

TEACHER TOOLKIT

SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH



Thank you for participating in Outside the Locker Room's program.

We've put together this toolkit to help you support your students' wellbeing. It includes:

Identifying a mental health challenge in a student	p.4
Approaching a student about their mental health	p.5
Responding to a student in a conversation about their mental health	p.6
Supporting a student experiencing a mental health challenge	p.7
Involving parents/primary caregivers in supporting the student's mental health	p.8
Which mental health services are available to support you and the student	p.9

We hope you find this toolkit useful.

If you have any feedback or questions, please get in touch via welfare@otlr.org.au.

DO YOU OFTEN

TELL YOURSELF OFF
 FEEL LONELY
 FEEL WORRIED

FEEL ANGRY
 FEEL SAD
 FEEL TIRED

HAVE TROUBLE SLEEPING
 FEEL HUNGRY ALL THE TIME
 OR NOT HUNGRY AT ALL

It's common to feel some of these things some of the time. But if you feel most of these things most of the time...

ASK FOR HELP

YOU'RE NOT ALONE. SUPPORT IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.

Friends, family, teachers or school counsellors.
 Your doctor or a mental health professional like a counsellor or psychologist.
 Free mental health services. Call Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800) or Lifeline (13 11 14) or visit headspace.org.au.
 Outside the Locker Room can help you find the right support. Email welfare@otlr.org.au or message us through our app.

If you're ever worried for anyone's immediate safety, call 000 straight away.

OUTSIDE THE LOCKER ROOM

We have posters for your classroom.
Download them for free via: bit.ly/otlr-posters



APPROACH

IDENTIFY

Below are common signs and symptoms to look out for.

The earlier we can identify psychological distress in students, the earlier we can begin to support them. There's no single textbook answer for signs and symptoms of a mental health challenge, but there are some common ones.

Most of all, it's important to look out for **changes over time**. There's probably nothing to worry about if a normally quiet student remains quiet, or if a normally boisterous student is quiet for a day or two – but if a normally boisterous student is suddenly quiet and withdrawn for two weeks or more, that may be a sign of a mental health challenge and we recommend checking in.

Uncharacteristically...

SOCIAL

- Avoiding, resisting or reluctant to engage in tasks they usually enjoy
- Not attending school
- Poor academic performance
- Avoiding friends and/or people generally
- Starting fights
- Threatening students and teachers
- Rebellious or antisocial
- Engaging in dangerous activities, e.g. drug use

EMOTIONAL

- Displaying outbursts of emotion, or significant mood swings
- Sensitive to criticism
- Denying observed behaviours
- Confused when asked questions
- Loud, erratic or displaying attention-seeking behaviour (when normally quiet)
- Quiet and withdrawn (when normally social or outgoing)
- Unfocussed or distracted
- Talking a lot/constantly about a problem
- Critical or pessimistic about themselves or the world
- Irritated when asked to behave in certain ways

PHYSICAL

- Changing eating habits, including significant weight gain or loss
- Changing personal hygiene (e.g. no longer washing their hair)
- Making significant changes to their appearance
- Having unexplained injuries, including cuts, burns or bruises
- Tired, maybe even sleeping during school hours

...for two weeks or more.

If you identify that a student may be experiencing a mental health challenge, the next step is to approach them and start a conversation.

To do this effectively, we recommend creating an environment in which the student feels safe to speak about their feelings.

To do this, approach the student in private, where others can't listen to the conversation and where there are no or minimal distractions. If you don't feel comfortable doing this alone, you can invite another staff member to be present.

We recommend starting with an empathetic statement identifying specific behaviours you're concerned about.

While it may feel strange to be so direct, statements like these show that you care and that the student has your time and attention. Then, encourage the student to speak if they're willing to.

In the case where a student approaches you in regards to mental health challenges, follow the same steps – move to somewhere private if possible, or where others can't listen to the conversation and where there are no or minimal distractions. If you don't feel comfortable doing this alone, again, you can invite another staff member to be present.

Thank the student for their courage in approaching you and let them know that you're there to listen and support them.



"I've noticed you've fallen asleep on your desk many times lately and I'm concerned about your wellbeing."

"You usually love playing football at lunch, but I've seen you avoid the schoolyard now for a week. Has anything changed for you?"

"I saw a number of dark bruises on your arm last week. When I saw that I felt really worried about you. I would like to talk to you about them, is that ok with you?"

RESPOND

When a student is ready to talk to you:

Listen without interrupting. Listening is core to supporting someone, even above offering solutions.

Express, through your facial expressions, body language and words, calmness, patience, acceptance and affirmation.

Avoid judgment or blame.

Ask open ended questions to encourage the student to continue speaking.

Normalise the student's feelings. You can do this by sharing some reasons they may be feeling the way they are, or by identifying (if appropriate and you are comfortable to) times in your life you've felt similarly.

Empathise by acknowledging that what they're experiencing is difficult.

Determine if there are any immediate risk or safety concerns*. While it can be uncomfortable, we recommend asking directly about self harm or suicidal thoughts. Contrary to popular belief, this will not 'put the idea into their head', but rather it will show you're willing to support them no matter what.

Validate their courage in sharing their experience.

Assure them that you're there to help them seek any support they need.

*If you're concerned about self-harm, a risk of suicide or any form of suspected child abuse, you must immediately consult with your school leadership or wellbeing team. Your response in these situations must be consistent with Child Safe Standards applicable to your school and state.

If you feel that the student is in immediate risk or harm to themselves or others, such as expressing intentions of suicide and self-harm with an active plan, it is important to leave an adult with the student at all times, make the student's immediate environment as safe as possible and consult school leadership immediately. Next steps may include: immediate sessions with the school counsellor or



It's important to be aware that students from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds may have different perspectives on mental health, mental health conditions and suicide.

