

# THE SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT

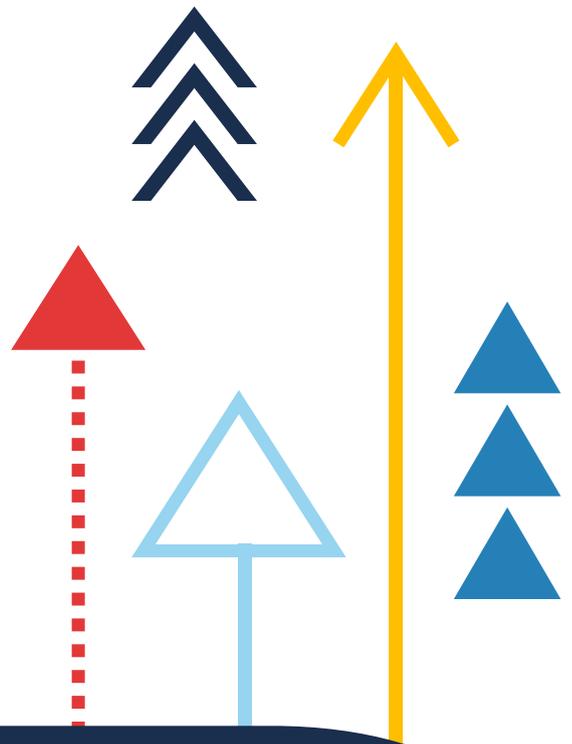
FOR SENIOR LEADERS



# INTRODUCTION

Get ahead with the Secondary School Improvement Toolkit! We have curated a selection of resources to support both you and your staff.

From helpful checklists to support you with your own professional development to lesson plans you can share with all your staff, we hope there is something for everyone in this toolkit.



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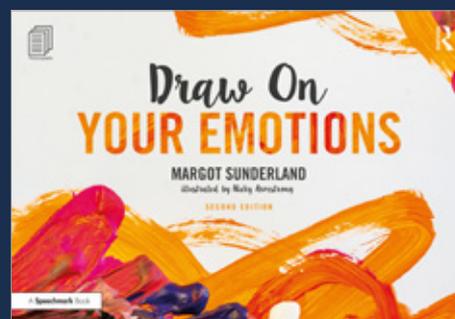
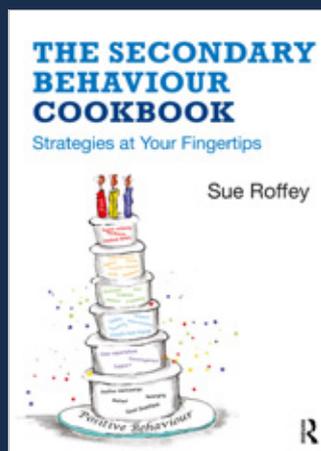
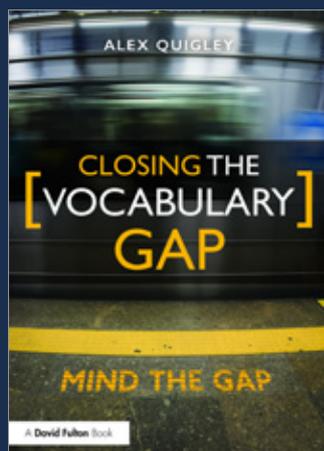
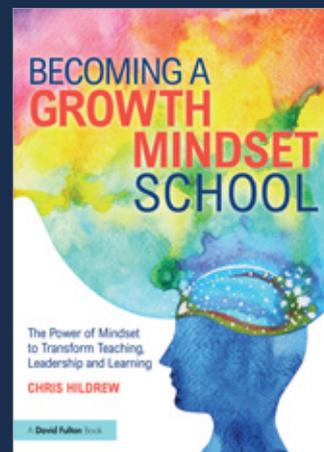
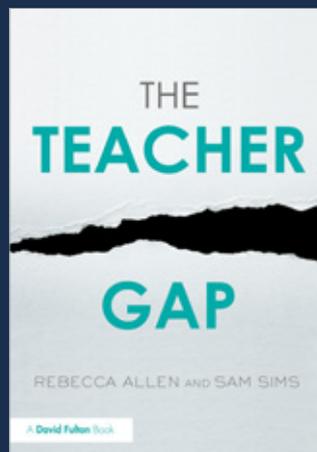
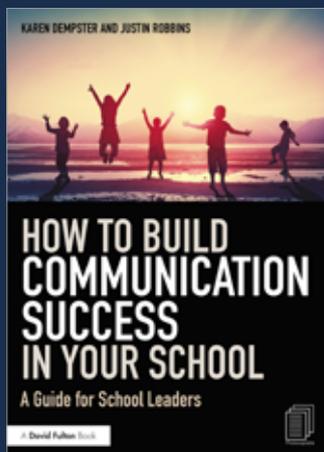
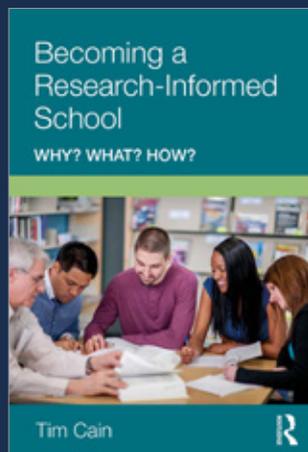
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*From **Draw on Your Emotions** by Margot Sunderland*

