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Foundations for Wellbeing

Year 3, lesson 5: Managing responses



Managing responses

This is the last of five lessons on self-regulation, mental health and emotional wellbeing, for year 3. This lesson focuses on managing stress, tension and reactivity.

To encourage pupils to use the self-regulation strategies taught in these lessons more automatically, autonomously and effectively, it is important to revisit and reinforce them regularly, as part of a whole-school approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing. The extension activities are designed to support this (for more information, see the [Teacher Handbook](#)). To learn more, please visit our [self-guided online courses](#), which are available to all School Plus members.

The lesson plan is based on a 45-minute lesson. The timings given are the minimum required to deliver the activities, but you may wish to spend longer exploring each activity.

Learning objective and outcomes

To learn how feeling calm can help us to manage our responses.

Pupils will be able to:

- describe some differences between feeling calm and tense
- explain how feeling calm can make it easier for someone to manage their responses
- identify strategies to help someone feel calmer

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Resource 1: *Tense and calm* [one per small group]
- Slide 15 [support option, as required – printed and cut up for pupils who may benefit, see ‘Tense or calm?’ activity]
- Pupils’ baseline assessments from Lesson 1: Exploring emotions – Resource 1: *Giving advice*

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. They include guidance on establishing a safe learning environment, supporting pupils with additional vulnerabilities, using assessment and personal reflection effectively, and embedding the learning. They also outline useful subject knowledge on the theory and evidence informing these lessons, self-regulation strategies and relevant neuroscience.

The lesson plans should be used flexibly, and you are encouraged to adapt them to meet the specific needs and abilities of your pupils. It is also important to consider sensitivities and prior knowledge about specific pupils’ circumstances. If safeguarding concerns arise during this lesson, these should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, in line with your school policy.

Baseline assessment

Reconnecting activity and baseline assessment (Slides 9-11, 5 mins)

Establish or revisit ground rules. Explain that if pupils have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Using slide 10, begin by briefly recapping the learning from last lesson.

Show slide 11 and ask pupils to 'think-pair-share' their responses to the questions:

1. How do you think Meena is feeling? (*When they share, you may wish to prompt pupils further by asking, what makes you say that? What else would you need to know to be sure?*)
2. Imagine that just at this moment, a friend asks Meena to borrow her favourite book, which she had been planning to read. How do you think Meena might respond?
3. What could Meena do to help with any challenging feelings she might be having?

Listen to pupils' responses to help gauge their starting points and consider which elements of the lesson might need adapting. For example, do pupils use the word 'tense' or does this term need to be unpicked in activity 1? Pupils may also refer to their prior learning on strategies in response to question 3, so this is a good opportunity to see what they remember and if anything from the previous lessons needs to be consolidated.

Introduction (Slide 12, 2 mins)

Introduce the learning objective and outcomes. Explain that today's lesson will explore the benefits of feeling calmer, and strategies to help with this.

Core activities

Tense or calm? (Slides 13-15, 10 mins)

Using slide 13, emphasise that (just like everyone!) sometimes Meena feels calm, sometimes she feels tense and sometimes she will be somewhere in the middle. Explain that there is no right or wrong place to be on this scale. Give each small group a copy of **Resource 1: Tense and calm** and ask them to add a few ideas for the thoughts, emotions and bodily feelings Meena might experience when she is tense or calm. Emphasise that they don't need to think of lots of ideas for each box, and it is OK if some boxes have fewer ideas than others. If pupils struggle, slide 15 includes some ideas to get them started (see support option).

Take feedback. Pupils' answers will vary, but might include:

- **Tense** – Meena's **body might feel** tight or tense – for example, in her shoulders, her jaw, her forehead, her tummy; her **thoughts** might be very busy (having lots of them in a short amount of time), they might be unpleasant, unhelpful, and repetitive, and she might be having lots of

thoughts about the future or past; her **emotions** might include frustration, annoyance, worry, irritation, anger.

- **Calm** – Meena’s **body might feel** more relaxed or easy – for example, her shoulders might be relaxed down, instead of scrunched up, her tummy might feel still and comfortable; **thoughts** might be pleasant, helpful, slower, more focussed on what is happening around her at that time (instead of having lots of thoughts about the past or about the future); her **emotions** might include peacefulness, being chilled, contentment, relaxation or gratitude.

Finally, ask pupils how Meena’s emotions are different when she is tense compared to when she is calm. Emphasise that the emotions experienced when feeling tense tend to be less pleasant than the emotions experienced when someone is calm. But remind pupils that everyone feels tense sometimes – for example, when they do something challenging or at the end of a busy, tiring day.



Support: Share the ideas bank on slide 15 (which includes some of the guide answers above). If some pupils would benefit from having the ideas in front of them, or physically sorting them onto the outlines, print and cut up this slide.



Challenge: Ask pupils if they can think of one or more questions someone could ask themselves to help work out if they are calm or tense.

How will Meena respond? (Slides 16-19, 5 mins)

Show slide 16 and explain that Meena needs to respond to her sister. Make sure pupils are clear what you mean by ‘respond’ (this is about what Meena might say or do – how she will act in response to her sister’s request). Click to reveal the questions on the slide and ask the same groups to discuss these, before taking feedback.

