



## How does KidsMatter support children who have experienced trauma?

KidsMatter Primary is a flexible, whole-school approach to improving children's social and emotional wellbeing. A whole-school approach involves the people who have a significant influence on the lives of children, including families, school staff, community groups and organisations.

Partnerships with families are crucial, as families are the most significant influence on children's social and emotional wellbeing. Schools also benefit from partnerships with community agencies and health services, particularly in terms of early intervention and treatment for children experiencing mental health difficulties.

### Taking care of yourself

When reading this resource, remember it is important to take care of yourself. Tune into how you're feeling and reacting to the content, and identify a place you can get support if you need to.

KidsMatter helps support children who have experienced trauma and their families by supporting schools to create environments where children:

- feel valued and supported
- are taught skills for developing and managing relationships, including skills for making good decisions and managing conflict
- are taught skills to understand and appropriately express and manage their own emotions
- feel able to seek help when things go wrong.



## Component 1

**Positive school community** helps schools to focus on building a school culture that provides safety, security and support for children, and emphasises the importance of positive relationships and promoting a sense of belonging.

One of the most helpful things for children after experiencing trauma is the consistency and the reliability of their environment and the people around them. A school that provides a sense of warmth, belonging, and structure can help meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma.

Having a positive school community also means that school is a place where children and their families want to be and this helps families to feel valued and supported. Schools that are inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community members will best support the cultural wellbeing across the school and promote cultural understandings.

A positive environment characterised by warm and responsive relationships also provides a platform on which adults can become more aware of and responsive to children's needs, and children can feel comfortable to approach adults about any problems they are experiencing. In this way, the effects of trauma in children can be minimised through early intervention and responsive action.

## Component 2

**Social and emotional learning for students** encourages schools to embed the teaching of social and emotional skills to children, with opportunities to practise and transfer the skills beyond the classroom into the playground and home. Children who have well-developed social and emotional skills (such as self-management, relationship skills and self-awareness) are better able to articulate their needs and concerns, understand the perspective of others, appropriately manage strong emotions and seek help from others when necessary.

One of the emotional consequences of traumatic experiences for children is the difficulty in self-regulation and problems being able to manage distressing thoughts and emotions. Children who have experienced trauma may also have problems getting along with others, making decisions and being able to take others' feelings into account. KidsMatter helps schools develop their approaches to supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of all children through a social and emotional skills lens. It helps schools to teach skills that enable children to relate to each other in appropriate ways, and to consider whether children displaying certain behaviours may need additional support to develop specific skills. KidsMatter also helps children to identify their own feelings, tune into physical changes and respond appropriately to distress.



## Component 3

**Working with parents and carers** helps schools to build strong, positive relationships with the families in their school community. Families are the most important people in a child's life and KidsMatter encourages positive home-school relationships, so that if something goes wrong, support is provided in an effective and timely manner, because the school and family already know and trust each other. Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members actively engaged in the school with links to community Elders and workers will best support families in their connection with the school.

When trauma has occurred in a child's life, it can impact on how a family functions and how members relate and respond to each other. Sometimes families will approach the school to ask how their child is going and to find out if behaviours they might be seeing at home are also occurring at school. This is an opportunity for parents and schools to work together to support and provide consistent responses to the child across both the home and school contexts. KidsMatter also encourages schools to remember that every family is unique and will respond in different ways to trauma.

Sometimes parents and carers might talk to school staff about trauma that they or their child have previously experienced. KidsMatter supports school staff to understand that previous trauma can impact on parenting, and that parents might ask school staff for support in managing their child's behaviour or wellbeing, including things like sleeping and eating. KidsMatter encourages schools to promote themselves as a place where parents can come to seek parenting resources and information. Sometimes parents and carers might ask for their own social and emotional wellbeing support, so it is again important that schools are aware of the services and agencies in their communities that can be accessed by families.



## Component 4

**Helping children with mental health difficulties** helps schools to recognise when a child may be experiencing difficulties with their social and emotional wellbeing. It assists schools to respond appropriately by working with the family, providing support and engaging with health and community agencies when required. In this way, children who might be experiencing difficulties related to trauma are recognised early and help and support is provided.

Schools are supported to recognise the signs of mental health difficulties and the impact that trauma can have on a child's social and emotional wellbeing. KidsMatter also supports staff to be aware of the stigma that may be associated with mental health difficulties and supports staff to respond to children and their families in a way that is respectful and understanding of the child's experiences and their needs. Working with families is a key part of responding to children's mental health difficulties.

Schools are also supported to establish links with community agencies that can support the child and their family. There may be local agencies or practitioners that are experts in working with trauma in childhood and communities, and schools can become aware of and develop links with such professionals. KidsMatter also helps schools to develop policies and protocols for recognising and responding to children's social and emotional wellbeing needs.



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