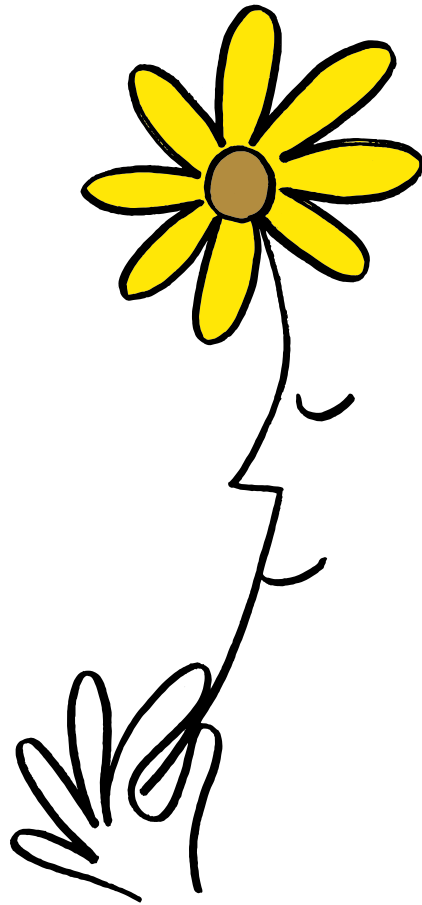


# **Mental Health Literacy**



**GRADES 9 TO 12**

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**Lesson Package**

THE ROAD TO POSITIVE WELL-BEING IN EVERY CLASSROOM STARTS HERE



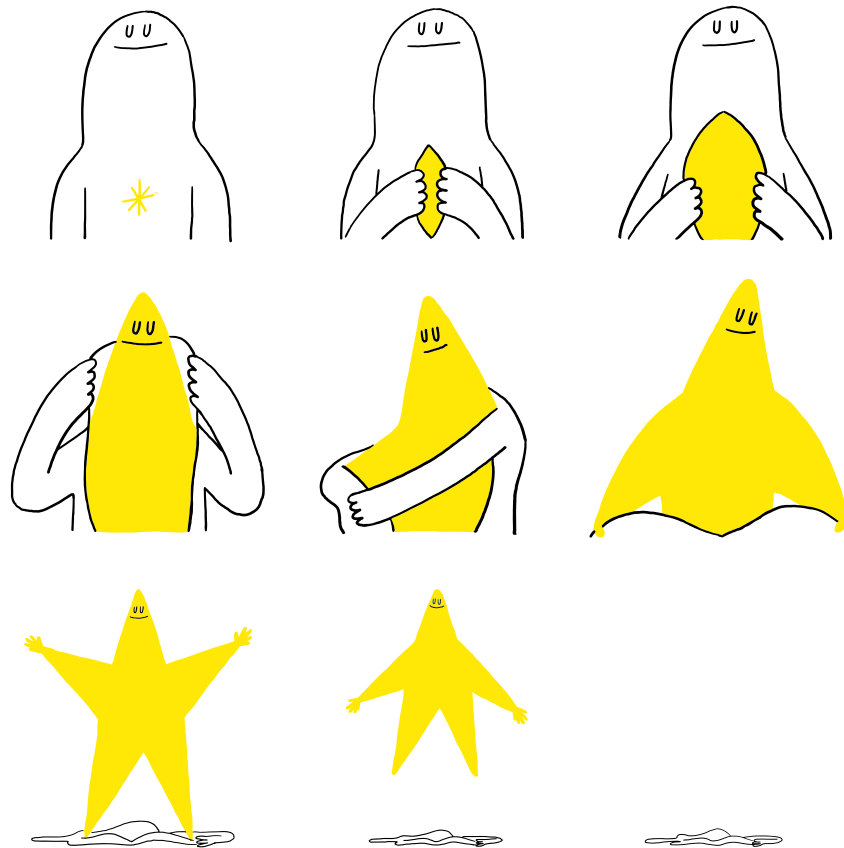
# WELL~ BEING CANADA

**Well-being Canada is an educational program that uses evidence-based tools, resources and everyday actions to nurture and promote positive well-being in students of all ages.**

**This resource provides tools and activities to promote mental health literacy, and supports students in self awareness, reflective practice and capacity building for themselves and others.**

**Mental Health Literacy is a collection of four lessons for students in grades 9 to 12 that focuses on helping them understand the importance of mental health literacy as it pertains to their own lived experiences and their relationships with others.**

# The Road to Mental Health Literacy



**GRADES 9 TO 12**

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**Lesson 1**

THE ROAD TO POSITIVE WELL-BEING IN EVERY CLASSROOM STARTS HERE



## Purpose

This activity aims to support students in exploring mental health and developing mental health literacy, helping them understand its significance and encouraging their active participation in conversations about mental health.

Students will explore definitions of mental health and mental health literacy, learn about their importance and participate in conversations about mental health literacy with members of their personal community.

### Objectives:

- Introduce students to the concept of mental health literacy.
- Explore how mental health literacy plays a role in our well-being and lived experience.
- Share knowledge and curiosity through discussion and collaboration with others.

### Estimated Time:

50 minutes

### Materials:

Projector and screen or monitor; writing paper; chart paper; markers; whiteboard/chalkboard or SMARTboard

### Skills Learned:



CRITICAL  
THINKING



COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS



REFLECTION  
SKILLS



SELF-AWARENESS  
SKILLS



## The Pratfall Effect

When a person seen as competent makes a mistake or acts in a clumsy way, they are found to be more likeable in comparison with people who portray to be always perfect. This is known as the "pratfall effect."

## Part 1: Investigate and Learn (35 minutes)

- Identify the importance of mental health literacy.
- Learn how mental health literacy can strengthen one's personal well-being, communication skills and relationships.

Let the class know that today, we'll be talking about mental health and the concept of mental health literacy. To gather students' prior knowledge, facilitate a class brainstorm.

On two separate pieces of chart paper or two separate sections of the board, write "Mental Health" and "Mental Health Literacy."

First, have the class brainstorm Mental Health. You may prompt them toward the following topics:

- How would you define mental health?
- How do we promote good mental health?
- What topics are important when we talk about mental health?

Next, brainstorm Mental Health Literacy. You may prompt them toward the following topics:

- How would you define mental health literacy?
- How do we practice mental health literacy?
- Why might mental health literacy be important?

**Show the class [this video](#) from Dr. Stan Kutcher, where he speaks to why mental health literacy is important for everyone.** After watching the video, re-visit the mental health literacy brainstorm to create a common definition of mental health literacy. Direct students to draw the following conclusions:

Mental Health Literacy:

- Is an overall understanding of mental health, why it's important, factors that can promote mental health,

and factors that can lead to mental health problems or disorders.

