

# What is the Bounce Back! program?

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- A review of the central role of schools in developing student wellbeing and resilience
- The history of the **Bounce Back!** program in Australia and overseas
- Details of the evidence-informed key features of the program
- The potential benefits for students in implementing the program

## INTRODUCTION

Life for children and young people today can be challenging. They not only need to master the typical developmental hurdles that are part of growing up, but also manage complex and relatively new challenges, such as cyber safety, greater family mobility, higher levels of family breakdown and easier access to addictive illicit drugs and alcohol.

Global figures show that approximately 10 per cent of young people have a diagnosable mental disorder<sup>1</sup>. Given that approximately one-third of the world's population is under 18 years old<sup>2</sup> this represents over 220 million children and adolescents<sup>1</sup>. Over half of those who experience mental illness in childhood will also suffer from a mental illness in their adult lives<sup>3,4</sup>. In recognition of these challenges, student wellbeing is now an integral part of the global education agenda<sup>5</sup>. Governments, policymakers and educators around the world are uniting to determine how educational policy and school and classroom practices can not only help children and young people develop greater wellbeing and resilience but also thrive and lead successful and happy lives.

## About Bounce Back!

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The award-winning *Bounce Back!* program was developed to support schools and teachers in their efforts to promote positive mental health, wellbeing and resilience in their students. It is the world's first Positive Education curriculum program, first published in 2003, then revised in 2011. The *Bounce Back!* program has since been substantially updated and revised in this third edition.

*Bounce Back!* is a whole-school Social and Emotional Learning program that teaches the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills advocated by CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning). It also includes evidence-informed coping skills identified in research studies in Positive Psychology that boost students' sense of wellbeing and help them to act resiliently when faced with challenges and adversity. *Bounce Back!* also aims to develop the optimal learning environments that help children experience joy in learning, develop positive teacher–student and peer relationships and thrive.

### ◆ Schools are central in developing student wellbeing and resilience

Great teachers do more than promote their students' academic learning. They teach the whole child, recognising that a focus on teaching social and emotional skills enhances students' academic outcomes as well as their capacity to form positive relationships and cope with the 'ups and downs' of their lives. Outside family life, schools are the most important social institutions for helping young people develop wellbeing and resilience.

### ◆ Positive Psychology and Positive Education

Positive Psychology is defined as 'the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions'<sup>6</sup>. Positive Education adopts the focus of Positive Psychology, focusing on strengths rather than deficits, on positive experiences rather than difficulties, on competency building rather than pathology and on what is going well rather than what is not working<sup>7</sup>.

Positive Education applies the core principles of Positive Psychology in educational contexts

and focuses on student resilience, wellbeing and accomplishment. *Bounce Back!* integrates the science of evidence-based practices in improving wellbeing with effective educational pedagogy and practices to help students thrive and succeed academically, socially and emotionally<sup>8,9</sup>.

### ◆ Social and Emotional Learning

One of the central components of a student wellbeing program is the teaching of social and emotional skills. Social and Emotional Learning helps children and young people to understand and manage their own emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions<sup>10,11</sup>. *Bounce Back!* is the most comprehensive Social and Emotional Learning program for schools globally. Acquiring these social and emotional skills and perspectives can be highly beneficial for everyday living and learning, which will continue later in life – at school, at work, in relating to others and as responsible citizens and community members.

## The history of the program

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### ◆ The first trial

The *Bounce Back!* program was first trialled in a joint research collaboration between the Drug Education section of the Department of Education in Victoria and the Faculty of Education at Deakin University<sup>12</sup>. Over 14 weeks, eight teachers from state, Catholic, independent, rural and urban schools implemented an early version of the program in their Year 5 or Year 6 classrooms.

All the teachers reported that the *Bounce Back!* program was user-friendly and easy to implement. And all but one of the teachers reported greater confidence in teaching the coping skills that underpin the program and expressed greater confidence in their ability to counsel and support their students. The teachers perceived that their use of the program facilitated better communication with their students, which, in turn, helped in the students' management of personal issues as well as schoolwork issues. All teachers also reported greater personal and professional resilience as a result of teaching the program. The students in the eight classes successfully learnt, understood and recalled the BOUNCE BACK! acronym (see pages 61–64).

