

Lesson 7:

# Managing Strong Emotions

Estimated Time: **30 minutes**

## Lesson Objectives

- Explore how strong emotions are accompanied by strong urges to act
- Understand how to use acting opposite as a skill for managing strong emotions

## Unit

1. Self-Awareness
2. **Self-Management**
3. Social Awareness
4. Relationship Skills
5. Responsible Decision-Making

## Manual Information

Grades 3-5  
Social and Emotional Learning  
5 Units  
20 Lessons

## What You'll Need

Access Lesson Agenda, accompanying Google Slide Deck and Resource PDFs under [What You'll Need](#) on our website.

### Print:

- [Feelings Thermometer](#)

### Print or prepare to display:

- [Acting Opposite](#)

### Prepare to display:

- [CBT Model](#)

### Preview, select, and load:

- [Shoulder Squeeze](#) (1:01) OR [Finger Tracing Breathing](#) (1:00)

## Lesson Overview

1. Mindful Check-In
2. Review: Using Skills to Manage Strong Emotions
3. Acting Opposite
4. Acting Opposite Simon Says Activity
5. Wrap-Up and Mindful Check-Out



# Mindful Check-In

(5 minutes)

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**Do:** Instruct students to individually complete the [Feelings Thermometer](#), identifying the emotions they're currently experiencing and their intensities.

## Review: Using Skills to Manage Strong Emotions

(8 minutes)

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**Discuss:** Review the [CBT Model](#) (think-feel-do cycle). The last two lessons were focused on recognizing and challenging our unhelpful thoughts.

- When we experience strong emotions (anger, frustration, fear) at a level between 7-10 on our thermometers, it can be hard to calm down enough to challenge unhelpful thoughts.
- Today we will learn some skills to help us choose positive behaviors when our feelings rate high on our thermometers.

**Say:** "When people are upset, feeling angry, frustrated, or sad, it's very common to want to choose a behavior that lets that feeling out, or makes that feeling go away. Sometimes, though, when we try to make the feeling go away, we act in ways that can make things worse."

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**Discuss:** What are some behaviors a person might feel like doing in the following situations?

- Someone cuts in front of you in line and you feel annoyed.
- You answer a question incorrectly, and a classmate laughs at you and you feel embarrassed.
- Someone bumps into you and knocks your lunch on the floor, and you feel mad.
- You ask someone in your house to play with you, but they say they're too tired and you feel sad.

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**Do:** For each scenario, help students consider whether the actions they identified would make the situation better, worse, or no different.

**Explain:** Often, doing what we first want to do when we feel a strong emotion (e.g., yelling at the person who knocked our lunch on the floor), feels good in the moment but often makes the next situation worse (e.g., our friend feels bad because it was an accident, and we get in trouble for yelling).

- We can use skills to help us with our strong emotions. We have learned a few skills already through our mindful check-ins and check-outs, such as [naming our emotions](#), [practicing mindfulness](#), and [using our breathing](#).
- Let's talk about some other skills we can use!



**Teacher tip:** If time allows, review each skill together!

# Acting Opposite

(10 minutes)

**Explain:** When we feel very strong emotions, another option we have is to do the opposite of whatever our emotions are telling us to do. Although this sounds silly, doing the opposite action can help us feel better and prevent the situation from getting worse.

**Explain:** When we feel really angry, for example, we might want to attack with our words or our bodies. Although this might feel good in the moment, we could feel guilty later on or get in trouble.

- If we do the opposite, like being kind instead, we may end up feeling better about our actions and change our emotions as a result.

**Discuss:** Briefly gather student responses to what acting opposite would look like for the situations listed earlier. (Included below for easy reference.)

- (Someone cuts in front of you in line and you feel annoyed.) Instead of yelling at the person in line, you approach them and calmly ask if they knew there was a line.
- (You answer a question incorrectly, and a classmate laughs at you and you feel embarrassed.) Instead of putting your head down when embarrassed, you smile at your classmate and raise your hand to answer the next question.
- (Someone bumps into you and knocks your lunch on the floor, and you feel mad.) Instead of yelling at the person who knocked your lunch down, you leave the situation.
- (You ask someone in your house to play with you, but they say they're too tired and you feel sad.) Instead of withdrawing to your room, you ask someone else to play with you or ask the person if you can play together at a later time.

