Recoded – Changing the way we game

A prevention program to support children and young people.

Support Services Training Pack

Presentation for

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

12:30pm – 1.30pm, Wed 08 December 2021

Acknowledgement of Country

'In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.'

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…to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

Recoded – Changing the way we game

✓ To reduce the potential harms of excessive gaming and the effects gambling elements within video games have on young people.

✓ To guide children and young people to intentionally think about their gaming behaviours. : **"if *the game is no longer fun, you're done*"**

✓ To educate on the links between gambling and video games. (Loot; Skin betting)

✓ Provide strategies around positive behaviour to support families.

✓ Improves help-seeking behaviour for children and young people and their peers.

✓ To embed a sustainable program in schools. *Relevant Lesson plans have been designed to support this.

Program Outcomes

There is greater community awareness of the links and harms between excessive gaming and gambling

There is an improved service response that identifies and addresses risk factors in children and young people

Communities and schools are equipped with a clear understanding on how to effectively intervene when gaming (gambling) is causing harm

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Common themes parents and professionals want to understand that we will cover today.

The positives of video gaming & managing gaming

How to help children and young people when their gaming habits seem excessive?

An understanding of Gambling within video games. What are the risks?

Signs of harmful gaming behaviour; Addiction

Prevention

Early Intervention

Harm Reduction

eSafety Commissioner
Australian Government

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Note: Does not focus on neurodivergent. Further research required for children and young people characterized by autistic or other neurologically atypical patterns of thought or behaviour.

Video Gaming industry

- One of the most profitable entertainment businesses in the world.

- Is worth more globally than the music and movie industries combined and continues to grow

………..and is deliberately designed to get players hooked.

Understanding video gaming and what it brings to a young person, when played in moderation

- fun
- entertaining

Skill development based

- Teamwork
- Problem Solving/Decision making
- teaches players about winning and losing

Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Social connection (multi-player online games).
- Sense of belonging
- Part of a community
- Feeling accepted
- **Doing something they are good at and enjoy doing.**

Video Gaming today

The ease of accessibility from smart phones to consoles and desktops, gamers immerse themselves in imaginary worlds which can be far more appealing than real life.

Since covid began, there has been a significate increase in video game console sales.

Exposure to this vast growing and changing digital space needs to be understood, to avoid complications within the family home early.

A snapshot of the video gaming environment you may not have heard of:

eSports
Playing and watching esports (multi-billion dollar business),think of a large soccer match with video games.

Streaming (Twitch & YouTube)

Think of a pop celebrity but with fans watching pro gamers play.

Crypto currency

Online games are adopting cryptocurrency

Ways to Game play
- Own device
- Local Server
- Public-multiplayer server
(eSafety website)

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Gambling in video games

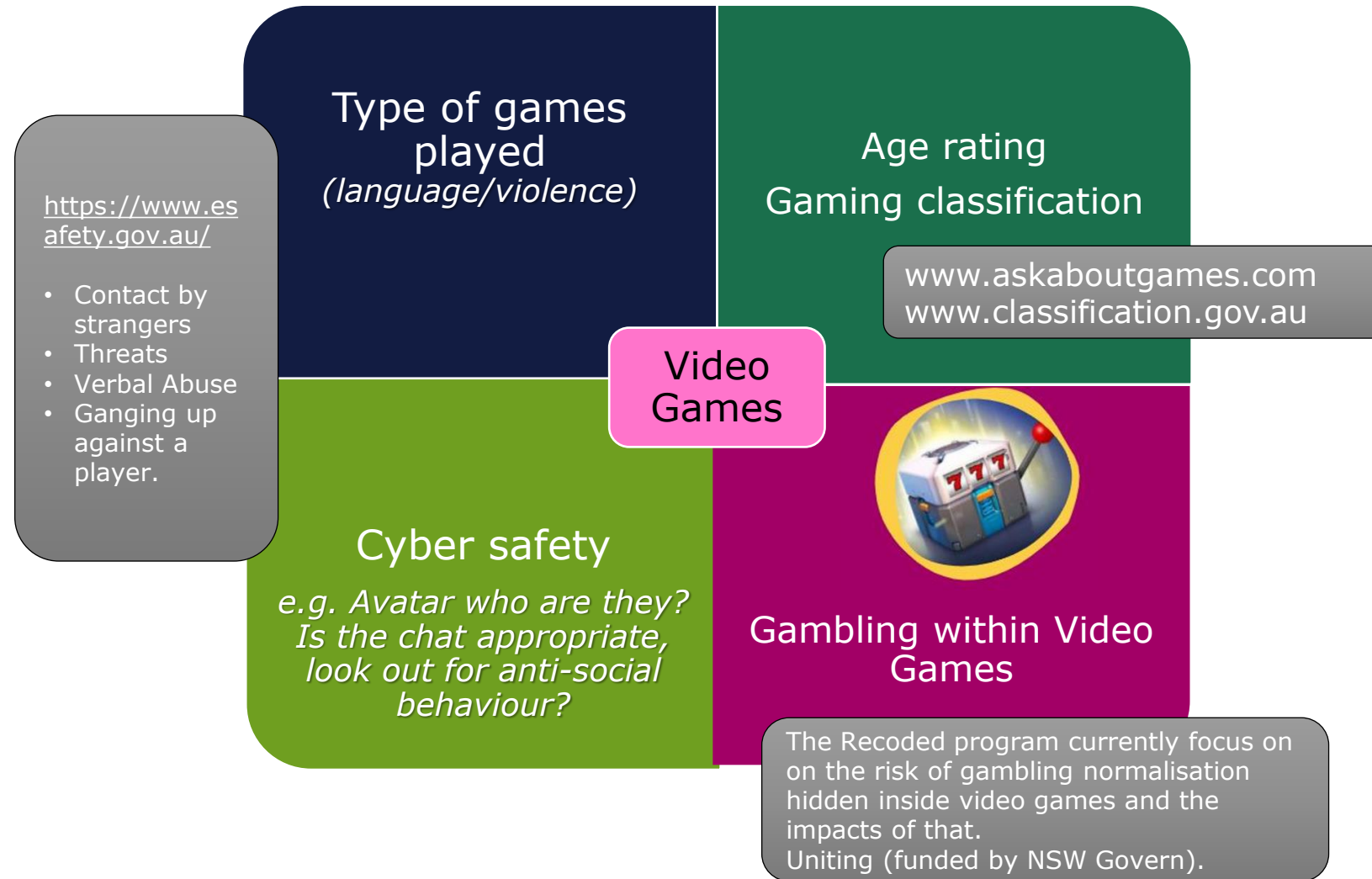| Loot box	Skin betting	Free to play Casino Games
In game locked box/crate,	A skin changes the appearance of characters/weapons to 'enhance the look'.	The algorithms make players believe that winning is based on skill, but this false belief leads players into an unrealistic view that the odds of winning are favourable, leading them to use real world money. (simulate blackjack; poker machines)
The reward mechanism is designed similar to a pokie machine which creates classical conditioning. This powerful behaviour response to chase the reward can become addictive, whether you have won or lost.	'skin gamble' occurs through unlicensed skin betting sites.	

