

Responding to challenging situations

Materials

- 7 small boxes suitable for the letterbox survey slips. Number each box from 1-7.
- Student Activity Sheet: *Has this ever happened to you?* [one per student]
- Teaching Resource: *Positive ways to deal with challenges and set-backs* [place on interactive whiteboard or photocopy one per student]
- Student Activity Sheet: *I know how to respond positively* [one per student]
- Student Activity Sheet: *Reflecting on my resilience skills* [one per student]

Before you get started

- Students are likely to have many questions that they may feel uncomfortable to ask in front of others. Providing a question box for students to place their questions in anonymously will ensure their questions are answered in a safe environment. Refer to the Guide: [Question box](#) for further information.

Learning activities

Group agreement

5 min

Teaching tip: A group agreement must be established before any Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) program begins to ensure a safe learning environment. Read [Essential Tool: Establishing a group agreement](#) for tips on how to create one and what to include.

1. Revise or create the class [group agreement](#).

Whole Class

This activity is based on the understanding that we all have challenges and setbacks and that they are a normal part of life and should not be personalised. Students explore useful reasons behind our intense emotions.

1. Write a class definition of each of the following words: **Resilience, Pessimistic, Optimistic.**
 - Create a [Y-chart](#) for each of the words, identifying what each characteristic looks like, sounds like and feels like.
2. Create two A3 paper signs. Label the first sign: *Pessimistic thinking is negative and unhelpful*. Label the second sign: *Optimistic thinking is positive and helpful*.
 - Have students add examples of each to the appropriate signs. Display these around the classroom.

- When students display pessimistic thinking ask them to think again and refer to the Optimistic thinking sign to change their thinking to be more positive.
3. Have students form 7 small groups and conduct a [letterbox survey](#) using the questions on the Student Activity Sheet: *Has this ever happened to you?*. Students tear off their responses and post in the corresponding numbered boxes and tally the yes/no responses from the box allocated to them. Hear findings from each question.

Ask:

- *What do these results tell us?* (everyone has bad times that don't last forever; everyone has bad things happen to them that they can't change; everyone makes mistakes; everyone feels rejected, lonely, sad at some stage in their life)
- *How does it help to know that everyone has setbacks, unpleasant feelings and bad times?* (we understand that they are a normal part of life)
- *Why do we sometimes think that setbacks, unpleasant feelings and bad times only happen to us?* (when these things happen it's hard to think about other people; other people often don't share these things with us)
- *Why don't bad times usually last?* (time makes things seem better; other people help; we work out ways to solve our problems; situations change)
- *How are mistakes useful and necessary?* (we can learn from them; no-one is perfect; trying to be perfect is stressful)
- *What happens if we take things personally and think that challenges we have are because we are jinxed?* (we feel helpless and less likely to bounce back from these unpleasant feelings by problem-solving and looking for ways to cope)
- *What are some things you could put into the category of 'just can't change so have to accept' when we are thinking about what caused setbacks or challenges?* (the weather; genetics; illness or death; moving school; some family issues; being in the wrong place at the wrong time)
- *How do we often feel in these challenging situations?* (angry; sad; worried; frightened)
- *Why is it useful to feel anger?* (we may need to stand up for our rights or protect ourselves in some way)
- *When is it not useful to feel anger?* (when it controls us so that we can't use helpful thinking and we act in a way that we may regret)
- *Why is it useful to feel sad?* (it is a useful way to grieve; it helps us move on; it lets us know what we value)
- *Is it useful to feel a little bit of worry or nervousness before we take on a challenge like talking in front of the school at an assembly?* (yes, a little bit keeps us motivated and makes us try hard, but too much worry makes it impossible to think properly and no worry at all may make us feel overconfident)
- *Is there one best way to manage intense emotions?* (no, it depends on the circumstances but usually it helps if you can find a way to calm down what's happening in your body; use self-talk and optimistic thinking; and then find a way to solve the problem in a calm way)
- *Why is it important to correctly name and recognise our feelings?* (this helps us use the right calming strategies, self-talk and optimistic thinking and problem-solve in the correct way. For example, we may think we are furious when we are really just annoyed. The way respond to each of these emotions would be different.)

Independent or Small Group

Students learn the difference between optimistic and pessimistic thinking; and how self-talk can help in challenging situations. They then apply these skills to a range of scenarios.

1. Explain that when we experience challenges and failures like the ones we talked about in the last activity there are 3 things we can do to bounce back from these setbacks.
2. Whiteboard:
 - a. **Calm** down the body
 - b. **Think** optimistically
 - c. Use **self-talk**
3. Place Teaching Resource: *Positive ways to deal with challenges and setbacks* on the interactive whiteboard. Introduce the skill of **calming down the body** and brainstorm strategies students use to distract them when they are angry, sad, disappointed, etc. For instance; exercise, listen to music, play with a pet, deep breathe.
4. Introduce the skill of **thinking optimistically** and explain that it is thinking (when things are bad) that:
 - a. 'Things will get better soon – this won't last forever.'
 - b. 'I don't like what's happening, but it happens to everyone, not just me.'
 - c. 'It's just this bit that isn't alright; everything else in my life is OK.'

Read and explain the other examples on the teaching resource.

5. Explain that it is more useful than **thinking pessimistically**, which is thinking that:
 - a. 'Things won't get better soon – this will keep happening to me.'
 - b. 'I don't like what's happening. It's because I'm dumb or unlucky.'
 - c. 'Everything in my life seems bad because of this.'
6. Explain that optimistic thinking needs to be practised and that even the most optimistic person sometimes takes a while to start thinking this way when they experience bad times. Emphasise that optimists feel happy and confident; have good health and live longer and are more successful at school, work and in their relationships. Ask:

Can you think of an optimistic person you know? What do they do or say that is optimistic? Invite 2 or 3 students to share.

7. Introduce the skill of **positive self-talk** and explain that it is a positive inner voice that makes you feel good about yourself and the things that are going on in your life. It is like having an optimistic voice in your head that always looks on the bright side. Positive self-talk can boost your confidence when things go wrong; can help keep intense feeling under control and help you make friends.

Example: "These clothes look pretty awesome on me and I feel great when I wear them", "I can totally make it through this exam", "I don't feel great right now, but things could be worse!"

Read and explain the other examples on the teaching resource.

Negative self-talk is a negative inner voice that makes you feel bad about yourself and things that are going on. It can put a downer on anything, whether it is good or bad.

8. Have students form small groups and give them a copy each of the Student Activity Sheet: *I know how to respond positively*.
 - Students choose 3-4 situations to discuss as a group and decide on useful calming strategies; optimistic thinking; and positive self-talk to use in each situation.
 - They record their findings on the worksheet. Show the example provided on the worksheet to ensure students understand the task.
 - Hear findings and encourage students to explain their choices.

3-2-1 Reflection

1. Give students the Student Activity Sheet: *Reflecting on my resilience skills* and, using a [think-pair-share](#) strategy, have them complete and share with a partner.
 - This resource can be used to create a class poster/chart. Students can then refer to it in the future when they need to be reminded of these strategies.
2. Students should take this activity home to share with their family.