Overview

- What is mental health?

- What are mental health conditions?

- How does mental health affect student engagement, behaviour and social skills?

- How to be mindful of mental health while talking with students

- The best way to handle a situation where a student discloses mental ill health
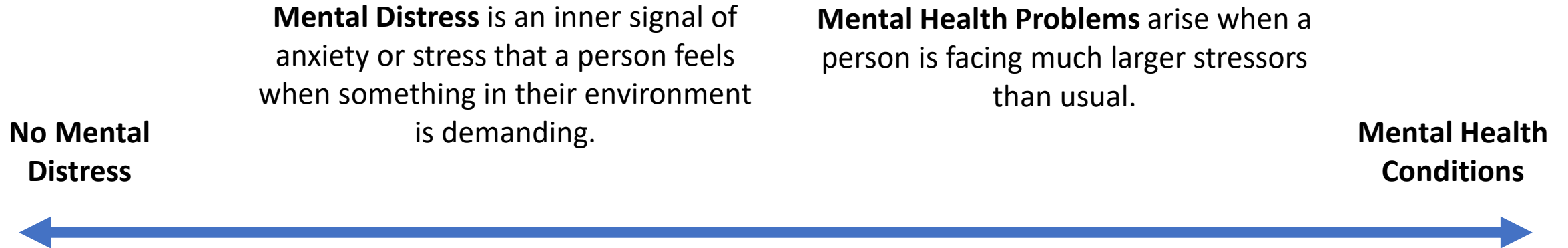
What is Mental Health?

Activity 1

Divide in to four groups. In your group write down all of the words that come to mind when you think about the term:

- Group 1: Physical Health
- Group 2: Mental Health
- Group 3: Physical Illness
- Group 4: Mental Illness

What is Mental Health?

- **Mental Health** <u>is a state of psychological well-being</u>, which includes an individual's ability to enjoy life, to cope with the normal stresses of life, to work productively and to make a contribution to the community.

- **Mental Illness** is a medical condition diagnosed by trained health professionals that significantly interferes with an individuals cognitive, emotional or social abilities.

Mental Distress is an inner signal of anxiety or stress that a person feels when something in their environment is demanding.

Mental Health Problems arise when a person is facing much larger stressors than usual.

No Mental Distress

Mental Health Conditions

How many Australian children have mental health conditions?

1 in 7 Australian children (aged 4 – 17 years) will experience mental health conditions

But only **1 in 6** will access support services

What are the most common mental health conditions in Australian children?
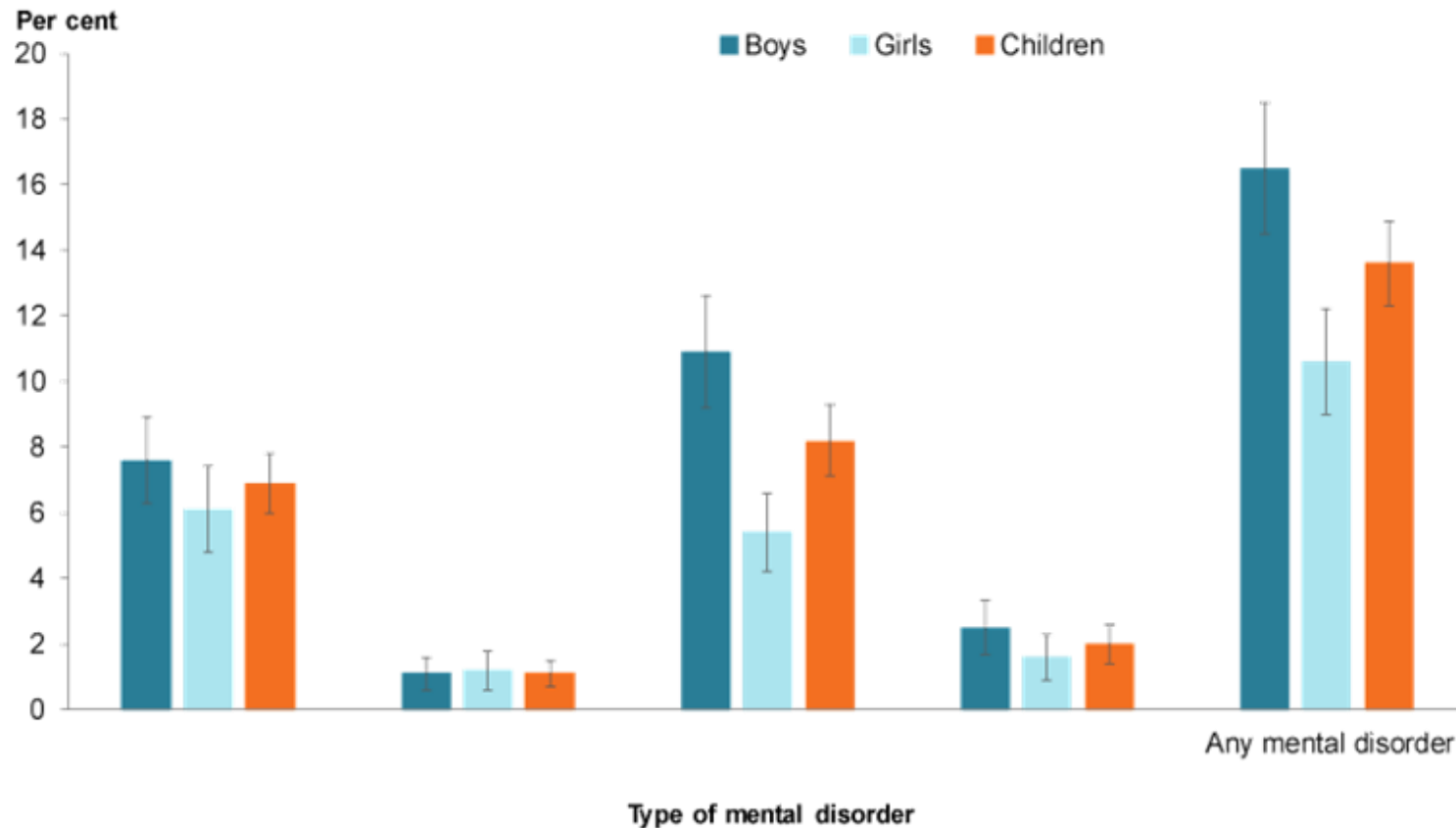

