# Transcript

**Improving Wellbeing with Social Strategies**

Duration: 1:03:05

DR BEN PALMER: Welcome if you've just joined us. It's Ben Palmer here from Genos. I'll be facilitating the webinar with you today. We did have over 200 people register for this webinar, but we also want to acknowledge the lockdown that's occurred today and the situation in Victoria, which I think will probably impact our numbers today. And our thoughts are going out to everyone who might be impacted by things today. I'm joined with Maria Oddo, the past Principal of Sunbury Downs Secondary College, currently the Manager of Leadership Programs at Bastow. Hi, Maria.

MARIA ODDO: Hi, Ben, and hello, everyone. It's great to be with you this afternoon.

DR BEN PALMER: And we've also got Jane Hancock, who'll also be helping me contextualise the material and provide some of her own examples. Jane is the Principal in Residence at Bastow at the moment. Hi, Jane, how are you?

JANE HANCOCK: Good, thanks, Ben, and welcome, everyone, to tonight's session.   
  
DR BEN PALMER: Great to have you with us.   
  
JANE HANCOCK: Yes.   
  
DR BEN PALMER: Yeah. We've also got Ian Hamilton, my colleague from Genos International, who's in the chat box with you, and we're going to give your colleagues just a few more minutes to turn up. We are expecting, as I said, at least a few of us to be here today. So while you're waiting, let us know where you're joining us from, which school are you joining us from in the chat box. It would be great to hear from you and great to see what sort of schools are joining us for this session.

Okay. So if you've just joined us, it's Ben Palmer here from Genos. It's great to have you with us today for the final webinar of our series on wellbeing, where we're going to be talking about enhancing and improving wellbeing with social strategies. We're just waiting for a few colleagues to roll up, and given the lockdown situation that's occurred today, we will wait just a couple more minutes to let people join. But thank you for joining us and I hope you enjoy the session. Today helping me facilitate the session I've got Maria Oddo. G'day, Maria.   
  
MARIA ODDO: Hi, Ben, and hello, everyone. It's great to be with you this afternoon. Looking forward to another great session, Ben.   
  
DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. This is one of the big areas of wellbeing: social strategies. And we've got Jane Hancock, the Principal in Residence of Bastow, with us as well. Hi, Jane.   
  
JANE HANCOCK: Hi, Ben, and welcome, everyone, to our final session and thank you for coming along, given the news that you've received today. Well done for making that extra effort.

DR BEN PALMER: Certainly. It's great to see Michael and the team there from Guthrie Street Primary School in Shepparton. Yeah. Great to see Kiralee from Rosanna Golf Links Primary School. It's great to have you with us and thank you, everyone, for putting in. We are recording the session and we hope you enjoy it. So let us know where you're joining from, when you get a chance, in the chat box and whenever you have a question or a comment, please put it into the chat box. We know that one of the things people love about these sessions is not only hearing from me and Maria and Jane, but also hearing from each other. Whenever you do, just make sure you change the default from ‘All Panellists’, because that means we're the only ones getting your contributions; change it to ‘All Panellists and Attendees’ so that everybody who's joined us today can see the contributions that you're making. So thanks, everyone. Let's get going.

As we said, this is the last of a series of webinars that we've done around wellbeing and the recordings are there with the links to them up on screen. If you want to get your phone out and take a photo of this, by all means. And the recording for this session we'll make available in the next couple of days as well. Yeah, they'll also be up on the Bastow site in good time as well.

So tonight's session is a train the trainer. It's designed to be led by you and, to that end, we've got a facilitator guide and the slide deck that you can get, if you haven't already. The facilitator guide has quite extensive notes under each of the slides about what to say and how to position, what the purpose of them. We hope you find that a valuable resource because we'd really like to see you and hear from you about running this session at your school. You've also got the participant workbook. That's the one with the big orange piece on the front, if you haven't identified that already, and I certainly will be asking you to be looking at both of these documents as you go through. If you weren't able to get them, Ian has put them into the chat box for us. You might be able to download them straight out of the chat box. Otherwise you can come back to the Bastow website to get them as well. And, as always, if you've been following along with us during these sessions, we'd like to encourage you to spend a little bit of time together as a team at the end to discuss what you might actually do with the content.

To that end, on page number 28 in the facilitator guide, there's some great reflective questions. They're designed to help you think about who you might run this for in your school, what you might actually include, add or edit, how you might go about it and when you might actually run it. And I'm pretty confident if you really took 10 minutes to answer those as a team tonight, you've probably got a much better chance of really doing something with the materials from this session.

What could you do? I'm going to ask Jane for a few reflections because I know Jane has been with us all along the way. But if you're quite new to this kind of material, of course you could simply implement it as is and, as it says in the facilitation guide, this session could take anywhere from an hour to about an hour and 45 to run and you could split it up into two sections, and I'll show you where you could do that. If you're very familiar with this kind of material, you could certainly add/edit, do certain parts of it and not other pieces, depending on what feels most appropriate for your context. And, of course, if you're very experienced with wellbeing and have wellbeing specialists at your school, you could certainly take it up a level. It's certainly been designed more at that sort of frontline level, that base level, if you like, so that all of us can feel confident in the delivery of the material. Jane, any thoughts or comments from you before we get into the content itself?

