

MODULE 4.8

BUILDING SUPPORT PATHWAYS

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Building support pathways

Objectives

- Schools seek to build effective linkages, and have shared policies and procedures with external agencies that support young people and their families.
- Information on internal and external pathways and programs that support youth mental health are actively promoted across the whole school community.
- The school seeks to work collaboratively with families and professionals who are involved in caring for their students' mental health and learning.

Outcomes

- Enhance understanding of internal and external pathways for supporting youth mental health.
- Enhance understanding of school policies and procedures for linking young people and families with external agencies.
- Develop understanding of working collaboratively with students and their families (where applicable) and the professionals involved in caring for students' mental health and wellbeing and learning.

Key messages

- Schools best support students with mental health difficulties when they work together with the student, family and mental health professionals.
- Schools need to have effective policies and procedures, as well as partnerships with external agencies in order to support students who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

What are the benefits for schools and health and community services working closely together?



Schools want to achieve the best outcomes for their students, but often struggle when trying to support individual students experiencing emotional or mental health difficulties to get the help they need and to remain engaged in their schooling. Many schools are unsure of what programs and services exist outside the school gates or who can help, and thus tend to deal with the challenges themselves.

By being aware of available referral options, schools can facilitate appropriate supports for young people. This reduces the distress both the young person, and those who care for them, experience and improve their longer term prospects. By linking together and mobilising resources, schools and community services can then achieve significant positive outcomes for young people.

There are clear benefits of school-health and community collaboration in supporting students' mental health. These include:

- improved capacity for prevention
- improved access to services
- efficient use of limited resources (including more appropriate referrals)
- improved continuity of care.

While some communities have more access to services than others, when schools explore what's available they may identify more services or become more aware of, and make better use of, existing services. There are national services such as headspace, which are becoming more accessible to communities.



Collaboration

In an ideal world, the schooling, health and community sectors have a shared agenda with respect to youth mental health and work in an integrated and coordinated manner. In reality, collaboration between these systems is often challenging and tends to vary across different regions in Australia. In general, different levels of collaboration are achieved between the various systems including:

- **Informal – initial conversations or information sharing**
- **Coordinated – beginning to link together**
- **Partnership – working together towards a common goal or purpose**
- **Collaboration – sharing resources and developing extensive plans**
- **Integrated – more consistent and ongoing partnering with well-established arrangements**

(adapted from Franklin & Streeter, 1995)

How can schools engage local services to support MindMatters implementation?

Effective working relationships between schools and local services and organisations are generally achieved when the respective parties:

- are clear of the goals and responsibilities of each party
- engage in activities to help each service understand the perspective of the other
- have realistic expectations of each other and what can and cannot be undertaken
- have an appreciation (and some empathy) of the pressures each other faces
- have clear points of contact between respective organisations who can troubleshoot any difficulties.



Some of the practical steps schools can take to build engagement with local service providers include:

- Schools mapping local and regional service providers. Directories from local councils or state and territory government websites can be useful in identifying services. The Raising Children Network website has the 'My Neighbourhood' mapping tool at <http://raisingchildren.net.au/myneighbourhood/>. Schools can also obtain this information from mental health professionals working with the school.

School staff attending local networking meetings (or at least being on the mailing list to obtain information).

- Obtaining information about identified services including: what services they are able to provide, the service's target groups, and capacity to engage with the school. This information may be gleaned from the agency's website but more accurate and tailored information will be obtained through meeting together to explore the school's needs and the capacity of the service.
- Inviting service providers to relevant meetings. These could be events for the school community or meetings set up especially for service providers to hear about the school and their interest in partnering. You may want to consider inviting service providers to be members of the MindMatters action team.
- Exploring possible community awareness days such as 'RUOK? Day' and partner with local community agencies.
- Including local agencies in activities or learning opportunities as part of the school curriculum. This could include professional development of staff in areas such as social and emotional learning or co-facilitation of groups.

What are some key national organisations or services that link with schools?

headspace

headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, established and funded by the Commonwealth Government of Australia in 2006 to help young people aged 12 to 25 years who are going through a tough time to obtain health advice, support and information.

headspace services that may be helpful for schools are:

- **headspace** centres
- **eheadspace**
- **headspace** School Support.

<http://www.headspace.org.au>

headspace centres can link with schools to accept referrals, provide information about available services and assist schools in helping to engage young people in attending their centres. There are now almost 100 centres around Australia, which can help with:

- general health
- mental health and counselling
- education, employment and other services
- alcohol and other drug services.

