



# Student Wellbeing Hub

Developing positive  
relationships

Module 2  
Years 5-6



Teaching resource for  
students with autism

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## Introduction

This resource is designed to support teachers of students with autism. It aims to help you as a teacher to understand some of the strengths and challenges that this diverse cohort of students brings to the topic. The core audience is teachers who work in mainstream schools rather than special schools.

The resource includes background information, links to resources designed for teacher use and resources that can be used with students.



You may wish to deliver the last section of this module 'Interacting with others in secondary school' in tandem with any secondary school transition activities that are occurring in the school.

## Australian curriculum

### [Achievement standard links](#)

- By the end of Year 6, students investigate developmental changes and transitions.
- They recognise the influence of emotions on behaviours and discuss factors that influence how people interact.
- They describe their own and others' contributions to health, physical activity, safety and wellbeing.

## Understanding perception

People need help for a wide variety of reasons and in lots of different contexts. The activities in this section are designed to help students with autism to develop their understanding that there are different points of view and responses to the same event for different people.

It can take a lot longer for students with autism to develop this sort of understanding as (like many other students) they assume that everyone thinks like they do. However, this thinking style is more pervasive in people with autism and can impact even the closest of relationships.



Source: Mushki Brichta/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

### Teaching activity 1: Differing perceptions

This activity provides two tasks you can use to illustrate the concept that points of view can be different for different people.



[11 optical illusions that will trick your eyes<sup>1</sup>](https://youtu.be/ILLVv2fqyIA)

Exploring some optical illusions can simply demonstrate this concept. Show your students the optical illusions in the video and explore what they see.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/ILLVv2fqyIA>

Following this, play a game of 'Guess what is in the bag'. Hide an everyday object in a bag and ask a student to describe what they can feel, without naming the object. Then ask the other students try to guess what it is based on the description. Discuss further with students to help develop their sense of different perspectives.

## Recognising when someone needs help

The activities in this section aim to equip students with autism with the skills to respond helpfully to others in a range of contexts across a range of emotions.

Research has shown that people with autism can have excellent empathy for the physical pain of others, even if they may need to be taught appropriate responses. In contrast, they may not recognise when people need emotional support, or they may be an 'empath' who senses the distress of others around them all the time. Empaths with autism may cry when someone else is upset, or exhibit big emotions in response to the distress of others. This is not attention-seeking behaviour. It is often a response to a situation that the individual finds overwhelming and does not know how to manage or how to help the person who is upset or in pain.

It is worth noting that people with autism can struggle with time and/or sequencing, so they may report an incident that happened six months ago as if it happened six minutes ago. Other students with autism may have no difficulties in this area but be unaware that what they are experiencing or seeing is bullying or inappropriate behaviour.

While students are developing these skills they may require **co-regulation** for much of the time. (Co-regulation has been identified as a critical precursor for emotional self-regulation.) Positive efforts should be rewarded using motivating language and attitudes. Desired behaviours should be consistently modelled in the classroom, the schoolyard and in the community.

If your students are mainly non-readers, use picture books or videos to introduce the topics that are most relevant for them. Readers may take home books or chapters of books to discuss in class or as a group.



[Little Parachutes](https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/issues/)<sup>2</sup> compiles lists of reviewed picture books on difficult issues.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/issues/>



If one of your students lives in a situation where people are not kind and compassionate, or actively engage in unkind or cruel behaviours, it may be much harder for them to change the way they respond to others. For some students with autism who learn negative interpersonal behaviours in the home, unless they are explicitly told that these behaviours are wrong, then they may use them.

## Teaching activity 2: Recognising when someone needs help

This activity provides suggestions for using two books to stimulate group discussions about when seeking help is important and the differing ways that people can provide help. The following two books are recommended for this task:



**Rain reign:** author – Ann M Martin

Recommended age: 8–12



**M is for autism:** authors – the students of Limpsfield Grange School and Vicky Martin

Recommended age: 9–12



If neither of these books is readily available, it may be possible to find a similar story book in your library. Look for books where the theme is about needing to gain help in a challenging situation.

