

Foundation session: Managing and understanding emotions

Session overview

This session is to help the young person understand how emotions are triggered and what effect they have on the mind and the body. The aim is to widen understanding of emotions beyond simple angry/sad/happy etc and to have greater awareness of how to manage their own emotions.

Information for practitioner

Exploration of emotions - it is very helpful to understand that all human beings experience emotions that lead to different behavioural responses. The point here is to understand the emotional response and remove blame from behaviours. Along with the recognition of our emotions, finding techniques to calm strong emotions can help.

Pre-session action

Select a *"Looking after yourself"* exercise in advance for the close of the session.

Resources needed for this session

- Emotions wheel
- Diagram of brain
- Behaviour cards

Session

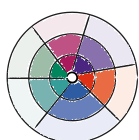
Check in with the young person as to how they have been since your last session together. Are there any thoughts or feelings that you may need to reflect on and address before you begin this session?

Inform the young person what we are going to do in this session, sharing the overview.

Feelings

Begin by listing some basic emotions together and why they happen. For example: happy, sad, angry, afraid, calm and they happen as a response to situations we experience.

Now break each of the emotions listed down into other feelings that might be happening. For example: sad might be pain, disappointment, shame, grief, misery; happy might be joy, excitement, hope, cheerfulness, ecstasy, contentment.



Emotions
wheel

Introduce the **emotions wheel** and spend some time looking at it together, exploring how the primary emotions contain a range of different emotions.

We don't generally feel one emotion at a time. Practitioner and young person to **pick three emotions** they are feeling now.

Are there any emotions in different parts of the emotions wheel that feel similar? For example: I'm scared of riding my bike fast **and** I also find it exciting; I'm happy that I won the high jump **and** I'm embarrassed to be mentioned in assembly; I am **content** to chat to my friends online **and** I'm anxious that I haven't done my homework yet; I'm excited to meet people online **and** I'm worried that I don't really know who they are.

It can be useful to see each emotion in three different ways:

- The emotional **feeling** (e.g. sad, happy, angry).
- Where we feel this in our **bodies** (e.g. butterflies in our tummy, jittery feeling, tension headache, fidgety).
- How we **behave** as a result of that emotion (e.g. cry, laugh, storm off, ignore someone).

Now pick one or two emotions and think about them in the above terms. Explore all the different physical feelings and behaviours that might occur in you (or a hypothetical person if this is easier) to go with that particular emotion.



Reassure the young person that the experience of emotions and how they make us feel is **human** – and by understanding emotions we empower ourselves to **respond rather than react**.

Bodily reactions

Sometimes we notice the feeling first; or sometimes we notice a reaction within our body.



Brain diagram

Introduce basic explanation of the brain using the diagram.

- The safety officer's job is to look out for potential danger, and it is constantly taking information from what we see, hear, smell, taste and touch, deciding whether there is a threat or not.
- It produces our emotional responses to what's around us.
- When these emotions get too intense – especially if it feels like there is a threat, whether that's real or not, it can cut us off from the thinking part of our brain.
- This is an important survival strategy (think jumping out of the way of a car without thinking about it) but it's not so useful when we need to respond to things that are more complex.
- So, when we experience strong emotions, we find it harder to think clearly – the safety officer is too excited and we therefore react without thinking.

Practitioner and young person to think about a time when they did something 'in the heat of the moment', one that does not cause them distress to reflect on. For example: replying to a message without thinking or beeping their horn when driving.

How did your bodies respond?

For example: heart rate increased, sweaty palms, panicky breathing.

Behaviours

In your 'heat of the moment' example what happened next?

Start to reflect on how an emotion presents in three different ways: the emotion, the bodily response and the behaviour.



Practitioner to share the following information with the young person.

Behaviour is an important form of communication but because it is not as clear or direct as words it isn't always seen and understood and can therefore be easy to misinterpret.

When we realise that behaviour is driven by an emotional response it can make it easier to understand someone else's behaviour – and even our own.

Behaviours are often trying to do one of two things:

- To obtain or gain something – more time, understanding, order, calm, peer or adult attention, a desired object or activity, or sensory stimulation.
- To avoid something – a stressor, a frustration, a task that may be difficult, boring or easy, a physical demand, an activity or person we don't like.



Behaviour cards

Using the **behaviour cards** think about possible emotions that might be causing that behaviour.

Can we always tell what emotion someone is feeling from their behaviour? For example: someone may look angry but actually be scared; or they may seem very calm but actually be sad.

Thinking about some situations you may have been in, and how you behaved, do you think people misinterpreted how you were feeling? Did you always know what emotions and feelings had been behind your behaviour?



Practitioner must reflect that this is not about judging past behaviours but understanding the emotional process that everyone has.



It may be useful to look at what else was going on when we behaved in a particular way.

