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Preface

Why No Putdowns?

Schools and neighborhoods are becoming combat zones. So why worry about a few kids calling each other names?

"Why did you hit her?" "She looked at me wrong."

"Why did you pull that knife?" "He insulted me."

Children are dealing with serious issues of drug abuse, depression and peer pressure. So why bother with putdowns and a few hurt feelings?

A teenager feels the pain of rejection, being different, being alone. He drinks to fit in, so he won't be different, odd, or a loser.

An adolescent is overweight and can't face another year of name calling and taunts about his size. He hangs himself in front of the school before September.

Why take time to deal with putdowns?

"I couldn't help it. He made me mad."

"It wasn't my fault. I just lost my temper."

"Once she makes me mad, there's nothing I can do about it."

"Nobody puts me down and gets away with it."

Violence has become any easy reaction to hurt feelings, and much of the violence starts with putdowns — a gesture, name calling, "disrespect." The putdowns grow louder and more abusive and the responses angrier and more reckless. And the violence to self and others spirals out of control — unless we teach our kids to STOP the spiral.

INTRODUCTION

“Kids Today...”

“Kids today...” What adult generation hasn’t started a lament about children with those words? It is practically a tradition to complain that “kids today” lack the values we grew up with.

“Our youth now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority, show disrespect for their elders, and love to chatter in place of exercise. They no longer rise when others enter the room. They contradict their parents, they chatter before company, they gobble their food and terrorize their teachers.”

Socrates made those observations about children in the fifth century B.C., and we could dismiss our own “kids today” laments with the observation that every generation finds its next generation lacking. But we would be sticking our heads in the sand. Daniel Goleman writes in his book *Emotional Intelligence* that a massive survey of parents and teachers reveals that our children are more troubled emotionally than previous generations and that they are more lonely, depressed, angry, impulsive and aggressive.

Juvenile arrests for violent crimes have grown at an alarming rate. The news media are filled with accounts of violence in the schools and metal detectors installed at entrances. Alcohol and drug use are high among adolescents and teens. Teen pregnancy is on the rise. Reports of teen suicide have become all too common.

That is the dramatic and headline-grabbing news. But the distress is widespread, even among preschool and elementary school children. Parents and teachers report the

increasing numbers of children are withdrawn, lacking in energy, unhappy or depressed. Many children act without thinking, don’t pay attention or cannot concentrate. Aggressive behavior is disrupting home and school life as children argue, demand attention, interrupt, talk too much, tease critically, destroy property and anger easily.

We complain about children’s lack of values and lack of discipline. But we are complaining about the society that we have created. We have all “gotten this way.” Now what are we going to do about it? How can we start NOW to help our children become responsible, emotionally capable adults?

Goleman writes in *Emotional Intelligence* “At present we leave the emotional education of our children to chance, with ever more disastrous results. One solution is a new vision of what schools can do to educate the whole student, bringing together mind and heart in the classroom.”

The lessons are basic. If children hear a consistent message of respect and responsibility year after year, they can stop the spiral of violence. Putdowns among young children may seem relatively harmless. But those putdowns, the feelings that prompt them and the responses to them are the beginning of habits that will impact behavior for years to come.

Some educators question whether it is the job of the school to teach children interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. However, character education expert Thomas Lickona writes, “Character education is as old as education itself. Down through history, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good.”

It is not the job of the school alone. But schools can lead the way.

As one principal in a No Putdowns school told his staff, “Who is going to do it if we don’t? Do we want the media to teach our children what it means to be a responsible adult?”

No Putdowns addresses issues integral to violence prevention, substance abuse prevention, conflict resolution and character education.

It focuses on building self-control, a sense of responsibility, self-worth, empathy, cooperation, respect and tolerance. It treats the school as a community and recognizes that members of that community have a right to a safe learning environment and a responsibility to create and preserve safety and trust for its members. The goal is to create an environment in which children feel safe to try new things, make mistakes, and learn, without fear of ridicule or recriminations.

No Putdowns involves parents and family and encourages children to take the message home. It brings parents to school for training and keeps them informed about the progress of the program. Nevertheless, even if some children do not learn these lessons at home, they can stop the spiral if they experience a school community that is caring, supportive and putdown-free.

