

Anxiety and Mental Health Issues in School Communities

Introduction

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headspace Schools

The division leads the interface between headspace and Australian education systems. Current contracts:

- Be You
- Schools Suicide Prevention Activities
- Private Coaching and Support Service
- SAFEMINDS in Practice and Suicide Risk Continuum Training
- Skills-based Training on Suicide Risk Management (STORM)

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Acknowledgement of Country

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Session outline

- overview of Be You
- understanding anxiety in children and young people
- common anxiety presentations – classroom and contributing factors
- practical strategies within a whole school approach
- Be You resources for recognising and managing anxiety

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Being safe and inclusive

Your mental health and wellbeing is crucial to student mental health and wellbeing

Make safe

Key Words: Self care, cultural safety, supports, strength-based

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Two key strategies

- Mental health literacy & self care
- Support seeking & getting help

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Why a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing?

A Venn diagram with four overlapping circles. The top circle is blue and labeled 'Prevention'. The bottom circle is orange and labeled 'Intervention'. The left circle is green and labeled 'Postvention'. The right circle is pink and labeled 'Early intervention'. The central area where all four circles overlap is labeled 'Resilient student'.

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What is Be You?

A screenshot of the Be You website. The main heading is 'Growing a mentally healthy generation'. Below it, there's a sub-heading 'Your role in Be You' with four icons representing different roles: Educator, Leader, Action Team, and Peer support educator.

beyou.edu.au

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Be You at a glance

A grid of resources categorized into five main sections:

- Handbooks:** Leadership, Action Team, Educators, Pre-service
- Planning & Implementation Tools:** Statement of Commitment, Be You Surveys, Reflection Tool, Action Plan, Actions Catalogue, Share and Extend Guide
- Be You Fact Sheets:** Healthy Communities, Self-Care, Inclusion, Learning & Development, Mental Health Issues, National Check-ins, Essentials, In Focus Webinars
- Tools & Guides:** Programs Directory, Organising Speakers Guide, Wellbeing Tools For You, Wellbeing Tools for Students, Suicide Planning and Response, Always Be You
- Events:** (None listed in this category)

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Be You whole learning community approach

A diagram showing a funnel shape. On the left, it says 'Individual schools learning'. In the middle, it says 'Collaborative activities, settings and engaging educators'. On the right, it says 'Whole learning community culture and strategies'. Below the funnel is an icon of a school building.

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Building the capacity of schools to understand the mental health system


A flowchart showing the progression of mental health services. It starts with three stacked boxes: 'Early Childhood', 'Primary Schools', and 'Secondary Schools'. An arrow points from these to a central blue circle labeled 'Be You'. Another arrow points from 'Be You' to a cluster of blue hexagons representing 'School services', which include: Professional Learning, Family Support, Quality Improvement, Wellbeing Tools, Wellbeing Tools For You, Suicide Planning and Response, and Health Services.

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A whole school approach: 10 key questions

- What policies and frameworks do we have?
- What professional learning or training is needed and to which workforce?
- How do we connect, engage, partner with, and build capacities of families?
- What internal strategies and programs do we have?
- What external support, strategies and services do we have?
- What stakeholders and partners should we consider?
- What evidence do we have?
- Do we have coverage across the mental health continuum?
- What campaigns and communication strategies do we have?
- What evaluation and implementation science checkpoints do we have - data, evidence, evaluation?

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Some key mental health concepts


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Clarifying mental health terms

Mental health issues:	Mental health conditions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> encompass cognitive, emotional & behavioural issues that may cause concern or distress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> are clinically diagnosed by a health professional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> affect thinking, feeling & behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significantly interfere with cognitive, emotional or social abilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> include issues experienced in relation to normal life stressors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can cause distress, impact day-to-day functioning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> span the mental health continuum from yellow to red zone. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> can occur at any age or stage often commence during childhood & adolescence.

