

..... Term 2, 2023

— Australian Psychological Society —

PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SCHOOLS

Newsletter

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CONVENER'S CORNER

By Jane Mosco

Welcome to our Term 2 Newsletter, 2023.

Firstly, thanks to those members who completed our recent survey. We really appreciate your engagement and the time taken to identify topics of interest. We plan to address some of these topics through our newsletter articles in this edition and upcoming termly webinars.

Secondly, I wish to acknowledge the hard work of Rachel Weymouth, who coordinates this newsletter, ensuring a suite of articles relevant to our unique work in schools. This edition is no different, a smorgasbord of thought-provoking articles that you can read from cover to cover or dip into articles that have relevance to your school context.

This issue of our newsletter includes an overview of our work and its unique nature in comparison with private practice (spoiler alert, school counselling wins in the end). We also acknowledge the need for more school counsellors/psychologists in schools, showcasing and celebrating those at the start of their careers and supporting internships in schools.

This edition looks at how to support students finding it difficult to attend school, with a focus on rebuilding trust and reconnecting with the school in practical ways.

Behavioural issues get some airplay, including research exploring the role that medicinal cannabis may have in treating some behavioural issues and how school-based interventions through parent and teacher engagement may assist in tackling disruptive student behaviour.

The issue of memory and remembering helps us revisit the two distinct memory systems in our brains and the implications for how much students and ourselves may remember at any time. This edition also looks at the gold standards for supporting parents of students with complex support needs. Psychologists in schools play a key role in engaging and supporting parents with reliable, evidence-based information.

Finally, we look at Sunshine Circles and how teachers can help bring joy back into classrooms, using tools that support even the most vulnerable students.

If this newsletter edition inspires you to get further involved in our committee, the good news is that we do have vacancies that we are looking to fill! Whether you view yourself as



an early career psychologist in school or as having been working in schools for many years – please consider joining us. We meet monthly during school hours, and each of us takes on a particular area of interest. You can assist with our social media, articles for our newsletter, preparing events and webinars or another project of interest.

For more information, please contact any committee member or me, Jane Mosco pisig2022@gmail.com

IMPROVING DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOUR THROUGH PARENT AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT IN A NOVEL SCHOOL- BASED EARLY INTERVENTION

By Professor Eva R. Kimonis

Disruptive and aggressive student behaviour is a major and increasing challenge for schools across Australia. These behaviours negatively impact teachers' ability to effectively teach, disrupt student learning, and create unsafe and stressful classrooms that harm student and teacher wellbeing. The psychological sciences offer highly effective interventions for reducing disruptive child behaviour. Parent Management Training (PMT) is the gold standard intervention for disruptive behaviour in young children, whereby parents learn effective behaviour management strategies to enact in the home setting. However, these services are hamstrung by two key limitations. First, there are major barriers to their reach to community settings, reflected in nation-wide research-to-practice gaps. Second, gains following PMT often do not generalise to the school setting, where persisting problems continue to impact student and teacher wellbeing. School-based interventions have been upheld as a solution to both limitations. However, meta-analyses indicate that existing school-based interventions for disruptive behaviour, which range in intensity from universal classroom-wide interventions to targeted small group or individual interventions, produce only small sized improvements in disruptive behaviour (effect size [ES] $d=0.21$).

To address these challenges, in 2019 researchers from the Parent-Child Research Clinic in the School of Psychology at University of New South Wales partnered with a network of public primary schools in the sociodemographically-diverse



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Southwest Sydney area to co-develop a school-based adaptation of arguably the most effective PMT program, called Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). PCIT is unique in its intensive delivery format that involves a clinician coaching the parent, in real-time from behind a one-way mirror using a parent-worn

bug-in-ear device, to implement evidence-based relationship building and behaviour management strategies during therapeutic play sessions with their child. Meta-analytic studies of PCIT show that it produces significant improvements in parent-reported and observed child disruptive behaviours with large to very large effect sizes ($ES=.89-1.09$; Thomas et al., 2017). Beyond improvements in student behaviour, research also finds secondary improvements in children's wellbeing, internalising problems (i.e., anxiety, depression), parent stress and mental health symptoms, and overall family functioning (Niec, 2018).

Project lead, Prof Eva Kimonis, worked with Principal Graeme Green and team at Ingleburn public school to build a customised clinic suite on the grounds of the school to deliver PCIT to students with clinically significant levels of disruptive behaviour problems from across the school network. The collaboration between UNSW Psychology and the Southwest Sydney school network led to the development of the 'School PCIT' intervention protocol. School PCIT is a comprehensive intervention program to address complex, challenging disruptive behaviours (i.e., chronic non-compliance, oppositional behaviour, hyperactivity-impulsivity, rule-breaking behaviour, destructive



and physically and verbally aggressive behaviour) of primary school-aged students in Kindergarten to Year 2 and children transitioning to Kindergarten. School PCIT expands on the standard format of PCIT by involving educators in coaching sessions with students and their parents. It also delivers universal training to teachers and school learning support officers (SLSOs) in how to implement PCIT skills and other evidence-based strategies for managing diverse students with complex behaviour problems. A major goal of School PCIT is to ensure that parents and teachers are consistently responding to student behaviour using the same evidence-based strategies. Pilot testing of School PCIT delivered on the grounds of Ingleburn Public school with primary school students from across the network of Southwest Sydney primary schools demonstrated large improvements in students' oppositional, destructive, and aggressive behaviours that sustained to a follow-up assessment three months after intervention ended.

To test whether this 'School PCIT' intervention model is equally effective in other school networks, this year a new partnership was formed with a second cluster of Southwest Sydney schools led by Principal Sian Websdale at Condell Park Public School. A new custom-built clinic suite was established on the grounds

of the school to enable students with disruptive behaviour problems from across six local area schools in the network to access School PCIT. It is expected that delivering the gold standard PCIT intervention at schools will break down many barriers to accessing early mental health intervention, including issues around transportation, stigma around seeking mental health support, cultural factors, limited availability of trained mental health professionals, long waitlists for psychological services, and cost (School PCIT is provided for free to eligible students). Students and their families who participate in School PCIT are expected to benefit from it by experiencing transformative and sustained change in the child's disruptive, destructive, and aggressive behaviours.

If you're interested in learning more about implementing School PCIT at your school, contact Eva Kimonis at e.kimonis@unsw.edu.au.

References

- Niec, L.N. Handbook of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy: Innovations and applications for research and practice. 2018. Springer.
- Thomas, R, et al. Parent-Child Interaction Therapy: A meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*. 2017; 140:e20170352.

Dr Eva Kimonis is a Clinical Psychologist and Professor of Psychology at the University of New South Wales. She is Director of the UNSW Parent-Child Research Clinic that specialises in providing state-of-the-art assessment and treatment for children with oppositional-defiant, destructive, and aggressive behaviours. Prof Kimonis is an international authority on the developmental psychopathology, assessment, and treatment of childhood conduct disorders and psychopathic traits, having authored over 100 peer-reviewed publications and 30 book chapters. Prof Kimonis is Associate Editor for the journal *Research on Child and Adolescent Psychopathology* (formerly *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*); President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Psychopathy (2022-2024); and the recipient of a prestigious Fulbright Award from the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (2012-2013). She is a certified therapist and trainer of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), which she adapted to target the unique deficits of children with conduct disorders and callous-unemotional traits.