# Transcript

**Having a Positive Impact on Others**

Duration: 1:30:26

KATE MORRIS: Welcome, everybody. Kate Morris here from Bastow. Welcome to our webinar today about Having A Positive Influence On Others. As you join the room, it would be fantastic if you could drop into the chat your name, your school, who you're with today if you're with your team, and how you're feeling. If you've had a great day, it would be fantastic if you could pop that in the chat. Thank you, all. I'd also like to welcome Ben Palmer. Ben's from Genos. He's facilitating our session today. Welcome, Ben.

DR BEN PALMER: Hi, Kate. It's great to be with you and with everyone from right across the great State of Victoria here today. We're expecting almost close to 1,000 people to join us, so it's fantastic to be here with you. Thanks, Kate.

KATE MORRIS: Thanks, Ben, and we've got Penny Earle with us. Hi, Penny. Penny's from Yarram Primary School. She's principal there. Thanks for joining us as one of our principal moderators today.

PENNY EARLE: Thanks, Kate.

KATE MORRIS: Also, David Lord is joining us from Staughton College. Welcome, David. Another one of our principal moderators. Looking forward to working with you today, David.

DAVID LORD: How are you?

KATE MORRIS: Great. And thanks to the Bastow team. Maria Oddo is with us today. She's the architect behind this. Thanks, Maria, for all your work. Jillian Brown and Louise Stewart are also with us today. We've got David Howes with us, who'll be welcoming us and lifting us off into the session today with some reflections and a welcome. And I'm just going to sit quietly for a minute as we move up to our start time. Thank you.

DR BEN PALMER: Thanks, Kate. Let me do a shoutout to anyone from St Helena Secondary College or Yallambie Primary, where I went to school. If you are with us this afternoon, it would be great to see you in the chat box.

KATE MORRIS: Thanks, Ben. Kate Morris here from Bastow. Welcome, everyone. We're working with Genos today on our webinar around Having A Positive Influence On Others. I like to think about it as the tiny tweaks you can make to assist you with your relationships and the way you work and how you feel about each day, and that's going to be the focus of our learning and working today. I'm joining you from the land and sea of the Kulin Nation and I'm really delighted to hand over now to David Howes. David is the Deputy Secretary of Schools and Regional Services. Welcome, David.

DAVID HOWES: Thanks, Kate, and welcome, everybody. Can I begin by acknowledging that wherever we are ‑ the north, the south, the east, the west of Victoria ‑ we meet on the lands of traditional owners. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, for me also the people of the Kulin Nation, and acknowledge Aboriginal colleagues who are part of this meeting today.

So welcome, everyone. Thank you for making time out of what are very strange days. It's hard to remember what day of the week it is sometimes. Every day seems to feel like Tuesday these weeks. So thank you for taking time out. I read through the material that Ben had provided in response to this and was really struck by the opening quote, which is from Nikki Banas: "You never really know the true impact you have on those around you; you never know how much someone needed that smile you gave them", and I wonder whether that's not what is one of the things that we're missing most when we're in remote and flexible mode. Even for people who are onsite at the moment, it will be a small number of students who are around, and I think one of the things about teaching is that every day you know you can make a positive difference just by exactly that ‑ by the smile, by noticing the child who hadn't been noticed at home, all those kinds of things. They're small things that made a difference and we don't have ‑ those opportunities are much reduced now. But kind of conversely, the need for this is all the more greater.

The other thing that I've been very struck by this week was ‑ and I didn't keep the report, but I'm sure there are plenty of them ‑ I was reading one of the reports that's come out about the impact of especially the restrictions that we're under here in metropolitan Melbourne, and they were around the pressures on relationships and friendships and reports of friendships breaking up as people ‑ and not intimate friendships necessarily, just broad friendships of people misunderstanding, communicating digitally, and a sort of general tension, meaning that things were heard in ways that weren't intended. Maybe people aren't paying as much attention to the way we speak. So we kind of have got less opportunities to do those small things that make a difference in the way that we used to, and the need is all the greater, both to receive and to give. Then I guess that was my closing thought: I wonder how much of this is the importance of giving but the mindset that allows us to accept kindness and a positive mindset from others as well in these really difficult days.

So, Ben, to you and Genos, you have been very important to the Victorian education community through this period and through the seminars that you've provided. There are completely literally thousands of people that have been part of these. The response has been overwhelmingly, to coin the word of today, 'positive' in terms of what you've offered and we've really appreciated the expertise that you've brought to that and valued being able to access it. So thank you again for making yourself available and for what you have contributed and for what you'll contribute over the next hour. So I might hand over to you.

DR BEN PALMER: Thank you, David, and it's not only a pleasure to be here with you all this afternoon; it's not lost on us just how much of a privilege it is to share this kind of material with everyone. So welcome, everyone, and I hope you enjoy our session. Today I really hope to draw on three sources of learning. Of course we're going to have content‑led learning, and I hope you've got the workbook for today. If you haven't, just grab a piece of paper and a pen and follow along. I can see that Gillian's put the link to the workbook in the chat box so you can go and get it at a different time if you haven't got it right now.

Of course we've got David and Penny with us who are really going to help to generate some discussion and bring their input and their responses to some of the great questions and things that we're going to explore today. So we're going to have learning, I'm sure, for them, and, of course, participant‑led learning. We're going to have learning from each other. The power of the crowd. We've got hundreds of people right across the State with us this afternoon. Thank you for coming. To that end, I'd really like to encourage you, as I always do in these webinars, to make some comments and provide your questions and thoughts and input into the chat box.

