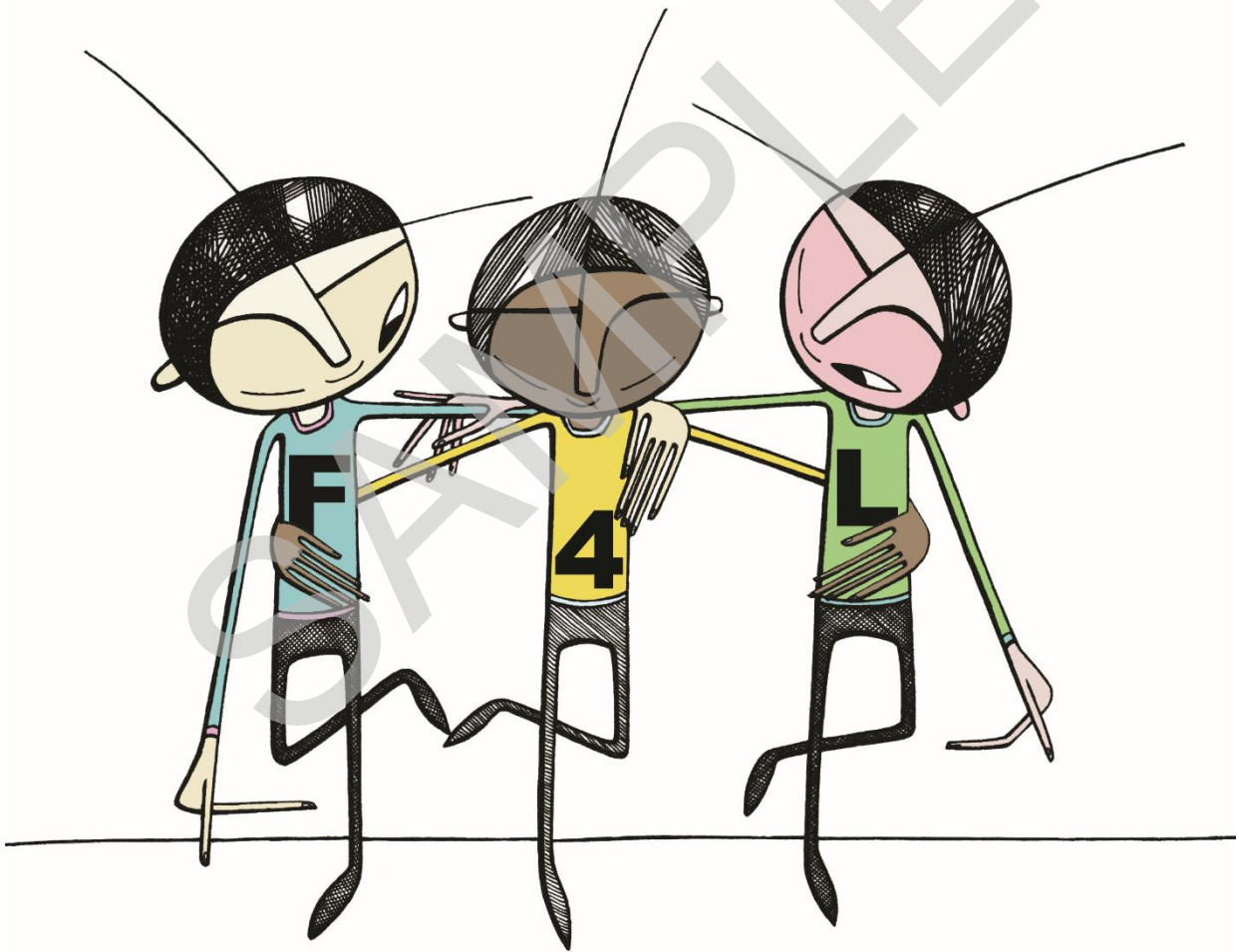


Facts4Life

## Mental Health Resource – Primary



Facts4Life: A health resilience programme for primary and secondary schools

*Helping young people take ownership of their mental health*

# Facts4Life

## Mental Health Resource - Primary

**Facts4Life: A health resilience programme for primary and secondary schools**

*Helping young people take ownership of their mental health*

*These materials are to be used in conjunction with the Facts4life resources for primary and secondary schools. The Facts4life approach recognises the interconnectedness of physical and mental health. These on-line resources with a focus on mental health have been devised as a response to requests from teachers to provide further support in an area of growing need across the country. We encourage teachers to continue to highlight the interplay between symptoms of physical and mental ill health within their teaching.*

### **Theme One**

#### **What is Mental Health? - Riding the Ups and Downs**

- Establishing understanding of mental health
- Introducing the mental health continuum
- Exploring language associated with mental health and mental illness

### **Theme Two**

#### **When Might I Need Help? – Keeping Balanced**

- Understanding the link between mental and physical health and how we keep in balance
- Making the distinction between low mood, normal levels of anxiety and the need for additional help

