

CARIBOU+ CBT Group Manual for Facilitators

A Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy
Intervention for Adolescents
with Depression or Anxiety

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This manual is a modification of the Adolescent Coping With Depression Course (CWD-A) with permission from Gregory Clarke, PhD.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| 2SLGBTQ+ | Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Trans, Gender Independent, Queer and Questioning, and other identities |
| ACT | Acceptance and Commitment Therapy |
| BA | Behavioural Activation |
| CBT | Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy |
| CWD-A | Adolescent Coping with Depression Course |
| DBT | Dialectical Behavioural Therapy |
| GOALS | G et straight to the facts, use an “I” statement to describe your O wn experience, A sk for what you want or say “no”, L oop back to the first three steps, S how gratitude |
| MDD-A | Adolescents with Major Depressive Disorder |
| SMART | S pecific, M easureable, A ttainable, R ealistic, T ime bound |

Introduction

Purpose

This manual was developed to address the need for an updated guide to deliver group Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for adolescents with major depressive disorder (MDD-A). As our group was delivering CBT, we also recognized the need to expand material to cover anxiety (i.e., generalized anxiety and social anxiety). Anxiety is often co-occurring with depression, and many of the CBT techniques used to treat depression also apply to anxiety. The CARIBOU+ CBT manuals are intended to expand reach to people with anxiety alone, depression alone or the combination of the two conditions.

The manual reflects the core theory of CBT: that changing one's emotions directly can be difficult for people, while strategies to change one's situations, thoughts or actions can indirectly change one's emotional experience and lead to reduction of symptoms of both depression and anxiety.

The manual is intended for use by clinicians who plan on facilitating group CBT for adolescents with depression and/or anxiety. Facilitators may include, but are not limited to, social workers, registered therapists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and trainees within each of these disciplines. We advise that clinicians have some basic formal training in CBT before implementation.

The purpose of this manual is to guide clinicians through the process and the content, so they can facilitate the CBT groups within their clinical context. This introduction will provide an overview of important aspects to note as a facilitator when working with youth from a CBT framework. The manual provides facilitator notes in italics including support to walk facilitators through each activity and provide tips on how to best engage group participants.

Contextualization of an Evidence-based Approach

Dr. Gregory Clarke et al. (1990) developed the Adolescent Coping with Depression Course (CWD-A),¹ which appears to be the most studied evidence-based group CBT for MDD-A manual to date.^{2,3} Our group saw opportunities to contextualize the implementation of group CBT for MDD-A. This included making session content more relevant to the current experiences of young people, dividing the content into modules, and incorporating additional material with Dr. Clarke's consent. The current version of the manual went through several iterations and was refined based on our experience providing group therapy for more than five years, in the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Child, Youth & Family Services: Mood and Anxiety Clinic. We anticipate there will be future iterations of this manual and that it may be modified for different contexts.

1 Youth Input

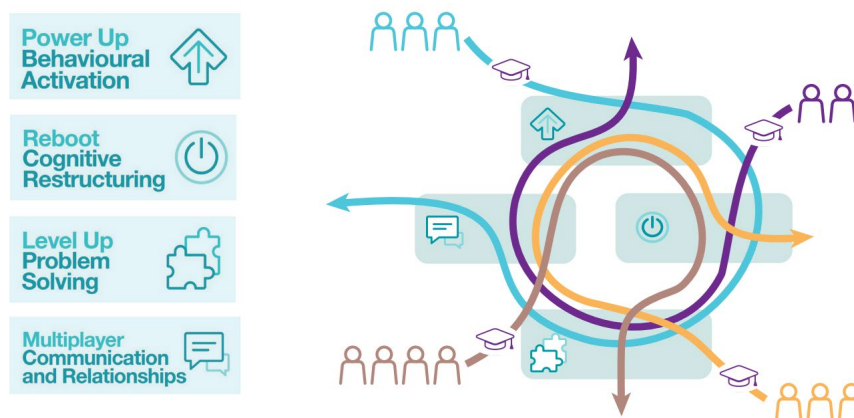
Collaborating with youth can result in projects and outcomes that better reflect the needs of youth.^{4,5} With this understanding, we partnered with several young people with lived experience of mental health or substance use challenges through CAMH's "Youth Engagement Initiative,"⁶ including one youth partner who is a co-author on the manual. Through several exchanges and multiple iterations, youth partners provided suggestions on alternate wording, engaging activities, graphic design and creative themes for the manual, in keeping with an Integrated Knowledge Translation approach.⁷ We also updated the example scenarios in the manual to reflect youth's present-day experience. For example, the current generation of youth text and interact with social media more often than they phone each other. We added case illustrations that include situations commonly experienced by 2SLGBTQ+ populations. We also incorporated youth-friendly language and suggested activities to make the modules more interactive. Youth also named the modules with video game themes (Power Up, Multiplayer, Level Up and Reboot) to make the material more engaging.

2 Modules

The original CWD-A was 16 sessions long and was intended to be a closed group, held twice a week. We sectioned the CWD-A content into four modules of four sessions each, still totaling sixteen sessions. This approach highlights the four themes reflected in many therapeutic approaches⁸: behavioural activation, cognitive restructuring, communication skills, and problem solving. Further revisions were made to incorporate anxiety-related material, including content on exposure (incorporated into the behaviour activation module), and specific strategies to address anxious thoughts (incorporated into the cognitive restructuring module).

Although there are both benefits and drawbacks to structuring treatment using modules, we believe the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. The benefits are as follows:

- There will be variability in how youth respond to the four modules⁹; youth who complete and respond to even one module can still leave treatment with a sense of closure, while youth who have not improved with one module may continue with further support to see if the next module leads to benefits.
- The approach allows for continual "rolling entry" where youth can join the group at the beginning of any of the four modules. The cycle of the four modules can continue in an open manner; that is there is no specified end date. Rolling entry allows for timely access to support and treatment.



- Modules enable treatment to be tailored to a youth's needs. For example, youth who are adept at mood-enhancing activities and problem solving, but struggle with social skills and negative cognitions, can be prescribed a specific set of modules that address areas the youth needs to focus on.
- With rolling entry, the length of time participants have been in the group will vary. Youth who have been in the group longer can model how to make the most of group and how best to engage with the material and practice assignments.

There are also drawbacks:

- Group cohesion may be harder to form, as the membership changes every four weeks.
- Youth may feel less committed to the group and may decide to drop out earlier.
- Some material from one module (e.g. being able to label and rate emotional intensity from the Behavioural Activation/Exposure Module) may help with a skill from another module (e.g. Cognitive Restructuring). Not learning one skill before another may limit the benefits.

3 Incorporating “Third Wave” Material

In the past 30 years, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), as well as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) have created further options to use skills consistent with CBT principles. Examples include:

- changing judging thoughts to non-judging thoughts
- changing “fighting reality” thoughts to “accepting reality” thoughts
- using client-identified values to engage clients in activities that are personally meaningful.

Our clinical experience is that these skills are incredibly relevant for youth and assist in motivating them to engage with the material.

Process Considerations

1 Collaborative Empiricism

An important approach in CBT is collaboration; that is, working alongside youth to engage them in self-discovery. This is in contrast to doing the work for the youth, or over-relying on external motivators to have them “go through the motions” of the exercises without internal reflection. Empiricism refers to examining evidence supporting and refuting depressive or anxious beliefs — and is most highlighted in the Reboot: Cognitive Restructuring Module. It is tempting to list evidence for and against depressive or anxious beliefs for the youth; collaborative empiricism is about engaging youth to discover the evidence themselves. It encourages intrinsic motivation. Two tools are emphasized to enhance this process:

- Socratic questioning—Ask youth open-ended questions to have youth elicit different perspectives. If a youth is stuck, the advantage of a group format is that there are other group members who may have ideas as well.
- Behavioural experiments—Collaborate with youth to design experiments to further explore evidence for and against depressive or anxious beliefs, again using the group to help brainstorm ideas for these experiments.

For more on collaborative empiricism, see Tee and Kazantzis (2011).¹⁰

2 Applied Behavioural Principles Within Groups

One important aspect of CBT is Applied Behavioural Theory. This includes the premise that the probability of engaging in a future behaviour is affected by the outcomes experienced after engaging in this behaviour in the past. Positive reinforcement is the preferred way to apply this concept. Positive reinforcement in group CBT can come in many ways. To provide positive reinforcement, facilitators can look for opportunities to:

- smile with eye contact
- remember a youth's name
- recognize positive efforts
- validate a youth's experience

Facilitators can also foster an environment where youth:

- feel connected to peers
- perceive their own progress
- are having fun in the group (e.g. by playing a game or hearing a funny story)
- have moments of self-discovery ("aha" moments).

Use these approaches as much as you can, while still being genuine and encouraging, to help youth engage with the material. Be creative and spontaneous with these concepts. If it is "too scripted" to the youth, it may not be as effective. Keep in mind that a reinforcer in one situation may be aversive in another; for example, if youth perceive receiving candies as prizes for correct answers to questions as patronizing or childish, the candies may be experienced as aversive rather than rewarding.

Youth may express oppositionality, irritability or disengagement by putting their head down, slouching, or not answering questions. Avoid reacting negatively; that is, avoid eye-rolling, sighing or appearing frustrated. Reacting in these ways may reinforce negative beliefs that young people may have about themselves and their experience in the group, and, as a result, perpetuate these behaviours.

Prepare ahead of time by reviewing the facilitator notes, writing the session's agenda on a whiteboard, and getting the snacks, handouts and other materials ready. Handouts are intended to keep the group structured and keep youth engaged. The icebreakers can help build connection among the group and facilitators, while also preventing "shutting down" behaviours during activation. "Roll" with any resistance that may come up in the group. If they provide negative feedback about the skills:

- Validate a component of what they are trying to say.
- Explore what leads them to see their view as helpful (which opens the door for exploring what might not be helpful about it).
- Let them know that they are free to disagree with what the handouts have to say.

Another option is to put interfering behaviour "on cue." For example, if youth are using their cell phones during part of the session, ask them to wait until a predefined time; when that time comes, say, "ok, everyone get out their cell phones and text away for the next 3 minutes..." Explore why youth might be behaving in a way that is interfering to the group. For example, youth might be using their cellphones as a way to cope with anxiety or to help them focus on the conversation. You can make modifications to the environment to help

with this by providing youth with fidgets (e.g., pipe cleaners, stress balls) or materials to doodle/colour. Invite youth to disagree with concepts in a structured way, rather than waiting for them to disagree at unstructured times. You may consider creating a “parking lot” for groups where you can make note of a conversation topic (e.g. write it in the corner on the white board if in person, or in the chat for virtual groups), put conversations on hold and come back to them when they are more relevant.

The concept of “shaping” is key to positive reinforcement processes while maintaining a positive atmosphere: reinforcing desired behaviours, while not reinforcing regressive or stagnant behaviours. A common example of applying this principle is when youth are having trouble completing their home practice assignments, and you have reason to believe that low motivation or forgetfulness may be the main barrier to completing the homework. In this example:

- Start by providing reinforcement when they bring their last week’s handouts to group (even if not completed at all).
- The following week, highlight partial completion of the assignment, but not just for bringing in last week’s handouts.
- The next week, reinforce completed assignment even if it is low quality (but not if partially completed homework).
- “Raise the bar” each week. Increase the expectation that youth will complete the weekly assignment until they bring in consistently high-quality assignments every week.

Keep in mind that other factors may be getting in the way of completing assignments (e.g., chaotic living environments or learning disorders); in these situations, the shaping approach may not work. Different group members may need different targets in their shaping schedule or in what active completion or group participation may look like for them.

Normalize and validate youth experiences. CBT is a set of active skills and strategies to improve mood. Some youth may interpret advice to use the skills in an invalidating way; when facilitators say “try this,” the youth may hear this as “they’re telling me I am doing it wrong,” or “they are saying my thoughts are bad” or “they want me to be fake”, leading to oppositional behaviours. It is important to normalize and validate this experience and invite discussion around it. It may also help to clarify how youth can use the following steps when using a new skill to avert this type of resistance to using the skill:

- fully acknowledge the emotions and thoughts experienced before using these strategies
- self-validate these emotions and thoughts
- consider the options to change the emotion using the CBT strategies.

Clarify that the focus is to support youth so that they feel more empowered to have control over their emotions for their own benefit — not for the sake of meeting others’ expectations.

Below is a sample agenda that outlines how the sessions are typically structured each week:

| Summary of Agenda | |
|---|------------|
| Item | Time frame |
| Introductions, Announcements and Group Norms Review | 5 minutes |
| Icebreaker Activity/Relaxation Exercise | 10 minutes |
| Good News | 5 minutes |
| Quick Check-in | 5 minutes |
| Home Practice Review | 15 minutes |
| New Material | 35 minutes |
| Home Practice Assignment | 10 minutes |
| Wrap Up | 5 minutes |

Orientation

Before joining the group at the beginning of any module, youth need to be oriented to the group. This will help them understand the purpose of CBT and the information and strategies that they will be able to gain by participating in the sessions. During the orientation session, it is important to discuss:

- The CBT model; that is, the relationship between emotions, situations, thoughts and actions.
- The typical size of the group.
- The day and time group is held every week.
- The CARIBOU Group Norms handout
- A very brief overview of the four module themes (Behavioural Activation and Exposure, Cognitive Restructuring, Communication & Relationships, Problem Solving).
- How rolling entry works, with some members graduating and some new members joining every four weeks.
- That this is a skills-based group and that home practice is required in order to get the most benefit from group.
- The attendance policy (e.g., “If you miss four sessions in a row, we will have to give someone else your spot in the group”).

Session Structure

Sessions are typically 90 minutes long. This can also be delivered over two hours with a 10- to 15-minute break in the middle, which might be used to check in briefly with some youth individually, or just allow for unstructured time where youth can take a break or socialize — enhancing cohesion. Having the agenda available for members to see (on a whiteboard or poster) can help orient youth so that they know what to expect. Having water and snacks available can be a sign of respect for their time and help prevent them from being distracted by feeling hungry or thirsty. Encouraging a water or food break also models a strategy that can be used for self-regulation as a way to maintain attention and reduce irritation from hunger or thirst.

1 Introductions, Announcements and Group Norms Review: 5 minutes

For Session 1 of each module, allow time for youth to briefly introduce themselves, giving their names, pronouns used (e.g., she/her, they/them, he/him) if they wish and a question that reveals a bit about themselves and helps with relationship building. Example: “Say your name, what pronouns you use if you wish and your favourite food.”

Be the first to go, and then go in order of experience in the group — with new group members going last. Asking more experienced members in the group to go first may make it easier for people to begin sharing. The goal is to get everyone in the group to say a little bit about themselves; this will make it more likely that they will contribute to the group when there are more sensitive questions later. As per the group norms (see below), passing on questions is allowed. During the introduction, you can also make any announcements (such as upcoming holidays where the group may not be running, or the date the next module will be starting). Using the CARIBOU Group Norms Handout, ask youth to each read one “group norm” from the list; you can switch which ones you focus on from week to week. Allow for brief discussion as to why the norms of focus are present if one is highly relevant for the group.

2 Icebreaker: 10 minutes

Options for Icebreaker games and relaxation exercises are described in Appendices A and B. The goal of icebreaker activities is to:

- make it more comfortable for youth to participate
- be a direct form of behavioural activation, exposure, and possibly positive reinforcement for coming to group
- enhance group cohesion.

The goal of relaxation exercises is to:

- give youth experiential practice with relaxation skills
- reduce anxiety during the remainder of the group.

Whether you lead an icebreaker activity or a relaxation exercise is the facilitator’s clinical decision. Facilitators may decide to be prepared to lead an icebreaker or a relaxation exercise and have the youth decide which to do. Some considerations include: the profile of youth currently in group (e.g., if there are a lot of youth with anxiety, they may benefit from alternating between icebreakers and relaxation exercises), whether there are many new members in the group (e.g., new members may benefit more from an ice breaker activity), and the content of the group that day (e.g., exposure might be best accompanied with relaxation exercises).

There is also the option of doing additional icebreaker or relaxation activities towards the end of a session, if there is time.

3 Good News: 5 minutes

Ask youth to share one thing that went well (or if they can't, one thing that didn't go horribly wrong). This helps draw attention to positive information in their lives.

4 Quick Check-in: 5 minutes

Ask youth to share how their week was in a few sentences. Again, you can start with the most experienced group members, followed by less experienced members. Here you are getting a sense of participants' mood and anxiety levels and also attending to potential examples for skill use later on in the session. For instance, if a youth describes low mood after an argument with a friend, and the new material is discussing collaborative problem solving, you could address the youth's situation when the new skill is being taught later in session. This may increase the sense of relevance of the skill and enhance uptake.

5 Home Practice Review: 15 minutes

Have participants describe their experience completing the previous week's home practice assigned to the group. Be sure to have a back-up plan if youth have not done the assignment (most session handouts have review exercises that can optionally be used to guide home practice review). If youth haven't done the assignment, ask them what got in the way. The most common reasons are:

1. Lack of understanding of the assignment,
2. Forgetting,
3. Low motivation

Problem-solve around these as a group. Be sure to follow through on the home practice review and reinforce the importance of doing skills practice between sessions.

In the case where they did not follow through with the assignment, facilitators can also ask about:

1. use of any CBT skill used in the past week (rather than the specific skill assigned),
2. how they could have used the specific skill in the past week,
3. how they anticipate they might use the skill in the coming week,
4. whether they addressed a specific goal they assigned themselves the previous week.

6 New Material: 35 minutes

Next is new material, described later in this manual. Allow some time for discussion on certain points. Youth may disagree with some of the suggestions in the new material. Invite disagreement by asking, “Who thinks this skill would be helpful for them? Who does not? What is your favourite part of the new material? What is your least favourite?” As a facilitator, you could:

- validate any hesitancy — while skills may be simple in concept, they are hard to put in action
- ask about pros and cons of using the skill
- invite a behavioural experiment (e.g., “I don’t know if it will work. Is there a way we could test it out?”)
- ask other group members for their experiences using the skill
- accept their experience (e.g., “Some skills work for some and not for others — the idea is to give you a bunch of ideas and see what works”).

7 Home Practice Assignment: 10 minutes

With 10 minutes left in the session, review what is expected for youth to do for the upcoming week.

Ask if youth have any questions about the home practice or if they anticipate anything that might get in the way of doing it and problem solve around these.

There are two types of assignments:

- an overall list of tasks that all group members are asked to do, listed at the end of the handouts
- an optional personal goal that youth identify for themselves. Once everyone has written their goal down on the handout, members share their “personal goal” with the group.

Note that addressing personal goals in a group format does take a substantial amount of time. It is important to consider this when offering this option.

Facilitators may decide to ask youth to make their personal goal more Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Realistic, and to have a Timeline (SMART goals). Again, use as much positive reinforcement and shaping principles as possible. There is no home practice assignment for the fourth sessions in the handouts for each module, but personal assignments can still be done. Alternatively, facilitators can still ask youth to practice the new skills discussed in group even though the module theme is changing. If you do this, be sure to follow-up with the assigned practice the following week. Ask if there is anything that might get in the way of completing their goal that week, and problem-solve around anticipated barriers.

8 Wrap Up: 5 minutes

Close the group by asking youth to share one reflection on the session: “Tell us, in one or two sentences, what your experience of group was today.” This allows facilitators to gauge what stuck out for youth.

Facilitators can use this information to fine-tune future sessions. This can also be done anonymously by having participants write down their feedback. If you prefer this option, provide paper for them to write down their answers.

An alternative concluding activity is to discuss “hopes and hesitations”: youth describe one thing they hope to get out of participating in the group and one thing they may be hesitant about. This can help facilitators plan for the next group.

Another alternative way to end session is with the Head, Heart, Feet activity. Ask youth to answer one of the following questions:

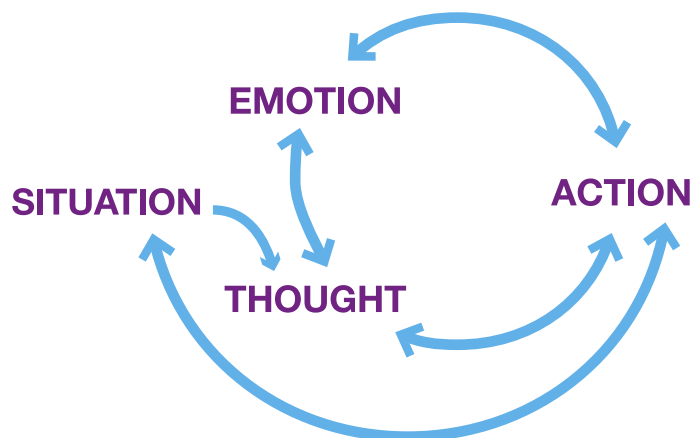
- What is one thing you’re thinking about after group today? (Head)
- What is one thing you’re feeling after group today? (Heart)
- What is something you are going to do after group today? (Feet)

Hand out graduation certificates when a member graduates (typically at the end of their fourth module), ideally after teaching new material. Youth tend to really like getting these certificates. Describe your observations (particularly positive observations) of the youth’s progress in Group. Try to do this with all youth present, so you can celebrate their success together. Other youth members may also decide to describe their positive observations of graduates and/or express their “well-wishes” —either verbally or in writing.

Content Rationale

A General

The mood cycle diagram: (below) is shown in each of the modules. The idea is that each skill can be related to this diagram and that by changing your thoughts, actions or the situation, you can change your emotion. Be sure to come back to this rationale for each skill set. When youth go through their personal examples, review the diagram and label each component (situation, thought, action, emotion) to practice conceptualizing life problems in this way.



Checklists: Some activities have checklists for common responses that youth may give. The benefit of this is that youth might be having an experience that they are having trouble articulating. Seeing a list of response options may help youth select one that makes sense for them and may help facilitate engagement. The downside is that it may mean the youth's own ideas are not shared, which limits exploration. We encourage using more open-ended questions initially with these activities. If youth are having trouble, the checklists are a good back-up.

“Depressive/Anxious Thoughts” vs. “Balanced Thoughts”: Each of the Power Up (Behavioural Activation and Exposure), Multiplayer (Communication and Relationships) and Level Up (Problem Solving) modules have a chart with typical depressive/anxious thoughts related to the topic with the invitation to generate balanced alternative thoughts, in keeping with the spirit of collaborative empiricism. The idea is to expose youth to other ways of thinking, but also to the idea that “balanced thoughts” don’t have to be the opposite (i.e., “all good” vs. “all bad”).

The facilitator version will include suggestions if youth struggle to come up with their own. The following questions can guide youth through coming up with more balanced thoughts:

- What is a way to think with more self-compassion?
- What would you say to a friend?
- What’s a more realistic way of thinking?
- What’s a more helpful way of thinking?

Youth can change some of the wording to make it more personalized. Some examples may be relevant for youth where others may not. Youth may find it hard to take on these “balanced thoughts.” If so, normalize their struggles and let them know that changing their thought patterns can take a long time. The goal is for them to know that there is another option for how to think about something, but it might take a while to shift their thinking in day-to-day life. If a youth finds one of the balanced thoughts immediately helpful, this is worth highlighting and discussing in the group.

Module Wrap-Up: At the end of each module is a chart with the list of skills learned and options for youth to talk about whether they thought about using these skills and whether or not they found them helpful. This wrap-up is an opportunity for youth to see how the skills all fit together and review if the strategies will work for them. They can also explore what gets in the way of effective skill use.

B

Power Up (Behavioural Activation and Exposure)

Behavioural activation (BA) can be defined as a therapeutic process that emphasizes deliberate attempts to increase behaviours that are likely to bring the individual into situations that are naturally rewarding with the aim of improving mood and overall quality of life.¹¹

Session 1 starts with a discussion of the CBT model and labelling situations, thoughts, emotions and actions. It is common for people to confuse these components – making it more difficult to work with them separately. Next, there is discussion to enhance self-awareness in emotions and is traditionally included in BA therapy (as well as other types of therapy). Some youth find this part very easy, and some more difficult. Pacing this section based on how group members are grasping the concept is important. Some youth will have a hard time putting a number to the intensity of their mood, in which case you can ask them to estimate. As they practice more and more, they will eventually become more precise at rating the intensity of

their mood. Notice that each emotion is rated separately on a different scale, as opposed to one overall scale of “good mood” at one pole and “bad mood” at the other. This helps teach youth that there are many mood states, some of which can be experienced at the same time; for example, after watching a good dramatic film, you might feel both happy and sad at the same time. Identifying emotions and rating their intensity is an important skill used in Level Up (Problem Solving) and in Reboot (Cognitive Restructuring), so you may have to review it briefly in other modules as well.

Session 2 begins with a discussion of the theory behind BA and exposure; namely, that a youth’s depressive and anxious behaviours (passivity, isolation, negative affect, avoidance) have been reinforced, and acknowledgment that healthy behaviours (activity, socialization, positive affect) may have previously led to aversive experiences. Moreover, depressive and anxious behaviours (e.g. isolation) lead to environmental changes (e.g. friends stop calling) which lead to more depressive/anxious experiences (e.g. the belief that “my friends don’t like me”) leading to worsening of mood and anxiety. This results in a vicious cycle (explained as the “downward spiral” in the handout).

Next, the facilitator facilitates a discussion around identifying and increasing enjoyable activities. This is a traditional component of BA, but can also serve as a way for anxious youth to expose themselves to typically avoided situations and draw focus away from internal preoccupations to external events. Youth may already find that they are doing things they enjoy, but that the benefits don’t really last. For example, watching TV or being on social media can be enjoyable, but these activities often don’t help us feel connected to others or that we are accomplishing things — and depression and anxiety continue. The idea is to balance these activities with enjoyable activities that provide more powerful reinforcing experiences. Achieving the right balance is key. During the group and through the handouts, you can incorporate activities where youth are able to brainstorm activities they enjoy. Activity scheduling is also included here. Without a clear time and date assigned to the activity, youth may neglect to follow through. Unstructured time is more likely to be time where the impulse to isolate, tendency to become preoccupied with anxious thoughts, or “shut down” wins.

Session 3 and 4 can be flexibly applied across both sessions, depending on the needs of the group. For example, if many group members struggle with anxiety, the facilitators may decide to focus on the exposure content, even flowing into session 4. If low motivation is a theme, facilitators can spend more time on session 4 content and start this as early as session 3.

The theme in session 3 is to break down seemingly overwhelming tasks into smaller steps – each in the pursuit of a long-term goal consistent with values (targeting low mood) or in exposure exercise (targeting anxiety). A discussion of values is also a more recent addition to BA. A similar strategy is used in ACT¹² and in the “Accumulating Positive Emotions Long Term” skill in DBT¹³ where Linehan frames this exercise as “building a life worth living.” This is an important skill particularly for youth who are struggling with chronic suicidal thoughts. The skill of “Graded Task Assignment” is reframed in this module as “Breaking it Down” and incorporated into a discussion of values. Youth may avoid thinking about the long-term future as it often feels overwhelming or more likely to lead to a sense of failure than success. Validate and normalize their feelings and guide them through the process in a supportive way. Of course, “Breaking it Down” can also be used for short-term goals as well, such as a school assignment due the following week.

There is a lot of overlap between Graded Task Assignment and Exposure – thus the rationale for grouping them in this session. It can be helpful to use opportunities in group to engage in “in vivo” exposure experiences as one of the exposure steps.

In session 4, the focus is on addressing potential barriers to engaging in BA or exposure activities. Examining beliefs around activation incorporates the “cognitive” part of CBT into this module. It is very important to highlight that people often don’t engage in these activities because they predict that it won’t help their mood or anxiety. While facilitating this component of the session, try and incorporate an activity (e.g. a card game) or experiment where youth are able to see this in practice. Label the thought prior to engaging in the activity (like the card game) as a “prediction” and invite youth to test it out. Do the activity in group. Ask them to rate their mood or energy after the activity. Ask them to share the result with the group. Frame the expected result as a “slight” improvement in mood and energy; and that this slight improvement is actually a sign that the youth is moving toward an “upward spiral” and that these small improvements accumulate over time to reduce symptoms of depression and/or anxiety.

