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Foundations for Wellbeing

Foundations for Wellbeing

Year 3, lesson 2: Understanding distraction



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QUALITY ASSURED RESOURCE
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Understanding distraction

This is the second of five lessons on self-regulation, mental health and emotional wellbeing, for year 3. This lesson focuses on how to direct attention and manage distractions.

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 different kinds of distraction and some ways they can be managed.

Pupils will be able to:

- analyse a range of distractions and decide if they are helpful or not
- explain how parts of the brain can help with different types of distraction
- describe how a range of distractions can make people feel and some ways they can be managed

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Resource 1: *A story of distraction – teacher copy* [for teacher reference only]
- Resource 2: *What can Tao do about distraction?* [one copy per small group]

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance 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

Reconnecting and baseline assessment activity (Slides 9-12, 6 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 write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Remind the class that last lesson focused on thoughts, feelings and emotions. Using slide 10, ask pupils to 'think, pair, share' in response to the questions shown.

Use pupils' responses to check their understanding of these key concepts from last lesson, before briefly using slide 11 to recap this learning. Explain that today's lesson will build on this by thinking about distraction.

Show slide 12 and ask the class:

1. What do we mean by 'distraction'?
2. Can you think of two examples of different types of distraction, and say how they could make someone feel?
3. Can you think of anything people can do about distraction?

Pupils could share their answers with the class or jot their ideas down on mini whiteboards. Use pupils' responses to gauge their starting point and identify any gaps or misconceptions in their understanding. For example, if pupils don't distinguish between helpful and unhelpful distractions in their examples, you may want to reinforce this distinction with practical examples when introducing the learning objective and outcomes.

Introduction (Slide 13, 2 mins)

Introduce the learning objective and outcomes and explain that today's lesson will explore distractions. If needed, remind the class that a distraction is 'when something takes attention away from what someone is doing, thinking or feeling'. Emphasise that everyone gets distracted and sometimes distractions are helpful. There are also ways to manage unhelpful distractions, and this is important because it allows people to focus on what matters to them. This will be a focus of today's lesson.

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Core activities

Distraction action! (Slides 14-15, 10 mins)

Tell the class they are going to listen to a short story about Tao. As they listen, pupils will need to mime (or silently act out) what Tao is doing. But whenever they think he experiences a distraction, pupils must pause the miming and do a 'distraction action' to show that they have spotted the distraction. You could agree the distraction action as a class or make it something simple like putting both hands on their heads. (Note that if acting the story out won't work for your class, they could listen from their seats and just do the distraction action when they hear a distraction).

Read the story aloud using **Resource 1: A story of distraction – teacher copy.** When pupils have identified a distraction in the story, ask them to pair up with someone close to them and briefly discuss whether the distraction is helpful or not and why. Ask one or two pairs to share responses with the class and use the table on slide 15 to establish whether the distraction is helpful or unhelpful for Tao, before continuing with the story.

Once the story is finished, prompt pupils to come out of the role of Tao – for example, by 'shaking off' the character. Then, look at the 'helpful' column and briefly discuss as a class what makes these distractions helpful. Emphasise these distractions either signal danger (for example, his dad shouting at Tao to stop before the road) or distract from things that are unpleasant (for example, being distracted from feeling sad by a friend making a funny face).

Tao's amazing brain (Slides 16-18, 5 mins)

Using slide 16, explain that when Tao experiences a distraction that alerts him to danger (like his dad shouting for him to stop at the road) a part of his brain called the amygdala becomes active. Emphasise that the amygdala is linked to fear and helps Tao to act fast! It is a bit like an alarm bell. So, in this way, the brain is always trying to help Tao and keep him safe.

Show slide 17 and explain that for less helpful distractions (like thinking about a TV show during an enjoyable English lesson), the brain can help too! The anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) can help Tao to notice the distraction, and together with the prefrontal cortex (PFC), these parts of the brain can help him to decide if a distraction is useful or not. This is an important decision because it helps Tao to know if he needs to do anything to manage the distraction, and to think about what the best action might be. Note that pupils do not need to worry too much about remembering the names of these different parts of the brain. The main thing is that they recognise the brain is always trying to help – for example, by trying to keep Tao safe from danger.

