

KidsMatter is a primary school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) and supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund.

## EDITORIAL

### Welcome to our first KidsMatter e-Newsletter!

We hope it becomes a resource that you look forward to receiving and will use with confidence. The KidsMatter health and education partnership enables us to provide diverse material that can be used to support the work you do. If you click on the logos at right you will be taken directly to each of the partner's websites. We want the e-Newsletter to be responsive to your needs.

The Email the Editor function in our KidsMatter banner will enable us to follow up issues important to you. We would also like to promote the great things you are doing to improve children's mental health. Please send us your stories that you would like us to share.

The format for the e-Newsletter has been chosen to reflect the four Key Components of KidsMatter. This focus is a way of making the task of improving mental health in schools more manageable. It also ensures that schools are putting their efforts into areas where they can be most effective.

The e-Newsletter is designed for easy reading. If an item interests you click on the link to learn more.

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### Introducing our Stage 1 KidsMatter schools...

100 schools representing states, territories, sectors, remote, rural and metropolitan locations were selected by the KidsMatter Evaluation Team from Flinders University to participate in Stage 1 of KidsMatter. All of the applications were considered. Every school described their readiness to begin the initiative and a commitment to a whole school approach. The schools eventually selected were randomly chosen because of their ability to be matched with a like school for evaluation purposes.

180 staff from the first 50 schools met for an implementation briefing in Adelaide on September 11 and 12. The second 50 schools will participate in this briefing next KidsMatter Update

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## GROUP 1 SCHOOLS

### NSW

Brooke Avenue Public School - Killarney Vale	Northmead Public School- Northmead
Curran Public School- Macquarie Fields	St Bernadette's Primary School- Lalor Park
Dubbo Public School- Dubbo	St John Fisher Catholic School- Tumby Umbi
Elands Public School- Elands	St. Columbas Primary School- Berrigan
King Park Public School- Wakeley	St Joseph's School Schofields- Schofields

**VIC**

Christ the King Primary School- Braybrook  
 Hastings Primary School- Hastings  
 Monmia Primary School- Keilor Downs  
 Sacred Heart Primary School- Fitzroy  
 Saint Joseph's -Trafalgar

St Bernadette's Primary School- North Sunshine  
 St. Christopher's School- Airport West  
 St. Vincent de Paul Primary School- Morwell  
 Tootgarook Primary School- Rye  
 Upper Ferntree Gully Primary School- Upper  
 Ferntree Gully

**QLD**

Burdekin School Special School- Ayr  
 Home Hill State School- Home Hill  
 Ithaca Creek State School- Bardon  
 Labrador State School- Labrador  
 Pomona State School- Pomona

Sandy Strait State School- Urangan  
 St Joseph's Stanthorpe- Stanthorpe  
 Cairns West State School- Manunda  
 Wondai State School- Wondai

**WA**

Bull Creek Primary School- Bull Creek  
 Holy Name School- Carlisle  
 Kinlock Primary School- Ferndale  
 Liwara Catholic Primary School- Greenwood

Settlers Primary School- Baldivis  
 St Simon Peter Catholic Primary School- Ocean Reef  
 Nulsen Primary School- Esperance

**SA**

Woodville Primary School - Woodville South  
 Hamley Bridge Primary School- Hamley Bridge  
 Hewett Primary School- Hewett

Leigh Creek Area School + Marree Aboriginal  
 School- Leigh Creek  
 East Torrens Primary School- Hectorville  
 St Aloysius College- Adelaide

**TAS**

Distance Education Tasmania- North Hobart  
 Richmond Primary School- Richmond

Waverley Primary School- Launceston

**ACT**

Turner Primary school- Turner  
 Blue Gum Community School- Hackett

Canberra Girls' Grammar Junior School- Deakin

**NT**

Gray Primary School- Palmerston  
 Living Waters Lutheran School Inc.- Alice Springs

