



# HEALTH AND WELLBEING 5

Classroom resources to support the  
Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Óige  
Department of Education  
and Youth



**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curraim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment



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## Introduction

**Health and Wellbeing 5** is part of a suite of resources developed to support learning in Senior Cycle SPHE. The learning activities are aligned with a selection of learning outcomes within the specification, mainly drawn from Strand 1 (Health and Wellbeing) and Strand 3 (Into Adulthood). Through engaging with these activities students will explore a range of factors that contribute to their holistic health and how they interconnect. There is a particular focus on mental health; these lessons are aimed at further developing skills and strategies that can help protect and foster positive mental health, as well as enabling students to recognise when support might be needed and where to find it.

This resource builds upon and assumes prior learning in Junior Cycle SPHE, in particular **Emotional Wellbeing 1, 2 and 3**. It also builds upon the **MindOut** programme, which was developed by University of Galway and HSE, and has proven to be effective in improving students' mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

## Using the resource

Teachers can use any of the learning activities in this resource to plan teaching and learning across 5th and 6th year SPHE, taking into account their students' needs, interests and stage of development. Every classroom is different and teachers are best placed to decide on what will be most effective in their classroom.

The lessons provide lots of ideas and activities to stimulate discussion and learning, and some topics may need more than one lesson. Depending on the needs of your students and the time available, you may choose to adapt the activities as appropriate. In such circumstances, ensure each lesson begins with an opening stimulus activity, followed by an opportunity to explore and develop insights on the topic, and concludes with a reflection on the meaning of the learning for the students' lives, whether now or for the future.

Some of the lessons include exercises that can support young people in regulating their emotions. While many young people find these exercises beneficial, some may have difficulty with them. For example, if a person is feeling stressed, anxious, emotionally raw or has experienced a trauma, a meditative activity may feel overwhelming as they sit with unpleasant emotions, and another activity may therefore be more suitable. Also, some students may struggle to sit still and may need a movement activity to help relax their bodies. It is useful to give students the option of an alternative if they struggle with a particular activity at a given time. If a student becomes upset during a lesson, it is important to offer support in the moment, for example by suggesting they take a break within the activity or step outside supported by a classmate. If you are concerned about a student, you can seek advice through the normal student support structures.

**Students should be signposted to available supports at the start of each lesson and reminded of these again at the end.**



### Flow of the lessons:

- **Lessons 1** looks at the many factors that contribute to holistic health and invites students to consider some of the factors that they can positively influence.
- **Lesson 2** introduces the concept of 'determinants of health' and builds understanding of those determinants that lie within and beyond their control.
- **Lessons 3 and 4** look at the importance of being able to identify and articulate emotions and considers strategies for managing emotions in times of stress.
- **Lessons 5 and 6** look at the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviours and examines 'thought challenger' techniques which can help shift unhelpful thoughts.
- **Lesson 7** looks at a range of different coping strategies and invites students to consider their helpfulness in dealing with stressful life situations.
- **Lessons 8 and 9** look at mental health within a continuum and helps build students' capacity to recognise when they or someone else might need additional support, and how to evaluate a range of support sources, including online.
- **Lessons 10** looks at the importance and benefits of social connections and the range of opportunities for connecting socially that can support holistic health.
- **Lesson 11** looks at how to stay well, reflecting upon the learning and strategies explored in this resource and beyond.

**Preparing the students:** All students benefit from knowing what they are going to be learning and how the lesson is going to unfold. To support students to feel more in control, it may be helpful to discuss upcoming learning activities in advance. Agreeing ground rules at the beginning of the school year and revisiting them regularly will also contribute to more successful teaching and learning.

Throughout their learning, students should be encouraged to use either a handwritten reflection journal or an electronic journal that is completed as part of weekly lessons. This is helpful in supporting current reflection on learning and enabling students to look back on their learning across the two years.

**Videos:** Throughout the activities, suggested video clips are listed. It is essential that these are previewed and used in accordance with the students' learning needs and school policies. Over time some of these external clips may become unavailable, but should be easy to replace with alternative, relevant online resources.

All activities are designed to be taught in conjunction with other resources on the [Senior Cycle SPHE Toolkit](#) developed by the NCCA. There, teachers can find further guidance and resources.

### We value your feedback!

Please share your feedback on these lessons and any suggestions for how any of the learning activities might be improved by completing a quick survey at [Senior Cycle SPHE Toolkit](#).



**Learning outcomes addressed in this unit to support the teaching of the Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum**

Strand	Learning Outcomes
<b>Strand 2: Health and Wellbeing</b>	<p><b>1.1</b> explore the determinants of good health</p> <p><b>1.2</b> investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health, including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related.</p> <p><b>1.5</b> recognise helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, including negative self-talk, and how these can affect emotions and behaviour</p> <p><b>1.6</b> describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health</p> <p><b>1.7</b> recognise the signs and symptoms of low mood, stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed</p> <p><b>1.8</b> discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety.</p>
<b>Strand 3: Into Adulthood</b>	<p><b>3.1</b> consider strategies for self-care that can help maintain health and prevent ill-health</p> <p><b>3.2</b> demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life</p> <p><b>3.3</b> explore a range of life events where they might experience change, loss or heartache and discuss how to care for themselves and/or others during these times and where to find support.</p>



## Lesson 1: Holistic Health

**Learning outcome 1.2:** Investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health, including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students explore the many factors that contribute to holistic health and how they interconnect. They set up a marketplace in the classroom to raise awareness amongst peers about these factors and what they can do to positively influence their holistic health.

### Teacher's note



Approaching wellbeing through a holistic lens recognises the interconnected nature of all aspects of health. It means looking at the whole person (physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual) and their environment. This lens can be very powerful as it leads to an awareness that one small change can have multiple ripple effects. For example, getting more sleep (physical) can boost mood (emotional), being active (physical) reduces stress (emotional), connecting with friends (social) is good for us emotionally and can even help people live longer!

### Holistic health

Holistic health refers to an approach to wellbeing that looks at the whole person and simultaneously addresses the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and environmental aspects of health. It also recognises the interconnected nature of all these aspects.





## Learning activities

### Introduction

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**Health map activity:** Form small groups and provide each group with a large blank page and markers. Their task is to imagine they are creating a community for people to live healthy and happy lives; create a map setting out what such a healthy community would look like. Encourage creativity and blue skies thinking! The main criterion is to think holistically and include on the map as many features as they can think of that will positively impact on people's health, considering all ages. If students need help in thinking of aspects of health you can use the following prompts:

- **Social:** Education facilities, community centres, libraries, recreational facilities, places to connect socially, places to enjoy the arts, places for worship, cultural spaces, etc.
- **Economic:** Businesses, jobs, factories, housing, etc.
- **Environmental:** Green spaces, safe pathways/cycleways, waste disposal sites, clean water, etc.
- **Personal:** Gyms, playgrounds, places to relax, affordable and healthy food markets, healthcare facilities, etc.

Following the group work, ask each group to present their map to the class, explaining why they considered specific features to be important for the community's health.

Facilitate a short discussion on the multidimensional nature of health and how different aspects interact with and influence each other. For example, how the presence of parks can affect physical activity levels.



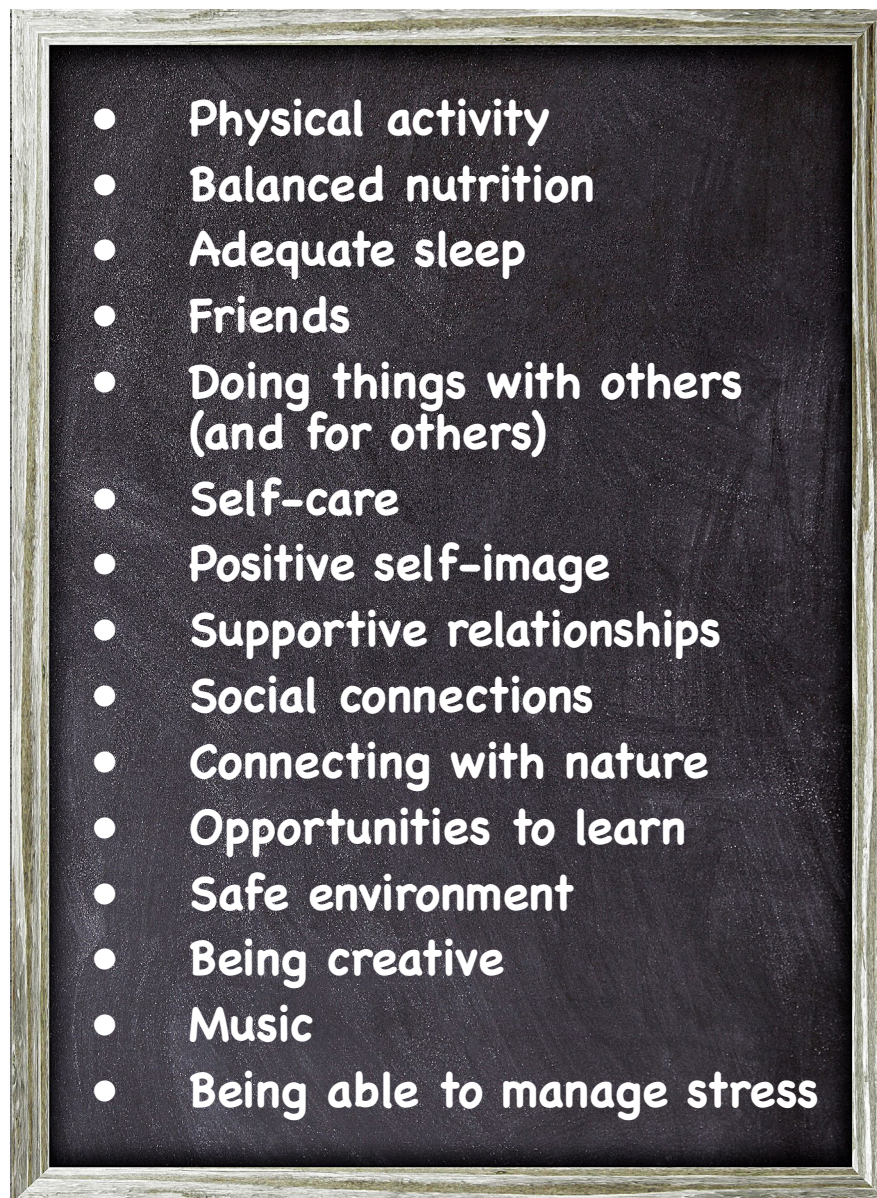
## Development of learning

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### Step 1

Building upon the opening activity, ask students to help you draw up a list of all the things that contribute to their holistic health. (If students need prompts they might find these categories helpful – physical, social and emotional).

The list might include the following and more:





## Step 2

Ask students to pair up and select an aspect of holistic health that they both feel strongly about from this list.

In pairs, set students to work on investigating their aspect of holistic health guided by the following questions:

- Our chosen aspect of holistic health is.....
- Why is this of importance?
- What are the health benefits of this? What evidence have you found to support your answer?
- How does this connect to other aspects of holistic health?
- What would be the knock-on effects of taking care of this aspect? (A prompt example might be helpful, such as sleep – if I get more sleep, I'll be able to focus and won't need an energy drink, I'll be less irritable with people, my immune system will be stronger and I won't be getting sick so often, etc.)

**Note:** Students will need access to the Internet for the research part of this lesson.

### Suggested websites

[Resources for learning and teaching SPHE | Curriculum Online](#)

Go to LO 1.2 for relevant websites that can support students' research.



## Step 3

Set up a marketplace activity during which students “sell” the benefits of the aspect of holistic health that they have researched. Each pair is given one minute to convince the class of the importance of their topic and to suggest one strategy that students can use to support this aspect of their health.

Invite students to note-take the strategies and suggestions that seem helpful to them.

**Note:** Further strategies to support their health will be explored in other lessons and can be collated into a personal wellbeing toolkit.

## Lesson 2: Understanding Determinants of Health

**Learning outcome 1.1:** Explore the determinants of good health.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will examine the concept of “determinants of health” and explore how we can, as individuals and communities, influence these factors to improve health outcomes.

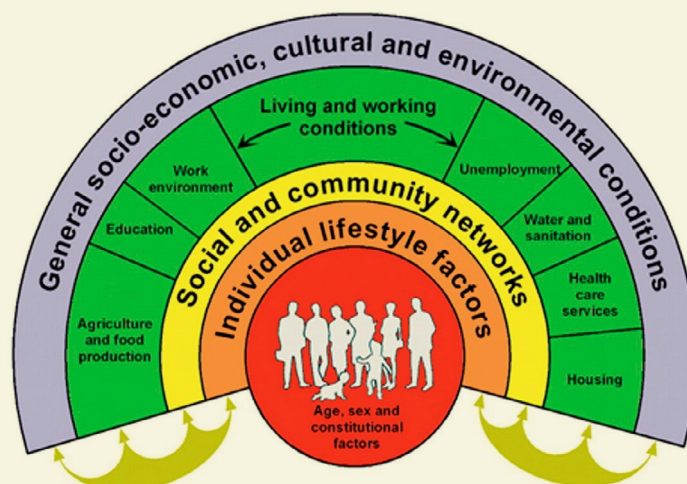
### Teacher's note



#### What are the determinants of health?

Determinants of health are the “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that can influence their health outcomes” (WHO). This definition points to an understanding that health is not solely determined by individual choices or behaviours. While personal behaviours like healthy eating, sleep and exercise are certainly part of the picture, health is also influenced by a wider range of factors. These factors include where we live, our physical environment, genetics, gender, income and education level, access to health services and support networks, and broader social, economic and cultural circumstances.

Think of health like layers of a rainbow, where each layer represents a different influence. The innermost layer might represent personal health behaviours (e.g. what we eat, how much we exercise), but surrounding this are layers that relate to social and economic factors, like our family’s income, the availability of healthy food, or the level of support we have from friends and community. And beyond that, there are broader influences such as gender, cultural norms, and global issues like conflict and climate change, all of which can influence our health in various ways.





## Teacher's note continued



### How do they influence health?

This model helps us recognise how a range of factors, including many beyond their control, might impact on our students' health. Factors like poverty, limited educational opportunities, community violence, and experiences of racism, domestic violence, or homophobia/transphobia can all have significant effects on health. The concept of intersectionality is helpful in thinking about how different aspects of a person's identity (like race, gender, class, sexual orientation) can combine to create unique experiences of privilege and discrimination.

### Why teach through this lens?

Viewing health through a "determinants of health" lens helps avoid a narrow focus on individual behaviours and encourages a more compassionate, supportive environment for all students, especially those from marginalised communities. This perspective shifts the focus away from thinking about health as simply a matter of individual choices and creates awareness about larger societal and environmental factors at play. It also opens up discussion about ways that individuals and communities can address health inequalities, thus building a sense of self-efficacy.

Understanding the determinants of health can create awareness of systemic health inequities in society and reduce the inclination to feel self-blame or shame, or to judge people based on their circumstances. At the same time young people can examine what can be done as individuals to support physical and mental health and become empowered to advocate for and take actions individually and in communities to bring about better health for themselves and others.

### How can this approach support and empower all students?

Addressing the topic of health inequalities in class requires sensitivity and an acknowledgment that inequality and discrimination can profoundly impact people's health choices and overall wellbeing. In most classrooms there are students who face barriers such as access to nutritious food, secure housing or safe environments. It is helpful for these students to be reassured that they are not responsible and may, at this point in their lives, have limited control. Being sensitive to challenging life circumstances and acknowledging socio-economic disparities can help empower all students whatever their circumstances.

