

Smiling Mind —

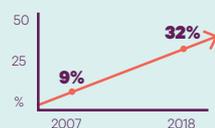
Supporting mentally healthy and resilient young Australians



The Problem

Youth mental health is a major problem and the incidence of mental illness continues to rise.

Youth psychological distress increasing



1 in 3

Young Australians are experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress. Triple the number since 2007¹

1 in 4

Secondary students are currently experiencing a mental illness²

1 in 7

Primary students are currently experiencing a mental illness

Youth suicide rates



10 year high

Rural and regional most at risk 41K attempted suicide 3,128 Deaths³

1 in 4 students bullied

\$28M

Cost of bullying during school years

3.5x

More likely to commit violence towards women if bullied at school⁴

The Impact of Smiling Mind

Smiling Mind is a not-for-profit organisation with a goal to support 5 million young people by 2021 so that we can turn these statistics around.

Smiling Mind has achieved, to date:

- 4m people using our freely accessible app
- 101,000 educators using our program materials in schools with 2.2m students
- Independent evaluation by Deakin University and Insight SRC documented the benefit of our program across more than 1,800 students and 12 schools the largest study of its kind worldwide.
- Member of the reference group for the federally funded National Education Initiative
- Our programs are a recommended resource in the current Kids Matter and Mind matters programs

Smiling Mind's **prevention** focussed online and face-to-face programs help develop essential personal and social skills for young people:

- Increased emotional awareness
- Empathy
- Improved emotion regulation
- Improved behaviour
- Respect
- Enhanced concentration and attention skills

Mindfulness practice is associated with an increase of ~16% in mental health and academic performance⁵ (relative to peers)

School based mental health and wellbeing initiatives — Our Solution for a mentally healthy future generation

We have developed a sustainable and scalable approach to support schools, students and teachers to use mindfulness to improve wellbeing. Our approach takes a positive and preventative approach to support children and young people to develop the skills they need to thrive.



Why Mindfulness in our schools?

The importance of social and emotional skills

Research has shown us that practising mindfulness strengthens areas of the brain that control 'executive function' such as the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus and amygdala.

For this reason, mindfulness leads to better attention, memory, regulation of emotions and self awareness^{5,6,7}. In turn, improvements in these areas can lead to reduced stress, anxiety and depression, and better academic skills, social skills and self esteem^{5,8}.

Prefrontal Cortex
Hippocampus
Amygdala



Deep and lasting changes in areas of the brain related to learning

Mindfulness causes changes in brain structure and activity. Studies tell us that people who have practised mindfulness show thickening of the grey matter in their frontal cortex⁹. This is the area of the brain responsible for attention, self regulation, executive function, and planning. They also show thickening of the hippocampus (responsible for memory function), the insula and precuneus (responsible for self awareness and emotional processing)⁵.

Those who practise mindfulness also show reduced activity in the amygdala (associated with distraction, anxiety, fear, depression and stress) and the default mode network (associated with worry and rumination, depression, and schizophrenia)^{10,11,12}.

Because brain changes are considered more permanent than behavioural changes alone, improvements that come from mindfulness are thought to be lasting.

Mindfulness changes the brain

How? In three main ways:

1

It improves attention, and improved attention means students are more able to focus on learning¹³. They are more capable of taking in new information without being distracted by internal reactions or pre-conceived perspectives¹⁴.

Some research suggests that a well implemented program of 90 minutes of mindfulness meditation per week is enough to move a student up the academic bell curve by 16% compared to their non-mindful peers. 90 mins is only 6% of the school day (18 minutes) assuming no home practice⁵. So even when only considering academic performance, the benefits of mindfulness practice more than repay their time cost, especially if this time can be integrated into the start of a lesson or throughout the school day.

2

It improves working memory, cognitive flexibility, reasoning, planning, goal-directed behaviour and self-regulation¹⁵. These skills are essential when it comes to learning new information.

3

It reduces emotional reactivity, behavioural issues, anxiety and depression⁵. This means students have fewer potential obstacles standing in the way of their learning.

“Benefits of mindfulness practice more than repay their time cost”

Mindfulness develops important meta-cognitive skills

Metacognition approaches, those approaches that help students become aware of their own thinking style, help students think about their own learning more explicitly and have been shown

to improve learning across domains and are not limited to just one or a few subjects^{16,17}. Mindfulness provides this meta-cognitive skills development opportunity across all ages.

Foundational Skill Development

Research⁵ shows that mindfulness practice can help young people to develop emotion, behaviour and attention regulation skills.

According to a meta-analysis of more than 70 studies comparing more than 6,000 school aged young people, those who practised mindfulness showed:



Better emotion and behaviour regulation

than 62% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.



Lower depression and anxiety scores

than 66% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.



