



NSW

School-Link

Health and Education Working Together

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District

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Recently received service flyers, program promotions and training opportunities.

Circulation

- Principal
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Compiled by:
ISLHD School-Link

Term 2 2021

Welcome !

Welcome to the 21st edition of the ISLHD School-Link Newsletter!

Hoping that everybody has had an opportunity to rest and recharge over the new year break.

This issue focuses on School Refusal, the signs and consequences of school refusal and some suggestions on what may be done to address concerns.

Approximately 1–5% of all school-aged children will demonstrate school refusal behaviour at some point. School refusal is more common between 5–7 years and 12–14 years of age.

About School-Link

Aims of the School-Link Initiative:

- Early identification of mental health issues
- Provide access to evidence-informed mental health programs in schools and TAFEs
- Early-access to specialist mental health services
- Support for the recovery journey

New Resource: A Teachers Guide

The Teacher's Guide provides intervention strategies to support a Primary School student demonstrating behaviours of concern.

Each intervention strategy can easily be applied by a Teacher and require no additional training or extra resources.

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>

ISLHD School-Link Website:

Find resources produced by Illawarra Shoalhaven School-Link and other NSW School-Link teams:

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-illawarra-shoalhaven>

Contact Details

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD)

Child, Adolescent & Youth Mental Health Service (CAYMHS)

1-5 Atchison St, Wollongong NSW 2500,
Tel: (02) 4254 1600

David Bunder: School-Link Coordinator
Mobile: 0427 424 514

Email: david.bunder@health.nsw.gov.au

Johanne Sneddon: School-Link Coordinator
Mobile: 0459 880 578

Email: Johanne.Sneddon@health.nsw.gov.au

School Refusal – Refers to when a child or young person refuses to attend school and/or has problems remaining in class for an entire day. School refusal is anxiety-based and can present as extended or periodic absences from school, missed classes or chronic tardiness. The child or young person may experience intense dread (or anxiety) about school that precipitates pleas for future non-attendance. Parents/carers are aware of school refusal absences and no attempt by the child or young person is made to conceal these absences.

School refusal could be thought of as a symptom, like when a child develops a fever. Investigating to find out the cause early on and then taking appropriate steps is the best way to keep the situation from developing into something more serious.

What does School Refusal look like?

Most children are occasionally reluctant to go to school or have some anxiety about activities like class tests or talking in front of the class. It is normal for children to miss a few days of school during the year, however, school refusal refers to a more persistent problem.

Primary school, school refusal behaviour may be characterised by some of the following:

- tearfulness, tantrums or clinginess upon arriving at school or repeated pleas to go home
- frequent complaints of illness during school such as stomach aches, headaches, dizziness or fatigue
- regular non-attendance after weekends, school holidays, school camps or sports days
- long, unexplained/unjustified absences from school
- frequent lateness to school
- long periods spent out of class in the sick bay or principal's office.

High school students who refuse to go to school may show some of the following behaviours:

- frequent unexplained/unjustified absences (especially on Mondays, after holidays, school camps or sports days)
- frequent lateness
- frequent partial attendance
- absences on significant days (e.g., days on which tests, speeches, or physical education class are scheduled)
- frequent requests to go to the sick bay
- frequent requests to call home or to go home during the day

Strategies to support positive school attendance

- Create a welcoming, engaging environment that helps students feel connected to their school, teachers and peers
- Provide a safe place where students can go when feeling stressed or overwhelmed
- Set up rewards for school attendance
- Establish relationships of respect and being approachable
- Show empathy when students express concerns or experience difficulties
- Provide academic supports for students who refuse school because they have academic difficulties
- Where possible, be flexible in your expectations when students are experiencing difficulties, e.g. extensions for homework, allow them to work in a quiet place rather than the class room and/or provide alternative tasks.

Source and Useful Resource: School-Refusal - Every school day counts

https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/mental-health/School_link_Newsletters/school_booklet_2017_web.pdf

What is school refusal?

School refusal is when a child or young person does not want to go to school, or actually refuses to go to school. School refusal involves a high level of stress and/or anxiety about school attendance.

What are the signs of school refusal?

