



EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE LITERACY TOOLKIT



EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE LITERACY TOOLKIT

Let's Chat is a specialist package of mental health and wellbeing support developed for the further education community.

Its resources and toolkits will help staff and students to look after their mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience so they can move forward and cope with the different challenges we face today.

It has been created with funding from the Department for Education (DfE) via the college collaboration fund as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the FE community.

If you're looking to support your staff and students through these challenging times, visit the Let's Chat website for a number of resources that will help you:

- Support one to one conversations with staff and students.
- Develop staff as part of your CPD helping create a positive culture where talking about mental health and wellbeing is the norm.
- Enhance your tutorial and PSD sessions.
- Equip your staff and students with the awareness, knowledge and tools to look after their own mental health and wellbeing and be better able to support others.



www.letschatwellbeing.co.uk

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EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE LITERACY TOOLKIT

SECTION ONE



SECTION ONE: What are Emotions?

Ekman's Universal 6

BASIC EMOTIONS

During the 1970s, the psychologist Paul Ekman identified six basic emotions that he suggested were universally experienced in every human culture. The emotions he identified were happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger.

These have been described as hardwired, neural pathways within the brain that can trigger behaviours with a high survival value.

He later expanded this list of basic emotions to include such things as pride, shame, embarrassment, and excitement.



Fig 1:
Ekman's Universal
Emotion Wheel
(Ekman., P 1972)

PRACTICAL TOOL

Try the emotion recognising exercises online here:

[Are There Universal Facial Expressions? - Paul Ekman Group](#)



SECTION ONE: What are Emotions?

Ekman's Universal 6

HAPPINESS

Of all the different types of identified emotions, happiness tends to be the one that we as humans strive for the most. Happiness can be defined as an enjoyable emotional state that is typified by feelings of contentment, joy, gratification, satisfaction, and experiencing optimal levels of our own individual well-being. Happiness can be roughly defined by cultural values and can be individual to us all.

SADNESS

Sadness is another category of emotion often defined as a transient emotional state typified by feelings of disappointment, hopelessness, disinterest, and low mood.

Like other identified emotions, sadness is something that everybody experiences from time to time and can be context dependent. On some occasions, our context dictates that we will feel sad for a certain period. In some cases, people can experience prolonged and severe periods of sadness that can turn into depressive disorders (this is highly context dependent). Sadness can be expressed in several ways including the following:

- Crying (Emotional).
- Changes in mood (Affective).
- Lethargy and Fatigue (Behavioural /Physical).
- Quietness (Behavioural).
- Withdrawal from other people and connections (Behavioural).

FEAR

Fear is a powerful and primitive emotion that can also play an important role in survival. When you face some sort of danger and experience fear, you go through what is known as the "Fight or Flight" Response (Cannon., W-B. 1915).

Your muscles can become tense, your heart rate and respiration increase, and your mind becomes more alert, priming your body to either run from the danger or stand and fight. These are physiological mechanisms that can also be felt at the start of an anxiety attack. It's important to maintain awareness and familiarity of our own individual fight/flight mechanism and developing this self-awareness can encourage us to identify our primitive response. If we can understand our own mechanisms, it can be a useful tool in the strategies to decrease levels of anxiety and control our reaction to many emotions.

This response helps ensure that you are prepared to effectively deal with threats in your personal environment. It is important to note that Fear can trigger the behavioural emotion of Anger and this can be seen often in young people in their educational setting. In terms of emotional activation, the body can often remember what the mind cannot, especially in cases of developmental trauma. Psychological associations are made most of the time in our day to day lives and we are often not aware of them.

SECTION ONE: What are Emotions?

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We may meet something that informs the brain we are in danger (a trigger) and we may respond with an emotional outburst without even knowing exactly why. Quite often, individuals may not be aware of their triggers or be able to explain them verbally.

Expressions of this type of emotion can include (but are not limited to):

- **Facial expressions:** such as widening the eyes and pulling back the chin.
- **Body language:** attempts to hide or flee from the threat (everybody has a different version of what is "safe" according to our individual regulatory frameworks). Students in education may not view the environment as safe just because we as academics know it is.
- **Physiological reactions:** such as rapid breathing and heartbeat or expressions of anger.

DISGUST

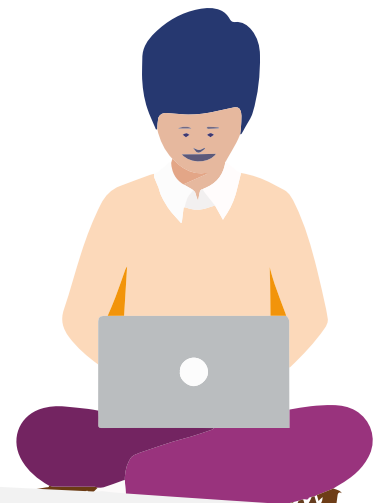
Disgust is another of the original six basic emotions described by Eckman (1979). Disgust can be displayed in various ways including:

- **Body language:** turning away physically from the object of disgust.
- **Physical reactions:** such as vomiting or retching.
- **Facial expressions:** such as wrinkling the nose and curling the upper lip.

This sense of repulsion can originate from a variety of things, including an unpleasant taste, sight, or smell. Researchers suggest that this emotion evolved as a reaction to foods that might be harmful or fatal to us. When people smell or taste foods that have gone bad, for example, disgust is a typical reaction.