JANE HANCOCK: Yeah, Ben, I think if I was at a school, I'd definitely be looking at - I mean, you could do it on so many levels. You could do it with the children. You could even do it with parents, a parent group, or your ES staff or your leadership team. It's just got so many opportunities to talk to staff about the different themes that you've covered. It really is an excellent program.

DR BEN PALMER: Mmm, and I know some schools who have indeed been running it not only with some of their staff but involving some other staff and parents and things as well. So this is where the actual session starts. If you've downloaded the slide deck, you'll recognise this slide. And as we can see up on here, we've got some people who are obviously enjoying one of their social things that they like doing and, indeed, that's the focus of this session: improving wellbeing with social strategies.

What I would recommend you do at the outset of the session, as it says up on the screen there, is to ask your audience what are some of their favourite social strategies that they like engaging in. Let us know in the chat box. Obviously, that particular comment is not on the deck that you'd be using, but it's on ours. I'm going to bring Maria in and ask her to share with us one of her favourite social strategies, and if you've got a moment to share with us in the chat box one of yours, please do so. Maria?

MARIA ODDO: Well, one of the things that I really love doing is getting together with friends. We do a weekly group walk and I find that's a really great way to just talk the week through and talk about the week ahead. So it's a fairly long walk once a week and we try to get it in twice a week. It's better when the weather is better. But that's one of my favourite things to do each week, yeah.

DR BEN PALMER: Yeah, a nice walk with friends, and, of course, we're mixing in together not only a social strategy there but a physical strategy with it, and the more of these things we combine, the better. So that's a great share. Thank you. Thanks, Maria.

So in this webinar there are - and in your session, this slide is here for you to position, if you like, the sources of learning that are in this particular session. There are three of them. There's first learning from the content itself. Secondly, there's learning from the discussion. And, thirdly, there's learning from each other. As it says in the facilitator guide, all of us are already doing things, just like we heard with Maria there, to maintain and improve our wellbeing. In other words, there's a lot of knowledge that already exists in the group that you'll be standing on your feet in front of, and so a lot of the questions and things from this session are really designed to draw on participant-led learning, if you like.

Now, I'm going to be both, as you can hear already, not only sort of showing you how I would deliver some of these slides literally but also deconstructing them for you so that you've got some of the learning design behind the session. So, yeah, I hope you enjoy me stepping in and out of both of those frames, if you like, as we go through. So if you want to follow along, I'm on slide number 3, page number 5 in the facilitator guide. Here I would be drawing participants to page number 3 in the participant workbook.

If you look into the science of wellbeing, you'll find that wellbeing is best defined as a diverse and interconnected component of wellness that includes our mental, our physical, our social and our environmental wellbeing, and these sorts of things are all interconnected. If you look more deeply into the science of wellbeing, you'll see that these things contribute to whether we'll lead a long and healthy life in different ways. Indeed, Susan Pinker, who's really studied a lot of centenarians and done a lot of research on centenarians, has not only looked at the sorts of things that predict whether we'll make it to 100 or not but the power of their predictive qualities, if you like, and if you were to choose one or two of these things and put them at the top and at the bottom in terms of how well they contribute to wellbeing and whether you'll make it to 100 or not, what would you put at the top and what might you put at the bottom? As you can see, if you're looking in the facilitator guide, this is how it plays out. What Susan and others who've studied this in some depth have found is that the quality of our interaction socially or our social integration, if you like, and the quality of our close social relationships are very strong predictors of our health, our happiness and our wellbeing. So of all the things we can do - losing weight, getting the flu jab, breathing clean air - all of these things, of course, are important, but the quality of our day-to-day interactions and our close relationships are two very strong predictors of our wellbeing. So we've designed this session around those top two: how do we improve the quality of our day-to-day interactions and how do we include close personal relationships?

Indeed, in this webinar and in your session you'll be exploring the things we can do to boost the quality of our day-to-day and social interactions. You'll be spending some time helping people think about a close personal relationship that they might be able to improve and some of the actions that they might be able to take to do it, and then we've got a little bit at the end, a great little model for thinking about how to approach, if you like, others who are obviously in one of their moments that matters, if you like: how do we help others respond to a challenging situation effectively? And I'm going to walk you through a great model called EAR for that. So stick with us all along the way.

We are already all doing things to maintain our social relationships, but tonight and today I really want to encourage you to go that little bit further, to go for stretch. What might it mean to all of us to improve our relationships by 2, 3 or even 4%? Imagine that on a collective level. So no doubt you're already doing things. What I'd really like to encourage you to do today is just stretch that little bit further and think what small things might you be able to do above and beyond what you're already doing to polish up and finesse and enhance your day-to-day interactions and your close social relationships?

