

# LESSON PLANS!

## UNCERTAINTY AND PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

### LEVEL 2

#### PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To help young people better deal with uncertainty. This activity can be done after completing the [level 1 exercise](#).

Why should you do this workshop with your students?

- To help them better manage their performance anxiety on a day-to-day basis
- To help improve their self-esteem
- To make them more optimistic and resilient

 **SKILL**

Self-care

 **RECOMMENDED  
LEVEL**

All secondary levels

 **DURATION**

45 minutes



## SECONDARY OBJECTIVES (QEP)

Constructing identity



## AREAS OF STUDY

Personal development



## SUBJECT-SPECIFIC SKILLS

Communicating orally in a variety of ways



## TRANSVERSAL SKILLS

### Intellectual

- Taking advantage of information
- Exercising critical judgement
- Using creative thinking

### Personal and social

- Realizing your potential

### Communication

- Communicating in an appropriate manner



## MATERIALS

- Quiz for all students
- Image of the dilemma with the 3 questions
- IWB or blackboard with chalk
- Student challenge sheet
- 1 pad of small sticky notes (such as Post-its)

# CONTENTS

## INFO

Some theoretical notions on managing uncertainty

03

## PREPARATION PHASE: 20 minutes

05

- **STEP 1:** Going back to the test in the level 1 activity
- **STEP 2:** Becoming aware of the effects of these behaviours
- **STEP 3:** Reflecting on the best way to react to uncertainty

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: 20 minutes

08

- **STEP 1:** Equipping young people to deal with uncertainty
- **STEP 2:** Continuing to work on it at home

## EXIT TICKET TASK: 5 minutes

13

Reinforcing what we have learned

## INFO

BASIC THEORETICAL CONCEPTS  
ABOUT UNCERTAINTY.HUMAN BEINGS  
AND UNCERTAINTY

We all know students who constantly doubt their ability to succeed, even though they may actually be quite successful. They are constantly looking for reassurance, ask many questions, have trouble making choices, over-prepare for assessments or procrastinate on assignments, paralyzed by anxiety.

**Why does this happen?** There may be a link with their ability to tolerate uncertainty. Generally speaking, human beings don't like uncertainty, even though it can occur in every aspect of life. For young people, school is definitely a source of uncertainty.

At the beginning of every school year, there are new courses, exams with content they don't know and evaluations with unknown results, despite clear instructions.

THINGS THAT TRIGGER  
UNCERTAINTY

***Newness, unpredictability and ambiguity are three triggers for feelings of uncertainty.***

When a student takes on a new activity or task for the first time, they have no point of comparison. For example: developing a bad cold two days before an important exam, taking a pop quiz, running into obstacles in a group assignment, etc.

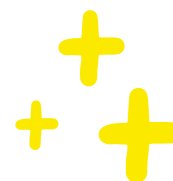
Ambiguity can often be perceived in instructions, remarks or comments that seem unclear to them.

## WHEN DISCOMFORT BECOMES AN ALLERGY

For some students, uncertainty can be completely intolerable; this is known as an allergy to uncertainty. These students are acute detectors of uncertainty and tend to readily envisage disasters, and have trouble functioning in unclear or ambiguous situations or moving forward when they are unsure of themselves.

## ACTIONS AS INDICATORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP TO UNCERTAINTY

There are two main modes of reaction that students may have to make things more definite and, at the same time, lower their anxiety: braking mode and overreaction mode.





### **BRAKING MODE: I FREEZE WHEN I'M NOT SURE**

- I put off my studying, my homework, my work
- I avoid doing certain things if I'm not sure of the outcome
- I question my choices
- I can't make up my mind, it always takes a long time
- I get scattered, starting various tasks but not finishing any of them
- I feel defeated for not doing certain things



### **OVERREACTION MODE: I BECOME AGITATED WHEN I'M NOT SURE**

- I need to be reassured by teachers, friends, my parents
- I look for a lot of information before I start a task
- I want to do everything myself to make sure it will be done right
- I double-check what I'm doing
- I take several steps at the same time to reassure myself
- I make decisions quickly because choosing makes me feel stressed

### **ALL OF THESE BEHAVIOURS.**

although they look different from the outside, **serve the same purpose: enhancing their feeling of certainty and reducing their anxiety.**

## **DOES SEEKING CERTAINTY REALLY WORK?**

Unfortunately, all of these behaviours are not enough to fully eliminate uncertainty, and it forces students to constantly start over. If a student avoids a new activity or task for fear of failing, they feel relieved at the time, but they're only postponing the discomfort.

