

# Student wellbeing and help-seeking using the Six-Star Student Wellbeing Survey

By Anthony Klarica - **Six-Star Wellbeing**

**Early intervention** and proactive wellbeing development are vital in preventing many challenges for students and schools. Education on topics such as resilience, mood and positivity can build skills and have a positive lasting impact on students and schools. In the process, student help-seeking can also be developed. **The Six-Star Student Wellbeing Survey will enable you to be both proactive with the wellbeing of your students, and also foster the important skill of help-seeking.**

It has been estimated that between 40% and 50% of all adult mental health disorders begin by adolescence (1). More specifically, approximately 50% of all lifetime mental disorders start by age 14 and 75% by age 24. Additionally, the median on-set age for lifetime anxiety disorders is 11 years (2).

Unfortunately, many students and young people are unskilled and unfamiliar with help-seeking. Seeking help, particularly for personal or emotional factors, is too readily seen as a negative, rather than something that strong, achieving people do well and regularly. A significant study by the Australian government into child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing found a range of barriers to help-seeking in 4 to 17-year olds with a mental disorder (3).

Most common barriers reported for not seeking or receiving help by parents and carers for 4-17 year olds with a mental disorder included:

- Not sure where to get help
- Preferring to handle the issue alone
- Couldn't afford help

Reasons for not seeking or receiving help based on reports from 13-17 year olds with depression were:

- Concerned what others would think
- Thought it would work out itself
- Wanting to work out the problem on their own or with family and friends

Similar investigations into help-seeking in adolescents and young adults have highlighted that facilitators include (4):

- Perceived positive past experiences (with support)
- Social support
- Encouragement from others (to seek support and address issues)

In this particular study it was concluded that improving mental health literacy, reducing stigma and taking into account young people's desire for self-reliance should be considered when encouraging help-seeking.

Developing help-seeking, however, should not be viewed as a stand-alone target. In my experience, proactive preventative wellbeing programs both educate students on wellbeing and develop help-seeking.

A model for effective programs can comprise of:

- Screening all students utilising a multi-dimensional wellbeing tool
- Utilising group data to provide feedback and education to students
- Following-up with students identified to have potential concerns and starting a conversation on wellbeing

Some of the benefits and features of the model above include:

- Facilitate relationship building opportunities between students and staff on social-emotional topics
- Increase wellbeing and positive psychology literacy of all students
- Build skills of the student population in wellbeing and positive psychology areas
- Utilise positive psychology education to reduce the severity of social-emotional concerns
- Utilise data on students to monitor changes to wellbeing categories
- Have direct education with students on help-seeking regarding benefits
- Provide an avenue for students to disclose information on wellbeing in a manner other than by starting a conversation or discussion

The Six-star Wellbeing Survey that I have developed for this purpose focusses on **mood, resilience, school engagement, relaxation, communication and positivity (5)**.

Multi-dimensional data collection also becomes applicable to the entire student population, rather than a small percentage of a student group. Such data collection also lends itself to whole class or large student group education, which strengthens student emotional skills and in-turn the school climate.

In summary, it is clear that help-seeking, particularly for students with social-emotional concerns, is challenging and lacking. Schools that emphasise early intervention can simultaneously build positive psychology skills, foster help-seeking and create opportunities for coaching students. This can be achieved by multi-dimensional whole student population screening using a survey such as **the Six-Star Wellbeing Survey**.

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## **ANTHONY KLARICA SIX-STAR WELLBEING**

- (1) Adult mental health disorders and their age at onset. P.B.Jones. British Journal of Psychiatry, 2013, 202: s5-s10.
- (2) Lifetime prevalence and age of onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication. Kessler et al. Archives of General Psychiatry, 2005, 62: 593-602.
- (3) The mental health of children and adolescents: report on the second Australian child and adolescent survey on mental health and wellbeing. Lawrence et. al. Commonwealth of Australia, 2015.
- (4) Perceived barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking in young people; a systematic review. Gulliver et. al. 2010, 10: 113.
- (5) Klarica et. al. 2017. The Six-Star Wellbeing Survey: A universal wellbeing screening tool for schools and students. [www.sixstarwellbeing.com.au](http://www.sixstarwellbeing.com.au)