

Supporting Young People

Information for Teachers & Counsellors

COVID-19



What this fact sheet covers:

- Discussing COVID-19 with students
- Supporting student mental health
- Daily wellbeing strategies
- Additional help

Introduction

As the number of COVID-19 cases rise in Australia, anxiety about the virus is understandably increasing. The purpose of this information sheet is to provide guidance about how schools can best support our children and young people through this challenging time. It is important to balance out 'school as usual' against the significant disruptions occurring across our community and addressing these directly with students.

This guidance is intended for teaching staff and school counsellors who work directly with students in schools. Below we have included an outline of strategies that can be used to help young people cope with stress surrounding the outbreak.

How to discuss COVID-19 with students

It is important that young people feel able to ask questions about the coronavirus and receive clear and honest answers from the adults in

their lives. The information shared should be done so in a non-alarmist way and tailored to be age-appropriate.

Your students will be absorbing information from their families, friends, the media and what they are seeing in their communities. School contexts can offer a safe space for young people to express their concerns and have productive discussions about what is going on.

Some specific tips about how to have these discussions are to:

- Speak to your students calmly and openly.
- Adapt information to make it developmentally appropriate.
- Encourage your students to ask questions.
- Ask them to share with you what they know and clarify any misinformation.
- Validate and normalise their concern and / or worry about the coronavirus. Experiencing some anxiety in response to the pandemic is to be expected and can lead to increased behaviours that keep us all safe (e.g., handwashing). It's important



to normalise young people's experience so that they do not feel that their response is unusual or worrisome.

- Provide reassurance to your students that as young people, they are relatively safe.
- If they raise concerns about their parents, grandparents or even vulnerable siblings this should be discussed.
- Let them know that you or the school counsellor will be available to talk to them about their worries.

Practical strategies to support students' mental health

When resourcing permits, school counsellors are advised proactively to reach out to students and let them know about their availability and options for additional support.

- Send out a list of online fact sheets for adolescents, resources such as digital anxiety programs and links to helplines.
- Encourage them to drop in if they are worried.
- Hold age-appropriate classroom discussions about engaging in practical steps to stay safe may provide a sense of agency and control. These may include education and practice of recommended hygiene practices.
- Communicate a plan about continued learning with students and your school's plan to keep in touch in case of a shut down will reassure students that a plan is in place to continue their education.
- Include a discussion of ways your students can keep in touch with each other (this may involve virtual teaching and conferencing software).
- Encourage students to provide creative suggestions about how this could be done

will provide a useful opportunity for their engagement in the process.

- Devise a 1-page action plan with your students. This might include listing trusted adults they can talk to, and helpful activities they can do to manage their worries.

Daily strategies to promote wellbeing

Focusing on controllable factors, such as general health and wellbeing is likely to increase student resilience.

Some easy strategies that can be implemented at school include:

- Spending time outside each day where possible, including lunchtimes and even outdoor classes and physical activity sessions where possible.
- Educating young people about getting a good night's sleep, which includes turning off screens in the evening and having a regular pre-bedtime routine.
- Encouraging communication and interaction with peers.
- In class meditation exercises that encourage young people to calm their minds, focus on the here and now and identify thoughts as being thoughts and not reality. Some useful meditation resources can be found here on the [Headspace App](#) and [Smiling Mind](#).

Seek additional help

If any student is very distressed, anxiety and finding it difficult to cope, there are many ways they can access additional support. School counsellors are often tasked with triaging students into external mental health services if needed. If that is not an option at your school, a referral to a mental health professional can



be made via a GP, which should be discussed with your student and their family. Many psychologists are now offering their services using tele-health (online formats).

Here is a list of online resources and tools for students:

Kids Helpline | 1800 55 1800

kidshelpline.com.au

Beyondblue | 1300 22 4636

beyondblue.org.au/get-support/national-help-lines-and-websites

eHeadspace

headspace.org.au/eheadspace

Smiling Mind

smilingmind.com.au

Headspace

headspace.com/covid-19

Brave online | free online anxiety program

brave-online.com

Moodgym

<https://moodgym.com.au/>

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