

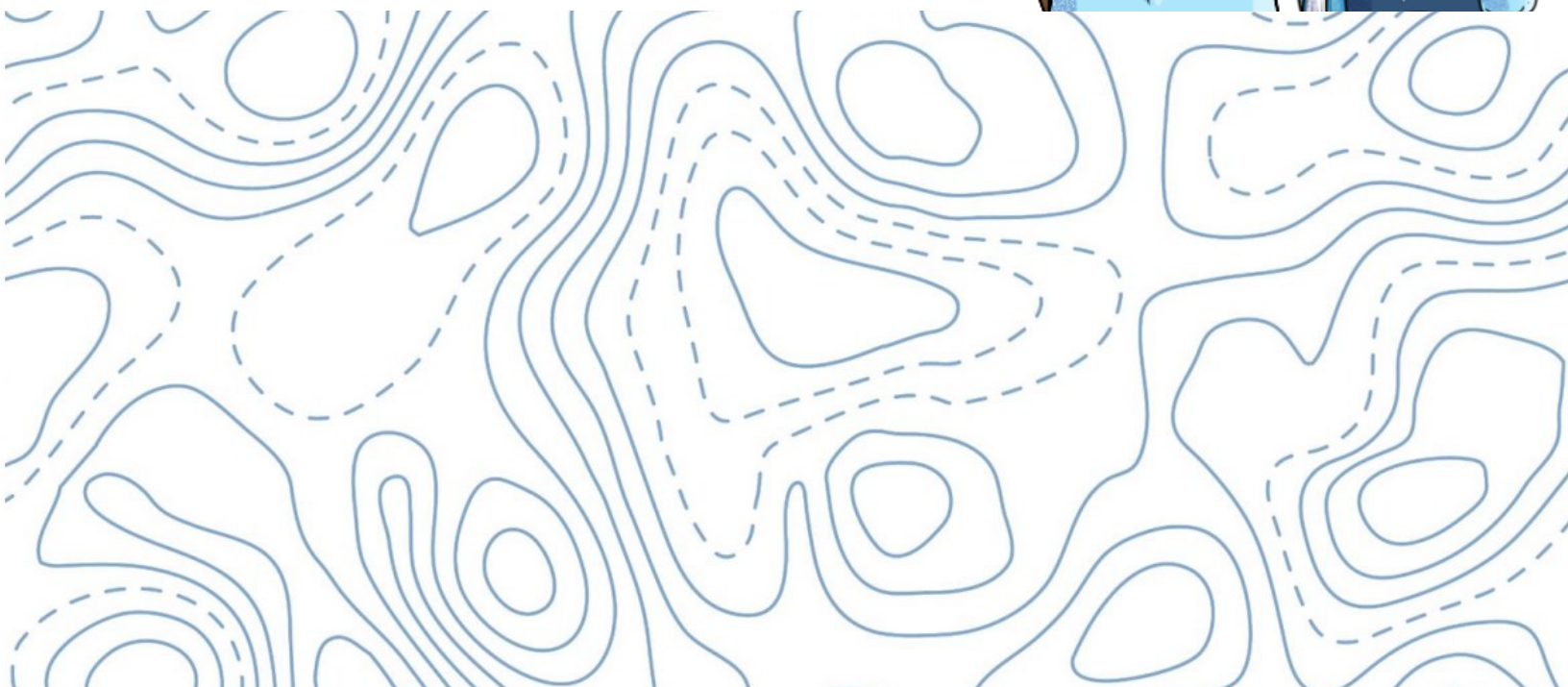


Talking About Anxiety Without Stress

Complete Facilitation Guide

Exploration Program—Secondary cycle 1

September 2025



A document developed by the [Centre RBC d'expertise universitaire en santé mentale](#), intended for children, adolescents, and young adults.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



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Table of contents

Workshop 1. Coping with my stress.....	04
Workshop 2. Dealing with anxiety.....	11
Workshop 3. Managing emotions and asking for help when needed.....	25
Workshop 4. Dealing with social comparison through self-observation.....	32
Workshop 5. Coping with social pressure by being assertive.....	40
Workshop 6. Building self-esteem through self-acceptance.....	48
Workshop 7. Fighting judgment with empathy and compassion.....	57
Workshop 8. Preventing and resolving conflict by communicating clearly.....	65
Workshop 9. Maintaining healthy friendships through prosocial behaviour.....	76
Workshop 10. Using social media wisely thanks to critical thinking skills.....	83
References.....	91





1. TOO MUCH IS JUST AS BAD AS NOT ENOUGH! WHEN STRESS PLAYS TRICKS ON ME...

Coping with my stress

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Managing emotions, stress and anxiety Self-knowledge, self-understanding, and self-worth
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)¹	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along
Cross-cutting competency (QEP)	Achieving their potential
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Recognize their signs of stress; • Understand what stress is and its purpose; • Better understand their own reactions to stress; • Use new strategies to manage their stress.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon



40-MINUTE version: DO NOT do activities marked with the icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the worksheet (1 per student): *Stressful or not?*
- Print the *Physical Sensations* and *Managing Stress* posters available on the [website](#) in the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Bring small cut pieces of paper (1 per student), placed in a container.
 - Reuse these same pieces of paper for activity F
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

¹ Please note that this workshop also introduces content corresponding to [Sheet 18](#), for 9th grade students, to anticipate future learning.

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A. Ready, set... improv! (5–10 minutes)

1. Announce that the workshop will start with a warm-up exercise—an improvisation!
 - Show the students the container and explain that inside are small slips of paper, each with a student's name on it.
 - Tell the students that you're going to pick five names at random.
 - The chosen students will have to do a two-minute improv in front of the class on the challenges of moving from elementary to high school.
2. Before drawing the names, have the students close their eyes if they want to. Ask them the following questions (Forsyth & Eifert, 2007, 2025)
 - What physical sensations do you feel? (e.g., racing heart, sweaty palms, shaking, irregular breathing, butterflies in their stomach, tight throat, sweating, feeling hot, etc.).
 - What emotions are you experiencing? (e.g., surprise, discomfort, fear, embarrassment, anger, excitement, joy, eagerness, pleasure, etc.).
 - What thoughts are going through your mind? (e.g. "Oh, no, I'll never be able to do this!" "Great! I love improv!" etc.).
3. Ask them to open their eyes again and then pretend to start drawing names, to create some suspense, then... SURPRISE! Tell them it was just a joke and they won't be doing an improv.
4. Ask the students to focus on their physical sensations, emotions and thoughts now.
5.  Then ask for volunteers to share their reactions to the "fake" improv activity with the rest of the class. Lead a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What did you experience when I said we'd be doing an improv activity? (Prompt the students to name their physical sensations, emotions and thoughts).
 - Why do you think everyone in the class didn't have the same sensations, emotions and thoughts?
 - What is the purpose of these reactions? What message do they send you?
6. Explain that what they felt during the fake improv (sensations, emotions and thoughts) are **signs of stress**. Ask the students:
 - Why is it important to recognize your signs of stress?
 - How can recognizing them help you in your everyday life?
7. Round out their answers with the following information:



The more aware we are of **our signs of stress**, the more easily we can **identify** situations that cause us stress and find strategies to **accept and manage it**. But the less sensitive we are to these signs, the more stress is likely to build up (Ciarrochi et al., 2014; Wassner & Sedley, 2024).

B. Educational clip - Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *When stress plays tricks on me – Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip – Part 1](#)



3



4



5

C. Stress... Good or bad? (5–10 minutes)

1. Referring to the video content, remind the students that stress is a **normal alarm reaction to a real, concrete situation**. It allows us to react appropriately when faced with danger.
2. Ask the students to explain what they understood from the video, and then complement their answers with the following information if necessary:

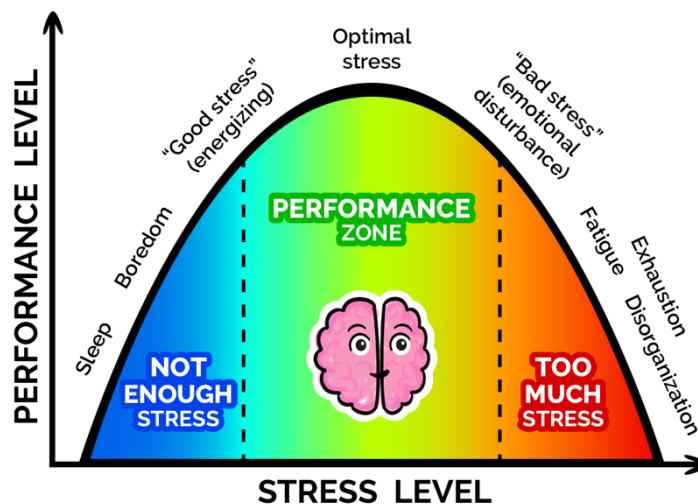


No stress or **too little stress** can cause us to fail to perceive the presence of danger in a situation, to let down our guard, and to under-react.

On the other hand, when we're faced with **excessive stress**, such as **cumulative stress** (e.g., a move in addition to your parents' separation, in the middle of your final exams), **prolonged stress** (e.g., family arguments that drag on for long periods of time, or a loved one dealing with a chronic disease), or **too much stress** (e.g., traumatic event or situation of abuse or bullying), it can affect our inner balance (health, wellbeing, and performance).

Of course, sometimes we have no control over the external events and circumstances that cause us stress. But remember that a **good level of stress (just enough, not too much, not too little)** can motivate us and even help us do better.

3. Briefly introduce the inverted stress curve (Beerendonk et al., 2024; Palazzolo & Arnaud, 2013), which effectively illustrates the title of the workshop: Too much (stress) is just as bad as not enough (stress): it throws off our inner balance and sense of well-being. But an optimal amount of stress is both necessary and good for us.



4.  Ask them the following questions:
 - Can you think of any examples of situations where a lack of stress played against you (e.g., not studying hard enough for a test)?
 - Can you think of examples of situations where you were under too much stress?
 - Can you think of situations where stress was helpful to you (e.g., before a test, helping you to stay focused on studying; before a competition, giving you the energy to train or the adrenaline to perform, etc.)?

D. Active break (5 minutes)

1. Explain that after exercising their brain cells, it's time to move around and take a few deep breaths. The students can do the exercises sitting or standing. The movements are done in time with their inhale and exhale, and each movement is repeated for about 1 or 2 minutes.
 - Torso movement: seated or standing, back straight. Breathe in, filling your chest. Exhale, rounding your back.
 - Shrugs: seated, with back straight and arms at your side. Inhale, slowly raising your shoulders toward your ears; exhale, letting your shoulders quickly drop down.
 - Head movements: seated. Gently lean your head toward your shoulder, as if reaching your other ear toward the ceiling. Repeat three times on each side. Then move your head slowly in half-circles, from one shoulder to another.
2. Conclude by explaining that:



Moving and stretching while focusing on our breathing can help us relax, calm down and better manage our stress. This is a good strategy to use whenever we feel the need. It can be done anywhere, discreetly, even during a test.

E. Our brain plays tricks on us (10 minutes)

1. Explain to the students that even though it's "normal" to feel stress, sometimes our brain plays tricks on us. An example would be reacting to certain stressful situations as though we were face to face with a bear, instead of the tiny ant that's actually in front of us. And that's a huge waste of energy!
2. Hand out the *Stressful or not?* printable worksheet, and then present the following situations:

- A final math exam;
- An argument with your parents;
- Drawing a blank during an oral presentation;
- An argument with your best friend;
- Your first day at your new high school;
- Being late to class;
- Eating alone in the cafeteria;
- Getting negative comments on social media;
- Losing someone close to you.



3. Ask them to answer the following question by circling the correct number on the printable worksheet.

How stressful is each situation for you (small ant: low or no stress / big bear: very stressful / somewhere in between: a moderately stressful situation)?

4. Now lead a discussion with the whole group using the following questions:
 - What do you notice about your worksheet?
 - Which did you circle most often: bear, ant or somewhere in between?
 - Or was it mostly even, depending on the situation?
 - What does this tell you about yourself?

5. Round out their answers with the following information. The idea here is to bring students to better observe their reactions to stress and to realize that sometimes **stress needs to be put into perspective** in a given situation:



If you tend to react to most stressful situations like you're standing in front of a bear, then **your emotional response is probably overblown**. This can be exhausting in the long run, and really take a toll on you.

Similarly, if you tend to react to most stressful situations like you're standing in front of a tiny ant, then **your emotional response is probably not adjusted to the situation**. You may be detached or apathetic, or even tend to put yourself in dangerous situations.

An exam is a good example of a situation that should fall somewhere in between (neither bear nor ant). It should cause enough stress to get you moving (into the performance zone), without causing you to freeze.

6. If time permits, conclude by asking students for examples of situations where their reactions to stress were not appropriate to the circumstances (either too much or too little stress).

F. Your turn (10–15 minutes)

1.  Give each student a small piece of paper. Ask them to write down a situation they find stressful. Reassure them that the exercise is anonymous.

2.  Collect the pieces of paper and put them in a container. Mix them up, then pick a dozen or so and read them out loud.

3.  For each situation, ask the students to name strategies that could be used to manage their stress without avoiding the situation. You can also ask students whether this is a situation they have control over, or not. Depending on the situation, ask them if the same strategies should be used (e.g., in the case of parents' separation vs. missing the bus).

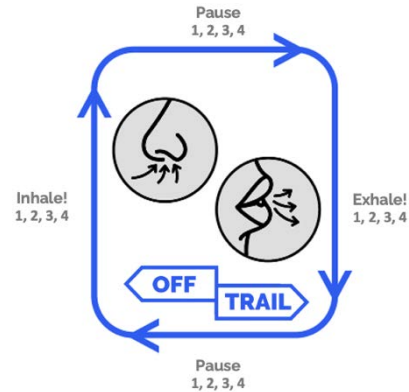
For schools that only have 40 minutes, you can simply ask the students to name the strategies they use to manage their stress.

4. Round out the strategies suggested by the students with the following list, inspired by **Strategies to manage stress**:

- Stop, take a break;
- Take a step back, put things in perspective, see the situation differently;
- Do a breathing exercise;
- Play soft, gentle music;
- Take a warm bath or a relaxing shower;
- Do some yoga;
- Practise mindfulness;
- Exercise or do a sport;
- Do an artistic or creative activity (drawing, painting, sculpting, singing, dancing, playing a musical instrument, etc.);
- Write in a diary or journal;
- Get in touch with nature: walk in the forest, visit a lake, do some gardening;
- Spend some time with an animal that makes you feel good;
- See friends, surround yourself with people;
- Confide in someone, ask for help.



- Now suggest that the students try a breathing exercise. Explain that there are many different types, but today you will be trying **box breathing**. Explain that breathing is automatic: it happens all the time, without our having to think about it. However, when we experience stress or strong emotions, our breathing speeds up and our heart tends to beat faster. By controlling the pace of our breathing, we can help our heart return to a normal rhythm. And we feel calmer as a result.
- Practise the **box breathing** technique with the students, using the image in the slideshow. You can count out loud to help students follow the pace.



16

G. Educational clip - Part 2 (5 minutes)

- Play the video clip *When stress plays tricks on me – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)

17

H. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, encourage students to manage their stress. If they encounter a stressful situation in the coming days, invite them to: 1) Identify their stress level (ant, bear or somewhere in between?); 2) Pay attention to their signs of stress (physical sensations, emotions and thoughts); and 3) Try one or two strategies to manage their stress, without avoiding it.

18

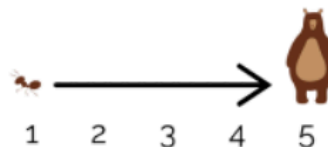


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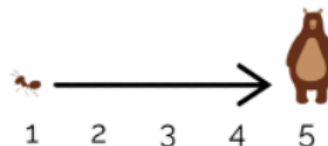


PRINTABLE WORKSHEET
Stressful or not?

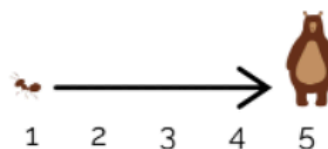
A final exam in mathematics



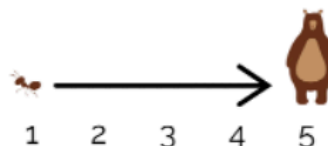
An argument with your parents



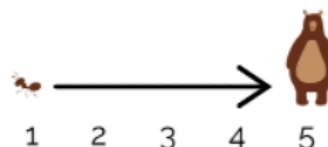
Drawing a blank during an oral presentation



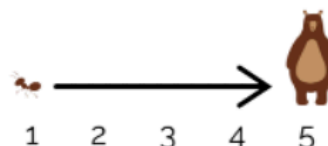
A conflict with your best friend



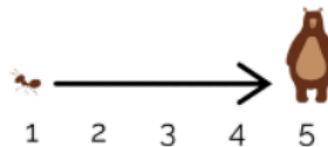
Arriving at your new high school



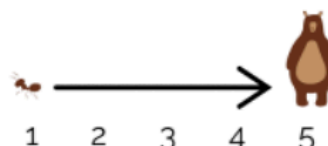
Being late to class



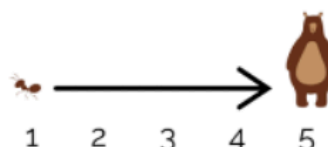
Eating alone at the cafeteria



Getting negative comments on social media



Losing someone close to you





2. THE FEAR OF BEING AFRAID... WHEN ANXIETY TAKES OVER!

Dealing with anxiety

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Managing emotions, stress and anxiety Self-knowledge, self-understanding, and self-worth
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ) ¹	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Distinguish between stress and anxiety; • Understand the concepts of comfort zone, avoidance and exposure; • Recognize situations that cause them more anxiety (their intolerances) and recognize their signs of stress and anxiety;

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon



40-MINUTE version: DO NOT do activities marked with the icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the 3 worksheets (1 per student): [Sacha's situation](#), [My level of intolerance](#), [Strategies for exposure to intolerances](#).
- Print the *Comfort zone* and *Intolerances* posters, available on the [website](#) in the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Read the [Breathing exercise](#) companion worksheet.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

¹ Please note that this workshop also introduces content corresponding to [Sheet 18](#), for grade 9 students, to anticipate future learning.

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A. Stress... anxiety... what's the difference? (10 minutes)

1. Tell the students they will be playing a quiz game on stress and anxiety. Explain that for each question you ask, they have to answer TRUE (raising an open hand) or FALSE (raising a closed fist).
2. Start the game with the following questions, which appear in the slideshow. If you prefer, you can generate an interactive quiz from the same content using a web platform (e.g., Genially, Kahoot!, Wooclap).
3. After each question, give the correct answer using the explanations provided (Lupien, 2019; Marchand et al., 2018; Shih & Lin, 2017; Strack et al., 2017; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908).

