

# Sparklers: A guide for teachers

We've often been asked for classroom resources that support the active improvement of children's mental wellbeing, for use in Canterbury schools. And that's what Sparklers is all about.

Made up of more than 30 strength-based activities, it's built on the philosophy that all kids are awesome and need a safe, secure base from which to grow. Fun, fresh and easy to use, the activities are suitable for Years 1 – 8 at all levels and where applicable, have worksheets attached. They vary in length from 10 minutes to a 'happy hour'.

Sparklers is about helping our tamariki to feel good, be at their best and embrace the things that make them unique.

But it's also about you. From talking to Canterbury teachers we know how challenging it can be to find time for yourself. Between prepping lessons, caring for students and managing extra commitments, it's easy for 'looking after number one' to fall to the bottom of the pile.

Our hope is that each time you come to this work, you'll take a moment to notice how you're doing and think about even one small thing you could do for yourself, to find balance and feel good. How you're doing really matters. And you'll be better able to support the wellbeing of your students if your own tank is full.

## Curriculum and evidence-based

Sparklers is based on a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing as described in Te Whare Tapa Whā. It's designed to foster children's physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing.

Activities are explicitly linked to the five Key Competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum. They are also based on The Five Ways To Wellbeing – evidence-based actions that promote mental wellbeing for people of all ages, and directly support the Curriculum's objectives for living and lifelong learning.

## The Five Ways to Wellbeing are:

1. **Connect:**  
With your friends, whānau and the people around you.
2. **Be Active:**  
Move your body, get outside, do physical activity you enjoy.
3. **Take Notice:**  
Enjoy the moment, notice the world around you, cultivate mindfulness.
4. **Learn:**  
Be curious and seek out new experiences. Literally exercise your brain.
5. **Give:**  
Practice kindness; give your time, words and actions.

Building these actions into our everyday lives can improve our wellbeing and boost our resilience, and many of these will already be an important part of your students' world at school, because of you!

To learn more about The Five Ways, check out this simple guide from [The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand](#).

## WELLBEING IS VITAL FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

**STUDENT WELLBEING IS STRONGLY LINKED TO LEARNING.**

**A STUDENT'S LEVEL OF WELLBEING AT SCHOOL IS INDICATED BY THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH LEARNING, THEIR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOUR AND THEIR SATISFACTION WITH LIFE AT SCHOOL. IT CAN BE ENHANCED WHEN EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICES ARE ADOPTED BY SCHOOLS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES, WHĀNAU AND THE COMMUNITY.**

**OPTIMAL STUDENT WELLBEING IS A SUSTAINABLE STATE, CHARACTERISED BY PREDOMINANTLY POSITIVE FEELINGS AND ATTITUDE, POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS AT SCHOOL, RESILIENCE, SELF-OPTIMISM AND A HIGH LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

# Our top tips: Ways to use Sparklers

## Mix, match and repeat!

As with so many skills, learning positive wellbeing practices is more about repetition than novelty. Many activities will improve with practice so don't be disheartened if you're not seeing major changes straight away.

Instead, take heart. Whenever you do these activities, you're laying the foundation for future growth. So even on days where nothing much seems to change, you've done something important and valuable.

To make repetition as easy as possible, we've designed Sparklers to be modular and flexible.

## Activities can be incorporated into lesson plans or used to:

- bring calm and focus
- warm students up for other lessons or learning
- extend sharing during circle time
- address barriers to learning
- support transitions from one activity to another
- understand and manage challenging behaviour
- strengthen social connections.

## How to find activities

From our main page, you can select an activity directly or sort them by:

1. Activity type (games, worksheets, craft, experience),
2. The curriculum's TKI key competency;
3. Wellbeing topic.

## Sparklers is made up of eight core wellbeing topics.

- Balancing energy
- Managing emotions
- Using our senses
- Noticing our world
- Being ourselves
- Feeling good
- Showing kindness
- Giving and gratitude

Once you've selected an activity, you'll see that it contains a snapshot of the science, a discussion guide to boost understanding and simple instructions of what to do.

Some will be familiar and others will be new, but we start each activity with an inquiry-based framework to promote reflection and understanding, and warm students up for the learning outcomes that follow.

## Tailoring the activities to suit your students

We've used a developmental approach, so each topic includes a range of activities, from concrete to more abstract.

The activities are designed to be flexible, so if you can adjust them to better support your students' emotional and social learning needs, go for it! No-one knows your class like you do.

On that note, while the activities are designed to be positive and strengths-based, we recommend having an 'unspoken' rule that students can opt out if they want or need to. If a child has a heightened response they may just need a calm space to retreat or debrief. And, that's okay.

As always, if you have concerns about a student's wellbeing or their response to a particular activity, we'd suggest talking with your pastoral team.

## Involving parents and whānau

We know teachers love to create strong links with parents and whānau and this is especially important in terms of a child's wellbeing, as their world is mostly made up of school and home.

