

**Edition**

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Life Skills Boot camps

**Instructor's Manual &  
Participant's Workbook (IO3)**

LEVEL UP

# Setting the ground for a multi-level approach on developing soft skills in Higher Education

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## A few words about this boot camp training

The primary purpose of this manual is to describe and operationalize the Life skills Bootcamp trainings (IO3). This manual has been prepared to provide step-by-step guidelines to instructors for conducting trainings in three soft skills areas: a) *Emotion Regulation*, b) *Interpersonal Skills* and c) *Adaptability*. The procedures and content presented herein have been derived from various sources.

This manual includes selected evidence-informed training activities, and it is divided into chapters that describe distinctive elements for each thematic area.

Each chapter provides a) the session outline, b) Review of previous session's homework, c) activities, and d) homework assignment. Finally, a list of references and additional resources is provided at the end of each chapter, giving the opportunity to instructors to dig in more detail about the main concepts taught.

**\*Instructional material in this program is designed to be used for educational purposes within the context of academic learning. The resources available in this manual do not replace therapy and are intended to be used by qualified professionals (i.e. mental health practitioners or academic staff with relevant background in Higher Education Institutions).**

The content of this manual is a compilation of foundational works on contemporary evidence-based approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral approach, Acceptance and Commitment approach, Dialectical Behavior approach and Positive psychology.

## Bootcamps Outline

The following outline shows the organization and flow of the boot camps training.

### I. Emotion Regulation

#### a. Emotion awareness

- i. Brief introduction on what an emotion is and how it is formed.
- ii. Learn how to deconstruct an emotional event.
- iii. Consciously recognizing emotions, body sensations and automatic thoughts-The concept of mindfulness.

#### b. Relaxation

- i. Brief introduction to relaxation techniques and biological evidence supporting them.
- ii. Learn relaxation techniques (diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, autogenous training etc.).
- iii. Introducing the concept of self-care. Helping students identify daily activities that could be relaxing (e.g. working out, dancing, soothing, etc.). and make a daily plan on incorporating these activities.

#### c. Thinking Traps

- i. Recognize thinking traps.



- ii. Challenge these inflexible automatic thinking patterns and persisting distressing thoughts.

d. Behavioral methods

- i. Opposite actions to modulate intense emotions.

## II. Interpersonal Skills

a. Verbal communication and Non-verbal communication

- i. Elements of effective communication.
- ii. The importance of body language.
- iii. The power of listening.

b. Assertiveness

- i. Brief introduction on the three communication styles (passive, aggressive, assertive).
- ii. Assertiveness training (assertive expression, assertive listening, responding to criticism).

c. Teamwork

- i. Effectively collaborating with others.
- ii. How to make contact
- iii. How to make accurate first impressions (minimize bias)
- iv. Influencing others

d. Negotiation

- i. Conflict management skills
- ii. Validation

### III. Resilience and flexibility

- a. Your own values and strengths
  - i. Brief introduction on how values can act as a compass to guide people on what it is important in their life.
  - ii. Values identification activities to guide students on how to live a healthy life
  - iii. Signature strengths to boost self-esteem and self-confidence on living according to their values.
- b. Positive emotions
  - i. Brief introduction on how positive emotions create an upward spiral of health and well-being.
  - ii. Practice activities that boost positive emotions (such as gratitude, humor, realistic optimism, forgiveness etc.).
- c. Self-compassion
  - i. Brief introduction on self-compassion as an important element of regulating negative emotions (VS self-criticism).
  - ii. Practice several self-compassion techniques.

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## THEMATIC AREA 1: EMOTION REGULATION

## **A few words about Emotion Regulation training**

This training aims to help participants enhance their ability to effectively manage and respond to emotional experiences. The training includes modules for learning to identify, label and describe emotions, using relaxation techniques to modulate emotion experience, reducing cognitive vulnerability linked to negative emotions, and acting in an opposite manner to motivational tendency associated with negative emotions.

**Note to instructors:** An additional module on increasing the occurrence of **positive emotions** (see Resilience & Flexibility training) can be added to enrich this training.



## **Emotional awareness**

(Corresponds to chapter 1 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Introducing the topic
- Group guidelines
- Activity 1: My emotions
- Activity 2: The components of emotional experience
- Activity 3: RAIN. Emotional awareness and acceptance of emotions
- Homework

### **Group guidelines**

Participation in group trainings can be beneficial for participants, as they are expected to have the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge, exchange opinions and give feedback, as well as to cultivate interpersonal skills. To achieve this, it is necessary to create a safe environment for all members, which will be based on some commonly accepted ground rules such as the following:

- **Be respectful:** Despite different perspectives or opinions try to respect each other's ideas. Try not to interrupt others while they talk, and practice good listening skills. Be honest with each other, while you show respect and do not humiliate, haze, or abuse others in any way. Deal with issues constructively.
- **Treat shared information confidentially:** Try to keep discussions that occur in group or personal experiences shared by others confidential.
- **Attendance and Promptness:** Weekly attendance is expected. Notify your instructor in advance (when possible) if you must miss a class or need assistance with an assignment. Come on time for every class and try to be prepared (do homework assignments).
- **Active participation and privacy:** Use class time wisely. Participating in group discussions or activities is beneficial not only for you (personal development) but for the group as well (contribute to group work). However, if you are asked questions or asked to participate in an activity which makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to refuse participation.

### **Introducing the Topic**

You will learn more about how emotions are formed, the main elements that consists of an emotion and consciously recognizing emotions.

### **Activity 1: My emotions**

Invite participants to think about emotions that all people experience. Present a list of well-known emotions:

Anger

Fear

Happiness

Boredom

Anxiety

Shame

Sadness

Pride

Joy

Guilt

Fear

After reading the list, assess the participants' knowledge of these emotional states. Discuss in the plenary, their understanding about these emotions. For example:

*"Now that we have read the list, I would like to ask you some questions about some of these emotions. The first emotion is anger, what do you think it means to be angry or to feel angry, have you ever felt that way, and how did you know you were angry?"*

Present a number of scenarios to introduce the importance of emotions for our survival and wellbeing. While presenting them invite participants to think of the following questions:

*What emotion you may feel under this situation?*

*Why do you think we experience this emotion?*

*How did you know you were experiencing this emotion?*



*Did the emotion lead you to do something? Did you have to do something that you would not have done otherwise?*

Here are a few examples:

1. *"Imagine you are walking and you hear the wheels of a car screeching. You are startled by the noise and look around to see what is causing it. You see that a car is coming towards you very fast and that the sound is coming from the driver hitting the brakes in an attempt to stop the car. You immediately feel fear and quickly pull away".*

[This is an example of a situation where the emotion of fear is useful. Fear is nature's alarm mechanism-it is a response to our sense of danger. Fear signals the need for immediate action and/or attention. When we feel afraid, we have the tendency to look for a threat in our environment. Fear is a useful emotion that helps us to keep safe from physical dangers].

