Positive school community

Participant Workbook

component 1
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KidsMatter Primary professional learning uses a range of approaches to help schools work through the content of each of the four components. It’s important that the professional learning is delivered by a facilitator who has been trained by KidsMatter Primary. He or she will lead you through activities and discussions specifically designed to get you thinking deeply about the way your school supports student mental health and wellbeing.

This professional learning is supported by a range of informative and engaging videos, which were made in collaboration with dedicated professionals and inspiring KidsMatter Primary schools.

Videos include commentary by mental health and education experts about what approaches work best in a school setting.

They also showcase the stories and experiences of real schools engaging with KidsMatter, and the strategies they have found most effective.
KidsMatter Primary

would like to thank the following experts and schools for their contribution to this professional learning.

Assoc. Prof. Helen Cahill
University of Melbourne

Bob Bellhouse
Educational Consultant

Prof. Brian Caldwell
Managing Director,
Educational Transformations

Kaye Dennis
Educational Consultant

Prof. Beverly Raphael
ANU and University of Western Sydney

Prof. Stephen Zubrick
Telethon Institute for Child Health Research

Prof. Ann Sanson
University of Melbourne

Andrew Fuller
Clinical Psychologist

Trial schools
Broadford Primary School (VIC)
Ithica Creek Primary School (Bardon, QLD)
Groves Christian Primary School (Kingston, QLD)

Focus group members
Kim Butler, St Mary’s Primary School (Ararat, VIC)
Inez French, Lumen Christi Primary School (Delacombe, VIC)

Wagaman Primary (NT)

Hastings Primary (VIC)

Cobdogla Primary (SA)

Rocherlea Primary (TAS)

Leighland Christian School (Burnie Campus, TAS)
Self care

You should participate in this professional learning at the level with which you feel comfortable. Your school’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is there to help in the event that something arises for you on a personal level.

Here are some other useful contacts:

- **Lifeline**
  Tel: 13 11 14
  www.lifeline.org.au
  24-hour telephone counselling

- **beyondblue**
  Tel: 1300 224 636
  www.beyondblue.org.au
  Information and referral line

- **SANE Australia**
  Tel: 1800 187 263
  www.sane.org
  Information line – 9.00am-5.00pm weekdays
  Online helpline, factsheets, resources

- **Australian Psychological Society (APS)**
  www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist
  Find a Psychologist service
Session 1: Understanding mental health and wellbeing
KidsMatter Primary is a national initiative that aims to contribute to:
- improving student mental health and wellbeing,
- reducing mental health difficulties amongst students, and
- increasing support for students experiencing mental health difficulties.

Guiding Principles
- The best interests of children are paramount
- Respectful relationships are foundational
- Diversity is respected and valued
- Parents and carers are recognised as the most important people in children’s lives
- Parents and teachers support children best by working together
- Students need to be active participants
- Schools, health and community agencies work together with families

Core Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive school community</th>
<th>Social and emotional learning for students</th>
<th>Working with parents and carers</th>
<th>Helping children with mental health difficulties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Whole-School Approach
- Planning for whole-school change
  - Professional learning, shared understanding and focus for staff
  - Partnerships with parents and carers, health and community agencies
  - Action within and beyond the classroom
Schools take action across four areas, known as ‘components’. Research has identified that these are the areas where schools can make a real difference in supporting their students’ mental health and wellbeing. They make up the core content of KidsMatter Primary.

Dividing KidsMatter Primary into the four components is a way of making the task of improving students’ mental health and wellbeing in schools more manageable. It also allows schools to focus their efforts more effectively, and include all the significant people and contexts in children’s lives that may impact on their mental health.

The four components of KidsMatter Primary are interrelated. Each is important for supporting student mental health and wellbeing.
KidsMatter Primary

The theory

Four key models inform the KidsMatter Primary framework:

1. Model for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention in schools (World Health Organization, 1994).
2. Risk and protective factors model (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000; Spence, 1996).

Model for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention in schools

KidsMatter Primary provides primary schools with a framework for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention (PPEI). Mental health promotion covers a variety of strategies that increase the chances of more people experiencing better mental health. **Promotion** includes actions that create living conditions and environments that allow people to adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles. Mental health **prevention** is about the actions taken early to try to stop mental health difficulties from developing. Mental health **early intervention** refers to picking up early signs of mental health difficulties and doing something about it to prevent problems worsening.

