



BIG TALKS for Little people

HPE MENTAL HEALTH MODULE INTRODUCTION

Big Talks for Little People
Child Mental Health Module

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BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 'Big Talks for Little People' HPE Program!

The 'Big Talks for Little People' HPE Program is a self-sufficient primary school online resource kit which aims to help school students better understand their mental health and enhance their wellbeing. This introduction provides a theoretical background to the program constructs and includes suggested activities for 10 lessons of 35-40 minutes each, incorporating topics on mental health for young children.

Teachers will be able to use a digital platform to run the 10-lesson program in their own classrooms, with the focus being on early intervention and prevention for all children in each class. Lesson progression throughout the HPE program provides clear guidance for teachers to enhance their students' mental health and wellbeing, with room for flexibility and adaptations, dependent on their own individual school and classroom context. Underpinning the 'Big Talks for Little People' HPE child mental health program, this work is designed to build competencies in is 'social and emotional learning' (SEL) theory. SEL theory and engages strongly with the content of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities – Personal and Social Capabilities.

Throughout the HPE program, students will learn to recognise, manage, and regulate emotions and behaviours, fostering not only the wellbeing of individuals, but whole school communities.

CORE HPE PROGRAM FEATURES

The Professional Development PowerPoint, which can be found of the HPE homepage, introduces teachers to the 'Big Talks for Little People' HPE program, and provides information about the program structure and expectations. Teachers are strongly encouraged to complete the Professional Development associated with the program for which they will receive 2 hours of credit toward their Professional Development requirements.

Each of the 10 lessons, which have been mapped to the HPE teaching bands for Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6 (30 in total) contain:

- A flexible and downloadable lessons plan, each with a suggested lesson outline for learning, activities, and materials that are needed for each lesson.
- A short animation, featuring unique and engaging Peeps and Feels characters, that aids in the teaching of the mental health skills and literacies and actively promotes group discussions about SEL topics.
- A PowerPoint, aligned to each of the lessons, that aids in the implementation of each lesson and provide visual stimulation for the duration of each session.
- Printable handout resources to promote student engagement and reinforce learnings.
- Teacher information sheets that provide suggested reading to expand teachers' knowledge around a variety of Social Emotional topics and better inform lesson delivery.

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE 'BIG TALKS FOR LITTLE PEOPLE' PROGRAMS

In 2021, the pilot 'Big Talks for Little People' Schools program was successfully trialled in 5 schools involving 248 primary school students.

Evaluations of the trial demonstrated that the program was effective in improving the well-being of students, enhancing their abilities to recognise and express emotions and reducing anxiety.

There was also a 25% reduction in students reporting being bullied, and interviews with teachers and focus groups with students provided positive endorsement for the program.

Based upon student and teacher feedback, the program was revised to include PowerPoints for each lesson, more teacher information sheets including a topic on 'Interoception' and additional animations on topics such as 'Resilience' and 'Exclusion'.

The overall recommendation of the trial was to upscale the delivery of the program to a larger number of primary schools in 2022, and in 2025 the Schools program was revised and used in public and private schools around Australia.

In 2023, an OSHC centred program was successfully developed and trialled. The OSHC program was revised in 2025, and a new trial has been conducted in a large number of OSHC centres across South Australia.

In 2024 an expanded HPE curriculum-aligned program was successfully developed and evaluated. The HPE program was revised in 2025 and downloaded by approximately 150 primary schools across South Australia.

In 2025, an 8 session Sports program was developed for use in both junior sporting clubs and PE classes and has been successfully trialled with junior sports players and students.

Future developments for the 'Big Talks for Little People' programs will include an Early Learning program for younger children.

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

GENERAL CAPABILITIES IN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The general capabilities encompass knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that will assist students to live and work successfully in the 21st century. They play a significant role in realising the goals set out in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA) 2008 that all young people in Australia should be supported to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

THERE ARE SEVEN GENERAL CAPABILITIES

- Literacy.
- Numeracy.
- Information and communication technology capability.
- Critical and creative thinking.
- Personal and social capability.
- Ethical understanding.
- Inter-cultural understanding.

The *"Big Talks for Little People"* Pack engages strongly with the content of the general capabilities. For example, students in reading and compiling figures about school bullying will be engaging with literacy and numeracy and in developing skills around inclusiveness will be enhancing inter-cultural understanding.

