

Beyond Self-care: An Educator Wellbeing Guide





Acknowledgement of Country

Be You acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the Land and waterways across Australia. We recognise their deep and ongoing connection to Country, and the continuation of the cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

We pay our respect to Elders, past and present, and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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Introduction

Your wellbeing at work matters.

It affects your health, outlook, personal life and how you build relationships with children, young people, families and colleagues.

This guide acknowledges that learning communities are professional workplaces and the importance of a whole-of-setting approach to wellbeing.

It uses the word 'educators' to include all team members in your learning community, including leaders and support staff.

Be You commissioned Monash University to conduct 5 projects investigating educator wellbeing. The research included a workshop and 13 focus groups with a diverse range of educators from different sectors.

The [study](#) found:

- existing educator wellbeing initiatives place too much focus on self-care and individual strategies
- leaders play an important role in creating a thriving workplace
- a whole-of-setting approach to educator wellbeing is needed
- there is a growing body of evidence that links educator wellbeing with educational outcomes for children and young people.

Based on these findings, this guide is designed to help leaders and Action Teams:

- think about all the factors that contribute to educator wellbeing
- rethink the roles individual educators play within a whole-of-setting approach
- give all staff members an opportunity to share their views and insights
- consider practical steps learning communities can take towards building a thriving workplace.

It includes suggested activities and actions to promote educator wellbeing. You can adapt them to fit your setting.

Be You acknowledges it can take courage and vulnerability to talk about areas for growth in your workplace. Be sure to prioritise your wellbeing and [seek support](#) if you are affected by any of these topics or conversations that arise during this process.

If you would like to share how you use this guide to support educator wellbeing in your learning community, contact your Be You Consultant or consider joining [Education Voices](#).

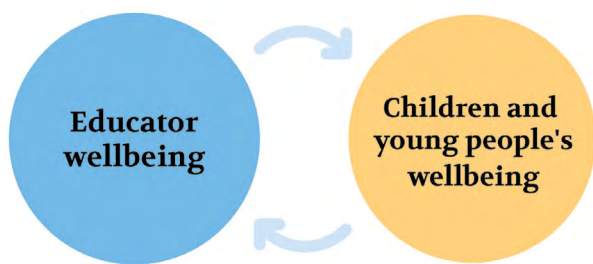
Be You thanks all the educators who took part in the design and development of this resource.

Rethinking educator wellbeing

Why does educator wellbeing matter?

Educator wellbeing is at the heart of caring for children and young people.

It affects how educators interact and build relationships with children, young people, families and colleagues (Cumming, 2017; McMullen, et al., 2020).



Head of the Educational Psychology and Counselling School at Monash University, Professor Andrea Reupert (2020), defines

wellbeing as “enjoyment in life, an ability to cope with stress and sadness, work productively, the fulfillment of goals and a sense of connectedness with others”.

Professor Reupert (2020) says “educators need a welcoming, supportive, safe and intellectually stimulating environment to thrive”.

The World Health Organisation (2022) defines mental health as “a state of mental wellbeing that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn and work well and contribute to their community”.

Even where some demands are high, the appropriate protections and support can enable wellbeing.

It’s important to consider everything that contributes to educator wellbeing. This includes individual factors and the systems in which educators work.



Six layers that contribute to educator wellbeing

- Individual educator factors
- Collegial relationships
- Workplace culture
- Leadership
- Community
- Governance and policy

All these components are connected.

The Monash University research revealed entrenched issues in the Australian education sector, which contributed to high stress levels. Only focusing on self-care ignores these systemic issues and is unlikely to create meaningful change.

