

FRAMEWORK for
STUDENT
SUPPORT
SERVICES
IN VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
SUPPORT
MATERIALS

Acknowledgments

These professional development support materials were prepared by Glenda Johnston in consultation with the Professional Development Reference Group.

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INTRODUCTION

Students are better prepared for learning when they are healthy, safe and happy.

All children and young people need care and support as they grow towards adulthood.

Helping students to learn effectively and to develop positive attitudes and behaviours are important complementary goals for teachers and student support services staff. However, fulfilling these goals is rarely a simple matter. Providing all students with the kind of environment that will best nurture their development has long been a challenge for teachers, parents and student support services staff.

Recent community concern about the difficulties faced by young people has triggered a focus on particular issues that include youth suicide and harmful drug use. The *Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report*, July 1997, pointed out that although “most young people successfully negotiate the transition from adolescence to become well-adjusted adults ... over the last 30 to 40 years we have witnessed a significant decline in many indicators of the wellbeing of young people.”

Depression, self-harm, drug misuse, family conflict, eating disorders and homelessness appear to be more prevalent in our younger generation.

The report acknowledged the value of many recent initiatives that support children and young people within the school system and in other community settings. It commended the “excellent examples of pastoral care and student welfare infrastructure” in a number of Victorian schools. However, it also emphasised that such efforts need to become more widespread and consistent as well as better coordinated.

The report found that a more seamless continuum of service needs to be developed, otherwise children and young people will continue to ‘fall through the gaps’ if they display multiple difficulties which cut across the boundaries of the ‘core business’ of schools or other service organisations.

These views echo concerns expressed in the *Report of the Premier’s Drug Advisory Council, Drugs and our Community*, March 1996. Young people at high risk of illicit drug use were also “vulnerable to other health risks, including psychiatric illness, self-damage or mutilation, youth suicide, nutritional disorders, and the broad cluster of problems that are often associated with social disadvantages such as homelessness, family disruption and unemployment.”

Drugs and Our Community recognised that while “some schools had moved to develop strong welfare responses and links to community services”, others could provide more focused support for these vulnerable young people. It recommended that “strenuous efforts be made to retain (at risk young people) within the school system to enhance their skills, knowledge and preparation for the workplace, and to prevent or delay their labelling and experience of unemployment.”

According to the *Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report*, “The pastoral care role that schools have traditionally undertaken can be strengthened in a way that is consistent with positive learning outcomes, the social and emotional health of their students and the establishment of better links with other professionals and support services.”

Schools were urged to place a high priority on developing a comprehensive school welfare strategy, encompassing partnerships with the community, to meet the needs of young people.

The report also called for identification of the strengths and weaknesses of existing responses in order to “set out practical ways to strengthen responses from all sectors of the service system and the broader community.”

It proposed “a conceptual framework within which the existing service systems could be unified, and the complex array of factors (detrimental to the health and well being of young people) made manageable and definable.”

Four levels of activity, encompassing primary prevention, early intervention, intervention and postvention, were described as the elements of a framework for a comprehensive suicide prevention strategy for Victoria.

The Government response to the findings and recommendations provided the opportunity to refocus the way schools and other community organisations work with children and young people.

The *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools*, 1998, acknowledges the *Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report* and the significant funding allocated by the Victorian Government.

This Framework describes principles, arrangements and the additional resources provided to enable a significant strengthening of student welfare and support services. It outlines how a continuum of services can be provided to students and their families within a comprehensive and integrated framework, with an increasing emphasis on preventive approaches and early intervention activities.

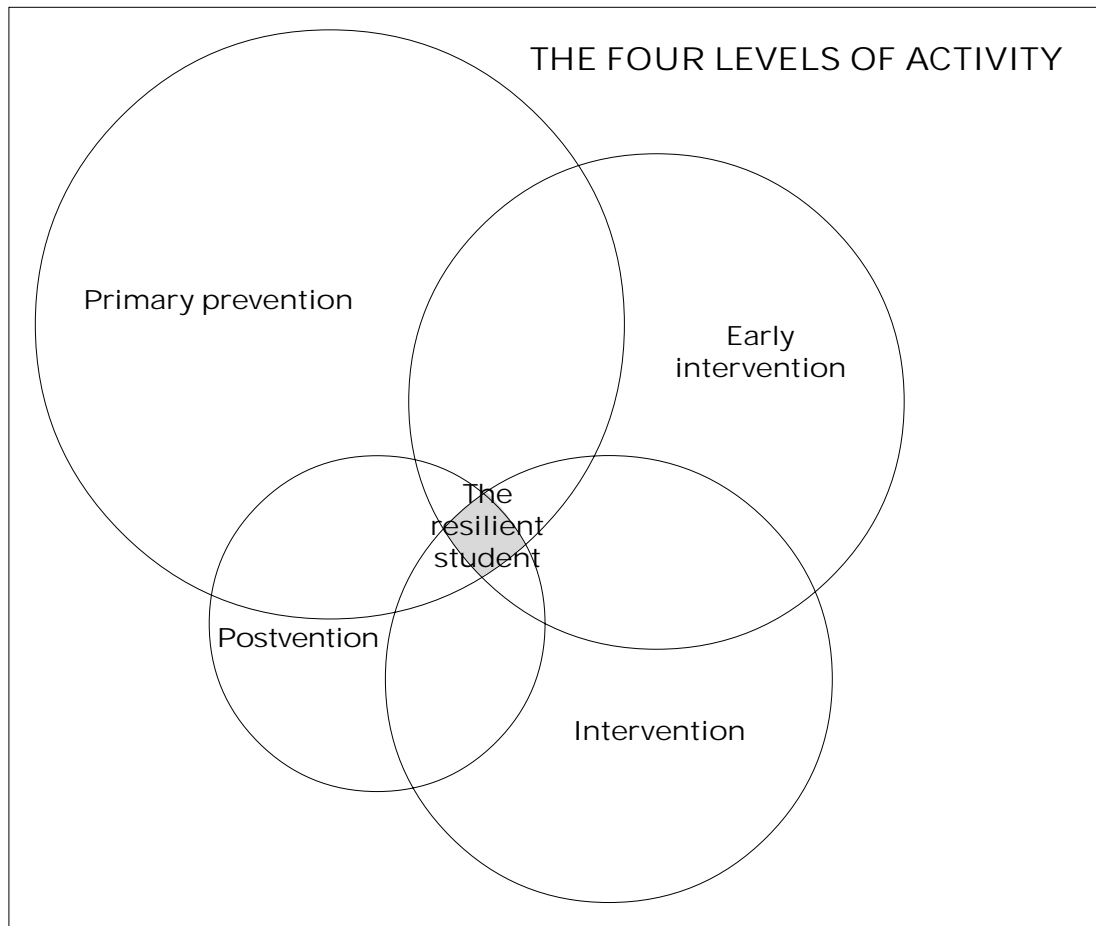
The increased focus on primary prevention and early intervention highlighted in the Framework has not only been enhanced by the provision of additional resources but through the consolidation of assessment services for the Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments by outsourcing or refocusing the role within a designated group of professionals in each region.

The Framework will assist schools and school support service staff to work more collaboratively and effectively to respond to the differing levels of need for support presented by students. Regional consultative committees have been used to facilitate the implementation of the Framework and will also be used to develop a regional strategy for the development and management of alternative/ ancillary programs. In consultation with schools and regions, resources will be deployed to meet identified student welfare and support needs.

The Framework outlines four interrelated levels to group together the wide range of activities currently being undertaken by schools and related support services:

- primary prevention
- early intervention
- intervention
- postvention.

To an extent, these levels overlap and span the range of provision from the support needed for all young people to activities which need to be targeted at those more at risk of harm and those who need to be supported through crisis situations.



The Framework incorporates the School Focused Youth Service, a joint initiative of the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services. This initiative is designed to develop a continuum of services which enhance the effectiveness of links between the primary prevention and early intervention work done by school-based support services and the secondary level of intervention provided by the community sector. It is structured to assist the implementation of an integrated service model to provide coordinated health and welfare services to 'at risk' young people and their families within local schools and community clusters.

The School Focused Youth Service targets young people between ten and eighteen years who are at risk of attempted suicide and suicide or who are displaying behaviours that require support and intervention.

The target groups of young people for the service are those exhibiting problem behaviours characterised by:

- violence
- offending
- depressed mood and depressive disorders
- self-harm
- substance abuse.

Target groups also include the following socially and geographically isolated young people for whom high risk may also be more likely:

- the homeless
- Koorie young people
- culturally and linguistically diverse young people
- rural young people.

Young people are also targeted if they display concerns regarding:

- sexuality
- early school leaving
- physical or psychological disabilities.

The School Focused Youth Service has been tendered in forty-one school and community clusters across the state. Each cluster will have the capacity to employ a coordinator or service provider who will link closely with schools and school welfare staff to identify service gaps, develop strategies to respond to those gaps and, where necessary, purchase appropriate services.