### **Theme Three**

#### **How Can I Better Support Myself? – Smoothing the Path**

- Identifying what is helpful, including self-help as well as accessing professional support
- Practising listening skills and how to support friends who might be struggling

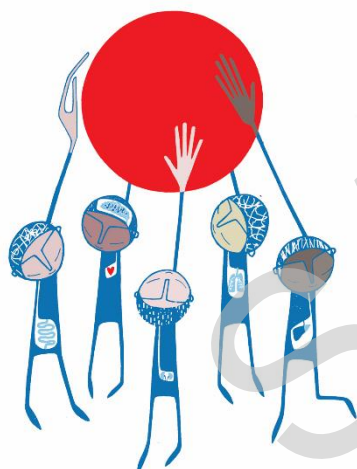
Using the metaphor of life as a journey, there are three key messages underpinning Facts4Life lessons:

### 1. Riding the Ups and Downs

How we are feeling is not static or fixed, it constantly changes. Sometimes this is in response to an event or our own experience and sometimes it is apparently for no reason at all. We all have different emotions and respond differently to our life – this is quite normal. The important thing to remember is that most feelings will pass whether they are good or quite bad. It is all part of the journey through life - it is not just what happens to us during this journey but how we respond that influences our wellbeing. This might mean learning to view a situation differently, choosing a new set of actions or accessing external support.



### 2. Keeping Balanced



Our minds and bodies are remarkably efficient at maintaining balance, they are really quite robust most of the time, but it can be hard to see that when we are struggling with something. We can get knocked in varying ways and our sense of balance may wobble a bit. As there is such a close correlation between our minds and bodies - the experience affects both. An example of this is when a person feels stressed; it may make a physical condition such as asthma or eczema much worse. By the same token, if a bone is broken or someone must go through a surgical procedure, this can affect their emotional state of mind.

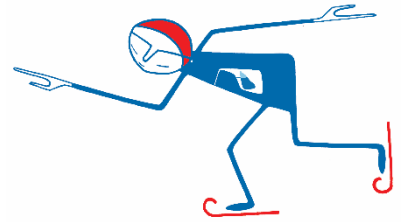
Conditions such as depression may be triggered by an episode of ill health – especially if it's prolonged or seems to have no end. Severe depression can lead to physical withdrawal and loss of appetite. Many of us return to a 'comfortable' state again although the time taken to achieve this will vary from one individual to another. Some however need a little more help.

*"You are the sum total of everything you've ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot - it's all there. Everything influences each of us, and because of that I try to make sure that my experiences are positive."*

Maya Angelou

### 3. Smoothing the Path

We are all different and how we respond to the challenges life throws at us will vary. This all depends on many factors which include previous experience and factors such as genetics, the environment and levels of resilience. The good news is that coping skills may be taught and learned to enable us to feel better. For example, we can learn to talk about feelings and worries. To learn a language to describe our mental and emotional wellbeing will increase awareness and understanding of our experience and help us to manage it. There are other actions we can take to support both our mental and physical health that relate to sleep, healthy eating, exercise and other coping strategies.



#### Ground Rules

Explain that the next series of lessons will focus on matters of mental health which can be a personal and sensitive issue. We therefore need to establish an agreed set of rules for how we all support each other.

#### Example:

The following are suggested rules although it is more meaningful for the group to establish their own.

1. Be responsible for your own learning
2. Respect others' opinions, accept that views and experiences will differ
3. Only one person speaking at a time
4. You have the right to pass
5. Listen to who is speaking
6. Talk about yourself and let other people talk for themselves
7. Observe confidentiality
8. Be thoughtful, considerate and non-judgmental always

Additional rules may be added, or existing ones adapted, to ensure the groups achieve ownership of the ground rules.

It is advisable to revisit the ground rules at the start of every lesson to enable pupils to feel safe and therefore able to contribute to discussions and activities and gain more from the sessions.

It is very important to consider the timing of sessions as they may raise issues that need addressing afterwards. Also, the teacher may require some support as they may feel distressed or concerned and need to share their reaction, especially if safeguarding is an issue.

## Theme 1: What is Mental Health - Riding the Ups and Downs

### **Mental Health Continuum (30 minutes)**

This activity is suitable for Key Stages 1 and 2. You might like to tailor the examples to suit the cohort. Aim to select 6-8 examples to place on the continuum.

Introduce the idea of the continuum of mental health and explain that all of us are located somewhere on it and that this position may change depending on a number of factors. Set up a line which represents the continuum with feeling dreadful (down) at one end and feeling fantastic (up) at the other.

Encourage the students to consider what might place them in a particular position on the continuum. Most of the time, most of us exist somewhere in the middle and always will and this is a very healthy position to occupy – this is the key message to highlight with the children. Examples of life events can be given and students place themselves along the line, depending on how they think they may react.

