



Planning for Wellbeing: mine, yours, ours



In collaboration with



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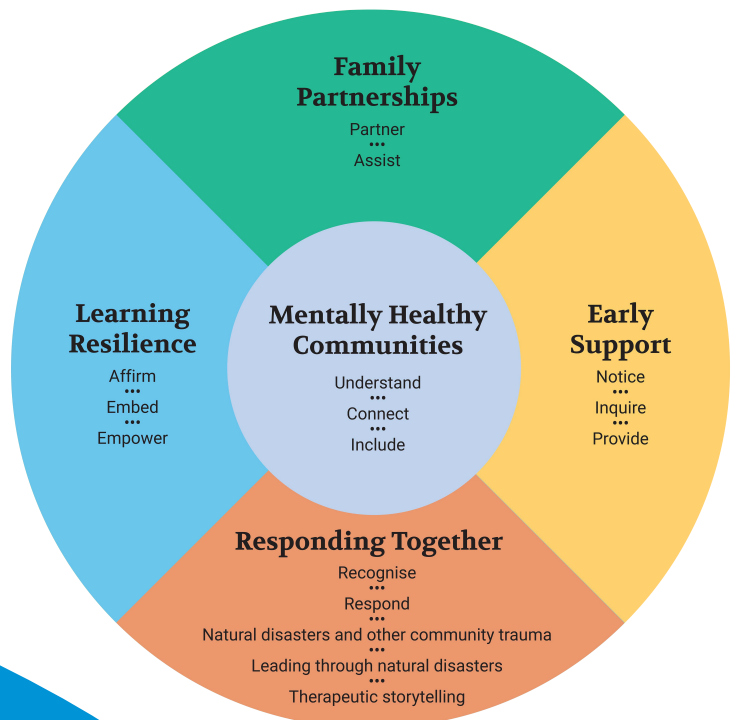


Be You offers a whole learning community approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing in your early learning service or school.

As well as promoting the mental health of children and families, a whole learning community working together can support educators to achieve their best possible mental health and find ways of reducing and responding to stressors for yourself and others.

Read and reflect on the ideas and strategies within this resource with your team.

You can also explore these concepts further next time you check-in with a Be You Consultant. See p. 15 for Be You contact information.



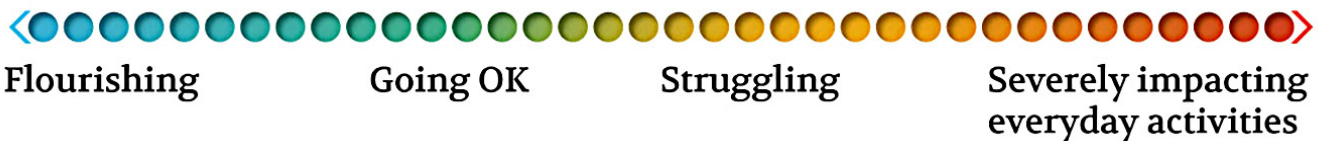
beyou.edu.au

Register with Be You: beyou.edu.au/register



Stress and mental health

Mental health exists on a continuum that ranges from flourishing and going OK through to struggling and having everyday activities severely impacted. Our responses to internal and external stressors can influence fluctuations.



Everyone experiences both positive and negative stress. The behaviours we use to self-regulate and respond to stress are stress behaviours. Stressors from our experiences and environments influence our stress levels. Stressors might be:

- **Biological** – health and environmental factors including noises, crowds, visual stimulation, exercise
- **Emotional** – experiences triggering strong positive (over-excitement) or negative (anger, fear, grief, loss) emotion
- **Cognitive** – factors related to processing certain kinds or amounts of information, and exposure to experiences requiring complex thinking
- **Social** – noticing, identifying and responding to social cues or understanding the effect of our behaviour on others
- **Prosocial** – capacity for coping with other people's stress, behaviours or expectations (From Dr Stuart Shanker, *The Domains of Self-Reg.* Visit at self-reg.ca).

Educators' stress responses

An educator was becoming increasingly concerned and worried about children and educators at the service. Children's attendance had reduced and those who came were navigating significant changes in routine and social interactions. The educator felt restless and reactive, had difficulty concentrating, and began eating more.