The *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools*, incorporating the School Youth Focused Service initiative, will enable the development of a comprehensive and well coordinated approach to promoting the wellbeing of school students in Victoria and to supporting them throughout their school years and beyond.

ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools, 1998, Department of Education, Victoria

School Focused Youth Services Information Pack, April 1998, Department of Human Services

Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report, 1997, Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report, July 1997

The Victorian Government Response to Suicide Prevention Taskforce Report, reprinted in the *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools*, 1998, Department of Education, Victoria

Drugs and our Community, Report of the Premier's Drug Advisory Council, March 1996, Premier's Drug Advisory Council

Managing School Emergencies: Minimising the Impact of Trauma on Staff and Students, 1997, Department of Education, Victoria

OTHER USEFUL DOCUMENTS

Guidelines for Developing the Student Code of Conduct, 1994, Directorate of School Education, Victoria

Program for Students with Disabilities and Impairments, 1998, Department of Education, Victoria

Schools of the Future Reference Guide, 1996, Department of Education, Victoria

Student Attendance Guidelines, 1997, Department of Education, Victoria

Leading Teacher Development Program Guide, 1997, Department of Education, Victoria

FURTHER REFERENCE MATERIALS

Integrated Service Delivery for Schools: A School/Community Model, 1997, Department of Education, Victoria

PURPOSE OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT MATERIALS

The Professional Development Induction Program is targeted primarily at student support services staff, particularly guidance officers, social workers and student services officers. It is also appropriate to include representation from school administrators and designated school-based student welfare staff in the program.

The Professional Development Support Materials will enhance the Professional Development Induction Program by helping participants to:

- establish common understandings concerning the *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools*
- explore the implications of the Framework for schools and student support services staff, particularly the need for increased focus on primary prevention and early intervention strategies
- highlight the need for cooperation and collaboration between schools and other service providers to ensure continuity of care for children and young people
- focus on the benefits of partnerships between schools and the community
- consider issues concerning change management in schools
- be aware of models of good practice
- establish links with the School Focused Youth Service initiative.

GETTING STARTED

What does the *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools* mean for schools and student support services staff?

1. Implications for schools

It is one thing to identify risk and protective factors in school communities and quite another to successfully implement and sustain a program of change. Program commitment can be enhanced if key school staff, students, parents, school support staff and relevant members of the community work together from the planning stage onwards.

Schools can implement the Framework by:

- placing high priority on developing and maintaining a positive, caring school environment—systematically working on the quality of relationships within the school community
- adopting strategic and collaborative approaches to address the health and wellbeing of students—within the school community as well as with other schools, student support services staff and in partnership with community agencies
- ensuring that provision is made for supporting students at all points of the continuum, from primary prevention to postvention
- targeting professional development for staff about knowledge and skills in areas concerning communication with students and parents, recognising the needs of vulnerable students and accessing appropriate support for them.

2. Implications for student support services staff

Providing comprehensive services and continuity of care for students and developing effective working partnerships with schools and other community groups will be crucial goals for student support services staff. Changes in work focus and working relationships will create challenges and opportunities for student support services officers.

Considerations for student support services officers include the following factors:

- officers are expected to participate in providing services within a comprehensive and integrated framework for responding to the needs of students and their families
- the Framework is supported by a significant strengthening of student welfare and support services to provide increased access to expertise in the area of student counselling and welfare support
- work teams may need to be reconfigured to make best use of the skills and expertise of all officers or outsourced consultants
- officers may need to review work priorities and practices
- personal professional development plans may need to be redeveloped to be consistent with any changes in work focus
- officers will be expected to develop and maintain close links with School Focused Youth Service officers, where appropriate, as well as with other relevant service providers in the local community
- collaboration with schools, school clusters and community agencies concerning service needs analysis, including priorities for professional development activities, should be an important feature of the work of student support services officers
- developing an effective team with groups of people from a range of backgrounds requires time, effort and commitment.

3. Implications for schools and student support services officers

3.1 WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

In effective teams:

- goals are clarified and adjusted as necessary so that the best possible match between individual goals and the team's goals may be achieved. Goals are cooperatively structured
- communication is two-way, and the open and accurate expression of ideas and feelings is emphasised
- participation and leadership are distributed among all team members
- ability and information determine influence
- decision-making procedures are matched with the situation—different methods are used at different times. Consensus is sought for important decisions. Involvement and group discussions are encouraged
- controversy and conflict are seen as a positive key to member's involvement, the quality and originality of decisions, and the continuance of the team in good working condition
- interpersonal, team and inter-team behaviour are stressed. Cohesion is advanced through high levels of inclusion, respect, acceptance, support and trust. Individual diversity is valued

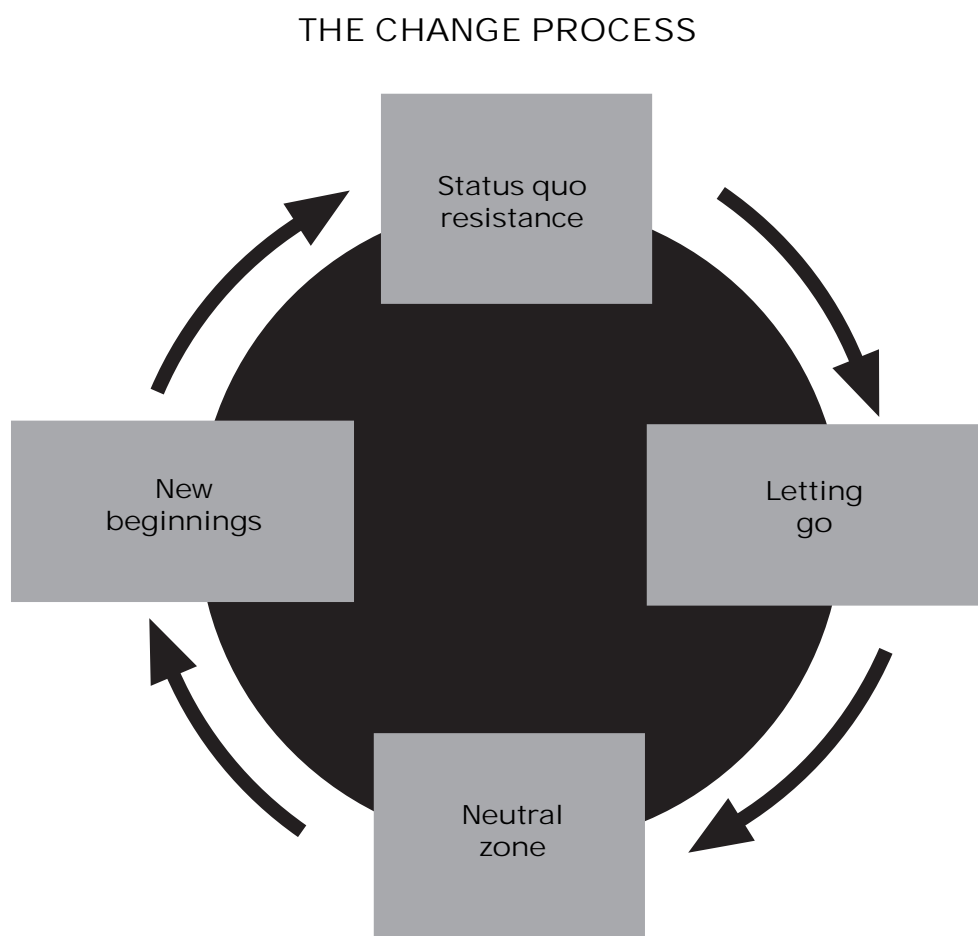
- problem solving capacity is high
- members evaluate the effectiveness of the team and decide how to improve its functioning. Goal accomplishment, internal maintenance and development are considered important
- interpersonal effectiveness, self-actualisation and innovation are encouraged.

3.2 OUTLINE OF THE CHANGE PROCESS

To work effectively on changes in schools or in other service areas, officers need to contribute to:

- establishing shared ownership
- developing a realistic timetable
- acknowledging the efforts of team members
- providing professional development to skill team members
- ensuring that there is a critical mass of staff who support the change
- gaining administration priority to ensure adequate resourcing.

3.3 MEANING OF BEING A 'CHANGE AGENT'



Factors that contribute to successful change include:

- thinking big, starting small
- balancing pressure and support
- developing an implementation plan
- considering content versus process
- considering values versus practice
- being aware of emotional agendas
- working in a positive school culture.

3.4 OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Change is more likely to proceed when leaders:

- identify the overarching goal
- find the overlap between organisational and self-interest
- communicate the change and its implications
- provide cultural mechanisms to build trust
- provide standard information and school-wide access to the information
- provide counselling and support to overcome anxiety.

GOOD PRACTICE

The development of the Help! catalogue

Help! is a catalogue of community agency services and programs for young people specially designed for use in schools within the local government areas of Bayside, Kingston and Glen Eira.

