GUIDELINE

Positive coping skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scope (Staff):</th>
<th>School Health</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scope (Area):</td>
<td>CACH, WACHS</td>
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Background

Stress is a normal occurrence in every day life. Feelings of stress can be caused by external situations such as exams, or internal thoughts and feelings. All young people are different; some will become highly stressed about situations which do not worry others.

There are a number of developmental and environmental stressors which impact on adolescents, from major life events to daily hassles. It is important to have effective skills to cope with different levels of stress. Individual coping skills moderate the association between life stressors and mental health outcomes. When stress levels become greater than individual coping capacity young people are at risk for maladaptive coping, depression, and self-destructive behaviour.

Young people usually learn coping strategies by watching family, friends and other role models. As they get older, they need to learn ways to deal with new sources of stress such as exams, relationships, working and making ends meet.

An ability to cope more effectively with day to day life events reduces feelings of stress and helplessness and contributes to overall mental health and resilience. It is important, therefore, that young people are taught appropriate and positive coping skills in order to manage life stressors and achieve their potential. Interventions to promote positive coping skills must address the whole person within the context of school, family and community. School based community nurses can provide a unique service in supporting young people to strengthen coping skills while being a positive role model, therefore facilitating future success as productive, healthy adults.

Practice Principles

- Explain that the consultation is confidential and private, with very few exceptions. Discuss conditional confidentiality, and explain that as a health professional, there are times when the law requires you to share certain details. See Confidentiality and Adolescents guideline.
- Encourage and support adolescents to inform their parents or guardian about significant health issues. The support provided should reflect the maturity of the individual, significance of the issue, and the particular circumstances of each case.
- Coping skills are learnt. It is possible to teach young people to take on new skills to increase coping capacity and deal with stress positively.
Positive coping skills

- It is impossible to always prevent things going wrong but it is possible to teach young people skills which will help them cope with life stressors.9
- One of the most important things for healthy coping is a sense of belonging within the school community, and having one or more persons to turn to in times of stress.9
- If appropriate consult with a suitable representative within school services who may be able to assist, for example the school psychologist.

**Brief Interventions for Positive Coping Skills**

Intervention can fall into four categories:

1. Individual work: includes health counselling with the individual
2. Group work: is useful when there are a few young people with similar issues. Group work encourages social skills, active participation and shared problem solving as well as learning. Four participants is the optimum size to manage student learning.
3. Whole class strategies: providing universal learning experiences about positive coping
4. Local partnerships: includes working in conjunction with school services staff such as school psychologist or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services3.

**Establish current coping styles**

- Determine the current coping styles the young person uses when stressed: “Tell me about what kind of things help you feel calm when you are stressed or overwhelmed…”
- Try writing down the “issue”, or stressful event, the “thoughts and feelings” associated with the issues and the “actions”, or what the young person usually does in response to the stressful event
- Once some patterns of coping are established, help the young person understand if their styles are positive or negative, see Appendix One. This can be done by writing a list of pros and cons for the particular action. For example:
  - Issue: Fight with school friend
  - Thoughts: Friend is being unfair and mean
  - Feeling: Angry, disappointed and sad
  - Actions: Smoke cigarettes in park after school on way home
  - Pros: Feel better, time out to think before going home
  - Cons: Smell of smoke on clothes, expense, not healthy
- Help the young person understand if there are any particular events which cause stress and negative coping e.g. relationship issues, exams.

**Care Packs**

- Care Packs are useful for the young person to carry with them, with items which can be used during time of stress. It is important for the young person to be involved in deciding what will go in their Care Pack. Ask the young person what they think would be useful.
  “We are going to put something together for you called a ‘Care Pack’. In this we can put things which might help you when you are stressed or overwhelmed. What kind of things do you think would be helpful?”
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- Some examples of items which are useful for self-regulation are: lollies to chew or suck on, a wheat bag (can be for heating and/or use lavender scent), small fidget toy e.g. squeezy stress ball, relaxing music on i-pod.
- It can be helpful to have cards with a list of quick relaxation tips, key positive thoughts or affirmations on them.

Chill out pass

- The “Chill Out Pass” assists young people to learn to regulate their feelings and gives them permission to take time out if they need it. A teacher can also tell the young person that they need to chill out if it is apparent they are becoming overwhelmed or distressed within the school. The card should be approximately credit card sized. See an example in Appendix Five.
- It may be necessary to establish if the school has a similar system already which a young person may be able to use.
- It is important to establish “rules” about use of chill out pass which are consistent in each classroom. Do this in collaboration with school staff and explain these rules clearly to the young person.
- This strategy can be for targeted young people or a universal strategy that can be available for all school students. It needs to be monitored carefully to make sure it is not misused.
- It should be noted that most young people who have these cards often do not need to use them, as just having the card and knowing they can use it when necessary helps them to feel less anxious or stressed.