<http://www.headspace.org.au/headspace-centres>

eheadspace is a free, confidential and anonymous telephone and web-based mental health support service for young people aged 12 to 25 and their families and friends. Schools can let students know about this service, which may be particularly useful in remote locations or as an initial contact for young people who may not be comfortable attending a headspace centre in person.

<https://www.eheadspace.org.au/>

headspace School Support works directly with school communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from suicide. This service provides training programs and online resources designed specifically for schools. The service is flexible and is designed to respond to the individual needs of schools. Support is provided by working with relevant education bodies, local headspace centres and other service providers.

<http://www.headspace.org.au/what-works/school-support>

Rania's story illustrates the potential impact of a referral from a school to a headspace centre:

"When I was younger I was always outgoing. It would have been in Year 7 when things began to change as I began to withdraw and fight with my parents.

Over the next few years I went between feeling so bad it almost physically hurt to just feeling numb. I quit music, drama and sports. Everything felt pointless or painful.

I started fighting with my friends who were telling me to get help. I didn't think anyone could help me and I didn't think I deserved to feel better.

I googled 'depression' and it matched exactly what I was feeling. Eventually I talked to my parents and then my school counsellor, which led me to a local **headspace** centre.

The process of going to speak to someone who I'd never met before about what was going on was really, really scary.

The centre wasn't as clinical or intimidating as I pictured it. I felt listened to – my problems weren't written off as teenage angst or moodiness. I didn't feel they had any preconceptions about what was wrong with me – that made it easier to talk and to go back.

I went to **headspace** for some time and I started to get better in about Year 10. I stopped going once I felt I had the tools to cope with life again and I had learned to ask for help. I was left knowing that the door was still open. I'd learned to talk to my family, friends and teachers and express what I was going through."



Child and adolescent mental health services

Each state and territory has child and adolescent mental health services, which focus on the needs of children and young people. These services vary between states and territories and across regions in terms of their priority areas, ways of working and engagement strategies. They often partner with schools for referral support, secondary consultation, professional development and delivery of programs.



Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between five and 25. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Kids Helpline counsellors talk with almost 6,000 young people each week and help with all sorts of problems, big and small.

<http://www.kidshelp.com.au>
1800 55 1800

beyondblue Support Service

The *beyondblue* Support Service provides information on depression, anxiety and related disorders, available treatments and referrals to relevant services.

For the cost of a local call, callers can access immediate counselling support that is provided by a team of trained mental health professionals. The *beyondblue* Support Service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

<http://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support>
1300 22 4636

School procedures for referral pathways



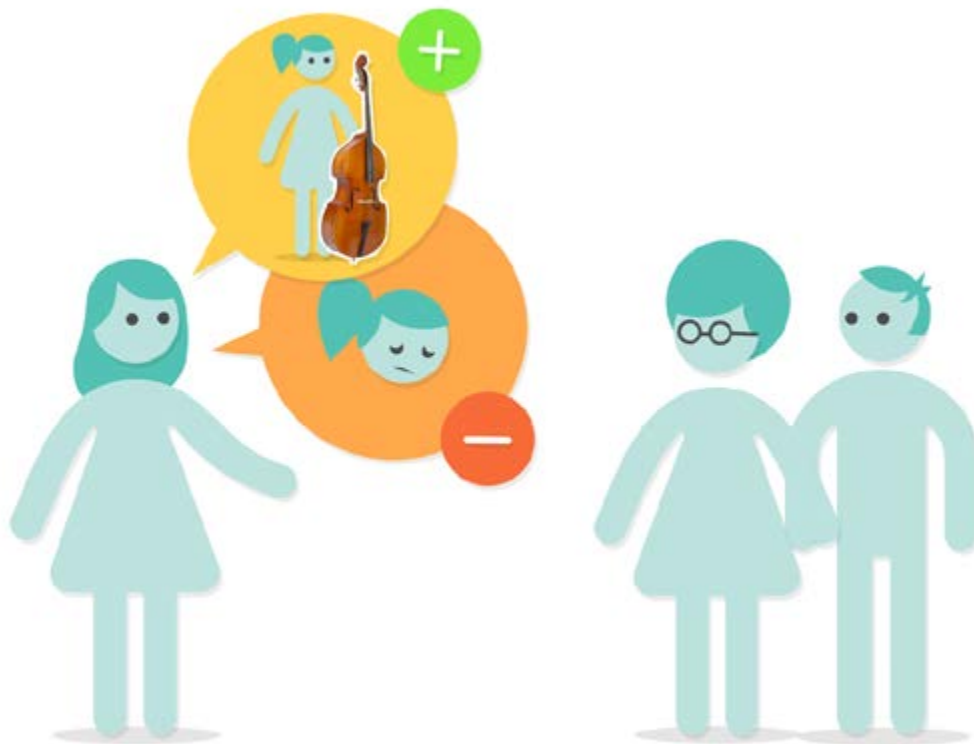
To effectively assist students' and families' access to services, schools need robust referral policies and processes that are relatively simple to follow. These policies and processes will be unique to each school and determined by a range of factors including access to services, cultural diversity and available internal supports.

