

MODULE 4.7

WHO CAN HELP?

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Who can help?

Objectives

- Services and programs for students experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties are known and actively promoted across the school community.

Outcomes

- Understand the importance of the school's role in effectively promoting programs and services across the school community, in order to prevent or reduce the impact on students of mental health difficulties.
- Enhance understanding of the range of services and programs available to support students experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties.
- Engage in practices that proactively break down barriers to students and their families accessing programs and services.

Key messages

- There are a range of professionals, services and supports available for young people experiencing mental health difficulties.
- The school can play an active role in promoting programs and services across the school community to support students with mental health difficulties.
- Schools can work with students and their families to explore the most relevant and appropriate services and programs to meet students' needs.
- The school can actively work with students, families and agencies to improve help-seeking and reduce barriers to young people accessing services and programs.
- Students will benefit from staff and family support that enables them to participate actively in decision making about services and programs, and that respects their confidentiality.

Pathways to support



Young people experiencing mental health difficulties benefit from early recognition and timely support, which ultimately may include professional help. For young people there is often a 'pathway to support', which involves the support of family and school staff in accessing professional help.

There are a range of services and supports for students experiencing mental health difficulties and schools are well placed to know who the local private practitioners are who work with young people and families. They should also know the local community agencies that provide programs and support services, including counselling, group work, family support and other initiatives.

It is important for young people to feel empowered and ready to seek support in order for it to be beneficial.

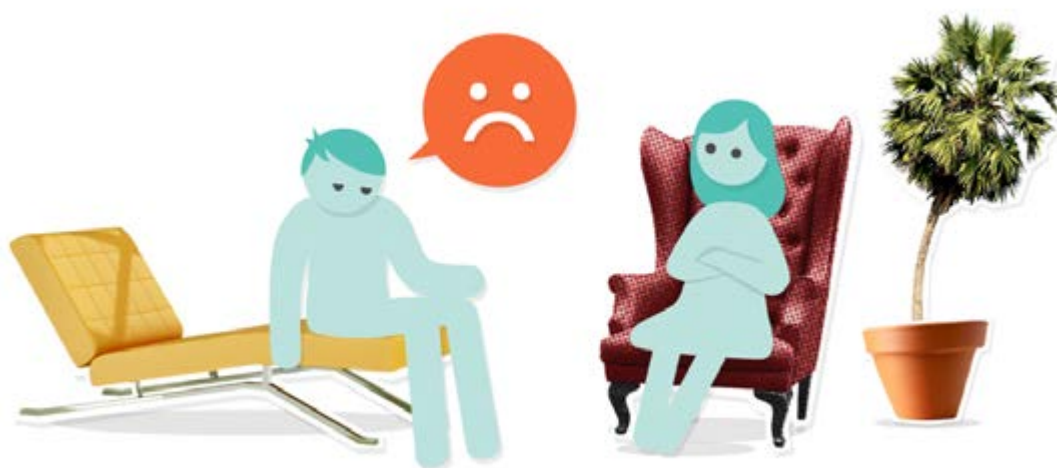
It is important to note that increasingly services and programs are being made available online or via the telephone in order to improve access. A number of these services are discussed in this document.

Methods of help

Face-to-face

Traditional supports for young people have tended to be face-to-face counselling. This often involves an assessment process to determine eligibility and to fully understand the young person's needs. The level of engagement between the young person and the counsellor requires a trusting, respectful relationship, which can take some time to build.

Accessing face-to-face counselling can be challenging for some young people, particularly when travel and cost are prohibitive. During recent years the Australian Government has extended the Medicare Benefits Scheme to include mental health care treatments. See <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba-fact-pat> for up-to-date information about this scheme.



Family involvement

Family may or may not be involved in the counselling, depending upon the issues facing the young person, and the way a particular counselling service operates. For younger adolescents, parents are often involved, but for older adolescents the family may be less likely to be a part of the sessions. Families may, however, be interested in providing support to the young person at home. Funding arrangements will often determine this as well.