For further information see [NCCA guidance on LO 1.1](#)



## Learning activities

### Introduction

Draw upon the “Teacher’s note” above to introduce the concept of determinants of health. Perhaps share the WHO definition and briefly explain that our health isn’t just about the choices we make individually – it’s also influenced by the people around us (and those that went before us), the places we live, and the larger world we’re a part of. A wide range of factors, or “determinants” work together to shape our wellbeing. Some of these determinants can be positive (protective), and help keep us healthy, such as having access to healthy food and living in a peaceful environment. Others can be negative (risk factors), and can increase the chance of poor health, such as poor nutrition and living in constant stress.



Show [this video](#) beginning at 0.37 mins and ending at 3.38 mins. After showing the video, ask students to recall the different factors that had an influence on Sam’s health and wellbeing. Write these on the board and then categorise them into social, economic, environmental and personal factors.

### Development of learning

#### Step 1



Divide the class into groups of 3–4.

Project the list page 12 onto the white board. These are a range of determinants of health. Explain to students that their task is to consider this list one by one, and decide where to position each one on the **worksheet** under these three headings:

- **Health determinants we can control**
- **Health determinants we can influence** (some control)
- **Health determinants we can’t control** (and can try to manage)

Mention that they may decide that something falls within more than one category. For instance, food might be something I can control (e.g. making my own lunch) and also something I can’t control (I don’t do the shopping) but they might be able to influence (asking for something to be added to the shopping list).



**Project this list onto the white board**

- Food
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Stress management
- Screen time
- Self-care practices
- Family and peer relationships
- Social norms
- Support networks
- Local community
- School environment
- Exams
- Sickness
- Worries about the future
- Global events
- Genetics
- Where we live
- People



## Step 2

After discussing in groups, invite each group to share their responses. Record their responses on three different flipchart papers around the room: one for each heading.

In taking class feedback it's important to acknowledge the nuance within each example. Also acknowledge that things we can/cannot control can alter with circumstances. Encourage students to recognise not only the limits of what they can control but also to consider ways they can exercise agency. Also mention that as they grow older and are more in charge of their lives, aspects of the picture might change.

## Step 3

Assign each group a starting station. Depending on the size of your group, you may need to have more than one group at stations.

At each station, students should pick a determinant listed on the flipchart paper. Encourage groups to pick a different determinant from the one chosen by the previous group. Once they have picked a determinant they should:



- Discuss how this determinant impacts their health and wellbeing.
- Discuss what actions could be taken for dealing with this determinant (e.g. actions they can take, ways to influence it, or how to cope with it).
- Write their suggestions on sticky notes and place them beside the corresponding determinant on the flipchart paper.

Allow groups time at each station and then ask them to rotate clockwise to the next station. Ensure all groups have had a chance to reflect on all three stations.

After the rotations, gather the class together. Ask each group to **share two actions** they could take and say how these actions could positively impact overall health and wellbeing.

Conclude the activity by inviting students to imagine what difference it would make if systemic barriers to health were removed. In other words, what would it be like if money or privilege was removed from the picture? How would that affect people's access to better health?

If some students need prompts, these examples might be helpful:

#### **Station 1 (Determinants we can control)**

*Determinant:* **Sleep**

*Strategies:* Set a consistent bedtime routine; spend time outdoors; limit screen time before bed.

#### **Station 2 (Determinants we can influence)**

*Determinant:* **School environment**

*Strategies:* Start or join school initiatives to promote inclusion and belonging; talk to teachers about homework workload; advocate for creation of quiet, safe spaces.

#### **Station 3 (Determinants we can't control)**

*Determinant:* **Genetic factors**

*Strategies:* Focus on factors you can control, like diet and exercise, to reduce the impact of genetic predispositions; get regular health check-ups and screenings to catch potential health issues early.

*Determinant:* **Global conflict and climate change**

*Strategies:* Support campaigns and groups working to address climate change and human rights; practise stress-reducing techniques, such as deep breathing, during times of stress or anxiety caused by news events.



## Reflecting and applying learning

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End of lesson reflection questions:

- What surprised you from learning about the wider causes of health issues?
- How did your understanding of health shift after exploring the wider causes?
- How can understanding the causes of health issues change the way we think about our own health and wellbeing?
- How might this understanding affect how we think about other individuals or groups who face health challenges?

### Take-home activity



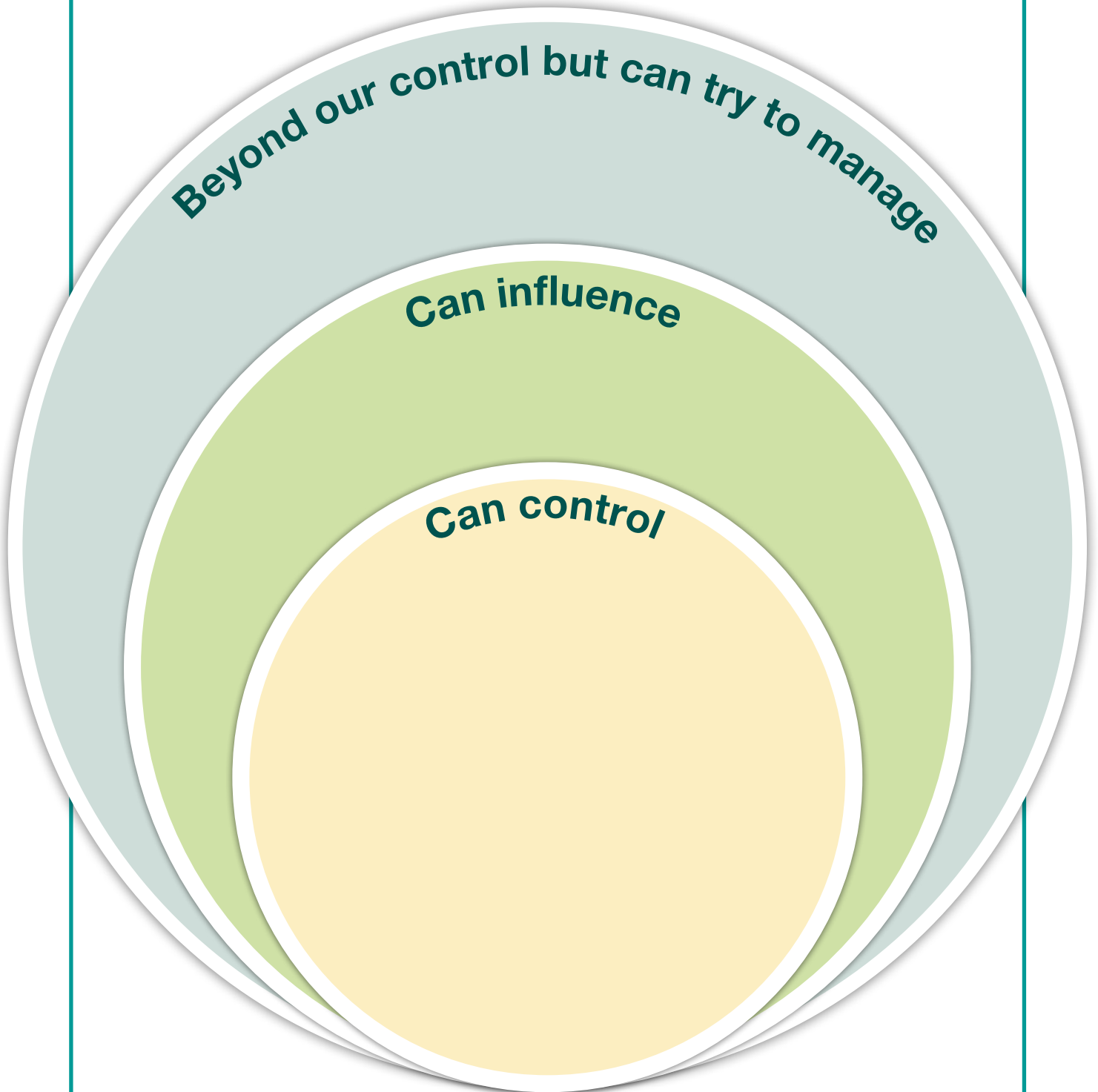
Think about your local community (neighbourhood, school, or town/city).

- List factors in your community that support good health – be specific (e.g. parks/green areas, access to healthy food options, cycle paths, community services).
- Now, consider one factor that might make it harder for people to stay healthy (e.g. pollution, noise, lack of services, unsafe areas for walking/playing, long commute to work and schools/colleges).

Write a short reflection in your journal answering the following questions:

- How do these factors influence the health of people in my community? How do they influence me and my health?

## Worksheet: Determinants of health within and beyond a young person's control





## Lesson 3: Identifying and Articulating Emotions

**Learning outcome 1.6:** Describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help manage thoughts and regulate emotions in order to nurture positive mental health.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will explore the importance of identifying and articulating emotions and will participate in activities designed to improve their ability to identify and articulate their emotions more effectively.

### Teacher's note



This lesson focuses on helping students identify and articulate their emotions, which is essential for their mental, emotional, and social wellbeing. When students know how to identify and articulate their emotions appropriately, it can improve emotional regulation, reduce stress, and foster better communication in relationships.

In this session we use the Mood Meter, developed by Dr. Marc Brackett at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, to support students in building emotional awareness. The Mood Meter organises emotions into four coloured quadrants based on energy/intensity level (high or low) and pleasantness (pleasant or unpleasant).

- **Red:** High energy, unpleasant (e.g. angry, frustrated)
- **Yellow:** High energy, pleasant (e.g. excited, joyful)
- **Blue:** Low energy, unpleasant (e.g. sad, tired)
- **Green:** Low energy, pleasant (e.g. calm, content)

This tool helps students develop a more nuanced emotional vocabulary.

Many students struggle to articulate how they feel, not because they lack emotion, but because they often lack the vocabulary or confidence to express it. When students struggle to name their emotions, we can equip them with strategies like:

- Using the Mood Meter
- Tuning into physical sensations
- Using metaphors or symbols
- Expressing feelings through creative outlets like journaling, drawing, or music

These strategies not only help with self-awareness, but also support better relationships with others, as being able to say how we feel and understand the feelings of others are key elements of healthy, positive relationships.



## Learning activities

### Introduction

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1. As students walk into class, casually ask each one: *“How are you feeling today?”*
2. Mentally (or on a board/paper) tally how many say vague responses like *good, grand, okay, fine, alright*.
3. Once everyone is seated, show the class the tally.
4. Discuss the following questions:
  - What do you notice?
  - Why do so many of us default to these words when asked how we feel?
  - What makes it difficult to describe how we feel? (e.g. *Is it habit? Lack of words? Not wanting to get too personal? Context – it may not always be appropriate to share exactly how we feel?*)
5. Explain that being more specific with naming emotions helps us express ourselves clearly, improves communication, and can even help us manage emotions better. We often default to vague words to describe our emotions, but when we challenge ourselves to be more specific, we understand our feelings and each other better.


### Development of learning

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1. Let students know that today they'll be learning how to identify and talk about emotions using the Mood Meter. The Mood Meter helps us better understand how we're feeling. It sorts emotions into four coloured quadrants based on two factors:
  - Energy: Are you feeling high or low energy? (High energy means feeling the emotion intensely and low energy means having a mild experience of the emotion)
  - Pleasantness: Does the feeling feel pleasant or unpleasant?
2. Display this visual from the [SCRED Mood Meter slideshow](#). Review the four quadrants:
  - Red: High energy, unpleasant (e.g. angry, frustrated)
  - Yellow: High energy, pleasant (e.g. excited, joyful)
  - Blue: Low energy, unpleasant (e.g. sad, tired)
  - Green: Low energy, pleasant (e.g. calm, content)



## Step 1: Identifying emotions

1. Divide students into pairs to foster discussion and collaboration.
2. Give each pair the **Identifying Emotions worksheet** and a copy of the Mood Meter. 
3. Read aloud one scenario at a time. Use some or all of the following:
  - *“You studied hard for a test and got a great grade, but your close friend didn’t do well and seems distant afterwards.”*
  - *“Your best friend cancels plans with you at the last minute to hang out with a new group of friends they’ve recently gotten close to.”*
  - *“You share a personal story online about something that matters to you. Many people respond with support, but a few classmates comment with sarcastic emojis.”*
  - *“You’re at a party having a great time when you overhear a group of people saying mean things about one of your friends.”*
4. For each scenario, students will:
  - Find and record three specific emotion words.
  - Choose one of the emotions and:
    - » Rate Energy (1–10) and Pleasantness (1–10)
    - » Identify the quadrant(s) on the Mood Meter
    - » Describe how it feels in the body (e.g. *butterflies in the stomach, clenched jaw, warm chest*)
    - » Write an Emotion–Cause Statement: “This person may be feeling [emotion] because [specific detail from the scenario].”
5. After exploring a few scenarios, lead a class discussion:
  - What were the emotions that came up for the different scenarios?
  - Did groups identify different emotions for the same scenario? Why might that happen?
  - Why is it important to recognise your body signals to better understand emotions? (*Remind students that body sensations are often the first clues to what we’re feeling.*)
  - How might practising the Emotion–Cause Statement be helpful? (*Helps us clarify both what we feel and why we feel it.*)

**Note:** To deepen understanding, you may choose to click on specific emotion words in the SCRED Mood Meter Slideshow. Each link provides a clear definition to support student learning and emotional vocabulary building.



## Step 2: Emotion guessing game

1. Keep the Mood Meter displayed or accessible to students.
2. Students pair up and face each other.
3. **Student A** silently selects an emotion from the Mood Meter.
4. **Student B** asks questions such as the following, to guess the emotion:
5. Project these questions on the board:
  - Where might you feel this emotion in your body? (*Mention that where one feels emotions in the body can vary from person to person*)
  - What facial expression might someone make when experiencing this emotion?
  - Can you describe another scenario where someone might feel this emotion?
  - Can you think of a metaphor to describe the feeling?
  - On a scale of 1–10, how high is the energy of the emotion?
  - On a scale of 1–10, how high is the pleasantness?
6. Student B guesses the emotion.
7. Switch roles and repeat.
8. Whole class discussion:
  - How did it feel to describe an emotion without actually naming it?
  - Was it easy or hard to guess the emotion? Why?
  - How can understanding and articulating our emotions help us manage them?
  - How can this kind of emotional awareness improve relationships?

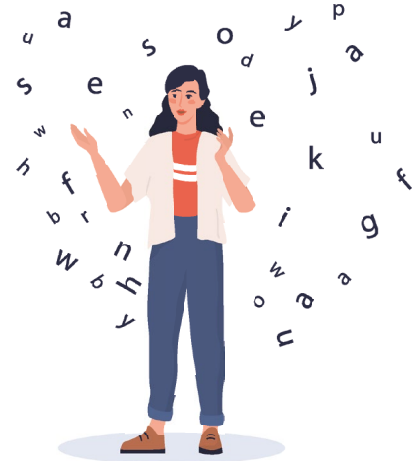


### Step 3: When you're struggling to find the words

1. Begin by acknowledging that sometimes it's really hard to find the right words when we're feeling an emotion.

2. Divide the students into pairs and ask them to discuss:

- What are reasons it might be difficult to articulate/express our emotions?
- Can you think of a time when you had trouble explaining how you were feeling?
- What made it hard to describe your emotions in that moment?



Explain to students that it's okay to have trouble finding the right words when identifying or articulating our emotions. This can happen for a lot of reasons; emotions might feel overwhelming, confusing, we may not have the vocabulary to describe exactly how we feel or we may not have felt that intensity before (e.g. falling in love). The more we practise recognising and naming our emotions, the easier it becomes. Sometimes, when we are struggling to find the right words, there are other strategies that can be helpful.



3. Introduce the strategies on the **Ways to express how you feel worksheet**.

4. Invite students to look at the strategies listed on the worksheet and reflect on the prompts individually:

- Which of these have I tried before?
- Which have helped me?
- Which ones have I not used that could help me?

