

THE
13
LIFE HACKS



Hack 13
To Change or
Not to Change:
Teacher Notes

A project of



Government Criteria Alignment Chart

Framework	Criterion / Theme	Covered in Hack 13
PSHE (Health & Wellbeing)	H4: Developing resilience	Encourages perseverance and patience in making changes, even after setbacks
	H6: Maintaining wellbeing	SMART goals and self-encouragement support long-term wellbeing
	H9: Setting goals	Teaches SMART framework: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
	H11: Building self-confidence	Challenges negative labels and self-doubt, promotes self-belief
PSHE (Relationships)	R1: Self-awareness in relationships	Reflecting on personal traits that affect relationships
	R4: Recognising influence of peers	Examples of changing friendship groups to support healthier choices
RSHE (Mental Wellbeing)	Self-improvement and growth mindset	Emphasises brain plasticity, ability to adapt, and gradual progress
	Recognising unhelpful thinking	Tackles perfectionism, “I can’t change,” and self-labelling
	Building resilience	Accepting setbacks, being patient, rewarding effort
PSHE (Living in the Wider World / Economic Wellbeing)	L9: Managing money, budgeting, and saving	SMART goal example of saving £50 over 2 months, with practical steps
	L10: How money choices affect future wellbeing	Shows how self-control and planning with money support success in other life areas
Safeguarding / KCSIE	Knowing when to seek support	Encourages speaking to trusted adults or professionals if change feels impossible alone
British Values	Individual Liberty	Empowers students to take control of their own growth and change
SMSC – Spiritual	Reflection on inner life	Encourages deep reflection on personal traits, goals, and meaning
SMSC – Moral	Responsibility and self-worth	Challenges negative labels, highlights fairness to self
SMSC – Social	Peer influence and support	Recognises role of relationships in helping or hindering change
SMSC – Cultural	Overcoming stigma around change	Normalises self-improvement as part of everyone’s journey

Learning Focus

This chapter helps students recognise that change is possible for everyone, even if it feels overwhelming or past attempts have failed. It introduces powerful metaphors, real-life stories, and the SMART goals framework to show how change becomes realistic when broken into steps. Students learn to challenge negative labels, perfectionism, and excuses for avoiding change, while building self-belief, patience, and resilience. The chapter also shows how personal growth connects with practical life skills, such as managing money, to demonstrate that change can improve both wellbeing and everyday decision-making.

Key Themes

- Change is possible, setbacks and past failures do not define you
- The teenage brain has unique adaptability (plasticity), making this the best time to grow
- Negative traits become heavier the longer we carry them, it's easier to address them early
- Focus on one change at a time to avoid overwhelm
- Challenge perfectionism: progress is built brick by brick
- Negative self-labels block growth- replace them with fair, positive labels
- SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) make change stick
- Money and life skills, saving, budgeting, and planning are real-life applications of SMART goals
- Perseverance and patience are essential, change takes time
- Be brave enough to open the “castle doors” of change rather than staying stuck
- Rewarding effort and self-encouragement builds motivation
- Seeking support from others is a strength, not a weakness

Discussion Prompts

- **Why Change?**
 - “Why do you think people often avoid making changes to themselves, even when they want to?”
 - “What happens if we carry negative habits or traits for too long without addressing them?”
- **Readiness to Change**
 - “What area of your life would you most like to change right now?”
 - “On the readiness ruler, which is hardest for you, importance, readiness, or confidence?”
- **Barriers and Excuses**
 - “Which common reason for avoiding change (‘I’ve tried before and failed,’ ‘too much to change,’ ‘I’ll never be perfect,’ ‘it’s just my nature’) do you hear most often?”
 - “Why might people cling to these excuses?”
- **Negative Labels**
 - “Have you ever believed a label about yourself that wasn’t fair or true? What impact did it have?”
 - “What’s one positive label you could give yourself instead?”
- **SMART Goals and Life Skills**
 - “How is a SMART goal different from a vague goal?”
 - “Why is saving money a good example of how SMART goals work?”
 - “How might learning to manage money help you in other areas of life?”
- **Patience and Perseverance**
 - “Why do people often give up on change when it doesn’t happen quickly?”
 - “How could rewarding yourself help you stay motivated?”
- **Courage and Support**
 - “What might the ‘castle doors’ of change represent in your life?”
 - “Who could support you if you found a change too difficult to manage on your own?”

