

*This is a transcript for the recording of the Be You webinar 'Transitions – preparing children and young people for change' (26 February 2019). The recording is available at <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/events/transitions>.*

## **Be You In Focus Webinar: Transitions – preparing children and young people for change**

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Welcome everybody to our In Focus webinar Transitions Preparing Children and Young People for Change. Thank you so much for joining us today. We've got a lot of people across Australia, so it's a really exciting hour ahead of us. For those of you that don't know much about Be You, it's a national initiative led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace funded by the Australian government. Be You aims to transform Australia's approach to supporting children and young people's mental health in early learning services and schools. Our vision is that every learning community is positive, inclusive, and resilient, a place where every child, young person, educator, and family can achieve their best possible mental health.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Be You offers educators and learning communities evidence-based online professional learning, complemented by a range of tools, resources, and events like this webinar today. Together, we're working to grow a mentally healthy generation, and we'll speak more about the benefits of being a registered Be You learning community later in the presentation. Before we begin, Beyond Blue and the Be You team acknowledge the traditional owners of lands and waters throughout Australia and pay respects to elders past, present, and emerging. We recognise the importance of continued connection to culture, country, and community to the health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** In addition to our acknowledgments, we also want to highlight that we may reference contents drawn from the Always Be You resource located on the Be You website. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledges are fundamental to the continuation of culture. Embedding references or imagery throughout this presentation is with the objective of being inclusive and respectful, and for the purpose of embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing, and doing. I invite all our listeners today to think about the lands, which you're joining us from across Australia and reflect on what that connection means to you.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Today, I am joined by two other panellists who you hopefully will see in a moment on your screen to share with you our knowledge and insights on the following learning objectives that you can see. To kick off the introductions, I'd first like to formally introduce myself. My name is Natalie Fanariotis, and I'm the Implementation lead for Be You, as part of the Beyond Blue team. A little bit about me, I'm a registered teacher in Victoria, and my contributions today stem from my experience within the field of education as a secondary school teacher, a head of wellbeing services, and educator across community engagement projects. I've supported many children and young people through times of transition, and my current work involves a focus on the successful implementation of whole setting approaches to positive mental health.

- Natalie Fanariotis:** I'd now like to introduce our other panellists, Marie Hirst and Sally Gissing.
- Marie Hirst:** Hi. I'm Marie Hirst. I'm a psychologist and mental health consultant. I've been working for over 14 years with children, young people, and families to support their mental health and wellbeing. I began my career as a primary teacher before training in educational psychology in the UK when I worked across the early childhood, primary, and secondary sectors before moving to Australia and working in the not-for-profit sector managing a range of services. I'm really looking forward to sharing my experiences regarding transition with you all today.
- Sally Gissing:** Thanks, Marie. Hi all. My name is Sally Gissing. I'm a Be You Implementation Manager here at Beyond Blue. I've been working in education for over 10 years now, both as a primary and secondary teacher as well as a school-based education and program manager. My role here is really drawing on my knowledge of the education sector and wellbeing initiatives to help support the implementation of Be You across Australia and really looking forward to talking about transitions with you all today drawing from my firsthand classroom experience.
- Natalie Fanariotis:** Thanks, Marie and Sally. It's great have professionals with different experiences and areas of expertise contributing to today's webinar, so I really appreciate having you both on board. Now, to help provide the best possible webinar experience today, we will all now be switching off our webcam, so Marie and Sally have left us. I'm going to turn my webcam off in a moment just to ensure our audio and the presentation flow is optimised. You will see us again later, but for now, I'll say bye and you will be able to hear the audio.
- Natalie Fanariotis:** OK, so before I provide you with some technical tips for maximising your learning online today, I wanted to highlight the importance of being mindful that talking about mental health in any context including transitions can affect us all differently. If you'd like further support at any stage for your own mental health, reaching out and connecting with others can be really helpful. Information about self-care and mental health supports can be found on the Be You website including who to contact if you want to have a chat with somebody.
- Natalie Fanariotis:** Now, for those unfamiliar with the webinar platform, this is what your screen will typically look like with the webinar viewer on the left and the control panel to the right. Throughout the webinar, you can ask questions about using the webinar function, and we'll have some technical support available for you, and the control box with the question box is highlighted in red. You can also use the control panel to manage your computer or phone audio. Today, everybody has been placed in listen-only mode, and your microphones have been muted as we have a large number of attendees. If you are experiencing any other difficulties at any time, please note the customer care details on the screen, and contact this team directly.
- Natalie Fanariotis:** Throughout the webinar today, we encourage you to get involved as much as you feel comfortable. It's important that everyone feels like this is a safe space to learn and that everyone's contributions matter. You can ask questions via the questions box, and we hope to respond to as many of your queries as possible during today's session, but for those that we don't get to, we'll follow up with the supplementary material after the event concludes.

