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Foundations for Wellbeing

Year 4, lesson 2: Managing internal and external distractions



Managing internal and external distractions

This is the second of five lessons on self-regulation, mental health and emotional wellbeing, for year 4. This lesson focuses on how to direct attention and manage distractions.

To encourage pupils to use the self-regulation strategies taught in these lessons more automatically, autonomously and effectively, it is important to revisit and reinforce them regularly, as part of a whole-school approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing. The extension activities are designed to support this (for more information, see the [Teacher Handbook](#)). To learn more, please visit our [self-guided online courses](#), which are available to all School Plus members.

The lesson plan is based on a 45-minute lesson. The timings given are the minimum required to deliver the activities, but you may wish to spend longer exploring each activity.

Learning objective and outcomes

To learn about internal and external distractions and how they can be managed.

Pupils will be able to:

- identify a range of internal and external distractions and evaluate their helpfulness
- describe what happens in the brain when someone is distracted
- evaluate strategies to manage distractions in different situations

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Resource 1: *Andie's outline* [one A3 copy per group]
- Resource 2: *Distraction cards* [one cut-up set per group]
- Resource 3: *Andie's distractions - teacher copy* [for teacher reference only]
- Resource 4: *Andie's amazing brain* [one per pair]

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. They include guidance on establishing a safe learning environment, supporting pupils with additional vulnerabilities, using assessment and personal reflection effectively, and embedding the learning. They also outline useful subject knowledge on the theory and evidence informing these lessons, self-regulation strategies and relevant neuroscience.

The lesson plans should be used flexibly, and you are encouraged to adapt them to meet the specific needs and abilities of your pupils. It is also important to consider sensitivities and prior knowledge about specific pupils' circumstances. If safeguarding concerns arise during this lesson, these should be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, in line with your school policy.

Baseline assessment

Reconnecting activity and baseline assessment (Slides 9-11, 6 mins)

Establish or revisit ground rules. Explain that if pupils have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Using slide 10, briefly remind pupils that last lesson, they learnt about emotions – and today's lesson will build on this by exploring distractions.

Tell the class that thumbs up (or stand up straight) is 'agree', thumbs down (or stay seated) is 'disagree' and thumb in the middle (or hovering between seated and standing!) is 'it depends'. Show the first opinion on slide 11 and ask pupils to silently consider their view, before closing their eyes and making their chosen action. Once they have made their action – with eyes open again, you may want to ask follow-up questions to find out more. For example, what makes you say that? What does it depend on? Repeat this process for the second and third opinions too.

Use this as an opportunity to gauge pupils' starting points, identify any gaps or misconceptions in their understanding and adjust the lesson as needed. The core activities will reinforce that distractions can be helpful, and that it takes practice and time for someone to be able to choose which thoughts they pay attention to.

Introduction (Slide 12, 2 mins)

Introduce today's learning objective and outcomes. Explain that this lesson will explore different types of distraction and a range of ways to manage less helpful distractions. Remind pupils that everyone gets distracted and sometimes distractions are helpful.

Core activities

Evaluating distractions (Slides 13-15, 15 mins)

Share slide 13 and, if relevant, encourage the class to think back to previous learning about distraction. Ask small groups to discuss the questions on the slide and take brief feedback before revealing some possible answers. Remind the class that recognising and managing unhelpful distractions supports people to focus on what matters to them – which in turn can have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Using slide 14, introduce Andie who wants help with distractions. Give each group an A3 copy of **Resource 1: Andie's outline**, along with a set of **Resource 2: Distraction cards**. Ask them to start by placing any internal distractions inside Andie's outline and any external distractions outside Andie's outline. If there are any distractions that they are not sure about, they should leave these to one side of the sheet. Circulate while groups are working and use **Resource 3: Andie's distractions – teacher**

copy to help assess their understanding, address any misconceptions and support groups with any distractions they are unsure about.

Next, tell groups to keep the distraction cards inside or outside Andie's outline, but re-order them so that the most helpful distractions for Andie are at the top of the sheet and the least helpful distractions for Andie are at the bottom of the sheet.

Again, circulate and use **Resource 3: Andie's distractions – teacher copy** as needed to help gauge pupils' understanding. Take some feedback and draw out that:

- *The helpfulness of a distraction will depend on the situation. For example, thinking about the games she wants to play after school would not always be unhelpful – but when this distracts Andie from her favourite lesson, then it is unhelpful because it's taking her attention away from something that she enjoys and wants to focus on.*
- *Sometimes the helpfulness of a distraction also depends on what action it encourages someone to take. For example, when Andie notices her tummy churning while she's reading and realises that she's feeling nervous about having a bad dream, this could be helpful if it encourages Andie to address the problem – for example, speaking to her adult at home and seeing if they have any advice.*

Finally, if time allows, ask groups to pick one helpful distraction (from the top of their sheet) and one less helpful distraction (from the bottom of their sheet) and discuss how these distractions would make Andie feel.

Briefly take responses, emphasising that if Andie is focussing on something important to her, then distraction from that might make her feel unpleasant feelings like irritated, annoyed or frustrated. Considering how a distraction makes her feel can also be a good way for Andie to decide if it is helpful or not.

Note: Pupils will look back at Andie's distractions in activity 3, so they should leave their distraction cards in their agreed order for the remainder of the lesson.



Support: Ask pupils to prioritise sorting the starred distractions on **Resource 2: Distraction cards**.



Challenge: Ask pupils to discuss: Are there any other ways to describe or categorise the distractions on **Resource 2: Distraction cards**? Why could it be useful for Andie to know the type of distraction she is experiencing?

