

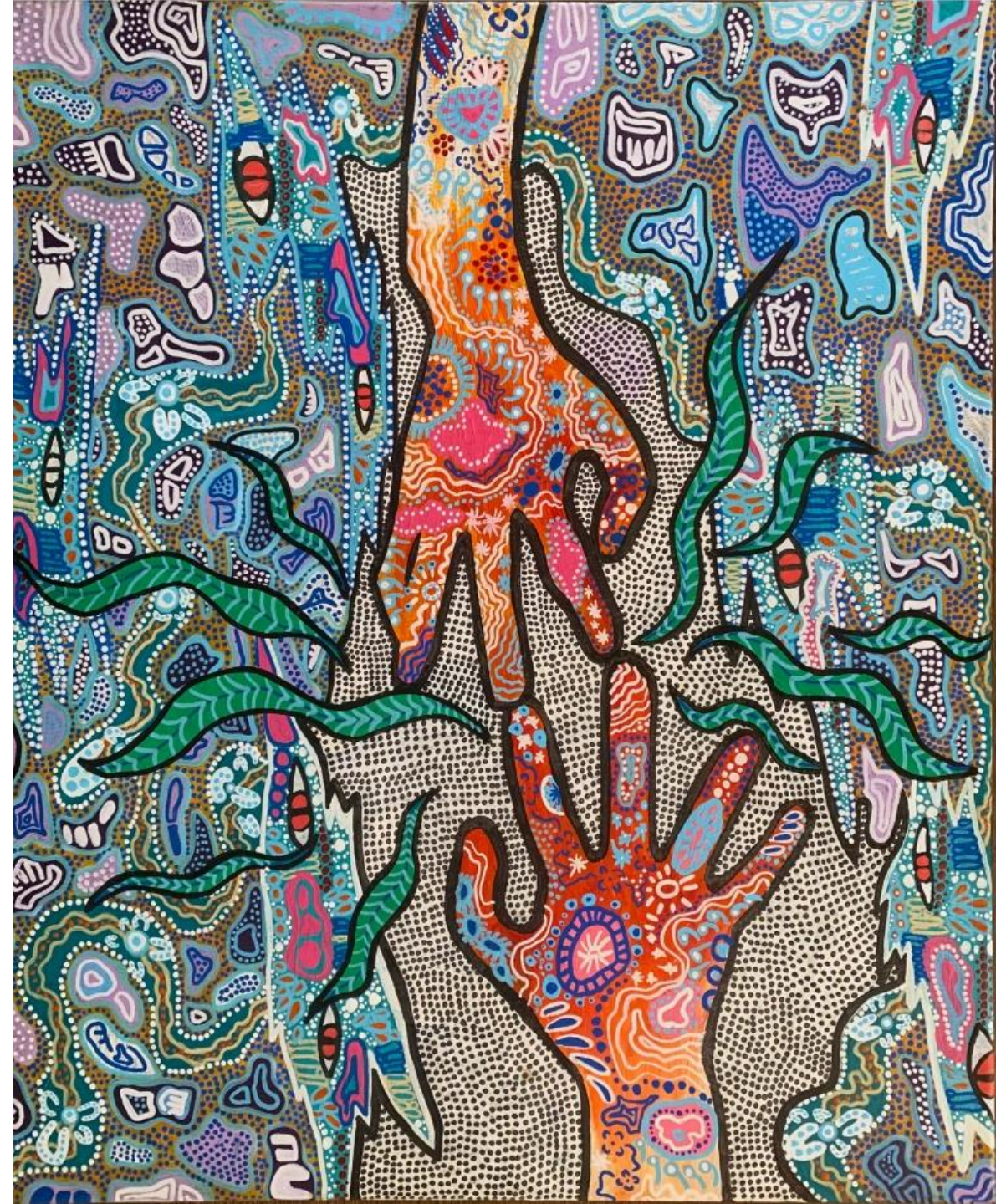
Supporting Autistic Students with Suicidal Behaviours

Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we meet today, the Gadigal People from the Eora Nation, and their connections to land, waters, and community.

