Be You Virtual Conference Transcript

Prepare and take care: critical incidents in uncertain times

Presented by Rachel Jewell (headspace) and Ami Raman (headspace)

Rachel Jewell

Hello, and thanks for joining us today for 'Prepare and take care: critical instance during uncertain times.' My name is Rachel Jewell. I'm a former secondary school teacher and pastoral leader, and now Be You state and territory manager for New South Wales and ACT at Headspace schools. With me today is my colleague Ami Raman, who's a clinical psychologist and clinical consultant here, who's worked across the public, private and not-for-profits mental health sector. So this session is appropriate for early learning services, primary and secondary schools, and explores how and why learning communities can take steps to prepare for critical incidents. Particularly, during the times of uncertainty about the situation communities have found themselves in recently, we really hope this session gives you a chance to reflect on how your learning community might be travelling at this time. Some suggestions for what steps it might be able to, or useful to take, or be itself purely as an affirmation of the great work that you've already been doing.

Ami Raman

Great. Thank you, Rachel. So before we get started with today's session, Rachel and I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, who are the traditional custodians of the land that Rachel and I are meeting from today. So we're currently, based in Sydney in New South Wales. We'd also like to pay respect to elders past, present and emerging. And also as an initiative with National Reach we'd really like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. Today since we have people joining us from all around the country, it'd be really great if you're able to share your own acknowledgement by putting the name of the country you're on, using the chat box.

Rachel Jewell

So for those of you who don't know about Be You, or haven't been in one of our virtual conferences before, Be You is a national, mental health initiative for educators and the organiser of this conference today. It's led by Beyond Blue, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and Headspace, it's completely free available to every educator, early learning service and school in Australia. Be You empowers educators to support children and young people's social and emotional well-being, and their own mental health as well.

It offers educators online, professional learning, fact sheets, online events, and other resources. It also offers learning communities as a whole, tools and processes to implement a whole learning community approach to mental health and well-being, and, crucially, consultant support for that. And some more details about Be You will be put in the chat box as we're talking as well.

So just a little bit about, a bit more about the conference in general. So recent events have already reinforced the need for mental well-being strategies in early learning services and schools, so the conference as a whole covers three themes, across the 10 sessions, over the two days. We really want to emphasise mental health and well-being in a whole community approach. We do know that the most effective approach to mental health prevention and promotion is one that involves the whole learning community. So that includes leaders, educators, children and young people, families, and the wider community, but looking at critical incidents in uncertain times this afternoon, and in the benefits of creating a strong family and community partnerships as well. So this keynote session is followed tomorrow by three breakout presentations for early learning services, primary schools and secondary schools, where discussions will already be tailored specifically to those contexts.

Ami Raman

Alright, thank you, Rachel. So in this session, we aim to provide a safe space to discuss topics around critical incidents, trauma and mental health, and in order to create an environment where, we're able to create that sense of safety, it's really important. I think for all of us to be mindful when we're sharing personal or professional experiences, just to do what we normally do in terms of maintaining privacy and confidentiality, when sharing our own experiences. But I guess more importantly, given that we might be discussing things today that might be of quite a sensitive nature, just to stay tuned into how you're feeling, your self-care and your well-being is paramount, throughout today's session and just in general. So, please stay tuned into how you're feeling, exercise any self-care strategies that you need to throughout the day, and if you notice any emotional reactions in any ongoing way, please reach out for support, take breaks as necessary throughout today's session, and, yeah, just make sure you look after yourself.

So you'll see on the screen, there are some services to some national support lines and websites, so we encourage you to reach out to any of these services, if you do notice that you are experiencing any distress, whether it's, during the course of today, or if it's just something that you've identified a need to do. You'll also see some links in the chat box that will direct you to national helplines and services. Beyond Blue also has a dedicated coronavirus, mental health support service, and that provides useful information about how to seek appropriate support during the pandemic. You'll also see a link to this in the chat box. So even if you might not identify a specific need at the moment to reach out to these services, we've highly recommend that you either bookmark or save these links for distribution across your learning networks, or even just for future reference, because what we know is help seeking is most effective when it's visible and accessible across your learning community. So in times of need people are more likely to access services, if there is that visibility. So we'd recommend that, yeah, you do bookmark these for future use, cause you never know when it'll come in handy.