# SUPPORT YOUR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN WITH THESE TITLES



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Purchase the set for just £118\* (RRP £168)

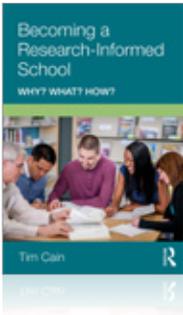
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The following is excerpted from *Becoming a Research-Informed School* by Tim Cain (@ProfTimCain).

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## IMPROVE YOUR DECISION MAKING

- Focus on what matters most in the development plan
- Read the relevant research ...
- ... then plan and implement change
- Monitor and alter where appropriate
- Measure change and evaluate its impact



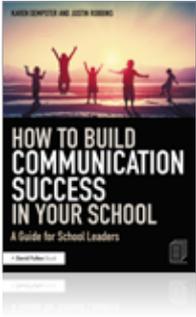
## EXTEND YOUR TEACHING MINDSET

- Engage with research (e.g. via blogs, Twitter, postgraduate study)
- Read research with a critical eye (see Ch. 6)
- Examine a snapshot of your teaching in this light
- After each lesson, ask 6 questions (see Ch. 8)
- Consider your competences, beliefs and values (see Ch. 3)



## DEVELOP AN INTELLIGENT SCHOOL COMMUNITY

- Appoint a colleague as research coordinator
- Institute teacher research groups
- Join relevant networks
- Involve partner universities
- Hold an annual CPD research conference



The following is excerpted from *How to Build Communication Success in Your School* by Karen Dempster (@KarenD72) and Justin Robbins (@JARobbins).

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These tests are designed to help you assess how communication within your school is currently working – one set is for you as a leader and the other is for your school. Answering the questions will produce a range of results that are aligned to the Ofsted rankings of Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good and Outstanding. From this starting point you can identify areas you need to work on.

## YOUR PERSONAL COMMUNICATION FITNESS TEST

To get an indication of your own communication fitness, complete the first test below and see how you score. For all questions, score yourself where 1 is the least favourable and 5 is the most.

Please be honest (with yourself)!

1. How confident are you in your ability to communicate with students?
2. How well equipped are you to respond to difficult and unexpected situations with students?
3. Would your students say that their views are listened to?
4. How committed are you personally to improve your communication skills?
5. How well do you understand your school's vision or purpose?
6. How confident are you in communicating with parents?
7. Do you feel equipped to deal with difficult conversations with parents?
8. How confident are you in sharing your ideas with colleagues?
9. Do you feel equipped to influence others who have a different view to your own?
10. How often do you check if people have understood what you said?
11. How well do you believe you listen to others? How are you doing?
12. Are you clear on what you should and shouldn't say about your school on social media?
13. How confident are you in speaking to larger groups of people?
14. How strongly does your communication (written or spoken) reflect your school's purpose?
15. How clear are the messages you write or say to others?
16. How likely are you to experience misunderstandings and confusion when you communicate?

## HOW DID YOU SCORE?

### *16–25 Inadequate*

It might be time to build your communication skills. The good news is that you've made a start by being more self-aware. By making some simple changes, you'll see some real benefits and will be more fulfilled in your job. You've started to understand some of the areas where you are less confident. We'll guide you through how to improve in this book. So let's start the journey together.

### *26–45 Requires improvement*

You are doing okay, but there is some room for improvement. There are simple things you can do to improve on the basics you have already. Think about where you felt least confident and target these areas as you go through this book. Being self-aware is important, and you've taken a first step. Keep an eye and ear out for opportunities to understand more about how you are doing in your day-to-day job.

