 Identifying strengths, skills and strategies

Suggested duration: 40 minutes

This activity has been designed to assist students to identify their strengths and skills and to recognise when it would be appropriate to use each skill or strategy. Students will have the opportunity to assess their personal strengths and identify ways to enhance their ability to apply these skills and strategies.

A number of scenarios have been developed to allow students to evaluate the most suitable strengths, skills and strategies to use in different situations. To make this activity more relevant, teachers and students can also design their own scenarios to reflect the issues that are faced in their local community.

Course outcomes

1.1 Assess personal strengths and skills to achieve positive outcomes in a range of challenging and changing situations.

1.3 Build positive thinking, self-belief and a sense of empowerment to take action to promote meaningful futures for self and others.

5.1 Critically analyse situations, attitudes and behaviours that influence independence, health, safety and wellbeing in different contexts.

7.3 Apply skills to take personal responsibility for their actions to protect and enhance the independence, health, safety and wellbeing of others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Identify personal strengths and skills for responding to challenging or harmful situations.
* Evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of a range of strengths, skills and strategies designed to assist young people in challenging situations.
* Assess and apply strengths, skills and strategies to potentially harmful situations in relation to employment, drugs and alcohol, identity, relationships, safe travel, sexual health and violence.

Suggested content

| Learning context | Content |
| --- | --- |
| Mental health and wellbeing  Focus: Developing self-efficacy and mental fitness | Building resilience   * acknowledging controllable factors * seeking, accessing and accepting help and support   Self-awareness and self-regulation   * emotional awareness and self-regulation * optimistic thinking * perspective taking |
| Independence  Focus: Building self-concepts and independence | Personal values and beliefs   * recognising and assessing strengths, aspirations and potential   Self-management   * managing change and initiating contingency plans * responsibility for self and actions * strategies for future success |

Teaching notes

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audiovisual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the [Life Ready website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready).

Learning experiences

Activity one – Identifying strengths and skills (10 minutes)

1. Students access the Authentic Happiness website to complete the [VIA strengths for children](http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx) survey and identify their own strengths.

* Students register as a new user.
* Click on the questionnaires tab and look for the VIA strengths for children survey. Complete the survey.
* Students record their top 5 strengths.

Alternatively, students work in small groups with familiar peers and peers they are comfortable with, to share ideas and discuss their top 5 strengths from the handout. Record their top 5 strengths.

1. In small groups, students reflect on their top 5 strengths and compare them with others.

* Where have these strengths developed from?
* Are these strengths reflected in other members of the family?
* How do your strengths compare to others in your peer group?
* What makes these strengths important to personal identity?

1. Students work in pairs. Students describe to a partner a situation where they have called on one of their top 5 strengths. Ask students the following:

* assess how effectively you used this strength?
* how did the strength impact on your decision or action in this situation?
* if this situation arose again, explain how you would call on this strength, or what other strengths you could use in this situation.

Activity two – Applying strengths, skills and strategies (20 minutes)

1. Students revise the strategies that could be used in challenging situations.

* In pairs, students choose one strategy each.
* Students explain to their partner an example of a situation in which their chosen strategy is appropriate to use.
* For example, your parent/ carer has been drinking at a friend’s house and wants to drive you home rather than take a taxi. Practise refusal skills – say no and convince them you would prefer to stay longer or take a taxi.

1. In small groups, students select three scenarios and review the strengths, skills and strategies that could be used in each scenario. Groups provide advice for the character involved. Encourage groups to:

* identify which strengths, skills and strategies would be useful in each scenario
* choose the most suitable strength, skill or strategy to use in each scenario, and explain how the strength, skill or strategy could be applied.

Groups should explain:

* What they could say?
* Where they could go?
* Who they could go to for support?

1. Invite each group to present their scenario and advice to the class.
2. To conclude this activity, students should complete a personal reflection on their capacity and confidence to apply strengths, skills and strategies in difficult situations. For example:

* which strengths, skills and strategies are you most confident and comfortable using? Provide reasons.
* which strengths, skills and strategies are you least confident and comfortable in using? Provide reasons.
* how could you improve your ability to apply these strengths, skills and strategies in different situations?

Strengths, skills and strategies

Sometimes, young people might find themselves in a situation where they are not comfortable. It is important for young people to have a range of strengths, skills and strategies that can be used in different situations to remain safe and increase the chance of a positive outcome.

Strategies

**Refusal skills**

Say no in a way that shows you mean it but without disrespecting others

**Judge the situation**

Assess the situation and trust your judgement. Be flexible and choose the options to maximize positive outcomes.

**Distancing**

Step back from a situation or reduce contact and interaction with people involved. It requires knowing your own boundaries regarding your physical and emotional “comfort zone”.

**Make an excuse**

Give a reason, whether real or not, to get out of the situation if you feel unsure or unsafe.

