

Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

Promoting Educator Wellbeing

Presented by Geri Sumpter and Dr Stephen Carbone

Geri Sumpter

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to our webinar on Promoting Educator Wellbeing. We're absolutely delighted to have you join us here today. I'm Geri Sumpter and I'm the head of Be You Delivery at Beyond Blue, and I have the absolute honor today of being joined by Dr Stephen Carbone, who I'll introduce to you after some formalities.

So as we get started now, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands and waters throughout Australia, and pay my respects to elders, past, present, and emerging. I'm joining you today from Melbourne Victoria, where it is a little bit windy and a little bit cloudy today and I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. As we gather online today, from all across our country, I invite you all to think about which lands you're joining us from and reflect on what that connection means to you.

On behalf of the Be You team, we recognize the importance of continued connection to culture, country, and community, to the health and social emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families. We continue to embed Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, and doing to all our Be You practices.

So as we learn online together today, I'm going to run through a few points about how we will do this before we get into our content. Whilst, as I'm sure over the past few months, you'll have been getting used to many different platforms. Every platform is different. If you've not used GoTo webinars, please explore the webinar control pain and any issues, contact our team behind the scenes who are all there to help you today.

We recognize also that you are coming to this conversation with lots of experience and knowledge that we'd encourage you to share, so please use the question box for this. Additionally, we will have a dedicated question and answer time, where Steve, I will take on those questions. And we will try to answer as many of those questions for you today as we can dig. So, please put your questions in the question box, as you think of them, and Steve and I will address as many as we can during this time. We'll also be keen to theme those questions and answer those questions in a hand out to you after the event, so you'll get something to take away with you.

Please remind that this session will be recorded, so you can watch it again. You will also receive a certificate of participation for joining us today. So, lots to look forward to as we head forwards.

So, just a little bit about Be You, for those that aren't too familiar with our initiative. It is a national mental health and education initiative for educators. Beyond Blue drives the initiative and is the organiser of this webinar. We run Be You in conjunction with our partners, Early Childhood Australia and headspace. It's completely free. It's available to every educator, early Learning Service, and school in Australia. So we do encourage you to jump onto our website and start having a look around and making yourself more familiar.

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Be You empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing and their own mental health. It offers educators online professional learning, fact sheets, online events and many, many other resources so please explore it. Also offers learning communities tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and wellbeing. We will be talking about this as we go through today's webinar, the discussions throughout the webinar. We'll reference many of the resources that are there to show you how Be You can really support you and a whole school or early learning service approach to mental health and wellbeing.

So, I do have the absolute honor now of introducing you to Dr Stephen Carbone. Steve is a former general practitioner to public health experts, who has a passion for promoting people's mental well-being. So, hi Steve, nice to see you on the screen.

Steve was a medical officer in Victoria specialist, mental health services, and as a general practitioner in Melbourne for many years, before moving into the area of mental health promotion. Here, he is focused on promotion, prevention, and early intervention. He has held public health positions in The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, and a non-governmental Organization, such as Origin, Youth, Health, headspace, Vic Health and of course Beyond Blue.

Stephen has a deep understanding of mental health. He also has experienced firsthand the impact of mental health conditions on people's lives, through his support of those close to him. So, with that introduction, Steve, I'm really keen to hand over to you for the day. I'm really excited for today's presentation.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Thank you very much Geri and thanks to the Beyond Blue and the Be You team for inviting me to be part of this webinar and hello to all the audience out there. So, just quickly, in terms of what we hope to cover today. The webinar will focus on helping you gain an understanding of the mental health continuum, learn ways to promote and protect your own mental health and well-being. But also to learn how to recognize and respond to whether you're experiencing mental health issues, or a condition, or someone close to you is. Also, through the question and answers to understand the role of early learning, service leaders, and leaders in schools in terms of supporting educator wellbeing.

So why exactly is it important to focus on educator well-being? Well, firstly, it's because we know that good mental health or mental health and well-being is an asset for life.

The research shows that people who experiencing high levels of mental health and well-being tend to have better study, work, relationship, and health outcomes and actually they also tend to live longer.

By contrast, we know that people who experience low levels of mental wellbeing or a mental health condition, like depression or anxiety, often experience a lower quality of life. Also, the conditions tend to impact their day-to-day functioning and performance. Now, I'm sure you'll all agree that in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic and all the impact it's had on our personal lives and our professional lives, that it's now more important than ever. To focus on promoting good mental health and preventing mental health conditions where we can. As well as looking out for and supporting people who may be experiencing mental health issues or conditions.

It's a bit like in the in-flight information. When people talk about, you know, attach your face mask before, your oxygen mask, before you help those around, you know, it's important to look after your own mental health to help you to be effective in your role in caring for the children and the students that you care for and in interacting with your colleagues.

So, I guess, given the circumstances, we thought we'd run a very brief poll just to check in with people in the audience to say, You know, what? Sort of impacts COVID-19 might be having at the stage on your mental health and wellbeing. So I might pull up the first of the poll questions and get people to address that. So the first question is to what degree has COVID-19 impacted your work as an educator? And there's full response options. They're not at all, a little, a moderate amount, for a large amount. So I'll just give you a moment.