"*We're already at a point where the games have become extremely sophisticated, and in some ways, players are not always aware of how much the game is actually playing them.*"
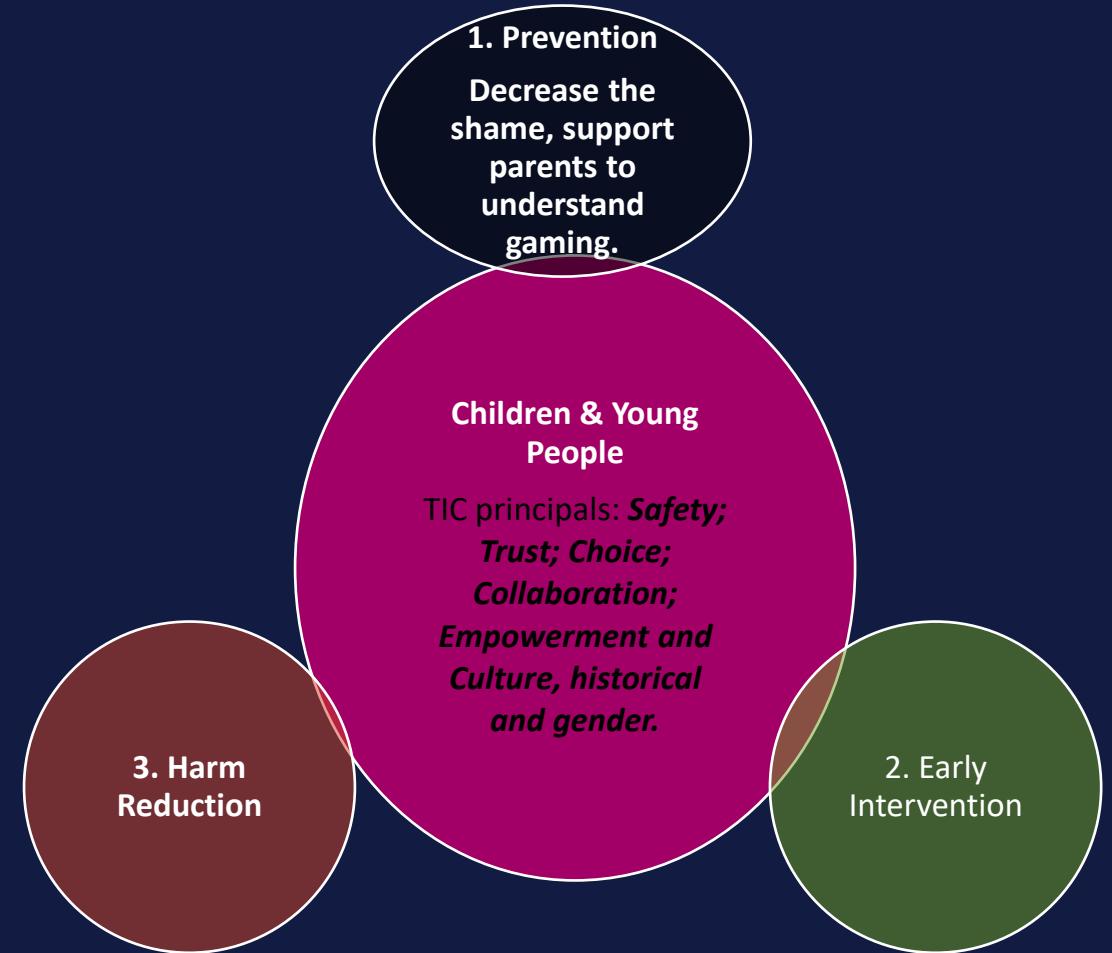
Video gaming has many factors to think about

Type of games played *(language/violence)*

Age rating Gaming classification

www.askaboutgames.com
www.classification.gov.au

https://www.esafety.gov.au/

- Contact by strangers
- Threats
- Verbal Abuse
- Ganging up against a player.

