

MINDMATTERS SPOTLIGHTS

# SUICIDE PREVENTION

Making it happen: tips and activities  
for addressing this topic



# Suicide prevention

## Introduction

The 'Making it Happen Guide' for the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention is designed to assist you to prepare and deliver group professional learning using the MindMatters Spotlights, which can be found at [www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au). It consists of a possible sequence of professional learning activities to use with the school leadership team and a group of staff as you move through the Spotlight.

Suicide prevention is an important but sensitive topic. Ensuring that you are well prepared with these activities can support staff to embrace a challenging topic with confidence and safety.

MindMatters Spotlights can be used in flexible ways: as an individual, in small groups, as a faculty, as a whole staff, or as an action team. MindMatters Spotlights are not intended to be used with students and/or their families.

As each school context is unique, it is important to carefully plan the best approach to meet staff learning needs. Trained healthcare professionals and the school action team who have an understanding of mental health and the direction that the school wishes to take can be well placed to facilitate group learning on the MindMatters Spotlight topics.

Taking the time to consider and plan for the particular sensitivities that may arise from using the MindMatters Spotlights is an essential step for school leaders. It is important to be prepared for people who may want to seek support after sensitive discussions.

For more information and ideas use this guide in conjunction with the [How to Facilitate MindMatters Modules Facilitator Guide](#) and the key resources linked to this document. Principals Australia Institute Project Officers can also provide you with further advice and support.

## Prepare

**Before you begin facilitating a group session, you might like to undertake the following steps:**

1. View and undertake the Spotlight(s) yourself.
2. Familiarise yourself with any background reading, videos and references.
3. Decide which activities you will include and how much time you will aim to spend on them.
4. Check that your school allows access to YouTube, as each Spotlight contains YouTube videos. If not, speak to your IT team to get access.
5. Select a physical environment conducive to active learning (people sitting in discussion groups, room to move, access to water, refreshments and restrooms).
6. Decide whether each person will access the Spotlight or whether the group will use large screen projection (make sure the sound can be heard by all in the room, check speakers).
7. Organise copies of any pre-reading and any materials needed for activities.
8. Enlist support of the school leadership team and MindMatters action team members (if relevant).
9. Plan for particular discussion sensitivities. This guide provides information on some sensitivities to be mindful of, however it is useful to consult with relevant staff at your school and consider your school's context.
10. Enlist the support of a relevant healthcare professional to co-facilitate, lead the discussions, or provide you with support in delivering the MindMatters Spotlight.

It is important to consider that some staff may have a personal experience of suicide or suicide loss, which may make activities relating to suicide prevention particularly challenging. Acknowledging this at the beginning of the session gives participants permission to share as much as they feel comfortable and safe to share.



## Overview

Activity – For school leaders	Time	Materials needed
1. Preparing for using the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention and having staff suicide prevention focused conversations	30 minutes	Conversations Matter fact sheets - Factsheet: Group discussions about suicide prevention, Core principles: prevention-focused conversations, Factsheet: Supporting CALD communities to talk about suicide, MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention, online device.
2. Reflective questions for school leadership and action teams – policy and processes	30 minutes	Guiding questions, MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention, online device, relevant school policies and procedures.
Activity – For school staff	Time	Materials needed
1. Energiser – Twenty questions	5 minutes	Space for people to move around.
2. Develop (or revisit) agreements for working together	5 minutes	Whiteboard or poster paper, markers.
3. View animation – MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention	10–15 minutes	MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention animation, hard copy of the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention - Key factors tip sheet.
4. Our school’s approach to addressing Suicide prevention (Understanding my role and who is there to help)	20 minutes	Relevant school policies and procedures. MindMatters Spotlight (if appropriate).
5. Exploring resources and tools to support staff	20 minutes	Conversations Matter fact sheet – When someone is thinking about suicide.
6. Connecting – Four things in common	5 minutes	National phone and online support and details of staff supports. headspace Tip Sheets - Self care for school staff and Self care for school staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in remote areas.

## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL LEADERS



🕒 **TIME:** 30 minutes.

