

Re-setting the foundations for good mental health for families post COVID



Parents Victoria Online Conference

PREVENTION UNITED

Joining forces to prevent mental health conditions

Learning objectives

- ▶ Understand the mental health continuum
- ▶ Recognise the importance of self-care for parents and their children and teens
- ▶ When and how to seek help for mental health conditions
- ▶ Evidence-based parenting strategies

BREAKING NEWS Casino operator Crown is under investigation for potential breaches of anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing laws < 2 / 3 >

Coronavirus survey into children's mental health reveals anxiety, depression

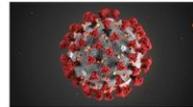
Posted 5d ago



If you need someone to talk to, call:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Beyond Blue on 1300 22 46 36
- Headspace on 1800 650 890
- QLife on 1800 184 527

More on coronavirus



See our full coverage of coronavirus

NATIONAL VICTORIA EDUCATION

Calls for help surge as teens' mental health suffers in lockdown

For our free coronavirus pandemic coverage, [learn more here.](#)

By [Anna Prytz](#) and [Adam Carey](#)
September 10, 2020 – 11.45pm

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Mental health support services have seen calls from children and young people in Victoria jump by up to a third as the state's hard lockdown and extended restrictions on school attendance take a toll.

There was a 28 per cent spike in calls to the phone counselling service Kids Helpline between March and July 2020 compared with the same period last year and a 19 per cent jump from July to August compared with the previous month.

LIVE BLOG Follow our live blog for the latest news on the coronavirus pandemic

Statistics show increase in children presenting to hospitals after self-harming

By [Rachel Clayton](#)

Posted Sat 8 Aug 2020 at 8:13am, updated Sun 9 Aug 2020 at 9:00am

NATIONAL EDUCATION

'Restless and unsettled': The pandemic is taking its toll on students

For our free coronavirus pandemic coverage, [learn more here.](#)

By [Jordan Baker](#)
August 9, 2020 – 12.00am



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The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic is taking its toll on children, with schools noticing increasing anxiety, misbehaviour and conflict with friends as students struggle to make sense of the masks, stress and disruption around them.

Teachers, principals and support staff say many primary pupils have been restless and unsettled since remote learning ended, with reports of more frustration, outbursts and difficulties with peer interactions.

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

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To build back better after COVID-19, we must support parents

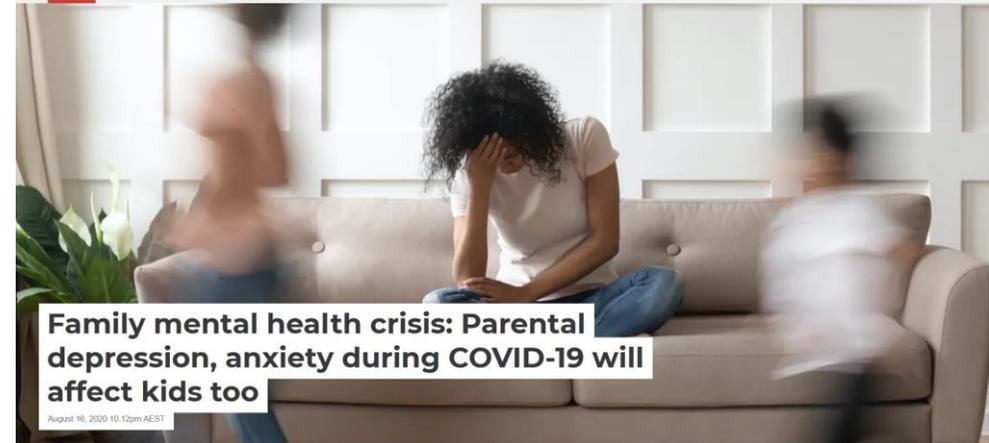
October 16, 2020 12:41am AEDT

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

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Family mental health crisis: Parental depression, anxiety during COVID-19 will affect kids too

August 16, 2020 10:12pm AEST

What is mental wellbeing?