- Can help us understand how to promote and maintain good mental health.
- Can help us understand mental disorders and their treatments.
- Can reduce stigma.
- Can help us to care for others and ourselves, so we know what to do and what not to do.
- Can help us increase self-efficacy and self-advocacy (voicing what we need to support our own good mental health).
- After watching the video and establishing a common definition, have students work in small groups or pairs to discuss the following questions:
- What is something that stood out to you from the video with Dr. Kutcher?
- What is something new that you learned?
- Why do you personally think mental health literacy is important?

Share answers as a large group, and then write down each of the four things from Dr. Kutcher's video on a piece of chart paper or on a different section of the board:

- Understand how to obtain and maintain good mental health
- Understand mental disorders and their treatments
- Decrease stigma
- Support with help-seeking efficacy (asking for help when we need it)

In two different coloured markers, have students brainstorm the following under each section from Dr. Kutcher's video:

- What are some ways we can practice this as a class and individually?
- Who are some of the people in our communities that we could share this information with? What are some factors we would need to consider?

\*You may choose to assign a group to each section, or to have groups rotate through each section for 1-2 minutes so everyone can contribute to each concept, building upon one another's ideas



## Part 2: Application (10 minutes)

Think about how students can empower themselves to share the importance of mental health literacy with others.

As a class or in small groups, review and discuss students' answers to the brainstorm questions.

Collectively, come up with a few ways to practice mental health literacy, based on students' responses to the first question. Keep the chart paper in plain view to reference as a class throughout the year and remind students of the ways they have identified to practice mental health literacy throughout the year.

Next, review some of the ways that you might talk about mental health literacy with different people in students' lives. If helpful, you may brainstorm some conversation starters, questions or facts to share. For example:

- Did you know that one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime?
- Why do you think there is so much stigma around mental health problems?
- Compare how the topic of mental health is addressed in school with an older family member's experience.



### Brain Development

Your brain does not reach full maturity until the age of 25. This means your brain can easily learn new skill sets, languages, sports, instruments or anything challenging.





# The Road to Optimal Mental Health

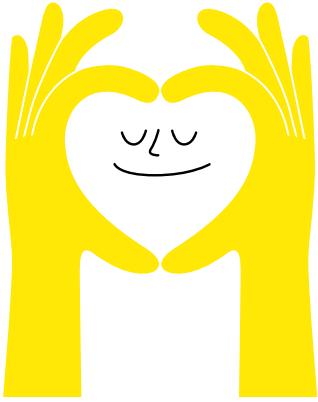


**GRADES 9 TO 12**

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**Lesson 2**

THE ROAD TO POSITIVE WELL-BEING IN EVERY CLASSROOM STARTS HERE



## Purpose

This activity is to support students in understanding proven ways to optimize their mental health and well-being through a variety of habits. Students will explore five ways to optimize mental health and reflect upon their own daily habits and how they impact their well-being.

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### Objectives:

- Introduce students to the concept of optimal mental health.
- Explore how a variety of actions related to sleep, nutrition, movement, relationships and helping others can impact our health and well-being.
- Support students with reflecting upon their own habits and developing personal action plans related to the “five things.”

### Estimated Time:

45 minutes

### Materials:

Projector and screen or monitor; writing paper; chart paper; markers; whiteboard/chalkboard or SMARTboard

### Skills Learned:



CRITICAL  
THINKING



COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS



REFLECTION  
SKILLS



SELF-AWARENESS  
SKILLS

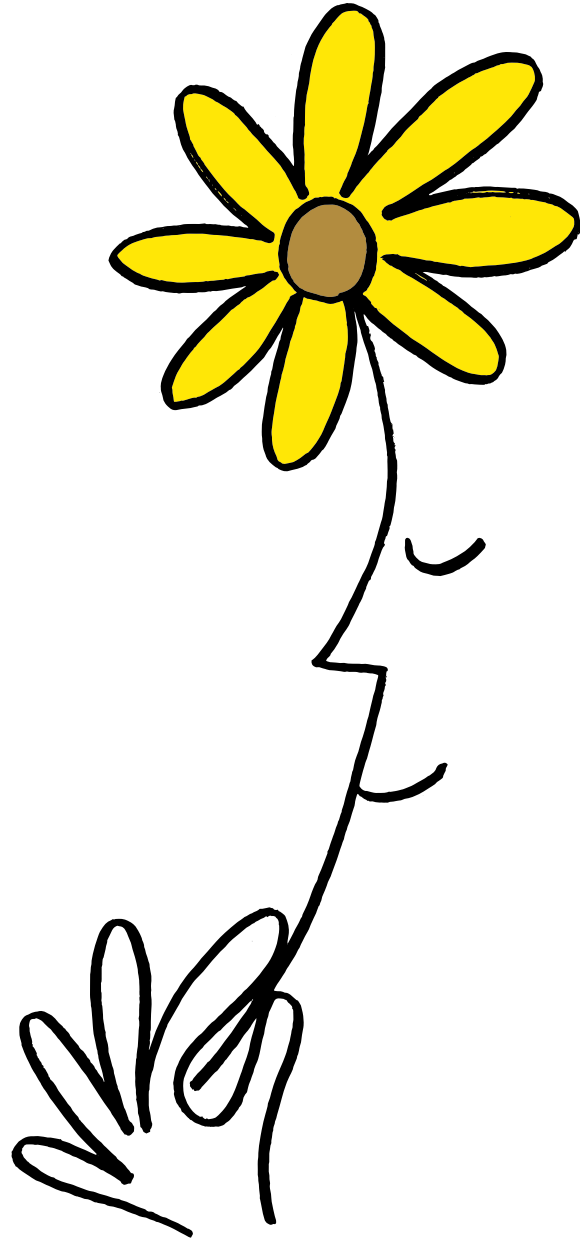
## Part 1: Investigate and Learn (20 minutes)

- Identify the importance of optimal mental health.
- Learn about how habits including sleep, nutrition, movement, relationships and helping others can support us with maintaining good mental health.
- Reflect upon students' personal daily habits and how they affect their mental health.

Let the class know that today, we'll be talking about ways that we can optimize our mental health and well-being.

In small groups, pair and share, or as a class, have students briefly discuss:

- What do they think it means to "optimize our mental health?"
- Why is it important?
- What are some practices that they believe would be helpful for optimizing mental health?



