GINNIE & PINNEY

Social & Emotional Learning Poster Set

Teacher Handbook & Daily Activity Guide

A practical guide for Victorian early childhood settings

Recognise feelings • Understand experiences • Choose helpful strategies • Build positive relationships

Aligned with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), updated 2026

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1. Purpose and Approach

The Ginnie & Pinney Social & Emotional Learning Poster Set provides a simple visual language for everyday conversations about emotions, self-regulation, relationships and problem-solving. The four posters are designed to be revisited across the day rather than taught as a stand-alone lesson.

The sequence is intentionally simple:
FEEL → UNDERSTAND → RESPOND → CONNECT

The approach supports children to notice an emotion, explore what may have contributed to it, consider a helpful response, and communicate or act with care towards themselves and others.

This handbook expands the original poster guidance so educators can use the resource as part of intentional, play-based and responsive teaching. It is designed for Victorian early childhood settings and uses the current VEYLDF language and five learning and development outcomes.

A strengths-based approach

- Emotions are treated as meaningful experiences, not as 'good' or 'bad' behaviour.
- Educators focus on connection before correction: first help the child feel safe and understood, then support problem-solving.
- Children are offered choices and agency rather than being expected to use one 'correct' coping strategy.
- Visuals, gestures, modelling, role-play and simple language are valued alongside spoken language.
- Children's culture, family experiences, communication preferences, abilities and individual ways of participating are respected.
- The posters are a teaching tool, not a behaviour-management system, diagnostic tool or substitute for individual professional support.

The educator's role

Educators model the language and strategies they want children to develop. Instead of waiting for a difficult moment, introduce and practise the posters when children are calm, then use the same language naturally during real experiences.

2. Understanding the Four-Poster Sequence

1. FEEL	2. UNDERSTAND	3. RESPOND	4. CONNECT
How do I feel? Name, point to or notice the feeling.	Why do I feel this way? Explore what happened or what may have contributed.	What can I do? Choose a safe and helpful response.	What can I say or do? Use words or actions that support connection, repair and participation.

Important: the sequence is flexible

Children do not always move through the four steps in order. A child may need connection before they can identify a feeling; another child may already know a strategy but need help communicating with a peer. Educators can enter the sequence wherever it is most useful.

Example

A tower falls down. The educator might say: “Your tower fell and you look frustrated. Is that how you feel?” → “What happened?” → “Would you like to try again or ask for help?” → “What could you say if you want help?”

3. VEYLDF Alignment at a Glance

The updated VEYLDF supports children from birth to 8 years and identifies five learning and development outcomes: identity, connection, wellbeing, learning and communication. It emphasises integrated teaching and learning, intentional teaching, play, relationships, inclusion, assessment and partnerships with families and professionals. The poster set can contribute to all five outcomes, with particularly strong connections to identity, connection, wellbeing and communication.

VEYLDF outcome	How the posters contribute	Possible evidence in practice
Identity	Children recognise and express emotions, develop agency, build confidence and experience secure, respectful relationships.	Child points to or names a feeling; expresses a preference; asks for help; participates in resolving a problem.
Connection	Children develop belonging, empathy, cooperation, negotiation and awareness of others.	Child joins play, takes turns, listens, includes another child or suggests a fair solution.
Wellbeing	Children develop emotional awareness, regulation, resilience and strategies that support participation and wellbeing.	Child identifies a need for a break, uses breathing, seeks a trusted adult or returns to play after a challenge.
Learning	Children develop curiosity, persistence, flexible thinking, problem-solving and learning dispositions through real experiences and play.	Child tries again, considers alternatives, reflects on what worked and applies a strategy in a new situation.
Communication	Children communicate feelings, ideas, needs and intentions using speech, gesture, visuals, AAC, facial expression, movement and other modes.	Child uses a feeling word, points to a visual, uses a sentence stem, gestures, role-plays or responds to a peer.

