

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

Refresh and Replenish

The mental health and wellbeing of children is connected to the mental health and wellbeing of the adults who parent, care and work with them. The team at KidsMatter hopes you take an opportunity to refresh and replenish your own emotional wellbeing over the Christmas break. If it has been a tough year, now is a good time to make plans for working out ways to do things differently in 2007. Often this is a process that requires the support of others. Sometimes seeking professional intervention can be the most appropriate strategy. We are getting smart at talking up our physical health, knowing what impacts on it and how to improve it - now we need to do the same for our mental health.

KidsMatter Update

THE KIDSMATTER INITIATIVE STAGE 1



The KidsMatter Initiative is now up and running in 50 schools across Australia, with another 51 schools due to begin in September, 2007. These 101 schools are participating in a 2 year trial to examine the extent to which KidsMatter is able to make a positive impact on the mental health and well-being of primary school students in Australia. Information learnt from this trial will be used to inform the intended national roll-out of KidsMatter, anticipated to occur sometime in 2008.

KidsMatter kicked off in the first 50 schools with a 2 day-briefing held in Adelaide on September 11 and 12. Around 180 school staff, including 50 school principals, attended this initial briefing designed to give schools detailed information on how they can implement the four KidsMatter components: (1) Positive School Community; (2) Social and Emotional Learning for Students; (3) Parenting Education and Support; and (4) Early Intervention for Students at Risk or Experiencing Mental Health Problems.

During Term 4, Action Teams in each of the 50 KidsMatter schools have been conducting school audits and developing school plans for 2007 around the four KidsMatter components. The work of schools is supported by a dedicated group of KidsMatter Project Officers and by the two KidsMatter Folders – the Implementation Guide and Programs Manual. KidsMatter Project Officers have also begun delivering Professional Development to Schools around the four components.

This first group of 50 KidsMatter schools are to be congratulated for the enormous work they have done in preparing their 2007 plans. Their commitment to the mental health and well-being of students in their school is obvious.

A POSITIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Schools working with community

The Working with Community: The Yule Brook College Experience resource has been developed “for schools eager to commence or further develop the process of engaging with their local Aboriginal community”. The package consists of a DVD and booklet outlining the steps that Yule Brook College, a middle school in suburban Perth, took to develop an Aboriginal Community Agreement with their local Aboriginal

community. The school has sustained the Agreement over the past 5 years, despite changes to the school's leadership team.

The resource is an excellent model for all schools. The booklet outlines the process that Yule Brook College followed in engaging with their local Aboriginal community. Data showing the improvements in attendance and graduation since the Agreement's development is highlighted. The second half of the booklet offers suggestions for other schools to consider in following a similar process. The strategies and ideas included are applicable in primary and secondary school settings.

Copies of the resource are available for \$10 (to cover postage and administration) through the Dare to Lead project. An order form can be downloaded from the front page of the Dare to Lead website www.daretolead.edu.au

School Culture

The end of the year is a time of reflection, evaluation and change as reports are written, goals measured, staff and students farewelled and future possibilities considered. For some sites the school community may be significantly altered if there is a large changeover of staff and students. Now is also a time when the way in which people are farewelled or welcomed can have a significant impact on how they think about themselves and your school community. What are the traditions at your site? Every school has its own culture and a way in which they go about their business. Farewells and inductions are significant milestones and the way in which transitions are managed can also reflect a lot about the culture of your site. In an upcoming edition of KidsMatter eNews, we are going to focus on the many elements of school culture and its importance in building a positive school community as a protective factor in promoting good mental health.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

TEACHING OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Schools, Parents, and Social and Emotional Learning

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a key protective factor for children's mental health and well-being, and KidsMatter schools are focussing on making sure that all students are taught these in a formal and systematic way. With the holidays approaching parents/caregivers can continue to support their children's social and emotional learning. Have a look at the following tip sheet for some ideas. You may wish to include it in your school newsletter.

