



Can't Talk, Write

**Using writing to improve young people's
mental and emotional wellbeing**

A toolkit for facilitators

Welcome

Writing is a really positive way of expressing thoughts and feelings. It can be particularly helpful for children and young people, supporting them to improve their mental and emotional wellbeing, and make sense of any issues they're going through.

This is especially important today, as life for children and young people – particularly the most vulnerable – is increasingly complicated. Pressures at home, in school and online can have a negative impact on wellbeing. Findings from Action for Children suggest that one in eight 5 to 19-year-olds has mental and emotional wellbeing issues.

Research commissioned by Royal Mail shows that writing can help. Almost half of young people (46%) said writing down their thoughts and feelings helped them feel better about something that had made them feel sad. Young people also said writing made them feel calmer (47%) and helped them to articulate their thoughts and feelings (37%).

This is why Royal Mail, The Prince's Trust and Action for Children have got together to develop a series of therapeutic writing activities for young people. This toolkit, which is for those facilitating sessions, includes individual and group activities. Each is designed to help children and young people to express their feelings in a way that works for them.

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit has been developed to help you, as a facilitator, explore how writing can connect with our thoughts and feelings.

There are 10 sessions – each with an accompanying activity – for you to try out with young people aged 11 to 18-years-old. Each session comes with a lesson plan, as well as ideas to help you adapt or expand the content.

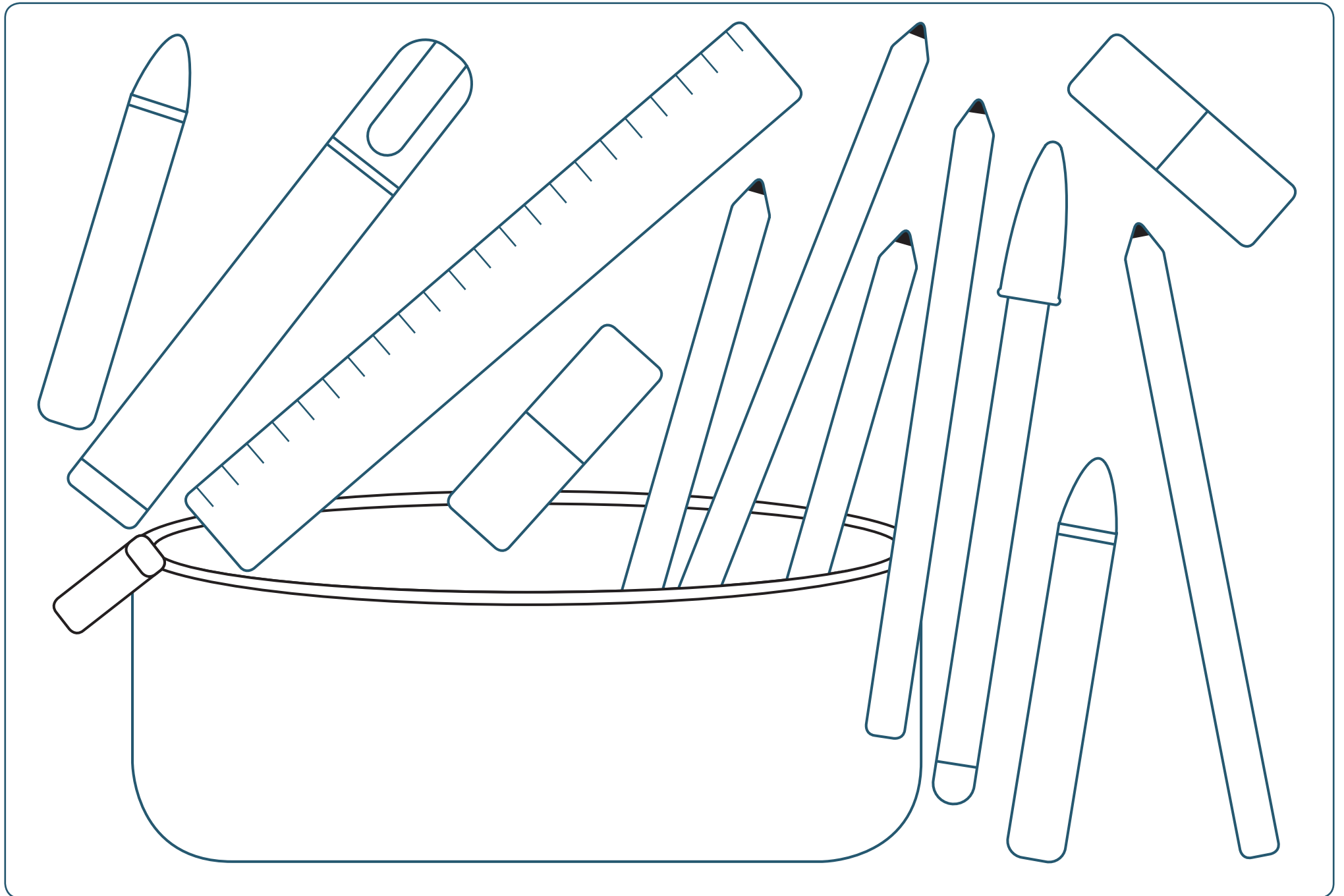
You don't have to print the activity worksheets out – you can use a journal or notepad instead.

