



# Parent Partnerships

Parent Involvement in the  
Later Years of Schooling



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# Foreword

Parent involvement in schooling benefits students, teachers and parents. As students progress through schooling, their parents tend to offer support in less visible ways, with direct parent involvement in schools being reduced.

The *Parent Partnerships – Parent Involvement in the Later Years of Schooling* was developed from research undertaken by the Department of Education & Training. The research project had five distinct phases:

1. A literature review
2. School-based consultation and focus groups with parents and staff
3. Key informant interviews with relevant agencies and personnel
4. Resource development
5. Professional development for staff, parents and regional personnel involved in the trial.

*Parental participation improves student learning whether the child is in preschool or in the later years of schooling, whether or not the family is struggling economically or is affluent, or whether the parents finished high school or graduated from college. (Davis 2000)*

# Introduction





# → Introduction



## Rationale

The *Blueprint for Government Schools* aims to improve the learning outcomes for all students and provides the context for this resource.

Flagship Strategy 1: Student Learning, acknowledges that students need a range of skills to operate effectively in our changing society. It is also important to ensure that students are provided with a learning environment that promotes their health, safety and wellbeing.

Research indicates that families are essential to the success and wellbeing of young people during the later years of schooling. In particular, involving parents in the later years of schooling improves:

- student attendance at school
- attitudes of students and parents towards school
- attitudes of teachers towards parents
- academic outcomes for students
- student support networks
- the health and wellbeing of students.

The *Parent Partnerships* resource has been developed to support schools to engage families in this critical phase of their child's schooling.

## Purpose

Parents of children in the later years remain very interested in their child's education. However, their parental role changes as their children move into adolescence.

This resource assists schools to meet the changing needs of parents and provides practical advice to enhance parent involvement in the later years of schooling. It encourages schools to assess current practice and provides tools to help develop a strategy for involving parents in the later years of schooling.

This resource provides:

- background information on the benefits of parent involvement in the later years for students, parents and teachers
- a process and tools for developing a parent involvement strategy
- support materials to assist schools to meet the changing needs of parents
- a professional development module for school teams.

## Key Findings

Research found that a dramatic decline in parent involvement occurs between primary and secondary school.

Schooling in the later years is a time of heightened risk. Many students experience increased alienation from school and learning. The onset of depression, anti-social behaviour, eating disorders, substance use and misuse are more prevalent.

Many parents, students and teachers perceive the Victorian Certificate of Education to be a time of pressure which includes challenges involved with transition from school to tertiary studies or other options.

Key informants and school feedback identified the need for schools to support:

- parents so that they avoid having unrealistic expectations of their children
- the transition process so students experience a smooth progression from school to further education or employment.

The most effective parent involvement occurs when schools consult with their parent communities and implement multiple communication strategies.

Families are crucial to the success and wellbeing of young people during the later years of schooling. Academically resilient students have strong support from friends, teachers and family (Clark 1991).

The *Kirby Report* (2000) was a catalyst for schools to implement a range of initiatives to keep young people engaged in education. These initiatives include Managed Individual Pathways (MIPs), Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and the introduction of the Local Learning Employment Networks. The MIPs ensures that all students who are 15 years and older, in government schools, have current individual pathway plans. The ways that parents can be involved should be built into these plans to enable successful transition through the later years to further education.

Parents who involve themselves in schools are often more supportive of their children and their children's teachers than parents who have less contact with schools. For students whose teachers involve parents consistently, there are overall improvements in academic achievement, attitudes toward school, homework habits, and parent-teacher relationships (Epstein 1985).

An implied success factor for increasing parent involvement is that teachers are:

- positive toward parent involvement
- aware of the benefits for themselves, their students and their students' parents
- pro-active partners of parent involvement initiatives.

Parents of students in the later years tend to be most interested in school initiatives that relate directly to health and wellbeing, academic outcomes, their child's future and the maintenance of a positive relationship with their child.

## Parental priorities

The four priority areas that seemed particularly relevant to parents were:

### 1. Protecting their child's health and wellbeing

Stress is a common issue in the later years. It affects parents, students and teachers. Parents may be responding to their child, or may be anxious about the attitude, behaviour, future prospects and/or performance of their child. These feelings can have many adverse consequences. The frequency and effectiveness of communication and mutual support through initiatives like parent networks, and the provision of constructive advice about supporting young people may all help to reduce parent stress.

### 2. Improving their child's academic performance

Criticism and/or constant questioning may have the contrary affect to what is intended. Schools can provide parents with information on how to support their child by creating an environment that encourages getting homework done and that helps their child to organise their learning.

### 3. Becoming involved in decision-making that affects their child's future

Many parents become anxious about the career choices of their child. Schools that facilitate a dialogue between teachers, students and parents may help parents to feel empowered. Parents may also be given the opportunity to understand better the transition process, and so develop an awareness of the problems caused by imposing unrealistic expectations.

### 4. Maintaining a supportive relationship with their child

Schools may facilitate opportunities for supportive communication between parents and their children. They may also provide opportunities for parents and their children to relax and enjoy themselves together in a supportive environment.

## Benefits of parent involvement

The benefits for involving parents include:

#### For students:

- improving academic achievement
- creating a more positive attitude to school and studying
- improving school attendance
- increasing satisfaction with tertiary education.

#### For parents:

- developing closer relationships with teachers
- increasing parent opportunities to share ideas with other parents
- reducing family conflict.

#### For teachers:

- developing a more positive relationship with parents
- encouraging a better understanding of students
- encouraging parental recognition of teaching skills and effort.

# → Links to the Framework for Student Support Services



Students are better prepared for learning when they are healthy, safe and happy. All children and young people need support as they grow towards adulthood to help them develop as healthy, secure and resilient people.

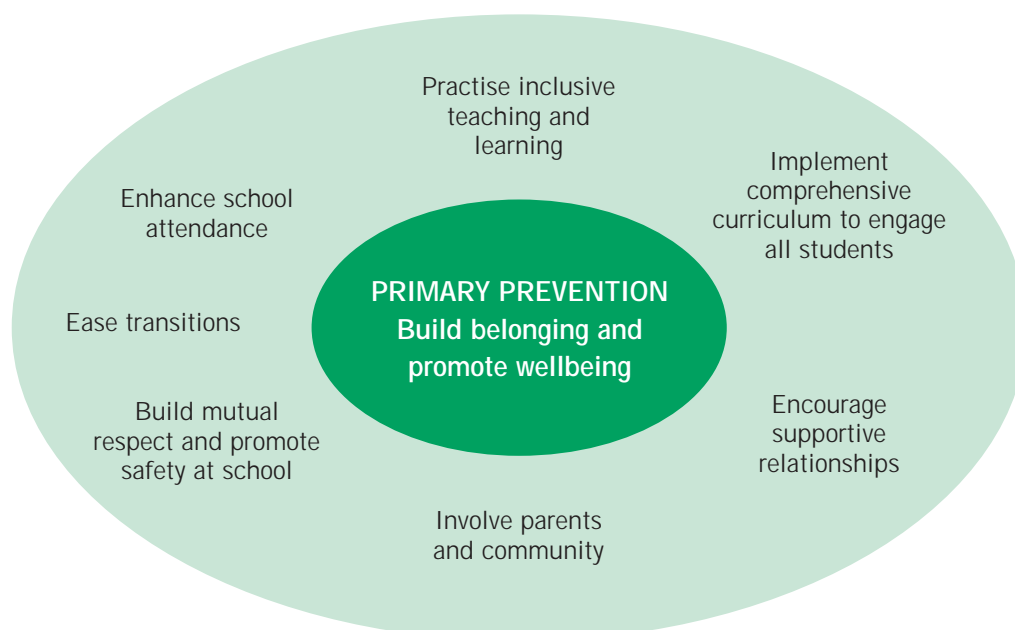
The *Framework for Student Support Services in Victorian Government Schools* (Department of Education, Employment & Training 1999) was developed to assist schools to support their students in a comprehensive and integrated way. It has four levels:

1. **Primary prevention** strategies are designed to enhance the emotional and social health of all students.
2. **Early intervention** is focussed on groups that are at a higher risk of harm and aims to improve their resilience through effective and appropriate support programs and treatment.
3. **Intervention** provides effective treatment to students in crisis.
4. **Restoring wellbeing (postvention)** aims to provide appropriate support to students, their families and other members of the school community affected by emergencies or potentially traumatic incidents.

*Parent Partnerships* sits best in the area of primary prevention. In particular, it involves encouraging supportive relationships with parents and their communities.

A caring adult, whether parent, other family member, friend or teacher can form bonds with children and young people that help protect them from harm.

Strong family bonds are protective for children and young people. For families to create environments characterised by the qualities of caring, high expectations and opportunities for participation (key building blocks for resilience), they themselves must exist in communities that also provide support and opportunities (Bernard 1995).