Imaginative Group Tasks

1. Readiness Ruler Line-Up (Am I Ready?)

How it works:

Each group receives a “Readiness Ruler” (Importance, Readiness, Confidence).
{See Appendix A for a readiness ruler or download it from www.masteringyourmind.today}
Students choose a realistic change (e.g., sleep earlier, manage screen time, save money).
Together they place sticky notes on a large poster or floor line-up to mark where they’d rate themselves on each scale. Groups then discuss what would move them one step higher.

Why it works:

Transforms abstract readiness into something visible, helps teens see that small shifts in readiness make change more achievable, and sparks peer encouragement.

2. Sweet Shop Choices (Avoiding Overwhelm)

How it works:

Using the “sweet shop” story, each group is given a list of 6–8 possible changes a teen might want to make (e.g., improve grades, spend less time online, exercise more, be kinder to siblings).
{See Appendix B for a list of examples.}
They must “choose just one sweet” to focus on, and explain why they picked it over the others.

Why it works:

Brings the metaphor alive, shows the importance of focusing on **one change at a time**, and opens discussion about priorities.

3. Castle Door Courage (Facing Fears of Change)

How it works:

Groups design two giant “castle doors” on chart paper. Behind one, they write the fears that stop someone from changing (e.g., “I’ll fail again,” “It’s too hard”). Behind the other, they write the rewards waiting if they take the risk (e.g., “better sleep,” “stronger friendships,” “more confidence”). Groups present their doors to the class.

Why it works:

Makes the metaphor tangible, encourages courage to step through the unknown, and highlights that fears and rewards can be visualised side by side.

Imaginative Group Tasks

4. SMART Goals Race (Turning Vague Into Specific)

How it works:

Each group is given 3 vague goals (e.g., “I’ll get healthier,” “I’ll be less stressed,” “I’ll be better with money”).

{See Appendix C for a vague goals list.}

Their task is to rewrite each one as a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). The group that produces the clearest SMART goals wins.

Why it works:

Turns the SMART framework into a practical challenge, reinforcing clarity, focus, and life skills like budgeting and time management.

5. Label Peel-Off (Challenging Negative Self-Labels)

How it works:

Groups receive cards with negative self-labels (e.g., “lazy,” “not clever,” “bad at change,” “hopeless with money”).

{See Appendix D for negative card examples.}

Their mission is to “peel them off” by rewriting each one into a positive or fairer label (e.g., “learning discipline,” “good at persistence,” “creative thinker”). Groups can act out the “before and after” self-talk in a mini role-play.

Why it works:

Makes the damaging effect of labels visible, encourages reframing, and builds confidence by replacing unfair self-criticism with empowering alternatives.

