

Supporting Teacher and Staff Wellbeing: Practical Check-In Methods for Leaders

Schools provide a sense of purpose and achievement for leaders, teachers and staff. However, various job-related stressors can increase the risk of mental health issues in Education. School leaders have a duty to ensure the wellbeing of their staff, and conducting mental health check-ins is one proactive approach that can create a supportive and caring work environment.

Wellbeing check-ins align with several of the Guiding Principles of a Well-Led School:

GP 1. Know that healthy, well and engaged staff positively influence student learning

GP 4. Are led by highly skilled, authentic and emotionally intelligent leaders

GP 6. Understand that staff wellbeing is a joint responsibility

GP 9. Carefully consider how to weave staff wellbeing into the fabric of the school

[See all 9 Guiding Principles here](#)

Why Wellbeing Check-ins Matter: The Benefits

Fostering a culture of openness and support:

Regular check-ins show that mental health matters and encourage open discussions. This builds trust and support, enabling staff to seek help without fear.

Early detection of issues:

Regular conversations help identify early signs of stress or mental health struggles. Prompt intervention can provide the necessary support to prevent bigger challenges.

Improving staff engagement and productivity:

When staff feel supported and valued, they are more engaged and productive. Regular check-ins demonstrate a priority on wellbeing, which boosts morale.

Reducing the stigma surrounding mental health: Open discussions about mental health reduce the stigma that often prevents people from seeking help.

Enhancing retention and recruitment:

A workplace culture that prioritises wellbeing attracts and retains staff who value work-life balance and mental health support.



Practical Methods for Checking in with Staff

PLAN REGULAR ONE-ON-ONE CHECK-INS

These individual meetings create space for staff to share concerns, celebrate successes, and discuss any challenges they are facing. Scheduling these regularly (e.g., every 2-4 weeks) helps ensure consistency.

Sample agenda:

- Positive opening (2-3 minutes)
- Review recent accomplishments (5 minutes)
- Discuss current projects/challenges (10 minutes)
- Set goals for the next period (5 minutes)
- Gather feedback/support requests (5 minutes)

Sample questions:

- "What's been your biggest win recently?"
- "What's your top priority right now, and are there any obstacles I can help with?"
- "How can I better support you?"



HAVE A "STOP-REFLECT-ACT" CONVERSATION WITH STAFF

These chats provide a structured process for school leaders or colleagues to check in on someone's wellbeing while ensuring the conversation remains constructive and empathetic.

- **STOP:** Make time to ask the person how they are doing. Pause and listen
- **REFLECT:** Providing emotional support is about being willing to talk about what is going on, how the person/group feels, and their options for support. If there are concerns: consider timing, space, policies, and professional boundaries before acting
- **ACT:** Acknowledge feelings and experiences, offer practical support, encourage self-care and professional support, follow up and through

"FIRESIDE CHATS"

"Fireside" chats are informal, open discussions designed to foster a relaxed, open environment. These gatherings help break down barriers and encourage honest conversations about wellbeing.

- Choose a comfortable location
- Set clear objectives for the chat (e.g., sharing experiences, discussing a specific topic)
- Follow up with a summary or resources afterwards





HOLD A MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID CONVERSATION USING THE ALGEE METHOD

The **ALGEE** method provides a structured approach to having conversations about mental health and offering support when someone may be experiencing a mental health challenge.

A - Approach, Assess, and Assist

Gently approach the person, assess their wellbeing, and offer help. Look for warning signs of distress.

L - Listen Non-Judgmentally

Listen actively and without judgment. Allow them to share their feelings and experiences without interruption.

G - Give Support and Information

Provide reassurance and helpful information. Let them know that mental health challenges are common and treatable.

E - Encourage Professional Help

Suggest seeking professional support, like a counsellor or therapist, if necessary.

E - Encourage Self-Help

Promote self-care and other support strategies, such as exercise, mindfulness, or talking to friends and family.

See page 5 for a structured conversation prompt to have a Mental Health First Aid Conversation

TEAM HUDDLES

A team huddle is a short, informal meeting where staff come together to share updates, align on priorities, and address challenges. These can be held daily, weekly or a few times a term.

Sample Structure:

- Quick individual check-ins (30 seconds per person)
- Celebrate recent wins
- Review top priorities
- Address team-wide challenges or announcements



PULSE SURVEYS

Pulse surveys are brief, frequent surveys designed to gauge staff sentiment. They provide a regular snapshot of staff wellbeing and engagement.

