



Strand 4 | Emotional Wellbeing

Learning Outcome 4.2:	Students should be able to recognise and acknowledge their emotions and recognise the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
Pre-learning:	Although pre-learning related to specific learning outcomes is not required, an open and trusting classroom environment needs to be in place to support students to feel safe in discussing their thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

The focus of learning

We know that certain skills and practices can nurture wellbeing, and amongst these skills, self-awareness and the ability to manage and regulate one's emotions are crucially important. The learning in Strand 4: Emotional Wellbeing, focuses on nurturing emotional wellbeing and promoting positive mental health through the development of these and other skills. This learning is underpinned by approaches used in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and approaches associated with positive psychology.

Learning Outcome 4.2 has two important dimensions – firstly, supporting students in being able to recognise and acknowledge their emotions and secondly, building awareness of how their thoughts, feelings, bodily and behavioural responses are interconnected and influence each other. In other words, what you think affects the way you feel and this affects the way you behave. This awareness can empower young people throughout their lives and particularly in times of stress and when they may otherwise feel they have little control over their thoughts, feelings and behavioural responses.

It is important for students to begin to see the links between their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Through awareness, we can distinguish between helpful and unhelpful thoughts, and break the cycle of unhelpful or negative thinking that may lead to anxiety or depression. The aim is not to remove all negative thinking but to establish a healthier balance between unhelpful and helpful thoughts.

SPHE teachers are not expected to have expertise in psychology, nor should they provide one-to-one psychological support to students experiencing specific mental health difficulties. However, teachers can draw upon the insights of psychology and integrate approaches into their classroom planning which can support the promotion of emotional wellbeing for all students. A cognitive behaviour informed approach is one such approach that can inform your teaching and benefit all students. If you are already trained to facilitate the *Friends Youth* programme (NEPS) you will be familiar with this approach. A CBT approach looks at the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It helps us to understand that when/if we engage in negative thoughts, it can affect how we feel (making us sad, anxious, etc.) and this affects our behaviour (withdrawal, avoidance, etc). Positive psychology is about focusing on people's strengths as opposed to their weaknesses and building positive experiences and positive traits (such as gratitude, resilience, compassion and connectedness).

Possible questions to explore through this learning outcome:

- What are the things that give rise to negative thinking? What can help us to rebalance our thinking?
- Reflect on the following statement: *'Emotions are neither good nor bad. It's what you do with them that matters'*.

Possible follow-on learning outcomes:
4.3 and 4.4

Go to the 2023 SPHE Toolkit for teaching resources linked to LO 4.2