I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including those who may be in attendance today.

'U gonna listen now?' by Leilani Tallulah Knight



Language

Self-injurious behaviour	Commonly used in the context of individuals with higher support needs, moderate to profound intellectual disability, limited expressive and receptive communication skills. May not be cognitively aware they are causing injury to themselves – a response to sensory input, physical pain, dysregulated emotions, etc.
Non-suicidal self-injury	There is an intent to harm themselves in the context of psychological distress, but there is no intent to end their life.
Suicidal behaviour	Harmful behaviour with an intent to end their life.



Suicide and Autism – Australian Context



Hwang, Y.I., Srasuebkul, P., Foley, K-R., Arnold, S., & Trollor, J.N. (2019). Mortality and cause of death of Australians on the autism spectrum. *Autism Research*, 12(5), 806-815.

Schwartzman, J.M., McMorris, C.A., Brown, C.M., Trollor, J.N., Uljarevic, M., Stokes, M.A., Williams, Z.J., & Hedley, D. (2025). Elevated suicidal thoughts and behaviours and nonsuicidal self-injury in autistic youth and adults: A multinational study. *Autism in Adulthood*, 00(00).

In Australia:

- Injury and poisoning was the leading cause of death of autistic people aged 5-65 years
- It was the 3rd leading cause of death for autistic people with co-occurring ID.

In a recent study of 245 autistic adolescents, adults, and caregivers, that included an Australian sample:

- 41.8% of participants self-reported they had attempted suicide (1-26 attempts per participant)
- Overall, Almost 88% experienced suicidal ideation at least once, 56.3% reported engaging in NSSI
- Average age of first suicide attempt was 16 years (ranging 7-45 years)

Prevalence Rates

- Autistic persons were almost three times more likely to die by suicide than non-autistic persons.
- Autistic persons without intellectual disability were more than five times more likely to die by suicide compared to non-autistic persons.
- The risk of death by suicide for autistic females relative to non-autistic females was significantly larger than the risk for autistic males relative to non-autistic males.
- Almost 2% of all suicide deaths globally in 2021 could be avoided if the risk for death by suicide was not elevated for autistic persons.



Santomauro, D., Hedley, D., Sahin, E., Brugha, T., Naghavi, M., Voc, T., Whiteford, H., Ferrari, A. and Stokes, M. (2024). The global burden of suicide mortality among people on the autism spectrum: A systematic review, meta-analysis, and extension of estimates from the global burden of disease study 2021. *Psychiatry Research*, vol 341, November 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2024.116150>

Contributing Factors



Brown, C.M., Newell, V., Sahin, E., & Hedley, D. (2024). Updated systematic review of suicide in autism: 2018-2024. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports (2024)*, 11, 225-256.