Each new situation will generate anxiety and they will maintain the belief that if they had tried, they would have failed. In a similar vein, when a student always turns to their teacher for reassurance about what they should do, they perpetuate the idea that they can't trust their own judgement, that they have probably misunderstood the instructions and made a mistake.

**The final situation is** that if a student over-prepares for exams, they maintain the idea that they would probably not have performed as well if they had not studied so much.

### **IT IS IMPORTANT**

**to disabuse your students of these erroneous beliefs to prevent them from needlessly wasting energy and to help them have more faith in their abilities.**

## **LEVEL 2: LEARNING TO BETTER DEAL WITH UNCERTAINTY**

This activity, which complements **the level 1 activity**, is designed to help young people better deal with the uncertainty that they will have identified in the level 1 activity.

After doing this activity, we recommend that you have your students work on the concepts they have learned once a month to reinforce their knowledge. Taming uncertainty means taking action, one small step at a time.



PREPARATION:  
20 min

IMPLEMENTATION:  
20 min

EXIT:  
5 min

**OBJECTIVE:** To learn about the impact of behaviour in the face of uncertainty

## PREPARATION PHASE: 20 minutes

### Learning about the impact of behaviour in the face of uncertainty



**WHAT TO DO** Ask your students to go back to **the results of their test** on how they deal with uncertainty (Level 1 Activity).

**WHAT TO DO** Have your students complete an exercise to help them **understand** the effects of these behaviours.

**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>66</sup> Whether your test results show that you are more in overreaction mode or more in braking mode, all of these behaviours have a **common goal**: seeking certainty.

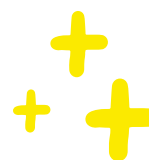
Get into groups of 2 or 3 with people who are sitting close to you.

**WHAT TO DO** Give each group a pad of sticky notes.

**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>66</sup> Use the sticky notes I just handed out to write down what you think are **the advantages** and **disadvantages** of using these behaviours to reduce uncertainty.

You have 5 minutes.

When the 5 minutes are over, come and put your sticky notes in the appropriate column.



**PREPARATION:**  
20 min

**IMPLEMENTATION:**  
20 min

**EXIT:**  
5 min

**OBJECTIVE:** To learn about the impact of behaviour in the face of uncertainty

**WHAT TO DO** Write Advantages and Disadvantages on the board, leaving space for the students to add the sticky notes.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE ANSWERS (IN BLUE ON THE TABLE).

**ADVANTAGES** of always trying to make things as certain as possible

- Relief at the time
- Feeling of control
- And so on.

**DISADVANTAGES** of always trying to make things as certain as possible

- Takes a lot of time and energy
- Relief is temporary
- Magnified emotions over a longer time period (stress, doubts, anger, disappointment)
- Tensions with friends or family, who may be "irritated" by the constant need to provide reassurance
- Less time for hobbies, social activities, physical activities and relaxation

**WHAT TO DO** Reflect on the exercise with the students, beginning with a review of the advantages they identified. Then move on to the disadvantages.

**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>6</sup>There is always uncertainty in everything.

We can't guarantee in advance how things are going to play out.

For example, in an exam, we don't know beforehand how the questions will be worded, how the exam will be structured, how the teacher will respond to our work, etc.