IMPLEMENTING THE BIG TALKS FOR LITTLE PEOPLE PROGRAM

We are grateful to the teachers who have agreed to participate in the trials of this program. For this reason, we will rely on teachers to provide feedback so we can modify the program as needed to ensure it is effective in addressing mental health and improving the well-being of primary school students.

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS OR COLLEGES INVOLVED IN A FORMAL TRIAL OF THE HPE PROGRAM

***Important Note regarding the optional 'Pre' and 'Post' program surveys mentioned in lessons 1 and 10 of the HPE program:**

Your school or college may be asked to participate in a formal trial of the HPE program in conjunction with researchers at Flinders University, or your school may wish to measure the efficacy of the program with students who will be participating in the HPE program.

If your school or college leadership has agreed to participate in a formal trial of the HPE program, students will be asked to complete the optional 'pre' and 'post' surveys, on a voluntary basis, in lesson 1 and again in lesson 10. Students may also be given the opportunity to be interviewed as part of a 'Focus Group' to provide feedback about their experiences with the program. Educators will be given the opportunity to participate in an optional post-program survey and may be given the opportunity to participate in a 'one-on-one' interview to provide feedback about their experiences delivering the program to students.

It is crucial that survey administration and completion is carried out in conditions that will enable honest and confidential answers from students. We ask that teachers carefully follow the instructions provided for survey administration.

A confidential report will be provided to your school or organisation regarding the outcomes of the survey and interview analysis.

Please note – signed permissions from Principals, Educators, Caregivers and Students must be sought to collect any form of data via surveys, 'Focus Group' and/or interviews.

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

If your school or college wishes to participate in the optional surveys and interviews to collect data about your school's progress and experiences with the program, please contact:

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***If your school or college is not involved in a trial, please begin the program at**

'PART 2: INTRODUCE STUDENTS TO THE IDEA OF THE PROGRAM AND THE PEEPS' in lesson 1 and omit the procedure for the post-program surveys at the end of lesson 10.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF SCHOOL BASED PROGRAM

In relation to the conduct of the interventions important attention is needed to matters of implementation and the integrity of the implementation.

THE DOMAINS IMPORTANT FOR PROGRAM INTEGRITY ARE

- Adherence (i.e. fidelity, compliance) – this is the degree to which the core components of a program are delivered as intended, e.g. – the 4 lessons on types of bullying.
- Exposure (i.e. dosage) – this refers to how much of the original program (how many lessons and activities) has been delivered and the quantity of the program to which participants have been exposed.
- Participant responsiveness is associated with the degree to which the program stimulates the interest or holds the attention of participants and the extent to which participants engage with the program.

- Quality of delivery relates to the teachers program delivery skills and how well different program components have been conducted.
- Program differentiation is the extent to which a program's theory and practices can be distinguished from other programs (i.e. program uniqueness) so that there is no contamination from other programs.

In addition to these five domains, Durlak and DuPre (2008) identified three other important aspects of implementation, which are particularly relevant to school-based programs. Specifically, these are:

- Adaptation, which refers to the changes made in the original program during implementation and the extent to which it is modified and adapted.
- Control monitoring, involving a comparison of differences to non-participating schools and their outcomes.
- Program reach, which refers to the proportion of the target audience who have participated and is the rate of involvement and representativeness of program participants.

We will ask teachers to comment of various aspects of this quality assurance in assessing the program.

STUDENT WELLBEING HUB

The 'Student Wellbeing Hub' is a widely recommended website for both Teachers and students, providing extensive resources that support physical, mental and emotional being in schools.

<https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/professional-learning/resilient-and-inclusive-classrooms#/>

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

BIG TALKS FOR LITTLE PEOPLE

Most of the research undertaken of wellbeing in schools has emphasised middle childhood and adolescence. There are challenges concerned with young children's cognitive understanding of wellbeing and mental health given the rapid changes in their social and emotional development.

Typically in the past, research has equated the health and wellbeing of young people with the absence of malfunctioning and disturbance, and one's mental health was considered satisfactory if a mental health disorder was not diagnosed.