The students achieved an average 80 per cent success rate and an increase in resilient thinking, especially optimistic and helpful thinking, when asked to solve problems in hypothetical difficult situations. In focus group interviews, many students reported using the coping skills in their own lives, including difficult family situations. Teachers also observed students spontaneously using the **Bounce Back!** statements in real-life stressful situations and in supporting their classmates and friends.

### ◆ The Bushfire Recovery Project

Australia is one of many countries prone to repeated natural disasters of bushfires and floods. In 2009 the state of Victoria experienced devastating bushfires with great loss of life and homes. The Bushfire Psychosocial Recovery Unit of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) offered workshops on the **Bounce Back!** program for the teachers and community support staff in the seven regions most affected by these devastating fires. The goal was to develop teachers' skills in supporting their students, teaching students the skills of resilience to help them recover from the trauma that many of them had experienced, and to enhance the capacity of all students to cope with any such future disasters.

Data was collected after the implementation of **Bounce Back!** over two school terms in 18 sample schools affected by the Victorian bushfires<sup>12</sup>. In summary, the findings indicated that participation in the **Bounce Back!** program enhanced the capacity of many students to cope more effectively with their experiences during the bushfires and, in general, to behave more confidently, resiliently and socially.

Teachers noted that they observed students using skills or behaviours that had been taught in the program in both the classroom and playground, and that they themselves had started to incorporate the key resilience messages from the program in their own lives.

Since all children and young people experience setbacks, difficulties and failure, these findings are relevant for all schools, but such initiatives are particularly relevant for those school communities experiencing any kind of trauma.

### ◆ International responses Scottish primary schools

A two-year evaluation of the implementation of **Bounce Back!** in 16 primary schools in the Perth-Kinross area in Scotland found similar benefits for both students and teachers to those obtained in the original **Bounce Back!** trial research study conducted in Australia<sup>13,14</sup>.

The study concluded that one of the main effects of the program was enhanced student–student relationships, enhanced teacher–student relationships and increased classroom connectedness. Additionally, the Scottish study not only found an increase in student resilience and social skills but also identified a highly significant increase in teacher resilience and wellbeing as a result of their teaching the program. The results of this research were cited in the report ‘After the 2012 Riots’<sup>15</sup> by the UK Government’s Riots Communities and Victims Panel.

The evaluation data showed increases in pupils’ personal resilience, attitudes and skills in the schools where Bounce Back! had been adopted. In particular, there was a marked increase in students’ awareness of control over their feelings. Pupils also commented on the positive effect of Bounce Back! on their own confidence and social skills. The Panel proposes that building character should be a central part of every school’s purpose. [...] it seems beyond dispute that this should be a core purpose of schools with at least as much importance as academic attainment<sup>13,14</sup>.

This initiative was awarded a silver medal by the Perth Kinross Council for an inspired community applied project in Perth Kinross schools.

### European Career Learning for at-risk college students

An adaptation of **Bounce Back!** was led by Anne Gillen, Adam Smith College, Kirkcaldy, Scotland as part of a collaborative project for European Career Learning for Lifelong Learning targeting at-risk college students in eight European countries (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Scotland and Spain). The project was funded with support from the European Commission.

## ◆ Research with long-term users of **Bounce Back!**

In 2016, school leaders in 10 primary schools that had been implementing the **Bounce Back!** program for between five and 12 years were interviewed to identify the factors that have contributed to their schools' sustained implementation of the program. These factors fell into three broad categories: school factors, school system factors and program factors<sup>16</sup>.

