

KidsMatter

is a primary school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, beyondblue: the national depression initiative, the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) and supported by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund.

The KidsMatter initiative aims to:

- ◆ Improve the mental health and well-being of primary school students
- ◆ Reduce mental health problems among students (eg., anxiety, depression and behavioral problems)
- ◆ Achieve greater support and assistance for students at risk or experiencing mental health problems.

The KidsMatter Initiative is aiming to strengthen those factors that protect students from developing mental health problems. Some of these factors reside within the student (eg. being socially and emotionally competent), some occur within the school context (eg. having a school climate where students feel safe, that they belong, and have opportunities to experience success) and some reside within the family context (eg. having supportive and caring relationships with parent/s, family and community).

It is particularly important to strengthen these protective factors in students who are at risk or who are experiencing mental health problems.

Teaching of Social and Emotional Skills

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is a key protective factor for children's mental health and wellbeing, and KidsMatter schools are focusing on making sure that all students are taught these in a formal and systematic way.

Parents and caregivers can continue to support their children's social and emotional learning at home, as the family is central to children's mental health. Children who have warm and secure relationships with their families or carers are protected from a range of mental health issues including anxiety, depression and behavioural issues.

The following is a list of ideas...

10 Things You Can Do at Home

1. Focus on strengths -

When your child brings home a test, talk first about what he or she did well. Then talk about what can be improved. Praise specific strengths. Don't just criticise things that were done wrong.

2. Follow up with consequences for misbehaviour -

Sometimes parents say things in anger that don't curb the behaviour in the long run. You might say, "Because of what you did, no television for a month." Both you and your child know that after one or two days the TV will go back on. Decide on consequences that are fair, and then carry them out.

3. Ask children how they feel -

When you ask your child about his or her feelings, the message is that feelings matter and you care.

4. Find ways to stay calm when angry -

It's normal to get angry or irritated sometimes. Learn to recognise "trigger situations" and do something about them before you lose control. Take deep breaths for a few moments. Consider having a "quiet area" where people can go when they are upset. Or you can just stop talking and leave the room for a while. Sit down as a family and talk about what everyone can do to stay calm.

5. Avoid humiliating or mocking your child -

This can make children feel bad about themselves. It can lead to a lack of self-confidence and, in turn, problems with schoolwork, illness, and trouble getting along with friends. Unfair criticism and sarcasm also hurts the bond of trust between children and parents. Be mindful of how you speak to your children. Give them the room to make mistakes as they learn new skills.

6. Be willing to apologise -

Parents need to be able to apologise to their children if what they said was not what they meant. Calmly explain what you really wanted to say. By doing this you're being a good role model. You're showing how important it is to apologise after hurting someone. You're teaching that it's possible to work through problems with respect for the other person.

7. Give children choices and respect their wishes -

When children have a chance to make choices, they learn how to solve problems. If you make all their choices for them, they'll never learn this key skill. Giving children ways to express preferences and make decisions shows that their ideas and feelings matter.

8. Ask questions that help children solve problems on their own -

When parents hear their child has a problem, it's tempting to step in and take over. But this can harm a child's ability to find solutions on his or her own. A helpful approach is to ask good questions. Examples include, "What do you think you can do in this situation?" and "If you choose a particular solution, what will be the consequences of that choice?"

9. Read books and stories together -

Reading stories aloud is a way to share something enjoyable and learn together about other people. For example, stories can be a way to explore how people deal with common issues like making or losing friends or handling conflicts. Ask your child's teacher or a librarian to recommend stories on themes that interest you and your children.

10. Encourage sharing and helping -

There are many ways to do this. Together you and your child can prepare food in a homeless shelter or go on a fund-raising walk-a-thon. You can help out elderly neighbours or needy families. This teaches children that what they do can make a difference in the lives of others. ✕



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AUSTRALIA

is a national
charity working
for a better life
for Australians

affected by mental illness and has a wide range of resources available. Call the SANE Helpline on:

1800 688 382



NT Health Direct:
It's your call

1800 186 026

*A new health advice and info line for Territorians has been established called NT Health Direct. It's free * and completely confidential, 24 hours, 7 days a week. Registered nurses trained in telephone triage will provide immediate guidance on health concerns, where to go to receive treatment and what callers can do until they can receive medical attention.*

**Charges apply for calls from mobile phones, consult your service provider.*

"Bitterness and an unforgiving spirit can be likened to you taking poison and expecting that someone else would die from the effect. Forgiveness is about setting the prisoner in your heart free, only to discover that all along, you had been the real prisoner."

Tope Popoola