True or false quiz

- **Stress is always negative**

False. Stress gives your body the energy it needs to deal with a perceived threat. In controlled amounts, stress boosts performance.

- **There is no difference between stress and anxiety**

False. Stress is an alarm reaction to a real, concrete situation, like when you come face-to-face with a bear while walking in the forest. Anxiety is an emotion that shows up when you worry about a situation that hasn't necessarily happened yet. Just thinking about what might happen can make you feel anxious.

- **Anxiety is a fear of being afraid**

True. Anxiety is the tendency to imagine worst-case scenarios and worry about things that haven't happened yet. For example, if you stop taking walks in the forest because you're afraid you might get eaten by a bear, that's anxiety.

- **Anxiety is normal.**

True. Everyone experiences anxiety at one time or another; it's completely normal. It becomes a problem if it prevents you from functioning properly, causes you to avoid certain situations, makes you feel upset or persists over time.

- **If you're living with anxiety today, you're going to live with it your entire life**

False. You can learn to manage anxiety. The more tools you have to cope with anxiety, the more resilience you will develop to anxiety-provoking situations, and the less likely you are to avoid suffering from it over the long term.

B. Educational clip - Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *When anxiety takes over – Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip – Part 1](#)



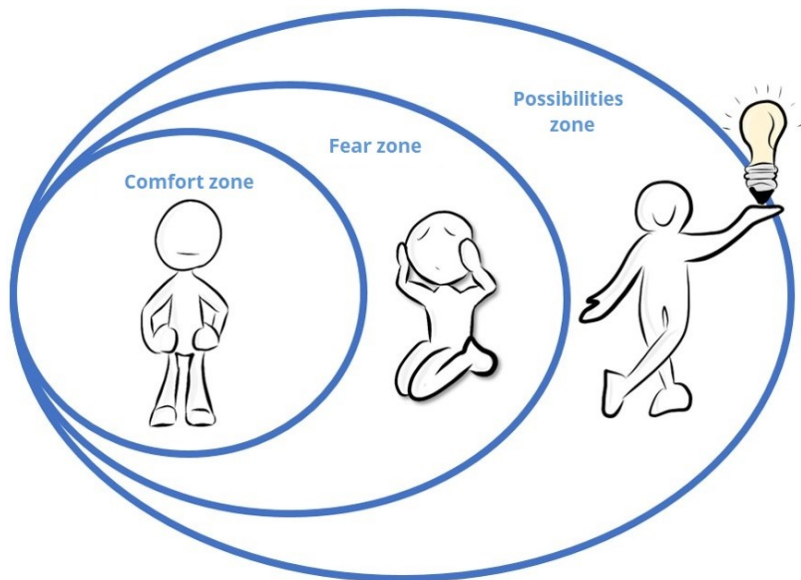
C. My comfort zone (15 minutes)

1. Move the desks to make a big, open space in the middle of the classroom, and then hand out the *Sacha's situation* printable worksheet to the students.

2. Ask for a volunteer to stand in the middle of the classroom and a few other people to stand in a circle around them. Explain that the person in the centre of the circle represents Sacha.
3. Start by reading the description at the top of the worksheet.
4. Then explain the concept of comfort zone:

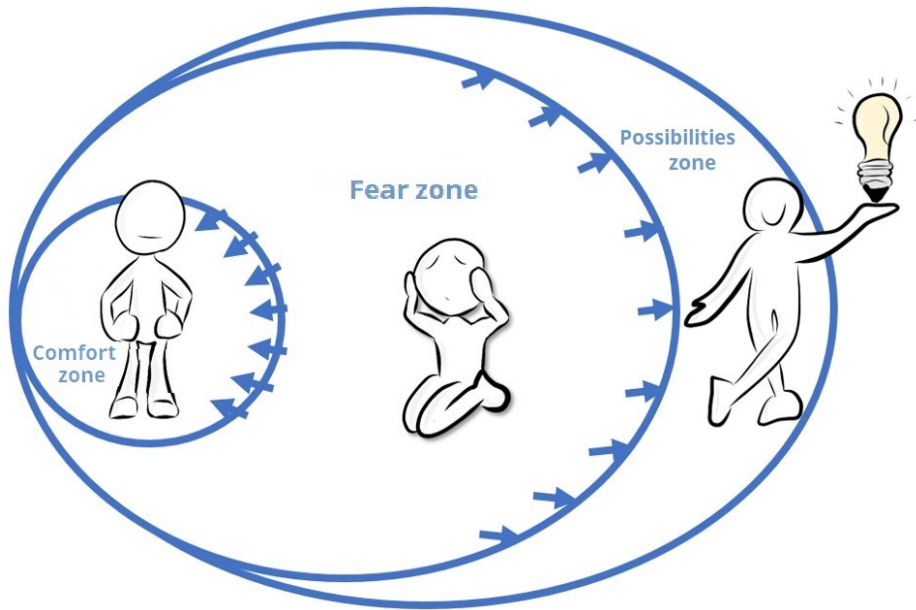
Your comfort zone is that place where you feel good in life; it's your familiar territory. It's the relationships, events and environments where you know how to react, where you don't ask too many questions. In other words, where you feel comfortable. At least, that's what you think (White, 2009)!

5. Show them the following image on the slideshow. Explain that the students surrounding the volunteer represent Sacha's comfort zone.

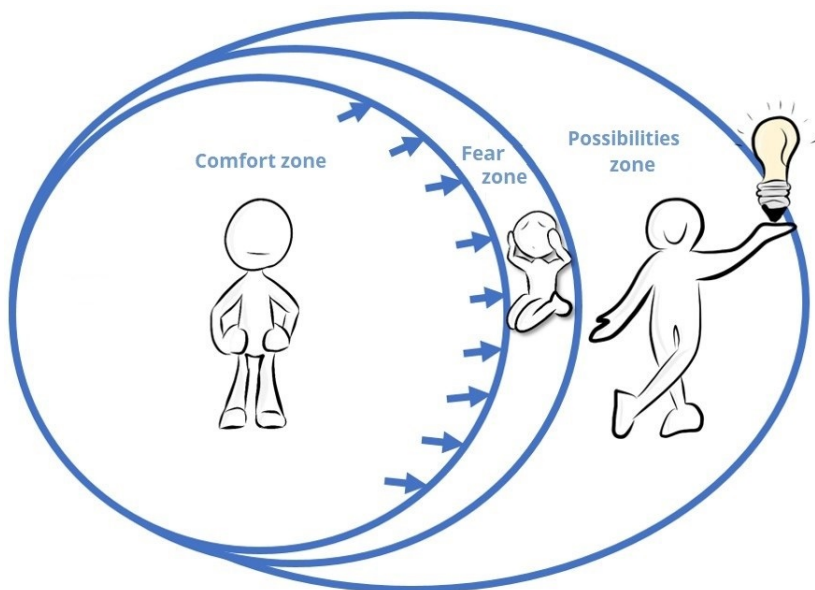


6. Then read the first part of *Scenario 1*, and ask the students surrounding Sacha to take a big step toward Sacha, shrinking the circle.
7. Then read the other three parts of *Scenario 1*, asking the students to take a big step toward Sacha at the end of each part, again shrinking the circle, until they are standing next to the volunteer at the very end.
8. Using the image in the slideshow, explain that anxiety can happen when you experience situations that cause you to leave your comfort zone.

You then have to push through your fear zone. You don't know how to react, you're afraid of the unknown, and you don't feel well. You're tempted to avoid these situations and retreat back into the cozy familiarity of your comfort zone, like Sacha did in the scenario. This is called **avoidance**. Avoidance feels good in the short term because it instantly lowers your anxiety levels. The problem is, the more you avoid a situation, the more frightening it becomes. Your comfort zone shrinks and you start to feel trapped inside it, or feel increasingly uncomfortable each time you step outside it.



9. Now ask the student in the centre of the circle to briefly share how they are feeling at that moment: "How are you feeling now?"
10. Suggest that the students act out Sacha's scenario again, this time changing how he reacts to anxiety-provoking situations.
11. Read the first part of *Scenario 2* and then ask the students to all take a big step away from Sacha, expanding the circle.



12. You then read the other three parts of *Scenario 2*, asking the students to take another big step away from Sacha at the end of each part, making the circle bigger and bigger.

13. Using the image in the slideshow, explain that the more you face your fears, the less scary they become—and they might even disappear. This is called **exposure**. Exposure can be very uncomfortable in the short term because facing the scary situation can cause your anxiety level to rise. Remember that anxiety isn't dangerous; it's temporary and it eventually goes away.
14. Now ask the student in the middle of the circle to briefly share how they are feeling at that moment: "How are you feeling now?"
15. Finally, you explain: "The more you expose yourself to a situation, the less anxious you'll feel about it. You'll feel more comfortable, more confident, and freer—just like Sacha, whose comfort zone is becoming less cramped. Stepping outside your comfort zone is also a great learning opportunity. You can then discover your 'possibilities' zone, with a sense of pride" (Forsyth & Eifert, 2007, 2025; Gosselin et al., 2019; Harvey & Ilic, 2014).



7

D. Intolerances that distort reality (15 minutes)

1. Ask the students why they think the same situation can be very stressful for one person, whereas for someone else, it won't be at all.
2. Complete their answers by explaining that we all have different tolerance levels depending on the type of situation. It's a bit like food intolerances: some people are more sensitive, or less tolerant, to certain foods, which causes them physical discomfort. This discomfort generally leads them to avoid the food in question. Similarly, in everyday life, some (real or imagined) situations more than others cause us to feel unpleasant sensations, e.g., worry, revulsion or feeling unwell. And this often makes us want to avoid them!

For example, Naomi is "intolerant" to situations where she feels judged. When she bumps into friends who are laughing together, she immediately thinks they're laughing at her. So, she prefers to keep her distance. Youssef, who is not particularly sensitive to being judged by others, bumps into the same group of friends laughing and thinks he'd like to hear their joke, which seems hilarious.

3. You explain that when it comes to anxiety, our intolerances are like lenses that distort reality. When you're aware of them, you can make an effort to remove these distorting glasses and look at the situation differently.
4. Using the titles, definitions and images in the slideshow, briefly explain **the 5 main types of intolerances**.



8

Title: Intolerance to uncertainty

Definition: Intolerance to potential danger, change and anything new.

Example: "I struggle to function in new situations (e.g., moving, starting high school, beginning a new activity), ambiguous situations (e.g., unclear instructions or rules, unclear expectations for an exam, etc.), or unpredictable situations (e.g., change of teacher, separation of parents, death of a loved one, etc.)."



9

Title: Perfectionism

Definition: Intolerance to the risk of making a mistake, to imperfection, and to guilt. Tendency to criticize one's own achievements.

Example: "I'm not satisfied unless it's perfect."



10



Title: Excessive responsibility

Definition: Intolerance to consequences that might happen to or affect others; you think it's your fault because you didn't do anything to prevent them.

Example: "I feel guilty all the time."

11

Title: Fear of being judged by others

Definition: Intolerance to other people's judgment and potential criticism, to ridicule and to being laughed at.

Example: "I often feel that others are judging me."



12



Title: Intolerance to psychological and physical discomfort

Definition: The tendency to worry excessively about negative emotions, unpleasant physical sensations, and symptoms caused by anxiety.

Example: "Something's wrong with my body!"

13

5. Ask students to think back to Sacha's situation in activity C (my comfort zone) and try to identify the intolerances he demonstrated. Take a few raised hands, then round out the answers with the following:
 - Intolerance to psychological and physical discomfort
 - Intolerance to uncertainty;
 - Fear of being judged by others.
6. You then hand out the *My intolerance level* printable worksheet and ask the students, working silently and individually, to rate how much each type of intolerance sounds like them, on a scale of 1 to 10.
7. If time permits, once they have completed their worksheets, invite a few volunteers to share their answers regarding the different intolerances. You can highlight certain intolerances that seem to be shared by several people and those that differ, in order to normalize their experiences.
8. Conclude by pointing out that this exercise allows them to notice how certain types of situations elicit a particular reaction from them, while others do not. Becoming aware of their intolerances allows them to try to adopt strategies to calm themselves and expose themselves to the situation, instead of avoiding it!



14

E. Your turn! (5–10 minutes)

1.  Now ask the students what strategies Sacha uses in *Scenario 2* of activity C (my comfort zone) to calm his anxiety and expose himself to anxiety-provoking situations. You also invite them to name other strategies that could have helped Sacha in these situations.

2. Hand out the *Strategies for exposure to intolerances* printable worksheet.

3. Present the various strategies to the students by revisiting the list of *Strategies for managing stress* from Workshop 1, as well as referring to the *Strategies for exposure to intolerances* worksheet, which is also summarized in the slideshow.

4.  To conclude, suggest that the students try a breathing exercise. Use the *Breathing exercise* companion worksheet to guide this exercise.



15

F. Educational clip – Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *When anxiety takes over – Part 2* for your students.

[Video clip – Part 2](#)



16

G. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, ask the students to pay attention to how they react (feelings, emotions and thoughts) to certain anxiety-provoking situations that cause them to react strongly (intolerance) and that they encounter in their daily lives (e.g., with classmates, at school, in extracurricular activities, during sports, with family, etc.). Ask them to try to apply at least two strategies to calm themselves and to expose themselves to the situation, at their own pace.



17



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Sacha's case

Description. After moving during the summer, Sacha has to start at a new school. This change causes all kinds of anxiety-provoking situations for him... Sacha often worries about what the other students at his new school think about him. Being more introverted, he hates being in situations where he might be laughed at, and tries his best not to attract attention.



SCENARIO 1

Part one. This morning, Sacha's teacher asks all the students to tell the class what they did on their summer vacation. Sacha's heart starts racing and his palms get sweaty as his mind begins to spin: "Oh no, please, not that! I don't know what to say... the others will laugh at me." His stomach starts to ache. It's a disaster. Sacha quickly goes to see his teacher and asks to go to the bathroom immediately.

Part two. At lunch today, Sacha goes to the cafeteria but doesn't see his new friend, Nolan. Sacha doesn't know where to sit and is afraid to ask anyone, for fear of looking ridiculous and being rejected. He feels anxiety welling up inside him. He hides out in the library and skips lunch.

Part three. Later in the day, Alexia invites the entire class to her house for a party that night. Sacha doesn't want to go because he's worried about who he'll hang around with and that he won't know what to say or do. He's made up his mind: He's staying comfortably at home.

Part four. When he's back home, Sacha checks his social media and realizes that *everyone* in his class is going to be at Alexia's party, except him! His anxiety surges. He begins to worry that he will miss out on a great night if he doesn't go and that he will be excluded from the group afterwards. But the idea of going terrifies him. He doesn't know what to do anymore. Sacha feels awful and very stuck.

SCENARIO 2

Part one. In school this morning, Sacha's teacher asks all the students to tell the class what they did on their summer vacation. Sacha's heart starts racing and his palms get sweaty: "Oh no, please, anything but that! I don't know what to say... the others will laugh at me." His stomach starts to ache. Sacha takes a moment to pause internally. He gets some perspective on the situation by telling himself that the worst that can happen is he might trip over his words. When it's his turn, Sacha talks about his move over the summer, with a hint of nervous excitement. The other students ask questions and take an interest in his story. Sacha's anxiety dissipates, giving way to a feeling of pride. Sacha feels much better.

Part two. At lunch today, Sacha goes to the cafeteria but doesn't see his new friend, Nolan. Sacha doesn't know where to sit and is afraid to ask anyone, for fear of looking ridiculous and being rejected. He feels anxiety welling up inside him. Sacha takes a deep breath. He tells himself that he is entitled to take his place, just like everyone else! Sacha gathers his courage and decides to sit alone at a table. Luca quickly sits beside him, and they spend their lunch break getting to know each other better. Sacha is glad he dared to do it.

Part three. Later in the day, Alexia invites all her classmates to a party at her house that same night. Sacha doesn't want to go because he's worried about who he'll hang around with and that he won't know what to say or do. He decides to talk to his friend Nolan about it anyway. His friend suggests that they go to the party together. Even though *the idea* of going to the party still makes him a little anxious, Sacha is reassured to know that he won't be going alone.

Part four. When he's back home, Sacha checks his social media and realizes that *everyone* in his class is going to be at Alexia's party. Phew, that's a lot of people! His anxiety surges. Sacha questions his decision to go... At the same time, he sees it as an opportunity to build a new network of friends. He decides to honour his commitment and go with Nolan, as planned. His initial nervousness quickly gives way to laughter when Alexia's mother drops the cake on the floor! Sacha now feels empowered, freer and more confident.



PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

My level of intolerance

Here are the five main types of intolerances. For each intolerance, try to identify how much it sounds like you.

Intolerance to uncertainty: "I struggle to function in new, ambiguous and unpredictable situations."

That doesn't sound like me much or at all				That somewhat sounds like me			That very much sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Perfectionism: "I'm not satisfied unless everything is perfect."

That doesn't sound like me much or at all				That somewhat sounds like me			That very much sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Excessive responsibility: "I feel guilty all the time."

That doesn't sound like me much or at all				That somewhat sounds like me			That very much sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Fear of being judged by others: "I often feel that others are judging me."

That doesn't sound like me much or at all				That somewhat sounds like me			That very much sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Intolerance to psychological and physical discomfort: "Something is wrong inside my body!"

That doesn't sound like me much or at all				That somewhat sounds like me			That very much sounds like me		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Strategies for exposure to intolerances

Intolerance to uncertainty

Gradually try out new activities that are not too anxiety-provoking. Accept that you can't control and anticipate everything. Put the actual risks of the situation into perspective by questioning your thoughts and perceptions (e.g., am I sure of what I'm thinking or perceiving? Is the situation really "serious" or just "unpleasant"?). Set aside time to plan and anticipate what might happen, but do so in moderation and without seeking too much certainty, etc.



Perfectionism

Set more realistic goals. Add moments of enjoyment to your routine. Strive for balance in different areas of life (family, friendships, studies, leisure, etc.). Focus on the process, efforts, and progress rather than on the results. See mistakes as opportunities to learn. Downplay the seriousness of the situation, etc.

Excessive responsibility

Refocus on yourself and your needs. Express your boundaries, learn to say "no." Accept to delegate things to others (e.g., recognize that others are capable of accomplishing things without you). Question your real responsibility in the situation (e.g., am I responsible for other people's emotions and reactions, their choices, their happiness? What do I have control over in this situation?). Let go of what is not in your control. Take your fair share of responsibility (no more, no less), etc.