Imagine declaring your school and its grounds a PUTDOWN-FREE ZONE. For many children, school is the one constant and safe place in their lives. Starting in kindergarten, they can experience school as a community of caring children and adults who treat one another with respect and resolve conflicts without verbal or physical violence. School becomes a model for how a community can be — people working together for the good of all.

These are idealistic goals for a ten-week elementary school program that teaches five simple skills: “Think About Why,” “Stay Cool,” “Shield Myself,” “Choose a Response,” and “Build Up.” However, the ten-week program is only a beginning, a “starter tool kit” that you can use to build a safe school and a respectful community — and stop the spiral.

Section 1

Understanding *No Putdowns*



**A Program for Creating a Healthy
Learning Environment by Encouraging,
Understanding and Respecting**

What is *No Putdowns*?

No Putdowns is a comprehensive, school-based curriculum that can meet your needs for work in violence prevention, character development, substance abuse prevention skills, and life skill building. It was created as a school-wide program and experiences its greatest success when used that way. However, single grades or classrooms can also implement the program effectively.

Each No Putdowns book (K-2, 3-5 and 6-8) consists of a program guide for staff support and three grade level class activity guides. The formal program lasts approximately ten weeks, with two weeks devoted to each of the five skills. Each grade-level has fifty developmentally appropriate activities designed to extend, but not be dependent upon, activities of previous grade levels. Many teachers have found that the activities in the guides satisfactorily meet their needs. Others have adapted the lessons or made up some of their own. Each of these is an acceptable option. No Putdowns is designed to be part of your school day. Incorporate the lessons into your existing curriculum, or work the program into your day by using teachable moments rather than formal instruction time.

No Putdowns grew out of concern in Central New York with issues that are typical or problems facing other communities across the nation: culture intolerance, sliding academic performance, increasing violence in school and children's lack of respect. These issues were seen as major factors in youth suicide and substance abuse. Parents, educators and community members gathered to discuss how they could help children develop necessary emotional and life skills.

Given the scope of the problem, any

program they proposed would have to be long term rather than a one-time workshop. It would be most effective if children could learn the necessary skills from adults whom they already trusted — school staff, with support and reinforcement from parents.

No Putdowns was developed under the auspices of CONTACT Community Services (a mental health agency providing educational services and telephone counseling) and the Onondaga County Department of Mental Health.

In 1991, the first version of the project was developed by twenty classroom teachers under the direction of professional staff developers and program director Margery Connor. It was piloted the following year within Onondaga County. It has since been revised based upon formal evaluation and field testing.

We are now seeing students who have “grown up” with No Putdowns at their schools. In those schools, the skills and language of No Putdowns are as common and natural as the ABCs.

The Five Skills

Through the five skills of No Putdowns, students start looking at their own behavior and the behavior of others. The skills emphasize responsibility for one's own actions and choices, self-control, empathy, community building and effective listening and speaking skills.

The lessons are presented through a wide variety of formats, including dyad, small group and classroom discussion, writing, art and music, literature, independent projects, games and celebration, and media education. They are designed to meet the many styles through which students learn. Many lessons fit within existing social studies, language arts, physical education or fine arts curricula (and some will even lend themselves to math and science).

Through five skills, children become aware of their own power. They learn that power is the ability to manage one's feelings, to stop and think before responding rather than automatically lashing out. Power is the ability to make good choices, not the ability to hurt or control another. Students learn new powerful behaviors, such as helping others, apologizing when wrong, walking away from a fight, using constructive words instead of fists and putdowns, sharing, and including rather than excluding others.

It is not critical to have been involved with No Putdowns in early grades in order for it to be successful in later ones. However, it is helpful to be aware of the activities and concepts covered in other grades.

