

PLEASE JUST SAY YOU'RE PROUD OF ME

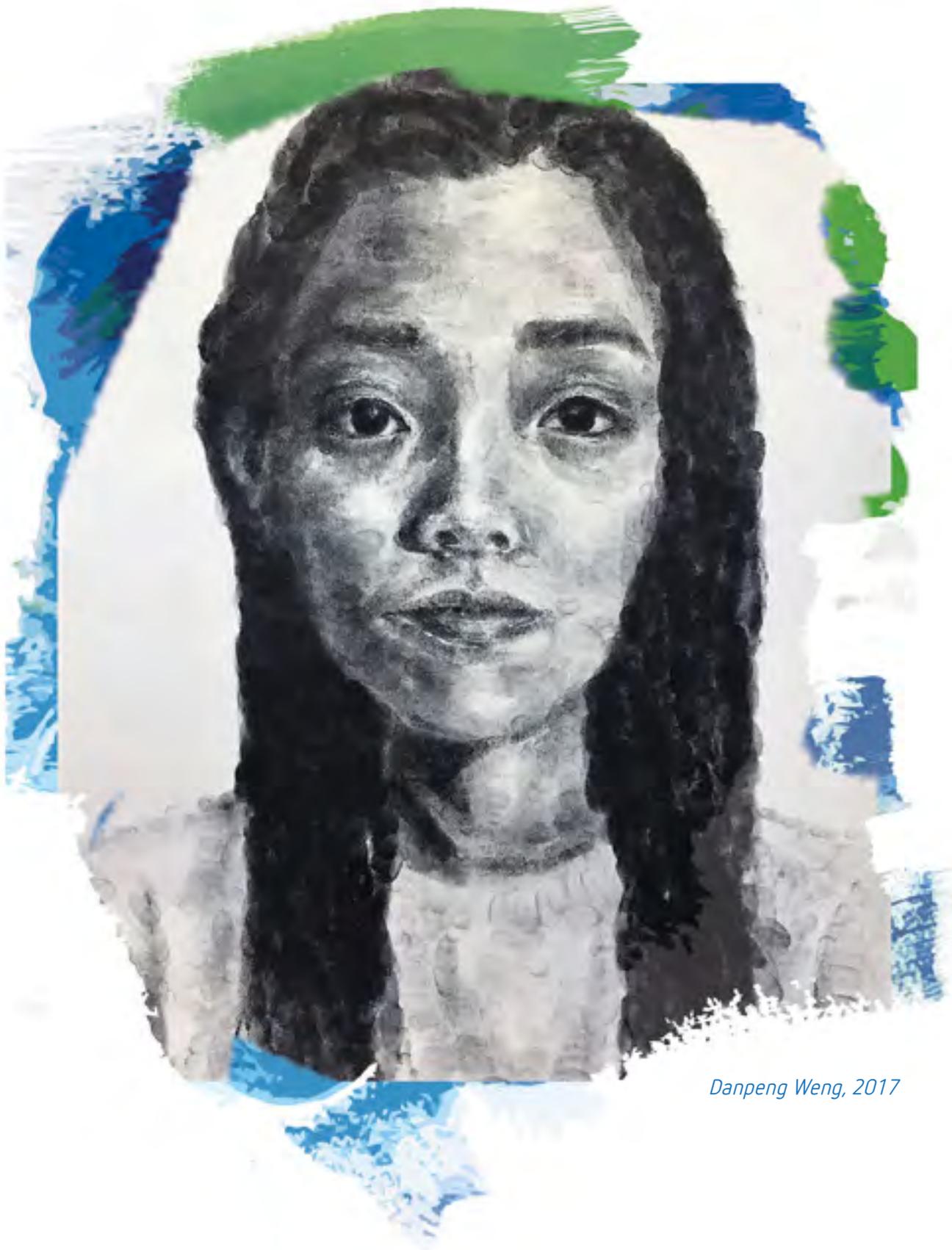
Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School

A report to the Australian Government Department of Education and Training



ARACY

Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth
Collaboration • Evidence • Prevention



Danpeng Weng, 2017

Please Just Say You're Proud of Me:

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Perspectives of Young People on Parent Engagement and Doing Well at School

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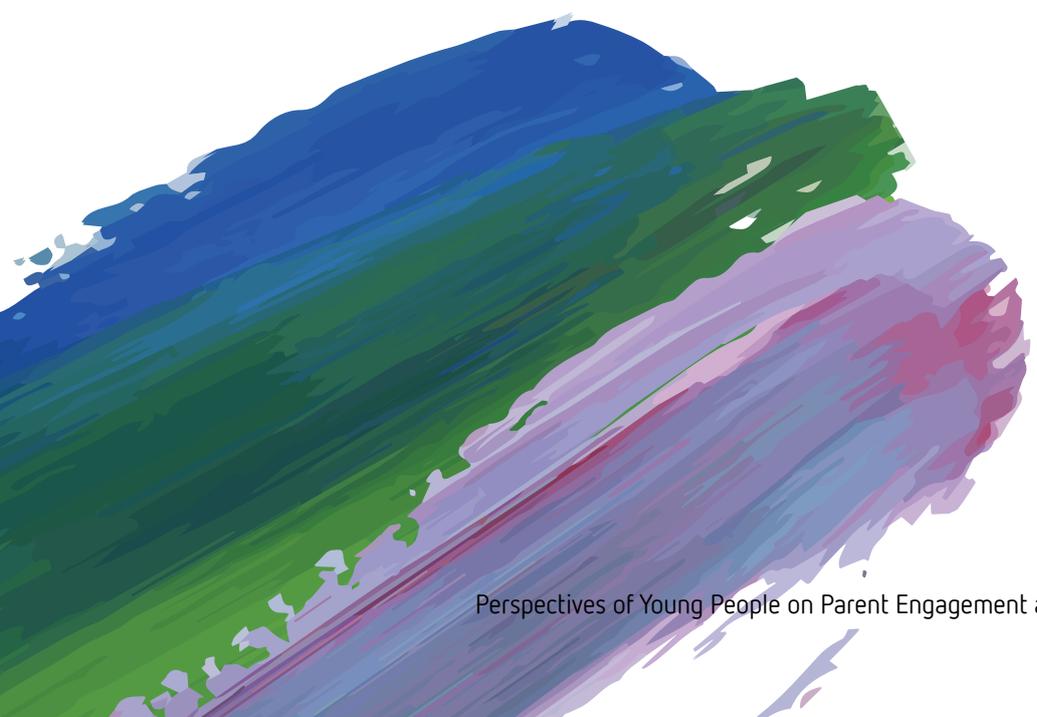
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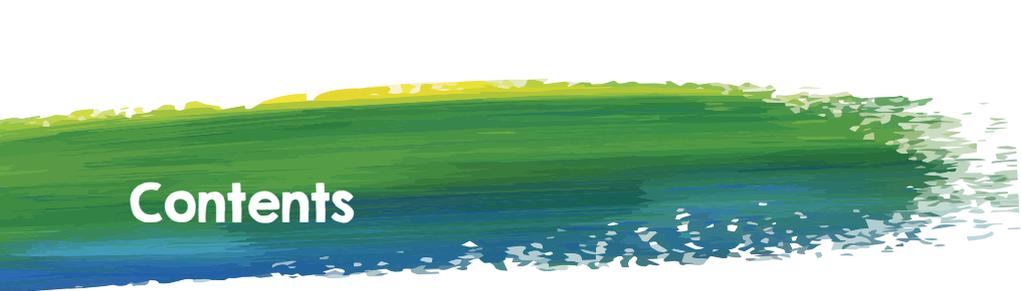
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alicia Mozqueira, 2010

Executive Summary

The consultation provided a rich source of information about students' perceptions of parent engagement with their education and learning. ARACY is grateful to the many students who shared their time and insights with us about their experiences in order to help improve supports for other young people and their families in the future.

As one student stated:

 ***I'm really happy there's people who actually want to listen to our opinion and listen to us and improve something that can really be improved.*** (Student, Year 12)

It is clear that students have a unique perspective on these issues and it is important that their experiences are considered in formulating policies and programs to support and encourage parent engagement.

.....



Izzy Bailetti, 2013

Overall Findings

While much research in this area has focused on parent engagement in the primary school years, this consultation explores the views of young people in the high school years about their parents' engagement with their education and learning. The discussions highlight the particular issues faced by high school students, who are maturing as autonomous individuals and taking on more responsibility for their own decisions and performance at school. The comments of students indicate the tensions between asserting their independence while still deeply wanting and needing the support and guidance of their parents in their education and decisions about the future.

The consultation confirms that, for most students, support from their parents and families is a key factor in them doing well at school and is an important foundation for their future. Students recognised the vital role that their parents and families play in their lives. Most students we consulted acknowledged that their parents and families care for them and are invested in their success at school in a way that is different to their teachers and friends.

.....

Doing Well at School

The consultation indicates that many students think that they have a different or broader view of what it means to 'do well' at school than their parents.

While most students acknowledged the importance of doing well academically, their ideas of success at school were often broader than those

they attributed to their parents and included doing their best, establishing and maintaining friendships, developing life skills, and doing well in extra-curricular activities.

A consistent and concerning theme across all groups who participated in the consultations was the high levels of stress and anxiety that many students reported about doing well at school and about succeeding in their futures. Many students noted the impact of this pressure to do well on their mental health and the challenge of maintaining a healthy balance between study, friends and family life.

Perceptions of Parent and Family Supports

While parent engagement in their education was valued by most students, and was seen as beneficial in motivating them and keeping them on track, there were sometimes disconnects between parents' expectations and student's aspirations or levels of achievement. Students perceived this as an additional pressure.

Some students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds reported particular pressures to conform to parent expectations regarding their future careers, and linked this to cultural norms.

Similarly, some students reported difficulties communicating with their parents about issues that concerned them at school.

Others suggested that technological change meant that their parents did not fully understand the challenges they faced in their education and the particular pressures and distractions presented by social media and technology.

Students' comments suggest that their parents did not always have the skills, understanding or the time to assist them with their education, although many would welcome more practical support.

Perceptions about Parent and Family Engagement with School

It was clear that many students in years 10 and 12 felt that their parents were not directly connected with their teachers or their school, even though some felt that their parents would like more connection. Some students perceived real value in their parents having a direct relationship with the school, as this could help them to receive the support and attention they needed. However, other students had concerns about their parents engaging directly with their teachers, as this could lead to greater pressure being placed on them at home and could affect their autonomy to make their own decisions about career paths and subject choices.

Students without Parent Support

Students who did not have the benefit of consistent parent or family support reported significant challenges in their lives and with their education. For those living out of home, life was often particularly difficult, and students reported that mainstream schools did not necessarily understand the struggles that they faced in managing a range of adult responsibilities, such as maintaining work and accommodation, dealing with the effects of trauma, and trying to do well at school. Some of these students did not have any real supports and others found it hard to place trust in anyone as they had been let down so many times in their lives.

Ideal Supports

Students provided their perspectives on the ideal support to assist them with their education and their future, and their messages shared strong and consistent themes in the qualities they identified. Most students talked about the importance of positivity, acceptance without judgment, genuine listening, and providing guidance based on experience while respecting their autonomy.

Students' messages often conveyed heartfelt gratitude to their parents for their care and support, but also revealed real concerns about doing well at school and worries about failing to live up to expectations.

The responses they wrote from their ideal support person suggested that, despite their growing maturity and independence, students still very much wanted the love, approval, and

encouragement of their parents, and needed to know that parents were proud of them and their efforts. Students also sought practical help from their parents to alleviate stress and manage workloads. They recognised the importance of parental guidance and support to enable them to achieve their own aspirations for the future.

Recommendations

The views and perspectives of students who participated in this consultation can assist to shape effective programs and policies to improve parent and family engagement with education and learning. Several recommendations have emerged from this study, as follows:

- 1.** That programs and policies developed to improve parent engagement in learning include a focus on:
 - a)** Helping parents and families to understand stress, mental health, and other well-being issues in a high school context and how to assist young people to manage these issues.
 - b)** Helping parents and families to improve communication skills and develop positive and supportive relationships with their children as they transition through high school and into pathways beyond.
 - c)** Fostering stronger direct connections between parents, families, and high schools, to assist parents and families to better support students, while ensuring the central role and autonomy of students in relation to their education and their futures.
 - d)** Providing supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families, as well as parents and families from CALD backgrounds to overcome particular barriers to engagement with high school.
- 2.** That in developing materials to assist parents to better support their children to do well at high school, the words and insights of the students reported in this consultation (in particular their messages to and from an ideal support person) be included to illustrate the kinds of supports students need from parents.
- 3.** That in developing programs and policies to improve parent engagement in education, that particular focus is placed on providing additional supports, including targeted evidence-based education programs for those students who do not have parents or families to support them in their education.



INTRODUCTION

Harriet Mitchell, 2014

I. Introduction

I.1 The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) is a national non-profit organisation that focuses on bringing together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to turn the best evidence on 'what works' for the wellbeing of children and young people into practical, preventive action for the benefit of all young Australians.

ARACY achieves this by facilitating, coordinating, and supporting the development of knowledge through scientific research, and the effective use of that knowledge.

ARACY has extensive experience conducting research on topics relevant to the wellbeing of children and young people. This research has involved consultations with parents, carers, teachers, children, young people, and many other professions whose work contributes to the wellbeing of young Australians.



Georgina Vickery, 2015

I.2 Parent and Family Engagement in Learning

In 2014, ARACY was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (DET) to undertake a four-year research project into parent engagement¹ in learning.

The three key objectives of the Parent Engagement Project (the PE Project) were:

1. Building a shared understanding of parent engagement and why it matters
2. Establishing a consistent approach to measuring the effects of parent engagement on the learning outcomes of children and young people
3. Building and sharing evidence about 'what works' to encourage parent engagement.

In progressing the PE Project, ARACY undertook a number of discrete initiatives, including:

- Developing partnerships with key stakeholders
- Establishing a Parent Engagement Expert Reference Group
- Commissioning a range of research studies
- Establishing the National Parent Engagement Network
- Hosting a National Parent Engagement Conference
- Seeking the views of young people (this study).

1 The term 'parent' (and 'family') engagement is used throughout this report. 'Parent' refers to a parent, guardian, caregiver, or other adult (family member or otherwise) who plays a significant role in the life of a child or young person.

Developing partnerships with key stakeholders

Early in the life of the PE Project, ARACY developed ongoing partnerships with key stakeholders relevant to parent engagement in learning, including:

- State, Territory and Commonwealth Government agencies and individuals
- Non-Government agencies and individuals
- Representatives from the Government, Catholic and Independent school sectors
- Parent Representative organisations
- Peak bodies
- Research institutes and academics.



Parent Engagement Expert Reference Group

In 2015, ARACY established the PE Project Expert Reference Group. The group is comprised of Australian researchers and practice leaders, who,

over the course of the PE Project, have provided guidance and advice regarding key activities and outcomes.