Fear of being judged by others

Use positive self-talk (e.g., I am worthy of respect, I am as worthy as anyone else, I can do it, I have everything I need to succeed, I am not lacking anything, I have accomplished similar tasks in the past, etc.). Appreciate your differences, see them as assets. Challenge perceptions and fears (e.g., maybe others are looking at me because they're interested in me, maybe they are talking about me positively, maybe they aren't even looking at me!). Gradually expose yourself to situations involving multiple people. Try to take your place in your own way, etc.

Intolerance to psychological and physical discomfort

Remember that in anxiety-provoking situations, emotions and physical sensations are normal, even if they are sometimes intense or unpleasant. Remember that they are not dangerous. Put the meaning of symptoms into perspective (e.g., remember that physical sensations in stressful or anxious situations are often not a sign of serious illness, but rather a sign that informs us about what we are experiencing internally). Try to expose yourself to physical sensations in natural everyday contexts (e.g., playing a sport and feeling your heart beat fast).





COMPANION WORKSHEET

Breathing exercise

Sit in a comfortable position.

Now focus your attention on your breathing.

PAUSE

Breathe normally, without forcing or trying to change anything about your breathing.

Pay attention to the movement created by the air entering and leaving your body.

Notice your stomach and chest rising when you inhale.

PAUSE

Now shift your attention to your stomach and chest falling as you exhale.

Pay attention as you inhale and exhale a few times.

PAUSE

If you feel comfortable, you can try inhaling and exhaling for one or two seconds longer, to try to take deeper breaths and increase your sense of calm.

PAUSE

Now go back to your normal way of breathing.

Take as much time as you need to inhale and exhale, without any extra effort.

If your thoughts wander, simply refocus them on your next inhale.

Take two or three more deep, calming breaths.

PAUSE

Now open your eyes and reconnect with your surroundings.

If you feel calm, try to hold on to the feeling for as long as possible, focusing on your breath as needed.



3. EMOTIONS... THEY'RE ONLY HUMAN!

Managing emotions and asking for help when needed

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Managing emotions, stress and anxiety Asking for help
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving potential, cooperating with others Solving problems
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Better recognize their various emotions and understand their purpose; • Use new strategies to experience and manage their stress in a healthy way; • Ask for help if they need it.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon



40-MINUTE version: DO NOT do activities marked with the icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the worksheet (1 per student): *Explore your inner weather!*
- Print the *Emotions and needs* and *Asking for help* posters, available on the [website](#) in the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Bring:
 - Three large poster boards for activity C (reuse the same poster boards for all groups participating in the workshop);
 - Permanent markers;
 - Three packs of sticky notes;
 - A stopwatch;
- Have a chalkboard with chalk or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



Université de
Sherbrooke



Centre RBC
d'expertise universitaire
en santé mentale

Summer 2025

A. Your emotions... your internal weather (5 minutes)

1. You begin the workshop by asking students this question: "Why talk about emotions in a program focused on preventing anxiety?"
2. Listen to a few answers, then complete with the following



Because anxiety is part of the world of emotions (Daniel et al., 2020; Mathews et al., 2016)!

Emotions are **spontaneous internal reactions** that we feel when faced with situations we experience (Naître et grandir, 2025). **There are six basic emotions that are universally recognized** (Ekman & Friesen, 1981; Ekman, 1992): joy, fear, anger, sadness, disgust and surprise. Other, more complex emotions (such as anxiety) stem from these six primary emotions.

Our emotions can be said to be like our **internal weather** (Bruzzone, 2023; Harris, 2009). Every day, and even several times a day, we can experience different emotions, much like weather conditions that change over time. We can start the day feeling joyful, then get angry, and finally end up feeling calm toward the end of the day. We can also cry and laugh at the same time, like a sun shower, which ends up creating a rainbow.

But... what is the purpose of all these emotions?



3

B. Educational clip - Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Emotions... they're only human! – Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 1](#)



4

C. Explore your inner weather! (10 to 15 minutes)

1. In light of the video, explain to the students:



Our emotions speak to us! Much like the weather, our emotions inform us about what is happening inside us! **Becoming aware of our emotional world (our internal weather) helps us to better understand ourselves and regulate our emotions** (Bruzzone, 2023; Dukes et al., 2022; Harris, 2009).

And this is essential for coping with stressful and anxiety-provoking situations in everyday life, as well as for developing good relationships with other people!

2. Hand out the [Explore your inner weather!](#) printable worksheet to students.
3. You then show the students a series of eight assorted videos that are in the slideshow. After each photo, you ask the students to:
 - Close their eyes, take a deep breath, and notice which emotions this photo made them feel;
 - Ask them to circle the emojis that best correspond to the emotions they felt (in the space provided on the worksheet).



5



6-14



4. Then have the students discuss the following questions:
- Why did some people feel different emotions when looking at the same image?
 - Did all the emotions that were felt carry the same weight? Are some better or more real than others?
 - During the activity, did you have control over the emotions that the image made you feel?

5. You complete the activity with the following:



Experiencing emotions, from the most pleasant to the most difficult, is inevitable (Reddy, 2020)! Just as we cannot choose the day's weather, we rarely have control over the emotions that we feel. On the other hand, **we do have power over how we regulate them**: how we experience our emotions, express them, and behave. Whether we are in the midst of an emotional storm or a wave of well-being, it is important to **recognize what is going on within** so that we can take helpful actions (Pekrun, 2022; Riediger & Bellingtier, 2022).

For example, if you notice that it's raining outside, you will probably grab your umbrella or raincoat before going out. However, if you go outside without checking the weather, you may be in for some surprises and experience a lot of inconvenience!

Finally, **whatever they may be, all our emotions have their place and their reason for being. They all have the right to exist within us and to be expressed.** But... not in just any way!



15

D. Your turn! (10 to 15 minutes)

1. You go on to explain that there is a difference between expressing emotions in a healthy way and acting impulsively on emotions (Naître et grandir, 2025).
- a. Ask students for examples of situations where they expressed their emotions in a healthy way and others where they reacted impulsively. Try to highlight the differences between the two types of reactions, as well as the pros and cons of each.



16



17

- b. You share with them some **new strategies for regulating their internal weather**, which can be found in the slideshow (Ciarrochi et al., 2014; Conover & Daiute, 2017; Rottenberg & Gross, 2007; Silk et al., 2003):

- Accept the situation as it is, without resisting it;
- Notice what is going on inside you;
- Welcome your emotions without judging them or trying to block or deny them;
- Express or release your emotions through art, sports, writing, etc.;
- Be attentive to the needs that lie behind your emotions;
- Be compassionate and kind toward yourself;
- Reframe your harmful thoughts into helpful ones;
- Refocus your attention on what is important to you (needs, values and goals);
- Look for solutions using your strengths;
- Ask for help.

2. You can remind them that the strategies from Workshops 1 and 2 (*Strategies for managing stress* and *Strategies for exposure to intolerances*) are also good ways to manage and regulate their emotions, stress and anxiety.

3. You explain that, ultimately, there are a multitude of strategies and that the best strategies are those that enable them to regain their balance!

4. If time permits, conclude this part of the workshop with a brief reminder of **the purpose of emotions**:



Emotions convey an important message about what is happening inside us: **“A need deserves our attention!”**

The more we are able to tune in to what is going on inside us, the more we are able to **act in a caring and supportive way to meet the needs that lie behind our emotions** (Ciarrochi et al., 2014; Silk et al., 2003; Wassner & Sedley, 2024).

E. Two heads are better than one! (5 to 15 minutes)

1. You show students that sometimes, when faced with highly emotional situations, it's also important to be able to ask for help! After all, two heads are better than one! For schools that only have 40 minutes, go directly to point 7 of the activity.



2. To discuss the topic of requests for help, ask the students the following questions:
- Why is it often said that talking about our emotions and asking for help is a taboo subject?
 - How might asking for help too soon or too often might increase anxiety? Round out the students' answers with these elements:
 - Thinking you can't do it without help;
 - Losing self-confidence;
 - Losing power and self-determination;
 - Depending on the opinions and solutions of others;
 - Exhausting your social network, experiencing isolation;
 - Shrinking your comfort zone.



18

3.  You now have three large poster boards in three different locations in the classroom, along with a pack of sticky notes. On each poster board, you have already written one of the following three questions (using a permanent marker):

- Who to ask for help and how?
- What's stopping you from asking for help (obstacles, fears)?
- What are the positive aspects of asking for help (pros)?

4.  Then divide the class into three groups (one group per poster board). Give each group three minutes to answer the question written on the poster board. You ask them to write their answers on the sticky notes and put them on the poster board.

5.  Then discuss all together as a group. The purpose of the discussion is to pool their answers, while demystifying and legitimizing help requests.

6.  Read the answers written on the sticky notes for each question (poster boards) out loud and ask the students to comment and explain their point of view.

7. Round out their answers (or present strategies for schools that have 40 minutes) from the following list (Andriessen et al., 2019; Heerde & Hemphill, 2018; Menna & Ruck, 2004; Tharaldsen et al., 2017):

- **Who to ask for help and how?**

- Ask a friend if they'd like to do an activity or go for a walk together;
- Text, call or directly talk to a friend, adult or parent you feel you can confide in;
- Meet with a school counsellor;
- Seek advice, guidance or support in a difficult situation;
- Contact official resources: social workers, CLSCs, Tel-jeunes, Alloprof, youth centres, etc.

- **What is stopping you from asking for help (obstacles, fears)?**

- Feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable asking for help;
- Not knowing where, when, how and whom to ask for help;
- Fear of not being welcomed, of bothering others, of being rejected;
- Fear of being judged by others;
- Not wanting others to know that you have a problem;
- Fear of appearing vulnerable or weak;
- Difficulty trusting others;
- Being hard on yourself for needing help, feeling ashamed;
- Believing that you are invincible, that you can do everything on your own;
- Believing that the problem will solve itself (magical thinking!).

- **What are the positive aspects of asking for help (pros)?**
 - Feeling supported, not being alone when facing a challenge;
 - Having someone you can rely on;
 - Regaining self-confidence;
 - Feeling relief, calm;
 - Finding new solutions to address the problem;
 - Getting perspective, seeing the situation differently;
 - Expanding your means and resources;
 - Discovering new strengths;
 - Creating a sense of mutual support and solidarity.



22

F. Educational clip – Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Emotions... they're only human! – Part 2* for your students.

[Video clip – Part 2](#)



23

G. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, ask the students to pay attention to how they react in a difficult situation they encounter. Ask them: 1) To identify the emotions you felt in response to this situation (what did this situation stir up inside you? What did this emotion tell you?); and 2) to use an emotion regulation strategy to better cope with the situation. You remind them of the importance of accepting their emotions without judging them and daring to ask for help.



24



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Explore your inner weather!



For each photo in the slideshow, circle the emoji that best matches the emotion you feel when you see the image.

Image no. 1

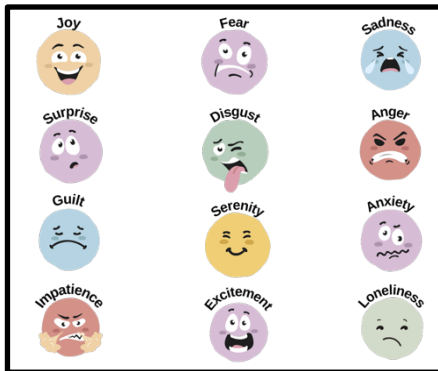


Image no. 2

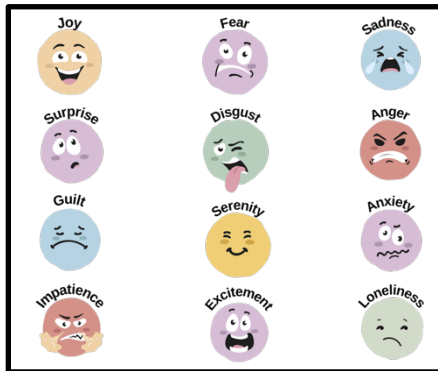


Image no. 3

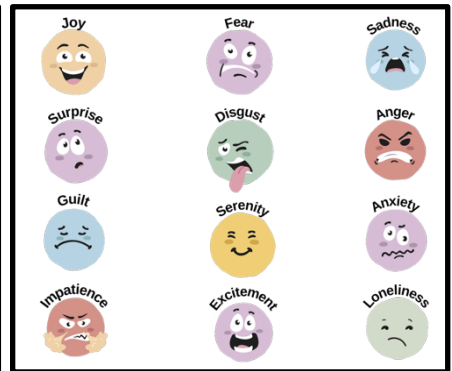


Image no. 4

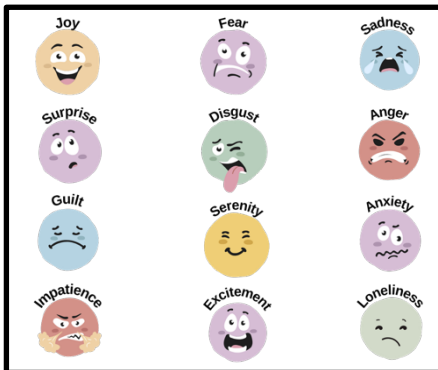


Image no. 5

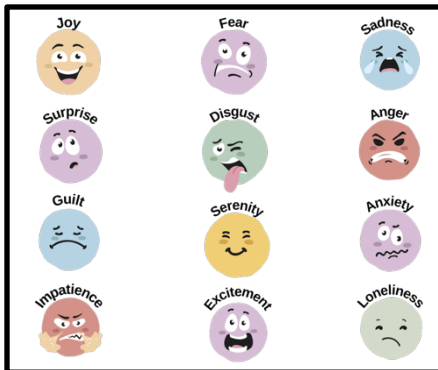


Image no. 6

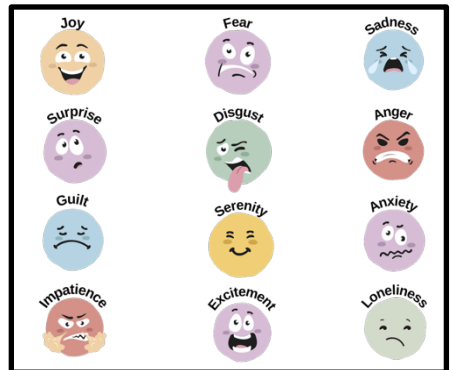


Image no. 7

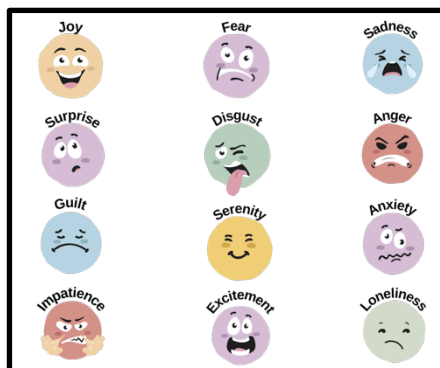
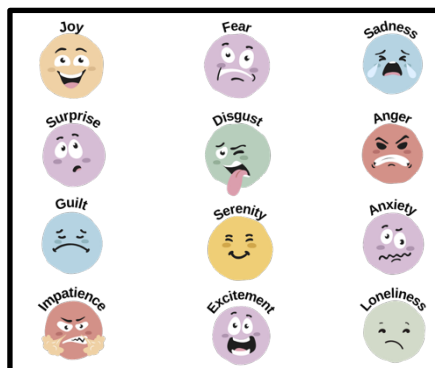


Image no. 8





4. DON'T PUT YOUR SELF-WORTH IN OTHER PEOPLE'S HANDS!

Dealing with social comparison through self-observation



Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Self-knowledge, self-understanding, and self-worth Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 16 : Being a role model for others
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Exercising critical judgment
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Identify some of their own values and characteristics; • Understand the impact of social comparison on self-esteem and self-confidence; • Use new strategies to get to know themselves better, strengthen their self-worth, and deal with social comparison.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon



40-MINUTE version: DO NOT do activities marked with the icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the 2 worksheets (1 per student): *Three wishes* and *Between me and myself!*
- Print the *Comparison and choices* poster, available on the [website](#) in the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Bring 3 to 6 inflatable balloons, not yet inflated.
- Have a chalkboard with chalk or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



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Sherbrooke



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en santé mentale

Summer 2025

A. Three wishes... (15 minutes)

1. Hand out a copy of the *Three wishes* printable worksheet to each student.
2. Suggest the following scenario to the students: "You have the power to make three of your biggest wishes come true. What do you wish for?" You ask them to write down these three wishes on their worksheet.
3. You ask for two or three volunteer students to name one of their wishes and come write it on the board.
4. You then present the following list of values to the class (the list is included in the slideshow):
Friendship, love, beauty, courage, discipline, listening, education, fairness, solidarity, environment, family, faithfulness, honesty, honour, justice, freedom, loyalty, sharing, patience, perseverance, fun, power, respect, success, health, safety, tolerance, work.
5. You then ask the students to raise their hands to match values with the wishes written on the board.
*It is possible and normal for students not to fully grasp the concept of values at the beginning of the workshop. The important thing is not to have the right answers, but to learn about the concept of values.
6. Now, lead a group discussion based on the following questions, to help them understand the concept of values and make links with the wish exercise:

- **What is a value?**



Values are the things we hold most dear, what we want to defend, and how we want to interact with the world around us. They are our compass, the guiding principles that shape our thoughts, choices and actions throughout our lives (Harris, 2009; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012).

- **Why is it important to know our values?**



Our values are important because they define us as individuals. They show us the "ideal" way for us to behave. They allow us to act in alignment with who we are. They should guide our daily choices and actions, much more than what other people think, say or do around us. They can help us deal with social comparison (Benish-Weisman et al., 2022; Lewis-Smith et al., 2021; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012; Verplanken & Holland, 2002).

- **Should our personal values be the same as other people's? Why?**



Yes... and no! The values we cherish are often rooted in our experiences, relationships and environments. So, it's only natural for some of our values to be similar to those of our friends or family, but also different from those of our school or society. Our values are also bound to evolve over time, depending on our environment, our life stage, and the times in which we live (Leijen et al., 2022; Mehta et al., 2025). So, it's best to try to connect with our own values, what matters to us, and to associate with people or groups who share those same values, at least in part, rather than defining our values based on other people's (Assor et al., 2020; Benish-Weisman et al., 2022; Lewis-Smith et al., 2021).



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7. Now have the students choose one of their three wishes and write down the value(s) they associate with it, on their worksheet.
8. If time permits, you can ask them to do the same with the other two wishes, or you can lead a short discussion with the entire class about the values that the students associated with their wishes.



