

PUSH FOR BETTER STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH



We recognise that not all teachers can be mental health experts, however they can play a role in opening up conversations about wellbeing and mental health and encouraging help-seeking behaviours in the classroom.

The following conversation starters will help teachers encourage students to look after their mental health and wellbeing.

What do you think of when you hear the words 'mental health'?



When we think about mental health, we often think of mental illness. The goal here is to help students reframe this perception to be more positive, so they think more proactively about looking after mental wellbeing. Ask your students what they think of when they hear the words 'mental health' then:

1. Write their responses onto sticky notes and display on a board.

2. Ask students to group responses into two categories:

- good mental health (eg. resilient, productive, happy)
- poor mental health or mental illness. (eg. depression, anxiety)

What sorts of activities help to boost mental wellbeing?



To keep our bodies healthy, we eat healthy food and exercise regularly - but there are also lots of things we can do to strengthen our mental wellbeing and resilience.

Taking action to boost mental health will help students cope better when stressful events happen, and encourage a more positive, satisfying life. Here are ways to look after mental health:

- connect with people
- spend time in nature
- avoid alcohol and other drugs
- be active
- take up a hobby or a cause
- learn new coping skills
- eat well
- get enough sleep

Where might you go if you needed mental health support at school or in the community?



It is normal to feel stressed, sad, angry, worried or down sometimes - especially during times of uncertainty. But sometimes, even if you are doing everything you can to look after your mental health, you still don't feel good, and you may want some extra help. It is important to know how and when to ask for help if you or someone you know needs additional support.

There are many services within the school and outside of the school environment where you can seek additional support.

At school:

- School Wellbeing Team
- School Counsellor
- Trusted Teacher
- Year Level Advisor

In the community:

- Your local headspace Centre
- Visit eheadspace for online/phone support
- Visit your local GP
- Or have a chat with a trusted adult

Other discussion ideas:

- You may like to involve your School's Wellbeing Team or other suitably qualified school staff member in discussions around the daily mental health facts we share during The Push-Up Challenge.
- Visit www.thepushupchallenge.com.au for additional discussion ideas.



Useful information for teachers

Why talk about mental health in the classroom?

- One in seven young people aged 4 to 17 years, experience a mental health condition in any given year ⁽¹⁾.
- Over 75% of mental health problems occur before the age of 25 ⁽²⁾.
- Young people are less likely than any other age group to seek professional help ⁽³⁾.
- Suicide continues to be the leading cause of death for young Australians ⁽⁴⁾.
- Stigma is a major barrier to help-seeking.
- Raising awareness of mental health and mental illness will help young people:
 - Look after their mental health and wellbeing
 - Seek help
 - Support their friends
 - avoid alcohol and other drugs
 - learn new coping skills

What do I do if a student discloses a mental health concern with me?

- Engage and support student by active listening
- Adopt a student-centred approach i.e. identify the individual students needs/how you can support them in the classroom
- Refer student to appropriate services (School Wellbeing Team, school counsellor, headspace centre/e-headspace) and encourage the student to seek support.
- Be aware of your Department's relevant policies and processes eg. duty of care, confidentiality.

Other useful services:

- Talking to students about mental health [Reach Out website](https://schools.au.reachout.com/articles/starting-a-conversation-about-youth-mental-health)
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- **RUOK?** - Has a bunch of useful resources (including lesson plans) for primary and secondary schools.
- **headspace** - National Youth Mental Health Foundation - provides mental health services to young people 12 to 25 online, by phone and through headspace centres across Australia.
- **Lifeline** - Provides 24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services for all Australians. Offering connection, compassion and hope, their vision is for Australia to be free of suicide. Call 13 11 14.

References:

1. Lawrence D, Johnson S, Hafekost J, Boterhoven De Haan K, Sawyer M, Ainley J, Zubrick SR. (2015). The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Canberra: Department of Health.
2. Kessler, R. e. a. (2005). "Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication." Archives of General Psychiatry (62:): p. 593-602.
3. Slade T, Johnston A, Teesson M, Whiteford H, Burgess P, Pirkis J, et al. (2009) The Mental Health of Australians 2: Report on the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Canberra: Department of Health and Ageing.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). Causes of Death, Australia, 2019: Intentional self-harm (suicide), Catalogue No 3303.0. Retrieved 23 October 2020.

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