Accessing face-to-face counselling

Counselling services are available to young people in a range of settings, including public health services, community agencies and through private practitioners. Counselling may also occur at a school setting and this is often a less stigmatising experience than seeking help from an external counselling service.



The most appropriate source of support for young people will depend upon their particular issue or need and the severity of their concerns. Traditionally, young people are referred to child and adolescent mental health services. However, these places are increasingly dealing with young people considered to be most at risk, so knowing about other services that can provide support is crucial to avoid time being wasted in accessing services.

At times young people with specific needs will benefit from a more specialised response such as:

- family support services or family-youth mediation services if there is family conflict or the family is experiencing difficulties. Parenting programs may be offered to assist families with parenting their adolescents
- drug and alcohol counselling, if drug and alcohol issues are creating significant concern or at risk behaviours
- specialist services for eating disorders, including information and out-patient and in-patient support.
- private mental health practitioners, such as psychologists or psychiatrists, who specialise in particular areas such as autism spectrum disorder or anxiety. Often general practitioners will be aware of these practitioners and will be able to make referrals. Better Access funding or private health insurance funding may assist with the cost of these private services.

Holistic counselling services

Some face-to-face counselling now occurs within a one-stop-shop venue (such as headspace) so that young people can access a range of supports from the one place. As the centres are set up to be youth-friendly, they provide an opportunity for young people to engage with a range of professionals in a space where they feel safe and comfortable. They also enable young people to be seen in a more holistic way than in more traditional services, which may focus predominantly on one aspect of the young person's mental health.

headspace is the national youth mental health foundation with over 60 centres around Australia. headspace helps young people aged 12-25 who are going through a tough time, providing support for problems like depression, anxiety, bullying and body image. See <http://www.headspace.org.au/about-headspace/what-we-do/what-we-do> to find out more information on the kind of help headspace can offer.

Online



We know that young people are often reluctant to access face-to-face help because of a concern that others will find out and they will be negatively judged. This concern can be especially prevalent in smaller communities.

In recent years a range of online supports have become available to young people, including:

- online counselling via webchat and/or email (for example, headspace - <http://www.headspace.org.au> and beyondblue - <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>)
- online treatment or prevention programs for common mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression (for example, the MoodGYM - <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au>, the BRAVE Program - <https://brave4you.psy.uq.edu.au/>)
- online forums where young people can read about others' experiences and potentially connect with them (For example, ReachOut.com (<http://forums.au.reachout.com/>) and headspace 'is it just me?' (<http://www.headspace.org.au/is-it-just-me>).



The introduction of smartphones is further expanding the frontiers with the explosion of mental health apps. These may range from the basic that simply provide mental health information to the sophisticated, such as those that seek to monitor a young person's mental health and provide tailored responses via the automatic collection of data on such things as physical activity, social media use, and even music preferences.

Website portals such as Beacon (www.beacon.anu.edu.au) and Mind Health Connect (www.mindhealthconnect.org.au) are being established to help the community identify appropriate online services and programs for mental as well as physical health issues.

Telephone

Services such as Kids Helpline, eheadspace telephone counselling, the *beyondblue* Support Service and Lifeline have offered telephone counselling services for some time. The services aim to ensure accessibility to immediate support when concerns are present.



Telephone support can be useful for young people to gain assistance in dealing with a one-off situation, but could also be a safe starting point to test out what it is like to talk about their concerns and how they are feeling. Depending upon the concern, it may be suggested that they consider face-to-face counselling and further information about this would be provided.

This area is relatively new and will likely evolve over time as organisations work out what works best for young people.

Telephone help services' ability to cope with the demand can be a cause for concern if more young people are contacting the service than can be managed. Young people may feel discouraged about seeking further support if calls cannot be responded to in a timely way. Having a range of options available, including a range of telephone numbers, could be helpful so that young people can call another phone number if one does not respond.