Read one or both books to your student and then use the following discussion points to explore the themes.

- In the story, who needed help and when?
- How did you know that they needed help?
- What did they do then?
- What did other people do to help?
- What could other people have done to help?

Follow this by asking students to create a group collage or book illustrating people in situations where they need help, either from one of the above stories or in real life.

Each student can draw or find one or more pictures that show someone in a situation where they might need help.

When the pictures are being put together in a collage or book, the students should be encouraged to explain why the person in the picture needs help and who could provide that type of help. This can be written, scribed or typed up and put under the relevant picture.

### **Teaching activity 3: What to do when someone needs help**

This activity helps students to identify a situation that has happened in school or at home where someone needs help.

Provide each student with the worksheet on the next page. Alternatively, you could provide actual sticky notes in three different colours.

1. On the yellow sticky note, ask everyone to write down or draw a situation that has happened in school or at home where someone needed help. This enables students to identify a range of situations where help is needed.
2. On the green sticky note ask students to then write down or draw how they responded or could have responded to help the person in step 1.
3. Now get the students to think about what they could have done differently, if anything, to be more effective in their help. Ask them to write this down or draw this on the blue sticky note.
4. Get the students to present their sticky note 'story' to their peers, either in a pair/share activity or in small groups. The students should discuss any other options that would be effective at helping for that scenario. If this brings new, helpful ideas to the surface these can be written on another blue sticky note.
5. Put the stories together into a book that can be used as a resource for the students. You could have the students role-play some of the scenarios. Periodically, revisit the book and ask the students if they have used the strategies and, if not, were they able to help or not?

If the students cannot think of any situations, or you would like to settle them into the activity more quickly, you could use the following scenarios for the yellow sticky note. If you do this, you may want to laminate the yellow sticky note scenarios to use again in the future.

Example scenarios:

- Someone lost their pencil case.
- Someone dropped their lunch in the mud.
- Someone fell off the top of the big climbing frame and is very quiet but not able to move their leg.
- Someone was hit by a stick in the playground.
- Someone doesn't know the rules of the game that the other students are playing.
- Someone is crying because their cat died.
- Someone fell over and grazed their knee and is crying.

Worksheet: What to do when someone needs help

**Someone needed help because:**

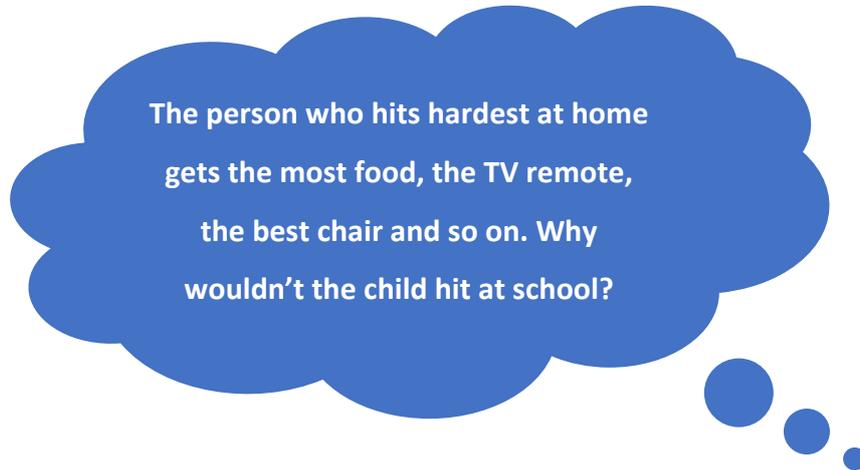
**To help them I:**

**Another effective way to help in this situation is:**

#### Teaching Activity 4: My strategies for helping people

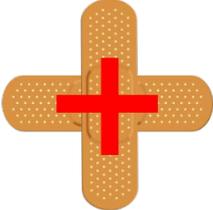
This activity explores medical, emotional and broader practical scenarios that might require different types of help.

Ask students to think about the statement in the cloud and discuss as a group.