If your child has missed school 2-3 times over a two week period, especially if related to some of the behaviours described below, your child may be developing a pattern of school refusal:

- Tearfulness before school or repeated pleas to stay home resulting in frequent lateness or absences
- Tantrums, clinginess, dawdling or running away before school or during drop-off
- Frequent complaints of illness before or during school such as stomach aches, headaches, dizziness or fatigue
- Difficulty attending school after weekends, holidays, school camps or sports days
- Long periods spent in sick bay or in principal's office

Source: [https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/mental-health/School link Newsletters/](https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/mental-health/School_link_Newsletters/)

What are the consequences of school refusal?

Long absences mean children and young people miss out on large chunks of the curriculum. School refusal can also create conflict and strained relationships within families through disruptions to their routines. It might even affect income when family members forgo work to stay home with the child or young person.

Children and young people who miss school by refusing to go might also face long-term problems. Research shows school refusal can contribute to mental health issues, emotional and social issues, exiting school early and occupational dysfunction in later life.

Source: <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/development/school-refusal#>

What can be done about school refusal?

You can support your young person by:

- Finding a time when you both seem calm, then ask your young person about their concerns and worries about school. These issues can start to be addressed if they are known. Sometimes it can help to ask direct questions:
 - are you being bullied?
 - are you struggling with the school work?
 - are you having issues with the teachers?
 - is something else bothering you?
- Exploring different ways your young person can try to manage their worries. Focus on their strengths and ways to positively engage in day-to-day activities
- Learning relaxation techniques together, such as breathing exercises, or meditation, to help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety
- Creating a plan together that explores ways to manage the beginning of the school day, school term, school year, social situations or school work, depending on what is troubling your young person
- Speaking to the school and developing a collaborative plan. A clear and well understood plan between a young person, parents or carers and the school can be a useful tool in addressing school refusal
- Considering if your young person may benefit from professional support to assist them with strategies and to better understand the underlying reasons for their school refusal

Source: <https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/school-refusal/>

TEACHER'S GUIDE



Supporting the wellbeing of primary school children

A New Resource for Primary School Teachers

The Teacher's Guide provides intervention strategies to support a Primary School student demonstrating behaviours of concern, which may be affecting their capacity to engage educationally or socially.

Each intervention strategy can easily be applied by a teacher in the classroom or playground, they require no additional training or the purchase of extra resources.

Each intervention strategy has a strong evidence base. Interventions were selected via a comprehensive literature search of health and educational databases.

The Teacher's Guide takes an early intervention approach, applying effective intervention strategies early may prevent a behaviour escalating into something more difficult to manage. If behaviour is not addressed by these interventions, this may indicate that the student requires more specialist support.

Access the Teacher's Guide:
<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>



This free resource is for any school staff working with Primary School students.



Health

Illawarra Shoalhaven
Local Health District

The Teacher's Guide was developed by the
School-Link Initiative of the Illawarra
Shoalhaven Local Health District



Stride Family & Carer Program: Illawarra & Shoalhaven

Stride Family & Carer Program are continuing to support Families and Carers during the current COVID-19 climate.

Referrals

We are currently taking referrals via email and telephone.

For any services wishes to refer a family and/or carer, we require their full name, contact details, and their current suburb of residence. We will endeavour to contact the carer upon receipt of referral made or organise relevant appointment.

We ask that you please ensure the carer and/or family member has given consent for the referral to be made.

Phone: (02) 4229 7254 (Wollongong)

(02) 4422 7641 (Nowra)

Email: familyandcarer@stride.com.au

Individual Support & Carer Appointments

Individual support appointments are still being offered to Illawarra & Shoalhaven carers, these appointments can be facilitated via telephone or online platforms.

We invite any carers seeking individual support appointments to contact their local Stride Family and Carer office or support workers, to organise an appointment.

Wollongong: (02) 4229 7254

Nowra: (02) 4422 7641

Email: familyandcarer@stride.com.au

When
you need
care &
support



STRIDE



Black Box Parenting Group

The Attachment Trauma Treatment (ATT) team at GPH are accepting referrals for our next Black Box Parenting Group

- Suitable for parents of pre- and primary school aged children who have, or are at risk of developing, a mental health issue due to an experience of domestic violence, physical abuse or neglect.
- Developed specifically for caregivers who may be facing challenges in addition to their parenting support needs.
- The focus of the group is about understanding about how the past experiences might affects how they get along as a family today.
- People who attend the group will learn about their relational patterns and develop skills in emotion coaching and limit setting.

