

Guidance Notes

Teacher Information



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*“Empower young people
to manage their thoughts
and feelings”*

*“Create an emotionally
literate environment”*

WHY USE THIS RESOURCE

Our Let's Talk videos encourage conversations about key mental health topics.

Talking about mental health in a creative way will dispel unhelpful myths and break down the stigma that prevents young people seeking support.

You can use this resource to create an emotionally literate environment in which young people can learn about the basics of their own, and others', mental health.

You will be giving young people essential knowledge about how our brains work with our bodies. This psycho-education will empower them to manage their thoughts and feelings in a healthy way, and/or recognise when to seek further support.

The following information will equip you with enough knowledge to confidently teach a lesson, lead an assembly, or even just start a discussion, on the topic of anxiety.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

We live our lives alongside other people (at home, at school/work, at the cinema/shops/park). We have relationships, of different intensities, with these people.

It is important to have good communication skills in order to successfully navigate these relationships. For example, the tone of voice, body language and vocabulary one might use for saying goodnight to your children would be different to the tone of voice, body language and vocabulary one might use to ask for a bus ticket. (One may naturally involve kisses, the other would not. One may involve an App, the other would not).

Being able to communicate effectively in different social situations is, however, different to being listened-to and accepted by one's immediate family and friends. Building relationships with family and friends requires sharing feelings, hopes, fears and the general ups and downs of life with other people (whether we want to or not).

And this is where communication become trickier; more nuanced and sensitive, with more pressure and greater expectations. A bus driver, for example, would not be expected to ask his/her passengers how they are feeling. But we should expect our friends to take an interest in our feelings.

The ability to recognise, and then confidently articulate, one's feelings with close family and friends is crucial for mental, emotional and social health. Sharing feelings appropriately enables one to access support when needed, feel understood and better understand one's own feelings. Equally, being listened to and understood validates one's sense of self and strengthens one's sense of connectedness with other people.



THE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication is easier when the emotional investment is lighter. It's easier to ask for a bus ticket (no emotional investment) than it is to tell someone that you feel lonely a lot of the time (high emotional investment).

It is risky to share sensitive feelings like loneliness with another person.

What if they don't understand and misjudge you?

What if they don't care?

Will you be gossiped about if you share your honest feelings with someone?

How can you tell if the person you talk to is going to be trustworthy? Will they keep your confidence?

What if your communication will cause hurt to another person? What if it will potentially damage your relationship?

What if being honest and sharing your feelings will make you stand out from the crowd? What if people will think you're weird or judge you? What if your feeling doesn't feel important enough to share? What if you feel like you'll annoy someone by talking to them, that you'll be a burden? What if you just can't find the right opportunity?

What if you're not sure exactly what to say?

In addition to these 'thought' barriers, there are physical barriers. Technology can be a useful tool for communication, but it may cause unnecessary problems (misinterpretation of tone, typos, ..) and becoming too dependent on technology may distance us from those closest to us (choosing to send an email/text rather than actually talk to someone). And perhaps there are too many messages flying around to be able to keep on top of them all.



WAYS TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Assertiveness is the key to effective communication. Being assertive means being positive, calm and clear AND standing up for yourself or others. It means knowing what you want to say and how you need to say it.

Assertiveness means being in control of yourself (not being bullied and shying away, or becoming angry and dominating the conversation). It is important to express how you really feel in order to have a sense of congruity or integrity. However, this is often a skill that requires a lot of practice!

Developing *emotional literacy* will help make communication more effective. Knowing the differences between complex emotions and being able to name them, will make your communication to another person clearer. For example, if a pupil says s/he is angry at a teacher for giving him/her detention, the pupil's apparent anger may be reflecting a deeper emotion, like sadness, loneliness, frustration or fear.

Analogies may help describe hard-to-pin-down moods and feelings. For example, when telling someone about the effect an argument has had on you, you could say 'it felt like...being kicked in the teeth/bashing my head against a wall/being invisible'.

As well as recognising personal emotions, it is also important to allow other people to have their own emotions. The art of *listening* without interrupting, judging or trying to solve the other person's problems creates a positive environment for clear and honest communication.

“The art of listening creates a positive environment for clear and honest communication”



It is important to remember that *there are no bad emotions*. Some emotions, like sadness, shame and grief, are uncomfortable feelings but they are not bad or wrong. They need to be recognised as serving an important purpose; these raw and unpleasant feelings can teach us about ourselves (about our values and desires) and need to be expressed in order for them to achieve their purpose.

If face-to-face communication is too hard, there are alternative methods to assertively communicate with others. For example, writing a letter or a poem, taking a photo or drawing a picture are all creative ways of sharing feelings with others. And as with talking, the act of writing/drawing is helpful in and of itself.

Similarly, having *communal resources* (like 'do not disturb' signs or conversation starter cards) can help families start to communicate with each other in healthy ways. Equally, sending a .gif or a meme to someone you trust may be a helpful way to begin talking about sensitive topics.

“Unpleasant feelings need to be expressed in order to achieve their purpose”



IDEAS FOR DIFFERENTIATION

High ability

Think of a person in your life who you struggle to communicate with.

Some questions to think about:

What makes communicating with this person so difficult?

What usually happens when you communicate with them?

What might be the benefits of improving communication with this person?

Are there any ways in which you could improve your communication with this person?

Low ability

Questions:

Name 5 ways of communicating

Name 5 people you might communicate with

Name 5 problems that might arise when you communicate with someone.

Those affected

Before delivering this lesson, let your school's pastoral support team know. Perhaps they can provide a drop-in on the same day for anyone who feels they need to talk more about their mental health.

If you have a TA in your class, make sure you give them advanced warning of your lesson's content, as they may have their own personal experiences which could impact your lesson. Your TA may also be the best person to support any students who are affected by the lesson's content.

If a young person appears to need more support during your lesson, perhaps you could offer them a quiet corner of your classroom and ask them to write a description of their anxiety, perhaps a poem or a story, or an analogy. Or maybe they could draw what anxiety feels like to them. This could then be used as the basis of discussion if/when that young person seeks further support.



SIGNPOSTING

Useful websites

Phase is a schoolswork charity based in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. Phase is on the frontline working with children and young people to promote their wellbeing. Check out their blog.

Shelf Help is a scheme which offers book suggestions for people struggling with mental health issues. For example, the books suggested for relieving anxiety are listed here. It also offers a reading list of books which will lift your mood. The books are available in local libraries, and so is free and easy to access.

AyeMind is a thoroughly detailed website which aims to improve mental health and wellbeing for young people. They have a page which links to a wide range of other websites too (this is where the link takes you), so you can explore the best the web has to offer on young people and mental health.



Phase are grateful for the support from:

