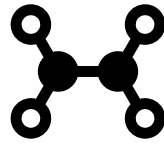


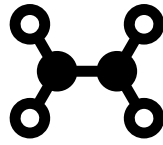
Engaging Curriculum Solutions



# MINDFUL VS MIND FULL

TRAUMA AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE EARLY YEARS





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# INTRODUCTION

## ***A note from Kate***

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Bec and I hope you have enjoyed the conference “Mindful Vs Mind Full: Trauma and Behaviour in the Early Years”. This accompanying resource is designed to help you take some of the mindful strategies we discussed on the day and implement them in to your service. We hope you find the ideas a good starting point, but as with any rich experience in early childhood, the ideas are meant to be flexible to your service and children's needs. This is *not* a structured curriculum guide, but simply a tool to inspire your mindful journey. Ideas can be used flexibly; and to ensure they are truly effective, should be embedded across all platforms of curriculum. We hope you find them helpful!

## ***What is Mindfulness?***

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Mindfulness is a simple concept, but that doesn't always equate to something being easy to do! It takes focus and awareness. Mindfulness is the art of being in the moment — of focusing on the here and now in a non-judgemental manner. Many studies have been completed in the world of mindfulness and there are some fantastic books, websites and resources that can help you learn more through a simple google search. Dr. Dan Siegel, founder of the Mindsight Institute, is one of the leading experts in the fields of mindful practice, self regulation and neuroscience (particularly in relation to education). His research, alongside that of other experts in the area, has shown how effective mindfulness can be when integrated in to the education setting. Positivity blossoms, stress decreases and academic scoring goes up! And don't think this is something just for the service setting. Take these practices with you through life to become more centred and grounded during times of stress.

## ***Trauma and Mindful Practice***

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Children who have experienced complex trauma can have difficulty regulating their emotions effectively. This is often due to 'hyperarousal' or dissociation (Downey, 2007). Both of these bring with them an inability to focus on the here and now. So, what could be more helpful than mindful practice? Something which is designed to help humans do exactly the thing which trauma children find so difficult! Research has proven that mindful practice helps us to naturally lower and control our cortisol levels (Turakitwanakan, Mekseepralard, Busarakumtragul 2013). Given that this stress hormone is inflammatory, the implications of this for lifelong health and well-being are immense.

# MINDFUL BREATHING

## *The Science of Mindful Breathing*

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Mindful breathing is taking the time to be fully conscious and aware of each breath you take, and the effect that has on your body as a whole. It is a core practice of mindfulness and is a great tool for relaxation. When you engage in mindful breathing it is most effective to do so to a set, steady rhythm. Research has found that when we engage in rapid breathing, there is increased activity across the brain, including the amygdala where stress is perceived and interpreted (Brullock, 2019) . This suggests rapid breathing increases stress levels, and that we may be able to achieve the opposite by slowing down our breaths, reducing our stress levels. Studies have gone on to show that controlled breathing can, in fact, cause positive changes in our arousal levels, attention and emotional control through the release of neurotransmitters such as Noradrenaline, leading to a healthier brain (Sandoiu, 2018).

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful breathing, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches** - Holistic education is about the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful breathing allows children the opportunity to get in touch with the physical sensations of breathing and the way in which this impacts state of mind.

**Outcome 1:** As children engage with mindful breathing it is an opportunity for them to connect their body and mind, building their emotional control and self regulation skills.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful breathing more and more, they will be able to use this skill to help them to regulate their emotional responses. It also allows them to be more in touch with their bodily responses to stressful times vs calm times, helping them to recognise and express emotions effectively.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 2.1 Health** - Promoting children's health and physical activity is important in the NQS and mindful breathing is a wonderful way to support healthy living. Reducing stress and thus the hormones released in the body during times of stress, can have a beneficial impact on a child's overall health. It is also an excellent opportunity to engage non-sleepers in some rest and relaxation.

**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - Mindful breathing allows for greater emotional control and self regulation through supporting children in making connections between their mind and body, lowering stress levels and managing emotions effectively.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Dewey** - John Dewey ascertained that children learnt best when educators took into account a holistic view of the child, recognising the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful breathing is an excellent opportunity for children to practice the connectedness of mind and body.

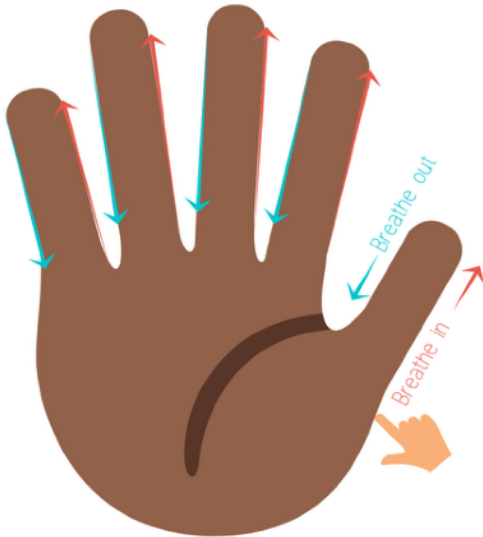
**Steiner** - Rudolf Steiner believed the purpose of early childhood education was to imbue the child with a sense that the world is good and to awaken the 'physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual' aspects of childhood. Mindful breathing, as with all mindful practice, is centred around focusing children on the here and now, not allowing everyday stresses to overwhelm. Through lifelong mindful practice humans are able to change their perspective on the world.



# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## Five Finger Breathing

### 5 Finger Breathing



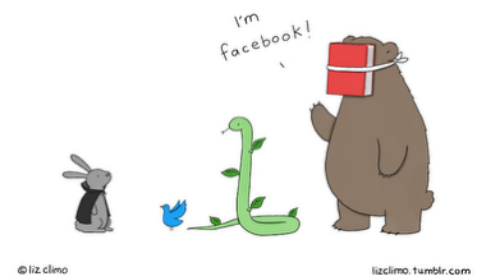
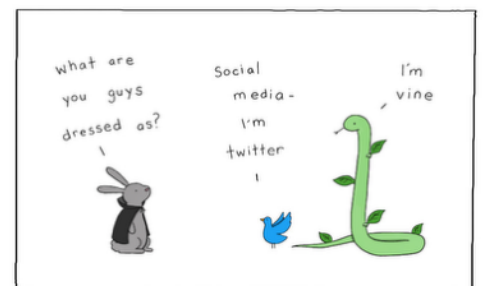
1. Spread out your fingers.
2. Use one finger on your other hand to trace your thumb — breathe in as your finger moves up, breath out as your finger moves down.
3. Keep tracing your fingers until you get to your little finger, remembering to breathe in and out as you go.
4. How are you feeling? Calmer?
5. If you need to, start again.

## Animal Breaths

**Hissing Breath** - Inhale a long, deep breath through the nose, and then let the breath out through the mouth long and slow, creating a hissing noise. Great for helping children slow rapid breathing.

**Bear Breath** - Breathe in through the nose for a count of 3 or 4. Pause for a count of 1-2. Exhale through the nose on a count of 3 or 4. Like a bear hibernating, this is useful before rest time.

**Bunny Breath** - Take three quick sniffs in through the nose and then do one long exhale out of the nose. The children can pretend to be bunnies sniffing the air as the breath. Particularly useful when children are in distress and finding it hard to breath through it.



*Note: Bubble blowing is great for engaging children in mindful exhaling!!!*

# MINDFUL LISTENING

## *The Science of Mindful Listening*

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Mindful listening is taking the time to listen to the sounds around you, distinguishing and taking each in, non-judgementally. It is a fantastic way to help develop children's communication skills. There has, in recent years been much research in to the brain development of musicians (natural mindful listeners). Studies have shown that musicians demonstrate structural differences in the brain, particularly around auditory and multi-modal integration areas (areas that work together to form speech). This is why the neuroscience world has the saying: "Study or listen to boost cognition!" (Medina, 2014). In addition to this, musicians show increased social and empathy skills as they are more easily able to discriminate mood through tone changes in the voice. We can safely assume these skills would also be present in anyone who had engaged actively in mindful listening. Finally mindful listening has been shown to increase sensory discrimination skills, which means it helps our brain to focus on the important sensory data around us (The MindUp Curriculum, 2011).

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful listening, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches:** Part of holistic education is providing children with opportunities to connect with the natural world. This includes all the visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory data it has to offer!

**Outcome 2:** As children increase their ability to distinguish tone and affect in speech, they begin to be able to 'read' the behaviour and moods of those around them.

**Outcome 3:** As children engage with mindful listening they increase their social skills as they begin to be able to distinguish different tones and affect in speech allowing them to work co-operatively with their peers.

**Outcome 5:** As children practice mindful listening they will naturally engage more with language and activate the language centres of the brain. Additionally as they begin to understand tone, they will be more able to communicate messages and express themselves effectively.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 5.1 Relationships between educators and children** - Mindful listening will allow children to express themselves more effectively and interpret others moods and emotions, thus allowing for more secure relationships with their educators.

**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - As children increase their ability to 'read' the behaviours of others through their communication, they will be able to engage in empathy, responding appropriately to the moods of their peers, and increasing their ability to sustain relationships.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Vygotsky** - Lev Vygotsky, one of our most popular theorists in early childhood, believed language to be a powerful tool for education and development. He emphasised that effective communication was integral to learning and that it was primarily through interaction that children learn.

**Reggio** - The Reggio Emilia approach recognises 'active listening' in much of their research, believing that listening is an important quality to enabling communication and dialogue. They further believe that children who are active listeners (mindful listeners) connect more effectively with their world. Finally, being able to actively listen, and being actively listened to, gives children a voice and recognises children as social beings.







# MINDFUL SEEING

## *The Science of Mindful Seeing*

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Mindful seeing is the ability to notice and distinguish visual details. Much like listening, seeing is a part of communication. Being able to mindfully see makes us more observant to people's body language and visual cues, increasing social skills and empathy. Furthermore, like with any mindfulness practice, mindful seeing calms the brain, allowing information to travel more freely throughout (The MindUp Curriculum, 2011).

Our brains process visual data at an incredibly high speed and something as simple as colour can play an important role in mood and emotional regulation. While people often think eyes work like a camera, this is not true. The visual process is extremely complex and our sight is not as reliable as we think (Medina, 2014). The more focused we can become on the here and now, the less unnecessary data our brain will have to process and the more likely we are to process the things we want to remember, leading to a more reliable working memory!

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful seeing, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches:** Part of holistic education is providing children with opportunities to connect with the natural world. This includes all the visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory data it has to offer!

**Outcome 2:** As children increase their ability to observe people and environments, they become more connected to their world and are able to more easily interpret the behaviours of the people around them, allowing them to respond effectively.

**Outcome 3:** As children engage with mindful seeing they increase their social skills as they begin to be able to interpret body language and visual cues in interactions, allowing them to work co-operatively with their peers.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 5.1 Relationships between educators and children** - Mindful seeing will allow children to be more focused on their interactions, not distracted by the environments around them, whilst also refining their ability to interpret visual cues and body language in interactions. All of this allows for more open communication with their educators, and the building of reciprocal relationships.

**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - Mindful seeing will allow children to be more focused on their interactions, not distracted by the environments around them, whilst also allowing them to interpret visual cues and body language in interactions. All of this allows for more open communication with their peers, empathetic relationships, and reciprocal relationships.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Montessori** - Maria Montessori's theory is very based in neuroscience and she recognised the importance of understanding the visual process. This is reflected in the significance she places on a sense of order and beauty to the physical environment, linking very closely with the "Calmer Classrooms" (Downey, 2007) guide for working with traumatised children.