Another educator started to withdraw from her professional and social connections with colleagues. On arriving at work, she would do what was required and then leave as soon as possible. The demands placed on her at work and interactions with families had changed. She felt overwhelmed and 'numb'.

Both educators were responding to stressors. Can you identify how? See p. 4.

You can always explore these concepts further next time you check in with a Be You Consultant.

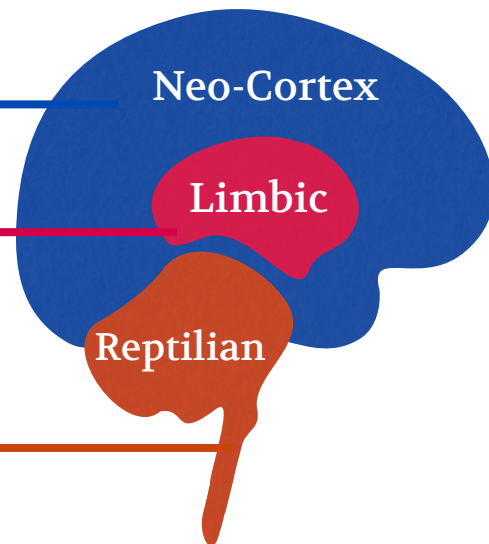
Stress behaviour and the brain

Stress behaviours are attempts to self-regulate and maintain a window of tolerance, or optimal state of self-regulation. We can better understand stress behaviour by considering the function of three parts of the brain.

The **neo-cortex** is the rational part of the brain. It gives us the ability to reason, form thoughts and words, hold specific memories, plan, and solve simple and complex problems.

The **limbic system** is responsible for experiencing and recognising emotion, attachment, love, and social interactions.

The **reptilian brain** (brain stem and cerebellum) supports basic functioning required for survival.



When our brain senses threat, it turns off the rational brain and only uses the areas for emotions and survival. How these parts of the brain experience the world and react to stressors can trigger us to move beyond our window of tolerance and into states of hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal, resulting in flight, fight, or freeze responses.

When experiences and social interactions send messages of safety, belonging, connection and pleasure, we have access to the rational brain. We are functioning within our window of tolerance and using all areas of our brain to regulate and respond to the environment and situation.

There are many ways we can regulate and maintain balance including through mindfulness, movement and breathing, and interactions with others.

Understanding your window of tolerance

Hyper-arousal

We feel: overwhelmed, anxious and out of control.

These reactions just take over – we don't choose to feel like this. Our body wants to fight or run away.

Window of Tolerance

When we are in our window of tolerance, regardless of stress or pressure, we feel we can deal with whatever is happening in our life.

This is the ideal place we want to be.

Hypo-arousal

We feel: numb, frozen and spaced out.

These reactions just take over – we don't choose to feel like this. Our body wants to shut down.



Remember, you can explore these concepts further next time you check-in with a Be You Consultant.

Recognising and reducing stressors

Self-regulation and maintaining an optimal state of arousal supports positive mental health. The Shanker Method® is a five-step model for enhancing self-regulation in children, young people and adults.

These steps and related reflection questions can support us to remain in the window of tolerance and maintain optimal energy levels for each moment.

1. Read the signs of stress and reframe the behaviour

- Which of my behaviours could I reframe as being stress behaviours?

2. Recognise the stressors

- What stressors (biological, emotional, cognitive, social, or prosocial) trigger these stress behaviours?

3. Reduce the stress

- Are there specific circumstances, situations, or experiences I could change that would reduce the influence of any, or all, of these stressors?

4. Reflect: Enhance stress awareness

- In what ways do these stress behaviours affect others and me?
- How frequently do I notice stress behaviours, and in what contexts do they occur?
- What differences do I notice between moments of stress and moments of calm where arousal levels are fit for the situation?

5. Respond: Develop strategies for responding to stress and returning to calm

- What strategies for up-regulating out of hypo-arousal, and down-regulating out of hyper-arousal, can I use to return to my window of tolerance and a state of calm?
- What protective factors will best support my wellbeing? (From The MEHRIT Centre, self-reg.ca/self-reg-101/).