The other thing I'd like to encourage you to do is to think about the notion of continuous improvement. We all get this in education. We can apply it, of course, to our personal relationships and our day-to-day interactions. So I'd really like to encourage you to come back to this material. I like to think about improving my relationships at a high level once a year, and once a quarter I like to pick people in my life that I'm going to focus on, and I hope that you might find something like that that you could do for yourself.

Well, without any further ado, let's have a look at our first big area: social integration. How do we improve our day-to-day interactions with others? In a moment I'm going to play this short video and the video goes for about five minutes. While it wasn't its original intent, it teaches us a lot about the things that we might be able to do to improve our day-to-day interactions and the quality of our relationships. So, as you watch the video, you'll notice on page number 3 there there's a reflective question: "What did the video get you thinking about in terms of the things we can do to better connect with others and generally improve our day-to-day interactions?". As you're watching it, take down a few dot point notes. Be ready to share. If you were on your feet, you would be saying this to people just like I'm asking you to do now. And so here we go. Thank you.

(Video plays).

(Music plays).

MAN: You have a nice moustache. (Laughter).

MAN: One, two, three, four, five, six? Five. (Speaks in foreign language). (Laughter).

WOMAN: Are you new in London?  
  
MAN: Yeah. Eight months.

WOMAN: And are you alone here or with your family?

MAN: Alone. Sometimes nice. Sometimes not good.

WOMAN: Hi.   
  
MAN: Hi. (Speaking in foreign language).

WOMAN: I am keeping my eyes on you.   
  
MAN: Oh.  
  
CHILD: Hello.

WOMAN: I expected just my number.

WOMAN: Be a strong man.

MAN: Yes. Thank you so much.

MAN: We will go to the zoo maybe the next few days. Text if you would like to see it.

WOMAN: No worries. Can do it.

MAN: When I was looking into her eyes, I was trying to see what I could tell from the life that she’d lived and I think I could tell that there was a lot of experience there.

MAN: It doesn't matter, looking in the eyes or something. Just give yourself a chance to talk and to look at the other person.

(End of video).

DR BEN PALMER: Okay. So, as you can see, it's a lovely, reflective video that's designed to get us thinking about some of the things we can do to better appreciate and connect with others and, as I say in the workbook on page number 10, and I'm going to bring in Maria for some of her reflections in a moment, what I recommend you do if you're on your feet and you've got a bit of a group in front of you, maybe 10, 15, 20, even 30 people, is to put people into small groups of four or five people and just ask them to spend the next five or ten minutes reflecting on the video. If you've got a smaller group of three or four people, then you could just have that more intimate group discussion around it. But Maria, can I ask you, what were a couple of things that stood out for you, Maria, from the video?

MARIA ODDO: I've just got to start by saying every time I see that, Ben, I just get so emotional. It always brings a tear to my eye, and I think that that's so powerful. But lots of thinking and I think there's many things that you can take away from watching that. I thought that just the silence, that people actually sat in silence and looked at one another and it was really giving someone else the time and looking into their eyes and having that connection and not rushing into any verbal conversation but feeling the energy and the person through their - you know, their facial expression. I think that was just so powerful. But then it led into some dialogue and then you’ve actually got touch at the end and that importance of - you know, whether it was shaking the hand or a hug and that bond that's connected there. So I think that there's a lot of things that you can take away from that clip that really makes you think about how do you connect with people, and I think the key was that they gave each other the time to do it, yeah.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes, absolutely. There's a lot of things behind the scenes. They're not given any training or much context. They're strangers obviously to each other. But one of the things the video does well is it shows how we all have the natural biology for empathy and it can sometimes simply be just a context like that that helps bring that biology for empathy out and helps us sort of get a little bit more, if you like, connected with each other.

Let me dive into a couple of things that are in the workbook that come more from the science than the textbook, if you like, around it. So one of the things that we can do to better connect, if you like, with others is just to be a little bit more present and to demonstrate mindful listening and that's really one of the things that we see going on in the video. And I'd really love to hear from you - I can see a couple of people jumping into the chat box, which is great - what else can we do to be present and demonstrate mindful listening. Now, if you've never used Smiling Mind before, jump into Smiling Mind. That's one of those applications on mindfulness. It actually has specifically mindful listening exercises that you can do within it. One of the things it reminds us, like what we saw in that video, is 80% of communication is non-verbal, and if we just put ourselves in a frame of mind, if you like, where we're listening to not only what's being said but what's being felt, if we just focus and be a little bit more mindful around that, we can really connect beautifully.

So, yeah, what I'd like to do now is bring in Jane and ask Jane what are your thoughts on that question, Jane: what else can we do to be present and demonstrate mindful listening when we're connecting with others?   
  
JANE HANCOCK: I think, Ben, I know as a principal, you know, people come into your office all the time, like it's a swinging door, and sometimes you can be guilty of - you know, you're still typing, while they're talking to you, on your computer. And I have really tried to work on that in the last year or so, that when someone comes in, I just stop, even if I have my hands on the keyboard and I just want to keep typing, and to be very present with that conversation because you never know what's going on for that person or what they're going to tell you or, you know - you just don't know and you just might miss that moment that is very important. So I have tried to really work on that in my work life and even in my private life, you know, trying to turn the phone off so that I'm more present at home.