Practice principles most closely supported

- Reflective practice — educators observe, consider what is happening, and adjust teaching and supports.
- Partnerships with families — families contribute knowledge about children's communication, culture, relationships and effective strategies.
- High expectations for every child — every child is supported to participate and develop agency, with appropriate adjustments.
- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement — educators respond to children's cues and emotions with warmth, consistency and respect.
- Equity, diversity and inclusion — children can participate through multiple communication modes and with adapted visuals, time and supports.
- Assessment for learning and development — observations of children's emotional language, interaction, strategy use and participation inform planning.
- Partnerships between professionals — educators collaborate with relevant professionals where additional support is needed.

Integrated teaching and learning is central: the posters can be used through guided play and learning, intentional teaching, adult modelling, child-directed play, routines, conversations and real-life problem-solving.

VEYLDF reference: Victorian Department of Education, Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, updated 2026.

1. Poster 1 — How Do I Feel Today?

Poster 1 supports children to notice, recognise and communicate feelings. Children may name a feeling, point to a visual, use a gesture, select from two choices or simply observe. The aim is not to require a verbal answer; it is to create an accessible starting point for emotional awareness.

Key vocabulary / ideas

- Happy
- Sad
- Worried
- Angry
- Tired
- Scared
- Excited
- Calm
- Frustrated

Educator prompts

- “How are you feeling right now?”
- “Which picture is closest to how you feel?”
- “What do you notice in your body?”
- “How can you tell someone might be feeling that way?”

Extend the learning

Expand emotional vocabulary gradually. Invite children to compare feelings that may look similar, such as worried and scared, or frustrated and angry. Use facial expression, body movement, Ginnie & Pinney ‘Learn & Grow’ stories, music and dramatic play to explore how feelings can be communicated in different ways.

VEYLDF connections

Strong links to Identity, Wellbeing and Communication. It also supports respectful relationships by helping children communicate needs and experiences and by validating different ways of expressing emotions.

2. Poster 2 — Why Do I Feel This Way?

Poster 2 helps children connect emotions with experiences. It encourages curiosity about what happened rather than assuming why a child feels a particular way.

Key vocabulary / ideas

- Feelings can have many causes.
- Different people can feel differently about the same event.
- A feeling can change as the situation changes.
- Children can talk about an experience without having to share personal details.

Educator prompts

- “What happened?”
- “What do you think made you feel that way?”
- “Could someone else feel differently?”
- “What might help us understand what happened?”

Extend the learning

Use hypothetical scenarios as well as real experiences. Avoid pressuring children to disclose private or upsetting experiences. When a child shares something concerning, respond calmly and follow the service's child safety and reporting procedures.

VEYLDF connections

Strong links to Identity, Connection, Wellbeing and Communication. It supports children's agency, perspective-taking, language development and understanding of relationships.

3. Poster 3 — What Can I Do When I Feel…?

Poster 3 moves children from emotional awareness towards choosing a safe and helpful response. Strategies should be introduced and practised when children are calm, then offered as choices during challenging moments.

Key vocabulary / ideas

- Talk to a trusted friend or educator
- Ask for help
- Take a break
- Sit in a quiet space
- Take slow breaths
- Count slowly
- Try again
- Hold a familiar object, where appropriate

Educator prompts

- “What could help?”
- “Would you like to try this or that?”
- “Do you want help, a break, or another try?”
- “Let’s practise it together.”

Extend the learning

Teach that different strategies work for different people and situations. A strategy that helps one child may not help another. Check that any physical-contact strategy, such as a hug, is child-led and appropriate; offer alternatives such as proximity, a wave, a hand signal or a familiar object.

VEYLDF connections

Strong links to Wellbeing, Identity and Learning. It supports agency, emerging self-regulation, resilience, persistence and help-seeking.

4. Poster 4 — Kind Words & Friendly Actions

Poster 4 supports children to communicate with others, build relationships, repair interactions and participate in group life. It is especially useful during free play, collaborative projects, turn-taking and conflict resolution.

Key vocabulary / ideas

- “Are you okay?”
- “Can I play with you?”
- “Let's take turns.”
- “Thank you.”
- “I'm sorry.”
- Sharing
- Helping
- Listening
- Taking turns
- Including others

Educator prompts

- “What could you say?”
- “What could you do to help?”
- “How could you include them?”
- “What would make the problem fairer?”
- “How can we repair what happened?”

