# Supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing

## Fact sheet – Mental health

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises their own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to their community (World Health Organization, 2014).

Mental health is affected by a combination of biological, psychological, economic and social factors. Children and young people have strengths and vulnerabilities in their mental health capabilities, which can change over time in response to life events. Factors such as social disadvantage or exclusion, disability, isolation, neglect, child abuse or exposure to violence can significantly increase the risk of mental health problems and disengagement from school. Protective factors such as a supportive family, school connectedness, good social and emotional skills, and positive environmental factors protect or reduce the likelihood of mental health issues.

Mental health difficulties encompass a range of problems that impact on a child or young person’s social, emotional or cognitive capabilities. Generally these difficulties arise in response to a stressor or a significant life event in the young person’s life. If the child or young person has a number of protective factors present in their life, they will likely bounce back and the issues will eventually resolve. However as the number of risk factors increase and the number of protective factors decrease, the vulnerability of the child or young person increases and the likelihood or risk of emerging mental health issues also increases.

A child or young person may require additional help from a parent, caregiver or mental health service if a decline in the individual’s social, emotional or behavioural functioning:

* persists over time
* is outside expected age-appropriate responses
* prevents a student from learning or participating meaningfully in the school community and
* cannot be accommodated through educational adjustments.

Through their professional roles, principals, teachers, guidance officers, teaching specialists (Advisory Visiting Teachers, regional coaches, behaviour specialists), therapists, Community Education Counsellors (CEC), regional Principal Advisors – Mental Health, youth support coordinators and non-departmental staff based in schools (including youth support coordinators and school-based youth health nurses), support students' mental health and social and emotional wellbeing in a variety of ways.

School participation is an integral component of care-planning for students requiring clinical intervention for their mental health difficulties. Schools support students' mental health and social and emotional wellbeing by working in partnership with parents, clinical care providers and specialist mental health services, to ensure they are supportive and engaging places for all students, staff and school community members.

**References**

World Health Organization 2014, [Mental health: a state of well-being](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/). Viewed 10 August 2018.