Moving on to the next question. I'd like to ask to what degree has COVID-19 impacted you your personal life, and, again, this is for response options. And I'll give you a moment to select one.

The third question is, To what Degree has COVID-19 impacted your mental health and wellbeing, your own personal mental health and well-being? And again, not at all, a little, a moderate amount or a large amount.

And lastly, we're just like to check how much of this impact on your mental health and well-being that you selected in. question three, is due to personal issues versus work issues. The three options there are, mostly personal, a mix of both, mostly work related.

Might just give you another minute or so to complete that, and then I might throw it over to Geri to talk us through the poll results.

Gerri Sumpter

Fantastic. So if everybody's completed those questions, come we please throw up the poll answers. So, in relation to our first question. To what degree has COVID-19 impacted your work as an educator, we've got a complete combination there Steve. We've got 39% from moderate amounts, and 39% for large amounts And with a little and not at all, to only 2% with not at all. So, I think that shows the impact of COVID-19 during this period.

Absolutely. I'm going on to our second question, to what degree, to what degree has COVID-19 impacted your personal life? We've got a really similar split on here. So only 2% of people say not at all, with 45% being the highest result of a moderate amounts, 31% saying a large amount. So we can see that we have had some quite significant impacts on our personal life during this period.

The third question, on to our third question, to what degree is COVID-19 impacted your mental health and well-being, and there's a few, and that's also 7%, not at all, and 13% on a large amounts. But to some degree, most people have been affected a little and a moderate amount, so 37% of you being affected, with your mental health and well-being being impacted by a moderate amount, 43% being a little amount. So we can see that you know what has occurred over this period has impacted on our mental health and wellbeing.

Final question, how much of this impacts on your mental health and wellbeing is due to personal issues versus work issues. So, 69% of people are saying a mix of both. And I think it always really is hard to differentiate between where the line is drawn between work and personal life. And at 21% of people saying mostly works. So one in five saying the working parts has been quite significant during this period. So I think that gives you plenty to work on there Steve on where your presentations heading today.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, thanks Geri. And I think that really exemplifies and I know it's a bit of a hackneyed and cliched phrase that, you know, we're all in this together, but it really demonstrates that, you know how you're feeling. You're not alone. You know, you can see by the poll results, and we've got almost 900 people online at the moment. You know, COVID-19 has been a major disruptor in our personal life and our work life, and it's understandable and it would be hard to believe that it wouldn't have at least some impact. And so, very few people, you know, said, Not at all. And so for some of us, it might be a little bit from, most of it sits in the moderate range, but also for some of us, it's, It's in the higher end. And so, I guess, that sort of, I guess, highlights why this talk is particularly important at this particular stage. So, I might move on and start the presentation.

So, to begin, one of the most critical concepts, I think, that will help us understand, you know, this presentation, is the mental health continuum. And, this is from the Be You resources, and you can find this on the Be You website. So, the important thing to understand is that our mental health exists on a continuum.

And here at one end, we can call that the high end of mental well-being, or positive mental health, or good mental health, which some people call flourishing, And at the other end of the continuum, is where our mental health is impacted and we may be experiencing a mental health condition. For example, depression, or anxiety. Then there is a whole series of steps in between, where we might be doing ok, also having to struggle, but not have a clinical mental health condition, right through to severe depression.

The other thing to remember, is that our mental health is dynamic, and it fluctuates according to the things both that are happening around us and our own sort of personal resources. And so, risk factors, or negative factors tend to push us towards the red end, or the lower end of the well-being spectrum. Whereas protective factors, and we're going to talk about those a lot today, help us to stay at the flourishing or positive end of the mental health continuum.

So, in order to understand what we're talking about, I think it's important to define mental health and wellbeing, because it's different from mental illness or mental health conditions, like depression, anxiety. Mental health and wellbeing is a multi-dimensional concept and most theorists talk about three core

aspects. Emotionally, it's about feeling generally happy, calm, and satisfied. Now, that doesn't mean, you know, people who have got good mental wellbeing don't ever feel sad or worried or angry, particularly when life circumstances throw us a curve ball, but it's about how we can maintain an equilibrium and sit with those negative experiences without feeling overwhelmed by them. And so that's a sign of good mental health.

Psychologically it's about feeling positive about ourselves, and to be able to function effectively, meet our responsibilities, be productive, but it's also about having a sense of control, a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

The social aspect of mental health and well-being is about experiencing positive relationships with others. And that also means people in the community having a sense of trust, a sense of belonging and connectedness with those around us. You know, immediately, but also in our neighborhood, our community, our society.

So put briefly, mental health and wellbeing, mental wellbeing is about feeling good emotionally and functioning well psychologically and socially and we can measure good mental health or mental health and wellbeing. Just the same way that we can measure whether someone may be experiencing a mental health conditions like depression or anxiety and nowadays there is a number of scales that help people assess you know how the degree of flourishing they're experiencing, or the degree of good mental health.