Extend the learning

Move beyond scripted phrases. Help children understand the meaning behind the words and consider whether an action is respectful and wanted. Encourage genuine repair rather than requiring children to say “sorry” before they are ready.

VEYLDF connections

Strong links to Connection, Identity and Communication, with links to Wellbeing and Learning through cooperation, negotiation, empathy, perspective-taking and problem-solving.

8. Daily Classroom Routines

Morning — Feelings Check-In (3–5 minutes)

1. Invite children to notice how they feel. They may point, gesture, use words, choose a picture or pass.
2. Model your own feeling without making the child responsible for your emotion: “I feel excited today because we are starting our new project.”
3. Offer an optional follow-up: “Would you like to tell us more, or would you like to keep it private?”
4. Notice patterns over time rather than treating a single check-in as an assessment of a child's wellbeing.

Throughout the day — Use the posters in the moment

- Before a challenging transition: preview likely feelings and possible strategies.
- During play: prompt children to negotiate, take turns and join play.
- During conflict: use the four-step sequence without rushing to solve the problem.
- After a challenge: revisit what worked and what the child might try next time.
- During story time: connect characters' emotions, choices and relationships to the posters.
- At the end of the day: invite reflection on kind words, helpful strategies and moments of persistence.

Educator modelling

Model emotional literacy in ordinary language: “I’m feeling a little frustrated because the paint has spilled. I’m going to take a breath and clean it up. Then I’ll try again.” This demonstrates that emotions are manageable experiences and that adults can use strategies too.

9. Eight Ready-to-Use Activities

1. Feelings Detective

Poster focus: Poster 1

Learning focus: Identifying and interpreting emotions

How to use it: Show a photo, puppet, story character or acted-out situation. Ask children to identify a possible feeling. Then ask, “What makes you think that?” Encourage children to notice facial expression, body posture, movement, voice and context.

What educators might notice:

- Pointing to a feeling
- Using feeling vocabulary
- Noticing non-verbal cues
- Understanding that more than one interpretation may be possible

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

2. What Happened?

Poster focus: Poster 2

Learning focus: Connecting emotions with experiences

How to use it: Present a familiar scenario: “A friend is using the toy you want.” Work through Feel → Why. Ask what might have happened before the feeling and whether another child might feel differently.

What educators might notice:

- Sequencing an event
- Using cause-and-effect language
- Considering another perspective
- Listening to peers

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

3. Strategy of the Day

Poster focus: Poster 3

Learning focus: Practising helpful responses

How to use it: Choose one strategy each day and practise it while children are calm. For example: three slow breaths, counting slowly, asking for help, taking a short break, or trying again after an unsuccessful attempt.

What educators might notice:

- Trying a strategy voluntarily
- Knowing where to seek help
- Persisting after difficulty
- Reflecting on which strategies help

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

4. Kind Words Role-Play

Poster focus: Poster 4

Learning focus: Communication and relationships

How to use it: Act out short scenarios: joining play, wanting a turn, noticing an upset friend, or repairing an interaction. Invite several possible responses rather than teaching one scripted answer.

What educators might notice:

- Using social language
- Negotiating
- Showing empathy
- Joining and sustaining play

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

5. Feelings Circle

Poster focus: All four

Learning focus: Integrated emotional learning

How to use it: Choose one feeling and move through the four prompts: What is it? What might cause it? What could help? What could a friend say or do? Keep the conversation brief and optional.

What educators might notice:

- Emotional vocabulary
- Perspective-taking
- Strategy selection
- Listening and group participation

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

6. What Would You Do?

Poster focus: All four

Learning focus: Problem-solving and agency

How to use it: Use classroom problems such as a tower falling, two children wanting the same toy, or wanting to join a game. Invite children to generate several possible responses and discuss which are safe, fair and helpful.

What educators might notice:

- Generating alternatives
- Reasoning about consequences
- Negotiating
- Making choices

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

7. Feelings in Storybooks

Poster focus: All four

Learning focus: Oral language, literacy and social understanding

How to use it: During or after a story, ask: “How does the character feel?” “Why?” “What could they do?” “What could a friend say or do?” Link the story to play or a follow-up drawing, puppet or dramatic-play experience.