The school factors that were identified by the schools as being essential to their sustainability of the program were: leadership communicating that student wellbeing is a high priority for the whole school and leadership support for the implementation of the program across all year levels. The program factors that contributed to **Bounce Back!** being used in the long term in these 10 schools included: effective structure and sequence, teacher-friendly program materials and activities, and the use of quality children's literature. The teachers viewed the program as effective in teaching resilience and flexible and adaptable to different student and class needs. See the five stages for quality implementation as well as implementation tips based on these findings in Chapter 6 (see page 70).

## Key features and benefits

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### ◆ Positive impacts on academic, social and emotional functioning

In the past educators and governments have focused solely on academic achievement as a measure of student success and their country's educational standards. In 2015 for the first time in its history, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the most widely cited international student achievement test, included measures of student wellbeing<sup>17</sup>. Why? Because strong performance on standardised academic assessments 'can only explain so much of how well students will do later in life'.

In addition, data from worldwide research has now clearly demonstrated that teaching key social and emotional skills not only enhances student wellbeing, but also improves academic learning<sup>18-20</sup>. A large-scale meta-analysis of SEL programs<sup>18</sup> based on 213 school-based, universal SEL programs involving over 270 000 students from primary school entry to Year 12 found,

on average, an 11-percentile-point gain in academic achievement as well as demonstrating significant improvements in students' social and emotional skills, attitudes and behaviour within the school context.

### KidsMatter

**Bounce Back!** was the most popular whole-school SEL program chosen by 64 per cent of the 101 schools in the Australian Government's mental health initiative called KidsMatter. The KidsMatter evaluation team identified that, over the two-year trial, there were significant and positive changes in the teachers, parents/caregivers and students in KidsMatter schools. In particular, there were statistically and practically significant improvements in students' measured mental health in terms of both reduced mental health difficulties and increased mental health strengths. The impact was especially apparent for students who were rated as having higher levels of mental health difficulties at the start of the trial<sup>21</sup>. The average academic results of students in 'high implementing schools' were superior (by up to six months on national assessments on literacy and numeracy) to those of students in low implementation schools. This was over and above any influence of socioeconomic background<sup>19</sup>.

### ◆ A multi-component program

Many schools have several different programs to combat each new problem that emerges. For example, some schools have a social skills program, an anti-bullying program, an emotional literacy program, a behaviour management program and a character strengths program. Some principals may perceive that a greater number of programs enhances any positive effects for students but this may not always be the case. In fact, having many programs in a school may become overwhelming for school staff to execute well, leading to poor implementation<sup>22</sup>.

Given that wellbeing and resilience are complex constructs, a comprehensive multi-component program with consistent messages, values, language, skills and understandings across the whole school has the potential to be a lot more powerful in terms of developing a positive school culture and in teaching the social-emotional skills that lead to wellbeing. One single (but multi-component) program can provide focused support for staff implementation of that program and help with communicating consistent messages to the whole school community, including families.

**Bounce Back!** is a multi-component program that focuses on building safe and supportive school communities as well as teaching the social, emotional and cognitive skills and understandings to help all children to thrive. The 10 **Bounce Back! Curriculum Units** are: Core values, Social values, People bouncing back, Courage, Looking on the bright side, Emotions, Relationships, Humour, Being safe and Success.

### ◆ The four SAFE elements of effective programming

**Bounce Back!** incorporates the four multi-strategic SAFE elements of effective SEL programming as recommended by CASEL<sup>18,23</sup>.

- **Sequenced:** **Bounce Back!** is a sequenced program that connects and coordinates activities to foster SEL skills development from Foundation to Year 6.
- **Active:** **Bounce Back!** uses a range of active forms of learning to help students master new skills and attitudes. These include, for example, cooperative learning groups, educational games, Circle Time, the use of cooperative

thinking tools, drama and the use of quality literature with literacy discussion prompts. These teaching strategies build positive peer relationships and actively engage students in learning and applying the key social and emotional skills, and messages.

- **Focused:** The key messages beginning each **Bounce Back!** unit focus teacher and student attention on the important personal and social skills and understandings in that unit.
- **Explicit:** **Bounce Back!** explicitly teaches specific social and emotional skills and critical, creative and ethical thinking skills. For example, Unit 7: Relationships includes ‘dos and don’ts’ lists of social skills and many activities, which provide additional opportunities for students to practise these skills.

