

Mental Health Fundamentals

Included below are the topics covered in the webinar, answers to questions asked, suggestions provided by attendees and references mentioned.

Learning objectives

- Gain an understanding of what mental health and wellbeing is and the importance of promoting mental wellbeing
- Learn about the Mental Health Continuum, including the difference between mental health issues and mental health conditions
- Explore risk and protective factors and influences that affect mental health
- Learn how to support help-seeking
- Discover how to apply these concepts in your learning community

What is mental health?

- Not merely the absence of disease – “mental health is about wellness rather than illness” – [Beyond Blue website](#)
- Ability to realise one's own potential
- Ability to cope with the normal stresses of life
- Able to contribute to the community
- Varies over time depending on what's happening in people's lives
- It is a multi-dimensional concept with three main elements: It is about how we feel **emotionally** and how we function **psychologically** and **socially**
- According to the [World Health Organization](#), mental health is “a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”
- Children spend so much of the day with educators and teachers, there is a great opportunity to contribute to their mental health and wellbeing
- Teachers and educators don't have to be psychologists, but they are well-placed to identify mental health issues in young people early and can provide appropriate advice and support

Categorical vs dimensional conceptions of mental health

Categorical:

- The [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(DSM-5\)](#) provides a taxonomy of psychiatric conditions based on criteria
- Examples include generalised anxiety disorder, major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anorexia nervosa

Dimensional:

- Conceptualises mental health along a sliding scale
- Recognises day-to-day fluctuations

unsettled periods, and identifying and raising concerns for those who may need more targeted assistance by leadership, wellbeing teams or external mental health professionals.

Find out more at: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/betls-observation-tool>

Risk and protective factors

- Throughout anybody's life course there are a range of influences and events – both positive and negative – that impact an individual's mental health. These influences and events are known as risk and protective factors.
- Risk factors for children's mental health and wellbeing increase the likelihood of mental health issues developing during childhood and beyond. These include internal (biological and psychological), family or environmental characteristics, and experiences and events that challenge social and emotional wellbeing.
- Protective factors decrease the likelihood of mental health issues and build and maintain resilience, even when risk factors are present. Enhancing individual, family and environmental protective factors means children are less likely to be vulnerable because they receive the acceptance, warmth and support required for learning, social and emotional development, and resilience.
- Having social connections, good personal relationships and being part of a community are vital to maintaining positive mental health – [Beyond Blue website](#)

Find out more at: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities/understand>

Supporting mental health in your learning community

- A mentally healthy learning community is critical to children achieving their best possible mental health, no matter their developmental stage.
- Mental health promotion looks to enhance social and emotional wellbeing through experiences directed at individuals, groups and communities. It's relevant and applicable to everybody, wherever they sit on the mental health continuum, including people with a mental health condition.
- Promotion occurs in everyday settings including early learning services and schools, workplaces and the broader community. The goal is to address the underlying determinants (that is, risk and protective factors) which can impact on a person's mental health.
- Promoting mental health and wellbeing in everyday practice is an integral step in creating a mentally healthy learning community.
- As educators you are very good at caring for others – looking out for others and putting strategies in place to support them. For some students that might include being aware of events that may trigger anxiety; for others it might be providing them with appropriate words to make social connections.
- **Remember, it's not your role to diagnose or make conclusions about a child or young person's state of mental health.** That's what mental health professionals do. You direct families and staff to expert organisations or programs when specific support is needed.

Learn more about positive learning communities, a whole school approach and everyday promotion here: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities/understand>

Seeking support and referral pathways

- The earlier a child or young person receives support for emotional, behavioural or social difficulties, the better their chance of overcoming those issues, and of reducing the likelihood of more serious mental health conditions.
- As an educator, providing support doesn't mean you need to be a mental health professional or to find a solution to the problem yourself.
- There's a lot you can do to help if you have concerns about a child or young person. There are different types of support, and sometimes it's difficult to know how to act or what specific role to take. Schools and early learning services should have established policies and procedures in place to guide you once you've observed a concern.
- Your responsibility is to understand the policies and procedures relevant to your role. But to effectively support the children and young people in your care, it's also useful to have a good understanding of the supports available, and the most appropriate time for you or your community to call on them.
- When learning communities offer a clear plan to follow where concerns about a child or young person are raised, educators can feel confident in their role and the steps they might take.
- A plan incorporating the learning community's policies and procedures on supporting children and young people should be readily available for all educators and include things such as roles and responsibilities, gathering information, internal supports, confidentiality, mandatory reporting, mental health services and supports in your area and information on working with external support services.
- These experiences can be stressful for you. Continue to monitor your own mental health and wellbeing, and that of your colleagues. Your skills in noticing, inquiring and providing support around mental health and wellbeing are as applicable to you as they are to those you care for.