One of those is the Mental Health Continuum, short form on the left. The other is the Warrick Edinburgh mental health well-being scale on the right and there's a link there. So I encourage you to actually go online and use those resources and check out where you fall on the mental health or mental health and wellbeing continuum.

You know, we've all got this stress bucket, and that, you know, when it fills up too much, we will start to feel overwhelmed. So it's important to have strategies that we can use to reduce stress and reduce that load on ourselves so that we don't feel overwhelmed or exhausted or depleted. And I guess I'm gonna break those strategies up into two main categories. one, I'm going to call self care and the other I'm gonna call social supports.

So in terms of self care, self care strategies, the things that we can do to maintain our mental well-being. And there's four key groups of strategy's healthy behaviors, relaxation, managing our feelings, and managing our mindset.

In terms of healthy behaviors, these are the things we're all very, very familiar with. So it's about establishing a routine and having habits that you do when you perform on a daily or weekly, a regular basis. One of those is staying physically active. We know that there is a strong connection between physical activity and our mental wellbeing. And studies have shown that you can boost your mental wellbeing by regular physical activity, for a number of reasons, including the release of certain, let's call them, happy hormones, that, that influence our mood.

Likewise, there's now a lot of evidence around the link between what we eat, and how we feel. And there are certain diets that can actually enhance our mental wellbeing. And there are other types of diets that can lower our mental wellbeing. And that includes diets that are too high in processed foods or eating too much junk food. It changes our gut flora. And that impacts on our mental health.

It's also very important to get a good night's sleep. I mean our body needs a chance to recuperate, to revive and restore and people who don't get enough sleep or actually at higher risk of experiencing depression that people that get that, you know, usual 7, 8, 9 hours at night of sleep.

It's also important to be very careful and, you know, reduce or avoid alcohol intake or other drugs. What was, it can often make us feel good in the moment it's counter-productive in the long term, and contributes to mental health conditions, particularly depression, but it's also about what we do know in order to, to have fun and enjoy life, and, and relax, and so you need to schedule in that time. And that can be tricky when you're working from home, and there's a blur between home life and work-life and, and particularly when you're juggling homeschooling of your own kids and things like that. But it's really, really important to factor in that sort of the stress downtime to get you through.

Relaxation is another big category of self care. And, you know, one way is through things like mindfulness meditation, where it's about, you know, clearing your mind and focusing on the here and now. Rather than worrying too much about what happened in the past, or what's going to happen in the future. It's about being in the moment, and that can actually help relax you and clear your mind of some of those worries, but you can also relax at a physical level or physiological level. Through deep breathing exercises to slowing

down your breathing can have a very calming effect, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, pilates, or body balance. It's anything that helps you to reduce that physical tension inside you. For others, it's about that sensory experience, it's about connecting with nature, or about listening to music or reading a good book.

But the important thing here is all of these relaxation techniques, what they do is they dial down our flight or fight center and stop the surge of adrenaline and other stress hormones that actually contributes to those negative feelings and particularly those negative physical feelings.

Then it is about managing our feelings. I mean, as I said before, worry, sadness, anger. I mean, they're all normal experiences and we can't avoid them. Most of the time, we know, from personal experience, will feel bad for a little while, and it will pass. It's often in relation to something negative that's happened to us, and so part of it is, you know, checking in and being more self-aware, reflecting on your mood, because that will help you to better regulate and manage your emotions.

One of the big things that's essential is to acknowledge how you're feeling. It's really critical that we don't bottle up things, you know, we all need to sometimes debrief or just talk things over with someone we can trust. You know, it helps us to get more perspective on an issue. Some people can give us some support or advice, but sometimes it just helps, you know, to talk things through and get things off our chest.

Be aware of how you relate to yourself. I mean, when we're under pressure, we can sometimes be a bit more self critical and negative about ourselves. That can be very, very damaging. And so, it's really important that we cut ourselves some slack and show ourselves a bit of self compassion. You know, it's impossible, it's absolutely impossible to be perfect during a pandemic. So, it's really important to realize that we're doing our best, and we're trying to hardest. And, even though some things might not always go the way we want them to go, you know, it's not our fault. Everyone, as we've seen, already through the poll, is feeling that way, and so cut yourself a bit of slack.

But, by the same token, it's also nice to be kind and considerate and compassionate to others. They're feeling what you're feeling, as we've seen from that poll. We know from research that expressing gratitude to others, you know, Whether it's an email, a card, you know. Or some gesture that expresses thanks for people that are doing things for you. That you appreciate, because that can boost your mental wellbeing but it also boost there's, so it's an incredible win-win situation.

What we think has a big and powerful influence on how we feel and as I said before, we have as humans this tendency to sometimes, you know, go towards the negative, you know, to look at the things that aren't going well rather than the things that are going well. And sometimes we can exaggerate or you know, make things bigger than they actually are. So, it's important not to assume things or jump to conclusions but sit down and in your head and assess the facts. You know, maintain some perspective, some balance. You know, clearly, there will be negative things, But, life isn't all negative. And experiences are all negative.