Then provide each student with a copy of the worksheet on the next page and ask them to think of their own strategies for helping people. Once they've finished, encourage the students to share their thoughts and strategies. If students are happy with their final version, they can keep the worksheet as a reminder of what to do in situations when people need help.

Worksheet: My strategies for helping people

Situation	 Type of helped needed	 What I can do to help or get help
	Medical help 	
	Emotional help 	
	Practical help 	

## What makes a good friend?

Due to the social communication difficulties and social naivety of students with autism, they are particularly vulnerable to bullying and victimisation. Often, students with autism may take one of two standpoints:

- either everyone they come into contact with is perceived as a friend, or
- they think most people (and all new people) hate them.

Neither of these standpoints is particularly healthy or useful in terms of friendship skills. In terms of protective practices, it is safer to assume that everyone hates you. When students with autism think everyone is their friend, it makes them more vulnerable. These standpoints both make it really important to help students understand the different behaviours that make someone a good friend or to identify someone who it is unhealthy or toxic to be around.

We don't like to label people as good or bad, preferring to label behaviours as good or bad, but it is vital that people with autism understand that some people are unsafe to be around. If students are living in unsafe situations, this section may be very difficult for them to process. Note that they may volunteer information during these activities that require mandatory reporting and/or discussions with school leadership as to how to support the student.

Although it can be tempting to use phrases like 'never hit someone', this can be counterproductive in the long run; for example, years later when the student doesn't hit back at someone beating them up in the street. The language used to teach healthy interpersonal behaviours is critical to helping students with autism understand the behaviours of not only themselves but also others.

Students who are still unable to self-regulate may lash out verbally or physically when they are in 'sympathetic nervous system' (SNS) overload/survival mode (see [Module 1: Year 5-6 Expressing feelings](#)), even though there was not a physical threat to their safety. This does not make them a 'bad person', but it does mean that other people can be upset or frightened by their behaviour. It is important to tell students with autism what to do and why, rather than just telling them what not to do. For example, if a student is told not to hit

when they are angry, they may kick instead, as they do not know what to do instead of hitting.

‘Relationships circle’ or ‘circles of touch’ activities are a useful starting point for teaching students about appropriate behaviour.



The ‘Circles Social Skills Utility’ app can be used as a standalone tool to provide relationship circles curriculum. The app is available in both the Apple Appstore and the Googleplay store for a small cost.

### Teaching activity 5: Relationships circle

This activity provides an example of a relationships circle. Provide students with a copy of the relationships circle worksheet on the next page. Ask students to write the names of people or job titles of people who would fit into each category. Alternatively, students might glue images of people onto each category.

#### Extend this activity

To further explore the relationships circle concepts, students could glue PODD or ‘Boardmaker’ symbols into the relevant categories.