ANGER

Anger can be a particularly powerful emotion characterised by feelings of hostility, agitation, frustration, and antagonism towards others. Like fear, anger can play a part in your body's fight or flight response. Anger is central in an emotionally literate toolkit as it is a complex emotion, not necessarily negative as many may believe. Anger can be tied up with feelings of grief and fear and unless we teach self-awareness, it is an easy mistake to assume a person is just "angry". Anger is more of a primitive response sometimes (not always) than a deliberate action. The wheel of emotions below demonstrates how complex the spectrum of anger can be.



SECTION ONE: What are Emotions?

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When a threat produces feelings of anger, you may be inclined to fend off the danger and protect yourself. Anger is often displayed through:

- **Facial expressions:** such as frowning or glaring.
- **Body language:** such as taking a strong stance or turning away.
- **Tone of voice:** such as speaking gruffly or yelling.
- **Physiological responses:** such as sweating or turning red.
- **Aggressive behaviours:** such as hitting, kicking, or throwing objects.

While anger is often thought of as a negative emotion, it can sometimes be useful to us as individuals. It can be constructive in helping clarify your needs in a relationship, and it can also motivate you to act and explore solutions to things that are bothering you.

Anger can become a problem, however, when it is excessive or expressed in ways that are unhealthy, dangerous, or harmful to others. Uncontrolled anger can quickly turn to aggression, abuse, or violence. This is one of the reasons in which Emotional Literacy skills and vocabulary are so important. They allow us to learn self-awareness of our emotions and how they are connected to our behaviour, thus allowing us to modify inappropriate or dangerous responses. This is quite a skill for some people and can take a while to master.

This type of emotion can have both mental and physical consequences. Unchecked anger can make it difficult

to make rational decisions and can even have an impact on your physical health. Emotional Literacy teaches humans to attempt to put a neutral breathing space between the emotion and the action; allowing us to choose the response carefully rather than being completely reactive towards situations.

Emotional Literacy additionally encourages us not to label our emotions as either “good” or “Bad” with the recognition that every emotion serves a purpose within us and we need to experience and accept the full range if possible, with kindness and compassion to ourselves.

SURPRISE

Surprise is another one of the six basic types of human emotions originally described by Eckman (1979). Surprise is usually quite brief and fleeting and is typified by a physiological startle response following something unexpected. This can also be seen in babies when they display the Moro (startle) reflex.

This type of emotion can be experienced as positive, negative, or neutral. An unpleasant surprise, for example, might involve someone jumping out from behind a tree, especially if we weren't expecting this.

SECTION ONE: What are Emotions?

Ekman's Universal 6

An example of a pleasant surprise would be arriving home to find that your closest friends have gathered to celebrate your birthday and throw you a party. Surprise is often recognised by:

- **Facial expressions:** such as raising the brows, widening the eyes, and opening the mouth.
- **Physical/bodily responses:** such as jumping backwards.
- **Verbal reactions:** such as yelling, screaming, or gasping.

Surprise is another type of emotion that can trigger the fight or flight response. When startled, people may experience a burst of adrenaline that helps prepare

the body to either fight or flee - it is not uncommon to see an anger response when people are startled as the body goes into survival mode and prepares to fight the stimulus. In addition, anger is often seen as a behavioural expression of fear. Surprise can have important effects upon our behaviour as humans.

Therefore, surprising and unusual events in the news tend to stand out in memory more than others. Research has also found that people tend to be more swayed by surprising arguments and learn more from surprising information (Association for Psychological Science, 2020).

PRACTICAL TOOL: SELF-AWARENESS DEVELOPMENT TASK

1. What is the strongest emotion you have experienced this week?

.....

2. How did you become aware of this emotion?

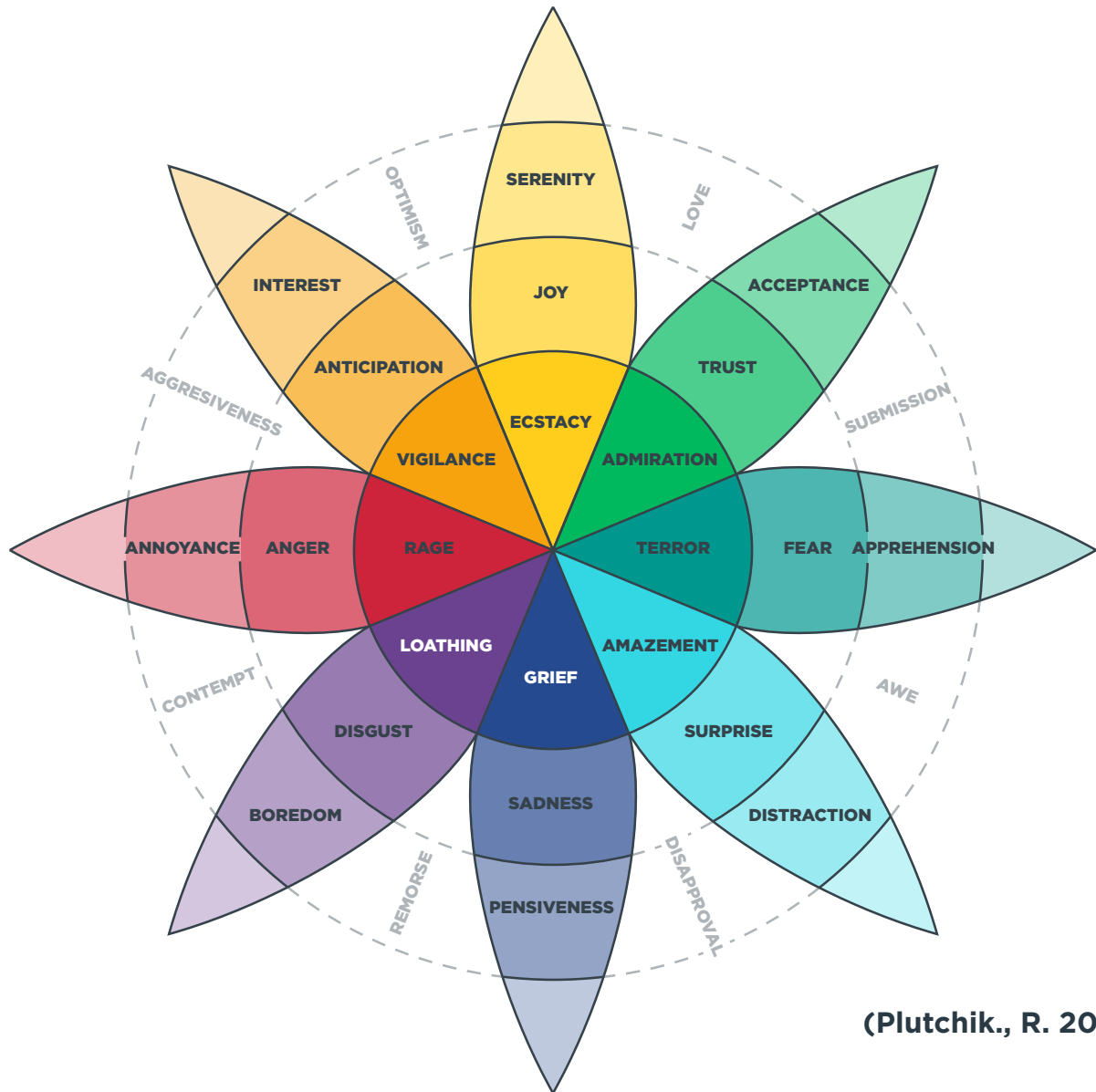
.....