Black Box is a 2-hour group that runs for 5 fortnightly sessions on Tuesday mornings.

If you have any questions, please call the GPH Mental Health Access Team on 1800 228 987. You can self-refer or be referred by a service. Alternatively, the family's GP can provide a direct referral by sending a Mental Health Treatment Plan to secure fax: (02) 4226 6489 or via email: info@gph.org.au



**Grand
Pacific
Health**

Did you know that an estimated **1 in 10** children have some form of hearing loss during their school years?

Help get your child ready for big school by testing their hearing with the Sound Scouts app.

Sound Scouts is a free clinically proven hearing check app funded by the Dept of Health. It tests your child's hearing using 3 game-based activities and generates a report with clear next steps if a problem is detected. All you need is a tablet or smartphone and good quality adult headphones.

The Sound Scouts app can be used by any responsible adult.

Download the free Sound Scouts app here
<https://www.soundscouts.com/au/download/>



upcoming sessions

Parents, Carers, and Community Members in Illawarra Shoalhaven are invited to attend a free mental health education session in Term 1.



The sessions aim to:

- Strengthen your understanding of mental health definitions.
- Enhance your conversational approach to mental health and well-being.
- Build skills and strategies to support young people, including transition to work and study.
- Build awareness of local, state and national supports available to young people.
- Increase your knowledge and understanding of the mental health challenges facing young people today.
- Introduce you to some of the skills and strategies to encourage and support help-seeking.



Communicating with my young person

Date: 15/2/2022

Time: 12:00 PM – 1:15 PM AEDT

Location: Online webinar

Registration: <https://bit.ly/3rjr1B3>



Helping my young person during COVID

Date: 23/2/2022

Time: 6:30 PM – 7:45 PM AEDT

Location: Online webinar

Registration: <https://bit.ly/3GEyTn6>



Helping my young person during COVID

Date: 9/3/2022

Time: 6:30 PM – 7:45 PM AEDT

Location: Online webinar

Registration: <https://bit.ly/3l36wzp>



For more information

Contact us at programsupport@headspace.org.au

ON THE COUCH WITH TRANSHUB

**Tuesday 15th Feb
2022**

10am

60 minutes

FREE on Zoom



caddyshack
share affection, not infection

WWW.CADDYSHACKPROJECT.COM

Join Caddyshack Project Health Education Officer Naomi Viret (she/her), who will be chatting with Sophie Keefe (they/them) a Community Health Promotion Officer at ACON in the Trans Health Equity Team. Sophie's role involves working on the peer resilience building workshop program Trans Vitality, adding to resources on Trans Hub or one of ACON's other Trans programs. Outside of work they spend their time playing with a telescope, building a model ship, or going far too deep into Wikipedia.

"REMEMBER THIS,
WHOEVER YOU ARE,
HOWEVER YOU ARE,
YOU ARE EQUALLY VALID,
EQUALLY JUSTIFIED, AND
EQUALLY BEAUTIFUL."

JUNO DAWSON

FREE ON ZOOM

[REGISTER HERE](#)

caddyshack
share affection, not infection

Free webinars in 2022



Health Education Sessions

Because You Care-fostering conversations about sexual & reproductive health

On the Couch with TransHub-February 2022

On the Couch with Liz Dore-May 2022

On the Couch with Kirli Saunders- October 2022

The Nitty Gritty Online: Specialised Reproductive and Sexual Health Training for Youth Workers

Sexual Assault in LGBTQ communities

Sticky Stuff - March 2022

For more information on each course register here:

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/sexual-health-nowra/sexual-health-programs-and-resources>

