

BEDROCK

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**Parenting is different to teaching
– and children need both**

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Should Earn Like
They Matter**

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TERMINOLOGY

*The union acknowledges regional
differences in some terms. Please
bear these in mind as you read.*

QNT

Kindergarten

NSW/ACT

Preschool/Early
childhood centre

Sector in the spotlight

Just when we thought the nation's rolling crises – drought, bushfires, floods – had come to an end, along came the coronavirus.

The global pandemic has taken a strong swipe at the early childhood education and care sector. Teachers found themselves in the front line as social distancing rules proved next to impossible in classrooms. Pick ups and drop offs became problematic.

Worried parents kept children home and fee revenue fell dramatically. Governments state and federal stepped in with support packages to keep the sector from collapse. But not all businesses were eligible, and some teachers were stood down or lost their jobs.

Debate raged about whether young children, likely to be asymptomatic if they did get the virus, were carrying it to others. Confusion reigned: children could attend preschools and centres so their parents could work, but they couldn't visit grandparents. Where did this leave teachers?

With the sector suddenly declared an "essential service", dedicated teachers, lacking personal protective equipment, fronted up – risking their health and safety.

The media went into overdrive, revealing opposing opinions teachers encounter all too frequently: they're "unskilled" yet require a university degree; they're crucial to the economy yet undeserving of fair pay. See our in-depth analysis of media representations (pages 12-13).

It's enough to make us all anxious. Young children who endured traumatic fires and floods are now contending with an invisible foe in COVID-19. We explore how anxiety manifests in young children and how teachers might manage it (see pages 8-11), and we offer members a special NESAs-registered professional development session with psychologist Helen Tsamoulos (see page 5).

One antidote to children's anxiety is getting into the great outdoors. Not only does nature play lift mood, a new study by researchers at the University of South Australia finds it improves children's motor skills, learning capacity and social and emotional development (see pages 16-17).

We are here to support you through this pandemic. If you are concerned about your employment conditions or circumstances, we encourage you to contact us.

Mark Northam
IEUA NSW/ACT Secretary

Terry Burke
IEUA-QNT Secretary

BEDROCK

UPFRONT



Top up funding providing much needed relief for kindys

The IEUA-QNT has been informed that kindergartens across Queensland should now be receiving their one-off "top up" funding in addition to the Queensland Kindergarten Funding Scheme (QKFS).

The one-off payment was announced by the Queensland Department of Education on 12 April 2020 and is intended to provide some financial relief to kindys during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our union has had verbal advice from both C&K and Gowrie that, generally, kindergartens will receive about the same income from QKFS plus the support package as they would have received from QKFS and parent fees.

However, this is not the case for kindergartens that filled vacant spaces with younger aged children, as this cohort is not eligible for QKFS.

Overall, this is a good outcome for the early childhood education sector in Queensland and will greatly minimise any lost revenue from fees in Term 2.

This was the result of significant advocacy from our union to the Department of Education together with central governing bodies.



Your workplace health and safety rights during COVID-19

Under workplace health and safety laws, employers must ensure the health and safety of their employees, and others at the workplace, as far as is reasonably practicable.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has provided the following risk-mitigation strategies for employees in the early childhood education sector during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- minimise children's contact with others outside their group by separating cohorts, as well as staggering meal breaks and play time between different groups
- exclude staff, children and visitors who are showing symptoms of illness
- encourage regular handwashing, cough and sneeze covering and general hygiene best practice for children
- clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and frequently used objects

- open windows to circulate fresh air or adjust air conditioning
- encourage staff, children and visitors to abide by physical distancing recommendations.

IEUA-QNT Senior Industrial Officer John Spriggs said that where an employee has a reasonable concern that carrying out their work would expose them to a serious risk to their health or safety (emanating from exposure to a risk in the workplace), the employee can cease work or refuse to carry out the risky work.

“That is the employee’s right under workplace health and safety legislation,” John said. “In these circumstances, the employee must advise the employer, and be available to carry out suitable alternative work.”

In the instance of a reasonable health and safety risk, members should advise their employer of the risk.

If it is not addressed, members should contact our union immediately as they have the right to alternative safe work or to cease the work that involves the risk.



Professional development: Anxiety and young children

Over the past six months, Australian children have been affected by drought, bushfires, floods and now a pandemic. Teachers have also been significantly affected.

The IEU has worked with psychologist Helen Tsamoulos to create “Working with young children around anxiety and COVID-19”, a course specifically designed for teachers working with children 0-5 years old. This course covers:

- recognising anxiety in young children
- what we learn from trauma
- how to talk with young children about COVID-19 – what they should know and how to use narrative effectively
- games, strategies and activities to encourage resilience
- engaging with parents to address ongoing worry
- focusing on the positive to be gained and reflecting on opportunities to learn from adversity

- self-care for teachers during times of stress.

More information

- An on-demand session of this course is available to members. Log in or sign up for an account at TheIEUZone.org.au. This course is NESA registered.
- High anxiety: Supporting children through stressful times, page 8.



Early childhood after COVID-19

The Front Project, an independent national enterprise working to create positive change in Australia’s early childhood education system, is focused on developing new policy and funding recommendations so the early childhood education and care sector emerges stronger from the pandemic.

Together with sector leaders in its Apiary Fellowship, the Front Project is committed to working directly with children, parents, carers and early childhood teachers to ensure their perspectives inform the research. Over the coming months, the team will consult with the sector to:

- clarify stress points within the system
- understand policy and funding settings that obstruct equitable access to high quality early learning
- produce scenario modelling that reveals what changes in the system are possible or likely as the impacts of COVID-19 are felt and understood
- identify the key changes possible and necessary right now to improve quality and equity
- provide a clear direction forward.

The aim is to establish what conditions and practices are necessary to deliver a sustainable and high quality early childhood education system, and the investment needed.

The research will prioritise the experiences and opportunities that should be available to all Australian children, and emphasise how a strong early childhood education system benefits all sections of society.

More information

- thefrontproject.org.au/news/newsletters/42-what-will-australia-s-early-childhood-education-system-look-like-after-covid-19
- thefrontproject.org.au/initiatives/welcome-to-the-apiary



WALKING TOGETHER

Reconciliation Action Plans

Implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan is a practical way for early childhood education centres to support Australia's national reconciliation movement, writes IEU journalist Emily Campbell.

The process of reconciliation aims to promote and facilitate respect, trust and positive relationships between First Nations peoples and the wider Australian community. A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), therefore, provides a framework for participating organisations to take practical steps towards achieving reconciliation.

Solid foundation

The IEUA-QNT formed the Yubbah Action Group (pictured above) with First Nations members to oversee the development of our union's own RAP.

"RAP is, in essence, a formalisation of an organisation's commitment to do something about reconciliation in that it details specific actions that can be undertaken to further the cause," said IEUA-QNT research officer Adele Schmidt, who is a member of the group.