3. Did you instantly recognise the emotion, or did you notice body language/gestures that told you?

.....



SECTION ONE: Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion



(Plutchik., R. 2002)

Primary: The eight sectors are designed to indicate that there are eight primary emotions (you will notice that anticipation and trust have been added to Ekman's (1979) original six: anger, anticipation, joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness and disgust).

Opposites: Each primary emotion has an opposite. These are based on the physiological reaction each emotion creates in animals:

- Joy is the opposite of sadness. Physiology: Connect vs withdraw.
- Fear is the opposite of anger. Physiology: Get small and hide vs get big and loud.
- Anticipation is the opposite of surprise. Physiology: Examine closely vs jump back.
- Disgust is the opposite of trust. Physiology: Reject vs embrace.

SECTION ONE: Plutchik's Wheel of Emotion

Combinations: The emotions with no colour characterise an emotion that is a mix of the 2 primary emotions. For example, anticipation and joy can combine to form what we recognise as optimism. Joy and trust combine to be love. Emotions are often complex and being able to recognise when a feeling is a combination of two or more distinct feelings is a useful skill when developing your emotional literacy toolkit.

There are also tertiary feelings, not shown on the feelings wheel, that are a combination of 3.

Intensity: The cone's vertical dimension signifies intensity, portraying the idea that emotions strengthen as they move from the outside to the centre of the wheel, which is also depicted by the colour: The darker the shade, the more strength the emotion carries. For example, anger at its lowest strength level is annoyance. At its highest level of strength, anger becomes rage. Or, a feeling of boredom can intensify to loathing if left unchecked, which is dark purple. It is useful to view emotions on a spectrum rather than as stand-alone entities.

This is an important rule about emotions to be conscious of in human relationships and interactions: If left unprocessed and not acknowledged, emotions can intensify. This is one of the fundamental reasons for becoming emotionally literate and enhancing our emotional vocabularies.

Plutchik's wheel of emotions assists us to explore literacy through a wider lens. Literacy means "a person's knowledge of a particular subject or field." So, enhancing emotional literacy means not only having words and a language that allows us to express emotions, but understanding how different emotions are related to one another and how they tend to modify and evolve over time.

PRACTICAL TOOL

Use this interactive model to explore the wheel further:

[Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions: Feelings Wheel](#)

• **[Six Seconds \(6seconds.org\)](https://www.6seconds.org)**



EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE LITERACY TOOLKIT

SECTION TWO



SECTION TWO: Navigating Emotions and Emotional Behaviours

Psychology notes that it is not necessarily the presence of negative emotions that directly impact upon our emotional health and well-being, but how we react and process them when we do experience them that really counts. It can be useful from an emotional literacy perspective to try not to label emotions as either “good” or “bad” but to practice awareness and acceptance and learn what the emotion is trying to tell us. Often, our emotions can be key to understanding our own moral compass and innermost values.

We all are unique and so are our reactions and emotions towards any given situation. Some of these ways are helpful while others are not so helpful. Various psychologists are constantly identifying these unhelpful emotional reactions and providing helpful options. One such effort has been made by Susan David who has now taken her influential work worldwide. You will find her ever popular talks on TED and video’s on YouTube. You can find more about her work and writings using this link: [**About Susan David, Ph.D. — Susan David, Ph.D.**](#)

(David, 2016) identified two ways that may be ineffective that human beings utilise to deal and cope with negative emotions as and when they occur. These ways are:

- Bottling up emotions, and
- Brooding up emotions.

According to David (2016), through these ways, individuals may attempt to avoid the processing of internal emotions without understanding the negative consequences this may pose to our wellbeing. We may use mechanisms such as humour to deflect from the emotion that we are feeling because on occasions, they can be uncomfortable. This is where the literacy skill of empathy is important. Often, when we have emotional conversations with others that reference negative emotions, we can sometimes find ourselves feeling uncomfortable and deploy our default behaviours such as humour or “at least”. Authors such as Brene Brown would encourage more of an empathetic response to create more authentic emotional connections with one another. It is important to keep a check on our emotional reactions to safeguard our well-being.

