

4.7 Help to overcome personal issues

Schooling does not occur in isolation for children and young people. They bring with them the impact of their circumstances, shaped by economic, environmental and social factors. So too are they affected by the circumstances within school, such as their relationships with others. Personal issues, then, may be associated with family, household, the individual or school factors.

Emotional concerns have the potential to impact student thinking, learning, behaviours and relationships. However, emotional support facilitates social and emotional development, particularly if provided when children or young people are facing challenges.¹²² Support may be informal, through quality interpersonal relationships or through formal systems.

Requirements for support are also not static – children and young people move in and out of situations and circumstances. For some, however, situations will be sustained and these children and young people may be more vulnerable to not achieving their potential or the benefits of education without supports and intervention.

Supportive relationships facilitate positive social and emotional wellbeing and build the capacities to cope with adversity.¹²³

Survey findings

- 60 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students and 39 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students felt that their teachers care ‘a lot’ about them.
- 61 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed that teachers go out of their way to help students.
- More than two-thirds of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed that teachers will find time to talk to students.
- More than one-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported doing activities to help others at school.

Sixty-one per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreed that at their school teachers go out of their way to help students and more than two-thirds (67.4%) agreed that teachers will find time to talk to students if the students need to talk to someone.

However, less than 40 per cent of Year 7 to Year 12 students said they feel that people at school (like teachers, other school staff and the principal) care about them ‘a lot’, just over one-half (52.3%) said ‘some’ and about one in 10 students (8.7%) said they feel that teachers and other school staff do not care about them ‘at all’.

Among Year 3 to Year 6 students, 60 per cent said they feel that their teachers care ‘a lot’, 38 per cent said ‘some’ and about two per cent said ‘not at all’.

For more findings on the relationships between teachers and students see Chapter 3.2 – Teachers who have a genuine interest in our wellbeing and future.

In regard to helping others, more than one-half of Year 7 to Year 12 students reported doing activities to help others such as peer support, tutoring, coaching, being a leader or helping others with their work.

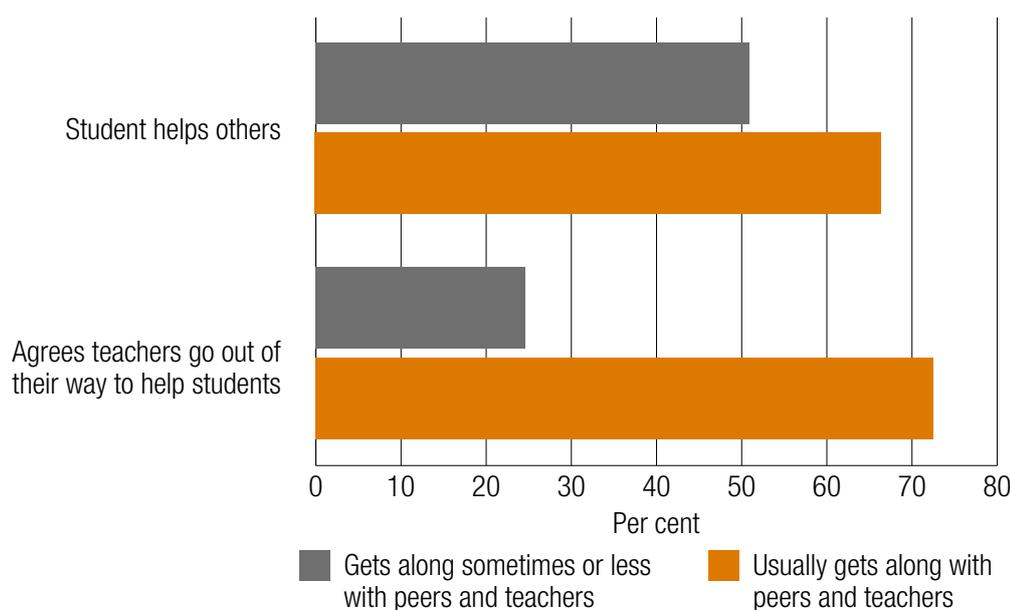
Table 4.23: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they do activities to help others at school often, sometimes or never, by selected characteristics

	Male	Female	Metropolitan	Regional	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal	All
Yes, often	14.4	19.2	18.2	15.4	17.4	15.9	17.3
Yes, sometimes	46.0	46.4	45.9	46.2	45.3	54.5	46.0
No	39.6	34.4	35.9	38.5	37.3	29.5	36.7

Students who get along with peers, teachers and family – Year 7 to Year 12

Cross-tabulation of survey results has shown that students who usually get along with their peers and teachers are more likely to say that they help others at school and that teachers go out of their way to help students (this is in comparison to students who said they get along with peers and teachers only ‘sometimes’ or less). In addition, students with families who are involved and interested in their learning were also found to be more likely to say that they help others and that teachers go out of their way to help students.