Nhulunbuy Primary School- Nhulunbuy

**GROUP 2 SCHOOLS****NSW**

Bexley Public School- Bexley  
 Carramar Public School- Carramar  
 Faulconbridge Public School- Springwood  
 Harrington Street Public School- Cabramatta  
 West

St Bede's Primary School- Braidwood  
 St Oliver's Primary School- Harris Park  
 St Mary's Catholic Primary School- Noraville  
 Tahmoor Public School -Tahmoor  
 St Patrick's Primary School- Macksville

**VIC**

St Mary's Primary School- Echuca  
 Benalla Primary School- Benalla  
 Corio Primary School- Corio  
 Lumen Christi- Churchill  
 North Brunswick Primary School- West Brunswick

Southvale Primary School- Noble Park  
 St Andrew's Catholic Primary School- Werribee  
 St. John Vianney's School- Parkdale East  
 St. Therese's Primary School- Cranbourne  
 St Louis De Montfort Primary- Aspendale

**QLD**

Caloundra Primary School- Caloundra  
 Goondiwindi State Primary School- Goondiwindi  
 Mater Hospital Special School- Woolloongabba  
 Redlynch State School- Redlynch

Tallebudgera State School- Tallebudgera  
 The Willows State School- Kirwan  
 Unity College - Caloundra West  
 Upper Mt Gravatt State School- Brisbane

**WA**

Geraldton Grammar School- Geraldton  
 Hilton Primary School- Hilton  
 Lance Holt School- Fremantle  
 Leeming Primary School- Leeming

Rockingham Beach PS- Rockingham  
 Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School - Rockingham  
 Coinda Primary School- Bunbury

**SA**

College- Wayville  
 Cobdogla Primary School- Cobdogla  
 Elizabeth Park Schools- Elizabeth Park  
 Munno Para Primary School- Munno Para

Open Access College - Marden  
 Roxby Downs Area School- Roxby Downs  
 Woodcroft Primary School- Woodcroft Annesley

**TAS**

Kempton Primary School- Kempton  
 Lauderdale Primary School- Lauderdale

Rocherlea Primary School- Mowbray

**ACT**

Aranda Primary- Aranda  
 Gowrie Primary School- Gowrie

St Francis of Assisi Primary School- Calwell

**NT**

Howard Springs Primary School- Howard Springs  
 Jingili Primary School- Darwin

Sacred Heart Primary School- Palmerston

**A POSITIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

*A positive school community promotes feelings of belonging and connection for students, staff, families and the community. Belonging and connection are protective factors for mental health*

**Belonging and connection**

A sense of belonging is an essential requirement for building a positive school community. It means building connections with, and between, staff, students, families and the community. A positive school community promotes feelings of belonging and connection for children, which are both protective factors for mental health. A positive school community is also essential for school staff to ensure

that the environment supports and promotes their well being. When staff feel supported and connected they are more able to effectively provide for their students' academic, social and emotional needs. A positive school community that is welcoming and respects diversity will encourage parents, families and the community to participate and contribute to school life.

Students who have a sense of belonging and connection to school are more likely to feel happier, safer and cope better with the ups and downs of life. Students who do not feel connected to school are more likely to experience poor mental health, low self concept, be in conflict with parents and teachers, and seek out alternate forms of social connection by belonging to negative peer groups.



For many children who live in challenging circumstances, school can represent a stable and reliable place to belong in an ever changing world. This includes children from fractured families, those caught in custody battles, those living in poverty or with mentally ill or drug addicted parents. A positive school community is vital for these children.



Similarly, children from indigenous communities, refugee families and other culturally diverse backgrounds have to move between the community at school and their 'outside school' community. If there are great disparities between these two communities, students may not manage the transition and will feel alienated and disconnected.