SECTION TWO: Navigating Emotions and Emotional Behaviours

We can understand emotional bottling and brooding through the illustration below:

SITUATION:

Your boss gives you a new task right before you are about to leave and asks you to complete it before the day is complete. The most obvious emotions in this situation will be anger and frustration. Here is how a bottler and a brooder will respond to it.

Bottling Emotions in Practice:

“I am angry at my boss, but I’m not going to think about it as I have the new task to complete.”

Brooding in Practice:

“Why did my boss do this? What did I do to deserve this?”

This shows that while the bottler hides the emotions under the carpet a brooder will keep on wiping his legs on the carpet (David, 2016). Either way, neither response demonstrates authentic and compassionate awareness of emotions - the consequence often being our own state of well-being.

SECTION TWO: Navigating Emotions and Emotional Behaviours

CHARACTERISTICS OF BOTTLERS & BROODERS (DAVID, 2016)

Bottlers	Brooders
Push away the negative emotions.	Get stuck in negative feelings.
They avoid the discomfort of the feelings thinking of expression as a sign of weakness.	They relive (ruminate) hurts, failures, and other negative feelings.
You simply forget what happened and suppress your emotions.	You pay too much attention to your internal chatter.
Bottling up emotions suppress them and surface in life through unintended ways.	Brooding up emotions makes them more powerful thus causing discomfort.

(David, 2016)

The Bottling Mind and the Brooding Mind might seem dissimilar in terms of reaction, but a plethora of new research suggests that their outcome on our well-being is similar. People who practice emotional bottling or brooding report low levels of happiness and high levels of sadness and anxiety (David, 2016). Some people may not be at polar ends of this spectrum but may switch between the two styles which is common; or sit somewhere in the middle. It is useful to view these types as a spectrum.

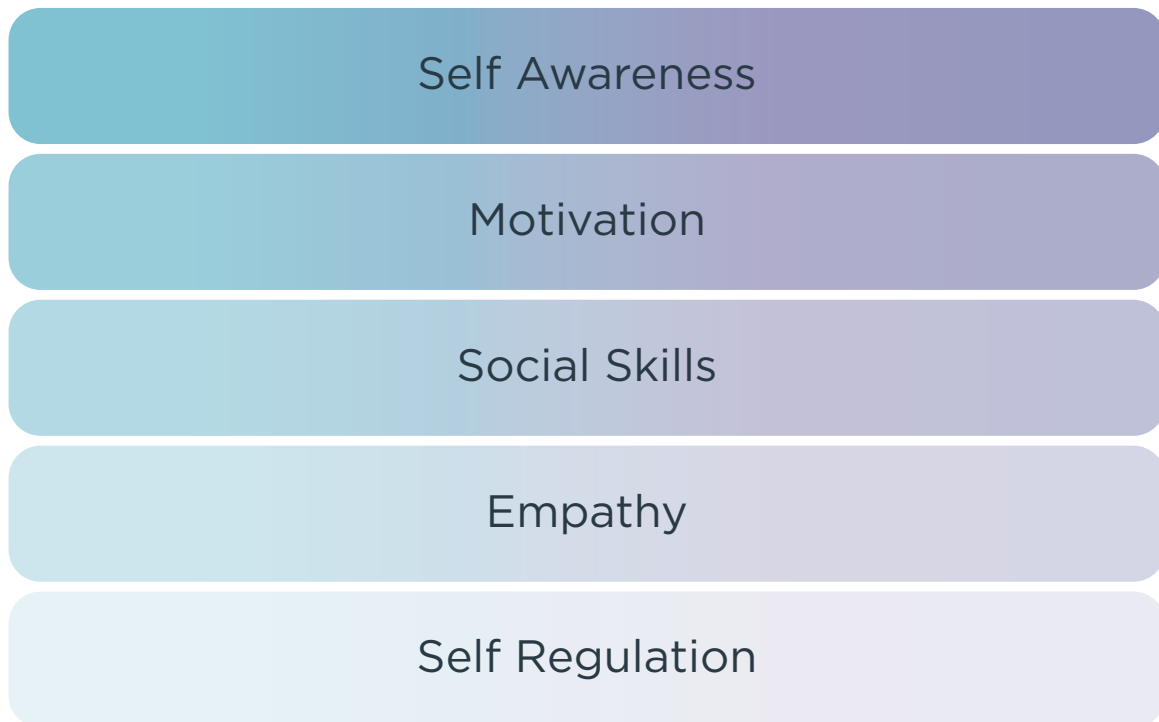
A healthy approach, according to David (2016), includes accepting and exploring challenging emotions and to learn the skills of Emotional Literacy/Agility that look like this:

The process of emotional agility, as described in David's bestselling book is:



SECTION TWO: Goleman's 5 Key Principles of Emotional Literacy

BASIC TENETS OF EMOTIONALLY LITERATE BEHAVIOUR (GOLEMAN, 1995)



