

**The No Nonsense Guide to Mental Health in Schools:
What every UPSTREAM teacher can do to make a difference**

JOHN BURNS PhD

THE ANGLICAN SCHOOLS CORPORATION

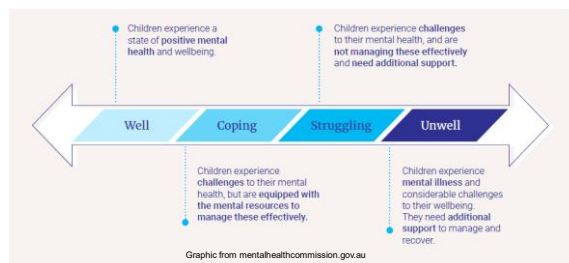
12 AUGUST 2026

(YOU)^{US} Advancing social, emotional and cognitive health and wellbeing for all.
That's YOU to the power of us.

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LIFESPAN HEALTH AND WELLBEING RESEARCH CENTRE

1

A word on terminology



2

UPSTREAM

- Principals and Deputies
- Directors of Wellbeing/Pastoral Care
- School Psychologists & Counsellors
- Head of Junior/Senior School
- Executive

DOWNSTREAM

- Classroom teachers
- Home Room Tutors
- Year Advisers
- Head of House

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OUR PLAN FOR TODAY



Session	Time	Topic
1	9:00 – 10:45	- An overview of Downstream - Having a vision - School climate and mental health
Morning Tea	10:45 – 11:15	
2	11:15 – 1:00	- Who's job is it? - Students with suicidal thoughts
Lunch	1:00 – 1:45	
3	1:45 – 3:30	-Managing difficult parent encounters - Staff burnout

4

A one-day DOWNSTREAM workshop



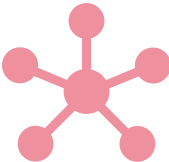
1.	Understanding the importance of mental health to schools
2.	Making sense of poor mental health
3.	Recognising mental health in students
4.	Responding to mental health concerns in students
5.	Classroom strategies/accommodations for students with mental health concerns
6.	Self-care for teachers

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5

PAIR - SHARE



With a person near to you – preferably who you don't know:
☐ Introduce yourself
☐ **Ask:** Think back to your school days. What things about your school enhanced your wellbeing? What things diminished it?

6





A UNIT ON SETTING A VISION FOR YOUR TEAM

7

7

We don't need to go overboard with fancy mission statements, but we do need a clear vision about what we are trying to do with our 'unwell' students - that our team knows, shares and contributes to fulfilling.



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FIRST, DO NO HARM

A UNIT ON SCHOOL
CLIMATE AND MENTAL
HEALTH

9

International Journal of Educational Research 36 (2004) 121–138

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Educational Research

Journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijer

The relationships between school climate and adolescent mental health and wellbeing: A systematic literature review

Jill M. Aldridge^a, Katrina McChesney^a

^a School of Education, South University, 4001 St. Johns Road, St. Johns, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

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School climate is:
“the norms, expectations, and beliefs that contribute to creating a psychosocial environment that determines the extent to which people feel physically, emotionally, and socially safe”
p. 122
“what’s like around here?”

10

FOUR DOMAINS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

Elsevier/Elsevier Inc. (2014) 36 (12) 121–138

DOI: 10.1016/j.ijer.2014.12.011

School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes

Hing To Wang^a, Anna L. Inge^{a,*}

Published online 22 June 2015

Abstract The construct of school climate has received attention as a way to enhance student achievement and reduce problem behaviors. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the existing literature on school climate and to bring to light the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the ways researchers have approached the construct. The central information in this article is organized into five sections. In the first, we describe the theoretical frameworks to support the multidimensionality of school climate and how school climate impacts student outcomes. In the second, we provide a breakdown of the four domains that make up school climate, including **Social/Emotional**, **Discipline & Order**, **Physical**, and **Safety**. In the third, we review the research on the outcomes of school climate. In the fourth, we outline the measurement and analysis methods of the construct of school climate. Finally, we summarize the strengths and limitations of the current work on school climate and make suggestions for future research directions.

Keywords School climate; School environment; Measurement; Behavioral development; Socioemotional development; Academic performance

FOUR DOMAINS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

- 1.Safety
- 2.Community
- 3.Academic
- 4.Institutional environment

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FOUR DOMAINS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

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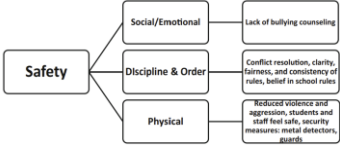
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SAFETY
The physical and emotional security provided by a school and formed by its members, along with the degree of order and discipline present.



