

Let us improve our psychosocial fitness

We have to face many challenges in life. These include personal challenges such as illness, exams, unemployment as well as natural disasters and war which affect the entire society. We need good physical, mental and social fitness to overcome such challenges. Mental and social fitness is important for proper decision making, facing challenges and to make use of one's experience in a positive way.

In the previous grades we learnt about factors which improve psychosocial wellbeing such as emotional balance, empathy, effective communication and good interpersonal relationships.

In this lesson we will learn some more skills which will improve our mental and social fitness.

Creative and exploratory thinking

We may have to make quick decisions when faced with challenges. Creative thinking and exploratory thinking are necessary to meet such challenges.

Creative and exploratory thinking ability is ability to use our knowledge and creativity to generate options which are novel.

Reading different types of books, thinking logically about what is learnt, engaging in games such as chess or draughts which require analytical thinking can develop our thinking abilities.



Figure 19.1 - Engaging in a game of chess

Nalindu visited Nipun at home after school. Both agreed to go for a walk along the paddy fields. Nalindu picked up a bamboo almost unintentionally. They noticed that there was a heavy current in the stream near the paddy field.

Nipun: We can cross here because the stream is not very deep.

Nalindu: Yes, but we don't know how deep it is.

Nalindu immersed the bamboo in the stream and checked its depth. "It is about three feet deep, we can even get washed away by the current. Let us walk down and find a narrow part of the stream to cross" He said.

They walked down and found a narrow part of the stream. Nalindu used the bamboo to jump across. He then extended the bamboo and helped Nipun too to cross the stream.

Afterwards Nalindu walked in front and used the bamboo to part the grass. They once saw a snake slithering across the grass.

They walked to the end of the stream. They found a mango tree full of fruits. It was too tall to climb or pluck the fruits. Nalindu aimed and threw the bamboo at a branch with fruits. Four or five mangoes fell. They picked them up and both enjoyed eating the mangoes.

The final use of the bamboo was when the next door dog Tommy jumped at them. Tommy was a fierce dog who had also bitten some people. Nalindu waved the bamboo at the dog to keep it away. The aunt next door then came and tied up the dog.

Nipun: "This is a magic bamboo. Can I have it please?"

Nalindu: "There is nothing magical about this bamboo. We used it appropriately when it was needed".

The above example shows how the two children were able to avert several dangers by using the bamboo appropriately.



Activity

Discuss how the two boys in the story used their knowledge, creativity and observations to overcome the challenges they faced.

Ability to solve problems

There was a big commotion when Nirodha and Ruvangi came home after school.

“Your father was admitted to hospital because he was not well. I have to go to hospital regularly to see him. How can I look after the two of you?” Their mother appeared very stressed.

“We can stay a few days with our grandmother or aunt” Nirodha suggested. “Yes that is a good idea. But don’t you have your term tests these days?” said his mother. “It is all right we have studied and we can continue to do so even if you are not there Amma. We can also get help from our grandmother” Ruvangi suggested.

“What about the school trip?” their mother asked.

“ I don’t think you will have enough money for it now. Also there is no one to drop me and pick me up. So I will go on the trip next time”. Ruvangi added thoughtfully.

“I will look after my younger sister, we can wash our own clothes” Nirodha said.

“Yes it is best that you stay at your grandmother’s. I will talk to her and find out if you can stay a few days there. Get your things ready. It is a great relief that we solved this problem” their mother said.



Activity

What are the problems faced by the family members in the above story? What were the solutions for each of these problems? How did each one contribute to problem solving?

Such unexpected problems can arise at various points in life. It is important that we try to solve problems instead of becoming distressed.

Let's see how did the people in this story use the strategies described below.



Figure 19.2 - Problem solving

Ways of handling problems

1. Be positive that the problem can be solved.
2. Understand the nature of the problem. - Collecting information about the problem is helpful for this.
3. Be creative and generate alternatives to solve the problem. - Writing these down may be helpful.
4. Select the most appropriate solution and implement it. - You need to be aware of who can help you and the resources available when selecting the most appropriate solution.
5. If you cannot think of a suitable solution you can get the advice from an adult who you can trust.
6. If the problem has an impact on the whole family or a group where everyone is affected, must meet and discuss options - You must respect each others opinions. Sometimes sacrifices may have to be made to achieve a solution that is acceptable to all.
7. If one solution does not work, find out reasons for failure and select and implement another solution.

Once you solve a problem, you can use that experience to solve similar problems in the future. Some people use maladaptive behaviours such as using alcohol or getting into conflicts which complicate problems. You need skills to solve problems while maintaining your physical and mental wellbeing and without getting stressed.



Activity

Try to recall a problem you faced during the past week. Write down how you could have solved that problem using the strategies listed above. Get help from your teacher.

Acting with responsibility

The class teacher has not come to school as she was not well. The students were shouting and behaving in an unruly manner. Malindu was the monitor. Malindu tried to stop the students from shouting but they did not listen to him. He knew if this behaviour went on longer they would all be punished by the teacher in the next class.