Highlight that:

- *If Meena is tense, she’s more likely to respond to her sister in a less helpful way. For example, she might say something unkind, refuse to hand over the device, or she might get very upset and run out of the room.*
- *If Meena is calmer, she might still feel annoyed, irritated or disappointed that her turn is up, but she’ll be more likely to have a helpful response – such as giving the device to her sister but asking if she can have another turn later or watch her play, or calmly asking if she can quickly finish her game before her turn is up.*

Using slide 17, explain that this is because when Meena is tense, her amygdala is more active. Ask the class when else the amygdala is active (*when someone worries or is scared*). Emphasise that the amygdala is trying to protect Meena – so it acts a bit like an alarm bell alerting her to danger. In this way, the amygdala tells her body to react by getting ready for either flight (for example, running away), fight (for example, shouting angrily), or freeze (for example, mind going blank and not being able to think what to say or do). Sometimes, this is a helpful response (for example, if Meena had seen a poisonous snake – she might need to run away!) but in this situation, these responses won’t be helpful to Meena, or her sister.

Explain that, luckily, Meena can use strategies to help activate another part of her brain that will help to soothe her amygdala and calm her body down. Ask if anyone can remember from last lesson what this part of the brain is called? (*the prefrontal cortex – PFC*). A different part of Meena’s brain will help her to remember these strategies and, with practice, use them more easily in future. Again, ask if anyone can remember the name of this part of the brain? (*the hippocampus*).

What could Meena do to feel calmer? (Slides 20-27, 10 mins)

Remind the class that everyone will feel tense sometimes, but what matters is that Meena manages feelings of tension, so they don’t build up and make her feel upset or unhappy. Explain that the class will now explore together some of the things that Meena can do to help activate her PFC and soothe her amygdala – making herself feel calmer.

Using the emotions chart on slide 20, show how tense Meena is feeling when her sister tells her that her turn is over. Ask pupils to think back to their previous learning. Can they think of any actions that could help Meena to feel calmer in this situation? Collate pupils’ responses to create a class list, which might include ideas like talking to someone about how they’re feeling, distracting themselves, doing a muscle relaxation activity, counting to ten, doing something else they enjoy, or deep breaths – for example, flower bubble breathing (breathing in as though smelling a flower, and out as though blowing out candles).

Explain that the class is going to look in detail at two strategies for feeling calmer and consider how they might impact Meena. Make sure you model these activities with eyes open and sitting, rather than lying (this is an attachment and trauma-sensitive approach – see the Emotion Regulation Strategies document for further information).

Use slides 22-23 to share the instructions for the first strategy (4-6 breathing) which, like the flower bubble breathing practice, is another way of using the breath to feel calmer. Model the 4-6 breathing technique to pupils first and then practise it as a whole class – counting pupils through 10 of these breaths (it is best if you count so pupils can just focus on the breathing). **Note:** If any pupil has difficulty focussing on breathing, they could instead try the ‘See, hear, move’ strategy (finding three things of a certain colour, noticing three sounds they can hear, and then making three different body movements – such as moving their arms, fingers and toes). Alternatively, they could draw a picture of a happy memory.

Next, look at slide 24 and ask pupils to imagine Meena just did the breathing technique with them. Where do they think she would be on the graph now? (*Pupils answers will vary, but this should be an opportunity to gauge how calming they found the breathing technique.*)

Use slide 25 to introduce the second strategy for Meena to try – progressive muscle relaxation. Again, model this (as needed) using the [video clip](#) initially before asking pupils to join in with you for each of the different body parts. Once all body parts have been completed, look at slide 26 and ask pupils where Meena might be on the graph now – following the muscle relaxation strategy.

Emphasise that Meena can practise these strategies anytime and anywhere, if she feels tense.

Reflection (Slide 27)

Without sharing, ask pupils to decide which of the two strategies explored made them feel calmer. Prompt them to use their chosen strategy next time they are feeling tense.

Endpoint assessment

Endpoint assessment (Slides 28–29, 10 mins)

Use slide 28 to remind pupils of everything they have learned over the last five lessons. With this learning in mind, ask each pupil to look back at their advice on **Resource 1: Giving advice** from 'Lesson 1: Exploring emotions'. And with a different coloured pencil, add in any new advice or make any changes to the advice they gave in the first lesson.

When pupils have finished, take in their copies of **Resource 1: Giving advice** so you can assess their progress over the series of lessons and identify any misconceptions or gaps that still need addressing. Check the question box and respond to any remaining questions.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 30, 3 mins)

Remind pupils that if they have any worries about any of the topics covered over the five lessons, or if emotions are difficult, then it's important they speak to a trusted adult at home or at school who can help. Pupils can also contact Childline: www.childline.org.uk/kids.

Closing the lesson (Slide 31)

Finally, using slide 31, reinforce the key learning by summing up for the class what they have achieved in today's lesson.

Activities to extend and embed the learning

Show not tell (Slide 32)

Ask pupils to write a short description of a character (perhaps their favourite character from a book, film or TV show) who is feeling calm or tense. They must show, not tell, in their writing – so they shouldn't use the words 'calm' or 'tense' or any synonyms. Instead, they should use clues to show things like:

- how the person looks
- their bodily feelings
- emotions they might be experiencing
- thoughts they might have
- how they might be behaving

Can the rest of the class or their partner guess whether the character is calm or tense? How did they know?

Pause and notice (Slide 33)

Over the next week, can pupils pause and notice when they are feeling tense? When they do notice they are tense, can they use a strategy from today's lesson? How do they feel afterwards? Pupils could use the strategies posters (see Appendix 3 in the [Teacher Handbook](#)) throughout the week and beyond to remind themselves of strategies that might help.

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