Find out more at: <https://www.caddyshackproject.com/>

Sonder
Youth

JOIN THE CHANGEMAKERS PROGRAM

**TUESDAYS
TERM 1**

4:00pm - 5:30pm

**Starting 8th Feb
2022**



LEARN LEADERSHIP SKILLS

MAKE POSITIVE CHANGE

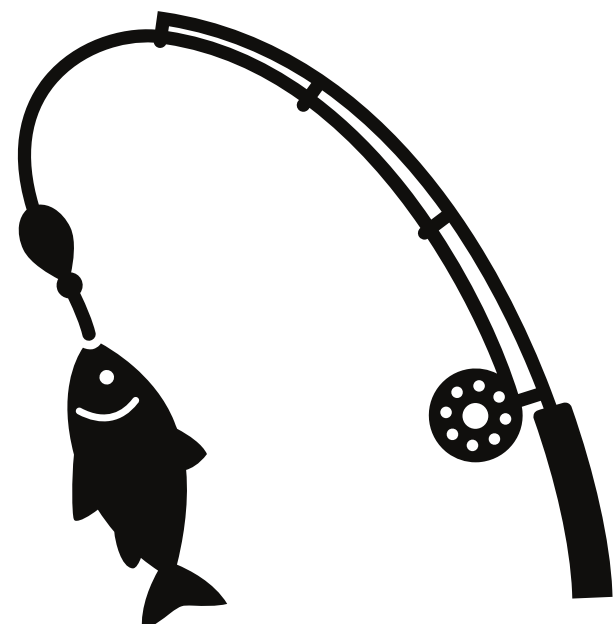
MEET NEW FRIENDS

HAVE FUN!

firefly | Bay & Basin
Bright lives for the community

**Running in St Georges Basin
For young people aged 10 - 14
Limited spaces available**

Please text 0468 600 574 or email cardler@uniting.org to register



FISHFIT

Afterschool learn to fish group for youth. Run in partnership with Jervis Bay Flatty Flickers.

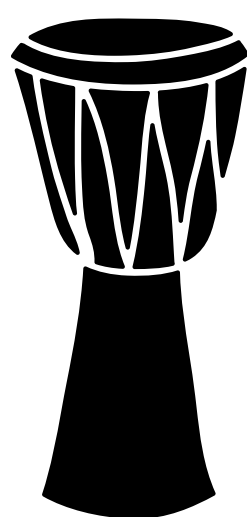
DATE STARTS 9TH FEBRUARY 2022
TIME VARIOUS LOCATIONS
VENUE BAY & BASIN
BOOKING CALL SHAMALA ON 0409 918 820



CHANGE MAKERS PROGRAM

Run by Sonder Youth for young people 10-14 years. Join a team of passionate young people and develop a 'Change Project' to tackle an issue that matter. Learn leadership skills, make a difference, meet new friends and have fun.

DATE STARTS 8TH FEBRUARY 2022
TIME 4.00 - 5.30
VENUE CHURCH HALL, UNITING CHURCH
ST GEORGES BASIN
BOOKING CALL CHRISTINE ON 0401 777 342



DRUMBEAT

A therapeutic drumming group for parents who have children with anxiety. Run in partnership with SSPAN.

DATE STARTS 17H FEBRUARY 2022
TIME 10 - 11.30 AM
VENUE CHURCH HALL, UNITING CHURCH
ST GEORGES BASIN
BOOKING CALL CHRISTINE ON 0401 777 342

Bright ideas live in this community

STRONG CONNECTIONS ARE VITAL FOR STUDENT WELLBEING.



For 50 years, schools have been dedicated to running a Peer Support Program using a proven, evidence informed best practice model. A model where Peer Leaders deliver and discuss social and emotional content with their younger peers. As the name suggests, this methodology provides authentic opportunities to:

- normalise some social and emotional experiences
- form connections across the school
- foster a corporate responsibility for one another.

Our Education Consultants have mapped out some implementation alternatives to help schools achieve these same results while adhering to restrictions impacting physical distancing and mixing of cohorts. Contact the team to find out more about our:

teacher training sessions



extensive library of resources



program adaptations



THE SALVATION ARMY FIRST FLOOR PROGRAM

PROGRAMS - TERM ONE 2022

SEE CHANGE (ONLINE)

Six-session program for families impacted by drug and alcohol use and/or mental health issues of a loved one.

***Wednesdays 10.30am-12.30pm
2nd March - 6th April
Online via ZOOM***

SEE CHANGE

Six-session program for families impacted by drug and alcohol use and/or mental health issues of a loved one.

***Mondays 10.30am-12.30pm
21st February - 28th March
Foundry Family Centre***

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Evidence based 12 session program to help families with a loved one with Borderline Personality Disorder. Information and strategies to manage and cope.

***Wednesdays 6pm-8pm
19th January - 6th April
Online via ZOOM***

RESOLVE

Our 6 session program for children aged 7-10 exploring emotions, identity and social support in a fun and interactive way

***Tuesdays 3.30pm-5.30pm
22nd February - 5th April
Foundry Family Centre***



THE FACTS

- Vapes (e-cigarettes) aren't just air, they contain toxic chemicals that can damage the lungs.
- Kids who vape are more likely to smoke.
- It is illegal for any vape to be sold to teenagers under 18 years of age.
- Vapes that contain nicotine are illegal in Australia.
- Vaping is easy to hide because it doesn't smell like cigarette smoke.