"In practice, many organisations find that once they've developed a RAP, their interactions with First Nations stakeholders take off and they can envision and enact new ways of working."

IEUA-QNT Branch Secretary and Caretaker of the union's RAP, Terry Burke, said the actions reflect our union's belief that building and maintaining meaningful engagement with First Nations members and their local communities is an important and necessary step to achieving reconciliation in Australia.

"Union values are also reconciliation values based on partnerships, solidarity, activism, justice, collectivism and inclusivity," Burke said.

"This commitment goes beyond industrial matters like wages and conditions – it is about using our collective strength to make positive changes in our workplace, our community and our society."

Practical plan

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program supports early childhood education centres and schools to design, implement and review their own RAPs.

The key steps for developing a plan include:

- establish a working group
- complete the reflection survey
- write a vision for reconciliation
- add actions
- submit the plan
- refresh the plan.

Take actions

Actions are the specific commitments included in a RAP. They relate to relationships, respect and opportunities within the early childhood education centre and with the community.

Although a minimum of 14 "required" actions must be included in a RAP for it to be considered complete, Narragunnawali details a list of 40 potential actions early childhood education centres can implement.

Centres looking to complete their first RAP may choose to start at the "Reflect" level.

Reconciliation Australia states: "A Reflect RAP clearly sets out the steps you should take to prepare your organisation for reconciliation initiatives in successive RAPs. Committing

to a Reflect RAP allows your organisation to spend time scoping and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, deciding on your vision for reconciliation and exploring your sphere of influence, before committing to specific actions or initiatives.”

Here are the 14 compulsory actions in a “Reflect” RAP framework:

- include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the classroom
- provide cultural competence for staff
- provide a Welcome to Country
- celebrate National Reconciliation Week
- build relationships with community
- teach about reconciliation
- explore current affairs and issues
- provide an Acknowledgement of Country
- display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- take action against racism
- consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when curriculum planning
- develop inclusive policies
- encourage staff engagement with these actions
- celebrate progress.

Is a Reflect RAP the right fit for your organisation?

RAP objective
Prepare the organisation for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives
Duration
12 months
Suitable for organisations that ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● may be new to reconciliation and unsure of how their organisation could or should engage with reconciliation ● may have limited or poor relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders ● need time to engage the whole of the organisation in reconciliation, including gaining support from senior leaders ● may not have an existing working group and structured plan to drive reconciliation ● may be unsure who their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and external stakeholders are
Key expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● establish an effective governance structure, including a RAP Working Group ● determine your organisation’s vision for reconciliation ● scope and reflect on how the organisation can contribute to reconciliation ● improve relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and relevant stakeholders ● build an understanding of who, how, why and when to seek guidance and consultation ● present business cases to senior leaders for future reconciliation initiatives

Source: Reconciliation Australia

Ongoing process

It’s important for organisations to review and update their RAP regularly to ensure the organisation continues on its unique reconciliation journey.

“Implementing a RAP is a strategic and meaningful way for early childhood education centres, kindergartens and preschools to teach students, teachers, families and the wider community about First Nations’ Australian culture,” Schmidt said.

“The preschool years are a crucial period in child development and their early experiences of education shape the trajectory of their experiences of schooling.

“Evidence shows that children who see themselves – their identities and cultures – reflected in the education setting have far more positive experiences of early learning.

“It’s also vital that non-First Nations children engage with First Nations histories and cultures as this shapes their orientation to Australian society.

“Inclusion of these cultures enriches learning for all.”

“Many organisations find that their interactions with First Nations stakeholders take off and they can envision and enact new ways of working.”

Getting started

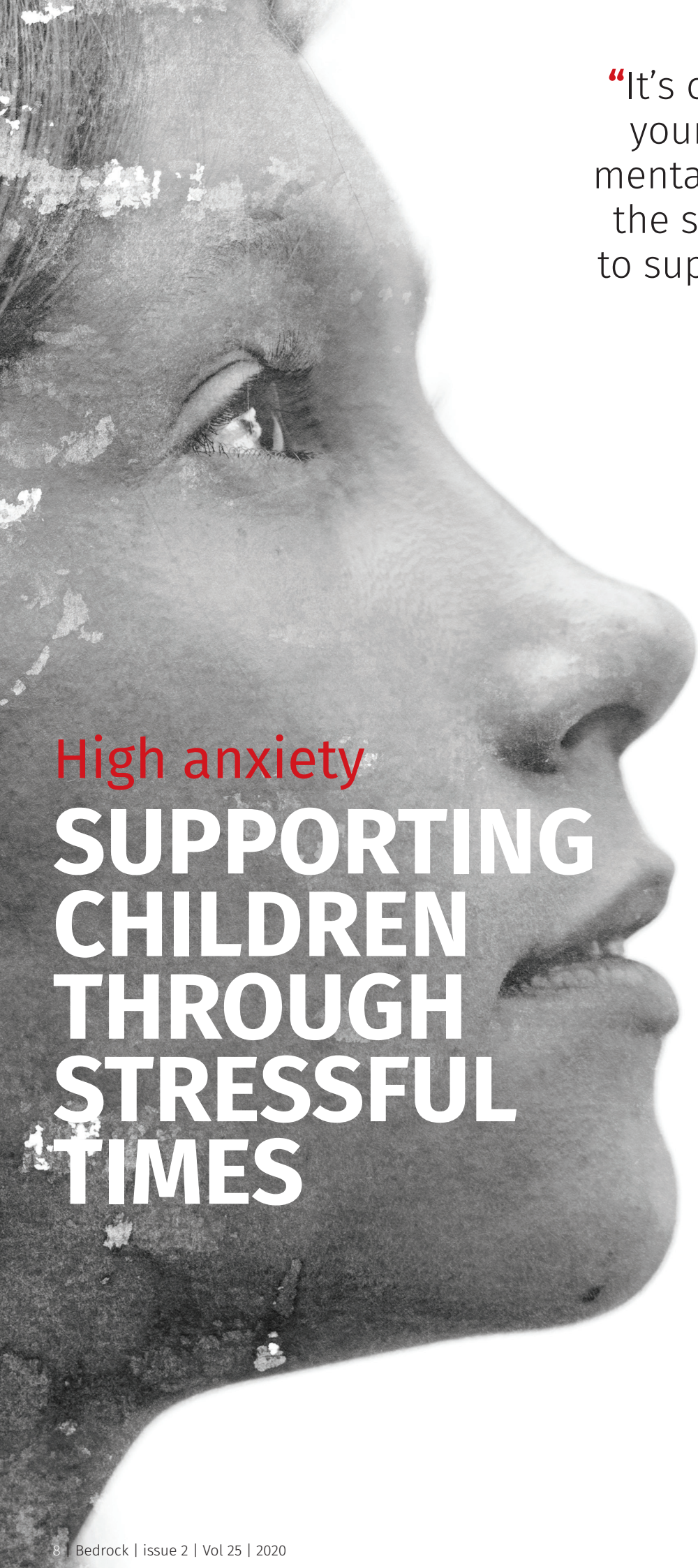
Early childhood education services and employees can begin establishing a RAP and learn more by visiting the Narragunnawali page on Reconciliation Australia’s website.