### *46–65 Good*

You are doing well and have a great foundation in place to build on. It won't take much for you to get to 'Outstanding'. Think about the areas where you felt less confident and keep them in mind as you go through this book. Actively ask for feedback from your peers to improve and continue to be self-aware.

### *66–80 Outstanding*

You are doing very well and are a communication role model! But remember that even the best of us have to keep improving. Ensure that you stay at the top of your game and continue to be the best by learning from some of the best practice in this book and asking for regular feedback from your peers.



## YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNICATION FITNESS TEST

Now, think about how your school is communicating overall. Again, for all questions, score your school where 1 is the least favourable and 5 is the most.

1. How well does everyone understand your school's common purpose?
2. To what extent are good teachers staying with your school?
3. To what extent are good teachers attracted to your school?
4. How positively is your school talked about on social media forums, local media and sites?
5. How strongly do all of your communication materials (newsletters, letters, printouts from your website, your prospectus) reflect your common purpose and reinforce your brand?
6. How clear is your school of the return on investment from your marketing or communication channel (text, email, intranet, website) spend?
7. How much time is invested in improving the communication skills of teachers?
8. How clear is day-to-day communication in terms of where to find information and what to do with it?
9. How easy is it for parents to share their views about your school?
10. To what extent would students say that their views are listened to?
11. How well informed are teachers about trends in education?
12. How well are your school leaders communicating, inspiring, motivating and listening?
13. How well do staff share their ideas and work together on issues to improve the school?
14. How well equipped are teachers with the tools and technology to communicate well with parents in your school?

## HOW DID YOUR SCHOOL SCORE?

### *14–25 Inadequate*

A score in this range indicates work to do within your school to get everybody aligned and on board with your common purpose. It is then necessary to communicate it well with all key stakeholders. Our best-practice guide will help you to put this all into action. How are you doing?

### *26–40 Requires improvement*

You may have a common purpose in place, but more could be done to align teachers and parents behind it, to ensure that you are giving the best impression of your school at all times. Look for the gaps compared to our best-practice recommendations and aim to close them.

### *41–55 Good*

You are clearly well aligned across all areas, and parents are generally positive about your school. If you are looking to become 'Outstanding', there are a few more steps to take.

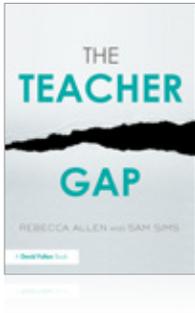
### *56–70 Outstanding*

Your school is doing very well, and is a role model for communicating and engaging key audiences. However, to ensure you stay where you are and continue to be a leading school, ensure you continue to follow best-practice guidelines.

# 5 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE TEACHER MOTIVATION WITHOUT WAITING FOR POLICY MAKERS



Excerpted from *The Teacher Gap*



The following is excerpted from *The Teacher Gap* by Rebecca Allen (@profbeckyallen) and Sam Sims (@DrSamSims).

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## 1. ENCOURAGE YOUR TEACHING STAFF TO SET THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE TARGETS FOR THE COMING YEAR

Teachers need a sense of autonomy, but this does not mean leaving teachers free to do things that undermine collective organisational structures or pupil learning. The role of school leaders is to support teachers in crafting plans that really will improve their practice.

## 2. SUPPORT YOUR TEACHERS IN GETTING BETTER AT THEIR JOB

Create multiple, low-stakes approaches to helping them measure improvements in their practice, whether this is through developing tests and quizzes to monitor pupil learning or lesson observations to watch how a specific technique they are trying out is developing.

## 3. ENCOURAGE YOUR TEACHERS TO WORK AND LEARN ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER TO HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS

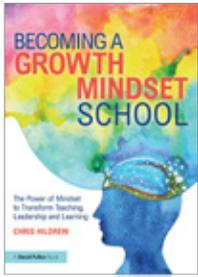
Create channels – whether through development sessions or noticeboards – for teachers with similar goals to find each other in the school. Seek out the local events or forums to make connections across schools. If any of your teachers choose to attend a TeachMeet or conference in their personal time, give them a 3-minute platform to tell others about it, both to celebrate the commitment they have made and to let others know what is out there.

## 4. REVIEW YOUR PERFORMANCE-RELATED PAY POLICY

Remove targets that are based on things that are partly outside the control of a teacher, such as GCSE grades. Link performance appraisal specifically to an agreed professional development plan, where the teacher commits to improving their practice and the school commits to giving them the time and space to learn. Make it clear that teachers in your school are not competing with each other and that it is possible for all teachers to succeed in meeting their goals.

