 Optimism

Duration: 60 minutes

Purpose of the task

Learning the skills of optimism can help protect against depression and anxiety. It involves learning to think positively about the future – even when things go wrong. Learning the skills of optimism includes the skills to look objectively at a situation, make a conscious and realistic decision and to focus on the good when headed through challenging situations.

Course outcomes

1.3 Build positive thinking, self-belief and a sense of empowerment to take action to promote meaningful futures for self and others.

7.3 Apply skills to take personal responsibility for their actions to protect and enhance the independence, health, safety and wellbeing of others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Recognise the benefits of optimism on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.
* Build skills for optimistic thinking.

Required resources and materials for preparation

Student activities are set around:

* Small group
* Individual activities
* Offline and online

Equipment required:

* Picture cards — A4 cards each displaying an image. Images should vary and come from images from media sources including magazines, newspapers, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram or through Creative Commons licenses.
* Butchers paper (enough for 1 between 3 students)
* Camera/ tablet/ phone
* Internet access

Suggested content

| Learning context | Content |
| --- | --- |
| Mental health and wellbeing  Focus: Developing self-efficacy and mental fitness | Self-awareness and self-regulation   * emotional awareness and self-regulation * optimistic thinking * perspective taking * positive self-talk * holistic view of life |
| Independence  Focus: Building self-concepts and independence | Self-management   * using mind-sets for motivation and achievement, e.g. growth mind-set * responsibility for self and actions |

Teaching notes

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready).

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audio visual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the [Life Ready website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready).

Learning experiences

Activity 1- what is optimism?

* Spread the media images around the space or across the classroom floor.
* Students choose a card they see as representing optimism or being optimistic.
* As a group, discuss what optimism is. Invite students to explain how they see optimism and why they made the image selection they did.
* Explain to students that learning the skills of optimism can help protect against depression and anxiety. It involves learning to think positively about the future – even when things go wrong. Learning the skills of optimism includes the skills to look objectively at a situation, make a conscious and realistic decision and to focus on the good when headed through challenging situations.
* Ask students:
  + when do you feel most optimistic?
  + what helps you to think more positively when you don’t feel optimistic?

Hunting for optimism

* Students work in small groups (3 per group) for 2 minutes. In groups, students create two lists of positive things or thoughts that make them happy.
  + Things that make me happy…at school.
  + Things that make me happy…at home/outside of school.
* Students merge with another group and share their lists. Groups record their list on butcher’s paper for both school and at home.
* Ask students, where can we go for help when we are not feeling optimistic? Guide the discussion so that students consider a mixture of online and offline places to go for help and include a discussion about the local school context and what/who are the supports available. This will vary across schools but some examples are listed below.
* Create a whole group list of where to go for help. Students record this list or are provided with a copy of this list for future reference.

Where/who can I go to for help?

| At home/outside of school | In school |
| --- | --- |
| Parent/ carer/ elder | Classroom teacher |
| Sibling or extended family | Year advisor |
| Friends | Head Teacher Welfare/Wellbeing |
| Sports coach | School learning and support officer |
| [ReachOut.com](https://au.reachout.com/) | Aboriginal education officer |
| [Headspace](https://www.headspace.org.au/) | Community liaison officer |
| [Youth Beyond Blue](https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/) | Chaplain/Pastoral Care Team |
|  | [ReachOut.com](https://au.reachout.com/) |
|  | [Headspace](https://www.headspace.org.au/) |
|  | [Youth beyond blue](https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/) |

* Using a camera/phone or tablet, students take on a mission to hunt out optimism at school.
  + In the same groups of 3 as activity b, students are to head on a scavenger hunt to take photos of the objects and things that make them feel positive/happy or bring a smile to their face at school. This activity does not include images of people. Students should be encouraged to focus on and take photos of objects not people.

Note: Remind students that permission must be sought before taking photos where people are included in background or forefront of the image. If permission is not gained, these people should not be photographed. For this reason this activity focuses on images of objects not people.

* Students share photos with the group.
  + Offline — print photos and display on an ‘optimism wall’ in the school or classroom.
  + Online — to share images online students should be previously educated about the positive and safe use of social media, see http://www.cybersmart.gov.au for Cyber Safety information and lesson content. It is recommended students share photos using an established school blog or social media platform such as Twitter or Instagram. A suggestion would be to use the hashtag (#) #optimism or a specific school/class based hashtag.

Note: For further information and advice on using Twitter in the classroom, check out [Reachout classroom resources](https://schools.au.reachout.com/classroom-resources)

Journal – thinking of positives

* using a paper journal, online journal, or an App such as [Life Charge](http://au.reachout.com/life-charge) students keep a journal of positive things they experience, think about or hope for across a week.
* after a week or more, students share with the group how their journal made them feel.
* as a whole group, discuss— How can students transfer these positive feeling skills to other parts of their life?