

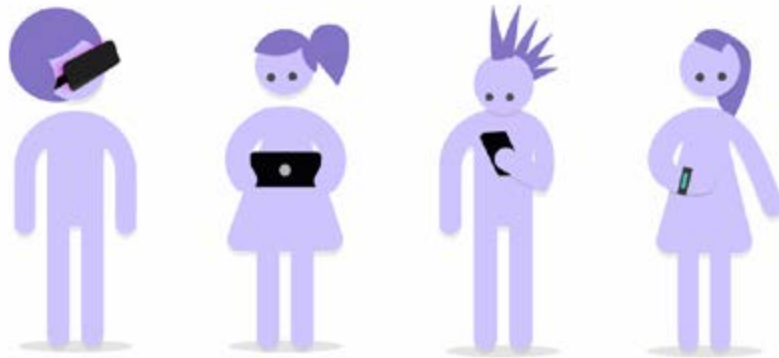
MINDMATTERS SPOTLIGHTS

# USING TECHNOLOGY OVERVIEW

# Table of contents

Technology presents opportunities and challenges for schools	1
Opportunities and challenges of social media	3
Empowering students to participate in school mental health promotion	5
Staff can get involved	7
Building knowledge and confidence	8
Schools need to be proactive	10
Bringing everyone along	11
Supporting students with mental health needs	13
Managing risks	16
Some additional risks	18
MindMatters can help	19
References and key readings	20

# Technology presents opportunities and challenges for schools



**Young people today have grown up in a world where technology is a core part of their lives. Internet connected devices may have been part of their home and school environments since birth and they have been shaped by this presence.** For these young people, technology is a way of expressing creativity, socialising, developing their identity and finding out stuff. More and more, young people go to the internet for help with important issues in their lives. One of these important issues is their mental health.

Technology enables students to connect with others who are going through similar experiences or who share their interests. It can open up a range of information which can be accessed in a confidential way, allowing students to reach out for support when they may not be able to access support in the school or community. Schools can be proactive in helping students critique and understand the types of mental health support and information available online and encourage them to use reputable and evidence informed sites.

## What does MindMatters mean by 'Technology'?

We use the term 'Technology' to refer to the digital platforms, applications and devices used to access information, link with others through social networks and seek help through online supports.

One of the newest uses of technology relates to social engagement and networking and there has been an influx of sites created for communication, uploading of images and creative ways of sharing information. This can lead to new forms of self-expression, sharing of experiences, appreciation of cultural beliefs and understandings – as well as providing access to mental health supports and sympathetic virtual communities.

Much has been written and reported about the potential risks of social media so it is helpful to consider both the opportunities and challenges.



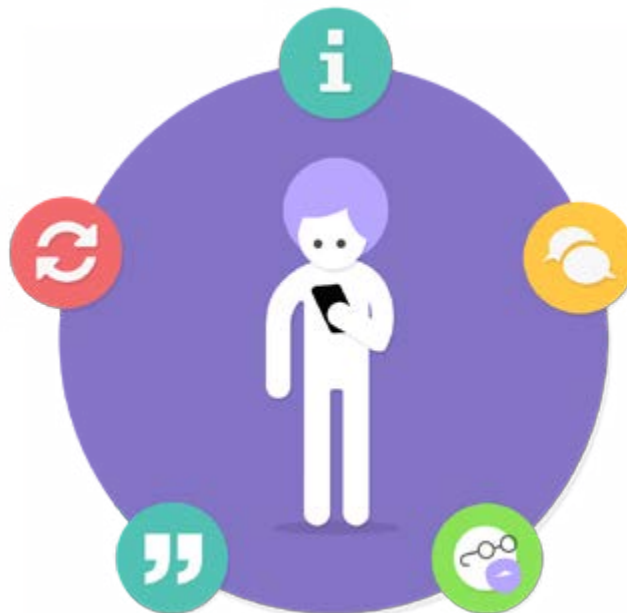
## Opportunities and challenges of social media

OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<p>Promote positive norms about health and wellbeing and enhance health promotion initiatives.</p>	<p>The range of content and culture of social media provides low-level exposure to a range of risks. However, experiencing some level of risk is necessary to build resilience online and offline.</p>
<p>Foster identity formation, community-building and creativity.</p>	<p>Across these positive developmental processes, children and young people may also experience upsetting and potentially harmful content and practices, which can have serious effects on their wellbeing.</p>
<p>Support the self-directed learning and aspirations of marginalised young people and extend formal and informal knowledge networks and social support for young people generally.</p>	<p>Poor integration of social media in formal and informal learning networks can reinforce social exclusion.</p>
<p>Online networks and resources that promote responsible attitudes to financial wellbeing may help to build young people's consumer and financial literacy.</p>	<p>More research is required to understand the multiple influences which may foster harmful consumption and financial practices.</p>
<p>Promote proactive approaches to issues of risk and safety. These approaches empower children and young people to develop their resilience and support their wellbeing.</p>	<p>Social media may also amplify risks to physical and emotional safety.</p>
<p>Support family and intergenerational relationships. Different generations of people will bring different skills and knowledge to social media. When young and older people, including family members, use technologies to collaborate and socialise they can find new opportunities to connect, utilise each other's strengths and can be watchful for each other's safety .</p>	<p>Social media may also be perceived as a barrier to traditional family relationships</p>

Source: (Swist, Collin, McCormack & Third, 2015).

**Common myth 1: Technology is not healthy for young people’s development or wellbeing. They are losing their skills to communicate face-to-face.**

Technology can support young people’s learning, development, social networks and mental health and wellbeing. It can provide access to opportunities to connect with others, and gain support, through the development of new skill sets to complement and build upon their existing social and emotional competencies. There is emerging research, which highlights the benefits of technology and in what circumstances young people can benefit.



Young people are engaging with technology in ways that challenge many traditional concepts of learning, connecting with others and seeking support. This can be difficult to understand for teachers and families who did not grow up with technology being such a core aspect of life. Concerns about risks, and the challenges of understanding the benefits of technologies, can make it seem too difficult. However, a failure to engage with new technologies within schools is likely to lead to missed opportunities in meeting the mental health and wellbeing needs of young people.

# Empowering students to participate in school mental health promotion

Technology is revolutionising access to mental health services and information and can “... reduce the disparities in access to health care as a result of isolation, stigma or cost” (Burns, et al., 2013, p. 10).

## **Common myth 2: All young people use technology anyway, so it is not necessary to focus on it at school.**

Not all young people have equal access to technology due to financial constraints, parental/carer expectations and understandings, and geographical locations. Schools can minimise the exclusion of students who don't have access to technology in the home environment by providing options for access at school.

In addition, students may not have the skills or knowledge to locate the best resources. Schools can help teach students how to critically evaluate mental health technologies, as well as direct them to valuable resources.

Largely, students will have the skills to be able to find and engage with mental health resources and services on the internet. However, the young person's ability to make good decisions is continuing to develop and this can affect their ability to:

- make sense of the wide range of information available
- decipher accurate information from inaccurate
- use good judgement when responding to others online
- make decisions about what is appropriate information to access.

Sifting through the available information in ways that draw out the most credible and accurate sources is not necessarily a strength of young people. Some research suggests that young people tend to use the top few results generated through search engines rather than searching more broadly. Spelling errors can lead young people to get misinformation. (Campbell & Robards, 2013). Young people may also be less discerning of the types of online social interactions they involve themselves in, potentially exposing themselves to risks that can impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

**Schools have a role here to empower students with competencies that will enhance their online experiences.**

Much of the heavy lifting in this area is done by the ICT Capability component of the [Australian Curriculum](#) which is integrated across all learning areas, so that students “... learn to use ICT with confidence, care and consideration, understanding its possibilities, limitations and impact on individuals, groups and communities.”

In relation to mental health and wellbeing, schools can build on the ICT components of the Australian Curriculum by:

- directing young people to researched and evidence-based information that can support their mental health and wellbeing
- introducing young people to a range of confidential supports and services, enabling them to reach out for support when they may not be comfortable to seek support in the school or community
- recommending safe places for young people to connect with others who are going through similar experience or who share interests.

## **How does belonging to an online community support mental health?**

Social networking sites can support a sense of belonging and inclusion for students. A sense of belonging provides young people with purpose, meaning, self-worth and social control, all of which are contributors to positive mental health.