The following organisations have been represented on this group:

- Co-chairs: ARACY and the Parenting Research Centre (PRC)
- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)
- Australian Council for State School Organisations
- Australian Parent Council
- Australian Primary Principals Association
- Charles Sturt University
- Flinders University
- Griffith Institute for Educational Research
- Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- Primary and High School Principals
- The Smith Family
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association.

I don't know
what I want to do
with my life or how I
am going to handle my responsibilities.
I am scared for myself and my future.
I love you all so much and
just hope that no matter what stupid
mistakes I make you will always support
me and be there for me but also not
shelter me from life because I
want to experience things for
myself without judgement
or shelter over protection.

We will always support
you no matter what. We
love you and will let you
experience things for yourself
and will not hold you
back.

Commissioning research

Over the course of the PE Project, ARACY has commissioned research relevant to parent engagement in learning, including:

- Promoting Parent Engagement in Learning Through Initial Teacher Education - Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE)
- Researching Parent Engagement: A Qualitative Field Study; Western Sydney University (WSU)
- Measuring Parent Engagement: Data audit; Needs Assessment; Ways forward in data collection, PRC
- Development and testing of a measurement tool to assist schools to assess the effectiveness of 'in-house' parent engagement strategies - ACER.



The Australian Parent Engagement Network

In 2016, ARACY established the Australian Parent Engagement Network to build a community of practice which includes policy and program developers, researchers, educators, parents, community organisations and other people interested in parent engagement in learning.

The overall goal of the Network is to:

-  **Drive a better understanding, and promotion, of parent engagement, with the aim of embedding the concept and its practice in school communities across Australia.**

And, core functions of the Network are to:

-  **...share information, to promote parent engagement, to build partnerships, and to provide expert consultation to Project leaders².**



National Parent Engagement Conference

In June 2017, ARACY hosted the National Parent Engagement Conference in Melbourne, Australia. The overall objective of the Conference was to highlight the way parent engagement supports the wellbeing and learning outcomes of children and young people, and focused on four key areas:

1. Growing a shared understanding of parent engagement and why it matters.
2. Acknowledging the diversity of contexts in which parent engagement operates.
3. Building a consistent approach to the measurement and evaluation of parent engagement.
4. Highlighting the importance of capacity building to the future direction of parent engagement in the Australian context.

The Conference attracted national and international attention, and around 560 people attended. The event's website (www.pecaustralia.com) is now a repository for keynotes, presentation slides, and other information.

During the Conference, two videos were shown highlighting the views of children and young people about parent engagement. These can be viewed at: www.pecaustralia.com/hear-from-the-kids.

2 <https://www.aracy.org.au/the-nest-in-action/australian-parent-engagement-network>



**SEEKING THE VIEWS
OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

Abigail Palmer, 2018

2. Seeking the Views of Young People

In line with Objective 3 of the project (Building and sharing evidence about what works to encourage parent engagement), in mid-2018 ARACY designed and facilitated a schedule of consultation sessions with predominately high school students aged between 15 and 18 years, and some older Alternative Education Program students aged up to 25 years.

In conducting this study, ARACY sought to address the absence of the perspectives of young people in relation to parent engagement in learning, particularly the role of families in the decisions relating to the transition to life beyond school, and parent and family attitudes to making decisions about future pathways.

The consultations aimed to discern the perspectives of students on what 'doing well' at school, and into the future, means to them, and the types of supports that students need and want from their parents, families and significant adults in their lives to feel good about themselves, do well at school, and plan for life beyond.

ARACY hoped that the direct involvement of young people would:

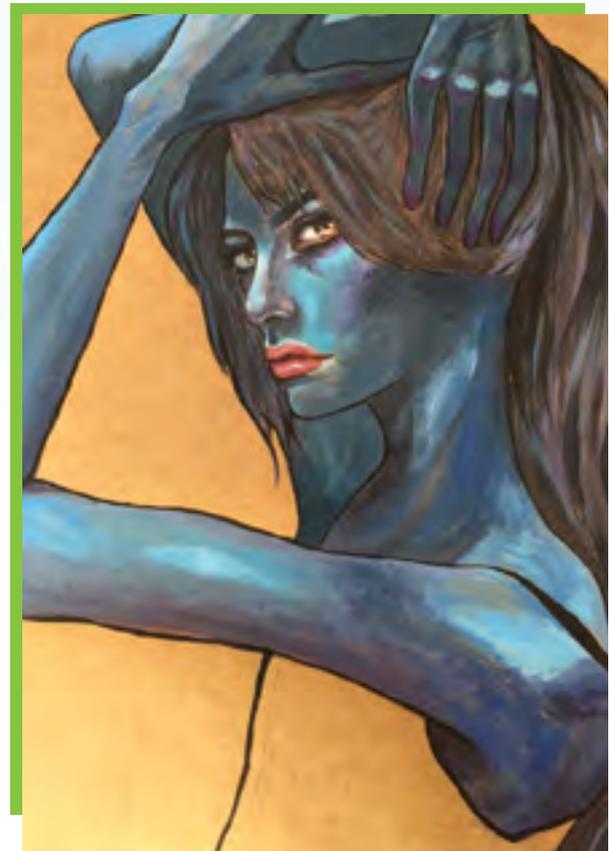
- Ensure that the views of young people informed ARACY's research into parent engagement in learning
- Model to young people that their views are important, and that adults should listen to these views
- Model to the Australian Government, and other stakeholders, that talking with young people about issues that affect them is worthwhile and leads to better outcomes.

The outcomes of these consultations are detailed throughout this report.

2.1 Project Design

Prior to undertaking the consultations, and to inform project methodology, ARACY undertook a number of discrete initiatives, including:

- Stakeholder engagement
- Literature review
- Ethics approval
- Recruitment of participants
- Developing a session outline.



Alexia Weekes, 2017

Stakeholder engagement

Prior to commencing the consultations, ARACY sought advice from key national stakeholders and experts regarding the project methodology. Stakeholders included members of the PE Project's Expert Reference Group, such as Flinders University and The Smith Family, as well as the Foundation for Young Australians, Youth Action and YMCA Australia.

Through these conversations, strong support for the study was established. A key finding was that parent engagement for young people in the later years of schooling should ideally have less to do with ensuring educational and occupational outcomes, and more to do with providing emotional support to facilitate school completion with minimal mental health issues.

ARACY sought to ensure that this concept was canvassed across the consultations with young people.



Literature review

In October 2017, ARACY undertook a literature review: *Cultivating Aspirations, Supporting Decisions: Parent engagement in the lives of young people*.

The review analysed existing national and international research about the relationships between parent engagement and learning, and was particularly focused on locating any research which considered the views of children and young people.

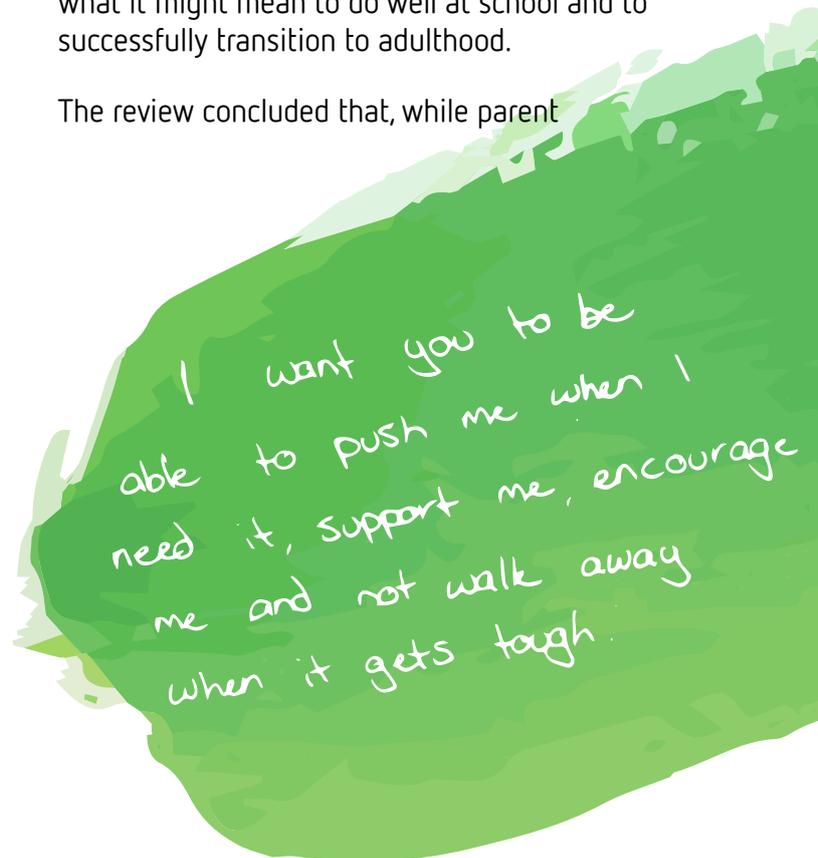
The review highlighted that:

 ***Research conducted over the past four decades has found that parent engagement is a key factor in ensuring positive learning outcomes for children... and that encouraging and supporting children's learning, talking with them about their homework, and engaging in two-way conversations with teachers result in improved grades.***

However, the review noted that most research on parent engagement focuses on effective practices and strategies that support the learning of children during primary years, while parent engagement with their children's education during high school and beyond has received considerably less attention.

Additionally, the limited literature that is available regarding parent engagement in later years tends to focus on educational and occupational attainment, rather than on a broader understanding of what it might mean to do well at school and to successfully transition to adulthood.

The review concluded that, while parent



engagement is important to the learning of all children and young people:



...the nature of this engagement is contextual: the extent of a parent's engagement in their child's learning is deeply influenced by family circumstance³.

That is, the children of families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and associated issues, are more likely to demonstrate decreased connectedness and engagement with education and fewer aspirations for their future.

Importantly, despite considering over 100 publications, the review was unable to find any literature which respectfully and effectively sought and considered the views of children and young people on parent engagement.

A copy of the review can be supplied on request.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval to conduct consultations with young people was sought and granted by the High-Risk Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian National University. Approval was also sought and granted by the ACT Education and Training Directorate, Queensland Department of Education and the Victorian Department of Education and Training for access to students in public schools, and for the relevant diocese in relation to Catholic Schools.

3 ARACY (2017). *Cultivating Aspirations, Supporting Decisions: Parent engagement in the lives of young people*: Unpublished report.



Catriona Bisset, 2011

Recruiting participants

Ninety-three (93) students participated in 16 consultation sessions held in the ACT, Northern Territory, Queensland, and Victoria.

Sessions took place with 'mainstream' school students, as well as with students from specialised or targeted learning environments.

Participating institutions and organisations were sourced through ARACY's network of members, with ARACY reaching out to individuals and organisations seeking interest in participating, or assistance with referrals.



Developing a session outline

Semi-structured focus groups were conducted with predominately High School students, aged between 15 and 18 years, and some older Alternative Education Program students, aged up to 25 years. The sessions were designed by Alasdair Roy, Director, DelRoy Consulting, with assistance from Barbara Barker, Dr Caroline Ladewig, and Neil Stafford, members of the ARACY team. All sessions were facilitated by two people, drawn from this project team.

2.2 Session Outline

Sessions began with the facilitators introducing themselves and the purpose of the consultation and giving a brief overview of the issues to be explored during the session and how the session was to be conducted.⁴

Facilitators explained that participation was voluntary, and that students could leave the session at any time, or could simply sit there and say nothing if they so chose.

Facilitators emphasised that there were no 'right or wrong answers', that this 'wasn't a test', and that students did not need to disclose personal details unless they were comfortable doing so.

Facilitators also reminded students that the session was going to be audio-recorded, and that what they said might be included in a report, yet that no individual would be able to be identified through anything included in the report.

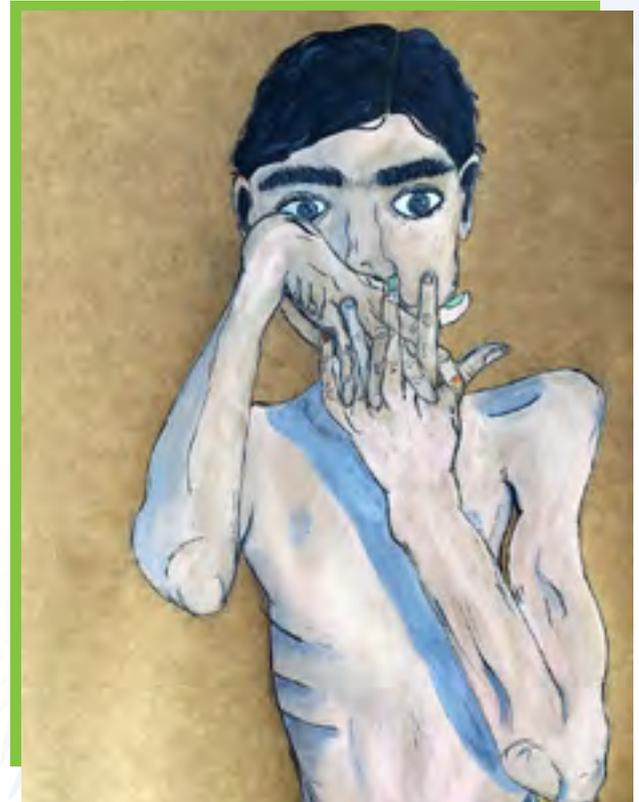
This activity also allowed the opportunity for facilitators and students to talk informally with each other, allowing everyone to get to know more about each other and to feel more comfortable and relaxed.

The session then progressed through several lines of enquiry and interaction, as detailed below.



Doing well at school

Students were invited to participate in a facilitated group discussion around the topic of what 'doing well at school' means to each of them, noting that 'doing well' means different things to different people.



Hugh Crowley McDonald, 2017

Each student was then provided with a pre-prepared handout, which asked the students to individually describe:

- Where is it important for you to do well at school?
- Who or what helps you do well?
- Who or what gets in the way?

Students were asked to nominate three areas where it is important for them to do well at school, as well as information about what 'helps and hinders' them doing well at school.

Students were then invited to share and discuss what they had written with the full group.

⁴ Overall, most groups followed the same format, however this was sometimes amended 'on-site' depending on time available, size of group, or the demographics or lived-experiences of individual participants or groups.

‘The Engagement Triangle’

Facilitators then explained the ‘engagement triangle’, a simple model to demonstrate the relationships between a student, their school, and whoever assists the student to do well at school (often a parent or other care-giver).

Students were invited to participate in a facilitated group discussion around the topic of how the three elements of the triangle work together to assist students to do well at school.

Students were encouraged to consider topics such as:

- How would you like your school and your parent/care-giver, to work together to assist you to do well at school? What would you not like them to do together?
- Any examples of something they already do together which helps you do well at school?
- Any examples of something they already do together which gets in the way of you doing well at school?

In some sessions, each student was then provided with a pre-prepared handout, which asked students to individually ‘rate’ how each of the three relationships (student-school, student-support, school-support) help them do well at school. Students were provided with coloured dots, with a red dot meaning ‘not much’, an orange dot ‘sort of, and a green dot ‘lots’.

Students were then invited to share and discuss what they had written with the full group.