All event participants will be able to access a certificate of participation, a recording of this webinar, and any supplementary material.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Throughout the webinar, we'll also pose some reflective questions that we invite you to consider and contextualise within your own learning community. We also encourage you to have a go at the polls we'll be launching throughout the session. Now, I'd like to pass over to Sally to launch our first poll and discuss different types of transitions and influencing factors.

**Sally Gissing:** Thanks, Nat. To get us thinking about types of transitions, let's try our first poll, which is asking if you've seen examples of transitions in your practice recently. We'll give you about a few 10 or 15 seconds to have a go at this poll. I can see some people are voting already, but just to give you a chance to see where you need to vote and then, we will share our results and see what we think. I suppose it's probably all very much front of mind at the moment given that we're in February and at the start of a ... Oh, we are. Yes, many, some examples, no examples, and not sure, need more information about transitions.

**Sally Gissing:** I can see there's lots of people, the majority have said yes, many examples I've seen. Look. For those people who have said not sure, need more information about transitions, you've definitely come to the right place, and we hope that we can share lots of information that will really help you in your practice today. Moving on to the next slide now, so looking at the many types of transitions, and I suppose that the thing to start with is quite simply, transitions are all about change. They signify the end of something and the beginning of something else, and play a significant part in the life of any child and young person.

**Sally Gissing:** Any change can be stressful and involve the need to adapt to new circumstances. The greater the degree of change, the more difficult it can be for children and young people, and their families. Children and young people experience many transitions in their day-to-day lives such as transitioning from home into a learning setting or going between activities or classes from indoors to outdoors, and so on. Today, we'll focus on the bigger transition of starting at a new learning setting, be it at an early learning service, primary, or secondary school.

**Sally Gissing:** Given the time of year, this type of transition may be front of mind for you. Even though we're focusing on this bigger transition, it's important to note that supporting children and young people to manage the smaller transitions in their daily lives is actually the building blocks for supporting them to manage life's bigger changes. Everyday transitions give us an opportunity to build children and young people's social and emotional skills like listening, problem-solving, compromising, negotiation, and so on. These will all contribute to managing change.

**Sally Gissing:** Consider their transitions will be different for everyone, so take time to think about what this may look like, feel like, and sound like across diverse communities, and what additional and possibly complex challenges this may present. We encourage you to spend time considering the needs of individuals and families from diverse backgrounds. For example, what might influence or impact on successful transitions for, say Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children and young people with a

disability, developmental delay or health condition, children and young people who have differing family structures, parents and carers, all these families experiencing hardship or extra pressures? All will have their own unique transition experiences and may require additional support. Partnering with families to navigate the best supports for children and young people is a great first step, and we'll definitely cover that a little later on. Now, I'll hand over to Marie who will tell us a little bit more about the influences on transitions.

**Marie Hirst:**

Thanks, Sally. Many years ago, we used to think about transition into learning environments more in relation to the child or young person. How can we make them fit the environment or what do they need to do or change? Thankfully, nowadays, we know that we need to view transition from a more multi-dimensional perspective, which recognises all levels of influence starting with the child, their peers, family, learning community, and the wider community including the broad political and social environment. All of these play a really important role in supporting children to make a successful transition, so whilst there's absolutely things the individual child or young person brings to their transition such as their temperament or their coping skills, there are many things that those around the child that influence whether transition is smooth.

**Marie Hirst:**

For example, that could be things like opportunities to build positive relationships including friendships with peers, having educators who are warm and responsive, the experience of an inclusive environment where diversity is valued, settings that enable connection to culture and support the development of cultural identity, and then, there's also the availability of support services, and so on. It's good to keep in mind that transition is also a process that happens over time, so often, we think about that first day or that first week, and as you will know, transition begins well before this time as early childhood settings, schools, and families begin preparations and continues as children and young people settle into their new environment. Many children who started this year are still in transition as they settle. For many, it goes smoothly, but others need more time to adjust.

**Marie Hirst:**

In some cases, they may settle well initially with issues rising in a few months when learning demands and pacing increases. All children and young people benefit from preparations, support, and ongoing understanding. It's really an optimal time to promote mental health and wellbeing, showing children they can cope, and celebrating successes. It's also a time when existing issues can be exacerbated, so it's important to be aware of those who might need additional intervention. You might be able to think of other influences on transition. Remember, as we go, if you've got any questions, send them through the questions panel.

