



*Promoting
Educator
Wellbeing*



With delivery partners



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

Learning objectives

- Gain an understanding of the Mental Health Continuum
- Understand the difference between mental health and mental health conditions
- Learn ways to promote and protect their mental health and wellbeing
- Self-care tips and strategies for COVID-19 and beyond
- Social support for mental health and wellbeing
- Learn how to recognise and respond to mental health issues and conditions
- Recognising the signs and symptoms of psychological distress in self and others
- The importance of help-seeking and support services available
- Understand the role of early learning services and schools in supporting educator wellbeing

Why is educator wellbeing important?

- Mental wellbeing is an asset for life
- People who experience high levels of mental health and wellbeing have better study, work, relationship and health outcomes and live longer
- People who experience low levels of mental health and wellbeing or a mental health condition often experience a lower quality of life and impacts on their day-to-day functioning and performance
- Now more than ever it's vital to focus on promoting mental health and wellbeing and preventing mental health conditions, as well as supporting people who may be experiencing mental health issues or conditions
- Educator wellbeing is good for you, and good for your students, young children and colleagues

The mental health continuum

- Mental health exists on a continuum
- At one end is the experience of 'good' or 'positive' mental health. This is often called mental wellbeing.
- At the other end of the continuum is the experience of a mental health condition, like depression. These conditions are sometimes called mental disorders, or mental illnesses.

- ⦿ The mental health continuum therefore stretches from high mental wellbeing at one end to a severe mental health condition at the other extreme
- ⦿ At any given time a person will find themselves somewhere along this mental health continuum
- ⦿ But our mental health is not static, and our position on the continuum will fluctuate week to week depending on the balance of risk and protective factors for mental health that pull us one way or the other



Promoting and protecting our mental health and wellbeing

What is mental health and wellbeing?

Mental health and wellbeing is a multi-dimensional concept with three main elements:

- ⦿ **Emotionally** we feel generally happy, calm and satisfied with our life
- ⦿ This doesn't mean that we never feel sad, worried, or angry, particularly when we experience difficulties or see others experience them, but we are able to 'sit with' and regulate negative emotions and they don't become persistent or overwhelming
- ⦿ **Psychologically** we feel positive about ourselves; we are able to function effectively, meet our responsibilities, and be productive; and have a sense of control, meaning and purpose in life
- ⦿ **Socially** we experience positive relationships with others, a sense of trust, belonging and connectedness with others in our community, and we feel have something to offer to others and contribute to society
- ⦿ It is about how we feel emotionally and how we function psychologically and socially

Measuring mental health and wellbeing

- ⦿ There are nowadays a variety of questionnaires and checklists that allow us to measure our own or other people's mental wellbeing
- ⦿ These include the Mental Health Continuum Short Form and the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

Looking after our mental health and wellbeing

- ⦿ Self-care are the everyday activities practical strategies that you can use to promote and protect your mental wellbeing without the involvement of a mental health professional

- ⦿ Social support relates to the quality of our relationships with others, and the size of our social network

Self-care

- ⦿ Healthy behaviours
- ⦿ Relaxation
- ⦿ Managing our feelings
- ⦿ Managing our mindset

Healthy behaviours

- ⦿ Establish a routine
- ⦿ Stay physically active
- ⦿ Maintain a good quality diet
- ⦿ Get a good night's sleep
- ⦿ Reduce or avoid alcohol and other drugs
- ⦿ Have fun – schedule-in downtime to enjoy pleasant and relaxing activities

Relaxation

- ⦿ Clear your mind and focus on the here and now, rather than the past or future, through mindfulness meditation
- ⦿ Relax your body, through deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, pilates, body balance or anything that reduces tension for you
- ⦿ Connect with nature, listen to music, read a good book
- ⦿ It's about slowing down to dial down our flight or fight centre and stress hormones

Managing our feelings

- ⦿ Worry, sadness and anger can be very normal reactions to stress and will generally pass
- ⦿ Check-in with how you're feeling – self-awareness and self-reflection are important
- ⦿ Acknowledge your feelings and don't bottle things up – talk to people you trust
- ⦿ Be aware of how you relate to yourself and others - self-criticism is damaging, while self-compassion can boost your mood

- ⦿ Performing acts of kindness, being compassionate and expressing gratitude to others can boost their mood AND yours!

Foster a helpful mindset

- ⦿ What we think has a strong influence on how we feel
- ⦿ Don't assume. Assess the facts, maintain perspective and avoid negative bias, challenge negative self-talk.
- ⦿ Maintain a growth mindset – life's about trial, error and improvement – you'll get there
- ⦿ Sometimes we just need to accept things and move forward – things are bad now, but they will get better
- ⦿ Focus on the big picture of what's important to you, not just what's happening here and now
- ⦿ Be part realist and part optimist!

