



# Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

## Are you ready? Maintaining a mentally healthy Community when change is all around

**Presented by Amelia Joyce, Katy Brennan, Maria Heenan and Maria Curtis on 27 November 2019**

**Amelia Joyce:** Hi everyone, and welcome to today's Be You In Focus webinar called *Are you ready? Maintaining a mentally healthy community when change is all around*. My name is Amelia Joyce and I work for Early Childhood Australia, as do the other panellists that are joining us today: Maria Heenan, Katy Brennan and Maria Curtis.

Be You is a national mental health initiative led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, who we all work for, and headspace. The initiative itself is funded by the Australian Government. We aim, through Be You to transform Australia's approach to supporting children and young people's mental health in their early learning services and their schools. Our vision is that every learning community is positive, inclusive and resilient and is a place where every child, young person, educator and family can actually achieve their best possible mental health. By joining us today, you'll be joining a Be You collaborative learning community.

We're connecting with people who are also working to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Being part of this community means that whole early learning services or schools can actually access Be You Consultants who can assist you in undertaking your learning, that's based on the Be You professional learning framework, and also the actions that bring about the changes to promote and prevent mental health and wellbeing. The first question that we will ask today is whether or not you know if your service or school is registered and if you are participating in Be You either as an individual or as a school. If you're not, that's fine; you're more than welcome to come along.

But if you are interested, please let us know at different points – either in the chat or in the final exit survey that you will do at the end of the session – that you would like to be in contact with us. So before we go much further, I would like to hand over to our next panellist Katy Brennan who will lead us in an Acknowledgement of Country. Hi Katy.

**Katy Brennan:** Hi, Amelia. Thanks very much everyone, and thanks for joining us today. I'd first like to acknowledge the traditional custodians from the land on which we are all gathered on today and not only to pay my respects to elder's past, present and future, but also those who continue to hold the memories, traditions and ways of being for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We really do recognize the importance of the continued connection to culture, country and community and to the health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. I join you today from the land of the Larrakia people in Darwin in the Northern Territory and acknowledge and pay my respects to them as the traditional owners of the land on which I work, live and play. Throughout today's webinar, we really do invite you to consider how these ways can support children's wellbeing and are actually informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

**Amelia Joyce:** Thanks Katy. Today is actually quite a special event because we've almost got the entire of Australia represented. Actually, I think we might have almost every base covered. I'm on Kaurna land myself, Maria, where are you?

**Maria Curtis:** I'm in Melbourne, on the Wurundjeri land of the Kulin Nation.

**Amelia Joyce:** We've got Penny who's in our chat who's way down south on the lands in Tasmania – Penny it would be great if you, and Di who we have up North, could both put the name of the lands that you are on and share that with the team as well. Maria, you're about to talk to us about self-care, but coming from what land today?

**Maria Heenan:** I'm on Whadjuk land in Western Australia and I'd like to pay my respects to the elder's past, present and emerging with the Whadjuk people. As Amelia said, we're all here today to consider, learn and reflect on the impact of change or critical incidents on the children and families in our care. So while we do this, it's really important that we look after ourselves. A sense of safety, connection and security are crucial for us to experience ongoing mental health. While we talk about periods of change or critical incidents, difficult feelings can arise for any of us.

It might come from our own experiences or from events that we've heard about through the media. We will have helplines posted in the chat throughout this webinar, so please use them if you feel like you need to talk to someone or if you'd like to access some support. Children learn from adults all around them so being aware of how we look after ourselves and support each other can make a huge difference to each of us, to the wellbeing of our team and also to the children in our care, so please remember to look after yourselves as we talk about mental health today. So just before we go on, Maria is going to provide some more information about this online space. Thanks, Maria.

**Maria Curtis:** For those of you unfamiliar with the webinar platform, this is what your screen will typically look like with the webinar viewer on the left and the control panel on the right throughout the webinar. You can ask questions using the webinar function and we'll have some technical support available. You'll see that in the chat. The control panel with the question box is highlighted in blue. The responses in green are public responses and the ones in red are private responses. You can also use your control panel to manage your phone or computer audio. During the webinar, everyone's going to be placed in listen-only mode and your microphones have been muted as we have a large number of attendees. If you're experiencing any other difficulties at any time, please note the customer care details on the screen and in the chat and contact the team directly. Throughout today we're encouraging you to get involved – get as involved as much as you feel comfortable. It's a safe place and everyone's contributions matter. You can ask questions via the questions box. We hope to respond to as many of your queries as possible during today's session.