Functional analysis of depressive and avoidant behaviours is often included in various iterations of BA and exposure and similar concepts are applied in Motivational Enhancement Therapy. Conducting a pros and cons assessment of “continuing my current routine” and “changing my activities to better fit the four targets” offers the youth and facilitator a window into what might be maintaining the current repertoire, while shifting motivation toward change. Facilitators and youth are encouraged to collaboratively look for ways to make depressive/anxious behaviours less reinforcing and healthy behaviours more reinforcing.

C Reboot (Cognitive Restructuring)

This module focuses on the cognitions that link the facts about a situation to the emotional experience that is evoked.

Session 1 starts with a discussion about how emotions can come on strongly when we react to a belief as though it is a fact. “Thought traps” (i.e., cognitive distortions) describe common errors in thinking; youth often can relate to many of these, which may promote a lot of discussion. Be prepared to address youth who might feel invalidated by the idea that their thinking is “wrong.” It is important to frame thought traps as common even among people without anxiety or depression, but that they may have more of an impact among people who are anxious or depressed.

Session 2 has a lot of content – thus will need repeating in sessions 3 and 4. Notice that in describing the process of creating a balanced thought, we use the term “train of thoughts” rather than “automatic thoughts” as the language is more familiar for youth. The manual also uses the term “reflex thoughts” instead of “hot thoughts”, a term classically used in CBT. These changes reflect feedback from youth that the term “hot thoughts” are associated with sexual themes, which can distract from the session content. The creation of balanced thought neutralizes the power of the reflex thought by getting away from polarized thinking and back to the importance of identifying facts versus beliefs. Facilitators experienced in DBT may notice that creating a balanced thought is articulating a “dialectic”, where two ideas that seem opposite on the surface can both be true at the same time.

In Session 2, further strategies on what to do with thoughts include brainstorming and evaluating alternative ways to interpret the situation are also included. There are parallels to the problem-solving approach discussed later and summarized below:

| Cognitive Restructuring | | Problem Solving |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Step 1 | Describe the situation and emotion (the need is less important here, and might be better to address after identifying the reflex thought, as it is the appraisal of the situation that is the threat to the need). | Describe the situation, emotion and need. |
| Step 1a | Identify the “reflex thought” — this might include listing the “train of thoughts” that arise and identifying which leads to the most emotion. | |
| Step 2 | Brainstorm interpretations . | Brainstorm solutions . |
| Step 3 | Evaluate: List evidence for and against each interpretation. | Evaluate: List pros and cons for select solutions. |
| Step 4 | Multiple options: play detective, balanced thought, act-as-if. | Carry out a solution. |

After going through each step with the group, you can then link the options for Cognitive Restructuring within Step 4 to particular thought traps:

- Playing detective might help most when youth are overgeneralizing or jumping to conclusions.
- Balanced thinking helps with polarized thinking. Act-as-if might be helpful in most thought traps (A skill to help with catastrophizing is described in Session 4, where skills to manage anxiety are discussed).

Session 3 begins with a discussion of core beliefs. Addressing these beliefs in the group can be sensitive, as the exercise tends to be emotionally charged. Facilitators can normalize this: “As we read through these core beliefs, you may experience some emotion. This is normal.” Be transparent with youth that these beliefs are difficult to shift, but that it can be helpful to be aware of the beliefs and look for ways to work on shifting them through the skills learned in Sessions 1 and 2. The next exercise in Session 3 is focused on giving and receiving positive feedback. This exercise can also be emotionally charged — in a positive way — and can be a nice counterbalance to the discussion around core beliefs. Youth may be anxious about the process and may express feeling awkward, though it very often results in a positive experience for them. Openly acknowledging that this is an awkward activity can help youth get through it. Group cohesion is often solidified by this activity.

In Session 4, the first skill discussed is also heavily influenced by DBT and is often included in more recent iterations of CBT. This skill is about “making non-judgemental statements”, which is also discussed in the Multiplayer (Communication and Relationships) Module, though the focus here is on reframing judgemental thoughts about oneself, as opposed to others.

The final skills are descriptions of ways of managing anxiety. Reassessing danger and one’s ability to cope with stressful situations are key aspects of cognitive restructuring for anxiety. The latter skill is particularly good for catastrophizing and is similar to the Cope Ahead skill in DBT. The “worry time” skill is essentially putting the unwanted behaviour (“worrying”) on cue.

D

Level Up (Problem Solving)



The TORDIA study found reviewing problem-solving skills within CBT to be associated with improved outcomes.¹⁴ The NICE Guideline on the long-term management of self-harm also suggests that a problem-solving component may be helpful to address self harm, which is common in adolescent depression.¹⁵ Further, enhancing problem-solving skills can enhance confidence in adolescents who are anxious, increasing their sense of ability to cope with whatever challenges may come their way.

Session 1 is dedicated to being able to define a “problem,” discussed here as a situation that threatens a need. This model is linked to the skill of self validation. Self validation is a skill that tends to be more emphasized in DBT. Regardless, self-validation is still about shifting our beliefs, but the belief being addressed is about one’s own appraisal of the emotional experience. “Self-validation” and “formulating one’s problems as a threat to a need” are highly overlapping skills, and presented accordingly in this session. Emotions are framed as normal, often functioning as a response to a need that is being threatened. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs¹⁶, which many youth may be familiar with, is used as a reference point. This adapted list of needs includes a sense of control, which is a common theme for adolescents and identified by other theorists as an issue to resolve (e.g. Erikson’s psychosocial stage called autonomy vs. shame and doubt,¹⁷ and literature on “locus of control”). Also in the adapted list of needs is a sense of identity — the sense that a person knows who they are and feels like the same person in different situations. Erikson also identified this as a common theme in adolescence (identity vs. role confusion). Simplifying needs down to six fundamental ones (physiological, physical safety, relationships, self-esteem, control and identity) allow youth to formulate their own problems.

Problem solving is framed as a strategy to find out how one’s needs can be met. If the need is met, the impetus for the emotion is no longer present and the emotion can settle. Beliefs about problem solving are discussed, as they often interfere with the process.

Session 2 starts with a discussion about beliefs about problem-solving which might get in the way of trying to solve problems. Subsequently, the focus is on the following steps: brainstorming solutions, evaluating them, reflecting on whether they will address the root of the problem, troubleshooting and carrying out the solution. Youth may find the many steps overwhelming and express low motivation to do them all. It can be helpful to highlight that they are likely already doing many of the steps naturally, but may be getting stuck on a particular one.

Therefore, working with youth to focus on the step they are having difficulty with may be all that is needed. For larger problems, youth might decide to go through the whole process and write down the steps guided by the handouts.

Session 3 discusses Collaborative Problem Solving. This approach was described in the original Adolescent Coping with Depression (CWD-A) manual, though has become a therapeutic approach in its own right with Dr. Ross Greene’s book *The Explosive Child*.¹⁸ The principles of individual problem solving are also present, but now include having another party involved — typically a caregiver.

Enhancing one’s ability to articulate one’s own perspective, considering the perspective of another and using both perspectives to arrive at a collaborative solution are crucial to this skill. Role plays are highly advised in this session.

Session 4 (the final session) is about acceptance. The facilitator acknowledges that some problems are not solvable. This skill is about shifting attention away from “reality fighting thoughts” (which may actually be helpful if the problem is readily solvable) to “reality acceptance thoughts” (that can be particularly helpful when the problem is not immediately solvable). DBT and ACT both address acceptance and can complement the other skills. The facilitator guide also includes a list of problems youth might encounter, which can be useful when the group is quiet. Ideally, youth would share their real-life problems and then the problem-solving skills can be used to address these problems. If youth are not willing to share, they can pick from example problems to work through. Youth can each work on their own problems through the handouts or through role-plays (which is particularly helpful for collaborative problem solving), or they can work on a problem as a group. The acceptance skill can also be applied to these situations.

E Multiplayer (Communication and Relationships)

Relationships have a significant effect on mood. A secondary analysis of the TORDIA study showed that CBT is more effective when social skills are included as part of CBT.¹² Young people who experience challenges in their social lives may be more likely to experience depression or anxiety. Anxiety and depression may also make it harder to engage in pro-social behaviour. The group format for CBT allows youth to practice skills through activities and experiments in vivo, where they receive immediate feedback on various ideas about social norms. This module may be particularly relevant to those with social anxiety.

Session 1 of this module starts by revisiting downward spirals with respect to relationships. Next, there is some discussion of communication skills. Many of these skills may seem obvious, but when depressed or anxious, they may not come automatically. Next the facilitator explores depressive/anxious thoughts youth may have that affect relationships.

In Session 2 there is discussion around how to start and end conversations. Sometimes youth may not want to start a conversation, because they won’t know how to end it without feeling like they are being rude. Ideas about how to end conversations are explored. TMI (“Too Much Information”) is a section about self-disclosure: again, youth may provide a lot of feedback to each other in this section. To start discussion, it can be helpful to ask “Who here tends to overshare information? Who undershares? What are the pros and cons of each of these approaches?”.

Session 3 begins with discussion around assertive communication. The GOALS acronym is used to describe steps in assertive communication. Facilitators experienced in DBT will notice parallels with the DEARMAN skill in this section. Youth tend to like the role-plays, particularly when you ask them to do ridiculous tasks and they get to say no — effectively.

Session 4 is about effectively deepening relationships through engagement in conversations and non-judging responses. There is overlap with non-judging thoughts covered in “Cognitive Restructuring” – though here the focus is on non-judging in relationships.

Other Considerations

Within the manual, there is a lot of overlap with DBT, as DBT was highly influenced by CBT; and now CBT, as it is currently practiced, is highly influenced by DBT. Even when the concepts overlap, there is variation in how distinctly the skills are described. The following table is intended to help differentiate what skills are covered in the Mood Foundations & CBT group versus what is covered in DBT. Clinicians may wish to supplement CBT group material with the remaining DBT skills for youth with emotion dysregulation, impulsivity and self-harm.

| Comparison of CBT and DBT | | |
|--|-----|-----------------------|
| Topic | CBT | DBT ^{[6][7]} |
| Education and Lifestyle | | |
| Education on depression (biopsychosocial model) | ✓ | ✗ |
| Education on borderline personality disorder (biosocial transaction model) | ✗ | ✓ |
| Sleep hygiene | ✓ | ✓ |
| Exercise | ✓ | ✓ |
| Diet | ✓ | ✓ |
| Concepts Related to Behavioural Activation | | |
| Beliefs about engaging in activities | ✓ | ✓ |
| Downward spiral | ✓ | ✓ |
| Connection between situation, emotions, thoughts, actions | ✓ | ✓ |
| Identifying/rating emotions | ✓ | ✓ |
| Engaging in pleasurable activities / Accumulating positive emotions short term | ✓ | ✓ |
| Identifying values and long-term goals / Breaking down long-term goals into smaller steps / Accumulating positive emotions long term | ✓ | ✓ |
| Engaging in activities that build a sense of accomplishment (mastery) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Activity scheduling | ✓ | ✓ |
| Concepts Related to Communication and Relationships | | |
| Beliefs about relationships / Relationship dialectics | ✓ | ✓ |
| Creating new friendships | ✓ | ✓ |
| How to leave a conversation | ✓ | ✗ |
| Ending destructive relationships | ✗ | ✓ |
| Active listening / GIVE | ✓ | ✓ |
| Responding without judgment, self-disclosure / Describe, express | ✓ | ✓ |
| Assertive communication | ✓ | ✓ |
| FAST (be Fair, make no Apologies, Stick to values, be Truthful) | ✗ | ✓ |

Comparison of CBT and DBT

Topic

CBT

DBT ^{[6][7]}

Concepts related to Problem Solving

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Beliefs about problem solving | ✓ | ✓ |
| Function of emotions | ✓ | ✓ |
| Defining a problem / (Describe) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Problem-solving / Pros and cons | ✓ | ✓ |
| Collaborative problem solving | ✓ | ✗ |
| Reality acceptance | ✓ | ✓ |

Concepts related to Cognitive Restructuring

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Facts vs. beliefs (Observe/Describe) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Thought traps / Cognitive distortions | ✓ | ✓ |
| Balanced Thinking / Dialectics | ✓ | ✓ |
| Self-validation | ✓ | ✓ |
| Act-as-if belief | ✓ | ✗ |
| Brainstorming alternative interpretations | ✓ | ✓ |
| What if? Then what? (Cope ahead) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Non-judging stance | ✓ | ✓ |

Other DBT-Specific Concepts

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Wise Mind | ✗ | ✓ |
| Participate (Mindfulness) | ✗ | ✓ |
| One-mindfully/Effectively (Mindfulness) | ✗ | ✓ |
| Crisis survival skills (ACCEPTS/5-senses/IMPROVE) | ✗ | ✓ |
| Willingness/Willfulness | ✗ | ✓ |
| Dialectical abstinence — and other addiction-specific skills | ✗ | ✓ |
| Opposite action for emotions other than sadness and anxiety | ✗ | ✓ |

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Power Up Behavioural Activation and Exposure



Session 1

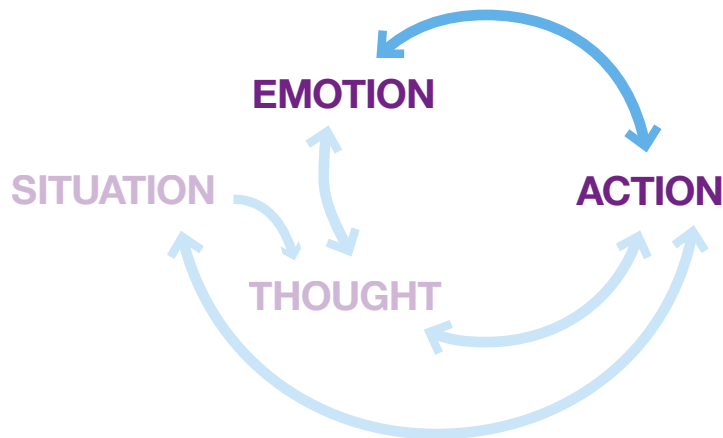
Naming and Rating Emotions

1 Mood Cycle

The concept behind Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is that your emotions are affected by the situation you are in, as well as your thoughts (cognitions) and actions (behaviour). For example, working on a challenging assignment (**SITUATION**) might lead to the **THOUGHT**, “I can’t do this”. This thought can lead to frustration (**EMOTION**). This frustration can lead to looking for something else to do, like checking social media on your phone (**ACTION**), where you see a picture of your friends having a good time (new situation). Then the chain continues.

Later on, it will also be explained how this chain of events can go in the reverse direction. In this module, for example, we will explore **how our actions can affect our emotions** in ways that we might find helpful. Look at the diagram below.

Draw the cycle on the board ...



Using the above diagram, identify the situation, thought, emotion and behaviour in the scenario below.

Ask a youth to read through the example...

“Brianna wakes up in the morning to her alarm. She feels like her mood and energy are low. She imagines that if she gets up and gets ready for school that she will feel horrible — that she will be dragging her feet all through the day. She has the urge to roll over and go back to sleep. She pulls the covers over her head and goes back to sleep.”

As the youth identify each component, write it on the board beside the corresponding label.

Sometimes it is tricky to distinguish each part of the cycle — this is important so that you know what to do next. Label each of the following as a “Situation” “Thought” “Emotion” or “Action”:

Ask youth to work with someone in the group to label the items below. Once everyone is finished, take up the answers as a group.

Sadness

(Emotion)

My mother was raising her voice saying “Please get out of bed!”

(Situation)

You call up a friend

(Action)

“Trish doesn’t understand me”

(Thought)

Smiling

(Action)

You brush your teeth

(Action)

Nervousness

(Emotion)

My teacher returned my assignment

(Situation)

2 Noticing and Naming Your Emotions

Ask a youth to read...

Naming your emotions is an important first step in being able to change your emotion. Some people find it hard, while others find it easy. Each emotion can be described as a combination of body sensations, thought patterns, changes in energy and urges to act in specific ways.

See the example below that describes what people often experience in **anxiety**. Some people call this the “fight or flight” response.

Thoughts

Describe characteristics of thoughts that go with this emotion.



Energy

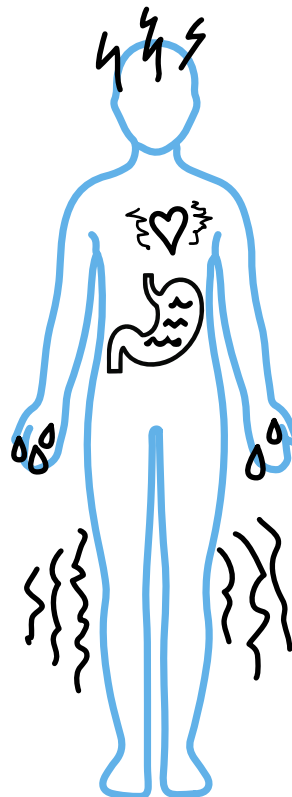
Does energy go up or down with this emotion?

Often energy goes high – sometimes I shut down

Sensations

Draw the body sensations that go with this emotion.

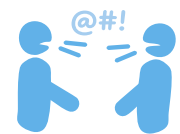
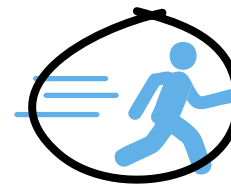
Dizzy
Headache
Jaw clenched
Throat tight
Muscles tight
Breathing fast
Heart beating fast
Sweating
Stomach upset
Palms sweat
Jittery
Pacing



Actions

Does the emotion make you want to approach, run away from, confront, or isolate from other people?

I feel like avoiding and running away from others



Ask youth to partner up for the following activity...

Activity: With a partner, use the remaining diagrams to map out your experience with one of the following emotions:

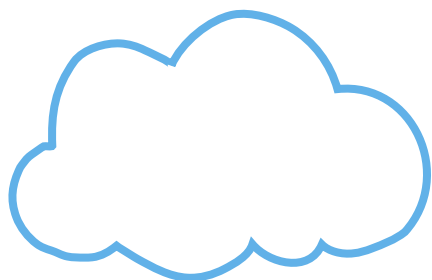
- Sadness
- Anger
- Happiness

If these are easy for you, try to map out more complex emotions like:

- Pride, boredom, jealousy, envy, guilt, shame, emptiness and love.

Thoughts

Describe thought patterns that go with this emotion.



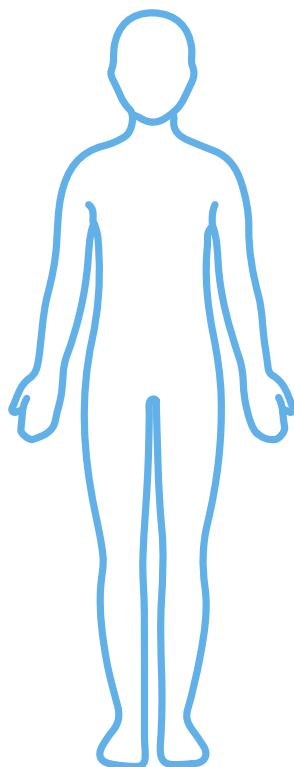
Energy

Does energy go up or down with this emotion?



Sensations

Draw the body sensations that go with this emotion.



Sadness is often characterized by negative thoughts, hopelessness, difficulties thinking about the future, cloudiness of thoughts.

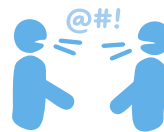
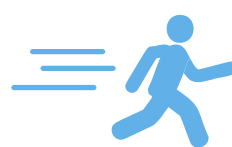
Energy is often low.

Physical sensations may include heaviness in the limbs, a "pit in the stomach", urge to cry, slowness.

Sadness often leads to an urge to isolate.

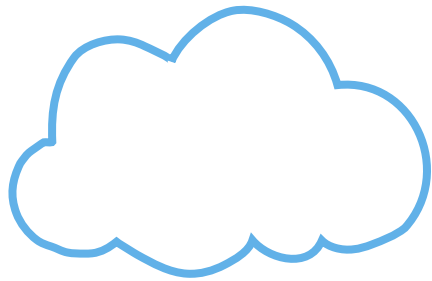
Actions

Does the emotion make you want to approach, run away from, confront, or isolate from other people?



Thoughts

Describe thought patterns that go with this emotion.



Sensations

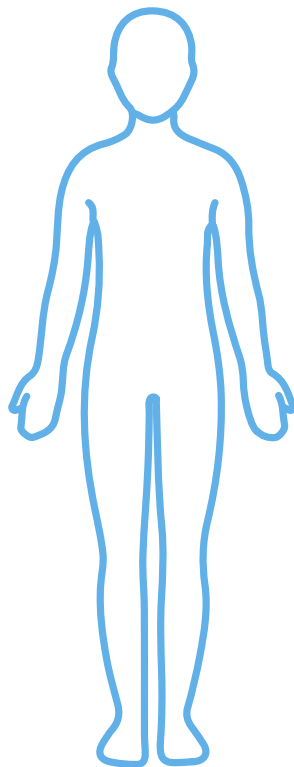
Draw the body sensations that go with this emotion.

Anger often leads to “tunnel vision”, overfocussed thoughts, “somebody hurt me”.

Energy is often high.

Body sensations are similar to anxiety (except maybe stomach issues).

Actions include the urge to confront others.

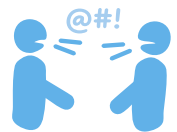


Energy

Does energy go up or down with this emotion?

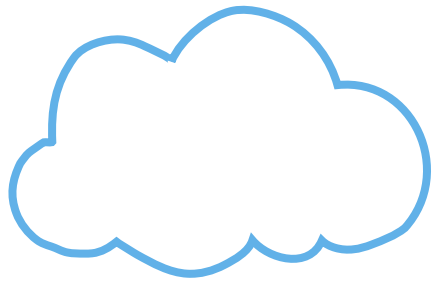
Actions

Does the emotion make you want to approach, run away from, confront, or isolate from other people?



Thoughts

Describe thought patterns that go with this emotion.



Sensations

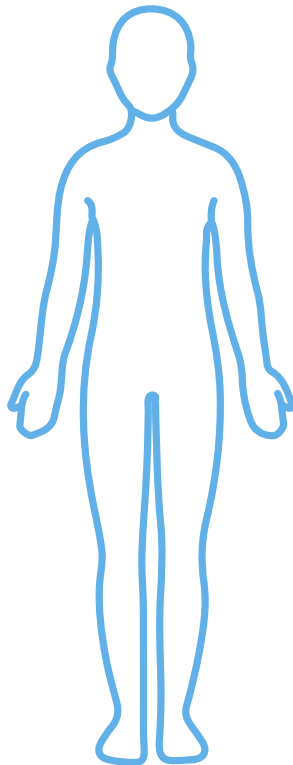
Draw the body sensations that go with this emotion.

Happniess often leads to flexible, clear thinking, hopefulness, ambition.

Energy is often high.

Body sensations include a feeling if lightness and ease.

Actions include the urge to approach others.

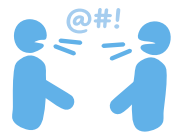


Energy

Does energy go up or down with this emotion?

Actions

Does the emotion make you want to approach, run away from, confront, or isolate from other people?



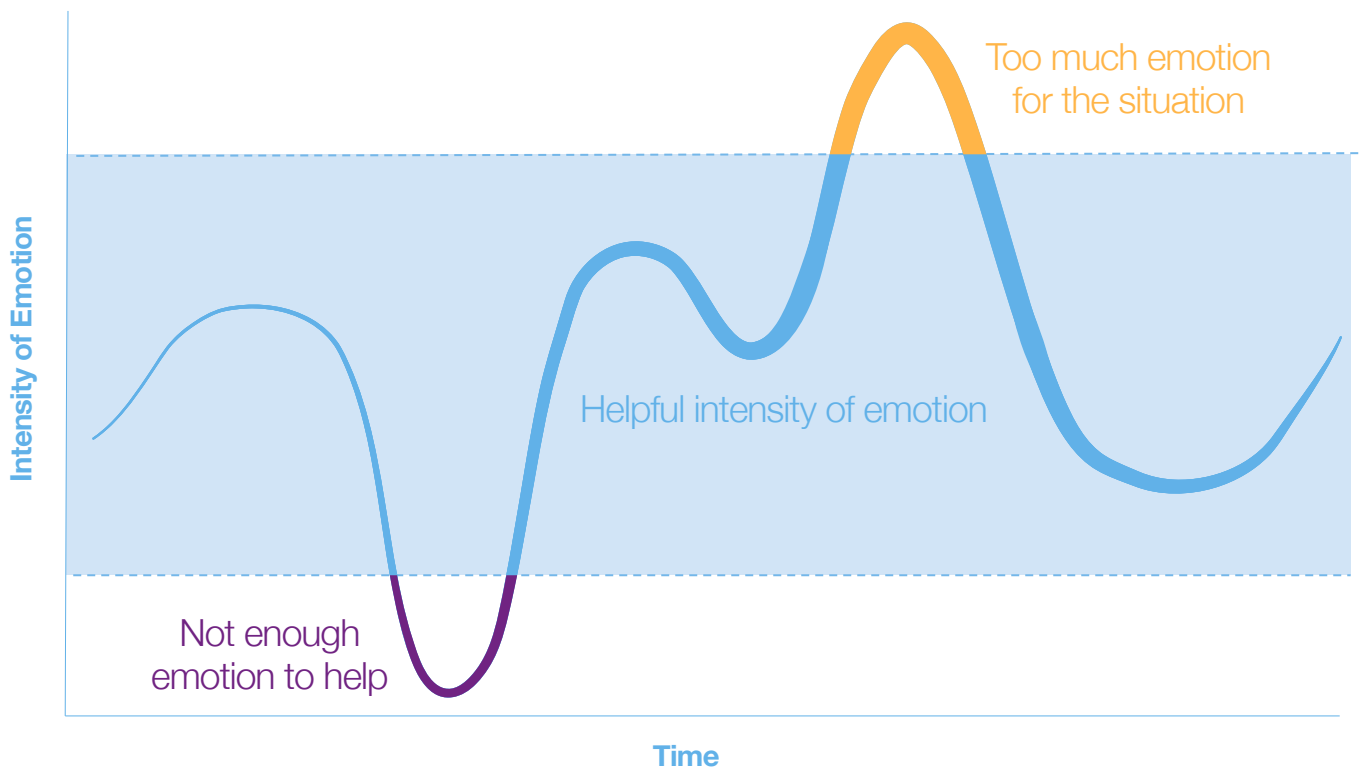
3 Rating the Intensity of Your Emotions

Ask a youth to read...

Finding a helpful intensity of emotion

Emotions, even the uncomfortable ones, can be helpful for us. For example, if you had a test coming up at school and you didn't have any anxiety about it, you probably wouldn't study and would be unlikely to get the grade you were hoping for. But if you have too much anxiety, you might find it really hard to concentrate when studying. There is a helpful amount of anxiety to have in this situation. Sadness can also be helpful. It has a role in being able to empathize with others, to reflect on what is important to us, or to pull back in problem situations where we need to think through solutions. But too much sadness can lead to over-isolating or avoiding problems all together.

Look at the diagram below to see how the intensity of our emotions is important.



Have youth take turns reading..

The intensity of the emotions that you experience throughout the day will change from hour to hour. It can be helpful to be able to describe this intensity for many reasons:

- First, it can help you **communicate** to other people what you are feeling so they can give you appropriate support.
- Second, it helps give you information on what you might need to do to control your emotion. For example, if you are at a low intensity in sadness (i.e. only slightly sad), you might **use a different strategy** than if you are at a high intensity (i.e. extremely sad).
- Third, if you notice when your emotion is at a low intensity, you can try to take steps to **prevent it** from becoming too intense.

The first step in rating your emotion is to set “anchor points” on a scale from zero to five.

Rating sadness and anxiety

A “zero” will represent the least amount of sadness you have ever felt. At “zero” you have no physical signs of sadness, no thoughts that go with sadness (such as negative thoughts) and you are active with a good amount of energy.

Can you think of a time when your sadness was at “zero” (i.e. no sadness)?

Ask for examples from the group.

A “five” will represent the most/greatest amount of sadness you have ever felt.

Can you think of a time when your sadness was at “five”?

Ask for examples from the group, keeping in mind this might be sensitive for some.

Similarly, can you think of a time when your anxiety was at “zero” (i.e. no anxiety)?

Ask for examples from the group.

