This resource provides information for school student wellbeing coordinators to guide discussions with families and health and community services when there are concerns about a child’s mental health and wellbeing.

When there are concerns about a child’s mental health and wellbeing there are many things to consider. Achieving the best outcomes for children with mental health difficulties is more likely when the family is informed and engaged early as well as throughout the process.

Sometimes health and community services will need to gather more information from the family, but the information you provide will be really useful as a starting point.

To help guide your discussions with the family and health and community services (which generally occur with the family’s consent), here are some questions you might like to consider:

• What are you concerned about?
• What is working well?
• What would the child and family like to change?

The knowledge and information that a school and those involved with the child on a daily basis can provide to a health professional about the child, including how things are working for them at school, will be vital to help the service gain a full understanding of the child’s mental health and wellbeing.

This resource should be used in conjunction with the B-E-T-L-S (Behaviour, Emotions, Thoughts, Learning and Social Relationships) framework for school staff as outlined in KidsMatter Primary Component 4 Professional Learning.

In particular, the KidsMatter Primary B-E-T-L-S observation tool is a good starting point to develop greater insight into issues concerning the child.

Think about what are you concerned about

The following questions might be worth considering before you speak to a health or community service about a particular child.

• What are the presenting issues leading to the referral? If possible, give an example of a particular behaviour that caught your attention. You could consider information about the child that was gathered using the B-E-T-L-S observation tool.
• How are the presenting issues impacting on the child’s learning?
• What is your general impression of the child? (eg temperament, personality, interests)
• Has there been a change in the child’s behaviour that has triggered concern for their mental health and wellbeing?
• Does the child have known additional needs? For example, learning difficulties or health problems. If so, what are they and what impact do they have on the child?
• What is the child’s capacity to develop and maintain friendships?
• What school-related issues are relevant to the referral? (eg attendance, bullying experiences)
• Has the child experienced any significant trauma, recent or otherwise?
Think about what is working well for the child

Think about the strengths of the child, what supports are already in place and what has been working well.

• What is your general impression of the child’s and family’s strengths? For example, a strength for some children can be as simple as the willingness of the family to work with the school.

• Which strategies and methods of support have been tried with the child? What has worked for the child?

• What does the child respond well to?

• Has the child received support from health and community services in the past? If so, which services were involved and what support did they provide? Who are the contact people for ongoing communication if the family provide consent?

• Drawing on information gathered from the B-E-T-L-S observation tool, has the child received any support from the school? If so, what type of support have they received and from whom?

Think about what the child and family would like to change

In discussions with the child and family consider what they think needs to change. Think about the following questions before your discussion with the family and health and community services.

• What do the parents and carers think the child needs and how could the school assist?

• If a preference has been expressed, what type of support would the child or their family like to receive (e.g., counselling, family therapy, group work) and/or what types of support can be accommodated within the school setting?

• When would the family like the child to receive support (e.g., during school hours, after school) and/or what is possible in the school setting?

• Where would the family like the child to receive support (e.g., outreach, in the school, office-based) and/or what could the school do to accommodate it? What is the family’s capacity to travel to appointments?

• If there is a waiting period for services, how will the family be supported in the meantime?

Other matters that the health or community service might want to discuss with you could include the following:

• What are the child’s family circumstances? Who do they live with and what are relationships like within the family?

• How do you think the child and family understand what is happening with the child?

• What is the family’s understanding of the referral and capacity to obtain support for the child?

For more information

The B-E-T-L-S observation tool can help your school address children’s mental health difficulties. It is located in the KidsMatter Primary Component 4 Professional Learning Participant Workbook, which is available online at: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/c4professionallearning