# Transcript

## Boosting Psychological Wellbeing

Duration 1:07:35

KATE MORRIS: Good morning, everybody, and welcome to the first of a series of seminars that Bastow is presenting in partnership with Genos International. We'll be launching the webinars at 8.30 and I'll be repeating this message a couple of times, but just to ensure we know you're there, if you could start sending messages to us through the chat line around where you are with us from today, that would be fantastic.

So you'll see we've got Michelle Bickley-Miller with us today from Warrnambool East Primary School and Matt Borg from Kellor Views Primary School. Matt’s also the substantive principal at MacKellar Primary School. And you'll see Ben there, who will be our lead expert today. So I'll be welcoming everyone a couple of times because people will be joining us across time, but we're delighted you're here with us. We've got people from Geelong and Swan Hill and it's fantastic to see you all here. All different roles. We've got staff from Central Office, regional staff, our principals, our teachers and our incredibly supportive Education support staff. Just keep sending us messages about where you're coming from. We're really interested to know: Upper Ferntree Gully, Burwood East, St Helena. Fantastic. Thank you.

Good morning, everyone. It's Kate Morris here. Thank you for joining us.  I’m the interim CEO of Bastow and we're here today launching the first of three seminars we’re delivering in partnership with Genos International. You'll see on the screen we've got our partner colleagues. Ben Palmer is with us from Genos.

DR BEN PALMER: Hi, everyone.

KATE MORRIS: Michelle Bickley-Miller from Warrnambool East Primary School and Matt Borg, who is principal at the moment at Kellor Views Primary School. His substantive role is at MacKellar Primary School.

We encourage you to use the chat box to tell us where you’re reporting in from. We've got staff with us today from all schools, regional offices and also our corporate colleagues from DET Central. So we'll be starting exactly at 8.30, but if you could just keep telling us where you’re from and we will start the webinar at that time. Thank you.

DR BEN PALMER:  Good morning, everyone. Ben Palmer here from Genos. I'm looking forward to being with you and thanks, Kate, for that warm introduction. That’s fantastic.

We should also mention all your colleagues at Bastow who are here helping us to moderate the session in the background as well. They’ll be looking at all the wonderful things that you type into the chat box - your suggestions, your comments and your contributions today. So we should acknowledge them as well.

KATE MORRIS:  Thank you, Ben.

DR BEN PALMER:  We are expecting over 500 people to come this morning and the numbers are climbing as we sit here and watch the participants join us, so that's fantastic and we’ll give it another minute and get going.

KATE MORRIS:  Good morning, everyone. Just before we get started, I would like you to keep adding your comments into the comment box around where you're joining us from today. It will be starting in about a minute, Ben?

DR BEN PALMER: Yes.

KATE MORRIS:  Great.

DR BEN PALMER: We do have a good support team with us in the call today, so if you're having any issues with your sound, with your audio, hearing us, obviously you're on mute but you should be able to hear Kate and I speaking and Michelle and Matt as we go through. So if you've got any issues, just let us know via the chat box because we also have people from Genos who can assist and try to help troubleshoot any little issues with the technology that you might be experiencing. We can see that some of you are letting us know that you can hear us loud and clear, which is fantastic. Thank you very much.

KATE MORRIS:  Thank you, everybody, and we will launch our webinar for today. Thank you all for joining us and for telling us where you're joining us from.  My name is Kate Morris.  I’m the interim CEO at Bastow and it's a great pleasure for us to be partnering with Genos International and also our Department colleagues who are with us to support this series of workshops. Today we launch with Boosting Psychological Wellbeing and you'll find that it's really a treasure trove of information and ideas underpinned by research that will give you the opportunity to reflect on how you're managing working remotely, teaching remotely, and how you're connecting with colleagues and families and managing your wellbeing.

We're delighted to have our Principal panel members with us today: Michelle Bickley-Miller from Warrnambool East Primary School and Matt Borg, who's with us from Kellor Views Primary, where he's acting principal, but substantive principal at MacKellar Primary School. They’re our moderators today and Ben will explain to you their role but they're going to really provide some contextual information about how this period of challenge and change is happening in their worlds. You obviously will get a chance to comment through the chat box. It's interactive. We're learning together and we're delighted to be supported also by our Bastow colleagues, who'll be working on the chat box as well.

So enjoy the professional learning today. I think it's a great opportunity for us all to virtually connect, work with experts, hear from our colleagues and build our understanding of how we can be best in this challenging and changing environment. Today David Howes, who is the Deputy Secretary of Regional Services, is joining us to welcome us and to introduce us to this series. Thank you, David.

DAVID HOWES: Well, colleagues, welcome to this special event. This is the first of three seminars that Bastow are presenting in partnership with Genos International. Can I begin by acknowledging the various lands on which those of you who are joining us today are meeting on. Wherever you are, they are lands of traditional people across Victoria and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and express our collective appreciation for the custodianship of this land by Indigenous people.

Well, this is such a strange time, isn't it? I want to just say a couple of words of introduction before getting to the really important part, which is the session that Genos will lead on psychological wellbeing at this really complex, interesting but challenging and difficult time. Who would have thought we'd be here at the start of term two when we were having our discussions at the principal forums last term? But one of the things I reflected on then was the important place that wellbeing was going to have in this year's work and I guess we were thinking more of student wellbeing, and that is clearly going to need to be probably much more of a focus than we'd even thought last term because of the circumstances that we now find ourselves in. But the wellbeing of all of us who are doing the work of supporting our young people, our own wellbeing is probably going to need a higher priority and a different kind of focus than we had thought last term, and for those involved in the frontline work of principals and teachers, this is just critical, I think.

