A TOOLKIT
for Soft Skills Development for Young People

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

What it is and why it's important

- Are you an optimist or a pessimist?
- Do you feel that your life is heading in the right direction?

The environment and your life experience shape how you see the world. Nevertheless, whilst you can't always control what happens to you, you do have some control over how you react and respond to events.

It is easy to become cynical and pessimistic towards the world we live in, and every single one of us, rich or poor, will have our share of hardships and difficulties. If you become too negative in your attitude, this can stop you from living a fulfilling life, and it can also have an impact on your family, friends and colleagues. The energy you bring into situations can be picked up by the people you are in contact with, whilst a positive attitude can lift their spirits, allowing new and exciting things to happen.

Fortunately, scientists are discovering more and more about what keeps us emotionally well and happy. We all have our habits, routines and ingrained thinking styles, but by making changes to these habits and thoughts, it's possible to develop more positive thinking skills, and this, in turn, can help you become a happier and healthier person.

You're on a journey, and in this stage of the journey, you'll develop positive thinking skills in some situations you might find yourself in. But first, let's see where you're at before you start this stage of the journey. It's time to take a skills check.

How to use this toolkit

You can either use the sections of the toolkit on your own or as part of a group. Your tutor/mentor/ support worker will help decide which approach is better suited to meet your individual needs.

If you have not done so already, then read the 'Introduction and Guidance' section which gives an overview of how to get the best out of your use of the UMJ toolkit.

If you need more space to write down your thoughts or actions then use additional sheets of paper.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Learning Outcomes

In this section, you will:

- Think about how your attitude can affect the way other people relate to you.
- Think about what you can do to make your outlook on life more positive.
- Plot out your own assessment of your positive thinking skills, and decide how you might need to strengthen these skills.
- Identify a situation or task you are involved in, and plan to use positive thinking skills whilst involved in this.
- Evaluate how your positive thinking skills have developed as a result of this activity, and how you plan to keep on developing your positivity.

Remember! Your skills won't develop overnight. You will need to give some time to work through these activities, go away and try out your skills, then come back and see how much your skills have improved.

If you need help, ask someone to work through this section with you. This could be a teacher, youth worker, coach, mentor or employment advisor, or someone in a similar role.

Look after yourself!

It's not usually possible to feel positive all of the time. It's only natural to feel sad, upset, angry, anxious or depressed at times, especially when faced with difficult circumstances. These could include seemingly small things like exams, finding a job or arguments with friends, as well as 'big' things like losing a parent, losing your home, or being a victim of crime.

However, if you feel anxious or depressed for more than a few weeks at a time, and your mood shows no sign of lifting or improving, you may need to seek medical help. This isn't a sign of weakness or failure. Help is out there if you need it, and many people will seek this help at some point in their lives.

You may find this chart helps you to plan and track your progress through your journey:

Aspect	Date started	Date finished	Your notes
Initial skills check			
Development activities			
Action planning			
Developmental activities			
Reflection, evaluation and 2nd skills check			
Moving on			

BEFORE THE JOURNEY – SKILLS CHECK

Think about the following situation.

Has this ever happened to you? How did you immediately react?
If this were to happen to you, how would you immediately react?

You're walking down the street, as you usually do at this time of day.

In the distance, on the other side of the road, you see someone who a friend introduced you to a few weeks ago. You only spoke for a few minutes, but despite this, you decide to wave at her.

She doesn't respond, but walks away and ignores you.

In this situation, which of the following best describes your immediate response?

She's pretending not to notice me. I feel so stupid now! She obviously didn't like me. I must have made a real fool of myself a few weeks ago, and I've just done it again!

I think she saw me... But maybe she didn't. She was quite far away. We only spoke for a few minutes, so she might not recognise me. Or maybe she's just shy? Anyway, it's not a big deal.

Which reaction is based on negative thinking, and which on positive thinking?
Which reaction best corresponds to the reality of the situation?

Now, complete the Skills Check.