The Narragunnawali program promotes reconciliation in education. It supports all schools and early learning services in Australia to “foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions”.

The website also provides early childhood education teachers and assistants who sign up to the program access to professional learning and curriculum resources to support the establishment of reconciliation initiatives.

Sources and more information

- reconciliation.org.au/narragunnawali/
- narragunnawali.org.au/raps/what-is-a-rap



“It’s critical you look after your own emotional and mental health so you have the strength and capacity to support your students.”

High anxiety

SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH STRESSFUL TIMES

Australia’s rolling natural disasters and the coronavirus are understandably instilling fears in some young children. IEU journalist Monica Crouch asks three experts how they work with preschoolers’ anxieties.



Drought, bushfires, floods and the coronavirus pandemic have inevitably disrupted the lives of Australia's young children, in some cases giving rise to anxiety. Teachers in preschools, kindergartens and long daycare centres are tasked with managing very young minds in these complex and constantly changing situations. So what do they need to look out for and how do they work with it?

"There's been a number of crises that children and families have had to contend with in a very short period," said psychologist Helen Tsamoulos (pictured top right), who works with children, adolescents and families in assessment and counselling.

For some young children the past six months have delivered shock, loss and grief; for others there have been upended routines, cancelled activities and separation from friends and some family members. Young children are not oblivious to the news and community concerns, but they don't necessarily have the language to express their responses. "Children might internalise or externalise some of that stress, then present as an anxiety situation," Tsamoulos said.

The director of Emerging Minds, the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health, Brad Morgan (pictured bottom right), says children need more reassurance than ever to support their social and emotional wellbeing at this time.

"We know that children rely on the adults in their life – not just their parents and family members but also teachers – for cues on how to make sense of government restrictions and find a new rhythm in what is and isn't possible," Morgan said.

Tsamoulos agrees. "Children in that 0-5 age group are very much in a stage where they look to adults for guidance around how they respond in situations," she said.

"They're still in those formative years of learning strategies and skills, so a lot modelling and scaffolding that we do as adults around children of that age is very important."

Look for signs

Stress, anxiety and trauma are part of a continuum, and each is not easily defined, especially as individual children will respond differently to any given situation. "Stress can be positive or negative," Tsamoulos said. "With the coronavirus, children might be a bit uncertain about what is happening and might be stressful, but they might not necessarily respond in a negative way because they're being guided by parents or teachers, so they might be adjusting well."

But some are struggling and teachers can look for both obvious and subtle signs. "Anything that's outside the norm of what the child presents within your average day would indicate there's something

happening emotionally for that child that they may not be coping with well," Tsamoulos said.

The director of Cobargo Preschool, IEU member Christine McKnight (pictured above, with children), witnessed stark differences in her young students after the horrific bushfires that ravaged their town on new year's eve 2019. Of the 20 children at the preschool at the time, 10 lost their homes and a further seven experienced substantial damage to the properties where they lived. Most had gone through hurried evacuations.

"They were sort of on the surface alright, but they were quiet and they were different, or they were noisy and different," McKnight said. "They were just different in their own ways. They started to interact a bit differently – some who had previously been really vocal and out there and involved in everything had gone really quiet, and it took a while for those children to start to feel more comfortable again."

To McKnight's surprise, the children were keen to engage in "fire play". "The first thing a child who had lost everything did was ask for the fire engine," she said. She questioned if this was appropriate but followed her instinct and went with it. "They played fire engines for weeks, so we had a lot of screaming around the playground. They just needed to do it."

McKnight also noticed that the children's play had become

particularly loud. “And not in a normal sort of children’s loud way, they seemed to need to make a lot of noise,” she said. “It seemed to me they just needed to be heard – to be bigger, to re-establish themselves. Everything they did was loud, they’d even walk loudly, it was noticeable.”

While the Cobargo children grew loud, Tsamoulos says children have other ways of externalising stress or anxiety. “They might become more aggressive or they might be less compliant and have more meltdowns, more tantrums,” she said. “On the other hand, they might internalise it. They might isolate rather than be among others, or it might impact on their sleep and on their eating.”

Morgan lists a range of behaviours that may indicate anxiety, including “frozen” expressions, uncontrolled crying, and persistent physical complaints such as nausea, stomach aches, headaches, and loss of bladder or bowel control. Other indicators include clinginess, wanting to check in on parents and siblings, “acting out” to get attention or “people pleasing” so as to avoid upsetting adults around them.

Time to talk

There are several strategies teachers can implement to ease children’s fears. “As educators, it will be important to provide plenty of opportunities for children to talk through their feelings, if that’s what they want to do,” Morgan said. “Within the physical and virtual classroom, it’s critical children are listened to, reassured and supported.”

While each child is different,

Tsamoulos recommends identifying emerging and unfamiliar emotions. “Being able to name and normalise the feelings children have is very important in validating fears – they’re quite real for the child,” she said.

“At the moment it’s over things that are quite significant, but sometimes it can be over things that might not seem as significant, so validating that the child feels strongly about something is important.”

After talks with staff and a trauma counsellor, McKnight and her team decided not to initiate discussion with the children about the fires, but allow them to lead and support them should they want to bring it up.

It was a counterintuitive event that coaxed the Cobargo children into talking: a visit from the local fireys. “Normally when the fireys come there’s great excitement because they bring the siren and they make a lot of noise and it’s a lot of fun,” she said. “But this time the children were quite hesitant when they arrived.”

The fireys understood this. “They sat down and played with the children and it was really quite lovely and gentle,” McKnight said. When it came time to leave, the fireys asked if the children wanted to hear the siren. “My first thought was ‘no,’” McKnight said, but she decided to let the children take charge. Reluctant at first, the children decided they wanted the siren after all. McKnight suggested they get as loud as the siren, and the children responded enthusiastically.

“We made it part of a game, and we drowned out that siren,” she said. “It was a really positive thing

for them to do. Then after the fireys left, the children came inside and they all started talking, and it was at that point we had them saying ‘we lost our home’, ‘we used to have a swimming pool’, ‘we lost our animals’, lots of little things. It allowed them to start talking about it, and it enabled them to start engaging in more direct conversations. So it was that community input that triggered a response that meant we could share about the fires more openly.”

Enable agency

In the face of uncertainty, children, like adults, feel the loss of control. So it’s important, Tsamoulos says, to grant them agency wherever possible. “It can be as simple as choosing the activity they’re going to do next,” she said. “So you might say to a child ‘would you like to do this activity or that activity?’. It might just be around their day to day skills and activities.”

