

Psychology of Exceptional Learning

Rational emotive behavioural therapy

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Example :

Event	How you judge it	Irrational self talk	Feeling
I did well in the discussion and showed that I know things better than my friends	I don't want to seem different from my friends. I need their approval	It would be awful if they don't approve. I couldn't stand it; it would make me a failure	Anxious
I have to do a maths test	I might fail the test	It would be awful to fail because that would mean that I'm not successful	Anxious
The teacher might ask me a question	I mightn't know the answer and my friends might see this	If that happens, I will seem stupid and that would be a catastrophe	I must worry
I couldn't do what I wanted to	I want my way	It's awful that I don't get it (self-pity)	Depression
My friend was nasty to me	She / he doesn't like me any more	I can't stand it if my friend doesn't like me	
I said something silly and everybody laughed	I seemed like a fool	I should be perfect and not do silly things	
I got a low mark for the test	I should have got a better result	This shouldn't have happened.	Anger
The teachers spoke unkindly to me	I don't like it when people speak to me like that	They shouldn't speak to me like that.	Anger
This subject is hard to learn	It's too hard	I shouldn't have bothered. My life should be easy, comfortable	

Teaching students to understand their feelings during learning

How do you feel about learning ? The purpose of this session is for pupils to understand that

- they have feelings about what they are learning and these feelings affect how well they learn,
- their feelings are not caused by what they are learning per se but rather what they tell themselves about the learning
- what they tell themselves can often be irrational and not help them to achieve their goals
- they can manage how they feel about what they are learning and that they can change what they tell themselves.

A class was having a maths test in two day's time. This is how four pupils felt about it

Peter was very angry about having to do the test. He was angry at home. He broke his parent's CD and lost his temper with his young brother. "Why should I have to maths ?" he said to himself. "I hate it. Teachers have got no right to make me have to do it." His angry feelings stopped him from studying. Whenever he sat down to revise, he would lose his temper, get in a bad mood, stamp out of his room and get into trouble (again). He was very irritable with his friends at school.	Jean was worried about the test. She wasn't getting her maths right. She kept telling herself that she was hopeless and stupid and would never be able to learn maths. She would say to herself "If I fail this test again, people are going to know I'm stupid. They won't like me and I couldn't stand it if they find out how dumb I am. What will I do ?" She felt that she just couldn't stand looking stupid again and didn't think she could face going to school for the test	Dan was feeling very anxious about the test. He was also feeling quite desperate. He had failed the earlier maths tests . He needed maths for his future, (he wanted to be a pilot) but just couldn't learn it. Whenever he tried to study he felt that he wasn't learning anything and couldn't remember what he had learnt earlier. He kept saying to himself " I know I'm going to fail this test. I'm not learning anything. I'll never be able to learn maths but I must. I need it to be a pilot. My future depends on it. What can I do ?	Prue was feeling good about the test. She had found the work hard and made lots of mistakes, but whenever she did this she corrected it and tried to discover why she had made it. She kept saying to herself "It doesn't matter if I get things wrong now, as long as I can correct my mistakes" She had already realized that the test wouldn't know whether she had had two, twelve or twenty goes at a problem while she was studying. She had developed a revision study plan and was working through it. She had failed earlier tests, but thought she could pass this one.
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Ask the pupils

<i>Describe each pupil's feelings?</i>	Have them name each pupil's feelings :
<i>What is causing the pupils to feel this way ?</i>	Many pupils will believe that the maths test causes these feelings.
<i>Does everyone in the same situation have the same feelings ?</i>	No, it is unlikely that they all feel the same. The maths test itself is not causing the same feelings in all of the pupils.
<i>Where do the feelings come from ?</i>	Let pupils see that all of the four pupils were making errors before the test.

Teach the students to analyse each example by using the following grid.

Child and feeling	Reason for the feeling	Focus on how what the four children were telling themselves affected their feelings
Peter was angry	He couldn't see why he had to do maths. "I hate it. Teachers have got not right to make me do it."	Would Peter have felt angry if he hadn't felt that he shouldn't have to learn math?
Jean was worried	She would be hopeless and stupid if she failed. Her friends wouldn't like her and she couldn't bear to lose their respect.	Would Jean have felt as worried if she hadn't told herself that she would be hopeless and stupid if she failed, that her friends wouldn't like her and she couldn't bear to lose their respect. ?
Dan was anxious	He needed maths for his future, but just couldn't learn it. "I'll never be able to learn maths but I must. I have to ".	Would Dan have felt so anxious if he didn't believe that he needed maths for his future, that he must learn it, but just couldn't and would never be able to ?
Prue felt good	Whenever she made a mistake, she corrected it and tried to discover why she had made it. She was working through a revision study plan.	Would Prue have felt as good if she was hadn't prepared a revision study plan and if she had panicked about making mistakes instead of correcting them ?