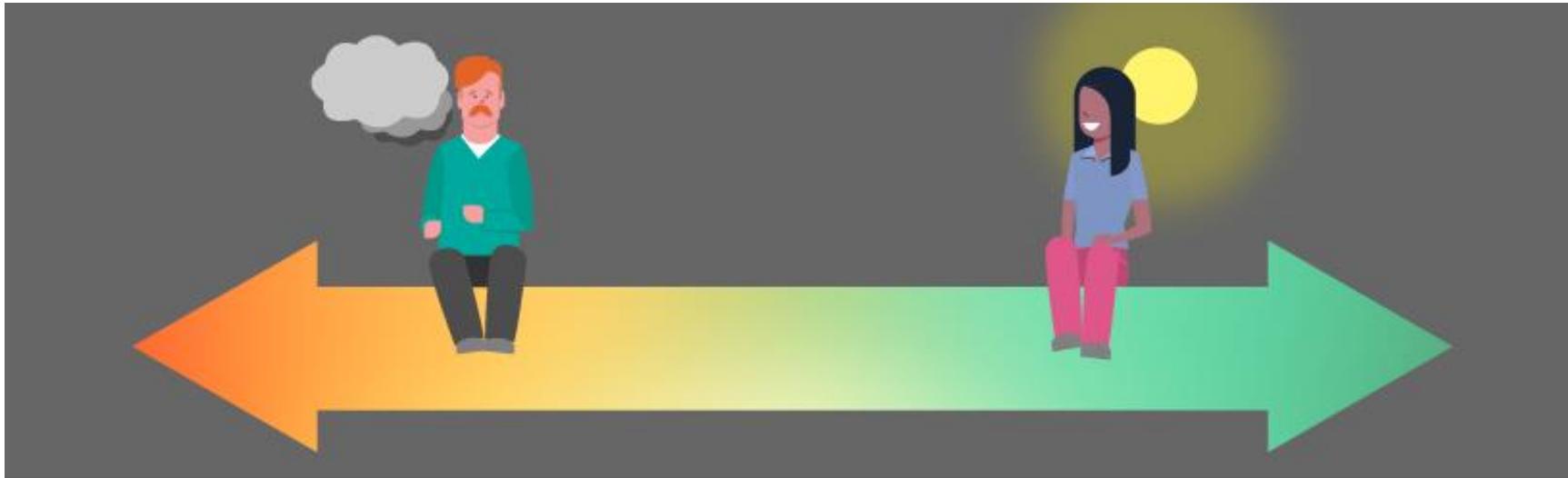
What is mental health and wellbeing?

- ▶ Mental health and mental ill-health are not the same
- ▶ Good mental health (aka mental wellbeing) is about feeling good emotionally and functioning well psychologically and socially
- ▶ Mental ill-health (aka mental health conditions or mental disorders) causes emotional distress and interferes with day-to-day functioning and relationships with others

What is mental health and wellbeing?

- ▶ We all have a level of mental health which varies on a continuum
- ▶ Our position is not fixed, and varies according to various personal and social environmental factors
- ▶ Aim to stay in the high mental wellbeing zone as much as we can through self-care, social support, and seeking help when we need it