Better academic performance

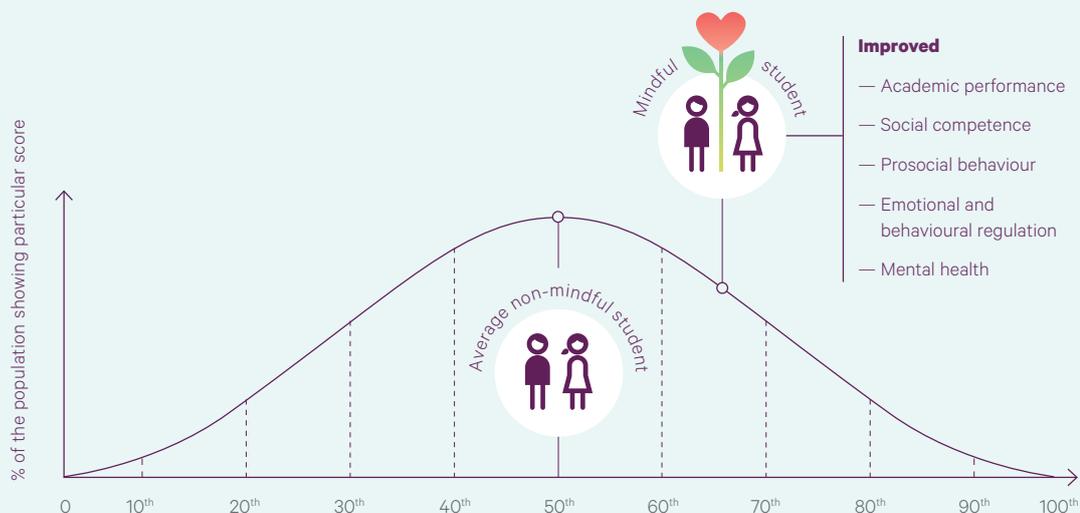
than 66% of those who didn't practice mindfulness.



Better social skills

than 64%.

Average mental health, social and academic function of young person after a mindfulness intervention compared to young people who have not practiced mindfulness



Mindfulness also supports the development of essential skills required for the future

- Creative thinking
- Decision making
- Problem solving and lateral thinking
- Innovation
- Ability to cope with ambiguity

These skills are essential in our future workplaces where basic knowledge will not be enough – our future generations will be required to have these skills to succeed.

“STEM and basic technology skills mean nothing if young people are not developing essential personal and social skills alongside them. The future depends on young people developing these foundational skills.”

— Steven Worrall
Managing Director, Microsoft AU

Supporting teacher wellbeing & performance

Many teachers feel ill-equipped, under supported and uncertain about teaching social and emotional wellbeing skills to their students. There is a high turnover of teachers and many teachers are leaving the profession.

41%

of teachers surveyed felt that they had inadequate support or resources to teach students the personal and social capabilities outlined in the National Curriculum

The main reasons for this were:

28%

Lack of funding

27%

Not a priority at their school

22%

Or they simply did not know where or how to access resources

50%

of teachers surveyed stated that their school did not have a comprehensive plan to support student wellbeing

36%

have received little or no training in teaching the personal and social capabilities

27%

of teachers rated their level of understanding of the teaching requirements for these capabilities as below average

Teachers need additional support for their own wellbeing



→ Teacher and principal wellbeing is a significant concern.



→ **1 in 4** Australian teachers experience burn out and emotional exhaustion



→ Principals experience **8 times** the rate of threats of violence to them than the general population and **1 in 10** report thoughts of self-harm

The Smiling Mind Schools Program



→ The Smiling Mind school mindfulness program is designed to support a system level, whole of school approach.



→ We have listened to teachers, school leaders, students and parents and designed our programs to meet their needs using a flexible, engaging and scalable approach.



→ We recognise that schools are busy, with limited time and resourcing, but we also recognise that guidance, structure and accessibility is important to make a real and impactful change.



→ Our school-based programs take a mixed modality approach – offering resources, education and training using a modular approach that can support the whole school community in a scalable and sustainable way.

Each element of our school program is designed to support a whole of school approach



Online platform

Our world-class web and app based mindfulness resources provide teaching materials for educators (lesson plans, mindfulness activities and guided meditation) as well as resources for students and parents to use.



Mindfulness Curriculum

Our mindfulness curriculum is mapped to the Australian Curriculum and provides developmentally appropriate teaching plans for the whole year. Covering 20 topics designed to develop a range of personal and social skills these resources provide schools with a framework that is easy to implement and flexible enough to support other wellbeing initiatives if required.



Foundational training

We know that every teacher within the school community can benefit from learning more about mindfulness and our foundational training workshops support the opportunity for teachers to explore mindfulness for their own wellbeing as well as understand how to introduce mindfulness to their students.

This training is delivered by experienced psychologists in person with each school.



Online learning hub

To support the ongoing engagement and continuing professional learning of teachers our online learning hub provides access to self-paced learning modules designed to support the implementation of mindfulness across the whole school.

The learning hub also provides ongoing opportunities to refresh knowledge and support new teachers who might join the school throughout the year.

Our online learning hub also provides an important opportunity for teachers to connect and share with others and provides a virtual professional community.



Train the Champion

Our intensive training program for school champions support sustainability for every school we work with. Identifying a champion will support ongoing engagement with the program and this training program ensures that every school champion has the skills needed to support their school teaching group into the future.

Our approach is designed to support schools all across the country with a specific focus on supporting regional and rural schools.

We leverage technology to ensure everyone has access no matter where they are located by providing access to online learning for teachers, virtual lesson plans and access to guided mindfulness programs through our award-winning app.

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More information can be found on the Smiling Mind website smilingmind.com.au.

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“I have struggled with anxiety for 4 years, and mindfulness has helped me to be in the present moment at all times. During 2017, I completed the HSC, and mindfulness helped me to remain focused in exams, remain present during periods where numerous assignments were due, not get caught up in social media, and get 9 hours sleep per night. By doing mindfulness, it helped me to achieve amazing results in 2017.”

Smiling Mind

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Smiling Mind is a 100% not-for-profit organisation that works to make mindfulness meditation accessible to all.

Visit us online or download the free app to get started.

Available on the iPhone App Store