WHY DO KIDS VAPE?

- Vapes come in many different flavours.
- Many vapes do contain nicotine and are addictive.
- They are small and discreet – easy to hide from adults.
- Teens try vaping to fit in with their friends.
- Disposable vapes only cost \$15.

Find out more: www.cancercouncil.com.au
or scan the QR code



KNOW THE FACTS. TALK TO YOUR KIDS.

Noah's Inclusion Services - Term 1 2022 Groups Timetable

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Young Yarns Playgroup 9.30am-12pm 172 Shellharbour Road, Warilla Playgroup for Aboriginal children 0-5 years	Koori Kids Together 9am-1pm Gudgahjhamia and Jervis Bay Public School Identify and support Aboriginal children with additional needs	Koori Kids Together 9am-3pm Gudgahjhamia and Jervis Bay Preschool Identify and support Aboriginal children with additional needs	PlayConnect Playgroup 9.30am-11am Noah's Ulladulla Playgroup for children 0-5 years with Autism or developmental concerns	Little Steps Playgroup 9.30am-11am Sanctuary Point Youth and Community Centre Playgroup for children 0-5 years who don't attend other care
Aboriginal Playgroup 9.30am-12pm Sanctuary Point Youth and Community Centre Playgroup for Aboriginal children 0-5 years	Cullunghutti Aboriginal Playgroup 10am-12pm Holloway Street, South Nowra Playgroup for Aboriginal children 0-5 years	Start Up 9am - 10.30am or 12.30pm-2pm Various locations Developmental Assessment for children 0-5 years	Early Intervention Group 9.30am-11.30am Noah's Nowra Communication, physical and social skills for preschoolers with NDIS Plan	Aboriginal Playgroup Noah's Ulladulla Playgroup for Aboriginal families Ph: Mel Harpur 0447 272 354 for details
Skills Building Group 10am-11.30am Noah's Nowra Language skills for pre-school age children with NDIS Plan	My Time 10am-12pm Noah's Ulladulla Peer support group for parents/carers of children with additional needs	My Time 9.30am-11.30am Sanctuary Point Youth and Community Centre Peer support group for parents/carers of children with special needs	My Time 10am-12pm Noah's Nowra Peer support group for parents/carers of children with additional needs	Other Programs offered at Noah's by arrangement: Be My Best Behaviour Support Westmead Feelings Program Secret Agent Society Peer Mentoring (for parents) The Parent Room Sector Capacity Building SWAY Program NDIS Services by appointment (subject to availability) Plan Management Key Worker (0-7 years) Speech Pathology Occupational Therapy Physiotherapy Psychology (current clients) Behaviour Support
	Little Steps Playgroup 10.30am-12pm Noah's Nowra Playgroup for children 0-5 years who don't attend other care	Little Steps Playgroup 9.30am-11am Noah's Ulladulla Playgroup for children 0-5 years who don't attend other care		
	Secret Agent Society (SAS) 3pm-4.30pm Noah's Nowra Social skills group for children 8-12 years with NDIS Plan	Grandparents as Carers 12.30pm-2.30pm Noah's Ulladulla Support group for grandparents who are primary carers of child/ren with a disability		
	Social Language Group 3.30pm-4.30pm Noah's Nowra Language and social skills for primary age children with NDIS Plan	Grandparents as Carers 12.30pm-2.30pm Sanctuary Point Youth and Community Centre Support group for grandparents who are primary carers of child/ren with disability		
		PEERS 3pm-4.30pm Noah's Nowra Social skills group for children 13-18 years with NDIS Plan		
		Social Language Group 3.30pm-4.30pm Noah's Nowra Language and social skills for primary age children with NDIS Plan		

Noah's Locations:

Nowra
Ulladulla
Sanctuary Point

Illawarra - no groups this term



GROUP/PROGRAM/SERVICE	DESCRIPTION	OTHER INFO
NDIS Services - Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan Management • Key Worker (0-7 years) • Speech Pathology • Occupational Therapy • Physiotherapy • Psychology • Behaviour Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For ages up to 18 years • Available at Noah's, home or education and community settings • Costs (charged to NDIS Plan) are according to the NDIS Price Guide • Waiting lists exist for some services • Limited access to some services in some locations
NDIS Services - Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills Building for School (school-readiness group) • Early Language Skills (pre-school age) • Early Intervention Group (pre-school age) • Social Language Group (primary-school age) • Secret Agent Society (social skills group for 8-12 years) • PEERS (social skills group for 13-18 years) • Westmead Feelings Program (various ages) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costs (charged to NDIS Plan) are according to the NDIS Price Guide • Waiting lists exist for some services • Mainly internal referrals accepted
Be My Best	Be My Best is for families who are experiencing difficulties managing the behaviour of their child/ren ages 2.5 to 7 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-NDIS Program • Intensive Program (Nowra only) - parents commit to 2-3 sessions per week on Mon, Tues and/or Thurs for around 10 weeks • Coaching Program available at Nowra and Ulladulla • Contact us for more information, including costs and availability
Start Up	Start Up is a developmental assessment program for families with a child under school age who is not meeting milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-NDIS Program • Contact us for more information, including costs and availability
Playgroups	Noah's runs a series of playgroups for families with infant or pre-school age children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playgroups for Aboriginal families • Little Steps (for children who do not attend other early childhood education services) • PlayConnect (Supported Playgroup) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-NDIS Program • Contact us for more information or to register
Carer Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My Time • The Parent Room • Peer-to-Peer Mentoring • Grandparents as Carers 	Contact us for more information or to register
Early Childhood Early Learning Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mundamia Early Learning Centre • SWAY (language and literacy program for early childhood services based on Aboriginal culture) • Koori Kids Together (targeted support for pre-schools and schools in Wreck Bay/Jervis Bay Territory) • Sector Capacity Building Program (supporting community pre-schools with a focus on inclusion) 	Contact us for more information or to register

For more information about Noah's Groups, Programs and Services or to book phone (02) 4423 5022 or visit www.noahs.org.au

Follow us on Facebook for the latest news and updates

Noah's Nowra:

69 George Evans Road, Mundamia (UOW Shoalhaven Campus), Ph: (02) 4423 5022

Noah's Ulladulla:

158 Green Street, Ulladulla, Ph: (02) 4455 1318

Noah's Illawarra:

Flagstaff Road, Port Kembla, Ph: (02) 4423 5022

Sanctuary Point Youth and Community Centre:

34 Paradise Beach Road, Sanctuary Point

Please note that bookings are essential for all groups. Timetable is subject to change. Some groups and programs do not run during the school holidays.

How to reach your **SAVINGS GOALS** with Saver Plus



Set a savings goal for an education cost



Make regular savings deposits for 10 months



Complete online financial education workshops



Receive up to \$500 in matched savings from ANZ

Key eligibility criteria to join Saver Plus:

- Have a current health care card OR pensioner concession card
- Be studying yourself OR have a child in school
- Have regular income from work, yourself OR your partner


For full eligibility requirements, speak to a Saver Plus Coordinator.

Learn more

-  saverplus.org.au
-  1300 610 355
-  saverplus@bsl.org.au
-  @SaverPlusAU

Australia's longest-running financial education & matched savings program

Eligible families and individuals on low-income will:

-  Build budgeting skills
-  Develop life-long savings habits
-  Receive up to \$500 in matched savings for education costs

*Eligibility criteria applies.

50,060

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS SINCE 2003

86%
female
participants



14%
male
participants



75% Saving for children's education

17% Saving for own education

8% Saving for both



\$26 million
Amount saved



\$21 million
Amount received in matching from ANZ

FINANCIAL WELLBEING¹ AFTER SAVER PLUS

Average financial wellbeing score before Saver Plus:

36

Average financial wellbeing score after Saver Plus:

64

Australia average financial wellbeing score¹:

59

Want to share Saver Plus with your community?

Here are some suggestions:

For more information, please contact your Saver Plus coordinator:







Delivered by



everyone's family

Managing Distress in Health Care Workers During COVID-19: Lessons From a Disaster Trauma Lens

» Gertie Quitangon, MD

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) blindsided the world. It exposed gaps in public health emergency planning at every level, including in the strategic planning to support mental health and wellness. Studies of the SARS and Ebola epidemics as well as natural disasters have taught us lessons about the importance of planning for and responding to the mental health needs of health care and frontline workers.¹ Thus, this is a pivotal moment, a chance to implement systems and structures for staff support in every organization and advance staff wellness and resilience initiatives.