2. *"Your best friend has moved away, and it has been several weeks since you last spoke to her. You start to think that she has forgotten about you and that you will never see her again. You start feeling sad and lonely. You start thinking that you won't be able to have fun without her".*

[Sadness is a natural response to something we perceive as a disappointment or a loss, such as an object, a person, a privilege, or an idea. When feeling sad, many of us want to withdraw from the outside world or at least reduce our daily activity].

3. *"Imagine you are getting prepared for an important exam. Instead of studying, you decide to watch TV for a while. While watching your favorite TV show, you start thinking that you*

*haven't studied enough and start worrying that you might not do well in the exam. You notice that your body is feeling tense. After a while, you also get a headache.*

[Anxiety is an emotion that focuses on what might happen in the future. When we experience anxiety, we often slow down our activity and focus our attention on a perceived future threat (such as an upcoming exam, illness or a more global threat such as climate change). Focusing our attention on the potential threat will help us to reach a solution. However, when we are unable to find a solution, we may get stuck and that the perceived threat is uncontrollable, something that increases our anxiety levels and has a negative impact in our productivity and health].

4. *Someone tells you that a friend of yours is spreading rumors about you. The next day you feel you have to do something. You feel that untruth harms your reputation, something that makes it incredibly frustrating for you.*

[Anger is a natural response to the belief that you have been hurt or treated badly. Anger is also normal if you believe that someone you care about has been hurt, mistreated or devalued (it may also include ideas, things, and values you feel important). Anger drives us to act to defend ourselves and the things we care about. Often, anger is directed toward the perceived source of threat.]

### **Activity 2: The components of emotional experience**

The next step is to understand our emotional experiences. Emotional reaction has many different parts. Emotional experience is typically (but not always) elicited by a stimulus, such as a situation, an event, another person, or a memory. We make an

appraisal or thought about it and that triggers an emotion, that is associated with physical sensations and leads to a behavior.

e.g. approaching car – car is going to hit me – racing heart – fear – run

Here’s a graphical representation of the components’ model of emotions:

<https://cogbtherapy.com/cbt-model-of-emotions>

In our daily life, it is quite often that emotional responses are happening automatically, something that hinders the ability to perceive, identify, and understand emotions. Understanding emotions can be helpful for us to figure out the best response to a situation.

One effective technique to increase emotional awareness is to ‘walk through’ our emotional experience. We can give an example (from [positivepsychology.com](http://positivepsychology.com); modified from Wilding, 2015):

Event	I said “hello” to an old friend, and she ignored me.
Negative thought(s)	She doesn’t like me anymore since she’s moved up in the world.
Negative feeling(s)	Upset, anger, heaviness

For example: *You come home from work and see that you had left the garage door open all day.*

What was the stimulus, situation or trigger?

What did you think about it, which evaluation did you make?

What emotion you experienced?

How was experienced in the body, what changed and in which parts?

What did you do? What was your response?

Activity 3: RAIN. Emotional awareness and acceptance of emotions

Many of us go through our daily lives on autopilot, not fully aware of our conscious experiences. Many of usually spend a lot of time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future.

The aim of the present activity is to introduce the concept of Mindfulness the “*Moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible*” [Kabat-Zinn, 2015; p.1482].

In other words, it is the non-elaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which thoughts, feelings, and sensations are accepted as they are.

Present the RAIN principles:

**R**ecognize what is happening: Name it

**A**llow the experience to be there, just as it is. Don't try to change it or avoid it.

**I**nvestigate your experience without judging it: what sensations, what thoughts, what urges do you have?

**N**ot-identify with the experience.

Guide participants to practice [RAIN principles](#).

Then discuss in the plenary their thoughts, concerns and reactions towards this technique.

### **Homework**

✎ See participants workbook, chapter 1.

## **Relaxation**

(Corresponds to chapter 2 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Blowing up like a balloon
- Activity 2: With All Our Might
- Homework

## **Review Homework**

Session 1 was devoted to emotional awareness. Today we will be focusing on the role of relaxation, but before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.

## **Introducing the Topic**

A busy life often leaves little time to relax. What does relaxation mean to you? What works for you? In this session we try a number of relaxation techniques, such as breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation and autogenous training.

### **Activity 1: Blowing up like a balloon**

We'll start with a short but effective calming technique involving breathing. It is called Diaphragmatic breathing, a technique that helps strengthen your diaphragm, an important muscle that enables you to breathe in calm way: Use the following [visual aid](#) and guide participants to practice diaphragmatic breathing.

### **Activity 2: With All Our Might**

Next activity is called Progressive muscle relaxation. The exercise's effectiveness is incumbent on first tensing before releasing different muscle groups. We need to deliberately create tension in a muscle group first, to reduce muscle tension below current adaptation levels. The goal is to make sure tension can be felt in the target muscles without inadvertently producing tension in other muscle groups (Hazlett-Stevens & Bernstein, 2012).

Use the following visual Aids and scripts to guide participants practice progressive muscle relaxation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGlWXiu4vLA>

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation Guidelines](#)

<https://positivepsychology.com/progressive-muscle-relaxation-pmr/>

### **Homework**

✎ See participants workbook, chapter 2.

## **Thinking Traps**

(Corresponds to chapter 3 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Don't fall into the thinking trap
- Activity 2: Dealing with thinking traps
- Activity 3: The pink elephant
- Activity 4: One Door Closes, Another Door Opens
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Session 2 was devoted to relaxation. Today we will be focusing on the role of the thinking traps and learn methods for re-constructing them, but before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.



## **Introducing the topic**

You will learn about thinking traps and how they undercut emotional wellbeing. You will learn about a list of common thinking traps and identify which you are prone to, in addition to the effects of those styles of thinking. Finally, you will practice effective simple strategies to challenge these thinking traps and promote flexible thinking.

### **Activity 1: Don't fall into the thinking trap**

Present the following scenario to participants:

*You receive a mail from your examiner asking you to meet.*

*What is the first thought that comes to mind?*

*How would that impact your emotions and behaviors?*

Ask participants to generate examples of possible interpretations on the scenario. How each interpretation would impact their emotions and behaviors.

Discuss in plenary students' interpretations.

Introduce the concept of automatic thoughts:

- The human brain process enormous amounts of information.
- We learn to sort out this information using automatic ways of interpreting the world.
- There are automatic thinking patterns that may be lead us to evaluate the world in an inflexible manner, thus ending up having dysfunctional responses.

Present a list of the most well-known thinking traps (use the following aids):

[Negative thinking traps](#)

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/ThinkingTraps.pdf>

[Common Mind Traps](#)

Ask students if they can relate to some of these patterns.

Questions for facilitation:

1. How often do you use them?
2. Which one is your ‘favorite one’?
3. Are any of these causing issues for you?

## **Activity 2: Dealing with thinking traps**

Dealing with thinking traps requires to adopt a more flexible approach while interpreting daily events.

One effective technique to deal with these thinking traps is to use “Socratic questioning” techniques to challenge these thoughts. For example:

- *What evidence do I have for and against this belief? Is there any evidence it is true? Is there evidence that it is not true?*
- *Could there be any other explanations?*
- *How bad would it really be? If it is reality, are you able to cope with it? Have you coped with it before?*

\*Make a bridge with Activity 2 from Emotional Awareness-Module 1 to add automatic thoughts in the components of emotional response.

