

Challenging Your Comfort Zones

Lesson Overview

During this lesson, students will identify their emotions, practice positive motivation and build their self-awareness skills while exploring their comfort and challenge zones.

Overall and Specific Expectations

- A1: A1.1, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5
- B3: B3.1

Learning Goals

- I can identify my emotions and practice positive motivation strategies as I build my awareness of activities I am comfortable participating in and activities that challenge me while participating in outdoor activities.
- I can identify strategies for expanding my areas of growth when engaging in new experiences.

Materials

- Cones
- Hula hoops - one per student (optional)
- Rope/ twine
- **Student Resource: Challenging Your Comfort Zones - Exit Card** (one per student)

Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education

Activities

- [Blanket Toss](#)
- [Climbing \(Aerial Parks\)](#)
- [Climbing \(Ascending Lines\)](#)
- [Climbing \(Bouldering/ Traverse Climbing Wall\)](#)
- [Climbing \(Challenge Courses/ Towers - High Elements\)](#)
- [Climbing \(Challenge Courses - Low Elements\)](#)
- [Climbing \(Climbing Wall and Related Activities\)](#)
- [Climbing \(Zipline/Tyrolean Traverse/Equivalent\)](#)

Tools and Resources

- [Disability-Centred Safety](#)
- [First Aid Plan and First Aid Emergency Response](#)
- [Sample Curricular Medical Information and Acknowledgement of Elements of Risk Form](#)

Other

[Risk Management](#)

Assessment for Learning

At the beginning of the lesson, work with students to co-create criteria for assessing knowledge and skills needed to apply their social emotional learning skills while participating in outdoor activities that may challenge their comfort zone. For example, success criteria might include:

- I can identify how I am feeling in situations that are challenging for me.
- I can use positive words and phrases to help me persevere to try new challenges.

- I can explain how trying new challenges can help me learn and grow.
- I can engage in positive supportive behaviours to help my classmates engage with their personal challenges.

After the activity, review the co-created criteria with students, and then have them complete their exit cards.

Assess students' responses during the minds on class discussions and on their exit cards/exit card discussions (primary). Use the co-created criteria to assess student learning and offer feedback. If needed, provide feedback to individual students or the entire group, to clarify or reinforce their understanding of stretching the edges of their comfort zones to learn and grow, and answer any remaining questions.

Minds On

Primary/Junior/Intermediate

Write down one or more of the following quotes so that students can refer to them.

Primary: "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think." (A.A. Milne)

Primary/ Junior: "Believe you can and you're halfway there." (Theodore Roosevelt)

Junior/ Intermediate: "All things are difficult before they are easy." (Thomas Fuller)

Junior/ Intermediate: "Try a thing you haven't done three times. Once to get over the fear of doing it. Twice to learn how to do it. And a third time, to figure out whether you like it or not." - (Virgil Barnett Thomson)

Junior/ Intermediate: "Whether you think you can or can't, you are right." (Henry Ford)

Divide students into pairs to talk about what the quote(s) means to them. Invite students to share their thoughts with the class. Use student responses to focus student attention on how they might feel or what they might think about in challenging situations.

Action

Primary/Junior/Intermediate

Create a big circle with cones, rope, or lines that exist on the activity floor, blacktop, or grass. Have students find a space inside the circle. Alternatively, provide students with hula hoops and have them find a space to place their hula hoop and stand in the centre of it.

Explain to students that everyone has comfort zones. The circle represents their comfort zone. This is a place where they feel physically and emotionally safe and comfortable. They have fun in this space and are confident about the activity or task. The edge of the circle is where their comfort zone ends. Everyone has different size comfort zones and that's ok.

Add another ring around the circle. Have students step into the next ring. If using hula hoops, have students step outside the hoop with their heels still in contact with the hoop. Explain to students that just beyond the comfort zone is a space called the challenge or fear zone. Use the following question prompts to engage students in a whole group discussion about comfort zones and strategies they might use to manage their feelings during a challenge (for example, use a motivational "I can" statement, a deep breathing technique, visualize what being successful would look like and feel like, or keep up positive self-talk).

- Why do you think this space is called the challenge or fear zone?
- What feelings might you have as you inch your way out of the comfort zone into the challenge / fear zone?
- What do you think happens when we challenge ourselves to step out of our comfort zone into the challenge zone? What might we learn?
- How can we manage feelings that might be uncomfortable as we stretch our comfort zones?

