



Living practice
with the Early Years Learning Framework

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What is the Early Years Learning Framework?

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) is a guide for early childhood educators. Through a series of principles, practices and learning outcomes it sets out key ideas about the ways in which we work with young children.

It is not a curriculum or syllabus. It won't tell us exactly what we should be doing from day to day or week to week. Rather, the EYLF is a reminder that learning is too important to be left to chance and gives us a guide for children's learning, development and outcomes.



Who is an educator?

In the EYLF all early childhood practitioners who work directly with children are considered to be educators. This recognises the fact that whatever their specific role, all educators support children's learning.

The big ideas



Belonging, being and becoming

These words are also the title of the EYLF - but they are more than just a catchphrase. In three simple words they actually sum up what we, as early childhood educators, do in our work with children and families.

If every child in our care can experience a genuine sense of belonging; if they can have time and space to be themselves; and if they can be supported in who they are becoming then we will have done a good job.



Belonging, being and becoming are all important, but the idea of **belonging** is central. By supporting children to belong, we provide them with the opportunity to be a part of a community and to work towards achieving the learning outcomes.

As adults we know how stressful it feels not to belong. When we are stressed or anxious we know we aren't in the right frame of mind to learn. The same is true for children. It is why a sense of belonging needs to underpin everything else that we do.



“The early childhood years are not solely about preparation for the future but are also about the present.”

(Early Years Learning Framework, p.7)

Being is about children having the chance to just be themselves. It is about allowing children the time to grow at their own pace rather than feeling that we should always be rushing them onto the next stage in their lives.

Childhood does not have to be hurried. Sometimes the best preparation for being five (or four, or three, or two...) is to be four (or three, or two, or one) for a whole year.

Time for “being” allows children to:

- experience the joy and wonder of childhood;
- learn about themselves and who they are;
- develop deep and satisfying relationships; and
- become fully involved with new ideas and interests.



Becoming is about who children are growing up to be. It is about our role in supporting them to realise their potential and also in helping them to grow into active members of the community. Being needs to be balanced against the idea of becoming. “Preparation for the future” shouldn’t be our only aim. But we can’t afford to ignore it. Preparation for the future is part of our role as early childhood educators, provided that it is not the only thing we focus on.



A framework for action

Principles and practices

As well as highlighting the big ideas of belonging, being and becoming the EYLF sets out five principles and eight practices that guide how we work. These guide our work with the framework. All are based on research about what makes early childhood education most effective. Together they give us some of the tools and ideas that we need to put the EYLF into action.

How they will be used will vary from one service to another. The EYLF is not about everyone doing the same thing. Each service will apply the principles and practices in their own way, to suit their own setting. What is important is that each of the principles and practices is evident, and that the way in which they are combined works for the children, families and educators of a particular service.



Principles

1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
2. Partnerships
3. High expectations and equity
4. Respect for diversity
5. Ongoing learning and reflective practices



Practices

1. Holistic approaches
2. Responsiveness to children
3. Learning through play
4. Intentional teaching
5. Learning environments
6. Cultural competence
7. Continuity of learning and transitions
8. Assessment for learning

A sense of direction

The final part of the EYLF is the learning outcomes:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
4. Children are confident and involved learners
5. Children are effective communicators





Like the big ideas of belonging, being and becoming, the outcomes prompt us to identify children's strengths and provide them with the opportunity to use their strengths in everyday practice.

The outcomes give focus to our planning for children's learning. They remind us that we have a responsibility to help each child to reach their learning potential.

Putting it all together



Although the EYLF is made up of separate parts - the principles, practices and learning outcomes - none of these stand alone. Each needs to be seen in relation to all the others. To use the framework effectively we need to think about how the parts fit together. If we use the principles and practices as our guide, the learning outcomes will develop.

This is complex. The framework highlights the importance of having high expectations for children. It also has high expectations for us, as educators.



Working with the framework means we need to be:

- reflective and thoughtful about what we do;
- responsive and flexible in how we do it; and
- committed to continually developing our own knowledge and ways of working.

This can be challenging. But it is also rewarding - for us as educators and also for the children and families that we work with.

As much as we might sometimes wish for someone to “just tell us what to do”, it’s simply not possible. When we think about the hundreds of different decisions that we make every day then we can see that no document could tell us what to do in each and every case.

What we rely on when we make those decisions is our own professional judgement. Understanding this is the key to understanding the EYLF.

Being a professional

Know what you do and why you do it.

If the EYLF could be summed up in one sentence that would probably be it. The EYLF introduces the idea that we should be thoughtful and purposeful in what we do. It is the basis of being professional - and that is really what the EYLF is asking us to be.





To be a professional in any field means being able to draw on a body of specialised knowledge to make decisions about what to do in a given situation. When we think of other professionals such as nurses, doctors, plumbers or accountants, we want them to use their knowledge about a problem or question and then give us an answer or solution that fits our situation.



This is exactly the same thing the EYLF is asking us to do - to use our knowledge and experience to guide our decision making so that we can make the best decision that we can in each situation.

To know what we do and why we do it.



The EYLF is our guide to the professional knowledge base of early childhood education. The principles, practices and learning outcomes are based on what we know about high quality early childhood education. The framework is deliberately open ended and flexible because it is important that we make our own decisions. But it is also quite clear that the key ideas it sets out should underpin everything that we do.



While there will be many ways of implementing the framework successfully that doesn't mean that anything goes. The EYLF will (and should) look different in every service. But it should still be recognisable as the EYLF. However, when we do things we should be able to find each of the principles and practices in what we do, and show how what we do helps children to reach the learning outcomes.



Early childhood education is complex. Far more complex than it usually appears from the outside. There are rarely one size fits all solutions to the challenges we face. Instead what we do is shaped by our context - by where we are, who we are working with and what else is happening around us.



The value of the EYLF is not that it provides all the answers - it can't. The value of the EYLF is that it gives us the key ideas that underpin successful early childhood education so that we can make our own decisions in the best interests of the children and families that we work with.

My Family



Katrine's children
Tom, Harry and Isabelle
+ the dog!