For those that we don't get to we will follow up with after the event concludes. I would just like to acknowledge the team in the background: Steph, Dino, Penny, and Di. There will be links going in the chat to resources and references that we use in the content throughout the webinar. These will also be available in the handout that you can download at any time along with some reflective questions that you might like to consider within your learning community.

These will also be available post webinar. We also invite you to participate in the polls we will be launching throughout the session. Everyone attending this event will be able to access a certificate of participation and a recording of the webinar. We are also making the attendee list public now for you.

**Amelia Joyce:** Okay, so let's cover what we're being putting in focus today through this webinar. The title almost says it all: Are you ready? We are really going to be promoting some strategies, ideas and some things to think about in terms of how we can be prepared for sudden change in our early learning communities or our schools.

This is around what we can do intentionally through interactions with families, children and each other but also the documentation formalising things in terms of processes and planning. We'll be covering four main big questions. The first one is around *Are you ready?* followed by *How will you how actually manage the impact of change?* We all know any change has an impact- whether it's a sudden change, an unexpected one or a positive change.

They all have a different impact and there are different consequences. Sometimes there are known consequences, but sometimes there are unintended ones as well. Then we'll also look at how we can actually sustain a mentally healthy community when change occurs because mentally healthy communities are not just about always being happy, healthy and fantastic all the time. It's actually about managing those ups and downs, but Maria will talk about that shortly. Finally we'll be looking at what strategies that we can use to sustain a mentally healthy community after a serious event. For anyone who wants some more information after this webinar, we recently run an online conference and the recordings are available.

The virtual conference is called *Trauma informed and thriving*. The foundational premises around that were five core principles about what we could do to be trauma informed in our ways of working and our ways of being. They are really centred around promoting places with safety, showing that there's trustworthiness within communities, offering choice around what we access and how we access it, and what we do in the learning and community spaces we have. It also focuses around collaboration in terms of being and working together.

Finally that leads onto a sense of empowerment with people being able to make those choices and feeling comfortable and confident in enacting those ways. Being trauma informed is a predictive factor for mentally healthy communities and we can do things in everyday practices, processes and philosophies to support that.

We will intentionally be remembering to reflect on own wellbeing and ensure that we're taking measures to promote our self-care, but also the care for others in our spaces during this webinar. We will be constantly checking in with you to make sure that you are all okay and you have plans for any tricky or difficult feelings or thoughts that may occur. I've got a couple of questions now for our panellists. The first question is to Katy. Katy, what would you describe a mentally healthy community as?

**Katy Brennan:** Thanks, Amelia. Great wrap up of what we're going to cover today. A mentally healthy community is one that really models positive behaviours and practices and promotes mental health in all aspects including policy, planning and decision making. A mentally healthy community I see is also one that promotes inclusion, healthy relationships and resilience, is including families and really encouraging that strong connection across our community as well.

When we're part of a mentally healthy community we are actually empowering children to feel safe, to really express their emotions and be involved in decisions that influence and affect themselves as well. We know that children in a mentally healthy community actually learn confidently and learn to support their peers, and they ask for support when they need it. By promoting the importance of self-care across all community members we are actually supporting those with possible mental health issues or needing any further support to talk openly and to really seek that support.

We do know that a positive approach to mental health can occur in an everyday setting in a mentally healthy community. We are supporting a proactive approach to what we call promotion, prevention and early intervention. I know Maria spoke a little bit about what a mentally healthy community might look like and Amelia touched on this before, but how do we know how a community is going to need more support?

**Maria Heenan:** Thanks Katy. There are going to be times when it's obvious that our community needs support such as following a critical incident. We can define a critical incident as an event outside the normal range of experience – something that is sudden, unexpected, or makes us lose control and involves the perception of a threat to life or can include elements of physical or emotional loss.

When something like that happens, the need for support is apparent and we can start to follow those plans or take actions to support our community in the way that we have planned. Sometimes the needs support can be more subtle. The way people respond to change or to critical incidents isn't always predictable and our response to an event either as a community or as individuals is influenced by our past experiences and our knowledge and understanding of the event as well as the risk and protective factors that we've experienced. We will talk about that a bit more shortly. For example, there might be an unanticipated reaction from a community to media stories about an event and that might come from that community's previous experience of something similar and the same can be true of individual.

You don't always know what people's experiences are going to be and you don't know how they're going to react to different things that are happening in the community. We need to be really in tune with our community and we need to be observant and sensitive to those changes. We need to be curious and ask what's happening for people and discuss what we are seeing. The greater our connection with the children and families at the service, the more likely we are to notice these changes. That puts us in a better position to respond appropriately when we do notice that something's changed for someone. We might just take a moment to consider what we mean when we talk about change. So Maria Curtis, do you want to take that one?