A couple of little housekeeping things to that end. If you've come in as a number or not as you'd like to be, I just want to remind everyone that up in the top right‑hand corner of your photo, you can click on this and go down to 'Rename' and you can put your proper name in there if your proper name hasn't come up. We're not looking for any Scooby Doos or anything like that but we'd encourage you just to make sure that you've got the name that you want there.

Secondly, when you are doing something into the chat box, we'd really like to encourage you to move from the default, which is just to the panellists, to this particular setting. You can click on it. A little dropdown menu comes along. Click on that and select 'All Panellists and Attendees'. That way, not only me and David and Penny will see your contributions but everybody who's joined us today will see your contributions. So, please, just make sure you're making those little checks as you make contributions to the webinar today.

Without any further ado, I'd like to encourage you to go to page number 3 in the workbook, and at the top of it, I ask us to think about and reflect on this question, and in a moment I'm going to ask Penny to come in and give us her answer. But let me ask you to ponder it for a moment and to take down some thoughts in the workbook for yourself. What would it mean if we were all 2% or 3% better at having a positive influence on others? What might that mean to your students, to your colleagues, to your partner, to your friends, to your siblings? What might it mean to you if we're all 2% or 3% better at having a positive influence on others? Penny, can I bring you in and ask you what would that mean to you in your context?

PENNY EARLE: Well, thinking about that, you think: wow, 2% to 3% across everything you do, so productivity, how you work with others, your personal life, relationships, personal wellbeing. Wow! 2% to 3% doesn't sound much but I reckon it would make a significant difference to how we operate.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. It's sort of like asking yourself the question: what would it be to have a 2% or 3% uplift in your mood? What would it be to a sporting team to be 2% or 3% better at their game? It could probably be the difference between somewhere in the middle of the ladder and on the top of it. David, I'd like to bring you in here and ask you for a contribution either from the chat box or a thought that you've had yourself to this question. Thanks, David.

DAVID LORD: I've just got someone in the chat box talking about small steps. It's Louise. And I think that's really important. It's not talking about trying to do everything at once. It's just trying to do the next little bit but that could have a big effect.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely, and that's one of the things we're really going to lean into and have a look at today as we go through. Indeed, as it says in the workbook, I really want to invite you to think about this notion of stretch, of leaning in, and just going that little bit further with those that you come into contact with, both in terms of your everyday social interactions and those important people in your life. How might you have just that little bit more of a positive influence on those around you?

Indeed, to think about that, I'd like to invite you to also think about what you're already doing. As you can see in the workbook on page number 3, that second box, I'd like to invite you to think about what you're already doing to have a positive influence on others and take some notes in your workbooks. Once you've done that, let us know one or two of the things that you're doing already to have a positive influence on others. As I was saying before, we really want to draw on the power of the crowd, and, of course, those things that you're thinking of or that you're already doing might not be what others are doing, so put them into the chat box so that we can begin this process of thinking outside of our own world and draw on the source of some other people's thoughts and inspirations. While you're doing that, let me ask David: what's something that you're already doing, David, in your context there, to have a positive influence on others?

DAVID LORD: Something I'm trying to do is deliberately getting to know people in the organisation and let them know me, and I've been doing this for quite a while here. I do it with the students and the teachers and the parents but I've got an example with the students. They all know that I barrack for Richmond and I play the harmonica. I'm out in the yard a lot with them, learning about them, and even in the time when they've gone offline, it's meant that I've been able to contact people, whether it's student leaders or various other students, and have a conversation where I know about them and they know about me.

DR BEN PALMER: Fantastic. I'm sure that's something that is having a positive influence. I know there's more staff out the front of the school that our kids go to at drop‑offs and pick‑ups, and that's meaning a lot for parents in terms of having that connection with their school. Penny, we've been getting some great contributions in the chat box. Can I ask you for one or two that are really resonating with you at the moment?

PENNY EARLE: Yes, lots around regular check‑ins with teams at the moment. I think that's been really, really important for everyone's wellbeing. Trivia games during meetings ‑ there's a new one. A fresh start each day. Daily messages to people; that's another way of checking in. And one that really resonated with me: singing at the top of their lungs.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes. Fantastic. Certainly a bit of humour and things like that are really important in these times, trying not to just have a check‑in but adding a few things into it to mix it up a little bit, make it feel that little bit different, a little bit more special. They're the sorts of things I think that fit into this notion of stretch that we're kind of talking about this afternoon. So thank you, everyone, for those contributions.

Now, let's turn over to page number 4. Here's this quote that David Howes was referencing in his opening remarks and you can see it up on screen here. As we think about stretch, what more could you do? I think it's important to think about ‑ it could be a little, it could be a lot, but either way you need to think about your context and what you can do and the fact that even the littlest of things can have a large impact. So while we invite you to think about stretch and go that little bit further, be reminded of this quote, if you like.

The other thing that we'd like to invite you to think about is this notion of continuous improvement. In education, we all understand the benefits of continuous school improvement, don't we? Today I'd like to invite you to bring that mindset to your relationships, in particular your close relationships. We're going to go through a process today and I'd like to invite you to think about coming back to that process at regular intervals and to just polish up and think about how you can bring some of what we do today to your close relationships on an ongoing basis.

