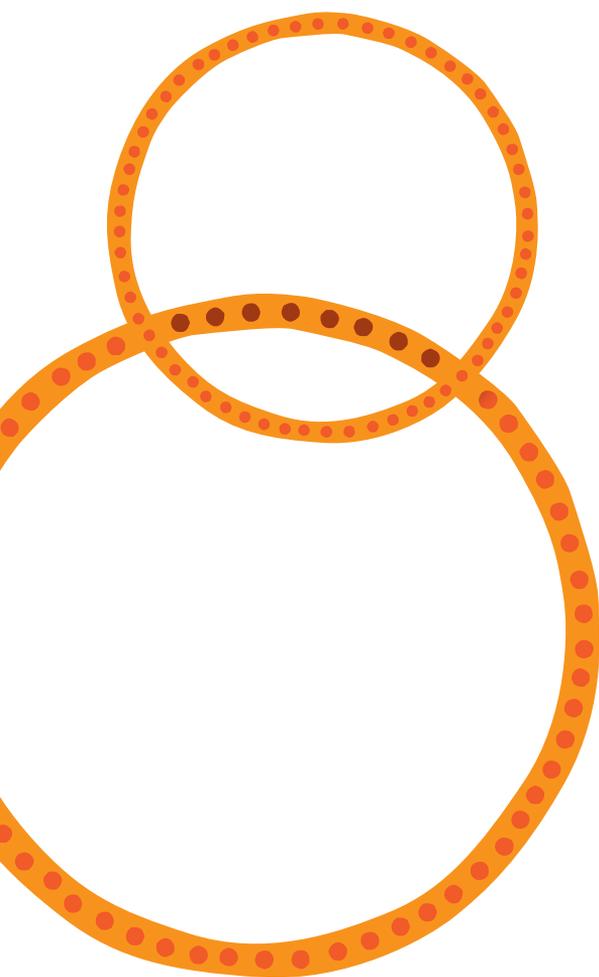


Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Supplement to the KidsMatter Primary
Action Team Handbook

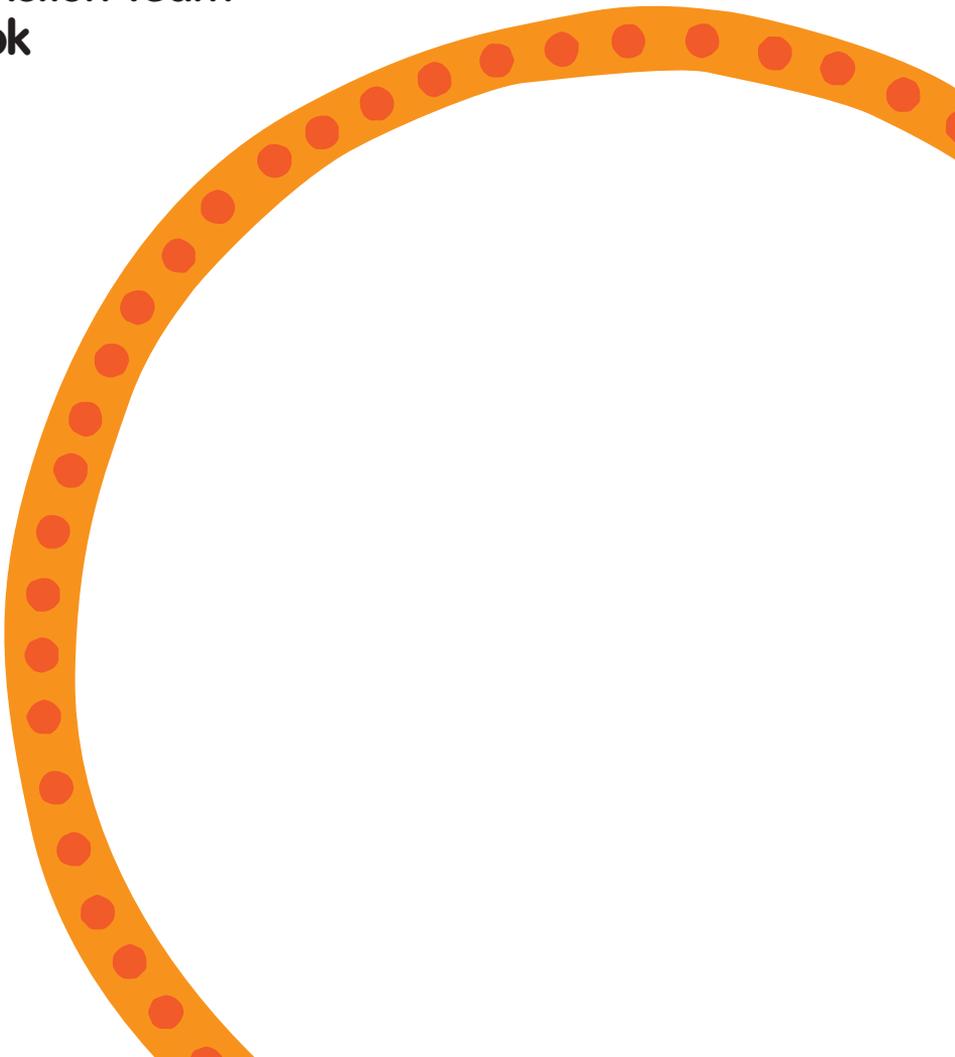






Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

**Supplement to the KidsMatter
Primary Action Team
Handbook**





Australian Government
Department of Health



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While the resources are available freely for these purposes, to realise the full potential of KidsMatter Primary, it is recommended that the resources be used with the appropriate training and support under the KidsMatter Initiative.

Last updated June 2014

IMAGERY

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SECTION 1

Introduction

Purpose of this handbook

This handbook is designed to be used by school staff, particularly teachers, principals, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers and other school leaders, who implement the KidsMatter Primary framework in schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. We hope that it has a range of applications from urban to very remote school contexts.

