

# HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILDREN



High expectations and equity are key ideas in the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)* and the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)*.

Described as a belief ‘in all children’s capacities to succeed, regardless of diverse circumstances and abilities’ (DEEWR 2009, p. 12), high expectations link closely to educators’ understanding that all children have rights to be successful learners and to be included in services and the broader community. The idea of high expectations and equity obligates educators to act to:

- ▶ identify and remove or minimise barriers to children’s learning
- ▶ counter bias and prejudice that interfere with children’s participation as learners
- ▶ communicate a belief to all children that they can succeed
- ▶ provide help and individualised support to each child to support effective learning.

High expectations can be described as ‘not putting a lid on’ what we think children can achieve. At times it may be tempting to do this because of age, disability, gender, cultural and language background or family circumstances. Children will surprise us with what they can do if we let them!

## What high expectations is not

Sometimes the concept of high expectations is misinterpreted as having unreasonable or too high expectations – expecting toddlers to sit still or share, for example, or expecting older children to want to spend all their time looking after younger children in school-age services. Having high expectations is not about pressuring children to achieve.

## Why high expectations matter

The saying that ‘children learn what they live’ is true. Their sense of identity comes from messages they receive from others. Messages about their strengths, their competence as learners and their value to others shape their sense of identity and their view of themselves as learners.

## How having high expectations looks in practice

Unless high expectations are communicated to children in ways they understand, they are of little value. Some suggestions about translating high expectations into practice follow:

### – Provide a balance of challenges and opportunities for success.

The materials, equipment and experiences offered should give children choices. Meeting challenges extends learning, but at times children need to relax and enjoy the satisfaction of being able to be successful easily and use new skills. Having jigsaw puzzles ranging from easy to difficult is a good example of offering children a choice between easy and challenging.



– **Identify children’s strengths and build on them.**

High expectations starts with believing that every child has strengths, committing to figuring out what those strengths are, and using them to support new learning.

– **Get to know each child and give individualised support to help them to be successful.**

The frameworks and the National Quality Standard emphasise the important role that educators play in children’s learning. At times acting on high expectations involves engaging with them and giving them tangible help to encourage them to keep trying.

– **All children need help to learn.**

Some need help more than others. Educators who have high expectations adjust their interventions to match the level of help and support that each child needs in order to be a successful learner. Outcome 4 in the frameworks contains a range of ways that educators support children to become confident successful learners.

– **Communicate trust and a belief that children can be successful.**

The ‘flip side’ of educators extending children’s learning through engaging with them is that sometimes educators stand back and allow children to be independent learners. Educators need to be mindful of not ‘over helping’. Offering encouragement from a distance or leaving a child alone can convey high expectations. A great learning environment is one where children can learn independently at times and know that they can get help whenever they need it.

– **Assist children to learn to be resilient – to know that trying and not succeeding is essential to learning.**

Resilience, mentioned specifically in Outcome 3 (wellbeing) in the Frameworks, is an important quality. We want to help children become resilient learners – that is, to bounce back from failure and try again, to have a strong sense of identity that is not diminished by trying and not succeeding.

**Some questions for critical reflection and discussion:**

Using the previous italicised points, identify examples from your practice. How do you communicate high expectations to children?

Do you have high expectations for all children? If not, what gets in the way? What can you do about obstacles to having high expectations?

Can you identify at least one strength for each child that you work with? How do you build on those to support each child’s learning?

**REFERENCES**



Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2009, *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework for all Children from Birth to Eight Years*, State of Victoria, Melbourne.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 2009, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia, ACT. 