



# DISCOVERING COMPASSION:

A School's Guide to Working with Difficult  
Children, Youth and Teens

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*Thank you to my family, friends, the University of Washington-Tacoma faculty, and my MSW cohort for all their patience, encouragement, and support.*

## **DEDICATION**

*This project is dedicated to the teachers, school social workers, school counselors, and school administrators who work tirelessly to provide their students with a well-rounded education, focusing not only their academic needs but their social-emotional needs as well.*

## **ABSTRACT**

On a daily basis school teachers, administrators, counselors, and social workers deal with students who present inappropriate classroom behaviors. These behaviors can create barriers for their future success. Mental illness, poor discipline, violence in the community, and the inability to understand cause and effect can all be contributing factors influencing poor behavior. Each of these lead to poor coping skills, little respect for authority, desensitization to violence, and lack of remorse for their actions in childhood and adulthood. Typically these children come from single, low-income families and spend more time in school and daycare than with their families. For this reason a reference guide was created to provide teachers and administrators with helpful tips and tools on how to deal with difficult behaviors that manifest throughout a school year. The goal of this reference guide is to help teachers and school administrators understand their students' overall development cultural influences; how to manage crises, incorporate positive discipline, and offer suggestions to motivate their students for success.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
Nothing is going to get better.  
It's not. - Dr. Seuss*

Have you ever had a child who blurts out in class, consistently moves around the classroom, spends more time wandering the school than in class, has more absences than days in the classroom, etc.? These students are understandably frustrating, difficult to teach, and hard to manage in a classroom.

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It is safe to say that these unresolved and inappropriate behaviors in early childhood can create barriers for their future success. Mental illness, poor discipline, violence in the community, and the inability to understand cause and effect can all be contributing factors in leading to poor behavior. Each of these lead to poor coping skills, little respect for authority, desensitization to violence, and no remorse for their actions in childhood and adulthood.

The children that fit this description typically come from homes managed by a single parent and in areas with little positive role modeling. In these communities, school social workers have skills that are beneficial for children experiencing anger and trauma showing inappropriate and aggressive behaviors towards peers and adults. However, not all districts employ school social workers and since children often spend the majority of their days in school or child care settings, teachers, school administrators, and childcare workers need to be given the tools and skills to offset the negative experiences these students face at home.

Historically, those on the federal level have determined that the best way to maintain these students has been to increase the students' academic rigor (*No Child Left Behind Act*), to provide alternative educational interventions (IEP's, 504 Plans, Title I, etc.), or to keep a child in their home school (*McKinney-Vento*). However, little has been done involving a child's social-emotional needs in relation to their education.

The goal of this reference guide is to provide schools with easy and effective tips and tools for handling the difficult behaviors and mental health issues of their students.

# **SECTION 1:**

## **UNDERSTANDING A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT**

*Children love and want to be loved and they very much prefer the joy of accomplishment to the triumph of hateful failure.  
Do not mistake a child for his symptom. – Erick Erickson*

Think for a moment about your childhood. How would you respond if the only interactions you had with adults were negative or neglectful? Would you know how to build healthy social relationships? Would you know your behavior was unhealthy? Why would you have motivation to change the 'label' you had been given?

Research has shown that children model the behaviors of their parent(s)/guardian(s). For example, if you have a child in your class who demonstrates poor coping skills (tantrums, acting out, etc.), it may be due to their parent's inability to handle stressful situations. This is particularly evident in households below the poverty line, run by single mothers, or families with mental illness.

As a teacher, it is important to understand that the preconceived ideas you form regarding these particular students will base the interactions you have with them. For example, if you maintain a negative relationship with these students (i.e., not praising their efforts, under-estimating their skills, consistently providing them with negative reinforcement for poor behavior), they will be more likely to act out during class and not reach their highest potential.

On the other hand, if, as a teacher, you stray away from the preconceived labeling of your students and instead work to build a positive and supportive relationship with your difficult students, the chances of their success greatly increase. In fact, some research has proven that the positive interactions between a student and their teacher can often combat the negative relationships they may be experiencing at home or in their community.

As a teacher, you have the ability to completely turn a child's life around by encouraging them, supporting them, and giving them a safe and supportive learning environment; students who were destined for failure could ultimately achieve success.