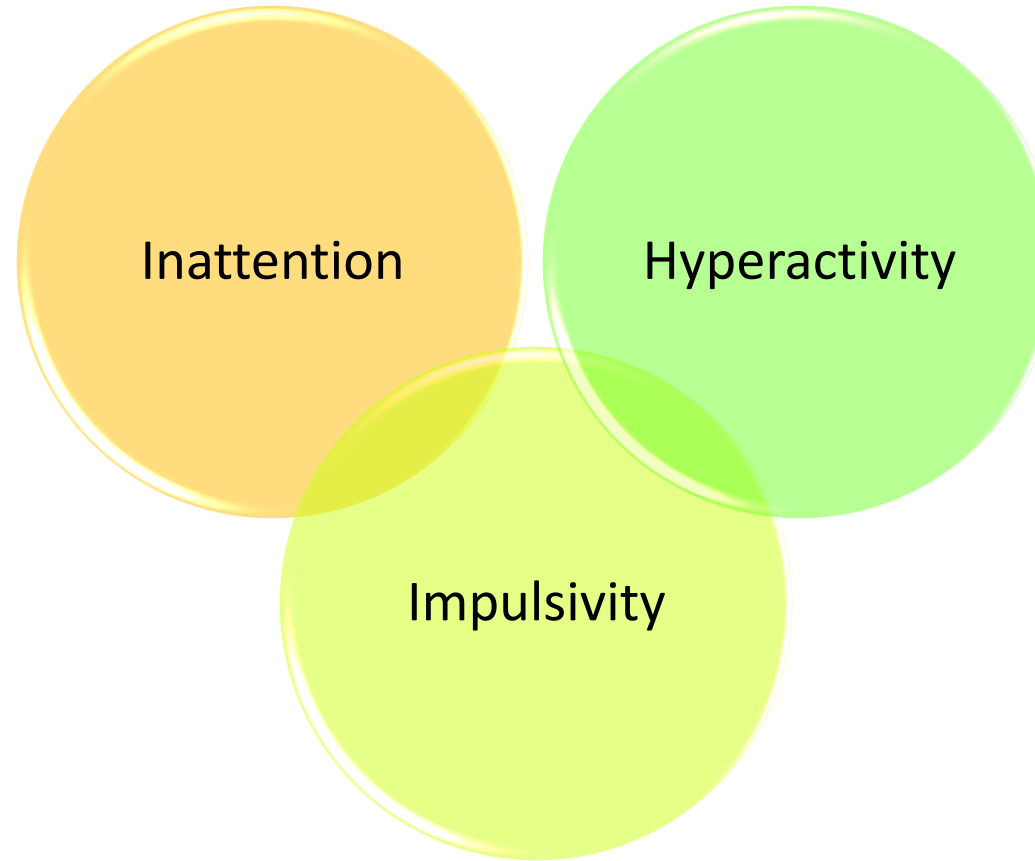
Chart: AIHW. 2013-14. Source: AIHW analysis of the Young Minds Matter Survey Results Query Tool.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Inattention