6

B. Educational clip - Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Don't put your self-worth in other people's hands – Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 1](#)



7

C. The same, not the same! (10 to 20 minutes)

1. You suggest to students that comparing themselves to others can affect their self-confidence. Ask the students:
 - “In what ways do you think social comparison can undermine self-confidence?”
2. Listen to a few answers, then complete with the following based on the slideshow:



The more we compare ourselves to others, the more we risk viewing ourselves and others in a **negative**, even **distorted**, **light**. This can affect our **self-confidence**, as well as our confidence in others (Ruan et al., 2023; Van Der Aar et al., 2018).

Self-confidence means **believing in your potential and abilities** (skills and talents), i.e., feeling that you have what it takes to overcome a situation (American Psychological Association, 2015). It means believing that **YOU CAN DO IT!**

3. Now show the students an inflatable balloon, and inflate it. You ask the class the following questions, and inflate and deflate the balloon depending on the students' answers.
 - “Imagine that the balloon represents self-confidence. If it's inflated, what does that mean? If it's deflated, what does that mean?”



Self-confidence varies depending on the context and the people you're with (Pekrun, 2022; Silitonga et al., 2025). For example, when I'm with people I love and feel comfortable with, I feel more self-confident, I share my opinion, and I'm more relaxed. On the other hand, when I'm with a group of people I don't know (or barely know), it stresses me out and I can start to doubt myself and lose my self-confidence.

- “What should the balloon's 'normal' size be?”



The “normal” size of the balloon should depend on how you feel inwardly about your self-confidence. So, it can vary significantly from person to person (Pekrun, 2022; Silitonga et al., 2025).



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10



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4. Ask a few volunteer students to come join you at the front of the class. Give each of them a balloon and ask them to wait for your instructions before handling or inflating it (give clear instructions to avoid any issues).

5. Now give the following instructions to the entire class:

- Silently, with your eyes open or closed (whichever you prefer), blow up your balloon so it represents your level of self-confidence. Try to maintain the balloon's size for the rest of the exercise. *Volunteers at the front of the class actually inflate their balloons. The other students in the class are invited to mimic the size of their imaginary balloon by gesturing in the air with their hands.
- Now, still silently, take a look around you. What do you notice? How do you feel compared to other people? Take the time to observe what is happening within you (physical sensations, emotions and thoughts).
- When you were inflating your balloon, did you feel like looking at the balloons of the others around you? Or, conversely, did you quickly inflate yours before everyone else?

6.  Give the students the following instructions, then read the scenarios below (depending on how much time you have, you can choose to read only the first two scenarios or all four):

- We're now going to observe how comparison impacts our self-confidence. I'm going to read some scenarios. You will need to adjust the size of your balloon according to how you feel and your level of confidence in each situation. For example, your balloon might deflate, inflate a little more, or stay the same, depending on how you feel.

Scenario 1	KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN You spent a quiet weekend at home relaxing. When you check your social media on Sunday, you see that your friends went out last night and are posting photos where they look like they're having a great time. You weren't invited. How do you feel? How is your self-confidence? Adjust your balloon.
Scenario 2	CLOSE YOUR EYES AND FOCUS ON WHAT YOU FEEL Your teacher announces that you need to work in teams of four students. Your four friends get together, and you find yourself alone. By the time you start looking for teammates, the other students have already all gotten into teams. How do you feel? How is your self-confidence? Adjust your balloon.
Scenario 3	CLOSE YOUR EYES AND FOCUS ON WHAT YOU FEEL You're playing in a sports tournament, representing your school. The game is tied, and the next point will determine the winning team. You're feeling the pressure. You are in a good position and a player on your team passes you the ball. Unfortunately, you miss the pass and the opponent scores a goal. How do you feel? How is your self-confidence? Adjust your balloon.
Scenario 4	KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN Today in class, you're going to receive your grade for your math exam. You studied hard for this exam and got a 71%. The class average is 85%. How do you feel? How is your self-confidence? Adjust your balloon.



12



13



14



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16

7. Lead a group discussion by asking the following questions:

- Did having your eyes open or closed influence the way you adjusted your balloon? Why?
- How do you feel when you notice that your balloon isn't as inflated as the other students'?
- How important is other people's opinion to you?
- What is the purpose of comparing yourself to others?



17

8. Round out their answers with the following explanations:



Social comparison is a way of socially situating and defining ourselves: we evaluate ourselves in relation to others by validating our tastes, choices, opinions and performances. In some situations, comparing ourselves to others can have a positive impact in terms of our motivation and desire to excel. But generally, as we saw previously, **comparison has negative effects on self-esteem and self-confidence.** This is why it's important to pay attention to how social comparison is affecting you. It's better to compare yourself with your past self over time in order to appreciate your progress, take the time to recognize your strengths and abilities, and try new experiences to develop your self-confidence. **Self-confidence helps lessen the negative effects of social comparison** (Lewis, 2021; Liu et al., 2025; Van Der Aar et al., 2018).



18

D. Between me and myself! (10 minutes)

1. You explain that good self-awareness helps build stronger self-confidence. You then briefly define what self-awareness is:

Self-awareness means **understanding our own nature, knowing our values, strengths and aspirations, and being aware of our limitations and weaknesses** (Vazire & Wilson, 2012). It includes **intuition** (Halász & Michel, 2011), **discovering and developing our talents** (Levine, 2007; Pruneau et al., 2013), and **building awareness of our values** (Harris, 2009).

Self-knowledge has **many purposes**. For example, it helps us **make informed decisions** that factor in our strengths, weaknesses and aspirations (for instance, when choosing what extracurricular activity to sign up for). Self-awareness also allows us to **better understand our emotions and reactions** to certain situations or events (Lewis & Minar, 2022; Nonweiler et al., 2024; Yildirim et al., 2023). For example, when experiencing conflict or social comparison!



19

2. You tell the students everyone is going to take a small step toward greater self-awareness.

3. Hand out the *Between me and myself!* printable worksheet to each student. Ask them to answer the questions on their worksheet. You encourage the students to be curious and to be kind to themselves during this exercise.

- What are your strengths, qualities and talents? Identify four.
- What are your imperfections? Identify four.
- What makes you feel good or brings you satisfaction?
- What is challenging for you?



20

4. Ask the students the following question:

- What is the purpose of getting to know yourself better? Can you think of examples of situations where this was important or beneficial to you?

5. You conclude with the following explanations based on the image in the slideshow:

*The more you develop your self-knowledge and self-confidence,
the less social comparison affects and influences you.*



21

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. You ask the students how they get to know themselves better. What are their strategies?

2. Continue with this list of **strategies to get to know and appreciate yourself better**, in order to address social comparison (inspired by Firestone et al., 2002; Meeus et al., 2023; Van Der Aar et al., 2018):

- Dare to jump in and try new experiences!
- Give yourself the right to make mistakes, without judging yourself... Accept that it won't be perfect.
- Try to look within and notice what you are experiencing and feeling, to discover what makes you happy or unhappy, what you find enjoyable or difficult.
- Try to be tolerant toward yourself. There are no right or wrong answers. They all have their place. What is true today may be different tomorrow. And this is normal.
- Keep in mind that others around you are also developing their self-awareness. So, try to be tolerant and non-judgmental toward them as well. All of this will help you better deal with social comparison!



22

F. Educational clip – Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Don't put your self-worth in other people's hands – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)



23

G. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, ask the students to pay attention to their tendency to compare themselves to others: "Does this happen to me often? Rarely?" You ask them 1) to identify at least one situation in the coming days where they caught themselves comparing themselves to others, and to ask themselves, "Why did I feel the need to compare myself?" "What did that create within me?" "Did it have a helpful or harmful impact on me?" Then, 2) suggest that they apply at least one strategy to get to know themselves better and deal with social comparison.



24



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET
Three wishes

List of values:

Friendship, love, beauty, courage, discipline, listening, education, fairness, solidarity, environment, family, faithfulness, honesty, honour, justice, freedom, loyalty, sharing, patience, perseverance, fun, power, respect, success, health, safety, tolerance, work.

1

My value:

2

My value:

3

My value:



PRINTABLE WORKSHEET
Between me and myself!

My four strengths or qualities

1	3
2	4

My two imperfections

1	2
----------	----------

What makes me feel good or brings me satisfaction:

What I find challenging:





5. DON'T SQUEEZE ME! I'M NOT A LEMON...

Coping with social pressure by being assertive

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Being assertive Dealing with social influences Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences Sheet 16 : Being a role model for others
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Exercising critical judgment Communicating appropriately Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand what social pressure is; • Recognize how social pressure influences them, their health and their well-being; • Use various strategies to better cope with social pressure; • Assert themselves calmly, respectfully, confidently and courageously.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon 

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT do activities marked with the icon 

Materials and preparation

- Print the *Resist the squeeze! Scenarios* worksheet (1 copy for you only).
- Print the *Strategies to be assertive* poster, available on the [website](#) in the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Cut out the steps from the *Resist the squeeze! Scenarios* worksheet
- Have a chalkboard with chalk or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
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en santé mentale

Summer 2025

A. Round of opinions (10 minutes)

1. Read the following scenario:
“Your friend receives a gift card to buy new clothes. She asks what you think she should buy. You show her this picture of an outfit that you like...”
2. You present the picture in the slideshow. Feel free to modify the images of the clothing items in the slideshow as you see fit for your students.
3. Still referring to the slideshow, you present various characters and their opinions about clothing:
 - Parent 1: “Clothes shouldn’t be too pricey!”
 - Parent 2: “What matters is that it’s comfortable!”
 - Grandparents: “Not too sexy, please!”
 - Friend: “Original clothing that stands out!”
 - Friend: “Plain clothes...”
 - Teachers: “Does it follow the school’s dress code?”
 - Society 1: “Trendy, latest-fashion clothing!”
 - Society 2: “Think green! Used or recycled clothing.”
4. Now ask the students these questions:
 - Do your suggested clothes meet all the criteria of all the different characters?
 - Is it possible to please everyone? If so, how? If not, why?
 - Can displeasing others affect our relationships?
5. Complete the students’ answers with the following explanations:



Whatever decisions we make, some people will always disagree with us. It’s better to accept that we can’t please everyone—just like not everyone pleases us. We can make our own choices based on our own needs, feelings, tastes, interests, values and rights. Hence the importance of getting to know ourselves well!

It’s also important to remember that the strongest relationships don’t usually break down over a simple disagreement or a difference of opinion. If this does happen, it may be a sign that it’s better to focus your energy on more positive relationships!

B. Educational clip – Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Don’t squeeze me! I’m not a lemon... – Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 1](#)

C. Lemon squeezer (10 minutes)

1. Based on what was covered in the video, ask students to explain what “**social pressure**” is, in their own words.

 3

 4-7

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 11

2. Listen to a few answers, then round them out with the following explanations:



Every day, we're exposed to all different kinds of social pressure in our environment (family, friends, school, sports, the media, society, etc.). This pressure includes, for example, beauty standards, bodily norms, gendered social roles, performance culture (academic, athletic), and pressure associated with romantic and sexual experiences, risky behaviours and substance use (Dupont, 2014; Young, 2013).

These kinds of pressure can positively or negatively shape how we show up and behave, i.e., our opinions, perceptions, behaviours, attitudes and choices (Wright, 2020). Some types of social pressure can even cause us stress and anxiety (Ventecinq et al., 2024). So, it's important to be aware of their presence in our lives and their impact on our health and well-being (Assor et al., 2020; Nor et al., 2025).

3. Now ask the students:

- What happens inside you when you constantly hear these messages and are subjected to this external pressure?



12

4. You take a few answers and complete them as follows:



Without even realizing it, we internalize this pressure and then impose it on ourselves... and on others! **Just like squeezing a lemon can change its appearance, being subjected to social pressure can change the way we show up or behave.**

For example, we might believe we should like certain things or think a certain way... Even if it doesn't really come naturally. Social pressure influences us to **fall in line more with established norms**, i.e., to do what other people are doing and "fit in."

It's not always easy to distinguish between what really comes from us and what has been influenced by external social pressure!

5. You now present two scenarios:

- a) "During recess, your friends make insulting remarks about another student's physical appearance. You feel uncomfortable and disagree with the way they're acting, but you don't dare say so. You even end up playing along and laughing at their comments, just like everyone else. Otherwise, you might come across as being boring or too sensitive... People might laugh at you or, worse, exclude you..."
- b) "Your friends shared a video on social media where they put themselves in all kinds of risky situations, to get as many likes as possible on their post. You didn't participate, and you don't agree with any of it. Even though they insist that you share the video too, you decide to stand your ground, and you refuse to do it. You prefer to stay true to your values and integrity rather than go with the crowd and encourage risky behaviour."



13



14

6. Now ask the students: In these two situations...

- Which situation illustrates someone giving in to pressure?
- Which situation illustrates someone resisting pressure?
- In your opinion, what things made them react differently to the pressure?



15

7. You take a few answers, then complete them by explaining:



How we react depends in part on our **self-confidence**. **Lower self-confidence** leads to greater conformity or submitting to social pressures, rather than **resisting and being assertive** (Fischer, 2020; Oghounu, 2025)!



16

8. You explore the concept of **assertiveness** further:



Assertiveness refers to our ability to **calmly and honestly communicate** our thoughts and feelings to others.

Assertive behaviour involves **two types of respect: self-respect** (taking into account our own needs, rights, thoughts and feelings) **and respect for others** (factoring in their needs, rights, thoughts and feelings). The more someone is able to respect others while respecting themselves, and the more clearly they are able to express themselves, the more rewarding and liberating their relationships will be (Boisvert & Beaudry, 2012; Darjan et al., 2020).



17

9. You conclude by letting students know that whenever they feel pressured, they can take a “time out” and try to observe what is going on inside them (i.e., sensations, emotions and thoughts). This helps refocus on what matters to them (needs, values, interests and tastes) so they can be assertive, i.e., so they can respect themselves and others.

D. Resist the squeeze—be assertive! (15 to 25 minutes)

1. First, make sure that there are two rows of desks in the classroom so that there is a clear path (aisle) in the middle for people to walk through.
2. You tell the students that they'll be doing a role play where the challenge will be to practise making decisions and asserting themselves calmly, respectfully, confidently and courageously in the face of social pressure.
3. Ask a volunteer to go to the end of the middle path, at the back of the room (between the two rows of desks), and wait.
4. You now mention to the class that the middle path symbolically represents the course of life:
 - In life, we move forward with our goals, desires, aspirations and values, as well as our fears and doubts, with the ultimate goal of reaching the end of our own path. However, along this path, we are confronted with various kinds of pressure that can positively or negatively shape our perceptions, attitudes and choices... In short, our direction!
5. You continue with these explanations:
 - Through role-play exercises, the volunteer student will have to move from the back to the front of the middle path, which represents the course of their life.
 - Three students will be positioned around the path in order to act out different stages of the scenario.



18

- When the volunteer student finds themselves in front of a student who is responsible for a stage of the role-play, that student will read the scenario aloud to the volunteer.
- Then, the volunteer student will have to perform the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause.

- a) Stop, close your eyes, and breathe;
- b) Take a moment to look within: “How is this making me feel inside (sensations, emotions and thoughts)?”;
- c) Make a decision and be assertive: “What do I decide to do about this situation that is making me feel squeezed? How can I be assertive?”

- Once the volunteer student has stated their decision to the group, they can continue along the middle path in the classroom to discover the rest of the story.
 - The situation will not necessarily evolve according to the decisions made by the volunteer student, but will illustrate how certain kinds of social pressure influence the way we make choices.
6. You now hand out stages A, B and C of the scenario that you chose from among the suggested scenarios (see *Resist the squeeze! Scenarios* printable worksheet) to the three students sitting on either side of the path, starting from the back and moving toward the front of the class.
 7. You tell everyone they can start. The volunteer student then steps forward into the path. When they get to the student responsible for stage A of the scenario, the stage A student reads it out loud to them.
 8. Then you ask the volunteer student to act out the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause, and have the class to do the same. You go through the three steps of the pause.
 9. You can call on the class to help the volunteer student if necessary. However, try to encourage the volunteer student to make their own choice.
 10. You can ask the following questions to get the students thinking:
 - Do you feel obligated? Why?
 - What are the pros and cons of the different choices before you?
 - Is there a fear or “intolerance” influencing your decision? (For example, fear of other people’s judgement, exclusion, rejection or failure.)
 - Is your decision true to who you are? Do you feel that you’re respecting yourself in the choices you make?
 11. After making and stating their decision, the volunteer student moves on to the next stage, and so on.
 12. The scenario unfolds with the other students reading the next stages in the scenario (B and C).
 13. At each stage, you apply the instructions for the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause with the volunteer student, allowing the class to interact.



14. At the end of the scenario, ask the class to give the volunteer a round of applause for their bravery.
15.  For schools that have 60 minutes, repeat the exercise with another provided scenario, and with other students if possible. For schools that only have 40 minutes, conclude the activity on the final point.
16. To finish up, let the students know that it's usually easier to make choices and assert themselves calmly and respectfully in a fictional situation than in real life! But the more we practise, the more confident we become in making decisions that align with who we are, and in asserting ourselves with honesty.

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to name **strategies for better coping with social pressure and being assertive** with others (for example, their peers).
2. Round out their answers with the following strategies (inspired by Ames et al., 2017):
 - Stop, breathe, refocus (use the “**RESIST THE SQUEEZE!**” pause);
 - Listen to yourself first;
 - Respect yourself: needs, feelings, tastes, values and rights;
 - Respect others: needs, feelings, tastes, values and rights;
 - Ask questions, gather information, try to understand;
 - Challenge preconceived notions, don't buy into everything;
 - When you're not sure, give yourself some time before making a choice;
 - Demonstrate confidence and courage;
 - Confront the fear of displeasing others, dare to say no;
 - Communicate calmly and honestly;
 - Use humour to defuse tension without trivializing the situation.



19

F. Educational video - Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Don't squeeze me! I'm not a lemon... – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)



20

G. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, ask students to identify a situation in which they feel they experience some form of social pressure in their lives. Encourage them to use the RESIST THE SQUEEZE! pause, then to assert themselves by trying to apply at least one other strategy covered in the workshop.