A more positive approach involves an assessment of well-being by considering the presence of positive feelings toward one's life and the level of functioning well in life. In the last few decades, a greater level of attention has been given to the wellbeing of children. Terms such as social and emotional wellbeing and student wellbeing are now commonly and widely used. Problems associated with defining wellbeing are no less for children as they are for adults. Fraillon (2004,p.18) concluded that an overarching definition of student wellbeing should be *"the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community"*.

He identified two dimensions of intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. The interpersonal wellbeing relates to students' evaluation of their social circumstances and capacity to function effectively in their school community.

Intrapersonal well-being focused more on students' sense of self and consequent capacity to function in their school community. More recently Noble and colleagues (2008, p.30) defined wellbeing as *"...a sustainable state characterised by predominantly positive feelings and attitude, positive relationships at school, resilience, self-optimisation and a high level of satisfaction with learning experiences"*.

THE RISK OF LABELLING

The program recognises the danger of naming or labeling a student. Unless we stop and think about it, we often don't recognise the labelling we engage in, and how it affects us and others.

In this HPE resource kit, and consistent with systemic thinking, every attempt is made to distance the behaviour from the person, e.g. perhaps talk about the 'behaviour' and not label the individual as a *"lacking in wellbeing"*.

NORMATIVE MISBEHAVIOUR: THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING BEHAVIOUR AMONGST YOUNG CHILDREN

An important caveat in addressing wellbeing amongst young children is the very real risk of unduly labelling children, with all the associated unfortunate consequences. In considering the issue of wellbeing amongst young children, there is no doubt that early childhood is characterised by rapid developmental change (Slee, Campbell & Spears, 2012) and consequently many parents and professionals believe that early social-emotional and behavioural problems are developmentally transient (e.g., the *"terrible twos"*) and likely to diminish as children grow older. However, this view conflicts with a growing body of evidence that for a small group of especially vulnerable children some early-emerging social-emotional and behavioural problems persist (e.g. see review by Briggs-Gowan et al 2006 as reported in Slee, 2017).

Students need to know and understand the language of wellbeing as well as their emotions. They need to have expertise with the words to tell what is happening to them, and a clear understanding of the many forms of wellbeing that exist.

Students require guidance to discuss the issue of wellbeing freely and without fear. They need strategies for overcoming bystander fear and being more supportive of other students. Empathy, kindness and compassion all have a role to play but their development in children needs careful guidance and support from responsible adults. Those who are experiencing problems in wellbeing need help in developing coping strategies that will assist them.

In the program we understand the challenges of defining and measuring well being. We propose a multi-dimensional emotional, social and cognitive perspective and the lessons provided in the module reflect this holistic and systemic thinking.

BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS

STUDENT WELLBEING

Each lesson comprises a significant element of social and emotional learning. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) highlights the role of resilient and inclusive classrooms which provide new opportunities for group membership and creation of effective learning environments. In facilitating inclusion, it is important that all class members as well as their teachers develop the skills to understand one another, and to communicate and work together effectively. Social emotional learning (SEL) is aimed at developing these skills and is generally defined as a process by which individuals learn to understand and manage their own feelings, understand and empathise with the feelings of others, communicate, resolve conflicts effectively, respect others, and develop healthy relationships. These skills are important to all children, both children with special needs and to those without, in terms of overall social development, perceptions of belonging, and promotion of overall mental wellness, as well as mitigation of the development of mental illness.

Five competencies that are generally agreed to be core to Social & Emotional Learning (SEL) are included in the lessons.

The lessons seek to develop in children skills that promote:

- **Self-awareness** – accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self confidence.
- **Self-management** – regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; goals; expressing emotions appropriately.
- **Social awareness** – being able to take the perspective of and empathise with others; recognising and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognising and using family, school, and community resources; and 'walking in someone else's shoes'.
- **Relationship skills** – establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed; developing and maintaining friendships.
- **Responsible decision making** – making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others and contributing to the wellbeing of one's school and community; making decisions based on what is right and wrong as well as in consideration of others.

The primary school lessons focus on factors which research shows are significantly associated with positive relationships and wellbeing. The topics include friendship, resilience, self-concept, optimism, conflict management and positive relationships.

What should a teacher do if a student seems upset by elements of this topic?