**Maria Curtis:** Thanks Maria. We want to look at change within the context of your learning community. Change can be defined as an act or process through which something becomes different. Life is full of changes for children and adults – big and small, significant and insignificant – and they happen continuously throughout our life. Sometimes we don't even notice change, but at other times it can impact us hugely. Change is different for everyone and in every context. Changes can be small; they can be transitions for young child from one room to another or from service to school, it can be sudden and unexpected staff changes or planned staff changes. It could be new or changing management, unexpected events, accidents and then we move on to natural disasters and even terrorist incidents that we are seeing in the community from time to time.

The impact of all these different changes will differ from situation to situation and person to person. It depends on the past experiences and the experiences learned throughout life. Changes can be traumatic for everyone in the community either directly or indirectly, but for some, small events might impact hugely on one learning community whereas a larger event may not have a great impact. It depends very much on the context.

For young children, traumatic changes can change the way they understand the world around them as they've got much more limited experience about the change and they don't have that experience to fall back on. Katy, would you like to talk about how change can cause stress and why?

**Katy Brennan:** To think about how change causes stress, we really need to understand the impact of change and the fact that, like you mentioned, it really is different from person to person and the challenges and the stress that change represents is actually really going to be different for all of us. Like you acknowledged Maria, change looks different for everybody. It can be small changes such as a small change in a service to a really large change and sometimes these stresses might seem quite insignificant but really does come with large challenges for the children in our care as well.

That does cause a greater sense of worry and stress so it's important that we understand what that looks like for the children in our community and how we can maintain that mentally healthy community. We need to understand change and accept that change actually requires emotional organisation. One really good thing about change is that we are stopping and starting and we're given that opportunity to really consider how we can approach this.

This reminds me of an author Pam Linke, who wrote a book called *Everyday Learning About Change*. In this book she said “*children learn best in a positive, caring relationship and the effort you put into helping support and teach children during change will be of immense value to them throughout their life.*” This

really does sum up the significance that change plays in the life of every child. I know Maria you talked before about the presence of protective factors and how these can actually influence change and the stress around change. Would you like to talk to us a bit more about that that one now?

**Maria Heenan:** Obviously when we're talking about children going through change, helping them to develop the skills to understand and deal with change at that early age, will assist them to face new experiences and respond to the events in their life as they grow and encounter lots of different events and challenges. Each of those smaller changes that Maria Curtis is talking about is an experience that they can build on and learn from, so they're all opportunities for us to develop some of those protective factors. Protective factors are influences that reduce the likelihood of poor mental health either on their own or when risk factors are present.

They are strengths or assets that help children maintain positive mental health and wellbeing and to be really resilient. By providing as many protective factors in a child's life as possible and reducing those risk factors present we can help them to cope with those changes. These protective factors can include things like good social and emotional skills, well developed language and communication, warm and supportive parenting and secure, trusting relationships with significant people in their life.

A safe and supportive community is a key protective factor for families and communities managing change. When we are working with children it is often behaviours that are the first indication that children might be experiencing some difficulties. In the instances where we're not sure what's been happening at home or where we're not sure of the impact of an event, children let us know what they're experiencing and feeling through their behaviour. Educators are of course in a great position to notice the changes in a child's behaviour.

You might notice that the child has become hyper-vigilant or difficult to settle. They might be clingy or the other extreme where they might be quite withdrawn. They might also have difficulty with concentrating or managing their feelings and there might be changes in the way they're interacting. You might notice that just their presentation and their interactions are quite different from how they were previously. When you're unsure about the child's behaviour, one tool that you can use to monitor that is our BETLS observation tool.

This is a template for gathering some really clear information about the child's behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning and their social relationships. It helps us to identify patterns or to see changes in their behaviour. It also provides a great structure to discuss with families so that we can look at the best ways to access support. It's really just starting that conversation about saying that you are noticing there are some changes and discuss what are some of the things that might be happening in the child's life and other information that you can put together so that you can have a great conversation with parents for them to seek support or for you to provide support, if that's appropriate. Thinking more about change, let's consider this now in the context of a critical or serious incident. I'm going to hand back to Amelia to start that conversation.

**Amelia Joyce:** Thanks Maria. So far today, we've been looking at change in a very broad, general space and I just want to check in with everyone and make sure you're okay and have some plans about what you do if tricky thoughts do come up because we are starting to get into a more pointy end now in terms of critical incidents and looking at them specifically in terms of the impacts of change.

With the upcoming poll we would like each of you to consider the strategies at your place. We all have strategies – these might be documented strategies or they could be things that that have just become the way of working.

