

Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning aims to build a common understanding of **mental health promotion** strategies to create environments that support mental health in schools and early education and care settings.

What is mental health?

The term **mental health** is often confused with mental illness, or a mental disorder, and while they are related, mental health is more than the absence of a mental illness.

Mental health refers to a state of **wellbeing** in which a person can realise their own abilities, engage in learning, cope with the normal stresses of life, and is able to make a contribution to their communityⁱ. Mental health is a combination of both positive feelings and positive functioningⁱⁱ.

What is mental health promotion?

Promoting Healthy Minds for Learning and Living presents a whole-of-setting approach to promoting mental health.

Mental health promotion forms part of a comprehensive approach to supporting wellbeing and mental health within a school or early childhood setting.

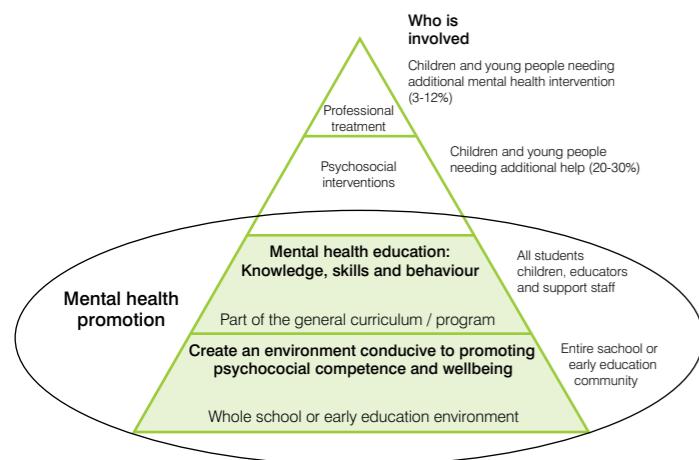
The diagram below highlights that the focus of **mental health promotion** is on actions that maximise mental health and wellbeing of whole communities and individuals by:

- improving social, physical, and economic environments
- strengthening the understanding and the skills of individuals to support their efforts to achieve and maintain mental health.

This approach is complementary to, but differs from:

Mental illness prevention, which includes actions taken to reduce the impact or prevent the initial onset of a mental illness, and

Mental illness treatment: which includes actions taken to remedy a mental illness; or to lessen the ill effects it causes



Adapted from World Health Organisation – four level, whole school approach to school changeⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Adapted from World Health Organisation, Strengthening Mental Health Promotion, Fact Sheet No. 220, Geneva, World Health Organisation, 2001.

ⁱⁱ Keyes, CLM. (2002) The mental health continuum: from languishing to flourishing in life. *J Health Soc Res* 43:207-22

ⁱⁱⁱ Wyn, J, Cahill, H, Holdsworth, R Rowling, L, & Carson, S 2000, 'MindMatters, a whole-school approach promotion mental health and wellbeing', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 34, pp.594-601

How can schools and early childhood education and care settings create environments that promote positive mental health?

Schools and early childhood settings already promote mental health: access to education; a sense of belonging and connectedness; and the development of social and emotional skills are all protective factors for children and young people's wellbeing. At the same time, poor attachment and parenting, peer rejection and experiences of bullying and discrimination are all known to contribute to poor mental health.

Evidence suggests that mental health promotion in these settings must operate on a number of levels simultaneously, addressing risk and protective factors in children and young people, skills development for the workforce, support for families, and a whole-of school approach to creating positive school and early childhood environments.

An early childhood setting or school that promotes mental health has strategies in place to sustain each of the following five areas:

1. Safe inclusive and empowering environments
2. Social and emotional learning
3. Family, community and service partnerships
4. Integrated mental health promotion
5. Building capacity to promote mental health

Policies promoting mental health in Victoria

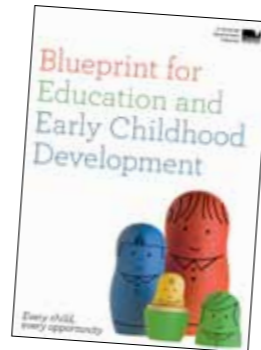
School and early childhood education and care settings are fundamental in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, building their capacity to do this is supported by key government policies, including the *Blueprint for education and early childhood development*, and *Because Mental Health Matters: Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019*.



