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Foundations for Wellbeing

Year 1, lesson 4: Helpful and unhelpful thoughts



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Helpful and unhelpful thoughts

This is the fourth of five lessons on self-regulation, mental health and wellbeing, for year 1. This lesson focuses on managing unhelpful thoughts and worries.

To encourage pupils to use the self-regulation strategies taught in these lessons more automatically, autonomously and effectively, it is important to revisit and reinforce them regularly, as part of a whole-school approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing. The extension activities are designed to support this (for more information, see the Teacher Handbook). To learn more, please visit our self-guided online courses, which are available to all School Plus members.

The lesson plan is based on a 45-minute lesson. The timings given are the minimum required to deliver the activities, but you may wish to spend longer exploring each activity.

Learning objective and outcomes

To learn about helpful and unhelpful thoughts.

Pupils will be able to:

- identify examples of helpful and unhelpful thoughts
- describe how helpful and unhelpful thoughts can change how we act and feel
- describe how unhelpful thoughts can be changed to more helpful ones

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Flipchart paper and pens
- Resource 1: *Helpful or unhelpful?* [one per group]
- Resource 2: *Mini scenarios* [one per group]
- Resource 3: *Visual supports* [support option, as required]

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher handbook notes before teaching this lesson. They include guidance on establishing a safe learning environment, supporting pupils with additional vulnerabilities, using assessment and personal reflection effectively, and embedding the learning. They also outline useful subject knowledge on the theory and evidence informing these lessons, self-regulation strategies and relevant neuroscience.

The lesson plans should be used flexibly, and you are encouraged to adapt them to meet the specific needs and abilities of your pupils. It is also important to consider sensitivities and prior knowledge about specific pupils' circumstances. If safeguarding concerns arise during this lesson, these should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, in line with your school policy.

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Baseline assessment

Introduction (Slides 9-11, 2 mins)

Establish or revisit ground rules. Explain that if pupils have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can speak to you individually or write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Using slide 10, begin by briefly recapping the learning from last lesson.

Introduce today's learning objective and outcomes. Explain that this lesson will be about helpful and unhelpful thoughts.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 12, 5 mins)

Using slide 12, introduce pupils to Zam and David who are on the same team at Sport's Day.

Ask pupils:

- What helpful thoughts is Zam having?
- How might Zam be feeling?
- What unhelpful thoughts is David having?
- How might David be feeling?

Take feedback and write up pupils' responses on the flipchart or whiteboard.

Then, allow pairs some time to discuss how David could change his unhelpful thoughts to more helpful ones, adding these ideas to the flipchart or whiteboard too.

Use the responses to gauge what they already know about helpful and unhelpful thoughts, and how unhelpful ones can be changed to more helpful ones. Note any misconceptions or gaps in understanding and aim to address these during the lesson. For example, you might want to spend more time on the 'What next?' activity, exploring what might happen if someone has helpful, instead of unhelpful, thoughts.

Core activities

Helpful or unhelpful? (Slide 13, 10 mins)

In small groups, ask pupils to sort the examples of thoughts that someone might have during a school day, into 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' piles, using **Resource 1: Helpful or unhelpful?**.

Take feedback.

Helpful: *I can ask for help; I can try again; Mistakes help me learn; I can share with my friends.*
Unhelpful: *I can't do it; It's too hard; I won't even try; I don't want to share.*

Reiterate that it is usual for someone to have lots of different thoughts and feelings in one day –

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some could be helpful, and others unhelpful. Tell pupils that it is possible to change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful ones.

Facing a challenge (Slides 14–15, 10 mins)

Explain that, when faced with something challenging, having helpful and unhelpful thoughts can change how someone might feel or behave. Share the scenario on slide 14: *Marek is finding his schoolwork hard.*

As a class, match a 'helpful' and an 'unhelpful' card (from Resource 1) to the scenario. For example, *I can ask for help (helpful)* and *I can't do it (unhelpful).* Once modelled, give groups one of the following scenarios from **Resource 2: Mini scenarios**:

- *Meena is building a tower of blocks, but it keeps falling down.*
- *Andie has a new toy, and her friend wants to have a turn playing with it.*
- *Tao is trying to tie his shoelaces and makes a mistake.*

Then, for each card in Resource 1, ask pupils to discuss how the character might feel if they had each thought. For example:
I can ask for help – confident/happy.
I can't do it – angry/upset.

Take feedback and make sure pupils have a chance to see all the scenarios using slide 15.

Support: Ask pupils to use **Resource 3: Visual supports** to help them identify feelings associated with each card.

Challenge: Ask pupils to create their own 'mini scenario' in which a character faces a challenge, and then swap their scenario with someone else. For the scenario they have been given, ask pupils to match a 'helpful' and an 'unhelpful' card and explain how the character might feel after having each thought.

What next? (Slide 16, 7 mins)

Ask groups to take their 'unhelpful' card from the previous activity and then discuss what might happen next in their scenario if the character had that unhelpful thought. Model the example of Marek:
'I can't do it' *– Marek might want to stop; he won't be able to carry on with his work; he will be 'stuck'.*
Then, ask pupils to do the same for the 'helpful' card, again modelling the example of Marek:
'I can ask for help' *– Marek asks for help; he can carry on with his work; the teacher helps Marek to understand the work.*

Take feedback and explain that everyone has unhelpful thoughts and difficult feelings, but that, although not always easy, it's possible to change them, and that this can change the way we feel too. Emphasise that when we practise changing unhelpful thoughts to helpful thoughts, our brains become better at remembering how to do this. This will help us next time something challenging happens and we have difficult feelings about it. You could also refer to 'Reappraisal' on the strategies posters (Appendix 3) in the Teacher's Handbook to reinforce this strategy, during and after the lesson.

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Reflection and Endpoint assessment

Reflection and Endpoint assessment (Slides 17-18, 8 mins)

Ask pupils to think of a time they have had unhelpful thoughts, for example when doing something difficult, and how it made them feel and behave. Then, ask them to think about ways they could change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful ones in the future. As this is a personal reflection, they do not need to share their responses with the class.

Share the following scenario using slide 18:
Zam and David are working together on a puzzle, but they can't work out where the pieces go.
Ask pupils:

- What helpful and unhelpful thoughts might they be having?
- How might these thoughts make them feel?
- How might they change unhelpful thoughts to more helpful ones?

Take feedback and write up pupils' responses on the flipchart or whiteboard. This can be used to demonstrate their learning in this lesson, as evidence of progress, and to inform future teaching.

Check the question box and respond to any remaining questions.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 19, 3 mins)

Tell pupils that if they have unhelpful thoughts a lot, or if their thoughts are upsetting or difficult to change, it's important to speak to a trusted adult at home or at school. Pupils can also contact Childline: 0800 1111.

Closing the lesson (Slide 20)

Finally, using slide 20, reinforce the key learning by summing up for the class what they have achieved in today's lesson.

Activities to extend and embed the learning

Helpful thoughts jar (Slide 21)

Ask pupils to add examples of helpful thoughts to a class jar or box. For example, it's brave to try new things; It's ok to ask for help; I can learn something new every day; I am a good friend.
If someone in the class is facing a challenge or having an unhelpful thought, encourage them to pick a helpful thought from the jar/box.

Promote helpful thinking (Slide 22)

Promote 'helpful' thinking in play activities. For example, if pupils are building a tower and it collapses, discuss with them how they can see it as an opportunity to build an 'even better tower'.

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