**Modification**

Make changes to the physical or social environment or modify behaviour to enhance safety and wellbeing for self and others.

**Awareness**

Pay attention to as much in the environment as possible. Using your senses (sight and hearing particularly) to be alert to changes in the environment and being prepared to reduce surprises.

**Assertiveness**

Clearly state your needs, wants and feelings whilst still being respectful of others

**Planning**

Forward think to put decisions into action and lead to positive outcomes. Requires flexibility to adapt plans when situations change.

**Avoidance**

Prevent an unwanted situation by avoiding it or leaving it. Requires you to trust your judgement or your feelings about a situation.

Strengths

**Leadership**

Can organise and encourage others to act

**Courage**

Takes action even when the situation is awkward, or they feel anxiety or fear

**Empathy**

Aware of the needs and feelings of others

**Kindness**

Shows generosity and a willingness to share and help others

**Respect**

Values the diversity in a person or group and challenges own personal beliefs and attitudes

**Caution**

Makes decisions carefully, considering all the options and needs of self and others

**Self control**

Can control actions and stick to decisions

**Persistence**

Keeps trying regardless of previous experiences or success

**Honesty**

Tells the truth regardless of the situation

**Sense of purpose**

Believes that they can contribute to the world in a meaningful way

**Perspective**

Comes up with good advice, considers the big picture, weighs up alternatives and outcomes before acting

**Modesty**

Doesn’t brag about achievements or show off

**Humour**

Sees the light side and helps people laugh

**Creativity**

Comes up with different ways to address situations

**Enthusiasm**

Brings energy and positivity to all situations

**Optimism**

Looks on the positive side of things

**Forgiveness**

Let’s go of anger and resentment and moves on without holding a grudge

**Loyalty**

Always there for others

Knowledge and Skills

Able to put forward a convincing argument

Able to distract people from what they are about to do without making them angry

Able to avoid or negotiate conflict with unreasonable people

Able to provide basic first aid in emergency situations

Able to listen to others, understand the needs and circumstance of others and expresses that understanding

Able to assert own point of view

Able to make meaningful connections with others

Able to assert own point of view

Able to identify people and situations which might be difficult of dangerous

Able to propose alternative when situations are not what is expected or what suits

Knows how to plan for and take action to protect self and others, even when plans change

Able to assess own abilities and use these abilities to work and cooperate with others

Able to seek help where required

Able to influence and persuade others positively

Able to encourage people to look out for themselves

Able to organise safe events and safe travel plans even when other plans fall through

Able to manage emotions effectively and appropriately

Able to make clean decision after assessing alternatives and evaluating outcomes

Able to communicate clearly with others and share thoughts and emotions appropriately

Able to think positively

Able to plan, set and evaluate goals

Scenarios

What advice would you give the character in each scenario to help them to respond to the situation?

Use the strengths, strategies and skills to develop your advice.

Ali works part time and is saving money to buy a car. Ali finds it difficult to balance both study for exams and part time work. Ali is pressured by the boss to take extra shifts which cut into school time and will affect school attendance.

Jai has been told that his parents have arranged for him to marry a woman from his community. Jai is 17 and is not yet legally old enough to marry in Australia. He does not want to marry the woman his parents have chosen but does not want to disrespect his family or lose them.

Alex spends a lot of money on entertainment and appearance. Having the latest phone and products is important to Alex. Alex does not smoke or drink alcohol but likes to socialise as often as possible. Alex is attracted to Danni and has been trying for months to get her attention. At a party, Danni offers Alex an alcoholic drink and is clearly offended that Alex won’t have a drink with her.

Jake and Roden are at the local skate park, trying new tricks and recording it on their phones. One of the locals tells a story about a video they saw where a guy rode his skateboard, holding onto the back of a car to get speed. Jake suggests to Roden that he should do it and film it to upload and show their mates. Roden is not comfortable with the suggestion.

Mira has been drinking at a party and feels unwell. She wants to lie down and her friend takes her to a bedroom and leaves her there to rest. While she is in the bedroom, a male friend from her year group at school comes into the room. She doesn’t want to be alone and is glad he is there. He asks to lie down with Mira and Mira asks him to get her some water. He brings her some water and then lies down and kisses her without her permission. She is not ok with it.

Arvon is at a club with friends. He goes to the bar to buy a soft drink. Arvon accidentally bumps a woman on his way back from the bar and she spills her drink. The woman starts swearing and shouting at Arvon. The woman pushes Arvon into another group of guys, who turn quickly and push Arvon back towards the woman.

Evie is dancing with friends, when some start fooling around and trying to look sexy. Most of the group think it is funny but Evie feels embarrassed. A group of guys join them on the dance floor and a few disappear together. Evie is left with a guy she does not know and does not know where her friends have gone. She wants to leave but can’t find anyone to go with her and doesn’t want to leave by herself.