5. Highlight that in the previous activity, where students had to guess their partner's emotion, they used some of these strategies to identify and articulate the emotions without specifically naming them. For example, they used the Mood Meter, noticed body sensations, described past experiences, used metaphors, and talked things through with someone.

6. Explain that, in addition to these strategies, additional strategies that can help include journaling, expressing emotions through art, music or creativity, and giving yourself more time to reflect.



## Reflecting and applying learning

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To wrap up the lesson, ask students to choose either journaling or creative expression to describe an emotion they've felt today. Encourage them to take out their notebooks and give them a few options.

They could write about their experience, create a poem or song lyric, draw, or doodle. Give them 3–5 minutes for this activity and remind them to consider these strategies, as well as the others covered in class today, in the future when they're struggling to put their emotions into words. Ensure every student has a copy of the Mood Meter to keep in their notebook.

## Additional Resources

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### How We Feel App

<https://howwefeel.org/>



How We Feel is a free app is based on the Mood Meter and was created by scientists, designers, engineers and therapists to help people better understand their emotions and find strategies to help them navigate their emotions in the moment. How We Feel helps people find the right word to describe how they feel while tracking their sleep, exercise and health trends in order to spot emotional response patterns over time.

### GIF Mood Meter Check-In

A way to build emotional awareness in your classroom is by incorporating simple daily mood check-ins. The GIF Mood Meter Check-In (developed by SCRED (St. Croix River Education District in the United States) is a fun and engaging tool that can help students identify and express how they're feeling at the start of class.

Access it here: [SCRED GIF Mood Meter Check-In](#)

## Worksheet: Identifying Emotions



### 1. List 3 specific emotions someone might feel in this situation:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Choose one emotion from your list to explore further:

Emotion chosen: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Rate this emotion:

- Energy level (1 = low energy, 10 = high energy): \_\_\_\_\_
- Pleasantness level (1 = unpleasant, 10 = pleasant): \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Identify the Mood Meter quadrant(s) for this emotion:

- Red (High energy, unpleasant)
- Yellow (High energy, pleasant)
- Blue (Low energy, unpleasant)
- Green (Low energy, pleasant)

### 5. Describe how this emotion might feel in the body:

(e.g. butterflies in stomach, clenched jaw, warm chest)

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### 6. Write an Emotion–Cause Statement:

This person may be feeling [emotion] because [specific detail from the scenario].

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## Poster: Print out for classroom

# Ways to express how you feel

*(when it's hard to find the words)*

### 1 Use the Mood Meter

Start by identifying how you're feeling in terms of energy and pleasantness. Then, locate the quadrant and choose a more specific emotion word from that section.

### 2 Emotion–Cause Statement

Say what you feel and why you feel it.

Example: "I feel nervous because I have a test."

### 3 Describe physical sensations

Notice things like a tight chest, sweaty hands, or a fast heartbeat.

### 4 Use metaphors or images

Example: "It feels like a storm cloud is over me."

### 5 Talk it out with someone

Tell a friend, teacher, or trusted adult how you're feeling.

### 6 Give it time

If you can't explain it yet, take a break and come back to it later.

### 7 Use art or creativity

Draw, write, journal, make music, or express yourself through something creative.

*There's no one "right" way to express emotions, everyone is different!*

*Try out a few and see what works for you!*

## Worksheet: Ways to express how you feel (when it's hard to find the words)



When it's hard to express how you're feeling, these strategies can help you explore and explain your emotions in different ways.

**Step 1:** Read through the strategies.

**Step 2:** Tick ✓ if you've tried it before.

**Step 3:** Reflect using the questions at the end.



✓ Tried it?	Strategy	What it is	Why it helps
	<b>Use the Mood Meter</b>	Start by identifying how you're feeling in terms of energy and pleasantness. Then, locate the quadrant and choose a more specific emotion word from that section.	It allows you to narrow down your emotion to a clearer, more accurate word, making it easier to understand, express, and manage your emotions.
	<b>Emotion-cause statement</b>	Say what you're feeling and what caused it (e.g. "I feel frustrated because I wasn't listened to").	Helps clarify both the emotion and the trigger, making it easier to understand and express your emotions.
	<b>Describe physical sensations</b>	Notice sensations in your body like tense shoulders, fast heartbeat, or butterflies in your stomach.	Physical signs can show emotions before your mind processes them, helping you figure out what you're feeling.
	<b>Use metaphors or images</b>	Use creative comparisons like "It feels like a storm cloud is following me."	Makes abstract feelings more concrete and easier to understand and express.
	<b>Talk it out with someone</b>	Share how you're feeling with a friend, teacher, or adult you trust.	Talking helps you make sense of your emotions. Others can also help you express and manage your emotions.
	<b>Give it time</b>	Take a break if you can't explain the feeling yet. Return to it when you're ready.	Emotions can become clearer with time and space, helping you respond calmly.
	<b>Use art or creativity</b>	Draw, paint, write, make music, or do something creative to show how you feel.	Creativity can help you process emotions and sometimes express things words can't capture.

### Reflection

1. Which strategies have you already tried? Which ones helped the most?
2. Are there any strategies you haven't tried yet that you'd like to?
3. What other strategies might your age group use to help them in naming their emotions?
4. Pick one strategy to try this week.

I will try: \_\_\_\_\_

When I might use it: \_\_\_\_\_



## Lesson 4: Managing Emotions

### Learning outcomes

**1.6:** Describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health.

**3.2:** Demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will explore the importance of managing emotional responses and learn how the brain reacts during moments of stress. They will learn and practise various calming strategies that incorporate the "pressing pause" method, helping them slow down and take a moment before reacting in emotionally charged situations.

### Teacher's note



This lesson introduces students to the brain's stress response to help them better understand what's happening in their body and mind during strong emotions. Using Dr. Daniel Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain, students explore how different parts of the brain work together, and what happens when they become overwhelmed. The amygdala (the brain's alarm system) triggers a survival response (fight, flight or freeze) while the thinking part of the brain (the prefrontal cortex) temporarily shuts down. This helps explain why it's harder to focus or stay calm during stress. Understanding the brain's stress response normalises these emotional experiences. It helps students recognise that these reactions are not personal flaws but automatic, biological responses to real or perceived threats in our environment.

The main message of the lesson is to convey to students that losing control of one's emotions is not inevitable. With practice it can be managed. One way of managing strong emotions is the strategy of "pressing pause". Pressing pause is a real-time emotional regulation tool that helps interrupt impulsive reactions and regain control before emotions escalate. A physical sensation in the body may be an indicator that stress levels are being elevated and there is a need to press pause.

Pressing pause involves creating a small moment of space between a feeling and a reaction. It allows us to 'catch' ourselves before the feelings take over. This enables the nervous system to calm and access to the prefrontal cortex is maintained, which is the thinking part of the brain. Once this part of the brain is kept online we can make a more thoughtful, calm response.



## Teacher's note continued



Unlike other regulation strategies, such as journaling, physical activity or talking to someone, pressing pause is designed to be used in the heat of the moment. It requires no special equipment or preparation and can be used in any setting. However, it does require practice and self-awareness.

By linking brain science to everyday experiences, this lesson helps students understand themselves and build lifelong tools for managing stress and emotions with confidence, control and care.



Video link: [Dr. Daniel Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain \(YouTube\)](#)

## Learning activities

### Introduction

1. Ask students to think about a time when they felt out of control with an emotion. What did their body feel like? What did they do in response? (*Students do not need to share this with the class, just hold the thought.*)
2. Explain to students that in order to learn how to manage their emotions, they need to understand what's happening in their brains when they feel strong emotions like anger, fear or anxiety.
3. Explain that when we feel overwhelmed or upset, our brain responds in a very fast and automatic way to protect us. It's called the stress response – you might have heard of it as fight, flight or freeze.

Here's how it works:

- The **amygdala** is like your brain's alarm system. It notices anything that feels like a threat, whether real or perceived.
- When the **amygdala** senses danger, it signals the brainstem to prepare your body to react by fighting, running away or freezing.



- Your **thinking brain** (called the **prefrontal cortex**) is the thinking and decision-making part of your brain. But when the amygdala is activated you “flip the lid”, which means your ability to think clearly and make calm decisions temporarily shuts off. The reason this part of the brain shuts off is because the brain is now solely concerned with protecting you from real or perceived danger.
- When your thinking brain is offline, it becomes harder to control your emotions, press pause or respond calmly.
- You might feel:
  - » A faster heartbeat
  - » Sweaty palms
  - » Shaky hands or knees
  - » A tight chest
  - » A racing mind

This response is natural and designed to keep you safe. It kicks in when you may be in danger, and sometimes it kicks in even when you’re not in real danger, like doing a test or having a disagreement with a friend.

That’s why it’s important to practise calming strategies *before* stress takes over. This helps keep your thinking brain “online” and ready to make better choices, even when emotions feel strong.

### Optional video:



Show The Hand Model of the Brain video at this [YouTube link](#).

After watching the video, ask students to reflect on the following:

- What surprised you most about how the brain works under stress?
- What are some signs (in your body or mind) that your “lid” might be flipped?
- When your “thinking brain” is flipped, what kinds of things become harder to do?
- How might knowing this “hand model” help you react differently in a stressful moment like during an argument, a test or a confrontation at home?

Conclude by encouraging compassion and understanding for themselves and others when they flip the lid, reassuring them that this is normal. Their job is to learn to manage their reactions when in stress and be aware that trying to reason with someone who in a flipped lid state will not work in that moment.



## Development of learning

### Step 1: Introduce “pressing pause” to students

Now that students understand what happens in the brain during emotional moments, including how we “flip our lid” when the amygdala takes over, introduce the concept of “pressing pause” as a way to prevent the stress response being activated and the thinking brain going off-line.

#### 1. The pause button analogy (teacher explanation)

Imagine you’re watching a movie, and something happens in the scene that really makes you upset. Maybe it’s a character saying something, or something intense happens. Instead of getting caught up in the emotion of that moment, you have the power to press pause on the movie. When you press pause, the movie stops, you get a moment to breathe, and you can decide what to do next – maybe rewind after you have prepared yourself for the scene, fast forward to see what happens next, or just take a break or turn down the volume so that it feels less intense.

In real life, strong emotions can feel just like that intense movie scene. When we get overwhelmed – by anger, anxiety, stress or fear – we sometimes “flip our lid”, meaning our thinking brain shuts down and we react automatically. But if we can press pause, before this happens, we have a better chance of keeping our lid on and staying calm and being able to respond thoughtfully.

#### 2. Display a graphic of a pause button on the board to anchor the metaphor.



#### 3. Ask students to take a few minutes to reflect:

Think of a time when you felt like reacting impulsively without pausing; maybe someone said something and you reacted too quickly. Now, think about what might have happened if you had hit the pause button for just a few seconds before reacting. What would have changed?

#### 4. After students have reflected, ask them to discuss the following:

- Why do you think pressing pause can be helpful when we feel strong emotions coming on?
- How does it connect to what we learned about the brain?
- Can pressing pause stop the stress response? *(Prompt them to understand that while pressing pause is not always easy, with practice catching the response early by pressing pause can help your thinking brain stay in control.)*



## Step 2: Emotional regulation strategies

Students are introduced to practical strategies that can help them press pause and stay calm, even when emotions are running high.

1. Each strategy will be introduced one at a time and students will have a chance to:

- Learn about the strategy
- Practise it through an engaging activity
- Reflect on how the strategy felt and its real-life application.
  - » What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?
  - » How does your body feel after practising this strategy?
  - » What type of situation might this strategy help in?
  - » On a scale of 1–5, rate how helpful you think this strategy might be for you.

2. Repeat this process for each of the following strategies:

**a) Pause and breathe**

Practise: Guided deep breathing

**b) Ground yourself**

Practise: 5-4-3-2-1 technique (noticing senses)

**c) Visualisation**

Practise: Calming mental imagery (e.g. imagining a safe or happy place)

**d) Progressive muscle relaxation**

Practise: Tensing and relaxing muscle groups

3. After all strategies have been practised and reflected on, hold a class discussion or have students discuss in pairs.

Discussion questions:

- How does knowing how the brain works during emotional stress change how you view your reactions?
- Which strategy felt easiest or most natural to you? Which felt more difficult or unfamiliar? Why do you think that is?
- In what types of real-life situations (school, work, relationships, online) could pressing pause make the biggest difference?
- Can you think of any other strategies you use to help yourself pause and stay in control when emotions start to build? *(e.g. walk away in order to remove yourself from the situation, pour cold water on face or wrists (this lowers body temperature and gets you into the body and away from the emotions))*
- Are there certain environments or situations in your life where it feels easier or harder to manage your emotions? Why?



## Reflecting and applying learning

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To close the lesson, invite students to reflect on how emotional regulation strategies can support them when their stress response is about to be activated; that moment when emotions rise and before their thinking brain begins to shut down.

Ask students to choose one strategy from today's lesson that resonates with them and commit to using it in a real-life situation over the next week. This could be a situation where they anticipate strong emotions, such as frustration, anxiety or anger.

Invite students to set a goal in their journals for practising their chosen emotional regulation strategy. Encourage them to think about a specific upcoming situation that might trigger strong emotions and how they can apply the strategy in that moment. For example: *"This week, I will use deep breathing when I feel anxious about an upcoming test or making a presentation to the class"*.

Encourage students to share one of the emotional regulation strategies they learned with a family member. This helps reinforce the learning and promotes communication. They can demonstrate the strategy or explain how it works and why it is beneficial.



## Things you can do when pressing pause to help regulate emotions

### Pause and breathe

#### Instructions

##### 1. Learn

When we're feeling anxious, angry or overwhelmed, our body can go into "fight or flight" mode. Deep breathing helps calm the nervous system and sends a message to your brain that you're safe. It's one of the simplest and most effective ways to press pause and reset.

##### 2. Practise

Guide students through this box breathing exercise slowly:

- Inhale through your nose for a count of 3/4 seconds
- Hold your breath for a count of 3/4 seconds
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 3/4 seconds
- Hold again for 3/4 seconds
- Repeat this cycle three times

**Tip:** Draw a square on the board, or trace a square in the air with your finger as you count the four sides, to help students stay focused.



Optional video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FriSddUY84>

##### 3. Reflect

- How do you feel emotionally after doing this?
- How does your body feel?
- When might this strategy be helpful in real life?
- On a scale of 1–5, how helpful was this strategy for you?

### Ground yourself

#### Instructions

##### 1. Learn

Grounding techniques help bring us back to the present moment when we feel overwhelmed or disconnected. The 5-4-3-2-1 method is a simple way to reconnect with your surroundings and calm your thoughts.



## 2. Practise



Play this short 2-minute video: [5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique](#)

If you prefer a teacher-led approach, guide students through the steps:

- Look around and name 5 things you can see
- Focus on 4 things you can hear
- Notice 3 things you can feel or touch
- Identify 2 things you can smell
- Name 1 thing you can taste

## 3. Reflect

- What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?
- How does your body feel after practising this strategy?
- What type of situation might this strategy help in?
- On a scale of 1–5, rate how helpful you think this strategy might be for you.

## Visualisation (safe or happy place)

### Instructions

#### 1. Learn

Visualisation helps your mind create a calming space when your body or emotions feel stressed. By imagining a peaceful place, your brain starts to relax, your heart rate slows, and your focus shifts to something comforting. It's like a mini mental vacation.

#### 2. Practise

Have students sit comfortably, close their eyes (if they're comfortable) and take a few slow breaths. You may choose to play soft instrumental music in the background.

Guide them with prompts:

- Picture a place where you feel totally at peace. It might be a beach, forest, cozy room, or somewhere you've been before.
- What do you see around you? What sounds can you hear? What smells are in the air? What can you feel on your skin?
- Take three slow breaths while imagining this place.



