Be Aware Of Your Assumptions

Element 4.2.3 Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other’s strengths and skills.

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4.2.3

An assumption is something that is accepted as being true without any proof. It’s like a belief in that we’re very often not aware of the assumptions we’re operating under in a given situation. But whereas beliefs are usually broad and far reaching, assumptions can be specific to a particular situation.

Take an example involving two educators: Liz invites Alison to join her and a group of friends for a fun Friday night drink. Alison politely refuses. Liz might accept Alison’s refusal at face value without any assumptions, or she might assume any number of things. She might assume Alison doesn’t like her other friends, or that Alison’s busy and doesn’t want to be disturbed. She might even assume Alison doesn’t like her. But whatever Liz’s assumption is, it will more than likely affect what she does next:

• If she assumes Alison doesn’t like her friends, she might suggest another time without them.

• If she assumes Alison’s busy, she might leave her alone for now, and ask her again another time.

• If she assumes Alison doesn’t like her, she might feel hurt and not talk to her again.

What happens when your assumption is wrong? Sometimes it’s harmless enough, but too often acting on an inaccurate assumption sets off a chain of events that causes problems, misunderstandings, wasted time and bad feelings. The ramifications, which are usually negative, can last far into the future. Acting on assumptions leaves people “in the dark” instead of “in the know.” And being “in the dark” is not where you want to be - ever.

Your challenge is to learn to notice when your action or reaction to something is the result of an assumption you’ve made, and then be willing to find out if your assumption was correct or not. Learn to tell the difference between what you assume to be true and what you know to be true. You’ll be amazed at how often your assumptions aren’t correct. When you learn to check out your assumptions, you’ll also be amazed at how differently you see other people and how much more competent and compassionate you are in your everyday dealings.

Assumptions and beliefs are related.

Often assumptions are underpinned by beliefs. See the following examples.

Two educators Mel and Anna are present when a child falls off a climbing frame and hurts their knee. Mel comments that this was bound to happen. Anna assumes Mel means risky play is always too dangerous for children to engage in. This is one of
NQS

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Anna’s beliefs. However, Mel may have meant:
- the climbing frame was unsafe and needed repairing
- the soft fall material was inadequate
- accidents can happen when children play
- the child should have been watched more closely
- the child lacked the co-ordination or strength to safely use the climbing frame.

The children at a service engaged in a wonderful group learning activity with educators Nola and Karen. At the end of the day the nominated supervisor looked for the Learning Story so parents could see the children’s experiences and learning outcomes achieved. It hadn’t been written because Karen usually prepares children’s documentation but she had to leave early. Nola says it’s not her job to the Learning Story. The nominated supervisor assumes Nola means her job description doesn’t specifically state she must complete children’s documentation. However, Nola may have meant:
- only trained workers have to write learning documentation (belief)
- there are more experienced educators and they should complete the documentation (belief)
- different educators should have different responsibilities (belief)
- the nominated supervisor is responsible for the NQS and children’s documentation (belief)
- educators should just focus on teaching; writing documentation detracts from the learning process (belief).

Mikaela started to run a fever and become restless and upset 2 hours after arriving at the service. Educator Cara said that was typical. Educator Craig assumed she meant that parents deliberatively bring their child to the centre when they’re sick because they want to go to work (belief). However, Cara may have meant:
- children always get sick early in the day
- Mikaela often had these symptoms because she was teething
- Mikaela was fine when she was dropped off
- Mikaela was going to miss out on the fun activities
- They’d have to delay the excursion while Mikaela’s mother came from home to pick her up.

Think about what actions the educators and nominated supervisors may have taken based on their assumptions and beliefs. These may have done little to remedy the actual issues. Educators should always ensure they discuss and understand the reasons others say and do things, and not rely on their own assumptions that what they believe is true.