectful ways of interacting with others. Learning is an active process that must involve children's engagement with shared sustained conversations featuring in adult engagement

Self Help Question 5

How do the educators in your service gather information about children's needs, interests, abilities and background? Provide four examples.

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What is diversity?

Diversity encompasses the different aspects and contexts that make each individual unique. These aspects include ethnicity, gender, family structure, language, religion, ability, socio-economic status, age, lifestyle, values and traditions. Australian society is made up of people from many diverse backgrounds and this is reflected in all areas of children's services. 'Children's connectedness and different ways of belonging with people, country and communities helps them to learn ways of being which reflect the values, traditions and practices of their families and communities. As children move into early childhood settings and then schools, they broaden their experiences, relationships and communities' (VEYLDF, 2009, p. 20).

Cultural diversity

Australia is a diverse country with people from many ethnic and racial backgrounds. Culture encompasses the values, beliefs, practices and interactions used by an individual within varied social contexts. These understandings and patterns of behaviour are developed through socialisation and determine how an individual responds to others. Every individual has a cultural identity that has

been socially transmitted through their relationships with others. Cultural misunderstandings can occur when there are differences between the cultural norms and expectations of the groups' people function within. Educators working in children' services need to respect the cultural diversity of each child and family through inclusive interactions and programming to maximise opportunities for every child. This enables the child to feel good about their own identity and develop a positive self-concept.

Gender
Gender plays a significant role in the lives of children. Children as young as two and three years of age begin to recognise differences in gender and by the age of four children know their gender and the expected roles and behaviours related to being a 'boy' or 'girl'. As children move into primary school, they realise that gender is constant and they begin to imitate adults and peers of the same gender .They also seek out gender typed clothing, games and behaviours and can be very negative towards the opposite sex. As with other aspects of diversity, gender identity and role development are highly influenced by families and significant others, as they provide models of behaviour and promote particular attitudes and values. Educators working with children need to observe the significance of gender in children's choice of friends, activities, language, interactions, group dynamics and behaviour. These observations can lead to valuable insight into children's understandings about gender.

Dau suggests the following principles as a basis to challenge sexism and promote anti-bias behaviour.
- 'Be prepared to challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours
- Ensure that you protect the child or adult who has been treated unfairly
- Explain what you think is unfair about their attitudes and behaviours and if appropriate, model anti-sexist attitudes and behaviours
- Correct any incorrect and sexist assumptions a child has about gender
- Plan a strategy for how to deal with a similar situation in the future,' (Dau, 2001, p. 56).

Educators 'become more effective through critical reflection and a strong sense of enquiry' (VEYLDF, 2009, p. 14). For that reason it is essential for educators to identify with the importance of leadership to support reflective practice, individually and collectively. We need to understand perspectives other than our own to contemplate, other views and possibilities and needs to be an ongoing approach, not a once only.
Reflective practice can be done with children and educators alike to provide the best learning and development opportunities for all children.

Self Help Question 6

Describe a situation when you have observed the influence of gender in children's play

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Additional needs

Some children who attend children's services may have additional needs. The specific needs of the child can be related to a genetic condition, physical disability, communication disorder, emotional and behavioural problem or acute health problems that require long-term care or hospitalisation. However, it is important to remember that all children have needs and experience varying stress and challenges in their life. These needs can also lead to both short and long term problems that require additional support. Educators working with children need to be aware of their individual needs and work with families, educators and other professionals to provide consistent and responsive care.

Dau (2001) suggests the following practical strategies to support children with additional needs.
- Become familiar with the child's specific needs, strengths and limitations
- Work with families and other professionals to establish a team approach that provides the best possible opportunities for the child
- Ensure play experiences and materials are accessible to all children
- Encourage children's efforts rather than focusing on outcomes
- Avoid overprotecting children
- Allow all children's agency to explore, play and be challenged
- Do not underestimate the child's abilities
- Allow the child to be independent
- Encourage positive interactions between children
- Encourage peer support and acknowledge the assistance of other children
- Be honest and open when asked questions about disability
- Focus on similarities as well as differences between children
- Be aware of your own attitudes and biases towards children with disabilities
- Encourage all educators to share in the care of a child with additional needs
- Ensure all educators have relevant information about the specific needs of each child

Family structure

Children in Australian society come from many diverse family structures and backgrounds. The traditional nuclear family of a mother, father and children no longer represents the varied family structures that make up our society. Families now include nuclear families, step families, sole parent families, same sex families and extended families. Family diversity is also reflected through socio-economic status, geography, lifestyle, values and attitudes. Educators working with children need to support and reflect the diversity of families using the service. They also need to be sensitive towards issues impacting on children and families and maintain appropriate confidentiality about these issues. Children's services need to create a welcoming environment in which all families are valued and respected. This can be further enhanced by providing materials and equipment that reflect family diversity and by challenging stereotypical attitudes and behaviours.

Self Help Question 7

How does your service support different family structures? Provide three examples.