### 📄 **MATERIALS:**

- Conversations Matter fact sheets - [Factsheet: Group discussions about suicide prevention](#), [Core principles: prevention-focused conversations](#), [Factsheet: Supporting CALD communities to talk about suicide](#)
- [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention](#)
- Online device

❓ **PURPOSE:** To consider evidence-based core principles for having prevention-focused conversations when planning the use of the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention with school staff.

## 1. Preparing for using the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention and having staff suicide prevention focused conversations

### **Instructions:**

1. Read the Conversations Matter fact sheets:
  - [Factsheet: Group discussions about suicide prevention](#)
  - [Core principles: prevention-focused conversations](#)
  - [Factsheet: Supporting CALD communities to talk about suicide](#)
2. Familiarise yourself with the elements of the [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention](#) – animation, information, downloadable resources, panel video, further resources and links.
3. Discuss what appropriate facilitation of the MindMatters Spotlight information might look like for your school staff. Work through the Conversations Matter ‘things to remember’ for group conversations and core principles.
4. Document your plan of action.

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**Debrief:** Planning for important conversations assists schools to create safe learning environments for staff.


## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL LEADERS



 **TIME:** 30 minutes

 **MATERIALS:**

- Guiding questions
- [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention](#)
- Online device

 **PURPOSE:** Seeing suicide prevention within the broader context of MindMatters enables leadership groups to take a comprehensive and cohesive whole school approach to reduce the likelihood of suicide and to respond effectively to incidents.

## 2. Reflective questions for school leadership and action teams

### Instructions:

1. Watch the [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention](#) panel video.
2. Discuss the idea raised in the panel discussion that a whole school approach to suicide prevention includes promotion, prevention and early intervention for mental health, and postvention.
3. As a school leadership team review your school's policies and procedures relating to suicide prevention. You may find the following reflective questions useful to guide your conversation:
  - What policies and procedures are in place to prevent suicide in our school?
  - What policies and procedures are in place if a student attempts suicide? (such as returning to school after an attempt).
  - What policies and procedures are in place if a student or staff member dies by suicide? Do we have a post suicide plan (postvention plan?) .
  - What policies and procedures will support a student who may be at risk of suicide?.
  - What training and support have staff been provided with to help them be aware and able to respond early to concerns about a student at risk of suicide? (such as safeTALK training).
  - Are staff aware of how to raise concerns or follow referral pathways? Are there adequate internal referral pathways to the school to support staff?
  - Which staff have training and expertise in responding to suicide? Are there staff trained in appropriate responses (such as Mental Health First Aid or LivingWorks Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST)) on the school grounds each day? Are all staff aware of who they are and how to access their support?
  - What debriefing processes does the school have in place to support staff? What supports are in place for staff with higher levels of responsibility to respond to concerns?
  - What external supports does the school have in place for responding to a student at risk of suicide? What are the school's existing working relationships with agencies or healthcare professionals?

▼ [ACTIVITY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE](#) ▼


## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL LEADERS



 **TIME:** 30 minutes.

 **MATERIALS:**

- Guiding questions
- [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention](#)
- Online device

 **PURPOSE:** Seeing suicide prevention within the broader context of MindMatters enables leadership groups to take a comprehensive and cohesive whole school approach to reduce the likelihood of suicide and to respond effectively to incidents.

- What existing mechanisms does the school have to monitor social media relating to the school community and beyond?
- How does the school support staff members who may have their own experience of suicidal risk in themselves or their family? How does the school encourage staff to access supports such as Employee Assistance Programs when they need?

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**Debrief:** What action do we need to take? Who might we need to consult with and inform? How will we continue this conversation with the school staff, gain their input and build shared ownership?

## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL STAFF



 **TIME:** 5 minutes

 **MATERIALS:** Space for people to move around

 **PURPOSE:** To discuss the importance of checking in with others. To practice communication skills and model an activity that could be facilitated with students.