And when you get into that frame of mind, where you can feel that inner critic. That in a negative voice, it's important to sort of talk to yourself back and challenge that negative self talk, and talk to yourself as if you were talking to a friend or a colleague, who you're trying to re-assure you or you're trying to help them through a tough time. So that inner voice becomes more positive, rather than overly negative and critical.

It's also important to as we say to our children and students, maintain that growth mindset. You know, life's about trial and error and continual improvement. We don't always get things right first time, but if we persist and we just try, we'll get there in the end.

Obviously, you know, some things can't change and we just need to accept those things, but we can still move forward. It's that idea that, you know, things might be bad now, but they will get better. We already saw that in relation to COVID-19 in parts of Australia that have done OK, despite this global pandemic, you know, they've managed to restore a bit of normality and even here in Victoria where we're going through a second wave. We're getting over the other side of that.

I mean, the human species is incredibly resilient with pain, as humans, you know, through incredibly difficult times, and we've managed to find our way through that, and personally, all of us, I'm sure have been through that as well. So it helps to just keep focusing on the big picture, not the small picture, what's important to you, not just what's happening here and now and work towards that. There'll be interruptions. There'll be bumps along the road. There'll be things that you weren't expecting, but if you keep your eye on what you're trying to achieve as an educator, as a person in your life, you know, that will get you through some of the tougher. times. So, perfectly, it's about being realistic, of course. You know, things aren't right. It's stressful when you're when you're having to change your whole approach to teaching, but it's important. Also not to be overly pessimistic. So part realist part optimist.

Now, while some of the things that we can do ourselves. You know, it's clear that our mental well-being, you know, is it relies on or is supported by our interactions, our relationships with other people. We know from research that sense of loneliness or a sense of lack of belonging can harm and mental health and wellbeing.

Whereas if we invest time and energy to grow and deepen and maintain our relationships and build our social networks, that can have incredibly positive effects on our mental health. It's about the quality, mainly, but it is also about the quantity. You know, the more people in our lives, the research shows, you know, generally the more mentally healthy we feel. But, it's not just your immediate social network, it's also being part of the community. And, we know, again, from research, that being something bigger than yourself, you know, people who volunteer, you know, people who are involved in group activities, people who are involved in spiritual pursuits, tend to be happier than people who aren't. And so, it's about a place in the world, can give us a sense of purpose and meaning, and make us feel mentally well.

But, of course, we can do all those things. But, you know, we can still find ourselves moving towards the right-hand side of that spectrum where we're experiencing mental health issues or conditions, and so, it's important to be able to tune in and recognize when that might be happening. And so, you know, one of the things to remember is it's extremely common to experience mental health issues or conditions. One in two people over their lifetime will experience a significant episode of mental ill health, so you're not alone, and it's no one's fault. These are just conditions that happen.

Now, that can vary from more stressed, through to psychological distress, or severe mental health conditions, and the signs and symptoms will vary, but typically involve changes in the following areas. Physically, you might notice that your sleep pattern changes, and you're having trouble sleeping, in particular you may feel that you lack energy. You'll feel easily fatigue. If you're experiencing anxiety, you're likely to feel tense and restless or fidgety.

You may experience a change in your appetite. For depression, it can be low appetite, but it can also the binge eating and comfort eating. And also, we can experience more physical symptoms, such as headaches, tummy aches and aches and pains. Emotionally, you know, depression is characterized by this sense of intense and persistent emptiness or sadness. Accompanied by a loss of interest or pleasure in the things that you used to enjoy.

And when you're feeling anxiety, it can be this sense of intense or persistent worry, nervousness, fear, panic. And also, it can actually, you know, manifests as moodiness, so irritability, frustration or anger, particularly depression.

Our thought processes change, you know, at a basic level, we might find it harder to focus or concentrate or remember, things, We might start to become overly pessimistic and critical thinking negatively about ourselves, our life, our future.

And sometimes, we may feel that life is no longer worth living. We may constantly feel worried or distract, and we can't get things out of our head. We just keep going back to the same issue over and over, and over again. We may catastrophise and start to look at worst-case scenarios and think the worst is going to happen. And sometimes it's really just hard to stop what's going on in your head, and you find it hard to switch off.

Behavior, you know, we may, as I say, feel that loss of motivation, we do less, we might get grumpy yell. We start to have difficulties in our relationships and may start to experience more frequent arguments. We may also to start to become more socially withdrawn and distant from others.

Basically, we just can't get the things done that we used to be able to do well. There's a drop in our productivity. There's a drop in our performance, and some people, as I said, start drinking to cope, taking drugs to escape or feel better, and more seriously, some people feel, you know, self harm to try to escape or deal with those negative emotions. So, just like there's ways that you can measure your good mental health or whether you're on the flourishing end of the spectrum, you can also measure mental health symptoms. And there are plenty of online check lists, including the K-10 that is on the Beyond Blue website that can help to determine whether you might be in that situation of experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress indicative of a mental health condition.