Step 1:

Indicate the places on the chart which best represents where your skills are at.
You can shade or colour in the grid, or mark with a X and then draw a line to plot out your skills.
You can do this by yourself if you want to. If you're not sure how to complete this, ask for help.

		Emerging		Consolidating	Established	
		Never – I struggle with this	Hardly ever	Sometimes	Usually, but not always	Always – no problem!
	Example: *I regularly offer to do things for other people without expecting anything in return*	1	2	3	4	5
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3	I value my physical health, and I make sure that I eat healthy food, get enough sleep and exercise regularly	1	2	3	4	5
4	I enjoy taking time out for myself to stop, be still, and notice what's happening around me	1	2	3	4	5
5	I like trying new things and am always learning	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have realistic goals which I feel I am progressing towards	1	2	3	4	5
7	I deal with stressful situations and don't let them overwhelm me	1	2	3	4	5
8	I don't ignore the negative things I have to deal with, but can focus my attention on the positives	1	2	3	4	5
9	I don't compare myself unfavourably with others and am comfortable with who I am	1	2	3	4	5
10	I have a purpose in my life and feel I am making a contribution	1	2	3	4	5

Shade in the box which indicates your overall positive thinking skills level.

Overall, my positive thinking skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established

Emerging = your skills are starting to develop.

Consolidating = you're practicing and developing your skills, but you're not quite there yet.

Established = your skills are well developed, and have become part of how you naturally do things.

Step 2:

Ask someone who knows you well to shade or mark the spaces which best represents where you're at. This could be a teacher, youth worker, mentor or employment advisor, or someone in a similar role. They must not look at your answers!

Peer reflection carried out by:		Emerging		Consolidating		Established
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Shade in the box which indicates their overall positive thinking skills level.

Overall, their positive thinking skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established

Emerging = your skills are starting to develop.

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Step 3:

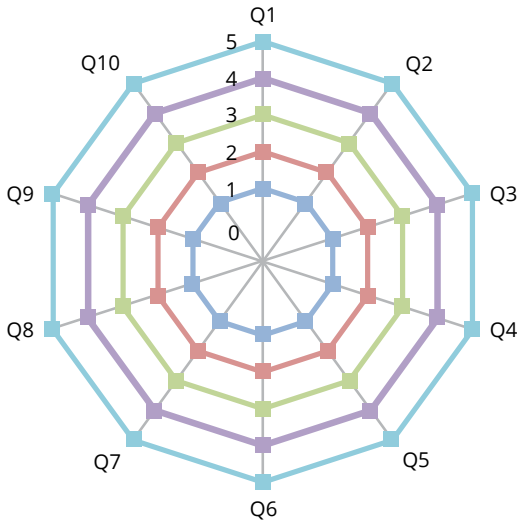
Next, plot your answers on the spider web diagrams below.

Q1 - Q10 represents the questions. On each question, if you answered 5, circle the blue cross. If you answered 4, circle the purple cross. If you answered 3, circle green; 2 circle red; 1 circle dark blue.

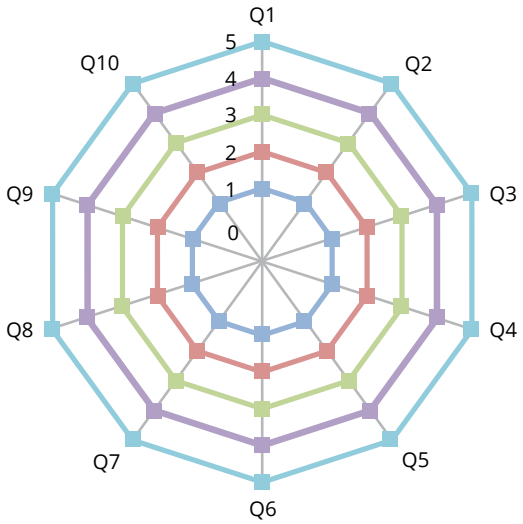
When you have circled all the crosses, right around the web, you should join each cross with a black line. The final diagram should look something like a spider's web and can be lots of different shapes depending on your answers.

