SenseAbility lesson plans:
Dealing with stress

www.beyondblue.org.au/senseability  1300 22 4636
Introduction

Stress is a normal part of life; everyone experiences it at some time. Stress causes hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) to be released into the body and these hormones speed up heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and metabolism.

Some amount of stress is healthy as it can help people to perform under pressure and motivate people to do their best; it can improve a person's focus, strength and stamina. Excessive or long-term stress however can be physically and mentally harmful. According to the Mission Australia National Youth Survey (2014) young people are most concerned about coping with stress and a quarter of young Australians say they are unhappy with their lives.

There are two types of stressors: external events [such as conflict, exams, lack of finances or security, loss, accidents], and internal events, where we are able to cause stress to ourselves by using self-talk like ’I can’t do this’ or ’I will look stupid’.

Stress affects the mind, body and behaviour in many ways, and everyone experiences stress differently. Signs of stress might include feeling:

- hostile, angry or irritable
- anxious
- like avoiding people
- moody or frustrated with things that normally don’t bother you
- worthless or doubting your abilities.

While physical symptoms of stress might include:

- upset stomach, diarrhoea or indigestion
- headache
- backache
- having a hard time sleeping
- eating more or less than normal
- raised heart rate.

To promote a healthy approach to dealing with stress young people benefit from:

- a strong network of supportive friends and family members
- learning to take control of how they think about a situation
- a realistic and optimistic attitude and outlook that accepts challenges as part of life and sees the funny side of things
- an ability to recognise and deal with emotions using stress management and relaxation strategies
- understanding what is going on. The more information a young person has about a situation, how long it will last, why it has occurred and what to expect etc., the easier it is to cope.

Improving a young person’s ability to manage stress also means helping them to develop their sense of control. When young people think they lack control over events in their life they can feel frustrated, stressed, angry or overwhelmed. While these reactions are normal, they don’t help change the situation – worse, they can be harmful, both physically and psychologically. So, it is very important that young people realise that while they can’t control all of the events in their life, they can control the way they respond to those events. Young people can choose how they interpret or think about events, and this in turn helps them control how they feel about them, and consequently make clear decisions about what actions they take. In other words, sense of control involves young people taking command of how they think about the things that happen to them, which can make them feel more empowered to deal with life’s challenges.

A sense of self-control helps a young person to:

- speak helpfully to themselves
- have realistic expectations (for themselves and for others)
- identify and manage emotions
- address problems as they arise
- use relaxation techniques and schedule in enjoyable activities
- use humour to deal with difficult situations
- seek help when they need it.

This lesson plan sets out a possible approach to addressing issues of stress in the classroom, with a focus on enhancing young people’s self-talk and sense of control. It provides the information that young people need to understand stress and it draws on materials in the SenseAbility Essential skills and Sense of control modules to convey the important role that healthy thinking and self-control plays in mental and emotional wellbeing.

Note

Look for opportunities during class discussions to draw out what your students were saying to themselves during activities or events and, consequently, how those thoughts made them feel and what they did as a result of this. Please note that some people find it difficult to remember what they were thinking or seeing in their mind, and some people get ‘thoughts’ and ‘feelings’ confused, such as ‘I felt I wasn’t good enough’ is in fact a thought, not a feeling.
Key messages and outcomes

Key messages

Stress is a normal part of life; everyone experiences it at some time. The signs of stress are different for everyone; as are the triggers for excessive stress.

Excessive or long-term stress can be physically and mentally harmful.

Your sense of control is your realistic belief that you have the skills and ability to cope with the changes and challenges that will occur in your life.

Developing a greater sense of control helps a young person to:

• speak helpfully to themselves
• have realistic expectations (for themselves and for others)
• identify and manage emotions
• address problems as they arise
• use relaxation techniques and schedule in enjoyable activities
• use humour to deal with difficult situations
• seek help when they need it.

Outcomes

At the completion of the session young people will:

• better understand stress; recognising the physical and mental warning signs of feeling stressed
• recognise the importance of sense of control and their capacity to enhance it
• understand the connection between the thinking and feeling
• understand that helpful self-talk is a skill critical to managing stress
• have an improved ability to manage stress using a range of techniques
• know where to access help if stress becomes overwhelming.
Lessons

Objective 1

Better understand stress; recognising the physical and mental warning signs of feeling stressed

Stress is a normal part of life; everyone experiences it at some time. Stress causes hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) to be released into the body and these hormones speed up heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure and metabolism.

Some amount of stress is healthy as it can help people to perform under pressure and motivate people to do their best. Excessive or long-term stress however can be physically and mentally harmful.

There are two types of stressors: external events (e.g. conflict, exams, lack of finances or security, loss, accidents), and internal events, where we are able to cause stress to ourselves by using self-talk like ‘I can’t do this’ or ‘I will look stupid’. Stress is often the response when a person feels that they lack control – leading to feeling frustrated, stressed, angry or overwhelmed.

Stress affects the mind, body and behaviour in many ways, and everyone experiences stress differently. Signs of stress might include feeling:

- hostile, angry or irritable
- anxious
- like avoiding people
- moody or frustrated with things that normally don’t bother you
- worthless or doubting your abilities.

While physical symptoms of stress might include:

- upset stomach, diarrhoea or indigestion
- headache
- backache
- having a hard time sleeping
- eating more or less than normal
- raised heart rate.

Note

Rather than presenting the signs of stress the group could be asked to brainstorm the signs of stress and then relate this to the following activity. This draws on their personal experience and creates an opportunity for group discussion early in the session.

Activity

Discussion about managing stress

Briefly ask what they do to reduce/manage stress (exercise regularly, meditate, stick to a timetable/budget/study routine, talk to family, friends or trusted adults). Create a list on the whiteboard.
Objective 2

Recognise the importance of sense of control and their capacity to enhance it

Sense of control is the belief that you have the skills and ability to cope with life’s changes and challenges, and to manage your emotions. It includes a realistic recognition of what is within and what is outside your control. It is an understanding that, although you cannot control all of life’s events, you do have some control over your responses to those events.

Having a sense of control means that you:

• do not react wildly to events you cannot control
• are less likely to suffer the physical and mental symptoms of stress/anxiety
• are more likely to speak helpfully to yourself
• feel more in control of your emotions
• have more capacity to prioritise and manage elements in your life.

A sense of control provides:

• an ability to think about events in helpful ways
• a means to curb instinctive, unproductive emotional reactions
• reductions in the physical and mental symptoms of stress/anxiety
• the belief that one has more control over one’s life
• an enhanced ability to see events from realistic perspectives.

Activity

Sense of control
Refer to page 64 of the Sense of control module.

Activity: ‘High noon balloons’

Time: 1–5 minutes

Size: Individual activity, but most fun when done by whole class

Space: For students to move around

Resources: Marking pens, four inflatable balloons per student, pens, paper

Review

Refer to page 55 of the Sense of control module.

Possible discussion pointers

• Do you think control is important? Why/why not?
• What are some examples of things that we cannot control e.g. other people’s reactions, acts of nature, accidents? How do you feel about these?
• How can thinking you have no control make you feel stressed?
• What are some instances when it is good NOT to be in control? Why?
Objective 3

Understand the connection between the thinking and feeling

You often cannot control the events that occur in our lives, but you do have control over the way you think about those events, and what you say to yourself about those events - self-talk. Self-talk is basically your inner voice and often you have these thoughts without even realising it.

