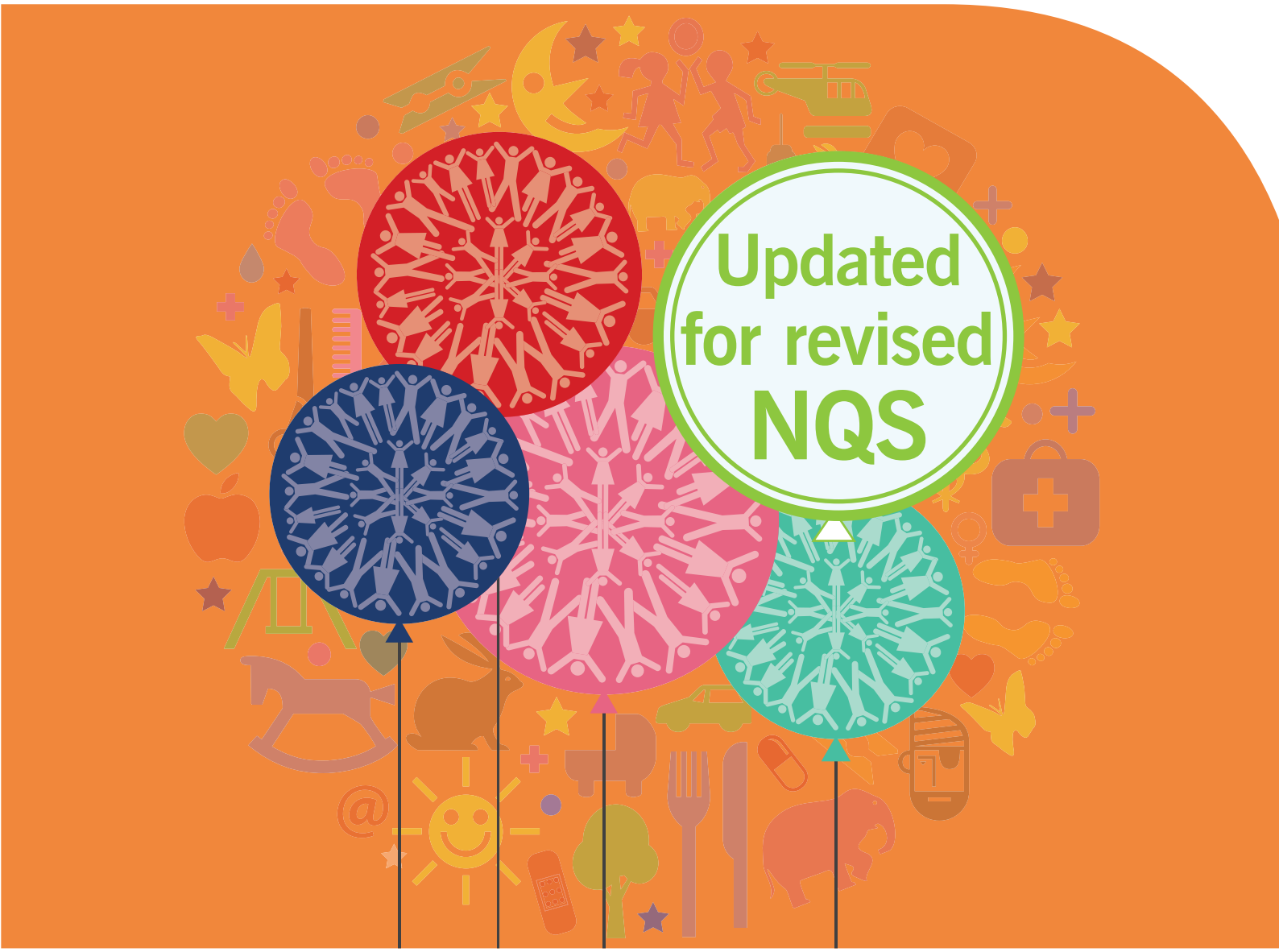
CHCECE017
Foster the holistic development and wellbeing of the child in early childhood



Learner guide

One World for Children Pty Ltd

Aspire learning resources

CHCECE017

Foster the holistic development and wellbeing of the child in early childhood

Release 2

Learner guide

Aspire Version 2.1

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CHCECE017 Foster the holistic development and wellbeing of the child in early childhood, Release 2

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Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCECE017 Foster the holistic development and wellbeing of the child in early childhood,* Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples	▶ These highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into practice. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	▶ Where QR codes appear, you can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help 
Summaries	▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	▶ There are learning checkpoints at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

Fostering physical development

Children's physical development is influenced by their genetics, culture and environment. Understanding how children develop and what influences this development helps you provide appropriate environments and opportunities to ensure children reach appropriate milestones for their age and stage of development.

Educators are responsible for ensuring that children in their care have the opportunity to develop in a stimulating and safe physical environment. This requires a program that includes planned and spontaneous activities that are age- and stage-appropriate. Assessment and monitoring provides information you can use to plan and provide appropriate experiences to foster each child's motor skills and fundamental movement skills, challenge their physical skills and abilities, and promote physical fitness.

Watch this video to learn about children's physical development.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
✓	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children
	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

1A Understanding development theories and monitoring physical skills

Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia (EYLF) is the basis for your service's standards, policies and procedures, and encourages you to focus on children's physical strengths and interests. The EYLF and the National Quality Standard (NQS), both components of the National Quality Framework (NQF), refer to the importance of monitoring children's development to assess their learning and identify whether additional support is required.

When you monitor children's development against milestones or the EYLF outcomes, you identify their abilities and what they can already do and understand. You also note the skills they are developing. This information helps you provide an ongoing and responsive curriculum.

The EYLF is accessible in your service or online at: http://aspirelr.link/eylf

The *Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia* can be found at: http://aspirelr.link/educators-guide-eylf

The *Guide to the National Quality Framework* provides clear guidance relating to the NQS and regulation expectations. You can find the guide here: http://aspirelr.link/nqf-guide-pdf

Physical skills and development

Physical development relates to the way children grow and develop control over their bodies. Physical skills relate to the way the body is moved and controlled to complete activities such as running, jumping, hopping, balancing, pinching and cutting. Physical growth and skill development work together to enable children to achieve physical development milestones.

Milestones are a measure of ability and are demonstrated based on a child's age, stage of development and experience. You need to be aware of the aspects of physical development to work with children safely and effectively.

Gross motor and fundamental movement skills

Gross motor skills include the movement of the body's large muscles. These muscles allow locomotor movement (movements that transport the body from one place to another). They also allow the use of fundamental movement skills, which are movement patterns involving different body parts, like the legs, arms, trunk and head.

Fundamental movement skills include skills such as:

- crawling
- walking
- static balancing
- running
- jumping, hopping, skipping and leaping
- catching
- side galloping
- overarm throwing
- kicking
- dodging
- two-hand striking.

These fundamental movement skills are used in more specialised, challenging and complex actions needed for play, active games, sports, gymnastics, physical recreation activities and dance.

Fine motor skills

Fine motor skills include smaller movements of the body, such as moving the wrists, hands, fingers, feet and toes. These are used for manipulation, movement and hand–eye coordination, and include skills such as:

- writing
- turning a page
- threading
- clicking fingers
- pinching clay
- weaving
- flipping cards
- playing the piano.

Hand grasp develops in sequence and influences a child's ability to control their activities. Skills like hand grasp are influenced by the environment, so if a child is not provided with opportunities to grasp objects, this skill will not develop well and their dexterity may be poor.

Hand grasp development

Palmar grasp

A palmar grasp appears once the grasp reflex has disappeared, at around four months. The whole fist is used in this grasp, with the palm covering the object and the fingers intentionally curling around the object. The child is able to let go of the object when they want to.

Pincer grasp

A pincer grasp occurs next as the fingers become more controlled. The pincer grasp is useful for picking up small objects and uses the index finger and the thumb together in a pinching motion.

Tripod grasp

A tripod grasp follows where a thick crayon or piece of food is held with the fingers in a tripod style with two fingers and the thumb.

Pencil grasp

Finally, a pencil grasp develops. This enables the child to have greater control over their drawing or writing implement.

Reflexes

Infants are born with a set of involuntary skills called reflexes. Some of these reflexes are survival reflexes and some have no obvious purpose.

Survival reflexes include:

- breathing – to maintain oxygen supply, blood flow and heart function
- blinking – this allows the infant to moisten and protect their eyes
- crying – this alerts carers to needs
- rooting, sucking and swallowing – to absorb adequate nutrition
- sneezing – to clear airways
- bowel and bladder movement – to eliminate waste products.

Reflexes without a specific purpose include:

- tonic neck syndrome (0–20 weeks) – when lying on their side, the infant will have their arm and leg stretched out on that side and on the other side their arm and leg will bend
- grasp (0–four months) – if an object is placed in the infant's hand or if the palm is stroked, the fingers close around the object and the infant is unable to let go voluntarily
- walking (0–four months) – if you hold the infant around the stomach for support and place the feet on a solid surface, the feet step forward
- Moro or startle reflex (0–six months) – if the infant falls backwards, the arms and legs extend out suddenly, then move back towards the body
- Babinski reflex (0–12 months) – if you stroke the infant's foot along the arch from heel to toe, their toes spread out.

Physical development

The terms 'cephalocaudal development' and 'proximodistal development' relate to the predictable sequence of physical growth and development. Development that starts from the head and works down is called cephalocaudal development; development that starts from the centre of the body and works outward is called proximodistal development.

This sequence of growth can be seen if you review the milestones of development, as infants first use their torso, arms and legs, and progress from large movements to the smaller, finer abilities of fingers and toes.

Since the large muscles of the body develop before the small muscles, development milestones often occur in a certain sequence. A child may experience splinter skills, where milestones are achieved out of sequence, which can cause a delay in development or make learning difficult for the child.

Kinaesthetic awareness

Kinaesthetic awareness is a sensory skill that allows you to know where your body is in space, which stops you from bumping into things or falling over objects. It is also about being aware of your muscles and being able to control and coordinate them.

To develop strong kinaesthetic skills, you need to practise getting your muscles to do what you need them to do. All children benefit from activities that develop kinaesthetic awareness, but it is especially useful for children who are tense and need to practise relaxation, and children who need to practise controlling parts of their body. Some children learn through kinaesthetic activities more clearly than by listening or watching.

Kinaesthetic activities involve activities where the child learns through doing. They include:

- dance (either free-form or a coordinated routine)
- creative arts activities
- cooking
- computers
- building and fixing things
- drama
- crawling into crawl spaces
- blindfold games
- feely or surprise bag games.

Sensorimotor development

Sensorimotor development relates to the link between physical actions and a child's cognitive development.

Stages of sensorimotor development:
1. Primary circular reactions, where an infant learns about the world through unintentional actions with their own body and then repeats these if they are enjoyable
2. Secondary circular reactions, where an infant repeats an action on an object if it is enjoyable
3. Tertiary circular reactions, where an infant looks for new ways to bring about pleasant activities

Provide opportunities for sensory motor development by ensuring infants have access to materials they can mouth, shake, bend, push, pull, throw and drop; that is, activities where children discover the properties of objects themselves.

Sensory integration

Sensory integration is the body's way of analysing all the information coming from its senses, both internally and from the environment, to produce an appropriate response. It helps you to understand who you are, where you are and what is happening around you, and allows you to complete activities.

Physical developmental theory

Child development theories help explain or predict development or behaviour. Understanding theories relating to physical development and knowing about physical development milestones:

- helps you understand individual children and their physical needs
- helps you understand why children act and react in the ways they do
- can be used to inform your practice in terms of program design and curriculum development.

Child growth standards

Children up to five years of age have been measured against World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards. These standards were developed based on 8,440 children from Brazil, Ghana, India, Norway, Oman and the United States of America. They provide a scale that can be used along with other information to determine whether a child is developing at an expected rate and within the appropriate weight, length and head circumference sizes.

Maturation

In the past, child and adolescent development was considered simply a maturation process, where children were seen as mini adults who only needed to get taller, stronger and bigger. We now understand that there are many environmental influences that contribute to growth on the path to adulthood.

In the 1940s, Arnold Gesell, a psychologist, paediatrician and educator, formulated a theory based on observations he made of children during his work. His maturation theory states that developmental changes in children's bodies and behaviours are a result of the ageing process rather than from learning, injury, illness, or other life experiences. Maturation supports the idea that each individual's unique genetic and biological makeup determines their development rate regardless of other environmental influences.

As the term suggests, maturation requires children to mature to be ready to implement new skills. Maturation is believed to be driven by an individual's biologically determined developmental pathway or readiness. The experiences provided to children in the education and care environment give them the chance to use and test the skills they are developing at different maturational stages.

Learning, on the other hand, is often defined as a permanent change of behaviour that occurs as a result of experience. Whereas maturation is purely a biological process, learning is dependent on an individual's environment (although most learning theories imply that some part of development is contributed to by maturation).

Learning is a problem-solving process that uses one learning experience to lead to the next. This means that the process of learning is just as important as the result of learning. This process takes place through planned activities and everyday experiences, and can be observed by watching how children demonstrate new skills and knowledge.

By observing the stage a child is at, and then planning enriching experiences for that child, you are providing an opportunity for the child to consolidate their skills. It also allows you to identify when a child is ready to move on and be provided with opportunities to extend on previous learning.

When observing children and their developmental stage, show your understanding of the difference between maturational age and chronological age. Maturational age refers to the stage of development the child is at; for example, whether they can climb a ladder or jump with two feet together. Chronological age refers to the biological age of the child; for example, the child is two years old.

Nature versus nurture

The concepts of nature and nurture are relevant to your understanding of development. Nature refers to genetic programming, and is linked to heredity, genetics and maturation. Nurture relates to personal experiences – what someone experiences and is taught through interaction with the environment and other people.

Example

Nature versus nurture

Gina identifies some of her own characteristics and then tries to work out if they originate as a result of nature or nurture. This is what she thinks:

- Nature: blonde hair, big feet, learns things quickly
- Nurture: afraid of spiders (her dad scared her with a toy spider as a young child), plays guitar (she has lessons at school), interested in gardening (her mum loves to spend time with her in the garden)

Gina doesn't know how to categorise her characteristics of being patient and mathematical. She knows that biological and environmental influences work together, and that some characteristics may arise from both. She thinks the following may be true:

- Patient: she may have been born with a patient personality, but she was also born into a large family where they needed to help each other and share things.
- Mathematical: she was born with a brain that works well with numbers, but she also had some positive mathematics experiences with encouraging teachers in early primary school.

Core principles

There are a number of core principles related to development. The following table shows principles relevant to physical development and provides examples applicable to your workplace practice.

Physical development principles	Description	Examples applicable to workplace practice
Belonging, being and becoming	Children learn best when they feel safe and valued.	▶ Make the physical learning environment safe and provide time for children to learn and then practise skills.
Sequence of development	Development progresses in a step-by-step pattern that advances from simple to complex (maturation).	▶ Crawl before walking ▶ Walk before running ▶ Jump before hopping

Physical development principles	Description	Examples applicable to workplace practice
Rate of development	Children develop at different paces.	▶ Children sit unsupported between five and eight months. ▶ Children walk between nine and 18 months.
Neurological or brain development	Brain and spinal cord development links to the acquisition of skills (cephalocaudal and proximodistal development).	▶ Children learn skills such as: – toilet learning – eating solid food – fine motor skill development.
Critical periods	Critical periods are points in a child's development when providing opportunities to learn is crucial. If these periods are not taken advantage of, the child may miss an important aspect of learning. Children are drawn to challenging experiences and enjoy intentional teaching.	▶ When children start to pull themselves up using furniture, providing a safe environment allows them to explore and move, and their skills to develop. ▶ Children learn to turn the pages of a book if you provide books and model turning the pages.
Heredity and environment	This is also known as nature versus nurture, and relates to the aspects of development that are genetically programmed as opposed to those influenced by the environment. You provide rich environments for children to learn and children actively learn from this.	▶ All infants demonstrate reflex actions (nature). ▶ Children usually learn to ride a two-wheel bike between the ages of three and eight, depending on the amount of practice provided (nurture).
Play as learning	Play is used by children to learn and develop physical skills.	Physical skills develop in: ▶ dramatic play; for example, dressing and undressing, using buttons and zips ▶ sand play; for example, digging, scraping, moulding and jumping.
Individualised learning	Children learn and demonstrate what they know in different ways.	▶ Some children learn through group activities; others prefer one-to-one contact and direct instruction. ▶ Some children do not notice things they can learn until they are brought to their attention.

Physical development principles	Description	Examples applicable to workplace practice
Holistic development	All domains of development are closely related and interlinked.	▶ Learning to cut with scissors: – Physical skills are used to open and close the scissors and to hold materials in place while they are being cut. – Social skills are used as the child watches their peers and others use scissors. – Psychological skills are used as the child's self-esteem increases as they develop confidence in trying new skills. – Cognitive skills are needed to understand the concept of opening and shutting the scissors.

Stages of physical development

Theories of physical development support milestones that occur in progression. These developmental milestones have been confirmed through research.

A document that summarises developmental milestones with links to the EYLF is available at: http://aspirelr.link/developmental-milestones-eylf

It is more useful to know specific milestones than general milestones, as you can measure achievement far more accurately with specific milestones. For example, a general milestone might be for the child to walk, while a specific milestone takes into account the steps along the way, such as 'walks around furniture independently'. Your milestones need to be flexible in order to take into account the development of the individual child, as children develop at different rates.

A guide to some common physical development milestones is provided in the following table.

Age	Physical milestone
0–3 months	▶ Brings hand to mouth ▶ Swipes at dangling objects ▶ Opens and shuts hands ▶ Raises head momentarily while lying on stomach ▶ Reflexively grasps finger or object placed in their hand
3–6 months	▶ Can reach for things voluntarily ▶ Holds head upright in a sitting position ▶ Holds head upright for longer periods while lying on stomach

Age/stage	Physical milestone
6–12 months	▶ Rolls over ▶ Sits easily without support ▶ Crawls or shuffles ▶ Able to support own weight when held in standing position ▶ Pokes objects with index finger ▶ Releases objects voluntarily ▶ Brings toes to mouth ▶ Transfers toy from hand to hand ▶ Holds own bottle ▶ Pulls self to standing position holding onto furniture ▶ Walks with assistance ▶ May walk independently
1–2 years	▶ Holds large crayon with a palmar grasp and marks paper ▶ Places objects in another person's hand and lets go ▶ Attempts to feed self with spoon ▶ Uses thumb and forefinger to explore objects ▶ Walks unassisted ▶ May begin to run
2–3 years	▶ Turns pages of a book one at a time ▶ Runs with ease ▶ Pedals a tricycle ▶ Builds a tower of up to 10 blocks ▶ Screws and unscrews objects such as lids and knobs ▶ Jumps using both feet ▶ Kicks a large ball ▶ Walks on tiptoes ▶ Feeds self with fork and spoon ▶ Holds a crayon or pencil in tripod grasp
Preschooler	▶ Walks up stairs one foot per step ▶ Throws a ball overhand ▶ Balances on one foot momentarily ▶ Uses scissors with some control ▶ Draws a person with some recognisable body parts ▶ Pencil grip emerges

Individual physical development

Physical development is not an isolated area of learning. Each action that uses physical skills is also integrated with other areas of development – social, emotional, psychological and cognitive.

Consider dramatic play. Physical skills are required for activities such as pouring tea, dressing up, riding bikes or washing dishes, but other skills are also used.

For example:

- Social skills:
  - Relationships
  - Play stages
- Emotional and psychological skills:
  - Expressing feelings
  - Talking about feelings and/or how things might make you feel
- Cognitive skills:
  - Solving problems
  - Negotiating
- Communication skills:
  - Communicating plots and acting out roles
- Creative skills:
  - Developing roles
  - Improvising
  - Using materials and equipment in imaginative ways

Watch this video about children's physical development.

Other factors that influence individual physical development are detailed in the following table.

Age	Some areas of physical development are linked with the child's age as they relate closely with body maturation and the development of vital skills (for example, using the toilet and eating solid food). Other skills relate to the sequence of skill development (for example, how a child learns to crawl, then stand, then walk, then run). There is no exact age that links to these abilities as each child develops in a slightly different way.
Gender	Gender can influence physical development as children tend to practise skills that relate to their interests. Although children each have their own likes and dislikes, there are interests that are more common to boys than girls (for example, gross motor activities and construction) and to girls than boys (for example, dramatic play, dressing and undressing dolls, sewing and threading). Children practise the skills they need to complete their favoured experiences. Studies have shown that girls participate in less vigorous physical exercise than boys. This is thought to occur due to girls being more involved in social, communicative and imaginative play.
Temperament	Temperament affects the way children approach activities and people, and how involved they may be. A child who takes time to warm up to an activity may gain less practice at using materials initially, but may spend more concentrated effort at the activity once they understand it. A child with a different temperament may have a low concentration span and choose not to try an experience.

Interests	Each child has a unique way of looking at the world and will be fascinated by different things. Sometimes interests will occur based on what they know about the world, what their family participates in or what friends enjoy; at other times, a child's interest will be determined by pure enjoyment of participation. If a child's interests include physical pursuits, they will practise skills more regularly than a child who is not interested in physical activities.
Peers	Peers can influence a child's interests and encourage a child to participate in physical games and experiences that they enjoy.
Genetics	Genetics influences the rate of growth, the size of body parts and the timing of development. Physical development is affected by these aspects; for example, if a child wants to learn to ride a bicycle but their legs are too short, they may not be able to reach the pedals.
Environment	The experiences a child is provided influence their ability and interests. For example, if a child has used their fine motor skills to create craft items and construction sets, they will have a different set of knowledge to a child who has never been exposed to these items, but who plays outdoors, using gross motor skills to climb trees and playground equipment.
Nutrition	The body needs fuel to grow and stay healthy, so children with poor nutrition have less energy and may develop growth issues that hinder their physical performance.
Injury	Injuries may stop children participating in experiences due to the injury preventing participation, or the experience of having the injury making them scared or unwilling to participate in similar activities; for example, if a child falls from a fort, they may choose not to use the fort anymore in fear that they will fall again.
Disease and illness	Both short-term and chronic illness and disease affect children's energy, and they may lose the use of part of their body (either temporarily or permanently).

Monitoring physical development

Regulation 74 of the Education and Care Services National Regulations requires you to document child assessments or evaluations for delivery of the educational program. This is supported by the EYLF Practice: Assessment for learning, which requires you to determine the extent to which children are progressing toward the learning outcomes. This practice explains how you can use the developmental information you gather to make decisions about a child's progress, and identify any barriers to their progress and any areas of additional need.

There are a number of methods you can use to make your expectations clear and ensure you capture the vital details you need to show the child's progress. Learning stories, anecdotal records and video recordings are popular and effective methods. For simple, measured assessment of children's developmental milestones, a checklist with comment spaces is an effective tool.

Developmental checklists

To create an effective developmental checklist, you must ensure the following:

- The contents of the checklist should include appropriate milestones that a child should demonstrate for their age and developmental stage.
- The checklist should help you identify when a child requires support or needs to be more closely monitored.
- You must consider chronological age (the number of years the child has lived) and maturational age (the stage of development the child is demonstrating) to ensure you are considering the child's individual needs, strengths and rate of development.

Each checklist should reflect the individual child rather than having one checklist for all children. The following is an example checklist for an individual child with achievement dates and progress comments.

Physical development	Developmental comments	Date achieved
Walks independently		06.02.18
Walks up stairs using two feet on each step	06.03.18 Crawls up stairs	24.03.18
Throws a large ball	24.03.18 Pushes ball along ground	
Uses pincer grip to pick up small objects		20.03.18 Sultanas at snack time

To create a checklist that is individual to a child, involve the child's family in decision-making. This helps you consider cultural and family values and beliefs, and to identify the skills that each family feels are important for their child to develop.

This is an excellent way to involve the family in the service, and is an opportunity to provide support and information to children and parents about the relationship between health and physical activity. By discussing this relationship and the role of the checklist for monitoring, you will encourage a collaborative relationship and the family will develop a greater understanding of the importance of physical development. Any aspects causing concern about the child's physical development may also be considered; for example, preventing obesity and poor health, expected activity levels and nutritional requirements for children.

Monitoring children's physical development is essential to ensure you identify strengths, as well as needs and developmental concerns. Your evaluation must be clear and non-judgmental, and must consider environmental factors that may be influencing the child's demonstration of a skill.

Developmental needs are quite common, and generally mean a child requires additional support to develop a particular skill to an expected level. The most effective way to do this is to provide activities for the child that are based on their abilities and interests, but use the skills they need to develop. For example, if a child's monitoring checklist shows that their ball-handling skills are less developed than their other gross motor skills, but the child is interested in dressing up, you could provide children with basketball outfits so they can play ball games.

Assessing physical development

The assessment you undertake in relation to a child's physical skills and development allows you to identify:

- the value of the experience to the child, whether it was challenging and how you can increase the value
- how core principles and theories link to the developing child
- the learning the child has demonstrated
- the child's interests, strengths, skills and abilities.

EYLF outcomes must be used as part of the assessment process, as they enable you to work towards addressing the child's holistic needs. To assess children's progress toward specific EYLF outcomes, you can use the following steps.

Step	Example
1. Gather and record information about the child.	Rose, three years, held the scissors with one hand on each handle and opened and shut them. She angled the scissors so they would cut into the paper, and cut three short snips into the edge.
2. Use the EYLF to identify which of the five outcomes your observation record links to.	Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
3. Identify a specific sub-outcome of the EYLF.	Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing.
4. Clarify your selection by referring to the evidence examples that are provided for the identified EYLF outcome.	Children manipulate equipment and manage tools with increasing competence and skill.

Practice task 1

1. Use a table similar to the following to monitor a three-year-old child's physical development. Observe the child throughout a day to identify whether they have developed or are working on the skills listed in the table.

Age of child: Three years		
Physical development	**Comments and date**	**Date recorded as achieved**
Dresses and undresses with little help		
Hops, jumps and runs with ease		
Imitates a variety of shapes when drawing; for example, a circle		
Independently cuts paper with scissors		

2. Explain how each of the **four** skills in the table could be influenced by the following.
   a. Social development

   b. Psychological development

c. Cognitive development

d. Nature versus nurture

e. Proximodistal development

2. Link each of the **four** skills in the table to an outcome in the EYLF.

1B Providing physical experiences

The opportunities you provide to children for physical development and movement will be influenced by the factors described in the following table.

Factor	Example
The characteristics of the children	▶ Age of the children ▶ Peer group influences
The physical environment	▶ Availability of indoor and outdoor facilities ▶ Venue and location ▶ Educators' capabilities ▶ Safety considerations ▶ Desire and ability for children to set up equipment themselves
The purpose of your service	▶ Frequency and regularity of use of the service by the child ▶ Type of service
Support	▶ Amount and type of support and/or participation you have from parents ▶ Level of support available to you from outside resources, such as specialists, resource workers and inclusion support workers
EYLF outcomes	▶ EYLF Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing; Sub-outcome: Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing

Gathering information and setting goals

The information you collect about children's physical skills and development from monitoring or records forms the basis for your plan of activities.

From the information you gather, you will be able to set some goals and objectives for each child.

A goal is long term. Do not expect a goal to be achieved in a short period of time. Goals need to be clear, but they are not usually detailed.

An objective is short term. You can expect an objective to be achieved in a relatively short period of time. Objectives must be clear so you know what you want to achieve and must be measurable so you know if it has been completed.

Watch this video about providing appropriate physical activities to children.

Selecting appropriate experiences

From the objectives you develop, you can identify suitable experiences. The following table shows some examples of how goals and objectives can be used to create relevant physical experiences. The goal sets an outline for the result you are aiming for, and the objective gives you the current plan; that is, it is the first step of the goal.

Goal	Reason for this goal	Objective	Experience and resources
For Henry to make sandcastles	Henry has shown an interest in sand play.	For Henry to use a spade to dig holes in the sand during outdoor play this week	Sandpit play: ▶ Long- and short-handled shovels ▶ Shovels with large and small scoops ▶ Hand scoops ▶ Interactions to encourage digging, such as, 'Can you dig a hole, Henry?' ▶ Sing a digging song
For Henry to create a bead necklace	I have noticed a need for Henry to develop hand–eye coordination through threading.	For Henry to thread a large bead on a stiff piece of cord	Threading: ▶ Large beads of various colours ▶ Stiff cord with plastic ends ▶ Discuss how to hold the bead and cord ▶ At first, hold the cord for Henry if needed

Setting up for physical activity

The success of your planned experiences relies heavily on how you set up the environment and ensure it meets children's needs.

Children are central to your planning and evaluation. Children can talk about what they are learning, identify what they would like to do differently, and report their interests and abilities. By letting children be part of the process of planning, they begin to have a vision for themselves and develop greater confidence. They become active participants in their own learning and are able to take great pride in their accomplishments.

Consider the following factors when setting up the environment.

Time

To provide time for play and leisure, your plan must be unhurried and uninterrupted. When children are rushed through play, they do not have an opportunity to fully experience the activity and may become frustrated.

Children need time to:

- make choices
- become involved
- change direction
- become involved again
- practise and master skills
- form relationships
- become independent.

Space

Every play space is different and the availability of indoor and outdoor environments may be limited or constricted by time or the needs of others. However, you can control the space available.

Work with children to think about how space will be used. When planning how to use space, remember the following:

- Children need hands-on experiences. They need to explore, touch, smell, move, create and build. You need to make these experiences available.
- Children need choices. Spaces must prompt children to choose an activity that interests them. There must be sufficient play spaces for children to have a choice of two or three activities at any time.
- Children need challenges. The space you arrange needs to invite children to use their physical skills in a variety of ways.
- Children need safety and security; they need to feel safe without feeling overprotected. Finding a balance between safety and healthy risk-taking can be challenging.

Aesthetics

An aesthetically pleasing environment means an attractive environment, and refers to how the environment is set up, and how materials and experiences are offered. If experiences are presented with care and look appealing, children will be inclined to try them.

When you set up experiences for children, try to imagine how the child is going to see the experience and identify what messages your set-up will send. An ideal set-up says 'Come and play!'

Other messages you should aim to send are:

- this space is cared for
- play is valued and respected
- it is easy to play here
- you can change this space and play out your own ideas.

You can send positive messages such as these by ensuring:

- you use neutral colours that do not overload children's senses
- the environment is clean, bright and well-prepared
- materials and furnishings are child-focused
- all children and parents are made to feel welcome
- the environment is safe and interesting
- the environment has boundaries
- there are inviting and attractive displays and experiences
- materials are changed according to children's interests
- safety is important, but children are still able to challenge themselves
- there are familiar staff.

Materials and resources

The materials and equipment you choose to make available to children have a huge impact on the quality and types of play children engage in. Choices should include active, passive, group and solitary physical activities, and should cater to each child's interests.

It is important that:

- materials match the children's interests, needs and abilities
- there are enough resources for the number of children in a group
- good-quality resources are provided
- equipment can be used independently where possible
- the environment is set up safely without clutter
- the environment is attractive and inviting.

Open-ended materials are useful for creating spontaneous challenges as they can be used in a variety of ways, and children and educators can increase challenges with these materials without interrupting play or needing to rely on other people or resources. For example, blocks facilitate open-ended experiences as they can be used in a variety of ways. A child who is constructing a long road using large blocks may see another child building a bridge and then try to make their own bridge.

When materials and resources are available to children, they are encouraged to be independent in their learning and choose activities and materials that interest them and are suited to their development.

Safety

When children feel safe, they more readily explore the environment and make use of experiences. Your service has policies and procedures to ensure the building, materials and resources are safe. These are likely to include:

- a child-safe environment policy
- cleaning and safety checklists
- a risk assessment procedure
- a work health and safety policy.

Your knowledge of child development and children's individual abilities allow you to identify how the environment needs to operate and be presented to ensure safety. Part of this involves considering children's developmental abilities, such as their:

- understanding of safety and danger
- level of spontaneous behaviour
- ability to follow limits and guidelines
- level of curiosity
- interest in adult-modelled behaviour
- independence and attempts at greater independence
- understanding of consequences
- level of mobility and stability.

Other things that influence safety include:

- clothing choice
- weather conditions
- equipment placement
- flooring; for example, if it is slippery.

The following table provides some factors that may hinder children's full participation and clear recording of their skills.

Hindering factor	Issues this may cause
Dress/clothing	▶ If clothing is too warm or too cool, children may not be active. ▶ If clothing is too restricting, children may not be able to reach or bend adequately. ▶ Long or loose clothing may cause a child to get tangled or drape into an activity. ▶ Children may have been told not to get dirty. ▶ If children's shoes are slippery, their feet may not be able to grip to climb.
Weather	▶ If the weather is hot, children may not be active, or outdoor equipment may burn their skin. ▶ If the weather is cold, children may restrict their movement until they are warmed up from activity. ▶ If the weather is wet, activities may be slippery. ▶ If the weather is icy, materials may be slippery or uncomfortable to touch.
Past experience	▶ A child may have had a negative experience with an activity in the past and their emotional concerns may influence how well they demonstrate these skills. For example, a child may be very skilled at ball-handling, but one day they are bumped on the nose with a hard ball when going to catch it. After this occurs, the child may avoid ball-handling or demonstrate difficulties such as turning away when the ball comes toward them.

Assist children to understand the hazards and risks in their environment by alerting them to these and encouraging safe actions. By explaining why things are hazardous and providing clear limits that children can link to the hazard, you support children to be able to assess hazards, an important life skill.

When communicating limits to children, use positive language that gives stage-appropriate detail and instruction. Describe acceptable behaviour rather than what is not accepted; it is much more effective to let a child know what you want them to do than what you don't want them to do.

Limits and guidelines for behaviour let everyone know exactly what is expected of them while they are at the service. Limits and guidelines should be clearly communicated to:

- children, especially those new to the service
- parents
- potential users of the service
- all staff, including relief staff.

The following are examples of common limits written in a positive way:

- Stay in the fenced area.
- Sit at the table to eat and drink.
- Be gentle with one another.
- Walk inside.

Using interactions

You can interact and communicate to:

- initiate physical play or activity
- encourage a child
- help the child feel comfortable and safe
- introduce new words and/or language
- involve the child in setting up and modifying activities
- assist the child to participate.

Many spontaneous and planned activities can be developed out of conversations you have with children and their responses to activities. When children are involved in open, stimulating activities, you may use their enjoyment to develop new skills and knowledge.

To achieve these goals:

- use open questions
- be prepared for the children to adapt materials or change the experience
- support experimentation
- be prepared to add more materials
- provide for all possible events; for example, cleaning up mess and slippery floors
- be curious and interested yourself and reflect this in your comments.

Acknowledging efforts and participation

Acknowledgment shows children that you value them and recognise their efforts. How and when you acknowledge children's efforts affects how they feel about themselves and can foster feelings of positive self-esteem.

To provide healthy acknowledgment:

- Teach children to evaluate their own efforts by saying things like, 'Was that fun?', 'You seemed to enjoy that' or 'What do you think about what you have achieved?'
- Never use acknowledgment to compare children or make it seem like the child must meet your standards.
- Focus on the process rather than the product, and don't judge a child's work. This means that you pay attention to the time and effort applied rather than the outcome achieved. Do this by saying things like: 'You must have planned well to achieve that', 'You worked really hard on that' or 'How many materials did you use?'
- Keep it private. Do not show children up or make an example of them. Healthy acknowledgment is used to show value to the individual, not to show others weaknesses or demonstrate how things should be done. You might say, 'Thanks for helping out' or 'I appreciate you putting all those puzzles together'.

Demonstrating enthusiasm

Your attitudes are extremely influential during physical activity. If you don't show enthusiasm and interest in going outside to play or don't engage in physical activity, this sends a message to children that physical play is not interesting or encouraged. Children watch what you say, think and do, and they learn from this, so always consider what you are modelling for them.

Your enthusiasm is also demonstrated in how you prepare the environment and what activities and experiences you plan. If you plan dull, repetitive fine motor exercises, children will choose other more enjoyable activities.

The following table contains examples of how you may model enthusiasm.

Situation	Modelling and interaction you may provide
Play dough with shape cutters and rolling pins	▶ Discussing actions of others ▶ Rolling, pushing and pressing the dough ▶ Discussing how enjoyable it is to squeeze or manipulate the dough ▶ Filling a cake tin ▶ Rolling dough into a snake
Obstacle course	▶ Allowing children to design the course ▶ Following the children around the course or participating yourself (consider safety and supervision) ▶ Using active body language when interacting; that is, if you say jump, jump up and down yourself ▶ Laughing and smiling ▶ Encouraging through each stage of the course

Remember that an experience's value relates to how you set it up and the materials you provide. For example, if you provide play dough on its own or with natural materials, it may be a creative and aesthetic experience as children use their imagination while manipulating the dough. If you set up the dough with tools like scissors, rollers and cutters, you encourage the children to use their physical skills.

Participating with children

There are times when it is important for you to become involved in experiences to guide or model actions, such as showing a child how to use a particular piece of equipment or tool. This is called intentional teaching. For example:

- You may show a toddler how to hit pegs with a mallet by doing it yourself.
- You may extend a child's play by asking open-ended questions that deepen the experience.
- When children are playing with clay or play dough, you may ask how it feels when they squeeze and pound it.

When you are invited into an experience, you may find you are able to provide suggestions to enhance and extend the experience so the children learn through play. However, remember not to take over the children's experience; let the children guide your involvement.

As you watch children in experiences and listen to their ideas, opportunities may arise for you to provide support and extend their activity. When you provide extensions, children remain engaged for longer periods and practise skills. It may be as simple as adding new props to a play space, suggesting a larger or smaller place for their play, or sharing an idea about their play.

Example

Extending play

Here are two examples of how educators can extend play experiences.

1. A group of four-year-olds are playing doctors with the dolls in the home corner. Maria, an educator, notices there aren't many props available for this play, so she suggests to the children that they come to the storeroom and see if they can find some more materials. Maria encourages the children's physical skills by suggesting bandages (which need to be rolled and wrapped) and dress-ups (which use buttons, velcro and zips).
2. Annabelle and Kaya (both five years) are using their fingers to poke and make patterns in the wet sandpit. Sharon (an educator) notices their interest and shows them how to make patterns with their fingers and hands in a traditional Aboriginal way. The girls continue to experiment by using their elbows and knees to make patterns. Later, Sharon sets up a painting activity for the children to experiment further with hand and foot printing. She also provides a range of natural materials for the children to make prints with and puts up some posters showing different styles of body painting.

Fostering physical skills

The success of your planned experiences relies heavily on how suitable the experiences are for the children you provide them for. When choosing experiences for fine motor, gross motor and fundamental movement skills, reflect on what you have noticed about the child, and link experiences with the children's interests and level of development, so activities are enticing and safe.

Provide for the following needs where possible:

- Infants need to explore objects by mouth and need toys to swing, rattle and explore through their senses. They also need to experience the outdoor environment to feel fresh air on their skin and to view different objects and activities.
- Toddlers need to use indoor and outdoor environments. They need time to practise their new skills of walking, climbing, balancing, pushing, pulling, dancing and using more challenging equipment.
- Preschoolers have a great need for outdoor play as they use their gross motor and fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, throwing, catching, dancing and cycling.