For example, sometimes we seem to manage a difficult situation calmly while at other times our emotions seem to take over. If we look at what else has been going on, for example, how much sleep we've had, how things are in our friendship group, how safe we are feeling at that time, whether we've come from a calm happy event or a stressful one, then we can sometimes make sense of the resulting behaviour. Practitioner can share their own examples of times when they feel they have had more or less choice about their responses in a particular situation.



Reflection on this session

Our emotions are a very useful resource that help us stay safe. When we've had an intense experience, the brain learns how to cope from what it did last time. For example: if storming off kept us safe in the moment, we may default to this behaviour next time we feel a strong emotion even if this is not a helpful behaviour this time. We can learn how to interrupt that pattern (to an extent) – if we are able to calm our strong emotions quickly.

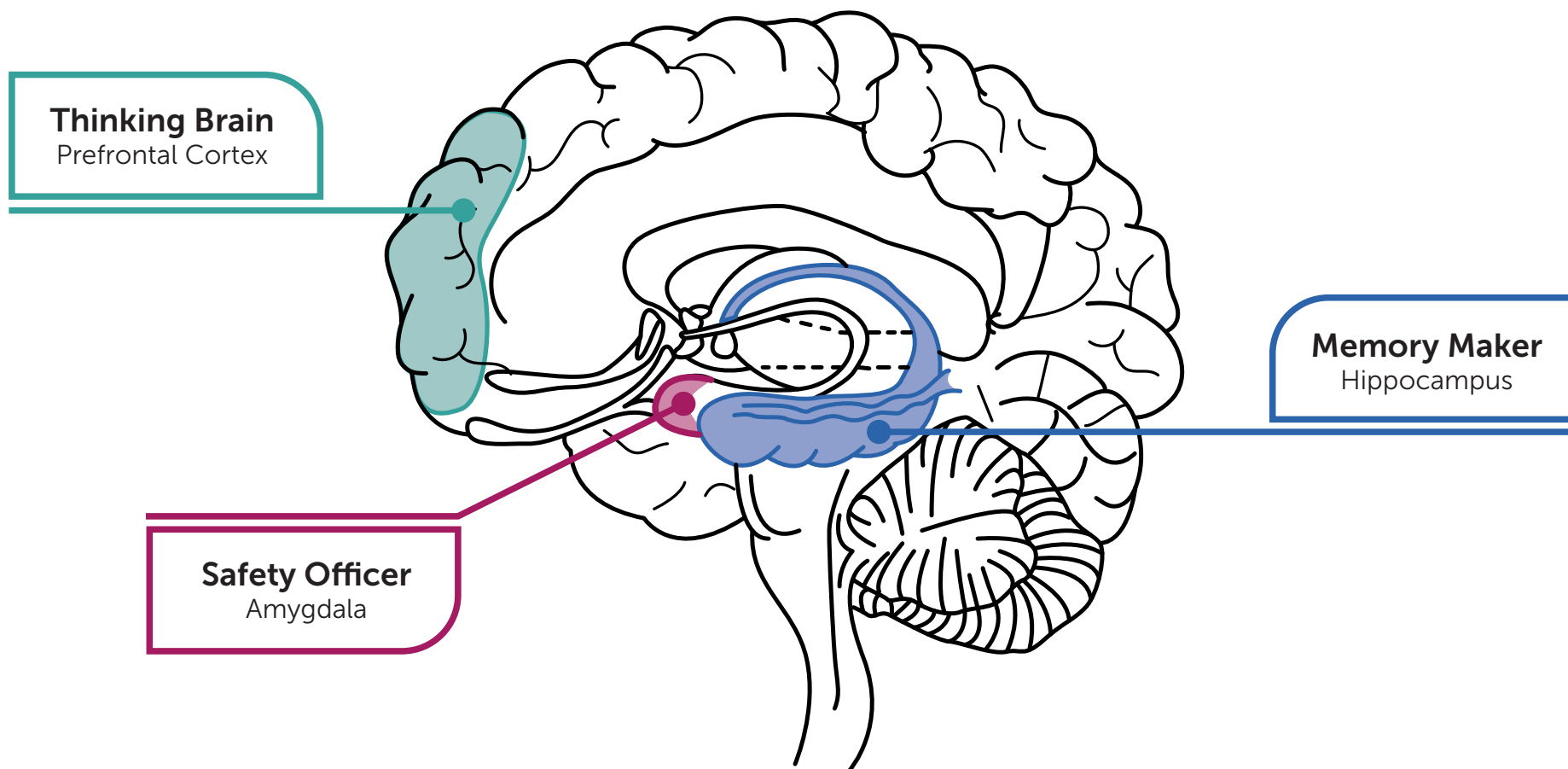


Closing activity

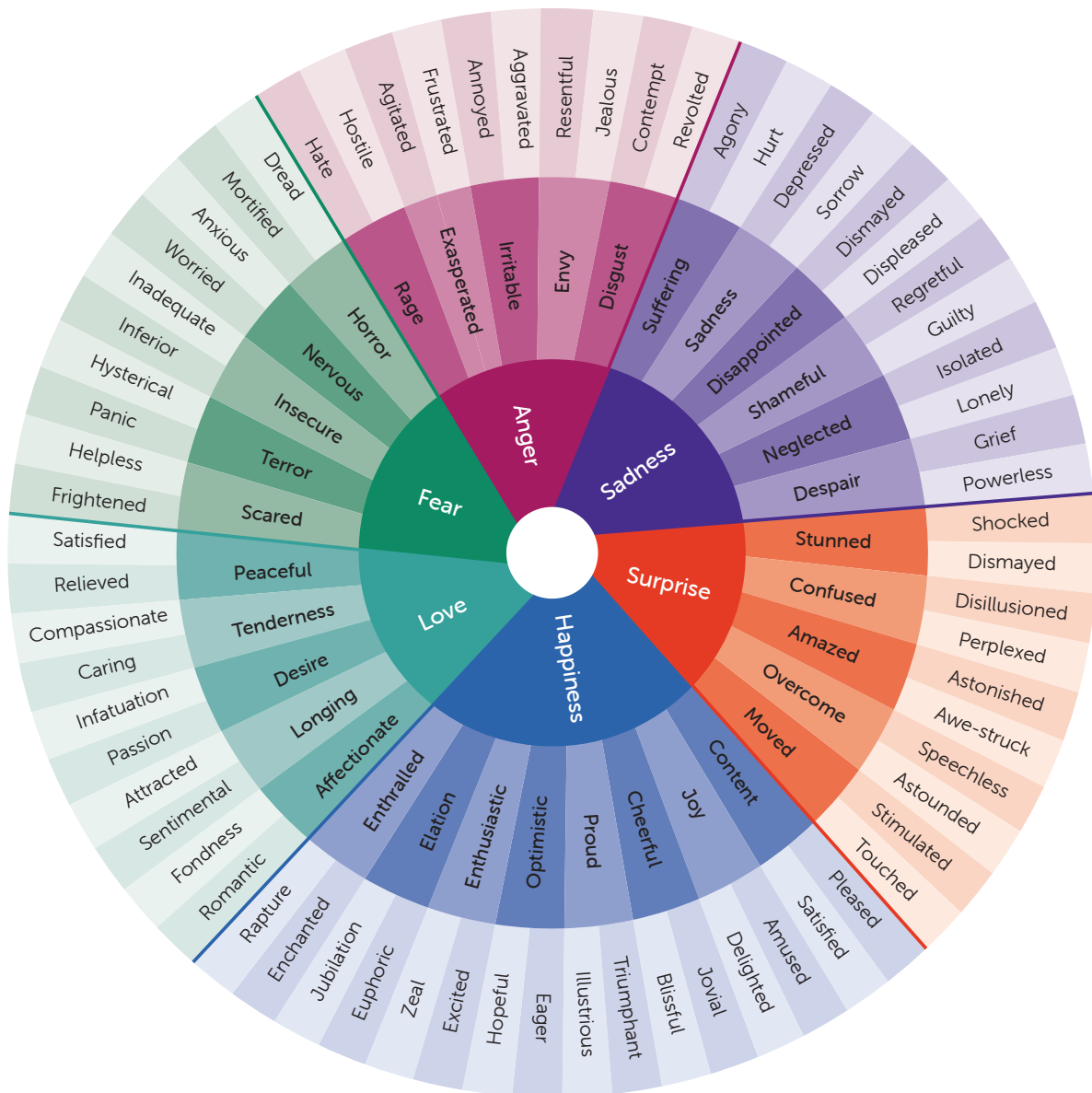
Looking after yourself exercise to close

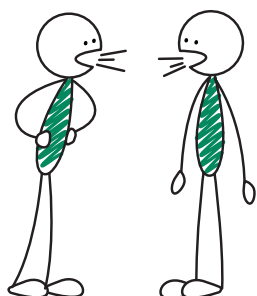
Pick one of the techniques that can help calm strong emotions, for example: "54321" or "extended exhale breathing".

The brain

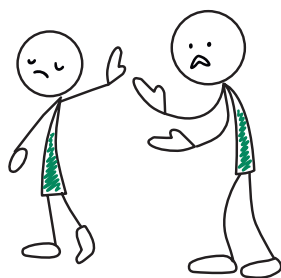


Emotions & feelings wheel





Answering back



Ignoring someone



Jumping up and down



Avoiding a situation



Storming off



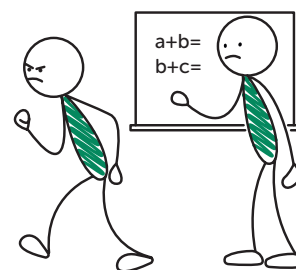
Crying



Shouting



Sitting in the corner



Leaving a lesson

SMIRKING



LOOKING
AWAY

FIDGETING



SLAMMING
A DOOR



TALKING
LOTS



Charlie was
staying off
school

Jamie was
tapping

Jordan was
hiding

River was
staring into
space

Rowan was
avoiding
a place