

Using the Be You Mental Health Continuum



What is the Mental Health Continuum?

The [Mental Health Continuum](#) is a scale that represents how a person's mental health can change. Our mental health can move between zones on this scale, based on our individual differences, lived and living experiences, cultural safety and recognition, socioeconomic factors, stressors, support systems and protective factors.

As an educator, it's not your role to diagnose mental health conditions – this can only be done by an appropriate professional. However, it is within your role to notice changes in a child or young person's emotions and behaviour, know when to be concerned, and provide appropriate support.

When can educators use this resource?

If you have concerns about a child or young person in your care, this resource can assist you in thinking about where they may sit on the Mental Health Continuum. This can help you consider whether they may benefit from additional support. It can also help you observe what 'flourishing' means for each child or young person, and promote positive mental health.

Using this resource

This resource is made up of 3 sections.

1. What to notice

Pages 2 to 4 highlight ways children and young people can express their wellbeing, needs, preferences, and responses to their environment. These may offer insight into where they sit on the Mental Health Continuum. This section can be used with the [BETLS Observation Tool](#) to help you document observations.

2. When to be concerned

This section on page 5 provides questions to guide decision-making about whether you should seek further support for the child or young person. While it's always best to act on the side of caution, the questions can help you reflect on the child or young person's individual strengths and circumstances. This can help you determine whether to raise your concerns with an appropriate colleague, such as a leader or wellbeing team member.

3. What to do

The last section, pages 6 to 7 provides a list of evidence-based actions for educators to support mental health and wellbeing at key points along the continuum. They are split into 3 tiers:

- **Good for all:** Actions to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people.
- **Necessary for some:** Actions focused on **service or school-based supports** for children and young people who may be displaying emerging signs of mental health issues.
- **Essential for a few:** Actions to take if a child or young person requires **professional mental health support** outside the service or school.

Remember, no matter where a child or young person may currently sit on the Mental Health Continuum, they still have the potential to flourish with appropriate support.

1. What to notice



Level of concern	Very low	Low	Moderate	High
Core features	Optimal wellbeing	Overall positive wellbeing with a few isolated experiences of distress	Occasional and time-limited periods of distress with mild impact on wellbeing	Poor mental health and wellbeing causing distress and significantly impacting on daily experiences
Support focus	Maintain	Enhance	Monitor and provide support	Collaborate with professional mental health support

What it can look like				
Behaviours, Emotions, Thoughts	- Regularly expresses more positive than negative emotions. - Demonstrates ways of expressing and responding to difficult emotions. - Shows strategies for responding to stress and challenges. - Displays well-developed emotional regulation (including drawing on self-regulation tools suited to their needs and situation). - Understands and uses personal strengths, including special interests. - Displays healthy lifestyle habits that promote wellness and educational achievements.	- Demonstrates a range of emotional expressions, which may be communicated in different ways and supported by the environment, across different situations and contexts. - Manages the normal stressors of the learning environment (possibly with the support of accepted self-regulation tools such as fidgets, headphones, stims and safe spaces).	- Shows changes in emotional expression in response to different situations or experiences. - More frequent or intense expression of emotions such as anger, worry or sadness, which may reflect their individual communication style or experiences. - May express emotions in less visible, less familiar or less socially acceptable ways.	- Frequently displays externalising (irritable, low impulse control, anger) or internalising (avoidance, worry, sadness) behaviours. - Displays low energy or tiredness. - Frequently critical of self and others. - Shows a loss of interest in previously enjoyed topics or activities. - Constantly seeking reassurance outside what is deemed typical for that child or young person. - Regularly speaks of physical symptoms (for example, headaches, nausea). - Excessive or limited appetite; significant change in weight. - Displays regression in behaviour or skills previously demonstrated. - Difficulty communicating their thoughts and emotions in ways that are readily understood by adults and/or their peers.



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What it can look like

Learning	- Interested, curious and absorbed in learning (when tasks accommodate their neurodevelopmental preferences). - Pursues and achieves learning goals with determination - Displays a growth mindset when faced with learning challenges. - Displays a sense of optimism about future learning. - Is engaged in social and emotional learning as appropriate for developmental level.	- Participates in learning experiences. - Makes progress within expected parameters. - Realises own abilities.	- Displays some reluctance to try tasks or completes them at a lower level than their ability. - Is often distracted, off-task or disengaged. - Learning progress is slower than expected.	- Educational progress has slowed or declined. - Avoids completing tasks, or completes them at a much lower standard than expected. - Has regular absences. - Avoids participating in new learning experiences or group work. - Has significant change in learning outcomes compared with their usual level. - Displays difficulty in paying attention to instructions or tasks.
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What it can look like				
Social relationships	• Maintains positive and supportive peer relationships (in their preferred ways). • Manages conflict effectively. • Continues developing awareness of and skills for connecting with others. • Makes valued contributions to others. • Displays a strong sense of belonging, identity and connection to culture. • Has established relationships with significant adults that are meaningful, with caring and responsive interactions that support them.	• Has one or more friendships and is satisfied with the number and quality of their connections. • Interacts respectfully with peers, based on their individual social and emotional development. • Shows consideration and empathy for others, in line with their individual social and emotional development. • Interacts in meaningful relationships with significant adults that are caring and responsive.	• Has some difficulties getting along with peers (for example, isolates self at times, or refuses to share or take turns). • Finds it challenging at times when engaging in interactions (for example, separating from family, entering into peer group, or transitioning between experiences or places).	• Displays regular difficulties in getting along with peers or joining in. • Is withdrawn from others or socially isolated. • Displays bullying behaviour or is bullied by others.