Developed as a supplement to the KidsMatter Primary *Action Team Handbook*, the purpose of this handbook is to support school staff to explore culturally relevant ways of working to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

KidsMatter Primary is all about kids and their wellbeing. It is a whole-school framework that assists schools to organise and coordinate their wellbeing work to improve student mental health and engagement in learning. KidsMatter recognises that every child and their family bring with them their own strengths, skills and values and that when schools and families work together, they can achieve better outcomes for their kids.

The three key aims of KidsMatter Primary are to:

1. Improve student mental health and wellbeing
2. Reduce mental health difficulties among students
3. Increase support for students experiencing mental health difficulties.

This handbook invites staff to reflect, explore and deepen shared understandings about their school community.



The process of developing the handbook has involved consultation with communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers, consultants, psychologists, principals and teachers. It acknowledges and celebrates different ways of working and thinking about wellbeing across cultures and communities. It specifically acknowledges the different, often more holistic view of mental health that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have, and how school-community leaders and teams can apply this knowledge to achieve the above aims.

How to use this handbook

The handbook is divided into four separate sections. It links closely with the KidsMatter framework, and is best used in conjunction with the KidsMatter *Primary Action Team Handbook*. Where relevant, scenarios or discussion questions are included that can be used to generate discussion in your Action Team and within staff meetings or other professional learning.

Section 1 sets the scene for understanding the importance and ways for working and using this resource. It also highlights the specific needs around self-care and supports for staff engaging in this work.

Section 2 unpacks some culturally relevant ways of working together/cultural considerations for schools undertaking this work. It also encourages the use of locally created community development resources.

Section 3 outlines Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander considerations for developing a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. It explores the concepts of building readiness to start the process, and key areas for reflection that relate to the four focus areas of KidsMatter, called the components.

The KidsMatter components are:

- 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.

This resource will provide school leaders, Action Team members or those working with KidsMatter schools with direct connection to the KidsMatter work in your school. For those schools building their readiness to engage with the KidsMatter framework, it will provide some tips and strategies for embarking on this work.

Key terminology used in this handbook is listed in the Glossary section. Icons are used throughout the handbook, as shown below. When you see these icons, they indicate a link to either a KidsMatter Primary video or the KidsMatter Primary *Action Team Handbook*.



Link to KidsMatter Primary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander video



Link to *Action Team Handbook*

Glossary

Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people have their own distinct cultures. We are aware that different people have different viewpoints on preferred terminology, including the use of the term 'Indigenous' in some communities. It is important to ask people in your local community what are the preferred terms.

In this handbook we have used the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' to encompass both cultures. The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous' are only used when quoting from a reference or source using these terms.

Action Team

The Action Team is made up of members of the school community (e.g. a member from the leadership team, a member of the teaching staff, a parent or carer). It is responsible for coordinating and driving KidsMatter in your school.

Aboriginal Education Worker (AEW)

There are more than 2500 Aboriginal Education Workers across Australia who support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. AEWs have different titles in different states and in the Northern Territory, including:

Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEA), New South Wales

Koorie Educators, Victoria

Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEO), Western Australia

Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW), Northern Territory

Aboriginal Education Workers (AEW), South Australia

Indigenous Education Workers (IEW), national.

Throughout this handbook, we have used the term Aboriginal Education Workers to refer to all AEAs, Koorie Educators, AIEOs, AIEWs, IEWs and AEWs.

Community

When we talk about 'community' in this handbook, we mean the network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live locally and feel a connection to the place or area and others who live there. Due to dispossession, transience/mobility and other factors, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not live on their own Country. Some people identify with more than one place and may belong to several communities. It is common for people to identify with the traditional countries of both of their parents.

'Community' is also referred to with regard to the school community, the broader community and remote Indigenous communities.

KidsMatter Primary

KidsMatter Primary is a mental health and wellbeing framework for primary schools that provides evidence-based methods, tools and support to help schools work with parents and carers, health services and the wider community, to nurture happy, balanced kids.



MindMatters

MindMatters is a framework used in secondary schools in Australia. It aims to promote mental health, prevent problems and enable early intervention to foster the mental health of secondary school students.



Mental health and wellbeing perspectives

Guiding principles

The KidsMatter framework contains seven guiding principles that emphasise a child-centred approach to children's mental health, wellbeing and behaviour.

The guiding principles are:

1. The best interests of children are paramount
2. Respectful relationships are foundational
3. Diversity is respected and valued
4. Parents and carers are recognised as the most important people in children's lives
5. Parents and teachers support children best by working together
6. Students need to be active participants
7. Schools, health and community agencies work together with families.

These guiding principles act as a compass for schools to learn, plan, act and reflect on student wellbeing and are best used in conjunction with school-based values.

This resource will explore the KidsMatter guiding principles through the lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, staff and agencies.

Strengths-based approach

As outlined by Dobia and O'Rourke in the 2011 report *Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous children in Australian primary schools*, using a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is vital to working in the social and emotional wellbeing space.

A strong sense of Indigenous culture is fundamental to the wellbeing and positive identity of Indigenous children, providing psychological benefits through affirming a sense of belonging, connectedness and self-worth and helping to protect against the impact of racism. Valuing and having a sense of pride in one's Indigenous heritage is a central theme in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings of mental health and definitions of wellbeing. (Dobia and O'Rourke, 2011, p. 12)



Self-care

Working in communities can be hard and demanding work. If staff work very long hours it can set up a precedent that some people may expect will be maintained. It is vital that you look after your own health and wellbeing. This should be your top priority, because a sick or absent worker is not a useful worker. It can be tempting to make your own health and wellbeing a low priority, especially at busy or stressful times, but this can sometimes be counter-productive.



SCENARIO

When Lin, a new teacher, first started working in the community she was dynamic. She formed strong relationships, and a few good friendships. Everyone knew she cared deeply about the community. Her door was always open, and young people knew they could ring or text her any time, day or night, and she would be there for them. Over time, Lin grew more and more tired. Her work started to suffer. She became badly run-down, and no-one was really surprised when she developed a nasty lung infection and needed three months off work to recover.

Reflective questions

1. How does this scenario illustrate the importance of looking after ourselves?
2. What boundaries could Lin introduce on her return?
3. When working in busy, sometimes stressful jobs, what strategies can we use to manage our own health and wellbeing?
4. What advice could you give to new staff in terms of their own personal health and wellbeing?