*Note: From the educator's perspective Montessori also recognised the importance of meaningful (and this is mindful) observation in the early childhood setting.*

**Bowlby** - John Bowlby, who established attachment theory believed in the importance of attachment in the first five years of life to a person's lifelong mental health. In the neuroscience world the term 'serve and return' is used to describe the interactions between a child and adult which work towards building those bonds. Encouraging mindful seeing allows for a more effective serve and return interaction from both the child and educator/parent.

# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## Scavenger Hunt



A good old scavenger hunt is a fantastic way to engage children in mindful seeing, while getting them out in the great outdoors! And it's easy to do! Simply make a list (use pictures with text to engage children in early literacy) of items for children to find on your hunt! Bush walks are particularly good for this as the bush provides so many wonderful items to add to your list! Let the children work in small groups to find as many items from the list as they can, calling for them to mindfully observe their environment.

## I spy

Does this one even need explaining? Sit outside (or even in the classroom) with a small group. Each child can take a turn spying something around the room (which they keep to themselves). They then say: "I spy, with my little eye, something the colour of [whatever colour their chosen thing is]". The other children then take turn guessing what the child has their eye on. This draws children's attention to the finer details of their environment. You can use colours, shapes or whatever concept you want in this game!



# MINDFUL SMELLING

## *The Science of Mindful Smelling*

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Mindful smelling is the ability to sit and smell something, distinguishing scent mixtures where applicable and noting smells in a non-judgemental manner. This is a particularly effective mindfulness strategy to use with children who have been impacted by trauma. The olfactory system (sensory system used for smelling) is close to the hippocampus and that is why smells can so easily evoke memories! It is also why smells are often a dramatic trigger for children impacted by trauma. Engaging children in mindful smelling can be one of the most effective tools for these children to rewire a trigger set off by scent. Furthermore many studies have been completed in to the links between the olfactory system and mood, demonstrating that odour can modulate mood (Soudry et al. 2011). Practicing mindful smelling will encourage children to stay focused and process smells as they are in the moment, not influenced by memory and not allowing mood to be impacted negatively.

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful smelling, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches:** Part of holistic education is providing children with opportunities to connect with the natural world. This includes all the visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory data it has to offer!

**Outcome 2:** As children increase their ability to distinguish and identify different scents within their environment, they become more connected to their world . They are able to more easily interpret odours, appreciate the world they live in and be comfortable within their spaces.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful smelling it will allow them to process this sensory data more effectively, and offers them an opportunity to use their sensory capabilities to explore the world.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 2.1 Health** - While the link between mindful smelling and the NQS is not strong, mindful smelling can definitely be used to engage children in healthy eating practices (particularly when combined with mindful tasting). It also allows children who have experienced trauma to identify and process smells effectively which may otherwise trigger them, allowing them to feel comfortable and secure in their environment.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Piaget** - Jean Piaget was the first theorist to really place emphasis on sensory stimuli in children's play, suggesting they need to experience the world through their senses to learn (a theory which is now reinforced in neuroscience research). It was through sensory play that children would engage with the processes of information assimilation and accommodation.



# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## ***Smell and Tell***



For this game you will need some scent bags/pads, or cups filled with ingredients with strong scents. The important thing here is that you use scents that are already familiar to the children. Once you have your scents ready, the children can take turns being blindfolded, smelling each of the bags/cups and trying to identify each of the individual smells! This is trickier than it sounds and you should definitely have a try with the children! Just be aware that strong scents can be emotional triggers for children impacted by trauma and if these can be identified in advance they can be easily avoided!

## ***Scent Scrapbooks***

For more of a project approach, give all of the children their own individual notebook. After the children have become familiar with "Smell and Tell" or any other mindful smelling game you come up with, get them to start to collect examples of their favourite scents. These can be from the service or home environments. You could even start them off with some natural scents that you might already have around, like eucalyptus. As they collect items over time they can stick them in their notebook, creating a scent scrapbook of their very own tastes!



# MINDFUL TASTING

## *The Science of Mindful Tasting*

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Mindful tasting is particularly useful in centring young children, because eating is something that children rarely do with focus. Mindful tasting is the art of placing a food or liquid in the mouth and keeping it there for a moment, focusing on the individual flavours/textures and how that feels in the mouth. This is the first step to approaching food with a healthy outlook and eating mindfully, which has proven benefits for gut health. Eating quickly can cause overeating, and eating while distracted can cause the digestion to slow down or stop, in much the same way as a fight or flight response in the amygdala does (Mindful Eating, 2011). Engaging children in mindful tasting will encourage them to slow down, focus on the eating process and taste foods properly before swallowing. In addition to all of these benefits, this can be a great way to get children to try new foods and flavours they may not be at first interested in.

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

---

**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful tasting, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches:** Part of holistic education is providing children with opportunities to connect with the natural world. This includes all the visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory data it has to offer!

**Outcome 2:** Mindful tasting experiences which use food sources such as plants and trees are a great way to help children connect with nature and place value on living things.

**Outcome 3:** As children engage in mindful tasting experiences and have conversations with their educators around mindful eating, they will begin to be able to take increasing responsibility for their own physical wellbeing through a healthy diet.



## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 2.1 Health** - The NQS recognises the importance of encouraging children to lead a healthy lifestyle, setting up good habits for lifelong health. When children engage in mindful tasting they begin to be able to distinguish between the flavours and textures of different foods. With an adult's guidance they can then make connections between taste and healthy foods, allowing them to make nutritious meal choices.

