

{Embrace}

Edition 5 | Your inclusion support magazine

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inside

The educator's guide to sensory processing



How to build children's resilience

7 best resources to help you welcome
Aboriginal children and families



One For All



What was a part of your childhood that you now recognise was a privilege to have or experience?

Perhaps it was the endless stretch of a lazy summer afternoon. Or visits to a grandparent's house in the country. Maybe it was riding your bike until you were called in for dinner.

Today, things are a little different, with growing concerns that children aren't spending enough time outdoors in natural settings.

Well, the bush kinder movement aims to change all of that.

In this edition of *Embrace*, we head out into the scrub to meet a long day care director and bush kinder enthusiast who believes children that spend time outdoors are healthier, more resilient *and* more inclusive.

We also hear from a unique OSHC service where children spend most of the day out in nature, regardless of the weather. There, toys are replaced by the imaginative use of sticks, rocks and leaves, and a 'play paddock' is the perfect space for grand adventures to unfold.

So what do you think – would you have liked to have attended a service where nature play was part of the everyday? How do you think it would have changed you? Do you suffer from a lack of nature in your life now? Join the conversation on Facebook [@CommunityChildCareAssoc](#)

And, as always, happy reading!

Karen Scobell and Jane McCahon
Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) Program Managers
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The Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. As part of the ISP, the Victorian Inclusion Agency is led by Community Child Care Association, and is delivered in partnership with Yooralla and KU Children's Services.

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The Victorian Inclusion Agency acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

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The outdoor OSHC service using nature to teach lessons

An unusual take on outside school hours care at Natural Learners in Greater Bendigo is giving children room to grow in new ways

Tell us a little about your service...

At our service, we provide an emotionally safe place to make mistakes, fail, try again, and, ultimately, take lessons from these experiences.

We use the outdoor environment as the canvas that provides the broadest opportunity for children to express and find connections to self, others and the world around them.

We are convinced that when we help our children find healthy ways to manage risk, manage themselves and their relationship with their world, we are creating self-confident and resilient global citizens that make our world a safer and better place.

Your service has all-natural play materials with lots of outdoor play and encouragement for natural learners. Can you tell us about that?

As a service, we are naturally drawn to the outdoors as the main learning-through-play environment for the children. The outdoors creates an authentic connection to our natural world and gives relevance and context to our place within it. Being outdoors facilitates all the children's senses, allowing exploration, experimentation and learning to unfold within the present moment.

Whilst we prefer all-natural play materials, it's as much about opened-ended materials or loose parts that allow 'natural play' to emerge. A lot of modern toys and play equipment tend to create structured play and outcomes. We've watched the children play for hours while upcycling an old sewing machine, pulling it apart – fascinated by how it works with its gears, motors and pulleys – and then repurposing the material into new items to meet their play needs at the time.

Outdoors in our play paddock, we have watched as hay bales, pallets and other recycled loose parts have been transformed into new playscapes for grand adventures to unfold, encouraging creative thinking, teamwork and communication. It's amazing to see children combat boredom by using simple things around them in new ways.

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How do these natural elements support the inclusion of all children? What are the benefits?

There are fewer set rules, and rarely right or wrong ways to use things. We find children have skills to offer in the natural environment that are different from skills used inside the classroom. This creates an additional platform for respect for each other's diversity. Children who may thrive in a classroom environment find that they may need to seek out ways to learn from their peers. Children who don't always feel at home in the classroom may suddenly find skills, knowledge and methods of communication that they didn't realise they had within themselves. The child in love with reading, but nervous about climbing a tree, finds themselves being inspired or challenged by others. Rather than create exclusion, we find that this creates inclusion. The educators need to learn to allow the children to support and include, rather than step in and take over.

Age also no longer becomes a 'thing' as children (and the adults) learn new ways, offer up different solutions and start to recognise that stages – not ages – are more important in the real world. Groupings are about shared interests or investigations rather than by year levels, gender or ability. This process allows children to find their natural place with people who value what they have to contribute.

“Children are natural learners. Our role as adults and educators is to facilitate, not control their learning.”

What does it take to create the perfect play space?

What is the 'perfect play space' would be our question back. Or perhaps, perfect to who, and perfect for when?

With the right framing, context and facilitation, most environments can be transformed into a natural learning environment. Unfortunately, predominately artificial environments often shape and constrain children (and educators!) into age-based roles and modes of behaviour.

In our experience, children will seek out what they need stimulation-wise for their individual developmental stage. This is far easier to facilitate in the outdoors for the simple reason that different naturally occurring materials can be used in multiple ways, often inspired by the child's developmental needs (rather than the educators' planned program!).