Deal with anger

- If anger is not expressed, it can lead to stress. Explain to the young person: “It is OK to get angry and it is healthy to express anger as long as it does not hurt anybody or damage anything.”
- Some healthy ways to deal with anger are: write, paint, stomp your feet, scream into a pillow, go for a run or talk to someone. You may like to give the young person a bean bear to throw against wall/floor.
- Refer to Anger Management guidelines for more information.

Escalation Profiling System

- The Escalation Profiling System should be developed in collaboration with relevant school staff and parents as appropriate.
- It may be based on what the young person says or does in a given situation, what can provoke or escalate behaviour, and what is calming.
- This tool can be especially useful for children with disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- See Appendix Four for an example.

Stages of Change

- The stages of change diagram can be a useful tool to assess how likely a young person is to change their current coping style.
- Appendix Three can be used as information for the nurse to see which stage they are at.
Encourage Learning Opportunities

- Encourage the young person to look for the solution, rather than telling them what to do. This allows them the opportunity to learn.
- Ask the young person what kind of things they have already tried and what has been helpful in the past e.g. “Have you been in this situation before? What happened? How did that work? What thoughts have you had about what to do?”
- Use reflective questioning to promote awareness, make comparisons, consider options and come up with a plan. It may be useful to write down this plan with the young person. See Appendix Two for question styles and examples.

Give Constructive Feedback

- Look for opportunities to provide positive feedback and constructive praise “So you felt really stressed after the maths test, but instead of skipping the next class altogether you used your Chill Out Pass and did some breathing exercises—that’s fantastic!”
- Give approval and encouragement for trying new strategies, even if it does not work first time. “I am so glad you didn’t go out drinking after the fight with your girlfriend; it must have been hard when all your mates wanted you to. So even though your brother didn’t have anything really helpful to say, I still think it’s great that you talked to him, and it sounds like just talking about it made you feel a bit calmer.”
- Show delight in the young person’s learning journey. “It sounds like you have learnt a lot about yourself this week, what makes you feel happy and what really doesn’t.”

Be Aware of Support Networks

Have information on local support networks and groups available, which can be provided to the young person when necessary e.g. friends, family, neighbours, church groups, children’s helpline, relationships Australia, parenting supports.
Positive coping skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related internal policies, procedures and guidelines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For more information on school health promotion guidelines to promote mental health and resilience, refer to the following documents available in the <em>Community Health Policy Procedures and Guidelines Manual:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Promoting Mental Health and Resilience in Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Conducting a Psychosocial Risk Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Identifying Students with Mental Health Problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Mental Health Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Brief Interventions in Social and Emotional Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <em>Working with Youth – A legal resource for community based health workers</em>, Department of Health WA.</td>
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<th>References</th>
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### Useful resources

- [http://www.inyahead.com.au/](http://www.inyahead.com.au/) has publications available on thinking and learning, interpersonal development including circle time, as well as games, posters and stickers
- [http://www.innovativeresources.org/](http://www.innovativeresources.org/) has a range of therapeutic card sets, books and stickers which can be used with children of varying ages and cultures.
- [http://www.feelingfacescards.com/](http://www.feelingfacescards.com/) School nurses and teachers can use the 42 Feeling Faces Cards like emotional flash cards to help individuals identify emotions and share important thoughts about feelings
- Community Mental Health Services: there is a comprehensive range of mental health services. Mental health care is provided for children, adolescents, adults and older people. Health Info: 1300 135 030
- Medicare Better Access Program: GP Mental Health Care Plan. The young person’s GP will assess their mental health, work out what help is needed, set goals and choose the treatment that would be best, depending on each individual situation. Treatment may include seeing a psychiatrist or psychologist, referral to other services, or medication. Significant Medicare rebates apply for these items. Further information: [www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au) Fact sheet for consumers can be found at: [www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/Patients/Factsheets/200709Infoforconsumers_MentalHealth.pdf](http://www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/Patients/Factsheets/200709Infoforconsumers_MentalHealth.pdf)
- [www.kidsmatter.edu.au/](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/) Aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children, reduce mental health problems amongst children, and achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties, and their families. Resources are designed for implementation in Australian primary schools.
- [www.mindmatters.edu.au/](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au/) A resource and professional development program supporting Australian secondary schools in promoting and protecting the mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing of all the members of school communities.
- The Anxiety Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal with Anxiety and Worry. This workbook can show young people how to deal with the day-to-day challenges of anxiety. It helps develop a positive self-image and recognize anxious thoughts. The workbook also includes resources for seeking additional help and support. Can be found at: [http://www.newharbinger.com/bookstore/productdetails.cfm?PC=615](http://www.newharbinger.com/bookstore/productdetails.cfm?PC=615)
- [http://au.reachout.com/](http://au.reachout.com/) A website for young people to improve understanding of mental health issues and wellbeing. Also provides information on services, and opportunities to connect with other young people.
- [www.mhfa.com.au](http://www.mhfa.com.au) Mental Health First Aid is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional treatment is received or until the crisis resolves. Website provides practical strategies and information.
- [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and
related substance misuse disorders in Australia. Website has fact sheets, information on referral and supports.