In the cases where the children's feelings were interfering with how well they were learning, what more helpful things could the children have said to themselves ? Have the pupils work in small groups on these recommendations and collate their suggestions. Possible recommendations include:

Peter

- It's not just in maths that I don't have any say in what I learn. There are many other things that I have to do and I don't get angry about them.
- The fact that I don't want to do maths doesn't mean that I can't learn it.
- I haven't got any choice about learning maths and I may as well make the most of it. I might even get interested in it.
- Getting angry about having to do maths doesn't help me get out of it. I still have to do it. So why get angry or hate it ?"

Jean

- Worrying about the test doesn't help me to do better in the test.
- Making mistakes when I'm revising for the test doesn't mean that I will make similar mistakes in the test; I can learn from the errors.
- If I don't get my maths right, this doesn't mean that I am hopeless and stupid.
- Just because I don't do well in this test doesn't mean that I will never be able to learn maths.
- Even if I fail this test, my friends won't necessarily think that I'm stupid. They will just think I'm not good at maths.
- Even if I fail this test and my friends think that I'm stupid and don't want me as a friend, they mightn't think like that forever. If they do, I can probably make other friends.

Dan

- Feeling anxious about the test doesn't help me to do better on it
- Making mistakes when I'm revising doesn't mean that I will make similar mistakes in the test; I can learn from the errors.
- If I don't get my maths right this time, this doesn't mean I'll never be able to learn it; I might be able to get another go and do better with more time to study.
- Failing the earlier maths tests doesn't mean I'll fail this one.
- Even if I never pass maths, this doesn't mean I can't be a pilot; I'll just go about training another way
- Even if I can't become a pilot it won't be the end of my life. I might even change my mind.

Prue does not need to learn alternative self-talk; she was already feeling good about the test and her feelings were not preventing her from learning.

Encourage discussion of the alternative self-talk, the corresponding feelings and the effects on each child's learning.

This discussion may help pupils to begin to reflect on their feelings while learning situations and where the feelings come from. Lead them to recognize the following general points:

- We all have feelings about what we are learning. We can't avoid them and we shouldn't try.
- Different pupils feel differently about a situation. Some students have positive feelings that help them to learn. Others have extreme negative feelings that stop them from learning.
- These feelings come from what we are telling ourselves.
- It helps us to recognise what feelings we have when we are learning.
- When we have negative feelings that stop us from learning, we should listen to what we are telling ourselves, try to look at the situation another way and say things that are more positive.

Activity Have your students apply the above to their learning: have them

- recognize the feelings that they have in relation to learning in particular areas and
- identify the relationship between their feelings and how well they learn.

How do you feel about what you are learning ? We all have feelings about how we learn. Sometimes we have good or positive feelings about what we are learning. We enjoy what we are learning and feel happy about it. On other occasions we have bad or negative feelings. We may feel anxious, worried, frightened or angry. The feelings that we have affect how we learn. In this session we look at the feelings that pupils have and how they affect our ability to learn.

Think of the subjects you are learning at present. Pick out the ones that you feel most positive about learning and those you feel least positive about . Put them in order along the 'feeling line' below:

Most positive <-----> Least negative

Look at the subject/s that you feel most positive about ? Why do you feel this way ?	
Now look at the subject/s that you feel most negative about. Why do you have these feelings?	

Where do the feelings that you have about subjects come from ? Why have you learnt to feel in these ways ?	
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Activity **How do your feelings affect how you learn ?**

How do your feelings affect how well you can learn ? Think back to a time recently when you felt good about learning something. Imagine yourself learning it. What was it that you were learning ? How did you feel ? How did feeling good help you to learn ? Now think back to a time recently when you had negative feelings about learning and do the same thing>

What was it that you were learning ?		
How did you feel ?		
How did your feeling affect your learning?		