This can help a child to feel a degree more empowered and independent, rather than constantly being told what to do. When McKnight granted the Cobargo children agency over the siren, it emboldened them to talk about their experiences.

Answer questions

In coping with the coronavirus, Morgan recommends teachers introduce frequent short discussions into the day and be prepared for children’s curiosity. “It will be important to answer questions honestly but in a hopeful way, correcting misinformation and focusing on helping children





understand the role they can play in preventing the spread of infection," he said.

Like Morgan, Tsamoulos proposes simple information tailored to particular stages of cognitive development, particularly around making the abstract concrete. She suggests a simple explanation of "we're making sure we wash our hands so we're not spreading germs". The inclusive "we" creates a sense of togetherness. "It's about putting it in the language they can deal with and process," Tsamoulos said.

Physical activity

"There are ways of addressing the emotional dysregulation that stress, anxiety and trauma can create from a thinking perspective, but there are also ways we need to address it from a physical perspective," Tsamoulos said. "And movement is quite an important aspect of that."

The power of physical activity to improve concentration, memory and mood are well known, and this goes for both adults and children. Morgan recommends creating as much time for play as possible, especially free play, both inside and outdoors. But the pandemic has also meant less access to parks and playgrounds and a corresponding rise in screentime.

"If energy levels and stress are affecting emotional wellbeing, it might be an opportunity to look at changing where education happens and some of the different ways physical activity can be incorporated into existing routines and learning," Morgan said. He suggests getting outside as much as possible and incorporating more incidental exercise as well as trying out some online physical activity programs (see: References, at right).

McKnight said the Cobargo children came up with a creative game that reflected their shared experience. "We were watering the garden and I put the sprinkler on," she said.

"And one of the children decided that was the fire, so they all had to work together to stay away from the sprinkler. When I'd move it, they'd say 'oh no, the fire's moved, we've gotta go and protect this other part of the playground'.

"That was also part of a very shared play," she said. "They were working together as a team and they had to cooperate. There was a strong sense of belonging. It was really interesting play, and it went on for days – so I had to water the garden a lot."

Tsamoulos notes that providing distractions or calming activities can help ease heightened states of emotional arousal. "Some children might need to run around or need to jump on a trampoline; other children might need to have a lie down with a book," she said. "It depends on what the child finds soothing."

Taking care of teachers

Teachers have been very much in the front lines of the nation's recent crises, and both Morgan and Tsamoulos emphasise the importance of supporting teachers' mental health. Think of the safety briefing on aeroplanes: put your own oxygen mask on first before helping anyone else.

"That means it's critical you look after your own emotional and mental health so you have the strength and capacity to support your students, who can become reluctant to share their own concerns if they think they will further upset the adults they rely on," Morgan said.

While self care looks different for everyone, suggestions include taking regular breaks and maintaining social support networks. Anxious children pick up on stressed adults.

"It's very important that we practise self care as adults and that we are able to help our own mental health so we can then help children's mental health," Tsamoulos said.

Suggestions for supporting children

- Maintain as many routines as social distancing allows.
- Be conscious of how you talk about the virus – avoid being flippant or dismissive.
- Communicate hope by talking about the actions people are taking to prepare, stay safe and recover.
- Talk to students about what is happening in the community, what their preschool is doing and how they can help.
- Provide comfort, reassurance and support if children are upset or feeling scared.
- Give young children time to play – it's one way they work through their feelings.

Source: *Emerging Minds*

Professional development

The IEU has partnered with psychologist Helen Tsamoulos to create a course, *Working With Young Children Around Anxiety and COVID-19*, especially for teachers working with children aged 0–5 years.

Members can sign up or log in to TheIEUZone.org.au to complete this NESA registered session on demand.

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- NSW Health: health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/childcare.aspx
- Queensland Health: health.qld.gov.au/public-health/schools/prevention
- Australian Psychological Society, Looking after children who are anxious about bushfires: bit.ly/2Wb8cBU
- Child Mind Institute, Talking to kids about the coronavirus: childmind.org/article/talking-to-kids-about-the-coronavirus/
- Anxiety Awareness Guide for Teachers: bit.ly/3bdURWP
- PE teacher Joe Wicks' on YouTube: bit.ly/3cqmzaY

**Parenting is different to teaching
- and children need both**

**‘An important role’: Early childhood
teachers fight for pay parity**

**Low-paid ‘women’s work’:
why early childhood
educators are walking out**

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A headline tells a thousand words

Thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, preschools and kindergartens are suddenly in the limelight. IEU journalist Angus Hoy looks at media perceptions of a highly skilled profession that is often misconstrued as “childcare”.

One of the many impacts of the COVID-19 crisis has been to lay bare the fundamental inequalities of our society. In polarised economies and labour markets, the burden created by the virus has fallen on the most vulnerable. This ripping back of the curtain has been the theme of the news and countless blogs, think pieces, letters to the editor, op-eds and commentary.

Examining a selection of media depictions of the sector illustrates the double standard to which this crucial workforce is subjected. Workers in early childhood education and long day care centres know this hypocrisy and inequality all too well.

Despite being university trained, early childhood teachers have been systematically underpaid and often underappreciated, with the predominantly female workforce dismissed as glorified babysitters, child minders and nappy changers. The sector has been criticised in contradictory terms: ineffective yet crucial; unskilled yet requiring a university degree; crucial to the economy yet undeserving of fair pay.

Suddenly essential

Yet when the pandemic struck and Australia (rightly) ground to a halt, early childhood teaching was an “essential service”. All of a sudden, they were not only fundamental to a child’s education and development and therefore a sound investment in Australia’s future economy, they were also central to the nation’s

Preschool Teachers Should Earn Like They Matter

Senator describes
childcare work as
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If coronavirus forces childcare
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immediate economic viability, educating children while their parents worked.

Early childhood teachers require university qualifications just like teachers in any other contexts but, in many settings, they are paid less. Employers and governments alike have tried to diminish the professional standing of early childhood teachers, saying their work is not as valuable as that of teachers in primary schools or high schools. We do not support this view: the IEU strives to achieve fair and decent wages, dignity and respect for all teachers in all contexts.

Plain speaking and platitudes

As the pandemic began unfolding in March, Shadow Treasurer Jim Chalmers acknowledged the crucial role of the sector and the stresses it was under. “Clearly one of the most impacted parts of the economy will be the childcare sector,” he said. “This situation is urgent in childcare and it needs to be fixed as a matter of priority.”

Platitudes abound from politicians, media pundits and commentators, praising the vital work of our newly minted “essential workers”. Some say the virus is an awakening, that governments now value these underappreciated, underpaid and underrepresented professions. But we are also hearing impatient calls for the world to return to “normal”, for our lives to go back to the way things were pre-coronavirus.

