



# Building Resilience for Children and Teenagers

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[autismteenwellbeing.com.au](http://autismteenwellbeing.com.au)

# The perfect storm for adolescents on the autism spectrum

- Reduced quality of relationships at time when relationships become increasingly important
- Social isolation
- Bullied by peers
- Increased likelihood of peer rejection
- Difficulty adjusting to changing situations in time of change
- Difficulties regulating emotions because of perspective taking problems
- Greater reliance on maladaptive coping strategies
- Those with lower support needs experience even greater loneliness (Whitehouse et al., 2009)

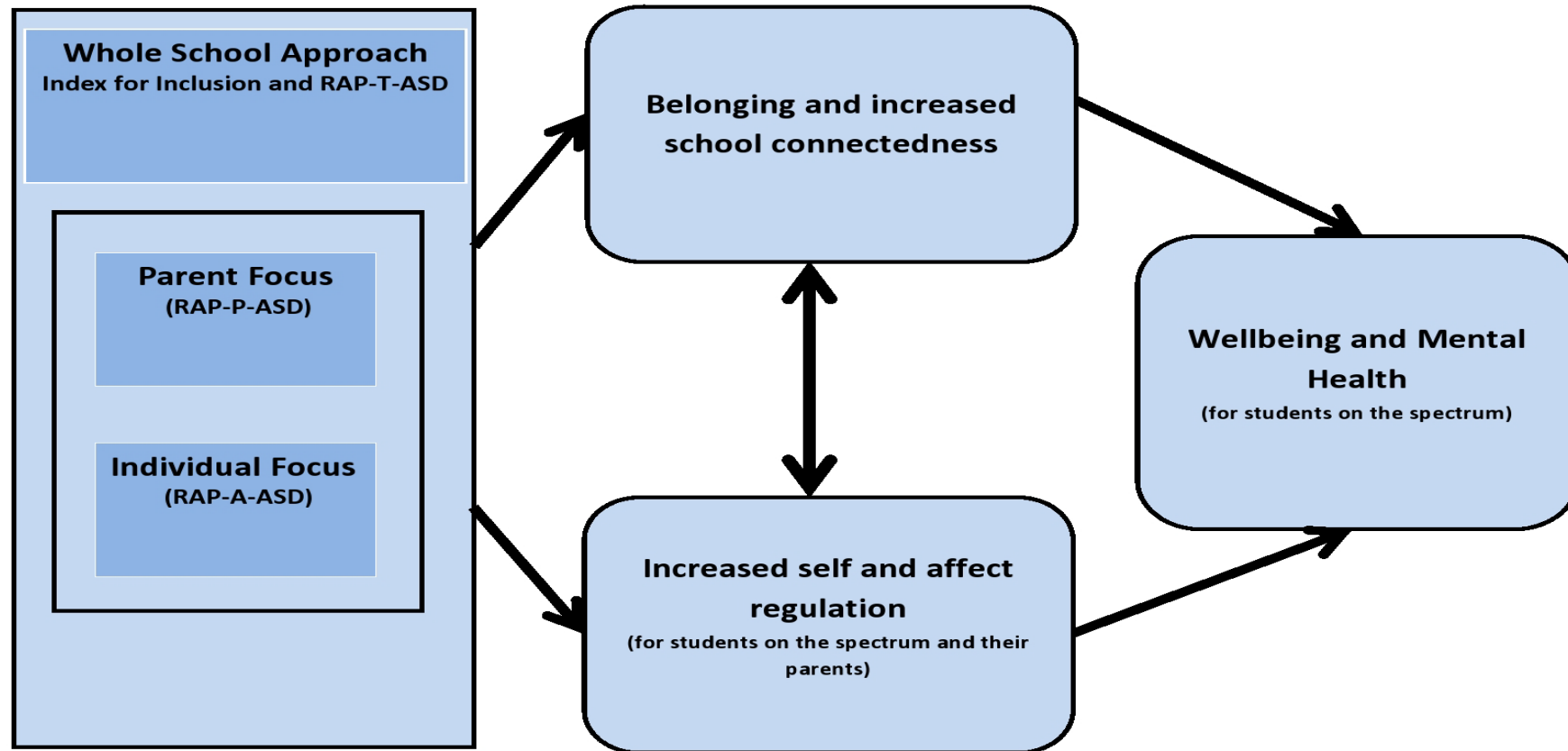


# Autism and mental health problems

- Autism in adolescence commonly associated with depression and other mental health problems
- Most frequent diagnosis given (over 50%) cases relates to mood or anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts very common, particularly in adolescence
- Experience significantly reduced quality of relationships across settings when depressed
- Increasing social withdrawal and oppositional and aggressive behaviour
- Loss of interest, self injury, decreased self care and adaptive functioning
- Can result in negative life prospects of unemployment or non completion of tertiary education