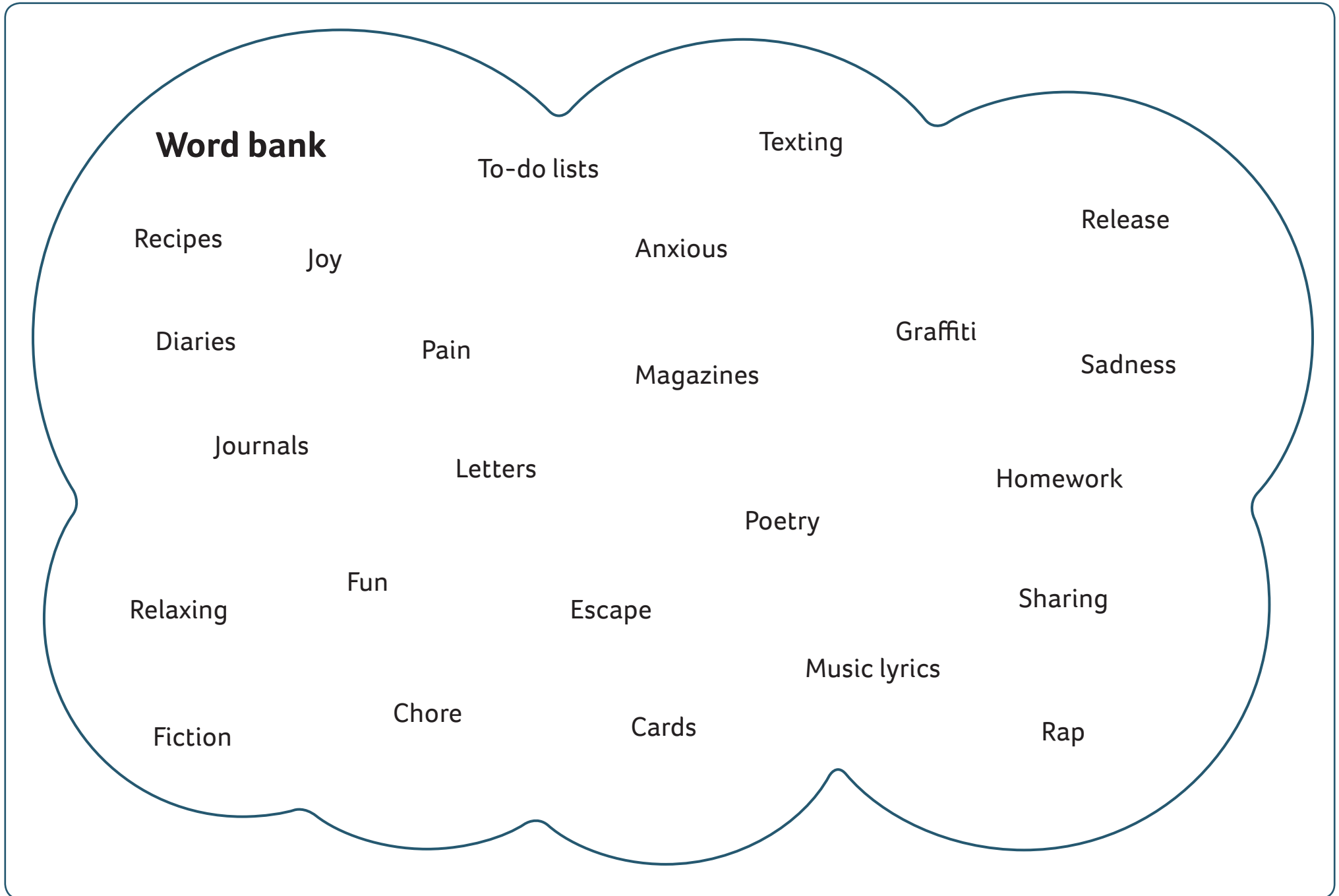
Session 1

What does writing mean to me?

Time	Activity	What you need	Aim of the session
10 minutes	Talk about how writing can be used to improve wellbeing. Ask the group to come up with words that describe how they feel about writing. Use their suggestions to create a word bank.	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To show how writing can improve wellbeing. To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>What does writing mean to me?</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask everyone to decorate their pencil case to show what writing means to them. They can use words from the bank included or come up with their own ideas.</p> <p>Invite people to share what writing means to them.</p> <p>Talk about the different ways of writing and how they reflect how we're feeling – for example, happy, sad, positive, angry, optimistic or hopeless.</p> <p>Note: Writing can help us to express our feelings, manage our emotions, and improve our wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Activity 1 worksheet: <i>What does writing mean to me?</i>– Felt tip pens.– Coloured pens.– Pencils.	<p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To help people to manage their thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To build self-esteem and resilience, and recognise strengths, achievements and values.</p> <p>To build relationships.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: You can also run the session as a discussion-based activity. Ask each person to draw on or colour-in their pencil case, and then talk about what they've done.



