

Focusing on the Positives.



Care Pack
11–12 years



Introduction

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As we all move through these challenging times together, parents, carers and teachers have the added responsibility of supporting the young people in their care as they grapple with rapid change and uncertainty. Mindfulness is an active, practical and appropriate response to the sense of overwhelm many of us are currently feeling.

Mindfulness has been practised for centuries and in many different cultures around the world. Academic research shows that when we pay attention to what is happening in the present moment, with openness and curiosity, and without judgement, we activate many wellbeing benefits including higher self-awareness, higher emotional regulation and reduced stress. It can also be a very useful tool that allows us to focus on the positive elements of life as they happen.

Integrating mindfulness into everyday life with the children in our care can have profound benefits for both adult and child. Smiling Mind offers a range of engaging evidence-based experiences and activities designed by wellbeing educators. You are encouraged to experiment and explore the wide range of meditations and activities with your child.

This third module, 'Focusing On The Positives' contains three specific mindfulness topics to progress through with your child to assist them to turn towards the positive, especially in times of challenge:

- Taking in the Good – Savouring and Gratitude
- Optimism
- Growth Mindset

These three topics combine to deliver a comprehensive toolkit to assist in supporting and boosting the emotional wellbeing of your child.



Here is a step by step guide to get the best out of this module designed specifically for 11–12 year olds:

1

Take a few minutes to read the topic overview written for parents, carers and teachers.

- This will orient you to the purpose and intention of each topic and set up some background for conversations with your child.



2

Listen to the mindfulness meditation with your child in a quiet place without distraction.

- Spend a few minutes afterwards inviting your child to share their experience and their thoughts and feelings following the meditation.
- Share your own experience, thoughts and feelings with your child.



3

Ask your child to select one of the activities at the back of the book.

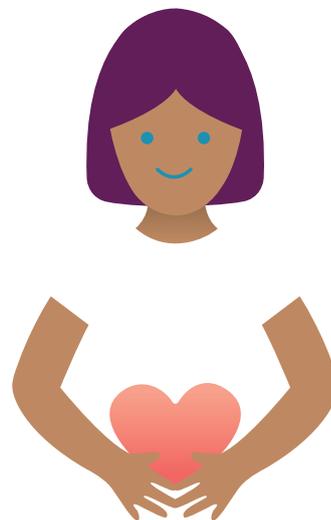
- Use the activity to collaborate and continue the conversation.



Taking In The Good: Gratitude and Savouring

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Taking in the good doesn't always come naturally. The human brain is like velcro for negative experiences and teflon for positive. Scientists call this the negativity bias. The stickiness of negative experiences was adaptive and has helped ensure our survival as a species. Once upon a time we needed to be on the constant look out for threats and danger. There are fewer dangers in our world, but the hardwiring of our brains hasn't changed.



Cultivating gratitude and savouring are ways to velcro the positive. They can serve as an antidote to the natural tendency to take the positives in our lives for granted. They help us get full bang for buck from the good stuff.

Gratitude is being thankful for the good things in our lives. When we appreciate people, places and experiences, we begin to pay more attention to what brings us joy.

Savouring is all about deliberately focusing on enjoyable experiences by tuning into them mindfully and with appreciation. We can savour looking forward to a special experience, as it is unfolding in the moment, or later as we recall it in our minds.

Gratitude and savouring are essential elements of mindfulness. Mindfulness helps us to train our ability to focus on one thing at a time. This present moment awareness is a way to tune into our minds and bodies and become more aware of positive experiences in our lives. When we focus on feeling grateful, our bodies may fill with warm and happy emotions. Areas of the brain associated with connection and building relationships are activated. Savouring helps us to take in and really absorb the positive details of an experience.

As parents, carers and teachers, we can model this by focusing our own attention on the positives in our lives. When we are grateful, feelings of joy can increase both within us, and in our immediate environment. The more we savour and practise gratitude, the happier we tend to be.

Children can be gently encouraged to practise gratitude and savouring on a daily basis. As they do this, they begin to take in the good and notice the little moments of joy that can be easy to miss.

Engaging in mindfulness practice with the children in our care provides a calming and collaborative shared time. After sharing the mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how it felt and how mindfulness can help to build awareness. After taking time to share thoughts and feelings, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your 11– 12 year old to choose one as an added activity. These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we encourage conversation and collaboration.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation.
A good one for this topic is:
Gratitude

App Location:

- All Programs
- Kids & Youth
- 10 – 12 Year Olds
- Mindfulness 207 – Gratitude
- Gratitude

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/32/150/150/>



Continue the conversation using
one of the activity sheets at the
back of this booklet:

Creating A Chain Of Gratitude

Once we begin to turn our attention to being thankful, we begin to see many examples. [This activity](#) encourages young people to tune into the good.