Graph 4.20: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students agreeing teachers go out of their way to help students or saying they help others, by how well student gets along with peers and teachers



Students who feel they can get help and who help others – Year 7 to Year 12

Students who said that teachers go out of their way to help students and who do activities to help others (‘often’ or ‘sometimes’) were more likely to feel part of their school, to like school, to say that being at school every day is ‘very important’ to them and to achieve high academic results. For instance:

- Students like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ (76.2% versus 31.3%).
- Students feel like part of their school (88.3% versus 51.3%).

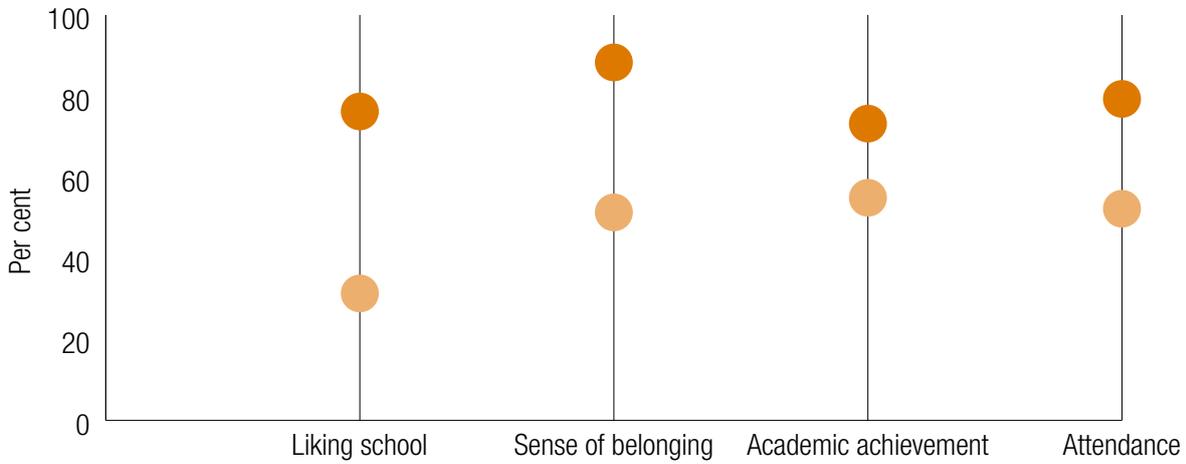
Table 4.24: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students saying they like school a lot, a bit, school is OK or they don’t like school/don’t like school at all, by response to selected statements about school

	Student agrees teachers go out of their way to help students and student does activities to help others	Student disagrees or unsure if teachers go out of their way to help students and student doesn’t do activities to help others
Likes school a lot	48.8	13.0
Likes school a bit	27.4	18.3
Thinks school is OK	20.6	45.2
Doesn’t like school/not at all	3.2	23.4

Table 4.25: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students feeling part of their school, not feeling part of their school or unsure, by response to selected statements about school

	Student agrees teachers go out of their way to help students and student does activities to help others	Student disagrees or unsure if teachers go out of their way to help students and student doesn't do activities to help others
Feels like part	88.3	51.3
Doesn't feel like part	1.1	14.8
Unsure	10.7	33.9

Graph 4.21: Selected engagement indicators for Year 7 to Year 12 students who say they help others and agree teachers go out of their way to help students or students who say they don't help others and disagree teachers go out of their way to help students



Note: Liking school includes students who said they like school ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’, sense of belonging includes students who said they feel like they are part of their school, academic achievement includes students who said they achieve ‘above average’ or ‘near the top’ in their school results and attendance includes students who said it is ‘very important’ to them to be at school every day. Students who gave a combination of answers (e.g. student helps others but disagrees teachers go out of their way) have been omitted in this graph.

Group discussion findings

“Some kids might be worried about something or they could be having difficulties with friends or at home.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Students described a range of issues or areas in which they required support. These concerns could impact their wellbeing, behaviour, attendance and learning. The reasons and circumstances in which students were seeking help significantly affected their help-seeking behaviour. Namely, students referred to:

- their relationships with others (the approachability, attitudes and responses of peers, school staff and family members)
- their own perceptions and knowledge (knowing how or where to seek help, identifying and articulating their concern, determining the seriousness of the problem)
- school practices (accessibility, availability, responses and maintaining confidentiality)
- past experiences of seeking help.

Stigma attached to needing help or being perceived as different made students feel embarrassed, shy or scared – with this as the most common difficulty to receiving or asking for help and support.

Support for a range of personal concerns

“Kids need help or support sometimes because they get bullied or have no friends or bad teachers that don’t help.”
(Year 3 to Year 6)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 discussed a range of areas in which they desired support to help them attend school, to like school and be better positioned to engage in learning. Students stated they need help and support:

- with learning
- to develop and navigate positive relationships, including responding to bullying
- with mental health and wellbeing
- to make and follow through on decisions
- with family issues.

