

Getting in early for mental health and wellbeing

Keeping children healthy and happy involves looking after their mental health as well as their physical health. Mental health is how we think or feel about ourselves and what is going on around us, and how we cope with the ups and downs of life.

Good mental health helps us to form positive relationships with others, handle challenges and be able to generally enjoy life. With good mental health, children think positively about themselves and learn and achieve better results at school. Good mental health in childhood lays the foundations for positive mental health and wellbeing, now and into the future.

Mental health difficulties in children

Mental health difficulties affects children's behaviour, feelings, ability to learn, social relationships, as well as their physical health and wellbeing. About half of all serious mental health problems in adulthood begin before the age of 14 years. In Australia it is estimated that approximately one in seven children experience mental health difficulties. There are many ways that parents, carers and school staff can support children who are experiencing mental health difficulties. Some of these may be parents, carers and school staff working in partnership to come up with ways of supporting the child, attending information sessions on particular childhood mental health difficulties or getting a referral to a mental health professional.

Although there are many effective supports for children experiencing mental health difficulties, many children do not receive the help they need. This can happen because families are unsure of whether their child has a difficulty, or they do not know where to go or what to do to get mental health support. Schools can be an ideal place for families to access information about supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children. Sometimes parents and carers may feel concerned about raising mental health concerns due to misunderstandings and negativity that they feel may exist about mental health difficulties.

The positive way in which families and schools support each other in relation to mental health and wellbeing will help parents and carers to seek support and assistance in a timely way.



Everyone has difficulties at times

Most people will experience mental health difficulties at some point in their life, including children. Getting help early for children's mental health difficulties is important. When children don't get help for mental health difficulties they can end up feeling bad about themselves.

They might have trouble getting on with others or struggle with their school work. It can also lead to health problems and family conflict. Problems that are not addressed can get bigger and affect children as they grow up. The earlier in life mental health difficulties are addressed, the better chance a child has at improving their long-term mental health and wellbeing.

Your child's school will have further information and resources that can help parents and carers understand more about children's mental health and wellbeing. School staff can also help you find out what children's mental health services are available in your local area.



To help parents, carers and teaching staff understand about children's mental health difficulties, KidsMatter Primary has developed a series of information sheets. Available at www.kidsmatter.edu.au, these resources provide information about children's mental health difficulties, how you can help and how you can find professional help when needed.

Mental health professionals have developed a number of very successful ways for helping children with mental health difficulties and their families. Just like taking your child to the doctor with physical health problems, it is important to get help and advice for mental health difficulties.

Helping children to be mentally healthy is a major part of caring for kids. Caring families, schools and communities working together offer strong support for children's mental health and wellbeing. Sharing knowledge about what to do and where to go for help can make a big difference to children's lives.

This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

