

# Introducing KidsMatter Primary

Do kids matter? Of course! They matter to families, to schools and to the community. These are the groups that KidsMatter wants to bring together to improve children's mental health.


Good mental health is vital for learning and life. Children who are mentally healthy are better able to meet life's challenges. They also learn better and have stronger relationships with teachers, family members and peers.

KidsMatter is a national mental health initiative currently being trialled in over 100 Australian primary schools during 2006 – 2008. KidsMatter has been developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, the Australian Psychological Society, and Principals Australia (formerly the Australian Principals Association's Professional Development Council). The trial was also supported by Australian Rotary Health (formerly the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund).

Research has found that up to 14% of Australian children have mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and behaviour problems. Only one out of every four young people with mental health problems receives professional help<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes this is because parents, carers and school staff are unsure whether children need further help. They may not know what kind of help is available or where to get it. In some cases it may be difficult to access child and adolescent mental health services in their area.

## KidsMatter Primary has three major aims:

- To improve the mental health and wellbeing of primary school students
- To reduce mental health problems among students
- To achieve greater support for those students experiencing mental health problems



One in seven Australian children have mental health problems - KidsMatter aims to reduce this.

# The four components of KidsMatter Primary

Schools can make a difference to children's mental health and wellbeing by addressing four key areas. Each KidsMatter school will be working on the following four components:

## 1. A positive school community

Positive relationships at school enable children and families to feel that school is a place where they feel welcome, where they will be listened to and where they can contribute. A positive school community helps children feel that school is a safe place where their needs can be met. Research has shown that when children and families feel connected to the school, children are less likely to develop mental health problems and they succeed better at school.

## 2. Social and emotional learning for students

Learning how to manage feelings and get on with others is an important part of children's development that helps them learn better and feel good about themselves. Teaching children social and emotional skills as part of the school curriculum gives them tools for coping with emotions, solving problems and learning more effectively.

## 3. Parenting support and education

If we want to promote children's mental health and wellbeing, it makes sense for families and schools to work closely together. Schools can support parents and carers in their central role of caring for children by making useful information and resources about parenting available and by letting them know where they can get further assistance.

## 4. Early intervention for students who are experiencing mental health difficulties

When children and families are able to access effective mental health intervention early it can make a significant difference to their lives. KidsMatter schools learn to respond more effectively to children's mental health difficulties by identifying when problems may need follow-up, providing information for families and developing links with mental health services in their local area.

**Keep an eye out for more information on KidsMatter Primary at your school.**

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)