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Project



EMPATHY MAPS

Work and play: Understanding how Australian families experience early childhood education and care

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The following empathy maps have been created with the assistance of Heartward Strategic and should be read in conjunction with the [Work and play: Understanding how Australian families experience early childhood education and care](#) report.

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UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCE DIFFERENCES: THE EMPATHY MAP FRAMEWORK

Based on both the quantitative and qualitative research findings highlighted in our *Work and play: Understanding how Australian families experience early childhood education and care* report, parents differ depending on the age of their child in terms of their:

- their mindset
- how experienced they are with the ECEC system
- what kinds of needs they, their child and their family have
- what they expect from ECEC services.

These differences have been analysed across the research to produce the empathy maps on the following pages.

For each of the three core parent groups – parents of babies, parents of toddlers and parents of pre-schoolers – the empathy map framework provides information on the audience, their goals, motives, perceptions, influences and behaviours. This can be useful in system, service and communication design.



HIGH-LEVEL FINDINGS

When it comes to making decisions around ECEC, parents have to weigh up the care and education options for their child. There are both commonalities and differences in how parents of babies, toddlers or preschoolers come to their decision.

COMMONALITIES

No matter the child's age, there are certain issues for parents that are present in all three defined groups:

- It is important for parents that their child's individual needs are met.
- The physical safety and security of a child in an ECEC service is imperative.
- Parents expect ECEC services to reliably help them earn/study/care for others
- Parents hear from other parents and their own parents about ECEC options and advice.
- Parents are mixing formal and informal care to meet their needs.
- Parents care about quality and are concerned about the quality of care that their child is receiving in ECEC, and whether they have made the right choice placing children in ECEC.
- The experience of securing a place in an ECEC service for their child and having to juggle work, ECEC and family requirements, is stressful for parents.
- The lack of flexibility in ECEC services and their workplaces is a source of frustration for parents.

DIFFERENCES

For parents, the primary goal of placing a child in ECEC can also vary, depending on the child's age:

- For babies, parents are focused on finding a safe, secure, loving ECEC arrangement that is able to fit around other demands.
- Parents of toddlers, seek safe, and reliable ECEC that provides the toddler with stimulation and the chance to connect with others.
- Parents of preschoolers are looking for ECEC that supports learning and social opportunities and prepares the child for starting school.
- Parents of younger children (babies, and toddlers), also dream for some reprieve to support their own emotional and social wellbeing.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the summary of the learning maps, parallels might be drawn between the opportunities identified in the *Work and play* report.