Video Games

Cyber safety

e.g. Avatar who are they? Is the chat appropriate, look out for anti-social behaviour?

Gambling within Video Games

The Recoded program currently focus on on the risk of gambling normalisation hidden inside video games and the impacts of that.
Uniting (funded by NSW Govern).

the eSafety guide

A guide to social media, apps and games with links to online safety information and how to report abusive content.

ask about games
From The VSC Rating Board

Games for all platforms
See the latest classification ratings for computer games on all platforms.
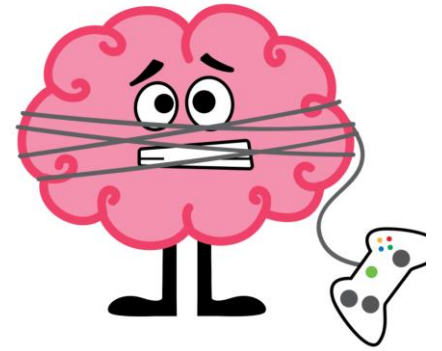
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Strategies for families and professionals

- What sits behind the game
- Harmful gaming/gambling behaviour and understanding the signs
- The game and the brain
- Who is at risk

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1. Prevention

Decrease the shame, support parents to understand gaming.

Children & Young People

TIC principals: *Safety; Trust; Choice; Collaboration; Empowerment and Culture, historical and gender.*

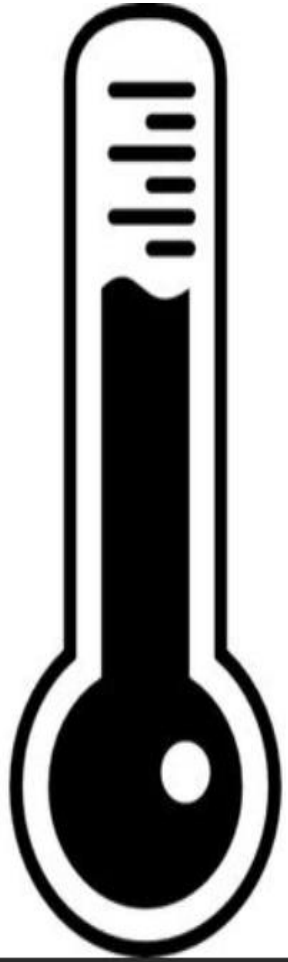**3. Harm Reduction**

2. Early Intervention

The Game and brain - Behaviour

- As children and young people's brains are not fully developed until they are 25yrs of age, this impacts self regulation; rational thinking and processing emotions when in a heightened state of game play.

- Remember, the dopamine release that comes from gaming is so powerful, it shuts the prefrontal regions of the brain down.

- When a video game is turned off after gaming, children may be irritable and angry initially. Give then time to regulate and settle back to reality.

Neurons that fire together, wire together

Brains are a learning organism

Rewards in game fire up the dopamine.

The more reward the more the brain gets stronger.

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What might be classified as Problematic gaming – what's behind the behaviour.

I NEED to play

If many hours are spent gaming, this does not necessarily mean that they have gaming addiction. However, **it becomes a problem if gaming starts to interfere with daily life, if thoughts, feelings and behaviours shift.**

- Harmful video gaming-gambling is not a standalone issue.
- Harmful gaming or addiction is not the primary problem but a response to something else.
- Understanding the reason 'why' a child games is step 1 to addressing the behaviours.