Our feelings have different strengths. You know that you can strongly enjoy some things and weakly enjoy others. Some things may make you slightly anxious while other things can make you very anxious. Select 10 recent learning events you have experienced and have them rate them on the feeling scale.

Recent learning events	feeling				
	strongly negative				strongly positive
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r
	r	r	r	r	r

Not all negative feelings stop you from learning. One thing you have to take into account is how strong the feelings are. A weak negative feeling can spur you on to learn better. When you are slightly anxious you may be more likely to start to work than when you are not anxious at all. Of course, if you are very anxious, you may not be able to learn much. We will look at two aspects of your feelings: try to

- develop those feelings that are most likely to help you to learn and
- reduce those feelings that prevent you from learning.

To do this you need to identify those feelings first.

Activity **Where do your feelings come from ?**

<p>Where do your feelings come from ? Think of your class before a mathematics test. Does everyone in the same situation have the same feelings ? No, it is unlikely that they all feel the same. So is it safe to say that it is not the mathematics test itself that causes the feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why would pupils feel differently about the mathematics test ? • Some believe that they will be more successful than others. • Some believe that they know more mathematics than their peers. • Some think that mathematics doesn't matter anyway; they don't need it for their future. • Some believe that they need to do better but just can't. • Some tell themselves that they just can't do maths; that they have always been hopeless at maths and will be now.

In other words, people believe different things; they have different beliefs and values. We call these things attitudes

Our attitudes are things we believe.

Activity

The aim of this activity is to focus pupils' attention on the feelings they have that affect their learning. Develop this on a group basis prior to individual reflection so that pupils

- see that their feelings are shared by class peers, that is, legitimise the feelings. Many pupils feel alone in their feelings; they need to see that other pupils also have these feelings.
- can identify both negative and positive feelings; often they think they do not have an option to the negative feelings that they have for learning. Learning to name various feelings helps them to understand and manage them.
- can see that negative feelings such as anxiety or hopelessness don't always restrict or limit learning and that while positive feelings such as self-confidence don't always help learning. They need to see the 'curvilinear' connection between anxiety and learning. High levels of anxiety can inhibit learning, but low levels can motivate and facilitate learning.

Have pupils in a group discussion suggest feelings that help them to learn and feelings that limit learning. List these under the headings

Feelings that help you to learn	Feelings that hinder your learning

When you have assembled a list, discuss each feeling in turn. If pupils have suggested that anxiety is to be avoided and self-confidence is needed, direct their attention to whether low levels of anxiety has helped them to learn in the past, for example

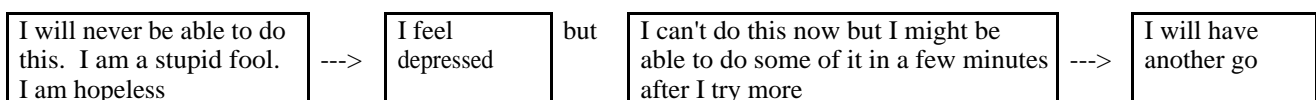
Does worrying a little bit about a test make you study more than not being worried at all ?

Does a little bit of concern make you more able to learn than not caring at all ?

Similarly, encourage them to examine whether high levels of self-confidence (that is, over-confidence) can restrict learning by not motivating the student to put in as much effort or work as hard on the idea. If necessary, modify the list of feelings so that the distinction between extreme and lower levels of feelings is noted. The modified list may include the following:

Feelings that help you to learn	Feelings that hinder your learning
confident a little bit anxious or worried when you feel ready in control	too confident , over confident, scared, frightened of getting things wrong too anxious or worried when you don't feel prepared angry, depressed, helpless, panic-stricken, threatened

Remind the pupils that feelings come from what we say to ourselves. When we say extreme things, we are more likely to have negative feelings, for example,



Use these diagrams to help pupils see the connection between how extreme the things are they say and how they feel. Encourage them to suggest 'more extreme' and 'less extreme' things that they say. Collate these. Examples may include

Less extreme	More extreme
I don't like maths but I can do bits of it	I hate maths and I shouldn't have to do it
I can get some of my maths right on the first try	I must get all of my maths right on the first try; if I don't, I'm dumb and I hate being dumb.

Help them see that the more extreme the things they say are more judgmental or self-critical and don't help them. Discuss how they can replace extreme feelings with more moderate feelings, that is, be less self-critical.