In terms of strategies to support mentally healthy communities in your place, which of these are you most aware of? Are you most aware of strategies that help to reduce the risk that is associated with critical incidents? Are you aware of strategies to support you being prepared for the 'if' and 'when'? Do your strategies focus around responding in the best way or supporting the recovery and sustaining the mentally

healthy community during these times and immediately after as well, or is it all of the above? Take a moment and have a think about it, have a think about it in terms of which of those things might be documented, which of those things are just somehow known, and if there isn't anything that's particularly documented, how do we make sure the whole community is aware and people know what they need to be doing when and how?

In terms of critical incidents, Katy you and I had a bit of a conversation earlier. Sometimes in early learning context, critical incidents also refer to serious incidents. Do you want to unpack that a little bit while Dino puts an end to the poll so we can see what the results are?

**Katy Brennan:** Thanks Amelia. While we waiting for the results of the poll I'm happy to share the thoughts we had earlier. What we were talking about was that when we're defining a critical or a serious incident, what we're actually talking about is where there is an imminent or severe risk to the health, safety and wellbeing of a person or a child in an education and care setting or within their extended community. What is really important to consider is that we have some reporting requirements under the national law and regulations.

A critical incident, or a serious incident as it refers to in those circumstances, does refer to the health, safety and wellbeing of a child at your service. What our service may define as a serious incident may not always fall under those regulatory requirements or the reporting requirements for a serious incident. It's really important that we actually acknowledge and be aware of what our reporting requirements are as an approved service, yet we also acknowledge the importance that these incidents can occur outside our reporting requirements and that makes them no less valid.

When we're thinking about the serious or critical incident, we actually need to consider those things as well. Amelia, I can see we've got the results of the poll up now. Did you want to talk us through those?

**Amelia Joyce:** Looking at the results, the most common response is all of the above, that they are aware of how to support those within their community to maintain a mental health. It's a pretty even spread across the remaining four responses, with people who know most well of just one of them. It's really interesting because as the results were up I was thinking in terms of the National Quality Framework and curriculum frameworks that we have, there's a lot of space to actually support us in being prepared.

For anyone who's looking to broaden or to ensure that their entire community is aware of all the processes, they are a really good place to start. Another great place to start of course is the Be You framework. Each of the domains within the framework helps provide some steps in those spaces.

Maria, Maria, Katy, do any of you have any thoughts about the poll results? I do want to also just let everyone know if you've got any questions at all, please pop them in the questions box and we will endeavour to answer them too. Maria, Maria?

**Maria Curtis:** I think for those who responded with all of the above, some people will have a lot of planning in place along with policies and procedures, where other people may not have as much. I think it will vary from context to context – those that have experienced any incident or previous incidents before will be certainly reviewing and doing things. I think those who answered all of the above are aware; it's just the degree of perhaps their own individual situation and experiences.

**Maria Heenan:** I think it's a great opportunity to start that conversation to make sure that if there are policies and procedures that they are up to date and are reviewed and, I think we'll talk about this a little bit later on as well, but that people are aware of them. This may mean checking with the other people in your service to see what they're aware of and how recently things have been updated.

**Amelia Joyce:** Now we are going to continue looking at critical incidents and change in a broader context. We are going to take a bit of a focus now on different areas within our community. We'll be looking at it in terms of individual perspectives, in terms of change or serious incidents across a broader community,

beyond early learning service or school or when critical incidents or change happens within the context of our early learning community or school. We can now have a conversation about incidents in our local community.

This is where we are going to talk about all the things that we can be considering to be prepared for change. Katy, do you want to unpack that a little bit for us?

**Katy Brennan:** Thanks Amelia. I wanted to talk a little bit about how we can actually prepare for change. When we're thinking about preparing for change, it's really important that we understand and acknowledge the importance of those strong and purposeful connections and partnerships with families as well and the way that those partnerships really do prepare us for change. That was something that both Maria H and Maria C mentioned earlier as well. It's really important we know that the children do benefit when significant people in their lives collaborate and work together and that by doing this and developing those partnerships in a really strong context, we're actually supporting the best outcomes for children and for the mental health and wellbeing of those in our learning community. It also reminds me of the Bronfenbrenner ecological system model.

The model recognises those multiple influences that really do affect a child's mental health and wellbeing and this in turn does have that effect on behaviours like Maria H spoke about earlier. We know that the child is at the centre of the model and that development occurs within the context of the relationships with families and the learning service and the community in that broader, wider society and community around them so that the child never actually does act in isolation and the changes that actually happen around the child really do influence those many aspects of the child's world.

As educators we're actually in a great position to support the children in our care and the local community when change does occur and in developing and understanding our skills and furthering our knowledge around change we can actually support them further.