Give explicit examples of how these thinking patterns are associated with emotional responses.

Then guide participants on how to use a thought diary to identify emotional responses, what triggered them, automatic thoughts associated with them and challenging these thoughts.

Use the following worksheets (from PositivePsychology.com) to help participants practice:

[Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet](#)

[Simple \(4-column\) Thought Diary Worksheet](#)

### **Activity 3: The pink elephant**

Use the activity instructions from [Student Affairs Coaching & Counselling, University of Twente](#):

Ask the participants to 'Try NOT' to think about a pink elephant for 3 minutes and see what happens.

Then discuss in the plenary:

- Were you able to not think about it at all?
- Have you ever had any distressing thoughts that stuck in your head?  
Which strategies do you usually use?

*Discussion points:*

- Distressing thoughts (i.e. worrying) are a normal part of life. However, constant worrying, can take a toll on our emotional and physical health.
- The more you try and get rid of these thoughts, the harder it is to get rid of them.
- Instead, if you learn to accept and detach from these thoughts, they will no longer have power over you (Winston & Seif, 2017).

\*Make a connection with Activity 3. RAIN. Emotional Awareness and Acceptance-Emotional Awareness-Module 1.

Use the following resources to help participants understand the concept of diffusion (detach, separate, or get some distance from our thoughts) and practice nonjudgmental noticing the presence of them:

[Ten defusion techniques for unhooking your mind](#)

[Defusion: How to Detangle from Thoughts & Feelings](#)

#### **Activity 4: One Door Closes, Another Door Opens**

Sometimes we become preoccupied with perceived mistakes, actions taken or not and opportunities we lost in the past. This is mental preoccupation is called rumination and usually is linked with distressing emotions such as guilt and regret, and with harsh criticism to self and others.

Use the activity [One Door Closes, Another Door Opens Instructions](#) (Rashid, 2008) to help participants to expand their perspective on negative events happened.

Discuss in the plenary:

- *How long after these doors closed were you able to see the doors that opened?*
- *What did get in the way of your ability to see the open doors?*
- *What can you do in the future when doors close on you to more readily find the open doors?"*

Points for facilitation:

- This exercise's purpose is not to downplay the negative event (it is important to acknowledge the emotions, the pain and heartache someone experiences), but to help participants bring a balanced perspective ([DOORS CLOSED DOORS OPEN](#)).

## Homework

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 3.

## **Opposite Actions**

(Corresponds to chapter 4 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Opposite Action
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Session 3 was devoted to thinking traps. Today we will be focusing on the role of behavior on emotion regulation and learn a popular behavioral technique to manage emotional urges. Before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.

### **Introducing the topic**

You will learn more about the term of “opposite action (Linehan, 2007), a skill used when we experience overwhelming emotions, and involves to consciously choose to act exactly in the opposite way of what your emotional urge is.

## Activity 1: Opposite Action

Make a brief introduction to the topic ([Susie Much, University of Oregon](#)):

*Each emotion comes with a related action urge. For example, when we are fearful, we may feel the urge to avoid or escape the source of that anxiety. Meanwhile, when we are sad, we may become passive, withdraw, or isolate ourselves, and when we are angry, we may become defensive or go on the attack.*

*Sometimes, our emotion and/or its intensity may be disproportionate to the situation we are facing. Opposite to Emotion Action is a technique for modulating **overwhelming/intense emotions**. It refers to the use of a behavior opposite to your emotional urge to turn down the volume on your emotion.*

Here are a few examples:

Emotion	Emotional Urge	Opposite Action
Feel extremely angry at a friend for cancelling dinner plans.	Yelling at them	Show kindness/explain in a polite manner
Feeling extremely anxious to make a public presentation	Avoid making the presentation/ try to find excuses	Make the presentation
Feeling extremely sad after breaking up with your partner	Social withdrawal/ alcohol use	Get active/ catch up with friends

The next step is to guide participants learn and practice a stepwise approach to use the opposite action skill. Use resources from [Free online CBT workbook- Part 8: Opposite Action, Behavioral Activation, and Exposure \(Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Los Angeles\)](#):

1. When you have a strong emotion, the first step is to identify the emotion we are experiencing. Check to see whether it's working for you or against you (whether this emotion and/or its intensity fits the situation).
2. Determine the urge associated with your emotion.
3. Engage fully in the exact opposite behavior of the emotional urge.

Additional resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDWn-cqKKrg>

## **Homework**

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 4.



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Schiraldi, G. R. (2017). *The resilience workbook: Essential skills to recover from stress, trauma, and adversity*. New Harbinger Publications.

Thomas, B. (2019). *Creative Coping Skills for Teens and Tweens: Activities for Self Care and Emotional Support Including Art, Yoga, and Mindfulness*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Mindfulness distress acceptance tutorial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obVT5PkbUI>

Thought diffusion meditation exercise:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h0J7XWFce0>

Mindfulness Emotional Acceptance exercise:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hw7rmdITCFs>

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## **THEMATIC AREA 2: INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

## **A few words about Interpersonal Skills training**

Social skills are essential for building and maintaining good relationships, collaborating with colleagues, assessing situations well. Undoubtedly, participants already master a lot of important social skills. The goal of the social skills bootcamp is to train more advanced interpersonal skills, such as blending non-verbal with verbal communication, assertiveness skills, teamwork, and negotiation/conflict management skills.

## **Verbal and non-verbal communication**

(Corresponds to chapter 5 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Group guidelines
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: How effectively do you communicate?
- Activity 2: What you don't say counts!
- Activity 3: I am listening!
- Homework

### **Group guidelines**

Participation in group trainings can be beneficial for participants, as they are expected to have the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge, exchange opinions and give feedback, as well as to cultivate interpersonal skills. To achieve this, it is necessary to create a safe environment for all members, which will be based on some commonly accepted ground rules such as the following:

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- **Treat shared information confidentially:** Try to keep discussions that occur in group or personal experiences shared by others confidential.
- **Attendance and Promptness:** Weekly attendance is expected. Notify your instructor in advance (when possible) if you must miss a class or need assistance with an assignment. Come on time for every class and try to be prepared (do homework assignments).
- **Active participation and privacy:** Use class time wisely. Participating in group discussions or activities is beneficial not only for you (personal development) but for the group as well (contribute to group work). However, if you are asked questions or asked to participate in an activity which makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to refuse participation.

### **Introducing the topic**

Communication is much more than 'talking'. It also includes facial expressions, body language, posture... This non-verbal communication is essential to understand, interpret and convey messages correctly. Through various exercises we show the importance of non-verbal communication.

### **Activity 1: How effectively do you communicate?**

We watch a scene from the [“A Thousand Words”, 2012 movie](#) (until min 1:10).

We instruct participants to pay special attention to the verbal and non-verbal cues that actors use in the interaction.

Then we facilitate a short discussion that help students to identify both verbal and non-verbal cues:

- What verbal cues did you identify?
- What was the role of verbal communication in this situation: was it enough?  
Does the person “talking” was communicating effectively?
- What non-verbal cues did you identify?
- How do they impact the message given? Does the person “not talking” was communicating effectively?
- What do you think went wrong in this situation?

