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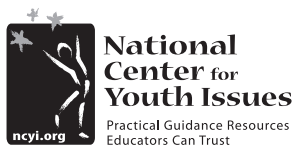
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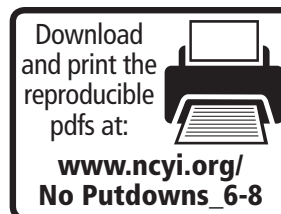
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Preface

Protect the Environment

The poison from putdowns, sarcasm, innuendos, hate language and gossip leaks into the environment regularly, and we hardly notice—it's part of life. But when a major spill—a school shooting—occurs, we insist something be done. This must be prevented in the future. Then other things grab the headlines and the spill recedes to the back pages, but the daily pollution continues. An environment that accepts the daily putdown language as normal becomes more and more toxic. Verbal violence becomes acceptable—as long as it doesn't escalate into physical violence. But a physical encounter usually gets its start with a verbal exchange. Words that threaten violence have increased. Toxic words are directed at kids because of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, economic status and physical or mental disability. Some kids are bullies; they deliberately intimidate kids they perceive as weaker. If the school tolerates this behavior, the standards for all kids—and staff—are lowered. Putdowns, cursing and other forms of disrespect become more common among all members of the school community.

Kids hear cruel language everyday at school, on the bus, even at home, as well as in music, television and movies. The poison in the environment builds and we don't even notice because we have lowered our “clean air” standards. We have come to accept putdown pollution as “only words.” But in a toxic environment, verbal assaults or perceived wrongs easily ignite into physical violence.

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

‡Why did you pull a knife?. ‡He insulted me.

Children who are “different” are particularly susceptible to the poison of words, and they are sick with fear and dread about going to school each day. They are afraid of being called “fat, skinny, jerk, stupid, faggot, dyke, weirdo.” They are afraid of the so-called “practical jokes,” like being locked in the bathroom or bumped so they dump their lunch trays. We hear about the kids who take it out on others by firing back with words or bullets. But what about the kids who take it out on themselves, beat themselves up for being victims and learn to live defensively?

An overweight adolescent feels the pain of rejection. She drinks to try to fit in.

A teenager is harassed for being physically challenged and can't face another year of this treatment. He drops out of school.

Protect your school environment. If it is already toxic, clean it up! School staff and students have a right to a healthy learning environment. By choosing to use *No Putdowns* in your school or classroom, you are taking control. *No Putdowns* teaches youth different ways to respond each step of the way, replacing angry reactions with clear communication, anger management and conflict resolution skills. With *No Putdowns* you are creating your own environmental protection agency.

Understanding *No Putdowns*



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

Why No Putdowns?

Kids can be thoughtless and even cruel. They mercilessly put each other down through insults, gossip, sarcasm, or physical gestures. They are quick to feel hurt themselves but often clueless that they are hurting others with the same type of behavior and comments.

“They can dish it out but they can’t take it.” So the cycle of putdowns and even violence begins. Peter accidentally bumps Nicholas in the hallway. Nicholas calls Peter “a fat clumsy slob.” Peter feels hurt, so he “dishes it out,” responding that Nicholas is “a weirdo pervert.” Now Nicholas becomes hurt and angry and responds with another putdown. The exchange continues and even escalates into physical violence or ongoing harassment and tension.

Some people might say that this sort of Peter and Nicholas exchange happens all the time and is no big deal. It erupts for a moment and then it blows over. It’s just two kids doing what kids do; we have all gone through it. Not everyone can like each other. Not everyone can get along. When you have a lot of people in one place, there is bound to be conflict.

But what happens when other elements are introduced, such as race, membership in different cliques or gangs, personal problems or stressors, peer pressure? Are other kids watching and even encouraging the dissension? Is one kid a “nerd” and the other a “jock?” Does one of the kids have trouble at home and is already feeling alienated and angry? Did the putdown strike a nerve? A seemingly simple and meaningless exchange can become more complicated, more hurtful—and more dangerous.

Some putdowns die down as quickly as they flared up. But hoping that disturbances will just go away is no way to manage conflict. We can’t allow putdowns to flourish, hoping they aren’t complicated by too many other variables. The variables are not going to go away. We shouldn’t want them to—those differences enrich our lives when we are not afraid of them.

Many teachers let the use of derogatory language slide because they assume that students are “just teasing” each other and don’t mean to be insulting. But members of the school community have the right to be safe in school, physically and emotionally.