So we're going to indeed focus a lot on others today but it would be remiss of us not to also mention, of course, the need to invest in ourselves. Indeed, this webinar is part of a three‑set series, if you like, and if you haven't been to our Boosting Psychological Wellbeing or Being Your Best Self that have indeed been focused on self, I'd invite you to get your phone out now, take a photo of the screen up here so you've got the URL. You can download the workbooks. You can watch the recordings. You can see all the poll results that we did and they are a really great resource in terms of investing in yourself. So today, without any further ado, we're going to really take quite a focus on others.

As Nikki Banas' quote reminds us, sometimes we're just not sure what impact our positive actions have on others, but one thing we are sure about is the positive impact it has on our own health and wellbeing. Indeed, there's a lot of research on how improving our relationships can have a positive influence on our own health and wellbeing. If you look at people who study centenarians, like Susan Pinker, they often look at the sorts of things that predict our mortality; that is, whether we'll live a long and healthy life. Up on screen here, I have indeed put the things that Susan Pinker looked at in her book 'The Village Effect'. Have a look at that list of things and think about those things that you think are the most predictive of whether you'll live until 100 or not. What would you put at the top of list and what would you put at the bottom of the list? Which one of these things do you think would be most predictive of whether you're likely to live to 100 or not and those that are least predictive? Some of you are guessing ‑ I can see in the chat box ‑ the correct answer. Here they are.

Now, level of close relationships and the quality of our day‑to‑day social interactions are the two strongest predictors of our own health and wellbeing. In fact, they better predict whether we're likely to live to 100 or not than the air we breathe, whether we quit booze or smoking, whether we exercise, and I think it's a timely reminder of this notion of continuous improvement and stretch and of leaning in and thinking about polishing up how we interact on a day‑to‑day basis and the quality of our close social relationships.

So, to that end, today we're going to spend a little bit of time upfront looking at how we can boost the quality of our day‑to‑day social interactions. Then we're going to do a relationship circles exercise and work on and pick out someone who's close to us. Then we're going to finally look at a model for helping others respond to challenging situations and to resolve conflict. When the going gets tough, how can we help someone else move through their challenging situations. Along the way, please, contribute in the chat box, as you've been doing, and don't forget to choose 'All Panellists and All Attendees' so that everyone can see.

So how can we positively influence the way others feel? Turn to page number 5 in the workbook. Follow along with me. One way of identifying ways we can positively influence others, of course, is to think about the feelings that we create for others when we've had a positive influence on them, because by looking at these feelings, we can start to actually identify some of the things underneath them that cause this positive influence to occur. So people are positively influenced when they feel acknowledged, when they feel listened to, when they feel valued, understood, consulted, cared for and informed. This, of course, is not an exhaustive list but just some thought provokers, if you like. David, I'd like to bring you in here and ask you: what are some other feelings that you might add to this list that we're looking at here?

DAVID LORD: I've got one. Connected and feeling part of something, and on a smaller level, just the way ‑ people have already talked about it in the chat ‑ about spending time with each other within the staff, but also on a bigger level, in our communities at the moment, there's a strong moral purpose about being part of a school that's serving the community. I know for our parent‑teacher interviews, we got small groups of parents that a staff member would speak to and there was a real sense of connection from that. They just wanted someone to talk to, and I know both of the staff and parents felt a strong sense that they were part of our community.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. And purpose, I know, is such a big motivator in education and that moral purpose that we all have to it. Penny, I've been noticing some great contributions in the chat box as well. I'd like to bring you in to call out a couple of those that have resonated with you.

PENNY EARLE: Yes, Ben. I'm seeing a few good ones now. Validated, respected, part of something bigger. Alisa said appreciated and Gail said respected. Joan mentioned energised, and that's a really challenging one at times at the moment, isn't it?

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. That sense of belonging and connected, that's coming through strongly, isn't it, and I would really concur that that's one of those things that we can put up on the list.

OK. Well, without any further ado, let's have a look at four different things that we can all readily engage in to bring about these kind of emotions and have a positive influence. The first one, if you want to follow along with me ‑ page number 6 in the workbook ‑ is perhaps one of the most obvious ones but not as common as it could be, is to be present and to demonstrate mindful listening. People feel more heard and understood when we're present, rather than disconnected, in our interactions with them. Of course, to enhance in the skill, there are many great apps. One of the things that we can do is obviously engage in a mindfulness meditation practice. Indeed, the research on mindfulness and the efficacy of it is better than the research on vitamins. In other words, mindfulness as a practice is better for us and better for those around us than the research on vitamins, and so that's something that really struck me. Of course, mindfulness meditation is not the only thing that we can engage in or that we can do to be more present. And to demonstrate mindful listening, I'd like to bring Penny in here and ask her some of the things that she does to be present and to demonstrate mindful listening in her interactions. And while she's doing that, add some of your own comments into the chat box. We'll ask David to call out some of the contributions that you're making. Thanks, Penny.

PENNY EARLE: So, of course, the obvious one is the phone away. If you're going to have a formal conversation or just a very focused conversation with anyone, phone away. If it's at work, I'm very mindful of what I have on my desk. Diary out if I need to take notes but diary away because it can be a distraction. Making sure that the door gets shut, that perhaps the office manager knows I'm not to be disturbed, and being able to really commit to that conversation, that interaction, with that person so that they feel valued, respected and that what has to happen at that time is of value and important to what we're doing.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. Thank you. They're a good reminder. We've been getting some excellent contributions in the chat box, David, as well.