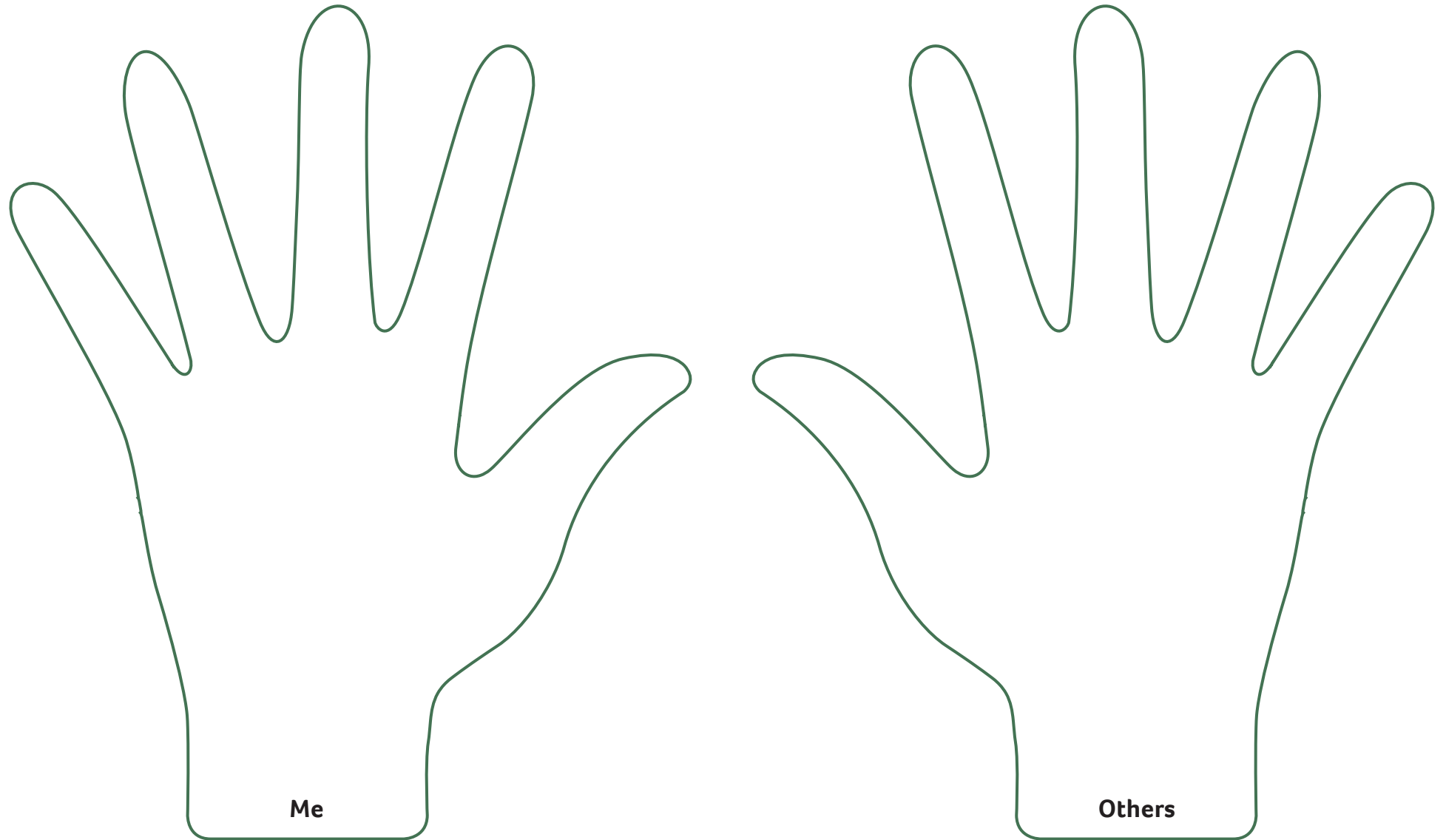


Session 2

What do I like about me? What do others like about me?

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	Ask the group to think of a role model or person they admire. Get them to share their role model's qualities, strengths and values. Use the answers to create a word bank under the headers: strengths, values and qualities.	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To recognise personal qualities, strengths and values. To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>What do I like about me? What do others like about me?</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask everyone to write down their qualities, strengths and values, on the left hand. Then, on the right hand, ask them to write down the qualities, strengths and values other people see in them.</p> <p>Point anyone who's struggling to the word bank. You can also help them to identify their qualities, strengths and values.</p> <p>Ask the group to share both lists.</p> <p>Talk about the difference between their perception and what they feel others think of them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity 2 worksheet: <i>What do I like about me? What do others like about me?</i> - Felt tip pens. - Coloured pens. - Pencils. 	<p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To name qualities, strengths and values – and to recognise these in themselves and others.</p> <p>To build self-esteem and resilience, and recognise strengths, achievements and values.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: The session can also be run as a discussion-based activity. Before you start, write some relevant words on Post-it notes. Ask the group to stick these to the hands.