That does mean that when these big or serious changes do occur, we have a greater idea or a greater understanding of what our response might be.

**Amelia Joyce:** Thanks for that, Katy. It really leads into that notion of how trauma informed practices are protective factors during these times as well as everyday times that we live through. As you were talking I was thinking quite a lot about how important it is that to be in tune with other people and in tune with supporting them, we actually need to be in tune with where we are in this space.

Maria, you mentioned a little bit earlier the BETLS observation chart. One of my favourite questions within that actually stops and asks us as the educator how we are feeling and how this is impacting on us and in what ways. That's a really important starting place.

Again, we're going to ask people to start from that place with us too in terms of when a big change or a serious incident occurs, how do you think you're most likely to respond in those cases? Again, this is a very hypothetical, general space and we would like you to be mindful of how you're feeling as you're answering this and to take steps to get support if you do need that. What do you get the sense that your most likely response would be, understanding that often we don't know how we will react in each different situation unless we've actually lived through it in some way

Let's start the poll and consider whether or not you think you go straight away to recognising and regulating your feelings, whether you do always feel prepared and know what to do, whether you get that sense of when you need to seek help and actually seek help if you need it, whether or not you tend to take a step back and keep to yourself a little bit or whether you do get a sense of feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about where things are going.

**Maria Heenan:** Just to take on from what you were saying Amelia, it is so important that we do look after ourselves and that we are aware of what's happening. Sometimes you can get caught up after a critical

incident or a natural disaster and that focus is not on yourself for a little while so it really is important that you start to think about how you are responding. We know that the best predictor of child recovery from a critical incident is the recovery of the adults around them.

It's like the airplane analogy where we need to apply an oxygen mask to ourselves before we can look after others in the same way. We need to ensure we care for ourselves and our own mental health and do what we need to do to recover well in order to be responsive and supportive for the children and families that we're working with in our service. As adults, a large part of our recovery or from change or a critical incident is often through our connections, so your recovery plan might include regular opportunities for your team to come together to connect or you might like to think about the people that you need to connect with in difficult times..

You might also like to include opportunities for families to connect with each other because when we support and stabilise families in our communities, that's how we support the children. When we can support and stabilise early childhood settings or schools that helps to stabilise and support the community. It is really important that we are looking after the adults around those children.

**Amelia Joyce:** We now have the next poll up. We'll give people a little bit more time to answer that question, but while we're talking about it, Maria you were talking about the airplane analogy, which is part of the self-care package within Be You. Maria C, there are also some helpful information that it's directed for children, but can be equally applied in an adult context as well from Emerging Minds. Would you like to explain a little bit about that?

**Maria Curtis:** Children are particularly vulnerable to the emotional impact and they rely on the adults around them for support, protection and information and the Emerging Mind website supports professionals, educators and parents to support children experiencing these difficult situations.

It's really worth visiting. There is a trauma toolkit available that talks about trauma informed care. There's a great video on supporting children immediately after a serious event or incident and there's the Emerging Mind Psychological First Aid for Children. While looking at this, I realised a lot of it is actually quite applicable to adults.

The first one is ensuring safety, ensuring everyone is safe and keeping calm, connecting with others as everyone has talked about, encourage self-efficacy - people taking responsibility as much as they can for what they're doing themselves, and having hope. I think this is really important and again, it's been mentioned before, is that media exposure can affect people, both adults and children. Emerging Minds website is a really useful tool for children, for those who are supporting children, and there's a lot there that adults can take on board also.

**Amelia Joyce:** It's great to be able to draw those connections and those alignments between what we do for and with children is equally applicable in the space for adults and families as well. Having something like the psychological first aid messaging and the strategies for being trauma informed along with the processes that you have within your workplaces and your organisations really helps to ensure consistent messaging and that help seeking is normalised.

It is important that it's communicated that we are there to support each other and knowing that we need to check in every now and then with each other and ourselves, because as Maria H mentioned, sometimes when we're so busy responding it's a little bit after the fact that we start to notice where we are at.

It's great to see that there's a pretty even spread across where people recognise and regulate their feelings and feeling prepared and seeking help. In terms of responses related to keeping to yourself and feeling overwhelmed and unsure, sometimes it's important to know that that's how we are and how we behave in those spaces but it's also important to know that they're there are things that that we can do across a workplace to support that. Sometimes it's okay to be by yourself. It's around knowing when something is impacting our everyday life and stopping us from doing the things that we normally love to do.



Again, I'm going to refer back to the BETLS observation chart where it talks about behaviours, emotions and thoughts that we have. When we are looking at things we need to address, it's really about looking at how pervasive and how frequent and how prevalent those behaviours, emotions and thoughts are in our everyday lives.