Paying attention to stressors

Identifying ways we can reduce stress is a protective factor for mental health and a self-care strategy. Protective factors can reduce the influence of negative stress and increase your window of tolerance. These might include the following:

Biological: listen to your body and address health and environmental factors through exercise, relaxation, sleep, mindfulness, meditation, breathing techniques, or making changes to your environment.


Emotional: find ways to identify, challenge, and reframe unhelpful thoughts; remember or experience moments of joy, gratitude or hope; and seek support from trusted people.

Cognitive: grow your understanding of mental health; identify the best times and spaces for you to process information, and use them. Understand the signs of when stress or fatigue is having an effect on your thinking.

Social: connect with friends, family, and colleagues; participate in groups or activities; create spaces for solitude to recharge too.

Prosocial: be clear to yourself and others about your time and your priorities; define and establish boundaries for work and relationships; explore strategies to manage difficult conversations; seek to understand the perspectives of others.

Being and feeling connected to others is a protective factor for mental health too. Be You suggests a Stop Reflect Act process for considering how you can support yourself while supporting others.



Be You has a range of Wellbeing Tools for You that offer further information, resources and tools to support practice and planning for wellbeing.

Wellbeing planning for you

Use this to reflect on your stressors and plan for your wellbeing.

STOP

What are my stress behaviours and what ways do these stress behaviours affect others and me?

REFLECT

What stressors (biological, emotional, cognitive, social or prosocial) trigger my stress behaviours?

ACT

What protective factors can best support my wellbeing?

My wellbeing strategies

Biological:

Emotional:

Cognitive:

Social:

Prosocial:

Which Be You resources, tools and events will I use?

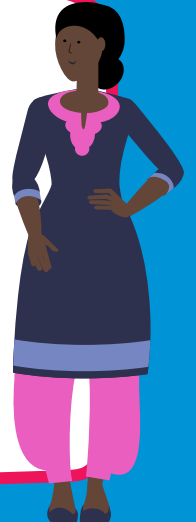
Explore **Be You** and the **Wellbeing Tools for You** at beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you to further understand your own mental health and protective factors for your mental health.

Planning for wellbeing

Fill in and share with your learning community.

How am I today?

Everyone has mental health.



How are you today?

We make time and really listen.



How are we planning for wellbeing?

Our community promotes help-seeking today, tomorrow, always.



Caring about each other: Have a Stop Reflect Act conversation

Regularly asking others how they are going can assist people to feel supported.

Having ways to ask and respond when you are worried about someone is also important.

STOP

Make time to ask the person how they are going. Pause and listen.

REFLECT

If there are concerns: consider timing, space, policies and professional boundaries before acting.

ACT

There are many ways to act, including:

- acknowledging feelings and experiences
- offering practical support
- encouraging self-care
- promoting help-seeking
- following up and following through.

Remember: take a moment to reflect on your self-care

What support services are available in my community?

What further skills, knowledge, support, and confidence do I need to enable conversations about wellbeing?





Supporting wellbeing as a community

Mentally healthy communities support everyone. These communities are welcoming, friendly, and emotionally safe. They are inclusive, focus on connectedness and relationships, prioritise belonging, and have people who recognise and respond when someone needs extra support.

Every day these communities embed practices that support everyone's wellbeing. They:

- have a systematic focus on wellbeing
- build protective factors for mental health
- promote self-care
- encourage help-seeking
- create culture and environments for safe, open conversations about mental health.

When adults model these practices, children learn about caring for self and others too.

Recognising when another adult may need support

Being aware of your own signs of stress and distress can assist in recognising this in others. It is important to know the difference between stress and mental health conditions such as anxiety. Recognising when the support they require moves beyond what the professional boundaries of your role can provide is also vital.

When determining if another adult may need extra support, try considering the pervasiveness, frequency, persistence, and severity of their distress signs. This can assist in recognising where on the mental health continuum someone's mental health could be. They could range from flourishing and going OK, through to struggling and having everyday activities severely impacted. Considering this can help inform your actions, which might include speaking with them and assisting them to seek help.

Connections that support others

Having a conversation, showing your concern and communicating willingness to provide support invites others to seek help when required.

The Stop Reflect Act framework can guide what you do when you or others are worried about someone when they are distressed or share a concern.

STOP

Take a brief moment to pause, listen and learn. Don't launch into speaking and acting before pausing to reflect.