**With this in mind, does seeking certainty at all costs seem helpful?**

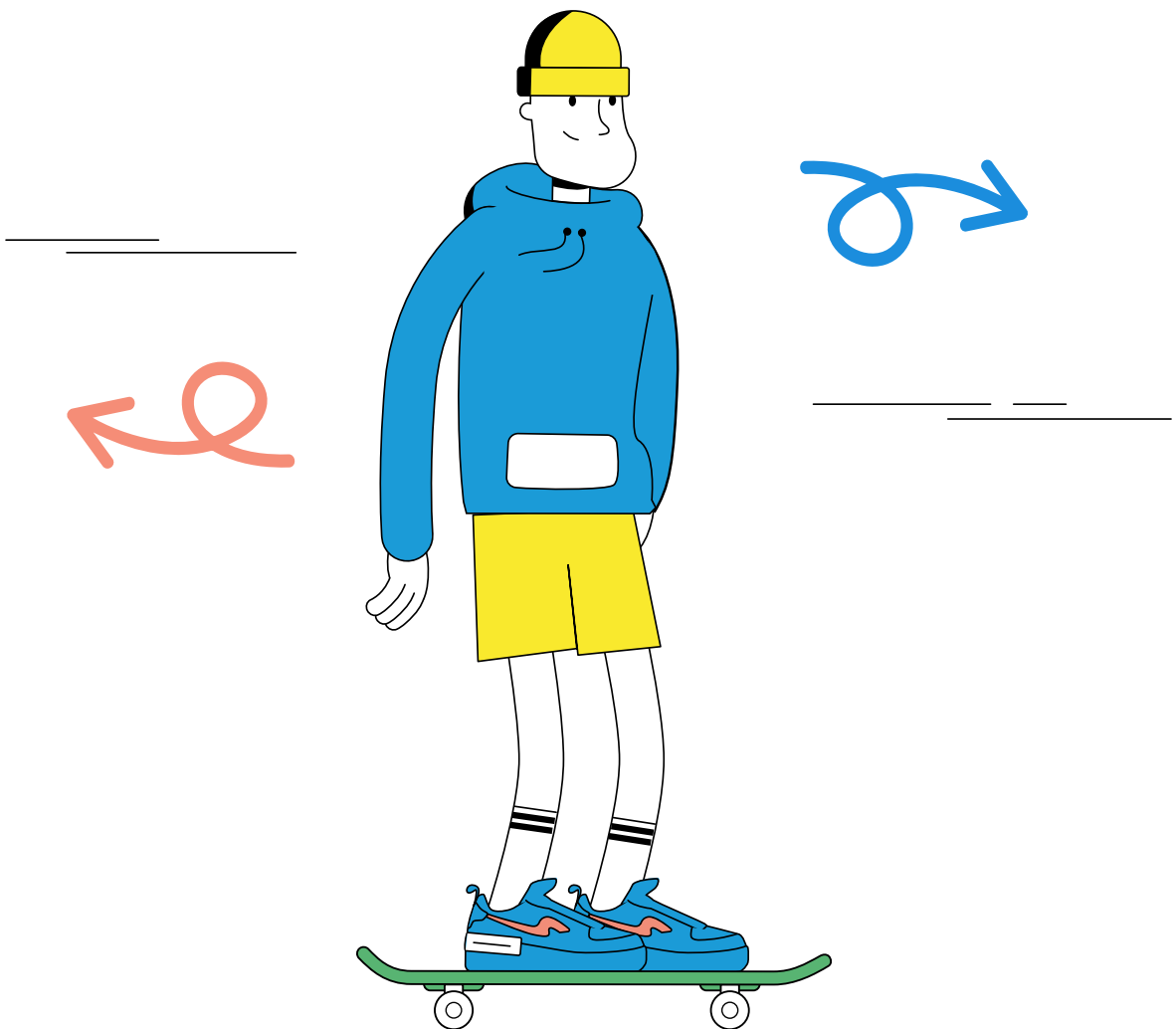
**WHAT TO DO** Let the students answer. If some of them say that it is useful, don't hesitate to give more examples to show them that these controlling behaviours will never achieve the desired goal, that it is a futile effort, like continuously trying to fill a bucket that has holes in it.

**WHAT TO DO** Show your students the image below and let them answer the question in the image by a show of hands.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU DO TO REDUCE YOUR ANXIETY?

SEEK CERTAINTY

TAME  
UNCERTAINTY



**PREPARATION:**  
20 min

**IMPLEMENTATION:**  
20 min

**EXIT:**  
5 min

**OBJECTIVE:** to equip young people to deal with uncertainty

## IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITY: 20 minutes



**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>66</sup> Now that we have seen that the quest for certainty has many disadvantages and provides little long-term relief, let's look at what we can do to better deal with it.