Providing for emerging skills

Observing children playing helps you clarify a number of things, including:

- whether your plans and materials are suitable
- whether your play area is set up appropriately
- whether children are challenged
- current group and individual skills, abilities, needs and interests
- relationships
- motivations for learning.

You will also notice emerging skills, which are abilities that are just beginning to develop. For example, a child may be developing the ability to climb stairs. When they can competently climb stairs, they have this skill.

When a child is beginning to take an interest in learning a skill, you may need to provide guidance to assist the child until they have developed and mastered this skill themselves. Guide children's learning by providing a learning environment where play experiences and intentional teaching help the children develop skills. For example, if a child is learning how to open and close fasteners (such as buttons, zips, velcro and hooks) you may use:

- learning through play: providing dress-ups that have fasteners
- intentional teaching: working one-on-one with a child during dressing and undressing to assist them to use the fasteners on their clothing and shoes.

Practising skills

To support emerging skills, provide spontaneous practice of physical skills, particularly as children participate in routine times. In any one day, many physical skills will be used, such as:

- washing hands
- dressing and undressing for weather conditions, toilet and/or rest
- applying sunscreen
- eating and using utensils, cups and cutlery
- manipulating play materials.

Opportunities for children to develop emerging skills vary according to factors such as:

- the physical environment
- the service's purpose
- the amount and type of support from parents
- the level of participation by parents
- the level of support available to the service from external bodies, such as advice specialist services, resource workers and inclusion support workers
- how frequently and regularly the child uses the service
- the child's age.

New skills also emerge when children are introduced to ideas and materials they have not used or seen before. This type of learning environment encourages children to try new things. These opportunities challenge your planning and organisational ability as you must identify the right time to introduce new things and extend on children's learning. Some physically challenging experiences you may introduce include:

- music and dance
- cutting with scissors
- tying shoelaces
- pouring drinks
- serving food
- cooking.

Practice task 2

1. Implement a play experience that fosters a child's fine motor, gross motor or fundamental movement skills. Write down how you prepared and implemented the experience.

2. List one social benefit, one psychological benefit and one cognitive benefit the child would have gained during this planned experience.

3. Which outcome of the EYLF links with this planned experience?

1C Providing physical challenges and promoting fitness

There is a fine line between providing a challenge and frustrating a child. You are likely to find this balance if you consider the development you have already seen and make activities a little more challenging than this.

Children enjoy being challenged by their experiences, as this engages them in the activity and ensures their skills are applied and being developed.

Challenge is particularly important for gross motor and fundamental skill development, as challenges in these areas help a child to be physically fit and feel motivated. This helps to avoid obesity and promotes the development of a healthy body.

Challenging skills and abilities

Developing challenging activities involves being able to competently extend and expand on a child's current skills. The EYLF principles encourage you to hold high expectations for children's achievement in learning. The Principle: High expectations and equity supports you to see that children are competent and capable, and that you should provide challenges so they can extend their skills.

The following table contains some examples of objectives that challenge the child.

What the child can do	What may challenge this child	EYLF outcome
Steve (two years) can pull his shoes on and off.	Steve might be challenged by using the velcro on his shoes himself when dressing and undressing.	Sub-outcome of Outcome 3: Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing
Jessie (three years) can climb to the top of the fort ladder and stand on the top of the fort.	Jessie might be challenged by climbing to the top of the large A-frame, going over the top and climbing down the other side as part of an obstacle course.	

To balance challenge and frustration, it is useful to prepare some ideas for use if needed; these may be useful for spontaneous activity or to increase or decrease the difficulty of a task. This way, you will always be prepared to provide success for children. You can also be led by the children's ideas and their enthusiasm to try new things.

The examples in the following table show how you might change the challenging activities.

Proposed challenging experience	What planned challenges occurred	What spontaneous challenges occurred
Steve putting his shoes on and taking them off using velcro	Steve could open and close the velcro after demonstration and with initial support.	▶ Steve noticed that the educator's shoes had laces and was interested in undoing these. The educator allowed Steve to undo the laces. ▶ The educator set up a lacing board as a spontaneous activity.
Jessie climbing the large A-frame as part of an obstacle course	Jessie could: ▶ climb to the top of the A-frame ▶ climb down from the A-frame ▶ move over the top of the A-frame with an educator holding her. On the second day, Jessie could do the whole activity independently.	▶ Jessie liked to sit on the top of the A-frame before climbing down. She called to the other children, 'Look at me!' ▶ Jessie was wearing a dress on the second day. This presented a spontaneous challenge as it became caught in her feet. Jessie and the educator worked out how to make sure the dress was not in the way of her climbing.

Culture and physical health

The way you present and prioritise physical play opportunities may be affected by the specific cultural and lifestyle priorities of the community your service operates in. Take these cultural considerations into account when determining how to approach health and physical fitness through exercise. For example, some communities place a high value on organic foods and active group experiences. Other communities have few opportunities to be involved in sports or active pursuits, and may include families who work long hours and have limited time.

In addition to these community factors, you need to work with different family cultures. Families have different patterns of eating and exercise, and some families are:

- aware of dietary and activity needs, and encourage your service to promote healthy choices
- unaware of the potential dangers that unhealthy foods and lack of physical activity can have on long- and short-term health.

Families may or may not have appropriate resources to make informed choices about diet and physical fitness. Family culture impacts the choices you make in your service about menus and planned activities. Be responsive to family needs and expectations, and provide support when they need advice and direction.

Providing education to families

An essential point to introduce to children and families is the links between lack of physical exercise, childhood obesity and poor health. You may do this using newsletters, parent education forums, group times, individual discussions, and meal or active play times. Share information relating to:

- health effects, such as increased risk of diabetes and other illnesses
- physical activity playing a part in keeping children healthy and ensuring they have a balanced lifestyle; this relates to limiting time spent using the computer, playing video games and other sedentary activities
- balancing the energy being used and the energy being taken in from food consumed
- ensuring the body is able to function properly by reducing processed, snack and fast foods, and ensuring the intake of a variety of nutrients.

You can promote healthy choices to children by:

- pointing out healthy foods and describing their benefits
- discussing physical activities and their benefits
- identifying which foods are healthy to eat often and which should be eaten rarely
- modelling healthy choices and being active yourself
- discussing sports, athletics, dance and other active choices
- developing healthy menus.

Promoting physical fitness

To promote physical fitness, you must start by providing active play that is suited to the children's needs. You must then:

- encourage children by making positive comments about their efforts
- think about safety
- include some organised activity each day; for example, a movement session or an obstacle course activity
- set a good example by being active yourself.

Some ways to provide for physical fitness include:

- active games
- exercises
- asking children to help set up games
- using a range of environments and equipment
- incorporating sociodramatic play
- using construction materials.

Practice task 3

Read the case study, and then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Felip (three years) is using a cricket bat like a tennis racket, holding it high in the air and trying to hit a bouncing tennis ball. He lunges the bat forward and misses the tennis ball.

1. How would you modify this experience to help Felip participate in an appropriate challenge?

2. What outcome from the EYLF links to providing an appropriate challenge?

Summary

- Physical development relates to how children grow and develop control over their bodies.
- Understanding theories relating to physical development and knowledge of physical development milestones helps you understand the physical needs of individual children.
- Physical development is not an isolated area of learning. Each action that uses physical skills is also integrated with other areas of development.
- When assessing and monitoring development, a number of methods can be used to ensure you capture the details you need to show the child's progress.
- The success of your planned experiences relies heavily on how you set up the environment and how well it meets children's needs.
- Fine and gross motor skills, fundamental movement skills and physical fitness can be fostered and promoted through play.
- Developing challenging activities requires you to competently extend and expand on children's current skills.
- Some essential points to introduce to children and families include the links between lack of physical exercise, childhood obesity and poor health.

Learning checkpoint 1
Fostering physical development

Part A

For each of the physical development aspects shown in the following table, list:

- two skills used in daily activity (including routines)
- two indoor play experiences that would develop these skills
- two outdoor play experiences that would develop these skills.

Highlight the experiences in your table that you think would improve a child's physical fitness.

Physical development aspects	Skills used in daily activity	Indoor play experiences	Outdoor play experiences
Gross motor skills	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Fine motor skills	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Hand–eye coordination	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Grasp	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Balance	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Fundamental movement skill	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Kinaesthetics	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Perceptual development	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.
Sensory motor development	1. 2.	1. 2.	1. 2.

Part B

1. Develop a physical skills checklist that would suit the age of a group of children you work with. You will use this checklist to work with one child. You may base your checklist on the EYLF development milestones checklist located at: http://aspirelr.link/developmental-milestones-eylf

   Ensure the checklist includes:

   - the age of the child
   - at least six specific physical development milestones (include fine and gross motor skills and fundamental movement skills)
   - space to record the date that the child demonstrated the skill
   - space to make comments about how the child is progressing toward achieving the milestone.

   Observe the child and use the checklist to record your observations.

2. Use the results from your checklist to complete the following:
   a. List the child's physical strengths.

   b. Describe one play experience you would provide for this child that would challenge one or a number of these physical strengths.

   c. Explain why you chose this experience.

   d. List the child's emerging physical skills.

e. Describe one play experience you would provide for this child that would support one or a number of these emerging physical skills.

f. Explain why you chose this experience.

3. Implement the play experiences from questions 2b and 2e and then answer the following questions.
   a. Was the child challenged by the experiences? How do you know?

   b. Explain how the experiences helped the child to develop physical skills.

   c. Explain how each of the following developmental aspects were included in some way during your experiences:
   - social
   - psychological
   - cognitive.

Part C

Write a report explaining how you promote EYLF Outcome 3: Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing in your daily work with children.

In your report:

- explain the organisational standards, policies and procedures you follow to work towards Outcome 3
- link the information you provide to at least **two** physical development theorists or core principles of development.

In addition, demonstrate how you use a range of documentation methods to plan and provide experiences that foster and challenge children's physical skills that are connected to Outcome 3.

Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

Fostering social development

Children's immediate carers, particularly their family, along with those from the wider social environment, are the primary influences on their social development. Educators are responsible for building on children's social skills and knowledge by providing developmentally appropriate experiences and activities, interactive environments, guidance, support, and ongoing assessment and monitoring of social skills and development.

In-depth knowledge of a range of development theories and how they relate to social development and work practices provides the basis from which to monitor social skill development, and plan and deliver appropriate programs and experiences for each child.

Watch this video about children's social development.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
✓	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
✓	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
✓	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

2A Understanding and monitoring social development

Many of the principles, practices and outcomes of the EYLF are linked to social development. As children develop confidence, relationships, responsibility, control of their feelings and the ability to work with others, you should provide an environment that meets these growing needs and encourages, supports and challenges their skills.

Watch this video about social skills children need to develop.

Social skills and development

Social skills are the means by which people communicate and interact. They include cultural rules that are learnt and involve both verbal and nonverbal actions. Social development refers to the learning of social skills, including how to behave in culturally acceptable ways.

Play is a means for children to practise and learn social skills that assist them in everyday interactions. Dramatic play in particular helps children to simplify events, act out things they are trying to understand, and take on roles they would not usually experience.

When you monitor children's development against milestones and/or the EYLF outcomes, you ensure their current abilities are being identified. You are also taking note of the skills they are developing. By recognising and recording these, you are gathering assessments for learning that assist you to provide an ongoing and responsive curriculum.

Further to this, theories of development allow you to understand why children do what they do by drawing on research.

Social development theories

Social development in early childhood is defined by a range of approaches and theories. These guide you to identify the milestones that children are expected to achieve and provide an understanding of why children approach social interaction in the way they do.

Attachment theory

John Bowlby developed the attachment theory, and Mary Ainsworth continued studies based on his findings. Bowlby believed that children and infants are able to form attachments with a number of people; the attachment with a primary caregiver (usually a parent or guardian) is strongest, then any number of other attachments may follow.

Other attachments are equally as important to the child's social and emotional development. As each child commences education and care, your goal is to develop an attachment relationship. Children who are securely attached usually experience less distress than other children.

Children show attachment relationships by demonstrating the characteristics in the following table.

Characteristic	Behaviour
Social referencing	Social referencing is when a child watches the emotional responses and responds in a similar way to a person they are attached to. For example, if a spider or bug was crawling on the wall, the child may copy the response of the person. If the person screams, the child will scream; if the person says, 'Hey look how many legs it has! How interesting!' the child will show interest.
Anchoring	Anchoring is when a child moves off to explore, but not too far from the person they are attached to. The child ensures this person is within close proximity and may be confused and concerned if the person moves away unexpectedly.
Refuelling	Refuelling is when a child periodically returns to the person they are attached to with a toy or activity, or just to make sure they are still in place. The child also returns to the person if frightened, hurt or upset.

These concepts have evolved, and the attachment theory now includes the following behaviours:

- Proximity maintenance – the child desires to be near the person they are attached to.
- Safe haven – the child returns to the attachment figure for comfort and safety in the face of fear or a threat.
- Secure base – the attachment figure acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.
- Separation distress – the child experiences anxiety that occurs in the absence of the attachment figure.

Bowlby also identified the following range of attachment characteristics in children.

Secure attachment characteristics	▶ Develops independence and autonomy ▶ Able to separate from the attachment figure ▶ Seeks comfort from the attachment figure if hurt or frightened ▶ A positive response is seen when the attachment figure returns ▶ Prefers the attachment figure to a stranger ▶ Has trusting, lasting relationships ▶ Has a high self-esteem ▶ Able to share feelings with others ▶ Seeks social support
Ambivalent attachment characteristics	▶ Wary of strangers ▶ Becomes greatly distressed when the attachment figure leaves ▶ Does not appear to be comforted when the attachment figure returns ▶ Struggles to develop independence and autonomy ▶ Reluctant to develop close relationships ▶ Becomes overly distressed when a relationship ends ▶ Dependent on others to meet their emotional needs

Avoidant attachment characteristics	▶ May avoid the person they are most attached to ▶ Does not seek much comfort from the person they are most attached to ▶ Shows little or no preference between the person they are most attached to and a stranger ▶ Independence and autonomy developed as a coping mechanism ▶ May have intimacy problems ▶ Does not share emotions in social or romantic relationships ▶ Unable or unwilling to share feelings with others ▶ Resistant rather than independent
Disorganised attachment characteristics	▶ Shows a mixture of avoidant and resistant behaviours ▶ May appear dazed, confused or apprehensive ▶ Independence and autonomy difficult to develop ▶ May take on a parenting role ▶ Some children take on the role of parent to their educator ▶ Become dependent on others rather than independent

You can develop strong attachments with children by using the following strategies:

- Hold infants as frequently as possible in a relaxed and comfortable way.
- Respond quickly to an infant's cries and cues to help the child feel secure quickly.
- Provide infants opportunities to explore the environment independently while you are nearby, to encourage them to feel secure when they are away from you.
- Help children to understand the pattern of the day; for example, by telling them what is happening next.
- Use routine opportunities, such as dressing, for one-on-one interactions.
- Make the child feel important throughout the day.
- Talk with children if you are unable to hold or be near them. Use singing, poems and rhymes as a way to comfort children.
- Ensure that educators remain consistent. It is detrimental in building relationships and security if there are frequent educator changes.
- Work at children's eye level.

Behaviourist theory

Behaviourists believe that the environment and interactions alone influence behaviour and learning. If positive responses are provided, the child learns and therefore increases their understanding. If negative responses are provided then the child ceases the behaviour. This theory (also called operant conditioning) is based on a system of reward and punishment, and particularly on positive reinforcement.

A number of theorists have worked with this theory, including Pavlov, Skinner, Thorndike and Watson. Each has a specific take on the theory, but all are based on positive reinforcement.

Example

Positive reinforcement

Rosie is four years old. Last week she spoke in front of the group in a group discussion and her educator told her how well she did and that she seemed very confident. Due to this positive reinforcement Rosie now wants to talk in front of the group again.

Ecological approach

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological approach to childhood development, where the entire environment and any connecting or influencing forces impact on all aspects of a child's development.

The connecting or influencing forces that may impact a child include:

- government decisions and laws
- parent workplaces
- culture and traditions of parents, carers, educators and the community
- events that occur in the family and community
- settings and their values
- carers, educators, babysitters, relations and family members that make up the child's world.

The ecological approach highlights the need for you to consider the broader situation of each child, their family and the other influences in their lives. It is represented by structures that comprise central forces that influence the child, as described in the following table.

Ecological structure	What this includes	Some examples
Microsystem ('micro' means small)	Relationships that include face-to-face interaction between the child and others	▶ Home ▶ Service ▶ Play group ▶ Relatives ▶ Friends
Mesosystem ('meso' means in the middle)	Relationships between two or more settings that the child is involved in	▶ Childcare and parents ▶ Kindergarten and education and care service ▶ Relatives and parents
Exosystem ('exo' means outside or external)	The child does not directly participate in these relationships or settings but they have a direct influence on the child	▶ Parent's workplace and associated conditions ▶ Community support services ▶ Support organisations ▶ Government
Macrosystem ('macro' means large)	These systems influence the culture and beliefs of the family	▶ Religion ▶ Laws ▶ Customs ▶ Barriers
Chronosystem ('chrono' means time)	The time frame in which the child's life is set; for example, 2018	

Friendship theory

Children go through different stages of friendship, in which they understand the concept of friendship differently. Robert Selman's ideas on friendship stages help to demonstrate the importance of these relationships to children at various stages and identify ways to support the development of peer relationships. It is noted that despite the stages of friendship, even toddlers interact differently with friends than with non-friends.

For a young child a friend is someone who they:

- spend more time with
- attempt reconciliation more often with
- quarrel more with
- are more forgiving of.

Friendship is a valuable development tool.

Through friendship and relationships children learn about:

- compromise
- sharing
- decision-making
- problem-solving
- how their emotions affect others
- leadership
- winning and losing
- social and pro-social behaviours
- viewpoints and perspectives
- similarities and differences
- character and personality.

The following guide to friendship stages is based on the age and developmental stage of children you care for, although Selman's theory extends into young adulthood.

Pre-friendship (infants and young toddlers)	▶ Relationships with adults are most important at this stage as needs must be met ▶ The child has momentary physical playmates ▶ Not able to articulate their ideas about friendship
Stage 1 (older toddlers and preschoolers)	▶ Relationships begin to turn to peers ▶ Not able to understand that others have different perspectives ▶ A friend is someone who is in the same space at the same time and sharing the same activity ▶ Friendships are often temporary or related to needs ▶ Enduring friendship is not understood ▶ One-way feelings or friendship actions are acceptable

Stage 2 (older preschoolers and school-age children)	▶ Realises different perspectives occur, but has trouble understanding two or more perspectives at once ▶ A friend is someone who does something that pleases or is helpful ▶ A close friend is someone the child knows better than others ▶ Cooperation and some reciprocal action is evident

Friendship involves forming a stable and intimate relationship with a peer. Popularity involves gaining acceptance among peers. Popular children are seen to be friendly, helpful and considerate, and become popular by:

- making attempts to enter groups
- initially going along with play or others' ideas
- not asking too many questions
- not trying to change a group's agenda.

Popularity and friendship, including peer acceptance, both contribute to a child's wellbeing as they:

- assist in the development of leadership skills, assertiveness and conflict-resolution strategies
- provide a safe context for self-exploration
- meet their needs for intimacy and social support.

You can assist children to develop positive friendships by:

- respecting each child's friendship choices
- understanding that some children have large groups of friends while others have fewer close friends
- acknowledging that some children make friends easily and quickly, while others make friends slowly
- letting them choose their own friendships
- encouraging children to spend time together
- providing free play time to develop relationships
- supporting them to resolve problems, conflicts and other issues.

You can assist children to understand what friendship means and to treat all people fairly by avoiding phrases such as:

- 'We are all friends' – children will not be able to understand the word 'friends' if you use it so generally, so try saying, 'We all need to care for each other'.
- 'Be gentle with your friends' when aggression occurs – by using this phrase you are advising the child that if someone is not your friend then it is okay to be rough. Try saying, 'Be gentle with people' or 'Nobody likes to be hurt' instead.

Moral theory

Lawrence Kohlberg based his theory of moral development on Piaget's theory relating to cognitive development. Kohlberg identified seven stages of moral thinking that cover all life stages. The three stages that are shown in the following table relate to children of the age you may care for. Children develop through the stages sequentially.

Level 1: Preconventional morality		
Stage 0: Egocentric judgment	**Stage 1: Obedience and punishment**	**Stage 2: Individualism and exchange**
▶ The child makes a judgment of right or wrong based on what they want or what is helpful to them. ▶ There is no concept of rules or obligations. ▶ The child has no concept of needing to obey or conform.	▶ The child sees morality as something external to themselves. ▶ The child responds to cultural rules and labels of good, bad, right and wrong. ▶ The child sees rules as things that adults impose. ▶ The child sees physical consequences as being linked to what is good or bad. ▶ Punishment is linked with doing wrong things and the child wishes to avoid punishment.	▶ The child realises that different individuals have different viewpoints. ▶ The child sees that they need to make their own judgment about what is right or wrong. ▶ Punishment is a risk that should be avoided. ▶ Elements of fairness, reciprocity and equal sharing are present. ▶ Concepts of loyalty, gratitude and justice are not yet understood.

This moral theory supports the following strategies for assisting children to develop moral understanding:

- Create discussion groups for children to solve different problems.
- Encourage children to be assertive.
- Foster choice.
- Include children in the development of limits and guidelines.
- Hold children accountable for their actions.
- Explain situations that occur that demonstrate right or wrong, including reasons for this.
- Provide warm, secure relationships to enable the child to distinguish the difference between good and bad feelings and actions.
- Step in when you see a moral issue about to occur and help children to understand the issue.
- Model good character.
- Be clear about your values.
- Show respect for others.
- Demonstrate and encourage manners.
- Interact as much as possible.
- Involve children in community activities.
- Discuss celebrations, holidays and cultural events, and show respect for what they mean to others.
- Take advantage of ‘windows of opportunity’ or ‘teachable moments’ to guide children morally.
- Provide children with responsibilities appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Provide a wide range of positive activities.

Play stages theory

Children develop many social skills through their play experiences. These provide them with opportunities to interact in a variety of situations and to learn to cooperate with others, choose activities, make decisions, and experience failure and success.

Pretend play assists children to explore the world of feelings and relationships. By enacting situations they have seen, children learn about and come to terms with their world, particularly if they are confused by their experiences or do not understand them.

As you observe children at play you should get a sense of how play impacts on a child's self-esteem, independence and sense of achievement. You should also see:

- children's fears, joys and frustrations
- how play enables them to better understand themselves
- how they express themselves, relate to their communities and learn about how others express themselves in different ways.

In play you can see children:

- learning and practising social skills, including taking turns, sharing, cooperating and setting rules
- using cognitive skills, including negotiating, thinking and solving problems
- expressing psychological aspects of themselves, including sharing feelings and working out emotional issues.

Theorist Mildred Parten defined social types of play. They include the social play stages described in the following information.

Solitary play	Solitary play includes situations where children play individually and do not have any social contact with others. It is mostly seen in children under two years, but older children may also engage in solitary play as they enjoy time alone to pursue their individual interests. An environment set up for solitary play should have activities or space for one child only, such as a pop-up toy, a puzzle or a table with one chair.
Parallel play	Children between the ages two and three begin to enjoy being near others and participating in the same activity. Although they are still very self-centred and usually unable to share or work together effectively, they may imitate and play in the same manner as a child nearby. An example of parallel play is when two-year-olds are at a play dough table and are both squeezing and poking the dough, but not interacting. Older children may also choose to play side-by-side in parallel play, even though they have the skills to play together. To set up for parallel play, you should provide activities where small groups of children can work in the same or similar play activities independently, such as puzzles, collage, blocks, painting or playing in the sandpit.

Associative play	Associative play usually occurs when children are between the ages of three and five. It is called associative play as children are beginning to associate with each other. As a child's language skills increase and improve, they also become more aware of other children and are better able to communicate. A child may play with others at activities, speak briefly to them, laugh together and react to them. Although these children are playing together, you may find their interactions brief and the play episode may not last very long. For example, children may borrow and lend toys and laugh together without actually cooperating or playing with common ideas in mind. To encourage associative play, provide props for imaginative play or activities that require children to share materials with others; for example, car mats, block corners and dress-up areas all give children the opportunity to associate with each other.
Cooperative play	Between the ages of three and five, children's interest in others increases. As their language becomes more complex, their interactions with other children usually last longer as they begin to share ideas and solve problems together. Cooperative play involves children working together. They enjoy taking the roles of leader or follower, and they give roles to each other in their play. Plots will be discussed and played out; for example, 'Now you go to the table and I will come in and serve dinner!' By providing for role-play, imaginative or dramatic play, you can encourage cooperative play.
Play with rules	Older preschool and early primary school-age children become interested in more structured games – those with clearly defined rules. Games with rules include board games, skipping rope games, hopscotch and ball sports. You can help support play with rules by ensuring all materials and equipment are in good order and readily available to children. Most play with rules also requires space. Avoid competitive games where possible as they may reduce some children's opportunities to practise their skills. In competitive games the children with the greatest skills get lots of practice, while the children with less developed skills are eliminated early. This not only reduces practice time, but can also be damaging to self-esteem and even see children becoming bored, upset or angry.
Unoccupied play	Children of all ages can undertake unoccupied play, which involves a child not playing as such, but being occupied watching something of momentary interest. When there is nothing exciting taking place, the child may play with their own body or their clothing, get on and off chairs, stand around, follow an educator or sit in one spot glancing around the room. Unoccupied play may not seem important, but you must respect a child's decision not to participate and also see the value in a child's observation of an environment and the people in it.

Onlooker play	Children of all ages can also become involved in onlooker play. A child who spends time watching other children at play is using onlooker play. The child may talk to the children they are observing by asking questions or giving suggestions, but the child does not enter into the play. This type of play differs from unoccupied play in that the onlooker is observing particular groups of children rather than anything that happens to be of interest at the time. The child stands or sits within speaking distance of the group so they can see and hear everything that takes place. Just as with unoccupied play, you must respect a child's decision not to participate, and also see the value in a child's observation of an environment and the people in it.

Example

Adapting a game for non-competitive play

Musical statues can be adapted so that it isn't competitive but is still fun and involves all children. Commence the game with all children moving to the music. When you stop the music the child who stops moving last can come out of the game and be in control of stopping and starting the music (if able), or directing the remaining children into movement ideas (for example, jump, spin, do star jumps and so on) until the music stops. The child who stops moving last comes out of the game and the child who missed the last turn goes back into the game again. This means that all children are occupied and all children continue to practise their skills. It also means that the game can continue for the period of time chosen.

Social learning theory

Albert Bandura's social learning theory is also known as the social cognitive theory, as it links a person's environment, behaviour and psychological processes.

Bandura believes that people's behaviour is affected by the environment, that is, through modelling, and that this modelling does not cause learning but rather motivates people to demonstrate what they have learnt. He believes there are certain stages required if modelling is to influence behaviour: attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. The following table elaborates on each of these stages.

Modelling stage	What this means	Positive modelling	Negative modelling
Attention	Children need to pay attention to learn from modelling; it also helps if the modelling takes into account aesthetics by being attractive and enjoyable.	If positive actions and interactions are modelled in ways that are encouraging and enthusiastic, then children will want to reproduce these, as they will see the benefit.	If negative actions and interactions are modelled and these are shown to work in achieving a goal or to have an influence, then these negative actions may be modelled.

Modelling stage	What this means	Positive modelling	Negative modelling
Retention	To learn from any modelling, children need to pay attention to what is happening to retain the process; this is where the cognitive processes of imagery and memory are important.	Consistent and repeated modelling of positive actions and interactions allow children to take them on; seeing them regularly helps them remember.	If children do not regularly see positive modelling, they will not be able to remember and repeat it.
Reproduction	To reproduce what has been modelled, children need to have the skill to do this.	Reproducing skills such as problem-solving, negotiation and conflict resolution requires support, encouragement and guidance.	Negative actions are sometimes easier to reproduce as they often require minimal skill. For example, it is easier to hit another child and grab a toy than to problem-solve and negotiate unless these skills have been developed.
Motivation	The motivation to reproduce modelled actions involves encouragement or reinforcement.	Children can be motivated to reproduce positive actions that are modelled if they link them to positive reinforcements or rewards. In this case a reward does not necessarily mean that a 'prize' is received; it means that something is gained from the action such as a positive outcome or an enjoyable experience.	Children can be motivated to reproduce negative actions that are modelled if they are linked to positive reinforcements. When negative modelling receives positive reinforcement, difficult behaviour can develop; and this is why you must consider what children gain from negative behaviour when developing behaviour plans.

Bandura believes that punishment is not an effective reinforcement tool as it can often turn into an attention-gaining activity, which may then be seen as positive reinforcement by the child. He suggests that the strategies outlined in the following table are useful for developing self-control and hence positive behaviour.

Strategy	Implementation
Self-control therapy	Assist the child to understand what behaviour is inappropriate and what behaviour is desired. You then assist and support the child to manage this behaviour using reflection, addressing issues as they arise, identifying triggers and changing the environment where possible. Self-control therapy relates clearly to the behaviour guidance planning you will do in your role.

Strategy	Implementation
Modelling therapy	This strategy relies on you demonstrating to the child how a situation may be dealt with in a positive way. You may do this by explaining, giving examples, undertaking pretend play or modelling in your own situation.

Sociocultural theory

Lev Vygotsky believed that social interaction not only increases levels of knowledge, but also changes children's thoughts and behaviour. He also believed that when children are exposed to a variety of social and cultural experiences, their world becomes richer and their perceptions of the world become more open and positive.

The sociocultural theory suggests there are three ways that learning is passed to individual children:

- imitative learning where the child copies another person
- instructed learning where the child is directed and then puts the information to use
- collaborative learning where the child works with their peer group, cooperating and learning about each other to achieve goals.

The sociocultural theory shows a link between social, communication and cognitive development, and how cultural experiences provide opportunities for learning.

Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' also demonstrates how children learn socially and in other areas of development. This theory shows that if scaffolding is provided and the child is ready, then soon after they can develop and master the skill themselves.

Another aspect of sociocultural theory involves reciprocal teaching, which provides a learning environment where open and frequent interaction occurs between the child and educator. The educator in this model will alternate leadership of the conversation with the child, until the child becomes confident in this role and assumes a leadership and instructional role themselves.

To apply the sociocultural theory, you should:

- challenge children and provide ideas and activities that take their learning to the next stage
- guide children to look for answers by imitating what they see in others, listening to instruction and working as part of a group
- provide opportunities for them to expand their current knowledge base.

Example

Zone of proximal development

Belinda (an educator) has previously observed Josie (three and a half years) at the collage table tearing paper and pasting. Today Belinda puts scissors onto the table and notices as Josie picks up a pair and holds them in two hands, opening and shutting them. Josie puts a piece of paper in the scissors, then with both hands opens and closes the scissors on the paper.

Josie is demonstrating an emerging skill – using scissors. Belinda notices this skill by observing Josie.

By supporting Josie's emerging scissor-cutting skills through scaffolding, Josie will gain confidence and competence over time, until she can independently cut using scissors.

Josie's educators will help her to hold the scissors correctly by providing fine motor strengthening activities like pegs and play dough, and will sit with Josie at the collage table and support and encourage her efforts. If Josie has trouble opening and shutting the scissors, the educators can provide scissors with springs that help with this motion.

Other ways Josie may experience scaffolding for this skill are seeing media of other children using scissors, using scissors at home with her parents' help or seeing her peers use scissors.

Pro-social behaviour

Pro-social behaviour relates to the successful and appropriate manner in which we interact; it also relates to the voluntary behaviour that benefits another person by helping, sharing, giving, comforting, showing sympathy and kindness, showing positive verbal and physical contact, showing concern, taking the perspective of another person and cooperating.

This helping behaviour is motivated by altruism, which means that any motivation is based on the benefits another person gains and that the person helping is not looking for personal reward or acknowledgment.

When you assist children to develop pro-social behaviour you are also helping them to succeed in friendships and gain group acceptance. You can do this by helping children to:

- notice social cues
- interpret social cues
- formulate social goals
- generate possible problem-solving strategies
- evaluate probable effectiveness of strategies
- take peer perspectives
- have knowledge of social rules
- remember past experiences and link these to expectations for future experiences.

Temperament

Temperament refers to the behavioural characteristics that shape reactions and responses, and is believed to be a trait that individuals are born with. Temperament is mainly referred to when discussing infants and toddlers.

As children develop socially and emotionally, various positive and negative life experiences impact them and their temperament may change as they begin to develop a personality that is not only based on inborn traits.

The temperament of a young child affects the way you interact, and may alter your expectations of a child. For some people temperament influences how well they bond with a young child.

There are three basic types of temperament that influence social development:

- Easy temperament – children with an easy temperament are cheerful, adaptable, fit well into routines and are positive in mood.
- Slow to warm up temperament – children who display a slow to warm up temperament adjust slowly to new experiences, tend to be negative in mood, inactive and show mild responses to the world around them.
- Difficult temperament – children with a difficult temperament are slow to adapt to new experiences, have strong reactions to change, have irregular routines, are negative in mood and are often withdrawn.

Core principles

A number of core principles that relate to social development are outlined in the following table.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with social development
Belonging, being and becoming	Children learn best when they feel safe and valued.	▶ Children's interactions with you will be limited if they do not feel a sense of belonging. Their involvement in experiences will be limited as they will not be comfortable exploring.
Sequence of development (maturation)	Development progresses in a step-by-step pattern that advances from simple to complex.	▶ Children play individually prior to playing with others. ▶ Children pretend with lifelike items before using their imagination to use items in various ways.
Rate of development	Children develop at a different pace.	▶ Children begin to play together cooperatively between two and five years of age.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with social development
Neurological or brain development	Brain and spinal cord development links to the acquisition of skills.	▶ Listening to others. ▶ Developing an understanding of other people's needs and what is right or wrong.
Critical periods and scaffolding	There are times when the opportunity to learn is at its most crucial. If these times are not taken advantage of the child may miss an important aspect of learning. Children are drawn to challenging experiences and enjoy intentional teaching.	▶ Bonding at birth. ▶ Access to other children to develop understanding of people.
Heredity and environment, and how children use active learning	Also known as nature versus nurture, this relates to the aspects that are genetically programmed, in contrast to how the environment influences development. You provide rich environments for children to learn in.	▶ Access to play. ▶ Attitudes of parents/carers to play.
Holistic development	All domains of development are closely related and interlinked.	▶ Learning through pretend play develops: – physical skills – acting out roles and completing tasks – psychological skills – expressing feelings in the roles taken – cognitive skills – understanding the role, memorising actions, imitating and imagining – social skills – communicating with co-players, expressing their ideas.
Play as learning	Play is used by children to learn.	▶ Social skills develop in: – dramatic play – role-play, interacting with others – group times – speaking in front of others, having turns, sharing ideas.
Individualised learning	Children learn in different ways and demonstrate what they know in different ways.	▶ Some children learn through group activities, others prefer one-to-one contact and direct instruction. ▶ Some children do not notice things they can learn until they are brought to their attention.

Stages of social development

Theories of social development recognise milestones that occur in progression. Some theories that demonstrate progressive milestones are Parten's social play stages, Kohlberg's moral theory and Selman's friendship theory.

Some of the most common social development milestones are provided in the following table.

Age	Social milestone
0–6 months	▶ Develops social smile around six weeks ▶ Enjoys social play with caregivers ▶ Fascination and interest in mirror images of self ▶ Squeals with delight ▶ Uses various cues for gaining attention to needs
6–12 months	▶ Imitates people during play ▶ Becomes increasingly shy with strangers ▶ Separation anxiety increases ▶ May begin to test caregiver and parent responses to behaviour
1–2 years	▶ Demonstrates self-awareness ▶ Separation anxiety may begin to fade ▶ Defiant behaviour is more apparent
2–3 years	▶ Separates from parents/caregivers ▶ Imitates the world around them through social play ▶ Does not have the ability to share toys and equipment
3–5 years	▶ Can cooperate with other children more regularly ▶ Negotiates simple solutions to problems and conflicts with peers ▶ Pretend play increases as children act out what they see ▶ More likely to listen and respond to rules

Individual social development

There are many different ways that children interact. Needs, interests and developmental stages influence these interactions. The activities you provide can reflect these influences and also contribute new aspects.

Some influences on social development are described in the following table.

Age-related stages	Some areas of social development are linked with the child's age, as they relate to their developing use of imagination or understanding of concepts that are difficult to grasp. For example, children's development allows them to learn how to play games with rules.

Gender	Gender can influence social development as children practise skills that relate to their interests. Although each child has their own likes and dislikes, there are interests that are more common to boys than girls and vice versa. Girls are more likely to communicate with each other verbally and therefore often have a higher level of social interaction skills.
Temperament	This affects the way children approach activities and people, and how involved they may be. Their level of understanding of their impact on others can influence relationships.
Interests	If a child's interests include social pursuits, they will be practising skills more regularly than a child whose interests are not social or who finds social activity unattractive as an option for enjoyment.
Peer group acceptance	How peers see the child and how the child portrays themselves to their peers influences how much social interaction they will have.
Cultural beliefs and practices	Family life experience has an immense influence on each child's abilities as they experience and are affected by the expectations of their family and community as well as their environment and social opportunities.
Environment	An environment can be rich in social opportunities and encourage children to participate with others in a collaborative activity, group experience, individual sharing with adults and problem-solving.
Ability	Children with autism spectrum disorders will have degrees of difficulty in understanding social cues and may lack interest in other people. They may have great difficulty making or maintaining friendships.

Monitoring social development

A variety of recording methods can be used to collect information about a child's social skills, development, culture and lifestyle. Social interaction occurs throughout the day, so records of interactions may be taken during:

- formally organised activities
- unplanned or spontaneous interaction
- meetings and group discussions
- conversations with others
- care routines
- excursions
- setting up
- sociodramatic play
- construction play
- art activities.

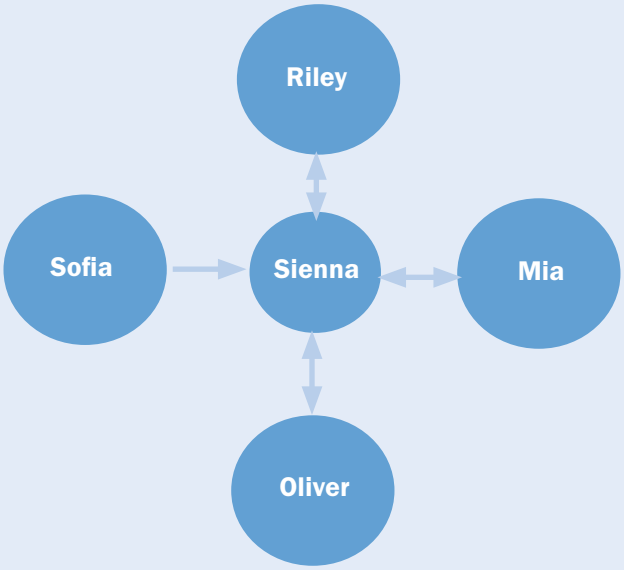
To ensure your records contain useful information about each child, you should base them on developmental milestones or stages; approaches or theories; and the child's culture and interests.