Social supports

- ⦿ A sense of loneliness and lack of belonging can harm our mental health and wellbeing
- ⦿ Invest time and energy to grow, deepen and maintain your relationships and social network
- ⦿ Be part of something bigger than yourself – people who volunteer, are involved in group activities or in spiritual pursuits tend to be happier than people who don't
- ⦿ Connect regularly with friends and family even if it's just through virtual means
- ⦿ Enjoy each other's company and have fun together
- ⦿ Share your thoughts and feelings with the people you trust, and allow them to do the same – listen, really listen
- ⦿ Giving back can give a sense of purpose and meaning in life, which really boosts mental wellbeing!

Recognising and responding to mental health conditions

Indicators of mental health conditions

- ⦿ It is common to experience mental health issues
- ⦿ Can vary from mild stress, psychological distress, through to a severe mental health condition
- ⦿ Signs and symptoms vary but typically involve a change in the way people feel, function, and relate to others

Physical changes

- ⦿ Trouble sleeping (hard to fall asleep, or hard to get back to sleep)
- ⦿ Lacking energy and feeling fatigued
- ⦿ Feeling tense, restless, fidgety
- ⦿ Change in appetite (low appetite or binge eating/comfort eating)
- ⦿ Aches and pains (e.g. headaches, tummy aches) and becoming unwell more often

Emotional changes

- ⦿ Intense and/or persistent emptiness, sadness, or depression
- ⦿ Loss of interest or pleasure in the things you used to enjoy
- ⦿ Intense and/or persistent worry, anxiety, fear, panic
- ⦿ Intense and/or persistent moodiness, irritability, frustration, anger

Thought changes

- ⦿ Unable to focus, concentrate, or remember things
- ⦿ Pessimistic, overly critical, negative thinking about yourself, your life, or your future
- ⦿ Constantly worried, distracted and preoccupied
- ⦿ Catastrophising and thinking about all the bad things that can happen
- ⦿ Having too much going on in your head and finding it hard to 'switch-off'
- ⦿ Thinking that life is not worth living

Changes in behaviour

- ⦿ Loss of drive, motivation, doing less, getting grumpy, yelling, having frequent arguments with others
- ⦿ Becoming socially withdrawn and distant
- ⦿ Not being able to get things done well or on time (drop in productivity and/or performance)
- ⦿ Drinking alcohol to cope
- ⦿ Taking drugs to escape or feel better
- ⦿ Self-harm

Assessing mental health issues and conditions

- ⦿ Online checklists
- ⦿ Assessment by a GP or a mental health professional

Seeking support

- The sooner you reach out to others and seek support the better
- Don't wait until rock-bottom or a crisis to seek advice. Support and assistance is available if you need it.
- If you need an interpreter to help speak with any of these services, you can call the [Translating and Interpreting Service](#) (TIS National) on 131 450
- [Telephone help-lines](#)
- Online forums
- Mental health professionals via telehealth or face-to-face
- Employment assistance programs

Helping others

- Ask if they are OK
- Listen, support, respond
- Check on suicide risk
- There is some great information on the [Beyond Blue website](#) around supporting others and how to have a conversation

Further support?

- Talk to your Be You team
- [Register](#) for and complete Be You Professional Learning
- Check out Be You [tools and resources](#)
- Check out resources and information on websites such as [Prevention United](#), [Beyond Blue](#), [Reach Out's Tips for Teacher Wellbeing](#)
- Consider other individual or school-based opportunities to build your knowledge and skills in educator wellbeing
- We encourage you to continue to engage with Be You, learn more and keep up-to-date
- If your learning community isn't yet implementing the Be You whole learning community approach, we encourage you to [register online](#) and get started with support from a Be You consultant
- If you're looking for resources to support you with a specific need or concern, such as promoting educator wellbeing, visit the [beyou.edu.au](#)

Learn more about Be You

- Register as a whole learning community to receive support
- Visit beyou.edu.au for resources
- Follow [Be You social media channels](#) to keep up to date

Attendee question and answer

Q. I find the "Are you okay?" question almost counterproductive as we are conditioned to answer "yes". I'm working hard to change the way I phrase that to my students. Do you have any suggestions?