The 'perfect' part of the outdoor play space is the exposure to challenge and the opportunity to think outside of the box and build resilience.

What are some of the lessons you've learned?

That going back to basics and heading outdoors is intuitively understood by children, but often forgotten by adults and replaced with fear, caution and aversion to risk. As an example, we originally named our service Open Air Adventure Care but there was a misunderstanding that we provided no shelter (we do, by the way!). Based on this perception, and on advice from the Department as part of the quality improvement process, we changed the name to Natural Learners.

For us to offer what the children need and want, we have learnt that it is important to advocate for and remind the community of the benefits of the healthy risks and experiences that our natural world creates. Without doing this, we run the risk of artificial and overly structured environments being the 'only' way to learn within the regulated landscape due to fear and misunderstandings – and perhaps a lack of faith that children are naturally capable and competent learners.



What advice would you give to services looking to follow your lead? Do you have any practical ideas or tips?

Trust that children are natural learners. Understand that our role as adults and educators is to facilitate, not control their learning. Remind yourself daily how capable children are and how important embedding self-confidence and resilience in them is. To build these skills, you need a supportive environment that allows healthy risk taking and mistakes.

'Find ways to say yes!' is a mantra we use at Natural Learners. The children are good at reminding educators of this. This sometimes requires out-of-the-box solutions to ensure we can facilitate the activity that the child proposes, but it is an invaluable demonstration to the children of problem solving and our trust in them.

As a service or educator, understand the difference between perceived risk and actual risk. Children perceiving something as risky and finding ways to deal with the risk creates valuable learning for everyone.

The child who has learnt to face and manage risks has been equipped for life.

To offer the time and space for children to do this within your service is a worthwhile contribution to our society as a whole. This doesn't mean putting the child into hazardous situations or absolve educators of their responsibilities. Rather, it recognises that one of our highest responsibilities is to allow our children to learn to

navigate their world safely, and this comes from learning to self-manage their body in space and understand strengths, weaknesses and environmental limitations.

Remember when starting up or transitioning to natural learning that it may take the parents and community time to understand the benefits. That's OK – persistence and patience is key and the rewards of observing the children in your care thrive will outweigh all the hard work!

What next for your service?

Natural Learners started three years ago with our inaugural site at a small rural school (Axedale Primary) just outside Bendigo. Here we developed and adapted our philosophy in close consultation with the school and the local community. We launched our first play paddock site adjacent to the school on a vacant block of land. We observed and learnt how the children used the space over time. We visually demonstrated the benefits of this space and other activities the children engaged in by interacting with the community at local events and also through our Facebook page (facebook.com/naturallearnersaustralia).

We have recently acquired an additional 220-place licence to run vacation care programs centrally in Bendigo and are offering access to our program to more families in the second half of 2019. We have also been approached by a local developer to explore sites to expand our services and include early learning centres into the Natural Learners ecosystem.

This year is set to be a game changer for Natural Learners. We are excited to see that the hard work is paying off and that we will be in a position to bring our philosophy and approach to even more children and their families!



Resilience in young children: How to build it

Nikki Graham speaks to kindergarten teacher Jessica Guyett from Complete Kids in Sunbury about the focus on resilience in her educational program

What is resilience to you?

Personally, I believe resilience is the foundation of a child's ability to cope with and recover from difficulties. Resilience is a fundamental skill for children to develop and strengthen within the early years. When children are able to regulate themselves, they feel a sense of confidence and empowerment.

Generally speaking, what does children's behaviour tell you?

A child's behaviour is a reflection of their internal emotional state.

How do you encourage children to foster resilience?

I have specific resilience strategies, which are displayed visually within the kinder room. These include 'Ask your teacher for help', 'Say "Stop, I don't like it when..."', 'Share and take turns', 'Walk away', and 'Shake it off' (which we do Taylor Swift-style). We refer to these daily through roleplays, social/emotional play areas and social stories. We always encourage the children to problem solve which strategy to use by prompting them with open-ended questioning.

What do the children learn about themselves through the program? Does it help their parents or caregivers too?

The children learn how to cope with difficult situations, regulate themselves, relate to others and persist with





challenging tasks. The parents are supported through communication regarding the strategies implemented within the kinder room. We have term 1 meetings with the families, which is when they receive the resilience visuals. The aim is to use the same language at kinder and at home to ensure the children are being supported consistently.

Do children enjoy learning about resilience?

Yes, the children enjoy learning about resilience because I make it fun for them, whilst using real scenarios the children can relate to. I even roleplay some scenarios myself. There are times where I have thrown myself on the floor, pretending to cry, only to have my children laugh and say, 'Oh Jess, you should really shake it off'. We then use this as a teaching moment as we discuss which strategies I could have used at the time, enabling the children to problem solve. The most rewarding part of my job is hearing the children independently use the resilience strategies.