### 1. Energiser – Twenty questions

#### Instructions:

1. Invite participants to find a partner and choose who will be 'partner A' and 'partner B'.
2. Ask participants to think of a hobby – it could be one they currently do, they have always wanted to try or something they think is interesting.
3. Explain that they will have two minutes to guess their partner's hobby using a maximum of twenty closed questions (questions with yes or no answers).
4. After each pair has completed their questioning ask the group to share if they guessed their partners hobby? If they needed more questions? How many they used to guess correctly?
5. Invite participants to share any insights on communication and enquiry about this activity.

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**Debrief:** Questions can be powerful ways to find connections with others, to build positive relationships and to check in with others about their wellbeing. It is important to remember that the questions we ask will determine the answers we get; sometimes we have to rephrase our questions to be clearer or more specific.




## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL STAFF



 **TIME:** 5 minutes

 **MATERIALS:**

- Whiteboard or poster paper
- Markers

 **PURPOSE:** To create a safe learning environment so that all staff can contribute to the session in a sensitive and respectful way. To make expectations clear to ensure all participants have opportunities to contribute their views and ideas. To encourage people to take responsibility for their own learning and be accountable to their colleagues.

## 2. Develop (or revisit) agreements for working together

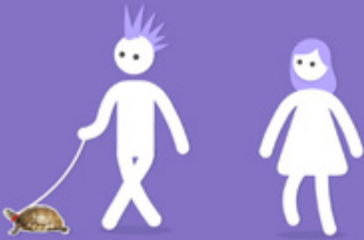
### Instructions:

1. Explain that MindMatters Spotlights contribute to the school's ongoing whole school approach to improving the mental health of students.
2. Detail any 'housekeeping' issues.
3. Acknowledge the sensitive nature of the topic/s, provide information on the supports available to staff and develop (or revisit) group agreements to keep the conversation safe.
4. Clarify the intended learning outcomes and duration of the professional learning session.

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**Debrief:** Say to the group 'Negotiating group agreements takes time and is an important part of a professional learning session. It helps to create safe and supportive environments, which is a key protective factor for our mental health and wellbeing. A safe learning environment also enables open, robust discussion amongst staff'.

## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL STAFF



**TIME:** 10 minutes

**MATERIALS:**

- [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention animation](#)
- [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention - Suicide prevention key factors tip sheet](#)

**PURPOSE:** To gain an overview of suicide prevention in schools. To discuss common risk factors, warning signs and appropriate responses. To share effective strategies for building student protective factors such as belonging, connection and help seeking skills.

### 3. View animation – MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention

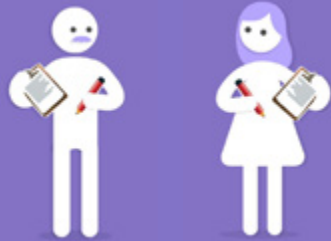
#### Instructions:

1. View the [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention animation](#).
2. Refer to [MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention – Suicide prevention key factors tip sheet](#). In pairs or small groups discuss the risk factors and warning signs for suicide listed on the tip sheet.
3. In the context of your school, ask participants to discuss:
  - What do you find most challenging about this topic?
  - What's your strategy for reporting concerns about students?
  - What strategies have been useful or not so useful?
  - What is your level of experience or confidence in checking in with a student you are concerned about? What would support you?
4. Invite pairs to share their ideas with the whole group.
5. Review the list of protective factors at the bottom of the tip sheet. As a whole group brainstorm and document:
  - What is the school doing well?
  - Where can we see opportunities for the school to build protective factors for students?
  - Where could we work with students and families to build protective factors such as belonging, connection, coping and help seeking skills?

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**Debrief:** Invite participants to share any insights they have had during this activity.


## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL STAFF



 **TIME:** 30 minutes

 **MATERIALS:**

- Relevant school policies and procedures

 **PURPOSE:** To have a shared understanding of the school's approach to suicide prevention and the relevant school policies and procedures for staff. To be aware of their individual role and responsibilities relating to suicide prevention and the available supports.