- Follow-up with a one-to-one private conversation with the student, rather than in front of the class.
- Be prepared to offer referrals according to school protocols e.g. see the school Wellbeing Coordinator.
- e.g. Kids helpline – 1800 55 1800 and the 'Bullying No Way' website.
- Offer a buddy to accompany the student if immediate comfort is required.
- Acknowledge that there are sensitive elements to this topic and advise them to talk to a trusted adult as needed.
- Throughout the program students may want to talk about personal situations. It is important that teachers have a list of recommended resources available. e.g. Kids helpline – 1800 55 1800 and Bully No Way website.

<https://bullyingnoway.gov.au>

THE PROGRAM SUMMARY

HPE YEAR 1/2 - TEN PRIMARY SCHOOL LESSONS

The program comprises up to 10 lessons. Teachers should attempt to undertake all 10 lessons, however where there are time constraints, one lesson can be omitted at the teacher's discretion e.g. lesson 10.

LESSON	DESCRIPTION	ANIMATION	LESSON OVERVIEW
1.	Optional Student Pre-Survey and Introduction to the HPE program	Introductory animation	Students are introduced to the Peeps and the Feels. Students recognise emotions, demonstrate ways to manage how emotions are expressed in different situations.
2.	Emotions	Ice Cream	Students develop skills in recognising and identifying different emotions.
3.	Emotions	Ice Cream	Students build upon their self-awareness in recognising and identifying different emotions.
4.	Emotions	Tennis	Students build upon their emotional and relational awareness, and practise skills and strategies on noticing emotions.
5.	Emotions	Tennis	Students will construct strategies on how to manage uncomfortable or strong emotions.
6.	Model Building Mindset	Model-Building	Students reinforce prior learning of emotional and self-awareness, extending to relational awareness and ethical conduct.
7.	Model Building Mindset	Model-Building	Students deepen their understanding of emotional and self-awareness, extending to relational awareness and ethical conduct.
8.	Resilience	Torch	Students reinforce learnings pertaining to emotional regulation and decision making with respect to emotions and feelings.
9.	Resilience	Torch	Students continue to practise their learnings pertaining to emotional regulation and decision making, extending them to how those responses affect others.
10.	Assessment and Conclusion Optional Post-Surveys	Review Torch	Students present and consolidate their learnings.

THE PROGRAM SUMMARY

HPE YEAR 3/4 - TEN PRIMARY SCHOOL LESSONS

The program comprises up to 10 lessons. Teachers should attempt to undertake all 10 lessons, however where there are time constraints, one lesson can be omitted at the teacher's discretion e.g. lesson 10.

LESSON	DESCRIPTION	ANIMATION	LESSON OVERVIEW
1.	Optional Student Pre-Survey and Introduction to the HPE program	Introductory animation	Students are introduced to the Peeps and the Feels. Students discuss the effects that emotions have on the body and the equal importance of all emotions and feelings.
2.	Exclusion and Relationships	Shy Friends	Students develop their sense of relational identity to facilitate their social competencies and self-awareness, particularly regarding friendship.
3.	Exclusion and Relationships	Shy Friends	Students develop their sense of relational identity to facilitate their social competencies and self-awareness, learning the concepts of friendships, and what it means to be a good friend.
4.	Self-Concept	Diving Board	Students further their self-awareness of identity and experience incorporating the notion of self-concept.
5.	Self-Concept	Diving Board	Students further their self-awareness and self-concept through understanding their feelings, why they experience them, and how they can manage challenging feelings.
6.	Conflict Management	Bean Bag Toss	Students explore conflict, conflict management, and conflict resolution.
7.	Conflict Management	Bean Bag Toss	Students extend their awareness of conflict resolution and their approach to conflict management. Students will identify motivational responses to conflict in themselves and others.
8.	Exclusion and Bullying	Handball	Students extend their prior knowledge of relationships, conflict and exclusion and begin to develop values, defined by their self-concept to address bullying and influential behaviour.
9.	Exclusion and Bullying	Handball	Students extend their prior knowledge of relationships, conflict and exclusion defined by their self-concept to recognise bullying behaviours and address bullying.
10.	Assessment and Conclusion Optional Post-Surveys	Review Handball	Students demonstrate, present and consolidate their learnings.