Outcomes

Upon completion of the ten-week instructional period, students (at an understanding appropriate to their grade) and

staff will be able to:

- Recognize and understand the effects of putdowns on themselves and others
- Recognize that putdowns are used for a variety of reasons
- Develop strategies to reduce their own use of putdowns
- Recognize and use alternative communication skills
- Develop peaceful, non-abusive strategies to deal with putdowns and other conflict situations
- Demonstrate strategies for calming down
- List attributes, achievements, abilities of which they are proud
- Recognize that they have choices about how to respond in any situation
- Recognize and express appreciation, encouragement or compliments
- Demonstrate increased levels of respect in child-child, adult-child, and adult-adult interactions

Defining Putdowns

NoPutdowns defines putdowns as negative or belittling words or actions that show disrespect toward a person or groups of persons. Putdowns are used both directly (to another person's face) and indirectly (to a third person about someone else.) They may be used because of fear, anger, ignorance, jealousy, need for power, frustration, lack of alternative communication skills, insecurity, habit, modeled behavior or humor. (Often, putdowns are disguised as humor — as seen in television sitcoms.)

Putdowns take many forms, both verbal and nonverbal:

- Dismissal or rejection, in the form of a critical or slighting remark
- Body language — rolled eyes, curled lip, shrugged shoulders, sneers
- Mimicking or mockery
- Words or actions used as weapons
- Self-putdowns
- Tone of voice, such as sarcasm or insincerity
- Stereotyping

Putdowns have a situational quality. Not only does a person's reaction depend upon the source of the putdown, it also depends upon circumstances. Putdowns hurt most when

- They are used in front of peers
- A loved one or someone you respect uses them
- They are used because of prejudice
- They are used repeatedly
- They hit a vulnerable area, something about which you are already insecure (family, appearance, abilities, body image)
- You are already sad, upset, frustrated or discouraged
- They lock you into a role or behavior ("You'll never be able to play soccer; you're a klutz.")

Skill 1: Think About Why

The key word for this first No Putdowns skill is AWARENESS. "Think About Why" invites children to begin to define, identify and investigate their use of putdowns. They begin to

think about two essential questions:

- Why do I use putdowns?
- Why do other people use putdowns?

This skill urges children to stop and think before automatically responding to a putdown or other perceived threat with a putdown. Children discover that anger, hurt, fear, jealousy, ignorance and power are often underlying reasons for putdowns. By asking the other person for more information, active listening, and empathy, they can learn more about the motives behind a perceived insult. By taking the time to "think about why," a child may learn that a comment was actually intended as constructive criticism rather than a putdown. Or they sense that the putdown was motivated by strong emotions, and the best response is to show empathy rather than trade insults.

Issues of diversity and intolerance are explored in this skill and throughout the program because cultural, gender, ethnic, physical, lifestyle and other differences are very often at the root of putdowns and escalating conflict. Through more open communication, children discover they have more similarities than differences with the other person.

During these first two weeks of No Putdowns, children and adults become increasingly aware of the use and nature of putdowns. This growing awareness is the beginning of change. Although alternatives to putdowns are not fully explored in this skill, participants begin to think about their own responses and behavior.

continued on next page

Skill Development

Kindergarten

- Identification of feeling words
- Identification of strong feelings that provoke putdowns

Grade 1

- Vocabulary building
- Identification of feelings through nonverbal clues
- Identification of events or situations that cause strong feelings
- Practice identifying putdowns
- Discussion and practice of manners as expressions of respect

Grade 2

- Use of empathy in putdown situations
- Differentiation between putdowns and constructive criticism and discipline
- Exploration of chain of events that create a spiral of angry feelings and putdowns
- Exploration of relationship between feelings and actions
- Identification of putdowns on television

Grade 3

- Exploration of consequences of putdowns
- Discussion of television putdowns and humor
- Self-assessment of putdown use
- Further understanding of empathy as ability to put oneself in other person's shoes

Grade 4

- Development of feeling vocabulary through antonyms, pantomime, poetry and word games

- Self-assessment of putdown use
- Exploration of use of putdowns in advertising, especially use of stereotypes and name-calling

Grade 5

- Assessment of school climate through "scavenger hunt" for putdowns and encouragement
- Consideration of use and abuse of power
- Discussion of putdowns as an expression of power

Skill 2: Stay Cool

"Stay Cool" provides strategies for staying calm in stressful situations. "Take a moment, buy yourself some time," this skill teaches "Think before you respond; do not simply react." This second skill begins to raise the issues of self-control and choice. Children can choose to manage their feelings rather than allowing their feelings to control them. They learn specific strategies they can begin to use right away, recognize events and situations that are potential triggers for them personally, and identify consequences of losing their cool. This skill fits well into health studies or drug and alcohol prevention.