## 4. Our school's approach to suicide prevention

### Instructions:

1. Set the scene for the group by stating 'everyone has a role to play in suicide prevention at school'.
2. Provide groups of participants with copies of relevant school policies and procedures.
3. In groups, review and document:
  - What aspects of the school's policies and procedures are working well?
  - What might need adding or updating?
  - What roles and responsibilities do staff members, school leadership and wellbeing staff have in suicide prevention?
  - Where can staff seek support and which healthcare professionals does the school work with? Which staff have appropriate training to respond to concerns?

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**Debrief:** Thank staff for their input and collect any notes from the discussions. Invite people to share any insights they have had during this activity. Provide an overview of any actions to be taken from this activity.

Provide participants with a list of the trained staff members who have additional roles of responsibility relating to responding to concerns, following an incident or death by suicide (student or staff member).

## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL STAFF



🕒 **TIME:** 30 minutes

### 📁 **MATERIALS:**

- MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention - Further resources e.g. [Conversations Matter Fact Sheet - When someone is thinking about suicide](#), [The Check-in App - beyondblue](#), Mental Health First Aid Guidelines - [MHFA Suicide Guidelines](#)
- Online device

❓ **PURPOSE:** To explore the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention further resources, to support school staff to take action within the boundaries of their role.

## 5. Exploring resources and tools to support staff

### Instructions:

1. Explain that it can be difficult to know what to say to someone who you are concerned is thinking about suicide. Invite participants to form small groups to explore relevant resources included on the MindMatters Spotlight: Suicide prevention, such as:
  - headspace – [Myth buster: Suicidal Ideation](#) “Asking young people about suicidal thoughts or behaviours will only put ideas in their heads”
  - Conversations Matter Fact Sheet – [When someone is thinking about suicide](#)
  - *beyondblue* – [The Check-in App](#) for planning conversations with others
  - Mental Health First Aid Guidelines – [MHFA Suicide Guidelines](#)
2. Ask each group to share their insights on the resources they explored back to the whole group. Record any suggestions or ideas.
3. Identify the staff who have additional training in suicide prevention and intervention and discuss processes for accessing their support. Discuss any further training and support options for school staff.

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**Debrief:** There are evidence-based suicide prevention resources and training available for school staff.


## ACTIVITY – FOR SCHOOL STAFF



 **TIME:** 5 minutes

 **MATERIALS:**

- Blank paper and pen for each person
- Space for people to move around
- National phone and online support and details of staff supports
- [headspace Tip Sheets Self care for school staff and Self care for school staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in remote areas](#)

 **PURPOSE:** To help people connect with each other and find things they have in common. To discuss the importance of developing connections and relationships, which can become key protective factors for staff mental health. To model an activity that could be facilitated with students.

## 6. Connecting – Four things in common

### Instructions:

1. Ensure all participants have a pen and a piece of paper.
2. Ask participants to walk around the room and find a partner. Say to participants 'Write down four things you have in common with your partner. Answers could include: liking the same foods, hair colour or having the same interests.'
3. Ask the group to mingle again and repeat this process with a new partner.
4. Repeat this process to create as many pairings as you have time for.

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**Debrief:** Ask the group: 'What are some of the things that you have in common with others? How did it feel to connect with people you work with in this way?'

Explain that finding common ground with others creates connections. Individual staff, in their day to day work, can make positive differences in the lives of students at risk of suicide. When working with students at risk of suicide, it is important to look after each other and yourself. There are a range of support services for staff to access and information for school staff on how to look after yourself following a death by suicide. Share support options and tip sheets with the participants.

As you close the session thank staff for their participation and encourage them to enact at least one self-care activity this afternoon/evening that nourishes them.

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)

This information is to be used as a guide only and is not intended as a substitute to formal training or professional medical advice on mental health or suicide prevention. Staff are advised to always refer to school policies and procedures in the first instance. This information is provided by Beyond Blue Limited in good faith and on an 'as is' basis. While every care has been taken in preparing this information, Beyond Blue Limited makes no representation or warranty as to the reliability or completeness of the information contained in this document. You must make your own assessment of the information contained in this document and if you choose to rely on it, it is wholly at your own risk. To the extent permitted by law, Beyond Blue Limited will not be liable to you or anyone else for any loss or damage, however caused, which may be directly or indirectly suffered arising from the use of, or reliance upon this information.