**Marie Hirst:**

Just moving on to the next slide, we're going to think about how can transitions impact on mental health. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of children and young people, which helps us understand their perspective and what they might need. Usually, when we start a new job or position, it's not unusual to experience some nerves or jitters. After all, we have to learn all about the rule and what's expected of us. We have to figure out the new norms and navigate new premises and get to know the new boss. We do this with years of experience in navigating transitions and hopefully with well-developed social and emotional skills.

**Marie Hirst:**

For children and young people, transitions are more significant because they're still developing the skills to enable them to cope, so think about the

last time you started a new job or took on new professional responsibilities. What was it like? What were you feeling? Did you feel nervous, excited? Probably a mixture of both. Let's bring our thinking to life now by considering two case examples. Firstly, let me introduce you to Malik. Malik is five years old and started school this year. Malik's family moved into the area from interstate during the summer holidays. He presents as a quiet reserved member of the class. His teacher has noticed that he fairly rarely volunteers to speak or be a helper. He's liked by his peers, but he tends to keep to himself. Information provided by Malik's early childhood setting highlights that he participated better in small groups. They also said that he's able to attend and concentrate for short periods, but he was reluctant to ask for help. He really enjoys construction and building activities as well as being outdoors.

**Marie Hirst:** Just reflect for a moment. Think about how might Malik be feeling, why might he be feeling that way. Let's put ourselves in Malik's shoes. Some of the things I came up with were things like maybe he's feeling a sense of loss and because he's left trusted relationships with his previous educators and also his friendships, he might be feeling a little bit overwhelmed. Malik has experienced more than one transition. He's moved homes, which is a stressful time for the whole family. He might be feeling a little bit stressed because of the demands in his attention and concentration, which the information provided suggests might be an area of development for him, and I'm sure you can think of many other things.

**Marie Hirst:** If you're in a early childhood setting, think about what things would you have done to help prepare Malik for the transition. If you're in a primary school, what would you do to support Malik? Sally, from a primary teacher's perspective, what are some of your ideas?

**Sally Gissing:** Thanks, Marie. From a primary school teacher's perspective, I'd suggest finding opportunities to interweave activities that Malik enjoys such as, you mentioned construction and being outdoors, and this time of year is really where we're wanting to build that really strong rapport and positive relationship with our students, so you can use construction and being outdoors, those sort of activities as really great conversation starters with Malik, and also investigate if there are other students who have similar interests to him and creating opportunities for them to participate in these activities together whether it be in a classroom or at recess, and at lunch times.

**Marie Hirst:** Thanks, Sally. That's some really great ideas, and as you were talking there, I was just also thinking that one of the first things I'd be doing is getting on the phone to his previous setting and talking to the early childhood educators and finding out a little bit more about his experiences there, the strategies that they used to support him, and more about his strengths.

**Marie Hirst:** Let's move on now to think about our second case study. Let me introduce you to Talia. Talia is 12 years old, and she started secondary school this year. Talia is an exuberant individual who is very active in class and takes time to settle following transitions between classrooms. She's a willing participant in discussions, but she can be a little bit argumentative with teachers and her peers. She doesn't yet appear to have a stable social group. Information from her primary school highlights specific difficulties around reading, writing, as well as emotion regulation, which at times impacted on her peer relationships. Her primary school also said that she was creative and enjoys activities like art and music.