DR BEN PALMER: Yes. Fantastic. So putting down little distractions like that and getting into little routines around it too is sort of what we hear from Jane's response. Now, again, if you're on your feet delivering this session, you could call on a few people for their thoughts to that question there. That's what it's designed to do. So here we're drawing on participant-led learning and asking people to share their reflections.

Now, Jane, your reflection was a lovely one that leads us nicely into our second big thing that we can get, if you like, from this, and that is to allow our natural curiosity to come out, so generally showing that little bit more interest in others, whether it's stopping with the keyboard, putting the phone down, but also thinking about some questions that we might be able to ask, you know” how are people going, what are they up to, what sorts of things are going on in their lives. So I'd love to hear from you. If you're on your keyboard, let us know some of the things you do to demonstrate curiosity in your day-to-day interactions.

I'm going to bring Maria in in a moment for a reflection to that question from her, but one of the things I think in education we're naturally curious with our students and staff and everything that's going on, but we shouldn't forget that that's not the norm. If you really think about it - like Australia has a national day called R U OK? Day and we have that to remind us that it is really important to reach out, to check in with people, to make sure that they are okay, if you like. It saves lives. And it's a little reminder perhaps, if we're thinking about delivering this session more broadly, not to skip over this stuff too quickly because it really can be quite meaningful and impactful to people. Maria, if we could get a reflection from you. What are some of the things you do to demonstrate curiosity in your day-to-day interactions?

MARIA ODDO: I think for me it's asking lots of questions so, you know, trying to dig a little deeper, and if I'm not really clear about something, asking, you know, the key questions of why - you know, why. And then also researching. If there's something that comes up either in my work life or my personal life and I'm really not clear on it or haven't got the background to it, to actually find out for myself. So that's how I do it, yeah.

DR BEN PALMER: I like it. And we've got a great comment in from Anne-Marie here that says it's just spending the time to reflect and slow down a little bit. I think that's a great comment. So thank you, Anne-Marie, for putting that in. Yes, just being that little bit more relaxed in our interactions. In fact, one of the things we can do to demonstrate mindful listening and to engage that biology for empathy that I've been talking about is just to take six deep breaths, but there's a particular way of taking these deep breaths that helps, and that is a process where you exhale for twice the length of time that you inhale. So if you inhale for three seconds, exhale for six. If you inhale for two, exhale for four. Anyone who's done yoga will know that breathing exercise, or breathing exercises like it. But if we do those sorts of deep breaths, it actually engages our parasympathetic nervous system, and that's the nervous system that we want engaged if we really want to connect and be empathetic with the people that we're interacting with.

Okay. I'm going to ask Ian to come in and give us a couple of other reflections in the chat box because we're getting some great contributions in there in a moment, Ian. But let's go, thirdly, to the third big thing that I think that video helps us think about, and that is that we can plan and just be a little bit more intentional about our interactions. So I've got Ed Sheeran up here and this is a screen grab, if you like, of a performance he gave at the late Australian music industry legend Michael Gudinski's funeral. He actually wrote a song for that particular funeral service called ‘Visiting Hours’, and you can go and see it if you want to on YouTube. And I think performers like Ed and others are a great reminder of just the level of depth that some people go to planning and being a little bit more intentional. Jane, does anyone come to mind for you? Anyone you can think of of other people who do this kind of planning, do you think, and intentionality in their interactions? Does anyone come to mind?

JANE HANCOCK: I was sort of thinking about it and it's not someone famous, but I know my daughter last year in her social group - because she had people interstate and during the COVID lockdown - they were very intentional in keeping connected. So they were sending desserts to each other from Uber and so they'd each sort of do something like that for one another to stay connected, but it was very intentional the way that they did it. And then they sort of followed up with a little Zoom thing. And I thought what a lovely thing to do. Like we would never have done that before, but it made them feel connected and I'm sure they'll go back to that this week.

DR BEN PALMER: A great example and thank you for sharing. It indeed reminds me of one of the things that I do. If I really do want to have that more intentional connection, I just take a few minutes before I meet the person to set that intention mindfully, just to ask myself the question: how am I going to connect in this next meeting, who am I seeing, what's important to them, how am I going to be open to what they might be thinking and feeling and wanting from the dialogue?

In the participant workbook on page number 5 - and you can draw people's attention to that, if you're on your feet in front of an audience - we've got some great reflective questions there that people could be asking themselves, a little bit of self-talk, if you like, along the way. These are some of the questions I sometimes ask myself if I want to be that little bit more intentional and impactful with the people that we meet. Now, there's a number of them up here and what I'd be recommending you doing is just showing them to your audience as again a way of helping them think about the things that they might do. And I'd like to bring Maria in on that last question: what other things can we plan for or be more intentional about when we're setting up our interactions with others, Maria?

