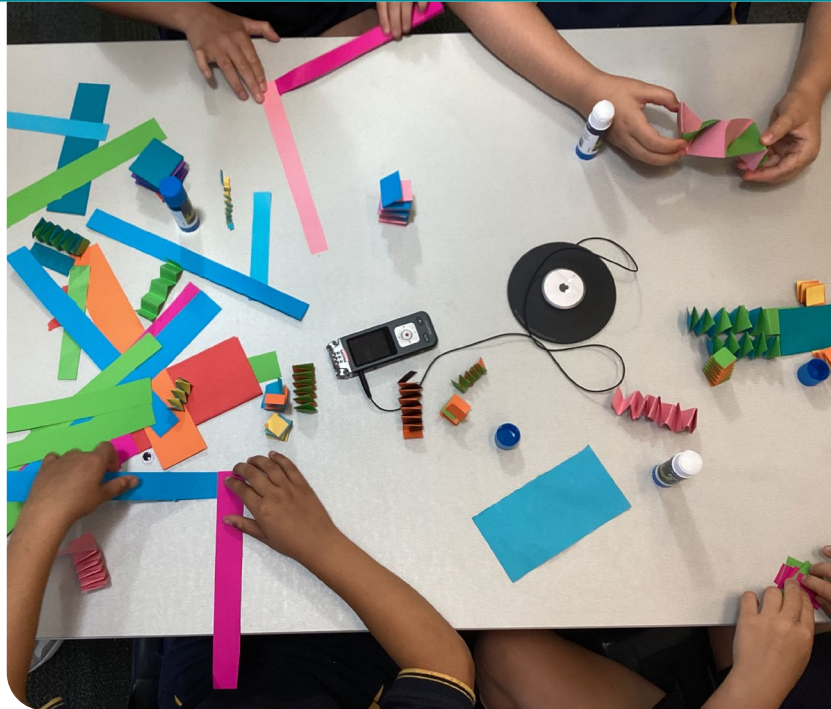


Your voice: MHiPS student focus groups

In 2023, researchers from MCRI asked students in years 4 and 5 what they know about mental health and wellbeing. They also wanted to see how schools are helping and supporting students. Fourteen primary schools from the Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) study took part.

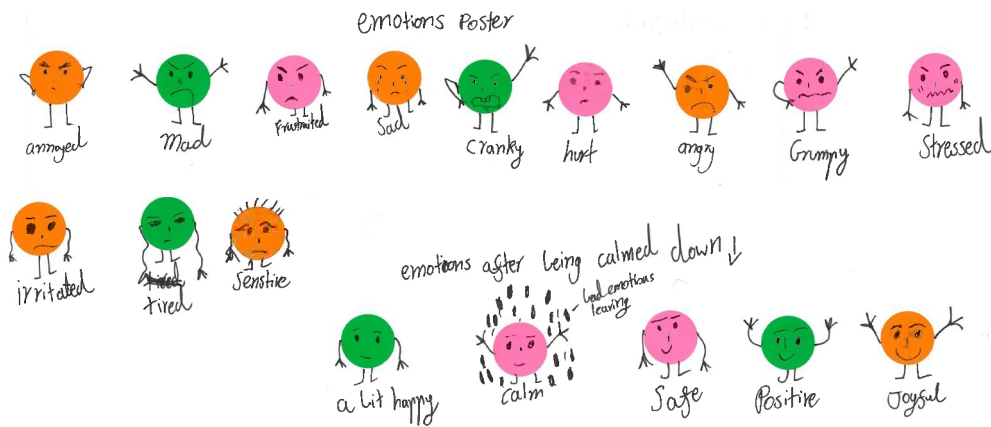


What we did

- Researchers spoke to 65 students in small groups.
- Each group heard a different story about a student. Sometimes the story was about a student being teased, or getting really upset in class or angry at others, or about older students being mean to younger students.
- Each group was asked about how the student in the story might feel and things at their school that could help. Questions included:
 - How can you tell what the student in the story is feeling?
 - How might the student’s feelings change?
 - Who or where could the student go to if they needed help?
 - How do you know how to do these things? Where did you learn this?

The students were asked to share their ideas and answers by drawing, painting or creating characters from paper, rocks or Play Doh.





What we found

1. Understanding and managing emotions

Students could describe many different emotions including happiness, sadness, anger and jealousy. They knew how to recognise them in themselves and others. They mentioned that someone can have different emotions at the same time, and that some emotions can have different intensities. This is helpful for understanding how someone is feeling and how to respond.

Students also talked about how they could manage their own feelings. They mentioned using fidget toys, drawing, reading, listening to music, mindfulness, deep breathing techniques, or going outside.

If they're angry, they might have their fists clenched beside their body.
Year 4 student, school #10

Body Language

Their eyebrows might be pointing downwards, or they might be crying.
Year 5 student, school #2

Facial expression

They might be shouting and saying things that are not very nice.
Year 4 student, school #14

Behaviour

2. Where to go for help at school

Many students said when someone is feeling upset, it's important to check on them and ask if they're okay. You might be able to make them feel better by telling a joke or playing with them. If someone is being bullied, students suggested talking to the kids doing the bullying and explaining how it makes others feel.

If someone needs help during class or at recess or lunch, students said they can ask for help from classroom teachers, yard duty teachers, wellbeing staff, or sometimes the principal or education support staff.

Some schools have special places such as a wellbeing hub or cubby where students can go to relax or get help. A few schools have a therapy dog that helps students feel calm.

3. Learning about mental health and wellbeing at school

Most students said they learnt about mental health and wellbeing from classroom or wellbeing teachers and programs in their school. The programs they talked about included Respectful Relationships, Zones of Regulation, The Resilience Project and Smiling Minds.

Overall, the students showed that they can recognise and understand about feelings and how to support each other. They had good ideas about what can make their school a better place for their mental health and wellbeing.

Thank you for sharing

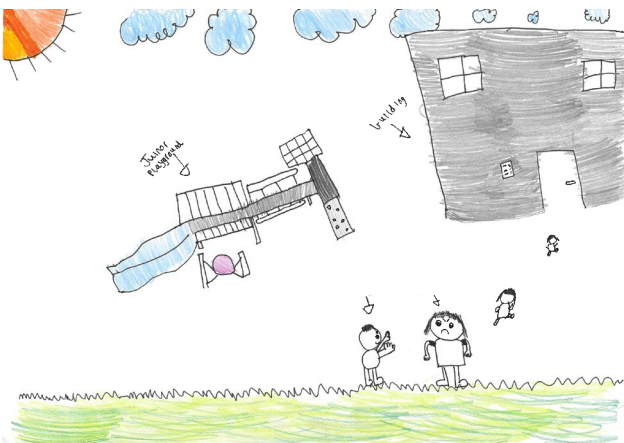
The information students shared is very important. Their ideas and knowledge will be given to the Victorian Department of Education. This information may also be shared with other schools to help their staff and students learn about ways to support mental health and wellbeing.

What next?

The MHiPS team will keep asking students questions through surveys or focus groups to learn more about mental health and wellbeing in MHiPS schools.

Want to know more?

You can email your questions to us at mhips@mcri.edu.au or visit the MHiPS website: www.mhips.org.au



Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) is a partnership between the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRi), and the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne.

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