A. Many people experiencing mental health issues try to put on a brave face and say everything is alright because they don't want to burden people, or they may be embarrassed or ashamed. It can help to preface the question with a statement normalizing the situation like "it's been a stressful year for all of us, I wonder how are you feeling at the moment?", or acknowledging any concerns you may have before asking someone how they are feeling, for example, "you seem a bit down lately, are you OK?" (or "is everything OK?"). There is no right or wrong way and it's about showing you care and are concerned while giving people the space to open up when they are ready. The [Beyond Blue](#), reachout.com, [headspace](https://headspace.org.au) and [R U OK](#) websites have some great tips on having the conversation with young people.

Q. Is it appropriate to recommend a wellbeing day to a school to support staff and student wellbeing?

A. Having a "Wellbeing Wednesday" or other regular event provides a great opportunity to encourage people to look after their mental health and give them tips on how to do it. It can also destigmatise and demystify mental conditions and encourage people who are struggling to seek-help more confidently.

Q. At our school we have been promoting staff self-care, do you have any ideas about the best way to encourage staff to do so?

A. Explaining that everyone has a level of mental health and there are practical self-care strategies each of us can do to promote our mental health can help normalize self-care. We can also foster behaviour change by pointing out the benefits, providing people with practical examples, tools and opportunities to practice self-care at work, making it something fun or social, and getting people to make a public commitment to self-care, as we're all more likely to follow through on something we've told people we're doing. Another option is to have a 30-day self-care challenge to motivate people.

Q. How can we advocate educator wellbeing within the sector?

A. The more wellbeing is discussed within educator circles the more it will be embedded within workplaces as part for the course. It's therefore great to discuss it at planning days, professional development sessions, feature it in conference presentations, and in conversations with union reps and department reps. Employers have a legal obligation to create a mentally healthy workplace and all employers should be aware of the psychosocial risk factors (hazards) in their workplace and have a plan to address them.

Q. Are there options for booking a speaker on mental health for staff meetings?

A. Beyond Blue has a speakers bureau where you can request a speaker to talk about their real life experience with mental health to your staff.

Q. Is there a school/educational facility that you think uses a good model of Wellbeing? Teaches Wellbeing to students and staff?

A. This is a tough one as all schools are different and what works well for one may not work well for others. We feel the schools that embrace Be You as a whole are in a better position to support their student and staff's wellbeing.

Q. Tips for professional supervision and workload management?

A. Most professionals benefit from having an opportunity to share their experiences with their peers. Whether one-to-one or through communities of practice or group, supervision allows sharing of knowledge and ideas, provides emotional support, and expands social and professional networks. Sometimes it needs one person to organise it, and then others will get involved.

Q. Do you foresee mental difficulties for students/staff to transition back into on-site learning?

A. This year has produced many challenges for students, parents, and educators alike. Everyone is feeling stressed, although it is likely that some are experiencing greater difficulties than others. This may be noticeable when people return to on-site learning. School-refusal may occur, some may find it hard re-engage with their peers, while others may show signs of depression and anxiety brought on by the worry about the virus, loneliness, the death of a loved one, family conflict, unemployment or other difficulties which may have occurred during remote learning. Keep your radar switched on.

Q. Can we have strategies for transitioning out of the pandemic? What have we learnt that we can continue?

A. A lot has changed, and a 're-building' phase is often needed after a major external 'shock'. It's important for all service/school staff to work together to review where things are at and plan for the next few months and then beyond. It's unlikely to be business as usual and it's worth reflecting on what can be done differently and what can return to previous practice. Ultimately, we will all need to stay agile and adaptable until a vaccine is developed and just do our best in the circumstances.

Q. What can you suggest to ease the stress of the blur between work and home when working from home?

A. Creating routines or structures that help to separate home and work can be helpful. Some people continue to set the alarm, get into their work clothes, set up an 'office space' and follow the routine they would at work, and then 'come home' by changing into different clothes and spending time in another area of their home. As much as possible, try not to do 'work' on your time/days off.

Q. Parents are finding it hard to have time away from children to attend to themselves at this time. Educators with young children of their own seem to be struggling. Do you have suggestions about how we can support these members of our work communities?

A. Some people are juggling multiple responsibilities. These are the staff members who need the most understanding and support. Make it clear that you know it is going to be hard for them and remind them they can only do their best in the circumstances. Encourage them to prioritise and do the critical things but recognise and accept they are going to find it hard to do everything and that is OK. If there is a way to share the load between staff members to give some breathing space for those under pressure that can help.

Q. What are some ways we can increase staff morale and wellbeing when we are all working virtually, with no face to face interactions?

A. It's really important to prioritise staff mental wellbeing at the moment and set aside time each day or each week to chat, unwind and do social things together online. There's always some staff members who are great at organising and bringing people together, so perhaps form a 'wellbeing' committee to brainstorm ideas and try new activities over email or videoconferencing like the 'joke of the day', a lunchtime quiz, after work chats, or a weekend 'challenge' that people report back on Monday. Be creative and keep it respectful, inclusive, and optional – not everyone may want to be involved.