OK. So we'll just give you a bit of an overview of what we'll be looking at today. So, first we'll be looking at what a critical incident means, and what we're referring to in the context of learning communities and its impacts. We'll then talk more about the core principles of planning and preparedness, and things that we can do, in our learning communities, to prepare for managing an immediate response to a critical incident. Then we'll actually talk about the key principles in managing a critical incident, and then how we can facilitate longer term recovery in our learning communities. Throughout today's session, we will have quite a focus on educator well-being and that's something that will be embedded throughout the session, that being said, we will also wrap up today's session, focusing specifically on educator well-being, and some things that we can consider individually, but also in terms of fostering a culture of support in our learning

communities.

OK. So now we're gonna talk a little bit more about what a critical incident is in the context of a learning community. OK. So today, when we talk about a critical incident, we will be using the definition by the World Health Organisation, that defines a critical incident as "an event outside the range of normal experience. One which is sudden unexpected makes us lose control, and also involves a perception of a threat to life and can also include elements of physical or emotional loss." If we then contextualise this to the context of a learning community. We're really thinking about how critical incidents can occur, not only within a learning community, but also externally to it. So examples of critical incidents in learning communities include things such as the death or a significant illness of a young person, a family member, someone in the community, or an educator, the serious assault of a young person, family member, educator, or someone in the learning community, the suicide of student, staff member, young person, and anyone else that's a part of that learning community, and also natural disasters and events such as cyclones, fires, and floods, and the impacts of drought. We'd also be looking at major community regional national and international disasters. And I think it's really important to highlight that it's not just single events that count as critical incidents, things that might influence the impact of things, like the cumulative impact of traumas, and the accumulation of negative experiences that impact upon a learning community. And instead of looking at the size of a critical incident to determine how significant it is, it's really about how it's impacted a community. That's how we are able to identify, the significance of an event.

Rachel Jewell
Yeah and I guess that's the beauty of Be You, in that it's flexible and really kind of, acknowledges the fact that you know your school best, and how your school will respond and recover best from this.

Ami Raman
Yeah, absolutely. That's a good point.

Rachel Jewell
So, Ami, being that, critical incidents can have this kind of range of impacts for everyone in a learning community, what might people observe in children and young people after one of these events?

Ami Raman
That is a very, very good question, and it's actually quite a complex question. And I think today, because we're speaking to people from early learning services through to secondary schools, the point I'd really like to highlight is that the impact on anyone from a critical incident will vary quite significantly. And children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of a critical incident, because the brains and bodies are still developing. And we also know that young people really look to adults for that sense of safety and security and to make meaning out of things. So, if you think about, how critical incidents might impact on, you know, caregivers or educators, the adults that they look to for that support, you can see that there are a number of reasons why young people might respond quite differently based on a range of factors. What we do know is that there can be a range of cognitive, behavioural, emotional and physical responses in young people. A lot of these are quite normal responses to grief or to trauma or distress, and over time with the right support, most people will recover. However, we will talk a bit later in today's session, but also in the breakout sessions, about how developmental stages, how this can look different, and how to identify the need for further support.

Rachel Jewell
Yeah, absolutely. And I'm guessing kind of, if we're talking about a whole school community, the impact on educators needs to be considered as well, what might that look like?

Ami Raman
Yeah, again, similar sort of response in the sense that there will be, a really wide range of emotional reactions and experiences. Educators play a really active role in looking after the community, in the face of a critical incident, and not only can the work, be really emotionally and physically draining. We're also

human. So there's a lot of impacts that we're carrying, whether it's around our proximity to the event, how we identify with it, our relationship to it, how our personal circumstances, our physical and mental health availability of support, all of those things sort of tie in to the way we're impacted by a critical incident. And also, I think Rachel, we touched on it briefly before, but the impact of cumulative traumas. If you're an educator in a community that's, you know, experienced multiple adversities in your community, that can also have an impact in how you respond as an educator. Again, there will be a range of responses that are really quite normal and most people will recover over time, even though there will be some disruption. But I think it's really important, we'll cover this later today, but around how to identify what's the sort of normal response in the context of what's happened, and then how to identify when you might need further support.