“The virus, and the shock to the economy it has incurred, provides a brief window of opportunity to stand up and assert the value, skill and dignity of the early childhood sector.”

We all eagerly await the chance to visit our friends safely again, to go to the movies, or out for lunch. But to allow Australia’s society and economy to “snap back” to its previous structure of corrosive inequality, exploitation and class stratification, would be a tragedy.

The virus, and the shock to our economy it has incurred, provides a brief window of opportunity to stand up and assert the value, skill and dignity of the early childhood sector. And while we’re at it, that of the hospitality, arts, retail, nursing and the broader education sector.

IEU supports you

The IEU continues to fight for equitable salaries for our members in early childhood education through our enterprise bargaining and in the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch’s landmark pay equity case. We call on the government to commit to properly funding early childhood education – extending beyond its stopgap pandemic measures.

Change only happens if we make it happen, and we are determined to continue on our way to creating this change.

Fair pay. Security. Respect. A safe place to work. These are crucial as we emerge into a post COVID-19 world. Otherwise, all the words sung out in praise of early childhood teachers will have been just that: words.

Opinion

Ready for a revamp



Lisa Bryant takes a look at the economics of early childhood education in NSW and considers how the coronavirus pandemic presents an opportunity for a rethink of funding mechanisms.

COVID-19 may not have delivered wage rises for early childhood teachers but it has delivered something dear to most teachers' hearts: free early education and care for children at long day care services and free preschool for three and four year old children in NSW.

So the multimillion-dollar question is: How do we ensure this is retained in the post COVID world? The answer is obvious. Parents!

It's clear Australia will be in a recession for a while. So any plan for young children to receive an early education free of charge (much as children in state primary schools do) will be needed to help parents and their tighter budgets.

It also costs less for the federal government to fund services this way.

Breaking it down

The federal government said it would pay an estimated \$600 million to the wider early education and care sector (long day care centres, family day care services and out-of-school-hours care centres) for the first three months of COVID-19 arrangements. It has also allocated money for supplementary grants.

JobKeeper payments to the education and care sector are expected to cost \$1 billion. That's a lot of money but still less than the \$2.2 billion the government would have paid under previous arrangements.

The NSW government is only funding what it usually spends on preschools; plus up to an additional \$51 million for preschools and \$82

“If you add up all the additional COVID-19 funding – free early education and care is cheaper for governments than partially subsidised education and care with parents paying fees.”

million for council services that are not eligible for JobKeeper payments.

If you add up all the additional COVID-19 funding, free early education and care is cheaper for governments than partially subsidised education and care with parents paying fees.

The flaw in this argument, of course, is that many services are receiving a much lower total income level than they had previously. Many service owners will tell you “free childcare” is coming out of their pockets.

But back to parents. Surely having had a taste of free early education, parents would be behind any push to keep it free?

Economists point out that there are inbuilt disincentives in how the Child Care Subsidy program works for women in full-time work. Coming out of a recession, the nation needs everyone working to keep its economic cogs turning.

Collective benefits

COVID-19 has also shown us that, above all, we live in a community – the virus has affected us all. This then seems a good time to talk about the collective benefit of early education for all of us.

So what are the arguments we need to muster to make free early education not just one of those weird things we did during the pandemic, such as cook all our own meals and avoid touching our faces, but a permanent feature of Australian society? Let's list them:

- It's good for all of us, not just those of us with children. Why? Because it's other people's children who will grow up to be the nation's doctors and nurses, among all kinds of professions. Don't we all want them to have the best start to their education?
- It's simpler. Forget complex funding arrangements to parents – fund the centres directly and it's easier for all.
- It doesn't cost governments that much more than usual.

- Parents expect it now. Which political party would ever risk taking something away from a group that has accepted it as a right?

Some of these arguments are not that different to what we would have said before the pandemic. What is different now is that early childhood teachers and advocates for early education and care no longer have to use them alone – others will join in.

Get the message out

But we have to make sure governments hear us. There will be calls for some of the economic changes wrought by the pandemic to be made permanent. Who wouldn't want less air pollution and more co-operation between state and federal governments to remain?

So we have to get our call in early and make it loud. Start by asking parents to write to their state and federal MPs to call for early education and care and preschool to be made permanently free of charge. Set up a letter-writing station next to your handwashing station and provide paper, stamps, envelopes.

Services can write to MPs as well. Write to local newspapers. Tell them how much children at your centre have gained from free preschool and early education. Remind them that one in five children in NSW is developmentally vulnerable by the time they start school.

Remind the politicians that early childhood teachers turned out to be essential workers all along, so paying them their worth would be another great thing to do after the pandemic.

Call for comment

Share your view on early childhood funding:
bedrock@ieu.asn.au



Into the outdoors

A world-first review into the effects of nature play on children's health reveals positive connections between nature-inspired play spaces and children's progress. IEU journalist Mykeala Campanini explores this exciting new research.

A groundbreaking review, "The impacts of unstructured nature play on health in early childhood development", which analyses 16 studies from around the world, was conducted by Kylie Dankiw, Margarita Tsiros, Katherine Baldock and Saravana Kumar at the University of South Australia. The researchers explored the impacts of nature play on the health and development of children aged 2 to 12 years.

They found that exposure to nature play had consistently positive impacts on children's physical activity outcomes and cognitive behaviour, with evidence showing nature play also improves children's complex thinking skills, social skills and creativity.

There is increased global concern regarding the physical wellbeing of young children after recent research indicated 41 million children around the world are considered obese, a figure that has steadily increased since 1990.

The findings of this review offer a solution in the form of nature play to improving children's mental and physical health and combating the childhood obesity crisis.

What is nature play?

Researcher Kylie Dankiw, who led the review, described nature play as simply playing freely with, and in, nature.

"One of the seminal findings of our research was that across the literature, nature play was defined in many ways," Dankiw said. "We think this could be explained due to where the studies were conducted, which included Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia.

"Despite this, there were some consistent characteristics and elements used to describe nature play spaces, such as free play and interacting with natural elements such as trees, sand, water and vegetation.

"While the concept of engaging with nature and free play is not new, the move towards redeveloping children's play spaces from traditional playgrounds into more nature-based play spaces, particularly in early childhood education centres and schools, is relatively recent."

Why mud pies matter

The findings of the new research support the development of innovative nature play spaces in early childhood education centres.



“The review found that nature play improved children’s levels of physical activity, health-related fitness, motor skills, learning and social and emotional development.”

“It’s about making mud pies, creating stick forts, having an outdoor adventure and getting a little dirty,” Dankiw said.

“In recent years, nature play has become more popular in the education environment, with many early childhood education centres incorporating natural elements, such as trees, plants and rocks.