No Putdowns helps create safe schools by focusing on these key principles:

- All members of the school (or classroom) are responsible for creating a respectful environment. We all always have choices about how to behave and respond.
- Youth are a resource, not a problem. They can make important contributions to the school community; in fact, they are the community.
- When youth recognize their own strengths and assets, they grow stronger and more resilient. When adults recognize that youth are an asset, the community grows stronger and more resilient too.

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- Violence can be prevented when members of the community learn the necessary skills together. These skills include clear communication, self-control, supportive behavior and constructive responses to conflict. Students practice social skills and strategies that make them more resilient in the face of peer rejection.

With *No Putdowns*, your school or classroom can become a model community in which people work and learn together, respect and care for one another. When conflict happens, it is resolved respectfully.

Development of *No Putdowns*

No Putdowns grew out of a concern in Central New York with issues that are typical of those facing other communities across the nation: cultural intolerance, sliding academic performance, increasing violence in school, children's lack of respect. These issues were seen as major factors in youth suicide and substance abuse. Parents, educators and community leaders gathered to discuss how they could help children develop vital 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 trust—school staff, with support and reinforcement from parents.

No Putdowns was developed under the auspices of CONTACT Community Services, Inc. (a mental-health agency providing youth development services and telephone counseling) and the Onondaga County (New York) Department of Mental Health.

In 1991, the first version of the project was produced by twenty classroom teachers. It consisted of seven teacher manuals (K-6) and was piloted the following year within Onondaga County. In 1997, the entire kindergarten through sixth grade *No Putdowns* curriculum was revised based upon formal evaluation and field-testing.

In 2000, the revised program was formally evaluated and tested by a specialist from State University of New York at Cortland. Because sixth grade can be such a critical year for young people struggling with decisions about drug use, violence and other issues, there was a special focus on the impact of the program on this

grade level. Testing involved pre- and post-tests and a comparison school.

Qualitative results indicated that students felt positive about the program and could see its benefits. Interestingly, violent behavior is reduced through increasing student awareness of putdowns. Students said they became more aware of their own and others' use of putdowns and the harmful impact of that behavior. As awareness grew, students became less cruel to one another, according to administrators in the test school. They also reported fewer office referrals because teachers were more willing to handle conflicts in the classroom.

Quantitative results showed a significant reduction in violent behavior such as fighting, hitting and being hit when compared to pre-tests and the comparison school. Some of the most dramatic differences were among sixth graders.

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.

Middle school and junior high school teachers and administrators witnessed the success of *No Putdowns* in elementary schools and began asking for *No Putdowns*.

Middle school can be a tough arena for students and teachers. Children from several elementary schools may be coming together in these grades. Students who participated in *No Putdowns* in elementary school are challenged to maintain their skills, especially as they encounter youth who have not been exposed to the program.

Students new to the program, however, will have no difficulty grasping the information or learning the same five skills.

The Five Skills

Outcomes

When students have completed the core set of *No Putdowns* lessons, they 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, nonabusive 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 youth-youth and youth-adult interactions.

Defining Putdowns

No Putdowns for Grades 6-8 defines putdowns as negative or belittling words or actions that show disrespect toward a person or groups of persons. This definition is deliberately broad and allows the teacher to address a range of behaviors, from “You’re a jerk” to hate crimes.

Putdowns may be used because of fear, anger, ignorance, jealousy, need for power, frustration, lack of alternative communication skills, insecurity, habit, modeled behavior or humor. (Putdowns are often disguised as

humor—as seen in television sitcoms.) Verbal putdowns are used both directly (to another person’s face) and indirectly (to a third person about someone else).

Putdowns by adolescents take many forms, both verbal and nonverbal, including

- Dismissal or rejection, in the form of critical or slighting remarks
- Body language—rolled eyes, curled lip, shrugged shoulders, sneer
- Mimicking or mockery
- Words or actions used as weapons
- Self-putdowns
- Tone of voice, such as sarcasm or insincerity
- Stereotyping
- Hate language and intolerance
- Graffiti and hate symbols
- Harassment (including sexual)
- Physical violence

Putdowns have a situational quality. Not only does a person’s reaction depend on 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 to harass
- They hit a vulnerable area, something about which you are already insecure (family, appearance, abilities, body image, sexuality)
- You are already sad, upset, frustrated or discouraged

Skill 1: Think About Why

The key word for this first *No Putdowns* skill is AWARENESS. “Think About Why” invites young people to define, identify and investigate the use of putdowns.