What are some resources (books, songs, activities) you use?

The children associate the strategy 'shake it off' with the Taylor Swift song. We also use a song called 'Belly Breathing' from *Sesame Street* that we learnt from Alix, our kindergarten assistant. I also use a lot of board games and interactive games to strengthen their resilience skills.

Do you enjoy teaching children about resilience qualities? How does it help your teaching practice?

I absolutely love sharing the resilience skills with the children. I am very passionate about this topic. The children begin to independently use the strategies, which in turn supports their conflict resolution skills and reduces their reliance on myself to solve conflicts for them.



Resources

Beyond Blue Building resilience in children aged 0–12

This trailblazing guide is jam-packed with explanations, practical resources and strategies that educators and services can use to develop their understanding, communication and planning around resilience strategies. Get it here:

www.beyondblue.org.au > Who does it affect? > Children > Building resilience in children aged 0–12: A practice guide

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Free visual supports for your lanyard overleaf

Visuals for your lanyard

✂ Cut out and laminate



Ask your teacher for help



Shake it off



Walk away



Say "Stop, I don't like it when..."



Share and take turns



Participation and difference: What can Reggio teach us about inclusion?

{ STEPHEN GALLEN
Early Childhood Consultant }

The Reggio Emilia educational project has been hugely influential on early learning environments here in Australia. But what does it tell us about inclusion?

For many years, the world-famous Reggio Emilia network of early childhood centres have challenged our understandings of young children's capabilities, our role as educators and teachers, and our pedagogy and practice. This is well known in relation to visual arts in the program, the organisation of the learning environment, the value of aesthetics and the power of their striking approach to curriculum and pedagogical documentation. Yet Reggio also has some powerful things to say to us about our approaches to inclusion in education and care.

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Firstly, Reggio challenges us to rethink some of the assumptions that underpin the very notion of inclusion and how these can sometimes work against genuine participation and belonging.

When thinking and talking about inclusion, it can be very easy to slide into an understanding that it is simply about including into the group those who don't belong or who are different from 'us'.

Unfortunately, while well-intentioned, this approach is actually part of the very problem it is trying to solve. By setting up an understanding that there is the group, and then those outside the group who we are trying to include, we are still operating within a framework that sees people as either 'us' or 'them'. Even more worryingly, this sets up difference and diversity as being defined against the 'norm' of the group – and this is the very structure that generates and sustains exclusion. It can be difficult to get out from under this structure as certain ways of being are privileged within society. Reggio offers us some provocation and possible directions for responding to this in our practice.

Importantly, Reggio shows us a powerful and practical way forward to enable, empower and include those children, families and identities that are at currently at risk of exclusion. This is through their understanding of the power of the 'image of the child'. Reggio suggests that our practices (as individual educators, as services and as a sector) are generated and shaped by our image of the child – in other words, the package of concepts, understandings, theories, views, descriptions and mental images of what we mean by 'child'. For example, when we talk about a child-centred program, or extending on the child's interests, most of us will have a personal 'image' or idea of what we mean by 'child' in this context. For me as a white, male English-speaker who grew up in an Anglo-Australian environment, my 'default' image might be a white, male child. If I am not careful, and critically reflective of this image and of my practice, I might well be unaware that I hold this image, or how excluding it is.

Reggio suggests that we all hold an image (or images) of a child. This is not a bad thing – it actually produces and generates our practice. What is important is that we critically reflect on the image/s we hold, take responsibility for them, and consciously choose and construct images of children that are respectful, empowering and inclusive.

Reggio also demonstrates practical and powerful ways to do this and it's important to understand the theory and thinking behind their approach. Choosing an image of a child is not as simple as choosing an item off the menu in a restaurant. These images are not just out there waiting for us in a pre-packaged sense (though they are a result of social, cultural and historical forces).



“Reggio shows us a powerful and practical way forward to enable, empower and include those children, families and identities that are at currently at risk of exclusion.”

Instead, we need to construct them, or generate them – and this is an ongoing process. In Reggio, documentation is a key way to consciously construct a particular image of the child. This is not simply about making sure that our documentation ‘includes’ all children, or ‘represents’ diversity – this is something more profound. Through their documentation they ask many ethical, reflective questions that we might like to consider as well:

- What image of the child is my documentation producing?
- Does this image empower the child? Does it see them as an agent, with their own voice, experience and point of view?
- Does it see them as a participant, as someone with rights, potential and a desire to connect and communicate? Does it show the child’s identity as coming out of relationships, rather than as something intrinsic within them?
- Is it inclusive? Does it show the child on their own terms, rather than in relation to the ‘norm’?