Who? What does KidsMatter Primary do? How?

**Who?**

Whole-school community, staff, students, parents and carers, health and community agencies

All students (and their parents and carers)

Students experiencing mental health difficulties (20-30% of students) and the 3-12% of students with mental health disorders, and their parents and carers

**What does KidsMatter Primary do?**

Creates an environment to promote positive mental health and wellbeing

Facilitates social and emotional learning (SEL) for students

Supports student engagement and connectedness at school and facilitates help-seeking for mental health difficulties

**How?**

Works with the whole community and provides support and information to staff, parents and carers

Through the curriculum, creates opportunities to practise skills and engages parents and carers

Supports children in school and develops clear processes and referral pathways (by working with parents and carers and health and community agencies)

(Adapted from World Health Organization, 1994)
Risk and protective factors

Research has identified a number of risk and protective factors that impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children. Risk factors are things present in a child’s life that increase the likelihood of them experiencing a mental health difficulty. Protective factors strengthen a child’s mental health and buffer against risk, making them less likely to develop a mental health difficulty.

Every day, schools have opportunities to reduce risk factors and build protective factors with the overall aim of improving students’ mental health and wellbeing. Different factors can impact on a child, and the presence of any particular risk factor does not mean that child will experience mental health difficulties. However, there are some key childhood risk factors that have a particularly strong effect on mental health (e.g., domestic violence).

The KidsMatter Primary framework can help you to understand the risk and protective factors in your school community, so you can best support your students and their families. This framework has informed the areas of focus for KidsMatter Primary schools (the four components).

Some examples of risk and protective factors associated with children's mental health can be found on page 15 of this workbook.

“I think it’s important that we get a say because if they did something that you didn’t like, and we had no choice, you wouldn’t feel like you’re welcome here. But if you got your say, then you’d feel like they’re letting you in, and you’d feel like you’re meant to be here.”

Student, Hastings Primary School

Whole-school approach

A whole-school approach considers all the different aspects of the school such as the curriculum; teaching style; classroom climate; school culture and values; participation of all members of the school community; physical environment; partnerships with families and the community; welfare services; and the wellbeing of staff and students.

A whole-school approach involves the entire school community working together to create a vision for the kind of school it aspires to be, and developing the policies and practices to make this vision become the reality. World Health Organization (WHO) research has demonstrated that change is more effective and sustainable when schools work on addressing these various aspects of their core functions.

Getting everyone involved is the best way to help people believe in the change and to follow the steps everyone agrees need to be taken. A whole-school approach helps embed the processes and practices into the fabric of the school.
The socio-ecological model

The socio-ecological model of human development recognises the many influences on children’s mental health and wellbeing. The child is at the centre of the model, which explains that development occurs within the context of relationships with family, school and community. Children are further influenced by the wider social, economic, cultural, workplace and political forces in which their families, communities and schools exist.

(Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1977)

“I think that’s part of that ‘community’ thing which is being lost a little these days. People want to be talking to somebody who cares, and I think that’s part of what we all feel about coming here. It’s just a really good feeling.”

Jenny (volunteer), Hastings Primary School

The family is the main context for children’s development as it provides the most powerful and enduring influences on short and long-term health and social adjustment.

After family, school is recognised as the most significant developmental context for primary school-aged children.

A school is a particular kind of learning community which is influenced by, and interacts with, the surrounding community. Students, families and school staff from many different backgrounds come together within this space.

The benefits for children can be maximised when the most significant people and contexts in their lives come together.
Component 1: Positive school community

In a positive school community, every face has a place, every voice is valued, and everyone has something to contribute.

Evidence of a positive school community is one in which people are connected with each other, all people’s needs are met, and they are involved in meaningful ways. Research confirms that a positive school community promotes children’s mental health and wellbeing. Children who are mentally healthy will be able to enjoy and benefit from family life, relationships and educational opportunities, as well as to contribute to society in age-appropriate ways. They will also be in a better position to adapt to change and cope with life’s stressors. Mentally healthy students arrive at school ready to learn and are more likely to achieve success.

