

Secondary-age activities

These ideas to explore the theme '**Growing Together**' are designed for secondary-age young people. They can be adapted for use in school, for home-schooling, online lessons or independent learning.

To differentiate or simplify the content, refer to our primary-age activities.

Below are a few key teaching points to consider and discuss with your students before engaging in '**Growing Together**' activities.

What is 'Growing Together' and why is it important?

Human beings change and grow– we do it all the time and in many different ways. Physical growth is easy to see as we grow from babies to children, teenagers to adults. We grow intellectually as we gain new knowledge, skills and understanding at school, and beyond.

But growing emotionally is also an important part of our development. Things that upset us when we were younger may no longer overwhelm us as we grow and learn to cope with life's ups and downs. Challenges and set-backs can help us to grow and adapt. Trying new things can help us to move beyond our comfort zone into a new realm of possibility and potential. However, emotional growth is often a gradual process that happens over time, and sometimes we might feel a bit 'stuck'. At these times we are reminded of how much we need others in our lives to help us to keep growing.

We need our parents and carers, our teachers, our friends and others to support us to grow, especially when things get tough. We often need others to help us to believe in ourselves, to keep going, and to try doing things a bit differently. We can also be a great source of support to others as they grow - an encouraging word, a smile or championing a cause for the greater good all helps us, and others, to grow. Even when we have experienced really difficult challenges in our lives, with the right support, we can continue to grow and even flourish.

Activities for use in classes and groups



The ideas on the following pages are designed to help secondary-age students to reflect on their personal growth so far, get in touch with how they are growing day by day, and how they might like to grow and develop in the future. These activities will also help students consider what they need to help them grow, and how they can help others to grow, too. Don't forget to let students know that growth is a life-long process and that you, as their teacher, are also continuing to grow. You may feel able to share a little of yourself (at an appropriate level of self-disclosure) by sharing some of your experiences while leading the following activities.

Activity ideas

A letter to my younger self



“Don’t judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.”

– Nelson Mandela

Invite your students to reflect on their current achievements. Don't just focus on academic, sport and musical achievements but include personal achievements, too. This could include things like getting to school independently, staying away from home, managing friendship or relationship difficulties, managing their wellbeing.

Discuss how all these things take time to develop and how they will have grown over time.

Introduce the idea of writing a letter to their younger selves.

What advice and reassurance can you give to their younger self? Can they write it in a letter starting 'Dear [name] aged X' and signed off from their current self.

You may wish to take inspiration from:

- 17-year-old Elsa's letter to her younger self on the Young Minds website bit.ly/3oEI29r
- Presenter Josh Smith's letter to his 11-year-old self bit.ly/3i1xviD
- Author Gulwali Passarlay's letter to his 16-year-old self after fleeing Afghanistan aged 11 bit.ly/3004wr1

🎵 A Letter to my Younger Self - Ambar Lucid bit.ly/3uHkSjy

🎵 Letter to Me – Brad Paisley bit.ly/3uHskq1

📖 I Will Not Be Erased: A collection of 14 essays by gal-dem about growing up as people of colour, using raw material from the writers' teenage years - diaries, poems and chat histories - to give advice to their younger selves and those growing up today. **Teacher note:** Some of the essays discuss themes that may be upsetting to some young people.



Place2Be's Growth Stories – check back on childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk in January 2022, when we will be releasing a series of short video clips with 'Growth Stories' from some well-known faces.

My 'best self'

Encourage your students to think about a time they felt they got something wrong, things didn't immediately work out for them or they were generally having a hard time.

This could include times such as falling out with friends, not achieving as well as they expected in exams or sports etc. They might have experienced losses or changes in their families that felt overwhelming at the time, but that they now feel they can cope with. (NB ensure this is something that is resolved i.e. something that they can think and talk about without becoming overwhelmed.)

Next, encourage your students to think about times when they feel they are their 'best selves'. This could be at school, at home, with extended family, with their friends, when doing sport, music or a hobby, when helping or volunteering – or all of these.

Discuss:

- What feelings did they experience on each occasion? How do they compare?
- What did they learn about themselves when things went wrong? If they had a similar experience now, what would they do differently?
- How do they think, feel and act when being their 'best selves'?
- Is it easier or more difficult to be our 'best selves' during challenging times?
- Can the students think of a 'top tip' they would give to another young person to help them be their 'best selves'?