These SAFE strategies have been found to be significantly more effective than just an ‘explain and hope’ model of teaching skills<sup>18,24,25</sup>. See the table below for an outline of the **Bounce Back!** units mapped according to the five CASEL SEL competencies.

The correlation between CASEL’s *Framework for Systemic Social and Emotional Learning* and **Bounce Back! Curriculum Units**.

CASEL: Social and Emotional Core Competencies	Knowledge, skills and behaviours	Bounce Back! Curriculum Units
<b>Self-awareness</b> The ability to accurately recognise your own emotions, thoughts and values and understand how they influence behaviour. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism and a ‘growth mindset’.	Identifying and regulating own emotions and thoughts; skills for self-reflection	Unit 6: Emotions
	Recognising own strengths and limitations; growth mindset; meaning and purpose	Unit 10: Success
	Well-grounded self confidence	Unit 5: Looking on the bright side; Unit 6: Emotions; Unit 10: Success
	Optimistic thinking	Unit 3: People bouncing back; Unit 5: Looking on the bright side
<b>Self-management</b> The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts and behaviours in different situations – effectively managing stress, controlling impulses and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work towards personal and academic goals.	Coping resiliently; using helpful and rational thinking; normalising	Unit 3: People bouncing back; Unit 5: Looking on the bright side
	Controlling impulses; courage	Unit 6: Emotions; Unit 4: Courage
	Using humour appropriately	Unit 8: Humour
	Self-motivation; self-discipline goal-setting; grit	Unit 10: Success

(Continued)

CASEL: Social and Emotional Core Competencies	Knowledge, skills and behaviours	Bounce Back! Curriculum Units
<b>Social awareness</b> The ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognise family, school and community resources and supports.	Perspective taking; empathy	Unit 6: Emotions
	Honesty; responsibility; kindness and support for others; fairness	Unit 1: Core values; Unit 2: Social values
	Respect for others; appreciation of diversity	Unit 1: Core values; Unit 2: Social values
<b>Relationship skills</b> The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively and seek and offer help when needed.	Social skills for getting along with others	Unit 7: Relationships
	Friendships	Unit 7: Relationships; Unit 8: Humour
	Resisting negative peer pressure	Unit 9: Being safe
	Conflict management	Unit 7: Relationships; Units 1–10: Relationship-building teaching strategies
<b>Responsible decision-making</b> The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the wellbeing of oneself and others.	Identifying and solving problems	Units 1–10, especially Unit 3: People bouncing back and Unit 4: Courage
	Analysing situations; evaluating and reflecting	Units 1–10
	Fairness	Unit 1: Core values; Unit 2: Social values
	Ethical responsibility	Unit 1: Core values; Unit 2: Social values; Unit 9: Being safe

Source: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2007, <http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel>

### ◆ A whole-school approach

A whole-school program is taught to students at all year levels and involves partnerships with families and the community. A whole-school program is not just an ‘add-on’, but is, wherever possible, embedded in the curriculum and in the general life of the classroom and the school. When the program is embedded, the skills, concepts and understandings in the program are also linked to other curriculum areas and applied in a variety of classroom and playground contexts. Chapter 6 includes guidelines on effective schoolwide implementation of the program (see page 68).

### Positive school culture and climate

Just as important as teaching the skills for wellbeing and resilience is creating and maintaining a supportive and inclusive school culture where every student feels welcomed both

as a learner and as a valued peer. A whole-school program, like **Bounce Back!**, that communicates the same key wellbeing and resilience messages in age appropriate ways across the school, is more effective in developing a positive school climate and culture than a program for one or two year levels only<sup>14,26</sup>. A positive school climate and culture has also been shown to be significantly related to improved outcomes for students such as stronger motivation to achieve and better academic results, increased prosocial behaviour, and higher school connectedness<sup>27,28</sup>.