So if you do feel that you're at that point, help is available. It's really important to recognize that it's OK to not be ok. And it's nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. And the sooner you reach out to others, and seek support, the better. I really urge people that encourage people, not to wait, and to know they feel that at rock bottom, or in crisis, to seek advice or support. We know that early intervention, we preach it

around our children and adolescents and young people, but it applies to us as well. The earlier we get, that professional support, when we need it, the better.

Now, if you need an interpreter, you know, when you're contacting any of those helplines, the telephone or the translating interpreting services is available and for Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people. There's a lot of information on health info net that you'll find helpful. And, obviously, on this slide, you'll see the many support options that you can turn to.

If you feel you're able to and if your mental health is ok, it's also important to reach out and try to recognize and support others who might be doing it tough or struggling to cope.

As we know through RUOK Day. Are you ok? It's important to ask that question, and then you know, dig a bit deeper. You know, let the person talk, you know, the main role there is to listen to offer some support and then to encourage people to maybe reach out to professional support. You don't have to become a counselor yourself and that's ok. And it's important to check on suicide risk. You're not going to put ideas into people's heads. And it's important to check in and then again, encourage people. And there are resources on the Beyond Blue website. You know, that can really help you have the conversation and know what to do next so you feel empowered rather than worried about asking those questions. And similarly, RUOK have a lot of those resources too.

So just to recap, in this part of the presentation we talked about the mental health continuum. And understanding that our mental health varies from high to low and anywhere in between. And that there are steps that we can take to be able to keep us at the flourishing end of the spectrum. And those include a whole raft of self care strategies. You'll find the one that works best for you, but it's important to have more than one string to you by more than one strategy in your toolkit. And, of course social supports from those around you. But it's also important to be able to recognize when you or someone around you might be experiencing the onset of mental health conditions, like depression, and hopefully you've seen where you can go to seek support.

So, I might now invite Geri back on to the line. And we're just going to have a question and answer session. So, Geri?

Geri Sumpter

Hello Steve, thank you, that was a great presentation, and I'm sure there's, there's plenty of people who've got some great takeaways from that and there's great conversation coming through in the question box, so please keep your questions coming. So Steve, just going back to the mental health continuum as a concept, can you please explain why that concept is so important and then how we can apply this in our everyday lives.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Look, I think it's important to recognize that, you know, the term mental health has become, you know, to synonymous with mental illness or mental health conditions like depression, anxiety. But mental health or good mental health is different, that we need to make space for that as part of the conversation. So the mental health continuum helps us to visualize that, you know, on that, on that spectrum, we can see whether we're at the optimal or flourishing or good mental health end of the spectrum. Whether we're somewhere in the middle where we're doing OK, but starting to show some signs of stress or distress or that we've tipped over into the sort of the more worrying end, where we may be experiencing a mental health condition.

So, because it also allows you to check in where I am on that continuum, and then take the appropriate steps to get you back towards that flourishing end. So, I think it's just a good mental concept that you can keep in your mind and ask yourself, where am I on the continuum right now, and how can I get myself back to the flourishing and if I'm not quite there?

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic. Thank you, and it was interesting because when the polls came through, some info came through on that question line, talking about the fact that the impact of COVID-19 can actually be positive for some people. So how do you respond to that one Steve?

Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, look, I think there's some evidence to show that, you know, when there is this sort of community, sort of, when everyone's experiencing something simultaneously that banding together and that sort of coming

together to fight this sort of adversity can actually create bonding and build that sort of trust and belonging and sense of community. And it makes us feel positive because where we are working together to deal with this. And I think it's also given us some time to reflect on our lives. And a lot of people have talked about, hey, look, I realized, now, I was probably, you know, running on empty and you know, there were too many things on my plate, And now, I've had time to sort of kick back a little bit. I don't have to commute for an hour a day and be stuck in traffic. I spend more time with my family or the people that are important to me. So, you know, it has been a positive for some people.

But it's clearly been a negative for a lot of people, particularly people who, you know, whose livelihood has been impacted, so people whose businesses, you know, have had to close, and people who have lost their job, You know, clearly it's varied across the community, But that's why I think some people have experienced an upside, but there's also a lot of people that have experienced the downside.

Geri Sumpter

I personally found it really important to try to highlight what we're classifying in our household as the COVID wins. So the things that have actually been beneficial for you, you're hurting this period, and then focusing on that, positivity that, that can lead into for ourselves.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Absolutely, look, you know, and those of us who, you know, not in the education space, I'm not going to work in an office any more. I'm going to work from home all the time now. So, just joking, but look, obviously, there are some benefits. We can say things can be done differently. We humans are so innovative. Humans can sort of learn and change things and adapt so quickly. And the educators, I know including members of my family, it's just been terrific in the way they've been able to adapt, you know, to such a major challenge in such a short space of time. So, you know, I really think that exemplifies, that's the good part and people need to remember that. And that is one of the wins you're talking about.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And there's been some comments coming through on the questions as well around some of the strategies that people are finding helpful. So items such as the Smiling Mind app, and then joined the Resilience Projects, etc. And you mentioned some self care strategies and tools that people can use, but, but are some better than others?