For further discussion on student’s views on support for learning, see Chapter 4.2 – A supportive classroom environment.

To develop and navigate positive relationships

“Everyone deserves friends so we should be able to express ourselves and solve by ourselves when we fight this I believe will stop us worrying about things.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Students overwhelmingly spoke positively of their relationships with friends and the significance of these relationships. Given the importance of friends, students across Year 3 to Year 12 expressed a desire for support with learning social and emotional skills that support friendships. They described the complexity of changing friendship groups and the difficulty new students sometimes face, particularly if moving schools throughout the school year – for further discussion on school mobility see Chapter 1 – Profile statistics.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Making/finding new friends instead of playing with the same person who tosses you away like trash.”</i></p> <p><i>“Social support to help make friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“When new kids come they don’t know their way around</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>help with learning</i> • <i>miss out on things they need to learn</i> • <i>need help finding friends</i> • <i>help with school difficulties.”</i> <p><i>“Being able to socialise or let down their barriers.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Friendship circles you can be happy about.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some kids also need help with becoming more confident or social.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouraged to do more interesting activities with new students (students encouraged to do that).”</i></p>

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 also requested support for experiences of bullying. They referred to stopping bullying, but also support for dealing with bullying. They suggested support could be provided from teachers and peers.

Year 3 to Year 6

“Kids need help and support to get around bullies because some aren’t strong enough.”

“Teachers helping with bullying.”

“If they are getting bullied and need help just ask teachers or parents. It is good for others to tell teachers if they know what’s going on.”

“Report bullying.”

“People can tease and they need them not to tease.”

“Help to stop bullying.”

Positive responses to bullying helped students to feel safe at school. Safety was another area of support referred to by students and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.6 – Feeling safe. Students wanted help to feel safe at school, to know that people were there for them and looking out for them and also direct instruction on safety.

Mental health and wellbeing

“Many kids our age struggle with depression and anxiety, I think there should be effort to support them.”
(Year 7 to Year 12)

Positive mental health and wellbeing is essential for personal wellbeing and constructive relationships. Mental health concerns can result in behavioural issues, a negative sense of worth and lack of coping skills. This affects a child or young person’s quality of life and emotional wellbeing as well as their capacity to engage in school and learning.¹²⁴ Within the consultation, students noted poor mental health made it difficult to learn and to get help and support. Students discussed the requirement for mental health support and education for students. In particular, education on mental health and wellbeing was suggested as a topic that would increase the meaningfulness of education for students in Year 7 to Year 12, as discussed in Chapter 4.4 – Teaching and learning that is relevant.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Psychological help because people can be insane.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sad help because they are sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“Positive encouragement when they look/feel down.”</i></p> <p><i>“My friends help me stay calm.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Students with mental problems.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mental help – depression, self-esteem, anorexia, bulimia counselling.”</i></p> <p><i>“Many teenagers just need someone to talk to – bottling up feelings can lead to self-harm (and has at this school on several occasions).”</i></p> <p><i>“Mental, physical, emotional – support.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mental health help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Psychological issues.”</i></p> <p><i>“Anxiety.”</i></p> <p><i>“Low self-esteem.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have a phobia of meeting new people.”</i></p> <p><i>“Social anxiety.”</i></p> <p><i>“Suffer depressions.”</i></p>

For students in Year 7 to Year 12 this included needing support for feeling positive about themselves.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Confidence.”*
- “They need care and love to feel good about themselves.”*
- “Self-support.”*
- “Support to be themselves.”*
- “Encourage them to be more positive.”*

Students stressed that positive mental health and wellbeing was important for school and learning. As such, they hoped that support staff, such as counsellors, psychologists or chaplains, would be visible within schools, such as walking around, and would proactively approach students, rather than the onus being on students to seek support. Such visibility would also help to build connections between school staff and students, as noted in subsequent sections of this chapter.

To make and follow through on decisions

“Teachers and parents to support us to pursue our dreams.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

The support of friends, family members and school staff was a common theme that students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified as helping them to feel positive towards school and learning. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 wanted people in their network to be supportive of them. They wanted encouragement to feel good about school and learning and, for students in Year 7 to Year 12, for people to support the choices they made about their life. As discussed in Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested, having family members who were interested in their learning and set high expectations for them was considered an important motivating factor providing the expectations were balanced and did not create stress. Similarly, high expectations from teachers and friends encouraged persistence, resilience and self-belief.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Encouragement from everyone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouragement.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encouragement helps happiness.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Parent encouragement towards school.”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage them to be more positive.”</i></p> <p><i>“Motivation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Parents who care about their education – but not so much the kid is stressed.”</i></p>

Students in Year 7 to Year 12 are often confronted with making significant decisions about their life. Students welcomed the advice provided by teachers, friends, family members or other role models. Respect and support for the decisions they made or their goals was also an important factor students identified as encouraging them with school and learning.