Most commonly you will reflect on the EYLF outcomes, as the NQF requires you to monitor the child's progression toward these outcomes.

Example

Measuring social interactions against outcomes

Oliver (an educator) wants to monitor the interactions of Sienna during a 10-minute morning snack time. He uses a sociogram, as this is an effective way to record lots of information about interactions. The sociogram demonstrates that Sienna interacted with Oliver, Mia and Riley. It also shows that Sofia interacted with Sienna, but Sienna did not respond to this communication.



Oliver links Sienna's interactions with the EYLF outcomes. He sees that she:

- initiated conversations with an educator, which relates to Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity; Sub-outcome: Children feel safe, secure, and supported
- interacted with a range of people, which relates to Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators; Sub-outcome: Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others for a range of purposes.

Recording development

Records of social skills and development provide you with data you can use to plan and provide appropriate social activities, experiences and interactions.

Children may require encouragement and assistance to develop skills in initiating and developing contact with others. To ensure children are encouraged to interact with a variety of people in a range of ways, you first need to gain an understanding of who the children already interact with and how they do so.

The types of social interaction children may be involved in include exchanging information, achieving goals, solving problems or conflicts, and working together. You need to take into consideration the type of social situation you are monitoring, then choose the most relevant method for recording this.

By monitoring children's social activity you can identify:

- the way each child interacts with others
- how their interactions alter when communicating with different people
- how you can provide for increased interaction
- how you can support the child to interact with those who are important to their learning and wellbeing
- the types of activities and experiences that would benefit the child or help them explore areas of interest.

When you understand how a group works and how each individual child operates within different groupings, you can ensure that your planning meets their needs and extends their skills appropriately.

Here are some social aspects to monitor and some recording types you may find useful.

Important aspects to monitor	Recording types
▶ Developmental milestones or stages (needs and abilities) ▶ Modelling ▶ Attachment or security ▶ Play stages ▶ Skills in problem-solving, negotiation, collaboration and conflict-resolution ▶ Moral understanding ▶ Friendships ▶ Pro-social behaviour ▶ Cooperation ▶ Decision-making ▶ Attitudes to difference ▶ Gender attitudes ▶ Environmental effects: time, space, materials, people, etc. ▶ Behaviour and play patterns throughout the day ▶ Behaviour in relation to other individuals and groups ▶ Group involvement ▶ Individual time	▶ Photographs ▶ Learning stories ▶ Video or audio recordings ▶ Checklists ▶ Sociograms ▶ Diaries, journals, logs and communication books ▶ Event samples ▶ Anecdotal records ▶ Incidental records ▶ Time samples ▶ Records of questioning; for example, graffiti sheets, daily evaluation sheets, surveys, questionnaires and forms

Example

Monitoring social interaction

By observing Leopold and keeping records of his needs, interests and developmental stage, Wilma (an educator) learns that Leopold:

- enjoys interacting with two particular children
- plays in a cooperative play stage
- can speak in front of a small group at mat time.

Wilma can then provide activities and experiences that extend Leopold's interaction skills. Wilma plans:

- small group play spaces where the three children can work together in cooperative play
- for Leopold to take on some responsibility and leadership roles within the group, such as serving lunch and snacks.

Assessing social skills

In Topic 1, the steps for assessing children's progress toward the EYLF outcomes were set out. They included:

1. Gathering and recording information about the child
2. Using the EYLF to identify which of the five outcomes your observation record links to
3. Identifying a specific sub-outcome of the EYLF
4. Clarifying your selection by referring to the evidence examples that are provided for the identified EYLF outcome

EYLF outcomes and sub-outcomes related to social skills and development include the following.

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

- Children feel safe, secure, and supported
- Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency
- Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities
- Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities, and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation
- Children respond to diversity with respect
- Children become aware of fairness
- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
- Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies, and natural and processed materials

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others for a range of purposes

Practice task 4

Observe a small group of children playing to answer the following questions. You may choose one child to focus on in your responses.

1. Record the age of the child or children.

2. Map the group interactions during a discussion using a sociogram.

3. Identify the social play stage the children are participating in.

4. Identify which outcome of the EYLF links to this observation.

5. Outline the physical, cognitive and psychological learning you noticed taking place.

2B Providing for social interaction

Children will participate in social interaction with you spontaneously and during planned discussions as part of small and large groups. There is a variety of experiences you can offer children to provide opportunities for communicating and learning.

Watch this video about providing suitable social interactions for children.

Providing play environments

Research has demonstrated that play is one of the best ways for children to learn social skills. The social play time you plan for children influences the quality of interactions they have with each other, and provides messages about how interactions are acknowledged and encouraged by you. You also have many opportunities during the day to help infants, toddlers and preschoolers to develop their social skills while engaging in routine tasks.

To ensure you send the message you intend to about the play space, consider the following factors, which were discussed in detail in Topic 1.

Time

The routine or timetable of your service must be unhurried and uninterrupted. When children are rushed through play they don't have an opportunity to fully experience the activity and may become frustrated. Children also need time to interact with each other in unplanned activities. Allowing time to do this assists children to practise social skills, and create and maintain friendships.

Space

You can work with children to determine how the available space should be used. When planning, remember that children need the following:

- Opportunities – to undertake the type of play appropriate for their age. For older children opportunities for each social play stage should be offered.
- Choices – the space available should assist children to choose an activity that interests them; therefore, there must be sufficient play spaces available for children to have a choice of two or three different activities.
- Challenges – the space you arrange should offer a variety of possibilities and should encourage children to collaborate, think creatively, solve problems and make decisions together. The space should be flexible to allow children to play in self-created play, or to combine two or more play experiences. For example, children may move the animals in the sand trough to the block area and extend their own play and interaction.

Some theories you have studied can guide you in how to set up an environment well prepared for social activity. These theories suggest that:

- materials match the child's interests, needs and abilities
- there are enough materials for the number of children in the group
- good-quality materials are provided
- materials reflect the cultures of those in the group
- materials introduce new concepts
- aesthetics have been considered.

In addition, there should be spaces where friends can interact and play in different activities, and play stages are accommodated; for example, spaces for solitary play, cooperative play and games with rules.

Safety

Your knowledge of child development and the individual abilities of children allow you to consider the safety of the environment and identify how it should operate and be presented. In terms of social development, this means there should be enough equipment to allow children to participate – particularly if they are young and unable to share.

Safety must also be considered in relation to the type of materials that are used for dramatic play. You must ensure they are sturdy and in good condition, and placed in positions that allow their use to be maximised.

Children who are in a safe environment have more opportunities to explore, work together, develop and achieve goals together, and feel secure in their play.

Encouraging participation

Cultural priorities, such as education, play, language, rituals and religious beliefs, all affect the way you present your play space, how you communicate with others and what priority you place on various play and leisure decisions. These same cultural priorities also affect the types of play that children engage in.

To encourage participation you can:

- support children to become involved in play – ask questions such as 'Do you need another person to play?' or 'Can Kristin join in?'; model how to enter play; or encourage the child by offering words to use or giving action ideas
- highlight differences in opinion, ideas and goals, and encourage children to explore these – discuss these things as they arise in conversation or play; for example, 'Isn't it interesting that you both have different ideas?'
- support the development and maintenance of relationships – support children to commence interactions and relationships with others and then offer ideas and assistance if difficulties arise
- support positive and effective interactions between children – model, guide and set up situations that are challenging but not frustrating.

Respecting individual needs

Every child needs time to themselves; this may be a rest or sleep time for some children, but for others it may occur during the usual pattern of daily activities. Children who are denied their need for privacy, solitude and/or quiet time may become unsettled, upset or disruptive.

Become aware of each child's specific needs and think about how they change over the day.

Through assessing and monitoring, watch out for and find out about:

- the expectations at home
- the child's routine at home and how it links with their need to be solitary or quiet
- how the care environment impacts on the child's daily routine – they may become tired from being more stimulated or need time to themselves as they are used to often being alone
- how the child communicates their need for privacy, solitude and/or quiet time – some children make this choice while others need guidance
- whether the child spends time alone due to choice or lack of attachment relationships and/or friendships
- whether the child is exhibiting a solitary, unoccupied or onlooker play stage
- whether the environment is providing the spaces needed by the child
- how the child's needs alter depending on the group they are participating with.

Difficulty participating

Most children do choose solitary or quiet play at times and may enjoy working alone and achieving their goals. There are some children, however, who have difficulty working with others or becoming involved in small or large groups. These children may just need experience, or they may have a communication difficulty. Some ways a child may misinterpret or react inappropriately in social situations include:

- laughing at inappropriate times
- ignoring others' attempts to interact with them
- becoming unexpectedly physically aggressive
- watching others in play
- becoming withdrawn and finding hiding places while others play.

A child who has difficulty interacting with others needs time to familiarise or prepare themselves for the situation they plan to enter. These difficulties may relate to temperament or their sense of belonging.

A child who has difficulty forming relationships and interacting with play partners will benefit from the planned experiences and teaching you provide. They can learn skills such as how to:

- compromise
- share
- make decisions and solve problems
- understand how their emotions affect others
- win and lose gracefully
- use social and pro-social behaviours
- accept similarities and differences.

A child's interactions in social situations should be considered an important area of competence, as this is a lifelong learning skill. The child must become capable of communicating with adults, siblings and children of different ages, as these relationships are essential for their ongoing learning and to meet their social and emotional needs.

Example

Allowing children to develop social relationships

Hilda, an educator, notices that Ben, who usually spends the morning in solitary play, is involved in dramatic play with Gerard. She decides to extend the play period for a little longer before lunch so Ben can continue to enjoy and develop skills from this experience.

Providing for social interaction

When providing opportunities for social interaction, ensure they are appropriate to the age and stage of the child. Infants are learning how interaction works – they imitate, take turns and copy the actions of others they interact with.

Toddlers have a greater ability to interact and start to choose their social activities based on shared interests. Children of this age group (one to three years) may benefit from the social interactions outlined in the following table.

Toddler-appropriate social interactions	Examples and strategies
Opportunities for small group play	▶ Providing: – home corners – simple games – open spaces to move.
Activities that encourage independence	▶ Allowing toddlers: – to help set up simple tasks – opportunities to participate in self-help skills – dressing, washing hands, etc. – to help with simple room responsibilities – setting the table, feeding the fish, etc. ▶ Providing all required materials that they need so they do not become frustrated or unable to complete the task.
Support when needed	▶ Providing the right degree of support depending on the child, their abilities and the task ▶ Allowing the child to complete tasks independently but ensuring you are available if needed ▶ Encouraging by commenting positively as the task progresses ▶ Providing direction by giving instructions ▶ Assisting by taking on a play role
Asking for children to share, but not expecting they are capable of sharing	▶ Supplying common items, such as prams, dolls and bikes, if parallel play is to occur successfully ▶ Offering enough equipment for several children to play with similar toys

Preschoolers are more interested in relationships, exploring and investigating, and being in control. Their imaginations allow them to play out a range of ideas and feelings based on social situations they have experienced or are interested in. Preschoolers may benefit from the social interactions outlined in the following table.

Preschooler-appropriate social interactions	Examples and strategies
Opportunities for small group activity	▶ Home corner and other dramatic play ▶ Games ▶ Interest groups ▶ Planning groups ▶ Research groups ▶ Information-sharing and discussion groups
Opportunities for large group activity	▶ Music and movement ▶ Excursions ▶ Stories ▶ Sharing information ▶ Discussion groups
Provision of culturally appropriate materials for role-play	▶ A range of props ▶ A variety of resources that depict the home life of different children

Listening to children's views

The most important aspects of clear communication and respectful acknowledgment when listening to children's views are active listening and physically getting down to the child's level.

Active listening requires you to acknowledge, encourage, clarify, restate and reflect what you hear to ensure the child knows you have received their message.

Getting down to a child's level allows you to make eye contact (where culturally appropriate) and also enables you to see and hear any messages a child is relating to you. In addition, the child is less likely to feel overwhelmed by you standing over them as they communicate with you.

When children are listened to in respectful ways and their ideas are taken seriously, they develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities (EYLF Outcome 1). These actions are also supported by theories of social development as outlined in the following table.

Theories	How it relates to children's views
Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner)	▶ Each child is receiving a totally different life experience based on the intertwining and influencing people and environments they are exposed to. ▶ These variations are an indication of how many different ideas and views you will encounter in relation to each topic of discussion you may have with a child and their family.

Theories	How it relates to children's views
Social learning theory (Bandura)	▶ When children feel their views are listened to, they are more likely to express themselves and provide information. ▶ In situations where children express inappropriate views, your ability to use self-control therapy (assisting the child to adopt more appropriate attitudes) is useful. An example of this is when a child has a strong gender or racial bias. ▶ When you listen to, acknowledge and value the views of children, they learn from your actions and then are able to respect others' views.
Behaviourist theory (Watson)	▶ When children participate and provide their ideas and views, and these are listened to and responded to respectfully, the child is receiving positive reinforcement and they will take this as a sign that they should continue doing this.
Moral theory (Kohlberg)	▶ Despite the appropriateness of a child's view, their confidence in expressing it to you allows you to identify areas of strength and need in relation to moral views. ▶ Expressed moral views are excellent sources for discussion and problem-solving, which enable children to learn about others and to consider what is right or wrong at their level of understanding.
Pro-social behaviour	▶ A child's individual views and experiences relating to pro-social behaviour can be expressed through discussion of their views. For example, a child who does not use manners at home may not automatically understand that they are required at care.

Example

Listening to children

Harrison (four years) and Sam (four and a half years) are talking with Jenna (an educator) about shopping for groceries. Harrison talks about how his mum goes to the market as the food is fresher there. Sam talks about how his family goes to the supermarket and how they take their own shopping bags so they don't have to use plastic ones.

While the children are talking, Jenna sits at their level, reflects what they are saying, adds her own experiences of shopping and also asks questions such as, 'What would your mum do if there were no apples at the market?'

Providing for group discussion and decision-making

Small or large groups of children can be involved in a variety of discussion activities. These activities aim to enrich, extend and develop the children's areas of interest and development.

Small groups allow for the development of self-esteem and a more intimate interaction with educators and other children, whereas larger groups are supportive in developing patience, turn-taking and cooperative skills.

Group activities can be either spontaneous informal sessions or formal planned sessions, and can focus on the children's interests as well as provide learning experiences and extend their development.

Spontaneous group experiences may include unplanned songs, stories or puppet shows that you initiate during the day to contribute to an activity or develop a new interest. They may also be used to regain control of an energy-charged room, calm a noisy period or extend upon a new interest of the group.

Discussion groups encourage active listening and social skills, and assist children to learn to listen to each other and value and respect others' opinions. The length of any discussion group activity will vary depending on the age and developmental stage of the children involved. A discussion group consisting of two- to three-year-olds may last only two or three minutes, while a discussion group with three- to five-year-olds may last up to 15 minutes.

The success of this type of group relies on how meaningful the topic is, how well you prepare, whether the discussion fits with the children's interests and developmental understanding, whether you use open questions and other strategies for discussion, and how you influence the children to take an interest in the subject.

Decision-making, problem-solving and conflict resolution

Environmental conditions can lead to problems and conflicts between children. Careful planning can control environments and assist in avoiding such issues. The following table provides some ideas.

Condition	Prevention strategies
Noise and overstimulation – an environment that is too noisy and overstimulating often encourages behaviour in young children that leads to conflict.	▶ Adults should use quiet voices. Children will raise their voices to talk over loud adult voices and this can lead to a high noise level. ▶ Reduce background noise; for example, use music selectively. Children learn to tune out if there is constant background music. This can have a negative effect on their ability to listen carefully when required.
Crowded activities – activities that are too crowded often encourage conflict.	▶ Set up activities so the number of children is automatically limited. For example, if you have decided that you have enough dough for two children to work at the table, have two lumps of dough and two chairs. If both chairs are occupied, other children can see that there is no space for them at that time.
Insufficient equipment – this shifts the child's focus from the activity itself to making sure equipment isn't taken by another child. The younger the child, the harder it is to share.	▶ Ensure that each child has individual equipment when possible. For example, six buckets and six spades in a sandpit that comfortably accommodates six children. ▶ Where it isn't practical to have enough for each child, expect to be helping children to resolve conflicts related to sharing – it is an important part of their learning and requires support. ▶ Remember that you can assist children under five years to share, but you can't expect them to share.

Condition	Prevention strategies
Overtired or overexcited children – children who are overtired are less able to cope with other children and conflict may occur; overexcited and boisterous behaviour is often an indication of tiredness in young children.	▶ Provide rest periods in the daily routine to cater for these needs. The needs will fluctuate according to factors such as age, weather and time of year. ▶ Rest can include sleep, lying quietly with or without a book or playing quietly by oneself. ▶ Listening to music or a story tape can also provide rest time.
Activities that cause frustration – activities need to be appropriately challenging; if activities are too challenging, children may become frustrated. This can lead to conflict and aggression between children.	▶ Provide activities that are suited to the children's development levels. They will then be fully involved and conflict is less likely to occur. ▶ If an activity requires the adult to be doing or directing much of the time, then it is probably not developmentally appropriate. ▶ As well as structured activities such as puzzles, provide plenty of open-ended activities so children can work at their own pace and level; for example, play dough, water play, clay, painting, drawing, home corner and block corner.
The need for time alone – it is valuable for children to enjoy their own company and to learn to work alone at times. Many children who are in long day care need extra time for working and playing uninterrupted by other children. Children who need time for solitary play may become involved in conflict more easily if this need is not met.	▶ Provide areas where one child can choose to work alone. ▶ Create these areas using screens and furniture. ▶ Encourage children to ask the child first before joining one who is working alone. A negative response needs to be respected. This is part of learning to respect the rights of others. ▶ In your planning make sure you offer a balance of solitary and group play.

When decisions need to be made, problems solved or conflicts defused, you often need to apply appropriate skills immediately. However, there are times when you can use a group discussion as time to develop these skills in children. In doing so you are involving children in learning about limits, barriers, choices and relationships. When used regularly these skills become part of everyday thinking, which helps the child deal with other issues when they arise.

To support decision-making, problem-solving and conflict resolution, you should:

- recognise when problems are developing and intervene before issues arise
- clarify goals by talking children through what they want to achieve
- plan strategies for supporting children to learn about and use decision-making, problem-solving and conflict resolution, and plan experiences that require these skills
- find solutions to issues that occur
- ask open questions so children think about what is happening and what they can do themselves
- support children to share their ideas with others

- answer questions so children learn the information they need to make good choices
- provide open-ended materials so a range of options and ideas are available for the children to think about and experiment with
- provide new and stimulating materials so children are busy and involved with their learning
- use everyday events as a basis for discussing how others may have made decisions, solved problems and dealt with conflict
- talk about routines and choices so children see options are available and that there are different ways to look at things
- encourage children to consult each other
- support parents to provide learning environments at home so children can transfer their skills to other environments.

When you assist children to develop their decision-making, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills, you can:

- give them a strategy to use when they are faced with decisions, problems and conflicts; for example, breaking the issue into manageable tasks
- help them identify what issues to tackle and in which order
- assist them to see other people's points of view.

Cooperative processes

To ensure that decision-making, problem-solving and conflict-resolution processes are cooperative, your interactions must be encouraging. You should make suggestions rather than give directions. You can do this by:

- encouraging children to interact with each other – introduce open-ended activities; this encourages children to feel important and to develop their own ideas
- helping children clarify or adapt their shared goals – to successfully make a decision all participants need to have the same or a similar goal; you can help them talk about what they want to achieve
- involving children who are unlikely to initiate – quieter children are less likely to initiate and state their ideas, so it is critical for you to support their involvement
- avoiding demonstrating or solving problems for the children – allow the children to think about their options and consider all outcomes.

To extend the children's ability to make decisions, solve problems and resolve conflicts you can implement a common decision-making strategy. When implementing the six steps of this strategy with children, you can encourage them to work with others to gain a broader view or support them to work through the steps themselves.

1 **Define the situation**

- What is the issue? Pick one issue and work on that. Be specific: What is the situation and why does it feel like an issue?
- What is the decision? Pick one decision and work on that. Be specific: What is the decision about and why do you need to make this decision?

2 **Brainstorm**
Search for solutions; any suggestion should be considered.

3 **Select ideas**
Sometimes children select a solution as soon as it is identified rather than considering a range of ideas. When they need to choose, support them in thinking about the pros and cons for each option before they select one.

4 **Put plans in action**
Encourage the children to implement their solution. You may need to help them do this, or just remind them of their decision. In some cases the solution may not work. This does not mean you should take over and decide for the children; it means that you need to help them identify a more suitable option.

5 **Review what happened**
Note how the issue was solved and remember to give feedback.

6 **Keep going**
The solution the children used may also be useful in another situation.

Encourage the children to reflect on the issue they solved and use the information and skills to solve other issues.

Interacting in play

Play experiences can assist children to learn to accept and value all people, particularly those who may appear different from themselves. Play can also assist children to learn positive attitudes of acceptance and respect for a range of people.

You can support this learning with the following strategies:

- Create a play environment that reflects many different people and ways of living; for example, by adding one or two new cultural items to a dramatic play area; including music or pictures of people from various cultures; inviting visitors to participate as volunteers or guests; or including aspects of each child's culture.
- Arrange a play setting that promotes participation of boys and girls, children with disabilities and children of various cultural backgrounds.
- Challenge any behaviour that alerts you to negative attitudes that may be developing in children; for example, if a child refuses to include another child in play due to their appearance, you should deal with this situation sensitively through discussion.
- Identify similarities and differences, and encourage the child who is being discriminated against to develop their own strategies for response. For example, a child who wears a headdress should be aided to develop a response about why they wear the headdress; this will enable them to develop confidence and assist them to feel capable of gaining acceptance through this confidence.
- Involve parents in any issues that centre on children's play.

Bear in mind that children:

- need time to observe, think things through and take note
- benefit from hands-on experiences in real situations
- prefer varied levels of autonomy; some children prefer to be completely dependent on the adults around them and others want to be independent
- may have experienced different levels of responsibility; some children may never have been expected to take any responsibility at home, and others may have been responsible for a wide range of things that are appropriate or inappropriate for their age
- play and learn best when their family and peers are around
- like to observe and imitate
- are very active and enjoy physical activity
- dislike being singled out
- are sometimes not used to obeying adults
- often prefer to experiment and use their initiative in play rather than being directed by others
- play cooperatively rather than competitively
- like to persist and practise over and over to succeed at something
- have varied experiences of sharing – some children will be used to sharing from a very young age, while others may have had limited experience of sharing
- use body language before words
- speak their first language before any new or second language and may not speak English – if you work with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, develop appropriate methods of supporting play and learning in ways that reflect and respect their backgrounds.

Example

Encouraging interaction

In the home corner the educators have placed a sari and a pair of chopsticks. These items are added to the regular items in the areas such as pots and pans, dolls, dress-ups, plates, cups and cutlery. An educator remains close by the area most of the morning so she can listen and observe the children.

At one time the educator enters the area as a child doesn't know what the chopsticks are. The educator explains that they are used to eat food like a spoon or fork and that if you go to an Asian restaurant you may use them there. She also explains that Ling (a girl of Chinese heritage) uses chopsticks to eat at home and may be able to demonstrate how to use them.

Relationship preferences

Children will demonstrate their preferences for either children or adults during their play. This is due to a number of influences. Theories that relate to children's preference for adults and peers are outlined in the following table.

Theory	How the theory relates to children's relationship preferences
Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner)	▶ The child's web of life influences impact on their choice of peer and adult relationships.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	▶ A child may learn more effectively if they receive modelling via a child or adult they relate to or prefer. ▶ A child may learn new skills if they receive modelling from a child or adult who has alternative ideas to their own yet is a preferred person.
Social learning theory (Bandura)	▶ Modelling is an effective strategy for learning. A child learns from a preferred adult or child more readily than a person they do not relate to. ▶ Preferred adults more readily provide self-control therapy where appropriate behaviour is modelled. ▶ Positive reinforcement encourages interactions to extend.
Behaviourist theory (Watson)	▶ Children may receive some type of reward from a relationship. This may be that they feel enjoyment, reach goals or the person provides them with a type of positive reinforcement they relate to.
Attachment theory (Bowlby)	▶ Children feel safest with primary caregivers. ▶ A child is able to form secondary relationships. ▶ The more securely attached a child is, the less likely they are to become distressed. ▶ Issues that can arise if attachments are not developed, respected and responded to.
Play stages theory (Parten)	▶ Children participate in play relevant to their peer group and their stage of development. ▶ Children will be involved more intensely if their peers have similar interests and play goals.
Friendship theory (Selman)	▶ Young children develop peer relationships that can be classed as friendships. It is natural that these children want to spend time together as these relationships can be rewarding and stimulating.
Pro-social behaviour	▶ Children may find similarities and differences in their peers that draw them to each other. ▶ When pro-social behaviour is used it may create a feeling of security or it may help a child feel valued or respected.

Problem-solving in play

There are many benefits to a problem-solving approach to play. Research has shown that in a problem-solving environment children learn to appreciate others' ideas and points of view sooner, and gain knowledge and better develop ideas and skills due to this modelling from others.

A problem-solving approach to play can be achieved by:

- planning activities where children have a shared goal
- ensuring that the goal is based on the interests of the child or children
- making it possible for children to achieve their goal through their own actions
- making the results of an activity visible and immediate.

The theories that relate to empowering children to make their own decisions are shown in the following table.

Theory	How it relates to empowering children to make their own decisions
Social learning theory (Bandura)	▶ The child's self-esteem is reflected in their ability to confidently decide. The child may choose above or below their ability. ▶ To empower the child you should model decision-making skills and abilities, and provide positive feedback when the child attempts to make decisions.
Attachment theory (Bowlby)	▶ Depending on the child's feelings of security, they may make decisions based on the placement or availability of adults or other children. ▶ To empower the child you should use your secure relationship to provide support that the child is confident with.
Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner)	▶ The child's environment and its associated links provide messages to the child demonstrating whether they should make decisions, what decisions may be made and how confident others are in the child's ability to do this. ▶ To empower the child, provide messages and activities in the environment that require decision-making. When you do this you are creating a place where children feel they belong, as they are making decisions about their environment.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	▶ The world around us provides the child with many opportunities to explore. The art of understanding and solving problems forms part of this world of opportunities as peers and others provide their input and modelling, agree or disagree and offer new considerations. ▶ To empower the child, offer choices so they can practise decision-making. This may occur during scaffolding as you provide different methods for completing a task or ask the child how they may do the task differently.

Example

Assisting children to support one another

Two children are interested in sand play. Felicity has strengths in castle-building and Pim has an interest in road-making.

In the sandpit both children are creating. The educator comments on Felicity's castle and includes Pim by saying, 'Pim, look at how tall and strong Felicity's castle is. Maybe you could make one of your flat roads go to the tower and Felicity could make more castles along the road? Maybe Felicity could show you how to make strong castles and you could show her how to make flat roads?'

These comments encourage the children to notice each other's strengths and consider how they can work together using their interests. They also give the children opportunities to learn from each other.

Practice task 5

Plan and implement a group discussion that encourages children to interact and participate in shared decision-making about how to resolve a conflict.

1. Describe the focus of the discussion.

2. What age of children participated in the experience?

3. Which children's interests did the experience build on and how did this make the discussion meaningful?

4. It is an organisational requirement to link experiences to EYLF outcomes. What outcome did the experience link to and how?

5. If a participating child decided to leave the discussion to be alone, how would you support their need for privacy or solitude?

6. Describe a play experience where children may use the skills of decision-making and conflict resolution that you have introduced in this discussion.

2C Encouraging a sense of community and cooperation

One way to accommodate a child's social needs in the care and education environment is to explore each child's family life and link family aspects to your program. This increases the link between home and the service, and extends each child's experience as they share their skills and knowledge. When children gain a sense of community, they feel a sense of belonging and develop an understanding of their own identity.

Supporting cultural identity

Children enjoy learning about others through interacting with their cultural capital, which provides the opportunity for you to introduce many new ideas and to involve children in discussions, play and games related to finding out how they are similar to and different from others.

Cultural priorities such as education, play, language, rituals and religious beliefs all affect the way you present your program, how you communicate to others and what priorities you place on various interaction and planning aspects. The same cultural priorities also affect the types of play and interaction that children engage in.

To encourage children to respect each other you can:

- highlight differences in opinion, ideas and goals, and encourage children to explore these; discuss these things as they arise in conversation or play
- demonstrate positive and effective interactions between children; for example, modelling and guiding
- set up situations where children share skills and knowledge, or support each other to achieve a goal.

There are many factors that make up the elements of a particular culture; some are easy to see, while others are harder to recognise. Knowledge of these factors will assist you in developing trusting and non-discriminatory relationships, and help you to meet the needs of children, families and colleagues.

Educators can incorporate various types of celebrations into the service's routines. This may include singing Christmas carols or learning about Hanukkah traditions. This provides a variety of social experiences and also acknowledges that diversity is valued and respected. In addition, you are widening your own view of the world and its people to gain a better understanding of how to approach your role. These actions fit well with the ecological approach of Urie Bronfenbrenner. There are many occasions for celebration, and the variety you offer may depend on the cultural mix of families.

A sense of community comes from the experiences people share, so the inclusion of celebrations is an effective way to promote a sense of community in the service. Celebrations can be exciting, personal and varied in their learning content, and may involve new and unusual items and content to explore. They can help children learn about respect for others and their views and opinions. Celebrations are part of most people's lives, so children and their family members can all be involved.

You can include cultural and religious celebrations, community celebrations or family celebrations in your program. Look online and ask families to find out when celebrations are occurring and what learning experiences you could link to them.

Example

Finding out about family celebrations

Emily and Tim are turning one on the weekend. The educators ask each family if they are planning a celebration.

Emily's family plan to have a party and:

- invite all the children in Emily's room
- invite all of Emily's relatives and friends
- have a barbecue in the evening
- hire a jumping castle and a clown
- have a large store-made cake with sparklers and sing 'Happy birthday' in Dutch.

Tim's family plan to:

- invite a friend from play group over to play
- have some finger food for lunch
- have cupcakes with candles and sing 'Happy birthday'.

Each family is excited about the birthday celebrations and feel that they are providing an age-appropriate and culturally suited celebration.

Encouraging cooperation

Language is an important part of social interaction and includes verbal and nonverbal messages, cues and written skills. Children with strong language skills may have strong social relationships as they are able to communicate their needs, identify others' needs and interact to achieve goals. Communication is required for successful cooperation, which relies on the child's ability to solve problems and resolve conflicts.

A child's ability in these areas can affect their success as part of a group or in a friendship, as other children appreciate those who are cooperative, capable problem-solvers, as their play is less distracted.

In addition to having cooperation modelled, a child needs to do the following to cooperate appropriately:

- have their point of view listened to and considered
- be involved in any solutions or problem-solving
- be provided with relevant information
- have the opportunity to consider another person's point of view (this may be difficult for young children)
- have some choices
- have successful cooperation acknowledged.

Children may be less likely to cooperate, and more likely to engage in a power struggle if:

- they are interrupted without warning from an activity they are enjoying
- their routine is changed unexpectedly
- they hear 'no' often from adults
- they don't know how to do a task or what they are being asked to do.

Providing for ethical investigation

An ethical issue involves morals and understanding what is right and wrong. Theories of development link to moral development and demonstrate how important it is to support children to understand expectations and limits so they can develop lifelong skills. There will always be ethical decisions to make within the service, the child's home and the community that children can become involved in. Some examples are described in the following table.

Concept	Ethical issues to consider
Squashing bugs	Is this appropriate? Is it appropriate indoors but not outdoors where bugs live? Is it appropriate to move them outdoors rather than squash them?
Sustainability	Should a recycling project start at the service? Should money be saved up for a water tank or should it be spent on toys?
Renovations	Should a tree be removed to enable a shade cloth to be constructed over the sandpit?
Materials	Should the children use a paint that is non-toxic and environmentally friendly if it less colourful than another that is bright but dangerous to the environment?
Food	Should fees rise so children can be provided organic foods?
Smacking	If educators are not allowed to smack children, should children be allowed to smack dolls while playing?

Children may not be able to take part in all decision-making, but they can be involved in the process of discussion and lobbying for what they think is right. When this occurs they will take a greater responsibility and interest in the outcome.

Ethical development theories

The theories related to ethical issues include those outlined in the following table.

Theory	How it relates to ethical development
Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner)	The child's cultural links and life experiences influence their understanding of ethics and how they treat others.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	Social and cultural experiences open the child's world so they can see alternatives to their norm and learn about others and how they would like to be themselves.
Social learning theory (Bandura)	Modelling influences a child's understanding of ethics and their experience of pro-social skills and expectations.
Moral theory (Kohlberg)	There are stages of moral development and these relate directly to ethics. Children below school age mostly consider moral issues in terms of good and bad as imposed by adults.

Theory	How it relates to ethical development
Play stages theory (Parten)	The stages of play clearly define the ability of the child to relate to others: ▶ Associative and cooperative play may challenge ethical attitudes; for example, if superheroes and villains are included in play. ▶ Associative and cooperative play often require pro-social skills or reflect the modelling of these skills. Cooperative play is also a place where ethics and moral issues can be explored. ▶ In play with rules, ethics may relate to winning and losing, and whether it is suitable to cheat.
Moral theory (Kohlberg)	There are stages of moral development and these relate directly to ethics. Children below school age mostly consider moral issues in terms of good and bad as imposed by adults.
Friendship theory (Selman)	Pro-social skills and understanding of right and wrong contribute to a child's ability to develop and maintain relationships with their peers.
Pro-social behaviour	Pro-social skills assist children to succeed in friendships. The cues and actions linked with pro-social skills also relate to a child's understanding of morals as they determine what behaviour is right or wrong, and how to treat others.

You can include ethical and moral thinking and pro-social behaviours in your program by:

- introducing topics by asking questions about issues
- identifying situations to discuss; for example, say, 'Do you think it would be fair if...?' and then following up by asking why each child has that particular point of view
- modelling and guiding
- identifying opportunities for children to use their pro-social skills; for example, you may say, 'Helen needs some help, would you like to help her?'
- providing opportunities to develop and practise skills and ideas in a range of situations and activities.

Example

Discussion about morals

During a discussion group an educator asks the children whether they think it is right or wrong to take a toy from another child's bag if they really want the toy. The children come up with many ideas for why this would or wouldn't be okay. The group concludes that it would only be okay if they asked the child first and the child agreed.

This discussion gave the children an opportunity to see what others thought and to come to a final understanding of what is right and wrong in this particular situation. It also helped children understand some of the limits that are in place in the service.

Practice task 6

1. Find a picture storybook that you could use with children to discuss an ethical issue. Record the title and author of the book, what the book is about, and the age of the children you are targeting.

2. Develop an activity that promotes discussion of an ethical issue based on the information from the storybook and implement it. Describe what the activity involves.

3. Explain how you encouraged children to cooperate during the activity.

4. How does the activity link with the EYLF outcomes?

5. Describe one way that your service promotes a sense of community.

Summary

- As children develop confidence, relationships, responsibility, control of their feelings and the ability to work with others, the understanding you show enables you to provide an environment that meets these growing needs and encourages, supports and challenges their skills.
- Social development in early childhood is defined by a range of approaches and theories that guide you to identify the milestones that children are expected to achieve and to provide an understanding of why children approach social interaction the way they do.
- Theories related to social development include: attachment theory, behaviourist theory, ecological approach, friendship theory, moral theory, play stages theory, social learning theory and sociocultural theory.
- Assessing and monitoring social skills provides you with information from which to plan and implement development experiences appropriate for each child's interests, goals and development stage.
- A variety of recording methods can be used to collect information about a child's social skills and development.
- It is important to plan and provide opportunities for different forms of social interaction between children during play. Each child's interests, goals and development stage need to be considered when providing these opportunities.
- Provided experiences need to be structured in a way that promotes cooperation and conflict resolution.
- When children feel a sense of community they feel a sense of belonging and develop further understanding of their identity.
- Offering a variety of experiences in the care environment gives the child options for communicating and for learning. This may include spontaneous social interaction, planned group discussions where children share their ideas and investigate ethical issues, activities requiring cooperation, and opportunities for privacy, solitude or quiet time.

Learning checkpoint 2
Fostering social development

Part A

Plan and implement a discussion with a group of children that focuses on investigating an ethical issue that is meaningful to the children.

The group should attempt to make decisions to resolve the ethical issue.

1. Provide details of the group, including the age and number of children involved. Explain the strategies you will use to encourage cooperation if there is a conflict within the group.

2. Document evidence of how you monitored and assessed the children's development during the discussion. Include:
   - how the children's level of moral understanding (relate this to theory) influenced the outcome of the group discussion
   - how you extended the children's psychological development (in particular, self-esteem) and cognitive development while involved in the discussion.

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Ula (four years) has been attending the service for some time. She is a quiet yet busy child and usually works independently on activities.

Today you notice that Ula is sitting at the table in the home corner where two other four-year-old children are imitating dinner time as they cook and do dishes, and talk about their actions. Ula is watching the play but not interacting or participating. You walk over to Ula and ask if she wants to join in the game.

1. If Ula says, 'Yes, I want to cook', what strategy would you use to help Ula enter this home corner play situation? Give reasons for your choice of strategy, including why your strategy is important in the development of Ula's play stage.

2. How would you support Ula differently if she was three years old and played in an associative play stage? Justify your answer by making reference to relevant aspects of development theory.

3. If Ula says, 'No, I want to be on my own', explain what you would do to accommodate her needs and the reasons for your actions.

Part C

Write a report explaining how you promote EYLF Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world in your everyday work.

In your report:

- explain the organisational standards, policies and procedures that you follow to work towards this outcome
- link the information you provide to at least **two** social development theorists or core principles of development
- demonstrate how you promote a sense of community within the service by using a range of documentation methods.

Topic 3

In this topic you will learn about:

Fostering emotional development

To respond appropriately to children's feelings, needs and ideas, you must have an understanding of each child's method of expression and individual development. Many children experience fears and feelings that are common, while children in special circumstances may have additional concerns. A child's ability to be expressive and understood relies on the way you present the environment, interact and provide suitable experiences for their expression.

Doing this requires you to assess and monitor children's emotional development. The information you obtain can be used to plan and implement appropriate experiences and activities, and provide appropriate support and guidance. This information guides you to create opportunities for children to experience individual strengths and successes during play, challenge emerging skills and capabilities, engage independently with tasks, explore self-image and identity, and express feelings and emotions through suitable experiences.

Watch this video about children's emotional development.

v0050

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
✓	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
✓	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
✓	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

3A Understanding emotional development

EYLF Outcome 3 focuses on how you support children to become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing. It encourages you to provide a responsive environment that promotes a sense of belonging and is a safe place to share feelings and information.

Emotional development is about feelings and emotions, and learning to recognise what your emotions are and how to express them appropriately. Emotional development is also about how you see yourself: your self-concept and resulting self-esteem.