What educators might notice:

- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Perspective-taking
- Retelling and discussion

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

8. Kindness Spotting

Poster focus: Poster 4

Learning focus: Noticing positive social behaviour

How to use it: Tell children you are looking for examples of helping, listening, taking turns and including others. Later, invite children to describe what they noticed. Avoid ranking children or turning kindness into a competition.

What educators might notice:

- Noticing prosocial behaviour
- Expressing appreciation
- Belonging
- Reflecting on group experiences

VEYLDF links: Identity • Connection • Wellbeing • Learning • Communication (select the outcomes most relevant to the observed learning).

10. Using the Posters in Play, Stories and Transitions

Free play

Keep the posters visible and accessible. When a child wants to join a group, negotiate a turn or becomes frustrated, use short prompts and allow children to generate solutions.

Dramatic play

Use puppets or role-play to explore feelings and social situations. Children can act out different endings and compare how each ending affects the characters.

Story time

Pause at meaningful moments rather than turning every story into a lesson. Ask one or two purposeful questions and return to the poster only when it adds meaning.

Transitions

Preview feelings and strategies: “We are packing away. Some people may feel disappointed because they want to keep playing. What could help?”

Outdoor play

Use real events: waiting for equipment, negotiating rules, managing competition, recovering from a fall, or asking to join a game.

Small-group projects

Use the posters to support collaborative planning, disagreement, persistence and shared decision-making.

Keep prompts short in emotionally intense moments

When a child is highly distressed, lengthy questions may be overwhelming. First support safety, connection and co-regulation. A simple visual choice such as “break or help?” may be more useful than asking the child to explain why they feel upset. Return to reflection later when the child is ready.

11. Supporting Children During Conflict and Big Emotions

The posters can support conflict resolution, but they should not be used to force children to solve a problem independently when they need adult support. Educators remain responsible for safety, supervision and appropriate intervention.

A responsive sequence

5. CONNECT — Move close, stay calm and acknowledge the experience: “Something is hard right now. I’m here.”
6. SAFETY — Stop unsafe behaviour and protect children from harm. Follow service policies and child safety procedures.
7. FEEL — When appropriate, help children identify or communicate the feeling using the poster.
8. UNDERSTAND — Explore what happened, giving each child an opportunity to communicate in their own way.
9. RESPOND — Offer realistic choices: take a break, seek help, try again, move to another activity or negotiate a turn.
10. CONNECT — Support repair: listening, checking on someone, returning an item, taking turns, helping or using words that communicate care.
11. REFLECT — Later, revisit what helped and what could be tried next time.

Avoid

- “Calm down” as the only response.
- Forcing eye contact or verbal explanations.
- Assuming a child's intention without checking.
- Making a child say “sorry” on demand.
- Using the feelings space as a punishment or isolation area.
- Expecting children to self-regulate beyond their developmental capacity.
- Treating the same strategy as appropriate for every child or every situation.

12. Inclusive and Communication-Supportive Practice

The poster set should be accessible to children with different communication styles, developmental profiles, sensory needs, languages, cultural experiences and ways of participating. Equity means providing the support each child needs to participate; it does not mean requiring every child to respond in the same way.

Ways children can participate

- Point to a feeling or strategy.
- Choose between two visual options.
- Use gestures, facial expression, movement or body positioning.
- Use home language, key words, signs or AAC where relevant.
- Use a puppet or doll to communicate indirectly.
- Copy an educator's model.
- Participate through role-play rather than personal disclosure.
- Observe first and join later.
- Use drawing, symbols or photographs to communicate.

Make the visuals more accessible

- Place posters at children's eye level.
- Use uncluttered spaces around the posters.
- Pair words with gestures or real objects where useful.
- Use individual communication systems alongside the posters when required.
- Provide extra processing time.
- Offer sensory supports that are safe and familiar to the child.
- Check that examples reflect different families, cultures, abilities and ways of being.