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FOUR DOMAINS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE



File Published On: 2019-03-10 10:00
DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4939-9194-7_10

School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes

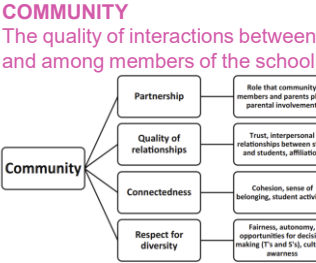
Ming Yi Wang^{1,2}, Jessica L. Inge^{1,2}

Published online: 27 June 2015
© Springer Science+Business Media New York 2015

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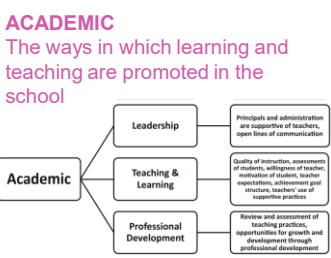
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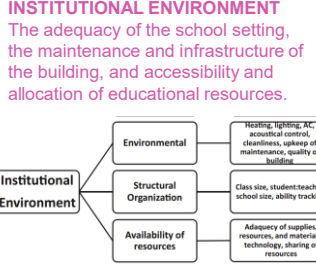
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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES



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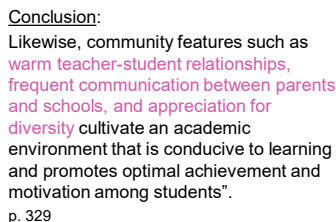
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Conclusion:
“Schools that set high academic standards, stress commitment to students, exhibit effective leadership, and emphasize mastery goal orientations have students that demonstrate higher academic achievement.”

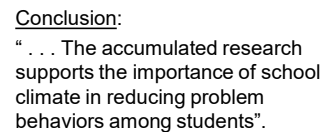
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Sydney Australia



p. 329

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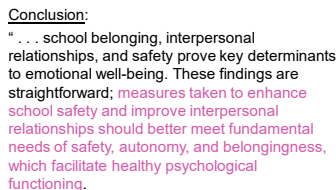
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Sydney Australia



p. 331

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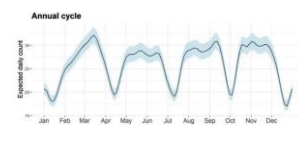
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[illegible]

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School climate is really important for enhancing student mental health (and academic outcomes). So . . .

- How is the climate at your school?
- What do students think? And staff? And parents?
- Which areas is your school doing well – and which areas is your school not doing well?
- And, what do you base your view on?

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School climate is really important for enhancing student mental health (and academic outcomes). So . . .

- How is the climate at your school?
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- And, what do you base your view on?

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ANSWER

You don't really know unless you measure it

M

**MEASURING
SCHOOL
CLIMATE –
IT ISN'T
ROCKET
SCIENCE**

There are a stack of freely available 'off the rack' climate measures.

Or, you could design you own.

Or a mix of the two.

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Evidence-Based Commentary

An Introduction to the School Climate Measure

Kerli J. Zelling, PhD
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Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Public Health
West Virginia University
Morgantown, WV

Molly B. Matthews-Enwall, PhD
201 Research Services, LLC
Ashtabula, TX

J. Scott Hershner, PhD
Professor
Department of Psychology
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC

<https://www.aasa.org/docs/default-source/publications/journal-of-scholarship-and-practice/2021-jsp/school-climate-measure.pdf>

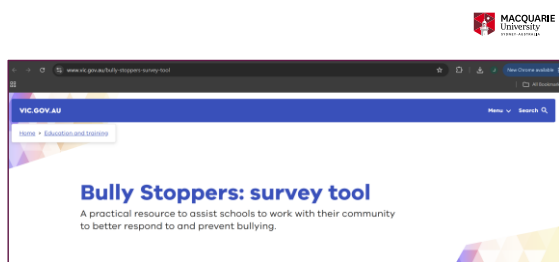
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School Climate Measure Items

Domain 1: Positive Student-Teacher Relationships
Teachers and staff seem to take a real interest in my future
Teachers are available when I need to talk with them
It is easy to talk with teachers
Students get along well with teachers
Teachers at my school help us children with our problems
My teachers care about me
My teacher makes me feel good about myself

Domain 2: Order and Discipline
Classroom rules are applied equally
Problems in this school are solved by students and staff
The rules of the school are fair
School rules are enforced consistently and fairly
My teachers make it clear to me when I have misbehaved in class
Discipline is fair

Domain 3: Opportunities for Student Engagement
Students have some opportunity in class to speak, and be listened to, in class
Students can express feelings and thoughts about school work and life
Students "suffered" in any way are treated with respect
Nobody in my school is excluded from being successful
Females and males treated as equals at school
I can participate in a lot of interesting activities at school



3. Bullying is a misuse of power: original repeated and involves behaviours that causes harm. When you been bullied at school? (If no, go to question 13)

☐ Yes
☐ No

4. How many people have been involved in the bullying? (Please tick one box)

☐ 1 person
☐ 2 people
☐ 3 people
☐ More than 3 people

5. How many times do you think you have been bullied in the past week and the past month? (Please tick in the appropriate boxes)

	1-5 times	5-10 times	10+ times
In the past week	☐	☐	☐
In the past month	☐	☐	☐

6. Where does the bullying usually happen? (Please tick one box or more)

☐ Playground/corridor
☐ In class
☐ Canteen
☐ Toilets
☐ Library
☐ Hallway
☐ Lockers
☐ During sport
☐ Gym/change room
☐ Waiting for the teacher before class
☐ Transferring to and from buses