Optional video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miU4pBZ0hXQ>



### 3. Reflect

- What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?
- How does your body feel after practising this strategy?
- What type of situation might this strategy help in?
- On a scale of 1–5, rate how helpful you think this strategy might be for you.

## Progressive muscle relaxation

### Instructions

#### 1. Learn

When we feel stressed, our muscles often tense up without us even realising it. *Progressive muscle relaxation* is a strategy where you gently tense and then release different muscle groups to help your body let go of tension – and your mind follow.

#### 2. Practise



Play this guided video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GIFukn6Q20>

#### 3. Reflect

- What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?
- How does your body feel after practising this strategy?
- What type of situation might this strategy help in?
- On a scale of 1–5, rate how helpful you think this strategy might be for you.

### Additional: [The Mindful Minute](#) (Spotify)

This podcast features short and simple meditations to help students find calm in the chaos. Hosted by Irish mindfulness teacher Conor Stone, the episodes are designed to be approachable and engaging.

You can:

- Share this with students to explore in their own time
- Start or end a class with a one-minute practice
- Use it school-wide as a “mindful moment” routine.

## Worksheet: Reflecting on Strategies



**Instructions:** For each strategy you practised, take a moment to answer the questions below.

### Strategy:

1. What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?

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2. How does your body feel after practising this strategy?

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3. What type of situation might this strategy help in?

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4. On a scale of 1–5, how helpful do you think this strategy might be for you?

(1 = Not helpful, 5 = Very helpful)    ☐ 1    ☐ 2    ☐ 3    ☐ 4    ☐ 5

### Strategy:

1. What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?

---

2. How does your body feel after practising this strategy?

---

3. What type of situation might this strategy help in?

---

4. On a scale of 1–5, how helpful do you think this strategy might be for you?

(1 = Not helpful, 5 = Very helpful)    ☐ 1    ☐ 2    ☐ 3    ☐ 4    ☐ 5

### Strategy:

1. What emotion do you feel after practising this strategy?

---

2. How does your body feel after practising this strategy?

---

3. What type of situation might this strategy help in?

---

4. On a scale of 1–5, how helpful do you think this strategy might be for you?

(1 = Not helpful, 5 = Very helpful)    ☐ 1    ☐ 2    ☐ 3    ☐ 4    ☐ 5



## Lesson 5: Understanding Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours

**Learning outcome 1.5:** Recognise helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, including negative self-talk, and how these can affect emotions and behaviour.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will deepen their understanding of the connection between thoughts, emotions and behaviours. They will explore how thoughts influence feelings and behaviours, recognising the impact this has on their wellbeing.

### Teacher's note



In this lesson, the aim is to build awareness of how our thoughts, feelings, bodily and behavioural responses are interconnected and influence each other. In other words, what we think affects the way we feel and this affects the way we behave. It is important for students to begin to see the links between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. This awareness can empower young people throughout their lives, particularly in times of stress and when they may otherwise feel they have little control over their thoughts, feelings and behavioural responses. Through awareness we can distinguish between helpful and unhelpful thoughts, and break the cycle of unhelpful or negative thinking that may lead to anxiety or depression. It helps us to understand that when/if we engage in negative thoughts, it can affect how we feel (making us sad, anxious, etc.) and this affects our behaviour (withdrawal, avoidance, etc.) The aim is not to remove all negative thinking but to establish a healthier balance between unhelpful and helpful thoughts.

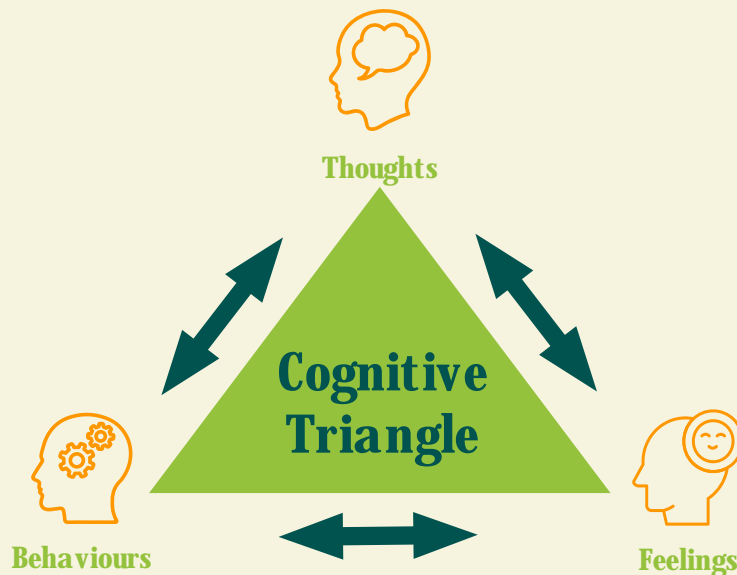
Before students can begin to challenge or reframe unhelpful thoughts, it's important that they first learn to recognise how their internal thoughts and feelings are linked and how they influence their behaviours.

This lesson introduces students to the concept of the Cognitive Triangle to deepen their understanding of the relationship between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

The Cognitive Triangle teaches that:

- Thoughts are the ideas or beliefs that pop into our minds (e.g. "I'm not good at this" or "I can do this").
- Feelings are the emotional responses those thoughts can trigger (e.g. anxious, embarrassed, excited).
- Behaviours are the actions we take (or avoid) as a result (e.g. acting out, giving up, remaining calm, staying focused).

## Teacher's note continued



These three elements are constantly interacting. A helpful thought can lead to positive emotions and behaviours while an unhelpful thought can lead to unpleasant emotions, which can then influence how a person behaves. Over time, these behaviours can reinforce the original thought, creating a loop that can impact our mental wellbeing. It is also important to avoid giving students the impression that unpleasant emotions (such as sadness) are the sole result of negative thinking as these emotions can be a response to events, often outside our control.

Many young people experience unhelpful thoughts without realising how much power those thoughts hold. By making this connection explicit, this lesson encourages students to develop greater self-awareness, recognise how thoughts shape their daily experiences, and understand that they have the ability to interrupt, challenge and change the triangle.

## Learning activities

### Introduction

1. Start the activity by writing on the board:  
*"I need to talk to these students after class."*  
 Write it clearly, keeping a neutral facial expression, tone and body language.
2. Pause and give students a moment to read the message.  
 Let them sit with this for a second; some may feel curious, confused or even anxious.



3. Pretend to write specific names under the statement without actually writing anything. Then turn to the class and say:  
*"Imagine your name was one of the names I was about to write."*
4. Have students turn to a partner and discuss these questions:
  - What thoughts might pop into your head if you saw your name?
  - How would the message make you feel? What emotions might come up?
  - How might your thoughts and feelings influence your actions and behaviour for the rest of class?
5. Invite volunteers to share their responses.  
 Common reactions might include:
  - **Thoughts:** "Did I do something wrong?", "I'm in trouble", "Maybe it's something good", "They probably want to ask me something".
  - **Feelings:** Anxious, nervous, confused, curious, excited, worried.
  - **Behaviours:** Becoming quieter, more focused, distracted, trying to remember what happened earlier, shutting down.
6. Have students notice that the same message can lead to very different thoughts and feelings for different people. This is a great example of how our brains can fill in the blanks – sometimes with worry, sometimes with hope, even when we don't have the full picture.

## Development of learning

### Step 1: Unhelpful thoughts: Ditch the monkey



1. Play this video developed by SpunOut: [Ditch the Monkey – Be Aware](#)
2. After the video, ask students to discuss the following questions:
  - What stood out for you in the video?
  - What do you think the "monkey" represents in real life?
  - Can you relate to having those kinds of thoughts?
  - Why is it hard to challenge the monkey sometimes?
  - What are some ways you can "ditch the monkey" when it shows up?



3. Explain to students that we all experience unhelpful thoughts from time to time, like a little monkey on our shoulder whispering doubts, fears or unkind things about ourselves. These thoughts can feel real, but they're often not true.

The “monkey” is a symbol for those unhelpful thoughts. The good news is, we don't have to listen to them. We can notice them, challenge them and ditch the monkey.

## Step 2: Introducing the Cognitive Triangle

1. Explain to students that the first step is learning to recognise our thoughts and how they influence our feelings and behaviours. Even a small shift in how we think can change the entire outcome of a situation.
2. Draw the Cognitive Triangle on the board (Thoughts – Feelings – Behaviours). Use some of the examples students shared from the introductory activity to demonstrate how thoughts, emotions and behaviours influence each other.
3. Ensure that students understand that these three parts of the triangle are deeply connected, and each one can influence the others. Explain that for the remainder of the class, we're going to dive deeper into this connection and explore how understanding the link between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours can help us know when and how to challenge unhelpful thoughts.

## Step 3: One scenario, many triangles

1. Divide students into small groups (3–4 students per group).
2. Give each group one shared scenario, either from the scenario list (page 40) or others brainstormed as a class.
3. Each group creates three different triangles for their scenario.

Each triangle should include:

- A different **thought** about the situation
- The **feeling(s)** that thought might lead to
- The **behaviour(s)** that might follow.

Encourage variety:

- One triangle could reflect a **negative/unhelpful** thought
- One could show a **neutral or uncertain** interpretation
- One could show a **positive/helpful** thought.



- After groups have had a chance to consider and discuss their three triangles, they will present these to the class. Groups can decide to present through one of the following options:

#### **Option A: Writing/Drawing**

- Groups draw three Cognitive Triangles on paper or posters.
- They can choose to use words or draw images to capture what is happening.

#### **Option B: Role Play**

- Groups act out each of the three versions of their scenario.
- Each short scene should clearly show the thought, emotion and behaviour.
- Encourage use of body language, tone of voice and narration if helpful (e.g. “In this version, the thought is...”).

- After groups present their three triangles (via writing/drawing or role play), invite discussion with the class:
  - Which version felt most familiar or relatable ?
  - What surprised you about how the same situation could lead to such different emotions and behaviours?
  - Which version do you think would lead to the most helpful outcome? Why?
  - How easy or hard is it to choose a more helpful thought in the moment? What makes it difficult?
  - How could the Cognitive Triangle help you next time you’re in a stressful situation?
- Wrap up by explaining to students that our thoughts shape how we feel and behave, but those thoughts aren’t always accurate. The same situation can be interpreted in many ways. By recognising and naming our thoughts, we gain more control over how we respond.

## **Reflecting and applying learning**

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- Ask students to quietly think of a recent situation in their own life that brought up a strong emotional reaction. Then, have them complete their own Cognitive Triangle for that situation in their journal or on a handout.

Prompts to guide their reflection:

- What happened?
- What thought did you have at the time?
- What feelings did that thought trigger?
- What did you do (or feel like doing) as a result?



2. After completing their triangles, ask students to reflect and write a short response to this question:
  - How might changing just one part of your triangle (thought, feeling or behaviour) influence the others? Can you imagine what that would look like in your situation?
3. Remind students that the more we practise noticing our thoughts, the easier it becomes to question and reframe them. Remember, our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all connected – changing one can influence the others. You don't have to believe everything your mind tells you, especially if it's unkind or untrue. In our next class, we'll explore practical strategies to help challenge unhelpful thoughts and quiet that inner monkey.

## Scenario List



### Possible scenarios

1. You get a text from a friend or partner saying, "We need to talk."
2. Your friends send you pictures/videos together, without you.
3. You do badly in a test you studied hard for.
4. You missed a penalty shot, and your team lost the game.
5. You get left on "read" after sending a personal message to someone.
6. One of your friends makes a joke about your appearance.
7. You get a new outfit for going out and when you try it on a family member passes a critical comment about it.
8. You have been asked to go to a party where you won't know anyone.
9. You have to give a presentation to your class tomorrow and you don't feel prepared.
10. Your friend asked you to a party and leaves you the minute you get there.



## Lesson 6: Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

### Learning outcomes

- 1.5:** Recognise helpful and unhelpful thinking patterns, including negative self-talk, and how these can affect emotions and behaviour.
- 1.6:** Describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health.
- 3.2:** Demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will identify unhelpful thinking patterns and explore strategies to reframe their thoughts. They will practise techniques to shift unhelpful thoughts towards a more balanced and positive mindset, enhancing their self-management skills and wellbeing.

### Teacher's note



Challenging unhelpful thoughts is essential for maintaining positive mental health and emotional wellbeing. In this lesson, students will learn to recognise unhelpful thinking, such as self-criticism or expecting the worst, and develop skills to reframe it. This process is vital because our thoughts directly influence how we feel and behave.

By learning to identify and challenge unhelpful and negative thoughts, students can shift to more helpful, constructive perspectives, thus allowing them to develop a more balanced view of themselves and the world. Ultimately, challenging and reframing unhelpful thoughts equips students with the resilience and confidence to navigate life's challenges and thrive.



## Learning activities

### Introduction

#### Step 1: Guess who? Overcoming setbacks



**1. Optional video** to start with Rory McIlroy on managing nerves and unhelpful thoughts. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC\\_uG0awpr4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC_uG0awpr4)

Play the video clip to set the stage. Afterwards, invite students to share their reactions:

- What stood out to you from the video?
  - Instead of imagining hitting the ball into the water, what could he have pictured instead to stay confident?
2. Start by introducing the activity. You could say something like:  
We're going to play a quick game. I'll describe a famous person – but not say who. All these people faced setbacks or challenges. Your job is to guess who they are, and then we'll figure out what helpful or unhelpful thoughts they might have experienced and what thoughts helped them keep going.
  3. Read 3–4 descriptions from the Guess Who? resource (choose ones that will resonate with your group).
  4. After each description:
    - Let students guess the person.
    - In pairs, ask:
      - » What unhelpful thought might they have had?
      - » What helpful thought might they have used instead?
  5. Invite groups to share back some of their responses.
  6. Just like these successful celebrities, we all have challenging situations and unhelpful/negative thoughts sometimes. But we don't have to believe everything our brain tells us. Today, you're going to learn four powerful strategies to challenge and reframe unhelpful thoughts in a way that can be more beneficial to our lives.



## Development of learning

### Step 2: Four corners – thought challengers

1. Label each corner of the room with one of the four strategies below (you can use posters or signs) and include the information about each strategy on a printed piece of paper:

#### Thought challengers:

- a) **Zoom out** – Step back and look at the big picture.
  - b) **Evidence check** – What facts support or don't support this thought?
  - c) **What would you say to a friend?** – Be kind to yourself like you would to a friend.
  - d) **Try a different angle** – Is there another way to see this situation?
2. At each corner, place a flipchart or large paper divided into two columns: "Unhelpful Thoughts" and "Reframed Thought".
  3. Introduce the four thought challengers.
  4. Randomly assign students to one of the four strategies and ask them to go to the corresponding corner of the room.
  5. Let students know that you will read a scenario aloud, and at each corner, they will go through three steps: Think, Challenge, Reframe.
  6. In their corners they will need to:

#### THINK

- Students list the different thoughts a person may have in response to the scenario and decide which of these are helpful or unhelpful.
- Students write the unhelpful thoughts they came up with on the "Unhelpful Thoughts" column of the flipchart paper.

#### CHALLENGE

- Students read about their assigned thought challenger (e.g. "zoom out") and discuss how this strategy can help challenge the unhelpful thoughts.
- They can talk about how they might apply the thought challenger to the unhelpful thoughts they've written down.



## REFRAME

- Students work together to reframe one of the unhelpful thoughts into a more balanced or realistic thought.
  - They will then write the reframed thought on the "Reframed Thought" column of the flipchart paper.
7. After 5–7 minutes, rotate groups to a new corner and provide a new scenario. Repeat the process until students have practised all four strategies, or as much as time permits.
  8. At the end of the activity, gather the students together for a whole-class debrief.
    - Which thought challenger was the most difficult to apply?
    - Which thought challenger did you find most helpful in reframing unhelpful thoughts?
    - Can you think of a time recently when you had an unhelpful thought and could have used one of these strategies?
    - How might using these strategies improve your mindset in the future?