I think it's also important that as organisations and as a whole in communities, we have a responsibility to ensure that we are constantly checking in and intentionally looking at what things we can actually be doing in these spaces to promote help seeking and to demonstrate that we are supporting within knowing what our boundaries are with that too.

We're going to move on to the next section of our webinar and it's really around the strategies that we can use to create a safe place for families. I think when we looking at this within the context of families, we also need to look at it in the context of our colleagues, the people that we see every day. As a community, we need to be supporting each other and looking out in these spaces. Maria, do you want to lead this discussion about the strategies that we can be using?

**Maria Curtis:** I just wondered if Katy wanted to say anything about adult recovery benefits before we move on?

**Katy Brennan:** Thanks very much, Maria. We were talking about the recovery and children and families and those connections and how they really do linked together. Amelia, you tied it in really well bringing in our own wellbeing and taking care of ourselves at the service and how that really is a strategy to look after ourselves when talking about the results of the poll as well. It really does all tie together, but I think it's really important to note that one of the biggest predictors of adult recovery after a critical incident in our community is actually the recovery.

One of the biggest predictors of children in our community after a critical or serious incident is actually the adult recovery. What we mean by that is that it's so extremely important that we take care of ourselves, both the families in our service but also ourselves as educators, and that we encourage our parents and families to take care of themselves because it's your recovery as a trusted adult in a child's life that is actually the biggest predictor that directly benefits the recovery for the child in the community as well.

We've talked a number of times today around self-care and what that might look like and how important it is to really consider our own wellbeing, but it's really important to acknowledge that not only are we benefiting ourselves in developing those strategies, but we're also benefiting the children that we care for as well. That leads in really well Maria, to what you are about to talk about. What are some of those strategies that families can use or that we can use to reassure them that the service really is a safe place?

**Maria Curtis:** Thanks, Katy. Some of the strategies that we can use to support families and reassure them, probably the main one is communication – communication between everyone involved; child, family, educators and community. It's also about consistent messaging about what has occurred and what is happening moving forward on a day-to-day, or even a shorter basis. It's also about collaboration between individuals, the educators, the families and the communities. Katy, you've talked about those strong connections with families.

There's got to be strong positive connections between educators and the families and also with external service supports because communities might need these external supports and you have to utilise all of these avenues. Educators and parents working in partnership can support children to recover.

Parents and educators need to make children feel safe so that children have the opportunity to make sense of what's happened. Children may not be able to understand how they are feeling or why they're behaving the way they are so they need lots of support and reassurance from parents and educators to help them cope with what's happened. It's about helping them to identify and understand their feelings and their responses to what's happened because they're usually outside their experience. It's the whole community

response, that intentional teaching of social and emotional learning. We've talked about observing children with the BETLS observation tool.

Move forward to formulating a plan in the long-term – it's going to be about communication and collaboration. It's a whole community process with transparency. There's got to be the opportunity to develop trust and reassurance following policies and procedures and there has to be a responsiveness there somewhere and flexibility. Things don't always go according to plan and you've got to acknowledge individual needs and be constantly reviewing. There are a lot of wonderful resources out there. We've already talked about Emerging Minds. There is also the Be You Responding Together domain and factsheets, which you can find in the chat. The whole thing is about communication, consultation and collaboration. That probably sums up some of the strategies that are the most basic ones people would use. Katy, would you like to talk a little bit more about this?

**Katy Brennan:** It's a really good time to remind us when we're thinking about these strategies of that importance of self-care. We'll always remember to consider the families and the way that we can support families in our service to know that it's a safe place as you talked about in those strategies and tools that we have got, but it's also really important that we remember how important it is to take care of ourselves and that we consider our own self-care and our own wellbeing.

It's a really good time to once again remind everyone that if you do need any additional support, there are those additional details popped in the chat for you today that you can reach out if that is something you feel you need. When we are thinking about self-care and wellbeing, there's actually also a place for this in the National Quality Standard as Amelia mentioned earlier today.

When we're thinking about our own wellbeing, we're actually also contributing to the National Quality Standard in our requirements that fall under that as well as within our professional learning plans. We can really embed some of that self-care as well. Looking at the importance of wellbeing really does support your team and your colleagues, so by doing that, you are actually addressing a number of these standards in the National Quality Framework as well.

As we are supporting our own wellbeing, we also acknowledge that everyone is affected in different ways and we can remember our self-care and how those experiences really do need that consideration and that during these times how we manage these things may have a different impact on people's everyday practice. We now have another poll coming up around supporting those emotions in our everyday practice.

