

Improving Infant Mental Health Outcomes in the Early Learning Sector: Intensive Emotional Support (IESP) for children who have experienced trauma

Alma-Jane O'Donnell , National Manager Child & Family Service Goodstart early Learning

Since 2015 Goodstart has implemented 40 Intensive emotional Support Plans (IESPs), with 18 of those being in this financial year. This exponential growth in demand is a result of the systematic rollout by Goodstart and the demonstrated outcomes of IESP implementation. Goodstart have seen overwhelmingly positive outcomes, with the objective of children not being excluded from their ECEC setting being achieved nearly 100% of the time. This is a result of inclusion capacity development within our centres, as well as significant social and emotional development outcomes in the children., An external evaluation is currently being undertaken.

The purpose of the IESP is to offer to the child one safe and predictable attachment figure. In the plan the educator is not to be counted in room staffing ratios, allowing the educator to be 100 percent emotionally available for the child. The educator's first objective is to build a secure relationship with the child, narrating the environment to help make sense of the world when the child is in a heightened and/or aroused state. The educator is to support the child to negotiate relationships with other children and provide them with support in escalated states. The educator aids the child with identifying, when possible, their own body's warning signals for distress, such as a fast heartbeat. The educator then role models and supports the child to learn breathing and mindfulness techniques.

This oral presentation will review the IESP approach and current findings to date and outline the approach to be taken to the external evaluation.