## Involving parents, families and communities

Schools should continue to seek ways to develop positive, respectful and meaningful partnerships with parents or caregivers.

Home–school partnerships create opportunities for the development of a shared understanding of learning. With this insight, both the student's home and school experiences can be built upon for further success in learning.

For most families, caring for their children is their main objective. Most young people want to maintain a strong relationship with their parents, no matter how difficult that can be. Many parents want to know how to parent more effectively and ultimately improve their relationship with their children (Department of Education, Employment & Training 1999).

## Resilience and protective factors

Resilience is the capacity to 'bounce back from adversity'. Being resilient involves 'the inherent and nurtured capacity of individuals to deal with life stressors in ways that enable them to lead healthy and fulfilling lives' (Department of Education, Science and Training 2003).

The experience of being in a family is one of the most significant influences on children. Consequently, in planning parent involvement programs, it is vital to understand the connection between family life and the development of resilience, competency and coping.

Protective factors within the family context are a powerful predictor of the outcome for children and youth. The following family characteristics are the primary determinants of positive outcomes.

### Protective factors within the family

Caring and support	Opportunities for participation	High expectations
A close relationship with one person	Valued participation in family activities	Respect for child's autonomy from early childhood
Affection expressed physically and verbally	Domestic responsibilities	Structure and discipline
Encourages independence		Order and clear expectations
		Faith: hope and expectations for the future
		Values and encourages education

(Bernard 1995)

# ➔ Adolescent Development – Later Years of Schooling



Adolescence is a time of major transition that involves critical developmental tasks and needs.

## Developmental tasks

- Forming relationships with peers
- Developing emotional independence
- Preparing for a career
- Developing a sense of morality (or an ethical system)
- Forming a sex-role identity

(Belsky 1984)

*The rites of passage from childhood to adulthood are becoming less clearly defined. Adolescents mature physically earlier and enter the adult world of work later. This may contribute to the blurring of roles for both parents and adolescents. The capacity to cope with transition periods in life will greatly enhance health outcomes (Quinn et al 1985).*

## Developmental needs

### Autonomy

Autonomy relates to a young person's need for increasing independence as they mature. The challenge for parents is to know how to provide support without trespassing into young people's territory. Schools can help parents and young people form mutually supportive relationships that facilitate autonomy, while still maintaining family support.

### Competence

Competence involves acquiring personal and academic skills. Organisational, study, coping, communication and leadership skills are all central to developing competence in the later years of schooling.

The later years of schooling are an optimal time to further a young person's socialisation. It is also a time to advance interpersonal problem solving, help seeking behaviours and self-management skills. The development of these life skills is supported by parents, teachers, authority figures, peers and an increasingly wide circle of people as adolescents gain autonomy.

## Belonging

A sense of belonging or connectedness to school and family is a prominent feature in the wellbeing of young people. The competitive nature of the later years can serve to isolate young people from the school community, hindering their sense of belonging.

School and family support can counter the pressures of the later years, helping students manage many of the key developmental tasks that occur during this period.

Developing parent involvement programs that aim to reduce stress and bolster life skills may help families provide appropriate support in the later years of schooling.

## Transitions

In the later years of schooling, key transitional points may be the decision to:

- stay at school
- commence employment
- go on to university or further studies.

Change or transition can be a time of adventure, learning and growth. It can also be a time of fear, loss of confidence and insecurity. With an increase in autonomy, growth in competence and coping skills, and an improved sense of belonging, transition may proceed more smoothly.



# What is Parent Involvement?



For this resource, parent involvement in the later years means:

Any activity that involves parents in their child's education at school, home or in the community.

## Parent involvement in the later years

As students progress through school, parent involvement changes. Parenting advice and communication become more significant in the later years, whereas previous forms of involvement like volunteering, membership of school policy committees and community collaborations become less prevalent. Parents focus more on supporting their children's home study habits, health and wellbeing, and decision-making. They do this most successfully when they are able to maintain positive relationships with their children.

## Principles guiding parent and school partnerships

There is little evidence to support any one particular approach to parent involvement; however, there is general endorsement for two main approaches:

- encouraging parents to model at-home behaviours that promote learning and demonstrate that education is valued
- conducting activities at school to support the teacher–parent relationship.

(Caplan et al 1997)

## Common goals for parent involvement:

- providing success for students
- serving the needs of students
- sharing responsibility for the education of students.

(Davies 1991)

## Factors that influence parent involvement:

- a tradition of parents feeling welcomed, encouraged and supported in their involvement with their children's school
- support from the school leadership team
- well-planned and coordinated strategies that are responsive to parent needs
- an active parent network
- training for staff
- an attitude of good will from the school community
- a resilient school community
- an understanding of the benefits of parent involvement
- a commitment from the school community.



# Types of parent involvement

## **A school initiative might include parent involvement in:**

- the tuition of students by helping in class, presenting as a guest speaker or supervising students on excursions
- the membership of school decision-making bodies, participation in a survey, ringing a teacher or school counsellor and/or writing a letter
- school events
- the planning of a new school building, or the ordering of new equipment or maintenance work.

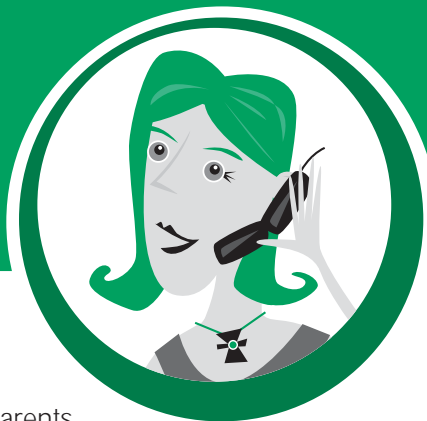
## **A school-home initiative might include parent involvement in:**

- a parent education program that aims to improve their capacity to support their child (e.g. parenting program, study skills, driver education)
- the implementation of school advice at home (e.g. homework habits, social behaviour and television viewing)
- a network of parents to provide support, organised and hosted by the school (e.g. providing mutual support and mentoring).

## **A school-community initiative might include parent involvement in:**

- working with community agencies to support families and young people
- community action initiatives (e.g. local youth issues)
- supporting their child's attendance at open days, expos, community events.

# → Developing a Plan for Involving Parents



Parent involvement in the later years of schooling is largely determined by the type and quality of parent involvement that is experienced in the early and middle years of schooling. Involving parents requires consultation, planning and commitment. Schools that have a tradition of communication, parent networks and inclusive parent practices have solid foundations for the later years. Much of the advice and many of the strategies suggested in this resource are generically applicable to all stages of schooling.

## 1 Getting started

- Gain support from the following key stakeholders: school administration, teachers, parents, community members, students and school support workers.
- Form a working party with representation from the key stakeholders.
- Establish clear and common aims for the working party.
- Decide how and what information will be gathered.

**Note:** Tool 1: Parent Involvement Checklist may be useful for monitoring the entire process.

## 2 Gathering information

Information may be gathered through questionnaires and/or interviews/focus groups. Questionnaires will provide quantitative information while interviews/focus groups will provide qualitative information.

### Understanding the needs of parents

*Understanding the needs of parents will help in attaining parental support for the initiative. Sometimes schools assume their needs correspond with the needs of parents. An understanding of the similarities and differences will help inform strategies which are effectively targeted to parents. Therefore, gathering information from the school community is a prerequisite for establishing evidence-based data.*

### Questionnaires

Questionnaires or surveys are useful when attempting to collect representative samples of information. Questionnaires require closed answers: yes/no, daily/weekly or agree/disagree.

### Interviews/focus groups

Focus groups produce qualitative information that provides insights into participants' attitudes, perceptions and opinions. These results are collected through open-ended questions where participants are able to choose the manner in which they respond and interact in a group discussion. The facilitator serves several functions: moderating, listening, observing and ultimately analysing the information gathered.

**Note:** Tools 2, 3, 4 and 5 may assist in gathering information.

### 3 Analysing the data

When analysing the data, the working party needs to take into consideration the:

- current level of parent involvement in school activities and programs
  - strengths
  - areas for improvement
- current level of parent involvement in their child's schooling
  - strengths
  - areas for improvement
- priorities of parents, students and staff.

### 4 Developing recommendations

Taking into account the identified strengths and areas of improvement, formulate recommendations to enhance parent involvement in the later years of schooling.

### 5 Developing a parent involvement plan

Once the working party has an understanding of the identified needs of parents, teachers and students, they should develop a parent involvement plan. The plan outlines the strategies, timelines, resources and key responsibilities necessary to address the recommendations.

**Note:** Tool 6: Parent Involvement Plan.

### 6 Informing the school community

Having completed the parent involvement plan, the members of the working party will need to communicate the proposed strategies to their representative groups. Information can be disseminated through school assemblies, pastoral care groups, school meetings and parent committees. Multiple communication strategies result in the likelihood of reaching a greater percentage of the school community. This may create opportunities for others to join the working party.

