

# ACTIVITY 4: WHAT AFFECTS OUR MENTAL HEALTH?

**AIM:** Children explore what affects their mental health, learn to recognise their emotional triggers and practise tracking their wellbeing over time (Article 24).

## Preparation:

- Prepare materials for group mapping
- Create a sample mental health journal

## Facilitator materials and resources:

- Activity 4 Presentation
- [Paddington's hard stare video](#)
- Flip chart or white board and markers (for in-person group facilitation)

## Participant materials:

- Five sheets of blank A4 paper
- Stapler
- Coloured pens to decorate and record entries in the journal

## Tips for those working in Early Years settings:

- Ask children to draw a daily self portrait of their emotions in their mental health journal.



## Facilitator Introduction

*There are many different things that affect our mental health. Sometimes small actions cause us to feel a certain way or change our emotion or mood – these actions are called triggers. Explain to the group that sometimes we also feel emotions that last for a longer period of time. These feelings could affect their health and their ability as children to grow into healthy adults. Talk about how, by paying attention to what makes us feel a certain way, and how our feelings can change our behavior, we can become better managers of our mental health.*



## Part 1: Warm up – Paddington's hard stare

1. In the story of Paddington, he had a 'look' he would sometimes use when people had forgotten their manners. Paddington called this look his 'hard stare' – taught to him by his Aunt Lucy!
2. Show the clip of [Paddington's hard stare](#)
3. In pairs or small groups (or taking turns in a virtual classroom) ask children to make their best 'hard stare' face.

# ACTIVITY 4:

## PART 2

### Part 2: Triggers and reactions: mapping exercise

1. Beginning with the feelings children identified when creating their wheel of wellbeing (Activity 3), ask the children to write out a list of emotions that they are most likely to feel day to day. Be sure to include a range of different emotions. For example: happy, angry, stressed, surprised, calm, scared, nervous. For older children, guide the group to include more complex emotions in their list, for example: rage, anxiety, disgust, grief, acceptance, annoyance, boredom.
2. On a white board or flip chart create a table with three columns and put the list of feelings in the centre column. See the example below.

**Tip for virtual facilitation:** try using an online presentation tool (for example Google slides) where the group can collaborate together. Alternatively, ask children to fold a piece of A4 paper into thirds and create their own 'chart' by making lists in each column.

3. At the top of the column to the left, write the word 'trigger', asking children if they know what this word means. Explain that when we talk about emotions and mental health, a trigger is an action (or lack of action) that causes us to feel a certain way. For example, in the warm-up activity we learned that when people didn't use their manners, this was a trigger sometimes for Paddington to feel frustrated or angry.
4. Ask young people what they think might cause or 'trigger' them to feel each of the specific emotions listed in the first column. Write their responses in the second column. For example: "I feel worried when I have a test at school", or "I feel happy when I think about my grandmother visiting, or "I get stressed when someone has written something bad about me on social media".
5. At the top of the column on the right, write the word 'behaviour', asking children how they think that the word behaviour (or how you act) relates to this exercise about their feelings. Referring back to the Paddington example, ask: "When someone has forgotten their manners Paddington is 'triggered'. How does he react?" His behaviour was that he gave people the hard stare – like the group practised in the warm-up activity.
6. Continuing to build on the same list, ask the children to identify any physical feelings or behaviours they might link to the emotion and trigger. Write these in the third column. For example: "When I feel cross, my face gets red and I feel a lot of energy in my body", or "When I feel anxious my stomach hurts and I lose my appetite for lunch".

#### Example

TRIGGER	EMOTION	BEHAVIOUR
My sister/brother/friend took one of my things	Angry	My face goes red and I feel a lot of energy in my body

*Additional activity: Ask each child to create a take-home chart listing their own set of emotions, triggers and behaviours.*

# ACTIVITY 4:

## PART 3

### Part 3: Mental health journal

1. Remind children that mental health is a continuum, and that it is normal to experience different kinds of emotions. Explain that in this activity we will create a journal to help us track our wellbeing over time so we can each recognise what makes our emotions change and what circumstances might affect where we are daily on the mental health continuum.

2. Ask children to create their own journals by folding A4 pieces of paper in half and securing them together at the fold. Encourage children to decorate the cover of their journal. They may include different emotion faces, their favourite emojis, or a picture that makes them feel relaxed and calm and encourages mindfulness.

3. Ask children how they would like to track information about how they are feeling. Some children may want to track their information every day with a space to record the date and draw emojis around how they are feeling that day and why. Other children may track their wellbeing through self-portraits or writing. Encourage individuals to express their feelings about their mental health in the way that feels most authentic to them and gives them opportunity to identify why they may be feeling a specific way at any time.

#### Note for facilitators:

In a case where an activity prompts a child to disclose that something has happened to make them feel very worried, anxious or unsafe, be sure to follow the safeguarding protocols of your school or organisation.