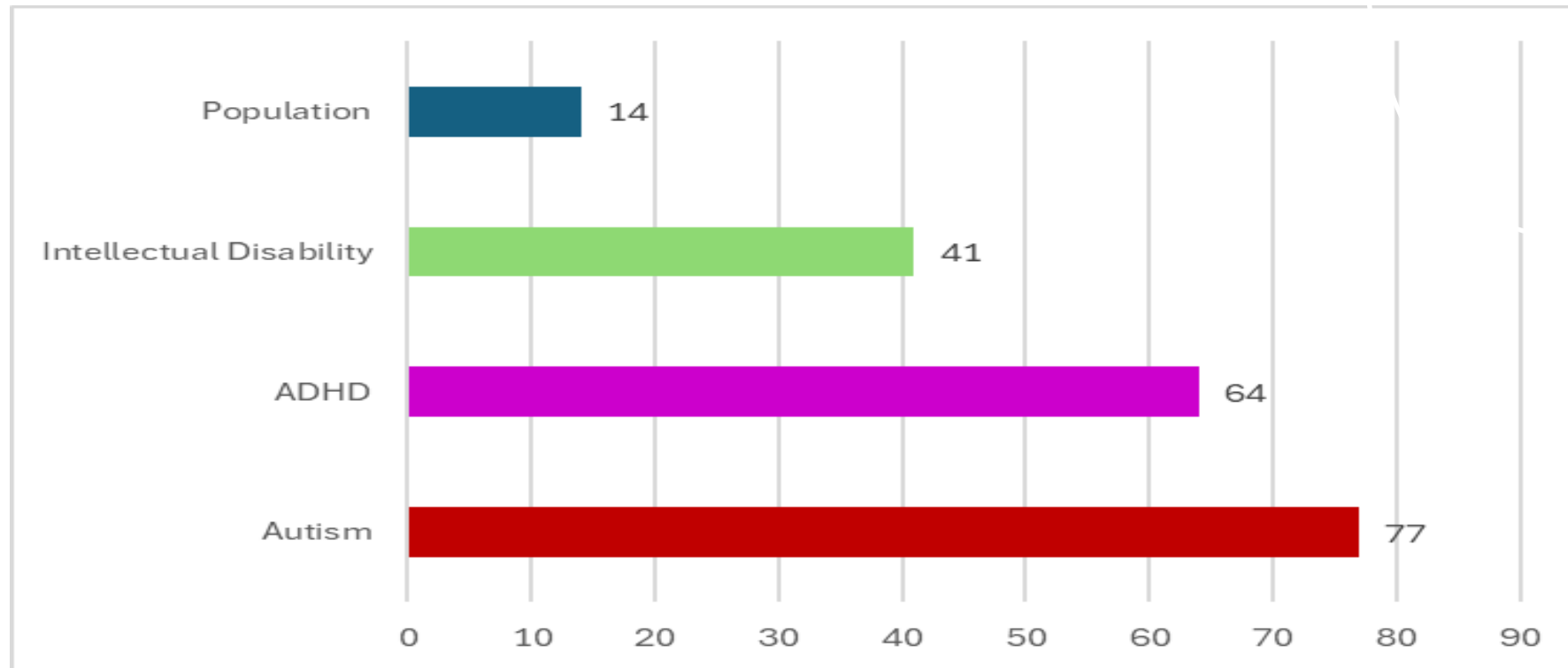
Cleary, et al. (2023). A scoping review of autism and the way it changes the presentation of suicidal thoughts and behaviour compared to the general population. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 44(4), 282-301.

Marsden, S.J.E., Eastham, R., & Kaley, A. (2024). (Re)thinking about self-harm and autism: Findings from an online qualitative study on self-harm in autistic adults. *Autism*, 29(1), 247-258.

- Autistic traits
- Diagnostic Overshadowing
- Presentation differences
- Barriers to accessing to mental health treatment
- Co-occurrence of mental health difficulties
- Camouflaging or masking
- Trauma/ACEs

Rates of Mental Health in Children and Adolescents

Prevalence of mental health conditions in different neurodivergent populations.



Bitsko RH, Claussen AH, Lichstein J, et al. [Mental health surveillance among children—United States, 2013–2019](#). MMWR Suppl. 2022;71(2):1-48.

Kerns, C.M., et al. (2021) Prevalence and Correlates of Caregiver-Reported Mental Health Conditions in Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorder in the United States.

The Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2015). Department of Health, Canberra.

Recognising the Warning Signs

- Changes in eating habits
- Withdrawal from usual activities
- Changes in sensory preferences or sensitivities
- Withdrawal from friends or classmates
- New, or changing, behaviours of concern
- Changes in special interests
- Worsening anxious and/or depressive symptoms
- Declining adaptive or self-care skills



Challenges in Identifying Distress

- Autistic students may struggle with words and language to communicate their distress
- Students may not appear distressed or be able to identify they are distressed
- Misidentify distress for other mental health concerns
- Stigma and shame
- Previous negative experiences
- Social isolation

Rodriguez, G., Holmberg, D.R., Fredrick, A., Stadelman, S.J. (2024). Addressing suicidality in autistic youth: Implications for school mental health professionals. *Psychology in the Schools*, 61(11), 4151-4174.