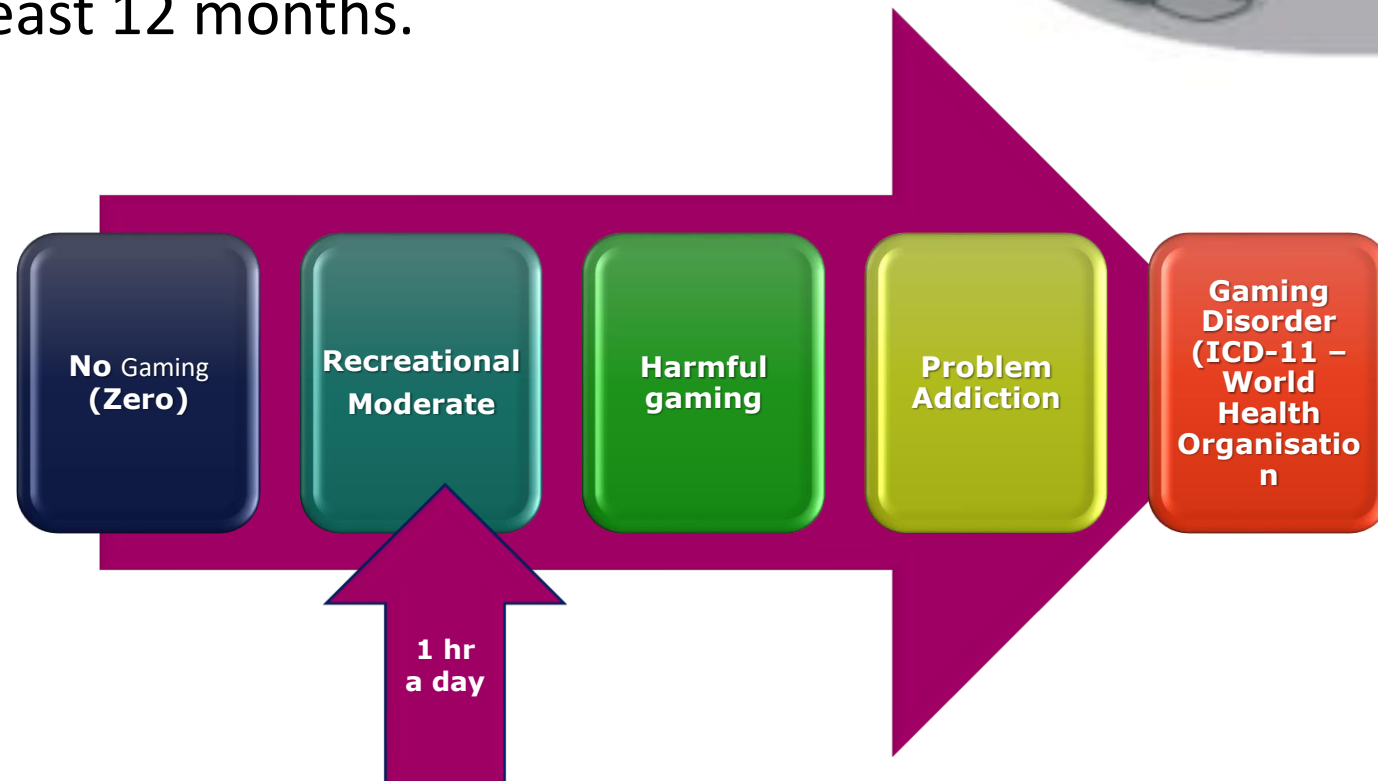But this holds true for any kind of addiction!

I WANT to play

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Gaming 'disorder' in DSM IV

For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behaviour pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, or other important areas of a person's life and would normally have been evident for at least 12 months.

If gaming hours are longer, ensure it's BALANCED with other parts of life.

No Gaming (Zero)

Recreational Moderate

Harmful gaming

Problem Addiction

Gaming Disorder (ICD-11 – World Health Organisation)

1 hr a day

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There are levels. Strategy 1 - Prevention

Start early
Building healthy relationships and setting consistent boundaries early

- **Set boundaries** Work with your child to create boundaries that you all feel will help create a safe gaming experience.

- When setting boundaries, ensure consequences are discussed and stuck to when the child goes outside the boundaries.

- **Set Timers** Gaming is a flow state, meaning they are not able to just switch of the game, just like sitting on social media, hours can go by before realising.

- **Timing** Play only at certain times of the day, avoid just before bedtime.

- **Include exercise** into daily routines.

- **Location** Play only in certain areas of the house for example shared living areas.

- **Include gaming in your family routine** If your child enjoys playing video games, create a routine that works for your family with a mix of gaming as well as other interests.

- **Reduce** your child's exposure to gambling content by having an open discussion and exploring other games.

- **Get engaged** Take an active interest. "Understand the lingo", look at walk-throughs together.

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Strategy 2 – Early Intervention

Noticing signs - Using strengths-based and person-centred approach to understand an individual gaming habits.

- Start to find out what gamers enjoy about video games. Have open and safe conversation around their digital world. Are their other activities they also enjoy outside of video gaming.

- Strength based – Tap into the motivation to get the same meaningful outcome that is less risky.

- Enable parents to see video gaming differently.

- Give parents tools (strategy 1)

www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/online-gaming

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Strategy 3 – Harm Reduction

Excessive Gaming/Problematic Gaming: **Seek help early** when gaming is not engaged appropriately and combined with other emotional and physical signs

- *Example: anti-social behaviours, school disengagement/refusal, mood changes (dysregulation), fatigue; poor diet; inability to stop playing; misuse of money; or a decrease in overall physical health.*
- Validate the gamer by being with the gamer in the moment.
- Separate the child and young person as the problem.
- Self-Directed recovery (not one size fits all); strength-based – Curiosity stand-point "what's gaming like for you?"
- Person-centered
- Motivational interviewing
- Responding positively to a young-persons story. Hear the stories and reframe
- Set up an individual support package.
- K10
- Behavioural agreement

Excessive video game playing can suggest the presence of an underlying mental health issue.

Trauma Informed Care approach helps understand the motivation behind the behaviour, it is important to look at the complete picture in order to determine whether someone has a gaming problem or not.