To help parents support the work you're doing, we've included a parenting portal from our main Sparklers page.

This portal gives full access to All Right Parenting, which is full of useful articles, resources and tools. It includes a link to all the parenting courses available in Christchurch, and access to our six printable parenting guides that align with Sparklers and cover the key topics parents often ask us about.

Titles include 'How to help your kids':

- Be calm
- Manage worries
- Be grateful and kind
- Feel good and have fun

And there are two others, titled: Looking after yourselves - Mums, and Looking after yourselves - Dads.

Full of practical ideas and information, these take-home guides link perfectly with our Sparkler activities. Where appropriate we'll mention which sheet to share if you haven't already, or you may prefer to provide parents with the full set early on.

The choice is yours!

## Keen to connect with families?

To let parents know about Sparklers and give them access to our handy parenting resources, email or send this [handy pdf letter](#).

# Appendix 1: Extra info and ideas

## Creating A Calm Space

The school environment can be an overwhelming place, especially for students who struggle socially, have difficulty regulating their emotions or are working through a period of transition (i.e. new entrants, transferring students, or children who are adjusting to changes at home).

Research shows that when people are uncomfortable, they're easily distracted. Temperature, lighting and furnishings all play a role in creating physical comfort, but psychological comfort is equally important.

Having a calming space in your classroom promotes wellbeing and can play a key role in improving learning outcomes. We would suggest creating a calm space in your classroom where students can go if they are feeling anxious, upset or need some time to 'cool off' and self-regulate.

Peace educator Linda Lantieri, describes this concept brilliantly on page three of her article: [Nurturing Inner Calm in Children](#) (see 'Create a Peace Corner').

It's important that this area is communicated as a "peace corner" or "calm space" rather than a place children go when they misbehave or are disruptive.

Some great wellbeing spaces we've seen have included soothing colours, calming nature photos, cushions and blankets, indoor plants, sensory aids (see below) and even a teepee! Students should be able to use this space when needed and you might like to quietly check in with them, acknowledging their efforts to find calm. They can rejoin the group as agreed/needed or when they're feeling good.

To boost engagement, we'd suggest involving students in the creation of this area, deciding how it will be used and making sensory aids you can keep in this space (see our Sensory kete, Smiley Stress Balls, and Glitter Shaker activities).

## Teacher suggestions we love!

- For new entrants, read [Invisible String](#) by Patrice Karst and keep this book in your wellbeing space.
- Play calming music at the start of the day, after breaks or during quiet time to foster focus and relaxation.

Have other ideas for creating happy classrooms? Please get in touch. We'd love to hear from you.

## Recommended reading and resources

Articles on wellbeing

- [What is 'wellbeing'?](#) | My Wellbeing, by Sovereign
- [The Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) | Mental Health Foundation of NZ
- [Five Ways best practice guide](#) | Mental Health Foundation of NZ
- [Understanding mindfulness](#) | Mental Health Foundation of NZ

## Children's wellbeing

- [Foster children's wellbeing at School](#) | Kids Matter
- [Starting School](#) and [School Refusal](#) | Kids Matter
- [Mindful Kids, Peaceful Schools](#) | Greater Good

## Taking care of YOU too

- [Balance Work, Love and Play](#) | Psychology Today
- [How To Turn Stress into a Good Thing](#) | Greater Good
- [How self-compassion can help prevent teacher burnout](#) | Greater Good

## Stories about building resilience

- *Wishes and worries*, by Julie Burgess Manning (ages 5-8, key topic: worry)
- *The Rising Tide*, by Sabrina Dickson (ages 5-8, key topic: anxiety)
- *Mr Jelly*, by Roger Hargreaves (ages 5-10, key topic: fears)
- *Mr Worry*, by Roger Hargreaves (ages 5-10, key topic: worry)

## Our other resources

All Right has many other resources that are free, Canterbury-focused and designed to promote wellbeing and strengthen relationships.

The following could be used in your classroom or shared with parents.

- [Tiny Adventures app](#): Fun, easy family activities
- [Whānau Effect](#): Māori wellbeing resources for whānau
- [All Right? App](#): Daily actions for Living Brighter
- [Strengths quiz](#): Discover your hidden strengths

You may also like to order our [free posters and print resources](#) for your classroom.

# Appendix 2: Cool initiatives & resources

## Character Day

- An outcome of Let It Ripple and their emphasis on positive psychology – character day is a day to celebrate ‘character strengths’ - something all schools can be involved with. The webpage is also filled with loads of other resources you may want to use in your classrooms (any day)! We also love [Let it Ripple short films](#), particularly - Science of Character (8 mins) and Adaptable Mind (11 mins).

## Pause, Breathe, Smile

- A collaboration between the Mental Health Foundation and the Mindfulness Education Group, this is New Zealand’s own locally developed and researched mindfulness programme for schools, which we think is terrific.

## Yoga Warriors

- This is a Christchurch based initiative providing a 10-week yoga programme in schools combined with Te Reo Maori. There are many links to the curriculum and we know first hand how great Letitia (your instructor) is.

