**Is it a symptom?**

Some children are asked to suggest symptoms of ill health.

Look at their suggestions.

**Grace**

Being tired.

**Chloe**

Skin changing colour.

**Alfie**

Loosing weight.

**Zayn**

High body temperature.

**Megan**

Feeling sad.

**Jack**

Teeth falling out.

**To talk about in your group**

1. Who do you **agree** with?
2. Who do you **disagree** with, and why?
3. How would you explain the right ideas to these people?

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

|  |
| --- |
| **Response activity** |
| **Is it a symptom?** |

**Overview**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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: | Recognise that changes in normal body appearance, function and behaviour can be symptoms of ill health. |
| Activity type: | Talking heads, discussion |
| Key words: | Health, disease |

This activity can help develop students’ understanding of the relationship between ill health and changes in normal body appearance, function and behaviour in response to the following diagnostic question:

* Diagnostic question: Symptoms

**What does the research say?**

The school curriculum has an important role to play in developing the health literacy of students (IUHPE, 2010; Paakkari and Paakkari, 2012; Kilgour et al., 2015; Bruselius-Jensen, Bonde and Christensen, 2017). Put simply, health literacy at the individual level enables a person to access, understand, appraise and use information to make informed decisions about their health.

Research has shown that the development of health literacy in children is important in reducing the incidence of disease (e.g. Hanson and Gluckman, 2011), and that efforts to improve the health literacy of school children can have impacts on their behaviour (e.g. Park et al., 2017). Health literacy includes both physical health literacy and mental health literacy (Kutcher et al., 2016; Mental Health Foundation, 2019).

Ill health (or “illness”) can be defined as deviation from the ‘normal’ appearance, functions and behaviour of an organism, although defining ‘normal’ and what constitutes a deviation from it even for an individual organism is not necessarily straightforward (Boruchovitch and Mednick, 2002).

**Ways to use this activity**

Students should complete this activity in pairs or small groups, and the focus should be on discussion within the group. Students should work together to follow the instructions on either the worksheet or the PowerPoint presentation. Giving each group one worksheet to complete between them is helpful for encouraging discussion, but each member should be able to report back to the class. Listening in to the conversations of each group will often give you insights into how your students are thinking.

After their discussions, each group should be prepared to report the key points of their discussion to another group, or to the class.

*Differentiation*

You may choose to read the speech bubbles and questions to the class, so that everyone can focus on the science. In some situations it may be more appropriate for a teaching assistant to read for one or two students.

The quality of the discussions can be improved with a careful selection of groups; or by allocating specific roles to students in each group. For example, you may choose to select a student with strong prior knowledge as a scribe, and forbid them from contributing any of their own answers. They may question the others and only write down what they have been told. This strategy encourages contributions from more members of each group.

**Expected answers**

Students should recognise that most of the suggested changes in body appearance, body function and behaviour *could* be symptoms of ill health, but may not necessarily be. For example, weight loss and being tired can result from exercise, which is an activity usually associated with good health. Some are normal changes as a person gets older, such as teeth falling out. Change in skin colour could be a seasonal change, due to increased exposure to the sun. Some, such as being tired and feeling sad may be reactions to experiences and will pass. Students may also recognise that there is a difference between feeling hot and having a high core body temperature.

If necessary, draw out the idea that if a change in normal body function, body appearance or behaviour is not expected for a person of that age, and persists rather than resolving on its own, it is more likely to be a symptom of ill health. in addition, you could prompt students to discuss the idea that some changes are associated with behaviours that lead to ill health, and can be reversed or reduced by altering behaviour to promote good health (e.g. by having a better diet, appropriate amounts of rest and physical activity, socialising, etc.).

Ideally, students will recognise that a change in body appearance, body function or behaviour means a shift away from what is normal *for that person*, and that there is variation between individuals (so ‘normal’ is different in different people).

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