Example Questions:

- On a scale of 1-5, how supported do you feel in your role this week?
- What's one thing that could improve your work experience right now?
- Do you have the resources you need to work efficiently?

IMPORTANT: The power of pulse surveys is in the review and follow through with staff - otherwise they see little value.

WELLBEING CHAMPIONS

Assign staff members as 'Wellbeing Champions' who act as an informal point of contact for colleagues. This peer support can foster a more supportive environment.

How to implement:

- Appoint 1-2 staff as Wellbeing Champions
- Set up protocols to check in informally with staff and report any concerns to leadership.



OPEN-DOOR POLICY

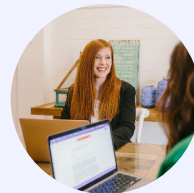
Establish specific times when staff can drop by for informal conversations. This signals to staff that leadership is approachable and that their concerns will be heard.

IMPORTANT: Your staff need to know there is an open door policy in place, how to access you, and for what purpose for it to be effective.

Script for introducing an Open-Door Policy:

"I want to make sure I'm accessible to all of you. Every Tuesday and Thursday from 3-4 PM, my door will be open for anyone who wants to chat, share ideas, or discuss concerns. No appointment necessary."

By implementing these practical ideas, schools can foster more supportive work environment, encourage open dialogue, and prioritise staff wellbeing, leading to improved morale and retention.



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Support Agencies and Organisations

- **Support Act Wellbeing Helpline** - The Helpline is a free, confidential phone counselling service available to anyone anywhere in Australia who works in the arts and culture sector. It can be easily accessed by calling 1800 959 500.
- **Mentally Healthy Workplaces** - Produced by the National Workplace Initiative, the [Mentally Healthy Workplaces digital platform](#) provides simple, consistent, quality-assured advice in one place
- **Black Dog Institute** - The Black Dog Institute [provides workplace resources](#) and training, including a [mental health toolkit for leaders](#), offering a practical guide to break down the stigma of mental illness and foster a work environment that promotes wellbeing.
- **Mental Health First Aid** - Offering training recognised for lessening the impact of mental health problems on productivity, [Mental Health First Aid](#) can provide the foundation for a workplace mental health strategy.
- **Head to Health** - The [Head to Health](#) website can help you find digital mental health services from some of Australia's most trusted mental health organisations.

Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

A pproach the person, assess and assist

The initial task is to approach the person, look out for any crises and assist the person to deal with them:

- Approach the person with your concerns about their wellbeing or ask how they are doing
- Share your observations of their actions or behaviours (free of judgement)
- Find a suitable time and space where you both feel comfortable - Respect the person's privacy and confidentiality
- Look out for any indications the person may be in crisis (suicide, extreme distress, disturbing behaviour)

Example: "I've noticed you've seemed a little down lately, is everything okay? I'm here to listen."

L isten and communicate non-judgementally

Listening to the person is a very important action. When listening, it is important to set aside any judgements made about the person or their situation and avoid expressing those judgements. Most people who are experiencing distressing emotions and thoughts want to be listened to empathetically before being offered options and that may help them.

When listening non-judgementally, adopt certain attitudes and uses verbal and non-verbal listening skills that:

- Allow the listener to really hear and understand what is being said to them, and
- Make it easier for the other person to feel they can talk freely about their problems without being judged.

Example: "That sounds really difficult. I can't imagine how overwhelming that must feel."

G ive support and information

Once a person with a mental health problem has felt listened to, it can be easier to offer support and information. The support to offer at the time includes emotional support, such as empathising with how they feel and giving them hope to feel better or for recovery, and practical help with tasks that may seem overwhelming at the moment.

You can also ask the person if they would like some information about burnout and/or mental health problems.

Example: "It's great that you're talking about this. There are some that might be able to help, would you like me to share those with you?"

E ncourage the person to get appropriate professional help

The support person can also tell a person about any options available to them for help and support. A person with mental health problems will generally have a better recovery with appropriate professional help. However, they may not know about the various options that are available to them, such as medication, counselling or psychological therapy, support for family members, assistance with vocational and educational goals, and assistance with income and accommodation.

Example: "Talking to a counsellor, a psychologist or accessing the Employee Assistance program can be really helpful. I can help you find someone if you're interested."

E ncourage other supports

Encourage the person to use self-help strategies and to seek the support of family, friends and others. Other people who have experienced mental health problems can also provide valuable help in the person's recovery.

Example: "Is there anything you like to do that helps you feel a little better? Even small things like going for a walk or spending time with friends can make a difference."