In this session we will focus on the role of non-verbal communication and indirectly explore verbal communication.

Briefly explain the non-verbal communication cues and ask examples from participants for exemplifying each element.

From free SAGE chapter 6: Nonverbal Communication: Present table 6.3 [Types of nonverbal cues \(p.158\)](#)

## **Activity 2: What you don't say counts!**

Divide participants in pairs.

Each pair takes about 5 minutes to talk about their last holidays.

While they do the talk, you will instruct them to use specific non-verbal cues. For instance, make eye contact, cross your arms, etc.

Every 15-30s, use the different instructions:

- Make direct and unwavering eye contact.
- Look away from your partner.
- Start talking in a fast pace.
- Talk with low tempo, use pauses and use filler words (i.e., umm, so, uh, hmm... etc.).
- Hold your arms crossed/folded at their chest. (After 15-20 seconds).
- Lower your voice.
- Don't use any hand gestures and keep minimal facial expressions while listening.
- Nod in agreement or understanding to what your partner is saying.
- Speak at the same time, interrupting each other often.

\*Variations of the activity: In case you are running out of time, adjust the number of non-verbal cues in no specific order.



Discuss in the plenary:

- How did it feel to interact in these ways?
- What combinations were the most comfortable? The least comfortable? Why?
- How and when do you adapt your preferences based on circumstances, if at all?
- How might a lack of awareness of these styles be harmful?
- How could you incorporate this new insight into your everyday interactions with others? How about with those from a different cultural background?

Discussion points:

Highlight that effective communication requires both verbal and non-verbal cues, and that various people (and cultures) may have different preferences.

### **Activity 3: I am listening!**

Divide participants in pairs.

Ask them to think about a happy experience they had.

In the first part, one person will talk for 3 minutes straight without interruption sharing the happy experience, and the other person will actively listen to the speaker without interrupting. In the second part, the listener will have the opportunity to reflect back what they heard for 2 minutes. After these two steps, they will switch roles.

Instructions to person A (speaker):

*“As a speaker, your only job is to share your story. Try to notice if you make use of some non-verbal cues or purposely include them during your conversation (e.g., use of hands, eye contact, space, body language, tone of voice, etc.)”.*

Instruction to person B (listener):

*“As a listener, your only job is to listen carefully to the speaker without interruption and actively provide non-verbal cues that can inform the speaker he/she is being heard. In the second phase, you’ll have the opportunity to reflect what you heard. Avoid giving advice and interrupt with your similar experiences. That’s not the point! Remember maintaining good eye contact, lean slightly forward, reinforce the speaker by nodding, use facial expressions”.*

Discuss in the plenary:

- What did you learn from this activity?
- How was it to be listened and to listen?
- Which non-verbal cues helped you to feel you were being heard?
- Were there any difficulties?

Discussion points:

Key elements of active listening:

- The purpose is not to evaluate the message and give your opinion, but to pay attention on what’s being said.

- Nodding and using words and phrases such as “very good”, “yes”, “indeed”, “I understand”, “uh huh”.
- Paraphrasing. Saying in your own words what someone else said: “What I’m hearing you say is ...” “In other words, ...” “So basically, how you felt was...” “Let me understand; what was going on for you was ...”
- Clarifying: asking questions until you understand the picture better
- Acknowledging: Let the other person know that you heard his or her feelings and wants. For example, “I hear that you are exhausted from a hard day and want to spend an hour before dinner taking a nap.”
- Attuning your facial expressions with what’s being said
- Keep eye contact
- Keep an open posture
- Avoid environmental distractors

## Homework

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 5.

## **Assertiveness**

(Corresponds to chapter 6 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: What makes communication ineffective?
- Activity 2: Recognizing communication styles.
- Activity 3: The I statement
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Previous session was devoted to nonverbal communication. Today we will be focusing on the role of behavior on communication styles and specifically on how to be more assertive. Before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.

## **Introducing the topic**

In interactions with others, you don't want to come across as passive, nor as aggressive. Asserting yourself is important to keep your relationships, such as friendships and work relationships, healthy. In this session we try to practice your assertiveness through specific techniques.

### **Activity 1: What makes communication ineffective?**

Invite participants to watch the following [video](#):

Discuss in the plenary:

- What do you think makes communication ineffective in this situation?

Discussion points:

- Different communication styles
- Highlight the importance of aligning verbal message with non-verbal behavior, so you can give a clear message.

### **Activity 2: Recognizing communication styles**

Instruct participants to make 3 groups.

Each group will work on a specific scenario (use handout from workbook-chapter 6).

Each group will decide who will do the role-play of the situation in front of the class.

Discuss in the plenary:

- How would you describe the communication style for each scenario? Which are their main differences?
- How useful each style is for effective communication and relationship maintenance?

Discussion points:

Briefly present [The Four Basic Styles of Communication](#).

### Activity 3: The I statement

The purpose of this activity is to help participant learn a simple and useful technique for assertive communication.

Use the following resource to explain and demonstrate the steps of the “[I statement](#)”

1. “When you\_\_\_\_\_”
- 2 “I feel or I think \_\_\_\_\_”
4. “Because\_\_\_\_\_”
4. “I would prefer that\_\_\_\_\_”

Invite participants to practice the I statement steps in the following [examples](#):

*“I hate when you yell at the kids.”*

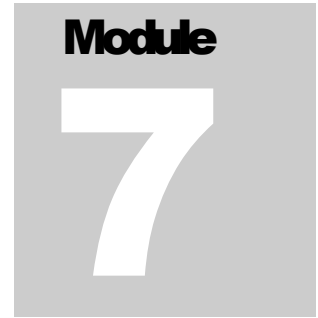
*“It’s rude of you to be late all the time. You screw up everyone’s schedule.”*

*“The salaries in this department are totally inequitable and discriminatory.”*

*“You never listen to anyone. In fact you are not listening to me now and you don’t actually care.”*

## Homework

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 6.



## **Teamwork**

(Corresponds to chapter 7 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Opposite Action
- Activity 2: The best possible team
- Activity 3: Building a bridge
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Last session was devoted to assertive communication. Today we will be focusing on teamwork and how to become team players. Before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.



## **Introducing the topic**

“Teamwork makes the dream work.” Effectively collaborating with others is vital to achieve the best possible results. Although your academic studies are often based on individual performance, teamwork is the norm in the professional field. In this session we think about what the ideal team looks like, and we reflect on how we can be a good teammate.

### **Activity 1: How could teamwork lead to better solutions?**

Discuss with students the importance of teamwork (Trigger questions):

- What are some complex problems in our world today? (e.g., hunger, poverty, climate change, war conflicts)
- How could teamwork lead to better solutions?

Discussion points:

- Advantages of teamwork:
  - Broadens what individuals can do (a good team supports and enhances the skills and learning).
  - Larger number of perspectives.
  - Efficiency (task allocation, peer support).
- Precondition: The team is working well-all its members are aware of their parts in the overall mission and try to make sure that others' work isn't wasted because of them.

## **Activity 2: The best possible team**

The Best Possible Self exercise (adapted from King, 2001; Loveday, Lovell, & Jones, 2018) first invites team members to envision an ideal version of the team individually, and subsequently, team members share their visions to find common aspirations and differences in views. Finally, the team works together to create one best possible team scenario based on the information gathered in the prior steps.

Instructions:

1. Imagine your best possible team. Write about your team at its best possible 'self.' Imagine your team functioning at its optimal level, with all of its members performing to the best of their abilities and the team achieving all of the set goals make. You will write for 10 minutes about this best possible team (be realistic) While writing, do not worry about grammar or punctuation; rather, focus on expressing all thoughts, feelings, and emotions that show up for you.
2. Share individual visions with the group: how does your best possible team looks like? Students can write down their ideas.
3. Discuss similarities and differences in students' visions.
4. Create a new best possible team
5. Define core values of the new ideal team.

Some examples: grow mindset, trust, passion, support, empathy, collaboration, optimism, realistic, respect, humor, connection, caring.

Discussion points:

- What makes teams effective?
- Common characteristics of effective teams:
  - A team has a clear purpose: Team members understand why the team exists and share in the creation and accomplishment of team goals.
  - Team members understand the team process and priorities: The team is clear on what needs to be done next, by whom, and by when. Team members understand that the accumulation of completed tasks leads to the effective and successful achievement of their final goal.
  - Team members know their roles: Team members know and carry out their roles for getting their tasks completed and they seek assistance from and give assistance to others, as required.
  - Team members have a collaborative and collective commitment: Collaboration among team members, with high levels of commitment, is achieved through shared decision making in a climate of trust created by open and honest communication and by consistent and respectful behavior. Team norms for working together are established and regarded as standards for every team member.
  - Conflicts and disagreements are openly resolved: Conflicts and disagreements are considered important to team decision making

and personal growth. Reasons for conflicts and disagreements are examined and resolutions are sought. Some disagreements cannot be resolved, resulting in the need for compromises that do not block the team's efforts.

- Constructive criticism and encouragement are extended to team members: Criticism is never directed at team members but is focused on ways of removing obstacles and maintaining high performance standards. All members are consistently supported and encouraged as a way of maintaining high levels of motivation.
- Present the guidelines for Creating Effective Groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2000):
  - Establish clear, operational, relevant group goals that create positive interdependence and commitment
  - Establish effective two-way communication
  - Ensure that leadership and participation are distributed among all members
  - Ensure use of power is distributed among members
  - Match method of decision making with availability of time & resources, size & seriousness of decision and amount of commitment needed
  - Encourage structured controversies to allow views & disagreements...to create quality and creative decisions.

- Ensure members face their conflicts of interest...and resolve them constructively.
- Which other qualities/ skills can contribute to teamwork? (e.g., responsible, organized, creative, dependable, patient, careful, calm, outgoing, enthusiastic, polite, persuasive, confident, proactive)
- Think about working on a team—such as with a group project, a team sport, or the school play. Do you agree or disagree with the statement, “Differences are more valuable than similarities”? Explain your thinking.

### **Activity 3: Building a bridge**

Participants will be split into two sub-teams and must work together to create a complete bridge with each team building half a bridge each. At the end of the time, they need to put their-half bridges together to create a unified one.

\*Materials required:

Anything for building the bridges: newspapers, Lego, toy bricks, paper, etc.

Tape, pens, tape measure, tarpaulin, or sheet. Provide each team with a bag of materials. Ensure that each bag contains exactly the same items. Also provide each team with paper, pens, and a tape measure.

Give them 30 minutes for building their half-bridge and ten more minutes to merge them into one.

### Discussion points:

- What did the team focus on first?
- What did you find most difficult about his challenge? How did you overcome that?
- What did you do well? How did you decide on that method?
- Who was responsible for communicating the design between the teams? If you had more than one person, did you find this difficult?
- Did you select a leader? Why was leadership important during the task?
- How did you work out the key responsibilities for the challenge? Did you delegate based on strengths and weaknesses?
- Did you miscommunicate at any point during the challenge? How did you get back on track?
- What surprised you most about the activity? What can you take away?

### Homework

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 7.

## **Influencing Others**

(Corresponds to chapter 8 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Cooking Up a Deal
- Activity 2: Internship negotiation
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Session 3 was devoted to teamwork. Today we will be focusing on another advanced skill, the ability to manage conflict and negotiate in a successful manner. Before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.

## **Introducing the topic**

In everyday life you don't get everything you want on a golden plate. Often you will try to obtain material and non-material things through others in order to be happy in life. Defending your own interests in an effective way means being able to properly assess the interests of yourself and others and finding a creative balance that can lead to a win-win situation. In this session we practice your negotiation skills.

### **Activity 1: Cooking Up a Deal**

This activity is an adaptation from the E+ program ELIT-in [Training Module NEGOTIATION](#).

We instruct the participants to watch the two videos below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=898OUCyBulM>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K50y\\_pgS-IE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K50y_pgS-IE)

Discussion points:

- Is there any difference between the two scenes? If yes, how would you explain what is different?
- How often do you negotiate in your everyday life activities?
- Do you always use the same method of negotiation?
- What do you look for in every negotiation you partake?
- What do you think are the key elements of every negotiation?

The main goal of the exercise is to help students brainstorm on what does it mean “to negotiate”?



- Each one of us is different and we have a unique view of things.
- This means that there will be times when we will have differences between ourselves and others.
- Differences cannot be avoided. Intense conflicts can, however.

### **Activity 2: Internship negotiation**

This activity is an adaption of the [“Salary Negotiation” activity](#) (Wesner, & Smith, 2019):

Arrange students in pairs: supervisor and applicant. If an odd number of students exists, two students can serve as the employers while the third student acts as the applicant. Alternatively, the instructor can stand in as needed.

Ask students to engage in negotiation role-play and come to an agreement to their internship benefits and tasks. Depending on class size, student pairs may need to leave the classroom so that they can hear one another during the role-play.

Ask students arriving at a mutually agreeable solution to write a summary of the agreement addressing the following: Benefits, tasks, schedule and Unanticipated Benefits (any benefits, compensation, or other perk that the student capitalized on but did not envision during planning).

#### ***Phase 1.***

Students will work individually on a pre-negotiation plan (use worksheet from chapter 8)

#### ***Phase 2.***

1. Students will play-role the situation (5 min). Important they make use of the 4 negotiation steps: preparation, discussion, proposal-counter proposal, agreement.
2. Through whole-class discussion, debrief the negotiation process, focusing on the (un)effectiveness of chosen strategies used by students (10 min).

- How well did your pre-negotiation plan prepare you for the role-play?
- What would you do differently when negotiating your internship?
- What strategies were used effectively or ineffectively to move toward an agreement?
- What issues arose during the negotiation? How were these issues managed?
- How successfully were emotions and nonverbal cues managed and goodwill developed?

### ***Phase 3.***

After discussing what things, they could have done differently (improve or get what they wanted), allow students to rehearse again the negotiation role-play (5 min).