NOTES

SCENARIO

Lucy is a great AEW, very committed and experienced. She has worked at her school for more than 30 years. The school averages one new teacher per year and Lucy is always generous with her knowledge and ideas. She is trusted by local families as well as the school staff, so she does a lot of work on attendance and behavioural issues. Lucy is often the first person involved when there is a discipline matter. She shares her home with two older people, two young adults and three small children.

Lucy has many commitments with other community organisations, family and funerals.

At the end of each school day the teachers are off duty, but Lucy continues to represent the school in the community. At holiday times, other staff members leave, but Lucy is still there. The Principal often asks herself: how long can Lucy keep going?

Reflective questions

1. What are some of the risk and protective factors for Lucy that school staff should be aware of?
2. What personal health and wellbeing services are available to Lucy?
3. What are some ways that the Principal and other staff could support Lucy within the school community?

NOTES



SECTION 2



Working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Overview

Every person is different.

Every school is different.

Every community is different.

There are similarities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. These include having a strong connection to land, but there are many differences too.

Think about the day-to-day life, experiences and culture of:

- an Aboriginal child in rural Tasmania
- an Aboriginal Elder in a remote Central Australian community
- an Aboriginal university student in Melbourne
- a Torres Strait Islander grandparent living on the Gold Coast.

These people might have different:

- languages
 - family structures
 - hopes and aspirations
 - health issues
 - experiences of schooling
 - experiences with government organisations
 - connections to land
 - dreaming
 - cultural practices.
- 



You can't place every Aboriginal and Torres person into one or even two groups. We need to understand the similarities, while remembering that every person (and community) is unique.

The most important thing to remember is do not make assumptions! Sometimes people make assumptions without realising it. It is important to be able to interrogate our own values, assumptions, beliefs and knowledge when we interact with 'the other'. When we are aware of these values, assumptions, beliefs and knowledge, we can then take steps forward with an understanding of where we are starting.



In the Component 4 video *Keep an eye out for your kids*, Carmen Cubillo, an Indigenous clinical psychologist, talks about the importance of not making assumptions about children and their families. She speaks respectfully about being open to diversity instead of making judgements.

When we talk about working together, or working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we are talking about authentic engagement. Working together means valuing the knowledge, experience and understandings we all bring to our work, and respectfully and openly engaging with each other.

This collaborative approach is important as it values cultural knowledge, thus minimising the risk of making assumptions. It acknowledges and celebrates differences and similarities.

By working in partnership, together we can achieve more for students' wellbeing. Through enquiry and understanding the values and knowledge of Aboriginal families and schools, school and community staff members can explore appropriate language to use and ways to strengthen the wellbeing of Aboriginal students and families.

Perspectives on mental health and wellbeing

As is explored further in Section 3, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have different approaches to mental health and wellbeing. Dobia and O'Rourke note that:

A more culturally appropriate approach to Indigenous mental health is based on the broader notion of social and emotional wellbeing. This concept was outlined in the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989), which highlighted that "Health does not just mean the physical wellbeing of the individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community." Swan and Raphael (1995) extended the social and emotional wellbeing framework to highlight that Aboriginal health or ill health is determined by the interrelations between spiritual, environment, ideological, political, social, economic, mental and physical factors. (2011, p. 7)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge relating to health and wellbeing is held by a variety of people in the community including Elders, AEWs, school leaders, teachers, families and community workers. School Action Teams can benefit from finding out more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge through the various stages of the KidsMatter journey.

The strong need for social and emotional health initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is clearly evident. Research shows that exposure to specific psychological stressors is higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly more likely to experience mental health problems than the mainstream Australian population (Dobia and O'Rourke 2011, p. 5). Risk factors on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's social and emotional wellbeing are outlined by Zubrick (2005) and include the following key constraints:

- stress that accumulates and overwhelms (e.g. high numbers of life stress events for carers)
- chaos (e.g. poor-quality parenting)
- social exclusion (e.g. exposure to racism, discrimination)
- social inequality (e.g. constrained access to resources).

Guidelines, protocols and practice

Welcome or Acknowledgement of Country

It may be appropriate at the start of a meeting, workshop or event to include a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country. For more information on the difference between the two and how they can be organised and conducted, please visit the Reconciliation Australia website (www.reconciliation.org.au) or your local state or territory education department website.

Cultural competence

Failure to grasp the value of cultural knowledge and the importance of people who can share this knowledge can lead to ineffective teaching. In the paper *Cultural Responsiveness and School Education*, Thelma Perso wrote, "The biggest barrier to progress may be the ethno-centric attitude that the 'Western way' is the only valid and authentic way of viewing the world. This attitude blinds us to the rich variety of worldviews that are evident in other cultures, especially Indigenous cultures. Breaking through this barrier into ways of working that respect and try to deeply understand other cultures will likely prove fruitful for all cultural groups."¹

¹ Perso, T.F., p. 83.



An important side-effect of embracing local cultural knowledge is that it reduces the burden on the teacher of 'having to know everything'. This means that a teacher may experience less stress.



In the Component 2 video *Schools can teach and support kids to be strong*, Simon, an Aboriginal teacher, talks about the cultural knowledge held in one community being different than the cultural knowledge held in another community. Simon talks about how important it is to acknowledge these differences in culture.



In the introductory video *What kind of school do parents want for their kids?*, principal Bronwyn talks about engaging students and the community with different cultural activities to both deepen cultural knowledge and inspire students.

NOTES

Building community capacity

Everyone working within a community setting can work to build the capacity of that community, providing members with opportunities for training, leadership and gaining experience wherever possible.

This is especially true in remote communities where non-Indigenous workers tend to stay for a short time and then move on. Who remains while teachers and youth workers and police officers and business managers and school principals come and go? The community people! This is one reason why working with local Elders and other leaders is essential; they have always held the knowledge, and continue to do so.



SCENARIO

Maria, a Community Manager, was the best worker the community ever had. She knew every program, every person and every policy. She made things happen. Then one day Maria left the community. All of her knowledge, contacts and programs had been kept in her head and not documented anywhere.