Can you think of a time when your anxiety was at “five”?

Ask for examples from the group, keeping in mind this might be sensitive for some.

Rating happiness

A “zero” represents the least/lowest amount of happiness you have ever felt.

Can you think of a time when your happiness was at “zero” (i.e. not happy at all)?

Ask for examples from the group, keeping in mind this might be sensitive for some.

A “five” represents the most/greatest amount of happiness you have ever felt. At “five” you have physical signs of happiness (e.g., smiling, high energy), thoughts that go with happiness (such as positive thoughts) and you are very active with lots of energy. **When was the last time you were at “five”?**

Ask for examples from the group.

Using yesterday as an example, rate the highest intensity each emotion got to throughout the day on a scale from 0 to 5:

Have participants complete this individually.



Sad



Angry (irritable)



Happy



Bored



Anxious (fearful)



Proud

Have a youth read...

Sometimes, it is difficult to know what emotion you are feeling. Noticing, naming and rating your emotions can help you feel more aware of what is happening – and help give you more control over the intensity of the emotions.

4 Home Practice

Ask youth to use the table below to keep track of their emotions and the intensity of each emotion over the next 7 days.

This week, at the end of each day, rate the highest intensity each type of emotion got to throughout the day. We will explore patterns at the next session.

| Emotion | Intensity of Emotions (0-5) | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Day 1 | Day 2 | Day 3 | Day 4 | Day 5 | Day 6 | Day 7 |
| Sad | | | | | | | |
| Bored | | | | | | | |
| Angry | | | | | | | |
| Anxious | | | | | | | |
| Happy | | | | | | | |
| Proud | | | | | | | |
| Other _____ | | | | | | | |

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Power Up Behavioural Activation and Exposure

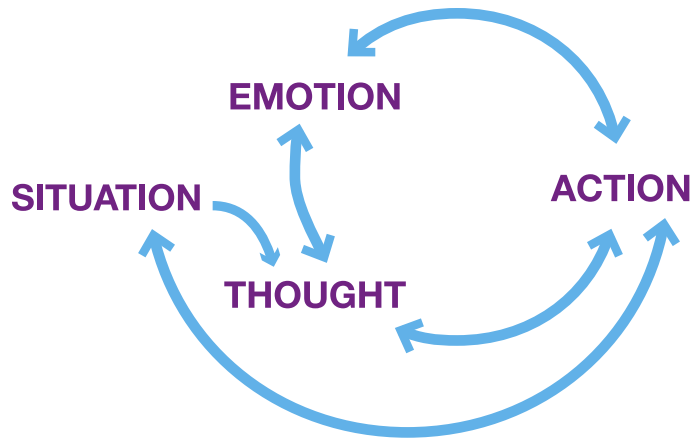


Session 2

Finding Balance in Activities

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, discuss the following content with the group...



Using the diagram above, describe each of the components that are represented in the following scenario.

Ricky has a math test tomorrow. He tried studying in his room, but didn't understand the new material. He said to himself, "What if I fail?" and then felt discouraged and panicky. He went to the basement to play video games instead. His brother was there and noticed that Ricky seemed tense. His brother asked "what's wrong?" and Ricky didn't answer.

How did it go tracking your emotions? What are the downsides of tracking your emotions? Upsides?

Did you remember to do it? If not, what can you do to help you remember?

Are there any patterns that you noticed in your emotions?

If you forgot to track your emotions over the last week, fill out this chart to help you notice your emotions over the past three days. Rate the maximum intensity (from 0 to 5) that you may have felt for each emotion, with 5 being the most intense.

| Emotion | Intensity of Emotions (0-5) | | |
|---------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------|
| | 3 days ago | 2 days ago | Yesterday |
| Sad | | | |
| Bored | | | |
| Angry | | | |
| Anxious | | | |
| Happy | | | |
| Proud | | | |
| Other | | | |
| _____ | | | |

2 Emotion Spirals

This module will help you learn skills to change your emotions by making changes in your actions.

Have a youth read out...

When we feel bad, we are more likely to shut down and stop doing things we enjoy. This can make us feel worse. This cycle can lead to a downward spiral in our mood. A similar spiral can happen with anxiety. When we feel anxious, we are more likely to avoid situations. The avoidance makes us anxious about the next time a stressful situation arises, in part, because we never gave ourselves the chance to learn how to manage the stress.

The Downward Spiral



Ask youth...

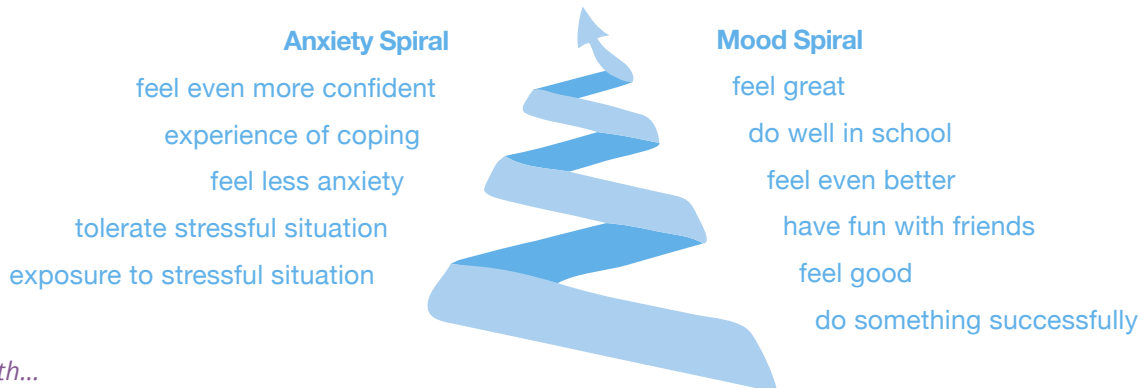
Do you recognize this downward spiral in yourself?

Have a youth read out...

When we feel good, we are more likely to do things we like. Once we start doing things we like, we tend to feel better. This cycle can lead to an upward spiral in our mood. Similarly, when we feel confident, we are more likely to learn how to manage stressful situations. This can lead to improvement in anxiety.

Read this diagram **from bottom to top**.

The Upward Spiral



Ask youth...

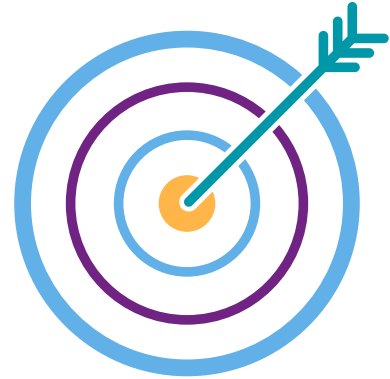
What are some things that cause an upward spiral for you?

3 Increasing Activities to Improve Your Mood and Decrease Anxiety

Have youth take turns reading...

To promote upward spirals in your mood, it is important that the activities we do are meeting key targets in our lives:

1. **Sense of connection:** Does it make you feel closer to others?
2. **Success:** Does it give you a sense of achievement?
3. **Enjoyment:** Do you like doing it?
4. **Personal values:** Does it fit with what's important to you?
e.g., serving your community, taking part in traditions, caring for the environment
(Note: We will explain and expand on "Personal Values" in the next session)



In the chart below, rate how much each activity meets each target, using a scale of 0–5, with 5 meeting the target the most.

Have youth complete the chart below (note an alternative activity is described after the table).

| Activity | Rating of Targets (0-5) | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------------|
| | Sense of Connection | Success | Enjoyment | Personal Values |
| Watching videos on YouTube | | | | |
| Texting friends | | | | |
| Sleeping | | | | |
| Playing video games | | | | |
| Using social media (IG, Snapchat etc.) | | | | |
| Listening to music | | | | |
| Going for a walk or run | | | | |
| Doing homework | | | | |
| Hanging out with friends | | | | |
| Cooking a meal | | | | |
| Having dinner with family | | | | |
| Playing a team sport | | | | |
| Doing a personal art project | | | | |
| Playing an instrument | | | | |
| Watching a movie with friends or family | | | | |
| Doing a “games night” with friends | | | | |
| Other | | | | |
| _____ | | | | |

Discuss the results. What did people notice? Which activities are they doing regularly now? Which activities might be more helpful in enhancing mood?

More interactive option: List one of the activities for the group. Ask youth to stand up or raise their hand if the activity meets one or more of the four targets for them. Ask one youth who responded to describe which target(s) and why. Next, the person who responded will list a new activity that also meets some of the targets for them.

Repeat the activity with additional examples. (These can be activities from the list or new examples.)

4

Finding Balance

Work with youth to individually complete the “Finding Balance in Your Activities — Now” and “Finding Balance in Your Activities — Future” worksheets.

It is important to find balance in the four targets discussed above. Take a look at the “Finding Balance in Your Activities — Now” worksheet (p. 19). List activities you are currently doing in the appropriate petal.

Take a look at the “Finding Balance in Your Activities — Future” worksheet (p. 20). List at least 10 new activities you think might help improve your mood or anxiety in the appropriate petal; remember to aim for balance between the four targets. Make sure you list at least two activities in each petal (except “other”). If you are unsure of what activities to include, take a look at the list at the Activities List for Short Term Targets (p. 21).

Of the activities you identified as wanting to work on, which would be the easiest to start doing?

Which would be a medium level of difficulty to start doing?

Which would be the hardest to start doing?

Once youth have completed the activity, have a group discussion to see if they are meeting each of the four targets. For the 10 activities they have selected, encourage them to start changing routines by introducing the easiest new activities into their day.

Alternative activities:

- Bring in magazines and art supplies and have participants make collages and/or drawings of pleasurable activities that they would like to engage in. The idea is that seeing images of the activities increases the chance of youth trying them out.

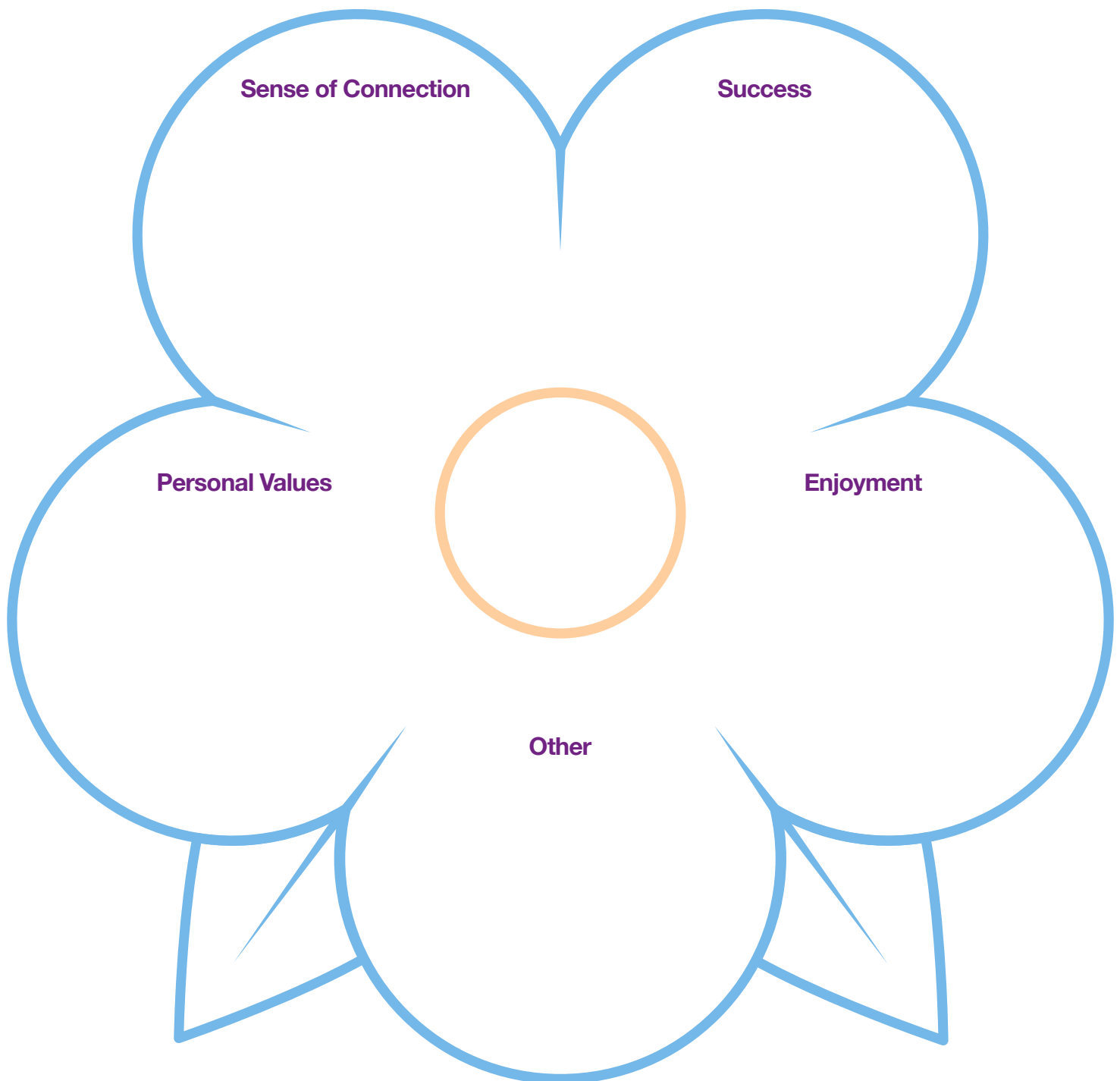
Or...

- Ask youth to take screenshots on their phone of activities they would like to do or quotes that are meaningful to them. Youth can then create a folder in their camera roll where they can save the photos. Depending what phone they have, they may also be able to create a list of the activities and set up notifications to remind them to do the activities.

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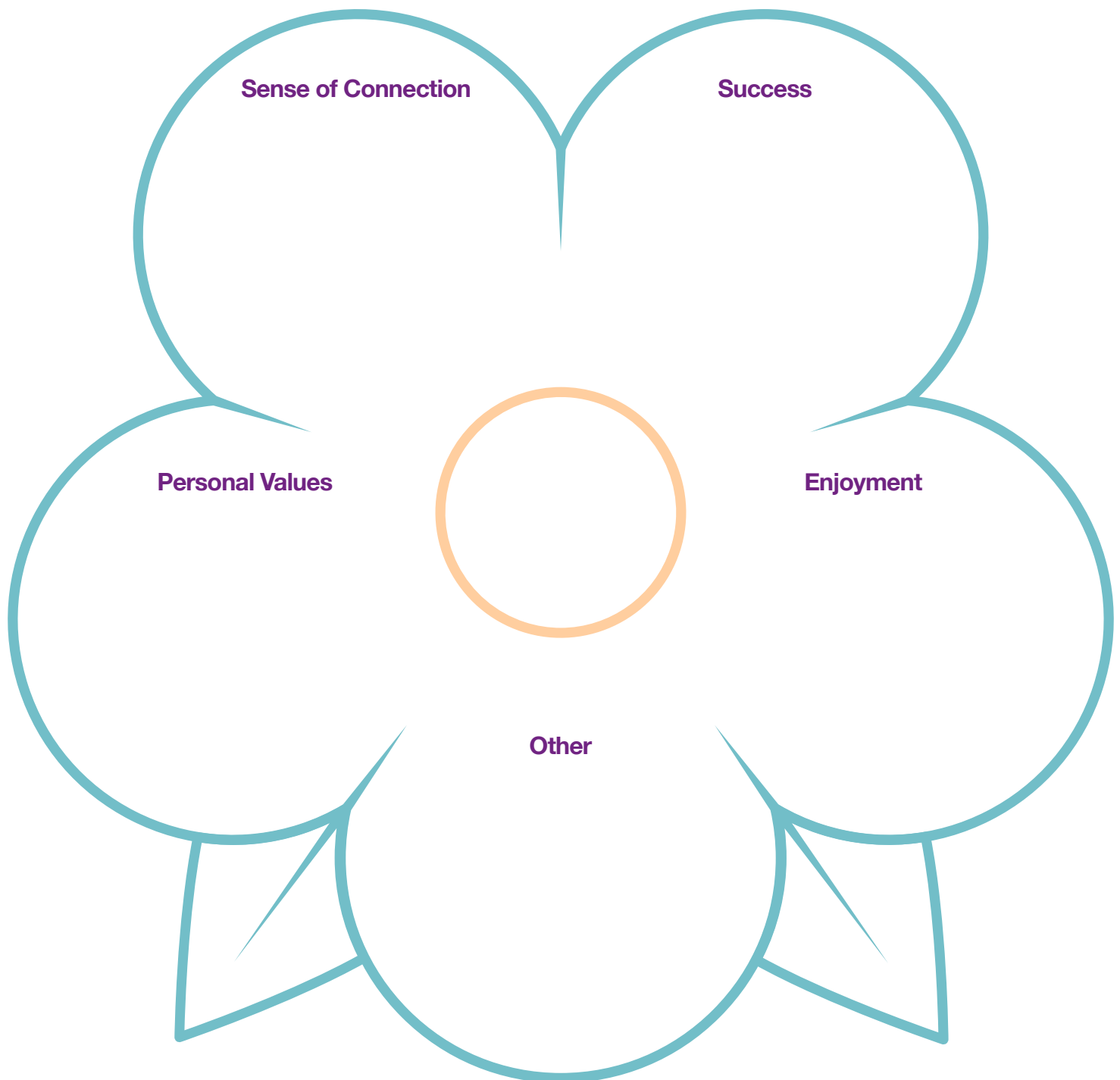
Finding Balance in Your Activities — Now



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Finding Balance in Your Activities — Future



Activities list for short-term targets

Check off 10 activities you are most interested in trying.

Sense of connection

- ☐ Talk about sports, my job or school with a friend.
- ☐ Play sports (e.g., basketball, soccer, swimming, bowling).
- ☐ Go to a sports event.
- ☐ Play a game with someone (e.g., board game, cards, pool).
- ☐ Coach someone.
- ☐ Go on outings (e.g., to the park, a picnic, a barbecue).
- ☐ Go to a fair, the zoo or an amusement park.
- ☐ Go camping.
- ☐ Attend a concert.
- ☐ Go to a party.
- ☐ Play party games.
- ☐ Go on a date.
- ☐ Ask friends to visit you or visit them.
- ☐ Introduce people who you think would like each other.
- ☐ Meet someone new.
- ☐ Have lunch with friends or co-workers.
- ☐ Hang out with friends at the park.
- ☐ Join a club or participate in a new activity at school.
- ☐ Join an advisory or working group at a local organization.
- ☐ Join a musical group.
- ☐ Participate in a traditional ceremony in your community.
- ☐ Act in a school play or with a local group.
- ☐ Learn new things from others (e.g. Elders, coaches, teachers).
- ☐ Hang out with relatives.
- ☐ Volunteer or help with a charity.
- ☐ Appreciate good things happening for your family or friends (e.g., make a congratulation card for a friend).
- ☐ Have an engaging conversation with people in class or at work.
- ☐ Give gifts.
- ☐ Help someone when they are in need (e.g., by talking to them or doing something for them).
- ☐ Compliment or praise someone.
- ☐ Talk on the phone.
- ☐ Attend a family reunion or get-together.
- ☐ Throw a party or get-together.
- ☐ Talk about good memories.
- ☐ Do something unexpected to surprise people.
- ☐ Go to a barber or hairstylist.
- ☐ Write letters, cards or notes.
- ☐ Ask for help or advice.
- ☐ Smile at people more often.
- ☐ Spend time with a romantic partner.
- ☐ Get in touch with an old friend.

Success

- ☐ Rearrange or redecorate your room or living space.
- ☐ Read an interesting book or article.
- ☐ Go to a lecture or listen to a webinar or talk online.
- ☐ Do something nice for a family member.
- ☐ Do home repairs.
- ☐ Do repairs on a vehicle (e.g., car, bike, motorcycle, tractors).
- ☐ Do carpentry.
- ☐ Do a puzzle or crossword.

- ☐ Write stories, novels, plays or poetry.
- ☐ Write a paper, essay or report.
- ☐ Work at a job.
- ☐ Learn a language.
- ☐ Play a musical instrument.
- ☐ Solve a personal problem.
- ☐ Make food or crafts to sell or give away.
- ☐ Do pottery, jewellery making, beading, knitting, sewing or another craft.
- ☐ Garden or do landscaping or yard work.
- ☐ Plan or organize an event.
- ☐ Compete in a sports event.
- ☐ Make a speech or do a presentation.
- ☐ Eat a balanced diet.
- ☐ Get exercise.
- ☐ Get a good night's sleep.
- ☐ Learn to do something new.
- ☐ Do a favour for someone.
- ☐ Read the newspaper.
- ☐ Find new music that you enjoy.
- ☐ Do housework, laundry or other cleaning.
- ☐ Care for houseplants.
- ☐ Babysit.
- ☐ Do volunteer work or some kind of community service.
- ☐ Work hard on assignments for school.
- ☐ Learn how to apply make-up.
- ☐ Learn how to code computer programs.
- ☐ Train a pet.

Enjoyment

- ☐ Read a novel, a comic, poetry or a magazine.
- ☐ Write in a diary or journal.
- ☐ Watch television.
- ☐ Think about something good for the future.

- ☐ Think about people you like.
- ☐ Take a bath or shower.
- ☐ Brush or wash your hair.
- ☐ Sing to yourself.
- ☐ Just sit and daydream.
- ☐ Listen to the sounds of nature.
- ☐ Listen to music.
- ☐ Watch the sky, the clouds or a storm.
- ☐ Pick wild foods or fruit, or collect rocks or driftwood.
- ☐ Wear clothes you feel comfortable and confident in.
- ☐ Make a purchase (e.g., a car, bike, phone).
- ☐ Look for flowers.
- ☐ Smell something nice like a candle or perfume or a flower.
- ☐ Say prayers.
- ☐ Brush your teeth.
- ☐ Go to the library.
- ☐ Surf the Internet.
- ☐ Play with a pet.

Multiple targets

- ☐ Be in nature (on a beach, by a stream, on the grass).
- ☐ Explore your own city or an unfamiliar one.
- ☐ Plan a trip or vacation.
- ☐ Buy things for yourself.
- ☐ Hang out at the beach.
- ☐ Do artwork, such as painting, sculpting, drawing or making a movie.
- ☐ Learn how to drive.
- ☐ Breathe fresh air.
- ☐ Smell a familiar smell.
- ☐ Write or listen to music.
- ☐ Be with animals.
- ☐ Explore something new in your environment.
- ☐ Make snacks.

- ☐ Dance.
- ☐ Put on makeup, fix your hair, etc.
- ☐ Sit in the sun.
- ☐ Take photos.
- ☐ Listen to jokes.
- ☐ See beautiful scenery.
- ☐ Prepare and eat a good meal or cook something new.
- ☐ Go to a community centre or other public space.
- ☐ Go on a hike.
- ☐ Visit a museum or exhibit.
- ☐ Go fishing.
- ☐ Go to the gym.
- ☐ Go to a book signing or movie screening.
- ☐ Watch a movie.
- ☐ Eat at a restaurant.
- ☐ Meditate or do yoga.
- ☐ Do exercise (e.g., swimming, running, biking, skateboarding, rollerblading).
- ☐ Go shopping.
- ☐ People watch.
- ☐ Take a walk.
- ☐ See a play or musical.

Note: Activities that target personal values will come later.

5 Activity Scheduling

We have spent a lot of time talking about what activities you do and plan to do. Sometimes, if our time is too unstructured, our emotions get the best of us and throw us in a different direction. Creating a schedule ahead of time prevents us from slipping into impulses to be inactive or to do the same things over and over that might not be helping to improve our mood or anxiety.

Schedule your coming week on the next page to help ensure you make time for the activities that will be most valuable to you (refer to the activities on your “Finding Balance in Your Activities — Future” worksheet). Do your best to stick to it. Some of it may already be determined for you (e.g. scheduled classes at school). Pay particular attention to activities that you would like to do and are valuable for you during those times that are not already scheduled — even between classes (like joining a club at lunch).

| Time | Activities | | | | | | |
|------------|------------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|
| | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| 7:00 a.m. | | | | | | | |
| 9:00 a.m. | | | | | | | |
| 11:00 a.m. | | | | | | | |
| 1:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 3:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 5:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 9:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 11:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |

Assign the following home practice:

Try to increase the activities that meet the four targets and that will likely have the greatest impact on your mood. Add the activities that fit your values to your schedule.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Power Up Behavioural Activation and Exposure



Session 3

Long-Term Goals and Facing Fears

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, discuss the following questions with the group...

Did you notice a time this past week when you started to go into a downward spiral (with mood or anxiety)?

Were you able to do something to move yourself to an upward spiral?

Think about the four targets we discussed last week:

- Sense of Connection
- Success
- Enjoyment
- Personal Values

Were you able to balance these four targets this past week?

2 Personal Values in Action

Present the question below to the group. Discuss how values lead you in a certain direction, while goals can show you got there, in a tangible way.

What is the difference between a “value” and a “goal”?

Have participants answer the following question individually and then take up responses as a larger group. If people are having a difficult time thinking of values they want to live by, they can refer to the subsequent list below.

What are some core values you would like to live by?

If you are struggling to come up with some values, consider the list below:

- Having a few close relationships
- Having a lot of friends
- Committing to self-growth
- Being spiritual
- Connecting to culture
- Helping other people
- Helping the environment
- Being true to yourself
- Doing exciting things
- Being knowledgeable
- Doing well at school
- Being honest
- Standing up for human rights and justice
- Being assertive
- Being respectful
- Being a learner
- Having a high-paying job
- Inspiring other people
- Having a sense of humour
- Being productive
- Being organized and on time
- Being independent
- Being physically fit and healthy
- Having a balanced lifestyle



Why bother with identifying values?

Doing activities that fit with our values can improve our mood and anxiety in the short-term and can prevent us from going into downward spirals. In the long term, one of the main things that contributes to low mood and high anxiety is not living according to our values. It often leaves us feeling uncomfortable and stuck. The first step is to think about what your values actually are! Not your parents' or your friends' values, but yours. What are some of the values you want to live by?

Lead participants through the following activity...

Activity:

Think about values you want to live by and then breakout into smaller groups and share with each other. Did anything surprise you? What are some activities you can try that are aligned with values? Come back and share with the larger group.

3

Long-Term Goals and “Breaking it Down”

Lead participants through the following activity...

Now that you identified some of your values, choose a value you would like to spend more time on in the long term.

Having longer-term goals can help put your values into action.

What sorts of things get in the way of setting longer-term goals?

Often, people are worried about not achieving their long term-goals and feeling like a failure. Some people feel overwhelmed with identifying a goal. The “Breaking It Down” skill, and having multiple long term goals can help with decreasing these barriers.

Now think of a longer-term goal that fits the value you selected above.

(Remember that a goal should be something you can measure so that when you accomplish it, you will know.)

This goal may seem too big. It is important to break it down into smaller goals.

What steps do you need to do to achieve the longer-term goal?

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

4: _____

5: _____

6: _____

Now take step number 1, and break it down further.

What is the first thing you need to do to complete step number 1?

When and where will you do it?

Will you need to ask anything from anyone else to do it?

Is this doable? Will anything get in the way? How will you tackle any barriers to this smaller step?

What would be the next thing you need to do to complete step 1?

A big long-term goal can seem overwhelming and unachievable. Breaking it down into smaller steps makes it seem much more manageable.

If you find yourself discouraged or unable to meet the goal, try to break it down further into even smaller steps.

Keep moving through the steps until you get there. Track your progress by checking off when you have completed the steps along the way. Celebrate smaller achievements.

Ask group members to share specific activities they plan to do, along with an aligning value. If they get stuck, ask other group members to brainstorm activities for them.

4 Exposure

Have youth take turns reading the following...