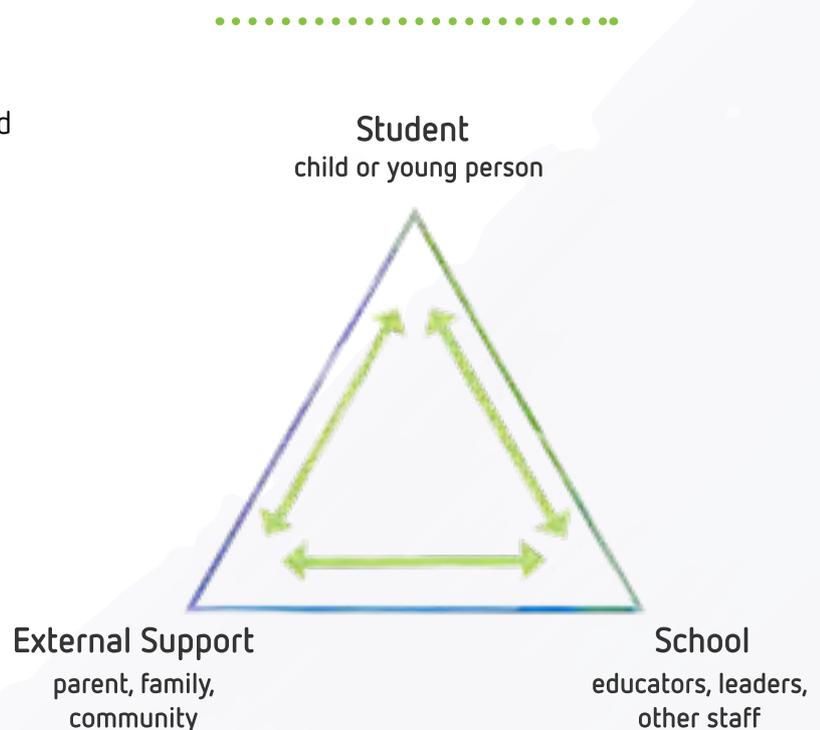
Doing well in the future

Students were invited to participate in a facilitated group discussion around the topic of what ‘doing well in the future’ means to each of them, noting that ‘doing well’ means different things to different people.

Each student was then provided with a pre-prepared handout, which asked the students to individually identify:

- Up to five areas where they want to do well in the future
- What needs to happen for them to achieve this future?
- Where they might need particular help to achieve this future and what this help might be.

Students were then invited to share and discuss what they had written with the full group.



Above: The Engagement Triangle.

'Ideal Support Person'

Students were invited to participate in a facilitated group discussion which asked students to consider their 'ideal support person'. That is, what sort of person would be their 'ideal' to help them to do well at school and in the future.

Students were then provided with sticky-notes of two different colours and asked to write on one colour the characteristics of their ideal support person to help them do well at school, and, on the other colour, the characteristics of their ideal support person to help them do well in the future.

Students were encouraged to provide as much detail as possible, to write whatever they wanted, and to consider such things as:

- Anything that the person would do, not do?
- Anything the person would say, not say?
- What characteristics they might have or not have?

Students were then invited to stick their notes onto two large pre-prepared posters of a gender-neutral stick figure, with one stick figure being an ideal support person to help doing well at school, and the other, an ideal support person to help do well into the future.

Students were then invited to share and discuss what they had written with the full group.

Message to and from an Ideal Support Person

Each student was provided with a pre-prepared handout, which asked students:

- If you could say one thing to your 'ideal support person', what would it be?
- What would be the best thing that your 'ideal support person' could say to you?

Students were then asked to fold their messages and seal them in an envelope provided by the facilitators.

This was to encourage students to be as open and honest as possible and to ensure that that the messages would remain private during the session.



Close

Facilitators thanked all the students, reiterated what was going to happen with the information gathered in the session, and invited questions or comments.

Facilitators also noted that they were available after the session, if anyone wanted to talk privately.

I am really struggling
to stay motivated and
get where I want to.
I feel like ~~now~~ noone
knows how hard it is
to have learning difficultys
life ADHD and Dyslexia.

2.3 Demographics of Participants

As noted above, 93 students participated in 16 consultation sessions held in the ACT, Northern Territory, Queensland, and Victoria. Sessions took place with 'mainstream' school students, as well as with students from specialised or targeted learning environments, including:

- Islamic schools
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs
- High achieving students
- Students participating in Vocation Education and Training (VET)
- Young parents
- Students unable to attend mainstream education, either voluntarily or involuntarily
- Students in supported accommodation
- Homeless students.

While the students were not selected as a statistically representative sample, discussions with the students and school or program staff suggested that they were broadly representative of Australian high school students in general.

That is, there were roughly even numbers of young men and young women, and students came from a wide range of socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, and had varying levels of writing, literacy, and verbal skills.

At some sessions, school or other agency staff remained in the room during all or part of the session, however did not participate in the discussions.

Most students reported that they lived with their biological family, or extended family, with some saying that they lived in shared-care arrangements, or in statutory out-of-home care.

A small number of students reported living in supported accommodation or being homeless.

A small number of students reported that they were young parents and that they lived alone with their child, or with their child and family or extended family.

Most students appeared happy to be involved and interested in the topics discussed. None of the students appeared concerned or distressed, nor indicated that they did not wish to participate.

Each session lasted between 1.5 and 2.0 hours, depending on the characteristics of individual groups. Most sessions were audio recorded for analysis purposes.



Carolina Dolan, 2012

Table 1: Location, nature and size of consultation sessions

Location	Sector	Year	Number of students
Canberra, ACT	Government School	Years 11 & 12	10
	Government School	Year 10	9
	Government School (alternative program)	Mix of secondary & TAFE	11
Darwin, NT	Government School	Year 10	1
Brisbane, Qld	Independent School	Year 10	6
	Independent School	Year 12	6
Sunshine Coast, Qld	Independent School	Year 12	5
Stanthorpe, Qld	Government School	Year 10	6
	Government School	Year 10	5
	Government School	Year 12	6
	Government School	Year 12	4
	Independent School	Year 10	5
	Not specified	Mix of secondary & TAFE	6
Melbourne, Vic	Not specified	Year 10	4
	Not specified	Years 11 & 12	4
	Not specified	Mix of secondary & TAFE	5
Total number of students			93

Table 2: Age of students

Age of students	Number of students
Less than 15 years	8
15 years	30
16 years	20
17 years	20
18 years and over	11
Unknown	4
Total number of students	93

Table 3: Country of birth of students

Country of birth	Number of students
Australia	72
India	4
Kenya	2
China	2
Bangladesh, Fiji, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, USA, Zambia	13 students each born in one of 13 other countries
Total number of countries of birth	17

Table 4: Language spoken at home by students

Language spoken at home	Number of students
English	76
Arabic	3
Mandarin	3
Hindi	2
Afrikaans, Algerian, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Kutchi, Macedonian, Marathi, Somali, Tagalog, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish, Urdu	16 students each speaking one of 16 other languages
Total number of languages spoken at home	20

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Eight (8) of the 93 students identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.



CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

Luke Tebb, 2013

3. Consultation Outcomes

The views of the 93 students who participated in the consultation sessions were analysed and grouped in terms of common themes and insights. In doing so, all full session transcripts⁵ and all written material gathered during session activities were analysed.

As it is the words of the students that is the primary focus of this report, their comments have been transcribed verbatim and the report does not contain substantial interpretation or analysis regarding the 'meaning' of individual comments.

While broad themes have been identified from what the students said, and some recommendations have been identified, it is intended that the words of the young people primarily speak for themselves.

So as to be able to present the outcomes of the consultations, including the views of the students, in a user friendly, but also reliable, manner, the terms 'some', 'many', and 'most' are used throughout this report to describe patterns or trends in the views and comments of the students.

Term	Definition
Some	Less than 33% of students said this
Many	More than 33%, but less than 66%, of students said this
Most	More than 66% of students said this

⁵ All of the 16 sessions were professionally transcribed.

3.1 Doing Well at School

In this part of the consultation, students were asked about what 'doing well' at school means to them.

The written responses and group discussions indicated that students were aware of external expectations of what it meant to 'do well' at school and that these focused primarily on academic achievement and tertiary entrance scores. Most students also felt that this was an important part of what it meant to them to do well at school.

However, many students also talked about other aspects of school life, including social connections, mental health and self-development that were important to them and part of a broader concept of 'doing well' at school.

In this discussion stress and anxiety about 'doing well' also emerged as a significant theme in all groups.



Academic achievement

Most students listed academic achievement as an important part of 'doing well' at school.

In their written forms, and in discussions, students described what academic success meant to them. There were variations and themes in relation to ideas about 'doing well' academically. This meant different things to different students and groups.

For some students, this meant achieving high marks and being competitive with peers. This was a particular theme in discussions with students in mainstream and high achieving streams and from students from CALD backgrounds. Their comments included:

 **Straight As. Getting all As.** (Student, Year 12)

 **Friends around you and stuff but at the end of the day it always comes down to results. If you want a future you've always got to have results to pass.** (Student, Year 12)

 **You want gaps between how good you are compared to someone else obviously.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Improving on current grades.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Showing yourself that you can do better than you did at high school and getting good grades.** (Student, Alternative Program)



Lilly Scott Graham, 2017

For other students 'doing well' was about knowing they were doing their best in terms of putting in effort and achieving personal learning goals, even if other students gained higher marks or grades. This was a consistent theme across all groups:

 **When I get high results and felt that I really put the effort in to get it.**
(Student, Year 10)

 **The amount of effort I put in. Because everyone has such different levels so taking what is the amount of effort they put into doing the actual work is what counts.** (Student, Year 12)

 **It's about your attitude. If you give it your hardest but you didn't get an A like everybody else did at least you know that you gave it your best, and that can help you in other places in life.**
(Student, Year 12)

Some students, particularly in the vocational and alternative streams, were not so concerned with grades and did not have such high expectations of academic achievement, but felt that 'doing well' at school for them meant doing all the work that was required and getting through their subjects:

 **Just generally doing your work and handing it in when it needs to be handed in.** (Student, Alternative Program)

 **Actually passing.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

Building a secure future

Many students connected 'doing well' at school with success in the future, particularly in terms of achieving entry into desirable university courses and securing a lucrative career:

 **It is important for me to do well in my education so I can have a better future.**
(Student, Year 12)

 **School is like one priority so I can just get somewhere in life.** (Student, Year 12)

 **I think the fear of not doing well and not getting where you want to be in life. Like if you don't go well in school, are you going to get into uni? Are you going to get a job?** (Student, Year 11/12)



Alexander Sarsfield, 2017

Broader concepts of 'doing well'

Many students were conscious of parent expectations about doing well at school. These often focused on getting good grades and university entry, however, students recognised that they might have different priorities for themselves. For students, 'doing well' at school also included succeeding in a range of other areas, including extra-curricular activities:

It's hard when you and your family have different prioritised ways. Personally, I find my extra-curricular is more important than certain things at school, but they think that school comes first, straight up. (Student, Year 10)

Developing and maintaining friendships and relationships was important to many students and was part of their understanding of what it means to do well at school:

I think it's important for me to stay good with my peers. (Student, Year 10)

Being social is very important for me because if I've got friends in the class then they can also help me with my learning. I honestly learn a lot from my friends in class. (Student, Year 10)

Just be a well-rounded human being that can go and live life. Like yeah I've got to work but I've got to socialise. (Student, Year 12)

Some students talked about the importance of contributing to society and remarked on their admiration for people who "give back to community and not [just] the school." Other students identified the importance of personal growth, spirituality and self-development:

My faith helps me because just knowing that there is a plan for you and that you're not alone and no matter what you do everything will be ok. (Student, Year 12)

Like improving yourself, not just in your results but how you talk to people. (Student, Year 12)

Keeping my head above water and keeping strong no matter how hard life gets. (Student, Alternative Program)



Tim Hardy, 2017

For some students, particularly those in vocational rather than academic streams, 'doing well' meant just getting through school so that they could get out into the workforce and become independent:

 ***I don't know, just getting to my target from getting out of school to get a job. That's all I care about.*** (Student, Year 12)

 ***Finish my apprenticeship and move out of home.*** (Student, Year 12)

These broader understandings of what it means to students to do well at school are important in any consideration of improving parent engagement in learning for young people. Assisting parents to understand the range of competing demands on students and the different areas where they are developing new competencies will help parents to better connect with their teenage children and to help them manage the priorities associated with 'doing well' at school and elsewhere.



Harriet Mitchell, 2014

Anxiety about doing well

A strong theme that emerged from almost every consultation group was the level of pressure, stress and anxiety that students reported about doing well at school. This was not a question directly asked by facilitators but emerged spontaneously in discussions. It was clear that many students were stressed about keeping up with their school work and achieving the results they wanted. This was common across students in both Year 10 and Year 11/12 groups:

 ***Thinking about it makes you a little bit anxious a lot of the time. If [assignments are] a bit more spread out it feels a bit more like you can manage it.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***A lot of people get really, really, really stressed.*** (Student, Alternative Program)

 ***I've noticed definitely from Year 7 to Year 10, I've been noticing increases in homework and my stress levels, so I'm not really looking forward to going to College because you know what's coming.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***Like a calm glaze over a really, really, really stressed out inside - so it's like just casual anxiousness on the top of that everyone's ignoring, and then underneath it's just like, 'oh my God!'*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***I think most of us have probably been there, where you're just like, 'I don't know if I can finish this', or 'I don't know if I can do this', and you just sit there questioning yourself. That's a big thing.*** (Student, Year 11/12)

Many students noted that the pressure they felt to do well came from parents and teachers but also from themselves. This pressure had a negative impact on their ability to spend time with friends, which was also important to them.

 ***With Grade 12 a bit of pressure's on as well. So it's a bit difficult to make sure I'm able to go here do that, have fun with my friends.*** (Student, Year 12)

 ***It's like you've got pressure from yourself to do well so that you can get a good future, but then you've got pressure from your parents and pressure from your school and pressure from your peers to do other stuff on weekends, and basically I think it's a bit daunting like we don't know what to expect.*** (Student, Year 10)



Alice Nguyen, 2017

Some students expressed fears about the future and whether they would be able to succeed as independent adults. This is consistent with the findings of the literature review which suggests that high school students today are developing aspirations and making decisions about the future during a time of significant change.

The literature review notes that that aspirations commonly held by 15 to 18-year-olds are harder to achieve than they were in previous decades due to the increased cost of university degrees and reduced prospects of secure employment for university graduates, together with factors such as increased cost of housing.

