

# Doctors in Secondary Schools Best Practice Guide



# Contents

<b>Best Practice Guide</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Introduction .....	3
School integration of DiSS program .....	3
School leadership.....	4
Extra tips .....	4
School staff .....	4
Building awareness of DiSS .....	5
Promoting the DiSS clinic.....	5
Involving the school community.....	5
Familiarising students with the DiSS clinic.....	6
Youth-friendly service.....	6
Creating a youth-friendly environment.....	6
Support students to attend the DiSS clinic.....	6
Accessibility .....	7
Consent and confidentiality .....	7
Making and attending appointments.....	7
Making an appointment.....	7
Examples of best practice appointment systems .....	8
Extra tips .....	8
Student participation .....	9
Student involvement and leadership.....	9
Collaboration.....	9

## Abbreviations

<b>The department</b>	The Department of Education
<b>DiSS</b>	Doctors in Secondary Schools
<b>PHN</b>	Primary Health Network
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>PN</b>	Practice Nurse
<b>Medical centre</b>	The medical clinic responsible for the GP and PN
<b>SPL</b>	School Program Lead
<b>Parent</b>	Parent/carer(s)

# Best Practice Guide

## Introduction

The Doctors in Secondary Schools (DiSS) program provides vital health and wellbeing support to students who might not otherwise easily access a General Practitioner (GP).

Designated School Program Leads (SPL) are responsible for the overall coordination of the DiSS program within their school and are critical to its success.

SPLs provide essential support to the GPs, Practice Nurses (PN) and students. They play an important stakeholder management and coordination role in promoting the program across the school community inclusive of staff, students and parents/carers, liaising with participating medical centres, and implementing strategies to increase student participation.

The advice offered in this guide aims to support schools to run a high-performing DiSS program, increase student participation and achieve best practice service delivery.

## School integration of DiSS program

For the successful implementation and integration of the DiSS clinic within a school, it is crucial that the SPL role is appropriately resourced and supported by school leadership.

Collaborative relationships between school staff and DiSS clinic staff are also essential, including a shared vision to provide primary healthcare alongside a whole-school health and wellbeing 'wrap-around' approach. This can include individual support, health and wellbeing education and health promotion activities.

Schools with well-integrated and effective DiSS programs ensure:

- the SPL is actively engaged with the program
- school leadership support the appropriately resourced SPL to work independently and autonomously
- DiSS clinic staff feel supported and integrated within the school
- the DiSS program is integrated with broader school health and wellbeing activities.

## School Program Lead

The SPL plays a crucial role in the success of the DiSS program in each school. Specifically, the SPL should:

- have the time and capacity to support the program, students and clinic staff on clinic days and at other times as required
- promote a non-judgemental and non-stigmatising approach to adolescent health
- support students to clarify their health needs, address barriers to attending appointments and provide information about services available through the program
- encourage student participation in the promotion of the program
- lead health promotion and health literacy conversations within the school
- establish a DiSS clinic leadership team and coordinate regular meetings
- work collaboratively with health and wellbeing staff to promote a whole school health and wellbeing approach, including coordination of regular meetings between clinic staff and health and wellbeing staff

- lead clinic promotion and relationship building activities between clinic staff and the school community to encourage a coordinated whole-school approach to primary healthcare
- discuss and implement improvements to DiSS service delivery with stakeholders
- ensure that the DiSS room/portable clinic remains a clean and welcoming environment for students
- adhere to the program's privacy and confidentiality principles regarding student appointments and attendance at a clinic.

## School leadership

To maximise the success and integration of the DiSS clinic within the school, school leaders should:

- advocate for the program to increase broader school community acceptance and promote the importance of primary healthcare for students on a regular basis
- ensure the SPL is appropriately resourced and supported to undertake this critical role
- ensure the SPL is included in leadership decisions regarding DiSS facilities and operations
- provide school staff health and wellbeing professional development opportunities
- discuss the DiSS program at school council level
- ensure school health and wellbeing processes and policies are reviewed to incorporate the DiSS program

## Extra tips

**Medical support** — from a medical perspective, the DiSS clinic can be considered the students' 'medical home' where they can receive referrals to various health and wellbeing supports and other clinical reference points.

**Safety** — if required, monitor safety in and around the DiSS clinic/portable to ensure DiSS staff safety and minimise risk, particularly if the DiSS clinic/portable is located some distance from the school office or other school staff.

**Flexibility** — recognise that general practice is under ever-increasing demand and that flexibility may be required to support the DiSS clinicians and staff in ensuring the medical centre partnership is retained at your school.

## School staff

To maximise the success and integration of the DiSS clinic within the school, school staff should:

- be well-informed about the program and adolescent health needs
- understand the internal DiSS referral and appointment making systems
- be flexible regarding appointment making
- release students from class for appointments while maintaining confidentiality
- help integrate clinic staff within the school community
- help embed the DiSS program within health and wellbeing programs and broader school culture
- adhere to the program's privacy and confidentiality principles regarding student appointments and attendance at a DiSS clinic.