### 7 Evaluating the initiative

Evaluation is an essential element of any initiative. The working party needs to keep referring back to the parent involvement plan as they complete key strategies. This enables the working party to reflect and build on good practice.

#### Things to be mindful of when developing strategies:

- *the proportion of working parents*
- *the proportion of single parents*
- *available transport*
- *the diversity of language and cultural groups*
- *the need for child-care*
- *important local community-based institutions*
- *attitudes of parents, teachers and students*
- *common forms of employment*



# Tools



## ➔ Tools Index



### TOOL 1: Parent Involvement Checklist

**Purpose:** To assist schools in monitoring progress when planning a parent involvement initiative.

### TOOL 2: Questionnaire for Parents

**Purpose:** To assist schools to determine the current level of parent satisfaction in relation to parent involvement in the later years.

### TOOL 3: Assessing Current Practice

**Purpose:** To provide sample questions that could be used in focus groups or interviews to assess the parent involvement programs offered in the later years. This tool is to be completed by both parents and staff.

### TOOL 4: Assessing Parent Involvement

**Purpose:** To provide sample questions that could be used in focus groups or interviews to assess parent involvement in their child's schooling in the later years. This tool is to be completed by parents.

### TOOL 5: Determining the School Community Priorities

**Purpose:** To provide sample questions that could be used in focus groups or interviews to determine the priorities of parents, students and staff in the later years of schooling.

### TOOL 6: Parent Involvement Plan

**Purpose:** To provide schools with examples for developing their Parent Involvement Plan.

# TOOL 1

## Parent Involvement Checklist



### 1 Getting started

- ☐ Support from key stakeholders
- ☐ Form a working party
- ☐ Establish clear and common aims
- ☐ Decide how and what information needs to be collected

### 2 Gathering information

Consult with:

- ☐ Staff
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Parents

### 3 Analysing the data

- ☐ Strengths of current level of parent involvement identified
- ☐ Areas for improvement identified
- ☐ Priorities of parents, students and staff considered

### 4 Developing recommendations

Formulate recommendations to enhance parent involvement that consider:

- ☐ Staff
- ☐ Students
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Community

### 5 Developing a parent involvement plan

- ☐ Outline strategies
- ☐ Indicate a timeline for individual strategies
- ☐ Identify key responsibilities of the working party

### 6 Informing the school community

- ☐ Dissemination of information via key stakeholders
- ☐ Use of multiple communication strategies

### 7 Evaluating the initiative

- ☐ Data collection
- ☐ Data analysis
- ☐ Future recommendations

# TOOL

## 2

### Questionnaire for Parents

When you have completed this questionnaire, please place it in the envelope provided and return it to the school.

Please do not put your name on the questionnaire.

1.	I visit my child's school	Never	Sometimes	Often
2.	My visits to my child's school are for reasons that are	Negative	Varied	Positive
3.	The school communicates with me	Never	Sometimes	Often
4.	I communicate with the school	Never	Sometimes	Often
5.	My child and I talk about school	Never	Sometimes	Often
6.	I would attend meetings at school if I had more time	Never	Sometimes	Often
7.	I feel welcome at my child's school	Never	Sometimes	Always
8.	I have been more involved in my child's school in the past	No	Sometimes	Yes
9.	My child would be pleased if I became more involved at their school	Never	Sometimes	Always
10.	I help my child with their homework	Never	Sometimes	Always
11.	The school would benefit if I were more involved with it	Never	Sometimes	Always
12.	My child would benefit if I were more involved in their school	Never	Sometimes	Always
13.	I would benefit if I were more involved in my child's school	Never	Sometimes	Always
14.	The school has informed me about the ways I might be involved at school	Never	Sometimes	Always
15.	Would you like to be more involved in your child's schooling?	No	Sometimes	Yes

1

List the reasons that might encourage you to become more involved in your child's schooling.

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2

List the reasons that might stop you from becoming involved in your child's schooling.

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire



## TOOL 3

# Assessing Current Practice



The following is a list of sample questions that may be useful when assessing parent involvement programs in the later years of schooling.

- How are parents made to feel welcome at school?
- How are parents encouraged to express their opinions/needs to the school?
- What mechanisms assist parents, teachers and students with coping and problem solving?
- What common goals unite parents, students and teachers?
- How do schools ensure that they communicate with all parents?
- How do parents communicate with the school?
- What are the contact points for parents?
- How are parents informed of points of contact?
- How often is there contact between parents and the school?
- Is parent contact for predominantly positive or negative reasons?
- How do parents and teachers demonstrate their appreciation of each other?
- What form do parent initiatives take as students become older?
- How do schools and parents support their children during the later years?

## TOOL

## 4

# Assessing Parent Involvement



The following is a list of sample questions that may be useful for determining the current level of parent involvement in schooling.

- How often do you talk to your child about their schooling?
- How often do you talk to a teacher at your child's school?
- How often do you receive information from your child's school?
- What sort of information would you like to receive from your child's school?
- Do you feel free to visit your child's school?
- Do you know how to contact your child's teachers?
- What ways are you involved in your child's school?
- What obstacles hinder your involvement in your child's school?

# TOOL 5 Determining the School Community Priorities



The priorities of parents change in the later years of schooling. They become more focused on outcomes that will directly support their child's transition into young adulthood. Consequently, although they may concur with the general aims of the school, their energies will be specifically focused. The most effective strategy for gaining parental support is to develop initiatives that are compatible with the priorities of parents.

The following sample questions may be useful in determining the priorities of parents, students and staff in the later years of schooling.

## Sample questions for parents

- How do you feel about being involved in your child's schooling?
- Why would you like to be involved in your child's schooling?
- How would you like to be involved in your child's schooling?
- How do you think teachers encourage you to participate in your child's school?
- How do you think teachers 'do not' encourage you to participate in your child's school?
- How does your child feel about you being involved in their schooling?
- How do you think your child benefits from you being involved in their schooling?
- Would you like a greater involvement in your child's schooling?
- Do any specific obstacles hinder you from having a greater involvement in your child's schooling?
- Would you like to learn how to help your child succeed at school?
- Would you like to influence school policies?
- Would you like to be involved in helping your child to make decisions about their future pathways?
- Would you like to join the school in helping to reduce school-related stress?
- Would you like to join the school in helping to enhance your child's resilience?
- How could we (the school) most help you to support your child?

## Sample questions for students

- How do your parents/caregivers help with your learning?
- How might parents help you to improve your learning?
- How do parents inhibit your learning?
- How could the school help you to communicate with your parents?
- In what ways do you like parents involved at school?
- In what other ways would you like parents involved at school?
- In what ways could the school improve its relationship with parents?

## Sample questions for staff

- In what ways do parents help their children learn?
- In what ways do parents inhibit their child's learning?
- How do parents support teachers?
- How do parents cause difficulties for teachers?
- In what ways do you like parents involved at school?
- In what other ways would you like parents involved at school?

# TOOL 6

## Parent Involvement Plan



RECOMMENDATION Goals	STRATEGIES What is required to progress the recommendation	RESOURCES the people, budget equipment, IT, learning time, learning space	TIMELINE the date, week, month, or term for completion	COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
e.g. Involving parents in student's learning.	Involving parents in the development of their student's personal learning goals and/or their Managed Individual Pathways plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An allocation of time with parents.</li> <li>• A room booked specifically for the discussions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By the end of term 1.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through parent teacher interview</li> <li>• Classroom teacher and other teachers as appropriate.</li> <li>• Letter home</li> </ul>
e.g. Establishing a parent networking coffee club to discuss strategies for supporting their child's schooling.	A coffee club established inviting parents to stay and network with other parents and teachers prior to the commencement of class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coffee budget</li> <li>• An appropriate room</li> <li>• Teacher</li> <li>• Volunteer parent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once a fortnight.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletter home</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Parent networks</li> </ul>
e.g. Establish a parent workshop/ seminar to engage parents in activities that will assist them support their child in the later years of schooling.	An organising group to conduct and gain endorsement of school leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An organising group</li> <li>• Presenters</li> <li>• Parent Partnerships</li> <li>• Handouts from the support materials</li> <li>• Budget</li> <li>• A room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning of the year</li> <li>• Beginning of third term</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletter home</li> <li>• Letter home</li> <li>• Promotional flyer</li> <li>• Parent networks</li> </ul>

# Support Materials



## ➔ Needs of Parents and Students – Later Years of Schooling



Parent involvement in schooling benefits students, teachers and parents. As students progress through schooling, their parents tend to offer support in less visible ways, with direct parent involvement in schools being reduced. Schools often perceive this trend as an indication of declining parent interest.