- Marie Hirst:** Again, think about how might Talia be feeling. Why might she be feeling this way? Again, some of the ideas I came up with was, well, perhaps she's feeling a little bit lonely. Her friendships have changed, and she's yet to find her place in a friendship group. Her social skills might make this a little bit more challenging for her. She might be feeling an initial sense of disconnection, maybe a bit lost in her new environment, or maybe overwhelmed. Because we know that she has some challenges in literacy, it might be raising her anxiety and causing a bit of a barrier to accessing lessons.
- Marie Hirst:** Think about how would you support Talia in your setting. What additional information could you gather, and how would you do that? What supports do you have available within your learning community to help Talia connect and feel a sense of belonging? Natalie, from a secondary teacher's perspective, how would you support Talia?
- Natalie Fanariotis:** Thanks, Marie. To support Talia, I guess I'd want to find out a lot more information about her, so this might be speaking with leaders at the school, her previous school, and also be very keen to partner with their family, but most importantly, actually asking Talia directly what she would like as type of support. You've said Talia's energetic and creative, so I'd want to be able to create opportunities for her to work to her strengths like through active getting-to-know-you activities or creative-based tasks that she can showcase her qualities and interests.
- Natalie Fanariotis:** For Talia and other students in the class to feel a sense of empowerment for their own learning space and also work with the class to create some shared norms, so highlighting how we're going to work together collaboratively and respectfully, and I think this really sets the tone especially at the start of the year and provides a lot of clarity about expectations and what we're all accountable for including myself as a teacher. I might also set up a rotating roster or class seating plan, which is going to help Talia get to know other peers and form those relationships, and finally, something that I could do is familiarise Talia and the rest of the class with the school routines and the environment because I think that when people are experiencing significant periods of change, knowing what's happening, when, and where can be really grounding and provide a sense of stability.
- Marie Hirst:** Thanks, Nat. Those are some really great ideas that you and Sally have provided. I really like that both of you thought about the children and the children's strength, and used those to support them. Now, we're going to just take a bit of a moment to check in with each other and think about what we've been discussing. Have you heard new information? Has the content presented affirmed what you're already doing? Are there practices that you can apply within your own setting?
- Marie Hirst:** There's some questions that have been coming through, and I'll just take a little bit of time to answer one of them if I can, so let's have a look. Can you tell us a bit more about some of the key things early childhood services do to support transition?
- Marie Hirst:** Okay, so thinking a little bit about early childhood specifically just for a moment, when I think about those early years and children's experiences within early childhood environments, I think that they really lay the foundations for the big transitions like starting school. Early childhood educators do lots of things to support children make the transition. For

example, those are things like helping children develop good language and listening skills. They might also help children develop positive attitudes about learning, and of course, they support children's social and emotional competence, which are really important skills to have as we go through transitions.

**Marie Hirst:**

They also support children through day-to-day transitions like, for example, saying goodbye to a family member or starting and stopping an activity. When educators organise their feelings and help them to manage their emotions, they're learning skills that help them manage big transitions too. An early childhood settings prepare children and families in lots of practical ways, and so sometimes, it can be things like helping children understand and develop realistic expectations about what school is going to be like, practicing skills to build confidence, things like sometimes, services get children to being in simple things like a lunchbox and practice opening it, and getting the foods out and knowing what to eat. They also provide lots of information to families because, of course, it's a transition for the whole family.

**Marie Hirst:**

Remember to keep your questions coming through, and we'll try to get to them during the session or provide some additional information afterwards. Let's move on now to think about how we can promote positive transitions. Many of you will be aware of the concept of mental health risk and protective factors, which I'm going to touch on briefly here, but if you want to know more, please have a look at the Be You professional learning within the mentally healthy communities domain under the Understand module. We'll be doing a lot of sign posting for you as well today, so that if there's information that you want word on, that you know where to go.

**Marie Hirst:**

Throughout anybody's life course, there's a range of influences and events, both positive and negative, that impact on an individual's mental health. These influences are known as risk and protective factors. Risk factors for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing increase the likelihood of mental health issues developing during childhood and beyond. These includes internal, family, or environmental characteristics, experiences, and events that challenge social and emotional wellbeing, so that might be things like having a family member with a mental health issue, the experience of exclusion or racism or disconnection within the learning community, just to name a few. The presence of risk factor doesn't mean that a child or young person will develop a mental health difficulty, but increases the likelihoods.

**Marie Hirst:**

Protective the factors. On the other hand, decrease the likelihood of mental health issues, and build and maintain resilience even when risk factors are present. Enhancing individual, family, and environmental protective factors means children are less likely to be vulnerable because they receive the acceptance, warmth, and support required for learning social and emotional development and resilience.

**Marie Hirst:**

By strengthening protective factors, we can also support children and young people's through transition. Some particular protective factors that increase the likelihoods of a smooth transition includes having a sense of belonging in the learning environment, developing positive relationships, involvement of families, and of course, building social and emotional skills and coping skills. I'm going to hand over to Sally now who's going to tell us a little bit more about fostering a sense of belonging.

