

## ADDITIONAL READING

### Module 3: Your Mental Health Toolkit



This document is designed to help you deepen your understanding of mental health literacy and explore how critical thinking can be used to engage students in discussions about mental health. It covers essential topics, presents films as effective tools for learning, and provides practical strategies for creating a supportive classroom environment. This reading will help you reflect, connect ideas, and engage more effectively in the upcoming session.

### Using Critical Thinking to Explore Mental Health

#### Why critical thinking?

Encouraging **students to think critically** helps them **explore their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviour patterns**. It builds **resilience, empathy, and problem-solving skills**, which are essential to mental wellbeing. When teachers bring critical thinking into the classroom, they do not merely **transmit knowledge** about mental health; they **open a space where students can question** assumptions, analyse representations, and reflect on the human condition in ways that go beyond surface-level narratives.

Film is a particularly powerful entry point for this approach. **Watching a film together provides shared experiences**, but the value lies not in asking students to repeat what the film shows, but in **challenging them to raise questions** about what the film suggests. Rather than asking “What is this film about?”, teachers might ask **“What questions does this film raise about what it means to be mentally well?”** or **“How does this character challenge our normality assumptions?”**

Approaching films in this way shifts the classroom away from passive consumption and toward active philosophical inquiry.

In this process, **films** can be treated **as hypotheses** rather than answers. They become **prompts for reflection** where students draw their own syllogisms and test them against the lived reality of themselves and their peers. A film about depression,



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for instance, does not need to be read as a lesson on what depression is, but rather as an invitation to ask:

*Can a person suffer deeply and still live a meaningful life?*

*Can a person be both mentally ill and a fully functional human being?*

*Should suffering always be treated, or can it have meaning?*

These are not questions that admit easy answers. They encourage students to engage with the ambiguity and complexity of human experience, which is at the heart of both philosophy and mental health.

As Socrates himself claimed, he did not teach in the traditional sense but rather helped others give birth to knowledge already within them, much like a midwife assists the natural process of childbirth. Yet in today's context, this "birthing" is no longer solely intellectual. It also involves emotion, uncertainty, silence, and the parts of ourselves we rarely share, but they are crucial for reducing the mental health stigma inside the classrooms.

This leads to deeper questions about what a classroom could be. What would it look like if not only thoughts but also feelings could be questioned and explored together? Could the classroom become a place where students are not afraid to show where something hurts, and where the group searches collectively for meaning in that pain? At this intersection of critical thinking and emotional literacy, a new kind of pedagogy becomes possible, one that values courage and inquiry over correctness.



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## From emotional reaction to thoughtful reflection

Critical thinking is what **allows students to move from initial emotional reactions to a place of reflection**. When faced with a challenging film or a difficult discussion, students will often respond first with strong feelings: laughter, discomfort, sadness, or even irritation. Rather than trying to suppress or bypass these **reactions**, teachers can treat them **as the starting point for deeper exploration**.

The process can be broken down into three broad movements:

### 1. STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO ANALYSE A SITUATION OR EMOTION

For example, a student who feels frustrated by a character's choices can be invited to articulate why they felt that way and what assumptions lie behind that judgment.

### 2. STUDENTS LEARN TO RECOGNISE PATTERNS IN THEIR THINKING

A teacher might ask: "Do you often react this way when you see someone struggling? or "Where might that response come from?"

### 3. STUDENTS CAN BE GUIDED TOWARD MAKING BETTER DECISIONS ABOUT HOW TO ACT OR RESPOND

Both within the classroom and in their daily lives. This might mean reconsidering a stereotype, challenging a prejudice, or recognising when empathy is needed rather than criticism.

By helping students move from raw feeling to reflection, teachers are not diminishing the importance of emotions but rather teaching how to work with them. Emotions become the raw material for inquiry rather than a barrier to learning. In this way, critical thinking does not stand in opposition to emotional engagement but deepens it, providing tools to navigate complexity and ambiguity in healthier ways.



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## Practical implications for teaching

To make this process effective, it is important that teachers **prepare classroom discussions that invite both emotion and analysis**. Open-ended, Socratic questioning works especially well. Instead of asking “Did you like the film?”, a teacher might ask “**What did this character’s choices reveal about freedom, responsibility, or wellbeing?**” Brainstorming sessions, structured debates, or paired reflections can all serve as scaffolds for critical inquiry.

The shift from emotional reaction to thoughtful reflection also requires a supportive classroom climate. **Students must feel safe enough to speak without fear of being ridiculed or shut down**. Teachers can model this by acknowledging a range of reactions and



showing that all perspectives are worth examining. Over time, such a **culture** cultivates **curiosity, empathy, and tolerance for ambiguity**. These are precisely the skills that help reduce stigma around mental health and allow young people to see it not as a mark of weakness but as a human reality that deserves understanding.

