MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING TOOLKIT

A RESOURCE FOR STRENGTHS-BASED DEVELOPMENT

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St Basils Works with young people

YOUTH VOICE

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOREWORD

St Basils is delighted to support and co-design this toolkit, which draws on the experience of our six-year partnership with the University of Birmingham.

One of our proudest achievements during this time has been the co-creation of My Strengths Training for Life (MST4Life™) – a psychologically informed, community-based programme which has been developed, delivered and continuously improved by taking a collaborative approach between young people, staff and sports psychology researchers from the University of Birmingham.

Too many young people in the UK experience homelessness. In 2018 alone, over 100,000 young people got in touch with their local authorities because they were homeless, or at serious risk of being so. The stereotypes of homelessness can all too quickly attach themselves to young people and trap them in a deficit world and unhelpful pathway. A focus only on need, risks and problems can overshadow talents, strengths and ambition. We want young people to have the opportunity to develop a different narrative; to have the safety, security and support to visualise a brighter future and to take advantage of the resources, friendships and opportunities and put in the hard work to make that better future a reality.

Mental skills training (MST) is an approach used to help elite athletes maximise their performance by focusing on their psychological strengths. The team of sports psychology researchers at the University of Birmingham, led by Dr Jennifer Cumming, have co-developed this toolkit with our staff and young people based on their extensive expertise implementing MST programmes for both athletes and now, young people who have experienced homelessness. Their experience as researchers at the University of Birmingham provides this toolkit with practical resources whilst maintaining academic credibility with its theoretical and research underpinning.

In five years, MST4Life™ has reached over 600 young people living in St Basils' supported accommodation. By integrating MST4Life™ into St Basils' core model of service delivery, staff have also benefited from an enhanced understanding about how to provide one-to-one mental skills development support; for example, using the resources included in this toolkit to help young people become more aware of their personal strengths.

Everyone who works with young people who have experienced homelessness or disadvantage has an important role to play in promoting positive well-being and developing confidence, skills and opportunities. This toolkit has been designed to provide you with practical support to improve young people's awareness of their existing strengths and ways in which you can facilitate the development of further mental skills.

For more information, visit our websites:
www.stbasils.org.uk and **www.sprintproject.org**

We're delighted to share our learning and would love to hear about your experiences if you decide to use the toolkit.

Jean Templeton,
Chief Executive of St Basils

University of Birmingham

3

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

Background

Sports psychologists from the University of Birmingham have teamed up with *St Basils*, *Youth Voice* and *Homeless Link* to co-design this toolkit based on learning and evidence from the **My Strengths Training for Life™ (MST4Life™) programme.**

MST4Life™ is a unique strengths-based programme developed over six years as a collaboration between researchers, psychological practitioners, frontline staff, housing service managers and young people themselves. Originating from sports psychology programmes to support top athletes, MST4Life™ helps 16–24-year-olds to recognise and develop the personal strengths needed to gain independence, build confidence and achieve their aspirations.

The team from the University of Birmingham brought expertise to this collaboration with experience of delivering mental skills training to athletes and students. In adapting the approach for young people who have experienced homelessness, MST4Life™ centred on life skills development and building qualities such as resilience and self-worth.

St Basils

The MST4Life™ programme was developed in continuous cycles of learning, with St Basils staff and young people actively involved in every iteration and changes and improvements made throughout the partnership.

St Basils' psychologically informed environment (PIE) framework was a key component in shaping the delivery and content of the programme[1]; giving facilitators psychological training in how to work with young people who have experienced homelessness.

Mental skills training

Mental skills training is used in sport to help athletes build versatile psychological skills to support their well-being, sporting performance and enduring mental qualities[2]. The intervention offers person-centred support and a participatory approach, both of which have been identified as important intervention characteristics by young people in our own research and that of others[3].

Outcomes

Pre to post improvements in:

Engagement

Optimism

Happiness

Perseverance

Resilience

Self-worth

Current level of strengths

> *It's really helped me because with my mental health, I fail to speak out when I'm feeling low and the other day, I had a bit of a rough patch and I knew who to call, because it was, "Ah, I've done this, I know who I need when I'm in a crisis, so why am I not doing it?" And it inspired me to just make that call and it saved a meltdown.*
>
> MST4Life™ participant

> *I've noticed that I've been controlling my emotions by encouraging myself more and thinking really positive instead of being negative. And I can face challenges now that I didn't think I could face before.*
>
> MST4Life™ participant

> *It's made me realise that I actually have got a lot of support around me, whereas some days when I'm feeling a bit low, things are getting a bit to me, I do feel like I haven't got the help, so I'm just happy that like I've actually sat down and reflected upon it. It's something now I can kind of take away and feel positive about it.*
>
> MST4Life™ participant

WHY THIS TOOLKIT AND WHY NOW?

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Health and well-being inequalities

The 2018 Homeless Link report[4] outlined the support needs of young people in the UK:

70% of young people who have experienced *homelessness* are between the ages of **18–24**

44% *Not in education, employment or training*

41% *Lack of independent living skills*

35% *Mental health problems*

We know that young people who have experienced homelessness present with complex and co-occurring support needs, but understanding why underpins how we respond…

Adverse childhood experiences

- With family breakdown being among the leading causes of youth homelessness[4], young people are likely to have experienced at least one (but in most cases many more) adverse childhood experience (ACE). We need to consider that populations of vulnerable young people who may have experienced multiple ACEs may include, for example, those young people who are care experienced or care leavers as this is an issue that transcends homelessness.
- Although ACEs are thought to have a harmful impact on behavioural, emotional and/or social competencies[5], services which offer appropriate psychological support can help young people feel valued and empowered to make positive changes moving forward.
- Being aware of how trauma can impact young people's engagement is the first step in understanding the value of a participatory and flexible approach. For this reason, our toolkit includes a variety of tools that are designed to be completed collaboratively, meaning staff and young people co-construct the learning process and desired outcomes.

Taking a strengths-based approach

- Identifying young people by their deficits will only perpetuate self-defeating mind-sets and negative self-fulfilling prophecies. Instead, a strengths-based approach is more likely to change self-perceptions, elevate feelings of self-esteem and self-worth and empower young people to make positive changes[6].
- Strengths-based homeless service provision has already been researched in the Netherlands, with evidence suggesting the service users experienced enhanced quality of life, improved satisfaction with their financial and family situations, and feelings of resilience, competence and autonomy[7].
- In adopting a strengths-based approach, the MST4Life™ delivery style is informed by Self-Determination Theory[8] and Solution-focused Brief Therapy[9, 10]. In our accompanying guide (see more information on next page), you will find tips and advice for delivering the tools within this resource based on these approaches and our experiences from MST4Life™.

HOW THE TOOLKIT WAS CREATED

Which mental skills and strengths have been targeted and why?
Based on stakeholder consultations with staff and young people and the views of the programme facilitators, the most desirable strengths for a young person who is ready to move onto independent living were: *Self-worth, Goal-setting, Self-confidence, Resilience, Problem-solving* and *Motivation*

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Toolkit development timeline

Six+ years of learning and evidence: Co-development, delivery and evaluation of *MST4Life™* with *St Basils*

Consultation with *Homeless Link* on the need of the proposed toolkit for the sector

Feedback from *St Basils, Youth Voice, Homeless Link*, and *Institute of Mental Health* on grant applications

Consultation workshops with *Youth Voice* and *St Basils* staff on toolkit content, style and approach

Review of theory and literature by sport psychology researchers, combined with experiences of *MST4Life™* delivery and evaluation

Toolkit launch event – comments, feedback and suggestions from across the sector and beyond

Homeless Link 'Young and Homeless' conference – final comments, feedback and suggestions on revised strengths profile tool

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Having emotionally safe conversations

The activities included in this toolkit may initiate some difficult and sensitive conversations. Having these conversations in an emotionally safe way is important for both you and the young person.