Hyperactivity

Impulsivity

What are the most common mental health conditions in Australian children?
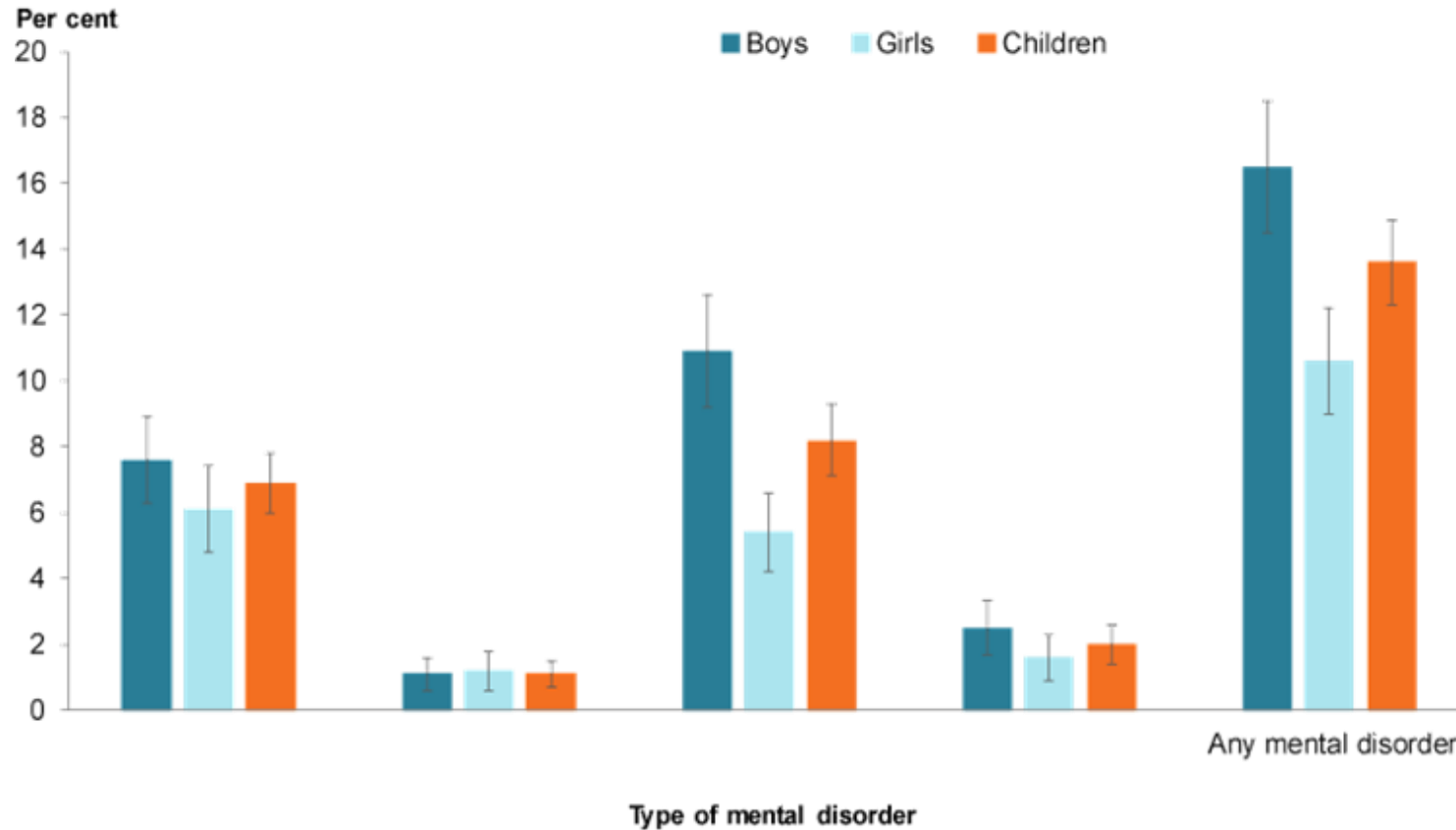

Chart: AIHW. 2013-14. Source: AIHW analysis of the Young Minds Matter Survey Results Query Tool.

Anxiety

Common signs and symptoms of anxiety include:

- feeling more anxious than others their age and level
- having anxious feelings that are consistently very intense
- feelings that persist well after the stressful event has passed
- feeling so distressed that it interferes with their capacity to learn, socialise and do everyday things.

| Generalised Anxiety Disorder | Social Anxiety | Specific Phobias | Panic Disorder |