Find out more about relationships and belonging in [MindMatters Module 1.4](#)



# Staff can get involved

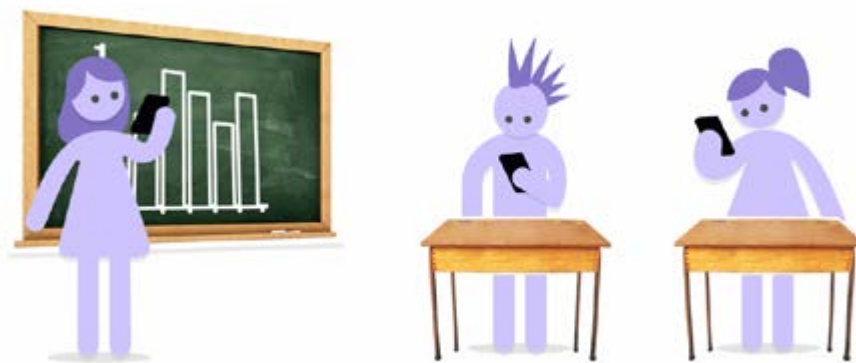
You don't need to be a technology guru to get involved in using technology to support your students' mental health and wellbeing. You can begin simply, and explore alongside your students.

## Try this for starters:

1. Select a mental health tool from the MindMatters technology toolbox and try it out for yourself. (Why not try a Mindfulness app?)
2. Have your students try the same tool in class.
3. Run a class discussion about this resource, and let it flow into a conversation on other mental health resources that your students may know.

There's any number of ways you could follow up, including running another session with a different online resource or app, or encouraging students to continue using this resource for a period of time and record their impressions. You may find it helpful to find out what sites and apps the students are already using, and seek their evaluation of these.

Remember that your students are a great source of information and know-how. Acknowledging their unique insights into new technologies and involving them in decisions and planning around the use of mental health technology in the classroom will help empower them in their own mental health support.



## Building knowledge and confidence

With technology, everyone is always in 'catch-up' mode. By the time you think you are on top of it all there's a bunch of new things happening. So don't get hung up on keeping up – simply continue to build your knowledge and skills. Here a few things teachers have found useful:

- Take an open and curious approach about your own use of technology for mental health promotion.
- Learn about online mental health sites and programs in order to help your students access the supports they need (through the school referral pathways and policies).
- Learn about the support services available online, (such as [eheadspace](#) and [Kids Helpline](#)) to provide guidance on help seeking.
- Engage in ongoing professional learning and skill development.

### Getting to know what's out there

There is an expanding range of resources, which can be useful for staff about the use of technology to support young people's mental health and wellbeing and the emerging research exploring this:

**[ReachOut \(website for students\)](#)** - Access to a range of resources that can be used by students and families.

**[ReachOut Professional](#)** - Resources for teachers (and other professionals) in relation to technology and young people, how to support students through curriculum programs and referral sources.

**[Young and Well Co-operative Research Centre](#)** - Young and Well CRC utilise a youth participatory approach in their work, including research methodologies, promoting youth voice and empowerment in engaging with young people and in research reports and recommendations they deliver.

Discussing your needs with the technology high-flyers in your school staff is also a great way to get support and some fresh ideas.

## What programs and applications should I use in class?

The [MindMatters technology toolbox](#) is a great place to explore the kinds of mental health technologies that may be useful at your school. The toolbox contains examples of websites, apps and communication tools for students, teachers, wellbeing staff and school leaders.



# Schools need to be proactive

**Technology is integrated into our lives. Cisco estimate that by 2020 there will 50 billion devices connected to the internet.** For schools, engaging with technology is a requirement in order to educate young people to live in our connected world. The impacts of this engagement reach almost every part of a school's operations – it is necessary to consider its role in most policies and procedures.

When planning how technology can be promoted as a mental health and wellbeing support for students, schools need to:

- consider the ways that technology intersects student mental health, wellbeing and anti-bullying policies, mental health procedures and referral pathways, and curriculum
- regularly review policies and procedures to help ensure their alignment with continually evolving technologies and usage patterns
- build the capacity of the school community to understand and embrace technology as part of a whole school approach to supporting students
- plan ways to empower students to be involved, take a lead and innovate in this space
- build technologies into mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention frameworks.

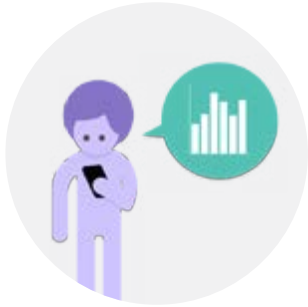
Schools will also need to be proactive in identifying key mental health apps, online resources and social media sites, which are reputable and supported by evidence. It would be useful therefore to have a system of classification that helps ensure that technology use is targeted and appropriate.