## 5. RECOGNISE YOUR OWN FALLIBILITY IN MAKING JUDGMENTS ABOUT OTHER TEACHERS.

Headteachers do know quite a lot about the quality of their own teachers, but they acquire this through slow accumulation of soft evidence. We now know that our capacity to judge high quality teaching in a lesson observation is rather limited and is affected by classroom pupil composition. We also know that pupil test scores do not cleanly capture teacher quality. Do not place too much weight on any single measure of a teacher's performance.



The following is excerpted from *Becoming a Growth Mindset School* by Chris Hildrew (@chrishildrew).

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Developing growth-mindset leadership in a school comes down to the culture and expectations that the organisation holds.

As leaders, I expect all of us to be open to feedback and critique, and to deliberately practice our leadership skills, taking time to focus on developing those aspects of our leadership which can improve the impact that we have on others.

At the same time the impact of that leadership requires a clear sense of expectation, laid out and shared as the priorities for the school – our vision statement. When compiling the vision for Churchill Academy & Sixth Form, we tried to imagine how the school we would be if we got every aspect of our practice right, if every part of the machine was firing on all cylinders, and if the ethos and culture we wanted to create was implemented. We initially compiled the following series of descriptors:

## 1. To promote the welfare of students and staff

What does this look like?

- All students have access to personalised pathways through the curriculum and access to appropriate support.
- All members of the Academy are regarded as individuals: “treat people as people.”
- Barriers to success are identified and overcome.
- The Academy has a sense of family, belonging, and enjoyment.
- Achievement in all activities is recognised and celebrated.
- High-quality staff are recruited and retained across the Academy.
- There is equality of opportunity and respect for all members of the community, celebrating diversity.

## 2. To develop the very best practice in teaching, learning and leadership

What does this look like?

### LEADERSHIP

- A leadership development programme is established and effective.
- Classroom teachers are empowered to lead innovation within the classroom.
- Students are empowered in the leadership of learning.
- Churchill works in collaboration with other schools and educational settings to develop leadership across the system.
- Teaching and learning
- There is a single-minded focus on improving classroom practice: a mantra of “learn at all costs.”



- Students demonstrate a hunger for learning, taking responsibility for their own progress and development.
- All staff are accessing professional development which improves their practice.
- Staff develop and share best practice, learning from one another to create a cycle of continuous improvement.

### 3. To develop a growth mindset across the Academy, so that learners embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, and see effort as the path to success

What does this look like?

- Learners set themselves ambitious goals and are not limited by their prior attainment, taking responsibility and embracing struggle.
- Learners challenge themselves to achieve their best: “if it’s not excellent, it’s not finished.”
- Students have an independent work ethic which renders catch up and extra sessions redundant.
- Learning focuses on the process over the product.
- Learners receive effective feedback that is acted upon and has an impact.
- Robust performance development processes ensure that all staff continuously improve their practice.
- Systems within the Academy align with a growth mindset ethos.
- Students model successful learning attitudes and behaviours across the Academy: “don’t stop until you’re proud.”

### 4. To set consistently high expectations so that all learners achieve exceptional personal and academic outcomes

What does this look like?

- Academic outcomes
- Significantly positive outcomes against national benchmarks.
- Outcomes improving year-on-year.
- Gaps between groups closing year-on-year.
- Excellent progress from all starting points.
- Students progress to secure and aspirational destinations including top universities, apprenticeships, and employment.
- Personal outcomes



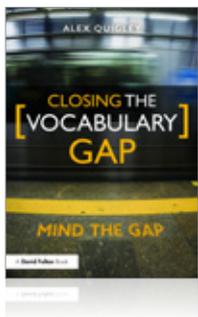
- Students display consistently excellent attitudes and behaviour for learning.
- Character, resilience, and employability skills are developed through curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- Students make a valuable contribution to the community to develop their citizenship and spiritual, moral, and social education.

In this set of descriptions, we captured aspects of the kind of school we wanted to work in. From this point, we worked with our staff, students, and governors to develop our Academy vision statement. Under the core purpose – “to inspire and enable young people to make a positive difference” – we laid out our vision for learning: “to set no limits on what we can achieve.”

# 7 STEPS TO CLOSE THE VOCABULARY GAP



Excerpted from *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*

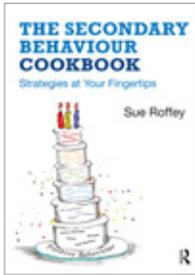


The following is excerpted from *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* by Alex Quigley (@HuntingEnglish).