If you need more help, look in the **Instructions and Guidance** section for how to do this.

My responses:



The other person's responses:



Discuss your different grids.

- Are your finished diagrams the same or different?
- Do other people see you the same way you see yourself?

Decide together what your strong and weak areas are, and make sure you both agree.
List your strengths and weaknesses below.

What are your three **weakest** areas?	What are your three **strongest** areas?
Area 1:	Area 1:
Area 2:	Area 2:
Area 3:	Area 3:

Your strongest areas might be positive thinking skills you're good at, but you can always improve. Your weakest areas are definitely areas you should think about improving.

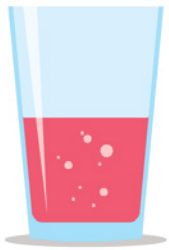
Remember that the levels are personal to you and reflect your habits, knowledge and experience and cannot be compared with other people who will have different backgrounds.

YOUR NOTES

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Thinking about Positive Attitude

You're already on a journey, because you're already involved in some kind of activity or project which means that you might have to look after your wellbeing and keep a positive outlook. You can now start to consider your own thinking habits, and identify some changes.



Is the glass half empty? Or is the glass half full?

This isn't a philosophical question. The way we see the world is often coloured by the 'spectacles' we put on, and the lens through which we view things. The same situation can look very different depending on how you 'see' the world.

Think about some situations which could arise during your work, study or home life.

What negative thoughts and feelings might you experience?

What positive thoughts could you use to challenge these negative thoughts?

What positive changes might result?

Situation	Negative thought	Positive thought
I'm starting a new work placement and I don't know anyone.	*I'm really nervous that nobody will like me! I won't know what to say, and people won't find me interesting.*	*I've got friends who like me for who I am. I'm just scared, and that's natural. It's not actually true.*
I applied for a training course and they rejected my application.		
It's started raining, I'm not wearing a coat, and I'm getting wet!		
Your choice:		

Positive Attitude in Context – 10 Actions for a Positive Life

Adapted from Action for Happiness: http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys

Developing positive thinking skills doesn't mean you always have to be happy. Nevertheless, psychologists researching happiness are finding out that people who think more positively tend to be good at certain skills. Like all skills, they take time to practice. Why not try implementing some of the following actions in your own life?

Action 1: Do things for other people. Helping other people, in big or small ways, is good for other people and can be good for you, too. You can feel good by doing good! Offer help when it's needed, or just be kind and thoughtful. Everyone around you will appreciate it.

Action 2: Build connections with others. People feel happier and more secure when they feel part of a team or group which values them. Extroverts in particular need to be around people to thrive. Get to know your work colleagues and neighbours. Equally, spend time away from work and maintain relationships with your friends or family.

Action 3: Look after your physical wellbeing. Regular exercise is proven to release endorphins in the brain, which can boost positive thinking as well as making you physically fitter. Physical activity can be as simple as walking up the stairs rather than taking the lift, but if you join a sports club, you have the added bonus of building connections with others. Eating healthily, getting enough sleep, and cutting down on cigarettes and alcohol make you feel brighter and more alert, too.

Action 4: Stop and be mindful! Most of our waking lives is spent on autopilot, with our minds constantly jumping around and caught up with random thoughts. Take the time to stop for a few minutes, take a few steady breaths, and focus on what's around you – the colours, sounds, textures and sensations. The world is more varied and interesting than we realise, and it's right in front of you, here and now.

Action 5: Keep on learning. The brain stays elastic throughout life, making new connections with each set of new knowledge and skills. Learning things keeps us active, gives us a sense of achievement, and can boost confidence. This doesn't have to be 'formal' learning in a classroom. It could also mean volunteering at a local project or joining a new club or group. Try new things without judging them first, and be curious and open to new possibilities.

Action 6: Give yourself some direction. We all need things to look forward to, and whilst the future isn't always going to be bright all the time, you can still set some goals to get you where you want to be. Make sure the goals you set are realistic and achievable. Being ambitious is positive, but it's better to set modest goals and achieve them, than to set unrealistic goals which you're unlikely to achieve.