Referral and Support



The Sydney
children's
Hospitals Network
care, advocacy, research, education

Referral Options: Safeguards



Safeguards

The Safeguards Teams are a new community-based service for children and adolescents (0-17 years) experiencing acute mental distress, and their support network. Safeguards is initially being established in 11 local health districts and will be rolled out to other locations over the next four years.

Safeguards will provide comprehensive assessment and brief interventions to resolve the immediate crisis, build personal strengths and capabilities, and assist the child/adolescent and their support network to access practical supports.

Referral Options: Safehaven

Safe Haven

- A place to go if experiencing distress or suicidal thoughts, as an alternative to Emergency Departments.
- Staffed predominantly by peer workers with lived experience of mental health difficulties.
- Free. No appointment required.
- There are 23 locations across NSW, with different operating times and age requirements

www.health.nsw.gov.au/towardszerosuicides/Pages/safe-haven.aspx

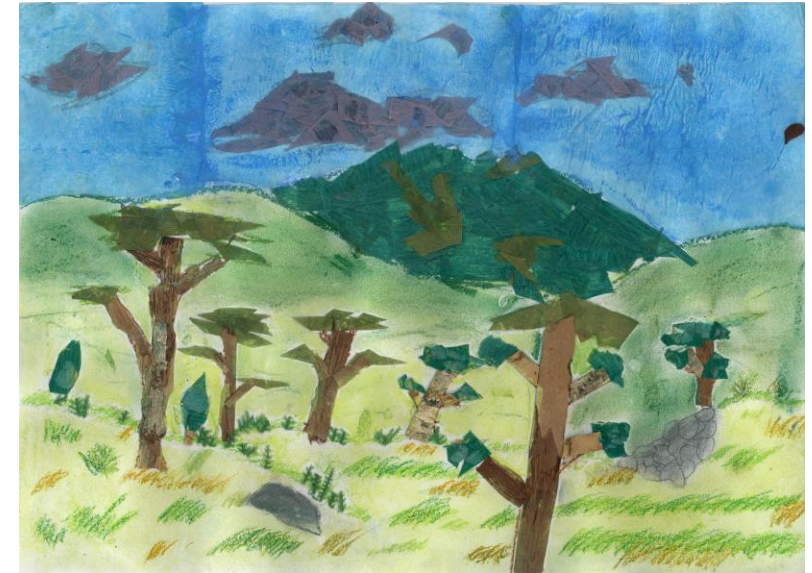


Referral Options: i.am

i.am

- Free support for children and young people up to 25 years old
- Support after a suicide attempt, significant suicidal ideation, or self-harm
- Staffed by peer workers
- Can provide support with goal setting, practical interventions, connections to community, family, education, etc.
- Teams located in Liverpool, Mt Druitt, Coffs Harbour, and Tamworth
- Self-referral available

<https://www.newhorizons.org.au/i-am-support-lives-here/>



Crisis and Support Options

- In an emergency or immediate crisis, please call emergency services on 000.

Lifeline Australia — [13 11 14](tel:131114)

Lifeline provides Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention. Support is available by [phone](#), [webchat](#), and [SMS](#).

Kids Helpline — [1800 55 1800](tel:1800551800)

Counselling and support for young people aged 5-25 years old. Support is available by [phone](#), [email](#) or [webchat](#).

Mental Health Line- [1800 011 511](tel:1800011511) NSW health's statewide for 24/7 counselling and crisis support services which links people with NSW health services.