Disaster literature

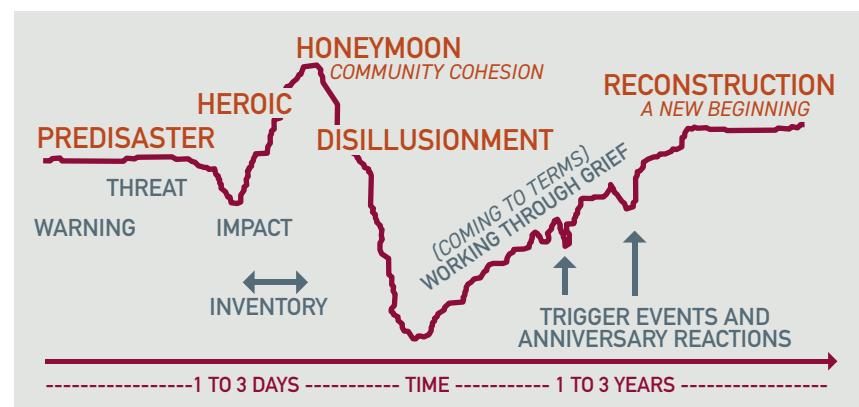
The literature on disasters and public health emergencies describes pervasive emotional distress, feelings of extreme vulnerability, uncertainty, and threats to life, particularly during the rapid spread of an outbreak.² A recent COVID-19 web-based survey supports this finding. More than 40% of respondents reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, substance use, and suicidal ideation. Symptoms were notably elevated in black and Hispanic individuals, essential workers, unpaid adult caregivers, and those with psychiatric conditions.³ Fortunately, evidence from disaster trauma research has shown that, ultimately, most people are resilient even after the most severe traumatic event.^{4,5} In the immediate aftermath of large-scale catastrophes, a majority of negative mental health symptoms are recognized as distress reactions to intense and overwhelming events. They are not pathologized or labeled psychiatric disorders. The disaster literature emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the normality of distress reactions, identifying high-risk popula-

tions, promoting effective coping and adaptation strategies, and encouraging overall wellness and resilience.⁶ Disaster mental health assistance during the acute phase is often more practical than psychological in nature. In this case, such assistance includes Centers for Disease Control information and updates, access to food and cleaning supplies, access to COVID-19 testing, protective equipment, financial assistance, and links to community resources.

After the acute phase of the disaster, long-term stress responses can emerge. Lancee et al.⁷ found that 2 years after the SARS outbreak, health care workers who treated these patients had elevated rates of smoking and drinking, absenteeism due to stress or illness, decreased face-to-face contact with patients, and decreased work hours. Yet rates of depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and other mental illness were not elevated. This is consistent with existing research, which has found that the long-term impact of massive disasters is predominantly in the range of subsyndromal stress responses rather than an increase in psychiatric morbidity. Limited long-term studies suggest that post-disaster symptomatology peaks in the first year and then declines, but the course of recovery is variable.⁸ The challenge for mental health clinicians is to distinguish normal distress reactions to catastrophes from exacerbation of existing mental health susceptibilities or new-onset disaster-related pathology.

Disaster trauma is characterized by exposure to personal loss and community disruption. Cultural, political, and socioeconomic factors all influence the shared experience of major disasters.⁹ Looking through a disaster trauma lens, a better understanding of the emotional stages of public reaction can help: anticipate community responses to large-scale catastrophic

Figure 1. Psychological Phases of Disaster¹⁰



events (Figure 1), identify the changing goals of recovery at different phases (Figure 2), and inform mitigation strategies. It is important to note that the timing of the phases is fluid. They do not occur in an exact sequence. Phases can overlap and move forward or back across a timeline, depending on the type of disaster.

Figure 1 depicts the stages of public reactions to natural disasters like 2012's Hurricane Sandy and even the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, but the community response to a pandemic seems more unpredictable. The immediate COVID-19 experience in New York state in the spring of 2020 was marked by safety concerns, deaths in the thousands, food and job insecurity, financial hardships, and anger at government response. We do, however, see a heroic phase exemplified by the emergence of heroes, such as Anthony Fauci, MD, on the national level and Governor Andrew Cuomo in New York state. We then witnessed community cohesion typical of the honeymoon phase as New Yorkers connected with each other from stoops, windows, terraces, and rooftops, all cheering for frontline workers at 7:00 PM each night to show gratitude and appreciation.