This guide focuses on the three components that learning communities can address:

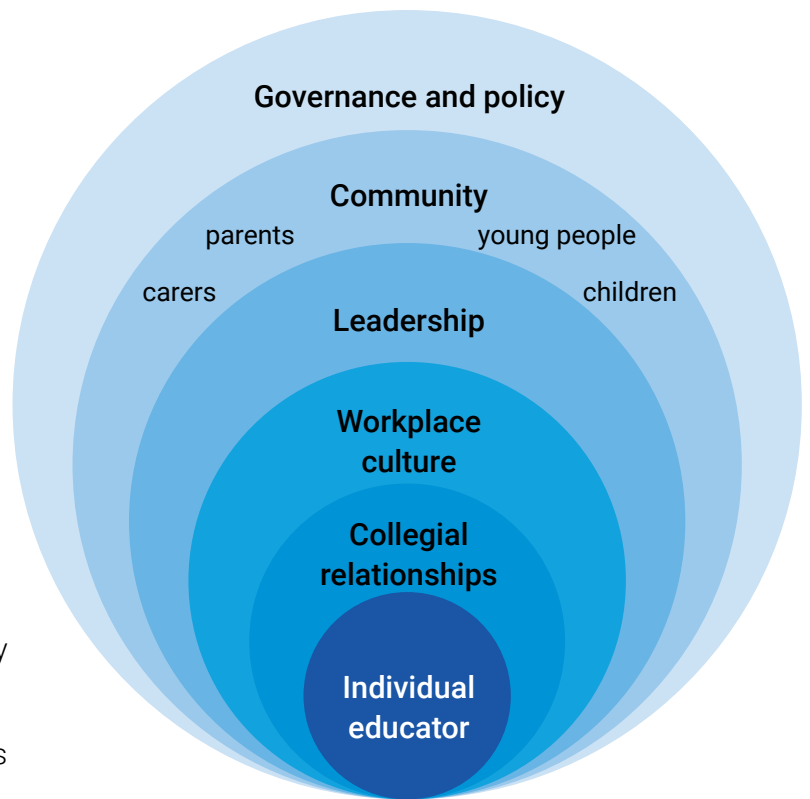
- collegial relationships
- workplace culture
- leadership.

We'll explore how these components affect educator wellbeing and how you can take action in the section, '[Towards thriving workplaces](#)' (page 12).

Factors that hinder educator wellbeing include:

- unsupportive leadership
- discrimination
- competition
- high or low workload
- lack of role clarity
- remote or isolated work
- emotional labour
- feeling undervalued
- job insecurity
- toxic culture.

While self-care is important, educator wellbeing is about more than individual strategies. Be You can support your learning community to adopt a whole-of-setting approach. [Learn about how one Be You Learning Community is prioritising educator wellbeing.](#)



The six contributors to educator wellbeing



The most important thing is getting a culture right. Then you've got something to work with. But until you have a look at your culture and what's happening in your workplace and understand it, then you can't sort of move forward on it. You can do appreciative inquiries all day long, but if the culture isn't right, [staff] won't be receptive to it. It's something you have to constantly work at, you can't take your foot off.

...[we should be] moving past the fruit bowls and yoga of practical tools and looking at the bigger eco-system.

Lea-anne, government primary school deputy principal



Suggested Activity 1:

From individual to workplace

Provide a safe environment

This activity isn't designed to focus on individual educator wellbeing experiences. But it's important to be mindful of the safety of participants. Ensure you create a safe environment for people to speak freely.

Before starting the discussion, ensure everyone knows they have access to support and how to access it. You may like to share the contact details for your organisation's Employee Assistance Program or [this list of mental health services and support helplines](#).

Audience

Leaders and Action Teams.

Run time

Be You suggests you spend one hour on this activity. This time can be adapted to suit your context and needs. For example, you may deliver this activity in short, separate stages, on its own as part of a staff meeting or be part of a longer professional development session.



Activity

1. Watch the 'Building educator wellbeing through mentally healthy learning communities' (15 minutes) video.



This clip features highlights from a Be You Virtual Conference session. You can [watch the full 50-minute session here](#).