The other thing that I've been reflecting on is how we talked about our key strategy this year was going to be learning from each other, but I did make the caveat last term that it was also important to look to the outside for where things were of value, and this is one of those instances. In this new territory, we need to find the people who have done the thinking and done the work and latch onto their expertise very quickly, and Bastow have done that, as always tremendously well, and have partnered with Genos, who they've been working with for some time now, to present these three sessions: one on our own psychological wellbeing, the second on what it's like to work remotely and how we manage ourselves in that environment; and then for our leaders, one on leading remotely.

So thank you to Bastow. Bastow, along with all the rest of us, are learning how to work differently, how to work responsively and how to provide the kind of professional learning now that is in real time and it's giving a whole new meaning to the phrase ‘just in time’. So thank you to the work of Kate, who's acting Chief Executive Officer at Bastow, and whose initiative it was to partner with Genos, who have the expertise in this space. So I'm going to hand you over to them now and look forward to hearing the kind of session that they’re going to lead for the next hour. Okay. Thanks very much and over to you, Ben.

DR BEN PALMER: (No audio) …the way you behave, it can cause fight or flight responses when it's really strong.

Let's, in fact, look at some more specific examples, and in a moment I'll call on Michelle to give us a sense of some of the things that she's been witnessing around in her area. So when people feel uncertain, they tend to make assumptions. People certainly felt uncertain about the availability of certain goods at the supermarket, for example, and panic-bought goods on that basis. When people feel stressed, they can become aggressive and we saw some of that aggression directed towards our frontline health care people and pharmacies. When people are anxious, they become reactive. When people become worried, they can get problem focused. When people feel fearful, they can blame, and this obviously can create a bit of a cyclic nature, if you like.

I'll just pause there and ask Michelle: any particular examples that are really relevant, if you like, for people in schools at the moment, Michelle?

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER:  All of them, I think, at different times. I'd like to actually start with the first one, the uncertain one. When the staff were aware that they would be teaching remotely at home but also offering to teach onsite, that management of the workload, the duplicity of those roles, that was really uncertain.  They had this assumption that they actually had to do both equally well all of the time, and so that was essential for me to put in some parameters around that of what that would look like. If you're teaching onsite or supervising onsite, therefore, there would be an expectation of lesser work on those days with your students at home, and I needed to communicate that.

The problem focus one was really interesting. One of my brilliant administration staff just came in in an absolute whirlwind. Didn't stop talking, was loud, was trying to solve everything because that's her nature. She absolutely wants to serve and support and help everybody all the time to the best of her ability. And it was just this whirlwind and I just needed to say, “Hey, I can see you really, really want to make this work for us. How can we settle you down? How can we make a plan for this to work? What's our priority?”. So all of those things I've seen and it's about having to say, “Okay, let's talk about this and make a plan.”

DR BEN PALMER: Awesome. Thank you for that example, Michelle, and I'm sure you've all got your own examples as well. What we're doing here is just helping us step back and appreciate, if you like, from a more informed perspective some of the things that we’re seeing go on.

Let's now look at some more pleasant examples. So when people feel a sense of purpose, they engage with one another. When people feel valued, they demonstrate care for others. When people feel informed, they become solution focussed. When people feel empowered, they innovate, and we've certainly been seeing some of these things happen in the community as well, and in a minute, I'm going to ask Matt whether he can draw on some of the really positive things that he’s been seeing in either the community or the school where you are, Matt.

MATT BORG: Yes, so it's a bit of additional work in our culture as we’ve shifted what we have - a school-based culture into a remote culture. And I think our vision and purpose has stayed the same throughout and I think that consistency for our whole community has really been valued where we continually go back to our vision and our intent and our values and then leverage those to actually work through and inform the whole community about the situation and come up with really clear and concise solutions to everyone's different concerns or issues or problems, and then being able to empower everyone to be able to innovate and ask questions and consult and ensure that every voice is heard. I think the real power of the innovative platforms such as Zoom and all the other tools that we're using, whether it be Teams or the Cisco WebEx platform, it seems that more voices are being heard than what would be heard in sort of an open staff meeting forum. I've found it really powerful as a leader to actually have those softer, less-heard voices in our community represented really well, and some great insight being affirmed into the work that we're currently doing.

DR BEN PALMER: Fantastic. Thanks for sharing that. And I can see some of you are sharing some of the things you're seeing and some of the great initiatives that are going on as well. So keep those things coming through the chat box.  That's fantastic.

What I will say is that disasters/crises create a heightened sense of emotions, and all emotions are important in these kinds of environments, both pleasant and unpleasant. What's equally important is you really pay attention to the way we feel. Because they’re heightened, emotions can have a positive or negative impact on the way we think, the way we behave and the way we perform, so it's really important to have that self-awareness, to be conscious of the way we feel, to be demonstrating empathy and be really in tune with the way others feel and to use that as a source of information to act intentionally with our emotions rather than having our emotions, if you like, take control, and also understand that sometimes emotions do take control, particularly in these environments, and it's great to be able to have someone who can help us to step back, re-assess and re-respond to certain situations in our environment.

