

Being healthy – enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle

Emotional Health

Health is defined by the World Health Organization as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’.

Our health is linked to the way we live our lives and our opportunities for choosing health. Health and life expectancy are not shared equally across the population and there remain big differences in health between those at the top and bottom ends of the social scale. Mental health problems are more common in areas of deprivation (Department of Health website). Young people who have been excluded from schools are likely to have more physical and mental health problems than other young people.

Emotional (or mental) health refers to the capacity we have to feel good about who we are and feel confident to deal positively with present and future circumstances. The first section of this unit focuses on emotional health, rather than physical health because it is emotional resilience and resourcefulness that supports us in making healthier choices.

Someone who is emotionally healthy has, among other things, a secure sense of who they are and an ability to be themselves – though this changes over time and develops as we grow; a sense of self-worth; a belief in their own ability; and an ability to recognise, care about and take responsibility for the impact of their behaviour on others (Bird and Gerlach 2005). The term ‘emotional health’ is used in *Life Routes* although others may refer to the same as ‘positive mental health’.

Research shows that emotions can hinder or promote learning. A young person first needs to feel safe and calm to learn (Health Development Agency 2004). To do this they need to be able to recognise and describe how they are feeling, and respond appropriately. Many vulnerable young people find it hard to name the feelings they are having because they haven’t learned the right word, or because their emotions seem too complex to describe. One way to become aware of our feelings is to become more aware of physical reactions to emotional states. Paying more attention to body signals, and linking the body’s signals to feelings increases our ‘feelings’ vocabulary.

Activities 2 to 4 in this section give young people the experience of naming feelings and becoming more conscious of the impact of feelings on behaviour. Activity 5 focuses on developing simple strategies for managing emotions.

I want to be able to manage my emotions. You can't let your emotions take over.

Young woman aged 15

Learning outcomes

Young people will:

- have an increased vocabulary to describe their feelings (Activity 2)
- recognise and understand their body signals for emotional states (Activity 3)
- be able to identify their triggers (i.e. situations which provoke a strong emotional reaction) (Activity 4)
- have developed strategies to manage in difficult situations or when things go wrong (Activity 5).

You will need

- large sheets of paper
- pens for display work
- marker pens in two contrasting colours
- one copy of Worksheet 1: *Feelings wheel*
- one copy for each person of Worksheet 2: *Triggers*

Optional:

- art materials
- magazines.

Suggested icebreakers:

How I feel
(See page 21)

