**Positive Psychology**

**Resource Pack:**

**Optimistic Thinking**



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**Teacher Information:**

Optimism relates to how people see the future: optimistic thinking is a way of training our brains to expect good results and not get discouraged when things do not go as we expect. It helps us to create an attitude that focusses on the positive of a situation and not on the negative.

Positive thinking does not necessarily mean avoiding or ignoring bad things that happen to us, instead it helps us to make the most of potentially bad situations, try to see the best in other people and view ourselves and our abilities in a positive light.

Research has found that there are many very benefits of positive thinking and having an optimistic attitude:

* Optimists report being happier in life
* More positive emotions and better relationships
* Increased physical and psychological wellbeing
* Research by Gillham and Reivich, 1999) found that learning optimism skills between the ages of 10 and 12 halved the rate of depression as school children go through puberty
* Better at coping with stress and take more direct action in the face of adversity
* Better performance: because of their attitude, optimists are more likely to exert effort toward their goals and persist in the face of obstacles.

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| I know that we all experience a variety of thoughts and emotions that affect how we feel and behave and I am learning ways of managing them. **HWB 2-02a / HWB 3-02a** |
| I understand that my feelings and reactions can change depending upon what is happening within and around me. This helps me to understand my own behaviour and the way others behave. **HWB 2-04a / HWB 3-04a** |
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**A close up of a logo

Description automatically generatedExperiences and Outcomes**

**Introduction to lesson:**



This lesson will encourage pupils to demonstrate their understanding of optimism. It will support pupils to understand how their thinking can influence their outcomes and help them to understand how they can develop optimistic thinking.

**Learning intentions:**

By the end of the lesson I will have an understanding of optimism; I will learn how my thinking can influence my outcomes and how I can develop more positive thinking.

**Success criteria:**

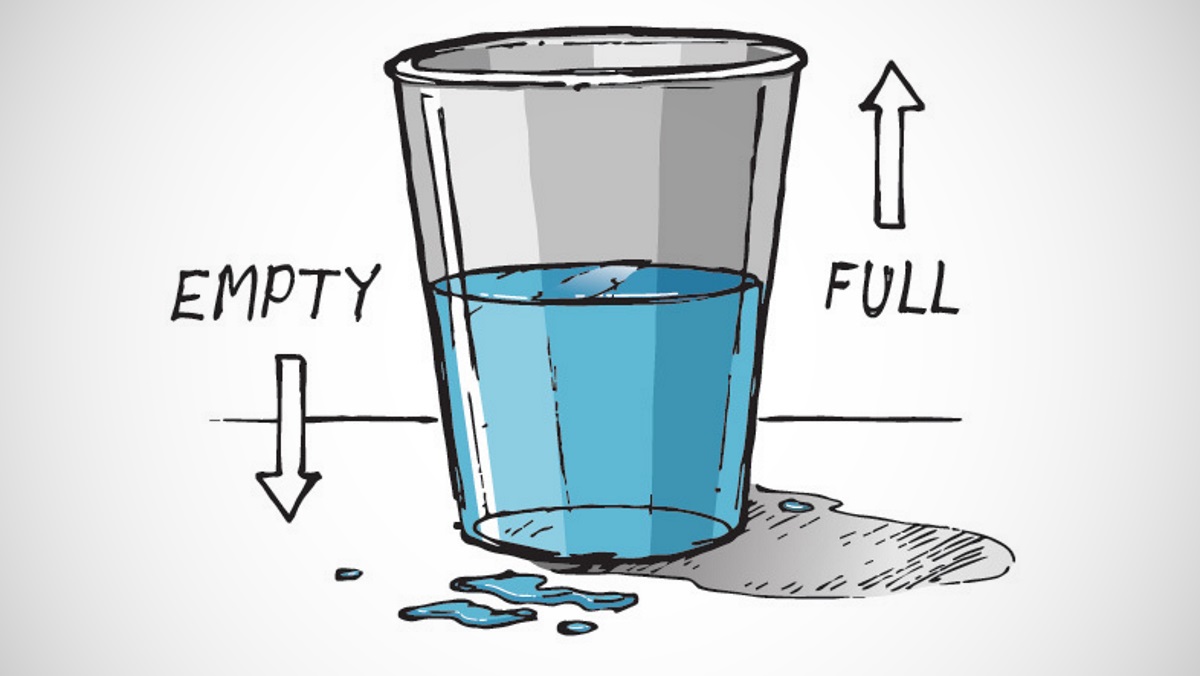
I will have been successful if I can:

* Explain what optimistic thinking is
* Understand how my thinking can influence my outcomes
* Identify how I can develop more positive thinking.



**Activity: Is the glass half full or half empty**

Show pupils the image below or demonstrate with a real glass of water filled 50% with water. Ask pupils for a show of hands for those who see the glass as ‘half full’ and those who see the glass as ‘half empty’.



**Activity: what do you think optimists and pessimist are?**

Ask pupils to work individually or in pairs to complete the following sentences:

* An optimist is...
* A pessimist is...

Discuss pupils’ definition, then read the following:

* An optimist is someone who approaches life with a positive outlook, they have high expectations and always consider the positives in situations.
* A pessimist is someone who approaches life with a negative outlook, they keep low expectations to prepare for negative outcomes



Now reflect back to the first task – is the glass half full or half empty?

*Ask pupils to think about how an optimist and a pessimist would view the glass*; An optimist would view the glass half full and a pessimist would view the glass half empty.