Helpful self-talk is a skill critical to managing stress and building a strong sense of control. When you speak to yourself helpfully and realistically you are better able to put events into perspective, are more likely to attempt things that might seem difficult and are more likely to keep trying to reach your goals even though you might experience setbacks. However, if we speak to ourselves unhelpfully, we may find it easier to give up, or to not even attempt something in the first instance.

The way you think and talk to yourself can directly affect the way you feel and, consequently, the actions you take or don't take. In this respect, self-talk relates directly to the A-B-C-D model. Therefore, if you get into the habit of challenging unhelpful thoughts and generating alternative ways of thinking you can gain a greater control over your thinking and related emotions.

The A-B-C-D approach means that changing the way we think can help make us feel better. Refer to pages 6, 20 and 54 of the Essential skills module to explain or display A-B-C-D model.

Activity

Sense of control
Refer to page 76 of the Sense of control module.

Activity: 'Noise in the night'
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Whole of class
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Whiteboard

Alternative activities

Option 1: If you have already delivered a core activity similar to 'Noise in the night' with another SenseAbility module you may consider reinforcing students' understanding of the A-B-C-D model through another activity on page 14 of a different module (Give me a song, Sing my dream, Compose a poem, Give me a joke).

Option 2: You can brainstorm scenarios where a single event can result in different feelings and actions in different people, simply because they thought about that event in different ways (page 15 of each individual module).

Note

If the A-B-C-D approach has already been discussed in previous SenseAbility sessions then a quick review of how it works would be all that is required before moving to the next section.

Look for opportunities during class discussions to draw out what your students were saying to themselves during activities or events and, consequently, how those thoughts made them feel and what they did as a result of this. Some people find it difficult to remember what they were thinking or seeing in their mind, and some people get 'thoughts' and 'feelings' confused, e.g. 'I felt I wasn’t good enough' is in fact a thought, not a feeling.
Objective 4

Understand that helpful self-talk is a skill critical to managing stress

Knowing how important self-talk is in managing our emotions is the next step to taking more control of your thoughts and feelings. Getting in the habit of challenging unhelpful thoughts and generating alternative ways of thinking is what is essential to gain a greater sense of control and therefore ability to manage stress.

Other important steps in thinking more positively is to:

1. Listen to what you’re saying to yourself. Take some time each day to listen, and even write down, what you’re thinking.
2. Ask questions about what you are thinking – about your self-talk. Refer to Thinking strategies on page 27 of the Essential skills module.
3. Try to replace your negative thoughts with positive ones.

Activity

Use one or more of the following activities to encourage students to practise helpful self-talk and to challenge unhelpful self-talk.

Essential skills

Refer to page 37 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘I say, I say’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Whole of class
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Emotion cards (page 52 of the Essential skills module), whiteboard

Sense of purpose

Refer to page 70 of the Sense of purpose module.

Activity: ‘Holidays are horrid’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: For pairs
Space: Room for pairs to work
Resources: Topic cards (page 71 of the Sense of purpose module), pens, paper, coin

Essential skills

Refer to page 47 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Operation miasma plasma’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Large groups/whole of class
Space: Clear room, sports hall, outdoors
Resources: Wild cards (page 54 of the Essential skills module), bucket, small, sports mats, markers (witches hats, skittles, etc.)

Brainstorming session

Consider a brainstorming session where students come up with a list of things that they feel they have little or no control over, then a complementary list suggesting helpful ways to think about those things that might help them feel less stressed and more in control.

Note

If you think your students would benefit from more indepth work on self-talk and challenging unhelpful thoughts they can be explored further using the Helpful thinking and self-talk section of the Essential skills module.
Objective 5

Have an improved ability to manage stress using a range of techniques

We all face problems every day. Often they are small problems, like how to find time to do your homework and play your favourite sport. Sometimes though they can be big things like arguments with friends or family, the loss of something precious, or a choice about a significant life decision. Feeling confident about your ability to face and deal with problems is really important to your wellbeing.

It is helpful to practise recognising the signs within yourself that let you know you are a bit stressed, feeling anxious, or in need of a break. When you feel these symptoms it is a good idea to stop what you’re doing (if possible) and perform a stress-management technique. Different people will respond better to different techniques. Some of us need vigorous exercise to help reduce stress; others prefer something quiet and meditative.

There are a range of other things that you can do to improve how you feel. They include:
- using a problem solving technique to solve problems when they crop up
- learning to plan your time so that you can fit in what you want to do and what you have to do
- using relaxation techniques
- using humour to deal with difficult situations.

Review

Refer to the Keeping well handout on page 169 of the Essential skills module.

Refer to the Relaxation handout on page 168 of the Essential skills module.

Activity

Use one or more of the following activities to encourage students to become familiar with and practise various stress management techniques.

Everyone might do an activity in each section or alternatively groups of students may do different ones and then report back to the larger group about what it was and what they had to do.

If time allows you might review a different technique every session.

Problem solving

The five easy steps to problem solving:
1. Ask: What is the problem?
2. Ask: What are my options/possible solutions?
3. Ask: What are the pros, cons and consequences of each option (for ourselves and for others, in the short- and long-term)?
4. Make a decision.
5. Do and review.

Essential skills

Refer to page 60 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Brainstorm common problems’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: Whole of class

Space: No special requirements

Resources: Whiteboard

Sense of future

Refer to page 39 of the Sense of future module.

Activity: ‘Problem solved’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: For small groups

Space: For small groups to work

Resources: Paper, slips of paper, pens, buckets/envelopes (one for each group of two to four students)

Planning and time management

When you plan your time you may be surprised at how much less stressful life can seem and you are likely to find you have even more time to enjoy the fun things.

Essential skills

Refer to page 128 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Josh’s calendar’

Time: 15+ Minutes

Size: Individuals

Space: No special requirements

Resources: Josh’s life, Blank timetable, Activity key sheet (pages 135–137 of the Essential skills module), scissors, glue, pens, paper
Essential skills
Refer to page 128 of the Essential skills module.
Activity: ‘Your timetable’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Individuals
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Blank timetable and activity key sheet (pages 136–137 of the Essential skills module), scissors, glue, pens, paper

Relaxation techniques
Dealing with stress is about learning to calm your mind and body and this can be done in a number of ways. It might include yoga, gym, meditation, painting, sport, music; it’s about finding something that works for you.

Essential skills
Refer to the Keeping well classroom activity on page 148 of the Essential skills module.
Watch one or more of DVD clips #2, #3 and #4, and distribute Relaxation techniques handout (page 168) or alternatively ask students to link into www.smilingmind.com.au and try some of the online relaxation exercises.

Real-life application
Ask everyone to set three things they can do this week to decrease their stress or get everyone to create a stress management tip sheet as described in Sense of control module Real-life application (page 17).

Sense of control
Refer to the Sense of control handout on page 55 of the Sense of control module.

These techniques are useful stress-management tools that you can introduce to your students any time you see fit. They are also helpful references for the Real-life applications (page 48).

Sense of humour
Refer to page 83 of the Sense of humour module.
Activity: ‘My leisure coordinator’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Pairs
Space: Room for pairs to work
Resources: Blank schedule (page 84 of the Sense of humour module), pencils, erasers, paper

Humour
Laughter is very good for your mind and body. Laughter helps us to relax, increasing positive emotions and reducing stress. Laughter is a very important coping mechanism that helps us not only to enjoy good times more, but also to deal with challenges. If we develop the capacity to look for the lighter side of ourselves and of life events, we are better able to remain mentally and emotionally resilient.

