

# Only Early Learning Centre



## Employee Mental Health Policy

Policy Number 24

7 Columbia Way Baulkham Hills  
Ph- 96808381  
Email- [info@onlyelc.com.au](mailto:info@onlyelc.com.au)  
Web- [www.onlyelc.com.au](http://www.onlyelc.com.au)  
FB- @onlyelc



## Contents

Employee Mental Health Policy .....	1
Aim.....	3
Who is affected by this policy?.....	3
What is Mental Health .....	3
Only Early Learning Centre Employer Responsibilities.....	3
Employee Rights .....	4
Employee Responsibilities .....	4
Reasonable Adjustments.....	5
Remaining at Work.....	5
Peer to Peer Conversations .....	5
Keeping the Team Mentally Healthy .....	6
Ensuring Manageable Workloads.....	7
Flexibility in Working Arrangements .....	7
Creating a Fair Workplace .....	7
Resources .....	8
Stress.....	8
Depression .....	8
Anxiety .....	8
Help Available.....	9
5 Ways to Wellbeing.....	9
Sources .....	11



## **Aim**

The aim of this policy is for Only Early Learning Centre to establish, promote and maintain the mental health and wellbeing of all employees through workplace practices. Only Early Learning Centre aims to build and maintain a workplace environment and culture that supports mental health and wellbeing and prevents discrimination. To increase employee knowledge and awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues and behaviours. To reduce stigma around depression and anxiety in the workplace. To facilitate employee's active participation in a range of initiative that support mental health and wellbeing.

## **Who is affected by this policy?**

Children  
Educators  
Staff  
Management  
Visitors  
Families

## **What is Mental Health**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as 'a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community'. Mental illness can affect anyone, of any age and background. Achieving and maintaining good mental health is important for everyone.

## **Only Early Learning Centre Employer Responsibilities**

Under the Workplace Health and Safety Act, employers have a responsibility to prevent harm to the health and safety of employees. This includes mental health. At no time will Only Early Learning Centre Management discriminate against, harass or victimise a person in employment because of a mental illness.

## Employee Rights

Under Australian Law, all employees have specific rights in relation to mental health conditions.

### **The right to protection from discrimination**

If an employee has a mental health condition, Australian Laws protection against discrimination in the workplace. The Australia-wide Disability Discrimination Act 1992 make it unlawful to discriminate against, harass or victimise people with disabilities.

### **The right to privacy**

Every employee right to privacy is covered by the Australia-wide Privacy Act 1988. If an employee discloses to their employer that they have a mental health condition, the employer cannot disclose this information to anyone without the employees' consent. The employer can use this information for the purpose for which it was disclosed, for example, adjusting work roles or environments to make allowances for the mental health condition.

### **The right to a healthy and safe workplace**

Workplace health and safety legislation requires employers to ensure that the workplace is both physically and mentally healthy for all employees. Only Early Learning Centre will ensure that steps are taken to manage the risk of the working environment impacting negatively on the mental wellbeing of employees.

**All employees have the right to not disclose any mental health conditions to their employer if the condition does not affect their work performance. This includes throughout the recruitment process.**

## Employee Responsibilities

Workplace Health and Safety legislation in Australia protects employee rights to a safe workplace, although employees also have responsibilities under the same legislation.

- All employees have the responsibility to take care of their mental health and cooperate with employers in matters of health and safety.
- If an employee's mental health condition could reasonably be seen to create a health and safety risk for others, then the failure to inform your employers could be a breach of an employee's obligations under this legislation.

Employees are required to inform Only Early Learning Centre of any mental health conditions that:

- Affect how an employee carries out the requirements of their job description. In this situation the purpose of providing this information is to enable Only Early Learning

Centre management to identify reasonable adjustments that might assist an employee in their performance.

- Affect the health and safety of others.
- If employees are taking prescription medication that could result in a positive drug test, should it occur, they are encouraged to inform the centre

## **Reasonable Adjustments**

Only Early Learning Centre will ensure that employees who are experiencing a mental health condition are given the opportunity to discuss reasonable adjustments to their employment. Reasonable adjustments are changes to an employee's job description or responsibilities which are made to enable an employee to perform their duties more effectively. Reasonable adjustments can include changes to the work environment, changes to the work responsibilities, changes to workload or hours of work and the amount of supervision or support received.