Use the [BETLS Observation Tool](#) to assist you in gathering information about a child or young person.

Note: Infants, toddlers and preschoolers can be in a period of rapid development. Their mental health needs to be understood within a developmental framework and in the context of key relationships.

Refer to the early learning stream of the [Be You Professional Learning](#) for a more comprehensive understanding of early childhood mental health.

2. When to be concerned



Children and young people can move between the zones of the Mental Health Continuum as a natural part of development and life experiences.

A child or young person may have a mental health condition or neurodevelopmental differences and still experience positive mental health and wellbeing, just as someone without a formal diagnosis may experience periods of distress and require support.

As the continuum suggests, there is no clear point that identifies mental health issues. It can be hard to know when to be concerned.

The behaviours listed in the 'What to notice' section are intended to provide some guidance. It's also important to consider the individual child or young person's developmental stage, social and emotional skills, cultural background, life experiences, communication skills, neurodevelopmental profiles and any other factors that may be influencing their behaviour.

The questions on this page and in the BETLS Observation Tool can be helpful when thinking about your observations and level of concern. They can also be useful in considering your next steps.

While it's always best to act on the side of caution, reflecting on these questions can help you determine whether to raise your concerns with an appropriate colleague, such as a leader or wellbeing team member.

*If you answer 'yes' to question 10, regardless of your answers to the other questions, you should immediately report your concern to a leader or wellbeing staff member.

The more you answer 'yes,' the greater the level of concern		Yes	No
1. Development	Is this outside of what is expected at this child or young person's stage of development?		
2. Personal change	Is this a noticeable change from their usual way of behaving?		
3. Developmental milestones	Does this behaviour differ to other children or young people of the same developmental stage?		
4. Duration	Has this behaviour been occurring more frequently over time?		
5. Context	Are you aware of any significant events or challenging circumstances the child or young person is facing? Do you have an understanding of their cultural context?		
6. Distress	Does the child or young person seem bothered, concerned or upset by what is occurring?		
7. Frequency	Is this occurring more days than not?		
8. Pervasiveness	Is this occurring across multiple settings and situations?		
9. Impact	Is this having an impact on their relationships, behaviour or learning?		
10. Risk	Are you concerned about their safety or the safety of others?*		

3. What to do

Be You supports educators to play their role within a whole learning community approach, promoting mental health at each point of the Mental Health Continuum.

Engage with Be You Professional Learning, resources and tools to learn more about how to support children and young people, wherever they are on the continuum.

Suggested support	Be You resources
Tier 1 – Good for all  Flourishing Going OK Struggling Severely impacting everyday activities • Provide mental health awareness and education activities. • Foster a stable and positive learning environment and create a sense of belonging through strong relationships, embracing diversity and inclusive practice. • Foster resilience through explicit teaching of social and emotional skills: self-awareness, emotional regulation, social awareness, interoception, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. • Foster an environment that offers opportunities for the child or young person to engage in the world around them, that suits their interests, needs and development. • Promote partnerships with families. • Safe and effective management of critical incidents.	Mentally Healthy Communities domain Cultural responsiveness, Disability inclusion Social and emotional learning Fact Sheets Building confidence in children Fact Sheet Family Partnerships domain Responding Together domain
Tier 2 – Necessary for some  Struggling Severely impacting everyday activities • Maintain routine and continue monitoring changes in learning, behaviour and relationships. • Consider who may have a trusting relationship with the family to have sensitive conversations with family members or caregivers about relevant circumstances or adversity at home and school or early learning service. • Establish level of concern, and if indicated, follow procedure for raising concerns with staff responsible for wellbeing (and involve family and child or young person as age appropriate). • Prioritise safety in the learning setting. • Further invest in relationships between educators and children or young people, and facilitate positive peer connections. • Provide opportunities for cultural expression and engagement in your learning setting • Increase educational supports. • Implement internal wellbeing support.	BETLS Observation Tool, Mental Health Continuum Early Support domain, Mental health support Fact Sheets Connect module Cultural responsiveness

Suggested support

Be You resources

Tier 3 – Essential for a few



- Help facilitate the child or young person’s access to external support.
- Prioritise collaborating with families and caregivers for decision-making.
- Promote collaboration with health professionals.
- Develop an Education Support Plan.
- Implement learning environment strategies to enhance engagement in education.
- Ensure immediate safety of the child or young person and others.

[Early Support domain](#)

[Recommending additional support Fact Sheet](#)

[My Return to School Support Plan](#)

[Embed](#) and [Empower](#) modules