It was developed by a steering committee, a collaborative effort between the Department of Education, local student support services officers, local government youth services officers and community health centre staff.

The Help! catalogue was developed to coordinate and promote many of the valuable services and programs available in the three local government areas and to make them more easily accessible to schools.

Programs are listed in the following areas:

- health and wellbeing
- student support
- sexuality education
- skill development
- general youth information.

Program provider profiles and evaluation procedures are also included in the catalogue.

THE FOUR LEVELS OF ACTIVITY

1. Primary prevention

Definition

Primary prevention

- aims to raise awareness of what makes students vulnerable, and develop strategies to reduce vulnerabilities and increase coping skills
- refers to population based strategies that may be universally or selectively targeted
- is an approach that needs to account for the coexistence of risk factors such as substance abuse, family conflict, homelessness, abuse and neglect and a range of emotional disorders.

These strategies are designed to enhance the emotional and social health of large groups of students rather than individuals. Efforts are directed at promoting strengths, wellbeing and positive developmental outcomes.

Primary prevention is also an inclusive approach which engages with young people and acknowledges their rights and responsibilities to influence their social, emotional and institutional environment.

Students of different ages have different social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs. Consequently, while some primary prevention activities apply to the whole school population, others need to be focused on the needs of specific age groups.

Schools need to be aware of concerns associated with school-based curriculum programs designed to convey specific information on suicide prevention/awareness for students.

The *Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report* states:

“There are many contributing factors to suicidal ideation and behaviour, and the Task Force does not believe suicide specific curriculum should be built into the programs of schools. Rather, the curriculum should provide opportunities for students to develop strong communication and problem-solving skills, and more practical training in how to access professional and medical services. This should be done through networking with other professionals in the local community, and through developing a health-promoting framework for appropriate parts of the curriculum.”

RESILIENCE

Many strategies developed for primary prevention and the other levels of activity seek to build resilience, which refers to the capacity to cope with extreme and stressful life situations. Research indicates that certain social experiences and arrangements foster resilience in children and young people, others reduce resilience.

Protective factors that enhance resilience include:

- promoting a sense of belonging at school or a similar institution
- ensuring children and adolescents have a relationship with at least one competent, caring adult
- contributing to positive social behaviours and problem-solving skills
- fostering a sense of spiritual and communal belonging
- minimising family stress
- strengthening family relationships.

What this means for schools and student support services staff?

Schools will be responsible for the development of appropriate welfare structures to ensure the provision of a positive and supportive school environment and the delivery of coordinated and comprehensive services for students.

(Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools)

Schools are the most important site outside the home where young people learn about relating to others and coping with life situations.

Schools can make a significant contribution to enhancing the resilience of children and young people by strengthening protective factors.

Schools can engage with the broader community to ensure that young people have a meaningful role within that community.

THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

1. Promoting a sense of belonging at school

“School is like a second home ... like, you spend more of your waking time at school, you see more of your teachers than you see of your parents, you should see it like that, a second home.”

(The Mind of Youth)

The support given to students by schools can make a crucial difference to their lives. Factors that place young people at risk of alienation and acting out behaviours can be moderated if students feel a sense of attachment or connection to their school.

(Based on Resnick)

Strategies

Student support services officers can assist schools to address the following strategies, particularly if they participate in school student welfare teams or committees. Examples include:

- whole school approaches to developing policies, structures, curriculum programs and other activities to build a positive and supportive school environment
 - the school charter provides school environment goals, implementation strategies and achievement measures concerning developing and maintaining a positive, caring and safe learning environment
- policies and strategies concerning overcoming violence, victimisation and harassment, racism and homophobia to increase a sense of belonging and security for students
- harm minimisation drug education
- school attendance guidelines and strategies to optimise attendance and to prevent student alienation
- provision of flexible, relevant, inclusive and appropriate curriculum
 - curriculum materials that reflect the personal and social concerns of the developmental stage of students
 - most alienated students still want to succeed in areas of the curriculum they value but need these areas to be dealt with in ways more closely related to their immediate personal and social interests
(From Alienation to Engagement, Vol. 1)
- placing a high priority on transition programs to establish a welcoming and socially supportive school community, especially for new arrivals
 - transition points between primary and secondary school and between school and further education and the workforce are times of difficulty for many young people and are also promising times for preventative activity (Fuller)
 - studies have shown that successful integration programs will prevent later substance abuse and delinquency (Felner & Adan)
 - by reducing the number of teachers with whom (Year 7) students interact on a regular basis (eg in conventional secondary schools), higher levels of rapport, trust and learning are achieved (From Alienation to Engagement, Vol. 1)
- developing activities and programs to build positive relationships and improve communication between teachers and students and between students, including student consultation, student participation in decision making, vertical home groups
 - genuine consultation between students and their teachers enhances students learnings as well as teacher effectiveness. Students tend to react very positively when teachers actively listen to them and take their views seriously (From Alienation to Engagement, Vol. 1)
 - teachers need to be vigilant to the needs of all their students and to employ strategies that support them in articulating both positive and negative features of their schooling (From Alienation to Engagement, Vol. 1)

- implementing programs and activities to promote awareness and sensitivity to the needs and issues of students from a diverse range of cultural and religious backgrounds and minority groups
- continually seeking to encourage parent involvement in school programs and activities
 - parent participation appears to be most effective when the emphasis is on practical forms of support with formal meetings and committee work kept to a minimum (From Alienation to Engagement, Vol. 1)
- challenging communities to provide opportunities for the meaningful participation of young people in the social, recreational, spiritual and political life of that community
- supporting young people to participate in the social, recreational, spiritual and political life of the community in a meaningful way
- monitoring and enhancing teaching style.

An effective teacher places as much importance on how to teach, as on what to teach

Three conditions have been identified as necessary to build bonding to a social unit like a school or particular class. These are:

1. Opportunities

Children must be provided opportunities to contribute to their community, family, school and peers ... The challenge is to provide meaningful, opportunities that help young people feel significant. These may include active roles of responsibility in the classroom.

2. Skills

Children need to be taught the skills necessary to take advantage of the opportunities provided.

3. Recognition

Children must be recognised and acknowledged for their efforts.

(Social Development Strategy: Building Protective Factors in Your Community, Development Research and Programs Inc, 1993)

These three conditions are standard practice for schools and teachers, but are worth monitoring to ensure that adequate provision is made for all students.

2. Contributing to positive social behaviours and problem solving skills

The effectiveness of coping skills is significant in how young people cope with stress and adversity. There is clear evidence that having effective coping and problem solving skills lessens the risk of depression in eight to twelve year olds in the face of negative life events.

(Goodman et al)

There is a clear link between effective interpersonal problem-solving and later adjustment. Interpersonal problem-solving is an approach that tries to teach young people how to think rather than what to think. It attempts to develop within the young person the skills of developing multiple solutions to problems, foreseeing the outcomes of actions and linking the ends with the means.

(Fuller)

Strategies

Student support services staff can raise awareness in schools of the importance of these strategies and can help schools to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate related programs and activities. Examples include:

- programs and activities to enhance resilience
 - Enhancing resilience involves providing individuals or groups of individuals with training and interactions that increase:
 - a ‘fighting spirit’
 - hope
 - belief in one’s own ability to accomplish a task: mastering difficulties by a persevering effort
 - feeling challenged in life
 - ability to laugh and have a good sense of humour
 - involvement in support groups and warm relationships
 - exposure to humanistic experiences (activities, books, films, videos)
 - living a dream or having a cause that motivates
 - a sense of control
 - optimism: disputing fatalistic and defeatist thinking
 - physical fitness
- peer support programs, including peer mediation and help-seeking strategies (how to ask for and access support when needed)
- policies and programs that are consistent with the principles of health promoting schools
- a comprehensive health and welfare curriculum
- programs that develop the skills of:
 - recognising and appropriately expressing basic emotions, including anger
 - realistic self-appraisal

- coping mechanisms that lessen self-blame
- stress management
- relating to others effectively
- conflict management
- study skills and time management.

3. Ensuring children and adolescents have a relationship with at least one competent, caring adult

Positive relationships that promote close bonds are protective. Examples of these are relationships with teachers and other adults who encourage and recognise a young person's competence.

The people that children are bonded to need to have clear, positive standards for behaviour. They also need to show they believe in the children.

Children who are bonded to others with healthy beliefs are less likely to do things that threaten that bond such as misuse drugs, drop out of school or commit crimes.