Avoidance

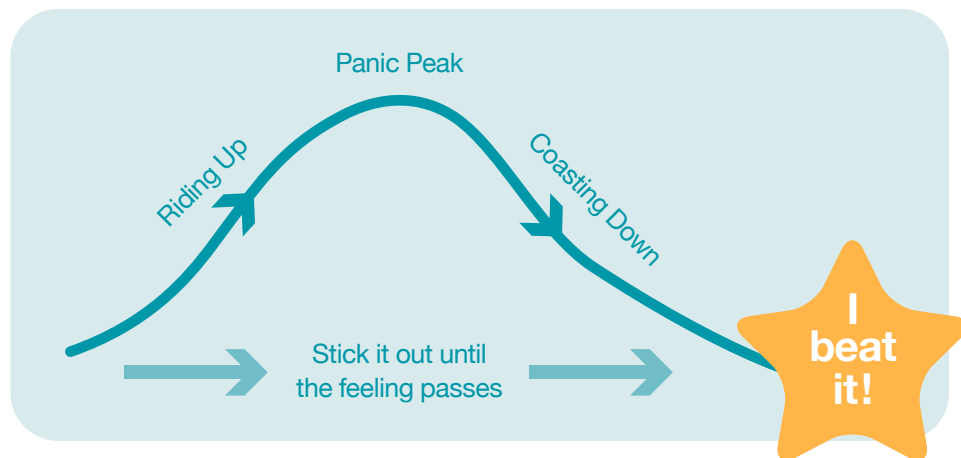
When something feels hard or scary, it makes sense that we would want to avoid it. Why? Because avoiding scary things makes us less anxious in the short term! But in the long term, avoidance actually maintains our anxiety because:

- Our brain continues to believe the feared situation is too overwhelming and we cannot handle it.
- Our brain does not get a chance to learn that we can get through the feared situation.
- We do not get a chance to practise skills to cope with anxiety.

The opposite of avoidance is exposure! In other words, facing our fears in a slow and planned way can help us move from a downward spiral of anxiety to an upward spiral of confidence.

Ride the Wave

What if we resist that urge to escape the feared situation and sit in the situation with the anxiety? This is what is meant by “exposure”. It is hard to sit with it, but our anxiety starts to decrease naturally over time — our brains can’t stay at a 5/5 anxiety forever. It eventually passes and our brain learns to be more confident the next time we’re in the situation. It’s not easy (even if it seems simple on the surface) and will take some practice.



Have youth discuss the idea of riding the wave and times they have already done this.

A Stepwise Approach to Exposure

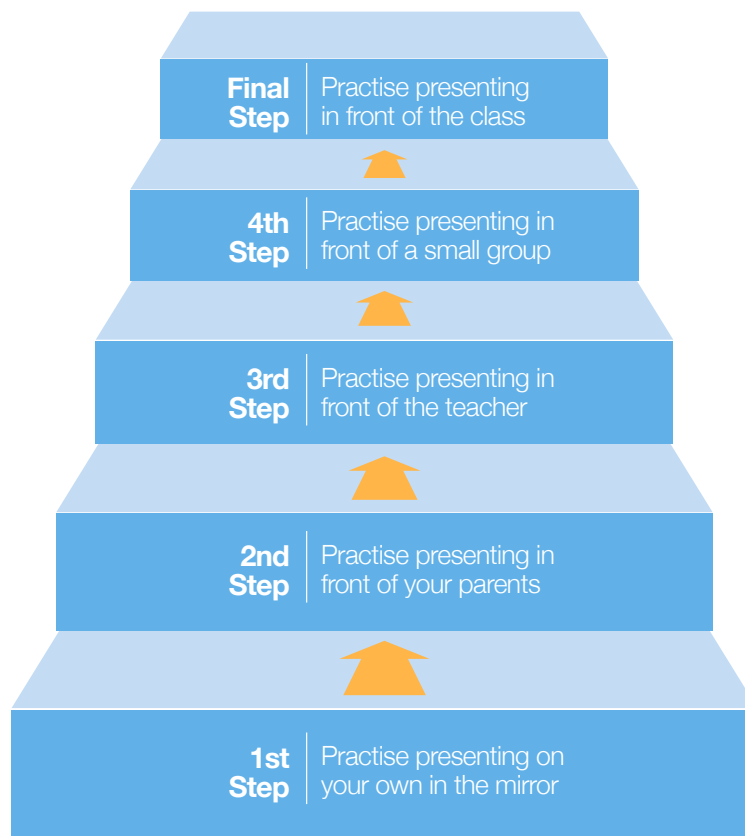
If you were scared of heights, starting exposure by going to the top a tall building and looking down probably wouldn't help your anxiety! Why? Because doing the scariest thing first is overwhelming. It is more effective to plan small steps towards slowly facing your fears.

With each step, ask youth to come up with their own example. Common examples of feared situations might include doing a job interview, asking peers to hang out outside of school, or joining a new club at school.

- Start by thinking of a situation that causes you 5/5 anxiety.
- Then think of situations that are similar, but cause less anxiety.
- Next, rank the situations in order of how much anxiety they cause, like an “anxiety staircase” (see image below).
- Then, intentionally put yourself in the situation that causes you the least fear (the 1st step) and allow the anxiety to come and go by riding the wave.
- Once you've learned how to feel more confident at the first step, move up the staircase to the next most anxiety-provoking situation and repeat.

Example:

Giving a presentation gives Saadia 5/5 anxiety and her goal is to be able to give a presentation in front of the class. Her anxiety staircase might look like this diagram (read it from bottom to top):



Saadia starts with the 1st step and notices the anxiety rise to 4/5 and fall. She continues to do the 1st step over several days. When peak anxiety is a 2/5 and she feels more confident at the 1st step, she moves on to the 2nd step and challenges herself a little bit more. Taking it step by step, she can eventually get to her goal without being completely overwhelmed. At any given step, it may take days or weeks before she's ready to move to the next one. If she's overwhelmed with moving up a step, she can pull back a bit to an exposure activity that's still somewhat challenging, but doable. Eventually, she is able to present in front of her class with only 2/5 anxiety.

Here are some strategies to help with riding the wave of anxiety:

Have youth take turns reading each strategy and commenting on whether they think it would be helpful for them...

- **Self-Validation.** Without judgment, acknowledge that it makes sense to feel some anxiety in the feared situation.
- **Imagine a wave.** Instead of fighting the feelings or worries, let them come and go. Remind yourself that the intensity of anxiety will eventually pass.
- **Use relaxation exercises.** Breathe deeply, listen to soothing music, visualize a peaceful place.
- **Distract yourself from the urge to escape.** Distraction is different from complete avoidance: you are still physically present with the feared situation, but your attention is drawn elsewhere to help tolerate it. Some examples include:
 - › invite a friend to have a conversation about something distracting
 - › count backwards from 100
 - › name as many places as you can that start with the letter “A”.

5 Home Practice

Assign the following home practice:

This week either:

1. Try out the first steps towards a long-term goal that fits with your values, or
2. Try out the first steps of an “anxiety staircase” as part of an exposure plan that fits for you.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Power Up Behavioural Activation and Exposure



Session 4

Breaking Down Barriers

1 Review

One option for home practice review to guide youth through the following questions....

Were you able to work towards your long-term goal this week? How did it go?

Were you able to face any fears this week? How did it go?

2 What Gets in the Way?

Have youth take turns reading the following...

Sometimes, our beliefs can make it hard to change our activities. Which of the following thoughts can get in the way of doing exposure exercises or activities you enjoy? What are some “balanced thoughts” that might be helpful?

Activity: With a partner, choose one or two of the negative thoughts and write down more balanced thoughts for the situation. Here are some questions that can help you come up with more balanced ways of thinking:

- What is a way to think with more self-compassion?
- What would you say to a friend?
- What’s a more realistic way of thinking?
- What’s a more helpful way of thinking?

| Negative thoughts | Balanced thoughts |
|--|--|
| 1. Doing activities or exposure won’t help my emotions. | <i>Optional response: Sometimes activities will help my mood/ anxiety, and sometimes they won’t.</i> |
| 2. People won’t believe I am struggling if I look like I am having fun. | <i>Optional response: Other people may have their own beliefs about what it looks like to be depressed or anxious. I know what I feel inside, regardless of what I look like on the outside; depression and anxiety can look different for everyone.</i> |
| 3. I don’t deserve to do activities that I enjoy. | <i>Optional response: Deciding to do enjoyable activities is not about whether or not I deserve to do these activities; it is more about whether or not they will help me.</i> |
| 4. If I have fun, it will eventually end, and that will lead to more sadness or anxiety. | <i>Optional response: Pleasure comes and goes. Sadness and anxiety also come and go. I may as well let myself enjoy fun times when I can.</i> |
| 5. If I do things that I enjoy, I will also have to expose myself to stressful events. | <i>Optional response: If I avoid stress, I also avoid doing things that are enjoyable. I will need to learn how to manage stress to also be able to experience pleasure — and the best way to do that is to get more experience doing activities that may seem stressful at first.</i> |
| 6. I will be too concerned with thoughts like, “I should be having more fun” or “I could be having more fun.” | <i>Optional response: There is no standard amount of “fun” to be had — everyone’s experience is different, and there is no pressure to feel a certain way about an activity.</i> |
| 7. I won’t have enough energy to do exposure or activities. | <i>Optional response: Doing activities often brings more energy.</i> |
| 8. Exposure will be too overwhelming for me. | <i>Optional response: By pacing my exposures in small steps, and combining them with relaxation exercises, I can make exposures manageable. In the end, I will be less overwhelmed than when I started.</i> |

Ask which thoughts are prominent for people. If there are common ones, discuss these in more detail. Ask if there are specific alternative thoughts that might be helpful.

If you get the sense that people struggle with the belief, “I don’t have enough energy to do something,” have the group members rate their energy on a scale of 0–10. Then direct them to get up and move around — even go for a walk outside on their own and then come back to the room and rate their energy. Have people comment on what they noticed. Many people will note an increased energy level, which can be helpful in showing how being active can actually increase our energy level. (Knowing this can help to motivate people as well.)

The examples of depressive and anxious thoughts on the left side of the chart above can be common, but are unlikely to be helpful. Remember that these depressive and anxious thoughts are beliefs and not facts. These beliefs can lead to avoiding activities you enjoy. If you never start an activity, there won’t be a chance to challenge these depressive and anxious beliefs, and this can lead to more difficulties.

Discuss if participants agree or disagree.

If you have additional depressive and anxious beliefs that you experience, try to think about balanced thoughts as well.

| Negative thoughts | Balanced thoughts |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

3 Getting Unstuck: How to motivate yourself to change routines

Changing up your routine to be more active or face your fears can be difficult. We all fall into habits in how we spend our time. Perhaps shifting our activity is difficult because our current activities do something for us. Fill out the chart below as it relates to you, in the order of the numbers indicated in the boxes.

Note that the Pros of continuing a routine probably overlap with the cons of changing a routine – but asking the question in a different way gives a better understanding of the situation. In the same way, the cons of continuing a routine overlap with the pros of changing a routine.

Alternative options for this activity are to:

- Do it as a group, drawing the table on the white board and discussing the pros and cons of continuing routines versus shifting them or
- Have individuals do the pros and cons activity below, starting with a specific activity they have targeted (e.g., going to the gym).

| Action | Pros | Cons |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Continuing my current routine | 1. (Do this one first) | 3. (Do this one third) |
| Changing my activities to better fit the “4 targets” or challenge my anxiety through exposure | 4. (Do this one last) | 2. (Do this one second) |

The order of completing the boxes is intentional as it guides youth from their current stance to a different one. Boxes 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 may yield similar responses, but may also elicit new information when the issue is looked at from different angles. Completing all four boxes is important to get a complete picture.

Does this help motivate you to change up your routine?

Collaboratively, facilitators and youth may discuss whether there is a way to break away from reinforcers that maintain depressive activities.

4 Wrapping Up

Look at the list of skills we have discussed in this module. Put a '✓' in each column to rate the extent to which you have used the skills in your life.

Have youth complete the table below, or use the table below to structure a discussion around all of the skills in this module.

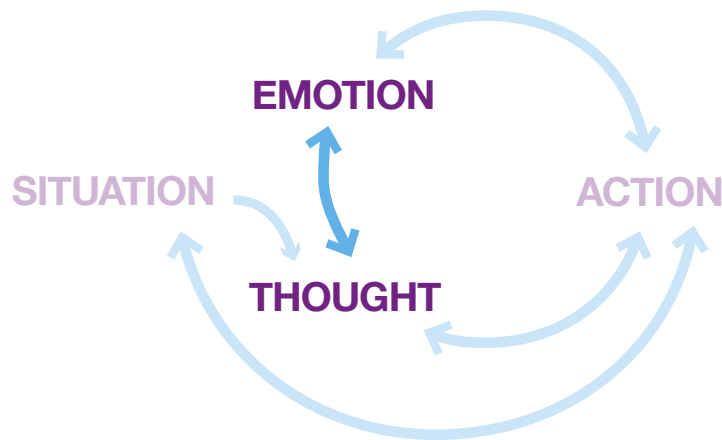
| Skills | Skill Use | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Haven't thought about using it | Thought about using it, but did not use | Used it, but not helpful | Used it, and it was somewhat helpful | Used it, and it was really helpful |
| Labeling events, emotions, thoughts and actions | | | | | |
| Naming and rating the intensity of moods | | | | | |
| Noticing downward spirals | | | | | |
| Moving towards an upward spiral | | | | | |
| Targeting connection, success, enjoyment and values in activities | | | | | |
| Working towards long-term goals and "breaking it down" | | | | | |
| Exposure Activities | | | | | |
| Using "balanced thoughts" about activities to get around negative thoughts | | | | | |
| Pros and Cons of changing routines | | | | | |



1 Thoughts and Emotions

Our situation, thoughts, emotions and actions are all interconnected. We have some control over what thoughts we have and pay attention to. The thoughts we control can change the emotions we experience.

An optional activity is to ask participants to think of as many worries as they can for the next 30 seconds; then, for the next 30 seconds, try and recall as many positive memories as they can. Ask what did they notice when they did this?



Our emotions can affect our beliefs and our beliefs can affect our emotions.

Ask youth for examples of times when their mood led to their thoughts changing in a positive or negative way.

For example, Clara was on Instagram and noticed a bunch of pictures of her friends smiling and eating at a restaurant. If Clara is happy when she sees the pictures, she might think “I am glad my friends are having a good time!” or “My friends seem happy in this picture” — and remain happy. Whereas, if Clara were sad she might think, “how come they didn’t invite me? I guess they don’t want me around” and become more sad.

From time to time, you will have thoughts that can lead to negative emotions. The skills learned here can be used to manage these thoughts, to increase the control you have over your emotions.

2 Facts versus Beliefs

This section overlaps with content in Session 4 in Module 4: Communication and Relationships. Go into as much or as little detail as you see fit, and then move on to the next section, “Thought traps.”

First, it is important to know the difference between a fact and a belief.

Explain that facts are things that are most likely to be true. They are qualities of a person, place or thing that are observed through your five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell). If most people looked at the same person, place or thing, they would likely agree that the quality you observed is true.

Some participants might argue against this if they get academic about it. If this happens, you can acknowledge that if you get down to molecular physics, you might have good reason to disagree with these statements; however, for everyday life, we take these as facts.

Facts are what we can observe through our five senses: “I see...”, “I hear...”, “I feel...”, “I smell...”, “I taste...”. Facts can also be an internal experience. For example, “I am having racing thoughts right now” or “I am feeling anxious”.

Beliefs involve some personal interpretation of the facts. For example, “I am anxious and that must mean I am in danger”.

According to these definitions, which of the following can be facts and which are beliefs?

| Statement | Fact | Belief |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| “I can hear my dog barking” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “My dog is anxious” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “I feel angry” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “You are angry” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “I am a safe driver” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “I passed my driver’s test and don’t have any traffic tickets” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “These French fries taste salty” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “French fries taste good” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “Joey doesn’t like me” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “Joey spoke to me loudly” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “I feel lonely” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| “Nobody cares about me” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “Group is fun” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| “I like coming to group” | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Discuss the subtleties of some of these responses. For example, examine why “French fries taste good” is a belief — because not everyone would agree — but “These French fries taste salty” could be a fact. Note that the suggested responses above could be challenged; representing that these classifications are not straightforward.

3 Thought Traps

There are common patterns in how anxiety and depression can trap our thinking, making it more likely that anxiety or depression will stick around or get worse. Understanding these traps can remove power from the beliefs that aren't helpful for you.

Here are common ways depression or anxiety can trap someone's thinking:

Read or have participants read each thought trap. If they have examples of when this has happened in their own lives, invite that discussion.

- **The negative filter:** In this trap, someone may only pay attention to facts that support their negative beliefs and ignore facts that go against their beliefs. When people struggle with depression, they tend to pay attention only to the negative things that have happened in the past. When people struggle with anxiety, they tend to predict that only negative things will happen in the future.
- **Polarized thinking:** Someone may only see things as “all good” or “all bad” — they may have a difficult time seeing things as in between.
- **Overgeneralization:** Someone takes a small piece of information and assumes that it represents all other similar situations. One negative event means that the same outcome will keep happening over and over. Look for words like “always” and “never” — these usually mean that overgeneralization is happening.
- **Jumping to conclusions:** Someone may interpret a situation based on little information.
- **Catastrophizing:** Focusing on the “what ifs?”. This is the tendency to predict that the worst possible event will happen in the future. This is very common for people who struggle with anxiety.
- **Personalization:** “It’s all because of me.” Events that happen (whether positive or negative) often have many different causes. People with depression tend to think that they have a bigger role in negative events than they actually do.
- **Emotional reasoning:** Feelings = truth. This is where we mistake our emotion-driven belief for a fact. For example, feeling guilty about your role in an event does not directly mean you have done something wrong; or feeling panicked about a situation does not necessarily mean you are in immediate danger.

Ask youth which thought traps they notice in themselves.

Note that the idea that our thinking patterns are maladaptive could be invalidating. Feel free to discuss this openly in the group. Discuss how identifying thought traps might be helpful and how it might be unhelpful (e.g., feeling like you can't trust yourself, leading to more anxiety). Discuss how sometimes our thoughts accurately represent the facts, in which case, skills in the “Problem Solving” module may be more helpful.

4 Discussion Activity

Lead the group through the following activity...

For this activity, there is the option to break out into smaller groups (or pairs) or stay together as a large group. Share with your group (or partner) a time in the past week where you may have been caught in a thought trap. Can you name which type of thought trap it was?

With your group (or partner), talk about some options to think differently:

- What is a way to think with more self-compassion?
- What would you say to a friend who was having this thought?
- Is there a way to think about the situation more accurately?
- What's a more helpful way of thinking?

5 Home Practice

Assign the following home practice:

Notice your thought patterns over the next week and see if you notice any times you are caught in a thought trap. Try naming the specific type of thought trap(s) you notice. Try some strategies used in the breakout session to think differently and see if that changes your mood.

Write down your personal goal over the next week, based on the skills discussed today:

Reboot Cognitive Restructuring



Session 2 Thinking it Through

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, guide the youth through the following activities...

Which of the following statements could be a fact and which would be a belief?

| Statement | Fact | Belief |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Most sparrows can fly | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The teacher is angry today | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| I like ice cream | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| That person always lies | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| I think Instagram is really cool | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| There are more than four people in the room | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It is after 3:00 p.m. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

As per the prior week's related exercise – some of the above suggested responses can be challenged in discussion with the youth (sometimes it is not 100% definitive which category the statement falls into).

Which thought trap goes with which scenario?

| Thought traps | Scenarios |
|---|---|
| 1. Negative filter <i>d</i> | a. "Tom and Dina were walking down the hall together — they must be dating." |
| 2. Polarized thinking <i>e</i> | b. "My teacher was acting differently today — I think it was because of the question I asked earlier." |
| 3. Overgeneralization <i>g</i> | c. "I am angry with my dad — it means that he did something to intentionally hurt me." |
| 4. Jumping to conclusions <i>a</i> | d. "The forecast calls for scattered showers with breaks of sun — the whole day is ruined." |
| 5. Catastrophizing <i>f</i> | e. "Jenna is horrible — she gave me the worst look today." |
| 6. Personalization <i>b</i> | f. "I was late for class today — my teacher will surely call my parents to have me grounded." |
| 7. Emotional reasoning <i>c</i> | g. "Charlie said she didn't like my shoes — it must mean she doesn't like me." |

The answers in italics above are suggestions; often thought traps overlap and one scenario can be conceptualized as multiple thought traps.

What types of thought traps did you notice this past week?

2 Balanced Thoughts

Lead youth through the following steps using the “Balancing Your Thoughts” worksheet as a guide.

One option is to use a common example situation to demonstrate the steps: “You text your friend, and 2 hours later, they haven’t texted you back” (see next page for this example in the worksheet).

It is really important to be able to create balanced thoughts in order to counteract thought traps. See the “Balancing Your Thoughts” worksheet. These are steps that you can use:

Step 1: Identify the situation. Be specific: Where were you? What time was it? Who was there? What was said?

Step 2: Name the emotion (e.g., sad, anxious, angry) and rate its intensity from 0 to 5.

Step 3: Identify your “train of thought.” We typically have several thoughts (or beliefs) that pop up with any situation. List your thoughts that seem to come automatically.

Step 4: Within your “train of thoughts”, identify the one thought that leads to your strongest emotion. We will call this your “reflex thought”.

Step 5: List evidence for and evidence against this reflex thought. Go back to facts for this part.

Step 6: Take one fact from the “evidence for” column and one fact from the “evidence against” column, and connect the two with the word “AND.”

Step 7: Rate the intensity of your emotion again — did it decrease?

Lead the group through the following activity...

In breakout groups (or pairs), try the above steps with the following examples:

- Sam was working at the clothing store as a cashier. There was a long line-up. The next customer in line came up and said “You know, you really need to be more efficient. I’m not coming back here again — you’ve wasted my time.” Sam noticed a train of thought including “I am bad at this job,” “This woman is annoying,” “I don’t like this job,” “I am too slow,” “I can’t do anything right.” They noticed feeling anxious, angry and sad.
- Taylor was at the gym using a weightlifting machine. A staff member approached them with a stern look on his face, leaning forward and telling Taylor loudly that they needed to get off the machine because “You’re doing it wrong and it’s not safe.” Taylor had lots of thoughts, including “I made him angry,” “I messed up again,” “Other people at the gym are judging me,” “I shouldn’t be here,” “I should just go home,” “I can’t do anything right.” Taylor felt embarrassed and sad.

BALANCING YOUR THOUGHTS

SITUATION: *E.g.: I texted my friend 2 hours ago, and I haven't received a text back yet.*

EMOTION: *Sad 4/5*

TRAIN OF THOUGHTS

They forgot about me.

I am not important to them.

They don't want to hang out with me.

They don't like me.

I am not important to anybody.

Nobody wants to hang out with me.

REFLEX THOUGHT:

Nobody wants to hang out with me.

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Reflex Thought

EVIDENCE FOR

I texted my friend 2 hours ago, and I haven't received a text back yet.

I feel lonely.

I haven't met up with any of my peers outside of school for 5 days.

EVIDENCE AGAINST

My friend that I texted has told me spontaneously that he wants to meet up some time.

Other friends text me when I reach out to them.

People seem to want to talk to me before and after classes at school. We laugh and joke together.

Create a balanced thought. Write down one **fact** that supports your reflex thought and one **fact** that contradicts it; then put the word "AND" in between these two facts.

I texted my friend 2 hours ago, and I haven't received a text back yet.

AND

My friend that I texted has told me spontaneously that he wants to meet up some time.

More Strategies to Change Your Thinking

Describe each of the following options; or, ask group members to take turns reading out the following. You can use the example listed, or continue with the example of a friend not texting back (as previously described), or use a different example that a youth has brought up.

After identifying the situation, “reflex thought” and emotion, here are some other options for how to change your thinking. These are alternative options to “Creating a Balanced Thought” discussed in the last section. Look through the examples below for each option to help understand how they might work.

Option A. Brainstorm and assess

List other ways of interpreting the situation. “What else could be going on?” Try to keep an open mind.

Once you brainstorm other possible ways to think about the situation (i.e. interpretations), see if you can identify which is the most realistic. To help with identifying the most realistic perspective, you can list “evidence for” and “evidence against” for the “reflex thought” as well as up to three other interpretations.

Listing “evidence for and against” for each brainstormed alternative interpretation can take up a lot of time. It is recommended to only do one or two examples at most to be sure there is time to review the other options below.

Consider the following example:

Clara was on Instagram and noticed a bunch of pictures of her friends smiling and eating at a restaurant. Her reflex thought is, “They didn’t invite me, because they don’t like me”. She notices feeling quite a lot of sadness about this.

Other than her reflex thought, what else could be going on? Choose up to three other interpretations to assess the evidence for and evidence against each possibility.

1. There was a technical issue with the texting app, so I didn’t get the invite.

2. They met up spontaneously without planning and didn’t have time to reach out to me.

3. The restaurant table only seats 6 people; they don’t allow more without a reservation.

Option B. “Act-as-if”

An “act-as-if” belief is what you will assume to be true, at least temporarily, so that you can carry on until you know more facts. Using the evidence and your own judgment, choose an explanation that would be the most helpful as an “act-as-if” belief.

If Clara behaves as though all her friends don't want to hang out with her, she may call them to accuse them and push them away. Or she may avoid them, leading to feelings of isolation. If she acts as though they didn't invite her because it was a last-minute arrangement (rather than because "they don't like me"), then she would more likely be friendly with them. When she hung out with them again, she might notice they still smiled and laughed with her — providing more evidence against the reflex thought.

Option C. Play detective

Get more facts. Try to be open and curious — not suspicious or accusatory. Seek out ways to get facts that will help you know what's going on. Try out "experiments" to test out your beliefs.

As Clara looks through the pictures more thoroughly, she notices that her ex-boyfriend is at the dinner; and she looks through her calendar and notices that it is his birthday today. In talking to one of her closer friends, Clara finds out that her ex-boyfriend has said that he is still finding the break-up difficult. Later that evening, Clara texts one of her friends to invite her to hang out the following weekend. She does this to test her reflex thought. Her friend texts back "for sure!" Clara realizes that this response does not fit her belief that her friends don't like her.

Use the "Changing Your Thoughts" worksheet to guide you through these steps for your own real-life examples. You can use the worksheet in session, try it for home practice or both.

Discuss the following question...

Remember you have many options when faced with thought traps: (1) Examine the thought with "evidence for" and "evidence against", (2) Create a balanced thought, (3) Brainstorm alternative ways of thinking, (4) "Act-as-if" a more helpful thought were true, and (5) Play detective. Which is your favourite strategy so far?

4 Practising Changing Your Thoughts

The above content tends to take much of the session time. The following exercises are intended to consolidate the learning, though may be skipped to stay within the time limits. Take advantage of the many opportunities in other sessions to consolidate the skills above – particularly in exercises where depressive/anxious thoughts are to be replaced with balanced thoughts.

In break out groups (or pairs), choose some of the common situations below and use the “Changing Your Thoughts” worksheet (p. 49) to try out the different strategies that have been discussed.

- Phil was texting a guy he recently met at school with whom he is hoping to hang out more. He sent two messages in the morning saying “Hey” and “We should hang out this weekend.” It is three hours later and he hasn’t heard back. He notices a train of thought: “He doesn’t want to hang out with me,” “No one wants to hang out with me,” “I don’t have any friends,” “I will always be alone.” He notices feeling sad and then thinks “I’m so sensitive — I shouldn’t feel this way.”
- Renita has missed some school due to being depressed. One afternoon, her mother says to her, “I’m really worried that you’re not getting to school — I just don’t want you to get behind.” Renita notices a train of thought: “My mom is always on my back,” “I am stupid — I’ll never get these credits,” “I am a disappointment,” “I am failing at life,” “Oh no, I’m getting angry again.”. Then she notices a feeling of numbness and emptiness.
- Ravi was hanging out at home after school. His father came in the front door, slurring his words and stumbling around the room. His father yelled at him for not doing his chores and told him to go to his room. Ravi was startled and went to his room — and noticed this train of thought: “My dad is drunk again — this is hopeless,” “I am a bad son,” “This will never end,” “I can’t seem to get it right.” He noticed feeling angry and sad.
- Sam was in class when they needed to go to the bathroom. They raised their hand and asked the teacher to go. The teacher said “Not now, Sam.” Sam noticed this train of thought: “The teacher doesn’t trust me,” “He’s transphobic,” “I never get a break,” “I must have done something wrong,” “Why me?”, “Why do I get so riled up?” They notice feeling shame and anger.

