**Healthy mind**

Think about things you can do that affect your mental health. These things affect your thoughts and emotions.

Draw a picture of you doing something that is **good** for your mental health.

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| **Me doing something that is good for my mental health** |

Now, draw a picture of you doing something that can make your mental health **worse**.

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| **Me doing something that can make my mental health worse** |

*Biology > Big idea BHD: Health and disease > Topic BHD1: What are health and disease? > Key concept BHD1.1: Good and ill health*

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| **Diagnostic question** |
| **Healthy mind** |

**Overview**

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| Learning focus: | The physical health and the mental health of an organism can range from good to ill, and are affected by numerous factors. |
| Observable learning outcome: | Identify factors associated with good and ill mental health in humans. |
| Question type: | Drawing |
| Key words: | Health, disease |

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| **P** | **PRIOR UNDERSTANDING**  This diagnostic question probes understanding of ideas that are usually taught at age 5-11, to aid transition from earlier stages of learning. |

**What does the research say?**

When children aged 5-9 in Australia (Brindal et al., 2012), 9-11 in the US (Reeve and Bell, 2009) and 14-15 in Turkey (Çetin et al., 2013) were asked to draw and write about healthy and unhealthy things, most of the students’ answers related to food and drink (over 60% in the US study) and physical activity. Ideas about social health and wellbeing were rarely seen. A separate study found that some adolescent children also referred to fresh air in relation to healthiness (O’Higgins, Sixsmith and Gabhainn, 2010).

Emotional or mental health was not commonly depicted or described by the children up to age 11 (appearing in less than 4% of answers in the US study), although depictions of healthy activities usually included people who were smiling – possibly to indicate happiness because they were doing the “right thing”. In the Australian study, one girl depicted herself reading and explained that it was healthy because it was “exercising the brain”, while another student referred to relaxing and being calm. Emotional and mental health featured more commonly in answers from the Turkish children aged 14-15.

Asking children to draw, discuss and write is an established technique for probing their understanding of health and disease, which has been said to enhance participation by children; the drawing aspect in particular enables children to convey personal preferences and concepts that may be beyond their current vocabulary (Wetton and McWhirter, 1998; Backett-Milburn and McKie, 1999; Harrison, 2002).

**Ways to use this question**

Students should complete the drawing tasks individually (the drawings will be discussed in small groups in the response activity ‘Improving mental health’). To reduce sensitivities when the drawings are shared, students could be told **not** to put their names on their drawings.

*Differentiation*

In some cases it may be helpful to prompt students to think about things they do that make them feel happy, calm or relaxed, or things they have been told to do (by parents/teachers/TV/books) that are good for their mental health.

**Equipment**

For each student:

* pencils, pens or crayons
* paper (if not drawing on the student worksheet)

**Expected answers**

There is likely to be a wide range of depictions, but activities that can help to promote good mental health include talking about feelings, socialising with friends, getting appropriate amounts of rest, spending time outdoors in the fresh air, and activities that also promote good physical health such as physical exercise and eating well (Mental Health Foundation, 2019).

**How to respond - what next?**

Asking children to draw, discuss and write is an established technique for probing their understanding of health and disease (Wetton and McWhirter, 1998; Harrison, 2002). Thus, the drawings that students have produced could be used as the basis for small group discussions, which give students the opportunity to explore their thinking and encourage social construction of new ideas (meaning making) through dialogue. The following BEST ‘response activity’ describes just such a small group discussion activity and could be used in follow-up to this diagnostic question:

* Response activity: Improving mental health

If students struggle to see the value of talking about feelings, the following video from the Mental Health Foundation, entitled “I’m fine”, could be used to challenge their thinking:

* <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos/im-fine>

**Acknowledgments**

Developed by Alistair Moore (UYSEG), from techniques described by Wetton and McWhirter (1998), Harrison (2002), Reeve and Bell (2009), and Brindal et al. (2012).

Images: hand holding pencil - pixabay.com/HeatherPaque (1515895)

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