(Based on Catalano)

Strategies

Student support services officers can promote the benefits of the following strategies to schools and community groups. Examples include:

- developing pastoral care/home group structures, including vertical home groups where the teacher, as far as possible, stays with the students throughout school
 - students appear to be most engaged in learning when they feel that teachers and other adults care about them as individuals and are interested in their personal achievements, as distinct from measures of comparative 'ability (From Alienation to Engagement, Vol. 1)
- offering mentor programs
 - offering access to one-to-one mentors for students experiencing difficulties that the students choose themselves can improve both their skills and sense of social connection
 - mentors can be drawn from within the school, from parents or from the local community
 - provision needs to be made for screening, training and maintaining volunteers for mentor programs
- developing programs linking students with community sporting clubs
- providing a supportive school environment
- offering extra curricula activities, such as the school newspaper, sport, music, school production, chess club can help to build student self-esteem and involve cooperative learning to further social skills development.

4. Strengthening family relationships and minimising family stress

It is crucial that schools continue to seek ways to develop positive, respectful and meaningful partnerships with parents.

Families with support show an increase in functioning, sense of being cared about and connected in their lives. This increases family mental health.

(Fuller)

For families to create environments characterised by the qualities of caring, high expectations, and opportunities for participation (key building blocks of resilience), they in turn, must exist in communities which also provide support and opportunities.

(Bernard)

Strategies

Student support services staff can assist schools to involve and support families in a preventive sense by highlighting and participating in these strategies. Examples include:

- encouraging the participation of a range of family members in school activities
- providing parent orientation programs
- communicating regularly with parents regarding positives—small gains, steps in progress—when students have been experiencing difficulties
- developing flexible arrangements and welcoming strategies to optimise parent participation in school activities
- providing culturally inclusive communication and activities for parents from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds
- offering positive parenting programs
- organising parent/community forums
- appointing parent liaison people and encouraging activities to promote communication between parents
- involving parents in school programs
- involving schools in parent sponsored community based programs
- providing access to parent advocacy and support
- encouraging parents to assume positions of responsibility such as fund raising and membership of the school council.

5. Fostering a sense of spiritual and communal belonging

Young people who are establishing their identities, values and beliefs need a clear set of reference points to help them make sense of life and their place in the world.

(Based on Eckersley)

All manner of stories—fairytales, folk tales, personal stories, etc—help listeners to explore sensitive issues in a safe non-threatening way, provide appropriate models for behaviour, and remind young people that they are not alone in their struggles and their pain.

(Fredericks)

If you want your children to be brilliant, tell them fairytales. If you want your children to be very brilliant, tell them even more fairytales.

(Albert Einstein)

Strategies

Student support services staff can promote the benefits of the following strategies to schools. Examples include:

- involving students in local activities such as caring for the environment
- challenging communities to provide opportunities for young people to participate in the cultural, political and spiritual life of the community
- collaborating with the community in organising a range of community service programs for students
- offering access to the Victorian Youth Development Program
- making links with local organisations to provide access to activities
- providing relevant curriculum, such as literature, comparative religion, music, environmental studies, philosophy
- organising/participating in festivals to acknowledge and celebrate diversity and a range of events significant to the local community
- civics education.

Good practice

1. Transition programs

Moving On

The videotape *Moving On* was made by Braybrook Secondary College students about the issues of transition from primary school to secondary school as a way of strengthening existing links between the college and the feeder schools in the cluster.

A staff member from the Footscray Community Arts Centre was appointed to collaborate with the school's project officer to mentor college students to make the video.

Year 5 and 6 students from the feeder primary were interviewed about their concerns regarding transition. This information then formed the basis of the script.

The Year 7–11 college students were supported through the process of making the video and were encouraged to find innovative ways to deliver the information. This resulted in the students gaining valuable skills and a great sense of achievement from producing an excellent docu-drama.

The primary school students also benefited from the chance to talk about their concerns and know that these were shared. They made very positive contact with college students and consequently felt better prepared for and more welcome at their new school.

Cathedral Cluster transition camp

Alexandra Secondary College runs an annual three day transition camp at Crystal Creek for Year 6 students in the December before they start at the college. A designated teacher coordinates the camp and other transition activities.

A team of teachers from the local primary school and the secondary college organise and run the program of activities, which includes swimming, Japanese and Italian, a trivia night and a concert.

For most of the time at the camp students work in their form group for the next year. The camp allows students and teachers to get to know each other in a relaxed and enjoyable environment.

Gippsland primary school transition coordinator model

- a transition coordinator is given a time allowance of four periods a week to work on the transition program with Year 5 and 6 students
- by the end of term 3 the coordinator concentrates on the Year 6 students
- a Getting to Know You program of games and activities is implemented to help the students become familiar with the coordinator and students from the local secondary college in order to remove any unnecessary fears
- parent transition meetings are held in June/July.

Gippsland secondary college home room model

- a Year 7 teacher works in a Year 6 primary school class four times a year to familiarise them with the students and the way their classes operate
- a home room teacher teaches at least two or three subjects to the same group of Year 7 students to reduce the number of changes of teacher
- orientation activities for parents and students are held in June and December.

2. Peer support

Altona Secondary College peer programs

The college has a peer support program for Year 7 students led by trained Year 11 students. Recently it has also introduced a VCE Supportive Friends program to provide a support network for VCE students to cope with the pressures of the final years of school.

3. Health promotion, incorporating drug education

Jamieson Park Secondary College

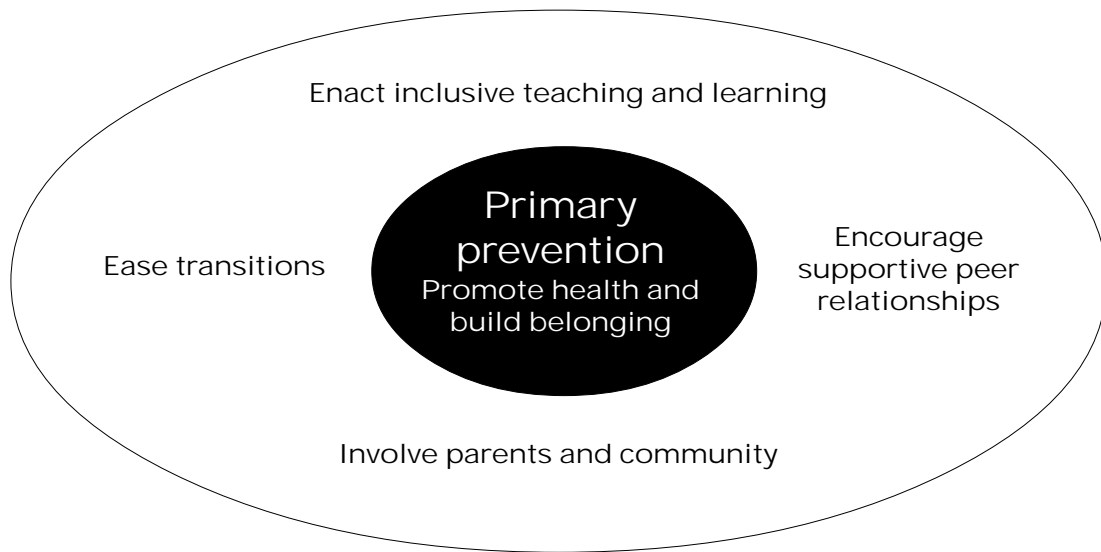
Adolescent health has been made a priority at Jamieson Park Secondary College. The college has been involved in the Turning the Tide in Schools drug education initiative and the Gatehouse project, which addresses emotional health issues for young people.

A newly formed adolescent health team with representation from the administration, teaching staff, parents and community agencies aims to identify and address health issues that impact on students and youth in the wider community. During 1998, there will be a focus on addressing issues related to harassment and bullying and developing a policy to deal with drug-related issues.

The school has actively promoted health as follows:

- the number of students who elect to do health as a subject has gradually increased
- the health curriculum has been reviewed and modified to ensure the goals of the Individual School Drug Education Strategy and the Gatehouse project are met
- all Year 8 students are involved in the Gatehouse project
- Health Education units have been introduced at VCE level
- English teachers are exploring how emotional health and drug education issues can be approached through novels studied
- stress management has been introduced for students and staff
- local clubs and associations have been promoted to increase student participation in local leisure activities.

PRIMARY PREVENTION



2. Early intervention

DEFINITION

Early intervention

- aims to target those at risk of ongoing social, emotional and/or physical harm in order to reduce the intensity, severity and duration of the risk behaviour
- intends to minimise potential harm by improvements in identifying, assessing and managing students at risk.

Early intervention is focused on groups that are at higher risk of harm and aims to improve their resilience through effective and appropriate support programs and treatment.

Strategies are targeted at students displaying inappropriate choice of coping skills, stress reactions, depressive symptoms, and other personal and social vulnerabilities.

Students who display clusters of predisposing risk factors are a particular focus of early intervention programs. Their multiple needs mean these individuals are especially vulnerable when service systems are poorly integrated and uncoordinated. Improved cross-sectoral approaches are an important goal in early intervention.

