



Community Matters

Introduction

* This current edition of MindMatters resources remains unedited and is intended as a school consultation DRAFT. This DRAFT material may be updated when additional MindMatters resources are completed. Please refer to the disclaimer attached to this material and on the website for details of the Commonwealth's limitation of liability in relation to this material.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2010.

This work is copyright. Provided acknowledgement is made to the sources, schools are permitted to copy material freely for communication with teachers, students, parents or community members. No part may be reproduced for any other use than that permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, without written permission from the Commonwealth of Australia. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Commonwealth Copyright Administration, Attorney-General's Department, Robert Garran Offices, National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 or posted at <http://www.ag.gov.au/cca>.

While all care has been taken in the preparation of this material, the Commonwealth accepts no liability for any injury or loss or damage arising from the use of, or reliance upon, the content of this publication. Furthermore, the material herein does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Health and Ageing nor of any mental health service provider.

Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holder of material used in the MindMatters materials. If accidental infringement has occurred, please contact the publisher.

MindMatters is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.



*mind*matters
Leading mental health and wellbeing





The MindMatters initiatives

The MindMatters initiatives were developed in recognition of the need to address the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Mental health and wellbeing has been linked to young people's:

- sense of connectedness to school and their academic success
- social development
- resilience in the face of adversity
- capacity to contribute to the workforce and the community.

There is an increasing awareness that schools can engage in deliberate strategies to build a secure and supportive school environment and to promote attitudes and behaviours which enhance mental health and wellbeing.

MindMatters therefore adopted a comprehensive, Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing, focusing on entire school communities, not just individual students with identified needs. It aims to enhance the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful.

The MindMatters booklets, CD-ROMs and website, together with accompanying Professional Development, have been widely adopted in Australian schools. Schools using MindMatters successfully have appreciated its 'high-quality and easy-to-use curriculum resources' and the access it provides 'to highly rated Professional Development'. It has been described as enabling 'a new language about student wellbeing to develop within the school', requiring staff to develop 'new ideas and share strategies' (Hazell 2006).

The MindMatters initiative helps schools and their communities to:

- take positive action towards creating a positive climate of mental health and wellbeing
- be pro-active in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing
- support prevention and early intervention initiatives for young people with mental health and wellbeing challenges.

MindMatters continues to have considerable success. In particular, it has 'succeeded in its aims to reconceptualise mental health issues positively and to build partnerships and capacity in school communities, and it now forms a support base for any new mental health programs that are introduced' (Rowling 2007).

MindMatters – The background

The 1996 audit of Mental Health Education in Australian Secondary Schools recommended schools as appropriate settings for the promotion of mental health among young people. The Australian Commonwealth Government funded a National Mental Health in Schools Project managed by a consortium from the University of Melbourne, University of Sydney, Deakin University and the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation. The MindMatters project was the result of a successful Australian national pilot involving 24 schools in the government, Catholic and independent sectors trialling MindMatters resources from 1997 to 1998.

Principals Australia Inc. is responsible for the implementation and redevelopment of MindMatters from 2000 to 2009, and has built on the research advice and initial Professional Development provided by the Consortium. MindMatters is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

The first MindMatters booklets and CD-ROM were published in 2000 and the accompanying website has supported those resources and the MindMatters Professional Development. The MindMatters website is at: www.mindmatters.edu.au.

A report from Principals Australia to the Department of Health and Ageing in 2008 indicated that staff from over 83% of all schools and settings with secondary student enrolments in Australia had attended MindMatters Professional Development, involving over 100,000 Australian and international participants. Recent statistics on the uptake of MindMatters can be found on the MindMatters website. A Planning Overview of the MindMatters Professional Development and a calendar of Professional Development can also be found on the website.

The Australian Council for Educational Research National Survey (2006) revealed that 71% of Australian secondary schools had used MindMatters resources, 52% of the schools surveyed continued to use MindMatters resources and 18% used MindMatters as their key organiser for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention (Ainley, J et al. 2006).

The ideas presented in MindMatters have been developed through many years of working with schools by MindMatters staff, from national implementation through to research, collaborations with key stakeholders, and independent evaluation.

The MindMatters approach to mental health and wellbeing

MindMatters adopts a universal school-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention approach. Such an approach 'targets the entire school population with the goals of enhancing strengths so as to reduce the risk of later problem outcomes and/or to increase prospects for positive development' (Weisz et al. 2005). Prevention strategies can be universal, selective or targeted and are designed to identify and counter risk factors. Intervention strategies are aimed at students who have some risk factors, mental health difficulties, or who have diagnosable disorders.