Rachel Jewell
Yeah. And I'm guessing as well, kind of the impact of the uncertainty, like the COVID time that we're going through at the moment, on top of other critical incidents must be quite tough as well.

Ami Raman
Absolutely, I think that's a really important point, it goes back to the cumulative impacts of things that learning communities are having to navigate. So, we know that people are more likely to experience stress, and feelings of helplessness, and lack of control when there is this sort of, climate of rapid change and unpredictability, like the situation we're in now. But what we also know is that critical incidents, like the single incident events, they continue to occur in this climate. So responding to those events while also managing this, like, rapid change and the unpredictability of the current environment, it can be incredibly challenging. So learning communities can minimise the impact of those uncertainties through things like preparation, planning, collaboration and coordination. Which are things that will be talked through, a fair bit over the conference.

Rachel Jewell
So, being that, I'm guessing a lot of you have quite recent experience on a lot of this. We'd really like to know what strategies you're already using to minimise the impact of uncertainty on your learning community. So, you can see the poll coming up on the screen now. There's some examples here of the sorts of things you might be doing, if you could choose one of those and we'll see what sort of strategies people are using. There's also many other strategies, that we know people at the schools and the learning services have been deploying at the moment, it's really helpful to share any other ones that you've been using in the chat box. We really like to hear how you're getting on, and how you've be managing in these uncertain times and really love to share some of those things. Which particular ones, while we're just waiting for the results to come in. I mean, which ones really speak to you?

Ami Raman
To be honest, I think all of these strategies are things that early learning services in schools prioritise anyway. But what I really like about all of these is that it really highlights how setting the foundation can... You know, these are things that we know of basic good practice, but having these solid foundations as schools and early learning services are already doing, that is really supportive, when we are in uncertain times. I like the help seeking and support particularly just, yeah.

Rachel Jewell
It's really interesting kind of looking, the polls are kind of changing and there's kind of quite a division between the top three. So, establishing clear processes, developing that culture of help seeking, and not forgetting those family partnerships and community connections as well. I'm just gonna see if people have had any other ideas and as they come through, I think we'll probably mention some of those as well.

Ami Raman
OK, great. So, now we're gonna talk a little bit more about how being prepared and planning can support our capacity to respond as either a early learning service or a school. So, the first concept we're gonna talk through is this idea of having a critical incident management plan. So as an educator, you already have your existing policies and procedures around managing emergencies and critical incidents. But the benefit

of having something like a critical incident management plan, is it really allows your learning community to provide adequate mental health support and facilitate a faster return to the normal routine. So, rather than being another laborious set of paperwork or documentation that your early learning service or school is required to have. A critical incident management plan is really aimed at having just really concise information that outlines things like the names and contact numbers of people in the emergency response team, that would be involved in sort of gathering together in the face of a crisis.

Rachel Jewell

So Ami, with an emergency response team, obviously we've got, you know, early learning services and primary and secondary schools here. Who's the best type of person to have in that emergency response team? That's a really good question, Rachel, I think, often I know in the work that we've done with schools, there can be this... It often ends up being the members of the wellbeing team, or the same sort of people that are involved in the emergency response team. But what we really recommend is, not only having a variety of people from your school or early learning service represented in the emergency response team, but also not necessarily having names allocated to specific tasks and responsibilities. Cause I know it... we know that there are people in our services or schools that tend to do things best, or we tend to delegate certain responsibilities to people. So, it can be quite... there can be a tendency to say, Oh, the principal will do that, oh, the principal can do this." But having contingencies too, where we're thinking, OK, if the principal isn't available that day, who's someone else that could step into that role?

How can we share the responsibility and, based on our organisational structure, who are the people we can have as standbys or step in? And by establishing those things in the planning stages, it really allows a lot more flexibility, and also to manage decision making, and sharing responsibility, and managing self-care, in the instance of actually being in an immediate response. And again, I think it's all about that... The fact that every school community is different, so it will need its own unique plan. Really need to think about that in their own context.

Ami Raman

Absolutely, and I think it's really interesting, sort of how we've seen some schools in particular work in this space where, you know, even having admin staff involved as part of that response. You know, being... if you think about what, yeah, responsibilities that your admin team have in terms of fielding phone calls from families or services, having some scripts prepared or having them involved in this, to be able to delegate some of those administrative tasks and also supporting them. Having a teacher librarian involved, let's say, you need to set up a support room for young people. That can then be delegated to then, they're able to organise the logistics. And it's also really beneficial for educators to have a role and to know what their role is. It's clearly defined and communicated, because that's also really conducive to recovery.

