

Family violence:

What's that got to do with my profession?

Early childhood professionals can play a key role in helping to tackle family violence and in supporting women and children who are living in fear.

Their work with thousands of children and families every day places them in a position to recognise and respond to evidence of family violence. In partnership with others, early childhood professionals can also help to establish and teach the non-violence values and gender equity standards that we want the next generation of Australians to adopt; standards that mean violence against women and children is never excusable.

That is why Community Child Care Association collaborated with Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria and the Municipal Association of Victoria, to host the first Victorian conference for both family violence experts and the education and care sector in Melbourne this week.

We need to build educators' awareness of the signs or evidence that indicate a woman is experiencing violence and to deepen their understanding of the impact of family violence on children's development, learning and wellbeing. Educators will then be in a better position to take appropriate action such as ensuring children's safety and best interests are protected at all times. The evidence is clear on the potentially long term and negative impact on children who are living in homes where violence is occurring even when the violence is not aimed directly at them.

Early childhood professionals' 'local' knowledge means they are well informed when referring a woman to support services within their community. The earlier a woman receives support when there is family violence occurring, the safer it will be for them and their children. Education and care services such as long day care centres or preschools are also safe places for women and children experiencing family violence when early childhood professionals offer non-judgmental, sensitive and responsive support.

There is also a responsibility for early childhood professionals to work in partnership with families in teaching children about respectful relationships with others. Values such as respect for others are being formed very early in life as young children watch, listen and learn from what adults and other children say and do and how they respond to each other. Every baby has the potential to grow into a caring, responsible adult, and yet we know some of them will grow to become angry, disrespectful adults who are violent towards others. The beginning of this unacceptable behavior is in a person's early life experiences.

We are learning from the stories and research that it takes a 'whole of village' and a 'life-long

learning' approach to prevent or reduce family violence.

Therefore, when early childhood professionals observe early signs in children of a lack of respect for themselves and others they understand that ignoring this behavior or remaining silent is not an option. In the past educators often used bland statements such as 'be nice to your friends' when they witnessed aggression between children. Now they are expected to take a more active role in talking with children about any acts of aggression and supporting them to understand its impact on others.

Community Child Care Association is the peak body for community owned, not for profit child care services in Victoria. It has a key role in building the capacity of early and middle childhood professionals in the education and care sector so that they can respond ethically and effectively to the complex issues facing many children, families and communities.

Community Child Care believes that everyone, including early childhood professionals working in education and care settings, has a responsibility to prevent and respond to family violence. Our collaboration with Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, which will be ongoing, is a strong indicator of our commitment towards every child and family living safely and thriving in peaceful, caring homes and communities.

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