Okay. So, in a moment, we're going to have a look at what we're doing already in the sense of wellbeing and I'm going to do a quiz with you that's going to help you reflect on thinking strategies, physical strategies, relationship strategies and environmental strategies. So if you've got the workbook, I'd like to invite you to turn to the workbook and go to page number 5, where you’ll see the quiz. If you don't have the workbook, don't worry. Just grab a piece of paper and a pen because I'm going to put the questions up on screen anyway. But if you've got the workbook, what I'd like you to do is read the instructions at the top. It's very simple. You just read each question, answer it ‘true’ or ‘false’, and then, once you've finished, flip over the page. You'll see a table like this and some instructions on how to score it. That's fairly simple. Let's say you answered ‘true’ to the second question: “I exercise regularly; at least 20 minutes most days”. You tick ‘T’ in the ‘True’ form to indicate that that is a strategy that you engage in. Let's say for question 4, “I work eight hours or less a couple of days a week”, if that wasn't happening right now, then you wouldn't tick number 4 here. You would leave it blank. What you should have at the end of it is a number out of 4 in each of these boxes, sort of showing you, if you like, your reliance currently on these different strategies that are available.

So we're going to go quiet for the next four minutes while you complete the quiz. When you finish the quiz, type in ‘Finished’ to let us know that you've done it, and then before we get into the strategies, we’ll have a little discussion with our panellists around it. So thanks, everyone. Four minutes to do the quiz.  Let us know when you're finished it. Thank you.

(Pause)

DR BEN PALMER: Okay. We’ve got a lot of people mentioning that they’re finding it a bit hard to read the questions off the screen, and a lot of people who were able to download to workbook have finished it already. So I'm going to read out the questions. You write down on a piece of paper 1 to 16 and then just put a ‘true’ or a ‘false’ next to it. So the first question is: “When dealing with stressful situations, I tend to stop, reflect and think through the causes of stress to help me feel differently”. If that's something you do, give yourself a ‘T’. If it's something you don't, just leave it blank.

Question number 2: “I exercise regularly; at least 20 minutes most days”. Again, if that's something you do, put a ‘T’ next to it. If not, leave it blank. Question number 3: “I have someone at work who I regularly catch up with to reflect on how things are going”. Question number 4: “I work eight hours or less a couple of days per week”. Question number 5: “I engage in meditation a few times a week”. Question number 6: “I'm careful about my diet, eating regularly, moderately and with good nutrition in mind”. Question number 7: “When someone bothers or frustrates me, I engage that person in discussion about it as quickly as I can”. Question number 8: “I take 45 minutes or more for lunch with someone once or twice a week”. Question number 9: “Once or twice a year I set myself achievable goals to help improve myself”. Question number 10: “Most days of the week I get the amount of sleep I need”. Question number 11: “I regularly seek feedback from colleagues on how I interact with them”. Question number 12: “I work in different environments to help me manage my mood or stress”. Question number 13: “I set boundaries for myself at work like how much time I spend on email and stick to them”. So “I set boundaries for myself at work and stick to them”. Question number 14: “I mix up activities at work so that I'm sitting, standing and walking around regularly”. Question number 15: “I regularly attend events with peers in my industry” and question number 16: “I could withstand a change in my financial circumstances”.

So they were our questions. I hope you were able to get them. You can come back to the scoring, if you didn't have the workbook, a little bit later. I can see a lot of people have finished now.

Okay.  So what I'm going to do is launch a poll.  Hopefully the poll has come up. If our moderators could give us a thumbs up to let me know if the poll has appeared. I can see it has for Matt, yes. Fantastic.

So which of the four categories of wellbeing strategies do you use the most? This is the sort of information - this collective, if you like, analysis is the type of information you can only get coming to a session like this. So, in a moment, I'm going to reveal to you all the strategies that we're relying on most at the moment as a group, what are the things we're using the most, and I'll show you the outcomes of the poll. We’ll just let the numbers tick over. There’s almost 380 of us here today and a lot of you are voting and I can see that happening. Don't worry if you can't see the poll. It doesn't matter. I'll reveal the results to us in a moment and then we're going to start looking at the new strategies. Okay.  We'll just let that keep ticking over because it's going at a hundred miles an hour and in a moment I'll reveal the result.

While you're waiting, which one do you think it is? Which do you feel is probably the most relied-upon strategy: thinking, physical, relationship or environmental? Okay. I'm going to end the poll now because I can see a lot of us have voted and I'm going to share the results with you and I'll get my moderators to just put a thumbs up if they can see the results of the poll. They should be coming up now.

So here we have it. The most - if you like, on average, what does large data tell us? Well, most people are relying on physical strategies to improve their wellbeing but we can see that all four are being used, which is great. And then the research suggests that it's good, if you like, to have a strategy in each of the categories.

Now, again, the purpose of this was to help us reflect on what we're doing. Now we're going to move forward and look at new strategies and, as we go, I'd love to hear from you. What sort of strategies are you using and, importantly, try and identify something you could stop or start doing to boost your resilience.