Year 7 to Year 12

“Support in choices that student makes.”

“Working towards a goal with parents/family.”

“Using advice from family, teachers and friends to make choices.”

“Support them to do what they love.”

“Give some role models they can learn from.”

“Friends to help support your decisions.”

“Advice.”

To cope with family concerns

A small number of students across Year 3 to Year 12 spoke about requiring help with family concerns. Students noted that systems need to support students to deal with these concerns before they are able to engage with learning.

Students also identified how situations in the home environment can make it difficult for them to get the help and support they needed. The home may not provide a supportive environment, student’s may feel embarrassed talking to others about their family situation, feeling upset about their family situation may be difficult for students to talk about, or relationships with adults in the home may influence students attitudes towards or relationships with adults in general. For students in these situations, quality relationships at school were particularly important.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Kids need a good home environment so they don’t have a hard time.”</i></p> <p><i>“When your parents fight and you are scared to go home to your family.”</i></p> <p><i>“Things going on in the family could distract such as a death or a divorce.”</i></p> <p><i>“Divorces they might feel sad.”</i></p> <p><i>“Maybe these people are having troubles at home and it’s worrying them at school.”</i></p> <p><i>“It might be hard because family and that don’t pay attention to them so they cannot get any help.”</i></p> <p><i>“It may be hard for kids to go to school if they have family issues. If their mum or dads don’t drive a car they might miss or be late for school. They might be scared of bullies and won’t come to school.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Help coping with domestic issues and class distractions.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they have any ‘problems’ at home with family members.”</i></p> <p><i>“A support group where they can talk to other students about their issue at home. This would give them reassurance that someone else is going through something similar to what they are. It is often easier to talk to someone about something if they understand the issue at hand.”</i></p> <p><i>“A better home environment.”</i></p>

Support is relational

“Kids need emotional support to help them work at their best and focus on their work rather than other distractions (friends, problems at home etc.).” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 expressed a desire for an environment in which they felt comfortable and confident to talk about any concerns. This meant they had someone to talk to who would listen, understand, make them feel OK and who was supportive and trustworthy. Students also explained the environment should promote help-seeking behaviour – indicating that it was a sign of strength to be able to ask for or access assistance.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Somewhere where kids can express their feelings.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need lots of support and need to be confident with everything they do.”</i></p> <p><i>“More understanding.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kindness.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think kids need more people to understand them when they need it the most.”</i></p> <p><i>“A chance to tell their fears to others.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support (from the teachers and classmates) (having people you can trust).”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need a good listener to support them because if there is no listener the child will not be supported by anyone.”</i></p>	<p><i>“People who care about them and they need adults to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids need to feel like they are being understood so they can feel they can trust.”</i></p> <p><i>“We need more supportive people that will listen to us.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have someone they can rely on at all times.”</i></p> <p><i>“Love and kindness.”</i></p> <p><i>“They need to know that someone will always be there to help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“They need to know that their problems can never be too big or too small.”</i></p>

Personal networks of friends and family members and formal supports of school staff and external agencies were all essential in creating a supportive environment. Whether students felt able to talk to people within these networks and whether they felt confident in the response was highly dependent on relationships.

Students across Year 3 to Year 12 spoke positively of the many sources of support available to them. Friends, teachers, family members, carers, teacher assistants, pets, chaplains, school nurses, helplines and the community were all seen as sources of support and encouragement. These individuals were characterised as helpful, reliable, trustworthy, provided advice and cared for them, which made them feel supported and valued. Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested discusses the positive ways family members provide support in more detail.

Aboriginal students in Year 7 to Year 12 expressed a desire for more Aboriginal staff and for school staff or visitors to the school to be more aware and understanding of Aboriginal culture and ways of working. This would provide culturally appropriate support to Aboriginal students.

Students at boarding school wanted more family contact when boarding. Living away from home sometimes made it difficult for these students to feel they had access to support. However, they also noted that the experience was positive for their developing independence.