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<p><b>1</b></p> <p>Train teachers to become more knowledgeable and confident in explicit vocabulary teaching.</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p>Teach academic vocabulary explicitly and clearly, with coherent planning throughout the curriculum.</p>
<p><b>3</b></p> <p>Foster structured reading opportunities in a model that supports students with vocabulary deficits.</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p>Promote and scaffold high-quality academic talk in the classroom.</p>
<p><b>5</b></p> <p>Promote and scaffold high quality academic writing in the classroom.</p>	<p><b>6</b></p> <p>Foster 'word consciousness' in our students (e.g. sharing the etymology and morphology of words).</p>
<p><b>7</b></p> <p>Teach students independent word learning strategies.</p>	



The following is excerpted from *The Secondary Behaviour Cookbook* by Sue Roffey.

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## THE OVEN

### THE EMOTIONAL CLIMATE OF THE CLASSROOM

If your oven is too cold or too hot, nothing you put in to cook will come out right. Similarly, whatever strategies are put into place for behavioural issues, the chance of their effectiveness will be determined by the context – the emotional climate of the classroom (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). This is dependent not only on the skills of the individual teacher but also the emotional climate of the school, especially in the secondary sector.

How people *feel* in the learning environment matters. This is determined by relationships between peers and between the teacher and the pupil; clear, high expectations and support given to meet these; how people talk to and about each other; a sense of belonging and the level of good humour in everyday interactions. Much behaviour is an outcome or expression of emotions, so it makes sense at every level to promote the positive.

## THE PROBLEM: HIGH LEVELS OF ANXIETY

### THE RECIPE: INCREASED CONFIDENCE

Anxiety is now endemic in Western society. Although some anxiety is normal, it can easily get out of hand. Anxiety becomes seriously problematic for young people when it impacts on learning, confidence, motivation and relationships. Anxiety is exacerbated by unhelpful thinking. It is often triggered by new situations when the student does not know what to expect. They often imagine the worst, catastrophize and lose sight of anything positive.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Specifics: Is this unfocused general anxiety or more specific, e.g. taking tests, family issues, social anxiety? How is the anxiety presented and how does this impact on what happens in the classroom? Are there psychosomatic symptoms – headaches, feeling sick and so forth?
- Exceptions: When does the student display most confidence? With whom? While doing what?
- Triggers: Does anxiety become panic in certain situations? What triggers this? If so, how often does this happen? Is it getting better or worse?
- At home: Are there changes at home? Is social media a concern?
- Expectations: Are conversations about success and failure contributing?
- History: Has anything been tried in the past that has had a positive effect, even if small?
- Self-concept: Does the student acknowledge personal strengths or fear they will be seen as a loser?



## TODAY IN THE CLASSROOM

- Routine and predictability will help with fear of the unknown.
- When anxiety is high, link new activities to more familiar ones.
- Do not single the student out.
- Comment positively on effort and any achievement. This reassurance needs to be specific.
- Remind student of past successes.
- Use strengths-based\* language where possible, e.g. *'I can see you are becoming more prepared to give things a go'*.
- Increase agency so the student can develop strategies to self-soothe.
- Breathing\*.
- Regular relaxation activities with the whole class reduce physical symptoms of stress. Simply standing and stretching for a couple of minutes has multiple benefits for all students.
- Provide the student with a refuge when necessary.
- Wristband\*.

## SPECIAL INGREDIENTS – STARRED STRATEGIES

Where you see a \*, e.g. '\*Assertiveness skills', in the text, it refers back to these strategies.

### \*STRENGTHS-BASED CONVERSATION

Students are asked to identify the strengths that might help in resolving an issue. A teacher may need to name the strengths they have observed, as young people may not acknowledge these themselves, e.g. *'I have seen you demonstrate leadership/friendship/creativity by ... how could you use this strength here?'*

### \*BREATHING

Deliberate regular breathing reduces heart rate and therefore anxiety. All pupils can easily be taught how to do this. Teachers can model this for students who are angry or otherwise agitated, encouraging them to copy.

### \*WRISTBAND

This helps with high levels of anxiety and other strong emotion. The student wears an elastic band on their wrist that they can pull and snap back. Emotion is triggered in the brain and is maintained by unhelpful thoughts. This action – usually repeated three times – brings someone back to their body and the here and now and can provide a gap between impulse and action. It can be accompanied by a chosen internal mantra, such as *'I am in control'*.



## LONGER-TERM CHANGE

- Strategies will depend to some extent on the root cause. Some students will not know why they are feeling anxious, or anxiety will generalize so they feel anxious all the time.
- Students need to know that anxiety does not make them 'not normal', that many people experience this and there are things that can help.
- It is valuable for the student to identify a trusted person with whom they can talk. It is helpful if this person is aware of the L.A.T.E.R.\* framework.
- Be aware of messages about assessments that may raise anxiety about performance.
- Tell students about individuals who did (are doing) amazing things with their lives but did not shine at school. Although passing exams opens doors, it is not the only key to success.
- Ask the student what they would find helpful. Give them time to think about this.
- Mindfulness\*.

## SPECIAL INGREDIENTS – STARRED STRATEGIES

Where you see a \*, e.g. '\*Assertiveness skills', in the text, it refers back to these strategies.

### \*L.A.T.E.R.

A framework for engaging with distressed students. This is based on the LATE model first developed by Michael Tunnecliffe (2000). 20 Ingredients L is for LISTEN. Give your full attention, without interrupting, giving advice or asking them to look on the bright side. Open questions help at the outset, e.g. 'What's been happening?' 'You look rough. How are things?' Use encouragers such as nodding and brief comments such as 'yes I see', 'go on'. A is for ACKNOWLEDGE. Validate the young person's feelings about the situation they're in. They need to know you are taking them seriously. T is for TALK. Ask about options they have thought of and perhaps add to these. E is for ENCOURAGE. Encourage them to choose something safe and doable. R is for REVIEW. Ask the young person to come and see you again about how it's going – how soon will depend on how worried you are about their safety.

### \*MINDFULNESS

There is good evidence for mindfulness in reducing stress (Broderick & Jennings, 2012), and many schools are now introducing the practice to students. Mindfulness is about paying full attention, first to the body, and then to the thoughts and feelings. See Resources for more information and ways to do this in the classroom.



## CIRCLE SOLUTIONS ACTIVITY\*:

### RAISING AWARENESS OF SELF-TALK

Mix the class up using silent statements. Ask pupils to stand up and change places if they agree with the following. Give students a moment to think before they move:

- Everyone feels worried sometimes.
- Someone who is anxious can't think straight.
- It is not always easy to look confident.

Now ask students to work in groups of three. Give them the following phrases on separate pieces of paper. These are things we might say to ourselves. Ask students to place them in two piles according to whether they will increase confidence or raise anxiety.

I can have a go. Everyone will laugh at me. I can learn from mistakes. Just do one thing and see how it goes. It will be a disaster. Where can I hide? I will never learn. Success begins with the first step. I'm no good. Take a chance. I can't. It's too hard. I can do this! Take a deep breath and try. What's the worst that can happen? I will get it all wrong.

Students may add to this list with their own phrases.

### WHAT HELPS PEOPLE BECOME MORE CONFIDENT?

Mix students up to work in groups of four. Give them a large piece of paper and felt pens.

Ask them to devise a recipe for a confidence cake. What would go into it, what ingredients would you need, how would you bake it and how might you decorate it? Encourage them to draw the cake. Each group displays their cake for others to see. Show them the cover of this book and see what they have in common.

Use the findings from this activity to develop whole class strategies to build confidence.

For more on negative and positive thinking, see **Resources**.

### SPECIAL INGREDIENTS – STARRED STRATEGIES

Where you see a \*, e.g. '\*Assertiveness skills', in the text, it refers back to these strategies.

#### \*CIRCLE SOLUTIONS ACTIVITY

A whole class intervention that takes place within a Circle incorporating the ASPIRE principles (see earlier). Although one pupil might be the main target of this intervention, doing the activity with others will not only enhance individual skills for everyone, but it will also reinforce these by having peer support and involvement.



## PANIC ATTACKS

Anxiety that becomes overwhelming may trigger a panic attack. This is where the flight or fight reaction to a perceived threat is in full swing. The physical signs are shaking limbs, sweaty palms, a fast beating heart and nausea, possibly difficulty breathing and dizziness.

It is a horrible sensation and can be very frightening. Panic attacks can come on very fast and usually last between 5 and 20 minutes.

Let students who are liable to have a panic attack sit by the door and give them permission to leave the class if they need to. Suggest they have a bottle of water with them; taking sips from this will help. When an attack is happening, the student needs to come back into the here and now. Ways to accomplish this could be:

- Deep, regular breathing.
- Focus on something in the room and use this to distract from negative thinking – e.g. count the number of chairs, list the colours in a poster.
- Do something physical – stamp, stretch and bend.
- Repeat a mantra – *'I am going to be OK, I am going to be OK'*.