Focus group discussions with parents indicated that perceptions of declining interest are incorrect. Parents remain very interested in their children; however, parent roles change. Schools that identify with these changing roles will improve their level of parent involvement, and improve the academic performance, health and relationship outcomes of their students.

In the key findings, we provided information about the changing needs of parents with students in the later years of schooling, and about the benefits of parent involvement. In the support materials, we provide information that will help schools to meet these needs.

The Support Materials Index offers some suggestions on how best to use the information, although schools are likely to know which strategies best suit their circumstance.

*Fuller (2001) suggests that in the last term of Year 10, students could spend time developing interpersonal problem-solving skills to augment the connections and belonging developed in earlier years. Study skills, time management and help seeking all need to be covered in preparing students for the later years of schooling. Career success is linked to developing strategies that engage students actively in projects that absorb and reward them for personal effort. Individual mentoring of students throughout Year level 11 and 12 is invaluable.*

# → Support Materials Index



The following handouts may be useful to schools in meeting the needs of parents, students and staff in the later years of schooling.

## HANDOUTS

### 1 World of the Adolescent

**Purpose:** To help parents understand adolescent brain development and to suggest ways that parents can support their children in the later years of schooling.

**Suggestions for use:**

- discussion starter at a parent meeting or forum
- information for a parent newsletter
- basis for an activity at a parent evening.

### 2 Health and Wellbeing

**Purpose:** To help parents understand the three broad challenges of autonomy, competence and belonging for young people as they approach adulthood.

**Suggestions for use:**

- discussion topic at a parent network meeting
- information for a parent newsletter
- basis for an activity at a parent evening, e.g. parents could be asked to list the challenges their children face under each of the three headings: autonomy, competence and belonging
- basis for an activity involving parents, teachers and students, e.g. list the ways parents might best support/hinder their child's schoolwork.

### 3 A Note to Parents

**Purpose:** To provide a positive introductory note to parents from schools, encouraging parents to support their children in the later years. The information covers key considerations in the later years of schooling.

**Suggestions for use:**

- sample letter to be sent home to parents
- discussion starter at a parent meeting or at a parent information evening
- to help parents identify areas which might need improving in order to support their child's schooling, e.g. health and wellbeing, study skills, communication.



## 4 Supportive Relationships

**Purpose:** To encourage parents to think about positive communication strategies.

**Suggestions for use:**

- material for student role-plays or activities at an inter-active parent evening
- to inform multiple-choice questions as a discussion starter at a parent meeting
- information for a parent newsletter.

## 5 Resilient Families

**Purpose:** To provide advice to parents about providing a supportive (resilient) family environment.

**Suggestions for use:**

- information for a parent newsletter
- inform discussions with parents as to how they might help their child at home
- basis for an activity on a parent night that covers how families might best help their children to be resilient when coping with stress and meeting the challenges of the later years of schooling
- an evaluation checklist for parents seeking advice about how to support their children at home.

## 6 The Difficult Emotions – Depression and Anxiety

**Purpose:** To help parents recognise that stress may cause mental health concerns in the later years of schooling. The information page provides simple advice on recognising signs that young people may be experiencing difficult emotions.

**Suggestions for use:**

- distribution by welfare coordinators when meeting with a parent
- discussion starter at a parent meeting or parent forum
- checklist when parents are discussing concerns with a support worker/teacher.

### Cautionary note

*The handout is intended to provide clear and concise advice for parents about the difficult emotions that their child might experience in the later years of schooling. The advice is NOT a diagnostic test. If parents have concerns, they should seek help from a suitably qualified practitioner.*

## 7 Young People and Drugs

**Purpose:** To provide information to parents about how to manage their relationship with their child when drugs are an issue.

**Suggestions for use:**

- information for a parent newsletter
- discussion starter at a parent meeting or event
- parent information handout on a rack in school waiting areas.

## 8 Success without Stress

**Purpose:** To reduce stress by informing parents about study skills, encouraging parents to provide positive support, and developing an agreement between parents and students.

**Suggestions for use:**

- basis for a meeting between parents, teachers and students to develop a study plan. Parents, teachers and students might agree to specific responsibilities.

The presence of three factors in families is strongly associated with student achievement.

1. Consistent values about the importance of education.
2. Parent's willingness to help their children and to intervene at school.
3. The ability to become involved in their children's schooling. (Mitsomwang & Hawley, 1993).

When young people enter the later years of schooling, the above factors remain important. However, parents are often at a loss to know how to support their child. This may cause feelings of powerlessness, leading them to ask what seems to their children like an eternal barrage of questions. One of the more common causes of stress for parents and their children is the issue of study. Parents often wonder whether their child is doing too much or too little. Young adults often are more stressed about their parents' worries than they are about their study.

Information, study tips and evaluation sheets are included to help young adults analyse their study profiles, and to empower parents, and encourage them to support their children. Parents, their children and a teacher examine the materials and use them to develop a study plan. This way a clear agreement is formulated. Parents can then assist their children to implement the plan by being more involved with some agreed elements, and allowing their children and teachers to take responsibility for the rest. The study plan could be discussed by the student, parent and teacher at set review dates.

While a properly informed study plan does not guarantee optimum academic outcomes with minimum stress, it does help set the parameters for both parents and children.

## 9 Pathways to the Future

**Purpose:** To encourage parents to remain supportive of their child when they exit the later years of schooling.

**Suggestions for use:**

- information for a parent newsletter
- discussion starter for parent information evening about post-compulsory transition
- discussion starter for parent meetings.

## 10 Communication and Parent Networking

**Purpose:** To identify strategies that schools and parents may use to improve communication.

**Suggestions for use:**

- discussion starter for staff or parent meetings
- discussion starter for parent involvement working party meetings.

# World of Adolescent

For secondary schools and parents

## Introducing the Adolescent Brain

During childhood, the brain develops an enormous number of connections (called synapses) between brain cells. At birth, you had about 2,500 synapses per brain cell. By your third birthday, you had 15,000! By the time you were nine, your brain had more connections than it needed, and so it began a process known as 'synaptic pruning'. It started to do away with those connections it didn't need. This process contributes towards humans specifically shaping their behaviour to their environments.

From the age of nine, the motto for the brain is 'use it or lose it!'

This is why the experiences children and young people have between nine and 18 years of age are so important.

A couple of other interesting things happen in the adolescent brain. The first is that hormones become more powerful and the adolescent shows more activity in the emotional area of the brain (the limbic system) than they do in the planning and impulse control area (the frontal lobes and the pre-frontal cortex).

This means that adolescents learn best when there is emotion involved!

The second thing that happens in the adolescent's brain is that the frontal lobe – the area that helps us to plan – is the last part to mature.

This means that a teenager's brain is all tuned up for emotions, fighting, running

away and romance, but not so well tuned up for planning, controlling impulses and forward thinking.

The frustrated parent who says to his or her teenager 'why didn't you think?' is asking an accurate question – the teenager probably wasn't thinking! This could also be the reason why too much freedom too soon does not seem to help many young people.

The third thing that is happening in an adolescent's brain is myelination. Myelin is a fatty material that wraps itself around the axons of brain cells. Myelin helps the brain to communicate quickly and efficiently.

In multiple sclerosis, the myelin sheath breaks down causing devastating effects for sufferers.

During the adolescent years, myelin is put into place. This is why a child or adolescent can seem perplexed when you ask him or her, 'what are you thinking about?'. He or she wasn't thinking at all, but reacting. The blank look was completely justified.

This means that adolescents sometimes need more help with planning and organising themselves than you might realise.

Obviously, it is important to help young people to become as self-reliant as possible. In some instances, however, parents can help with organisational details.

During the later years of schooling, teachers and parents can help students with four major tasks:

### 1. Time Management

The time management skills needed to complete successfully the later years of schooling are more severe than those found in many workplaces. The 'Success without Stress' component of this resource assists young people and their parents to develop these skills.

### 2. Resource Management and Organisation

Organising sports, home life, social life, family time, catching up with friends, getting sufficient sleep and rest, as well as succeeding in the later years of schooling, is challenging. The 'Success without Stress' survey enables young people and their parents to identify areas of strength as well as areas that may need more attention.

### 3. Stress Management

The pressure of the later years has an effect on young people and their families. The 'Creating Resilient Families', 'Supportive Relationships', and 'Young People and Drugs' support materials can help parents and young people adapt to and cope with these pressures.

### 4. Fatigue Management

Many senior students become worn out and emotional. By setting up clear expectations and communication lines between parents and the school, negative consequences of fatigue can be minimised.

## Why is it all so different?

The world has changed dramatically and so have the skills that are needed for success.

Consider these points:

- ▶ It is estimated that 70% of the jobs that will exist in 2020 do not exist today
- ▶ Experts believe human knowledge now doubles every three years and estimate by 2020 it will double every 76 days!