In older grades, this second skill continues to address issues of personal responsibility within a community as children consider people who stayed cool in the face of prejudice and other adversity in order to bring about positive change.

Skill Development

Kindergarten

- Introduction and practice of three specific strategies
- Count to ten
- Take deep breaths
- Say to yourself, “Freeze, please,” or “Stay cool”
- Practice being still and peaceful
- Discussion of consequences of losing cool by considering behavior of favorite storybook characters

Grade 1

- Review of three basic strategies introduced in kindergarten
- Use of language and art for describing and understanding concept of staying cool
- Further discussion of consequences of losing cool by considering favorite fictional and historic characters

Grade 2

- Variations and practice of the three basic strategies
- Awareness of stress level through construction and use of “tension barometers”
- Use of role-plays for practice of techniques
- Choosing one strategy to practice for several days
- Identification of literacy characters who stayed cool

Grade 3

- Demonstration of an “eruption” of baking soda and vinegar as metaphor for losing cool
- Identification of personal physical signs of anger
- Use of muscle relaxation techniques to calm down
- Discussion of difference between staying cool and burying one’s feelings

Grade 4

- Identification of personal stressors
- Identification of “stay cool” strategies that can interrupt cycle of stress
- Introduction of additional muscle relaxation exercises
- Exploration of importance of “keeping the situation in perspective” and the role of thought and language in how people view a situation or event
- Analysis of role of television on stress levels

Grade 5

- Review of strategies from earlier grades
- Identification of stressors and appropriateness and effectiveness of student’s usual responses
- Emphasis on language skills in understanding concept of staying cool

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Skill 3: Shield Myself

This skill teaches that children and adults can shield themselves from the devastating effects of putdowns. Their shield is a “force field” of confidence and self-worth. Children look at their own strengths and weaknesses, make honest assessments about themselves and recognize that they are worthy human beings. They do not have to do anything special to be special.

“Shield Myself” teaches that putdowns do not have to destroy one’s sense of worth. Children investigate the harm they cause themselves through self-putdowns and negative self-talk, and they begin to substitute those self-denigrating habits with positive statements and affirmations. Older students also learn about goal-setting and planning as prerequisites to achievement. Although this lesson teaches that children do not have to be “stars” or excel to be worthy people, a sense of achievement enhances self-esteem and self-respect.

This third skill also looks at issues of diversity and celebration of individual differences and strengths.

Skill Development

Kindergarten

- Development of self-concept through creation of “All About Me” booklets
- Introduction to harm putdowns can cause to self-concept
- Introduction to shielding effect of confidence and positive self-talk

Grade 1

- Creation of personal shields
- Illustration and discussion of impact of positive self-talk and ability to achieve goals
- Identification of accomplishments
- Recognition that it is acceptable to make mistakes; mistakes do not have to destroy our confidence or ruin our day

Grade 2

- Identification of accomplishments or deeds of which students are proud
- Community building through sharing of interests and goals with class
- Discussion of what it means to be a good friend to oneself and others

Grade 3

- Emphasis on communication skills
- Focus on difference between bragging and speaking confidently
- Development of positive language skills by replacing “I can’t” statements with more specific statements about limitations and abilities
- Introduction to positive responses to putdowns

Grade 4

- Development of positive self-talk
- Exploration of role of self-confidence and self-esteem as shields against putdowns
- Personal assessment of self-esteem by weighing likes and dislikes about oneself
- Learning to retain the constructive information in a comment and letting the putdown go

Grade 5

- Reflection on self-concept and how students think others see them
- Consideration of role of confidence in not only deflecting putdowns but preventing them
- Development of confidence through setting and reaching goals
- Importance of goal-setting and positive self-talk in achieving results

Skill 4: Choose a Response

When faced with a conflict, many children feel that they have few choices. They react by hitting, screaming, kicking, yelling — or withering in distress! “Choose a Response” stresses the role of choices in a child’s life. Children (and adults) may not realize it, but they always have choices. However, some choices yield positive consequences and some, negative; children learn to consider those consequences before acting. After responding, they evaluate the results and decide whether the response would be effective the next time they are involved in a similar situation. Problem-solving models are provided for older grades to help children remember to consider alternatives and consequences.