Find out more at:

- Be You Professional Learning 'Early Support' domain: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>
- Mental Health Support fact sheets: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support>
 - Overview of mental health service: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/overview-of-mental-health-services>
 - Help-seeking in early childhood: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/help-seeking-in-early-childhood>
 - Help-seeking for children and young people in schools: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/help-seeking-for-children-and-young-people-in-schools>
 - Before recommending additional support: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/before-recommending-additional-support>
 - Recommending additional support: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/recommending-additional-support>

How to apply these concepts in your learning community

How can I support a holistic approach to mental health in my team?

- **Collaboration**
 - Effective teamwork and healthy team dynamics are based on collaboration.
 - Collaboration involves listening to 'the other' and considering the perspective of others in everyday practice and in decision-making. It requires humility and courage.
 - Ideally, is multi-disciplinary, a feature of the Be You initiative and intentionally modelled in webinar sessions
- **Communication**
 - Oral, gestural and written communication is important in promoting health and wellbeing within individuals and the team
 - A challenge is for email communication to be respectful and realistic. When are emails sent to the team? What are the form and content of emails? What is a realistic response time?
- **Connection**
 - Connection events/opportunities may need to be fewer rather than greater in number, particularly in light of the challenges of COVID-19.
 - Connections need to include rather than exclude participants. Seek a democratic approach where the interests and needs of participants are considered.

How can I support the mental health of young learners?

- **Institutional practices**
 - The work and vocation of educators and teachers is framed by the institutional practices and cultures of their workplaces.
 - Who has power? Who has access to power? How are young learners conceptualised? Are learners seen as competent? Is the culture vindictive, overly competitive, one of shame and punishment?
- **Interactional opportunities**
 - Incidental everyday interactions contribute to the mental health of learners and educators.
 - Focus on the entry and exit interactions, the welcome and farewell protocols.
- **Incisive questions**
 - Pose questions that probe without being intrusive. Reflect on questions that promote mental health.
 - Avoid a battery of questions. Be selective and disciplined in the nature, range and frequency of questions.
 - Use silence as a powerful communication device.

What is the top-tip for preservice educators/early career educators?

- Create and maintain a supportive and safe learning environment. [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, Standard 4:](#)
 - Support student participation
 - Manage classroom activities
 - Manage challenging behaviour
 - Maintain student safety
 - Use information and communication technology (ICT) safely, responsibly and ethically

See Be You's Wellbeing Plan for Education Students here: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>

How will I promote my own mental health?

- **Challenge my current practice**
 - Engage in the discipline of reflective practice. Consider alternate approaches, test them with colleagues/friends and have the courage to experiment.
- **Review my time management**
 - Consider time management in relation to social media and COVID-19 updates as a mental health strategy.
 - Limit the frequency and duration of engagement with updates so that one's own time is protected.
- **Commit to self-care**
 - Prioritise self-care. It is not selfish or self-centred. Self care is intentional and allowing us to care for ourselves and others.

Further support?

Talk to your Be You team

- Register for and complete Be You Professional Learning: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn>
- Check out Be You tools and guides: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides>
- Consider other individual or school-based opportunities to build your knowledge and skills in mental health and wellbeing
- We encourage you to continue to engage with Be You, learn more and keep up-to-date
- If your learning community isn't yet implementing the Be You whole learning community approach, we encourage you to register online and get started with support from a Be You consultant: <https://beyou.edu.au/get-started>
- If you're looking for resources to support you with a specific need or concern, visit beyou.edu.au

Attendee question and answer

Q. Does BETLS have a component or section for teachers / educators to reflect on their practices first, before making inputs to BETLS regarding the child?

A. Yes, there is a space within the BETLS tool where it encourages educators to reflect on their feelings regarding the situation and the child/young person.

Q. Can the BETLS tool be used on an ongoing basis?

A. Yes, you can use the BETLS tool at various points in time and observe to see if there have been any change(s) with the child or young person as a result of your plan.