Wrap up by explaining to students that they now have four great tools to challenge unhelpful thoughts. Everyone struggles with unhelpful thinking sometimes, but you have the power to change your perspective. Like the famous people we talked about earlier, your mindset matters.

## Reflecting and applying learning

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1. Encourage students to use their journals to think about a situation from today or this week where they had an unhelpful thought. It could be something that happened at school, with friends, or at home.
2. Reframe:
  - a) Write down the unhelpful thought in one sentence (e.g. "I'm not good enough to handle this").
  - b) Choose one of the four strategies you learned today and write this down.
  - c) Using that strategy, reframe your thought into something more helpful or balanced. Write it down (e.g. "I might feel overwhelmed now, but I can break things down and manage one step at a time").
3. Ask students to take a moment to reflect on how it feels to change that thought. Do they feel more in control of the situation now?



## Resource: Guess who? Famous failures game

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1. This basketball player was cut from his high school team – but became one of the greatest athletes of all time.  
**Answer:** Michael Jordan  
*Unhelpful thought:* “I’m not good enough to play.”  
*Helpful thought:* “I’ll work harder and prove I belong.”
  
2. This singer was told her music was “too weird” – and now she has 7 Grammys and millions of fans.  
**Answer:** Billie Eilish  
*Unhelpful thought:* “No-one will ever like my style.”  
*Helpful thought:* “Being myself is what makes me stand out.”
  
3. She was interrupted and embarrassed on stage in front of millions – but came back stronger and didn’t let the hate define her.  
**Answer:** Taylor Swift  
*Unhelpful thought:* “Maybe they’re right – maybe I don’t deserve this.”  
*Helpful thought:* “I can’t please everyone, but I know my music makes me and others happy – and I know who I am.”
  
4. He was told he was too small to ever play professional football – but went on to become a global superstar.  
**Answer:** Lionel Messi  
*Unhelpful thought:* “I don’t have what it takes.”  
*Helpful thought:* “My skill and determination matter more than my size.”
  
5. He was told he didn’t have the look of a typical pop star – but now sells out stadiums worldwide.  
**Answer:** Ed Sheeran  
*Unhelpful thought:* “No one wants to see someone like me on stage.”  
*Helpful thought:* “I know people connect with my music – and that’s what really matters.”
  
6. She withdrew from events at the Olympics for mental health reasons – but returned to compete and inspired millions.  
**Answer:** Simone Biles  
*Unhelpful thought:* “People will think I’m weak.”  
*Helpful thought:* “Taking care of my mind is the strongest thing I can do.”
  
7. She was dropped by her record label at 22 because they didn’t think her music would make money – but she didn’t give up. Now, she’s selling out shows and gaining tons of fans.  
**Answer:** Chappell Roan  
*Unhelpful thought:* “Maybe my music isn’t good enough to make it.”  
*Helpful thought:* “My music is unique, and I believe in it. I’ll keep going until people notice.”



## Resource: Sample scenarios to practise thought challenging and reframing

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- You've been working hard in a class but still aren't getting the grades you want.
- You forgot some of the words for your presentation and now feel embarrassed in front of the class.
- Your team loses an important game, and you feel like you let everyone down.
- You and your best friend used to spend a lot of time together, but lately they've been busy with other activities, and you feel like you're drifting apart.
- You have an opportunity to try out for a team, but you're afraid of not being good enough.
- You had a disagreement with a family member, and you feel like they don't get you.
- You feel overwhelmed by your packed schedule and feel like you can't cope because you can't do it all.
- You see a friend succeeding at something you're struggling with, and it makes you feel like you're falling behind.
- You scroll through social media and see people living what seem to be perfect lives, which makes you feel like you're not doing enough with yours.
- You auditioned for a role in the school musical but didn't get selected.
- You're a goalkeeper and you let the ball in, your team loses, and you blame yourself.
- You've been playing football for a while but don't feel like you're getting any better.
- You have to tell your parents that you did badly on a test or assignment, and you're worried about how they'll react.

## Worksheet: Thought Changers



**Zoom out** – Step back and look at the big picture.

**Description:** Sometimes when we're caught up in an unhelpful thought, it's easy to get stuck in the moment and forget the bigger context. Zooming out helps us see the broader perspective.

**How to use this strategy:**

- Ask yourself:
  - » "How will this look in a few days, months or years?"
  - » "Is this one setback the end of the story, or just one part of a much bigger journey?"
- This strategy helps shift focus from immediate frustrations to long-term goals and bigger successes.

**Evidence check** – What facts support or don't support this thought?

**Description:** Often, our unhelpful thoughts are based on assumptions, not facts. "Evidence check" encourages us to gather facts to challenge those assumptions.

**How to use this strategy:**

- Look for evidence that supports the unhelpful thought, and evidence that contradicts it.
- Ask yourself:
  - » "What facts support this thought? What facts suggest it might not be true?"
- This strategy helps you challenge the strength of your unhelpful thought by focusing on concrete facts.

**What would you say to a friend?** – Be kind to yourself like you would to a friend

**Description:** We're often much kinder and more supportive to others than we are to ourselves. This strategy asks you to treat yourself like a friend in need of encouragement.

**How to use this strategy:**

- Imagine a friend is having the same thought you're struggling with. What would you say to help them reframe it?
- Think about how you would offer them support, kindness and perspective, then apply that to yourself.
- This strategy focuses on self-compassion and empathy to reduce negative self-talk.

**Try a different angle** – Is there another way to see this situation?

**Description:** Sometimes, we only see one side of a situation. Trying a different angle means finding new perspectives or rethinking the situation from a different point of view.

**How to use this strategy:**

- Ask yourself:
  - » "What are some other ways to look at this situation?"
  - » "How might someone else see it differently?"
- This strategy encourages creative thinking to find alternative, more balanced interpretations of the situation.



## Lesson 7: Managing Myself in Stressful Situations

### Learning outcomes

- 1.6:** Describe and draw on a variety of strategies that can help regulate and manage thoughts and emotions in order to nurture positive mental health.
- 1.8:** Discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety.
- 3.2:** Demonstrate self-management skills necessary for life.
- 3.3:** Explore a range of life events where they might experience change, loss or heartache and discuss how to care for themselves and/or others during these times and where to find support.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will explore a range of different coping strategies and reflect on their effectiveness in dealing with stressful life situations. They will also reflect on their personal coping skills toolkit, learning what strategies might be most helpful to them in managing stressful and difficult situations.

### Teacher's note



Managing stress and difficult situations is essential for maintaining overall health and wellbeing, including mental, emotional and physical aspects. In this lesson, students will learn about a variety of coping strategies people use when facing stressful situations – some helpful, some unhelpful, and some potentially harmful.

Understanding how different coping strategies affect us is important because the ways we manage stress can either support or harm our holistic health or have a neutral effect. Helpful strategies promote resilience, emotional balance and physical wellness, while unhelpful or harmful strategies might feel good in the moment but may increase stress or cause additional problems. Building a personal coping toolkit equips students with self-management skills needed to handle everyday pressures and more difficult situations. It encourages them to identify and use coping methods that nurture their wellbeing and to avoid those that might lead to further stress or harm.

This lesson helps students become more aware of their coping habits, reflect on their effectiveness, and develop the confidence and resilience to manage stress and challenging situations both now and in the future.



## Learning activities

### Introduction

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In introducing the lesson explain that students will be discussing how people deal with stress and challenging situations, and looking at the different ways people cope – some helpful, some unhelpful, and some that could actually do harm. By the end of the session, they'll have a collection of strategies that support them when they have to face challenges.

It is worth highlighting here that what works for one person doesn't necessarily work for someone else, and also what works in one situation may not work in another. This is why a self-care toolkit is helpful to identify several strategies that could be helpful.

#### **Warm-up: What stresses us out?**

1. Explain to students that stress is how our body and brain react to pressure or challenging situations. A little stress can help us stay focused or motivated (like before a test), but too much stress, especially over time, can affect how we feel, think, behave, and even how our body works.
2. Ask: "What kinds of things cause stress for people your age?"

Write answers on the board. If needed, prompt with ideas like:

- School and exams
- Friendships or breakups
- Family issues
- Social media or body image
- Money or future plans

3. Follow up with:

"How do we know when we're feeling stressed?"

Guide them to think about body signs, feelings, thoughts and actions. Explain that our body often gives us the first signs that we're stressed – like headaches, tummy pains, skin break-outs, a racing heart or sweaty palms. Our thoughts, feelings or behaviours might change too.



4. Then ask, when people feel stressed, how do they usually deal with it? What do you do, or what do you see others do?"

Jot down a few examples on the board/flipchart, highlighting that strategies can be:

- **Helpful**
  - » These support your mental and physical health.
  - » They help you feel better, think clearly, and handle stress in a healthy way.
- **Unhelpful**
  - » These might seem to work for a moment, but they don't really solve the problem.
  - » They might leave you feeling the same or even worse later.
- **Harmful**
  - » These hurt your mind or body and can make things worse over time.
  - » They might offer short-term relief but lead to more stress or even danger.

## Development of learning

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### Step 1: Coping strategy tables

1. Set up 5–6 tables around the room and assign 4–5 students per table.

At each table, place:

- A printed case study: A short scenario involving a young person facing a real-life challenge.



- A **Coping Strategy worksheet** for students to complete together.
- Pens/markers.

Students at each table will:

- Read the case study
- Brainstorm coping strategies – Come up with as many coping strategies as they can think of for this situation (helpful, unhelpful or harmful) and record them in the first column of the worksheet.
- Evaluate each strategy – For each proposed strategy, complete the other columns in the worksheet by answering:



- » Is it helpful, unhelpful, or harmful?
- » Why is it helpful, unhelpful, or harmful?
- » How might it affect the person's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and body?

## Step 2: Group share back

1. Following the group work activity, each group will take turns to:
  - Briefly explain their scenario to the class
  - Share three coping strategies they came up with
  - Say if each strategy is helpful, unhelpful or harmful and why
  - Describe how the strategy might affect the person's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and body.
2. After each group shares their scenario and strategies, take a minute to briefly explain to the students the science or reasoning behind each strategy.
3. Explain to students that different strategies work better for different people and situations. Something that helps in one moment might not help in another. The important thing is to notice what works well and to avoid strategies that could hurt our mental, physical or overall health, or hurt others.

## Reflecting and applying learning

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### Coping toolkit

1. Explain to students that now you've explored different ways people cope with stress, including which strategies are helpful, unhelpful or even harmful, it's time to think about what this means for you. Each person deals with stress in their own way, so your Coping Toolkit will be unique to you. It includes strategies you already use, new ones you want to try, signs to watch out for, and the supports and strengths that help you bounce back.



2. Hand out the **"Coping Toolkit" worksheet** or project the questions onto the board. Invite students to reflect on the questions and complete the worksheet privately. Remind them this is their personal toolkit – there are no right or wrong answers.



## Resource: Example case studies

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1. **Aoife** failed her maths exam even though she studied hard. She's worried her parents will be upset and now she's dreading having to tell them her result.
2. **Fatima's** parents argue a lot at home. She tries to keep her younger brothers and sisters distracted, and as a result finds it hard to focus on her schoolwork.
3. **Liam** has a part-time job in a café but didn't get paid his tips recently. He feels awkward asking for it, but he needs the money because he's saving for concert tickets next month.
4. **Dara's** teammates want him to play in a game this weekend, but he has a family event at the same time. He feels stuck and worries he might lose his spot on the team.
5. **Jamie** uses they/them pronouns but some students and even teachers keep using the wrong pronouns. This makes Jamie feel upset, disrespected and stressed every day at school.
6. **Jakub** wants to go out with friends after school, but his parents are strict and won't let him. He feels stressed and frustrated and worries that he's missing out.
7. **Seán** feels a lot of pressure to get top grades. His parents want him to study medicine, but he's not sure that's what he really wants.
8. **Róisín** sees perfect pictures and videos of other girls on Instagram and TikTok. She feels bad about how she looks and feels like she'll never look as good.
9. **Zara** helps her parents by translating bills, doctor appointments and school emails because they don't speak English well. It sometimes makes her feel stressed having to take care of grown-up things.
10. **Cian** is trying to manage school, GAA training, a part-time job and time with friends. He feels really tired and is falling behind on work.
11. **Mateo** moved from South America and speaks English well, but people still tease him for his accent. He doesn't speak up in class, even when he knows the answers.
12. **Jasmine** heard some classmates making racist jokes. She's not sure if she should tell a teacher or if that will just make things worse for her.
13. **Harry**, who has ADHD, finds it hard to pay attention in some classes. Sometimes he forgets what he was meant to do or gets distracted and falls behind. He feels frustrated, embarrassed and tired of always having to try harder just to keep up.
14. **Eoin** is scared to tell his parents about his boyfriend because he worries they might judge or reject him.
15. **Maya** kissed her friend's ex at a party, and now all the girls in her year are upset with her and ignoring her. Maya feels really alone and isolated.

# Worksheet: Coping Strategy



**Scenario:**

Coping Strategy	Is it Helpful, Unhelpful, or Harmful?	Why is it Helpful, Unhelpful, or Harmful?	How might it affect the person's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and body?



## Group Reflection

1. What's the most likely way of responding to this scenario?
2. Is it helpful, unhelpful or harmful? Explain why.
3. What other ways of responding could you suggest that would be helpful?

## Worksheet: Coping Strategy



### Example

**Scenario:** Josh just went through a breakup and is finding it really hard to focus on anything else.

Coping Strategy	Is it Helpful, Unhelpful, or Harmful?	Why is it Helpful, Unhelpful, or Harmful?	How might it affect the person's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and body?
Talking to a friend	Helpful	Friends can help you feel less alone and offer a different point of view.	Might feel calmer, less upset, more hopeful. Can help you feel less tense or tired.
Ignoring the problem	Unhelpful	Pushing feelings away doesn't make them go away – they build up.	Could feel more overwhelmed later, might snap or shut down. Can lead to feeling tired or stressed.
Drinking alcohol	Harmful	Might block feelings short term, but makes things worse after.	Numbs feelings for a bit but makes it worse later. Can mess with your sleep and health.
Going for a run or walk	Helpful	Moving your body helps clear your head and boosts your mood.	Clears your head and boosts your mood. Gives you energy and helps you relax.
Posting about it online	Unhelpful	Might feel good to vent, but others' reactions can make it worse.	Could feel embarrassed or have regret after. Can make stress and anxiety worse.
Writing in a journal	Helpful	Helps you understand what you're feeling and let it out safely.	Can help you feel lighter, more in control of emotions. Can slow your heart rate and help you feel calmer.
Re-reading old messages	Unhelpful	Keeps you stuck in the past and makes it harder to move on.	Might keep feeling sad, stuck or confused. Could cause trouble sleeping, stomach aches, tension.

## Worksheet: Coping Toolkit



### 1. My go-to coping tools

What are some things you already do that help you feel better when you're stressed or having a tough time? (e.g. *going for a walk, talking to a friend, listening to music*)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. New strategies I want to add

What are some new ideas you'd like to try for managing stress or feeling more balanced? (e.g. *journaling, mindful breathing, spending time in nature*)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Stress warning signs and what to avoid

What are some signs that you're getting overwhelmed? What unhelpful or harmful coping strategies do you want to avoid? (e.g. *isolating myself, negative self-talk, skipping meals*)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. People or things that support me

Who (or what) can help you feel supported when you're going through a stressful time? (e.g. *a trusted adult, friend, teacher, pet, music, nature*)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. My bounce-back strength

What's one strength or quality you have that helps you get through tough situations? (e.g. *creativity, humour, kindness, determination, optimism, trust*)

- \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. This week's coping mission

What's one helpful strategy from your toolkit that you'll try to use more often this week? (Set a simple goal like: *"I'll take 10 minutes to go outside when I feel overwhelmed."*)





## Lesson 8: Strengthening Mental Health Literacy

### Learning outcomes

- 1.7:** Recognise the signs and symptoms of low mood, stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed.
- 1.8:** Discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will develop their mental health literacy skills. They will develop an understanding of the mental health continuum, and learn to recognise the signs of mental health challenges and when further support is needed.