REFLECT

Consider your thoughts, feelings and professional boundaries, as well as everyone's physical and emotional safety, what you know, and what else you might need before deciding how to act.

ACT

Be purposeful and intentional in taking each step. It is important to remember you don't need to completely solve an issue or even have answers to questions immediately; these often come about through a series of simple Stop Reflect Act moments.

Supportive ways to act could include:

- **acknowledging feelings and experiences**
- **offering practical support** within your professional boundaries. Ask if there is anything you can help with
- **encouraging self-care** as a protective factor for mental health, at work and home
- **promoting help-seeking** – explore their options for seeking help. Identify trusted people they can talk to or ways of accessing support services such as Employee Assistance Programs, General Practitioners or helplines
- **follow up and follow through** – make another time to check in with the person, and follow through with any practical support you offered.

After the conversation, take time to notice how you are and give your own feelings some space. Enact your self-care plan if needed.

These conversations help create and maintain a culture of care throughout your learning community.

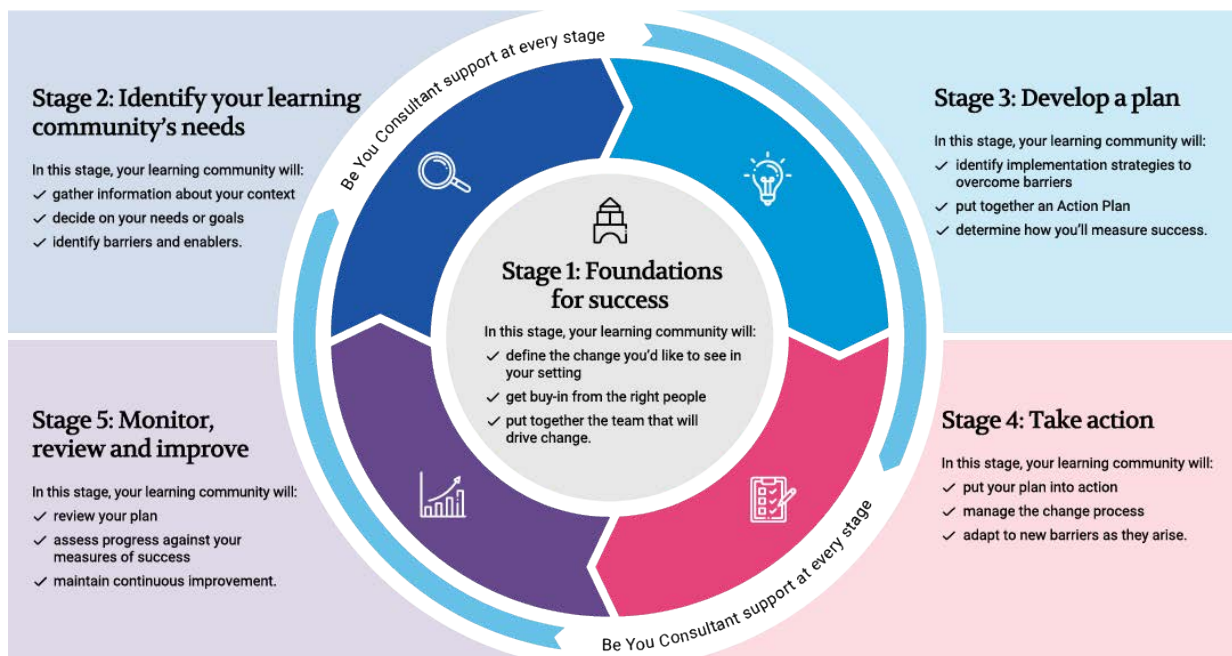




Wellbeing connecting Be You and the National Quality Standard

Individuals can create and influence positive change with the whole learning community. Be You aligns with existing national frameworks and standards, and supports the *National Quality Standard* (NQS) 'Exceeding' themes by embedding practice, critical reflection and meaningful engagement.

Be You supports continuous improvement and links with your Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Services and schools that participate in Be You can use the Be You Implementation Cycle and our tools and resources to guide and strengthen practice across the Quality Areas of the NQS.