Sense of humour
Refer to page 22 of the Sense of humour module.
Activity: ‘Laughter school’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Small groups
Space: For small groups to move around in and make noise
Resources: Laughter style cards (page 81 of the Sense of humour module)
Objective 6

Know where to access help if stress becomes overwhelming

Sometimes you need more than the help of your friends or family, or maybe, you need some help but don’t want to involve your friends or family. There are a range of services that can help you to deal with the problems you are facing – whether it is solving a problem that you can no see a solution too, bullying at school, feeling anxious or depressed, or perhaps experiencing difficulties with your friends or family.

Getting help is a sign that you want things to be different; that you want to find a way to solve the challenges you are faced with. To seek help from others is strength – even though some people find it a hard thing to do.

Often a good starting point for getting help is to talk with a doctor, school counsellor, or a worker at a local youth resource or support service; often these are run by your local council or headspace. They can help you to work out what the problem is and what your options are for finding a way forward.

Getting help is not about handing over the problem to someone else and expecting an immediate solution, it is a process that over time will give you the skills to deal with the current problem, but also provide you with skills that will help you face other challenges in life.

Activity

Essential skills
Refer to page 155 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Scenario-based help’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Pairs/small groups
Space: For small groups to work
Resources: Scenario sheets 1, 2 and 3 (pages 172–174 of the Essential skills module), pens, paper

Essential skills
Refer to page 155 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Own map of assistance’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Individuals
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Pens, paper, whiteboard
Summary

Final remarks might include:

- Don’t waste time sweating the small stuff!
- Practise asking yourself: “How can I think about this situation in a more helpful way?” It is a fantastic habit to get into.
- When you make a choice – own it! Take responsibility even if things didn’t quite go as planned. Be proud that you took control.
- There is a wide range of stress-management and relaxation techniques to try; make time to do some deep breathing every day or perhaps learn something new, like meditation, yoga, Tae Kwon Do, or Tai Chi.
- It is important to feel confident about seeking help. There is a wide range of support available.

Review of understanding

There are many ways you may choose to check your students’ understanding about dealing with stress and their sense of control, including a written evaluation (a short creative essay or quiz), class discussion or even role-play.

Resources and downloads

Essential skills module

Helpful thinking and self-talk

Unit 1: Explains that while we can’t control all of the events in our lives, we can control how we think about them and, consequently, how we feel about them and what we do as a result.

Unit 2: There are many unhelpful ways of thinking about situations (referred to as cognitive or thinking errors), and these can lead us to misinterpreting situations and talking very unproductively to ourselves. This unit examines the concept of challenging unhelpful thoughts and seeking to replace them with more helpful thoughts.

Life problem-solving

Unit 1: Explores how to break most problems into five easy steps to help them seem less overwhelming and more likely to be solved.

Unit 2: Discusses the wide range of thinking (and consequent emotional) responses we can have to various types of problems, especially ones we can’t seem to fix on our own. This unit explores strategies for challenging unhelpful thoughts, and ways to find support to help manage problems that cannot be solved.

Planning and time management

Unit 1: Examines ways to manage our time effectively so we don’t become stressed and miss out on lots of good things in life. In this unit, students reflect on and appraise their own time-management skills.

Unit 2: Offers strategies for setting goals, predicting likely obstacles, creating plans and making realistic schedules.

Keeping well

Unit 2: Presents a range of stress-management and relaxation techniques from which students can pick and choose.

Unit 4: Examines the importance of being able to seek help for ourselves or others, and explores symptomatic signs of a range of problems. Students consider the people and places from various areas of their lives [e.g. friends, school, family, community] they think might be useful sources of help for a range of possible issues.

Sense of control module

Explores how taking command of how we think about the things that happen to us can make us feel more empowered to deal with life’s challenges. It explores the importance of helpful self-talk, having realistic expectations, identifying and managing emotions, using relaxation techniques and seeking help when it’s needed.

Sense of purpose module

Explores that a healthy and realistic sense of purpose can help us make sense of events that we experience. It can greatly enhance feelings of accomplishment; it helps give meaning to events in the present and gives hope for the future. It can help us to prioritise and choose where to apply time and energy.

Sense of humour module

Explores the importance of humour to a healthy mind and body, how humour helps us cope with difficult situations, how humour helps us connect with other people and to see things from new perspectives and the importance of planning enjoyable and pleasant events into our schedules.

Sense of future module

Explores how to set goals and make plans to meet them, how to maintain hopefulness about the future, the importance of scheduling pleasant/enjoyable events the work and skills required to achieve future aims.
Handouts and activities
- Sense of control handout [page 55]
- Sense of control module classroom activity ‘High noon balloons’ [page 64]
- Sense of control module classroom activity ‘Noise in the night’ [page 76]
- Essential skills module classroom activity ‘I say, I say’ [page 37]
- Sense of purpose module classroom activity ‘Holidays are horrid’ [page 70]
- Essential skills module classroom activity ‘Operation miasma plasma’ [page 45]
- Essential skills Keeping well handout [page 169]
- Essential skills Relaxation handout [page 168]
- Essential skills Life problem solving ‘Brainstorm common problems’ [page 60]
- Sense of future module classroom activity ‘Problem solved’ [page 29]
- Essential skills Planning and time management ‘Your timetable’ [page 129]
- Essential skills Keeping well classroom activity (page 148)
- Sense of humour module ‘My leisure coordinator’ [page 83]
- Sense of humour module ‘Laughter school’ [page 22]
- Sense of control module Real-life application [page 17]
- Essential skills Keeping well Unit 3 classroom activity ‘Scenario-based help’ [page 155]
- Essential skills Keeping well Unit 3 classroom activity ‘Own map of assistance’ [page 164]

Smilingmind.com.au
Smiling Mind is modern meditation for young people. It is a unique web and app-based program, designed to help bring balance to young lives.

Teaching suggestions

How many activities?
Select and deliver as many activities as you think necessary to allow your students to understand and have sufficient practice at applying the lessons learnt. If you feel your students have grasped a point well, you may decide delivering more activities or persisting with discussion is ‘overcooking’ the information. You are the best judge.

Non-participation
Some students, with good reason, may not wish to participate in either activities or discussion. This non-participation should be seen as a valid response to the material; it does not necessarily mean the student is not gaining insight from your delivery or other students’ participation. Allowing the student to observe is often the best course.

Sensitive issues
Some activities or discussion points may cause distress to some vulnerable students. Vetting activities and references beforehand, and thorough debriefing when necessary, should decrease this risk.

If you feel your students require more work
- Select other activities you haven’t already done using the classroom activities guide on page 49 of the Sense of control module.
- Select and discuss other Suggested texts on page 46 or films/TV programs on page 47 of the Sense of control module.
- Find/create your own activities and discussion references to help build understanding about sense of control.

Further information
- youthbeyondblue.com/low-self-esteem-and-body-image
- www.thedesk.org.au
- au.reachout.com
- www.sirc.org/publik/mirror.html
- www.youth.gov.au/sites/Youth/bodyImage

Reference
SenseAbility lesson plans: Bullying
Introduction

Bullying is behaviour that is meant to be hurtful, targets a person or group of people, happens more than once and embarrasses, threatens or intimidates the person being bullied. It may happen in person but can also happen out of sight or online. Bullies don’t always work alone. The impact of bullying can be even greater when a group of people begin to act together.