THE PROGRAM SUMMARY

HPE YEAR 5/6 - TEN PRIMARY SCHOOL LESSONS

The program comprises up to 10 lessons. Teachers should attempt to undertake all 10 lessons, however where there are time constraints, one lesson can be omitted at the teacher's discretion e.g. lesson 10.

LESSON	DESCRIPTION	ANIMATION	LESSON OVERVIEW
1.	Optional Student Pre-Survey and Introduction to the HPE program	Introductory animation	Students are introduced to the Peeps and the Feels. Students identify and analyse different emotions and feelings.
2.	Emotions	Lighthouse	Students will begin to explore the value of social connections outside of an increasingly 'online world', while developing strategies to manage emotions in online conflicts.
3.	Emotions	Lighthouse	Students will begin to explore the value of social connections outside of an increasingly 'online world', build their concept of what 'health' entails and explore the importance of social connection.
4.	Resilience	Ball Throw	Students will further develop skills in emotional awareness and regulation, to practise demonstrating empathy and relational awareness, and develop resilience.
5.	Resilience	Ball Throw	Students develop a further awareness of identity and experience into the notion of self-concept, particularly to build resilience.
6.	Self-Concept	Under a Cloud	Student will extend their learnings and relational and social awareness, to explore and understand the values of empathy.
7.	Self-Concept	Under a Cloud	Students will develop and understanding of the importance of seeking help when experiencing strong emotions or feeling sad.
8.	Conflict management	Three Steps	Students will engage with strategies to identify, respond to, and protect themselves from online-bullying.
9.	Conflict management	Three Steps	Students will continue to build strategies to identify, respond to, and protect themselves from online-bullying. Students explore conflict, conflict-management and conflict resolution in online and off-line contexts.
10.	Assessment and Conclusion Optional Post-Surveys	Review Three Steps	Students demonstrate, present and consolidate their learnings.

THE PROGRAM SUMMARY

EVERY LESSON

Remind students that they will be talking about sensitive topics in these classes and the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

PROTECTIVE INTERRUPTING

Protective interrupting is a teaching strategy designed to protect:

- The person telling a personal story from disclosing in the public arena, or from damaging their reputation.
- Those who the story is told about; they have a right to privacy.
- The class members: from distress at hearing a disclosure, or from covert pressure to be engaged in social activities or “*high status*” risky behaviours.
- The teacher from sidetracking off the discussion activity, or from allegations that the course is an arena for gossip or intrusion upon the privacy of others.

CLASSROOM RULES

Have students create classroom rules. They should include:

- No put-downs.
- Have this as a rule for every class. Stop the class when you hear infringements on this rule. Ignoring breaches can be interpreted as condoning the action.
- Respect each other’s point of view, even if it is different from yours.
- Have students understand that it is OK to be different.

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AUSTRALIAN WEBSITES

Brain Basics: Anxiety for Kids: with Lee Constable

<https://youtu.be/eD1wliuHxHI?si=dakE3wl08Bag7nx5>

Brain Basics: Anxiety for Kids (Part 3) : The fight, flight and freeze responses.

<https://youtu.be/8do0Jiscgsk?si=zi5Uwl-rNvq74M2t>

Brain Basics: Anxiety for Kids (Part 4) :

Coping Strategies

<https://youtu.be/PsK3HejhOwc?si=hxvQwtsibeRNcrkY>

Bullying No Way

<https://bullyingnoway.gov.au>

Bullying No Way - Connections - Primary Schools

https://youtu.be/3gK1BsKarek?si=hioAhlaF_QedHz6

Balancing your time online | eSafety Commissioner

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/balancing-your-time-online>

Kids helpline - 1800 55 1800

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

Mr. Brooks Reads - The Color Monster - Read Aloud by Mr. Joshua Brooks. "The Color Monster" by Anna Llenas (Narrated by Mr. Joshua Brooks)

<https://youtu.be/W6wlEp-M4tg?si=PElHyCpl5Mw9vgjk>

National Kidney Foundation

Social Determinants of Health and Chronic Kidney Disease | National Kidney Foundation

<https://www.kidney.org/kidney-topics/social-determinants-health-and-chronic-kidney-disease>

Online Safety

Online safety | eSafety Commissioner

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

The Student Wellbeing Hub

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

Whole Kids - Wise Mind

<https://youtu.be/QHha2e9b9UA?si=KnrhKKh2J8V3tPaA>

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