MARIA ODDO: Oh, I think that planning is important in all aspects of our lives, Ben. So I think that the questions - yeah, you could think about questions, things that you're wanting to share with a person, that you're willing to share, depending on context, and also, you know, sort of topics that you might have in common that you could actually have a conversation about. And I know that in my life there are certain people that I would have political conversations with, but I wouldn't have it with other people in my life. So being really mindful about that and sometimes savouring that for when you do have the encounter with those people, so that you're sort of up to speed with the information if it is politics or if it's sport or it might be books that you read or music that you like. So, you know, sort of thinking about all the different people in your life and planning for when you're going to get in contact with them and having that time together.

DR BEN PALMER: Yeah, excellent. Sort of around that what interesting and relevant information could I share. So the next step, if you like, of the session is to do a little practice application, and this is a great exercise. Basically what you do is you pair people up and you invite them to practise applying the three techniques that we've just debriefed, if you like, from that video: being present and demonstrating mindful listening, being curious, and planning and being just that little bit more intentional. So in this activity set-up - and you can see it in the facilitator guide, if you like; the notes for how to set it up and run it are on page number 15 in that - but essentially you put people into pairs and give them five minutes to share something or someone that recently moved them emotionally. This is quite a cathartic exercise. It really builds social bonds. You'd be surprised how awkward and how much people love it at the end of it. And so around the planning and being more intentional, of course, one of the things we recommend you do is give people three minutes to personally prepare a story of their own that they'd like to share. And so I'm going to give you three minutes and a little bit of a break from us talking now. I'm going to play a song. The song goes for about three minutes. While the music is playing, I'd love you to go to the participant workbook, page number 5, take the next three minutes for yourself just to think about a time when something or someone moved you emotionally. Was it watching a funny or a sad movie? Was it looking through old photos with mum or dad? Was it something one of your kids did with you on Mother's or Father's Day, by way of example? And, again, we've got some reflective prompts there to help you. So take these next three minutes to prepare your story, if you like, that you might share with your class when you're on your feet, like I am now, delivering this session. If you find the music distracting, just turn your volume down for the next few minutes. If you like it, keep it up and allow it to stimulate your thoughts. Thank you, everyone.

(Music plays).

Okay. And so after people have had three or four minutes to prepare, that's when you put them into pairs for 10 minutes to share their stories, and believe me, it's a really cathartic exercise. You'll see people really engage. There's actually a lot of science to this. It's, you know, getting people to share something that moved them emotionally. It's designed to really bring out pretty much a similar experience to what you saw in the first video that I played for you, and people will really enjoy that. Now, we don't have the luxury of doing that right now with you, but that's what you do and you can see the notes for it. You would debrief it by just asking a few people for some reflections on how they found the exercise and how they found indeed demonstrating those things.

And that brings us to the conclusion of the first part of the webinar, focused in on how we improve our day-to-day social interactions. You can see that there's an action plan there on page number 6 and some, again, reflective prompts to get people thinking about that notion of stretch, what could they do more of, what new things could they do and when will they revisit this - that continuous improvement part. And again there's a song that you can play while people do that. But, Ian, I thought I'd bring in you here. We've had some great reflections from Michael and others in the chat box. So what a perfect time to ask you to come in and just give us some reflections of the contributions that we've had from participants today who are with us. Thanks, Ian.

IAN HAMILTON: Yeah, thanks, Ben. Well, one of the themes that I've noticed coming through the chat box is a recognition that we've all got the capacity to build stronger connections with others. The thing that gets in the way for most of us is feeling busy and stepping off that metaphorical treadmill. So I've noticed comments coming through about lockdowns last year taught us the importance of connecting with others, learning more about the people around us, and that just takes a bit of extra time. So I think the message is powerful, yet simple, which is just making a little bit of extra time and spending a bit longer in these conversations and listening with more intention. And there was another great comment about just finding out something unique about somebody that can trigger a deeper conversation, and that's something I think - when someone does show an interest and be curious in you, it's significant and it can really open up some very interesting conversations.

DR BEN PALMER: Yeah, absolutely. So thank you to everyone who's been contributing in the chat box and, indeed, all this is designed to do is get people thinking about those two or three little extra things that they could do. We never know what impact it might have. We do know about the impact it has on our personal health. It's one of the most predictive things of whether we'll make it to 100.

Let's go to our next thing now. The next part of our webinar, if you like, is improving close relationships. And what we invite people to do firstly is to start thinking about someone they'd like to improve their relationship with. It might be a colleague, it might be a sibling, it might be a child, it might be a partner, it might be a friend. And you might go a little bit slower than I just did through those slides in helping people think about someone they'd like to focus on. Indeed, what we've got in the workbook - and if you're following along in the participant guide, it's page number 7 - is what's called a relationship circles activity, and essentially you start this by asking people and inviting them to give their circles meaningful headings. So for me I've got my three kids - in fact, they're out in the next room there - so I've got me as a father. That's the heading, if you like, for one of my circles. I've also got my partner, Georgia. My partner is another label, if you like, or heading, for one of my circles and I put her in there. I'm one of four kids, so I've certainly got siblings. I've got that as one of my headings with the names of my brother and sister in there. And then, of course, I've got my parents as well.