Although KidsMatter Primary focuses on children’s mental health and wellbeing, a positive sense of community is important for everyone at school.

This includes staff, families, and members of the broader community. When the adults in children’s lives feel valued, they will be most effective in supporting children’s mental health and wellbeing.

At the core of a positive school community are responsive and respectful relationships. These help create a sense of belonging, enable inclusive practices to occur, and increase involvement and contribution at school. Ongoing efforts at a whole-school level are required to ensure that all community members feel included and are able to participate actively in day-to-day school life.

Component 1 of KidsMatter Primary provides a framework that can be used in a school setting to achieve these goals.

The following Target Areas and their associated goals, drawn from children’s mental health and education literature and experiences, further support schools in developing policies and practices that promote a positive school community.

Target Areas

1. A school community that promotes mental health and wellbeing

   - School staff understand the importance of mental health and wellbeing, its impact on learning, and the significant contributions schools can make to improving student mental health.
   - School staff have an understanding of their school community.

2. Respectful relationships, belonging and inclusion

   - School staff expect and model respectful and responsive relationships within the school community.
   - Belonging and inclusion for all school community members is specifically addressed in school strategic planning, policies and practices.
   - The school environment and communication reflects the diversity of the school community.
   - School leadership and staff create opportunities for students, staff, families and the wider community to be involved in a range of school activities and contribute to school planning.
Discussion
What is mental health?

Write any words or phrases you use to describe mental health:
Defining mental health

Good mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” (World Health Organization, 2007)

Or, put more simply... “Mental health is the way we think or feel about ourselves and what is going on around us, and how we cope with the ups and downs of life.”

What does mental health mean for children?

Good mental health for children means “the capacity to enjoy and benefit from satisfying family life, relationships, and educational opportunities, and to contribute to society in a number of age appropriate ways. It also includes freedom from problems with emotions, behaviours or social relationships that are sufficiently marked or prolonged to lead to suffering or risk to optimal development in the child, or to distress or disturbance in the family.” (Raphael, 2000)

- Mental health and wellbeing is vital for learning and life.
- Children who are mentally healthy learn better, benefit from life experiences, and have stronger relationships with family members, school staff and peers.

Mental health difficulties

Mental health difficulties describe “a very broad range of social, emotional or behavioural difficulties that may cause concern or distress. They are relatively common, may or may not be transient, but encompass mental health disorders, which are more severe and/or persistent.” (Adapted from Everybody’s Business, 2001).

Please note that Component 1 focuses on positive mental health and wellbeing for everybody. More information about mental health difficulties will be covered in the professional learning for Component 4: Helping children with mental health difficulties.
Risk factors for children’s mental health

Risk factors

- Difficult temperament
- Low self-esteem
- Negative thinking style
- Any form of child abuse, including neglect
- Family disharmony, instability or break up
- Harsh or inconsistent discipline style
- Parent with mental illness or substance abuse
- Peer rejection
- School failure
- Poor connection at school
- Difficult school transition
- Death of a family member
- Emotional trauma
- Discrimination
- Isolation
- Socioeconomic disadvantage
- Lack of access to support services

Protective factors

- Easy temperament
- Good social and emotional skills
- Optimistic coping style
- Family harmony and stability
- Supportive parenting
- Strong family values
- Positive school climate that enhances belonging and connectedness
- Involvement with caring adult
- Support available at critical times
- Involvement with caring adult
- Support available at critical times
- Participating in community networks
- Access to support services
- Economic security
- Strong cultural identity and pride

(Adapted from Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000; Spence, 1996)
Risk and protective factors

The role of schools in improving children’s mental health and wellbeing

Schools, with the full support of families and the community, are a great place to comprehensively support children’s mental health and wellbeing for the following reasons:

• School is the most significant developmental context, after family, for primary school-aged children, with almost all children attending school at some time in their lives.

• Through their role in supporting children’s learning and behaviour, schools play a crucial role in building children’s self-esteem and sense of competence. Conversely, when children’s learning and wellbeing needs are not met at school, their overall development and mental health may be undermined.

• Schools can act as a safety net and assist in protecting children from circumstances that affect their learning, development and wellbeing.

• School mental health programs have shown to be effective in improving students’ learning and emotional wellbeing, and in improving mental health difficulties.