A positive school community will assist in bridging the gap by being responsive to the interests and needs of students and families from diverse cultures, backgrounds and circumstances. The lack of a sense of belonging within a school community can be seen in many ways, including frequent student absence, inappropriate student behaviour, poor family participation and support for school events, poor family representation on committees, little or no acknowledgement of school correspondence, lack of staff support for new ideas, high staff stress levels, turnover and absence.

**Children can be helped to cope with grief and death by learning to understand the nature of death as a biological event.**

### Talking with children about death

By Dr Bob Montgomery PhD FAPS  
Adjunct Professor in Psychology, University of the Sunshine Coast  
Director of Communications, Australian Psychological Society

Children are inevitably confronted by death, through direct or indirect experience or through fictional depictions. Adults understand that death comes to all living things, is the final stage of the life cycle, is inevitable and irreversible, and is caused by a breakdown in the biological functioning of the body. However, children do not think like adults and their reactions to death are shaped by their ideas about its nature. Early research found that children, like adults, saw death as a highly emotional issue, evoking sadness, anxiety, and fear, particularly of the separation that death may cause. Children's ideas about death involved some consistent misunderstandings (from an adult point of view) that could exacerbate children's emotional responses.

Children younger than 10 tended to see separation due to death as similar to other forms of parting. Death is behavioural, in that dead people had gone away, to heaven or the cemetery or some such special place, where they continued to live but from which they were unlikely to return, because they were unable or were permanently asleep. It is easy to see how the language sometimes used by adults to discuss death with children could give rise to such ideas.

*Later research identified seven components in the adult idea of death:*

(1) irreversibility

(2) universality and applicability -  
all living things, but  
only living things, die

(3) personal mortality

(4) inevitability

(5) cessation-  
body and mental  
functions cease after  
death

(6) causality-  
death is caused by a  
breakdown of bodily  
functions

(7) unpredictability



By ages 5 or 6, children have usually acquired the ideas of universality and irreversibility; but the ideas of cessation and causality are usually acquired last, not until age 7 or older. In other words, an understanding of death as a biological event typically comes last.

Recent research has explored how children build ideas about how the world works by actively building causal 'theories'. Dr Virginia Slaughter, a psychologist at the University of Queensland, and her colleagues investigated children's understanding of death in two studies, one in North America and one in Australia. She concluded that young children typically don't have a sufficiently mature 'theory' of the biological nature of life, so they cannot have an understanding of death as a biological event. Researchers generally agree that between ages 5 and 8 children first begin to think specifically about how biology works and how this applies to the human body. Usually between ages 4 and 6, children begin understanding the body as 'biological', seeing its major organs as serving the purpose of maintaining life. So by age 7 children usually understand life in a way that allows them to begin understanding death.

### *Implications*

Talking with a young child about death is inevitably difficult, because it is highly emotional and requires a level of thinking more mature than usually occurs in youngsters. But there will unavoidably be occasions when adults need to discuss death with young children and to do so in a supportive way. Euphemistic discussions may only serve to maintain children's misinformation about death, so delaying their coming to terms with it and exacerbating their emotional distress. Expert opinion is that death should be discussed with children in concrete and unambiguous terms.



This means talking, in language understandable to the child, about death as a biological event involving the irreversible cessation of bodily functions. However, such an explanation will not be helpful to a child who has not yet developed a biological 'theory' of life, so this may need to be addressed first. Ask the child open-ended questions about the nature of life and death to allow the child to show whether she or he has developed a biological 'theory' of life. If not, then the child will benefit from reasonably detailed explanations of the biological nature of life, repeated as often as necessary to achieve understanding. One or two age-appropriate library books may help. An understanding of death as a biological event should facilitate helpful, supportive communication with adults and lessen the child's emotional pain.



### Reference:

Slaughter, V. (2005). Young children's understanding of death. *Australian Psychologist*, 40:179-186.

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## **National Safe Schools Framework**

The National Safe Schools framework has a focus to ensure our schools are safe and supportive environments. All State and Territory government and non-government education authorities, and the Commonwealth, are committed to working together to ensure the wellbeing of all Australian students. Providing an environment where bullying, harassment and violence are not tolerated and wellbeing, social responsibility and respect are promoted is the foundation for a positive school community.