Reflective questions

1. What are the potential implications of one person holding all the knowledge?
2. What can the community and staff do to ensure that this situation doesn't occur?
3. How can we involve other staff and local community members in this work so that the knowledge is spread across several people?

NOTES

SECTION 3

Whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing

In this section, we provide information for thinking about the implementation of a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing through a culturally relevant lens. Each component sets out the key considerations schools may like to explore within their own context.

At the end of each component we list optional alternative activities to those suggested in the KidsMatter *Action Team Handbook*. It is important to seek advice from key people about the activities as a way of contextualising them. This is the case with much work undertaken with different groups, in a range of contexts including remote and very remote contexts.

Getting ready to get started

Group agreements

It may be useful to decide on a set of group agreements for the Action Team and wider school staff.



Refer to *Action Team Handbook*, 'The implementation journey' section.

Group agreements help to frame up *how* you work and ensure that your team and staff are on the same page. It is important to develop shared understandings about how to work together effectively in a supportive, safe environment.

Further, you may need to consider if there are any additional considerations you need to take into account when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.



Getting to know key staff

Often the best people to inform us about the community and introduce us to key people are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers (AEWs) (see glossary for other names for AEWs) and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Getting to know the community

While other school staff often come and go, AEWs and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are often enduring staff members and carry memories and knowledge of the school, and the community. They are great people to ask about the local community. At the same time, don't forget the pressures on them from within their community. Perhaps also ask them if there are others you could talk to in order to find out more about the community.

Asking questions

Do not be afraid to show your lack of knowledge. Asking naïve questions can produce the best information. However, it is important to use sensitivity in the way you ask questions.

Some key questions to ask an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Workers or a trusted community member:

1. Whose Country are we on?
2. Are there Elders in the community? If so, who are they?
3. Who are the other key people in the community?
4. What language/s do most people speak? Is there a local interpreter if one is needed?
5. What should I be aware of about the community, particularly around relationships?
6. What does the community want for its children?
7. What things are working well in the community? What could be improved?
8. Have the students had any teaching of social and emotional learning before?
9. What are the local protocols for:
 - funerals?
 - ceremonies (if any)?
 - naming or referring to people who have passed away?
 - the divide between men's and women's business?
 - sharing of cultural knowledge?

Instead of going through the above questions like a questionnaire, you might have a general conversation that touches on these points. Also, it is important to be aware that some people may not be comfortable or feel they are the 'right' person to answer all of these questions.

It can be a good idea to ask a number of people these or other questions so that one person doesn't feel that they are speaking for the whole community.

Component 1 — Positive school community

Component 1 has two key target areas:

- 1.1 A school community that promotes mental health and wellbeing
- 1.2 Respectful relationships, belonging and inclusion.

Reflective question:

How does our school community promote mental health and wellbeing for Aboriginal students, staff and families?

1.1 A school community that promotes mental health and wellbeing

In order to create a school community that promotes mental health and wellbeing and do so in a culturally appropriate way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, a school will ensure that it:

- values different mental health and wellbeing perspectives
- considers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student risk and protective factors.

Different mental health and wellbeing perspectives

'Mental health' means different things to different people in different places and at different times. Some communities dislike using the term altogether. The word 'mental' can have negative connotations. Terms like 'being well', 'strong spirit' and 'being kind to yourself' might be preferred.

You may need to spend a considerable amount of time to unpack meanings of mental health and wellbeing in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, particularly regarding language, meaning and translation.

When thinking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, it is important to take a comprehensive view. This will incorporate physical wellbeing and also social and emotional wellbeing.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, health is holistic. There is no separation between mental and physical health and these are both related to cultural and spiritual wellbeing. It is for this reason that the term 'social and emotional wellbeing' is preferred to 'mental health' (MindMatters 2010, p. 40).



Refer to video Component 1 *Mental health can be described in different ways* to hear parent and community views around terminology of mental health and wellbeing.

A whole-school approach to supporting a positive school community starts with respect for the various members of the school community. How we welcome and include people such as staff, students, parents, carers and the broader community is important. It can make a big difference to the way people view and feel about the school

As a whole-school group you might like to ask:

- Do we discuss and share our school values?
- Do we invite conversation about what is important and why we have these school values and beliefs?

We all want the best outcomes for our kids. In order to make sure we are striving for these outcomes, as a whole-school group you might like to ask:

- Are we open to hearing community feedback?
- Are we willing to work together to discuss and change these school values and beliefs if needed?

It is critical to take time to have these discussions. It is essential to listen and work together to create values and beliefs that reflect the school community.

When the school values reflect what everyone feels, it is important to have a firm base on which to build and refine school practices that are respectful. This will provide a greater chance for new practices to be effective. This takes time and is part of an ongoing process as new families and individuals join the school.



Refer to the video *Weir State School: our story*. In this clip the Chaplain discusses the initial lack of school spirit and direction within the school and the steps that the school leadership team took to overcome this.

The whole-school community can only actively be involved when they are provided with the skills and opportunities to learn, discuss and practise together. Discuss with Elders and AEWs how social and emotional learning can be culturally inclusive and adapted to the local community so it remains relevant.

Identify opportunities to practise and learn these skills with involvement of the broader community both within and outside the school.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student risk and protective factors

SCHOOL-BASED INFLUENCES ON WELLBEING AND LEARNING FOR INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

Positive influences	Negative influences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive school climate • Positive relationships with peers • Positive relationships with educators • Belonging • Connectedness • Feeling safe • Opportunities for success • Recognition of achievement • Engaging lessons • Challenging work • Feeling competent • High expectations • Culturally inclusive pedagogy • Responsibility • Student ownership of learning • Pathways to opportunity • Strengths focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative school climate • Bullying and violence • Peer rejection • Rejection by educators • Failure • Feelings of failure • Shaming • Ineffective behaviour management • Alienation from school • Inadequate or harsh discipline • Low expectations • Stereotypes of Indigenous learners • Achievement emphasis toward sporting rather than academic achievements • Teaching pedagogy assumes Western centric point of view • Deficit discourse • Racism • Low student ownership of learning • Inappropriate lesson plan or 'busy work' for Indigenous students • Attendance disruptions and barriers • High exclusion rates • Fewer pathways to opportunities due to low expectations

(Dobia and O'Rourke 2011, p. 15)

1.2 Respectful relationships, belonging and inclusion

A self-audit tool can be useful to get a good idea of where your school is currently at regarding cultural competence and inclusion. Self-audits should be done in a supportive way, as a means to collect information and give a good sense of the current situation, rather than as an assessment.