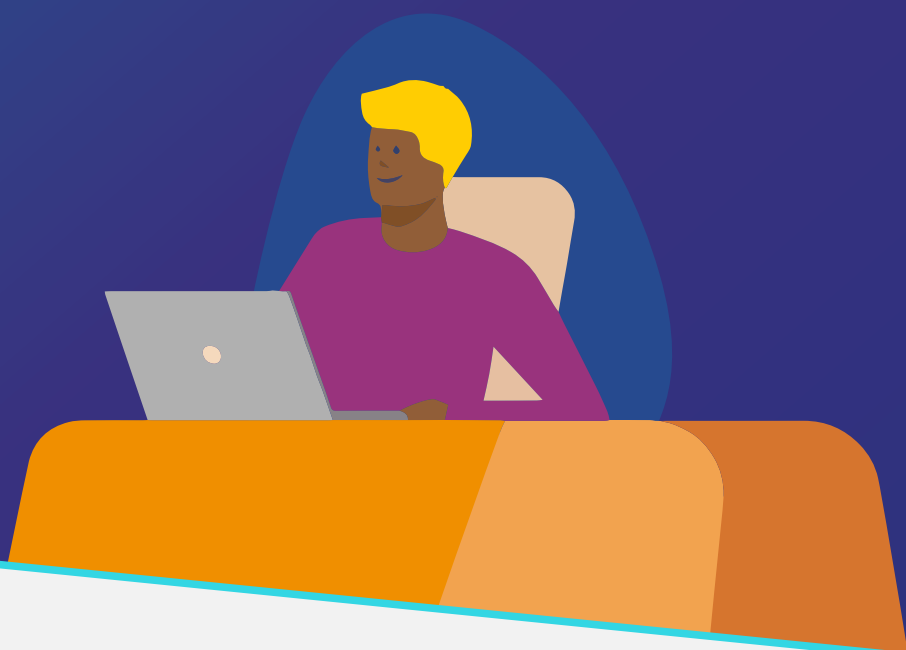
- **Self-Awareness** - Knowledge of what we feel and WHY we feel so.
- **Self-Regulation** - The ability to express our feelings in the right way.
- **Motivation** - The internal/intrinsic drive to change the way we feel and express our feelings/emotions.
- **Empathy** - The ability to relate to other emotions and see the world from somebody else's perspective. Empathy drives connection between humans and differs from sympathy in that an empathetic approach keeps us within our boundaries.

- **Social Skills** - The power to communicate effectively and build strong connections at home and in life.

Some may have solid social skills but lack in self-regulation; learning begins with knowing and identifying which area we need to work on.

EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE LITERACY TOOLKIT

SECTION THREE



SECTION THREE: Schemas and Cognitive (thought) Reframing

Schemas are internal mental structures (or jeans pockets in our brains) providing a framework for representing aspects of the world (Piaget, 1954). They are our own unique internal rules system that unconsciously helps us to navigate the world around us. They help us to organize most information that we absorb in a manageable way. Our brains love predictability and prior knowledge provides us with a roadmap of how to respond to situations. Prior knowledge means we do not have to put a lot of effort into interpreting or reading any given situation. Often, if there is no available schema for something it can cause anxiety as we have no guidance on how to behave or respond and this is vital for emotional literacy because sometimes our emotional responses can be guided and influenced by our past experiences.

We use our own schemas to organise current knowledge, but they also provide a framework for further understanding – predicting what will or should happen in the future. They influence your attention and absorption of knowledge. They also represent your core beliefs and values and beliefs about emotions and emotional behaviours, so an awareness of these is vital to emotional literacy as effectively, they go hand in hand. It is useful to be equipped with knowledge of schema's in communication also so that we don't inadvertently activate schemas in other people that may be negative.

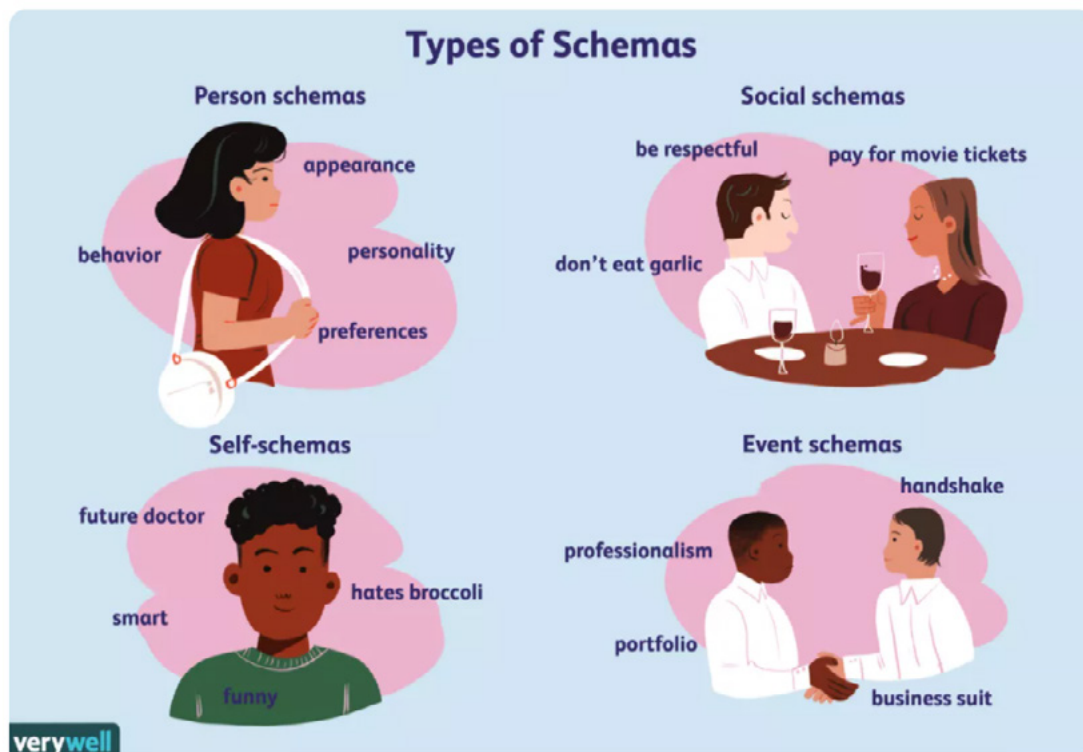
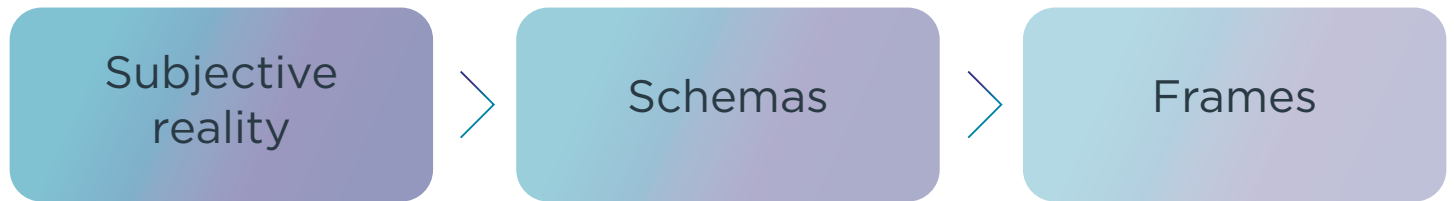