Dr Stephen Carbone

I think that's a great question. I mean, the first thing to say is that, look at it, self care is a very personal thing. And it's about finding what's right for you, what works for you. And it's gonna be a little bit different for each and every one of us. And that's why it's good to have that awareness of the broader array, and it's great that people are sharing their tips and strategies in their own personal experiences, you know, online, because that's how we learn. We feed off what other people are doing and we try it for ourselves.

The key thing to remember is that there's not going to be one single thing that's going to keep you at that flourishing end of the spectrum. You need a breadth of strategies and you know, have that toolkit and maybe 1 or 2 from each of those four categories I talked about, you know, the healthy lifestyle pedigrees, the relaxation category, the healthy mindset, the social connections. So don't rely on one thing to get you through, you know, try a few different things. And that generally tends to work better.

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic. And then some other examples of the strategies that people have been sharing, we are going to play golf, and avoiding caffeine, dairy, and gluten free. And I've personally been on that journey over the past few weeks and certainly feel better for it. Having that sort of clean living. Somebody mentioned, which I really like is doing something for you, so not work related and home related but just feel like it's something that you really want to enjoy.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Absolutely. And I think this is a critical thing that self care is about self now that's not self indulgent to look after your mental health that's just very, very sensible and you know so you do need to take that time for yourself. And look, you know, I think the, it's not only what individuals are doing, but I gather schools and education departments. I know, you know, I've been told that the, Department of Education Victoria's set up a virtual gym, and teachers can sort of access that, and look after their mental health for their physical health.

You know, Some schools are running sort of Wellbeing Wednesdays, where, you know, people will take a little bit of time off screen and just, you know, look after themselves. And obviously it's that whole school approach, you know, your part of the school community. So, it's not just about your students and about parents, it's about you and your colleagues, and so it's perfectly reasonable to practice, you know, that self care, in whatever way works for you.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic, and it's interesting that another question that's come through is around, what would you suggest for people who feel like they need to achieve something in order to earn that downtime?

Dr Stephen Carbone

Look, I think that, you know, we all have different personality characteristics, and I think there's that sense of somehow, you know, with people with very strong work ethic. So, it's about, I've got to give, I've got to do well for others. You know, I don't deserve this. Of course, he does this, you know. Of course, you have to, you know, look after yourself. I mean, why are you any different from the people that you, you love and that you care for, or that you're trying to educate? You know, you wouldn't say that to them. You wouldn't say, no, you haven't earned this. Let's say that back to yourself.

I think it really is about understanding life, about balance. You know, it's a give and take situation, and, of course, it's reasonable. You know that when you feel you need it, you need it and you know, we all need time to be stressed or refresh and recharge. We can't put it on hold. We can't wait and kick it down the road. Because what will happen is that stress bucket will fill, and fill, and fill, and you become overwhelmed. So, you've got to drilled some holes in it every so often don't we.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, it's absolutely true, and it leads very well into the next question, which is, that many people would say that being an educator across both learning services and the school sectors is an inherently stressful job. So how can people tell when their stress is ok, or when it is too much?

Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, it is an incredibly stressful job. And, you know, I really applaud, and as I said, I have family members who are educators. I wouldn't be able to do it, you know. So the fact that people are doing this job, and in particular, you know the responsibility that comes with it, both the students and their parents and dealing with, juggling all the demands that are on your plate. I mean, I think it is inherently stressful and say, look, we know a little bit of stress is ok. And in fact, it's important you know, it actually psyches us up and keeps us motivated and helps us to format our peak.

But you have to be careful, then you don't come down to the downside of that curve where you're starting to feel fatigued, or depleted, or overwhelmed or burnt out. And so, some of the things I mentioned around the signs and symptoms of depression, anxiety, there also tell-tale signs that you'll probably slipping towards, you know, the more depleted or burnt out, or distress side of the curve. And so, there, the red flags. You know, your sleep changes, your appetite changes, your energy level changes, you can't perform to your optimum. You feeling that you annoyed with or don't want to relate to people around. You know, that's a sign that, you need to take time for yourself, recharge refresh, or perhaps seek professional support. You know, if it's really getting on top of you. Like I said, it's OK to not be, OK. it happens. We all are going to experience that at some time in our life. So if you feel, that way, reach out to colleagues, friends, family, but also to professional supports.

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic, Thanks, Steve. And another thought, a theme that's coming through on the questions is around, how do you approach this topic when you notice these behavior changes in colleagues, or amongst, your family and friends.

Dr Stephen Carbone

Yeah, look, that's always tricky. You know. it's often that, sometimes people are tuned into their own stress levels, and you will be the first person to recognize it, And, you don't have to, I mean, But, it can be important, very helpful that for that person, if someone takes interest in them, reaches out, ask that basic question. Are you OK, but then, has that conversation and takes it a bit further.

Like, I said, you need those role boundaries, your colleagues, your friends, your family members, You're not the counselor, you're not the support person. But that doesn't mean you can't show empathy, compassion, care and then direct people to the sorts of professional services that will be able to help them.