Reflective question:

What strategies do we use to build respectful relationships, belonging and inclusion for Aboriginal students, staff and families?



An example self-audit tool is included below. This is adapted from Purdie, Dudgeon and Walker (2010) *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing Principals and Practice*, pages 174–176. It is designed for service organisations in general, rather than specifically for schools, so you may choose to tailor it specifically for the education context, and your school.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURAL COMPETENCE AUDIT

Context (organisational environment)

In relation to the organisation:

- Does it promote and foster a culturally friendly environment?
- Is it located in an area where Aboriginal people and culturally and linguistically diverse people may wish to access services?
- Do the staff display attitudes and behaviours that demonstrate respect for all cultural groups?

Practices (culturally inclusive)

Does the organisation:

- Involve or collaborate with Aboriginal persons or groups when planning events, programs, service delivery and organisational development activities?
- Develop policies and procedures that take cultural matters into consideration?
- Provide programs that encourage participation by Aboriginal persons?
- Use appropriate communication methods and language e.g. appropriate and relevant information communicated through user and culturally-friendly mediums?

Relationships (collaborative partnerships)

Does the organisation:

- Have knowledge of local Aboriginal groups?
- Have knowledge of local Aboriginal protocols?
- Actively involve Aboriginal persons or groups in the community?
- Have a strategy for community engagement?

Service delivery (outcomes)

Does the organisation:

- Develop and/or implement a collaborative service delivery model with other organisations relevant to the specific cultural needs of the clients?
- Provide culturally responsive services that meet the cultural needs of clients?

Checklist for cultural competence and inclusion

Following is a checklist of propositions for non-Indigenous facilitators that enhance engagement and assist respectful, authentic connections when facilitating training workshops with Aboriginal staff and families. This has been adapted from Tijtayi and Houlby (2009) *Supporting Anangu Leadership of MindMatters*:

Knowledge:

- Who are the community leaders/Elders that you could connect with?
- What resilience and wellbeing work has already been done in the school and the community? Who might help you find out?
- How might you find out about community life, including cultural sensitivities and strengths?
- Are there other stakeholders who need to be invited and involved?

Preparation:

- What strategies could you use to invite Aboriginal people to participate, e.g. word of mouth, colourful posters at key places around the community, invitations by Aboriginal and non-Indigenous staff?
- How could you create a meeting environment where everyone feels safe to participate?
- Is the meeting place easy to get to? Is the time of the meeting suitable?
- Is the meeting place set up so there are chairs in different parts of the room, and not only up the front?
- Consider placing some chairs outside the meeting space to encourage participation by people who may have other obligations, or (in some communities) might have an avoidance relationship with someone inside the room.

Communication:

- Some participants may have hearing difficulties, and/or English may be an additional language. How could you support everyone to understand and hear? For example, avoid jargon, consider acoustics, voice volume, clarity and pace.
- Participants may need time to process and think deeply about their responses, particularly if English is an additional language. How could you create opportunities for participants to consider and respond? For example, extended time after each question is posed, encouragement to check meaning, discuss in first language
- Could you require an interpreter to be present?
- Do you make sure that responding to questions or activities can be done in groups, not singly?

CHECKLIST FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND INCLUSION (CONTINUED)

Leadership:

- Do you follow advice given by Aboriginal people, or ask for advice then do what you think is best?
- Should you try to talk less and listen more?
- Are you a learner as well as a leader?
- Is there more you can do to build positive relationships?

Remember:

- That some Aboriginal people have lost culture through the past acts of governments and agencies. Acknowledging their culture shows respect and is important to authentic engagement.
- To ask permission before using words from language or symbols. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people own their history and knowledge.
- To be aware that things which are men's business cannot be discussed with women, and vice versa. (A lot of the time it cannot be discussed at all; it is generally safer not to talk about it.)
- That different people within the community may view each other and the community itself in different ways.
- Not to assume that any individual Aboriginal person can speak for all members of the community.
- To be aware of our own assumptions/pre-conceived beliefs.



Mark, the deputy principal in the Component 2 video *Schools can teach and support kids to be strong* talks about the way he works alongside the Aboriginal staff in his school to deepen his understanding of how best to engage with Aboriginal parents and families.




Component 2— Social and emotional learning for students

The two target areas for Component 2 include:

- 2.1 Effective social and emotional learning curriculum for all students
- 2.2 Opportunities for students to practice and transfer their social and emotional skills.

The following needs have been identified as central to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today. These include:

- high self-esteem and self-confidence
- freedom to communicate needs and feelings
- the ability to love and be loved
- a sense of belonging to family and community
- the ability to cope with stress
- being able to relate, create and to assert oneself
- having options for change that help the development of a problem-solving approach
- being comfortable with your environment
- believing in something (family, community, culture, religion).

(Swan and Raphael 1995, p. 17).



Refer to pages 14–15 of the *Action Team Handbook* (Action Team tasks in Stage 1) and pages 2–3 of *Essential Reading* to understand local community beliefs about mental health and wellbeing.

Using language

In some contexts, it may be worth investigating the idea of partnering with the local community members and AEWs to unpack translations and specific language more appropriate to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.

In a 2009 report on KidsMatter in schools with Aboriginal students language was highlighted as a critical way to work with Indigenous students in the area of mental health:

The important role of language and culture in supporting Indigenous students' mental health was recognised in some schools. The Warlpiri idea of 'pirilirpa rarralypa', growing a strong spirit, was adopted by one school to promote two-way learning about mental health issues and cultural identity in its community. (Dobia and O'Rourke 2009, p. 4)

Culturally competent teaching

Emeritus Professor Paul Hughes of the University of South Australia, a Yunkunyatjatjara/Narunnga/Kaurna man, has defined a culturally competent teacher as:

'A teacher who is empathetic, has cultural understanding and applies both to their pedagogy for the purpose of a curriculum outcome.'