This skill teaches nonviolent and constructive responses to putdowns and other conflicts. Often a child can respond with a clear and direct statement such as, “That feels like a putdown to me,” or “That hurts my feelings.”

In the first three grades, children learn about specific choices they can make and when they are most appropriately used. Older children begin to look at the importance of

clear communication in resolving conflict and practice listening and speaking skills. By sixth grade, children learn to identify their own conflict resolution styles and recognize some predictable consequences of those styles.

Skill Development

Kindergarten

- Introduction of concept of choice
- Introduction of practice of three specific responses to conflict:
- Tell them to stop
- Walk away
- Tell an adult
- Identification of consequences of reacting rather than choosing a response

Grade 1

- Practice using the three specific responses (Tell them to stop, Walk away, and Tell an adult)
- Consideration of responses of fictional characters to conflict or putdowns
- Identification of responses of fictional characters to conflict or putdowns

Grade 2

- Practice using positive communication techniques of eye contact and listening
- Discussion and practice working together to reach agreement
- Consideration of safety issues in choosing a response
- Use of fable to identify responses and their consequences

continued on next page

Grade 3

- Practice using positive communication skills of listening, honesty, and consideration of other person's point of view
- Discussion of "letting it drop" as an appropriate response to a putdown or conflict
- Practice using problem-solving model STAR (Stop, Think, Act, Review)

Grade 4

- Practice using problem-solving model WHALE as reminder of choices (Words, Humor, Apologize, Let it drop)
- Demonstration of importance of "letting it go" if children choose to "let it drop"

Grade 5

- Practice using problem-solving model ACT (Alternatives, Consequences, Trial Run)
- Using of "I statements" in dealing with conflict
- Recognition of barriers to using No Putdowns responses

Skill 5: Build Up

"Build Up" is the opposite of put down, and the goal of this skill is to teach children to replace putdowns and encouraging and supportive communication and behavior. "Build Up" is also about building community, appreciating differences (and common traits), and pulling together as a class and a school to create a respectful, accepting and safe environment. Students learn about giving and receiving compliments, encouraging each other and working together. This skill, however,

emphasizes sincere caring and respect, not empathy praise.

Skill Development

Kindergarten

- Practice giving verbal and nonverbal encouragement and compliments
- Discussion of differences and practice appreciating diversity

Grade 1

- Practice giving compliments and encouragement
- Identification of similarities and differences among classmates
- Recognition and appreciation of efforts of school members in creating an effective and nurturing community

Grade 2

- Practice giving and receiving compliments and encouragement
- Identification of "Build Up" behavior in media and in school
- Identification of ways to improve school community
- Practice with cooperative play
- Identification of person upon whom student can count for encouragement or help and recognition of responsibility of being available for others as well

Grade 3

- Practice giving and receiving compliments
- Recognition of contributions of others to school community
- Identification of build-ups in fiction and history

Grade 4

- Community building through encouragement and compliments
- Practice being a buddy by being a “secret buddy” to a classmate
- Practice working cooperatively on an art project
- Expression of written appreciation to community members who volunteer or help others through their jobs

Grade 5

- Focus on community building through cooperative work activities, common experiences and interests, and encouragement and compliments
- Consideration of effect of television on perception of differences

No Putdowns Video

The No Putdowns video, performed by the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company, Syracuse, New York, supplements the curriculum. It includes a five-minute No Putdowns rap song and short scenarios to illustrate the five skills.

Many schools have used the rap portion of the video in their kick-off events or as part of an assembly halfway through the program. The lyrics are included below in case some of your students would like to perform it. The rap song introduces the five skills and the No Putdowns chant.

