

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

## Guide to social competence

Resources for Queensland  
early childhood education  
and care services



# Guide to social competence

This document has been designed to support early childhood education and care services to understand the AEDC domain ‘Social competence’ to inform curriculum programming, planning and quality improvement.

Social competence refers to a child’s ability to get along with and relate to others. For young children, social skills include learning to be a friend, to negotiate personal needs and deal with difficulties, to be assertive without being aggressive and to relate effectively with adults and peers (Linke, 2011).

Being socially competent involves many elements, including the ability to regulate emotions, developing knowledge and experience of social interactions and understanding social situations and customs (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

The AEDC reveals four specific areas of social competence which support children’s development, learning and engagement as they start school:



## Protective factors

Families and early childhood educators can help increase protective factors and reduce risk factors in a child’s life.

Examples of protective factors for building social competence include having nurturing, supportive and secure relationships with adults and having the opportunity to develop effective personal skills, such as problem-solving, social skills and recognising and managing feelings effectively (Hunter Institute of Mental Health, 2014, p.17).

## Developing children’s social competence

Families and educators play an important role in helping children learn about regulating their feelings and behaviour.

Friendships are a particularly important part of children’s social development because they build curiosity, self-confidence, self-control and cooperation. As young children interact with others, they learn important social skills as different situations call for different behaviours. As young children play with others, they increase their ability to sustain relationships by building cooperative skills.

Active and ongoing play with others requires children to use language to engage in meaningful conversation, and use conflict-resolution skills to compromise and attempt to solve problems in socially acceptable ways. Through such experiences, and with appropriate support from adults, children can discover that cooperating and collaborating is often more fun, more creative and gives a better result, and their sense of belonging to a group is strengthened (KMEC, 2012a, p. 17).

An example of this is when families and educators support a new child in a daily routine such as lunch, remind them to wait to take a turn in an activity, organise materials so that young children can play side by side, or give children opportunities to work cooperatively on projects with other children (KMEC, 2012a, p.7).

Experiences of success can build children's social confidence, engagement and curiosity. Children who are confident can be motivated to engage in more experiences and learn new skills (KMEC, 2012b; KMEC, 2012c).

Educators can also support children's natural curiosity by being responsive, encouraging and supporting children to be independent and promoting self-help skills. Ways to do this include helping children to know the names of feelings and being able to identify their feelings by name; supporting children to work through problems, encouraging a greater sense of agency, confidence and self-esteem; involving children in making simple decisions to give them practise before making bigger decisions; and promoting a sense of responsibility for small tasks.

Strategies which educators can apply to support children's social competence include:

- gradually reducing their level of support in tasks over time to help children to learn independently
- talking children through activities, using questions and praising their efforts to help children become engaged in their learning and routines
- encouraging children to to enjoy learning
- asking groups of children to volunteer for a particular job
- having conversations with children about how to act at certain times, places and settings
- encouraging children to talk with others about what they are doing to promote their learning and development
- using nonverbal directions, eye contact and appropriate gestures as cues for a child that may need help to regulate their feelings and behaviour
- modelling self-regulation behaviours for children
- providing repeated experiences so that children can see how their actions affect their world and the people in it, and see themselves as capable, competent and having control.

Children of different ages have different abilities. So while many of the characteristics or attributes of social wellbeing and learning follow a developmental pathway, it is important to acknowledge age appropriateness of strategies in developing children's social skills.

Early childhood educators can support children from culturally diverse backgrounds or with a disability (either diagnosed or undiagnosed) by valuing diversity, collaboration and partnerships, and supporting the active participation and engagement of all children throughout the day. Inclusive practices can support all children to have meaningful and positive relationships and friendships with peers and other adults (ECA & ECIA, 2011, p. 5).



## Tracey's story

Silky Oaks Child Care Centre found that their community was showing vulnerability in the social competence domain in the AEDC. The service began to focus on the three to five age groups to help children to support their social development. Tracey organised excursions to the school so children were familiar with the environment and prepared for entering a larger environment.

'In Prep they move from the Prep classroom to a music classroom, they go to a P.E. teacher, an e-learning teacher and a library teacher. So that requires quite a lot of social confidence to move from one adult to another. It also requires quite a lot of emotional maturity to feel confident and have a sense of belonging in all those different environments', says Tracey.

Older children from the school have been involved in reading to children at Silky Oaks and teachers from the school have also visited the Centre.