Action 7: Develop your resilience. We all have to deal with stress, trauma or loss at different times in our lives, but the key to developing resilience is to recognise that we have a degree of choice over how we react to situations. Our natural reaction is often to see every situation as a disaster, but what feels terrible at the time is often a mixture of good and bad. Every crisis can present an opportunity to develop. Use difficult situations to reflect on your inner strength and discuss alternative approaches with friends, family or colleagues.

Action 8: Train your thoughts. Every thought we think strengthens the tendency to think in similar ways again. This means that if you try and think positive thoughts – gratitude, kindness, satisfaction, etc. - you'll strengthen the tendency to think more positively in general. Think of your mind as a garden. Cultivating positive thoughts takes effort, but you'll see it flower over time. The weeds will still be there but they'll be easier to manage. Over a day, note down your state of mind as positive, neutral or negative, If you have many negative thoughts, consider what caused them and how you could move them to be more positive.

Action 9: Be content with who you are. Nobody is perfect. If you constantly compare yourself unfavourably to other people, you'll never be satisfied, and it'll be difficult to stay positive. Nobody is better or worse than anybody else, and everyone is worthy of respect. If you can't value yourself, how can you expect other people to value you, too? Make a list of your positive qualities and look for opportunities to practice these 10 actions

Action 10: Find meaning in your life. Most people who feel part of something bigger than themselves feel happier and more in control of their life. Some people find meaning in their family role, their football team, or their job. Others seek meaning in belonging to a religious faith or a campaigning organisation. What gives you meaning and purpose?

Read '10 Actions for a Positive Life' again, and then do the exercise below.

Write down 1 action you do already.

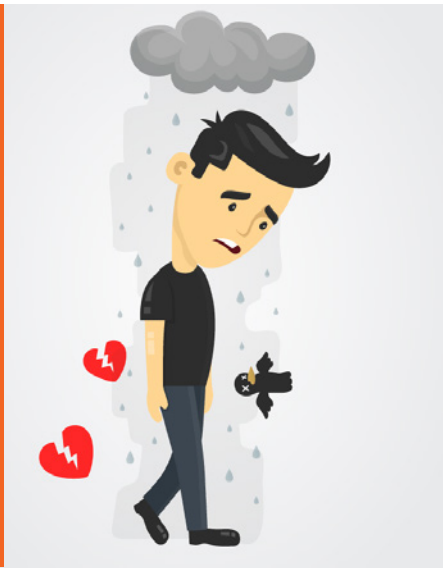
Write down 1 action you're going to find out more about.

Write down 2 actions you're going to start doing.

YOUR NOTES

ACTION PLANNING

The 'spectacles' you wear - the attitude you have – can determine how you see the world.



Your friend's spectacles are faulty, and he finds it difficult to see situations in their entirety. When he does, he focuses on the negatives and ignores the positives. How might his view look if he wears more positive 'spectacles'?

	How could he view things more positively?
It'll be too difficult. I'm no good at anything. Why bother even trying?	
There's no point looking for a job, I'll never find a decent one.	
Why should I give up my seat for an older person? I was here first.	
Life's too short to worry about your health. Exercise!? Forget it, I will go and get some more ice cream. Do you want some chips?	
People always let you down.	

Think about some key tasks or activities you're going to take part in.

Once you've identified this, think about your schedule for one week. Write down some strategies in a weekly planner. You should choose 2 or 3 strategies for each day.

Go and be positive!

Monday Date:	**Tuesday** Date:	**Wednesday** Date:	**Thursday** Date:
Friday Date:	**Saturday** Date:	**Sunday** Date:	**Next week's plans:**

- Offer to make someone a cup of tea or coffee
- Try to spot the positive in people, before thinking about the negative
- Count how many people you smile at today
- Find out about 3 new topics or subjects
- Write down 3 things which have gone well this week
- Choose a different route to a place you regularly go to
- Say 1 positive thing to every person you meet today
- Make a list of new things to try next week
- Speak to someone from an older generation
- Research a cause you care about, and donate your time or money
- Look for something positive in a difficult situation, and write it down
- Make a list of 5 things you're grateful for
- Set a realistic goal and achieve it by the end of the week
- Eat something you've never tried before
- Every hour, stop and take 3 mindful, calming breaths, and look around you
- Write down 3 things you like about yourself
- Think of a mistake you're glad you made, and remind yourself what you learnt from it
- Write down 5 things you're good at
- Give 3 people compliments today
- Buy someone a gift or send a card
- Instead of saying 'I can't', say 'I can't... yet'
- Reflect on what helped you get through a tough time
- Commemorate a special event from the past
- Look around you and find 3 things which you have never noticed before
- Do unpleasant tasks mindfully by focusing on each tiny action and sensation

At the end of each day, write down your experiences in a **Positive Attitude Diary**.

Example: *I wasn't feeling my best this morning, but I wrote down 5 things I'm grateful for on the journey to work. I realised that I spend all my time worrying about what I haven't got, and not appreciating the things I have got. I also made an effort to look for 1 good thing in a person every time they annoyed me or stressed me out. This was really difficult, but after a while I started to appreciate my colleagues more. When I told them what I liked about them, they also started to acknowledge me. Other people said that I seemed happier and more relaxed than last week, so it must be working!*

Day 1	**Day 2**
Day 3	**Day 4**
Day 5	**Day 6**
Day 7	**Positive aspects of the week:**

If you found this exercise useful, then use a diary or notebook and set yourself a challenge to use the technique for a month.

REFLECTING AND EVALUATING

How did it go? Here's your chance to reflect on how you've improved your skills. Fill in each arrow below with your results and thoughts.

What task/activity did you complete?

Did you follow your own positive attitude advice? How?

Is your outlook more positive now? How?

What new positive thinking skills will you take with you and develop further in the future?

AFTER THE JOURNEY – SKILLS CHECK

You've almost completed this stage of your soft skills journey. You've used this part of the journey to think about your positive thinking skills. Now it's time to see how much distance you have travelled in your positive thinking skills journey. Indicate in the spaces which best represents your skills now.

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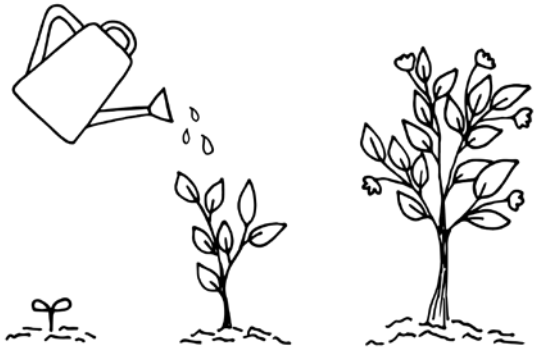
Shade in the box which indicates your overall positive thinking skills level now.

Overall, my positive thinking skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established



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Again, ask the same person who knows you well to indicate on the chart the spaces which best represent where you're at now. They must not look at your answers!

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Shade in the box which indicates his or her overall positive thinking skills level now.

Overall, his or her positive thinking skills are:	Emerging	Consolidating	Established

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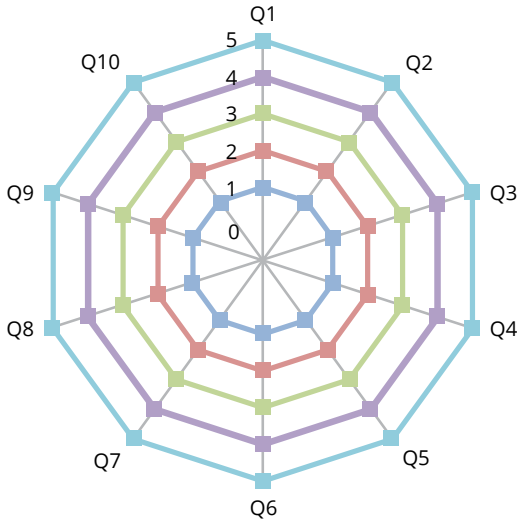

