




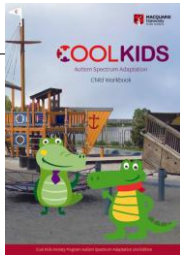
Data-Informed School Counselling: Measure What Matters


JOHN BURNS PHD
ISCN NORTHERN SUBURBS GROUP 14 MAY 2026

(YOU)^{US}
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Might your school be interested in partnering with us at Macquarie Uni on a research project aimed at helping schools be better at early identification of students with mental health risks?
Please contact me:
john.burns@mq.edu.au

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ASSUMPTION 1
YOU WANT TO PROVIDE A GOOD COUNSELLING SERVICE

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ASSUMPTION 2
OUR "COUNSELLING"
IS A **SERVICE**.

Who are we in schools to
serve?



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QUESTION

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A
COUSELLING SERVICE IS
DOING A GOOD JOB?



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Let's think about vision

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WITH A VISION ...	WITHOUT A VISION ...
A clear vision creates purpose and direction — it gives the team a shared sense of meaning, motivation, and what they are working towards.	Without it: teams can become reactive, fatigued, and unclear about their purpose.
A clear vision clarifies priorities and decision-making — it helps determine what matters most, which initiatives align with the service's goals, and where time and resources should be invested.	Without it: teams can become overloaded, distracted by competing demands, and inconsistent in their decisions
A clear vision strengthens teamwork and alignment — it brings staff together around a common goal and shared understanding of the service's role	Without it: teams can become fragmented, with individuals pulling in different directions.
A clear vision improves accountability and evaluation — it provides a benchmark for measuring progress, effectiveness, and whether the service is moving in the right direction.	Without it: it becomes difficult to assess success, identify improvement areas, or demonstrate impact.
A clear vision increases efficiency and impact — it helps the team focus energy on the work that most meaningfully contributes to the service's purpose.	Without it: time and effort can be wasted on low-impact or misaligned activities.

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DOES YOUR COUNSELLING SERVICE (OR WELLBEING SYSTEM) HAVE A VISION?

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Let's think about measurement

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Why would we want to measure?

JB'S GUESS

To understand	How much? How often?	How severe?
To compare	Better or worse? More or less?	
To monitor change	Is it improving? What's it like compared to previously?	
To evaluate and improve	Did it work? Can we do it better?	
To guide decisions	Where should we act? What should we do next?	

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For discussion

WHAT THINGS DO YOU THINK ARE IMPORTANT TO:

- UNDERSTAND,
- COMPARE,
- MONITOR,
- EVALUATE,
- DECIDE . . .

IN YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELLING SERVICE?

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Why would we want to measure?



To understand	What are the main types of problem being referred? How many students utilise the Time Out room?
To compare	How evenly is the case load spread among team members?
To monitor change	Are my clients getting better? Did our anxiety group reduce anxiety symptoms?
To evaluate and improve	Did our bullying intervention work? Has our new triage process reduced wait list times?
To guide decisions	Do we need another counsellor? How do we divide counsellor load between JS and SS

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Did we cover these five?



- Five key aspects
- Student change
 - Satisfaction with service
 - School climate
 - Referral types and details
 - Team case load

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1. DECIDE WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR SERVICE



1. Be guided by your **Vision**
2. **Consult** with your team about what things are genuinely important.
3. Choose only **1, 2 or 3** things so you are not overwhelmed
4. Be **specific** about what you want to know about
5. **Don't collect data** you don't have a plan/reason to collect

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1. DECIDE WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR SERVICE



EXAMPLE 1
We really want to know whether our clients 'change' as a result of meeting with us.

EXAMPLE 2
We are getting a stack of students where bullying is part of their presentation. We want to understand more.

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2. DECIDE THE BEST WAY TO COLLECT DATA



1. Who should we collect data from?
2. Qualitative vs quantitative?
3. Develop our own approach or use a pre-existing idea?
4. What is your level of competence in data collection?
5. How long do we collect data for?
6. Consider sustainability.
7. Consider who you need on board to collect data.



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2. DECIDE THE BEST WAY TO COLLECT DATA



EXAMPLE 2

We are getting a stack of students where bullying is part of their presentation. We want to understand more about peer relationships at school.

- Once a year school climate questionnaire
- Get wellbeing team on board



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2. DECIDE THE BEST WAY TO COLLECT DATA



EXAMPLE 1

We really want to know whether our clients 'change' as a result of meeting with us.

- Collect from clients
- Regular client survey = must be short and manageable
- Devise our own or use what's already available?



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3. GO GET SOME DATA



- The benefits of a good data management system
- The benefits of an online survey subscription
- Stay within your area of competence
- Get others on board if needed
- What confidentiality and privacy considerations?



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3. GO GET SOME DATA



EXAMPLE 1

We really want to know whether our clients 'change' as a result of meeting with us.

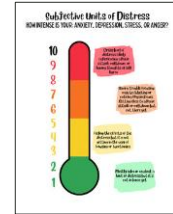
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<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Subjective-Units-of-Distress-SUDs-Teaching-stress-anxiety-anger-10077219>

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



Distress Questionnaire-5 (DQ5)

This scale is designed to assess levels of general psychological distress.

