



Mentally Healthy Schools

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee toolkit

A guide for introducing and delivering a meaningful Student Mental Wellbeing Committee in schools.

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What is a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee?

A Student Mental Wellbeing Committee is a group of students who meet with supportive adults to work together on promoting and improving student wellbeing within their school.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committees can be an important place for encouraging students to reflect upon their wellbeing and create meaningful actions, including initiatives, activities and events to promote mental wellbeing and a sense of belonging for the school community.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committees can be delivered in different ways and frequencies to suit the school's needs and capacity. At their core, Student Mental Wellbeing Committees will focus on improving dialogue between students, teachers and other staff members on themes related to student wellbeing.

Increasingly, research shows positive links between active participation of students and positive mental wellbeing. Students respond positively to opportunities to express themselves and 'have a say' on how initiatives are run within their school.

"Having a say has been shown to reflect a sense of being cared for, respected, and valued, and of being viewed by others as unique individuals with opinions, preferences, and needs that are worthy of being heard and acted upon."

(Anderson and Graham, 2015)

Meaning can be added when student voices translate into action. Student Mental Wellbeing Committees are therefore most effective when they are set up in ways where students views are responded to, and lead to dialogues about if and how their opinions can be actioned within the school. This can be achieved through a range of small initiatives, promotions and events that are co-designed between students, staff and the wider school community.

This toolkit provides information and resources which aim to support the development of Student Mental Wellbeing Committees with a focus on safety, dialogue and positive relationships between students and the school staff who work with them.

Key components of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Setting a scope

The scope and purpose of the Committee needs to be clearly communicated to those involved with the Committee and the wider school community.

It is important that students are aware that it is not the role of Committee members to counsel other students or provide mental wellbeing advice or support on behalf of the Committee.

The purpose of the Committee should be focused on planning, developing and promoting mentally healthy initiatives and providing opportunities for the school community to participate in activities and events to improve mental wellbeing and a sense of belonging for the school community.

Due to the nature of the Committee, some mental health and wellbeing topics may be raised. Act Belong Commit recommends setting a strong scope before the first Committee meeting to ensure that the students and staff involved understand the purpose of the Committee.

If the school wishes, some mental wellbeing related issues can be discussed, such as bullying, friendships, belonging

and how the Committee can work to educate and/or improve relevant issues within the school through initiatives, activities and events.

Staff leading the Committee should ensure discussions are age appropriate and encourage strategies that are appropriate for the school community.

Setting boundaries

Similar to setting a scope, schools may wish to consider expressing boundaries for the Committee directly to students.

This could be formed collectively with students in an initial planning session and a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee charter could be developed.

Holding a group discussion on how to positively discuss topics around mental wellbeing can help individuals understand their role in the Committee, as well as ensuring the Committee members work towards common goals.

Examples of discussion points for setting boundaries are included on the next page (6).

Key components of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Examples of discussion points for setting boundaries may include:

- We focus on providing opportunities for the school community to participate in mentally healthy activities and events.
- We protect our own mental wellbeing as the first priority.
- We are student representatives rather than counsellors or therapists.
- We don't comment on specific issues we may have heard about regarding other students.
- We use positive language, avoiding outdated terms such as 'crazy' or 'insane'.
- We can leave the room if at any point we feel uncomfortable during a discussion.
- We can talk to a teacher or other adult privately if we are concerned about anything raised during a Committee meeting.

Regular meetings

Having regular meetings helps to support the Committee to have a sense of regularity and purpose. Meetings could be held as regularly as once every two weeks, but some schools may find that once or twice a term is a more realistic timeframe.

Consider student and staff capacity and decide upon a regular timeframe that is realistic and achievable.

Regular Staff Leader meetings

Having at least two regular staff members who facilitate the committee meetings will help students have a sense of stability and provide opportunities for students to build meaningful relationships with staff supporting the Committee.

Each school will need to consider who is best placed to lead the committee, with those who are interested or passionate in the subject likely to be most suitable.

Student Committee roles

It is important that students are clear of their roles within the Committee. Each school can consider whether to formalise different roles within the Committee, such as having a Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Media Manager and other roles.

Formalising roles in this way can help students to explore different roles that are often present in other groups or committees. Schools may wish to weigh this benefit with the potential challenges of adding additional student responsibilities and workload.

Act Belong Commit Committee roles

Some Mentally Healthy Schools divide their student wellbeing groups into 'Act' 'Belong' 'Commit', whereby students are allocated or choose one main focus to work on and be responsible for within the Committee.

