

THE
13
LIFE HACKS



Hack 4
Problems and Life Challenges:
Teacher Notes

Government Criteria Alignment Chart

Framework	Criterion / Theme	Covered in Hack 4
PSHE (Health & Wellbeing)	H1: Recognise and talk about emotions	Tasks on accepting negative emotions, personal reflections on challenges
	H4: Developing resilience and perseverance	Butterfly story, coping with challenges, Holland metaphor
	H5: Skills to manage setbacks and change	Reality gap discussion, divorce example, mind maze task
	H10: Strategies to manage pressure	SODAS problem-solving technique
	H11: Self-respect and achievement	Graduation story, “You can do it” metaphor
PSHE (Relationships)	R2: Trust, respect, communication	Family setups, getting support, different family forms
	R13: Managing change in relationships	Divorce, family change, coping with loss
RSHE (Mental Wellbeing)	Importance of accepting emotions	Acceptance section, validation of difficult feelings
	Impact of challenges on wellbeing	Life challenge tasks, growth and strength themes
Safeguarding / KCSIE	Knowing when to seek support	Encouraging getting help from friends, teachers
	Recognising mental distress	Emphasis on emotional struggle, “mind maze” example
British Values	Individual Liberty: owning your journey	Focus on personal growth from challenge
	Tolerance: understanding differences	Different family forms, judging less
SMSC – Spiritual	Self-awareness and reflection	Butterfly metaphor, Holland story, personal task responses
SMSC – Moral	Understanding emotional struggles	Normalising emotional reactions, anger, shame, confusion
SMSC – Social	Recognising diverse life experiences	Tasks on family setups, life going differently than planned
SMSC – Cultural	Respecting non-traditional families	Acceptance of different home environments and family forms

Learning Focus

This chapter helps students distinguish between everyday problems and larger life challenges. It equips them with the SODAS problem-solving model for dealing with short-term issues and introduces powerful psychological and emotional tools for managing long-term life difficulties, such as acceptance, emotional processing, and mental flexibility. Through metaphor, personal stories, and guided self-reflection, students learn that challenges are not barriers to success—but stepping stones toward resilience, maturity, and inner growth.

Key Themes

- Every person will face problems and challenges in life
- The SODAS technique: a structured tool for solving everyday problems
- Not all challenges can be “fixed” some must be accepted and lived with
- Negative emotions (anger, sadness, frustration) are normal and valid
- Too much thinking can trap us in a “mind maze” and we can learn how to get out
- Struggles can lead to growth, strength, and even new purpose
- No family is perfect, but love and support matter more than setup
- Using metaphors like Holland vs. Italy and the caterpillar’s transformation to shift mindset

Discussion Prompts

1. Facing Everyday Problems

- “What kind of problems do teens face at school or at home?”
- “Have you ever solved a problem by writing out your options?”
- “What makes a problem different from a life challenge?”

2. SODAS Technique

- “Which part of the SODAS method do you find hardest or easiest?”
- “Can you think of a time you made a list of options before choosing what to do?”

3. Life Challenges

- “Why do you think it’s hard to accept a big life change?”
- “Is it okay to feel angry, sad, or upset when something tough happens?”
- “What’s something hard in life that helped you grow stronger?”

4. Holland vs. Italy

- “Have you ever had something turn out totally different than you expected?”
- “What does this metaphor teach us about disappointment and hope?”

5. Acceptance and Emotional Coping

- “Why does fighting reality often make things worse?”
- “How does accepting your feelings help you deal with them better?”
- “What might happen if we try to push our feelings away too quickly?”

6. The Mind Maze

- “Have you ever got stuck thinking the same thought over and over?”
- “What’s a small activity that helps you snap out of overthinking?”

7. Family and Identity

- “What makes a family strong, even if it looks different from others?”
- “Why might someone feel ashamed of a family challenge and how could they see it differently?”

Imaginative Group Tasks

1. SODAS Relay (Problem-Solving Practice)

How it works:

Each group is given a realistic teen problem (e.g. “My teachers have given me three assignments due on the same day”). {See Appendix A for problem examples.}

Their mission is to:

- Define the Situation
- Brainstorm Options
- List Disadvantages and Advantages
- Choose a Solution

Each team fills in a large SODAS chart and shares their process.

Why it works:

Turns abstract problem-solving into a hands-on group experience, with practical takeaways and creativity.

2. Holland vs. Italy Metaphor Builder (Coping with Disappointment)

How it works:

Groups receive a metaphor starter (e.g., “You planned a big party... but it gets cancelled last minute”) and must create their own “Holland vs. Italy” story. {See Appendix B for metaphor starter examples.}

They then share how the “Holland” (new reality) turned out to have its own beauty or meaning.