- **http://www.sane.org** SANE Australia is a national charity working for a better life for people affected by mental illness through campaigns, education and research. Website has fact sheets, , SANE Australia produces a range of publications including factsheets, magazines and DVD’s for people living with a mental illness, carers, professionals and students. They also have ‘Helpline Online’ for more specific information and referral to support agencies (it is not a counselling service). Information and advice is also available by calling the SANE Helpline, 1800 18 SANE (7263) 9-5 weekdays EST. Request free Infopack 24 hours.

- **www.handsonscotland.co.uk** The handsonscotland toolkit is a one-stop shop for practical information and techniques on how to respond helpfully to children and young people’s troubling behaviour, build up their self-esteem and promote their positive mental wellbeing.

- **www.bevaisbett.com** Bev Aisbett has published a range of cartoon books including “Living with It”. This can assist with understanding the nature of anxiety and may help with regaining control and starting recovery.

- **www.Moodgym.anu.edu.au** Moodgym is designed especially for young people, it is an innovative interactive program aimed at preventing and decreasing depressive symptoms. Moodgym teaches the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy. Offers services such as anxiety and depression assessments, relaxation and advice to deal with stress and relationship break-ups.

- **www.justask.org.au** Lifelines just ask is a national mental health information and referral service, specialising in self-help approaches to mental health. Also has available emotional wellbeing toolkits for Aboriginal groups.

- **www.headroom.net.au** This site is dedicated to positive mental health of children, adolescents and the adults in their lives.

- **http://www.childrenandyouth.wa.gov.au/ms/lmsfiles/publication- feeling-winyarn.pdf** The Department for Communities (Office for Youth) has an information brochure called ‘Feeling Winyarn? Get Support’ for young Aboriginal people to help them understand their feelings and let them know what they can do to help themselves and their friends.

- **http://www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth/publications/head2head.cfm** Head2Head magazine is published three times a year and provides an avenue for WA mental health information to all sectors of the community. The magazine is available free of charge.

**Recommended Professional Development**

- It is recommended that Community health nurses in schools work with school administration and student service teams to develop a proactive suicide risk response plan. Community health nurses working in schools complete the Gatekeepers Suicide Prevention training presented by the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention [http://www.mcsp.org.au](http://www.mcsp.org.au).

- The Mental Health First Aid Website has information regarding courses which cover the situations of: panic attacks, acute psychotic behaviour, suicidal behaviour/thoughts and the ongoing mental health issues of depression, anxiety disorder, gradual onset psychosis, substance misuse. Please refer to website for

- **Family Partnerships training:** is based upon an explicit framework that integrates the use of core helping skills and qualities with the processes of a goal orientated approach. Participants are encouraged to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in the processes of engaging and relating to clients and supporting them effectively. These processes are assumed to involve the developments of a genuine and respectful partnership. This training covers:
  - The needs of parents and children
  - The parent-professional relationships
  - The processes of helping
  - The qualities and nature of communication skills needed in the helper to facilitate these processes

For more information discuss with your line manager or refer to website  www.fpta.org.au
### Appendix One: Examples of Positive and Negative Coping Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITIVE COPING</th>
<th>NEGATIVE COPING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confronting the situation, facing up to the problem, and using constructive problem solving</td>
<td>Using evasive and avoidant activities such as daydreaming, sleeping more than usual, electronic games, putting off facing up to the problem, or blaming someone else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being optimistic, positive thinking, trying to keep a sense of humour, thinking positively, and trying to see the good side of the situation.</td>
<td>A sense of pessimism, hopelessness, and a feeling of little control over the situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using support systems: personal, professional or spiritual. It is important to note that online support systems are not a good substitute for real people.</td>
<td>Expressing and releasing emotions by getting angry and letting off steam, or doing something impulsive or risky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to control stress by doing something positive to feel better such as using relaxation techniques or exercising</td>
<td>Trying to control stress by doing something negative to feel better e.g. eating more than usual, alcohol and substance abuse, self-harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking for help from a trusted person when it is needed</td>
<td>Depending on self rather than others by keeping one’s feelings to oneself, working problems out alone and not wanting to “worry” others.</td>
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### Appendix Two: Reflective Questioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AWARENESS</th>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
<th>ALTERNATIVES</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To promote awareness</td>
<td>To make comparisons</td>
<td>To consider options</td>
<td>To make a plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you know about…?</td>
<td>How does that compare with what you did before?</td>
<td>How could you find out about…?</td>
<td>How are you going to put that into place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you currently doing…?</td>
<td>How does that fit in with what your goals are?</td>
<td>What else could you have done to…?</td>
<td>What do you plan to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you tried?</td>
<td>How did you know you needed to change your plan?</td>
<td>What would it take for you to be able to…?</td>
<td>What supports will you need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did that work for you?</td>
<td>What do you think will happen if you…?</td>
<td>What might make it work better next time?</td>
<td>What will you do differently next time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel…?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What other opportunities would be useful?</td>
<td>Where will you get the help you need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What supports were most helpful?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What option will get the best result?</td>
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</table>