Q. Can you apply the BETLS to observations made while remote learning?

A. Remote learning makes the BETLS tool more challenging to use. However, you might still find some of the question prompts useful to reflect on for the child/young person. We encourage you to discuss this with your Be You consultant.

Q. I work with CALD families and they're 0-5 aged children. How can we as educators support these families when many have taboos around mental health.

A. As an educator, you're in a unique position within your community, as you have contact with people from many different settings and circumstances. Schools and services are made up of a diverse range of children, young people and families, all with their own challenges, needs and circumstances. It is important to understand the demographics or characteristics of your learning community and their needs. This in turn will support effective approaches to communicating with families and inform the type of events likely to engage them. Identify groups that may not access or receive information and develop a plan to ask them how this could be addressed. Developing the most appropriate approach for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds requires sensitivity. Consider language difficulties (including literacy issues) when you invite opinion, send information home or expect families to access information from a website.

Many people are reluctant to seek help for themselves or their families because of the stigma associated with mental health issues and conditions. Families may also fear that their concerns won't be taken seriously, or that they'll be blamed by educators or healthcare professionals for not 'doing enough' for their child. Creating a culture of openness, approachability and understanding is essential for breaking down stigma and increasing families' willingness and ability to seek help when needed. The most effective method of reducing social stigma is to ensure 'contact' between people with different backgrounds and life experiences, in a supportive way. This could mean inviting people experiencing a mental health condition to speak to educators or families. Another suggestion is to speak more broadly about social and emotional wellbeing, or to share your observations of the child.

Learn more in the Family Partnerships domain and Include module:

<https://beyou.edu.au/learn/family-partnerships>

<https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities/include>

Q. Do you have some good ways to reintegrate home schooling students back into school after being away for 15 weeks due to Covid?

A. It is important that a school has a protocol which educators can follow. It may be that each teacher checks in with their students on a regular basis, or it may be that designated student wellbeing staff play that role. It's also important to let students know support is available and maintain an 'open-door' policy where students can contact a staff member if they need to talk. It's good to ask students for their views on how your school can approach this.

See below resources to help with this transition:

- [Coronavirus support for learning communities](https://beyou.edu.au/coronavirus-support-for-learning-communities)
(<https://beyou.edu.au/coronavirus-support-for-learning-communities>)
- [Be You fact sheet: School refusal](https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/school-refusal)
(<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/school-refusal>)
- [Be You fact sheet: Promoting school attendance](https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/promoting-school-attendance)
(<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/promoting-school-attendance>)
- [Returning to school after lockdown: Six ways to support your students](https://www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/returning-to-school-after-lockdown-six-ways-to-support-your-students)
(<https://www.monash.edu/education/teachspace/articles/returning-to-school-after-lockdown-six-ways-to-support-your-students>)
- [COVID-19: We've got this covered!](https://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/healthy-people/centres/centre-for-emotional-health-ceh/covid-19-weve-got-this-covered!/information-for-teachers-and-educators)
(<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/healthy-people/centres/centre-for-emotional-health-ceh/covid-19-weve-got-this-covered!/information-for-teachers-and-educators>)
- [How do I know if a student is not coping?](https://www.mq.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/986740/FMHHS2191-CEH-COVID-19-Support-Resources_Teacher-Educator_1-Student-Coping_FA_DIGITAL.pdf)
(https://www.mq.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/986740/FMHHS2191-CEH-COVID-19-Support-Resources_Teacher-Educator_1-Student-Coping_FA_DIGITAL.pdf)
- [Managing your child's transition back to school](https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/COVID-normal/family-life/managing-your-childs-transition-back-to-school) (for parents and/or carers)
(<https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/COVID-normal/family-life/managing-your-childs-transition-back-to-school>)

Q. Are there resources available to use for whole classes that discuss and work through mental health ideas that teachers could use as classes return after lockdown?

A. Be You does not offer resources or lesson plans for mental health discussions in the classroom. However, you might find our professional learning modules on mentally healthy communities useful in providing more information around key concepts related to mental health, wellbeing, connectedness, relationships and diversity: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities>. Additionally, Be You's Programs Directory offers a searchable database of mental health and wellbeing programs for learning communities. It is designed to help educators choose programs to implement in their learning community: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/programs-directory>

Q. What research for conversation analysis can we be directed to to help us?

A. At this stage, Be You does not have any materials on conversation analysis. You might like to reach out to your Be You consultant if your learning community is signed up with Be You. Alternatively, you might use the BETLS tool to help you record some of the phrases that are child or young person is using either in conversation or in play. Over time, you might start to notice themes emerging that might give you some insight into how the child or young person is feeling, or what might be on their mind.