**Sally Gissing:** Thanks, Marie. A sense of belonging is a significant protective factor and includes feelings of being accepted, respected, and supported by others in the learning environment. Children and young people who feel they belong are happier, more relaxed, and have fewer behavioural problems. They are also more motivated and successful learners. It is really hard to underestimate the importance of belonging and its role in mental health. For example, the positive effects of belongingness extend beyond the learning environment. Research highlights that it can buffer the impact of disadvantage, and for young people, it can also serve as a protective factor for engaging in risky behaviours. Children who do not feel a sense of belonging are more likely to become disengaged, refuse to go to their learning setting, and experience mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

**Sally Gissing:** As children and young people are now settling into their new learning environment it, it's important to step back and observe. We need to consider if they're developing a sense of belonging. If not? why might this be? Thinking about their individual needs. Could there be a mental health issue or learning needs that have not yet been identified? Think about their relationships. Do they have a sense of connection to their educators, and peers? What about their learning environment? Are there elements that the child or young person might be struggling with? Do they see themselves reflected in their environment, or are there circumstances outside of the learning setting that's impacting their sense of belonging?

**Sally Gissing:** Consider what transition activities could help children and young people in your setting feel like they belong. These could include opportunities for families to get to know the new learning environment, really getting to know the children and young people in your care and their families, knowing their needs and preferences, ensuring the environment reflects the community, so thinking of examples like, can families recognise themselves in photographs, books, toys, and learning materials? Think about involving cultural leaders or community figures in the transition process. Try focusing on children and the family strengths to help them settle in, and clearly communicating the service or school's policies on things like welfare, safety, and discipline, and lastly, ensuring children and young people in their families know who and where they can go to if they need help. Next up, let's hear from Natalie about the importance of positive relationships as a protective factor during transitions.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Thanks, Sally. Positive relationships is definitely a significant protective factor. They enable children, young people, and families to feel that they're welcome and valued, that they can contribute and be listened to, and that their opinions, ideas, and beliefs matter. Positive relationships and a sense of belonging are really interrelated. When children and young people have a supportive network of relationships, they're more likely to feel comfortable and connected to the learning environment. Positive relationships build mutual trust, respect, and shared understanding. The development of positive relationships involves all groups, recognising that each has a valuable contribution to make. For example, when you're building relationships and communicating with children's previous educators and setting leaders like between an early learning service in school, that's really going to strengthen that relationship and understanding.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Partnering with families is also critical in creating and maintaining positive relationships. When educators and families work together, it provides continuity for children and young people as they settle into their new



environments. There are many reasons to foster positive relationships with families during transitions. Building strong connections early can support ongoing partnerships with families throughout education settings, and this will ensure a collaborative and really holistic support approaches provided to children and young people, which in turn has benefits socially as well as for their learning.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Fostering relationships between families can also influence transition. Research suggests that families who have positive relationships with other families generally have low stress levels and more positive interactions with children. This then leads to more positive educational experiences and further creates a sense of community. I think it's really important to link families and others in the learning community with their wider community during transitions as that's likely to provide the additional social support and reduce social isolation at potentially stressful times.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Some actions that can support positive relationships include inviting families to the learning community for an information session, events, or some sort of social activity. I think this is a really great way to make families feel welcome and connect with others as well as introduce educators to families and build those relationships. Relationships internal to the early learning service or school are also really important, so when staff members are seen to model respectful and open interactions, it really demonstrates the learning community that the voices and opinions of everyone are valued. Supportive relationships amongst and between educators can help to ensure continual improvement of transition processes through reflective practice.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Now, relationships can also extend into the local community and assist in tailoring transition practices to fit local needs. Settings may have close connections with local community groups and other organisations and members from such communities, and they can provide essential links between educators, families, children and young people. An example of this is a commitment to engaging with community members as well as positive involvement of families, and this has been emphasised as central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's transitions into learning settings.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Now, there's going to be some families that naturally feel connected. Perhaps they've had other children at the early learning service or school or already know some families or educators. Now, this is a great opportunity to engage with these families and see where they can further strengthen and champion engagement with a broader family community. Thinking about new families or those who don't know anyone, think about how you can support them to build those relationships. Different settings have different levels of and opportunities for engagements, so think about what would enable stronger partnerships with families especially in the secondary environment where there is less opportunity for incidental interactions. Marie's going to continue on with telling us more about partnering with families.

**Marie Hirst:** Thanks, Nat. We've touched on the importance of viewing families as a great source of information and knowledge about their child, which helps educators to appropriately support the child or young person during the transition periods. Transition is an ideal time to foster family involvement because the research tells us engagement tends to be higher, and we know when family is involved, it supports a smooth transition as well as ongoing

mental health and learning success. Just focusing for a moment on secondary, it's important to note that the commencement of secondary schooling can be accompanied by a gradual lessening of parental involvement. However, the research tells us that it remains highly important and influential in terms of academic success and wellbeing. We still need to work at engaging with families at all stages of education, and transition provides an opportunity to help families understand why this is important and what it might look like from direct involvement in the learning community to home-led aspects of engagement such as providing a general positive atmosphere and encouragement for learning.