When teachers approach mental health with this **holistic and critical perspective**, they prepare students not only to absorb information but to engage with the complexity of real life. They help **cultivate resilience, foster empathy, and open a path toward greater self-awareness**. In doing so, teachers make their classrooms places where students are not only learners of facts but explorers of their own lives.



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## Dialogical Methods

### Socratic Method

The **Socratic Method** is a **form of inquiry** named after the Greek philosopher Socrates (469–399 BCE). It is a way of **examining beliefs by uncovering contradictions within their implications**. Put simply, it teaches us to **create space in our minds for different ideas and perspectives**, no matter how much they may challenge our existing convictions. The ultimate goal of the Socratic philosophical method is always ethical: to **reveal our misconceptions**, errors, and **self-deceptions**, and to lead us toward a **deeper understanding of the good**. In doing so, it helps us pursue the universal human aspiration - happiness (eudaimonia). In the early 20th century, the German philosopher Leonard Nelson adapted the Socratic Method for **dialogical group philosophy** (Die Sokratische Methode, 1922). The purpose of a Socratic dialogue is to **reach genuine agreement on answers to general questions**. The starting point of analysis is often a **real-life example**, though it can also be a children's story. Contemporary programmes designed to **teach children how to think and to develop critical thinking** frequently employ a modernised version of the Socratic dialogue - that is, dialogue structured around Socratic questioning and answering. In essence, the method can be summed up as: "Question everything - but on the basis of sound reasoning." The method is adaptable to different age groups, and its most fundamental question is: "Why?" Modern applications of the Socratic Method in education are built on carefully structured sequences of questions. These questions open the way to new inquiries and new justifications.

A method of asking structured, open-ended questions to guide students toward deeper understanding, through:

-  Inquiry over answers
-  Encouraging reflection and reasoned thinking











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## EXAMPLE

Facilitator/teacher: *Instead of beginning with a definition, let us explore together.*

-  What does anxiety feel like to you?
-  Is it the same feeling for everyone, or can it differ from person to person?
-  Can anxiety ever be useful, or is it always harmful?
-  What might cause your own anxiety?
-  Why do we often care so much about what others think of us?
-  If anxiety comes from our thoughts, can changing our way of thinking also change our anxiety?
-  Is being anxious a sign of weakness, or could it be a natural part of being human?
-  Can we imagine a world without anxiety—would that be better, or would something be lost?

### DIALOGUE PRINCIPLES



#### Reflection, Not answers

Each question opens space for reflection, rather than providing a direct answer



#### Real-Life Examples

Students are encouraged to use examples from their daily lives (e.g., school, friendships, public speaking)



#### Understanding, Not elimination

The goal is not to eliminate anxiety but to understand it more deeply and recognize its challenges and potential role in human life.

### PURPOSE

#### Encourage Reflection

Students reflect on their own experiences, question assumptions, and develop a deeper understanding of anxiety as a human experience.

### FACILITATOR 'SINSTRUCTIONS

**1. Open-ended questions**  
(not definition)

**2. Allow time to think**  
(before responding)

**3. Encourage multiple perspectives**  
(no "wrong" answers)

**4. Use follow-up questions**  
(deepen reflection)

**5. Summarize key insights**  
(insights that emerged)



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## Philosophical Inquiry

Philosophical inquiry is most often practised through Philosophy for/with Children (P4C), and similar ethics education programs were first designed to help children learn how to think, not what to think. Its greatest value lies in developing critical, reflective, and caring ways of thinking from an early age.

### Why use it with children?

Encourages curiosity & questioning

Builds self-confidence & respect for others

Helps children express their own views clearly

Protects them from indoctrination by providing tools for independent judgment

Strengthens social skills through listening, dialogue & tolerance

### Why use it with older students and adults?

Although created for children, the **method works just as well with teenagers, university students, and adults of all ages.** With younger learners, teachers often start from stories, pictures, or simple everyday situations. With older participants, discussions can grow into complex ethical dilemmas, social challenges, or philosophical questions. In both cases, the core remains the same: asking thoughtful questions, listening carefully, and searching together for better answers.



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## Practical steps for teachers

### Choose a stimulus

- Short story, picture, film clip, or real-life situation

### Encourage open questions

- Invite students to ask what puzzles or interests them

### Select a question for dialogue

- Ideally one that touches on values, meaning, or shared human experience

### Guide the discussion

- Ask follow-up questions, invite different perspectives & model respectful listening

### Summarise insights together

- Highlight what was learned, both about the topic and about thinking/dialogue itself

### Tip for all age groups

The most important question is always “Why?” It leads learners of every generation to think more deeply, test their assumptions, and practice reasoning in a supportive community. In this way, philosophical inquiry becomes not only a tool for developing children’s thinking, but also a lifelong method of learning and living together. The **Socratic Method** is a **form of inquiry** named after the Greek philosopher.



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