These questions, particularly the last one, also point out other things that Reggio can teach us about inclusion. Traditionally in Australian education and care, we use our documentation and observation of children to assess them against some predetermined criteria – such as developmental milestones or learning outcomes, for example. While technically speaking, child developmental processes and learning outcomes are complex and fluid, the reality is that we tend to use these as a ‘norm’ to measure children against. This carries the risk of creating a ‘normal’ image of the child, which then inevitably marginalises and excludes those who are different.

In the theory and practice of Reggio, there is no ‘norm’ from which others are judged. Instead, there are only subjective points of view and experiences that encounter each other: we are all different from each other, and we are different from each other in different ways. Encountering each other with this in mind means being open and welcoming to difference and to the Other on their own terms – a powerful experience of inclusion.



As a final point, Reggio also suggests that if we truly aim for inclusive practice, then along with our ‘image of the child,’ we need to consider the ‘image of our work’. In other words, we need to take responsibility for the structural, social and organisational aspects of our work. Inclusion is not just about our individual practices within our classrooms or services. It is about the choices we make for how the sector and our settings position themselves within society. Reggio came out of a parent-built network of schools, and positions itself as a civic, community participant with a major role to play in the city and surroundings. It has managed to carve out a role for itself as a participant and contributor within broader society. In this way it is included in the community as well as inclusive of the community – it is difficult to have one without the other. To truly work towards inclusion in meaningful ways then, we have to consider both our individual practice and the role of our sector and services within society – towards a vision of a truly inclusive and participatory community and world.



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Better out than in: The benefits (and fun) of bush kinder

Director Madeleine Lowrie from Bright Horizons in Croydon North reveals how her successful bush kinder program is helping to build the next generation of nature lovers

Tell us about your service and the uniqueness of your programs?

We are developing a curriculum in which the children can lead their own learning and play in nature. We want to harness the opportunity by exposing the children to the natural bush. This is modelled around our community and children's specific needs. It recognises the place the bush has in Australian folklore, Aboriginal stories and the significance of the land in Aboriginal culture. The best thing about our bush kinder program is that it is not just for the kinder-age children – it is for all children at our centre.

Where is the bush program held?

The program is held at the local Yarrunga Reserve, which is on Wurundjeri land and means 'beneath tall trees'. It is a short walk from the centre – younger children get there in our six-seater stroller. The reserve has plenty of space to play. There is a river with turtles and ducks, which fascinate the children. They can look and enjoy without going too near. There is so much for them to see.





How do you manage the safety of the children?

Children are made aware of our program rules and the safety of not only themselves but of other children and educators. This is discussed at length before and during each excursion. Children walk to the reserve in small groups with low child-to-educator ratios. The excursion is classed as a regular outing and can occur at different times throughout the day. Educators have work mobile phones, first aid kits, contact details and other items of need. There are water drinking facilities, and the community house has welcomed us to use their toilet facilities and change areas. Bush kinder is also supported by a road safety program and a water safety program.

What are some of the benefits that you see for children?

The program enables children to engage in natural outdoor spaces with plants, trees, rocks, mud and water. This invites open-ended interactions, spontaneity and risk taking. We see it as a great opportunity to provide children with a connection to nature while they are young, with the hope that they will build a sense of belonging and respect for the country as they grow.

Children observe the change of seasons, talk about native trees, learn about birds through their calls and observe the changes to the environment.

This outdoor bush play introduces the children to concepts such as problem solving, language, science and – importantly – caring for the environment. We see children collecting rocks, feathers and sticks, which is a great way for them to learn about patterns, sorting, similarity and difference.

How does bush kinder support children with additional needs?

Children with various abilities and needs, children from culturally diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal children are all supported to participate in the bush kinder program – it is a fun way to further develop their physical, social and emotional skills and improve their cognitive function. The program encourages children to connect with and appreciate nature while learning to work together and take turns in a small group environment. It encourages peer interaction, supports self-regulation, minimises hyperactivity and reduces aggression that can be displayed in children with varying needs.

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Children work together to create little environments using nature as their resource. On one occasion, a number of children created a tepee out of sticks and bark. They worked together and also supported those who needed assistance with lifting or holding branches. They used words of encouragement to support each other and boost each other along without any discrimination. It was amazing. They were all so proud of themselves and each other.

What do your educators get from offering a bush kinder program?

Since it started, all educators have enjoyed their involvement, sharing stories and excitement just as much as the children. They are amazed at what a difference a few minutes in the bush can do to redirect children's moods and engagement.