For government and service providers

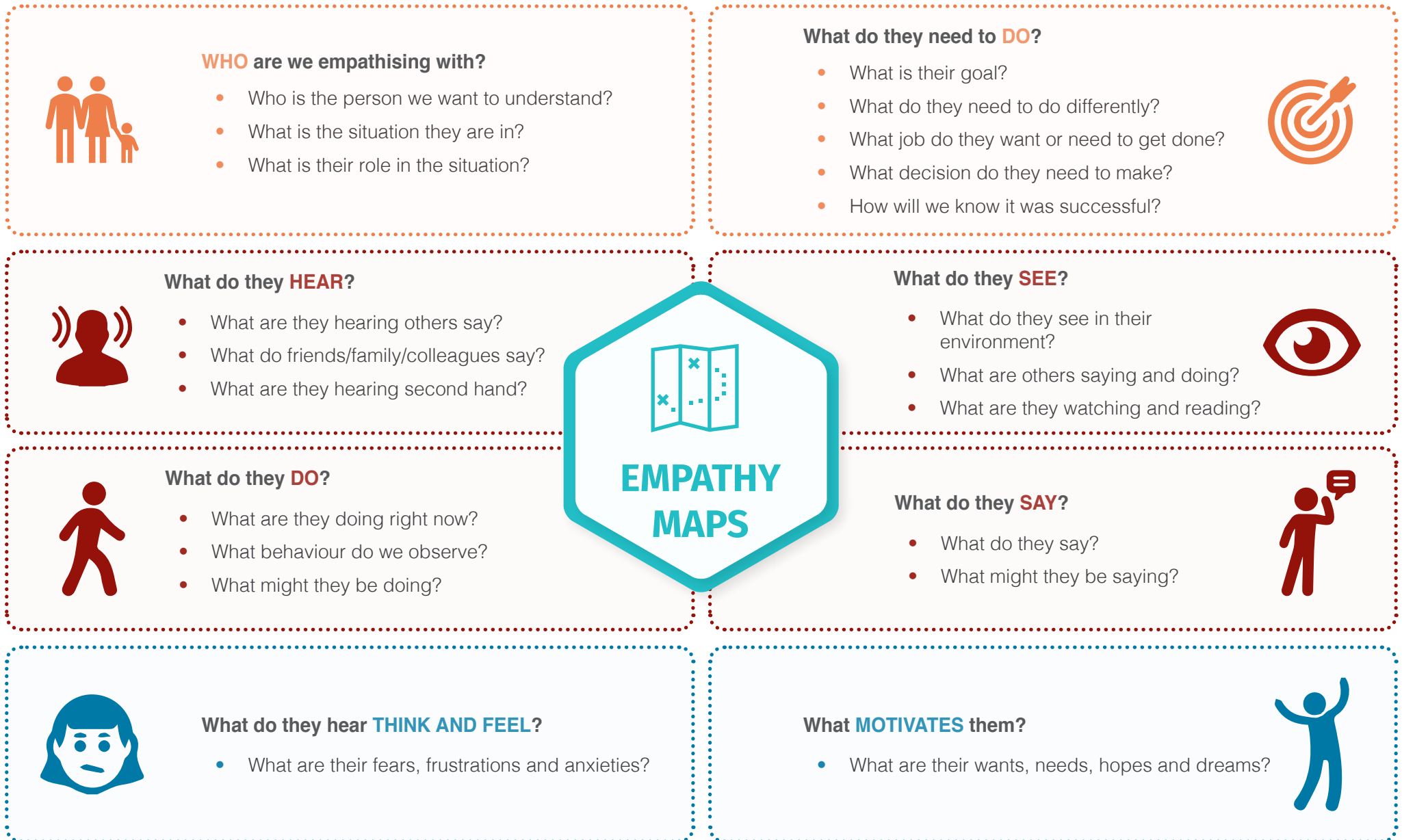
- Realise the multiple policy benefits – ECEC services are increasingly seen as important for both children's learning and development and parents' workforce participation, alongside the mental health and wellbeing of the whole family.
- Improve guidance on how to determine quality (as concerns around quality are identified as an issue) and support parents to navigate the ECEC system.

For government

- Take on a stronger role as market steward to ensure ECEC services are affordable and accessible (as parents wish money was not a dictating factor in choice to use ECEC and currently feel frustrated at the lack of flexibility).



GUIDE TO READING PARENT EMPATHY MAPS



PARENTS OF BABIES



PARENTS OF BABIES IN THEIR FIRST YEAR

- Decision makers for care & education options.
- May be going back to work or study.
- May not have family support.
- May feel conflicted about having others care for baby.
- Paid parental leave may have expired.
- May have older siblings to consider.

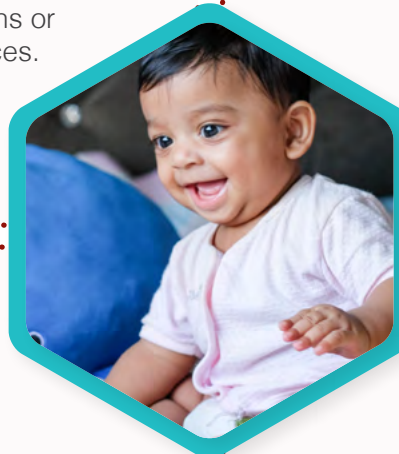
SEEKING SECURE, SAFE, LOVING ECEC THAT FITS WITH OTHER DEMANDS



- Balance the family's (& parents') needs with the baby's needs.
- Decide which type of care to use.
- Assess whether service providers meet their needs.
- Find a service that has an opening.
- Navigate the subsidy system (sometimes for the first time).
- Juggle finances to make working worthwhile.



- Other parents commiserating about limited options or sharing recommendations about particular services.
- Their own parents providing options and advice.
- Workplace pressuring a return to work/fulltime work.



- Bank balance dropping while waiting for a place.
- News that it's hard to secure ECEC places.
- May see reviews or ratings of services.
- Once in care, baby gets sick more frequently.



- May choose to mix formal & informal ECEC to fit needs.
- Enrol at a centre without being certain it's right.
- Take time off work when baby gets sick.