Be You tools and resources to consider

Quality Area 1

Professional Learning modules from the Mentally Healthy Communities and Learning Resilience domains

Quality Area 2

Wellbeing Fact Sheets, Mental Health Continuum and BETLS Observation Tool; Early Years Learning Community; try Mindfulness for Everyday Wellbeing and Professional Learning from the Learning Resilience, Responding Together and Early Support domains

Quality Area 3

Try A Connected Place Action Chart, or Early Years Learning Communities; try Nature Pedagogy, Mentally Healthy Learning Communities, and Collaborating for Sustainability

Quality Area 4

Be You News stories; Fact Sheets; events or the Share and Extend Guide

Quality Area 5

Advocating for Children's Rights; Early Years Learning Community; Professional Learning from the Learning Resilience, Early Support, and Mentally Healthy Communities domains; BETLS tool

Quality Area 6

Statement of Commitment; Professional Learning from the Family Partnerships domain; and Be You SURVEYS

Quality Area 7

Implementation and Reflection Tool and create an Implementation Profile using the Implementation and Reflection Tool; National Check-Ins for Consultant-facilitated conversations with other educators; Early Years Learning Communities; try Conversations about quality of practice and continuous improvement; or ask a Be You Consultant about starting your own.

*Registered learning communities can find all these tools on the Be You website.

QA1

Educational program and practice

After a significant drop in the number of attendances, one kindergarten that had engaged with the Mentally Healthy Communities modules decided to prioritise connection and inclusion. The service planned an online learning program for children in their local community that incorporated music, dance and book-sharing. The service drew on the Understand module that identifies community as a protective factor supporting children's resilience.

QA2

Children's health and safety

A school-age care service has been using the Be You Wellbeing Fact Sheets with the Learning Resilience modules. They started celebrating strengths by introducing a Kindness Tree. The children are encouraged to record and then place a kind thought or comment about a peer on the tree for everyone to celebrate. They also introduced yoga, meditation and a wellbeing box filled with toys, objects, activities, and mental health information – such as the Mental Health Continuum – to promote calmness, self-regulation, mental health literacy and help-seeking.

QA3

Physical environment

Be You has online communities focusing on ways the physical environment can support and strengthen mental health. Services have found many ways of creatively embedding learning from discussions into practice. These include establishing wellbeing spaces for children, families and staff that incorporate the natural environment, gardens of scented or edible plants, and opportunities for physical activities.



QA4 Staffing arrangements

Creating a staff mental health and wellbeing policy provides strong foundations for building a mentally healthy community. Many services use Be You tools and resources to develop their policies and procedures. Wellbeing Fact Sheets, Be You News stories, and the recorded Staff Wellbeing webinar can support and inform their development. To facilitate staff collaboration many services use templates and suggestions from the Be You Share and Extend Guide.

QA5 Relationships with children

The Empower module supports educators to reflect on children's rights and agency. One service approached this by dedicating one-on-one time with children to reflect about their wellbeing. Provocations such as drawing your feelings, or photographing enjoyable places and environments provide platforms for children's voices and informs educator pedagogy with a focus on mental health and wellbeing.

QA6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities

Family Partnerships is one of the five domains of the Be You framework. One service acknowledged and celebrated their existing annual park event for welcoming new families. The educators reflected about the diversity of families and its influence on communication, then used the Be You tools to create a Statement of Commitment to develop inclusive communication strategies.

QA7 Governance and leadership

To ensure continuous improvement, some services and schools use the Be You Implementation and Reflection Tool as a weekly self-assessment process. This supports them to reflect and record actions and thoughts for action. Services can consider their policies, practices and procedures and chat to a Be You Consultant to assist in identifying strengths too.

Learn more

The Be You website offers a range of tools and resources, while the Professional Learning offers a flexible framework to develop knowledge and skills about mental health and wellbeing.

To learn more about connecting Be You and the NQS, register your learning community for access to all resources and tools as well as support from a team of Be You Consultants.

Helplines

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

Lifeline: 13 11 14

headspace: 1800 650 890

MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

Our local supports and services

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Be You

Be You: beyou.edu.au

Professional Learning: beyou.edu.au/learn

Resources (Tools and Guides, Fact Sheets, Events): beyou.edu.au/resources

Register with Be You: beyou.edu.au/register

For more information contact us: beyou@earlychildhood.org.au



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