

Lesson 5: Healthy coping strategies

Key stage 3

This is the fifth of five lessons for key stage 3 exploring mental health and emotional wellbeing. This lesson focuses on developing healthy coping strategies and it is important that you teach this after the previous lesson on unhealthy behaviours. 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:

- healthy ways to manage difficult feelings or challenging circumstances



Learning outcomes

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

- recognise circumstances leading to intense emotions that may be difficult to manage.
- explain a range of positive strategies for managing difficult emotions
- assess whom, how and why to ask for support when it's needed



Resources required

Box or envelope for anonymous questions



Resource 1: Intense feelings



Resource 2a: A day in the life of Logan



Resource 2b: A day in the life of Celia



Resource 3: Talking heads



Key words

Healthy coping strategies, managing feelings, positive strategies, depression, anxiety disorders



Climate for learning

Before teaching these lessons, we strongly recommend that you read the accompanying PSHE Association document [Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing](#) for guidance on establishing ground rules, the limits of confidentiality, communication and handling questions effectively.

Activity	Description	Timing
1. Introduction	Revisit ground rules and introduce lesson objectives and outcomes.	-
2. Baseline assessment	Strength of feelings – pairs create vocabulary to describe the intensity of different emotions	10min
3. A day in the life	Students read about Logan's day, considering the 'ups and downs' he experiences. This is compared to Celia's day, who is finding it harder to cope.	15min
4. Help conversation starters	Students debate how Celia or her friends could seek help/help, and how to begin a supportive conversation.	15min
5. Healthy coping strategies	Students explore a range of healthy coping strategies and recommend those most appropriate to Logan and Celia's needs.	10min
6. Endpoint assessment	Students compete to list as many coping strategies as they can.	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. Remind students that they can ask anonymous questions using the question box/ask it basket throughout the lesson.

Explain that today's lesson is about developing healthy coping strategies for managing intense feelings. Remind students of the learning from the lesson on unhealthy coping strategies, explaining that these strategies can be used as healthier alternatives, recognising this selection is not always a rational decision-making process.



Baseline assessment activity



In pairs, hand each pair two (or one if time is short) of the four cards from **Resource 1: Intense feelings**. Ask students to add different words to express the degree of these feelings along the scale, from least to most intense. e.g. for 'anger' students might add irritated, annoyed, incensed, furious, livid as they progress up the scale. They should also suggest any strategies they think might help manage the more intense feelings effectively.

Take some brief feedback and ask students to put these aside to return to at the end of the lesson.

To develop discussion further, ask if feeling intense emotions every now and again is a problem. Explore when it does become a problem. Draw out that feeling furious, for example, every now and again for a good reason, is not necessarily a problem. If they have written words such as 'suicidal' discuss that some extreme feelings are more problematic. If someone is experiencing an overwhelming number of negative feelings, does not have healthy ways of coping, is at risk of using unhealthy coping strategies, or is experiencing these feelings for no apparent reason, then this indicates they need further support.

Core activities



A day in the life



In small groups, students read **Resource 2a: A day in the life of Logan** and highlight everything that could have either a positive or negative effect on Logan's emotional wellbeing. Consider the following when taking feedback:

- Logan's phone use
- His diet and eating habits
- His sleep pattern
- Logan's interest in football
- His friendship with Matt
- Logan's homework habits

Give each student a set of traffic light cards and read out the other 'day in the life ...' diary entry about Celia, who goes to the same school as Logan and is in the same year group. If something occurs that promotes

her emotional wellbeing, students should hold up their green card; if something happens, or Celia does something, that is not so good for her emotional wellbeing, they should hold up an amber card; if they feel very worried about something happening to Celia, they should hold up a red card.

Discuss what the triggers were in the diary that caused students to display different cards, or to be concerned for Celia. The following questions might be helpful prompts:

- Celia is upset when she sees her reflection. Why might she feel this way? What could she do to help manage these feelings?
- How does Celia's parents' arguing make her feel? Do they know this?
- How will Celia's focus on her studies affect her wellbeing?
- Why has Celia not eaten? What might others think/say if they noticed?
- Why does Celia fake a smile before taking a selfie? (Discuss social media distortion of reality and that Celia's friends may not know there is a problem because she is hiding it.)
- If Celia's friends comment on her weight loss, how might this make Celia feel? (Note that she may be developing an eating disorder and the comments may fuel her thoughts and behaviours.)
- How important is Celia's relationship with Casey? (Consider the positives of the online world.)
- Celia cries herself to sleep – what could she do to help her feel better at the end of the day?

Support:



Consider only focusing on Celia's story. Alternatively, cut the story into strips and ask students to sort the parts of the story into things which have a positive or negative impact on wellbeing.

Challenge



Ask students to suggest what could happen next if each character's story continues in the same way. For example, could Logan or Celia feel better or worse?



Help conversation starters



Explain that Celia's friends are worried about her: she seems down, she's wrapped up in her schoolwork and doesn't really talk to them much or go out with them outside school any more. Ask the class what Celia's friends should do and where they could go for help. Feedback is likely to include:

- do nothing
- talk to a teacher
- talk to Celia's parents
- talk to Celia
- do something else – if so, what?

Explore the possible consequences of each option using a think, pair, share discussion.

Give each group a large sheet of paper and a different coloured pen. Allocate each group one of the following people and ask them to write their person's name at the top – Celia, Celia's Mum, a teacher, someone else they have identified. Ask the groups to brainstorm all the ways that Celia's friends could open up a conversation, about their concerns for Celia, with the person on the flipchart (e.g with Celia herself, with Celia's mum, with a teacher).

Once finished, ask each group to stick their sheet on the wall in different areas of the room. Students should go as a group to look at the other groups' work and add their own ideas in their colour pen.



Healthy coping strategies



As a class, read **Resource 3: Talking heads**, which suggests a range of healthy coping strategies. Ask students to discuss these ideas and decide which strategies might be most appropriate for Logan to use to manage his wellbeing, and which might be most helpful for Celia. Students could be asked to select and rank their top three strategies for each character.

Take feedback, ensuring that a range of techniques is discussed. If not brought up in discussion, it should be emphasised that different techniques will appeal to different people, so trying a range of strategies can help people find the strategies that work best for them.

Plenary/ Assessment of learning



Endpoint assessment

Ask students to revisit their baseline assessment using **Resource 1: Intense feelings**. They should add anything that they would change as a result of the learning, or add any new strategies they have learnt about to manage these, or other intense feelings.



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

Childline - www.childline.org.uk Phone: 0800 1111

Samaritans - www.samaritans.org Phone: 116 123

Shout - a 24-hour text service for someone experiencing a crisis and needing immediate help: 85258

**It may be necessary to lift the mood after this learning - ensure the lesson ends on a positive note, using a strategy of your choice (see accompanying PSHE Association document [Preparing to teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing p12](#)).*

Extension activities →

Students could keep a reflective journal for a week, noting down the difficult feelings they encounter and any strategies they use to manage them. Note that this should be a private reflection activity and is not intended to be shared as a class.