Risk and resilience factors

Level	Risk factors	Protective factors
Community level		
	Availability of drugs	
	Media portrayals of violence	Cultures of cooperation
	Transitions and mobility	Stability and connection
	Low neighbourhood attachment and community disorganisation	Good relationship with an adult outside the family
	Poverty	
School culture and ethos		
	Detachment from school	A sense of belonging
	Academic failure, especially in middle years	Positive achievements and evaluations at school
	Early and persistent antisocial behaviour	Having someone who believes in you
	Low parental interest in education	Attendance at pre-school education
Family		
	Family history of problem alcohol or drug usage	A sense of belonging or connectedness to family
	Inappropriate family management	Family valued traits
	Family conflict	Proactive problem solving and minimal conflict during infancy
	Alcohol/dugs interfere with family rituals and celebrations	Maintenance of family rituals
	Harsh/coercive and/or inconsistent parenting	Warm relationship with one parent
	Marital instability or conflict	Absence of divorce during adolescence
	Favourable parental attitudes toward risk taking behaviours	A good fit between parent and child
Individual/peer		
	Constitutional factors, alienation/rebelliousness, hyperactivity	Temperament/activity level, social responsivity, autonomy
	Seeing peers taking drugs	
	Friends who engage in problem behaviour	Developed a special gift, curiosity and zest for life
	Favourable attitudes toward problem behaviour	Work success during adolescence
	Early initiation of the problem behaviour	High intelligence, not when paired with sensitive temperament

Adapted from the forthcoming publication by Fuller A., *From Surviving to Thriving*, 1998, ACER, Melbourne. Reproduced with the permission of the Australian Council for Educational Research.

What this means for schools and student support services staff?

Research has shown that there are a number of risk factors that increase the chances of adolescents developing health and behaviour problems. Risks need to be reduced while increasing protection throughout the course of young people's development.
(Catalano).

Generally teachers are better at identifying behavioural rather than emotional disturbances. Therefore it is not generally beneficial to train them to intervene with suicidal young people but rather to provide them with sufficient training so that they can review the relationships they form with students, develop a healthy culture in their schools and be more attuned to students experiencing depression and emotional turmoil.
(Fuller)

Considerations regarding risk assessment:

- teachers and school support staff need to develop knowledge and skills to help them recognise a range of behaviours or situations that indicate students are vulnerable to harm such as suicide, self-harm, substance abuse and exploitation
 - while risk factors are valuable, they can only be a guide. There are young people without any of these risk factors who engage in risk taking and self-damaging behaviours each year. We therefore need to be conscious of the stresses on all students
 - two main groups of concern are:
 - those young people who enter their teenage years with low levels of functioning and maintain these. Close association with someone who has died tragically or who has attempted suicide will often open up suicide as an option for these young people
 - those who decline in the mid to late years of adolescence are at high risk to complete suicide.
- (Krupinski, 1997)

One common theme in many but not all young people attempting suicide is depression. With young people exhibiting high levels of depression referral to a mental health worker is important.

Strategies

Student support staff can assist schools to develop the following strategies and can participate in their implementation and evaluation. Examples include:

- establishing supportive school management structures and procedures to assist all school staff in carrying out their pastoral role with students, for example school welfare committees
- developing school policy and practice that clearly articulates and supports pastoral roles and responsibilities for all staff. This will enable student distress to be recognised early and acted upon appropriately

- asking for a volunteer staff member who is prepared to connect with a marginalised student on a positive basis for a short time (even ten minutes per week) can be a timely way to boost resilience. This staff member should not be involved in disciplinary action with that student (Fuller)
- assessing, where appropriate, the social-emotional status of students
- using diagnostic measures of psycho-social functioning where appropriate. This can include levels of student self-esteem, social isolation, drug misuse, depression or suicidal tendencies
- planning and implementing appropriate curriculum programs to meet the specific needs of identified students
- monitoring and evaluating programs to determine their effectiveness
- developing clear referral systems for school staff to help clarify emerging difficulties and to link students with appropriate support before problems are too entrenched
- providing school-based helping processes where students are assisted to clarify their concerns and to access further specialist support if needed
- offering co-counselling approaches or consultation to designated student welfare staff or other teachers when they are supporting students and their families
- communicating that it is important for teachers in a counselling role to clarify with students limits that may apply to confidentiality
- working in partnership with other schools and service providers in the community to make an early impact on behaviours and situations that are potentially damaging to children and young people
- developing, implementing and evaluating a range of strategies to find out more about their students and their needs, such as surveys concerning their perceptions of their health and wellbeing and their sense of safety at school
- developing flexible options for schooling including, for example, work experience and partial work/partial school programs
- developing the skills of school staff. As teachers are often the first point of contact for young people experiencing emotional distress, they need to develop relevant skills for recognising signs of distress and responding appropriately.

Teachers need skills to:

- develop a caring climate and clear procedures to ensure that students will feel comfortable in discussing their concerns with them and with counsellors
- clearly communicate to students how to access support, as well as the role of the teacher when they are discussing personal problems
- know how to respond appropriately to student concerns
- know how to raise sensitive issues with parents and how to handle conflicts between students and parents concerning their difficulties
- determine an appropriate level of involvement with students and their families
- know how to communicate with colleagues about particular students, especially when their colleagues have negative attitudes
- know their professional obligations and accountability requirements, for instance regarding legal and ethical issues such as the mandatory reporting of child abuse.

Good practice

Whole school approach to overcoming violence and harassment

In 1996, harassment was seen as a major obstacle to learning at South Gippsland Secondary College. Awareness of the links between harassment and youth suicide also prompted action. Steps taken to address the issue include:

- students were surveyed with the School Safety Survey for Secondary Schools and parent feedback was sought on the extent of harassment at the college
- data gathered from the survey and through other processes showed that a significant problem existed, particularly with junior school boys. Fear of harassment was a major worry for students entering the college for the first time and for their parents
- policy and procedures were developed in 1996 to achieve an harassment-free school, featuring a “SGSC No Put Down Zone” message conveyed on stickers and badges, in classroom lessons and in communication with parents
- other practices to deal with instances of bullying include using the “method of shared concern”, introduced via professional development.

Students now report a marked decrease in levels of harassment and a recent parent opinion survey shows that nearly 90 per cent of parents believe that the school has a safe and secure environment.

Skills training program for teachers involved in student welfare

The Springvale Cluster has had a welfare training program for primary school teachers for four years at Wallarano Primary School.

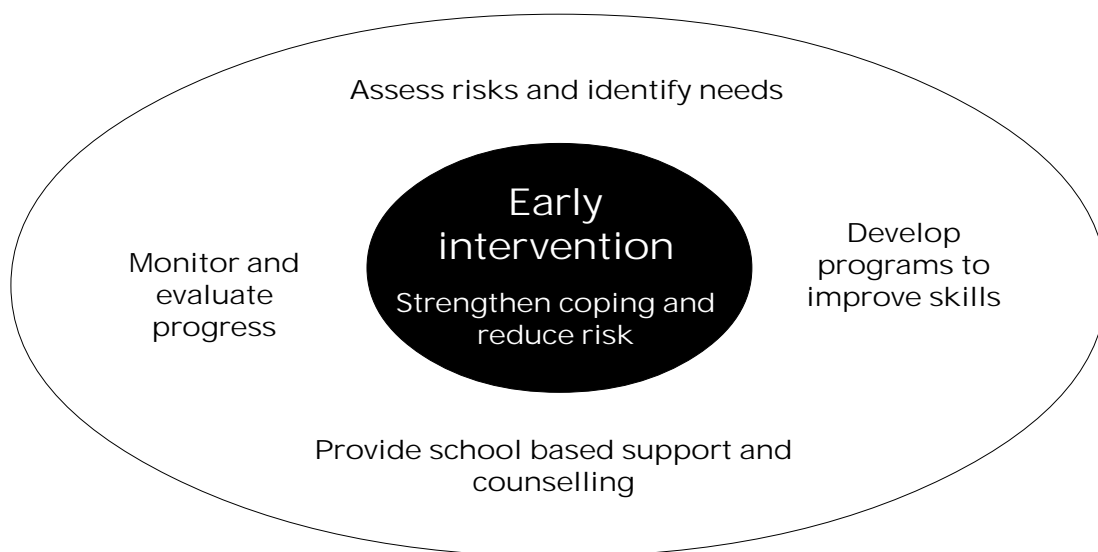
At present this after school program is structured in two phases, each providing one session of training per week for six weeks. Local student support services staff, service providers and past participants present sessions on areas including:

- interpersonal skills
- management issues
- the role of a student welfare coordinator
- mediation skills
- learning difficulties
- legal and ethical issues
- resources
- working with external agencies.

A critical component of phase 2 of the training is how to conduct a welfare audit. This activity allows participants to choose a specific welfare issue to focus on and explore in their own school.

The program has facilitated the development of a welfare role within a number of schools in the cluster.

EARLY INTERVENTION



3. Intervention

DEFINITION

Intervention

- intervention involves providing effective treatment and support to students in crisis
- includes ensuring access to affordable and appropriate counselling, care and treatment services
- is concerned with providing skills for professionals who are dealing with students at crisis point.