Q. Are there other suggestions for staff wide initiatives to support wellbeing at this time?

A. It's important to maintain social bonds and social supports despite working remotely so creating opportunities for people to stay in touch is important. It can also be a time to run virtual 'wellbeing

workshops' online like exercise classes led by the PE teacher, cooking classes, yoga or mindfulness group that people participate in together from their own home at the same time. We need to keep doing things that are fun, relaxing and social.

Q. How can teachers support students if working/teaching remotely?

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

Q. What about when we're forced back to school? Children don't socially distance, they might not be required to wear masks, there is no way to socially distance in a classroom with a full class. All of this has been making a really stressful job so much worse. But again, where is the support? Just talk to someone? Sorry. I'm just so confused as to how the support is actually meant to look like.

A. It is important that individuals and workplaces follow the public health advice. While this advice may change as circumstances change, there are certain core steps we need to follow to reduce the spread of the virus and keep ourselves and others well. All workplaces need to have a COVID-safe plan and it's good to discuss these specific issues in the context of developing that plan.

Q. How much do we allow this COVID-19 challenge to accept very poor behavior by staff especially when this behavior has been a form of bullying of other staff?

A. Bullying, harassment and discrimination are never acceptable and are potentially unlawful in the workplace environment. While we are all feeling the stress, we need to remain respectful, civil, and professional in our interactions with each other, parents, and students. If a person is stressed it is important to show care and concern and encourage them to seek assistance, but that does not mean accepting or condoning abusive or aggressive behaviour.

Q. As a person listening to someone with concerns with mental health what are good simple strategies to support that person? I'm also as a volunteer a Country Fire Authority Peer Support person.

A. The [Beyond Blue](#) website has some great information on how to have those sorts of conversations. The [R U OK](#) website also has a lot of fantastic tips and resources to guide you through that process. The other thing to consider is doing a Mental Health First Aid training course which may really come in handy for your volunteer work.

Q. How do you support people if they're not feeling well?

A. Whether you are trying to encourage someone to seek assistance or you're supporting them through their treatment and recovery, it's important to listen, show empathy and be non-judgmental. You don't have to be the person's counsellor just a caring friend, colleague or family member who provides emotional, social and practical support but encourages the person to use the professional supports and services that are available. The [Beyond Blue](#) website and [headspace](#) website have some great tips on how to support people who are unwell.

Q. What is the best way to support older relatives in encouraging positive mental health and wellbeing, when perhaps they do not fully believe in it?

A. We all can benefit from looking after our mental wellbeing, regardless of age. Some people are not used to, or comfortable with terms like mental health or mental wellbeing, but may be happy to talk about active ageing or healthy ageing, or having a conversation about the importance of doing things that are fun, social, exercise the mind, and keep us active. These things can help to reduce the risk of dementia as well as depression, and it may be another way to 'sell' the benefits.

Q. If you have a history of mental illness (depression and anxiety), is there a higher risk of recurrence if you do not maintain positive strategies?

A. While most people will experience recovery from an episode of depression and anxiety, a sizeable proportion may experience further episodes. There is evidence to show that continued use of self-care strategies, such as healthy eating, physical activity and mindfulness meditation, 'booster' counselling sessions and where required maintenance medication can reduce recurrence.

Q. How do you address that feeling of heaviness or inability to help others, that empathy that weighs you down?

A. We all have to recognise our own personal limits when supporting some who is experiencing mental health issues. Compassion fatigue and burnout can occur when people spend a lot of time helping others and neglect their own needs. We are all more effective in helping others, when we're in a good place emotionally as well. Ultimately, it's about doing what you can, when you can.

Q. Even though it's a bit cold in Melbourne getting out in the fresh air and sunshine (when we have it!) has been critical for me. I heard Vitamin D is directly connected to immunity and 'happiness'. Is this true?

A. Research has shown a 'correlation' between low Vitamin D and low mood, but it is unclear whether there is a 'cause-and-effect' connection or that the two co-occur for other reasons. It is also possible that depression may lead to low Vitamin D because people may be less active and get outdoors less.

Furthermore, while some studies show that Vitamin D supplements can improve mood for people experiencing depression, other studies have shown no benefit and at this stage Vitamin D is not recommended as a treatment for depression. Indeed, it is important to note high levels of Vitamin D can be toxic and it is important not to take supplements without discussing it with a qualified health professional. Ultimately getting outdoors in the fresh air and sunshine certainly has benefits as long as we follow the guidelines around UV exposure and skin cancer.

