Overview
This lesson covers Session Three of Emotional Competence—an indicator of thriving. Young people can be encouraged to read “Elephant Inside Us” in preparation.

Youth experience their personal version of the famous Stanford Marshmallow Experiment about self-control. When young people join the group or class, they find a wonderful little cupcake or cookie that is tempting to eat sitting out in a tempting presentation. They can eat the treats, but they are encouraged to wait because there will be another treat later or next time, for those who do wait.

The lesson kicks off with a DVD clip of the Marshmallow Experiment re-done years later, in Columbia. Youth explore the importance of learning the ability to delay gratification, and they discuss why this is such an important life skill.

Then young people learn tips and tricks to smooth the path for that Emotional Elephant so that he wants to follow the Rider to the “water hole.” They learn and then practice trigger strategies or ways that youth can plan ahead to resist temptation while not exhausting their self-control. They discuss tricks such as distracting the Elephant or better preparing the Rider to use the reins well. The Rider can state a clear direction to the Elephant - so the Elephant knows where to go and how to get there. We do that by designing the goal path ahead.

The lesson closes with young people acting out their cartoons in a Freeze Drama. They act out the original cartoon of the Emotional Elephant winning the day, and then how the scene changes when the Rider uses some tips or tricks to maintain control of the reins.

Goal
Youth learn that regulating one’s emotions is fundamentally tied to life success.

Objectives
By participating in this lesson, young people will:
1. Learn about scientific research illustrating the value of this skill of delaying gratification.
2. Practice and learn tips about delaying gratification and control of the “Emotional Elephant”.
3. Learn tips on how to connect emotions and reasoning to smooth the path toward desired goals.

Vocabulary

- *Emotional Competence* — the ability to identify and manage one’s emotions. (This includes knowing how to nourish your emotional state, the ability to take turns, delaying gratification and coping with failure and loss. It also involves knowing how to control impulses, use good judgment and adapt emotions in response to others’ emotions and reactions.)
- *Delayed gratification* — the ability to wait in order to obtain something you want. Also called impulse control or self-control or willpower.
- *Amygdala* — Center for emotions. The almond-shaped mass just above the ear, deep inside each brain hemisphere.
- *Frontal Cortex* — front part of brain. Organizes thoughts and actions for reaching goals; makes decisions and moderates or controls social behavior.

Materials

- PowerPoint – *Self-Control and the Elephant!*
- *The Elephant Inside Us* Handout (delivered ahead of session)
- Thriving Indicator Wheel (Definition of Emotional Competence)
- Cupcake or cookie - 1/participant (plus second reward for each participant who resists temptation.)
- DVD clip of Marshmallow Experiment

