

KidsMatter and Smiling Mind

KidsMatter and Smiling Mind share the goal of promoting children’s mental health and wellbeing in schools. Smiling Mind is a free program that provides resources to support the development of mindfulness and meditation skills. These skills help to manage stress, increase awareness of emotions, improve attention and focus, and can prevent difficulties from getting worse. The Smiling Mind website (www.smilingmind.com.au) and smartphone App provide information about mindfulness and action-based tools to guide children (starting from seven years) and adults through Mindfulness Meditation practices. They also offer mindfulness programs for schools, including free resources and tools to teach mindfulness to students. Early childhood educators may find the resources useful for their own purposes or to provide information to parents.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a state of being fully awake to life – being aware and undistracted in the present moment and observing life as it unfolds without analysis and judgment. It is about focusing attention on the present, rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Mindfulness Meditation is a clinically proven tool to support wellbeing and mental health. It involves setting aside time in a quiet space to focus on the present moment and what’s happening internally and externally. Practising Mindfulness Meditation helps to develop the state of mindfulness that allows us to reduce stress and experience life more fully.



How can Mindfulness Meditation benefit student wellbeing and learning?

International literature and clinical trials reveal that mindfulness can help reduce and prevent depression in adolescents, specifically within school settings. What’s more, mindfulness has the two-fold affect of supporting academic pursuits and is demonstrated to aid learning, memory processing and emotion regulation.

In addition, Mindfulness Meditation has been shown to:

- reduce stress
- increase resilience
- increase positive emotions
- boost self-esteem
- improve attention and focus.

How can Smiling Mind support your school to address the KidsMatter Component Target Areas?

During the implementation of KidsMatter, schools make decisions about their goals, strategies and outcomes under each of the four KidsMatter components. How your school implements KidsMatter will depend on the needs of your school community. The Smiling Mind program helps to support children's mental health at school and has been designed to complement existing mental health and wellbeing programs in a variety of ways.

Smiling Mind has developed a free Education Program which includes Mindfulness Meditation sessions for individuals and groups of students. The program can be facilitated by teachers, educators and other wellbeing staff. Smiling Mind also offers Adult Programs that could be used by school staff and families in your community.

Universities across the world have investigated the positive impacts of Mindfulness Meditation. Smiling Mind has used these published techniques and adapted them to provide free, online preventative mental health tools.

KidsMatter addresses children's mental health and wellbeing by looking at four key areas known as components. Each KidsMatter Primary school works on the four components and the Smiling Mind smartphone App and Education Program can be used across all components.

"I believe mindfulness offers the potential to transform education so that we are truly educating the whole person."

Dr Shauna Shapiro, PhD, Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology, Santa Clara University



Component 1: Positive school community

Component 1 aims to increase awareness of mental health and wellbeing in school communities. It also focuses on developing respectful relationships and a sense of belonging and inclusion within the school community.

The Smiling Mind resources can help your school to address **Component 1 Target Area 2: Respectful relationships, belonging and inclusion**.

This Target Area encourages school leadership and staff to create opportunities for students, staff, families and the wider community to be involved in a range of school activities and contribute to school planning.

You may meet aspects of Target Area 2 by:

- providing your school community with information about mindfulness and the Smiling Mind resources
- running the Smiling Mind Education Program in your school which involves students, staff and families
- finding out if any members of your school community are familiar with mindfulness techniques
- inviting members of your school community who are familiar with mindfulness techniques or a health and community professional to run a meditation session for staff and families
- facilitating a mindfulness group and inviting everyone in your school community.

Component 2: Social and emotional learning for students

Component 2 focuses on supporting the development of social and emotional skills for all students. It promotes four core social and emotional competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. KidsMatter schools incorporate these competencies into their curriculum and give students an opportunity to practise and transfer these skills.

The Smiling Mind resources can help your school to address **Component 2 Target Area 1: Effective social and emotional learning curriculum for all students.**

Social and emotional curriculum:

- covers the core social and emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making)
- has research evidence of effectiveness or is underpinned by a sound theoretical framework
- is taught effectively, formally and regularly in a co-ordinated and supported way throughout the school.

You may meet aspects of Target Area 1 by:

- having information about Mindfulness Meditation that can be given to students and families

- providing staff with the Smiling Mind resources to develop skills in facilitating Mindfulness Meditation
- offering resources such as the Smiling Mind Program to teach mindfulness as part of your social and emotional curriculum through individual or group sessions
- demonstrating how mindfulness increases self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making
- giving students the opportunity to learn mindfulness practices that can be shared with families and practised at home.

You may integrate mindfulness into your school community by:

- encouraging students to demonstrate situations when they feel mindfulness practices would be helpful
- encouraging students to use the Smiling Mind website or download the smartphone App to practise mindfulness
- using mindfulness to focus in on a particular skill (eg self-awareness) and providing information to families to support the skill at home
- inviting families to sit in on a classroom mindfulness session.