Take a few minutes to share and discuss answers as a large group before introducing the following video from Dr. Stan Kutcher: **5 Things for Optimal Mental Well-being**

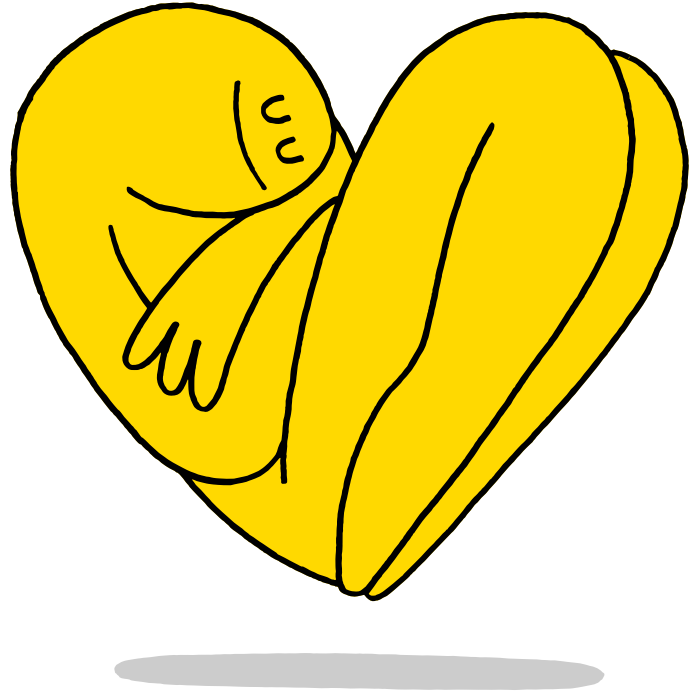
As a class, recap the five things outlined by Dr. Kutcher. You may choose to share some of the following facts to help students understand the value of each:

<p><b>Sleep</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper sleep has the power to boost brainpower and decision making, charge the immune system and lower blood pressure.</li> <li>• Research shows that downtime fuels productivity, creativity and our highest levels of performance.</li> <li>• A recent study using brain imaging technology revealed that a great deal of meaningful activity occurs in the brain when the mind is at rest.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Movement</b></p>	<p>Physical activity delivers the following benefits to brain health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved cognition, performance on academic achievement tests, memory, executive functions like planning and organizing, attention, emotional regulation, problem-solving and improving overall quality of life.</li> <li>• It can reduce the risk of depression, short-term feelings of anxiety and improve sleep.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nutrition</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fats are essential for both hormone and brain health. Try avocados, olive oil, salmon, nuts and seeds.</li> <li>• Fruits provide an excellent source of essential vitamins and minerals and are high in fibre. Banana is the only fruit that is high in amino acid tryptophan and vitamin B6, which can help the body produce serotonin, a natural chemical that alleviates depression.</li> <li>• Vegetables are important sources of many nutrients, including potassium, fibre, folic acid, vitamin A and vitamin C.</li> <li>• Cucumbers are 96 per cent water and are great for dehydration. Kale is rich in iron, peppers are loaded with antioxidants and tomatoes are rich in vitamin C.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationships</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A friendly hug, a pat on the back or a gesture of kindness releases oxytocin, the hormone involved in social bonding, and reduces cortisol, the stress hormone. Don't forget to ask for permission before initiating any physical contact with another person.</li> <li>• According to a Harvard study on long-term happiness, quality relationships are a greater source of happiness than other perceived factors such as money or fame.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Helping others</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you help others, you help yourself.</li> <li>• You might even experience "helper's high"—a feeling of energy, inner warmth and calm created by a release of endorphins in the brain.</li> </ul>

Next, place each of the five words—**sleep, movement, nutrition, relationships, helping others**—in a different part of the room. Let students know that you will be sharing a number of statements related to each of the five things. Instruct students to move to the “thing” that best represents their answer to each statement:

- Which of the five things do you personally think is the most important?
- Which of the five things do you think is most challenging for students?
- Which of the five things would you personally like to improve on?

After each statement, have students discuss their thoughts on the question with others around them. If there are stations with only one or two students, teachers may have them join up with one another. After a few minutes of discussion, have each group share their overall thoughts.



## Sleep

Sleep solidifies learning and helps us remember new information. This means next time you are studying for an exam or test, don't pull an all-nighter, aim for seven to nine hours of quality sleep.

## Part 2: Application (20 minutes)

- Students will reflect on whether their daily habits nourish or drain their energy
- Students will develop a personal action plan to practice a habit that can help optimize their mental health

Invite students to come back to their seat and take out a piece of paper or journal. Have students divide their page into three columns and encourage them to picture a typical day.

In the first column, have students write down every single thing they do in a typical day from the moment they wake up to the moment they go to sleep. Encourage students to be as specific as possible with all the steps they take in a typical day. **See example below:**

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
<p>Hit snooze twice Get up Check my phone Use the washroom Stretch Brush my teeth Drink some water Text my friend Eat breakfast Have a shower etc.</p>		

## Lesson 2: The Road to Optimal Mental Health

Next, invite students to categorize their activities by putting an **"N"** beside activities that they find nourishing or that give them energy, a **"D"** beside activities they find draining or that deplete their energy and a **"O"** beside activities that are neutral. **See example below:**

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Hit snooze twice	O	
Get up	O	
Check my phone	D	
Use the washroom	O	
Stretch	N	
Brush my teeth	N	
Drink some water	N	
Text my friend	N	
Eat breakfast	N	
Have a shower	N	
etc.		

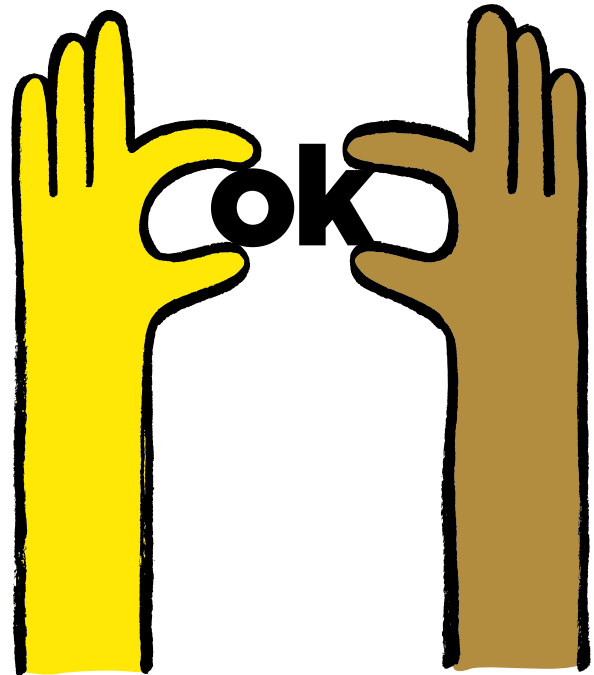
Last, invite students to indicate in the third column which of the five things each activity applies to. If an activity doesn't apply to any of the five things, they can leave it blank. **See example below:**

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Hit snooze twice	O	Sleep
Get up	O	
Check my phone	D	
Use the washroom	O	
Stretch	N	Movement
Brush my teeth	N	Nutrition
Drink some water	N	
Text my friend	N	Relationships
Eat breakfast	N	Nutrition
Have a shower	N	
etc.		