Skills of negotiation, problem solving, lateral thinking and emotional intelligence gauge young people's ability to be successful in the workplace.

# Health and Wellbeing

**Three psychological needs fundamental to human growth and development are autonomy, competence and belonging.**

## Autonomy

Autonomy relates to a young person's independence growing as they mature. Sometimes this is interpreted as a child distancing themselves from his or her family, resulting in parents having a declining influence over their child. However, while greater independence comes with age, young people need to experience a continuing sense of belonging and attachment to their family. This involves a feeling of acceptance and security, as well as experiencing oneself as worthy of love and respect. In this sense, parent involvement programs in the later years of schooling are as much about schools providing support to families as they are about families providing support to schools.

The challenge for parents is to know how to provide support without trespassing into young peoples' territory. Schools can help parents and young people to form mutually supportive relationships that facilitate autonomy, while still maintaining family support.

Some examples of supportive programs are:

- developing school contracts with young people
- creating a set of shared values or behavioural protocols
- involving parents in mentoring without them taking dominant roles
- providing study skills advice to parents
- facilitating opportunities for parents to network and discuss issues with other parents, teachers and students.

## Competence

Competence involves acquiring personal and academic skills. Organisational, study, coping, communication and leadership skills are all central to developing competence in the later years of schooling.

The later years of schooling are an optimal time to further a young person's socialisation. It is also a time to advance interpersonal problem solving, help seeking behaviours and self-management skills. The development of these life skills is supported by parents, teachers, authority figures, peers and an increasingly wide circle of people as adolescents gain autonomy.

## Belonging

The highly competitive environment of the later years has consequences for students' subsequent opportunities and pathways. This competitive nature can create an intensely individual environment, instead of a collaborative or co-operative environment. This can disconnect young people from school, hindering their sense of belonging.

Support by families can counter the pressures of the later years and help students manage many of the changes that occur during this period. Support is most effective when it is sensitive to the needs of students, rather than placing an additional burden on them.

Developing parent involvement programs that aim to reduce stress and bolster life skills may help families provide appropriate support in the later years of schooling.



# A Note to Parents...

## Welcome to the later years of schooling.

*From Year 10 onwards, we recognise that attending and succeeding at school is a choice students make with their parent(s).*

*One of the most powerful factors in creating a successful outcome for your child in the later years of schooling is you!*

*Research shows that the strength of the partnership that can be built between you and your child's teacher has a positive effect on your child's academic achievement.*

"But my child hates it when I come up to the school!"

Guess what? We know that already. When we asked parents about why they felt uncomfortable coming up to the school, the main reason mentioned was that their child didn't want Mum or Dad hanging around the school embarrassing them.

We thought that too. Then we asked students what they thought. Amazingly, in a statewide study (Fuller, McGraw and Goodyear 1999), 64% of Year 11 students said they wanted their parents more involved in their schooling.

We bet they don't often tell you that! Then again, teenagers have been known to say one thing and mean something entirely different.

## Later years of schooling is too important to do alone

Raising young people is one of the best jobs there is. Unfortunately, it is also one of the toughest jobs.

When completing Years 10, 11 and 12, restricted job opportunities and increased competition for tertiary education can be daunting. The later years of school are a bit like running a marathon – it takes planning and preparation as well as a good support team.

To implement an effective planning phase, students, teachers and parents should become familiar with effective study techniques. Success in these years isn't just about slogging it out or just giving it your best go. Success requires us to work smarter, not necessarily harder.

The support team for a senior student is possibly the most important part. A powerful protective factor is the sense of belonging that a young person has to his or her family and to his or her school. The way a parent or guardian provides support will greatly influence whether the support actually helps or hinders the student. While some parents may not help enough, most parents make the mistake of trying to help too much.

**Try to be guided by the simple thought:**  
It's not just up to them.  
It's not just up to me.  
It's up to us.

## Some common mistakes are:

### 1. Expecting great changes

This can result in re-creating all those past battles in the one year. While some students show dramatic changes for better or worse, generally students will have attitudes, behaviours and academic outcomes that are similar to those they have had for the previous ten years of schooling. If your child has been a middle grade student all their life, they are probably going to stay a middle grade student in the later years. Having unrealistic expectations can be counterproductive.

### 2. Distracting problems

The best support you can give is to provide a comfortable and quiet working environment and try to keep emotions calm. It is important not to load your child up with additional worries.

### 3. Interfering

You might be worried about how well your child is going, but you can be sure that your child is more worried. He or she is just better at disguising it. Leave the shock tactics and guilt trips for another time. Your child wants and needs your support, although ultimately he or she is pretty much on his or her own. You cannot do your child's senior schooling. Nagging and interference is most likely to cause more problems than it solves.



## Years 10, 11 and 12 – Key considerations

### Common concerns:

- failing, freedom, finances, sexuality, depression.

### Preventative measures:

- adult support
- positions of responsibility
- relationship issues – how to be cool and smart at the same time
- coping mechanisms that lessen self-blame and conflict, and protect against drug misuse and depression
- peer support programs
- parents being involved in school.

### Skills to build upon:

- study skills – success without stress
- leadership skills and self mentoring
- communication skills
- drug prevention strategies
- pathways to the future.

### What does it mean to be more involved in my child's school?

Several sessions will be held at school during the year to assist parents, students and schools to meet the needs of children in the later years of schooling. Your attendance at these events would be beneficial. If you would like to discuss any issues, please contact:

.....

Phone:.....

## What are the benefits of being more involved in school?

We know people live busy lives so we are not asking for a lot of time. Sometimes spending a little time can save a lot of time. Several dedicated evenings could be of great benefit.

The benefits of parents being more involved in school include:

### 1. Benefits for students

- improves performance
- improves academic achievement
- creates more positive attitude to school and to studying which is linked to better attendance
- increases chances of entry into tertiary education.

### 2. Benefits for parents

- develops better relationships with teachers
- improves your ability to share ideas with other parents
- results in less family arguments over homework as your child's motivation to succeed and their happiness in school improve.

### 3. Benefits for teachers

- develops a better relationship with you and therefore a better understanding of your child
- helps teachers to achieve their teaching goals.



# Supportive Relationships

## The golden rules of communication with teenagers

### Grunt...shrug...as if... whatever...dunno!

While many teenagers are articulate, cheerful and well motivated, and able to express clearly their needs, feelings and deep love for their parents, there are exceptions!

For parents, it can be quite a challenge to work out ways to communicate with their children who are completing the later years of secondary schooling.

Many parents find that communication with children follows the 'law of the 3 Hs'; children are easiest to communicate with when they are happy, hungry or horizontal.

Communicating with students in the later years is far trickier. Firstly, you need to know that "whatever" means "yes" and "as if" means "no". You can only keep them talking to you trapped in the car for so long.

OK, so you could give up, downgrade your expectations or become content with the odd shrug and the occasional withering pout. The problem is that this is the stage of life when young people actually benefit most from speaking with their parents regularly.

Middle to late adolescence is a time of facing up to and making major decisions about life. It is also worryingly a time when many young people make critical decisions about drugs, sex and their career.

A survey of Year 11 students asked them how parents should speak to their child if they were worried about them. Their advice was direct, clear and succinct:

"Speak to us like you would speak to your best friend."

#### Do's and Don'ts

##### Let's start with the don'ts:

- ▶ Don't ask them every night, "Have you got any homework?" Accept that they will have homework and work out a rough schedule together for doing it.
- ▶ Don't let them get into the habit of locking themselves away in their rooms (televisions in bedrooms is a bad idea).
- ▶ Don't overdo:
  - uninvited lectures
  - appeals for loyalty or commonsense
  - statements that begin with "after all we've done..."

##### Do:

- ▶ speak as calmly as possible
- ▶ remind them that people in this family speak in full sentences
- ▶ expect to have a conversation.

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#### And remember...

- ▶ keep your child as busy as you possibly can
- ▶ as much as possible, try to keep them mixing socially with a range of friends (and activities)
- ▶ never believe anything they tell you during an argument
- ▶ never forget that a child has more energy to put into an argument than any adult. Choose your battles carefully!

## What causes communication difficulties?

Worrying and lack of time are the most common sources of communication difficulties. Quite understandably, parents worry during the later years of school that their child might get anxious or depressed.

Teenagers were asked what issues they thought worried their parents. They listed:

- drugs
- crime
- education
- opposite sex
- sex
- safety when out
- peer influences
- immorality
- pregnancy
- alcohol
- violence
- diet

While most parents worry about these issues, one question that bothers them more than any other is "will my child grow up to be a happy person?"

All too often parents forget this is their main concern. They try to rush communication or pry rather than talk with their teenagers. Don't try to achieve too much in the one conversation.