One way to do this is to work together to create a set of agreed ground rules before completing the activity. The main premise of these ground rules is to create an environment where people feel safe, secure and comfortable.

Facilitate this conversation with questions like, 'How can we ensure we help ourselves and others to feel comfortable during this activity?', 'What kind of qualities might help us support others?', 'How would you like to feel during this activity?'

It would be helpful to brainstorm the different ideas with a pen and paper as you establish the ground rules. Before finalising the rules, ensure that everyone is happy with them and happy to adhere to them (yourself included!), this helps to promote a sense of empowerment and accountability during the activity.

Ground rules – a collection of suggestions that have been created and agreed upon by those in the group that aim to ensure an emotionally and physically safe space.

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Accompanying psychologically informed delivery guide now available

Feedback from our toolkit launch event asked us to expand on how to ensure a psychologically informed delivery style. One suggestion on how to do this was to create an educational piece to go alongside the toolkit.

We have now created an accompanying guide which provides evidence-based delivery style recommendations, as well as learning from over six years of delivering MST4Life™. We have summarised our key learning in the form of suggested delivery behaviours to support young people's basic psychological needs and well-being. This guide is available to download for free at **www.sprintproject.org**

MENTAL SKILLS TRAINING TOOLKIT

PUTTING THE TOOLKIT INTO ACTION

Who?

This toolkit has been specifically designed for young people aged 16–24. These same tools can also be applicable to younger adolescents and adults but may need to be adapted if using with children to suit their reading and comprehension levels.

What?

The main tools are:
1. Strengths profile
2. Goal-setting
3. If/Then
4. Emotional awareness grid
5. STOP
6. Dream team

Each tool is broken down into:
- The rationale for using the tool
- What mental skills will be developed
  (look out for the green diamonds!)
- The tool itself
- Steps to implementing the tool
- Reflective questions
- Action plans to help with continuing to use the tool

Why?

The tools are designed to help young people:
- Recognise new and existing strengths and mental skills
- Develop a better awareness of how they can use their strengths and mental skills to be more resilient and confident in their everyday lives and progress towards independent living
- Set effective goals and plans for achieving them
- Identify different ways of managing and solving problems
- Have greater awareness of their emotions and social networks

How?

We have organised the tools in a recommended order, starting by completing a strengths profile *(page 9)* to encourage young people to identify their existing strengths. But, there is no one right or wrong order to complete the tools. Instead, young people can journey through the toolkit in different ways *(see the mapping my journey flow diagram, page 8)* and complete the tool most relevant to them at that time. Tools can also be revisited as a way to extend and further develop the mental skills being promoted and to monitor progress.

When?

This toolkit can be used as part of one-to-one support work or in small group sessions. For group sessions, we recommend keeping numbers to five or below to allow for meaningful conversations with each young person. The suggested activities for exploring each tool range from 25–75 minutes to complete, so be mindful of this before you start. Factors that may influence how long it takes to complete a tool include: the aim of your support session, how engaged the young person is, or how well you and the young person understand the tool in advance.

Finally…

Look out for the blue circles!
Developing mental skills may be quite challenging for young people and take up a lot of physical and mental energy. One way to bring things back to the present moment is through one or more of the six grounding tools found in blue circles.

Grounding tools are simple, yet effective evidence-based techniques to use in situations where young people might find themselves becoming overwhelmed or distracted. These tools can help to reduce emotional stress and elevate mood and can be used in lots of different situations. Encourage young people to experiment with a few different exercises until they discover what works best for them.

If young people disclose any safeguarding issues when using the toolkit, we **strongly advise you follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures.**

MAPPING MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE TOOLKIT

This is a resource to be used with the young person to help make collaborative decisions as you move through the toolkit.

Preparing for my journey
Have an informal chat with your support worker about how you would like to use the toolkit

⟫⟫

Step 1
Complete the strengths profile to get a better understanding of your strengths and competencies

⟫⟫

What else…?
Maybe the strengths profile wasn't for you, don't worry! Continue to communicate with your support worker, maybe pick out a different tool which would be more helpful

Currently, my focus is on…

Education, employment, training

Knowing myself

Relationships

Still not sure

Goal-setting or If/Then planning
Set goals to achieve next steps
Maintain current housing and EET status
Planning for big events

Dream team or emotional awareness
Understanding of your support network
Understanding your emotions better
Identify people and places that help you feel purposeful or happy

Goal-setting
Build your own timeline
Set realistic and achievable goals to get you started
Set short- and long-term goals

I'm stressed in my job/ training/college

My job/training/college is coming to an end soon

I know myself better, but what next?

I know my support network better, but what next?

Plan might not work!

I have a plan but need some help achieving it

Emotional awareness or coping strategies
Understand what might be triggering emotional responses
Build upon your stress management skills

Goal-setting or strengths profile
New plans, realistic goals and next steps
Identify opportunities to build on your strengths

Goal-setting
How can your support network help you achieve your goals?
Set goals to strengthen or expand your support network

If/Then planning or coping strategies
Identify possible barriers and plan for how you can overcome them

Dream team
How can your support network help you achieve your goals?
Who would you go to for different types of support?

How others affect my emotions?

I have a plan but need some help achieving it

Plan might not work!

How can I make this goal a reality?

I'm ready to go, but feeling a little apprehensive

How do I contribute to my dream team?

Dream team
How does your support network influence your emotions?
How can your support network help you achieve your goals?

If/Then planning or coping strategies
Identify possible barriers or challenges and plan ahead for how you can overcome them

Strengths profile or emotional awareness
Bring awareness to your strengths and how you can support others
Identify how you're feeling in different situations and around different people

STRENGTHS PROFILE

The strengths profile is our unique take on performance profiling from sports psychology[13, 14]. Used in sport, this tool is an effective strategy for helping athletes refine their skills and competencies and highlight areas in need of improvement. In our MST4Life™ programme, participants have found this tool an engaging method to learn more about themselves and build a sense of ownership for their personal development during the programme. Our findings suggest this tool is associated with improvements in resilience, self-worth and well-being[15].

⫸⫸ Completing the strengths profile *(55–75 minutes)*

You'll need:
- A paper copy of the strengths profile (pages 10–12)
- Two coloured pens
- One biro

See below for the steps to completing a strengths profile, and right for an example of what it might look like:

Your strengths profile

Name:

Date:

1

Strength: _Time Management_

What does this mean for you? _Being on time for important appointments_

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?
To be a 7, I'd need to plan in advance for getting to my job interview on time, but I might need help with what bus to catch

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Top Tip!
Identifying other people's mental strengths can help with brainstorming ideas, how about strengths of their support worker or even their favourite music artist?

Step 1
Brainstorm what are important mental strengths to the young person, both what they're currently good at and ones they'd like to develop *(use page 13 to help with this)*.
10 minutes

Step 2
Aim to fill out as many strengths as possible, adding a personal meaning to each one. Although there's space for six strengths, this is neither a minimum or maximum. For additional copies of the tool, visit our website www.sprintproject.org
10–15 minutes

Step 3
Score each strength for current and goal levels, using coloured pens if desired to shade in the scores.*
10–15 minutes

Step 4
Ask the young person to identify how they could move up one point on the current scale, eg, *'How would you know you've achieved the next point up?'*, *'What would others notice about you?'*
10–15 minutes

Step 5
Reflect on the strengths profile and the process of completing it *(see reflective questions)*.

Set action steps or goals for where, when and how the young person can use their strengths in their day-to-day lives.
15–20 minutes

Top Tip!
*To make this step more meaningful to the young person, ask what the numbers mean to them, eg, *'What does a seven look like to you? How would you be feeling, thinking, and behaving?'*

Your strengths profile

Name:

Date:

1

Strength: _____

What does this mean for you? _____

_____

_____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

_____

_____

_____

· ·

2

Strength: _____

What does this mean for you? _____

_____

_____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

_____

_____

_____

Your strengths profile

Name:

Date:

3

Strength: _____

What does this mean for you? _____

_____

_____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

_____

_____

_____

....