• When schools are actively involved in comprehensive mental health programs, generations of children are reached.

“Schools have got a really strong role to play in promoting positive mental health and development in children, and this is because they are the place where people gather and this is the richest opportunity that children will have to develop their social health.”

Associate Professor Helen Cahill, University of Melbourne

Things to keep in mind:

• Pathways to mental health and wellbeing are complex, and it’s rarely possible to identify a single cause.

• Just because a child is exposed to one or more risk factors, it doesn’t mean he or she will experience mental health difficulties. In general, it’s the accumulation of risk factors without the buffering effects of protective factors which can contribute to the development of mental health difficulties.

• For some children, school may be the one environment where they have access to responsive adults who believe in and care for them.

• The presence of just one protective factor for a child who may have many identified risk factors can be enough to protect that child from developing a mental health difficulty.

• KidsMatter is about celebrating the protective factors schools already provide for students, and continuing to build on them through each of the four components.
**Session 1 summary**

**Mental health is**
- how we think or feel about ourselves and what is going on around us
- how we cope with the ups and downs of life.

Academic results and educational outcomes are enhanced when we support mental health and wellbeing.

KidsMatter Primary brings together the significant people and settings in children’s lives.

KidsMatter Primary helps schools celebrate and strengthen the protective factors they provide for their students.

Things to remember, new ideas to note, actions to take
Session 2:
Designing a positive school community
### Factors which enhance a positive school community

- Strong leadership
- Collaborative decision-making
- Inclusion
- Community stability
- Cohesive teaching staff
- Continuity of staff
- Spirit of generosity
- Staff who are open to critique and reflection
- Goodwill
- Openness to change
- Respect for diversity
- Desire to embrace students, parents and community
- Transparent decision-making
- Sense of agency/confidence
- Mutual respect
- Expectation of success
- Open communication
- Acknowledgement of knowledge and experience
- Attitude of enquiry
- Humour
- Skills to resolve conflict and problem-solve
- A sense of safety
- Interpersonal skills
- Effective policies and practices to ensure appropriate responses to safety (eg bullying, harassment, child abuse)

### Factors which inhibit a positive school community

- Hypercritical attitudes
- ‘Us and them’ attitudes (between students and teachers, parents and school)
- Cliques
- Lack of power
- Lack of opportunities to participate
- Favouritism
- Bullying and harassment
- Lack of control
- Ignorance
- Individualism
- Lack of trust
- Lack of respect
- Authoritarianism
- Competitiveness
- Lack of identity
- Poor communication
- Lack of generosity
- Judgemental culture
- Fear of failure
- Lack of security
- Lack of responsibility for own actions
- Lack of confidentiality
- Lack of respect for privacy

(Adapted from Butler & colleagues, 2011)
## Video
Component 1 in action - school story

School story notes and observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things that stood out to me</th>
<th>Things I’d like my school to explore further</th>
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Session 2 summary

A positive school community surrounds its members with protective factors for good mental health and wellbeing.

Respectful and responsive relationships are the glue that hold a positive school community together.

Identifying the factors that enhance and inhibit our sense of community helps our school as an organisation systematically plan and implement policies and strategies to create and sustain a positive school community.

Things to remember, new ideas to note, actions to take
Session 3: Relationships and belonging
Creating and sustaining a positive school community involves building a network of respectful and responsive relationships.

**Relationship qualities**
- Sensitive, warm, respectful
- Frequent positive interactions
- Genuine concern for the other

**Belonging**
- Feeling valued, accepted and secure

**Good outcomes**
- Improved mental health and wellbeing
- More confidence to take on challenges
- Fewer behavioural problems
- More positive attitude towards school
- Increased academic engagement, motivation and achievement

(Adapted from Bergin & Bergin, 2009)

“There’s really only so many things that we need to feel important in life. There’s a sense of belonging, and there’s an element there where every one of them has to have a sense of significance. The ‘what I’m doing here is important’, ‘I’m not just a number’, ‘I’m not just another kid in the school.’”

Phil (Teacher), Leighland Christian School
Discussion
Investing in the relationship bank

What do I already do?

What else can I do?
3 Session 3 summary

Respectful and responsive relationships

• require staff and the school organisation to reflect upon their values, beliefs and practices and take positive action
• help promote a sense of belonging at school for everyone.