## Parenting the Click and Go Generation

The generation of young people born after 1984 are the Click and Go generation – the baby boomlets. These young adults were born with a mouse in their hands.

They are different to past generations in several important ways that affect their families. They have shorter attention spans, are more agitated, have a greater reliance on external sources of stimulation and happiness, and expect immediate outcomes.

They have grown up in a world of 'stranger danger' that has taught them to be wary of unknown adults and to critique the world. This leads them to question authority. Where previous generations had more role models, the Click and Go's have mainly their parents and themselves.

At school, they want good marks but don't want to be seen to be working hard. They often cultivate an image of the 'cool fool'. They will live at home for longer and save money (often yours) in order to finance text messaging and mobile phones.

Concerning work, they don't believe adults who suggest if they put in the hard yards now it will pay off later. The words 'what's in it for me right now' could be the motto of the Click and Go's.

Motivating and parenting the Click and Go generation can be tough work. Not only do we need to figure out ways for them to build success and self-esteem, away from the eyes of their friends, we need to find some immediate reward for them.

## Methods of communication for parents

Try to remember the following motto:

'When you are digging a hole for yourself, the first thing is to stop digging!'

Two classic mistakes made by parents of senior secondary school students are:

1. debating or arguing over things that just don't matter
2. using too many words.

### Some suggestions are:

- ask open ended questions; that is, questions that cannot be answered with only one word
- give encouragement
- don't ask questions and then rush in with the answer
- listen with your body as well as your mind
- develop your influence through questions or discussion rather than opinions. For example, when your child asks to do something that you are doubtful about, say either "convince me" or "convince me that it is safe". You'll be amazed how often they will strike a better bargain with you
- adolescents do NOT respond well to sarcasm or irony. They might use these techniques themselves (with the odd put-down for good measure) but if you are trying to communicate with them don't use these yourself
- some adolescents are catastrophisers and dramatists of the highest order – calmly respond and try to help them.

# Resilient Families

Resilience is a fundamental skill for people to realise their potential, as well as to protect their health and well-being. It is the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life. Resilience gives us the ability to rise above adversity and carry on. Resilience applies to people, families and organisations.

Importantly resilience also applies to learning. Resilient learners are those who don't give up when they are stuck, and persist in the face of obstacles.

## Characteristics of resilient families

### 1. Spontaneous and curious

In resilient families, the adults tend to be models for the idea that life is worth living, and that it is worth striving for success. Living around adults who enjoy their own lives, is one reliable way for young people to develop a positive sense of themselves.

### 2. People are loved for their differences

Children take on different roles according to their birth order. What works well in parenting one child may not work well for the other.

### 3. It is clear who is in charge

Families do not work well as democracies; they work best as benevolent dictatorships. You consult a lot and then make a decision.

No parent wins all the time, so it is important that young people feel their parents are in charge of the family and are able to protect them. It is NOT enough to be just a friend to your child.

### 4. Ensure diversity of friendships

Having a diversity of friendship groups protects young people. For this reason, it is desirable during their childhood to try to have them mix with a few different groups of friends in and outside school.

### 5. Involve other adults

Resilient families also seem to be able to share the parenting task more broadly. Involving other trustworthy adults in your child's life will help them and you.

### 6. Consistency

Resilient families have consistently high expectations and hold key values about life and the way they live it. Resilient families avoid harsh and inconsistent discipline methods because they are detrimental to teaching children to trust and rely on others. Rules are useful but relationships are essential.

### 7. Maintain rituals

Resilient families take time out from the rush of life to celebrate anniversaries, birthdays and events.

### 8. Teach the skills of self-esteem

Beyond praise and encouragement, this involves asking young people how they have achieved something. Explaining in their own words how they succeeded helps them to see their own strengths.

### 9. Know how to argue

Parenting is a twenty-eight year long debating competition! It is estimated that the average parent makes 250 requests of the average child every day and the average child goes along with two-thirds of those requests.

### 10. Be reliably unpredictable

Parents in resilient families are prepared to do the unexpected. They know that nothing works ALL THE TIME! So they try to do things that are fun and not take problems too seriously.



# The difficult emotions – depression and anxiety

**Cautionary note:** The following is intended to provide clear and concise advice for parents about the difficult emotions that their child might experience in the later years of schooling. The advice is NOT a diagnostic test. If parents have concerns, they should seek help from a suitably qualified practitioner.

## When should I worry about depression?

As a general rule, it is better to over-react than under-react if you are concerned. Signs to watch for include if your child seems substantially different from usual (more moody, restless, angry etc.); and if these changes seem to be consistent across different settings such as at home, at school and with friends.

Other signs that might cause you to worry include:

- loss of interest in usual activities
- increased use of drugs and alcohol
- sleep problems
- less energy and more restlessness than usual
- a change in eating habits – either uninterested or over-eating
- increased or inexplicable irritability.

## When should I worry about anxiety?

Stress and anxiety affect many students in the later years of secondary school. This is why we spend time helping them to learn relaxation techniques and problem-solving methods.

Some signs that may indicate the need for further help include:

- consistent loss of sleep
- increased feelings of nausea
- often speaking about failure and feeling inferior
- difficulty eating
- ruminates over small things
- looks tired
- cannot seem to focus on a discussion due to other thoughts or concerns
- engages in strange or slightly bizarre behaviours in an attempt to ward off the possibility of negative events happening
- becomes increasingly suspicious of others.



# Young People and Drugs

## What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability to bungy jump through life and rise above adversity.

The development of resilience in young people is linked to long-term occupational and life success.

The sense of belonging to family, friends and school that underpins resilience may be the most powerful antidote for substance misuse, violence and suicide.

## Types of drug using young people

Broadly speaking there are three main categories of drug using young people:

**Experimenters:** Many young people experiment with drugs but do not go on to become regular users. We need to ensure that if these young people do experiment they do so safely.

**Socially disconnected young people:** These young people see drugs as a way of fitting in and gaining friendships. In many ways, this is the most preventable group. By ensuring that each person in our school has a range of people to associate with, rely upon and talk to, we can lessen this group substantially.

**Self-medicators:** These young people with emotional difficulties such as depression use drugs as a way of treating their distress. We need to ensure that these young people get the professional help that they need.

## Drugs – what every parent needs to know

We live in a world where drugs are unavoidable

- 17% of young people identified themselves as being committed smokers.
- 35% of young people reported having their first full serve of alcohol by the age of 14.
- 21% of young people men and women aged 14-17 drink alcohol at short term risk of alcohol related harm—at least monthly.
- 17% of young people aged 16-24 reported using cannabis once a week or more.
- 10% of young people aged 16-24 reported using amphetamines once a week or more.

We can't 'drug-proof' our young people, but we can make it less likely that drugs will become a major issue in their lives.

It is important not to get too dramatic. Most young people do not use drugs, and most go on to live happy and fulfilling lives. Many of the strategies we have put in place in the past few years are working. Suicide rates are down. Death rates of young people are falling. The rate of heroin overdose deaths has fallen. Fewer young people are smoking tobacco. However, we can always do better.

## How?

Firstly, it is important that senior school students have access to accurate information about drugs. Trying to scare them out of it doesn't work. Telling them just to "say no" doesn't work either.

No drug is instantly addictive but some drugs can be instantly fatal (whether taken in isolation or in combination with driving a vehicle).

Most of the problems for young people actually relate to legal rather than illegal drugs. Pain relievers are Australia's most abused drugs.

## What to look for

Throughout the later years of school, it is wise to keep asking yourself the following questions:

- When was the last time I had a good conversation with my child?
- Is he or she more secretive?
- Is she or he locked away in the bedroom more often?
- Does my child have access to money that I can't explain?
- Has his or her appearance changed (looks tired, red or glazed eyes, sniffing as if he or she has a cold, restless, agitated or unusually irritable)?
- Do I know my child's friends?
- Am I getting silent hang-ups when I answer the telephone?
- Is there any evidence of drug-using paraphernalia such as plastic bottles with holes in the side, pieces of garden hose, scales or spoons?
- Does my family have rituals (regular activities or events) that we do together?
- Are there alcohol-free family rituals?
- Does my family convey a message that misuse of substances is not acceptable?

## How can we make drug misuse less likely?

Drug misuse decreases as connectedness to an adult increases. Stay involved in your child's life.

Young people often act as if their parents are an unnecessary and embarrassing burden. Don't fall for this act. They need you around more than they (or you) know.

Know their friends. Organise social functions; food is a good way to get to know teenagers.

If you are worried, talk to someone. Don't be afraid to seek help. School can be a good place to start. Information on drugs can be obtained from:

<b>Direct Line</b>	<b>1800 888 236</b>
<b>DrugInfo Clearinghouse</b>	<b>1300 858 584</b>
<b>Parentline</b>	<b>13 22 89</b>
<b>Family Drug Help</b>	<b>1300 660 068</b>

Or if you are worried about the toxicity of substances your child is using, phone the

**Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26.**

Online information is available at:  
**[www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)**

Be prepared to talk to your child about your concerns and persist until you feel reassured (not just until they say "it's all right – don't worry"). If you remain concerned, seek help. In addition to the above help lines, GPs, student welfare coordinators, drug and alcohol services and psychologists are also useful sources of assistance.