Word bank

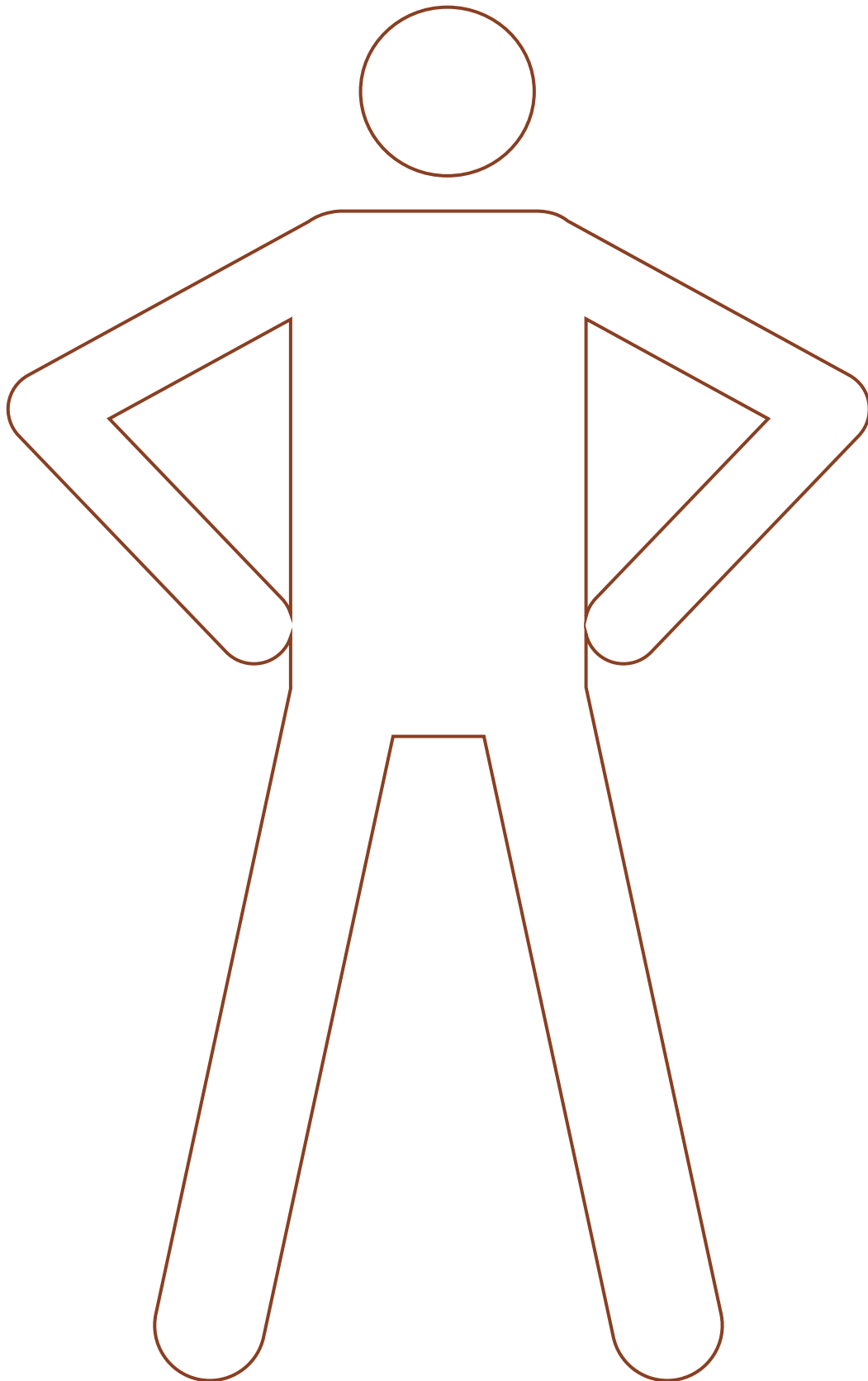
- Friendship
- Home
- Family
- Peers
- School
- Relationships
- Community
- Clubs
- Personality
- Character
- Uniqueness
- Leaders
- Sport
- Likes
- Emotions

Session 3

What makes me, me?

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Show the group the large <i>What makes me, me?</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask them to create a bank of words that illustrate what makes us who we are. These words could include: family, home, emotions, strong, determined, anxious, friends, school, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 3 worksheet: <i>What makes me, me?</i> (large) – Whiteboard or flip chart. 	<p>To raise awareness of how writing can improve wellbeing.</p> <p>To introduce young people to the idea of positive emotional wellbeing.</p>
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>What makes me, me?</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask people to write down words – on the body template – that describe who they are. Suggest using examples from the word bank, or ask them to come up with their own.</p> <p>Encourage everyone to share their template and talk about ‘what makes me, me’. Have a chat about the different things that make us who we are.</p> <p>Talk about the things in our lives that have a positive impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>Ask the group to describe how it feels to write about these. Are they surprised by how many ideas they came up with?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 3 worksheet: <i>What makes me, me?</i> (large) – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. 	<p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To understand feelings and emotions, and recognise their impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: Use drawings and pictures to fill the body template, in place of words.