It is such a learning experience for the educators as well. Plenty of the children's discoveries extend further and continue back at the service, especially their interest in bugs and birds. Children have discovered feathers and twigs, which have also been used for such things as painting tools. They study the various textures and patterns, which the educators implement into their program and spontaneous play.

How have the families responded to bush kinder?

Our families have had such a positive response to the program. With the assistance of the online programming app, parents and families are able to view the stories and photos as to what the children are discovering and the learning process, as well as the fun that the children have. Parents often comment that it opens the opportunity for children to talk with them about their adventures and what they are learning about the environment and nature. Families and friends have volunteered to participate and assist with walking the children and engaging in the activities at bush kinder.

We want to hear more about your rules and how other services can learn from what you offer...

In addition to our safe clothing and walk/road rules, we have quite an extensive list, so I will share just a few ideas:

- Are we allowed to play with sticks? Yes, they make great digging tools or we can stack them up to build things. But we don't point them or swing them at our peers or educators.





- Are we allowed to play with rocks? Yes, think of the amazing towers and rock formations that we can create. But we keep them low to the ground and see if it is safe if we move them. Always ask a teacher or parent helper if you are unsure.
- Are we allowed to climb trees and tree stumps? Yes, but we ask the teacher, 'Can you watch me climb the tree?' Wait for the teacher to check the tree and say it is safe. The teacher will stand by you and you can show them how you can climb the tree.
- We try not to pick things off the trees and plants, only from the ground, as that is nature telling us they are still needing to grow. We can collect things off the ground to make stories, and maybe leave them behind so that someone else or another living creature can use them. It may be part of a bird's home one day.
- We may see ants nests in the ground, and this area will have a flag nearby. This is to say 'this is an insect's house' so you are able to slowly approach the area and have a look at how it makes its home, but remember to be quiet and calm, as they get scared of loud thumping feet on the ground above their homes. We do not stick sticks in or poke at the nests, as it will harm them or frighten them, and when they get frightened, they may bite you, and then you will have a sting. So, don't upset their homes. It's the same for any insect or animal homes – we have to look after them, so they are safe like we are.

Is there anything else you would like to focus on with your programming? Where to next?

We would like to introduce extra curriculums as well as invite visitors to share and extend knowledge and perspectives. This includes Aboriginal Elders and cultural incursions to be held at the reserve. Our Bright Horizons' Acknowledgement of Country not only acknowledges the Traditional Owners but also the land, wind, water and community. These elements form a part of our bush kinder philosophy and goals, which continue to guide us with the program.

Further information and engagement opportunities have been offered by our Inclusion Professional Monica Solomon, who has been able to share contacts and other program enhancement ideas that have kindled our imagination regarding how much further we can take our bush kinder program. One of these ideas includes Wayapa Wuurk, which is based on traditional Aboriginal teachings. There are 14 elements such as the sun, the rain and the wind. It provides connections to the earth, through mindfulness, deep breathing and gentle movement. We would like to implement this wellness modality with the children. We are thinking Innovative Solutions funding could be sourced to support and extend educators' skills in Wayapa Wuurk to enhance the bush kinder program and the centre.



Making sense of children's senses: The educator's guide to sensory processing

RENEE WRIGHT
Team Leader,
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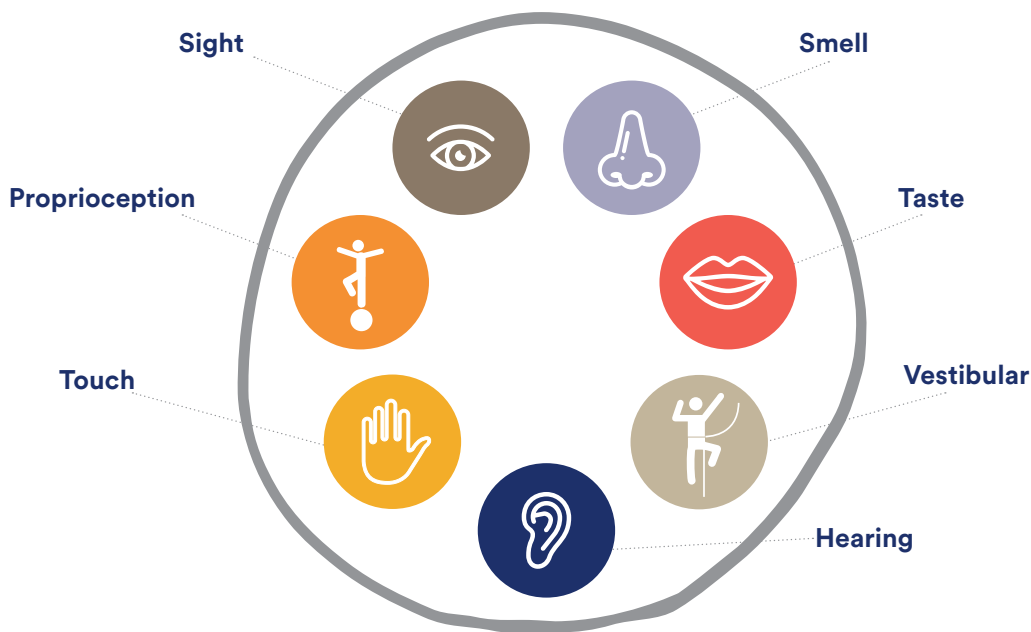
How can sensory processing help us understand children's behaviour?