Reflective questions

How do you see mindfulness being used in your school community?

How might this help achieve your goals of supporting mental health and wellbeing?

How might you measure the impact of mindfulness practices on your school community?

Component 3: Working with parents and carers

Component 3 looks at how schools and families can work together to support children's mental health and wellbeing. This can be achieved through developing collaborative relationships with families, providing parenting support and facilitating support networks for families.

The Smiling Mind resources can help your school to address **Component 3 Target Area 1: Collaborative working relationships with parents and carers** and **Target Area 3: Parent and carer support networks**.

In Target Area 1, this involves school staff implementing strategies to develop collaborative working relationship with parents and carers.

In Target Area 3, this involves the school providing opportunities for parents and carers to connect with each other and develop support networks, and actively seeking to minimise barriers to participation.

You may meet aspects of Target Area 1 and Target Area 3 by:

- sharing experiences of teaching mindfulness in the classroom with families and looking at how it could be practised at home
- collecting the tools and resources to conduct mindfulness training sessions for families.
- creating spaces and opportunities for families to come together and practise mindfulness.



Component 4: Helping children with mental health difficulties

Component 4 focuses on recognising and responding to children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties. It aims to increase awareness of mental health difficulties and how to seek help.

The Smiling Mind resources can help your school to address **Component 4 Target Area 2: Responding to students experiencing mental health difficulties**.

This involves school staff having knowledge and skills for recognising and supporting students experiencing mental health difficulties, including how to access support and make referrals.

The school also works together with families and professionals who are involved in caring for their students' mental health and wellbeing.

You may meet aspects of Target Area 2 by:

- sharing information about Mindfulness Meditation with families and looking at how it supports children and adults who may be experiencing mental health difficulties
- providing students with mindfulness skills to support their ongoing mental health and wellbeing
- supporting children to use Mindfulness Meditation on a needs basis. For example, downtime during class or in a one-on-one setting with a student wellbeing staff member
- encouraging students to practise Mindfulness Meditation outside of school.

Case study: Ferncourt Public School, NSW

Ferncourt Public School teacher Ariana Davis talks about how the KidsMatter Primary school is using the Smiling Mind Education Program to improve students' wellbeing.

How long has your school been involved with KidsMatter Primary?

We began KidsMatter Primary in mid-2012. A few years prior to that, we had integrated a social and emotional learning program called BounceBack into our whole school. We were keen to expand on this curriculum through the provision of other support in the school, particularly where parents were concerned. We viewed KidsMatter Primary as a framework that could assist us in developing these elements across the school community.

When did you begin to use the Smiling Mind Education Program?

Smiling Mind was discovered by one of our KidsMatter Primary Action Team members in a drive to find other programs to support social and emotional learning at a whole-school level. We recognised that despite having a positive response to BounceBack, students needed more tools to assist them with transitions throughout the day and general anxieties. We could see immediately that Smiling Mind not only supported the core values of KidsMatter Primary, but also facilitated a gentle and practical approach to meditation and relaxation. The fact that the program is free and based on extensive research meant that it was easy to promote the Smiling Mind Education Program to the school community and to gain the approval of all stakeholders.

How does the Smiling Mind program look at your school?

Smiling Mind has been fully integrated into daily use across the whole school to support our student welfare program. It sits neatly under the KidsMatter Primary framework which focuses on the mental health and wellbeing of students. The Smiling Mind Education Program provides an excellent vehicle for children to explore the concept of mindfulness through meditation, which ultimately contributes to their social and emotional wellbeing.

The school decided to engage students in Year K-4 by using the 7-11 age bracket of the Smiling Mind program. We utilise both the age 7-11 and 12-15 Smiling Mind programs with our senior students in Year 5-6. We find that using Smiling Mind straight after lunch is effective as children complete the meditation session and are settled and engaged for the next lesson of the day. Staff have also utilised the Smiling Mind App during out-of-school excursions such as school camp in order to calm students down at bedtime.

How has the Smiling Mind program supported the implementation of KidsMatter Primary at your school?

The Smiling Mind program complements the work Ferncourt Public School is doing throughout the implementation of KidsMatter Primary. Giving students the tools of mindfulness is enabling our students to cope better with day-to-day issues and is assisting in the development of resilient children.

What students and teachers say about Smiling Mind

"It doesn't stop you thinking about yesterday but it makes you think about what's happening now." Archer, age 6

"Meditation helps me clear out my mind and lets new stuff come in." Taylor, age 6

"Mediation makes me feel calm and have a peaceful day." Madeleine, age 6

"Most students will find it as a means to simply relax after a busy time on the playground; however, you also find that there are students who will take on board specific outcomes from each session and will apply them elsewhere in their lives." Viktoria Sen, Year 5/6 teacher