

School-based Events and Activities Guide

Timing

Events and activities in schools can be held at any time of the year - but planning them to coincide with an externally recognised day can provide an opportunity to focus on a particular issue or topic. There are days of significance focusing on diversity, bullying and human rights as well as gender, sex, and sexuality throughout the year.

Be Active

Events and activities in schools can be a great way to focusing attention on issues that need to be addressed and help to build supportive school communities. They can also provide 'allies' and 'champions' with ways to be more visible within your school. This visibility is important for students who might not be sure where they can find support when they need it.

Achieving good outcomes like this doesn't 'just happen'. It is important to think about what you want the event to achieve, who you need to help organise, and run the event, and how other people will be able to choose to participate.

An event or activity that isn't planned well may not achieve the outcome you are aiming for, and sometimes, events that aren't planned well (despite all the best intentions) can do more harm than good. With consideration, this can be avoided.

Be clear

Discuss with others > Agree on a shared goal > Communicate clearly & consistently

When you are planning a school event or activity, the first thing to think about is "why?" What are you trying to achieve by holding the event?

Being clear about what you want to achieve makes it easier to articulate why the event is important, and why people might choose to participate. Discussing ideas about this with a group of students or teachers can help develop, and clarify, the purpose of the event. As a result:

- everyone has a clear, and shared understanding of what you are doing and why
- it's easier to make small decisions about how to run the event
- it's easier to explain to what the event is and why people may want to be involved

This makes it much more likely that you will achieve your goals and measure your success.

Events and activities in schools can be held for a whole range of reasons, but some of the more common reasons include:

- to provide accurate information and encourage critical thinking
- to foster a safe and welcoming school community
- to provide positive role models and/or support networks
- to raise money for a specific purpose or cause

What's Best?

Brainstorm events and activities > Remember the shared goal > Pick the best event for that

Once you've worked out what you are trying to achieve it's worth giving some thought to the kind of event or activity that is most likely to help you do this.

At the back of this guide, there are some ideas of activities that have worked in other schools. This might be a helpful starting point for you to think about the kind of activity or event that you think would work best in your school.

Talking with people from other schools can be a good way to explore different ideas, but it's also important to remember that all school communities are different; what worked well in one school may not work so well in yours.

It is important that the event or activity you run is a 'good fit' with the values of your school community, otherwise it could end up causing tension and division that is unhelpful for everyone.

Who is Your Audience?

Remember the shared goal > Who needs to participate to achieve this >
Communicate clearly with the people you want involved

The answer to this question will be different depending on what it is that you are trying to achieve, and also the kind of activity or event you are proposing.

Generally, in a school environment, events that are designed to help build safer school communities should engage everyone in the school community. This is important, because if certain parts of the school community are (or feel as though they are) excluded while activities and conversations take place, it can serve to further divide rather than bring people closer together.

For example, if the purpose of your event is to provide accurate information on a topic that falls within the Australian Curriculum, then it would usually be appropriate to hold an event or activity that all students participate in as part of a structured lesson or assembly.

If the purpose of the event is to provide ways for people to show support for a cause or an issue affecting a minority group, then it would be more appropriate to structure an event or activity that allows people to choose to whether and how much they want to be part of it.

Creating situations where people feel 'forced' to show their support in ways that they don't feel comfortable with isn't helpful for anyone.

Sometimes the purpose of your activity might be to create safe spaces for students to share their personal stories or questions. It would usually be sensible to restrict attendance at an event like this so that people feel safe being open and honest with each other. Rather than setting 'rules' about who can attend, it is often better to just be clear about the purpose and aim of the event.

For example, rather than saying "this event is only for LGBTIQ identified students", you could just be clear that you are creating a safe space for LGBTIQ students to talk about their identity and experiences together. This means that people who attend arrive with a clear sense of the purpose and some shared expectations around respectful engagement - and it also allows people to attend without having to 'declare' their identity.

Considered involvement

The people at the right time in the right ways

Involve people from the start > Encourage shared sense of ownership and community >
Talk to teachers and your school administrators

Organising events is usually best done by a group of people working together. Not only does this mean that the workload is shared, but it also means that there is input from more people with more skills, more time, and more ideas than any one person can manage on their own. When more people are actively involved it also helps to build a shared sense of community. There is a lot of research that shows that when people feel a shared sense of community, their sense of purpose, belonging, confidence, self-esteem and general mental health improves.

The earlier you involve people, the more people will feel a real sense of ownership and engagement in the process. It is generally a good idea to talk to at least one (and maybe more) teachers about your ideas. Having a member of staff understand what you are planning and want to achieve can be really helpful to making your event a success.