The Savouring Jar

Developing an ability to savour experiences creates both positive emotions and happy memories. [This activity](#) encourages young people to keep a record of the many good moments in each week.



Deepen the conversation
by exploring these questions
together. Remember, there are
no wrong answers:

Tell me about a recent time when you really looked forward to something. What did that feel like?

How can we make sure we notice the many little moments in each day that make us feel good?

How might keeping a record of moments of gratitude in life be useful for our wellbeing?

Optimism

—

When we think optimistically, we often positively place ourselves in the future. Optimism is a future minded emotion that assists us to build a positive perspective about something that is yet to happen. When we are optimistic, we expect good things to happen to us, even when we face challenges.

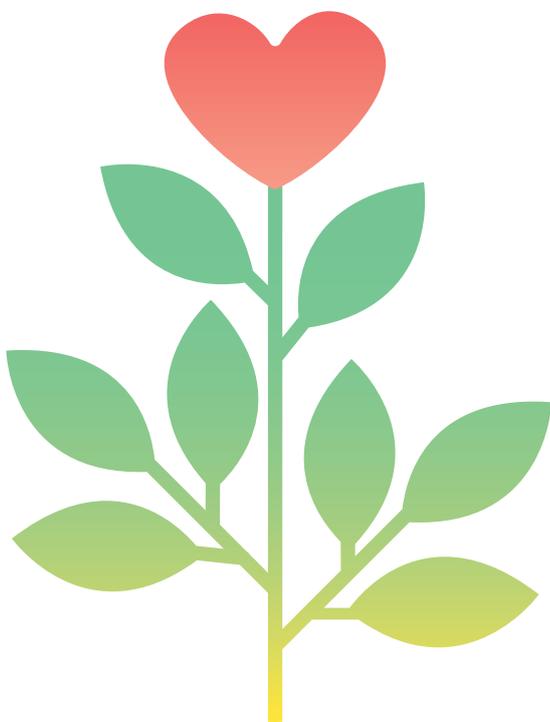


Research shows that when we are optimistic, we are more able to cope with stressful happenings in life. We tend to take a problem-solving approach and mindfully plan our way forward. Alongside this behaviour, we begin to see the best in a situation and move towards the positive in our thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

Optimism is a strength we can build and practise from early childhood onwards. Children in our care look to trusted adults and model what they see, hear and experience. Being aware of our own thoughts and emotions is therefore very important. When we model a positive outlook, we demonstrate an ability to mindfully navigate challenges effectively without becoming stuck in the negative implications. Children witness this perspective taking and learn to consider the same positively oriented actions in their own lives.

Cultivating an optimistic outlook begins with mindfulness. Through awareness and attention, we can begin to notice our thinking patterns. Acknowledging and supporting positive thoughts and acknowledging and then letting go negative thoughts is a great place to start. This does not mean that we pay no attention to the negative or challenging aspects of life. Rather it is about gently unhooking ourselves from negative thought patterns in order to provide room for a more optimistic outlook.

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Listen to a mindfulness meditation.
A good one for this topic is:
Catching Butterflies

App Location:

- All Programs
- Classroom
- Primary Year 5 – The Mindfulness Curriculum
- Lesson 9 – Optimism
- PRACTISE – Catching Butterflies 5

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/308/738/>



Continue the conversation using
one of the activity sheets at the
back of this booklet:

Flip Side Optimism

This activity encourages young people to believe that even when things do not go well for us, there are lessons to be learnt and ways to manage our emotions so that solutions can be found.

Optimistic Self-Talk

Speaking to ourselves as we would to a good friend is especially important when we experience challenges. This activity encourages reflection and then positive and open hearted self talk, hopefully leading to solution focused thinking.



Deepen the conversation
by exploring these questions
together. Remember, there are
no wrong answers:

How can we be our own best friend when things are not going so well for us?

When we think optimistically what happens to our ability to come up with solutions?

When things get really challenging in life, what do you like to say to yourself to be supportive and positive?

Growth Mindset

—

Growth Mindset is the belief that with effort, we can train our brains to grow and develop. We can build the neural connections in our brains because they are neuroplastic – able to develop and change across our lifespans. The more we challenge our brains, the more neural connections we make, leading to a smarter and stronger brain. Growth mindset is one of the essential elements of mindfulness. Mindfulness is all about paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity and without judgement.



