KidsMatter Primary is divided into four components to make the task of improving students’ mental health and wellbeing in schools more manageable. The four components are interrelated and each one is important for supporting student mental health.

- Component 1: Positive school community
- Component 2: Social and emotional learning for students
- Component 3: Working with parents and carers
- Component 4: Helping children with mental health difficulties

How do the components work?

Schools begin their KidsMatter Primary journey with Component 1, where they develop a shared understanding of mental health and wellbeing and a school community that promotes belonging and inclusion. They then work through the remaining three components, aiming to complete Component 4 about two years after beginning the process. Components are ordered to reflect the development of capacity in areas of mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention.

Where do health and community services fit into the KidsMatter Primary framework?

KidsMatter Primary encourages schools to engage health and community groups, and especially mental health services, within and across all four components – and not just in the context of early intervention. As a local health and community service you may be able to offer specialised support to help KidsMatter Primary schools implement specific interventions to create better relationships with families (Component 3), enhanced social and emotional skills (Component 2) or a stronger school community (Component 1). Here are some suggestions for how you might approach, assist and develop partnerships with schools.

Health and community services supporting KidsMatter Primary schools
Component 1: A positive school community

Component 1 promotes mental health and wellbeing, helping schools to focus on enhancing respectful relationships and students’ sense of belonging and inclusion at school. This component aims to increase staff members’ understanding of the importance of mental health and wellbeing and to place student wellbeing within the context of a positive whole-school environment.

Some of the ways you might help schools achieve this goal are by:

• having a presence at your local KidsMatter Primary school by attending events
• holding information sessions or training events for school staff on various mental health and wellbeing topics to help teachers implement inclusive practices
• providing information to schools about engaging culturally and linguistically diverse communities in your local area.

Component 2: Social and emotional learning for students

Component 2 helps to develop students’ ability to care for others, make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships and handle challenging situations (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2003). Schools are encouraged to look at the best ways to teach social and emotional skills to all students and promote five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. KidsMatter

Primary schools are encouraged to incorporate these competencies into their community and give students an opportunity to practise and transfer these skills.

Some of the ways your service might assist are by:

• facilitating skills groups for children in partnership with school staff that align with the social and emotional competencies
• holding training sessions for staff on children’s social skill development
• providing materials for school staff about social and emotional learning
• supporting schools to engage families to learn about social and emotional skills.

Component 3: Working with parents and carers

Component 3 encourages schools and families to work together to support children’s mental health. This can be achieved by developing collaborative relationships with families, providing parenting support and facilitating support networks for families.

Staff working in health and community services can support KidsMatter Primary schools to achieve these goals by:

• facilitating parenting support groups within schools or at your local premises
• streamlining referral processes for parents by providing schools with information about the services you provide
• collaborating with schools to disseminate information to parents about your service through newsletters or the school’s website
• holding training sessions for staff on how to navigate and support parent-teacher relationships effectively.
Component 4: Helping children with mental health difficulties

Component 4 increases the capacity of schools to organise early intervention for children who may need extra support. It recognises that school staff need assistance in this area and promotes working with health and community agencies as the best way to achieve good mental health and wellbeing outcomes for children. This component aims to increase understanding of mental health difficulties and improve help seeking.

Some of the ways your service may help schools to recognise signs that children may be experiencing mental health difficulties and offer extra support include:

• consulting with school staff when they have concerns about their students’ mental health and wellbeing
• meeting with school staff and providing information about your local community service and what external support you can offer children and families to help facilitate referral pathways
• providing training to staff about common mental health issues among primary school students, the best ways to support students in the classroom environment and appropriate services to refer to for additional external support
• providing specialised knowledge and support to staff on areas that might affect students’ mental health and wellbeing (eg intellectual disability, grief and loss, family violence)
• attending regular school meetings with school staff and family members of a child who is receiving support from your service
• maintaining regular, informal contact with school staff if you have parental consent and are providing support to a student.

For more information

KidsMatter has an information sheet especially for health and community services about what to consider when making connections with a school or early childhood education and care (ECEC) service: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/hcpartners

KidsMatter health and community online resources contain tips and strategies to help you generate fruitful partnerships between your service and KidsMatter Primary schools. There are videos, eLearning modules, a programs guide and mental health information sheets which you are free to use in your practice: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community

You can also subscribe to the bi-monthly KidsMatter health and community enewsletter at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/enewsletter, join our Twitter conversation at www.twitter.com/KidsMatterAus or follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/KidsMatterForFamilies