Torah Perspectives

Theme in Hack	Source	Hebrew & English (in same cell)	Use in Lesson
Self-improvement is life's purpose	Vilna Gaon, Mishlei 4:13	חזק במוסר אל תרף – “Grab hold of mussar and do not let go... for man's sole purpose is to break that character trait not yet broken.”	Shows students that working on themselves is the very reason for life.
Overcoming natural laziness	Mesillas Yesharim 6	שהחפץ לזכות בעבודת הבורא צריך להתגבר על טבעו... – “One who wishes to merit proper service of the Creator must overcome his very nature.”	Encourages pushing past comfort zones and natural resistance.
Best time to change is youth	Pirkei Avos 4:25	הלומד תורה ילד – לדיו פתובה על גיר חדש – “One who studies as a child is like ink on fresh paper.”	Shows that the earlier you start changing, the easier and more lasting it becomes.
Avoid procrastination	Chovas HaTalmidim ch. 13	אל תאמר כי כשאגדל אעבוד – “Don't say: when I grow older I will improve.”	Teaches urgency — change must begin now, not later.
Honest self-reflection	Bava Basra 78b	ירגיל אדם עצמו לבדוק מעשיו – “A person should accustom himself to examine his deeds.”	Encourages regular self-checks to see what needs improvement.
Admit faults early	Bava Kamma 92b	מי שיש לו מום – יקדים ויאמרו – “If you have a fault, bring it up before others do.”	Normalises admitting weaknesses as the first step to change.
Take small steps	Yuma 80a	תפסת מרובה לא תפסת, תפסת מועט מועט תפסת – “If you grasp too much, you grasp nothing; grasp a little, you grasp it.”	Shows why focusing on one small goal works better than trying to fix everything at once.
Change comes with repeated effort	Mishlei 24:16	כי שבע יפול צדיק וקם – “Seven times the righteous fall and rise again.”	Teaches that falling is part of growth — resilience is what matters.
Actions shape feelings	Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 16	אחר הפעולות נמשכים הלבבות – “The heart is drawn after one's actions.”	Shows how practicing small changes reshapes thoughts and emotions.
Effort brings divine help	Yuma 38b	הבא לטהר – מסייעין אותו – “If one comes to purify himself, he is helped from Above.”	Builds confidence that Hashem supports sincere efforts to change.
Climb the ladder gradually	Vilna Gaon, Mishlei 19:2	מעלה אדם במעלות כמו סלם – “A person improves step by step, like climbing a ladder.”	Reinforces patience — don't rush, take one rung at a time.
Patience in growth	Rambam, Pirkei Avos 2:5	הרוצה לקנות מדות – ירגיל נפשו במתנות – “One who wants to acquire virtues must accustom his soul patiently.”	Emphasises that lasting change requires time and tolerance for setbacks.
Believe in yourself	Rav Tzaddok HaKohen, Tzidkas HaTzaddik 154	כשם שחייב אדם להאמין בה' – כך חייב להאמין בעצמו – “Just as a person must believe in Hashem, he must also believe in himself.”	Connects faith in Hashem with self-belief, a vital ingredient for change.
Habit becomes second nature	Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 491	הרגל נעשה כטבע שני – “Habit becomes like a second nature.”	Encourages building small positive habits that stick and create character.
Change is man's greatest achievement	Rav Yisroel Salanter, Ohr Yisroel	קשה לשנות מדה אחת יותר מללמוד כל התלמוד – “It is harder to change one trait than to learn the entire Talmud.”	Elevates the struggle of self-improvement as the ultimate human work.

Suggested 3 lesson plan

Lesson 1: Why Change Matters

Learning Focus:

- Understand that change is possible for everyone, even after setbacks
- Recognise teenage years as the best time for growth (brain plasticity)
- Explore why people avoid change (excuses, procrastination, perfectionism)

Key Themes Covered:

- Change is life's purpose — but it requires courage and honesty
- The longer we hold on to negative traits, the heavier they get
- Excuses (“it’s my nature,” “I’ve failed before”) prevent growth
- Change is easier when started young

Discussion Prompts:

- Why do people often want external change (weather, clothes) but resist changing themselves?
- Which excuse for avoiding change (failure, too much to change, perfectionism, “it’s my nature”) feels most common among teens?
- Why might it be easier to change as a teenager than as an adult?

Group Activity:

- Castle Door Courage - Groups design “fear doors” (excuses) vs. “reward doors” (benefits of change).

Workbook Pages:

pp. 210–217

Lesson 2: How to Begin Change

Learning Focus:

- Learn the importance of focusing on **one change at a time**
- Use the **Readiness Ruler** to assess importance, readiness, and confidence
- Explore the role of SMART goals in making changes realistic and measurable

Key Themes Covered:

- Don't try to change everything at once- choose one priority
- Readiness (importance, readiness, confidence) predicts success
- SMART goals make change stick (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)
- Money management as a practical SMART example

Discussion Prompts:

- Why do people feel overwhelmed if they try to change too many things at once?
- Which part of the Readiness Ruler (importance, readiness, confidence) is hardest to score high on — and why?
- How does a SMART goal differ from a vague goal? Can you give an example?