**Standard 3.3 Use (Physical environment)** - Being environmentally responsible is an important aspect of the NQS. Mindful tasting, when using foods provided by trees and plants, is an excellent way to demonstrate to children the importance of caring for our earth and appreciating what it has to offer us.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Piaget** - Jean Piaget was the first theorist to really place emphasis on sensory stimuli in children's play, suggesting they need to experience the world through their senses to learn (a theory which is now grounded in neuroscience). It was through sensory play that children would engage with the processes of information assimilation and accommodation.

# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## *Sweet or Sour?*



This is a fairly simple game. Pick out 3-4 sweet tasting foods, and 3-4 sour tasting foods. Get the children to take turns tasting the food and attempting to place it in the right category — sweet or sour. As children become more practiced you can introduce more of the basic human tastes — salty, bitter and umami. Not only are the children being mindful tasters, but they are also refining their categorising skills!

## *Taste and Tell*

This is very similar to the game “Smell and Tell” except this time we’re distinguishing tastes not smells! For this game cut up some familiar foods in to bite sized pieced (try and disguise shape as best you can — children are clever and will use whatever clues are at their disposal). Once you have your foods (or drink, either works) prepared, the children can take turns being blindfolded, tasting each of the foods and trying to identify them on taste alone! This is trickier than it sounds and you should definitely have a try with the children!



# MINDFUL MOVEMENT

## *The Science of Mindful Movement*

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Mindful movement requires the child to engage in movement while paying attention to the feelings it creates within the body, the effectiveness of the movement and how the movement is occurring (posture, weight distribution speed , etc.). It is common knowledge that bodies and brains are partners, so it isn't surprising then, that people who engage in regular exercise for example, show lower levels of stress.

What we don't often think about is *how* we engage with movement. Implicit memory, or subconscious memory, includes a subset of procedural movement (walking, running, etc.), meaning when we go through these movements we aren't thinking about the *how* or the *why* (Zimmermann, 2014). When we engage in mindful movement, or movement with a goal, however, we are engaging multiple parts of our brain in the process, including the prefrontal cortex (when we choose the goal), the premotor cortex (which creates a plan to achieve that goal) and the motor cortex (which actually makes it all happen). All of this, instead of just the default mode network (Bishop, 2014). This will allow children to correct less effective movement, and encourages a mind-body awareness.

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful movement, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches** - Holistic education is about the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful moment allows children the opportunity to get in touch with the physical sensations of movement and with this comes an awareness of the bodies physical signals.

**Outcome 1:** As children engage with mindful movement it is an opportunity for them to connect their body and mind, which allows them to recognise the physical cues of emotion and promotes autonomy.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful movement they will become much more aware of their physical needs, abilities and limitations allowing them to engage in effective physical activity and lead healthy lifestyles. It also improves their recognition of the physical cues associated with emotion allowing for greater emotional control.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

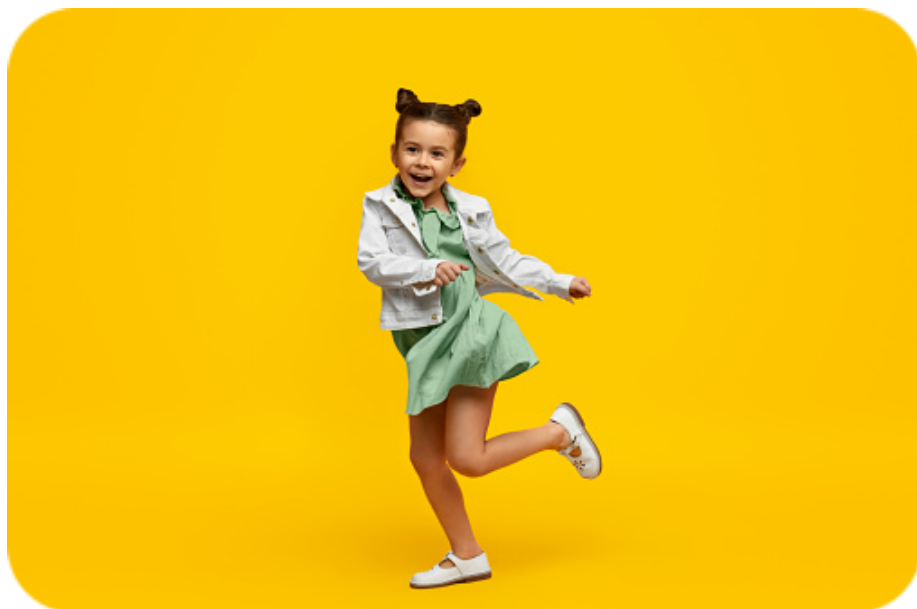
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**Standard 2.1 Health** - Promoting children's health and physical activity is important in the NQS and mindful movement is a wonderful way to encourage physical activity and the ability to make healthy lifestyle choices.

**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - Mindful movement allows for greater emotional control and self regulation through supporting children in recognising physical cues (signs of emotions).

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Dewey** - John Dewey ascertained that children learnt best when educators took into account a holistic view of the child, recognising the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful movement is an excellent opportunity for children to practice the connectedness of mind and body.

**Bruner** - Jerome Bruner's theories of information encoding link closely with the neuroscience of memory. He believed the first stage of memory making was the enactive mode which is action based and grounded in procedural movement. And this is what we are engaging in when we are *not* being mindful of our movement. Have you ever thought about a simple movement and then found yourself unable to complete the task naturally?

# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## ***The Balancing Act***



If you have ever tried Wii Fit you will know just how deceptively difficult this game is. You don't need anything and you can play with as few or as many children as you like.

1. Tell the children to focus their gaze slightly below eye level (giving them a physical focal point works best for younger children).
2. Tell them to stand on one leg and keep their gaze fixed on that focal point.
3. Challenge them to see how long they can stand on one leg like this.
4. Tell them to try the other leg.
5. Challenge them to stay focused while you engage them in conversation, ask them to sing a song, or tell them to close her eyes.