7. When you have told a person about being bullied were they...? (Please tick in the appropriate boxes.)

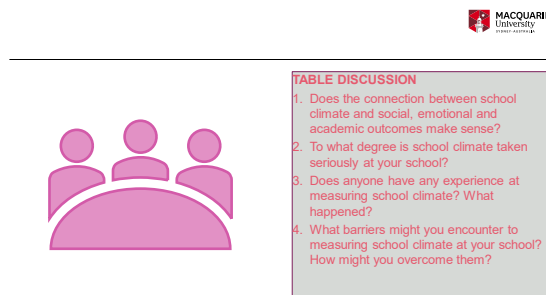
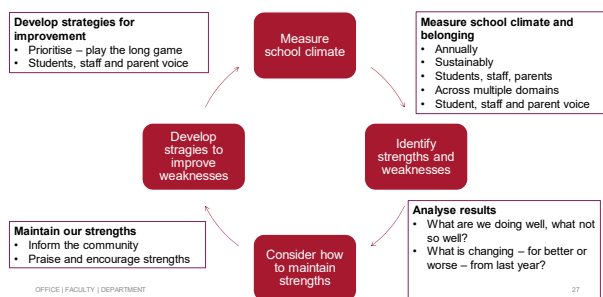
	No help	A bit helpful	Not helpful	Helpful	Very helpful
Class teacher	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teacher on yard duty	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other teacher	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Principal or Assistant Principal	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wellbeing coordinator/ counsellor / chaplain	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Integration aide/ support person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parent/carer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sibling	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friends at school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
No one	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. What did they do to help?

☐ Organised for someone from wellbeing team to meet with you
☐ Helped you identify your concerns
☐ Told you to ignore it
☐ Told a meeting to be arranged with you and the student
☐ Helped you make friends with other students
☐ Were more visible in the school year or place where you are being bullied
☐ Other: _____

9. Was the bullying stopped?

☐ Yes
☐ No







A UNIT ON ROLE CLARITY – WHO’S JOB IS WHAT?

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It *looks* like Barney is smiling. But in reality, he’s looking at the growing pile of work on his desk.

Is it his job to manage everything that goes on in this school?

If not his, whose?

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30% of 4-17 year olds with a (serious emotional or behavioural concern) have never seen a ‘service provider’

Lawrence et al p.80

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RECOGNISING SIGNS OF DISTRESS





Four questions to guide us

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Does this student do something most students don't do?



Does this behaviour have undesirable academic, emotional or social outcomes for the student?



Are the usual teacher interventions failing to bring about the desired change?

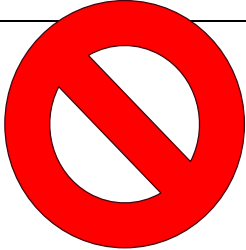


Have the signs of concern persisted over an extended period?

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We don't need you to be Sigmund Freud



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Let's think about our counsellors for a minute



- What is the ratio of school counsellor to teacher in your school?
- What percentage of students have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties that would benefit from additional counselling support?
- Do you know what type of training the counsellor(s) have? Social worker? Psychologist? Chaplain? Teacher? Counsellor? And what's the difference?
- What is a counsellor's role – and what isn't?
- What are they generally skilled to – and what aren't they skilled to do?

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Let's think about our counsellors for a minute



- MY POINT**
1. I can't answer those questions for your school and your counsellor(s), but if you are a middle/senior leader in your school, you should have an answer to them.
 2. Counsellors aren't the solution to a school's concerns about students with emotional and behavioural problems. Schools are not mental health clinics.
 3. Everyone has a job to play in caring for students with emotional and behavioural concerns. Do they know their own job – and that of others?

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WHO'S
JOB
IS
IT?



WHO'S JOB IS IT?

- There aren't really any right or wrong answers, but . . .
- You need all stakeholders to have clarity within your school about whose job is whose (consider how role descriptions, staff meetings reinforce this)
- You need clarity on when and how to collaborate with other team members.
- Staff need to be adequately equipped (time, resources, training) for what is expected of them

Figure 5-1-1: Average NAPLAN numeracy test score trajectory of students across all Years from 3 to 5, for those with a mental disorder by service use, and for those with no mental disorder

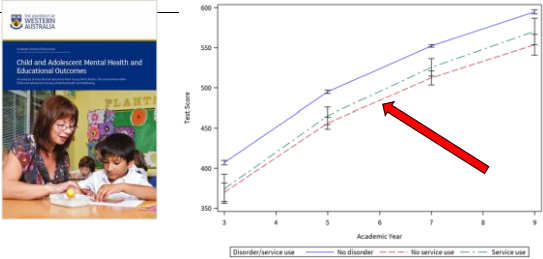
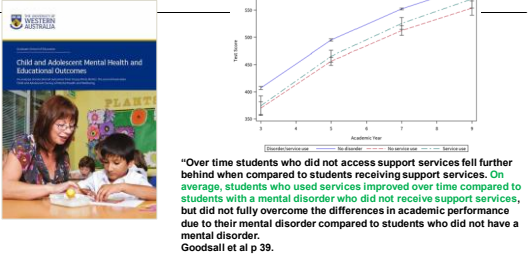


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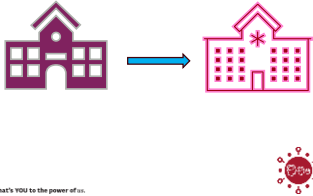
"Over time students who did not access support services fell further behind when compared to students receiving support services. On average, students who used services improved over time compared to students with a mental disorder who did not receive support services, but did not fully overcome the differences in academic performance due to their mental disorder compared to students who did not have a mental disorder. Goodsall et al p 39.