**Please note: these questions are a guide only and should be presented in a way which is understood by the young person.**
Appendix Three: The Stages of Change

1. Not interested in changing behaviour/lifestyle
   Young people in this stage do not want to change their behaviour and they will insist that their behaviour is acceptable.

2. Thinking about change
   Young people in this stage are thinking about changing their behaviour; however, they are not ready to commit to making a change. They are apprehensive about changing the behaviour possibly because they have tried in the past and failed.

3. Preparing to change
   These young people are ready to change their behaviour and plan to do so within the next few weeks. These individuals may need assistance with problem solving and social support. Brief interventions are appropriate to use with these individuals. Set a date for change and determine a follow-up plan before the young person leaves you.

4. Making changes
   Young people in this stage are actively changing their behaviours.

5. Maintaining the changes
   Young people in this stage are maintaining the change in their behaviour. This stage can last anywhere from six months until the rest of the young person’s life. Monitor and support the positive changes.

6. Relapse
   Young people in this stage have gone back to the behaviour they were trying to change. Identify where they are in the stages of change and support appropriately.
### Appendix Four: Example of Escalation Profiling System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name:</th>
<th>School:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calm:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide examples of young person’s appearance and actions when calm.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>For example:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Smiles / Responds to staff requests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Physically relaxed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Triggers:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide examples of young person’s triggers for distress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For example:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classmates touching her or her things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Telling her that she has done something wrong, either to do with class work or behaviour.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changes e.g. to timetable or staffing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agitation:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide examples of young person’s appearance and actions when agitated.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>For example:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rubbing her nose.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Twisting hair.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Facial expression changes – looks distant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide some useful strategies of how people in the immediate environment can manage the situation and help the young person cope.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>For example:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Young person to have a break, supervised by Education Support staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Contact staff the young person knows well – Mrs Smith or Mrs Bloggs. Otherwise Education Support administration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use: Redirection, Focus on Positives, Praise and Distraction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. During lunch/recess try distracting the young person by asking questions. e.g. what food have you eaten today? What are you going to do after school today?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If the young person explains that someone has touched her or her things, listen to her concerns and then say: “Thank you for telling me, I will tell Mrs Smith about it”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Acceleration:
This means that there will be a very quick transition to Peak. Provide examples of how staff can recognise the young person is at this point.

**For example:**
- Saying inappropriate things.
- Increased fidgeting and unable to be calmed.

### Strategies:
Provide some useful strategies of how people in the immediate environment can manage the situation and help the young person cope.

**For example:**
- Contact staff the young person knows well – Mrs Smith or Mrs Bloggs.

### Peak:
Provide examples of young person’s appearance and actions when at Peak.

**For example:**
- Throw things such as chair, pencils.
- Screw up front of t-shirt with hands, bite into it.

### Strategies
Provide some useful strategies of how people in the immediate environment can manage the situation and help the young person cope.

**For example:**
- Give young person space; move other students away.

### De-escalation:
Provide examples of young person’s appearance and actions at de-escalation.

**For example:**
- Responds to redirection.
- Education support staff member will assist to re-engage in activity.

### Recovery:
Provide examples of activities the young person may engage in to recover.

**For example:**
- Sitting in a safe place.
- Reading social story.
- Supervised by Education Support Staff
- Ring Mum or Dad
Appendix Five: Chill Out Pass Example (Front and Back)

**SCHOOL NAME**

Chill 4 5

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1. Show this card to your teacher and sit outside the class.
2. You MUST be in sight of the class.
3. If you cannot return to class go to agreed place/person.
4. A teacher can tell you to chill as well.
5. Don’t forget to breathe…

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

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