Word bank

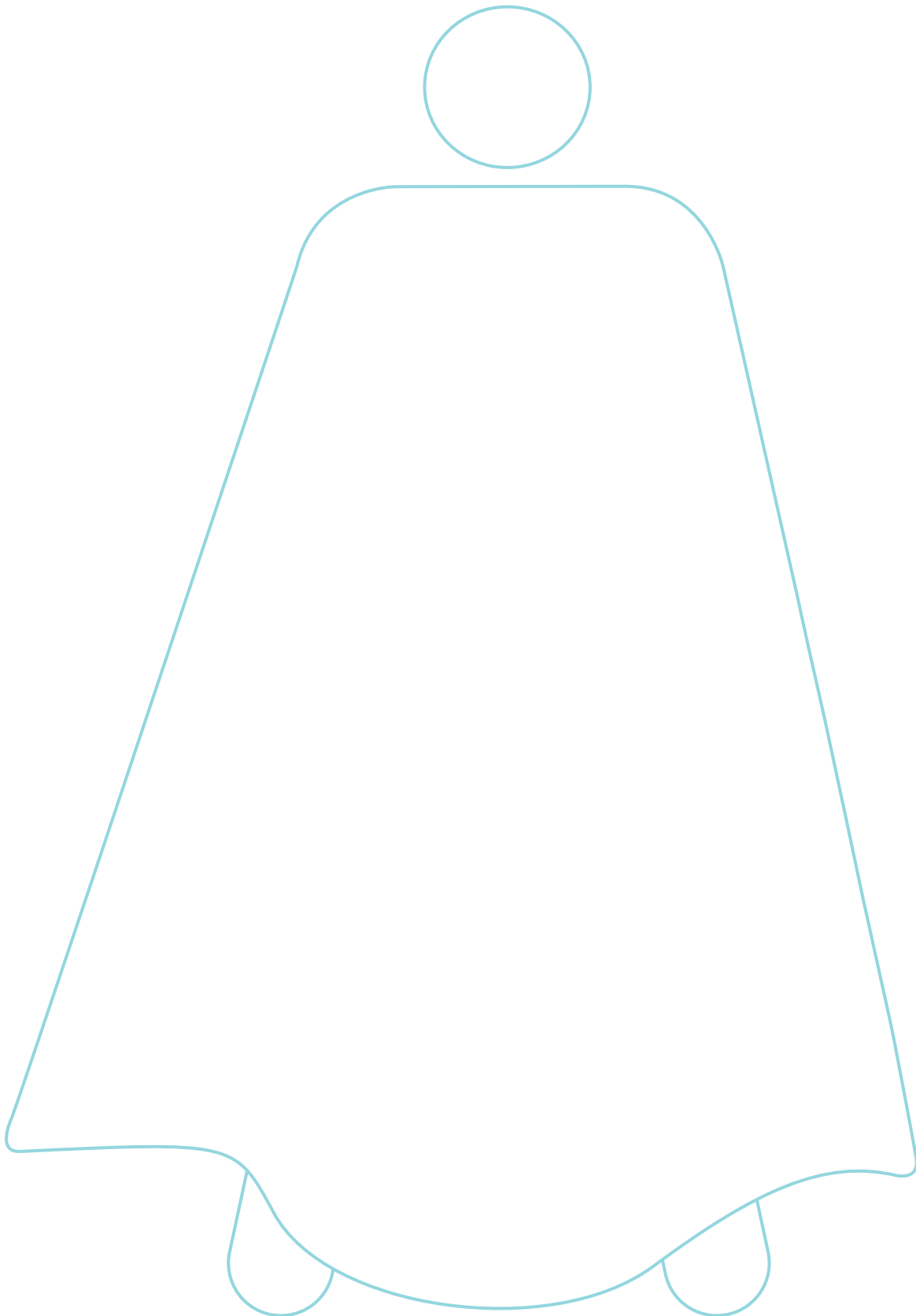
- Family
- Hope
- Inspiring
- Positive
- Loyal
- Determination
- Champion
- Strong
- Emotion
- Negative
- Friends
- Giving
- Balance
- Kind
- Resilience
- Teachers

Session 4

My superhero cape

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Introduce the idea of a superhero – someone who has amazing qualities.</p> <p>Ask each person in the group to name a superhero. This could be someone they look up to or respect – for example, a celebrity, sports person, family member or fictional character.</p> <p>Come up with a list of superhero traits – for example, brave, caring, strong, determined, etc.</p> <p>Talk about how their superhero shows resilience. For example, a footballer will keep trying to score a goal even when their team is losing. A family member will look after others even when they're tired. These people carry on when things are difficult.</p>	Whiteboard or flip chart.	<p>To raise awareness of how writing can improve wellbeing.</p> <p>To share the idea that a superhero or role model demonstrates resilience.</p>
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>My superhero cape</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask people to decorate their cape with words that describe someone who shows resilience. These could include: determined, strong, invincible, problem-solver, forgiving, positive, etc.</p> <p>Encourage people to share their cape with the group and explain why they chose those qualities.</p> <p>Talk about how resilience helps us when things get tough, just like the footballer who keeps going 'til the final whistle.</p> <p>Ask the group to talk about how it felt to write about their superhero.</p> <p>What are their superhero qualities? Do they feel good, strong, sad, happy, determined, etc?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 4 worksheet: <i>My superhero cape</i>. – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. 	<p>To reinforce a sense of self and resilience, and recognise our strengths.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To understand feelings and emotions, and recognise their impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: The session can also be run as a discussion-based activity. Prepare a few words in advance for the group to glue on to the cape.