So the first category is thinking strategies. We can, of course, engage in prefrontal cortex type activities, if you like, to improve our wellbeing, and the No.1 one that I love to share with people is creating boundaries. What do we mean by that? Drawing, thinking about and conceptualising for yourself that metaphorical line in the sand. It might be around something that's a little bit unhealthy for you in your life at the moment. For example, if you like to have a couple of glasses of wine most nights of the week, you might say, “I'm going to draw a boundary around that” and move from seven to six to five and so on. Or if you look at your phone right up until when you go to bed, research suggests that's not good for your sleep. Sleep is really important for your wellbeing. You might put a boundary around it and say, “I won’t look at my phone for at least one hour before bed.” You might have a time-gobbler in your life, someone who zaps up a lot of time and really makes you feel a bit stressed and anxious from it. You could create a boundary where you say, “I'm going to go and talk to that person and say, ‘Hey, I love our interactions but we have to bring them down a little bit because they’re impinging on my work’.” This is what we mean by boundaries.

One of the things we're all being encouraged to do is to reduce how often and how long we spend in social media and the news right now, and these two are obviously quite linked. But if you're feeling quite anxious - I know I do, particularly around the next phase of our crisis, if you like, the financial side of things - if you're tuning in and you're noticing that's kind of getting to you a bit - I'm not suggesting we don't -

I think it's really important to feel informed but you might like to reduce how often and how long you tune in for. I'm just checking in in the mornings and at night, by way of example.

Gratitude reflections: one of the things that environments like this create is a bit of an imbalance between pleasant and unpleasant emotions. One of the really great practices to get in is to stop and just ask yourself, ask those around you, as you meet with people virtually or in person, “Hey, what's one of the things that's really going on that's really positive right now for you?”, just to help intentionally get that balance back.

Diarise think-and-reflection time. If it's not in the diary, sometimes it doesn't happen, does it? It's really important to have a self-reflective practice at the moment, to be reflecting on what's working well and what could be done differently to make it better the next day.

And, finally, perspective taking; really evaluating the context and perspective. One of the things that this kind of environment can do is narrow our perspective, limit our interpretation of events. Even unconscious, unpleasant emotions can get in the way of level-headed, clear judgment.

What can you do to broaden your perspective? Well, there are a lot of different things. We naturally seek out people who are just like us. Seek out somebody who thinks differently, by way of example, or if you like to read conservative newspapers, balance it up by reading both conservative and progressive newspapers. If you only tune into the normal news, tune into the Good News Network. Type it into Google. It's a news channel just dedicated to positive news and it will help again with that balance and that perspective that we really need in these times.

Michelle, I'd like to call on you. What's your favourite thinking-oriented strategy?

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: It probably links to my other strength, which is probably more on the relationship side of it. So when I want to think through things, I'm a sharer. I'll talk it through with colleagues, talk it through with friends, partners. So that's my general way of thinking. But I actually have already noticed that I'm really upping the use of gratitude reflections and perspective; really looking at their perspective, trying to understand where people are coming from. So a lot of my thinking time is in that space at the moment.

DR BEN PALMER: Excellent. Thank you for sharing. Matt, what are we seeing coming through on the chat box? Are there any particular things that you're picking up there that are striking yourself in this area?

MATT BORG: Yes, many people talking about and echoing Michelle's thoughts around using gratitude particularly and being grateful for what we have in this current situation particularly, and grateful for our own communities and teachers and other professionals within the school and outside the school, to be able to provide a real base of context and perspective really about what is actually happening in our environment in comparison to some of the larger threats across the globe.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, we're seeing a lot of reflections on gratitude. Rebecca asks: “What was the name of that positive news channel?”. The Good News Network. Type it into Google. It should come up.

Okay. What are your favourite thinking-oriented strategies? Some that often get mentioned here are reading, for example, and learning something new - a new language, a new instrument. Things that kind of engage us in that purposeful, positive, action-oriented kind of thinking can be really great right now.

Okay. Let's go to our next one: our physical strategies. Big connection between our physical health and our emotional and psychological health and vice versa. Loneliness indeed can be the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. So what are the type of strategies? The number one: sleep better. One of the things this kind of environment can do is lots of distractions and it can impinge on our sleep, as can stress and anxiety. So I'd really like to encourage you to ask yourself the question: how much sleep do you need? What's effective for you? And then ask yourself the next question: how often are you getting that amount of sleep? There is a wealth of information on how to sleep better. The internet and Google is our friend, if you like. This is your search term: ‘sleep better’. You can go out and stand outside in the dark. You can clean your bedroom, change your bedsheets. You can not look at screens for an hour before bed. You can stop drinking coffee after 2pm. The list just goes on and on and on. It’s really important to be thinking about sleep right now.

Drinking less alcohol and caffeine: these are two substances that particularly work on our nervous system and our emotional system. I'm practising this at the moment; trying really hard. I’ve created that boundary of not having caffeine after 2pm and I'm finding I’m more tired at night and wanting to go to bed earlier, which is good for me personally.

Improving your diet: I like to use Easy Diet, the app Easy Diet, as a way of not only counting calories and keeping on top of how much I'm eating, but it helps me reflect on and think about the quality of food as well. It's really important to be eating whole foods at the moment, which, by definition, are those things with a fairly quick use-by date on them.

Exercise: trying to get something done most days. There’s a lot of things we can do in our homes and obviously outside but there are great apps and there are great things going on. I know people are having virtual exercise with their colleagues as well and setting up Zoom meetings just like this to do the exercises together - virtual spin classes and so on.

