

Support for Children and Young People in their Middle Years: Gaps, Challenges and Opportunities

Tuesday 19 April

Queen Victoria Women's Centre

[#middleyears](#)



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One Foot in Each World:

Challenges and Opportunities for
Children and Young People in the
Middle Years



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What are the Middle Years?

- Middle years fall between early childhood and adolescence.
- Different understandings of age group. We define the middle years as a period from eight to 12 years.
- Sometimes referred to as ‘tweens’, ‘pre-teens’, or ‘pre-adolescents’.



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The Gaps

- Middle years often fall through the gaps of existing services
- Significant research and policy gaps in this area



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Challenges for the Middle Years

- Disengagement from school
- Difficulties transitioning from primary to secondary school
- Experimentation with drugs or alcohol
- Emergence of symptoms of mental ill health
- Increasing impact of gender inequality
- Heightened risk of violence, particularly for girls and young women
- Early sexualisation



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Mental Health

- Middle years are a period when mental health issues can first manifest
- Mental health issues related to early onset of puberty
- Some evidence girls and young women now more at risk



Violence Against Women and Girls

- Girls and young women can face a heightened risk of violence
- Additional challenges for girls and young women with disabilities, from Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Need to better understand internet-based violence and forced marriage



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Early Intervention

- Middle years can be a period of heightened risk
- Middle years can establish patterns of behaviour that go on to influence later life
- BUT also a critical period for early intervention. With the right support, positive change can occur



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Policy Context

- In Australia and internationally, few policies that are specifically about the middle years
- Examples of policies that address the needs of the middle years:
 - *Middle Years Strategy 2014-2017*, City of Yarra
 - *Strategic Plan for Children and Young People*, currently being developed in New South Wales



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Services

- Traditionally, services focus on early years or young people.
- Middle years falling through the gaps.
- There is a need for services targeted at the needs of the middle years.



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The Way Forward

- Some initiatives that should be put in place include:
 - National and state policy frameworks that are targeted at the middle years and include a focus on gender
 - Stronger links between children's, family and young people's services
 - Stronger links between community sector and schools
 - More initiatives to address educational disengagement
 - Research about the middle years
 - Targeted services



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Next Steps

- Drawing on your expertise
- Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand will produce a summary report on the forum's findings



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