Responding to COVID -19
Resources to support students and yourself

What this fact sheet covers:

- **Strategies to support students to cope with COVID-19**
- **eMental Health Resources**
- **Self care for practitioners**

During this challenging and uncertain time with the COVID-19 pandemic we have collated a selection of resources to help you support your students and yourselves. The resources are recommended as an adjunct to your usual practice and individualised to meet the specific needs of the student(s) with whom you are working.

For students

General recommendations include:

- **Normalise** and **validate** their reaction to the corona virus.

- Encourage **prioritising mental health**, as normal routines that are a platform for wellbeing become disrupted.

- Encourage the use of usual **healthy coping strategies.** If we frame coping as a natural instinct, we can start to assess the young person's usual coping strategies and open up a discussion around helpful and unhelpful strategies. This promotes a strengths-based approach and can lead to the introduction of experimenting with new strategies. Explore how these could be modified if disrupted by social distancing directives.
  See the **Coping Plan worksheet** to aid these discussions.
  Some useful tips for students can be found at:
  ReachOut:
  Coping during coronavirus
  10 ways to take care of yourself during coronavirus
  headspace : **Coping with stress related to COVID-19**

- Encourage staying informed using **credible information sources** in order to take the necessary practical steps to stay safe. Advise about placing limits on the amount of time spent engaging with news and media covering the virus.

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- Work with students to develop **new routines** that include pleasurable activities, social connection and physical activity during periods away from school. Encourage students to reconnect with areas of their life that still bring them pleasure or a sense of achievement and where they can still exert some sense of control. Getselfhelp.co.uk have useful acronyms and worksheets:
  BACE - **Steps to positive mental health**
  BACE - **Weekly activity diary**

- Given the constant news coverage, often containing disturbing images, students may need some assistance to process the information. Teach students how to **recognize and challenge unhelpful thinking patterns**. Help them develop a list of rational and adaptive coping statements which they could refer to when feeling overwhelmed or anxious. For example, 'this is challenging but we're all going through this together', 'it will pass', 'there are things I can do to help me cope better', 'these are the things I can try to help me cope better.'
  The following resources may be helpful:
  Unhelpful thinking habits
  Finding alternative thoughts
  Challenging negative thoughts

- Teach students simple but effective ways to r**educe anxious arousal**. This can include physical activity, breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation. The following resources may be helpful:
  Breathing retraining
  Progressive muscle relaxation
  Coping skills: anxiety
  Biteback mindfulness audio tracks
  Youth Beyond Blue relaxation exercises
  Virtual Hope Box

- Work with the student's support network to establish **wrap around support,** including monitoring and assistance to use **adaptive coping tools**. Flag the signs that indicate when someone is not coping well and provide options for additional help. Direct them to resources to support themselves and their family. ReachOut:
  How to talk to your teenager about coronavirus
  Black Dog Institute: **Reassuring young people about the unknown**

- Think about how to use adjunct **eMental Health resources** to increase support such as online forums, treatment packages and helplines. See **eMHprac** resources guide for practitioners or **Head to Health digital gateway** for more information about what is available and how to integrate them into your work.
  Recommendations inlcude:
  Online peer support forums
  ReachOut
  headspace
  Youth Beyond Blue

  Build resilience and wellbeing
  Bite Back
  Virtual Hope Box

  Online treatment packages
  This Way Up - all courses free during COVID-19
  The Brave Program
  Teen STRONG

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- With other relevant school staff develop a plan to **check in regularly with vulnerable students**, including those with pre-existing mental health conditions, poor social support or challenging home environments.

- If using **telehealth**, discuss with a student how to use this safely and confidentially within the limits of their home environment.

For yourself

It's worth thinking about your own wellbeing during this time as we are not immune to the impacts of this uncertain time. In order to continue to support the students and the broader school community you need to prioritise your own self-care. This includes monitoring how you are going, having a repertoire of your own healthy coping strategies and seeking additional help if needed.

Advice for looking after your mental health during the coronavirus pandemic:

Beyond Blue – **Looking after your mental health**

Beyond Blue - **Relaxation exercises**

Information about the NSW Department of Education Employee Assistance Program can be accessed **here**

Black Dog Institute Supporting Young People: **Information for teachers and counsellors**

Black Dog Institute: **Weekly mental health check in**

Stay informed and connected with your peers, think about online meeting platforms, join the **Black Dog Community of Practice**

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Coping Plan Worksheet 1

Problems, worries and feeling down, stressed or irritated are all normal parts of life.