And, finally, mindfulness. Mindfulness we could have put in any one of these categories – thinking, physical, relationship, environmental. I've put it here. I like Smiling Mind. It's a free one and it's a great one and it has particular strategies for the COVID-19 environment. But the research on mindfulness is more robust in terms of its efficacy than the research on vitamins, for example. So if you haven't tried it or you're not doing it regularly, it could be something that we could be doing.

Matt, I'm going to ask you in a moment for your favourite physical strategy and, Michelle, I'm going to then ask you for a bit of a reflection on the wonderful things that people are putting into the chat box for us. But, firstly, Matt, over to you. What are you doing on your physical wellbeing right now?

MATT BORG: I must say I'm a bit envious of some of my staff who are working from home, particularly, who can do the brisk walk around their neighbourhood during lunchtime and recess. I've tried to replicate that here at school by ensuring I'm not sitting in the same position, ensuring I’m moving up and about around the school, doing laps of the school while I'm here. But one of my personal favourites when I do get home is to go for a bike ride with the kids and be able to get out and even just being mindful during that time of what's happening around me as far as just even something as simple as the sun on my face, the breeze flowing through on my skin on the way, and focus on the tiny, little things of success and things that are really positive within my life when I'm doing those activities outside of the work environment. But principal class - I think it's been challenging for us to actually keep the physical stuff up but it's a challenge worth rising to and being able to get up and move around your physical environments, which sometimes can be a bit concerning that they're so empty and large, especially those in large schools, but use it as an opportunity to get in the gym. We've set up a tennis court in our gym and we're playing some indoor tennis as an opportunity for staff and enjoying that really immensely in our break times.

DR BEN PALMER: Thank you, Matt. One of the things we heard there was the combination of activities as well, so not only doing exercise but adding to it, for example, a mindfulness practice as you go around. If you’re particularly walking around outside, you can do the five senses, for example: things you can hear, things you can see, things you can smell and so on. So thank you for that input, Matt. Michelle, what are you picking up in the chat box? What are some of the common themes that people are contributing as we’re going through?

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: What I'm noticing, Ben, is that people are not going to want to come back to work. They've got a whole set of new skills and things they’re really, really enjoying: oil painting, skipping, knitting, yoga, going for walks in the park, laps in their garden, lots of cooking, lots of virtual link-ups, beach walks. Someone's walking with ankle weights around to get extra exercise. Fantastic. Jigsaw puzzles, dancing, music, sensory walks. Someone's using white noise to help settle them down. Someone's learnt German, Auslan. Phenomenal things. It's really giving people an opportunity to try something different, for those circuit breakers to fill their days productively and purposefully. And, wow, congratulations to everybody. That's all I can say. There's great things there for me to pick up.

DR BEN PALMER: Absolutely.

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: I hope to be able to speak to you next time in French!

DR BEN PALMER: The power of the crowd! Thank you, everyone, for your contributions. In fact, one I picked up on there: white noise to help sleep better. I've been putting a fan on in my room - not having it over me, because it's too cold, but just having it going in the background, and I'm finding that white noise fantastic for helping me fall asleep. And, as I said before, what works for us is very individual. It's like the fingerprints on our hands. So it's really important for us to experiment with things and to see whether they can work for us.

Okay. Relationship-oriented strategies: one of the single most important areas for wellbeing. If you look at the research done on centenarians, this is the element that helps us live a long and healthy life more than anything else: our relationship-oriented strategies. So I like to engage and recommend relationship improvement actions. I like to draw circles that represent the important relationships in my life: me as a father, me as a parent, me as a colleague, me as a friend. Once I've got my important circles up, I like to put the relevant people in those circles and then think of very small, practical things I can do to improve my relationships in each of those areas. So, by way of example, in terms of me as a partner, I have a partner, Georgia, and I've asked her the question: “What can I do to improve our relationship with each other this year?” and she said to me: “I'd like you to put your phone into aeroplane mode when you've finished work for the day, particularly in this kind of environment”, and I've done that and it's been fantastic in terms of being more present and more connected with her and the kids when the workday has finished.

In terms of me as a parent, I put in there gratitude reflection. So at our dinner table now, we like to go around the table and just ask each of our kids to reflect on something and share with us something that they've been really enjoying during the day, something that's been really good for them. My little 6-year-old girl, Maya, is the best in the family at doing this and always wants to go first. The point I guess I make is now is the time to do little, practical things like that to try and improve the relationships, the important relationships, in your life.

Staying connected with people, structuring regular check-in times. I think a lot of us are doing this and seeing this in the community, which is great. If you're not having virtual breaks with colleagues, that could be something you could engage in as well. The point is, I suppose, when you look at the research, to work on your close relationships and your connection in the community.

And, finally, perhaps as a more long-term strategy, leaning into conflict learning, how to facilitate the art and finesse of hosting difficult conversations. Wherever there are people there are conflicts, and I think as Australians we tend to be inherently conflict-avoidant. So pick up a book like ‘Crucial Conversations’ or anything like it; learn a model if you haven't already, or refresh yourself if you have; and just think about how you can enhance the finesse at facilitating, if you like, those kind of challenging conversations that we all have in our lives to try and reduce the number of left-unsaid things that we often have in our areas.

Michelle, I'd like to ask you to share with us your favourite relationship-oriented strategy.  I know you talked a little bit about it before.