5 Home Practice

Assign the following home practice:

Over the next week, try each of the following:

- Examining “evidence for” and “evidence against” a reflex thought
- Creating a balanced thought
- Brainstorming
- Using “act-as-if” thoughts
- Playing detective
- Examining the thought

Notice if your mood improves with these strategies.

Write down your personal goal for the next week, based on the skills discussed today.

Changing Your Thoughts

INSTRUCTIONS



Describe

- a) The situation—use only facts and be specific: where? when? who was there? what was said? what happened?
- b) Your emotion—if there were many emotions, list the most prominent one; how intense was it on a scale of 0 to 5?
- c) Your need—which need was threatened? food/water? sense of safety? relationships? self-esteem? sense of control? sense of identity?



Explore your options

- a) Identify your reflex thought—this is the thought that automatically comes to mind, provoking the strong emotion you listed in section (1).
- b) Brainstorm other possible ways to interpret the situation; be open to many possibilities.



Assess

- a) The reflex thought—what is the evidence for the reflex thought? What is evidence against? Use only facts.
- b) Choose another three possible interpretations you brainstormed in section (2) and list evidence for and against these.



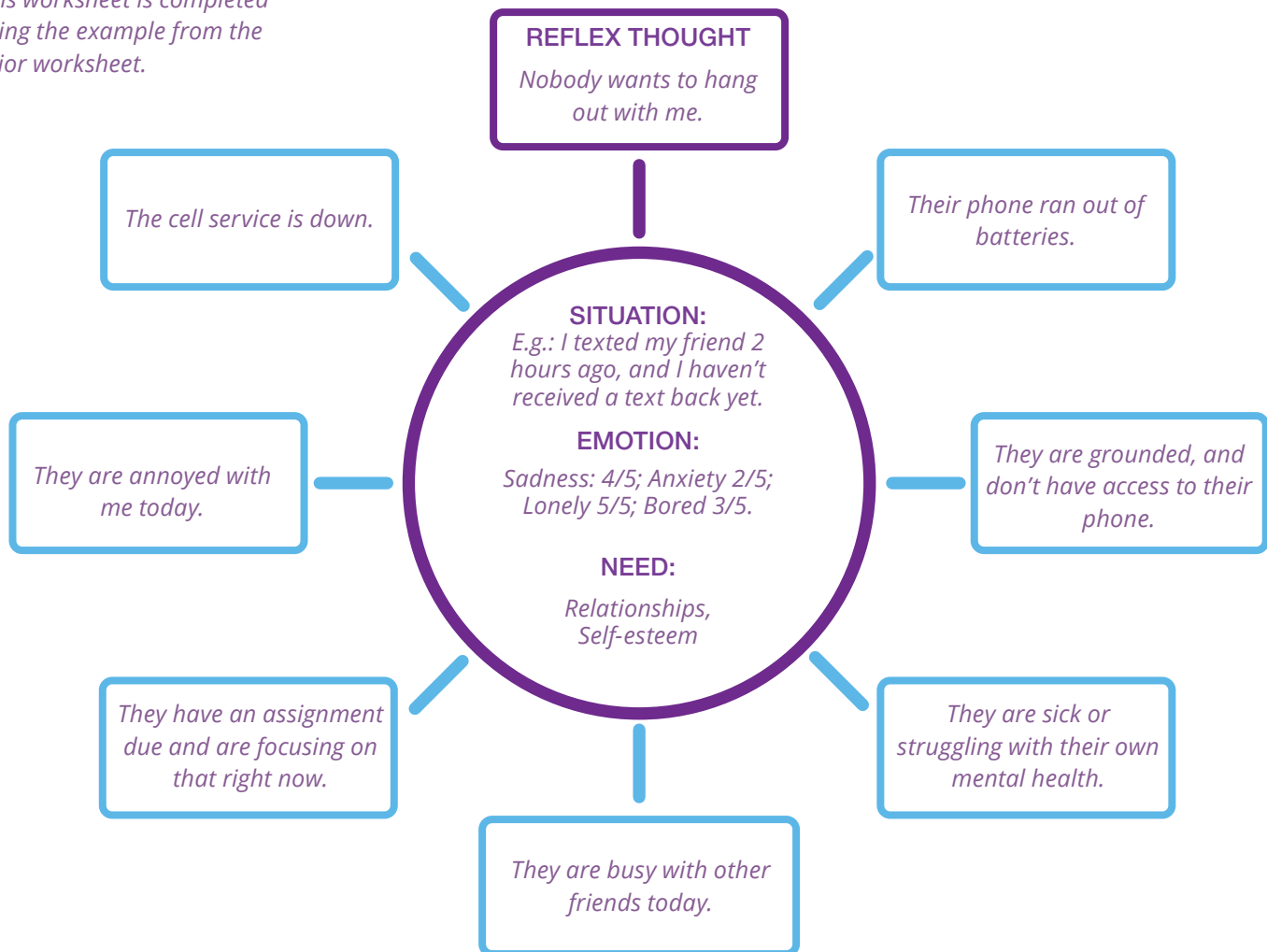
Take action

Choose any of these:

- a) Choose an “as-if” belief that would be most helpful to take on.
- b) Play detective—get more information.
- c) Create a balanced thought—state one piece of evidence for your reflex thought, then state one piece of evidence against it; put the word “AND” in between them.
- d) Reflect—did your emotion change after any of these steps? If not, try a different strategy.

Changing Your Thoughts

This worksheet is completed using the example from the prior worksheet.



BELIEF ONE (REFLEX THOUGHT)

Nobody wants to hang out with me

EVIDENCE FOR

My friend didn't text me back

AGAINST

People joke around with me after class

BELIEF TWO

They are grounded

EVIDENCE FOR

They are often grounded

AGAINST

I don't know of any reason they might be in trouble today.

BELIEF THREE

They are struggling with their own mental health

EVIDENCE FOR

They tell me that they sometimes have bad days.

AGAINST

They seemed happy a few days ago when last saw them.

BELIEF FOUR

They are annoyed with me today.

EVIDENCE FOR

They tell me sometimes they get annoyed with me and need space.

AGAINST

They seemed happy a few days ago when last saw them.

Changing Your Thoughts

OPTIONS FOR WHAT TO DO NEXT

1

Choose an “act-as-if” thought. Which belief would be the most helpful to try on “as if it were true” until you have more information? How would your actions change if you take on this “act-as-if” thought?

They are struggling with their own mental health

I would respond to them with more compassion the next time I see them; rather than irritated.

2

Play detective. Do you need to get more information? How will you go about getting it?

I can wait a few more days when I see them at school, and see how they act with me then.

3

Create a balanced thought.

Write down one fact that supports your reflex thought and one fact that contradicts it; then put the word “AND” in between these two facts.

I texted my friend 2 hours ago, and I haven't received a text back yet.

AND

My friend that I texted has told me spontaneously that he wants to meet up some time.

4

Reflect. Has changing your thinking helped your mood? Are your needs met? If not, try a different thought or a different skill to change your mood.

I think so. It does make me open to the idea that our relationship is okay. My sadness is as 3/5 instead of 4/5.

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Session 3

Core Beliefs and Taking in the Positive

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercises...

Choose a time this past week that you had a strong emotion.

Work through the situation starting with:

- Identifying the situation, emotion and train of thoughts
- Identifying the reflex thought leading to the strong emotion
- Creating lists of “evidence for” and “evidence against” the reflex thought

Now choose any one or more of the following strategies to see if it would help reduce the intensity of the emotion:

- Create a balanced thought (using evidence for and against the reflex thought).
- Brainstorm other ways the situation could be interpreted (also listing evidence for and against alternative beliefs).
- Use an “act-as-if” thought that might be more helpful to work from.
- Play detective: get more information, run an “experiment.”

2 Core Beliefs

If the group is large (e.g. ≥8 members), consider splitting the group up in half, with each facilitator taking one of the smaller groups. This allows for more intimate discussion.

Have members read each of the following paragraphs, taking turns and pausing to discuss after each paragraph.

There are common core beliefs in anxiety and/or depression that can make life hard. Core beliefs are strong — they often have been there for a while and may be based on messages you received when you were younger or may be due to messages the anxiety and/or depression has been giving you for some time, over and over again.

They are still beliefs — and not facts. This is important to note, as it removes some of their power.

Often, “reflex thoughts” are very much related to the themes of core beliefs. Repeated use of the strategies we have already talked about can chip away at these core beliefs.

Let youth know that it might be hard to accept the alternative beliefs at first — it needs time and repeated experience to shift perspective.

Consider the following common core beliefs and then, as a group, come up with more balanced thoughts. Try to stick to facts (no interpretations, judgments, or predictions). See if using the balanced thoughts as “act-as-if” beliefs helps chip away at the core beliefs.

Another strategy to create an alternative balanced thought is to ask yourself:

- What is a way to think with more self-compassion?
- What would you say to a friend who was having this thought?
- Is there a way to think about the situation more accurately?
- What’s a more helpful way of thinking?

Ask youth to take turns reading the following core beliefs and have the group come up with more balanced thoughts. If they struggle, some suggestions are included in the facilitator notes below. If time is limited, you can ask youth which core beliefs are most relevant to them and focus on those only.

| Depressive core beliefs | Alternative balanced thoughts |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| I am unlikeable. | <i>Some people will like me, and some people won't. No one is hated by everyone. No one is loved by everyone. I can also learn how to act in a way so that I am true to myself, and people will still want to be around me.</i> |
| I am not good at anything. | <i>I am skilled at some things and not skilled at others. I can also learn and practice new things so that I can become more skilled.</i> |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| I don't measure up. | <i>For whatever reason, other people may have standards that I don't meet; however, these are unrealistic for me now. I can set my own standard for what is meaningful in my life.</i> |
| The future is hopeless. | <i>The future is uncertain. Things change all the time. One small change in my life can lead to bigger changes. One small change that is positive could lead to bigger changes that are positive.</i> |
| People can't be trusted. | <i>Some people can be trusted — depending on the person and what I am trusting them with. I will need to trust some people sometimes to get by; I will also need to be careful who I trust and when I trust them.</i> |
| People will leave me. | <i>Relationships come and go with everyone. I will need to enjoy them while they are here and cope with it if they end. If people leave, it does not reflect on my self-worth. With each interaction, I can learn something about how to improve relationships moving forward. Relationships that end can also make room for new ones to come.</i> |
| I am a bad person. | <i>I have done things I regret. I have done the best I could with what I had. I am taking the time to learn how to do better. Sometimes, I do things that I am proud of.</i> |

The following core beliefs often are associated with anxiety:

| Anxiety core beliefs | Alternative balanced thoughts |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| The world is dangerous. | <i>Some aspects of the world are dangerous, some are safe. I can learn how to tell the difference. To get the most out of life, I will need to take some risks.</i> |
| I will lose control. | <i>Somethings in life are under control and some are not. I can learn how to tell the difference. I can learn how to tolerate things not in my control.</i> |
| Uncertainty is unbearable. | <i>I can learn how to tolerate uncertainty. I can also learn how to face uncertainty with curiosity, rather than anxiety. I can learn how to cope with whatever happens in the future.</i> |
| I can't trust myself. | <i>There are times when I can trust myself and times when I might make mistakes. I can learn how to tell the difference. I can also learn from my mistakes and see them as an opportunity to grow.</i> |

3 Hearing and “Taking In” Positive Thoughts

We often aren't used to hearing and “taking in” positive feedback; sometimes we may not be used to giving it, either. Many people are quick to point out flaws in others, with the intention of making their lives better; however, this focus on negatives can instead be discouraging.

It is particularly challenging to allow the positive feedback to be received when depressive or anxiety-based core beliefs are working to fight against the feedback. Hearing and allowing yourself to believe positive feedback is a skill and takes practice.

In group, you can practise giving and receiving positive feedback in an exercise guided by the group facilitators.

As a facilitator, start the process by saying one positive thing about each person in the room. Focus on positive traits and habits, rather than appearance. Then have the youth say one positive thing about each other person in the group. If the group is large, split it into two smaller groups for this exercise. Acknowledge that this exercise can feel awkward at first.

Write down the positive comments people in this group have said about you:

Ask youth some of the following questions:

- *What is it like to hear these positive comments?*
- *What do you notice about your emotions when you hear them?*
- *What do you notice about your thoughts when you hear them?*
- *Did any “thought traps” come up? If you notice negative thoughts counteracting the positive comments, try and let them go — even if only temporarily.*

4

Home Practice

Assign the following home practice:

Over the next week, try to notice your strong emotions, and then choose one of the following strategies:

- Identify the core belief that the feeling is coming from, and use the balanced thought list to counteract it.
- Practise “taking in” positive thoughts about yourself — and watch out for “thought traps” taking over.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Reboot Cognitive Restructuring



Session 4

Letting Go of Judgments and Targeting Anxious Thoughts

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercises.

Match the depressive core belief to the more balanced thought:

| Anxiety core beliefs | Alternative balanced thoughts |
|--|--|
| 1. The world is a dangerous place d | a. As long as I have at least partial control of the situation, I can be okay. |
| 2. I will lose control a | b. Not knowing what comes next can be scary, but I can cope with most things that come my way. If I don't cope, I can learn from the experience. |
| 3. Uncertainty is unbearable b | c. I can learn when to trust my judgment and when I might need to reassess it. |
| 4. I can't trust myself c | d. Some situations are safer than others. |

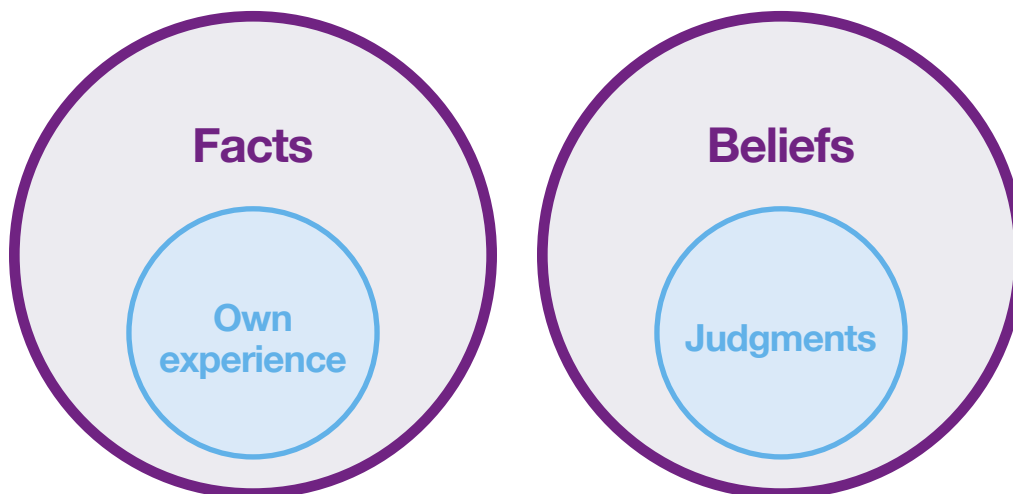
| Depressive core beliefs | Alternative balanced thoughts |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. I am unlikeable <i>f</i> | a. The future is uncertain. Things change all the time. One small change in my life can lead to bigger changes. One small change that is positive could lead to bigger changes that are positive. |
| 2. I am not good at anything <i>c</i> | b. Relationships come and go with everyone. I will need to enjoy them while they are here and cope with it if they end. If people leave, it does not reflect on my self-worth; the circumstances didn't allow for it this time. With each relationship that happens, I learn something new. Relationships that end make room for new ones to come. |
| 3. I don't measure up <i>e</i> | c. I am skilled at some things and not skilled at others. I can also learn and practise new things so that I become more skilled. |
| 4. The future is hopeless <i>a</i> | d. I have done things I regret. I have done the best I could with what I had. I do the best I can with what I have. I am taking the time to learn how to do better. Sometimes, I do things that I am proud of. |
| 5. People can't be trusted <i>g</i> | e. I can set my own standard for what is meaningful in my life. |
| 6. People will leave me <i>b</i> | f. Some people will like me and some people won't. No one is hated by everyone. No one is loved by everyone. I can also learn how to act in a way so that I am true to myself and people will still want to be around me. |
| 7. I am a bad person <i>d</i> | g. Some people can be trusted — depending on the person and what I am trusting them with. I will need to trust some people sometimes to get by; I will also need to be careful who I trust and when I trust them. |

2 Letting Go of Judging Thoughts

You can poll the youth to see if they prefer talking about Letting go of judgments or targeting anxiety (section 3 of this session). If it is the latter, start with section 3 and come back to section 2 later in the session.

Have youth take turns reading the following section.

In the first session of this skill set, we discussed how facts and beliefs are different.



All judgments are a type of belief — they are never facts.

For this concept, it is helpful to think of judgments as including any of the following phrases:

- something is “good” or “bad”
- something “should” or “shouldn’t” be
- something is “right” or “wrong”

Judgments tend to intensify emotions. Reframing the judgment as situational facts and your own experience can help regulate your emotions.

As youth to take turns answering the following examples.

Try this: For each of these situations, which thought would lead to more anger? Circle whether each thought is describing a fact or belief.

1. Jordan is angry with Meshal after Meshal refused to help him with his homework. Jordan might have one of two types of thoughts:

- a. “Meshal is such a jerk!” **Fact or Judgment**
- b. “I am angry with Meshal.” **Fact or Judgment**

2. Maria got 50% on a test — she was hoping for 70%. Which thought will lead to less intense emotion?

a. "I didn't do as well as I had hoped." **Fact or Judgment**

b. "I am so stupid — I can't seem to get it right." **Fact or Judgment**

The judgments that we make treat our beliefs as though they are facts. This can also lead to stronger emotions than is helpful for the situation.

Have youth take turns reading the following examples.

Instead of using judgments, the following phrases can help us to think differently about the situation so the emotions do not become so intense:

- I "like" or "don't like" something.
- I *think* something is "helpful" or "harmful."
- I *think* something is "dangerous" or "safe."
- I *feel* anxious when my teacher calls on me in class.

When you use the phrases above, this can change something from being a judgment to being a fact. You are stating your experience about a situation. "Helpful/harmful" and "dangerous/safe" tend to be words that don't intensify emotions as much — and still help you move forward.

Remember that the judgments you make about others and the judgments you make about yourself come from your unique perspective and the personal set of standards you have developed in your mind. You may find that letting go of judgments about others helps your own self-esteem.

Try this in breakout groups or pairs: Circle which of the following are judgments and which are facts. If it is a judgment, how could you say the same thing without judgment?

My sister is so annoying. **Fact or Judgment**

I am annoyed with my sister today.

I am bored in the CBT group. **Fact or Judgment**

I worry that it is unsafe to meet people on the internet. **Fact or Judgment**

You shouldn't judge. **Fact or Judgment**

I don't think it is helpful to judge in this situation.

I should be happier than I am. **Fact or Judgment**

I don't like the way my teacher talks to me. **Fact or Judgment**

It's not right that I have another assignment to do this week. **Fact or Judgment**
I don't like that have another assignment due this week.

Those shoes are awesome. **Fact or Judgment**
I like those shoes.

I find that some CBT skills are helpful for me, while others are not. **Fact or Judgment**

3 Targeting Anxious Thoughts

Have youth take turns reading the following skills.

Some people find the following strategies helpful when managing anxiety. Try some out to see if they are a fit for you.

- **Reassess the danger:** People struggling with anxiety often assess a situation to be much more dangerous than it is. They either predict that something dangerous will happen that is much more unlikely than is realistic, or they assess that any potential danger in a situation will be more severe than is realistic. Ask yourself:



- › How likely is it that I will be faced with the dangerous situation I am predicting?
- › If it does happen, how severe would it really be?

Use the skills discussed in Session 2 of this module to help work through these questions.

You may need to remind them of the skills: Identify the reflex thought, list evidence for/against, create a balanced thought, use an "act-as-if" strategy, play detective, brainstorm alternative interpretations of the situation.

Example:

Nico was hoping to ask a group of 4 friends he knows from school to hang out after class to play board games. He was really nervous about this, anticipating that he would stutter, his friends would laugh at him, and say "no way". He also predicted that his friends would stop talking to him all together and think "Nico's too needy".

He then asked himself: "How likely is it going to happen the way I am imagining it?" He reflected that when he has asked his friends to play cards during lunch, they joined in. He also asked himself "If it does happen, how severe would it really be?" He remembered that one of his friends is really friendly and often up to hanging out, so if some were to say "no", it would be unlikely that all four would be uninterested. Remembering these things helped reduce his anxiety.

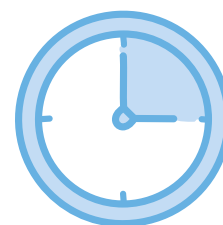
- **Increase your confidence in your ability to cope:** If you get the “what ifs?” and start to worry about a future stressful situation, imagine yourself being in that scenario and coping with it really well. Make a detailed plan for how you will cope. Change the movie in your mind from one where you fall apart to one where you are mastering the situation.



Example:

Nico imagined himself stuttering when asking his friends to join him for board games after class (the “what if” scenario). He then imagined himself saying to his friends “let me start again, I am just a bit nervous”, and imagined himself taking a breath and following through with his request (coping well). He imagined all his friends saying “no way” (“what if” scenario); then imagined himself thinking “well, I guess they would rather be doing other things” and signing up for the board game club at school where he might meet people with similar interests (coping well). He notices his anxiety go down as he practises this skill.

- **Set aside “worry time”:** Set a specific time (e.g. 7 p.m.) to allow yourself to have all the negative thoughts your brain will have. During that time, don’t do any other activities, like eating or watching TV. If you catch yourself having negative thoughts outside that specific time, say to yourself “I’ll save that to think about during my ‘worry time’.”



Ask youth which one(s) they like the most and think will be most helpful.

This discussion can also lead into a discussion about filling out the chart on the following page.

4 Wrapping Up

Look at the list of skills that we have discussed in this module. Put a '✓' in the appropriate column to rate the extent to which you have used each skill in your life.

Have youth complete the table below, or use the table below to structure a discussion around all of the skills in this module.

| Skills | Skill Use | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Haven't thought about using it | Thought about using it, but did not use | Used it, but not helpful | Used it, and it was somewhat helpful | Used it, and it was really helpful |
| Identifying thought traps | | | | | |
| Listing evidence for and evidence against | | | | | |
| Creating own balanced thought | | | | | |
| Brainstorming alternative interpretations | | | | | |
| Using "act-as-if" | | | | | |
| Playing detective (getting more information) | | | | | |
| Challenging depressive core belief | | | | | |
| Taking in positive feedback from others | | | | | |
| Letting go of judgments | | | | | |
| Targeting anxious thoughts | | | | | |

Level Up Problem Solving



Session 1

Self-validation and Defining Problems

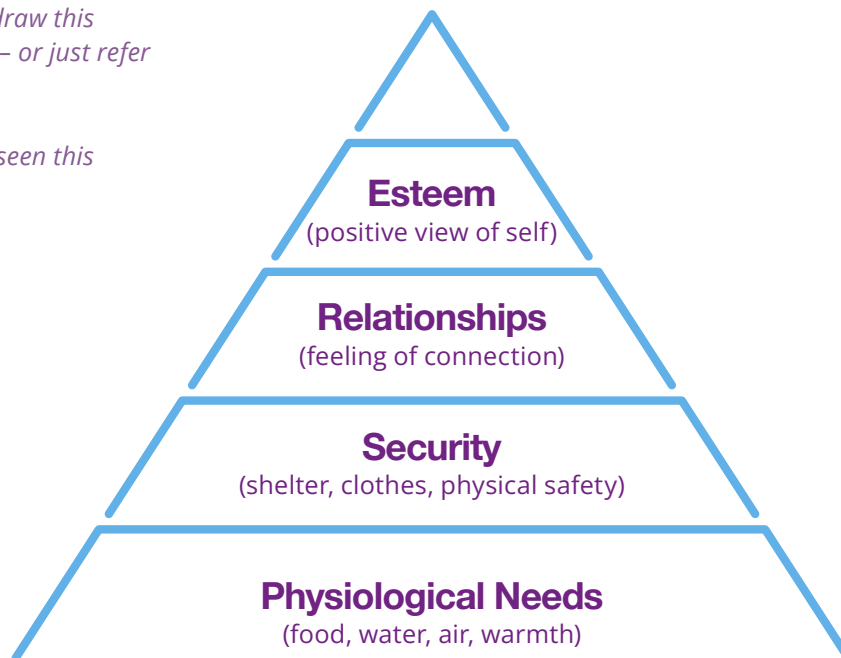
1 Emotions and Needs

One major reason we have emotions is to help us meet our needs.

In the 1940s, a psychologist named Abraham Maslow described a “hierarchy of needs,” and how people’s motivation to fulfill these needs can affect how they act. Included in this hierarchy are:

There is the option to draw this diagram on the board – or just refer to the handouts.

Ask youth if they have seen this diagram before.



There are two other needs that other theorists have talked a lot about:

Describe the “Sense of Identity” (i.e., what your values and preferences are) and “Sense of Control” (i.e. that you have options in whatever situation you are in)

_____ *Sense of Identity* _____ and _____ *Sense of Control* _____

Typically, a strong uncomfortable emotion indicates that one of the above six needs is being threatened.
(Ask youth the following:)

**Can you think of a time in the past week where you had a strong emotion?
What needs were threatened at that time?**

Emotion: _____

Need: _____

2 What is Self-validation?

Take turns with youth reading out the following...

Self-validation means acknowledging to yourself that part of your experience makes sense.

In our culture, we are often told that emotions don't make sense, which can be invalidating. The messages we have received from other people can become part of our own beliefs about emotions.

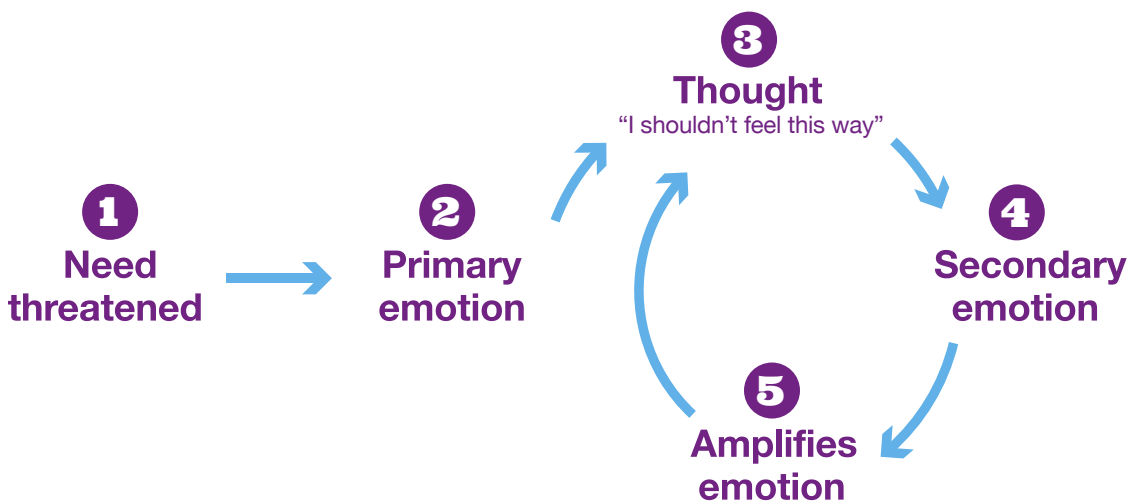
Imagine the following situation:

You were supposed to go to a friend's cottage this weekend. At the last minute, your friend got the flu and the weekend was cancelled. You're feeling sad, but you don't want to feel this way! So you try saying to yourself, "It's just one weekend, don't be a baby about it."

How would this make you feel? What happens when we invalidate our emotion?

- Our emotions don't go away — in fact, often they escalate!
- We may be more likely to get stuck in a depressive or anxious downward spiral

For a deeper understanding, look at the diagram below. When one or more of your needs are threatened (e.g. relationship needs), you will likely have a PRIMARY emotion (e.g., sadness or anxiety). If you have an invalidating thought (e.g. "I shouldn't feel this way"), it can lead to a SECONDARY emotion (e.g. shame or embarrassment). This can then amplify the PRIMARY emotion so that you feel even more sad.



