

Using Thinking Cards to improve mental wellbeing

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To discuss this case study, please contact us via email customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk



Key Points

- The “Thinking Cards” were developed to help young people improve their mental wellbeing utilising techniques from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and mindfulness.
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Purpose

What were your reasons for doing this development work?

Over a number of years we had recognised that young people were finding it hard to make changes in their life and to develop resilience. Simply presenting them with advice and scenarios did not seem enough to help them effect change. So we looked at the ideas used in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Mindfulness and sought to distill the key ideas into 25 or so easily remembered phrases that could be presented on cards for them to learn and work with. The aim being that young people can improve their inner life and well being by suffering less from unhelpful thinking and benefit more from helpful thinking.

Who were the identified target learners?

At the Royal Free Hospital School, the cards are used with Key stage 2-4 pupils with mental health challenges but they could be used with equal effectiveness in mainstream settings with children and young people struggling to develop resilience.

What specific curriculum area did you intend to have impact on?

The overall impact of the programme is intended to affect the social emotional aspects of learning across the curriculum. They may be especially useful to tutors and mentors.

How were you intending to improve pupil learning?

What were your success criteria?

Methodology

What did you do - what teaching approaches did you use?

- We wanted to develop a learning tool to support young people in identifying their positive and negative thought patterns. The overall aim was to see a reduction in anxiety and an improvement in resilience.

- The development of the tool, required the design and printing of a set of cards with text on one side and an image relating to that text on the other side. The cards are used to teach young people to identify their negative and positive thought patterns.
- The cards are also designed to encourage a dialogue between personal tutors/learning mentors/teaching assistants and pupils and provide a scaffold for breakout sessions.
- The visuals that were used appeal to young people and are combined with simple yet powerful messages to enable young people to identify and challenge negative thinking.
- We have endeavored to make the use of the cards a special experience for the young people. The cards have a high quality finish and presentation and are supplied in a velvet lined presentation box.
- Children and young people set themselves targets over a period of time and by a particular focus on the helpful thinking cards can exhibit changes on their thinking and feeling.

What specific teaching resources did you use?

What CPD experiences, materials, research and expertise have you drawn on?

Outcomes and Impact

What has been the impact on pupil learning?

- The impact of the cards is being assessed through the use of both qualitative feedback from pupils/staff and the collation of quantitative data gathered through the assessment of pupil's pastoral progress by staff (recorded on the school database and analysed on a termly basis).
- The cards have been in use since September in their current format and already there are signs that children are using the thinking cards to effect significant change both outside and inside school
- Qualitatively, there have been a number of concrete examples of young people reporting that they have used the images on the cards to evoke a more positive state of mind. To measure the impact quantitatively, the school is recording the range of unhelpful thinking patterns with the view to reducing these over the periods of twelve months

- A scheduled handover meeting each morning allows our teachers and other staff to feedback pastoral progress on pupils. The project is clearly sustainable: new packs can be distributed year on year for use with new groups. The possibility also exists for the development of research projects alongside CAMHS in the Royal Free Hospital.

Evidence of impact on pupil learning

What has been the impact on teaching?

Evidence of impact on teaching

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

What would your next steps be?

Sharing Practice

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where should they start?

- The Senior teacher at the Royal Free Hospital School would be happy to hold an initial meeting with the interested school and discuss the experience of using the cards and the most effective ways for their use.

What would be the essential elements to include?