



Empowering Young Minds



Teacher's Guide (for Grades 7-12)

CLASS ACTIVITIES

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Introduction

PURPOSE

At YouthSpeak, our vision is to inspire and empower youth to live resilient and meaningful lives. Our mission is to assist youth facing challenges through leadership training and empowering them by sharing personal stories in order to promote mental health, well-being, empathy, and hope in assemblies and workshops. We aim to make sure no child or youth feels alone, and those who are struggling with mental health or challenges are connected to available support tools to improve their overall well-being.

The purpose of this teacher guide is to provide valuable and easy-to-follow awareness-building activities. This teacher's guide is a resource that teachers can use in their classrooms with their students. The activities in this teacher guide are for the Intermediate and senior divisions but may be modified for your unique classroom.

HOW TO USE

This teacher guide has numerous activities that are designed to help students build resilience during difficult times and how to cope. They can be used in the classroom to help students understand and explore important topics such as confidence and empathy skills from a young age. Each activity has an estimated time frame and a material list at the top of the page with specific steps on how to run the activity underneath. There are also virtual alternatives for each activity so you can use these activities in your online teaching as well. Teachers do not need to follow every step for each activity and can revise the steps to suit their unique classroom.

SAFE SPACE

Please remind students that the classroom is a safe space and encourage them to have open discussions about coping strategies and mental wellness. Discussing these topics can bring up strong thoughts and feelings, and it is important to let them know that if students are experiencing any difficult feelings and need help, that the teachers, administration, and other caring adults are always there to listen and support them.

1. Navigating the N.A.S.T.Y

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 20-25 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ markers /

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meets.

OBJECTIVE

To help students understand how thoughts can impact feelings. This activity presents a model that allows students to recognize “thought traps” as well as practice how to change negative thinking into more productive and positive thoughts.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Present a scenario for your students that can allow them to work through the N.A.S.T.Y thought trap. Consider using the following script (or making your own):

- “The school’s basketball team is about to face your rival school for the final game of the season. Everyone is energetic; the coach relays just how hard the team has worked on preparing for the game, and that victory is imminent. Everyone at your school is shouting words of encouragement and the atmosphere is full of excitement.”
 - “What kind of thoughts would you assume are going through the students’ minds?”
 - “How do you think the players on the basketball team are feeling?”
- “Consider another scenario. Picture your teacher just handing you a make up exam for the one you missed when you were away. Your teacher tells you that this particular test is even harder than the original and not many students pass it. She expects you to be confused and misunderstand many of the questions. To top it off, your teacher tells you that this exam will count for 40% of your class grade.”
 - What kind of thoughts would be running through your head at this moment?
 - How are you feeling?

2. After having a group discussion over these questions, discuss the following:

“As it becomes clearer, you can see that our own thoughts can have a significant impact on how we feel. If we have positive thoughts, we are likely to be in a good mood. If our thoughts are negative, we are likely to feel very stressed, worried, anxious, and even sad. When people are upset or experience stress, there are “thought traps” that we can easily fall into leading us to feel even more upset or anxious. For now, we’re going to look over a specific thought trap called N.A.S.T.Y.

Encourage your students to try and figure out what each letter could stand for. Write down their suggestions on the board before writing down the correct answers. Each letter stands for:

- N: Never - I will never figure out how to answer this question.
- A: Always - I always mess up friendships.
- S: Should have - I should have known that would happen, how could I be so dumb.
- T: Total Disaster - I do not want to do this presentation in class. I know everyone is going to laugh at me and make fun of me.
- Y: Why Bother - Things are always going to go bad for me so why am I even trying to change it.

Inform students that whenever they get caught in this N.A.S.T.Y. trap, they are likely to feel hopeless, and/or helpless, and it can be very challenging to think of change or even new alternatives. These negative thoughts will only limit their thinking and their options and negatively impact the way they feel and how they expect things to turn out.

3. Ask: So what can you do to feel better and alleviate stress? How can you learn to identify negative thoughts, catch them early, and ultimately get rid of them to replace them with positive thinking?