There are different types of bullying. Below are some of the more common forms:

- **Cyberbullying**: Hurting someone using technology, via email, chat rooms, text messages, discussion groups, online social media, instant messaging or websites. For example, being teased or made fun of online, having unpleasant comments, pictures or videos about you sent or posted on social media or websites, having someone use your screen name or password and pretending to be you to hurt someone else.
- **Social**: Leaving people out, not inviting someone to social occasions, stopping a conversation when someone walks in the room. Gossiping, bitching, or talking about someone behind their back.
- **Physical**: Punching, tripping, kicking or stealing and/or destroying someone else’s property. Unwanted kissing or touching.
- **Verbal/Emotional**: Name calling or put downs, threats, teasing, ridiculing, intimidation and stalking.

Bullying is a common experience reported by young people. Cyberbullying happens at least every few weeks to about one in 10 young people, and workplace bullying is also a common experience reported by young people.

The experience of being bullied is different for everyone. People may feel anxious, scared, miserable and powerless, while others may feel overwhelmed by sadness or ashamed. They may feel there is no escape from the bully or that there is no hope that things will change. Anger is another common reaction, as the attack from the bully is unfair and unwarranted. Being rejected or excluded from a group can also make people feel unwanted, unvalued and alone.

Bullying can affect every part of a person’s life, including relationships with their friends and family. It can affect a person’s confidence and performance at school, in a sports team or at work. The person being bullied might change how they look or act to try to avoid being bullied further. They might also withdraw from social activities or use unhelpful coping strategies, like drugs and alcohol or self-harming, to manage painful feelings.

The impact of bullying can last longer than the bullying itself. Experiencing bullying can increase a person’s chances of developing anxiety or depression.

A sense of belonging, where a person feels valued, needed and accepted by others helps protect against the impact of bullying. Feeling ‘connected’ to your friends, family, school and community provides this sense of belonging. Without a sense of belonging a young person can feel cut off and anxious. If a young person experiences a sense of isolation they are less likely to interact with others, less able to cope with tough times, and less likely to take healthy risks and do the things that make them feel good.

A sense of belonging helps a young person to:

- feel valued, needed and accepted by others
- feel safer
- feel that your beliefs are valid and your efforts worthwhile
- feel comforted by being with others who share your interests and values.

To promote a healthy approach to dealing with bullying young people benefit from:

- a strong network of supportive friends and family members
- learning to take control of how they think about a situation
- understanding that diversity and differences are normal and healthy
- awareness that excluding others from even short-term activities can be hurtful
- learning to communicate using a variety of techniques (negotiation, perspective taking, assertion, and conflict resolution)
- enhancing their sense of belonging through participation in local activities (e.g. cleaning up/re-greening a local creek), hobbies, interests, volunteer organisations.

Improving a young person’s coping skills (communication, problem solving and self-talk) and their sense of belonging does not stop bullying from occurring but provides a young person with some of the tools they need to cope with the situation. It is very important that young people realise that while they can’t control all of the events in their life, they can control the way they respond to those events. Young people can choose how they interpret or think about events, and this in turn helps them control how they feel about them, and consequently how they should respond.

This lesson plan sets out a possible approach to addressing bullying in the classroom, with a focus on enhancing students’ self-talk and sense of belonging. It provides the information that young people need to understand bullying and it draws on materials in the SenseAbility Essential skills and Sense of belonging modules to convey the important role that healthy thinking and belonging plays in mental and emotional wellbeing.
Note
Sense of belonging can be strengthened or weakened in the classroom. Consider the criteria you use when choosing groups, and how your choices might affect students' sense of belonging. Also be mindful of differentiation strategies you use (such as 'house' systems), and of connectedness among students and teachers – how may they each affect students' sense of belonging?
Key messages

- Develop a strong network of supportive friends and family members.
- Take control of how you think about a situation, particularly when you are responding to a difficult situation.
- Understand that diversity and differences are normal and healthy and that excluding others from even short-term activities can be hurtful. Try to focus on people’s strengths.
- Consider how to communicate what you need and how you feel.
- Get involved in a variety of things around you – hobbies, interests, volunteer organisations, sports etc.
- Take action to stop bullying for you or those around you.
- Look out for your friends, or for people who are being bullied. Offer them support and help them feel like they belong.
- Get help if you need it.

Outcomes

At the completion of the session young people will:

- better understand bullying; understanding what it is and the impact it has
- recognise the importance of sense of belonging, and practice ways to develop it
- understand the connection between the thinking and feeling and the role it plays in coping with bullying
- use a range of strategies to cope with bullying
- know where to access help if feeling isolated, alone or being bullied.
Objective 1
Better understand bullying; understanding what it is and the impact it has

Bullying is behaviour that is meant to be hurtful, targets a person or group of people, happens more than once and embarrasses, threatens or intimidates the person being bullied. It may happen in person but can also happen out of sight or online. Bullies don’t always work alone.

There are different types of bullying. Below are some of the more common forms:

- **Cyberbullying**: Hurting someone using technology, via email, chat rooms, text messages, discussion groups, online social media, instant messaging or websites. For example, being teased or made fun of online, having unpleasant comments, pictures or videos about you sent or posted on social media or websites, having someone use your screen name or password and pretending to be you to hurt someone else.
- **Social**: Leaving people out, not inviting someone to social occasions, stopping a conversation when someone walks in the room. Gossiping, bitching, or talking about someone behind their back.
- **Physical**: Punching, tripping, kicking or stealing and/or destroying someone else’s property. Unwanted kissing or touching.
- **Verbal/Emotional**: Name calling or put downs, threats, teasing, ridiculing, intimidation and stalking.

Bullying isn’t:

- single episodes of social rejection or dislike
- single episode acts of nastiness or spite
- random acts of aggression or intimidation
- mutual arguments, disagreements or fights.

The experience of being bullied is different for everyone. People may feel:

- anxious, scared, miserable, powerless, overwhelmed, sad or ashamed
- there is no escape and no hope that things will change
- angry, as the attack from the bully is unfair and unwarranted
- unwanted, unvalued and alone.

Bullying can affect every part of a person’s life including:

- relationships with their friends and family
- a person’s confidence and performance at school, in a sports team or at work
- involvement in social activities
- using unhelpful coping strategies, like drugs and alcohol or self-harming, to manage painful feelings.

Experiencing bullying can increase a person’s chances of developing anxiety or depression.

When someone is being bullied there are two important things to think about – looking after yourself or the person being bullied, and taking action to try to stop bullying. These include:

- ask them to stop
- walk away or ignore them
- treat everyone with respect. Don’t stand by and watch or encourage bullying. Don’t tease or spread gossip about others, this includes on social networks like Facebook
- talk to someone
- keep a diary
- report the abuse
- focus on looking after yourself
- install the cybersafety help button on your computer or mobile device. It offers help and advice about upsetting things that you have seen on the internet.
- if things don’t improve get support from a friend, family member or counsellor
- be kind and respectful to the young person being bullied. Try to include them so they do not feel alone.

Provide Youthbeyondblue Bullying and cyberbullying factsheet: youthbeyondblue.com/bullying-and-cyberbullying
Activity
Use one or more of the following activities to encourage students to consider the impact of the groups they are in and how they interact with them.