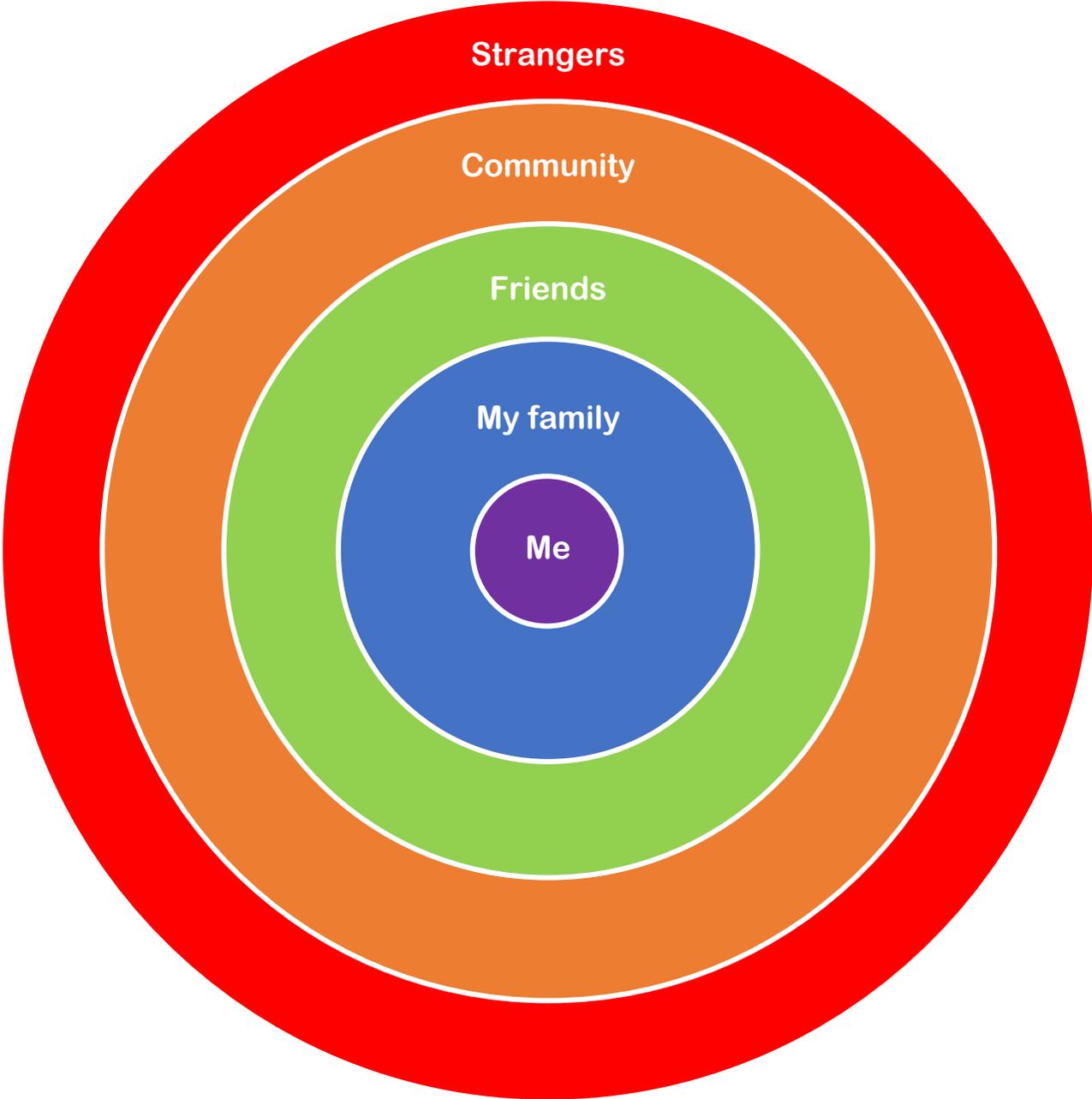
A PODD (Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display) is usually a book or device that contains symbols and words to support communication between people with complex communication needs and their communication partners, whether that’s carers, family, friends or teachers. See [PODD Communication Books](https://novitatech.com.au/equipment/podd-communication-books/)<sup>3</sup> for more information.

The [Student Wellbeing Hub](#) hosts videos and a link to the [SECCA App](#), a free web-based resource that you can use to support understandings of relationships and sexuality.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://novitatech.com.au/equipment/podd-communication-books/>

Worksheet: Relationships circle



### **Teaching activity 6: Greeting and interacting with the people in my circles**

This activity asks students to identify all the ways that they can appropriately greet the people in their relationship circles.

Provide students with a copy of the worksheet on the next page. Ask them to cut out the greetings and interaction styles and place them in the appropriate relationship circle category. Alternatively, students could draw a line from each greeting or interaction.

Worksheet: Greeting and interacting with the people in my circles

Students: Put in all the ways that you can greet the people in your relationship circles. You can add more if you can think of any.