Developed by Thrive Foundation for Youth. Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommerial-Share Alike 3.0. U.S. License. 2010. This document can be shared and adapted by users for educational, non-commercial purposes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Outline</th>
<th>Lesson Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENROLL (9 min)</td>
<td>Facilitator shows slides from PowerPoint <em>The Brain: Grow that Self-Control!</em> Uses slides as appropriate to make points. Young people may have read the article: <em>The Emotional Elephant Inside Us!</em> ahead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door Greeting (3 min.)</td>
<td><strong>Build relationships as young people walk in the door.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Elephant in the Head (1 min.) | **Slide #1: Self-Control and the Elephant!** Say:  
  • This is the title of our session today. Who sees an elephant in the brain of this painting?  
  • This painting was painted in the Italian Court, in the 1500s, by painter Guiseppe Arcimboldo. He painted portraits of noblemen. When he noticed that the nobles’ features resembled animals or vegetables, he placed those images in his view of their heads. This elephant in a noble’s head is painted 400 years before scientists discovered that a brain region acts just like a 5-ton elephant.  
  • 3) What is this region called? Who remembers the name? (Amygdala. It means “Almond” in Latin.) That’s because it is the size and shape of an almond, right? |
| Treat at each youth-spot. (1 min.) | **Set-up Mock Marshmallow Experiment.** Facilitator places cupcakes or large cookies in front of each individual, with a lot of fanfare. Say:  
  • For remembering the Amygdala, there is a cupcake/cookie out here for you. Any of you can choose to eat your cupcake right now, but if you wait until the end of our time today to eat it, you will get another cupcake/cookie at ____ (name timeframe). |
| Definition of Emotional Competence (2 min.) | **Review Definition of Emotional Competence** Ask:  
  • Let’s remind ourselves of the definition Emotional Competence. It’s a skill that is essential for you to be all you can be. What does it mean? |
| Review Cartoons (2 min.) | Slide #2: Definition of Emotional Competency  
Facilitator shows slide that reviews definition.  
Ask:  
- Who read the article, Elephant Inside Us! ? Good for you! What did you think of it?  
- Others will remember points from our last session. What did you learn?  
| Enrollment Question | Slide #3: Let’s Review the Cartoons  
- What were some of the themes in the cartoons you did at our last session that reflected times when your Emotional Elephant ruled?  
- Does anyone remember tips for managing that Elephant?  
  (Answer: It’s okay to acknowledge and seek help.)  
Ask: Are we up for learning some more tips and having some fun along the way?  
Say:  
  - Great! Let’s start by watching some four-year olds!  
| EXPERIENCE (12 min) | Slide #4: The Marshmallow Experiment to extent needed to introduce video.  
Say:  
  - Now we’re going to watch one of the most amazing studies ever conducted. In the 1960s, a professor at Stanford University (Dr. Walter Mischel) tested the ability of 4-year old children to control their impulses and resist temptation.  
  - Children were taken into a room with a one-way mirror and they were shown a marshmallow. The experimenter told the child he or she could eat the marshmallow right then, or, if they waited for the experimenter to return, they could have two marshmallows.”  
  - Scientists watched. Some children grabbed the marshmallow **within seconds** of the experimenter leaving. Other 4-year olds waited up to **15 minutes** for experimenter’s return.  
  - See if you can watch and notice some of the children’s tips for distracting themselves from the temptation.  
Share Stanford Marshmallow Experiment (2 min)  
Look for Tips!
Watch Video: Ted Conference presentation of Marshmallow Experiment (7 minutes)

Discuss (1 min.)

Grow Skills, then Grow Life Success! (2 min)

- This study has been repeated in many cultures and countries. Let’s watch it done with Dr. Joachim de Posada and a Latino group of children.

Watch DVD: Ted Conference presenter Joachim de Posada & the Marshmallow Experiment

Ask:
- What did you notice? How did some of the 4-year olds try to distract themselves from the treat?

Slide #5: The Marshmallow Experiment: Conclusion

Say the results:
- In a follow-up study (Shoda, Mishcel & Peake, 1990), scientists looked at these children they called high delayers or able to delay instantly getting what they want. (Delayed gratification.)
- Children who waited 15 minutes, tested at age 18 over 200 points higher on their SAT tests for college entrance, had much better grades. They showed a much higher ability to plan and think ahead in life.
- Those 4-year olds who ate the marshmallow right away (showing that they weren’t able to resist the immediate pleasure of eating a yummy marshmallow by waiting) had more trouble in school and at home.
- Those with trouble delaying their desires (low-delayers) were more likely to have behavior problems later.”

Say:
- However, some low-delayers, the children with trouble, grew up to be very good at delaying gratification and controlling their impulses.

Ask:
- What do you think happened? (Answer: They grew the skill.)
- Scientists have proven that this skill can be grown. In these young children, some had perhaps natural ability; others had parents who helped them...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARN &amp; LABEL (2 min)</th>
<th>Strategy for Resisting Temptation: Think About Your Thinking (2 min.)</th>
<th>practice this self-control.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEMONSTRATE (3 min.)</td>
<td>Examples of Youth (3 min.)</td>
<td>Slide #6: Learn the Skill: Think About Your Thinking! (Facilitator note: Thinking about your thinking is called meta-cognition.) Say: • In this study, when children were taught to pretend the marshmallow was surrounded by a picture frame, they dramatically improved their willpower from 60 seconds to 15 minutes.” • They thought about their thinking! • If delaying instant gratification isn’t a strength you have right now, it can become a great skill for life success if you work hard at it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPLY &amp; DEMONSTRATE (7 min)</td>
<td>Slide #7: Study of Teens: Relationship between self-control &amp; grades Say: • And, then there was an additional study of teens. Facilitator reads slide text. Slide #8: Study of Teens: Relationship between self-control &amp; grades Say: • This means that self-control is more important than intelligence for getting good grades! Ask: What are some examples of low and high delayers that you see around you? (Answers might be: Low delayer should get homework done, but cannot resist friend’s offer to hang out. High delayer stays studying longer even though a favorite TV show is on.) Ask: • Where have you worked or struggled with delaying gratification? Have you seen any strategies in others that work?</td>
<td>Slide #9: Willpower is Weak. Mental Tips for Resisting Temptation Say: • Willpower is exceedingly weak!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Your adolescent rider exhausts self-control in 30 seconds.
• Therefore, you can practice some tips to “resist the marshmallow” so that you can stay on track to reach goals.