Similarly, some students stated that their friends attended different schools; limiting the amount of time they were able to see them.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<i>"Parents give us advice to support us whenever we need."</i>	<i>"Parental guidance and support."</i>
<i>"Supportive teachers, friends and family."</i>	<i>"Chaplains."</i>
<i>"Help from your teacher assistants."</i>	<i>"Mentors from other people who are around their age group and have been in the same situation."</i>
<i>"Their friends, siblings, parents, family and pets support me."</i>	<i>"Support from teachers."</i>
<i>"Nannas."</i>	<i>"Support from their parents or care takers."</i>
<i>"Pets."</i>	<i>"Counsellors, for issues."</i>
<i>"Poppas."</i>	<i>"KIDS HELPLINE."</i>
<i>"The community can support you."</i>	<i>"Health counsellor."</i>
<i>"Chaplain."</i>	<i>"Teacher aids (helpers to help you understand)."</i>
<i>"Teachers, helper, family and many more."</i>	<i>"Doctors."</i>
<i>"More helplines/ phone numbers."</i>	<i>"Kids need more support from their families."</i>
<i>"Kids helpline: 1800 555 800."</i>	<i>"Aunty, uncle."</i>
	<i>"Nana, pa."</i>
	<i>"People in general."</i>
	<i>"Psychologists."</i>

Talking to someone face-to-face was important for some students, whereas others preferred to have the option of a variety of ways to communicate and tailored to communication abilities where appropriate.

For students in Year 7 to Year 12, the anonymity offered through helplines or online options was particularly important. These options provided students with an avenue to feel comfortable talking about their concerns. Such options are critical for students who may feel they do not have a support network available to them or feel unsure about discussing their concerns with individuals in their support network.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Someone to sit down with and talk.”</i></p> <p><i>“Telling someone in person, not online.”</i></p> <p><i>“I like it when we have buddy time because I help a person and help them open their hearts.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Online/text message counselling to make it easier for people to talk about the problem without being in the space of the person.”</i></p> <p><i>“They/we need an anonymous place to share troubles and get help/advice.”</i></p> <p><i>“Private help.”</i></p>

However, students also stated that simply providing a link to a website was not an adequate level of support. They hoped for individuals in their support network to proactively engage with them about their health and wellbeing. They wanted school staff and families to approach them, particularly if there were changes in their behaviour. Some indicated that this made it easier to talk about concerns.

Generally, having a connection to those they were receiving support from assisted students in accessing support structures or talking about their concerns. There were barriers to getting help where connections did not exist or were fraught, as discussed further below.

Year 7 to Year 12

- “Not opening up to strangers.”*
- “Too afraid (don’t know the counsellors).”*
- “If they don’t have any connection at school.”*
- “The teachers never stick around.”*
- “If they don’t have a relationship with the teacher where they feel like they can’t talk to the teacher.”*
- “Not close to teachers or parents.”*

Students without quality interpersonal relationships with friends, peers, school staff, family members or other community members are isolated from accessing the support such relationships provide. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 made this connection, outlining that students without positive relationships would find it difficult to get the help and support they needed generally and for school and learning.

Disjuncture within the support network also caused stress for students, making it difficult to get help and support, as discussed in Chapter 3.3 – Families who are involved and interested.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Not helpful teachers, no supportive friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Unsupportive parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“Very bad parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“When your friends put you down.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bad friend.”</i></p> <p><i>“Bad guardians.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they have no friends (loner).”</i></p> <p><i>“Mean teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they are getting bullied they may be threatened not to tell the teacher so it is hard to make a decision so they don’t have so much support because people don’t know.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Not enough connections.”</i></p> <p><i>“Having parents/teachers that don’t care about you or you education.”</i></p> <p><i>“Dysfunctional families that interfere with learning or support systems.”</i></p> <p><i>“No parents to support them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t have many classmates.”</i></p> <p><i>“Rude friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Loneliness.”</i></p> <p><i>“If they feel like they can’t talk to anyone.”</i></p>

Support from friends

Friends were a significant source of support and friendships were often the key to students feeling they were valued, their concerns were valid, and that they would be able to cope with concerns. When describing friends as sources of support, students used terms that expressed reliability – ‘always’, ‘all the time’, ‘have your back’ and ‘are there for you’. Particularly in comparison to adults, friends were described as trustworthy and possessing a level of understanding that adults were not able to provide. For students in Year 7 to Year 12, provision of support and understanding their perspective was the most commonly stated reason why it’s important to have friends at school.

Students explained how friends responded to their emotions, noticing when they were sad and acting in ways to make them feel happy and included, and also supporting them to self-regulate. Additionally, students noted friends provided advice for responding to concerns, which was informed from their position of understanding (in comparison to adults).

When students did not have friends they spoke about feeling isolated and the impact this had on their ability to cope with and respond to concerns, and subsequently concentrate on learning. Trying to deal with concerns without support can be particularly difficult for children and young people.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“I think friends are important because they always care about YOU!”</i></p> <p><i>“So you don’t have a terrible time at primary school, so you don’t have to deal with everything by yourself.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s important because when you are lonely your friends could calm you down.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because if kids have a problem and they don’t like to talk to a teacher they can talk to the friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because they won’t tell on you if you do something wrong.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can tell what’s happening at home and tell your secrets to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you might be lonely and you need someone to talk to and you will also want to come to school more. Friends also encourage you and help you if you need a friend to talk to especially if you don’t want to talk to a teacher.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Yes IT IS IMPORTANT, good friends are always there for you!!!”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes because friends are everything, they will be with you through hard times.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they can help you and give you some advice and if you need to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help you and encourage you. They see the real you, whereas some teachers do not.”</i></p> <p><i>“They can relate to you and understand what you go through.”</i></p> <p><i>“It’s important to have at least one friend at school because you might have a problem with someone/ something and that friend will have a better understanding of that situation.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is important to have friends at school because they help you get through hard times and they are also good at keeping secrets that you tell them.”</i></p>
<p><i>“You have no support.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel you have to do things on your own.”</i></p> <p><i>“All the bad things builds up and there’s no one to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“You don’t have anybody to support you or stand up for you if you are going through rough times.”</i></p> <p><i>“You won’t have people to care about you and you won’t have someone to help you back up if you fall.”</i></p> <p><i>“You can’t share your worries so it’s harder to solve out the problem.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Yes because if you don’t have friends you will feel lonely and you won’t have anyone to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have no one to trust with your worries and fears.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you need to talk to someone, nobody would talk to you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You become lonely and sad if you have no one to comfort you.”</i></p> <p><i>“You have no one to talk to when you need it most.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not feel as supported as someone with friends.”</i></p>

Some students in Year 7 to Year 12 acknowledged the significance of friends to supplement sources of support that may not be available for all students. This included necessities, such as food, and support provided by family.

Year 7 to Year 12

“School friends become such a large influence in our lives. They mould us into the people we are today and give us the attention and love we may not have at home or outside of school.”

“I suppose not everyone has a great family and it might provide additional support. Also if they lean towards extraversion it might make them more likely to attend.”

“They give you food.”

“If you can’t talk to someone at home.”

Support from teachers

Teachers were identified as another important source of support and students described positive ways in which teachers provided help and advice. For students in Year 3 to Year 6, these included helping with worries, bullying, hard situations, feeling unsafe or being hurt. Whereas for students in Year 7 to Year 12 teachers helped with problems, decisions and hard situations.

While students in Year 3 to Year 6 described teachers as trustworthy, students in Year 7 to Year 12 had some reservations – as is discussed below.

There were several benefits to positive relationships with teachers in relation to provision of support. Students in Year 3 to Year 6 explained relationships with supportive teachers continued beyond the year within the classroom – *“It’s a forever trust”* (Year 3 to Year 6). When positive relationships existed, students in Year 7 to Year 12 felt more comfortable talking to teachers which, students felt, led to them being better understood and receiving more informed responses from teachers.

Students in Year 3 to Year 6 felt the provision of support from teachers was shaped by the student-teacher relationship. Students perceived that teachers were unable or unwilling to provide help if students and teachers did not get along. While there were a few responses suggesting this association from students in Year 7 to Year 12, it was more pronounced in the responses from students in Year 3 to Year 6. Where positive relationships did not exist, students in Year 7 to Year 12 were more likely to state they felt uncomfortable or that the teacher was unapproachable.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Because teachers want to help and make sure that you are happy.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because then they can talk to a trusted adult if you’re upset.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because you can talk to them if you feel unsafe.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Guide us to do the right decision.”</i></p> <p><i>“They help form a good circle of help that you can get in school and help make you feel like you are a part of the school.”</i></p> <p><i>“So they help you when you need it and don’t get ignored because they hate you.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because it makes it easier to communicate with them if you have an issue or problem.”</i></p>
<p><i>“You need to be friends with your teachers so they will help you more.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because if you don’t get along with your teachers they will give you a hard time, doesn’t help you and ignores you!”</i></p> <p><i>“It is important to get along with teachers because they could help you more.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The teacher might refuse to help you.”</i></p> <p><i>“If you don’t get along with them, they might not help you, but if you do get along with them, they are more approachable to ask for help.”</i></p>

Barriers to seeking and receiving support

“People may not want to hear their problem because they may be really busy and have no time to listen or people may not want to know their problem.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

Feeling embarrassed or scared

The difficulty of asking for help or voicing concerns because of the perceptions of others was a strong theme from students across Year 3 to Year 12 – with this as the most common response to the question, ‘What makes it hard for kids to get the help or support they need?’ Students discussed how speaking up about concerns can make them feel scared, shy or embarrassed. These feelings were uncomfortable and students felt it required a lot of courage to ask for help or discuss their concerns.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“It is hard because they are too scared to explain to parents and teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids don’t have the courage to ask for help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Anxiety.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are shy so they don’t talk to anyone about it!”</i></p> <p><i>“Being ashamed of what they need help with.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Too cool to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“You feel like you’ll be embarrassed if you tell.”</i></p> <p><i>“Hidden feelings/feel cooped up.”</i></p> <p><i>“They are shy to speak up and feel they need to deal with it by themselves.”</i></p> <p><i>“Scared to approach the teachers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Working up the courage to talk to someone is very hard.”</i></p>