The mental health continuum



**Mental health
condition**

Stressed but OK

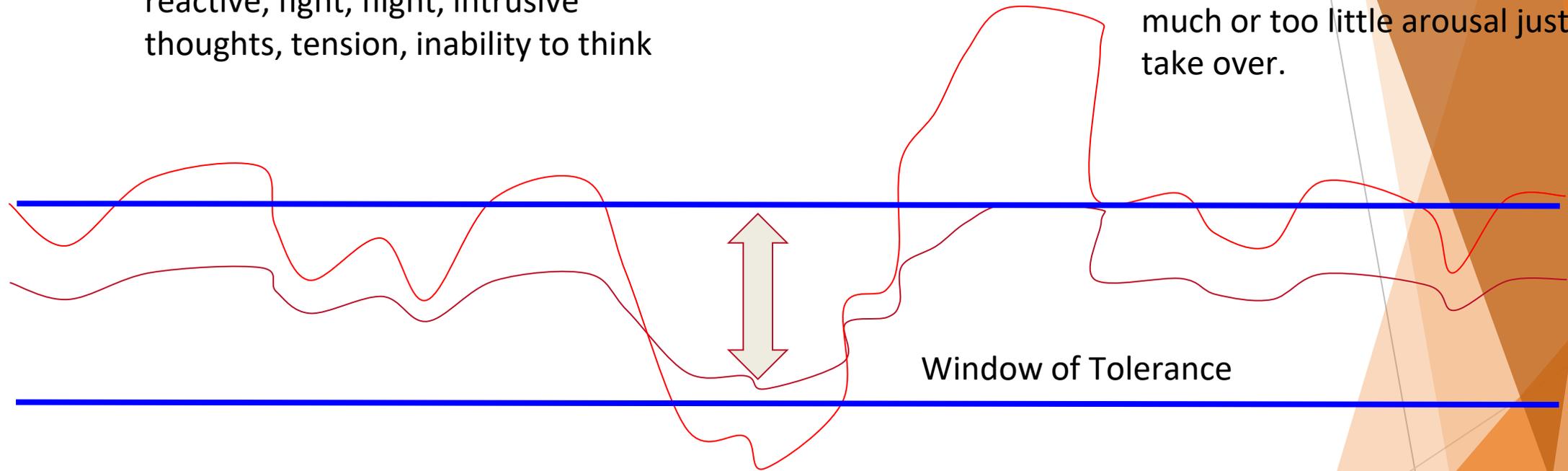
**High mental
wellbeing**

Window of Tolerance

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Hyperarousal - Too **much** arousal:
reactive, fight, flight, intrusive
thoughts, tension, inability to think

This is not a choice point -
reactions associated with too
much or too little arousal just
take over.



Hypoarousal - Too **little** arousal: flat,
blank, numbing, inability to think

Source Tom Mulvaney



What is self care?

Self-care

- ▶ One way to stay, or get back into the higher mental wellbeing zone is through self-care
- ▶ Self-care refers to the active steps we can take to promote and protect our own wellbeing, particularly during periods of stress
- ▶ These apply to parents and to children and teens

Self-care

Healthy behaviours

Relaxation strategies

Emotional regulation

Fostering a helpful mindset

Building our social supports

Healthy behaviours



- ▶ Stay physically active
- ▶ Maintain a good quality diet
- ▶ Get a good night's sleep
- ▶ Reduce or avoid alcohol & other drugs
- ▶ Have fun - schedule-in downtime to enjoy pleasant and relaxing activities



Relaxation strategies

- ▶ Slowing down helps to dial down our flight or fight centre and stress hormones
- ▶ Relax your body through deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, Pilates, body balance or anything that reduces tension for you
- ▶ Connect with nature, listen to music, read a good book
- ▶ Clear your mind and focus on the here and now, rather than thoughts about the past or future through mindfulness meditation



