

2024 TALK-AND- WALK-A-THON



Teachers' Guide to the Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon

We are hosting a Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon to build student connections.

October is Mental Health Month and we are encouraging students to talk and walk. Our Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon is on <insert date> at <insert time>.

The aim is to build connections between students, as strong relationships are crucial to good mental health.

Research has shown the benefits of students feeling a sense of connectedness at school include:

- A positive school culture.
- A reduction in bullying behaviours.
- Increase in students' self-worth.
- Higher attendance rates.
- Improved academic outcomes.

We also know that most young people turn to each other in times of need, rather than an adult. This highlights the need for young people to be equipped with strong peer connections and the skills to support themselves and each other.

What is the Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon?

The Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon helps all students develop the skills to experience belonging and connection. The aim is to provide an opportunity for students to start a conversation and cultivate meaningful connections, highlighting that conversation is a normal and necessary part of life.

The Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon is a free and simple way for schools to engage in Peer Support Australia's mission to build student-to-student relationships and a positive school culture.

Why is it important?

Engaging with, learning about and listening to others are not skills that come easily to everyone, but they can be taught, practised and mastered.

We will use prompts to help ease students into conversations with peers they may not have met or spoken to in the past. Students who find conversation easy will be challenged to use their skills to increase connections beyond their usual friendship groups.

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How does it work?

Students use conversation cards to help prompt discussion with each other. Ideally, students should connect with peers outside their friendship group.

The conversation cards will help students in their interactions – and we also have a guide to supporting students in the lead-up to the event.

Using the conversation cards

There is a range of conversation cards that you can use on the day. It's best to use one conversation card at a time, with two students talking and walking together between checkpoints. At each checkpoint, students will swap conversation cards and partners.

You may like to select appropriate conversation prompts from the suite of cards. Use the template provided to create new questions too – you can even involve students in coming up with some additional conversation prompts. There are also conversation cards available for students to use at home.

Preparing students for conversation

Consider preparing students for the Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon by helping them learn and practise conversation skills in advance.

Teach students how to introduce themselves to someone new. Depending on the age and maturity of your students, you may like to address turn-taking, active listening, and non-verbal communication.

Here are some questions you could discuss with students in the lead-up to your event:

- What are some ways to start a conversation?
- What are some ways to keep a conversation going?
- How does it feel when I'm having a good conversation with someone?
- How do I show someone that I am listening to them?
- What are some things that show someone is not listening?
- How do I feel when someone is listening really well to me?
- What are some things that people might do in a conversation that I don't like?
- How can I help have a good conversation with someone?

You could also use roleplay or use drawings to demonstrate effective conversational behaviours.



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Building connections when students are learning from home

You can still facilitate conversations while students are learning remotely. Here are some ways to adapt to a virtual event:

- Use the conversation cards to engage students in online conversations with each other.
- Schools can use the conversation cards with their family.
- Students could be invited to video call someone they know to discuss the conversation cards. This could be a cousin, an aunt, a sports' teammate, a friend or anyone else they would like to get to know better.
- Older students may be able to meet with a peer for a walk, if their parents permit it.

Be COVID safe on your walk

You may need to consider COVID safety when mapping out your route and planning your day. The Talk-And-Walk-A-Thon lends itself well to social distancing, particularly if you hold it outside in the fresh air. Remind students about social distancing and good hygiene, including hand washing and coughing or sneezing into their elbows.

- Schedule staggered start times to have fewer students out and about at once.
- Partner vulnerable students with existing friends to limit their close contact with additional students.
- Consider creating vertical groups, if allowed under regulations, so the whole school community can connect across cohorts. You could group students by birth month, house colour, or random allocation.



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The 4 Pillars of Wellbeing

These pillars contribute to the mental, social and emotional wellbeing of your students.

Connectedness

Connectedness involves the feelings of belonging a student develops through their relationships with peers and teachers within the school community.

Sense of self

Sense of self involves what students think, feel and believe about themselves.

Resilience

Building resilience involves the empowerment of the student to be positive, proactive and resourceful in dealing with life experiences.

Sense of possibility

A strong sense of possibility involves awareness and belief that positive outcomes can be achieved in the future.

Who is Peer Support Australia?

Peer Support Australia is a not-for-profit and has been helping Australian students build their wellbeing and connectedness for 50 years. Our signature program, the Peer Support Program, can form part of a school's wellbeing strategy.

The program involves senior students mentoring groups of younger students, using modules supplied by Peer Support Australia. Research by Deakin University reported that the program is effective. The Peer Support Programs were noted to have some of the strongest evaluation evidence of any peer support program internationally.

Contact

For more information, contact <insert person organising your event> on <email / phone>.

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