On p.9 we've included mental health services for CALD communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In the case where you've approached a student and they're not ready to talk, be patient and don't pressure them to.

Instead, invite them to come back to you when and if they're ready. You may find different ways to approach them again, or explore other (non-conversational) ways of helping the student express their feelings.

wellbeing officer to undergo a more formal risk assessment; communication with family or guardian; or contacting external services such as child services or emergency services (000).

It's important that you do not take high-risk intervention regarding mental health into your own hands, and that you immediately contact relevant agencies and your school leadership or wellbeing team for help. If you are currently unclear about school guidelines regarding student risk, please consult your school leadership team at the earliest possible opportunity.

SUPPORT

After an initial conversation with a student, it's crucial to continue to provide support.

You can do so by:

Checking in regularly. Be flexible with your approach to keep it as calm and casual as it needs to be. When checking in, follow the same guidelines we've suggested on p.6. If the student doesn't want to talk, don't push or take it personally. Leave an open invitation for them to come to you whenever they want to.

Encouraging the student to seek help from other trusted adults such as parents/primary caregivers (p.8) or the school wellbeing team. Offer to help them start these conversations, if they need support.

Updating yourself on relevant local services you can connect them with (see p.9).

Keeping the student accountable to any appointments they've agreed to.

You can also encourage effective coping strategies:

Support the student to identify their strengths and how these can help them in this situation. Focussing on their strengths can also help the student to not feel defined by their challenges or perceived "weaknesses".

Ask the student what they normally do to relax/comfort themselves/have fun. Often, the student can be their own best helper.

Suggest simple meditation techniques to increase mindfulness. Mindfulness can help reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, sadness and volatility by promoting calmness, clarity of thought, understanding, empathy and self-awareness. [headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com) is a great place to start for beginner meditation tips and techniques.

Encourage creative ways to express emotion, such as songwriting, poetry, journaling or story writing.

When offering a student ongoing support, we strongly recommend seeking out resources and working collaboratively with your school wellbeing team or a local counselling service to ensure you're providing effective support.

Please don't do anything you don't feel comfortable doing and don't take any high-risk intervention strategies upon yourself. Your school wellbeing team and Outside the Locker Room's welfare team are available to help link you to relevant resources and services.

If you notice, or it's brought to your attention, that the student's mental health or behaviour is deteriorating further, consult with your school leadership or wellbeing team. Your response in these situations must be consistent with Child Safe Standards applicable to your school and state.

PARENTS/ PRIMARY CAREGIVERS



Parents' active involvement in a child's life is important for mental health development in adolescents. While it's not uncommon for students to be reluctant to involve their parents, it's important you encourage and support them to do this. Most parents receive information regarding mental health issues well. If you have concerns, reach out to your school leadership or wellbeing team.

In supporting the student to involve their parents, we recommend maintaining a student-centred approach. Encourage the student to be the person to involve their parents, and explaining that their parents' involvement is about creating the best outcome for the *student*.

Involving parents also serves to create a support team. Working as a team means the student has more people they can rely on and means that the time and energy of supporting the student doesn't fall on one person. Like all team work, open communication is key, so it's important that you or your school keeps in touch with the parents.

As mentioned previously, do not take high-risk intervention upon yourself. Inform your school leadership or wellbeing team.

We recommend researching the support services that are available to the student and for yourself (p.9).



MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES



Free, national and confidential

CRISIS

In an emergency, always dial 000.

Lifeline Australia (13 11 14)

24/7 crisis support for anyone in Australia who is feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping or staying safe.

Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467)

24/7 phone and online counselling service for people affected by suicide.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Services

Culturally appropriate mental health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

ACT: www.winnunga.org.au

NSW: www.ahmrc.org.au

NT: www.amsant.org.au

QLD: www.qaihc.com.au

SA: www.ahcsa.org.au

TAS: www.tacinc.com.au

VIC: www.vaccho.org.au

WA: www.ahcwa.org.au

GENERAL SUPPORT

Outside the Locker Room

Throughout the duration of our program with your school, students, parents and teachers can reach out to our dedicated welfare team for free consultation advice and referrals. Email welfare@otlr.org.au or message us via our mobile app.

Beyond Blue (1300 224 636)

24/7 telephone support where you can speak one-on-one with a trained mental health professional.

EATING DISORDERS

The Butterfly Foundation (1800 33 4673)

Phone and online support for people experiencing an eating disorder, as well as their friends and family.

8am-12am AEST, every day.

LGBTI

Q Life (1800 184 527)

Phone and online counselling for LGBTI people. 3pm-12am AEST, every day.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800)

Australia's only 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

eHeadspace (1800 650 890)

Phone and online counselling for young people aged 12 to 25, and their family and friends. 9am-1am AEST, every day.

CALD

embracementalhealth.org.au

Mental health and suicide prevention service for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.



Our Teacher Toolkit was created with reference to:

- Beyond Blue
- Emerging Minds
- Kids Health
- Kids Helpline
- MentalHealth.gov
- Life Supports Counselling
- Queensland Government website
- ReachOut.com
- Victorian Department of Education
- Atkins, M., Hoagwood, K., Kutash, K., and Seidman, E., 2010. Toward the Integration of Education and Mental Health in Schools.
- Wang, M. and Sheikh-Khalil, S., 2013. Does Parental Involvement Matter for Student Achievement and Mental Health in High School?
- Weare, K., 2012. Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People.

In Western Australia, Outside the Locker Room has been funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the Community Health and Hospitals Program.

Please note we are not an emergency response or crisis support service. If at any point you are concerned for your safety, or the safety of someone else, please call 000.

Outside the Locker Room Charity Ltd is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission | ABN 45635277762

© 2020 Outside the Locker Room. All rights reserved.