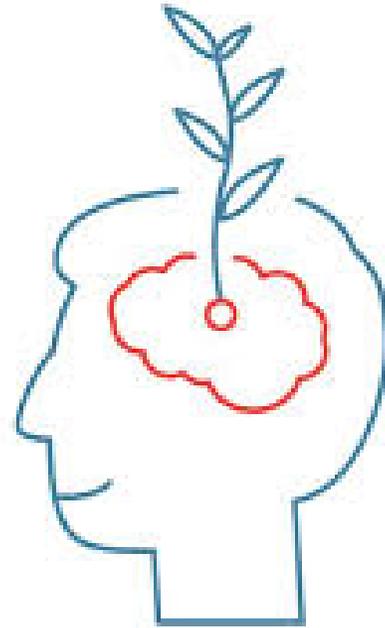
Emotion regulation

- ▶ We can't always feel happy
- ▶ Negative feelings like worry, sadness and anger are normal reactions in certain situations
- ▶ Strong or prolonged negative emotions can have negative impacts and need to be managed
- ▶ Be aware - acknowledge (and name) your feelings
- ▶ Sit with it - accept how you're feeling - it will pass
- ▶ Change it or re-think it - keep your mind busy, try to solve the problem causing you concern, double check your self-talk and mindset
- ▶ Share it - don't bottle things up, talk to people, share how you're feeling, and seek support
- ▶ Be compassionate - don't beat yourself up (or others)



Fostering a helpful mindset

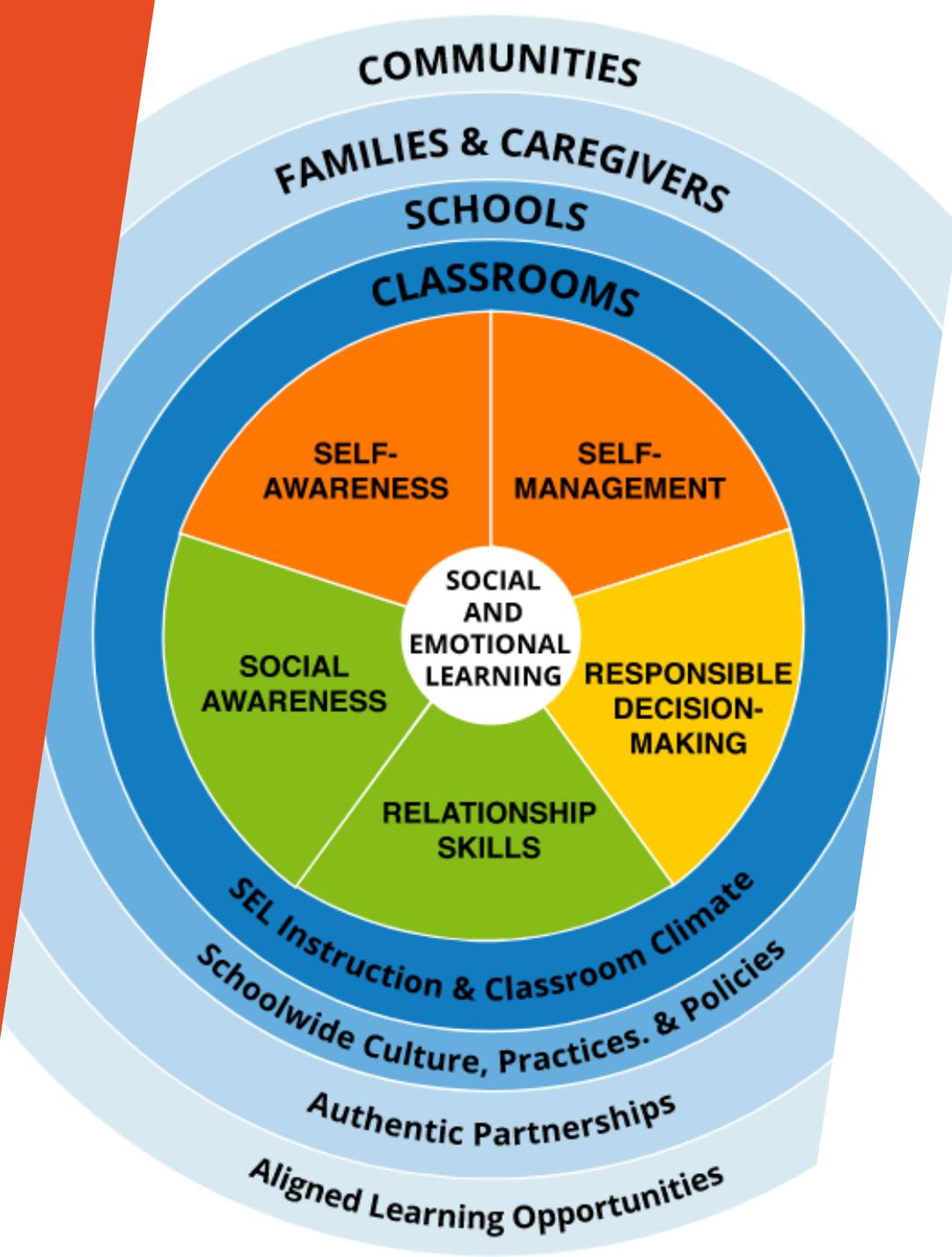
- ▶ What we think has a strong influence on how we feel
- ▶ Sometimes our thoughts are misleading.
- ▶ Assess the facts, maintain perspective, avoid negative bias, challenge negative self-talk
- ▶ Maintain a growth mindset - life's about trial, error and improvement - things don't always go right first time
- ▶ Focus on the big picture of what's important to you, not just what's happening here and now
- ▶ Sometimes we just need to accept things and move forward - things are bad now, but they will get better
- ▶ Be part realist and part optimist!