## ***Can you be a butterfly?***

This is a really simple, yet extremely fun movement game! And if you have ever done a drama class you might be familiar. You can play with one child, a small group or the whole group — it is that flexible! It works best if you have some visual cue cards with a variety of animals and everyday objects, (but visuals aren't necessary as you can just call out the names). Then all you do is say: "Can you be a [use cue card visual]?". The children then have to use their bodies to represent the animal or object in question.



# MINDFUL MOODS

## *The Science of Mindful Moods*

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Mindful moods practice refers to the ability to not only identify our emotions and feelings, but being able to recognise the impact these have on your body. For instance you know you are angry, but do you notice how your palms sweat, or your muscles tense? Once children can recognise the signs of mood changes, they will have better emotional control allowing them to more readily self regulate. The brain gives priority to emotions and that is because emotions matter! Nothing good comes from ignoring them. And given that our brains and bodies are partners, moods manifest in physical cues to help us identify and express emotions effectively. When we experience stressful moments, our body releases cortisol to help our brain to function quickly for problem solving. However, when we experience trauma, overwhelming our ability to cope, our brain triggers a much higher release of cortisol sending us in to 'fight or flight'. When this happens we respond to threat instinctually rather than rationally as we lose connection to our prefrontal cortex. For children who have experienced complex trauma these cortisol levels can already be reset on high permanently, which means it will take less for them to go in to fight or flight (Hodgekiss, 2017).

Practicing mindful moods will allow children better control of their cortisol levels and help them to stay focused and aware in moments of stress. The lifelong impact of childhood trauma can be healed immensely through mindful mood practice.

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful moods, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches** - Holistic education is about the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful moods allow children the opportunity to get in touch with the physical sensations of emotions and manage their responses effectively.

**Outcome 1:** Part of building a strong sense of identity is being able to self regulate. Being mindful of their moods and emotions encourages children to express emotions and manage stronger emotions effectively.

**Outcome 2:** As children practice mindful moods, they will become increasingly aware of, and able to recognise, the emotions and behaviours of others arounds them. This will help them to respond appropriately to the moods of their families, peers and educators.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful moods more and more, they will be able to use this skill to help them to regulate their emotional responses. It also allows them to be more in touch with their bodily responses to stressful times vs calm times, helping them to recognise and express emotions effectively.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 5.1 Relationships between educators and children** - Mindful moods will allow children to express themselves more effectively and interpret others moods and emotions, thus allow for more secure relationships with their educators.

**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - As children increase their ability to manage their own emotions and to 'read' the behaviours of others through mindful moods practice, they will be able to engage in conflict resolution and empathy, responding appropriately to the emotions of their peers, and increasing their ability to sustain relationships.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Erikson** - Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial stages of development shows the importance of children's emotions in their personality development. In the first year of life children are simply building a sense of trust with their carers. However in the second stage of Erikson's theory autonomy becomes hugely significant. Children need the chance to develop autonomous skills to feel confident in themselves, if they are not given this opportunity, according to Erikson, they would develop a great sense of self doubt. Mindful moods practice gives children the skills to be autonomous in managing their emotions.

**Vygotsky** - We don't often hear Vygotsky and emotional control together, and yet he did have his theories about self regulation. He believed that self regulation was not a trait one could learn, but rather an emerging of a more complex way of thinking or a higher mental function. Mindful moods practice is, in part, about allowing children to keep access to their prefrontal cortex (higher mental functions) through times of stress.

# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## ***Do you see my face?***



This is a simple game which encourages children to think about facial expressions and body language related to emotion and mood. For this you will need some emotional cue cards (there is a great free set of downloadable cards available on the Educate to Empower Website). Put the cards in a box and sit the children in a circle (also works really well as a pairs game sitting opposite each other). The children take turns passing around the box and picking a card. Once they have their card they have to try to get the other children to guess what card they got without using words. Think of this as emotional charades!

## ***Draw your mood***

There has been a lot of research in to the world of art and colour therapy, with mindful colouring becoming increasingly popular in recent years. When exploring mindful moods, a permanent 'mood drawing station' is a wonderful tool for self regulation. Simply set up an art centre (using whatever materials you have on hand) with a mirror to allow the children to study their own faces/bodies. When a child is feeling emotionally overwhelmed, take some time to sit with them. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine that if their feelings had a colour what would they be? Would the colour/s be dark or light, straight or swirly? Then give the child an opportunity to draw a representation of their emotion.



*Note: The video "Just breathe" which is available on Youtube is a great introduction to the neuroscience of mood for children.*



# MINDFUL RELATIONSHIPS

## *The Science of Mindful Relationships*

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Mindful relationships simply means the ability to be in the moment of our relationships, not thinking about the past or future, or what the other person might think of us, but simply enjoying our time with people. Mindful relationships are attuned relationships in which we have a deep understanding of the other person and are non-judgmental in our differences. In recent years relationships have become an increasing feature of our national curriculum, but in the neuroscience and theory world, the importance of human connection has long since been established. Back in the mid 90's the CDC completed a study in to adverse childhood experiences which demonstrated the devastating impact of trauma in the early years. However the other side of this included looking in to the healing nature of relationships. Children who had at least one strong attuned relationship showed greater resilience, leading to far less detrimental impact on the brain and lifelong health (Hodgekiss, 2017).

When we engage in loving and attuned interactions with children we are helping to build healthy, strong neural connections. The back and forth that happens in the process of serve and return, is capacity building and is viewed as one of the most essential experiences in shaping the architecture of the brain (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). Humans are biologically driven for connection!!

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful relationships, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Belonging** - Creating a sense of belonging for young children happens through the connections they make within the setting. Secure relationships with educators and peers add to the child's understanding of what it means to belong to a group.

**Secure, respectful and reciprocal Relationships** - The EYLF is a socially driven curriculum and the very first principle recognises the importance of establishing secure relationships with and between children. Mindful relationship practice encourages children to be conscious of the way in which they connect with others, the way they treat others, and the way they are treated.