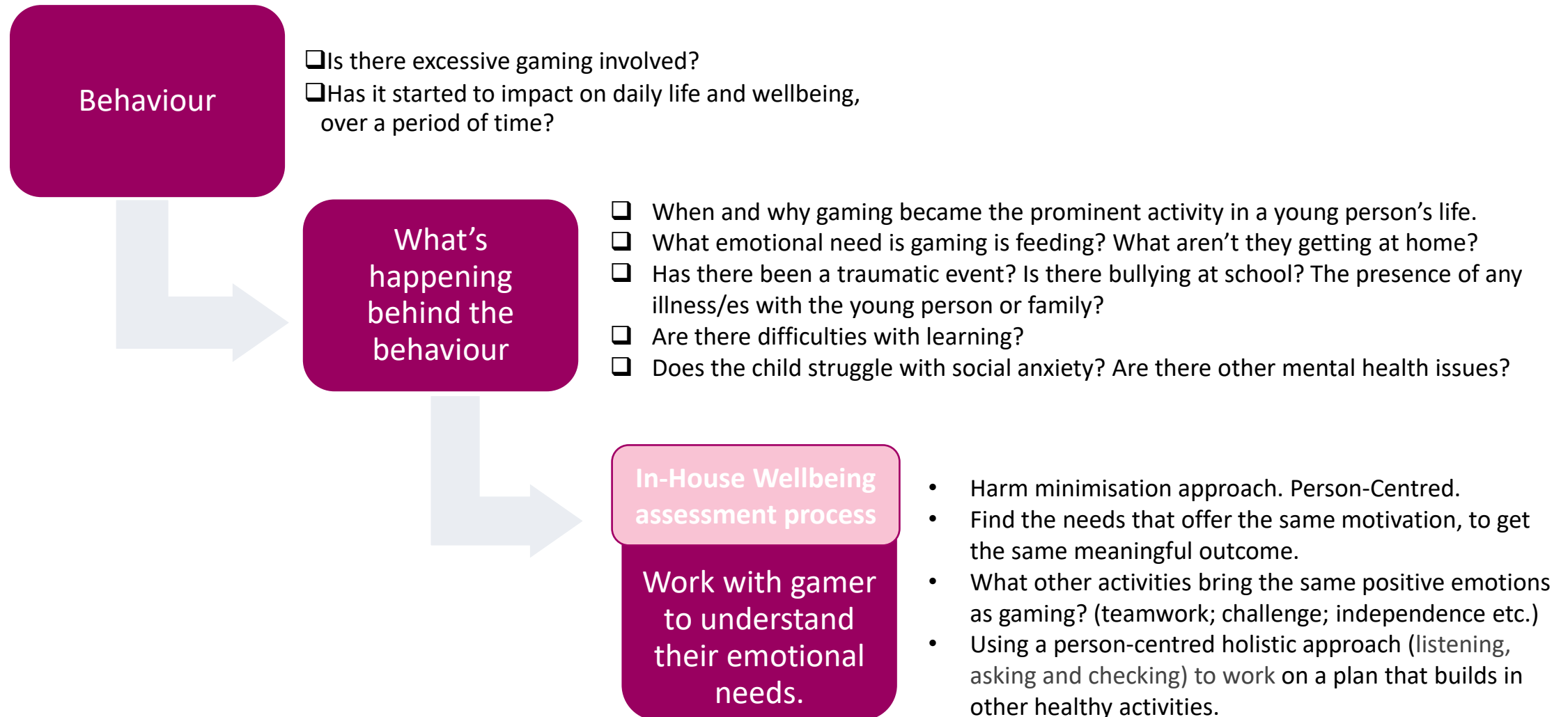**Uniting**

Look behind the problem: Understanding the Why?

If game play is starting to interfere with daily life, thoughts, feelings and behaviours…

- Is the child or young person meeting these basic needs?

- Explore: What emotional need is gaming feeding?

- Then, look at ways to disengage them from unhealthy behaviours by working with them.

- If harmful behaviours are evident, before a child can create healthy gaming, they should be aware of it, accept it, and own it. Encourage their own voice of change.
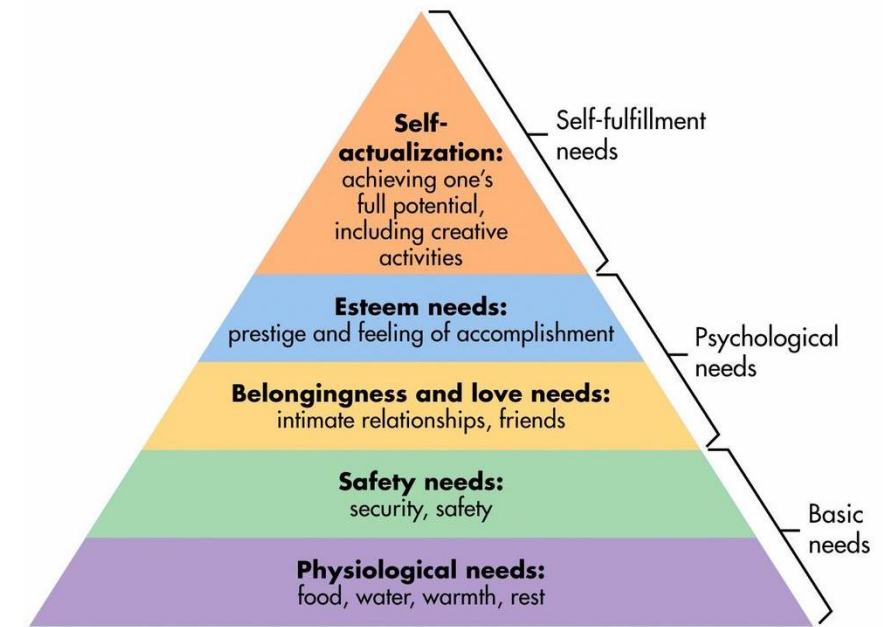
Assessment process for Wellbeing

Rather than looking at the video game as the problem, we should be asking what's happening behind the video game, let's not blame the game, using a holistic approach, let's explore.