To check pupils' understanding, ask pairs to look at the two distractions on slide 18 and discuss:

- Which one is most likely to activate the amygdala?
- Can they explain their thinking?

Take feedback and emphasise that the lion roaring is the distraction most likely to activate the amygdala, and this is because (unlike someone asking to borrow a pencil) it signals possible danger

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Support: Print slide 16 to remind pupils what the amygdala does.

Challenge: Ask pairs to consider a distraction that could mean danger but is a 'false alarm'. For example, someone's friend jumps out to try and scare them, but they are only messing around. What could happen in the brain in response to this distraction? *The amygdala would be active first, but then the ACC and PFC would help to decide if the situation is dangerous or not. If it is not dangerous, the PFC would communicate this to the amygdala.*

Responding to distractions (Slides 19-21, 15 mins)

Part A: How do distractions make people feel?

In small groups, ask pupils to pick one helpful (purple) distraction and one unhelpful (orange) distraction from slide 19. Using the emotions bank shown, can they agree which emotions Tao would be most likely to experience from the two distractions they have chosen?

Take feedback, drawing out that a distraction might prompt more than one emotion in Tao. For example, he might feel frustration at having been distracted from his English lesson by thinking about a TV show – but this might be mixed with some happiness if it's a TV show he likes and enjoys thinking about. Use questioning to highlight the importance of context for the emotion Tao might experience (e.g., for distraction 2, what if Tao was just about to take his turn in his favourite game when the bell rang?).

Before moving on to the next part of the activity, ask which distractions might need managing. *(The ones that create more challenging emotions – usually the unhelpful ones.)*

Part B: How could Tao respond to distractions?

In the same groups, ask pupils to look at **Resource 2: What can Tao do about distraction?.** Show slide 20 and, as a whole class, discuss:

- How could this distraction make Tao feel? (*Emphasise that this distraction might make Tao feel a range of emotions – such as frustration, annoyance, irritation, curiosity)*
- What could Tao do to help with this distraction? Pupils could think back to the action Tao took in the story in activity 1. (*Tao could make a change in his environment – for example, in the story he got his dad to help him 'close' the alert.)*

Next, revisit the unhelpful distractions on slide 21 and ask groups to agree two actions that could help Tao with each of these distractions.

Take some ideas from groups, including any that looked at 'something else?', emphasising that different actions will work for different people. For example, some people might find listening to music during activities like art or maths helps them to focus, while others might find it distracting. Emphasise that one of the most useful things someone can do for unhelpful distractions is to remind themselves of why they don't want to be distracted, or why they have chosen to focus on a particular activity, place or person. When being distracted in English for example, Tao could remind himself how much he enjoys writing poems and how thinking about his favourite animal makes him feel.

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Reflection and endpoint assessment

Reflection and endpoint assessment (Slides 22-23, 5 mins)

Ask pupils to think about a time when they have experienced a less helpful distraction. If this happens again in future, which of the actions explored today do they think would be most helpful? Encourage them to silently choose one to try out. As this is a private reflection activity, pupils should not be asked to share their answers.

Remind pupils of the learning outcomes and, with these in mind, ask them to complete the three statements on slide 23 by giving examples. They could jot their ideas down on mini whiteboards and hold them up so you can get a sense of whether pupils have met the learning outcomes, or if there are gaps or misconceptions that still need addressing.

Check the question box and respond to any remaining questions.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 24)

Remind pupils that if they are finding it difficult to manage distractions, or distractions are making them experience strong challenging emotions, it's important they speak to a trusted adult at home or at school who can help. Pupils can also contact Childline: www.childline.org.uk/kids.

Closing the lesson (Slide 25)

Finally, using slide 25, 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

What might happen next? (Slide 26)

Following on from the 'Responding to distractions' activity, ask pupils to choose one of the scenarios they looked at involving Tao and explain:

- how the action they suggested could have helped Tao
- what might have happened next if Tao took the action they suggested.

Exploring distraction (Slide 27)

Challenge pupils to explore distractions next time they read a story or watch a TV show and consider:

- Does the character experience any distractions?
- Is the distraction helpful or less helpful?
- How does the distraction make the character feel?

If relevant, pupils could also ask themselves:

- How does the character manage the distraction?
- Are there any other ways the character could have managed the distraction?

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