In comments from students in discussions, it appeared that their fears reflected messages they were hearing from teachers and other adults about the state of the world and how difficult it might be to find work and make ends meet, suggesting that these ideas can have a real impact on students' confidence and wellbeing:

 ***The teachers keep making it out to us that it's so bad. They say, 'oh school's so great, you'll miss it you know, the world's terrible.'*** (Student, Year 12)

 ***A lot of the time, especially grown-ups, they're like, the whole rest of your life is going to be harder than this. Nothing at the moment seems like it's going to be harder than this because you've got pressure from all sides.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***I'm worried more money-wise. Like it's expensive to live nowadays.*** (Student, Year 12)

 ***I'm scared I'm not going to do well enough to like get out there in the world you know.*** (Student, Year 12)



Belle Palmer, 2011

Some of the worries expressed by young people also related to a perceived lack of control over their future, and the uncertainty about career paths and choices:

I'm kind of worried that something will happen and then I just end up completely swerving off course from where I wanted to go. Then being completely unhappy with where I was and then just kind of stuck in a rut going 'Oh God, what am I going to do now!?' (Student, Year 12)

I'm sure once I get closer it will seem less scary because I'll have a better plan. But when you don't have a plan and don't really know what you're going to do it's a bit more frightening. (Student, Year 10)

These comments indicate that many students are aware of the increasing challenges ahead of them in relation to finding a secure career path and, rather than hearing disempowering messages that reinforce fears about the future, would benefit from guidance and reassurance to navigate these issues.

Looking after personal mental health

Some students talked specifically about the importance of maintaining a good 'headspace' as a precursor for 'doing well' in other ways at school. This involved keeping a balance between the pressures of school work and other activities:

Mental health is actually a huge aspect, but it tends to be overlooked...we don't really go ask for help if we need it, possibly saving face and stuff. We don't want the social stigma of us not being 'normal'. (Student, Year 11/12)

You can't do well at school in your subjects if you're not in the right headspace. (Student, Year 11/12)

Mentally doing well. Just keeping a happy life, no stress. (Student, Year 12)

[On my activity sheet] I said mental health. I mean it's not as a mark at school, that's not what I meant, but it says what is important for you to do well - a balance between school and other things. (Student, Year 12)

While research suggests that there is an increased prevalence of mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety amongst young people in Australia, it appears that students are more aware of mental health issues and of the importance of managing their mental health and wellbeing.



Lauren Arthur, 2014

3.2 Perceptions of Parent and Family Supports

In this part of the consultation, students were asked about supports that help them do well at school. Most students identified their parents, and sometimes other family members, as a key support in enabling them to do well. In discussions, a range of themes emerged from the different groups regarding their experiences of parent engagement in their learning and the impact of parent expectations as well as the types of support that they perceived as most helpful.



Importance of parents and family

Many students acknowledged the unique quality of the support and guidance provided by parents, compared with teachers or friends. Students talked about the particular bond they have with their parents and the connection they felt with them because their parents know them so deeply:

 ***My parents have a big influence on everything I do. I mean I'm with them at home and everything. They have a positive effect on it. (Student, Year 10)***

 ***I think now my main support is my parents because I think we're still at the age where we need that nurturing. (Student, Year 11/12)***

 ***I think actually my parents are living what I'm living. When I'm under a lot of stress they really care about it and they really understand it, but the teachers or whoever at school ...might not really understand you, the pressure you're under, or your fears or whatever. (Student, Year 11/12)***

 ***Because my parents support me in what I'm good at and say 'if you're not really good at that maybe just find another path'. So that's just my parents I guess because they know me. It's just a personal bond. (Student, Year 11/12)***

 **For me I'm getting closer to my parents because in a way despite the hardships I feel like they're the closest people to me right now that I can easily talk to them about anything, because luckily my parents, they just [listen to] anything.**
(Student, Year 11/12)

Many students spoke about the importance of parent guidance and the respect that they had for their parents and their views, even if they didn't always follow their advice:

 **I feel like I'm in control of what I do, but I go by what my parents advise me to do... I will do what they say because I know that they're right, they've always been right.** (Student, Year 12)

 **I'm captain of my own ship. People try and tell you different stuff like 'don't do that' and like I've always been like a boundary-pusher so I always step over and then I'm like 'yeah they were right'. Then I'll say 'rightio I'll listen to them for a bit'. My parents are good.**
(Student, Year 12)

 **To me it would be more of a 50/50 with me and my mum... I don't mind. The fact that I might need the 50 percent is because I'm indecisive.** (Student, Year 12)

Some students pointed out that other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts or older siblings may provide additional supports in a way that is different or complementary to the guidance they receive from parents.

 **But my parents are usually the ones I listen to most and my grandparents/my Pop, because he's like 50 and I listen to him because he's like a wise owl. If I need advice on something I'll go to my Pop.**
(Student, Year 12)

 **I think sometimes other relatives. Like you may have a really cool aunty or uncle or someone that you can speak to and that helps because they have that life experience but they're not also looking down on you, which you may feel from a parent.** (Student, Year 12)

Parent expectations

The impact of parent expectations was a strong theme emerging from each of the groups. While the literature review indicates consistent findings across many studies that high parent expectations are associated with higher educational and occupational attainment, the consultations suggest that students experience both positive and negative aspects of parent expectations.

Many students talked about wanting to please their parents, and having a desire to meet parent expectations and make them proud:

 **Also pleasing your parents - you want to make them proud.** (Student, Year 11/12)

 **You're not going to go up to your parents and be like 'be proud of me'. You have to do something to make them proud.**
(Student, Year 12)

Some students felt that parent expectations (and pressure) could be a helpful motivator to do better, and this was seen as important to their success:

 **Because some people are a bit lazy. If you're not getting pressure you're not going to do as good as you can.**
(Student, Year 12)

I think your parents always want you to do your best but like they want you - like if you have the ability - not to slack off, and do as well as you can. So like they'll praise you for what you get, but they'll keep, not pressuring, but like pushing you to keep getting better. (Student, Year 12)

They kind of pressure you to really make sure that's what you want to do. Which is understandable though, because your parents don't want you to do bad in life and go on the wrong path. (Student, Year 10)

However, many students talked about parent pressure to succeed at school as having a negative impact, adding to their stress when they may already be struggling academically, or going through difficult times at school:

Obviously like the people who do want you to do well obviously help but like that's kind of an adverse effect if they like put too much pressure on you. (Student, Year 12)

I guess that just puts pressure on ourselves. We don't want to let our parents down but we also don't want to let ourselves down. (Student, Year 10)

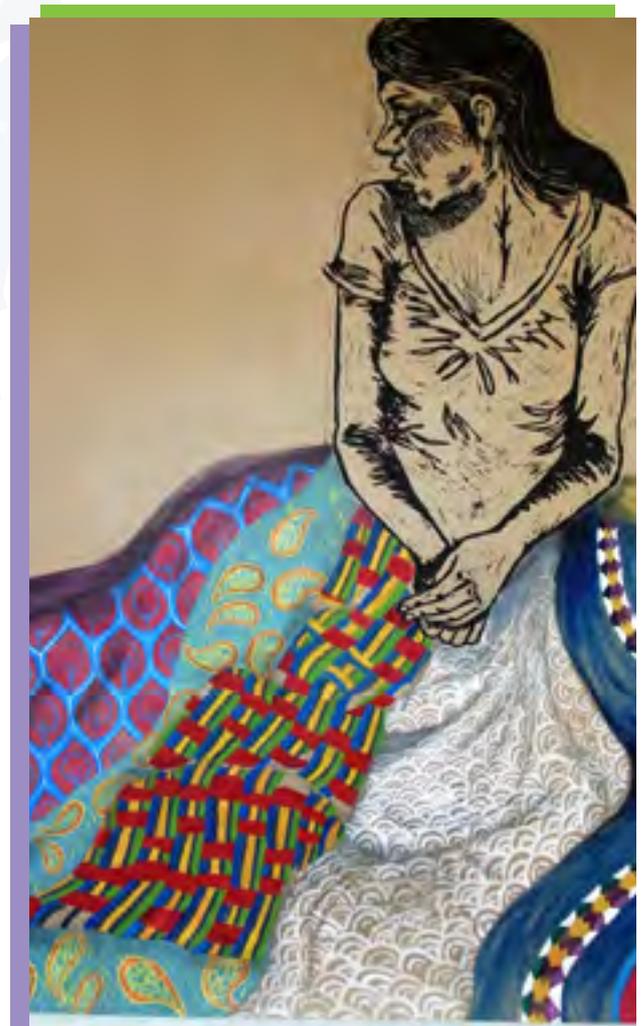
One of my biggest fears is failing my parents. Like, they even - they were reassuring me and saying 'no you're not going to fail... we'll still love you', but like, it's always been just an inside fear of mine that I'm not going to do well enough for them. (Student, Year 12)

My parents are really like, 'you need the education, you need to study, you need to do some stuff', so that limits the time I have to do my own thing. (Student, Year 10)

Some students felt that parent expectations could limit their autonomy and ability to learn from their own decisions.

Well for most of my family, they do have expectations but for me to actually think of their expectations all the time isn't really productive. So most of the time I ignore them at that time. I'm working towards it - it's just not one of my major goals. (Student, Year 12)

It's understandable but then again, we need to learn to make decisions for ourselves and if they're bad decisions we'll learn from them. (Student, Year 10)



Sophie Brennan, 2010

Tension between parents' expectations and students interests and aspirations

One theme which emerged from the discussions was the extent to which parent expectations might be different from students' own aspirations and how this could cause tension and conflict. This was particularly the case where parents had strong views about career choices that differed from students' own interests:

 *Like I'm really happy if I get a B, like in Year 12 a B is amazing, and I'm so happy with it, but my dad's like 'It could have been an A'. My mum's like 'good job - yay!' (Student, Year 12)*

 *Then it got like my dad going, 'I want you to be a doctor', my mum going 'I don't mind what you're going to end up becoming'. It's just very stressful to try to think of what I want to do because I don't actually have the choice of my own right now. I'm not actually thinking towards uni etcetera because I'm like in this zone right now. (Student, Year 12)*

 *I would want them to take my feelings into account and think about what I want and not what they want. (Student, Year 12)*

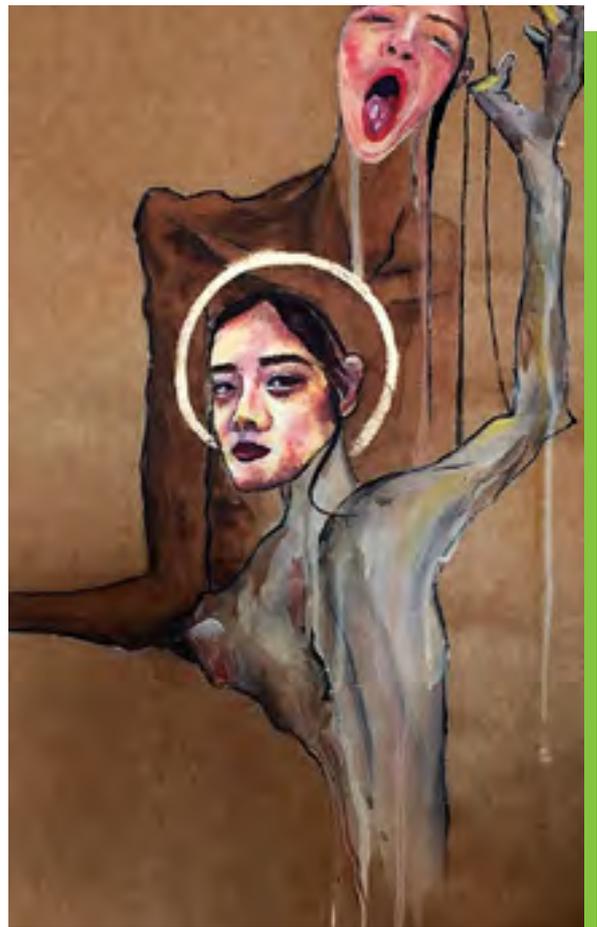
 *Pushy parents who want us to go to university but...like expectations for you and all that stuff, but you really want to do something else. (Student, Year 10)*

 *I wanted to do that too [be a boilermaker] but my dad's like 'no you can't'. Because my dad was a boilermaker. He kind of crashed down and he's like, 'no you're a girl'. (Student, Year 10)*

 *I did want to study law but my parents didn't agree with it so I changed my mind. (Student, Year 10)*

The experiences of these students indicate that where there is a mismatch or disconnect between parents' aspirations or perceptions of career choices and those of their children. This can discourage students from exploring careers that might better suit their interests and aptitudes.

The comments suggest that it could be useful for high schools to provide information to, and raise the awareness of, parents about the broad range of career options available and the full range of pathways that are available to individual students - academic, vocational or other - that draw upon their particular strengths and areas of interest.



Danpeng Weng, 2017

Cultural expectations

The literature review indicates that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people are a highly diverse group and their specific issues and challenges may differ depending on the particular cultural group with which they identify, their length of time in Australia, and their level of local community and family support.

Some migrant cultures are associated with high parent expectations and high levels of academic achievement. Young people from refugee backgrounds are more likely to face challenges associated with trauma and disconnection from communities.

In the consultations, some students who identified as coming from CALD backgrounds talked about the distinct cultural factors that they felt led to high parent and community expectations:

It's always 'us and community' type culture. It's always like 'this person's becoming a doctor' and 'this person's going to this...', like always trying to influence that you should do something medical related...so they can brag about you. (Student, Year 12)

There are expectations as well as school, they want you to become like a perfect, ideal wife and auntie and then religious, like become a good practicing Muslim and then do all that. (Student, Year 12)

In social gatherings we always have the stories of the high achieving students who have their life perfect right now, and therefore our parents expect, 'oh if they get the same grades my kids will be perfect in their lives as well'. It's more the cultural influencing your parents, therefore it's influencing you in a way. (Student, Year 11/12)



Bianca Hill, 2009

They haven't been here for quite a bit of time. So I don't think that 'she'll be right' attitude has sunk into my parents as well.
(Student, Year 11/12)

My mum always tells me that back in Kenya she didn't have the opportunity to learn an instrument. All these things, these leadership groups. That's why I do them because she didn't have the opportunity to do them.
(Student, Year 11/12)

I feel that when that medicine talk came up he was like 'oh because being a doctor is really prestigious'. Especially with Indian parents it's like we have this entire community of parents who just want to talk about their kids. It sounds good.
(Student, Year 10)

However, this experience was not shared by all students in this group. Some students from CALD backgrounds experienced less parent pressure regarding career paths and perceived that this was a good thing.