Now, I've only got four circles on the page. You could go more broadly than that. But the first step of this is just getting people to put meaningful headings and put the names of their close relationships in those circles. I'm going to bring Maria and Jane in here in a little moment to give us a reflection of those. So you put the names in and then you underline the name of someone you'd like to focus on, someone that you might like to do this for first; that is, think about how you might actually improve that relationship. And then you turn to page number 8. But, firstly, let's bring in Maria and then Jane. Who are you going to focus on, Maria? Would you mind sharing with us?

MARIA ODDO: Yeah, sure, Ben. I've actually thought about my parents - well, both my parents actually. So I've thought about working on that relationship, and that really started last year with COVID and knowing that I've got elderly parents and their vulnerability. So, yeah, that's my relationship circle.

DR BEN PALMER: Lovely. Thanks for sharing. And sorry for my phone going off in the middle of that. Jane, over to you now. Who are you going to focus on, Jane?

JANE HANCOCK: I was going to say my mother's actually living with me at the moment. That's just happened in the last couple of weeks. But I might say my brother. I think I need to put some time into that relationship because he lives up in rural Victoria and he's the only one that's not down here and I need to work out some ways of trying to be more intentional to improve and build on that relationship because we're all sort of in our bubble and he's up there on his own.

DR BEN PALMER: Yeah. I've got an affinity with that. I've got a brother who lives in Canada and I was thinking about him just as you were saying it. And that idea of doing this with a group of people is that as others talk and share, you'll be thinking about some of the things you're going to reflect on. So here, from a design perspective, you want to encourage people not just to think of one person but to have multiple people in there so that they can come back and do the continuous improvement part. But it's great. What Maria and Jane have given us is that point of focus, if you like, which we're hoping everyone will do as well.

So, without any further ado, let's now have a look at our relationship improvement suggestions. These are on page number 8 in the participant workbook and, if you're following along in the facilitator guide, page number 20. The lists here on page number 8 in the participant workbook are really just there as thought provokers. They're by no means definitive and, as you can see, they're very high level. They're almost like your Google search terms, if you like. So you don't need to necessarily know these in a lot of depth, but just be able to present them to your group and say, "Look, here's some ideas”. Obviously we've got an hour, or whatever amount of time, with us today. We haven't got the time to go through everything, but more than anything what I'd like you to do is just see if you can find one or two ideas that you could then go and research and flesh out a little bit more on your own in your own reflective space.

So the three main buckets, if you like: firstly, we can improve the quality and the amount of time, and you can see some of the things in there, like cooking together, listening or playing certain music, going for walks. We heard Maria talk about the walk she likes to do with her friends, by way of example. We can practise mindfulness meditation together, take some time to conceptualise fun or interesting things. I know a lot of people like to sit down and watch Netflix series together, by way of example.

The second bucket, if you like, is improving specific aspects of relationships. It might be intimacy; it might be your parenting; it might be how do I be a better friend. And here there's lots of blogs and lots of books on those headings, if you like, of your circles. And then the final bucket is to improve specific relational skills, like how do you demonstrate empathy, how do you facilitate difficult conversations? You might want to focus and enhance your skill at facilitating interesting conversations. I know with my kids at the dinner table, that's one of the things I decided to focus in on, you know: how do I make the dinner table more of an interesting dialogue? How do I get better discussion going with me and my partner and my three kids at the dinner table? And that's one of the things I focused on and focused in on, by way of example.

So essentially you would give people a little bit of time there to read over those individually. You could draw on people within your group for some thoughts and reflections as you're going through and then you move to the next stretch action plan, that close personal relationship: what things will you do to improve the relationship with the person you've identified, and, in the spirit of continuous improvement, when might you come back to this. Use the examples on page 8 in the workbooks as thought provokers, and when done, be ready to share in a small group. So, again, the method here: play a piece of music, give people about five minutes to do this work personally, and then put them into some small groups to talk about what they're going to do so that they can help get that peer-led learning and ideas from each other and then move into the next and final part of the webinar. Jane, what are you going to do? What have you been thinking about with that person you identified earlier?

JANE HANCOCK: I've been thinking that perhaps I could be maybe making time once a week to give my brother a call, because we probably don't do it very often, and just be a little bit more intentional about that, just to check in on him to see how he's going - he lives by himself - and make a real effort to do that. I'll have to put it in my calendar or something so it comes up and reminds me to do that because you just get busy and forget.

DR BEN PALMER: That's a lovely example and I love the practicalness of it. We're going to put in calendar invites to remind us to do things. In our physical and environmental strategies, we talked about habit formation, how do you form new habits, and doing things like that can really be powerful in terms of helping those new habits form. So, again, if you were on your feet, there's a piece of music that's embedded in the slide deck. It's Dionne Warwick's ‘That's What Friends Are For’. I'm going to keep us moving today rather than play it, but essentially that's what you'd be doing: breaking for five minutes, allowing people to individually do the exercise and then getting people in small groups to share with each other.