“But as they transition from the traditional plastic playground to novel, nature-based play spaces, they are also looking for empirical evidence that supports these investments.

“Our research involved first rigorously, transparently and systematically reviewing the body of work on nature play and showing the impact it has on children’s development.

“The review found that nature play improved children’s levels of physical activity, health-related fitness, motor skills, learning and social and emotional development.

“It showed that nature play may deliver improvements in cognitive and learning outcomes, including children’s levels of attention and concentration, punctuality, settling in class, constructive play, social play as well as imaginative and functional play.

“Nature play also positively impacted children’s levels of physical activity and health-related fitness, including fine motor skills relating to improved levels of balance and flexibility.

“The importance of physical activity to reduce obesity risks has been well documented in the literature, particularly in childhood, where physical activity patterns in the early years have been known to track strongly into physical activity patterns later in life.”

Obstacles in the way

The research indicates that, despite its benefits, access to nature play is diminishing among young children.

There is a variety of contributing factors, such as space, safety, time and competing interests that promote an inactive lifestyle in which play is restricted to electronic devices.

“Nature play activities incorporate things children love to do but, unfortunately, as society has become more sedentary, risk-averse and time-poor, fewer children have these opportunities,” Dankiw said.

“Currently there is no universal definition of nature play nor consistent descriptions of nature play environments. This can pose an obstacle for teachers to implement or create nature play spaces when it is unclear what actually constitutes a nature play environment.

“One of the recommendations from our current research is for a better universal definition of nature play.

“By doing so, future nature play spaces can share commonalities in their development and implementation,

which will assist consistent critical evaluations in building the evidence base for nature play.”

Open to everyone

Dankiw emphasises that current research is focused on unstructured free play within nature rather than structured outdoor education.

“The importance of child-led play is clear and so teachers, where and when possible, should allow children to go outside and explore the outdoor environment, either on school grounds, or take an excursion to the local creek or park, where they are bound to find trees, plants or other natural materials,” she said.

“Let the kids take the lead and they may find natural materials that interest them. It might be some colourful leaves, flowers, sticks, bark or, if they look even closer, some insects.

“These materials can then be used at the site or in the classroom as part of everyday activities.”

Recognising the broad range of benefits children gain from nature play is a first step.

“But knowing alone is not enough,” Dankiw said. “We must endeavour to incorporate unstructured free play as part of everyday activities for children and let them take the lead.”

Photo above courtesy of Kylie Dankiw

Power of a playground

Before the coronavirus crisis came the bushfires that shattered Cobargo – and the playground of its preschool. Kindness and community are the keynotes in its recovery, director Christine McKnight tells IEU journalist Monica Crouch.

It was only six months ago that bushfires tore through the small town of Cobargo, in the Bega Valley of south eastern NSW. Shocking images emerged on new year's eve of the town's main street flattened by the massive fire.

With a population of just 775 people, Cobargo was devastated. The fire destroyed almost 450 homes throughout the shire, more than 120 of these in Cobargo.

Yet out of this horror sounded a small note of hope. Cobargo Preschool, on the far reaches of the main street, was left untouched – almost. “The fire jumped the fence, but it was put out by our neighbours because nobody else was around,” said Cobargo Preschool director and IEU member Christine McKnight. “Two people who lived in the street heard it was getting into the preschool and they came over.”

But at that stage, there was no water available to them. “They put the fire out with sticks and branches and by pulling things away from the building,” McKnight said. “It was amazing because this saved our building, otherwise it would've gone up.”

Immediate aftermath

McKnight was stunned when she first saw the school. “I don't think I have words for it,” she said. “I just could not believe it. The fire had come right to the boundary of the building. I was in disbelief that it could even happen, and that the preschool was still standing but two nearby houses had burned. I couldn't find words.”

While the preschool building was saved, the grounds had sustained considerable damage. “The fire had destroyed some of our playground area,” McKnight said, and play equipment was left unsafe.

As the week wore on, she heard news of her young students. “Everyone in our community, and in our preschool community, had suffered some loss,” she said. Among the preschool's 20 students, “10 had lost homes, I think another seven had damage to property – so even if they still had a home, fences or sheds were damaged or their animals or something was lost”. The few who escaped direct losses had nonetheless experienced anxious evacuations (see story, page 8).

The fire revealed just how central the preschool is to the Cobargo community. Of the neighbours who'd fought the fire, McKnight said: “I think they thought it was really important that the children have the security of somewhere to come back to – they thought their preschool



was an important thing to save.” The rest of the town saw it that way too.

Starting over

Fortunately, the preschool’s insurance company came through with funds quickly. Then one of the fathers, Tim Dummett, and his team at local landscaping business Proscape Garden Construction, was keen to take on the project. “Tim was just wonderful,” McKnight said. “He came in with such confidence and so many ideas, and he took the stress away from replacing the playground and has just done the most beautiful job. It’s more beautiful than it was.”

Proscape had other jobs booked in, but these clients were only too happy to wait in favour of the preschool. “After such a traumatic school holidays for the children and their families, we wanted to be able to offer a familiar and safe space for the children to come and play as soon as possible,” Dummett told the *Bega District News*.

The rebuild worked wonders for the children. “The playground gradually started to get better, and that was a real healing process for all of us,” McKnight said. “Before our eyes, the thing that was awful was gradually becoming better.”

Unexpected generosity

To McKnight’s surprise, the school received all kinds of donations, including teddy bears, backpacks, food and clothes. “People have contacted us from great distances and other preschools have got together and supported us and supported the families,” she said.

Out of the blue, McKnight was contacted by a mother in the Wollongong area. She’d been watching the news about Cobargo and done her best to answer questions from her three-year-old son. The little boy disappeared into his room, filled a backpack with his favourite toys, and told his mother he wanted to give it to a child in Cobargo. McKnight facilitated this exchange. The little boy who received the gift responded by finding some small thing of his own to give in return.

Where the heart is

In the immediate post-fire period, McKnight says the preschool became a centre for local families to come together and talk. When bringing their children to playgroups, parents were also encouraged to hunt through the donations sent to the school and take anything they needed.


The sheer devastation throughout the area made it hard for everyone to stay positive all the time, McKnight says, but she was struck by how Cobargo united. “The community has stayed together, built up resilience and cared for each other,” she said. “There’s the support everyone is offering to each other, the way the community has strengthened.

The preschool “family” has also become a stronger unit. “The community promotes for the children the importance of building resilience and being positive – they are seeing we will be OK if we stick together,” McKnight said. “I think that’s been a really strong thing that’s kept going throughout the fires, and now the virus.”




“The community thought it was really important that the children have the security of somewhere to come back to – they thought their preschool was an important thing to save.”





What tricky toddlers are really telling you

IEU organiser Lisa James listened to an episode of parenting podcast *Feed Play Love*, exploring challenging behaviour in young children. She adapts its findings for the early childhood education setting.