DAVID LORD: Yes, there's some pretty common themes. Turn off the phone was definitely there. Petra had listening and acknowledging. Lots of people talked about eye contact. And Louise had a really interesting one that I could probably learn from, which was just slow down to do it.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. And one of the things that we've talked about in one of our previous webinars ‑ and I noticed a few of you have been saying it ‑ is taking some deep breaths. In fact, three or four or five deep breaths before we meet with someone can help us engage our parasympathetic nervous system and can help us be just that little bit more present, that little bit more empathetic. It can indeed help engage our biology for empathy. Penny, I liked your comments too on the environment and just thinking about setting things up so that we're more present and more connected with each other. Thank you to everyone who's been contributing in the chat box.

The next thing I'd like to draw our attention to is being curious, a mindset of curiosity. Thursday, the 10th of September is our national day of action when Australians are reminded to ask: "Are you OK?". And I'd like to invite you to think about curiosity as being an extension of that. 2020 has been a challenging year for us all, and it's really important to make that stretch, to show that little bit more interest, to pay that little bit more attention, to be thinking about our open questions that we can ask, how we can check in more with how people are going, what they're up to, what's been going on in their lives, taking just that little bit more time in our day‑to‑day interactions and thinking about this mindset, if you like, of curiosity. David, of course, I think you've probably got some things here too that you could bring to us in terms of how we can show up and be more curious in our day‑to‑day interactions.

DAVID LORD: I've got an example that happened to me after doing the Open to Learning training and they talked about if you've got a staff member you've been working with for a long time and there hasn't been improvement, you've got to realise that you could be part of the issue. And the next time that I spoke to them, I genuinely listened. I was much more open‑minded and explored what they were actually thinking and I ended up coming out with a different idea about what was happening, and we've constructed something together that's actually allowed us to work much more positively on improvement. She said at the end of the time that it was the first time that she felt that I'd actually listened to her properly while we were having these discussions.

DR BEN PALMER: Very good. Thanks for that wonderful contribution. Yes, I think Viviane Robinson's work reminds us that we all see things very differently and it's really important to make dents and to engage in what different people's perspectives are and things like that in that kind of train. Thank you, David. Penny, I've been noticing, as I'm sure you have, some great contributions that are being made in the chat box. What I'd like to encourage everyone to do too is not just to make a contribution but to look at what your colleagues are saying there and capture them down if you can. Penny, over to you.

PENNY EARLE: Louise mentioned curious, not furious. I like that one. Rosina reminded us not to multi‑task. I have seen other ones like asking specific questions to draw out the person that you're interacting with, and follow up on prior conversations was another really valid point.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. It reminds us too of the power to paraphrase back and to acknowledge what we've heard. I think it's not only good to be curious but to reflect that curiosity back and to recall the things that people have said. So thank you for that kindly reminder of that too. Thanks, Penny. And thank you to everyone who's contributing.

Okay, over to page 7 in our workbook: gestures. Another great way of thinking about how we can push, if you like, is to think about how we can give or make more meaningful gestures ‑ whether it's lifting your head up and smiling at people as they walk by, talking more with those customer service people at the local shops, waving to your local lollipop person. Indeed, I've used this image because I can tell you first‑hand, I ride my bike to work often and I used to ride past this lollipop person a lot. That wave as we went past has become a little chat every now and then and many other great little interactions that I've had there, and it reminds me of the power of gestures. So let us know the sorts of things that are coming to mind for you, whether it's that care package, whether it's saying 'thank you'. Penny, let me bring you in here and ask you: what gestures have been coming to mind for you during this time?

PENNY EARLE: Ben, the all‑important one has got to be those twinkle wrinkles and eye contact, no matter who you see, because everyone is really hungry for interaction at the moment. They can't see your mouth. I'm actually finding it quite hard to hear people. It's amazing how much you must rely on their mouths to hear. But also just making sure that whoever you go past, you acknowledge in some way. It might be the smallest just eye contact, a nod, regardless of your relationship with them, especially in the workplace. You need to be even with everyone and just make everyone feel that they're important and you value them being part of your team.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. Gestures can be around humour. They can be around care packages. They can be just around that eye contact and things like that that we're talking about. In fact, David, we've been getting a lot of great suggestions in the chat box. Would you like to give us a couple that have struck you as you've been listening?

DAVID LORD: Heart‑shaped hands from Erin. I thought that was fantastic. Enthusiastic waving ‑ so not just waving but enthusiastic waving from Ez. And a whole lot of other things: air high fives, thumbs up, prayer hands and just making sure that we're doing everything to communicate.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. So think about our gestures. Think about that stretch. Think about those little things that you might be able to do in your community in your day‑to‑day interactions.

Finally, page number 7, towards the bottom there, one of the things we can, of course, do is just plan and be a little bit more intentional in our interactions. If you'd like a good metaphor for this, I would invite you to go and watch on YouTube Michelle Obama and some of her speeches, and compare and contrast the speech that she gave this year in 2020 with the speech that she gave in 2008 or 2012. In those earlier years, there was a certain mood in America and I think Michelle in her talks really reflects that mood in how she presents. In the earlier years, there was very much the ra‑ra and the "Yes, we can". Now, today, of course, the mood in America, as COVID‑19 sort of ravages the country a bit, there's a much more sombre mood, and Michelle was much more blunt and much more sombre in how she delivered her message, perhaps even you could say a little bit more serious. So if you do go and watch these, watch them through that metaphor and think about: OK, how can I bring some of that more intention and that more planning, how can I use my own mood and emotion to help connect with people?