Explain to students that the challenge zone is the place where they may feel scared, anxious or uncertain about the task, they may not think they can succeed, or they might be afraid of some sort of danger. It's a place where they may not be comfortable, but they also don't feel panicked. When they overcome challenges, they learn they can do new things, and they grow. Now they have expanded their comfort zone.

Have students step back into their comfort zone. Explain that they will be asked a series of questions. When they hear each question, they decide how they feel about it. If they are very comfortable, they remain standing in the middle of their comfort zone. If they are a bit uncomfortable but would do it, they move toward the edge of their comfort zone. If they would not be comfortable, and it would be a bit fearful or challenging, they step into their challenge zone. Remind them that it is important to be honest and not worry what others around them do. Remind everyone what it might look like and sound like to show that they are respectful of others' feelings and answers. For example:

- "I can listen and observe my classmates' actions without judgmental comments or gestures";
- "I can acknowledge someone else's feelings by saying, I hear/see you are feeling nervous about this. That's ok."

From the following questions, choose the ones that are most appropriate for the age and stage of the students (consider adapting the questions to the age and language level of students and/ or adding additional questions to spark student response) and read them aloud.

- How comfortable are you with loud noises like fireworks and thunderstorms?
- How comfortable are you when a barking dog comes near you?
- How comfortable are you in meeting someone new?
- How comfortable are you inviting someone new to play with you?
- How comfortable are you speaking or presenting to your peers?
- How comfortable are you with eating something new that looks and smells a little different?
- How comfortable are you ordering for yourself in a restaurant?
- How comfortable are you with spiders?
- How comfortable are you touching a spider web?
- How comfortable are you with snakes?
- How comfortable are you with touching something slimy like a worm or a frog?
- How comfortable are you if a bug crawls on your arm or leg? Would it be ok?
- How comfortable are you trying a new activity?

- How comfortable are you climbing trees?
- How comfortable are you asking questions when you don't understand something?
- How comfortable are you discussing your mark with a teacher?
- How comfortable are you being away from your family for a night?

(Comfort Zone Activity: Jordan Rowell, 2012; Guide Inc, 2021)

Consolidation

Primary/Junior/Intermediate

Provide each student with an exit card to record their reflections about the activity. Have students answer the following questions to guide their reflection.

- Which situations fell into your comfort zone and which situations fell into your challenge zone and why?
- How did you feel when you stepped into your challenge zone?
- What is something else that would fall into a challenge zone for you?
- What do you think you might need to try new activities that would be challenging for you? (for example, support/ encouragement from a friend, talk about why it is a challenge, see someone do it first)

For primary students, consider reading the questions aloud for students to talk about with an elbow partner. Alternatively, provide students with the list of the situations described during the activity (for example, fireworks, thunderstorms, a barking dog, trying a new food). Have students circle the situations that are within their comfort zone, and put a square around situations they might try to stretch their comfort zone.

Notes to Teachers

Remember to check school board policies and procedures applicable to any outdoor education activity you might consider including as an extension of this activity (for example, trust activities, challenge courses).

A variety of assessment strategies have been identified in the Assessing for Learning section of each activity. Please note that these assessment strategies have been provided as a means for teachers to gather information to determine what students already know and can do, to inform instruction, scaffold learning, differentiate instruction in response to their students needs, and help students keep track of their progress in achieving the learning goals. These are not meant to be used formal assessment and evaluation purposes.

Comfort zone activities are a great vehicle for helping students engage with natural areas in a more meaningful way. Most students are accustomed to seeing and hearing nature. Their low level of comfort in natural areas restricts their connection to the deeper experiences that are possible. By inviting students to challenge their senses through acknowledging and stretching their comfort zones (for example, touching something slimy, or getting close to smell something unfamiliar) allows for the normalization of natural interactions and ultimately increases their comfort zones.

Activities that have a high perceived risk such as climbing wall, blanket toss, trust walks can all be introduced with general comfort zone discussions or activities. Putting language to these internal challenges and letting them be realized and acknowledged at the group level will open the opportunity for students to engage in positive supportive group behaviours. Consider engaging students in available outdoor education activities to experience and practice stretching the edges of their comfort zone and further develop their relationships skills by practicing positive supportive behaviours to help their classmates engage with their personal challenges.

References

- Jordan Rowan. (2012). High Trails, [Stepping Outside of the Circle: Growing Comfort Zones](#).
- Guide, Inc. (2021). [Team Building Activity: Risk Zones](#).