Take a look around the room at your service. Can you identify a child that bites and kicks other children for no reason? Do you know a child who travels from one activity to another, spinning as they go? You're not alone.

This article will explain how sensory processing can help you understand and respond to children's behaviour.

What is sensory processing?

Sensory processing is how a child's brain makes sense of the seven senses (yes, there are more than just five!). There's seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, plus vestibular (moving and balance), and proprioception (a child's sense of their body position in space).



How sensory processing can help explain challenging or confusing behaviours

Sensory integration is a child's ability to use information from the senses and respond appropriately.

A child that loses their balance and bumps into other children during a music and movement session may have difficulty with sensory integration. In other words, they are struggling to get the right messages from their brain to their body.

Learning the three main sensory processing patterns can help educators identify when children are having difficulty with sensory integration. These are **low registration**, **sensory seeking** and **sensory avoiding**.

Children who take longer to respond to sensory information and do not seek out sensory experiences may have **low registration**. These children can lack awareness of their environment, seem easily fatigued, and need extra encouragement and input to follow tasks. During a fire drill, a child with low registration might appear relaxed and removed from their environment, ignoring the alarm and educator's instructions.

Children who are **sensory seeking** have a high sensory tolerance. These children might be energetic and constantly seeking sensory experiences. A child who is sensory seeking may be 'climbing the walls' at your service. Some sensory seeking children bite or kick other children – not because they want to hurt others – but because the sensory information to their muscles and joints feels good.

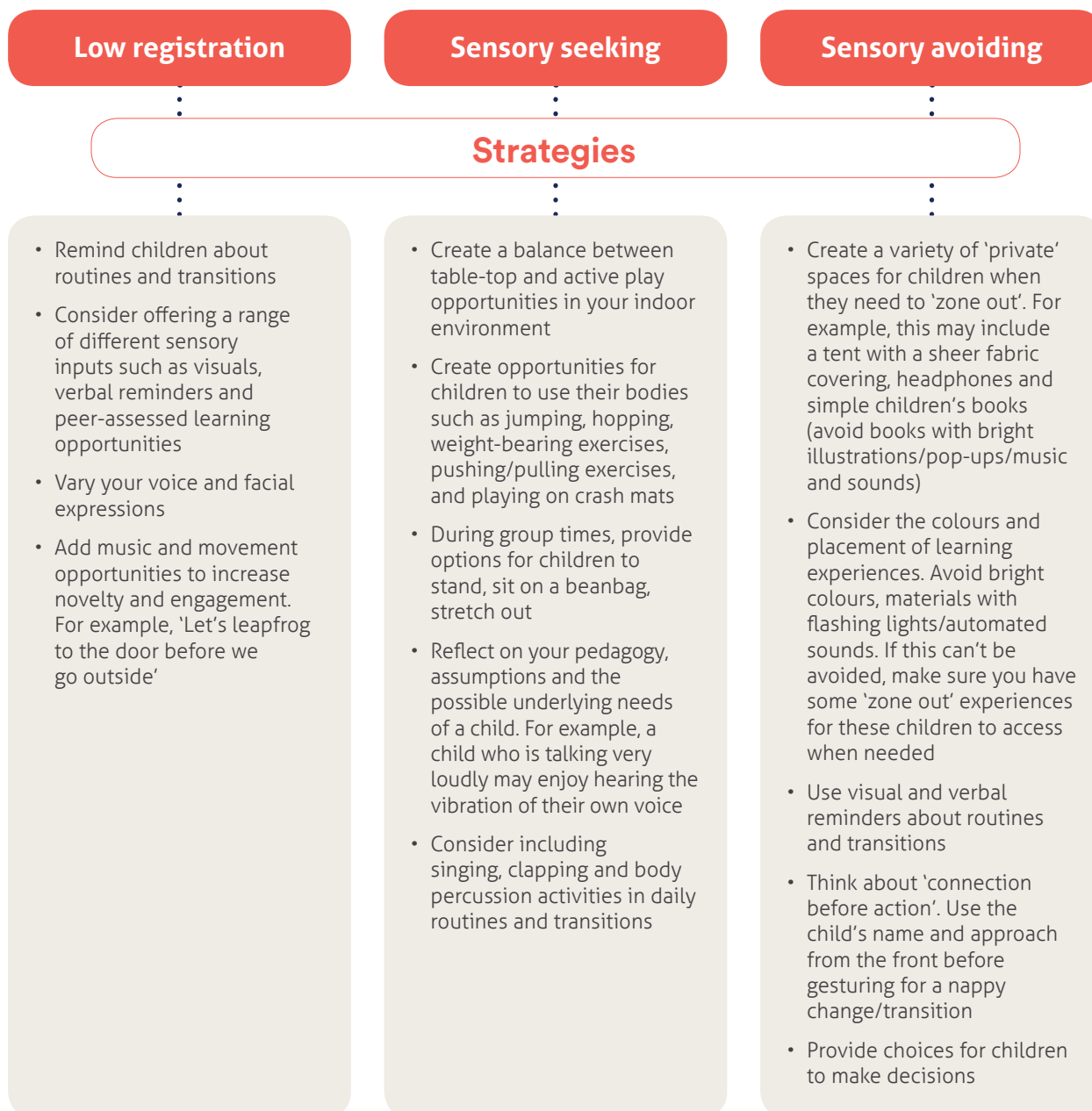
Sensory avoiding children don't seek sensory experiences. They can be very sensitive to stimuli and easily startled by noises, visuals, touch and motion. They might be resistant to strong flavours, textures and sounds, including tags on clothes and noisy toys. Sensory avoiding children can become distracted and overwhelmed, even by small changes in their environment.