**Discuss:** Referencing the [Acting Opposite](#) handout, as a large group, discuss strong emotions, the behavior that is often tied to them, and what acting opposite may look like.

## Developmental Adaptation

For more developmentally advanced classes, instead of discussing all 4 scenarios above, reduce the discussion to 1-2 scenarios and encourage students to think of a recent situation that sparked a strong emotion. How did they act? How might things have looked differently if they acted opposite to their emotion? Gather 1 or 2 examples from volunteers or have them discuss in small groups, allowing students to pass as desired.

# Acting Opposite Simon Says Activity

(8 minutes)

**Do:** Engage students in the Simon Says activity to demonstrate opposite action, the discomfort that comes from doing the opposite of what your brain wants you to do, and

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the concept that we have choices in our behaviors, even if the first idea of how we want to act is very strong.

**Say:** *“When I say, ‘Simon says,’ and then an action, you do the opposite. For example, if I say ‘Simon says touch your nose,’ you will touch whatever body part seems opposite of your nose – it could be your feet or your ears, there’s no wrong answer. If I say, ‘Simon says touch your toes,’ you will touch any other body part BUT your toes, like your head or your fingers. The object is to do the opposite of what Simon says or what Simon does.”*

**Teacher tip:** If time allows, have different students take turns playing Simon.

**Do:** Play Acting Opposite Simon Says for a few rounds using the following examples:

- Stand up
- Sit down
- Move forward
- Make a Happy Face
- Make a Sad Face
- Put your hands in the sky
- Stand/Sit still
- Give a thumbs up
- Close your eyes
- Open your mouth.

### Developmental Adaptation

For more developmentally advanced classes, warm up by playing a few rounds using the directions above. Then ask students to act opposite using some of the following examples. (Several students can demonstrate by using charades, or a pair of students can demonstrate in a role-play):

- Someone is sitting in your seat, and they won’t move. (Example: The student acts out deep breathing and finding a new seat, instead of acting on their urge to yell at the person in their seat.)
- You accidentally broke something that belongs to your teacher.
- Someone made fun of something you like.
- You didn’t keep a promise to a friend.
- You were asked to clean a mess you didn’t make.
- You are afraid to try new food at a friend’s house.
- You said something that hurt your friend’s feelings.

Note: Students will have to identify the behavior they would initially want to do in order to act out the opposite of that behavior. Post in the room or hand out [Acting Opposite](#) for them to reference as they complete this activity!

**Discuss:** Was it hard to do the opposite of what your brain told you to do? Sometimes we can also manage strong emotions by acting oppositely, even if this feels uncomfortable at first.

- Even though doing the opposite of what we want is hard, it can sometimes be the perfect thing to improve the situation we're in and change our feelings!
- Next time you're feeling sad, try to do something active and next time you're feeling angry, try to be kind. Think about how it changes things for you!

## Wrap-Up and Mindful Check-Out

(2 minutes)

**Explain:** When we have a strong emotion, we can:

1. Stop and take a deep breath
2. Name that emotion
3. Name the action we want to do
4. Do the opposite!

**Do:** Choose one mindfulness practice from below to complete as a large group. Encourage students to sit in a comfortable position:

- [Shoulder Squeeze](#)
- [Finger Tracing Breathing](#)
  - **Say:** (alternative scripting) *"Starting with your thumb, trace your finger from the base of your thumb to the top. As you move upward, breathe in; as you move downward on your finger, breathe out. Continue this pattern with the rest of your fingers, slowly breathing in as you trace your finger up, and slowly breathing out as you trace it downward."* Repeat for the other hand.



**Teacher tip:** Use alternative scripting if you are unable to use the guided mindfulness video or if you wish to lead the activity yourself.

# After the Lesson

Use the below suggestions to incorporate these SEL skills into your classroom routines and/or academic content.

## Integrating SEL and Instruction

- When discussing book characters, historical figures, or pop culture, identify those who were or weren't able to tolerate discomfort or act opposite of their emotions (e.g., the Beast from Beauty and the Beast).
- Create a space in the classroom for students to practice acting opposite by going to the corner instead of yelling, lashing out, being destructive, or giving up. See an example here: [Peace Corner: Creating Safe Space for Reflection](#) (2:39).

Check out the TRAILS [SEL: After the Lesson](#) resource on the TRAILS website for additional suggestions for integrating SEL and instruction and extending the lesson for this lesson topic!