### Teacher wellbeing

Various international studies have shown that up to one-third of teachers are stressed or extremely stressed<sup>29</sup>. A Canadian study found that in elementary classrooms where teachers reported more burnout or feelings of emotional

exhaustion, students had elevated cortisol levels. Higher student cortisol levels are linked to learning difficulties as well as mental health problems<sup>30</sup>. Teaching a SEL program has been found to lead to greater job satisfaction and higher levels of teacher efficacy and teacher wellbeing<sup>28,29</sup>. The **Bounce Back!** program has been found to have a significant impact on improving teacher wellbeing<sup>14</sup> and on teachers' perceptions of an increase in their own professional and personal resilience<sup>12</sup>.

### Education and support from home

Great importance in education is now placed on effective family-school partnerships to facilitate SEL so children use these skills at home as well as at school<sup>31</sup>. Implementing **Bounce Back!** as a whole-school program makes it easier to communicate the key messages to the whole school community, including families<sup>14,16</sup>. Home communication can be achieved through school newsletters, assembly items, school concerts and performances, student talks to families and so on<sup>16,32</sup>. **Information for families** and take-home information is provided, and each unit also includes homework tasks, such as interviews, which are designed for students to communicate the **Bounce Back!** messages to their families.

### ◆ A universal program

**Bounce Back!** is a universal program which means it is taught to all students, not just children identified as 'at-risk' for behaviour problems or mental health difficulties. It is designed to be delivered to all students from the first to the last year of primary school<sup>123,33,34</sup>.

### ◆ Taught by class teachers

Academic improvement, as well as social and emotional improvement, is more likely when teachers (rather than external professionals) implement a SEL program<sup>18,35</sup>. Based on their knowledge of their students' needs, the classroom teacher is able to provide targeted support. For example, a teacher can teach the whole class about managing 'their worries' which benefits all students but may be especially relevant for highly anxious students. Teachers are also able to utilise 'teachable moments' (e.g. after a bullying incident) that can provide a real-world opportunity to teach or reinforce the program's relevant skills and values to encourage students to apply these skills in context<sup>16</sup>.

### ◆ Long term and multi-year

Multi-year programs are more likely to produce enduring benefits and are more sustainable, especially when taught across all year levels as a whole-school program<sup>32,33,36,37</sup>. **Bounce Back!** is taught from the first year of school and then every year throughout primary school with age/developmentally appropriate activities. The 10 **Curriculum Units** are introduced in Years F–2 and then repeated in Years 3–4 and Years 5–6. This means that the key wellbeing and resilience concepts, skills and understandings in the 10 units are repeated with an age-appropriate curriculum, so that students develop a deep understanding of these concepts and therefore can apply them in their lives.

### ◆ Delivered to students early in their schooling

Most reviews of preventative research stress that programs that start when students are very young are more likely to be effective<sup>32,38,39</sup>. Indeed, by the end of primary school, students develop the habit of thinking optimistically or pessimistically<sup>40</sup>. The implications are that the earlier children learn the skills of thinking, feeling and behaving optimistically, the better for their ongoing mental health and wellbeing. **Bounce Back!** is designed to teach children good habits of thinking, feeling and behaving socially and emotionally from the first years of school with the aim of inoculating children against mental illness. Ideally the program should be taught from the first years of school, but there are always benefits of introducing the program at any age level.

### ◆ Evidence-informed psychological principles

The two main models of Psychology that underpin the **Bounce Back!** program are Positive Psychology and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

#### Positive Psychology

In 2011, the founder of Positive Psychology, Martin Seligman, challenged policy makers to develop a new measure of 'prosperity', beginning early in life:

The time has come for a new prosperity, one that takes flourishing seriously as the goal for education and of parenting. Learning to value



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and to attain flourishing must start early – in the formative years of schooling – and it is this new prosperity, kindled by positive education, that the world can now choose.<sup>7</sup> (p.97)

Seligman defines wellbeing in terms of five elements: **Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (PERMA)**.