Invite students to share their initial thoughts on the practice of reflecting on activities, experiences or people that either replenish or drain their stamina/well-being.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What does it feel like when your stamina is close to empty?
- What does it feel like when your stamina is close to full?
- How did it feel to reflect on the things that replenish and drain our stamina (well-being)?
- Did you find anything surprising when you looked at what nourished or depleted you in your daily activity list?
- Why is it important to regularly do things that replenish your energy/stamina?
- What is one simple action you want to take this week to practice habits that can optimize your well-being?
- How can you measure or track this new habit to keep yourself accountable and reflect on how you feel?



**Introverts and Extroverts**

Introverted individuals drain their energy when socializing and require alone time to recharge. Extroverted individuals gain energy and happiness when socializing. Are you an introvert or extrovert?



## Part 3: Action (5 minutes)

- Students will practice their personal action plan to practice a habit that can help optimize their mental health.

Invite students to pair and share, or to share with the class, the one action they would like to take this week to practice habits to optimize their well-being. Students may have some tips and tricks to share with each other at this time.

A few additional tips you may want to share with students:

- Set your alarm for the same time every morning.
- Reduce blue light and screens before bed.
- Try stretching or reading before bed.
- Use an app to help track the amount of water you drink.
- Pack a healthy snack for school the night before.
- Try out a new healthy recipe with your family.
- Try stretching in the morning before getting ready.
- Take a daily walk.
- Try an exercise or yoga video.
- Plan to play a sport this week with a friend.
- Leave someone a note to let them know you're thinking about them.
- Call someone you haven't spoken to in a while.
- Journal about someone or an experience you're grateful for.
- Show your appreciation to community (or school community) workers.
- Volunteer for an after-school initiative.
- Raise money for a cause you care about.
- Hold the door open for someone.
- Initiate a random act of kindness through the "paying it forward" gesture—for example, post inspirational quotes around your school/class or help someone with an errand without them asking you for help.



## Part 4: Reflect (20-30 minutes, later in the week)

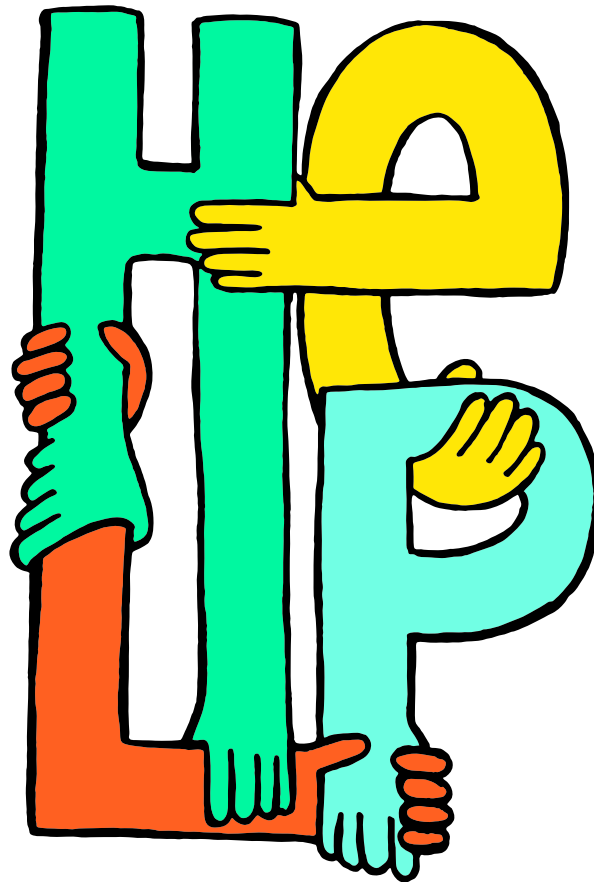
- Reflect on the experience of trying out a new practice to optimize well-being.

As an extension, you may invite the class to journal or share their experiences with the class. You may refer to the following suggested debrief questions:

- What new practice did you try out?
- What did you find challenging?
- What surprised you about the experience?
- Did you notice any changes after practising your new habit?
- Why do you think it's important to be mindful about how habits and practices can affect our mental health?



# **Understanding Stress Response**



**GRADES 9 TO 12**

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**Lesson 3**



## Purpose

This activity supports students in understanding stress response. Students will learn how the brain responds to stress, explore tools in challenging stressful thinking, understand cognitive distortions also known as error thinking and build their personal coping toolbox. This activity engages students to reflect on stress as an individual and as a class in order to build a healthy personal community.

### Objectives:

- Introduce students to understanding stress response and the importance of language when speaking about stress.
- Exploring how the brain functions in managing stress response.
- Explore strategies on managing stress and negative thinking.
- Share knowledge and curiosity through discussion and collaboration with others.

### Estimated Time:

50 minutes  
Part 1 and 2 – complete as one lesson.  
Part 3 – complete as a separate lesson.

### Materials:

Blank paper; pen or pencil, access to a computer and a word document (if the student wants to complete this activity digitally); Internet access; projector and/or screen

### Skills Learned:



CRITICAL  
THINKING



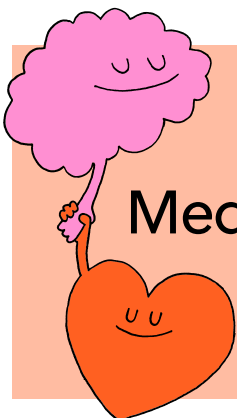
COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS



REFLECTION  
SKILLS



SELF-AWARENESS  
SKILLS



## Meditation

Meditation can help manage stress and rewire your brain, resulting in an increase in memory and focus. Try different forms of meditation or mindfulness practice to find your perfect fit. Remember purposeful consistency with the right mindset is more important than spending hours meditating.

## Part 1: Investigate and Learn (20 minutes)

Explore and identify the definition of stress from the student's perspective.

- Learn about stress response and the importance of stress management for one's personal well-being, communication, and relationships.

Let the class know that today we will be exploring the topic of stress under mental health literacy. We will be defining stress individually and reflecting on the importance of how we communicate about stress.

Before watching Dr. Stan Kutcher's video on understanding stress response, ask students to write out their definition of stress. Remind students that there is no wrong or right answer: simply reflect on how they would describe stress, what it feels like, how their body responds to stress and how their thinking reacts to stress. Ask a few students to share their answers with the class, if they're comfortable, to learn different perspectives on stress.

**Next, watch the following video from Dr. Kutcher on understanding stress response:**  
**Understanding Stress Response**

After watching Dr. Kutcher's video, brainstorm as a class on the following discussion questions:

- What is stress?
- Why is stress normal and what is it telling us?

- What did you find surprising or interesting about Dr. Kutcher's take on stress?
- Why do we need to be mindful on how we speak about stress?
- What approach is important in managing stress?