Life is full of challenging situations like fitting in with friends, pressure at school, starting and ending relationships, bullying, family stress, mental health, body image, and LBGTIQ issues.
"Coping" is our built-in, automatic response to problems, stress and uncomfortable emotions.

Healthy coping strategies have been proven to work and lead to long-term positive outcomes.
Unhealthy coping strategies may provide some relief in the moment but have long-term negative consequences.

Examples of unhealthy coping strategies:
- shutting down and avoiding the problem
- withdrawing
- overthinking
- alcohol use
- self-harm.

Examples of healthy coping strategies:
- talking about your problem,
- using social support
- problem solving
- using relaxation strategies

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What are your 'go – to' coping strategies?
Which ones are healthy and which ones are unhealthy?

Just like the feeling of hunger is a sign we need to eat, a feeling of not coping is a sign that we need to add more coping strategies in our life. And just like with food, we can choose healthy or unhealthy options.
Other signs that we are not coping are if the problem continues, it gets worse, or it starts to affect more and more of your life.

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What are your signs that you're not coping?
They might be how you feel emotionally, sensations in your body, a shift in the way you are thinking about things or how you are behaving.

Mental health issues can often start during school years. They can make everyday problems more difficult to deal with, make us feel like we're not coping and have extra issues to manage.

Anxiety and depression are common mental health issues faced by young people.
Take a look at **Youth Beyond Blue** to learn more about depression and anxiety or ask your school counsellor for more information.

Learning about helpful coping strategies to manage everyday life problems is useful – but it's even more important to start building a toolkit of strategies to manage mental health issues.

Tick the ones you're willing to give a try:

☐ Get Informed

Learning more about what you are going through can be a good starting point. It can help you better understand what is happening, know that you are not alone and other people have gone through this too and start to plan what to do to help. Useful information can be found online through trusted sources:

Youth Beyond Blue www.youthbeyondblue.com

Reach Out www.reachout.com

Kid's Helpline www.kidshelp.com.au

Ask a trusted adult to help you find out more information.

☐ Get Support

You don't have to deal with this problem on your own. When we share a problem with someone else, we feel less alone, have the opportunity to brainstorm different options and have someone else looking out for us which automatically start to help. Think about the type of support and qualities that would be most helpful. Sometimes online blogs and webchats are what you are after, other times telephone support or talking to someone face to face is better. For face to face options you could talk to a trusted adult, your GP, your school.

☐ Stay Engaged

Often when we're feeling down or overwhelmed, we tend to withdraw and stop doing our usual activities. This is an unhelpful coping strategy because although it might provide some relief at the time, it leads to feeling disconnected from friends, less positive experiences, more time to ruminate and worry and makes things worse. Find a balance between reducing pressure and demands on yourself but still engaging in activities that provide positive experiences (even if they don't feel that way at the moment). Pick one small achievable activity a day that helps you feel connected with others, lifts your mood or provides a sense of achievement.

If we're avoiding situations because they make us feel anxious, this makes the anxiety worse over time. Get some help to learn anxiety management techniques and to do graded exposure to the situations that trigger your anxiety. Have a look at the **Brave-Online program**.

☐ Tackle your Problems Head-on

Get perspective on your problems by learning problem solving techniques. This can help you work out what are real problems within your control that you can do something about versus "what if's" that take up lots of thinking time but may never happen. Look into the **5-step problem solving technique**.

☐ Change your Thinking

The way we think influences the way we feel and how we act. We all have automatic ways of thinking that can be unhelpful as they distort reality and lead to worry, rumination and distressing emotions. Learning to identify unhelpful thinking styles and replace them with more rational thinking helps us get perspective and often feel better. **https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-challenge-negative-thoughts**

☐ Healthy Habits

Sometimes when we're not feeling good, we slip into unhealthy habits like not eating well, disrupted sleep and being inactive. Moving more, eating healthy foods and getting into a good sleep routine help us physically and mentally and are a good platform for overall wellbeing.

www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/keeping-well/taking-care-of-yourself

☐ Calm Down

There are things you can do to help yourself when you're feeling upset, worried, or stressing out. Learn about relaxation, deep breathing, mindfulness and visualising.

www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/keeping-well/relaxation-exercises