2020 Theme: From Strength to Strength in Tough Times

On PosEd Day, we invite you to Colour Your Threads for Pos Ed! and wear colourful clothes to make Positive Education visible in schools.

Let's work together to raise awareness and understanding of Positive Education in our schools and communities, and to encourage students, teachers, families and the community to learn and talk about how to grow their own wellbeing, and support the wellbeing of those around them.

Our goal is to support disadvantaged schools and their communities to undertake a journey of Positive Education and wellbeing. We can do this by providing access to education about Positive Education and why it is important, PESA Memberships, PESA Conference tickets, and resources to support their school’s Positive Education journey.

Positive Education Day will be celebrated annually on 4 November.

How to Use the Primary Slides...

We have prepared some PowerPoint slides you may wish to use in an assembly or your classroom to help students and staff to understand Positive Education and some simple interventions that enhance wellbeing. They have been written in a reasonably simple way as an introduction to PosEd and include some activities you might like to try with your students.

If your school is further down the PosEd track, these may be too basic for you and of course, you are very welcome to celebrate the day in their own way – please feel free to be creative!

We are pleased to provide the discussion notes below to accompany our slides, which we hope help make your Positive Education Day celebrations a success.
Positive Education is an approach to education that is as equally inclusive and responsive to students’ development of

- character
- resilience
- wellbeing

as it is to their academic progress.

First, let’s be perfectly clear - Positive Education is not happy-ology!

There will always be times in your life when things aren’t going well. That’s part and parcel of being human. You don’t need a smile on your face every day – but what you do need are skills to be and optimistic and resilient when faced with a difficult, sad or challenging situation.

It is about creating a community where students and staff have the skills to be their best possible selves, evolving toward their highest potential.

Pos Ed helps students develop the skills they need to be active participants in how they want to “show up” in the world.

Wellbeing, resilience and character can be taught and this notion is at the very core of Positive Education.

Research also suggests that students who know how to care for and enhance their own wellbeing tend to achieve higher academic results.
There are many models of wellbeing and PERMA+ is probably the most well-known. Dr Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania developed this model, which breaks down the elements needed for wellbeing or a ‘flourishing’ life.

What does each element mean?

- **Positive Emotion** – feeling good. Not necessarily happiness but also contentment, life satisfaction etc.
- **Engagement** – finding “flow” – those moments when you’re so engaged in what you’re doing you lose track of time. You’re immersed in an activity which flows through you in an unforced, even blissful, way
- **Relationships** – real and meaningful connections with others. This may include family, friends, work colleagues, teachers, even a moment of friendly connection with the person who serves you in the school canteen.
- **Meaning** – believing you have purpose, or the activity you’re doing has a worthwhile purpose. This goes beyond pursuing pleasure or happiness. It may be that helping a friend in need through a difficult time gives you a greater sense of wellbeing than doing something purely for your own personal pleasure.
- **Accomplishment** – we all love to feel as though we’re achieving something. This may be something large like finishing Year 12 or something small, such as learning a few new notes on a musical instrument. Having realistic goals and ambitions can help us focus on what we want to achieve or accomplish
- **Physical health** – exercise, nutrition and sleep. The physical aspect of our wellbeing is essential to our mental wellbeing. Getting enough exercise, eating well and ensuring we have enough sleep each night are all vital factors in how happy or content we feel.

Perhaps ask students to focus on the R in PERMA – what relationships do they value most? How do they, and the people they care about, show respect for each other?
This year’s theme is **From Strength to Strength in Tough Times**.

For PosEd Day 2020, we will focus on character strengths - your own, and the strengths of those around you, which have helped us get through a difficult year and support one another.

Although bushfires and the Coronavirus pandemic have thrown some enormous challenges at us this year, through tough times we learn, develop resilience, and grow.
This slide encourages students to focus on the things that make them happy. It may be a relationship, something they enjoy doing, or even spending time with a pet.

Research suggests that while a large part of our “happiness pie” is governed by genetics and environmental factors, a significant proportion is within our control. Thus, wellbeing can be learned, and intentionally focussing on what makes us happy is key.
We love this idea from Regent International School in Dubai.

Colour your Threads for PosEd, and display your coloured threads proudly! Why not make a rainbow? Consider asking students to wear their house colours to enhance their sense of school belonging.

Watch this terrific video of Regent International School’s 2018 PosEd Day rainbow celebration.
Throughout the fields of psychology, religion, and social science there are a number of common character strengths that are recognised and valued, and that each of us has within us to some degree.

Probably the most well-known list of 24 character strengths was developed by psychologists and social scientists at VIA (Values In Action).

Every individual possesses all 24 character strengths – some more than others, and this gives each person their own unique character. And these strengths can change within an individual over time. Students and staff can discover their own personal character strengths profile by taking the scientifically validated VIA Survey.