Sense of belonging
Refer to page 59 of the Sense of belonging module.
Activity: ‘Act like this’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Groups of four or five
Space: Empty room
Resources: Deck of playing cards (optional)

Sense of belonging
Refer to page 84 of the Sense of belonging module.
Activity: ‘Please step outside’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Large groups of 10-12
Space: For large groups to sit and work
Resources: Character biographies sheet, scenario and assessments sheet (page 85–86 of the Sense of belonging module)
Objective 2

Recognise the importance of sense of belonging, and practice ways to develop it

Sense of belonging is a basic human need. It involves feeling valued, needed, protected by, and accepted by others and protects against the impact of bullying.

Having a sense of belonging means that you:
- feel connected to others
- identify with others and share features in common
- feel your values are shared
- feel a sense of safety/security
- feel valued and cared for by others.

A sense of belonging provides:
- a base from which young people can define themselves
- group affiliation
- feelings of comfort and safety
- validation of beliefs and values
- protection against feelings of isolation, anxiety or depression.

Without a sense of belonging you can feel cut off and anxious. If you experience a sense of isolation you are less likely to spend time with others, less able to cope with tough times, and less likely to take healthy risks and do the things that make you feel good. Improving sense of belonging is about identifying what groups you might or could be part of, understanding what you might bring to the group and how you become and remain a valued member of the group.

Activity

Use one or more of the following activities to encourage students to consider their sense of belonging and the opportunities that exist to improve it.

**Sense of belonging**

Refer to page 75 of the Sense of belonging module.

**Activity:** ‘My orchard’

**Time:** 15+ minutes

**Size:** Individuals

**Space:** No special requirements

**Resources:** Pens, paper

**Sense of belonging**

Refer to page 77 of the Sense of belonging module.

**Activity:** ‘Natural selection’

**Time:** 10-15 minutes

**Size:** Whole of class

**Space:** Clear space for students to mingle

**Resources:** Slips of paper, pens

**Sense of belonging**

Refer to page 91 of the Sense of belonging module.

**Activity:** ‘Why we rock’

**Time:** 15+ minutes

**Size:** Groups of three to five

**Space:** Room for small groups to sit and mingle

**Resources:** Paper, pens

Review

Refer to the handout on page 55 of the Sense of belonging module.
Objective 3

Understand the connection between thinking and feeling and the role it plays in coping with bullying

You often cannot control the events that occur in our lives, but you do have control over the way you think about those events, and what you say to yourself about those events – self-talk. Self-talk is basically your inner voice and often you have these thoughts without even realising it.

Helpful self-talk is a skill critical to building a strong sense of belonging and coping with the experience of being bullied. When you speak to yourself helpfully you are more likely to take healthy risks, join new groups, and participate in groups more rewardingly. However, when you speak to yourself unhelpfully, you may be discouraged from speaking to people or from joining or participating in groups – and as a result, you risk feeling isolated, misunderstood or alone. Helpful self-talk also enables you to manage how you feel in response to being bullied.

The way you think and talk to yourself can directly affect the way you feel and, consequently, the actions you take or don’t take. In this respect, self-talk relates directly to the A-B-C-D model. Therefore, if you get into the habit of challenging unhelpful thoughts and generating alternative ways of thinking you can gain a greater control over your thinking and related emotions.

The A-B-C-D approach means that changing the way we think can help make us feel better.

Refer to pages 6, 20 or 54 of the Essential skills module to explain or display A-B-C-D model.

Knowing how important self-talk is in managing your emotions is the next step to responding to bullying and developing a stronger sense of self. Getting in the habit of challenging unhelpful thoughts and generating alternative ways of thinking is what is essential to managing how you feel and behave.

Other important steps in thinking more positively is to:

1. Listen to what you’re saying to yourself. Take some time each day to listen, and even write down, what you’re thinking.
2. Ask questions about what you are thinking – about your self-talk. Refer to thinking strategies on page 27 of the Essential skills module to help you to do this.
3. Try to replace your negative thoughts with positive ones.

Activity

Use one or more of the following activities to encourage students to practise helpful self-talk and to challenge unhelpful self-talk.

Sense of control

Refer to page 96 of the Sense of control module.

Activity: ‘Worry bucket’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: Large groups

Space: Room to sit in a circle

Resources: Hat or bucket, slips of paper, pens

Sense of control

Refer to page 80 of the Sense of control module.

Activity: ‘Operation miasma plasma’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: Large groups/whole of class

Space: Clear room, sports hall, outdoors

Resources: Wild cards [page 81 of the Sense of control module], bucket, small sports mats, markers [witches hats and skittles etc.]

Alternative activities

Option 1: You can brainstorm scenarios related to bullying to explore what the bully may be thinking and what the person being bullied may be thinking and subsequently feeling (use the A-B-C-D model [page 57]).

Option 2: There are a range of other activities available to develop these skills including Ka-Boom! [Sense of control module page 66] and Can I join you [Sense of belonging module page 22].

Note

If the A-B-C-D approach has already been discussed in previous SenseAbility sessions then a quick review of how it works would be all that is required before moving to the next section. If you think your students would benefit from more in-depth work on self-talk and challenging unhelpful thoughts they can be explored further using the Helpful thinking and self-talk section of the Essential skills module.

Look for opportunities during class discussions to draw out what your students were saying to themselves during activities or events and, consequently, how those thoughts made them feel and what they did as a result of this. Some people find it difficult to remember what they were thinking or seeing in their mind, and some people get ‘thoughts’ and ‘feelings’ confused, e.g. ‘I felt I wasn’t good enough’ is in fact a thought, not a feeling.
Objective 4

Use a range of strategies to cope with bullying

Improving your coping skills (communication, problem solving and self-care) does not stop bullying but it provides you with some of the tools you need to cope with the situation. So while you need to look at what you can do to respond to bullying you should also consider how to cope in these situations.

Communication skills
Refer to page 107 of the Essential skills module.

Assertiveness
Being assertive means:
• sticking up for yourself: don’t allow other people to dominate you
• being firm, fair and reasonable
• looking for win-win outcomes
• being honest without being rude or hurtful
• valuing yourself and others around you.

Essential skills
Refer to page 100 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Healthy assertiveness role-play’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Pairs
Space: For pairs to perform
Resources: Perspective-taking, Assertiveness, Negotiation and conflict resolution handout (page 107 of the Essential skills module.)

Conflict resolution
There will be times when your wants and needs will differ from other people and that can sometimes lead to conflict. Learning conflict resolution skills helps you work through these situations. It is important to first work out if the conflict is worth dealing with. If it’s an important issue in your life or for a person close to you, then it should be dealt with but if it’s something minor, for example, just a slight disagreement that will go away if you leave it, then perhaps that’s the way to go. Not all conflict will be resolved. However, most of it can be handled well if you use a positive, respectful approach.

Essential skills
Refer to page 101 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Resolving conflicts’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Pairs
Space: For pairs to perform
Resources: Conflict cue cards (page 115 of the Essential skills module).

Negotiation
A negotiation is not issuing an order or receiving a command. Negotiations are like conversations – they are two-way interactions that help people to settle differences. Effective negotiations require good listening and thinking skills.