Indeed, there are a few different things that we can be thinking about, and they're listed there on page number 7. You can be thinking about the mood and emotions of the people we're meeting, what's most appropriate for the interaction, what's the best environment for us, what questions can we ask, how can we acknowledge what we've heard? What other interesting and relevant information could we share? So planning and just being that little bit more intentional in terms of how we go about it can be really good. What are you thinking about here, David? I'd like to bring you in, and again as you're listening to David, pop your own comments and thoughts into the chat box in terms of being more intentional in your interactions. Thanks, David.

DAVID LORD: I think as well as being intentional in the ways that are up there, there's being intentional in making sure you actually have the interaction. As soon as you know people need support ‑ we're in busy jobs ‑ having a system of getting it down and then making sure you make the calls. I'm trying to contact a lot of our staff at the moment and I'm having a system to make sure that I do that each day because it's really important. I do care about them and I want to speak to them, but to make sure that I fit them in, I'm doing that.

DR BEN PALMER: Fantastic. Yes, that's some other good things that we could add to the list. Thank you. Penny, some great contributions coming in from a few people in the chat box. Would you like to reflect on a couple of those?

PENNY EARLE: Yes, I think Louise has said about that importance of a little wellbeing piece, a bit of fun lightheartedness before a formal meeting in the workplace is a great thing. Researching to make sure that you've got the full facts about whatever it is that you need to discuss, which is supported by KMS, who said preparation is key. I'm a great one for preparation, preparation, preparation. And knowing about the person who you're going to be talking with. A little bit of background knowledge about their kids or their interests can just often break the ice and help them feel more relaxed so you can really deal with what you need to deal with.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. And some of the comments are reminding me too about the power of vulnerability. Sharing some of your own struggles and things that are going on, if it's appropriate to do so, can be one great way of just breaking the ice and making it feel more comfortable for those you're interacting with to indeed be vulnerable with you.

So let's ‑ without any further ado ‑ turn to page number 8. We've looked at these four different ways in which we can stretch and lean in, if you like. What I'd like to invite you to do over the next three minutes as a song plays out is to take all this thinking and bring it into your own action plan. What are you already doing that you could do more of? What new things could you do? When will you revisit this and finesse or enhance it further? So this song by Eva Cassidy, 'Time After Time' ‑ it's her great version of it ‑ it goes for about three minutes. Take this time for yourself to capture down some of those thoughts, and then when you have, give us a contribution in the chat box. Now, if you find the music distracting, I'd encourage you to turn the volume down or take your headphones out. If you like it, leave it on and let it stimulate your thoughts as you do the action plan. Thanks, everyone.

(Music plays)

*# Lying in my bed I hear the clock tick and think of you*

*Turning in circles confusion is nothing new*

*Flashback to warm nights*

*Almost left behind*

*Suitcase of memories,*

*Time after sometimes you picture me*

*I'm walking too far ahead*

*You're calling to me, I can't hear what you have said*

*And you say go slow*

*I've fallen behind*

*The second hand unwinds*

*If you're lost you can look and you will find me*

*Time after time*

*If you fall I will catch you I'll be waiting*

*Time after time*

*If you fall I will catch you I'll be waiting*

*Time after time*

*Time after time*

*After your picture fades and darkness has turned to gray*

*Watching through windows I'm wondering*

*If you're okay*

*And you say go slow*

*I've fallen behind*

*The drum beats out of time*

*If you're lost you can look and you will find me*

*Time after time*

*If you fall I will catch you I'll be waiting*

*Time after time*

*If you fall I will catch you I'll be waiting*

*Time after time*

*Time after time*

*Mmm, time after time*

*Ooh, time after time*

*Time after time #*

DR BEN PALMER: Great words to that song: go slower. We talk about slow cooking. I think to think about slowing down in our relationships. It can be a really, really valuable thing to do. "If you're lost, you can look and you will find me time after time; if you fall, I will catch you, I will be waiting, time after time". Thank you to everyone who's been making great contributions in the chat box. I'd love to run a little poll here. I'm going to launch it now. Which area of the content that we've explored does your new 'something' fall into? I know a few of you have been contributing in the chat box. I just want to check, David, that the poll's come up at your end. Can you see it?

DAVID LORD: Yes.

DR BEN PALMER: Fantastic. OK. So if you haven't, take a vote. There's almost 600 of us here tonight. Let's have a look at something we will never find on the internet. You can only get this from coming to an event like this. Let's have a look at what on average our new strategies are and where they fall.

So over 60% of us have voted now. If you have voted, take a guess: where do you think the greatest number of new things are going to be? Which category? OK. Alright. David, while we're waiting for that, let me bring you in. What was your new strategy?

DAVID LORD: To be present and mindfully listen when it's not a good time for me. To make sure people still feel heard and cared for and valued at that time because that's the hardest time.

DR BEN PALMER: So it falls into that first category of really being a little bit more present and mindful. Penny, would you like to share your new thing?