The following example illustrates how effective procedures can guide actions – from the initial awareness that there may be a mental health issue, to the point where collaboration with external services may be required:

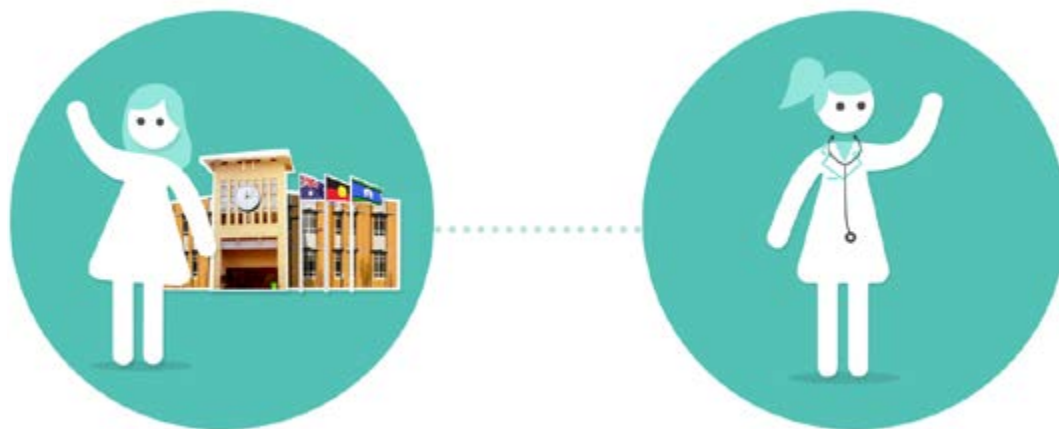
Step 1	A teacher concerned about a student's mental health and wellbeing follows school procedures and firstly 'checks in' with the student to get their views about how they are going.
Step 2	The teacher also notes key aspects of the student's behaviours that are of concern, identifying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when and where they observe particular behaviours • how often they happen • when they first observed them • whether anyone else is worried (e.g. other staff, students, family members).
Step 3	Being sufficiently concerned about the student's mental health, the teacher takes the next step and discusses their observations with a senior staff member or staff member responsible for student wellbeing.
Step 4	After discussions, a range of options are proposed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising concerns with the parent or carer (with student's knowledge) • continuing to monitor the student's wellbeing over a limited period of time before discussing again • discussing with other staff to gather more information • referring to an external agency for additional support. <p>In accordance with school procedures, the teacher and other staff members involved in the discussion choose the most appropriate response.</p>
Step 5	A follow up meeting with the staff involved is scheduled to assess progress and determine further actions.

Tips for attending case management meetings

- Check who will be attending the meeting, e.g. student? Parent?
- Request an agenda.
- Ask for clarification about what is expected of you.
- Consider what information the student expects you to keep confidential and not share with family, other staff and mental health professionals.
- Reflect on students' strengths that you can share at the meeting.
- Think about any concerns you have that you would like to raise at the meeting.
- Ask yourself what would help you to do your job better with this student and whether this group could be helpful.
- Ask how decisions will be conveyed to all parties.
- Confirm actions.
- Clarify if a follow up meeting will be required.



Whether to refer to an external agency



Deciding when to refer to external services and when to respond within the school can be challenging at times, particularly when students are reluctant to seek support. Having processes within the school that enable this to be done in an effective way, which respect the student's confidentiality and rights to be part of the decision making process, are important. Consider:

- What is the most significant concern at the moment for the student, family and staff? What are the school-specific concerns?
- What can we handle within the school? Who is available to provide support? Is there a staff member the student has an existing positive relationship with? Are current school staff available? Does the issue require specialist mental health support?
- What can be done immediately to provide support to the student?
- What do we know about the student? For example: age, family circumstances, interest in accessing support, previous support they have accessed, strengths and abilities, additional needs such as learning or physical health concerns?
- If the concerns are beyond the capacity of the school or are complex, what services are available in the local community? What do we know about them, e.g. waiting lists, target group, accessibility, cost and how will this impact on the referral process?
- Who will engage the student and family – will the student and family self-refer or will a school staff member make the referral? Who will follow up progress?