Personally, my family I'm sure they've got that culture but they don't expect me to become a doctor or any of that. I don't have expectations from extended family. They just want me to try my best.
(Student, Year 12)

I mean every parent would love their child to become one of the amazing careers but I guess my parents - they don't force me in any direction and it's good.
(Student, Year 11/12)

Parent engagement in their learning

Some students talked about their parents being very involved in their day to day learning and helping them with tasks such as time management and keeping on track with assignments:

My parents always help with my schoolwork and it's kind of like a team effort yeah.
(Student, Year 10)

So often it's like 'ok mum so I have two weeks left to do this assignment'. Then there's like a constant day to day 'ok so what have you done?'. Once it gets to three days until the deadline it's her sitting me down in front of the computer and generally just being around as I do it, so that if I start getting really frustrated and stressed she'll be there.
(Student, Year 10)



Alexandra Hirst, 2010

My dad he tries to be really involved in my schooling life because his parents couldn't be involved in his. So he puts in the effort to ask me what's going on and if I need help when there's exams and assignments coming up. That was a big help. (Student, Year 10)

I go to [my dad] a lot because he puts it in a way that's easier for me to understand rather than going on Google and getting it. (Student, Year 10)

Some noted that their parents wanted to engage with them about school and while they didn't always want to talk about it, they appreciated their parents' interest:

I think my Dad since I was a little fellow was like 'what did you do at school today?' 'How did you do at school?' and like you'd try to get out of it as a teenager, you didn't really want to talk about it necessarily. But like that kind of thing, I think they just want to know how you're doing. (Student, Year 12)

But talking to them obviously helps and gives you a more central idea of what you want to do. (Student, Year 12)

Others reported that their parents had a general interest in their achievement but were not so closely involved in their learning. Some noted that their parents might not always have the knowledge or skills to provide direct assistance with school work. This could be particularly difficult if parents had not studied the same subjects:

In regard to feeling separated from your parents, bonus points if you're doing subjects in college that they've never actually done before. You can't talk to them about it at all. (Student, Year 11/12)

They are supportive but it's kind of like, 'I need to do this, I have homework to do.' [My parents say] 'Oh you could have done it at school, you could have done it ages ago'. I'm like 'but I need to do it today'... it's hard to explain especially to my dad because he doesn't understand. (Student, Year 12)

If it's something they don't get, then they won't explain it. If it something they get, then they'll explain it too much. (Student, Year 10)

At school there's teachers that can help you not get distracted but at home there's sort of no one if your parents aren't there if they're working or something. (Student, Year 10)



Sophie Brennan, 2010

Disconnect between experiences of parents and young people

Some students talked about their parents not understanding the issues they were facing as a young person today because of significant social and technological changes:

It's hard trying to relate to some of the teenage problems to them because they're not in that demographic anymore. So their lives are different. It's hard for them to empathise with you. (Student, Year 12)

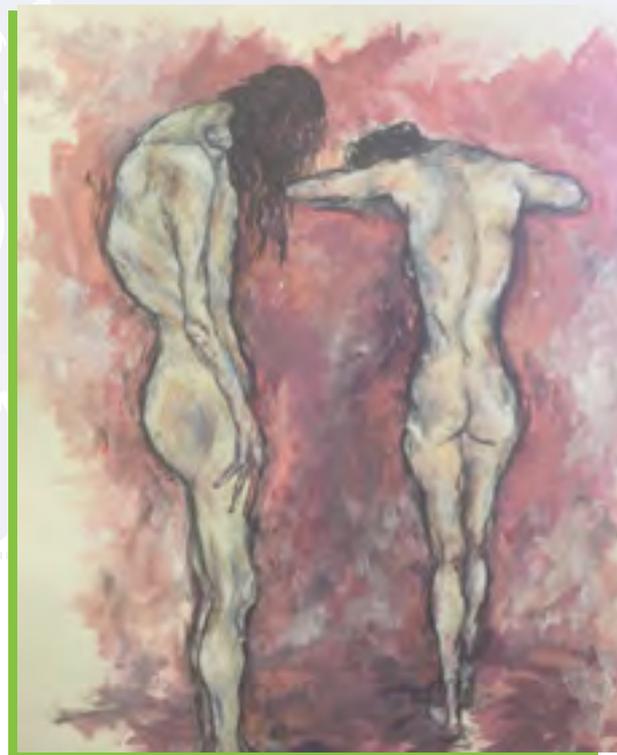
I guess if you say that you're not doing well you're kind of afraid that they're going to be like 'oh well when I was your age I was growing up on a farm and working 12 hours a day. You should be so happy'. (Student, Year 12)

I'm always hearing 'we didn't have the internet when we were younger' and all these things. (Student, Year 12)

But sometimes [parents] don't also understand the distractions that come with social media. There wasn't exactly social media back in the days. That's the biggest distraction. It's not all easy. (Student, Year 12)

My mum listens to me but she doesn't take it in. They kind of like zone out on what you're trying to say to them it's like 'yeah cool.' (Student, Year 10)

There's a lot of things that you can't tell your parents. It's like - it's not like you can't tell them, it's more like you feel like you can't tell them. (Student, Year 10)



Rachel Ellis, 2012

Parent separation

In some consultations some students commented on particular challenges they experienced due to parent separation and the effect that different levels of involvement of each parent could have on their schooling:

I have two different parents and two different homes. They prioritise differently. (Student, Year 10)

I used to go house to house and it was very stressful because they have different ways things run, so then you have to adjust really quickly. Then it's hard to get work done while doing this thing at your dads or this thing at your mums. It gets very stressful. (Student, Year 10)

Competing demands of study and family life

Another theme which emerged was the perception of some students that parents and families expected them to participate in family life, or in other activities that took them away from their studies, and that this could be experienced as an additional demand. Some missed spending time with their families due to their study commitments:

 *Sometimes it's just really stressful, because you're dealing with family issues at one end and then on the other side you've got this going on...so you try to find somewhere you can be between both of them. (Student, Year 12)*

 *We also have like not much time for family as well because you have other work and because of school and stuff. (Student, Year 12)*



Emily Woodthorpe, 2011

 *Yeah and another thing is when you get home and you just want to go to sleep but then your parents are like 'hey we've got stuff for you to do.' It's like 'well I just did stuff for six hours'. (Student, Year 10)*

 *I'll be juggling a lot of things, trying to get an education done here. While everything else is going on, I have to make sure that I try to keep them happy at the same time. (Student, Year 12)*

 *There's a lot of stuff in my family at the moment about 'being part of the family', 'part of the team'. It's really hard when you're already trying to be part of so many other teams... It's like 'I want to hide in my room and do nothing please'. (Student, Year 10)*

 *I feel like school pushes me away from my parents because when I want to study I study alone, and so I don't spend as much time with my parents or anyone... So I'm very isolated from my parents because of the pressure from school to study and do well. (Student, Year 11/12)*

These comments reflect the tension between students wanting to spend time with family and engage with their parents but also developing independence and taking on new responsibilities which take them away from family life.

Reflections of parents' own educational opportunities

Some students explained that their parents wanted them to have educational opportunities that they hadn't had themselves. This was generally experienced as a positive encouragement but might also create some pressure to fulfil their parents' ambitions:

My parents also want me to get a QCE and finish high school because my mum didn't get an OP...my dad dropped out in Year 9, so they both want me to finish... and I want to finish high school and say 'hey look I finished this!' (Student, Year 12)

It's also like, what your parents didn't have they want you to have. So if they didn't have the best education, obviously they want that for you and they want you to work hard so you can like - so they can give you everything. (Student, Year 12)

They encourage their children more to study because it's like 'Don't repeat my mistake. Do it for your future.' (Student, Year 11/12)

It's also like we have this opportunity and there are so many people in the world that don't get an education... so it's more like a privilege kind of. If I had the chance why not take it. (Student, Year 12)

I don't know I feel like they just want me to do better than they did or something. (Student, Year 10)

Conversely, for some students, family members who did not have high academic aspirations were able to provide support and reassurance

about vocational pathways and careers outside of school which was also very helpful:

I talk to family friends that have - a bit like me, like had behavioural issues during high school and now they love it. They say they've never looked back. Didn't miss it. Dad, he walked out at the end of Grade 10, had a day off and then started a bricklaying apprenticeship the next day, and said he never looked back. (Student, Year 12)



Holly Caton, 2013

3.3 Student's Perceptions about Parent Engagement with School

In this section of the consultation, students were asked about the 'engagement triangle' and their perceptions of connections between their parents and their schools. While most students identified parents and family as an important support for them doing well at school, this was generally discussed in terms of the relationship between their parents, or family, and themselves. It was less common for students to talk about a direct relationship or partnership between their parents and their school.



Disconnect between parents and school

Some students talked about parents attending parent-teacher nights and receiving newsletters from the school, however, some perceived a lack of open communication between parents and school:

-  ***I feel like there is a slight connection between school and the parents themselves because of parent teacher interviews that we have every session.*** (Student, Year 11/12)
-  ***My parents don't go [to parent-teacher night] because schooling for them is more up to me. They're not very actively involved in my schooling. They obviously still support me in my schooling but they're not actively on top of me making sure I'm doing well.*** (Student, Year 11/12)



Magdalen Elmitt, 2013

-  ***I feel like parents are actively seeking that connection with the school but even sometimes my parents don't even know that there are parent teacher interviews because it's never taught to us.*** (Student, Year 11/12)
-  ***I don't think our school's very open to parent voice in terms of change. They want to be one way.*** (Student, Year 11/12)
-  ***There's usernames and passwords for logging in on campus for parents. They were sent to our house and my parents didn't even know what it is. So the school constantly can tell my parents 'login, login see your daughter's activities'. They are like 'we don't care'.*** (Student, Year 11/12)

These comments suggest that high school students see the primary relationships in their education being their own direct engagement with their school, and the support and assistance they receive from parents. The third side of the 'engagement triangle' (a direct connection between parents and school) was perceived by students as more tenuous, in that the importance and strength of that relationship was sometimes less clear. Students identified barriers to open and mutual communication and mismatches between the types of engagement sought by parents and schools.

These findings align with previous research conducted by ARACY which highlighted that the growing independence and autonomy sought by young people in high school can lead to parents feeling a weaker connection to their child's school, particularly through communications. Parents can feel that there are fewer 'invitations' to participate, both from students, as they become more autonomous in their learning, and from schools, as the style of communication between parents and teachers changes. However, family-led, home-based aspects of parent engagement, such as providing a general environment that supports and encourages learning, is shown to have more impact than parents having direct involvement in the content of what young people are learning at school.⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

In the small group consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it was apparent that these students faced significant challenges in their lives and that it was sometimes difficult for them to remain engaged with education.

Some students who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander reported that they had experienced racism in their school environment. Family members did not have the connection with, or support from, the school to be able to change things for them, which resulted in students missing out on education:

 ***If there's three Aboriginal dark-skinned people, he always sat you at the back. He never let you put your hand up, he never answered any of your questions, and he'll just yell at you.***
(Student, Year 9 or 10)

 ***We asked them to change but nah... We asked them a million times and then we see other kids changing their classes.***
(Student, Year 9 or 10)

 ***I told Nan and she just told me to stop going to his classes and so I did.***
(Student, Year 9 or 10)

The literature review confirms that parent and community engagement are key factors in improving school attendance, learning outcomes and reducing the vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. However, it is clear that some schools need to do more to support parents and communities to engage with schools and to form positive connections, so that they can assist their children to overcome barriers and do well at school.

6 Refer to factsheets produced by ARACY (2016) on behalf of the ACT Education Directorate, for schools and families, 'Parental Engagement in High School': <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/599> and <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/548>

Experiences of direct engagement

For those students who did report direct engagement of parents with their school, some saw this as a very positive and helpful relationship which resulted in more individualised support from their school:

 **Some people who may have more troubles with things will probably have a better connection between the school and their families because they talk about ways to try to help that.**
(Student, Year 10)

 **If you need more help in class, your parent [will] have a better relationship with the teacher because your parents have talked to them, they know your needs and it's kind of a bit more one on one rather than you're just in the class and you're kind of overpassed. You feel kind of more - I don't know the word, like important, because they're focusing on you and your needs kind of.**
(Student, Year 10)

 **I really struggle with maths and as soon as my mum started talking to my teachers about it, it was easier because they realised what I needed more help with. I felt like my mum was just like, 'I want you to do well so we're going'. It was my mum that really wanted to drive it.**
(Student, Year 10)

However, others considered that schools contacting their parents could make the situation worse for them and simply added to the pressure they were experiencing:

 **For some people [if the teacher contacts their parents] they get support and their parents are like 'yeah cool we'll help you with that'. [But] with my parents it's like 'now what are you going to do to fix this?'**
(Student, Year 10)



Alexia Weekes, 2018

Some students talked about concerns of parents having more direct contact with the school as potentially limiting their autonomy and choices, so they preferred to be in control of the information flow to their parents:

 **Some people are more individual, so they don't really I guess want their parents' support. So then if the parents come in then sometimes they get annoyed by it.**
(Student, Year 10)

 **I feel like that contact is always a bit dangerous because it kind of takes away from what I want and it kind of goes to what the school wants - you lose a bit of power.** (Student, Year 10)

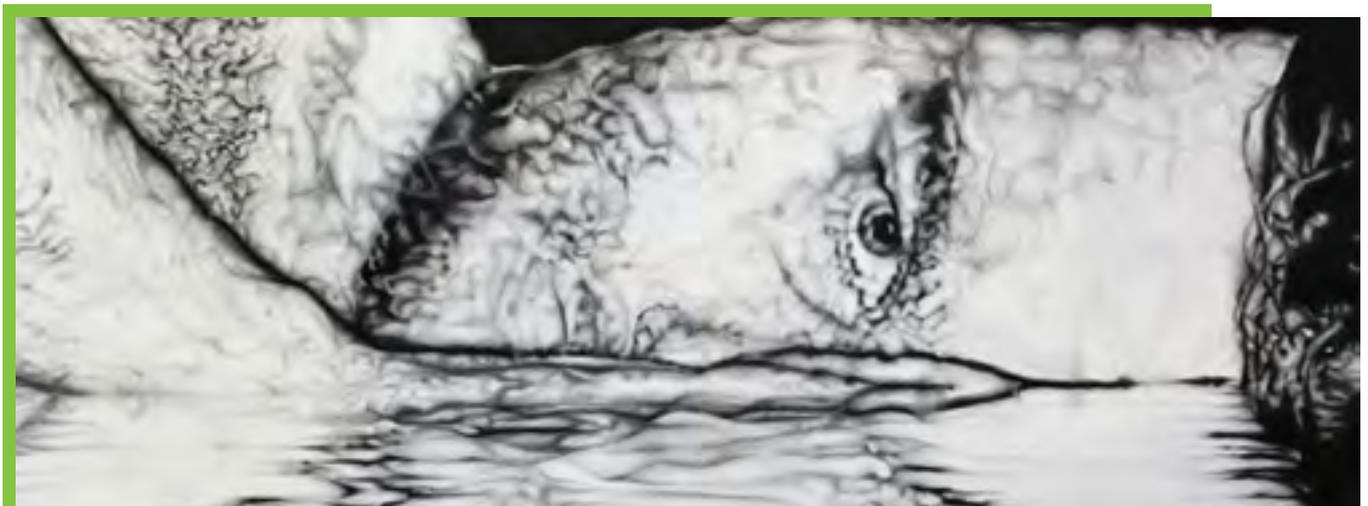
 **Once your parents have contact with the school, they get ideas about what subjects are right to do and which ones are pre-reqs and which ones will help you with this. It really influences your own decision to do something maybe you really wouldn't want to do.**
(Student, Year 10)

These comments indicate that parent engagement with schools themselves can be complex. While engagement was viewed positively where parents were supportive, in other situations direct engagement between parents and schools could exacerbate tensions at home and be seen as disempowering, particularly where it gave parents greater control over students' school life and choices.