**Since uncertainty is inescapable, what approach should we take?**

**Continue to seek certainty or tame the uncertainty?**

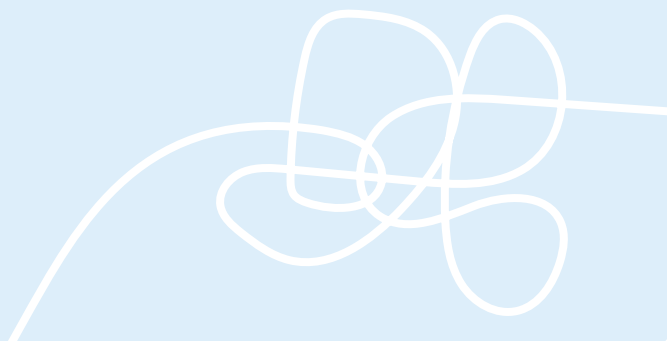
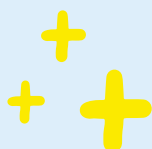
**WHAT TO DO** Begin the discussion with the students by a show of hands.

### Step 1: Equipping young people to deal with uncertainty:

**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>66</sup> Now that we have seen that the quest for certainty has many disadvantages and provides little long-term relief, let's look at what we can do to better deal with it.

**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>66</sup> Get into a small group of 2 or 3 people and answer the following questions on a sheet of loose-leaf paper.

**WHAT TO DO** Project the questions or write them on the board and read them aloud.





**PREPARATION:**  
20 min

**IMPLEMENTATION:**  
20 min

**EXIT:**  
5 min

**OBJECTIVE:** to equip young people to deal with uncertainty

- *Due to uncertainty, Alice spends a lot of time studying on the weekend. Friends regularly invite her to do things, but she often refuses for fear of not having enough time to study. What could she do to better deal with the uncertainty? You have a choice of three topics for a French assignment.*
- *You're torn; the first option seems easier but less original, the second seems more interesting, and the last one can be done in a group. There is uncertainty associated with each of these options. What attitude would help you deal with the uncertainty in this situation?*
- *Final exams are approaching. There is also homework to do. It's stressful. Jules is already dizzy just thinking about the sleepless nights. What do you think a student who copes well with uncertainty would do in a situation like this?*

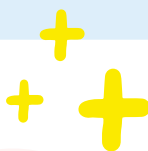
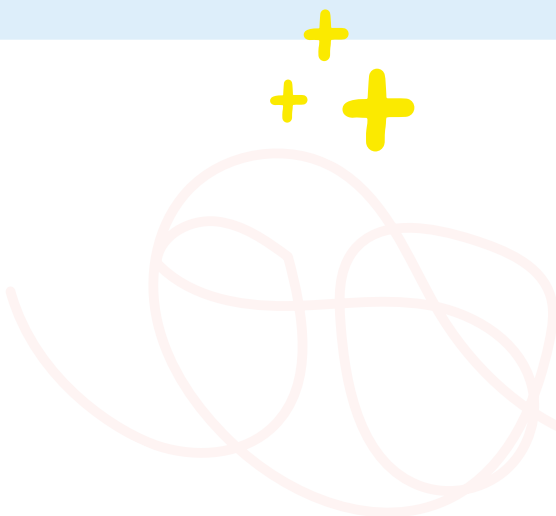
**WHAT TO DO** Briefly review the answers with each group.

**Possible answers**

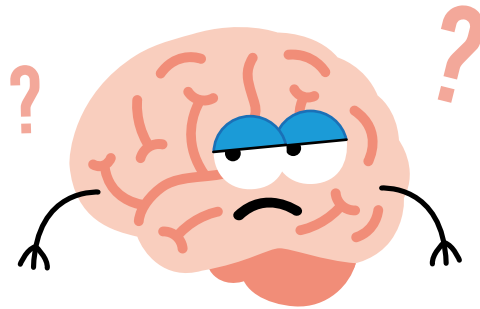
- Make a plan to organize your work while leaving time for relaxation
- Trust yourself and move forward one step at a time
- Give yourself a mindfulness break to take a step back from the situation
- Identify the most important work and classes and concentrate on them