Group Activity:

- Sweet Shop Choices – Pick one “sweet” (possible change) from Appendix B and justify the choice.
- Readiness Ruler Line-Up – Place sticky notes on readiness scales, then discuss what would move you one step higher.

Workbook Pages:

pp. 218–222

Suggested 3 lesson plan

Lesson 3: Making Change Stick

Learning Focus:

- Discover tools to persevere when change feels slow (patience, resilience, self-encouragement)
- Challenge negative labels and perfectionism
- Learn to reward effort and seek support when needed

Key Themes Covered:

- Change happens “brick by brick” and includes setbacks
- Labels can trap you, peel them off and reframe with positive ones
- Resilience: falling seven times and getting up again
- Rewarding yourself and seeking support builds long-term success

Discussion Prompts:

- Why do people give up when change doesn't happen quickly?
- Have you ever felt held back by a label and how could you replace it?
- What's one way you could reward yourself for making an effort?
- Who could you ask for help if change felt too big?

Group Activity:

- Label Peel-Off – Rewrite negative self-labels into positive ones.
- SMART Goals Race – Turn vague goals into SMART goals (competition format).

End-of-Hack Activities:

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

Workbook Pages:

pp. 223–227

Appendix A

Readiness Ruler

Date: _____

Change I want to work on: _____

● Importance

How important is this change to me right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Not important at all → Couldn't be more important)

Readiness

How ready am I to start making this change?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Not ready at all → Totally ready to begin)

● Confidence

How confident am I that I can make this change?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Not confident at all → Very confident I can do it)

Reflection Questions:

- What would help me move one step higher on each ruler?
- Who or what could support me in this change?

Appendix B

Possible Changes for Sweet Shop Choices

- Improve my grades in one subject I'm struggling with
- Spend less time on my phone or social media
- Go to bed earlier and get more sleep
- Exercise regularly or join a sports team
- Be kinder and more patient with siblings
- Stop procrastinating and finish homework on time
- Save money instead of spending it right away
- Eat more healthily and cut down on junk food
- Speak up more in class or with friends
- Manage stress better when exams are coming up
- Reduce time on my phone and do other hobbies too
- Try being more positive instead of self-critical
- Work on being less jealous of friends
- Build confidence to try new things
- Spend more time helping at home
- Make an effort to hang out with healthier friends

Appendix C

Appendix C – Vague Goals List

Set 1: Wellbeing & Lifestyle

- *"I'll get healthier."*
- *"I'll exercise more."*
- *"I'll sleep better."*

Set 2: Stress & Emotions

- *"I'll be less stressed."*
- *"I'll be happier."*
- *"I'll stop worrying so much."*

Set 3: School & Learning

- *"I'll do better in school."*
- *"I'll revise properly for tests."*
- *"I'll concentrate more in class."*

Set 4: Money & Responsibility

- *"I'll be better with money."*
- *"I'll save up."*
- *"I'll spend less."*

Set 5: Friendships & Character

- *"I'll be a better friend."*
- *"I'll stop arguing so much."*
- *"I'll be more confident."*

Appendix D – Label Cards

Academic & Learning

- “I’m lazy.”
- “I’m not clever.”
- “I always fail tests.”
- “I can’t focus.”

Confidence & Personality

- “I’m boring.”
- “I’m too shy.”
- “I mess everything up.”
- “I’m not popular.”

Life & Responsibility

- “I’m bad with money.”
- “I never finish what I start.”
- “I’m hopeless at change.”
- “I can’t make decisions.”

Feelings & Self-Worth

- “I’m weak.”
- “I’m too emotional.”
- “I’m a disappointment.”
- “I’m not good enough.”

Social & Religious Life (Jewish teen context)

- “I’m different from everyone else.”
- “I’m not frum enough.”
- “I’ll never be confident to speak up in class.”
- “I don’t belong anywhere.”