The discussions suggest that high schools could do more to encourage direct engagement with parents and to foster positive two-way communication. This connection could assist parents to better understand issues their children may be facing at school and to work with teachers to better support their children's individual needs. However, it is important that students are consulted in relation to any engagement with their parents and that communications are respectful of students' developing autonomy.

I am have been doing really bad at school, recently. It's a bit disappointing considering all my effort.

Its okay, all I can ask from you is to do your best, which you are doing and I am very proud of you [then they proceed to make a joke to make me laugh]



Lauren Arthur, 2014

3.4 Students without Parent Support

The literature review notes the cumulative impacts of disadvantage and vulnerability on the educational prospects of some cohorts of young people, who may experience a profound absence of care and protection through their exposure to domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse, random violence, mental health issues and caring for adult family members.

While most students in the consultation identified family support as critical to their success, some students who participated in group sessions, who experienced high levels of vulnerability, were not able to rely on their parents to help them do well at school. Some were in out-of-home care; in residential programs; homeless; or living on their own, sometimes with their own young children.



Evie Lines-Morison, 2016

Relying on themselves

Some students within this group described being let down repeatedly by their families or support people and learning to rely primarily on themselves. They talked about difficulties in establishing trust and connecting with others who may not understand what they had been through:

-  ***I couldn't really think of an ideal person to support me because every time I did want a person to support me I ended up walking alone anyway.***
(Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***Our mums have always been drug addicts - they've never cared about us. I felt lonely I just wanted to have a home.***
(Student, Year 9 or 10)
-  ***[I've] Grown up being pretty independent because my parents, when I was living at home, were both working, so I didn't really see my parents or my family that much, so it was always me on my own with my brother.***
(Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***These kids that haven't been through the same thing that we've been through don't understand. The teachers don't understand.*** (Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***At the end of the day, you have yourself. Yes there's people to support you but they can't necessarily keep you stable. It's always up to you.***
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **When school finishes, the teachers finish. You can't call your teacher and go, 'hey, I need help with this'. There's no one in the house that knows what you're on about. No one can help you.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **Sometimes when you feel so down and low, you just don't want to ask for help because there's just no - in your head it doesn't make sense, there's just no point in it because you're always going to feel like that.** (Student, Alternative Program)

Extended family connections

Within these groups some students reported connections with extended family members or carers who provided them with some support:

 **Nan um she just helps me out she tells me to do the best I can. They support you, um stick by your side, come with you if anything, talk to the police.**
(Student, Year 9 or 10)

 **Auntie ...she took me 'cause when I tried to get a home/away allowance she took me to talk to this girl and I was crying and she was there patting my back and saying, it's alright, you can do it.**
(Student, Year 9 or 10)

 **My Nan, she's up in heaven, but she keeps me going, and my workers.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **[My carer is] nice, she supports us through everything. She's not abusive she talks to you very calmly and she only yells at you because she loves you.** (Student, Year 9 or 10)

Additional pressures

For these students, schooling was often experienced as more difficult and stressful, as most were dealing with some form of trauma or were juggling a range of responsibilities, including supporting themselves and maintaining accommodation. These pressures were not always understood by their schools and they often fell behind:

 **I think the big thing about school is that it's very stressful at times. I've heard so many people just getting really bad mental illness or getting really sick from all the stress.** (Student, Alternative Program)

 **There was a long time when I didn't go to school because just mentally I couldn't, and my housing got compromised. So I started going to school... I went into a course that I actually wanted to do.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **School is designed for a certain kid. You have to fit the criteria to enjoy school and go through it without anything. If you don't fit the criteria, or if you fall behind it's like 'oh see ya, you tried - bye!' Then you're left. It's a domino effect if you don't understand one thing.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **It's hard to go to school then go to work. With work sometimes, I do overnight shifts then I'll have to go straight to school. So I stopped going to school for a little bit because I was exhausted.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **I just get depressed sometimes because I feel like I can't do it sometimes and then it gets too much. Because when I was in high school I was always behind, it just brings that back.** (Student, Alternative Program)

Specialised programs and flexible education options

Some students were participating in specialised programs to provide them with supported accommodation or more flexible education options. While these students still faced greater challenges at school than their peers, some talked about the difference it made to have access to these supports:

-  ***What's really, really good about this place is even though we've all been in shit situations, were not stuck in them anymore and we're actually getting an education. Most people never get out of the cycle we've all been through.***
(Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***I prefer to come here because everyone's so nice. It's such a supportive environment and it's just nice.***
(Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***They don't hassle you. They just make sure you're alright.***
(Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***The workers they all help us transition with that. If there's a problem they'll try and sort it out.*** (Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***With my worker I find that we get on really well. We're more like friends than like a worker being like 'you need to do this you need to do that.' It's more of a conversation, it's more relaxing.***
(Student, Alternative Program)
-  ***They actually care about you going to school.*** (Student, Alternative Program)

The experiences of these students highlight the importance of flexible education programs that meet the individual needs of vulnerable students and those experiencing disadvantage, to help them reconnect with education and to succeed at school. For students who cannot rely on parental or other family support to assist them with their education, these targeted programs can provide some of the individualised care and support that other students might receive within their families.



Mahala Hill, 2011

3.5 Other Supports

While most students identified parents and families as their key supports, they also recognised that there were a range of important people in their lives who provided support for them in different ways to do well at school. Teachers and friends were mentioned by many young people as a source of advice, support and encouragement in their education. These supports were particularly important for young people whose parents were less engaged in their education.



Teachers/Educators

Most students acknowledged that their teachers were an important source of practical and academic support for doing well at school. In discussions some mentioned specific teachers who provided them with individual support and encouragement:

Teachers at the trade centre like you can talk to them about anything and they're really good to lean back on sort of thing. They really point you in the right direction and tell you when you've done something wrong, just like, from man to man. (Student, Year 12)

I have some teachers that I go to, that I can count on. (Student, Year 12)

Teachers - in year 7 and 8 they really make an effort to follow up with you but they're kind about it, so it's like you know there are consequences, but it also pushes you to do better. (Student, Year 11/12)

Teacher - 'cause he understands and he helps if you are behind. And he doesn't talk to ya like you're stupid. (Student, Year 9 or 10)

Teachers, friends and myself, that's what I've got. (Student, Alternative Program)

However, some students felt that teachers were too busy to help them with individual issues. This was a particular theme for students experiencing vulnerability who found it difficult to connect with teachers in mainstream school environments in order to get the help they needed.

Teachers have to take care of so many ...25 children. So many children. (Student, Year 11/12)

Sometimes school's like 'come to talk to a teacher if you need help'. But I feel personally if I had a really big problem I wouldn't really go with them. Because I would feel like they... just wouldn't understand you the same way as your parents or someone that's really close to you would. (Student, Year 11/12)

[Teachers] never showed much interest because obviously they're dealing with 20 kids. I don't want a one on one but a little more assistance would have been nice... They honestly treat you like you're stupid. (Student, Alternative Program)

These comments suggest that high school teachers who are able to form positive connections with students who are struggling can make a real difference in their lives. However, teachers need time to build these relationships. This can be difficult with the increasing expectations placed on them in terms of teaching academic content, while also managing student behaviour, and meeting administrative and reporting requirements. These pressures can make it difficult for teachers to build connections and support students' individual needs.

Friends

Many students also talked about their friends as a vital support in doing well at school. The comments indicate that friends provide support of a qualitatively different kind to parents which generally complements parent engagement.

Friends were identified as providing emotional support and helping to alleviate stress arising from school and parent expectations:

It's good when friends realise that ...you actually need to be taken away from that thing and having that stress lifted off you. That's good when they can do that for you. (Student, Year 10)

Maybe you can just open up to them because they can relate to you. Like before with parents how they experience something different because it's a different generation. With friends you can relate to them more as they're in the same thing as you. (Student, Year 12)

There's some things that you don't want to tell your parents that you can tell your friends so that's what also makes it good. (Student, Year 10)

Friends were also seen by some students as an important support in doing well academically, provided that they had an academic focus, because they could help each other to study:

Sometimes your peers or the people you hang around with, if they're study-focused you also want to be study-focused. (Student, Year 11/12)

Also if you don't understand something in a class because a teacher didn't explain it well...you can always just go to one of your other peers who gets it and be like can you explain it in the simplest terms. They usually will. (Student, Year 10)

When you're social at school it can really affect your academic as well. If you're not feeling so good with your friends then it's going to affect how you are in class, it's going to affect your mental [health]. (Student, Year 10)

However, sometimes it could be difficult to talk to friends where they were competitive or had different aspirations for the future:

You kind of feel that [your friends] are going to judge you. Especially when you're not the very smart one in the group and all the others are smart and know that they're going to go to uni and all that. (Student, Year 10)

Everyone is competing. You don't care who your friends are, who your enemies are, everyone is competing. (Student, Year 12)

Overall the comments indicated that students valued and appreciated the support of their friends, but recognised that parents were invested in their lives and success in a way that was different from their peers.



Tori Liu, 2018



Tim Hardy, 2017

3.6 Ideal Supports

In this part of the consultation, students were asked to think about the qualities of an 'ideal' support person to help them to do well at school and into the future. In considering this question, students identified a range of characteristics that they perceived as particularly valuable.

Many students spoke of the importance of positive support and encouragement, as well as recognising their efforts, not just their achievements:

 ***It helps you when people focus on the positives. They'll tell you when you've done something right, not wrong.***
(Student, Year 12)

 ***Supportive loving, lenient, caring, friendly, fun positive.***
(Student, Alternative Program)

 ***Someone who means well and is open to help and never negative towards your schooling.*** (Student, Alternative Program)

There was a strong theme in the comments of wanting to be accepted without judgement, suggesting that while high parent expectations can improve motivation, they can make students fearful of failure. Many students crave unconditional acceptance and might need this most when they are struggling to live up to their own or others' expectations:

 ***Like you just want people to accept - like if you did something wrong you just want them to accept it because you're not going to change by them judging you.***
(Student, Year 12)

 ***Accept you for yourself and do not judge you or your past.*** (Student, Year 12)

 **Ask how I am feeling but it is ok if there is no set answer - unconditional love.**
(Student, Year 12)

 **Can cope with me even when I am stressed or anxious.** (Student, Year 12)

 **Non-judgmental caring positive.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

 **Someone who understands that things aren't always as simple as they seem.**
(Student, Alternative Program)

Being good at listening to them was also seen as a key attribute of an ideal support person, and comments suggest that students can readily tell when a connection with an adult is authentic, such that the adult is really listening and interested in them:

 **I think you can tell and it's nice to know someone's actually listening to you because they actually wanted to be there.** (Student, Year 11/12)

 **Yeah, they're respectful of you and they're your support person, so you respect each other, and you probably love each other in a way and they'll tell you honestly because they're your person and you're their person. It's open communication and it's actually listening.**
(Student, Year 12)

 **They don't put the focus on themselves, they go back to you, that's when they're engaging with you.** (Student, Year 10)



Lauren Arthur, 2014

Students also focused on the importance of a support person who could provide sound advice and assistance, drawing on their own experience, while being respectful of the student's perspective. They drew a distinction between 'guiding' which was helpful and 'pushing' which was not. Comments included:

 ***Someone who is responsible and can keep me in check but also have fun.***
(Student, Year 12)

 ***Someone who has 'been there done that' however not someone who is closed off and closed minded.***
(Student, Alternative Program)

 ***The best balance there is someone who's compassionate who can see your point of view and understands what your thought processes are and why you think the way you do. But who's also independent and not just going to blindly support anything you do. So they'll be that resistance but also compassionate enough to be able to put themselves in your shoes and so they can provide both roles.***
(Student, Year 11/12)

These comments provide insight into the qualities and characteristics that students perceive to be important in those providing them with support to do well at school and could help to inform programs for parents to assist them to provide more effective support to their children.

3.7 Messages to and from Ideal Support Person

In the final activity of the consultation, students wrote an anonymous message that they would like to say to their 'Ideal Support Person', as well as the response that they would like to hear back.

To encourage students to be open and honest in expressing their thoughts, these messages were put into envelopes (by the students), not shared with the wider group, and were only read by the facilitators during the analysis of consultation outcomes.

It was clear that most students took this exercise very seriously, as they wrote moving, personal and often detailed messages to and from their ideal support person. These highlighted issues of concern for young people, such as stress, coping with various pressures, and the desire for acceptance and reassurance. The content of the messages suggests that, in most cases, they were directed to a parent or other important support person.

The dialogue between the student and their ideal support person in these confidential messages was often sophisticated and reflective. It appeared that many students used their messages from an ideal support person as a therapeutic exercise, to give themselves the kind of support they would dearly like to receive from parents or others. The messages, read as a whole, suggest insights into the ways that parents and families could ideally engage with their children to better support them at school and into the future.

All messages can be found at Appendix A.

Messages from students

A strong theme in the messages from students to their ideal support person was gratitude and appreciation for the support that this person (often a parent or family member) had provided them in relation to school and over their lives:

 *Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made in my life. You have been there for me no matter the circumstances and I could not be more appreciative of it. You have always been the one thing I needed most, whether I need guidance, someone to rant to or just a smile. Without you I would not be where I am today, you have made my life better in every way, providing the best care and support, given me opportunities to do whatever I desired yet have taught me how to be humble and generous. Thank you for being in my life. (Student, Year 11/12)*

 *I appreciate you and love you and know sometimes I'm hard to work with, but I thank you for staying and supporting me all these years even though you have your own problems! (Student, Year 10)*

 *Thank you so much for all the support and help for making me who I am. Thanks for picking me up when I was down (mentally & emotionally) and helping me grow and mature. I owe you more than I can give you. (Student, Year 12)*

 *I am so grateful to have you in my life. You are so important to me, I would have no idea what to do without you. I love you very much and I appreciate everything you have ever done for me. I know I can depend on you and I know you will always be straight with me. I may not show it, but I am so, so grateful to have you in my life. (Student, Year 12)*

 *You are so kind to me. I can never thank you enough, please let me be as kind to you as you are to me, I'm here for you. (Student, Year 12)*



Alexander Sarsfield, 2017

While many messages acknowledged the support and care they had received from parents, some students expressed feelings about a parent being absent, or abandoning them:

 ***I need you to realise that your absence in my life has affected me as a person and I need you to change before I can accept you into my life again. I need you to make an effort so that I can do the same.***
(Student, Year 12)

 ***Sometimes I wish you never left, other times I'm glad you did.***
(Student, Alternative Program)

Another clear theme from the messages from students (consistent with the group discussions) was the level of stress and pressure that students were experiencing in relation to doing well at school and their futures. Some students asked their ideal support person for practical help with these issues, including providing guidance on tasks; checking in on them and listening to them; and helping them to unwind and take a break.