Once you have identified a sensory processing pattern, you can implement strategies to support children's needs and promote appropriate behaviour.



Strategies to support children's sensory processing needs

Sensory processing pattern



Obviously, a child's behaviour cannot always be explained by sensory processing and integration. A child who cannot help bumping into other children during a music and movement session might also be affected by poor sleep or emotional, physiological or other factors.

Your local Inclusion Professional can offer support to discuss sensory processing and how it may be impacting on your care environment and practice. Make sure you discuss your observations with the child – where appropriate – and with their families, who can often share great insight and expertise.

All the best in making sense of children's senses!

I work as an Inclusion Professional in regional Victoria. What do you want to know?

Inclusion Professional
Di Bewsell understands the
challenges and delights of
being a country educator

Tell us about your work...

I'm an Inclusion Professional based in the Wimmera – I support regional, rural and remote education and care services and their educators across 11 local government areas.

What is your background and how did you come to be an Inclusion Professional?

I have worked in children's services all my career and although working directly with children is an amazingly challenging but delightfully satisfying role, I have found that I have naturally moved into roles that work with adults. First with students and educators in the TAFE sector and now in the inclusion field. Working with, supporting and advocating for educators is every bit as professionally challenging and satisfying. I am privileged to be able to work and reflect with educators as they try something new, change their practice, pick themselves up after a challenging day and reflect



on how tomorrow will be different. Educators have incredibly complex roles as they work with families, children and communities in all their diversity, and they do this within a highly regulated professional space. I believe they deserve strong advocates, like the Inclusion Professionals at the Victorian Inclusion Agency, to champion and support their work.

How has your upbringing influenced your career?

It has influenced where I have based my career. Having grown up in the country, I not only enjoy living and working here but I also believe I have a sound understanding of the challenges and rewards of being a country educator. Travel time and access to high quality professional development, working within close-knit communities, as well as being an active member of that community, are just some of the challenges and delights for a country educator.

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Can you describe a typical day?

I often joke with my partner that I have an amazing job – it involves driving around the countryside having interesting conversations with passionate people – and, in essence, it's true! Like all rural Inclusion Professionals, a lot of my time is on the road visiting services. Some of my remote services operate for 2–4 days with space for 12 children – tiny by city standards – and I may be one of just a few professional visitors they have each year. These services are vitally important for rural and remote communities as a place for nurturing social connections and belonging. I also have medium-sized services and large ones, like the city, and I have discovered working with services is like working with children – each is unique, has their own ways of working, requires different supports and is on their own path. At various times throughout the year, I am a part of that journey,

“ I have an amazing job – it involves driving around the countryside having interesting conversations with passionate people ”

assisting them to create environments and develop strategies to support the inclusion of all children. I assist services to formalise that journey in a Strategic Inclusion Plan and also support them to apply for Inclusion Development Funding, which can be challenging but we get there in the end (no laughter from my lovely, patient coordinators, please!).