Although emotional and social development are closely linked, emotional development is different to social development; social development is about relationships and interactions with others, whereas emotional development focuses on how you feel within yourself and how you deal with and express these feelings.

An understanding of theories relating to emotional development, alongside your knowledge of emotional development milestones, enables you to understand individual children and their emotional needs.

Attachment theory

Topic 2 introduced attachment theory in relation to social development. This theory equally applies to emotional development.

To recap, Bowlby believed that children and infants are able to form attachments with a number of people. The attachment is usually strongest with the primary caregiver, but other attachments may follow. The primary caregiver is the person who most provides for the child's physical and emotional needs consistently and responsively – usually a parent or guardian.

Other attachments are important to the child's social and emotional development. As each child commences care, your goal is to develop an attachment relationship.

Attachment behaviours allow you to observe how well you have developed relationships with the children and provide guidance as to what is required of you by a child who is attached to you. These indicators evolved from Bowlby's initial theory where he identified behaviours demonstrating that a child is positively attached, including proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base and separation distress.

Behaviourist theory

Topic 2 also introduced behaviourist theory in relation to social development. This theory also applies to emotional development.

To recap, behaviourists believe that the environment and interactions alone influence behaviour and learning. If positive responses are provided, the child learns and increases their understanding in response. If negative responses are provided, the child ceases behaviour. Called operant conditioning, this theory is based on a system of reward and punishment, particularly on positive reinforcement.

Example

Behaviourist theory and emotional development

Rosie is four years old. She often cries when she is away from home. Today, she is on a beanbag crying. Usually Peggy, an educator, asks Rosie what is wrong and Rosie will not answer. Today, Peggy asks Rosie if she is okay. Rosie looks up and says that she misses her mum and is sad. Peggy tells Rosie how brave she is and how she is pleased that Rosie can talk about how she feels. Peggy gives Rosie a hug and then helps her find a quiet activity to do.

The next day, Rosie comes to Peggy when she arrives. She tells her that she feels sad about her mum not being there. Peggy tells Rosie how proud she is that Rosie can tell her that she is sad, and helps her become involved in some activities.

Brain development

Various theorists have studied brain development and concluded that it has an enormous impact on how a child learns. Heredity (nature) defines the framework of a brain, but the environment (nurture) has a huge effect on the depth of its development.

A child's brain will develop and the brain wiring will be strong if a child is lovingly cared for and provided with appropriate stimulating and emotionally meaningful interactions and activity at critical learning periods. Emotional aspects are as important as intellectual aspects in providing the best possible brain development.

As children grow, they do not develop more brain cells; rather, they make more connections between cells as they learn. These connections are called synapses; they connect through learning and develop strength if this learning is continued and practised. If the particular connection is not used, then it will break down.

Cognitive theory

Jean Piaget worked in cognitive theory and strongly believed that we learn as constructionists. A constructionist is someone who learns actively from the world around them and develops (or constructs) meaning from what is found. Educators who follow this theory encourage children to think about the activities and experiences provided, and support children socially and emotionally.

The following table explains some of Piaget's ideas about constructionist learning.

Player	Characteristics
The learner	▶ Is individual and has their own background, needs and culture ▶ Is influenced by culture and world view, including the language, logic and mathematics they are exposed to ▶ Must interact with others to acquire social meaning ▶ Initiates their own learning ▶ Has a potential for learning that is influenced by their feelings of independence and autonomy
The educator	▶ Should adapt to provide what the learner needs ▶ Should facilitate learning by encouraging problem-solving and decision-making related to what they are learning ▶ Should ask questions, observe and guide, create an open learning environment, and interact consistently and frequently ▶ Should encourage the child to be an independent thinker

Following the constructionist model, you must encourage and promote the skills of decision-making and problem-solving to enable the child to have success in learning.

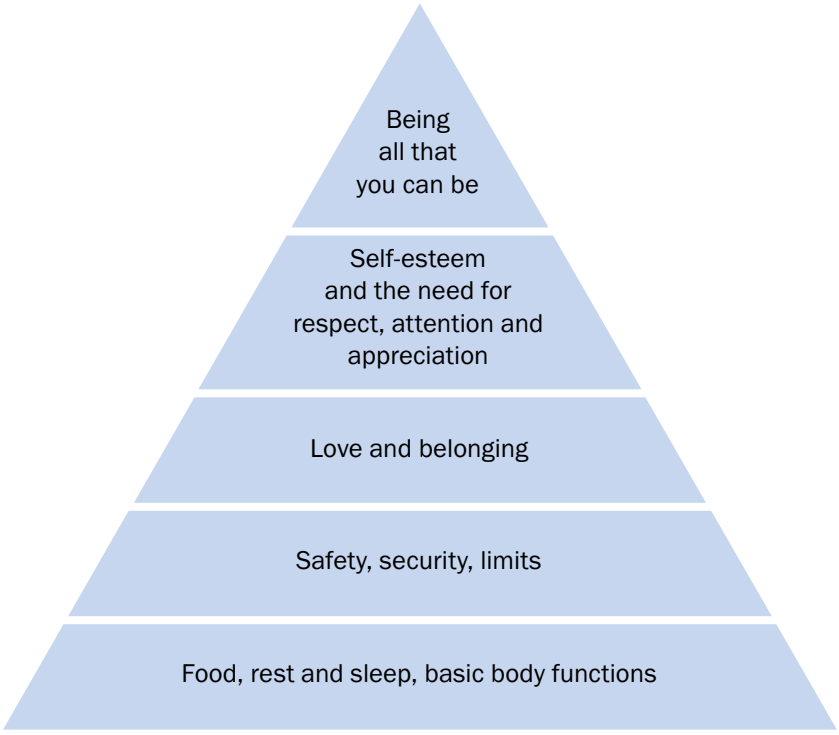
Cognitive theory links to a process called 'object permanence'. Object permanence is the process of learning that leads to recognising that an object exists even if it can no longer be seen. Infants have fully developed object permanence by age one. This development helps explain why infants are fascinated with toys and games that use hiding and finding.

In the second stage of cognitive development, the preoperational stage, logical thought is not consistent. This is caused by some underdeveloped skills and predictable preoperational processes, including those outlined in the following table.

Process	Characteristic	How this might influence emotional development
Transductive reasoning	The child makes errors in connecting two unrelated events or objects. This may occur if two things happen in close succession, causing the child to think they are related.	Children may not understand what has occurred and become scared or confused.
Irreversibility	The child is unable to see that a process can be undone or reversed.	Children may react strongly as they think something is irreversible or cannot be resolved.
Single classification	The child can only sort an object based on one characteristic.	Children may value an object or activity based on one category, rather than seeing other values.
Either/or thinking	The child is only able to see events one way or another; the child cannot understand that there may be an answer in the middle of these two ideas.	Children may not be able to view things from alternative perspectives or be able to resolve issues fairly.
Over-generalising	The child links things they know to all situations of that kind.	Children may preconceive situations based on prior experience, even though the new situation has many differences and outcomes.
Animism	The child gives animate characteristics to inanimate things.	Children may believe that inanimate objects can control things or are the cause of an issue.

Humanistic theory

Psychology theorist Abraham Maslow identified basic needs that must be met before we progress to satisfying other needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes the needs of children and adults.



Once our basic physical needs are met (food, rest, sleep and basic body functions), emotional needs can be addressed. Safety, security and limits allow us to feel that our emotional needs are being met and acknowledged. Love and belonging support our feelings of being needed. Self-esteem and the need for respect, attention and appreciation are directly linked to how we experience and react to feelings, fears and change, and how we feel others will experience and react to these. A child who is emotionally cared for and confident can attempt to be all they can be, including becoming independent and autonomous.

Maslow's theory helps you recognise priorities in caring for children; you must make sure the lower level needs are met before you can help to satisfy the higher level needs. If a child feels insecure and unsafe (second-level needs), they will not feel loved and cared for (third-level needs). They also may not participate fully in the activities you plan and may not develop secure relationships with those in the service. In addition, the child's developmental progress may be affected as they are focused on being safe and secure, rather than being involved and challenged.

Psychosocial theory

Erik Erikson provides a theory of development that clearly links to emotional development. This theory describes stages from birth to death. Erikson's theory suggests that:

- people have the same basic needs
- personalities develop and change in response to how these needs are met in our lives
- development proceeds in stages that match biological lifespan changes.

The psychosocial theory can be presented in stages, as shown in the following table. Each stage has a conflict based on life experience that is resolved either positively or negatively. This determines how positively or negatively the next stage can be managed.

Age/crisis	Explanation	Your role
Infants: trust or mistrust The infant is developing a sense of drive and hope in others.	The developing trust between the infant and caregivers is a vital part of their healthy emotional development. Infants are helpless, use cues to express their needs and rely on caregivers to understand and respond to these cues appropriately. If the infant's needs are not met or their cues are not acknowledged, they develop a lack of trust in those around them and do not develop the ability to make things happen, lowering their self-esteem. An infant who cries is doing so for a reason, such as pain, hunger, a soiled nappy or being too hot or too cold. This stage results in the child trusting or mistrusting others. The outcome determines how positively or negatively the child moves into the next emotional crisis. A child without trust may be wary and hostile as they will try to protect themselves from an unpredictable world.	Caregivers should spend as much individual time with each infant as possible and should respond to crying and other cues immediately to help establish trust.

Age/crisis	Explanation	Your role
Toddlers: autonomy or doubt The toddler is developing a sense of self control, courage and will.	During toddlerhood, autonomy is not always viewed positively by caregivers as children: ▶ become more assertive ▶ wish to have control over their environment ▶ regularly use the word 'no'. This may be a challenging time for parents and educators as they may feel toddlers are being uncooperative. However, this is a normal stage of development that can be managed in a positive manner. Toddlers experience egocentrism, where they think the world revolves around them and they find it difficult to share and take turns. Frustration, difficulty in sharing and tantrums may be common. Between 18 months and three years, children are exploring more and can easily become overwhelmed. Tantrums result mainly from the mismatch between what a child would like to do or thinks they can do, and the realities of their skills, the needs of others, the environment and the expectations, safety and health concerns imposed on them. When the toddler crisis is complete, the child will either show autonomy or demonstrate feelings of doubt in themselves. This outcome determines how positively or negatively the child will move into the next emotional crisis.	Only give toddlers choices when appropriate and realistic, and where the choice allows the toddler to feel in control. Choices such as whether they would like milk or water to drink give them independence but do not threaten their safety. Be aware of asking 'Would you like to...?' when you are actually giving an instruction. Many educators are puzzled by a child's noncompliance with an instruction, failing to recognise that they have asked instead of instructed. Encourage toddlers to attempt new skills with support so you can intervene if frustration is apparent or if safety is a concern. Allow time for the toddler to complete a task for themselves rather than doing it for them. To minimise tantrums: ▶ allow children to make realistic choices throughout the day ▶ ensure children have their physical needs met, are well rested and have had adequate food and drink ▶ re-direct children to areas of interest to prevent tantrums from escalating ▶ incorporate stories and songs about feelings to help children identify their emotions ▶ have multiples of popular equipment to avoid conflicts ▶ stay calm, as this reassures the child that they are safe.

Age/crisis	Explanation	Your role
Preschoolers: initiative or guilt The preschooler is developing a sense of purpose.	Initiative refers to the ability to take on new tasks and complete these with energy and enthusiasm. This skill emerges at preschool age. If a preschooler has learnt that they can trust the world and they have a strong sense of autonomy, they will also have a lot of ideas, energy and enthusiasm to explore the world. However, preschoolers do not always have a wide knowledge of how to achieve projects. They are still learning to negotiate and solve problems, so they still need adult support. When the preschool crisis is complete, the child will either demonstrate initiative or show feelings of guilt in having their needs met or taking control of their needs. The outcome determines how positively or negatively the child will move into the next emotional crisis.	The environment and the questions you ask aid children to become more independent by providing opportunities for decision-making. Decision-making skills help promote positive behaviour as children choose what they want to do themselves. Encourage children to make decisions when appropriate; for example, what activity to participate in, whether they would like more to eat or drink, or how they might set up an activity. Adults must make decisions about safety, such as whether to wear a hat outside or take medication.

As this theory relates to a person's whole life, you should be aware of the other stages Erikson predicts, as outlined in the following table. In some situations, you may identify a preschooler entering the school-age crisis.

Age/crisis	Explanation
School-age: industry or inferiority The school-age child is developing a sense of method and competence.	School-age children are developing industry, which means they are learning to apply skills and work effectively with others. If they are not supported to become industrious or if their efforts are given little or negative feedback, they will develop a sense of inferiority.
Adolescent: identity or role confusion The adolescent is developing a sense of devotion and fidelity.	The adolescent is attempting to find out who they are as an individual. Peer relationships feature greatly here. Until this stage, psychosocial development is largely related to what is done to the child. Now development relates to the choices an individual makes.
Young adulthood: intimacy or isolation The person in young adulthood is developing a sense of affiliation and love.	Mutually satisfying relationships are sought and families are started in the search for companionship and love. Distance from others occurs if the person is unsuccessful at this stage.

Age/crisis	Explanation
Middle adulthood: generativity or self-absorption and stagnation The person in middle adulthood is developing a sense of production and ability to care for others.	In middle adulthood, the adult often takes a leadership role at work or at home as a parent. As a leader, the person sets examples and defines the culture and expectations of their family. As children leave home or relationship goals change, a mid-life crisis may occur in an effort to find new purpose and goals.
Late adulthood: integrity or despair The person in late adulthood is developing a sense of wisdom.	In late adulthood, the purpose is to look back on life and feel a sense of integrity. At this time people develop a sense of completion and acceptance of death. For those who do not feel integrity and feel a lack of achievement in their life, despair can occur.

It is always possible to return to a particular stage and progress through again in a positive manner.

Example

Experiencing emotional growth later in life

Andrea had a difficult childhood and was raised by parents who were unable to meet her needs. She did not trust others, doubted her own abilities, felt guilty about asking others for help and was unable to participate properly in many activities as she felt inferior. Andrea did not have a strong sense of identity.

In her early twenties, Andrea met someone she cared deeply about. She learnt from this person that trust was possible, as they were consistent and considered her needs. This positive experience of trust (trust or mistrust) helped Andrea feel more confident in her own ability to achieve things (autonomy or doubt), including confidence in meeting this other person's needs. As her confidence developed, she also felt less guilty (initiative or guilt) as she could see she was able to contribute to situations too and this made her feel less inferior (industry or inferiority). Andrea began to find out what she really wanted to achieve in her life and this gave her a sense of self (identity or role confusion) and she was able to develop new life goals and make strong healthy relationships (intimacy or isolation).

Social learning theory

Topic 2 introduced Bandura's social learning theory in relation to social development. The theory is also known as social cognitive theory, as it links a person's environment, behaviour and psychological processes, including imagination and language. This theory also has specific relevance to emotional development.

To recap, Bandura believes that behaviour is affected by the environment (modelling) and that this modelling does not cause learning, but motivates us to demonstrate what we have learnt. He believes there are certain stages required if modelling is to influence behaviour, including attention, retention, reproduction and motivation.

Bandura's theory includes self-esteem as a central influence and suggests that self-regulation (controlling our own behaviour) is combined with modelling and behaviour reinforcement to create our personality and how we behave.

There are three parts to this self-esteem theory:

- Self-observation – looking at yourself and monitoring how you behave or act.
- Judgment – comparing what you observe in yourself with a model or expectation; these models or expectations may be traditionally imposed (such as using manners) or self-imposed (such as wanting to read a book each week).
- Self-response – measuring how your self-observation meets your judgment.

These three parts link together and are influenced by past experiences and how you measure yourself. If you have high expectations of yourself or are measured through competition with others, you are more likely to have low self-esteem, as you might battle to meet these expectations.

Here are some potential thoughts a child may have that link with self-esteem.

Self-observation thoughts	Judgment thoughts	Self-response thoughts	High or low self-esteem?
When I played ball with Nelson, I dropped the ball three times. Nelson threw the ball to me and it was out of my reach, but I should have been quicker. I missed the other catch as it was coming towards my face, but I should be braver. Nelson only drops the ball sometimes and he never looks away.	If I was good at ball games, I wouldn't drop the ball at all and I would not be scared when it comes toward my face.	I am bad at ball games. Nelson is much better than me. Maybe I should avoid playing with the ball. I should give up. I am hopeless. I don't know why Nelson asks me to play ball.	Low self-esteem
Today when I played ball with Nelson, I dropped the ball a couple of times, but the other times I did really well. The ball nearly hit my nose, but I looked away and it was fine.	I have good ball skills and do my best to catch the ball and only drop it sometimes. If I feel scared because the ball comes toward my face that is okay because it hurts if it hits my nose.	I am pretty good at ball games. I like playing with Nelson and he always asks me to play ball with him too.	High self-esteem
Today Nelson asked me to play ball. When I played ball I laughed a lot. Nelson and I had fun and we played for ages.	I have fun playing ball and my skills in the game don't matter too much.	I like ball games and I have lots of fun. Nelson asks me to play ball nearly every day.	High self-esteem

Sociocultural theory

Topic 2 introduced Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in relation to social development. To recap, Vygotsky believed that social interaction increases levels of knowledge and changes children's thoughts and behaviour. The world of children becomes richer and their perceptions of the world become more open and positive when they are exposed to a variety of social and cultural experiences.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development demonstrates how children learn in all areas, particularly in regard to self-help skills. The child moves from not being able to do a task, to doing it with guidance, to doing it on their own.

When a child seeks guidance, or you identify their need and provide it, Vygotsky calls this scaffolding. If scaffolding is provided and the child is ready, then soon after they can develop and master the skill themselves. The child's emotional and psychological development impacts this process; a child who demonstrates independence and autonomy will have confidence in moving into the zone of proximal development. They also accept and take notice of any scaffolding provided.

Another aspect of Vygotsky's theory involves reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching provides a learning environment where open and frequent interaction occurs between the child and the educator. The educator in this model alternates leadership of the conversation with the child until the child becomes confident in this role and assumes a leadership and instructional role themselves. Leadership requires the skills of independence and autonomy.

If children are exposed to new activities that are slightly above their skill level, they will be encouraged to move forward themselves and attempt to learn these skills too. An example of this might be a toddler who is helped to dress after sleep. The toddler may watch the older children dress themselves and learn how to put socks on or do up velcro.

Reciprocal teaching is one of the reasons some services group their children in 'family groupings', meaning that the children of a variety of ages are grouped together.

Temperament

Topic 2 also introduced the concept of temperament. Temperament refers to the behavioural characteristics that shape reactions and responses, and is believed to be a trait we are born with. Temperament is mainly referred to when discussing infants and toddlers. As children develop socially and emotionally, various positive and negative life experiences impact them and their temperament may change as they begin to develop a personality that is based on more than inborn traits.

Topic 2 discussed three basic types of temperament: easy, slow to warm up and difficult. However, some theorists, Alfred Adler and Rudolf Steiner in particular, believed that there are four temperaments, as described in the following table.

Temperament	Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Sanguine	▶ Light-hearted ▶ Fun-loving ▶ A people-person ▶ Entertaining ▶ Spontaneous ▶ A leader ▶ Confident	Can be: ▶ arrogant ▶ cocky ▶ indulgent ▶ a daydreamer ▶ impulsive ▶ unpredictable
Choleric	▶ Lots of ambition ▶ Energetic ▶ Passionate ▶ Tries to instil passion in others	Can be: ▶ dominating ▶ easily angered ▶ bad-tempered ▶ mean-spirited ▶ suspicious ▶ angry
Melancholic	▶ Thoughtful ▶ Kind and considerate ▶ Highly creative ▶ A perfectionist ▶ Particular about what they want and how they want it in some situations	Can be: ▶ overly preoccupied with tragedy and cruelty in the world ▶ depressed ▶ unsatisfied with their own work ▶ constantly critical of themselves
Phlegmatic	▶ Calm ▶ Generally content ▶ Kind and compassionate ▶ Consistent and reliable ▶ Relaxed ▶ Rational ▶ Curious ▶ Observant ▶ Has many friends ▶ Is a dependable friend	Can be: ▶ resistant to change ▶ lazy ▶ inhibiting of enthusiasm ▶ unemotional

Independence, autonomy and self-esteem are influenced by a child's temperament. A child with an easy, sanguine or choleric temperament may be more independent, autonomous and have a higher self-esteem than a child with a slow to warm up, difficult, melancholic or phlegmatic temperament.

Providing goodness of fit

You can adapt your interactions and responses to suit a child's temperament, and you may even be able to help those with a difficult or slow to warm up temperament to become more settled and ready for change.

Matching the environment and your interactions with the temperament of a child helps ensure a 'goodness of fit' (Thomas and Chess). When attempting to provide goodness of fit, consider the characteristics outlined in the following table.

Characteristic	Issues to consider to provide goodness of fit
Sensitivity	How sensitive is each child to particular situations and experiences? Noise, room temperature, pain, smells, colours and textures affect everyone differently, so consider these when planning changes or actions.
Activity level	Each child may require a different amount of activity – some children can be active all day without rest; others of the same age require a regular sleep or rest period. Children require both quiet and active choices throughout the day – be aware of individual children's needs and be flexible in your day to ensure you cater for these.
Adaptability	Constantly changing rooms, staff and routines is disruptive to children and may cause great anxiety in some. When a child is new to your service, establish a routine with minimal changes. Prepare the child in advance for any changes that do occur.
Approach	For new children, use a strategy where you use a familiar item or object to bridge your relationship and break down the barriers between you and the child, known as a transition action. Respect a child's need to take things slowly when dealing with new people, places or practices. Rushing things may only cause mistrust and create further difficulty in dealing with new situations. Children with a slow to warm up temperament may need their parent to stay longer than other children, so encourage this if necessary.
Attention span	Be realistic in the time you expect a child to concentrate on one activity for. In a group of children who have varying skills, temperaments and personalities, a number of children will be able to stick with an activity for a long period of time, while others will maintain only a brief concentration span. Ensure your routines and activities allow for these differences.

Core principles

There are a number of core principles that relate to development. The following table shows those relevant to emotional development and explains how they link.

Principle of development	Description	Example links with emotional development
Belonging, being and becoming	Children learn best when they feel safe and valued.	▶ Children need to feel safe and a sense of belonging to express their emotions. When they express emotions, they may feel vulnerable.

Principle of development	Description	Example links with emotional development
Sequence of development	Development progresses in a pattern that advances from simple to complex.	▶ Children progress through trust versus mistrust before autonomy versus doubt (psychosocial theory). ▶ The child needs their basic needs met prior to feeling safe and secure (humanistic theory).
Rate of development	Children develop at different paces.	▶ A child who is provided with consistent and responsive care by a primary caregiver will quickly develop attachment relationships.
Neurological or brain development	Brain and spinal cord development links to the acquisition of skills.	▶ Children who are provided with secure, safe and rich learning environments will develop stronger skills in self-expression and be able to express their feelings.
Critical periods and scaffolding	There are times when the opportunity to learn is at its most crucial. If these times are not taken advantage of, the child may miss an important aspect of learning. Children are drawn to challenging experiences and enjoy intentional teaching.	▶ Trusting relationships need to be developed during infancy. Autonomy needs to be supported during toddler age (psychosocial theory).
Heredity and environment, and how children use active learning	Also known as nature versus nurture, this relates to the aspects that are genetically programmed in contrast to how the environment influences development. Children actively learn from rich environments.	▶ Temperament influences the way a child approaches situations. ▶ When goodness of fit is provided, the child will be better able to participate and contribute.
Holistic development	All domains of development are closely related and interlinked.	▶ Naming feelings involves: – cognitive skills – understanding and attributing the names of emotions – social skills – developing relationships where information can be shared – emotional skills – feeling and then expressing the emotion and understanding what it means.

Principle of development	Description	Example links with emotional development
Play as learning	Play is used by children to learn.	▶ Children learn emotional skills through group discussions and dramatic play.
Individualised learning	Children learn and demonstrate what they know in different ways.	▶ Emotional skills are learnt through close contact and trusting relationships, but are also demonstrated in friendships and through group activities.

Stages of emotional development

Theories that demonstrate progressive emotional milestones include cognitive theory and psychosocial theory. The following table shows some common emotional development milestones.

Age	Emotional milestone
0–6 months	▶ Cries in response to another infant's cry ▶ Becomes capable of demonstrating emotions such as sadness, happiness, joy, anger and disgust
6–12 months	▶ Becomes increasingly shy with strangers ▶ Begins to demonstrate fear ▶ Separation anxiety increases
1–2 years	▶ Becomes increasingly independent of caregivers ▶ Toward the latter part of this stage, separation anxiety may begin to fade
2–3 years	▶ Prefers routine; does not enjoy changes ▶ Separates from parents/caregivers ▶ May be attached to a comfort toy ▶ Experiences new feelings such as guilt, shame and pride ▶ Becomes increasingly independent and exerts control by saying 'no'
3–4 years	▶ Is able to cooperate with other children more regularly ▶ Negotiates simple solutions to problems and conflicts with peers

Individual emotional development

Each child is unique. Their environment and personal characteristics influence their emotional development. A range of influences are commonly identified, including those factors outlined in the following table.

Factor	Influence on emotional development
Age	Older children can understand and control their feelings more readily. They may also be able to label these feelings and work with you to self-regulate.
Gender	Some cultures have different social expectations for males and females; for example, that females may demonstrate emotion openly while males should keep their feelings private.
Family background, lifestyle and culture	Families have unique values, which may place expectations on children in relation to expressing and understanding. Some norms influence how people demonstrate emotions; for example, there may be different expectations following a death or serious incident, such as hiding their feelings or expressing grief loudly.
Abilities	Some challenges affect emotional responses. Autism spectrum disorder is known to interfere with a child's ability to understand, express and regulate emotion, including having difficulty understanding the feelings, reactions and cues of others.
Level of egocentrism	Children may respond to the emotions of others or ignore them. They may be overprotective. They may be unsupportive due to their lack of ability to look beyond their own needs.
Temperament	Slow to warm up, difficult, melancholic or phlegmatic temperaments may be overly emotional or demonstrate a higher level of emotion. They may also appear to be in a negative emotional state more often than other temperaments. More even temperaments may not appear to react to difficult times with emotion.
Peer groups	Children who relate well to other children enjoy a greater level of positive emotions. They may also enjoy a number of learning experiences as they relate to others who manage emotions, and learn how these occur and affect people.

Monitoring emotional development

To ensure your records contain useful information about each child, you may base your assessment and monitoring on:

- developmental milestones or stages
- approaches or theories
- children's ideas and feelings.

Each child's emotional development is unique, so through observing it you can plan appropriate experiences for them.

When observing children's emotional development, you should look for:

- developmental milestones or stages (needs and abilities)
- how the child fits with theories or approaches
- ways the child expresses themselves
- learning or windows of opportunity
- attachment or security
- interests and ideas
- environmental effects; for example, time, space, materials, space and people
- autonomy and independence
- level of self-esteem and understanding of who they are.

Assessing emotional development

Topic 1 set out the steps for assessing children's progress toward the EYLF outcomes. These steps can be used to help assess the emotional development of the child, and include:

1. Gathering and recording information about the child
2. Using the EYLF to identify which of the five outcomes your observation record links to
3. Identifying a specific sub-outcome of the EYLF
4. Clarifying your selection by referring to the evidence examples that are provided for the identified EYLF outcome

EYLF outcomes most commonly related to emotional development include:

- Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
- Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

Practice task 7

1. Collect information about a child using recording methods of your choice. Provide the age of the child and information about:
   - self-help and independence skills
   - ability to express thoughts, feelings and ideas
   - influences that may impact the child's emotional development, including self-esteem and identity.

2. Use emotional development theories or core principles of development to explain the child's abilities.

3. In line with your service procedures, link each of the findings with EYLF outcomes.

4. What is an experience you could provide to support this child's self-concept or self-esteem? Explain your choice.

3B Providing challenges and opportunities for success

Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing (EYLF Outcome 3) when they are supported to develop skills and succeed in completing challenges they feel are meaningful.

Children may use a variety of skills and abilities to complete activities, tasks and experiences; however, their emotional health dictates their attitude toward any challenge or success, and their ability to feel a sense of achievement.

Developing individual strengths

An indicator of social, emotional and/or psychological success is when a child is pleased with something they have achieved during play and learning. This may be a simple task or activity they have participated in or completed, or it may be connected to a relationship they have with another child or adult. Many children feel an increase in self-esteem from achievement, but most will gain further positive feelings if they are acknowledged by another person.

Open-ended play allows children to decide how it will challenge their strengths. Each player participates at a level appropriate to themselves. Adults can support individual learning through play by providing activities suited to children's interests and abilities. Children's play should not be onerous; it should allow children to feel and experience achievement in a positive manner.

When children are experiencing an achievement, you may notice the following things.

What they may say	What cues they may give	What you can do
▶ 'Look what I have done.' ▶ 'We did it.' ▶ 'I did it myself.'	▶ Smiling ▶ Finishing and sharing their work ▶ Wanting to do the activity again ▶ Telling others	▶ Comment on the process or skill ▶ Ask how the activity was done ▶ Offer tasks of a similar skill level or interest

Focus acknowledgment and encouragement on the effort or process a child displayed, and aim to help the child feel good about themselves. This will help develop positive self-esteem by showing children that you value them and their efforts, and encouraging them to be motivated to do things for intrinsic reasons.

There is a range of ways you can demonstrate acknowledgment and encouragement, both during and after an event. You might:

- provide feedback on the child's work by commenting on the effort they are taking, the structure or colour, the materials used or what parts you are particularly interested in or attracted to
- ask questions that demonstrate your interest and appreciation, such as: 'How did you do that?', 'What materials did you use?' or 'What do you think of your work?'
- thank children for their contribution by commenting using basic manners; for example, saying please and thank you.

Providing for emerging skills

Sociocultural theory focuses on the child's emerging skills and uses the term scaffolding to describe the actions taken to support emerging skill development. You can recognise emerging skills by noticing what children say and do, and then act to scaffold this learning.

When children are being challenged positively or are experiencing an achievement, you may notice the following.

What they may say	What cues they may give	What you can do
▶ 'I want to do this.' ▶ 'How do you do this?' ▶ 'Why is it like that?' ▶ 'What do I do?'	▶ Trying something you haven't noticed them do before ▶ Watching others do something they cannot do themselves	▶ Provide modelling and demonstration ▶ Provide technology and appropriate materials ▶ Inform others so they can support the child ▶ Encourage the child

Scaffolding takes place in response to you identifying a child's developing skills. Refer to the zone of proximal development to ensure you provide challenging but not frustrating experiences and build on skills using this scaffolding concept.

The scaffolding you plan leads you towards appropriately challenging activities. Through observations and interactions, you will identify and monitor the child's level of confidence as they are challenged, which enables you to ensure they do not become frustrated or overwhelmed.

The following table provides examples of how you can identify when a child is being challenged positively and how you can support them.

What they may say	What cues they may give	What you can do
▶ 'This is hard, but I can do it.' ▶ 'I know I can do it if I try hard.' ▶ 'Look what I can do.' ▶ 'I need a little help, but not much.'	▶ Smiling ▶ Humming or singing ▶ Concentrating hard ▶ Succeeding ▶ Working on the task for some time with progress ▶ Asking for a little bit of help or feedback, but not wanting you to take over or complete the activity for them	▶ Stay nearby to ensure you provide timely support ▶ Offer ideas and help only when needed or asked for ▶ Comment on the process or skill ▶ Not interrupt concentration ▶ Allow time and space to succeed

Your reaction to and expectations of children can greatly affect the scaffolding you provide and a child's enjoyment of experiences. When you have appropriate expectations of children, you make an effort to ensure that the environment meets their needs, that they are challenged and that your response shows you understand that learning takes time. You will also expect that, while skills are being developed, children will make mistakes, have accidents, make poor decisions and explore choices.

To build on these learning opportunities, you may:

- comment on the child's use of problem-solving skills to help them see that persistence is useful and mistakes help you learn; for example, you may say, 'Wow! Great effort in trying to solve that problem!'
- ask the child about ways to succeed in the future and comment positively about their ability to plan what they can do
- tell the child you can see they are trying and that this is important
- ask the child what they found out from the experience
- respond in the least dramatic yet positive way possible; for example, if the child has knocked some things off the table as they tried to spread their work out, instead of commenting, 'Oh no, what a mess', frame your comment positively; for example, 'Let's see how we can make more room.'
- provide additional time, space, materials, resources, support and encouragement.

Be prepared to consider things from the child's perspective. The most effective way to do this is by continually providing a child-focused curriculum.

The power of scaffolding and challenging children is demonstrated through your understanding of the following:

- Behaviourist theory: positive reinforcement encourages success.
- Humanistic theory: emotional security and a high self-esteem allow children to be successful in their pursuits.
- Psychosocial theory: conflicts that result in positive outcomes help children grow into productive and stable adults.
- Social learning theory: self-image affects self-esteem.

Example

Considering a child's perspective

Daniel is drawing with crayons at a table when Christine, an educator, approaches and sits at the same table. Christine has noticed Daniel working at the table for some time. As she sits down, she asks, 'What have you been working so hard on, Daniel?'

Daniel is proud – he has drawn a horse. Christine can see that although the horse is not perfectly formed, it is one of Daniel's most detailed drawings. She asks him if he is pleased and then comments that she really likes the way the horse's tail is flying out. Christine asks if Daniel would like to display the work or if he wants to take it home tonight.

When Christine comments on Daniel's drawing, Daniel's feelings of success are acknowledged and his self-esteem increases.

Practice task 8

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Benjamin has been observed completing five-piece knob puzzles. Benjamin completes these without help.

James has started to pull at the end of his socks when he is sitting playing on the floor.

Vey has started to build towers with the wooden blocks.

Carmel has been observed talking to herself while holding the peg dolls. The educator heard Carmel saying, 'Go to the toilet now, you are a big girl.'

1. Identify an activity or experience you think would appropriately challenge each child. Explain your choice.

2. Give one example of what you might say or do to support each child's self-esteem during this challenging experience.

3. Give one example of what you might observe that tells you the challenges are appropriate. Relate each of your responses to theory and core principles of emotional development.

3C Supporting development of independence and identity

Each child requires different attitudes and interactions to successfully achieve independence and use appropriate self-help skills.

Providing for independence

Self-help skills are actions used every day to complete tasks that assist with your own and others' care. They allow children to take responsibility for themselves and take on jobs that contribute to the group's success.

A child must feel independent and autonomous to attempt and succeed at self-help skills. Conversely, they feel independent and autonomous when they are completing self-help skills. A cycle exists, very much like positive reinforcement in behaviourist theory. You can support children's independence, autonomy and self-help skills if you demonstrate actions and responses such as those outlined in the following table.

Action or response	Example
Have realistic expectations	▶ Infants may not be able to feed themselves, but they may be able to hold a spoon and attempt to pick up food. ▶ Older children may be able to feed pet fish, but they may not be able to remember to do this every day.
Show children that you have confidence in them	▶ Tell children you know they can do it.
Provide opportunities for children to do things for themselves	▶ Create routines and timetables that include tasks for children. ▶ Assume children will complete tasks themselves and ask if they need help.
Give warnings	▶ Tell children prior to the task so they can prepare and complete what they are doing; for example, 'In two minutes we are going to pack up' or 'After you finish this puzzle, we will prepare the snack table'.
Offer children choices	▶ Provide options that are realistic and within the child's range of abilities. ▶ Do not provide too many choices. ▶ Create routines and timetables where choice is expected; for example, 'Would you like to set the table or serve the food?'

Action or response	Example
Ensure routines and care are child-centred	▶ Ensure programs provide opportunities for children to complete self-help tasks themselves; for example, dressing, undressing and feeding. ▶ Create routines and timetables that allow the child to feel they are not being rushed. ▶ Display a positive and encouraging attitude; for example, 'That's all right, Helen. Take your time and try again', rather than 'Hurry up, Helen, it's time for a snack!'
Make it fun	▶ Clap when the child succeeds. ▶ Invent games relating to daily tasks; for example, imitate a front-end loader when packing up toys. ▶ Link tasks with upbeat music; for example, a fast marching beat could mean it is time to pack up. The children will be motivated by the sounds and the speed of the music.
Give positive feedback	▶ Reflect on the process (how the child did a task), rather than the product (result) by saying things like, 'You worked for ages on that!' or 'What a lot of pieces you put together!' rather than 'You finished the puzzle – great!'
Give reasons	▶ Demonstrate the usefulness of self-help tasks by explaining their benefit; for example, say, 'When you pull off your own socks, you don't have to wait for me' or 'The LEGO won't get broken if we pack it away when we're finished'.

Developing positive relationships

Your positive relationships with children enable them to develop independence and autonomy. The following strategies help create this positive relationship:

- Hold small infants as frequently as possible in a relaxed and comfortable way.
- Respond quickly to infants' cries and cues, because children who learn that their needs will be met from an early age learn to feel secure quickly.
- Provide infants with opportunities to explore the environment independently while you are nearby; this encourages them to feel secure when they are away from you.
- Help children understand the pattern of the day; for example, by telling them what is happening next.
- Use routine opportunities such as dressing for one-on-one interactions.
- Make the child feel important throughout the day.
- Talk with children if you are unable to hold or be near them, and use singing, poems and rhymes as a way to comfort children.
- Ensure that educators remain consistent; it is detrimental in building relationships and security if there are frequent educator changes.
- Work at children's eye level.

Applying theory

The following relates some of the theories you have learnt about with children's emerging self-help skills.

Theory/ approach	How it relates to developing self-help skills and independence
Temperament (Adler/ Steiner)	When you provide 'goodness of fit' you are supporting the child based on their needs and giving them a feeling of worthiness and acceptance. These feelings allow the child to become independent and to attempt and learn self-help skills.
Social learning theory (Bandura)	A child's level of self-esteem can be directly linked to their ability to be independent and autonomous.
Attachment theory (Bowlby)	Securely attached children are more likely to feel safe to explore the world and develop independence and self-help skills as a result.
Humanistic theory (Maslow)	An emotionally cared for and confident child can attempt to be all they can be; this includes becoming independent and autonomous, and developing self-help skills.
Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner)	Relationships and systems in the child's world all influence the child's ability to become independent and autonomous. For example, if the child is given the message that they are not capable, they will not attempt tasks.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	Self-help skills are learnt through each of the three ways of learning: imitative learning, instructed learning and collaborative learning.
Psychosocial theory (Erikson)	The crises in this theory link with a child's thoughts about themselves and how they view their environment. These views influence the child's ability to see themselves as capable beings, and influence the things they try and the level of effort they apply to succeed.
Brain development	The synapses that are created as children develop new skills and knowledge allow them to make choices and become more independent and autonomous.
Cognitive theory (Piaget)	The child has a potential for learning that is influenced by their feelings of independence and autonomy. The child should be encouraged to be an independent thinker.
Multiple intelligences (Gardner)	The child may demonstrate independence and self-help skills in areas that best match their type of intelligence. There is more on this in Topic 4.