So, I think it's the more you learn about how to have those conversations, the more you'll feel able to sort of step in without taking on too much responsibility. And I encourage people to have a look at the Beyond Blue website and even the RUOK website to learn how to step in and ask those questions and then be able to detach. And just really that the person, take the next step, so I think that's how to approach it.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic, and I think that message around, you're not, you're not diagnosing and treating people when you're going down the steps. You're guiding them to that pathway.

Dr Stephen Carbone

You're not a clinician having to trying to define whether someone has or hasn't got a condition. You're just saying, I see you're struggling, it looks like you're not coping. You know, are you ok. Can I help? You know, have you used our EAP, have you tried this hotline, I've heard some really good things about it? Why don't you give it a go?

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. And there are some comments coming through as well, around often you don't recognize these changes in yourself until someone pointed out, and it's so important at this time that you do take that step to went to ask that question. There's also questions around the workplace. So we talk about the shared approached of student wellbeing, so what about worker wellbeing? What role does the workplace play in this?

Dr Stephen Carbone

Look absolutely Geri, and that's the thing to stress here, mental health is a shared responsibility. We've all got a role to play our own individual wellbeing and those around us. And I think, we know that workplaces have both got a moral, but also a legal responsibility, you know, to protect their staff, their workforce, again, psychological injury, or work related mental health conditions. And so there is a level of responsibility that has to go back to the management team, the leadership team, you know, the department, where they put in place as much as possible. The protective factors and focus on the risk factors that are eliminating the risk factors That might contribute to poor mental health in the workplace, and there's a whole raft of what we call psychosocial risk factors at work that relate to the level of control you have over your work. The demands to the place on you.

The time you have to do that, the level of training and support that you have to do, the job you have to do. And it's an employer's responsibility to try to help and get those things right. Now, no one's perfect and everyone's trying to do their best and COVID-19 is this thing that's impacted our leaders as well as ourselves. I think that everyone is trying to take account of that and offer support to their stuff. But we're working our way through, we don't always have all the answers. So. Now, I'm not trying to get them to shirk that responsibility, but I also think that, you know, we have to respect that, we can't change everything. And, so, it's that balance, and we just need to do our best, and share the load.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic and I think the thing with the workplace mental health side of things, as well, as mental health hazards, aren't as necessarily straightforward to spot as a traditional occupational health and safety hazards. So there's not the cable on the floor that's there to trip us up. So often, it's all about the conversations that you have around what's causing people that stress in the workplace, that can lead to the identification of those of those challenges that might be increasing stress levels.

Exactly right. And look, I think at the moment, there's a couple of things that are, happening across education settings, I mean, obviously we need to know first and foremost, attend to making workplaces CIVID safe. And I guess that's part of the leadership team's responsibility, but also in Victoria for restoring remote learning, it's about recognizing that there's a bit of that scaffolding that's been lost around collegiality. And working together and supporting one another. And so, we have to find some sort of replacement, you, know, you, know, to deal with that during that time. So I think there are some generic issues that it's important that, you know, workplaces are on top of for the benefit of this stuff. But the other thing is about having those programs in place.

Like the EAP or the referral pathways for people who feel they need that personal support, again, it doesn't mean you wait until you're in crisis, but to encourage people to look after their wellbeing, you know, even when they're in that, I'm a little bit affected, because I don't want people to get to a lot of factors. And, you know, I think some, you know, that the Heads Up website, that Beyond Blue has got around workplace mental wellbeing is an excellent resource to team leaders and employers broadly. And I'd really, really encourage people to access the Heads Up resources. There's some other websites out there as well that have some similar information, so don't feel it's entirely up to you. Speak, speak on behalf of yourself, on behalf of your colleagues. If you think there are some improvements that can happen at the collective level, that are going to be good for everyone.

[Geri Sumpter](#)

Fantastic, I know that sounds like great advice, and there is another question that's come around and promoting mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and what about some tips you can give there.

[Dr Stephen Carbone](#)

Look, I think I've said it in some ways it starts with a plan. I mean, you know, these things work better when they are understood to be part of core business. And that there's some sort of mental health promotion of mental wellbeing plan in the organization that covers off on the sort of three big aspects. Protecting mental health and wellbeing, preventing mental health conditions, but responding to people who may be experiencing those and supporting them through that period, because, you know, people will get better, and you know, the more they can stay involved in their work, the better. But if they need to take time out, or have adjustments, these things need to be structured into policies and protocols and be there in advance, rather than ad hoc and sort of, in developing the reactive sense. So, you know, I think every school needs to have a mental health and wellbeing plan for its students or in every early learning service for its kids, but also for its staff.

And, you know, if it's not there, it's one of the things that as a staff group, it's great to think about and encourage the organization to put in place.

And, as I said, there's a lot of templates, there's a lot of resources, that are available on Heads Up that plan and structure. Policies and protocols are important. Then the usual things, like I said the Department of Education offering that virtual access to the virtual gym. That's fantastic.