## Extending the Lesson

1. Create slips of paper with an action and on a separate slip of paper, the opposite action. Using the [Acting Opposite](#) handout, cut out and provide a slip of paper to each student and ask them to find their opposite. One student might have "be alone." They'd be looking for the opposite action, "spend time with someone."
2. Play Acting Opposite Charades by having students draw an emotion out of a hat and act out what their initial reaction would be. When students guess the emotion, have the actor act out an opposite action and have students guess the opposite action.

## Additional Resources

### For Instructional Staff

- Article: [Managing the Classroom by Teaching Emotion Regulation](#)

### For Students

- Video: [PBS KIDS Talk about Feelings](#) (9:40)
- Video: [Have Courage and Be Fearless \(Acting Opposite by Having Courage and Facing Our Fears\)](#) (4:32)

### Resources for Caregivers and Families

- Article: [Opposite Action Skill](#)

[TRAILStoWellness.org](https://trails.wellness.org)

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# Adapting the Lesson

Use the below suggestions to modify this lesson for different pacing and virtual formats.

## Modifying Lesson Pacing

### Abbreviated Lesson

For a 15-minute lesson: Complete Review of Emotions and Using Skills and Acting Opposite.

For a second, 15-minute follow-up lesson: Complete the [Feelings Thermometer](#) and Acting Opposite Simon Says Activity. Close the lesson by going over the Wrap-Up and Mindful Check-Out.

### Daily Instruction

For daily lessons after the initial delivery of this full lesson: Complete the [Feelings Thermometer](#) each day, followed by a review of the CBT Model (think-feel-do cycle) showing how strong emotions can lead to urges or behaviors. Repeat Acting Opposite Simon Says Activity. Each day, discuss an emotion outlined on the [Acting Opposite](#) handout, and encourage students to consider what their actions tend to be in response to that feeling. Prompt them to consider what the opposite action would look like.

To break-up this lesson over the week, use 10–15-minute daily increments:

Day 1	Complete <a href="#">Feelings Thermometer</a> , review the <a href="#">CBT Model</a> , and show examples of how strong emotions can make us react quickly, which can make the situation worse.
Day 2	Complete <a href="#">Feelings Thermometer</a> and Acting Opposite. End with a Mindful Check-Out activity.
Day 3	Complete <a href="#">Feelings Thermometer</a> , review the <a href="#">Acting Opposite</a> handout briefly, and complete the Acting Opposite Simon Says Activity. End with a discussion about how tricky it can be to try doing the opposite of whatever our urge is.
Day 4	Complete <a href="#">Feelings Thermometer</a> and review the <a href="#">Acting Opposite</a> . Discuss the CBT model (think-feel-do cycle) and show how each situation would change if we behave the way our urge is telling us to versus acting opposite. Discuss some opposite actions students can try at home when feeling strong emotions.
Day 5	Complete <a href="#">Feelings Thermometer</a> and review when our acting opposite skill can be helpful. Provide ideas that can be practiced at home. End by playing Acting Opposite Simon Says Activity or a Mindful Check-Out activity.

## Adapting Lesson for Virtual Formats

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- Adapt some of the examples in Review: Using Skills to Manage Strong Emotions to reflect virtual learning (i.e., you email your teacher about something important and don't hear back from them; you take a quiz and get a failing grade; and/or your internet stops working and you get disconnected during a class call you were enjoying).
- To increase engagement, consider playing Simon Says (acting opposite version) before the acting opposite discussion. This way, students can reflect on the discomfort of acting opposite as a lead-in to the discussion about acting opposite.
- To kick-off the lesson with active brainstorming and discussion, delay introducing the [Acting Opposite](#) handout and instead lead students in a discussion about behavior urges and what opposite action may look like (using the Acting Opposite handout for your own reference). After the discussion, screen share the handout for review and to ensure understanding.
- Display the four steps to acting opposite listed in Wrap-Up and Mindful Check-Out using screen share for students' reference.
- To complete the Simon Says activity in video chat, play as is but be sure to use movements that could be done while sitting and are easy to see on the screen. For example, "Simon says, give yourself a high five," or "Simon Says, blink once," "blink twice."
- Send home [Acting Opposite](#) to have caregivers review and complete with their students at home.