Word bank

- Thoughtful
- Consistent
- Caring
- Strong
- Determined
- Positive
- Fun
- Committed
- Solid
- Brave
- Resourceful
- Available

Session 5

Recipe for my best day

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>In this session, ask the group to create their perfect day using a range of 'ingredients'.</p> <p>Ask people to create a word bank of possible ingredients – for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A sprinkling of summer. – A cup of the beach. – A litre of Christmas. – A pinch of holiday. – A tablespoon of friends. – A kilo of love. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Whiteboard or flip chart. – Cutout props, including a wooden spoon. 	<p>To raise awareness of how writing can improve wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p>
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>Recipe for my best day</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask the group to draw a large mixing bowl on their worksheet. Get them to write down their chosen ingredients, either using words from the bank, or their own, to create a 'my best day' recipe.</p> <p>Invite people to share their recipe and explain why they picked the ingredients.</p> <p>Discuss the similarities and differences between everyone's 'best days'.</p> <p>Ask the group to share how it felt to write about their 'best day' – for example, good, nostalgic, sad, happy, excited, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 5 worksheet: <i>Recipe for my best day</i>. – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. – Stickers. – Magazine. – Newspapers. – Scissors. 	<p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To understand feelings and emotions, and recognise their impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: Fill the mixing bowl with drawings, cutouts from magazines, or photos.

Ingredients

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Method

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Word bank

- Friends
- Where
- Season
- Events
- Pictures
- Spoons
- Feelings
- Who
- When
- Place
- Activities
- Ingredients
- Mixing Bowls
- Cakes
- Celebration

Session 6

Motivated me

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Write some inspirational words and quotes on a whiteboard or flip chart. Ask the group what these words make them think about.</p> <p>Chat to the group about motivation and what they think it is (the driving force that helps us achieve what we want). Ask them why it's important to be motivated and how it affects self-esteem (feeling motivated helps us to feel positive).</p>	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To motivate the group, encourage them to think positively, and to remove self-doubt.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>Motivated me</i> worksheet and Post-it notes.</p> <p>Ask everyone to write down a few simple quotes and/or motivational words.</p> <p>Invite them to share these with the group. How does writing these thoughts make them feel? For example, positive, determined, aspirational, driven, encouraged, etc.</p> <p>Ask the group to come up with ideas to tackle negative thoughts and feelings. How do we stop ourselves from giving up or losing interest in things we enjoy?</p> <p>Reinforce the idea that feeling motivated helps us to achieve our goals, develop skills and knowledge, and makes life more rewarding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Activity 6 worksheet: <i>Motivated me</i>. - Post-it notes. - Felt tip pens. - Coloured pens. - Pencils. 	<p>To show how motivation helps us to achieve our goals and be successful.</p> <p>To understand feelings and emotions, and recognise their impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: Draw or stick pictures on the Post-it notes instead of writing down words or phrases.

I was always looking outside myself for strength and confidence, but it comes from within. It is there all the time.
 Anna Freud

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying 'I will try again tomorrow.'
 Mary Anne Radmacher

Perhaps this is where you breathe deep and take the leap.
 Morgan Harper Nicholls

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.
 Barack Obama

You are brave. Even when it does not seem that way. And your bravery shows up in your choice to keep going every day.
 Morgan Harper Nicholls

Word bank

- Inspiration - Belief - Passion - Resilience - Persevere - Dream - Imagination
- Motivation - Strength - Drive - Opportunity - Achieve - Hope

Session 7

My journal

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Find out whether anyone uses or has written a journal. Explain that writing down events, thoughts and feelings can be helpful and improve our wellbeing.</p> <p>Ask the group to come up with a list of words they associate with keeping a journal – for example, writing, celebrating, worries, memories, private, personal, etc.</p> <p>There are lots of different ways to keep a journal – you can use a notepad, send text messages to yourself, write in a diary, etc. Encourage the group to set aside some quiet time to write in a way they're comfortable with. Anyone who's new to it should practice for five minutes a day to get into the habit.</p> <p>Help the group by giving them a few prompts. What do you want to write about? What's happened recently? How did it make you think and feel? Write the prompts on the whiteboard or flip chart.</p>	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To encourage young people to write a journal to improve their wellbeing.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>My journal</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask the group to write their own journal entry. Reassure them that they can write about anything, that it's personal to them, and no one else will see what they've written.</p> <p>Ask the group to talk about the benefits of journal writing. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Understanding and expressing emotions. – Making sense of our thoughts. – Spotting patterns of negative thoughts and feelings. If we know what's causing us to think and feel this way, we can do something to prevent it. – Celebrating things that make us happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 7 worksheet: <i>My journal</i>. – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. 	<p>To understand thoughts and feelings by regularly writing them down.</p> <p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: Use drawings and pictures to bring the journal to life.