**Marie Hirst:**

The transition phase could also be used to partner with local agencies to deliver parenting programs or workshops for families to enable their capacity to support their child's development and wellbeing. Strategies like these help to increase a family's confidence in managing the transition, which has been shown to further increase engagement within the learning setting and improve outcomes for children and young people. It's good to reflect on whether your colleagues see the value of working with families and if not, what could you do to help them understand the benefits?

**Marie Hirst:**

With that in mind, let's do our next poll. Do my colleagues see the value of working with families? Just give you a few seconds to complete this, and think about, yes, and they actively engage with families, yes but lack confidence and/or time to engage with families, or no and have limited engagement with families. Have a think, and complete the poll. Just the last few seconds coming up. Here we go, so 64% of you feel that your colleagues both value and actively engage with families, which is really terrific. Lots more of you want to engage with families, but perhaps lack confidence or sometimes, it's difficult to find the time.

**Marie Hirst:**

There's always ways that we can continue to develop our practice and further engage and create authentic partnerships with families. If you're registered as a Be You learning community, you could speak to your action team to identify opportunities and select some quick win strategies highlighted in the Be You Implementation Tools. Some other ideas include asking for feedback directly from families about how they think the early learning service or school could best connect with them and vice-versa, so always good not to make assumptions, but actually to connect with families and ask them what they think. Ask a family or a few families to come and present to staff about their cultural backgrounds and values to better understand their various families. Encourage colleagues to check out the Be You professional learning under the domain family partnerships and put into practice some of the key learnings. Thanks for contributing to the poll, and now, we'll move on to the next slide.

**Marie Hirst:**

OK, so now we're going to think a little bit about social and emotional learning and coping skills. Social and emotional learning includes the ability to understand and manage emotions, to be able to set goals and work towards them, as well as make and maintain healthy relationships. A slide seems to be a little bit stuck for now, so I'll keep talking and hopefully, the slides will catch up in a minute. In terms of social and emotional learning, for the purposes of today, I just really want to touch on the fact that these skills support the transition phase and protects children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during a potentially stressful period. If you want to know more about social and emotional learning, you can look at the Be You Professional Learning under the domain learning resilience and Actions Catalogue.

**Marie Hirst:** Early childhood services and schools support children to develop their social and emotional skills through their everyday interactions, through structured programs, and through their planning. These skills make it more likely that children and young people will cope as they settle into their new environment and get on with learning. Social and emotional learning includes the development of coping skills, which are things we think and do to help us through difficult situations. They help us when we encounter ups and downs, and continue to develop as children and young people grow during transition, for example, being able to ask for help or use helpful thinking strategies like, "I can do this. I can be brave," enables children and young people to cope with change. Working with families and helping them to also learn about coping skills and how to support their development and their child will be more effective than doing it on your own.

**Marie Hirst:** Think about it how do you develop social and emotional skills through your everyday interactions. Some of the things I was thinking of includes things like interacting with ... when we interact with respects and care and appreciation, and we demonstrate to children and young people how we use our social and emotional skills, we know that children and young people learn by modelling and observing the way that we interact, and so we're teaching them about the skills that they need to learn too. We also, when we provide comfort to a child or young person when they're upset helps them learn how to manage some of those big emotions and when we help children find the label for the emotion that they're feeling. All of these things contribute to children's social and emotional learning.

**Marie Hirst:** Great. The slides are back up with us again, so we're good to go. Let's move on to the next section, knowing when and how to find help. Before we do that, let's get a sense of how confident you're already feeling, recognising when you may need additional support and knowing where to find it, so let's do our next poll. How confident are you knowing when and how to find additional support for a child or young person? Maybe you're feeling very confident. You might be feeling a little bit confident, somewhat confident, or maybe you're not confident at all, and that's OK, because coming up, we're going to give you lots of hints and tips about things that you can be doing. We'll just give you a few seconds to complete the poll. Have a think about your experiences. You might like to think about children you're supporting at the moment.

**Marie Hirst:** OK, so we've got a number of you, 39%, feel really confident, and we've got a number of you, 57%, who feel somewhat confident, and so that's really great. Lots of you have got lots of ideas and ways of supporting children and young person, but it's not unusual to feel a little bit unsure about how to recognise when to seek help and what support is available, so let's move on from the poll and give you some ideas about what you might be able to do.