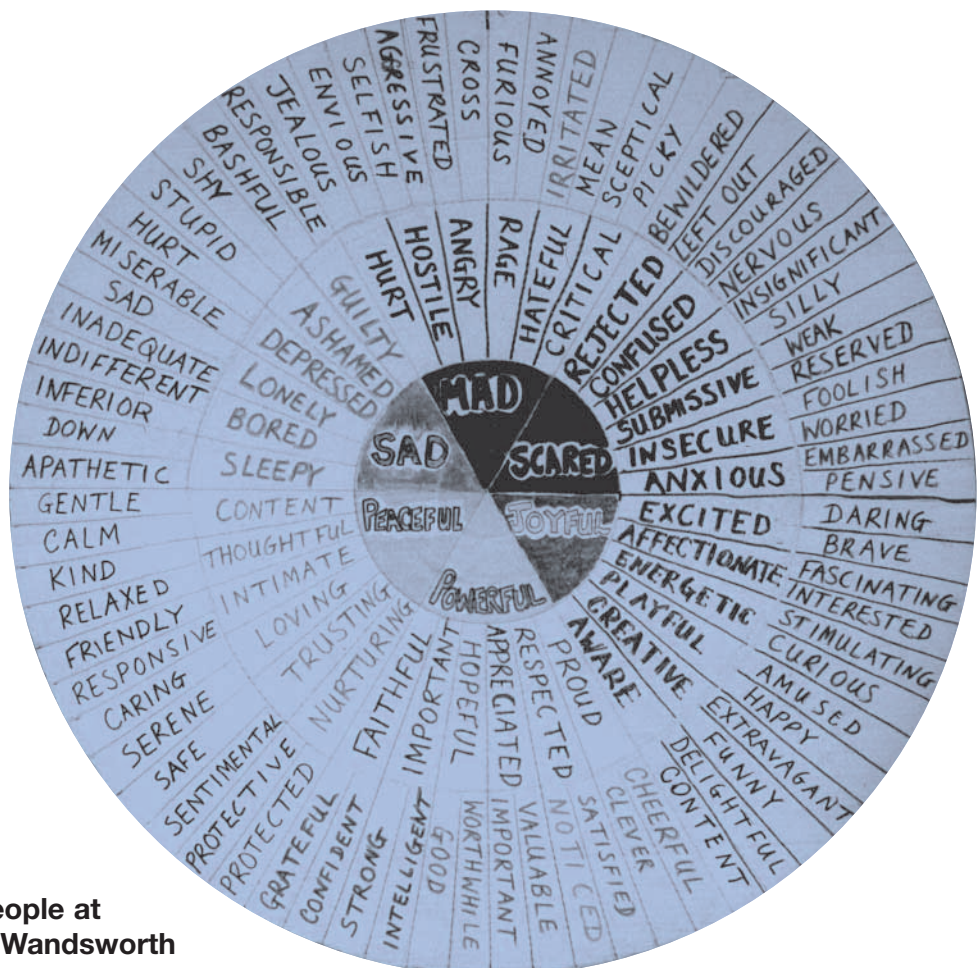


Activity 2: Developing a 'feelings vocabulary'

There are three options for this activity. Choose the one that is most appropriate for your group.

Option (a) The feelings wheel

1. Using a large piece of paper draw a circle and separate into segments, or use the example on worksheet 1 (See the photo below).
2. Either start with six words in the inner circle (for example, happy, sad, powerful, peaceful, angry, scared) or ask the group to choose and agree six words that describe different emotions and write these in the inner circle.
3. Brainstorm alternative words for the original six and develop a second/middle circle of feelings words.
4. Finally, brainstorm an outer circle of feelings words that further develop the original words in the centre of the circle.
5. The wheel can be developed over a period of time and used as an ongoing resource for the young people.



A feelings wheel developed by young people at Francis Barber PRU in Wandsworth

Option (b) An A to Z of emotions

1. Divide the young people into groups of three or four.
2. Give each group a large piece of paper with the alphabet down the left hand side.
3. Get them to write one feeling or emotion next to each letter (for example, H = happy).

Or:

4. In one large group brainstorm as many feelings words as possible for each letter.
5. Ask the group to divide the feelings into ones that make us feel good or bad, using different colours for each. There may be some feelings in both sets, and this provides an opportunity to explore when and why this might be.

An A to Z of emotions developed by young people

- A = anger, admiration, afraid, alone, amazing, alright, attractive, atrocious, attentive, anxious, apprehensive
- B = bored, beautiful, boastful, bad, bubbly
- C = calm, cranky, courageous, caring
- D = depressed, daring, delightful, dreamy
- E = encouraging, envious, empathetic, empty, energetic
- F = fragile, feminine, friendly, frightened
- G = gay, gregarious, grateful, generous, gracious
- H = happy, hysterical, horrible, horny, hungover, high
- I = ill, invisible, intellectual, inspired, intimidated, ignorant, ignored, irresistible, irritated
- J = jumpy, joyful, jolly
- K = kind, kinky, kissable
- L = lonely, lovely, luscious, low, lazy, lickable
- M = mature, mad, misunderstood, mean, manly, mental
- N = naked, nothing
- O = ostentatious, old, ok
- P = peaceful, persuasive, 'pissed', polite, pensive, precious, pleased
- Q = quiet
- R = restless, rebellious, relieved
- S = sexy, serious, scared, special, surprised, sad
- T = tense, tired, talkative
- U = unsure, undignified
- V = vexed
- W = warm, wet, wonderful
- X = xcited
- Y = youthful
- Z = zealous