Through whole-class discussion, debrief the negotiation process, focusing on the (un)effectiveness of chosen strategies used by students:

- How and why did you adjust your strategy during the role-play?
- What strategies were used effectively or ineffectively to move toward an agreement?
- What issues arose during the negotiation? How were these issues managed?

Discussion points (from Wesner, & Smith, 2019):

[p.18] Encourage students to discuss the strategies that their partners used successfully or unsuccessfully and to provide feedback to others.

[p.18-19] All successful negotiations and interpersonal interactions require the ability to adapt to new information and the behavior of others. Effective negotiators also need to maintain goodwill with their partner(s) during a negotiation so that they can maintain positive reputations and ensure productive future interactions.

Present [“The Blind men and the elephant” metaphor](#) (Daigneault, 2013):

[p.83]: *“According to Indian folklore, there were once six blind men who had heard of the animal called the elephant but did not know what one was like. To satisfy their curiosity, they decided one day to use their sense of touch to determine the creature’s appearance. Matters became confusing, however, when each man touched a different part of the elephant and became convinced that he alone understood its true nature. “The elephant is very like a snake!” proclaimed the man who had touched its trunk. The fellow who had touched its side, however, declared the elephant to be “nothing but a wall,” whereas the man who touched the creature’s tusk claimed that the elephant was “like a spear,” and so on. It is no wonder, then, that the six men could not agree on the true appearance of the elephant (Saxe, 1936). (Bosson et al 2000: 631)”-*

Humans tend to claim absolute truth based on their limited, subjective experience

as they ignore other people's limited, subjective experiences which may be equally true. This is a principle that is quite relevant with the negotiation process.

### **Activity 3: The Win-Win Waltz**

This activity was retrieved from Susan's Heitler article: [Solve Tough Dilemmas With the Win-Win Waltz](#).

1. Arrange students in pairs
2. You are facing the following situation:
  - a. [Scenario](#) (from [positivepsychology.com](#)): Your partner likes to talk on and on, sharing every detail of what s/he has done at work. You like some quiet time after dinner
3. Use the [Brainstorming for Synergy](#) worksheet (from [positivepsychology.com](#)) to encourage bouncing ideas off each other until the couple finds a win-win for both partners. Often, resolutions to conflict and disagreement feel like a win to both parties – this is a win-win situation. Remember, your goal is for mutual satisfaction. Follow the next steps to reach an agreement:
  - a. What is the disagreement about:
  - b. A win for partner one is that (Partner two has to write it down):
  - c. A win for partner two is that (Partner one has to write it down):

- d. Begin listing thoughts and ideas—they don't need to be fully formed yet—that could resolve the situation. Take turns, writing them and drawing them, and connecting them if it helps (Brainstorming ideas):
- e. Now, together reflect on each idea non-judgmentally. Write down only those ideas (expand on them if needed) that lead to a win-win situation.

Discussion points:

- Did you reach to a mutual agreement?
- How did you feel about that?
- Which elements were helpful and which of them were not?

## Homework

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 8.

## References

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- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (2000). *Cooperative learning*. Minneapolis, MN, 88.
- King, L. A. (2001). The health benefits of writing about life goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27(7), 798-807.
- Loveday, P. M., Lovell, G. P., & Jones, C. M. (2018). The best possible selves intervention: A review of the literature to evaluate efficacy and guide future research. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 19(2), 607-628.
- Wesner, B. S., & Smith, A. B. (2019). Salary negotiation: A role-play exercise to prepare for salary negotiation. *Management Teaching Review*, 4(1), 14-26.

## Additional Reading- Resources

- McKay, M., Davis, M., & Fanning, P. (2009). *Messages: The communication skills book*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Paterson, R. J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. New Harbinger Publications.

## [Communication in the Real World: An Introduction to Communication Studies](#)

[Author removed at request of original publisher].

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**THEMATIC AREA 3: RESILIENCE AND FLEXIBILITY**

## **A few words about Resilience and Flexibility Skills training**

Life is accompanied by a lot of stress, pressure, and expectations. You are expected to perform well as a student, make something of life, exercise enough, eat healthy, maintain your social contacts, feel good about yourself... These are a lot of balls to keep in the air, and no doubt you will soon or drop a ball. Resilience is the ability to "bounce back" after a setback. The goal of the 'resilience' bootcamp is to provide you with tools and techniques to be more resilient in life, specifically, on how to: live a valued life, to put values in action (strengths), to increase the occurrence of experiencing positive emotions, and to strengthen self-compassion and foster a sense of self-acceptance.

**Note to instructors:** Additional modules on **stress management and flexible thinking** (see Emotion Regulation training) can be added to enrich this training.



## **Signature Values and Strengths**

(Corresponds to chapter 9 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Group guidelines
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Identifying values: A first glance
- Activity 2: Identifying values: Digging a bit deeper
- Activity 3: Living your strengths
- Activity 4: Cultivating your signature strengths
- Homework

### **Group guidelines**

Participation in group trainings can be beneficial for participants, as they are expected to have the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge, exchange opinions and give feedback, as well as to cultivate interpersonal skills. To achieve

this, it is necessary to create a safe environment for all members, which will be based on some commonly accepted ground rules such as the following:

- **Be respectful:** Despite different perspectives or opinions try to respect each other's ideas. Try not to interrupt others while they talk, and practice good listening skills. Be honest with each other, while you show respect and do not humiliate, haze, or abuse others in any way. Deal with issues constructively.
- **Treat shared information confidentially:** Try to keep discussions that occur in group or personal experiences shared by others confidential.
- **Attendance and Promptness:** Weekly attendance is expected. Notify your instructor in advance (when possible) if you must miss a class or need assistance with an assignment. Come on time for every class and try to be prepared (do homework assignments).
- **Active participation and privacy:** Use class time wisely. Participating in group discussions or activities is beneficial not only for you (personal development) but for the group as well (contribute to group work). However, if you are asked questions or asked to participate in an activity which makes you feel uncomfortable, you have the right to refuse participation.

## **Introducing the topic**

What helps to flourish and thrive in life is discovering and trusting your own values and strengths. What you find important for a happy life can be a compass to guide yourself in difficult times. When adversity arises, your signature strengths, the things you are naturally good at, can help you to overcome difficulties. In this session we help you find out what is really important to you in life, where you want to go and which of your signature strengths can help with that.

### **Activity 1: Identifying values: A first glance**

Present to the participants the following scenario:

*“Tomorrow, time will stand still for one day...”*

- What do you picture yourself doing?
- What will you do?
- Where will you go?
- Who will you spend it with?
- How will you feel?

Discussion points:

Discuss with participants how these activities/events... reflect their values:

See definition of [values](#) (from Association for Contextual Behavioral Science):

- who they would like to be

- how they would like their lives to be
- how they would like to behave

You can help participants to align their responses into specific aspects of their life: e.g. + see separate list

- Spirituality
- Growth & learning
- Partner & love
- Family & friends
- Community
- Environment
- Fun & recreation
- Health, wellbeing & fitness
- Work & career, success, achievement
- Money & finance
- Comfort, security
- Peace, justice & kindness
- Honesty & integrity

## **Activity 2: Identifying values: Digging a bit deeper**

Invite participants to:

Step 1: Identify and write down 3-6 people who are important role models or valued connections for them.