Q. Can you tell us more about the research around the questions for children which is helpful/selective?

A. A range of studies and resources around questions for young learners includes:

'I wonder what you know'

['I wonder what you know ' teachers designing requests for factual information](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303958473)

Talking with children: Question design

<https://talkingwithchildren.org/caineearlychildhoodeducation/2019/1/28/question-design-houen-et-al-2016>

Tips for using questions

<https://evidenceforlearning.org.au/assets/ECE/Curious-About-Questions-FINAL.pdf>

Q. I am a preservice teacher. Can you please recommend some strategies regarding teaching mental health?

A. Be You do not provide direct resources for teaching mental health, however you may find our professional learning modules on mentally health communities useful in outlining key concepts related to mental health, wellbeing, connectedness, relationships and diversity: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities>. We also have the 'Be You Wellbeing Plan' for education and early childhood students available, which is designed to help support your *own* mental health and wellbeing while studying and address the unique challenges you may experience throughout your career as an educator. It will help you to consider strategies and resources you can use to promote and protect your wellbeing: <https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>

Q. Do you have any tips and tricks on how to open a conversation with children when we want to open a conversation on mental health?

A. The Be You Early Support professional learning module provides information and guidance on how to recognise behaviours which might indicate early signs of mental health issues, how to talk to children and young people about these issues, and how to provide appropriate and timely support: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>. Specifically, the 'Inquire' module offers a range of strategies on how to appropriately inquire about a child or young person's circumstances, and how these are affecting them. It is important to consider the time and place for the conversation, and to consider the language used during the conversation.

You should also remember to have the conversation within the context of your community's policies and procedures and take care of yourself after the conversation. Specific strategies around timing, body language, supportive language and some scripted examples can be found within the 'Conversations with children' topic page of the Inquire module: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support/inquire>

Remember, it's important to **stop, reflect** and **act**. When we **stop**, it gives us a moment to make sure we don't launch into autopilot and instead take time to listen and learn. Going into autopilot often means we speak and act before pausing to reflect. When we **reflect**, we consider our thoughts and feelings, everyone's physical and emotional safety, what we know and what else we might need before deciding how to act in purposeful and intentional ways. When we **act**, we don't need to completely solve an issue or even have answers to questions. You might simply act in a way that prepares for the next step.

Q. If we live in a society that promotes individualism, rather than collectivism, do we need to reconsider our over-all approach?

A. Be You promote a whole-school and service approach to the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. This means schools and early learning services operate on a cycle of continuous improvement, across everything required to support learning – this should include supporting the mental health and wellbeing of everyone in the learning community. Promoting mental health and wellbeing in everyday practice is an integral step in creating a mentally healthy learning community. We know that the most effective way to achieve the aims of promotion, prevention and early intervention is by using a whole-school approach, where everyone is involved.

Key features include:

- a systematic focus on wellbeing through all aspects of the school
- being inclusive of everyone: children, families, educators and other professionals working with the school
- the entire school community working together
- provision of professional learning for educators
- ongoing and sustained action
- being supported by policies and procedures.

You can find out more in the Be You Understand module: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities/understand>

In addition to this, your Be You consultant is available to help guide you in promoting a whole of school or service approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing.

Q. Mental health can be hidden well if people know how to, and children can learn this from parents. How do we combat this?

A. You are doing your job by promoting positive mental health in your practice as an educator, monitoring children and young people who may require more attention and support during unsettled periods, and identifying and raising concerns for those who may need more targeted assistance by leadership, wellbeing teams or external mental health professionals.

Remember, it's not your role to diagnose or make conclusions about a child or young person's state of mental health. That's what mental health professionals do. Tools such as the [Mental Health](#)

[Continuum](#) and [BETLS Observation Tool](#) are merely a guide to increase your understanding of mental health, assist in determining your level of concern and inform your actions.

Try to understand your function within the bigger picture of the family, school or service and mental health professionals. Your main role is to observe and support children and young people. Try not to diagnose or solve mental health issues or conditions. Instead, approach your work in a way that supports positive mental health and wellbeing.

The Be You [Early Support domain](#) provides information and guidance on how to recognise behaviours which might indicate early signs of mental health issues, how to talk to children and young people about these issues, and how to provide appropriate and timely support.

