



## Imagine: Creating Nurturing Adolescent Communities to Help Young People Thrive

Media stories of emotional and mental stress among adolescents and children are becoming increasingly common, often in the wake of the tragic news of another young person self-harming or taking his or her own life. Research from around the globe confirms that too many of our young people are failing to thrive and experience anxiety, depression, aggression, loneliness, rejection, bullying, and other aspects of suffering. Among disadvantaged Indigenous youth, these problems are even more pronounced.

The Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (Australian Catholic University) is undertaking *Imagine*, a research project that aims to combat this at school-level. The researchers adopt the view that, when social and emotional problems are this widespread and common in our society, the problem lies not with the individual young person but rather with the social environment. The young people suffering these problems do not somehow 'lack' something or have a 'disorder' — we have failed to provide an environment that gives them the tools to thrive.

Bringing together mindfulness and positive psychology approaches, the *Imagine* project will use the best available evidence to help schools develop social networks that support social, emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being.



*Imagine* is a whole-of-school approach that trains teachers (at no cost to the participating school) and selected students to build nurturing communities in their schools. With ongoing support, these 'champions' lead their peers in in six key behavioural areas:

1. Connect with others, nature, animals, and meaning
2. Give to others and have an influence on the world
3. Be active
4. Enjoy the moment
5. Engage and challenge yourself
6. Care for yourself.

The project aims to improve the mental health, well-being, and social support of young people and reduce the future risk of mental disorder. The results of the project will also help researchers to understand which aspects of well-being and social support promote positive mental health and enable adolescents to thrive.

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