Examples of Act Belong Commit Committee roles are included on the next page (7).

Key components of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Examples of Act Belong Commit Committee roles



Purpose

Provide students and staff with opportunities to be mentally, socially, physically, culturally and spiritually active.

Initiatives/activities/events

- Lunchtime mindfulness activities.
- Games/activities at school events.
- Assist in running whole-school events.
- Present on behalf on the Committee at assemblies.
- Morning physical activity (yoga, run club).



Purpose

Provide students, staff and the wider school community with opportunities that lead to a strong sense of belonging.

Initiatives/activities/events

- Break time clubs based on students' interests.
- Promote student voice through surveys/speaking to peers.
- Assist with whole-school events.
- Promote safe spaces (calm corners, sensory rooms etc.)
- Plan and run events that invite families into the school.



Purpose

Provide students and staff with opportunities to commit to an important cause and feel a sense of purpose.

Initiatives/activities/events

- Fundraising activities.
- Plan and develop a school vegetable garden.
- Recruit student volunteers to assist with running events.
- Events that promote gold coin, food and clothing donations.
- Get students involved in a school mural.

Key components of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Meeting discussion topics

It is encouraged that students bring their own ideas to meetings; however, it is also helpful to consider the focus and strategies that are likely to be achievable and impactful for the school community.

A [Student Mental Wellbeing Committee Meeting Agenda Template](#) has been developed to support the Committee in discussing important topics and staying on track within meetings. Topics may include:

Mental wellbeing issues

It is important that this is not the main focus of the Committee, however, issues that help develop ideas for initiatives, activities and events may be discussed.

Some age-appropriate issues could include:

- Making friends and maintaining friendships.
- School belonging.
- The impact of words (including bullying and things said when experiencing challenging emotions like frustration or anger).
- Managing stress, particularly around homework or exams.

- The importance of nutrition and eating well.
- Regulating emotions.
- Balancing commitments and interests.

Previous events/activities

Summarising and discussing the success and challenges of previous events and activities, including how staff and students received the event/activities. It is important to ensure continuous improvement of the Committee's processes and planning strategies.

Upcoming initiatives/events/activities

Discussing what is upcoming is useful, as it allows for the Committee to distribute

roles, tasks and responsibilities between staff and students committee members.

Planning

This is a useful discussion point, as members with actions can update the Committee with the status of their tasks, while providing an opportunity to ask for support if needed. Planning and updating the Committee on their action items is an important skill for students to learn.

Future ideas

Included for great ideas that come up but may not be feasible in the current term or year and want to be remembered for future planning.

Key components of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Fun and reflective activities

Discussing mental wellbeing may be challenging for some students.

Consider that some students may be drawn to involvement in these topics due to a personal connection to mental ill-health, either personally or through a close friend or family member.

Because of this it is important to approach topics in ways that are sensitive, positive and fun.

Using icebreakers to open meetings and game or play based activities can help to facilitate discussions in lighter ways that help to protect students and ultimately enhance discussion.

Planning initiatives, activities and events

The Student Mental Wellbeing Committee should be encouraged to review school events throughout the year where they can initiate and promote opportunities for participation in mentally healthy activities.

This could include a short presentation or activity as part of a bigger pre-existing event, a more targeted event, or a promotional initiative within the school.

Each school should consider their individual environment and the best way for the Committee to provide opportunities for students, staff and the wider community.

Initiative examples

- School recycling programs.
- School compositing programs.
- Waste Warriors Team.
- Posters displayed around the school to promote messaging decided upon by the Committee.
- Embedding a Student Mental

Wellbeing Committee update in regular assemblies.

- Including a success story from the Committee in the school newsletter.
- Implementing a vegetable garden.

Activity examples

- Weekly run clubs.
- Lunchtime mindfulness activities.
- A breathing or mindfulness exercise delivered by older students or teachers as part of the school day.
- Sharing information about mental wellbeing tips (**such as Act Belong Commit Key Messages**) at assemblies.
- Break time clubs e.g. art/LEGO clubs.

Event examples

- A 'Have a go day' where local community, art and sporting groups visit the school and allow students to try new activities.
- A uniform-free day which donates money to a mental wellbeing charity and raises awareness.
- A stall at a fair providing information on the Committee/specific topics discussed by the Committee.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee decision making process example

1

During a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee meeting, students are asked to discuss a strategy that has a positive impact on their mental wellbeing.