They look at their own use of putdowns in response to stressful situations. The skill urges them to stop and think before automatically reacting to a putdown or other perceived threat with a putdown. Students discover that anger, hurt, fear, jealousy, ignorance and power are often underlying reasons for putdowns. They consider the potential long-term effects of harassment or bullying behavior on the other person.

This skill moves outward from the individual to take a look at the “bigger picture.” Students assess the climate of the school, analyzing where and when the risk of putdowns is greatest. They explore issues of diversity and intolerance. Ignorance or misunderstandings about culture, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical differences and lifestyle are often at the root of conflicts. Students learn about the dangerous escalation of words into physical violence. They take a look at the use of putdowns in popular music, movies and television shows and consider if this affects their own behavior.

Alternatives to putdowns are not fully explored in this skill; however, participants are already beginning to rethink their responses. *Awareness is the beginning of change.*

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 skill fits well into health studies and drug and alcohol prevention programming.

“Stay Cool” activities raise issues of self-control and choice. Students can choose to manage their feelings rather than allow their feelings to control them. They learn to use specific strategies to calm down, recognize events and situations that are potential triggers for them, and identify consequences of losing their cool.

While “Stay Cool” is primarily about self-control, many lessons ask students to step back and look outside themselves: How can they help an angry friend stay cool? What happens to athletes who lose their cool? Is there a way to channel anger into something more productive? How does swearing aggravate a tense situation?

This skill addresses personal power and emphasizes to youth that they are in control of their own behavior. The act of backing off to regroup is an important step toward choosing effective responses to putdowns and conflict.

Skill 3: Shield Myself

Adolescence is a time of self-doubt and insecurity. “Shield Myself” asks students to take inventory of their personal strengths and the exterior supports they have (family, friends, role models) that help them get through the tough times.

This skill focuses on “building a better shield” that allows valuable feedback to get in but keeps out negative judgments that can devastate a youth’s sense of self. This skill looks at peer pressure and teaches students skills to

maintain their own values and make their own decisions—to exercise “I-control.”

“Shield Myself” continues the “bigger picture” theme by exploring the putdowns in music lyrics and searching for affirmative messages in this medium so important to youth.

Skill 4: Choose a Response

Many young people don’t realize that they have choices about how to respond to conflict. “Choose a Response” helps them recognize that they always have choices and that those choices have consequences. Students learn to consider the effectiveness and consequences of their responses. If the consequence of responding to a putdown with a putdown is a further escalation of the conflict, they need to try a different response next time.

Students learn to distinguish between putdowns and serious threats. One lesson is devoted to specific school procedures for notifying an adult if they suspect a serious safety threat exists

“Choose a Response” also explores the role of bystanders or third parties to a conflict. Bystanders can play a big role in either easing tensions or aggravating the situation. But the best response for a bystander or participant depends on the specific incident. Youth explore the many possible responses to hypothetical situations. They are asked to think about the importance of taking a stand against gossip, cruel jokes, hate language and other negative behaviors that hurt members of the community. Does silence imply approval? These discussions about one’s role and responsibility to the community continue in the final skill, “Build Up.”

Skill 5: Build Up

“Build up” is the opposite of put down, and the goal of this last skill is to teach young people to replace putdowns with encouraging and supportive communication and behavior. In this skill, students ask themselves, “How can I make my school community a better place? ”

“Build Up” is 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.

This last skill emphasizes *sincere* caring and respect, not empty praise. Students learn about giving and receiving compliments, encouraging each other and working together to create a “putdown-free, build-up” classroom or school.

Community Service and Long Term Projects

The activities in the five skill areas are designed to be implemented in 30 minutes or less, however, many can become the basis for research projects and even semester-or year-long projects. Use topics suggested in the activities for development of writing, reading, research, presentation or critical thinking skills within curriculum areas.

A major objective of the *No Putdowns* program is to inspire youth to think about their role in building community. Some of the projects developed within a single classroom can be taken into the school hallways and other public areas. For example, your students can post *No Putdowns* related artwork or displays or become “buddies” for new students. In this way, the *No Putdowns* approach can influence students and

staff who are not participating in the program and reinforce ideas to those who are. And your students develop personal assets and experience the satisfaction of community service.

The community service aspect can be extended beyond the middle school environment. Your students can act as mentors for younger students or adopt an elementary school classroom. This activity can be conducted formally, as class project, or informally with students volunteering to work with younger students or children's groups on their own time. Regardless of which direction you choose, find a classroom (third grade or lower) or children's group with which to work before you introduce the project to your class. Once you launch the idea with your class, you don't want to lose any momentum.