When fears are based in reality (e.g. what is happening at home) or panic- attacks happen regularly, then the student needs someone to talk to and on- going support.



The following is excerpted from *Drawn on Your Emotions* by Margot Sunderland.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book, *Drawn on Your Emotions*, and the Emotion Cards is to help people reflect on their lives and the key emotional and relational experiences that have been central to how they see themselves, others and the world today. The exercises in the book and the cards are designed to enable people to think, feel and act in more creative, fulfilling and potent ways. They are based on a belief that a healthier society is one where the effective communication and handling of emotional experience, within a safe and supportive arena, is not merely the property of a few psychologically minded people, or those lucky enough to be able to afford therapy or counselling. It should be possible for many more people to benefit from thinking psychologically, to stand back and review their lives and to be able to manage their feelings well, on an everyday basis. This book and the accompanying cards, therefore, aim to provide some of the tools, content and structure for such an arena, in which people can convey and address the powerful and profound feelings intrinsic to human existence.

## HOW TO USE THE BOOK WITH PARTICIPANTS

First, identify the exercises in the book which seem from the title to be most relevant to the needs of the person or group with whom you are working. Now turn to those exercises and read the Objective section to double-check their relevance. These sections are only for you and are not to be read out to the participant. If you choose to proceed with the exercises, photocopy the pictures (as many copies as you need for the number of people with whom you are working). You may wish to enlarge the pictures when photocopying. Read the Instructions section and remember them so you can paraphrase for your participant. Naturally, the instructions do not need to be offered to the participant verbatim; they can be adjusted as you see fit.

The Development sections offer further work with the given theme or issue. Decide whether it will be appropriate for you to use them after the exercises themselves. They may also be used to spark other ideas of what you might do. Development sections are not designed to be read out to the participant. Many of the Development sections require art materials, paints, miniature objects, puppets and so forth.

At the end of the book, some completed exercises have been reproduced to give an indication of the type of feelings participants express.

## HOW TO INTRODUCE THE EXERCISES TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Read out or offer the explanation in the Instruction section, or your own version of it if the instructions need adjusting to the age or level of the participants concerned. Many people find the exercises very easy and within their grasp. If, however, you are met by a response like, "Oh I can't draw," reassure participants that there is no right or wrong way to do the exercises, only their way, and that scribbles and stick people are perfectly acceptable.



## PHOTOCOPYING OF THE WORKSHEETS IN THE BOOK

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## A WORD FOR SCHOOLS

The aforementioned is particularly relevant advice for teachers wishing to use the exercises to discuss or explore emotional themes with their classes. I believe that introducing onto the school curriculum themes around reflection on your life, your emotions, your relationship with self and others, as explored in this book, is vital for any school that claims to be “mental health informed.” Many Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons tend to address feelings at a far more banal level, sometimes fuelled by a fear of opening up a can of worms. I do not believe that these exercises are too dangerous for secondary schoolchildren. Rather, they are likely to improve the quality of life. We know from the “affect labelling studies” (Lieberman et al., 2007; Lieberman, 2011) that talking about feelings actually reduces stress, brings down blood pressure and supports the immune system.

## LIFE REVIEW (FOR TEENAGERS)

### OBJECTIVE

This exercise offers participants a chance to sit back and review their life. People rarely spend enough time reflecting on major life events in this way.

Good, life-changing events need as much talking about with a good listener as painful life events, but sadly we tend not to do this. We might do so in our mind, but it is such a rich experience to go over and tell the story of lovely life-changing events with a good listener. This exercise may also be useful in highlighting any recurring ‘life patterns’ (e.g. every three years something awful has happened or a new door opened). In addition, it can provoke discussion about how past events are still affecting the participant’s life now (e.g. a childhood experience of loss, resulting in a fear of intimate relationships now). It can also reveal underlying pessimistic or optimistic attitudes to life.

### INSTRUCTIONS

On the Stages of Life, draw lines going up or down from the age axis to represent whether periods in your life felt Very Good, Good, Difficult or Very Difficult.

- If a time was OK, neither good nor difficult, just put a dot on the OK line.
- If it was a difficult year, draw a line going down into the Difficult section.
- If it was a very bad year, go right down into the Very Difficult section.
- If it was a good year, draw a line going up into the Good section, and if it was a very good year, go right up into the Very Good section!



Then, in the 'blobs' which correspond to the lines you have drawn, write or draw any significant events that happened and then events which you feel have affected who you are now, for better or worse.