Co-regulation before self-regulation

Young children often need an attuned adult to help them regulate before they can independently choose a strategy. The educator's calm voice, predictable presence, reduced language, visual support and safe environment can be part of the strategy.

13. Creating a Feelings & Wellbeing Space

Display the four posters together in an inviting, accessible area. The space should communicate safety, belonging and choice—not removal from the group.

Possible resources

- Ginnie & Pinney 'Learn & Grow' story books
- Ginnie & Pinney puppets
- Ginnie & Pinney A-Z Emotions Poster
- Cushions or a comfortable seat
- Soft toys or familiar objects
- Breathing or movement visuals
- Drawing materials
- Visual timer, where appropriate
- Individual communication supports

Teach how the space works

12. Introduce it when children are calm.
13. Explain that anyone can use the space with educator guidance, according to the service's routines.
14. Model how to choose a strategy.
15. Practise returning to the group when ready.
16. Review whether the space is supporting participation or unintentionally becoming a place of exclusion.

The space should not be used as a consequence for behaviour. If a child needs separation for immediate safety, follow service procedures and maintain appropriate supervision and connection.

14. Intentional Teaching and the VEYLDF Planning Cycle

The posters are most effective when educators use them as part of the ongoing observation–assessment–planning–implementation–reflection cycle. The resource does not need to become an additional stand-alone program.

Notice	Interpret	Plan / Act	Reflect
A child becomes upset when another child joins their play.	The child may be developing negotiation and inclusion skills.	Use Poster 4 in small-group role-play; model joining language and turn-taking.	Did the child begin to initiate or respond to peer interaction? What support helped?
A child points to 'frustrated' when a construction collapses.	The child is connecting an emotion with an event.	Use Poster 3 to practise trying again and asking for help during calm play.	Which strategy did the child choose? Could they use it later without prompting?
A child communicates feelings through gesture rather than speech.	Visual and non-verbal communication is meaningful.	Offer visual choices and allow extra processing time; coordinate with the child's communication supports.	Which mode of communication enabled the child to participate most successfully?

Intentional teaching prompts

- What learning is already happening here?
- What is the child trying to communicate?
- What could I model, name, demonstrate or make visible?
- How can I create another opportunity for the child to practise this skill through play?
- What adjustment would increase the child's participation?
- How can the child's interests, culture and family knowledge inform the experience?

15. Observation, Assessment and Documentation

Use the posters to support assessment for learning and development, not to score children's emotions or determine whether a child is 'good at feelings'. Look for changes over time in communication, participation, relationships, agency, strategy use and problem-solving.

Possible evidence to document

- Names, points to or otherwise communicates a feeling.
- Connects an emotion with an experience or event.
- Seeks support from a trusted adult.
- Chooses between strategies.
- Returns to play after a challenge with support.
- Uses words, gestures or AAC to negotiate with peers.
- Shows increasing awareness of another person's feelings.
- Joins play or invites another child to participate.
- Negotiates turn-taking or shared resources.
- Reflects on what worked and suggests another option.

Sample observation

“During block play, Mia's tower fell. She pointed to the frustrated picture and looked at the educator. When offered ‘try again’ or ‘ask for help’, she chose ‘ask for help’. After the educator modelled ‘Can you help me?’ Mia repeated the phrase and returned to the construction.”

Possible interpretation

Mia is developing emotional vocabulary, help-seeking, communication and persistence. The educator can plan further opportunities for her to choose strategies during collaborative construction and other play experiences.

Assessment should consider the child's strengths, interests, culture, communication preferences and the supports that enable participation.

16. Partnerships with Families

Families have valuable knowledge about children's relationships, communication, cultural practices, strengths and ways of expressing emotion. Share the four-step language with families where appropriate and invite them to contribute strategies that are familiar and meaningful to the child.

Ideas for family communication

- Send home the four questions: How do I feel? Why? What can I do? What can I say or do?
- Invite families to share words for feelings in the child's home language.
- Ask families what helps the child feel safe, connected and ready to participate.
- Share a brief example of learning rather than a judgement about behaviour.
- Encourage families to use the posters flexibly at home, without expecting the child to disclose private experiences.