## A toolbox for classifying mental health resources

It can be difficult to know what technology to use and when to use it. To help you conceptualise the different kinds of resources, and how they can be used with your students we have provided the [MindMatters technology toolbox](#) that helps classify mental health resources

## Bringing everyone along

School leadership and wellness staff can lay the foundations for a cohesive whole school community response by engaging teachers, staff and families in the use of technology to support students' mental health and wellbeing.



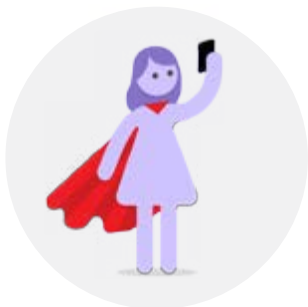
### School leaders can engage staff by:

- Exploring staff readiness – audit professional development strengths and needs.
- Empowering staff who are knowledgeable and confident with technology to support colleagues
- Trialling websites, apps, forums etc, and sharing learning experiences. Use the supplied [MindMatters Technology toolbox](#), to structure information on the trialled technologies and resources.



### School staff can engage students by:

- Asking students to identify what technology young people in the school community are using.
- Involving young people in exploring ways technology can be used in the school community to support student mental health and wellbeing.
- Incorporating the student voice into whole school planning approaches to effective and safe use of technology.



### School wellbeing staff can engage families by:

- Using technology to communicate with parents and carers.
- Supporting parents and carers to understand and manage the benefits and risks of technology use, including creating balance in family life which incorporates technology use with other activities.
- Providing information to parents about the ways in which technology can support young people's (and their own) mental health and wellbeing.
- Providing information about the school's approach to using technology for mental health promotion.

## How can schools engage with families?

- Engaging with families will be crucial in utilising technology for mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention work. MindMatters [Component 3 modules](#) look at how schools can communicate effectively with families.



# Supporting students with mental health needs

Efforts in recent years have attempted to understand the barriers to young people accessing mental health services. A range of online sites, services, supports and counselling that are engaging for young people have now been established. Recent research points to the fact that these online supports are well used.

## Where do young people go for help?

In relation to sources where young people turn to for help, the Mission Australia Youth Survey 2014 found that while most seek help from friends (87.7 per cent), parents (76.2 per cent) and relatives or family friends (66.9 per cent), the survey results also showed that:

- over 50 per cent said that they would go to the internet for help with important issues in their lives
- 15.9 per cent said they would seek help from an online counselling website
- over one third of respondents indicated that they would go to their teacher (36.2 per cent) or school counsellor (33.5 per cent) for help with important issues.

Whilst this pattern was similar for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, less said they would seek help from the internet (43.3 per cent) and more said they would seek help from a telephone hotline (17.4 per cent).





The second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey on Mental Health and Wellbeing (2014) found that, for 13 to 17 year olds, in the 12 months prior to the survey:

- 22.2 per cent had used an online service in the previous 12 months for help or information about emotional or behavioural problems
- 52 per cent of those with a major depressive disorder had used an online service including services provided by Headspace, Reachout and Youth Beyondblue, to get help or information about emotional or behavioural problems. Of those:
  - 40.2 per cent used online services to find out information about mental health issues
  - 29.6 per cent used online assessment tools to find out if they needed help
  - 8.6 per cent had participated in a chat room or support group
  - 7.4 per cent had received online personal support or counselling.

The survey also found that 37.6 per cent of parents and carers of children and adolescents with mental disorders used online services for help or information in the previous 12 months.

**For school wellbeing staff, these findings confirm that young people and their families are often receptive to online supports and information. It highlights that it is useful to have an understanding of how different sites, applications and services could be used. Some may be useful for helping individual students with mental health difficulties, while others may be relevant for use across the whole school community.**



The following sites provide information for school staff and/or health professionals on using online mental health sites and service to support professional practice:

- **[ReachOut: Using e-mental health services](#)** (for schools and health professionals)  
This free online professional development provides practical guidance on using e-mental health services in face-to-face work with young people, including helping young people recognise and respond to emerging mental health problems, and connecting to peer and professional support at the times they need it most.
- **[E-mental health in practice](#)** (for health professionals)  
eMHPrac provides free e-mental health training and support for health practitioners – GPs, Allied Health Professionals, and service providers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. eMHPrac aims to engage mental health professionals in the use of e-mental health by increasing awareness, knowledge and positive attitudes; building confidence and self-efficacy; and providing training and workforce support.
- **[Young and Well Co-operative](#)** (for schools and health professionals)  
Evidence-based mental health tools, applications and resources, research and professional development. The Young and Well CRC aims to explore the role of technology in young people's lives and to determine how those technologies can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25.