Referrals to mental health professionals

A range of mental health professionals with varied backgrounds and approaches can work with young people regarding their mental health and wellbeing. Some may be available by referral from the school, while others may require a referral from a general practitioner.



Mental health professionals within school

Some schools have access to professionals within their setting, including psychologists, social workers, teachers or student welfare staff with mental health training, school health promotion nurses and youth workers.

In some cases, students may feel more comfortable, and find it easier, to rely on teachers or other school staff for support. Depending upon the circumstances, this may or may not be possible or appropriate. Boundaries around the role of teachers and school staff need to be clear, so that they do not become over-involved, but also are not dismissive.

Mental health professionals outside of school

Within the community there are a range of professionals who provide support for young people, including psychologists, psychiatrists, youth workers, occupational therapists, mental health nurses, counsellors with mental health training, family therapists and social workers.

Sometimes mental health practitioners will have a particular focus such as drug and alcohol work or family therapy work. Depending upon the needs of the young person, it may be necessary for a number of mental health professionals to work in partnership. For example, a psychiatrist or other medical practitioner may prescribe medication, while a psychologist may provide counselling support.



Mental health professionals: Quick reference guide



School staff who can provide support

Schools may have their own internal processes they can promote to students about how to access staff with mental health training. Some schools may have other staff, such as youth workers or health promotion nurses, who are able to provide support to young people.



General practitioners

Outside of school, general practitioners are often the first point of call for young people and their families and increasingly they are becoming the gatekeepers for mental health referrals. Some general practitioners have undertaken training to assist them in supporting young people. A referral from a general practitioner is required in order to claim the Medicare rebate for mental health treatment from other professionals.



Psychologists

Psychologists provide assessment and treatment for a range of mental health difficulties. They do not prescribe medication. No referral is necessary, although to obtain funding under Better Access funding a general practitioner is required to develop a mental health care plan. Some rebates are also available through private health insurance cover.



Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are doctors who have undertaken additional training to become specialists in mental illness. Referrals are required from a general practitioner or paediatrician.



Paediatricians

Paediatricians are doctors who specialise in treating children. They consider what is typical behaviour for children at different ages to determine if a problem is physical or emotional. Referrals are required from a general practitioner.



Youth workers

Youth workers provide a range of support and assistance to young people and are often employed in community agencies.



Occupational therapists

Occupational therapists provide assessment, counselling and support to assist young people cope better with their day-to-day functioning. They are often employed in community health services and agencies.



Drug and alcohol workers

Drug and alcohol workers provide assessment and support in relation to drug and alcohol issues. They are often employed in specific drug and alcohol services in agencies and community health services.



Social worker

Social workers provide assessment, counselling and support in relation to a range of issues facing young people and families. They are often employed in community agencies and hospitals.



Speech pathologists

Speech pathologists assess and treat people who have a communication disability. They are employed in a variety of settings, including schools and mental health services.

Support options for serious mental health issues

Depending upon the severity — particularly if risk-taking or suicidal thoughts and/or behaviours are present — some young people may require intensive support. This can include access to mental health inpatient units for a period of time to ensure the young person's safety, manage medication and to ensure their needs are properly understood. Support can also include other services, such as family therapy, assistance with any accompanying drug and alcohol issues, and links to local service providers who can provide more ongoing support and assistance.

Schooling during inpatient treatment



In situations where a young person receives inpatient treatment, they may not be attending school until they are well enough. Some inpatient units have a school attached to them so that the student can continue to remain engaged in education.

In any event, the student's secondary school can play a crucial role by remaining in contact with the young person and developing a return-to-school plan. They can also liaise with the inpatient unit about how they can best support the student on return-to-school. It may be that there will be ongoing contact with the unit for some time and the school can attend meetings and, with the young person's consent, share information about school progress and continuing needs. The student's return-to-school, and active participation in school life and peers, will be built into their mental health plan.

Developmentally, it is important for young people to continue to feel part of the school.