Essential skills
Refer to page 101 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Negotiation’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Individuals/small groups
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Perspective-taking, Assertiveness, Negotiation and conflict resolution handout (page 107 of the Essential skills module), Negotiation scenarios sheets (page 114 of the Essential skills module)

Problem solving
The five easy steps to problem solving:
1. Ask: What is the problem?
2. Ask: What are my options/possible solutions?
3. Ask: What are the pros, cons, and consequences of each option (for ourselves and for others, in the short- and long-term)?
4. Make a decision.
5. Do and review.
Essential skills
Refer to page 60 of the Essential skills module.
Activity: ‘Brainstorm common problems’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Whole of class
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Whiteboard

Sense of future
Refer to page 62 of the Sense of future module.
Activity: ‘Bridging the gaps’
Time: 15+ minutes
Size: Groups of 3 or 4
Space: Two desks per group
Resources: Several newspapers, one role of sticky tape per group, ruler, scissors, cricket ball

Keeping well
Keeping well means looking at the things we can do to give our minds and bodies the best chance possible to keep us happy and healthy now, and to carry us into a rewarding and enjoyable future. These help to buffer you from stress and difficult situations.

Essential skills
Refer to page 143 of the Essential skills module.
Activity: ‘Personal reflection’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Individuals
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Whiteboard

Essential skills
Refer to page 153 of the Essential skills module.
Activity: ‘Strength stories’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Individuals or small groups
Space: For small groups to work together
Resources: Strength stories sheet [page 171 of the Essential skills module], pens and paper

Note
The Sense of control module handout 1 covers useful stress-management tools that you can introduce to your students any time you see fit.
Objective 5

Know where to access help if feeling isolated, alone or being bullied

Sometimes you need more than the help of your friends or family, or maybe, you need some help but don’t want to involve your friends or family. There are a range of services that can help you to deal with the problems you are facing – whether it is solving a problem, bullying at school, feeling anxious or depressed, or perhaps experiencing difficulties with your friends or family.

Getting help is a sign that you want things to be different; that you want to find a way to solve the challenges you are faced with. Getting help is a sign of your strength and determination, enabling you to take back the power that the bully has tried to strip from you. It’s about making yourself stronger mentally to deal with the challenges that you face every day.

Often a good starting point for getting help is to talk with a doctor, school counsellor, or a worker at a local youth resource or support service; often these are run by your local council or headspace. They can help you to work out what the problem is and what your options are for finding a way forward.

Getting help is not about handing over the problem to someone else and expecting an immediate solution, it is a process that over time will give you the skills to deal with the current problem, but also provide you with skills that will help you face other challenges in life.

Activity

Use one or more of the following activities to encourage students to consider what options they have for getting help:

Essential skills

Refer to page 155 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Scenario-based help’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: Pairs/small groups

Space: For small groups to work

Resources: Scenario sheets 1, 2 and 3 (page 172-174 of the Essential skills module), pens, paper

Essential skills

Refer to page 163 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Own map of assistance’

Time: 10+ minutes

Size: Individuals/pairs/small groups

Space: No special requirements

Resources: Scenario sheets 1, 2 and 3 (page 172-174 of the Essential skills module), pens, paper, whiteboard
Final remarks might include:

• Develop a strong network of supportive friends and family members.
• Take control of how you think about a situation, particularly when you are responding to a difficult situation.
• Understand that diversity and differences are normal and healthy and that excluding others from even short-term activities can be hurtful.
• Consider how to communicate what you need and how you feel.
• Get involved in a variety of things around you – hobbies, interests, volunteer organisations, sports.
• Take action to stop bullying to you or those around you.
• Look out for your friends, or for people who are being bullied. Offer them support and help them feel like they belong.
• Get help if you need it.

Review of understanding

There are many ways you may choose to check your students’ understanding about dealing with stress and their sense of control, including a written evaluation (e.g. a short creative essay or quiz), class discussion or even role-play.

Resources and downloads

Essential Skills module

Helpful thinking and self-talk

Unit 1: Explains that while we can’t control all of the events in our lives, we can control how we think about them and, consequently, how we feel about them and what we do as a result.

Unit 2: There are many unhelpful ways of thinking about situations (referred to as cognitive or thinking errors), and these can lead to us misinterpreting situations and talking very unproductively to ourselves. This unit examines the concept of challenging unhelpful thoughts and seeking to replace them with more helpful thoughts.

Life problem-solving

Unit 1: Explores how to break most problems into five easy steps to help them seem less overwhelming and more likely to be solved.

Unit 2: Discusses the wide range of thinking (and consequent emotional) responses we can have to various types of problems, especially ones we can’t seem to fix on our own. This unit explores strategies for challenging unhelpful thoughts, and ways to find support to help manage problems that cannot be solved.

Communication

Unit 3: Explore four different skills that are important to good communication within relationships; perspective taking, assertiveness, negotiating and conflict resolution.

Keeping well

Unit 2: Presents a range of stress-management and relaxation techniques from which students can pick and choose.

Unit 4: Examines the importance of being able to seek help for ourselves or others, and explores symptomatic signs of a range of problems. Students consider the people and places from various areas of their lives (e.g. friends, school, family, community) they think might be useful sources of help for a range of possible issues.

Sense of belonging module

Conveys the importance of having a solid sense of belonging to at least one – but hopefully many – meaningful groups. It also explores the impact of isolation and rejection on young people.

Sense of control module

Explores how taking command of how we think about the things that happen to us can make us feel more empowered to deal with life’s challenges. It explores the importance of helpful self-talk, having realistic expectations, identifying and managing emotions, using relaxation techniques and seeking help when it’s needed.

Handouts and activities

• Youthbeyondblue Bullying and cyberbullying factsheet
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘Act like this’ (page 59)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘Please step outside’ (page 84)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘Map of belonging’ (page 16)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘My orchard’ (page 75)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘Can I join you?’ (page 22)
• Sense of control module classroom activity ‘Ka-Boom’ (page 66)
• Sense of control module classroom activity ‘Worry bucket’ (page 96)
• Sense of control module classroom activity ‘Operation miasma plasma’ (page 80)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘Natural selection’ (page 77)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘Why we rock’ (page 91)
• Sense of belonging module classroom activity ‘The word for us’ (page 92)
• Essential skills communication classroom activity ‘Healthy assertiveness role-play’ (page 100)
• Essential skills communication classroom activity ‘Resolving conflicts’ (page 101)
• Essential skills communication classroom activity ‘Negotiation’ (page 101)
• Essential skills Life problem solving classroom activity ‘Brainstorm common problems’ (page 60)
• Sense of future module classroom activity ‘Bridging the gaps’ (page 62)
• Essential skills Keeping well classroom activity ‘Personal reflection’ (page 143)
• Essential skills Keeping well classroom activity ‘Strength stories’ (page 153)
• Sense of control module handout 1
• Essential skills Keeping well Unit 3 ‘Scenario-based help’ (page 155)
• Essential skills Keeping well Unit 3 ‘Own map of assistance’ (page 163)

Further information
• au.reachout.com/bullying
• www.youthbeyondblue.com/bullying-and-cyberbullying
• www.thedesk.org.au
• www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Teaching suggestions

How many activities?
Select and deliver as many activities as you think necessary to allow your students to understand and have sufficient practice at applying the lessons learnt. If you feel your students have grasped a point well, you may decide delivering more activities or persisting with discussion is ‘overcooking’ the information. You are the best judge.

Non-participation
Some students, with good reason, may not wish to participate in either activities or discussion. This non-participation should be seen as a valid response to the material; it does not necessarily mean the student is not gaining insight from your delivery or other students’ participation. Allowing the student to observe is often the best course.

Sensitive issues
Some activities or discussion points may cause distress to some vulnerable students. Vetting activities and references beforehand, and thorough debriefing when necessary, should decrease this risk.

If you feel your students require more work
• Select other activities you haven’t already done using the classroom activities guide in each module.
• Select and discuss other suggested texts or films/TV programs.
• Find/create your own activities and discussion references to help build understanding about sense of control.

