Auckland EYFS

Promoting Wellbeing

*This document explains how Auckland’s Early Years Department promote and take care of children’s mental health.*

Wellbeing is a term we hear a lot when discussing adults and young people – but we don’t often think about it so much for young children. We know that rates of teenage mental health problems are rising alarmingly, and we are aware that young people can feel stressed at times. But we passionately believe that if we work to support the youngest children’s wellbeing as well then, we are setting them off to a great start in in life.

One critical factor in helping children improve their wellbeing is making sure that they know that they are loved for being the unique and precious individuals that they are. Parents and grandparents clearly have a crucial role to play in letting children know that they are unconditionally loved, but we also believe that teachers and Early Years Practioners (EYP’s), have their own role to play in showing children that they are loved and wanted.

When welcoming the children we work with each day, we show warmth in our smile and words. We try to notice how they look – maybe they have a Spiderman hat on or a new hair band in their hair. By noticing these things that are important to children and telling them how delighted we are to see them, helps them arrive feeling wanted and loved.

Here are some of the ways in which Auckland EYFS support young children’s wellbeing:

**Massage and meditation:**

Auckland’s Early Years team are working on delivering whole class child led massage and meditation sessions. We aim to deliver these sessions at least twice a week. During this session, gentle music is played in the background and classroom lights are turned off. Children sit crossed legged on the carpet, sitting in lines – one child behind the other. We focus on our breathing before massage begins, taking deep breathes in through the nose and exhaling out through the mouth. The adult leading the session will call out a hand action, for example ‘ice skates’, ‘butterfly’, ‘baker’ etc. and children gently rub their hands on their peers back.

As an alternative to massage time, EYFS teachers can use child friendly meditation stories to help children relax and focus on a particular positive mind set theme, for example ‘happiness’, ‘relaxation’, ‘calmness’ e.t.c. Children listen to a story told by the teacher with soft background music, lights down and children finding a comfortable position (usually sat at a table, arms folded on table and head resting on arms).

**Use emotional language**

We need to help children understand their feelings and using emotional language helps to give them the vocabulary they need to understand their own feelings, as well as other people’s. Even when children are babies we can start talking about their feelings. For example, when a baby is crying to be fed, we can say: “It’s okay, I know you are feeling hungry. I am going to feed you now.”

When a toddler is crying because their parent has left them at nursery, we can say: “I can see that you are really sad that Mummy has gone. She will be back later, but I am here for you now.”

**Yoga as part of the Enhanced Curriculum Programme**

Our lives are often very busy, and our children’s lives can often be busy too. We need to help children find the time to rest and experience moments of stillness. By moving classroom furniture, we can provide space in the classroom where children can lay back and relax or daydream before the yoga session. Yoga helps children to find stillness.

**Being creative**

Creativity is an essential part of wellbeing. We need to give children the space to be creative and join in the process with them. EYFS teachers, find times to sing and dance with children, this can be a joyful experience. We give children the opportunity to experiment with a wide range of materials and mark-making tools. Creativity should be about enjoying the activity and not about having a finished product.

**Child led activities and, In the moment planning**

Children have a passion for learning and discovering. They need adults around them who want to learn and explore with them. In Auckland College we are working towards the new 2021 EYFS Framework. This framework encourages practioners to plan and deliver learning that ignites the curiosity and interests of the children. We are working towards asking children to lead their own learning and implementing curriculum objectives through the themes and interests the children pick out. Children are great at becoming fascinated by something – this might be the snail and sticks you see on the road as you are walking to the shops, or it might be a keen interest in dinosaurs. As adults, we can express our own interests and delight our children by learning alongside them, allowing their natural interests to shape our daily activities.