Here are some positive thoughts to replace the N.A.S.T.Y. trap:

- “I messed up this time, but I’ll be prepared for next time and will do better.”
- “I can do this if I keep trying.”
- “This is a bad situation but there are still things I can do to make this better.”
- “It’s okay to make mistakes everyone now and then, no one is perfect.”

Encourage students to come up with their own examples of negative thoughts and the countering positive thought for it. Record student answers on the board (or shared google doc) using two columns - one titled “Negative Thoughts” and the other titled “Positive Thoughts”. Students can continue practicing this in either pairs or small groups (3-4)

2. Subdue the Stress

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 25-30 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ chart paper / markers / poster board

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meets.

OBJECTIVE

To conceptualize the differences between healthy and unhealthy forms of stress management. This activity will provide a reflection on the many ways one can manage their stress and provide students an opportunity to come up with their own Ten-Step formula to combat stress. This activity will also provide students an opportunity to create a communal Ten-Step routine for stress reduction to use within their own classroom.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before initiating this activity, be sure to remind students of the difference between stress and depression. Stress is a feeling that you are under too much mental or emotional pressure. It is often triggered by something in your life that feels too much for you to personally handle, regardless if others can or can't do the same. Depression can develop in response to unresolved issues and sometimes occur for weeks, months or even years. Though it may appear similar on the surface, depression is a medical condition.

2. Ask:

- "Let's talk about stress... What does stress mean?"
 - Stress is often defined as any situation that is either positive (ex. getting a new promotion, moving, applying to university) or negative (ex. Family members falling ill, overwhelming homework, fighting with friends or family) that have an impact on an individual's emotional and physical state.
- "What are some stressors that you face in your life?"
- "How do you know when you are actually feeling stressed? What are the symptoms or signs involved?"
- "What are some ways that you deal with stress?"
 - Have students record their responses.

- Additional ideas can include:
 - Keep a journal
 - Strive for excellence not perfection
 - Do something you find creative
 - Get a proper amount of sleep
 - Say “no” more often; this means knowing your boundaries and do no volunteer for everything because you think you have to
 - Listen to music or dance to it
 - Break large tasks into smaller sized portions
 - Visualize yourself succeeding at the task
 - Taking a long bath
 - Ask for help
 - Exercise
 - Practice deep breathing techniques

3. Once students have completed their own list, have them share them during group discussion. Write them out on the board or in a shared google doc as students provide their answers. As a class, have everyone vote on their favourite ways to deal with stress from the list of possibilities provided.

4. Record the students’ top ten stress-reducing strategies on a poster board and put it on display within the classroom (or readily accessible on the google/virtual classroom).

3. Guided Imagery and Visualization

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 10-15 minutes

MATERIALS: Chairs/ desks/ open minds

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meets.

OBJECTIVE

To demonstrate and exercise a guided imagery technique used for both stress management and relaxation. This activity aims to familiarize students with a technique that some may find uncomfortable or even awkward in order to better integrate it into regular practice.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Initiate the activity by informing students the purpose of guided imagery and visualization (this can be taken directly from the objective component of this activity sheet).
2. Ask students to sit comfortably in their chairs. At this point, tell students that it is their choice whether or not they wish to close their eyes, look down at their desk or even the floor while doing the exercise (as not every student may be comfortable with their eyes closed).
3. The following is a pseudo-script that you can follow during this guided visualization process. Of course, feel free to make adjustments to the wording but this works well as a general framework for simple yet effective use of this practice.
 - "Something that can be quite helpful during stressful moments is to visualize (or picture) yourself in a place that feels calming and peaceful to you. This place could be anywhere. It can be your favourite room in your house or the favourite spot on the beach. It may even be a place you've never been to and have only dreamed of. When you create this image in your mind, the more senses you use, the more powerful the image gets and feelings of relaxation become stronger. For some people, pictures may come easier while others sensations of smell or hearing may be easier to imagine. As we navigate through this visualisation exercise, always remember that there are no wrong or right answers to your imagination."