Example message for families

“This week we are using our Social & Emotional Learning posters to explore feelings, helpful strategies and kind ways to communicate. You may hear us ask: ‘How do I feel?’, ‘What happened?’, ‘What can I do?’ and ‘What can I say or do?’ If your family has words, stories or strategies that help your child talk about emotions, we would love to learn from you.”

17. Child Safety and Educator Guidance

Emotional learning resources can sometimes lead children to disclose experiences that require adult attention. Educators should listen calmly, avoid leading questions, avoid promising secrecy, and follow their service's child safety, information-sharing and reporting procedures.

- Do not use the poster sequence to investigate or interrogate a child.
- If a child discloses harm or feels unsafe, respond according to current Victorian child safety requirements and your service's policies.
- Prioritise immediate safety and connection.
- Use open, non-leading prompts only when needed to support communication.
- Document and escalate concerns according to your role and service procedures.
- Seek support from the appropriate professionals when a child's needs exceed the educator's role.

Emotional safety matters too

Children should never be required to publicly identify their feelings or explain a personal experience. A child may participate by pointing, observing, using a puppet, choosing a hypothetical example or passing.

18. Weekly Planning Template

Day	Focus	Experience	Intentional teaching	Evidence / reflection
Monday	Recognising feelings	Feelings Detective	Model feeling vocabulary and invite multiple interpretations.	
Tuesday	Understanding experiences	What Happened?	Use open prompts and perspective-taking.	
Wednesday	Helpful strategies	Strategy of the Day	Practise one strategy while calm; offer choices.	
Thursday	Connection	Kind Words Role-Play	Model negotiation, inclusion and repair.	
Friday	Integration	What Would You Do?	Use a real or hypothetical problem and work through the four steps.	

Optional extension

Add a child interest, storybook, puppet, construction experience, outdoor challenge or family contribution to each day's experience so social-emotional learning remains integrated with the curriculum rather than isolated.

19. Educator Reflection

Use these questions during weekly planning or team reflection. Select only those that are useful for your context.

- Are children increasingly able to communicate feelings in ways that work for them?
- Which children are participating through non-verbal, visual, home-language or AAC communication?
- Are we giving children enough time to process before expecting a response?
- Are we modelling regulation and respectful communication ourselves?
- Do children have meaningful choices about strategies?
- Are we supporting children to solve problems without expecting independence beyond their developmental capacity?
- Are we noticing empathy, inclusion, negotiation and repair during play?
- Are our examples and visuals culturally responsive and inclusive?
- Is the feelings space supporting participation and connection rather than functioning as a time-out space?
- What patterns are we noticing across the group?
- What do we need to adjust in the environment, routines or teaching?
- Would partnership with a family or another professional strengthen the support?

20. Key Messages for Educators

Social-emotional learning does not need to be another activity added to an already busy day. It can be woven into the moments children already experience: a tower falling, a new activity beginning, a disagreement over a toy, joining a game, waiting for a turn, helping a friend or trying something again.

Remember the four questions

FEEL	UNDERSTAND	RESPOND	CONNECT
How do I feel?	Why do I feel this way?	What can I do?	What can I say or do?

The goal is not to make children stop feeling difficult emotions. The goal is to help children increasingly recognise and communicate their experiences, feel supported, make choices, participate with others, and develop the confidence and skills to navigate everyday challenges.

Feel it. Understand it. Choose what to do. Be kind. 💛

Reference & VEYLDF Alignment Note

This handbook has been revised with reference to the Victorian Department of Education's updated Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), released in 2026. The VEYLDF applies to children from birth to 8 years and identifies five learning and development outcomes: identity, connection, wellbeing, learning and communication.

The handbook also reflects the current VEYLDF emphasis on integrated teaching and learning, intentional teaching, reflective practice, partnerships with families, high expectations, respectful relationships and responsive engagement, equity/diversity/inclusion, assessment for learning and development, and partnerships between professionals.

Official Victorian Government resource: https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-early-years-learning-development-framework-veyldf

Note: VEYLDF alignment statements in this handbook are intended to support curriculum planning and professional reflection. They are not a claim that the poster set alone meets any regulatory, curriculum or assessment requirement.