Reference

SenseAbility lesson plans: Body image
A healthy body image is crucial to self-confidence, self-acceptance and self-worth. By improving how a young person feels about themselves (their self-worth) and helping them to feel comfortable and happy with the way they look (self-acceptance) a healthy body image can be developed. This will also lead to healthier behaviours; as it is easier to lead a balanced lifestyle with healthier attitudes and practices relating to how you think, food and exercise when you are in tune with, and respond to the needs of your body.

Body image is a major concern for many young people in Australia. As children grow and develop their bodies change in appearance and in how they function. As this occurs young people learn to adjust to these changes but there can be periods of dissatisfaction, embarrassment, apprehension or worry about their body.

Body image problems are starting earlier and earlier\(^1\) and when body image becomes a focus young people may overestimate their size or weight or think that their muscles should be bigger. When body image becomes confused with personality and self-worth, it may mean that there is a deeper problem that could lead to an eating disorder, or other related issues such as depression or anxiety.

Media and technology give young people unachievable and unrealistic standards of body shape.\(^2\) Strategies that encourage actively challenging the perceived ideal body shape can also help change attitudes and improve body image.

To promote a healthy body image young people benefit from:\(^3\):
- Family and peer support – examples and values set by parents and role models from early childhood influence a young person’s actions.
- Gender role satisfaction.
- Physical self-esteem – physical activity and overall fitness.
- Coping strategies and critical thinking skills – life skills broaden a young person’s outlook and critical thinking helps them analyse and make educated decisions.
- Holistic wellness and life balance – ability to define themselves through other interests such as hobbies, sport, spirituality and personal values.

Improving body image means working on issues of self-worth and self-acceptance. These in turn are influenced by lots of different factors: the environments in which young people live, study and socialise; how young people think they perform in different activities and settings; things that other people say to young people; and (perhaps most importantly) things that young people say to themselves. It is this last factor – self-talk – that young people have the most influence over, and so helpful self-talk is extremely important to building and maintaining a healthy sense of self-worth and self-acceptance. And with these in development a healthier body image should result.

A sense of self-worth helps a young person to:
- recognise that they are valuable, unique and that there is no one else like them
- try new things, to meet new people and to really enjoy life
- get through tough situations and try again if things don’t work out the first time.

This lesson plan sets out a possible approach to addressing issues of body image in the classroom, with a focus on enhancing their self-worth and self-acceptance. It provides the information that young people need to understand body image and it draws on materials in the SenseAbility Essential skills and Sense of self-worth modules to convey the important role that healthy thinking and self-worth plays in mental and emotional wellbeing.
Key messages

Healthy bodies come in different shapes and sizes. Everyone is unique and has their own interests and value systems. Body size and weight do not predict happiness, success or health.

A healthy body image is being comfortable in your own skin, being happy most of the time with the way you look, and feeling good with yourself. It’s not about what you look like – it is about valuing who you are – your self-worth.

A sense of self-worth helps you to:

• recognise that you are valuable, unique and that there is no one else like you
• try new things, to meet new people and to really enjoy life
• get through tough situations, and to pick yourself up and try again if things don’t work out as you’d hoped.

Self-worth and self-acceptance can be improved by being proactive about keeping well and taking steps to change the way you think about yourself.

Outcomes

At the completion of the session young people will:

1. Have a greater understanding of body image – what it is and the importance of developing a healthy body image to enhance their sense of self-worth.
2. Be more able to challenge the media stereotypes for what is ‘ideal’ weight and appearance.
3. Understand the connection between the thinking and feeling.
4. Understand that personal well-being can be improved by speaking helpfully to themselves and being proactive about keeping well.
5. Have an improved ability to access positive, affirming thoughts about themselves in their day-to-day lives and support each other in having a healthy body image, eating well and staying fit.
Objective 1

Have a greater understanding of body image – what it is and the importance of developing a healthy body image to enhance their sense of self-worth.

Body image is how a person sees, thinks and feels about their physical appearance, and how they think others perceive them. Many things influence how people look, such as size, weight, build, skin, appearance, gender, fashion, religious identity and culture.

Healthy bodies come in different shapes and sizes. Everyone is unique and has our own interests and value systems. Body size and weight do not predict happiness, success or health.

A healthy body image is being comfortable in your own skin, being happy most of the time with the way you look and what your body can do, and feeling good with yourself. It’s not about what you look like – it is about valuing who you are – your self-worth.

Sense of self-worth is a knowledge and belief in your strengths, qualities, and abilities and an acceptance of your inherent value and individuality. Building and maintaining a belief in the value of the essential ‘you’ can help you face life changes and challenges more effectively (refer to page 16 of the Sense of self-worth module).

Activity

Use one or more of the following three activities to encourage students to reflect on their sense of self-worth.

Sense of self-worth
Refer to page 22 of the Sense of self-worth module.

Activity: ‘My adjective’
Time: 10-15 minutes
Size: Large group
Space: Room to form large circle
Resources: Tennis ball

Sense of self-worth
Refer to page 22 of the Sense of self-worth module.

Activity: ‘Chicken ransom’
Time: 10-15 minutes
Size: Groups of six to 10 or whole class
Space: Room to form large circle/s
Resources: Rubber chicken or stuffed toy, pens, paper

Sense of self-worth
Refer to page 22 of the Sense of self-worth module.

Activity: ‘My carnevale’
Time: 30+ minutes
Size: Individuals
Space: For individuals to work
Resources: Mask templates 1 and 2 (pages 67–68 of the Sense of self-worth module), magazines, glue, pens, paint
Optional: Real-life application activity if having follow-up session (refer to page 18 of the Sense of self-worth module)
Objective 2

Be more able to challenge the media stereotypes for what is ‘ideal’ weight and appearance

Activity

Sense of self-worth

Refer to page 22 of the Sense of self-worth module.

Discuss body image, either in groups or as a class. Topics might include things like:

- celebrity endorsements
- photo touch-ups
- dietary supplements
- fashion shows
- men’s/women’s magazines
- the ‘aussie male’ and ‘aussie female’ stereotypes
- body image through history
- importance of body image issues to young people today
- body image in different cultures.

Consider whether visual material displaying how media change images would benefit conversation, for example: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRiplkH3bSI

Possible points of discussion might include:

- What does seeing manipulated images of people make you think? How do you then feel?
- Why is it unhealthy to compare yourself with people who look different to you, or move in different circles, or own better things? What happens when you make those comparisons?
- What are some good self-talk strategies to employ when you are confronted with images of ‘ideals’ you know you won’t achieve?
- How often do you think about the amazing things your body can do (regardless of shape and size), like heal itself, move about, function while you’re asleep, etc.
Objective 3

Understand the connection between the thinking and feeling

A big component of keeping well is thinking well. You can’t always control events or our world, but you do have some control over how you think about life’s events – self-talk. Self-talk is basically your inner voice and often you have these thoughts without even realising it.

Everyone can change the way they feel about events if they change the way they interpret and think about what is happening. If you are hard on yourself, or put yourself down, you run the risk of making yourself feel low, and as a result may give up or not try something that could really be beneficial or enjoyable.

Helpful or positive self-talk has a vital role building and strengthening emotional and mental wellbeing; unhelpful or negative self-talk can increase the risk of emotional or mental problems.

Helpful internal comments make you feel good about yourself and the things that are going on in your life, encourage you to try new things, and assist to put things in perspective if they don’t turn out as you want them too.

