ACTIVITY 2

EXPLORING ACTION TENDENCIES

SKILL/S COVERED: Empathy
APPROXIMATE TIME NEEDED: 40 minutes
AGE GROUP: 9-12 years old

BRIEF INTRODUCTION
Experiences of positive emotions prompt individuals to discard automatic (every day) behavioural scripts and to pursue novel, creative, and often unscripted paths of thought and action. In other words, positive emotions create more room for choice and introduce an action tendency to explore new options. Recognising the emotions and feeling for them is a skills for Empathy that students need to develop as early as possible.

AUTHOR OF THE TOOL/EXERCISE WITH REFERENCING LINK
Activity created by "Prof. Ivan Apostolov" high school. It is adapted from the tool created by Hugo Alberts (PhD) (https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hugo_Alberts) and Lucinda Poole (PhD) (https://www.linkedin.com/in/lucinda-poole-24a122121/).

GOAL
To increase awareness of action tendencies that result from both positive and negative emotions.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
This activity works well with any class size, as students can work individually and as part of the group.

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NECESSARY MATERIALS

- A large bulletin board or wall space in the classroom
- Paper and markers
- Sticky notes or index cards

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

INSTRUCTIONS

Part 1: Action tendencies resulting from negative emotions

This visualisation exercise invites students to tune in to how you respond to emotions. Give them the following guidance:

1. To begin, gently close your eyes, and bring to mind a recent time where you experienced a difficult emotion... Maybe you were nervous about giving a presentation, or missed an important deadline, or had an argument with a friend ... [20 secs]

2. As best you can, put yourself back into this difficult moment in time. Picture where you are ... who you are with, if anyone ... and what you are doing... [30 secs]

3. Picture yourself exactly as you are in this difficult moment ... [20 secs]

4. Now, notice any feelings or emotions that are connected to this difficulty ... Take the strongest feeling or emotion, and notice where this seems to be located in your body ... [20 secs]

5. If you can, give this feeling or emotion a name, for example, anxiety, stress, guilt, shame ... [20 secs]

6. Now, notice what you want to do right now, in response to this feeling or emotion. Disregard what you did at the time, and stay in this imagined moment. Is there an urge to act in a particular way? Is there a sense of wanting to run away, to escape? Or is there a sense of wanting to stay here in this situation? [30 secs]

7. Now, let this moment go. Let go of the difficulty, and associated feelings and emotions, and when you are ready, gently open your eyes.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

INSTRUCTIONS

Part 2: Action tendencies resulting from positive emotions

This visualisation exercise invites students to tune in to how you respond to emotions. Give them the following guidance:

1. Gently close your eyes again, and bring to mind a recent time when you experienced a positive emotion … [20 secs]

2. As best you can, put yourself back into this pleasant moment in time. Picture where you are … who you are with, if anyone … and what you are doing … [30 secs]

3. Picture yourself exactly as you are in this moment … [20 secs]

4. Now, notice any feelings or emotions that are connected to this experience. Take the strongest feeling or emotion, and notice where this seems to be located in your body … [20 secs]

5. If you can, give this feeling or emotion a name, for example, joy, pride, happiness … [20 secs]

6. Now, notice what you want to do right now, in response to this feeling or emotion. Disregard what you did at the time, and stay in this imagined moment. Is there an urge to act in a particular way? Is there a sense of wanting to run away, to escape? Or is there a sense of wanting to stay here in this situation? [30 secs]

7. Now let this moment go … and come back into the room. When you are ready, gently open your eyes.

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

1. How was this experience for you? What did you notice?
2. What did you want to do in response to this positive/negative experience
3. What was the action tendency? How did this differ from the first scenario?

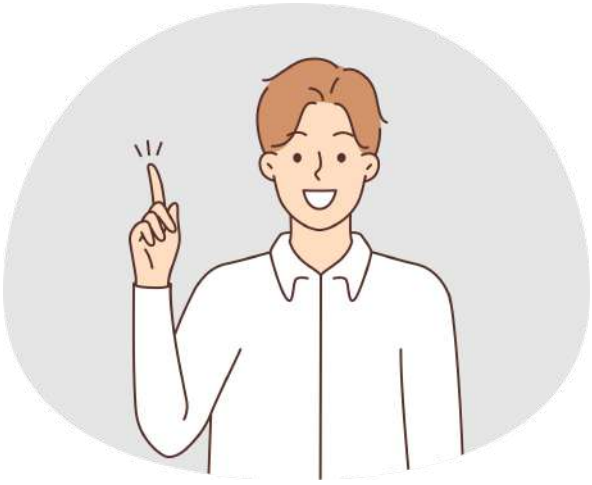
OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

Students who are completing the exercise for the first time should bring to mind scenarios that are only moderately distressing (ie., a 5 or 6 out of 10 on their personal stress scale).

As students become familiar with the technique, they might explore more difficult scenarios.

In the event that your student struggles to bring to mind a recent positive experience, take some time to gently explore recent events until he or she finds something to use. Those with anxiety may have trouble attending to and recalling pleasant experiences, but it is unlikely that they have not experienced anything positive in the past, say, month.

This tool is particularly helpful for students who tend to be impulsive, as it promotes awareness of the urges that are created by an emotional experience, and creates space between the experience and the reaction that follows.



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