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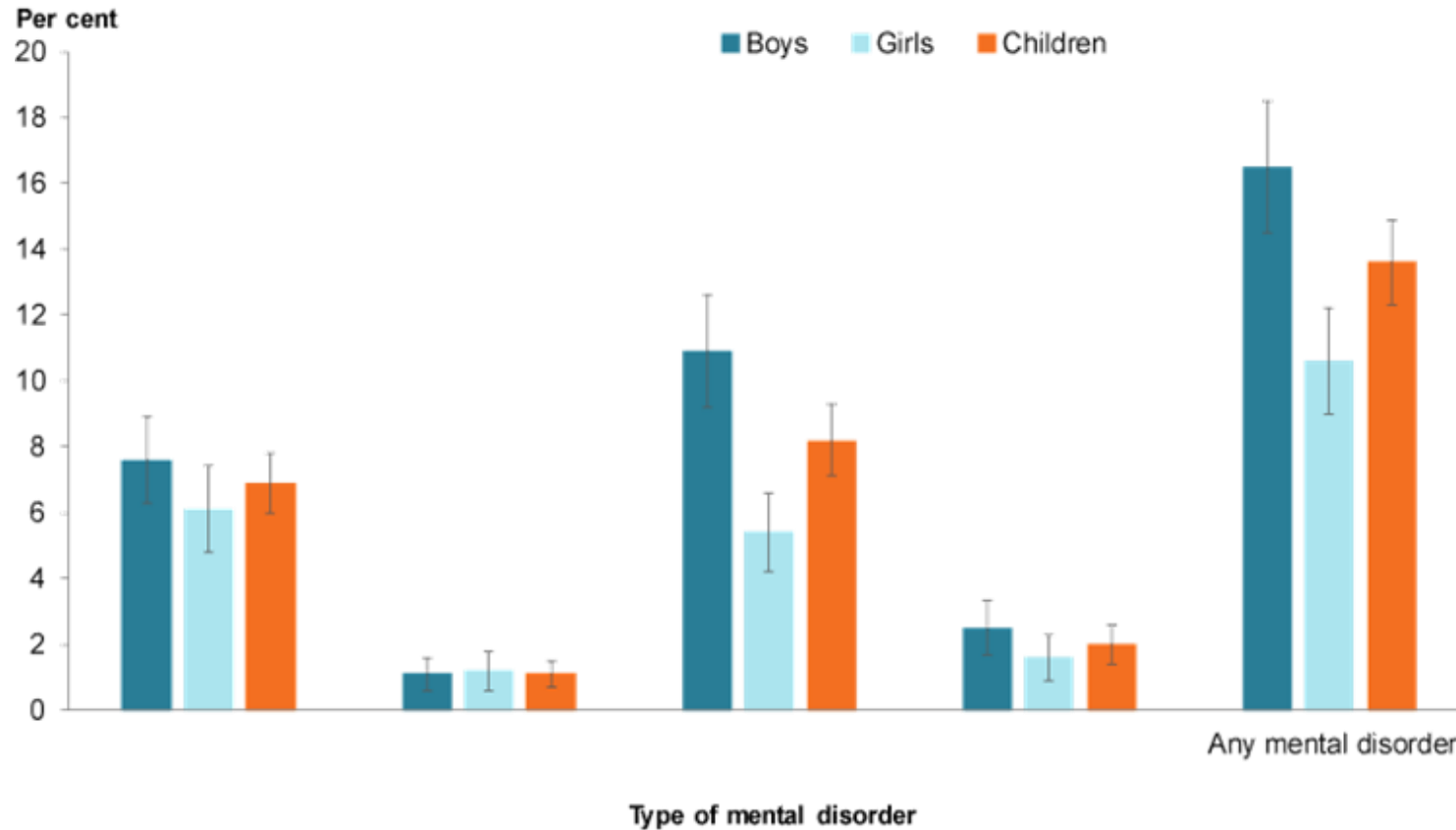

Chart: AIHW. 2013-14. Source: AIHW analysis of the Young Minds Matter Survey Results Query Tool.

Conduct Disorder

- Characterised by hostile and sometimes physically violent behaviour and disregard for others.

- Signs of the disorder can be difficult to spot in younger children.

- Bullying, lying and stealing can all be signs of CD.