Fig 1: Types of Schema's (Baldwin M, 1992) [Psychological bulletin.](#) (Picture from www.verywellmind.co.uk)

SECTION THREE: Schemas and Cognitive (thought) Reframing

Schemas can be extremely stable, enduring and hard to change (Padesky, CA. 1994). Schema's are easier to modify in childhood than in adulthood.



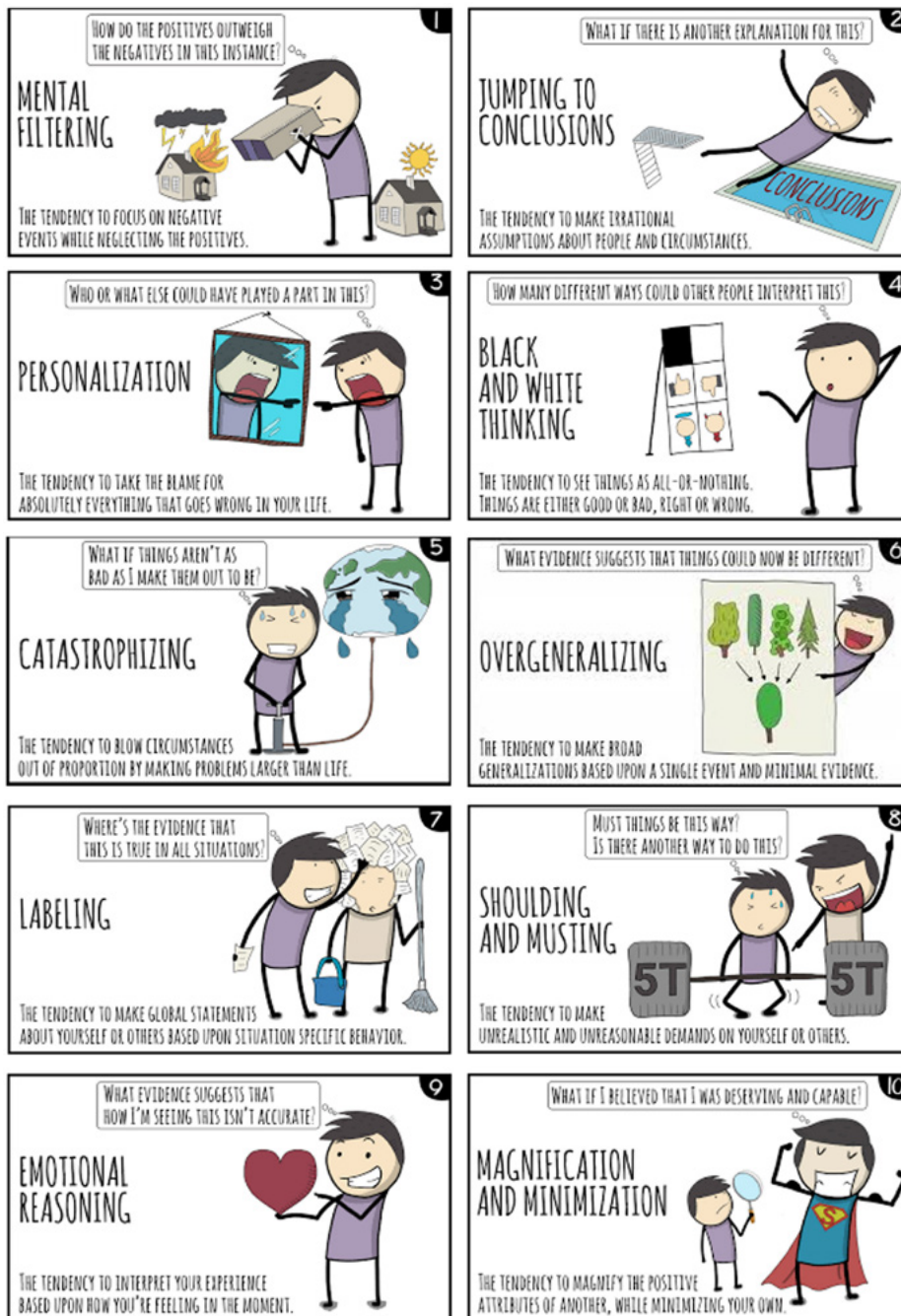
When schemas are triggered, they can generate automatic thoughts, strong effects and behavioural reactions/ responses. Remember, we may not be aware of when a schema is triggered, and we may not know what triggers it or be able to explain that to another person. This is important in education - just because we know the environment to be safe, doesn't mean it automatically will be for a young adult who has experienced developmental trauma and formed negative schemas. Consequently, schemas may from time to time cause quite a lot of problems and lead to Cognitive Distortions (as shown within the training slides).

