

work and study support - it's life changing

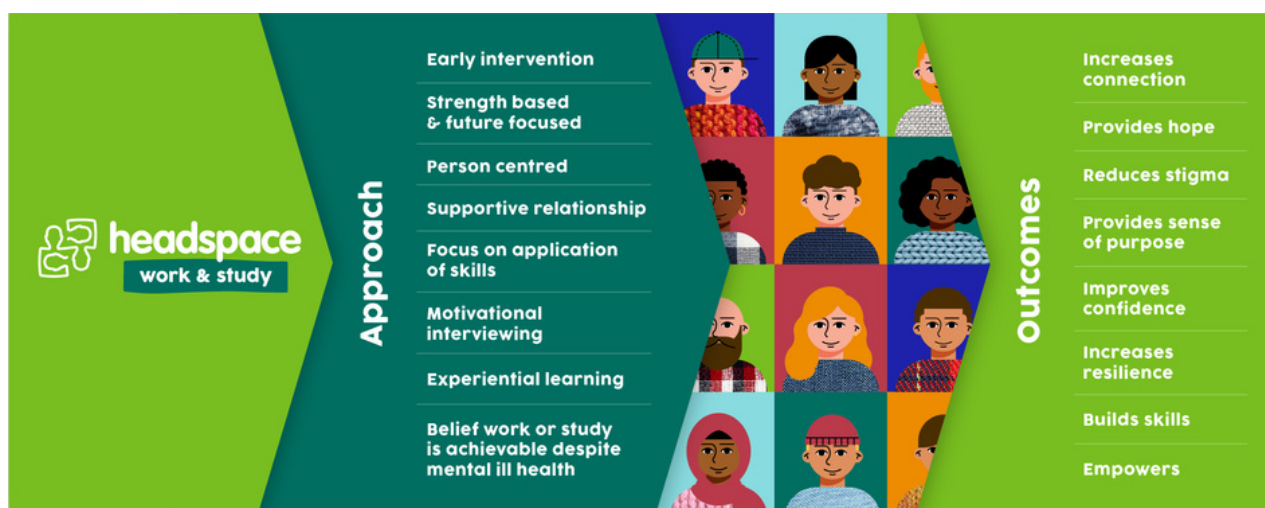
How engaging in work and study support leads to improved mental health outcomes for young people

The information included in this resource has been written for all headspace staff, to ensure we have consistent language to explain the importance of work and study in the lives of young people. Our aim is for all young people who engage with headspace to be asked about their work and study situation and offered support to talk about their needs in this space. Prioritising engagement with work and study support as part of a young person's mental health journey is core to delivering the headspace model.

The onset of mental ill-health commonly occurs during adolescence and can affect a young person's ability to engage in work or study. This can significantly impact their development and future. Reducing the length of time a young person is disengaged from work or study can positively impact their mental health and wellbeing.

- Working or studying provides purpose, connection, and structure.
- Engaging in meaningful work or study is a critical protective factor for good mental health.
- It leads to improved resilience, self-esteem, social connection, and inclusion.

Work and study support assists young people to identify and reach their work or study goals, so it is essential that vocational considerations are included when working with young people across the continuum of mental health and regardless of their mental health presentation.



how work and study support leads to improved mental health

Increases connection

Supporting young people to work or study helps them sustain or build their connections with people, places, and routines. Reducing their isolation assists young people to deal with challenges and broadens their perspective and sense of belonging. Vocational Specialists provide a point of connection and support and also work with young people to build connections through meeting their goals.

Provides hope

Future-focused support counteracts worry and encourages optimism. Young people can feel anxious about their future, work and study support encourages hopefulness and a positive outlook. This can help them to identify meaningful goals and plans rather than feeling stuck and helpless.

Reduces stigma

Alongside stigma from their community or workplaces, young people can also experience self-stigma when dealing with mental ill health. Supporting them to explore their options and see possibilities beyond self-imposed or discriminatory limitations reduces stigma and supports mental health recovery.

Provides sense of purpose

Young people with mental ill-health often identify working or studying as one of their main treatment goals. Supporting them to reach these goals by providing a framework for structure, routine, and purposeful engagement can help with motivation and keep them engaged with mental health support and other activities.

Improves confidence

Through work and study support, young people can explore access to a meaningful role, improve their self-efficacy and achieve a sense of accomplishment. They do this while developing skills, practising strategies that support good mental health, and growing their confidence in new and challenging situations.

Increases resilience

Work and study support helps young people identify interests, strengths and values, increases their self-awareness, and supports their decision-making skills. Bolstering self-efficacy and skills for navigating setbacks can have a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing. It can also assist young people to identify issues such as excessive demands, unreasonable work conditions or bullying, and find appropriate and supportive solutions.

Builds skills

Through work and study support, young people develop their career goals, source education and training opportunities and acquire the job search skills they need to find meaningful work or study. Skills developed through this support are often transferable to other areas of life including managing stressors, anxiety, or difficult situations.

Empowers

When young people are successfully engaged in work or study, it can foster a sense of achievement and boost self-confidence. Empowerment comes from achievements such as having a plan, earning money, and overcoming the barriers that might have arisen due to mental ill-health. When feeling empowered young people feel more able to face challenges, and manage any unexpected change.



how headspace approaches work and study support

Early intervention

Responding early when a young person is not engaged in or at risk of disengaging from work or study is important. The longer someone is not working or studying the harder it is for them to re-engage. This aligns with the headspace model of early intervention for young people with mental ill-health. Combining work and study and mental health support early in a young person's journey will have a positive impact on their wellbeing and future.