### **OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT**

The development of a child has been a focus of study for several centuries and as technology advances we will undoubtedly learn more about the impacts of the brain on the child's development, and the correlation on their behaviors. The most well known contributor in the realm of human development is Erik Erickson. His eight stages of development provide us with a foundational understanding of how and why individuals may become stuck in their developmental stages. The following table provides a brief overview and descriptions of Erickson's developmental stages:

Table 1.1: Erickson's 8 Stages of Development

| AGE                | STAGE                        | DESCRIPTION   |
|--------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Birth to 24 months | Trust vs. Mistrust           | Child learns to trust in adults to meet their basic needs. If adults are unable to meet those needs, a mistrust of adults is created.   |
| 2 to 3 years old   | Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt | Child develops the ability to master physical skills on their own, giving them a sense of independence. A lack of success in this skill can create a feeling of shame and doubt in a child.   |
| 3 to 5 years old   | Initiative vs. Guilt         | Child begins to explore and command their environment. If a child is successfully able to do this, they will obtain a sense of purpose. However, if a child obtains too much command over their environment and receives disapproval a sense of guilt is established. * |
| 6 to 11 years old  | Industry vs. Inferiority     | Youth learns to deal with societal demands created by a schooling environment. This will lead them to a sense of success or failure. *  |
| 12 to 18 years old | Identity vs. Role Confusion  | Teen learns to accept who they are as a person and embraces their individuality. Success will lead teens to be true to themselves, whereas, failure leads to a weak self-esteem. *  |
| 18 to 40 years old | Intimacy vs. Isolation       | Adults work to acquire long lasting relationships (romantic and otherwise) with other individuals. If this is not done successfully, adults will become lonely and isolated.  |
| 40 to 65 years old | Generative vs. Stagnation    | Adults work to create a legacy. This can be done through reproduction and forming role model relationships. If an adult is unsuccessful, then they will create a weak impact on the world.  |
| 65+ years old      | Ego Integrity vs. Despair    | Adults reflect back on their life accomplishments, either leading to a feeling of success and wisdom, or a feeling of despair, bitterness, and regret.  |

\* These stages will be referenced in the next subsection.

In addition to Erickson's eight stages of development, Abraham Maslow developed the hierarchy of needs. Essentially Maslow believed that a person's motivation for their behavior was developed based on the needs that were being met. For students whose parents may not have been able to meet these needs, they could have a more difficult time adjusting into a school setting. For example, they may struggle in appropriate social interactions with their peers. They may suffer from a lower self-esteem. Lastly, they may need affirmation from teachers and peers in order to feel

successful and reach self-actualization. These students may require additional one-on-one support.

Overall, in order for a child to be truly successful during their education they need to have family support to achieve their educational goals. However, I am sure that that for many students having family support may not be realistic.

As will be discussed in a later section, a child's economic status can often predict the behavior of a student. With this in mind, it is crucial not to label

these students or create preconceived ideas regarding their behaviors or the value they place on their education. Unfortunately for many students this can become difficult. As schools move towards technology based learning both in the classroom and at home, these children may be unable to keep up with educational demands, due to potentially not having the appropriate technology in their home

In comparison to Maslow's hierarchy these students and parents are focused on maintaining psychological and security needs, and having access to a computer and the internet are not seen as important as food, shelter, safety, etc. For these students to be the most successful they need support in meeting all their developmental needs.

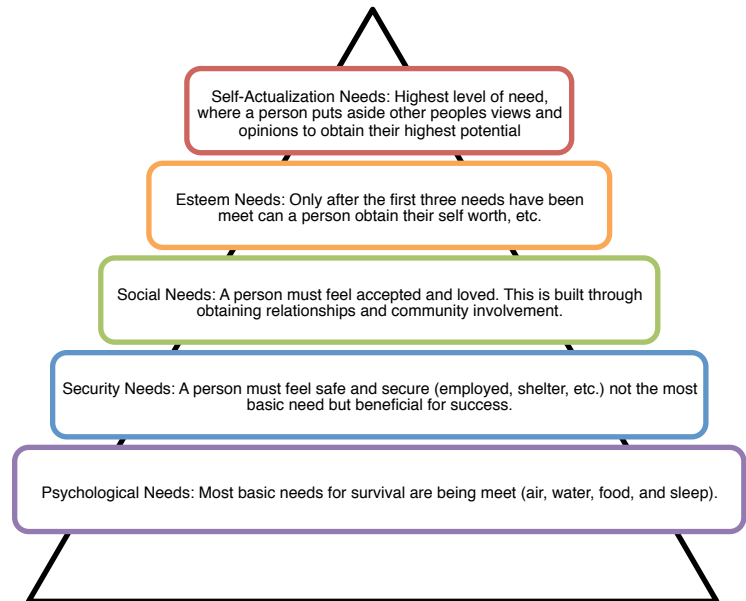


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Table 1.2: Students Educational Developmental Needs