Distortions are fundamental human thinking errors that most adult humans can identify with. Stereotypes, prejudices and cognitive distortions are all based upon negative schemas, often built up through childhood and persevering into adulthood.

While schemas are hard to change, switching to a new frame(meaning) can be a little bit easier, although it does require conscious effort and practice. That's where cognitive reframing skills come into play.



SECTION THREE: Schemas and Cognitive (thought) Reframing



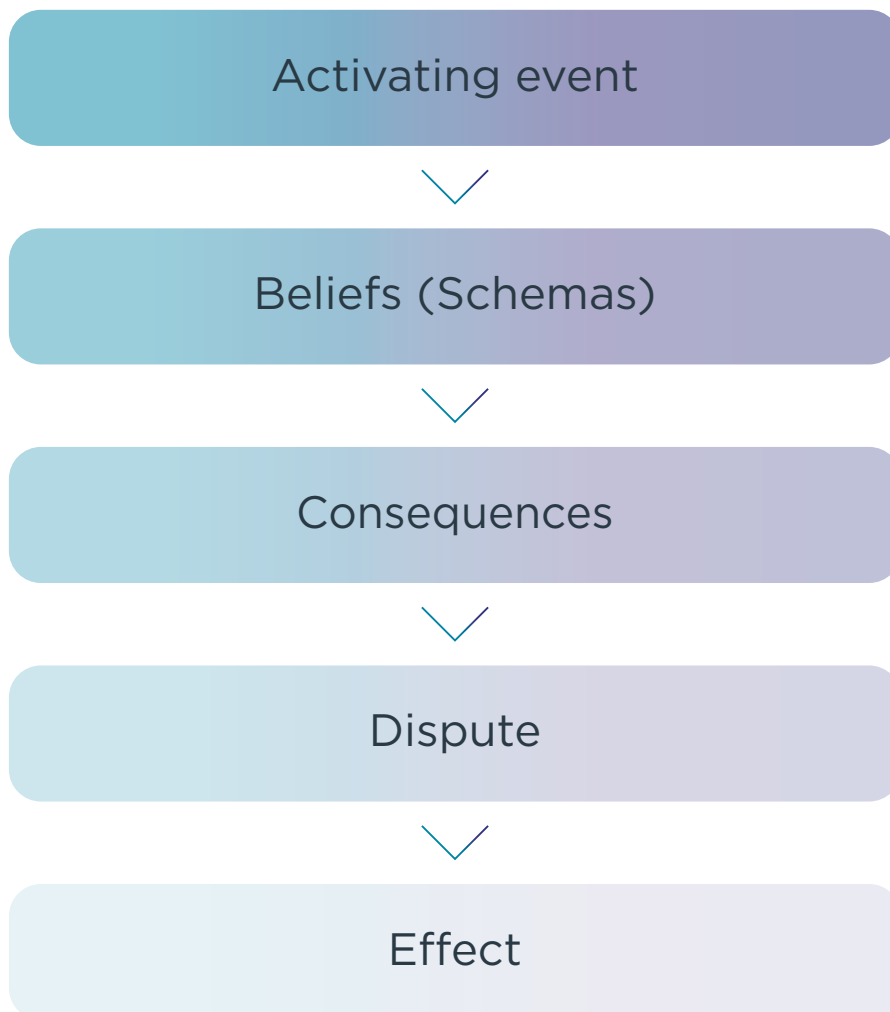
Cognitive reframing includes language and discourse as well as taking action to reframe troubling events. If we are aware of schema's, we can in turn be aware that sometimes negative emotional language may trigger a schema. Reframing takes a specific situation/language/terminology from your

life and the aim is to try to develop a more positive view on it - with that, you influence your individual thinking pattern and feelings about that particular situation, but you also slightly update your schemas and overall subjective reality (meaning systems) in a more positive way.

SECTION THREE: ABCDE – The Alphabet Formula for Reframing

Cognitive reframing is based on the ABC model constructed by Albert Ellis, (1957) one of the founders of cognitive therapy. Cognitive reframing could be deemed to be changing our response when we can't change what has happened. It allows us to take negative events and attempt to turn them into something more positive and allows us to reflect upon the emotions that we have experienced. Additionally, we can do this with language and conversations between ourselves and young people and

our colleagues. Some language can trigger negative schemas within people that we may not even realise i.e. "You are an angry person". We can learn to reframe our language to be significantly more emotionally positive to provide an empathetic conversation. For example: "I can see that the situation made you angry and your reaction does make sense to me. Shall we explore it further to find a solution for next time this occurs?"



SECTION THREE: ABCDE – The Alphabet Formula for Reframing

THE FIRST STEP IS TO WRITE DOWN THREE THINGS:

1. Activating event: The event that troubles you and leads to automatic dysfunctional thinking is called an activating event. As the first step, try to describe what happened as accurately as possible. It can be useful to draw this also.

2. Belief: Describe how you view the situation as accurately as possible. Try to identify your key beliefs around the event that happened. Help yourself with the following three questions:

- What caused the situation to happen?
- What does the event say about you?
- What do you think should happen?