## MHERC Library

- MHERC (Mental Health Education and Resource Centre) provides seminars and presentations, but also has an extensive free library which includes many of the books we recommend as a part of Sparklers for teachers and parents. This is really worth checking

out!

## ERO (Education Review Office)

- Another template framework from ERO including great resources and research links with firm New Zealand/Aotearoa foundations. Designed for ages 12 - 19, but still very relevant for primary schools as well. We also like their 2013 publication which can be found [here](#).

## Innovative Resources

- These guys have some fantastic resources, particularly their Strengths Cards, so if you’re looking to extend the work you’re doing around children’s strengths and some new ways to do this, check Innovative Resources out.

## IPEN (International Positive Education Network)

- Information, a library, articles, oodles of helpful resources to help navigate a positive wellbeing strategy in your school.

## Mindful Cup

- Weekly newsletters, updates and a facebook page created by Aucklander Ara Simmons, who is a Nga Manu Awhina cluster 8 specialist teacher of Learning and Behaviour and an independent Educational facilitator. She is particularly focused on bringing mindfulness as a practice into teaching and parenting.

## **AFTER BOOKS AND VIDS FOR KIDS?**

**IF YOU’RE AFTER RESOURCES THAT TEACH KIDS HOW TO MANAGE WORRIES, BE KIND AND FEEL GOOD, HERE ARE [OUR TOP PICKS](#).**

# Appendix 3: Connect with parents

## Dear parents, caregivers and whānau

Just as we look after our physical fitness, there's heaps we can do to boost and strengthen our mental fitness too.

The definition of 'wellbeing' is feeling good and functioning well and whatever age we are, we can all benefit from learning handy wellbeing tips and tricks.

To help kids learn things that can help them now and in the future, we've developed Sparklers - an exciting new resource that's full of fun wellbeing activities that are curriculum-based and linked to the Five Ways to Wellbeing (see right).

To check out these activities, head to: [www.allright.org.nz/sparklers](http://www.allright.org.nz/sparklers). Doing so may help answer why your child is suddenly giving you more compliments, or willing to chat about how they're doing!

Another reason to investigate Sparklers is you'll gain immediate access to All Right Parenting, where you'll find:

- Fantastic guides on 'How to help your kids':
  - Manage worries
  - Be calm
  - Be grateful and kind
  - Feel good and have fun
  - Plus: Looking after yourselves for Mums
  - And: Looking after yourselves for Dads
- A handy list of the free parenting courses available in Canterbury
- Routine charts for teaching kids to take responsibility for parts of their day and feel good about it (they're also very useful for helping kids with worries to feel secure and happy)
- The Tiny Adventures app, whānau activities, parenting articles and more!

We hope you'll check it out, and if you have any questions, suggestions or ideas on things you'd like to see and read, simply email [hello@allright.org.nz](mailto:hello@allright.org.nz).

Best wishes and ngā mihi  
The team at Sparklers

### The Five Ways to Wellbeing

Building these evidence-based actions into our everyday lives can improve our wellbeing and boost our resilience. Many of these will already be an important part of your family's life but it's always nice to know they're having a positive effect!

#### Connect

With your friends, whānau and the people around you.

#### Be Active

Move your body, get outside, do physical activity you enjoy.

#### Take Notice

Enjoy the moment, notice the world around you, cultivate mindfulness.

#### Learn

Be curious and seek out new experiences. Literally exercise your brain!

#### Give

Practice kindness; give your time, words and actions.

If you're keen to let parents know about Sparklers and would like to give them access to our handy parenting guides and resources, simply [email](#) or [print a copy of this letter](#).

# Appendix 4: Shareable Images

If you'd like a visual way to share Sparklers and All Right Parenting with families, please feel free to download and use the below images.



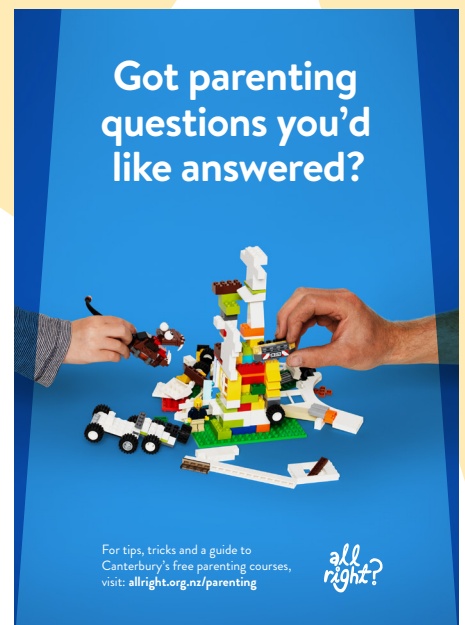
Sparklers ad (landscape)



Sparklers ad (portrait)



Parenting ad (landscape)



Parenting ad (portrait)