Together the Committee came up with the following list:

- Being outside.
- Playing sports.
- Being creative.
- Watching a movie.
- Hanging out with their friends.
- Relaxing in the school holidays.

2

The Staff Leaders ask the Committee to vote on which strategy they would like to focus on for an event or activity. To do this Staff Leaders write each strategy on a piece of butcher's paper and ask students to tick the strategy they would most like to work on.

3

The students place the most ticks on 'being outside' and a short group discussion takes place on why this is the most important strategy to focus on.

The students feedback that the main reasons are:

- Not as many students prioritise time outside as they do sports or watching movies.
- The school already has lots of activities for sports but does not currently have activities or events specifically focused on nature.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee decision making process example

4

Students break into smaller groups to generate ideas on how they may encourage other students to spend more time outside. Staff Leaders support them to develop their ideas.

5

Students present back their ideas in small groups. These ideas include:

- Putting up posters that explain the benefits of nature on mental wellbeing.
- Holding a whole-school competition around which class has spent the most time outside.
- Advocating to the School Principal for 'outside time' where students participate in a scavenger hunt to find items (rocks, leaves etc.) or answers to clues (e.g. what is the name of the tree near the sports shed?).

6

Staff Leaders feedback that as this idea takes place during class time, the Committee will need to be clear on its value in order to effectively advocate for the approach to the leadership team.

Further discussions take place to refine the idea, including 'outside time' taking place before or after school, teachers tasked with incorporating outside time in appropriate classes, and asking for student feedback on the initiative to assess its benefit to students.

Key benefits of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Improved student/teacher relationships

Having time and space outside of the classroom helps to build stronger relationships between staff and students. Fostering these relationships can lead to a greater sense of social connectedness at school and improved social and emotional skills.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committees can also provide a key space for staff to encourage more participatory approaches and pedagogies such as collective decision making and student-led initiatives. In turn, students can experience more positive relationships with peers and school staff involved in the Committee.

Working together can help to develop feelings of collaboration and commitment, both of which have been found to be a central feature of relationship-based wellbeing.

Curriculum alignment and student leadership

A Student Mental Wellbeing Committee aligns with the Western Australian Curriculum's General Capabilities of Personal and Social Capability, as the skills learnt while working with the Committee will improve life skills, social and emotional learning and improve relationship skills.

A student committee also teaches students skills that relate directly to the Humanities and Social Sciences subject area, particularly the Civics and Citizens strand, as students who take part in a student committee can learn the value of self-expression, participation in democratic processes and the promotion of social justice.

These skills are central to the development of leadership skills and will support skills such as active listening, speaking in groups, teamwork, negotiation and compromise.

Key benefits of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

Increased understanding of student wellbeing needs

Providing a platform for students to openly discuss their opinions, thoughts and needs in relation to wellbeing at school leads to increased understanding of student needs.

Hearing directly from students will always lead to a more complete view of how they are experiencing school and provide insights beyond what staff alone would have contemplated. This increased level of insight can be used to improve the wellbeing within the school community.

Improving school culture

While learning about wellbeing is beneficial to students, there is a risk that wellbeing can be seen as a subject, rather than a school-wide approach.

Initiatives that involve students outside of the classroom help to facilitate the Mentally Healthy Schools Program and The Health Promoting School Framework's 'whole-school approach' which supports a more expansive view of wellbeing.

Over time, students taking on more active roles in planning and delivering strategies to promote wellbeing can help positively shift the school culture into one where wellbeing is integral to students' experience of school and their lives.



Key delivery factors

Meaningful engagement and avoiding tokenism

While research shows that engaging with students' views can be a productive way to increase a sense of ownership and influence at school, it's important to consider how to meaningfully action these views.

While it may not be possible to action every idea that students raise during a meeting, having honest conversations about what is achievable and beneficial and what is likely to be challenging is important.

Effective youth governance structures involve feedback mechanisms so students can see the effects of having their voices heard.

The **Student Mental Wellbeing Committee Planning and Feedback Tool** was developed as an easy framework for providing feedback to students on actions resulting from their suggestions.

"It's pretty hard to come across a teacher that really respects and values your opinion; a lot of them they listen to you and they ask your opinion but they don't do anything about it - they just leave it."

Year 11 student (Graham, 2015)

Building relationships

Supporting students to share their opinions and needs requires developing relationships that can facilitate this type of open dialogue.

Students may experience a heightened sense of vulnerability sharing more personal opinions than they would in a typical lesson.