Toddlers often engage in behaviours in which they test boundaries by asserting themselves – hence their reputation for responding “no” or throwing tantrums when faced with what adults perceive to be the most reasonable of requests. For example, refusing to be strapped into their car seats or refusing to hold an adult’s hand in a car park.

Dr Kate Highfield, an expert in early learning with Early Childhood Australia and mother of a toddler, explains that when toddlers behave in this way they are not trying to frustrate their parents and caregivers but learning about cause and effect: “If I do this, what will happen?”

At this age, toddlers are not aware of the risks involved with their behaviours and caregivers need to look at the behaviour and analyse what the child needs to learn in this situation.

It is the caregiver’s responsibility to shape the toddler’s understanding of the situation. For example, if you want to teach a child not to run around in a car park, do it in a way that does not infer that all cars are dangerous and to be avoided, as children are making synaptic connections through their experiences and interactions with caregivers.

Here are a few difficult or dangerous behaviours and what is really happening for the child:

Running in car parks

Running in a car park or onto the street is dangerous but a child might not be ready to understand that a driver may not be able to see them. Teachers may at times need to prevent a toddler from engaging in this unwanted behaviour by holding their hand and walking them to or from their parent. Car parks, particularly enclosed ones, provide excellent acoustics for stomping and shouting. The young child is simply showing interest in movement and sound.

Jumping on furniture

Jumping up and down on furniture can lead to injuries, not to mention the potential damage to budgets if something gets broken. Children are learning how their body feels and works as they push their weight against the furniture followed by launching into the air. Guidance here might involve redirection: “I see you’re enjoying leaping in the air, the trampoline outside will help you go even higher, let’s see if we can play on that.”

Hitting and biting

For many children, hitting or biting others is a form of communication. Your responsibility as a teacher is to work out what the child is trying to communicate. Are they frustrated? Are they unable to express what they want or feel? For example, are they distressed, hungry or confused? Toddlers who hit or bite are releasing their frustration rather than considering how the recipient of their behaviour is experiencing it. Emotion coaching is needed here – acknowledge the child’s feelings and set boundaries around their behaviour. “I know you

were angry that Jack had the truck you wanted but hitting is not OK. Jack is crying because you hurt him. Let’s find another truck so you both have one.” You may need to prevent the toddler from hitting by moving them away from the other child.

Saying “no”

Toddlers like to say “no”, even when you are asking them to do something familiar. At this developmental stage, two year olds are building their sense of agency – they’re discovering that they have free will and can make decisions independently. Acknowledge what the child is telling you and maintain boundaries while redirecting them to more appropriate behaviour. “I understand you are saying you don’t want to brush your teeth, but you need to do it to stay healthy. So we’ll do it now, then you can go and play.”

“Your responsibility as a teacher is to work out what the child is trying to communicate. Are they frustrated? Are they unable to express what they want or feel? Are they distressed, hungry or confused?”

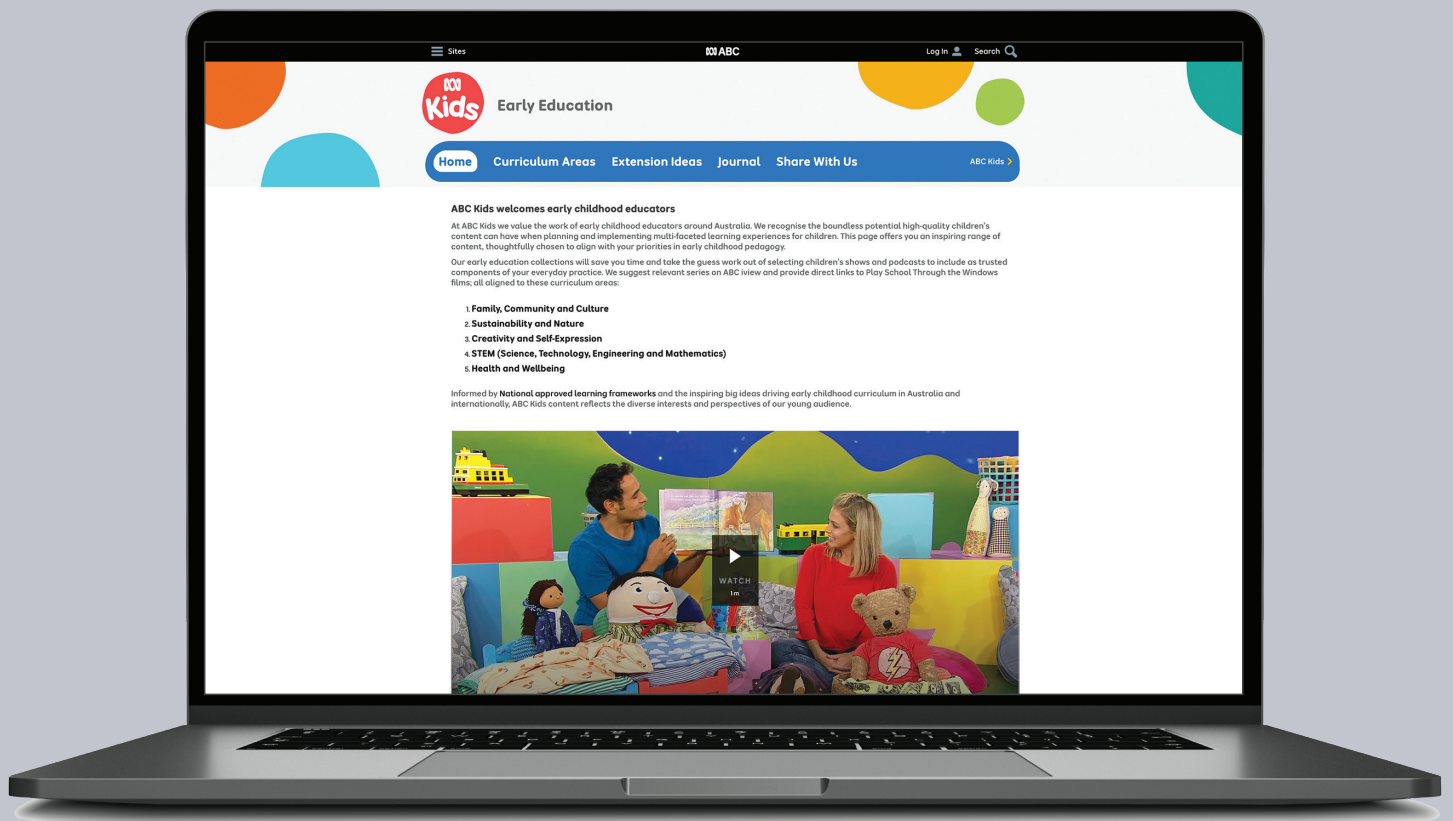
Refusing to nap

Conflict may arise when toddlers are clearly tired – they may fight the urge to rest as their head nods forward, their resilience is rapidly deteriorating and they get upset over little things. This reluctance may be due to the child’s growing brain firing – overstimulation from noise in the room, interest in what other children are doing and a strong desire not to miss out on anything. Developing a routine such as reading a story, giving the child a drink of water and playing restful, relaxing music can encourage them to succumb to the need for rest.