3. Consequence: The consequence of what happened interpreted through your beliefs results in a certain way of thinking, feeling and acting. Consequently, there are three more questions to answer:

- What kind of automating negative thoughts go through your mind? Write them down and identify the cognitive distortion.
- How do you feel about the event? Identify all the negative emotions (on a scale from 0 – 100%).
- What's your automatic action? Describe your actual response to the situation.

This should give you a good overview of how you are viewing the event, what your underlying beliefs are and how you feel, think and behave as an automatic response to the event. This reflection can provide us with highly useful information about our subconscious responses to situations.

To achieve the whole reframing, you need to add D – Dispute and E – Effective change to our model (ABC-DE).

4. Dispute: Dispute is about challenging your thoughts and beliefs in order to understand reality truthfully. It's about finding an improved frame (modification) that enables you to neutralise the situational emotions and act in a rational manner rather than from a place of emotion or distortion. This technique enables us to respond from a rational mindset, rather than an emotional one and is a common feature of emotional regulation skill sets. There is a set of questions you should answer in the dispute process:

- If the same thing happened to your best friend or someone you love, what would be your interpretation of the event then?
- How would someone else interpret this situation?
- What are other potential explanations besides blaming yourself?
- What was under your control and you could have done better, and what was completely out of your control?
- What is the most positive interpretation of the event you can think of?

SECTION THREE: ABCDE – The Alphabet Formula for Reframing

5. Effect: Write down or draw/storyboard the final effect. This closing effect should be a more precise interpretation of the situation with an upgraded account, deactivated negative thoughts and feelings, and an action plan for responding more constructively in the given situation. Self-Awareness should have been built upon to allow us to connect the Emotion-Feeling-Behaviour. When we have confidently identified this pattern, we should be actively more aware of it when it occurs again- the more we practice, the more we become familiar with the chain.

- Write down your new thoughts about the event.
- Write down your new feelings about the event.
- Write down the action plan you will put in motion.

PRACTICAL TOOL

As noted in training, you will find a great template for this technique here: **AgileLeanLife-CognitiveReframing (1).pdf**



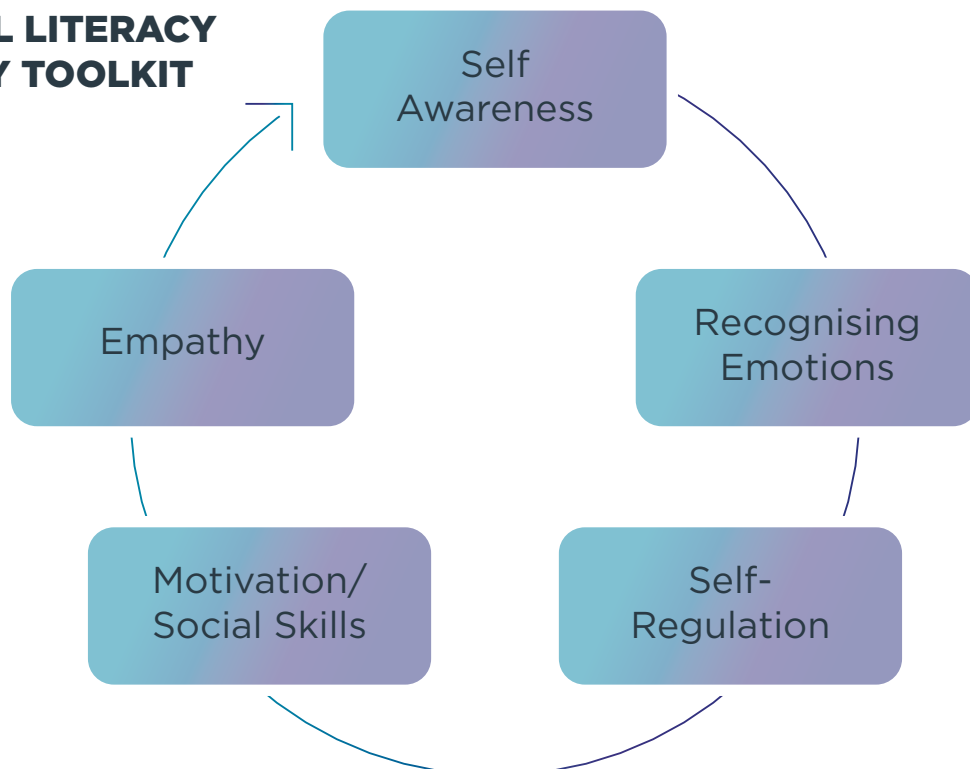
SECTION THREE: ABCDE – The Alphabet Formula for Reframing

SIMPLIFIED VERSION (ABC) (AS DEMONSTRATED IN THE ONLINE TRAINING):

ACTIVATING EVENT (Trigger)	BELIEFS (Thoughts)	CONSEQUENCES (How you behaved)
My boss has given me more work on top of my existing deadline.	I cannot get all of this done in time but if I admit I can't cope with it, she will think I am useless.	How did you act? What did you feel? I avoid asking for help so I don't know if help is available. I struggle to focus on one task and flit between many. I feel fearful and anxious.

(Ellis, 1957)

EMOTIONAL LITERACY TAKE-AWAY TOOLKIT



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USEFUL RESOURCES:

Brene Brown - The power of vulnerability
TED Talk available here:

[The power of vulnerability | Brené Brown - YouTube](#)

Brene Brown - RSA Empathy Short Video:

[Brené Brown on Empathy - YouTube](#)

Susan David - TED Talk available here:

[The gift and power of emotional courage | Susan David - YouTube](#)

This resource was written by Georgie Ford, Advanced Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner at Weston College and MHFA England Instructor.



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