When students feel like they belong it benefits

• mental health and wellbeing
• academic engagement and achievement

Things to remember, new ideas to note, actions to take
Session 4: The practices of a positive school community
**Reflections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thought</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think about the physical environment – artwork, signage, displays, murals, posters. What images are you seeing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What sounds do you hear as you walk around the school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greetings?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Languages?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Music?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think about the people and interactions you are likely to come across while walking around the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are you welcomed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will you have anyone to talk to?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What expressions do you notice on people’s faces?</td>
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<td>Look at the notice boards and printed material sent home. How easily do you understand them?</td>
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<td>Think about the regular events on the school calendar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would they be like for you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How appealing are they?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are the core values and vision of the school displayed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are they made explicit around the school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do they mean to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What texts are children reading in class?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What diversity is being seen?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can you see yourself in the materials?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What else might you notice as you move around the school?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Inclusion and inclusive practice

Inclusion is also about:

- understanding the diversity that exists in your school community. This includes (but is not limited to) beliefs, religion, culture, educational level, language use, family arrangements and circumstances, lifestyle and background, personality, interests, thinking and learning styles, abilities and disabilities
- embracing diversity and the richness it provides to a school, as well as recognising similarities between people
- reflecting actively on your school’s practices to ensure they are inclusive
- understanding that when people feel included, they are more likely to participate in the life of the school and take an interest and be more confident to contribute to school planning.

A sense of inclusion is a protective factor for the mental health of all school community members. In fact, it is a very critical protective factor as it relates to the issue of being part of the group. The need to belong and be included has been identified as fundamental to our survival. Without the protection of the group we are more vulnerable.

There are many practices within a school that can support inclusion. Because every school is different, how this looks, and what form it takes, will vary depending on the unique circumstances of the school community.

“We realised we needed to understand the context of our families. We didn’t know how we were being not inclusive if we first didn’t understand our parents and our families.”

Michael Bourne (Principal), St. Mark’s Fawkner Catholic School
Discussion
The inclusiveness scale

Who’s participating? Who gets a say? Who comes? Who doesn’t?
Who are we missing? Not noticing? Who feels threatened? Overlooked?

How could we develop our inclusive practices?
Think about what you’ve learnt during the professional learning – what do you want to add to your own practice to help promote your positive school community? What new practice are you willing to commit to?

**My goal for Component 1 is...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Ways I’ll work around them</th>
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Is your goal **SMART**? (Tick next to each of the criteria it meets. Rewrite as necessary)

- **Specific** – Do I know exactly what it is I want to accomplish?
- **Measurable** – Will I know if I have accomplished the goal? Can I measure my progress?
- **Attainable** – Do I see myself able to reach the goal?
- **Realistic** – Am I willing and able to work towards the goal?
- **Timed** – Does the goal have a defined time frame?

Why is it worth it? I’m willing to commit to this goal because...

What might stand in the way of you achieving your goal?
How will you work around the obstacles?

The people I’ll tell about my commitment to help keep me motivated are...

I’ll review my progress towards my goal on this date:
Planning school-wide action

Think about any ideas you have for what your broader staff group and the entire community could do to enhance your positive school community.

Write your ideas below and tear them off. Your ideas will be provided to the Action Team to help plan school-wide action.

Ideas for staff to enhance our positive school community:

Ideas for the entire school community to enhance our positive school community:
Session 4 summary

A positive school community understands mental health and wellbeing

encourages all members of the community to get involved and contribute

and ultimately...

develops and maintains policies and practices that enable people to feel included at school

promotes relationships and a sense of belonging

supports students’ mental health and wellbeing and educational outcomes.

“Your beliefs become your thoughts, Your thoughts become your words, Your words become your actions, Your actions become your habits, Your habits become your values, Your values become your character.”

Mahatma Gandhi
Tell us what you think!

Your feedback is very important and will ensure that the KidsMatter Primary professional learning sessions are effective. Your feedback can also be counted towards our formal recognition as a KidsMatter Primary school.

Every participant, including the Facilitator, is invited to provide feedback. Responses are anonymous and are viewed only by the KidsMatter Primary national team for quality assurance purposes.

Please provide your feedback at:
www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/componentfeedback