### Teacher's note



This lesson builds students' mental health literacy by introducing the mental health continuum. Mental health is dynamic and can change, like physical health. The goal is to recognise these changes as normal, develop ways to manage in periods of poor mental health and be able to identify when they or another person may need additional support. Students will explore how thoughts, feelings and behaviours change across the continuum of mental health, from thriving, through to coping and struggling, to being unwell. This awareness can increase understanding and empathy around the reality of mental health challenges in themselves and others.

While sometimes the signs can be subtle or a person can "mask" them, there are a range of common signs which may indicate that someone needs to seek help. This lesson opens up discussion about spotting early warning signs and suggests questions that can be helpful, such as how long the sign lasts, is it impacting on a person's daily life, is the person behaving differently to how they did before? Through discussing signs and scenarios, students will practise recognising when to seek help and how to support others, focusing on observation and understanding, not diagnosing.

Key points to highlight:

- Mental health, like all aspects of wellbeing, is constantly changing. It's normal for mental health to fluctuate from day to day or even moment to moment.
- Mental health is more than the absence of illness: Not having a diagnosed mental health condition doesn't automatically mean someone has good mental health. Similarly, people can experience conditions like depression or anxiety and still maintain positive mental health depending on how they manage their wellbeing.
- Pay attention to the words people use. For example, when someone says "I'm so depressed", it might mean they're experiencing temporary low mood or a bad day, rather than clinical depression. Understanding this supports more accurate and helpful conversations about mental health.

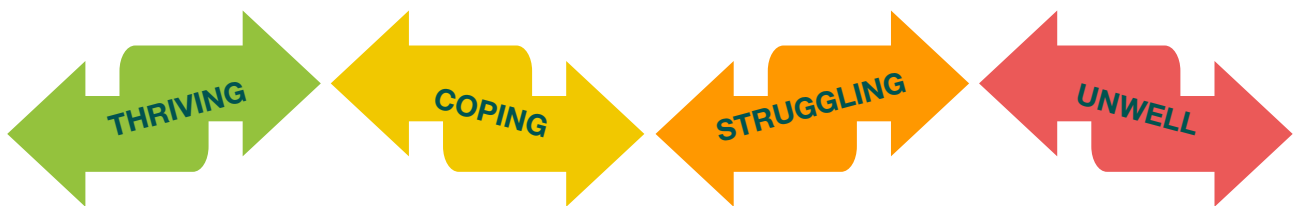
## Learning activities

### Introduction: Everyone has mental health

#### 1. Display: Mental Health Continuum

- **Thriving:** Positive mental health
- **Coping:** Managing, but not at your best
- **Struggling:** Having difficulties
- **Unwell:** Unable to function normally

#### Mental Health Continuum



To introduce this lesson, explain to students that just like physical health, our mental health can change from day to day. Some days we're in good form, some days we're just coping, and sometimes we really struggle or feel unwell. That is what it means to be human. Good mental health means you're able to function and cope with the normal stresses of life. It doesn't mean not feeling low, or anxious or stressed. Just like our physical health, we can sometimes know what to do to help ourselves feel mentally better. However, there are times when despite our efforts to support our mental health, the scales may tip and we need to reach out for help. How do we know when the scales have tipped, and we need to reach out for help? What are the signs to look out for in ourselves and others? This lesson will help us to answer these questions.

2. In small groups, students use post-it notes to describe how someone may think, feel and behave at each stage of the continuum. (The following examples can be used as prompts, if needed).

Examples:

- **Thriving:** "I feel good today," participating in class, laughing with friends, getting good sleep.
- **Coping:** "I'm okay, just tired," not feeling great but getting on with life, feeling nerves before a social event but still going.



- **Struggling:** Avoiding people, low energy, overwhelmed by tasks.
- **Unwell:** Can't or don't want to get out of bed, tearful or panicked, feeling hopeless.

3. Students stick their post-its on the board under the appropriate place on the continuum.

Use the **Teacher's note** to briefly explain:

- The difference between low mood and depression
- The difference between everyday stress and anxiety disorders
- When signs may mean someone needs extra support or professional help.

4. Discussion

- What might cause someone to move down the continuum?
- What might help someone move towards feeling better?

## Development of learning

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Explain to students that everyone experiences stress, low mood, or feeling anxious; it's part of being human. However, some signs can mean a person is struggling more and needs help. Today, students will practise spotting the difference. This activity is not to judge or diagnose, but to help students notice the ebb and flow of emotional wellbeing and understand the signs for when further support might be needed.

Note: Just as there is a continuum of mental health, so too there is a continuum of mental health supports, ranging from things we can do to support ourselves, to reaching out to family and friends, to seeking professional support (in person or online).

### Step 1: Spotting the signs

1. Each student gets 'Traffic Light Cards' with three colours:

- Green = *Typical/temporary*
- Yellow = *Should monitor*
- Red = *Needs support*

(These can be printed cards, laminated, or just coloured pieces of paper.)

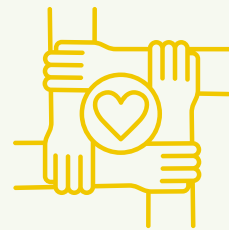


2. Read out “signs which might signal that help is needed” one at a time (see examples below).
3. After each one, students silently hold up the colour that matches how serious they think the sign is.
4. Pause to ask a few students to share why they chose their colour.

Guide the discussion by reminding students that there may not be one “right” answer – it depends on the situation, how long the feelings / behaviour lasts, and how much it affects a person’s daily life. Explain to students that any feelings/behaviours that last a long time, get worse, or make daily life harder should be taken seriously. All the signs don’t need to prevail before a person needs to ask for help. Any significant change in a person’s behaviour can be an indicator of something being wrong. Students could be reminded of how the Mood meter (lesson 3) could be helpful in tracking changes.

#### Which of these signs might signal that help is needed?

- Feeling tired after a busy day
- Avoiding friends and losing interest in things you usually enjoy
- Feeling anxious before a presentation
- Snapping at others more than usual
- Crying every day and not knowing why
- Feeling nervous before a test
- Skipping school or refusing to go without a clear reason
- Being unusually quiet in group settings
- Not sleeping well for a couple of nights
- Using substances (alcohol, drugs) to cope with feelings
- Feeling overwhelmed by tasks
- Feeling sad or down for a couple of days
- No energy or motivation and finding it difficult to get out of bed





## Step 2: Scenarios

Explain to students that they will be looking at different situations that people their age might experience. Some are depicting typical responses to situations that would not signal alarm. Others are warning signs that someone might need support. Their job is to spot the signs and talk about what they mean. Inform students that this isn't about diagnosing specific mental health conditions – it's about paying attention and knowing when a person might need to support themselves or ask for help or support.

1. Split students into small groups of 3–4.
2. Give each group a different scenario.
3. Each group should:
  - Read the scenario aloud
  - Highlight or note signs of feeling low, anxious or stressed
  - Use traffic lights to rate the concern level.



- On the **worksheet** or in their copies, groups should answer:
    - » What emotions might this person be feeling?
    - » What signs or behaviours do you notice?
    - » Which signs seem normal or temporary, and which might be cause for concern?
    - » What could this person do to support themselves and what additional supports might they need? Who could offer it?
  - As a final task, each person in the group should write one support idea on a sticky note and place it on a shared board or wall.
4. After group work, bring the class together and invite each group to share a brief summary of their scenario:
    - » Key signs or behaviours they identified
    - » Their concern level (traffic light) along the continuum of mental health and why
    - » Their suggested supports.

## Step 3: Discussion

Back in whole-class format, ask:

1. What signs that someone might need support? stood out the most to you?
2. Why might people hide how they're really feeling?
3. Why do you think it can be hard for people to talk about difficulties they are experiencing or



ask for help?

4. How can we help make mental health conversations and asking for help okay?

Reinforce key messages:

- Everyone feels anxious, stressed or low sometimes, that's part of being human.
- If signs last a long time, get worse, or impact daily life, it's time to ask for help.
- Talking early can prevent things from getting worse.
- Stigma (fear of judgment, embarrassment) can stop people getting support, and we can all help change that.

## Reflecting and applying learning

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Explain to students that sometimes, mental health stigma shows up in things people say often without realising the impact. Let's look at a few examples of unhelpful or harmful comments that can stop people from seeking the support they need.

1. Write or display these stigmatising statements:
  - "You're just overreacting, it's not a big deal."
  - "People with anxiety just need to toughen up."
  - "Talking about your feelings won't change anything."
  - "Only weak people ask for help."
  - "Why don't they just snap out of it?"
2. Ask students to think about and share their thoughts on:
  - Why are these comments unhelpful or harmful?
  - What could someone say instead that would be more supportive?
3. Give each student a sticky note or small slip of paper and ask them to consider this question: If you could suggest one way to make it easier for students at our school to talk about mental health or ask for help, what would it be?
4. Have students post their responses on a board titled: "Ways our school can make it easier to talk about mental health and ask for support."



## Scenario 1



### Scenario 1 – Robert

Robert has always been known as a high achiever, the kind of student who gets top marks, plays multiple instruments, and is a leader on the sports field. Teachers often point to him as a role model, classmates admire his focus, and his family proudly tells others how motivated and talented he is. But lately, Robert doesn't feel proud of himself; he feels trapped by the expectations that surround him.

In recent months, Robert has been feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to stay on top. The voice in his head never seems to stop. He constantly worries about falling short or letting people down. Every piece of work feels like it has to be perfect. He often rewrites essays several times, even when they're already done, and spends way too long double- and triple-checking everything, afraid of getting something wrong.

At night, he struggles to fall asleep. His mind races with thoughts like: *What if I mess up this test? What if my teacher thinks I'm slipping? What if my parents stop being proud of me?* These worries keep him awake, leaving him exhausted in the mornings.

In class, the pressure is starting to show. He rarely puts his hand up anymore, not because he doesn't know the answer, but because he's worried about getting it wrong. He still hands in good work, but he looks tired, distracted and far less engaged than usual. Teachers have started to notice that something's off.

Even the things he used to enjoy – playing guitar, going to training, or hanging out with friends – now feel like pressure instead of a break. He knows it's good to keep up contact with friends, but he worries about giving them time when he feels under so much pressure to study.



## Scenario 2



### Scenario 2 – Liam

Liam used to be the kind of guy who was always up for a laugh, full of energy and someone his friends could count on. He loved playing football and never missed a training session, but lately something's changed.

Over the past few months, Liam has been getting into more and more arguments both at school and at home. He's been sent out of class three times in just the last week for snapping at teachers or being disrespectful when asked to do something. His face often looks tense, and he seems ready to explode over the smallest things. At home he's been clashing with his parents too, slamming doors and staying locked away in his room for hours. Some of his friends suspect that things haven't been easy at home and Liam sometimes shows up to school tired like he hasn't slept well. But he never talks about it, and when people bring it up, he changes the subject or brushes it off.

His friends say he's not the same. He's stopped joking around and keeps to himself. When one of his mates asked him if everything was okay, Liam just shook his head and said, *"I dunno... I'm just fed up all the time. And I don't even know why."* He hasn't been to football training in over two weeks, even though it used to be his favourite thing. When the coach texted to check in, Liam left it unread.



## Scenario 3



### Scenario 3 – Taylor

Taylor has been spending time with a group of friends, but lately things haven't been going well. The group often puts her down, making sarcastic or cruel comments that impact her confidence. They laugh at her mistakes, make jokes at her expense, and sometimes even post private or unflattering photos of her in group chats. When Taylor isn't with them, she's started noticing that she's being excluded from plans.

She's also receiving messages online from fake accounts, teasing her about her appearance and calling her names. She suspects it's one of her "friends", but she doesn't know who, and it makes her anxious every time her phone buzzes. She's become much more self-conscious about her body and appearance, often comparing herself to others and picking herself apart in the mirror. She's deleted some of her own posts because of the hurtful comments she gets.

Sometimes Taylor says she feels sick, just to avoid going in at all. Her parents are concerned because she wants to stay home more often.

When Taylor is at school she is withdrawn. Teachers have noticed that she's quieter and no longer participates the way she used to. When a close friend asked how she was doing, Taylor quietly said, *"I just feel like I'm ever good enough for them and I don't even know why they keep me around."*



## Scenario 4



### Scenario 4 – Clíodhna

Clíodhna had been in a relationship with her boyfriend for almost a year. He was her first real love, and she truly thought they would last. They spent nearly every day texting and hanging out together. When he suddenly said he wanted to break up, it felt like the ground had been pulled out from under her.

Since the breakup, Clíodhna hasn't been able to stop thinking about him. She replays their conversations in her head and scrolls endlessly through old messages and photos on her phone, trying to figure out where things went wrong. Seeing him active on social media, especially if he's hanging out with other girls, makes her feel physically sick.

Clíodhna has been struggling in school. She finds it almost impossible to concentrate in class or feel motivated to do homework. Teachers have noticed she's not her usual self – she's quieter, zones out during lessons, and her grades have started slipping.

She's also stopped going out with her friends when they invite her. She either makes excuses or just ignores the messages. Most days, she stays in her room, curled up in bed, crying or staring at her phone. This has been going on for weeks. Everything feels dull and heavy.



## Scenario 5



### Scenario 5 – Sam

A few weeks ago Sam's family dog, Toby, passed away. Toby had been with them since Sam was six, and he'd been a part of their family for ten years. Even though Toby was getting older and had been unwell for a while, it still hit hard when he was suddenly gone.

Since then, Sam's been feeling a bit off. He hasn't made a big deal out of it, but things don't feel quite right. He's been more tired than usual, even after a full night's sleep, and sometimes struggles to focus on schoolwork. In class he finds it harder to focus, as his thoughts drift and he thinks what it's like to go home and not have Toby there wagging his tail and excited to welcome him in from school.

At home, Sam doesn't really talk about how he's feeling, not because he doesn't care, but because he's not sure how to explain it. His family has tried to check in, but he usually just says, "I'm fine," and changes the subject. Some of his friends haven't said much, and a few have made comments like, "*It was just a dog,*" which makes Sam feel like maybe he's overreacting.

He still meets up with his friends, but even when he's with others, he doesn't feel like his old self. When a close friend asked how he was doing, Sam just shrugged and said, "*I'm fine. Just a bit tired lately,*" and then changed the subject.

It's not that he's crying every day or unable to function, it's more that everything feels a little heavier, a little less enjoyable than it used to.

## Worksheet: To support discussion of scenarios



1. What emotions might this person be feeling?

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2. What signs or behaviours do you notice?

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3. Which signs seem temporary, and which might be cause for concern?

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4. What could this person do for themselves and what support from others might help?