**Amelia Joyce:** As both Katy and Maria were talking, I was thinking about the diversity and how there is such a broad scope of how communications that we have and the practicing of self-care plays out in those spaces depending on different contexts and the individual circumstances of people.

We are asking people to now consider experiences that they've had or anticipate having in terms of supporting children to regulate and express emotions and whether or not there is a particular emotion that as educators we feel more comfortable and confident in supporting, because like you said Katy, professional development is actually a process for self-care as well.

This could be an indicator that you might like to seek more information about how to support a behaviour you feel less comfortable and confident in supporting. This question is actually asking which ones you feel most confident and comfortable in supporting.

Do any of you have any thoughts about which emotions you feel most comfortable in supporting?

**Maria Heenan:** I think just as a general comment, it's often the case that it's easier to support people when their emotions align with your experience so I guess it's a bit more challenging if someone's response is quite different from something that you have experienced or that you would experience in that situation. It's just good to be mindful that people are all going to respond with different emotions to different events and that we need to be aware of what we're feeling at the time.

**Amelia Joyce:** Thanks Maria, that's a really good point. Perhaps consider your responses within the context of what Maria has just said as well. So Katy or Maria C, do either of you have any thoughts about what's come up in the result of this poll?

**Maria Curtis:** Look, I think fear is one that people find quite challenging to discuss because the degree of fear is often an unknown. The child being unable to articulate the fear exactly is what I think people do find quite challenging, I know I would.

**Katy Brennan:** I think along a similar lines as what you just said Maria C, but leading to anxiety. I'm not that surprised that anxiety is probably one of the lowest there.

It is a really challenging emotion to support. The poll is the way I expect in terms of that happiness, fear and anger, those emotions that we see most often in the children or we believe we see most often, are sitting most comfortable with most people. It really is about how can we further develop our own professional learning so that we do feel comfortable supporting anxiety and supporting fear so that we can confidently support all those emotions.

**Amelia Joyce:** I guess an extension of those is even perhaps to layer over the top of the emotions, whether it's externalising or internalising behaviours that potentially we feel more comfortable in supporting or that we notice that we're supporting in more ways. Moving on to you Maria Curtis, you're going to now provide us with some myth busters.

**Maria Curtis:** There is a mistaken belief, a total myth, that people believe young children are not affected by trauma and don't even notice or even remember traumatic events. They say the child is too young to be affected so the adults decide not to talk about the incident. Often it's the adults who don't want to talk about it. Not talking about the incident will not support the child's recovery from the incident. If the adults give vague answers, don't say anything at all or deliberately change the subject when a child brings it up, the children will make up their own version. Often what they imagine may be horrific and far more dreadful than what has actually occurred and will create far more anxiety than the reality of what happened.

If a child starts to talk about an incident, just remember to follow their lead, have a conversation and answer their questions honestly in language they can understand but don't give more information than is necessary, just basic facts.

Allow them to go away and when they're ready and they've digested what you've told them or your response to their questions, they'll come back and ask for more. Some children will seem to be recovering and not want to talk and certainly we let the child be the one to make the first move, but sometimes it could be months before a child will actually come out and say something. They may repeatedly tell their story of the incident. It's important to listen calmly.

They may recreate it through play. It's about helping them identify their feelings and name them. Encourage the child through creative means; drawing, painting, clay, playdough, have books about feelings available and maintain familiar routines and talk to the children about any changes that are occurring.

The return to normal routine is really important for children and it's important to warn them of any changes because they become very sensitive when an incident has occurred.

**Amelia Joyce:** Thanks, Maria. It's certainly a place where people might want more professional learning in this space because there is a fine line between how much information we provide at what time because we don't want to do any more harm than what's already been and done re-traumatise as well, which sort of leads us into the next conversation with Maria talking to us a little bit about the resources and things that we should be considering when we are responding and reviewing our response plans.

**Maria Heenan:** Thanks, Amelia. What just popped into my mind is one of the phrases I heard about when talking to children about an event is to be truthful and useful and I just think that's really useful, letting

people know truthfully what has happened, but making sure that that information is useful and it isn't extending beyond their understanding of the event.

The things that we've been talking about in relation to supporting a community following an incident involving a child, also apply when the incident involves an adult who's connected to the learning communities. Both adults and children need to be given permission and opportunities to talk about change or critical incidents that have occurred. Often we don't discuss things because we're worried that it might have a negative impact on the child or the family but talking actually helps us to process and event and provides that narrative that Maria was talking about around what has happened. If we don't have the opportunity to talk about, ask questions and process that information, then that's the sort of thing that can lead to some ongoing issues and concerns because people will have intrusive thoughts or they may not have understood the event properly and they're likely to create their own inaccurate narrative around that event and maybe even put themselves at the centre or as a cause of an event. It's really important that we do talk to children about what's happened in the most truthful and useful way we can. When thinking about when an incident involves an adult connected to the learning community we need to consider who else is impacted and how we're going to communicate that with our staff and with the families and then also with the community more broadly, if that's relevant.