A culturally intelligent or culturally competent teacher has both skills and knowledge, but the vital third ingredient is attitude. The following questions might assist when considering cultural competence in a teacher:

- Does the teacher have high expectations of his/her Aboriginal students?
- Does the teacher communicate well with local community members?
- Does the teacher accept the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, or does she/he make assumptions and generalisations?

Culturally intelligent teaching means understanding the contemporary realities of life for your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teaching in a way that addresses their needs. It means making connections between classroom activities and students' everyday lives. It means engaging with the community, and understanding at least some of their history in order to understand the ways in which past events impact on the present and future.

Thelma Perso's literature review on culturally responsive education¹ argues that:

'At the heart of any culturally responsive teaching program is a genuine knowledge of the students and their needs. This knowledge however, is often determined by the world view held by the teachers, and how they see their students and the families that they come from.'²

1 Perso, T.F. (2012). *Cultural Responsiveness and School Education: With particular focus on Australia's First Peoples; A Review & Synthesis of the Literature*. Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and Education, Darwin Northern Territory.

2 Perso, T.F, p. 30.



Perso points out that culturally intelligent teaching benefits not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, but all students.

‘The risks of not engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in schools are principally those of delivering a biased program, from a white, middle class perspective, using pedagogies and delivery styles that do not take the needs of students into account. In addition, providing a biased view robs the entire student cohort of the richness provided by Indigenous perspectives.’³

Reflective questions:

1. How can cultural competence assist in your teaching?
2. What training or professional development could you access if you want to upskill in this area?

NOTES

She also notes that,

‘The distinction between ‘knowing about the students’ and ‘knowing the students’ is important. Knowing about someone is an intellectual task; knowing them requires a relationship based on mutual respect.’⁴



In the *Dawul Remote Community School: our story* video, Dani, the principal talks about the strong connection between the school and the community. Dani comments that what happens at school affects what happens in the community, and what happens in the community affects what happens at school.

3 Perso, T.F, p. 17.

4 Perso, T.F, p. 49.

Component 3— Working with parents and carers

‘The evidence is now beyond dispute: parent involvement improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in school.’⁵

A report on Aboriginal parental involvement in learning⁶ found a set of common beliefs at schools where parent involvement occurs. These beliefs may be useful for schools to consider when implementing the KidsMatter framework and particularly Component 3. They may include:

- parents are the first educators of their children
- children do better when their parents are engaged in their education
- the best way to ensure that a child develops to his or her full potential is to create a partnership between the school and family
- Aboriginal parents, like all parents, want the best for their children
- many Aboriginal parents are alienated from schools as a result of their own bad experiences there and that if there is to be a partnership, it is necessary to overcome this alienation
- overcoming this alienation requires the building of trust between the school and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents
- the school has the responsibility to make the first move in building this trust

“I can’t speak highly enough of our Aboriginal Education Officer. It was a big learning curve for me to work out how to engage and work with our Aboriginal families in culturally appropriate ways. She introduced me to the families and helped me to build relationships with them. I couldn’t do it without her.”

(Dobia and O’Rourke 2009, p. 3)

5 Henderson, A. & Berla, N. (1994). *A New Generation of Evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*, monograph, Center for Law and Education, Washington DC.

6 Muller, D. (2012). *Parents as partners in Indigenous children’s learning*. A report by Denis Muller & Associates for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau: Canberra.

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- Aboriginal family structures are different from non-Aboriginal family structures, and these differences need to be accommodated by the school
 - it is important to recognise the role of the extended family and the community in the upbringing of children
 - many Aboriginal parents do not start from the same level of advantage as many non-Aboriginal parents because of the legacies of the past
 - the school should do whatever it can to help Aboriginal families overcome this disadvantage
 - education is the key to the current generation of Aboriginal children leaving disadvantage behind
 - helping Aboriginal families and children break out of disadvantage is a moral imperative and is a nation-building project fundamental to the future good of Australian society
 - while few would argue about the importance of parent, family and community involvement in students' learning, making this happen is less straightforward.



In the Component 3 video *Schools, families and communities* working together with parents talking about many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents' experiences of school.

In their 2009 KidsMatter Indigenous Adaptation Schools report, Dobia and O'Rourke found that support for Indigenous staff was central to the effective engagement of parents and communities.

Schools that did particularly well in engaging Indigenous parents and communities recognised and strongly valued the central role of their Indigenous Education Workers [AEWs and other titles as noted on page 4]. They acknowledged that Indigenous Education Workers were an important link to their communities and sought ways to support their professional development. One school was actively undertaking strategies to improve inclusive communication with its Indigenous staff and ensure they had a voice in decision making (Dobia and O'Rourke 2009).



SCENARIO

Your Action Team decides to invite parents to a meeting at the school to talk about KidsMatter and the school's focus on wellbeing. You want to get the parents involved and give them an opportunity to contribute to the discussions and action plans. You put a lot of effort into the preparations, send an invitation letter home with students and include meeting details in the school newsletter. Your school has a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The day of the meeting comes and no parents come along.

Reflective questions

1. What might be barriers to parents attending the meeting?
2. What different communication strategies might be more effective?
3. What other strategies could you use to try to encourage parents to attend?

NOTES



Parent and community involvement in learning

Considerations for school staff:

- How does your school encourage parental involvement to occur?

- What strategies could increase and improve involvement?

- How can your school be genuinely open and supportive of this involvement?

- What is the best way to achieve this involvement without disrupting the school and students? (Examples: School community shared breakfasts, involvement of parents/ carers/Elders in collecting and preparing traditional foods, storytelling, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, art)

- How does your school take an outreach approach?

- How is your school a welcoming place? How can your school become more welcoming?





- What is the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, through staff members, displays, artefacts, art?

- When do you contact parents? For example, to tell them about students' achievements or only when there is a problem?

- What resourcing do you have for parent contact?

- How could you respond if the level of involvement is low?