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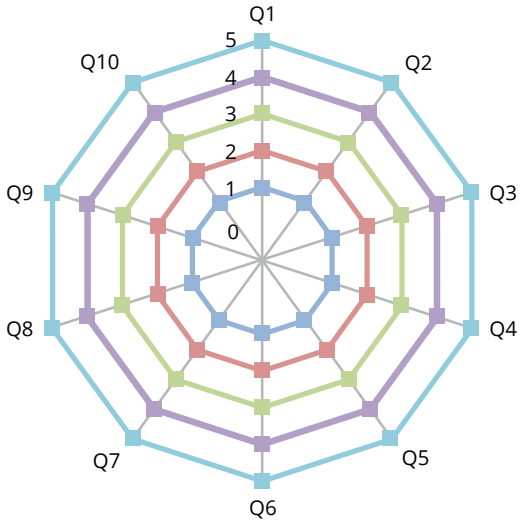
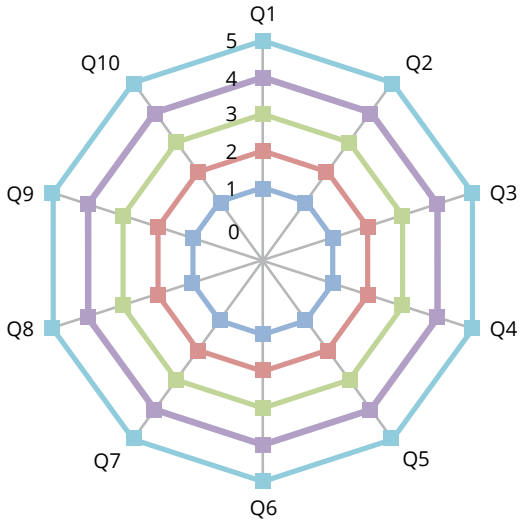


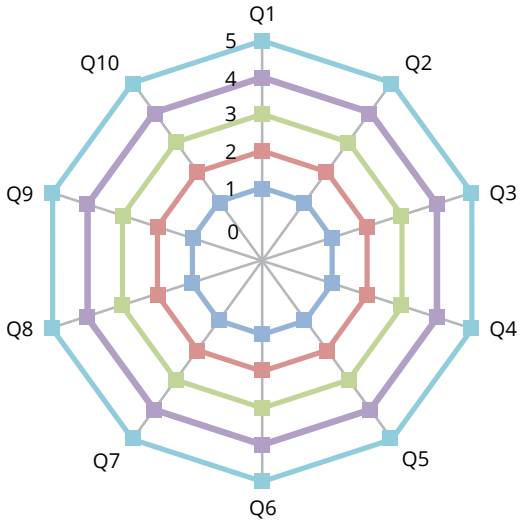
If your spider's webs look the same, that's fine. Go to the next stage.
If they're different, work together to produce a single spider's web you can both agree on.

Plot out two diagrams – your skills before, and your skills now.

My skills before:



My skills now:



Are your 'before' and 'after' diagrams different? How much progress have you made?

If they're the same, don't be disheartened. Sometimes we slip backwards, or we need more time to develop our skills. This is part of the journey!

Remember that the levels are personal to you and reflect your habits, knowledge and experience and cannot be compared with other people who will have different backgrounds.

MOVING ON

This part of the journey is almost over. It's time to prepare for the next stage.

1. How are you going to continue developing your positive thinking skills?

I am going to continue developing my positive thinking skills by:

2. You've applied for a job or training course, and they want to know how you have approached a difficult situation positively and constructively.

What examples can you now give in your written application?

3. They liked your application, and they want to invite you for an interview.

What further examples of positive thinking skills should you mention in your interview? How could you show them you have a positive attitude?

You are now ready to move on to your next skill.

YOUR NOTES