

Section 4:

Managing feelings

This section of the toolkit is designed to help you support your class to name any difficult feelings they may be experiencing. It will also help class discussion around the development of practical strategies to manage them.

Naming our feelings: an important step to minding our mental health

The first step in taking care of our feelings is identifying and naming them. Sometimes young people don't have the language to name and discuss what is going on for them. It's helpful to teach young people to identify what they are feeling and differentiate between how they are feeling emotionally and how they are feeling physically.

When a young person is able to name their feelings, they will be better able to identify when they require some extra attention or support. This, in turn, will help their mental health.

Mood boards and body mapping are two of the suggested activities that will help support young people in naming their feelings.

How young people experience feelings

When it comes to feelings, there are a few different ways we can experience them. We might notice the emotional aspect first, for example we feel sad, angry or upset. There can also be a physical component to feelings which might be easier to notice or to name. We might feel tense, or shaky for example. These

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physical components of a feeling can sometimes lead to things like headaches or stomach aches, which become the main focus or cause for concern, without recognising that there may be an emotional element at play. If physical causes for physical sensations are ruled out it can be helpful to see if there is an emotion such as fear, worry or stress involved too.

The third, and often overlooked component of a feeling is the thought that helps to create it. For example, I might notice that physically I feel tense and achy, if I check in with my emotions I notice I am feeling stressed and worried. It's then helpful to look more closely at what I'm thinking. Perhaps I'm thinking 'I can't cope with all this work' or 'I'm going to fail my exams' or 'everyone hates me'.

You can use the 'Anatomy of Feelings' worksheet to help young people to better understand what is going on for them. Ask them to start with a physical sensation, emotional feeling or a thought that they have and see if they can identify the other components. Encourage them to recognise both pleasant and unpleasant feelings and to become aware of how these can impact on their reactions.

You can use some of the statements about emotions to encourage discussion in class. You can use a walking debate in the classroom or a tool like a Kahoot poll if delivering online. Read out the statement, for example 'there's no such thing as a bad feeling' and ask the class to



indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement. Encourage the class to give reasons for their decision and facilitate a discussion around this which supports young people to explore the nature of feelings.

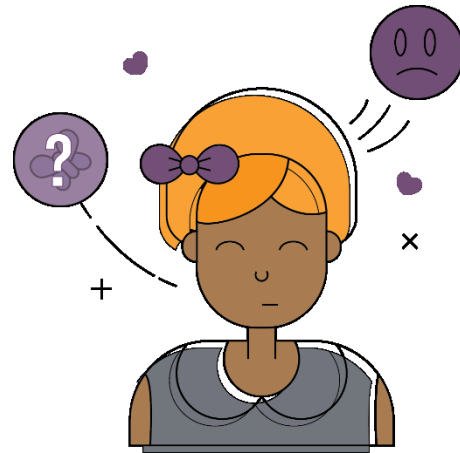
Strategies for supporting young people to manage feelings

If an emotion is well understood, it will become less feared. The mood boards and body mapping activities outlined will help with understanding emotions. Use the ‘Anatomy of a feeling’ worksheet in class to help with differentiating between physical and emotional feelings, and thoughts. It’s important for young people to learn that difficult feelings can alert us to potential problems that need to be addressed. For example, if a young person is feeling angry, it could be a sign that they feel they feel a sense of injustice.

Use the ACE animation to demonstrate to young people the ACE technique – which is a way of supporting young people to manage feelings.

‘**A**’ refers to accept how you are feeling
‘**C**’ refers to come back into your body
‘**E**’ refers to engage fully with what you are doing.

You will be able to access the ACE animation on the Managing feelings section of the schools’ toolkit.



Support the young person to recognise any patterns in how they are feeling. Any internal or external triggers may be maintaining feelings. Support the young person in making changes if required and if appropriate.

Learning how to sit with, and tolerate, emotional distress can take practice. Grounding and breathing exercises help with this.

Find practical demonstrations of some of these techniques in the Managing feelings section. Use ‘Top Tips for Managing Feelings’ as a method to support young people. Ask them to rate from ‘Least helpful’ for them to ‘Most helpful’ and start a discussion on this.

Encourage young people to try out activities to better manage difficult feelings, such as: exercise, relaxation, mindfulness.

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