

Benefits of being Mentally active



Just as our body performs better when we are physically fit, so too does our mind when we are mentally fit.

Learning something new, or achieving something mentally (e.g. solving a puzzle) contributes to feelings of self-confidence and belief in one's abilities.

Try doing things you enjoy doing, it increases the chances of doing it more which has improved mental health benefits. When we are keeping our brain active, we are less likely to be focusing on stressors and worries and instead working on something productive.



Here are some suggestions on how to be mentally active at school:

In the classroom

- Offer brain puzzles – our word search, unscramble and crossword sheets are available here:



actbelongcommit.org.au/programs-initiatives/mentally-healthy-schools/

- Set up a sensory or colouring corner in the classroom:



[twinkl.com.au/teaching-wiki/sensory-corner](https://www.twinkl.com.au/teaching-wiki/sensory-corner)

- Fill in our 'Take Action' worksheet:



actbelongcommit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Take_Action_Worksheet.pdf

- Do a maths puzzle or riddle each morning to stimulate mental activity.
- Provide opportunities for science investigations.
- Allow students to write freely and creatively.
- Play silent ball.
- Play Simon Says.
- Allow students the opportunity to build something (e.g. blocks, lego or a robot for older students).

Whole of school

- Start a school book club.
- Set up groups to bring together like-minded students e.g. maths club, chess club etc.
- Ensure students have opportunities to participate in arts and music.

During break times

- Put board games out at lunch time.
- Allow students access to books at break times.
- Set up a sensory room near student support services.



Benefits of being Socially active



Connecting with others is not only enjoyable but also provides us with a support base when we need it.

Sharing the good times and being supported in the not-so-good times is what friendships are all about.

Relationships and social connections provide us with a sense of belonging, which is essential for our mental health and wellbeing. Belonging to groups, whether formal or informal, large or small, local or even international, contributes to our identity and who we are.

Belonging helps define our sense of identity and satisfies our psychological need for friendship. It's important that we stay socially active on a daily basis.



Here are some suggestions on how to be socially active at school:

In the classroom

- Use social activity sheets - our 'Being a Great Mate' and 'How to Make Friends' sheets are available here:



actbelongcommit.org.au/programs-initiatives/mentally-healthy-schools

- Provide opportunities for students to sit and work with students they wouldn't usually.
- Become pen-pals with a class in another state or country.
- Encourage and model good social interaction, e.g. sharing, cooperating, eye contact and active listening.
- Practise social interaction through role-play and drama.

During break times

- Set up games and activities for students to easily connect over.
- Start a lunch group where students can sit and eat together.

Before and after school

- Create clubs or groups for students' different interests (maths club, drama club, Minecraft, etc.)

Whole of school

- Encourage a culture of inclusion and friendliness at the school:



aits.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/spotlight/creating-an-inclusive-classroom-culture-fact-sheet.pdf?sfvrsn=5cf3d33c_2

- Implement a peer system between students in lower year groups and upper year groups.
- Buddy bench - having a bench where students can sit if they feel lonely and other students can recognise this and make an effort to include student(s).
- Develop student groups, such as the garden club, sustainability club, Act Belong Commit club, etc. This enables students to be involved with a cause they are passionate about with like-minded students.

Outside of school

- Attend a local community event.
- Join a community group or youth group.
- Attend a workshop with like-minded people to learn about a hobby or interest.
- Join a sports team.
- Join a band or arts group.
- Provide school events outside of school for students, families and the wider community to attend (e.g. markets, discos, fundraisers, etc.)

Benefits of being Physically active



Regular physical activity is a known protective behaviour for preventing mental health issues, and is beneficial to mental health and wellbeing.

Evidence suggests young people who are more physically active are more likely to report higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction, and are less likely to be diagnosed with a mental health condition. Although the evidence is still emerging, it seems exercise may also reduce the incidence of mental health conditions such as depression.

Regular physical activity may also improve cognitive development, social skills and can have positive impacts on academic achievement.

Australia's physical activity guidelines

The national physical activity guidelines recommend children and young people aged between 5 and 17 years should do at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. Activities that strengthen the muscle and bones should be incorporated into the recommended 60 minutes at least three days per week.

Participation rates of school aged children

Data suggests less than half of Western Australian school-aged children (aged 5-15 years) are being

active every day with data from 2018 suggesting only 40.1% met the recommended physical activity levels. In addition, 65% of 5-8-year-olds, 78% aged 9-11 years and 72% aged 12-14 years participated in organised sport outside of school only once per week.



Here are some suggestions on how to be physically active at school:

In the classroom

- 15x star jumps at the beginning of class or an alternative energiser:



app.education.nsw.gov.au/sport/classroom-energisers

- Nature-based education opportunities:



actbelongcommit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Act_Belong_Commit_Schools_factsheet_mindfulness_nature.pdf

- Guided classroom dance videos from GoNoodle on YouTube:



youtube.com/gonoodle

- In-class yoga breaks with Cosmic Yoga:



cosmickids.com/watch

- Fitness brain breaks (stretching, jumping, a lap around the classroom).

- Movement within lessons (e.g. four corners, hopscotch in Maths, acting out scenes in English).

- Provide time for free play in addition to recess and lunch.

During break times

- Make equipment enabling physical activity available at recess and lunch.

- Open the gym at recess and lunch and encourage mini tournaments (e.g. table tennis, basketball).