The five skills scenarios have not been included in the lesson plans in the grade level books so that you can choose whether and when to show them. Teachers have used them to introduce a skill, as alternate lessons, or to wrap up a skill. Suggestions for discussion questions are provided below for your use. Adapt them as necessary for your grade level. Often, kindergarten and first grade teachers choose not to use the five scenarios since most feature older children and situations.

NO PUTDOWNS RAP

A woman stands at a podium speaking to a rally of parents, teachers, students and families.

"Welcome, everyone. We're here to talk about a problem that is sweeping the nation. It's in your homes, community and school. Everywhere you look, it's being done — makes who you are break and fall apart. Now that's a real work of art. You see, you have the power to stop it. What am I talking about? I'm talking about the infamous putdown."

They come and go, all through the day
From side to side and every which a way
Putdowns sometimes are not even said

But you know when you've been hit on the head

You dish it out — yeah

You take it in — yeah

That has to end

[Music begins]

Relaxing at home, minding your business
Watching a program of game show quizzes
Father walks in screaming and fussing
Why, what, when, it seems for nothing
He looks at you and all of a sudden
Does the one thing to push your button
You're feeling kinda hurt, trapped in a box
You'd do almost anything to take off the lock

Wait a minute, let me stand in his shoes
And ask a question or maybe two
Really listen to the bluesy blues
And understand why he did it to you
Really try to see deep inside
Guess you have to Think About Why

In class having a good time
Really involved and that's just fine
Somebody calls you a four-eyed egghead
The teacher yells out that shouldn't be said
But it's too late cause you already see red
Without thinking you dish it out instead
Tempers are flaring, it's this for that
But wait. Does it really have to be like that?
It's a bad program so you can change the station

Ignore, divert, distract the situation
And when you know that is where I'm coming from

In the end you don't feel dumb
At home, in school or on the block
Best strategy, Choose a Response!

No Putdowns, pass it around
Pass it around, No Putdowns
No Putdowns, pass it around
Pass it around, No Putdowns

Putdowns come in many forms and shapes
Most of the time there is no escape
Pouring down like rain on your face
Popping out from the least expected place
But you carry a big protective shield
It's kind of like a — force field
You have it every day, everywhere you walk
All you have to do is self-talk
I can be a good student
I can be a good friend
I can stay away from drugs
P.D.s can't get in
Shield your worth, shield your health
I'm the only person who can Shield Myself.

On the playground or in the neighborhood
Joking with friends that feels good
Then out of nowhere comes someone's
aggression
You may feel anger, fear or depression
He's coming right at you to teach you a
lesson
What do you do now — that's the question
All your emotions start to revolve
That won't help the problem get solved
Wait a minute, let me keep my cool
The wise man thinks, not the fool
I think I'll try the nonviolent way
Do my best to just walk away
Positive people use this rule
Talk it out, let it drop, Stay Cool!

Now in the community, home and school
There's one thing we all must do

Give love and respect in healthy rations
It's the right thing to do, always in fashion
Fills your heart with satisfaction
Replace putdowns with positive action

Spread it around universally
Goes hand in hand with diversity
Everyone has a right to respect
If someone denies you just put 'em in check
Compliment, helps others dream
You can inspire their self-esteem
Wish for the best and lots of good luck
Prepare for your future, Build Up.

No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns
No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns

No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns
Think about why...

No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns
Stay cool...

No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns
Shield myself...

No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns
Choose a response...

No Putdowns, PASS IT AROUND
PASS IT AROUND, No Putdowns
Build Up!

THINK ABOUT WHY

Time: 3 minutes

Scenario: On a busy morning, Dad is anxiously preparing for a job interview and trying to get his children ready for school. He is less than patient and the family is feeling the stress. The oldest daughter senses what is happening and explains the problem to her younger siblings. They all try to understand and cooperate to get everyone calmly out the door!

Introducing the scene:

- To avoid getting sidetracked by the composition of the family, explain that it is a group of actors and many not be characteristic of most families — the father is African-American, the older sister, Asian-American, and the younger siblings, white.
- Briefly describe the situation.
- Ask students to relate to the situation and think of an example from their own lives.