# Our integrated multilevel model for adolescents on the autism spectrum



# What is School Connectedness?

**“The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school and classroom”** (Goodenow, 1993)



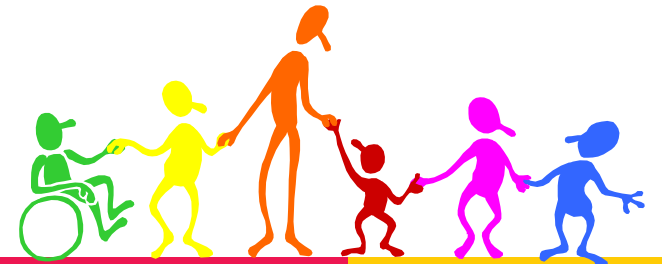
## There are two major components to School Connectedness

### 1. Validation and Respect

Validation is making people feel that what they have to say or contribute is meaningful and important to you.

### 2. Sense of Belonging, Acceptance and Inclusiveness

School Connectedness is not only the relationship between teachers and students, but also peers, administrators, etc.



# School Connectedness Mental Health Correlations

(Shochet, Dadds, Ham & Montague, 2006 )



	PSSM	CDI	SDQ	SCAS
PSSM	1	-.67	-.60	-.34
CDI		1	.74	.52
SDQ			1	.54
SCAS				1

N=2022; 14 schools

PSSM: Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale  
CDI Children's' Depression Inventory  
SDQ Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire  
SCAS Spence's Children's' Anxiety Scale

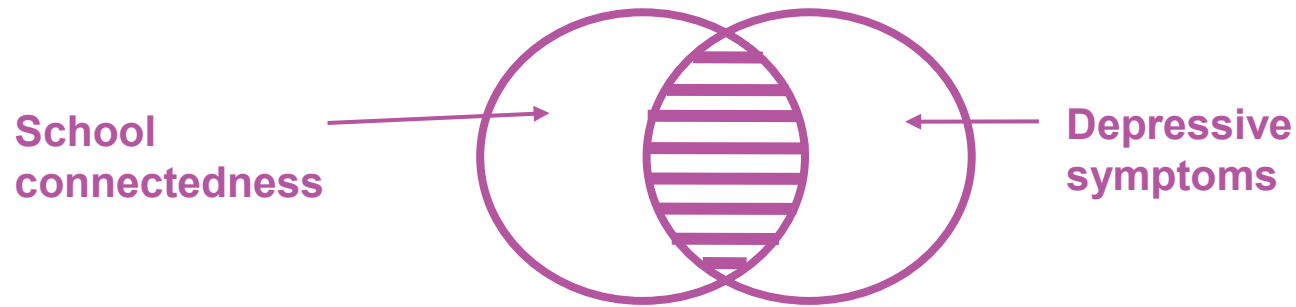


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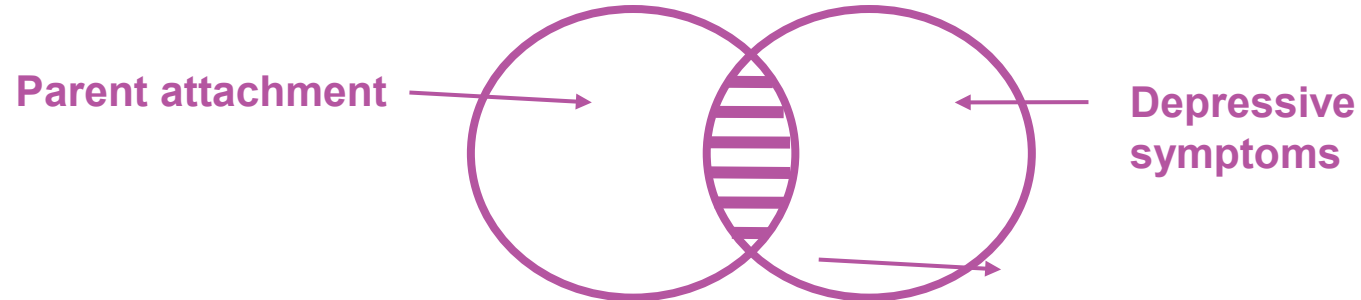
# School connectedness and parent attachment are both vital in adolescent wellbeing

Shochet et al., 2008

- 49% co-variation between school connectedness & depressive symptoms.



- 28% co-variation between parent attachment & depressive symptoms.



**Parents also play a crucial role in promoting school connectedness and a general sense of belonging**



# The role of belonging

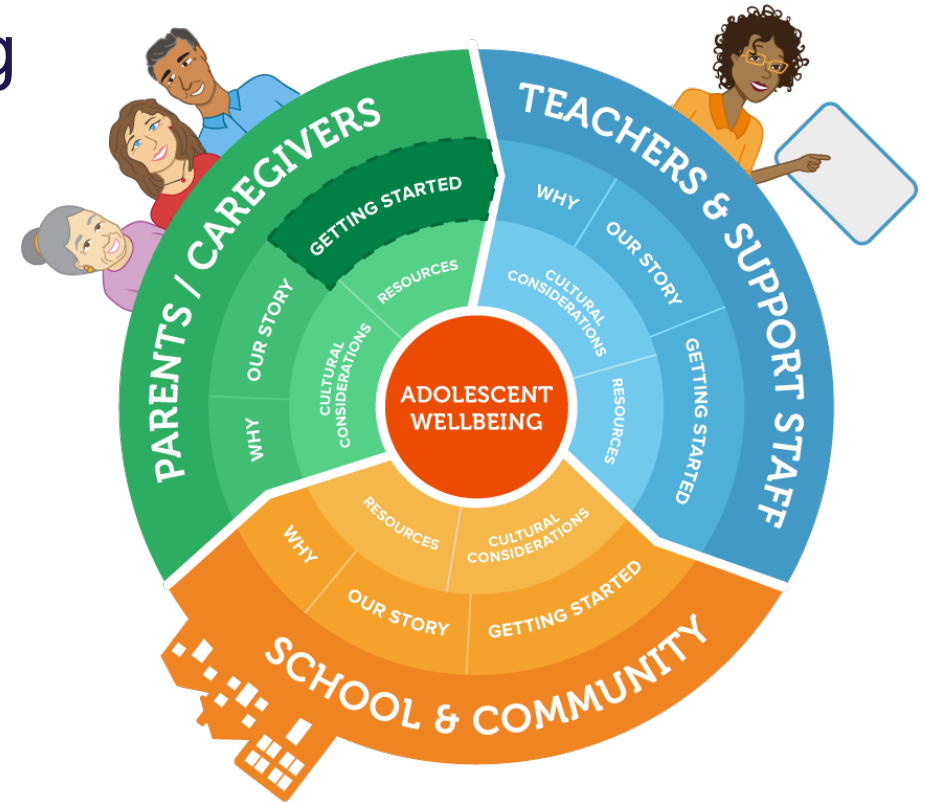
- Our present research established general belonging as the largest correlate of adolescent depression.
- Connectedness at family, school and other contexts are all vital for positive mental health

(Parr, Shochet, Cockshaw & Kelly; 2020)



# What can parents do?

- In the current climate of social distancing and isolation, parents are finding themselves with even more responsibility than usual.
- So perhaps our [website](#) is arriving at a very timely moment 😊



# What can teachers do?

- Teachers and schools systems are operating in very new ways at the moment.
- There are still many things that teachers and schools can do to promote a sense of belonging.



## TEACHERS & SUPPORT STAFF

- WHY
- OUR STORY
- GETTING STARTED
- CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS
- RESOURCES

# Microskills of school connectedness: The WISE Model (Shochet & Wurfl, 2004)

<b>W</b> armth and Empathy	with all the elements (such as empathy, respect and understanding “where teenagers are at”) that help establish warm relationships.
<b>I</b> nclusion	and the importance of finding a role and sense of belonging for the students/group participants.
<b>S</b> trength Focus	which entails noticing, identifying and encouraging each group member’s strengths.
<b>E</b> quity and Fairness	which includes not only a lack of discrimination, but support for differences and a strong sense of fairness.

# What can schools do?

- Even in this time of social isolation and distancing, there are things that can be done at the school and broader organisational levels.
- Research says that connectedness to the workplace is fundamental to our wellbeing
- So connectedness from top down ultimately promotes connectedness for students. The Index for Inclusion is one excellent tool for looking at inclusive school policies, practises and culture



## SCHOOL & COMMUNITY

- WHY
- OUR STORY
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- RESOURCES

# In conclusion

Now, more than ever, we need to utilise every opportunity to build a sense of belonging for our children, our students and ourselves.



# Thank you

## Questions?

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**AutismCRC**

Autism CRC is the world's first national, cooperative research centre focused on autism. We are taking a whole-of-life approach to autism focusing on early years, school years and adulthood.