Knowing what to do in a crisis

School staff need to know what to do in times of crisis, such as suicidal behaviours, self harming and drug use by students. Policies and procedures need to be really clear about this and staff need confidence in knowing how to deal with the situation and get the student support, protect other students and look after themselves.

Confidentiality and young people

Importance of trust

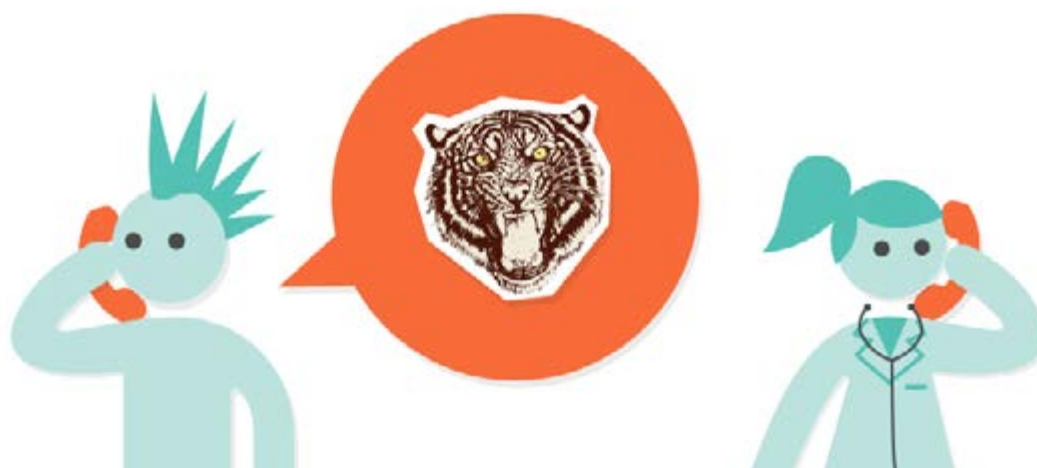
For young people to feel supported and willing to share their concerns it is necessary for them to trust the school staff member or mental health professional. An important component of trust for young people relates to how the information they share is handled. Knowing it will be respected and confidentiality maintained will help them to feel supported and more willing to seek help.



Challenges for school staff

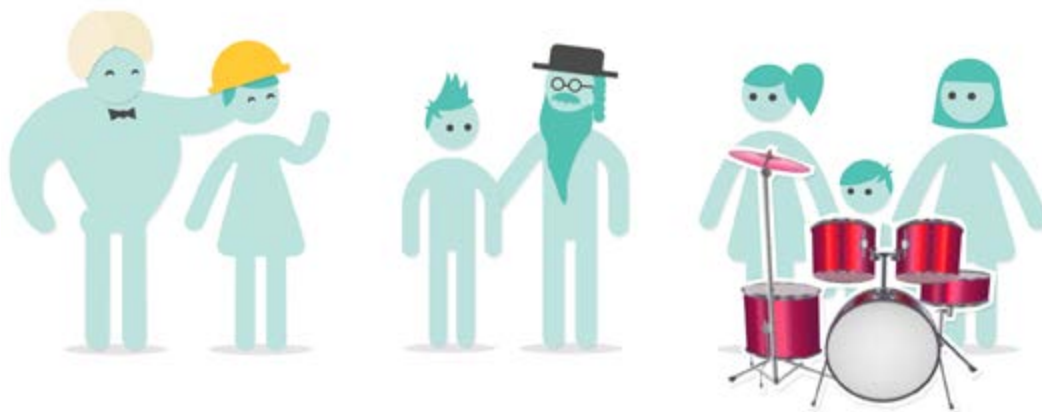
One of the challenges for school staff and workers is to be able to share information with other staff or families while respecting the trust shown by the young person in providing information to them. The best way to handle this is to openly discuss with the young person this dilemma and ask them explicitly about their expectations about any information to be shared. It is also important for staff to remember that there will be some limits to confidentiality if certain information is shared – such as risk to the young person or someone else. Being clear about this at the outset and reminding young people again as required is important for trust to be developed and maintained.

Young people's self-referrals



Older students can access services without parental consent and schools will need to be aware of the need to respect confidentiality in these cases. Having their children self-refer can be confronting for parents and may lead to staff feeling uncertain about what information should be shared with parents. The age at which general practitioners and mental health professionals will see a young person without consent of parents varies between states and territories but is usually around 16 years of age as long as the young person is considered to be able to understand.