## Building awareness of DiSS

High performing DiSS clinics effectively promote and increase awareness of the program year-round to improve access for students.

Schools with high awareness of the DiSS program:

- actively promote the DiSS clinic within the school
- build the clinic's profile within the broader school community
- familiarise the students with the clinic's facilities.

These schools ensure students know:

- what services the DiSS clinic offers
- how to access the DiSS clinic and make an appointment
- what they can expect at an appointment
- other services and support that can be accessed through a referral from the DiSS clinic
- how to give feedback about the program and their experience.

## Promoting the DiSS clinic

Specific strategies to promote and embed the DiSS program at the school include:

- promoting the school's participation in the DiSS program and what the DiSS service offers on its public website, Compass/student management systems, newsletters, social media etc.
- using posters, banners, sandwich boards, electronic message boards (e.g., Dr X is in) etc.
- ensuring there is an option for students to independently book a confidential appointment without going through a staff member (e.g., through an online booking form, scanning a QR code etc.)
- regularly promoting the DiSS service to the school community through health and wellbeing sessions, assemblies, conversations with students etc.
- encouraging teachers to promote the DiSS program to students
- ensuring promotional material and information is available in the school community's languages
- building familiarity of the DiSS GP and PN with students and staff (this can include clinician bios and/or Q&A in school communication channels, short videos of clinicians introducing themselves, displaying posters with clinician photos and bios throughout the school etc.).

Schools can also contact their PHN for additional promotional ideas.

## Involving the school community

Engage the whole school community by:

- a whole-school launch of the DiSS clinic
- inviting clinic staff to regularly engage with students at assemblies, health and wellbeing activities etc, to build health literacy and increase awareness of the program
- inviting clinic staff to school staff meetings and engage in networking opportunities with school staff
- inviting clinic staff to activities within the broader school community, such as health and wellbeing activities, open days, school celebrations etc.

- ensuring parents understand the purpose and function of the clinic, including support and referrals available for students
- inviting parents to meet with the SPL and clinic staff
- supporting well-informed students to become advocates for the program among their peers.

### **Familiarising students with the DiSS clinic**

Encourage student participation and ownership of the DiSS program by:

- giving Year 7 students and students new to the school an orientation tour of the DiSS clinic
- giving students a class tour of the DiSS clinic during health and wellbeing sessions
- making drop-in sessions available for students to access information and make appointments
- students could create promotional videos of the DiSS clinic as a project.

### **Youth-friendly service**

Schools with high-performing DiSS clinics consciously create a youth-friendly service. Embedding the DiSS program within school culture can support a whole-of-school approach to adolescent health and wellbeing.

Normalising conversations about adolescent health and access to healthcare provides an opportunity to build health literacy. This can lead to students better understanding their own health and improve their language to discuss health and wellbeing, which may assist prevention and early intervention of health issues.

### **Creating a youth-friendly environment**

Ensure the DiSS clinic is:

- a comfortable and youth-friendly space, with bean bags, student artwork, plants, mindfulness activities etc. and is welcoming for students seeking information and walk-in appointments
- open to students visiting the clinic to become familiar and comfortable with it
- supportive of student ownership, through clinic decoration, naming the clinic, how it is promoted etc.
- encouraging of student feedback around service delivery improvements
- supportive of students from diverse backgrounds.

### **Support students to attend the DiSS clinic**

Assist students by:

- ensuring staffing consistency as much as possible to build students' trust in the program
- encouraging students to attend with support of a friend, parent or staff member where appropriate, if they wish
- ensuring students can see the GP alone, if they wish
- encouraging school staff to lead and promote open conversations with students about adolescent health, access to healthcare and support available through the DiSS clinic.
- ensuring a reminder system is in place to help prevent missed appointments.

## Accessibility

Increase student accessibility to the DiSS clinic by:

- addressing students' barriers to accessing the program (e.g. cultural safety, embarrassment, low confidence, confidentiality worries) and providing appropriate support
- ensuring students are aware of the consent and confidentiality policies to allay concerns about privacy
- offering walk-in appointments
- ensuring processes around attending appointments are in place to keep waiting times to a minimum
- ensuring information and resources regarding adolescent health issues and the services provided by the DiSS program are readily available to students and the broader school community, including in different school community languages
- building students' health literacy during appointments and school health and wellbeing activities
- considering the availability of, and access to, local external services that can provide students additional health and wellbeing support.

The DiSS Operational Guide has further information on physical accessibility (Infrastructure and equipment) and financial accessibility (Funding/accessing the GP).

## Consent and confidentiality

Increase student comfort and confidence in visiting the GP by ensuring:

- the DiSS consent and confidentiality information sheets, and/or how to access them, are readily available to students and the broader school community
- SPL and clinic staff are well-informed to provide information and reassurance regarding consent and confidentiality
- student access to the program is discreet (e.g., leave passes and appointments recorded in student management systems are marked as an 'appointment' rather than a DiSS or wellbeing appointment)
- walk-in appointments are available for students who do not wish to pre-book
- SPL and clinic staff adhere to the DiSS consent and confidentiality policy regarding information sharing (e.g., seeking a student's permission to speak to each other, if necessary, on each occasion of working with the student).