**WHAT TO SAY** Here's a quick reference to help you feel better by reducing your anxiety and uncertainty.

**WHAT TO DO** Give each student the following info sheet.

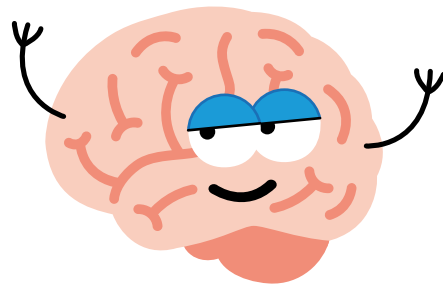


## WHAT TO DO WHEN I FEEL UNCERTAIN

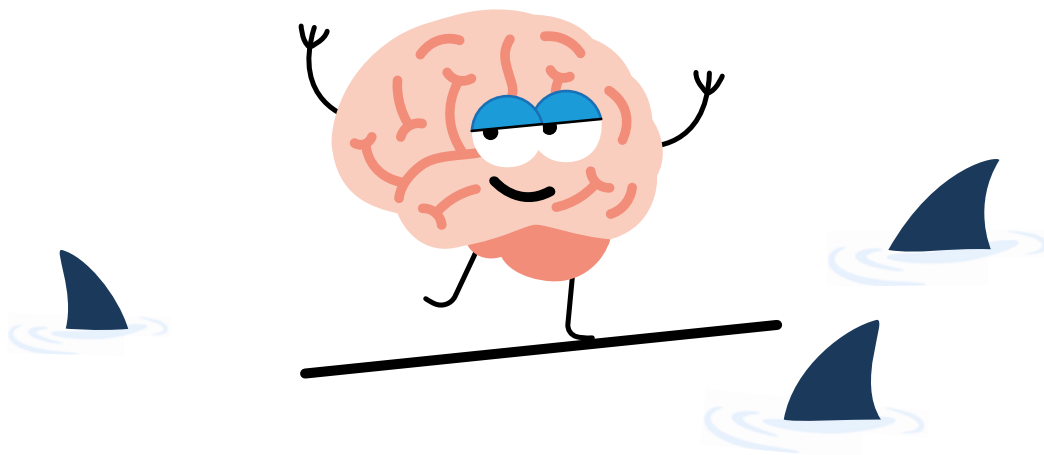


ACT LIKE I'M MORE CONFIDENT...  
EVEN THOUGH I DON'T FEEL THAT WAY RIGHT NOW

~~IMPOSSIBLE~~



MOVE FORWARD WITH DISCOMFORT AND ACCEPT THAT I WON'T KNOW THE  
OUTCOME OF THE SITUATION IN ADVANCE



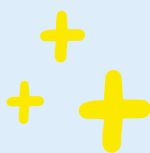
**PREPARATION:**  
20 min**IMPLEMENTATION:**  
20 min**EXIT:**  
5 min**OBJECTIVE:** to equip young people to deal with uncertainty

## STEP 2: Continuing to work on it at home

**WHAT TO SAY** <sup>66</sup> Being able to deal with uncertainty is something you have to work on every day!

Here is a worksheet with challenges that you can set for yourself and update regularly. I suggest you choose one challenge each month and then think about how it has affected your anxiety.

**WHAT TO DO** Distribute the worksheet below to students.



# CHALLENGES ACCEPTED!

**CHALLENGE #1:**  
I HAVE A BIG  
ASSIGNMENT DUE IN 3  
WEEKS. I CAN:



1. Move forward with my work DESPITE my fears and doubts.



2. Refrain from asking my teacher questions when I'm not 100% sure of the instructions.



3. Organize my work so that I make a little progress every day.

Challenge accepted: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you handle this challenge? \_\_\_\_\_

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**CHALLENGE #2:** I HAVE  
A TEST, BUT I DON'T  
KNOW EXACTLY WHAT  
PART OF THE LESSON  
TO STUDY. I CAN:



1. Read the entire lesson and underline the points that seem most important to me and focus on them.



2. Take a moment before I start studying to pause my thoughts with a mindfulness session.



3. Acknowledge that it's hard to deal with uncertainty, but remember that I'm not the only one in this situation and that the most important thing is what I learn from this lesson, not the grade I get.