21



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET
Resist the squeeze! Scenarios

	Scenario: option 1
A	Your friend Matis invites you over to his cousin's party. You don't know his cousin, but you know that he's in 10th grade and hangs out with a group of somewhat "rebellious" kids at school. You wonder if you'll feel like you fit in. Deep down, you feel it's better not to go. But another one of your friends, Juliette, insists that you tag along. She begs you, saying that if all three of you go, you'll be less awkward. What do you do?
B	You ultimately decide to go to the party, to show up for your friends and be bold. At the party that night, some people start drinking alcohol. The atmosphere shifts. Inside, you no longer feel comfortable, and part of you would prefer to leave the party. But Matis and Juliette are having fun and want to stay. What do you do?
C	You ultimately decide to stay, to avoid displeasing your friends. Matis's cousin offers everyone a drink. It's his "round"! You've never really had an alcoholic beverage before. Deep down, you feel that it's not a good idea. But your two friends accept the drink, like everyone else. You hesitate... It's his party, after all. What do you do?

	Scenario: option 2
A	It's the end of the academic semester. You have three big exams coming up. You plan to study all weekend so you're well prepared. Your friend suggests going out to the mall and the movies on Saturday instead. You're tempted! But deep down, you feel that it's not a good idea. You feel it's better to stay at home and focus on finishing the semester. Your friend insists that you're stressing too much over your exams for no reason. She says studying is a waste of time. She tells you to enjoy life! What do you do?
B	You ultimately decide to go out with your friend on Saturday and do all your studying on Sunday. When Sunday comes around, you realize that it's too much studying for one day. You feel overwhelmed and unable to do it. You turn to your parents for help, but they think you mismanaged your time and blame you for going out yesterday. They are strict: you need to study thoroughly for your exams and do well. Internally, you feel the pressure building. You don't want to disappoint your parents. You could use some help... What do you do?
C	You ultimately decide to manage on your own and study late into the night. On Monday morning, you're exhausted. Your French teacher wants to talk to you. She says you look very tired. She offers to give you extra help during the lunch hour. Deep down, you feel that you need the help your teacher is offering. But your friend is trying to convince you not to go, and to have lunch with her instead. She says that going to see your teacher will probably cause you more trouble than anything else. What do you do?

	Scenario: option 3
A	It's a school night, and you're playing online with friends. You were planning to stop playing at 8 p.m. to finish your homework and get ready for bed. But at 8 p.m., your friends start a new game and insist that you stay and play with them. What do you do?
B	You tell them that you have to go. Someone on your team says, "You're always letting us down! If we lose, it'll be your fault." The others also ask you if you can stay for a few more minutes. How do you respond?
C	Since you refuse to keep playing, a friend asks you to give them your password so they can play as your character for you. The friend promises they won't do anything else with your account. What do you do?

	Scenario: option 4
A	Some students in your class are doing a social media challenge where each person posts an awkward or embarrassing photo of themselves and then tags others to do the same. Your name has been tagged in the challenge, but you don't want to participate. What do you do?
B	The next day, several people ask you why you didn't do the challenge. Some of them say things like, "It's no fun if you don't do it!" or "Everyone else did it—you're the only one left who hasn't!" Some of them insist that you post a photo. How do you respond?
C	A few days later, you find out that a fake photo of you—created using artificial intelligence and without your consent—has been posted on social media. You feel your anger rising. What do you do?



6. IMPERFECT? PERFECT!

Building self-esteem through self-acceptance

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Self-knowledge, self-understanding and self-worth
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand what self-esteem is and the factors that strengthen or weaken it; • Define their real and ideal selves, and the gap between the two; • Use strategies to help build and develop their self-esteem.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the icon 

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the icon 

Materials and preparation

- Print the *Exploring your self-esteem* worksheet (1 per student).
- Print the *Real me and ideal me* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



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Summer 2025

A. Challenge time! (15 minutes)

1. Ask for four students to volunteer to go to the front of the classroom and attempt a few challenges. They may be solo or group challenges.
2. The challenges given to students should be difficult or impossible, such as:
 - Reciting the alphabet backwards;
 - Licking their own elbow;
 - Interlocking their arms with another student's and then trying to get untangled;
 - Making a long chain of paper clips with their eyes closed.
3. Give the volunteers around 5 minutes to complete the challenges. While the volunteers do their best, encourage the other students in the class to cheer them on.
4. Once the time is up, applaud the volunteers and congratulate them.
5. Next, ask the students in the class to take turns naming strengths and qualities for each of the volunteers. Students can draw inspiration from the list of qualities and strengths presented in the slideshow. If necessary, supplement the list of qualities and strengths mentioned by the students.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| • Funny | • Honest |
| • Persevering | • Enthusiastic |
| • Creative | • Motivated |
| • Respectful | • Attentive |
| • Generous | • Cheerful |
| • Patient | • Responsible |
| • Brave | • Sincere |
| • Organized | • Caring |
| • Positive | • Thoughtful |
| • Observant | • Tolerant |
| • Calm | |

Tip for this exercise

Make sure that the exercise is carried out in a spirit of respect, positivity and fairness. The goal is for students to feel the effects of being complimented and being assigned positive qualities.

6. Next, ask the students who volunteered about how the experience was for them, using the following questions:
 - What did you think of the challenges you were asked to complete? Were they easy or hard?
 - How did you feel while you were doing the challenges?
 - How did you feel when you received compliments?
7. Explain that the goal of the exercise was to put them in a situation that would catch them off balance (e.g., having to attempt impossible challenges, being watched by the whole class, and receiving compliments). Explain that our spontaneous reactions in these kinds of situations of vulnerability often reveal the relationship we have with ourselves: in other words, our self-esteem.



3



4



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8. Continue the discussion with the whole group using the following questions:
 - Did you notice any changes in how your classmates looked or acted after receiving a compliment?
 - How do you usually feel when someone compliments you?
 - Is it easy for you to compliment others? Is it easier to give compliments or receive them?

9. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the activity by mentioning that:



Each person has their own **unique strengths and qualities that contribute to their beauty, both inside and out**. It's not pretentious to recognize your own beauty. In fact, it's important for **learning how to love and value yourself!**



6

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Imperfect? Perfect! —Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip — Part 1](#)



7

C. What is self-esteem? (10 minutes)

1. To help students connect with the educational video, ask them to define self-esteem in their own words. Listen to a few answers and complete them with the following explanations:



Having good self-esteem is feeling like you have **importance and VALUE** as a person and are **worthy of love**. Self-esteem comes from the **overall positive or negative assessment of your own value as a person** (American Psychological Association, 2015; Muris, 2001; Orth & Robins, 2014). Self-esteem can be **strong** or **weak**. The **emotions you feel** or the **thoughts** that go through your mind when you think about yourself are **good indicators of your self-esteem** (Carlén et al., 2023; Kőszegi et al., 2022; Rosenberg, 1979).



8

2. Using the slideshow, you now present a table (inspired by Thibault et al. [2019]) with example statements associated with strong or weak self-esteem:

Strong self-esteem	Weak self-esteem
• “I may have flaws and I may fail sometimes, but I still consider myself to have inherent worth as a person.”	• “I’m constantly worried about or even obsessed with my image.”
• “I have a good understanding of myself (my strengths and weaknesses) and act accordingly.”	• “I feel insecure in social situations and tend to be self-conscious about how others look at me.”



9

• “I assert myself and know not to let others be disrespectful toward me.”	• “I tend to make choices that go against my own wants and needs, so I won’t upset others.”
• “I assert myself and make sure I’m treated with respect.”	• “I tend to feel excluded or different from others: more vulnerable, weaker or less competent.”
• “I accept that I can’t be talented and successful at everything, and that fact doesn’t make me a failure.”	• “I have a hard time accepting criticism or dealing with failure.”
• “I recognize my qualities, strengths, abilities and achievements.”	• “It’s hard for me to recognize my qualities, strengths or abilities. I have trouble taking credit for my own achievements.”

3. Briefly ask the students the following three questions and listen to a few answers:

- Do any of these statements sound like how you might describe yourself?
- Which column of statements best describes you?
- What might that say about yourself and your self-esteem?

4. Conclude the activity with these words of encouragement:



It is perfectly normal for your self-esteem to be stronger or weaker for different aspects of yourself. As a teenager, you’re **still building your self-esteem** (Bien et al., 2024; Carlén et al., 2023). Your self-esteem is influenced by **changes in your identity** and by **your interpersonal events and experiences** (Dorard et al., 2013; Guillon & Crocq, 2004), so it’s bound to **evolve over time** (Bien et al., 2024; Carlén et al., 2023; Trzesniewski et al., 2003). What’s important is that you understand your self-esteem in the present moment, **so that you can build it up and strengthen it with kindness, one step at a time!**



10

D. Real me or ideal me? (15 minutes)

1. Segue into the next part of the activity, focusing on a way for students to examine their own self-esteem: the **“real me”** and the **“ideal me.”** Explain to students what the **“real me”** and the **“ideal me”** are:

- The **“real me”** is how you view yourself in the present moment—your importance, your successes, your challenges, your strengths and your weaknesses (American Psychological Association, 2015). It’s the reflection you see when you look in the mirror. Your **“real me”** corresponds to the value (positive or negative) you assign to different aspects of yourself (e.g., academic, social, emotional, physical) in the present moment (Ouellet, 2020; Shavelson et al., 1976).

- The “**ideal me**” is the idea of what you think you should ideally be like (American Psychological Association, 2015). It’s the image you have of the best version of yourself. Your “ideal me” therefore corresponds to the value you assign to different aspects (e.g., academic, social, emotional, physical) of the person you wish you could be (Ouellet, 2020; Shavelson et al., 1976).

2. Explain that **self-esteem** is influenced by **the distance, difference or gap** between the “real me” and the “ideal me” (Cervone & Pervin, 2020; Norem-Hebeisen, 1976).



 The greater **the distance, difference or gap** between how you perceive yourself in this moment (the “real me”) and what you think you should be in order to have value and be worthy of love (the “ideal me”), the more your self-esteem is likely to be **affected or weakened**. Conversely, the **closer** your two “me”s are to each other, the more likely your self-esteem is to be **positive, balanced, healthy and strong** (Cervone & Pervin, 2020; Thibault et al., 2019).

3. Give this example:
 - “**Real me**”: At school, I only have two close friends that I get along with. Even though I really care for them, I sometimes feel “weak” or “ugly” in comparison. I feel like I’m less important and less capable of making friends.
 - “**Ideal me**”: I wish I was in a popular social group, like my older sister is. If I had more friends, I would feel like I had more value and importance.
4. Now, hand out the *Exploring your self-esteem* printable worksheet and ask students to fill it out individually. Give them a maximum of 5 minutes.
5. You then discuss the answers with the whole class.
 - What do you think of the difference, distance or gap between your two “me”s? Are they far apart or close to each other?
 - What might that say about you and your self-esteem?
6. Let students know that it’s normal and common to see some degree of gap between how you see yourself and how you would like to be, especially in a society with lots of social comparison and heavy social pressure!



Social comparison can **harm your self-esteem** by **worsening the perceived gap between the “real me” and the “ideal me”** (McComb et al., 2023; Zogmaister & Maricutoiu, 2022).

7. Complete the activity by clarifying what it means **to develop positive, balanced, healthy and strong self-esteem**:



A positive, balanced, healthy and strong self-esteem involves neither **self-glorification** (e.g., overvaluing yourself, trying to appear unshakeable, never doubting yourself, always putting yourself first over other people), nor **self-trivialization** (e.g., judging yourself harshly, devaluing yourself, minimizing your own successes, making yourself invisible).

Rather, it's about having a **kind but realistic assessment of yourself** (Neff, 2011; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Ouellet, 2020). Or, in other words, bringing your two “me”s closer together! And there are ways to do that!

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Explain that there are various strategies you can use to bring those two “me”s closer together. Ask the students to name some potential strategies.
2. Listen to a few answers, then supplement them by presenting the following list of **strategies for building and strengthening your self-esteem**, inspired by Thibault et al. (2019):
 - Be aware of your inner dialogue (thoughts and emotions about yourself);
 - Avoid disparaging or overly demanding thoughts about yourself;
 - Be mindful of the words you use to talk about yourself;
 - Criticize yourself less and don't judge yourself too harshly;
 - Don't define yourself solely by difficult or past experiences;
 - Take a fresh look at yourself, and see what is beautiful within you;
 - Develop a kinder and more forgiving inner dialogue;
 - Get a better understanding of your strengths and weaknesses;
 - Accept yourself as you are;
 - Welcome criticism and treat it as an opportunity to learn;
 - Be open to compliments from others;
 - Write down your good qualities, accomplishments and successes in a journal;
 - Assert yourself calmly and respectfully;
 - Allow yourself to say no, even if it may disappoint others;
 - Leave your comfort zone and dare to take risks;
 - Accept the possibility of failure;
 - Try not to compare yourself to others... Instead, compare yourself to yourself!



13



14

3. Finally, conclude with these words:



Are you imperfect? Perfect! You don't need to be perfect in order to love yourself, to be loved by others, and to recognize that you have inherent worth. "Achieving perfect self-esteem is impossible" (Thibault et al., 2019, p. 10). Being kinder to ourselves, regardless of our weaknesses, failings and faults, helps to build our self-esteem. **In other words, accept yourself for who you are: no more, no less!** And never forget that you can always take steps to evolve and grow! Changing, adjusting or improving the way you see yourself to make your "real me" more positive and realistic helps reduce the gap between your "real me" and your "ideal me," and that helps boost your self-esteem!

F. Meditation on strengths (5 minutes)

1. Next, ask the students to close their eyes for a minute and meditate. You can dim the lights or play soothing music if you wish.
2. Ask the students to take a few deep breaths.
3. Gently suggest that they reflect on a personality trait or characteristic of theirs that they especially like (a strength or quality). This can be a strength or quality that someone else previously used to describe them.
4. Tell them to let the answer come to them naturally, without rushing to find a perfect answer.
5. Once the students have each found their strength or quality, tell them to take a moment to silently compliment themselves about this trait.
6. Next, ask them to also notice the emotions, thoughts or physical feelings that accompany this compliment.
 - How does it feel to give yourself permission to reflect on what you like about yourself?
 - When do you take time to recognize and appreciate the positive in you?
7. You give them a minute to feel. Encourage them to welcome whatever comes up, without judging or trying to change anything.
8. Next, suggest that they imagine how they could use this strength or quality in their life.
 - How does that make you feel inside?
 - What does it create for those around you?

9. Like before, give the students time to visualize the idea and consider how it feels. Then, suggest that they apply that strength or quality in their real life over the next few days. Give them time to take in this suggestion.
10. Finally, gently conclude the meditation by inviting the students to open their eyes, stretch and yawn if necessary before returning to the group.
11. If time permits, ask if a few students wish to share their experience.
12. Conclude by giving some explanations about meditation:



Meditation is simply taking the time to settle into a comfortable position—maybe in silence or with soft music playing—to help centre yourself for a moment and gently refocus. Then you can concentrate on a specific thing and consider it from a fresh perspective. It doesn't need to be long or complicated. You can gradually start meditating for a little longer or on different things, depending on your needs and how it makes you feel (André, 2009).

G. Educational clip—Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Imperfect? Perfect! —Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip — Part 2](#)



H. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, encourage the students to build and develop their self-esteem by trying to bridge the gap between their two “me”s (real me and ideal me). Encourage students to: 1) pay attention to their inner dialogue (emotions and thoughts about themselves) and how it affects their self-esteem; and 2) turn criticisms about themselves (weakness, imperfections, difficulties, undesired aspects) into kinder, more positive and more realistic statements. Lastly, invite them to 3) use some of the strategies covered in the workshop to improve their self-esteem.



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Exploring your self-esteem



1. Explore your “Real Me” and your “Ideal Me”!

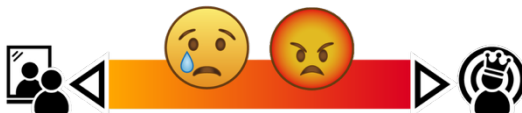
- **Describe your “Real Me”:** How you view yourself—your worth, your importance. It’s the reflection you see when you look in the mirror in the present moment (in terms of academic, social, emotional, physical or other aspects).

- **Describe your “Ideal Me”:** What you think you should ideally be like. It’s who you wish you were—a “better” or “best” version of yourself (in terms of academic, social, emotional, physical or other aspects).

2. How big is the gap between your two “me”s? Are they

- ☐ **Far apart** (lower or weaker self-esteem); or
- ☐ **Close together** (positive, balanced, healthy and strong self-esteem).

ARE THEY
FAR APART?



OR CLOSE
TOGETHER?





7. BEING OPEN-MINDED DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE NOTHING IN YOUR HEAD!

Fighting judgment with empathy and compassion

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Showing empathy Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences Sheet 16 : Being a role model for others
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Achieving their potential Exercising critical judgment Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand the impact of prejudice and judgments on themselves and others • Adopt an attitude of openness, attentiveness, understanding and respect toward others. • Use more strategies to develop empathy and compassion for themselves and for others.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the supplementary *Kindness Meditation Script* (1 copy for yourself).
- Print the *Be kind to yourself* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have sticky notes available (1 per student).
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
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en santé mentale

Summer 2025

A. Get labelling! (10 minutes)

1. Draw a large stick person on the board. Introduce this stick figure to students as “Lou.”
2. Read the following scenario: “Lou often looks unhappy. At school, he doesn’t talk to anyone. You’d almost think Lou doesn’t like people all that much.”
3. Give one sticky note to each student and ask them to write down the first idea that comes to mind when they read the following question (this step should be done quickly without too much thought):
 - Why does Lou act this way?
4. Once the students have written their answers, they will paste their sticky notes onto the stick figure on the board (so that the stick figure is completely covered).
5. Read a few of the answers written on the sticky notes, then ask the following question:
 - “What if I told you that, since the beginning of the year, Lou has been getting bullied at school? How would that change your perception of the situation, or your answer to my question?”
6. Listen to a few answers, then conclude by explaining that this activity is intended to make people aware of their tendency to express **prejudice**.



A prejudice is when you make **assumptions: judging** a person or a situation **too quickly** based on your own **perceptions** or on **incomplete or unfounded information**. It’s like sticking a label on someone without really knowing them or their experience. These labels cover up and hide the person’s true nature, just like these sticky notes covering up and hiding Lou. Prejudices prevent us from seeing a person as they really are (Eberhardt, 2019; Fiske & Macrae, 2012).

7. Finish up the activity by saying:



It’s normal and natural to judge people. As humans, we do it all the time! It’s a way of seeing where we stand in comparison to others. For example, each time you walk into a room, you scan the room and the people in it, what they look like, how they’re acting, and so on. This gives you cues as to how you should behave in that situation. Without really realizing it, you’re placing labels on people, lumping them into categories. “He’s like this,” “She’s such-and-such kind of person.” Those labels become your benchmarks. But **things are rarely what they seem at first glance**. Our **prejudices can play tricks on us and mislead us about others**. It’s important to remember that you don’t know everything, and that if you take the time to get to know someone, they might surprise you!