Step 2: Think of the values they embody. For example, their list might include: “my grandfather for his acceptance and love,” “my wife for her honesty,” “my colleague for his listening skills,” and “my friend for his loyalty,” to name a few.

Share with participants a list of values ([Harris, 2010](#)) to help on identifying them.

Discussion points:

- Discuss with participants how these examples reflect their values as well.

Then invite participants to write the values they defined in the previous 2 exercises in the grid ([Bull's Eye](#)), and indicate for each to which extent these values are represented in their lives.

Discussion points:

- Which values are well represented, and which ones are not?
- Which ones would they like to include more in their lives?
- Which values have priority at this moment?

That, although values are often assumed to be pretty stable, the importance of some values changes throughout the life span: some values matter more now they are students, but as a working person, a mother, a grandmother... perceptions of values may change somewhat

Discuss in the plenary

Why are values important? Some probing questions to let the students come up with the answers:

- They help us to set goals.

Values make decisions easier.

Why did you choose to study [specific field]?

- They help when we lack motivation.

Our values help us during challenges.

You find a course very difficult. What helps you to make it through? What motivates you?

- They enrich and give meaning & fulfilment to our lives.

### **Activity 3: Living your strengths**

Begin the activity with a group discussion:

- What can help us to achieve our value-based goals, motivation, fulfilment?
- What positive words have others used to describe you?
- What compliments have others given you?

After the discussion, invite participants to think about when:

- Someone commented on something they did very well
- They did something that made them feel energized and fulfilled
- They did something well and it came to them naturally, without effort

Instruct participants to take a few minutes to fill the [VIA survey](#) (Seligman, Park, & Peterson, 2004; Park, & Peterson, 2009) to identify their natural/signature strengths.

Discussion point:

\*Natural/signature strengths don't only refer to what we are good at, but also to what comes naturally, what we like to do and fulfills us.

#### **Activity 4: Cultivating your signature strengths**

Invite participants to think about a future adventure they want to take on.

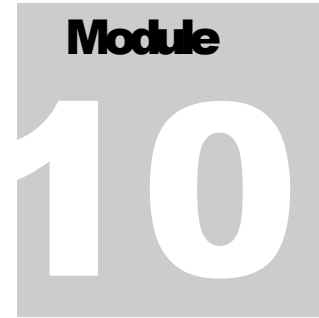
- Something they enjoyed doing in the past, but no longer do at this time.
- Something they always wanted to learn if they had the opportunity.
- A current hobby or interest that they would like to take further.

Then discuss the following questions:

- How does this goal relate to their values?
- How will their signature strengths help them to achieve this goal?

#### **Homework**

✍ See participants workbook, chapter 9.



## **Positive Emotions**

(Corresponds to chapter 10 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: Choose a photo
- Activity 2: WOW moments
- Activity 3: All I want to say
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Previous session was devoted to values in action. Today we will be focusing on positive emotions and learn some techniques to help us increase their occurrence. Before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.



## **Introducing the topic**

Positive emotions have the ability to create an upward spiral of health and well-being. This spiral can help you to better deal with stress and negative emotions, and to be more positive in life. In this session we show how you can look for positive emotions in a more active way. It is important to note that despite we use the distinction ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions, there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ emotions. All emotions can be helpful, and they have evolved to serve a purpose (Honeybourne, 2019).

‘Negative emotions’ such as fear, anger, and disgust are important for our survival, while the cultivation of positive emotions can increase satisfaction with life, overall wellbeing and bring many benefits like opportunities for personal growth, and further positive emotions (Fredrickson’s ‘broaden and build’ theory, 2004).

### **Activity 1: Choose a photo**

This activity is an adaptation of mindful photography activity ([Kurtz, & Lyubomirsky, 2013](#)) and [5 pictures: good things this vacation](#) (from Marc Helgesen, [www.ELTandHappiness.com](http://www.ELTandHappiness.com)).

Give participants the following instructions:

- Have a look to their phone photo library.
- Choose a photo representing a pleasant experience of their life (a moment that it is not highly personal).

Discussion points:

- What makes that moment, special for them?
- What kind of positive feelings does it bring back to their memory?
- Why is this photo meaningful for them?
- \*O'Hanlon, & Bertolino, (2012):
  - Being in an automatic pilot=not being present in life experiences they are having.
  - detrimental for happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being.

### **Activity 2: WOW moments (Awe experience)**

This activity is an adaptation of Pictures of Awe (Passmore, & Holder, 2017) and memories of Awe (Rudd, Vohs, & Aaker, 2012).

\*Additional resources:

<https://thethrivecenter.org/finding-awe-in-uncertain-times/>

[Four Awe-Inspiring Activities | Greater Good \(berkeley.edu\)](#)

Instructions to participants:

- Take a few minutes to think about a time in their past when they experienced goose bumps while being in the presence of something vast that transcends their understanding of the world. A moment that made them aware of the vastness of the world. A moment that made them feel smaller as a being of

this world. Any experience that made them feel like, “*Wow! The world is big and I feel fear and/ or wonder as I recognize that!*”

- Example: when you look up at the stars at night and feel how vast and beautiful the universe is or after being exposed to a new idea or brilliant theory.
- Invite the participants to describe in detail their own experience a) what the source of this experience was, b) the specific feelings it made them feel, as well as c) the way it has changed their perspective of the world.

\*Variations of the activity: In case that any of the participants are having difficulty in recalling such a memory, provide them assistance

- by giving them access to stimuli such as [videos](#) or songs
- guide them on how to search on the internet or in their library for relevant videos, pictures, songs, movies etc.
- Inspiration: Any person who inspired you when you learned about their story? Any personal story/biography that you drew inspiration from?

Discussion points:

- When was the last time they felt in awe or wonder of something?
- What are the key components of Awe experiences? (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Allen, 2008):

- “perceived vastness” (observing something literally physically large, being in the presence of someone with immense prestige or being presented with a complex idea).
  - “need for accommodation” (attempt to change the mental structures that we use to understand the world).
  - Self-transcendent state where they focus less on themselves and feel more a part of a larger whole ([The Science of Awe Archives - John Templeton Foundation](#)).
- What are the benefits of having Awe experiences? (Chen, & Mongrain, 2020):
    - Associated with other positive concepts that are linked to life satisfaction and better health outcomes: Humility, connectedness to other people and to humanity as a whole, gratitude for experiencing these moments/ being alive, compassion, optimism, prosociality etc.

### **Activity 3: All I want to say is...**

Briefly introduce the activity:

One of the most significant contributors to well-being is the expression of gratitude. There are many ways to let others know that we appreciate them and what they do for us, others, our communities, and the world around us.

The following activity is an [adaptation](#) of an evidence-based technique that involves a specific way that people can show gratitude through the expressive writing (Toepfer, & Walker, 2009; Toepfer, Cichy, & Peters, 2012).