A spiral-bound notebook page with ten horizontal lines for writing. The spiral binding is on the left side. The page is otherwise blank.

Session 8

My appreciation certificate

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Ask people to think about a time when they've needed help. This could be with homework or getting a lift, or finding somewhere to stay for the night.</p> <p>Put together a bank of support networks – for example, mum, dad, brothers, sisters, teachers, friends, helplines, support agencies, etc.</p>	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To find and understand what support networks are available.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>My appreciation certificate</i> worksheet. Go through an example together.</p> <p>Ask each young person to think of someone they'd like to give a certificate of appreciation to. If they're happy, invite them to share who they've thanked and why.</p> <p>Explain that being able to recognise and accept help is a good thing, and that it shows great resilience.</p> <p>Get the group to describe how it feels to say 'thank you' to someone who's helped them – for example, happy, thankful, grateful, loved. Doing nice things for other people can make us feel good, too.</p> <p>If they feel comfortable, suggest they send their certificate to the person they'd like to thank.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 8 worksheet: <i>My appreciation certificate</i>. – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. – Envelopes and stamps (optional). 	<p>To make people think about their support networks and that asking for help is a sign of resilience.</p> <p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To understand feelings and emotions, and recognise their impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

Do something different: Write a letter or postcard thanking someone, and then post it to them.

APPRECIATION CERTIFICATE

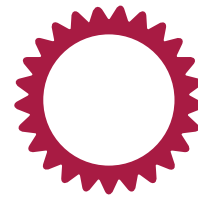
Awarded to: _____

For making a difference by:

Impact this had:

From: _____

Date: _____



Session 9

Letting go of worries

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Ask the group to come up with a list of things that people may worry about – school, exams, family, friends, money, illness, etc.</p> <p>Give each member of the group a balloon. Ask them to write a worry on the outside (this doesn't have to be one of their own).</p> <p>Ask someone to hold all the balloons. This demonstrates how difficult it is to carry lots of worries and how important it is to let some of them go.</p>	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To use writing to manage and let go of worries.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>Letting go of worries</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Get the group to write their worries on the worksheet. Ask them to share these with the group, if they're happy to.</p> <p>Ask whether there are any worries they can let go of. Are any out of their control? Talk about how important it is to accept that worrying won't change the things we can't control.</p> <p>Invite the group to select the worries they can let go of, write them on a separate sheet and then shred or tear them up.</p> <p>Ask the group how they feel now they've got rid of some of their worries – for example, relieved, happier, less anxious, etc.</p> <p>Even if they can't let go of a worry, writing it down will help them to manage it better.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 9 worksheet: <i>Letting go of worries</i>. – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. 	<p>To understand that some worries aren't in our control and we can let them go.</p> <p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To understand feelings and emotions, and recognise their impact on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>