- The causes are unknown by family life is a strong risk factor

What are the most common mental health conditions in Australian children?
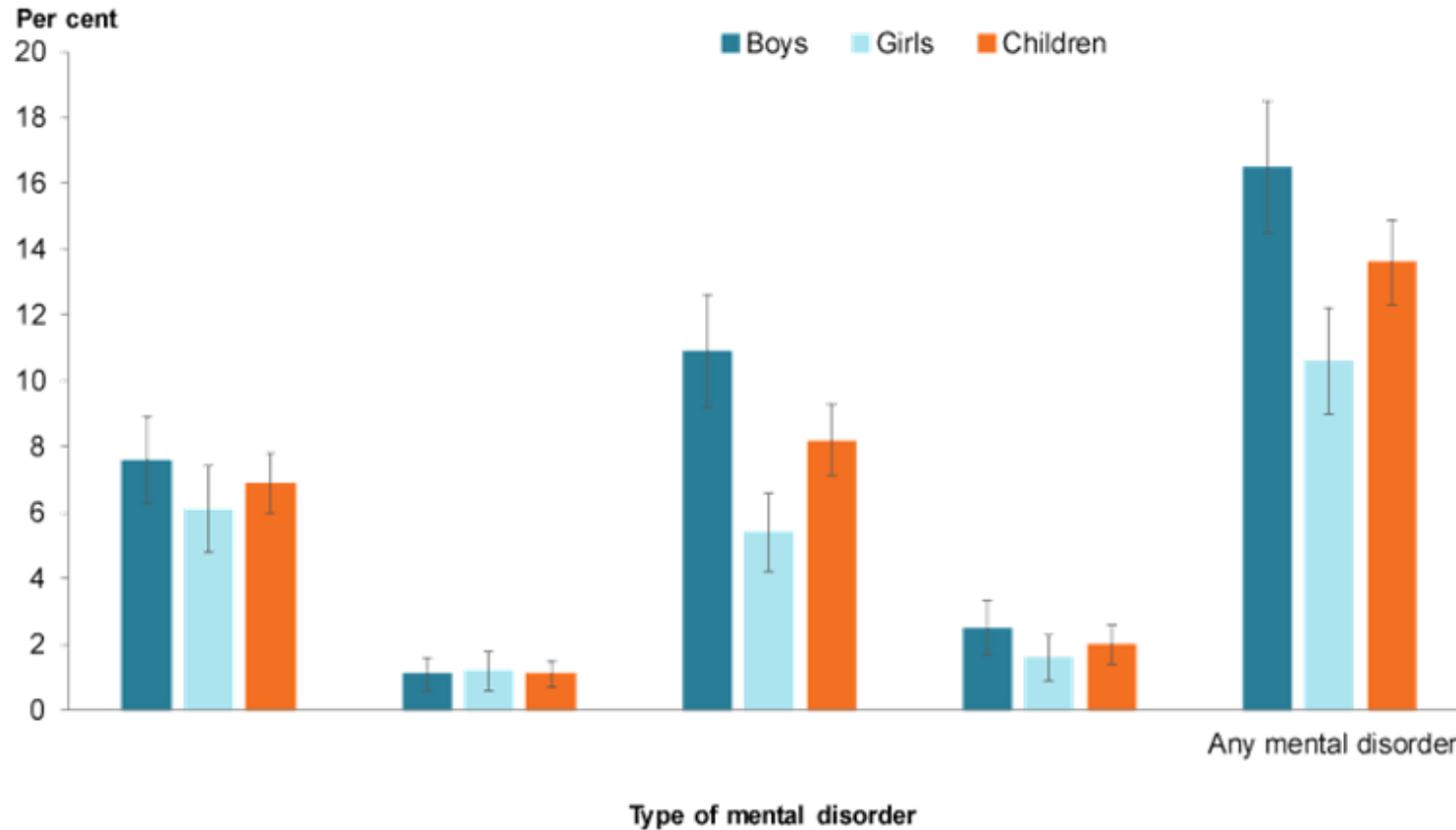

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Depression

- A child or young person who is depressed may:

  - be irritable, easily annoyed or upset
  - seem sad and cry easily
  - have low energy and be difficult to motivate
  - have difficulty concentrating in class and completing their work
  - seem withdrawn and have difficulty relating to peers and educators
  - lose interest easily in an activity they usually enjoy
  - make a lot of negative comments about themselves
  - have trouble sleeping or want to sleep most of the day
  - experience changes in weight (including both weight loss and gain)

Are Mental Health Conditions on the Rise?

- No great change in overall prevalence of mental health symptoms over the last 20 years

- There have been some changes in the prevalence of specific conditions.

- Major depressive disorder in children and teenagers (6-17 years) increased from 2.1% to 3.2%, with a greater increase among teenagers (from 2.9% to 5.0%).
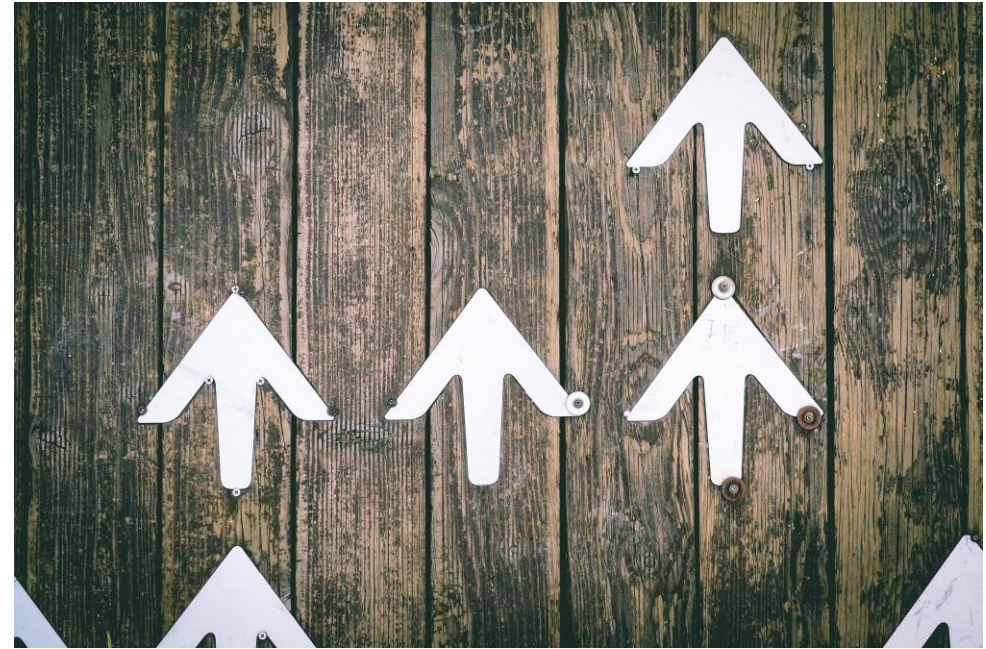
Contributors to mental health issues

Photo by Eaters Collective

Social media

Genes

Image source: https://www.philosophytalk.org/sites/

Abuse

Discrimination

Severe stress

Social Isolation

Image: © Nadzeya_Dzivakova/Getty Images

Impact of mental health issues on learning

- All mental health conditions can impact learning

- These conditions can also impact social relationships and self-esteem

- Once children fall behind in their learning it is very hard to catch up.