Self-esteem and identity

Self-esteem is the feeling of confidence in one's own ability. Identity is about who you are and how you believe you fit into the world. A child with high self-esteem generally wants to attempt new play activities and will feel satisfaction through participation in their play. They enjoy a stronger sense of identity due to feeling that they are valued and hold an important role in the lives of people that are meaningful to them.

A child with low self-esteem is generally less enthusiastic, avoiding new play activities and feeling frustration if challenges in play are posed. Their sense of identity is low, as they are not sure where they fit into the lives of others, and may not feel their needs are important or that others are interested in seeing them succeed.

These reactions in young children are learnt through experience. A child who is encouraged, supported and provided opportunities to play and be independent is learning to feel self-confidence. A child who is questioned, overshadowed and provided limited opportunities to be independent and play is receiving a message that they are incapable, and they will have little confidence in their abilities as a result.

To positively influence a child's self-esteem:

- give individual attention to each child and provide opportunities for children to be independent
- encourage children to attempt skills and activities as individuals and part of a group
- provide children with positive feedback
- support children to be clear communicators and considerate of others
- acknowledge children when they help you or others
- encourage realistic ideals by providing materials, activities and models that show diversity
- prohibit put-downs, avoid comparison and competition, and accept mistakes as learning opportunities
- be genuine in your interactions with individual children and groups
- allow children to make decisions, problem-solve and negotiate as individuals and part of a group
- provide age- and stage-appropriate activities, equipment and expectations
- identify and celebrate the social, emotional and psychological successes of individuals and groups.

When children are not noticed, they learn to have little confidence in themselves. Some children are quiet achievers; they may not be demanding or they may have positive behaviour and continue work without expectation that you will acknowledge or support them. In a busy education and care service, these children may not receive much attention. They may seem to have a positive self-esteem, but many may not feel like they fit in with the group or may feel they are unworthy of attention. You need to make sure you spend time with and acknowledge the work of all children, regardless of their temperament.

In addition to ensuring you spend time with all children and interact in ways that demonstrate all children are worthwhile, Bandura's social learning theory suggests the following strategies for children who have low self-esteem:

- Help the child to develop an accurate picture of their abilities and behaviour.
- Redirect a child's inaccurate or confused beliefs about themselves.

Developing an accurate picture of the self

You can help a child develop an accurate picture of themselves, their abilities and their behaviour through encouragement and by demonstrating that their abilities are appropriate to their age and stage of development. Talk positively about the child's work and provide measures appropriate to the child's stage of development.

The following table sets out some strategies for a child to develop an accurate picture of themselves.

Strategy	Explanation
Children measure their own achievements	By measuring against themselves, rather than against other children, children can see improvement in their own performance and think about factors such as how much enjoyment they experience during activities.
Rotate games	Rotate games so that skilled players are not always central. All players should assume an important role in an activity they are involved in. This may mean changing the rules or developing a new game from an old one.
Keep expectations realistic	Make sure your expectations or challenges are not set too high, or you will set children up to fail. Similarly, if you set the standards too low, they will be meaningless. You can get the balance right if you monitor the children regularly and ensure you are aware of their skill level.
Scaffold skills to support challenging experiences	If a child is able to do something with support, you can respond to this by scaffolding their skills and providing appropriate challenges. If a child is not in the zone of proximal development or you have not noticed an opportunity, you may be setting up the child to fail or become frustrated.
Encourage children to reward themselves	Encourage children to reward themselves and discourage negative self-talk. Support children to do this by giving them words to use and telling them what you think as well. Celebrate achievements and help children see that mistakes are ways to learn.

Redirecting inaccurate or confused beliefs

Another important way you can explore and support positive self-image is by redirecting a child's inaccurate or confused beliefs about themselves. Usually these beliefs occur when the child makes generalisations about their abilities, personal appearance or anything else they feel is important. This may also occur when a child believes they should think, feel or act in a particular way. Children are provided messages about these things constantly as they hear or see others being praised or encouraged, and hear or see images of what a boy or girl should be like or how a certain culture should behave or look.

In cases where a child's self-image is confused or inaccurate, your interaction and the experiences you provide can help the child separate their abilities from their insecurities.

To improve a child's self-image you might:

- discuss things you know about the child that disperse their insecurities
- demonstrate that the child's insecurities are false by showing them previous work
- provide images or experiences that demonstrate that gender and culture do not determine likes and dislikes or personality
- invite people to the service to share their experiences, knowledge, interests and different images
- ensure the child is provided with attention and affection
- create opportunities for the child to participate positively in the area they are concerned about
- discuss or introduce strategies that help the child become more skilled in the area of weakness
- celebrate areas of interest, ability and enjoyment
- eliminate competitive games and activities, as these boost the winner's self-esteem, and highlight weaknesses and failures of other participants
- pair the child with others that complement their skills or place the child in a position where their skills or abilities are valuable.

These types of activities, along with your positive and supporting interactions, allow the child to reassess their feelings and self-perceptions. They also provide opportunities for the child to build on and extend their achievements.

Self-esteem and self-concept are often developed indirectly as a child is provided with experiences that are successful and rewarding, meet their individual interests and strengths, and provide for success.

EYLF Outcome 1 emphasises the importance of self-esteem and identity, while Outcome 2 looks at the child's feelings of belonging in their world. These promote the child's emotional wellbeing as a foundation to success in all other areas of their learning, which closely resembles a humanistic view.

Providing for emotional expression

Emotions may be positive (for example, happiness, excitement, enthusiasm, empathy and curiosity) or negative (for example, grief, fear, hatred, shame and anger).

Every child experiences emotions to different degrees and may even experience different emotions relating to the same event. Some emotions are used as cues to communicate messages. Your response to these emotions and your demonstration of empathy is crucial; the way you respond can have a long-lasting effect on a child's self-esteem throughout their life.

Carefully consider your attitudes and interactions, and be aware of the way each child communicates their emotions. Emotions can be expressed through verbal interaction and body language, including the use of body movements, gestures or facial expressions. Infants may communicate through different cries. Sometimes cultural or individual circumstances may cause a child to display signs you do not understand. It will take some time for you to get to know each child and to understand how they communicate their feelings.

Once you understand the messages a child is trying to communicate about their feelings and ideas, you need to respond promptly to build relationships with children and show them that you care.

Infants need to:

- have their nonverbal communication understood and catered for
- cry and be attended to.

Toddlers need to:

- express themselves through activity
- express themselves verbally
- name their feelings.

Preschoolers need to:

- express themselves through activities such as clapping and stamping
- express their feelings verbally
- express their feelings through paintings, drawings and other creative activities.

Even a child seeking your attention requires time and understanding. A child who seeks attention and does not receive it may feel unworthy of love or become destructive in order to receive attention, as some children feel that negative attention from you is better than no attention at all.

Negative feelings

The most common negative feelings experienced by children are caused by:

- accidents
- other children
- the loss of a toy
- embarrassment
- the environment being too noisy, crowded, large, busy, quiet or uninteresting
- not being heard.

When negative feelings are expressed, you can respond in simple ways:

- Listen to what the child has to say and use body language to show you are listening, by facing the child and getting down to their eye level.
- Respond with simple comments.
- Use active listening to highlight specific feelings to help the child learn what they are feeling; for example, 'You seem angry'.
- Ask the child what to do next or help them decide by providing materials or opportunities.
- Redirect them to the next activity.

Using play to express emotion

Play experiences provide children with an excellent outlet for expressing emotions.

The following play experiences provide children with opportunities to express their emotions:

- Dramatic play props such as dress-ups, furniture and equipment can assist a child to act out their feelings.
- Drawing or painting allows children to express themselves without words.
- Tactile or manipulative play can have a calming quality; for example, messy play where the mess created is not a concern, water play, and playing with sand, clay or mud.
- Imaginative play with models and miniatures allows children to play out their feelings.
- Storytelling, props, puppets and books encourage indirect expression.
- Music and movement allow non-threatening physical expression.
- Swings have a movement that relaxes the body and mind, and gives the child a feeling of freedom.
- Hammering can allow frustration to be expelled.

The following experiences provide opportunities for emotional enrichment and expression:

- sociodramatic play, including dress-ups, home corner, dolls, cars and roads
- movement experiences: dancing and moving expressively
- listening to different types of music
- art experiences such as using clay, finger paints or any other open-ended materials.

Anger

Many issues concerning children's feelings are a result of them not understanding their emotions, not knowing that feelings are normal or dealing with feelings in inappropriate ways. Anger is an example of this. Children's outbursts can be frightening and even dangerous, and these may demonstrate that the child is not in control of their feelings or capable of expressing themselves safely.

Your ability to deal with children's emotional outbursts relies on you remaining calm. Your actions should be consistent and you should be open to comforting upset children even if they seem difficult to get close to.

Different children respond to different methods of calming:

- some children need quiet time away from others
- some children need to sit and express themselves to someone who is prepared to listen to what they are saying
- some children may need to express their emotions physically.

You can cater for each of these calming methods, but you must also consider the safety of the other children. It is appropriate for children to become emotional, but it is inappropriate for them to hurt others, damage the environment or attempt to leave your care. The limits and strategies you provide for the child at this stage will help them throughout their life.

Emotional outbursts of anger are common for some children, just as emotional outbursts of fear or frustration, sadness or joy are too. Sometimes children are placed in situations that impact their emotional state as well as other developmental areas. These situations include:

- ill health, or long periods of hospitalisation of the child or a family member
- changes in family circumstances and relationships
- accidents or embarrassing events that may occur during care
- separation from familiar people and places, including starting care
- difficult interactions with other children
- moving house or migrating
- the death of a family member or pet.

The feelings that children express in relation to these situations must be dealt with appropriately and respectfully.

Separation and stranger anxiety

Many children experience anxiety when separated from their parent or primary educator, or when being introduced to a new person. Common signs of separation and stranger anxiety include:

- withdrawal
- clinginess
- lack of eye contact
- sleeping difficulties
- unusual quietness
- aggression
- crying
- other behaviour that is out of character.

Separation and stranger anxiety are linked with the theories outlined in the following table.

Theory	How it links to separation and stranger anxiety	How to respond
Temperament	▶ Children react differently to others based on the temperament they possess. For example, a child with a phlegmatic temperament may be resistant to change.	▶ Consider how you introduce yourself to children. ▶ Provide strategies for new people and situations based on what you know about the child's temperament. ▶ Be sensitive to the child's ability to feel safe and secure.
Attachment theory (Bowlby)	▶ Children need secure attachments to feel safe in their exploration of the world. ▶ Children are wary of people they don't know. ▶ If children are securely attached, they will be less anxious in general.	▶ Your interactions and plans for every child should include developing close attachment relationships. ▶ Support children and remain close by if strangers are near. ▶ Use your secure attachment relationship to help children feel less fearful and develop new relationships with others.

Theory	How it links to separation and stranger anxiety	How to respond
Psychosocial theory (Erikson)	▶ Trust is a basic need of children if they are to develop positively in early childhood. ▶ Children who do not trust others will feel greater fear and anxiety when faced with new situations and people. ▶ The development of autonomy and initiative relies on the child's ability to trust others and the environment.	▶ Ensure those close to the child tell the child when they are leaving so the child is not confused or looking for the person. ▶ Explain what is happening to children so they are not fearful or confused. ▶ Create a stable, consistent and predictable routine and environment.
Cognitive development (Piaget)	▶ Children develop object permanence, which allows them to understand that people and things exist when not seen. ▶ Children develop memory skills so they are able to remember people and things, and know if these are familiar or not.	▶ Expect that separation and stranger anxiety are likely to occur between eight months and two years. ▶ Be prepared with strategies for managing separation and stranger anxiety as part of a child's normal development.

When a child displays signs of separation or stranger anxiety, the strategies to settle them are very similar to those for reacting to any emotional upset.

You can use strategies such as:

- physically comforting the child with a hug or a rub on the back, arm or shoulder
- talking to the child
- providing comforters to relax the child
- redirecting or distracting the child with another activity.

When children meet you for the first time, some make eye contact with you and are happy to be close to you physically, while others keep their distance and turn their faces away. To help break down a barrier between you and a child, you can use a special toy or ritual. This process is called using a transition action and involves using something other than yourself to gain the child's interest and attention. The child links the toy or ritual with you and slowly becomes familiar and comfortable with you.

Determine what may work as a transition action by asking the parent or watching what activities the child goes to in the room. Transition actions are also often a link between care and home. Consider the stage of development and interests that are common to children of this age and stage of development.

Example

Using a transition action

Ally (two and a half years) is visiting a new service with her mother as part of the orientation program. An educator, Dave, has observed over the last two visits that Ally is fine with him talking to her mother, but gets a bit clingy if he speaks directly to her. Dave plans to use a transition action on Ally's next visit to see how it assists their relationship.

Once Ally has settled in for a while with her mother, Dave brings over an animal set to show Ally. He sits nearby and starts to play with the animals. Ally's mum has told Dave that Ally loves animals, so he makes some quiet animal noises as he plays. After a few moments, Ally crawls over, sits near Dave and they play with the animals together for some time.

The next day, Dave has the farm set up and shows Ally as soon as she arrives. He sits with her and they play with the animals together while her mother sits apart from them.

Fear

Fear is an emotion that is recognised as a reflex at birth and develops in a child as their brain function increases and their imagination and thought processes become more complex and abstract. In children, fear often occurs as the result of not understanding a situation or not being prepared for change.

The way fear is managed can affect the security and safety felt by a child, and may also reflect issues a child may be managing. When your routine is stable and predictable, you can eliminate some fears children may have, such as fears relating to change and:

- what may happen next
- what is expected of them
- who will be caring for them
- when certain things may occur.

Some fears that are common to each age group are listed in the following table.

Age group	Common fears
Infants	Infants show fear of sensory surprises like loud noises and unexpected approaches. This occurs because they are not able to process what is happening and are unable to connect an object or action with a sound. Later, when their brains understand these concepts, they show fear of being separated from familiar people, as they do not understand that the other person continues to exist when they are not seen.
Toddlers	Toddlers often show fear of night-time, darkness and of potentially scary activities. This occurs due to their developing imagination linking with things they are familiar with.
Preschoolers	Preschoolers show fear of imaginary things and often have nightmares. They have vivid imaginations and explore outside their familiar environment into things that they can make up. They often become afraid of things they don't understand, perhaps after having overheard an adult conversation they misunderstood.

A range of strategies you may find useful for managing fear are outlined in the following table. As fear is an emotion that affects individuals differently, you will need to vary strategies.

Strategy	Implementation ideas
Anticipate fears	Anticipate fears and act to prevent them; if you know a child is afraid of something or someone, you may be able to prepare the child or avoid the fear.
Remove objects that cause fear	Removing objects that cause fear is often a simple task because the child may be afraid of a toy or noise. This strategy may be more difficult if the fear relates to a particular educator, all people with a particular characteristic (for example, males or people with glasses) or the actual room of care.
Prepare children	Prepare children for unpleasant times and events. Children's lives may involve many unpleasant experiences; for example, having a blood test, going to hospital and moving rooms. Encourage emotional expression and provide ways for children to find out more about what the experience involves. Be honest and give accurate information, as telling children an experience will not be as bad as it actually is may make them more afraid once they undergo the experience.
Age- and stage-appropriate routines	Ensure routines are appropriate for the age and stage of the child and provide a stable and predictable environment. When routines are not flexible or if materials and messages in the environment do not match a child's needs, they may become fearful or distressed and negative feelings may become a regular part of the day.

Managing fear

When working with older children, it is generally easier to empower them to manage the fear themselves, particularly in the lead-up to an unpleasant event. This is due to their level of understanding and ability to rationalise a situation. However, younger children may try to manage their own fear by:

- humming – this distracts their minds from focusing on the fear
- taking deep breaths – this allows their bodies to slow down and relax
- squeezing a hand or item – this focuses tension and allows the level of fear to be transferred to this action.

Ensure you watch for indications of fear management so you can provide the child with the comfort and support they need.

The following plan may be useful if a child expresses uncontrollable emotions of fear:

- Remove the child or the feared subject if possible.
- Get the child's attention. Ask the child to look at you and, if necessary, hold the child's face gently and turn them towards you.
- Offer the child a security item, such as an item they use for comfort. If the child doesn't have an item, provide something they can use if wanted.
- Comfort the child by talking calmly and quietly, and using body language to let them know you care about what they are feeling.
- Acknowledge the fear by saying, 'I know you are afraid'. Ensure the child knows they are safe with you and continue to do so until the child has calmed down. Don't talk too much; continuing to speak about the fear or reassuring the child continuously may increase their anxiety.
- Redirect if possible. Encourage the child to move to another area or activity to give them something other than the feared item or situation to think about. This step may not suit all children or be inappropriate if the child is very overwhelmed.

Practice task 9

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow. Link EYLF outcomes, theories and core principles of development to your responses.

Case study

Mim, who is five years old, loves animals and dinosaurs, playing with trains and trying to climb. She knows she is a girl, but all the other girls she knows and the girls on TV play with dolls. Mim wonders why she is not like that. Today, you notice Mim standing alone with her head down. You ask her what has happened and she tells you one of the boys pushed her off the A-frame and told her to play with the girls. When she went to play with the girls, they said she wasn't their friend.

1. What could you do to help Mim develop a stronger self-image and gain a greater understanding of her identity?

2. What might you do to provide Mim with an opportunity to release her emotions?

3. What responsibility could you give Mim that might develop her independence, while helping her to increase her self-image?

Summary

- Emotional development is about learning to recognise emotions and how to express them appropriately. It is also about how you see yourself, your self-concept and resulting self-esteem.
- Understanding theories relating to emotional development and related milestones enables you to understand and cater for individual children and their emotional needs.
- A child's emotional development can be assessed and monitored using a checklist of age-appropriate milestones.
- Children may use a variety of skills and abilities to complete activities, tasks and experiences. However, their emotional health dictates their attitude toward challenges or successes, and their ability to feel a sense of achievement.
- Sociocultural theory focuses on the child's emerging skills and uses the term scaffolding to describe the actions taken to support learning of emerging skills. You can recognise emerging skills by monitoring what children say and do.
- Self-help skills are actions used every day to complete tasks that assist in the care of yourself and others. They allow children to take responsibility for themselves and take on jobs that contribute to the success of the group.
- Create opportunities for children to explore their self-image and identity through play.
- Provide children with opportunities to release feelings and express emotions through suitable experiences.

Learning checkpoint 3
Fostering emotional development

Part A

Observe a group of children and complete the following tasks:

- Identify **five** self-help tasks that children participate in throughout the day.
- For each self-help task, identify emerging skills you may observe if a child was learning to complete this task independently.
- For each emerging skill, describe one way you could scaffold the child's learning through play.

You may wish to record your information in a table similar to the following.

Self-help task	Emerging skills	Scaffolding provided through play

Part B

1. Think about children you have worked with and write down a play activity you have planned and provided that demonstrates each of the following characteristics:
   a. Catered for individual strengths and successes

b. Challenged children's emerging skills and capabilities

c. Catered for release of feelings and expression of emotions

2. Find a documentation method you, a colleague or your supervisor have used to monitor a child's play and learning.
   a. Evaluate what is important about the documented information.

   b. Describe how the play experience was planned. Include what was planned, what materials and resources were provided and how you ensured that the experience met the planned goals.

Part C

Explain how you promote EYLF Outcome 1: 'Children have a strong sense of identity' in your everyday work with children.

Link the information you provide to at least **two** emotional development theorists or core principles of development.

Then, explain how you:

- assess and monitor the children's emotional development
- create opportunities for children to explore self-image and identity through play.

Topic 4

In this topic you will learn about:

Fostering cognitive development

Cognitive development is defined by a range of approaches and theories that guide you to identify the milestones children are expected to achieve. These theories also provide you with an understanding of why children approach learning and development the way they do. As children learn how to problem-solve and develop scientific, mathematical, technological and environmental knowledge and skills, the understanding you show enables you to provide an environment that meets these growing needs, and supports and challenges their abilities.

You will play a significant role in helping children develop their critical thinking capabilities. To do this, you need to assess and monitor children's cognitive development, and know how to apply relevant concepts from cognitive development theories and principles to enhance learning opportunities and cater for children's individual needs and abilities.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

4A Understanding cognitive development

The EYLF is focused on a view that children are capable human beings. Review the following to refresh your memory on how the EYLF links with supporting cognitive development:

- Principle 3 – High expectations and equity
- Principle 5 – Ongoing learning and reflective practice
- Practice – Intentional teaching
- Practice – Learning environments
- Outcome 4 – Children are confident and involved learners

Understanding cognitive theory

An understanding of theories relating to cognitive development, combined with knowledge of relevant milestones, enables you to plan and provide for individual children's cognitive needs.

Cognitive development is about how the brain functions, develops and makes sense of information. It involves the development of thinking and learning, and relates to aspects such as language, attention span, planning, problem-solving and memory.

Studies show that the brain develops connections when learning occurs. These connections break down if the learning is not practised; however, if the learning is practised, the connections increase in strength and become a skill or knowledge.

Learning can take place through play and experience, or, alternatively, through rote learning. Rote learning is a technique based on memorisation through repetition. Examples of rote learning include repeating numbers or the alphabet over and over, or writing something repeatedly. Contemporary learning theories suggest that more meaningful learning occurs through play and first-hand experience.

Watch this video about how children's age and stage of development links to cognitive development.

Example

Learning through experience

Gertrude is learning to count to five by copying her educator in rote learning. They count items, repeating, 'one, two, three, four, five' over and over.

Marika is learning to count to five while she plays. The educator sets up five chairs for musical chairs and they count the chairs and children together. Later they complete a five-piece puzzle that has the numbers one to five written on the pieces. At group time they sing about five little ducks and wiggle their fingers while they count.

Perceptual development

Perceptual development is closely linked to cognitive development, as it is about how the senses are used to understand the world. The sensory experiences a child is involved in increase their ability to send messages from the brain to the body.

Sensory experiences occur when children participate in activities such as:

- washing
- cleaning
- cooking
- listening
- using different environments for play
- using tactile materials during play
- looking at faces
- comparing images
- using hanging mobiles.

Note that the environment must not be overloaded with sensory stimulation or children will find it difficult to focus and will be easily distracted.

Brain development

The quality of experiences and relationships during the first few years of life has a profound and lasting impact on brain development. Rich environments, experiences and interactions result in faster and more meaningful learning.

Environmental influences include:

- adequate rest and nutrition
- water
- safe environments
- appropriate materials and equipment
- adequate space for development of motor skills
- good oxygen supply
- appropriate levels of stimulation – overstimulation can distract children.

The environment and the types of stimulating and age-appropriate experiences you provide are important factors in supporting cognitive development. Brain research consistently links cognitive development to these points, which encourages you to consider how the care and education you provide children assists their brain function and their ongoing learning ability.

Infants are born with 100 billion brain cells that are ready to connect. As the infant learns about the world, their brain cells make connections called synapses. When the connections in the brain are developing, a substance called myelin covers the connection, insulating and strengthening it. This process is called myelination. It helps neural impulses travel more quickly and effectively, which results in a greater amount of control and a shorter reaction time.

Children do not develop more brain cells as they grow; instead, they form more connections between cells as they continue to learn. These connect during learning and develop strength if this learning is practised.

The synapses that are created as children develop new skills and knowledge allow them to make choices and become more independent.

Cognitive development theory

Topic 3 introduced Jean Piaget, who was foremost in cognitive theory and believed strongly that we learn as constructionists. In the constructionist model, the child must decide which information is vital or new, then decide which information they will retain and develop.

Before investigating the stages of development described by cognitive constructionist theory, you need to understand some basic concepts of cognitive learning. These concepts link with brain development, but are more about the process of learning new things rather than how the brain grows.

The process of cognitive learning involves four concepts, which are explained in the following table.

Schema	Schemata are mental representations of things we know: perceptions, ideas and/or actions. They are the basic building blocks of thinking and expand as new information is learnt. Schemata relate to synapses in brain development. Synapses are the physical connections made in the brain, which hold schemata.
Assimilation	Assimilation occurs when new information is received. We use assimilation to match a new event or object with information we already know. When we link new information with our current ideas, it is easier for us to develop understanding and then accept the new information.
Accommodation	Accommodation occurs when the new information is understood and recognised. New schemata are developed when accommodation occurs and the new events or objects are understood and remembered.
Equilibration	Equilibration is the term used by Piaget to describe our need to assimilate and accommodate new information and create new schema in order to understand the world. Equilibration relates to the way we try to find logic in events and objects in our desire to understand them.

Example

Cognitive learning

For a holiday, Xavier's family visits a farm. Xavier is fascinated by the calf in the yard and calls out, 'Dog!' His parents explain to him that this is not a dog; it is a cow. They show him the other grown cows and they listen to the cows' sounds. They talk about what the cows are eating and what cows look like.

As they walk around the farm, Xavier points to every cow he sees and yells, 'Cow!'

Xavier demonstrates the following cognitive learning concepts:

- Schema: Xavier already has ideas and perceptions about dogs. He has a pet dog at home and he knows lots of information about this dog.
- Assimilation: Xavier links the calf with the dog, as there are similarities. Xavier knows about dogs and expects the calf to link with the ideas he already has. Xavier's parents provide new information so that he can develop new ideas (schema) about what a cow is.
- Accommodation: Xavier uses the information given by his parents to develop an understanding of cows. He can now identify the differences between a cow and a dog.
- Equilibration: Xavier demonstrates equilibration as he listens and thinks about what his parents are telling him. He wants to make sense of this new creature. He also labels cows for the rest of his holiday at the farm.

Sensorimotor stage

The sensorimotor stage is the first stage of cognitive development. It spans from birth to approximately two years and is determined by the child's use of physical actions to explore with their senses. Children in this stage are only able to think about people or events in the current situations they are in.

There are six sub-stages of the sensorimotor stage; each of these has clear characteristics and relates to the concept of object permanence. This concept was introduced in Topic 3 and defines the process of recognising that an object exists even if it can no longer be seen. Infants have fully developed object permanence by the end of their first year.

The following table outlines the sub-stages of the sensorimotor period through the characteristics that indicate each one, as well as object permanence development.

Sensorimotor sub-stage	Characteristics	Examples	Object permanence
Sub-stage 1: Reflexive (Birth to approximately one month)	▶ Reflexes are used. ▶ There is little or no imitation.	▶ The child is occupied by inborn reflexes: looking about, grasping and sucking.	▶ None. Unable to find an object even when watching while it is hidden.
Sub-stage 2: Primary circular reactions (Approximately one to four months)	▶ Simple motor actions are centred on the child's own body. ▶ The child copies another person's behaviour.	▶ Opening and closing fingers. ▶ If the child blows bubbles and this is repeated by an adult, the child will do it a second time.	▶ None. Unable to find an object even when watching while it is hidden.
Sub-stage 3: Secondary circular reactions (Approximately four to eight months)	▶ Actions are oriented towards recapturing interesting effects. ▶ The child imitates the behaviour of a model, but only if the action is one the child has already learnt.	▶ The child may shake a rattle to repeat the effect gained or kick their feet to make a mobile move. ▶ If the child is able to gurgle and an adult gurgles to the child, the child may repeat the action.	▶ Able to retrieve a partially hidden object. ▶ Unable to find a completely hidden object even when it is hidden while the child is watching.

Sensorimotor sub-stage	Characteristics	Examples	Object permanence
Sub-stage 4: Coordination of secondary circular reactions (Approximately eight to 12 months)	▶ Actions are goal- directed and serve as a means to an end. ▶ The child can imitate actions that are slightly different from the ones they have already learnt.	▶ The child may reach out (the means) to grab a toy (the end). ▶ If the child can gurgle and an adult gurgles with a start/stop action, the child may imitate. ▶ The child is excited by pop-up toys and hide-and-find games as they challenge their development of object permanence.	▶ Able to retrieve a partially hidden object from the first location it is hidden in, but will not look in a second hiding place. ▶ The child is beginning to understand that objects exist when out of sight – this links with the onset of separation anxiety.
Sub-stage 5: Tertiary circular reactions (Approximately 12 to 18 months)	▶ The child explores the properties of objects by acting on them. ▶ The child imitates unfamiliar actions.	▶ The child explores objects through sucking, biting, throwing and so on. ▶ If the child cannot clap but an adult claps in play, the child can imitate the action.	▶ The child is able to search in successive locations for a hidden toy.
Sub-stage 6: Mental representation (Approximately 18 months to two years)	▶ There is now some symbolic representation. ▶ The child has a good memory of objects and events.	▶ The child may cradle a doll or make a 'brrroomm' noise as they push a car around on the floor.	▶ Able to find hidden objects without first seeing the hiding action.

Preoperational stage

The preoperational stage spans from approximately two to seven years and is determined by the child's use of exploration, imagination and symbolic representation, including language development. Children in this stage are egocentric; that is, they see everything from their point of view.

As mentioned in Topic 3, logical thought is not consistent in this stage, which is due to underdeveloped skills and predictable preoperational processes, which are outlined in the following table.

Process	Characteristic	Example
Transductive reasoning	The child makes errors in connecting two unrelated events or objects. This may occur if two things happen in close succession, causing the child to think they are related.	Ferner slams the door. At the same moment, his friend Greg slips over on the path nearby. Although the sandy path is what causes Greg to slip, Ferner believes that slamming the door is the cause because of the timing. The next day Kerryn slams the door. Ferner calls to her, 'Kerryn, you will make someone slip!'
Irreversibility	The child is unable to see that a process can be undone or reversed.	Fleur is building with blocks. She has made a tower and roads with fences along the side. Atticus is playing nearby and bumps the fence, causing two blocks to fall. Fleur begins crying uncontrollably and starts to get angry at Atticus. The educator talks with Fleur about how they can repair the fence. She explains that they can put the two blocks back in place. Fleur remains upset, saying, 'It is all broken now!'
Single classification	The child can only sort an object based on one characteristic.	Bert is sitting at the puzzle table. There is a range of different items laid out and some small tubs. The educator asks Bert to sort the items that are red into one tub and the items that are square into another. Bert finds all of the red items and all of the square items and sorts them. Later the educator asks Bert to sort the red squares into one tub and the yellow triangles into another. Bert struggles with this activity as he is required to look at each object in two ways at once.
Either/or thinking	The child is only able to see events one way or another; the child cannot understand that there may be an answer that is in the middle of these two ideas.	Daniel is playing with Dorothy at a non-competitive board game. When Dorothy completes the game, Daniel becomes angry. He says, 'I hate losing!' The educator explains to Daniel that he hasn't lost; it is a fun game and Dorothy just finished first, but Daniel holds his understanding that you either win or lose in any game.
Overgeneralising	The child links things they know to all situations of that kind.	Dulci has a sister that is often unwell and spends a lot of time in hospital. An educator mentions that her sister is visiting on the weekend and Dulci asks, 'Is she coming home from hospital?'

Process	Characteristic	Example
Animism	The child gives animate characteristics to inanimate things.	Delia gets a paper cut when she turns the page on a book. She tells the educator that the book has 'bitten' her.

You may recognise that some processes from the previous table continue into adulthood. Sometimes this is caused by strong connections formed in early childhood; other times it is due to information that has been repeated to strengthen the conclusion made (such as thinking all games are either lost or won).

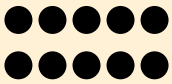
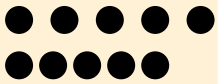
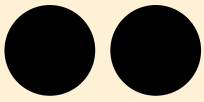
Two other abilities that link with preoperational processes are:

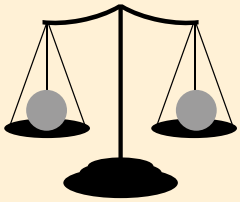
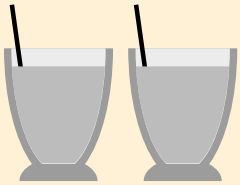
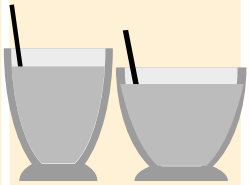
- the child's lack of understanding of the concepts of number, colour, shape and size
- the child's lack of ability to conserve (realise that two things are the same amount) in relation to number, length, liquid, mass, area, weight and volume.

These limitations are important to consider when developing programs for children and establishing appropriate expectations.

Conservation in relation to number, length, liquid, mass, area, weight and volume is difficult for a preoperational child to understand due to their tendency to think illogically. Indications that a child is unable to conserve can be gained from the way materials are presented. The following table includes examples of preoperational children not understanding that the transformed materials are equal to the original materials – even though only the appearance has changed.

Even if the change in appearance occurs while the child is watching, they will still think the quantities have adjusted due to the different appearance.

Conservation task question	Original presentation	Child's response	Transformed (change in appearance)	Child's response
Number: Is there the same number of dots in each row?		Yes		No, the top row has more.
Length: Are the sticks the same length?		Yes		No, one is longer.
Mass: Is there the same amount of clay in each ball?		Yes		No, one has more.
Area: Are each of these lawns the same size?		Yes		No, one is longer.

Conservation task question	Original presentation	Child's response	Transformed (change in appearance)	Child's response
Weight: Does each of these balls of clay weigh the same amount?		Yes		No, one weighs more.
Volume: Do the glasses have the same amount of liquid?		Yes		No, one has more.

There are many day-to-day implications for children and educators arising from these conservation ideas. Children in the preoperational stage may have difficulty understanding why they have different materials or equipment to others.

Example

Conservation of value

Tahlia, four and a half years, has five one dollar coins. You offer her a five dollar note in exchange. She does not accept this. She says, 'Five coins equal more than one note!' Being in the preoperational stage means Tahlia sees the quantity of coins as 'more' and disregards the monetary value, despite the note being equal.

Even when you offer her a 10 dollar note in exchange, Tahlia continues to value the coins by number rather than value.

Concrete operational stage

In the concrete operational stage, from approximately seven to 11 years, children are flexible, organised and logical, and have an understanding of conservation and other concepts that preoperational children don't. Their thinking becomes close to that of an adult, although they still require real examples of information to help them apply logic.

Formal operations stage

The formal operations stage is entered during adolescence. The child finds it easier to make rational judgments with or without concrete information.

Cognitive development stages span from birth to adolescence. The stages occur at approximate ages and will overlap at times. If a child has entered a stage of overlap, you may observe abilities expected in two different stages, which indicates the child's emerging skills.

Example

Overlap of cognitive stages

When Ted says his drink is smaller, Nina (five years) explains to him that it is his cup that is different and he still has the same amount of drink. Later, Nina is playing and tells Lana, an educator, that the bike is 'naughty' as it hurts her leg.

Nina displays concrete operational skills in her explanations about the cup to Ted. She displays preoperational skills in her bike comment.

Despite being in the preoperational stage, Nina shows cognitive characteristics that indicate she is progressing into the concrete operational stage.

Multiple intelligences

Howard Gardner developed a theory of multiple intelligences in 1983. To capture the full range of abilities and talents, he suggested that people have more than one intellectual capacity, and possess many intelligences that rarely operate independently. While one person may be particularly knowledgeable in a single area such as linguistics, they can also possess a range of abilities in other areas. The theory suggests that all eight intelligences are needed to function productively.

The theory involves a set of eight different strengths (intelligences) that apply to a child's development, and provide a basis for developing programs and experiences that suit their ability to learn, understand and express themselves in particular learning areas. When you recognise a child's strengths, you can provide learning and support methods that focus on their strengths and learning styles. This acknowledges each child's ability to learn and provides them with the best opportunity for development.

The eight strengths are outlined in the following table.

Strength	Focus
Verbal-linguistic intelligence	Language and words
Logical-mathematical intelligence	Numbers, logic and reasoning
Spatial-visual intelligence	Pictures and diagrams
Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence	Movements of the body and objects
Musical intelligence	Music, rhythm and pitch
Interpersonal intelligence	People, moods, desires and motivations
Intrapersonal intelligence	Understanding the self
Naturalist intelligence	Plants, animals and nature in general

Example

Using the theory of multiple intelligences with individual children

Gordon demonstrates that he learns best through spatial intelligence. Elise, the educator, wishes to extend his ability in construction, so she:

- provides pictures of buildings or construction activities
- finds a house plan and talks about it with Gordon.

Rachelle demonstrates that she learns best through linguistic intelligence. To extend her abilities in construction, Elise:

- provides books on the topic
- discusses ideas and materials with Rachelle.

Example

Using multiple intelligences with a group of children

Molly, an educator, knows that her group is interested in insects. She develops a list of activities she can use with the children to extend on their interest and aid the learning of every child in the group by catering for different kinds of intelligence. She also thinks that she might be able to find out more information about each child's strengths by seeing how they react to each of the activities.

Strength	Suitable learning experience
Verbal-linguistic intelligence	▶ Using books relating to insects ▶ Discussing insect information
Logical-mathematical intelligence	▶ Working out how insects eat and what they eat by watching them ▶ Counting how many legs insects have
Spatial-visual intelligence	▶ Looking at pictures of insect species
Bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence	▶ Moving like particular insects ▶ Touching the insects and finding out what they feel like
Musical intelligence	▶ Singing songs about insects
Interpersonal intelligence	▶ Asking others what they know about insects
Intrapersonal intelligence	▶ Talking about information the child knows about insects ▶ Finding out how the child feels about insects
Naturalist intelligence	▶ Finding out where insects live in nature ▶ Exploring and finding insects in the garden

Sociocultural theory

As mentioned in Topics 2 and 3, sociocultural theory, also known as the social constructivist learning theory, builds on Piaget's theory to include learning that is acquired through social interaction. Vygotsky provides a clear picture of how critical learning periods, or windows of opportunity, are influenced by children's social environment and community. The strategies for supporting skills are based on scaffolding or social learning, and require you to consider the zone of proximal development.

Another aspect of Vygotsky's theory, also discussed in Topic 3 in relation to emotional development, is reciprocal teaching. This provides a learning environment where open and frequent interaction occurs between the child and the educator. The educator in this model alternates leadership of the conversation with the child until the child becomes confident in this role and assumes a leadership and instructional role themselves. If children are exposed to new and more skilled activities, they will be encouraged to move forward themselves and attempt to learn new skills.