There are many ways your students can participate in community service. They can sponsor an event to raise money for a charity, volunteer at a event such as a race or sale, help clean up the neighborhood or schoolyard or help maintain a community garden. They can write letters to the editor or letters to local, state or federal government representatives.

By helping your students see the bigger picture, you help them see how much they have to contribute to others. Everyone has something to give.

Using No Putdowns

No Putdowns can be thought of as an “environmental protection” program. It seeks first to prevent damage to the school environment by teaching all students to replace putdowns with better communication skills. If putdowns still occur, it seeks to contain the damage by teaching students strategies that make them more resilient in the face of peer rejection.

No Putdowns can meet your needs for work in violence prevention, character development, substance abuse prevention skills and life skills. The manual consists of activities in five important skills: “Think About Why,” “Stay Cool,” “Shield Myself,” “Choose a Response,” and “Build Up”.

No Putdowns is most effective when implemented school-wide, as the elementary school (K-6) program is usually presented. For a school-wide implementation in middle school or junior high, *No Putdowns* lessons can be presented across disciplines through a team approach, in homerooms each morning, during activity periods, in health or language arts class, or in extracurricular groups. School administrators can help a lot in keeping the message alive throughout the school.

School-wide use is not always possible in middle school or junior high school. The program can be implemented in a single grade or classroom with excellent results; however students face the extra challenge of maintaining their skills among students who are not “speaking the same language.”

Principals Can Support the Program

Middle school principals can play a vital

role in promoting the success of *No Putdowns*, whether it is implemented school-wide or in individual classrooms. They can demonstrate they sincerely believe in the program by regularly modeling *No Putdowns* strategies with adults and students, and showing respect for the contributions of staff and students. Here are some specific ideas for strengthening the program:

1. Be knowledgeable about *No Putdowns*.

Principals should be familiar with the curriculum and the five skills (*Think About Why, Stay Cool, Shield Myself, Choose A Response, Build Up*).

2. Encourage all teachers to use *No Putdowns*.

While *No Putdowns* can bring about positive changes when used in a single classroom, the program’s impact is greatest when implemented throughout the school. When the entire school is involved, students are more likely to incorporate the lessons of *No Putdowns* into their day-to-day social interactions. The principal can serve as a *No Putdowns* “cheerleader” by motivating staff and students.

3. Give students positive or corrective feedback.

School administrators can serve as “*No Putdowns* coaches” for students, giving them timely feedback about how well they are using the *No Putdowns* strategies. If the principal witnesses a putdown, he/she should intervene immediately to let the student know that putdowns are unacceptable in the school. On the other hand, if a student does a particularly good job of keeping her temper even when teased

by another student, the principal might praise her for “staying cool.”

4. Treat students fairly and consistently.

Students will support school behavior codes only if these codes are enforced fairly and consistently for all students. The principal should make every effort to impose consequences in an even-handed manner.

5. Elicit student feedback about school climate and act on this feedback.

Students have a wealth of “inside information” about positive and negative aspects of a school’s behavioral climate—information that often cannot be obtained from any other source. For example, students often can name peers who are bullies, identify the safest and most dangerous places in the school and even identify those teachers who connect well with students and treat them with respect. Savvy principals who are launching an ambitious school-wide or grade-wide program like *No Putdowns* know that student input is too valuable to ignore. These administrators find imaginative ways to elicit a strong student voice (e.g., by attending class meetings or having students complete anonymous surveys). Furthermore, they are prepared to act on that student feedback to make schools safer and more welcoming places.

6. Provide opportunities for students to take part in community-service projects. Many lessons in *No Putdowns* can be adapted as community-service projects. The principal can help teachers successfully implement such projects, by encouraging and facilitating collaboration

among staff and identifying and clearing away obstacles. (See “Community Service and Long Term Projects” section below.)

7. Encourage teachers to share *No Putdowns* tips and ideas.

Teachers using *No Putdowns* report that they greatly value the opportunity to share tips and ideas with colleagues about how to fine-tune and improve the program. In fact, opportunities for professional sharing are among the most effective (and often overlooked) forms of staff development. Principals can ensure teacher interaction about *No Putdowns* by setting aside time for discussion at faculty or school staff meetings or staff development days.

8. Promote parental involvement. Parents are key stakeholders in any school. Before launching the program in the school, the principal should explain it to parents and answer their questions. With teacher input, the principal may even create a *No Putdowns* Tips Sheet for parents with suggestions for reinforcing key concepts at home (e.g., praising their child for not using putdowns with siblings or friends).

