

BELONGING

Matters

Simple moments
Deeper connections
Better mental health

Kia ora e hoa,

Mental Health Awareness Week 2026 is all about the power of belonging – and for kura/schools, ECEs and tertiary communities, that message matters every day.

We all deserve to feel like we belong. When young people feel included, seen and valued, they are better placed to learn, connect with others and take part in school life. Research shows that experiences of exclusion can negatively affect wellbeing, increasing feelings of loneliness, stress and emotional distress.

Loneliness is a growing issue for young people in Aotearoa. Compared to other age groups, loneliness is highest among young adults aged 15–24 (Stats NZ, 2023).

That's why schools and learning settings have such an important role to play. A strong sense of belonging helps taura/students feel safe, supported and connected to the people and places around them.

When taura feel they belong at school, they are more likely to attend, participate and engage in their learning – and those everyday connections can make a meaningful difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

Mental Health Awareness Week is a great opportunity to reflect on what belonging at your school looks like. You might like to pose these questions at a staff meeting, or write about them in your school newsletter:

- What does belonging look like at our kura?
- What sense of belonging does our community/ neighbourhood feel they have to our school?
- What sort of welcome do visitors or parents/caregivers receive when they come here?
- How do our taura see themselves reflected in the spaces and places around our school?
- What events are on our school calendar that highlight diversity and inclusion and make your students feel that they belong? e.g. Matariki, Diwali, Pink Shirt Day, Schools' Pride Week?



IMPORTANT REMINDER:
Mental Health
Awareness Week starts
on day one of Term 4.
Start your planning now!

**Mental Health
Awareness Week** 12–18 | 20
OCT | 26

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

mhaw.nz


mauri tū, mauri ora
**Mental Health
Foundation**
OF NEW ZEALAND

HOW TO BRING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK TO LIFE

There are lots of ways to celebrate at your kura/school, ECE or tertiary institute.

Spread the message

Over the coming weeks you'll see Mental Health Awareness Week on your social media feeds, in magazines and newspapers, on the radio and TV, and billboards.

It'll be hard to miss. And we'd love for you to share the kaupapa too.

- **Order a free Event Pack** or download our posters and display them around your school or campus. Visit mhaw.nz/resources.
- Add an item in your **school newsletter**. Here's some copy to get you started:
*At [insert your school name] we know how important it is that our students and staff feel they belong, which is why we're excited to take part in Mental Health Awareness Week 2026 (12-18 October). This year's theme is **Belonging Matters**. We'll be marking the week by celebrating the small, everyday moments that create connections and build a stronger, more inclusive school.*
- Download a Mental Health Awareness Week **social media sticker** from our website. Add your own photo that celebrates belonging at your school and share it on your social channels. When you share content, be sure to tag us [@mhfnz](https://twitter.com/mhfnz), and use [#mhawnz](https://twitter.com/mhfnz).
- Use the InCommon **Belonging Calendar** exercise to identify the cultural dates that matter most to your staff, students and community and ensure these events are part of your school calendar every year.

Classroom activities

Use Mental Health Awareness Week as a reason to start important kōrero with your taura about the power of belonging. Here are some ideas:

- **Create a class agreement** around what belonging looks and feels like in the classroom.
- End the day with a **reflection**: Who helped you feel like you belonged today?
- Make sure every new student has a **buddy**.
- **Create a 'Belonging Box'** where students can anonymously share ideas for making school more welcoming.
- **Create an 'Our Community'** display featuring families, cultures, and places that are important to students.

We also have lots of **free resources** and activities you can download from mhaw.nz/resources.

- **Kōrero cards** – use the printed set in the 2026 Event Pack or download your own.
- **Bingo** – we have versions for tamariki and older rangatahi to discover what they have in common with their classmates.
- **Tamariki quiz** – for students to use one-to-one to better understand a classmate.
- **Chatterbox** – print, cut and fold to create a fun chatterbox for students to use to connect with each other.
- **Mindful colouring** – print and create space for people to pause, relax and get creative.

Thank you for taking part in Mental Health Awareness Week 2026 and for everything you are doing to build wellbeing and hauora in your kura/school or learning community.

Ko au ko koe, ko koe ko au. I am you, and you are me.

Our whakataukī reminds us that when we see one another, value one another, and care for one another, we create an environment where everyone feels they belong.