What's been a highlight of your career so far?

This role has invited me to start to really learn and begin to understand the amazing complexity and breadth of Aboriginal culture. Through this role, I have had the opportunity to study, learn, meet, talk, listen and reflect with passionate members of the Aboriginal community, who see how pivotal early childhood is for creating understanding and pride in our Indigenous heritage and future. This is an ongoing journey for me and one that I am really enjoying sharing with services.

What are some of the greatest lessons you've learned?

That we are all on a journey – families, children, educators and Inclusion Professionals! Everyone's journey is unique and my role as an Inclusion Professional is to journey beside educators to support, resource, inquire, wonder, question, reflect, reframe and celebrate.





I have an amazing diversity of educators that I work with. Some are just beginning and studying hard while others are nearing the end of their career; some have worked in the same service since they left school and others have changed careers because education and care is their passion; some were born overseas and have made rural Victoria their home, while many were born and bred in their little country town. All on a professional journey and all part of the diversity of education and care.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Work really hard at relationships because they will help you find the answers to your questions.

Working with young children and families with complex, diverse needs is all about relationships. Knowing them, knowing yourself and – from there – finding ways to support and nurture takes time, understanding and connection.

What do you love most about what you do?

I love working alongside educators and being able to see and celebrate change – sometimes big, though often small. As educators, we are so good at celebrating children's growth, development and understandings but often forget to do it for our professional selves. By far the most rewarding part of my job is to support educators to develop their practice and then watch as they cement it into their everyday work and it becomes part of their professional selves. I get to see, acknowledge and celebrate that change with them – sometimes it is leaps in understanding, but often it is little things, nuanced changes. But, like with children, those tiny but important changes (as well as the big ones!) contribute to an amazing whole.





7 best resources to help you welcome Aboriginal children and families

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. reveals the top resources for educators looking to embed Indigenous perspectives into practice (you'll love #7)





1. ECA best of reconciliation: Research, theory and practice

A collection of key articles focusing on reconciliation from past editions of the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* and *Every Child* magazine.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au > Our publications > ECA special titles > ECA best of reconciliation: Research, theory and practice

2. Indigenous culture: It's everybody's business

An article addressing the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives in terms of national guidelines, such as the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au > Our publications > Every Child magazine > View the Every Child index > Every Child – Vol. 18 No. 1 2012 > Indigenous culture: It's everybody's business

3. Professional development: Aboriginal cultural awareness

- Module 1: Understanding identity
- Module 2: Understanding our past
- Module 3: Understanding learners

An online professional learning tool to assist educators to develop their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultures.

www.education.vic.gov.au > Schools > Training and development > Professional development for teachers > Aboriginal cultural awareness



4. Embedding Indigenous perspectives in the early childhood curriculum

An article outlining different approaches and practices in relation to embedding Indigenous perspectives, including answers to commonly asked questions.

www.ecta.org.au > Journal extracts > Melinda Miller – Embedding Indigenous perspectives in the early childhood curriculum

5. Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in your service

An article supporting educators to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with information about how to include Indigenous Australia in education and care services.

www.aussiechildcarenetwork.com.au > Articles > Childcare articles > Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in your service

6. Selecting and evaluating resources

A set of guidelines for educators to evaluate the adequacy and appropriateness of resources.

www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/approach2/indigenous_g008_0712.pdf



7. Meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

A popular video, created by the Victorian Inclusion Agency, that showcases how leading educators weave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their programs.

vimeo.com/viac/aboriginalperspectives

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✓ **OSHC specialist Dr Bruce Hurst**
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Dr Anne Kennedy has worked in early childhood education for more than 30 years as an educator, child care director and a teacher at Monash University. She was a member of the team who developed the EYLF. In 2012, Anne received the Barbara Creaser Memorial Lecture award by Early Childhood Australia.

Dr Bruce Hurst has 25 years' experience working in and with OSHC programs, and is one of the few academics who specialise in this area. Bruce's research has explored the experiences of older children in OSHC. He also has extensive experience delivering professional development programs for LDC, kinder, FDC and primary schools.

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Testimonials from 2018 participants

'Excellent information and resources. So impressed with the speakers.'

'Learnt a great deal and can't wait to implement the ideas.'

.....

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Monday April 29

Dingley

Tuesday April 30

Preston

Wednesday May 1

Ringwood

Thursday May 2

Choose a day or afternoon workshop:

Day workshop with keynote from Bruce: 11am – 2pm

Afternoon workshop with keynote from Anne: 1.30pm – 4.30pm





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