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Getting help: Pathways to Care



One of the best things school can do is ensure that students with emotional and behavioural distress get proper assessment and intervention by a qualified health professional.



Advancing social, emotional and cognitive health and wellbeing for all. That's YOU to the power of us.



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A UNIT ON SUICIDAL STUDENTS

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The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry
Volume 55, Issue 12, December 2014, pp 1088-1098

Multilevel risk and protective factors for self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempt in adolescents

Alison L. Calvert,¹ Philip J. Batterham,² Alice Wiggan-Bell,³ Kate Weather,⁴ Michelle Trench,⁵ Rosemary O'Neil,⁶ Mark B. Lomas,⁷ and John Christensen,⁸

¹University of Western Australia, ²University of Western Australia, ³University of Western Australia, ⁴University of Western Australia, ⁵University of Western Australia, ⁶University of Western Australia, ⁷University of Western Australia, ⁸University of Western Australia

Background: Better characterising risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation and self-harm in adolescents may facilitate better targeting of interventions that address underlying vulnerabilities. However, the general understanding of these factors is limited. **Methods:** We conducted a multilevel analysis of risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation and self-harm in adolescents. **Results:** We identified a range of risk and protective factors for suicidal ideation and self-harm in adolescents. **Conclusions:** Our findings suggest that a range of factors are involved in suicidal ideation and self-harm in adolescents, and that these factors may be targeted in interventions to reduce the risk of suicidal ideation and self-harm in adolescents.

- ANU and Black Dog Institute, 2026
- 4,122 adolescents from 134 Aussie schools
- Prospective study

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12-MONTHS PREVALENCE OF
SH, SI AND SA

- 17.7% reported self-harm
- 18.6% reported suicidal ideation
- 3% reported suicide attempt

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PREDICTORS OF SELF HARM
AT 12-MONTHS

- Being nonbinary
- Being female
- Having a MH diagnosis
- Gov't > Independent schools
- LGBTQI+
- Self-harm and suicidal ideation at baseline

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PREDICTORS OF SUICIDAL
IDEATION AT 12-MONTHS

- Being nonbinary
- Being female
- Having a MH diagnosis
- LGBTQI+
- Cyberbullied
- Baseline depression and peer problems
- Self-harm and suicidal ideation at baseline

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PREDICTORS OF SUICIDAL
ATTEMPT AT 12-MONTHS

- Elevated peer problems at baseline
- Suicidal ideation, self-harm and suicide attempt at baseline

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Conclusions:
"Rates of suicidal distress and self-harm remain high in Australian adolescents. Reducing symptoms of depression, improving peer relationships, mitigating online bullying and providing social support for families may be suitable targets for future prevention and early intervention programs".
p. 609

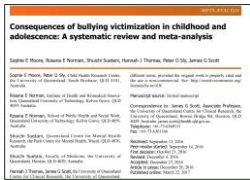
What predicts suicidal ideation in young people?	
Previous suicidality	Previous suicidal ideation and/or attempts and/or self-harm
Current psychological distress	Depression, anxiety, trauma, eating disorders etc
Adversity	Child abuse, family disruption, parental mental illness, poverty/financial stress, ACEs
Disconnection	Poor family relationships, loneliness, poor peer relationships, bullying, low school belonging
Additional vulnerabilities	Sleep problems, substance use, SE disadvantage, gender and identity factors

What school staff may notice that raises our concerns about suicide



- withdrawal from peers
- bullying/victimisation
- declining school participation
- academic disengagement
- loss of belonging
- deterioration in relationships
- sleep-related tiredness
- marked changes in mood
- substance use
- social isolation

Bullying and mental health



"Strong evidence exists for a causal relationship between bullying victimization, mental health problems and substance use. . . . The strong evidence that bullying victimization is causative of mental illness highlights the need for schools to implement effective interventions to address bullying behaviours"

Moore et al, Uni of Queensland, *World Journal of Psychiatry*, p. 61.

Bullying and educational outcomes



Research article

The effect of peer bullying on academic achievement: A meta-analysis study related to results of TIMSS and PIRLS

Leoni Trötschel^{1,2} · Anja Kretsch^{1,2}

Abstract

Children in the countries that participated in the TIMSS and PIRLS studies have been exposed to peer bullying. This meta-analysis examined the effect of peer bullying on academic achievement in the TIMSS and PIRLS studies. The results showed that peer bullying had a significant negative effect on academic achievement in the TIMSS and PIRLS studies. The findings of the study revealed that peer bullying had a significant effect on academic achievement . . .

Ozayildirim and Karadağ 2023

Child Abuse & Neglect

The relationships between violence in childhood and educational outcomes: A global systematic review and meta-analysis

Richard P. · · · · ·

Abstract

This is the first study to examine the associations globally between violence in childhood and educational outcomes. The results showed that children who experienced violence in childhood had lower educational outcomes than those who did not experience violence. The findings of the study revealed that peer bullying had a significant effect on academic achievement . . .

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Lifetime effects of bullying



Research article

The adult consequences of being bullied in childhood

David G. · · · · ·

Abstract

This study examined the impact of bullying in childhood on an individual's mental health and educational outcomes. The results showed that children who experienced bullying in childhood had higher rates of mental health problems and lower educational outcomes than those who did not experience bullying. The findings of the study revealed that peer bullying had a significant effect on academic achievement . . .