Promoting Healthy Minds for Learning and Living has been developed as part of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy.

Improving mental

health outcomes for children, young people and their families is a priority of the Strategy. The Strategy envisages a broader system of child and youth (birth- 25 years) and family mental health care involving both promotion of mental health and wellbeing and early identification and intervention for mental illness.



More information

Visit the *Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning* website for links, information and resources to support schools and early childhood education and care settings.

www.education.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth

Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning

An initiative of the Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019



Promoting Healthy Minds for Living and Learning

Safe, inclusive and empowering environments

Family, community and service partnerships

Social and emotional learning



Mental health promoting schools and early childhood education and care settings recognise their role in promoting mental health, and act to create environments where children and young people can thrive, learn and grow

| Mental health is..... | Mental health is supported by..... | Schools and early childhood education and care settings.... |
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| Mental health is a state of social and emotional wellbeing in which a person can realise their abilities, engage in learning, cope with the normal stresses of life, and make a contribution to their community. | Environments that are safe, support secure attachments, and create a sense of belonging through social inclusion and participation. Skills to develop and maintain positive relationships, and resilience to social and emotional stressors | Have a key role in promoting mental health in all children and young people, and to assist those who may be at risk of developing mental illness. Recognise that children and young people's learning and development is supported by environments that promote mental health. |

Key components of mental health promoting schools and early childhood education and care settings

| Safe, inclusive and empowering environments | Social and emotional learning | Family, community and service partnerships |
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| <p>Environments that promote mental health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • value children and young people for who they are • support and promote the physical and mental wellbeing of staff • create physical environments that are safe, and support a range of opportunities for learning and physical activity • foster safe, respectful and supportive relationships between children and young people, educators and families • create opportunities for children's and young people's voices to be respected and to contribute to decisions that impact on their wellbeing, learning and environment • have strategies to promote positive and responsible behaviour, and to prevent and respond to bullying, discrimination and harassment, including online. | <p>Social and emotional learning is integrated in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards and the Early Years Learning and Development Framework, and should form part of a child's or young person's learning.</p> <p>Educators and school based health professionals have learning and teaching strategies that support children and young people to develop*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-awareness: recognise and manage emotions • social awareness: develop care and concern for others • responsible decision making: understanding and applying decision making skills • self-management: handle challenging situations effectively; take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing • relationship skills: establish positive and respectful relationships; build trusting adult relationships; form attachment to a familiar and consistent educator/s <p><i>*Adapted from Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) http://www.case.org/basics/skills.php</i></p> | <p>The school or early childhood education and care setting has processes in place to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proactively build connections with families and communities • recognise the primary role of families in children's and young people's learning and development, mental health and wellbeing • support families to enhance their skills in developing positive relationships and their children's resilience • identify children and young people who may be at risk of developing mental illness, engage their families and refer to appropriate early interventions • partner with service providers to assist children and families to access the support they need • enable positive transitions within and between settings |

Enablers of mental health promoting schools and early childhood education and care settings

Integrated mental health promotion

Mental health is recognised as an integral component of school and early childhood health promotion and educational outcomes. All actions in these settings are seen as opportunities to promote mental health and may include:

- planning health promotion actions that complement each other, and are included in overall strategic planning
- building a shared understanding across the setting of the purpose of each health promotion action, and clear processes for implementation and evaluation
- integrating health promotion actions into teaching and learning, recreation and management processes

Building capacity to promote mental health

School and early childhood education staff must have the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to promote mental health. These competencies need to be supported through professional practices that encourage staff to work together, and to build partnerships with other professionals. Competencies and practices include:

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| <p>Professional competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding children's social and emotional development • teaching and facilitating social and emotional learning and promotion of positive behaviour • listening and facilitation skills • understanding and promoting diversity • development of personal social and emotional skills and awareness | <p>Professional practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional learning • establishing communities of practice and networks • connecting with mental health professionals • building partnerships with community service organisations • establishing and maintaining referral pathways • connecting with relationships with other mental health initiatives |
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