Follow up activity: Give each student a piece of paper and encourage them to draw themselves at their best. What are they doing? Who are they with? Where are they? Encourage them to add thought bubbles, speech bubbles and feeling words to their picture. Let them know their best self is always there – even when it seems things are not going their way.



Write your own report

Ask the students to write their own report. Encourage them to write positive things for each subject - even/especially the ones they dislike. Under each subject encourage students to write a comment starting with 'well done for...'. This might include things like "well done for showing up/giving it a go/asking for help etc." Discuss with your students how they grow through such experiences.

My Changing Shapes

Consider the following Chinese Proverb with your students: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"

Watch this three-minute video tutorial from our Art Room team: bit.ly/3nhiYTI 

After completing the My changing Shapes activity, if the students feel comfortable, ask them to share some examples from their 'past growth'. Think about how these things could be extended in the future. For example, if they like reading books then they could also try listening to audiobooks... and they could also write a book!

Again if someone is comfortable to share, discuss the things that they would like to develop from their 'future growth' shape. We tend to avoid things that we're not already good at – but we might be missing out if we don't explore them. Perhaps there is an area of their life that they have neglected for some time that they would like to get back in touch with? This could be in the areas of learning, emotional wellbeing, physical activities, friends or social life etc. For example, a student may say that they used to love skateboarding with friends when they were younger but no longer do so.

Invite the students to keep their Changing Shapes, to revisit again in the future. Remind them that growth is a life-long process.

Self-actualisation: can it be achieved?

Introduce the meaning of self-actualisation to your students.

You may wish to show an image of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow was a humanistic psychologist. He described self-actualisation as the process of becoming "everything you are capable of becoming." There are times when our growth is more focused on meeting our basic needs such as food and shelter, or on feeling safe, and when we are through this we can move back up Maslow's hierarchy and grow and develop in other ways.

Discuss:

- Can we ever really achieve self-actualisation?
- Can we be 'self-actualised' in one aspect of our lives and not in another?
- What can help us move in the direction of self-actualisation when we feel stuck?
- Can we do it alone or do we need others?
- How can trying new things or taking on challenges help us become more self-actualised?

Talk to your students about how each day is an opportunity to grow towards self-actualisation. We all have different things that scare us or challenge us. Ask students to think about things that scare them at school – such as asking for help, admitting a mistake, accepting a compliment, putting their hand up in class, joining a new group or club etc.

Encourage students to keep a week-long diary of small acts of daily growth or ways in which they challenged themselves to try something new.

Growing Together for your community

Choose one of the following quotations to discuss:

- "The secret to growth is helping others grow." (Unknown)
- "Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." (Warren Buffet)
- "I wondered why somebody didn't do something. Then I realised, I am somebody." (Unknown)

Talk to your students about how we need others to support our growth and development – and how they can help others to grow and develop, too.

Ask the students to think of ways that they already support others to grow. For example, do they help out at home or school? Mentor younger students, volunteer etc? Are they a good friend and a good listener? Do they stand up for what they know is right, for example, calling out bullying?

Discuss how this can be hard to do, individually, but collectively people can make changes that impact everyone e.g. the abolition of slavery, votes for women, LGBTQ+ rights etc.

As a class or group, decide on one way you will collectively try to make things better for others in your school or community.

You may wish to listen to or take inspiration from:

- 🎵 **A change is gonna come** - Sam Cooke
- 🎵 **Redemption Song** – Bob Marley

OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH WEEK



- 1 Hold a **'Dress to Express'** day to raise vital funds for young people's mental health bit.ly/3C9RAwM 
- 2 Tune in to our free **'Growing Together'** virtual assembly during your form or registration time [Available from Monday 7 Feb]
- 3 Watch our series of **'Growth stories'** featuring some famous faces, and even be inspired to create your own [Available from January]
- 4 **Share our tips** for parents and carers with your school community bit.ly/3C8wHC7 
- 5 **Spread the word** by sharing how you plan to take part on social media! Don't forget to use #ChildrensMentalHealthWeek