As teachers, we acknowledge toddlers lack the language or cognitive skills to express their feelings in appropriate and constructive ways, and part of our job is to teach them to regulate their emotions and behaviour. A good practice is to consider the young child’s behaviour as a form of communication; verbally express what they are trying to express; then redirect them towards an alternative, more positive action.

Reference

Feed Play Love with Shevonne Hunt; Understanding your toddler’s behaviour, 11 February 2020



Treasure trove of online education easily accessible

The coronavirus pandemic has meant the creation of all manner of education resources, and early childhood teachers can benefit from this wealth of new material. IEU journalist Monica Crouch rounds up a few (hopefully) useful resources.

Teachers have done an extraordinary job of adapting resources previously delivered face-to-face for an online context. Some have found this a way to keep connected with children and families who are not attending the service.

Delivering early childhood education online comes with its own unique set of challenges: young children have short attention spans; they're unlikely to "take turns" on Zoom; and screentime is a whole other conversation.

But one upside is that teachers everywhere can access the ideas and resources created by some of Australia's much-loved and highly respected institutions.

Here are a few ideas covering both the online process and useful resources:

- *The Early Education Show* explores what remote learning means for young children. Together with Jo Grimmond and Martha Johnson of the University of Wollongong's Early Start team, the show examines what remote learning looks like in the early years and how preschools and centres can stay connected during isolation: earlyeducationshow.com/episodes/episode121
- Community Early Learning Australia (CELA) investigates how teachers in China and Italy engaged with families during isolation: bit.ly/2YQ8zU5
- CELA has compiled a strong collection of resources from around Australia: bit.ly/2YP67gK
- The ABC has expanded its education offering, working with state and territory education departments and other education providers to deliver curriculum-linked content for children of all ages. The platform

offers a specific section for early childhood teachers: abc.net.au/abckids/early-education/

- The National Gallery of Victoria offers activity sheets and e-books for drawing and encouraging creativity in children: ngv.vic.gov.au/kids/
- The Australian Museum has created "Inside Out" to ensure science and culture remain accessible through virtual tours, online exhibitions and school resources, including the ever popular "Dinosaurs and their relatives": australianmuseum.net.au/learn/teachers/learning/
- The Australian National Maritime Museum offers activities developed specifically for "curious minds and little fingers": sea.museum/learn/learn-from-home/early-learners
- Prosper Education offers tailored lessons for young children both in the classroom and at home, including lesson plans, digital story books and original songs: prospereducation.com/prosper-products/

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED FAQ

Tina Smith is an organiser for the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch. Danielle Wilson is an industrial officer for IEUA-QNT. They answer your industrial and legal questions as they relate to state laws and regulations.

Dear Tina,

I am a university-trained early childhood teacher working full time in a large not-for-profit early childhood organisation. With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic our enrolments have declined considerably, even though no fees are being charged at the moment. My employer intends to apply for JobKeeper payments. They have sent a nomination form for me to complete and return. I'm a little unsure what this means. Am I being stood down then rehired? Do I still work?

Pamela



Tina Smith
IEUA NSW/ACT Branch

Dear Pamela

We are in uncharted times and many early childhood teachers are facing the same situation as you. If your employer is eligible for JobKeeper (a wage subsidy of \$1500 per fortnight less tax), you will receive a nomination form. Your employer

is asking if you agree to be nominated for JobKeeper and receive JobKeeper payments through your employer as part of the scheme. The scheme aims to keep employers and employees connected while we all navigate the pandemic.

Your employer has several options:

- They can maintain your current full-time status, and the JobKeeper money will subsidise your salary; that is, no change to your pay per fortnight.
- They may reduce your hours temporarily to reach the JobKeeper amount. This means you will work fewer hours, but your hourly rate remains the same. If a temporary agreement is made under JobKeeper, it should end no later than September 2020 unless the federal government extends the scheme. Please contact us if you are unsure of any changes to your employment.
- They can ask that you take any accrued annual or long service leave. This means the JobKeeper amount would either subsidise your leave to the full time equivalent or be equal to the JobKeeper amount. You can retain up to two weeks of annual leave for later use.
- They can stand you down from your current position and you will receive the JobKeeper amount for not attending work at all. Your employer can request you resume work at any time.

If you are a part-time teacher or temporary part-time teacher, and your employer is asking you to increase your hours for the sole reason of matching the JobKeeper payment, the Fair Work Ombudsman has made it clear this is unreasonable. However, you are free to accept additional hours and earn above the \$1500/fortnight amount.

I invite you to contact us again if you still have concerns.

Tina

Dear Danielle

I am an early childhood teacher, and I commenced leave without pay for 12 months at the end of Term 1, 2020. However, when I received my last pay for the term covering my holidays, it was less than I was expecting. Under my collective agreement, I usually get locality allowance and senior teacher allowance but, on this occasion, it was not paid. I asked our centre's HR person who said that because I wasn't actually at work on the days after the Term 1 teaching period finished, I wasn't entitled to the allowances on those leave days. However, I noted that I had always been paid these allowances across holidays in the past, even though I wasn't working. Is the advice HR gave me correct?

Teneal



Danielle Wilson
IEUA-QNT

Dear Teneal

Payment of allowances is absolutely reliant on the industrial instrument that covers you in your employment.

The general rule is that when you go on leave, you should receive the same pay as you would if you were in

attendance for work. However, many agreements and the award do not always make this clear, and where there is no reference to how payment should be made, employers often take the position you have experienced – that they are not required to pay allowances on days that staff do not actually attend.

To remove all doubt, when we negotiate a collective agreement, we ensure there is a clause clarifying that payment while an employee is on paid leave is the same amount the employee would have received had they attended for work.

I encourage you to contact us to talk about this issue, so we can check the industrial instruments that apply in your particular case and determine whether payment is due.

Danielle

SUPER IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



The current global environment is an unsettling one, to say the least. You and your staff are no doubt worried about the health and wellbeing of your families, friends and the wider community, and the impact of stock market volatility on super.

We understand that in times like these it's more important than ever to be able to give your staff the information they need. That's why we've created a dedicated web page to help our members stay up-to-date with their super, which includes:

- regular updates from our Chief Investment Officer and CEO
- information about insurance and COVID-19
- details about the government's early release of super provision.

Visit **ngssuper.com.au/covid-19**. And to find out more about how we can help you and your staff make informed choices in uncertain times, please call **1300 133 177** or visit **ngssuper.com.au/crm**

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