**Direct students to draw the following conclusions on stress response:**

- Stress response is your emotional, cognitive and physiological change to your environment.
- Stress should not be observed as negative but as a positive indicator that an appropriate response is needed.
- Stress is a positive challenge and an opportunity to grow or develop new skill sets.
- Our personal perspective and experiences can shape how we see and respond to stress.
- Using appropriate language is key in reframing a stressful incident.
- How we speak about stress to others can either be debilitating or supportive.
- It is important to strategically respond and develop needed skills to manage stress.

## Part 2: Application (20 minutes)

Think about how we react to stress and explore the process involved. The objective of this exercise is for students to individually reflect on a stressful incident and explore their thoughts, emotions and physical reactions to a stressful incident. Students will explore in retrospect how to positively approach a stressful incident by changing the way they think.

### Introduce the video “Fight, Flight and Freeze Response” from Braive

To manage our stress responses, it is important to understand how our brain responds to stress. Watch the following video on the brain’s response to stress by fighting, fleeing or freezing: **Fight, Flight and Freeze Response**

The video mentions how our body and brain prepares us to react to stress. However, we can also encounter “false stress responses.” False stress responses mean that you perceived a situation to be stressful or threatening however in retrospect it was not that “threatening.”

### Introduce the video “How to Stop Cognitive Distortions” from ThriveUnion.

Our brains can also distort stressful situations with negative error thinking. These are called cognitive distortions. Watch the following video on cognitive distortions to gain a better understanding: **How to Stop Cognitive Distortions**

Let students know that we will now combine our knowledge on stress responses, how our brain responds to stress and how our brain generates cognitive distortions to increase our awareness on how we respond to stress. The following exercise will require use of the Emotion Wheel found on page 11, Cognitive Distortions found on page 12 and Reflection on Stress Worksheet found on page 10.

Ask students to think of an experience which can be described as a “false stress” and answer the following questions on the Reflection on Stress Worksheet provided on page 10.

- Describe the situation where you felt stressed. (What triggered it? Where were you? Who was involved? What happened?)
- How did your body respond to this stress? (increased heart rate, feeling of a heart attack or anxiety attack, difficulty breathing, sweaty palms, body or hand shaking, increased focus, increased breathing, headaches, inability to sleep, butterflies or cramps in your stomach)
- How were you feeling during the stressful incident? Using the Emotion Wheel on page 11, add a number beside each emotion—1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest.
  - What did you automatically think in reaction to the situation? Write out the thoughts that were automatically generated in your mind. After writing out your automatic negative thoughts, use the Cognitive Distortions on page 12 to identify and label which thoughts were distorted.
  - Was it completely your fault or the other person’s?
  - Did you negatively label yourself or the other person/situation?
  - Did you only focus on the negatives of yourself/that person/situation?
  - Did you over-generalize the stressful incident?
  - Did you jump to conclusions without facts or understanding the other perspective?
  - Did you react to your emotions and make assumptions about yourself/the person/situation?
  - Were you negatively critical of yourself or the other person?

For more about cognitive distortions, **[click here](#)**.

**Next, reflect back on your stressful incident and answer the following questions:**

- How could you have approached or thought about the situation differently?
- How could you have responded objectively rather than reactively?
- How would this approach change your emotional response, stress level or the outcome of the incident?
- What positives would have resulted from taking a responsive approach rather than a reactive approach?

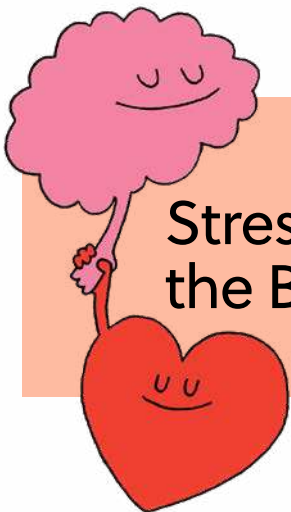
**After completing this exercise, discuss the following questions:**

1. What did this reflective exercise teach you?
2. What was challenging when completing the reflective exercise? What further information is needed to overcome these challenges?
3. How can we use this reflective exercise in managing future stressful incidents?

Direct students to draw the following conclusions from completing this exercise:

- We tend to overreact to stressful incidents which can exacerbate the situation and create further unnecessary stress.

- Our thinking affects our emotions and how we react to stressful situations.
- By changing how we think, we can change how we feel and respond to stress.
- We can build our stress response management skills by pausing and allowing time to think, in order to change how we feel and how we choose to respond—this skill can be developed by using the stress worksheet provided in this lesson.
- Our negative thinking or cognitive distortions can impair our ability to appropriately respond to stress.
- There are always two perspectives to any situation.
- Sometimes healthy communications can reduce stress.
- Sometimes we cannot change the stressful incident but must accept it with a positive mindset.
- We can strengthen our stress response skills to stress rather than unconsciously reacting to stressful incidents.
  - It is important to understand the difference between “react” and “respond.” As human beings we all need time to gather our emotions and thoughts before we are ready to respond.



## Stress and the Body

Our body responds to stress by increasing our physiological response. For example, our heart rate increases and our breathing becomes shallow. Breathing exercises can reduce these physiological responses and prepare us to calmly respond to stress.

# Part 3: Action and Reflect (30 minutes)

- Explore coping skills to manage stress and build your personal coping toolbox.
- Explore and share coping strategies as a class.
- Create an action plan as a class to support positive stress management.

provided on page 9. As a class, share coping strategies that can be helpful to others. Lastly, think of a word that can be used comfortably in class to signal a need for a wellness break or check-in. Utilize this word and the need for a wellness check-in or break by practising it in class.

As a final activity, ask students to create their personal coping skills toolbox by following the worksheet

## Coping Skills Toolbox

### What is it?

A coping skills toolbox is a place for you to keep things that calm you down in periods of stress. If you have everything gathered in one place, it's easier to remember to use your coping skills, rather than using negative behaviors. Remember, we are strengthening those brain circuits to "respond" to stress rather than "react."

<p><b>SELF-SOOTHING</b> Comforting yourself through your five senses</p> <p><b>Something to touch</b> (e.g., stuffed animal, doodling)</p> <p><b>Something to hear</b> (e.g., music, meditation guide)</p> <p><b>Something to see</b> (e.g., happy pictures, snow globe)</p> <p><b>Something to taste</b> (e.g., candy, tea)</p> <p><b>Something to smell</b> (e.g., lotion, essential oils)</p>	<p><b>DISTRACTION</b> Taking your mind positively off the problem for a short time</p> <p>Examples: <b>artwork, crafts, movies</b></p>	<p><b>MINDFULNESS</b> Tools for centering and grounding yourself in the present moment</p> <p>Examples: <b>meditation, breathing exercises, walking with presence</b></p>	<p><b>CRISIS PLAN</b> Contact info of supports and resources, for when coping skills are not enough</p> <p>Examples: <b>Family Friends Therapist Psychiatrist Counsellor Hotline Community support 911 ER</b></p>
<p><b>OPPOSITE ACTION</b> Doing something opposite of your reactive thoughts and seeking time to build an appropriate response</p> <p>Examples: <b>Watching funny videos, reading an article on your feeling or stress, affirmations</b></p>			
<p><b>EMOTIONAL AWARENESS</b> Tools for identifying and expressing your feelings</p> <p>Examples: <b>Journalling, creative writing, accepting your emotions</b></p>			



In your own words, write why a coping toolbox is important to you.