“Judging is sometimes a pleasure; understanding is always one!”

- HENRI DE RÉGNIER (1864-1936)

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Being open-minded doesn't mean you have nothing in your head! —Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip—Part 1](#)



5

C. Be kind to yourself (5 minutes)

1. Go back to the points brought up in the educational clip: even though judging others and being judged is “normal,” saying things that are prejudiced often reveals a **lack of empathy**.

2. Ask the students to define **empathy**:
 - What does empathy mean to you?

3. Listen to a few answers, then complete them with the following:



Empathy is **the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes: to understand and be sensitive to someone's experience, feelings and needs** (Naître et grandir, 2022).

4. Continue by explaining that developing empathy can help encourage compassion.

5. Ask the students another question, this time requesting they define **compassion**:
 - What does compassion mean to you?

6. Listen to a few answers, then complete them with the following:



Compassion is a **sincere desire to help, understand and care about the well-being of others** (American Psychological Association, 2015). Compassion also means being able to see the good and beauty in everyone, and **being open to those who are different from you**. You can show compassion by having a **positive and respectful attitude** toward others, even when you don't expect to get anything in return (Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Strauss et al., 2016). Being compassionate doesn't mean you have to be friends with everyone, or just accept everything that someone else does. It's about being able to assert yourself respectfully, sincerely and with positive intentions (Masson, 2018).

7. Conclude by saying that to be empathetic and compassionate toward others, first you need to “be kind to yourself!” This is important for developing and maintaining healthy, harmonious relationships!

D. Labels that leave a mark... (10 minutes)

1. Go back to the scenario about Lou (the stick person from activity A.). Based on the principles of empathy and compassion that you just discussed, ask students the following questions:
 - Now that you know that Lou is being bullied at school, what might you say to him?
 - What could you do to help lessen the judgments weighing Lou down?



8

2. For each empathetic or compassionate answer the students give you, remove one of the sticky notes covering Lou.
3. Once all the sticky notes are gone, have the students look at Lou on the board. Point out to them that Lou is no longer hidden behind labels. However, his outline is faded and smudged in places.
4. Raise students' awareness of **the negative impacts of prejudices:**



The way we judge others, and the labels we place on them—often too quickly and without really knowing them—can **leave a mark**. This can **damage or weaken** that person's **self-esteem** (Brito & Oliveira, 2013; Dou et al., 2022). It may also **harm our relationships with others**. So, it's better to take the time to get to know the other person, to take a genuine and sincere interest in them, or simply to refrain from making judgments, in order to avoid negative consequences for yourself and others (Tyler et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2019). You may not be able to prevent others from judging (or judging you!), but you yourself can stop judging others **by cultivating empathy and compassion** (Marshall et al., 2020).



9

E. Kindness Meditation (5 minutes)

1. Next, invite the students to take part in a kindness meditation to help them develop acceptance, kindness, and compassion toward themselves and others.
2. Remind them that meditation is a way for them to pause for a moment, settle themselves, open their minds, and tune in to things within and around them, just as they did in previous workshops (André, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).
3. Use the [audio file](#) available in the slideshow to help bring the meditation to life for your students, or read it aloud yourself. *Please note that the audio file takes a few seconds to start.



10

F. Because we're a lot alike! (15 minutes)

1. Tell the students that, for the next activity, you need them to be honest, respectful and mature, in order to make the experience enjoyable, positive and meaningful for everyone.
2. Explain how the activity will work:
 - When I say so, you'll close your eyes and be quiet.
 - Then I'll say different statements that you might relate to. For each statement I read, if you think that statement might apply to you, raise your hand. Everyone should keep their eyes closed.
 - I'll then ask the students who raised their hands for that statement to open their eyes for a few seconds and look at each other, quietly and compassionately, and then close their eyes again.
 - If you don't think that statement applies to you, then you must keep your eyes closed.
 - We'll repeat this for each statement.



11



12

3. Now ask the students to sit comfortably, in silence, with their eyes closed.
4. Remind the students of the importance of being respectful to each other. Then, begin the exercise by reading the following statements out loud, in order:
 - I go to school;
 - I'm mostly into salty foods (chips, popcorn, etc.);
 - I'm mostly into sweet foods (candy, cake, chocolate, etc.);
 - I like playing video games;
 - I'm an only child (no brothers or sisters);
 - I hate doing oral presentations;
 - My parents are separated;
 - I've been through a breakup before;
 - I've seen someone get bullied at school;
 - I have a hard time accepting criticism or admitting when I'm wrong;
 - I'm afraid of being judged negatively for who I am.
 - I've experienced a major loss in my life (such as the loss or death of a loved one);
 - I've previously faced one of my biggest fears;
 - I sometimes feel proud of myself.
5. After the exercise, ask the students the following questions:
 - Did you find this exercise easy or difficult? Why?
 - What did you feel when you saw other students in the same boat as you? Did that put you at ease or make you more uncomfortable?
 - What did you find out about your classmates? What did you find out about yourself?

Tip for this exercise

Try to take the time to look each student in the eye in a compassionate manner. Doing so sets an example and acknowledges their experience. Students are not required to open their eyes if they don't want to, but you should strongly encourage them to do so! If you don't have time to cover all the statements, select the ones you think will be most beneficial to the students while still following the suggested order. Remember that the goal of this exercise is to help them build bridges with each other by focusing on the ties that bind them. The goal is to for them to develop their sensitivity, their openness, and their empathy.

6. Listen to a few answers, then conclude by explaining the purpose of this activity:



The goal of this activity was to help make you aware of the things you have **in common** with other people—the things that **bring you closer together** rather than those that push you apart—in order to **better handle judgments**. Unfortunately, in our day-to-day lives, we rarely take the time to really get to know others and to appreciate the similarities that unite us. **Let's learn to focus our attention on the bridges that connect us, rather than on the differences that divide us...** Because deep down, we're more alike than we think!

G. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Share a list of **strategies** with your students **for developing empathy and compassion toward others**, in order to better handle judgment (inspired by Lambert et al., 2009; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Sitbon et al., 2019):

- Avoid making assumptions or holding prejudices;
- Describe behaviours and facts, without judgment;
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes—be sensitive to their needs and emotions;
- Take an interest in truly getting to know the other person;
- Have an attitude of openness, attentiveness, understanding and respect toward others;
- Accept others without trying to change them;
- Recognize the other person's strengths and qualities;
- Focus on what you have in common with the other person, rather than on the differences;
- Appreciate your similarities;
- Think of difference as a positive asset;
- Be grateful toward others and recognize the good that they can bring;
- Be generous, do good deeds and help others.

2. Also share a list of **strategies for self-kindness and self-compassion** (inspired by Krefft, 2019; Neff and Germer, 2018):

- Talk to yourself as you would talk to a loved one;
- When you're overwhelmed by emotions (perhaps those caused by the judgment of others), take a minute to breathe;
- Listen to yourself and be attentive to what you're feeling (such as your emotions and needs);
- Be aware of and respect your own limitations;
- When facing judgment from others, assert yourself in a way that encourages respect;
- Write down your feelings in a journal;
- Practise self-care by doing the things that are good for you;
- Ask for help if needed.

3. Encourage students to supplement these strategies with the *Strategies for building and strengthening your self-esteem* from Workshop 6 if they feel the need.

4. Conclude with these words:



Remember... **Building and strengthening your self-esteem helps you better handle judgments.** The more you feel that you're valuable and worthy of love, the less you'll fear others' judgment and the less likely you are to judge others for trivial reasons (Brito & Oliveira, 2013; Dou et al., 2022).



15



16



17

H. Educational clip—Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Being open-minded doesn't mean you have nothing in your head!* —Part 2 for your students.

[Video clip—Part 2](#)



18

I. OFF-TRAIL challenge

This week, encourage students to practise empathy and compassion toward others. Invite students to: 1) identify a person or group of people they tend to judge without really knowing them, 2) find at least two strengths or positive qualities in that person or group, or two things they have in common with them, and 3) observe how this influences the way they feel or act toward that person or group.



19



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Kindness Meditation Script



The meditation you are about to practice is called the kindness meditation. Kindness is the openness, cheerfulness and love we show to others, not the love we imagine in romantic movies. Loving-kindness. It's a love that allows you to accept people as they are, without judging them, by giving them the best of yourself. It's this love for others and for yourself that also allows you not to worry and to forgive when you feel judged.

I invite you to think that everyone is a bit like you, deep down. Everyone looks alike in some ways, wants the same things and sometimes worries about the same things. You can try to keep this in mind when you're with others and especially when you feel judged.

Make yourself comfortable. Remember that you can move gently to reposition yourself if you feel the need, along the way. I invite you to start by observing your breathing. Turn your attention to your inhaling. Feel the movement of the air entering your body and swelling your belly. Then, as you exhale, observe as the air reverses direction and exits through your nose or mouth. Don't try to change your breathing. It's perfect as it is right now. It doesn't need you to give it qualities or faults. Simply give it your attention by becoming aware of your sensations as you inhale and exhale.

Now, with your eyes closed, think of someone who loves you very much. Imagine that this person is at your side, giving you a big hug. They wish you safety, health and happiness. Take the time to feel all the love, all the positive wishes that come from the person you imagine at your side.

Take a deep breath and exhale through your nose.

Now that you've spent a moment receiving kindness, I invite you to change roles and pass on this loving-kindness in turn. Think of someone in the class you know less about or have less of a connection with. Turn all your attention toward them and start sending them a big wave of love and kindness. You and this person are similar, even if you don't know each other very well. Like you, they too want to be well, be happy, be healthy and safe. Take a moment to silently send them your kindness and good thoughts. For example, you can wish them a life filled with love, good health and well-being.

Take a deep breath in and relax your body completely as you exhale. You can repeat a few more deep breaths at your own pace. For a moment, try to observe how you feel in your body and what's going on in your head. And when you want to, gently open your eyes. Look around you to return quietly to the rest of the class and stretch, if you feel like it, to return to a more active position.



8. NOT RIGHT OR WRONG: IT'S A MATTER OF PERCEPTION!

Preventing and resolving conflict by communicating clearly

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Communicating appropriately Resolving conflicts Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Communicating appropriately Solving problems Using creativity Cooperating with others
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand the role that perceptions play during conflicts; • Become aware of their own attitudes and behaviours that worsen conflicts; • Use an approach to conflict resolution based on compassionate communication; • Use positive strategies for listening to others and expressing themselves.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon



Materials and preparation

- Print the following worksheets (1 copy of each worksheet for each student): [Conflict resolution](#) and [Emotions and needs](#).
- Print out the supplementary [Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise](#) sheet (1 copy for yourself).
- Print the *Communication is the key!* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
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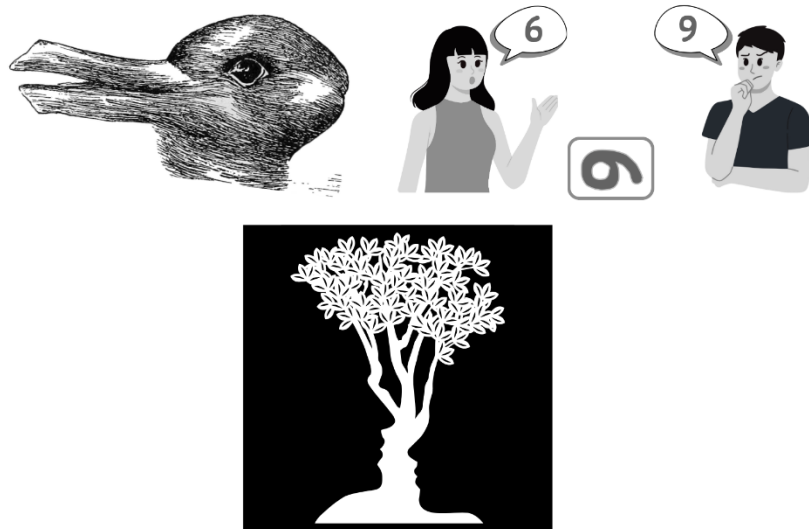


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Summer 2025

A. Perceptions (10 minutes)

1. Begin the workshop by presenting a series of ambiguous images that can be perceived differently depending on the person.
2. For each image, ask the students to raise their hands and say what they see at first glance, without thinking too hard about it or looking for anything specific.



Graphics designed with [Canva](#) are under Canva's content licence.

3. After presenting the images, continue the discussion with the following questions:
 - When looking at the images, did everyone see the same thing at first glance? Why or why not?
 - Can you change your perspective to see how others interpreted the images differently?
 - Has there ever been a time where you and another person had different perceptions of the same situation?
 - What might this exercise teach us about our perceptions?
4. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the discussion by saying the following:



The purpose of this exercise was to make you aware of how **there might be multiple perceptions, perspectives or points of view about a single situation**. There's no point trying to figure out who's right and who's wrong, because it's all a matter of perception!

But these **differences in perception are often at the root of interpersonal conflicts** (Eberhardt, 2019). No two people have the exact same life experience, which means that no two people will perceive a thing, a person or a situation in the exact same way. Everyone has their own "filters" (prejudices, stereotypes, sensitivities, past experiences, etc.) through which they perceive and interpret situations. These "filters" can distort the intended message, a bit like static on a phone line. These distorted or scrambled messages may unfortunately create conflict (Eberhardt, 2019; Fiske & Macrae, 2012).

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Not right or wrong: it's a matter of perception! –Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip—Part 1](#)



8

C. Communication is the key! (15 minutes)

1. Segue into the next section by mentioning that, as the clip shows, how a conflict is managed can determine whether it is **helpful or harmful**.
2. Ask the students the following questions:
 - Can you think of any examples of conflicts that got out of hand or ended up harming your relationships?
 - Can you think of any examples of conflicts that were resolved positively and ended up helping your relationships?
 - What do you think explains why the outcomes of these conflicts were different?
3. The goal here is to help students understand that their reactions influence the outcome of their conflicts.
4. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the discussion by saying the following:



Some of our **spontaneous reactions** (attitudes and behaviours that we take on without really thinking about it) can **make conflicts worse**, while **other, more positive strategies** would help resolve conflicts in a **helpful** way (Baker & Exner-Cortens, 2020; Borecka-Biernat, 2024; Burger, 2022). No matter the situation, **communication is the key to preventing** conflicts or resolving them **effectively and positively**!

5. Next, suggest students learn a new **approach to conflict resolution based on compassionate communication**. This approach is inspired by the stages of conflict resolution according to Crawford & Bodine (1996) as well as the principles associated with conscious or nonviolent communication [NVC] according to Rosenberg (2015).
6. Summarize the **four steps** of the conflict resolution process.
 - Step 1: Calm yourself and refocus;
 - Step 2: Communicate with compassion;
 - Step 3: Look for solutions;
 - Step 4: Choose and implement a solution.
7. Before continuing, inform students that they will have to apply these steps for conflict resolution later in the workshop. Hand out the two *Conflict resolution* and *Emotions and needs* worksheets to the students.



9



10



11

8. Next, explain each of the four steps in the resolution process, along with the corresponding strategies, using the slideshow:

- **Step 1 – Calm yourself and refocus**



When trying to resolve a conflict with another person, it's crucial that you calm yourself beforehand. If your emotions are running high, it's probably not the right time to talk! It's better to refocus and take care of what's going on inside yourself *first*, and wait for the dust to settle. Here are a few strategies to do so (Feldman & Gowen, 1998; Gascon, 2011; Tuval-Maschiach & Shulman, 2006):

- Stop and take a break;
- Remove yourself from the conflict and go somewhere quiet;
- Take a deep breath;
- Take a look at what's happening inside yourself;
- Identify your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Release your emotions in a healthy way (exercising, drawing, writing, listening to soothing music, etc.);
- Refocus your attention on what is important to you and your values.



A quick reminder: Our emotions speak to us! They send an important message: **“There’s a need that requires your attention!”** To help identify your own emotions and needs, use the *Emotions and needs* sheet.

- **Step 2 – Communicate with compassion**



Once you've calmed down, you can begin a respectful discussion with the other person to talk about what each of you experienced and perceived during the conflict. The idea here is for each of you to have a space to express yourself and to listen to the other person with compassion. Here are some strategies to do this (André, 2009; Burdick, 2014; Greenland, 2016; Rosenberg, 2015; Weger et al., 2014; Willard & Salzman, 2017):

Listening to the other person:

- Use nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice) that shows your interest;
- Be open and receptive to what the other person has to say;
- Give the other person time to speak without interrupting them;
- Try to understand the other person's point of view without judging them;
- Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and be sensitive to their emotions and needs;
- In short, listen to the other person just like you want them to listen to you!

Expressing yourself:

- Describe the facts of the situation without making judgments or interpretations;
- Avoid making assumptions about the other person's intentions;
- Use “I” statements about yourself, rather than “You” statements about the other person;
- Clearly express your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Don't blame the other person for your emotions and feelings;
- Admit your own faults in the situation and be able to apologize.



12



13

- **Step 3 – Look for solutions**



Now that each person has had the opportunity to express themselves and has listened to the other person with compassion, you can move on to “looking for solutions.” Any proposed solution is welcome as long as it is respectful. Here are some strategies you can use to achieve this:

- Propose realistic ideas, solutions or actions that would meet the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Come up with a range of solutions.



14

- **Step 4 – Choose and implement a solution**



Lastly, work together to choose one of the proposed solutions. The idea here is to identify the solution that works best for everyone and implement it. Here are some strategies you can use to achieve this:

- Consider the pros and cons of each proposed idea, solution or action;
- Work together to choose the solution(s) that best meet(s) the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Implement the solution.



14

9. Explain to students that, even though there is a logical order to these steps, they don't follow a strictly linear sequence. For example, the strategies for compassionate communication (expressing yourself and listening to the other person) should be used throughout the conflict resolution process. And if your emotions start to get the better of you at some point, it's best to go back to step 1 and give yourself time to calm down again. Also, don't hesitate to ask for help whenever you need it.