The verb ‘to prosper’ means to thrive, to flourish, to succeed in a healthy way and grow strong. The acronym PROSPER stands for the Science-based wellbeing components of **Positivity, Relationships, Outcomes, Strengths, Purpose, Engagement and Resilience**<sup>8</sup>. PROSPER is not a curriculum but a framework that offers schools coherence and a common language for their selection and implementation of a range of evidence-based structures and practices derived from Positive Education/Positive Psychology. These practices are linked to encouraging positivity, building relationships, facilitating outcomes and an optimal learning environment, focusing on strengths, fostering a sense of purpose, enhancing engagement and teaching resilience. **Bounce Back!** is a curriculum for student wellbeing, not a framework. The **Bounce Back!** curriculum incorporates all these PERMA and PROSPER elements.

### Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

There is more research support for the efficacy of CBT in changing feelings and behaviour than there is for any other type of therapy<sup>41</sup>. Originally developed by psychiatrist Aaron Beck<sup>42</sup>, CBT is based on the understanding that ‘how you think affects how you feel which in turn influences how you behave’. The key message is that by changing a person’s thinking from irrational to rational and more positive thinking, they can change their behaviour and feel happier. Two specific refinements of the basic model of CBT have particularly influenced the content of **Bounce Back!** These are Albert Ellis’s Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)<sup>43</sup> and Martin Seligman’s Learned Optimism<sup>44</sup>. The ‘coathanger’ of the **Bounce Back!** program is the BOUNCE BACK! acronym (see page 61), which incorporates the 10 key CBT coping statements<sup>23</sup>.

### ◆ Evidence-informed teaching strategies

The learning environment is a key to student success at school. Therefore, the use of effective teaching strategies in a SEL program enhances student engagement and interest while also increasing their achievement. The teaching strategies embedded in **Bounce Back!** have been informed by large scale meta-analyses of effective teaching and learning research by Hattie<sup>45</sup> and Marzano<sup>46</sup>. According to Hattie, teacher effectiveness is ‘less about the content of the curricula and more about the strategies teachers use to implement the curriculum so that students progress upwards through the curricula content’<sup>45</sup>.

Effective teaching strategies motivate and challenge students through the provision of high performance standards, opportunities for formative assessment and by providing tasks that promote higher order thinking. **Bounce Back!** includes the following high impact evidence-informed teaching strategies.

### Cooperative learning

Working cooperatively helps create a sense of belonging in the classroom. The most frequently used teaching strategies in **Bounce Back!** are cooperative learning strategies that have extensive evidence<sup>45-48</sup> for achieving positive outcomes, such as:

- higher levels of academic outcomes
- higher levels of class engagement
- the building of positive relationships
- enhanced class cohesion
- more effective social and emotional skills.

Students learn more about social skills such as taking turns, negotiating, reaching consensus and developing positive respectful relationships when cooperative learning is used well. It also enhances literacy outcomes as students are actively engaged in social dialogue that encourages deeper understanding and promotes different perspectives and a range of acceptable responses. Teaching strategies and resources, and the **Curriculum Units in Bounce Back!** provide step-by-step instructions for implementing many cooperative learning structures.

## Thinking tools

Giving students a challenging task that is designed to foster critical and creative thinking skills doesn't mean they will actually use these thinking skills. A student is more likely to persist at a task that is intellectually challenging if they find the task intrinsically interesting. **Bounce Back!** includes many topics that are relevant to young people today. It also includes thinking strategies that encourage students to consider different perspectives and different values on important social justice and life issues, as well as how to reach a group consensus. Many of the activities are open-ended and encourage students to develop skills in solving problems, making decisions and thinking critically, creatively, ethically and empathically. These thinking and social and emotional skills are important to employers and are crucial to coping with the complexity of life. Thinking tools from McGrath & Noble<sup>49</sup> are outlined in Teaching strategies and resources and are included in the **Curriculum Unit** topics depending on their relevance to the year level:

- Under the Microscope
- Ten Thinking Tracks
- Cooperative Controversy
- Multiply and Merge
- BRAIN
- PACE
- Socratic Circles
- Multiview.