Diversity



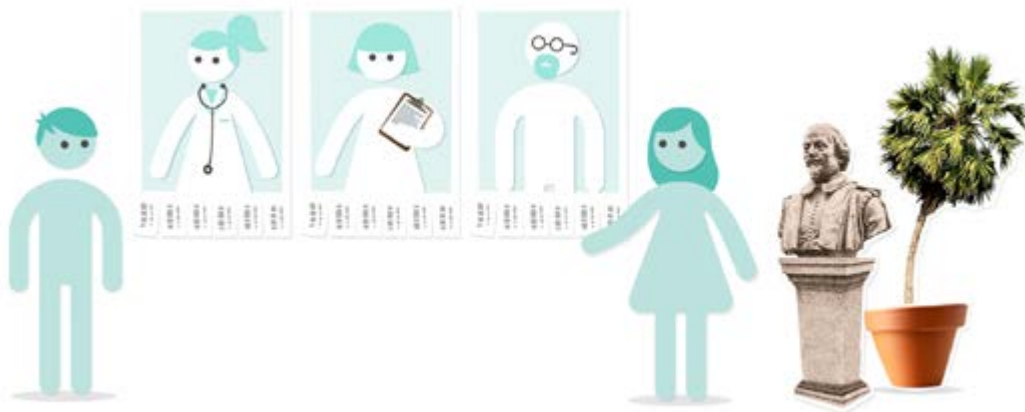
In order for school communities to engage students and work effectively with families, an understanding of the important role that the socio-cultural context plays in their lives will be required. This is particularly relevant when considering areas such as mental health and wellbeing. Appreciating various conceptions of mental health and wellbeing, including the use of different terms to describe it (e.g. social and emotional wellbeing is the preferred term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) will ensure that schools can engage families and broader community members in MindMatters.

Young people's mental health difficulties cannot be understood in isolation of who they are in relation to their diversity. As young people are still developing their identity, it is essential that services are able to assist them in continuing this development as part of their support of the mental health difficulty. This includes taking care during the assessment process not to highlight the diversity but rather to embrace it as core to who the young person is.



Mental health service workers who are well-trained in understanding youth development, culturally safe in their practices and aware of diversity among young people will find it easier to build trusting and respectful relationships with young people. Schools will better support young people, their families and their workers when they also share this understanding.

Overcoming barriers to help seeking



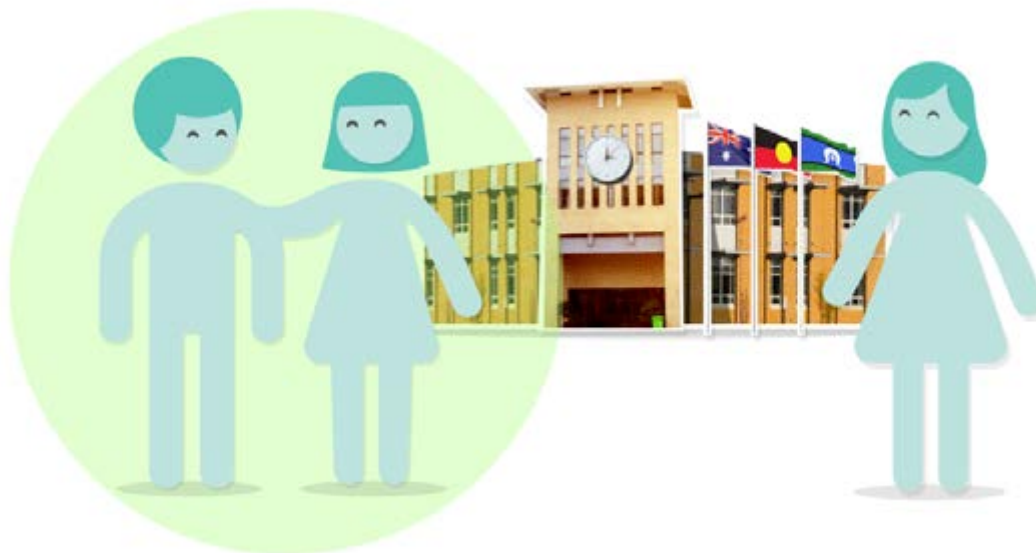
Schools need to be proactive in reducing the barriers to students and families' access to services by promoting support services positively. This could occur in a range of ways, including:

- 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 becoming 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 that would be useful.
- school staff working effectively with students and families to identify their concerns clearly so that there is an awareness of the need for professional support.

Is school the best place for students experiencing significant mental health difficulties?

That depends. Considerations of the student's wellness and ability to cope with school needs to be weighed up with the school's duty of care to the student, other students and staff.

Being with friends, having something to do during the day, and feeling connected to people who care about them are all part of students' developmental needs that can best be met through attending school.



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

References and key readings

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