**Marie Hirst:** Okay, so the time that you've spent getting to know the child or young person and their family will really assist in making decisions, so we're just going to move on to the next slide. It's not unusual for children and young people to show some changes in behaviour during transition like regressions, younger behaviours, acting out, and so on. Many of these will settle with the approaches that we've described earlier. Talking to families and educators in the child or young person's previous setting is a really good place to start to find out how they typically coped with change to help understand what are typical transition behaviours and what are possible signs of ongoing difficulty requiring additional support.

**Marie Hirst:** Next, stepping back and conducting some observations of the child or young person can help clarify what their needs are and make decisions about the level of concern. Be You provides the BETLS observation tool, which supports educators to gather helpful information. BETLS stands for behaviours, emotions, thoughts, learning, and social relationships because we really want to understand the child or young person's whole experience, and you can find this on the Be You website. It's also important to gather a range of perspectives including others within the learning community and families because we want to have really good information and also involve families from the start. We then need to keep monitoring and assessing if interventions or supports put in place are successful, so here's Natalie to tell us a bit more.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Thanks, Marie. When we carry out observations, we want to be as specific as possible to ensure the information we gather is reliable and helpful. Remember that when thinking about behaviour, we're talking about children and young people who might be showing internalising behaviours such as withdrawal as well as those with externalising behaviours such as acting out or pushing boundaries. Some suggestions for gathering good observations, to focus on the practice not the person, and this ensures we're being really inclusive and accepting of different personalities and just focusing on what we are noticing in behaviours. Consider the patterns of behaviour, so think about whether you're noticing connections between certain times when different peers are involved. Is it at the beginning or the end of the day when a child or young person is going home? Talk to other educators or leaders to identify if others are noticing the same things as this sometimes can help create a bigger picture. Also, noticing what things trigger children's problems and what helps to make them easier.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Think also about reflecting on areas of everyday functioning that have been impacted. This might be learning, social relationships, ability to cope, and think about what will support a stronger return to positive outcomes.

**Natalie Fanariotis:** Now, through all considerations, it's really important to always be very respectful of privacy and only share observations for the purpose of supporting the child or young person to the people that need to know. Through all observations, it's really important to remember that the purpose of observing is not to diagnose mental health issues. It's really to help educators be more informed about next steps and who is best to connect with to follow up this support, and this might be leadership, wellbeing leaders within the setting, and potentially families too. There will be times where we do need to seek further support, and Marie's going to tell us a bit about that.

**Marie Hirst:** Thanks, Nat. Many behaviours, as we've discussed, will settle with supports and working closely with families, and some of those, the issues described on the slide may be temporary. For example, emotional volatility may be an initial response to change. However, some difficulties can be ongoing such as continued distress and avoidance of the service or school. Many of you can probably think of children and young people displaying some of these behaviours described on the slides and have a range of strategies that you use to support them. If the behaviours are not settling, then it may be time to seek additional support. Bear in mind that for some families, it might be difficult for them to approach you if they are noticing some challenges with their child, so you might, for example, notice a family withdrawing from communication or maybe even expressing some frustration because they're unsure how to manage the situation. You might need to reach out and try to understand things from their perspective.

**Marie Hirst:** Carrying out observations like those described in the previous slide will help you know if the behaviours are improving or staying the same. The information will be really valuable if you do end up working with external agencies or professionals, and I know from working with schools and early childhood services that when they provide me information like that, it's so helpful. Here we go. Here's some ideas about some helpful supports. It's not an exhaustive list, but these are just some examples of what might be available.

**Marie Hirst:** Of course, getting to know your unique community, gathering information, and building relationships with a range of agencies and professionals will help you know what options are available. Support may look very different depending on the child or young person's needs. For some, setting-based targeted intervention may be enough. You might consult with a senior educator in your early childhood setting or the wellbeing team at your school. There may be targeted groups that are available, for example, evidence-based social skills groups or additional resources that can be accessed to support the child or young person in your learning setting.

**Marie Hirst:** For others, referrals to an external professional may be necessary. If the setting has good relationships with community agencies, then sometimes, consulting with agencies can provide guidance and directions for next step. I know myself, working in not-for-profit agencies that I've often been on the phone to early childhood educators or primary school teachers or secondary teachers who want to talk through a situation and think about whether the deferral is appropriate for our agency, obviously with the information anonymised, but it can really help to talk through if you foster good relationships with other agencies.