## Circle Time

Like cooperative learning, Circle Time builds positive relationships and a sense of classroom community, while also teaching social and emotional skills<sup>50,51</sup>. Circle Time is used in all 10 **Bounce Back!** units to introduce key concepts and facilitate whole-class and small-group discussions and activities. Each Circle Time discussion is followed up with individual or small-group activities that provide opportunities for students to apply the concepts in a meaningful way. See Teaching strategies and resources for more information.

## High quality educational games

Games can be effective in improving student engagement and learning outcomes, as well as creating classroom energy and a sense of fun<sup>52</sup>. Redefining an aspect of schoolwork (e.g. revision) as a game has been found to sustain students'

attention longer and makes it more likely that they are willing to 'have a go' at intellectually challenging content<sup>53</sup>. The rules and procedures that are a core part of any game provide both structure and limits, and make it more likely that students will behave more socially and less aggressively when playing educational games<sup>27</sup>. Most of the games in **Bounce Back!** require students to play in either pairs or in a small group against another pair or small group. Students then practise social skills such as being a good winner and loser, negotiating with their partner, taking turns and using perspective. Playing cooperatively also provides opportunities for practising organisational skills (e.g. recording data and time management), language skills, hypothesis testing and strategic problem-solving. Cooperative games can provide a natural setting in which to conduct assessments of the social and emotional skills of specific students. This can be the basis for further more-focused direct teaching of specific social skills in small group contexts.

## Peer support

In **Bounce Back!** many activities involve older students working directly or indirectly with younger students. These activities are usually based on educational games, literacy activities or a specific children's picture book. For example, older students are encouraged to assist with creating digital stories on themes such as courage, bouncing back after a setback, and so on. Older students also gain a deeper understanding of wellbeing concepts when they teach and work with younger children. Those students who need a boost in self-confidence particularly benefit because they can feel more knowledgeable than the younger student. This can boost confidence in their own skills and abilities while also helping them relate positively to others<sup>54</sup>. They also gain a sense of meaning and purpose through helping someone else. This cross-age contact can be based on:

- direct classroom visits to run a game, make a craft activity or work with a buddy
- lesson preparation, or products for younger students
- using technology to develop a product to teach wellbeing concepts that may include sound, video clips, images, digital storytelling, animation, and so on.

## ◆ Designed to be integrated with other curriculum areas

Integrating social and emotional learning with academic content has been shown to increase program effectiveness<sup>35</sup>. The content of *Bounce Back!* has been developed so that it can effectively be integrated with other curriculum areas (and their key learning outcomes), such as English, Health and Physical Education, Technologies, Humanities and Social Sciences, Science, Mathematics, Religious Education and The Arts.

Where possible, links are made between aspects of social and emotional learning and common topics that are often covered in primary school. For example, concepts such as courage, persistence and dealing with setbacks can be addressed through age-appropriate literature and through the topics of explorers, inventors, those who have stood against injustice and researchers who have made great breakthroughs in Science and Medicine.

### English and children's literature

The use of high-quality children's literature in *Bounce Back!* is perceived by teachers as a stand out strength of the program, as shown in two research studies (see pages 2–3 for more detail). Teachers' comments confirmed that the use of quality literature made the program easy to teach and helped them to feel more confident about teaching their students about wellbeing and resilience<sup>16,55</sup>.

The books, films and videos used in *Bounce Back!* can be used in a range of ways:

- to introduce a key topic (e.g. being brave)
- to enable students to engage with and discuss key real life issues (e.g. friendships, kindness) in a safe and comfortable way
- to encourage students to discuss a problem that is linked to a book's character without owning that problem
- a teacher can choose a book to use with the whole class that has particular relevance for one student or a group, but do so without specifically focusing on that individual or group
- to help 'normalise' a situation such as loneliness and help a student see that they are not the first or the only person to encounter such a problem
- to encourage students to feel and express empathy for a character in a specific situation which can enhance their empathy for 'real people' in a similar situation
- to prompt self-reflection and insight
- a character can be used as a positive model when they display a prosocial value such as kindness, solve a relationship problem through a social skill such as negotiation, or get on top of a situation by using an emotional skill such as managing their anger or being courageous.