There is the option to draw this diagram on the board – or just refer to the handouts.

What would happen if instead you said to yourself, "It makes sense that I'm feeling sad because I was so looking forward to connecting with my friends". This is a SELF-VALIDATING thought.

How would this make you feel? What happens when we self-validate?

- There is no more shame about feeling sad, and you are just left to manage the unamplified PRIMARY emotion.
- You are less likely to get stuck in a depressive or anxious downward spiral.
- It is easier to cope with the emotional experience.

Self-validation is a tool that you can use to help make sense of these experiences. Self-validation can simply be thinking to yourself, "My emotion makes sense." This takes away the secondary emotion and so can decrease the intensity of the sadness.

Ask youth if they agree or disagree with this concept.

3 How to Self-validate:

Continue to ask youth to take turns reading. Stop and discuss points as you see fit.

Here are the steps to help self-validate:

1. **Identify the emotion** – e.g. "I am feeling sad"
2. **Identify the need being threatened** – e.g. Need for relationships
3. **Articulate why the emotion makes sense** – "It makes sense that I'm sad, because it's important for me to spend time with friends"

A good phrase to remember for self-validating statements is:

"It makes sense that I feel _____ (EMOTION) because _____ (NEED)"

There is the option to ask youth for their own examples of self-validating statements, or continue take turns reading the following examples.

Here are some more examples of self-validating statements:

Situation #1: You were invited to a party this weekend and don't have anything you want to wear.

Self-Validating Statement: "It makes sense that I feel **anxious** because I want to feel good about how I look (**esteem**)."

Situation #2: You didn't get the grade you hoped for on your final math exam.

Self-Validating Statement: "It makes sense that I feel **disappointed** because doing well in school is important to my sense of who I am (**identity**)."

Situation #3: You want to go to a friend's birthday this weekend and stay out until midnight, but your parents want you to be home by 10 p.m.

Self-Validating Statement: "It makes sense that I feel **angry** because I want to be able to make decisions for myself (**control**)."

***Important Note:** It is often helpful to validate the emotion and not the behavior. Feeling angry makes sense in this situation, but getting into a screaming argument with your parents (i.e. aggressive behaviour) might not be helpful in meeting your needs.

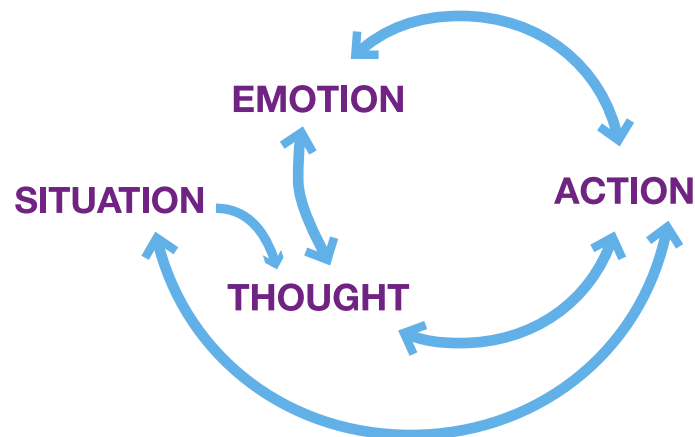
4 Breakout Activity

Guide the youth to engage in the following...

In breakout rooms of 2-3 people, identify a recent situation where you had a strong emotion and self-validation could have been helpful. Practise a self-validating statement using the format:

“It makes sense that I feel _____ (EMOTION) because _____ (NEED)”.

5 Defining Problems



Have youth take turns reading the following with reference to the diagram.

Consider the above diagram.

- A stressful **situation** may come up that threatens a need (e.g., a conflict with a friend threatens a relationship)
- ...which can lead to a **thought** (e.g. “she doesn’t like me”)
- ...which can lead to an **emotion** (e.g. sadness)
- ...which can lead to an **action** (e.g. avoiding your friend).

Problems are simply situations where your needs are threatened. If you can change the situation so that your need is met, the emotion won’t be so strong. Problem solving is a way to change your situation to eventually change your emotion.

The first step in Problem Solving is defining the problem. A great way to define a problem is to use the self-validation skill we just discussed; where you describe the SITUATION, EMOTION and unmet NEED without any judgments. The next session will go through this in more detail.

One quote attributed to Albert Einstein is “If I were given one hour to save the planet, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem, and one minute resolving it” ... though there are many versions of this on the internet. One option is to bring up this quote in group and discuss what it might mean for youth in their daily lives.

6

Home Practice

Assign the following home practice:

Over the next week, try each of the following:

- Notice when you have an intense EMOTION and try to self-validate by identifying the NEED that is being threatened. Notice whether it changes your emotional experience.

Write down your personal goal over the next week, based on the skills discussed today:

Level Up Problem Solving



Session 2

Individual Problem Solving

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercises.

What are the six needs that our emotions drive us to meet?

1. *Physiological needs (food, water, warmth)*

2. *Physical safety*

3. *Relationships*

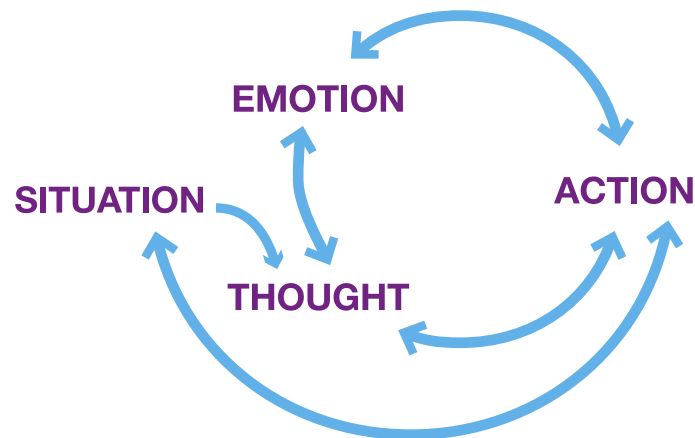
4. *Self-esteem*

5. *Sense of identity*

6. *Sense of control*

Which part of the diagram does problem solving address?

Situation



Describe a **SITUATION** this past week where a **NEED** was threatened, and you experienced a strong **EMOTION**.

SITUATION: *Example: My brother took my favourite sweater and wore it to school*

EMOTION: *Anger 3/5*

NEED that was threatened: *Sense of control, sense of identity*

Now rephrase this in a SELF-VALIDATING statement:

It makes sense that I feel angry, I don't feel like I have control over what happens with my own things.

2 Beliefs About Problem Solving

Note that there is a lot of content in this session. Some may overflow into Session 3, which might overflow into Session 4. Use clinical judgment and the formulation of group members to decide which sections to spend more time on, and which to go into detail.

Have a youth participant read the following paragraph..

People with depression and anxiety tend to have negative beliefs about the problems they face. These beliefs can get in the way of problem solving. Which of the following thoughts can get in the way of problem solving for you? Can you think of balanced thoughts that might be helpful?

Guide youth through the following activity:

Activity: Using the existing chart of negative beliefs about problem solving, go into breakout rooms of 2-3 people and come up with some more balanced thoughts.

Some questions that can help come to a balanced thought include:

- What is a way to think with more self-compassion?
- What would you say to a friend who was having this thought?
- Is there a way to think about the situation more accurately?
- What's a more helpful way of thinking?

The balanced thoughts below are suggestions if you get stuck. Ideally, youth are coming up with their own.

| Negative thoughts | Balanced thoughts |
|---|---|
| I am unable to solve problems. | <i>I can learn how to solve problems.</i> |
| If I think about my problems, my emotions become more intense. | <i>Emotions can be particularly strong when I am facing my problems, and I will likely feel better if I can solve them.</i> |
| My problems cannot be solved. It is hopeless. | <i>Some problems can be solved and some can't. If they can't be solved, there are other skills I can use to cope.</i> |
| I didn't cause my problems, so I shouldn't have to solve them. | <i>I may not have caused my problems, and I still need to solve them.</i> |
| I don't have the energy to solve problems. | <i>It does take energy to solve problems, and it can save energy in the long-run.</i> |

If you experience additional negative beliefs, try to think about any balanced thoughts about these as well.

| Negative thoughts | Balanced thoughts |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

3 Defining Problems: Revisited

Guide the youth through the following exercise. Have them take turns reading examples and providing responses.

Remember that defining the problem is an important first step to problem solving. Helpful problem definitions briefly describe the situation, emotion and unmet need, without judgments.

For each of the following, indicate which are helpful problem definitions. **Circle “yes” or “no” and describe the reason for your answer.**

Example 1: “I know you want me to be safe and that you try to take care of me. My problem is that I want to stay out until midnight on weekends to party with my friends, but my curfew is 11:00 p.m. This bothers me because I have to leave parties early, and I miss out on the fun.”

☒ Yes ☐ No

The other person’s perspective is considered. The speaker’s needs are articulated. The emotional experience is expressed. There is no judgment.

Example 2: “My problem is that you are too strict about curfew!”

Yes ☒ No

The problem is stated as a judgment and likely to shut down the other person.

Example 3: “You don’t text me back when I text you. I wish you weren’t so lazy about it.”

Yes ☒ No

The problem is stated as though it is always the case that the other person doesn’t text them back. Again, the problem is stated as a judgment and likely to shut down the other person.

Example 4: “I’m upset when you tell me that you are embarrassed to have your friends over and see that I am not doing well. It makes me feel even more guilty about being depressed.”

☒ Yes ☐ No

The speaker’s needs are articulated. The emotional experience is expressed. There is no judgment.

4 Brainstorming Solutions

After defining the problem, it is really important to think about all possible options for ways that you can get your needs met. Sometimes, just brainstorming and realizing that there are many options to resolve the problem can decrease the intensity of the emotion.

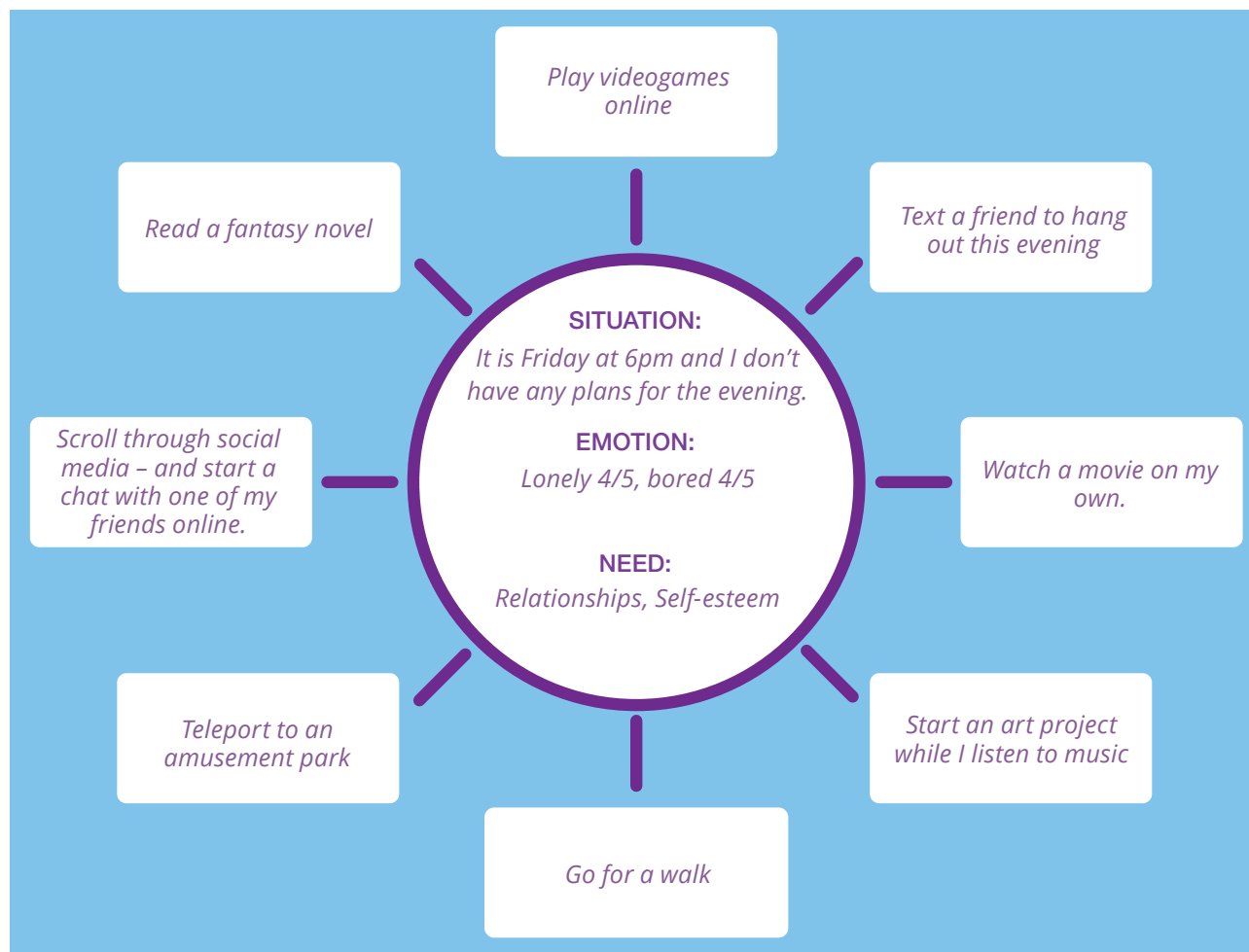
When people have a strong emotion, it can often create tunnel vision — where the person has a narrow perspective on what to do next. This can get in the way of finding the most helpful way through the problem.

Here are some things to keep in mind to make the brainstorming stage more effective:

1. List as many possible solutions as you can.
2. Try not to be critical about any solution yet. Keep your mind open to come up with many possible solutions.
3. Be creative about what other solutions might be possible.

Use the graphic below to begin brainstorming solutions for the problem that you are working through. If you are struggling to come up with solutions, ask a friend or trusted adult to help. Internet searches might help. If the problem is not time sensitive, sometimes setting the problem aside and coming back to it the next day can help too.

Note that the example here is to demonstrate how a youth might complete this activity. You may or may not agree on what is the best solution. The focus here teaching the process, not the outcome. Provided the solution is not dangerous or particularly harmful (e.g. substance use), it can be most helpful for the youth to try out their own solution and see if it helps. If not, to try a different one the next time.



5 Elimination

Make sure that you are done the brainstorming phase before moving on. It is important to have an open mind during brainstorming and then begin thinking more critically during the elimination phase.

“Elimination” is really crossing off solutions that are the most unreasonable or unrealistic. For example, if you put “fly to the moon” or “trip the other person” as a solution in the brainstorming phase, consider crossing off those solutions. You should try to have at least three or four realistic solutions remaining. If you found that you crossed off all the solutions, go back to the brainstorming step. See if a friend or family member can help you with thinking of more possible solutions.

Return to the worksheet to begin eliminating solutions that would not be possible.

6 Assess Pros and Cons

In order to fully assess which solution will be most helpful in changing the situation, list the pros and the cons of the remaining solutions in relation to how they meet your needs.

If you have trouble creating a list, think of how that solution might meet some of your six needs or the needs of others. Try to keep points specific, brief and non-judgmental.

| SOLUTION ONE | SOLUTION TWO | SOLUTION THREE | SOLUTION FOUR |
|---|--|--|---|
| <i>Board game with family</i> | <i>Watch movie alone</i> | <i>Social Media/DM a friend</i> | <i>Art Project</i> |
| PROS <i>Distracting; I like boardgames. They would likely join in.</i> | PROS <i>Distracting. Makes time pass quickly</i> | PROS <i>Possible that chat could lead to meeting up.</i> | PROS <i>I enjoy art and music. Fulfilling in other ways then socializing. Could show art to friends later</i> |
| CONS <i>I get annoyed with my sister sometimes. I would rather hang out with friends from school.</i> | CONS <i>I would likely still feel lonely.</i> | CONS <i>Sometimes, looking at social media just make me more lonely.</i> | CONS <i>Still a solo activity.</i> |

7 Final Steps

1. Select a solution

After listing pros and cons, choose a solution on the worksheet that you think will best meet your needs (not just the one need threatened, but a good balance of all of them).

- When you are making your selection, try first going with the solution that you feel best about. The number of pros and cons isn't as relevant as the importance of each pro and con to meeting your needs.
- If you have trouble choosing, rate the importance of each pro and con on a scale of 1–5 and then add up the numbers to see how the totals for each solution compare.

Depending on the challenge you are facing, there may be many possible solutions for you to try.

Solution selected: *Social Media/DM a friend*

2. Reflect on the solution

For the solution you chose, again ask yourself — will this help me meet my needs?

It might – but if I notice that it's making me feel worse, I would need to consider an alternative plan.

3. Detect barriers

Is there anything that might get in the way of carrying out your solution? Here are some examples of barriers and ways to try to overcome them:

- Forgetting to carry out the solution? Think of ways to be reminded.
- Low motivation? Go back to your pros and cons and remind yourself why you are doing this.
- Emotions that are too strong? First try other CBT strategies to settle your emotions, or wait until the emotions have settled with time.
- Depressive thoughts? Try using balanced thoughts.

Potential barriers to carrying out the solution:

1. *None of my friends are online when I go on.*

2. *I start seeing people living their “perfect” lives and get envious.*

Ways to overcome these barriers:

1. *Move to a different solution that I brainstormed.*

2. _____

4. Make a plan and try it out

Once you have chosen your solution(s), write down a plan as to when, where, how and what will take place to carry out your solution using the worksheet.

After you try the solution, ask yourself, did it meet my needs? If not, try a different solution on your list.

Problems can be solvable, but not always. As you're trying to solve a problem, use other CBT strategies to manage the situation or to manage the emotion in those situations.

1. When will you do it? *At 7pm.*

2. Where will you do it? *On Instagram.*

3. Who will be there? *Depends who is online.*

4. How will you do it? (step-by-step)

Check to see who is online. Comment on someone's post. If they respond, start a chat.

8 Home Practice

Over this week, use the "Problem Solving" work sheets on the following pages on another problem you are working through in your life; it can be a long-standing problem or one that comes up through the week.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Problem Solving

INSTRUCTIONS



Describe

- a) The situation—use only facts and be specific; where? when? who was there? what was said? what happened?
- b) Your emotion—if there were many emotions, list the most prominent one; how intense was it on a scale of 0 to 5?
- c) Your need—which need was threatened? food/water? sense of safety? relationships? self-esteem? sense of control? sense of identity?



Explore your options

- a) Brainstorm—other possible actions you can take to meet your needs; be open to many possibilities.



Assess

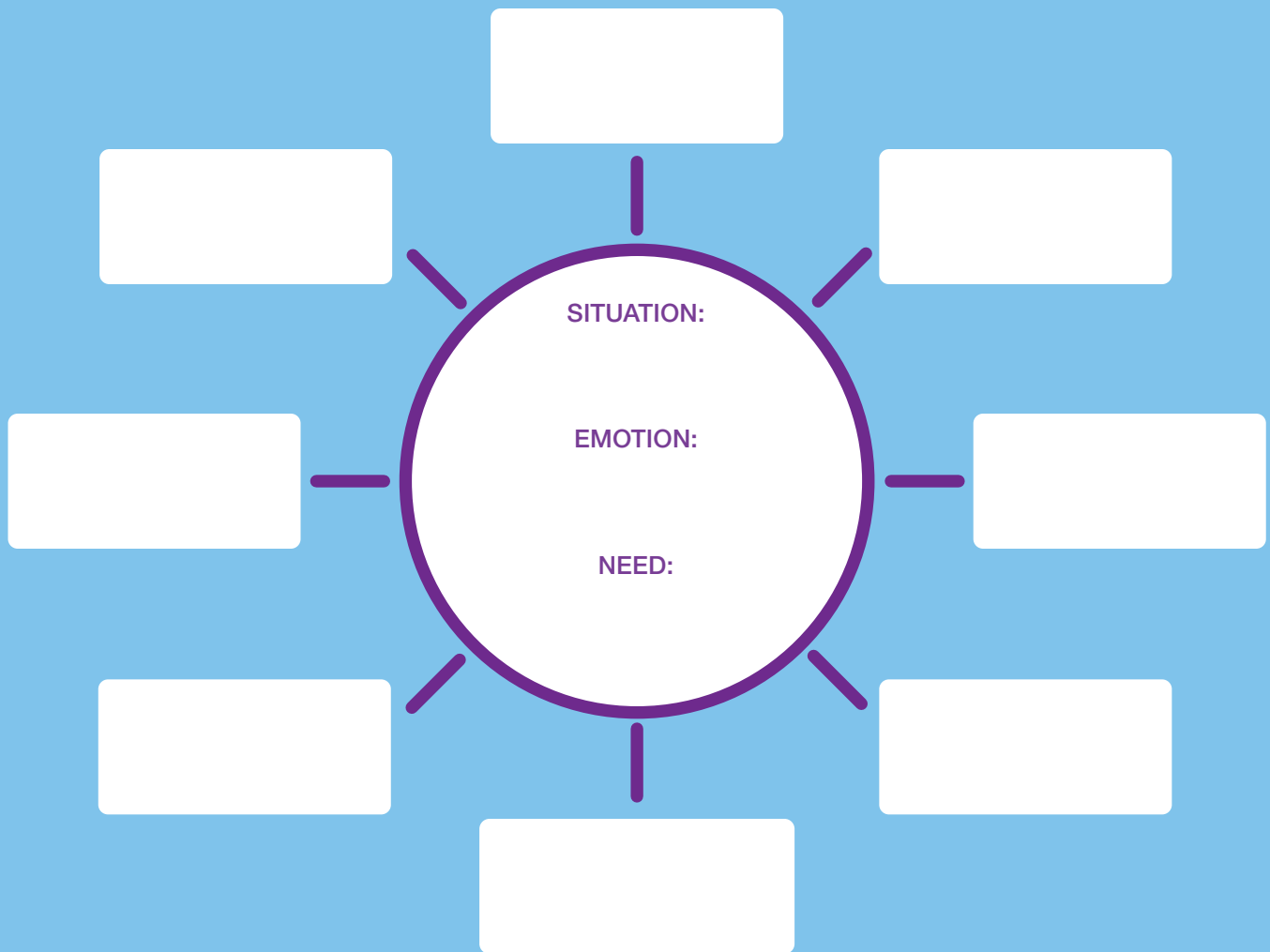
- a) Choose up to four of the brainstormed solutions and list pros and cons of each.



Take action

- a) Select a solution.
- b) Reflect if it will meet your needs.
- c) Detect any barriers to your solution before you carry it out; work through these.
- d) Write down your plan (this makes it more likely you will follow through) and carry it out.

Problem Solving



SOLUTION ONE

PROS

CONS

SOLUTION TWO

PROS

CONS

SOLUTION THREE

PROS

CONS

SOLUTION FOUR

PROS

CONS

Problem Solving

NEXT STEPS

1

Select. Which solution did you choose?

2

Reflect. Will this meet your needs (not just one, but overall)?

3

Detect barriers. Is there anything that could get in the way of carrying out your solutions? How will you deal with this?

4

Details. Now that you have identified your plan:

When will you do it?

Where will you do it?

Who will be there?

How will you do it, step-by-step?

Level Up Problem Solving



Session 3

Collaborative Problem Solving

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercises.

What are the steps in problem solving?

- Define the problem:
 - › Describe the situation using only the facts (who was there, what was said, what did you see happen, where were you, when was it?)
 - › Identify your needs (e.g., physiological, security, relationships, esteem, sense of control and identity)
 - › Identify your emotion(s) (e.g., anxiety, sadness, anger, boredom, guilt, shame, jealousy, envy, etc.)
- Brainstorm solutions without judgment. (There are no good or bad solutions.)
- When you are done step 2 eliminate solutions that you know are completely unrealistic.
- List pros and cons of the remaining solutions, particularly in how they relate to your needs.
- Select/Choose a solution (or a set of solutions) and try it out. Remember to base your selection on how likely the solution is to help you to meet your needs.
- Reflect on whether this solution will meet your needs.
- Detect any barriers that may get in the way and work through them ahead of time.
- Make a specific plan about how you would do it:
 - › What will you do?
 - › When will you do it?
 - › Who will be there?
 - › How will you do it?

Ask a youth to read the following...

Some problems you can manage on your own. When problems involve another person (e.g., friend, teacher, caregiver), you may decide to work with that person to try to come to a solution that at least partially meets both of your needs. Working this out together will likely reduce your tension, and improve your mood.

Here are some steps to consider:

Step 1: Define the problem

- **Describe the situation** using only facts (e.g., what do you see? hear?)
- **Identify your needs** verbally, to the other person: Saying “I need food” or “I need water” is straightforward; but stating your other needs directly can seem awkward to the listener. For example, “I need shelter”. As a group, come up with natural-sounding ways of saying the following:

Guide the youth through generating ideas. The following are examples if they are stuck. They can agree/disagree with the suggestions or adjust the wording as they see fit.

› **I need shelter:**

“I need a place to stay.” “I need a place to crash”

› **I need physical safety:**

“I need to feel safe”. “I need to know I won’t be harmed”

› **I need relationships:**

“I need to feel connected to people”. “I need some social time”

› **I need a sense of control:**

“I need to know I have options”. “I need to be able to make decisions here”.

› **I need self-esteem:**

“I need to feel good about myself”.

› **I need a sense of identity:**

“I need to feel like I can be myself”. “I need to know who I am”.

- **Identify your emotion** — verbally, to the other person (e.g., “I get sad when this happens”).

Read out the following...

When you are in conflict with another person and emotions are high, it can be easy to jump to conclusions and assume the worst (e.g., They are trying to hurt me, they don't care about my feelings).

Consider the following questions: *(Ask members of the group the following)*

- Can you describe recent examples where this has happened with you?
- Does this make it easier or harder to solve a problem?
- Does this reduce or intensify emotions?

One way to improve collaboration, is to practise the skill of perspective taking.

Ask youth to take turns reading...

Remember, taking someone else's perspective does not mean that your feelings aren't valid (it is still important to self-validate!). Instead, perspective taking is about acknowledging that another person's feelings are also valid, and is a way to support collaborative problem solving.

How to Take Someone Else's Perspective:

1. Imagine what they might be thinking/feeling.
2. What are possible explanations for the other person's behavior? What is your most compassionate interpretation of what might be going on for them?
3. Can you be kind and gentle in your approach with the other person? Can you assume that there are understandable reasons for their behavior? (This step can be tough. Discuss in the group how or why you might try this approach.) *(Allow time for discussion here)*
4. Empathize with and validate the other person, either in your head or to them directly! Consider using statements such as:

"I can see why you would feel _____."

"It makes sense that you feel _____."

Guide the youth through the following activity...

In breakout rooms of 2-3 people, identify a problem that you have had with another person. Can you think of the perspective of the other person and come up with a validating statement such as "It makes sense that they feel _____ (EMOTION) because _____ (NEED)"? Discuss how this might help you collaboratively solve problems alongside the other person.

4 Collaboration: Putting It Together

Read the following...

Now summarize: State your needs and the other person's needs back-to-back and invite the other person to problem solve.

Lead the members through the following activity...

Consider the following scenarios to practise defining the problem collaboratively in pairs:

- Steve's boss has asked him to work the late shifts at the shop, which means staying until 10:00 p.m. Steve has to be at school for basketball practice at 7:00 a.m., and is worried that he won't be able to get enough sleep.
- Mr. Kipling is expecting an assignment to be handed in on time, but Sophie hasn't started it because she's been having difficulty concentrating while she is depressed.
- Kara's mother is concerned about her wearing clothes that are appropriate for the weather, but Kara wants to feel comfortable wearing whatever she wants to fit in with her friends.

Work with a partner to define one of the problems listed above. One person will identify their own needs and the other person will act as the other person in the situation. After you've worked through one example, switch roles and work on another example so you get more experience defining the problem.

5 Collaboration: Next Steps to Find a Solution

Either describe to the youth or have youth take turns reading the following...

Here are additional steps that you can take when problem solving collaboratively. Note, they are very similar to individual problem solving, but you are going through each step alongside the other person.