Challenge accepted: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you handle this challenge? \_\_\_\_\_

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**CHALLENGE #3:**  
I TOOK A TEST AND,  
EVEN THOUGH I FELT  
LIKE I UNDERSTOOD IT,  
I'M WORRIED ABOUT  
HOW WELL I DID.  
I CAN:



1. Take a break and do a mindfulness meditation session to ease my mind.



2. Recognize that this thought isn't helpful and focus on what I can control, here and now.

Challenge accepted: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you handle this challenge? \_\_\_\_\_

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**CHALLENGE #4:** I'M  
NOT SURE I 100%  
UNDERSTAND THE  
INSTRUCTIONS FOR AN  
EXERCISE. I CAN:



1. Limit myself to asking my teacher about it only one time.



2. Reread the instructions carefully and come up with a hypothesis.

Challenge accepted: \_\_\_\_\_

How did you handle this challenge? \_\_\_\_\_

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**PREPARATION:**  
20 min

**IMPLEMENTATION:**  
20 min

**EXIT:**  
5 min

**OBJECTIVE:** to reinforce knowledge

## EXIT TICKET TASK

### 5 minutes



**WHAT TO SAY** There are only a few minutes left before the end of our workshop. I'm going to give you a sticky note.

Please write down one thing that you learned or enjoyed in today's workshop on the sticky note. This will give me an idea of your impressions.

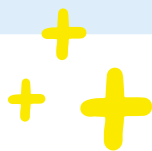
Don't write more than 7 words.

**You can just write down a few key terms** that are important to you. When you finish, please stick the note on my door frame, and then you can leave. You can write your name on it or not.

**WHAT TO DO** Give each student a sticky note.

**WHAT TO SAY** I hope this discussion will help you become more aware of your reactions to uncertainty.

Remember: our only certainty is that there is no certainty.  
We can move forward even if we don't know exactly how things are going to unfold!



## RESOURCES

to better understand anxiety:

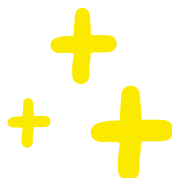
### L'anxiété apprivoisée,

transformer son stress en ressource positive.

Éditions Trécarré

[Taming Anxiety: Turning Stress into a Positive Resource]

Amélie Seidah, PhD and Isabelle Geninet, PhD, psychologists



### TOUT SAVOIR POUR COMPOSER

AVEC LES TURBULENCES À L'ADOLESCENCE

[EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO HANDLE

THE TURMOIL OF ADOLESCENCE]

Amélie Seidah, PhD and Isabelle Geninet, PhD, psychologists



## CHECK THESE OUT

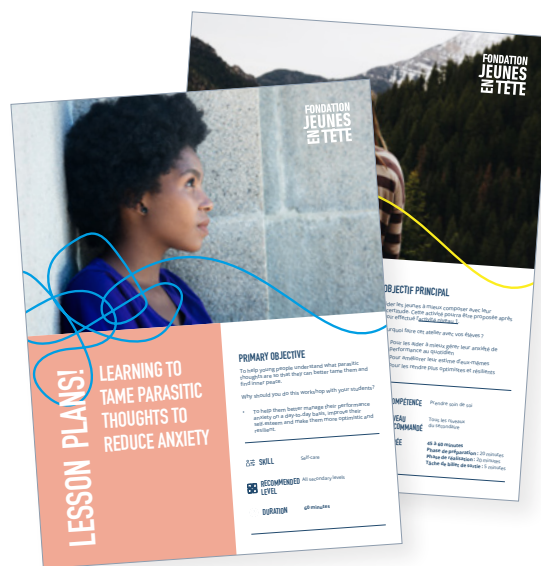
## LISTEN TO THIS PODCAST

created to help you manage  
your stress and anxiety

*Only Available in French*

EXPLORE OTHER EDUCATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES

to teach your students to better manage  
their anxiety

ALL OUR TOOLS AND  
LESSON PLANS

in our School Toolkit to help young  
people develop good mental health

<https://fondationjeunesentete.org/en/school-toolkit/>



[fondationjeunesentete.org](https://fondationjeunesentete.org)

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