2. Reflect on these questions and how they apply to your learning community as a workplace. There are no wrong answers.
 - How has your learning community promoted individual self-care in the past?
 - What might educator wellbeing look like if we focus on creating thriving workplaces?
3. Brainstorm the responses with your Action Team using butchers paper, post-it notes or an online collaboration space.

Follow-up activity

Share the video and reflective questions with educators at a meeting or as part of a professional development session. To encourage open discussion, you may like to share some of the insights from the leader or Action Team reflections.

Ensure you provide a safe sharing environment for all participants.

Building mentally healthy workplaces

The National Mental Health Commission (2022) identifies three intersecting pillars needed to create a mentally healthy workplace.

Protect

Identify and manage work-related risks to mental health

Respond

Identify and respond to support people experiencing mental health issues or distress

Promote

Recognise and enhance the positive aspects of work that contribute to good mental health

This guide focuses on creating a positive environment and promoting mental health and wellbeing.

You can learn more about the 'Protect' and 'Respond' pillars in the Commission's [Blueprint for Mentally Healthy Workplaces](#).



Guiding principles for thriving workplaces

Seven principles can guide your learning community towards being a place where educators thrive.

Principle 1: Create a positive culture and environment

Educator wellbeing is based on a positive organisational culture. Create environments where educators are supported, engaged and can thrive.

Principle 2: Recognise educators as professionals

Educators' professionalism, expertise and capability is acknowledged, respected and celebrated.

Principle 3: Acknowledge educators' autonomy

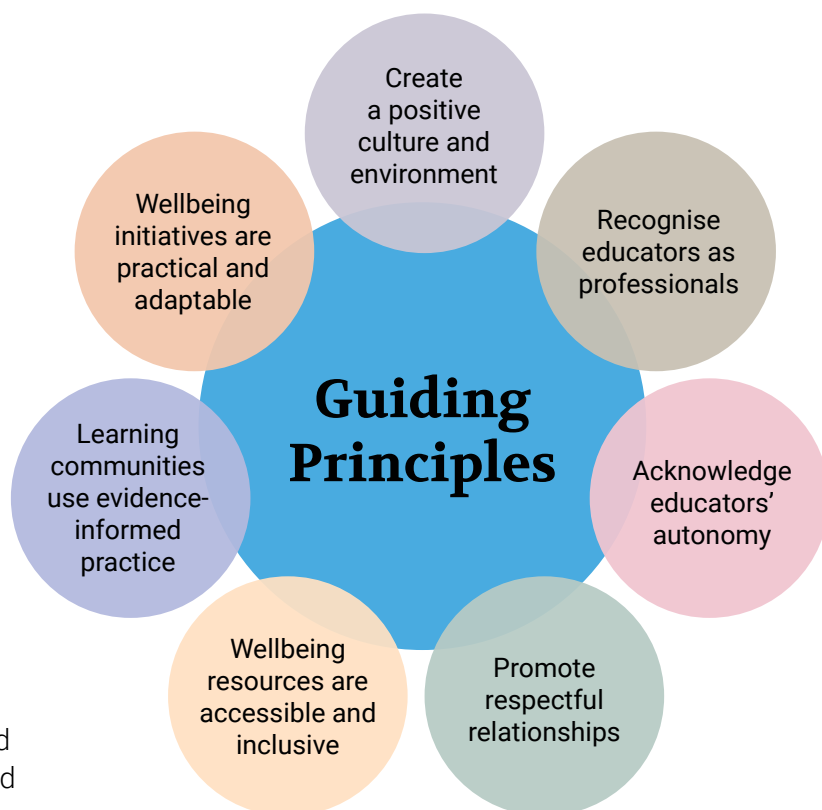
Educators' agency and autonomy is acknowledged and respected. This includes whether and how, to engage in wellbeing initiatives.

Principle 4: Promote respectful relationships

Relationships amongst staff, students and the learning community are respectful and collaborative.

Principle 5: Wellbeing resources are accessible and inclusive

Wellbeing initiatives are accessible to all educators and convenient. They acknowledge



educators' cultures, experiences and needs. They support their work with children, young people and communities.