Beyond Blue — [1300 22 4636](tel:1300224636)

Beyond Blue provides counselling and support by [phone](#), [email](#) or [webchat](#).

Autism Connect. National autism helpline. Autism Connect is open 8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday. Call 1300308699, email or webchat. <https://www.amaze.org.au/autismconnect/>

Crisis and Support Options

BeYou suicide response: [Suicide Response - Be You](#). Coordinated and informed response can help schools address student and staff needs following a suicide, providing support, aiding recovery and reducing the risk of more suicides

13YARN – [13 92 76](#)

13YARN is a national crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They provide support by [phone](#).

QLife – [1800 184 527](#)

QLife provides anonymous LGBTI peer support and referral across Australia. They provide support by [phone](#) and by [webchat](#).

Parentline

Parentline is a counselling service for parents, grandparents, and carers. They use a different phone number and run different operating hours in each state. The Parentline website [page](#) that lists all the different Parentline numbers.

Disability Gateway – [1800 643 787](#)

The Disability Gateway provides information and services to help people with disability, their family, friends, and carers, to find the support that they need in Australia. They provide support by [phone](#) and by [email](#).

Group Activity



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Prevention: Safe School Environments

QUESTION: How does your school create a safe environment?

- Protective factors (teacher relationships, safe spaces, supported etc)
- Education for students and staff on identifying signs of distress
- Provide information to students on what supports and services are available
- Let students know the policy/process if they disclose intent to harm themselves

Intervention: Supporting a Student to Return to School

QUESTION: What do you currently do when a student returns to school following suicidal behaviours? I.e. Following a hospital presentation or inpatient stay.

- Case conference with family/carers and any external support staff
- Behaviour support plan

Postvention: Responding to Suicidal Behaviours

QUESTION: In the event of a student completing suicide, do you have a plan?
To support the students, your staff, and yourself?

- Risk assessments/safety planning
- Response plans and processes
- Is everyone trained and confident to respond?
- How confident are you and your leadership team in managing these situations?

Future Focused: What Do Schools Need?

QUESTION: What gaps are there for your staff and school in this space?

- Policies and processes
- Training
- In school-support
- Up to date research and knowledge of the sector
- Supervision

Further Training

- **Mindful (\$\$)**

Centre for training and Research in Developmental Health.

<https://mindful.org.au/autism-training>

- **Zero Suicide Alliance**

UK based, online and freely available

<https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/autism-suicide-training>

- **Living works**

SafeTALK training

<https://livingworks.com.au/>



Mindful
Centre for Training and Research
in Developmental Health

Semester 2 2025

Statewide Autism Training

Learn about **autism assessment, diagnosis, and support** for children, adolescents, and adults.

