

Teachers have an important role to play in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their students. When times are uncertain, it is important to monitor how students are going. Where necessary, refer them to your school wellbeing coordinator or team for additional support.

## What you can do:

- ✓ **Recognise that each student will have different experiences and reactions**
- ✓ **Establish and maintain routines and a calm classroom**
- ✓ **Provide reassurance that school is a safe place to be**
- ✓ **Support social skills by including social and emotional learning in the curriculum**
- ✓ **Build connectedness to school**
- ✓ **Talk about mental health and seeking help**
- ✓ **Notice changes in your students' mood, behaviour and presentation**
- ✓ **Inquire, asking your students how they are**
- ✓ **Listen without asking too many questions**
- ✓ **Refer or report if you are concerned about a student**
- ✓ **Access support**
- ✓ **Take care of your own mental health.**

## Recognise each student will have different experiences and reactions

Encourage students to reflect and share their experiences of learning from home and worries about coronavirus (COVID-19), noting that repetitive discussions about fears and concerns may be unhelpful. Answer questions using simple, direct and age appropriate language.

Move on if you observe signs of stress or anxiety (e.g. fidgeting, avoiding eye contact, asking to leave the room, or becoming teary or angry). These signs may also provide an indication of students who might need additional support.

## Establish and maintain routines and a calm classroom

Predictable routines and known boundaries support student mental health and wellbeing, promote learning engagement and support positive behaviours.

You may need to regularly talk about classroom expectations and routines with your students. Think about how you can negotiate tasks and deadlines and break larger assessment tasks into smaller chunks where possible to help students experience success and support their engagement.

Some students and families may struggle with returning to routine and starting school on time. You may wish to consider scheduling fun activities at the start of the day.



## Provide reassurance that school is a safe place to be

Reassure students of the procedures and supports in place to ensure that school is a safe place to be. Remind them that your school is a community in which everyone cares for one another.

## Support social skills by including social and emotional learning in the classroom

There are a range of activities that you can do with your class to support their mental health and wellbeing.

The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials provide a variety of activities designed to develop students' social and emotional learning. The activities cover six key elements of social and emotional learning, including emotional literacy, personal strengths, positive coping, problem solving, stress management and seeking help.

For more information, see: [Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships](#)

## Build connectedness to school

Connectedness, or belonging, is essential for positive mental health and wellbeing.

Think about how you would normally create a warm and positive classroom climate. Activities could include cooperative games, puzzles that require students to work together, lunchtime clubs and group work with defined roles and low stress outcomes.

## Talk about mental health and seeking help

It is helpful to normalise talking about mental health and wellbeing in an age appropriate way. Reassure students it is normal and understandable to experience a range of emotions about coronavirus (COVID-19). Whatever their reaction, it is okay. They won't be the only one feeling this way!

Encourage your students to take a break from social media, spend time with people who make them laugh and feel happy, get outdoors, get creative, listen to music, eat well, get more sleep and talk to someone if they need.

Students will often be the first to notice a friend may be struggling. Encourage your students to listen to and check in with each other. Reinforce that talking to a trusted adult about a friend isn't betraying a confidence, but an important part of looking after each other.

Regularly remind students about how to access wellbeing support at school. If appropriate, talk about external services such as headspace and Kids Helpline and leave the relevant details up on your whiteboard.

## Notice any changes in mood, behaviour and presentation

Changes in students' mood, behaviour and presentation may be signs that something is not right. Be alert to any changes in your students' attention and concentration; interaction with peers; agitation; sadness or lethargy; personal appearance; physical symptoms or visits to the sick bay.

While these changes may be developmentally appropriate and reasonable for the transition period, some may be of concern. These changes in mood, behaviour or presentation may become apparent over several weeks or longer.

You can refer to the [DET mental health toolkit](#) for information on early warning signs for mental health issues, symptoms, actions and support available.

For students with existing mental health problems, these may be exacerbated, with symptoms escalating. Monitor and check in on these students in your class and talk to the school wellbeing team about how to best provide support.

Be alert to the physical and behavioural indicators of child abuse. More information about identifying child abuse can be found [here](#).



## Inquire

Ask your students how they are going. Think about different ways of approaching a student to ensure they feel comfortable – this may be outside the classroom. Plan lessons that allow you to move around the room and informally check-in with students.

It is always important to follow your school's Engagement and Wellbeing policy.

If you are particularly concerned about a student, talk to wellbeing staff for advice. Before talking with the student you should be confident that: the time and environment is right to have a conversation with the student; you feel equipped to support the student; you are familiar with confidentiality limits and can explain these to the student; you are aware of referral processes if appropriate.

## Listen

If a student turns to you for help, it is because they respect and trust you.

Listen without asking too many questions or interrupting.

Thank the student for sharing with you, validate their experience and follow up. Don't make any promises, including not telling anyone about the conversation. Encourage the student to seek further help and offer to go with them to see someone from the school wellbeing team.

## Refer or report

If you are concerned for a student's safety and welfare, follow your school processes for making a referral to the wellbeing team. The wellbeing team can work with students, and parents where appropriate, to determine if support is needed.

Seek immediate support from a school leader if it is urgent or call 000 if there is immediate risk of harm to the student. Don't manage the situation alone.

If you become aware of an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, you must follow all procedures for responding to and reporting abuse, including the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#). More information about responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse can be found on the [PROTECT website](#) or at [Child Protection – Reporting Obligations](#).

## Accessing support

There are several services students can directly access. These include:

- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 551 800 or [kidshelp.com.au](http://kidshelp.com.au)
- **headspace:** 1800 650 890 or [eheadspace.org.au](http://eheadspace.org.au)
- [DET mental health toolkit](#)

## Take care of your own mental health

It is important that you take care of your own mental health and wellbeing. Support for staff is available through: [Employee, safety and wellbeing services](#)

Call the Employee Assistance Program: 1300 361 008.

Or access external services:

- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)
- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 46 36 or [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