Step 2a: Brainstorm solutions

If they are willing, work with the other person to generate solutions together.

- Don't criticize the other person's solutions.
- Be open to new possibilities.

Step 2b: Elimination

If there are solutions you generated that you both completely agree are not reasonable, cross them off your list.

Step 3: Assessment

Work with the other person to individually rate how each solution meets or threatens your needs.

- You can simply use a “+” or “-” sign to show that it either meets or does not meet your needs.
- Or use numbers to indicate the strength of the solution in meeting the need(s). For example, rate the strength on a scale of 0–5, with 5 being the strongest ability to meet the need(s).
- Note that the evaluation part of collaborative problem solving is quite different than when doing problem solving on your own. In collaborative problem solving, you are no longer listing pros and cons as you did with individual problem solving.

Step 4: Choose a solution and carry it out

- Find a solution that optimizes each of your needs.
- You should each be willing to “make the first move” and/or make a change in your behaviour.
- Write down the details on how this will take place:
 - › What will you each do?
 - › When will you each do it?
 - › Who will be there?
 - › How will you each do it?
 - › What barriers might there be to your plan? How can you work through these together?

Use the “Collaborative Problem Solving” worksheet on the following pages to start thinking more about collaboration.

Either use an example generated by the group, or one of the examples on the previous page to show how this works on the worksheet. An example is provided in the next pages.

Collaborative Problem Solving



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Collaborative Problem Solving

NEXT STEPS

1

Select. Which solution did you choose?

Ask someone else to take the later shift at work

2

Reflect. Will this meet your needs (not just one, but overall)?

As close as I can get in this situation.

3

Detect barriers. Is there anything that could get in the way of carrying out your solutions? How will you deal with this?

If no one is available to take the shift, I will choose solution one (get through the day with 6 hours of sleep)

4

Details. Now that you have identified your plan:

When will you do it? *In the next hour.*

Where will you do it? *Using my phone to text.*

Who will be there? *Hopefully, my co-worker will answer*

How will you do it, step-by-step? *Text my co-worker explaining the situation.*

Try out collaborative problem solving this week. If a family member is willing to do it with you — on a relatively small problem — do it with them. If not, try it out with a trusted friend. Even just doing some of the steps, if you aren't able to do them all, can be helpful.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Level Up Problem Solving



Session 4 Acceptance

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercises.

Match the depressive thought with the more helpful balanced thought.

| Depressive thoughts about problems | Balanced thoughts |
|---|--|
| 1. b I am unable to solve problems. | a. It does take energy to solve problems, and it can save energy in the long-run. |
| 2. d If I think about my problems, my emotions become more intense. | b. I can learn how to solve problems. |
| 3. e My problems cannot be solved. It is hopeless. | c. I may not have caused my problems, and I still need to solve them. |
| 4. c I didn't cause my problems, so I shouldn't have to solve them. | d. Emotions can be particularly strong when I am facing my problems, and I will likely feel better if I can solve them. |
| 5. a I don't have the energy to solve problems. | e. Some problems can be solved and some can't. If they can't be solved, there are other skills I can use to cope. |

What is a more natural way to say: "I need self-esteem. When you insult me, I feel sad"?

Example response: "I don't like being judged. Just like everyone else, I need to feel good about myself."

Solving problems involves:

- defining the problem (situation, emotion, need)
- brainstorming solutions
- eliminating solutions that are completely out of the question.

What is the next step if you are solving problems individually?

Identify pros and cons of each solution.

What is the next step if you have a problem with someone else?

(this involves collaborative problem solving)

Identify whose needs are met/not met for each solution

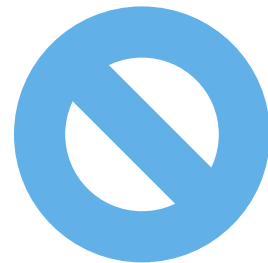
2 Acceptance: Turn “Oh no!” to “Oh well”

Have youth take turns reading the following sections. Stop and discuss various points along the way. Allow members to agree or disagree.

Sometimes it can be really challenging to solve problems, maybe because you encounter a problem that can't necessarily be solved (e.g., Your good friend moves away, or you break your foot) or your emotions are too intense to go through the steps. It can be tempting to reject the situation (or pretend it's not happening) to avoid a low mood or high anxiety.

What happens when we don't accept (or reject) situations?

- Rejecting a situation does not change or improve the situation.
- Rejecting a situation can turn pain into suffering (where emotions are experienced more intensely and taking all of your energy and attention).
- Refusing to accept a situation can keep us stuck in negative emotions like unhappiness, anger, shame, sadness or bitterness.



When we encounter a problem that we cannot solve, we may choose to turn to the skill of acceptance.

Acceptance is acknowledging a situation for what it is. To be clear, acceptance is not giving up, approving of the situation, or being against future change! It is accepting things you cannot currently change instead of going into a downward spiral. Sometimes, acceptance actually gives us a greater ability to solve problems in the future.

Here is a simple example of practising acceptance:

My summer camping weekend got rained out. At first I thought “why me”, “this is not fair”... Then I made the decision to accept the situation and said to myself, “it is what it is!”. This allowed me to make the most out of my camping situation rather than staying unhappy. We got rain jackets and did activities under a tarp. It was great!

Here are more detailed steps for acceptance:

Step 1: Notice you are rejecting the facts.

“Rejecting the facts” is a thought pattern that can worsen your mood. These types of thoughts tend to add fuel to the fire of your emotions.

These thoughts might be: “Why me?” “It’s not fair.” “It shouldn’t be this way.”
“If only things were different.” “Oh no!”

Step 2: Identify the fact to accept.

Remember — during this process, don’t accept beliefs, judgments or predictions about the future — only the facts.

Step 3a: Change your thoughts.

While thinking about the fact you identified, start having the thought “it is what it is”,
“I don’t like it, but I accept it” or “oh well”. Or just describe the facts to accept over and over.

and/or

Step 3b: Change what your body is doing.

Some people find it helpful to pair the following: (1) Think of the fact to be accepted and (2) sit in an accepting posture with a slight smile and relaxed hands. These actions send a message to your brain that promote acceptance.

and/or

Step 3c: Change your actions.

Act as though you have accepted the facts, even when you haven’t fully. This can help shift your acceptance even further.

You might find that doing all three (i.e., change thoughts, body position, actions) helps the most.

Step 4: Repeat.

Acceptance is not a one-time thing, but needs to be practised over and over. In more intense situations, the process can lead to a wave of intense emotion, but then a sense of calm.

3 Practising Acceptance

Guide members through the following example.

Go through the following example as a group:

Ian has been really looking forward to going to an amusement park with Kelly and Sharron on Saturday. It has been a while since they all connected. But on Saturday morning, both Kelly and Sharron texted him to tell him that they are both sick and can't go.



Step 1:

He notices getting on a thought loop: "Why does this always happen to me?" "I never get to have fun." "I wish I was able to go." "It's not fair that this happened."



Step 2:

He notices thoughts, such as: "They bailed on me. That's so mean" and "They don't like me". Ian catches himself and realizes that these are beliefs, not facts. He then identifies the facts of the situation. "I was hoping to go to the amusement park with Kelly and Sharron, and they have texted me, saying that they are sick."



Step 3a:

He says to himself, "It is what it is" and "I don't like that they texted me to say that they are sick and can't go, but I accept it."



Step 3b:

He notices his muscles are tense and takes time to relax his face and hands as he continues to focus on the thought: "I was hoping to go to the amusement park with Kelly and Sharron, and they have texted me, saying that they are sick."



Step 3c:

He then asks his brother to hang out with him and to go to the park to play catch (a behaviour that has nothing to do with going to the amusement park).



Step 4:

He notices that sometimes his mind goes back to "Why me?" and then goes through the above steps again.

4 Choosing a Strategy When Facing Problems

Read the following paragraph

Remember, if you can solve a problem, you should do that first! If not, try reframing your thoughts about the problem to help improve your mood or anxiety (see the Cognitive Restructuring module). If neither of those is working, then you may want to think about acceptance as the next step to avoid a downward spiral.

Ask youth to provide their perspective on the following exercise. It could be done as a group, or in pairs/breakout groups. Ask them provide the rationales for their responses.

What would you choose to do in the below scenarios: problem solve, reframe your thoughts, or practise acceptance?

1. If I am in a situation where I'm late to work, what would I choose to do?

2. If I were in a situation where I was mad about being left out of a social event over the weekend, what would I choose to do?

3. If I were in a situation where a friend of mine had just moved away, what would I choose to do?

4. If I were in a situation where someone I have been dating for a few months broke up with me, what would I choose to do?

5. If I were in a situation where I wanted to go to a party but my parents wouldn't let me go, what would I choose to do?

6. If I had a part time job and kept getting scheduled to work late shifts, what would I choose to do?

Guide the youth through the following activity. This could also be done before or instead of the above activity.

Activity: In breakout rooms of 2-3 people, each person can try to identify a situation where they could practise acceptance. How do you think acceptance would help in this situation? Come back and share with the group.

5 Home Practice

Notice this week when you start “rejecting the facts”. Try out the steps for acceptance and notice if it changes your emotional experience of the situation.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

6 Wrapping Up

Have youth complete the table below, or use the table below to structure a discussion around all of the skills in this module.

Look at the list of skills that we have discussed in this module. Mark a '✓' in each column to rate the extent to which you have used them in your life.

| Skills | Skill Use | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Haven't thought about using it | Thought about using it, but did not use | Used it, but not helpful | Used it, and it was somewhat helpful | Used it, and it was really helpful |
| Self-validating | | | | | |
| Considering balanced thoughts when problem solving | | | | | |
| Defining the problem | | | | | |
| Brainstorming solutions | | | | | |
| Weighing pros and cons | | | | | |
| Communicating your needs to another person | | | | | |
| Taking the perspective of another person | | | | | |
| Collaboratively problem solving | | | | | |
| Practising Acceptance | | | | | |

Multiplayer Communication and Relationships



Session 1

Communication Skills and Beliefs about Relationships

1 Social Interaction and Spirals

Discuss the following question with youth.

This module is about communication skills and navigating relationships. Why do you think this is something we're talking about in a CBT group for depression and anxiety?

Guide the youth through the following.

Take turns reading each statement:

- The amount and quality of our social interactions can affect our emotions.
- Our emotions can affect the amount and quality of our social interactions.
- This relationship can lead to a "downward spiral."

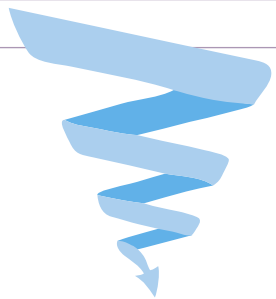
Ask a youth to read the following.

Consider the following situation:

Jenna struggles with low mood and anxiety. As a result, she struggles to make eye contact. She usually sits slouched over, and speaks slowly and softly. Other people may interpret these behaviours to mean that she would rather be left alone.

Jenna ends up feeling even more lonely and anxious and is stuck in a "downward spiral".

She starts to recognize this. Even though she doesn't feel like it and is nervous about what may happen, Jenna seeks out a friendly classmate named Kayla. Jenna starts talking to Kayla about simple things, like music. Jenna starts to make some eye contact and smiles when Kayla makes a joke. Jenna notices her mood start to improve a bit, and feels more relaxed. The next day, Jenna initiates another conversation with Kayla and they talk some more. She notices feeling more confident in approaching other classmates. An "upward spiral" has started taking hold.



Discuss the following questions with youth.

Which parts of Jenna's experience can you relate to? Is Jenna's behaviour understandable given her struggles? In what ways is her behaviour helpful? In what ways is her behaviour not helpful?

To change the pattern to an "upward spiral" it is important to participate in social interactions, even when you don't feel confident or feel like interacting. What are things that other people do in conversations with you that make you feel good about the interaction and want you to engage with them more?

We can use this group to practise social interactions.

2 Communication Skills

Read the following to the group.

Practising communication skills can help our interactions with other people and move us to an upward spiral.

Here is a list of skills that may help you in your conversations with others. They may seem simple on the surface but take a lot of energy when feeling anxious or sad. Which do you think would be helpful to start working on? You might not be able to practise everything, or you might not be comfortable with trying certain things yet.

As instructed, as youth to select skills they want to work on.

Choose two or three communication skills from the list to focus on first.

- ☐ Smile and have a relaxed facial expression that conveys warmth.
- ☐ Make eye contact.
- ☐ Join in conversations.
- ☐ Sit up straight in a chair or stand up straight.
- ☐ Comment on positive things about a situation.
- ☐ Gesture with your hands to express enthusiasm (e.g., describe things with your hands or wave).
- ☐ Ask questions and show interest in others.
- ☐ Respond to questions.
- ☐ Tell people about things you are looking forward to.
- ☐ Speak with a strong, confident voice.
- ☐ Speak at the right pace.
- ☐ Let go of judgments about others.
- ☐ Pay attention to others.
- ☐ Other: _____

Guide the youth through the following activity...

In Breakout groups of 2-3 people:

- Identify 1 or 2 skills you want to practise.
- Either use one of the provided conversation starters or talk about something of your own choosing.
- Be intentional about using the skill(s) you identified in a three minute conversation with the people in your group.

Potential Conversation Starters:

- Talk about your plans for an upcoming weekend.
- Talk about what social media platform you like the most.
- Talk about music or a TV show you like.

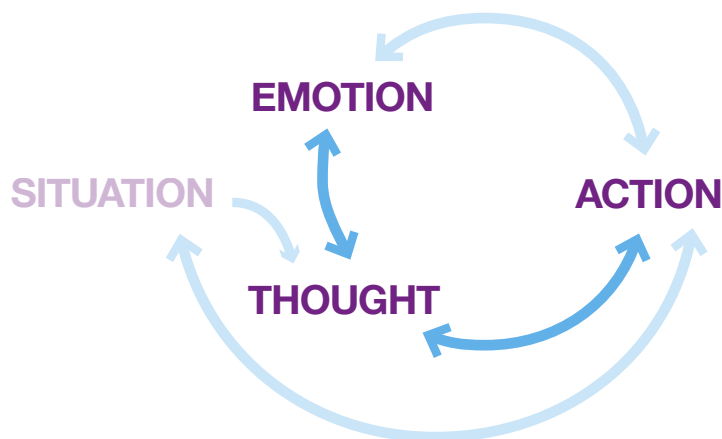
When coming back to the larger group, share:

- What do you think you did well?
- What might you want to continue working on?
- What do you think your partner did well?

3 Beliefs about Relationships

Ask a youth to read this paragraph:

Remember that our **thoughts** can affect our **emotions** and the **actions** we take. This applies to social situations as well. Having balanced thoughts about relationships can improve the way we interact with others.



Go into breakout rooms of 2-3 people. Using the chart on the next page regarding negative beliefs about relationships, come up with some more balanced thoughts,

Alternatively, this can be done as a larger group. Facilitators may decide to ask them to provide balanced thoughts only on the negative beliefs relevant to them. If an individual doesn't struggle with a particular negative belief, it might be easy for them to generate a more balanced thought to help a group member who does struggle with that belief.

Some questions that can help come to a balanced thought include:

- What is a way to think with more self-compassion?
- What would you say to a friend who was having this thought?
- Is there a way to think about the situation more accurately or objectively?
- What's a more helpful way of thinking?

The following table has some example responses for youth. It is better for them to arrive at their own balanced thoughts.

| Negative thoughts about relationships | Balanced thoughts |
|--|--|
| I will be rejected. | <i>I may be rejected, or I may not. The only way to know is to at least try to connect with others. If I am rejected, it may not be because of me. It may be more about the other person, or the timing might not be right. I will cope.</i> |
| I can't stand being alone. | <i>Being alone is hard. Learning how to manage being alone will help me be more confident in relationships.</i> |
| They won't like me. | <i>Some people will like me and some people won't; this is a fact for everyone.</i> |
| They will judge me. | <i>Another person may judge me. Their judgments may have more to do with their own ideas about themselves rather than me.</i> |
| They won't see me as interesting. | <i>There are some things about me that are interesting. I can learn ways to introduce myself to people by speaking about these more interesting things. I can also show interest in the other person — typically people like to be asked questions about themselves.</i> |
| They will think I am anxious. | <i>I may appear anxious in front of the other person; that is pretty common. The other person might be anxious meeting me too. The best way to overcome anxiety is to keep pushing through it.</i> |
| I will run out of energy to keep up the conversation. | <i>Sometimes having a conversation I really like gives me more energy. If I decide I need to end the conversation, I will do so politely.</i> |
| I am attracted to them, and I shouldn't be. | <i>Being romantically attracted to other people is normal and common — lots of people have a lot of different types of people they are attracted to. It is nothing to be ashamed of. But it is still important that I manage that attraction in a way that is going to be most helpful for me.</i> |

If you have any additional negative thoughts about starting or navigating relationships that aren't listed in the table above, put them in the left column of the table below, along with any balanced thoughts in the right-hand column.

| Negative thoughts about relationships | Balanced thoughts |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |

Ask a youth to read through the following key point.

These types of negative thoughts are common in depression and anxiety. Remember that they are beliefs and not facts. Challenging these beliefs can help you engage in more social interactions; and even allow for more experiences to disprove these beliefs.

4

Home Practice

Over the next week, try each of the following:

- Practise the social skills we discussed today with other people.
- Try an alternative belief you have checked off to see if it helps your mood.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Multiplayer Communication and Relationships



Session 2

The Art of Conversation

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercises.

Based on our discussion so far, name four communication skills that can be used with other people:

1. *e.g.: Tell people things you are looking forward to* _____
2. *e.g.: Make eye contact* _____
3. *e.g.: Smile when talking and listening* _____
4. *e.g.: Ask questions about the other person's day or preferences* _____

Match the negative thought with a potentially more helpful balanced thought:

| Negative thoughts about activities | Balanced thoughts |
|--|--|
| 1. f I will be rejected. | a. Some people will like me and some people won't; this is a fact for everyone. |
| 2. h I can't stand being alone. | b. Another person may judge me. Their judgments may have more to do with their own ideas about themselves rather than me. |
| 3. a They won't like me. | c. Sometimes having a conversation I really like gives me more energy. If I decide I need to end the conversation, I will do so politely. |
| 4. b They will judge me. | d. I may appear anxious in front of the other person; that is pretty common. The other person might be anxious meeting me too. The best way to overcome anxiety is to keep pushing through it. |
| 5. e They won't see me as interesting. | e. There are some things about me that are interesting. I can learn ways to introduce myself to people by speaking about these more interesting things. I can also show interest in the other person — typically people like to be asked questions about themselves. |
| 6. d They will think I am anxious. | f. I may be rejected, or I may not. The only way to know is to at least try to connect with others. If I am rejected, it may not be because of me. It may be more about the other person, or the timing might not be right. I will cope. |
| 7. c I will run out of energy to keep up the conversation. | g. Being romantically attracted to other people is normal and common — lots of people have a lot of different types of people they are attracted to. It is nothing to be ashamed of. But it is still important that I manage that attraction in a way that is going to be most helpful for me. |
| 8. g I am attracted to them, and I shouldn't be. | h. Being alone is hard. Learning how to manage being alone will help me be more confident in relationships. |

2 Starting Conversations

Read through the following and discuss the listed questions with group members. This session's material works really well as discussion-based; that is, that youth are giving each other advice on how to start conversations. Rely more on the discussion than the text below.

In this session, we are discussing starting, joining, and leaving conversations.

Here are some questions for discussion in group:

- Which of those three things do you have the hardest time with?
- What makes it hard?
- What worries might get in the way?

There are two questions to consider when starting a conversation:

1. Is it a good time to start a conversation?

Sometimes negative thoughts or worries we have get in the way of recognizing good times! Look for potentially good times to start conversations, including:

- Another person smiles at you.
- You are standing in a long line near another person.
- Another person asks you a question.
- A friend introduces you to a new person.
- A person is petting your dog.
- The first week of school in a new class where few people know each other.
- You are part of a group that meets weekly (e.g. an extracurricular club).

Ask youth if they agree/disagree with the above.

As a group, can you think of any other good times to start a conversation?

2. What are good things to talk about when starting a conversation? Here are some potential examples:

- Ask the person a question about themselves (e.g., "How old is your dog?")
- Ask the person a question about a common activity (e.g., "What did you think of English class today?")
- Identify a common interest (e.g., "Do you watch baseball?")

As a group, are there other good questions or topics to talk about when starting a conversation?

3 Joining Group Conversations

Read through the following and discuss the listed questions with group members.

Joining group conversations can be even more complicated as there are more people and topics to pay attention to.

As a group, consider the following questions:

1. When is a good time to join a conversation? Here are some examples:

- People are talking about something you know about.
- People say hi to you as you walk by.
- People open up the circle of conversation for you to join and someone asks you a question directly.

Are there other signs that it is a good time to join a group conversation?

2. What will you say?

- Say hi and ask how people are doing (“Hey! How are you guys doing?”).
- Comment on something they’re talking about and ask a follow up question (e.g. “I saw that movie too! What did you think of it?”).
- Simply enter the conversation and smile, show that you’re paying attention!

Are there other helpful things to say when joining a group conversation?

4

How to Leave a Conversation

Read through the following and discuss the listed questions with group members.

Some people don't like starting a conversation out of fear they won't know how to end it without getting overwhelmed or making the other person feel bad.

Here are two questions to consider:

1. When is a good time to leave a conversation? Here are some ideas:

- When there is a natural break in conversation (e.g., people are having smaller side conversations, checking their phone, less talking).
- When someone else in a group setting is also leaving.
- When you feel ready or need to leave.

Any other ideas on when to leave the conversation?

2. How is the best way to leave a conversation? Here are some ideas:

- If in a group setting, say "I've gotta run" and step away.
- If in a group setting, smile and wave as you leave.
- If in a 1:1 conversation, say "It was great talking to you, and I have to head out."
- If in a 1:1 conversation, say "It was nice to meet you! Hopefully I'll see you again."
- If in a 1:1 conversation, say "I gotta go do _____, hope you have a great day."

Do you or any group members have other ideas about what to say to end a conversation?

5 TMI? Letting people know what you think and feel

Read through the following and discuss the listed questions with group members.

Telling other people about yourself (self-disclosure) is important for building relationships, even though at times it may feel safer to keep things to yourself. At the same time, revealing too much about yourself too quickly can make others overwhelmed, making it more difficult for them to bond with you.

Do you tend to under-share? Or over-share? Appropriate self-disclosure is an important communication tool.

Identify the following as true or false by circling the correct answer below each statement:

The circled responses here are suggested. Facilitators and group members are free to disagree.

1. Self-disclosure means honestly sharing how you feel about what is going on.

True or **False**

2. Appropriate self-disclosure means telling every intimate detail of your entire life.

True or **False**

3. Hiding your reactions to another person's behaviour is a good way to improve your relationship with that person.

True or **False**

4. Self-disclosure involves taking a risk.

True or **False**

5. You should always be self-disclosing in all relationships.

True or **False**

6. Self-disclosure should be a two-way street — it is helpful if both people in a relationship participate in the process.

True or **False**

7. It's best to wait until several stressful situations have built up before you discuss them.

True or **False**

8. It can be a helpful strategy to listen carefully to how much the other person is sharing about themselves, and match your own self-disclosure to theirs.

True or **False**

As a group, discuss strategies to disclose the most helpful amount of information about yourself.

6 Group Activity

Guide the group through the activity. Join in the activity as well.

As a group, everyone stand up and move around the room for 5 to 10 minutes. Start conversations with others, join other groups and leave conversations. See what it is like to do this. Afterwards, discuss as a group what it was like to do this. What was helpful? Were there parts that were difficult? If so, what made it difficult?

7 Home Practice

This week, try:

- Starting a conversation with someone you don't know very well.
- Joining a group conversation.
- Leaving a conversation skillfully.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Multiplayer Communication and Relationships



Session 3 How to be Assertive

1 Review

As an option for home practice review, use the following exercise.

Describe a time this past week where you started, joined, or left a conversation. What went well? Would you do anything differently? If you ran into difficulties, ask group members for suggestions on how to approach things differently next time.

2 Communication Styles

Ask youth to take turns reading the following.

There are four types of communication. A simple way to understand them is to think of whether or not they meet your needs and/or threaten the needs of other people in the short term.

Imagine that a friend asks if they can copy your schoolwork, but you don't want them to. The style in which you respond will affect whether your needs get met, and can also impact the relationship. Consider the table below.

Draw out or show the table below and describe the 4 types of communication style.

| Communication style | Example | Are your needs met? | Does your answer help keep your relationship? |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------|---|
| Aggressive | "No way! That's your problem, not mine." | ✓ | ✗ |
| Passive | "Oh, sure." | ✗ | ✓ |
| Passive-aggressive | "I mean if you're too stupid to figure it out then I guess so." | ✗ | ✗ |
| Assertive | "I'm worried about getting caught, so I don't want you to copy my work. Thanks for understanding." | ✓ | ✓ |

3 Ask for what you need and set limits: GOALS

Ask youth to take turns reading the following.

Being assertive is the ideal; it helps ensure that everyone's needs are taken into consideration. In short, being assertive means either:

- Asking for what you want (i.e. your goal in the conversation)

or

- Saying “no” to a request

...without **judgments** or **threats**.

To increase the chances that your assertion will be successful, there are a few steps to consider. The acronym **GOALS** might help you remember.

Step 1: Get straight to the facts. Describe only what you see or hear, not what you are thinking yet.

Step 2: Describe your **Own experience** of the situation using an “I” statement: either the emotion (“I feel...”) or the thought (“I think...”).

Step 3: Ask for what you want. Examples include:

- requesting more time from a romantic partner,
- asking a classmate to help you with a project,
- asking your boss for a day off.

...OR... say “no.” Examples include:

- telling your caregiver/parent that you can't help with the chores this evening,
- saying to your friend that you are not able to hang out with them this weekend,
- telling your co-worker you won't cover their shift next week.

Step 4: Loop back to the first three steps calmly and firmly if the other person does not follow through with your request (and it is within their ability to do so). Don't let yourself be distracted if they respond with their own judgments.

Step 5: Show gratitude once the other person follows through with your ask or respects your “no”. If the other person follows through with what you want, be sure to smile and say “thank you”. Be sure that the other person feels appreciated.

Remember: Avoid **judgments** and **threats** as you do this. Confident body language is important as well:

- Have your back straight and shoulders down and back.
- Use appropriate eye contact.
- Use a confident and loud enough voice.

Rehearse (in your mind or by practising with a friend) ahead of time — this may make it more effective.

4 Trying It Out

Do some role-plays with the group to practice the GOALS, asking them to walk through each step with their response.

Choose a few of your favourites from the list below, or come up with your own scenarios. For the first three below – you can just play the role of the group facilitator – and the youth can practice saying no to your extensive request.

- *“Eddy [or group member’s name], can you please run to Starbucks and get me a coffee?”*
- *“Julia [or group member’s name], I would like you to stand up in front of everyone and sing “O Canada.”*
- *“Reggie [or group member’s name], can you please lend me \$100? I want to go for a nice meal.”*
- *“Do you want to go to the party with me tonight?”*
- *“Just lend me \$20 to buy lunch today.”*
- *“You don’t need to study for the test tomorrow. Come play soccer with me tonight.” Provide other examples where they might request things from others:*
- *You want your parent/guardian to help you practice driving for your licence.*
- *You want your classmate to contribute more to a group science project.*
- *You want your brother to help with the dishes.*

Once they have the hang of it with a few of the above examples, have them work through the steps in break-out rooms through the activity below.

Either as a whole group, or splitting into 2-3 breakout groups, try using the steps in GOALS to be assertive in the following example situations. If you prefer, you can use a recent situation in your personal life instead.

Examples:

1. Your boss keeps scheduling you for late shifts, but working late makes you tired and is getting in the way of doing schoolwork.
2. You had planned an online gaming session with your best friend. They promised to go online at 7:00 p.m. but then didn’t show up.
3. You are very overwhelmed with schoolwork and need to ask a teacher for an extension.
4. Your partner or friend is often on social media when you are hanging out and you don’t like it.
5. Your parent comments on your appearance often, and you don’t like it.