CORE TRAINING	SKILL DEVELOPMENT	ADVANCED ASSESSMENT
<p>Providing a foundational understanding of autism and co-occurring conditions.</p> <p>AUTISM ASSESSMENT FUNDAMENTALS & CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS</p> <p>Two day workshop \$390 / \$260** / \$0* Free for Victorian ICYMHs* Presenters: Specialist autism and neurodevelopmental assessment teams from Victorian Infant, Child & Youth Mental Health Services, Different Journeys (DJW)</p> <p>DATES (9:00am - 4:30pm) Wednesday 13 - Thursday 14 Aug (live webinar) Tuesday 7 & 14 Oct (live webinar) Wednesday 5 - Thursday 6 Nov (live webinar)</p> <p>AUTISM AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT</p> <p>One day workshop \$260 / \$125** Presenters: Leah Dalton & Jenny Field DATE (9:00am - 4:45pm) Friday 1 Aug (live webinar)</p> <p>TRACKING BETTER WITH AUTISM: POLYVAGAL THEORY IN PRACTICE</p> <p>Series of two half day workshops \$360 / \$185** Presenter: Dr Debra Kimber DATES (9:00am - 2:30pm) Tuesday 18 & 25 Nov (live webinar)</p> <p>ADULT AUTISM INTRODUCTORY</p> <p>3 hour online module \$140 / \$70** / \$0** Free for Victorian ICYMHs/AMHS** Developed by Mindful with Dr Emma Rodford & Vanni Purdie Available online on demand</p> <p>ADULT AUTISM ADVANCED</p> <p>Two day workshop \$470 / \$260** / \$0** Free for Victorian AMHS** Presenters: Leonie Wilson, Elie Perry, Dr Emma Rodford Prerequisite: Adult Autism Introductory Course DATES (9:00am - 4:30pm) Tuesday 21 - Wednesday 22 October (live webinar)</p>	<p>A deeper exploration of autism with co-occurring mental health conditions.</p> <p>AUTISM AND SUICIDE PREVENTION</p> <p>4 hour workshop \$140 / \$70** Presenters: Dr Damien Hedley, Dr Claire Brown, Dr Jodie Wilson, Dr Sanjay Patel DATE (9:00am - 1:00pm) Friday 4 Jul (live webinar)</p> <p>AUTISM, ATTACHMENT AND TRAUMA</p> <p>5.5 hour workshop \$190 / \$95** Presenters: Dr Jennifer Harrison DATE (9:00am - 2:30pm) Thursday 28 Aug (live webinar)</p> <p>THERAPY MODIFICATIONS FOR AUTISTIC ADULTS</p> <p>1.5 hour workshop \$260 / \$130** Presenters: Malorie Cooke, Elie Perry, Leonie Wilson DATE (9:00am - 4:30pm) Monday 15 Sept (live webinar)</p> <p>AUTISM AND ADHD</p> <p>Includes online introductory ADHD module 5.5 hour workshop + 2 hour online module \$290 / \$130** Presenters: Dr Emma Sciberras, A/Prof Daryl Egan, Emily Unity, Mindful DATE (9:00am - 2:30pm) Friday 28 Nov (live webinar)</p>	<p>Training in autism assessment tools for use in clinical practice.</p> <p>ADOS-2 INTRO + TODDLER BUNDLE</p> <p>Three day workshop \$1300 / \$630** Presenter: Deborah Sweeney Prerequisite: Autism Assessment Fundamentals & Co-occurring Conditions workshop DATES (8:30am - 4:30pm) Wednesday 23 - Friday 25 Jul (in person)</p> <p>ADOS-2 TODDLER</p> <p>One day workshop \$490 / \$240** Presenter: Deborah Sweeney Prerequisite: ADOS-2 Introductory Workshop DATES (8:30am - 4:30pm) Friday 25 Jul (in person)</p> <p>AUTISM DIAGNOSTIC OBSERVATION SCHEDULE (ADOS-2) INTRODUCTORY</p> <p>Two day workshop \$960 / \$470** Presenter: Deborah Sweeney Prerequisite: Autism Assessment Fundamentals & Co-occurring Conditions workshop DATES (8:30am - 4:30pm) Wednesday 23 - Thursday 24 Jul (in person) Monday 4 - Tuesday 5 Aug (live webinar) Monday 8 - Tuesday 9 Sep (in person) Thursday 9 - Friday 10 Oct (live webinar) Monday 10 - Tuesday 11 Nov (in person)</p> <p>AUTISM DIAGNOSTIC INTERVIEW REVISED (ADI-R)</p> <p>Two & a half day workshop \$1850 / \$900** Presenter: Deborah Sweeney Prerequisite: Autism Assessment Fundamentals & Co-occurring Conditions workshop DATES (8:30am - 4:30pm, Day 3 ends 12:30pm) Monday 28 - Wednesday 30 Jul (live webinar) Wednesday 10 - Friday 12 Sep (in person) Wednesday 19 - Friday 21 Nov (live webinar)</p> <p>ADOS-2 ADVANCED</p> <p>Three day workshop \$1850 / \$900** Presenter: Deborah Sweeney Prerequisite: ADOS-2 Introductory Workshop DATE (8:30am - 5:00pm) Wednesday 29 - Friday 31 Oct (in person) Monday 1 - Wednesday 3 Dec (in person)</p> <p>ADOS-2 CODING AND RELIABILITY MASTERCLASS</p> <p>4 hour workshop \$325 / \$145** Presenter: Deborah Sweeney Prerequisite: ADOS-2 Introductory Workshop DATE (9:00am - 1:00pm) Friday 14 Nov (live webinar)</p>