Often embarrassment was linked with fear or stigma of being different. Students were concerned that others would judge or tease them if they required help. The feeling of isolation compounded the difficulty of speaking to others about their concerns and affected a student’s feelings of acceptance and belonging at school.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Kids don’t want their friends knowing because of peer pressure.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some people tease and bully others because they need extra help.”</i></p> <p><i>“By people judging them and not wanting to be their friends.”</i></p> <p><i>“Rumours.”</i></p> <p><i>“When they are afraid to ask and people put them down.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The mindset that they will be judged/bullied for trying to get help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Other peers saying things.”</i></p> <p><i>“Scared of being judged.”</i></p> <p><i>“The fear of being abnormal or different.”</i></p> <p><i>“Fear of being alone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Opinions – what people think of them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes they think if they ask for help they would look like a loser in front of their friends but they’re not.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t want other kids thinking they have ‘problems’.”</i></p>

Intimidation or judgement from teachers, peers and friends contributed to students' concerns about asking for help. Students were largely concerned about responses from friends and other students if they asked for help.

Responses to bullying were particularly complex for students to navigate as they feared speaking up about bullying would lead to more bullying. These experiences of students highlight the importance of schools as emotionally safe environments for students.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"Words like 'You're not good enough', 'You're bad', 'You're useless'."</i></p> <p><i>"Not telling an adult if they are getting bullied or having a hard time."</i></p> <p><i>"Being threatened to tell a teacher by another student."</i></p> <p><i>"When they get bullied they may get distracted – they also may not tell the teacher because they don't want the kid in trouble."</i></p>	<p><i>"Teachers can be intimidating for some students."</i></p> <p><i>"Having a figure of authority intimidate them."</i></p>

Identification and acknowledgement

For some students in Year 7 to Year 12, not realising they needed help, not wanting help or not realising the gravity of the situation influenced their help-seeking behaviour.

Year 7 to Year 12

"If no one, even the student themselves, acknowledge that they need help or support."

"Students not accepting that they need help."

"Not understanding the importance of the situation/problem."

"Sometimes kids lie to themselves saying they are 'fine' when they aren't."

"Being bottled up (not telling people you need help)."

"People think they can handle their own problems."

"Kids often act ignorant or some might just not have the confidence to ask for help. Some rather pretend everything is OK and be silent."

Availability and accessibility

“And help and support they can get.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Students referred to the accessibility and availability of support resources as a potential barrier to receiving support. They referred to the time people may have available, the type of support people were able to provide, the accessibility and capacity of services and financial constraints.

Students often referred to family members and school staff being too busy to provide assistance. For some students, friends attending different schools meant that their access to their support network was also limited.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Family doesn’t have time.”</i></p> <p><i>“The teachers don’t have time to help them.”</i></p> <p><i>“Their parents are at work after school or away for job in a different country.”</i></p> <p><i>“Some may have some friends that are different and the friends at the other school may not be like that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Cost.”</i></p> <p><i>“It makes it hard because sometimes you have to pay a lot of money to get help.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because we live in [a regional town] it’s hard to get the support she needs.”</i></p>	<p><i>“More chaplains.”</i></p> <p><i>“Psychologist more than one.”</i></p> <p><i>“People that you need help from are too busy with others.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not enough staff working in student services.”</i></p> <p><i>“Kids don’t get support because they can’t get money.”</i></p> <p><i>“No phones to call helpline.”</i></p> <p><i>“Support is offered outside of school which students don’t want.”</i></p> <p><i>“Language barrier.”</i></p> <p><i>“They don’t know English.”</i></p>

Students spoke about feeling or being different as a barrier or making it difficult to get support. They identified disability, cultural reasons, sexuality, gender or religion. Racial discrimination from other students and school staff was also commented on by a few students in terms of accessing support and also their experiences of school and learning.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Different religions get different respect because of their beliefs.”</i></p> <p><i>“People who have special needs.”</i></p> <p><i>“The kids who have disability and can’t talk well it makes it hard for them to talk to others in the way they want to.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Not fitting in.”</i></p> <p><i>“Race/ethnicity.”</i></p> <p><i>“Gender.”</i></p> <p><i>“The way they look – appearance.”</i></p> <p><i>“Different family background.”</i></p> <p><i>“Religion.”</i></p>

Uncertainty

“Not knowing where to get the help or fear of the unknown of what the help might be.” (Year 7 to Year 12)

Uncertainties made it difficult for students across Year 3 to Year 12 to access or receive assistance. For some, this meant not knowing or being unsure of who to talk to or where to get support. For others, identifying what they needed assistance with or articulating their concerns was challenging, particularly if they did not feel comfortable or did not feel they had supportive relationships.