- “Choose a relaxing scene. This can be the most relaxing place you know of. It can be real or it can be imagined. Imagine it with all your senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Construct as many details as you can.”
- “Now choose a word or phrase that will help you return back to this scene. Take a few breaths and go through your created scene in your mind. Give students 5-10 minutes to practice this).”
- “As you become more confident in using this visualization technique, try to use it through the course of your day. Practice it during a study period or even before your way to school. Practice makes perfect and the more you repeat these words to yourself, the easier it becomes to return to your peaceful place.”

4. Consider continuing this exercise by asking students to share their scene or thoughts on which part of the exercise was the most relaxing.

Optional: Consider incorporating this practice within your own classes. Consider allocating some time before a test to have students practice good visualization or after a lesson.

4. Working With P.I.P

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 25-30 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ chart paper / markers / handout

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meets.

OBJECTIVE

To present students an accessible model for thinking and problem solving that is easily put into everyday practice. This activity will provide students with a problem solving framework that is easily adjustable to suit their own needs for prevention and skill building through divergent and convergent thinking.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Provide each student with a copy of the PIP Handout (digital or physical).
2. Inform students that the following activity will have them learning about the "Problem, Ideas, and Plan" problem solving approach. To begin, have students think about a particular problem they have that they would like some help with addressing.
3. Direct them to record their problem on the handout. Give students some time to actually think about a problem they have before writing it down.
4. Next, have students create at least three different ways they can re-word their problem into a question. Have each rephrasing start with a "how could".
 - For example, if a student has a problem stated as "I always feel so exhausted", they could write it as the following:
 - How could I get more sleep at night?
 - How could I be more energetic?
 - How can I organize my tasks so I have more time to relax?
5. Out of the questions the students created, have them select the one they feel is the most important or most relevant question.
6. After selecting their rephrased problem, have them find a partner to work with. Pairs will be generating ideas together to address each of their problems and

recording their thoughts as they work through them. As they work through it, inform students that they will be using divergent thinking when they generate their ideas.

- Divergent thinking is when you generate as many ideas as you can (brainstorm), without any judgement or value on any idea at this step. The goal here is to be as creative as you can and surprisingly focus on quantity not quality (for now). Encourage students to build off their partner's ideas as anything goes. Give around 5-7 minutes for this step.

7. Now have students go over their generated list of options and use convergent thinking to select the best option. Give another 5-7 minutes for this step. Have them write down their chosen idea on the handout.

- Convergent thinking is when you take a pause and focus on ideas that seem helpful and realistic.

8. Inform students now is the time to create an action plan. Under the written idea on the worksheet, students will be creating a step-by-step guide to show how they can complete the proposed solution. When thinking of steps, have students consider:

- Who is going to do it?
- What are they going to do?
- When are they completing it?

Students should include light "due dates" for when each step should be completed over a 24 hour period.

9. After students have completed their guide, ask students to volunteer their solutions to the larger group. Prompt them by asking questions about their development process and how helpful that was for finding solutions. Ask other students to chime in too and provide even more suggestions if time permits.

Working With P.I.P (Handout)

Problem: What's on your mind? What's something you would like some help solving?

Based on the problem you wrote above, create three ways to reword the problem starting with "How could I" :

How could I...

How could I...

How could I...

From the list you created, choose one you think is the most important

Divergent Thinking: Create at least 6 ideas or ways you can answer the most important question you choose.

- 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
 - 4)
 - 5)
 - 6)
-

Convergent Thinking: From the list of ideas above, choose the best idea and develop a solution statement that starts with the phrase "What I see myself doing is..."

What I see myself doing is...

Look over you solution statement and start developing an action plan. The action plan should include who is involved, what they are going to do, and by when they should have it done. Make sure your entry for "by when" is a real date.

Use the following template to create the action plan. There should be at least 5 action steps. The action plan should have a component that is scheduled to be finished within the next 24 hours!

	Who?	Does What?	By When?
1)			
2)			
3)			
4)			
5)			
6)			

5. Community Compliments

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 15-20 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ cue cards/ markers /

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meets.