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: Some might say I’m an over-sharer, so I like to - anything that I've created or I’ve heard of or thought about, I love to put that out to other people to have their reactions, to share those. That's in the professional space.

The other thing is that I really do connect with my friends and my family really, really well. I set up times for it. I'm one who will prioritise the relationship and catching up with my friends and my family and my colleagues over housework, et cetera. I think I'm very able to prioritise those things that mean something.

I know I appreciate receiving gratitude so that's something that I do regularly - different ways of giving gratitude to my staff, to my friends and to my family. So I'm very strong in that sense and because I love it myself and I just think we need to recognise other people. It’s really important to put them as the priority. That's at the centre of everything that I would do.

DR BEN PALMER: Thank you, Michelle. Matt, what are some of the things you’re picking up in the chat box here? Anything standing out to you? I noticed someone mentioned the lady Brené Brown on vulnerability.  A fantastic TEDx presentation from Brené Brown. Matt, what are you seeing in the chat box?

MATT BORG:  Really interesting comments particularly around connecting with people and those closest to them. So Kimberley has a date night every Thursday night where they light a fire in the backyard in their fire pit and make a barbecue and have a really conscious effort, I’d assume, to connect with each other, which is a fantastic suggestion. Lots of people connecting in ways online that they wouldn't ordinarily with the community that they work in, whether it be different faculties and so on. It's a great, positive mindset around the Brené Brown stuff with ‘Daring To Lead’ and she also has a great podcast which she’s just released. So it's worth listening to while you're walking around the block.

There's lots of other great comments particularly regarding family and spending time with family and relationship connections and making the ‘iso’ time, where people and families are together, count and be a really positive experience rather than a negative one.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely, and I notice someone was mentioning – Steve likes to do a TikTok dance with his daughters. Fantastic. You feel the three things coming through there. Tiktok dancing is a very good thinking strategy; dancing is a very good physical strategy; and combining it with your daughters, Steve, is a great relationship strategy as well. Thank you to everyone who's making these wonderful contributions as we go through.

Okay. Our final category: environmental strategies. Big business know this. There's a big connection between the kind of ambience, if you like, of the environment we’re in and how we feel.  Most department stores have similar music and similar kind of smells in them for very specific reasons. But what are the sorts of things that are really relevant in this time? A lot of people can feel quite overwhelmed by the amount of webinars, connection, phone calls, emails. For some of us, this is really working, and for others of us, we can feel a bit overwhelmed by that. So structuring your email and call times, particularly if you're one of those people like me who is a little bit introverted and finding the amount of this sort of stuff a little bit overwhelming.

Engage with things that you love doing. What moves you emotionally? Emotions are a really powerful source of contemplation. They are a really powerful source of self-improvement. They are a really powerful source of reflection.  Personally, I love the talent shows: ‘America's Got Talent’, ‘Great Britain's Got Talent’, ‘Australian Idol’, ‘X Factor’. For me, I’m the sort of guy who easily sheds a tear and these talent shows, for whatever reason, really move me and make me reflect and think, and I love them. I love getting onto YouTube a couple of nights a week and having a look. There's some really great ones that are coming out.

The point I make is: what moves you emotionally? To think about those kind of things and to engage in them. Separate your workspace from other areas, if you can. Jazz it up a little bit. I’ve been loving watching Jacinda Ardern and some of the different environments that she's been doing her video podcast from.

Burn essential oils: peppermint if you want more concentration and attention; lavender or ylang ylang if you want to create that more Aveda shop-type experience at work. But essential oils and things like it - a candle - can be really great in terms of setting the mood you want. Michelle, tell us about the environments that work well for you? What are you doing in this kind of environmental area?

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: Well, I probably need to do a little bit of work in this area.

DR BEN PALMER: Okay.

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: So I'm trying really hard to - there are so many changes and so many things you need to share with your staff but I'm trying to collate them together and send them out in groups of information rather than sending them out one after the other. Sometimes you have a sense of urgency of things to get out to staff immediately. For myself, I am really, really trying very hard to stop at a reasonable time at night, about 8 o'clock, so no longer sending and no longer receiving or looking at the emails. It’s very hard for me to do that. But setting up the environment has been really important for me at home and at school. We’ve actually just had our offices all repainted during the holidays and it's killing me, the smell, so I'm having to put nice things in there to make it pleasant for myself. But at home, I get up. I actually dress for work and at about 5 o'clock, I change out of those clothes into something different. I do go and have a break between school and home time. I may go back to some work but I actually do have some definitive breaks. So I'm trying to put some walks into those things and walk and catch up with a friend on the phone as you’re doing it. So all those sorts of things. So I'm really trying to make a work space and a home space so that they’re different for myself.

DR BEN PALMER: Awesome. Thank you for sharing, Michelle. And we heard in that that this might be the area for Michelle that she could do a little bit more in, and that's the point. It could be stopping or starting. We also heard some wonderful strategies as well from her contribution, so thanks. Matt, what are we seeing in the chat box? What’s striking you as some of the interesting ones that are coming through from our participants?

MATT BORG: Some great suggestions in the chat box, particularly around placing start and finish times maybe as a calendar reminder for you in the day because you can get in the vortex of work and committed to getting our demonstration or instructional videos out or whether it be communications to families, so it's great stop and start time.