Ten Things You Can Do at Home

Some ideas for parents to use at home that can be put in the school newsletter...

1. *Focus on strengths.* When your child brings home a test, talk first about what he or she did well. Then talk about what can be improved. Praise specific strengths. Don't just criticise things that were done wrong.

2. *Follow up with consequences for misbehaviour.* Sometimes parents say things in anger that don't curb the behaviour in the long run. You might say, "Because of what you did, no television for a month." Both

you and your child know that after one or two days the TV will go back on. Decide on consequences that are fair, and then carry them out.

3. *Ask children how they feel.* When you ask your child about his or her feelings, the message is that feelings matter and you care.

4. *Find ways to stay calm when angry.* It's normal to get angry or irritated sometimes. Learn to recognise "trigger situations" and do something about them before you lose control. Try taking deep breaths for a few moments. Consider having a "quiet area" where people can go when they are upset. Or you can just

stop talking and leave the room for a while. Sit down as a family and talk about what everyone can do to stay calm.

5. *Avoid humiliating or mocking your child.* This can make children feel bad about themselves. It can lead to a lack of self-confidence and, in turn, problems with schoolwork, illness, and trouble getting along with friends. Unfair criticism and sarcasm also hurts the bond of trust between children and parents. Be mindful of how you speak to your children. Give them the room to make mistakes as they learn new skills.



6. *Be willing to apologise.* Parents need to be able to apologise to their children if what they said was not what they meant. Calmly explain what you really wanted to say. By doing this you're being a good role model. You're showing how important it is to apologise after hurting someone. You're teaching that it's possible to work through problems with respect for the other person.

7. *Give children choices and respect their wishes.* When children have a chance to make choices, they learn how to solve problems. If you make all their choices for them, they'll never learn this key skill. Giving children ways to express preferences and make decisions shows that their ideas and feelings matter.



8. *Ask questions that help children solve problems on their own.* When parents hear their child has a problem, it's tempting to step in and take over. But this can harm a child's ability to find solutions on his or her own. A helpful approach is to ask good questions. Examples include, "What do you think you can do in this situation?" and "If you choose a particular solution, what will be the consequences of that choice?"

9. *Read books and stories together.* Reading stories aloud is a way to share something enjoyable and learn together about other people. For example, stories can be a way to explore how people deal with common issues like making or losing friends or handling conflicts. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian to recommend stories on themes that interest you and your children.



10. *Encourage sharing and helping.* There are many ways to do this. Together you and your child can prepare food in a homeless shelter or go on a fund-raising walk-a-thon. You can help out elderly neighbours or needy families. This teaches children that what they do can make a difference in the lives of others.

PARENTING SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

Holiday activities

The Child and Youth Health website is a wonderful source of ideas and information for parents in your school community. You may like to provide this link in your newsletter so parents can access a wealth of ideas to use with their children in preventing holiday boredom. See: <http://www.cyh.com/Default.aspx?p=1>



Relationship Building



The family is central to children's mental health. With the possibility of most people having at least a few days of holidays in the next few weeks we want you all to enjoy your own families and children too. Children who have warm and secure relationships with their families or carers are protected from a range of mental health issues including anxiety, depression and behavioural issues. We look forward to providing you with practical ideas and up to date information in 2007 to better work with the parents and families in your community.



Link:

If you would like learn more about "Leading Communities – Raising Resources" the following link will be of interest to you - See: www.raisingresources.edu.au

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

For the families in your school who have children with mental health difficulties there are times when extra support may be required to manage the parenting challenges during a long holiday period. Schools can assist these families to plan ahead by identifying community resources that may be of support and are accessible during these times.

Help parents out over the holidays by providing community information in the school newsletter

You may wish to consider including any community assistance helpline numbers in your school newsletter if they are available. The front of your White Pages phone book can show what is available in your area and those organisations that also provide freecall contact. A clear picture of the options available can make a lot of difference.

A good number to include is the Parent Helpline - 1300-364-100



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



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