Each edition of the KidsMatter e-Newsletter will highlight strategies and resources to help further build safe and supportive learning environments for your students.

Examples about whole school approaches can be found on the Bullying. No way! Website at [www.bullyingnoway.com.au](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au)

## **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR STUDENTS**

### **TEACHING OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS**

Link between social and emotional skills and learning

Social and emotional competence is an integral requirement for good mental health and like all learning is acquired developmentally and needs to be taught. Growing evidence shows that the acquisition of social and emotional skills is critical in achieving better academic performance and success in school and life.

Read more about the relationship between Social and Emotional Learning and Academic performance in future e-Newsletters.

## PARENTING SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

### Positive parent - school relationships are very important

Help parents out with transition to school by providing them with information from the Raising Children website

The family is central to children's mental health. Making parenting information and education a regular part of what schools offer to families has many benefits including opportunities to improve parenting practice and increase parents' understanding of risk and protective factors in regards to their child's mental health. Many organizations provide helpful tip sheets and great suggestions for parents on many topics related to bringing up children and are happy to supply a range of brochures for free.

You may like to advertise the Raising Children website in your newsletter, [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au). It provides a wealth of ideas and some would make a great insert for parents of children just starting school. You could provide them as part of your transition to school suggestions.

### Raising Children Website



This website provides information for grown-ups, and tips and information about parenting newborns, babies, toddlers, preschoolers and school age children.

The website provides specific information for families with primary school age children detailed in the table below.

*Grown-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Family Management</li> <li>o Looking After Yourself</li> <li>o Parents Like Me</li> <li>o Pregnancy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o For Fathers</li> <li>o Work &amp; Family</li> <li>o Dealing with Separation</li> </ul>
* School Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Behaviour</li> <li>o Connecting &amp; Communicating</li> <li>o Development</li> <li>o Health &amp; Daily Care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Nutrition &amp; Fitness</li> <li>o Play &amp; Learning</li> <li>o Safety</li> <li>o Sleep</li> </ul>
* Services & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Child Care to School</li> <li>o Hotlines</li> <li>o Links &amp; Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Local Services</li> <li>o Money &amp; Finances</li> <li>o Parenting &amp; the Law</li> </ul>

Check out the [behaviour tool kit](#) for school-aged children and the tips sheets on understanding children's behaviour, school issues, discipline, and common concerns.

## EARLY INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Create a flow chart at your school outlining which services to call for mental health crisis support, follow-up, referrals or more information

### Auditing your community resources

Early intervention can make a significant difference to children who are at risk of developing mental health difficulties but very few children with mental health difficulties receive any professional support. It can be helpful to audit what resources are available and build a reference list of contacts. A flowchart is a good way of

mapping phone numbers to call for immediate response in a crisis and those that would be helpful for follow up or later counselling and referral or support and information.

Your own education department student support service numbers are a great start. Every state also has a directory of community resources that are available to download on line or purchase in hard copy. When you 'Click for more' you'll find a list of directory websites and the opportunity to view the Flowchart.

Click on the links below to find out more about the mental health services for children in your state or territory.

### NSW

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

Local Information Network for Community Services - <http://www.datadiction.com.au/lincs>

### Victoria

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

### Queensland

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

Some local councils provide local community information:

Charters Towers - <http://www.charterdata.org.au/>

### Western Australia

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

Some local councils have community information available online <http://www.datadiction.com.au/lincs>

### South Australia

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

<http://www.cisa.asn.au/>

### Tasmania

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

### ACT

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

Citizens Advice Bureau ACT - <http://www.citizensadvice.org.au/>

### Northern Territory

<http://www.serviceseeker.com.au/>

NTCOSS provides a printed Community Services Directory and online database -

<http://www.ntcoss.org.au/>



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing



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