## Risk and Protective Factors

### Risk factors in secondary schools:

- drug misusing peers (especially for girls)
- opportunities to use drugs
- depression.

Note: Drug misusing teenagers tend to over-estimate the prevalence of drug use among young people.

### Protective factors in secondary schools:

- connectedness with family and school, and a diversity of friends
- academic success
- social and resistance skills.



# Success without Stress

A guide for senior students and their parents

## Grunt...shrug...as if... whatever...dunno!

**Would you study if I gave you a quarter of a million dollars?**

Every single day you spend in secondary school is worth about \$100 in lifetime earning power.

### Beating the success beaters

Distractions, tiredness, hunger, putting yourself down, comparing yourself with others are all enemies of success. Forget about comparing yourself with other people. Get used to it: there will always be brighter people and people who aren't as bright as you. Set aside some time to dream. Think about the life that you'd love to live, and make a pact with yourself to go for it.

### Getting ready to study:

- decide why you want to do well
- don't panic about mistakes – they are part of learning
- you need to take a break every 50 minutes or so
- change what you are doing every 20 minutes to maximise your memory
- think about when you learn best and study at those times
- if you can, eat a high protein breakfast and drink lots of water
- decide what mark you want to get in each of your subjects
- try to find an angle that makes studying fun and memorable for you

### Work Smarter – Not Harder

The difference between students who do really well at school and those who do not isn't just about how hard they work, it's about figuring out ways to make studying easier and even enjoyable. This is where parents who know about effective studying techniques can really help!

**Homework** should be divided into three types:

**Keep up work:** This work needs to be done for class and should be done as quickly as possible.

**Project work:** These longer term projects may need more time for completion.

**Memory work:** This doodling work makes your notes interesting and memorable.

Decide when and where you are going to do homework. Never wait until it feels right – it won't and you could wind up doing it all again next year!

### Tips on the best study environment:

- ▶ don't study under fluorescent lights; halogen and broad-spectrum desk lamps are ideal
- ▶ no loud music and definitely no radio or TV while studying
- ▶ Pachelbel's Canon, Mozart's music and baroque music have been associated with higher academic attainment
- ▶ room temperature between 18 and 21 degrees celsius
- ▶ aromas such as lemon and peppermint can increase attention
- ▶ study at the same place every day
- ▶ set yourself a definite time period for studying and focus your energies for that time; once you've done that reward yourself
- ▶ bad news! It seems that adolescents need more sleep than children need. Ideally, you should get nine hours and 15 minutes sleep every night. Even worse, sleeping in more than two hours longer than usual at the weekend disrupts your sleep patterns.

## Memory tricks

We need to make information interesting so it is worth keeping in our minds. Linking information to things you are interested in helps to do this.

Learning information in different ways also helps. Don't only read English texts, listen to recordings, and if quality videos or DVDs are available, watch them. Use a tape recorder to make memos of things you need to remember and play these back to yourself.

Other techniques include:

- learning new stuff in the morning – that's when many people find they can best absorb new information
- explaining information to someone else – one of the simplest ways to stimulate your memory is trying to teach someone else
- taking a journey you know very well and finding a number of landmarks; at each landmark remembering one piece of information; practice mentally walking the journey
- acronyms are useful ways of making remembering easier
- the most difficult information to learn are the middle bits, so vary the order in which you work so that the same subject areas don't get missed over and over again.

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## Take great notes

- ▶ don't only write down what the teacher writes; when you do, convert it into your own language
- ▶ keep asking yourself, what's the main idea here?
- ▶ highlight main ideas in one colour and secondary ideas in a different colour
- ▶ use size so that some words **STAND OUT!**
- ▶ use colours and create your own style
- ▶ take notes on a particular subject, then put them together in an interesting way
- ▶ relate the most boring bits to the things you are most interested in, then replicate your notes
- ▶ as well as taking notes, some students tape themselves reading out information they will need to remember and play it over and over again
- ▶ create colourful posters of information you need to remember.

**Apply the 'GET IT' model to your homework or study session:**

**Get ready to learn:** have the books you need, go to the toilet if you need to, have a drink with you, decide how long you are going to study (even set an alarm clock), switch off phones and have someone take messages for you.

**Examine main points:** begin by asking yourself "What's the main idea here?" Skim briefly over the work to be done. Focus your attention.

**Trying it out** – action time: Try out activities or exercises, and write out what you know. Do this as fast as you can.

**Information processing:** work out ways to make it interesting and memorable.

**Tying it together:** write a mini essay on each of the topics you are studying.

There is no such thing as good writing; there is only good re-writing, so always treat your first attempt as a draft to be improved upon.

# Success without Stress – Study Skills Survey

One of the more common causes of stress for parents and their children is the issue of study. Parents often wonder whether their child is doing too much or too little. Young adults often are more stressed about their parents worry than they are about their study. To overcome unnecessary stress a study skills survey has been developed to assist you in developing your own study plan.

Please complete all five sections of the survey before scoring and plotting your responses. Remember this is not a test! It is a self-assessment of your current study techniques.

## NOTE TAKING

1	If I think I'll remember something, I don't write it in my notes even if it seems important.	True	False
2	When taking notes in class I never abbreviate words.	True	False
3	I take notes on loose-leaf pieces of paper rather than notebooks.	True	False
4	I take notes after I have completed a reading assignment rather than as I go along.	True	False
5	I recopy my notes as soon as possible after class.	True	False
6	I usually take notes in class.	True	False
7	I usually take notes in class and then never look at them again.	True	False
8	My notes are so boring even I can't stand to look at them.	True	False
9	I often lose the notes I do take.	True	False
10	I only ever write down what the teacher writes on the board.	True	False

Score .....

## STUDY HABITS

1	I use the headings of a chapter to get an idea of the outline before reading it.	True	False
2	Before reading a chapter, I write down several questions to focus my reading.	True	False
3	When studying a book I try to remember the exact words.	True	False
4	I often study with the radio or music on.	True	False
5	I try to break large bits of information into smaller areas.	True	False
6	I usually wait until I'm too tired to do anything else before I start doing homework.	True	False
7	I often find it hard to concentrate.	True	False
8	It seems to take me longer than most people to do homework.	True	False
9	It takes me a long time to get ready to do homework.	True	False
10	I have to be in the right mood to do homework.	True	False

Score .....

## MOTIVATION

1	I sometimes wag classes.	True	False
2	I use facts I learn in school to help understand events out of school.	True	False
3	I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	True	False
4	I use the facts I learn in one subject to help me in another subject.	True	False
5	I usually just learn enough to pass the subject I'm studying.	True	False
6	I generally don't study for teachers I don't like.	True	False
7	I already know the marks I want to get in each of my subjects.	True	False
8	With really boring subjects, I try to keep my goals for my life in mind.	True	False
9	I think people can get smarter if they stick with things; intelligence isn't a fixed thing.	True	False
10	I don't like my friends seeing me try hard to do well at school.	True	False

Score .....

## PLANNING

1	I often sit down to study only to find I don't have all the books, notes or materials I need.	True	False
2	I often don't have reports ready on time or they are done poorly to get them in on time.	True	False
3	I leave school assessed work to the last moment.	True	False
4	In my school diary, I don't just write down when something is due in, I also write reminders.	True	False
5	I have set times to do homework during the week and pretty much stick to it.	True	False
6	I spend some time each week pulling information together in a way that is easy to remember for me.	True	False
7	I have a specific place for studying at home.	True	False
8	When I start to do homework I think about how much I want to get done in a set period of time.	True	False
9	I often discover I've read several pages without knowing what was on them.	True	False
10	I write down in my diary the most important thing I want to get done in each subject each week.	True	False

Score .....

## TEST AND EXAM TAKING

1	I panic before tests.	True	False
2	I 'freeze up' in exams and go blank.	True	False
3	I try to get examples of past questions or exam papers.	True	False
4	In revising my notes, I use highlighters with different colours to distinguish main ideas from less important ideas.	True	False
5	I consider what questions are likely to be asked, and write mini-answers to them.	True	False
6	I write down the formulae, quotes and key concepts on small cards and use these to test my memory.	True	False
7	I develop acronyms to make it easier to remember my notes.	True	False
8	I do the hardest questions on an exam first.	True	False
9	I stick with a question on an exam until I feel I've got it right.	True	False
10	I study late the night before an exam.	True	False

Score .....

## SCORING KEY

For each item, you can either get a score of 0 or 1. At the end of each of the five sections, total your scores.