15

10. Finish up the activity by reminding students:



When a conflict is poorly managed, it can affect and weaken relationships between those involved (e.g., friends, families). Try to avoid running away from conflict, and ignoring or trying to control the other person (Borecka-Biernat, 2024; Feldman & Gowen, 1998; Gascon, 2011; Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). Conversely, when conflict is managed properly, it can strengthen your relationship with the other person, allowing you to know and understand each other better and find new solutions (Baker & Exner-Cortens, 2020; Brion-Meisels & Selman, 1984; Sikorska et al., 2024). In short, **communication is the key!**



16

11. If time permits, explain to students the difference between conflicts and situations of violence and bullying:



Remember that a **conflict** can be resolved between **two people acting honestly and in good faith** who are willing to meet each other halfway. If a situation involves a **power imbalance** or some form of **violence** from one person toward another (such as bullying), **it is not a conflict** (Burger, 2022; Oyelade & Adebayo, 2023). If you're a witness to or a victim of such violence or bullying, it's best to distance yourself from the situation to protect yourself and, importantly, **to ask for help and support from someone you trust**.



17

D. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Next, present the students with the following scenario:

“You get home from school and notice that the books on your desk have been moved. Right away, you assume your sister went into your room *yet again* without asking for permission. You run to her room, barge in without knocking, and loudly accuse her of snooping around your room. Your sister asks you what your problem is and tells you that you always get worked up over nothing. She says she didn’t go in your room, but you don’t believe her. A conflict breaks out between you and your sister...”

2. Now have the students apply the strategies they learned for helpful and effective conflict resolution, using an approach based on compassionate communication.
3. Resolve the conflict together as a group. If necessary, guide students through the steps and supplement their answers using the associated strategies.

E. A dramatic turn of events! (20 minutes)

1. Explain to the students that the next exercise involves acting out two different conflicts between two characters, as an interactive theatre piece: an artistic method that asks audience members to intervene throughout in order to encourage the search for solutions.
2. Introduce the students to the different roles needed for the interactive theatre exercise.
 - **The actors:** two students volunteer to play the characters and make the scene come to life.
 - **Directors:** the other students in the class play director. They can intervene on behalf of the characters and change the course of the story by proposing behaviours and interactions for the characters to take, using the right strategies to remedy the situation.
3. Explain that to play the role of director, all that you need to do is:
 - Raise your hand and shout, “CUT!”, putting the actors on pause.
 - Then give recommendations on how to help or correct the scene.
4. Explain that both characters will then resume acting, adjusting their roles to the director’s cues and continuing along those lines. Specify that there can be multiple audience interventions for the same scene.
5. Make sure the students understand the instructions for the interactive theatre exercise, then ask the first two volunteers to come to the front of the classroom.
6. Choose, or have the students choose, two scenes from the *Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise* supplementary worksheet. Using the slideshow, read out loud the first scene that was chosen. Then give the actors a few minutes to divvy up roles and prepare to act out the rest of the scene.



18



19



20

7. Meanwhile, invite the other students in the class to reread their worksheets (*Conflict resolution* and *Emotions and needs*) so they can prepare themselves to intervene in the situation, following the steps and strategies discussed previously.
8. Next, begin the first scene that was chosen. Each scene should last around 5 minutes.
9. Ask students these questions to encourage them to jump in as director:
 - What's your perception of the characters' nonverbal communication (expressions, gestures, etc.)?
 - What attitudes or behaviours would you have one of the characters change in order to de-escalate the situation and help resolve the conflict? How?
 - How could you help one character listen better to the other?
 - Could you guide a character to reword their statement to clearly explain their emotions and needs?
10. Let the situation unfold, either until the conflict is resolved, you feel that the scene has been sufficiently fleshed out, or the time runs out.
11. Thank the students who volunteered to play the characters; then, invite two other students to volunteer to come to the front of the classroom.
12. Proceed with the second scene that was chosen, following the same steps and again relying on the approach to conflict resolution based on compassionate communication and corresponding strategies.
13. Once both scenes have been resolved, congratulate the students on their participation.



21

F. Educational clip — Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Not right or wrong: it's a matter of perception! – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)



22

G. OFF-TRAIL Challenge

This week, ask the students to think about how they react to and handle their conflicts. Ask them to identify: 1) a spontaneous reaction (attitude or behaviour) they often adopt without really thinking but which may make their conflicts worse, 2) a positive conflict resolution strategy that comes naturally to them and that they already tend to use, 3) a new strategy of compassionate communication (to listen better to others and express themselves better) that they can apply in the near future so as to resolve conflicts in a helpful way.



23





PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Conflict resolution

- **Step 1 – Calm yourself and refocus:**

- Stop and take a break;
- Remove yourself from the conflict and go somewhere quiet;
- Take a deep breath;
- Take a look at what's happening inside yourself;
- Identify your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Release your emotions in a healthy way (exercising, drawing, writing, listening to soothing music, etc.);
- Refocus your attention on what is important to you and your values;
- Ask for help if needed.

- **Step 2 – Communicate with compassion**

Listening to the other person:

- Listen to the other person fully and be present in the moment;
- Use nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice) that shows your interest;
- Be open and receptive to what other person has to say;
- Give the other person time to speak without interrupting them;
- Try to understand the other person's point of view without judging them;
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes and be sensitive to their emotions and needs;
- In short, listen to the other person just like you want them to listen to you!

Expressing yourself:

- Describe the facts of the situation without making judgments or interpretations;
- Avoid making assumptions about the other person's intentions;
- Use "I" statements about yourself, rather than "You" statements about the other person;
- Clearly express your emotions and needs regarding the conflict;
- Don't blame the other person for your emotions and feelings;
- Admit your own faults in the situation and be able to apologize.

- **Step 3 – Look for solutions**

- Propose realistic ideas, solutions or actions that would meet the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Come up with a range of solutions.

- **Step 4 – Choose and implement a solution:**

- Consider the pros and cons of each proposed idea, solution or action;
- Work together to choose the solution(s) that best meet(s) the needs of everyone involved in the conflict;
- Implement the solution.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Emotions and needs

MY EMOTIONS



FEAR

Insecurity Shyness
Worry Anxiety
Panic



SADNESS

Depression
Disappointment
Heartache



DISGUST

Revulsion
Repulsion



ANGER

Irritation Rebellion
Frustration



SURPRISE

Excitement
Amazement



JOY

Satisfaction
Pride Optimism

MY NEEDS

Safety

Consideration

Affection

Acceptance

Achievement

Belonging

Freedom

Independence

Entertainment

Rest

Enjoyment

Justice

Time

Trust

Comfort

Understanding

Help

Recognition

Calm

Balance

Listening

How about you — **what are you experiencing now?**



SUPPLEMENTARY WORKSHEET

Scenes for the interactive theatre exercise

Scene 1

Emil invites his friend Ophelia to the movies to see a new movie that just came out. Ophelia tells him she can't go with him this evening because she's going to visit her grandparents. That night, before going to bed, Emil sees on social media that Ophelia has posted photos of herself hanging out with other friends at a party. Emil feels his anger rising quickly. He feels ashamed that his friend lied to him. The next day at school, Emil ignores Ophelia when they cross paths in the hall. Ophelia snaps at him and yells, "Hey, you could try saying, 'hi'!" Emil tells her that he doesn't know why he would say "hi" to her when clearly she has better things to do than spend time with him. Seeing the puzzled look on Ophelia's face, Emil tells her that he saw her photos on Facebook and knows that she lied to get out of going to the movies with him. Ophelia tells him that those photos are from last week. Emil doesn't believe her—why would she post old photos? He accuses her of lying again. The tension is building...

Character 1: Emil

Character 2: Aisha

Scene 2

Leo is going out with his friends this Friday for a special occasion. He wants to be able to come home around midnight instead of 10 p.m., his usual curfew. Everyone else has permission from their parents to come home late, but Leo talked with his parents at breakfast this morning and their answer was a big, fat "no." At dinner, he tries to bring up the topic again. The response is still "no." Leo feels a growing sense that this is really unfair. He raises his voice, saying that it's totally unfair and humiliating that he's the only one not to have this freedom. His parents remain firm: it's a no. They tell him that they're still the ones in charge and that he doesn't get to negotiate these kinds of decisions at his age. They go on to say that he needs to learn to take no for an answer and that he can do what he wants when he turns 18. Leo is seething with rage inside. The tension is building...

Character 1: Leo

Character 2: Parents

Scene 3

Thierry sends a private message to his friend Iness to talk to her about a difficult situation he experienced at school. Iness isn't quite sure how to respond, so she takes a screenshot and sends it to someone else to ask for their opinion on the situation. Without Iness's knowledge, the screenshot gets shared in a group chat, where multiple students comment on the situation. The next day at school, Thierry realizes that many people have found out about the experience he went through. He feels betrayed and humiliated. He decides to confront Iness during the break, blaming her for sharing details of his private life with everyone. Iness tries to explain that she was just trying to help him and that she had only shared the situation with a single person in order to get some advice. She tells him that she's not responsible for the information getting shared in the group chat. Thierry disagrees and demands that Iness stop the screenshot from circulating. The tension is building...

Character 1: Thierry

Character 2: Iness

Scene 4

During several rounds of an online video game, Yousef keeps criticizing Mila's mistakes. He tells her she's bad at the game and that she's making the whole team lose. Mila records a sound bite of Yousef's criticisms and posts it on social media along with an insulting comment about him. When Yousef finds her post, he demands that she take it down and accuses her of sharing his voice without his permission. Mila says she wanted to show other people how he acts when they're gaming together. She asks him to acknowledge that his comments are hurtful. Yousef says that he was joking and that what happens during a game shouldn't be shared outside of it. Mila argues that he's just trying to avoid the consequences of what he said. The tension is building...

Character 1: Yousef

Character 2: Mila



9. CARVING OUT YOUR PLACE!

Maintaining healthy friendships through prosocial behaviour

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Adopting prosocial behaviours Self-knowledge, self-understanding, and self-worth
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 14 : Inclusion and getting along Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Cooperating with others Using creativity Achieving potential
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand the importance of prosocial behaviour for getting along and finding one's rightful place in a group; • Recognize the importance of healthy friendships as a protective factor for tackling life's challenges; • Adopt new strategies for creating and maintaining healthy friendships and for leaving uncomfortable relationships.

Total duration

60- MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon



40- MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon



Materials and preparation

- Print three copies of the sheet [Secret missions](#) and cut them into six pieces.
- Print the *Friendships* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have one large sheet of paper per group of six students for exercise A: *Twelve skilled hands*.
- Have enough coloured felt-tip pens (for drawing) on hand.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



Université de
Sherbrooke



Centre RBC
d'expertise universitaire
en santé mentale

A. Twelve skilled hands (15–20 minutes)

1. Put the students in teams of six, and arrange the classroom so that each team has space to work.
2. Next, present the exercise to the students by giving them the following instructions:
 - Each team will have **eight minutes** to make a **group drawing** on the theme of their choice (e.g., friendship, justice, music, arts, sports, environment, travel, etc.).
 - Each student will have a **secret mission** to complete while making the group drawing.
 - During the activity, I **will not be answering any questions**. The only thing I will do is give a reminder when half of the time is up.
3. After this, give each team the six secret missions that have been cut out. Ask each student to pick one **at random**, reminding them **not to share it with others**.
4. Give each team the materials they need for their group drawing: a large white sheet of paper and colour pencils.
5. Give the signal to start the group drawing.
6. Keep track of the time and give a reminder when half of the time has elapsed.
7. Ask the students to stop what they're doing; then, ask them about their experience:
 - What did you think of this experience?
 - Were you able to find your place in the group and participate in the exercise, despite the obstacles you encountered? Why or why not?
 - How did your secret mission go?
 - Did you figure out what your team members' secret missions were?
8. Listen to a few answers, then reveal what the six secret missions were by reading them aloud one by one. For each, invite students to raise their hands when they hear you call out the secret mission that was assigned to them.



9. Continue the discussion, drawing inspiration from the following questions to allow students to share their experience:
 - What were your reactions (physical feelings, emotions, thoughts, behaviours) to the attitude of some of your teammates?
 - How did you determine roles (who does what and how)?
 - Did everyone on your team participate equally or fairly in the group drawing?
 - How did the strengths and skills of those on your team help complete the task?
 - How did you work as a team to resolve the challenges you faced?



10. Conclude the activity by telling the students:



It's important to find a **comfortable place** among your peers. Even if you have different tastes, interests or opinions, or even if you sometimes have opposing goals and needs (like you saw with the group drawing exercise), you can still **get along** with each other by using **prosocial behaviour**. In a group, **each person has their own unique and important place to carve out** (Burger, 2022; Dirks et al., 2018; Rubin et al., 2018; Schacter et al., 2023). No more, no less!



6

B. Educational clip – Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Carving out your place – Part 1* for your students.

[Video clip—Part 1](#)



7

C. Real connections vs. virtual connections (10 min)

1. Connect the discussion to the clip by explaining that friendships are very important in adolescence. Expand the discussion with the following:



Friendships are **crucial to your emotional needs during adolescence**. They play a **very important role in adapting** to all the changes that occur during adolescence (e.g., puberty, first romantic relationships, relationships with family, social integration, academic success; Allen et al., 2022; Costello et al., 2024; Madsen & Collins, 2018).

In fact, friendships act as **protective factors**. Just as an umbrella protects you from the rain, a good social support network protects you with **feelings of safety and well-being** that make it easier to overcome life's challenges (Claes et al., 2005; Graber et al., 2016; Shah et al., 2024).



For example, **having friends you can share fun and important experiences with and who you can confide in** helps you feel like you have **importance and value as a person**. This helps you have the **self-esteem, confidence, and courage** to face certain challenges (e.g., conflict with your parents, heartbreak, disappointing grades; Fritz et al., 2018; Madsen & Collins, 2018; Van Harmelen et al., 2021; Waldrup et al., 2008).

Conversely, if you **lack friendships**, if you **feel left out** in your friend group or you **feel like you don't belong**, that can affect your **self-esteem** and lead to **feelings of sadness, isolation, helplessness, and stress** when it comes to dealing with life's challenges (Burger, 2022; Dirks et al., 2018; Schacter et al., 2023; Schinka et al., 2013).



8



9

2. Next, show the students the two images in the slideshow, then hold a discussion using the following reflective questions you read aloud:

- What do you see in these two images?
- Which of these images most closely resembles the way that you relate to others?
- What are the pros and cons of each form of interaction (virtual vs. in person)?
- Is it important for you to have a lot of friends? Why or why not?
- What does being a good friend mean to you?
- Which is more important in your opinion: the quantity of friendships or the quality? Why?

3. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the discussion by saying the following:



Whether you're connecting with others on social media or in person, it is the **quality of these relationships that matters most**, not the **quantity**. It's better to have **a few friends you can count on and have a sincere, fulfilling and mutual relationship with**, than to have **a bunch of superficial relationships** with people who don't care very much about you, or relationships where you don't feel that you've found your place or don't feel like you can be yourself (Claes, 2003; Shah et al., 2024; Waldrup et al., 2008).

And while social media and virtual spaces may be exciting and effective ways to communicate and stay in touch with friends and family, it's still essential that you **develop and nurture authentic and meaningful relationships with other people by sharing experiences in the real world, in person** (Blum et al., 2022; Steinsbekk et al., 2024; Yau & Reich, 2020).

D. Navigating troubled waters... (15 minutes)

1. Based on part 1 of the video clip, explain to the students that:



Friendships are bound to **grow** or even **change over time**. You may find during your adolescence that you no longer feel comfortable in your current circle of friends, especially if certain behaviours in that circle start to bother you or conflict with your values (Hutten et al., 2021; Meter & Card, 2016; Poulin & Chan, 2010; Schacter et al., 2023).

2. Ask the students to stand against the wall at the back of the classroom and then to take a step forward if they have ever experienced a situation similar to the ones you will read out. Read out the following statements:

- "Staying in a social group even if you don't feel fully like myself there."
- "Sometimes avoiding saying what you think because you're afraid you'll be judged."
- "Doing something that you were uncomfortable with in order not to lose friends."
- "Sometimes feeling like the odd one out in a group of peers."
- "Distancing yourself from someone because your interests and values drifted apart."
- "Having friends who asked you to lie for them."
- "Confiding in a friend, only for them to share your secrets with someone else."
- "No longer feeling comfortable in your group of friends, but being afraid of ending up alone."

3. Have students to return to their seats. Conclude the exercise by asking:
- What did this exercise teach you about yourself or about others?
 - What emotions did you feel?
 - Have you ever been in a situation where you put aside some of your personal values in order to stay part of a group? How did that make you feel inside?
 - Why do you think someone might stay in a group of friends even when they start to feel uncomfortable or out of place there?
 - What advice would you give to a young person in this kind of situation to help them get out of it?
4. Listen to a few answers, then conclude the discussion by saying the following:



Fear of rejection, exclusion, loneliness, or judgment can lead you to adopt all kinds of strategies in an attempt to **avoid** experiencing these uncomfortable situations. That's only human! But these strategies of avoidance can trap you in relationships that are **harmful** or that **affect you negatively** (Burger, 2022; Dirks & al., 2018; Rahim & Katz, 2019). It's better to listen to yourself—to your values and your needs—so you can act in a way that's consistent with them and improve your relationships!

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)

1. Tell students that there are many **prosocial attitudes and behaviours** that will help them build fulfilling and harmonious relationships with others.
2. You present them with a list of **strategies for building friendships, maintaining positive relationships, and getting out of uncomfortable relationships** (inspired by Copeland, 2002; D'Ansembourg, 2020; Jeunesse, J'écoute, 2018; Motoi & Villeneuve, 2006).

Building friendships:

- Take the first steps to talk to someone;
- Show interest and ask questions;
- Use non-verbal cues to show openness (e.g., smiling, making eye contact, nodding, speaking with a calm and composed tone of voice, etc.);
- Make eye contact with the person you're talking with;
- Take the time to listen attentively to the other person before resuming the discussion;
- Participate in the discussion;
- Use humour;
- Recognize the other person's value and highlight their achievements and skills;
- Identify your shared interests.

Maintaining positive relationships:

- Be involved in the relationship and check in on the other person;
- Listen attentively to the other person;
- Be sensitive to the other person (including their emotions and needs);
- Respect the other person's values and point of view;
- Be tolerant of differences, including differences of opinion;
- Open up and learn to talk about yourself;



13



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16

- Express yourself clearly and honestly;
- Take initiative and talk about your ideas and projects;
- Be critical of the other person's behaviour and ideas, but without judging them as a person;
- Accept and welcome criticism directed at you;
- Be able to apologize;
- Encourage, help, and compliment others;
- Have a sense of humour.

Getting out of uncomfortable relationships:

- Discuss the discomfort you feel in a respectful manner;
- Identify and express your own emotions and needs;
- Actively look for solutions;
- Choose activities where you feel more comfortable;
- Develop other friendships at the same time;
- Find an ally;
- Gradually distance yourself from harmful relationships;
- Leave the group if behaviour goes over the line or no longer aligns with your values;
- Choose yourself, despite your fears and doubts;
- Ask for help.



