

MENTOR TOOLKIT

Early Childhood Placements

Practical Strategies to Support PST Growth

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Every Pre-Service Teacher (PST) is different, arriving with varied skill sets, backgrounds, and abilities. Requiring additional guidance is a normal part of learning and does not automatically mean a PST is at risk of failing. Early conversations, clear expectations, and timely feedback are the most effective ways to support growth.

This toolkit aligns with the Monash Professional Experience Intervention and Support Policy, providing practical guidance across **4 core areas: knowledge and skills, communication, behaviour, and wellbeing**. Use the matrix below to:

- **Identify:** Match your PST's observed behaviours to one of the concern areas.
- **Act:** Consider and apply the practical strategies suggested under that area.
- **Address:** If issues persist after trying these approaches, **contact the PPC team at edu-ppc@monash.edu** for further support and advice.

SUPPORT AREA: KNOWLEDGE & SKILL

This could look like:

- **Weak Planning & Frameworks:** Late or generic documentation failing to link child observations to the EYLF/VEYLDF.
- **Pedagogical Confusion:** Struggling to balance child-led play with intentional teaching, or ignoring indoor/outdoor learning spaces.
- **Routine & Care Hesitancy:** Lacking confidence or skills in infant/toddler care routines (e.g., sleep, nappy changes, floor-play).
- **Missing Evidence:** Falling behind on focus-child observations, behaviour management, or the required Monash templates.
- **Behaviour Management:** Lack of confidence and knowledge in managing challenging behaviour.

Practical Mentoring Strategies

- **15-Minute Planning Co-Design & Exemplars:** Sit down together to map out the planning cycle for one focus child using past successful templates to explicitly show how observations drive planning.
- **Side-by-Side Care & Behaviour Modelling:** Physically demonstrate routines and behaviour strategies. Have the PST shadow you, then take over small tasks (e.g., floor play or a small group) to build confidence.
- **Intentional Teaching Debrief:** After a play session, ask the PST: "What part was child-led? Where did your intentional teaching occur?" to clarify the difference between the two.
- **Indoor/Outdoor Planning Prompt:** When reviewing any plan, require the PST to explain exactly how the learning experience will be adapted for both the indoor and outdoor environments.
- **Daily Practice:** Encourage PST to set aside some time each day to complete observations, learning experiences and reflection journal while details are fresh.

SUPPORT AREA: COMMUNICATION

This could look like:

- **Instructional Delivery & Accent Barriers:** Delivering instructions that get lost in noisy play; delivery, language barriers, or accents impact overall clarity with children.
- **Collaboration Gaps:** Failing to share child observations, communicate planning ideas, or actively engage with room colleagues.
- **Detached Body Language:** Remaining standing or physically detached instead of getting down to the children's eye level with open, engaged expressions.
- **Negative Corrections:** Relying on reactive reprimands or negative phrasing instead of using age-appropriate, positive guidance.

Practical Mentoring Strategies

- **Action-First Phrasing & Visuals:** Coach the PST to pre-script short, step-by-step phrases (e.g., "Shoes on. Go outside.") paired with physical props or song boards to lock in group attention and ease spoken language delivery.
 - **System-Led Collaboration:** Walk the PST through your room day-book or digital app, and assign them a specific section to document their daily team notes.
 - **The Mid-Day Milestone Check:** Establish a 1-minute, twice-daily check-in where the PST must verbally present one child observation and their immediate next step.
 - **Physical & Positive Guidance Modelling:** Explicitly prompt the PST during play to drop to eye level, mirror your open body language, and immediately rephrase recent negative reprimands into positive directions.
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SUPPORT AREA: BEHAVIOURAL/PROFESSIONALISM

This could look like:

- **Safety & Policy Gaps:** Missing supervision, blind spots, ignoring emergency protocols, or failing to follow service policies.
- **Lack of Initiative:** Standing back during room setups, packing up, or cleaning instead of actively assisting the team.
- **Boundary & Privacy Breaches:** Using inappropriate language, crossing professional boundaries, or mishandling child photos/data.
- **Poor Feedback Tracking:** Failing to record mentor feedback, show behavioural changes, or bring evidence to placement reviews.

Practical Mentoring Strategies

- **Day 1 Safety Induction:** Walk the PST through your specific supervision blind spots, child medical action plans, and emergency policies immediately.
- **The Active Zone Method:** Give the PST a highly specific role during routines (e.g., "Your job right now is to actively zone and lead the handwashing transition").
- **Feedback-to-Action Note:** Have the PST write down three things after every debrief: "The feedback I received was... The action I will take is... The evidence I will show tomorrow is..."
- **Explicit Boundary Correction:** Use immediate, exact feedback for code of conduct or language slips (e.g., "When talking to a child, use this phrase instead of that one").
- **Written Warning Escalation:** For persistent safety or policy breaches, put the warning in writing immediately and cc the Monash PPC team at edu-ppc@monash.edu.

SUPPORT AREA: WELLBEING

This could look like:

- **Visible Overwhelm:** Feeling anxious, exhausted, or paralysed by the busy environment or documentation workload.
- **Burnout & Fatigue:** Low energy linked to long commutes, external study pressures, or personal life balance.
- **Isolation & Adjustment:** Signs of homesickness or difficulty adapting to the Australian school culture.

Practical Mentoring Strategies

- **The "Circuit Breaker":** Step in and temporarily take over a routine or transition to give an overwhelmed PST a 5-minute mental break.
 - **Micro-Goal Mapping:** Reduce workload anxiety by helping them set just one manageable documentation goal per day.
 - **Empathetic Check-Ins:** Use a quick morning touchpoint to validate their reality: "I know your commute is massive. How are you holding up today?"
 - **Monash Support Connection:** Remind the PST of Monash's free student wellbeing services, and contact the PPC team yourself to notify them that the student needs extra support.
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Thank you, Mentors!

Thank you for the vital role you play in helping future teachers develop the confidence and skills needed to succeed.

Need further support? If challenges or concerns persist after using this toolkit, please reach out to the PPC team at edu-ppc@monash.edu for continued advice and guidance