Usage: No permission required - please cite reference.

In the last 30 days	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
My worries overwhelmed me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt hopeless	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I found social settings upsetting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had trouble staying focused on tasks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anxiety or fear interfered with my ability to do the things I needed to do at work or at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



PHQ-9 modified for Adolescents (PHQ-A)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: How often have you been bothered by each of the following conditions during the last 7 days? For each symptom put an "X" in the box that best describes how you have been feeling.

	Not at all	A few days	More than a few days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things?				
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?				
3. Trouble falling asleep, or sleeping too much?				
4. Feeling tired or having no energy?				
5. Trouble concentrating on things that you do at school, at home, or at work?				
6. Thinking about hurting yourself or others?				
7. Thoughts of suicide or death, or worse than death?				
8. Feeling sad or hopeless most of the time?				
9. Trouble at school because of these problems?				

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)

DATE: _____ NAME: _____ SEX: _____

ADDRESS: _____ PHONE: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the following statements and tick the appropriate box for each. Tick the box that best describes the child's behavior over the last 6 months. Tick the box that best describes the child's behavior over the last 6 months.

STATEMENT	1	2	3	4	5
1. Child is happy and content					
2. Child is confident and self-assured					
3. Child is socially competent					
4. Child is academically competent					
5. Child is resilient					

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



MyCORS

WHAT IS THE Child Outcome Rating Scale?

MyCORS is a secure online platform for administering the CORS. It allows you to create accounts for students, teachers, and parents. You can also track scores and generate reports.

[Get MyCORS](#)

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



EXAMPLE 2
We are getting a stack of students where bullying is part of their presentation. We want to understand more about peer relationships at school.

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/8bec2773-52e2-46ca-a2d5-a57fcb8780e8/SchoolClimate-Questionnaire>

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



SCHOOL CLIMATE QUESTIONNAIRE

This sample page questionnaire can be customized to meet your school's needs and objectives. It is designed to assess and monitor school climate progress related to school climate and safety as part of larger school-based initiatives that also include curriculum, learning programs and other work. Tables can be adapted for use with parents.

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1. Students in our school get along well.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Students receive a balanced curriculum with content that is meaningful.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Students in my school know how to report harassment or bullying.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Students in my school receive timely and appropriate support for mental health concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Teachers in my school actively work to create safe and inclusive environments for every student.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Every student in my school has the opportunity to learn and grow.	1	2	3	4	5
7. In my school, teachers, administrators, staff, students and parents share in our vision.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I look forward to coming to school in the morning.	1	2	3	4	5

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School Belonging Scale

Reference:
Merrill, K., & Davis, L. (2017). Initial development and validation of the School Belonging Scale. Child Indicators Research, 10(2), 199-208.

	Always	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
1. I feel safe and secure at school.	1	2	3	4
2. I feel free when I am at school.	1	2	3	4
3. I feel that I can be myself at school.	1	2	3	4
4. I think that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
5. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
6. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
7. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
8. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
9. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
10. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
11. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4
12. I feel that I am not included in what is going on at school.	1	2	3	4

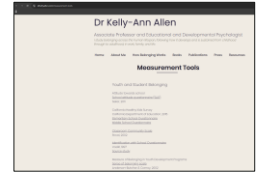
<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/8bec2773-5b9c-46ca-ec0b-e8770d4750a8/School-Belonging-Questionnaire.pdf>

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<https://www.drkellyallen.com/measurement-tools/>

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



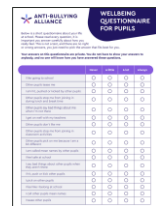
https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/pubs/bullystoppers/Student_Survey-Bullying_at_school.pdf

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3. GO GET SOME DATA



https://www.daf.org.uk/files/default/files/uploads/attachments/WellBeing_Questionnaire.pdf

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5. WHAT DO I/WE NEED TO CHANGE IN RESPONSE TO DATA?



- Based on our data, what do we need to change?
- Have I measured the right thing?
- Develop a strategy to bring about the changes you think are important.
- What if the data says we (our school, our service) is doing a poor job?



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5. WHAT DO I/WE NEED TO CHANGE IN RESPONSE TO DATA?



EXAMPLE 1
We really want to know whether our clients 'change' as a result of meeting with us.



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6. REVIEW DATA AFTER YOU'VE MADE SOME CHANGES



- choose a length of time before you review changes



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SUMMARISING OUR STEPS



1. Decide what is important
2. Determine the best way to collect information
3. Go get some data
4. Analyse: what is your data telling you?
5. Consider how you need to change/improve as a result of the data. And, do it!
6. Go get some more data to review if your change has helped



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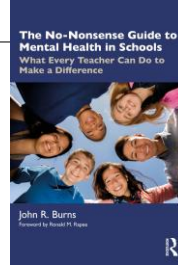
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For discussion

Choose just one of the matters you identified as important earlier. Work your way through what the key steps might be.

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