- ADHD can disrupt classrooms, and childhood inattention is a significant predictor of long-term academic outcomes.

- Major depressive disorders often result in significant absence from school

- High-school dropouts are 63 times more likely to be jailed than University graduates

Impact of mental health issues on learning

Activity 2

Divide in to pairs or small groups:

- Discuss a time that you have felt particularly stressed
- How did this make you feel physically and emotionally?
- How did this impact on your behaviours and cognitive abilities?

- What do you do to relax?

Interventions

- Most mental health conditions can be effectively treated

- Early intervention is crucial

- Interventions can include medication, cognitive and behavioural therapies

- More recently there has been an increase in digital interventions
  - Easy to access
  - Can be completed at home
  - Do not require clinical appointments
  - Reduces stigma

Strategies to Promote Mental Health in Schools
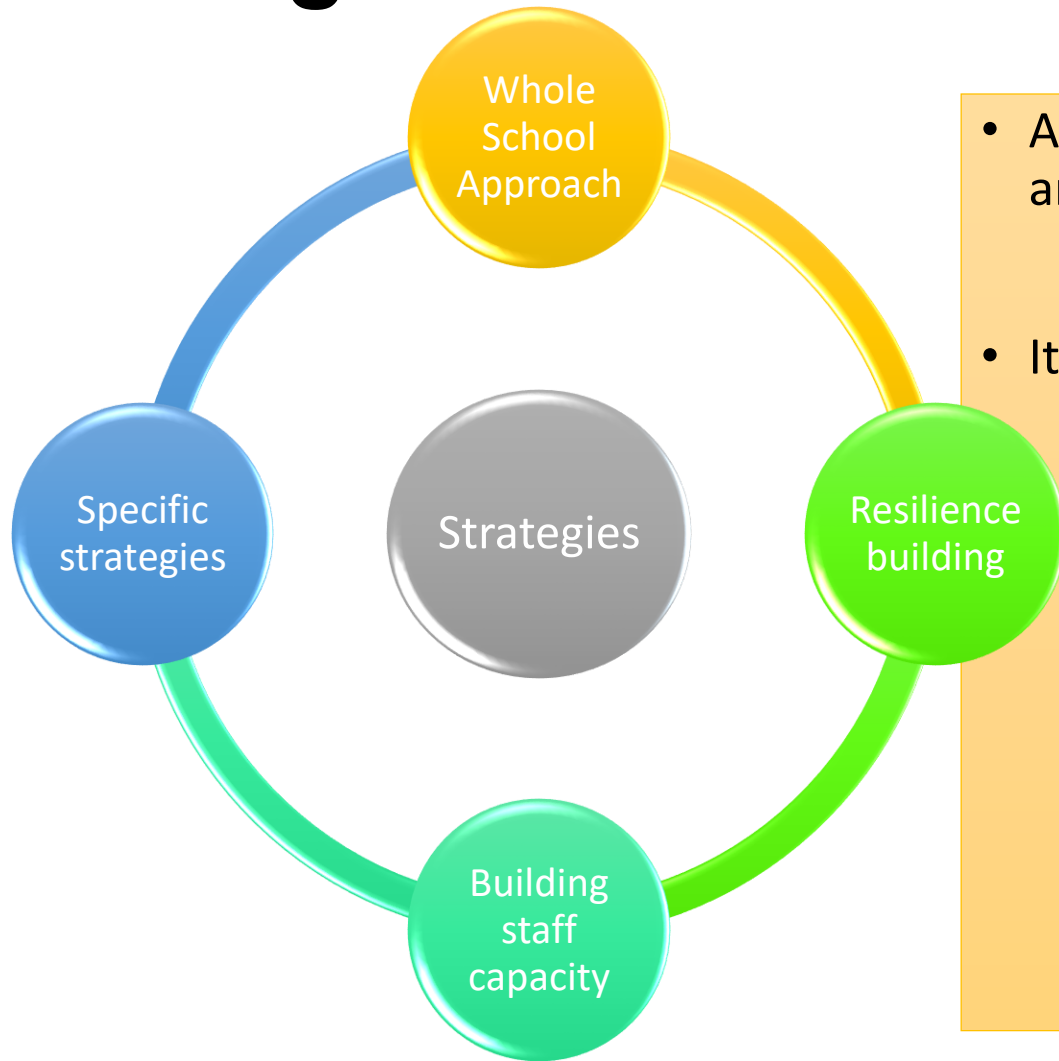
- A whole school approach involves everyone to embed a safe and inclusive learning culture and environment.

- It can involve:
    - establishing proactive policies addressing wellbeing and inclusion
    - explicitly teaching social and emotional learning skills
    - use positive approaches to manage student behaviour, including fostering a range of strategies to prevent and respond to bullying
    - noticing and intervening when students experience problems related to learning or wellbeing.