Universal approaches or programs are aimed at enhancing the resilience of the whole school and community by increasing protective factors for positive mental health and wellbeing.

Selective programs or resources are aimed at a select group or cohort of students to address developing or potential mental health problems. Protective factors are identified and focused upon to help mitigate the risk factors involved.

Targeted programs or interventions are aimed at those students at greater risk of developing a mental illness, or at those who have already been diagnosed.

Mental health professionals need to be involved in discussion about selective and targeted strategies.

MindMatters' aims

MindMatters aims to:

- embed promotion, prevention and early intervention for mental health and wellbeing in Australian schools with secondary enrolments
- encourage the development of school environments where young people feel safe, valued, engaged and purposeful
- develop social and emotional skills, and spiritual understandings, if appropriate, in order to enhance resilience, resourcefulness, respect and a sense of connectedness with others
- help school communities to plan and take action to create a climate of positive mental health and wellbeing in secondary schools
- provide information to enable schools to collaborate better with families, communities and the health sector
- describe strategies to enable a continuum of support to students with additional needs in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

CommunityMatters and the 2010 MindMatters resource

The MindMatters resource consists of a range of text, web-based and multimedia components. It is accompanied by a comprehensive national Professional Development program. The foundations are laid in the Whole School Matters booklet, which describes the key concepts of the MindMatters Whole School Approach and outlines action areas for its implementation, including strategies specifically for students experiencing high support needs in mental health. Three booklets build on this foundation, providing the scaffolding for a further six more specialised booklets. These three booklets are: Teaching and Learning; Students Experiencing High Support Needs in Mental Health; and this booklet – CommunityMatters.

MindMatters was first released in 2000. CommunityMatters was added in 2001. Since then, the MindMatters resource, accompanying Professional Development and website have met with considerable success. This new edition has benefited from the incorporation of new research, feedback from Professional Development and formal evaluations published in 2006. The components of the new MindMatters resource are identified on the following page.

Introducing CommunityMatters

CommunityMatters is a building block within the MindMatters resources. It builds on the foundations laid in Whole School Matters and incorporates regular cross-referencing to this and other booklets and to the MindMatters website: www.mindmatters.edu.au.

CommunityMatters explores identity, culture and community and their relationship to students' mental health or 'social and emotional wellbeing' (the broader concept preferred by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). It suggests strategies for managing the mental health and wellbeing of all students, but has a special focus on students who, for a range of reasons, may feel marginalised within mainstream Australian society, and who may therefore have high support needs in mental health.

CommunityMatters acknowledges and endorses the goals of the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA 2008). CommunityMatters' aims align closely with the Declaration's commitment to ensuring that 'schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity.'

CommunityMatters affirms the importance of providing all students with 'access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location'. CommunityMatters is committed to ensuring that 'schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning' and to reduce the effects of socioeconomic disadvantage and other sources of disadvantage, such as 'disability, homelessness, refugee status and remoteness'. [All quotes from Goal 1 of the Melbourne Declaration: Australian Schooling Promotes Equity and Excellence].

CommunityMatters examines the internal and external partnerships and services which are a critical component of the MindMatters Implementation Model. It supports and develops the Whole School Matters premise of forging community and family and parent/caregiver partnerships to ensure there is a holistic and sustainable approach to the mental health of school students and staff. Its cultural perspective on protective and risk factors makes important connections with the other MindMatters booklets, especially Change: Loss and Grief and Enhancing Resilience 1 and 2.

In particular, CommunityMatters examines:

- the ways in which an individual's resilience and wellbeing are related to their sense of cultural identity and community connectedness
- a range of issues and strategies for fostering a socially and culturally inclusive environment and curriculum in schools that will increase protective factors and enhance connectedness and resilience
- the role of partnerships so that schools, together with their community, their people and other resources, can be places that promote mental health and wellbeing for all students.

The CommunityMatters approach is now integrated across all the other MindMatters resources, which acknowledge that cultural alienation and disconnectedness from community are risk factors which can jeopardise the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of students. For example, the CommunityMatters process has now been highlighted in discussions of diverse areas such as staff working with mental health and wellbeing; change, loss and grief; and resilience. The revised MindMatters protective and risk factors (see Whole School Matters, Section 2) include relevant family and community factors.

How to use this booklet

This booklet has three major parts:

- A) A Whole School Approach to valuing community, culture and identity for mental health and wellbeing
- B) Mental health issues and strategies for specific cultural groups
- C) Culturally inclusive teaching, learning and partnerships.