Principle 6: Learning communities use evidence-informed practice

High-quality, relevant evidence is used when designing wellbeing initiatives. Local data are used to inform decisions and track and review progress and outcomes.

Principle 7: Wellbeing initiatives are practical and adaptable

Wellbeing initiatives need to be applied and relevant to the daily work of educators and their learning communities. They should be adaptable to the context in which educators work.

Suggested Activity 2:

Considering strengths and opportunities in your workplace

Provide a safe environment

This activity isn't designed to focus on individual educator wellbeing experiences. But it's important to be mindful of the safety of participants. Ensure you create a safe environment. Before starting the discussion, ensure everyone knows they have access to support and how to access it if needed.

Be You acknowledges it can take courage and vulnerability to talk about areas for growth in your workplace. Be sure to prioritise your wellbeing and [seek support](#) if you are affected by any topics that arise during this activity.

Audience

Leaders, Action Teams and educators.

Involve leaders

Be You recommends a leader steers the conversation. This allows educators to see that leaders support their wellbeing and that this activity may lead to meaningful change in the workplace.

Run time

Be You suggests you spend one hour on this discussion. This time can be adapted to suit your context and needs. For example, you may deliver this activity in short, separate stages, on its own as part of a staff meeting or follow on from [Suggested Activity 1](#) as part of a longer professional development session.

Setting up

Regardless of whether you are working online or in person, you will need:

- Beyond Self-Care: An Educator Wellbeing Guide (this guide)
- Workplace Review Table ([on the next page](#) or [download editable template](#))



Activity

1. Divide participants into small groups or pairs.
2. Ask participants to identify something they like about their work or the learning community.
3. Ask them to use Workplace Review Table to review how they feel their workplace currently demonstrates or addresses the [7 guiding principles](#) and where there may be opportunities for growth. Encourage participants to provide specific examples and suggestions.
4. Inform participants the findings from this activity will help leaders and Action Teams identify areas for growth and actions that can be taken to promote educator wellbeing in your learning community.

It's important to acknowledge that your learning community may already be addressing some of these principles at a workplace level.

Workplace Review Table



How well does your learning community:	Areas of strength	Opportunities for growth
	List what you are currently doing well in each area:	Consider any gaps in each area:
Create a positive culture and environment?	What examples can educators identify that make them feel the learning community creates a positive workplace culture and environment?	<p>What aspects of our culture and environment could we improve and how?</p> <p>How can we ensure ALL staff experience positive workplace culture and environment?</p>
Recognise educators as professionals?	What happens in your workplace to make you and other educators feel recognised as professionals?	<p>Is there a shared understanding of what professional recognition means in our workplace?</p> <p>How can we ensure there is, and what would it look like?</p>
Acknowledge educators' autonomy?	How are your expertise and decision-making capabilities acknowledged in your learning community?	What does the acknowledgement of educator autonomy look like in day-to-day practice?
Promote respectful relationships?	How does your learning community currently support and promote respectful relationships?	<p>What do we need to put in place to ensure everyone in the learning community experiences respectful relationships?</p> <p>What gaps exist and how can we address these?</p>
Ensure wellbeing resources are accessible and inclusive?	<p>Can you identify wellbeing resources that you find inclusive and accessible that are used in your workplace?</p> <p>Would a diverse range of staff and children or young people agree?</p>	<p>In what ways could specific resources be more inclusive or accessible?</p> <p>How could you learn more about how the whole learning community feels about the inclusivity or accessibility of your wellbeing resources?</p>
Ensure it is using evidence-informed practice?	Can you give examples of your workplace using data or research to inform wellbeing practices?	In what areas would you like to have more evidence-informed practice?
Ensure wellbeing initiatives are practical and adaptable?	Can you give examples of wellbeing initiatives that have been practical and adaptable for your workplace?	How could wellbeing initiatives be more practical or adaptable in your workplace?