Lots of people talking about creating a very safe and warm and welcoming environment within their homes to be able to work and also trying to keep those spaces somewhat separate, which can be difficult in a household with many children learning from home as well. Lots of other suggestions particularly around the use of essential oils and using diffusers to create sort of an ambience in the room that is more productive.

DR BEN PALMER: Absolutely. Thank you. And again what I would recommend is thinking about these as your search terms. Go and search things and make sure you've read around them a little bit so you’re really familiar with the strategy and then implement.

Thank you very much for everyone’s contribution and for that great summary, Matt. So if we want to improve our psychological wellbeing, we need to identify things we might be able to stop doing - it might be stopping caffeine after 2pm, by way of example - or things we could start doing: a little bit more exercise, a little bit more focus on our health, work on one of our important relationships, by way of example.

I wanted to finish on empathy. We all know, I know, in schools how important empathy is. The great thing about empathy is we’re all biologically equipped for it. It's not something we need to work on that hard. We just need to think about the context that can get in the way of our natural biology for empathy coming out and think about things we can do to allow it to come out, and I'm going to focus on that.

The other reason why I wanted to focus on empathy is it's really critical obviously to our relationship strategies. Of all the four areas, it’s one of the most single important ones for our wellbeing, for our longevity, for how long we’re likely to live. And, finally, empathy is something we just need in our community in spades at the moment - empathy from parents for our teachers and students and the pivot that we're making to learning from home; empathy for our emergency responders, and I'd like to acknowledge the situation that Victorian Police are in this morning with the unfortunate accident that happened late last night on the Eastern Freeway and so on.

So empathy is not something we need to develop within ourselves. We all have the biology for it. What gets in the way of it can be things like being too distracted by social media and the news or by your phone, inattention or a lack of presence and listening.

Judgment: whenever someone's talking, obviously the thing we’re naturally doing in response is running it through our own filters, thinking about what's being said, what we agree with, what we don’t, what our perspective on it might be, what question we're going to ask to keep the conversation going, whether we're demonstrating active listening skills, all those sorts of things, and that's very natural and important but too much of it can get in the way particularly of empathy.

So if we want to improve our empathy, if you like, and let our natural biology come out, one of the things we can do is just pay a little bit more attention to these sorts of things and tone it down a little if we can, intentionally focus more on not only what's being said but what's being felt, that 80% of communication that's actually non-verbal. And obviously our context can get in the way as well, and this is why it's important to have those boundaries and to really be thinking about the sort of context we need to bring out empathy.  If you want to see empathy in action, the natural biology of it coming out, go to YouTube when you get a spare moment and type in ‘Look Beyond Borders - 4 minutes experiment’. This is a five-minute video from Amnesty International which really shows how to bring your natural biology for empathy out. None of the people in this video were given any training on empathy. They were just put in a context that allowed their natural empathy to come out and I really want to encourage you to watch it not only for what it is but as a metaphor for thinking about how to engage your biology for empathy.

So here's my little trick on how to engage your biology for empathy. Whenever you go to meet with someone, whether it's virtually or together, use a purposeful pause to get ready to meet, and in that time, I mean - what is a purposeful pause? It's one minute where you stop and do six deep breaths, but how you do these six deep breaths is really important. You need to exhale for twice the amount of time that you inhale. Anyone who has done yoga or breath work will probably know this kind of technique. So you perse your lips. You imagine yourself blowing through a straw.  If you breathe in for three seconds, you’ll blow out through the straw, the metaphorical straw, for six. If you breathe in for two, you breathe out for four.  It doesn't matter what your breathing rate is but it's that twice as long on the exhale as the inhale. This exercise engages your parasympathetic nervous system, calms down the sympathetic nervous system, and it's that parasympathetic nervous system that we need to allow our biology to naturally come out. So use a purposeful pause: one minute, six deep breaths, as you get ready to meet with someone.  Once you've done this a few times - and if you've done it, you’ll know - you can do it without having to think about it. Just like learning to drive a car, once you can drive the car, you don't think about it that much as you're doing it.

So once you’re really practised at it, then start setting an intention to be empathetic. So whilst you're doing the breathing, ask yourself that question and engage in that self-talk: how am I going to listen to not only what's being said but what's being felt and expressed through the body language, tone of voice, facial expressions and so on? How can I be empathetic to this next person that I'm going to meet? And then when people are talking, use mindful listening. Smiling Mind has some great mindful listening exercises in it. Indeed, that's where this particular strategy comes from. Focus your attention on listening to the other person, what they're saying and what they're feeling, and just consciously bring back a little bit your own thoughts, your own judgments, your own questions. Really just focus on what’s being said. I like to do this now with the people I meet. They think it's a bit wacky at the start, like “What sort of course has this guy been on?”. “Don’t you try that psychology stuff with me” was one of the things my partner once said to me. And we do it together now and it's really fantastic. So it's something you can do on your own. It's something you can actually do with each other - the breathing and the setting the intention, if you like, and engaging your biology for empathy.