Option (c) The feelings bank

1. Divide the young people into small groups of three or four.
2. Give each group a large piece of paper, pens in three different colours, and a selection of art materials and magazines.
3. With one pen write the word 'feelings' in the middle of the paper.
4. Ask the young people to fill the rest of the piece of paper with as many 'feelings' words or pictures as they can, to use as a 'feelings bank'. For example:
 - they could use art materials, for example coloured paper, felt tips or fabric
 - they could cut out pictures from magazines that illustrate different facial expressions and explain what the expressions mean to them.
 - they can use different colours to represent feelings that make them feel happy or sad. There may be some feelings that are both happy and sad, and this provides an opportunity to explore when and why this might be.
5. Leave time after the activity for the young people to present their sheet to the group and describe the feelings words and pictures they have found.
6. The 'feelings bank' can be used as a prompt during other work on understanding emotions that the group undertakes.

Reflection

How did it feel to do this activity?
How was it more difficult than you expected?
How was this exercise useful?
What did you learn?

Facilitators note

Remember to display the posters, feelings wheels and other artwork in a prominent place in the room. Young people will get used to being surrounded by the vocabulary of emotions. Regular reference to them will help them to feel more comfortable using these words. It will also boost their self-esteem and confidence to see their work displayed.



Activity 3: Triggers

Either:

1. Give each participant a copy of Worksheet 2: *Triggers* (see page 40, and ask them to write down their immediate responses to the questions. If they need examples offer some.
2. Ask each young person to share their responses with a partner.
3. Back in the whole group, invite the young people to discuss responses and identify where there are similarities and differences.
4. Identify ways to manage situations positively.

Or:

1. As a whole group brainstorm the questions on Worksheet 2. This is particularly helpful if participants have low literacy levels.

Or:

1. Explore the questions on Worksheet 2 through role-play. In pairs or small groups, ask them to select one of their 'triggers' and prepare a short role-play showing the trigger and the response to it. Those watching can try to guess the trigger.

Reflection

What was the most important thing you learned in this activity?

Which of other people's triggers were like yours?

What ways did you learn about managing difficult situations?



Activity 4: Physical reactions

1. Divide into small groups and ask each group to draw a simple outline of the human body on a sheet of paper.
2. Ask one person to act out a frozen image of an emotion.
3. Get the groups to guess which emotion is being demonstrated and to describe what they see, for example, clenched teeth, sad face.
4. Ask the groups to draw on the appropriate parts of the body what physical reaction there may be to feeling that emotion, for example, feeling hot, mind racing, heart beating, sweaty hands.
5. Discuss these physical warning signs – everyone is different and will react differently. Point out that it is helpful to recognise early warning signs as this will help them make choices about how to deal with and respond to an emotion.

Reflection

Which physical reactions did you identify with?
How can understanding physical reactions help you understand what you are feeling and manage your behaviour?



Activity 5: Developing strategies for dealing with stressful situations

1. Using some of the triggers from Activity 3, ask the young people to identify possible feelings associated with the trigger.
2. Give the young people a storyboard, either individually or in pairs, and ask them to write a story that manages the situation and triggers positively. Examples might include:
 - bringing a conversation to an end, by agreeing to differ, instead of shouting
 - walking away from the situation if you feel too angry to keep calm, to avoid possible violent outcomes
 - bringing in someone who is not involved to help calm the situation
 - checking your body language to see how you are reacting (for example, crossed arms may demonstrate defensiveness; moving hands quickly may show anger or frustration)
3. Invite young people to role-play the difficult situations, but showing positive management, including the use of effective body language.

Reflection

Can you identify one thing you can change to help you manage your emotions when you feel angry or stressed?

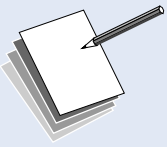
What will help you make this change?

What will stop you making this change?