Fostering an environment of mutual respect, clarifying roles and expectations and facilitating opportunities for fun and reflection are all key elements of building positive relationships.

"Children do not engage fully if they do not feel a sense of warmth and affection; they cannot participate equally if they are not respected as rights-holders; and they will not have a real impact unless there is mutual esteem and solidarity, and a sense of shared purpose."

(Nigel Thomas, 2012)

Key delivery factors

Recognising students' contributions

Recognition is a central part of participatory processes and collective decision-making involving students.

Students taking part will generally be giving up break times to contribute to the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee, and these efforts should be recognised to foster a sense of pride and empowerment for students.

Student recognition works best when it is an ongoing process where students can see that their contributions are valued regularly.

Examples of effective positive recognition within the Committee

Love-a-lanche activity

When to deliver the activity

When students have formed a positive dynamic and have some knowledge of the other students in the Committee.

What you need

Students names in a hat, paper, pens.

How to deliver the activity

- Put all students' names in a hat on individual pieces of paper. Draw one out and inform the students of who has been selected. Staff Leaders can also choose a student who has been demonstrating positive skills, leadership or responsibility within the group.
- Hand out pieces of paper to each of the students (aside from the student who has been drawn from the hat).
- Ask each student to write a positive comment about the person selected. These are to be done anonymously and scrunched up when finished.
- Once all students are finished writing their comments, shout 'Love-a-lanche' and instruct all students to softly throw their pieces of paper at the selected student.
- The selected student can take the pieces away to read later.

This activity can be completed at the end of each meeting or select one meeting per term, with a different student selected each time.

Key delivery factors

Examples of effective positive recognition within the Committee

Recognition capes

When to deliver the activity

When students have formed a positive dynamic and have some knowledge of the other students in the Committee.

What you need

A piece of butcher's paper for each student and marker pens.

How to deliver the activity

- Hand out a piece of butcher's paper to each student.
- Ask them to rip the top of the paper in a 'u' or 'v' shape ready to attach it as a cape later. Students can write their name on their cape.
- Students write on each other's capes with comments about what they have noticed each other do well within the Committee.
- Repeat until each student has written a comment for each other student.
- When everyone has finished, students can review their cape comments and wear the cape around their neck/shoulders (tape can be used to make this more secure).

Examples of school-wide effective positive recognition

- Certificates presented to the Committee in assemblies (see **Act Belong Commit Merit Certificate**).
- Signed thank you letters from the school Principal.
- A photo of the Committee in the annual school yearbook or a wall in the office.
- Include a photo and acknowledgement of the students involved in the Committee in the school newsletter.
- Regular presentations from the Committee at assemblies.
- Thank the Committee for their contributions to the school community at the end of term or year assembly.

Key delivery factors

Evaluating the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee

An important part of knowing how the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee is being experienced by students involved in the Committee is by evaluating it.

Having an evaluation framework in place can support a process of continuous improvement, supporting both staff and students to reflect upon what is working well and what could be improved.

Evaluation can include formal feedback forms conducted at the end of each term or school year, as well as more participatory forms of evaluation.

Formal feedback often includes a range of quantitative and qualitative questions to gain the most complete picture of students' experiences.

Example of formal feedback statements:

Please score each of the following statements on a scale from 1-5 (with 5 being the highest score):

- I enjoy attending the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee.
- I feel as though my voice is valued within the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee.
- I have opportunities to meaningfully promote mental wellbeing within the Committee.
- I receive feedback on ideas I share within the Committee.
- I am pleased with the progress of the Committee.

Please provide a comment in response to the following questions:

- What has been your favourite moment from the Committee this term?
- What event or activity did you think was most successful and why?
- Please describe a view you have expressed within the Committee that has led to an action being taken within the school?
- If you were encouraging another student to join the Committee, what would you tell them to encourage them to come?

Key delivery factors

Examples of participatory feedback mechanisms:

- Draw a picture that reflects how you feel about the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee.
- Smiley face scales.
- Write a story about a positive moment/event/activity from the Committee.
- Stand up/sit down (asking students to sit down or stand up in relation to questions around their experiences of the Committee).
- Balloon evaluations (blowing up balloons to represent enjoyment of a meeting. For example, a large balloon means a really good meeting and a deflated balloon means a really bad meeting).

Whole-school feedback

As well as evaluating the perspectives of those involved in the Committee, the school may benefit from seeking evaluation from students and teachers across the school. This could take place in the form of a simple survey conducted at the start of the school day.