Behaviour

❑ Is there excessive gaming involved?
❑ Has it started to impact on daily life and wellbeing, over a period of time?

What's happening behind the behaviour

❑ When and why gaming became the prominent activity in a young person's life.
❑ What emotional need is gaming is feeding? What aren't they getting at home?
❑ Has there been a traumatic event? Is there bullying at school? The presence of any illness/es with the young person or family?
❑ Are there difficulties with learning?
❑ Does the child struggle with social anxiety? Are there other mental health issues?

In-House Wellbeing assessment process

Work with gamer to understand their emotional needs.

• Harm minimisation approach. Person-Centred.
• Find the needs that offer the same motivation, to get the same meaningful outcome.
• What other activities bring the same positive emotions as gaming? (teamwork; challenge; independence etc.)
• Using a person-centred holistic approach (listening, asking and checking) to work on a plan that builds in other healthy activities.

Harmful / Problem gaming behavioural signs to look out for escape or avoidance.

Behaviour	Description
Maladaptive coping strategies	Avoiding new situations/ avoiding issues.
Health problems:	Increased anxiety
Diet	Missing meals; poor nutrition
A preference of solitude	Gaming behind closed doors
Mood changes	Negative emotions, extreme anger
School Disengagement	No doing homework

Behaviour	Description
• **Negative Impact on Other Areas of Life**	Other areas of life are neglected.
• **Hiding/avoiding rom Negative or Uncomfortable Feelings or Situations**	Gaming to self-medicate. Hiding from (e.g. poor grades; bullying; social; family)
• **Defensiveness**	Denial regarding excessive gaming that may leave others neglected
• **Misuse of Money**	Using parent/carer credit cards without asking.
• **Loss of Time/Loss of sleep**	Extreme example when games are played throughout the night, and it is only realised how much time has passed when the sun begins to rise.

Prevention Factsheet for parents

Harmful signs and behaviours Prompting Tool (Early Intervention)

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Changing the way we game.

Harmful gaming-gambling is not a standalone issue.

Look behind the problem: Understanding the Why?

You may notice behaviours that are negatively affecting a child or young person's life.

By having a conversation that is non-judgemental, it will allow children and young people to feel they can open up and talk to you about 'why' they are gaming excessively. Are they avoiding something else?
The discussion you have may be a personal and confidential matter and will require you to follow the school's Wellbeing process.

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As a professional who works with children and young people you may notice signs or behaviours that are of concern.

Hiding/avoiding negative or uncomfortable feelings or situations
Gaming to self-medicate
Hiding/avoiding from e.g. poor grades; bullying; social; family.

Defensiveness
Denial regarding excessive gaming-gambling that may leave others neglected.

Misuse of money
Using parent/carers credit cards without asking

Loss of time/Loss of sleep
Extreme example when games are played throughout the night and it's only realised how much time has passed when the sun begins to rise, and this happens often.

Maladaptive coping stratergies
Avoiding new situations/avoiding issues

Health Problems
Anxiety, Depression
Poor Diet
Missing meals; poor nutrion

A preference of solitude
Gaming behind closed doors

Mood Changes
Negative emotions

*This list is not an extensive list and offers a few behavioural signs. This list should not be used to diagnosis. Seek support from service professionals.

Supporting Material – Prompting conversation when harmful signs have been identified

Build a relationship to break down the barriers first.
Then you may try:

I'm noticing…
What's happening for you…
Tell me about…

What have you been up to?

What do you like to play?

What do you enjoy doing on weekends/after school?

Ask about the game, the characters.

How much sleep do you get, what time did you go to sleep last night?

How are things at home?

Do you play games after school?

What do you like to do to relax in your spare time?

I've noticed your falling behind in your homework, how can I help?

gambleaware.nsw.gov.au

headspace.org.au

kidshelpline.com.au

unitingvictas.org.au
Recoded Prevention Program

Recoded

Changing the way we game.

With the growth of technology and the access to smartphones and other gaming devices, there is an increased exposure to gambling for our children.

Children and young people are at higher risk due to their cognitive and social development stages and are more likely to develop unhealthy behaviours if not managed.

Healthy gaming
When played in moderation, video gaming is a form of fun, entertainment and leisure.

Multi-player online games can provide children and young people with important social connection with their peers. Gaming can enhance problem solving and leadership skills and so much more.

It is important for parents to be aware and educate their children about online gambling in games.

What does gambling in games mean?
Put simply, gambling is traditionally an activity where someone risks money or belongings; where there is an element of randomness or chance involved; and the purpose is to win.

With the gaming industry now bigger than ever, there is increasing evidence that there is cross-over between gaming and gambling in many games played today by children and young people.

Where to go for help
GambleAware
T 1800 858 858
Website: gambleaware.nsw.gov.au

headspace
T 1800 880 218
Website: headspace.org.au

ReachOut
Website: au.reachout.com

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A few points:

- Video Gaming is here to stay.

