

TIP SHEET NO.4
SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

Use: Building Staff Capacity

Audience: All Staff

Intent: Intervention

The following are a number of strategies found to impact on positive outcomes for students with high support needs in the area of mental health.

1. All staff are involved in providing for students with support needs in the area of mental health and well being

“All staff need to recognise that student welfare is a priority area and embrace that”
Berengarra

“Emotional needs of students as important as performance and curricula” Lavalla College

“Every teacher at Whitefriars is a pastoral care teacher” Whitefriars College

“All staff are able to do something – it is just a matter of working who can do what according to their skills and interest” St Michael’s Collegiate

2. Active leadership builds capacity to support student well-being

“It will be written into the job description that the Principal needs to be focused on supporting student well-being...our Principal has been the driving force in making sure that word has got out to the community about what the school offers to students and their families”. Taminmin High School

“It is very important to have supportive management” St Michael’s Collegiate

“A way of ensuring a sustainable approach is having the benefit of the commitment of the principal to support student well-being” Whitefriars College

3. Staff and students are engaged in decision making about student well-being and communicate to the whole school about progress and activities around improving student welfare

“It is also important to ask young people what they want and ensure that they are able to communicate this to staff – which they will do once they trust and respect you”
Berengarra

“It is important to have some structure so that support for student well-being can be built into the school decision-making process” Whitefriars

4. All staff are provided with access to resources and training to improve their mental health literacy and confidence about identifying and supporting students with high needs

“(training) has provided the staff with more options in how to assist students. Benefits have also filtered down to the students – they feel more equipped to deal with problems and seek help”. Berengarra

“ We have tried to increase training of staff so that they feel comfortable in addressing issues at a personal level...it has meant that staff are more likely to accept diversity and to recognise that it is their problem to deal with” Whitefriars.

4. All staff are reminded that they can have a positive impact on student well being and make a difference – persistence is the key.

“Realise that as a teacher you can have an important impact – even if you only see the students for 8 hours a day- what you do and say is having an impact and does affect their day, life choices and their development” Berengarra

“ supporting students with high support needs can be exhausting....we acknowledge teacher support by raffling relief time each Friday..its fun and serves a practical purpose” Coombabah

“It is important to have a belief that people can make a difference” St Michael’s

“teachers need to be aware that change will not happen overnight but that persistence is needed” Lavalla

6. There is an understanding that student behaviour, academic performance and well-being interact – and that all three factors need to be addressed.

“staff are more willing to recognise the ‘baggage’ that some students bring to school, has an impact on their behaviour, resilience, and their ability to function appropriately in the school community” Trinity Bay

“Staff need to accept that the emotional needs of students are as important as performance and curricula and that if you ignore well-being, there is no point in dealing with the academic” Lavalla

“You need to try and stop and listen to the student, even though this may be difficult when the student is upsetting your class” Lavalla

7. A diverse welfare team including a wide range of staff and community members builds are committed to support students with high support needs

“We have developed good relationships between parents, students, staff and the local community, our principal refers to the school as being like a village.....be aware that your local community can help build your support for students” Taminmin

“It is important to have a variety of people on the core team – we have an IT person, jnr school teachers, Director of Pastoral Care, Deputy Principal, and a curriculum writer. Having a diverse group like this can help bring others into it and support it” St Michael’s Collegiate

8. A formal referral process for within and outside school is developed jointly by multiple stakeholders, is easy to use and understand, is workable and involves student input

“We have created a referral pathway form for the GPs and have also arranged for the GPs to come out to the school – where they come out to a year level or just a classroom”. St Mary’s College

“There has been a big change in the school since we worked out a good referral pathway with GPs” St Mary’s College

“We have developed a ‘Have you got a problem’ flowchart which sets out what you should do about referring kids who may need assistance”. St Michael’s Collegiate

9. Strategies for supporting all students are embedded in curriculum and classroom methodology and fit as much as possible with pre-existing strategies and processes.

“We started by identifying our strengths and beginning to practise where we are most effective” Melba

“All year 8 students experience pastoral care lessons taught by all year 8 teachers which incorporate emotional wellbeing, pro-social skills and resilience training”.
Lavalla Catholic College

“We believe a focus on well-being should be part of the culture and fabric of the school” Whitefriars College

10. Small, incremental steps are taken that result from a well thought out and universally agreed plan.

“We developed a conceptual map of how our welfare process fits together so that everyone can see where they fit in. This helps people realise also that they don't have to do everything and they don't have to do it straight away.” St Michaels Collegiate

“It is best not to rush into any approach without a plan and a focus” Melba

“You need to work out where your needs are and start from there”. St Michael's

11. A commitment is made to provide a sustainable approach to supporting students with support needs.

“It is not about resources – it is about having a commitment to do it. It is having the philosophy and commitment to offer yourself and give up a personal power”. Berengarra School

12. Staff well-being is addressed, so they are equipped to support students

“If staff get the well-being treatment themselves they will be able to deal more effectively with students” Lavalla

“Staff attend a debriefing session at the end of each day to discuss any issues before leaving for home” Berengarra)

Reference:

Anderson, S. (2005). Key factors in supporting students with high needs in mental health: Discussions with the MindMatters Plus Demonstration Schools. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 15, 214-219.

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Relevant learning from MindMatters Plus project:

“Active leadership including formal leadership from the principal and school executive and informal leadership by advocates within the school community which is communicated to all is critical for ongoing support of students and staff.”

http://mmplus.agca.com.au/key_learnings.php