Messages included:

 ***I'm not able to do this on my own. I cannot achieve to my best ability without your support and your guidance. I need you to check up on me even when I may seem okay because sometimes I find it hard to express my troubles without being asked.*** (Student, Year 11/12)

 ***I am so stressed, I have three assignments and 7 exams in the next 3 weeks. I know I need all this for what I want to do but I'm just so stressed.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***The amount of pressure I feel is immense. I am stressed out, I'm not doing all that well in school - not how well I want to be doing. I need a break.***
(Student, Year 11/12)

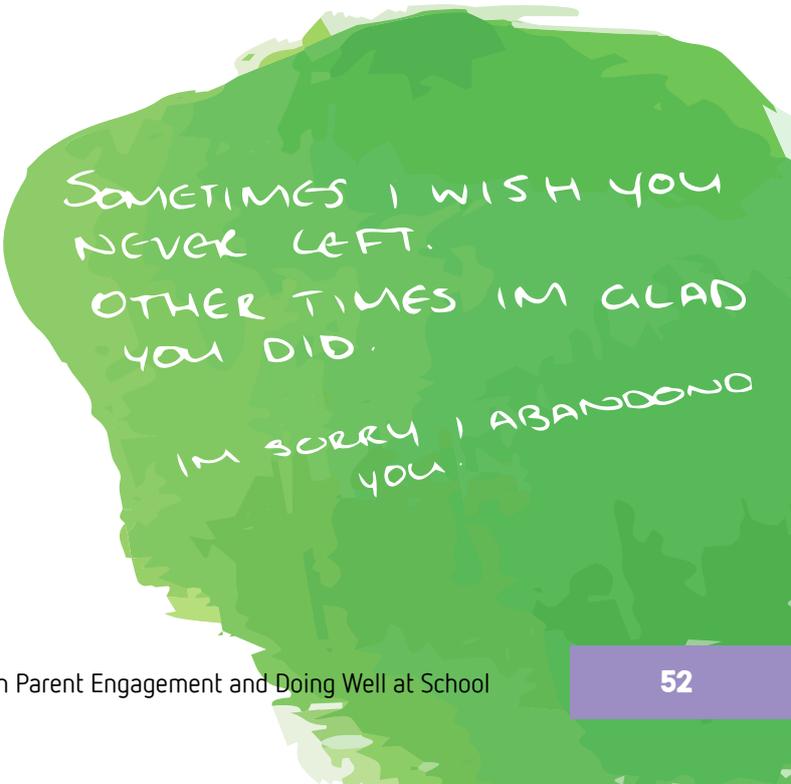
 ***I wish I had something to keep myself going and afloat.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***I am really struggling to stay motivated and get where I want to.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***I feel like no one knows how hard it is to have learning difficulties like ADHD and dyslexia.*** (Student, Year 10)

 ***But I can't just handle this much pressure and I feel like I can't completely express myself. I definitely can do better but I don't know why it's so hard and I can't right now.*** (Student, Year 11/12)

 ***I'm stressing so much, and I don't know where my future will be. I am unsure if I can make my parents proud and I am doubtful that I will get the result they want me to achieve.*** (Student, Year 10)



SOMETIMES I WISH YOU NEVER LEFT.
OTHER TIMES IM GLAD YOU DID.
IM SORRY I ABANDONO YOU.

A related concern raised in these messages was the perception that they had failed in some way to live up to expectations, often despite their best efforts:

I want to tell you that I am sorry, I love you and I am so, so incredibly grateful. I can't put it into words how much I need you in my life. Or thank you for how much you do. I also need to say I am sorry. Sorry because I never am quite good enough - never quite the best. But I'm trying. I'm learning. If you can be patient and just love me for whatever I am right now, it would be so good. (Student, Year 12)

I tried my hardest and I haven't achieved what I wanted nor what you expected me to become, I'm sorry. (Student, Year 12)

I have been doing really bad at school recently. It's a bit disappointing considering all my effort. (Student, Year 11/12)

I doubt because I fail so much but thank you so much. I am so grateful and indebted to you (just a little cheesy). (Student, Year 11/12)

I want you to know that for everything that I have done at school or sports, despite making many mistakes, I have always tried my best. (Student, Year 10)

These messages indicate very clearly just how important parent support is to students, and that most deeply appreciate their parents even if they do not often express this. The messages reflect that despite their growing independence students still want and need guidance and support from parents to handle pressure at school and to make the right decisions for their futures.



Eremaya Albrecht, 2015

Messages from Ideal Support Person

The 'hoped for' messages back from their ideal support person also showed strong and consistent themes regarding the type of support that students would really like. These mirror the discussion around qualities of an ideal support person.

The messages are overwhelmingly positive, and often express pride in the student's achievements and acceptance of who they are as a person:

 ***I am proud of what you've achieved and whatever you'll do and want you to know that I'll always be there for you.***
(Student, Year 12)

 ***I am so proud of you. I will always support you and anything that you decide to do in future. I want you to know that you can always talk to me and I will try my best to help you. Again, I am so very proud of you and what you have achieved and the difference you've made to others.***
(Student, Year 10)

 ***I know how hard you have tried and studied, and I want you to know that no matter what I am proud of you and who you have become. I will continue to support you throughout your studies and life.***
(Student, Year 12)

 ***I am honoured to have guided you through these years. It has been inspiring to watch you mature and grow. It is vital for you to be provided with opportunities and choices in life. I am here whenever you want and whatever you need. I will be supportive and understanding.***
(Student, Year 12)

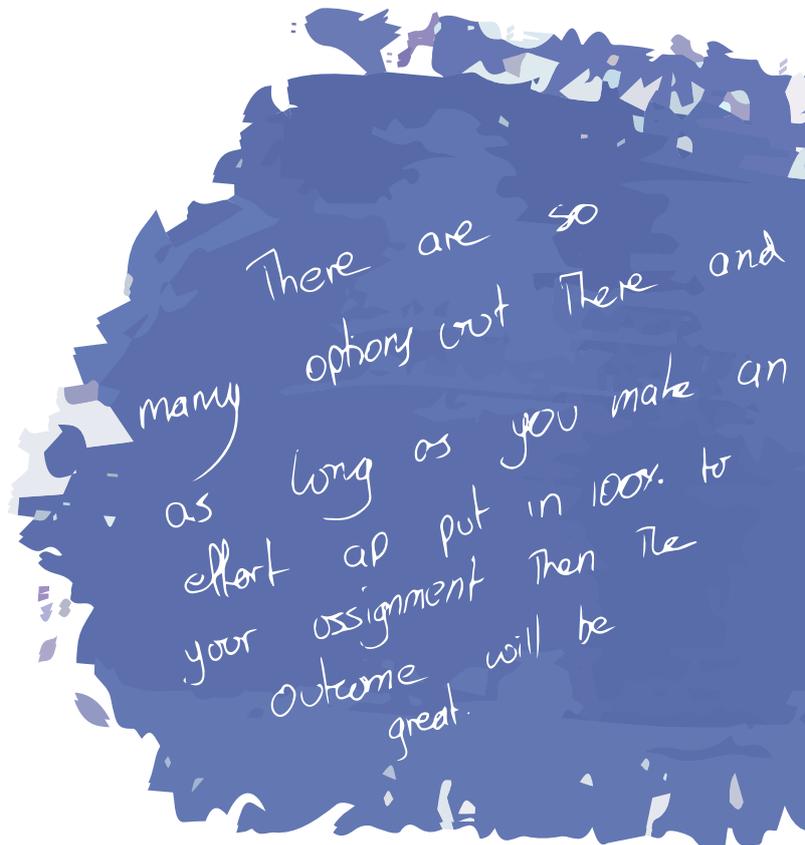
It was important for many students to hear that their parents or support person loved them unconditionally, and would always be there to support them:

 ***No matter what, I'll always be there for you and love you.***
(Student, Year 10)

 ***I will always have your back, always support you, encourage and push you when needed. You will always be able to count on me.***
(Student, Year 10)

 ***I'm here for you and am willing to make time to support you. I feel comfortable in listening to your problems. I will give you as much support as I can. I will be honest with you about what I am thinking.***
(Student, Year 10)

 ***I will be here through it all until my last breath. I will love you forever.***
(Student, Year 11/12)



Messages from an ideal support person also frequently included references to providing practical guidance and assistance in tackling stresses and other problems students were facing:

 **We can do this... What else can I help you with?** (Student, Year 10)

 **I can understand how you feel but I know you can do it. We can do this together as a team. Everyone supports you and believes in you.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Well depending on what you want to be or do, it doesn't really matter. I'll support you and give you the best advice I can.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Ok well, I know this is really important to you, but you need to take a break, let's go do something and we'll come back to all those things less stressed and ready to work.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Well, we can do this together wherever you need someone to talk to I'll be here. We won't stop until you feel confident about it.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Well I don't actually know but I could find out for you.** (Student, Year 10)

Finally, several messages from ideal support people encouraged and supported students to follow their own aspirations and make their own decisions regarding their futures, rather than pressuring them to follow their parents' dreams:

 **To my parents - I would like you to be more supportive and understanding of my decisions. I would like you to encourage me to follow my heart instead of criticising my every action.** (Student, Year 12)

 **I think that is great and you should always do something that you want to do, not what someone else wants you to do.** (Student, Year 10)

 **Yes, and remember do what you want to do in life. Do it to make you happy not anyone else.** (Student, Year 10)

 **I trust you to do what you think is right. You're the bloody best!** (Student, Year 11/12)

 **I'll always be there for you, you amazing, kind, genuine and respectable human being. Follow your dreams and I will support you 210%.** (Student, Year 12)

I'm so stressed, I have 3 assignments and 7 exams in the next 3 weeks. I know I need all this for what I want to do but I'm just so so stressed

Ok, well I know this is really important to you, but you need to take a break lets go do something and we'll come back to all those things less stressed and ready to work



CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Laura Darcy, 2017

Concluding Comments

These messages strongly indicate that even though high school students may not always clearly communicate their needs to their parents, they value positive support, love and encouragement, as well as practical assistance from their parents to do well at school. Most students are motivated to please their parents and make them proud, but many also have a real fear of failure and rejection.

Students' messages suggest that positive parent support and building open and communicative relationships may be more effective in managing stress than simply setting high expectations regarding their achievement and career goals.

The views and perspectives of students who participated in this consultation can assist to shape effective programs and policies to improve parent engagement with their children's education.

A clear message is that while parent engagement in learning is important, parents and families could be better supported to assist their children to manage stresses and pressures of school life, rather than adding to those pressures.

Comments from students highlight the tensions between students appropriately seeking their own independence and taking on new responsibilities, while at another level still needing the support, encouragement and guidance of their parents. The consultation also demonstrates the challenges faced by schools in supporting students and respecting their developing autonomy, while engaging effectively with parents about issues affecting their children's education.

Programs for parents could focus on increasing parent understanding of the developmental stages and issues their children may be experiencing,

including mental health, self-esteem, social and relationship issues. These programs could help parents to support their children's well-being in high school, as well as fostering open and respectful communication.

The ideal qualities of a support person that were identified by students are skills that could be taught to parents to equip them to better support their children in education and in the future. The thoughtful and personal insights that students shared in this consultation, about the kinds of supports they need from parents and other significant adults and the words they would like to hear from them, could be drawn upon in materials prepared for significant adults to help them better understand the kinds of supports that would assist their children.

It appears that high schools could do more to encourage a direct connection between parents and schools, to enable parents to better understand what is required of their children and how they could support them with school work and other activities. However, it is important that students are included in this conversation and that this connection does not undermine the autonomy of students in making decisions about their education based on their own aspirations for the future.

A focus on improving parent engagement in learning will be helpful for a majority of students in Australian schools. However, it is important that this focus does not neglect or further marginalise those students who do not have the benefit of parents and families to support them. These students require targeted evidence-based programs that recognise their needs and assist them to stay engaged at school and to achieve their potential.

The views and perspectives of students who participated in this consultation can assist to shape effective programs and policies to improve parent and family engagement with education and learning. Several recommendations have emerged from this study, as follows:

1. That programs and policies developed to improve parent engagement in learning include a focus on:
 - a) Helping parents and families to understand stress, mental health, and other well-being issues in a high school context and how to assist young people to manage these issues.
 - b) Helping parents and families to improve communication skills and develop positive and supportive relationships with their children as they transition through high school and into pathways beyond.
 - c) Fostering stronger direct connections between parents, families, and high schools, to assist parents and families to better support students, while ensuring the central role and autonomy of students in relation to their education and their futures.
 - d) Providing supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families, as well as parents and families from CALD backgrounds to overcome particular barriers to engagement with high school.
2. That in developing materials to assist parents to better support their children to do well at high school, the words and insights of the students reported in this consultation (in particular their messages to and from an ideal support person) be included to illustrate the kinds of supports students need from parents.
3. That in developing programs and policies to improve parent engagement in education, that particular focus is placed on providing additional supports, including targeted evidence-based education programs for those students who do not have parents or families to support them in their education.



Madison Porozny, 2017

Appendix A: Messages to and from Ideal Support Person

Trigger warning: please be advised that the content of some of these written messages may be distressing for some readers. If this raises any issues and you require support, please call Lifeline Australia on 131 114.

Message from Student to Ideal Support Person	Message from Ideal Support Person to Student
Hey I would really like to do law when I am older, what do you think about that.	I think that is great and you should always do something that you want to do, not what someone else wants you to do.
Thank you for everything you have done for me.	Anytime, I am so proud of you. I will always support you and anything that you decide to do in future. I want you to know that you can always talk to me and I will try my best to help you. Again, I am so very proud of you and what you have achieved and the difference you've made to others.
What if I don't get the grades I need to have a chance at my future career.	There are so many options out there and as long as you make an effort to put in 100% to your assignment then the outcome will be great.
I am so stressed, I have three assignments and 7 exams in the next 3 weeks. I know I need all this for what I want to do but I'm just so stressed.	Oh well, I know this is really important to you but you need to take a break, let's go do something and we'll come back to all those things less stressed and ready to work.
I want you to be the main reason I get to a good place and not a bad one.	I'll be there for you, no matter the situation.
I appreciate you and love you and know sometimes I'm hard to work with but I thank you for staying and supporting me all these years even though you have your own problems!	No matter what, I'll always be there for you and love you.

I want you to put yourself in my shoes and understand that I'm trying to please you but I know that at the end of the day I'm gonna feel guilty because this is what I want. If you could just let me be and try really hard even if I don't succeed I just want you to be proud of me for trying to be as good or even better than what you thought of me.

I trust your decision, I'm proud of you, it's ok, it's just a mistake.

I want to have a good career but I don't know exactly what. Do you think you could help me look.

Yes and remember do what you want to do in life. Do it to make you happy not anyone else.

I need to have confidence in my intelligence and have belief that I am capable of accomplishing my dreams and aspirations.

Give me ways and a guide on how I can accomplish them. Remind me that I am intelligent.

I want the support person to be there when I really want them to be loving, supportive, caring and understanding.

I'll always be there when you want me. I will be loving, caring supportive and understanding.

I tried my hardest and I haven't achieved what I wanted nor what you expected me to become, I'm sorry.

I know how hard you have tried and studied and I want you to know that no matter what I am proud of you and who you have become. I will continue to support you throughout your studies and life.

Thank you so much for all the support and help for making me who I am. Thanks for picking me up when I was down (mentally & emotionally) and helping me grown and mature. I owe you more than I can give you.

I am proud of what you've achieved and whatever you'll do and want you to know that I'll always be there for you.