So let's move to the final part of our session, which is helping others in challenging situations. There's a lot of great research, and this isn't as difficult as it might sound to do. So let's have a look at some of the key principles first and then the EAR coaching model. So the first thing just to be mindful of, I think, when people are in a challenging situation is our own sort of reassuring platitudes, if you like, and other sort of positive messages that we can send. They don't always in all contexts land well and there's a great article in ‘The Age’. You can see I've put it in the participant workbook - it's still available, I checked it just the other day - about this sort of thing, but words like "everything will be fine", “look on the bright side", “yes but ", “because ", those things can be well intentioned but not land the way we'd like them to. And I'd love you to think about that: what words and phrases do you sometimes use that might fit with what we're talking about here? Maria, have you got one that you sometimes find yourself using in some circumstances like this?

MARIA ODDO: I think the one that I use most often is "This too shall pass". I think that's one of my go-to ones, or "It’ll be okay" - you know, "It’ll be fine", you know, "you'll get over it". Yes, I think they're the common ones. But, yeah, "This too shall pass".

DR BEN PALMER: Thank you. I like that one and I like Ian's comment too, "It could be worse". That's one of the ones I find myself sometimes - if I'm a bit on auto pilot and going a bit too quick - that I can drop in. "Give it some time" - thank you, Michael. That's another good one. It's not that these don't ever work, sometimes they are appropriate, but it's really important just to be wary of them and, you know, if you want to just polish up a little bit on the science of this, go read that article. It's actually quite a good one by Allyson Chiu on how our reassuring platitudes sometimes don't actually work the way we might intend them to.

Another great thing to be thinking about is this well-known psychological phenomenon called the empathy gap. It's particularly important when we've been in the situation, if you like, that we're seeing somebody else in. It's harder to empathise with people if we've been in their shoes. This article talks about the fact that there are a number of things that sort of go on, if you like, that cause us to fall into this. Two things. Firstly, we generally have difficulty accurately recalling how difficult a past adverse experience was and, secondly, overcoming obstacles can make us especially confident about our understanding of how to, and this is why parents often underestimate the anxiety of their kids around certain situations at school, by way of example. It's these two things combined: our, if you like, confidence about overcoming these sorts of things and our difficulty in accurately recalling just how challenging they were, that can combine to unintentionally diminish, if you like, our empathy towards others struggling with the same event.

The other thing, of course, that it can cause us to do is to jump into a mentoring mode where we're giving advice, as opposed to a listening and questioning mode, where we're really empathising. Empathy really is more about listening and questioning than providing advice. So something there just for us all to think about. We can overcome the empathy gap phenomenon by just being mindful of the fact that it exists and by little frameworks like the one that I'm going to share that can help us stay in that coaching frame, if you like. And if you want to follow along, page number 11 in the participant workbook, iIf you were on your feet like I am now, you'd be asking your participants "Let's go to page number 11 to look at a model that can help us stay in that listening and coaching frame", if you like.

So EAR: a coaching model for helping others. In the EAR model, E stands for ‘empathise’, and if we're in this phase, if you like, of the dialogue with someone, we're really asking questions that help the person explore how they're thinking and feeling. We might be acknowledging what we hear and paraphrasing back. Importantly, we want to be really listening not only to what's being said but what's being felt; mindfully listening, as we talked about before; suspending our own judgment. Towards the end of this phase, if you like, of the dialogue and the conversation is where you might start exploring what their desired outcome is, and I've got the ampersand there and "make it real". What do I mean by that? I mean sometimes when you ask people, "Ideally, what would you like to see happen here?", people have ideal outcomes that are very unrealistic and very difficult to achieve. And so what I mean by the ampersand and "make it real" is just to continue to ask questions that might help somebody think about an outcome that's more within their control, more within their sphere of influence, something that's more realistic, if you like, in terms of an outcome from the situation.

That becomes a great anchor point for the second part of the EAR model. In the EAR model, A stands for ‘alternatives’. There's nothing better than a plan B, is there, Jane? So helping people think about not only one way but multiple ways of tackling the issue that they're facing can be a really powerful way and thing to do, just in case that first strategy doesn't work or doesn't land the way we want it to.

So here you'd be asking questions that really help people explore a number of different ways, if you like, of responding to the event, and you can see some of the things that I've got there: what might the cost and benefit of that approach be; what might others say? You're really inviting the person here to engage in a bit of perspective taking and to come up with a number of different strategies. And, of course, you don't always have to be locked in to the coaching frame. There will naturally be times in the conversation where you'll be able to flip into mentoring and provide some advice. But here again we want to get that balance right and we want to be coaching more than we're perhaps providing advice, if you like.