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- Data from the National Child Development Study
- Prospectively followed a sample of 17,415 babies born in one week in the UK in 1958
- Measured bullying aged 7 and 11 years.
- Reviewed 12 sweeps of data up to age 62
- FINDINGS: Bullying . . .**
- Negatively impacts wellbeing
- Raises probability of mortality before age 55
- Lowers the probability of having a job in adulthood

**** These effects are independent of other adverse childhood experiences**

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The economic cost of bullying



Research article

The Economic Cost of Child and Adolescent Bullying in Australia

Andrew · · · · ·

Abstract

This study examined the economic cost of child and adolescent bullying in Australia. The results showed that the total economic cost of bullying in Australia was estimated at AUD \$763 million. The findings of the study revealed that peer bullying had a significant effect on academic achievement . . .

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"Annual costs in Australian dollars (AUD) in 2016 on health and non-health outcomes attributable to child and adolescent bullying victimization were estimated at **AUD \$763 million**: AUD \$750 million for health system costs with AUD \$147 million for anxiety disorders, AUD \$322 million for depressive disorders, AUD \$57 million for intentional self-harm, and AUD \$224 million for tobacco use; AUD \$7.5 million for productivity losses of victims' caregivers; and AUD \$6 million for educational services".

Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2021) p367

The economic cost of bullying



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- Costs associated with bullying = \$2.4 billion for each individual school year group, made up of:
 - \$525 million in costs to victims, perpetrators, families, schools and the community over 13 years of the cohort
 - \$1.9 billion in the 20 years that follow school completion due to impacts to productivity, chronic health issues, impacts on family and other members from family violence

PWC 2018

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Anti bullying programs work



Examining the Effectiveness of School-Bullying Intervention Programs Globally: A Meta-analysis

Abstract

"We conclude that overall, school-based antibullying programs are effective in reducing bullying perpetration and bullying victimization . . ."

Gaffney et al 2021

Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying perpetration and victimization: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis

Abstract

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A UNIT ON CHECKING IN WITH SUICIDAL STUDENTS

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EVALUATING SUICIDE CONCERN



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Can you guess what I say to "downstream" staff about what they should do if/when they learn or suspect that a student is self-harming or having suicidal thoughts?

Escalate your concern upstream!

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERNS



Checking Concerns
Vs
Assessing Risk

It is never your job to assess suicide risk.
All you can do is “be concerned”.

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERNS



Our purpose:
To be equipped to check in about suicide concern – and to know how to respond.

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



ESCALATION
Just as a downstream teacher's job is to escalate concerns to you,
your job is to escalate concerns to:
- Parents
- External professionals

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



1. **Who** needs to know how to evaluate suicide concern?
2. **When** do we evaluate suicide concern?
3. **How** do we assess suicide concern?
4. **How** do we respond after asking?

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



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MY DISCLAIMER

- This work isn't a mathematical formula with a straightforward answer.
- We can't cover every scenario or every question.
- Your professional judgement and school policies/procedures are key.

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TABLE DISCUSSION

What did you notice in that video?

What did you connect with, or question or like?

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



1.

Who needs to know how to ask?

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ANSWER

1. We all do

2. We all need to know our school processes for checking in.

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



2.

When do we need to check concern?

ANSWER

1. When a student is self-harming
2. When a student is expressing extreme hopeless and low mood
3. When a student has hinted at not wanting to be alive
4. When a student reveals very strong interest in/knowledge about suicide

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



3.

How do we ask about suicidal thoughts?

ANSWER

1. Calmly
2. Create safe/supportive conversation
3. Without criticism or judgement
4. Without reassurance of confidentiality
5. With a clear question that requires student to answer

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



3.

How do we ask about suicidal thoughts?

“Sometimes when people are feeling this overwhelmed, they think about suicide. Has that been happening for you?”

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EVALUATING SUICIDE CONCERN



4.

How do we respond after asking about suicidal thoughts?

When student says NO

- “Okay. Thank you for telling me. We’re still going to get you some help, but it’s good to know you’re not in immediate danger right now.”
- We carry out normal pastoral care, and we still respond to the concern that has been raised
- If you’ve been concerned enough to ask the question, parents should be told

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



4.
How do we respond after asking about suicidal thoughts?

When student says YES

- "Thank you for telling me. I'm really glad you told me."
- "I can't keep this just between us because I'm concerned about your safety. But I'll only involve the people who need to know."
- "Are you thinking about killing yourself right now?". This question helps you understand urgency and supervision need.
- Stay with them and organise help. Take immediate action to inform parents, handover care so they can get an assessment.

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



4.
How do we respond after asking about suicidal thoughts?

When student says NO but you don't buy it

- Take the safe approach and treat it as if it was a "YES"

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



5.
What we don't do when asking about suicidal thoughts?

- Lecture, judge or criticise
- Diagnose
- Minimise/trivialise
- Try to "fix"
- Risk Assessment

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CHECKING SUICIDE CONCERN



So where does that leave us?

ANSWER
NOT in a position to comment on risk of suicidality in anything but general terms.

So, we adopt caution and ESCALATE.