**Marie Hirst:** Keep in mind that accessing some supports may require a referral. Usually, often a GP is a good place to start. For example, if you need an assessment by a paediatrician or you might need a mental healthcare plan to access a psychologist. Working with families in this context is really essential because involving them every step of the way ensures that if a referral to an external professional is advisable, then it doesn't come as a shock to the family. The key point here is that early intervention is always more effective to achieve better mental health outcomes.

**Marie Hirst:** Okay, so let's have our last check-in for today. Well done, everyone. Let's take the opportunity to think about the practices in your learning community and practices that you think you could continue, start, change, or possibly stop to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during times of transition. I'll just take a couple of minutes just to see if I can answer a couple of questions that have come in. Thanks so much for all of your questions. Someone has asked about building partnerships within the local community and how you can find out what supports are available.

**Marie Hirst:** Really, a good place to start is to do a bit of an audit and really research what's available because it will be different in every community. Spending some time talking to other educators often if you've got relationships with other schools, other early childhood settings, they often ... and sharing information because sometimes, someone else knows lots of information or has lots of contacts that you can share with each other. Sometimes, local councils organise events for agencies and learning communities to get together to share information, so it's a good idea to check out what your local government, your local council have available. Really, it's about reaching out and building those relationships, and just getting on the phone and talking

to people to see what's available. Sometimes, there's more available than you think there is, so it's really good to spend some time doing that.

**Marie Hirst:** Another question that's come in is, what if the family don't want a referral for professional support? This can be really tricky, and I know that it's something that a lot of people grapple with. I think the thing is that we really need to work with families and try and understand their perspective. There can be lots of reasons why a family are reluctant to make a referral. That might include things like just their own sense of loss or the unexpectedness that their child is perhaps not ... the way that their child is developing isn't perhaps in line with what they expected or what they had dreamed would happen.

**Marie Hirst:** Perhaps, their own experiences of being at school or working with other agencies may make them reluctant. Perhaps there are different values, attitudes, cultural understandings that we need to investigate a bit more to really know where families are coming from. For some families, they just need a bit more time, so you need to follow your setting's policies and procedures to support the child or young person, involving the family every step of the way in giving them feedback and helping them feel like they have a say, that they have some ownership over what happens to their child. You might find that over time that that family then become more willing to make referrals outside of the learning community.

**Marie Hirst:** Thanks everyone for your great questions. I'm going to hand over to Sally now who's going to wrap things up for us and speak about next steps.

**Sally Gissing:** Thanks, Marie. Today, we've covered a lot. Firstly, we looked at types of transitions and what can influence these, then how transitions can impact mental health, promoting positive transitions by reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors, and then, we looked at practical tips to strengthen protective factors through fostering a sense of belonging and positive relationships, partnering with families and building social and emotional skills. We also talked about how to know when a child or young person may require additional help and where to access this.

**Sally Gissing:** We hope you have taken some key learnings from today and that you can share these with your learning community to support children and young people through transitions. We encourage you to check out the Be You website, specifically the professional learning that we've talked about today, the different domains and modules we've mentioned, and the specific Fact Sheet providing information about transitions.

**Sally Gissing:** In terms of next steps, as we draw our webinar to a close, let's think what can you do next. Firstly, are you registered as an individual Be You user? Is your early learning service or school registered as a Be You learning community? Being a Be You learning community is the best way to enhance your whole setting approach to promoting children and young people's mental health. There are many benefits in registering as a Be You learning community. Firstly, you gain access to a dedicated and expert Be You Consultant for support. They act as a critical friend and are really good in taking a strengths-based approach, helping identify what your learning community is already doing, celebrating those wins, and also how Be You can support your existing work and planning priorities.

**Sally Gissing:**

Be You learning communities also have access to a wide range of implementation tools and resources such as the action plans and catalogue, reflection tools and surveys, and resources to help you share and extend your learning with the wider community. If you're already a registered individual user and part of a Be You learning community, that's fantastic. You can continue your Be You journey through navigating through our online handbooks, utilising the planning, and implementation tools, attending future events like future webinars and engaging with our professional learning modules and information fact sheets.

**Sally Gissing:**

I'm just going to switch back on our webcam, so we can we can all say thank you and a goodbye for now. So that's all from us today, and many thanks for joining us to discuss this really important topic of transitions. When you exit the webinar, you'll be prompted to fill out a five-question survey, and this feedback is really invaluable to us so that we can make sure that we're making sure that webinars like today are really addressing your learning needs. We hope that we'll see you again next time, but until then, take care and continue joining us to grow Australia a mentally healthy learning community or a mentally healthy generation, so thanks, everyone. See you next time.

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