The survey could be electronic or written and may include questions such as:

- Have you heard of the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee?
- Do you have any suggestions for key issues the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee should focus on?
- Which (events, initiatives etc.) delivered by the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee have you found useful?

Case study: Ursula Frayne Catholic College's Act Belong Committee

Ursula Frayne Catholic College's Student Mental Wellbeing Committee was set up in 2020. Named the 'Act Belong Committee', the group is led by a teacher and the school's psychologist. They have a regular cohort of 12 students who attend, with others dropping in and out throughout the school year.

Setting up

The 'Act Belong Committee' was initially set up for students from Years 10-12 and was then extended to students in Years 8-12 after it had established its scope and regular attendance. A decision was made not to include year 7s as they are typically adjusting to a new school environment.

The group was initially advertised on the student notice board, and at the beginning of every year there is a call out so that new students can sign up.



Case study: Ursula Frayne Catholic College's Act Belong Committee

Key activities

- 'Dress Down to Stress Down' event which promoted mental wellbeing across the school-wide event.
- Making stress balls and sharing food.
- Group discussions around managing stress.
- Designing a community and belonging home room.
- In 2021 the group was awarded a QCE Award for 'Best Student Led Activity'.

Top tips for other schools

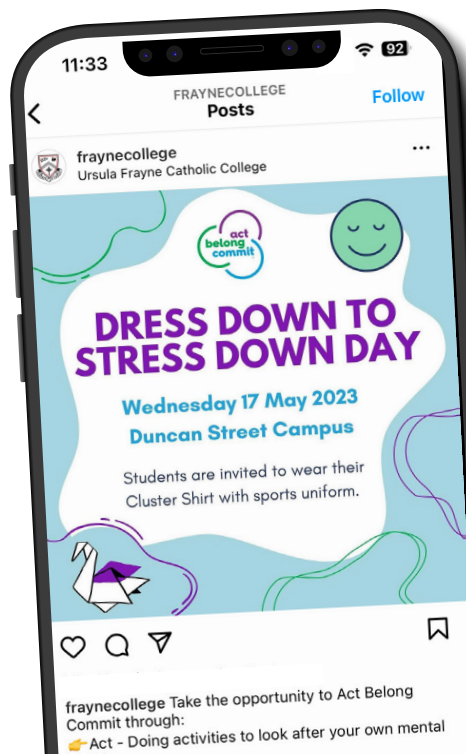
- Set the tone using positive Act Belong Commit messaging from the outset.
- Define the roles of students on the Committee.
- Emphasise students looking out for themselves and the importance of boundaries.
- Ask students for feedback to help improve the Committee.
- Use small positive successes to justify requests for school budget being allocated to the activity.

What's next for the Act Belong Committee?

Following on from many successes with the Act Belong Committee, Ursula Frayne continues to innovate and seek to improve the Committee outcomes.

They are currently considering producing a handbook for students which supports those who take part in the Committee.

They are also considering how they may increase and formalise leadership skills students build during the Committee, particularly through the potential introduction of named roles for those regularly attending.



Find out more about Ursula Frayne's Act Belong Committee at:
[youtube.com/watch?v=mGCN0GKq7EM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGCN0GKq7EM)

Setting up a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee – Checklist

The following checklist has been designed to help schools think about the necessary actions, decisions and considerations of setting up a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee.

Deciding on leaders

Decide upon at least two staff members who will be the Staff Leaders of the Committee.

Key staff meeting to review **setting a scope** and discuss the purpose of the Committee and how it will run.

Decide if both staff members will be co-leaders, or if different roles will be undertaken and what these are.

Come up with a regular meeting time for Staff Leaders to plan and debrief on the Committee.

Discuss the Committee with the Leadership Team.

Making delivery decisions

Frequency and duration of Committee meetings.

Location of Committee meetings.

Which year group(s) will be invited to join the Committee.

Committee roles.

If all students are welcome to join the Committee, or if there's a nomination system to promote interest and elect members.

Continued on next page

Communicating with other staff

Brief explanation/presentation is provided to other staff during a team meeting/briefing.

Other staff understand the purpose of the Committee and key details related to it.

Promoting the Committee within the school

Design a poster to help promote the Committee within the school (The **Act Belong Commit logo** can be used on this).

Decide upon a system for signing up.

Announce the Committee at an assembly and communicate the benefits of being involved.

Announce the newly formed Committee, communicate the purpose and how it will benefit staff and students.

Decide on communication methods for updating students and staff on Committee events and activities.