Ask:
• What might those tips be? Can you guess?

Answers: (See slides):

Slide #10: Willpower is Weak. Mental Tips to resist temptation are:
#1: Distract Yourself: Kids who stared right at the marshmallow and thought about resisting it had a very hard time! Try to distract yourself. (Experiment children played with shoelaces; sang songs; built a mental box around the treat; imagined it covered in bugs.) Scientists call this a skill of thinking about your thinking—metacognition.

#2: Identify tempting situations ahead & develop Trigger Strategies: Plan for what, where, how you will move towards your goal.

Ask:
• What tempts you?

Say:
• Think ahead and don’t buy the marshmallows at the store or plan what you will do or say when your friend offers a temptation.
• Rather, plan all the details of what you will do to reach your goals when temptation occurs.

DEMONSTRATE
(13 min.)

Freeze Drama (13 min.)

Slide #11: Freeze Drama of the Cartoons
Explain the procedures for the game in its entirety before selecting volunteers and beginning the drama skits.

Say:
• We’re going to play Freeze Drama, using the cartoons. In each cartoon there is the hero at the center of the cartoon, and the other characters in the scenario.
• The hero has two brain centers represented by actors. One will be the Elephant actor and the other will be the Rider actor.
• I am going to pass out some of those anonymous cartoons randomly, one to each person. Remember that these cartoons have the Elephant winning.
• You will pair up with a partner and select one cartoon to use.
• I will ask for two volunteers who will step onto the stage-area and act your chosen cartoon as written, in its entirety.
• While the scene is acted out, as audience members you should think of strategies that could have helped the Rider.
• When it’s time for the volunteers to do the cartoon a second time, any audience member can yell out “freeze” at any time during the performance.
• The audience member who has yelled “freeze” will take the place of the Rider and try some tips to help the Elephant fall in line.
• Performers will respond however they choose, in the evolving conditions.
• Audience members can continue to yell “freeze” and try out new strategies to keep the emotional elephant from getting his way at scene-end.
• As play producer, I get to say “freeze” and replace the Elephant at times of my choosing. I will replace the Elephant if it seems that the Elephant is abnormal and not willing to respond to good Rider effort.
• Once the scene comes to an end, I will ask for a new pair of volunteers to act out a new comic strip.

Vary the cartoons so that some of them are more suited to different types of tips or scenarios that the youth may have. After the group has worked through roughly three challenges, discuss the activity. Then you can wrap up the game or keep going as time allows and there is interest.

Ask:
• What happened?: What were some of the strategies that people saw in the skits to try to trick the elephant and steer the scene a different direction?
• So what?: In your own life, do you think these strategies would work? When you see things aren’t working and you can’t yell “freeze”, what could you do?
• Now what?: In the future, could you try to re-direct a situation when the emotional elephant is winning? What are some good tips that you could use?
| REFLECT (4 min) | Cookie Time & Statement of Intention | **Slide #12: Cookie Time & Statement of Intention** Facilitator thanks group and passes out second cookie for those who delayed their gratification, as per the Marshmallow Experiment. Joke and remind people that it is good for all of us to practice this skill.  

**Ask:**  
- Please take a moment to think about how you can use what you have learned in Emotional Competence. Write on a piece of paper something you intent to practice in this area. We call that a Statement of Intention.  
- Then state your intention to an elbow partner. |