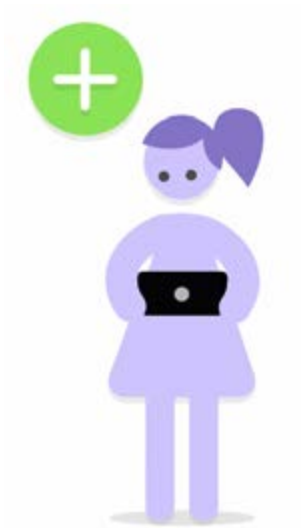
## How can schools help students with mental health difficulties?

Students with mental health difficulties can be supported through a whole school approach to mental health, and technologies may form part of that support. Find out more about supporting students in **[MindMatters Component 4](#)** modules.

# Managing risks

New technologies can be difficult to understand as knowledge around their use and impact is evolving. For example, reports about the dangers of cyberbullying, sexting or accessing pornography online by young people may lead to teachers being concerned about their duty of care and how they can ensure students are not exposed to inappropriate content.

Research has suggested that young people's awareness of risks and ability to keep themselves safe sometimes conflicts with adult views about young people's understanding of online safety (Strider, et al., 2012). If students are supported to critically analyse the content and process through which they engage with technology, they may be better prepared than adults might expect to navigate the risks and benefits associated with technology.



## **Common Myth 4: The internet breeds bullying and therefore should be avoided.**

Given that bullying occurs within the context of social environments, it is inevitable that the risk of bullying transfers to the online space. Avoiding the internet because of bullying is like avoiding school for the same reason. Bullying is a problem wherever it occurs and schools need to be proactive in reducing both online and offline bullying.

To find out more about addressing bullying, have a look at the [MindMatters Bullying Spotlight](#).

The Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia undertook a review in 2015 of children and young people's use of social media and its effect on their wellbeing. The review suggested moving beyond simplistic views of risk towards building a positive focus on the opportunities social media provides for young people to explore and share ideas, participate in communities, and to creatively engage in the digital world. In this view, risk is not inherent and static but something that is individual, situational and contextual. This shifts focus from the notion of 'avoiding' risks to an emphasis is on building individual skills for managing risks.

## Cybersafety

The Australian Government resource [Cybersafety in Schools](#), provides information and links to resources for students, teachers, parents and the broader community about creating safe online and offline environments.

School staff can meet their duty of care requirements by being both proactive and reactive in helping young people manage the risks associated with technology use. Proactive strategies include:

- Incorporating cybersafety into curriculum, year level events and health promotion activities as part of mental health promotion activities.
- Adopting a whole school approach to preventing bullying.
- Developing students' ability to critically analyse websites, apps and social sites to ensure that the sites are credible and safe.
- Supporting families through information shared via the website and newsletters as well as information sessions or workshops to empower them to support their young people in the safe and effective use of technology for mental health and wellbeing.

School staff should respond to incidents of cyberbullying or inappropriate technology use by following their school's policies and procedures. It is important to recognise that some students are more at risk of cyberbullying than others, including gender diverse and same-sex attracted young people, students with disabilities, students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Some additional risks



### Access and equity

While technology has the potential to connect young people in rural and remote areas to online services and communities, reducing their social isolation and providing opportunities for empowerment, it also carries risks. Young people from these communities, as well as those from low socioeconomic areas, may have less access to technologies at home. This may further disadvantage them compared to most urban young people. Schools can help by having computers available at school and providing class-based mental health promotion activities.

### Students with disabilities

In the same manner, technology can both support and disadvantage students with disabilities. Young people with disabilities may find opportunities to connect with others, feel an enhanced sense of belonging and be able to better participate in education through the use of technologies. However, these young people may require additional supports to engage with online sites and services, such as assistive technologies designed to improve access and engagement. Young people with a disability may also be more at risk of bullying or accessing inappropriate sites, so tailored cybersafety education and monitoring may be required to ensure safe and effective engagement with technology.



# MindMatters can help

MindMatters can help your school develop strategies and policies that build a positive school culture and develop resilience across the whole school population. Part of that picture is empowering students to use technology for their own mental health and wellbeing needs. MindMatters provides staff with practical advice and guidance so that they build both a whole school approach to mental health and support students who may be experiencing mental health difficulties in a timely and appropriate way. Promotion, prevention and early intervention are central tenets of the MindMatters' approach.



START MINDMATTERS  
IN YOUR SCHOOL TODAY

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](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au)

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