Pupils might suggest several categories– for example, distractions caused by thoughts, bodily feelings, or sounds. Knowing the type of distraction she is experiencing, can help Andie to decide on the best strategy for managing it, if needed.

My amazing brain (Slides 16–17, 5 mins)

Remind pupils that Andie's brain can help her to manage less helpful distractions – but first, Andie will need to notice that she is distracted! Luckily, the brain can help with this too.

Thinking back to last lesson, ask pupils, can they remember some parts of the brain that help people to notice their thoughts and feelings? (*The anterior cingulate cortex – the ACC – and the insula.*)

Emphasise that the ACC and insula also help people to notice if they are distracted, and there are parts of the brain that can help people to manage distractions too. Using **Resource 4: Andie's amazing brain**, ask pairs to discuss and agree on the right words to complete the description of how the brain helps with this.

Take feedback using slide 17 to reveal the correct answers. Emphasise that just like last lesson, we learnt that noticing feelings, thoughts and emotions can get easier with practice – the same is true for managing distractions. The more our brains practise doing this, the easier we will find it in future.

Watching thoughts (Slides 18–25, 10 mins)

Emphasise that if Andie can identify different types of distractions, this can help her to decide which distractions might need managing and choose the best way to do this. For example, if Andie experiences internal, unhelpful distractions, there are strategies she can use to pause, notice and watch or observe her thoughts and feelings. With time and practice, this could help Andie to choose which thoughts and feelings to pay attention to and which ones to pay less attention to. Make sure pupils recognise that this is not about Andie denying her thoughts or feelings, or trying to force them away.

Referring back to the distractions from activity 1 (using slide 19), remind pupils of Andie not being able to enjoy the day with her dad because she's being distracted by thinking about an argument. Briefly discuss the thoughts that Andie might have when she experiences this distraction and how it might make her feel, before sharing some possible ideas on slide 18. Show the class the different strategies on slide 20 and emphasise that, just like thoughts, leaves on a stream, pop-up adverts and balloons, can all float away, or come and go.

Ask pupils to imagine they are Andie and explain that they are briefly going to practise each strategy for just 30 seconds or so. Use slides 21–23 to share more detailed instructions to help pupils practise the strategies and after they have completed all three, ask pairs to discuss:

- Which of those strategies (leaves on a stream, pop-up adverts, thoughts as balloons) do you think would be most useful for Andie and why?
- Do you have any other ideas for what Andie could do to help manage this distraction?

Finally, use slide 25 to recap on other strategies that Andie could use for managing distractions. Using all of these ideas, ask groups to look back at the unhelpful distractions they identified in activity 1 and discuss which strategies Andie could use to manage each of these different distractions.

Briefly take feedback, and make sure groups have chosen appropriate strategies depending on the type of distraction and the situation – for example:

- (2) to manage this external distraction, Andie could close the pop-up alerts, ask her adult at home to help adjust settings so the alerts are paused while she does her homework, or (if possible) try to move away from the device until she has finished.
- (4) to manage this internal distraction, Andie could use the leaves on a stream, pop-up adverts or thoughts as balloons strategy to try and visualise the thoughts about the game. She could also try counting backwards from 5 or using the 'See, hear, move' strategy (naming three things of a certain colour, noticing three sounds and making three different body movements) to take her mind off the argument. You could refer to the relevant strategies poster (Appendix 3 in the Teacher Handbook) during or after the lesson, to revisit and reinforce these strategies.



Support: Print the strategy kit on slide 20 for pupils to have in front of them.



Challenge: Ask pupils to complete sentence starters to summarise their learning. For example, 'The best strategy for managing distraction will depend on...'

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Reflection and endpoint assessment (Slides 26–27, 5 mins)

Using slide 26, ask pupils to silently reflect on an unhelpful distraction they have experienced today or this week. Encourage them to think about a distraction that they experienced while they were doing something they enjoy or that really matters to them. Without sharing, ask pupils to reflect on what type of distraction it was (whether internal or external), and identify a strategy that they could use to manage the distraction in future.

Remind the class of the learning outcomes for the lesson, which focused on evaluating different types of distractions and choosing strategies to manage them, as well as recognising how the brain can help with this. To apply this learning, ask pairs to look at the images on slide 27 and discuss:

- Which distraction could be the odd one out and why?
- Are any of the distractions unhelpful?
- If so, what could someone do to help manage these distractions?
- How might the brain help someone to use these strategies?

Circulate while pairs discuss and take some brief feedback from the class. Use this endpoint assessment to get a sense of pupils' progress and identify any gaps or misconceptions that may need to be addressed in future lessons. Check the question box and respond to any remaining questions.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 28, 2 mins)

Remind pupils that everyone gets distracted and sometimes distractions are really helpful! So, there is no need to worry about being distracted. However, if distractions are difficult to manage or make them feel worried or upset, then it's important they speak to a trusted adult at home or at school who can help. Pupils can also contact Childline: www.childline.org.uk/kids.

Closing the lesson (Slide 29)

Finally, using slide 29, reinforce the key learning by summing up for the class what they have achieved in today's lesson.

Activities to extend and embed the learning

Thoughts are like... (Slide 30)

Share the different thoughts with the class and ask them to imagine the thoughts are:

- words on the page or screen – what fonts and colours would they have?
- clouds in the sky – what would those clouds look like?
- leaves on a stream – what would those leaves look like?

Pupils could choose one way to display the thoughts and write or draw their ideas.

Watching thoughts (Slide 31)

Ask pupils to pick either the leaf, cloud or balloon watching thoughts strategy that they learnt this lesson. Can they try to practise this at least once before the next lesson? It could work especially well for internal, unhelpful distractions. You could display the relevant strategies poster (Appendix 3 in the [Teacher Handbook](#)) in the classroom to help prompt pupils.