Why it works:

Encourages reframing disappointment, builds metaphorical thinking, and makes abstract lessons emotionally real.

Imaginative Group Tasks

3. Butterfly Growth Timeline (Growth Through Challenges)

How it works:

Students reflect on a personal challenge and map it on a “caterpillar to butterfly” worksheet:

- Caterpillar = how life was before
- Cocoon = the struggle and emotions
- Butterfly = one strength or insight gained

Optional: share in pairs or display on a class board.

Why it works:

Visualises resilience, links personal struggle to emotional growth, and builds peer understanding.

4. Mind Maze Escape Room (Handling Overthinking)

How it works:

Each group is presented with a scenario of a student caught in a “thought loop” (e.g., “Why did my friend ignore me? Maybe they hate me. Maybe I’m a terrible person.”). {See Appendix C for some scenario examples.}

Their task:

- Spot the looping thought
- Create 3 “escape” strategies (distraction, redirection, action)
- Share their exit plan with the class

Why it works:

Normalises overthinking and equips students with practical escape routes.

Torah Perspectives

Theme in Hack	Source	Hebrew & English (in same cell)	Use in Lesson
Everyone faces suffering and challenges	Midrash Shmuel, Avos 6:4	כל אדם סובל סבל בזמן כל־שהוא בחייו – רק מי שמצלח לא לתת לזה להסיח את דעתו – יצליח – Everyone suffers at some point in life. Only those who don't let it distract them will succeed in Torah learning.	Opens the chapter with the idea that struggles are a normal part of life.
Life is a test of how we respond	Mesillas Yesharim, Ch. 1	כי הנה באמת האדם עומד תמיד בתוך המלחמה – A person is constantly in the fiercest inner battle.	Helps students see all situations as opportunities for growth.
Solving problems brings clarity and happiness	Mishlei 15:30, Metzudas David	אור עינים ישמח לב – אין שמחה כהתרת הספקות – Light in the eyes brings joy to the heart – there is no joy like resolving doubt.	Emphasizes the emotional benefit of learning how to solve problems (SODAS).
Habits build inner change	Rambam, Avos 3:15	אלף פעמים על פני פעם אחת – הרגל יוצר טבע – A thousand repetitions are better than once – habit creates inner nature.	Encourages students to practice their new thinking and action patterns.
Acceptance leads to growth	Berachos 5a	'אלוי יסורין של אהבה – יסורים שפאים מאהבת ה' – These are sufferings of love – challenges that come from Hashem's love.	Introduces the idea that pain can have meaning and value.
Every challenge is from Hashem for the good	Taanis 21a	גם זו לטובה – נחום איש גמזו – This too is for the good – Nachum Ish Gamzu.	Helps students adopt the "Holland vs. Italy" mindset of reframing disappointment.
Challenges can bring us closer to Hashem	Mishlei 3:12	כי את אשר יאהב ה' יוכיח – For the one Hashem loves, He rebukes.	Encourages a positive reframe of struggle as part of Hashem's care.
The future brings understanding	Chafetz Chaim al HaTorah, Vayigash	לעתיד לבוא יתבררו כל הדברים ויתברר שכל מה שעשה ה' לטובה עשה – In the future everything will become clear, and it will be revealed that everything Hashem did was for the good.	Offers hope and comfort when students feel confused or frustrated.
Don't despair – the end may be good	Rambam on Berachos 9:5	אין ראוי לאדם להתעצב – שמא הסוף יהיה לטובה – A person shouldn't despair – maybe the outcome will turn out good.	Encourages calm thinking and resilience in moments of uncertainty.
Speak out your worries	Yuma 75a	אם דואג אדם בלבו – ושיחנה לאחרים – If someone has anxiety in their heart, they should speak it out to others.	Supports the idea of not bottling up feelings and seeking support.
True wealth is contentment	Pirkei Avos 4:1	איהו עשיר? השמח בחלקו – Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has.	Helps students reframe their situation with gratitude and acceptance.
Small steps lead to big change	Yuma 80a	תפסת מרובה לא תפסת – תפסת מיעוט תפסת – If you try to grab too much, you grab nothing – grabbing a little works.	Encourages realistic, steady steps when facing problems.
Growth takes time	Vilna Gaon, Mishlei 19:2	אדם מתעלה מדרגה אחר מדרגה – כעולה בסלם – A person grows one step at a time – like climbing a ladder.	Normalises the slowness of emotional progress and effort.
Wanting to grow is the first step	Likutei Moharan 1:193	מחשבות טובות מושכות הצלחה – אם תרצה באמת תצליח – Good thoughts draw success – if you truly want to grow, you will succeed.	Empowers students to believe in their ability to grow.
Change is hard at first	Rashi, Shemos 19:5	כל ההתחלות קשות – All beginnings are difficult.	Helps students understand that difficulty at the start is normal and worth pushing through.