4

Strength: _____

What does this mean for you? _____

_____

_____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

_____

_____

_____

Your strengths profile

Date:

5

Strength: _____

What does this mean for you? _____

_____

_____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

_____

_____

_____

6

Strength: _____

What does this mean for you? _____

_____

_____

CURRENTLY, FOR THIS STRENGTH I'M A...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

MY GOAL FOR THIS STRENGTH IS TO BE...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

How could you move up one point on the current scale? What would that look like?

_____

_____

_____

>>>> **Brainstorming strengths: get the ideas flowing!**

Managing my tenancy...?

Getting my own place...?

Looking after my health and well-being...?

Being the best version of myself...?

COMMITMENT
REFLECTION GOAL-SETTING
SELF-CONTROL RESILIENCE
CALM SELF-CONFIDENCE
ASSERTIVENESS SELF-WORTH
PASSION FOCUS ORGANISATION
RELIABILITY TRUSTWORTHINESS
SUPPORTIVE RESPECT
MOTIVATION POSITIVE-MINDSET
DILIGENCE PROBLEM-SOLVING
EMOTIONAL-REGULATION

Managing or getting into education, employment or training...?

Using my money wisely...?

Top Tip!
If completing 'paperwork' is a barrier to engaging with this activity, try becoming familiar with the tool so you feel comfortable facilitating it verbally.

⟫⟩⟩⟩⟩ Reflection questions on the tool

Ask reflective questions about the mental strengths and qualities identified through these steps: either directly: *'What mental strengths did you need to complete this activity?'* or indirectly:

Categories game!
Pick any category and take it in turns to name something in the category. This can be used as more of a distracting or energising exercise.

Have you learned anything new about yourself as a result of completing the strengths profile?

Self-awareness

How did you find the process of reflecting on your strengths and qualities?

Self-esteem

How could you use your signature strengths in the future?

Future-focused

Can you think of times in the past that you've used these strengths? How did that situation play out?

Reflection

Did you find this activity helpful, if so, why? If not, what could we do differently in the future?

Feedback

⟫⟩⟩⟩⟩ Action plan

Identify a situation where you can use your strengths…

✕ Continuing to grow

Having completed the strengths profile, discuss possible ways in which the young person could continue to learn about their strengths and build on them. It might be helpful to identify situations where the young person feels comfortable and shows the best version of themselves, versus more challenging situations – this way you can work together to pick appropriate times and places to work on their strengths.

Don't forget to check in! If you've made an action plan together, don't forget to ask the young person how it went. If you expect the young person to follow through with the plan, you've got to show the same commitment to being part of the process.

When reflecting on how it went, recognise and acknowledge what strengths were used, before mapping out the next action plan!

To do…

14

SMART GOAL-SETTING

A goal is something that you hope to achieve in the future, whether it is within the next hour, day, weeks or months to come. Envisioning, planning and committing to your goal will energise you into acting, boosting your motivation and determination to succeed, as well as increasing your self-confidence.

Attentional control
Planning
Problem-solving
Self-regulation

Goal-setting tool *(40–60 minutes)*

Step 1
Spend some time reflecting on past goals to make this tool meaningful to the young person. Prompting questions could include *'What goals have you achieved in the past?'*, *'What was it like to achieve?'*, *'How did you feel?'*
5–10 minutes

Step 2
Ask the young person to identify what they are aiming to do in the future and brainstorm different possible end results they would like to achieve (eg, life skills, habits, education, employment, relationships).
5–10 minutes

Step 3
Decide together on at least one goal (maximum of three) that motivates the young person and relates to an important priority to them. Ask why this goal is personally valuable and worthwhile to help determine for themselves how interested they are in the outcome.
5 minutes

Step 4
Discuss how to turn their idea into a powerful SMART goal by making it Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound.
10–15 minutes

Step 5
Secure commitment to working towards the goal by asking the young person to write it down and identify two or three cues they could use as a visible reminder (eg, tape it to a mirror they look in every day, put it as a note in their phone).
5 minutes

Step 6
Develop a plan for how the goal can be achieved by taking two to three specific actions. Decide together on a suitable reward for achieving the goal to help increase motivation even further. After achieving the goal, return to Step 1 and set a new one!
10–15 minutes

Top Tip!
Encourage the young person to set goals that are relevant and attainable to them. This will help them to feel more committed to the goal and increase the likelihood of its success.

Top Tip!
Goal-setting is an ongoing activity, so plan a regular time to review the young person's goal(s) and encourage them to keep going with it.

Top Tip!
Goals are more effective when they are stated positively (eg, my goal is to eat more healthily) rather than negatively (eg, my goal is stop eating so much rubbish food).

15

SMART GOALS

Setting SMART goals can help keep you motivated and get you closer to reaching your goal!

Specific

What is the exact goal that you are trying to accomplish?

Measurable

How will you be able to see that you are making progress?

Attainable

Is this a goal that you think you can actually reach?

Relevant

Is this something that's important to you right now?

Time-bound

When do you think you'll be able to reach your goal?

SMART goal-setting

Name:

Date:

My SMART goal is to…

_____

_____

_____

_____ **Target date:**

This goal is important to me because….

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

I will turn this goal into a SMART goal by…

S _____

M _____

A _____

R _____

T _____

I will remind myself of this goal by….

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Actions I will take/ my key strengths I will use to achieve this goal are…

_____

_____

_____

_____

I will reward myself for achieving this goal by…

_____

_____

_____

_____

≫≫≫ Reflection questions on the tool

Can you think of any barriers or roadblocks that might get in the way of your goal? (If yes, then consider if/then planning).

Have you learned anything new about yourself and your aspirations for the future?

Which of your strengths can you use to help achieve your goal?

If you achieved your goal, what would be different for you? How would it make you think or feel? What would you do differently?

Wrap yourself tightly in a blanket and give yourself a big bear hug!

≫≫≫ Action plan

Keeping on track

A great way to keep on track with achieving a goal is by telling by someone in your social network, such as a friend or support worker, what you are working on so that they can support you *(see Social Support tool page 28)*.

After setting your goal, try imaging yourself successfully achieving it as clearly and as vividly as you can. Enjoy the feelings of confidence that this brings you and use these positive feelings to motivate yourself to take the first step to achieving it.

Try to set goals that can both happen quickly (called short-term goals) as well as goals that will take a longer time to achieve (called long-term goals). It can help to picture your long-term goal at the top of a ladder, with each rung representing a smaller step or short-term goal to achieve (see **www.sprintproject.org** for a goal ladder tool to use). You can design your ladder by working forwards or backwards and by determining how to break down your bigger/long-term goal into smaller, more achievable actions.

