

43rd APS Annual Conference



Media Release

23 – 27 September 2008: Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart Tasmania

Large percentage of students in school struggling with social and emotional skills

More than 40 per cent of Australian primary and secondary school students have poor social and emotional skills, according to a study of 11,000 participants.

Symptoms of poor social and emotional skills include low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, anger, anti-social behaviour and under-achievement at school.

Study author from the University of Melbourne, Professor Michael Bernard, said poor social and emotional skills can have a significant impact on student motivation and engagement in the classroom.

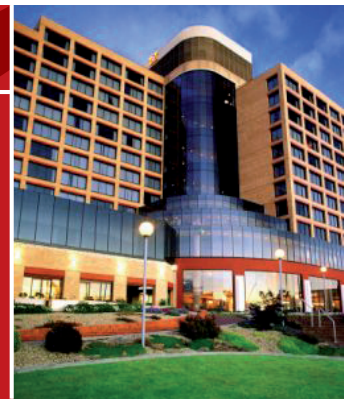
“Our research found two-thirds of students say they are not doing their best in their schoolwork. Most of these students are lacking the confidence, persistence, organisational and teamwork skills to help them perform at the best of their ability,” said Professor Bernard.

Reflecting on the data, the largest of its kind collected in recent years in Australia, Professor Bernard highlighted the low level of resilience skills of school students.

“Of equal concern are the large number of students who say they cannot describe how they feel, are unable to resolve interpersonal problems and who have difficulty calming down quickly when upset,” said Professor Bernard.

“In addition, more than 50 per cent of young people say that at school, they are not learning about how to communicate their feelings, how to cope with stress and how to resolve conflicts. This is a real wake-up call.”

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“Because of these findings, we need a commitment in the new national curriculum being designed to spell out the social and emotional skills that should be taught at each level of schooling. We are planning to do this for English, math, science, history, geography and languages. We really need to do this for social and emotional learning as well.”

Professor Bernard said the research has found parents, extended families, schools and members of the community, have a role to play in helping to build students’ social and emotional skills.

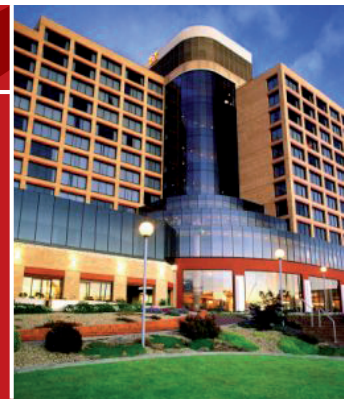
“It is essential for young people to learn the ‘ABC’s’ of social and emotional skills, including ways to manage their emotions, resolve conflicts and build positive relationships with peers and adults”.

The study was conducted in conjunction with the Australian Council for Educational Research and investigated the social and emotional wellbeing of prep to Year 12 students from across 80 schools. More than 6,000 teachers were also surveyed.

Professor Bernard will present the research findings this week at the Australian Psychological Society’s 43rd annual conference, ‘*Psychology Leading Change*,’ in Hobart at the Hotel Grand Chancellor from 23 to 27 September.

To download the full research report visit: www.apsconference.com.au

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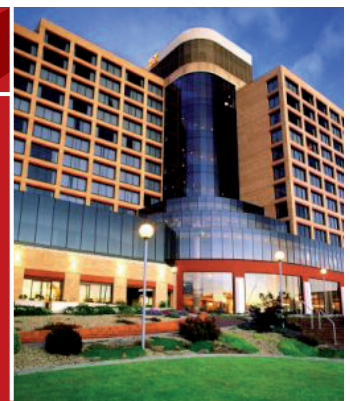
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Professor Bernard offers these top tips for parents to help build their children's social and emotional skills:

- 1. Start a dialogue featuring the importance of social and emotional skills.**
Have conversations with your child about different social and emotional skills and how they help everyone to be successful, happy and to get along. Talk about ways to be resilient, persistent, confident, organised, make friends and resolve conflicts.
- 2. Catch your child "in the act" of using a social and emotional skill and give feedback.** For example, you could say: "You stayed calm in that difficult situation and showed resilience" or "The persistence you showed in doing those hard math problems really helps you to do your best." Applaud other siblings, friends and adults who display good social and emotional skills.
- 3. Discuss stories a child is reading or a movie a child has seen.** When talking about books or movies, discuss how the characters portrayed used their social and emotional skills and how these skills influenced the outcome of the story.
- 4. Practice what you preach.** For example, if you are discussing the importance of effort and not giving up (persistence), you need to show your child that you don't readily give up.

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To coordinate an interview with **Professor Michael Bernard**, please contact **Elaine Grant** on 0412 683 068



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