

# Lesson 1: Attitudes to mental health

## Key stage 3

This is the first of a series of five key stage 3 lessons exploring mental health and emotional wellbeing. This first lesson builds on the mental health and emotional wellbeing work completed in key stage 2. The lesson addresses misconceptions about, and examines attitudes towards, mental health. Neither this, nor any of the other lessons, is designed to be taught in isolation, but should always form part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme.



### Learning objective

Students will learn:

- about attitudes to mental health and challenging misconceptions



### Learning outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- evaluate the links between mental health and physical health
- identify common misconceptions about mental health
- recognise and challenge prejudice and discriminatory language and behaviour, in relation to mental health



### Climate for learning

Before teaching these lessons, ensure that you read the accompanying PSHE Association document [Teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing](#) for guidance on establishing ground rules, the limits of confidentiality, handling questions, and additional advice relating to teaching about mental health effectively and safely.



### Resources required

Resource 1: Explain to an alien



Resource 2a: True or false quiz



Resource 2b: True or false quiz [support sheet]



Resource 2c: Quiz answers



Resource 3: Exploring language



Resource 4: Helpful language [optional support sheet]



### Key words

Mental health, emotional wellbeing, misconceptions, discrimination, stereotype

Activity	Description	Timing
1. Introduction	Introduce ground rules and outline the objectives and outcomes	5min
2. Baseline assessment	Students complete an 'explain to an alien' activity responding to prompt questions about mental health	10min
3. True or false quiz	Students complete a true or false quiz, helping them to evaluate misconceptions about mental health.	10min
4. Exploring language	Students work in groups to respond to four different examples of discriminatory language and attitudes.	15min
5. Challenging discrimination	Students suggest ideas about what could be done to challenge discrimination by individuals, schools and society	10min

6. Endpoint assessment	Students revisit the 'explain to an alien' baseline assessment, adding and editing ideas to demonstrate progress.	5min
7. Signposting	Signpost students to sources of support for mental health issues	5min

## Baseline assessment



### Introduction

Establish or reinforce existing ground rules – add or emphasise any ground rules that are especially relevant to this lesson. Ensure students know they have a right to pass and that there should be no personal stories.

Explain that today's lesson looks at mental health. Students may have direct experience of someone with poor mental health, so ensure they are aware of where they can go to talk to someone after the lesson, if necessary. With that in mind give students a chance to ask anonymous questions via your usual method such as a question box or 'ask it basket'. It is important to address these questions with the whole class, or individually as appropriate, during the scheme of work.



### Baseline assessment activity

Ask students to imagine an alien who knows nothing whatsoever about humans has come to earth and wants to know about what humans refer to as 'mental health'. Using **Resource 1: Explain to an alien**, students answer each of the alien's questions, with as much detail as they can. As this is a baseline assessment for the scheme of work, they should work individually and without prompting, so that you can accurately gauge their current understanding. Ask students to put the sheets aside as they will be revisited at the end of the lesson.

**Take some initial feedback from students at this stage. Ask:**

*The World Health Organisation defines 'health' as: 'a complete state of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing not merely the absence of disease'. If this is the definition of health, how would we define mental health? What is the link between physical and mental health?*

**Emphasise that mental and physical health are closely linked, for example by promoting their physical health (through exercise, healthy food choices and quality sleep) a person is also promoting their mental health.**

## Core activities



### True or false quiz



In pairs, students complete **Resource 2a: True or false quiz**. For a more active version, students could move to different sides of the room to represent 'true' or 'false' as each statement is read out.

Take feedback, ensuring that myths and misconceptions are challenged. **Resource 2c** includes additional teacher information to develop discussion. Students should note the 'true' information next to any statements marked 'false'.

## Support:



**Resource 2b** is provided which is a simplified version of Resource 2. Questions posed are simplified versions of questions 1, 2, 4, 7, 8 & 9 from Resource 2.

## Challenge



Encourage students to consider why they think these misconceptions might have occurred in the past. What could be done to prevent future misconceptions about mental health?



## Exploring language



Explain to students that sometimes people find it difficult to talk about mental health, or might have little understanding of it and can therefore say things that might be unhelpful or offensive to others, often without meaning to.

Organise students into four groups and give each group a different sheet from **Resource 3: Exploring language**. Each group should spend **5 minutes** adding ideas to the top and bottom half of the sheet, responding to the questions:

- How might these statements make someone feel?
- What could some more positive alternatives be?

After 5 minutes, students stick their sheet to the wall/desk, and ask the groups to move around the room looking at each other's examples and ideas, adding any additional ideas as they visit each sheet.

Take feedback, identifying key themes from each sheet:

- Purple = these statements demonstrate the flippant way people can use mental health language. This is a subtle way in which mental health stigma is reinforced.
- Blue = these statements are typical of the responses people with a mental health issue sometimes get from friends or family. The statements diminish the issue and minimise the impact of experiencing a mental health issue.
- Orange = these statements focus on unhelpful behaviours in relation to mental health, primarily excluding or deliberately trying to upset someone known to have mental health issues.
- Green = these statements include unhelpful advice that people sometimes receive when discussing a mental health concern.

**Refer to Resource 4: Helpful language** – to provide examples of more positive alternatives.

## Support:



Students could be provided with **Resource 4: Helpful language** prompts or some appropriate responses could be modelled before starting the activity.

## Challenge



Ask students to suggest reasons why this sort of language is used.



## Challenging discrimination



Students work in pairs to suggest ideas about how mental health stigma and discrimination could be challenged. Encourage them to suggest up to three ideas for each of the following:

(Cont.)

- What could be done by individuals/friends to challenge discrimination?
- What could be done in schools to challenge discrimination?
- What could be done in wider society to challenge discrimination?

If time allows, share ideas, either using post-it notes, a class mind map, or volunteers read out their ideas.

Students might suggest ideas such as:

- *Individuals: avoid using language that might be offensive or upsetting, challenge this language when used, encourage people to be understanding and supportive around mental health, avoid trivialising or making fun of mental health issues;*
- *Schools: teach more about mental health, promote school counsellors and other sources of support to normalise asking for help, have 'positive mental health' events, make all people feel included, use displays to promote mental health;*
- *Society: Mental health campaigns, more funding for mental health charities or services, stronger laws about discrimination against people with mental health concerns, mental health support services in workplaces to both support and destigmatise those with mental health concerns, encourage openness around mental health issues, etc.*

## Plenary/ Assessment of learning



### Endpoint assessment

Revisit the baseline activity, using **Resource 1: Explain to an alien**. Ask students to make any additions or edits to their original responses with a different coloured pen to demonstrate what they have learnt. This can be kept as assessment evidence and used to inform future teaching.



### Signposting support



Remind students that they can access support at home, and both in school (e.g. through their form tutor, head of year or school nurse) and out of school, through local and national organisations. Explain to students that there are lots of different ways that young people can seek help from reputable organisations, including text-based support, digital chat support and online counselling, as well as face to face or via phone. Share the following websites and phone numbers with students:

Young Minds - [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk); Childline - [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)  
Phone: 0800 1111; Samaritans - [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) Phone: 116 123

## Extension activity

### Awareness campaign

Ask students to create an awareness campaign focusing on mental health discrimination and the need for appropriate and supportive language and actions.

Provide students with the following areas of focus for their publicity materials:

- Why is mental health an important issue?
- What are the effects of mental health discrimination both on those with mental health issues and those without?
- What might be helpful advice for someone who may be struggling with their mental health?
- What could be done to help someone who is or has experienced mental health discrimination?