**Outcome 1:** As children participate in mindful relationships they will learn to appreciate the core values of connection, they will naturally build their capacity for care, empathy and respect.

**Outcome 2:** Mindful relationships is a great way for children to begin to understand the reciprocity of human connection, allowing them to take responsibility for their part in relationships, and moving them out of their egocentric view of the world.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful relationships more and more, they will naturally increase their ability to participate in co-operative play and work, build friendship groups and sustain friendships.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Area 5 - Relationships with Children** - Practicing mindful relationships directly relates to both standards 5.1 (relationships with children) and 5.2 (relationships between children). As children practice this mindful strategy, they will build their capacity for positive interactions, recognising reciprocal rights, collaborative learning and self regulation.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Bowlby** - John Bowlby established attachment theory and his work is some of the most important when thinking about relationships. Bowlby theorised that the first five years of life were fundamental in establishing connection. He believed the first primary relationship we establish will go on to form the prototype for all future relationships. Furthermore he believed that first relationship in life provided a secure base from which the child can go out and explore the world (circle of security). While Bowlby's work revolved around the relationship between child and mother, many have added to his research later to establish the significance of all early relationships.

**Bronfenbrenner** - Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is the basis for much of our practice in Australian early childhood. His was the first big theory to recognise the importance of all the systems in the child's life and the relationships between those systems. He understood that the child is not a solitary learner and that their capacity for learning and development will be impacted by their environments and the relationships in their life. He took **Vygotsky's** idea of the learning as a social interaction (similar to the microsystem) and extended the idea into wider circles of connection (exosystem, mesosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem).

# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## Key Educator Approach



Building mindful relationships in an early childhood setting starts between the educator and the child, setting up a prototype of respectful relationships for child to carry through in their interactions with peers. The key educator approach is the best way to encourage Bowlby's 'circle of security'. It is *not* the same as focus groups. Each educator is allocated a primary caring group (numbers should be based on service ratios and grouping should be established as naturally as possible through initial connections). The educator is then responsible for building *attuned* relationships with each child in their group. They will be responsible for meeting the children's emotional and biological needs. See *appendix 1 for primary caring/key person approach key points and myth-busters.*

## Why I love you cards

Mindful relationships are best established through embedded practices such as small group experiences, collaborative play, sustained conversation and key educator approach. However there are some activities you can plan which encourage relationship building (circle games for instance) and relationship value (this game). Children often throw around the words "I love you" but sometimes its nice to stop and think about what that really means. Make a card for each child in the class with the words "Why I love you" and their name at the top. You are going to take the first card and then sit with the corresponding child's group of friends or the whole class, and ask the other children what they love about the child in question. Write down their responses with their name. Continue until each child's card is complete and everyone is left with a card full of love!



# MINDFUL GRATITUDE

## *The Science of Mindful Gratitude*

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Mindful gratitude refers to the ability to take the time to fully appreciate and be thankful for the positive moments and things in one's life. Throughout life we tend to become too busy and time poor to stop and appreciate the finer things life has to offer (to 'stop and smell the roses' so to speak). Teaching children mindful gratitude will help them to move through life focusing on the positive rather than becoming overwhelmed by life's challenges. When we participate in mindful gratitude two important neurotransmitters are released in our brain. The first is serotonin, which is responsible for modulating mood, cognition and learning. The second is dopamine (our most powerful neurotransmitter) which helps control motor function and allows messages to pass through the brain more freely (meaning your brain works quicker and more effectively). For this reason, studies have shown that participating in mindful gratitude eases negative emotions, reduces physical pain, improves the overall quality of sleep, aids in stress regulation and reduces anxiety and depression (Chowdhury, M. 2020). Mindful gratitude is particularly helpful for trauma children who often become natural dopamine seekers, giving them a positive way to seek out dopamine releases.

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful gratitude, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Belonging** - Mindful gratitude reminds children to appreciate the connections they have in their life, something which trauma children respond particularly well to. Our human relationships are primarily what creates our sense of belonging in any space.

**Holistic Approaches** - Holistic education is about the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful gratitude allows children the opportunity to get in touch with the positive things in their world and connect this with the pleasure that comes with dopamine and serotonin releases in the brain.

**Outcome 1:** Mindful gratitude allows children the opportunity to stop and appreciate themselves and their own strengths and contributions, helping to build a strong sense of identity.

**Outcome 2:** Mindful gratitude encourages children to appreciate the groups to which they belong, as well as the natural beauty the world has to offer. This allows for connections to their social and physical worlds.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful gratitude they are able to better regulate their moods and start to connect dopamine releases in the brain (a pleasure response) with positive experiences, leading to greater wellbeing and increased optimism.

## ***Links to the National Quality Standards 2018***

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**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - Mindful gratitude allows for greater emotional control and self regulation through supporting children in seeking out positive experiences rather than becoming overwhelmed with negative emotions.

## ***Links to Early Childhood Theory***

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**Steiner** - Rudolf Steiner believed the purpose of early childhood education was to imbue the child with a sense that the world is good and to awaken the 'physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual' aspects of childhood. Mindful gratitude is concerned with recognising the good

in the individuals world. It encourages children to take a positive outlook on life. At the same time it is an opportunity to connect the bodies pleasure response (the release of serotonin and dopamine) with positive experiences.

# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## *These are a few of my favourite things*



This is a very simple drawing/art experience. You can use whichever art materials you choose, perhaps even tying it in with a mindful colour experience! Ask the children to draw the people/places/toys/experiences that make them happy. This is a great way to get them to stop and think about positive experiences; and you can use the information garnered from this to help them to regulate negative emotions in the future!

