Supporting Pain Awareness and Research in Kids and Youth (SPARKY) Youth Advisory Group
Pain Smart Study, Faculty of Medicine and Health
The University of Sydney, NSW, 2006, Australia

30 September 2026

Dear Teachers, Educators and Principals,

We hope this letter finds you well.

We are writing to you on behalf of SPARKY, the Youth Advisory Group for the Pain Smart project at the University of Sydney. We, as a group of Australian high school students, including rural and regional areas, find it critical that our current schooling programs provide pain education and management for our youth. Approximately 1 in 5 children (20-25%) in Australia experience chronic pain. We are writing this letter to better your schooling community. Every student will experience or know someone that has experienced chronic pain and illness in their life and therefore it is integral that we equip them with the opportunity to be ready to support it at any moment. In this letter, we will propose why it's important to teach pain education at school, in public, independent, catholic and alternative education settings.

Pain is an unavoidable part of life; for this reason, we need to make sure that every young person has a thorough understanding of it and the tools to manage it. Some young people will be faced with a short-term, mild form of pain, but many will suffer chronic pain in their lives. That is why it is important to educate young people about pain management from an early age and provide tools for managing their specific type of pain, so they can go about their lives confident in their ability to cope and seek help if necessary.

Pain has the potential to impact many areas of a young person's life. This can include their overall wellbeing, behaviour, performance, relationships, and their capacity to participate to their upmost extent in school. The ongoing burden of pain can also impact how well students are able to attend school, connect with others, and feel a sense of belonging at school. As such, it is important to try to understand how pain impacts students beyond just their physical health and consider their overall wellbeing and capacity to participate in school.

Pain can have a lasting impact on young people especially when uneducated about pain, influencing our behaviour, wellbeing and ability to perform at our full potential. Even when pain is not always outwardly visible, the struggles students experience can still be present and significantly affect our everyday life. Often, young people may attempt to hide their pain due to misinformation, fear of judgement or the pressure they feel from parents, peers and themselves. This pressure can cause us as students to suppress our personal experiences

rather than seek support, ultimately allowing our struggles to become more difficult to manage or symptoms to be further worsened.

Small changes in the way that schools support young people facing pain can have a big impact on their wellbeing and ability to engage with their learning. To support pain in an adolescent does not always need clinical experience and expertise. It is important for the teachers, School Counsellors and Welcome teachers to work in coordination ways. Offering flexibility, understanding, regular communication and support can reduce the barriers to achievement at school that many face when managing their pain. Although small steps, these can make a significant difference to a young person's feelings of being able to confidently manage their pain at school, as well as the impact on their engagement, overall wellbeing, and sense of belonging at school. Creating a culture and environment at school that is supportive and understanding does not always have to involve making big changes; sometimes, small practical steps can make the biggest difference.

It is vital for adults and young people (especially in schooling environments) to understand and be educated about what pain is and the significant impact of living with chronic illness. Pain education should be clear, simple, free of jargon and abbreviations and relatable so that more people can understand pain and respond with empathy. In order to shape an atmosphere that is supportive, inclusive and makes every individual feel heard, we must work together in a coherent environment.

Awareness and education around pain management is equal to other preventive health awareness. It is important that education be delivered in school and in the community. Pain does not only affect physically but leaves a long-lasting impact on individuals as it affects them emotionally, psychologically, and mentally.

Warm regards,

The members of SPARKY Youth Advisory Group

SPARKY
YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP
Supporting Pain Awareness and Research in Kids and Youth.