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T – Thank them for talking with you
Thank you for telling me. I'm really glad you told me

A – Ask about their immediate safety
Are you thinking about killing yourself right now?

S – Stay with them
Don't leave the student alone or send them off to find help themselves.

C – Connect them with help
"Let's talk to someone who can help"

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IN PAIRS OR TRIPLETS

I'd like us all to have a chance to ask the suicide checking-in question.

This role play only takes 60 seconds

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Building safety plans that keep students safe



In table groups, share your experiences in using safety plans for at-risk students.

What things make them helpful?

What troubles have you encountered with them?

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Building safety plans that keep students safe



- Safety plans that don't work**
- 1. Plans that focus on school's legal compliance, not on keeping the student safe.
 - 2. Plans that adults (parents, teachers, counsellors) develop without adequate involvement/buy-in from the student.
 - 3. Plans that adopting an 'off the shelf' approach, as if one size fits all.
 - 4. Plans that are poorly communication such that key staff don't know about the plan and/or their role.
 - 5. Plans that are too long, or too short to be beneficial.
 - 6. Plans that take a 'one and done' approach

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Building safety plans that keep students safe



A safety plan operates as a de-facto prefrontal cortex when the limbic system is powerful

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Building safety plans that keep students safe



- Maximising safety plan effectiveness**
- 1. Based on a clear understanding of the risks that threaten safety
 - 2. Anticipate scenarios that may threaten safety
 - 3. Articulate student's internal signs of rising distress
 - 4. Articulate signs of rising distress adults may see
 - 5. Remind student of emotion regulation strategies they *know how to use* to reduce distress
 - 6. Instruct the student on *when, who, where and how* they get adult supervision while distressed

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When I notice I'm struggling, I can:

☐ _____

The warning signs I should look out for are:

☐ _____

Things I can do to help myself:

☐ _____

A safe place I can go at school:

☐ _____

An adult I can tell:

☐ _____

What I can say:

"I'm not feeling safe right now. Can you help me?"

If things get worse, the next person I should contact is:

☐ _____

The adults supporting me will:

☐ _____

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WHO'S JOB IS IT? KEY POINTS

- There aren't really any right or wrong answers, but . . .
- All stakeholders must be clear about whose job is whose
 - consider how role descriptions, staff meetings reinforce this
 - When is collaboration between members/teams required
- Whoever's job it is, those staff members need to be adequately equipped for what is expected of them
 - Time
 - Training
 - Resources

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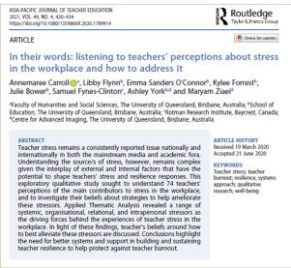
86



87

Comments relating to managing the demands and expectations of parents (24%) were almost as frequently cited as those regarding managing student misbehaviour and engagement (28%). The "increased parental expectations" that added to teachers' stress included excessive communication with parents, and negotiation of their individual expectations in relation to their child's performance and experience within the school environment. As one teacher states, "over the top expectations from . . . parents as to what is actually possible to achieve in four terms".

(p. 426-427)



88

Teachers also reported that a change in parents' perspectives of and attitudes towards teachers would be helpful in addressing stress, with teachers often speaking from a position of felt subservience.

(p. 429)



Private school teachers identified parents, as opposed to pupils, as 'more of an issue at [private] schools. Interviewees from different schools considered that parents applied 'pressure' and were 'very hands on'. Teachers explained that parents expected high academic outcomes (sometimes regardless of the pupil's interest in academic work), and that they demanded instant replies to emails, meetings at short notice and were inclined to ask for 'investigations' into teachers' conduct if their child was aggrieved by any kind of school sanction.

(p. 213)



Teachers interpreted these 'unpleasant' interactions as a consequence of the 'business client' nature of the relationship which positioned teachers as 'more answerable to the parents' compared to state school teachers who were more accountable to government. Several interviewees made comments of the type that parents were paying 'large sums of money' and thus held high expectations for what one teacher termed the end 'product'.

(p. 213)

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In contrast to this experience, participants from the state sector rarely noted parents as a direct source of stress '.

(p. 213)

THREE CORE ASSUMPTIONS

ONE
Parents are a key part of our community – most are supportive and fabulous

TWO
All parents deserve to be treated with basic human respect and decency.
We don't parent shame

THREE
No matter what I say, no matter what you do, there will always be tricky parents

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My pre-meeting checklist



- Be very clear – for you and for the parents – about the purpose/agenda of your meeting. "Frame" your meeting in a positive and productive context.
- Do your homework – get all your "facts" straight/verify information
- Know and use your school policies
- Be intentional with your meeting invitees. Who needs to be there?
- Be intentional with your venue
- Be intentional with the time
- Consider how the parent may be feeling
- Develop some *preliminary* ideas about your desired outcome
- Tap into your own feelings. What do you need to monitor?