Rachel Jewell

What about debriefing?

Ami Raman

I'm so glad you brought that up, Rachel, because if you think about when you're running on adrenaline, you're trying to put out, you know, so many fires, trying to manage so many things at once. We know how beneficial debriefing is, but it's not always something we prioritise. So, factoring in not only roles and responsibilities, immediate actions that need to be taken, as well as the longer term actions, but also having opportunities scheduled in to debrief at each critical stage is really, again it goes back to that concept of educator wellbeing, being able to share, fostering that really supportive culture, and also making sure that you're OK, you have opportunities to check in with people also, and just, have that... be able to share experiences.

Rachel Jewell

And I've just taken a little look at the chat Ami, lots of people are kind of sharing their experiences of being in very different types of schools and settings, and so the importance of having that kind of flexible plan that's tailored to your learning community is pretty important.

Ami Raman

Absolutely, and I think one of the main things about this, and I think it reflects those comments, is the last thing we want with this plan is, like I said, to be another piece of paperwork that sits and collects dust. It's something that should be dynamic, reflect changes in your learning community, everyone should have some sort of input in it, who has a role in it, and it should be flexible and dynamic. So yeah, I appreciate all that feedback coming in from the chat.

Rachel Jewell

Yeah, brilliant.

Ami Raman

OK, so most of the principles that we'll be talking about today are guided by this emergency management cycle. So any sort of critical incident management planning should be guided by this idea where we have these steps. So, we have prevention, which is taking action to reduce or eliminate the likelihood of a critical incident occurring. Preparedness, which is taking steps before a critical incident to enable effective response and recovery. We also then have the response, which is us taking control to try and minimise, contain the impacts of the critical incident and that's more on the short term, and the immediate term. Then we move into recovery, which is steps that we can take to minimise the disruption and also to strengthen our community's response and recovery efforts. So, I guess, the main point to make on this particular... At this point, is that this isn't a linear process, where it's something that's fluid. Each of these steps is constantly feeding into the other, so if we're working in preparedness or prevention, what we're actually doing is we're strengthening recovery, and we are also strengthening the way we respond.

Rachel Jewell

And again that's something that's very important about the Be You framework, really thinking about, it really takes a school from that kind of response and recovery into that prevention and allows the school to be flexible in one year about which focus they take to support that recovery and general well-being as well.

Ami Raman

Absolutely, I think that's also the... Goes back to the point about us being really reflective too, about our critical incident management plans, having them reviewed regularly, so we can see what we've done really well, areas that are really strong and also being able to identify, at the right time, what can we do in the future or what are some things we might need to start embedding in our plan, or, you know, protectively in our learning communities to then enable a better response next time or to strengthen the recovery process?

OK, so now we are just gonna look at some principles of the immediate response. So what we need to do when we are faced immediately with a critical incident. So in the immediate aftermath response, there are some key principles that need to be addressed. So the very first thing is addressing the immediate welfare and safety needs of those that have been impacted by the incident.

Rachel Jewell

Is that more if it happens at school or at the learning service, or kind of if you hear about it or...?

Ami Raman

It could actually be either. So it would mean that wherever, and it also depends on the school or early learning services capacity to be able... or whether that sits with a different, you know. But I think, the really important things here are we are not just talking about physical safety but we can also talk about psychological safety. So exposure to things that might be potentially traumatic, just trying to address the immediate health and safety needs. The next step is then to implement the critical incident management plan. So whoever in the learning community has responsibility for that would then access the plan, and then ensure that the actions that need to be undertaken have been done so in a timely and thoughtful manner. Following from that, we'd gather the emergency response team, and another benefit of having that plan already sort of consolidated, and also having numerous people allocated towards different roles and

responsibilities, that can allow you to then gather whoever's available, who's been part of that plan, and then determine based on who you have available, how we can allocate tasks and clarify roles, and make sure that everyone already has a solid understanding of what they are going to do.