- Organise friendly staff vs student competitions.

Whole of school

- 10-minute morning whole school exercise or yoga classes.

- Develop or encourage school sporting clubs or competitions:



sportaus.gov.au/schools

- Inclusive physical education and activities:



app.education.nsw.gov.au/sport/policy-inclusion

Before and after school

- Promote the KidSport grants to parents and caregivers through your school newsletter:



dlgsc.wa.gov.au/funding/sport-and-recreation-funding/kidsport

- Encourage walk or bike to school days (if safe and appropriate):



actionforhealthykids.org/activity/walk-to-school



natureplaywa.org.au/talk-n-walk-to-school

- Consider structural barriers in the school setting for why students aren't using active transport such as bike lockers.

Benefits of being Culturally active



Culture means different things to different people. Keeping connected to culture can provide social and emotional wellbeing benefits.

Teaching students about their family or culture and language is a great way to be culturally active. In addition to this, taking part in cultural ceremonies and expressing culture in the arts are further ways we can connect.

Doing cultural practices together benefits both adults and the next generation. Connecting to culture can increase feelings of belonging, and learning about other cultures can increase inclusion and empathy.

It's important for teachers to be culturally responsive as it allows them to celebrate students' differences, allows students to demonstrate their cultural strengths and helps to make students feel safe and included in their classrooms.

As well as continuously reflecting on understandings and practices, there are a number of strategies schools and classroom teachers can implement to ensure they are providing opportunities for students to be connected to their culture.



Here are some suggestions on how to be culturally active at school:

In the classroom

- Ensure lessons are culturally diverse and responsive:



actbelongcommit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/on-country-learning-experiences.pdf



aitsl.edu.au/teach/intercultural-development/building-a-culturally-responsive-australian-teaching-workforce

- Build a word wall of ways to say 'hello' or 'welcome' in other languages:



australiantranslationservices.com.au/how-to-greet-the-world-with-a-hello-in-15-different-languages

- Read and watch stories on other cultures:



readings.com.au/collections/cultural-diversity-in-kids-books



sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/diverse-picture-books

- Reflect on culturally significant dates and celebrations:



homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-affairs/about-multicultural-affairs/calendar-of-cultural-and-religious-dates

- Introduce and use language from other cultures in the classroom.
- Group students using language names (e.g., Aboriginal birds).
- Celebrate differences and strengths of various cultures.
- Teach culture truthfully and factually.

Whole of school

- Deliver an Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of the day and before large school events:



education.wa.edu.au/web/policies/-/welcome-to-country-and-acknowledgement-of-country-protocols

- Acknowledge and celebrate cultures as a school (e.g. NAIDOC week, Chinese New Year, Diwali, etc. (links to cross-curriculum priorities).

- Translate documents for culturally and linguistically diverse families.

- Invite families into the school and build positive relationships and understanding of other cultures.

- Partner with local cultural organisations and invite them into the school.

During break times

- Introduce games from other cultures:



sportaus.gov.au/yulunga

- Have food from different cultures available at the canteen at recess and lunch.

- Play music from other cultures.



Benefits of being Spiritually active



While the term spirituality means different things to different people, engaging in some form of spiritual activity contributes to mental wellbeing.

Having a sense of spirituality can help people keep things in perspective, provide hope in times of need, relieve stress and can also have social benefits.

There are many ways for schools to support students to express spirituality such as spending time in nature, meditation and mindfulness or creative practices. The benefits of spirituality are greater if practised on a regular basis, particularly daily!

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is awareness of one's internal states and surroundings. It is the practice of learning to observe our thoughts, emotions, and other present moment experiences without judging or reacting to them. We can practise mindfulness through colouring, showing gratitude, spending time connecting with nature and meditating.

Connecting with nature

Spending time in nature connects us to something bigger. We can reflect on the beauty of nature and our existence in it. Benefits are more pronounced

when we not only spend time in nature but we actively connect with it, such as smelling a flower or listening to birds.

Creativity

Creative practices are a way to express ourselves. When we are acting creatively our minds are focused on being productive. Working towards something can take our mind off stressors and worries and help us regulate our emotions. Creative practices can also improve social cohesion and increase a sense of belonging.



Here are some suggestions on how to be spiritually active at school:

In the classroom

- Practise gratitude - fill in our gratitude activity:



actbelongcommit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Act_Belong_Commit_gratitude_primary.pdf

- Offer colouring options in class. Our mindful colouring templates are available here:



actbelongcommit.org.au/programs-initiatives/mentally-healthy-schools

- Teach students about respecting others' spiritual beliefs.
- Reflect on how students feel before and after a creative activity.
- Run regular mindfulness/meditation sessions during the week.

During break times

- Offer lunch time mindful meditation sessions. Smiling Mind has some great YouTube videos:



youtube.com/@SmilingMindTV

- Offer lunch time nature walks.

Whole of school

- Offer a collaborative colouring activity. Ours is available here:



actbelongcommit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Act_Belong_Commit_mindful_collaborative_colouring.pdf

- Offer creative outlets (band, theatre groups, photography etc.)
- Provide a space for students to be mindful, e.g. a calm corner or room.
- Provide space(s) for students to pray.

Outside of school

- Attend a religious service if this aligns with your values.
- Connect with nature. Smell a flower, listen to the birds.
- Promote local theatre, music and art groups around the school.