Towards thriving workplaces

As discussed earlier, the three components contributing to educator wellbeing most relevant to workplaces are collegial relationships, workplace culture and leadership.

Be You educator focus groups highlighted the importance of these factors:

- **Collegial relationships:** Poor relationships and interactions such as workplace bullying, gossip, conflict and criticism can harm an educator's wellbeing.
- **Workplace culture:** Inclusion and belonging nurture wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTQIA+ educators emphasised the value of having their identity acknowledged and feeling comfortable to be themselves.

- **Leadership:** Education leaders are pivotal in fostering wellbeing. By prioritising staff wellbeing, leaders can create a culture of care, autonomy and trust.

Taking action in your workplace

The following pages suggest outcomes your workplace can aim for to improve educator wellbeing in your setting. These have been selected from recommendations in the research and are grouped under three focus areas:

1. Working together
2. Inclusivity
3. Prioritising wellbeing



Working together

These outcomes are what positive practice looks like for ‘working together’ in a workplace.

Use the checklist to consider what focus areas you may like to address in your learning community. There are examples of practice on the next page.

Collegial relationships	Workplace culture	Leadership
<p>Respectful communication where individual views and ideas are welcomed</p> <p>Opportunities for respectful team planning and working together</p> <p>Open communication and active listening are the norm</p> <p>Educators work well together, care for each other and can rely on each other</p> <p>Environments (for example, staffrooms) promote healthy, inclusive relationships and a sense of belonging</p> <p>Timely and responsive procedures to address overt or casual discrimination and unhealthy communication styles</p> <p>Conflict resolution skills for educators</p>	<p>The successes and achievements of individual educator and teams are recognised and celebrated</p> <p>Personal and professional boundaries are respected and upheld</p> <p>Staff have opportunities to provide input, feedback and collaboration in the decisions impacting the learning community</p>	<p>Role model respectful behaviour and expectations</p> <p>Encourages a help-seeking environment for all staff</p> <p>Collaborative decision-making</p> <p>Trust-building within teams</p> <p>Valuing the contributions and achievements of staff</p> <p>Being visible and actively engaged in teaching and learning</p> <p>Leaders understand their role and responsibilities</p> <p>Develop ongoing strategies to build trust, respect, valuing of diversity and reciprocity within teams</p> <p>Consider the ways in which physical environments can be enhanced to promote wellbeing connectedness (such as staff room, break spaces)</p>

Use the findings from your review in [Suggested Activity 2](#) to help your Action Team choose where to start. You don't have to take action in any particular order or cover all the areas listed. Choose what will work best for your workplace and keep the conversation going with your educators.

Example: Collegial relationships

- Timely and responsive procedures to address overt or casual discrimination and unhealthy communication styles

Apply and follow clear policies and procedures. Demonstrate them in action rather than as static documents. This sets an expectation of respectful interactions between staff and helps people feel supported in the workplace.

“ The staff communication policy, making it quite specific around what’s acceptable in the communication realm and what isn’t. We have a zero tolerance for bullying and harassment. By example, we have been able to show our team it won’t be tolerated so they feel supported to speak up. They’ve seen action. It’s not just words on a piece of paper. Seeing the piece of paper come to life, it’s not just sitting in a folder. ”

Amanda, NSW early learning service operations manager

Example: Workplace culture

- Staff have opportunities to provide input, feedback and collaboration in the decisions impacting the learning community

Involve staff in decisions that impact their workplace and provide opportunities for genuine feedback. A primary school in Western Australia is fostering a more positive workplace culture. This included asking staff to identify any immediate areas that could be addressed to improve the workplace environment:

“ Some examples of the quick fixes – couch in the staffroom. We bought two simple couches, it just creates a bit of a communal seating arrangement. It was about softening that environment. ”

Lea-anne, WA government primary school deputy principal

Even though this example links to workplace culture and environment, you’ll notice how wellbeing practices can quickly influence relationships, culture and leadership.