So we're almost out of time. What I'd like to do now is another poll. I'm going to bring it up. What have you got out of our session today and from the chat box and from the wonderful contributions that everyone has made? Panellists, can we see the new poll?  Can you see it? Yes, Matt can. Okay. Hopefully you can. I'm going to launch it. Here it comes. The question is: have you been able to identify a new strategy that you might be able to use either from the material or the chat box or the contributions that people have made? If you have, great. If you haven't, let us know. We'd really like to see your voting. And then the second question is: which of the categories does that new strategy fall into? I’ll launch the poll in a moment. Once you’ve voted, I'd like you to take a guess: which of the four categories do you think most of us have got a new strategy in?  We can see that the vast majority of us so far have been able to identify a new strategy, some of us more than one, which is great. What do you think the overall result is going to look like? Are we identifying more thinking, more physical, more relationship or more environmental strategies? You've got your own personal new strategy, which is fantastic. What do you think the majority of us have identified? Which area do you think it might fall into? Wow. I can see all of us almost voted, which is fantastic to see. I'm going to share the results with you in a moment and then get some reflections from Michelle and Matt to finish off.

Okay. So here are the results. Fantastic to see that a lot of us have been able to identify a new strategy, and a lot of us more than one. Can you see the poll results? Have they come up, panellists? Yes. Fantastic. And we can see that the vast majority of us have identified a strategy in the relationship category, which is great. We were at the outset of our webinar mostly relying on physical and, as we can see here at the end, the new strategies that most of us have been able to adopt are falling into that important relationship area, but we can also see new strategies in all four of the categories, which is fantastic to see. So I want to finish by asking our panellists just to reflect on something that's stood out for you from our time together. I'm going to ask Michelle, I'm going to ask Matt and I'm going to ask Kate too for a closing comment. What have you taken away from our webinar this morning? Michelle, let's start with you first.

MICHELLE BICKLEY-MILLER: I'd like to pick up on that part of the relationship. I think it actually crosses all of the things we spoke about today. It's absolutely noticing the different behaviours and feelings of your staff, trying to really - I think in some of your other sessions, you're talking about the ladder of inference. It's actually knowing that we get the right information of what's going on for those people by talking to them, listening to them and just being really present in what's going on for them, and then making sure we actually address concerns. Rather than holding them into, “Oh, they’re being really mean” or “They're working too hard” or “They're blaming someone else”, actually go and address those issues and find out what's going on for them and seeing if we can really get their perspective and then work with them to try and solve the problem. You’ve alleviated the problem in your own mind and you actually help them as well. So I really believe that's a really important part of our work in this space - to listen, to observe and then to actually have the conversation with the people that you’re concerned with, with their behaviours.

DR BEN PALMER: Awesome. Thank you, Michelle. And I love the plug for our other webinars: working remotely and leading remotely. If you've enjoyed today, please join us for our others. Matt, what's come out of the session for you today? What's it really got you thinking?

MATT BORG: It's got me thinking a lot about the self-awareness stuff, efficacy, and being able to invest in myself first, particularly as a school leader, but obviously we're all leaders at some point, whether it be a classroom teacher leader, an ESO leader who’s joined us today or an educational leader outside of a school. And it's about taking that time for yourself to make sure that you yourself are looking after your wellbeing and being able to provide a really good base for all those that you lead to be able to manage their own wellbeing and utilise the strategies we’ve shared and looked at today.

A lot of comments in the chat that we all know these strategies, we’re aware of them as school professionals, although sometimes they are put to the wayside because the work gets hectic and we just forget to work on that self-care, and now's the time really to take those moments out of your day and make sure that you are putting the oxygen mask on first and then catering for all the needs of all the other people that you are responsible for.

DR BEN PALMER: Awesome. Thank you, Matt. And Kate, finally, give us the last word. What stood out for you today?

KATE MORRIS: Thank you, Ben. Firstly, I'd like to acknowledge our panellists and Bastow crew and you, Ben.  It’s incredible working with experts and I think all of you bring a really great capacity to link the research with real experiences. What I take out of this is how we become more conscious. I think each of you have talked about that, but actually scheduling time for yourself: self first, self-care, knowing that it's complex; we’re in changing times. The chat box talked a lot about uncertainty, and in uncertainty, part of our role as leaders working with our students and with our families and with our colleagues in Regional and Central Office is to really try and help everyone manage that uncertainty, by building in brain breaks, all different things that people have talked about. You’re creating an opportunity out of a situation that's incredibly uncertain and creating the conditions for success for yourself, for your school and for your community and for your learners.

So we really wish you well. It's an incredibly difficult time. But the way we can support each other, I think, is through the power of schools and the connections that we make through our relationships, and focus on learning and supporting young people to build their confidence and capability to step out into a fast-changing world. So it's really relevant.

We're running this session again next Wednesday and Thursday, so if your colleagues have missed it, we really encourage you to get people to jump on board. So thank you, all, and I'll pass back to Ben to finish for today.

DR BEN PALMER: Thank you, Kate.  I’ll just finish by thanking you and the team at Bastow for bringing us into the picture. We hope you've enjoyed this session. Thank you for all the very kind words that people are sending through. It's just been fantastic to interact with you through this medium. And, finally, the recording. It will take us a little while to get it up, but we'll get it up on the Bastow site. You'll be able to come in and watch the recording. And I want to encourage you all: if you've enjoyed this session and there are others at your school, in your community, who you think would benefit from it, please give them a copy of the workbook; give them access to, or play for them, the recording. That's what it's there for. Spread it as broadly as you think is necessary and appropriate. Thank you, everybody, and have a lovely day.  Thank you to our panellists and in particular to all the team in the background at Bastow who have also been answering all our questions. Thank you and enjoy your morning.