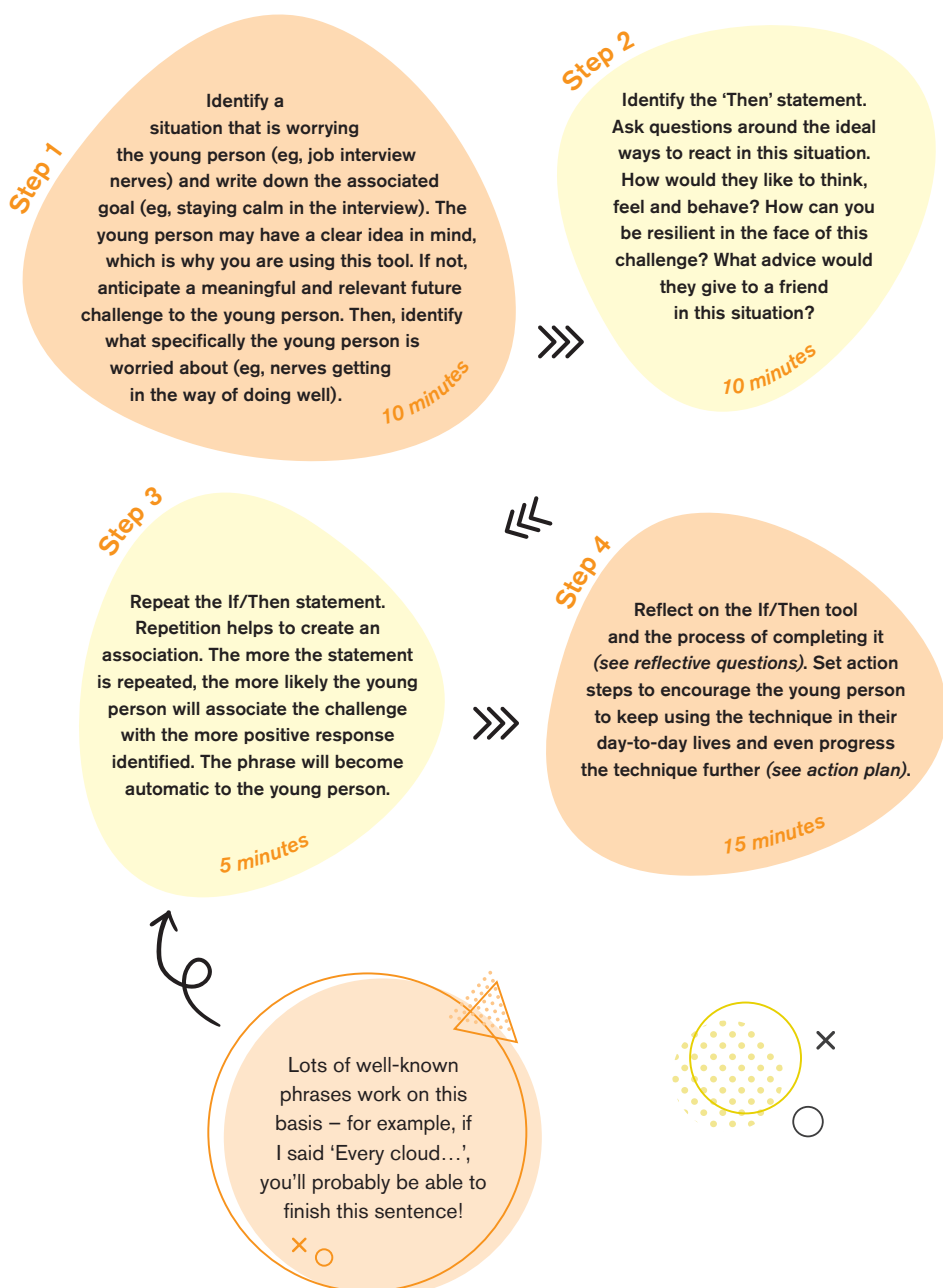**Remember to revisit your goals regularly!**

To do…

IF/THEN TOOL

This simple technique is a great follow-on from the goal-setting activity on page 15, or it can be used as a stand-alone tool.

Originating from behaviour change psychology, the 'If/Then' technique is an ideal tool to use when there are perceived barriers in the way of achieving a goal or worries about an upcoming situation.

The 'If/Then' tool helps young people to use their strengths to plan how to be resilient when facing potential challenges. Eventually, with practice and repetition, the link between the 'If' statement and the 'Then' statement will become strong enough to help you change how you react.

Planning ahead
Problem-solving
Positive mind-set
Resilience

⟫⟫⟫⟫ Using the If/Then tool *(40 minutes)*

Step 1
Identify a situation that is worrying the young person (eg, job interview nerves) and write down the associated goal (eg, staying calm in the interview). The young person may have a clear idea in mind, which is why you are using this tool. If not, anticipate a meaningful and relevant future challenge to the young person. Then, identify what specifically the young person is worried about (eg, nerves getting in the way of doing well).
10 minutes

Step 2
Identify the 'Then' statement. Ask questions around the ideal ways to react in this situation. How would they like to think, feel and behave? How can you be resilient in the face of this challenge? What advice would they give to a friend in this situation?
10 minutes

Step 3
Repeat the If/Then statement. Repetition helps to create an association. The more the statement is repeated, the more likely the young person will associate the challenge with the more positive response identified. The phrase will become automatic to the young person.
5 minutes

Step 4
Reflect on the If/Then tool and the process of completing it *(see reflective questions)*. Set action steps to encourage the young person to keep using the technique in their day-to-day lives and even progress the technique further *(see action plan)*.
15 minutes

Lots of well-known phrases work on this basis – for example, if I said 'Every cloud…', you'll probably be able to finish this sentence!

Top Tip!
Maintain positive language. Initially, young people might associate the 'If' statement with negative reactions, for example, 'If I feel like giving up, then I will stay in bed'. Instead, try to encourage them to reframe with a more positive lens, eg, 'If I feel like giving up, then I will think: I am up for this challenge; I will feel excited; I will smile, breathe and relax my shoulders'. For more information on reframing, revisit the solution-focused techniques in the accompanying delivery guide, available at www.sprintproject.org
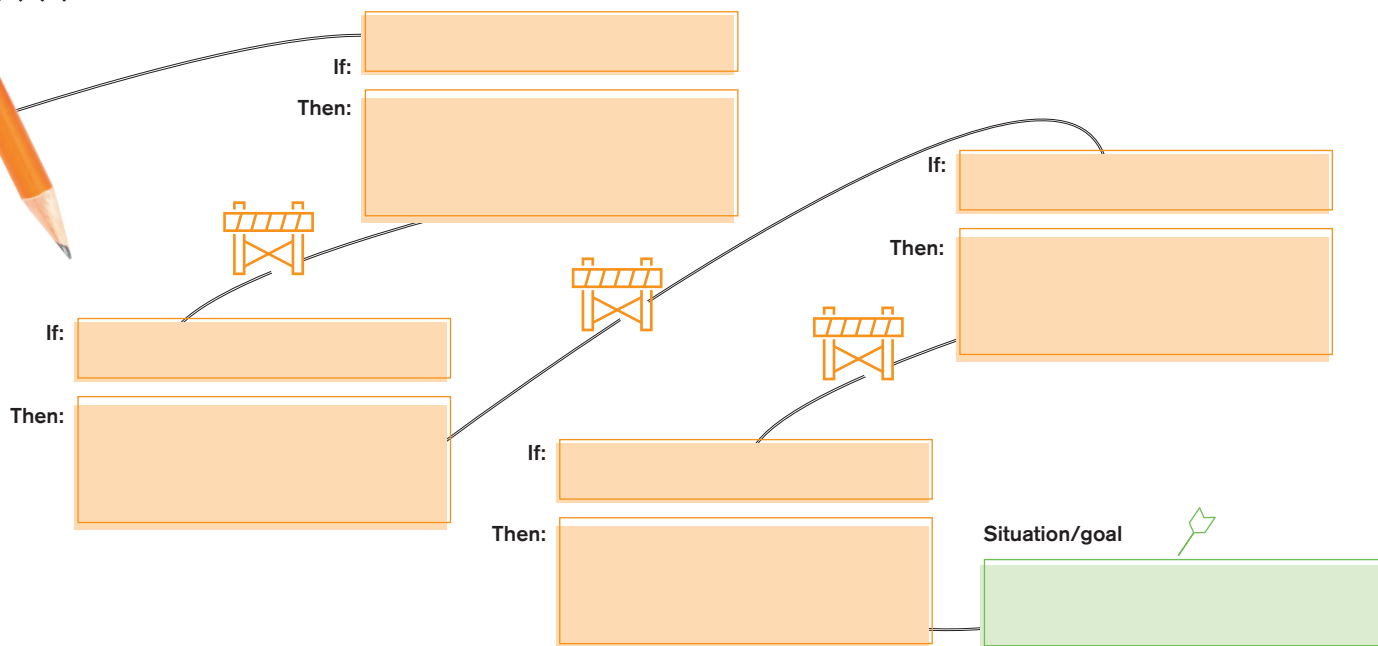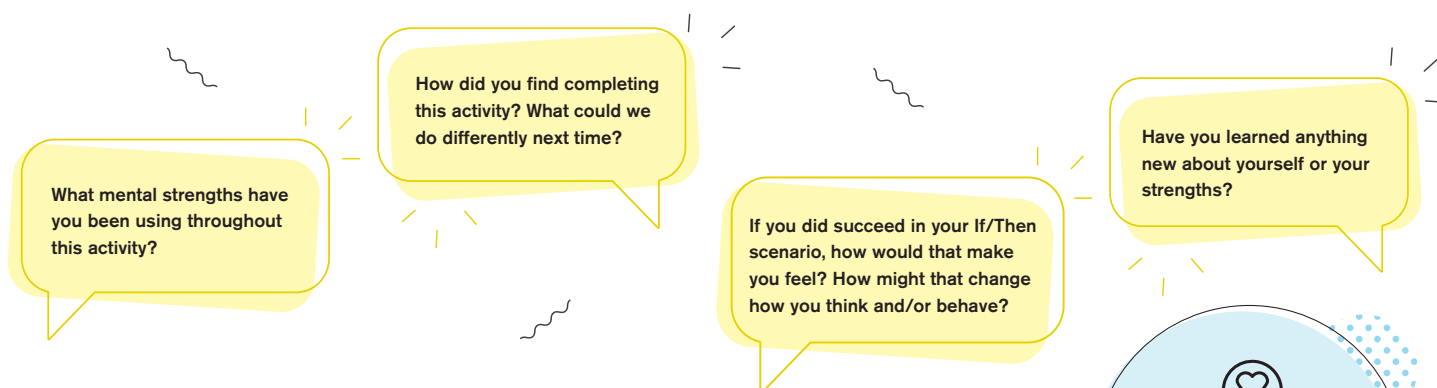
If/then…