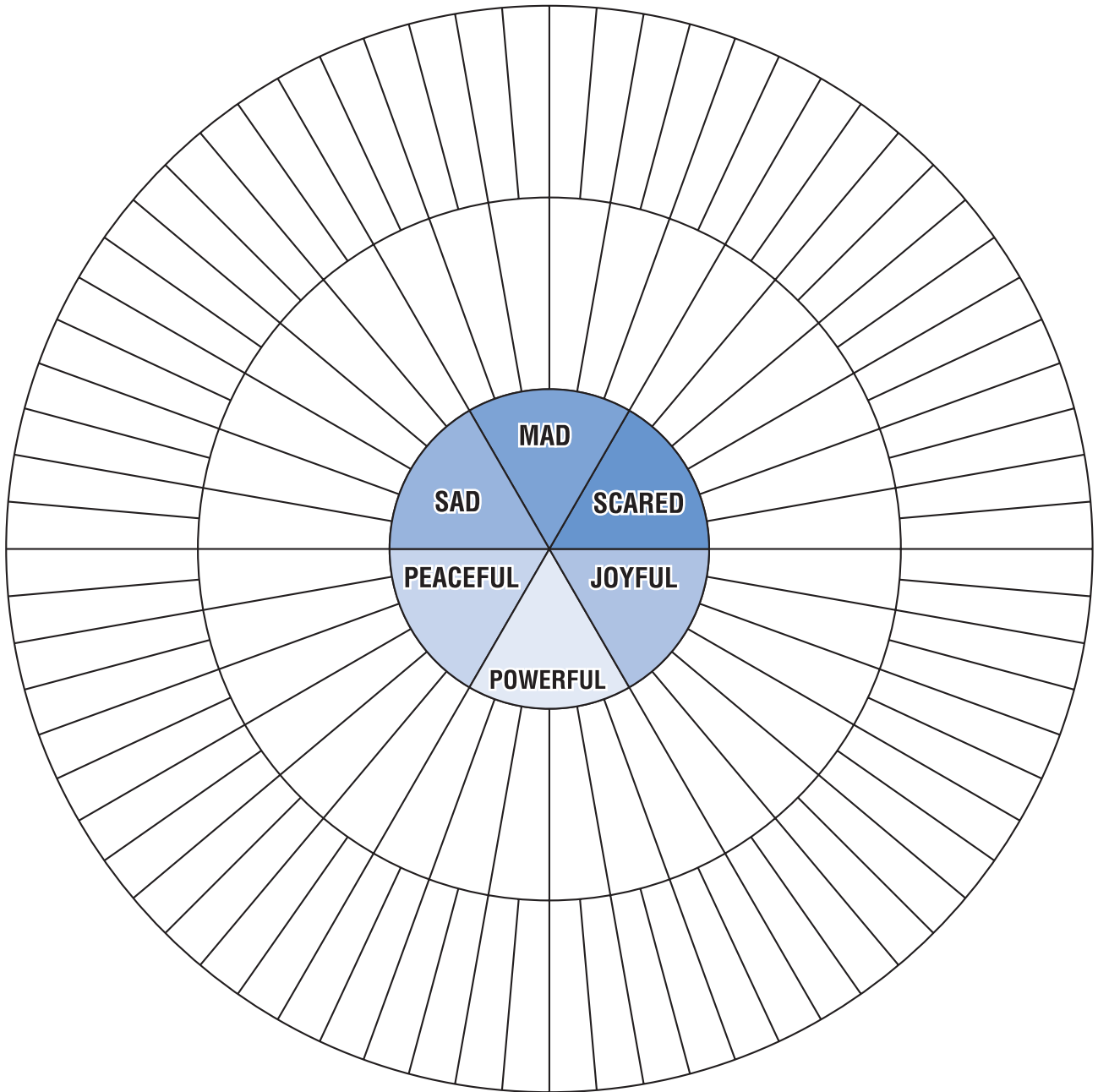
What is the most helpful thing you have learned today?

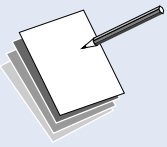
Facilitators note

Activity 5 builds on Activities 3 and 4, and provides an opportunity to try out different ways of dealing with difficult situations, such as those identified in Triggers on page 37. Use the Storyboard from *Creative assessment* (see page 26).



Worksheet 1: The feelings wheel





Worksheet 2: Triggers

What irritates you?

What excites you?

What makes you angry?

What makes you happy?

What frightens or upsets you?

What grabs your attention?

What frustrates you?