Creating a *No Putdowns* School

No Putdowns is designed to be an integral part of school life, not “another thing to do.” When *No Putdowns* is incorporated into the language and culture of the school, it becomes a mindset, not just a short-term program.

No Putdowns works best as a school-wide program with a goal of creating a putdowns-free community. Creating that culture requires coordination and cooperation by all members of the school community. Buying into the creation

of this PUTDOWN-FREE ZONE is important for all members of the school—students, teachers, administrators, secretaries, counselors, bus drivers, cafeteria staff and maintenance staff.

The adult members of the school community set the tone for *No Putdowns*. If they are enthusiastic and believe in it, the youth will become excited and take the messages to heart. If they give a halfhearted effort and are unwilling to look at their own communication habits, use of putdowns or handling of conflict, the students are going to sense that. They may wonder, “Why should we care?” Students are looking to the adults in their lives to model *No Putdowns* behavior. School staff members are their role models, the key to the effectiveness of the program.

School administrators report that the teachers who have the most success with the program are those who are enthusiastic and who “practice what they preach,” by treating other people with respect and acknowledging and valuing youth for their contributions.

Any adult who is in contact with youth can reinforce the skills. A powerful message is being sent when all staff members are speaking the same *No Putdowns* language and working within the same framework. If an argument is taking place in the cafeteria, the lunch aide or staff member on duty can use *No Putdowns* strategies and language to resolve it. Many principals display the *No Putdowns* poster in their offices and refer to the skills when disciplining students, or they ask students which skill they could have used to prevent the escalation of the conflict.

Many schools involved with *No Putdowns* devise their own projects, lessons and methods of extracurricular reinforcement. They also make

their own buttons, magnets, videos, posters and T-shirts with program icons and themes.

No Putdowns is a ten-week program with separate manuals for grades kindergarten through second grade and third through fifth grade. Entire schools adopt it and every classroom is working on the same skill at the same time (at different developmental levels). The schools hold assemblies to kick off the program. Many start the school day with *No Putdowns* messages on the public address system or school television system. *No Putdowns*-related artwork and posters hang in the hallways. School newspapers run articles on the program and feature student accomplishments.

No Putdowns also can be instituted in entire middle school buildings. The lessons can be taught in homerooms, health classes, and language arts classes or through an interdisciplinary team-teaching approach.

Even if the entire school does not adopt *No Putdowns*, the program can also be implemented in individual classrooms or in a single grade.

Creating a *No Putdowns* Classroom

As you launch the *No Putdowns* program, take steps to guarantee a positive and caring environment for students. When students feel appreciated and safe, they will be motivated and enthusiastic about *No Putdowns* activities. Here are some suggestions for preparing yourself and your students to take part in the program:

1. Structure activities to match the developmental qualities of your students.

Teachers report that middle-school students exist in an awkward “in-between” age when emotional development may lag behind physical maturity. Students often become extremely interested in social relationships, appear markedly egocentric in the eyes of adults and seem preoccupied with their personal appearance. But, as one middle-school teacher said about her science class, “emotionally, my students are like little fourth-graders!”

Because middle school is a time of transition, teachers working with younger middle-school students may choose to be more directive in presenting the lesson and provide considerable structure to the group activities. Teachers with older middle-school students will probably discover that the class enjoys exploring topics through group discussion and running many of the activities. These *No Putdowns* lessons work best when you can be flexible; “read” your class and give them just the amount of structure or autonomy that they need.

2. Build personal relationships. Teachers find that they are better able to motivate a class to behave appropriately and participate in learning activities if they have built strong, positive emotional connections with their students. Help students feel they are valued members of the classroom community by greeting them by name as they enter the classroom and giving equal attention to all students

when calling on them. Let students know you monitor and care about their academic success. Offer specific praise to students who do a good job on a class assignment or jot encouraging notes on homework assignments. Remember, too, that students appreciate adults who occasionally demonstrate a sense of humor!

For students with whom you find it particularly difficult to “connect”, Allen Mendler and Richard Curwin, developers of the *Discipline With Dignity* program, recommend the “2 by 10” strategy. Every day for 10 consecutive days, the instructor approaches the student and engages in 2 minutes of casual conversation. By the end of the 10 days, the teacher and student have usually established a personal connection.