Social support

- ▶ A sense of loneliness and lack of belonging can harm our mental health and wellbeing
- ▶ Invest time and energy to grow, deepen and maintain your relationships and social network
- ▶ Connect regularly with friends and family even if it's just through virtual means
- ▶ Share experiences, enjoy each other's company and have fun together
- ▶ Be part of something bigger than yourself - people who volunteer, are involved in group activities or in spiritual pursuits tend to be happier than people who don't





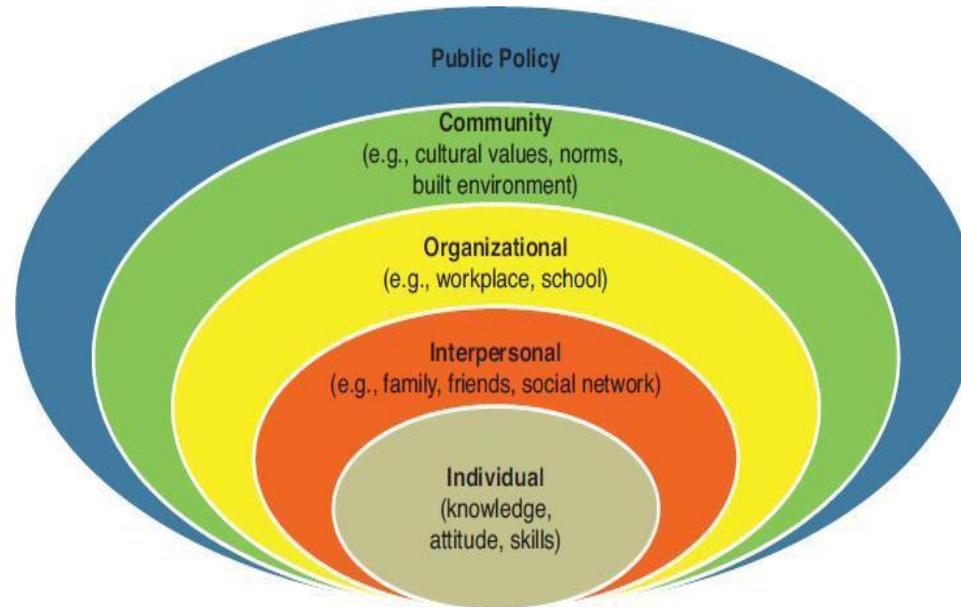
A word about social and emotional skills

- ▶ Parents and schools can work together to build their child and teens social and emotional skills
- ▶ **SELF-AWARENESS:** Understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values
- ▶ **SELF-MANAGEMENT:** Manage one's emotions thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations
- ▶ **SOCIAL AWARENESS:** Understand the perspectives of and empathize with others
- ▶ **RELATIONSHIP SKILLS:** Establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships
- ▶ **RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING:** Make caring and constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions

<https://casel.org/sel-framework/>

A word about social factors

- ▶ Our mental health is not just up to us
- ▶ It is impacted by what's happening around us at home, school or work and in the broader community
- ▶ Some things that impact our mental health are out of our direct control
- ▶ Family violence, bullying, racism, discrimination, job stress, financial stress, unemployment, homelessness
- ▶ We need collective action to address these 'big picture' factors through organisational programs and healthy public policies



Getting help for mental health conditions

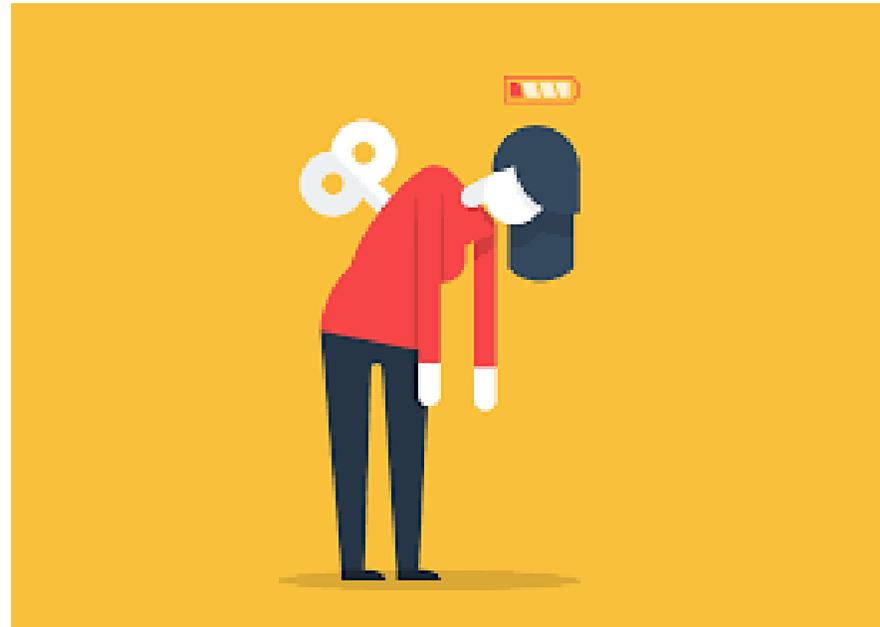
Indicators of mental health conditions

- ▶ It is common to experience mental health issues - 45% of people will experience a condition at some point in their life
- ▶ Can vary from mild to severe mental health condition
- ▶ Signs and symptoms vary for each condition but typically involve a change in the way people feel, function, and relate to others



Physical changes

- ▶ Feeling tense, restless, fidgety
- ▶ Lacking energy and feeling fatigued
- ▶ Trouble sleeping (hard to fall asleep, or hard to get back to sleep)
- ▶ Change in appetite (low appetite or binge eating/comfort eating)
- ▶ Aches and pains (e.g. headaches, tummy aches) and becoming unwell more often



Emotional changes

- ▶ Intense and/or persistent worry, anxiety, fear, panic
- ▶ Intense and/or persistent emptiness, sadness, or depression
- ▶ Loss of interest or pleasure in the things you used to enjoy
- ▶ Intense and/or persistent moodiness, irritability, frustration, anger



Thought changes

- ▶ Unable to focus, concentrate, or remember things
- ▶ Having too much going on in your head and finding it hard to 'switch-off'
- ▶ Constantly worried, distracted and preoccupied
- ▶ Catastrophising and thinking about all the bad things that can happen
- ▶ Pessimistic, overly critical, negative thinking about yourself, your life, or your future
- ▶ Thinking that life is not worth living