PENNY EARLE: Look, it's always around planning interactions and being more intentional. I am very task oriented and my desk is always beckoning or something else, but I need to consciously make time just to relax and enjoy my team and just share the small stuff because, of course, that's the foundations that when the going gets tough you need to draw on.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. Alright. Well, here are the results and I'll share it now. A lot of us ‑ and this was similar to the session this morning ‑ are planning our interactions and just being that little bit more intentional. It doesn't take much, does it? Even five minutes of just stopping and thinking just that little bit more can demonstrably improve our interactions. So that's great to see. Keep the comments coming in the chat box. I'm going to stop sharing the poll now. If it's still up on your screen, just hit the delete button or move it over to the side so that it's not in your way.

We're going to change gears a little bit more and start to think about how we can be more of a positive influence on those who are close to us. I'd like to invite you to start by thinking about someone special in your life that you'd like to focus on for the next part of our webinar. Is it a colleague? Is it a student or a child of yours? Is it a sibling? Is it your partner? Is it a friend? I'd like you to think about ‑ and I'd like to encourage you to think of ‑ someone important in your life that you'd like to focus on in this next part of our session.

So we're going to do a relationship circles activity. I'd like to invite you to turn to page number 9 in our workbooks and you'll see some circles there. Of course, if there's not enough, you can add some more. But here we go with the first part. The first thing I'd like to encourage you to do is to give each of your circles a meaningful heading. So you might put you as a partner. For me, I put me as a father, me as a friend, me as a colleague, me as a sibling. So put the right kind of headings, if you like, around your circles. Step number one.

Once you've done that, I'd invite you to put not just the name of the person that you've been thinking about but a few different names into those circles. As I said before, continuous improvement. I'm going to invite you to come back to this activity time and time again and get into this notion of picking a person at a time to have a bit of focus on. So put the relevant names of people in those circles. Then underline or highlight that person that you'd like to focus on. So that's the first step of our activity.

OK, now let's turn to page 10 and have a quick look at the different relationship improvement strategies that we've got there. If you look at these, they fall into three categories, if you like: improving the quality and amount of time that we spend, and there's some suggested activities there. These are really just thought provokers. Then we've got improving specific aspects of our relationships; for example, how do I become a better partner or a better parent or a better friend? So we can think about and focus on a particular aspect that we bring to a relationship. And, thirdly, the third category there: reading books and blogs and engaging in courses and things that improve a particular relationship skill; for example, improve our empathy, how we communicate, how we facilitate difficult conversations. Lately I've been focussing on how to express how I feel more effectively. It's just something that hasn't been something of great capacity for me, I don't think. I've always struggled with talking about how I personally feel. So I've been working a lot on that, and that's what I mean by improving a specific relational skill.

So what I'd like to invite you to do is to take the next three minutes, as the song plays out, to identify something that you might be able to do with this person that could have a positive influence on your relationship with them. Use the examples in the workbook as thought provokers and, when done, share something in the chat box you feel comfortable sharing. After this song, this next song, I'm going to bring Penny in and ask her to share an example of something that she's going to do with a person that she's been thinking of, and I'll, of course, ask David to come in and again reflect on our chat box.

Now, this next song by George Benson and Bill Withers is 'Just the Two of Us', so again if you find the music stimulating, keep your headphones on, keep the volume up and use it as a source of inspiration. If, on the other hand, you find the music a bit too much, turn your volume down, take your headphones out for the next few minutes and really just be in that nice, silent peace as you take the opportunity to use these thought provokers as a way of thinking about something you might be able to do to enhance your relationship with that person. Thanks, everyone.

(Music plays).

DR BEN PALMER: Thanks, everyone. Penny, would you like to come in and share what your thoughts were on the thing that you could do with your close relationship?

PENNY EARLE: Yes, thanks, Ben. I've been thinking about my sister and I'm really keen to improve the quality of our relationship and the amount of time we spend together because we find just through life's ups and downs at the moment ‑ she's in lockdown in Melbourne, working in a busy, big hospital in the emergency department, obviously with all the pressures that that's bringing in the current situation, and here I am in level 3 lockdown in rural Victoria, and we just find that our conversations more recently are around mum and dad, what the kids are up to, she lost her husband about 10 years ago, and so it's been very focused on tasks and things that need doing rather than quality time. So I'm really looking forward to getting out walking together, going camping together, just spending time doing activities that will deepen our relationship at our age and stage in life.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely, and I can resonate with that with my elderly parents who are in heavy lockdown down in Melbourne. It's particularly difficult on my mum, who is a teacher herself and loves a lot of social engagement and interaction. David, we've been getting some great contributions in the chat box too. Are there a couple that have really resonated with you as you've been watching them?

DAVID LORD: Yes, there's been quite a number. Giving time and listening, from Brian. A lot of people talking about versions of taking the time to touch base. I liked mindful questioning by Jacqueline, not just going through the motion with questions. Having fun and being silly, which I get in trouble, the silly bit, with my assistant principal sometimes. I really liked be present, be invested, by Ellie. I thought it summed it all up.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. One that caught my attention was from Megan Taylor. She was talking about art and craft and thinking about doing that more with children. Indeed, it made me think about the late Sir Ken Robinson, who passed away, the great British author and adviser on education, who talks a lot about creativity and how we beat that out of children a little bit. I'm thinking about my 7‑year‑old daughter and how much she loves art and craft and I've really been trying to facilitate a little bit more art and craft at our house lately with his passing, and I'd invite any of you who haven't seen some of his great TED talks and YouTubes to go and have a look at that. Thank you, everyone, who's been contributing.