Example: Leadership

- Valuing the contributions and achievements of staff

Leaders taking time to acknowledge and show appreciation for the work staff do plays a key role in creating a thriving workplace. A Victorian early learning service’s leaders have deliberately considered ways to make sure educators feel valued.

“ We’ve tried hard to do things to make educators feel appreciated. On educator day last year we made a word cloud for each educator highlighting how wonderful they are, framed them and sent them to each educator. It was to make them feel important and appreciated. ”

Deborah, Victorian family day care educational leader

Inclusivity

These outcomes are what positive practice looks like for ‘inclusivity’ in a workplace.

Use the checklist to consider what focus areas you may like to address in your learning community. There are examples of practice on the next page.

Collegial relationships	Workplace culture	Leadership
<p>Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ knowledge and culture and a climate where non-Indigenous people assume responsibility for learning and embedding appropriate protocols within learning communities</p> <p>A respectful workplace culture where educators who do not come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds assume responsibility for learning and embedding appropriate protocols</p> <p>There are structures and policies to identify and appropriately respond to stigma and exclusion of educator groups (such as LGBTQIA+, culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and people with disabilities) in schools and early childhood settings</p>	<p>Each setting has behaviour policies that are shared, enforced and reviewed regularly. These may include anti-racism and anti-bullying policies</p>	<p>Inclusive communication skills and actions</p> <p>Advocate and be an ally for educators and marginalised groups</p>

Use the findings from your review in [Suggested Activity 2](#) to help your Action Team decide where to start. You don’t have to take action in any particular order or cover all the areas listed. Choose what will work best for your workplace and keep the conversation going with your educators.

Example: Leadership

- Inclusive communication skills and actions

Inclusivity in the workplace may include policies such as providing cultural leave and supporting educators to observe cultural or religious practices. It could also be considering the accessibility requirements of staff and making sure inclusive language is used in documentation and communications.

Leadership plays a key role in creating an inclusive workplace culture and environment. Early learning service operations manager Amanda considers this an essential part of supporting educator wellbeing:

“

Self-care, then company culture - how does the company present, how does it make staff feel, how is it an inclusive culture, what does it do to make people feel valued? I do see it as many different parts coming together. It's more than just the educator - there's the educator, there's the organisation and then all the regulatory bodies all coming together...It is our hope that when we're communicating those policies we try to deliver the message that this is in place to support wellbeing and to support inclusivity.

Amanda, NSW early learning service operations manager

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Prioritising wellbeing

These outcomes are what positive practice looks like for ‘prioritising wellbeing’ in a workplace.

Use the checklist to consider what focus areas you may like to address in your learning community. There are examples of practice on the next page.

Collegial relationships	Workplace culture	Leadership
<p>Conversations about wellbeing are normalised</p> <p>People feel safe and supported at work</p>	<p>Each setting has a wellbeing policy, which is shared, enforced and reviewed regularly</p> <p>Wellbeing initiatives that focus on the individual educator may be offered (such as mindfulness activities) but are not mandatory</p> <p>Supervision structures and other supports (including mentoring) are made available</p> <p>Mental health literacy initiatives are promoted for staff, children and young people</p> <p>Wellbeing initiatives are implemented, monitored, and evaluated regularly using local data</p> <p>Educator wellbeing is a success indicator and outcome for learning communities with measures to ensure accountability in achieving educator wellbeing outcomes</p>	<p>Leaders’ wellbeing needs are recognised and in which:</p> <p>Discussions about the wellbeing of leaders are normalised, prioritised and addressed</p> <p>Help-seeking is promoted</p> <p>Opportunities are supported and time is allocated for targeted professional development in the area of educator wellbeing</p> <p>Regularly collect insights from your learning community and others to inform wellbeing initiatives</p> <p>Psychosocial hazards are assessed and risks managed</p>

Use the findings from your review in [Suggested Activity 2](#) to help your Action Team decide where to start. You don’t have to take action in any particular order or cover all the areas listed. Choose what will work best for your workplace and keep the conversation going with your educators.