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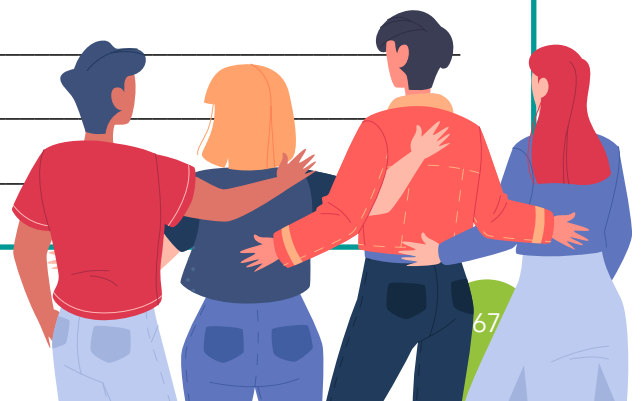
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## Lesson 9: Seeking Help

### Learning outcomes

- 1.7:** Recognise the signs and symptoms of low mood, stress and anxiety in themselves and others and recognise when help should be sought, where to go and how to access help if needed.
- 1.8:** Discuss ways of responding to low mood, stress and anxiety.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will explore the importance of seeking help for mental health challenges and learn how to evaluate a range of support options. They will learn how to identify trustworthy online sources by evaluating mental health advice, spotting red flags and understanding what makes a source reliable. The lesson also focuses on the important role of peer support and how to be there for a friend who is struggling.

### Teacher's note



This lesson develops students' help-seeking skills by exploring the range of support options available and how to identify trustworthy sources of advice, especially online. It encourages students to understand that seeking help is a sign of strength and that no-one should face mental health challenges alone. In fact, help-seeking is an essential and powerful tool in supporting our mental health.

Students will learn to differentiate between close personal supports, local/national services, and online resources. They will practise evaluating online mental health information, recognising the characteristics of reliable information and spotting red flags. The lesson also explores the important role young people can play in supporting their peers, especially through listening, showing empathy and encouraging professional help when needed. By examining real-life scenarios, engaging with tools like the Navigator app and reflecting on peer experiences in video clips, students will be better equipped to take action if needed, whether for themselves or someone else.

Key points to highlight:

- Support comes in many forms.
- Online information is not all equal.
- You don't need to have the answers to support someone.
- Reaching out early, whether for oneself or a friend, can prevent small struggles from becoming bigger issues.
- Tools like the Navigator app empower students to explore their options and find support that suits their needs, location and comfort level.



## Learning activities

### Introduction: Different sources of support

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Remind students that in the previous lesson they learned how to spot signs that they or someone else might need support. Today, they'll explore different support options, learn how to critically evaluate online sources of mental health advice and what they can do to support a friend going through a challenging time.

Explain that everyone feels stressed, low or worried sometimes, it's a normal part of life. What's important is knowing that we don't have to deal with these feelings alone. Seeking help means reaching out to someone or something that can support us. Today, we're going to explore the different kinds of support available and how they can help during tough times.

1. Write the following three categories on the board or on a flipchart (but hold back the examples for now).
  - Close supports (e.g. friends, family, teachers, coaches, school counsellor, youth leader)
  - Local and national services (e.g. GP, Jigsaw, HSE, Youth Work Ireland)
  - Online resources (e.g. SpunOut, Teenline, BelongTo, mental health apps, other online sources).
2. Give students sticky notes and ask them to write down one or two people, places or online resources someone might turn to for help. Then have them place their notes under the appropriate category. Suggest additions as appropriate under each heading.
3. Discussion:
  - Which sources of support do you think people your age use most often and why?
  - Are there supports listed here you didn't know about before?
  - Do you think some types of support are better suited to certain situations than others? Can you give an example?



## Development of learning

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### Step 1: Media evaluation

1. Explain that today we're going to focus especially on online supports, how to find the trustworthy ones, and how to spot the ones that might not help or could even cause harm.
2. Ask students:
  - Where might people your age go for information about mental health or mental health advice or support online?
3. Pair up students and ask them to discuss the following questions for each of the posts you display on the PowerPoint:
  - Does this seem trustworthy? Why or why not?
  - Is this advice safe or could it be harmful? Explain.
4. Show example posts on the PowerPoint slides.
5. Ask students to reflect on the posts they just reviewed and think about what clues or warning signs helped them decide if the information was trustworthy and safe.
6. Invite them to share their ideas aloud while you write their responses on the board.

#### Examples to help prompt discussion:

##### *Things to look for:*

- ✓ Is the person or source qualified or an expert? How might you be able to tell?
- ✓ Is the advice professional and informative, or is it personal and anecdotal?
- ✓ Is the information connected to a recognised organisation (like HSE, SpunOut or other trusted health bodies)?

##### *Red flags:*

- ✗ Promises of miracle or quick cures.
- ✗ Attempts to sell products or services.
- ✗ Discouraging people from seeking professional help.
- ✗ Feeding into stigma or negative stereotypes about mental health.
- ✗ Lack of reliable sources or evidence backing the advice.

Encourage students to keep these things in mind whenever they come across mental health advice or information online.



## Step 2: SpunOut Navigator app exploration

Inform students that they will now explore Navigator, a free Irish tool for young people that helps you find support, whether that's reading information, talking to someone or finding local services.



Play Video: [Navigator Intro – 0:45 sec](#)

1. Divide students into pairs or small groups and ask students to use their devices to go to the Navigator web page (QR code on ppt slide) <https://spunout.ie/navigator/>
2. Give students the option to be given a scenario or choose their own.

Example scenarios:

- A student anxious about exams
- Someone feeling isolated in a new environment
- A teen unsure how to help a struggling friend
- Someone sad but unsure who to talk to
- Someone whose parents are splitting up
- Someone being bullied.



3. Answer the questions in their groups on their **SpunOut Navigator worksheets**:

- What categories of support or help did the Navigator offer?
- What specific information or resources did your group discover?
- What did you find useful or helpful about the Navigator? Is there any way you would improve on it?
- Would you trust the Navigator as a source of mental health support? Why or why not?
- How does this compare to advice or support you might find on social media?

### 4. Whole group discussion

Ask a few groups to share:

- What is one helpful option they found?
- How easy or trustworthy did the tool feel?
- Why is getting help early important?



Explain to students that it's important to remember that while friends can listen and offer support, they're not trained professionals. A friend can be there for someone, but they can't "fix" everything. If a problem feels too big or ongoing, encouraging your friend to talk to a trusted adult or service is often the most helpful thing you can do.

### Step 3: Supporting a friend

1. Explain that the students will now watch a video clip in which young people in Ireland discuss their own experiences of both seeking help from and providing help to others.
2. Choose one of the following videos that best suits your class group:



- [Ryan & Joe \(6:14 mins\)](#)
- [Jenn & Aoife \(4:48 mins\)](#)

3. After watching this video, ask students to discuss the following:
  - What message or moment from the video stayed with you, and why?
  - What did the young people in the video teach us about how to support a friend who's struggling?
  - How can we become better listeners and support for the people in our lives?

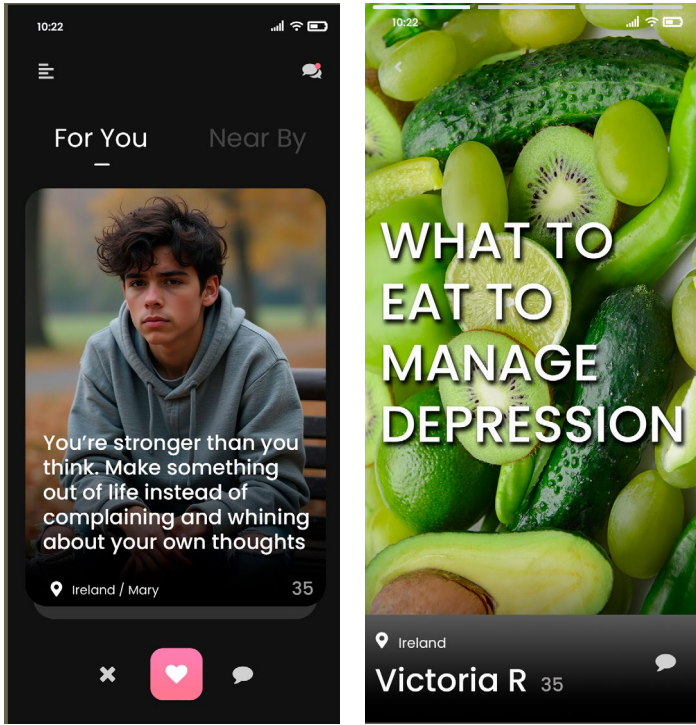
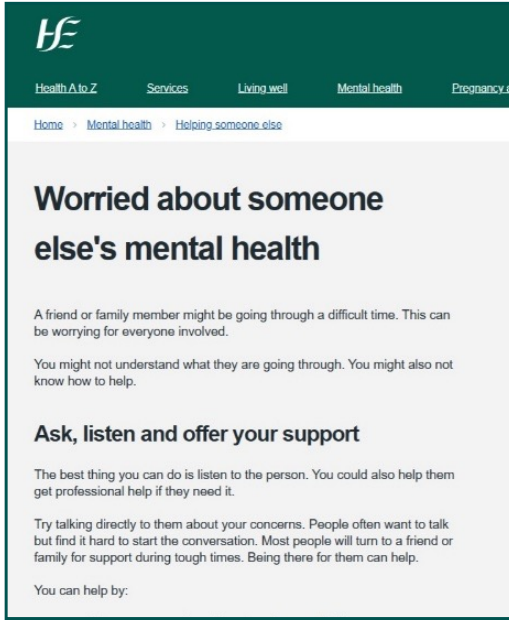
### Reflecting and applying the learning

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Ask students to reflect on one or more of these questions in their journals:

- What is one important thing you learned today that will help you find online mental health advice that is trustworthy?
- What one thing have you found useful for yourself, either now or if you were going through a tough time?
- What is one thing you learned about helping a friend going through a difficult time?

Wrap up by reminding students that today they looked at the importance of reaching out for help when you're going through a tough time, and how powerful it can be to support a friend or fellow student who might be struggling. They also learned how to identify trustworthy mental health advice online, and how tools like the Navigator app can help guide them to the right resources when they or someone they know need support.

Websites	Example website posts
<p><b>Trending short videos</b></p>	
<p><b>AI advice</b></p>	<p><b>User asked: “How do I deal with anxiety?”</b></p> <p><i>“I’m not a doctor, but you might want to try breathing exercises, meditation, or reducing screen time. Some people find herbal teas helpful. If it continues, you could talk to someone you trust or a mental health professional.”</i></p>
<p><b>HSE website content</b></p> <p><a href="https://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/helping-someone-else/worried-about-someones-mental-health/">https://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/helping-someone-else/worried-about-someones-mental-health/</a></p>	



<p><b>Online mental health quiz</b></p>	<p><b>BuzzCheckMe.com – Mental Health Quiz</b></p> <p><i>Do you cancel plans a lot? Feel low energy? You might have depression! Take our 5-question quiz to find out what mental health condition you have and get personalized recommendations. Don't miss our exclusive 12-week programme. For a limited time only, sign up now and start your journey to better mental health!</i></p>
<p><b>SpunOut – Text about it</b></p>	
<p><b>Online discussion forum</b></p>	

## Worksheet: SpunOut Navigator Group



1. What scenario did your group explore?

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2. What categories of support or help did the Navigator offer?

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3. What specific information or resources did your group discover?

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4. What did you find useful or helpful about the Navigator? Is there any way you would improve on it?

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5. Would you trust the Navigator as a source of mental health support? Why or why not?

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6. How does this compare to advice or support you might find on social media?

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## Lesson 10: Connecting with Others

**Learning outcome 1.2:** Investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will explore the importance and benefits of social connection for their wellbeing. They will gain an understanding of the many benefits that can be given and received through social connections and develop skills for starting, deepening and maintaining connections.

### Teacher's note



This lesson builds on students' prior exploration of holistic health by focusing on social connection as a vital part of holistic health and wellbeing. Connections that enable us to feel heard, seen and understood are important and most people typically have a small number of such connections. In addition, we can benefit from a wider range of social connections and over time some of these may deepen to become meaningful connections. The focus of this lesson is on the former - how engaging with a range of social connections can support wellbeing.

Students will reflect on real-life experiences of connection and disconnection, engage in interactive activities that highlight the emotional and physical benefits of human connection, and develop practical skills for initiating and maintaining social connections.

Regular experiences of social connection, including those that are brief or casual, can lead to a range of positive outcomes for a young person's mental health and wellbeing. These include increased happiness, enhanced sense of inclusion, more frequent help-seeking behaviour and a stronger support network. The activities in this session highlight the value of connecting with others and encourage students to reflect on the role that different kinds of interactions and relationships can play in their lives.

Key points to highlight:

- Social connection generates a positive feedback loop of physical, social and emotional wellbeing.
- Feeling connected can boost energy, improve mood and reduce stress. It's also associated with better physical health, stronger immune function and improved sleep.
- Supporting others helps us feel connected too. Doing something that helps others (e.g. volunteering) not only benefits others but also strengthens our sense of connection as we feel part of a wider community.
- Even brief moments of positive social contact can make a big difference. These are beneficial in themselves but may also lead to deeper connections and broaden our web of support.

## Learning activities

### Introduction

Begin by reminding students of Lesson 1, where they explored the different factors that contribute to holistic health. One key element they identified was social connection and friendships. Today, they'll be focusing on how human connection isn't just something that feels good, it's actually a key part of being healthy. Feeling connected boosts our energy, improves our mood and helps us feel less isolated. We're going to start by seeing how quickly we can connect with people around us, and in particular those we don't know well.

#### Find someone who...



1. Hand out the **Find Someone Who... worksheet** to each student.
2. Explain to the students that their task is to move around the room and try to find someone who can answer “yes” to each statement on the worksheet, avoiding moving to their closest friends as far as possible.
3. Once they find someone who can answer “yes”, they should ask them a specific question about the statement. For example, if the statement is “Has an older sibling” the student might ask “Is this older sibling a sister or brother?” or “How old is your older sibling?” The student should then write the answer to their question on the worksheet and the other person's initials beside the statement.
4. Tell the group they must try and collect as many names as they can in five minutes.
5. Discuss the following questions as a class:
  - What did you notice about doing this activity? Did your energy or mood shift, even a little?
  - How did it feel to briefly connect with someone new or someone you don't usually talk to?
  - Did you find it easy or difficult to approach people during the activity? Why do you think that was?

Explain to students that the boost of energy they might have felt isn't random, it's biological. When we connect, our brain releases chemicals like oxytocin and dopamine that lower stress and make us feel more energised. Even short moments of connection can improve how we feel and function.



## Conclude introduction

Ask students to think of a recent moment when they felt connected to someone, even just a small moment. It could've been a short exchange or a deep conversation, a laugh, a small kind gesture, whether one-to-one or as part of a larger group.

Ask students to note:

- Who was it with?
- What was happening?
- What made that moment feel connecting?

## Development of learning

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### Step 1: The benefits of connection

1. Play this video SpunOut: [Connect – #DitchTheMonkey](#)



2. Ask students to reflect on the video:

- What do you think the message of the video is?
- Why might someone avoid social connection, even if it could help them?

Sometimes we retreat from others; maybe we're tired, overwhelmed, low or feeling insecure. This video captures that inner conflict between isolation and connection and reminds us how even small social moments can make a big difference.

3. Then ask students to pair up and discuss the following questions:

- Think of a time when just being able to talk to someone made you feel better. How did it affect you mentally, emotionally and physically?
- Now flip it: What happens if a person were to go days or weeks without that kind of connection? How might that affect a person's wellbeing over time? (It's important to mention that "alone time" is ok too. Some alone time can be restorative, although spending too much time alone or avoiding social contact can impact mental health.)

4. Invite a few pairs to share with the class.



5. Reinforce the conversation with evidence. Display on PowerPoint or read aloud this list:

Social connections can:

- Strengthen your immune system
- Improve your ability to manage stress
- Increase self-esteem and empathy
- Boost physical activity levels
- Improve sleep quality
- Reduce loneliness, which is linked to chronic conditions (e.g. heart disease, inflammation)
- Increase lifespan – connection is one of the strongest predictors of long-term happiness and health.

Loneliness facts:

- Loneliness is linked to depression, anxiety, sleep problems and heart disease
- Small social interactions (even a short chat) can buffer against loneliness.