- The industry growth is rapid.

- Gaming is a community for many and sense of belonging.

- A large reason why kids game is due to the behavioral desire to connect.

- Healthy social connection is vital for a child's development.

- Path of least resistant, Gaming has made the perfect babysitter for parents and killed boredom.

- As parents and carers and professionals, we need to understand the gaming world, notice signs and support and encourage healthy balance in young peoples lives today.

- It is not the responsibility of children and young people to understand an industry that is much bigger than them, we as adults need to support them and set heathy boundaries for them.

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Services

More work to be done

It's important to ensure that children and young people are linked with appropriate support services where potential risks are identified.

- **GambleAware**
  1800 858 858
  gambleaware.nsw.gov.au

- **headspace**
  headspace.org.au

- **Reach Out**
  au.reachout.com

- **Kids Helpline**
  kidshelpline.com.au
  1800 55 1800

- **E-safety**
  For more information about online gaming, visit the eSafety Website: esafety.gov.au/parents/big-issues/gaming

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End
Thank You

mandy.buchholtz@vt.uniting.org

unitingvictas.org.au

Uniting ...to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are Australia's First Peoples and the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we live and work.

Uniting is committed to safe and inclusive work places, policies and services of LGBTIQ+ communities and their families.

Framework Gaming/Gambling children and young people

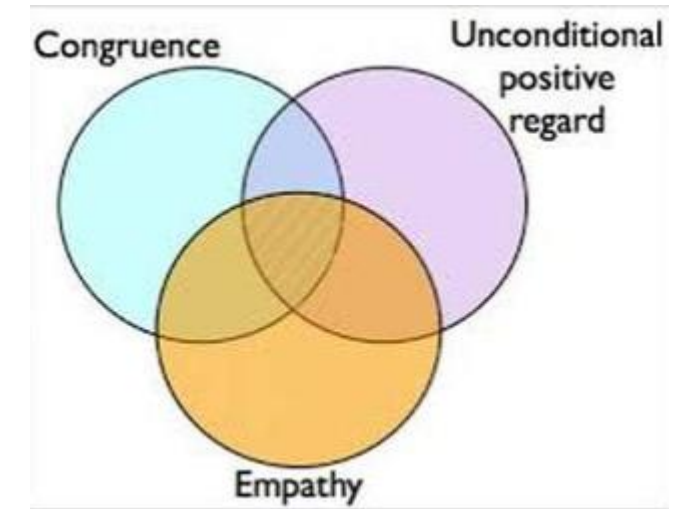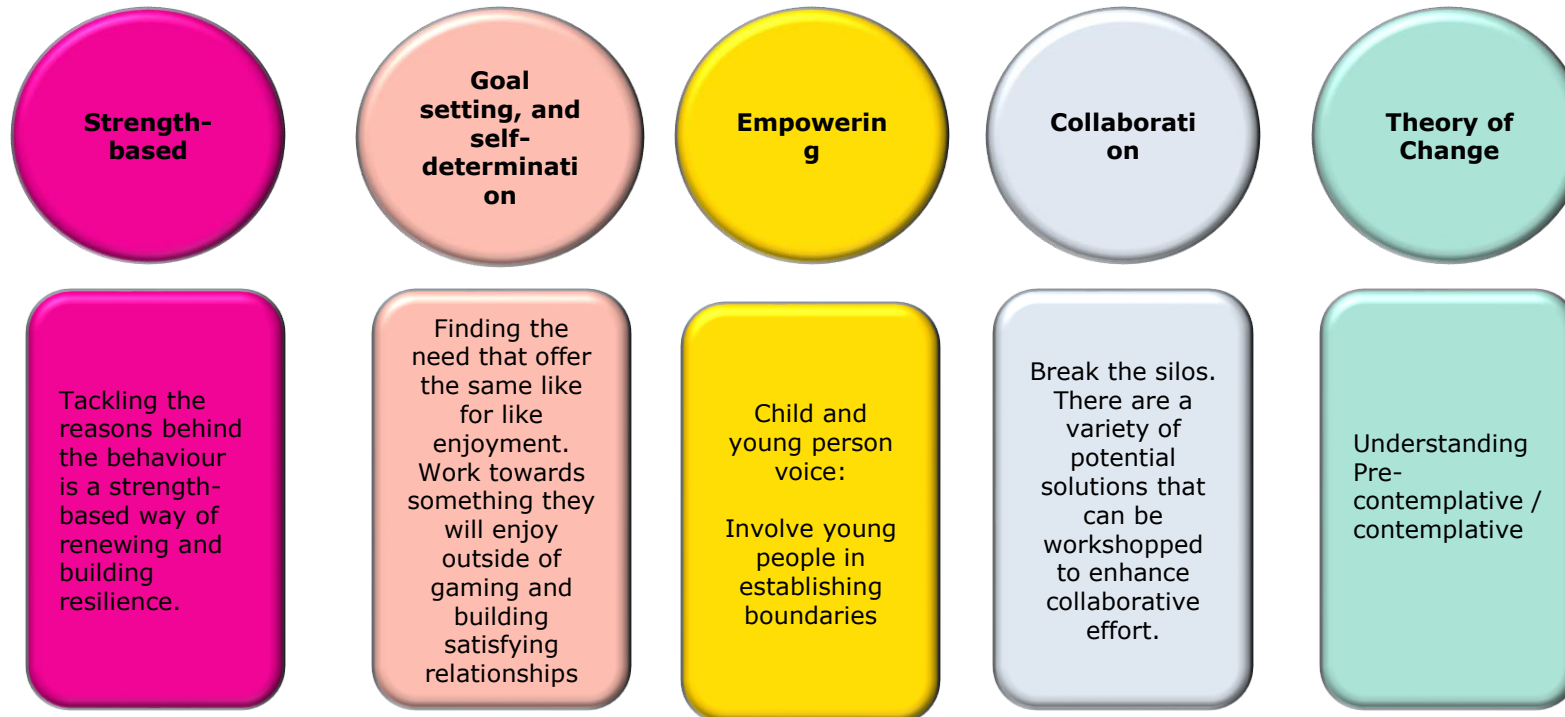| Addictive gaming Prevention	Addictive gaming Early Intervention	Addictive Gaming - Gambling	Recovery
• **Understanding why gaming can be an issue** • **Understanding strengths /** • ** of gaming** • **Understanding healthy boundaries around gaming** • **Raising awareness** • **Understanding addiction / risk of addictive behaviour**	• Issue / risk around gaming and use of games and working to educate vulnerable groups	• Developing boundaries and understanding risk / impact of gaming • Working with parents / communities to implement boundaries • Providing additional supports	• Engagement in pro-social activities • encouraging other activities Resilience building • self-regulation