These positive personality traits reflect what is good or moral, practical and authentic about each of us. The 24 strengths fall under six broad virtues, which are:

- **Wisdom** (strength of head): Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment, Love of Learning & Perspective
- **Courage** (strength of heart): Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty & Zest
- **Humanity** (strength of others): Love, Kindness & Social Intelligence
- **Citizenship** (strength of community): Teamwork, Leadership & Fairness
- **Temperance** (strength of self): Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence & Self-Regulation
- **Transcendence** (strength of spirit): Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor & Spirituality

Research suggests that “playing to our strengths” can have a significant positive impact on our lives. Using your strengths can help to buffer against, manage and overcome problems; improve your relationships, and enhance health and overall well-being.

**Ask students to describe what each of these strengths might look like in action.**
2020 has been a tough year for all of us. Ask students to consider which 2 character strengths they have relied on this year, more than previous years.

Given 2020 has been such a challenging year for students, for this exercise you may want to ask students to choose one particular character strength they have relied on this year, more than previous years.
Spot the Strengths

Which character strengths can you spot in others? Let them know!

- Walk around the room and tell others the strengths you see in them.
- Place a strengths sticker on a sheet at your classmates’ desks.
- Write a note or card for someone that gives examples of when they’ve used a character strength.

Our thanks to Geelong Grammar School Institute of Positive Education for sharing these activities.
People can have similar strengths but a completely different way of displaying them. For instance, considering creativity, many people think that being creative involves activities such as making music and taking photos. However, creativity is a concept that is expressed beyond traditional and stereotypical manifestations, like painting or writing music.

This exercise allows students to experience that strengths can be expressed in many ways.

**Goal**

The goal of this exercise is twofold. First, exercise can help participants understand that strengths are very personal. Strengths can be expressed in many ways. Second, the exercise can facilitate social connection because participants team up with others who have similar strengths. Recognizing oneself in another can boost the emotional bond.

In this exercise, students/staff will be interacting together to discuss their strengths. Students should discuss each of their similar and different experiences with shared strengths. Have them write it down in the table of the worksheet below.

You may wish to expand on this activity after 8-10 minutes, with students finding someone new in the group to repeat the exercise with.

Get feedback from the group after each student has had 2-3 opportunities to discuss his/her signature strengths with another student.
You may wish to use the following questions as a guide:

- What did you learn about your signature strengths?
- How do you and others experience with your shared character strengths?
- How do you and others express talents with your shared character strengths?

Conclude the exercise by having students share their experiences and insights with everyone.

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<th>Strength</th>
<th>Name of person with shared strength</th>
<th>Our similar experience with this strength</th>
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Our thanks to Berry Street for sharing this exercise.
Musical Strength Statues

Download Strength Star Cards for free at [https://www.leawaters.com/pesa-strength-stars](https://www.leawaters.com/pesa-strength-stars)

Choose four or five Strength Star Cards.

Look closely at the Star for each strength.

Talk about what the star is doing in the picture.

Copy the pose of the star.

Play a musical statues game! When the music stops, your teacher will hold up one card and name the strength. Then students freeze in the pose that matches the card.

In small teams, design a 3-minute play that shows the strength in action.

Thanks to Prof Lea Waters AM for this activity.

Download Strength Star Cards for free at [https://www.leawaters.com/pesa-strength-stars](https://www.leawaters.com/pesa-strength-stars)

[Click here](https://www.leawaters.com/pesa-strength-stars) for further information on this activity.

Our thanks to Professor Lea Waters for sharing this activity.
Strengths are not ‘one size fits all’, and it is certainly possible to overplay or underplay our strengths.

For example, considering the strength of humour, we might overplay it making a joke in an inappropriate situation. Or we might underplay it when a funny remark may have been tactfully used to diffuse a tense situation.

Understanding how to use strengths in an optimal way is a helpful exercise in self-reflection, and in growing our social intelligence.

For an expansion of this exercise, please click here to view the Berry Street activity sheet.
Download Strength Star Cards for free at https://www.leawaters.com/pesa-strength-stars

Click here for further information on this activity.

Thanks to Professor Lea Waters for sharing this activity.
Slide 14

Family Strengths

Draw a family tree.

List what you think are the top 3 strengths of each family member.

Ask your family to complete the VIA online character survey.

Were your guesses right?

For an expansion of this exercise, please click here to view the Berry Street activity sheet.
Extending these conversations beyond the school gates and into our students’ homes can be an excellent way to reinforce what students have learned at school, as well as a way to continue the conversations about strengths with parents, encouraging ‘strength-based parenting’.

For an expansion of this exercise, please click here to view the Ravenswood activity sheet.
There are many ways we can identify, explore and utilise character strengths across the curriculum.

Consider this excellent resource from Mt Barker High School in SA, which illustrates how character strengths are relevant across the curriculum, and may be woven into your teaching and class activities.

Mt Barker has also suggested the following strengths building activity:

1. Students should complete the VIA Character Strengths survey.
2. Students identify the Strengths they see in people close to them.
3. They then pair up with someone whose signature strength is one of their lesser strengths and discuss how they use this strength.
4. With their partner each student lists three of their signature strengths and identifies new ways in which these can be used.