Rachel Jewell

Excellent, and just thinking, some of the incidents that... That'd been faced quite recently, some of those people might not be able to be in that role. Cause they might have been impacted themselves.

Ami Raman

Absolutely, and that's why these planning processes really support people to actually say... And that's also based on a number of factors we will talk about a bit later. But being able to... Because we're all human and there are times we won't have capacity to manage this in role and also manage our own personal impacts, by having these things in place, like you were saying Rachel, it really allows that, I'm not at capacity, I don't have capacity to do all these things today and to be able to share that responsibility and have that support. So once you've done that, it's also really important to then identify people in your learning community that might require support, or who might be vulnerable, and then to ensure also that appropriate supports are available. And those things can be... those processes can really be strengthened by some of the content that's been spoken about in the prior sessions but also what will be spoken about in subsequent sessions to today. But around really strengthening those relationships with community services and agencies, because when we're in a really heightened state of arousal and stress, it can really be difficult to have to navigate those referral pathways. So if you have those connections and those relationships already firmly established, ensuring the right support is available to vulnerable people can be really helpful.

Rachel Jewell

And I'm guessing kind of identifying people it might be quite tricky, because some people are very... Just make things very obviously, but some people wouldn't really internalise as well.

Ami Raman

Absolutely, and then that also goes back to the preventative and the... Oh, what's the word

Rachel Jewell

The preparation?

Ami Raman

Preparation involved to make... to sort of support your educators to have mental health literacy, to understand how to identify vulnerable young people, to have those people assigned to those roles you know, and knowing that that's their role, who are in the best place to actually identify vulnerability in your learning community. So it's also drawing on your existing strengths and resources that you have in your educators. And it's definitely, you know, I'm thinking about right now, it's a really difficult time in terms of monitoring well-being.

Rachel Jewell

It's interesting something has just come through on the chat box saying, like, the difficulty of planning for incidents, such as COVID, when nothing like this has ever happened before. And I guess it's looking at some of these principles, and just more about, kind of, thinking about some of the basic principles of responding and recovering. I don't know what you would say Ami.

Ami Raman

And I think by the very nature of uncertainty, it means that things aren't predictable and we can't plan for them. So part of what we really need to think about today is what are some things we know are best practice, and how much we're communicating and coordinating and how visible are these things? So for example... For example, if there's been a break down in technology or with COVID, we've had a lot more teaching and learning practices occurring remotely. How can we translate our existing processes, using the new processes that we're coming up with for teaching and learning?

Rachel Jewell

I think that's what we are about to move on to as well. So I guess all this is kind of, you know, as a lot of you're identifying in the chat box. this brings about quite a lot of challenges for educators and leaders in particular. So you know, you gotta support yourselves, your communities, during these critical incidents, and that's really hard to organise for a practical aspect, as well as making sure that you're responding to the needs of staff, of students, of families as well. And thinking about some of those personal impacts that you may be experiencing yourself, because everyone's got a life at home and beyond work. So that kind of heightened arousal is a really common reaction, and that heightened arousal that we've been talking about can really impact decision making and functioning at this time, and also over a long period of time can lead to exhaustion. So, I mean, what can communities do about that?

Ami Raman

I think it's... There are ways that we can, sort of, proactively sort of, build our capacity to manage critical incidents, and there are also things that we can do in the immediate response to support that. And I know, you know, Rachel, in New South Wales, we've worked with so many schools who've been impacted by, you know, the impacts of drought, and then the bush fires, and then having to manage, you know, single incident events, and then now there's been the impact of COVID. And just the level of resilience that, you know, we've identified in some of these communities, it's been incredible. And it's not only managing what you do in the moment, but it's all those things that you can do in terms of what's modelled by leadership, the type of culture, or the sense of support that you build in that community. There're a whole range of different things that actually make it, the actual response, not completely smooth, because it's just the nature that these incidents are disruptive, and they do cause a lot of diverse emotional reactions. But they do buffer the impacts and sort of bolster recovery and strengthen communities where there can be that post-traumatic growth, rather than necessarily experiencing ongoing distress long into the future.

Rachel Jewell

It's really good actually, a lot of people are sharing the way that they've been coping with this in the chat box as well, which is fantastic to see, so do take a look at that as well. So, if we could move onto the next one. One of the key things Be You aims to do is build the capacity of educators themselves to support the recovery of a whole school following a critical incident. So, now we're going to talk about some of the key principles underpinning long term recovery for critical incidents.

