



## ACTIVITY: 'GIVE ME A JOKE'

**TIME:** 5–10 minutes  
**SIZE:** Whole of class  
**SPACE:** No special requirements  
**RESOURCES:** A-B-C-D Model (p.59 or SenseAbility CD)

**The aim** is to allow students to experience a situation where their thoughts about an event affect their feelings. (see A-B-C-D Model p.59)

**The result** should be that students understand that they can control the way they think about events and so exercise control over their emotional responses. The activity should also highlight the link between thoughts and feelings, and show how our thoughts have the power to increase or decrease our personal stress.

1. Tell your students that, in keeping with the topic of humour you are going to randomly pick four people from the class to stand up and tell the other students a joke.\*
2. Explain that everyone has five minutes to make up the joke they are going to tell using three elements that you choose (e.g. an elephant, a tissue, and a sports car), and that the jokes will be rated by class laughter. Students are NOT to talk with their classmates in this time.
3. Pretend to be busy with notes/work but try to observe your students' reactions.
4. After one minute has elapsed, commence class discussion using the tables below (no one will be telling any jokes – this was just an experiment to gauge various reactions but do not tell the class this yet).
5. Commence class discussion using the tables below.

## LIST STUDENTS' RESPONSES

6. On the board draw up a five-column table. Label the first column '**A: Event**' and write beneath it the only entry for that column: 'Asked to tell a joke in front of the class'.

A:Event				
ASKED TO TELL A JOKE IN FRONT OF THE CLASS				

7. Label the third and fourth columns 'Emotions' and 'Bodily Symptoms', respectively, under the broader title '**C: Feelings**'. Ask students: What were you feeling during the activity minute (e.g. anxious, excited, angry, unconcerned)? What was happening to your body (e.g. increased heart rate, sweaty palms, tense muscles)? Write the various answers in columns three and four.
8. Label the fifth column '**D: Behaviour**' and ask those same students: What were you doing during the minute (e.g. fidgeting, looking around at friends/others, avoiding eye contact with the teacher)? Write responses in column five.
9. Label the second column '**B: Thoughts**' and ask the same students: What was going through your mind when you were told that you might have to stand up and share a joke? (e.g. 'I'll make a fool of myself', 'This is unfair', 'I like telling jokes!', 'I'll die of embarrassment'). Write responses in column two.

\*You can substitute another activity for this, so long as it is likely to evoke a wide range of reactions in your students.



### EXAMPLE RESPONSES:

A: Event	B: Thoughts	C: Feelings		D: Behaviour
		Emotions	Bodily Symptoms	
ASKED TO TELL A JOKE IN FRONT OF THE CLASS	I'LL MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF	ANXIOUS EMBARRASSED	SWEATY CHURNING	LOOK TO FRIENDS FIDGET
	DON'T PICK ME!	APPREHENSIVE	PALE KNOTTED STOMACH	LOOK DOWN AVOID TEACHER
	THIS IS STUPID/UNFAIR	ANGRY ANNOYED	FLUSHED CLENCHED JAW	GLARE AT TEACHER PROTEST
	I QUITE LIKE TELLING JOKES	CALM A BIT EXCITED	ALERT MUSCLES HEART RATE UP	DECIDE ON THE JOKE YOU WANT TO TELL

- The table now completed, discuss how there were some very different reactions among the class to the **same** event.
- You can now explain this was an experiment to gauge student's responses to a specific event.
- Project the A-B-C-D Model (p.59 or SenseAbility CD) and explain how people can think differently about the same event and consequently have different feelings and actions. In other words, it is not the event but your interpretation of the event that leads to emotions and behaviours; you can change your feelings by changing your thinking. Therefore, challenging unhelpful thoughts and generating alternative, helpful ways to think, is an important way to help manage stress and curb unhelpful emotional reactions.



## DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- Highlight that a whole raft of different responses – anger, nervousness, excitement – all resulted from the one common event. What caused you all to feel and act in different ways.
- Brainstorm some thoughts that might challenge unhelpful self-talk for this activity (e.g. 'Maybe I'll actually come up with something good' or 'At least I'm not the only one, we're all in the same boat'). What feelings might these more helpful thoughts have resulted in?
- Brainstorm some other real life instances where people might have a variety of reactions to the same event. Try to predict the likely feelings and actions that result from various ways of thinking. Which thoughts would be helpful, and which would be unhelpful to the situation? Which thoughts would be most beneficial to the person's overall goal (e.g. to be happy, to do a good job)?
- Brainstorm a list of events that have the potential for you to feel self-conscious or to dwell on the serious side of things (e.g. stumbling in front of peers, asking someone for a date, trying out for a sports team). But remember the amount of stress and anxiety you **feel** is linked directly to how you **think** about the event. This is because unhelpful thoughts have the potential to exacerbate feelings of self-consciousness and to allow us to dwell on the negative aspects of events. So, changing the way you think is the most effective way to control your feelings and actions, and to reduce stress and anxiety, and to strengthen your Sense of Humour.
- If any student has a joke they would like to share, now is a good time to do so.