

# Using Thinking Cards to improve mental wellbeing

---

Mike Kelly

Published January 4, 2017

To discuss this case study, please contact us via email [customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk](mailto:customersupport@camdenlearning.org.uk)



## Key Points

- The “Thinking Cards” were developed to help young people improve their mental wellbeing utilising techniques from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and mindfulness.

## Purpose

### **What were your reasons for doing this development work?**

Over a number of years we had recognised that young people were finding it hard to make changes in their life and to develop resilience. Simply presenting them with advice and scenarios did not seem enough to help them effect change. So we looked at the ideas used in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Mindfulness and sought to distill the key ideas into 25 or so easily remembered phrases that could be presented on cards for them to learn and work with. The aim being that young people can improve their inner life and well being by suffering less from unhelpful thinking and benefit more from helpful thinking.

### **Who were the identified target learners?**

At the Royal Free Hospital School, the cards are used with Key stage 2-4 pupils with mental health challenges but they could be used with equal effectiveness in mainstream settings with children and young people struggling to develop resilience.

### **What were your success criteria?**

### **What did you do? (What success criteria did you use?)**

- We wanted to develop a learning tool to support young people in identifying their positive and negative thought patterns. The overall aim was to see a reduction in anxiety and an improvement in resilience.
- The development of the tool, required the design and printing of a set of cards with text on one side and an image relating to that text on the other side. The cards are used to teach young people to identify their negative and positive thought patterns.
- The cards are also designed to encourage a dialogue between personal tutors/learning mentors/teaching assistants and pupils and provide a scaffold for breakout sessions.
- The visuals that were used appeal to young people and are combined with simple

yet powerful messages to enable young people to identify and challenge negative thinking.

- We have endeavored to make the use of the cards a special experience for the young people. The cards have a high quality finish and presentation and are supplied in a velvet lined presentation box.

- Children and young people set themselves targets over a period of time and by a particular focus on the helpful thinking cards can exhibit changes on their thinking and feeling.

**What specific teaching resources did you use?**

## Outcomes and Impact

**What has been the impact on pupil learning and teaching?**

- The impact of the cards is being assessed through the use of both qualitative feedback from pupils/staff and the collation of quantitative data gathered through the assessment of pupil's pastoral progress by staff (recorded on the school database and analysed on a termly basis).

- The cards have been in use since September in their current format and already there are signs that children are using the thinking cards to effect significant change both outside and inside school

- Qualitatively, there have been a number of concrete examples of young people reporting that they have used the images on the cards to evoke a more positive state of mind. To measure the impact quantitatively, the school is recording the range of unhelpful thinking patterns with the view to reducing these over the periods of twelve months

- A scheduled handover meeting each morning allows our teachers and other staff to feedback pastoral progress on pupils. The project is clearly sustainable: new packs can be distributed year on year for use with new groups. The possibility also exists for the development of research projects alongside CAMHS in the Royal Free Hospital.

**Evidence of impact on pupil learning and teaching/leadership**