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**SELF-SOOTHING**

Something to touch

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Something to hear

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Something to see

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Something to taste

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Something to smell

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**DISTRACTION**

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**MINDFULNESS**

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**CRISIS PLAN**

Family

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Friends

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Community support

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Emergency support

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**OPPOSITE ACTION**

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**EMOTIONAL AWARENESS**

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**OTHER IDEAS SHARED**

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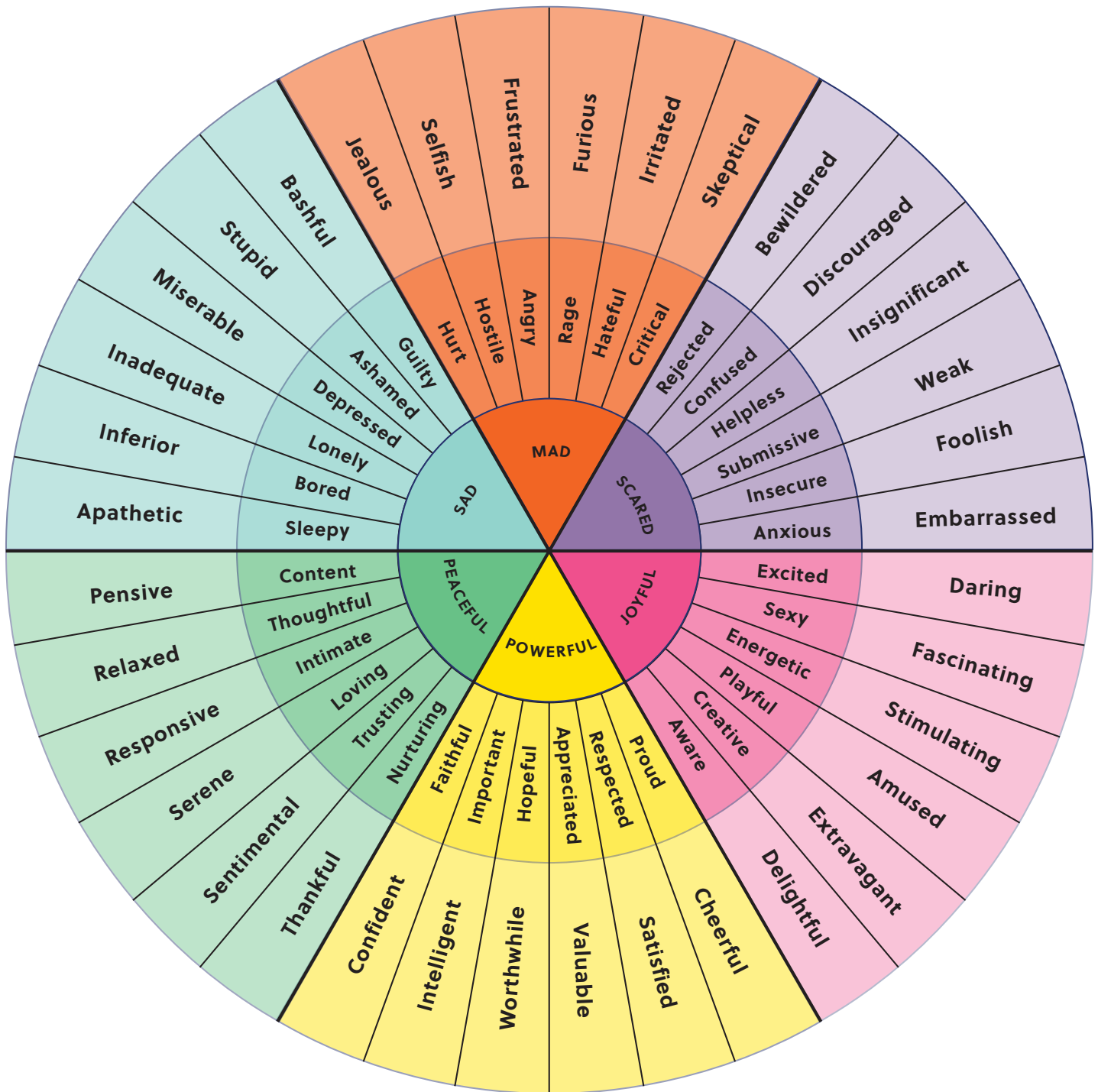
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## Reflection on Stress Worksheet

<p><b>Describe a situation that you felt was stressful?</b> (what triggered it, where were you, who was involved, what happened?)</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>How did your body respond to this stressful incident?</b> (increase heart rate, feeling of a heart attack or anxiety attack, difficulty breathing, sweaty palms, body or hand shaking, increase focus, increase breathing, headaches, inability to sleep, butterflies or cramps in your stomach)</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>How were you feeling during the stressful incident?</b> Add a number beside each emotion, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest. (Use the <b>Emotion Wheel</b> to describe how you felt immediately or during the stressful incident.)</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>What did you automatically think when reacting to the stressful situation?</b> After writing out your automatic thoughts, refer to the <b>Cognitive Distortions</b> sheet to label thoughts that could be distorted. (Use the Cognitive Distortions found on page 12 to write possible thinking errors that were involved in your stressful incident.)</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>How could you have approached or thought about the situation differently?</b> <b>How could you have responded objectively rather than reactively?</b> <b>How would this approach or thinking change your emotional response or stress level?</b></p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>What positives would have resulted from taking a responsive approach rather than a reactive approach?</b> <b>What did this reflective exercise teach you? Discuss and share your answer as a class.</b></p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

**Emotion Wheel**



### Cognitive Distortions



**Filtering**

Focusing on the negative  
Ignoring the positive



**Overgeneralization**

Assumes a rule from  
one experience



**Catastrophizing**

Expecting the worst case scenario  
Minimizing the positive



**Jumping to conclusions**

Makes assumptions based  
on little evidence



**Polarized thinking**

All-or-nothing thinking  
Ignoring completely



**Emotional reasoning**

"If I feel it, it must  
be true."