Part of relationship circle	I can greet these people in the following ways
<b>Strangers</b>	
<b>Community</b>	
<b>Friends</b>	
<b>Family</b>	

Hug	Kiss	Hold hands	Say 'I love you'	Shake hands	Sit next to
Say 'Hi'	High five	Wave	Smile	Nod	Thumbs up

## Teaching activity 7: Things I can do to be a good friend/kind person

This activity provides some discussion questions related to watching one or both of the following videos:



[Little voices: What makes a good friend?](https://youtu.be/ReMq3KX8F94)<sup>4</sup>



[A short story about true friendship](https://youtu.be/TPkqoJ_k_98)<sup>5</sup>

Use these discussion points to explore the concepts in the videos with your students.

- What makes a good friend?
- What can you do to show your friends that you are a good friend?
- What could you do to help others at home or school?

## Teaching activity 8: My friendship skills – an ad about me

This activity focuses on helping students understand what *they bring to a friendship* by create a ‘good friend’ advertisement about themselves.

Provide student with a copy of the worksheet on the next page. This can be done as an individual activity or students can participate in an initial discussion about the elements in the worksheet.

Encourage students to share their ads with a small group or the whole class. After each student shares their ad (or it is presented for them), ask other students what they like about the ad. The goal of this activity is to help the students get to know each other a bit better and to find out if other students share interests and passions, as the friendships of many students with autism are forged on shared passions.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://youtu.be/ReMq3KX8F94>

<sup>5</sup> [https://youtu.be/TPkqoJ\\_k\\_98](https://youtu.be/TPkqoJ_k_98)

Worksheet: My friendship skills – an ad about me

<p><b>My name:</b></p> <p><b>How old I am:</b></p> <p><b>Picture of me:</b></p>	<p><b>What I am interested in:</b></p>	<p><b>How I show my friends I am a good friend:</b></p>
<p><b>I like these movies or games or YouTube channels:</b></p>	<p><b>What I like doing:</b></p>	<p><b>Things I do that are kind to others or animals or the planet:</b></p>

### Teaching activity 9: What I'm looking for in a friendship

This activity focuses on helping students understand what *they are looking for in a friendship*. Ask students to create a friendship skills poster that describes the characteristics they would like in a good friend. Students can discuss this first as a group, or they can think, pair, share first as needed. Students share their posters with the group or class.

After each student shares their poster (or it is presented for them), ask the other students to say whether they have any of the characteristics described on the poster. As with the previous activity, this aims to assist students get to know each other a bit better and to find out who may be a good friend for them.

#### Extend this activity

Support understandings of how to actively sustain friendship by facilitating students in role-play. Have students role-play a friendship scenario. Provide each student with a scenario and ask them to role-play how they would respond to the scenario as a 'good friend'. If needed, provide each student with some character descriptions, so that they have some structure for the role-play.

### Teaching activity 10: Asking friends to play



#### [How to ask a friend to play<sup>6</sup>](#)

After viewing this video, discuss with students if you should always tap people on the shoulder, or if this is sometimes inappropriate, and if so why?

Cover the concepts of 'touch sensitivity' and 'making people uncomfortable' in this discussion.

Touch or tactile sensitivity or hypersensitivity is an unusual or increased sensitivity to touch that makes the person feel peculiar, anxious, or even in pain. It is also called tactile defensiveness or tactile over-sensitivity. Like other sensory processing issues, tactile sensitivity can run from mild to severe.

Follow this by asking students to role-play asking someone to play with them following the steps, (leaving out tapping on the shoulder if that would be a problem for the person they

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<sup>6</sup> <https://youtu.be/sBPYVI3S5-k>

are role-playing with). The aim of this is to improve student confidence in asking someone to play and knowing how to respond if they say no.

## How can individuals respond when people are not being good friends?

Some students with autism can struggle to manage when others are unkind to them, or interact with them in ways that are not pro-social. This includes behaviour such as bullying, which students with autism experience disproportionately. Bullying of students with autism can be more subtle than other bullying and may go unnoticed and unreported for a significant period of time. Bullying of students with autism can sometimes involve one of two different behaviours:

- demeaning and/or deliberately triggering an SNS overload (see Module 1 *Expressing feelings* for more about SNS overload)
- telling the student with autism to do something that the bully knows will get them into trouble, by implying or saying they are friends. Then, once the student with autism is in trouble, laughing at them and not including them.