A number of core principles relate to development. The following table outlines those relevant to cognitive development and explains the link.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with cognitive development
Belonging, being and becoming	Children learn best when they feel safe and valued.	▶ When children have a sense of belonging, they feel safe to be themselves. This means that they are curious and involved, and demonstrate a sense of agency. Their ability to 'be' enables them to learn, develop and practise skills so they can demonstrate and achieve their full potential.
Sequence of development	Development progresses in a step-by-step pattern that advances from simple to complex (maturation).	▶ Object permanence – the child starts with no understanding of unseen objects and moves through stages until they realise that people and items exist when not seen.
Rate of development	Children develop at different rates.	▶ A child may remain in the preoperational stage between 18 months and seven years, but display characteristics of two stages during this time.
Neurological or brain development	Brain and spinal cord development links to the acquisition of skills.	▶ Synapses develop when new information is learnt and practice occurs.
Critical periods and scaffolding	There are times when the opportunity to learn is at its most crucial. If these times are not taken advantage of, the child may miss an important aspect of learning. Children are drawn to challenging experiences and enjoy intentional teaching.	▶ When a new skill is learnt, practice must occur in order for the skill to be consolidated. ▶ When children show agency, their interests need to be developed in order for them to remain enthusiastic and curious.
Heredity and environment, and how children use active learning	Also known as nature versus nurture, this relates to the aspects that are genetically programmed in contrast to how the environment influences development. If you provide rich environments, children actively learn from this.	▶ A child's intelligence can be increased through consistent interaction with a stimulating environment. ▶ The child's intelligence type (multiple intelligences) is genetic. ▶ Schemata (cognitive theory) are limited if the environment does not provide variety.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with cognitive development
Holistic development	All domains of development are closely related and linked.	▶ The child demonstrates an understanding of object permanence: – Psychological – the child develops bonds with primary caregivers and begins to show separation anxiety as they realise the other person exists when they cannot be seen. – Social – relationships develop with important people; children also realise that their actions can influence others (for example, if they cry, then the important person might return). – Cognition – the child is able to understand that objects and people exist even if unseen.
Play as learning	Play is used by children to learn.	▶ Cognitive skills develop in: – water play – pouring measuring, floating, sinking, etc. – construction play – balancing, counting, size, shape, colour, number, etc.
Individualised learning	Children learn and demonstrate what they know in different ways.	▶ Children learn in different ways based on their learning style. They may prefer to listen to or watch how things work. ▶ Some children are keen to investigate; others need encouragement. ▶ Some children will talk about and demonstrate their knowledge and skills; others will demonstrate this only if asked.

Milestones of cognitive development

Children will use their cognitive skills at different levels according to their age. You will need to approach their learning differently depending on their needs and stage of development. Some characteristic needs of children at each stage are shown in the following table.

Age group	Examples of needs
Infants	▶ Prompt and consistent responses from educators ▶ Routines that provide sensory experiences ▶ Toys that stimulate all the senses, including touching, looking, listening, smelling and tasting ▶ Opportunities to perceive similarities and differences
Toddlers	▶ Equipment to explore concepts of size, shape, number, volume, weight, temperature, time and all the senses ▶ Songs, rhymes and stories to aid the development of memory ▶ Opportunities to help with household duties ▶ Opportunities to explore the man-made and natural environments
Preschoolers	▶ Time to explore ▶ Opportunities to interact with people and objects so they can gain an understanding of themselves, others and the world around them ▶ A variety of materials and resources ▶ To be alerted to aspects of the environment they may have overlooked ▶ Respectful responses to their reasoning

Opportunities to extend children's knowledge of the world may include:

- excursions/incursions
- maps, posters, music and books
- walks in the local area
- visitors/guest speakers
- activities in the local community.

A guide to some of the most common cognitive development milestones is provided in section 4B.

Individual cognitive development

Cognitive development is influenced by a range of factors. Some of these factors are outlined in the following table.

Factor	Influence on cognitive development
Age	Children progress through cognitive stages sequentially. Their understanding increases as their brains develop and they are able to understand more complex concepts. Children aged three to five often ask 'Why' questions.
Gender	Traditionally boys have been known to show more interest in science, mathematics and technology. This usually occurs based on the types of activities they are presented with and drawn to. You can alter experiences to make them more attractive to both genders; for example, adding the doll house to the train set or the uniforms to the home corner. You should offer experiences equally to children of all genders.

Factor	Influence on cognitive development
Family background, beliefs and cultural practices	Family interest or accessibility to a diverse range of concepts and interests can influence the child's understanding of the world and what it has to offer. This may influence the child's opportunities for learning. In some families, children are expected to attain high levels of educational achievement. This may lead to different expectations about play and enjoyment, attitudes to learning and teaching methods. Some parents choose to ignore 'Why' questions from their children, which restricts learning opportunities.
Ability	Genetic level of intelligence influences the child's ability. The environment adds to their capabilities; however, some limitations may occur due to developmental challenges, such as how well a child understands concepts or whether a material or resource is accessible. Some children may be naturally higher in intelligence and be able to ask questions and calculate information in a way that builds their understanding and interest.
Temperament	Children with particular temperaments may be more likely to participate in activities that are social rather than cognitive based. Other temperaments may find cognitive experiences challenging or frustrating.
Interests	Some children are more drawn than others to activities that involve investigation, exploration and experimentation. Some children question constantly.
Peer groups	Peers learn from each other in play, as information is shared. Children may add their own cognitive skills and knowledge to the play environment, asking questions or relating their understanding to others.

Engagement and attention span

Attention is the ability to focus on particular activities or information for a significant amount of time. Attention is important for cognition and cognitive processes such as memory. The ability to maintain attention is needed to promote the thought processes that are necessary for learning to occur. When you engage children in an activity, you are stimulating them and using their abilities to concentrate or maintain attention.

It is important that children continue activities and experiences for the length of time that they are interested. By strengthening their attention span, you provide them with a greater ability to be engaged and learn. Engagement and attention span are closely linked and, although attention span is a cognitive skill, the manner in which you develop this skill is derived from the child's interests and current skills. Children will pay attention to an activity or experience that interests them for much longer than one that does not interest them.

Attention span is particularly evident among children with developmental needs such as attention deficit disorder (ADD). Children with this disorder display qualities such as poor self-control and difficulty maintaining attention.

The main theories that relate to attention span are presented in the following table.

Theory	How it relates to attention span
Brain development	Attention span and the ability to become engaged and involved in an experience are brain development outcomes. Synapses need to become strong in the area of interest for this to occur, as does the ability to focus thought and ignore other stimulation.
Cognitive theory (Piaget)	Attention span forms a large part of this constructivist theory as thinking, problem-solving and exploration each need the child to focus and use learnt strategies. In the sensorimotor stage, attention is achieved through interest and exploration. The child requires time to use their senses, and support to explore materials more than once. In the preoperational stage, imagination and symbolic thought has emerged, which allows the child to use thought as a companion to their activity or as the activity itself.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	A child's emerging skills and the scaffolding they are provided with are linked together by attention span. The child must concentrate for some time on the scaffolding in order to benefit from it. This is also true for reciprocal learning, as attention is required between the child and adult or another child to ensure the greatest benefit from the opportunity.
Multiple intelligences (Gardner)	Attention span can be developed by approaching interests and skills via the appropriate intelligence. The child will respond more readily and continue the activity with more interest.

Example

Extending a child's attention span

Leonard's attention span at group time is very low. He becomes agitated and often leaves the group within five minutes.

His educator uses his interest in trains to deliver a group experience. She reads a story about a train and sings a train song. At the end of the group experience, she asks the children questions that will interest Leonard. She asks what the children know about trains and includes specific details that Leonard will know such as, 'What is the name of the part where the smoke comes from?' and 'What powers the steam train?'

At the next group time, Leonard continues full participation for more than five minutes without interruption.

Monitoring cognitive skills

A variety of recording methods can be used to collect information about a child's cognitive development. Skills may include:

- reasoning
- developing understanding and explanations
- critical thinking
- use of mathematical concepts
- problem-solving
- inventing and discovering
- planning.

Development occurs during a range of different times over the day, so records may be taken during:

- formally organised activities
- unplanned or spontaneous interactions
- group discussions and meetings
- travelling times
- care routines
- excursions
- setting up
- sociodramatic play
- construction play
- art and craft activities.

To ensure your records contain useful information about each child, base them on one or more of the following:

- developmental milestones or stages (needs and abilities)
- approaches or theories
- cultural capital
- interests.

Assessing cognitive skills

The steps for assessing children's progress toward the EYLF outcomes were set out in Topic 1. These steps can be used to help assess the cognitive skills and development of the child. They include:

1. Gathering and recording information about the child
2. Using the EYLF to identify which of the five outcomes your observation record links to
3. Identifying a specific sub-outcome of the EYLF
4. Clarifying your selection by referring to the evidence examples that are provided for the identified EYLF outcome

EYLF outcomes most commonly related to cognitive skills and development include the following:

- Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners:
  - Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
  - Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
  - Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
- Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators
  - Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work
  - Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking

Practice task 10

1. Complete a table similar to the following to monitor a four-year-old child's cognitive development.

Cognitive skill	Comments	Date recorded as achieved
Sorts objects by colour		
Completes puzzles with 10 pieces		
Counts to 10		
Follows a three-part instruction		

2. Explain how each of the **four** skills in the table can be influenced by the following:
   a. Social development

   b. Psychological development

   c. Brain development (nature versus nurture)

3. Link each of the **four** skills in the table to an outcome in the EYLF.

4B Constructing, sorting and comparing

Children aged around two to five years become interested in constructing, sorting and comparing. During activities involving these concepts, children see the world differently as each layer of understanding unfolds. Cognitive theory describes these developments through the sensorimotor and preoperational stages. EYLF outcomes, including the sub-outcomes, emphasise the importance of these abilities. For example:

- Outcome 4 sub-outcome: Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- Outcome 5 sub-outcome: Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
- Outcome 5 sub-outcome: Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work

Exploring concepts through play

A concept is a thought or idea that can be developed through:

- encouraging active exploration, experimentation and learning
- introducing new ideas and experiences via formal, informal, planned and spontaneous experiences
- encouraging program input from children, staff, parents and the community
- encouraging problem-solving and curiosity.

Milestones for concept development that children reach through exploring various activities during play are outlined in the following table.

Age	Milestone	Resource and activity examples
0–6 months	▶ Can distinguish an object from a picture ▶ Imitates facial gestures ▶ Explores the world with their hands and mouth ▶ Recognises that objects remain the same shape and size even if distant ▶ Recognises close family members ▶ Shows interest in what is going on close by	▶ Materials that are easy to grasp and safe to suck ▶ Imitation games such as pulling faces ▶ Talking about what is happening ▶ Placing interesting objects, such as hanging mobiles, where the infant can see them

Age	Milestone	Resource and activity examples
6–12 months	▶ Correctly identifies objects if the name of the object is spoken ▶ Explores objects through physical activity; for example, shaking, dropping or throwing ▶ May attempt to use objects in an appropriate way; for example, talking on a telephone	▶ Calling objects by name ▶ Materials that are sturdy ▶ Simple pretend play objects; for example, telephones, cars and dolls
1–2 years	▶ Recognises own facial features ▶ Acquires the notion of object permanence ▶ Begins to sort shapes and colours	▶ Mirrors ▶ Photographs of familiar faces ▶ Simple sorting games
2–3 years	▶ Problem-solving skills increase ▶ Able to complete a four-piece puzzle ▶ Participates in make-believe play ▶ Sorts by shape and colour	▶ Talking through simple problems ▶ Simple puzzles ▶ Home corner ▶ Sorting games or activities
3–4 years	▶ Capable of verbalising some numbers ▶ Grasps concepts such as same and different ▶ Names some colours ▶ Follows instructions with up to three commands ▶ Realises that people have differing views ▶ Developing a sense of time ▶ Memory allows them to recall stories ▶ Begins to draw a person with a head, body, arms, legs and features such as eyes, nose and mouth ▶ Can recognise letters, but is not necessarily reading yet	▶ Counting and colour activities that use concrete materials ▶ Discussing similarities and differences ▶ Giving simple directions ▶ Discussing time through links with routines ▶ Sharing stories ▶ Art with crayons, paper, pencils and paint ▶ Exposure to words

Once children have developed an understanding of concepts, these can be extended and used in different ways to stimulate curiosity and learning. Concept development can be further stimulated by:

- being enthusiastic
- creating an interesting environment
- being safe, but allowing for exploration

- using your direct environment to explore; for example, listening to the wind or rain, finding out what lives in the yard, watching clouds and playing in sand or mud
- using materials that engage the senses
- allowing children to find out how things work through experimentation
- responding to individual interests
- using a problem-solving approach
- including children in community activities
- encouraging collections.

Using construction to learn

The interest children have in construction and taking things apart starts early in life. An infant shows interest in stacking cups and building towers, spends time putting things in and taking things out, and checks that objects are still in place over and over again. They attempt to find new materials and move the old ones to new places, experimenting with sensorimotor development of object permanence.

For older children, construction may be as simple as building structures using blocks, boxes or construction sets, or as complicated as taking apart and rebuilding appliances and cars.

Taking apart and constructing is an excellent method for answering 'why' questions. Children who ask 'why' questions are trying to make sense of the world and, by providing concrete materials for them to examine, they will find out about things in their own way at their own pace.

The child will be learning:

- cognitively – about size, shape, weight, length and other concepts, including memorising how things come apart and go back together
- physically – how to manage screws, clips and knobs
- socially through communication – when asking questions, explaining to others what they know and sharing their knowledge of new names for items
- creatively – as they try to imagine how things work
- emotionally and psychologically – as they gain skills and knowledge, receive feedback and achieve success.

There are many concepts that are difficult to explain, so being involved in practical activities can be a good way to learn. Using real-life examples in learning is exciting for children. Children use the things they understand to make up stories of how things work. Intentional teaching then explains what cannot be seen. You could conduct research activities if there are concepts that are beyond the children's abilities or the possibilities of what can be done in your environment.

With adult support, children can see how cars, motorcycles, lawn mowers and other machinery work. This is a great activity to encourage parent participation. Fixing broken appliances can be a fun and useful activity for older children.

You may need parent permission before you begin projects such as deconstruction. The children need to be aware that they need your permission before taking things apart; the items must be old or discarded and the child must have an adult with them at all times. Using tools is an excellent life skill for children to learn.

To challenge children's thinking, you could:

- ask them to draw what they might find inside the item prior to taking it apart
- take the item apart and see if the children can guess what it is (take a photograph first so that you can show the children what it originally looked like)
- take photographs at various stages so children can understand sequence and refer back to the photographs to put the item back together.

Creating patterns, sorting and comparing

Cognitive theory describes how making patterns, sorting and comparing are important activities for preoperational children. At this stage, these are emerging concepts and you can scaffold children's skills by providing activities to consolidate and further develop ideas. Infants and toddlers start to sort when you involve them in pack-up times; they might put toys of a similar type together or you could suggest that they put all the blocks in one place.

Children cannot sort by more than one characteristic until later in their preoperational stage. For example, when completing a puzzle, a child can look at the shapes of the pieces or the colour of the pieces, but looking at both at once can be challenging.

The patterns you see and the sorting and comparing you do each day as part of your normal routine supports a major part of your activities. You might sort laundry in a variety of ways, organise a desk, compare items in a shop or set up a table for an art experience. Sorting, comparing and recognising patterns are lifelong skills.

Open-ended materials are excellent for creating patterns and practising sorting and comparing. You can also make games that employ these concepts. Comparing and sorting are useful for developing cognitive skills such as learning about similarities and differences.

Practice task 11

1. Plan and provide an experience for children in each of the following areas. Describe the experience you provided.
   a. Exploration of concepts through play

b. Taking apart and constructing

c. Creating patterns, sorting and comparing

2. Link a cognitive theory, EYLF outcome or a core principle to each of the experiences you described.

4C Exploring and experimenting

When you engage children in exploring and experimenting, they become engrossed in what they are doing and are led into an experience that may bring out new skills and knowledge.

Children are more likely to be engaged in activities that are based on their interests and strengths. They are also more likely to become engaged when they have participated in developing the plan of activities and/or when they are curious. Curiosity is related to natural inquisitive behaviours such as exploration, investigation and learning.

The EYLF includes curiosity in Outcome 4 sub-outcome: Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.

Curiosity is important as it:

- makes the mind active rather than passive
- makes someone observant of new ideas
- opens up new possibilities and ideas
- enables excitement.

You can demonstrate and encourage curiosity by:

- keeping an open mind – be ready to see things from other points of view, especially the child's
- not taking things for granted – start from scratch; approach each idea as though it is the first time you have thought about this point and you are discovering it again
- asking questions – open questions encourage communication, interest and enthusiasm; the questions may be about the activity or the learning experience
- not labelling things as boring – use positive attitudes
- seeing learning as fun – be confident
- showing interest in a variety of topics and ideas.

Curiosity is significant when initiating a new activity or experience; it may encourage participation and build on existing knowledge, skills and interests.

The theories that relate to exploring and experimenting as learning strategies are shown in the following table.

Theory	How it relates to exploration and experimentation
Brain development	The brain is being developed through the cycle of exploring, understanding and solving problems. The skills learnt through these actions enable the child to develop strong synapses and so increase their ability to build on existing knowledge, skills and interests. They also encourage a positive attitude toward trying new things.
Cognitive theory (Piaget)	A child in the sensorimotor stage is led strongly by the need to explore using the senses. There are many ideas they have not yet tried or experienced, so introducing age-appropriate ideas is vital. A child in the preoperational stage is exploring the environment in a variety of ways. They use their logical and illogical thought to understand what they explore. They are inspired by curiosity and explore many areas, so are able to identify a number of strong interests that shape their personality.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	A child has many opportunities to explore the world around them. The art of understanding and solving problems forms part of this world of opportunities, and your planned and spontaneous input provides modelling and stimulation.
Multiple intelligences (Gardner)	When children are approached with their 'intelligence' in mind, they will be better able to develop knowledge, extend skills and develop interests.

Investigating mathematics, science and technology

Mathematic, scientific and technological experiences are valuable parts of the early childhood program and are enjoyed by children. Take a positive and confident approach and reflect this in your presentation of experiences.

Most children find scientific, mathematic and technological learning experiences intriguing and enjoyable. Your outlook should reflect interest and confidence; a nervous or unsure approach can affect the child's curiosity and learning. Science, mathematics and technology are covered in the EYLF within the following sub-outcomes:

- Outcome 4 sub-outcome: Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- Outcome 5 sub-outcome: Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

The following are some things you can do to present science, maths and technology experiences in a fun and valuable way:

- Identify the use of science, maths and technology experiences. When you are counting say, 'Look, we are doing maths!' If you are watching an insect, comment, 'Wow, this is science, isn't it interesting!' The children can begin to link the experience to the enjoyment they are having.
- Be ready for questions you don't know the answer to. When you don't have an answer, you can show the children that investigation is important and that nobody needs to know everything. This is a perfect opportunity to investigate together – get

some books from the library or search on the internet to show children how they can find out more. In some cases, even if you know an answer you can encourage children to find out for themselves to extend their abilities.

The following table provides some examples of how sand play links with maths, science and technology activities.

Experience	Examples		
	Maths	Science	Technology
Sandpit with spades, buckets, cars and large pebbles	▶ Counting the pebbles or cars ▶ Working out how many cars or pebbles each child should have ▶ Creating an idea and working out how much space is needed and where each thing will go	▶ Thinking about the properties of sand, such as working out how to push toys through the sand ▶ Finding out what sand is made of	▶ Using the bucket to make a sandcastle ▶ Using a spade to fill a bucket or dig a hole

Cultural influences

Cultural priorities such as education, play, language, rituals and religious beliefs all affect the way you present your program, how you communicate to others and what priorities you place on various interaction and programming aspects. The same cultural priorities also affect the types of play and interaction that children engage in, and the types of things they notice. Some things that you can do to encourage children to observe what is happening around them include:

- highlighting differences in opinion, ideas and goals, and encouraging children to explore these – discuss these things as they arise by saying, 'Isn't it interesting that you both have different ideas?'
- encouraging positive and effective interactions between children by modelling and guiding
- setting up situations where children share skills and knowledge, or support each other to achieve a goal.

In your efforts to present stimulating experiences, you must also consider the impact of cultural capital and its influence on a child's attitudes and application of different concepts. In relation to scientific, mathematic and technological activities and experiences, children will demonstrate different abilities and values based on home experiences.

Some examples include:

- the types of games they play
- toys they possess or enjoy
- responsibilities they have at home
- events and celebrations they participate in or are exposed to
- how they are involved in family decision-making
- access to a computer or electronic games.

Encouraging children to view the world around them

At times, children will express views spontaneously; other times these will be planned discussions where you ask for views or have children share their ideas.

When encouraging children to view the world around them, active listening and open questioning are important aspects of clear communication and respectful acknowledgment.

Aspect	Explanation	Examples
Active listening	▶ Requires you to acknowledge, encourage, clarify, restate and reflect what you hear to allow the child to identify that their message is being received by you appropriately. ▶ Active listening uses body language and verbal communication.	▶ Body language through facing the child, using eye contact and using facial expressions that match the message show that you are open to communication ▶ Verbal communication through short responses that either reflect what you hear ('So you mean …'), demonstrate you are listening ('Okay, I see') and acknowledge feelings ('You seem angry')
Questioning	▶ Closed questions encourage a one-word answer that does not reveal details. ▶ Open questions encourage an explanation or some description, details or views.	▶ Closed questions are useful for testing your understanding of another person's discussion, concluding a discussion or making a decision, e.g. 'Did you notice that?' ▶ Open questions are useful for developing conversation and finding out information, e.g. 'What did you think of that?'

Risk-taking as a learning process

Risk-taking occurs when a child is learning to sit, stand, walk, jump, hop, climb or balance. Almost every milestone in every area of development has an element of risk. This risk may be physical (someone might get hurt) or emotional (someone might be embarrassed, ridiculed or punished).

When it comes to cognitive development, risk-taking in learning relates to the chances children take in their thinking, reasoning, hypothesising and experimenting. Children need to be encouraged to try new ideas and practices; these involve taking a risk, as the idea or practice may not be successful. Children who are not confident taking a risk to ask a question or explore an answer will not be able to work out their ideas.

For example, inquiry-based learning requires an environment that supports risk-taking in learning. Through inquiry-based learning, children explore, experiment and investigate. Children are encouraged to ask questions and make mistakes; mistakes are valued as natural learning experiences.

To facilitate learning environments where children feel comfortable taking risks, you need to:

- encourage children to ask questions and try new ideas and ways of doing things
- model acceptance and value unusual ideas
- plan for open-ended experiences and activities
- provide for inquiry learning; that is, exploring, experimenting, testing and investigating
- encourage spontaneity and advise children that mistakes are opportunities to learn
- provide appropriate levels of challenge
- encourage guesswork and hypothesising (speculating on what they think might happen)
- avoid labelling ideas as 'right' or 'wrong' when children are involved in discussions.

Mathematics

Maths applies when you ask questions such as:

- How many?
- How big?
- How long?
- What fits?
- When?

Maths focuses on three specific areas, outlined in the following information.

Number

- Counting
- Facts about numbers
- Operations, such as addition and subtraction

Measurement

- Length
- Money
- Time
- Temperature
- Mass
- Volume and capacity
- Area

Space

- Dimensions
- Position in relation to other objects

Science attitudes, processes and concepts

Science is about exploring, studying and attempting to understand the world around you. Science applies when you ask questions such as:

- What is that?
- What can that do?
- What happens when ...?
- How does that work?
- Why does that happen?

Developing scientific skills and understanding requires the following:

- an attitude of curiosity and determination
- development of cognitive skills necessary for the process
- learning new concepts about the world.

A science experiment does not need to be an organised scientific activity; it may be a simple 'finding out' exercise. A simple experiment may include:

- using sensory exploration to find out about an object
- trying things out
- working out what happens.

Some common, simple experiments include:

- the changes that occur to play dough when it is left out, dampened or has flour added to it
- how water moves in the trough and what happens if you add things to it
- how puddles form
- how shadows move
- what happens when you spill something.

You can see from this list that these simple experiments may occur by accident or be engineered as part of a plan. Either way, their main outcome is learning what happens from the experience. Analysis and lengthy explanations are unnecessary.

Be prepared that things may not go as planned. This is part of how experiments work, and it is valuable for children to see that things don't always work as planned and think about why this was the case. You may want to talk about how interesting it was that the experiment was different to what you expected or you could try the experiment again. If an experiment doesn't go as planned, this is a good opportunity to model risk-taking and mistakes as part of the learning process.

Thinking, reasoning and hypothesising

Thinking, reasoning and hypothesising are each ways to explore and make sense of the world, as the following explains:

- Thinking – the processes of using your mind to come up with ideas, remember, develop an opinion or make a decision.
- Reasoning – the ability to think logically.
- Hypothesising – the process of guessing how or why something will occur.

Instead of telling children the answers to questions, encourage them to use thinking, reasoning and hypothesising, and then experiment to reach a solution. You can start the discussion or follow on from a child's lead.

Example

Experimenting

Dawn asks the children if they know what plants need for healthy growth. The children think about the question and then hypothesise and offer suggestions. The children come up with different suggestions relating to light, water and soil. They all agree that the plants need soil as that is how they come from the nursery. Together they decide to experiment in order to find out the answer. They set up the following experiments with seedlings:

- One sits in the sun, but is given no water.
- One is given water, but sits in a dark cupboard.
- Another plant is given water and sunlight.

Dawn suggests they place another seedling in a bottle of water so they can see its roots without soil. The children watch and wait to see the outcome. When the result identifies that the plants need water, soil and light, Dawn implements a range of further experiences about growing plants and seeds.

Exploring the natural environment

Environmental experiences include finding out about how people interact with the environment. Ultimately, you are seeking to build knowledge and skill so children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment (EYLF Outcome 2). Consider the following aspects of children's age and stage of development when implementing environmental experiences:

- Infants participate through observation and exploration.
- Toddlers participate by being introduced to natural materials from the local environment and to a range of people in the community.
- Preschoolers participate by exploring the local environment, talking to visitors and going on excursions.

Some common environmental activities you can easily include involve:

- nature and life science:
  - watching insects
  - taking notice of the garden
  - planting seeds or plants
  - identifying similarities and differences in peers
- environmental science:
  - recycling materials
  - saving water
  - sun safety
  - where creatures live
  - weather watching
  - seasons
  - planting trees
  - what people, insects and animals need to stay alive.

Sustainability

The word sustainability is commonly used in environmental education to explain the need to manage current world resources so that future generations are not affected. You should attempt to reduce, recycle and reuse resources in your work wherever possible. The impact of environmental sustainability relates to your work in the following ways:

- Waste disposal practices: paper/plastic/metal recycling, composting and worm farms
- Water conservation practices: installing water-saving devices and water tanks, monitored and timed water use and using grey water
- Maintenance and cleaning practices: using environmentally friendly cleaning products
- Using waste, natural and recycled materials in programs

Technology

Technology links closely with science. Science is about discovering things (concepts), and technology is about applying the knowledge; for example:

- Science is exploring and finding out about how magnets work.
- Technology is using magnets to help achieve things like sticking your photo on the fridge.

Technology is something that children see as part of their everyday existence. Interactions with technology might include the use of electronic and digital devices, as well as activities such as cutting with scissors, painting with brushes, building a structure using staplers and using glue guns for beading material.

Examples of activities involving children using technology include:

- art: using staplers, masking tape, pieces from broken radios or paint programs on the computer
- cooking: using frypans, beaters, blenders, egg rings, ovens or utensils
- making movies
- designing and building vehicles using materials such as LEGO and Mobilo
- creating circuits using simple electronic kits
- making websites
- taking photos of their own work for educators' learning stories.

Practice task 12

1. Plan a group discussion. The discussion should encourage the children to think, reason and hypothesise, taking risks to share their understanding. Include the age of the children participating.

2. Plan an experiment or exploration of the discussion topic.

3. Briefly describe one scientific, one mathematic and one technological experience that could support the children's learning.

4. Link an EYLF principle, a core principle or a theory to each experience you listed.

5. Choose one of the experiences and show how it is of value to the children's social, physical and psychological development.

4D Using play to experience consequences

There are two main cognitive areas that relate to experiencing the consequences of choices, actions and ideas during play:

- the manner in which choices, actions and ideas result in feelings
- consequences resulting from problem-solving and decision-making.

Cognitive development links very closely with all other areas of development. Cognitive skills allow children to think about what they are doing, link what has occurred to a result or consequence, and communicate their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and additional ideas.

Consequences can be natural; that is, a natural result of something that happens. Other consequences can be logical, positive or negative.

Consequences and feelings

The ideas that children express often relate to their feelings. Feelings are the consequence or outcome of occurrences and/or interactions. Once children are old enough, it is useful for them to start labelling these feelings so that they become familiar with them and consider how they have occurred. This means that they will be identifying what the emotional consequence of behaviour or another action feels like. If children gain an in-depth knowledge of their feelings, they will be able to recognise these sooner and manage them appropriately. You can also help them to see that actions and choices create consequential feelings by reminding them; for example, by asking, 'Miguel, how does it feel to achieve that?' or 'How does it feel when your idea works differently to what you expect?'

Some common feelings that you may encounter in children are described in the following table.

Common feelings	Explanation
Excitement	This may be the consequence of positive outcomes such as an experiment working, a hypothesis being proven or a reconstruction being successful. Many young children lose control of this positive emotion and can become overexcited or extremely reactive.
Anger	Each child will express anger differently and sometimes the appropriate expression is difficult to identify. Nonetheless, children need to be aware that anger must be expressed in a way that does not hurt others or the environment. Children may feel anger if others interfere with their ideas or a hypothesis turns out to be incorrect.

Common feelings	Explanation
Frustration	This is a difficult feeling for children to identify. Often it has a very similar response to anger. Children need to recognise when they feel anger and understand why, as the origin will most likely assist in redirection of the frustration. Frustration may occur if the child cannot come up with a hypothesis they agree with, if the experiment or deconstruction activity is beyond their ability, or if their materials or resources are not suitable.

Managing feelings

Strategies for managing feelings relate to cognitive ability. Some strategies you can help children use and how these link to a child's cognitive skills are outlined in the following table.

Strategy	Example	Cognitive relationship
Acknowledge feelings by reflecting what you think they are.	'You seem very frustrated.'	▶ Language is used; this is a skill that requires symbolic thought. ▶ The child needs to develop understanding of the feeling and outcome.
Discuss how the child feels.	'Tell me how it feels to be so frustrated.'	▶ The child must consider the feelings and problem-solve, then make a decision on what they really feel. ▶ Various feelings must be identified and recognised.
Link the feeling to the event if appropriate.	'Tell me why you feel this way.'	▶ This is a challenge to encourage logical thought; there is not always a logical explanation.
Use the event to put the feeling into context.	'If the puzzle makes you feel this way, maybe this is not the right puzzle for you right now. Why don't you try a different one?'	▶ Decision-making and problem-solving skills are used.
Redirect inappropriate actions (for example, hurting others or damaging the environment) to a more appropriate one.	'It is okay to feel frustrated, but not to throw the puzzle. When you feel frustrated, maybe you need to take a break or come and tell me.'	▶ The child alters usual behaviour using new information. ▶ The child uses language or thoughts in times of distraction. ▶ New ideas need to be understood, implemented and practised.

Theories relating to consequences and feelings

Theories that relate to consequences and feelings are outlined in the following table.

Theory	How it relates to feelings as a consequence
Brain development	Brain development involves: ▶ understanding feelings ▶ recognising feelings ▶ developing appropriate understanding and responses to feelings.
Cognitive theory (Piaget)	The sensorimotor child has an understanding of what is immediate in their environment. They are not able to make informed choices or express considered ideas. They may be confused by natural consequences. This shows that the child should be provided with support and be assisted in situations where consequences may occur to ensure the connections are made. The preoperational child demonstrates that logic is not always understood clearly. The child's choices, actions and ideas may evolve from this lack of logic, so natural consequences may either be unexpected or linked incorrectly. On the other hand, they are able to make informed choices and actions, and their ideas can be considered. This shows that the child should be supported in considering natural and logical consequences and developing critical thinking skills.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	Children are seen as worthy of being listened to, so their views are important to the whole program, creating a child-centred environment. Children are given time to express themselves. This includes time to think about their ideas and views and then to express them in ways they feel are appropriate; for example, through art, craft, discussion or emotional reactions. The social and cultural aspects of this theory support the involvement of children in the investigation of natural and logical consequences, as these relate to how the world operates and allow the child to learn from their environment and those around them.

Consequences and problem-solving

A child who has the opportunity to practise and explore aspects of cognitive development will be able to solve problems and make sense of the world around them. Some cognitive processes children should have the opportunity to practise are outlined in the following table.

Logical thinking	Logical thinking is a learnt mental process where reasoning allows a conclusion to be reached. To think logically, the child must be able to collect ideas, facts and possible consequences and solutions relating to a problem and then link them sequentially to enable problem-solving. Logical thinking skills allow children to see themselves as capable and competent; instead of thinking, 'I don't know', they think, 'Let me work it out'. In early childhood, children need support to ensure logical thinking occurs.

Concentration	Concentration requires focus of attention. This focus consists of two parts – the will to focus and the skill to focus. Concentration allows the child to receive necessary information; concentration is developed more effectively if the child has an interest in the topic being explored or experienced.
Perception	Perception is about using the senses and then understanding what they are telling you. The more experience a child has of the world, the greater their ability to link what they see, hear, taste, smell and touch to things they know about.
Memory	Memory is broken into a number of areas: ▶ Receptive memory relates to the skill of recognising things later; for example, shapes, sounds, letters and faces. ▶ Sequential memory relates to the order of things. This assists in speaking, reading and mathematics, as sequences or patterns occur. ▶ Rote memory refers to the ability to learn from repetition rather than understanding. It also links to the ability to recall information. ▶ Short-term memory refers to remembering occurrences from a few seconds or minutes ago; for example, a new person's name. ▶ Long-term memory refers to memory of things from the past.

Problem-solving and thinking skills are important in early childhood due to the brain development that occurs during this period. Young children's brains form synapses based on the skills that are used and, as mentioned previously, these connections strengthen the more the skill is used.

Your attitude toward children and how they learn has a strong influence on how successfully you plan and provide opportunities for exploring, understanding and solving problems in the environment. You need to provide plans that allow children to think and solve problems, hypothesise and identify possible consequences.

The following table illustrates the outcomes of some problem-solving strategies based on beliefs you may have.

Educator strategies and/or beliefs	Consequence
Negative	
▶ I solve the children's problems for them. ▶ I think that things should occur the way I want them to. ▶ I don't think the children are capable of solving their own problems.	▶ Children rely on you to solve problems. ▶ Children use inappropriate solutions when you are not present. ▶ Children have reduced social, emotional and cognitive development opportunities.

Educator strategies and/or beliefs	Consequence
Positive	
▶ I should support problem-solving and provide strategies when children need them. ▶ Children are capable of solving problems. ▶ I think there are many ways events and issues can occur or be solved.	▶ Children attempt problem-solving themselves. ▶ Children use appropriate solutions when unsupervised. ▶ Children have increased social, emotional and cognitive development opportunities.

You can promote activities to children that encourage brain activity by:

- providing environments with lots of conversation and stimulation
- recognising problems
- clarifying goals
- planning strategies
- asking open-ended questions
- answering questions and finding solutions
- providing open-ended materials
- scaffolding emerging skills
- using everyday events to explore the world
- supporting exploration
- talking about routines and choices
- supporting parents to provide learning environments at home.

Problem-solving in play

There are many benefits to a problem-solving approach to play. Research has shown that in a problem-solving environment, children learn to appreciate the ideas and points of view of others sooner, gain new knowledge and develop greater ideas and skills due to this modelling from others. This means they learn that the consequences of working with others are positive and that it leads them to greater learning.

A problem-solving approach to play can be achieved by:

- planning activities where children have a shared goal
- ensuring that the goal is based on the interests of the children
- making it possible for children to achieve their goal through their own actions
- making the results of an activity visible and immediate by acknowledging the consequences of the problem-solving approach.

Example

Providing problem-solving opportunities in play

Ashleigh, an educator, has observed Tim and Robbie playing for long periods in the block area, and considers block play to be an interest for these children.

To encourage a problem-solving approach and help the boys see that a consequence of working together would be creating a greater outcome, she sets up the block play and adds animals and tractors. She then places posters of farms on the wall in the block space, which she moves to the bark area outdoors.

To ensure the problem-solving approach goes to plan, she:

- is present in the block area when Tim and Robbie arrive, and discusses the area, assisting them to talk together and identify what they would like to achieve – they set a goal
- observes Tim's and Robbie's reactions to the experience to ensure they are both interested in the activity and the goal
- ensures that any additional materials are provided and assists Tim and Robbie to talk about new ideas and how to solve issues as the goal is being achieved
- discusses the children's progress, takes a photo of their work and encourages others to have a look
- encourages Tim and Robbie to stand back and look at their progress.

Tim and Robbie set a goal to create a farm. During the time spent achieving this goal, they set other objectives. They:

- build a farm house
- make fences
- make a barn
- make a road to the farm
- clear areas for animals
- collect food for animals
- use LEGO to make a tractor and a four-wheel drive
- create a duck pond using a tub.

Upon completion of their work, Ashleigh asks them how it feels to have worked together and how different the outcome is because of this collaboration.

Cognitive theories and problem-solving

Problem-solving and thinking about consequences is not just about solving issues or negotiating – it also relates to answering questions and investigating. For example, 'What are the qualities of this object?' or 'What will happen if I ...?' and 'How will I find out about ...?'

The cognitive theories that relate to encouraging children to solve problems in play are outlined in the following table.

Theory	How it relates to children's problem-solving
Brain development	The brain is being developed through this cycle of exploring, understanding and solving problems. The skills learnt through these actions enable the child to develop strong synapses and so increase their ability to be independent and autonomous. They also encourage a positive attitude toward trying new things.

Theory	How it relates to children's problem-solving
Cognitive theory (Piaget)	A child in the sensorimotor stage is led strongly by the need to explore using the senses. A child in the preoperational stage is exploring the environment in a variety of ways. They use their logical and illogical thinking to understand what they explore. At times, their thought processes enable them to see issues clearly; other times they are confused or misdirected by their reasoning.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	Children have many opportunities to explore the world around them. The art of understanding and solving problems forms part of this world of opportunities, as peers and others provide their input and modelling, agree or disagree and offer new considerations.
Multiple intelligences (Gardner)	When children are approached with their intelligence in mind, they are able to explore, understand and solve problems using this strength. The same outcome can be achieved using all intelligences as building blocks.

Encouraging problem-solving

To ensure the problem-solving in play occurs in a cooperative way that encourages children to think about consequences, your interactions must be encouraging and make suggestions rather than provide directions or answers. This can be achieved by doing the following:

- Encourage children to interact with each other – introduce activities in open-ended ways so children feel important and are encouraged to have their own ideas.
- Help children clarify or adapt their shared goals – to successfully make a decision, all participants need to have the same or a similar goal. Help them to talk about what they want to achieve.
- Involve children who are unlikely to initiate – it is critical that you support everyone's involvement; quieter children are less likely to speak up and state their ideas.
- Avoid constantly demonstrating or solving problems for the children – allow children to think about their options and consider all possible outcomes.

Children of different ages benefit from age-appropriate approaches to problem-solving:

- Infants need opportunities to explore cause and effect.
- Toddlers need equipment such as spades, spoons, buckets and baskets to explore the environment.
- Preschoolers need time to investigate a topic that interests them; for example, how water taps work.
- All children need the opportunity to practise trial and error.

Practice task 13

1. For each of the examples below, identify a positive and negative consequence, and explain what you would do to ensure the child experiences the consequence in an appropriate way.
   a. Radja (four years) finds a small ball of play dough on the floor. He is about to drop it into a puddle outside.

   b. Dean (one year) is holding a spoon and can reach a bowl of cereal. He uses his free hand to grab at the cereal in the bowl.

2. Identify an EYLF outcome, theory or core principle that relates to each of these examples.

Summary

- Cognitive development is about how the brain works, develops and makes sense of information.
- Children use cognitive skills at different levels according to their age and stage of development. These skills can be assessed and monitored by using a milestone checklist.
- Constructing and deconstructing are strategies for learning. The interest children have in construction and taking things apart begins early in life.
- When you engage children in experiences involving exploring and experimenting, you are providing challenging activities that are open-ended and stimulate inquiry and risk-taking.
- Activities involving thinking, reasoning and hypothesising foster the development of cognitive skills.
- Most children find science, mathematics and technology learning experiences intriguing and enjoyable.
- Children need to be provided with opportunities to experience the consequences of their choices, actions and ideas.
- Children should be provided with a wide range of everyday materials to create patterns and sort, categorise, order and compare.

Learning checkpoint 4
Fostering cognitive development

Part A

1. Plan, prepare and implement a learning activity that requires construction and/or deconstruction, includes an aspect of technology and involves problem-solving.

   Provide evidence of your implementation. Include:

   - the age and number of children involved
   - any permission you gained from parents or other people
   - safety precautions you took
   - the materials and resources you used and how you set them up
   - how you introduced the activity
   - how you implemented the activity.

2. Provide one example of how each of the following developmental aspects is linked to the activity you provided:
   a. Cognitive

   b. Physical

   c. Social

   d. Emotional

3. Use examples from the implementation of your activity to answer the following questions.
   a. Explain how you supported children during the activity to experience the consequences of their choices, actions and ideas when problem-solving.

   b. Explain how you supported children during the activity to take risks in their learning.

Part B

Plan and implement a science experience that involves an appropriate level of challenge. Ensure it enables the children to:

- investigate ideas and complex concepts
- explore, experiment and take risks in their learning
- use thinking, reasoning and hypothesising skills.

1. Provide evidence of your planning and implementation, including the name of the experience, the age of the children involved, the materials you used, the set-up and how you carried out the experience.

2. Provide evidence that your experience challenged children and encouraged them to explore and experiment. Do this by providing a record summarising the experience in the form of a learning story, diary entry or anecdotal record.

3. Explain how the activity relates to the following:
   a. An EYLF outcome

   b. A cognitive development theory or core principle of development

Part C

1. Develop a mathematics game for a particular age group of children. Design the game to explore one or more of the following:
   - pattern
   - sorting
   - categorising
   - ordering
   - comparing.

   Summarise the rules of the game, the skills it is designed to develop and the materials that are required. Also explain how you would interact with the children to support their cognitive development while playing the game.

2. Explain how you applied a theory relating to cognitive development to the game design.

Part D

Write a report explaining how you promote the following EYLF sub-outcome of Outcome 4 in your daily work with the children in your service: 'Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating'.

In your report:

- include an explanation of any organisational standards, policies and procedures that you follow to work towards Outcome 4
- link the information you provide to at least **two** cognitive development theorists or core principles of development
- explain how you monitor and assess the children's development of cognitive skills
- explain how you encourage the children to develop and use the skills and processes.

Topic 5

In this topic you will learn about:

Fostering communication development

From infancy and throughout childhood, children begin to develop a sense of self-awareness. It is a time in their lives when they are developing and learning about how to express themselves. Language and communication experiences give children opportunities to develop their own sense of self in the world.

An important part of an educator's role is to foster children's communication and language skills by providing developmentally appropriate experiences and activities that stimulate them to use and understand language. Ongoing assessment and monitoring of skills and development is also important. In-depth knowledge of developmental theories and how they relate to language development provides the basis for monitoring communication skill development, and planning and delivering appropriate programs and learning experiences for each child.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
✓	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
✓	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
✓	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
	Children are confident and involved learners
✓	Children are effective communicators

5A Understanding language development

EYLF Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators expands your view of communication to show that development of communication skills influences many areas of learning, including a child's ability to feel a sense of belonging. Using communications that are meaningful to children aids them to participate in ways that demonstrate their feelings of acceptance and helps them to learn and share important skills and knowledge.

Language and communication definitions

Communication skills include the use of speech and language. Speech includes the ability to produce sounds and words; language relates to the words that you use and understand.

You are likely to come into contact with many different languages, including international languages and nonverbal languages such as Auslan or Key Word Sign. You may also become familiar with made-up terms that have meaning to particular people or families.

To understand language more clearly, ensure you are familiar with the following key terms related to language and communication.

Words and terms	Meaning
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
NESB	Non-English-speaking background
Language	Communication, whether spoken or nonverbal, and the particular words and meaning related to a particular community or country
Literacy	Ability to read and write
Pre-language communication	Cues that are used by an infant (for example, cooing, crying and grunting), to which adults may attach meaning
First words	A child's first word is usually defined as one that sounds like an adult word and is used consistently in similar situations; this usually occurs late in the first year and accompanies gestures that enable communication; for example, waving goodbye when asked
Holophrase	A single word that stands in for a complete sentence; for example, saying 'drink' instead of 'I would like a drink'
Telegraphic speech	Two or more words used together in a meaningful sentence, with small words, such as 'a', 'to' and 'the' left out; for example, 'Go sleep car'

Words and terms	Meaning
Sentence	A set of words that forms a complete statement – by three years of age, most children can form sentences of three or more words
Syntax	The rules by which we organise words into sentences
Morphology	The application of markers that denote number, tense, case, person, gender, active and passive voice; that is, the –s and –ed endings in English words
Pronunciation	The sounds of speech
Semantics	The meaning of words
Standard Australian English	The spoken and written English language used in Australia; this includes pronunciation and accents, as well as particular words commonly used in Australia
Over-generalisations	Applying the rules of grammar consistently, but incorrectly; for example, applying 's' for plurals ('Look at the sheeps') and 'ed' for past tense ('I goed to the shop')
Parentese/motherese or child-directed speech	How we modify our speech to suit the child's development using shorter, simpler sentences, more repetition, careful articulation, slow speech, basing talk around a child's interest and expanding on telegraphic speech
Phonology	How we understand and produce speech sounds
Pragmatics	How we engage in communication with each other, take turns to speak, maintain a topic of conversation, communicate clearly, and use gestures and tone of voice
Questions	Questions are complex forms that involve reordering a sentence and using tone to express a query; 'what' and 'where' questions are usually asked first, 'why' and 'when' follow and it is not until well into the preschool years that children competently use 'can't' and 'don't' questions
Closed questions	Questions that are answered with a yes or no comment
Open-ended questions	Questions that must be answered with information; for example, 'What did you do at school today?'

Language development theories

Understanding theories about language development and related milestones enables you to understand children's individual language needs.

Behaviourist theory	Behaviourist theory has been covered in Topics 2 and 3 in relation to social and emotional development. The following example shows how the theory applies to language development: Brit is six months old. When she smiles and babbles, her mother returns her sounds. This encourages Brit to continue making sounds. Communication occurs between the mother and the daughter.

Nature versus nurture and brain development	The concept of nature versus nurture was introduced in Topic 1 in relation to physical development. Nature refers to your genetic programming and the things you do naturally, and is linked to heredity, genetics and maturation. Nurture relates to personal experiences and what you are taught through interaction with the environment and other people. Refer to Topic 3 for a summary of brain development. Theorists studying brain development have found that it has an enormous impact on how a child learns. Heredity (nature) defines the framework of a brain, but the environment (nurture) has a huge effect on the depth of development. Brain development has a direct relationship to language skill development. The following example defines nature and nurture characteristics in relation to communication: Mansa is two years old. He has two older sisters. When Mansa wants something, he points and grunts and his sisters run to get him the item. Although Mansa can say words expected for his age, he chooses not to use spoken language. Marquelle is two years old and an only child. Her mother speaks to her all day and, when Marquelle wants something, her mother does not give it to her unless she tries to say the words. Her mother helps her by repeating information, e.g. 'Marquelle, say "cup"'. Marquelle's spoken language development meets the milestones of her age.
Sociocultural theory	The sociocultural theory, also known as the social constructivist learning theory, builds on Piaget's work to include learning that is acquired through social interaction and scaffolding emerging skills. Critical learning periods, teachable moments and windows of opportunity relate to Vygotsky's work on emerging skills, and the social learning provided to enable a child to develop and learn. If children are exposed to new activities requiring a higher skill level, they are encouraged to move forward themselves and attempt to learn these skills. An example in relation to communication development is a toddler who is learning new words. The toddler may listen to older children speaking and labelling objects, and hear how they express themselves in different ways. This demonstrates one way that Vygotsky's theory links to social learning.
Nativist theory	Noam Chomsky's theory is that children's language development is instinctive and present from the moment they are born. Newborns make noises and attempt to communicate, which Chomsky calls the 'language acquisition device'. This is not a real device, but is a child's inbuilt ability to understand basic language skills that develop into speech and more comprehensive language skills over the first few years of their life.

Cognitive theory

Cognitive theory, including Piaget's theories, was covered in Topics 3 and 4. Piaget believed strongly that we learn as constructionists; that is, someone who learns actively from the world around them and develops (or constructs) meaning from what is found. The process of cognitive learning involves four concepts:

- schema
- assimilation
- accommodation
- equilibration.

Cognitive development stages span from birth to adolescence at approximate ages that will at times overlap. During overlap, you will observe a child demonstrating abilities expected in two different stages, which are their emerging skills.

The sensorimotor stage of cognitive development spans from birth to approximately two years and is characterised by the child's use of physical actions to explore with their senses. Children in this stage are only able to think about people or events in the current situations they are in. In relation to language development, the child begins using reflexive sounds and progresses to a stage where they can use language to represent items. To be able to label items, the child first must understand what the item is.

For example:

1. The child plays with an object.
2. The child develops an understanding of what the object is.
3. The child hears others calling the object a ball.
4. The child begins to call the object a ball.

The preoperational stage of cognitive development spans from approximately two to seven years, and is depicted by the child's use of exploration, imagination and symbolic representation, including language development. Children at this stage are egocentric; this means they see everything from their own point of view. Language in the preoperational stage develops fast as the child is able to pick up symbolic understanding quickly and interpret more abstract ideas and label these with language.

In the concrete operational stage, at approximately seven to 11 years, children are flexible, organised and logical. Their thinking becomes close to that of an adult, although they still need concrete information to help them apply their logic.

Children in the concrete operational stage enjoy developing more complex language patterns and understanding. They participate in conversations and use the rules required to communicate their feelings, ideas and thoughts.

Multiple intelligences	Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences was discussed in Topics 3 and 4. When you recognise the 'intelligence' that is a child's strength, you can provide learning, and support methods and approaches that focus on this child's strengths and learning styles. Refer to Topic 4 for an explanation of the eight intelligences. For example: ▶ Sol has bodily kinaesthetic intelligence. He uses a lot of body language and expresses himself by showing others through his actions. ▶ When Michelle is happy, she sings happy tunes. When she is sad, she hums in a low tone. She demonstrates musical intelligence to communicate her feelings. ▶ Ted watches others communicate and uses facial expressions and active listening. His strongest intelligence is interpersonal. ▶ Children who have linguistic intelligence as their strength: – are more sensitive to spoken and written language – have a greater ability to learn new languages – can use language to accomplish goals – express themselves using language – use language to remember.

Core principles

A number of core principles of communication development are described in the following table.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with communication development
Belonging, being and becoming	Children learn best when they feel safe and valued.	▶ When children have a sense of belonging, they feel safe to 'be'. This means they are curious and involved, and demonstrate a sense of agency. Their ability to 'be' enables them to learn, develop and practise skills; hence, they 'become', demonstrating and achieving their full potential.
Sequence of development	Development progresses in a pattern that advances from simple to complex (maturation).	▶ Children learn consonants first as they babble and coo using conversation styles. This is supported by Chomsky's nativist theory. ▶ Children start using holophrases (single words) to communicate meaning. As they develop, they increase the number of words in their sentences until they speak in full sentences.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with communication development
Rate of development	Children develop at different rates.	▶ Experience with language determines the rate of development. If a child is not exposed to or encouraged to use language, their rate of language skill development will be reduced.
Neurological or brain development	Brain and spinal cord development links to the acquisition of skills.	▶ Synapses develop when new information is learnt and consolidated.
Critical periods and scaffolding	There are critical periods for learning and, if these times are not taken advantage of, the child may miss an important aspect of learning. Children are drawn to challenging experiences and enjoy intentional teaching.	▶ When a new skill is learnt, practice must occur to consolidate the skill. ▶ When children show agency, their interests need to be developed for them to remain enthusiastic and curious.
Heredity and environment, and how children use active learning	Also known as nature versus nurture, this compares aspects that are genetically programmed to how the environment influences development. Children learn from the rich environments you provide.	▶ A child's language can be increased through consistent interaction with a stimulating environment. ▶ The child's intelligence type (multiple intelligences) is genetic.
Holistic development	All domains of development are closely related and interlinked.	▶ The child communicates in a conversation: – Psychological – the child gains feedback from others, which encourages further interaction. – Social – the child is interested in sharing their ideas with others. – Communication – the child uses language skills to communicate their ideas. – Cognitive – the child understands concepts and can communicate these to others.

Principle of development	Description	Examples of links with communication development
Play as learning	Play is used by children to learn.	▶ Communication skills develop in: – dramatic play – discussing roles, imagining and sharing ideas – games – as the child talks about rules of play, they ask questions and talk about the game play.
Individualised learning	Children learn and demonstrate what they know in different ways.	▶ Children learn in different ways based on their learning style. They may prefer to listen, watch or be shown how things work. ▶ Some children will talk about and demonstrate their skills and knowledge; others will demonstrate these only if asked.

Stages of language development

A child's language development begins from the moment they are born, with newborns making noises and attempting to communicate. Because these basic language skills are fostered and developed into speech and more comprehensive language skills over the first few years of their lives, it is essential to provide children with activities and experiences that assist this transition from an early age. The language skills children learn at this age form the basis for the advanced skills they will develop later in life.

The first signs of formed language are through an infant's experimentation with different sounds. Infants often begin by making 'raspberries' with their mouths and experimenting with different volumes and tones, such as squeals and moans. These simple sounds then begin to form babble and eventually simple words. Even at a very early age, you will notice infants communicating with you by watching your face and responding with smiles and noises. This communication is in a conversation style, with you and the infant taking turns to interact. As a child's speech develops, they begin to form the basics of language.

Children's listening skills also begin to develop from birth. Infants from three or four weeks old begin to demonstrate their listening skills by using simple gestures, such as turning their head in the direction of different sounds. These simple signs of listening develop further as children are exposed to a variety of experiences that support and enrich this development.

When fostering language development, encourage children to express themselves verbally at their own rate. Children use nonverbal cues for communication until they are developmentally ready to speak. Until this time, you can model the use of words correctly and clearly, as children learn from modelling.

Watch this video about communicating with children.

Language development milestones

Some of the most common communication and language development milestones are provided in the following table.

Age	Development milestones
0–6 months	▶ Coos back and forth with the caregiver ▶ Capable of responding to own name (four to five months) ▶ Pays attention to human voices more than any other noise ▶ Gives and receives communication ▶ Imitates and responds to someone speaking
6–12 months	▶ Communicates mostly by crying, cooing, babbling, imitating, and using facial expressions, body language and gestures ▶ Can respond to simple verbal requests ▶ Understands that words relate to objects ▶ Begins to imitate spoken words, and first words may be spoken
1–2 years	▶ Uses combinations of words in meaningful ways ▶ Identifies names of people and familiar objects ▶ Has a vocabulary of up to 200 words
2–3 years	▶ Displays interest in word rhymes ▶ Understands verbal prepositions, such as ‘under’ and ‘on’ ▶ Has a vocabulary of up to 1,000 words ▶ Understands many things said by adults ▶ Most words spoken are recognisable by both caregivers and strangers
3–4 years	▶ Clear speech with only a few grammatical errors ▶ Has more complex speech patterns and vocabulary ▶ Asks questions ▶ Tells stories and recalls past events ▶ Understands advanced concepts, such as ‘same’ and ‘different’ ▶ May be capable of reciting their name and address

Age-appropriate experiences

By developing an awareness of stages of language and communication development, such as those in the following table, you can plan and provide age-appropriate experiences to support individual needs.

Age	Expectations
0–3 months	At this age, an infant’s language development is limited. They: ▶ make a variety of different noises to capture adults’ attention ▶ are interested in the rhythm and tones of stories, poems, music and songs ▶ react to loud noises ▶ move their heads towards different sounds.

Age	Expectations
3–6 months	At this age, infants begin to develop a purpose for each noise. They: ▶ express emotion through laughing, squealing and crying ▶ begin to make sounds that you may refer to as babble ▶ respond to different tones within the voices around them ▶ look at and hold books that are within their reach.
6–12 months	You may hear a child begin to use their first words during this time, which are commonly 'Mama' or 'Dadda'. Infants also begin to: ▶ understand the meaning of simple, common words such as 'bye', 'stop', 'car', 'bottle' and 'dummy' ▶ respond to their name by turning their head ▶ sit and look at books while you read – pointing to pages, words and pictures, and trying to turn the pages ▶ understand simple instructions, especially if accompanied by cues or physical directions ▶ enjoy books or poems that have repetitive sections or rhythmic wording. Plan short individual language, literature and listening experiences for this age group.
12–18 months	Children of this age have short attention spans and a love of repetition. They will begin to show interest in books, particularly those that focus on their personal interests. Most children will: ▶ begin to identify objects by name ▶ say up to 20 words and understand about 100 words ▶ begin to repeat and mimic your language. Plan individual language, literature and listening experiences for this age group. Keep group experiences short and give children the choice to participate.
18 months–2 years	Children of this age begin to form sentences, but it is often difficult to understand what is being said. You may notice that the speech of children who converse frequently with older siblings or adults becomes clearer more quickly. Plan individual language, literature and listening experiences for this age group. Keep group experiences short and give children the choice to participate.
2–3 years	Children of this age begin asking 'Why?' and 'What?' questions. They increase their vocabulary on a daily basis until they have a language base of hundreds of words they can use to communicate with others. Plan individual language, literature and listening experiences for this age group. Keep group experiences short and give children the choice to participate.

Age	Expectations
3–5 years	Children at this stage begin to use short sentences that are often grammatically incorrect; for example, 'I drinked some milk'. They have a longer attention span, so it is possible to provide longer experiences. They also: ▶ show interest in stories as well as informative text ▶ enjoy stories that help them deal with emotions, feelings or situations ▶ are able to memorise, recite and read stories aloud ▶ have an understanding of language; however, it is common for them to make errors with their pronunciation and sentence structure. Plan individual language, literature and listening experiences for children of this age group. Group experiences may be more lengthy and complex. You should expect older preschoolers to participate. Encourage younger preschoolers to participate while still giving them a choice.

Individual language development

Language and communication development links closely with development in other areas; for example:

- fine motor skills, including tongue and mouth coordination, as well as subtle body language
- gross motor skills, including body language
- emotional and psychological development, including the ability to express feelings and thoughts through verbal communication
- social development, including interaction with peers and others, expressing needs and using pro-social skills
- cognitive development, including symbolic understanding and memory, which allows children to develop language
- creative development, including self-expression.

Language development is also influenced by a range of factors, such as those in the following table.

Factor	Influence
Age/stage of development	Children progress through language stages sequentially.
Gender	Girls generally use communication more than boys due to their interests. Girls commonly use language to communicate with each other and play out nurturing roles, which involve the use of various forms of language and relationships.
Family background, beliefs and cultural practices	Families communicate differently and sometimes family dynamics affect their ability to communicate together. The languages families use may also influence development as some children may be expected to use verbal, nonverbal or sign language. 'Baby talk' and words that are specifically used by the family may also influence the child's ability to be understood by others.

Factor	Influence
Ability	Genetic ability and the environment influence children's skills; however, some limitations may occur due to developmental challenges. Some children may have a naturally higher ability to use language than others.
Temperament	Children with particular temperaments may prefer to participate in activities that require less communication than other activities. Some children take more time than others to become involved, which may put them behind others.
Interests	Some children are genuinely drawn to activities that involve discussion and listening. Some children notice changes in language and new words, while others utilise specific language concepts regularly.
Peer groups	Peers learn from each other in play as information is shared and play occurs. Children may add their own language to the play environment, asking questions and relating their understanding to others.

Monitoring language development

Before you can establish a child's level of language and/or communication abilities, you must observe the child in a range of situations to form the foundation of a monitoring and/or screening process. The information you gather from a series of observations:

- clarifies the child's abilities
- allows you to gain a greater understanding of the child
- provides information for others
- looks at the child from different perspectives
- helps you to gain insight by investigating the child's behaviour, their level and types of interaction with adults and other children, and their emotions, including any anxieties and/or frustration they express at the time.

Evaluation helps you to identify whether your program is relevant and meets the needs of children, families, the service, and the education and care industry. There is a range of things you can evaluate or review; each helps you to plan what to do next and improve your practice. Your evaluations will form new observation records about the child's language and communication abilities, and enable you to identify and record the child's progress.

Use the guidelines in the following table to monitor how a child uses language.

Why monitor this area	What to look for	Observation methods suited to this area
▶ Language is an important part of development. ▶ Language includes verbal and nonverbal messages, including cues and written skills. ▶ Children with strong language skills may also have strong skills in other areas of development.	▶ Developmental milestones or stages ▶ Learning and windows of opportunity ▶ Modelling ▶ Skills in problem-solving, negotiation, collaboration and conflict-resolution ▶ Ways the child expresses themselves ▶ Attachment or security ▶ Interests and ideas ▶ Environmental effects: time, space, materials and people ▶ Autonomy and independence ▶ Level of self-esteem and understanding of who they are	▶ Video, audio or DVD recordings ▶ Checklists ▶ Sociograms ▶ Diaries, journals, logs and communication books ▶ Learning stories ▶ Time samples ▶ Event samples ▶ Anecdotal records ▶ Incidental records ▶ Records of questioning, such as graffiti sheets, daily evaluation sheets, surveys, questionnaires and forms

Assessing language skills

Topic 1 set out the steps for assessing children's progress towards the EYLF outcomes. These steps can be used to help assess children's language skills and development:

1. Gather and record information about the child.
2. Identify which of the five EYLF outcomes your observation record links to.
3. Identify a specific sub-outcome of the EYLF.
4. Clarify your selection by referring to the evidence examples that are provided for the outcome.

EYLF outcomes and sub-outcomes most commonly related to language skills and development include:

- Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity:
  - Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.
- Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world:
  - Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities, and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation.
- Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators:
  - Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others for a range of purposes.
  - Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.
  - Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.

Practice task 14

1. Use the following table or similar to monitor a child's language development.

Language development/skill	Comments	Date recorded as achieved
1. Uses two or three words together; for example, 'Go potty now'		
2. Refers to self by name and often says 'mine'		
3. Asks a lot of questions		
4. Likes listening to stories and books		

2. Explain how each of the skills in the table may be influenced by the following:
   a. Social development

   b. Psychological development

   c. Brain development (nature versus nurture)

3. Link each of the **four** skills in the table to outcomes in the EYLF.

5B Providing for language skills

Children communicate more readily and openly when they feel a sense of belonging. Aim to develop a warm and communicative relationship with children, and spend time interacting and talking with them. To demonstrate your respect for children:

- greet and farewell every child
- use children's names often
- respect children's names by using them correctly
- be affectionate, but avoid terms like 'darling' or 'sweetie'
- never give children nicknames unless these are provided by parents as the name the child is known by; in particular, never use negative nicknames.

As you interact with children each day, your modelled speech and communication will form the basis of their interaction skills. You may give children signals and information through words, gestures, stance (posture), tone and facial expressions. This modelling is an important part of enriching and supporting children's development. Model active listening techniques, negotiation skills, expression and emotions that you want children to mimic. Your positive body language helps to foster children's listening skills by ensuring they feel valued when they speak; this inspires them to make others feel the same. When listening to children, use your body language to show them you are interested in what they are saying.

EYLF Outcome 2 sub-outcome: Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation, reminds you of your role as a language model.

EYLF Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators, encourages you to view children as effective communicators, in particular reflecting on the following areas:

- Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others for a range of purposes.
- Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.
- Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.

Fostering language and literacy

Many different types of language and literature experiences can be planned for individual children or groups. Everyday activities and routines provide opportunities for children to listen to, practise and use language. Social play in particular can support language learning and enable a child to practise and experiment.

Watch this video about providing children with opportunities to learn language.

Some ideas you may like to use are outlined in the following table.

Experience	Examples of activities
Music	▶ Headphones with songs and stories ▶ Background sounds or music at display or nature tables, such as bird or water sounds ▶ Singing, including action songs ▶ Multicultural music
Stories, songs and poems	▶ Reading or telling stories ▶ Rhymes ▶ Poems ▶ Learning words of songs
Drama/visual	▶ Videos and DVDs ▶ Hand and finger puppets ▶ Props ▶ Felt boards ▶ Imaginary and dramatic play relating to: – cars – people – dolls – animals – home/community areas – dress-ups
Personal interactions	▶ One-on-one interactions ▶ Decision-making activities ▶ Group discussions ▶ Show and tell
Discovery activities	▶ Mirrors ▶ Magnifying glasses ▶ Discussing photographs ▶ Creating handprints and footprints ▶ Looking at shadows or silhouettes ▶ Matching and sorting ▶ Poster or picture discussions
Games	▶ Word games ▶ Board games ▶ Puzzles ▶ Group activities and games: – Who am I? – Guessing games – Fill-the-gaps games; leaving words out of rhymes, stories or sentences – Matching games – Finger play and poems (Where are your ...?)

When providing language, literacy and listening experiences, consider the guidance in the following table.

Listening	▶ Children can listen to each other or be by themselves at a listening experience if you provide quiet spaces. ▶ Children find it easier to listen if the words are relevant to them, so choose age-appropriate language and topics that interest them. ▶ When children are playing, involve yourself sensitively in their play and listen carefully, giving your full attention.
Modelling and interactions	▶ Young children learn by listening, watching and copying. ▶ Your interactions must be frequent and positive. ▶ Modelling shows children how to respect each other when speaking, listening and taking turns. ▶ When you show enjoyment in your presentation of activities, you encourage children to be involved.
Supporting experiences	▶ During periods of child-initiated learning, you can sensitively remind children of the skills they are developing and help them use these skills. ▶ Enhance your communication by using puppets and props. ▶ Small groups allow children space to think; large groups can be distracting. ▶ Language, literature and listening experiences may occur indoors or outdoors. ▶ Children's information-processing skills are still developing, so you may need to model what you want them to do. ▶ Children will naturally want to contribute if they are interested in what is going on.
Resolving conflict	▶ When children are involved in conflicts over space, friends or resources, you can use your conflict-resolution skills to help them listen to each other and resolve their difficulties, thus developing essential skills for life and learning.

Engaging children

Children are more likely to be engaged in activities that are based on their interests and strengths, particularly if they have participated in choosing the activities. Curiosity is about finding things out and experimenting; it is great for initiating a new activity or experience and encouraging participation.

To capture children's attention and stimulate a response, you should:

- use open-ended questions
- be prepared for the children to adapt materials or change the experience
- support experimentation
- be prepared to add more materials
- provide for all possible events, including having to clean up mess
- be curious and interested yourself, and reflect this in your comments.

When presenting experiences, be aware of the aesthetics and availability of equipment. To do this you should:

- model the value of materials by handling them with respect and care
- use posters, pictures, mobiles, books and poems to enhance areas of the room in formal and informal presentations
- present book corners with a variety of books, a display and posters
- make the area look interesting and inviting to encourage children's participation in the experiences you are offering
- add books and language resources to display tables
- incorporate language, literature and listening into other experiences, both indoors and outdoors.

Spontaneous learning

There will be opportunities to engage children based on spontaneous events. By reacting to these opportunities, you ensure children are gaining your positive feedback. As suggested in behaviourist theory, this is an excellent way to encourage children to continue to express themselves openly and develop greater language skills.

Some of the most challenging, stimulating and educational activities and experiences come from simple ideas or discussions that occur spontaneously throughout the day. A child may ask a question, notice something they have not seen or thought about before or become involved in new play themes. When this spontaneous event occurs, ensure the children continue to lead the activity that emerges from it.

Consider the way you use your verbal and nonverbal language to:

- allow children time to explore their ideas
- provide appropriate materials and resources
- enable children to continue their play
- encourage children to investigate
- see mistakes as learning opportunities.

With the development of language, literacy and listening, just as with any other developmental area, children may make mistakes and use their skills incorrectly at times. When children need to use language skills to solve problems or negotiate, support them by providing appropriate words to use. Be mindful that not all children have the ability to use words with skill. Model positive examples of words that can be used in a variety of situations. Telling children to 'use their words' sets a child up to make a mistake. The child may not know which words fit the situation and may use words that are not suitable. Always give the child some words to use to express themselves.

When a child says a word with incorrect pronunciation, don't stop the child and ask them to repeat it in the correct manner; instead, model the correct way to say the word.

Example

Modelling correct pronunciation

Thomas is sitting at the drawing table holding a yellow pencil in his hand. He turns to Megan (an educator) and says, 'Megan, I did a lellow sun!' Megan looks at his drawing, smiles and replies, 'Yes, you drew a very bright yellow sun!'

Asking questions

Open-ended questions are a useful and important tool to incorporate into your everyday interactions with children. You need to think about how to word and present your questions to ensure children are given an opportunity to explain and extend their answer beyond a simple yes or no.

Questions that involve a one-word answer such as yes or no are called closed questions. Some examples of closed questions are:

- Is it hot outside?
- Did that hurt?
- Do you like trains?
- Are you angry?

Some examples of open questions are:

- What is it like outside?
- What happened?
- What do you like to play with?
- How did you do that?

Listening to children

Once you understand the messages a child is trying to communicate about their feelings and ideas, respond promptly. By responding to all feelings, you start to build relationships with children and show them that you care.

Infants need to:

- be responded to
- have their nonverbal communication understood and catered for
- cry and be attended to.

Toddlers need to:

- express themselves through activity
- express themselves verbally
- name their feelings.

Preschoolers need to:

- express themselves through activities, such as clapping and stamping
- express their feelings verbally
- express their feelings through paintings, drawings and other creative activities.

Planned group experiences

Language and literacy experiences that involve resources and props are stimulating for children. These enriched experiences create curiosity, and encourage children to be involved and want to learn.

Group time provides many opportunities for sharing and experiencing language and literacy, while also supporting the children's ability to listen, participate and respond.

Some suggestions to encourage children to become engaged in experiences are to:

- use a variety of media in discussions, such as magazines, videos, music, books and posters
- respond to all children's conversations and ensure you follow up on them
- plan experiences related to children's interests
- plan a variety of experiences involving music, movement, stories and directions
- ensure all children can see the activity
- project your voice so everyone can clearly hear you
- use props such as puppets, felt board stories, toys, dolls and mobiles
- ask open-ended questions
- provide new equipment for children to explore, such as headphones and microphones.

Example

Group time session plan

Child or group identification:	**Age of child or group:**
Group 1 (10 children)	Five to six years old

Name and description of experience: Expressing emotions

Date: 17 January 2018

Observation:

Two toddlers came into the room today and one of them was crying. Jeanette and Mischa (group 1) came to the crying toddler and tried to pick him up, but he pushed them away with a scowl on his face. Jeanette and Mischa looked at each other and then they went to Adele (an educator) in the home corner. Mischa said, 'See that boy? I don't know why he looks at us with that face.'

Why this observation encouraged you to plan this experience:

Mischa and Jeanette appeared confused by the toddler's facial expressions.

They didn't seem to know how to respond to the toddler's emotions or understand how he might feel.

Other children in their group were not able to help them with information.

What is the value of this experience:

- **Social and emotional:** Understanding the emotions of others and expressing their own emotions; recognising different facial messages and what they might mean.
- **Language:** Putting feelings into words and expressing how they might feel.
- **Cognitive:** Problem-solving using facial expressions.

Materials required:

- Posters of children with happy, sad, angry and surprised facial expressions
- Chair near the large wall mirror
- Felt board – happy face, sad face, angry face, surprised face
- Book: *Where the wild things are* by Maurice Sendak

Strategies used to foster creativity during the experience:

- Being prepared for children to express other emotions and linking them into the session
- Allowing children to share their own experiences and disagree if they have a different experience or emotion
- Being open to children sharing stories or scenarios

List your strategies for settling:

Sing 'Here are grandma's glasses'. Start the rhyme with a strong voice and finish with a whisper as I put my hands in my lap:

'Here are grandma's glasses

Here is grandma's hat

Here is the way she folds her hands and puts them in her lap'

(Actions with hands showing glasses and hat then folding in lap)

Explain the introduction:

Sing: 'If you're happy and you know it'

Continue the song with 'If you're sad and you know it'

Explain the body of the experience:

- Use posters of children with expressions and have children identify what the child is expressing. Have the children express this emotion using their faces. Have them look at each other's faces and look at themselves in the mirror if they wish.
- Have different faces on a felt board and discuss with the children what each face means and what sorts of things can make them feel like this.
- Talk about what they might do if they feel happy, sad, angry or surprised, and what they would want other people to do.

Explain the conclusion:

- Read *Where the wild things are* by Maurice Sendak.
- Point out the angry faces in the pictures.
- Think of some ways we might make Max and the animals in the story happy.

Explain your dispersal:

Ask individual children to make their choice of a happy, sad, angry or surprised face, and have other children guess what they are expressing. Then ask the child to go to the bathroom to wash their hands and sit for lunch.

Spontaneous interests catered for, extensions or changes to planned activity (complete after experience has been implemented):

- Elise added to our discussion by showing us her scared face, so we included this in our discussion and linked it with the story, including the fact that Max did not have a scared face.
- Joseph commented that Max had a scary face, not a scared face, so we talked about this and also pulled scary faces.

Listening and responding to language

Listening is a critical communication skill – we listen for enjoyment and to obtain information to learn and understand. Children need to learn to listen, but you should also be an active listener and role-model for children. This includes responding to children's conversations and language, using correct pronunciation when speaking, and reflecting the child's conversations and words when responding to them. By modelling this behaviour, you will teach children to do the same.

Factors such as background noise, stress and time-pressed routines can affect children's ability to listen effectively.

Listening requires skills to direct your attention to what is heard, gather meaning, interpret and decide on actions. If you encourage listening, children interpret and gain an understanding of the world around them. Poor listening habits produce misunderstood messages, language and relationships.

Strong social listening skills involve a lifelong learning ability to:

- hear
- see
- engage with the speaker
- get pleasure from social interactions
- learn about taking turns
- follow directions and instructions.

Creating opportunities for children to listen and respond

Children have the opportunity to develop their listening and responding skills when you consult them and give them instructions. There are also a number of specific games and activities you can provide that will assist the development of these skills, such as:

- puppet play
- talking books
- group discussions
- games such 'Simon Says', 'Secret whispers', 'Who am I' and 'I spy'
- show and tell
- talking about stories after you read a book.

Watch this video about communicating with children.

Following directions

Listening skills are required for a child to be able to follow directions. The following table lists age-appropriate expectations for following directions.

Age	Expectations
Before 18 months	The child is learning that they can be heard and their needs can be met if they communicate. They are also learning that there are benefits in listening as they will be able to be involved in more meaningful interactions.
After 18 months	The child will be able to follow a simple instruction with one step; for example, 'Please bring the hat to me'.
By two years	The child can follow two-step instructions; for example, 'Please put your hat on, then go to the door', but may become distracted or only follow through part of the direction.
By three years	The child can follow three-step instructions; for example, 'Please get your hat, put it in your bag and then stand at the door', but may become distracted or only follow through part of the direction.
By five years	The child can follow more complex directions that require careful listening and remembering; these may include following demonstrations. They may attempt the direction more than once to try to remember and implement it.

To ensure children are given the best possible opportunity to follow directions or instructions appropriately, consider the following:

- Use positive directions to ensure the child understands what you want them to do, such as 'Put the paper on the table'. Avoid using negative directions such as 'Don't put the paper in the bin'.
- Express directions clearly, and repeat the direction if needed.
- Model good listening skills.
- Try to make following directions fun.
- Provide age-appropriate directions and give children the opportunity to practice.
- Provide the direction in the order it is required (older children will be able to decipher order, younger children will need practice).
- Give directions in context; for example, if the child is painting, they may become confused or have difficulty remembering if you give a direction about sand play.
- Play non-competitive direction games to build skills.
- Have children practise following recipes (illustrated recipes for young children).

Consultation

One of the most effective ways to encourage children to listen and respond is to consult with them. By consulting them, you are supporting them to express their ideas and views.

The level and method of consultation you have with children depends on their stage of development and their needs at the time.

Stage of development	Level and method of consultation
Infants and toddlers	Consulting infants and toddlers is simple and practical. Start by talking with infants and toddlers as you care for them. Show them your interest by consulting them about the things that concern them, such as talking about the foods they eat, the toys they play with or what they can see. For example: ▶ Tell infants what is going to happen to them: 'Let's change your nappy now'. ▶ Give toddlers a warning about what is going to happen: 'We are going inside soon'. ▶ Attend and respond to children's nonverbal communication: 'I can see you don't like that cold water'. ▶ Be a positive role-model by verbally consulting with children and staff: 'Mary, should we put the new mobile here?' While you cannot always expect an answer from an infant, by verbalising what you are doing, you are familiarising the child with this type of interaction and helping them think about their environment.
Preschoolers	Consultation must be appropriate to the child's level of development. Get to know their communication style and consult with them about simple matters that concern them, such as the activities and experiences that are interesting to them. Some preschoolers are skilled enough to help plan activities with you; others will need lots of encouragement and support. Try the following suggestions: ▶ Offer possible play choices and listen carefully to children's ideas. ▶ Use open questions to encourage children to consider all options; for example, 'Could you make something with those boxes?' ▶ Only give a choice when it is appropriate; it is unfair to offer a choice you do not intend to provide. ▶ Too many choices can confuse young children and make it hard for them to make a decision; give the number of choices suited to the child's ability to decide. ▶ Help children understand the choices they have; never assume children know what you mean. ▶ Use both verbal and nonverbal communication to help children understand; for example, pointing or showing. ▶ Encourage children to consult each other.

Creating literacy-enriched environments

Literacy is the ability to read and write words. School-age children may use these skills to communicate with each other, express themselves and complete activities. In early childhood, many children are interested in literacy. Activities such as experimenting with images and print can capture children's attention and stimulate a response. These activities are the beginning of a child's reading and writing skills and, if they capture the child's attention and the child is interested, they enable the child to start to read and write, and understand the many symbols used to communicate.

All written language reflects the culture from which it originated. Familiar culturally constructed text is usually material that matches the language you understand and use. Unfamiliar culturally constructed text is material that uses language you are not used to.

By providing children with the opportunity to engage with diverse text types, you are allowing them to become familiar with the different cultural capital of others.

The following table includes some strategies for creating a literacy-enriched environment that introduces images and print from a variety of culturally constructed origins.

