

Introducing KidsMatter Primary

Good mental health is vital for life. Children who are mentally healthy are better able to meet life's challenges and have stronger relationships with the people around them. They are also better learners who are more likely to succeed at school. Good mental health in childhood provides a solid basis for managing changes as they grow.

On the other hand, children who are exposed to multiple stressors – such as a family breakdown, poverty, abuse, racism, bullying, or the mental illness of a parent – are at a higher risk of developing emotional or behavioural problems that can continue into adulthood.

It's not always possible to tell which children will develop difficulties, so it's important to consider the wellbeing of all children.

The good news is that KidsMatter Primary is all about growing healthy minds. KidsMatter is a mental health and wellbeing framework that helps schools focus on the development of all their students in partnership with families. It was developed by mental health and education experts and has already made a big difference to the lives of Australian children.



Does KidsMatter Primary work?

KidsMatter Primary works because it unites all the people that influence children's mental health most – families, school staff and the wider community.

KidsMatter Primary can help improve:

- the mental health and wellbeing of students¹
- the quality of their school work¹
- the ability of parents, carers and teaching staff to help children deal with problems¹
- NAPLAN results² – when schools implement KidsMatter Primary well.

KidsMatter Primary was developed in collaboration with *beyondblue*, the Australian Psychological Society, and the Principals Australia Institute, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and *beyondblue*.

How does KidsMatter Primary work?

When schools take on KidsMatter Primary, they build on the work they are already doing to support students' mental health and wellbeing. Firstly, they form an Action Team to represent the whole-school community and to coordinate and lead the implementation of the initiative. The Action Team reviews the schools' current efforts across four focus areas (or 'components'). They look for ways they can strengthen these efforts, and then take action using a step-by-step planning process.

Every school is different, with different needs for their students and families. The KidsMatter Primary framework covers four components that have shown to be highly successful in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children.



1 Positive school community

Positive and respectful relationships at school help children and families feel that they belong and that their contributions are valued. A positive school community also gives children a sense of security that their needs will be met. Research shows that when children and families feel connected to school, children are less likely to develop mental health difficulties and are more likely to succeed academically.

2 Social and emotional learning for students

Learning how to manage feelings and get on with others is an important part of children's development. It helps them become better learners and feel good about themselves. Teaching children social and emotional skills as part of the school curriculum gives them tools for coping with emotions, solving problems and learning more effectively.

3 Working with parents and carers

In order to promote children's mental health and wellbeing, it makes sense for families and schools to work closely together. Schools can support parents and carers by providing useful parenting information and resources, and by connecting them with further assistance if required.

4 Helping children with mental health difficulties

It can make a significant difference when children and families are able to access mental health intervention early. KidsMatter primary schools learn to respond more effectively to children's mental health difficulties by recognising and responding to concerns that may need following-up. They can provide information to families and develop links with health and community agencies in their local area.

How can families help?

Families are the biggest influence on children's mental health and play a very important role in KidsMatter. Children benefit when the important people in their lives work together and have a shared understanding of their development and their needs.

KidsMatter Primary has developed a range of information sheets with parenting tips and strategies to help all Australian families support the wellbeing of their children. View them online at

www.kidsmatter.edu.au

If your child's school is participating in KidsMatter Primary, there are many things you can do to help make it a success:

- Read the KidsMatter Primary information sheets to further your understanding about children's mental health.
- Develop relationships with staff, so you can share knowledge and information about how they can support your child.
- Get involved in the Action Team.
- Ask staff how KidsMatter Primary is being implemented.
- Participate in school activities to build a sense of community.
- Respond to any school requests for ideas or information.
- Talk to other parents and carers about ways the school can support your needs.
- Let the school know what skills or talents you are happy to share.

¹ Slee, P. T., Lawson, M. J., Russell, A., Askell-Williams, H., Dix, K. L., Owens, L., Skrzypiec, G. & Spears, B. (2009). KidsMatter Primary Evaluation Final Report. Adelaide SA: Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures, Flinders University of South Australia.

² Dix, K.L., Slee, P.T., Lawson, M.J. & Keeves, J.P. (2011). Implementation quality of whole-school mental health promotion and students' academic performance. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*.

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