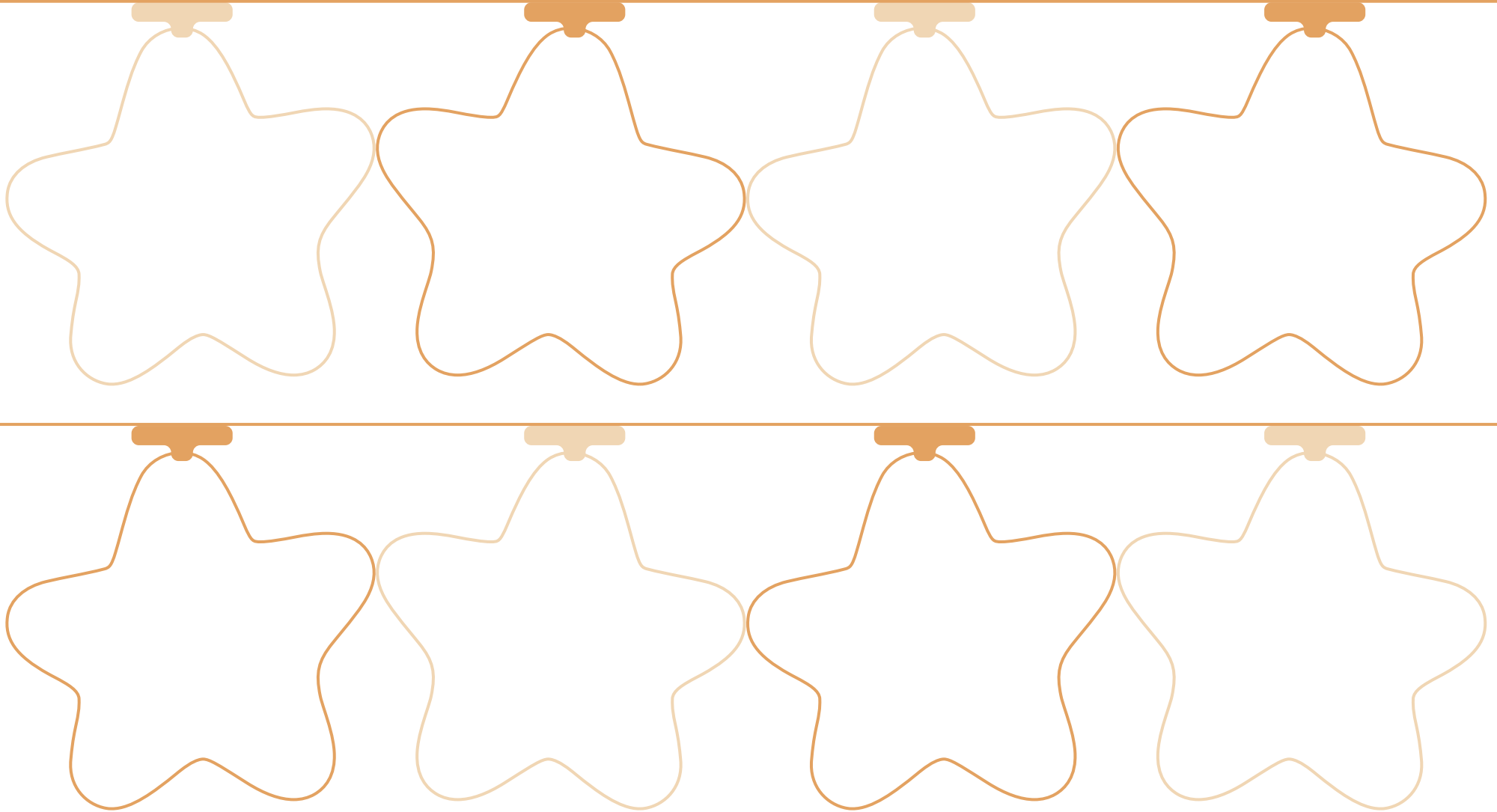
Do something different: Drawing a picture can be a good way to illustrate a worry.

A large rounded rectangular box with a thin green border, containing ten horizontal green lines for writing. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across most of the width of the box.

Session 10

Celebrating me and mapping next steps

Time	Activity	What you need	Aims of the session
10 minutes	<p>Ask the group to think of something they'd like to celebrate – making a nice meal, passing a driving test, finishing exams, etc.</p> <p>Explain that celebrating means anything from giving yourself a pat on the back to throwing a party. Recognising you've done something to be proud of is a celebration.</p>	Whiteboard or flip chart.	To acknowledge that celebrating achievements and planning what's next helps to build resilience.
15-20 minutes	<p>Hand out the <i>Celebration bunting</i> worksheet.</p> <p>Ask each member of the group to write something they'd like to celebrate in a section of the bunting.</p> <p>Encourage people to share their celebrations and make a note of their reasons (this will help those who struggled to find things).</p> <p>Ask the group about how writing their celebrations made them feel – for example, good, proud, positive, happy, excited, etc.</p> <p>Talk about how these positive thoughts and feelings can help them to think about the future.</p> <p>Ask the group to think about where they would like to be. What would they like to be doing a few years from now? How will they achieve their goal?</p> <p>Hand out the <i>Dream me</i> worksheet. Ask the group to write their goal at the end of the path. Starting at the 'me today' point, get them to imagine the steps they need to take to achieve their goal.</p> <p>Encourage people to share their 'path' with someone else in the group.</p> <p>Talk about how writing a goal down can make it seem more achievable. It also helps us to feel more positive and motivated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activity 10a and 10b worksheets: <i>Celebration bunting</i> and <i>Dream me</i>. – Felt tip pens. – Coloured pens. – Pencils. 	<p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to celebrate successes and achieve our goals.</p> <p>To understand the many different ways of writing and the impact they can have on our wellbeing.</p> <p>To demonstrate how writing can be used to positively express our feelings and communicate with other people.</p> <p>To come up with ways to manage thoughts, emotions and behaviour.</p> <p>To develop creativity.</p>



Word bank

- Success
- Achieve
- Pride
- Joy
- Congratulating
- Appreciate
- Positive
- Party
- Hope
- Happy
- Celebrate
- Progress
- Milestone
- Goals
- Gaining





For more information and support, visit:

actionforchildren.org.uk

princes-trust.org.uk

For mental health resources for parents, visit:

buildsoundminds.org.uk

Disclaimer

This toolkit is a low level early intervention tool that helps young people to explore their feelings through writing and/ other activities. The toolkit should not be used as a substitute for conventional clinical, psychological and/or therapeutic treatment. In the absence of any negligence or other direct breach of duty by us, we are not responsible for any or all adverse outcomes in relation to the use of this toolkit. If you feel that you are struggling with your mental health, we expressly advise that you seek assistance and/or advice from a certified practitioner.