New York successfully flattened the curve by the summer. The number of daily deaths fell dramatically, from a

high of nearly 800 per day across the state down to none in New York City by June. Now the focus is shifting to economic recovery, while keeping community viral transmission low and bracing for a potential second wave. This could be the beginning of the reconstruction phase: figuring out a new normal and how to live with a persisting virus. Disillusionment is certainly felt when other states are unable to control the virus, in spite of the availability of immense resources and clear and concrete directions from world-class health experts to wear masks, avoid crowds, maintain social distance, and wash hands.

Supporting staff

Studies indicate that during an infectious disease outbreak, the operational response of an organization is likely the single most important factor influencing staff perception of both stress and safety.¹² Traumatic events can disrupt feelings of safety, trust, control, esteem, and intimacy. As a result, staff can exhibit maladaptive behaviors or experience traumatic stress symptoms.¹³ Best practices to mitigate the disruptions and support staff during a pandemic involve 4 key elements: leadership, communication, education, and social support.

LEADERSHIP. Strong leadership and supportive teams influenced the resilience of health care workers during

the SARS and Ebola outbreaks.¹² Capable and effective leadership over the course of a major disaster makes staff feel safe and supported by the organization. Best practices include:

- Visible and prepared leaders at organizational, departmental, and team levels.
- Setting the tone for a positive and supportive organizational culture.
- Skilled assessment of team strengths and weaknesses.
- Proactive outreach and crisis support from all levels of leadership.
- Creativity and innovation in increasing staff resilience and reducing stress.
- Role modeling infection control and safety practices—wear masks, practice physical distancing, and wash your hands.

COMMUNICATION. The cornerstone of infectious disease management is communication, coordination, and collaboration.¹⁴ Delivery of clear, transparent, timely, trustworthy information in a rapidly evolving situation is essential. Organizations should be prepared to:

- Communicate timely and trustworthy COVID-19-specific guidance.
- Acknowledge and normalize feelings of anxiety related to the pandemic.
- Communicate efforts to address the negative impacts of the pandemic, including financial concerns.
- Communicate supportive organizational practices (eg, working from home, flexible work schedule, reduced hours, job rotation, location rotation, availability of PPE, testing).
- Widely disseminate available self-care and wellness information and resources.

EDUCATION. Training and education on the issues

of infection control, disaster mental health, and the disaster response system increases confidence and moderates the risk of stress. Just as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides appropriate resources and training for disaster responders before deployment, organizations have a responsibility to provide education and training to better prepare for and respond to a pandemic. Organizations should be prepared to offer staff:

- General information on disasters and pandemics.
- Education on infection control and universal precautions.
- Overview of disaster mental health.
- Targeted education on key sources of distress from COVID-19 (eg, quarantine-related distress, fear of contagion, concern for family, job stress, financial concerns, interpersonal isolation, stigma).

SOCIAL SUPPORT. Studies indicate that social support, both personal and professional, is a consistent protective factor and a strong mitigator of emotional distress in the wake of a massive disaster.^{15,16} Unfortunately, the battle against COVID-19 calls for decreased interpersonal contact. Quarantine, physical distancing, and remote and virtual work have all increased social isolation. This unprecedented public health crisis requires creativity and innovation to restore a sense of community and connectedness. In order to provide much-needed social support during difficult times, organizations should prepare to:

- Hold virtual meetings and virtual lunch/coffee breaks/happy hours to improve team cohesion and morale.
- Build in formal time during work hours for peer consultation to reduce feelings of isolation and increase feelings of efficacy.
- Use in-person or virtual service meetings and

huddles to build relationships and improve responsiveness.

- Establish buddy system to check and balance each other's stress level.

The scarcity of existing research on staff support and mitigation strategies during pandemics presents an opportunity to develop new programs that can be tailored to specific organizational contexts and cultures. Evaluation of best practices and robust analysis of the impact and sustainability of staff support plans during COVID-19 can inform future strategic planning and policy recommendations for staff wellness and resilience.

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Figure 2. Changing Goals of Recovery at Different Phases of Disaster¹¹