Free information (DST Inclusive)
**Price for Victorian Infant, Child & Youth Mental Health Service (ICYMHs) clinicians
***Price for Victorian clinicians in ICYMHs, Children's Health and Wellbeing Locals, Headspace, ACHD and Take Two
#Price for Victorian Adult Area Mental Health Service (AMHS) and Forensic clinicians
Please read our [Cancellation and Attendance policy](#) before booking

Live webinar training is delivered via Zoom videoconference.
In person training is held at the Mindful Centre in Traralgon, VIC.
These workshops are not recorded.

mindful-ask@unimelb.edu.au

Mindful's Statewide Autism Training program is supported by the Victorian Government for Victorian public mental health clinicians

Register online at mindful.org.au/autism-training

Further Training

The emotions clinic (\$\$):

- Suicide, Self-harm and Safety Planning in Autism (ONLINE COURSE/On Demand for mental health professionals) - with Dr Belinda Ratcliffe.
- Foundations in Autism (ONLINE COURSE/On Demand for mental health professionals)- with Dr Belinda Ratcliffe

<https://theemotionsclinic.com.au/>



The
Emotions
Clinic
AUSTRALIA

School-Link Resources



The Sydney
children's
Hospitals Network

care, advocacy, research, education

School-Link Consultation Line

SCHN School-Link provides support and advice on relevant mental health services for children and adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Please contact:

- schn-chw-schoollink@health.nsw.gov.au
- 02 9845 2005

Behaviour Tip Sheets

Behaviour Tip Sheets focusing on children with ID and Autism. Topics include:

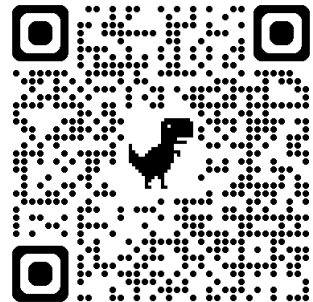
- Why is my child Anxious?
- Why does my child hurt others?
- Why does my child hurt themselves?
- Sensory processing difficulties
- How can I help my child navigate adolescence?

Behaviour Tip Sheets are available in:

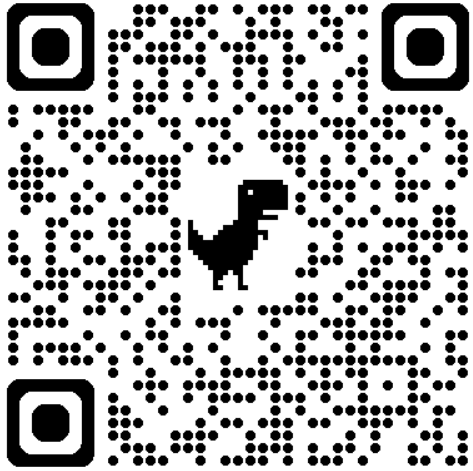
- Long version (reading age: school year 7-8)
- Short version (reading age: school year 3-4)
- Vietnamese
- Simplified Chinese
- Arabic



<https://chwschool-link.squarespace.com/behaviour-information-sheets/>



Website: www.mhidkids.info



E-list & website

Free Journal

Articles by psychiatrist David Dossetor
and pharmacist Judy Longworth

Free webinars

Clinical on-demand webinars available anytime on
mental health and ID topics:

- assessment
- formulation
- comorbidities
- self-injurious behaviours