## Making and attending appointments

High-performing DiSS clinics have a successful appointment system. Appointment systems and processes that maintain student confidentiality and privacy to attend the DiSS clinic promote a school culture that is youth-friendly and supportive of student health and wellbeing and their access to healthcare.

These systems encourage students to take an integral role in their health and related care, leading to better health outcomes and improved student health and wellbeing. Booking a GP appointment should be easy and accessible.

### Making an appointment

The SPL and clinic staff should establish an appointment making system and processes that clearly outline their roles and responsibilities, and that will work best for the school.

How to book an appointment at a DiSS clinic should be widely communicated and promoted to the school community.

The appointment making process should ensure:

- students can confidentially book an appointment in several ways (e.g., through SPL or health and wellbeing staff, directly with clinic/GP/PN, online booking system)
- students are not asked to disclose their reason for making or attending appointments
- parents can make appointments for their child and school staff can make referrals for appointments.
- Students understand that if the school uses a student management system that provides parental access, parents may be notified that the student attended a 'Health and Wellbeing Appointment'.

All DiSS clinics should reserve time for walk-in appointments.

## Examples of best practice appointment systems

### *Example 1*

- Students independently book an appointment online via a web application booking system integrated into the school's existing website, such as [Easy!Appointments](#)
- If required, the SPL supports students to make appointments
- Students are provided with a leave pass on the day of their appointment to release them from class.

### *Example 2*

- Students contact the SPL who coordinates the appointment list, including follow-up appointments
- The SPL provides the appointment list to the PN to enter it into the medical centre appointment system
- The SPL and PN work together to remind students about their appointment and fill available appointments from a waiting list
- Students are provided with a leave pass on the day of their appointment to release them from class.

### *Example 3*

- Students request an appointment time via a booking sheet kept discreetly at school reception or other secure location
- The SPL confirms appointment times with students
- The PN collects the appointment list and enters details into the medical centre appointment system
- Students are provided with a leave pass on the day of their appointment to release them from class.

## Extra tips

Regularly monitor bookings to maintain appointment numbers. Work towards fully booked sessions with waitlist and be proactive in replacing absent or "did-not-attend" (DNA) students with other students from your waitlist.

Undertake a critical analysis of any decrease in appointment numbers, identify reasons, and take actions to rectify.

Use a shared access booking system, such as Googledoc, to allow both school and clinical staff to access the document and prepare for upcoming sessions by gathering all required student information before it begins, in line with consent and confidentiality procedures.

## Student participation

Schools can adapt the DiSS program to best suit their individual context and circumstances by encouraging and supporting student participation. Students can contribute to DiSS clinic design, service delivery and ongoing quality improvement in many different ways. With increased participation, students develop a sense of ownership in creating a responsive service and supportive school environment where they are well-informed about DiSS services and their right to healthcare.

Schools with increased student participation in the DiSS program are those where:

- students are involved in service design, promotion and delivery
- students provide input and feedback on the DiSS program to their SPL and/or school leadership
- students are involved in creating and supporting a youth friendly DiSS space.

## Student involvement and leadership

Examples of successful student participation strategies include:

- the existing student leadership team establishes DiSS representative roles and activities
- DiSS student representatives are well informed and advocate for the program among their peers by leading promotion activities, creating promotional resources, naming the clinic and decorating it with student artwork
- DiSS student representatives coordinate student feedback on service design and delivery formally (e.g. anonymous suggestion box, discussion at student council meetings) and informally (e.g. conversations with other students and SPL/school staff)
- DiSS student representatives regularly meet with SPL and clinical staff to discuss feedback and improvement suggestions.

## Collaboration

Establishing and integrating a DiSS program into a school requires the connection, engagement, and collaboration of a range of stakeholders all committed to its success.

DiSS collaborating partners include:

- The Department of Education (the department), including the central DiSS team, regional offices and Area-based health, wellbeing and specialist services
- PHNs
- GPs
- PNs
- school principals and/or assistant principals and/or SPLs
- medical centres

- schools and the health and wellbeing teams
- students.

To encourage and strengthen collaboration:

- have pre and post clinic meetings with DiSS clinicians to discuss issues, debrief and handover
- regularly attend DiSS quarterly meetings with your PHN and DiSS clinicians and monitor progress of the DiSS program
- contact your PHN to help overcome any barriers/challenges you and/or your DiSS staff may be experiencing
- ensure you and all new staff recruited to work on DiSS read the DiSS Operational Guide and understand your roles and responsibilities
- encourage and support direct linkages between DiSS staff and the school's health and wellbeing teams, including the opportunity for DiSS clinicians to attend school health and wellbeing team meetings.