Why young people often do not seek help

Young people having ongoing struggles with their mental health often do not seek help from family or friends or look to access professional help. Apart from the initial first step of recognising there is a problem, research has identified a number of all too common barriers (Rickwood et al., 2007):

- belief that their issues are not 'solveable' and that no-one can help
- feelings of shame or guilt over their thoughts, emotions or behaviours
- concerns about what others (friends, family, peers) will think about them
- a belief (or hope) that the issues are manageable or will resolve over time
- difficulties in understanding or articulating what is happening to them
- lack of knowledge regarding available services
- negative previous experience with services or providers
- lack of access to services (including support to access services such as transport)
- concerns over confidentiality.

Often it is family, friends or school staff who detect worrying changes in a young person's mood or behaviour, and who express their concern to that young person (in some cases forcing the issue) that ultimately results in the young person getting professional help. Practical suggestions for helping a friend are provided in **Module 4.6 Looking after your friends**.

Common student concerns about attending services

Once young people recognise their need for support, they may have a number of concerns when they think about accessing professional help, including:

- how to approach the service and ask for help
- what will happen during the session
- whether confidentiality will be maintained and if there is any risk of their private information being shared or given out
- whether adults will just tell them what they should do
- what role their family will be expected to play.

Many aspects are out of the control of a school, but there are many other ways a school can facilitate help.



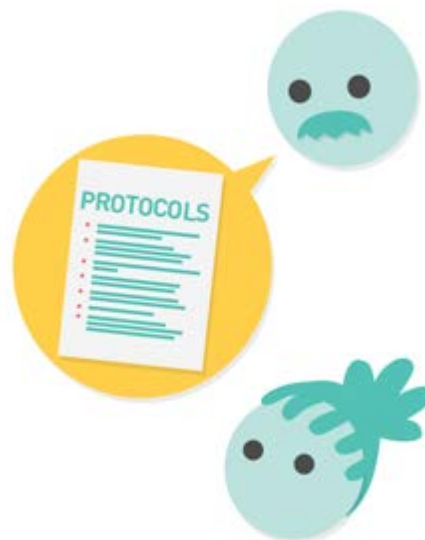
Confidentiality

An ongoing consideration for all mental health professionals and schools is confidentiality. Young people will be unlikely to access mental health support if they believe their confidence will be broken or they are uncertain about how their confidential information will be handled.

Mental health professionals and schools can support young people by:

- developing protocols about what information will be shared
- clearly outlining those circumstances when confidentiality could be broken
- helping young people to feel empowered by participating in case management meetings or in working with staff to determine what information will be shared (this includes information shared with family members and school staff members).

While young people may be encouraged to share information of relevance to those important people in their lives, it is also important that staff respect a young person's desire to maintain their privacy.



Negative perceptions of mental health services

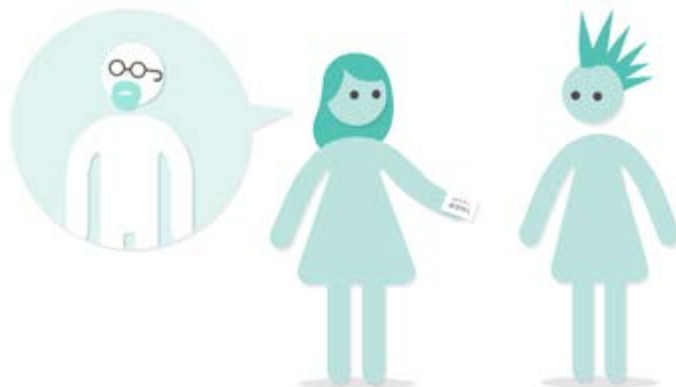


Families are more likely to seek help from people in their social networks or from non-mental health professionals. Decisions to access professional help are largely influenced by the opinions and attitudes held by those in their social network. When these opinions are positive, families are more likely to seek professional help, while negative perceptions can be a barrier.