## Reflection

- What do the AEDC results reveal about children's social competence in your community?
- How does your service implement inclusive practices? What are some things that you could do to support children's different approaches to learning?
- How does your service teach children to care for and respect their belongings?
- How can your service build children's understanding of social rules and expectations in different settings?
- How might experiences at your service help children to feel a sense of belonging?
- How does your service provide opportunities for children to work cooperatively? This might include working in small groups where each child has a specific responsibility.
- How does your service support children to work through conflict in a constructive way together? This might include acknowledging children for helping others.
- How do educators provide safe and interesting spaces where children are free to explore and see the effects of their actions in your setting?
- How can you support children learn that they don't get things right all the time and that is part of learning and growing?

## Partnerships with families and communities

Collaborative partnerships have a positive impact on supporting children's social development (KMEC, 2012d, p. 3). When information is shared, families and educators are able to gain a deeper understanding of:

- how to work together to support children's social development
- children's behaviour at home and at the early childhood service
- the most effective ways to support children's learning
- how to build on children's strengths
- resources for addressing children's difficulties.

Early childhood services can also form partnerships and help families to access community services. Some of the services families and staff can access for support include:

- maternal and child health nurses
- therapists
- counsellors
- psychologists
- child and adolescent mental health services
- playgroups
- schools
- family support groups.

## Reflection

- How might you work in partnership with families and community organisations to encourage children's social competence?
- How could you support families to share information about their children's social competence with the local school to enhance children's transition to school?
- How can your service be inclusive of all families to support children's social development.

## Resources for staff and families

**KidsMatter Early Childhood**, *Information sheet index*, available at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood/resources-support-childrens-mental-health/information-sheet-index-0](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood/resources-support-childrens-mental-health/information-sheet-index-0). Information for families and early childhood educators.

**Raising Children's Network**—[www.raisingchildren.net.au/play\\_\\_learning/toddlers\\_play\\_learning.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/play__learning/toddlers_play_learning.html), [www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/attending.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/attending.html), [www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/praise\\_and\\_encouragement.html](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au/articles/praise_and_encouragement.html)

**The Australian Psychological Society**, *Tip sheets*, available at [www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip\\_sheets](http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/tip_sheets). Information on a range of topics related to children's mental health.

**The Centre for Community Child Health**, *Childcare and Children's Health*, available at [www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources\\_and\\_publications/Childcare\\_childrens\\_health\\_archives](http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources_and_publications/Childcare_childrens_health_archives). A range of resources for parents and early childhood educators.

**The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne**, *Responsive caregiving for infants*, available at [www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/econnections/CCH\\_P\\_Sept2007\\_English.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/econnections/CCH_P_Sept2007_English.pdf). An information sheet for parents on the importance of simultaneous emotional support and facilitation of learning and development.

**The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne**, *The social baby*, available at [www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/econnections/SocialBaby\\_May04\\_English.pdf](http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/econnections/SocialBaby_May04_English.pdf). An information sheet for parents on infant communication and relationships.

**Kidscount**—developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation, this website for parents and carers provides useful information about supporting children's development. It is available in a range of languages at [www.kidscount.com.au](http://www.kidscount.com.au)

**The National Association for the Education of Young Children** (NAEYC), *Developing young children's self-regulation through everyday experiences*, available at [www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201107/Self-Regulation\\_Florez\\_OnlineJuly2011.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201107/Self-Regulation_Florez_OnlineJuly2011.pdf). A resource for educators detailing everyday opportunities for developing self-regulation in young children.

**The National Association for the Education of Young Children** (NAEYC), *Self-regulation: A cornerstone of early childhood development*, available at [www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200607/Gillespie709BTJ.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200607/Gillespie709BTJ.pdf). A paper on the importance of self-regulation as well as tips and strategies for developing self-regulation in young children.

**Hunter Institute for Mental Health**, *Connections*, available at [education.gov.au/news/connections-resource-early-childhood-educators-about-children-s-wellbeing-0](http://education.gov.au/news/connections-resource-early-childhood-educators-about-children-s-wellbeing-0). A resource for early childhood educators to support young children's wellbeing.

## References

- Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA). (2011). *Early Childhood Australia and Early Childhood Intervention Australia—Position statement on the inclusion of children with a disability in early childhood education and care*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.
- Hunter Institute of Mental Health. (2014). *Connections: A resource for early childhood educators about children's wellbeing*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Department of Education.
- Katz, L.G., & McClellan, D.E. (1997). *Fostering children's social competence*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC). (2012a). *Component 2: Developing children's social and emotional skills*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.
- KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC). (2012b). *Building partnerships between families and early childhood staff*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.
- KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC). (2012c). *Confident children are eager learners*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia.
- Linke, P. (2011). Social and emotional learning as a basis for curriculum. *Every Child*, 17(1), 14–1



To access further AEDC resources please visit [www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood](http://www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood).

To access the AEDC data please visit [www.aedc.gov.au](http://www.aedc.gov.au).