## **Gratitude/Happiness Jars**

Gratitude jars are an old favourite in the mindfulness world, and what is particularly great about them in the early childhood setting, is that when you have finished you have a sensory jar which can be used to help regulate and explain mood (see the “Just Breathe” video on Youtube). For this you will need a glass container — mason jars and Voss water bottles work well. Fill the jar three quarters full with water. Sit the children in a small group and give each child a pinch of glitter (bigger glitter sinks better than the dust glitter). Ask the children to choose something they are grateful for and that is what their glitter represents. They then take turns saying what they are grateful for as they empty their pinch of glitter in to the jar. You are left with a jar full of happiness!



# MINDFUL KINDNESS

## *The Science of Mindful Kindness*

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Mindful kindness refers to the ability to take the time to ensure we are participating in daily acts of kindness, and to notice the acts kindness bestowed upon us, being truly grateful for each. Furthermore, we focus on the effect that participating in acts of kindness has on our overall mood. Participating in acts of kindness is fantastic for brain development in a variety of ways. Firstly, when we are mindfully kind to each other our brains naturally release oxytocin, our bonding hormone, which has many benefits including heart health (regulating heart rate), and increases in self esteem and optimism. Studies have shown that people who are consistently kind have happier lives in general. Additionally when we participate in mindful kindness the pleasure and reward centres of our brain light up, giving it the nickname “helpers high”. We get a serotonin release, helping to modulate mood and increase happiness, along with a dopamine release, helping our brain to function more effectively (much like in mindful gratitude). All of this leads to a healthier life in general, because a happy and healthy brain encourages a happy and healthy body (Kindness Health Facts, 2020).

## *Links to Belonging, Being & Becoming: The EYLF*

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**Being** - Being in the here and now and recognising each moment as important is a big concept of the EYLF. Mindful kindness, as with all mindful strategies, is practice at exactly this — taking each moment as it comes and simply being.

**Holistic Approaches** - Holistic education is about the connectedness of mind, body and spirit. Mindful kindness allows children the opportunity to get in touch with the positive pleasure responses that comes with dopamine and serotonin releases in the brain when they generate or receive kindness.

**Outcome 2:** Mindful kindness isn't just about children learning to appreciate the kindness of others, but it is also about being kind themselves. Participating in acts of kindness in one way children show an awareness of fairness.

**Outcome 3:** As children practice mindful kindness they are able to better regulate their moods and start to connect dopamine and serotonin releases in the brain (a pleasure response) with positive experiences, leading to greater wellbeing.

## 'Links to the National Quality Standards 2018

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**Standard 5.2 Relationships between children** - Mindful kindness allows for greater emotional control and self regulation through supporting children in seeking out positive experiences rather than becoming overwhelmed with negative emotions. Acts of kindness also allow children opportunities to give back to their friends, help each other, and generally build responsive relationships.

### **Links to Early Childhood Theory**

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**Steiner** - Rudolf Steiner believed the purpose of early childhood education was to imbue the child with a sense that the world is good and to awaken the 'physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual' aspects of childhood. Mindful kindness is concerned with recognising when others do nice things for us, and in turn giving back to them.

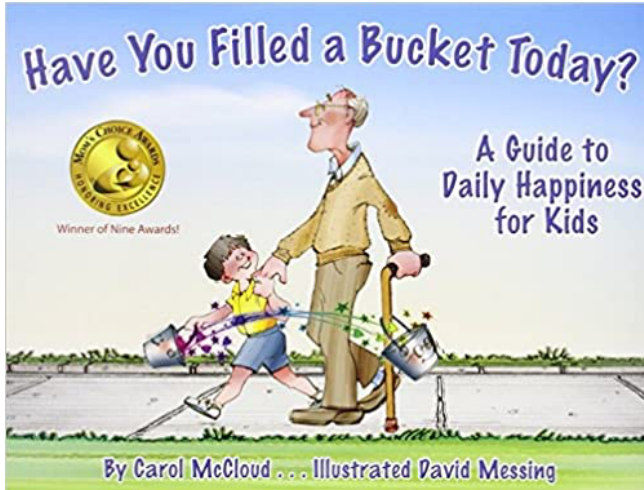
This encourages happiness, positivity and optimism.

**Montessori** - Maria Montessori was a big proponent of peace education and this started with teaching kindness. She understood that children learn kindness through their experience with others, stating "They [children] will imitate us in any case. Let us treat them, therefore, with all the kindness which we would wish to help them develop".



# IMPLEMENTATION IDEAS

## *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*



If you haven't already got this book at your service, you are missing out! This wonderful award winning picture book by Carol McCloud (2006) introduces acts of kindness as a concept of bucket filling. In the book it explains we all carry an invisible bucket around with us and when we do something nice for someone else, or they do something nice for us, it fills our buckets. It's a great physical demonstration of the impact of kindness. You can even give the children actual buckets and odd bits to put in them, and put the book in to action!

## *Random Acts of Kindness*

Fill a jar with little notes with simple acts of kindness written on them. At the beginning of the day when the children arrive they should pick a note from the jar for that day. This can be a nice little parting discussion with the parent as they read the note to the child and explain their daily task (if not, educators will have a wonderful opportunity for connection here). The note that the child has picked for the day has their random act of kindness which they must perform at some point in the day. At the end of the day, get the whole group together to discuss everyone's kind acts and how it made them (and the recipient where applicable) feel. This is a lovely positive game which can be embedded in to daily routine.