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Continuum of mental health



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Risk factors	Protective factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult temperament Low self-esteem Negative thinking and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy temperament Good social and emotional skills Optimistic coping style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disparity, instability or break-up Harsh or inconsistent discipline Mental health conditions or substance abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family harmony and stability Supportive parenting Strong family values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer rejection School failure Poor connection to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive school climate that enhances belonging and connectedness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult school transition Death of a family member Emotional trauma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involvement with caring adult Support available at critical times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discrimination Isolation Socioeconomic disadvantage Lack of access to support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation in community networks Access to support services Economic security Strong cultural identity and pride

Risk & protective factors in context

Identifying risk and protective factors in a child's or young person's context can help educators plan support strategies.

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Mental health issues in school communities

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Why is this relevant for educators?

Compared to other children and young people, individuals with a mental health condition are likely to:

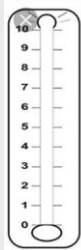
- be less connected and engaged with school
- miss more days of school
- have lower academic outcomes (e.g. lower NAPLAN scores)
- fail to complete year 12.

Mental health conditions are therefore an education issue not just a health issue.



A common issue for children and adults

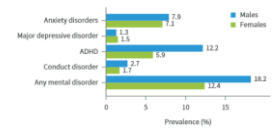
- busy head
 - head noise
 - incessant thinking
 - negative thoughts
 - ruminating thoughts
 - negative loop
-exacerbated by social media



- 10 - Highest distress/fear/anxiety/discomfort that you have ever felt
- 9 - Extremely anxious/distressed
- 8 - Very anxious/distressed, can't concentrate
- 7 - Quite anxious/distressed, interfering with performance
- 6 -
- 5 - Moderate anxiety/distress, uncomfortable but can continue to perform
- 4 -
- 3 - Mild anxiety/distress, no interference with performance
- 2 - Minimal anxiety/distress
- 1 - Alert and awake, concentrating well
- 0 - Totally relaxed

Common mental health conditions in primary school children

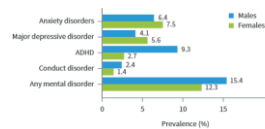
PREVALENCE OF MENTAL DISORDERS IN STUDENTS IN YEARS 1-6, BY DISORDER AND SEX



Goodell, B., Lawrence, D., Ainley, J., Sawyer, M., Zubrick, S. R., & Horwood, J. (2017). Child and Adolescent Mental health and educational outcomes: An analysis of educational outcomes from Young Minds Matter: the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Common mental health conditions in secondary school-aged young people

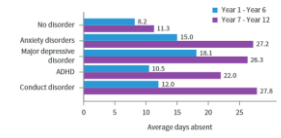
PREVALENCE OF MENTAL DISORDERS IN STUDENTS IN YEARS 7-12, BY DISORDER AND SEX



Goodell, B., Lawrence, D., Ainley, J., Sawyer, M., Zubrick, S. R., & Horwood, J. (2017). Child and Adolescent Mental health and educational outcomes: An analysis of educational outcomes from Young Minds Matter: the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

Mental health conditions and absenteeism

AVERAGE DAYS ABSENT FROM SCHOOL OVER THE SCHOOL YEAR BY TYPE OF MENTAL DISORDER AND YEAR IN SCHOOL



The Mental Health of Australian Children and Adolescents: Educational Outcomes <https://youngmindsmatter.telethonkids.org.au/>

Exploring anxiety



Common fears and anxieties in childhood

7 months - toddler	Toddler to middle childhood	Middle to late childhood	Late childhood to early adolescence
Fear of:	Fear of:	Fear of:	Fears revolve around social or evaluative situations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strangers • separation • loud noises • animals • large machines (e.g. vacuum cleaner or lawn mower) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • animals/insects • separation from parents • the dark • monsters • sleeping alone • 'bad' people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supernatural beings • bodily injury • the dark • heights • getting lost or trapped • burglars • doctors/dentists • death and dying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rejection by peers • being embarrassed • dating • taking tests, • death • physical injury

Source: 'Small Steps Strategies to Support Anxious Children in the Classroom' <http://understandingmylearning.com.au/educationalstrategies-to-support-anxious-children-in-the-classroom>



How might anxiety present?

Feelings and emotions

- being irritable and/or having persistent worries and fears; avoiding feared situations; panic.