And then, finally, the third part of the model, R stands for ‘response’. Now that we've got the desired outcome clear and we've got a couple of different plans, what one feels like the best thing to try, what will you do, how can I support you, when will you do things? Here you really want to just try to move that into a great action planning model. So I hope you enjoy the EAR model. I think we've got a great reflection from Rachel. In the chat box, Rachel says, "An extension of the EAR model is to add EATR. The T stands for ‘think’; think before responding. Absolutely. That's a great reflection. So thank you, Rachel, for adding that in.

So that really is improving wellbeing with social strategies and I use this slide just to say to people, you know, we've got to the end, but let's summarise the journey we've been on. We've explored the things we can do to boost the quality of our day-to-day social interactions. We've identified a close personal relationship you could improve and the actions that you might take to do so. And we've finished with a coaching model for helping others respond to their challenging situations effectively. Along the way, your participants, if you were working with a crowd like I am now, should have - and I know we haven't because we haven't had the luxury of that time together, but if we had had the full 90 minutes, of course we would have done those exercises and you would have had two separate action plans. Your crowd in front of you will have two separate action plans: one around the quality of their day-to-day interactions and one around that close personal relationship.

So, to that end, how I like to finish off this session is simply by asking the audience to reflect on what's been a key takeaway from the session for you. So, without any further ado, let us know in the chat box what you thought about the session. Let us know some of the key takeaways of it, if you like, for you. I'm going to bring Jane in here and ask Jane if she wouldn't mind reflecting on that question while we give you a chance to pop in a few things into the chat box. Thanks, Jane.

JANE HANCOCK: Yeah, thanks, Ben. I think some of the takeaways for me have been around boosting my day-to-day social interactions and I've already started planning how I'm going to catch up with people over the next seven days, to have some sneaky walks and meet people sort of in our 5Ks, and also to really try and build some connections and make some time that I can spend with my brother, even though he's like two hours away - how else can I sort of find a way to communicate with him and make him feel like he's with us, to make sure he's okay.

DR BEN PALMER: Thank you, Jane. Indeed, your contribution’s got me thinking about my action in this, which is to reach out to my brother in Canada and just schedule more regular catch-ups. So a great little example of how the participant learn learning can really play out in this webinar. Ian, we've got some great contributions coming in through the chat box and I'd like to bring you in in a moment for a reflection on the chat box. While I'm giving you a moment to think about what you'd like to say, don't forget this is a T3, a train the trainer session. This content has been designed to be led by you, so please use the facilitation guide, use the participant workbook. We can give them to you in Word and PowerPoint so that you can add/edit and do the things that you'd like to do. Spend some time with each other. If you can, now; if you can't, in the next few days: who might you do this for, what might you do, how might you do it and when might you do it? Ian, if I can bring you in here for a couple of reflections on the chat box, that would be great.

IAN HAMILTON: Yeah, absolutely, Ben. I think the theme of slowing down continues to come through the chat box and, you know, as I said earlier, if we do slow ourselves down, the quality of what we do does significantly improve. So that was a big theme. The other feedback that I've just picked up there is how powerful the EAR model can be. And as somebody who's used it in programs, don't be fooled by its simplicity. There's a lot of depth to the model and it really brings in everything that Ben has been talking about today. So I think the EAR model can be used situationally with pretty much anybody that you want to positively influence and it's good to see even some small adaptations to it as well coming through.

DR BEN PALMER: Absolutely. And I know schools who have been indeed using it. They've been creating some scenarios to even practise around using the EAR model - working with a difficult parent, helping a student through a challenging situation. You probably know those scenarios better than Ian and I and the rest of the gang here. So if you wanted to really take it up a level, coming up with a couple of scenarios to practise around can be a really, really great way.

Now, we started with a video. We want to end with an inspirational video for you. This is a video - a montage, if you like - of some great positive things that have been done in lockdown throughout Europe. And given the situation we're all facing over the next few days, I hope you enjoy this. And when it finishes, I'll just ask Maria to come in and wrap up. So stay with us. Sit back and reflect and just enjoy this video for the next few moments. Thanks, everyone.

(Song ‘Take Me Home, Country Roads’ plays).

DR BEN PALMER: Thanks, everyone. A great reminder of the power of our social relationships. Well, Maria, a big thank you to you and the team at Bastow and to Ian tonight and to everyone who's attended. This brings us to the conclusion of the Wellbeing series that we've run. It would be great to let you just finish things off and wrap things up. Thanks, Maria.

MARIA ODDO: Oh, thanks so much, Ben. I just want to first of all thank Jane Hancock, our Principal in Residence at Bastow, for being in every webinar of this series. So thanks so much to Jane. And, Ben, to you and your team at Genos, thank you for partnering with us for this series this term. You've extended the learning and provided a train the trainer model, and we've had so many emails, phone calls and comments from our school leaders and their leadership teams about how useful the resources are and how they will be able to use them in their schools, both with teachers, their education support staff and also their students. So thanks, everybody, for joining us and we really hope that you've enjoyed our very last session and looking forward to having people hit the viewings of the recordings in the next couple of weeks and into next term. So thanks again and wishing you all well.