What this means for schools and student support services staff?

Students may encounter a range of difficulties that may require intervention. Issues around mental health, family difficulties and breakdown, abuse and neglect, sexual identity, drug misuse and eating disorders may require short-term or ongoing support. In some cases this support may need to be provided by a specific therapeutic service.

Early and persistent difficulties and antisocial behaviour

Students who display early and persistent difficulties, including poor attendance and antisocial behaviour, such as misbehaving in school, truanting and getting into fights with other children, are at increased risk for drug misuse, juvenile delinquency, violence, dropping out of school and teenage pregnancy. Collaborative intervention to improve such behaviour is a crucial area of work for schools, student support services and community services.

Suicide intervention

One of the most difficult crisis situations to manage effectively is being confronted with a suicidal young person. Should a student threaten suicide the following advice, provided in the *Suicide Prevention Victorian Task Force Report*, is critical:

“All suicide threats must be taken seriously. While contemplating suicide, an adolescent’s perception of reality is often quite different from actual reality. If contact is made with a young person who is suspected of showing suicidal tendencies, it is essential to take rapid and appropriate action. Do not assume the situation will cure itself. It is far better to take action if the possibility of suicide exists, than to deal with the aftermath of a suicide. While caution is required, what you do between identifying the imminent risk and the arrival of professional help may save a life. During this time, you can assist the adolescent to feel less isolated and alone.”

Suicide intervention is based on an approach of:

- *Affirming the person: using whatever technique one feels comfortable with to make the adolescent feel valued and worthwhile.*
- *Affirming the problem: recognising the adolescent's concerns about the problem and not denying the issue or its importance to the person.*
- *Negating the solution: presenting alternatives and facilitating different perspectives with the adolescent in such a way as to avoid lecturing or preaching."*

Liaison with other key departments and organisations, such as the Department of Human Services and Victoria Police, is essential in providing access to a range of support services for young people and their families.

Strategies

Student support services officers have a pivotal role in assisting schools to:

- determine the range of specific expertise available from student support service officers in their cluster in order to access it most effectively to meet the needs of students and their families
- clarify counselling and other interventions that can be provided by student support services staff
- negotiate how these interventions will be carried out and clarify associated communication procedures
- make decisions concerning when other specialist services in the community need to be involved
- strengthen liaison with their local community and its services. Particular attention needs to be given to ensuring there is access to services that are appropriate and effective, for instance there may be special difficulties in rural areas that need a strategic community approach to filling service gaps
- target services to identified local needs
- develop and monitor referral pathways with a range of service providers in the local and wider community
- involve relevant school staff in the systematic monitoring of student progress, including involvement in support group/case management meetings
- develop and regularly review protocols to assist cooperation and collaboration between schools and other service providers—need to clarify roles and responsibilities of all involved in intervention support for students
- use an action research approach to monitor, evaluate and modify the intervention.

When referring to health services, consider the need to:

- identify agencies/community resources before their services are required, including contact names, numbers, after hours arrangements

- ensure a range of service providers are identified such as:
 - local general practitioners
 - mental health services, including crisis teams
 - adolescent services
 - child and family services
 - drug and alcohol services
 - services able to effectively respond to sexuality issues
 - appropriate resources for different cultural and religious contexts
 - specialist services, such as those for refugees
- check the professional bona fides of the service providers
- take into account the ethnic and cultural background of the student to be referred and the professional and ensure appropriate cross-cultural communication
- build in processes for feedback
- attend to confidentiality issues
- build in follow up procedures
- measure and monitor outcomes.

In particular, student support services staff can strengthen the role they play in intervention approaches by:

- constantly updating and strengthening their repertoire of professional skills
- participating in inter-sectoral professional development to build knowledge of available services, positive working relationships and common understandings regarding service delivery
- assisting schools in the development and maintenance of referral pathways with a range of service providers in the local and wider community
- being available for involvement in regular support group/case management meetings
- clarifying their role in any intervention
- helping schools to develop and review protocols to assist cooperation and collaboration between schools and other service providers.

Good practice

Benalla cluster implementation of the Exploring Together program

Benalla West Primary School, Benalla Primary School and Peranbin College, together with the social worker from Benalla District Support Services, have pooled their resources to offer the Exploring Together program.

The program runs for ten weeks and aims to reduce behaviour problems, improve parenting skills and strengthen the family unit. Children with behaviour difficulties such as aggression, social withdrawal and problematic peer relationships, are encouraged to develop appropriate skills as their parents explore new ways of relating to them.

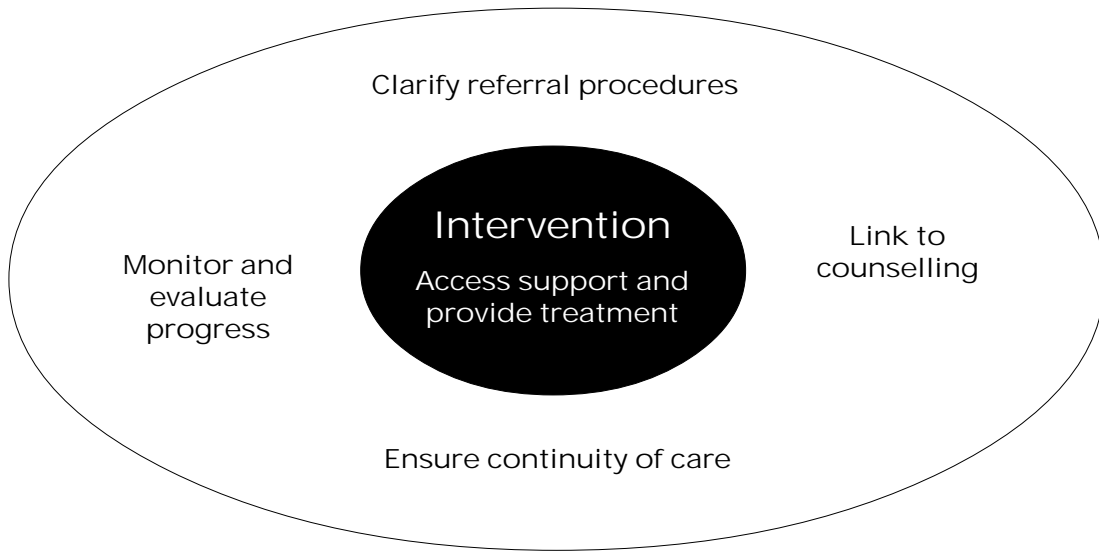
This innovative program was designed by the School of Psychology at Latrobe University and extensively trialed at the Austin Hospital. It intervenes across the main systems in the life of each child—the individual, the family and the school. It provides an environment in which family members can improve their communication and understanding of each other's needs. It also increases home and school communication and provides a common approach for behaviour management across both systems.

South Gippsland Connect project

As part of Turning the Tide in Schools, this drug education Connect project, auspiced by the South Gippsland Division of General Practitioners, has been conducting a health and wellbeing survey for students in the seven local secondary colleges. The survey information will be extremely useful in voicing the views and needs of young people and will give impetus to improving health and welfare service delivery for youth in South Gippsland.

Data provided in survey responses will form the basis of intersectoral workshops on youth health and welfare issues in the region for general practitioners, teachers and health providers. Four secondary colleges will also trial approaches to improve the way local young people view and access general practitioners and medical services in the region.

INTERVENTION



4. Postvention

DEFINITION

Postvention

- Postvention aims to provide appropriate support to students, their families and other members of the school community affected by emergency situations or traumatic incidents, particularly those involving death due to suicide, accident or illness.
- Traumatic incidents are those which are extraordinary and beyond our normal ability to cope.

Postvention is the work carried out to deal with the aftermath of traumatic incidents, such as suicide, in order to assist the survivors to cope with what has happened and to reduce the chances of further trauma, including suicides and suicide attempts.

The specific situation will determine the actions a school will take. These actions will vary according to the degree to which the incident is public, the age of those affected by it, and the extent of involvement.

Postvention activity recognises that those bereaved (the friends, family and peers of a person who has died) may be particularly vulnerable.

Postvention programs assist in managing the effects of traumatic incidents, which can include strong emotional reactions (such as anger, guilt, shame) that may lead to the development of depression or in other ways interfere with recovery.

What this means for schools and student support services staff?

The effects of a critical incident can be lasting, depending upon the quality of the individual's experiences during or shortly after the incident. The degree and rate of recovery is determined in part by the extent to which the individual is surrounded by supportive, caring people who help him or her to deal with the after-effects of the experience.
(Whitla)

A school plan worked out in advance can avoid much confusion and stress among staff and can ensure that the best possible help is available to the school in a timely manner.
(Taylor)

Recovery processes that address stress and grief responses, and that minimise distress and maximise morale, are likely to be most effective in the school environment.
(Jackson and Bates)

Managing School Emergencies: Minimising the Impact of Trauma on Staff and Students

This manual was distributed by the Department of Education in 1997 to provide schools, regions and school support services with policy and procedures for managing a range of emergencies and traumatic events. It details such important areas as roles and responsibilities for regional and school-based staff, how traumatic incidents should be reported and processes for needs assessment.