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During the meeting



- The merits of a 'joining' phase?
- (Re)establish the agenda for the meeting
 - Brief statement on the nature of concern that has prompted the meeting
 - The time available / end time
 - We'll let you know what we know, and we're keen to know what you know
 - And then we'll see what solutions we can come up with moving forward

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During the meeting



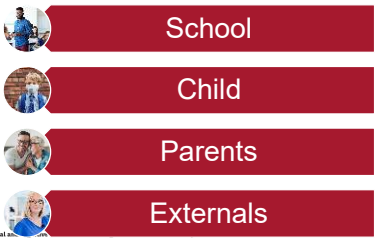
- The merits of a 'joining' phase?
- (Re)establish the agenda for the meeting
- Sharing what you know – factually
- Invite their views and input
- Exploring solutions

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Exploring solutions - Who can do what?



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During the meeting

- The merits of a 'joining' phase?
- (Re)establish the agenda for the meeting
- Sharing what you know – factually
- Invite their views and input
- Exploring solutions
- Dealing with unexpected diversions/new information
- When to next meet and confirm 'homework' for everyone



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How is the meeting's temperature?



Green (0-4)	The productive meeting zone	Make progress on your meeting goals
Orange (5-7)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
Red (8-10)	The febrile zone	Conclude the meeting



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Meeting in the green zone



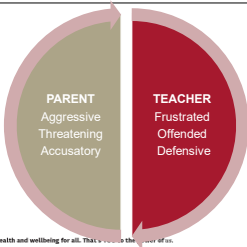
Green (0-4)	The productive meeting zone	Make progress on your meeting goals
• You know how to do this. This isn't our topic of interest today.		



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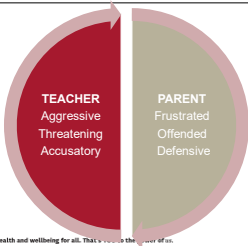
WHAT WE WANT TO AVOID . . .



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WHAT WE WANT TO AVOID . . .



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Meeting in the orange zone



Orange (5-7)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
1. Keep yourself calm ✓ Breathe ✓ Relax your muscles ✓ Mental reminders ("stay calm . . . I am the professional in charge here . . . I don't need to provoke or react to this")		

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Meeting in the orange zone



Orange (6-8)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
2. Keep your tone, language and body language neutral ✓ Tone is quiet and confident but not aggressive or condescending or sarcastic ✓ Keep hand and facial gestures neutral ✓ Rate of speech is slow		

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Meeting in the orange zone



Orange (6-8)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
3. Using validation to lower the temperature. Validation = the process of <u>expressing</u> to the other party that you can <u>understand</u> where they are coming from and <u>why</u> it is important to them. Validation ≠ agreeing with the other party or giving in to the other party.		

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Meeting in the orange zone



Orange (6-8)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
3. Using validation to lower the temperature		
Failure to validate as the emotion rises can come across as - o Dismissive - o Minimising - o Judging - o Denying		

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Meeting in the orange zone



Orange (6-8)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
3. Using validation to lower the temperature		
Examples of validating statement: "I can see that this is very upsetting for you" "I can see how much this matters to you" "I can better understand now how this has been building up for some time" "Let me make sure I understand your perspective"		

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Meeting in the orange zone



Orange (6-8)	The rising temperature zone	Take steps to bring the temperature down
4. Coming back to the shared concern – student wellbeing		
- o As the temperature rises it is easy to get stuck in micro-arguments or minor points of difference. - o As far as possible, seek to come back to the shared concern – student 'wellbeing'		

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How is the meeting's temperature?



Red (8-10)	The febrile zone	Conclude the meeting
Signs your meeting has hit the red zone		
- o Someone has become threatening or abusive - o Someone has become distressed to the point of no longer being able to continue - o You feel you have lost control of the meeting process - o You have concerns for the physical and/or emotional safety of those present		

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After the meeting



- Yep, we put aside some additional **time to debrief** with staff **immediately after the meeting**
- RU OK? Let's check in with each other and ourselves
- What do we need to escalate to our manager?
- Write a (concise) summary to document the meeting
 - Restate reason for meeting
 - Who was present
 - Concise summary of key information shared
 - Concise summary of outcomes – who will do what?
 - Confirm time/date of follow-up meeting, if applicable

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109

After the meeting



- Yep, we put aside some additional time to debrief with staff **immediately after the meeting**
- RU OK? Let's check in with each other and ourselves
- What do we need to escalate to our manager?
- Write a (concise) summary to document the meeting
- File your summary
- Write/send a summary to the parent
 - Restate reason for meeting
 - Who was present
 - Concise summary of key information shared
 - Concise summary of outcomes – who will do what?
 - Confirm time/date of follow-up meeting, if applicable

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A UNIT ON STAFF WELLBEING

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



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- Researchers from Uni of Queensland – 2022
- Surveyed 749 teachers, prior to pandemic

"Results showed over half of the sample reported being very or extremely stressed and were considering leaving the profession, with early career teachers, primary teachers, and teachers working in rural and remote areas reporting the highest stress and burnout levels."

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TEACHER STRESS



- Research out of Monash Uni
- Sample of 2444 Australian primary and secondary teachers

What factors push teachers to leave the profession?
What's **your** guess?

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TEACHER STRESS



What factors push teachers to leave the profession?

1. Workload

"Administrivia, just another data collection, just another form to complete, just another record of incident, just another job on top of an already very demanding workload. I arrive at school at 7:00 and very rarely leave before 5:30 but my work is never finished." (p. 201)

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TEACHER STRESS



What factors push teachers to leave the profession?