Strategies to Promote Mental Health in Schools

Circular diagram centered on "Strategies" with surrounding nodes: Whole School Approach, Resilience building, Building staff capacity, Specific strategies.
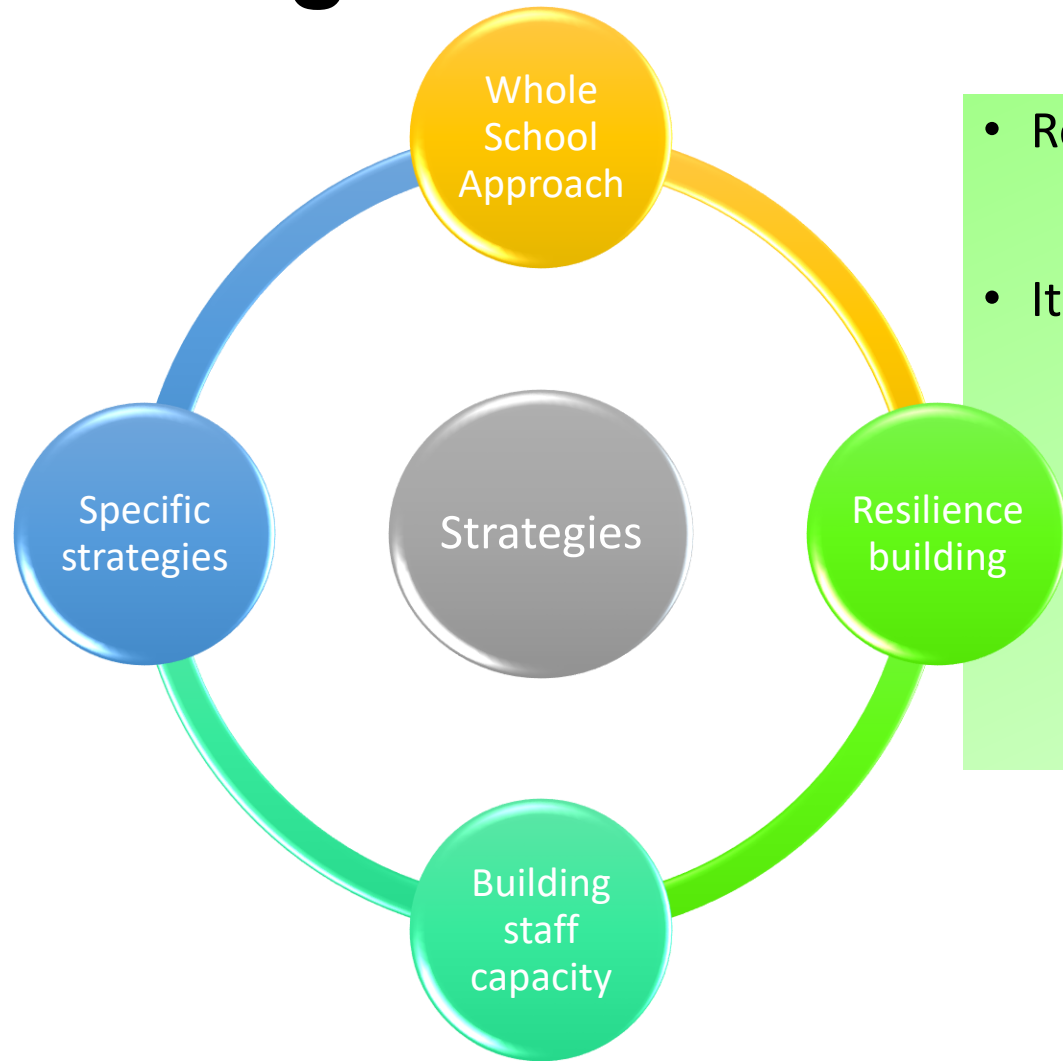
- Resilience is the ability to cope in the face of challenges.

- It is a skill that can be developed through:
  - Positive social connections
  - Safe environments
  - Life skills such as positive coping
  - Sense of responsibility