Important advice for schools and student support services staff includes:

- details of roles and responsibilities at the regional, school support service and school level
- requirements for reporting emergencies and traumatic incidents
- the nature of available specialist support
- the composition of the statewide recovery network and how it is accessed
- considerations concerning management of post-traumatic stress.

Strategies

Schools and student support services staff need to:

- have an accessible copy of the manual, *Managing School Emergencies: Minimising the Impact of Trauma on Staff and Students*, and be informed about current Department of Education policy and procedures, particularly concerning their own roles and responsibilities
- be aware of how people can be affected by traumatic incidents and emergencies
- ensure that school emergency management plans are developed, consistent with the manual, to enable an effective response to a range of traumatic incidents—specific plans are needed for some situations such as suicide, accidents, bereavement due to death of student or teacher, drug incidents
- provide for and participate in training concerning the development and implementation of emergency or traumatic incident plans
- be aware of the need to monitor the reactions of vulnerable students
- ensure that they have ongoing support for themselves and their colleagues when they are involved in managing a traumatic incident. It is recommended that effective support should include:
 - administrative support
 - personal support
 - collegiate support
 - professional support
- be aware of the importance of structured defusing or debriefing meetings coordinated by appropriately trained professionals
- review and evaluate the plans after any implementation.

GOOD PRACTICE

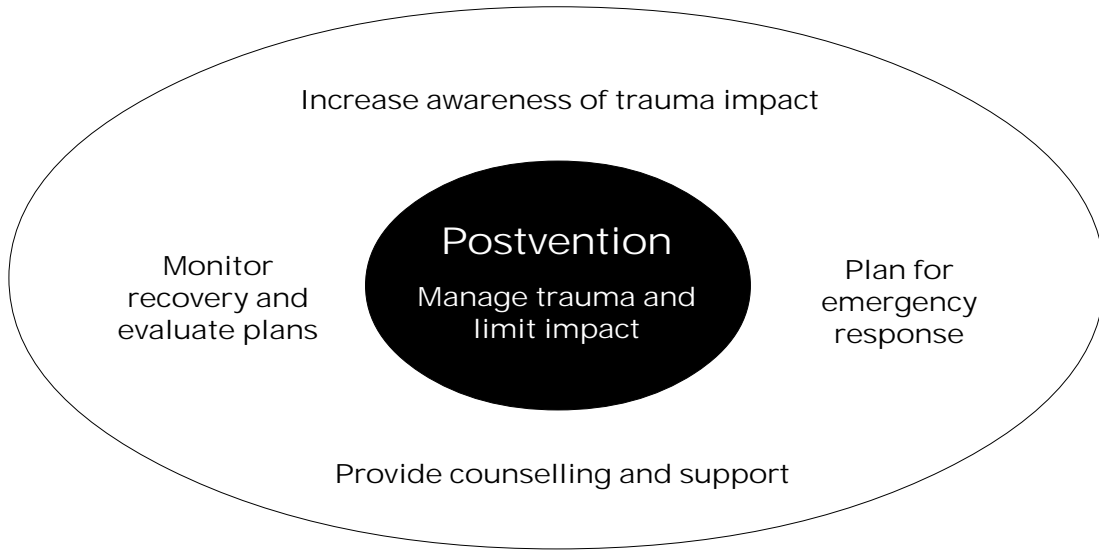
A recovery process at a metropolitan secondary college

Following the recent suicide of a student, secondary college students and staff spent some months working through a process of recovery.

A well informed and coordinated response facilitates the process of recovery. Some learnings relating to those difficult first days may assist other schools:

- check with the family to determine what information can be released
- while avoiding excessive detail, provide honest and unambiguous information to staff and students
- provide staff with a written statement to guide them in informing students
- offer support from a member of the management team to those teachers who feel they cannot deal with this task
- identify those students closest to the deceased and inform them before the rest of the school
- contact the parents of those particular students and allow these students to talk to their parents. Encourage them to stay together at school
- inform all students in classroom groups rather than large assemblies. This allows for greater containment and easier identification of those who may need additional support
- provide a recovery room for students to spend time together
- have counsellors available to work with individual students, groups of students and staff
- be prepared for ongoing provision of additional support. Recovery is a long and painful process
- prepare a statement to be sent home to all parents advising them of the facts of the matter and reassuring them of the support being offered to students
- provide avenues for members of the recovery team to support one another and the rest of the staff. Several meetings need to be held within those first few days and issues revisited over a period of months
- have a clear and up to date emergency management plan.

POSTVENTION



MAJOR CONCEPTS

1. Continuity of care

DEFINITION

Continuity of care refers to:

- the ongoing and coordinated management of a young person who is at risk
- the services the young person is accessing
- the provision of a range of services from responses to crises to preventive activities.

It will usually involve establishing a team and developing a coordinated services plan to meet the needs of the young person.

Strategies

While evidence is inconclusive about whether individual or group interventions are more successful in achieving positive outcomes for young people with health and welfare needs, in reality, as a young person's health and welfare needs intensify, there is an increasing likelihood that a range of people will be supporting them.

One factor that contributes to a successful outcome for a young person is having someone prepared to support them over an extended period of time. Another critical success factor in supporting young people with health and welfare needs, is to operate compatibly with their social family. In this context, the role of the classroom teacher becomes paramount.

Teachers

The way a teacher teaches will create opportunities for the development of feelings like belonging, trust, care and respect. These feelings in turn underlie meaningful communication and relationships, as well as a sense of mutual responsibility for the wellbeing of all members of the school community.

Student support services officers

It is important for student support services staff to support relationships that have been developed in the school. In some instances, the student support services staff may take a secondary role, where they 'coach' teachers, welfare coordinators or school administrators about how best to support a young person in need.

Furthermore, the student support services person will be in a well informed position to know if and when more specialist support or intervention is required. Student support services staff and school-based personnel should also remain aware of what is appropriate considering expertise, resources and legal requirements.

Further involvement

When intervention is required, usually a range of people will have an involvement. If there is one factor that contributes to a successful outcome, it is having **someone who is prepared to support a young person over an extended period**. This person could be a parent, student welfare coordinator, school administrator, teacher, health, youth or community worker or even, in some cases, another student.

Young people often need a primary contact person who is supported by other colleagues who take on different roles. High risk adolescents may need:

- a manager whose job is to provide structure, containment and consequences for problematic behaviour
- an ‘advocate’ who will accompany the young person in their dealings with professionals and institutions
- a ‘mentor’ who can remain in a neutral, engaging role with the young person.

The needs of some high risk adolescents are so disturbed that it is not possible for one person to take on more than one of these roles. By dividing the tasks between three staff members, continuity of contact can also be increased. It is desirable that the people involved in these roles represent more than one institution (intersectoral approach) so that the young person is not relying on school personnel alone.

Obviously, this approach is dependent on the level of support required and the resources available.

Student support groups

Student support groups have been used effectively with young people with disabilities for a number of years. Some student support staff and welfare coordinators have also used the approach to successfully support young people with other needs. They are an effective way of managing or coordinating a range of people who are involved with a young person. They encourage clear aims, clear job roles, monitoring and review, which in turn leads to an efficiency that encourages commitment and continuity of care.

The main tasks of a student support group meeting are to:

- identify objectives
- develop a plan to achieve the objectives
- choose strategies to implement the program
- review and adjust programs.

Elements of successful student support group meetings include:

- planning
- preparation
- collaboration
- clear meeting structure
- documentation.

Role of student support services staff

Student support groups are an effective way of organising communication between school staff, families, student support services staff and outside agencies and professionals.

Student support services staff can play an integral role in making student support groups work in a number of ways, including:

- providing professional development for school-based staff and the community sector in organising student support groups
- convening the groups
- following up with different members of support groups to ensure they comprehended proceedings and are acting accordingly
- acting as a prompt to ensure participants attend regularly and document and review the process.

GOOD PRACTICE

School support group at Mooroopna Park Primary School

A school support group was formed at Mooroopna Park Primary School in 1996 to ensure that the needs of students and families who are experiencing education, health or welfare problems are met.

It aims to use the resources of the Department of Education, welfare agencies, health services and the private sector to meet needs in a coordinated way at a reasonable cost. This school support group model is an adaptation of the Debney Meadows Primary School model, adjusted to meet the needs of a medium-sized country school.

Membership of the school support group includes:

- the principal
- the assistant principal/student welfare coordinator
- the classroom teacher of the student to be discussed
- the school nurse
- Shepparton District speech pathologist
- Shepparton District social worker
- an educational psychologist
- a school support representative from Goulburn Valley Family Care
- a representative from the Council Against Sexual Assault (CASA).

