

How US schoolkids launched a hotline to spread joy

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Which of these things are most likely to help you forget your worries and feel better, at least for a short time? Rank them in order 1-8, with 1 being the most likely and 8 the least likely.

1. _____ kittens and puppies
2. _____ having some ice cream or cake
3. _____ reading the news
4. _____ young children laughing
5. _____ doing sports
6. _____ shopping for something nice
7. _____ shouting and screaming where no one can hear you
8. _____ going for a long walk

b. Compare your answers and give reasons for your preferences.

2 Key words

a. Find words in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. enthusiasm; a new idea that helps you to do something _____
(paragraph 1)
2. worried because you think something bad might happen _____
(paragraph 1)
3. feeling annoyed and impatient because you are stopped from doing something or improving a situation _____ (paragraph 2)
4. words or actions that give someone confidence or hope _____
(paragraph 2)
5. difficult to do, deal with, or understand, especially because of involving a lot of different processes or aspects _____ (paragraph 3)
6. showing serious thought and wise and good ideas _____ (paragraph 3)
7. a form of treatment for someone with emotional problems that involves talking to them or asking them to do things _____ (paragraph 5)

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8. make someone feel happier or more hopeful _____ (paragraph 6)
9. someone whose job is to manage a business, organization, or institution _____ (paragraph 14)
10. an area or building used for a particular purpose _____ (paragraph 14)

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. My sister and brother-in-law are starting couples _____ tomorrow.
Thank goodness!
2. The accident and following events provided the _____ for his first novel.
3. He works at the company's manufacturing _____ in Texas.
4. Unfortunately, the situation seems to be getting more and more _____.
5. The coach ran up and down the side of the pitch, shouting _____ to the team.

'If you're sad, get a cookie': how US schoolkids launched a hotline to spread joy

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Matthew Cantor

12 March, 2022

- Elementary-school students in California have launched a free hotline that offers inspiration and advice for anxious people. The small school's project has gone viral and receives thousands of calls an hour.
- When you call the number, a cheerful voice says: "If you're feeling angry, frustrated or nervous, press 1. If you need words of encouragement and life advice, press 2. If you need a pep talk from kindergarteners, press 3. If you need to hear kids laughing, press 4."
- I called the number and realized that often life is less complicated than we make it. These students have a lot of wisdom, as well as a true appreciation for ice cream. Here are a few of their tips:
 - "If you're nervous, get your money and spend it on ice cream and shoes."
"If you're frustrated, go to your bedroom, punch a pillow or cry on it and just go scream outside."
"If you're angry or frustrated, do what you want to do best or do flips on the trampoline."
"If you're sad or angry, go and get a cookie, a smoothie or an ice cream."
- Other pieces of advice could save you a lot of money on therapy:
 - "You are OK."
 - "Don't give up – power through."
 - "The world is a better place with you in it."
- The project was started by Jessica Martin and Asherah Weiss, teachers at West Side Union Elementary School in Healdsburg. "We asked kids to think about what they wanted to say to uplift other people."
- They went to each classroom in the small school, whose 141 students range in age from kindergarten to sixth grade. "We said to the kids: 'We've had some difficult years. You kids found all kinds of ways to stay joyful,'" Martin said. They asked the children to think of moments when they felt frustrated and they'd received good advice, or think by themselves of something helpful to say. "So all of the responses are really coming from the kids and their own life experience."
- The students know about the war in Ukraine, local wildfires and the pandemic. After more than a year of remote learning, they understand the isolation of Covid. "I experienced it – home schooling and quarantine," said Natisse, a fifth-grader.
- Rosalie, another fifth-grader, said it wasn't hard to come up with ideas. "It's good to say nice things to people," she said. A pink poster reads, "If you are angry, think positive thoughts." The yellow poster next to it reads "Think of fun things."
- The hotline was started as "a fun project", said Susie Dalton, the school's fifth-grade teacher. "But it's been amazing for everybody to see the impact it's had."
- At first, students gave out cards and flyers announcing the project. Soon, the project went viral on social media and in the news.
- Martin had signed up for the cheapest hotline provider she could find, thinking the kids would be excited to hear 100 people had called in a month, she said. "Two days later, we were getting 500 an hour, and now we're getting 9,000 an hour."
- "We get people saying, 'Oh, we're so relieved to have the hotline' or 'This made me cry so I sent it to all my friends.'"
- Staff and patients at Johns Hopkins Medical Center call the hotline regularly. A woman with cancer calls during her treatments. The administrator of an Iowa elder care facility, where most patients are over 90 years old, called to thank the kids. She played it for everyone at that facility and said: 'I haven't heard laughter like that from them in years.'"
- Martin said she was "pretty thrilled" for the kids: "They get to see how kind words can lift up millions of people."

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First published in *The Guardian*, 12/03/2022

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3 Understanding the article

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The article is about an inspirational hotline set up by an elementary school in a small town called Healdsburg, in California.
2. It has 141 pupils in its kindergarten.
3. Callers are asked to choose one of four options.
4. The teachers signed the school up with a cheap hotline provider as they didn't expect to get many calls.
5. The project is paid for by the kids' parents.
6. The kids know about some of the difficult situations in the world such as the war in Ukraine, local wildfires, and the Covid pandemic.
7. The kids are currently unable to go to school and are getting their lessons via computer.
8. News of the project has gone viral, and the hotline now receives many more calls than the teachers and students could ever have imagined.
9. Many lonely, ill, or elderly people say they have been helped by the school's helpline.
10. The author says that life is usually more complicated than we realize.

4 Key language

a. Match the words to make word pairs from the article. Then find and highlight them in the article.

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. gone | a. experience |
| 2. pep | b. facility |
| 3. power | c. provider |
| 4. life | d. schooling |
| 5. remote | e. talk |
| 6. home | f. learning |
| 7. hotline | g. through |
| 8. care | h. viral |

b. Talk about the meanings of each, looking up any you don't know.

c. Choose four that you would like to be able to use well and write sentences of your own for each one.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions and statements.

- Which piece of advice given by the children do you like best and why?
- Who do you call or what do you do when you need some advice or some nice words of encouragement to brighten up your day?
- Talk about a time when you felt frustrated or anxious and you received good advice or came up with something helpful on your own.
- What else can people do to help spread joy in difficult times?

6 In your own words

- a. Think of three problems you have or challenges you need to deal with. Write each one on a separate piece of paper.**
- b. Fold the pieces of paper and put them into a bag.**
- c. Take three pieces of paper from other students. Read the problems and challenges and decide what advice you could give.**
- d. Read out the problems and give your advice. Use the expressions below.**

Giving advice

If I were you, I'd ...

Why don't you ...?

Have you thought about ...?

Perhaps you could ...

- e. Discuss the advice you've heard in this task.**