- They wish the decision was not based on money.
- Difficulty securing a vacancy stress at a vulnerable time.



- Fear that any ECEC cannot care for their baby as they would.
- Fear of making the wrong choice.
- Guilt emerges if they are conflicted about needing ECEC.
- Anxiety about not knowing what quality of care baby is receiving
- Stress increases as parents juggle work, ECEC, & family responsibilities.
- Frustration about inflexibility of the ECEC system & of workplaces.



- Need baby to be physically safe & feel secure.
- Want safe, warm, consistent care givers their baby can become attached to.
- Expect ECEC to reliably help the parents earn/study/care for others.
- Hope to give their baby the best possible start to life.
- Dream of a reprieve to support own emotional & social wellbeing..

PARENTS OF TODDLERS



PARENTS OF 1–2 YEAR OLD TODDLERS

- Decision makers for care & education options.
- May be going back to work or study.
- May not have family support.
- May be under financial pressure.
- Toddler may be looking for social contact.
- May have older siblings to consider.

SEEKING SAFE, RELIABLE ECEC THAT PROVIDES STIMULATION



- Balance the family's (& parents') needs with the toddler's needs.
- Decide which type of care to use.
- Assess whether service providers meet their needs.
- Find a service that has an opening.
- Navigate the subsidy system.
- Juggle finances to make working worthwhile.



- Other parents sharing recommendations about particular services.
- Their own parents providing options and advice.
- Workplace pressuring a return to work/fulltime work.



- Toddler has increasing need for connection with other children & adults.
- Toddler gets sick more frequently.
- Toddler may resist or welcome going to ECEC..



- May choose to mix formal & informal ECEC to fit needs.
- Look to toddler's behaviour to see if service is right.
- Take time off work when toddler gets sick.
- May change service provider to suit needs of toddler.



- Difficulty securing a vacancy adds stress.
- Can be tricky to negotiate having family care for toddler.



- Parents (esp. first time) may be concerned about quality of education.
- Fear of making the wrong choice.
- Anxiety about not knowing what quality of care toddler is receiving.
- Parents can fear that they are not performing well at work & at home.
- Stress continues as parents juggle work, ECEC, & family responsibilities.
- Frustration about inflexibility of the ECEC system & of workplaces.



- Need toddler to be physically safe & feel secure.
- Want toddler to be in stimulating environment.
- Expect ECEC to reliably help the parents earn/study/care for others.
- Want ECEC to provide learning experiences they can't at home.
- Hope that their child's individual needs can be attended to.
- Dream of a reprieve to support own emotional & social wellbeing.



PARENTS OF PRE-SCHOOLERS



PARENTS OF 3-5 YEAR OLD PRE-SCHOOLERS

- Decision makers for care & education options.
- May have older or younger siblings to consider.
- May be under financial pressure.
- Additional or complex needs may have emerged.

SEEKING ECEC TO SUPPORT LEARNING & SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES BEFORE SCHOOL



- Balance the family's (& parents') needs with the child's needs.
- Decide whether to opt for kinder or centre based care.
- Assess service providers.
- Find a service that has an opening.
- Navigate the subsidy system.
- Juggle finances to make working worthwhile.
- Consider fit with later schooling.



- Other parents sharing recommendations about particular services.
- Their own parents providing options & advice.
- Work/ study pressure to work long days/odd hours.



- Child has increasing need for learning and growth opportunities.
- Child may resist or welcome going to ECEC
- Behavioural challenges may arise.



- May choose to mix formal & informal ECEC to fit needs.
- Observe child's behaviour when making decisions.
- Take time off work when child is sick.
- May change service provider to meet needs of child.



- Difficulty securing a vacancy adds stress.
- Pre-school/kinder hours do not fit working hours.



- Parents may be worried their child will not be ready for school.
- May be torn between centre-based care (better meets need for hours) & pre-school/kinder (perceived to better meet educational needs).
- Stress continues as parents juggle work, ECEC, & family responsibilities.
- Frustration about inflexibility of the ECEC system & of workplaces.



- Need child to be physically safe & feel secure.
- Want child to experience broad-based learning designed to prepare them for school.
- Expect ECEC to reliably help the parents earn/study/care for others.
- Hope that their child's individual needs can be attended to.
- Dream of hitting a rhythm & enjoying a smooth-running family life.



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We are an independent national enterprise working
to create positive change in Australia's early
childhood education and care (ECEC) system.

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