The school support group meets twice a term and works through a confidential client-based agenda where the principal, student welfare coordinator and the classroom teacher brief the group on the issues/concerns. The group agrees on action, allocates tasks, tracks progress and monitors outcomes.

The school support group has a number of benefits:

- it achieves consensus among the professionals in clarifying the problem
- it brings to the discussion a broader understanding of child psychology, family dynamics and medical issues
- it allocates the most appropriate resources to address the specific concerns.

2. Partnerships between schools and the community

DEFINITION

Partnerships between schools, school clusters and service providers involve:

- an acceptance of shared responsibility for addressing common areas of concern
- a collaborative approach to developing strategies to reach goals.

They are also a means of providing optimum service delivery for students at risk.

Strategies

Since community approaches are likely to involve a broad spectrum of individuals, groups and organisations they create a greater base of support for change and the optimisation of service delivery for students at risk.

A broad base of community leadership and involvement in prevention is likely to lead to long-term change as programs and strategies are integrated into the services and activities of local organisations and institutions, eg mapping, protocols and referral.

Community partnerships have three main components:

- intersectoral collaboration.
- community development.
- health promotion.

Intersectoral collaboration

Intersectoral collaboration occurs when a range of government departments, professionals, community organisations, schools and other relevant parties come together for reasons like responding to, or promoting an issue, providing professional development or exchanging information, being proactive by developing a program or a joint funding application, or providing support to a mutual client (young person).

Intersectoral collaboration is often for a specific purpose. It generally offers a more comprehensive service than one institution or individual is capable of offering, can lead to a more rational and efficient use of resources and provides an environment conducive to information sharing and creative solutions.

Student support staff can encourage intersectoral collaboration by:

- convening meetings
- mapping services
- being aware of referral procedures and protocols
- promoting services to schools and parents

- acting as a conduit, eg case management, school support groups
- clarifying aims and job roles
- encouraging positive communication and feedback
- sharing information.

School Focused Youth Service

The School Focused Youth Service is a part of the Government's response to the Suicide Prevention Task Force Report (Recommendation 6.2). Four million dollars additional funding has been allocated to the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education in partnership to implement the initiative. These funds have been supplemented by \$1.02m (previously with the Department of Education's Extra Edge Program).

The objectives of the initiative are to:

- establish collaborative structures and mechanisms between schools and the relevant services
- provide linkages for agencies and schools which have a client base of young people and which directly support young people
- improve linkages, cohesiveness and integration of service provision for young people displaying 'at risk' behaviours who require support and intervention, and
- purchase services to meet gaps in the current service system as identified at the local level.

Partners in collaborative strategies will include:

- schools and community agencies
- both government and non-government sectors (includes Catholic and independent schools)
- other local resource/service providers as required/appropriate.

It is important that the School Focused Youth Service links closely with the student support services. The School Focused Youth Service will be required to develop close linkages with school support personnel located in government schools, as well as close linkages with Catholic and independent schools, and with community agencies who are in contact with young people who are no longer connected to the school system. Developing these linkages will enable identification of service gaps, development of strategies to respond to those gaps and development a continuum of service intervention.

Community development

Community development tends to be more strategic than intersectoral collaboration, and often functions under the auspice of a peak body, eg local council, executive with representatives from a range of organisations etc which develops a mission statement and set of proposed outcomes, strategies and organisational roles.

Member organisations including schools, government departments, health professionals and community organisations, may adjust their own charters to

support the targets set by the community-based strategy. In other instances, service gaps will be identified and prioritised in the strategic plan, and support will be given to those institutions that choose to respond to those gaps.

Successful community development strategies require a major commitment from at least one person (with support from many others) to drive the process. Some clusters (or a groups of clusters) may consider this an effective use of staff time. How student support services staff might drive this process may become more clear after considering some of the models that follow.

Health promotion

Health promotion is an integral part of the broader community health prevention strategy. Quit, SunSmart, Safe Sex, Turning the Tide and TAC campaigns are all the more effective if taken up by local communities in a cooperative and strategic way.

Health promotion also encourages clients to use services more effectively, is likely to foster community support for health and welfare related organisations, and encourages a sense of community purpose and achievement.

Furthermore, any community partnership that fails to promote itself, jeopardises its sustainability. This form of promotion may be a regular report to a supportive group, distribution of evaluation studies to relevant organisations, media publicity, high profile fund raising activities, engagement of influential members of the community, or from a schools perspective, regular feedback to school, cluster or regional management groups, administrators, staff, parents and students.

GOOD PRACTICE

Wimmera model

Horsham and surrounding districts have fostered cooperation and planning with committees formed under the auspice of the regional youth committee. Many local institutions including schools, churches, government departments, community organisations and individuals actively participated in the process.

The methodology is based on a youth suicide prevention model developed in Canada. The three main techniques being used are intersectoral collaboration, community development and health promotion.

The process involves:

- developing an understanding of the region and the context in which young people live, go to school and work
- consulting with different sectors of the community—health, welfare, youth, clergy, parents and local government
- understanding how young people are serviced in relation to health
- providing training to improve competence, confidence and consistency
- consulting with young people using focus groups
- developing appropriate responses.

Some strengths of this approach include:

- involving all relevant groups and individuals, particularly young people
- effective allocation of resources to needs
- fostering a common language and purpose
- empowering people to resolve issues
- being task oriented
- using peoples' time efficiently
- being proactive rather than reactive.

Geelong model

Geelong has had an active youth sector for a number of years. The peak policy making body in the community-based youth sector is the Barwon Adolescent Taskforce. School representatives attend meetings as part of the community.

The peak body develops priorities, supports funding proposals and sponsors local research, as well as advocates on behalf of youth. It has a business plan, including a mission statement, objectives and procedures. It has a school subcommittee called Risky Business, which also has a business plan.

Risky Business is made up of community workers who work with schools. Its mission statement is to ‘support workers who seek to develop the best possible strategies and programs for students at risk across the Barwon region’.

The school sector has the info-hub which is a formalised communication centre. It is a subcommittee of the assistant principal’s association which has as its mission statement, ‘enhances communication between the community and school sectors in support of students at risk’. A range of other steering groups meet to oversee the implementation of programs for young people.

The benefits of a well organised community sector, that incorporates a well organised relationship between schools and community agencies, local council, health professionals, legal services and government departments, seems to manifest itself in a range of programs available for students at risk.

At last count, the city has alternate school settings, youth workers in programs working solely with schools, many more who work in programs that include school students, a buddy system where every participating school has a community worker who meets with school personnel on a regular basis to give advice as a critical friend and who is contactable at any time, intensive intervention programs operating out of agencies, and a host of individual support programs including mediation, mental health and advocacy.

Another manifestation of Geelong’s well-organised youth sector has been the development of a youth precinct within the city. In the same city block, the Post Office, the Clockwork and Courthouse projects are housed. The latter is a multi-million dollar initiative that includes a 250 seat theatre, cafe, information service, recording studios, photographic studios, exhibition and gallery space, and a gift shop. Fifteen of the twenty-six board members are aged between twelve and twenty-five years and all staff are in this bracket. One aim of the project is to provide a positive environment for young people that is safe, welcoming, affordable and free of alcohol and drugs.

The Post Office is where young people can go for information about available services and programs. The Clockwork project is housed next to the Courthouse and is a youth specific health service.

Sandringham Secondary College model

The Sandringham Secondary College community support model recognises the importance of the school as an integral part of the community. It aims to:

- provide support to young people who exhibit any of the ‘at risk’ behaviours, including young people with a significant mental illness, inappropriate drug use and anti-social behaviour
- develop a chain of links that will support young people and allow them to choose the source of their support
- focus on preventive programs.

Personnel and community agencies involved in the model include:

- the college student welfare coordinators
- a Department of Education guidance officer
- a youth, family counsellor and a community recreational officer from Bayside City Council
- a youth outreach worker and a parent and adolescent mediator from Southern Family Life Counselling Service for Children, Youth and Families
- a nurse from the Central Bayside Community Health Centre.

A key activity undertaken within the model is the Caretakers Cottage project. A house on the Sandringham Campus of the college formerly occupied by resident caretakers is being restored for use as a centre for student services. In a cooperative mission between the campus and Southern Family Life, assisted by the Sandringham Rotary Club, this valuable resource will be a base for:

- a youth worker from Southern Family Life
- outreach counsellors from the Taskforce Drug Rehabilitation and Counselling agency
- social workers from Centrelink who need to interview students applying for the homeless rate of AUSTUDY
- a nurse from Heathlands Community Health Centre
- a work placement industry liaison officer who will work with the students undertaking VET courses
- other community agencies, for instance youth accommodation services, as necessary for interviewing and counselling.

Donations of equipment from local traders and voluntary work on the house by Holmesglen TAFE students, Rotary Club members and Southern Family Life workers have helped to get the project started. Special interest groups have been established to work on related projects, including music, art, gardening and planning groups.

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