I want them to tell me that they will support whatever I choose to do.

I would want them to take my feelings into account and think about what I want and not what they want.

If you're there for me, I will always be there for you. I will always appreciate your existence. I hope I can help you like how you help me.

I'll always be there for you you amazing, kind, genuine and respectable human being. Follow your dreams and I will support you 210%.

Thanks for everything for dealing with me.

You be you.

I tried my best and got (specific) results.

I'm proud of you. You tried your best to achieve such outstanding results.

What do you see in me? - personality, sport, school, characteristics.

Honesty, response in a caring but honest way, every thought, constructive feedback, what to change, support

Do you think I am a good person? How do I improve myself?

No one is perfect but yes you are a good person. Don't try change who you are, it just makes everything worse.

How can I improve the situation, what did I do right, what did I do wrong, did I make the right decision? If it's not right, tell me why not if it's not the right decision

Feedback on how I can improve the situation, what have I done right, what have I done wrong - if I made the right decision and support my decision if it's right, tell me why not if it's not the right decision.

Thank you for the support that you've given so far.

I wish that I could feel more confident with myself and my work.

I would like you to stop making choices for me most of the time but keep doing everything else your doing.

Okay I'll try my best to stop and I will continue to help.

I'm feeling really stressed out and kind of without a cause at the moment.

Hey, that's okay, we all go through times like that in our lives. What you need to remember is that this will pass and you will get through this.

To my parents - I would like you to be more supportive and understanding of my decisions. I would like you to encourage me to follow my heart instead of criticizing my every action.

My brother can be honest with me about the mistakes he made in his life and what he would change in the past life he chose.

Can you see things from my point of view. The view of a teenager?

Parent: Yeah, I will try to empathise more.

I feel like I'm just stuck in a cycle.

Well let's put a stick in those spokes and change the cycle. New outlook on life.

Are you here for me always?

Of course, always.

Let's hang.

I'll get the rope.

What would be the best way for me to get an apprenticeship?

You should go to someone that has really good ideas on how to get people like me to get an apprenticeship.

<p>I really want to be this (?) but I also need your support and like your opinion on it.</p>	<p>Well depending on what you want to be or do, it doesn't really matter. I'll support you and give you the best advice I can.</p>
<p>I need help in deciding on how to go about being and becoming an Indigenous officer health worker.</p>	<p>Go talk to the work educator at work and get an understanding of the job and see if you like it or not. And if you do apply for a training ship.</p>
<p>Hey, how do you think I could go about getting an apprenticeship.</p>	<p>Well I don't actually know but I could find out for you.</p>
<p>I want to be a mechanic - I really enjoy it and would love a career as one.</p>	<p>I'm happy for you I'll be there, and I will help you through it.</p>
<p>I just want to hear thank you. I want you to realise I have tried my hardest, I've done everything I could to make and shape myself into a better person and the adult I want to be. Please just say you're proud of me and you both love me. You've been there for me my whole life and I appreciate that, but I just want to hear Thank you.</p>	
<p>Thanks for all that you have done and told me to suck it up and all the tuff love you gave me.</p>	<p>Love them to be speechless.</p>
<p>Be there to support me always in my decisions and help me succeed and make the right choices.</p>	
<p>Thank you for helping me and all the ... my schooling and apprenticeship.</p>	<p>We are all here to support you.</p>
<p>I need you to realise that your absence in my life has affected me as a person and I need you to change before I can accept you into my life again. I need you to make an effort so that I can do the same, if not, then I will completely remove myself from your life.</p>	<p>I'm sorry, I realise that I have been distant and that I have pushed you aside your whole life, I need you to help me, I promise I will listen, I promise I will learn. If I don't learn from my mistake I will let you leave.</p>
<p>You are so kind to me. I can never thank you enough, please let me be as kind to you as you are to me. I'm here for you.</p>	<p>I'm proud of you. You're doing your best you can and that is enough. I'm here to help. I'm here for you.</p>

I am so grateful to have you in my life. You are so important to me, I would have no idea what to do without you. I love you very much and I appreciate everything you have ever done for me. I know I can depend on you and I know you will always be straight with me. I may not show it but I am so, so grateful to have you in my life.

That they will always be there for me, that no matter what, I can still come to them about anything and everything. That I am as important to them as they are to me. That they are proud.

I want to tell you that I am sorry, I love you and I am so, so incredibly grateful. I can't put it into words how much I need you in my life. Or thank you for how much you do. I also need to say I am sorry. Sorry because I never am quite good enough - never quite the best. But I'm trying. I'm learning. If you can be patient and just love me for whatever I am right now, it would be so good.

You are good. You are actually a good human being. You are enough for me, for yourself. There's no pressure to be anything but yourself and it is ok if you don't even know what that is or who you want that to be. Don't apologise for what you're not. What you don't have and don't apologise for what you are.

I don't know that I want to do with my life or how I am going to handle my responsibilities. I am scared for myself and my future. I love you all so much and I just hope that no matter what stupid mistakes I make you will always support me and be there for me but also not shelter me from life because I want to experience things for myself without judgement or over protection.

We will always support you no matter what. We love you and will let you experience things for yourself and will not hold you back.

I need saving from myself.

No one can help you as much as you can but I will help as much as I can and I will always be here when you need me.

I wish I had something to keep myself going and afloat.

I am really struggling to stay motivated and get where I want to.

I feel like no one knows how hard it is to have learning difficulties like ADHD and dyslexia.

I can understand how you feel but I know you can do it. We can do this together as a team. Everyone supports you and believes in you.

How can you help me - can you help me?

Try your hardest. If you work hard and work like you are then you will be fine. If you need anything else I am here for you.

<p>I am struggling with this thing, I am not sure I will be able to do this.</p>	<p>Well, we can do this together wherever you need someone to talk to I'll be here. We won't stop until you feel confident about it.</p>
<p>I want you to be able to push me when I need it, support me, encourage me and not walk away when it gets tough.</p>	<p>I will always have your back, always support you, encourage and push you when needed. You will always be able to count on me.</p>
<p>I have trouble with focus, stress and anxiety. Please help me fix this.</p>	<p>We can do this To fix that. What else can I help you with?</p>
	<p>Hey, I'm here for you, I get your jokes and I want to help you be your best you if you can help me be mine.</p>
<p>Hi, I don't see you as often as I would like but sometimes going to [name of city removed] negatively affects my school routine. I was wondering if every second visit you could come down here but we could see each other every 2nd week instead of 3rd.</p>	<p>You know this would be rather difficult as it would be hard to find a place to stay. However, I will put in the effort to, maybe buy a small place in town and we can come down with the rest every 4th week with the [name of city removed] weekend in between. Love ya!</p>
<p>I need help.</p>	<p>Sure, what with?</p>
<p>I don't need help.</p>	<p>When you need it I'll be here.</p>
<p>Hey! Ty</p>	<p>No worries.</p>
<p>I'm not able to do this on my own. I cannot achieve to my best ability without your support and your guidance. I need you to check up on me even when I may seem okay because sometimes I find it hard to express my troubles without being asked.</p>	<p>I am always here for you. I want you to do the best you can and therefore I will do everything I can to make sure your best is achieved. I will be on your back about things but only for the benefit of you because I know you want to do well but you need support.</p>
<p>Have I already failed in life? Is there any point in going on, if there is no hope?</p>	<p>Pain is not your enemy, it means you are alive and you have survived. Your ability to keep on trying is your victory in itself. You are not alone and will never be alone. We have always watched over you.</p>

I need you to provide me with constructive criticism and tell me when I am being too hard on myself. I don't want regrets, don't want to regret not studying that one weekend when I receive my ATAR back. It frightens me to think the way I do. Right now I think that ATAR is the ultimate goal but that's not true and I need you to remind me - thank you.

It is okay to go through what you are going through. Your experiences are valid and there is no need to consider privilege. You are not a rank among other and there are things special about you. There is no need or rush to find out what they are. Being able to relate to others or when people are going through the same thing as you is not a bad thing, you are still an individual.

I get stressed and anxious about school and my future, so thank you for being there to encourage me and better me and support me.

You are full of potential in any area you choose, but I am here for you to have somewhere to come back to if it becomes too much.

What do I do?

I trust you to do what you think is right. You're the bloody best!

I have been doing really bad at school recently. It's a bit disappointing considering all my effort.

It's okay, all I can ask from you is to do your best, which you are doing. and I am very proud of you. (then they proceed to make a joke to make me laugh).

The amount of pressure I feel is immense. I am stressed out, I'm not doing all that well in school - not how well I want to be doing. I need a break.

You can handle this pressure. It's help you to grow as an individual and that isn't a bad thing. Why aren't you doing well? What's the reason? If you need to take a break, just do it. You need to see what feels right for you - I'll always be here to support you.

I don't think I can do this. I am afraid that people will judge me or think badly of me. Does it matter if I get it wrong?

Nothing comes easy to anyone so give it time. If it's not for you, it's not for you, just give it a second chance. Everyone is so focused on themselves, they are not going to even think about you. Don't worry about others' opinions anyways. No, it doesn't. You do how you feel it right and if you try your hardest that that's all that matters.

I don't want you to be superficial to me, BE HONEST. I hope you stay by my side and not tell anyone about my confidential problems. My feelings are important too.

And how do you feel? Do you think you can do it? I think you should try and see how you go. To be brave enough to say, "I don't think that's a good idea".

Thank you. I doubt because I fail so much but thank you so much. I am so grateful and indebted to you (just a little cheesy).

You should believe in yourself. You may fail and fall sometimes (or often) but that's okay. I'm here to help you. I promise not to criticise you, only question if the decisions you are making are good. I promise to give you advice and point out when you're wrong but tell you how to improve.

<p>Thank you for all of your help. I love you.</p>	<p>You are so amazing young lady - I love you very much.</p>
<p>Sometimes I wish you never left, other times I'm glad you did</p>	<p>I'm sorry I abandoned you.</p>
<p>I feel like some days I am failing my family and don't want to have responsibility.</p>	<p>That everything is going to be ok.</p>
<p>Thank you for helping me and for giving me constant reassurance. I really need it to keep going. Without this positive reassurance I wouldn't be at school</p>	<p>You're doing great, keep going, I'm proud of you.</p>
<p>I really appreciate that I have someone like you to support me and assist me with what I need assisting with. You are genuine and amazing.</p>	
<p>I need mental health.</p>	<p>I'm proud of you.</p>
<p>Thank you for always being there when I need someone to talk to and always being so supportive of all my choices.</p>	<p>You're doing well.</p>
<p>Thank you for being so supportive and caring - you have motivated me to continue and complete my schooling. If you weren't so lenient and if you were hard on me I probably wouldn't have completed it. You're like a friend that's always there but also my role models.</p>	<p>You have done so well, and you still could have done it without us. We are proud.</p>
<p>I need someone that is happy to help/support me all the time. Friendly and kind towards me.</p>	<p>You can do this, you just have to put yourself to it.</p>
<p>Just because X is easy for you, doesn't mean it is for me. Just because things seem fine doesn't mean they are.</p>	<p>You're allowed to leave, you're allowed to walk away. Focus on yourself, the others aren't your problem.</p>
<p>I'm stressing so much, and I don't know where my future will be. I am unsure if I can make my parents proud and I am doubtful that I will get the result they want me to achieve.</p>	<p>Everything is fine, you are on the right track. ATAR is just a little step in your life. From your subjects add interests you might like.... courses but just have a look. It's ok to stress, I will always be here for you. The direction you take in the future is not locked, there is opportunity to switch paths.</p>

I give you my full support just as I hope you want to do for me. I don't want you to keep supporting me if it feels like a burden or a chore to you. I need your advice but I don't want to focus on myself - I need you to listen to what I am saying even if it sounds stupid.

I want you to know that for everything that I have done at school or sports, despite making many mistakes, I have always tried my best.

The one thing I need from my support person is encouragement. Although I may not be thinking about one thing, tell me how I could do better to achieve my goals. One thing I don't want is for you to lie to me. I need someone tell me the truth but/and to encourage me to find an alternative route.

Recently I feel like I haven't been myself and can't do my best. Everything is just too hard for me and I don't talk to my parents about it as they have migrated for me and already have many concerns; but it is so hard to enter a new country after several years and try to cope with all the difficult year 12 subjects along with the language difficulties, different study methods and wanting to do my best. But I can't just handle this much pressure and I feel like I can't completely express myself. I definitely can do better but I don't know why it's so hard and I can't right now.

Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made in my life. You have been there for me no matter the circumstances and I could not be more appreciative of it. You have always been the one thing I needed most, whether if I need guidance, someone to rant to or just a smile. Without you I would not be where I am today, you have made my life better in every way, providing the best care and supportive, given me opportunities to do whatever I desired yet have taught me how to be humble and generous. Thank you for being in my life.

I'm here for you and am willing to make time to support you. I feel comfortable in listening to your problems. I will give you as much support as I can. I will be honest with you about what I am thinking.

No matter what happens in the future, whether you achieve your goals and dreams that your best is all that matters.

I would like to hear words of encouragement and someone to uplift me when things aren't going as planned. I need reassurance that everything will be alright, at the end of the day and everything works itself out. Don't worry because there will always be another chance and another way.

Dear, you are very talented and no matter how you do and what you do, I'm always there for you and I'll always love you. Don't worry, everything will be fine, it just takes time. You need some time to get used to it, all the new stuff. I know it's hard but no matter what I'll always be there for you and help you.

I am honoured to have guided you through these years. It has been inspiring to watch you mature and grow. It is vital for you to be provided with opportunities and choices in life. I am here whenever you want and whatever you need. I will be supportive and understanding.

I want to not care about what others think. I want to feel like I'm perfect and beautiful. I want to be successful and I want everyone to know it. I want my parents to know how thankful I am for them. I want to feel accomplished with what I do, and I want a boyfriend.

You're doing what you love, you're beautiful and you will have a great career, everyone will adore you but you should care about it. I want to show you how to be content with yourself and not try to please others.

Can you love me the same way as I am loving you? Am I able to count on you when things are getting a little bit more tough? Can I ask of you to do me a favour anytime? I want to have someone to understand me and help me through stressful times.

Sure, no problem at all. I will be there for you always to teach you, to support you and to encourage you at all times. I will do my best to make sure that you are always happy and healthy no matter what, you can always come to me for help and I will be there for you.

I hate the person he made me become! I hate myself and I can't do this anymore.

I'm here for you! It may not be Ok now, or for a while, but one day it will be ok xx.

Never give up on me. Show me the love I show you.

I will be here through it all until my last breath. I will love you forever.

I feel depressed and get images of my dying.

"Okay so...what now" "I guess in life we all go through struggles, and each come with our own battles, you will always have a friend in me. And I won't ever leave your side."

I know I've done some stupid shit in my life that you really hate. I hate it within myself as well, I know I've said a lot of things and haven't fell (followed?) through with it but I am trying. I'm trying so hard for you and only for you because I love you so much.

I know you've been through some crazy shit that I don't like but it's in the past and we can't do anything about it. But know I love you for who you are, and we are working through this together. Till do us part.