It is also really important to keep the school administration aware of what you are doing. They might have legal requirements about your event that you hadn't thought of. This could include issues about insurance, safety, or conflicts with other school events.

Some events and activities may not be appropriate to hold in your school environment, but this doesn't mean you should give up on the idea! Instead, you could think about changing the event to make it more suitable to your school context, or you could find ways to hold the event outside of school.

Allow for diversity

Views and beliefs

Not everyone will think the same way > Model respectful behaviour, especially when you disagree > Focus on finding common ground rather than disagreement

School communities, like broader society, are communities that are full of different kinds of diversity. This includes diversity around sexual orientation, gender identity and biological characteristics, but it also includes diversity in relation to race, cultural background, financial status, religion, political beliefs and lots of other things.

Behaving respectfully towards people who are different from ourselves is one of the fundamental principles of Australian society. It's usually pretty easy to see all the ways that we want other people to respect our diversity. Sometimes, it can be a bit harder to think about the things we need to do to behave respectfully around diversity that is different from our own.

Sometimes people have different views because they don't have access to accurate information, or because they haven't thought about an issue much before. Sometimes listening to someone else's view will change the way a person feels about an issue... but sometimes, no matter how much talking you do, it just won't.

Behaving respectfully doesn't mean that we all need to agree, have the same beliefs, or think the same ways about an issue. It just means that we need to find ways to acknowledge the differences we have, seek out common ground where there is some, and find ways to co-exist that aren't damaging for anyone.

Improvement and future planning

Celebrate the things that worked well > Learn from the experience >
Share your experience with others

No matter how well an event or activity is run, there are always ways to make the next one even better. It can be really useful to get together after the event to talk about what worked well and what could be improved upon next time. It's especially useful to think about who chose to participate in your event and who chose not to. Sometimes, the way an event is organised and run can unintentionally exclude some people who might have wanted to be involved.

Some questions you could ask are:

- What worked well?
- What could we improve on next time?
- What were we trying to achieve?
- To what extent did we achieve this, and how do we know?
- Did we achieve any other positive things that we weren't planning for?
- Did the event foster respectful engagement? (between participants and between people who chose to participate and those that chose not to)
- Were there any things that were difficult to manage?
- How might we avoid and/or manage any issues better next time?
- Did we get any feedback or suggestions from people about the event?
- How can we incorporate these in the future?
- Who actively participated?
 - Was it the number and types of people that we expected?
 - Was it a broad cross-section of our school community?
- Who didn't actively participate?
 - Do we know why they chose not to?
 - Did they feel uncomfortable?
 - Did they make an active choice not to?
- What could we try doing next time to make it easier for more people to participate if they want to?

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What's worked well in other schools

To provide accurate information and encourage critical thinking

- Invite an expert guest speaker either to an assembly or a particular class, to provide information on a topic that falls within the Australian Curriculum. Ask a teacher to help you work out what is within the curriculum.
- Invite a speaker to attend an event during a lunch break.
- Hold a discussion group during a lunch break to talk about a particular issue, or perhaps screen a short film on a topic of interest.
- Create an information display or hold an information stall on a particular issue of relevance. For example, Intersex Awareness Day could be used to provide accurate information on intersex variations.
- Provide your school library with a list of age appropriate books and resources that you would like them to provide.

To foster a safe and welcoming school community

- Hold a meeting or workshop to brainstorm ideas for things that could be done to improve the school.
- Work with SRC or other school leadership to discuss the issues and what could be done to improve the school.
- Do a survey of students about their experiences at the school, including how safe they feel, and what their ideas are to make the school more welcoming.
- Form a group that meets at lunch time to develop these ideas into the future.
- Put up posters that share ideas about inclusion and diversity. You could make these yourself or use some that have been made by other organisations.
- Invite a guest speaker to talk about the role 'bystanders' have in creating safe communities.

To provide positive role models and/or support networks

- Invite someone from within the school community to talk about their experiences. This could be a parent, a teacher, or a student, but make sure that the person sharing their story will be safe doing that in your school environment.
- Establish a network of supportive students who meet at lunchtime or after school to share their experiences and ideas and provide peer support.
- Ask one of your student support staff to help facilitate a group of students to talk about issues that are important to them.

To raise money for a specific purpose or cause

- Raise money for a particular activity you want to have happen in your school. For example, buying resources for your school library.
- Identify a community organisation outside of your school whose work you would like to support.
- Hold fundraising events that raise awareness as well as money. For example, selling merchandise that raises awareness, participating in a bigger event like:
 - IDAHOBIT
 - Wear It Purple Day
- Hold general events to raise money. For example, a sausage sizzle, cake stall.