

Using a whole school approach to promote social and emotional wellbeing

Teachers, early childhood educators and educational facilities play an important role in supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of children in their care. Promoting social and emotional wellbeing from an early age is associated with more positive behaviour, better academic achievement and improved health and wellbeing, resulting in better outcomes during adulthood.

Research has shown that the most effective way to achieve the aims of mental health promotion, mental ill-health prevention and early intervention in schools is by using a whole school approach. These principles can also be extended to the concept of a whole centre approach, to be inclusive of early childhood education and care centres.

Key features of a whole school approach are:

- It involves a systematic focus on wellbeing through all aspects of the school or centre;
- It must be inclusive of everyone: children, parents, staff and other professionals who might work with the school or centre;
- The entire school community works together;
- Provision of professional learning for staff;
- Ongoing and sustained action; and
- It is supported by policies and procedures.

A whole school approach has implications for the learning environment, curriculum and pedagogy, policies and procedures and relationships in the school community. Each of these areas will now be explored in further detail followed by examples of whole school approaches in Australian schools.

The learning environment

Educators can support wellbeing by creating a safe, supportive learning environment. Relationships are based

on respect and belonging. Diversity is welcomed and celebrated. Staff model the behaviour that they want children to adopt. The environment is safe physically, socially and emotionally, so children and young people feel free to participate and contribute. There are clear expectations for behaviour and positive behaviour management practices.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Educators can include tasks that help children to understand emotions and social situations, in a developmentally appropriate way (e.g. stories, interactive activities or group discussion for older children). It is helpful to use a range of teaching techniques to cater for different learning styles, so that everyone can experience success. Celebrate the achievements of children and young people, both academic and personal. Where possible, give children and young people a sense of responsibility by allowing them to make decisions and solve problems e.g. setting class rules, or running a special event.

Policies and procedures

Wellbeing principles should be reflected in the organisation's mission statement, policies and procedures. Examples might include statements about the philosophy of the organisation, as well as specific points about student welfare, behaviour management, bullying and other issues. The focus on wellbeing should include systems for supporting the wellbeing of staff, and for responding appropriately to children, young people, staff or parents who may need additional support.

Partnerships with the community

A comprehensive approach requires meaningful partnerships with parents, families and the community. Centres and schools need to create an environment that is welcoming and inclusive, to encourage parents to become actively involved. Diversity can be enhanced and celebrated by connecting with community members and inviting them to participate in events in your school or centre. Educators should also build partnerships with a range of health and welfare agencies in the local area, so they can provide advice or referrals for families in need of support.



Examples in schools and early childhood education and care

A whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing generates better social, emotional and academic outcomes for students. In Australia there are three national frameworks which use a whole school/centre approach for mental health and wellbeing. These are:

- KidsMatter (for early childhood education and care) www.kidsmatter.edu.au/early-childhood
- KidsMatter (for primary schools) www.kidsmatter.edu.au
- MindMatters (for secondary schools) www.mindmatters.edu.au

Research and information from MindMatters and KidsMatter indicate implementation of a whole school approach is most effective and sustainable when it includes:

- Support from executive leadership;
- A diverse, high performing action team;
- Effective communication;
- Exploration of beliefs and perceptions about mental health among the school community;
- Improvement of mental health literacy in staff, students and parents and staff skills in and commitment to promoting mental health;
- Sharing of leadership;
- Opportunities for everyone in the school community to contribute to the planning, decision making and roll-out of the initiative;
- A data and evidence informed approach and evaluation of impact;
- Alignment with school values;
- Everyone in the school community working together for a common outcome; and
- Embedding a focus on mental health into the everyday practices as a core component of work for everyone.

National Safe Schools Framework

The National Safe Schools Framework vision is that all Australian schools are safe, supportive and respectful

teaching and learning communities that promote student wellbeing.

The framework was developed by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood and has nine key elements:

1. Leadership commitment to a safe school;
2. A supportive and connected school culture;
3. Policies and procedures;
4. Professional learning;
5. Positive behaviour management;
6. Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum;
7. A focus on student wellbeing and student ownership;
8. Early intervention and targeted support; and
9. Partnerships with families and community.

www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/national-safe-schools-framework

Sources and Links

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