Parent and community surveys

As part of the KidsMatter journey, schools are encouraged to conduct surveys with their school communities. Details about the purpose and value of these can be found in the *Action Team Handbook*.

When you conduct surveys with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community, consider using qualitative data. Also consider the following:

- What do you need to do to build trust so that you can get accurate results?
- What do you need to do to engage parents and community in a culturally appropriate way?
- How do you ensure that you have more than one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person on your Action Team?



Refer to *Action Team Handbook* pages 17–18 regarding collecting evidence-based data and process for conducting surveys.



Refer to one school's success in increasing parent and community involvement in school surveys in the introductory video, *What kind of school do parents want for their kids?*



Component 4— Helping children with mental health difficulties

Support services

There are support services and other agencies working in most communities. In order to work with them in the most effective way it is important that school staff know:

- what services are available
- how the services can be accessed
- when they can be accessed
- key personnel in the services
- any areas of cross-over with KidsMatter.

Further information can be found on the Health and Community section of the KidsMatter website at: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community

Support services may be limited or non-existent in very remote communities. On the other hand, some remote schools find that agencies are too present. As one Northern Territory worker observed, “Although schools are welcoming places, sometimes it feels as though they have lost control to the agencies and people are ‘doing’ to them rather than working in partnership with them.”

To avoid this over-servicing, every school could have a list of agencies and services working in the community. The list could detail the way in which the agency works with the school, and every person from the agency who works with the school. Sharing this information with other services (such as the local health clinic) can be helpful too.

Please see table below as an example proforma that could be used in recording agency visits.

Agencies and support services working with your school			
Organisation title	Contact name	Telephone/email	Notes
Centacare (for example)	Christian Surname	08 0000 1234	Visits first Monday of every month and visits Clinic on the same day. Calls the day before she visits.



Please refer to Topic 7 External Supporters on page 54 of the *Action Team Handbook*.



Please also refer to Tool 2—How does KidsMatter build on what we are doing? on page 61 of the *Action Team Handbook* for mapping current work and identifying where there are gaps.



SECTION 4



Activities and discussion starters

In this section we provide activities and ideas to consider for your first steps in implementing KidsMatter.

Your Action Team

List the members and contact details of the members in your Action Team

School name: _____

Action Team members

1. _____ Email _____

2. _____ Email _____

3. _____ Email _____

4. _____ Email _____

5. _____ Email _____



Readiness to implement the KidsMatter framework

What personal health and wellbeing services are available?

- What services are available to staff in the community?
- What are the services that can be accessed from within the community, and those that can be accessed online or over the telephone/Skype?
- What are some strategies that have helped other workers?
- Do you have any personal relaxation activities that work for you? (List them all— for example, taking a long shower, walking the dog, cooking a nice meal, lifting weights while listening to heavy metal music, watching a DVD.)

Before you start KidsMatter—points to consider

Before you start on your KidsMatter journey, there are a few things that need to be taken into consideration in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

It is easy to make assumptions or have particular expectations about the different groups of people in your community. Making the time and putting processes in place to consider these assumptions is an important starting point.

1. Gather baseline information. Consider the following:

- What are the different language groups in your school and community?
- What are the different cultural groups within your school and community?
- What are the ideas in the community about mental health and wellbeing?
- Is the term 'mental health' helpful in your community, or is it better to talk about 'wellness', 'resilience', 'spirit' or another term?

2. What are examples of processes around mental health and wellbeing in the school that are strong and effective for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff and families?

3. Which key people at the school—the principal and other leaders, plus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff—are on board with KidsMatter, and dedicated to improved mental health and wellbeing? Who do you need to get involved?

4. A whole-school approach will increase the chances of successful implementation of KidsMatter Primary in your school.

- Which staff members need more support?
- What could be done to encourage their participation?





5. In the school leadership team who is involved in the implementation of KidsMatter? This is important. At the same time, the implementation should not be the job of one person only, however senior. Who else in the leadership group could be invited to actively support the implementation?

6. Which community people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members could be included to ensure learnings and program knowledge will be retained within the community?

7. Which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members can we encourage to have input into activities and lesson creation? It's vital to involve people from the start and not just seek input at the end.

8. How has the school been proactive about mental health and wellbeing in the past?
- Has the school been caught in the cycle of being reactive to issues as they emerge?
 - What are the school's current values and beliefs?
 - Are existing policies and practices inclusive and do they promote wellbeing?

Follow-up actions

List the steps that your school can take to implement KidsMatter taking into consideration the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____



Please also refer to the KidsMatter Primary *Action Team Handbook*, in particular the section 'Essential Reading' on pages 1–15 for background information on the benefits of taking on KidsMatter Primary in your school.



Discussion starters

The following nine discussion starters will help your Action Team and whole school staff to reflect on different situations that focus on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school communities. They are a mixture of school settings, urban, regional and remote.

Scenario 1

Phil, a teacher, grew up in suburban Sydney and has been posted to his first school in northern New South Wales. He wants to engage with parents and the community but he does not know what words to use. Is he in Koori or Murri country? Should he say 'Aboriginal'? Or is 'Indigenous' better? Are there any Torres Strait Islanders at all? He saw a sign on the highway about Bundjalung people, but someone mentioned Ngarabal language, and Wikipedia said the Traditional Owners are the Kamilaroi people. Are they the same as Gamilaraay people, or different? Phil did not want to upset anyone with the words he used, so he did not talk to community people at all.

1. Who could Phil approach for advice?
2. What are the possible implications if Phil makes a 'mistake'?
3. What are the implications if Phil does not talk with community people?

There is something worse than using non-preferred language when trying to engage with people. It is worse not to engage. If you take a genuine approach to engagement, proceed carefully and are open about gaps in your knowledge, you are on track for success.

SCENARIO 1 NOTES

Scenario 2

Andrew visits a school to deliver some sexual health education. He contacts the school in advance and specifically requests that Aboriginal staff attend. When Andrew arrives to deliver the training, the only participants are non-Indigenous teachers. He asks where the Aboriginal staff members are, and the teachers tell him that they did not pass on the invitation because they, "are not very helpful and never around". Andrew proceeds with the training. But he makes the point that if the teachers do not value what their AEWs bring to the classroom, it will be hard to get good results within the school and the community.