Now let's turn our attention to our third big piece of the webinar: helping others respond to challenging situations. If you'd like to follow along, I want to bring you to page number 11 in the workbook to start with. When helping others, it's important to manage our own emotions and to demonstrate appropriate emotions for the context. It's important not to try and bring too much positivity to a conversation that is serious and that is sombre. Indeed, there was this article that appeared I think both in The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald last week or this week about exactly this. We take it as a timely reminder to just be conscious that we can easily isolate people further if we don't bring the right mood and emotion to these interactions.

So while there's no right way to feel, the first thing to really think about, if you like ‑ some general principles around this ‑ is to be calm and to be caring. Avoid words and phrases like "Everything will be fine", "let's look on the bright side", "the positives of all this are". They're the sorts of things we just really need to be mindful of as we're approaching these kind of situations.

The second big principle to think about is to listen and coach as much as possible and to perhaps only give advice when necessary or invited to do so. Quite often, particularly those of us who ‑ the more experienced we become, the more we know how to overcome things, but the more we also fall into a trap, and that trap is called the 'empathy gap phenomenon'. Basically, it kind of goes like this. It's particularly important firstly to think about listening and coaching when we're approaching situations that indeed we have overcome in the past because, generally, we have difficulty accurately recalling just how difficult past adverse experiences were. This quote from this article in the Harvard Business Review captures it very nicely: "it's harder to empathise with people", interestingly, "if we've been in their shoes". Overcoming past obstacles can make us especially confident about our understanding of how to, and indeed it's the combination of these two things that can unintentionally reduce our empathy towards others struggling with the event. This is widely known as 'the empathy gap' and, indeed, men, we have an overtendency I think: hear a problem, jump in with the solution. But, of course, it's not just men. We can all do it, and sometimes the more experienced we are, the more we can fall into this trap. So it's great just to be mindful of this and to just remember that it's important to bring in the empathy gap phenomenon into our thinking as much as possible.

Thirdly, on page number 11, again to just generally plan and to be intentional. What's the right environment for the conversation? What emotion do I want to project and how? What words and phrases should I avoid or use? What's my purpose? What's my interaction? As it says in the workbook there, it only takes a few minutes of consideration to demonstrably improve our approach. So I'd really encourage you just to do your planning and your intention around these sorts of things.

So lastly now, with those as our general principles, let us bring ourselves to the EAR model, a coaching model for helping others. It's page number 12 in the workbook. This model is a cognitive reframing model that's often used by coaches and mentors to help somebody work through something that is causing them stress, or the stress of a challenging situation. Of course, acronyms help us remember it. I like to think of it as 'putting on the ears'. It gets me right into that mindset of listening and coaching when I'm helping somebody work through something.

In this model, 'E' stands for 'empathise', and here we want to be asking questions that help us establish how the person is thinking and feeling. We want to be asking what they're thinking of doing, what their kind of analysis of the situation is, if you like. We want to, of course, demonstrate empathy here as well, so we need to be listening and suspending our own judgment, just being conscious to do that, and to be paraphrasing and acknowledging what we hear.

Now, you might notice at the end of this I've got there: explore what their desired outcome is and make it real. So once we've established what's going on, at least the way the person sees it, we want to start to ask some questions like: "Ideally, what would you like to see happen here?" And the ampersand is there and then 'make it real'. Often some people will say things that are unrealistic and unachievable, so we need to bring a lot of finesse to the conversation here and learn the art of saying, "OK, that sounds like a really great outcome but what other outcomes might we be able to achieve?". So we've got to think about our questions here, but getting that outcome as something that actually feels real, something that could actually be a possibility once you've heard what the situation is.

That becomes a great anchor for the second part of this model: alternatives. Here we want to be asking great questions that help people come up with their plan A, B and C. We want a number of different and range of different ways of responding to the event. So we could be asking questions that help people look at issues from different perspectives, that help people think about and explore what other people might do in similar situations. We could invite people to do a little bit of a cost benefit analysis, if you like, across the options that they have in front of them. But in this phase of the conversation, what we are trying to generate is options, if you like. We're not trying to come up with the option but a range of them because 'the option' is the last part of our model, the response, where we really want to revisit that desired outcome, get them to choose something that they can do, note down the actions and the timelines, if that's appropriate ‑ it's not always appropriate but if it is ‑ then determine the support required, asking them questions about what we could do to support them, and then, finally, a very nice way of rounding out the conversation: how you're thinking and feeling now at the end of this discussion. So that's our model.

I'd like to bring in Penny first for a bit of a reflection. What did this get you thinking of in terms of helping others in challenging situations? As you hear Penny talk, please let us know some of your thoughts on this model and some of these principles that we've talked to in the chat box and we'll get David to do a reflection on those. Penny, thank you.