Find out more here: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>

Q. Do you have any suggestions as to how to start making changes to our time management apart from committing to self-care? We know we should do it, but how do we start so that we can sustain the change?

A. Be You's [Wellbeing Tools for You](#) offers a range of resources that you can use to support your mental health and wellbeing. This includes the Be You Wellbeing Plan for Educators, a resource which can help you to consider strategies and resources you can use to promote and protect your wellbeing at and outside work, and address the unique challenges you may experience as an educator.

The Be You In Focus webinar on '[Promoting Educator Wellbeing](#)' may also help provide guidance on how to look after your own mental health and wellbeing, beyond 'self care' strategies. Ultimately, we're all different. What makes you feel connected and energised might make your colleague feel exhausted. Part of looking after your mental health is finding out what works for you. You probably already have a few 'go-to' activities to help you relax (for some people, a cup of tea and a book might do the trick; for others, the only way to unwind is by hitting the gym to work off stress). You might have times of high wellbeing and times when it is not so good. And what is great for you might not be so great for your colleague. You can't set it and forget – you need to work at it and increase your focus on it in times of stress. Managing stress, maintaining positive social interactions and asking for help when needed is important.

Find out more in the 'Your wellbeing' section of the Understand module:
<https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities/understand>

Q. I'm teaching casually at the moment, and seeing the frustration of students in the classroom, as their friends are missing, and their teachers are on Zoom, is really saddening. Do you have any thoughts about conversations that can be had with the whole class after classes resume?

A. The last 18 months has produced many challenges for students, parents, and educators alike. Everyone is feeling stressed, although it is likely that some are experiencing greater difficulties than others. This may be noticeable when people return to on-site learning. School-refusal may occur, some may find it hard re-engage with their peers, while others may show signs of depression and anxiety brought on by the worry about the virus, loneliness, the death of a loved one, family conflict, unemployment or other difficulties which may have occurred during remote learning. A lot has changed, and a 're-building' phase is often needed after a major external 'shock'. It's important for all service/school staff to work together to review where things are at and plan for the next few months and then beyond. It's unlikely to be business as usual and it's worth reflecting on what can be done

differently and what can return to previous practice. Ultimately, we will all need to stay agile and adaptable and just do our best in the circumstances.

Q. Are there any resources online for practical classroom activities for morning and farewell rituals? What are some examples of good questions to ask during the morning and farewell ritual?

A. Be You do not have a specific resource for activities in the classroom but our professional learning module on mentally healthy communities outlines key concepts related to connectedness: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities> . Specifically, the **Connect** module outlines how community connectedness can positively impact mental health and wellbeing and provides practical strategies for you to partner with families and other members of the learning community to promote connectedness and belonging in your school or service.

In the primary school context, considerations include:

- Are families greeted warmly when they call or arrive? Is there a comfortable place for them to sit if they are waiting for an appointment?
- Are there clear indicators showing people where to go? For example, signs and educators who can assist.
- Do people greet each other as they walk through the school? This can help indicate to families that there are positive relationships and people get along.
- Can families see themselves and their diverse backgrounds reflected in the school environment? For example, posters, written languages, images, books and resources.
- Are the spaces inviting? Do they encourage involvement and provide opportunities for families to connect with educators and other families?
- Do educators seem physically and emotionally available to children, young people and families?

Read more in the Connect module: <https://beyou.edu.au/learn/mentally-healthy-communities/connect>

Q. Could you provide the links to the videos. I want to share with my staff.

- Understand mental health and wellbeing in learning communities: <https://youtu.be/ZHV6HNXWheA>
- How does mental health literacy support educators' practice: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE2_yv3ra5Y

Be You Fact Sheets

Development fact sheets: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development>

- School refusal: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/school-refusal>
- Promoting school attendance: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/promoting-school-attendance>

Mental Health Support fact sheets: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support>

- Overview of mental health service: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/overview-of-mental-health-services>
- Help-seeking in early childhood: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/help-seeking-in-early-childhood>
- Help-seeking for children and young people in schools: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/help-seeking-for-children-and-young-people-in-schools>
- Before recommending additional support: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-support/before-recommending-additional-support>

Videos

<https://youtu.be/ZHV6HNXWheA>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE2_yv3ra5Y

Be You social channels

<https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/beyou-aus/>

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsJGij4uveIYnI4SbfT9OpRppOKjAJVYJ>

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