Build classroom relationships by holding regular class meetings to discuss issues important to students. Facilitate these meetings in a manner that allows all students to feel safe, gives every student a chance to be heard and prevents any individual student from being singled out for criticism or ridicule. Provide feedback boxes into which students can drop anonymous notes raising issues that need to be addressed. (An activity in Skill 5 called “Going Off-Line” suggests using a notebook as a forum for students to share ideas, information or problems. You can introduce this activity earlier in the program to get suggestions for class meeting topics. As the *No Putdowns* program progresses through the skills, the nature of comments will probably evolve into more open communication.)

3. Model appropriate behaviors. Middle school students often have a keen sense of fairness and are not afraid to question authority. They are likely to hold you to the same standards of behavior that you expect of them. For example, if you set a rule in your classroom that students avoid using putdowns, don't be surprised if your students challenge any adult who berates them or speaks to them in an obviously sarcastic manner!

4. Promote student responsibility and leadership in group activities. Some instructors feel more comfortable lecturing to students than engaging them in active discussion and group participation. Middle school students, however, usually find group activities and discussion to be motivating because they are often intensely social and interested in sharing their opinions. Most of the lessons in the *No Putdowns* curriculum are structured around group activities and discussion. You may even decide to experiment by assuming an observer role for some lessons and giving your students the responsibility for facilitating the activity.

5. Train students to brainstorm. A number of *No Putdowns* lessons require students to brainstorm ideas. If your students have not had a great deal of experience in brainstorming, you will probably want to give them some explicit ground-rules:

- The sole purpose of brainstorming is to list many potentially useful ideas down in a short amount of time.
- Students should offer any creative response that comes to mind

- Students should not pass judgment on (or “put down”) other people's ideas.

Intervene if necessary during brainstorming to stop students from criticizing or ridiculing the ideas of others. “Reteach” brainstorming skills whenever needed.

6. Protect the emotional safety of students during *No Putdowns* activities. With few exceptions, the activities included in this manual do not require that students disclose sensitive information about themselves or their views. As students begin to develop a trust in their fellow group members and the *No Putdowns* framework, however, some may take a risk and share information that might make them vulnerable. You are responsible for maintaining an environment in which students feel emotionally safe to participate in *No Putdowns* activities. This responsibility includes your obligation to intervene immediately to stop students from using putdowns with each other. Students who continue to use putdowns or other negative speech, even when confronted repeatedly about this behavior, may need to be removed from the group.

7. Recognize when students need additional emotional support. School staff should always be aware of signs that a student is experiencing significant emotional or psychological difficulties. States have mandatory reporting procedures if the staff suspects that a student is a safety risk to self or others or is a victim of physical or sexual abuse.

Jump Start the Process

It takes time to work through the *No Putdowns* process. When you model the *No Putdowns* principles and behaviors from the start, you reinforce the skills and soon begin to see changes among the students.

1. Clearly define putdowns as any words or actions that are disrespectful of another person or group of persons. (See “Defining Putdowns” and Skill 1, Activity 1.)
2. Make it clear to everyone that putdowns, name-calling and degrading language are not tolerated. Be alert to racist, ethnic, sexual orientation and religious slurs.
3. Encourage students to take a stand against bullying, harassment and intolerance.
4. Focus on build-up behavior, such as encouragement, respectful listening and acknowledgement of accomplishments. (See explanation in “The Five Skills.”) Youth and adults need daily practice replacing putdowns with encouraging words. Display build-up phrases on posters and banners. Use build-ups during sports events, assemblies and field trips, and in school publications.
5. Focus on positive rather than negative traits of people.
6. Use constructive criticism rather than putdowns. Be specific in your comments.
7. When angry, deal with the situation without resorting to putdowns.
8. Avoid putdowns when reprimanding an adult or youth.
9. Point out the negative consequences of putdowns.
10. Point out the positive results of respectful behavior and communication.
11. Promote understanding and treat differences as assets.
12. Take advantage of “teachable moments” that occur in the classroom, hallways, cafeteria, bus or school grounds.
13. Keep a file of inspirational quotes; news stories about conflict and misunderstanding; stories about “good deeds” and positive accomplishments (especially those that feature teens); information about historical figures, sports stars, politicians or performers who are positive and negative role models.
14. Pay attention to movies, music, television shows and websites that are popular with students for examples of negative behaviors (putdowns, slurs, violence) and positive behaviors (encouragement, community-building, friendship, taking a stand).
15. Encourage and support parental participation in *No Putdowns*. Send explanations and suggestions for using the skills at home.
16. Remember that change comes slowly, but it does happen. Hang in there.
17. Practice, practice, practice.
18. Model, model, model.