

How US schoolkids launched a hotline to spread joy

Level: Advanced – Teacher's notes

Article summary: How and why a hotline, set up by an elementary school, providing life advice from children has gone viral.

Time: 90 minutes

Skills: Reading, speaking, giving advice

Language focus: Vocabulary, speaking, writing

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

1. Warmer

- a. Working first on their own, students rank the things by writing the numbers 1–8 on the lines to show which of the things are most likely to make them feel better (1), and which are least likely to do so (8). They may add other things if they like.
- b. Then they talk with a partner or in small groups and compare their ranking order, discussing the similarities and differences.

2. Key words

- a. Students write the correct word from the wordpool next to the definitions on the lines provided. Then they find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

Key:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. <i>anxious</i> | 9. <i>gleaned</i> |
| 2. <i>frustrated</i> | 10. <i>bleak</i> |
| 3. <i>encouragement</i> | 11. <i>reach</i> |
| 4. <i>eager</i> | 12. <i>overwhelming</i> |
| 5. <i>spoil</i> | 13. <i>principal</i> |
| 6. <i>envisioned</i> | 14. <i>administrator</i> |
| 7. <i>profound</i> | 15. <i>facility</i> |
| 8. <i>resilient</i> | |

- b. Before reading the article carefully, students use some of the key words to fill the gaps in the sentences to ensure that they understand and know how the words are used in other contexts.

Key:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. <i>bleak</i> | 5. <i>encouragement</i> |
| 2. <i>profound</i> | 6. <i>overwhelming</i> |
| 3. <i>facility</i> | 7. <i>spoil</i> |
| 4. <i>gleaned</i> | |

3. Understanding the article

- a. Students answer the questions with information from the article in as much detail as possible.

Key:

1. *It's an elementary school in a small town called Heldsburg, in California. It has 141 pupils ranging from kindergarten age to the sixth grade.*
2. *They signed up with the cheapest hotline provider and people can call for free. The project is funded by donations.*
3. *There are four options: callers are asked to press 1 if they are feeling angry, frustrated, or nervous; they should press 2 if they want words of encouragement and life advice, press 3 for a pep talk from kindergarteners (the youngest children at the school), and 4 to hear children laughing with delight.*
4. *The teachers say the kids are very resilient. They are aware of the difficult situations in the world such as the war in Ukraine; they know about more local disaster situations such as wildfires and evacuations; and they have personally experienced isolation and not being able to go to school and see their friends during the pandemic.*
5. *Students at the school initially distributed flyers and cards, and they put up posters in the streets.*
6. *First, news about it spread by people talking to each other. Now, news of the project has gone viral on social media and picked up by the news (presumably radio, TV, or newspaper). They receive many more calls than they could ever have imagined.*
7. *Staff and patients from a medical centre and elderly people from a care facility. Callers have cried with joy and other emotions and others have laughed more than they have done for years. Some follow the children's advice and go out and buy ice cream.*
8. *That life is usually less complicated than we make it.*

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4. Key language

- a. Students decide what the missing word is in each of the phrases and write it in the gap. Then they find them in the article to check their answers.

Key:

1. *supply*
2. *pep*
3. *years*
4. *heart*
5. *mouth*
6. *home*

- b. Then they use each of the phrases in sentences or short anecdotes of their own.

5. Discussion

- a. Students discuss the questions related to the article and give their reasons and justifications for each answer, referring to their own experiences wherever possible.

6. In your own words

- a. Follow the steps on the worksheet and hold a feedback discussion afterwards. The advice-giving part can be done in pairs to make it more collaborative. Use this task to review how to give tactful and helpful advice. If you are teaching a very small group, or even one-to-one, prepare some problems and challenges in advance so that they have plenty of things to give advice on.