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><u>EARLY CHILDHOOD (AGES 3-5)</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent parent and teacher support provides children with the greatest foundation for academic growth (Search Institute, 2005).</li> <li>• Educators need to provide children the ability to experience natural consequences and discipline in a positive manner promoting self-regulation and acceptable behaviors (Search Institute, 2005).</li> </ul> |
| <p><u>CHILDREN (AGES 5-9)</u></p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports from other adults outside of their parent figures, this is especially important for children coming from neglectful families (Search Institute, 2009).</li> <li>• Positive and supportive peer relationships are essential in the school settings (Search Institute, 2009).</li> <li>• Structure, consistency, and clear</li> </ul>                |

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
|                           | guidelines allow for students to learn the difference between right and wrong in a safe environment (Search Institute, 2009).  |
| <u>YOUTH (AGES 8-12)</u>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental engagement in their education leads students to understand the importance of receiving an education (Search Institute, 2006).</li> <li>• Consistent expectations and appropriate consequences (Search Institute, 2006).</li> </ul> |
| <u>TEENS (AGES 12-18)</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathetic, supportive, and structured learning environment (Search Institute, 2009).</li> <li>• Consistent expectations and appropriate consequences (Search Institute, 2006).<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>                                      |

### **TEACHING TO DEVELOPMENTAL AGE**

When you are teaching it is important to understand the development levels of your students. As seen through Erickson’s eight stages of development, by the time children reach school they should have developed a sense of trust in adults as well as a sense of independence. Issues with behavior begin when the developmental stages and tasks have not been completed. For example, if the student has been born into a household that neglects their needs the student will have little respect for adults and their authority. Additionally, if a student is not given the ability to gain independence (i.e., master potty training), they may appear less mature and not have gained confidence to complete tasks independently.

Teaching to a student’s developmental level increases your chance to facilitate their academic success and has the added benefit of helping the child meet developmental goals. Starting in preschool, students should be taught through play. This method of teaching allows for students to explore and manipulate their environment while still learning. As Erickson found, students who do not know how to appropriately control their environment will develop a sense of guilt, particularly when receiving consistent disapproval by adults. When children enter elementary school, they have to learn a new set of societal norms. For many students, up until this point their social interactions could be limited to mainly family members and could involve very little peer interaction; this could lead to difficulties adjusting to an unfamiliar environment with new rules and standards. For a student, who is used to creating and managing their own environment this transition can be extremely difficult, especially for a student who has underdeveloped coping skills or undiagnosed mental health needs. Lastly, by the time a student enters middle and high school they are beginning to develop as a person and are learning to accept who they are as an individual (i.e., gender identity, personality,

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<sup>1</sup> Revised with permission of Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN. For more information about the Developmental Assets, please visit [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

interests, likes and dislikes, etc.). Teachers working with this age group need to be able to identify those teens who are struggling and encourage their development.

Although 504 plan's, Response-to-Intervention (RTI), and Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) are beneficial when students need educational accommodations or specialized instructed they are limited in both time and consistency. As a general classroom teacher, you have the ability to engage students at their developmental level. The following table provides you with a description of how students learn developmentally.