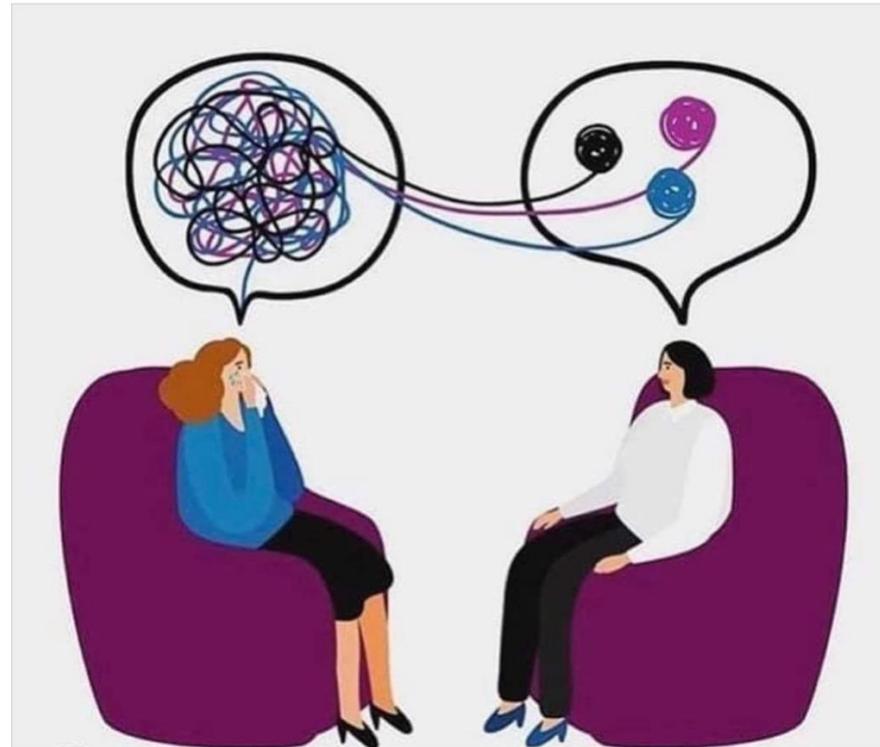
Behaviour changes

- ▶ Loss of drive, motivation, doing less
- ▶ Not being able to get things done well or on time (drop in productivity and/or performance)
- ▶ Becoming socially withdrawn
- ▶ Getting grumpy, yelling, having frequent arguments with others
- ▶ Smoking or drinking to cope
- ▶ Taking drugs to escape or feel better
- ▶ Self-harm



Seeking help

- ▶ It's Ok to not feel Ok
- ▶ Don't bottle things up, talk to people you trust about how you're feeling and your concerns
- ▶ Don't wait until rock-bottom or a crisis to seek advice for you or loved ones.
- ▶ Support and assistance is available if you or others need it



Seeking help

- ▶ Websites (info resources, self-guided treatment programs)
- ▶ Telephone help-lines
- ▶ Email and chat support (e-headspace)
- ▶ Online forums
- ▶ Counsellors in schools
- ▶ headspace and CAMHS
- ▶ Mental health professionals in private practice
 - ▶ Recent increase in Medicare counselling sessions
 - ▶ Telehealth counselling sessions available



#GettingThroughThisTogether

Tips for your mental health and wellbeing during COVID-19



Beyond Blue Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service **1800 512 348**
Lifeline **13 11 14** | headspace **1800 650 890** | Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**

Free financial counselling, Monday – Friday National Debt Helpline **1800 007 007**
National Alcohol and Other Drugs hotline **1800 250 015** | 1800RESPECT **1800 737 732**



Australian Government
National Mental Health Commission

Parenting strategies

Parenting and mental wellbeing

- ▶ Parents and caregivers lay the foundations for mental wellbeing, but they are certainly not to blame for mental health conditions
- ▶ There's no one 'right' way to raise a child
- ▶ A range of approaches can help children and teens develop into healthy and happy people
- ▶ But there are some things that are important to avoid