So, how do we recover? So, it's really important to remember that every person recovers from the impact of a challenging experience in their own way, and also in their own time. But there are some, sort of, key considerations to mention. I guess the first one is staying connected. We've seen first-hand some of the challenges people have had with staying connected during COVID, but also some of the things that people have been doing in a kind of really creative and aware way, of trying to kind of mitigate that. I guess it includes having really clear channels of communication, communicating in a timely, regular and really honest way to ensure understanding of what's going on, and also engender trust in both, kind of, children and students and also families as well. The next one, so, work in ways that are flexible, relaxed, slower paced, and I know a lot of people might be watching that going, we're in a school, we're in an early learning service, you know, by definition, we work at quite a pace here. And I guess what's really important to say, is that we really acknowledge that schools are...

Sorry, I've worked in schools so I guess that's where my experience comes from, but they're very fast-paced environments. And, you know, you've got things like exam focus, lots of young people presenting with issues, and there's really that kind of pressure. But I think that in dealing with those kind of issues, it's really hard to allow ourselves to be more flexible and slowdown in that sense, because you know people who work in this industry are caring, they want to support students, they have great intentions. But I think it's really important to remember that following a trauma your, kind of, decision making and students ability to process information can be really impaired, so having a little bit of a slower pace can actually be really beneficial in bringing back that, kind of, safety. I don't know whether any of you have seen Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? Which basically states that if people don't feel safe and they don't feel that their basic

needs are being met, it's actually very difficult to motivate people to do things like taking on new learning. So, I guess establishing that kind of sense of safety is super important at this time.

So, maybe aim to return to usual routines as soon as possible as well. I guess young people really thrive on having or knowing what's coming and having those routines, and that gives people a real time to process and recover. But also flexibility, and we're gonna talk in a minute about some of the things you can do in the classroom to try and help that along as well. I think acknowledging strengths. So, things that are going really well in the school and kind of calling that out, and providing that kind of sense of positivity can be really helpful as well. And validating and acknowledging those feelings and reactions of people, and kind of calling them out, and acknowledging that this is a really tough time for the community. Checking in and also monitoring not just in the first instance but in the short term, medium-term and long term, a lot of people can have a very delayed reaction to these events as well.

Ami Raman

So, when we talk about recovery, we're really also looking at things that we can do in our everyday interactions to build that resilience and to promote recovery. A lot of this will be spoken about more in the breakout sessions, and also I think we've covered some of these concepts already in today's session. So, things like continuing to build positive relationships. Making sure we use a culturally inclusive approach. Fostering a safe environment, which Rachel was just talking about. So, we know that young people really, even though we might get pushed back, having those structures in place, predictability, familiarity, it's really important to create that sense of safety. And it can also be a really important thing as educators to try and keep some level of routine and structure, because that can be really conducive to all of us moving through recovery. That being said, we're also aware that it's not always possible, but wherever routines need to be disrupted, being able to explain these things to young people can really alleviate some of that anxiety, and some of the feelings associated with that change. It's also really important that we continue to communicate effectively, because we know that young people are very perceptive at knowing when things are changing, or when things are going on around them. So, having really clear communication to sort of alleviate any misconceptions that they might have or misattributions, it can be a really helpful way for young people to then make sense of what's going on around them. And also providing opportunities for young people to ask questions. That being said, it can be difficult at times to know as an educator, even as a parent, how to respond to those things but there are some great Be You resources and fact sheets that can sort of support with how to have age-appropriate conversations around some of these topics.

Rachel Jewell

And I'm just looking at the chat box, and people are asking some quite specific questions around some of the Be You resources, and I would say, if you've got some questions you can go to the Be You website and look at the contacts page, or if you are an action team leader in a school do contact your consultant for more support as well.

Ami Raman

Yeah, thanks Rachel. So, it's also important we help young people to manage their feelings in a variety of ways and also to focus on what we can influence, because as an educator and someone in the caring or helping profession, we can have a million concerns about young people and feel pulled in a million different directions. But what we do best is what would actually help most in these times, and that's focusing on your wellbeing, and focusing on what your role is as an educator.

