WHOLE-SCHOOL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Emotional Backpack

PROJECT

Four Conversations.
One Healthier School Culture.

A practical whole-school reading, reflection and action program.

Helping schools understand the invisible emotional demands of work, and build cultures where nobody has to carry it all alone.

> One book.
> Four stages.
> Four conversations.
> One school term.



WHY THIS PROJECT MATTERS

THE INVISIBLE WEIGHT OF WORKING IN SCHOOLS

Schools are deeply human workplaces.

Every day, teachers, education assistants, school leaders and support staff manage demands that rarely appear on timetables or workload calculations. They respond to challenging behaviour, support distressed students, navigate difficult conversations, carry other people's stories and make decisions that affect lives.

Much of this work is meaningful. Some of it is unavoidable. **But not all of the emotional weight is necessary.**

Some demands arise from the essential nature of education. Others are created or intensified by unclear expectations, inconsistent support, competing priorities and the way work is organised.

The Emotional Backpack Project gives staff a common language for these experiences, and a practical process for improving the conditions in which they work.

> The goal is not an empty backpack. The goal is to understand what we carry, what makes it heavier, and how we can carry it together.
>
> THE EMOTIONAL BACKPACK PROJECT



Pebble. Pebble. Rock. Pebble.

None of it appears on a timetable. All of it has weight.

THREE SOURCES OF WEIGHT

WHAT I BRING

The personal circumstances we bring into work.

SUPPORT THE PERSON

WHAT I PICK UP

The emotional demands we encounter through relationships.

PROCESSING AND BOUNDARIES

WHAT THE WORK PUTS IN

The demands created or intensified by working conditions.

REDESIGN THE WORK

This isn't another program asking staff to become more resilient.

It's an opportunity to understand the demands of the work and strengthen the conditions that help people thrive.

FOUR STAGES. FOUR CONVERSATIONS. ONE SCHOOL TERM.

The project follows the four parts of *The Emotional Backpack*, guiding staff from individual awareness to collective understanding and practical school improvement. Each stage ends in one 20-minute conversation.

INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS	COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY	ORGANISATIONAL ACTION
Understanding what we carry	How we support one another	Better working conditions

STAGE 1

Lessons 1–3
Weeks 1–2

WHAT WE CARRY

Making the invisible visible

Staff explore the backpack metaphor and recognise how everyday emotional demands accumulate.

GUIDING QUESTION
What are we carrying?

OUTCOME
A shared language for understanding emotional load.

STAGE 2

Lessons 4–7
Weeks 3–5

WHERE THE WEIGHT COMES FROM

Understanding emotional demands

Staff explore emotional labour, compassion fatigue, responsibility, control and the demands of caring for others.

GUIDING QUESTION
Where does the weight come from?

OUTCOME
Greater understanding of significant emotional demands.

STAGE 3

Lessons 8–10
Weeks 6–7

PUTTING IT DOWN

Developing sustainable practices

Staff reflect on recovery, boundaries and the personal and organisational practices that make demanding work sustainable.

GUIDING QUESTION
How do we put the backpack down?

OUTCOME
Practical strategies for sustainable work.

STAGE 4

Lessons 11–12
Weeks 8–10

CARRYING IT TOGETHER

Building a school where nobody carries alone

Staff identify ways to strengthen support, reduce unnecessary demands and improve working conditions.

GUIDING QUESTION
How do we carry it together?

OUTCOME
An achievable School Emotional Backpack Action Plan.

READ
Short lessons, read independently

REFLECT
Three guiding questions, kept private

DISCUSS
20 minutes in an existing staff meeting

ACT
A practical takeaway each time

WHAT SCHOOLS RECEIVE

SMALL CONVERSATIONS. MEANINGFUL CHANGE.

AVAILABLE

THE BOOK

The Emotional Backpack for participating staff.

PILOT RELEASE

FOUR REFLECTION GUIDES

Guided reading, reflection questions and discussion activities.

PILOT RELEASE

FACILITATOR'S TOOLKIT

Simple instructions and meeting plans for school leaders.

PILOT RELEASE

PRACTICAL SCHOOL TOOLS

Personal reflection resources, a School Rock Register and an action-planning template.

PILOT RELEASE

EVALUATION RESOURCES

Brief surveys and review tools to assess the experience and track commitments.

NOW IN PILOT

The book and School Rock Register are ready now. **Pilot release** resources are being finalised with WA pilot schools.

OPTION ONE

SCHOOL-LED PROJECT

Schools receive the books and implementation resources and facilitate the four stages through their existing staff meeting structures.

OPTION TWO

RSO PARTNERS GUIDED PARTNERSHIP

The full program with professional support, which may include an introductory presentation, facilitator preparation, consultation and a concluding leadership workshop.

BY THE END OF THE TERM, SCHOOLS WILL HAVE WORKED TOWARD

- A shared language for emotional demands
- Better conversations about support and recovery
- Greater understanding of avoidable sources of emotional load
- Practical commitments to healthier working conditions
- A clear process for reviewing agreed improvements

Works alongside your existing processes. The project complements a school's psychosocial risk management. It does not replace formal hazard identification, risk assessment or consultation.

LET'S BUILD A SCHOOL WHERE NOBODY HAS TO CARRY IT ALL ALONE.

RSO PARTNERS
RESILIENT SAFE OPTIMISED

Beyond Wellbeing. Beyond Compliance.

Enquire about bringing The Emotional Backpack Project to your school.

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