	Note Taking		Study Habits		Motivation		Planning		Test & Exam	
	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False	True	False
1		1	1			1		1		1
2		1	1		1			1		1
3		1		1	1			1	1	
4		1		1	1		1		1	
5	1		1			1	1		1	
6	1			1		1	1		1	
7		1		1	1		1		1	
8		1		1	1		1			1
9		1		1	1			1		1
10		1		1		1	1			1

## Study skills profile

Strong 10					
Moderate 5					
Weak 0					
	Note Taking	Study habits	Motivation	Planning	Test & exam taking

To determine your study profile plot your results in the grid. This will assist you to determine your strongest study area and those areas which require more time and energy.

Identifying those areas for improvement will enable parents and a teacher to assist you to develop your study plan.

Parents can then assist their children to implement the plan by being more involved with some agreed elements, and allowing their children and teachers to take responsibility for the rest. The study plan could be reviewed by the student, parent and teacher at set review dates.

# Study Skills Agreement

**Note:** To be signed by parent and young person.

## Study times

I will begin studying at ..... pm Sunday to Thursday.

I am going to study for a minimum of .....hours per day (Monday to Friday).

I am going to study for a minimum of .....hours each weekend.

The time of day that I find I can concentrate and learn best is .....

I am definitely not going to do school work at the following times:

.....  
.....

My family can help me with my study routine by: .....

.....

## Study routine plan

Day	Study Times	Day	Study Times
Monday		Friday	
Tuesday		Saturday	
Wednesday		Sunday	
Thursday			

### **Important note:**

*If you wait until you feel like doing homework, you will often be waiting a long time. Highly successful students work out how much time they are prepared to spend on schoolwork at home, consider when they can do this and then turn it into a routine.*

### How much homework to do?

My subjects	The mark I want to get	The amount of homework time I think I need to get that mark

Back up plan: If things aren't working out well for me, I will .....

Student signature .....

### A checklist (note for parents)

Does my child have:	Have I:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a consistent and comfortable, quiet place to study</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• discussed what sort of help they would like from me?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a reasonably regular time to study</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• asked them when they think they can learn best?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• an organised filing and note taking system</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• asked them whether they would like me to also read their texts?</li></ul>

Parent signature .....



# Pathways to the Future

## For senior school students and their parents

### So what happens after school?

When you finish school, you are free: no more homework; no more teachers; no more deadlines, right? As if!

The transition from school into tertiary studies or work can bring with it a lot of concerns and pressures. For some it means new living arrangements, new friends (or the possibility of no close friends). Friendships that have sustained people through school sometimes fall away at this time.

### What to watch for

Many first year university or college students report feelings of loneliness, isolation and sadness. Some students have difficulty with the freedom that tertiary education offers.

This can be particularly true for students who come from country areas, overseas or who attended secondary schools that were highly nurturing or demanding.

Up to a third of first year students have doubts about their courses and feel troubled by their commitment to study.

Thirty to forty per cent of students drop out of university without completing a degree.

University is not for everyone.

### What predicts good adjustment to tertiary studies?

- Having a range of coping styles
- Problem solving skills
- Social support
- Self-esteem
- Assertiveness
- A sense that they control their destiny
- Optimism
- A sense of mastery over some aspects of their lives

### Parents are important

You may not realise it, but senior secondary school students' adaptation to Year 12 as well as to tertiary education depends partly on the way their parents and schools connect with the students during this crucial time.

The sense a young person has that he or she is connected to and loved by his or her family is linked with:

- fewer feelings of loneliness
- fewer thoughts of self-harm
- less likelihood of depression
- more social support from friends
- more positive connections to school
- less stress and anxiety

The sense a young person has that he or she is connected to his or her school during the later years is linked with:

- more positive connections to family
- fewer thoughts of self-harm
- less likelihood of depression

### Successfully bridging the gap

#### How parents can help?

If you talk about first year university or college as some form of wild party, your child might feel that he or she can't talk to you if he or she encounters difficulties.

Feelings of loneliness, depression and worry are very common. Talk to your child about what to do if he or she feels down. Encourage him or her to call home.

Give the message 'you are more than your score'.

If your child is feeling jaded, or even undecided, get him or her to think about taking a year off before commencing study. For young people in rural areas, delaying tertiary studies for a year can have the effect of being out of step with their peer group and finding it even more difficult when they do start. In this case, taking the second year off might be more appropriate.

Check your attitude: the world of clear career paths has gone. Many young people will experience many changes in their working life as well as in their studies. It is estimated that a school leaver in 2006 will experience six career changes during their working life.



# Communication and Parent Networking

## Schools and Parents in Partnership

Schools can ensure that parents remain involved when their children are completing their later years of school in a number of ways.

Schools and parents can employ the following strategies to improve communication:

- teacher and parent education sessions
- joint professional development for staff and parents on helping students succeed at school
- joint learning activities for students and their parents on study skill techniques, stress management, transition into senior school and family problem solving
- family learning projects that involve parents and their children
- school representatives in community organisations
- student facilitators for parent evenings and reporting and review nights
- practical contingencies, e.g. child-care provisions, language interpreters
- establishing a parent resource centre
- parent networks
- meetings with parents held in a neutral setting
- a parent space at school, where parents can meet
- a parenting section in the library that parents know about and feel comfortable using
- free coffee at drop off and pick up times to encourage parents to get to know one another
- register of parents willing to share skills/expertise with students and staff
- streamlining of communication to parents about academic progress and wellbeing issues through one or two key contacts
- students writing letters to invite their parents to school events
- mail school newsletters, invitations and important information directly to parents
- a telephone tree of parents so that communication can occur easily
- sufficient notice of parent–teacher interviews and curriculum days (ideally, a yearly calendar with dates noted for the year to come)
- a welcoming front office and telephone manner
- prompt delivery of telephone messages from parents to staff
- a nominated school contact for each parent, as a first port of call
- email addresses of parents and staff where available to facilitate quicker feedback
- student support meetings, mentoring and Managed Individual Pathways programs
- progress report evenings
- staff contact times – when they are available to take calls directly from parents
- create an environment of mutual respect where parents, staff and students share values about behavioural protocols
- a 'party safely' policy that equips and supports parents
- a memorandum of understanding between parents and teachers, including ways to arrange meetings with staff members
- telephone parents randomly to get their opinions on school policies, events, progress and include these opinions in the annual report
- a parent representative of senior years students on school council
- students consulted about how they would like their parents to be involved
- parents consulted about their needs, using surveys, focus groups

### Do's and Don'ts

Most parents are busy people who want to be involved in their child's education but don't know how to do so, feel discouraged by their children and feel awkward attending social functions at the school where they don't know anyone.

The best way to keep parents engaged in school is not to lose them in the first place. Ensure there is one person who has primary contact with each family, who is the conduit for information and who phones each family at least once a term.

Parents should be able to contribute usefully to school functions. They should also feel that the event is directly related to their child's wellbeing.

Vary communication – use the telephone, telephone tree, email, newsletter, and postcards designed and written by students.

Make sure that dual parents get dual information.

*We are grateful to Gail McHardy from Parents Victoria.  
[www.parentsvictoria.asn.au](http://www.parentsvictoria.asn.au)*

# Parent Networking

Parents can initiate a closer involvement with their children's schooling. Schools can create an environment that encourages:

- building an effective parent network
- making the core business of parent networks useful, e.g. consulting with parents about their needs and opinions using surveys, meetings and informal discussions
- making the core business of parent networks supportive rather than demanding, while focusing on the needs of parents rather than the needs of the school or the community
- making participation easy, e.g. providing childcare, locating the meeting at a central setting and providing alternative forms of communication for those who cannot attend
- keeping other parents informed through established channels of communication and sources of information
- sharing the workload around – helping people gain skills, keeping the work interesting, and avoiding group cliques
- developing an understudy method to help parents to develop skills
- developing collective responsibility by actively involving all members of the group in decision-making, helping to develop group identity and responsibility
- being patient and quietly persistent.

Strategies to help build up a base of support and influence for parents in school, include:

- starting small
- talking to one other person and enlisting his or her support on common concerns
- asking interested parents to invite one friend each to the next meeting, making it easier for people to approach a new group and feel welcome
- phoning or door-knocking parents of other students in the same year level
- encouraging information networks
- keeping all parents informed and interested, and keeping absent members up to date about progress to make them feel supported and valued
- using telephone trees.

Telephone trees allow people to share information in a minimum amount of time. Create a list of all your members in the shape of a pyramid. At the top, you have the name of a central person in your group who is most likely to receive up-to-date information. Below that person, you have another line with the names of two or three other members. On the line beneath that, you have two or three other names, and so on. You do this until everyone in your group is included in the tree. Each member of the group will only telephone two or three other people on the line below them to pass on information.

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