PENNY EARLE: Ben, if I may, two really quick ones that I've applied this model with with great success. The first one is the roster coming back from remote learning two. I delegated it to some of my middle leaders to come up with a draft and then, of course, we took it to the whole staff to make sure that everyone was happy, that it was fair and so forth. They were quite passionate about the ratios being right between part‑timers and full‑timers coming in for onsite supervision. And I actually threw it back to them. I actually said to them ‑ my way of seeking alternatives was, "Well, how would you solve it? What is fair?". And rather than me coming up with solutions, I sought their input. Then, of course, I was able to coach the team who'd come up with the roster and said, "OK, now massage it. You've heard what the concerns are. Let's get it as right as we can". And, as a result, we've had a really good level of support and buy‑in and everyone's feeling included and valued that it had a good outcome.

The other one that is really important to bear in mind too is the students. This is a great model to use with them as well. Every school's got the kids who come to kick the footy. They're not really interested in the learning. They've just come for the social side, and that's becoming really obvious during remote learning because the kids onsite actually think they've got it good. Most schools have a no‑tackling rule, and, of course, those kids who come to kick the footy want to do the full shebang, and we, of course, have the rule that unless there's a staff member out there, there's no tackling. So we got the kids in. They were feeling quite disenfranchised and we said: "Well, how are we going to solve it? What's a good solution? What can we do to fix this?". They had their say. They felt that they were in control. They didn't know that we actually had the plan first, but that's alright. And then, of course, we were able to enact it ‑ and staff were happy and the kids were happy. Look, that's going to have to happen forever and forever but there's two really good, sharp examples of how you can apply this principle.

DR BEN PALMER: Absolutely. And while I've been listening to you, Penny, it's been reminding me of curiosity and autonomy and empowerment. That's what I really heard in your message there, and I think giving those really other great mindsets to bring to this type of stuff. So thank you for that reflection. David, we've been getting some great things in the chat box as well. A couple of reflections from you on those.

DAVID LORD: Sharon was talking about suspending judgment. Louise a little bit similarly: don't assume we know why. Then there was some how to ask better questions from Sheree. There was also a couple of people saying that it can be difficult and it sometimes doesn't go as well as you might want it to. And Jane was talking about the importance of silence and giving people space to be able to expand their thoughts and ideas.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. It's a good reminder. Some people think out loud. Some people think inwardly. Thank you on that reflection from Jane. I think it's important to just even to remember that a problem shared is a problem halved, isn't it.

OK, so let's bring us now to our final little activity: summary and action planning. Page number 13, everyone, in the workbook. Today we've explored ways to improve our day‑to‑day social interactions, the stretch. How might you lean in and stretch that little bit further? We've identified ways to improve a close social relationship, and I can see in the chat box that a lot of you have come up with some really good ideas there. Again, I'd like you to encourage you to come back to this exercise, to use this and to think about continuous improvement. And, finally, we've looked at some principles and a model to help us help those face challenging circumstances. What's something that's stood out for you today?

I'm going to play our final song for the session. Stay with us. We're going to play the song. We're going to bring David in to ask him what stood out. We're going to get Penny to reflect on some of the contributions you make in the chat box, and then I'm going to hand back over to Kate Morris, who will wrap up the session for us. So here comes our last song. It's our very own Australian Jimmy Barnes with his song 'Higher and Higher'. So, again, if the music's distracting, turn it down. If you like it, keep it on. Take this opportunity, these three minutes for yourself, to bring all this session together for you. Thanks, everyone.

(Music plays)

DR BEN PALMER: David, let me bring you in. A quick reflection on the session from you. Thanks, David.

DAVID LORD: Thanks. For me, it's reminded me to slow down and listen and to show that I care by genuinely listening and engaging.

DR BEN PALMER: Fantastic. Thank you. Penny, a couple of things that have struck you from the chat box on what people have been reflecting on in the session.

PENNY EARLE: Yes, Ben. Lots of comments around being curious, intentional planning, being aware of the toxic positivity, small regular gestures to improve relationships, and the star by far, apart from your dancing, has been the EAR model.

DR BEN PALMER: Fantastic. Thanks for those reflections. And on the dancing, let me use it as a reminder to do something that moves you emotionally, something that brings a smile to your dial, or actually gets you frustrated, or brings a tear to your eye. It's really important to stretch that muscle and to use it and to practise it, and the more you do, the better you'll become at perceiving, understanding and responding not only to your emotions but those of others. I'm going to hand back over to Kate now, who's going to wrap up the session for us. Thanks, Kate.

KATE MORRIS: Great. Thanks, Ben. And I'm calling you our CHWB, our Chief Health and Wellbeing Officer. You could be our rockstar Brett Sutton, and we all know about that in Victoria. But it's fantastic to have you, Ben, pop into our world on a regular basis. You really have assisted all of us in understanding that actually cutting time, privileging time for ourselves and thinking about how we can positively influence others, how we can be our best selves and lift up those around us has been truly fabulous.

Our principal stars also with us today, thanks, David and Penny, and a huge shoutout to your communities. Schools are human enterprises and you have absolutely made that clear to us today, the role that you've played in lifting up those around you in your schools, and I know whether the corona train is coming through or not, you do that every day. So thank you for that. Thanks to the Bastow team. And just a little note to leave you on. I think the idea that schools make communities is absolutely the tenet that I build everything I do around, and I can see that in the room, all of you are doing that too. So thank you very much. Thanks to Ian Hamilton also with us today from Genos. Thanks, Ben. Thanks, Maria, for being the architect behind these, Louise as well and also Jill, and thanks, everyone, for being part of the session. Go and be moved.

DR BEN PALMER: Thanks very much. Thanks, everyone, and have a good evening.