For students to receive appropriate levels of support they need to be aware of and able to access support systems.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>“Don’t know who to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not knowing what they need help with.”</i></p> <p><i>“Because some children don’t know the number to call.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not being able to say why.”</i></p> <p><i>“You always need a note to see the nurse, but the teachers tell you to get a note from the teacher, but the nurse wants a note from a teacher so you never get a note, so you can’t talk to anyone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Mind blank.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The fact that kids just don’t have access to certain services and the lack of exposure to these kind of resources prevents them from that.”</i></p> <p><i>“Schools don’t say that there is someone to talk to.”</i></p> <p><i>“Don’t know who to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“Might not know how to ask.”</i></p> <p><i>“Not knowing the right words to tell someone.”</i></p> <p><i>“Lack of communication.”</i></p>

To feel confident in support systems, students wanted to know what would happen after they raised their concern and assured it would be kept confidential. Students explained how being unsure of whether they would be heard, of what might happen, what people’s responses might be or whether their concern would be kept private all made it difficult for them to get the help and support they needed. Some students were worried that the situation may be made worse or they may not receive the right type of support.

Concerns about family members or teachers minimising or dismissing their problems made it difficult for students to seek help. Students perceived sometimes adults were not interested, did not have the time, did not believe or take them seriously or did not understand their perspective.

Students explained that how people responded to their concerns influenced their future actions. They stated that a lack of action or support from an adult compounded feelings of distrust, made them less likely to approach another adult and made them feel isolated. Making the situation worse, taking over or overreacting were also concerns of students.

Year 3 to Year 6	Year 7 to Year 12
<p><i>"People won't listen or they shrug it off, then the students will get more anxious to tell anyone else."</i></p> <p><i>"You might think that they won't believe you."</i></p> <p><i>"Their mum, dad, teacher and kids might not listen to her or him to get what her or him needs."</i></p> <p><i>"They might think that if they tell someone that it will get worse."</i></p> <p><i>"Have to go up and speak alone."</i></p>	<p><i>"The feeling of being alone can make a student not feel like they can ask and not feel understood."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers not understanding kids' problems."</i></p> <p><i>"When no one listens."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers who aren't understanding or able to acknowledge students troubles."</i></p> <p><i>"Might be scared to be turned down."</i></p> <p><i>"Because it can make the situation worse."</i></p> <p><i>"Not providing legitimate support, providing a link won't help."</i></p> <p><i>"The people you go to for help make it 10x worse."</i></p> <p><i>"What they need might be harmful for them."</i></p> <p><i>"Teachers need to listen and act. Students turn to other resolutions because they feel like they're not being listened to."</i></p>

Regarding confidentiality, students in Year 7 to Year 12 referred to their past experiences of trust being broken and how this made them sceptical of privacy being maintained. Students were particularly concerned about conversations between teachers, and between teachers and parents. They wanted teachers to ensure confidentiality, especially when explicitly requested by students.

Year 7 to Year 12

"Teachers gossiping."

"Nobody trusts chaplains/teachers."

"Sometimes they feel they can't trust anyone."

"Not respecting privacy."

"Trust being broken previously, affecting any future trust needs."

Suggestions from students

“Everyone gets what they need.” (Year 3 to Year 6)

The areas for support and barriers to accessing support discussed by students highlight significant areas for action where change is possible and that would better position students to engage in school and learning. Throughout the consultation, students emphasised the difficulty of engaging in learning when they were hungry, tired, unwell, worried or anxious. Students were also clear about the behaviours of others and the environments in which they felt comfortable.

Students referred to systems being stretched and complex or difficult to access (off-site locations, lacking privacy or prohibitive because of cost). Students suggested support systems should be accessible, meet the varied needs of students and be responsive.

Students wanted schools to promote avenues of support, providing a variety of options, so students are aware of the help available. This would contribute to a culture in which help-seeking behaviour is viewed positively and as a strength. Creating an environment and cultures in which asking for assistance is encouraged and framed positively will assist students to overcome concerns for feeling embarrassed, shy or fearful of bullying or judgement.

Ensuring students have people they feel comfortable and confident talking to and in whom they believe will have a positive response is critical. Students across Year 3 to Year 12 identified family members and school staff (teachers, assistants/aides, principals, and non-teaching staff such as counsellors and psychologists) as potential sources of support. When these adults proactively built relationships and ‘checked in’, students perceived them as approachable and available to raise concerns with. This means these adults regularly talk with students and ask about their health and wellbeing (particularly if there are changes in behaviour), encourage help-seeking behaviour, listen when students raise concerns, assure and uphold confidentiality, and provide support, advice or take direct action as requested and as required, with students being involved in or informing responses. These practices are consistently raised by children and young people with regard to speaking up about concerns and are implemented in child safe organisations.^{125 126}