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Risks v Protective Factors

- What decreases your risk of vulnerabilities:

Character	Family	School
• Easy temperament • Adequate nutrition • Attachment to family • School achievement • Problem-solving skills • Internal locus of control • Social competence and social skills • Good coping style • Optimism • Moral beliefs • Values • Positive self-related cognitions • High self-esteem; conscientiousness; • The absence of depression and anxiety; • No substance use; • Lower risk-taking; • Future-oriented thinking; • Emotion regulation skills.	• Supportive caring parents • Family harmony • Secure and stable family • Responsibility within family • Supportive relationship with other adults • Strong family norms and morality	• Sense of belonging/connectedness • Positive school climate • Positive peer relationships

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Holistic Approach (evidence-based support models):

- Strengths-based approach that recognises the strengths and values of both the children and young people and gaming. This positive approach will ensure that children and young people who game do not feel ostracised or targeted by the process.

- Having an attitude that the young person is doing their best and that every choice they make, is their best choice at the time based on their circumstances.

- If harmful behaviours are evident, before a child can create healthy gaming, they should be aware of it, accept it, and own it. Encourage their own voice of change.(theory of change model)

Strength-based	Goal setting, and self-determination	Empowering	Collaboration	Theory of Change
Tackling the reasons behind the behaviour is a strength-based way of renewing and building resilience.	Finding the need that offer the same like for like enjoyment. Work towards something they will enjoy outside of gaming and building satisfying relationships	Child and young person voice: Involve young people in establishing boundaries	Break the silos. There are a variety of potential solutions that can be workshopped to enhance collaborative effort.	Understanding Pre-contemplative / contemplative

Congruence Unconditional positive regard

Empathy

The key Recoded principles:

- **Person-centred approach: The young person is at the centre** they are the consumer – their narrative is to be heard and respected (and challenged respectfully where appropriate).
- **Empowerment:** We recognise risk but work to support and **empower** and not **dominate** (young person's voice).
- **The entire picture:** Recognition of eco systems and an understanding that eco-systems can be both a protective and contributing factors to excessive gaming and **consider all aspects of a person's life**
- **The gaming is not the problem:** The young person is engaged with and supported through a trauma lens.
- Working with the young person to tailor to **their needs and goals**
- **Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR):** Approach children and young people with UPR, with the attitude that they are making the best choices that could have, based on-their circumstances and if expectations/healthy choice are not being met ask 'why'.

The Recoded program aims to:

Create a sustainable framework that is embedded into schools.
Implementing a program that is agile, i.e. changes with new evidence; continues to be delivered through a train-the-trainer model and has measured results. (Survey's)

Sustainability Values – Building a Whole School Approach – see document for more details. Uniting Recoded are committed to provide education and capacity building (cross-skilling) on the emergence of gambling within online games.	
Adoption, Not Roll Out	• Uniting will work with schools to get gradual buy-in from interested staff (Wellbeing ; leadership; student champions). • The Recoded framework will get buy-in from the school administration to create a streamlined approach • and buy-in from other school stakeholders.
Create a team of teachers and communicate highlights	Working with key teachers that are committed champions: Responsibilities include: • Attend PD training (1-Day session) • Spreading awareness and build interest (collaboration) • Use tools provided by Recoded trainers. • Follow processes and use positive (TIC) language when potential harm is being identified. As word spreads of these teachers' efforts and impact, a gradually generated interest amongst others in the school community will form.
Identify the Right Training and Implementation Route Uniting	Each school is unique and the Recoded approach to training and implementation will adopt an understand to: • What awareness is already evident and what supports support exists? • Being aware and considerate of time; capacity and school processes; • Understanding school size and demographics; • Understanding culture and diversity and being considerate to everyone's needs.