An age-appropriate critical literacy approach is adopted through discussion questions and activities. Literature prompts and wellbeing prompts that specifically focus students' attention on the social and emotional aspects of a book, film, video or poem are provided in Teaching strategies and resources (e.g. Who was the most optimistic character? Who was courageous and what risks did they take?).

Detailed Resources lists (both core and supplementary) of books, films, poems, songs and websites are available at the start of each **Curriculum Unit**.

### The Arts: Drama, Music, Visual Arts

Most **Curriculum Units** in *Bounce Back!* include opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of wellbeing concepts through drawing, painting, constructing, modelling, singing or drama activities. These activities are developmentally appropriate and meet various outcomes for The Arts at different levels.

Music is reported to be one of the most powerful means for inducing powerful positive emotions irrespective of culture, age or time<sup>56</sup>. Class singing is encouraged in *Bounce Back!* as there is now substantial research to indicate that group singing enhances positive mood and attention as well as social connection and cohesiveness<sup>56</sup>. Many of the key SEL concepts and wellbeing and resilience messages have been incorporated into songs for Years F–4 and are available online. Regularly singing the *Bounce Back!* songs allows students to revisit the key wellbeing messages many times. This repetition makes it more likely that students will then transfer this learning to their real-life experiences and remember them in difficult situations. In Years 5–6, students are also encouraged to go 'song hunting' and bring to school songs that

they believe are consistent with a key message related to wellbeing and resilience.

### Health and Physical Education

**Bounce Back!** addresses outcomes from the Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum. The HPE curriculum has a strong focus on students' social and emotional development so they learn to work and play effectively with others, to understand and value diversity, to manage change and to negotiate roles and responsibilities with their teachers and peers.

### Technologies

Each **Bounce Back!** unit includes ideas on how students might use digital technology, such as slide shows, podcasts, photographic displays, narrated photo essays, digital storytelling and book trailers, short movies, animation, visual records of their learning products, topic-related internet research and creating their own music.

### Other curriculum areas

Activities in each curriculum unit also draw on Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Maths. The Elasticity unit (available digitally) in particular relates to Science and Maths.

### ◆ A range of assessment tools

The evaluation of any SEL program is essential in the implementation research to ascertain what's working and what's not<sup>11</sup>. Documenting progress in students' understanding of the key **Bounce Back!** messages is not only critical to their own self-knowledge and self-management but is also important for teacher feedback. Documenting progress also creates opportunities to share outcomes with the whole school community and gain system support. **Bounce Back!** recommends both formative and summative assessment. The topics provide teachers with day-to-day formative

assessment on students' readiness for learning specific social and emotional learning skills, their strengths and interests and their approaches to learning. A range of assessment tools for summative assessment which can be used as pre- and post-intervention measures of change in student wellbeing and resilience is also included. See Chapter 6 for more information about these assessment tools for measuring wellbeing and resilience (see page 68).

## Expected outcomes

Expected short-term and long-term outcomes from **Bounce Back!**

Expected short-term outcomes	Expected long-term outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and understanding of social and emotional skills</li> <li>• More positive attitudes (e.g. to self, others, learning and school)</li> <li>• Enhanced learning environment: classroom becomes more safe, supportive, respectful and engaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced social behaviour</li> <li>• More-positive, respectful peer relationships</li> <li>• More-positive school climate</li> <li>• More-resilient behaviour</li> <li>• Less emotional distress</li> <li>• Fewer conduct problems</li> <li>• Improved academic performance</li> <li>• Higher levels of teacher wellbeing and resilience</li> <li>• More-effective teacher counselling/support for students</li> </ul>

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