Strengths based and future focused

Identifying and working towards a young person's goals is the driving factor in their work and study journey. Focusing on the strengths of a young person is vital to developing an appropriate plan and allows identification of any areas where they may need additional support.

Person centred

Work and study support focuses on understanding the young person and allowing them to determine their own journey with working or studying. What are their goals, strengths, and challenges? The work is driven by the young person, without judgement or pressure to 'just get any job'. This leads to a greater sense of self-efficacy and the opportunity to celebrate successes along the way.

Supportive relationship

Building rapport with a young person is a crucial skill used by Vocational Specialists. Listening, advocating, supporting, and encouraging them through the challenges of employment, education or career planning are vital elements of a supportive relationship and achieving good outcomes for the young person. A Vocational Specialist plays an important role amongst the other supports in a young person's life. They can be an independent sounding board and someone to explore options with in an open and constructive manner.

Focus on application of skills

Assisting a young person to identify and practise the skills required for successful engagement in work or study is important. Skills like speaking confidently about themselves, feeling comfortable in new situations, asking for help, or having difficult conversations in the workplace are all examples of supporting young people to sit out of their comfort zone to build capacity and confidence. These skills are transferable and can be taken into other areas of a young person's life.

Motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing is a technique used to support young people to explore their opportunities and barriers when considering their work and study goals. This can be used to help them identify and understand issues like reduced motivation or procrastination.



Experiential learning

Learning new skills occurs most effectively through real-world practice. Engagement with work and study may cause stress or anxiety; however, receiving structured support during these times can help to build skills and positively contribute to addressing mental ill-health. Having the support of a Vocational Specialist if a young person is unsuccessful in gaining employment also assists in the learning process.

Belief that working or studying are possible despite mental ill-health

An important principle of work and study support is that everyone is capable of working or studying. If a young person has mental ill-health, they might also have a negative view about the possibilities for their future. This feeling is often exacerbated by people around them who are also concerned. However, engagement in work and study support – with the belief that goals can be reached – can have a positive impact and support recovery.

Let's bust some myths

Myth: We should focus on ways to manage anxiety before thinking about referring a young person for work and study support.

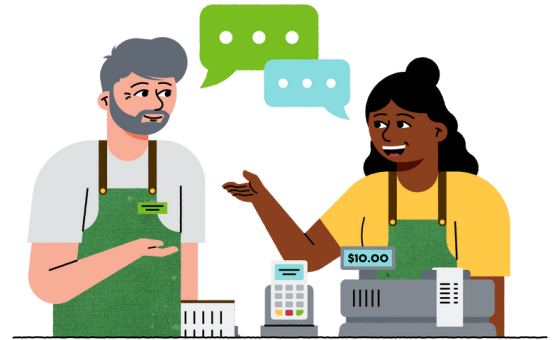
headspace aims for young people to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities. To do this it is important to think of the young person as a whole person, which includes their work and study goals. Asking about work and study at intake/assessment or during ongoing support and encouraging uptake can be incorporated into mental health interventions, and prompt a referral for specific work and study support. If working or studying is identified as one of the young person's main goals, we need to support this as they might disengage from clinical support if this goal is not acknowledged.

Mental health support has multiple mental health benefits across the mental health continuum and is a key component of functional recovery. Supporting a young person to engage with work and study early reduces the barriers and stressors that impact on mental ill-health. The longer the gap they have without meaningful work and study, the bigger the impact it has on their lives.

Myth: If a young person is struggling to get out of bed each day, they won't attend a new job. Failing will worsen their mood and increase their risk.

Young people can engage in work and study even if they have symptoms of mental ill-health. It is developmentally appropriate for young people to strive and plan for their future and their support networks can encourage this, so it is important we ask about their goals. Leaving work and study considerations to the end or as an end point of mental health support can mean that the young person has a longer time without meaningful work and study engagement and the benefits these bring. It might help them build a routine or have a purpose that will encourage them to embrace each day.

Tailored, youth-led work and study support meets a young person where they are at, while guidance, and normalising unsuccessful attempts to engage with work or study can help them develop skills and resilience to navigate the world of work in the future.



Resources

- Devine, A., Vaughan, C., Kavanagh, A., Dickinson, H., Byars, S., Dimov, S., Gye, B., & Brophy, L. (2020). "I'm proud of how far I've come. I'm just ready to work": mental health recovery narratives within the context of Australia's Disability Employment Services, BMC Public Health, 20:325, doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-8452-z
- Lloyd, C., & Waghorn, G. (2007). The Importance of vocation in recovery for young people with Psychiatric Disabilities, British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 70(2), 50-59, research-repository.griffith.edu.au
- Redekopp, D., & Huston, M. (2020). Strengthening Mental Health Through Effective Career Development: A Practitioner's Guide, ceric.ca/publications/strengthening-mental-health-through-effective-career-development-a-practitioners-guide/
- Robertson, P. (2013). The wellbeing outcomes of career guidance, British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 41(3), 254-266, dx.doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2013.773959#2013
- Scanlan, F., & Kilackey, E. (n.d) Research Bulletin Vocational Interventions for Young People with Mental Ill-health, Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, orygen.org.au/Training/Resources/Vocational-recovery/Research-bulletins/Vocational-Interventions

For more information on headspace Work and Study support options visit headspace.org.au/workandstudy

Resources to support young people through their work and study journey can be found on our website or through the headspace online account. Vocational Specialists from Work and Study Online or Work and Study Centres are also available to discuss resources and tools that support young people to reach their work and study goals.