1. What skills and knowledge can local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provide to add value to your teaching?
2. What steps could you take in order to access these skills and knowledge?
3. What might you need to know about local protocols around bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into your classroom or extracurricular activities?

SCENARIO 2 NOTES

Scenario 3

After a year in the community, Lydia invited her parents to stay with her for a holiday. They enjoyed exploring the community and took photos everywhere they went. Lydia noticed that they talked with many of the local people. After they left, she had the uncomfortable feeling that some people in the community whom she regarded as friends were now avoiding her.

1. What could Lydia do now?
2. Are there protocols for having visitors on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land?
3. How would you know what is acceptable to photograph?



SCENARIO 3 NOTES

Scenario 4

Derek has been at the school as an Aboriginal Home Liaison Officer for two years. The new non-Indigenous principal, Jane, says that there should be Welcome to Country at every school assembly and asks Derek to do it. He explains that the school is not on his Country and he has only been in the community for 10 years. Jane says she understands why that is a problem, but then she starts giving Welcome to Country at assembly herself.

1. What should Derek say to Jane?
2. Do all Aboriginal people of Australia do 'Welcome to Country'?
3. What is the difference between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country?
4. How can you find an appropriate person in the community to provide a Welcome to Country?

SCENARIO 4 NOTES

Scenario 5

Trina is a brand new teacher, excited to be posted to a remote community. She has always been interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and did two years of Indigenous Studies at university. She is delighted when she is given a skin name, something she has always wanted. However, over the next months she starts to realise that her skin name has placed her in an obligation relationship with several people and distanced her from others. She does not fully understand the ramifications of having a skin name and is feeling confused.

1. How can Trina find out about her skin name obligations?
2. What are some potential issues that Trina might face in regards to her work?
3. What are some potential issues that Trina might face outside of work in the community?

SCENARIO 5 NOTES

Scenario 6

Peter, a teacher, has formed a good relationship with many of the families in the community. It is common for children to visit him outside school hours, and for Dave, one of the parents, to drop in for a cup of tea. After school one day, Peter wants to find out why Dave's son has been absent. He goes to Dave's house, climbs over the front fence, stands on the verandah and knocks loudly on the door. After a while Dave comes to the door, gives a short answer to Peter's first question, then says goodbye and closes the door.

1. What might Peter learn from this experience with Dave?
2. Are there common protocols for visiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's houses?
3. What potential issues could arise from Peter allowing children and other community members to visit him outside school hours?



SCENARIO 6 NOTES

Scenario 7

Belinda is a teacher who has a good relationship with the parents of the kids she teaches. One day she is in the local supermarket when she meets Donna, the mother of an Aboriginal student who Belinda has recently disciplined. Donna attacks Belinda verbally, calls her a racist and accuses her of picking on the Aboriginal students. The following day Belinda sees Donna when she drops her daughter at school. Donna waves to her and drives away as if nothing has happened, but Belinda is still very upset.

1. What could Belinda do?
2. Who could Belinda talk to about this?
3. How can Belinda feel less upset?

SCENARIO 7 NOTES

Scenario 8

Hector is a middle-aged Torres Strait Islander man, a hard worker for the community and a member of the School Council. He has a very good relationship with Tom, the school deputy principal. Hector stops Tom outside the store and asks to borrow 10 dollars. Tom likes Hector, but he worries that if he gives him 10 dollars on this occasion then Hector will ask for money every time he sees him. On the other hand, perhaps it is a once-only request, and Tom figures he would probably lend the 10 dollars if one of the non-Indigenous school councillors asked. Tom feels very uncomfortable.

1. What might be Tom's options?
2. How will Hector feel if Tom does not lend him the money?
3. How could Tom say no but still preserve the relationship?

SCENARIO 8 NOTES

Scenario 9

Stuart is a new teacher, and very enthusiastic about his work. Although Thomas (an AEW) works in his room Stuart never asks him for advice. Stuart is teaching a unit on Health and has invited one of the parents, Johnno, in to talk about bush tucker. Johnno has not been in the community long and grew up in a different part of Australia, but he gives a good presentation to the class. However, on the morning Johnno came to speak, Thomas called to say he would be absent for the day.

1. What reasons might Thomas have for not attending work?
2. What are some possibilities that might help Thomas?
3. Once he realises that Thomas is upset, what are some things that Stuart could do to improve the situation?

SCENARIO 9 NOTES

New KidsMatter Primary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources

VIDEO AND ANIMATION

Video title	Key messages
What kind of schools do parents want for their kids? (Introductory video) (9:30 minutes)	Embracing culture, fostering a sense of belonging and building relationships with children, families and communities.
C1 video: Mental health and wellbeing can be described in different ways (5:10)	Social and emotional wellbeing; identity and belonging, spirituality.
C2 video: Schools can teach and support kids to be strong (10:00)	Social and Emotional Learning, valuing family, respecting and sharing culture.
C3 video: Schools and communities working together (9:25)	Working respectfully with parents, families and the wider school community.
C4 video: Keep an eye out for your kids (8:30)	Risk factors, trauma, resilience and support for students.
School story: Dawul Remote Community School: our story (10:20)	Working with community in a remote school context: one school's story.
School story: Weir State School: our story (9:00)	Creating a positive school environment and ethos: one school's story.
Animation	
Relationships get results (3:00)	A light-hearted look at resolving conflict and building relationships with parents and families.



PRINTED RESOURCES

School stories	
35.	A big heart at Fraser Park—Fraser Park Primary School, South Australia
36.	Positive action in the heart of Australia—Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School, Northern Territory
37.	Caring in the Kimberley—Ngalangangpum School, Western Australia
38.	The way forward for Wyndham—Wyndham District High School, Western Australia

Mental health information sheets	
1.	Trauma and resilience: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
2.	What is trauma?
3.	How might trauma affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?
4.	Suggestions and resources for school staff for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who have experienced trauma
5.	Trauma: Suggestions and resources for families. How you can help
6.	How does KidsMatter support children who have experienced trauma?

Handbook
Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: supplement to KidsMatter Action Team Handbook

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