Top Tip!
Try to relate the If statement to:
1) things that are within the young person's control (vs outside of their control) and 2) process goals (vs outcome goals).

19

>>>> If/Then tool

If:

Then:

If:

Then:

If:

Then:

If:

Then:

Situation/goal

>>>> Reflection questions on the tool

What mental strengths have you been using throughout this activity?

How did you find completing this activity? What could we do differently next time?

If you did succeed in your If/Then scenario, how would that make you feel? How might that change how you think and/or behave?

Have you learned anything new about yourself or your strengths?

Try counting backwards from 100, subtracting seven each time!
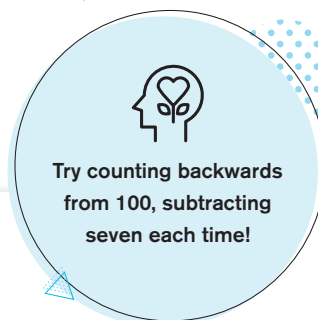
>>>> Action plan

Eat, sleep, If/Then, repeat!

Identify strategies to help the young person to remember to repeat the statement, eg, can they provide themselves with any visual prompts? How about a post-it note above their door handle?

To advance this technique, ask the young person if they can incorporate some imagery around their If/Then statement. Ask them to close their eyes while repeating their statement and imagine themselves responding to the 'If' statement in line with their 'Then' responses as clearly and vividly as they can – what do they notice about themselves? How do they look? How do they feel?

Remember to check in with the young person and revisit the If/Then statement after the situation has happened.

- Did you notice any differences in the way you responded to challenges using your If/Then statements?
- If so, what did you do differently (eg, behaviours, thoughts, feelings)?
- If not, how can we change the If/Then statements to make them more helpful in future?

To do...

EMOTIONAL AWARENESS GRID

We based our emotional awareness session on the mood mapping techniques outlined in Dr Liz Miller's book – *Mood Mapping*[16]. Dr Miller talks about the prevalence of mood disorder, such as, in the example of herself, issues like bipolar disorder. However, mood mapping is a process to creating mood order. By being more aware of moods and emotions, we can start to manage them in a healthy way. Emotional awareness is the foundation to emotional regulation, which is thought to be strongly correlated with young people's mental health[17].

>>>> **Using the emotional awareness grid** *(55–75 minutes)*

Happy!

You'll need:
- Pens and post-it notes
- Printed out emotional awareness grid
- Large surface area

Top Tip!
Have a game of Uno! First, have a standard game, keeping it brief. You'll notice the Uno cards have the same colours used in the emotional grid. When you play the second time around, set young people the challenge of naming an emotion which matches the colour of the card they are about to put down (best used as an energiser or at the end of the session).

Step 1
Set some ground rules for the activity. Emotions can very a sensitive subject, so whether you're delivering this in a group or one-to-one, it's worth establishing ground rules (see page 6).
10 minutes

Step 2
Brainstorm as many different emotions as possible, with no right or wrong answers. Write these different emotions on post-it notes.
5–10 minutes

Step 3
Introduce the emotional grid, explaining what the different axes mean and the four different sections the grid is divided into. You might want to put the grid in the middle of a large surface area to help with step 4!
5–10 minutes

Step 4
Invite participant(s) to add their emotions on to the grid. Facilitate discussion, especially around emotions which are hard to categorise. Move your way around the grid, discussing what situations might elicit different emotional responses.
15–20 minutes

Step 5
Discuss how you could move from one section of the grid to another, inviting people to share strategies that work for them and trying to emphasise adaptive strategies.
10–15 minutes

Step 6
Bring the activity to a close with a guided reflection (see below for questions). At this stage it is important to debrief participants and signpost if necessary.
10 minutes

Emotional awareness grid example

High intensity (eg, increased heart rate, fidgety, sweating, tension, butterflies)

How do you typically respond to orange emotions? What works well for you?

Anger

Frustration

Excited

Pride

Where on the grid do you find yourself most often? Ideally, where would you like to be?

Uncomfortable
(eg, undesirable emotional state)

Comfortable
(eg, pleasant emotional state)

Upset

Depressed

Love

Calm

What strategies could you use to move this emotion towards a more pleasant feeling?

In what situations do you find yourself experiencing green or yellow emotions?

Low intensity (eg, feeling fatigued, tired, numb, steady heart rate, muscles feeling relaxed)

22

Emotional awareness grid

High intensity (eg, increased heart rate, fidgety, sweating, tension, butterflies)

Uncomfortable
(eg, undesirable emotional state)

Comfortable
(eg, pleasant emotional state)

Low intensity (eg, feeling fatigued, tired, numb, steady heart rate, muscles feeling relaxed)

>>>>> **Reflection questions on the tool**

After completing this activity, it might be beneficial to first check in with the participant(s) or do a brief grounding technique. These strategies will give participants time to assess their feelings and give you as the facilitator an opportunity to understand what impact the session has had.

Short walk
Go for a short walk for a few minutes, ideally outside, but if the weather isn't suitable then inside can also work. Concentrate on your steps, the feel of your foot connecting to the ground and lifting back up again, how long or short your steps are, the strength of how your foot is connecting with the ground.

>>>>> **Checking-in questions**

'That can be a pretty intense activity. How is everyone feeling now?'

'When I did this activity, I found it pretty tough. Having completed it yourself, what do you think?'

Other reflective questions for this activity might include:
- Why is it important to be emotionally aware?
- Is it possible that no matter whether an emotion is positive or negative, it can tell us something important about a situation?
- How do you feel being more emotionally aware might impact your day-to-day life?

'I feel like we had some really good conversations today, thank you. How did everyone else find it?'