When we practise mindfulness, we create much needed space within our minds to learn and grow. Combining mindfulness and growth mindset helps us to develop a mind that is open to possibilities and challenges. It enables us to cultivate what's referred to as 'beginner's mind', a mind that is willing to see everything as if it was for the first time. A mind that is completely available to the moment. Think of a scientist making a new discovery, or a child examining a new insect or playing in puddles for the first time. This is captured nicely in an old zen proverb:

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s mind there are but a few”.

For many of us, focusing on what we don't know or can't do can become an unhelpful pattern of thinking. Some of us may also find it challenging to do things in a new way. We call this a fixed mindset. Building a growth mindset does the opposite, expanding our awareness to how we can try things out and improve through learning, even if we make mistakes along the way.

As parents, carers and teachers, we can model a growth mindset by focusing our own attention on the possibilities for growth and development in our own lives. When we demonstrate that we are able to learn from our mistakes and challenges. We show the children in our care that giving up is not productive and things improve with effort and persistence. Always aiming to do our best, is a key attitude to model. This can be particularly important if you have a tendency towards needing perfection.

Children can be gently encouraged to have an open mind on a daily basis. As they do this, they are more likely to persist and believe in themselves. Cultivating a growth mindset begins with mindfulness as we pay attention to the present moment with curiosity, tuning in to all it has to offer us.

Engaging in mindfulness practice with the children in our care provides a calming and collaborative shared time. After sharing the mindfulness practice together, have a conversation about how it felt and how mindfulness can help to build awareness. After taking time to share thoughts and feelings, we suggest downloading the companion activities appropriate to this topic and inviting your 11–12 year old to choose one as an added activity.

These resources can be found towards the end of the booklet. While the activities are designed so they can be done without adult support, we encourage conversation and collaboration.



Listen to a mindfulness meditation.
A good one for this topic is:
Rock the Boat

There are boat-building instructions in the Origami Mindfulness Activity.

App Location:

- All Programs
- Kids & Youth
- 10 – 12 Year Olds
- Mindfulness 101 – The Land of Mindfulness
- Activity – Rock the Boat

Web App Link:

<https://app.smilingmind.com.au/sessions/18/127/1195/>



Continue the conversation using one of the activity sheets at the back of this booklet:

Origami Mindfulness

Origami provides a great opportunity to persevere with something challenging. [This activity](#) encourages step by step mindful effort in order to complete the boat.

Open Mind, Open Heart

When we support ourselves to stay with a task and keep a growth mindset, challenges are less overwhelming. [This activity](#) encourages young people to develop some 'go-to' phrases when challenged.



Deepen the conversation by exploring these questions together. Remember, there are no wrong answers:

What can we say inside our heads when things are getting difficult and we feel like giving up?

How do we stay with challenging tasks?

When was a recent time when you were able to encourage yourself through something difficult?

Creating a chain of gratitude.