Part A (Sections 1 and 2) explains the key concepts about culture, identity and community which underpin the rest of the booklet. It locates community and cultural diversity concerns within the MindMatters Whole School and Whole Student Approach to mental health and wellbeing, and explains the crucial role of the school core team in promoting connection and resilience and embedding a diversity perspective within this process.

Part B (Sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) then examines mental health and wellbeing issues for five specific populations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, rural and remote students, students with disabilities, same-sex attracted students, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Strategies to address these issues are identified for each group. These sections are likely to be used selectively by readers according to their contexts and needs at particular times, or when considering the issues for specific groups or individuals within the school community.

Part C (Sections 8 and 9) looks specifically at culturally inclusive teaching and learning, and the school–community partnerships which support and enhance such pedagogy.

Section 8 considers how cultural diversity can be embedded within the curriculum and suggests specific strategies for engaging a diverse range of students, including those from the marginalised groups discussed in the preceding five sections. It considers behaviour education and management and also has a section on culturally inclusive classroom strategies for students experiencing high support needs in mental health.

Section 9 examines some of the complexities, challenges and strategies relevant to involving culturally diverse and Indigenous communities and building partnerships with community agencies and specialist support services.

Professional Development activities are incorporated at the end of most sections of this booklet along with relevant whole school actions addressing the three key dimensions of the MindMatters Implementation Model:

- School ethos and environment
- Curriculum: teaching and learning
- Internal and external partnerships and services.

The audience for this booklet

The main focus of CommunityMatters is on Professional Development. It aims to increase staff understanding of the cultural and community dimensions of mental health and wellbeing, thereby expanding their leadership capacities and facilitating a more inclusive school curriculum and a school ethos and environment characterised by strong relationships, good communication and cultural competence.

CommunityMatters provides a cultural lens through which to see the MindMatters Planning Cycle for a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing. This will enable schools to examine their beliefs, assess their capacity, collect and analyse data and implement actions in ways which are culturally inclusive and respectful of diverse identities.

CommunityMatters provides a rationale and some practical strategies for implementing the MindMatters Community Partnership Process for Mental Health and Wellbeing. See Section 9.

How members of the school community can use this booklet

Audience	Relevant focus
Principal & executive leadership	Information to underpin a Whole School Approach to mental health and wellbeing that is inclusive of cultural diversity and community needs. This will be achieved by promoting greater understanding of culture, identity and community within the school administration, the school core team, amongst teaching staff and throughout the student body. Leadership knowledge of these issues can support staff and students experiencing marginalisation or acculturative stress and help to promote a welcoming and supportive school ethos and environment. Information about specific population groups can inform policy on bullying and harassment, discrimination, loss and grief, and culturally inclusive curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
School core team	Information, Professional Development and planning tools for a Whole School Approach to community, culture and identity. Strategies for building partnerships with community, families, parents and caregivers.
Classroom teachers	Essential background information about community, culture and identity to help facilitate a more culturally inclusive curriculum and teaching strategies. Information to guide culturally appropriate behaviour education and management. Connects these understandings to the whole school social and emotional curriculum.
School support staff	Essential background information about culture and identity to assist in supporting students (and staff) experiencing specific mental health difficulties deriving from their cultural histories, marginalisation or discrimination. Connects these understandings to the whole school social and emotional curriculum. Information and strategies to assist Indigenous Education Workers with their work with students and their own self-care.
Community leaders	Knowledge to assist community–school partnerships to build protective factors to deal with disadvantage and marginalisation experienced by certain cultural groups.
Allied health workers	Ways to partner and support schools and their management systems in a Whole School Approach to cultural inclusivity and strategies for dealing with specific culturally related issues such as racism, homophobia, social isolation, low self-esteem, feelings of disconnectedness, and cultural transitions and adaptation.

References - Introduction

- Ainley, J. et al. (March 2006) *National Survey of Health and Well-being Promotion Policies and Practices in Secondary Schools*, ACER
- Hazell, T (2006) 'Evaluating the impact of MindMatters at the school level', paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) National Conference, Adelaide
- MCEETYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) (December 2008) *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne_declaration,25979.html
- Rowling, L (2007) 'School mental health promotion: MindMatters as an example of mental health reform', *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 229–35
- Weisz, J, Sandler, I, Durlak, J & Anton, B (2005) 'Promoting and protecting youth mental health through evidence-based prevention and treatment', *American Psychologist*, 60, pp. 628–48