Strategies to Promote Mental Health in Schools
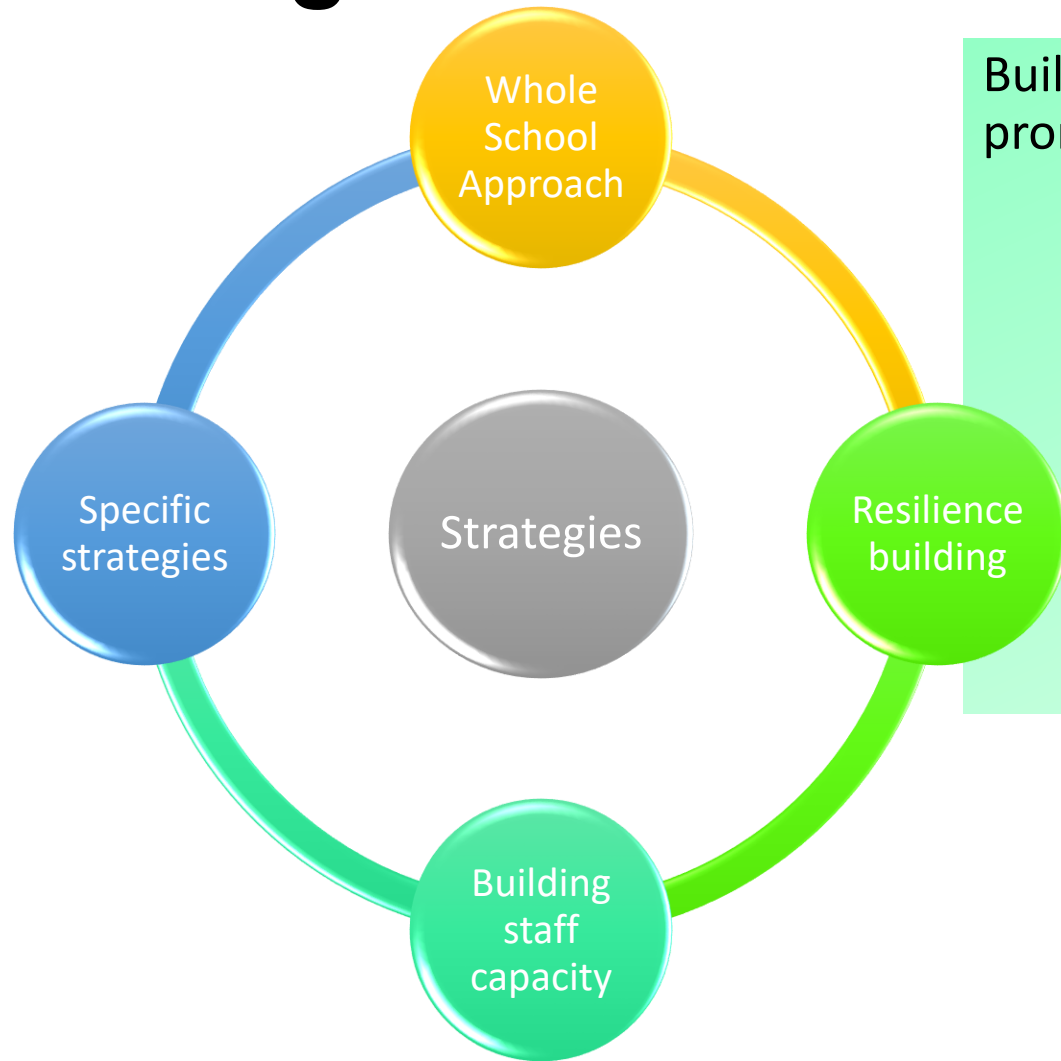
Building staff capacity by giving educators resources and tools to promote and model behaviours. This can:

- improve teacher-student relationships
- Build inclusive and safe school communities
- Improve early identification and intervention

Strategies to Promote Mental Health in Schools

Whole School Approach

Specific strategies

Strategies

Resilience building

Building staff capacity

- On an individual level, there are also many helpful ways you can support children and young people experiencing mental health issues:

  - Give children language to label how they're feeling
  - Give notice prior to transitions
  - Laddering – breaking tasks down in to manageable chunks
  - Build self-esteem
  - Relaxation techniques
  - Strong support networks
  - Be physically healthy

How to handle a disclosure of mental health issues

Communication Skills for Educators

Communication Barriers

- Timing
- Environment
- Your feelings
- Family background

- Distractions
- Different agendas
- Dismissing
- Judging

Communication Skills for Educators

Key Communication Skills

- **Information-sharing:** develops a common understanding to support an individual

- **Non-verbal communication:** body language, tone and gestures.

- **Empathy:** being aware of the difficulties and challenges others face

- **Active listening:** attending, following, pauses, reflecting and prioritising

Language to avoid

You don't look anxious or depressed

Things could be so much worse

Stop looking for attention

No one ever said life was fair

You are always so negative

It's all in your mind

I always knew you had a problem

It's your own fault

Mental health support after an emergency or natural disaster

- Major incidents and natural disasters such as fires can be traumatic for young people, with impacts on mental health and wellbeing

- **Psychological first aid** is a term used to describe strategies to assess and protect children, young people and adults in the immediate aftermath of an emergency or natural disaster

- Psychological first aid for children and young people is guided by the key principles of **listen, protect and connect**.

Mental health support after an emergency or natural disaster

Listen

- Provide opportunities for discussion
- Respond encouragingly and show interest
- Respect the wishes of those who don't want to share

Protect

- Answer questions honestly
- Make adjustments
- Be aware of things that might re-traumatise

Connect

- Encourage interactive school activities
- Re-establish normal social relationships

Summary

- Mental Health is about wellness and we should be promoting positive mental health for all children

- Mental health conditions are common in childhood

- Early assessment and intervention is crucial

- If untreated mental health conditions have a significant impact on learning

- Whole school approaches and open communication help to support mental health

Questions?