CAN I HELP?
Background

Often young people have problems they don’t feel comfortable sharing with their family and friends, or they are unsure as to whom they should go for help. Magazines and help lines catering for teenagers and young adults are often used as a way for young people to air their problems and issues, and to get what they hope is an authoritative and sympathetic reply which will answer their problems. The *Dear Abby* style of letter is used in this session as a vehicle for students to consider and reflect on problems and challenges they or their friends may be experiencing.

Students will watch the contestants in the house trying to deal with problems that arise in their letters from home. Students will first look at one of the contestant’s problems and assess possible options using a structured decision-making sequence. Students will then have the opportunity to initiate and discuss a range of problems and construct answers to the issues based on thoughtful reflection about the consequences of different courses of action. They will also consider the range of sources of support that are available to help out when they or friends face a challenge.

In dealing with some of the issues confronting young people it is important to remember and caution students about legal and ethical responsibilities. For example, reminding students of the illegality of under-aged sex, possession and use of illegal substances, or participating in crimes such as stealing or graffiti. There is also the ethical dilemma for students regarding breaking confidences when someone they know is at risk of harm and outside help is needed. Some of the sample problems offered in this session relate to these issues. However, there are a range of options offered so that teachers may choose those issues most appropriate to their class group.

Learning outcomes

In this session students:

- Use a problem-solving approach to generate alternative solutions to a problem or issue
- Predict consequences of decisions and actions
- Demonstrate the capacity to take the perspective of other people
- Discuss the importance of social support systems
- Identify people and services that provide support and develop options for seeking help or support
Key messages

- If you are trying to help a friend (or yourself) solve a difficult problem there are a few things you need to take into account including:
  > the issue for everyone involved
  > what everyone may be thinking and feeling
  > all possible options
  > the impact of those options for everyone involved
  > who else can help

- Sometimes our problems may seem too difficult to talk about to people we are close to. There is always someone available to talk to whether it is, for example, the school counsellor, telephone help lines, or online counselling.

Skills: problem solving, positive problem orientation, perspective taking, help seeking

Session outline

5.1 Video – Episode 5 of Strongbbox
5.2 Discussion – Rating for sense of control
5.3 Activity – Adam’s dilemma
5.4 Activity – Dear Abby
5.5 Extra activity – What do I say after “Hello...”? 
5.6 Out of class activity – On the couch

Materials

- Video set at Episode 5
- OHT of Resource 5.1
- OHT of Resource 5.2
- Photocopy Resource 5.3
Session Plan

5.1 Video - Episode 5 of Strongbbox 9 mins
What’s happening this week? Judges rate the contestants on their sense of control and it’s mail day for the contestants. Some of the news is not good.

5.2 Discussion - Rating for sense of control 5 mins

Learning environment Whole class
Preparation/materials
• No specific requirements
Procedure
1. Briefly discuss the judges’ ratings and whether students agree or disagree. Ask if there were any issues of control when the contestants received their letters that would confirm the judges’ decision, and where does the class think the contestants stand now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judges ratings of sense of control:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Activity - Adam’s dilemma 10 mins

Learning environment Whole class
Preparation/materials
• OHT of Resource 5.1 – Decision making process
• OHT of Resource 5.2 – Adam’s dilemma
Procedure
1. Discuss how different people respond to challenges and problems in different ways. The initial, often emotional, reaction is not always a good state to be in to make decisions about how to handle the situation. Use Adam’s and Rona’s reactions to receiving their letters as examples (Adam displayed anger, hurt and bitterness, Rona displayed anger, hurt, frustration, and sadness).

2. Discuss how people of all ages not only seek the advice of others such as friends or family to help solve their problems, but will also use anonymous sources, such as telephone or internet help lines or magazine advice columns.
3. **Ask** students to brainstorm what things need to be considered when giving advice to a friend about their problem. **Remind** students that there are usually other people involved who have their own perspective and may be impacted by their friend’s actions.

4. When students have come up with as many ideas as possible, **display** the OHT (Resource 5.1) which shows all the things that need to be considered and a simple process for doing this.

5. **Work through** Adam’s situation on the OHT (Resource 5.2) as an example of how to use the process.

5.4 Activity - Dear Abby  

**Learning environment**  
Small groups or pairs

**Preparation/materials**
- Photocopies of Resource 5.3 – Dear Abby letters [1 for each group/pair]

**NOTE:** Choose those letters that you think are most appropriate for your class.

**Some alternatives for letters**
- Use one of the problems from the video, e.g. Adam, Rona
- Each group (or pair) writes a Dear Abby letter and exchanges with another paired group to respond
- You may like to prepare your own letters that are appropriate to the class

**NOTE:** If there is time, the paired group option would be more interesting for the students.

**Procedure**
1. **Hand out** letters (Resource 5.3) to groups/pairs.
2. **Refer** students to page 30 of their books.
3. **Ask** students to use the questions on page 30 as well as the list of support people on page 31, to guide them in writing an answer to the letter.
4. When completed, **ask** pairs/groups to report to the class on their letter, debating any difference in responses (if using the same letter).
5. **Discuss** the usefulness of the decision-making process.
   - Did it assist in providing a helpful response?
   - What issues were raised that students might not normally think about in trying to solve problems?

6. **Explain** to students that sometimes really difficult problems can seem defeating, as if there were no solution. But believing that you can solve a problem makes it easier to solve as you are at least willing and prepared to have a go.

### 5.5 Extra activity – What do I say after “Hello…”? 15 mins

**Learning environment**  
Pairs

**Preparation/materials**
- No specific requirements

**Procedure**

1. **Refer** students to *Getting Help and Support for Yourself* on page 33 of the student book. This outlines the things to consider and questions to help students plan for getting help for themselves or someone else.

2. **Ask** pairs to devise a hypothetical problem a young person might have and, using the information in *Getting Help*, develop a plan for seeking help. Also refer students back to the summary of support people used in the last activity (page 31).

3. Students then role play seeking that help, i.e. ringing a doctor’s surgery, counsellor, or other support service, or approaching someone directly for help. One student in the pair plays the help seeker and the other plays the supporter role (or the person at the end of the phone, e.g. receptionist).

4. **Ask** some pairs to report back to the class on their problem, the support person they used, and the types of things that needed to be considered to get help from that person.

5. **Discuss** how difficult it might be to access the right person. For example, is the enquiry or appointment process too daunting or difficult? Students might be able to share experiences they have had in trying to make appointments with doctors or dentists, or other services. Consider some ways of overcoming these difficulties.

**NOTE:** If there are issues, such as how to access a particular service that the students did not know or were not able to find out, this could be the basis for an interesting research project that could be undertaken at another time or in another subject.
5.6 Out of class activity – On the couch

1. **Refer** students to page 34 of their books.

2. **Instructions:**

   Go to a magazine help column or to an internet help site (see some of the web addresses below) and read one of the letters published. If there is a response (or responses) to the letter, don’t read it yet!

   *www.headroom.net.au/lounge/phorum_phrame.html*

   Consider the problem in the letter and devise your own response for that person using the decision-making process used in today’s activity (page 30) and the list of support people (page 31).

   Then compare your response with the other response(s) provided.

   - Have they considered everything?
   - What did they miss?
   - Did you consider all aspects of the problem and response?
   - What else could you have covered?