Discussion questions:

1. What is your house like in the morning?
2. What does the father do that is a putdown?
3. If someone is yelling at you, what do you do?
4. Did Danielle “think about why?” Did it work?
5. When have you been in a situation where you thought about why? Did it change your attitude or behavior?
6. Could you be as understanding as the kids in this video?

STAY COOL

Time: 2 minutes

Scenario: During a one-on-one basketball game, tension mounts and things start to get rough. The other children gather around the two boys and encourage them to fight. One player pushes the other, who trips on a baseball bat and falls. The other children laugh. As the boy picks himself up, he thinks about what he feels like doing to the others. He returns from his thoughts, looks at the group, picks up his baseball bat on the ground — and walks away.

Introducing the scene:

- Briefly describe the situation.
- Explain the difference between thinking about hitting or yelling and acting on those impulses.
- Note that the actors use language that is probably inappropriate for school (“Kick his butt”).

Discussion questions:

1. Did the boy stay cool or was he a “wimp?” What, if anything, did he gain by his behavior? What, if anything, did he lose?
2. Why were the other children so eager for the two boys to fight?
3. Have you ever thought about doing something negative and then not acted on those thoughts? What stopped you? (Bring up the issue of consequences.)
4. What else could the boy have done and still stayed cool?
5. What do you think the coach/teacher should have done?

SHIELD MYSELF

Time: 3 minutes

Scenario: A group of drama students is complaining about a situation that happened in the school cafeteria. They start to put down the group that has been putting them down. Their teacher joins the discussion and talks to them about “self-talk.”

Introducing the scene:

- Briefly describe the situation in the video.
- Define thespian.
- Note that the unhappy students are resorting to putdowns even though that is what has upset them!
- Ask students to listen for examples of self-talk.

Discussion questions:

1. Did the students feel better as they put down the “jocks”?
2. Can we control what others do or say to us?
3. Can we control our own thoughts, feelings and behavior?
4. Have you ever let something that someone did or said “get inside you”?
5. How do you keep the things that other people say and do from hurting you?
6. What self-talk phrases did you hear in the video? What self-talk phrases do you use?
7. If you have very different issues and tastes from most of the other kids, does that make you wrong?

CHOOSE A RESPONSE

Time: 2 minutes

Scenario: While the class is discussing a story, one boy is laughing and making rude comments. Sam responds to the teacher’s question and is taunted by his classmates who call him names. The teacher urges, “No Putdowns” but the comments continue. Sarah tries to divert attention to other issues. Sam explains himself to the other.

Introducing the scene:

- Briefly set up the situation.
- Note that several different responses will be shown and students should watch for them. It especially illustrates ways not to respond!

Discussion questions:

1. What responses were used?
2. Are you ever afraid that others will make fun of you if you answer questions in class?
3. How can you respond if you are feeling angry, sad or afraid?
4. Is it ever acceptable to use physical violence as a response?
5. What could the teacher have done differently? (The teacher may be perceived as uninvolved and not in control of her class.)
6. Some of the people in the scene may be taken as stereotypical - the smart boy with glasses, the girls as peacemaker, the African-American boy as the troublemaker. Discuss the role of stereotypes in prompting putdowns.

BUILD UP

Time: 5 minutes

Scenario: Lisa is alone on stage trying to perform a song. She runs backstage and says she can't do it. Her friends offer encouragement and the teacher joins in with "You can do it" and other build up comments. Lisa goes on stage again with her friends and together they perform. Lisa soon gains confidence and the friends back away. As the song ends, the teacher and friends hug Lisa.

Introducing the scene:

- Briefly describe the situation.
- Explain that the friends' presence on stage is a physical show of support, but support does not have to be quite so dramatic!

Discussion questions:

1. How did Lisa's friends help her?
2. In what other ways might they have supported her?
3. Do you like people to encourage you?
4. What is the difference between encouragement and praise?
5. Should you be praised for everything you do?
6. How do you encourage friends and relatives?
7. How do you respond to a compliment?
Do you give compliments?