Thoughts

- difficulty concentrating; being easily distracted; catastrophizing; being critical of own work.

Physical symptoms

- racing heart; sweating, feeling dizzy; feeling tense, aches/pains, poor sleep, butterflies in the stomach, jittery, not being able to sit still

Behaviour

- being withdrawn or excessively shy and unable to relax; regression in behaviour or development.



Jake's story

Jake storms in late to his Year 7 English class first session in the morning.

He noisily sits down and puts his books down heavily on the desk.

The teacher asks for his late pass from the office (which is school process), he begins to protest, the teacher insists, he stands up, cursing, to head to the office, and knocks his neighbour's book off the table.

Considering your current role, how might you respond? How might your school respond?

You now have more of the story:

- the before school yard duty teacher has seen Jake sobbing, not wanting to leave his Mum's car at drop off time
- Jake's father had recently left his mother, completely unexpectedly for Jake
- Jake's world, that felt stable, has unexpectedly crumbled
- he appears anxious when he is not around his Mum

Would your previous consideration to responding to Jake look different and if so how?



Factors influencing anxiety

Internal

- temperament
- interpretation of events
- mastery of skills and knowledge
- physical health
- thought patterns



External

- family history of mental health issues
- family relationships
- life events
- connection to community
- environment
- culture



Practical support strategies



Providing early support

Notice changes in mood and behaviour

Inquire sensitively about the individual's circumstances

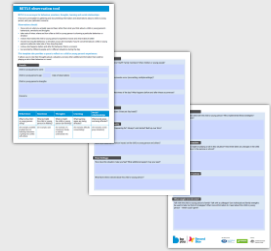
Provide support/referrals to children/young people and their families

BETLS observation tool

This tool is a template for systematically gathering and documenting information and observations about a child or young person, and noting particular concerns.

The acronym, BETLS, reminds us to consider:

- behaviour
- emotions
- thoughts
- learning
- social relationships



Practical classroom strategies to assist students manage anxiety

Strategies include:

- recognising, understanding emotions and bodily cues
- helping children/young people think it through
- reassurance
- calm responding
- routine
- relaxation strategies eg mindfulness, music, drawing, colouring art supplies
- actively coaching a highly distressed, anxious student to return to calmer state

10 ways to support students with anxiety

1. Slow down and breathe
2. Make time to worry
3. Climb that ladder
4. Encourage positive thinking (Reframing)
5. Have a go
6. Model helpful coping
7. Empower
8. Be Upfront
9. 'Be Brave' Program
10. Check own behaviour



Reframing unhelpful thinking

I wasn't invited to Peter's party.

He doesn't like me.



I'll see my other friends on Friday and speak to Peter on Saturday.

Peter is catching up with friends from his old school. I don't really know them.

Some useful resources

Available on Be You website:

- Be You Anxiety fact sheets (in Resources)
- 10 strategies to try to support anxious children (in Resources)
- BETLS (behaviour, emotions, thoughts, learning, social relationships) observation tool (in Tools)
- BRAVE online program to help kids cope with worries and anxiety (in Programs Directory)
- Smiling mind mindfulness website and app (in Programs Directory)

Other resources:

- Small steps strategies to support anxious children in the classroom (Mental Health Association, NSW)
- St Luke's Innovative resources for social and emotional literacy and learning

Next steps

- Visit the Be You booth and learn more about its benefits for educators and schools
- register with Be You at beyou.edu.au as an individual educator and whole learning community
- continue your Be You journey and share your commitment with others



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Register

Individual

Access to:
 • professional learning and online resources
beyou.edu.au



Whole School Community

Access to:
 • your school's allocated consultant
 • surveys, planning tools and events
 • suicide postvention support



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Be You State and Territory Managers

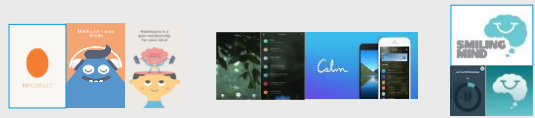
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Mindfulness

A simple strategy for classroom & schools to increase calm, connectivity, belonging and safety



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For Teachers



Thank you

Questions?