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The adult role in supporting diversity

Children become aware of differences at an early age and begin to view these differences either positively or negatively. These views are largely determined by the messages children receive from families and other socialising agents such as peers, school and the media. Educators in children's services have a significant role to play in helping children to develop positive attitudes towards diversity and challenge bias. When dealing with diversity, educators tend to use one of the following approaches to guide their work with children.

Common approaches to diversity

Denial

- Difference is not important as 'we are all the same here'
- Discussing differences only creates prejudice
- We should avoid raising negative issues with children

Tokenism/tourist approach

- Showing diversity using narrow, stereotyped images and materials that misrepresent ethnic and minority groups
- 'One off ' experiences, e.g. focusing on a particular country for one experience or day rather than integrating cultural diversity into the daily program
- Disconnecting diversity from daily life
- Ignoring incidents of bias and exclusion

Anti bias/inclusive

- Acknowledges and reflects diversity in all aspects of the service
- Connects cultural experiences to individual children and families
- Explores cultural diversity within the premise that everyone has a culture
- Intervenes when incidents of discrimination and exclusion occur
- Assists children to develop respectful, inclusive interactions with others
- Helps children accept and view differences as being positive and special

Self Help Question 2

How is diversity reflected in your service? Provide three examples.

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Developing an inclusive program

When planning the program, it is important to consider an anti-bias approach in the provision of experiences, environment design, interactions and service procedures. This approach values and reflects diversity in all aspects of the program by encouraging both children and adults 'to feel confident, competent and comfortable in dealing with diversity,' (Dau, 2001, p. 13). Children's services can play a vital role in giving children positive messages about diversity, challenging bias and eliminating discrimination. Educators need to avoid using a 'tokenistic' or 'tourist' approach that represents groups in stereotypical ways or simply offers 'one off' activities or theme days. 'An anti-bias program promotes diversity by constructing an environment that:

- Reflects diversity positively through resources and materials
- Provides activities that encourage children to explore and ask questions about aspects of diversity
- Provides children with opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds
- Challenges all negative attitudes and behaviours
- Encourages children to recognise and challenge bias in themselves and others
- Involves parents, extended family and the wider community,' (Dau, 2001, p. 13).

Educators have an important role to play in promoting equity and making children aware of their potential. When children are hindered by culture, gender or ability they are less likely to seize the opportunities and possibilities that life has to offer. Educators need to develop clear policies and goals that form the basis of inclusive practice. These goals can then be translated into practical strategies that accommodate the individual needs, abilities and background of each child. The following strategies can be used as a starting point for developing an inclusive program.

The following strategies form the basis for an inclusive program and accommodate the individual needs, abilities and background of each child. It is productive to challenge the taken for granted practices and reflect on the experiences from different perspectives from child, family and educators.

- Respecting diversity, values, beliefs and practices of children and families
- Showing sensitivity towards cultural issues that may be impacting on the child or family
- Providing experiences, equipment and materials that reflect the social, cultural and linguistic background of children and families
- Encouraging the input and contributions of families
- Actively seeking and using resources that are up to date and non-stereotypical
- Modifying the program to suit the varying abilities and needs of each child
- Actively supporting the goals of families and other professionals in the care of children with additional needs
- Actively responding to and challenging discrimination
- Encouraging positive and inclusive interactions amongst children
- Modelling respectful and inclusive styles of communication
- Developing a policy statement on diversity and inclusion – including the input of children, families, educators and the wider community.

Self Help Question 9

List any other inclusive practices being implemented by your service

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When educators foster a positive approach to diversity, children develop a strong self-identity and learn to interact effectively with others. As children become older this can also lead to a greater sense of justice, equity and social responsibility. Children will feel empowered to challenge discrimination and stand up for the rights of themselves and others. When diversity is valued, children feel good about themselves and this leads to a positive sense of self.

Conclusion

Children who are encouraged and supported by responsive adults will begin to develop confidence about their skills and abilities. When this is further enhanced through positive feedback from peers, educators and other family members, children develop a healthy sense of who they are. This sense of identity is consistently promoted when educators value the diverse backgrounds of each child and reflect this diversity within the service. Thus, the role of the educator is critical in fostering self-esteem and acknowledging the diversity that makes each child and family unique.

References and Resources

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Assessment Task

Task One

Describe four situations when you encouraged a child's self-esteem in your service, briefly discuss the strategies you used to enhance the child's self-esteem and reflect on how the child responded to your strategy.

Task Two

The aim of this task is to begin a process by planning and developing an appropriate inclusion policy to meet the diverse needs of your service. In meeting *Outcome 2 of the approved frameworks 'Children are connected with and contribute to their world' and the National Quality Standard 1.1.2 'Curriculum decision making is informed by the context, setting and cultural diversity of the families and community*,' reflect on your practices to build and review your policies.

List <u>three</u> broad statements focusing on diversity and inclusion
These statements should include children, families and educators. <u>For each</u> statement, write <u>five</u> strategies describing how these statements will be implemented in your service. Use the following format as a guide.

Task Three

Describe in your own words the key elements of an inclusive program