Holding the first meeting

Staff Leaders meet to discuss the first meeting and plan agenda, icebreakers and games to introduce the Committee.

Staff Leaders work with students to design a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee charter.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee support resources

Act Belong Commit has developed resources that can be used to support the development and delivery of a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee.

Meeting Agenda Template

An editable Meeting Agenda Template has been developed to support the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee in discussing important topics and staying on track within meetings.

Topics can include:

- Mental wellbeing issues.
- Previous events/activities.
- Upcoming initiatives/events/activities.
- Planning.
- Future Ideas.

Adapt the template to suits your school's context and needs.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee – Meeting agenda template

Purpose:
To plan, develop and promote initiatives, activities and events to students, staff and the wider community at [insert school name] to improve the mental wellbeing and sense of belonging of the school community.

Attendance:
Staff Leaders:
Students:
Apologies:

Date/Time	Discussions/topics	Action items	Student/staff responsible	Review date
	Mental wellbeing issues:			
	Previous initiatives/events/activities:			
	Upcoming initiatives/events/activities:			
	Planning:			
	Future ideas:			

We're a Mentally Healthy School

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee – Meeting agenda template

Purpose:
To plan, develop and promote initiatives, activities and events to students, staff and the wider community at [insert school name] to improve the mental wellbeing and sense of belonging of the school community.

Discussions/topics	Action items	Student/staff responsible	Review date
Mental wellbeing issues:			
Previous initiatives/events/activities:			
Upcoming initiatives/events/activities:			
Planning:			
Future ideas:			

Healthy School

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee support resources

What's Your Why?

What's Your Why? is about helping students and staff to understand their interest in, and commitment to mental wellbeing.

By ensuring there is space for students to share their motivations on taking part in the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee, staff involved can work to ensure their expectations are met.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee Promotional Poster

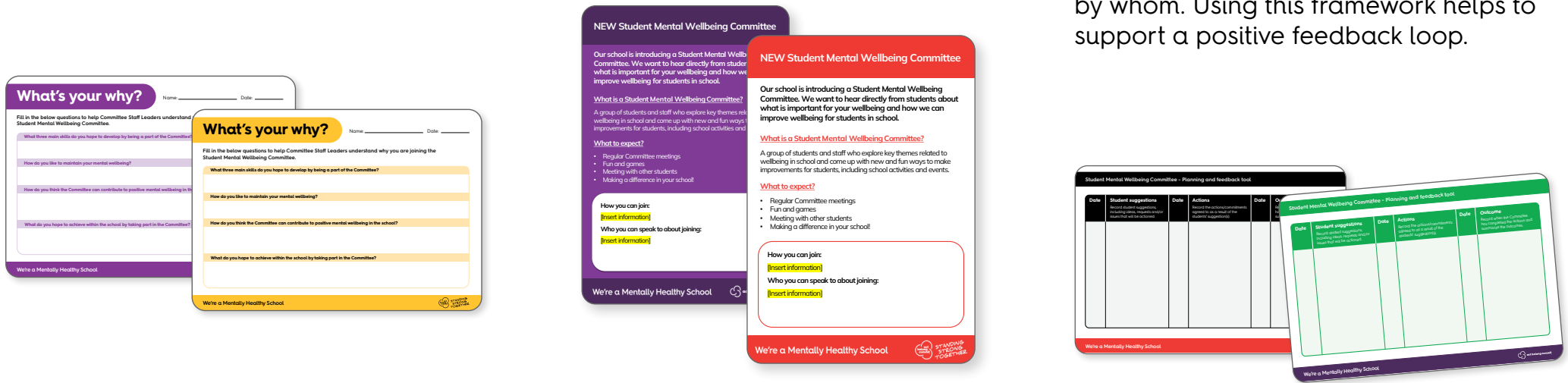
This **Promotional Poster** can be used to support the recruitment of students to the Student Mental Wellbeing Committee.

It provides an engaging format to advertise the Committee with space to fill in the details specific to your school.

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee Planning and Feedback Tool

The **Student Mental Wellbeing Committee Planning and Feedback Tool** allows a Student Mental Wellbeing Committee to record student suggestions and see how responses and actions are progressing.

This can be used during meetings to review what actions have been taken and what further actions are needed and by whom. Using this framework helps to support a positive feedback loop.



These resources (and more) are available on the School Portal (password: PurpleGreenBlue)
actbelongcommit.org.au/school-portal

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Mentally Healthy Schools

Student Mental Wellbeing Committee toolkit

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