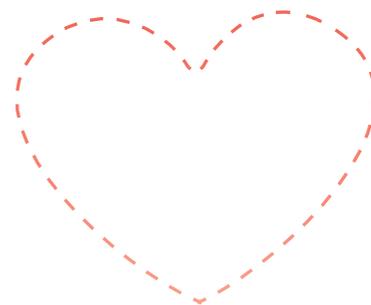
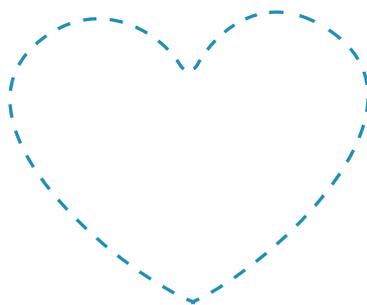
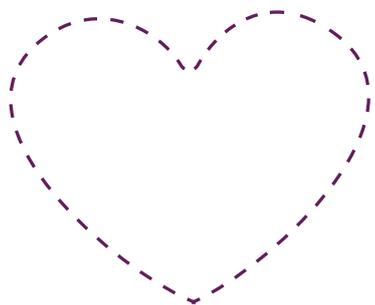
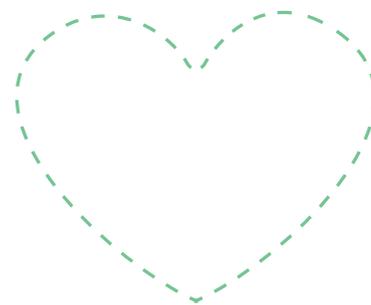
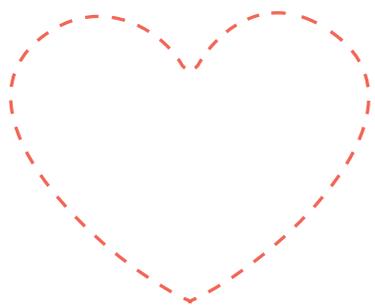
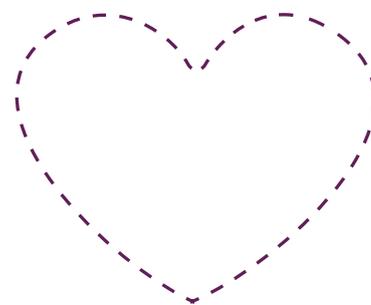
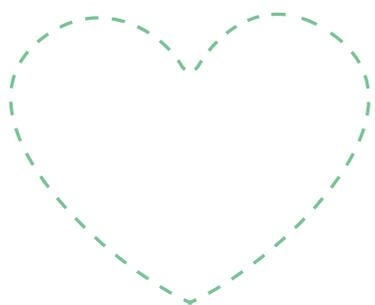
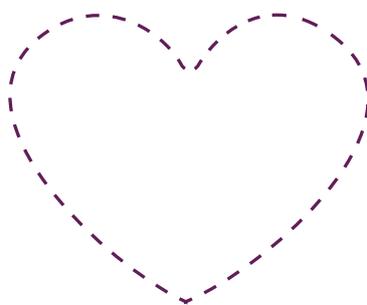
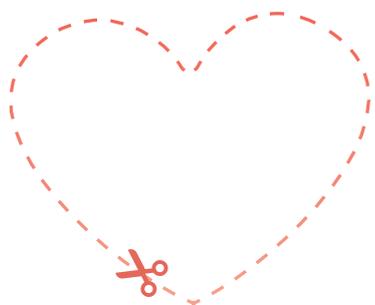
Gratitude is a social emotion that builds relationships. With your family, begin a chain of gratitude. Using these coloured strips, invite your family to write and draw some things you feel grateful for and then make a chain of gratitude. You will need a glue stick to join each loop. You can add to your chain each week. Add colour and hang it up where all can enjoy it.



A series of six horizontal rectangular boxes, each outlined with a dashed line of a different color: red, orange, yellow, blue, purple, and green. These boxes are intended for writing and drawing gratitude notes.

The savouring jar.

When something happens that brings you positive emotion and joy, write and draw it on a heart shape. Cut out the hearts and find a small jar with a lid. Decorate your jar with art/craft materials and label it. Each completed heart can be folded and popped inside. Later, when you are wanting to savour, just get your jar out and enjoy a second boost of positive emotion as you read each little heart.



Flip side optimism.



Can you think of a recent time when things did not go your way but turned out okay in the end? What happened and how did you turn things around? Optimistic people can flip their thinking to the positive and find workable solutions. Write and draw about a time when you were able to do this. Add thoughts and emotions to your drawing.

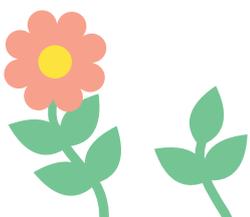


Optimistic self-talk.



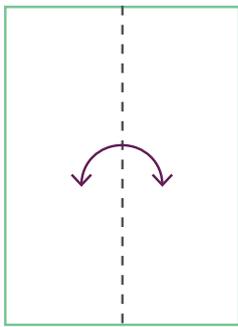
Can you think of a time when you were dreading something and it all turned out okay? Perhaps you had a big test to complete, had to give a presentation to the class or maybe you were going on a challenging school camp and felt worried. When things turn out better than we expected, we learn to think more optimistically for next time. Fill out the chart below adding positive and optimistic self-talk for each event.

The event I dreaded	How it all turned out	My optimistic self-talk for next time



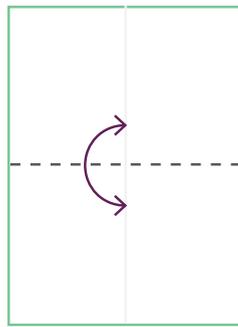
Origami mindfulness.