Rachel Jewell

Thank you. So, we're gonna talk a little bit about teaching strategies, and apologies to, I guess, early learning services and primary schools. I have a secondary background, so I'm gonna just talk about a few things that perhaps might help in the classroom. And I also acknowledge that a lot of this must feel very fresh in your minds, so probably fresher than when I was in the classroom even. So, please, feel free to share some strategies that your school or early learning service have tried that have worked as we talk. It would be great to highlight some of these if I can see them coming through. So, I guess the first thing is,

just being that students, as I mentioned before, might have, sort of, a decreased ability to process information. Using multiple ways of presenting instructions, thinking that can allowing time to repeat back, brief neighbours on the task to reinforce what's required. Thinking about using different types of medium to present work. Putting information into context, and I know we use scaffolds a lot on pieces of work, but perhaps even using scaffolds for students that might necessarily always might not usually require scaffolds for their work as well.

Creativity is a really great way to bring a bit of, kind of, that slower pace into the classroom, so using things such as drama, arts, production of materials. And also to foster that kind of sense of connection coming back into the classroom, group or class projects that encourage social interaction and expression. I guess, when I was feeling quite overwhelmed as a teacher in those kind of busy times, I really used to look at my lessons and think about the different year groups where I would be able to, I guess, slow myself down a little bit, and provide some opportunities for classes to do things that didn't require so much, I guess, so much more of my energy, and when I was working with student teachers and new teachers, I used to sort of have this discussion with them. So, you know, if there is a lot of pressure on yourself to kind of spend a lot of time with one class in quite an intensive way, is there other things you can do in other classes, like some peer marking for instance, so that your mark load is reduced and, and kind of have those conversations. I think the other thing that's really important at this time, and as a history teacher, this was something really important to me, is being really mindful to avoid content, after an incident, that might be triggering or distressing to young people. So for example, one of my young people, when I was teaching, opened up and spoke to me that she had experienced a war. And so I've had to be really, really mindful in history teaching of how, what teaching techniques I was using to, kind of, teach, yeah.

Ami Raman
I think that's a really important point, Rachel, yeah.

Rachel Jewell
OK. So we're going to do another poll now, and this one is about supporting young children, young people to manage their feelings. Yeah, I was gonna talk a little bit more in the previous slide, but I might do it in a second. So if you can have a look at this and think about the sorts of things that you tend to use in the classroom. So do you offer activities that encourage expression, and how do you respond to emotions and not behaviour, of humour, relaxations of people, do you use any kind of mindfulness in the classroom? I'm really interested to see what sort of things you do. And also if you could tell us of any other things you use. So while we're talking, I was just... while you're filling in the poll, one of the things I used to do in the classroom, was really look at, kind of, the opportunities for self-reflection. And that was in things like in plenaries, offering the chance for students to write their response to what they'd learnt, how they'd empathise with anything we'd done that day.

Ami Raman
So, a lot of social and emotional teaching.

Rachel Jewell
Yeah, a lot of that. And even with students who are finding it really difficult to express themselves verbally, there's things you can do non-verbally, like thumbs up, thumbs down, or, you know, out of 10, how'd you feel about that? There's so many different things you can do. And I think with younger students as well you know, using emojis to see how they've responded to something, smiley faces, those sorts of things as well. So just looking at the poll. So, oh, there's a real mixture this time. So lots of people using relaxation techniques, that's a quarter of people kind of finding those sorts of things, and I think that's something that schools are really kind of using now. Activities that encourage expressions, so lots of creativity, and again, responding to those emotions, not focusing on the behaviour. Yeah. I'm just looking - oh, there's loads of things in the chat box as well. So take a look there as well, but we better move on though, Ami.

Ami Raman
OK. So what we're gonna talk about really briefly now, is how to focus on what you can influence and how

you can provide help as an educator. So we know that there are a range of responses you will see in young people and there is the need to provide support that you can do in your role as an educator, but also having really clear internal and external referral pathways is a really critical part of being able to support young people. So what we would suggest is in the Be You professional learning under the early support domain, there's some really great ideas and some learnings to take away from the provide module, which sits under there. Please refer to the chat box and you'll have a link there to, sort of, develop some further learning around how that could look in your setting.