## DEVELOPMENT

Ask the participant about which of their 'blobs' feel the most powerful to them, in terms of being a truly life-changing event (for better or worse). Participants may like to draw a picture of one or more of these events, or they may prefer just to talk about it. If it was a very painful event you could ask how that event has added to their wisdom today, but also to their problems. An alternative question would be, "How has that event made life difficult for you now?" Additionally, the participant could think of a story or myth which seems to be a direct metaphor for one of these powerful life events or for his or her life as a whole. Remember to listen well and empathise when the participant speaks about painful events. Questions with no empathy or compassion do not ensure optimal psychological safety for the participant.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

The exercise is mostly about events that are life changing. A discussion topic which people often find very powerful and very relieving to talk about is "Conversations that changed my life." So much creative and wonderful enterprise happens in the world as a result of life-changing conversations.

LIFE REVIEW FOR TEENAGER						
Very good	○	○	○	○	○	○
Good	○	○	○	○	○	○
OK	Early years		Middle years		Teenage years	
		5		12		18
Difficult	○	○	○	○	○	○
Very difficult	○	○	○	○	○	○



## LIFE AS AN OBSTACLE COURSE

### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this exercise is to enable participants to explore how they are holding themselves back in life and holding themselves back from fulfilling an important plan, life change or vision of what they want to do next in their life. By naming and defining current obstacles to fulfillment, and then looking for solutions (rather than simply seeing problematic life situations as fixed or immovable), it is hoped the exercise will help participants be more proactive in their life, rather than reactive and staying stuck or standing still in their life when they want to move forward to positive change.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Often when we want to get things done in our lives, we meet various obstacles that prevent us from fulfilling an important plan or life change or dream. Sometimes the obstacle is created by others or circumstances and sometimes by ourselves, particularly what we tell ourselves. Name what you believe to be the obstacles in your life at the moment by writing on the ones in the drawing.

So, if an obstacle in your life feels like a brick wall, write on the wall what your particular 'brick wall' is in your life. If it feels as if an enemy or competitor is out to get you, you might like to write on the crocodile. If the obstacle feels like a critic or a critical voice in your head, you could write on the critic figure in the picture. If your obstacle feels like some sort of drain, e.g. of ideas or money or if your depressed mood is a drain, you could write on the drain and so on.

If you prefer, use the second picture with no obstacles on it. Simply draw your own obstacles on this second picture instead and label them. Draw or write next to each obstacle any solution you can think of. If you feel that, at the moment, you can't think of a solution, translate the situation into a fairy story and then find a fairy story solution. You then may be able to think of a way of changing the fantasy into reality. If you find that difficult at the moment, don't worry, it may come to you at a later date.

### DEVELOPMENT

Empathise if there is a person being unsupportive or actually destructive in the participant's life who is blocking fulfillment of an important change the participant wants to make. Really praise and acknowledge when the participant owns that one or more obstacles are of his or her own making. For many participants, these will be critical voices in their head introjected from childhood or insufficient encouragement.

For some participants, it may be useful to explore psychological games of self-sabotage (a term from transactional analysis) and ask the participant if she plays any of these games or knows people who do. These are conversations between two people which are designed (often unconsciously) to prevent the other person from helping find solutions for you or from exposing the fact that there really isn't an obstacle there in the first place.



## EXAMPLE: THE 'YES, BUT' GAME

A: "You could solve that by doing x."

B: "Yes, but if I did x, it wouldn't work."

A: "Well, you could try y."

B: "Yes, but if I did y, that wouldn't work because... "

A: "Well, try z."

B: "I've already tried that and it didn't work."

Explain that the unconscious payoff of such a psychological game is to make the helper feel as helpless as you. So the best thing for the helper to say is, 'I'm not actually going to think of options for you now as I see that what I am saying is not helpful, so I will listen to you now.'

There are also unconscious, psychological games designed around blame, where the person can justify non-action in their life by treating the other person as the obstacle. It's called the "If it weren't for you" game.

EXAMPLE: "If it weren't for person x, I'd change my life and go out and get a good job/be far happier/get a lovely partner."

It can be useful to gently expose the game and get the participant to own that he is blaming someone else for his non-action as, perhaps, it can produce anxiety if he feels he himself can be potent!

Also discuss fears of failure and fears of success (sometimes the latter are as frightening as fears of failure) and then fears of change and how such fears may be blocks in a person's life.

Resistance to change and self-sabotage are sophisticated concepts, so such further development may be appropriate, particularly with a deeper exploration using, perhaps, drawing or sandplay, where the person's self-saboteur could be given an actual form and conversed with.