Suggested 4 lesson plan

Lesson 1: Solving Problems with SODAS

Learning Focus:

- Use the SODAS method to break down everyday dilemmas
- Practise teamwork and decision-making under pressure

Key Themes Covered:

- Problem-solving builds clarity and confidence
- Some challenges need action — others need acceptance
- SODAS = Situation, Options, Disadvantages, Advantages, Solution

Discussion Prompts:

- What kind of problems do teens face at school or at home?
- Have you ever solved a problem by writing out your options?
- Which part of the SODAS method is easiest — or hardest?

Group Activity:

- **SODAS Relay** (see Appendix A)

Workbook Pages: 78-83

Lesson 2: Coping with Life Challenges

Learning Focus:

- Reframe disappointment and recognise the value of emotional pain
- Discover how personal struggles can lead to growth

Key Themes Covered:

- Not all challenges can be “fixed” - some must be accepted
- Disappointment often leads to unexpected growth
- Using metaphor to shift mindset

Discussion Prompts:

- Why do you think it's hard to accept a big life change?
- What's something hard in life that helped you grow stronger?
- Have you ever had something turn out totally different than you expected?

Group Activity Options:

- **Holland vs. Italy Metaphor Builder** (see Appendix B)
- **Butterfly Growth Timeline**

Workbook Pages: 84-90

Suggested 4 lesson plan

Lesson 3: Emotional Traps and Resilience

Learning Focus:

- Recognise overthinking patterns and learn practical “escape routes”
- Build emotional resilience through action and flexibility

Key Themes Covered:

- Overthinking traps us in loops — action sets us free
- Naming emotions helps process them
- Resilience grows from honesty, not avoidance

Discussion Prompts:

- Have you ever got stuck thinking the same thought over and over?
- What’s a small activity that helps you snap out of overthinking?
- Why might someone feel ashamed of a family challenge, and how could they see it differently?

Group Activity:

- **Mind Maze Escape Room** (see Appendix C)

Workbook Pages: 91-94

End-of-Hack Activities:

- **Multiple Choice Recap Quiz** (download from: masteringyourmind.today)
- **Wordsearch** (optional calming task or early finisher activity — also available on the website)

Appendix A

Suggested Group Problem Cards

1. My teachers gave me three assignments due on the same day.
2. I've been left out of a group holiday, and I don't know whether to say something.
3. My parents expect me to babysit, but I've been invited to something on the same night.
4. I want to try for a part in a play, but I'm scared I'll embarrass myself.
5. Someone in my class keeps copying my homework, and I don't know what to do.
6. I've been spending too much time on my phone, but I can't seem to stop.
7. My best friend is hanging out with someone who used to bully me.
8. I've missed two weeks of school and feel completely behind.
9. I want to speak up in class more, but I freeze whenever I try.
10. I know I need to revise, but I keep leaving it to the last minute.

Appendix B

Metaphor Starters

1. You planned a family holiday abroad... but had to cancel and stay local.
2. You auditioned for the school play... but didn't get the part.
3. You studied for weeks for a test... but still got a low mark.
4. You were excited to move to a new school... but you didn't make friends straight away.
5. You had a dream to go to a certain yeshiva or seminary... but it didn't happen.
6. You imagined a perfect Shabbos with guests... but it was chaotic and stressful.
7. You started a hobby you loved... but later found it wasn't practical or doable long-term.
8. You really wanted to win an award... but someone else got it.
9. You hoped to have a big celebration for your birthday... but it was quiet and low-key.

Appendix C

Mind Maze Scenarios

1.
“Why hasn’t my friend replied?”
They saw my message. Maybe they’re annoyed with me. Or maybe I did something wrong. What if they never want to speak to me again?
2.
“I said something wrong in class.”
Everyone probably noticed. They must think I’m dumb. I always mess up. What’s wrong with me?
3.
“My teacher looked annoyed when I walked in.”
Was it something I said last lesson? Did someone tell them something about me? What if they hate me now?
4.
“I wasn’t invited to that party.”
Maybe they forgot me on purpose. Maybe I’m just not popular. No one really likes me anyway.
5.
“My sibling got praised again.”
I try so hard, but I’m never good enough. Maybe my parents prefer them. Maybe I’ll never be enough.
6.
“Someone walked past me without saying hi.”
Did I upset them? Maybe they’re purposely ignoring me. What did I do wrong?
7.
“I got a low mark on one test.”
This probably means I’m failing. Maybe I’m just not clever. What’s the point of trying anymore?