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# APPENDIX 1

## Key Person Approach

Key Points	Mythbusters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comes from Bowlby's theory of attachments which was later developed further by Ainsworth.</li> <li>• Goldshmeid was one of the pioneers who adapted attachment theory in to the key person approach for ECEC.</li> <li>• Closely related to the idea of the 'circle of security'.</li> <li>• Closely related to Reggio Emilia Approach.</li> <li>• Original theory around attachments did not consider the family structure which will influence the attachments in that child's life.</li> <li>• Attachment is central to survival and, according to more recent research, our wellbeing.</li> <li>• Research around brain development has demonstrated the importance of quality interactions and attuned adult relationships to development in the 0-3 age range particularly.</li> <li>• The key person role is an emotional relationship, as well as being organisational.</li> <li>• The key person will learn little facts about the child, their family, and their likes and dislikes.</li> <li>• Key person will greet the child upon arrival, ensuring a smooth transition from the home setting to the service environment.</li> <li>• Key person meets the routine needs of the child – nappy, rest, meal times etc.</li> <li>• The relationship between the key person, the parent and the child is triangular.</li> <li>• Change should be kept to a minimum to ensure continuity of care.</li> <li>• Back-up key person (or secondary caregiver) must be assigned to each child.</li> <li>• The key person becomes the secure base from which the child explores (circle of security).</li> <li>• Direct connection with EYLF: develops a child's sense of belonging.</li> <li>• Key person Approach is related to high quality care because it demonstrates recognition of the importance of secure relationships.</li> <li>• Creates harmony between the way families raise their children and the approach in the EC service.</li> <li>• Educators can ensure routines meet the individual needs of the children in their group.</li> <li>• Attachments help us to understand children's behaviours.</li> <li>• Key person approach has proven to lead to calmer environments and reduced stress levels.</li> <li>• Research has shown children who consistently receive nurturing and responsive relationships are more likely to explore their environment through play.</li> <li>• Key function of key person approach is self-regulation — children learn to manage their own emotions.</li> <li>• Children will begin to go to their key person instinctively.</li> <li>• Parents should pass any information on to the key person.</li> <li>• Other educators should consult the key person as they plan educational experiences for the child (to get whole context).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Does not</b> limit the child's activities or interactions.</li> <li>• <b>Is not</b> an 'exclusive' relationship. It fosters secure attachments not 'clingy relationships' (insecure attachment).</li> <li>• The child is <b>not</b> only cared for by their key person. The primary caregiver/key person has the special relationship with the child, but they are not the only one to meet the child's routines.</li> <li>• Children <b>should not</b> be given equal attention and care as they have differing needs. Key person approach ensures <i>individual</i> needs are met.</li> <li>• Key person Approach <b>does not</b> limit the perspective on the child as they are still observed and planned for by other educators. However the key person will be included to ensure needs are met within educational experiences.</li> </ul>

# GLOSSARY

<b>Adrenal glands</b>	Responsible for releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol.
<b>Adrenaline</b>	Hormone released by the adrenal gland, especially during times of high stress.
<b>Amygdala</b>	Almond shaped part of brain, part of the limbic system, deciphers emotional messages and responds accordingly.
<b>Attunement</b>	Being emotionally in sync with another person and communicating and responding with them in a sensitive manner.
<b>Brain Stem</b>	First part of brain to develop (in utero). Relays signals from spinal cord to brain. Helps control basic functions such as breathing, heart rate etc.
<b>Cerebellum</b>	Like a little brain within a brain it is responsible for procedural movement (walking etc) and spatial awareness.
<b>Cognitive Empathy</b>	Conscious empathy, when you can understand someone else's experience or trauma.
<b>Cortisol</b>	Stress hormone released by the adrenal glands. Increases during times of severe or persistent threat.
<b>Diencephalon</b>	Made up of the thalamus and hypothalamus it filters sensory information and regulates motivational behaviour.
<b>Dopamine</b>	Neurotransmitter linked to feelings of pleasure. Regulates positive feelings.
<b>Emotional Empathy</b>	When you pick up on the emotional state of someone else and carry it with you.
<b>Endorphine</b>	Neurotransmitter important to the creation of pleasant or euphoric feelings.
<b>Episodic Memory</b>	The memory of event, usually autobiographical.
<b>Explicit Memory</b>	Memory which is stored and recalled consciously.
<b>Frontal Lobe</b>	Responsible for planning, reasoning, impulse control, it is where personality is formed.
<b>Hippocampus</b>	Part of the limbic system, responsible for processing and forming memory, also for storing long term memory.
<b>Implicit Memory</b>	Memory which is stored and recalled subconsciously and is often procedural.
<b>Limbic resonance/ (empathy)</b>	Empathy based in movement — we are not conscious of it.
<b>Limbic system</b>	Controls emotions and other behaviours.

<b>Mindfulness</b>	Being in touch with or aware of the present moment in a non judgemental way.
<b>Neural pathway</b>	Pathways that connect areas of the brain and nervous system.
<b>Neuron</b>	Made up of an axon, dendrites and soma, neurons carry messages through electrochemical signals.
<b>Neuroplasticity</b>	The brains ability to continue to recognise and make new neural connections.
<b>Neurotransmitter</b>	Chemicals which assist signals in moving from one neuron to another.
<b>Occipital Lobe</b>	Responsible for vision — makes sense of what we see.
<b>Parietal Lobe</b>	Responsible for orientation of movement and processing/ integrating sensory information of taste and touch.
<b>Prefrontal Cortex</b>	Part of the frontal lobe responsible for rational and high order thinking.
<b>Serotonin</b>	Often called the happiness chemical, this neurotransmitter is responsible for a range of functions including mood modulation, learning, memory and cognition.
<b>Semantic Memory</b>	Semantic memory is factual memory, usually general world knowledge.
<b>Somatic Empathy</b>	Empathy based in movement - as we move closer to the other person we connect with their emotion.
<b>Emotional Empathy</b>	When you pick up on the emotional state of someone else and carry it with you.
<b>Synapse</b>	The tiny gap which serves as a connection between the dendrites of one neuron and the axon of another.
<b>Temporal Lobe</b>	Responsible for processing and making sense of auditory input.
<b>Trauma</b>	A stressful event which causes a prologued alarmed reaction. Split in to two categories simple and complex. Simple trauma refers to a one off incident where complex trauma is more pervasive.