**Heaven's reward fallacy**

Expecting self-sacrifice  
to be rewarded



**Blaming**

Assumes everyone else  
at fault



**Control fallacies**

Assumes only others to blame  
Assumes only self to blame



**Fallacy of change**

Expects others  
to change



**Always being right**

Being wrong is unacceptable  
Being right supersedes everything



**Global labelling**

Extreme  
generalization



**Fallacy of fairness**

Assumes life should  
be fair



**"Shoulds"**

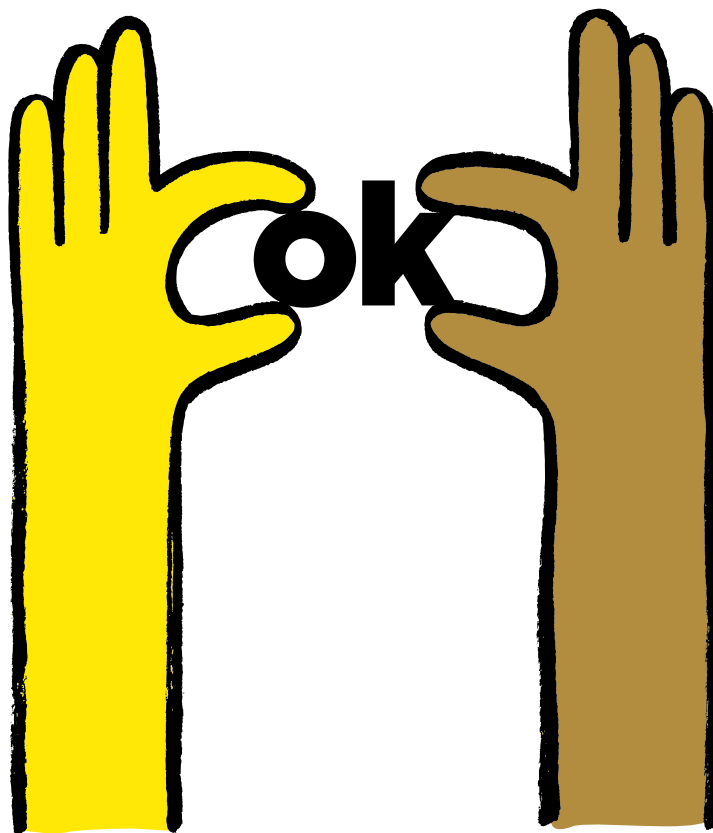
Holds tight to personal  
rules of behaviour



**Personalization**

Always assuming  
self responsible

# Understanding Language



**GRADES 9 TO 12**

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**Lesson 4**



## Purpose

This mental health literacy activity supports students on the topic of understanding language. Students will learn how words are powerful in creating a sense of shared understanding. Students will explore the importance of using appropriate words when communicating with each other, including the impact of using inappropriate words. This activity engages students as an individual and as a class to reflect over the meaning of words within mental health and to promote a positive community.

### Objectives:

- Introduce students to the importance of using appropriate words when communicating about mental health.
- Exploring words used in mental health literature and utilizing it meaningfully.
- Sharing knowledge and curiosity through discussion and collaboration with others.

### Skills Learned:



CRITICAL  
THINKING



COMMUNICATION  
SKILLS



REFLECTION  
SKILLS



SELF-AWARENESS  
SKILLS

### Estimated Time:

50 minutes

Part 1 and 2 – complete as one lesson.

Part 3 – complete as a separate lesson.

### Materials:

Blank paper; pen or pencil, access to a computer and a word document (if the student wants to complete this activity digitally); Internet access; projector and/or screen

## Part 1: Investigate and Learn (20 minutes)

- Explore the impact of words and the meaning they generate.
- Learn the importance of words in communicating with a shared understanding.
- Understand the meaning of mental health language.

Let the class know that today we will be talking about mental health language and the impact of the words we use. To gather students' prior knowledge, begin with the following brainstorm exercise.

Read the following statements and draw an image to represent what is being communicated:

**A car crashed into a truck**

**A car bumped into a truck**

**Dan was ecstatic after watching the movie**

**Dan was joyful after watching the movie**

When we hear the word "crashed," we typically imagine a fast car or an accident that is severe. How many of your students imagined the same when drawing out an image to the word "crashed"? Similarly, when we hear the word "ecstatic," what did the majority of your students draw or think?

This small activity teaches us that by simply changing one word in a sentence, we can change the meaning and perception of the sentence. Therefore, words are powerful. As a class, discuss how words can change what we think or understand. Ask students to write down a few takeaways or interesting points that came up in discussion.

**Next, watch Dr. Stan Kutcher's video on understanding language – [Understanding Language](#)**

After watching the video, reflect as a class on the below discussion questions. The questions should help students learn the following about understanding language:

- Using language and words to accurately communicate our thoughts and/or feelings.
- Using language to talk to each other and increase empathy as a community.
- Building and expanding their vocabulary on mental health literacy.
- Using proper language earlier so we can all accurately understand each other.

Learning the meanings of words used in mental health: for example, not describing any stressful or anxiety-provoking situation.



### Language and the Brain

Research shows that learning and practising new languages has strong effects on the brain. It boosts the size and activity of certain brain areas outside of the traditional "language centres." What new language do you want to learn?

## Discussion Questions

As a class, discuss answers to the following questions. You can write answers on a chart, board, or shared digital platform—feel free to utilize the best method for your students. Dr. Kutcher states that there is a difference between “talking to” and “talking past” each other: the first two questions will explore this difference.

What words, phrases or actions describe the act of “talking to” each other?

Direct students to draw the following conclusions:

- Summarizing what is being communicated
- Being present when someone is speaking
- Listening before providing an opinion
- Reflecting on what is being communicated
- Using non-verbal behavior such as making eye contact and keeping arms open
- Using open ended questions
- Asking questions for clarification
- Sharing your thoughts after asking for permission
- Using “I” when expressing your thoughts
- Being attuned to the person’s feelings
- Being empathetic

What words, phrases or actions describe the act of “talking past” each other?