OBJECTIVE

To have students share positive feedback with their peers. This activity aims to promote a safer classroom space where students are more comfortable sharing and opening up to one another.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Have students watch the following video titled [People react to being called beautiful.](#)

- Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aW8BDgLpZkl>

Discuss with your students how they felt about watching this video. Consider talking about how each reaction in the video was unique and beautiful in their own way. Ranging from laughter to blushing, or even shyness to defensiveness, everyone reacts in their own way. Consider asking your students questions to spark up further discussion like when was the last time they were complimented? How did they feel about it?

2. Have students break into groups (4 or 6). Provide each student with a cue card and markers. If learning virtually, have students in each group share a google doc with each of their group members.

3. Ask every student to speak with each of their group members. On each of their peer's individual cards, ask the student to write a characteristic that they like about the peer. This could be anything from a special talent or something that the person appreciates about their peers. Also feel free to participate within this activity yourself.

4. Emphasize that this activity is about giving their peers positive feedback. The comments should be genuine and kind.

5. At the end of the activity, every student should have a card that is filled with multiple entries added by their peers. Encourage students to share what others have said about them if they are comfortable to do so.

Booklists to Check Out

11 Enlightening and Empathetic YA Novels About Mental Illness

<https://www.readbrightly.com/enlightening-empathetic-ya-novels-about-mental-illness/>

Reality Scoop: Promoting Mental Wellness with YA Literature

<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2016/02/02/reality-scoop-january-is-mental-wellness-month/>

You're Not Alone: Mental Health Nonfiction Picks for Teens

<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2019/09/09/mental-health-nonfiction-picks-for-teens/>

52 YA Books About Mental Illness

<https://readingmiddlegrade.com/ya-books-about-mental-illness/>

8 Books About Mental Health For Teens

<https://www.bustle.com/articles/175881-8-books-about-mental-health-every-teen-ager-should-read>

Resources

- Kids Help Phone: Text- 686868 (24/7 support)
<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>
- Find trusted, culturally competent therapists that know *our* feelings and can help navigate being a strong, black woman.
<https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>
- Black Youth Helpline: a Black youth specific service, positioned and resourced to promote access to professional, culturally appropriate support for youth, families and schools.
<https://blackyouth.ca/> +1416-285-9944 / +1833-294-8650
- Youth Line offers confidential and non-judgmental peer support through our telephone, text and chat services.
<https://www.youthline.ca/> +1647-694-4275
- If you or someone you know is in crisis or requires immediate support, please contact 310-COPE at 1-855-310-COPE (2673) or visit your nearest emergency department.
- Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN): to empower autistic people across the world to take control of their own lives through public policy advocacy, the development of autistic cultural activities, and leadership training for autistic self-advocates. <https://autisticadvocacy.org/>

Apps for Students:

- Calm: This app teaches activities to help you sleep, breathe and relax.
- Headspace: Options customized for three age groups—under 5, 6-8, and 9-12. Plus, parents can use the adult version to practice breathing alongside their child.
- HelloMind: Young worriers can significantly benefit from HelloMind, an app which helps change negative thought patterns.
- Smiling Mind: It is designed to help youth through the stresses, and challenges of daily life. It offers programs for a variety of age groups, including 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18 and adults.
- MindShift: Scientifically proven strategies based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help you learn to relax and be mindful, develop more effective ways of thinking, and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety.

Want to Get Involved and Help Empower Other Youth and Inspire Change?

Here are some ways you can support:

- Join an event committee
- Attend our events
- Join our Board of Directors
- Follow us on social media



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- Donate to Canada Helps
 - You can click the “Donate” Button on the www.youthspeak.ca homepage
 - OR this link will take you straight to the donation page https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/youthspeak-performance-charity-organization/?utm_expid=.Z0WUQV4rT9mKtKTXtGPdnw.0&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyouthspeak.ca%2F
- Share your special skills with our team of youth to help build their leadership
- Perform administrative tasks that are important behind the scenes work

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