Literacy areas	What you can do
Developing a positive attitude toward the use of print	▶ Get excited about books. ▶ Provide books written in different languages. ▶ Talk about the books you have read. ▶ Show children your favourite books. ▶ Bring in interesting articles and pictures from newspapers or magazines from different countries.
Developing an awareness of print	▶ Point out print in the environment. ▶ Provide opportunities for writing, drawing and/or scribbling with crayon, markers, pencils, etc. ▶ Encourage children to write; for example, labelling their own items or writing to friends. ▶ Don't worry too much about spelling and formation in the early years; these will develop over time. ▶ Provide help with spelling, printing and writing stories if asked. ▶ Let the child know that you consider their writing to have meaning by responding to what they want their writing to say.
Gaining skills and knowledge for reading	▶ Show how books can be used to find out things. ▶ Encourage children to work out what words mean in English and other languages. ▶ Encourage children to think about a story: to predict, imagine and project. ▶ Discuss how stories relate to children's lives or what they already know, including stories about children living in non-English-speaking countries.
Playing with words	▶ Follow the children's lead when they play with words spontaneously. ▶ Make up new songs to old tunes. ▶ Point out interesting things about words and names, such as words that start with the same letter, long words and short words. ▶ Sing familiar songs in different languages or use sign language.

The ability to play with words is a milestone demonstrating that the child can use and understand language. Encourage this as you see it developing.

Literacy experiences

Literacy experiences are good ways for young children to start developing an enjoyment of written words, and include the following.

Reading stories

Reading stories involves reading published literature aloud. It helps to develop language skills and imagination. Stories can help children cope with stress and provide breaks from regular daily routines so the child can relax and understand what is going on around them. Stories can support, extend and develop interests, and also inspire children's creativity by exposing them to the visual aspects of illustration.

You can read a story to the whole group or to an individual child. Reading stories with children can be a good learning experience as many stories are informative and answer questions the children may have. By using books to explain or demonstrate things in a child's life, you can impact how they deal with these aspects of their lives.

Telling stories

Telling stories is the process of developing a story as you tell it to others. It is different to reading a story that has been written by someone else; it allows you to use your own creativity and engage the children's creativity to develop stories of your own. Storytelling plays a vital role in providing enriching language, literature and listening experiences for children of all ages and stages of development.

There are some important points to remember when you are implementing a storytelling session. The purpose of the activity is to enrich and extend the children's language development. Children need to enjoy the story to engage with it, so it must be energetic and interesting. You may have a vivid imagination and be able to create an exciting story without needing to take inspiration from anywhere else, or you may wish to start by using an existing story and elaborating on it.

Another way to get more inspiration for storytelling is to gather ideas from the children themselves; children are a great source of imaginative material.

Posters and displays

Posters and displays provide opportunities for discussion and can link children to new topics or an understanding of others. Assess posters and displays using the following guidelines to ensure they lead the discussion appropriately:

- Are different cultures represented using present-day clothing and environments or are they only presented in a historical context?
- Are different cultures represented positively and without bias, or are some people only presented negatively?
- Do a variety of people contribute to a variety of activities or do only some people contribute?
- Does each person have an individual appearance or does everyone look the same or similar?
- Is a range of emotions and abilities shown or is everyone happy?
- Do various people take on various roles or do only some people contribute?
- Is a range of talents and skills displayed?
- Are talents and skills demonstrated by non-gender stereotypes or are gender stereotypes displayed?
- Is a variety of people represented or is one group of people represented a lot more than others?

Action rhymes, poetry and finger plays

Action rhymes and finger plays involve a chant, song or poem that is accompanied by actions. They challenge memory and recall as well as physical skills, as the body and mind work together to act out the activity. Most children find these engaging and fun as the words can be musical, funny, nonsensical or patterned, and often encourage movement.

Action rhymes and finger plays can be valuable tools for settling a group session or as part of a dispersal process. They are good for keeping the group or an individual child involved during unexpected waiting times.

Rhymes and poetry play an integral role in the provision of exciting language experiences; they develop children's understanding of words and their sounds.

You may choose to write and develop your own poems or rhymes for children that support knowledge and provide entertainment.

There are many different types of poems, including those in the following table.

Type	Description
Acrostic	In an acrostic poem, the first letter of each line forms a word vertically. The word the poem forms may be the focus of the poem; for example, a person's name.
Ballad	A ballad is a poem that tells the story of an event. The event may be from history, the news or your life. Ballads are rhyming poems and are commonly used by poets to recall significant historic events. However, you may write a lighter version about a birthday party or teddy bear picnic.
Haiku	This is a form of poetry originating from Japan. Haikus focus on what you see or feel. They have three lines: the first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables and the last line has five syllables.
Limerick	A limerick is a rhyming poem that consists of five lines. The last words of the first two lines rhyme, both with each other and with the final word of the poem. The last words of the other two lines rhyme only with each other. Limericks also have a strong rhythm to them and are often humorous.
Rhyming poems	Couplets are two-line poems where the last word of each line rhymes. Triplets are three-line poems with two alternatives of rhyming patterns; either all lines of the triplet rhyme or just the first and last line rhyme. Quatrains are four-line poems with two alternatives of rhyming patterns; either every second line rhymes or the first two lines rhyme with each other, as do the last two.

Puppets and felt stories

Puppets and felt stories help to enrich a child's enjoyment and experience in a storytelling or language experience as they add a visual aspect to it. They are a great extension for group time sessions and a valuable individual experience as children can act out their own stories with the puppets or felt characters, developing their use of language. Older children can make their own puppets and felt characters, and even develop their own puppet shows.

The following table guides you to choose age-appropriate puppets.

Age group	Characteristics
Infants and toddlers	▶ Safe when explored with the senses ▶ No small pieces ▶ Aspects easily manipulated by small fingers ▶ Relate to areas of interest, such as animals and faces ▶ Not too loud
Preschoolers	▶ Can be self-made and individual ▶ Can be open-ended ▶ Relate to stories, rhymes and finger plays ▶ Can be used in plays, stories and theatres

Older children may wish to develop their own stories and create puppets so they can act the story out. They may also be able to use puppets to express their feelings, concerns or ideas.

Digital technology

Digital technology is advancing rapidly. Introducing new technology to children stimulates their curiosity and improves how they listen, see and explore. Consider the technology in the following table.

Computers	Computer programs can provide children with stories, music, pictures and other language experiences. Children can learn words, hear other languages, create their own stories, make posters and design a range of ideas. Older children may use the internet to look up pictures and information. By observing how children use the internet to access different sites, you gain an idea of what they are interested in and like to do. To ensure children are safe online, install software that blocks inappropriate content and any contact from others online. You can build pictures or information that children find into other activities in your program; for example, printing items for group discussions, reading stories from the screen or using the computer for children to find objects – a trivia hunt.
CDs/DVDs and headphones	DVDs and headphones can be used to offer small and large group experiences as well as individual activities. Listening to music, poetry and stories can be soothing and allow children time to be alone while encouraging learning, language, listening, imagination and creativity. You can use a range of CDs with or without headphones to play music, multicultural languages and stories. CDs can be used for dancing, singing and listening in a group.
Radio	The radio is not generally recommended for use with children as the content cannot be controlled. The program you choose may be interrupted by news, and inappropriate language or comments. Some radio programs play music that is not appropriate for younger children.

Television	Television may be used to watch a program being broadcasted or a DVD. Only use television if your service philosophy supports its use and parental permission is gained for the rating level of the program you choose. The overuse or misuse of television is a concern as it is linked with childhood obesity. When working with children under school age, the use of television is not generally supported as it is: ▶ not interactive, so children are not involved or participative ▶ inflexible; it cannot change its focus with the children's needs ▶ often considered a 'babysitting' tool, where staff use it in preference to planning quality activities for children. If you choose to use television as part of your program, ensure that you: ▶ have parental permission ▶ follow service policies and procedures ▶ preview the entire program before showing it to children ▶ sit with the children when they are watching it and involve yourself in any active play within the program ▶ are prepared to answer any questions that arise from the content ▶ encourage children to discuss what they watched afterwards ▶ plan the program as part of your day, never just 'put on the television'.

Practice task 15

1. Plan an experience for children in each of the following areas.
   a. Language and literacy in play

   b. Listening and responding

c. Experimentation with image and print

2. Link theories, EYLF outcomes and/or core principles to each of the experiences you planned.

3. Provide **four** ways you can add unfamiliar culturally constructed text to the play environment.

5C Valuing linguistic diversity

The EYLF demonstrates the importance of language and communication through its outcomes, particularly Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators, which focuses on the different ways children communicate and how communication involves many different concepts, including identity and language.

Encouraging the use of home languages

'Linguistic heritage' is the term used to describe language that is passed on from a person's ancestors. Many families in Australia use languages other than English. This linguistic heritage makes up their identity and is valued as part of their history or way of life.

Children who demonstrate appropriate development in their first language are likely to establish new languages more easily. You must always consider a child's abilities in languages other than English when identifying their level of development.

Keep in mind that some families may have special words or phrases that you can use.

Collecting information at orientation

You should get to know a new child and family, and collect information about them during your service orientation process. By the end of orientation, you should have built a relationship with both parent and child, and gained enough information to effectively educate and care for the child.

A lot of information may be collected at your service through informal methods, such as general conversations, but formal methods are also required to ensure you have all relevant details.

Formal methods of collecting information include:

- Enrolment form: a standard form that collects the same information for each family and is updated at least once a year
- Enrolment interview: an orientation process where families are shown around the service and introduced to the environment while discussing the family's and child's experiences and preferences
- Referral agent: shared information from other services used by the family, with the family's consent; this may be ongoing or a one-off situation
- Meetings: uninterrupted time where information about children's needs, interests, routines and preferences can be exchanged, discussed and negotiated
- Surveys: asking about particular information; this may be done regularly or just on certain occasions
- Planning strategy: involving parents at planning times and requesting their knowledge of certain areas and/or needs, goals and hopes for their child

If a family does not speak English, you may need to access a translator or interpreter so you can gather appropriate information, prepare to meet the child's needs and ensure the family understands your service requirements. Encourage parents to explain the environment and what is happening to their child in their first language. Ensure you discuss the child's development with the parent and explain clearly that the better developed the child becomes in their first language, the greater skills they will establish in the new language.

You may discuss the value of this new language and cultural input to all children in the service as you:

- incorporate different rhymes
- teach songs
- display and teach simple words and phrases
- encourage the group to learn about each other.

During a child's orientation period, the information you collect about them should include specific details of key words and phrases. This applies to all children, whether they speak English or another language at home. You may find it difficult to use these key words and phrases, but they may be essential as you attempt to interpret and provide for the child's needs. For example, a child may call their blanket a 'cuddly' or their mother 'mimi'.

Introducing new languages

To introduce a new language to children, go slowly and do the following:

- Expose the child to the new language: If a child who does not speak English attends an English-speaking service, this will occur naturally. If an English-speaking child is to learn another language, they should listen to songs, stories and communication if possible.
- Teach one word or phrase at a time: Point out an object and identify it using both languages. Give the child time to think about this and practise it.
- Have realistic expectations: Children will not learn a new language if you overwhelm them or if they are not exposed to the new language consistently.
- Provide positive reinforcement.

You can ask parents or others who use the language to help you. There are also free programs on the internet where you can type in a word or sentence and it will provide a written and audio translation in the chosen language. Try:

- http://aspirelr.link/google-translate for translating a word, sentence or document
- http://aspirelr.link/translate-and-speak for translating a word or sentence, or placing the translation into an email.

These internet programs can be used on a phone, tablet or computer to help you communicate easily with a child who is having trouble settling in or is trying to tell you something in their first language.

Choose a more reliable source (such as a professional interpreter) if the information is very important or related to health and safety.

You may need to encourage parents to allow you to support their first language. Many people have experienced prejudice or have been bullied as children because of the language they speak. To encourage parents to maintain this language with their child:

- collect relevant information
- include the first language as part of the orientation process
- respond with respect to any language used
- include the language in the care environment
- encourage all children to share their culture and language.

Explain and demonstrate to the family through your actions that you value all languages and their importance in children's learning. You may ask parents and other family members who use another language to participate in the program and help teach language skills.

Example

Playing a game using two languages

To support English language development, you could play the game 'Who am I?' and support the child to respond in English; for example, 'I am Finn'.

To support new language development of children who speak English, you could play the game 'Who am I?' and support the children to respond in the new language they are learning; for example, 'Mi nombre es Max' (Spanish).

Bilingualism

Simultaneous bilingualism refers to a situation in which a child is exposed to two languages in infancy. Children learning two languages simultaneously usually learn in three stages:

1. They mix the two languages at times (infants).
2. They separate the words belonging to each language and use whole phrases (toddlers).
3. One language becomes dominant (school age).

Sequential bilingualism refers to a child learning a second language after three years. Children learn the second language in three stages:

1. They become involved in social interactions with speakers of the second language, often relying on memorised phrases.
2. They communicate with second-language speakers in the second language using memorised phrases and new vocabulary. This stage progresses quickly if the child is not afraid to make mistakes.
3. They attempt to speak using correct grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Children cope well learning two languages. However, particular things determine how well the child will manage new language learning, including:

- how well the child learnt their first language
- the support provided by those using the new language
- the attitudes of others towards the child's first language and culture
- the extent to which the child becomes involved in the English language environment.

There are some normal patterns of language use to expect in second-language learners:

- A silent period: this is a time when the child says very little for a long period, maybe even months. During this time, the child is listening, watching and building their knowledge of the new language before they use it. If this occurs, you should:
  - continue talking even if the child does not respond
  - continue to include the child in small group activities
  - use varied questions
  - include other children as the focus of any conversation
  - use the first language in activities if possible
  - accept nonverbal responses
  - encourage minimal effort
  - expect a response
  - provide activities with repetitive words and/or counting for success
  - use both languages in one sentence to provide meaning and fill gaps (known as code mixing).
- Loss of the first language: if the language is not used, respected and nurtured, the child will lose skills in it. This may be damaging to the child's self-image or it may occur because they feel like they do not belong.
- Numerous grammatical errors: this occurs as the child learns the new language rules.

Including a variety of languages in the curriculum helps children to develop a healthy self-esteem, self-concept and self-image as you show them their language is valued. New languages offer an opportunity to learn new skills, find out about the world, and develop interest and respect in the cultures and backgrounds of others.

A child learning a second language must accomplish many tasks:

- Develop a new set of sounds and sound groupings.
- Create new intonation patterns so that their meanings are understood.
- Recognise a new alphabet or script.
- Develop a new set of sound symbol relationships.
- Establish a new vocabulary.
- Learn new ways of putting words together and organising information in the expected sequence.
- Identify the new social rules for when to speak and what to say.
- Experience new sets of culturally specific knowledge and behaviour.

Practice task 16

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

You are welcoming a new family into the service. Their first language is Armenian. The mother tells you that she wants you to only use English when talking to her child as she wants him to fit in.

1. How would you respond to the mother?

2. List **three** ways you could include the Armenian language in the service environment and program so its value for all children is evident.

3. Identify one EYLF outcome, theory or core principle and explain how it relates to this.

Summary

- Children's language skills and development can be assessed and monitored against developmental milestones.
- A child's language development begins from the moment they are born; for example, newborns make noises and attempt to communicate.
- Children communicate more readily and openly when they feel a sense of belonging. When you develop warm and communicative relationships with children, you can spend time interacting and talking with them.
- Everyday activities and routines provide opportunities for children to listen to, practise and use language. Social play in particular supports language learning by giving children opportunities to practice and experiment.
- Children should learn to listen and be given the opportunity to respond, and you should be an active listener and role-model for children.
- Linguistic heritage is the term used to describe the language passed on from someone's ancestors. Many families in Australia use languages other than English, so this linguistic heritage makes up their identity and is valued as part of their history or way of life.
- Provide children with opportunities to engage with familiar and unfamiliar culturally constructed texts.
- Provide environments that are rich in literacy for children. Display words and letters in English and other languages.
- By providing appropriate resources, you can encourage children to experiment with communication.

Learning checkpoint 5
Fostering communication development

Part A

1. Plan an experience that celebrates a language other than English. The language chosen should be the first language of a child in your group. If this is not possible, choose any language other than English.

   The activity must include opportunities for children to:

   - engage with familiar and unfamiliar, culturally constructed texts
   - experiment with print and images
   - foster positive self-concept and self-esteem.

   Provide the following information.

   a. The name of the experience

   b. The age of the children involved

   c. The materials you used

   d. A description of the set-up

   e. An explanation of how you carried out the experience

2. Explain how the experience relates to the following.
   a. A specific EYLF outcome

   b. A language development theory and/or core principle of child development

Part B

1. Plan a play-based experience that provides developmentally appropriate opportunities for children to:
   - use their language and literacy skills during play
   - listen and respond to the language of others
   - express their thoughts, feelings and ideas in a positive and safe environment.

   Provide the following information.
   a. The name of the experience

   b. The age of the children involved

   c. The materials you used

   d. A description of the set-up

e. An explanation of how you carried out the experience

2. Explain how you encouraged children to listen and respond to the language used. Use examples to support your explanation.

Part C

Submit a report explaining how you promote EYLF Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators, in your daily work with children. In particular, focus on the sub-outcome: Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others for a range of purposes.

In your report:

- explain any organisational standards, policies and procedures that you follow to work towards Outcome 5
- link the information you provide to **two** communication development theories or core principles of development.
- explain how you assess and monitor the children's language skills and development
- explain how you encourage children to express themselves, listen to others and exchange information.

You may use a range of documentation methods to explain this information, such as:

- photos
- learning stories
- anecdotal records
- diary entries
- jottings
- samples of work
- checklists
- sociograms
- other methods as agreed with your trainer/assessor.

Topic 6

In this topic you will learn about:

Fostering an environment for holistic learning and development

The EYLF views the child as a capable learner who experiences a range of developmental areas.

To effectively implement holistic learning environments, educators need to:

- collaborate about assessments and evaluation
- share information with colleagues about child development and wellbeing
- recognise spontaneous teachable moments
- ensure a balance between child-initiated and educator-supported learning

Watch this video about fostering a child's development.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
✓	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership
Early Years Learning Framework	
Principles	
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
✓	Partnerships
✓	High expectations and equity
✓	Respect for diversity
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice
Practice	
	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children
✓	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching
✓	Learning environments
	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions
	Assessment for learning
Outcomes	
	Children have a strong sense of identity
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world
✓	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
✓	Children are confident and involved learners
	Children are effective communicators

6A Encouraging inquiry, challenges and experimentation

This learner guide has presented different aspects of child development and how you can use these ideas to provide meaningful learning environments. The consistent aspects to ensure and stimulate when creating a learning environment are:

- challenge
- engagement
- curiosity
- agency.

This section reiterates the significance of:

- initiating inquiry processes and providing challenges
- engaging children in shared conversations
- seeing mistakes as opportunities to learn.

Initiating inquiry processes

An inquiry process is about making sense of the world. Inquiry is valuable to children as it helps them to find out what is real, what is imaginary and what the answers to their questions are. It challenges cognitive abilities in the pre-operational stage as children grapple with ideas such as measurement and number, and links to other developmental areas such as those shown in the following table.

Developmental area	Characteristics
Social	Sharing ideas and helping each other
Language	Asking questions, finding out about new terms and meanings
Emotional and psychological	Feeling a sense of pride in finding out an answer
Physical	Carrying out tasks of varying difficulties

The ideas children have may launch an inquiry process in which you provide intentional teaching and set up learning environments that build on their interests. To use inquiry as a strategy for learning, employ the following steps.

Step	Example
1. Identify something the children are interested in, or provide a new item or experience.	Rex has brought a new basketball in to show the group. The children are intrigued by the ball.

Step	Example
2. Find out what the children already know.	Ask the children questions: ▶ Do you know what the ball is for? ▶ What game do you play with it? ▶ What is it made of? ▶ What makes the ball hard?
3. Find out what the children want to know.	You find out that the children would like to know: ▶ the rules of basketball ▶ how the basketball is made ▶ what makes it hard.
4. Discuss the item or interest and introduce correct terminology or language.	You: ▶ introduce a simple basketball game so that the children can play and learn the rules ▶ talk about the differences between man-made and natural materials ▶ show the children how to pump up a ball and they see how, without air inside, the ball is soft ▶ introduce new words: 'hoop', 'backboard', 'foul' and 'dribbling'.
5. Expand the topic or item into other areas of the curriculum.	Introduce other types of balls to play indoors and outdoors, including: ▶ small soft balls and a bucket so that the children can throw the ball into the bucket from a distance ▶ a soccer ball ▶ an AFL football.
6. Watch for decreasing interest; this tells you the children are finished with this inquiry.	After a week and a half, fewer children are playing. You decide to start a new inquiry topic.

Developing skills through inquiry

Some skills children may develop through an inquiry process are:

- exploring
- identifying
- classifying (sorting)
- comparing and contrasting
- hypothesising (putting forward an idea and testing it).

They will also have the opportunity to make mistakes as part of learning. As they try to understand how something works, the child will hypothesise and use the inquiry process to find the correct answer.

Inquiry processes can be implemented as group or individual experiences. Any time you are investigating a 'why' or 'how' question with the children, you are involved in inquiry. Preschool children often ask 'why' or 'how', and there are regular opportunities for you to ask these questions of the children too, facilitating intrigue with something they have not thought of earlier.

New ideas and challenges

Inquiry is about new ideas and challenges. It involves exploring, examining something in detail, experimenting and performing some procedure or action to find something out. It can also involve risk as the child is unsure of the result and needs to be prepared for unexpected outcomes.

Some outcomes will challenge and intrigue the child. Intrigue may occur if the child is unable to complete the inquiry for some reason, or if they cannot find the answer. The child may also be surprised and may need further help due to their experiment not turning out how they expected. A child may be surprised when they work something out and feel excited that they can add this knowledge to their memory.

When thinking about inquiry, try to match the type of challenge and investigation with the age of child. If the child is in the sensorimotor stage, they will be involved in inquiry that involves safe sensory exploration, such as:

- tasting different foods and drinks
- feeling the difference between two things
- touching something they haven't felt before.

The pre-operational child will have more questions and many ways of looking at things – not all of them logical.

Engaging in shared conversations

A shared conversation is a discussion – either spontaneous or planned – between adults and children. Shared conversations focus on a particular topic, but incorporate a range of ideas and thoughts, some initiated by the educator or parents and some by the children. Children may participate in the conversation depending on their interests and needs.

A shared conversation might become part of an inquiry process or a construction activity. Sustained shared conversations extend children's thinking and listening skills.

Using mistakes to learn

Mistakes are a common occurrence that both adults and children experience. If mistakes are seen as a weakness or failure, children may develop a fear of trying because there is a chance they will make an error.

Mistakes should be seen as developmental norms. If they are viewed this way, children can accept that when a mistake does occur, they are safe to take responsibility for their actions, and either solve the issue or develop skills to better manage the situation if it arises again.

Viewing mistakes as opportunities to learn relates to the theories in the following table.

Theory	How it applies to learning from mistakes
Temperament (Adler/ Steiner)	The child's temperament may influence their ability to see that they have responsibility in certain areas. A child with a sanguine and choleric temperament may believe the issue is someone else's problem. A child with a melancholic or phlegmatic temperament may believe they are totally responsible and blame themselves.

Theory	How it applies to learning from mistakes
Social learning theory (Bandura)	If you model accepting responsibility, it will be demonstrated by the children. This does not mean you must tell the children when you have made a major mistake at work or home, but sharing smaller and more relevant mistakes could be useful. For example: ▶ 'I didn't put out enough things. I will need to fix that.' ▶ 'I dropped the glass, now I need to clean up the mess.' ▶ 'I just stood on the toy. I hope it didn't break.'
Attachment theory (Bowlby)	A securely attached child is confident accepting responsibility as they know your response and feel safe in the outcome. A child who is not securely attached may fear any outcome and may even try to hide their actions so they don't need to take responsibility. This is common in some children when they are aggressive toward others; they may blame another child or act as if they are not involved.
Humanistic theory (Maslow)	The foundation of success is required for children to be able to safely and securely take responsibility for their actions. It may result in fear that their basic needs may be taken away. Punishment can have this effect; this can cause the child to hide from their responsibility.
Ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner)	The messages in the child's environment indicate whether it is safe to take responsibility or not. This theory links with all the other approaches in this particular area as the messages come from needs, fear, unpredictability, attachment and modelling.
Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)	Part of the scaffolding you do should include the limits of the experience. For example, if a child is learning to set the table, you might ensure they know to put a spoon, fork, cup and plate at each place. You would also let them know that if they forget something it is okay and they don't need to be scared or upset. By doing this you are letting the child know that they can accept responsibility for their actions without being placed in an unsafe or unpredictable situation. The child is then more likely to say, 'I will fix that' when a mistake occurs, rather than being upset or hiding the issue.
Psychosocial theory (Erikson)	The child who trusts others, feels confident and independent, and demonstrates initiative should have no trouble taking responsibility for their actions. This is part of their positive development. If the child is mistrusting, doubts their own abilities and feels guilt easily, they will be more likely to hide or avoid taking any responsibility for their actions – not because they are deceptive, but because they fear the outcome.

Theory	How it applies to learning from mistakes
Cognitive theory (Piaget)	Young children often have illogical explanations of how things may have happened. This may influence a child to refuse to take responsibility for their actions if they are not clear in their understanding of the situation. For example, they may fear it is worse than it really is. This difficulty with logic may lead to a child taking responsibility for something that is not related to them in a situation where they are upset.
Brain development	When mistakes are seen as ways to learn, children will use these situations to develop greater understanding and increase their brain power.

Self-directed play

Self-directed play involves children controlling the direction and structure of their own play. They freely initiate the play from their interest and continue due to their enjoyment or sense of fulfilment. Most children are involved in self-directed play for the majority of the time. They may need educators to demonstrate how to use materials or provide resources, but are then able to proceed to play independently or with peers. This method of play is suited to an emerging model, as the child is controlling the direction of the play, and their interests and projects emerge from these.

Self-directed play allows the child to use their own creativity to decide how the play will go and in what direction. They identify who is involved and how, developing social relationships and communication.

Parten's social play stages demonstrate how each age group is capable of a different level of self-directed play. For example, no matter how an educator intervenes, a two-year-old in the parallel play stage will not be able to participate fully in cooperative play.

Watch this video about providing children with opportunities to play and solve problems.

Practice task 17

1. Observe each of the following situations. For each item, include:
   - a description of what happened
   - details of how this links to the EYLF as per organisational requirements
   - details of how this links to a development theory and/or a core principle.

   a. An inquiry process

b. A situation where children displayed intrigue

c. A situation where children displayed surprise

d. A sustained shared conversation

e. A mistake made by a child that was used as a learning opportunity

f. A situation where self-directed play occurred

6B Guiding the learning process

As an educator, you have the ability to participate in the learning processes of children. There are a number of ways you can support children to learn from their play and structured activity. You can:

- scaffold learning and development
- recognise spontaneous teachable moments
- balance child-initiated and educator-supported learning
- promote a sense of belonging and connectedness
- facilitate diverse contributions from families.

Scaffolding learning and development

Scaffolding is integral to many of the concepts covered in this learner guide. It is a consistent strategy used to support children to develop their emerging skills.

Scaffolding, part of sociocultural theory, relates to the actions and efforts that support a child to learn to use new skills. The theory, developed by Vygotsky, is an important part of being a receptive educator, and describes an important part of pedagogy.

When you monitor learning, you find out whether a child is ready to learn or work independently. You then provide a range of support ideas to enable the child to learn and develop until they have the skills you are focusing on.

Example

Using scaffolding to help a child learn

Greg, one year old, is pulling at his shoe, trying to remove it. Helen, an educator, notices his actions and puts scaffolding strategies into place:

- She makes sure his shoe is loose so that he can pull it off easier.
- She talks to him about the actions of pulling off his shoe, gives encouragement and acknowledges his efforts.
- She suggests that Greg watches his peers to see how they are taking their shoes off.
- She suggests that his mum provides him with velcro shoes so that he can more easily learn the skill.

Recognising spontaneous teachable moments

Spontaneous teachable moments occur throughout the day. A teachable moment is when you recognise a learning opportunity that you can provide guidance for. The following are some examples of spontaneous teachable moments:

- A child is watching a bird. You see this as a spontaneous teachable moment to support them to learn what type of bird it is, where it lives and what it eats.
- A child is painting using different colours. You see this as a spontaneous teachable moment to talk about colour and experiment with mixing colours.

Scaffolding and teachable moments are very similar. Scaffolding relates to developing emerging skills; teachable moments are unplanned and are about appropriate learning relevant to that particular moment.

Balancing child-initiated and educator-supported learning

Children learn in different ways – through listening, seeing and doing. Child-initiated learning means that the child has chosen their activity and are learning through this. This may be an informal learning experience that involves play and results in knowledge, or the child may initiate a learning experience in which adults participate and guide the learning. The role of the educator is to support learning in which children are inviting this to occur.

Current pedagogy supports child-initiated learning in early childhood environments. It is promoted within the EYLF under the following listed practices, each with different methods you can use to support learning:

- Responsiveness to children – involves catering for children's interests and abilities and participating as partners in child-initiated learning.
- Learning through play – involves respecting the value of play in learning, and adding sustained shared conversations and encouragement to think and explore, including providing for teachable moments.
- Learning environments – involves catering for different learning styles and offering possibilities and experiences, knowing that the children will explore using the resources and ideas provided.
- Assessment for learning – involves watching, noticing, observing and recording so that you find out what is next, what the children need and how the program, and your pedagogy will adapt based on the knowledge you gain.

Supported learning interactions should not be disruptive to the learning that occurs naturally or through child investigation. Your curriculum will be balanced if you refer to the information you collect during assessment and monitoring. Your curriculum will also be informed by the learning you participate in with children and the important ideas generated from that experience. These can be turned into structured learning experiences.

Promoting a sense of belonging

Belonging and connectedness are the foundations to healthy relationships and enjoyable learning. The EYLF is based on the goal that all children feel a sense of belonging. This is a priority for each child.

The humanistic psychological theory considers belonging a necessary step toward reaching your full potential. Children are unable to explore, experiment and ask questions if they are insecure, unsure of their position in the group and concerned about what will happen next. Play, a medium for learning, will not occur naturally unless a child feels a sense of belonging.

Being is about feeling comfortable and safe. When you can 'be' you are involved and settled in your environment. When participating in this way, learning takes place and the child commences their path to 'becoming' all they can be.

Each child requires something different to help them feel they belong; you will need to discover this through orientation processes, discussion with families and finding out about the child. Children will respond to your inclusion and recognition of their cultural capital, the places and spaces you make their own and how you incorporate the child and their family.

Contributions from families

Encouraging parents to participate in the service can be challenging as each family has their own commitments and level of comfort. The varying skills, abilities, time available, ideas and interests of individual parents influence their involvement, as do their ideas about what education and care are.

Many services consider family involvement to be related to events and actions that occur or are arranged; for example, a family picnic or information evening. Some services consider family involvement to relate to parents doing something for the service; for example, fundraising or being on a committee.

A parent's ability to participate will vary according to their situation. For example, many work full time and may not have a lot of opportunity to interact with the service. Remember that parent involvement can simply be them staying a little longer at drop-off or pick-up times and enjoying an activity with their child or a small group.

The most important aspect of family involvement is the relationship you develop with the child's parents. This helps you to encourage active family involvement as you will know more about the parents, and be able to target their individual interests and capabilities. Volunteer opportunities may encourage parents to become involved in the service.

Some strategies include:

- Encourage families and other community members to volunteer their support by attending service events.
- Ask family members if and how they would like to participate as volunteers, and respond in a timely manner to their suggestions.
- Encourage family and community members to become involved as:
  - participants in management meetings
  - activity presenters
  - assistants with art shows, read-aloud events, workshops, book swaps and other events
  - volunteers on excursions
  - instructional assistants in specific activities
  - non-instructional assistants in general activities
  - from-the-home contributors; for example, assembling materials or typing.

Participation can also be increased by encouraging families to take part in learn-at-home activities. These activities should be designed to enable the family to gain a better understanding of how learning occurs, how it benefits the child, what is involved and how the service operates.

You can do this by:

- offering learning activities and events for the whole family
- inviting parents to borrow resources from service libraries for themselves and their families
- suggesting resources and activities in the community that promote learning
- giving parents materials they can use to evaluate their child's progress and provide feedback to educators
- linking home learning activities to learning in the service.

Practice task 18

1. List one example you have observed for each of the following. Include:
   - a description of what happened
   - details of how this links to the EYLF
   - details of how this links to a development theory or a core principle.

   a. A child demonstrates that they have a sense of belonging or connectedness.

   b. Scaffolding occurs.

   c. A family contributes to the learning community.

d. A teachable moment occurs.

e. A child-initiated learning experience involves some educator-supported learning.

6C Sharing information and collaborating about assessments

Information about a child's development and wellbeing may be gathered through:

- observation recording methods
- meetings
- communication books, logs and/or journals
- evaluation forms
- questioning
- surveys
- observing the way they react to the environment.

This information needs to be shared with colleagues so they can collaborate on the assessments and evaluation. Information you might exchange with others in regard to children's development and wellbeing includes:

- what the child's level of participation is and how they interact with others
- whether they use equipment appropriately
- whether modifications to equipment are needed to meet their abilities
- health-related information
- what their interests, strengths, abilities, skills and needs are
- background information about their family or living arrangements
- how they are progressing toward the EYLF outcomes.

The EYLF explains that assessment, based on the Practice: Assessment for learning, is the process of gathering and analysing information as evidence of what children know, can do and understand. It is also part of the cycle of planning, recording and evaluating. Your assessments provide evidence of the effectiveness of learning in the environment – otherwise known as evaluation. If you assess the progress of the child toward the EYLF outcomes, and consider their health and safety needs, you will have a complete picture of the child. This is the information you would share with others when they are co-educating the child, taking over the care of the child or are participating with others in strategies to enhance the development and wellbeing of individual children.

Sharing information with educators

Sharing information relies on the contribution of all parties involved, providing feedback, comments and suggestions as appropriate, or gaining knowledge and skill as needed. Confidentiality must be respected, so the educators you share most information with will be the ones responsible for the direct education and care of the child.

This open sharing enables educators to:

- create a holistic approach to the child to ensure successful outcomes occur
- become aware of each other's needs and goals so they can be assessed and applied or adapted

- develop an ongoing, trusting relationship with each other, enabling a greater ability to work together
- openly share concerns and issues about children
- show respect for each person's contribution to the child and their family
- share the specific skills and views that each educator's personal expertise can provide
- contribute alternative attitudes and ideas about children's development and wellbeing
- be acknowledged for the individual role they play in the child's life, and be valued as a person rich in knowledge about individual children.

Sharing information with families and children

By collecting and using information about children, you will be acknowledging and valuing the work of children and their families. In addition, you will be:

- consulting others about activity choices
- encouraging children to choose activities that support aspects of their development
- encouraging children to participate
- adapting the environment to make it belong to the children and their families
- respecting different levels of participation – including the choice not to participate.

When your observations of the children are guided by the children's views, cultural capital, family knowledge and peers, you will be ensuring the processes outlined in the following table are implemented.

Process	Benefit for child development and wellbeing
Consultation is taking place	You are using information from a range of related sources – each with their own perspectives and experiences. Children participate differently at home than they do in a care environment; they are influenced by their siblings and peers, they use different materials and their limitations are varied. Their cultural capital is untapped without consultation.
Diversity is valued	Stories, visual materials and activities based on information gained through a consultative method of planning ensure that the similarities and differences between families (not just their religion or country of origin) are respected and become an influence that extends each child's experiences and initiates their ability to accept others. This type of opportunity enables each child to become excited and curious about the ways others participate in life.
Contingencies and extensions are prepared	By involving others in your planning process, you are preparing for success. In particular, when children participate in planning, especially choosing, setting up and modifying activities, they are given the opportunity to participate more successfully and gain a sense of excitement at seeing their ideas evolve.

Process	Benefit for child development and wellbeing
Full participation is encouraged	By involving all stakeholders in every step, the activities and experiences you plan will be anticipated by others and increase their levels of interest. Parents may have materials or resources to offer, which may be required to implement the activity, complement the resources you have already or allow you to proceed in a direction you had not considered before. As an educator, you will be stimulated to explore new ideas, develop deeper relationships, listen and learn, use your time differently and more effectively, and value children's contributions and abilities. You will also see your role as the manager of communication, not only to ensure routines meet children's needs, but to work together with others on a daily basis to provide a lively environment valued by all.

Practice task 19

Use your responses to practice tasks 17 and 18 to share information about the children's development and wellbeing with a colleague. This collaboration should include assessments and evaluations.

Write down their comments about what you recorded.

Summary

- The consistent aspects to ensure and stimulate when creating a learning environment are challenge, engagement, curiosity and agency.
- The ideas children develop may launch an inquiry process in which you provide intentional teaching and set up learning environments that build on the children's interests.
- Sustained shared conversations with children may be spontaneous or planned. They enable a child to extend their thinking.
- Mistakes should be seen as developmental norms. When mistakes are seen as appropriate methods for learning, children are likely to think that it is safe to take responsibility for their actions when a mistake occurs.
- Self-directed play involves children controlling the direction and structure of their own play. They freely initiate the play from their interest and continue due to their enjoyment.
- Scaffolding facilitates development of emerging skills.
- Teachable moments are about appropriate learning relevant to a spontaneous moment.
- Children learn in different ways – through listening, seeing and doing. Child-initiated learning means that the child has chosen the activity through which they are going to learn something.
- Belonging and connectedness are the foundations to healthy relationships and enjoyable learning.
- Facilitate team collaboration of assessments and evaluation to examine the child's development and wellbeing.

Learning checkpoint 6
Fostering an environment for holistic learning and development

Part A

1. Plan an inquiry experience that provides opportunities for children to explore, experiment, test and investigate. Ensure the experience:
   - encourages children to try new ideas and take on challenges
   - provides resources and materials that offer challenge, intrigue and surprise
   - includes an opportunity for sustained shared conversation
   - provides an appropriate level of challenge where the children are encouraged to explore, experiment and take risks in learning.

   Include the following in your plan:
   - the name of the experience
   - the age of the children involved
   - the materials you used
   - the set-up
   - how you would carry out the experience.

2. Explain how an EYLF outcome relates to the experience.

3. Explain how a development theory or core principle relates to the experience.

Part B

Observe a child over two years old for a period of five days to collect the following information.

Specify the child's age and demonstrate the following by providing evidence (for example, learning stories, anecdotal records, a log, event samples or other documentation as agreed by your trainer/assessor):

- The child feels belonging and connectedness.
- Learning and development was scaffolded.
- The child made a mistake and this was used as a learning opportunity.
- You or a colleague involved the child's family and they made a contribution to the learning community.
- The child chose self-directed play, which led to a spontaneous teachable moment.
- A colleague collaborated with you and provided information for you to use in your evaluation of the child's development and wellbeing. Detail the information they provided.

Part C

Develop a report explaining how the EYLF Practice: Holistic approaches influences your daily work with children.

In your report:

- include an explanation of any organisational standards, policies and procedures that you follow that relate to the EYLF practice
- explain how you ensure the holistic child is represented, integrated and interconnected in the curriculum.

You may use a range of documentation methods to support your report, such as:

- photos
- learning stories
- anecdotal records
- diary entries
- jottings
- samples of work
- checklists
- sociograms
- other methods as agreed with your trainer/assessor.