17

F. Educational clip – Part 2 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Carving out your place – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)



18

G. OFF-TRAIL Challenge

This week, ask the students to reflect on their friendships: How do you feel about your friendships or friend group (do you feel good, comfortable, uncomfortable, etc.)? Ask the students to look at the list of strategies and to choose two to apply during the week to improve the quality of their friendships.



19



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PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Secret missions

SECRET MISSION 1 Distract your team from the task (for example, talk about other topics, make irrelevant comments, drop materials, point out something going on elsewhere, etc.).	SECRET MISSION 2 Choose one COLOUR and insist on using that colour in as many ways possible in the group drawing, to the point that it becomes over-the-top.
SECRET MISSION 3 Have a NEGATIVE attitude all throughout the exercise (for example, look discouraged, sigh, stop working on the group drawing, leave the group to sit somewhere else, criticize your group's drawing, refuse to keep participating, etc.)	SECRET MISSION 4 Insist that your team choose the "ENVIRONMENT" theme for the group drawing. You must act convincing and provide arguments in favour of this theme.
SECRET MISSION 5 Have a POSITIVE attitude all throughout the exercise (for example, act enthusiastic, cry out with joy, smile and laugh, encourage everyone to get along, try to find compromises, etc.)	SECRET MISSION 6 Insist that your team choose the "SPORTS" theme for the group drawing. You must act convincing and provide arguments in favour of this theme.

SECRET MISSION 1 Distract your team from the task (for example, talk about other topics, make irrelevant comments, drop materials, point out something going on elsewhere, etc.).	SECRET MISSION 2 Choose one COLOUR and insist on using that colour in as many ways possible in the group drawing, to the point that it becomes over-the-top.
SECRET MISSION 3 Have a NEGATIVE attitude all throughout the exercise (for example, look discouraged, sigh, stop working on the group drawing, leave the group to sit somewhere else, criticize your group's drawing, refuse to keep participating, etc.)	SECRET MISSION 4 Insist that your team choose the "ARTS" theme for the group drawing. You must act convincing and provide arguments in favour of this theme.
SECRET MISSION 5 Have a POSITIVE attitude all throughout the exercise (for example, act enthusiastic, cry out with joy, smile and laugh, encourage everyone to get along, try to find compromises, etc.)	SECRET MISSION 6 Insist that your team choose the "TRAVEL" theme for the group drawing. You must act convincing and provide arguments in favour of this theme.



10. TAPPING INTO YOUR CRITICAL MIND!

Using social media wisely thanks to critical thinking skills

Targeted competencies (based on ÉKIP and the WHO)	Using critical thinking Adopting prosocial behaviours
Content for the development of personal and social competencies (MEQ)	Sheet 13 : Making friends and social network Sheet 15 : Responsibilities, rules of conduct, the virtual world, and consequences
Cross-cutting competencies (QEP)	Exercising critical judgment Communicating appropriately Using information and communication technologies Achieving potential
General objectives of the workshop	By the end of the workshop, students will be able to: • Understand issues surrounding social media use; • Understand their responsibility to follow internet codes of conduct and how failing to do so can have consequences for themselves and others; • Understand attitudes and practices to help develop their critical thinking skills; • Use strategies for responsible social media use.

Total duration

60-MINUTE version: follow ALL steps, including the ones marked with the clock icon.

40-MINUTE version: DO NOT follow the steps marked with the clock icon.



Materials and preparation

- Print the *Critical thinking* poster, available on the [website](#) under the section: First cycle / Workshops and tools for students / Classroom posters to support your explanations and reinvest learning in class.
- Have a stopwatch on hand.
- Have a chalkboard or interactive whiteboard (IWB) available.

Financial contribution:



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



Centre RBC
d'expertise universitaire
en santé mentale

Summer 2025

A. Think about it... wireless or filter-less? (20 minutes)

Tip for this exercise

Before starting this workshop, it's important to take the time **to identify your own beliefs and prejudices regarding social media**, which could influence how you facilitate the workshop. New technologies have both pros and cons. It is important to understand the nuances of these technologies in order to foster open-mindedness in your students. We also encourage you to use the term "social media" rather than "social networks," as the former encompasses all online platforms (such as online gaming sites, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok) that allow young people to communicate with one another, share content, join virtual communities, etc. (Dewing, 2013).

1. Start by saying: "Adolescents are more social-media savvy than any other age group." Now ask the students to share their knowledge with you. To stimulate the discussion, ask the following questions:
 - What social media platforms do you use?
 - What do you do on these social media platforms?
 - How many hours a day do you spend on social media? How many hours do you spend on screens in general?
 - Do you ever go on social media because you're on "autopilot," without realizing how much time you're spending online?
 - What are the pros and cons of social media?
2. Then, have the students take the True or False quiz to test their understanding of social media. After each explanation, ask students if they feel they can relate (though they do not have to respond) in order to get them thinking.

True or False Quiz

- **Screen time and social media use can have an impact on our health...**

TRUE.

These impacts can be helpful or harmful. When used in a balanced and thoughtful way, technology can have positive effects on physical and mental health (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2019). For example, some apps offer tools to help you unwind, meditate, or simply relax. Others help you better organize your daily routine, and improve your time management. Some social media platforms can be vehicles for creativity, through artistic content and games, or by serving as platforms for self-expression. They also make it easier to access support services, especially mental health, education, and social services. That access can be incredibly helpful for many families (PAUSE, 2025). Some video games can also have positive effects on young people. They can promote learning, creativity, problem-solving and sportsmanship, and help understand how to deal with failure, be aware of social issues, learn other languages, and master new technologies. They also provide opportunities for social interaction, whether with other players or through gaming communities (Government of Quebec, 2020).



3



4

On the other hand, heavy use of social media can have harmful effects on physical and mental health. Heavy social media use can lead to a decline in healthy lifestyle habits, causing increased risks of chronic diseases and mental health disorders in the medium and long term (Schimmele et al., 2021), and particularly depression in adolescence (Kelly et al., 2018; Mills et al., 2018; Moreno et al., 2011). Repeated exposure to certain content, like unrealistic body images or posts promoting negative messages, can contribute to lower self-esteem and trigger or worsen symptoms of depression (Boers et al., 2019). In fact, young people themselves report various negative effects from social media use, including loss of sleep, trouble concentrating on tasks or activities, a decrease in physical activity, and increased feelings of anxiety, depression, frustration, or anger, as well as envy about other people's lives (Boers et al., 2019; Schimmele et al., 2021).

Screen time can also have negative effects on young people's development and functioning (High Council for Public Health [HCSP], 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2015; Canadian Paediatric Society [CPS], 2019, 2023). For example, using electronic devices (like cell phones, tablets, and computers) before going to sleep can reduce the amount of sleep young people get. This then affects their ability to function throughout the day: being drowsy or lethargic in class, trouble getting up in the morning, etc. (HCSP, 2020; WHO, 2015; Poirier et al., 2024; Royant-Parola et al., 2018; CPS, 2019, 2023).

In short, for screens to be a source of enrichment rather than a cause for concern, they need to be used in moderation ([Le bon côté des écrans](#) [website in French only]; PAUSE, 2025).

- **Using social media can affect your mood...**

TRUE.

The more active someone is on social media, the more negative they feel after using it (Fardouly et al., 2015; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014). Social media has become a place where people compare themselves to others (Ahmad et al., 2024; Thorisdottir et al., 2019), and people who use social media platforms a lot are more likely to compare themselves negatively (Ahmad et al., 2024; Lee, 2014). For example, someone might think that other people are happier and have easier, more pleasant lives than their own. This can make them feel like life is unfair. They start fixating on ideas or dwelling on negative thoughts, leading to feelings or symptoms of depression (Chou & Edge, 2012; Feinstein et al., 2013; Villanueva-Moya et al., 2023).

- **Cyberbullying has fewer consequences than traditional bullying...**

FALSE.

Cyberbullying has the same harmful consequences as traditional bullying. In fact, the consequences of cyberbullying may be even more devastating (Saltz et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). Cyberbullying also comes with its own specific consequences, such as broken trust, invasion of privacy, and feeling powerless against a bully who may be anonymous. What's more, it's often impossible to erase all traces of cyberbullying (Gouvernement du Québec, 2020; Kwan et al., 2020; Saltz et al., 2020).

One study found that around one third of young people report having been **victims of online mistreatment**, most often in video games, private messages, or in comments and posts on various social media platforms (MediaSmarts, 2023a). And nearly half of young people say they have **witnessed bullying or cruelty online**. Whether they're witnesses or victims, when faced with such situations, young people tend to do nothing or ignore the behaviour (MediaSmarts, 2023a).



5



6

- **Social media can help us get through hard times in our lives.**

TRUE.

Despite its drawbacks, social media gives young people a feeling of “connection with others” that is beneficial for them, especially during difficult or challenging times (Ellison et al., 2007, 2011). For example, during the pandemic, internet use was identified as a possible way to reduce isolation (Feng & Tong, 2023; Magis-Weinberg et al., 2021; Marciano et al., 2022). In fact, young people’s internet use is believed to be as closely linked to social connections as it is to entertainment. Communicating with loved ones, especially friends and family, accounts for a significant portion of time spent online. Young people from diverse backgrounds (e.g., immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, individuals with disabilities, etc.) are particularly likely to turn to social media to access support, resources, and online communities. This shows just how important these spaces are for inclusion and well-being (Guinta & John, 2018; MediaSmarts, 2022).

- **Our personal information is safe on social media.**

FALSE.

There are many risks to our personal information on social media, most notably loss of control over privacy, getting hacked, and identity theft. The more personal information you share, the more you put yourself at risk (Cosoi, 2011; Senthil Kumar et al., 2016)! Keep in mind that, just because there’s a privacy policy, that *does not mean* your personal information is safe from being shared with others. Many social media platforms have privacy policies that are difficult to understand and create a false sense of security. As a result, many young people who use these platforms think they’re safe and welcoming spaces, when in fact that might not be the case. Many platforms share or even sell your personal information! So, it’s important to be on guard to protect your digital identity and to limit the information you share online (MediaSmarts, 2021, 2023b; Tisseron, 2023).

Your digital identity is made up of all the traces you leave on the internet, often without even realizing you’re doing so. Every connection, every click leaves traces—sometimes permanent—in the public sphere: your computer’s IP address; your location; the length of time you were connected for; the websites you visited; comments, photos and videos posted by yourself or others, etc. All of this data is very likely to remain available online; it can be accessed at any time and may end up in the hands of people who would use it for malicious purposes (Amani, 2024).

- **Everything we see on social media is true.**

FALSE.

The information we see on social media is not always accurate. These days, information is plentiful and readily available. It’s getting harder to distinguish accurate and reliable information from misinformation or lies. Sometimes we might even spread false or misleading information ourselves, without realizing that’s what we’re doing (Colliander, 2019).

3. You conclude by pointing out to the students how the quiz shows that things aren’t always black and white. Using social media can have **both pros and cons**. The goal of the exercise was to encourage students to reflect on their own experiences with social media, gather information, and acquire new knowledge in order to **develop a more informed perspective**.

B. Educational clip—Part 1 (5 minutes)

1. Play the video clip *Tapping into your critical mind! – Part 1* for your students.
[Video clip—Part 1](#)



10

C. Don't believe everything you read! (5 minutes)

1. Follow up the educational clip by asking students what they think it means to use “**critical thinking**.”
2. Listen to a few answers, then wrap up by explaining that, basically, “critical thinking” means not believing everything you see or read on social media. It also means being wary of the information you come across and knowing how to assess its credibility.
3. Use the figure shown in the PowerPoint presentation (Éducol, 2025; Sotir, 2014) to explain critical thinking and its components in order to help get students to think more deeply on the topic.



11

Critical thinking Practices and attitudes that get us thinking about the world around us.	
Attitudes Ways of being, personality traits, personal characteristics	Practices Concrete actions, important things to do, to apply
Being curious Wanting to find out more about different subjects.	Looking up information on the subject.
Being discerning Making sure the information you have is reliable.	Asking yourself questions and assessing the information you find.
Being independent Forming your own opinion based on the information you have.	Coming up with arguments that distinguish fact from opinion.
Being a good listener Agreeing to disagree with others and taking an interest in their opinions and knowledge.	Comparing your ideas and arguments to those of others.
Being humble Allowing yourself to be wrong and change your mind.	Assessing new information and taking a position.

4. Point out that these attitudes and practices are, in fact, strategies for gradually applying their critical thinking skills in their daily lives.

D. Devil's advocate (20 minutes)

Tip for this exercise

For a successful debate, students must be able to: 1) understand the problem presented. 2) decide on their position/view of the issue. 3) come up with arguments. 4) summarize the arguments. 5) illustrate their arguments with examples; 6) consider the opposing viewpoint; and 7) prepare their conclusion (de Vecchi, 2017, p.158).



12

Some helpful tips for this debate

- a) During a debate, it can sometimes be difficult to manage speaking turns. Feel free to clarify or repeat the rules as needed and to correct any behaviours you find inappropriate.
- b) You can act as the time keeper (e.g., by reminding participants that there are three minutes left or by saying that you'll listen to two more answers).
- c) If the students stray too far off topic, feel free to steer the debate back on track by repeating the question.
- d) Even if you'd like to share your own opinion with the students, it's best to let them debate among themselves and see what interesting turns the discussion might take. This doesn't prevent you from guiding the students toward a particular aspect of the debate or encouraging them to explore the topic further.
- e) If the debate becomes heated and emotional, you can use mindfulness to get students to focus on specific aspects, for example, by asking them questions or by telling them to take a few deep breaths or settle down (e.g., "Notice the emotions that come up when you talk about a particular subject. Notice your breathing. Is it deep, fast, slow? What does that tell you about your state of mind?")

1. Explain that the next activity will be a debate on an issue related to social media.
2. The purpose of the debate is to get them to think about the issue and to debate their ideas with each other. The goal is not to be right, but rather to take a position for or against the question asked.
3. Add that the debate is also an opportunity for them to **explore attitudes and practices for critical thinking** (in reference to the figure on attitudes and practices seen earlier, and in the PowerPoint presentation).
4. Organize the classroom in a way that promotes discussion (move the desks around, divide the room in half, place the desks in a half circle, etc.).
5. Next, ask the students the debate question shown in the slideshow:
 - **Is social media helpful (FOR) or harmful (AGAINST) when it comes to personal relationships?**
6. Allow a few minutes for each student to choose a position on the topic, then tell them to break up into two groups: those who are **FOR** and those who are **AGAINST**.
7. If the groups are really unbalanced, ask for volunteers to defend the opposite position, or form a third group for **undecided** students.



13

8. Open up the debate with a five-minute discussion period between the FOR and AGAINST groups. Act as the debate moderator, inviting both sides to take turns expressing their opinions.
 9. At the end of this initial discussion period, ask the students to stop talking and stay silent. Without any explanation, show the video [Are You Living an Insta Lie? Social Media Vs. Reality](#) (2017; 3 min 12 sec).
 10. After playing the video, ask the students the debate question again:
 - **Is social media helpful or harmful to personal relationships?**
 11. Ask them to take a few seconds, while remaining silent, to consider their position on the question (FOR, AGAINST, UNDECIDED) and to revise their position if they feel the need. Without wasting any time, ask those who have changed their stance to switch groups (or sides of the classroom).
 12. You then resume the debate for another five-minute round.
 13. To reignite the discussion and encourage students to think more deeply about social media, you can use the following questions as a starting point:
 - Does being popular on social media necessarily make you feel good about yourself? If it does, is this feeling real and long-lasting?
 - Does the number of followers or likes you get reflect a genuine, authentic appreciation from other people toward you?
 - When you see a post (photo, video, text) showing someone at their “best,” what emotions (positive or negative) do you feel (envy, jealousy, frustration, dissatisfaction, joy, gratitude, etc.)?
 - Do you ever “like,” post, or share things on autopilot, not really thinking about what you’re doing?
 - Do the photos that influencers post reflect their everyday lives? What’s lurking behind these photos (money, editing, a photographer, sponsors, etc.)?
 14. At the very end of the debate, ask the students to take a firm position on the debate question: **FOR, AGAINST, or UNDECIDED**. Ask them one final time to change groups (or sides of the classroom) if they’ve changed their opinion since the midway point of the debate. Encourage them to notice the movements or changes in opinion that happened during the exercise.
 15. Conclude the activity by asking the students what they learned from this debate experience. To encourage discussion, you can ask the following questions:
 - Do you think there’s only a single correct answer to the debate question?
 - Did you find it easy or difficult to choose and express an opinion?
 - How did you feel when you had to stand up for your opinion in front of others?
 - And how did you feel listening to others’ opinions? (e.g., the urge to interrupt to share your own opinion, specific emotions, physical sensations, etc.)
 - Why is it important to develop your critical thinking on a daily basis?
- For students who changed their mind during the debate:**
- What influenced you to change your opinion?
 - Did you find it difficult to change your mind?



14



15



16

For the students who did NOT change their mind during the debate:

- Why did you stick to your original opinion?
- Is it difficult for you to change your mind, in life in general?

E. Your turn! (5 minutes)



17

1. Explain that, when social media is used thoughtfully and responsibly, it can be a valuable resource and can create opportunities.
2. You then present a list of **strategies for responsible social media use** (inspired by: Cent degrés, 2024; Escobar-Viera et al., 2018; Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Tandoc et al., 2015).
 - Use your critical thinking;
 - When using social media, stop and take breaks and notice how you feel;
 - Choose the pages you like and the people you follow very carefully;
 - Become aware of how social media affects you (positively or negatively) while you're using it and afterwards;
 - Try to nurture authentic relationships and put yourself in positive situations;
 - Take a moment to think before posting or sharing;
 - Limit how much personal information you disclose and share online;
 - Try going offline for a few hours (for example, while you're out with friends) or for a few days;
 - Think about the time you usually spend on social media, and what you could be doing instead;
 - Follow the "3 zeros" rule: zero screens while getting ready in the morning, zero screens during meals, and zero screens in your bedroom;
 - Turn on the "Screen Time" feature on your cell phone to see how many minutes you use it each day;
 - Turn all your screens off an hour before you go to bed, in order to sleep better;
 - Turn off non-essential notifications.

F. Educational clip – Part 2 (5 minutes)



18

1. Play the video clip *Tapping into your critical mind! – Part 2* for your students.
[Video clip – Part 2](#)

G. OFF-TRAIL Challenge

This week, encourage students to think about how they could improve or change their social media habits to be more effective, and to try at least two strategies to accomplish this goal. Suggest that they talk to their friends about it.



19



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