# Mental Wellbeing and Screening in Early Childhood Education

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## Abstract

Mental wellbeing is an essential part of a child's overall health and development. During the early childhood years, children begin learning how to identify their emotions, develop relationships, and respond to challenges. Early childhood educators and caregivers play a vital role in helping children build the emotional skills they need to succeed both in school and throughout life. By using early screening tools, teaching healthy coping strategies, and creating supportive learning environments, educators can help children understand their feelings and develop fortitude.

One of the most effective ways to support children's mental well-being is through early intervention. Screening tools are brief, research-based assessments used to identify emotional, behavioral, developmental, or social concerns before they become more significant challenges. These screenings are not used to diagnose a child but instead help educators and families determine whether additional evaluation or support may be helpful.

**Examples of commonly used screening tools include:**

- **Ages and Stages Questionnaires:** Social-Emotional (ASQ): Evaluates children's social and emotional development from infancy through preschool.
- **Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA):** Measures protective factors such as self-regulation, attachment, and initiative while identifying behavioral concerns.
- **Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ):** Screens for emotional symptoms, peer relationships, conduct problems, and attention difficulties.

Using these tools allows teachers to collaborate with families and specialists to provide support early, improving children's long-term developmental and educational results.

Children experience a wide range of emotions but often need guidance in learning how to manage them appropriately. Teaching coping skills provides children with healthy strategies for handling stress, frustration, disappointment, and anxiety.

**Effective coping tools include:**

- **Deep breathing exercises:** Activities such as "smell the flower, blow out the candle" help children calm their bodies.
- **Mindfulness activities:** Simple guided breathing, stretching, or mindful listening exercises teach children to focus on the present moment.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** Children learn to tense and relax different muscle groups to reduce stress.
- **Emotion identification:** Using feeling charts, emotion cards, or mirrors helps children recognize and name their emotions.
- **Positive self-talk:** Encouraging children to say phrases such as "I can try again" or "I am safe" builds confidence and resilience.

Regular practice allows these strategies to become lifelong habits for emotional regulation.

Many early childhood classrooms include calm-down spaces or peace corners where children can regulate their emotions independently. These areas are not designed as punishment but as supportive environments where children can regain emotional control.

**A successful calm-down space may include:**

- Soft pillows or beanbag chairs
- Books about feelings
- Sensory tools such as stress balls or fidget toys
- Visual breathing guides
- Emotion charts
- Noise-reducing headphones
- Calming sensory bottles

Teachers can guide children in using these spaces appropriately by modeling when and how to use them during moments of frustration or deregulation.

Social-emotional learning helps children develop skills that promote positive relationships, emotional awareness, and responsible decision-making. Research has shown that children with strong social-emotional skills often perform better academically and demonstrate fewer behavioral challenges.

**SEL activities may include:**

- Reading stories that discuss emotions and empathy
- Role-playing social situations
- Cooperative games that encourage teamwork
- Group discussions about feelings
- Problem-solving activities that teach conflict resolution

These experiences help children understand both their own emotions and the feelings of others.

Positive relationships between teachers, children, and families provide the foundation for mental well-being. Children who feel safe, valued, and respected are more likely to express their emotions openly and seek help when needed.

**Teachers can foster supportive relationships by:**

- Greeting each child warmly each day
- Listening actively without judgment
- Praising effort rather than perfection
- Maintaining predictable routines
- Communicating regularly with families
- Modeling respectful and compassionate behavior

Strong relationships help children build trust, confidence, and emotional security.

Families play a critical role in supporting children's emotional development. When educators and families work together, children receive consistent messages about healthy emotional expression and coping strategies.

**Ways to involve families include:**

- Sharing information about classroom coping strategies
- Providing resources about child mental health
- Encouraging family mindfulness or relaxation activities at home
- Discussing developmental screening results respectfully and collaboratively
- Offering workshops on emotional development and positive parenting techniques

Partnership ensures that children receive consistent support across home and school environments.

Teaching young children about mental well-being begins with creating nurturing environments where they feel safe, understood, and supported. Early screening tools allow educators to identify concerns before they become more serious, while coping strategies such as mindfulness, breathing exercises, and

calm-down spaces help children learn healthy ways to manage their emotions. Social-emotional learning and strong relationshops with families further strengthen children's emotional development. By intentionally teaching these skills during the early years, educators help children develop resilience, confidence, empathy, and emotional regulation that will benefit them throughout their lives.