## Step 2: Loneliness in society

Even though we're more "connected" than ever through social media, more people – especially young people – are feeling lonely. Chronic loneliness doesn't just affect how we feel. It impacts our bodies and our lifespan. This isn't just a personal issue, it's a public health issue.

Discussion questions:

- Why do you think loneliness is so common now, especially for young people?
- What's the difference between being alone and being lonely?
- What might stop someone from reaching out even when they want to connect?
- What could you do in your school or community to help people feel less lonely?
- What could your school do?



### Step 3: Tips for building connections

Now that students have explored why connection matters, it's time to shift the focus to how we actually build those connections in real life. Acknowledge that interacting with others can sometimes feel awkward or uncomfortable. This next activity is designed to help students build their confidence and skills when it comes to creating a range of potential connection moments.

1. Set up five “advice column” stations around the room, each with a piece of flipchart paper and a scenario written like a short letter to an editor for the five different categories:
  - Starting a connection
  - Deepening a friendship/connection
  - Reconnecting with someone
  - Supporting someone who seems quiet, upset or left out
  - Navigating a conflict with a friend.
2. Split students into five groups.
3. Around the room, you'll see five different “advice columns”. Each one has a short letter, like something written to a magazine or blog about a real situation someone your age might face when trying to connect with others. Your job is to become the advice columnist. Work as a team; think about what kind of realistic advice you'd give that person – something specific they could actually say or try.

At each station:

- Read the letter out loud as a group.
  - Talk through: What is this person feeling? What's holding them back?
  - Write one thoughtful, specific piece of advice in response on the flipchart.
  - Avoid generic tips like “just be nice”.
  - Rotate stations a few times.
4. After students have completed their station(s), take five minutes to walk around and read the advice other groups wrote. Give students star/dot stickers to vote for advice that feels especially real, thoughtful or useful.



5. Distribute the **Tips for Connecting with Others worksheet**. Encourage students to:

- Copy down advice they found helpful at the stations
- Add personal tips or things they've seen work in their own lives
- Think about 1–2 ideas they could try this week.

## Reflecting and applying the learning

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Ask students to take a quiet moment to reflect on the following prompts in their journals.

- What's one thing that stood out to you today about connection?
- What's one small way you might act more intentionally to someone new this week, even if it's just a small gesture?
- How might this action support your wellbeing and theirs?



## Scenarios



### Station 1: Meeting new people

*Dear Editor,*

*I'm new to a club and noticed there's a group that seems really friendly. I'd really like to join them, but I'm not sure how to approach or start talking with the whole group without feeling awkward. What's a good way to break the ice and become part of the group?*

*– Anon*

### Station 2: Deepening a friendship

*Dear Editor,*

*I hang out with a friend during school sometimes, but we're not super close. I think this person is really nice and I'd like to maybe hang out more outside of school, but I don't want to come on too strong. What would you suggest?*

*– Anon*

### Station 3: Reconnecting with someone

*Dear Editor,*

*I used to be really close with someone last year, but we kind of drifted. I miss them, and I want to reconnect, but I don't know what to say or how to make it natural again. Any ideas?*

*– Anon*

### Station 4: Reaching out to someone who seems quiet, upset or left out

*Dear Editor,*

*There's a person in my class I see eating alone a lot. They seem nice, and I'd like to get to know them, but I'm not sure how to start without making it weird. What's something I could say or do?*

*– Anon*

### Station 5: Healing a broken connection with a friend

*Dear Editor,*

*I got into an argument with my friend last week and things really feel awkward between us. I want to fix things, but I don't know how to bring it up without making things worse. What can I say or do?*

*– Anon*

## Worksheet: Tips for Connecting with Others



### 1. BE FRIENDLY AND POSITIVE

Having a positive outlook and being friendly will help you meet new people.

### 2. BE THE FRIEND YOU WOULD WANT OTHERS TO BE FOR YOU

Being the type of friend you would like will make it easier to connect to others.

### 3. START THE CONVERSATION

Simple ways to connect with people can start with asking them simple questions and really showing interest in the conversation.

### 4. SPEND MORE QUALITY TIME WITH PEOPLE

You can connect better with your family and friends if you really take time to connect with the people in front of you and switch off from the things around you (e.g. schoolwork, smartphone, computer).

### 5. CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Be friendly with your neighbours and get to know the people within your community.

### 6. STAY IN TOUCH - MAKE AN EFFORT

It can be easy to drift from friends and family if you are busy, move school or are away from home, but make the most of technology. Between social media sites, free messaging apps and video chat apps, it's easier to stay connected with people. Check in every so often to see how they are doing. Remember that meeting people in person is important too!

### 7. FOLLOW THROUGH ON PLANS

Meeting up with people can improve your mood when you are feeling down. It can feel overwhelming sometimes to stick to arrangements and meet people, especially if you're feeling low. But remember, meeting people you care about can help you feel better.

### 8. VOLUNTEER

Getting involved in some community work or a charity you are passionate about means you will not only connect with like-minded people but you'll be making a difference in other people's lives too.

Add your own tips here.....

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Tips adapted from SpunOut

## Worksheet: Find Someone Who...



... has lived in another country.  .....  ..... NAME	... has an unusual hobby.  .....  ..... NAME	... was born in August.  .....  ..... NAME	... has broken a bone.  .....  ..... NAME
... has an older sibling.  .....  ..... NAME	... has been on an airplane.  .....  ..... NAME	... has a fear of spiders.  .....  ..... NAME	... loves to play a sport.  .....  ..... NAME
... writes with their left hand.  .....  ..... NAME	... has brown eyes  .....  ..... NAME	... dislikes pizza.  .....  ..... NAME	... can sing or play a musical instrument.  .....  ..... NAME
...has been camping.  .....  ..... NAME	... enjoys reading.  .....  ..... NAME	... has read a whole book in one day.  .....  ..... NAME	... has a parent who is not Irish.  .....  ..... NAME
... has an unusual pet.  .....  ..... NAME	...has a unique or unusual talent.  .....  ..... NAME	... can speak another language apart from English/Irish.  .....  ..... NAME	...has met someone famous.  .....  ..... NAME



## Lesson 11: Staying Well

### Learning outcomes

- 1.2:** Investigate ways a person can influence their holistic health including physical activity, food, sleep, social connections, positive self-image and connecting with nature, and discuss how these are related
- 3.1:** Consider strategies for self-care that can help maintain health and prevent ill-health.

**Short overview:** In this lesson, students will reflect on strategies they've explored throughout their learning that support their holistic wellbeing. They will also be reminded of three simple, evidence-based practises – namely gratitude, performing acts of kindness, and finding joy in everyday moments – and how these simple actions can enhance overall wellbeing.

### Teacher's note



In Lesson 1 students discussed the factors that contribute to holistic health and what they can do as individuals to positively influence their holistic health. In further lessons they explored ways to support their overall sense of wellbeing and considered mental health (like our physical health) as a continuum that can change day to day, from thriving, to coping, to struggling (Lessons 8 and 9). In this lesson students are invited to draw upon their learning and reflect on the simple yet powerful things they can do to help move towards or stay within the thriving/coping end of the continuum.

Throughout the lesson, students will be encouraged to think about what has helped them so far. In addition, they will consider how small actions like expressing gratitude, showing kindness or noticing moments of joy can provide steady support for their mental and emotional wellbeing. These strategies are accessible because students can practise them anytime, anywhere.

Importantly, this lesson isn't about feeling happy or joyful all the time. Happiness is not the goal! Happiness is an emotion, just like sadness or anger – it comes and goes. No emotional state is permanent, and this can be a comforting thought during difficult times. The fact that happiness is transitory doesn't make it less valuable. In fact, it can encourage us to really savour those moments and be present in them.

Psychologists sometime refer to the "paradox of happiness"; the more people chase happiness directly, the more elusive it becomes. Research shows that people who prioritise happiness often end up feeling less happy, especially when their expectations aren't met. Psychologists argue that happiness is achieved indirectly. It arises by engaging in meaningful activities that give us a sense of purpose and achievement, having positive relationships, focusing on the positive and contributing to something larger than oneself.



## Learning activities

### Introduction

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1. Begin by explaining to students that over recent lessons, they've explored different ways to care for their wellbeing – physically, emotionally and socially. They've explored tools and strategies that can help them stay balanced, connected and strong, even when things feel challenging.

We've also talked about how our mental health exists on a continuum from struggling, to surviving, to thriving, and that we all move over and back along that continuum at different times. Today, we're going to reflect on the things that can help move us towards the thriving end of the continuum – the habits, strategies and small actions that give us a boost and support our overall wellbeing.

2. On large flipchart pages displayed at the top of the room, write the heading: **"Things that boost our wellbeing"**.

Optionally divide the space into three sections:

- **Physical Wellbeing**
- **Emotional Wellbeing**
- **Social Wellbeing**

3. Ask students to think back over the lessons: What ideas stood out to you? What made an impact? What's something you've remembered, tried, or want to keep using in your life?

Invite students to contribute freely and creatively to the wall by:

- Writing key words, short phrases or lesson takeaways
- Drawing simple pictures or symbols
- Adding quotes, examples or reflections from earlier sessions that stood out to them.

4. Once contributions are complete, gather the group and walk through the mural together.

- What stands out to you on our wellbeing wall?
- Are there any strategies or ideas you'd like to try more often?
- Are there any strategies or ideas that you feel grateful for?

Conclude by explaining that looking after our wellbeing is an ongoing journey. These small strategies, when practised regularly, can help us feel better no matter where we are on the continuum.



## Development of learning

Explain to students that for the rest of the class they'll explore three simple, science-backed strategies that support wellbeing. These are things they can practise anytime, anywhere and they don't take a lot of time or effort.

Draw on the Teacher's note to remind students that wellbeing isn't about being happy all the time. Instead, it's about building habits that help us notice and manage our emotions, stay grounded, and feel more balanced even when things are challenging. These simple strategies can offer small boosts that support us whether we're struggling, coping or thriving.

**Note:** If time is limited, you may choose to focus on two of the three strategies.

### Strategy 1: Gratitude

#### What does the science say?

Gratitude has been shown to significantly boost wellbeing by helping people focus on the good in their lives rather than what's missing. Research shows that high levels of gratitude is associated with higher levels of self-esteem, life-satisfaction and optimism. It can also improve relationships, reduce stress and even support physical health. Simple practices like writing down what you're thankful for or expressing appreciation to others can shift your mindset and help you feel more grounded, optimistic and connected, even during tough times ([Harvard, 2021](#)).



1. Play the video: [An Experiment in Gratitude](#) to the class.
2. Ask students to quietly think about someone in their life they would like to thank – a friend, family member, teacher, or meaningful person in their lives.
3. Invite students to write quietly for a few minutes in response to this prompt: Who is someone you feel grateful for, and why? What have they done or said that made a difference to you?
4. After writing, ask students to imagine:
  - How it would feel to tell that person how grateful they are.
  - How that person might feel hearing their gratitude.



5. Discussion (option as a wider group or in pairs)
  - How did it feel to reflect on someone you're grateful for?
  - What impact might it have on you or them if you shared this with them?
6. Encourage students to share their letters with the person they chose to thank and notice the effect it has on the recipient and on themselves.
7. Conclude by explaining that gratitude doesn't always have to be about people. It can also be about appreciating the small, everyday things around us that make life better.

## Strategy 2: Acts of kindness

### What does the science say?

Research shows that performing kind acts can increase happiness, reduce anxiety and strengthen social connections. Kindness can also lower blood pressure and decrease stress hormones, helping our bodies as well as our minds. Engaging in multiple acts of kindness regularly helps build the habit and brings even greater benefits. Plus, kindness tends to spread like a ripple effect, encouraging others to be kind too. Whether it's volunteering, helping a friend or simply smiling at someone, small acts of kindness can make a big difference to our overall wellbeing ([Harvard, 2025](#)).



1. Play this video: [Random Acts of Kindness](#)

2. Facilitate a whole-class discussion using these prompts:

- What stood out to you in the video?
- What is the key message the video is trying to share? What does that tell us about the power of our everyday actions?
- Why do you think kindness can have such a big impact on our wellbeing, both for the person receiving it and the person giving it?
- If we could re-make this video in our school or community, what would it look like? What kind of acts could we include?

3. In pairs, students brainstorm and write down five simple acts of kindness they could do this week, for family, friends, classmates, strangers or school staff. Each act should be written on a sticky note.
4. Students post their sticky notes on the Kindness Wall.
5. At the end of class, students will be invited to pick one act from the Kindness Wall that they will commit to trying outside of class this week.



## Strategy 3: Finding joy in everyday moments

### What does the science say?

Finding joy in everyday moments means noticing and appreciating the small things that make you feel good throughout your day. These could be simple things like enjoying your morning smoothie, laughing at a funny video, hearing your favourite song or having a quick chat with a friend. These little bursts of happiness are sometimes called “micro-joys”.

Scientists have found that these tiny moments actually help your brain and body. They can reduce stress, boost your mood and help you bounce back from tough times. Plus, when you focus on these moments regularly, you train yourself to feel more positive overall. It’s not about being happy all the time but about noticing the good things when they happen ([Burke, 2024](#)).

### Option A: Mindful joy walk

1. Explain to students that they’re going to take a short, mindful “joy walk” outside and the goal is to notice the little things that make them smile, feel calm or spark joy.
2. To model for students, share 2–3 small joys that make you smile, such as:
  - The crunch of leaves under your feet in the autumn
  - Your dog wagging its tail at the door welcoming you home
  - The feel of your favourite sweater.
3. Ask students to walk slowly and observe mindfully. Use these prompts to guide their attention. You can display these on the PowerPoint before they go outside.
  - What do you see that makes you smile or feel peaceful?
  - What sounds around you feel calming, pleasant or uplifting?
  - Are there any smells, colours or textures that feel comforting?
  - What are you noticing now that you usually overlook?
4. After the walk, ask students to write down 3–5 joyful things they noticed, especially ones that made them smile.

**Tip:** Conducting this activity outside provides an opportunity to make the important connection between nature and wellbeing.



### Option B: Sparks of micro-joys

1. Explain to students that sometimes we think joy has to come from big things, but it's often the small, everyday moments that lift us up. In this challenge, you'll brainstorm as many "micro-joys" as you can – the little things that bring you happiness, calm or a smile.
2. Give some playful examples:
  - Eating a juicy orange
  - Finding money in your pocket
  - Sipping an ice-cold drink on a hot day
  - Warm bed on a cold night
  - Laughing out loud
  - The bus driver waiting for you when they see you running to the bus stop.
3. Split students into small groups of 3–4 and give each group a large piece of paper and a pen.
4. Set the timer to three minutes and challenge them to list 15+ micro-joy sparks as quickly as they can. Encourage them to write fast: quantity over perfection. Remind them that no joy spark is too small or strange.

**Tip:** You can play upbeat music in the background to energise this activity.

5. After the three minutes, ask each group to share 2–3 of their favourite or funniest ideas.
6. To wrap up this activity, ask the students:
  - How can noticing small joys help you during a tough day?

Explain to students that while noticing small joys won't fix all our problems, it can help give us a lift. These little sparks of joy, the things that make us smile, feel calm or even laugh, can create moments of light, whether we're struggling, coping or thriving. Paying attention to these everyday moments helps us stay connected to what's good, even during challenges.



## Reflecting and applying learning

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Choose 1–2 of the following prompts and ask students to reflect on them in their wellbeing journals or notebooks:

- What's one simple action you could try this week to boost your wellbeing? How do you think it might make a difference?
- Who is one person in your life you feel grateful for and why? How could you show them your appreciation this week?
- What is one small act of kindness you can do this week, and how do you think it might make you and others feel?
- When you're having a tough day, what are 2–3 small things that could help spark joy?