Give instructions to participants (retrieved from [Greater Good in Action, Berkely University of California](#)):

- *Call to mind someone who did something for you for which you are extremely grateful but to whom you never expressed your deep gratitude. This could be a relative, friend, teacher, or colleague. Try to pick someone who is still alive and could meet you face-to-face in the next week. It may be most helpful to select a person or act that you haven't thought about for a while—something that isn't always on your mind.*
- *Now, write a letter to one of these people, guided by the following steps.*
- *Write as though you are addressing this person directly (“Dear \_\_\_\_\_”).*
- *Don't worry about grammar or spelling.*
- *Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person, and how this person's behavior affected your life. Try to be as concrete as possible.*
- *Describe what you are doing in your life now and how you often remember their efforts.*
- *Try to keep your letter to roughly one page (around 300 words).*

Discussion points

- What was it like for them to write the note?
- How did they feel?

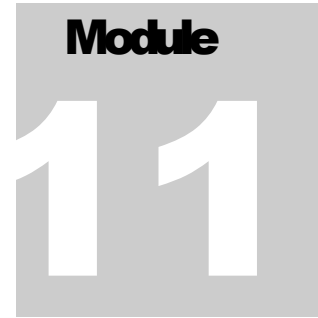
- What is it like to know that they have just expressed something positive to someone else?
- What could they do to on a more regular basis to let others know how much you appreciate them? How might that also benefit them?
- Do they plan to deliver this letter in person?

\*Variations of the activity:

If there are participants showing difficulty in expressing their self in written form, help them to adjust the note in a relevant form to them e.g. “post-it” notes, or use artwork for this exercise.

## **Homework**

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 10.



## **Self-Compassion**

(Corresponds to chapter 11 of the workbook)

### **Outline**

- Review and comment on homework adherence
- Introducing the topic
- Activity 1: What is self-compassion
- Activity 2: Compassionate sheet work
- Activity 3: Soften perfectionism plan
- Homework

### **Review Homework**

Session 2 was devoted to positive emotions. Today we will be focusing on the role of self-compassion and learn on how to cultivate a healthier way to relate oneself. Before we do, I'd like to check in on your experience with some of the recommendations from last session.

## **Introducing the topic**

We are all only human. Nothing and nobody is perfect. Learning goes by trial and error. Everyone makes mistakes and bad decisions in life, and that's completely normal. If this happens to you, you can choose to be very critical and strict with yourself, or you can choose to show self-kindness. The latter will contribute to your self-development in a more constructive way. In this session we practice techniques to achieve self-compassion. Self-compassion as an alternative to self-criticism (Biber, & Ellis, 2019). It involves responding in the same supportive and understanding way you would with a good friend when you have a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself.

### **Activity 1: What is self-compassion**

Begin this activity by presenting this [video](#) to participants.

Additional videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpGrAQxYfVk&list=RDLV-kfUE41-JFw&index=5>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufK-0qANOd8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kfUE41-JFw>

Discussion points:

- After watching the video, what do they think about it?
- How do they feel about being friend with themselves?

Briefly explain the components of self-compassion (Kristin Neff, 2003):



- Self-kindness.
- Common humanity or connectedness.
- Mindfulness.

## **Activity 2: Compassionate worksheet**

Instructions to participants:

- To think of something that has recently made them to criticize themselves.  
To be specific and select daily/routine event.
- To try to write down the following sentences:
  - A self-judgmental thought
    - For example, “I should have done a better job during the presentation, I am a failure”. “I hate the fact that you’re such a whimp and aren’t self-assertive.”
    - To try to imagine their self, expressing this thought. Do they express worry, angry, self-righteous, exasperated? What their body posture is like? Strong, rigid, upright? The tone?
  - To try to verbalize how they feel, as a response to that thought
    - For example, “I feel so hurt by you” or “I feel so unsupported” or “I feel really vulnerable and sad”. Again, to notice the tone of their voice? Is it sad, discouraged, childlike, scared, helpless? What is their body posture like? Are they slumped, downward facing, frowning?

- The perspective of a supportive friend. What would a supportive friend say to the judgmental part?
  - For example, “I know you made a mean comment to your friend and that you feel bad about it. You thought it might feel good to get that off your chest, but you just felt worse after” or, “I see that you’re really scared, and you’re trying to help me so I don’t mess up.”
  - What does the supportive self say to the criticized part of themselves? For example, “It must be incredibly difficult to hear such harsh judgment day after day. I see that you’re really hurting” or “All you want is to be accepted for who you are” or “I know you feel you are a bad person for reacting that way”. Try to relax, letting your heart soften and open.
- Then to try to reframe their critical voice more compassionately. What would a supportive friend tell in this situation?
  - For example, “I know you feel really bad about being mean to your friend. You were not in the best situation. Why don’t you call your friend and apologize? It will feel good to make up with her” or “I know you feel really bad because the presentation did you went as you expected. You did the best you could. Tell me what did you like and what things you could do better next time?”

## Discussion points

- How did it feel to be a supportive friend with themselves?
- What were the struggles?
- Do they have any new insights into how they treat themselves?
- Did they find new ways of thinking about the situation that are more productive and supportive?

## Activity 3: Soften perfectionism plan

Intro to the activity:

Perfectionism is often seen as a positive characteristic for success and goal achievement. However, it can lead us to harsh thoughts or behaviors that can make it difficult to achieve goals (Flett, Heisel, & Hewitt, 2014).

This activity consists of four phases/steps:

1. Invite participants to brainstorm:

- How does perfectionism look like?
  - Examples: Fear of making mistakes, fear of failure, worry about what others think, extreme behavior (e.g., non-stop exercising, or extreme dieting), unrealistic expectation
  - \*Highlight that to some degree, we all engage in perfectionism or in certain areas of our life.

2. Invite participants to take some time to reflect on the standards they set for themselves and use the [table](#) (Dr. Jeremy Sutton) to write down activities of their daily life that trigger their perfectionism.
  - a. Guide participant to reflect on unrealistically high and inflexible standards they set in different areas of their life. For example, “I must obtain only high grades at school” “I should be able to run 10 kilometers”, “I should be able to run a marathon next week”, “I should not make mistakes”.
3. After completing the table, we instruct participants to choose **one area** of perfectionism that they would like to work on first.
  - a. To think about a more realistic standard. What would other people consider to be a healthy high standard that participants could work towards?
  - b. Identify the perfectionist behavior they wish to work on. What are possible behaviors that contribute to maintain this unrelenting high standard? For example, postpone decision making, overcompensating, reassurance seeking from others, excessive organizing, avoidance etc.
  - c. Identify a specific goal towards reducing this perfectionist behavior. This goal should involve the perfectionism behavior they identified above. Use the following resources from TRIO outreach programs, UC San Diego to guide participants for setting [SMART goals](#).

- d. To write down a compassionate thought they could tell themselves when facing this perfectionist behavior.

#### 4. Discussion in plenary

Discussion points:

- Any prominent areas of expressing perfectionism? How do they do to cope with it?
- What are the negative consequences of setting high demanding standards?
- What is the difference between striving for excellence and perfectionism?
  - Mistakes are inevitable. See them as opportunities to learn.
  - Flexible thinking vs. all or nothing thinking
  - Self-care and self-compassion vs. self-criticism.

#### **Homework**

- ✎ See participants workbook, chapter 11.

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