Example: Collegial relationships

- Normalise conversations about wellbeing

Creating the opportunity for staff to have conversations about wellbeing in the workplace highlights it as a priority and standard practice. Normalise wellbeing conversations by encouraging staff to discuss what affects their wellbeing and how the learning community may address this.

“ We started looking at how we can improve staff mental health and wellbeing and we thought it would have a knock-on effect for the students...We had worked hard to create a positive culture in the school but we could see that was changing. It weighs on you all the time as a leader. It's about living it well, not just saying we do it well. We had to really dive into that – I posed some questions to the staff. What do we do well? What are 3 wishes for improvement on what we do well? We got an array of responses for both. It took about a term and a half to do this process – we opened up discussions with our staff and they fed back, it was collated and presented back. All the way along they had input and they could have ownership over the process. Some things we were able to fix really quickly. We spoke to them about that process. They could see it came from the right place. The ability to be able to feed back openly and honestly without feedback.

Lea-anne, WA government
primary school deputy principal

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Example: Workplace culture

- Wellbeing initiatives that focus on the individual educator may be offered (such as mindfulness activities) but are not mandatory
- Supervision structures and other supports (including mentoring) are made available

Acknowledging that individuals have different wellbeing needs creates a culture in which staff feel supported to prioritise their wellbeing. They see their own needs are valued and considered. A Victorian network of early childhood education settings has introduced individual care plans for each staff member.

[Download the Be You Wellbeing Plan for Educators](#)

“ We did what we call care plans for our educators – we got the idea from... Be You online. We made these care plans part of the other documents – questions like, ‘what makes them happy?’, ‘who can we contact if they’re having a bad day?’, ‘how do they like to cope with hard times e.g. be left alone, have support etc.’. It’s in their file so we know the ways they like to be supported. Any part of the management team can access it and see how educators like to be supported in times of stress. We try to do a lot of work on wellbeing.

Traditionally when they think of wellbeing they think of meditation and yoga whereas that’s not what it’s all about. We’re trying to shift away from that.

Deborah, Victorian family day
care educational leader

”

Example: Leadership

- Regularly collect insights from your learning community and others to inform wellbeing initiatives

Looking at data from existing wellbeing programs helps leaders find the most effective approaches for their learning community's needs. Another approach is connecting with other educators in the community to share findings and challenges and support one another in addressing wellbeing needs.

“Two or three years ago I was struggling with how we move forward with our wellbeing...I put a call out to our neighbouring schools asking if anyone was interested in creating a network. Eleven schools are a part of it. We meet once a term. We tried to keep meeting through covid. It started off as a student focus, but it has morphed into a staff focus. We have representation from big high schools, small high schools, big primary schools, part time and full-time staff. It's been really quite powerful. Our school psych is involved...In our group we've been able to problem solve, share and it's quite a strong network. It's receiving information from other schools about how we do different things.

Lea-anne, *WA government primary school deputy principal*

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Next steps

Plan your actions for building a thriving workplace using:

- your completed Workplace Review Table
- the outcomes and examples in this guide.

The [Be You Actions Catalogue](#) lists actions you can take to promote educator wellbeing. You can also contact your [Be You Consultant](#) or visit the [Educator wellbeing resources](#) page for ideas. Be sure to include educators in the planning process.

Consider using the [Be You Action Plan template](#) to record, map out and review actions.

Tell us which actions work for your learning community by contacting your Be You Consultant, joining [Education Voices](#) or attending an event or session.



References

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Further resources

- [Be You Action Plan](#)
- [Be You Actions Catalogue](#)
- [Be You Educator Wellbeing](#)
- [Be You Wellbeing Plan for Educators](#)
- [Beyond Blue resources](#)
- [Education and workplace safety resources by state and territory](#)
- [Future of Work Institute's Thrive at Work initiative](#)
- [Mental health services and support helplines](#)