Examples might include:

1. Death of a pet
2. Going swimming after school
3. Joining brownies or cubs/beavers
4. Visiting Grandma
5. Having favourite dinner
6. Having a deep bubble bath
7. Playing on a new game
8. Watching a favourite programme
9. Reading a new book
10. Doing some colouring in
11. Listening to music
12. Looking at photographs
13. Riding your bike
14. Learning some new spellings
15. Being told off
16. Having an argument
17. Falling out with your friend
18. Being left out of a game
19. Not being picked for a team
20. Falling over and hurting yourself
21. Feeling embarrassed
22. Being laughed at
23. Having your hard work recognised
24. Being praised for helping out

..... the group can create their own ideas to add to the list and decide where this would place them

Emphasise at the end how our lives are full of both positive and negative experiences. We are all different and for some, going swimming might be an enjoyable activity. For others, it might be a source of anxiety. That's completely normal. We can learn to manage the challenging situations more easily.



## Theme Two: When Might I Need Help? - Keeping Balanced

### Exploring Worry

#### (Key Stage One)

Using a class toy or puppet:

*Oh dear, Milo is looking sad about something. He said he's feeling worried. Shall we see if we can help him.*

*What sort of things do you think Milo might be worrying about?* Discuss, drawing on children's own experience of worry.

*How might Milo's worrying be making him feel?* Discuss, making the connection between worry and Milo's physical and emotional state – how worry manifests itself in the body e.g. stomach churning, hot and cold, difficulty sleeping or getting to sleep, tearful etc.

*What kind of things might make Milo feel better?* Take suggestions from children – e.g. talk to someone else about his worries, have a cuddle etc.

#### (Lower Key Stage Two)

#### Out of your hands, Save for later, Deal with it now

Using the fictitious family from the resource you can explore different types of worry and different strategies for dealing with worries.

Refer to one of the characters in the fictitious family who is worried about something. *What do we mean by a worry? Why do people get worried about things? What kind of things might people worry about?* Note down children's different suggestions on post-it notes or similar. Sort the different worries into categories under the headings:

**Out of your hands** – these are worries that you have no control over e.g. how mum will get on in her job interview; how big sister will do in her exams; how successful granny's chemotherapy will be\*. You can still be concerned about these things but ultimately you can't affect the outcome.

\*Worries of this kind, while very big and scary, are out of our control and are best managed by employing a range of positive coping strategies. We will be looking at other strategies for coping with difficult feelings and keeping ourselves in balance in future sessions.

**Save for later** – these are worries that might niggle at you from time to time but are not pressing and don't need your urgent attention e.g. what secondary school you are going to go to; staying away from home for a future residential visit etc.

**Deal with it now** – these are worries that are more urgent and are best dealt with sooner rather than later. Sometimes people put off doing something that worries them but this just prolongs the time they are worrying about it and so the worry grows e.g. learning your spellings ahead of a test; talking to a friend after falling out with them etc. Similarly, some worries are significant in ensuring the child's, or a family member's, safety and so would need immediate action by sharing with a trusted adult e.g. unusual upsetting or harmful behaviour from a family member at home; being bullied etc.

*How does worry affect a person both physically and emotionally?* Children may want to discuss this in small groups using a gingerbread person template to show different ways the body is affected by worry e.g. churning stomach, wobbly knees, flushed cheeks, pounding heart etc.

## Theme Two: When Might I Need Help? - Keeping Balanced

(Lower Key Stage 2 continued...)

*What strategies can we think of to help manage these difficult feelings?* You might want to extend this task to suggest strategies for managing different types of worry such as

- Talking to a friend/trusted adult as appropriate acknowledging that some problems can be talked over with friends, but some worries need the help of an adult
- Distraction techniques, i.e. do something to take your mind off a nagging worry
- Mindfulness – to help focus your attention on soothing your worried state, e.g. breathing techniques, body scan etc.

A useful book to help explore the issue of worry is *You've got dragons* by Kathryn Cave and Nick Maland where dragons are used as metaphor for worry.



### Theme Three: How Can I Better Support Myself? - Smoothing the Path

#### What keeps our mental health in balance? (quick filler/tutor time)

This activity is well suited to Lower Key Stage 2 and could be done as a Diamond Nine activity where the children arrange the behaviours in a diamond shape with the most important/helpful at the top and the least important/helpful at the bottom.

There is no right or wrong to this, but the activity will generate discussion around types of behaviour in response to differing circumstances; acknowledging when certain behaviours may be more or less useful. Encourage the group to consider other helpful strategies.

<b>Talking about worries to someone you trust</b>	<b>Taking regular exercise</b>
<b>Meeting up with friends</b>	<b>Being kind to others</b>
<b>Getting enough sleep</b>	<b>Focusing on the positive</b>
<b>Doing something you enjoy</b>	<b>Being kind to yourself</b>
<b>Learning a new skill</b>	

Encourage the group to think of their own ideas to add.