Monkey vs Lizard Activity

When to use: quick check-ins; introducing conflict responses; early intervention; group icebreaker.

Time: Individual activities (separate timings are provided for each) or 50-60 minutes total.

Find it: For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Monkey vs Lizard

Recommend: Before the session begins show the 'My Brain' video. (For Young People » The Learning Zone » My Brain.)

Part of us reacts fast to threat **(Lizard: fight/flight/freeze)**. Another part helps us reflect and connect **(Monkey)**. Both are useful! Learning when each shows up can help to de-escalate conflict.

The learning bit...

- Understand the difference between automatic (or instinctive) and learned responses.
- Get to know their responses to conflict situations and understand these can change depending on the situation and how they're feeling in the moment.
- Recognise how to manage responses and reactions by using coping skills.

Activity 1 (10-15 mins)

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1. Read scenario 1 and 2.

2. Sort the responses into Monkey or Lizard responses. Is the response reflective or reactive?

3. Discuss why each response is triggered by either Monkey or Lizard.

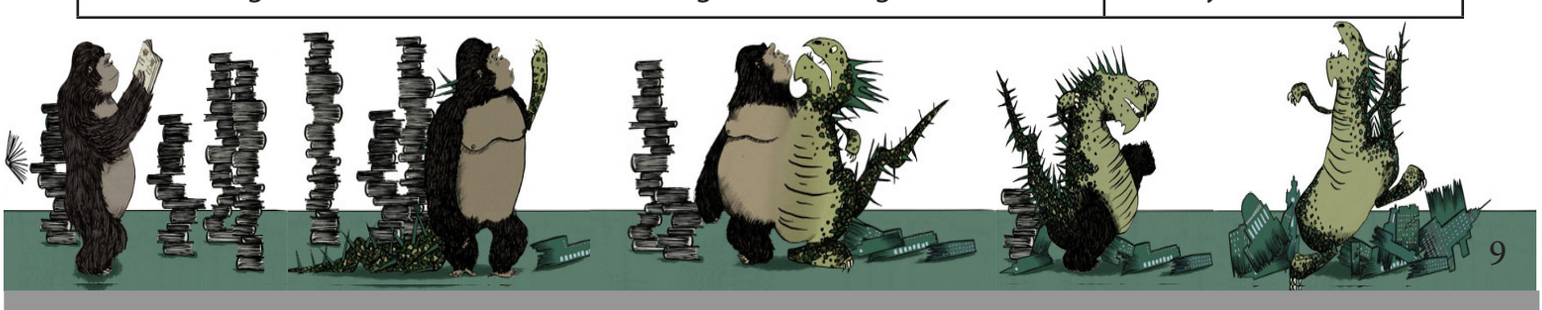
REMEMBER! Monkey responses show reflection, empathy, and problem-solving, while Lizard actions may indicate fight-or-flight responses or relying on instinct.

MvL PAGE

Scenario 1

At the start of the lesson, the teacher returns test results to the class. In front of the class, the teacher says Sam is not working hard enough. As a consequence, Sam…

Response	Monkey or Lizard
Rips up the test paper and argues with the teacher about the test.	Lizard – fight response
Leaves the classroom during the lesson.	Lizard – fight response
Keeps their head down during class and hopes the teacher doesn't bring it up again.	Lizard – freeze response
Says nothing at the time but becomes snappy with their friends later.	Lizard – freeze and fight response
Stays after class to explain the reason they couldn't study for the test and how the teacher's comment made them feel.	Monkey – reflection
Arranges a meeting with the teacher to get help with the areas they are finding difficult.	Monkey – planning, problem-solving
Reads through the feedback to see where things went wrong.	Monkey – reflection



Scenario 2

Sam has fallen out with a friend over something said in a group chat. Sam is angry, and as a result…

Response	Monkey or Lizard
Avoids the friend in school.	Lizard – flight response
Talks to the friend about how they are feeling.	Monkey – reflection, problem-solving
Considers their friend's side of the story.	Monkey – empathy
Shouts at the friend.	Lizard – fight response
Gets into a physical fight.	Lizard – fight response
Comes up with a clever plan to get their own back.	Monkey – planning
Shuts down and doesn't speak to anyone about it.	Lizard – freeze, flight response

Activity 2 (15-20 mins)

Now that you know more about the different parts of the brain and how they respond to conflict, let's find out if you are a '**Lord of the Lizards**', a '**Monkey Genius**' or something in-between.

Let's try the Monkey vs Lizard quiz! (For Professionals, Practitioners & Volunteers » Mind Works » Monkey vs Lizard » Take the Quiz.)

The quiz has ten questions and should take around five minutes to answer.

MvL Quiz

Share and discuss your results:

1. Talk about which character you got at the end of the quiz.
2. Does your result sound like you? Or were you surprised?
3. What does your result suggest about how you react?
4. If having a good or bad day, do you think results might change? Why?



Activity 3 (15 - 20 mins)

When we feel ourselves getting overwhelmed, angry or frustrated we might lose our Monkey-Lizard brain connection, and our Lizard brain might take over. So, let's think about how we can keep that connection or regain it by using coping skills.

My Wellbeing

1. Think about things that help you to feel calm and relaxed, to keep your connection strong and intact.

2. Create a coping skills poster by writing or drawing your ideas onto paper (if you're in a group, you could always make a poster together).

Learn more about coping skills and other complementary resources on our website (For Young People » My Wellbeing).