OK. So I think in the course of the next two days, we will talk a lot about this amazing tool that we're very passionate about. It's called the BETLS tool. So have a look at the chat box and there'll be a link to it, but essentially this is a way that educators can document observations about young people and it can also serve as a really, really helpful tool to then use to refer on, if you are concerned about a young person. I know that schools and early learning services already have processes whereby they document observations, but we just really wanna direct you to this tool, because it has a whole range of...

Rachel Jewell

Yeah, and I always think that do have a look at it, I know that it's been linked in the chat box, but when I was a head of house, it would have been a really helpful tool to have to really kind of collect that evidence for, kind of, what was actually going on for students. Ami, we better keep going because we've got something really important to talk about before we finish as well. So Be You is very much about supporting a whole of learning community approach to mental health and this really can't happen without a focus on leadership and staff wellbeing, and it's something we're really picking up around the country as something that's really important. We can really only meet the needs of children and young people effectively, if our own needs being met. So the wellbeing tools for you that are being shared in the chat box, on the Be You website, outlines range of online tools and resources designed to support your mental health and that of your colleagues. And Ami's just gonna talk us through a few of those considerations.

Ami Raman

OK, so when we talk about educator wellbeing, there can be the sort of idea that it's just about self-care, and what you can do as an educator to look after yourself. That is definitely a really important part of this process, but as you can see on the visual that we have on your screen, what we're looking at is a really fluid sort of concept where there's this idea of having self-awareness. Self-awareness is important because it helps us to identify when we're starting to become stressed or distressed, and being able to pick up on those cues proactively, it can help us identify when we need support before it gets over the tipping point, where it's a lot harder to recover once we've sort of gone over that point. And I know early in my career, I definitely was not good at identifying when I was getting quite heightened. And it's something that, you know, self-awareness develops over time, but it's important to prioritise, understanding yourself and also knowing when you are getting to that tipping point, and then being able to exercise self-care. So that's looking at what we can do to manage our mental and our physical wellbeing, and there are a range of strategies that we all use to manage our self-care. But more importantly than that, I think in our communities, it's also about having support available, whether it's informal support, so connecting with your loved ones, or your peers, or your colleagues, but also having a system of support available, so it's not just having a professional support or, you know, seeing a psychologist it's also, which is beneficial, but it's also about having a system of support and a culture of support that's moulded from leadership where it's OK to help seek and to show some vulnerability and know the supports available.

Rachel Jewell

And I think it's that culture that's the most important thing really there. Definitely from schools I've worked in. So if you want to know more about educator wellbeing, there's some links, if you go to the events page on the Be You website, the InFocus webinar recordings, there was a great session on staff wellbeing in December, and you can still check that out there.

Ami Raman

And I could talk about this for hours... (CROSSTALK)

Rachel Jewell

We've got to start wrapping up. So OK. So what can your learning community put in place to support children, young people prepare for and recover from a critical incident? So hopefully this has kind of helped you, either affirmed what you already knew, or give you some ideas about the sort of thing you might be able to do, and do, you know, check in with your consultant about it. Have a look at the professional learning that's in the domain about responding together on the Be You website, and also speak to your consultant if you'd like to use the... action team leaders can use something called the share and extend guide, to unpack this learning with staff, which is a really useful tool, speak to a consultant for support. So the next sessions, we're finishing for today, but please tune in tomorrow for the, kind of, the more detailed unpacking of this session, in the three concurrent sessions that are happening from two o'clock tomorrow. In early learning services, that's gonna be about relationships and play assisting recovery after change. We've got primary school critical incidents, community-based recovery, and for secondary schools, core components of responding to and recovering from critical incidents in secondary schools, which will go into a bit more detail about some of the work we do as well. We've then got a keynote presentation from three o'clock about the benefits of building strong family and community partnerships followed by a Q and A panel and conference wrap-up, which Ami's gonna be a part of.

OK, these things will be shared in the chat box, to learn more about Be You, please do have a look at the websites, follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, all of those things. And finally thanks for listening to us, and behalf of Ami, myself, we'd really like to say thank you for attending. Yeah. We hope you'll be joining tomorrow to unpack this further in the breakout sessions, take care and thank you for everything you do to support your schools and communities.

Ami Raman

Thank you. Thanks everyone.

End of webinar.