Optimism in more detail:

Optimistic thinking is a type of positive thinking characterized by the belief that the future is full of hope and opportunities to be successful. Optimists believe that negative events are caused by external factors, and that they are isolated exceptions. They believe that it is not something that will reoccur and that they are not responsible for the bad event.

Example: If the optimist is cut off in traffic, for example, instead of getting angry or upset, they will simply downgrade the importance of the event by saying something like, ‘Oh, well, I guess that person is just having a bad day.’  The pessimist on the other hand, has a tendency to take everything personally. If the pessimist is cut off in traffic, he will react as though the other driver has deliberately acted to upset and frustrate him.



**Activity: Optimism/Pessimism Story**

Read the following story to pupils which illustrates difference between optimism and pessimism.

There were once two identical twins. They were alike in every way but one. One was a hope-filled optimist who only ever saw the bright side of life. The other was a dark pessimist, who only ever saw the downside in every situation. The parents were so worried about the extremes of optimism and pessimism in their boys they took them to the Doctor. He suggested a plan. “On their next birthday give the pessimist a shiny new bike but give the optimist only a pile of manure.” It seemed a fairly extreme thing to do. After all the parents had always treated heir boys equally. But in this instance, they decided to try to Doctor’s advice. So when the twins’ birthdays came round, they gave the pessimist the most expensive, top of the range, racing bike a child has ever owned. When he saw the bike his first words were, “I’ll probably crash and break my leg.” To the optimist they gave a carefully wrapped box of manure. He opened it, looked puzzled for a moment, then ran outside screaming, “You can’t fool me! Where there’s this much manure, there’s just got to be a pony around here somewhere!”

Ask pupils to reflect on the story: how did each of the twins view their birthday gift?

**Activity: Role play**

Pupils could go into groups of three. Within each group pupils could take on the role of the interviewer, pessimist or optimist.

The pupil role-playing the interviewer should read out the situations below, the optimist should answer the interviewer as an optimism and the pessimist should answer the interviewer as a pessimist. Pupils should take turns at playing each of the roles.

Situations:

* Your house has just burnt down. You have lost all your possessions except for your favourite music CDs.
* You have just had your first day at a new school. You felt very nervous and worried that you didn’t know anyone when you first got to school.
* You have just broken your leg eight weeks before the football/netball grand final and the doctor has told you it will heal in six weeks.

Process the activity by asking students to decide if it was easier to respond using pessimistic or optimistic thinking. Remind students that optimistic thinking requires practise.



**Activity: Self Talk**

-Ask pupils “Who has a voice in their head?” Ask for a simple show of hands. Ask for or give some examples of a conversation or dialogue that people might have with themselves.

-Now ask “What thinking, and attitude takes away your energy?” Again, discuss in groups and share as a class.

*Negative examples: I can’t; I shouldn’t; I’m not good enough; I don’t have the energy; I’m hopeless; the situation is hopeless; they would never let us; I’m useless and no good at anything, etc.*

Now ask “What thinking, and attitude gives you energy?”

*Positive examples: I can; I will; it is possible; that interests me; I want to experience that; I want to learn a new skill; I want to have fun and enjoy myself; I like trying new things; anything is possible, let’s give it a try, etc.*

Now ask “What might you do to make sure you tell yourself more positive than negative things?”

Answers might include

* Recognising when you are talking to yourself
* Keeping a note or diary of all the good things you do
* Saying to yourself at the end of each day 3 things you have done well
* When you have negative self-talk, discuss this with a friend, parent or teacher.

Maintaining a positive mindset and thinking positive thoughts will build energy, self-belief, confidence and raise ambition and achievement and quickly.

**Activity: How does my thinking influence my performance?**

Read out or put the following quote on the board for pupils to discuss what they think it might mean.

*“If you think you can or think you can’t, you will prove yourself right.”*

The learning is that if you focus on the negative, you are more likely to experience a negative outcome. So, if you believe that you can’t, then this is likely to be the case. Yet if you focus on a positive outcome, the chances of this being achieved are significantly enhanced. So, if you think that you can, it is more likely that your mind will focus on achieving what you want. This is often referred to as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’. Your thoughts and energy will determine the outcome.

Some questions to prompt discussion:

* Why do you think being grateful for all the good things in your life may be a new way of thinking for some people? (Some people are pessimists and only focus on the things that have gone wrong. It takes time to turn our thinking around)
* What is hope? (Hope can be defined as the belief in a brighter future despite the fact that things may look bad at that time) How does being more hopeful help you to achieve what you want, solve problems and feel better? (It helps you to take action and this makes you feel in control of a situation and less sad or worried)
* What happens if you give up hope? (You can feel worse and you don’t take action or solve your problems) How is persistence related to optimism? (Optimists believe good things are possible and keep trying, even when they first don’t succeed)
* Why do some people think they are ‘unlucky’ most of the time? (These people only remember the bad things that happen to them and not the good things. As these people don’t believe they are lucky, they often don’t try hard for things and look for opportunities so their view of being unlucky is confirmed)
* How can we make ourselves luckier? (e.g. try to solve our problems; ask for help when we need it; work hard; persist even when we first fail)

**Video clip: The present**

Watch the following video clip to discover how the character changes his thinking and reflect on video with class.

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjqiU5FgsYc**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjqiU5FgsYc)

**Take home messages:**

* Bad times don’t last – expect things to get better.
* Expect that good things are more likely to happen than bad.
* Take credit for your own successes, no matter how small.
* Be grateful (thankful) for all the good things in your life.
* Look for small good bits in the bad things that happen.
* Stay hopeful in unhappy times.
* Work hard and make your own luck

**Activity: Goal Setting**

Pupils could write themselves a goal to practise optimistic thinking,