An employer is not obligated by law to make reasonable adjustments to an employee's job description if:

- The employee cannot adequately perform the requirements of their employment after reasonable adjustments have been made.
- Making reasonable adjustments would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer or the business.

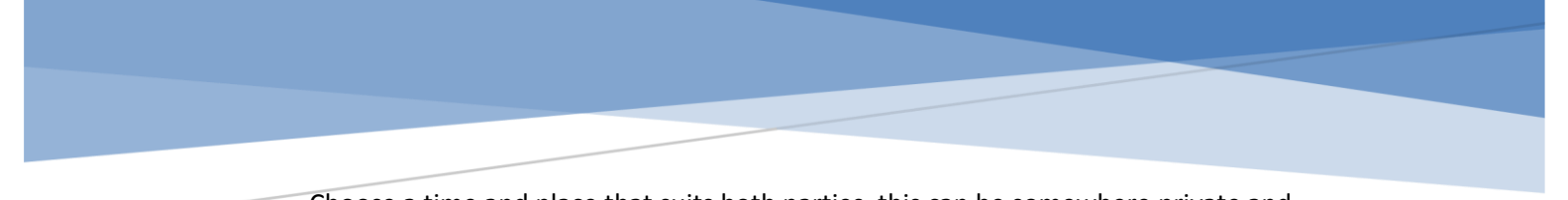
## **Remaining at Work**

An employee of Only Early Learning Centre will not be able to remain at work if:

- They are at risk of self-harming or suicidal behaviour
- They are a danger to others
- They are showing signs of psychosis
- They are suffering from very deep depressions
- Have a negative reaction to prescribed medication
- They are behaving in a way that is significantly affecting other employees and reasonable adjustments are impossible or will not improve the situation

## **Peer to Peer Conversations**

Only Early Learning Centre encourages positive conversations between employees regarding good mental health. If an employee notices a change in a colleague's behaviour, they are encouraged to use the following guidelines to initiate a positive conversation to check in with the employee:

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- Choose a time and place that suits both parties, this can be somewhere private and away from the classroom.
  - Encourage them to talk but accept that they might not be comfortable doing so.
  - Listen and show that you are listening.
  - Find out if they are ready to seek help and offer your help in doing so.
  - Check in regularly to see how the colleague is.
  - Suggest additional support services, for example Beyond Blue or General Practitioner

Educators might want to talk, or they may not, but informing a co-worker that you have noticed and that you care can make an enormous difference.


## **Keeping the Team Mentally Healthy**

Only Early Learning Centre Management aims to promote mental health in relation to educators by:

- Taking the time to meet with educators regularly through informal meetings. Throughout these meetings their mental health is discussed, if the employee feels comfortable doing so. Educators are also encouraged to discuss things that may be affecting them outside of work, if the employee feels comfortable doing so.
- Giving educators a clear Job Description.
- Giving educators regular feedback about their work performance.
- Encouraging trusting and respectful communication.
- Acknowledging good work performance.
- Encourage colleagues to be connected both at work and outside of work.
- Encourage educators to continue learning and offer opportunities for professional development.

All members of the Management Team and Senior Educators at Only Early Learning Centre are expected to:

- Act as a positive role models within the workplace including:
  - Model positive self-care and balance between work and other aspects of life.
  - Modelling appropriate language to decrease stigma
  - Showing confidence in the ability to employees
- Create a supportive workplace culture, including:
  - Encouraging team work and collaboration
  - Welcoming new ideas
  - Discouraging gossiping
  - Ensuring that educators are not punished for mistakes, but instead mistakes are seen as an opportunity to professional development
- Communicating openly, honestly and effectively, including:
  - Being approachable and available to communicate with employees

- 
- Offering in advance notice of meeting topics to avoid anxiety

## **Ensuring Manageable Workloads**

Only Early Learning Centre management aims to ensure that all employees have workloads that are manageable to ensure that work related stress is kept to a minimum by:

- Monitoring workloads to ensure that educators are not overloaded
- Managing performance targets to ensure that they are realistic and achievable
- Monitoring workloads to ensure that educators can complete their work within allocated work hours
- Monitoring workloads to ensure that they are reflective of educator's ability and qualifications
- Ensuring that there is a sufficient number of educators present to share the workload

## **Flexibility in Working Arrangements**

Only Early Learning Centre management aims to ensure that flexibility is given to educators, where it is reasonable, to minimise work related stress by:

- Allowing flexibility in relation to hours and days of work, where possible
- Allowing employees flexibility to take paid or unpaid leave from the centre for urgent personal matters, where possible
- Allowing flexibility in relation to room placements each day
- 

## **Creating a Fair Workplace**

Only Early Learning Centre management recognises that being treated unfairly at work can be linked to an increase in mental health conditions. Management will treat all employees fairly by:

- Holding all employees accountable for their actions in the workplace
- Maintaining the confidentiality of employee's personal information in all conversations
- Treating employees of all background equally and fairly
- Ensuring that merit, person-job fit, and competence are the basis for recruitment and promotion

# Resources

(Collected from the Black Dog Institute)

## Stress

Stress is often confused with anxiety, but it is not a diagnosable mental illness. Within limits, stress has positive effects on motivation and performance, enabling us to meet deadlines, think and respond quickly. Too much stress though and performance deteriorates. When stress is sustained for too long a period, health can also deteriorate.

## Depression

1 in 6 people will experience depression during their lifetime. Depression influences not only how you feel but also how you think, behave and interact with other people. Common signs of depression include:

- Lowered self-esteem or self-worth
- Change in sleep patterns, insomnia or broken sleep
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Less ability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability and anxiety
- Varying emotions throughout the day
- Reduced capacity to experience pleasure
- Poor concentration and memory
- Reduced motivation
- Lowered energy levels



1 in 6 people will experience depression at some stage of their lives.



## Anxiety

It's normal to feel anxious in high pressure situations. To a degree, this anxiety can help us, making us stay focused and alert. Anxiety becomes a problem when you start to feel anxious most of the time and about even minor things, to the point where your worry is out of control and interfering with your day to day life. Common signs of anxiety include:

- Frequent or excessive worry
- Poor concentration
- Specific fears or phobias
- Fatigue, irritability or sleeping difficulties
- Sweating or difficulty breathing
- Procrastination or avoidance



1 in 4 people will experience anxiety.

To be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, a combination of symptoms is present on most days for more than six months and interferes with your ability to function at work or at home.



## Help Available

### See a General Practitioner

A GP can provide accurate diagnosis, referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist, and a medicare mental health plan.

### Phone Lines

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800

MensLine Australia: 1300 789 978

Suicide Call Bank Service: 1300 659 467

### Websites

[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

[www.SANE.org](http://www.SANE.org)

[www.mindhealthconnect.org.au](http://www.mindhealthconnect.org.au)

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

[www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)

## 5 Ways to Wellbeing

Wellbeing is thought to be made up of two main components: feeling good and functioning well. The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a set of evidence-based actions which promote people's wellbeing. Only Early Learning Centre will encourage all educators to take steps to promote their wellbeing both inside and outside of work. Whilst at work employees will be encouraged to:

### 1. Connect

Establish staff groups, connect with co-workers, organise activities with co-workers outside of work hours.


### 2. Be Active

Walk and talk to co-workers rather than sending emails, find ways to be active with the children and with co-workers whilst at the centre.

### 3. Take Notice

Change your work environment during lunch breaks, take a walk, sit in the sun, enjoy the outdoor environment, listen with interest when co-workers talk about themselves.

### 4. Keep Learning



Seek out opportunities to develop skills and interests whilst at work, consider career goals regularly, attend professional develop courses and bring these to management when interested.

**5. Give**

Notice good work in others, give feedback and thanks to co-workers, appreciate contribution and teamwork, encourage co-workers to do the same.



## Sources

Black Dog Institute

Heads Up

Safe Work Australia

### Review

The policy will be reviewed annually. Review will be conducted by management, employees, parents and any interested parties.

**Reviewed By:** Alex Jury    **Date:** 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**Approved By:** Kelly Williams

**Date for Next Review:** April 2021