Have you ever tried making origami? Origami is a wonderful growth mindset activity. You will need an A4 piece of paper to make this little boat shaped origami and practise until it is just right. Origami takes time and practice. Then do the Rock The Boat meditation. Make more little boats of different sizes together and see if they can float in water!



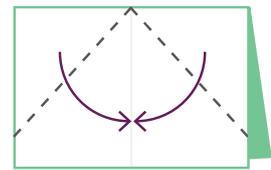
1.

Fold in half



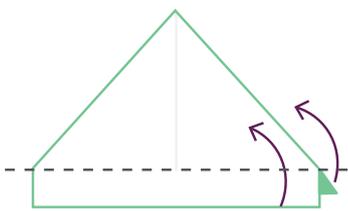
2.

Fold in half again



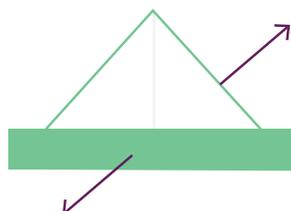
3.

Fold in corners



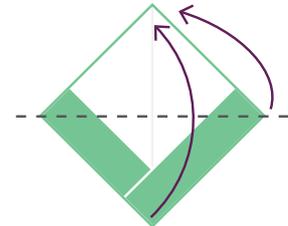
4.

Fold up edges on both sides



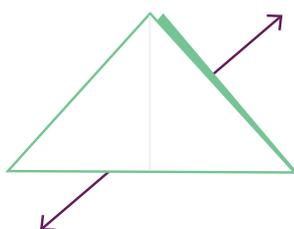
5.

Pull the sides out and flatten



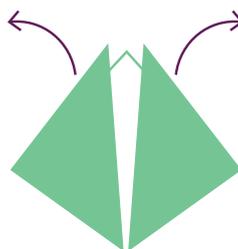
6.

Fold front and back layers up



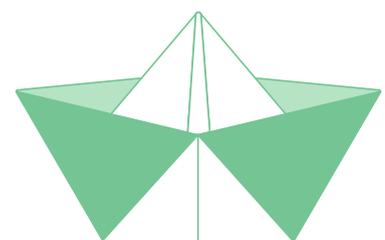
4.

Pull sides apart and flatten



5.

Pull top flaps outwards

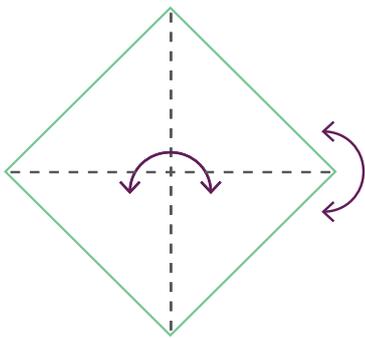


6.

Squish the bottom and pull the sides up. Tada!

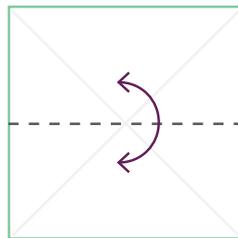
Open mind, open heart.

Think of recent times when you have done your very best and felt proud of your efforts even when the 'going got tough'. Make an origami heart envelope using a square piece of paper. Reflect on how it feels to try hard and keep going even when things are tough. On little squares, write some encouraging self-talk you say to yourself and pop them inside your heart.



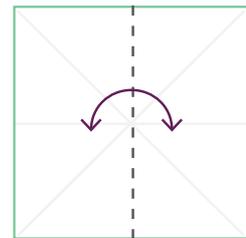
1.

Fold in half in both directions



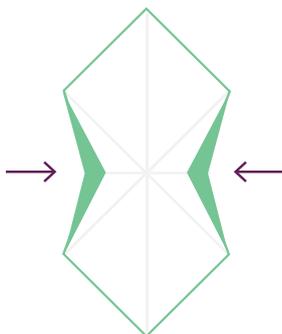
2.

Fold in half horizontally



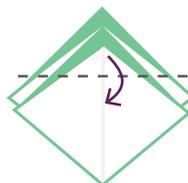
3.

Fold in half vertically



4.

Pinch corners inwards



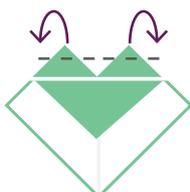
5.

Fold the first top flap downwards on both sides



6.

Fold the inside corners down



4.

Fold the top edges down



5.

Fold side edges inwards



6.

Tada! You did it!



Smiling Mind

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smilingmind.com.au

Smiling Mind is a not-for-profit organisation that works to make mindfulness meditation accessible to all.

Visit us online or download the free app to get started.