We need to be mindful that some staff at the service might be impacted themselves and it might be worth noting that they might not actually be in a position to provide a caring role. We've talked about self-care, but there will be times when the impact is actually too great on some particular members of the community and we can't ask them to provide a caring role in that situation.

Going back to the practicalities, being prepared with an up-to-date plan that includes the contacts and communication strategies that helps us to be clear with our communication and having a clear plan is crucial so that everyone knows what actions to take and what their role is going to be so that we don't have overlaps or we're not missing things. People often think they know what to do and they'll jump in and do things, but if you've actually got a plan and procedure to follow it makes it a lot easier. It can also be useful to think about what resources we might want to gain extra information from or extra support from. It's important that people know what's available in their local community, but there's also some general resources that we can access. Maria, have you got some ideas about the different types of resources that people can access online or in their community?

**Maria Curtis:** Yes, there's the Stop Reflect Act tool. There are quite a few resources that we have looked at. It is important just looking around your local community to see what's available and again going back to the Emerging Minds website.

**Maria Heenan:** Yes, the Emerging Minds website is an amazing resource. Katy, you were talking about the Red Cross resources also.

**Katy Brennan:** Yes, absolutely. There are some amazing resources out there that we can find, not only from Emerging Minds but within the Be You website and also Red Cross as well, so there is certainly a lot out there if you're looking to seek and find more information.

**Amelia Joyce:** Today we have really broadly covered what we can do to sustain recovery. It's around supporting educators to develop their mental health knowledge. We have also looked at what sort of place strategic planning has in supporting mentally healthy relationships and communities. We've also really highlighted that we need to take intentional steps to normalise and promote help seeking behaviours and how we operate and intentionally teaching social emotional skills, as well as supporting the professional resilience of educators. This can all be linked back to the National Quality Framework and the National Quality Standard. We are now down to our last three minutes. What messages would we take away from today?

I think for me probably the big one is that the change is so different and responses to change are so different for each person and each place and we really need to be guided by how the individuals are experiencing anything in a particular moment. Now Katy has a take away message about being prepared.

**Katy Brennan:** My quick takeaway message is around being prepared. When we're thinking about being prepared we think about what we can actually take away and what we might have gained in the information and our responses to sudden change and critical incidents. I really hope that in finishing up today that everyone's gained a greater understanding around the strategies that might be required and the reasons why we might need to do those things and why we really need to take that coordinated approach around planning, policies and procedures. What about yourself Maria C?

**Maria Curtis:** I just think it's about managing the impact and it's about recognising, understanding and monitoring both individuals and the whole learning community and taking that collaborative approach with consistency, communications and messaging. What about you, Maria?

**Maria Heenan:** We are talking about the sustaining the mentally healthy community and returning to a mentally healthy community after an event and going back to what Katy was saying about the importance of planning, that it's helpful if that plan extends beyond the immediate critical incident or event. The research has shown that communities can come together during the immediate aftermath of a crisis and feel really connected and really supported and work together really well. As time goes on the recovery can be such a big part of some people's lives, whereas other people may have started to move on and think about other things that are happening in their life. It's really important to recognise that recovery isn't linear and that it will take a lot of time for some people. It can be phasic as well, so people might look like they're covering really well and then they slip backwards.

So just to keep in mind that the planning should involve things that go on for longer than that immediate period. Things can also remind people of that traumatic event, so it might be that certain smells or being with people or in certain locations can bring back those memories and also significant events like birthdays, Christmas or anniversaries of the event itself. Maintaining that mentally healthy community means understanding that recovery from change or a critical incident can take so much longer than we might expect and it's not going to be a smooth and easy path, but we will get there.

**Amelia Joyce:** Thank you so much. We have covered so much territory in 60 minutes. Thank you everyone for joining us today. You will be receiving a certificate of attendance. Please also complete the exit survey. Let us know what your thoughts are and if they've grown from today's webinar.

Also be sure to include the names of anyone who might be watching with you so we can also provide them with a certificate too and again if you're interested in participating or you are participating, remember to keep in touch with us by getting contact at our other events. National Check-In's are a good place to come along and look at your learning and your action with a Be You Consultant. Once again, thank you Maria, Maria and Katy, and thank you to everyone behind the scenes, Steph, Di, Penny and Dino, for making today happen. We look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

**All:** Thank you.

**End.**