### [What is bullying \(the basics\)<sup>7</sup>](#)

After watching the video, ask the students to identify which behaviours were unhelpful or unkind and which behaviours were kind and supportive.

This activity is designed to reinforce the students' understanding of positive healthy relationship/friendship behaviours. Use the whiteboard to record responses in two different columns using the following headings:

- Helpful, positive behaviour (a friend)
- Unkind, unhelpful behaviour (not a friend)



The video above requires students to have good auditory processing and receptive language. If they do not, you may want to watch the [McGruff – Anti-bullying film<sup>8</sup>](#) which more explicitly explains how friendship and bullying interact.

<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/eAj2kTQyEGw>

<sup>8</sup> [https://youtu.be/EvhldB\\_8WXE](https://youtu.be/EvhldB_8WXE)

## Teaching activity 11: Stop, walk and talk

The final teaching activity for this section is a role-play. It utilises the *Stop, talk, walk* strategy outlined in the following two videos:



[McGruff – Anti-bullying film](https://youtu.be/EvhIdB_8WXE)<sup>9</sup>



[Stop, walk and talk](https://youtu.be/oDpL49snvel)<sup>10</sup>

If your school is implementing positive behaviour support (PBS) then role-playing the *Stop, walk and talk* strategy is recommended.

The worksheet on the next page provides a set of visual prompts and some scenarios. Encourage your students to role-play each of the scenarios, choosing one or more of the prompts to respond to each scenario.

During and after the role-plays, discuss alternative and preferred strategies for each of the scenarios. Explore the contexts and/or barriers to the success of the *Stop, walk and talk* strategy.

This activity is designed to counteract the tendency to do nothing or respond with survival behaviours that students can demonstrate when they are not skilled at managing conflict or being annoyed.

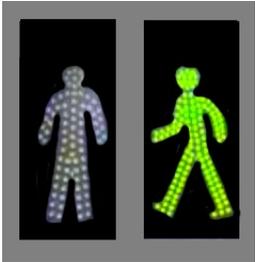
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<sup>9</sup> [https://youtu.be/EvhIdB\\_8WXE](https://youtu.be/EvhIdB_8WXE)

<sup>10</sup> <https://youtu.be/oDpL49snvel>

Worksheet: Stop, walk and talk

Role-play actions:

<p>SAY STOP</p>	
<p>WALK AWAY</p>	
<p>TALK TO AN ADULT</p>	

Role-play scenarios:

You are being treated unkindly.

Someone is telling you that you are stupid.

Your friend takes your lunch and eats it.

You ask to play with someone and they say 'No. You are rubbish at this game.'

Someone is pulling your hair in assembly.

## Interacting with others in secondary school



You may wish to deliver this section in tandem with any secondary school transition activities that are occurring in the school as it is helpful if the students know where they are transitioning to. These activities are designed to increase confidence and decrease anxiety around transitioning to secondary school, as well as giving students the practical skills to maximise their social inclusion at their new school. Students will need access to their school website and/or brochure to complete some of the following activities.

It can be very hard to adjust to secondary school for any student, but particularly difficult for students with autism, for whom social differences can become suddenly much more marked. Secondary school is quite different to primary/middle school. Students will have to move around the school between lessons and get to know a larger number of students and staff.

Students will need to learn the language and unwritten social rules of secondary school before transitioning, so that transition visits do not mark them out as easy targets by other students. For example, secondary school students do not 'go out to play'. They either have recess/lunch, or go into the yard. Students also need to be aware of the social hierarchy that exists in a secondary school, where the older students have much more power than the younger students, especially outside of the classroom in the school grounds.

Bathroom/toilet behaviour may need to be explicitly taught at this stage too. For example:

- Where should boys stand if there is a shared urinal space?
- Who can girls ask for menstrual products if they need them urgently?