'Well done today, I appreciate the effort you put into that. One a scale of one to ten, where would you score yourself on how you're feeling right now?'

Top Tip!
Start with some kind of validation (see definition in glossary), acknowledging the effort put in by the participant(s) or how they felt the session went.

>>>>> **Action plan**

Identify times and situations where you can be more aware of your emotions...

✕

Continuing to use the tool

Print off a smaller version of the tool, small enough to fit in a pocket or wallet (**www.sprintproject.org**).

Set the task of mapping emotions throughout the day. Maybe decide on particular times or around certain situations. This can be done with a simple cross on the grid with the time written next to it.

Encourage participant(s) to be aware of how their emotions impacted their actions and what the outcome was.

To create a sense of togetherness and accountability, maybe try it yourself too. Then compare and contrast your emotional maps when you meet up again.
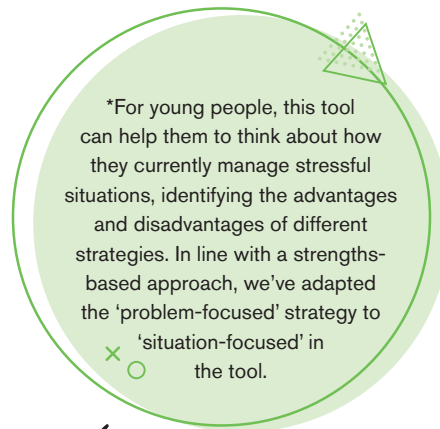
To do...

STOP TOOL

There are two common coping strategies to dealing with **stressful events**[18]:

1. Problem focused* – aim is to deal with the situation causing the stress response (eg, increase effort; reanalyse and find a new plan)
2. Emotion focused – aim is to regulate our emotions in order to reduce or manage psychological stress (eg, deep breaths, relaxation techniques, seeking social support)

For each strategy, we can adopt two main **coping styles**[19]:

1. Approach coping – addressing the stressful situation directly (eg, positive thinking, being realistic)
2. Avoidance coping – removing yourself from the situation either physically (ie, walking away) or psychologically (ie, cognitive distancing)

When we consider these two approaches and styles, we end up with a 2x2 grid, which helps to identify different thoughts and actions we can use when responding to stressful situations.
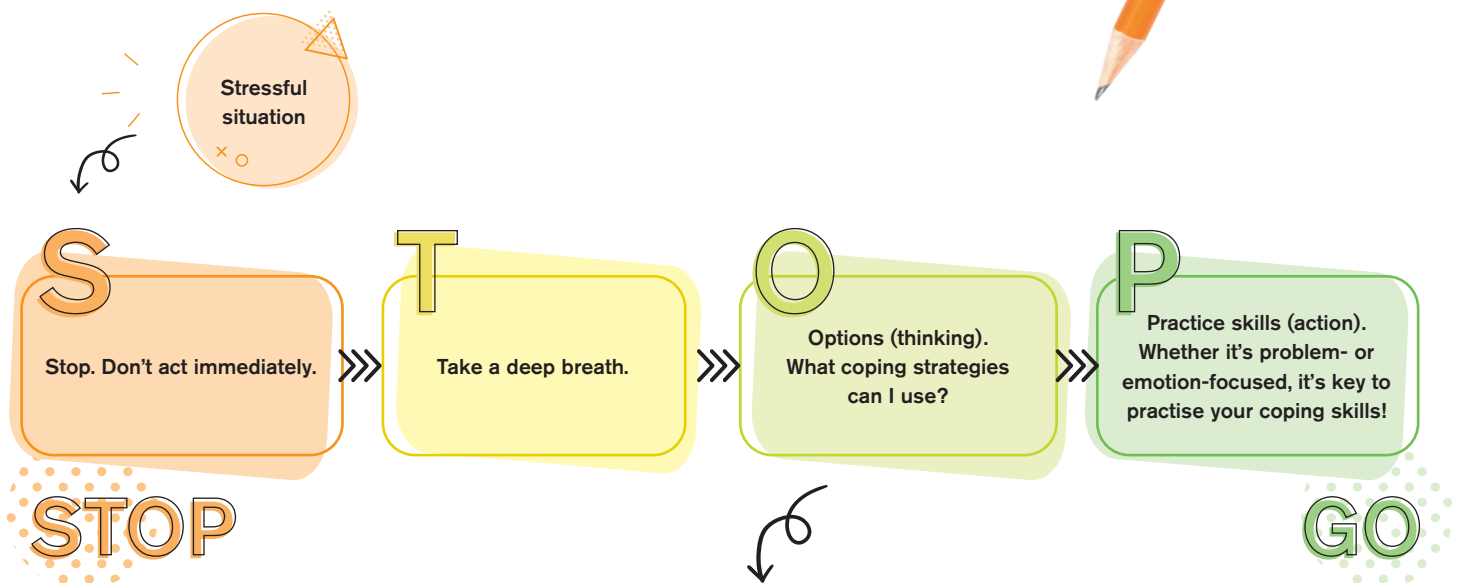
*For young people, this tool can help them to think about how they currently manage stressful situations, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of different strategies. In line with a strengths-based approach, we've adapted the 'problem-focused' strategy to 'situation-focused' in the tool.

Problem-solving
Self-regulation
Resilience
Self-awareness

		COPING TOOLS	
		Approach	Avoidance
COPING STRATEGIES	Situation focused	*Reflect on the situation causing the stress and try to change it*	*Try again and don't worry about it (distraction/walk away)*
	Emotion focused	*Use relaxation techniques to reduce stress*	*Ignore the situation as if it didn't bother you (walk away)*

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Using the STOP tool *(65–75 minutes)*

Step 1
Introduce the 2x2 coping grid, explaining that the grid shows different coping strategies (situation vs emotion focused) and different coping styles (approach vs avoidance). Discuss the different thoughts and behaviours you might have depending on your style and approach.
10 minutes

Step 2
Then introduce the STOP tool as a technique to managing stressful situations.

Stop: how easy is it to stop when you're stressed? What could the benefits be?
10 minutes

Step 3
Take a deep breath: practise taking a long, deep breath, how did it feel? Highlight how taking a breath can slow your mind down and help to make rational decisions.
10 minutes

Step 4
Options: highlight how this stage is about thinking. Think about which strategy and style will help you get the best possible outcome. What are the pros and cons of the different approaches?
15–20 minutes

Step 5
Practice: this part of the tool is about action and developing skills. Discuss the different actions you might take depending on the preferred strategy and style. What are the consequences of these actions? How can you practise this action in other situations?
10–15 minutes

Step 6
End with an open reflection about how we've managed stressful situations in the past, how we currently deal with stressful situations, and what we could do differently in the future.
10 minutes

25

THE STOP TOOL

Stressful situation

S — Stop. Don't act immediately.

T — Take a deep breath.

O — Options (thinking). What coping strategies can I use?

P — Practice skills (action). Whether it's problem- or emotion-focused, it's key to practise your coping skills!

STOP

GO

COPING STYLE		
	APPROACH	AVOIDANCE
COPING STRATEGY — SITUATION FOCUSED		
COPING STRATEGY — EMOTION FOCUSED		

>>>>> Reflection questions on the tool

Past

Can you think of times in your life when you've used situation- or emotion-focused strategies? What were the outcomes? When did you feel more in control? Which led to more desired outcomes?

Try to really focus on the technique of your breathing
1. First, take a deep breath through your mouth, like you are sipping through a straw
2. Hold your breath for a few moments
3. Then gently exhale, like you are slowly blowing out a candle

Present

How did you find today's session? Have you ever looked at coping strategies in this way before? Have you learned anything new about yourself?

Future

How would you like to respond to stressful situations in the future? How could this tool be helpful in your day-to-day life?