[Geri Sumpter](#)

Yeah, so all sorts of things that we're getting creative with and agile with in these times. And just another sort of comment on this. We've got a bit of a question around what if you you're trying to support someone but they're refusing to get help for whatever it might be that's going on for them? How far do we need to push, or what sort of boundary's should we think about for ourselves?

[Dr Stephen Carbone](#)

Yeah, that's absolutely one of the most curliest and most complex questions in the mental health field, because you know, that does happen. I mean, regrettably, we know, as a professional I've come across it, you know, as a family member I've come across it, you know, and it's really tough call.

And I think it's about, the more we can normalize destigmatize, make people understand that this is not a judgement on them, this is not about, you know, saying anything negative about them. It's about recognizing that we all have a stress bucket, and sometimes we get to the top of that, and we feel distressed and overwhelmed, and there are sometimes when your friends and family can help you through that. But sometimes, it's going to need an expert or a professional to help you through that. And sometimes you just need to chip away, chip away, and keep encouraging people, you know, shine the light in that direction.

But you can't force people, that's not your role, and that is really only the role of professionals who are empowered to maybe make that judgement. But, you know, that's the option of last resort where someone may need to receive care on an involuntary basis. And usually when you're at that point, because there's, a real risk that that is a serious danger. That the person may harm themselves or harm other people, but that's a professional decision to make. That's not a personal decision, and, you know, just keep plugging away offering support offering encouragement.

But, you know, not nagging or lecturing, or telling people off, but, look, you can only do what you can do, and as private individuals, as opposed to health professionals, we can only be there and encourage we can't force people.

Geri Sumpter

Fantastic, thanks, Steve. And I think that's really important to mention there, so, we are coming to the end of our time together, but I've got a question for you. So, what do you do for your own mental health Steve?

Dr Stephen Carbone

I knew I was going to be asked this. Probably, nothing there on the list. Look, I find you know, just people's company. I guess, I find work relaxing strangely enough, but I like getting at I guess into the garden and into nature I just love being around green. And that sort of freshness and that stuff and I'd say I really like watching the football but at the moment my sides doing so poorly, so that doesn't relax me.

Geri Sumpter

Yeah, fantastic. Well, thank you for that, absolutely incredible information. I'm sure that's been super valuable for everybody that's here on the webinar today and for those that will watch this moving forward. So thank you very much Steve.

The questions that we didn't get around to answering for people today, they've all been fantastic. We will make sure that they are addressed and that they are themed out in a handout that will be distributed post the webinar. So thanks very much Steve from all of us.

So just to start to wrap up the conversation, I do want to encourage you to think about talking to your team about Be You and talking to colleagues and exploring our website yourself. It is a fantastic initiative, has lots of fact sheets, lots of information, professional learning modules and then also that support to create a mentally healthy workplace, a mentally healthy learning community for yourselves. So, register for and complete Be You professional learning, if you haven't done so already. Jump on there and check out all of our tools and then all of those that we also then reach out to. Then consider individual or school based opportunities to build your knowledge and skills in educator wellbeing. This topic is going to be at a bit of a focus for Be You over this next period. So keep referring back to us and checking in to see what information we have moving in there.

If you're already a registered learning community, you can also reach out to your consultants for some support from an action team leader level. And the consultants will be able to also guide you through some more information where you can find out further and further supports all tools that you might need to reference. So, we continue to encourage you to learn more about Be You, and make sure you are registering as a whole learning community to show you, as a collective, with your colleagues, can receive that further supports.

Visit our websites and access all of those resources and follow our Be You social media channels to keep yourself completely up to date with wherever updates we've got, as you can see there, the normal Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter that we've also got a YouTube channel. So, check that out and see what we've got to offer from there. You can also see our suite of previously recorded webinars on our website, so you can access all the different topics that we've covered within our In Focus sessions.

So, I would like to wrap up there by thanking you all for your participation and your attendance today. I know it's sometimes challenging to take time out of your busy conversations to come and attend a webinar. So I do hope that you enjoyed it, and we'll come back to see us again soon. And I'd like to again, thank Steve for all his expertise. I'd like to thank our team behind the scenes, and everybody knows who they often that perspective. They've been fabulous, and I've seen all of the questions coming through and being answered by our moderators. So, thanks again to everybody that supported to get this webinar up and running for today.

For yourself, you will as I said, receive a certificate of participation for attending today and we will have the recorded materials out to you soon. And, just wanted to let you know that post this session, you will be driven to a survey so that we can seek your feedback on how we went today and also looking at some topics for future webinars that you might be interested in. So please give us your information, your support and help us to continue and improve, as we move forwards.

Just to finish off with what I would like to say, is that because you did attend today's session, because it is always challenging to think about our mental health. What I would like for you to do today is to take that treat for yourself. So, your recognition for having attended the session today, have a little treat, do, something you wouldn't normally be doing for yourself on a Thursday night. So, if you don't normally, go for a walk or take that 10 minutes to read a book for yourself. Do that tonight as praise for yourself having attended today.

And with that, I'll leave that there. Thank you very much. Don't forget to look at our Be You website, and we'll see you all again very soon. Thanks very much.