The A-B-C-D approach means that changing the way we think can help make us feel better.

Refer to pages 6, 20 or 54 of the Essential skills module to explain or display A-B-C-D model.

Activity

Sense of control
Refer to page 78 of the Sense of control module.

Activity: ‘Noise in the night’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: Whole of class

Space: No special requirements

Resources: Whiteboard
Objective 4

Understand that personal wellbeing can be improved by speaking helpfully to themselves and being proactive about keeping well

It is important that we challenge unhelpful thinking and self-talk, and get into the habit of speaking to ourselves as if we are speaking to our most valued friend. This means trying to identify the things we are okay at, rather than focusing on the things we don’t like about ourselves. When we acknowledge our strengths, we are more likely to appreciate ourselves and attempt things in life that can be really rewarding, fun, challenging and valuable.

Other important steps in thinking more positively is to:

1. Listen to what you’re saying to yourself. Take some time each day to listen, and even write down, what you’re thinking.
2. Ask questions about what you are thinking – about your self-talk. Refer to thinking strategies on page 27 of the Essential skills module to help you to do this.
3. Try to replace your negative thoughts with positive ones.

Activity

Use one or more of the following three lessons to encourage students to practise helpful self-talk and to challenge unhelpful self-talk.

Essential skills

Refer to page 14 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Our special guest’

Time: 15+ minutes

Size: large groups/whole of class

Space: to arrange desks like a quiz show

Resources: pens and paper

Essential skills

Refer to page 15 of the Essential skills module.

Activity: ‘Role-play’

Time: 10+ minutes

Size: Pairs or trios

Space: Room for pairs to interact

Resources: Role-play cue cards [page 28 of the Essential skills module]

There are a range of other things that you can do to improve how you feel.

Review Essential skills

Refer to the Keeping well handout on page 16 of the Essential skills module.

Activity

Ask everyone to set three things they can do this week to improve their health and wellbeing.
Objective 5

An improved ability for students to access positive, affirming thoughts about themselves in their day-to-day lives
Before finishing it is important to once more tap into your strengths and attributes that make you who you are – that form your sense of self-worth.

Activity
Use one or more of the following three activities to encourage students to help students identify their strengths.

Keeping well
Refer to page 155 of the Essential skills module.
Activity: ‘Helpful analysis’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Pairs
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Whiteboard, pens, paper

Sense of self-worth
Refer to page 29 of the Sense of self-worth module.
Activity: ‘I’m not perfect, but...’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Individuals
Space: For individuals to write
Resources: Pen, paper, hat/bucket (optional)

Brainstorm
As a class brainstorm ways that they can enhance their own body image and sense of self-worth. Refer to page 164 of the Sense of self-worth module.
Activity: ‘Map of assistance’
Time: 10+ minutes
Size: Individuals/pairs/small groups
Space: No special requirements
Resources: Scenario sheets 1, 2 and 3 (pages 172–174 of the Sense of self-worth module), pens, paper, whiteboard
Summary

Final remarks might include:

• your identity is based on who they are rather than how they look
• keep a list of your positive qualities that have nothing to do with your appearance
• defend against unhealthy cultural pressures regarding looks, weight, food choices and dieting. Treat your body with respect and kindness
• work to overpower any negative thoughts with positive ones; it take practise but it works
• actively embrace health and vitality through positive eating and physical activity
• support each other in having a healthy body image, eating well and staying fit.

Review of understanding

There are many ways you may choose to check your students understanding about body image and sense of self-worth, including a written evaluation (e.g. a short creative essay or quiz), class discussion or even role-play.

Resources and downloads

Essential skills module

Helpful thinking and self-talk

Unit 1: Explains that while we can’t control all of the events in our lives, we can control how we think about them and, consequently, how we feel about them and what we do as a result.

Unit 2: There are many unhelpful ways of thinking about situations (referred to as cognitive or thinking errors), and these can lead to us misinterpreting situations and talking very unproductively to ourselves. This Unit examines the concept of challenging unhelpful thoughts and seeking to replace them with more helpful thoughts.

Keeping well

Unit 3: Explains how important it is to strengthen and maintain wellbeing by focusing on our strengths instead of our perceived flaws or shortcomings.

Sense of self-worth

Explains how each of us has innate value, the importance of valuing our own uniqueness, as well as the uniqueness of others and how speaking to ourselves in helpful ways can enhance the way we value ourselves and how, if we value ourselves, other people may also value us more.

Handouts and activities

• Sense of self-worth handout (page 53)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity 'My adjective' (page 22)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity "Chicken ransom" (page 56)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity 'My carnavale' (page 66)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity 'Create a self-brochure' (page 18)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity 'Rate your send of self-worth' (page 18)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity 'Discuss body image' (page 22)
• Essential skills A-B-C-D model (pages 6, 20 or 54)
• Essential skills thinking strategies (page 27)
• Sense of control module classroom activity 'Night noises' (page 76)
• Keeping well Unit 3 classroom activities 'Helpful analysis' (page 155)
• Sense of self-worth module classroom activity 'I’m not perfect, but....' (page 29)
• Keeping well Unit 3 classroom activities 'Map of assistance' (page 164)

Further information

• youthbeyondblue.com/low-self-esteem-and-body-image
• www.thedesk.org.au
• au.reachout.com
• www.sirc.org/pulik/mirror.html
• www.youth.gov.au/sites/Youth/bodyimage
Background information

**Youthbeyondblue website**

**youthbeyondblue.com**

Body image is how a person sees, thinks and feels about their physical appearance. How a person looks is only a small part of who they are and what they can give.

But body image is the number one concern for many young people in Australia. When body image becomes a focus, people may overestimate their size or weight or think that their muscles should be bigger. When body image becomes confused with personality and self-worth, it may mean that there is a deeper problem that could lead to an eating disorder.

**Mission Australia Youth Survey 2013**


As in previous years, the level of concern regarding body image among Australia’s young people remains high. Concern about body image was considerably higher among females with 42.1 per cent indicating body image was a major concern, compared with 14.4 per cent of males. While a number of initiatives have been introduced to promote positive body image among young people in Australia, careful evaluation of these initiatives is needed in order to understand their impact and inform future policy initiatives.

**Mirror, mirror: A summary of research findings on body image**

**www.sirc.org/publik/mirror.html**

‘...although we resemble our ancestors and other cultures in our concern about appearance, there is a difference in degree of concern. Advances in technology and in particular the rise of the mass media has caused normal concerns about how we look to become obsessions.’

**How? Three reasons:**

Thanks to the media, we have become accustomed to extremely rigid and uniform standards of beauty.

TV, billboards, magazines etc. mean that we see ‘beautiful people’ all the time, more often than members of our own family, making exceptional good looks seem real, normal and attainable.

Standards of beauty have in fact become harder and harder to attain, particularly for women. The current media ideal of thinness for women is achievable by less than 5 per cent of the female population.”

**Kids as young as eight unhappy about body size, Australian Institute of Family Studies report reveals**


Most ten year olds are taking steps to manage their weight, while primary school children as young as eight are unhappy with their body size.

An alarming new report into the body image battles of Aussie kids, released today by the Australian Institute of Family Studies reveals about half of all children who are underweight or in a normal weight range are dissatisfied with their body size. And that figure jumps to 75 per cent for children who are overweight.

The data, from the landmark Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, also reveals that by age 10-11 the majority of kids are taking steps to maintain, reduce or increase their body size.

**References**