Schools are well placed to reduce these barriers by promoting support services positively. This could occur in a range of ways, including:

- mental health promotion to reduce stigma associated with discussing mental health difficulties
- encouraging services to attend the school to reduce transport and access issues
- staff being aware of services — who is available and what they offer — so that they can speak with credibility about services they suggest
- school staff (such as student welfare staff) offering to support students and families by assisting with referrals and offering to attend sessions if needed
- school staff working effectively with students and families to clarify concerns to help understand if professional support is needed.

How staff can facilitate help



When school staff understand that there are potential barriers to help seeking and that help seeking is not a simple process that young people can undertake without support, then they are able to:

- support the young person in accessing information about the services available in the local area
- share their own understanding of what the services offer
- help the young person think about questions to ask to check out if the service is going to be useful to them
- encourage the young person to make their own decisions about what they think will be most helpful for them
- encourage the young person to ask questions when they first meet with a mental health worker so they feel more comfortable. Questions could include:
 - What information will remain confidential?
 - Who can access files?
 - What are the limits of confidentiality?
 - What will we do when we meet?
 - How many sessions will I come here for?
 - Who will you talk to about these sessions?
 - Will you write down things I say?
 - Can I tell my friends and family what we discuss?
 - What happens if I don't want to come back again?
 - Will other people know that I'm here?

The diverse nature of young people and their needs, as well as their beliefs about mental health and help-seeking, means that there will not be one response that will best meet the needs of all students at any one point in time. Some students may not be ready to seek help when adults suggest it.

Guidelines for setting up a mental health support network for your school

- Schools will have limits to what they can provide, so it is important to find the right balance between what can be offered at school and when students need to be referred to an external support or service.
- Consider your mental health strategy from a promotion, prevention and early intervention framework so that promotion is balanced with more interventionist responses.
- Developing a service list can be helpful for understanding what is available. Don't just think of the obvious mental health services – think of any organisations that can extend your services.
- Develop a contact sheet of people to refer to if needed. Make sure it is up-to-date so that you are prepared should a student experience a mental health issue.



Developing partnerships

Schools may be able to develop partnerships with local agencies to obtain a range of supports beyond individual referrals. Examples include:

- the development of programs to be held at the school
- visits for students to the agency to find out what the agency offers
- professional development for staff
- secondary consultation when school staff are concerned about a student, but for a range of reasons cannot arrange for the student to access support directly.

For more information on developing partnerships see **Module 4.8 Building support pathways**.



Promoting mental health services and programs to the school community

MindMatters will provide schools with information about the main types of supports or services available to young people and families and how to access these. Schools are well placed to identify the programs and services available in their local community. Below are some simple promotional opportunities:

- Identify the most relevant programs and services and obtain posters - including local programs and services, as well as national phone lines and websites.
- Map out the school site with students to identify best places for posters and other information. Include students in planning where posters and other information will be most accessible to students from each year level.
- Work with local program and service providers to arrange regular visits to the school and visits to their sites. Begin with contacting local agency staff to identify key target groups and scope for visits.
- Include students in arranging mental health expos with speakers and information stalls. Students will be able to identify the types of support and topics that will be useful for them. The more students are involved, they more likely they will be to promote the expos to their friends and families.
- Use parent/teacher evenings and information sessions to promote programs and services. This sends a message that the school is part of the broader community and a place to access information. This will also be useful for staff during sessions if concerns are raised by parents.
- Use school newsletters and the school website to promote programs and services. Tips and links to relevant websites and phone numbers could also be useful as a regular part of the newsletter. Messages from school staff could be included to remind parents about the school's role in linking them with community programs and services.
- Identify community events and national and state/territory days to promote mental health support (for example, RUOk). Student involvement could be harnessed to plan these events and local media could be contacted to further promote and highlight the school's work.



MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools developed by *beyondblue* with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health.

See more MindMatters resources at www.mindmatters.edu.au

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