It can be helpful to structure the session in one of two ways:

### 1. School structure

Skills in the schoolyard, classroom and with peers

or

### 2. Who is who

Safe spaces, behaviours and people

Whether you focus on 'School structure' or 'Who is who' will be dependent on the language that your students are already familiar with.

For example, if they already have a safe space and safe person identified at their current school, this is the structure you would use. However, if they don't have these, but they have a social skills group or a friendship skills group, then you would use the first structure. Essentially, the same things will be learnt in each structure. You would just introduce the topics using slightly different language.

The following teaching activities provide stimulus for students to create a set of visual/written/video prompts for each topic, which they can take home as a resource for use prior to transition visits and prior to starting secondary school in Year 7.

### **Teaching activity 12: Who is who in my new secondary school?**

This activity aims to assist students to identify the roles and responsibilities of different groups of adults and students in a secondary school. In this task, encourage students to think about who has 'formalised' power in the school and sources of support or help. They can also discuss scenarios where they could potentially get into trouble with someone 'more important' (either by not understanding the hierarchy or through manipulation by other students).

Provide students with a copy of the worksheet on the next page. Ask the students to undertake some research about their new school (using the school website or brochure). Use these sources to fill in as many blanks as possible.

Lead a discussion around the roles and responsibilities of each of different groups of adults and students. Highlight that they should not do what people say if that will get them into trouble with someone who is 'more important'.

Worksheet: Who is who in my new secondary school?

I am going to ..... school in 202... There are lots of staff and approximately ..... students. I will know .....

Name	Roles/Job titles (examples)	Responsibilities	What this means for me
	Principal		
	Deputy principal		
	Curriculum coordinator		
	Front office manager		
	Head of year		
	Home group teacher		
	Prefects		
	(Other)		

Who I should follow instructions from – in order of the importance of the adults in the school.	
Who I should follow instructions from – in order of the importance of the students in the school.	
When shouldn't I follow instructions from people, and why not?	
What kinds of things should I tell my family or school counsellor?	
Things I am allowed to take to school.	

### Teaching activity 13: Safe spaces in the schoolyard

This activity encourages students to identify areas at their proposed secondary school that offer protection, safety or less noise or crowding.



Students will need a map of the school grounds to undertake this activity. Preferably they will have also visited the school and taken photos of the site outside of school hours.

Ask students to study a map of their new school and identify the yard spaces that are different to the yard where they play now. Use maps sourced from the schools website or Google maps.

Students should identify:

- some spaces that might be more crowded and loud than others (highlight these areas in red)
- areas they think they would like to use (highlight these areas in green).

### Teaching activity 14: Safe behaviour in the schoolyard

This activity supports students to identify strategies to ward off bullying or behaviour that they are worried about.



[\*School rules and positive behavior: Good and bad examples\*](#) is a video that demonstrates desirable and undesirable behaviour in an American classroom. The basic premise is analogous to Australian secondary school classrooms.

After viewing the video, lead a discussion with your students about how they can think ahead about a range of scenarios. Use the worksheet on the next page to structure the discussion.

**Worksheet: Safe behaviour in the yard**

Some people in the yard will do things that are unsafe or unhelpful. I may find some of these funny or upsetting. I have strategies about what to do.

<b>Unsafe or unhelpful yard behaviours</b>	<b>My strategy to stay safe and out of trouble</b>

I can identify someone safe in the yard if I need help by:

If I can't see one of my safe people in the yard, I can:

## Teaching activity 15: Secondary school classrooms



### [School rules and positive behavior: good and bad examples](https://youtu.be/Z3y_RrLdYtE)<sup>11</sup>

After watching the video, ask students to respond to the following questions. You might like to lead this as a class discussion or encourage students to work on the questions individually and share their thoughts afterwards.

- Are there any other rules that you can think of?
- What positive helpful behaviours did you see in the video?
- Which positive behaviours from the video will you use and in what circumstances?
- Are there any other positive behaviours that you are going to use?

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<sup>11</sup> [https://youtu.be/Z3y\\_RrLdYtE](https://youtu.be/Z3y_RrLdYtE)



# Student Wellbeing Hub

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