Top Tip!
Try to encourage an 'approach style' to coping with stressful situations. *However*, sometimes this can escalate a situation (eg, conflict), so also recognise the strengths in avoidance styles when necessary.

>>>>> Action plan

Practice makes permanent!

When first using the tool, identify less stressful events, ones which you can already manage pretty well, and try applying the STOP tool.

This will give yourself a chance to try different strategies. If you're very emotionally aware, how can you try and be more situation focused? Or, if you're a good problem solver, could you try and focus on regulating your emotions?

Practise different skills that work for you. Just like a sports person will practise a physical skill until they master it, practise your psychological skills consistently to ensure they're easily accessible when you need them!

Over time, identify more stressful situations where the STOP tool could help you manage different scenarios.

To do...

DREAM TEAM

Social support is the different ways in which people help each other.

For young people who have experienced homelessness, greater levels of social support are linked to greater levels of resilience, lower psychological distress and a lower risk of depressive symptoms[20, 21, 22].

Social support also promotes a sense of belonging, serving as a protective factor for well-being and increasing the chance of overcoming complex early disadvantage[23].

Support seeking
Awareness of social support
Problem-solving
Resilience

>>>> Using the different social support tools

Feedback that we've had from young people and staff about this activity indicates this can be a sensitive subject for some young people, depending on their background and previous experiences. Therefore, this tool is broken down into two sections, allowing for their readiness to engage with this topic.

Section 1 is recommended for use with young people where you might have heard comments around broken relationships with others such as 'I don't have anyone else' or 'I only rely on myself'. This section is designed to broach the topic subtly to help you as a staff member gauge how ready the young person is to engage with this topic.

Section 2 can be used when you think young people are comfortable with discussing social support and who they have around them. You might have reached this point by completing section 1 or you might already be aware that the young person has positive relationships from other discussions.

Top Tip!
Regardless of which section you are using, regularly check in with the young person and remember that you can stop at any time if things are becoming overwhelming. If this happens, try the grounding exercise on page 30.
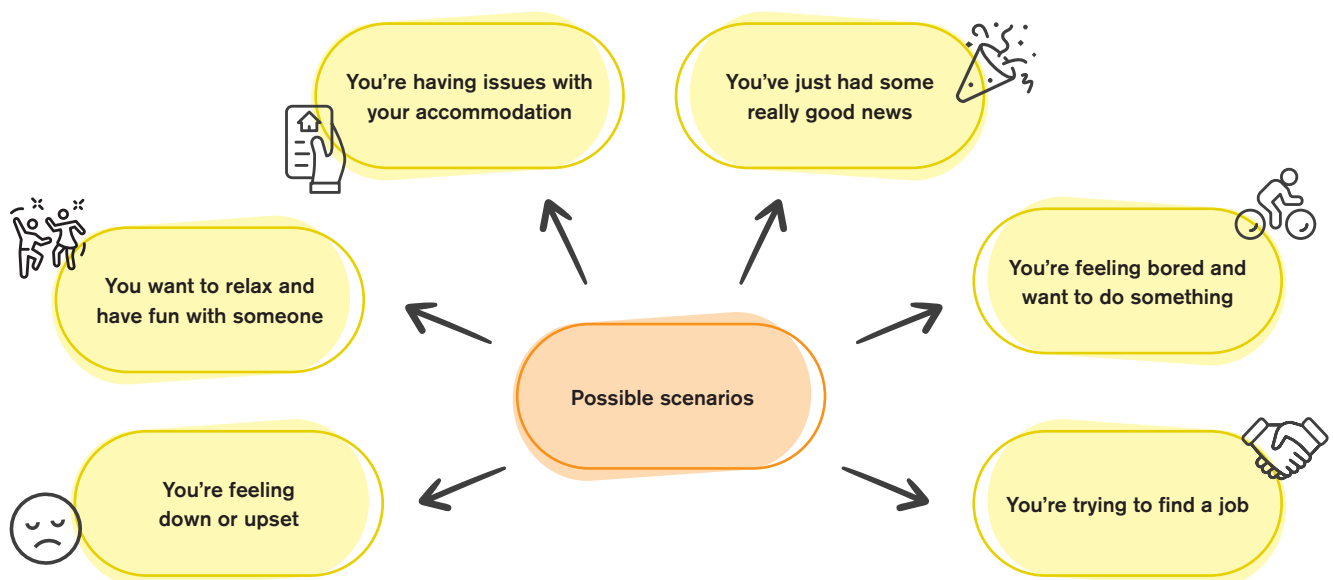
28

⟩⟩⟩⟩⟩ Section 1 *(25–35 minutes)*

This section focuses on conversations to plan ahead for different scenarios. For a more structured approach, try using the If/Then technique on page 19 (using the scenarios as 'If' statements). To keep this activity more informal, use the scenarios to guide conversation with the prompts suggested on the next page.
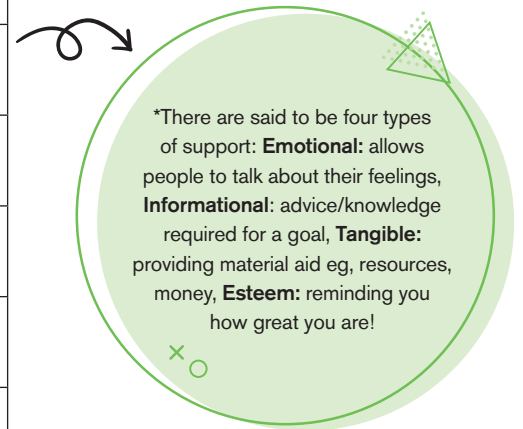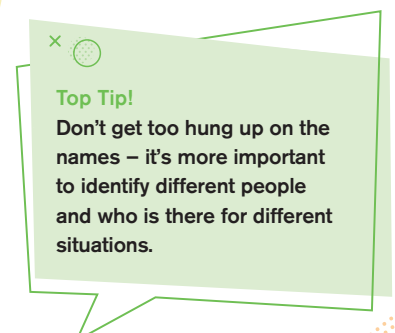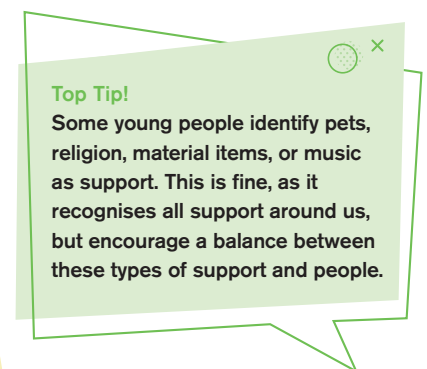
Step 1

Set some ground rules for the activity. Social support can be a sensitive subject for people, so whether you're delivering this in a group or one-to-one, it's worth establishing ground rules (see page 6).

5 minutes

Step 2

Ask the young person to pick a scenario they'd like to discuss. Draw from the list of general prompts to explore how they would respond.

5–10 minutes

Top Tip!
Even if the young person isn't currently experiencing these scenarios, it's good to practise and plan ahead for when they might happen.

Step 3

Gradually introduce questions from the support prompts. If the young person engages well, ask more questions from the list. If the young person disengages, becomes quieter, or seems distracted, check in with them, acknowledge the discomfort and then ask how they'd like to proceed: 1) move on to another scenario and focus more on the general prompts, or 2) move on to a grounding exercise to bring things back to the present moment.

10 minutes

Step 4

Bring the activity to a close with a guided reflection (see page 33 for questions). At this stage, it is important to debrief and signpost if necessary.

5–10 minutes

Top Tip!
Avoid making suggestions for them, which won't be as meaningful. Remember to use solution-focused language (see accompanying guide) and questions, such as 'What could you do about the things you have control over?' and 'What is the smallest step you could take in the next two days which could be helpful?'