Parenting and mental wellbeing

- ▶ Children and young people benefit from:
 - ▶ Love and emotional warmth
 - ▶ Regular communication and interaction
 - ▶ Their parents' and family members' interest, guidance and involvement in their life
 - ▶ Gradual increase in autonomy and giving things a go
 - ▶ Consistent and fair rules and discipline
 - ▶ Safe, supportive, and low conflict family environments
- ▶ Focus on parenting style and the overall family climate

Parenting style

- ▶ Authoritative parenting styles - close parent-child relationship, high levels of parental warmth and support, involvement with high levels of progressive autonomy granting
- ▶ Avoid harsh or authoritarian parenting, inconsistent discipline, inter-parental conflict, overprotection/control and criticism/lack of warmth

Family climate

- ▶ Good communication, show affection and appreciation, mutual respect, cohesion and cooperation, eating meals and spending time together, extended family support, and minimising conflict
- ▶ Children who experience overly stressful family environments can develop changes in their immune and stress hormone systems which compromise their psychological and social development.

Top 10 tips - Partners in Parenting

1. Establish & maintain a good relationship with your child - show affection and acceptance, take time to talk
2. Be involved in your child's life but avoid over involvement. Encourage autonomy and sensible risk taking - try not to smother or micro-manage them.
3. Encourage your child to build relationships with friends, family members and other supportive adults - belonging and social connectedness are important to mental wellbeing.
4. Minimise arguments and conflict in the home, particularly between you and your partner. Avoid critical, harsh or punitive responses to your child's behaviour.
5. Help your child to manage emotions by helping them to put a name to their feelings and teaching them ways to calm themselves.
6. Support your child when something is bothering them.
7. Help your child to set goals and solve problems.
8. Establish family rules and consequences and be a role model for these rules yourself.
9. Encourage good health habits like healthy eating, regular physical activity and good sleep patterns.
10. Seek professional help if you're concerned your child may be experiencing a mental health condition, or if you are finding things tough and are struggling to cope.

Top 10 tips - Triple P

1. Stop and pay attention - when your child wants to show you something, stop what you are doing and pay attention to your child. Spend frequent, small amounts of time with your child doing things that you both enjoy.
2. Give your child lots of physical affection - children often like hugs, cuddles, and holding hands.
3. Make time to chat - Talk to your child about things they are interested in and share aspects of your day with them.
4. Praise them and be specific - Give your child lots of descriptive praise when they do something you'd like to see more of
5. Provide opportunities for engaging open-ended play - children are more likely to misbehave when they are bored
6. Teach your child new skills by first showing the skill yourself, then giving your child opportunities to learn the new skill.
7. Have simple and consistent rules and consequences - Set clear limits on your child's behaviour. Let your child know what the consequences will be if they break the rules.
8. Be calm and clear when your child misbehaves - tell them what you would like them to do instead, praise your child if they stop. If they do not stop, follow through with an appropriate consequence.
9. Have realistic expectations - All children misbehave at times and it is inevitable that you will have some discipline hassles. Trying to be the perfect parent can set you up for frustration and disappointment.
10. Look after yourself - It is difficult to be a calm, relaxed parent if you are stressed, anxious, or depressed.

Parenting programs

- ▶ There are various programs designed to empower and equip parents with parenting strategies based on feedback from parents, parenting 'experts' and research
- ▶ Can be accessed online and/or face to face
- ▶ Most are free to parents



Parenting Resources

- ▶ There are also a range of telephone services & websites, that provide parents with information, and advice on any matter to do with parenting including child and adolescent mental health



raisingchildren.net.au
the australian parenting website

Parenting Resources

- ▶ The Commonwealth and Victorian State governments have websites with information resources for parents on promoting and protecting child and adolescent mental wellbeing



<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/mentalhealthtoolkit.aspx>