5 Home Practice

This week, try to practise using the GOALS skill to be assertive in an interaction this coming week with someone you trust. It can be something small (e.g., “pass the salt”) or medium (e.g., asking for help with schoolwork). Consider holding off on more complex situations until you get more practice.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

Multiplayer Communication and Relationships



Session 4

Deepen Your Connection in Relationships

1 Review

What are the GOALS steps in assertive communication?

1. Get straight to the facts.
2. Use an "I" statement to describe your own experience of the situation: either the emotion ("I feel...") or the thought ("I think...").
3. Ask for what you want OR say no to a request without judgments or threats.
4. If the other person does not follow through with your request, loop back to the first three steps calmly and firmly.
5. Once they follow through with your ask or respect your "no," show gratitude.

Were you able to practise the GOALS skill to help with being assertive this past week? As you are comfortable, share with the group how it went.

If not, was there a time you could have used it? As you are comfortable, describe how you could have used it.

2 Truly Engaging with Others

Have youth take turns reading the following. Stop and discuss points as you see fit.

This session is about relationship-enhancing skills. When we do things to show other people we are interested, empathic, and non-judgmental, our relationships benefit. Good relationships support good mental health.

It's tempting to focus on ourselves in conversations, particularly when we're anxious or sad, because we want to make sure we're not doing anything wrong or embarrassing. But focusing on ourselves versus the other person makes it seem like we're not paying attention to them. It also makes us miss out on the connective experience of conversations.

Here are some ways to show that you are truly engaged in a conversation:

- Non-verbal cues (e.g., eye contact, smiling, nodding)
- Verbal cues (e.g., "Mmm-hmmm", "That's cool")
- Restate the person's message in your own words if you need to clarify what they are saying.

To help deepen the engagement further, use empathic statements if someone is upset, demonstrating that you understand why they would feel that way. Here are some examples:

- **"I can see why** you would be upset."
- **"Lots of people** would feel the way you do."
- **"That sucks!"**
- **"It makes sense** that you feel confused."

Empathic responses are the things that require a lot of practice, particularly because most of us want to jump to problem solving. Consider the following when responding:

- Avoid jumping straight into problem solving — much of the time people just want to be heard.
- Avoid talking about your own ideas until the other person sees you have understood their message or there is a break in the conversation.
- Avoid showing approval or disapproval for what the other person is saying. If you think it is important to express your agreement or disagreement with what the other person is saying, wait until you get a sense that the other person feels understood.

3 Identifying and Practising Engagement

Guide the youth through the following activity

Review the example below, and after each message check the most empathic response that would demonstrate that you're engaged in the conversation.

You are listening to your friend discuss struggles she is experiencing with her music teacher. Her struggle includes three messages.

Message 1: "I keep messing up in music class. Mr. Smith keeps pointing out all the things I do wrong. I think I am going to fail."

- ☐ "That's ridiculous. You're not going to fail."
- ☐ "Maybe you should practise more."
- ☐ "It's stressful to have your mistakes pointed out."

Message 2: "Yeah — I think it's hopeless. He obviously really likes the way Jordan plays — but not me."

- ☐ "It sounds like you don't believe it's worth trying in music class."
- ☐ "You'll feel better next week. Don't worry."
- ☐ "Let's go get lunch."

Message 3: "I try so hard, and he doesn't seem to care. Do you know what that's like?"

- ☐ "No, I don't even like music."
- ☐ "If you don't like it, just drop out."
- ☐ "I have felt unappreciated for my work before — it's a horrible feeling."

In breakout groups of 2-3 people, try this:

One group member talks about something stressful happening in their life right now. The other member(s) responds empathically. Then switch. Refer to the example responses above for help.

Let youth know that the example in the breakout activity can be mildly stressful (like a school assignment that is due).

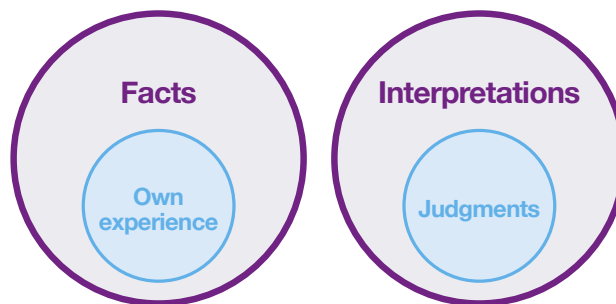
4 Responding without Judgment in Relationships

This section is review from the Cognitive Restructuring Module, only applied in interpersonal settings. Adjust the amount of focus on this section accordingly. Have youth take turns reading the following.

First let's understand the difference between a fact and a judgment. (This is also discussed in the other module on Cognitive Restructuring).

Facts are things we observe with our five senses. If you are observing something that is real, most people will agree on what it is (e.g. "Sara is wearing a coat."). Also note that your own emotional experiences are considered facts. For example, statements such as "I like Sara's coat", "I am angry" or "I am happy" are not typically up for debate.

Judgment is a type of belief where something is evaluated as "good or bad," or as something that "should or shouldn't be" or that is "right or wrong" (e.g. "Sara should have worn a sweater."). See the diagram below.



In the context of relationships, judgments can get in the way of connecting with others. Other people may feel threatened and get defensive if they hear judgments (even if the judgment is about a person not in the conversation). When communicating with others, it can be useful to reframe judgments in factual ways, often including your own emotional experience.

Example non-judging phrases include:

- "I **don't like** pasta",
- "I **am worried that** trying out this new skill will be dangerous", and
- "I **hope that** this strategy will be helpful.

Guide the youth through the following activity. The answer key provided is suggested – but up for discussion.

Which of the following are judging statements and which are non-judging?

| Statement | Judging | Non-judging |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| That movie was the worst. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I don't like country music. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Lisa is not acting the way I expected her to. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| I think it will be helpful for me to attend group. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Peter shouldn't be judging people so much. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5 Putting it Together: Engaging and Non-judging Communication

Guide the youth through the following activity. Suggested answer key can be challenged. If there is time, invite youth to come up with even more helpful responses.

Look at the following examples. Circle the letter corresponding to the engaging and non-judging response in these conversations. Describe the reason for your selection.

Example 1: "I have been going to this school for three years, and I can't seem to make friends."

- A** "That sounds pretty frustrating, especially when you feel that it's gone on for a long time."
(more engaging and less judging)
- B** "It's pretty hard to have fun without friends. You should really work on that. There are lots of things you could do to learn how to make friends."

Example 2: "I really wanted to go on a date with Lily, but it took two weeks before I got up enough courage to ask her out. I couldn't believe it when she said yes! But then I was so anxious about it that I cancelled last minute."

- A** "What?! You should have just gone!"
- B** "That sucks. I find dating makes me anxious too." *(more engaging and less judging)*

Example 3: "I hate math. Mr. Pascal is really putting a lot of pressure on me with my homework."

- A** "Yeah — he is such a bad teacher."
- B** "Yeah — I find he puts a lot of pressure on students. I don't like how he does that." *(more engaging and less judging)*

Example 4: "I heard that Matt was talking to Bryn again after they broke up. I'm nervous that he is leading her on."

- A** "I can see why you'd be worried." *(more engaging and less judging)*
- B** "That's so wrong. They shouldn't be talking again."

6 Home Practice

This week, try to practise engaging and non-judging communication with people you want to feel more connected to. Notice whether it changes or deepens your sense of connection to the other person.

Write down your personal goal over the next week based on the skills discussed today:

7 Wrapping Up

Have youth complete the table below, or use the table below to structure a discussion around all of the skills in this module.

Look at the list of skills we have discussed in this module. Mark a '✓' in each column to rate the extent to which you have used them in your life.

| Skills | Skill Use | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Haven't thought about using it | Thought about using it, but did not use | Used it, but not helpful | Used it, and it was somewhat helpful | Used it, and it was really helpful |
| Communication skills | | | | | |
| Using "balanced thoughts" about communication and relationships | | | | | |
| Starting, joining and ending conversations | | | | | |
| Helpful self-disclosure | | | | | |
| Assertive communication | | | | | |
| True engagement skills | | | | | |
| Letting go of judgments in relationships | | | | | |

Appendix A: Icebreakers

Each of the following icebreaker activities can be used at the start or end of sessions. There is the option of matching the activity with themes of the session.

#1: Icebreaker activity: Ball game

Group size: At least 4

Equipment: 3 tennis balls (or similarly sized round objects – no sharp edges)

Setting: In person only.

Time: 5-10 minutes

CBT Themes:

- 3 of 4 Targets of Behavioural Activation (enjoyment, success, connection)
- Exposure,
- Noticing Negative Thoughts,
- Letting go of Judgments,
- Acceptance (for example, if they drop the ball).

Instructions.

- 1 Have everyone stand up, and introduce that they will be playing the “ball game.”
- 2 You start with a tennis ball (or similar object to toss). Say the name of the person you are going to toss the ball to and then gently toss it to them.
- 3 When they catch it, this person will now say someone else’s name and then toss the ball to them.
- 4 Keep going, until the ball has been thrown to everyone once and only once, and is returned to you (with your name being said).
- 5 Repeat the exact same sequence only faster the second time around. Repeat again, this time adding a second ball after a few passes in the sequence, then a fourth time adding a third ball after a few more passes in the sequence. Stop the game when you have reached your maximum speed at 3 balls. You can also reverse the order; or have people change positions, but still have to throw the ball to the same sequence of people.

Watch the YouTube video below for an idea as to how it might look — with some variations:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eJUOUijB4

Note: You can refer to the game later in this session when talking about how activities might affect our mood or thoughts. Some youth find this game anxiety provoking as well as enjoyable — normalize all these feelings.

#2: Icebreaker activity: What do you do with your time?

Group size: Any

Equipment: None

Time: 3 minutes per group member

Setting: In person or virtual

CBT Themes:

- Behavioural Activation
- Communication Skills
- Exposure (particularly for social anxiety)

Instructions:

- 1 Ask a member of the group what they like to do with their time. If they cannot think of anything, ask if there are things group members used to do that they really enjoyed.
- 2 Have other members of the group take turns asking more detailed questions, such as: How old were you when you first...? What is it about...that you like? Who do you do... with? Tell me more about...
- 3 Ask another group member what they do with their time and repeat step 2 accordingly.
- 4 Keep progressing until all group members have had a turn describing how they spend their time.

#3 Icebreaker activity: Who wrote it?

Group size: At least 7 (beyond the leader of the game)

Equipment: pen and paper (if in person)

Setting: In person or virtual

Time: 10-15 minutes (depending on group size)

CBT Themes:

- Communication Skills
- Problem-Solving
- Behavioural Activation

Instructions:

- 1 Name a general topic (e.g., mode of transportation).
- 2 On a small piece of paper, have everyone secretly write down a unique item that fits that topic (e.g., bright yellow three-person bicycle). Collect all pieces of paper. If done virtually, ask youth to send them in private chat.
- 3 Read all items out loud – without any indication of who wrote it, asking group members to remember the list.
- 4 Go around the circle, starting on the left side. The first person to have a turn will choose one item from the list (from memory) and guess who wrote it.
- 5 If they get it right, the two people join a team, and they get to go again; if not, it is the next person's turn on the left.
- 6 The teams will keep growing as more people's items are guessed. Keep going until everyone's item is guessed.
- 7 The team with the most number of correct items wins. If this activity goes quickly, you can repeat with a different topic.

#4 Icebreaker activity: Spoons

Group size: At least 4

Equipment: Several spoons (or pens with caps on them) – one less than there are group members playing.

A deck of cards – can even have two decks if group size is large.

Setting: In person

Time: ~10 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Behavioural Activation
- Letting Go of Judgments.

Instructions:

- 1 Start with a deck of cards and enough spoons so that there is one less spoon than the number of people playing the icebreaker.
- 2 Put the spoons in the middle of the table and deal four cards to each person. Keep the rest of the deck beside you as the dealer.
- 3 The goal of the game is to get four of a kind in your hand, or to not be the last person in the group with a spoon.
- 4 The dealer starts by taking one card from the deck and discarding a card to the player on their left.
- 5 This continues clockwise around the group, as the dealer continues to pick up additional cards from the deck.
- 6 Once someone in the group has four of a kind, they grab a spoon (as discretely as they can) from the middle.
- 7 Once one group member grabs a spoon, all the other players can now try to grab one of the remaining spoons (even if they don't have 4 of a kind).
- 8 If they are not able to get a spoon, they get an "S" (or if the player lost previous games, they get a "P" "O" or "N"). The game ends when one person has all five letters of "SPOON".
- 9 Often we will stop after 5 or 6 round due to time – so it is rare to get to the full "SPOON"

You can continue playing this game for multiple rounds, remembering to remove a spoon from the middle each time a player is out of the game.

Watch the YouTube video below for an idea as to how it might look:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5apwK711_8

#5 Icebreaker activity: Magic Potatoes

Group size: Any

Setting: In Person

Equipment: One potato and straw for each person (many potatoes and straws are no longer usable after this activity, this is a downside).

Time: 5-10 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Beliefs vs Facts
- “Act-as-if” strategy

Instructions:

Potato activity: Before group, watch the YouTube video “The potato icebreaker”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrWVqLzNywA>

- 1 Demonstrate the activity in front of youth.
- 2 Discuss what beliefs people had before attempting to pierce the potato with the straw (e.g., “I won’t be able to do this”).
- 3 Discuss what it was like to act regardless of this belief (e.g., anxiety? doubt? anticipating pain?).
- 4 Discuss whether or not acting on a “different belief” changed their emotion (e.g., surprise, pride, excitement). This will come up again later in the session, as you discuss acting on a “working theory”).

#5 Icebreaker activity: Lower the bar

Group size: 4 or more

Setting: In person

Equipment: A long stick (e.g. tent pole, broom stick, meter stick).

Time: 5 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Collaborative Problem-Solving
- Communication

Instructions:

- 1 If there are more than 6 people, break up the the group into smaller groups.
- 2 Within each group, each person must stand across from each other and use one finger from each hand to place below the stick
- 3 The group needs to lower the stick to knee level while each finger maintains contact with the stick.
- 4 If anyone loses contact with the stick, they need to start again.
- 5 Before group, watch the YouTube video describing the activity here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYdVKdAMIII>

#6 Icebreaker activity: Folding paper

Group size: Any

Setting: In person or virtual

Equipment: A piece of 8.5" x 11" paper (will be ripped up – so can use scrap).

Time: 5 minutes.

CBT Themes:

- Facts vs. Beliefs,
- Thought traps,
- Letting go of judgment

Instructions:

- 1 Have participants stand up, **close their eyes** and hold a blank piece of 8.5" x 11" paper. Ask them to follow these instructions without asking any questions:
 - a. Close your eyes and hold the paper out in front of you.
 - b. Fold the paper in half.
 - c. Rip off the top left corner.
 - d. Fold the paper in half again.
 - e. Rip off the bottom right corner.
 - f. Fold the paper in half one more time.
 - g. Rip off the bottom left corner.
 - h. Now everyone open their eyes and unfold your paper.
- 2 Ask: "Was your paper the same as mine? Or the same as someone else's? Why were they different?"
- 3 Discuss how we all might receive the same information, but interpret it in different ways. You can also discuss how sometimes, when we receive non-specific information, we question "Am I doing it right?" when in fact there may not be a "right way."

#7 Icebreaker activity: "What if?"

Group size: At least 3

Setting: In person or virtual (if private chat use is allowed between participants)

Equipment: Piece of paper (if in person)

Time: 5-10 minutes.

CBT Themes:

- Brainstorming as part of cognitive restructuring or problem-solving (i.e. thinking creatively)

Instructions:

- 1 Give each participant a small piece of paper. Ask them to write a "What if" question, such as "What if the sky was purple?" or "What if we all had three arms?" Encourage people to work quickly, and once people have completed their question, ask them to pass their question to the person on their right. If being done virtually, you can assign people to send/receive questions as messages through the private chat if you are comfortable with private chat use.
- 2 Next, each person writes the answer to the question they've received. They should answer the question as if they had written it. For example, if Tom hands his question ("What if I won the lottery?") to Susan, she should answer the question as if she had won the lottery, not Tom.
- 3 When participants have written their answer, select someone to read **ONLY** the question they have in front of them. Then ask the person to their right to read the **ANSWER** to the question they have. They should then read the question on their paper and the person to their right reads the answer, etc. Even though the questions and answers are unrelated, you'll find some hilarious combinations!

#8 Icebreaker activity: Quick questions.

Group size: Any

Setting: Any

Equipment: None

Time: <1 minute per person

CBT Themes:

- Communication skills

Instructions:

Ask anyone of the following questions to get people sharing a bit about themselves.

What app do you use the most?

What is your favourite emoji and why?

If you could have any superpower – what would it be and why?

What is your favourite sandwich/pizza toppings?

What is the most boring thing about you? (Often people respond with interesting answers).

What is one thing that made you smile this past week?

What is your favourite type of music?

What was your favourite childhood toy? Or cartoon?

What is your favourite boardgame or card game?

Do you have any scars? How did you get them?

Alternate: You could also get people to break out into pairs where members ask each other several of these questions, when they come back to the group, they can share what they learned about the member they were paired with.

#9 Icebreaker Activity:

Group size: ≥4 members

Setting: In person

Equipment: Marshmallows and Spaghetti noodles (or Linguini)

Time: 10-15 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Collaborative problem-solving
- Communication

Instructions:

- 1 Have the group divide into teams of two or three and work together to build a tower out of marshmallows and linguini noodles.
- 2 Time them for five minutes. At the end, see who has the tallest tower.
- 3 You can discuss how they went about deciding on how to get the tallest tower. Was there a plan? Was there discussion? Have some people had experience doing this before?

#10 Icebreaker activity: Categories

Group size: ≥3 members

Setting: In person or virtual

Equipment: A pen/pencil and paper for each group member.

Time: 5-10 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Brainstorming as part of Cognitive Restructuring or Problem-solving (Thinking Creatively)

Instructions:

Choose a list of 5 topics (e.g. animal, transportation, food, game, something in the sky) and, for each topic, a letter (e.g. F, S, D, P, E).

- 1 All group members must now work individually to try and find a word that fits the topic and starts with the corresponding letter.
- 2 Ask them to write down a word that they think no one else from the group will choose.
- 3 Set the timer for 3 minutes for members to write down their words.
- 4 At the end of 3 minutes, see who had the most original words. If anyone in the group has the same word, they must cross it off their list. Who has the most words left?

Alternate: Can count 2 points for alliterative answers. Example: “Flying Fish” – for animal that starts with F.

#11 Icebreaker activity: Pop-Up

Group size: ≥4.

Setting: In person or virtual.

Equipment: None

Time: 5 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Exposure (particularly for social anxiety)
- Communication and Relationships (sharing information about yourself).

Instructions:

If everyone is comfortable, ask the youth to stand up. (If they aren’t comfortable, this can also be done seated.)

- 1 One person volunteers to start talking about themselves to the group. They can share anything interesting about themselves (e.g., hobbies, pets, family members, upcoming trips).
- 2 As soon as another person in the room can relate to something the speaker says, they clap (or “raise their hand” in a virtual environment) and then describe what it was that they related to. They then continue talking about themselves until someone else in the room claps in.
- 3 Once a person participates, they are out of the warm-up and can sit down.
- 4 The activity continues until everyone has had a chance to speak.

#12 Icebreaker activity: “What’s changed?”

Group size: ≥4

Setting: In person (with a virtual option – see below)

Equipment: No extra items required than what is already in the setting.

Time: 5 minutes per round (play as many rounds as you like)

CBT Themes:

- Facts vs. Beliefs

Instructions:

- 1 Ask a group member to volunteer to be the “observer”.
- 2 The “observer” will then leave the room for a few minutes,
- 3 The rest of the group members change five things in the room (e.g., by moving a chair; having participants switch seats; erasing or writing something on the board).
- 4 Once they have done this, ask the “observer” to come back into the room and report the five things that they think have changed.

The virtual version is similar, though roles are reversed.

- 1 Ask a group member to volunteer to be “observed”
- 2 The rest of the group members studies the “observed”’s screen.
- 3 The “observed” turns off their camera and changes one thing in the scene (could be in the background, foreground or on the person”.
- 4 The “observed” turns their screen back on and the rest of the group members guess what has been changed.

#13 Icebreaker activity: Keywords

Group size: ≥4.

Setting: In person (or virtual – see below)

Equipment: For in person only:

- Pen/pencil and paper.
- Hat/container to place passwords in.

Time: 10-15 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Letting go of judgment
- Brainstorming
- Communication

Instructions:

- 1 Have each participant write down 10 words (nouns or verbs) on 10 pieces of paper. If they write down names of places or people, they should be names that everyone would know. These are the set of “keywords” to be guessed.
- 2 Pile all of the keywords into a hat/container and mix them up.
- 3 Have one participant in the circle be the “clue-giver” and the person to the left of them be the “guesser.”
- 4 A separate group member is the time keeper (can use their phone, clock or watch). The set the time for 1 minute.
- 5 The “clue-giver” chooses a piece of paper from the bowl and gives clues to have the guesser guess the keyword. Components of the keyword cannot be contained in the clue.

- 6 Once the guesser gets the keyword, the clue-giver picks up another keyword from the bowl. If the word is really difficult to guess, the clue-giver can pass on that word.
- 7 The goal is for the guesser to guess as many words as possible in a one-minute period. Once a keyword is used, it is removed from the game.
- 8 After the minute is up, the guesser becomes the clue-giver for the next participant in the circle.

Virtual option:

- 1 Search for an online “random word generator” on the internet. Request 10 random words. This is the set of “keywords” (double check that the words are group appropriate before using them).
- 2 “Copy” the words (highlight the words and using CTRL+C).
- 3 Assign one group member to be the “clue-giver” and another to the “guesser”.
- 4 Paste (CTRL + V) the list of 10 words into the private chat of the “clue-giver”.
- 5 A separate group member is the time keeper (can use their phone, clock or watch). The set the time for 1 minute.
- 6 The “clue-giver” can choose any of the keywords from list of 10 in their private chat for the “guesser” to guess and in any order.
- 7 Once the “guesser” guesses the right word, the “clue-giver” moves on to another word in the list of 10.
- 8 This repeats until 1 minute is up.
- 9 The goal is for the guesser to guess as many words as possible in a one-minute period.
- 10 The guesser then becomes the clue-giver for the next participant “guesser” in the group.

#14 Icebreaker activity: Take a stand

Group size: Any

Setting: In person (virtual version possible – see below)

Equipment: none

Time: 3-10 minutes (flexible)

CBT Themes:

- Self-disclosure as part of assertive communication.
- Exposure for social anxiety.
- Identifying values
- Particularly helpful in getting quiet group to become more engaged.

Instructions:

- 1 Have everyone stand up.
- 2 Say a statement that people will likely disagree on. Start with something that will be easy for people to react to, like “I like pickles.”
- 3 Instruct participants (even co-facilitators) to stand on the left side of the room if they agree and the right side if they disagree; allow people to stand in between if their opinion is somewhere in between.
- 4 Ask each youth to explain their position as best as they can.
- 5 Continue with further statements, and with each statement, have participants position themselves somewhere on the spectrum of “agree” and “disagree” — with the option of increasing the intensity of the topic (i.e., “I like sports.” “School is boring.” “I like pop music.” “Emotions are useless.” Feel free to make up other ones, being sensitive to the needs of the room, while also not avoiding more challenging topics.
- 6 The aim is to get people comfortable stating their position assertively

Virtual option:

- 1 Instead of taking a stand in the room, youth can put a number in the chat from 1 to 10. “1” represents “fully disagree” and “10” represents “fully agree”.

#15 Icebreaker: Creating a story one word at a time

Group size: Any

Setting: In person or virtual

Equipment: None

Time: 5 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Creative thinking (e.g. Brainstorming)
- “Reflex thoughts”
- Communication
- Letting go of judgments

Instructions:

- 1 Establish a sequence of order of group members (if in person, can just go around in a circle; if virtual, paste the order of group members in the chat)
- 2 The first person in the sequence will say a word to start a story.
- 3 The next person will continue the sentence saying another word to continue the story.
- 4 In sequence, each group member adds to the sentence with one word.
- 5 When the sequence is complete, start at the beginning of the sequence to continue the story.
- 6 Go as long as you like.

Icebreaker #16: Desert Island.

Group size: Any

Setting: In person or virtual

Equipment: A list of 10-12 items for consideration on a desert island (e.g. knife, rope, matches, tarp, sleeping bag, fishing net, cooking pot, mirror, glasses, water canteen, shovel).

Time: 5 minutes

CBT Themes:

- Collaborative problem solving
- Needs and emotions
- Communication

Instructions:

- 1 Provide the list of items for consideration to have on a desert island to group members.
- 2 Ask the group to negotiate to only bring 5 of the items and why.
- 3 Option: If you are feeling creative, you can continue a storyline after they choose the 5 items to see how they would use them. (e.g. A hurricane comes to the island, the night is very cold, there are tons of fish in the water, etc.).

Appendix B: Relaxation Exercises

For most relaxation exercises, offer ways to give youth privacy so they are not preoccupied with what others think. If the group is in person, youth can turn their chairs around to be facing the outer wall of the room (instead of each other. If the group is virtual, allow them to turn off their camera for the exercise only.

Let people know that many people find these exercises helpful; though some can find that it may increase anxiety. Let them know they can stop at any time and focus on something external to their body to distract them until the group exercise is over.

Most exercises, it is helpful to ask the youth to sit in a chair, back straight, shoulders down and back. Invite them to close their eyes if they would like. Start with a few breathes “at your natural rhythm”. At the end of each exercise, invite them to take a “few more breathes at your natural rhythm and then slowly bring your attention back to the room”.

After any of the exercises, invite youth to discuss their experience about the exercise – whether it be positive, neutral or negative.

#1 Relaxation Exercise: Paced breathing

Instructions:

- 1 Ask group members to breathe in through the nose for 4 seconds
- 2 Then ask them to hold the breath for 4 seconds
- 3 Then ask them to breathe out through the mouth for 6 seconds
- 4 Then ask them to hold this state for 4 seconds.
- 5 Repeat 1 or two more times.

#2 Relaxation Exercise: Body Scan

Instructions:

- 1 While seated, ask youth to imagine scanning their body from head to toe; noticing any sensation of comfort/ tension, warmth/coolness, dryness/dampness. There is no need to change the sensation – rather just notice it.
- 2 Guide them through each section of the body, pacing with about 20 seconds between areas– leading to about 3 minutes. Invite them to notice:
 - a. The top of the head and scalp,
 - b. The muscles around the eyes,
 - c. The muscles around the mouth and position of the tongue.
 - d. The neck and shoulders
 - e. The upper back and uppers arms
 - f. The lower arms, hands and fingers.
 - g. The torso and abdomen.
 - h. The weight of the body on the chair.
 - i. The upper legs.
 - j. The lower legs, feet and toes.

#3 Relaxation Exercise: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Instructions:

- 1 While seated, ask youth move through each body section from head to toe, clenching muscle groups for 10 seconds, and then relaxing the muscle group for 10 seconds – noticing the releasing sensation.
- 2 Guide them through each section of the body, pacing with about 20 seconds between areas– leading to about 3 minutes. Invite them to tense each movement below (in brackets) and relax:
 - a. Raise the eyebrows.
 - b. Close the eyes tightly.
 - c. Clench the jaw and press the tongue to the roof of the mouth.
 - d. Raise the shoulders towards the ears.
 - e. Squeeze the shoulder blades.
 - f. Flex the biceps, wrists and clenching fists at the same time.
 - g. Pushing hands together in front and squeeze the abdominal muscles.
 - h. Pushing heels into the floor while seated – to feel tension in the thighs and buttocks.
 - i. Point toes out in front as far as possible while straightening the legs.

#4 Relaxation Exercise: Imagery

Instructions:

- 1 Ask youth to imagine a relaxing scene – that may include:
 - a. Being at the beach with waves lapping up to shore
 - b. Walking on a nature trail with birds chirping.
 - c. A “safe room” – where they get to:
 - i. decorate the walls
 - ii. choose the furniture
 - iii. decide what objects are in the room
 - iv. who gets to come in
 - v. how many windows or doors there are
 - d. Sitting on the edge of a shoreline – watching boats go by.
 - i. As a step further, boats can represent thoughts, emotions or impulses that come and go.