Malindu had a bright idea. “Can everyone please sit down. We are going to have a competition. This is a general knowledge competition. Can Nilmini and Oditha become the leaders? We will divide the class into two groups. Each group can ask questions from the other. The side that answers the most questions correctly is the winner”.

“Excellent” said the students. Everyone sat down and the competition commenced. The competition was proceeding. The students were busy thinking of difficult questions.

The principal on his walk around the school came into the class room. He was very pleased to see that the class was quiet despite the absence of the teacher. He praised all the students.

The above case shows that we sometimes need to make decisions regarding others. We must act with responsibility in such situations.

Because Malindu made the correct decision, as the class monitor, everyone benefited. He had the power to make the decision. If he has avoided responsibility everyone in the class would have suffered. When people with power avoid responsibility it can harm the society.



Figure 19.3 - Decision making

Making decisions responsibly, appropriate to the situation based on experience, contribute to the wellbeing of everyone.



Activity

You have to spend an afternoon at home alone. There is no adult at home. If a friend comes and suggests that you go out to the playground, how will you handle this situation? How can you act responsibly?

Coping effectively with stress

We become stressed when we have to face challenges. Stress is the physical and psychological reaction to a challenge.

Being late to school, becoming ill, facing exams, losing a friend or death of a family member cause different degrees of stress.

Some extent of stress lead us to do our work effectively and to face challenges successfully.

There are only a few days more for the term test. Everyone is talking about it.

Madhavan saw that Nizam was looking unhappy and was resting his head on the desk. “Nizam, do you have a headache?” asked Madhavan.

“No I slept only a few hours last night. I studied throughout the night. I get scared when I see the number of books I have to study. Then I don’t feel like doing anything”. “Last few days I studied without watching television or going out to play. But I can’t remember anything” Nizam said.

“Why did you take such a long time to finish studying? I do daily work and finish all the tasks given by the teacher. By doing that my knowledge improved. About one month before the exam I made a timetable and started revising. I continue to read story books and plan to take part in the badminton tournament tomorrow as well” Madhavan said.

Saman who was listening to this story said “ Why do you want to work so hard? I couldn’t do any work. Now there is no point in studying. Therefore I don’t want to start studying now. I don’t mind even if I am the last in the class”.

Madhvan replied “Your position in class is not important. The purpose of a term test is to check if you have understood what has been taught”. “Nizam, there is no point

in studying throughout the night. Proper sleep is important for a good memory. Make a time table today and study whatever you can within the next few days. Don't forget to have some time to rest and play” Madhavan advised Nizam.

“When I have lot of work to do I don't feel like studying at all. What should I do when that happens?” asked Nizam.

“Why don't you listen to a song or talk to someone so that you become less stressed? After that you can get back to studies. Study a subject you like when that happens. In the morning when you are active you can study the difficult subjects” said Madhavan.

You can see that in the above story Nizam became very stressed because he couldn't complete revising on time. Because he was stressed he couldn't even do the work he otherwise could have done. When the stress reaches a certain level it reduces efficiency and leads to failure.

If a student has no stress at all he will become lazy and would not prepare for the exam. Saman is an example of such a student. Therefore a certain amount of stress helps us meet challenges.

Madhavan who sees the exam as a challenge, and wants to get good results started studying well in time. His advice to Nizam on how to face stress is very useful. Working according to a timetable, making optimal use of time and working to a plan helps achieve success. Proper rest helps reduce stress. Engaging in sports and adequate sleep also help decrease stress and improve your memory.



Figure 19.4 - Preparing to meet challenges

Good habits which help to handle stress

1. Good time management
2. Recognising and dealing with problems
3. Preparing in advance to meet challenges
4. Exercising daily
5. Proper rest and sleep
6. Engaging in hobbies
7. Engaging in religious activities
8. Engaging in activities which calm the mind such as meditating

The good habits listed above are connected with each other and improve mental and social wellbeing. Developing one such skill will lead to improvement in other areas as well. You can achieve success by developing these skills.

Summary

Developing of skills which improve mental or social wellbeing help us face challenges successfully.

Creative and exploratory thinking involves being able to observe a situation, identifying factors which influence it, using our knowledge and creativity to generate novel alternative solutions, selecting and implementing the most suitable course of action.

The ability to solve problems helps us achieve success as individuals and as groups. When we discuss solutions as a group we should ensure that everyone contributes, solutions are arrived at through dialog and each others views are respected.

Taking responsibility and making correct decisions helps society.

Stress is the physical and psychological reaction to a challenge. Excessive stress can lead to failure. Being prepared in advance, being organized and good time management can help minimize stress.



Exercise

1. What thinking abilities do you need to make decisions?
2. Name five strategies you can use to solve a problem
3. Name three situations which can cause stress to a student
4. Take one of the situations listed above and list activities which can minimize stress in that situation.