

MindMatters Plus TIP SHEET NO.2

CHOOSING SCHOOL BASED MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS



Universal programs include all students in a particular setting or geographical area, for example all students in Year 9. As universal programs are offered to all students, there is the potential for these programs to become part of the school curriculum.

Use: Building Whole School Approach
Audience: Executive Team and Support Teachers
Intent: Promotion/prevention

Advantages

- No concerns about labelling or stigmatisation
- Intervention may act as a protective mechanism to assist students with no current problems to develop skills and build resilience to prevent the onset of problems.
- The inclusion of “well functioning” participants can provide role models for others.
- Recruitment rates are higher than in indicated programs, resulting in higher rates of youth access.
- Ease of organisation: for staffing and timetabling purposes.

Before deciding on a universal program, consider the following:

- Are there likely to be students with serious emotional problems who may require special help with their problems.
- If so, what backup services and procedures for identification, assessment and referral will be available to help these children?
- Is it practical to deliver the program to all of the potential participants?
- If there are disruptive students and / or students with learning difficulties which could limit their ability to benefit from the program, how will these students be managed?

Settings best suited to Universal programs

- Schools with small numbers of students or where there are sufficient staff and resources to run the program well on a large scale and deliver the program to all students in a target group.
- Settings which are receptive to changes and disruptions to timetables and program planning

Disadvantages

- Very time and resource intensive and harder to “sell” to staff and parents.
- Group management issues if participants are unmotivated or feel the program is not relevant to them.
- A program aimed at “well” students may not include the depth of intervention required to assist students already showing signs of a disorder.
- Students with difficulties may not speak out in front of peers for fear of stigmatisation.

Staffing

- Need for adequate in-service courses and training for school teachers to successfully implement the program.
- Depending on the type of program, supervision or debriefing support by School Counsellor or mental health workers may be helpful to assist with management of students with support needs in mental health and wellbeing.
- Staff may not feel trained or interested in running a mental health program



Relevant learning from MindMatters Plus initiative:

“Programs were more effectively completed when school planning ensured:

- Good fit between the programs and school’s needs and capacity
- Best use of available resources including school counsellor/psychologist/nurse/specialist teacher and community professionals”.

Dr. Ann Wignall: Director, Lower North Shore Child and Adolescent Mental Health, North Sydney and Central Coast Area Health Service