

Pre-service teacher training lays the foundation for prevention and management of bullying in schools

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www.responseability.org

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What is mental health?

Mental health is a positive concept related to the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities. Mental health influences a person's ability to learn, work, and interact with others. The concept is culturally defined, but generally relates to:

- enjoyment of life
- ability to cope with stresses and sadness
- fulfilment of goals and potential
- sense of connection to others.

Mental ill-health refers to a spectrum of problems that interfere with an individual's cognitive, social and emotional abilities. It encompasses:

- mental illness (or disorder)
- mental health problems (problems that do not meet the criteria for a diagnosed mental illness).

In any 12 months, 1 in 5 Australians experience mental illness (NSMHW 2007: ABS no. 4326.0).



The value of pre-service teacher education

Training professionals in key areas and skills pre-service provides the best opportunity to influence and prepare a skilled workforce:

1. **For teachers to participate actively in targeted bullying programs in schools**, a foundation knowledge of mental health must be developed during their pre-service tertiary education.
2. Since **not all teachers have access to in-service training**, waiting to train teachers in-service is not only detrimental to preparedness to act but also reduces the chance that all teachers will be trained in the promotion of mental health.

Response Ability Teacher Education Initiative

Response Ability is Australia's only custom designed, evidence based intervention that prepares teaching professionals to contribute, through their day-to-day practice, to the mental health and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people. It is a national program that equips future teachers during their pre-service training with the skills, knowledge and confidence to promote mental health and respond to mental ill-health in their students.

Response Ability's resources

Resources and support for lecturers and course coordinators to incorporate content related to mental health promotion and mental ill-health prevention in their teaching include:

- multimedia resources (DVD packages)
- graphically designed guides for students
- fact sheets
- website: www.responseability.org
- dedicated email address: education@hnehealth.nsw.gov.au



Bullying and mental health

Bullying can have serious effects on the mental health and wellbeing of young people who are bullied, those who bully, and bystanders. Addressing bullying is particularly important since the social and emotional development that occurs during childhood and adolescence lays the foundation for mental health throughout life. Greater frequency and severity of bullying can be associated with poorer psychological wellbeing and adjustment problems in later life.



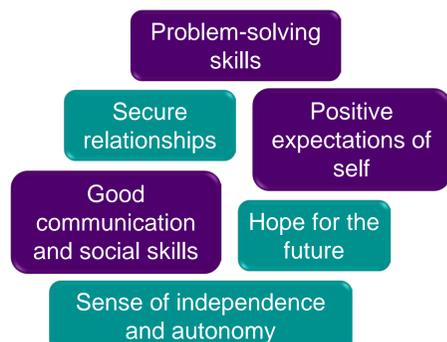
Risk and protective factors

Mental ill-health can be both a risk factor for and consequence of bullying. Bullying and mental ill-health share common risk and protective factors.

Good mental health can buffer the impact of bullying and help prevent bullying.

Developing good mental health and the skills associated with resilience can assist with preventing someone from bullying others, mitigating the ill effects of being bullied or encouraging a bystander to support someone being bullied.

Encourage protective factors, such as:



Whole-school preventative approach

Bullying is best addressed using a whole-school approach that makes use of mental health promotion and prevention strategies, as a complement to management strategies for specific bullying incidents. Teachers provide leadership and are essential for effectively implementing this process.



Teachers shape a child's learning, thoughts, emotions and behaviour. They can positively influence a child's present and future mental health. By the nature of their role, teachers are well placed to identify and prevent bullying in schools and implement prevention strategies that promote mental health. However they require the knowledge and skills to successfully enact this role.

Response Ability's resources on bullying

Resource: Nicola (case study film) and 25 options for accompanying activities.

Target: Pre-service primary school teachers.

Film synopsis: "Nicola" portrays episodes of bullying in a group of primary school girls: covert bullying with photos on a mobile phone and social exclusion. The teacher seeks advice from the principal, holds a class discussion about friendship and bullying in general, and intervenes directly with the girls (bullies and bullied).

Example student activity:

DIMENSION: Develop broader organisational, school and community strategies that promote wellbeing.

OUTCOME: To raise awareness of the need for school policy and its regular update as well as to role play being involved in such a process.

FORMAT: Role play/group discussion.

QUESTION:

You have been invited to join a committee to look at re-writing the school policy on the use of mobile phones and the internet in the primary school setting. You have also been asked to make a list of other possible strategies that could be applied as part of a whole school approach to address bullying ... You will have 40 minutes to discuss in a group of four or five what you are going to include in the policy, any issues that might arise as a result and develop some recommendations to be presented to the school executive. You may wish to consider:

- existing school policy
- external guidelines (national/state)
- potential bullying issues
- the use of photographs/child protection
- consequences for children who contravene the policy.

Make sure that your rationale takes into account the mental health impacts of bullying and cyber-bullying.