Direct students to draw the following conclusions:

- Giving your opinion without permission
- Being judgmental
- Pretending to listen
- Being prejudiced
- Jumping to conclusions
- Assuming what is being said
- Using defensive or closed non-verbal behavior such as being on your phone, looking elsewhere, closed arms
- Using sentences starting with “You” to express your opinion
- Selective listening.
- Debating
- Derailing
- Interrupting
- Finishing the person’s sentence
- Talking about your experience and making them feel less important
- Correcting or undermining them
- Staying silent with no non-verbal cues



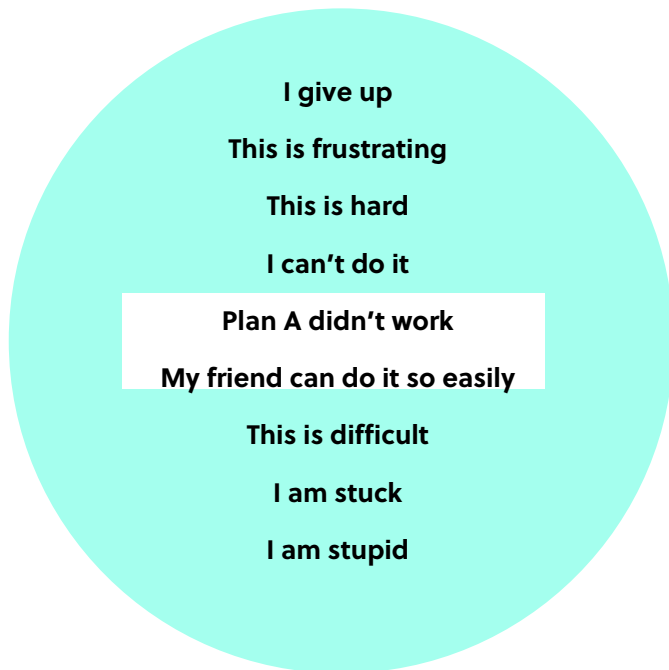
## Lesson 4: Understanding Language

Dr. Kutcher explains that any stressful situation can be either distressing or an opportunity. As a class, reflect how words or phrases can frame our mind to see a stressful situation as an opportunity or distressing.

Together, write down words or phrases that we often use when we are in a negative or distressing state.

Next, challenge students to think of words or phrases to reframe those negative phrases into a positive one. Words or phrases that promote growth mindset will reframe a situation as an opportunity. Words or phrases that generate a fixed mindset will reframe situations as distressed.

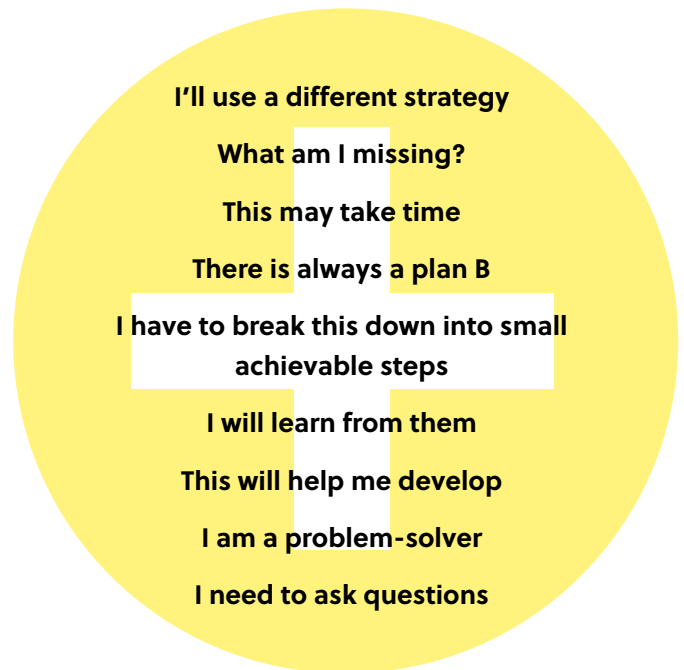
### NEGATIVE PHRASES OR WORDS USED WHEN DISTRESSED



### OTHER NEGATIVE WORDS

Mistake • Never • Give up  
Not good • I suck • Bad  
Anxious • Depressed

### POSITIVE PHRASES OR WORDS TO CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY



### OTHER POSITIVE WORDS

Collaborate • Teach  
Feedback • Courage • Support  
Challenge • Improve

As a class or individually, reflect and write anything interesting someone shared or a thought that can be taken away.

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## Part 2: Application (20 minutes)

The objective of this exercise is for students to explore how words can generate different meaning and the importance of asking for clarification. Students will also explore the importance of using appropriate words to communicate their thoughts and/or feelings, to connect with others and create a shared understanding.

For the next activity, arrange the class in a circle or semi-circle. The objective is for everyone to be able to see each other's responses. Start the activity by picking a reader—their job is to read the words below and wait for

everyone to write or draw their responses on a piece of paper. After everyone writes or draws their answer, allow each student, if comfortable, to share their response. If a student wishes to skip a word or not share their answer, that should be okay.

Once the reader has read a word, the person sitting on their right will read the next word. Continue this process until all words have been read. In this activity, it is encouraged for the teacher to also participate.

**Draw or write an incident that made you feel:**



Happy



Sad



Embarrassed



Stuck



Angry



Loved



Frustrated



Bored



Worried



Anxious

After completing this exercise, proceed with the following discussion questions:

**What is the difference between angry and frustrated?**

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**What is the difference between loved and happy?**

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**What is the difference between anxious and worried?**

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Allow students to discuss their perspectives and how they would define each word. As a class, write one definition for each word. Discuss the meaning of each word given below to highlight the importance of using words appropriately and seeking clarification on the speaker's message.

**Anger:** A reaction to a stimulus which results in being antagonistic toward someone. A reaction to a feeling that something deliberately did you wrong. Anger is often a reaction to an underlying emotion such as frustration, sadness, etc.

**Frustration:** A feeling of disappointment when an effort or observation does not work out as expected or anticipated.

**Loved:** A strong feeling of affection without any expectations, jealousy, force or misunderstanding.

**Happy:** A temporary feeling of contentment or pleasure.

**Anxious:** An intense feeling of unease, worry and fear. A feeling causing trouble in concentration, avoiding situations or people, irrational fear of things or situations, irritability, fatigue, sweatiness, dizziness, inability to sleep, difficulty in breathing, and chest pains or hear palpitations.

**Worried:** A state of concern or disturbance from care.

**Why is it important to use appropriate words to a describe a situation so we can communicate a shared understanding?**

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**Why is it important to ask for clarification when someone is expressing their feelings or thoughts?**

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**Why is it harmful to assume what someone is saying?**

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# Part 3: Action and Reflect (30 minutes)

- Explore the impact of words in mental health by utilizing the understanding of language in mental health literacy.
- Create an action plan to educate others on the power of words and labels that stigmatize mental health.

For the last activity in understanding language, watch the following video by **Your words matter – the stigma around mental health**

Direct students to answer the following questions as a class. Write answers provided on a chart, board or shared digital platform.

<p><b>What words have you used toward someone that could be described as a negative label or inappropriate?</b></p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>How could you be mindful in choosing appropriate words when speaking to someone?</b></p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p><b>In what ways can you educate someone on the power of words and how negative labels can stigmatize people with mental illness?</b></p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



## Words Matter

A Japanese researcher by the name of Dr. Masaru Emoto conducted an experiment by freezing water exposed to positive or negative words. His research showed that positive words produced beautiful hexagonal ice crystals and water presented with negative words produced distorted or incomplete ice crystals. Our words have power: they impact others, but they also impact us. **Find out more here.**

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BEING  
CANADA**



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