⟩⟩⟩⟩⟩ Scenarios

You're having issues with your accommodation

You've just had some really good news

You want to relax and have fun with someone

You're feeling bored and want to do something

Possible scenarios

You're feeling down or upset

You're trying to find a job

GENERAL PROMPTS	SUPPORT PROMPTS
What made you pick that scenario?	What type of support* would you like if this situation happened?
What would be the ideal way you'd like to react in that situation?	How would you go about accessing that type of support?
How would you like to think, feel and behave?	Who would be the best person to go to for that type of support?
What would be the first step towards handling this situation?	How would you feel about asking for help for this situation?
What advice would you give to someone else in this situation?	If someone provided you with that support, how would that make you feel?

*There are said to be four types of support: **Emotional:** allows people to talk about their feelings, **Informational**: advice/knowledge required for a goal, **Tangible:** providing material aid eg, resources, money, **Esteem:** reminding you how great you are!

>>>> **Section 2: Dream Team** *(45–60 minutes)*

This section is about helping young people to develop awareness of who they have around them and the types of support* they provide. As this activity can be quite complex for different people, we've listed some common responses and learning opportunities on our website (**www.sprintproject.org**).

Get yourself into a comfortable position, close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths. Now open your eyes, look around you and name out loud: **Five** things you can see, **Four** things you can feel, **Three** things you can hear, **Two** things you can smell, **One** thing you can taste.

Step 1

Encourage the young people to think about the different roles required in a successful team (eg, sports team – players, coaches, managers, supporters). Discuss the different strengths and qualities required in each of those roles.

10 minutes

Step 2

Now turn their attention to their own support networks (eg, 'Your own support network is a team similar to a sports team, with different roles and strengths'). Introduce the dream team tool and encourage them to identify different people in their support network (eg, friends, family, support workers). Encourage them to assign each person to a card and write down: 1) their name or label (eg, 'friend'), 2) their greatest quality, 3) what support* they provide and 4) in what situation they would go to them for support. Refer to the scenarios in section 1 if that helps.

30–40 minutes

Step 3

Bring the activity to a close with a guided reflection (see page 33 for questions). At this stage, it is important to debrief and signpost if necessary.

5–10 minutes

Top Tip!
Some young people identify pets, religion, material items, or music as support. This is fine, as it recognises all support around us, but encourage a balance between these types of support and people.

Top Tip!
Don't get too hung up on the names – it's more important to identify different people and who is there for different situations.

Captain

o Role model
o Can think calmly when under pressure
o Provides direction

Supporter

o Supports the decisions you make
o Pushes you to reach your goals

Defence

o Gets the job done
o Stands up for you
o Provides stability

Manager

o Can see the 'bigger picture'
o Good organisational skills
o Knowledgeable

Attack

o Energises you
o Gets things moving
o Can have a laugh with them

Coach

o Encourages you
o Motivates you
o Provides helpful advice for taking care of yourself

Medic

o Provides emotional and/or physical support
o Makes you feel better
o Reliable

Caretaker

o Takes care of you
o Provides practical support
o Trustworthy

Captain

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Defence

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Attack

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Medic

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Supporter

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Manager

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Coach

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

Caretaker

Name

Best Quality:

What type of support do they give you?

When would you ask them for support?

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Reflection questions on the tool

How did you find this tool?
What could we do differently if we were to do it again? What mental strengths were you using throughout this activity? How might this activity be useful in your day-to-day life?

Section 1
How did you find this section? Are there any scenarios we didn't discuss that you'd like to cover (if young person has engaged throughout section 1)? How would you feel about completing the next section (explain section 2 briefly)?

Section 2
How did you find the process of identifying your dream team? What are some of the benefits of being able to recognise who is around you for support? How might your dream team change over time? How often would you like to review your dream team? What do you notice about the different types of support* people in your dream team are giving you? For example, is it more emotional or informational?

*There are said to be four types of support: **Emotional:** allows people to talk about their feelings, **Informational**: advice/knowledge required for a goal, **Tangible:** providing material aid eg, resources, money, **Esteem:** reminding you how great you are!

⟩⟩⟩⟩ Action plan

Building a personalised action plan

If the young person hasn't felt comfortable with this topic then don't worry, perhaps try a different tool. How about revisiting their strengths profile to see what they'd like to focus on?

If you've been through section 1 together – well done! How about going through section 2 in your next meeting together?

If you've completed section 2 – great work! Encourage the young person to think about how the people in their dream team can help them achieve their goals – the goal setting tool on page 15 will be really helpful for this.

We've talked a lot about the support people receive, but another aspect to think about is the type of support given to others. Secret challenge for both of you – do something kind for someone else, without them knowing you did it! Things to consider:
- What would they appreciate?
- How can you do it?
- Why is this meaningful to you?

Don't forget to reflect together about how it went for both of you!

To do…

FINAL THOUGHT

>>>> **At this stage we'd like to leave you with a final thought...**

" *It's almost like there's a stigma attached to being homeless and talking about the feelings and emotions that are associated with homelessness, but [MST4Life™] completely just breaks through the stigma and it changes the way that you view it, like, it's not a negative thing , it's a positive thing if you choose it to be.* "

These are the words of a young person who has experienced homelessness. Having completed our programme, and in combination with the support received from a psychologically informed organisation such as *St Basils*, she has since spoken in parliament, attended university and lived independently. However, not all young people will respond so favourably and not all young people will show the same signs of engagement. This toolkit should not be seen as a quick fix and nor should any method of working.

Instead, the growth of any young person is dependent on nurturing support from skilled and passionate people (such as yourself!). Take what you need from the toolkit, share what you learn, and adapt what doesn't seem to fit.

Thank you for taking time to read this section and the toolkit. We're always looking to generate new ideas and work with new people, so please don't hesitate to get in touch via our website: **www.sprintproject.org**

thank you!

GLOSSARY

MST: Mental Skills Training

EET: In Education, Employment or Training

NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

YP: Young Person

PIE: Psychologically Informed Environment
(see further explanation below)

ACE: Adverse Childhood Experience

DEFINITIONS

AUTONOMY: A basic psychological need that reflects people's desire to have choice, free will and/or a sense of self-driven motivation to complete a task.

CHECK IN: A deliberate process to 'touch base' with the person/people you are interacting with to determine how they are currently feeling, and how that might influence their levels of engagement for the day.

COGNITIVE DISTANCING: The process of removing yourself psychologically from the situation and pay attention to your own thoughts.

COMPETENCE: A basic psychological need that reflects people's desire to be effective and develop mastery.

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMME: A programme that has been co-developed with stakeholders from the community in which the programme is taking place, taking their specific considerations into account with the aim of creating a programme that is engaging and mutually beneficial for both the community stakeholders and researchers.

GROUND RULES: A collection of suggestions that have been created and agreed upon by those in the group that aim to ensure an emotionally and physically safe space.

MENTAL SKILLS: Used as an umbrella term to describe psychological skills, techniques and qualities that are considered beneficial for day-to-day life, but also can be applied to different settings (eg, work, education). Examples of skills include self-awareness, emotional regulation, confidence and goal-setting.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH: An approach whereby researchers aim to fully engage stakeholders (eg, young people) in the research process.

PERSON-CENTRED: Ensuring that the programme participants' needs are at the heart of the approach.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY INFORMED ENVIRONMENT (PIE): A PIE service or organisation utilises evidence-based psychological theories and models to guide practice to help ensure the emotional and psychological needs of their clients and staff are met.

RELATEDNESS: A basic psychological need that reflects people's desire to belong and be connected to others.

VALIDATION: Showing recognition or acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours as understandable.

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Attendees of our toolkit launch (11 November 2019), University of Birmingham. With a special thanks to those in bold for their efforts in supporting the day.

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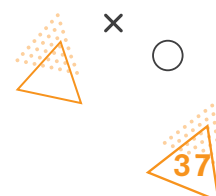Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

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