Q. How often do these webinars occur?

A. These webinars occur roughly once a month and are presented by [Beyond Blue](#), [Early Childhood Australia](#) and [headspace](#). Check back at the [In Focus event page](#) regularly for upcoming sessions.

Q. I have concerns over the mental health of one of my students. He is refusing external support. What can I do?

A. Broadly speaking, your actions will depend on your level of concern about the young person's mental health and their safety, and your school's protocols on these issues. Where you have significant or urgent concerns, it is important to act immediately and escalate the matter to a year level coordinator, vice principal or principal to involve the student's parents or guardians (if appropriate), and to refer the student to internal or external supports. Where the issue is less urgent, it may be possible to take more time to encourage the student to seek assistance. It is important to talk in private, express your concerns using non-diagnostic lay terms like 'stress', and use empathic, non-judgmental language to encourage them to talk to their parents/guardians and/or seek assistance. It can be helpful to demystify mental health support through information resources like [reachout.com](#), or by encouraging the student to use a confidential online service like [e-headspace](#), or by arranging a warm referral to [a headspace centre](#) which offers youth-friendly, low-stigma supports and services. Once again, it is important to follow your school's protocol and escalate the matter to a more senior teacher/school leader if you have tried various approaches without success and you still hold concerns about the young person's mental health.

See Be You resources for more information:

<https://beyou.edu.au/learn/early-support>

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news/preparing-for-difficult-conversations-with-families>

Attendee suggestions

What strategies do you have around self-care and support with others?

- ⦿ Going for a walk each day to get some sunshine
- ⦿ Cup of tea chat with faraway friends, yoga, walking and gardening
- ⦿ One hour walk before breakfast
- ⦿ Reading a non-work related novel
- ⦿ Feeling that I am on top of my workload
- ⦿ Ignoring the messy house and playing with the kids makes me feel so much better
- ⦿ Exercise is always uplifting
- ⦿ Part of my self-care was to learn to crochet and knit
- ⦿ Podcast on relaxation in a quiet space
- ⦿ Singing loudly in the car on the way home from work
- ⦿ My team had a critical reflection meeting on educator wellbeing last week. we talked about focusing on what we can control rather than getting caught up with all the things that are out of our control at this time, as well as practicing self-care
- ⦿ Yoga has transformed my life on a personal and professional level
- ⦿ You can create quiet spaces in your home to discuss what you are feeling in a non-confrontational way
- ⦿ Fish Principles are helpful
- ⦿ Have fun/play. Be there, make their day. Choose your attitude.
- ⦿ I have started journaling and it has really helped me process feelings
- ⦿ Pilate's and gut friendly diet and mindfulness work for me. having time with family, learning new stuff helps too.
- ⦿ I run free Zumba classes weekly and want to help as many people as I can feel good mentally
- ⦿ I am working as a school counsellor and I have found setting up staff catch ups through online meeting forums. Staff are missing one another and having the ability to generate a way for the team to stay connected has been wonderful.

What virtual or other supports have you found during COVID-19?

- [TESSA Inc](#) is providing free self-care sessions with 30mins of gentle movements, breathing and mindfulness
- I can strongly recommend the [Smiling Mind app](#)
- I listen to [Calm app](#) and their mindfulness helps me. They used to have it free for educators. It has completely changed my mindset.
- We use the [Resilience Project](#) at our school. Great to practice what we teach as well
- I daily use two apps - [Presently](#) and [Action for Happiness](#). Presently just allows me to record what I am grateful for every day and Action for Happiness has a daily 'goal' and message
- [Daily yoga app](#)
- Online games like [Skribbl](#) or Scattergories with team debriefings or ice breakers
- I use [ABIDE](#) meditations for sleep
- [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) has COVID resources for families.

Further resources for educators and early learning services

Websites

<https://beyou.edu.au/>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/>

<https://headspace.org.au/>

<https://preventionunited.org.au/>

<https://www.headsup.org.au/>

Resource links

<https://beyou.edu.au/getting-started>

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news/coronavirus-schools-adapting-to-changes>

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/news/covid-19-supporting-early-learning-communities>

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/mental-health-continuum>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/have-the-conversation>

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety-and-depression-checklist-k10>

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>

Be You Fact Sheets

<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/wellbeing/staff-wellbeing>

<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/wellbeing/stress-management>

<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/wellbeing/mindfulness>

Be You social channels

[LinkedIn](#)

[YouTube](#)

Be You Early Learning

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

Be You Primary

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

Be You Secondary

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