Click here for Mt Barker’s exercise notes and worksheet.
This slide directs students’ attention to the people that guide and support them each day – their teachers and all of the other staff who work in a school community. (Sometimes students need to be prompted to think of those adults as people too!)

**Ask students to reflect on those people at school - whose efforts should be noticed? Who might students acknowledge and thank for the good they do?**

This may be teachers, gardeners, office staff, sports coaches, tuck shop helpers, school counsellors or volunteers.

In caring for our own wellbeing, it’s important to be aware that other people matter.

You may wish to distribute cards such as this one used by Ravenswood to students:
Evidence suggests that we can improve our wellbeing in one very simple way – by expressing gratitude. Saying thank you seems like a simple thing to do, but in simply expressing our thanks in a genuine way we’re not only enhancing the wellbeing of the person you’re thanking (and who doesn’t love to be told “thanks!”?), but you’ll also improve your own wellbeing.

This might be a simple comment to a friend – “you know, you’ve always been a great friend to me and I’m really grateful for all you do.” It may be a letter to a family member – and what a delight it would be to receive that letter!

Some people even keep a gratitude diary, so they write down a daily or weekly record of everything they’re grateful for.

It doesn’t have to be a huge thing – it can be as simple as “I’m grateful for this lovely sunny day, and that I have someone to sit under a tree at lunchtime with”. It’s all about counting your blessings and focussing on ‘the good stuff’.

We suggest the following exercise:

**Part 1**
Ask students to think about something good in their life that falls into one of the following areas:
- Health
- Education
- Safety/Security
- Weekends/Holidays
- Support from others
- Personal achievement
- Possessions

**Part 2**
Ask student to imagine what their life would be like without that one good thing. How would it change their life? How does this make them feel? Discuss how their life would be different without this one good thing. Ask them to think about their feelings.
Another simple but highly effective exercise to boost our wellbeing is to ask ourselves “What went well?”

Humans are hardwired to focus on the bad stuff – the friend who treated you unkindly, the stubbed toe, the lost lunch money, the late bus. It’s part of our brain structure to dwell on the negatives.

But research suggests that we can teach ourselves to overcome this default negativity bias. When we ask ourselves ‘what went well’, we’re not only directing our attention to what’s good in our lives, but actually training our brains to look for the good in future.

It might be fun to run a wellbeing bingo game - with lots of good things students could possibly have experienced - for example, had breakfast before school, had an umbrella if it was raining, sat next to a friend at assembly etc.

Otherwise, just ask students to think about one thing that went well earlier in the day and share it with the student next to them. How did that thing make them feel?
Another immensely powerful wellbeing booster is mindfulness.

Simply by **Paying attention ...**

to the present moment – how do you feel, what can you see, smell, hear?

By forcing yourself **not to judge your thoughts** – but just to be aware of them and approach them with openness and curiosity.

By taking a moment to **focus on our breathing**. Close your eyes. Feel the air move in and out of your body. Hear it. Try to think about nothing else.

Though regular an intentional mindfulness we can enhance our wellbeing and actually improve our brain functioning.

Mindfulness is a learned skill and there are some great Apps to help students and teachers with practicing mindfulness – including **Calm, Headspace and Smiling Mind**.

**You may want to invite students to do a mindful breathing exercise** – simply closing their eyes, placing their hands comfortably on their knees and feeling their breath move into and out of their bodies. Breathe slowly and deeply. Think about the clean air entering your body – is it cool when it enters and warm when it leaves? Listen to the quiet sound it makes as you inhale – is it quieter when you exhale? (Try the **Balloon Man practice** on the next slide.)

**Another exercise is to encourage students to mindfully eat their snack or lunch today** - invite them to think about who made the lunch, right down to bringing an awareness to who grew the produce, who might the person have been and did they love their job of picking lettuce, outside in the sunshine growing produce?
Encourage students to try this simple 2-minute classroom-based mindfulness practice, designed by Geelong Grammar School’s Institute of Positive Education.
This final slide is intended as an ongoing call to action beyond the simple interventions in the earlier slides that students may have participated in.

Encourage students to bring these interventions into their everyday lives –

- **by helping others** feel a sense of belonging – according to a recent PISA study, Australian students’ sense of belonging is below the OECD average

- **by expressing gratitude** to a friend – the more you do it, the more natural it becomes

- **by encouraging students to think about not only their own character strengths** but those of their friends. No one strength or combination of strengths is more important or valuable than any other. This is an exercise in knowing yourself, and being able to take deliberate steps to rely upon the strengths that feel easy, energising and essential when things get tough.
And speaking of gratitude... our thanks to

Berry Street
Geelong Grammar School
Mt Barker High School
Ravenswood School for Girls
Professor Lea Waters AM

for their contributions to these materials.