2. Health and wellbeing

"I am an extremely hardworking person, but excessive workload, constant emotional and mental fatigue plus a young family at home have all brought me crashing down this year [...]. Even today I am on sick leave because I just can't be f****d. How many people think that of a morning and then end up getting on with it anyway? I couldn't. . ." (p. 202)

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TEACHER STRESS



What factors push teachers to leave the profession?

2. Health and wellbeing

‘Respondents frequently used the terms ‘stress’ and ‘burnout’ as part of their descriptions about why they intended to leave the profession, also referring to concerns about students’ health and wellbeing as an additional pressure. One respondent exemplified this theme when they said ‘[...] students’ mental health and wellbeing adds to our concerns and sleepless nights. We worry about our young people’” (p. 202)

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TEACHER STRESS



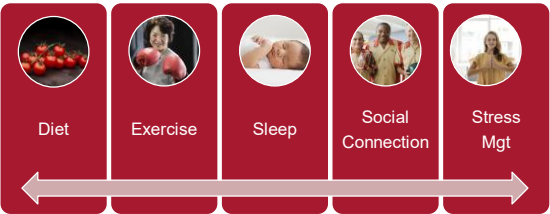
What factors push teachers to leave the profession?

3. Status of the profession

“Having been both a classroom teacher and in leadership [...] struggling with parents who immediately assume that teachers are always in the wrong. The public perception of teaching is often extremely negative and the media portrayal of teachers and teaching as a profession, often leaves me feeling quite despondent about my chosen career..” (p. 204)

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Pillars of wellbeing



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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



- Do you see yourself as a leader of people?**
- Middle and senior managers have some control over the work expectations, loads and routines of those on their team.
 - Who’s work can you have some influence over?

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What does **burnout** look like in teachers?



Emotional exhaustion	• Drained before the day starts • Overwhelmed by ordinary tasks • Reduced patience with students
Depersonalisation/ Cynicism	• Becoming cynical • Feeling detached from your students • Withdrawing – from students and colleagues
Reduced personal accomplishment	• Feeling ineffective • Reduced confidence • Feeling nothing you do helps

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THE COPENHAGEN BURNOUT INVENTORY

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



There is a place for the individual team member practicing self care (yoga, sleep hygiene, relaxation exercises etc), but . . .

1. The research that shows this is helpful is based on very intensive intervention programs carried out over many weeks in the teachers' own time (see Beames et al 2022 Black Dog Institute study), and . . .
2. There's not much use doing individual stress interventions if you are going back into the same work environment that is leading to the stress.

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Q: So what's the alternative?

A: Viewing burnout as primarily an organisational/work-design problem, not just poor self-care.

Let's look at actions middle and senior leaders can take.

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Reduce demands (stop, simplify, postpone or remove) rather than just expect teacher to step up.

- ✓ Audit/eliminate meetings
- ✓ Simplify documentation
- ✓ Stop low-value initiatives
- ✓ Provide common resources rather than reinventing
- ✓ Each new initiative = subtracting an existing one
- ✓ Stagger assessment and reporting demands

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Give teachers more control over how they work. More control > less burnout:

- ✓ Which professional learning they choose
- ✓ How teams distribute work
- ✓ When they complete some admin tasks

Leaders who constantly check, correct and direct can inadvertently add to stress.

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Protect the things that make teaching great

- ✓ Meaningful relationships with students
- ✓ Collegiality and collaboration
- ✓ Recognition of good work
- ✓ Opportunities to use expertise
- ✓ A sense their work matters

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Manage difficult student behaviour

- ✓ Clear and effective behaviour management policies
- ✓ Consistent consequences
- ✓ Support in face of behavioural escalation
- ✓ Case management of challenging students
- ✓ Coaching around challenging behaviours

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Monitor your own leadership style/team culture. Are you . . .

- ✓ Unpredictable?
 - ✓ Critical?
 - ✓ Unavailable?
 - ✓ Micromanaging?
 - ✓ Dismissive?
 - ✓ Communicating outside work hours?
- Leaders can give permission to NOT do something

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



Intervene early with individual teachers.

- ✓ "I've noticed you're looking tired"
- ✓ "What's taking the most out of you at the moment?"
- ✓ "What can we remove, reduce or redistribute?"
- ✓ "Is there anything you need from me or the school?"
- ✓ Agree to some changes and review.

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Caring for your stressed or burnt out team member



The Employee Assistance Program

- School leaders need to be well versed in how it works.
- It should be of some assistance but isn't a stand-alone solution for workplace demands.

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1. Reduce demands (stop, simplify, postpone or remove) rather than just expect teacher to step up.
2. Give teachers more control over how they work. More control > less burnout.
3. Protect the things that make teaching great
4. Manage difficult student behaviour
5. Monitor your own leadership style/team culture
6. Intervene early with individual teachers.

IN TABLES

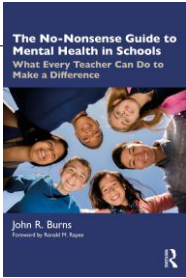
Think through these six possible approaches to managing work environments.

- Which ones do you think have more value – which ones less value?
- What options do you have to make a difference for those who work with you?

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Advancing social, emotional and cognitive health and wellbeing for all. That's YOU to the power of us.



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TASC 12 August 2026



I'd really appreciate your feedback on today's workshop

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