



Parent Supplement

Key Concepts, Tasks, and Discussion Points

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Welcome to the Healthy Minds Program

First of all, congratulations on sending your child to a school where wellbeing and psychological development is taken seriously. To become an accredited Healthy Minds School, it takes the allocation of teacher time and resources, curriculum space, the cost of expert Healthy Minds facilitators and materials, *plus* they have to meet supplementary criteria around school processes and procedures. It also means they are facilitating the delivery of a program that has a strong evidence base and that is being constantly updated to reflect the very latest research and theory around the healthy psychological development of children and adolescents.

Why this program is important

Psychological skill development is as important as anything else taught in a school curriculum. That's because personal psychology is the filter through which all human endeavours pass. Consider the differing life paths of a child who can or cannot:

- Be resilient in the face of stress
- Demonstrate flexibility in the way they think and respond to change
- Have balance in their view of the world: a combination of being positive in attitude but also realistic in their thinking
- Make helpful decisions consistently
- Manage emotional impulses
- View messages from the media (including social media) with a critical eye
- Cultivate self-compassion, not just self-esteem

Each of the components in this program is based on the latest scientific research from the field of psychology, and has a sound body of evidence to support its usefulness as something that young people should learn and integrate into their broader lives.

The Healthy Minds Program is not psychological 'treatment' however, and does not *guarantee* mental health. Rather it reduces risk for psychological problems in the future, and builds the skills that are very useful in creating and maintaining mental health.

You may notice that your child does many writing tasks as part of this program, both within the classes themselves, and as part of their 'homework' tasks. This is because the writing tasks offer students the opportunity to practice and apply the ideas taught, on their own. Psychologists are particularly keen on writing tasks, because they help us train our thinking. Consider this: anytime you must write something down, you must think it first. Therefore, structured writing tasks are also structured *thinking*

tasks. Healthy Minds teachers and facilitators establish the need to respect confidentiality and privacy of personal thoughts and feelings in the written exercises, and although many of the exercises are expected to be completed, most of them are only shared publicly (i.e. with the class) on a voluntary basis.

For you, the parent, our aim is to provide a means for you to be aware of, and follow, the progression of ideas and skills taught in your child's Healthy Minds lessons. Our aim is to make the parent modules as brief and accessible as possible, for you to be aware of some of the key points, and then follow them up in discussions at home – a gateway to conversations with your child.

How the parent modules work

The parent modules have been created as a result of strong demand from many parents who have had children going through the Healthy Minds Program. They have wanted to learn more, to be able to understand and reinforce the key 'Healthy Minds' concepts, and to have meaningful discussions with their child about what they are learning. Having a parent module will also enable parents to reflect on their own points-of-view when it comes to potentially applying these ideas in daily life.

One parent module corresponds to each of the 8 core Healthy Minds sessions. You will be able to read the key concepts that are taught in each session in your child's class, plus get an idea of the tasks they have been asked to go away and do as part of their 'homework'. We also provide some suggestions for discussion points, for those parents who would like to discuss the content with their child, plus some self-reflection questions to assist parents in considering their own perspectives on the content. The modules are designed to be brief and to the point, so that parents can choose to use them to stay up-to-date about what their child is learning, or to have lengthier, more in-depth discussions.

It is recommended that parents also attend the parent evening(s) offered as part of the Healthy Minds Program at your child's school.

The parent modules are not intended to replicate all the content in your son or daughter's Student Workbook, but rather to provide a brief summary and overview, and to assist in your learning more in discussions with your child if you wish.

What you might gain out of this program

As a parent, you might find yourself being exposed to new skills and concepts, useful ideas, or even to have some of your beliefs challenged. It is our hope that parents can be a curious, supportive presence in their child's journey through learning the psychological skills that help people be healthier in a mental and emotional sense.

What to do if you think there is a problem

It is important to remember that the Healthy Minds Program is not a treatment program and does not guarantee to prevent the onset of all psychological or emotional difficulties. Instead, it is about building helpful psychological skills in your child.

If you suspect your child is experiencing a psychological problem such as depression, anxiety, or disordered eating (for example) then it is always advisable to seek help. This may take the form of your school's psychologist, a general practitioner, or an independent psychologist or specialist. It is better to seek professional help early, and to realise things are okay, than to let any problems get progressively worse.

How you can maximise your child's benefit

Taking the time to read the supplementary Parent Modules and showing an interest in what your son or daughter is learning is a great way to support their participation. By having regular conversations – brief or in-depth – you are demonstrating the value and importance you place on their development of healthy psychological skills. Many parents may also find that the Healthy Minds Program gives them a structure for meaningful conversations they may not have otherwise had with their child. It is also a way you can *normalise* the discussion of such things as helpful attitudes, thinking, decision-making and handling strong emotions. These very conversations are a powerful protective factor for adolescents as they negotiate all of the challenges – and rewards – that adolescence can bring.

HEALTHY MINDS – Parent Supplement

Module 1 – An Introduction to Perfectionism

Key Concepts

- Confidentiality and the purpose of this program. While we are generally very good at identifying those things we need to do to keep our bodies healthy, it is often the case that we find it harder to know what to do to be healthy in our minds. This program is about learning the skills and ideas that psychologists would wish to teach someone to help them be healthy in a psychological sense. Throughout the course of the 8 lessons ahead, student will be asked to write in their Healthy Minds workbooks, and these are to be treated as confidential. For most tasks, students will not be *required* to share their answers, but may be invited to do so on a voluntary basis to facilitate class discussion.
- The first lesson introduces the idea of perfectionism. Perfectionism is considered by some people to be a helpful trait that helps them strive to achieve, stay focused on their goals, and reach high standards in all that they do. Unfortunately, perfectionism can also have some unhelpful aspects to it. It can be associated with self-criticism, high levels of stress, taking too long on tasks, and even being focused on achievement to the detriment of a balanced life. Students are invited to learn about the costs of this ‘unhelpful’ side to perfectionism through the worksheets ‘What is Perfectionism?’, ‘What are some of the key characteristics of perfectionism?’, and ‘What’s Bad about Being Too Good’.
- Students will view a video of Lisa Simpson, the consummate perfectionist, and how her perfectionism creates some difficulties in her life.
- We also introduce students to the value of imperfection, mistakes, and failures. Having a perfect life is not only an impossible ideal, but it is also unrealistic. We can be lulled into a sense that making mistakes, failing at tasks, or being less than the best is somehow bad. A ‘Who Am I?’ quiz invites students to consider the lives of people who are considered ‘successful’ (whatever the definition of successful may be) but who have also made mistakes and/or failed at something in their life, and how this may have

contributed to their later success. Consider the cases of examples such as former US President Abraham Lincoln, basketball player Michael Jordan, or author JK Rowling.

Key Student Activities

- Students are tasked with coming up with an example of a person from their own life (family member or friend) or a person that can research on the internet, who they think of as being 'successful' (whatever their definition of success might be). They must then try to uncover the challenges or difficulties that person has faced (these may be less well known than their successes) that have likely contributed to their later success.

Discussion Points

- Where do we draw the line between 'helpful' and 'unhelpful' perfectionism?

Parent Self-reflection Questions

- Do you consider yourself a perfectionist?
- If so, how do you think this has affected your life in either a good or not-so good way?
- What have you 'modelled' to your child in terms of the importance of achievement versus having a balanced life? Do you think you have gotten that balance right?
- Are there any examples you could share with your child about life going off track a little leading to better outcomes or strengths and opportunities you perhaps couldn't foresee at the time?