Table 1.3: Students Developmental Learning Needs

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><u>PRESCHOOL:</u></p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn best through play.</li> <li>• Hands on learning through blocks, toys, sensory development, etc (Armstrong, 2006).</li> </ul>   |
| <p><u>ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (K-5):</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are learning how their environment works.</li> <li>• Students learn best through activity and theme-based programming, which can be unstructured and are performance focused outcomes not standardized outcomes.</li> <li>• Students learning styles can be identified (i.e., visual, kinetic, auditory) (Armstrong, 2006).</li> </ul>   |
| <p><u>MIDDLE SCHOOL (6-8):</u></p>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are in the first stages of identifying who they are as a person.</li> <li>• Students should have a social emotional focused education setting.</li> <li>• It is important for teachers to great a safe and positive environment for their students.</li> <li>• Teachers should be readily available for dialogue with their students regarding the issues they are facing day-to-day (Armstrong, 2006).</li> </ul> |
| <p><u>HIGH SCHOOL (9-12):</u></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are preparing to leave the academic field and entire adulthood.</li> <li>• Teachers should be taking on a mentorship role for their students.</li> <li>• Students should be participating in career development activities and college preparation programs (Armstrong, 2006).</li> </ul>  |

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:**

*The Best Schools* by Thomas Armstrong

## **SECTION 2:** **NOT ALL STUDENTS THINK LIKE US**

*Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.*  
- Mother Teresa

In teaching it is obvious that the students who are the most difficult to teach are the ones who do not fit the description of an 'ideal student.' However, as a teacher rather than only focusing on a student's negative behaviors use them as clues to understand their home life. Not every student is going to come from a loving and supportive environment; in fact in some districts you will be lucky to have parental support. This section is meant to serve as a reminder for students who live in these difficult environments. We will be looking particularly at the culture of poverty and a snapshot into the increased need for culture awareness when working with families of poverty and diversity.

### **CULTURE OF POVERTY**

In many ways the needs of today's students are changing and with school demands becoming unmanageable, their behaviors are becoming a burden to some teachers and administrators (Focus Group, November 7, 2013). Current data show that students who display inappropriate behaviors are at higher risk of being abused by adults (Afifi, McMillan, Asmundson, Pietrzak, & Sareen, 2011). Abuse due to aggressive behavior in a student can be related to poor parenting, inability to manage stress, poverty, frustration, mental health disorders, and poor social contacts (Baving, Laucht, & Schmidt, 2000; Fraser, 1996; Price, Chiapa, & Walsh, 2013; Stormshak, Bierman, McMahan, & Lengua, 2000). Although this does not make the abuse appropriate, it does open up doors for interventions. As will be discussed later, there are several interventions that can be used to help lessen poor behavior and enhance parenting skills.

Economics is a proven significant influence in a child's overall behavior (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998). When looking at a family's financial status there is an ability to predict the community they live in, their societal interactions, and if they are receiving public assistance. All of these factors can contribute to behavioral issues in youth. Those who have lower socio-economic status tend to live in communities that are recognizable through their extreme poverty, dependence on public assistance, lack of role models, high populations of single mother homes, and high rates of violence (De Coster, Heimer, & Wittrock, 2007).

Research shows disadvantaged regions tend to be grouped racially. However, race does not play a significant factor in a student's overall level of violence; instead the main contributor to the level of delinquency a student will participate in is based upon the income level of their community (De Coster et al., 2007). These environments often consist of similar ethnic groups and are typically made up of single parent households.

Factors leading to desensitization toward violence include, societal parenting pressure, mental illness, difficult children, little to no socialization, and lastly, no family support (Church, Jagers, & Taylor, 2012; De Coster et al., 2007).

Previous research has suggested that students who receive forms of public assistance are more likely to show aggression, disciplinary problems, and have lower academic achievement. Additionally these students are generally exposed to multiple versions of violence, such as social isolation, community exposure, and family abuse-particularly firsthand maltreatment (Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris, 1993). In terms of academic achievement, research found that when comparing socio-economic status one's income level has the greatest influence early in life. Meaning that if a significant income change were to take place later in childhood, the child's mentality towards wealth would not be affected. The same research found that students from low-income homes often significantly struggle with completing school (Duncan et al., 1998).

In some school situations teachers may have lower expectations for students from lower economic situations (Focus Group, November 7, 2013). When teachers form preconceived ideas regarding their student's behavior, whether it be positive or negative, the ideas will influence the interaction between the students and teacher. Students who experience negative relationships with their teachers will often have increased negative behaviors in the classroom and at home; these negative interactions between teachers and students do not often work to correct behavior but instead multiply the negative behaviors. On the other hand, research has shown that positive interactions at school are not always enough to counterbalance the negative experiences in the home and community (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Tremblay et al., 1992). In fact, it is not uncommon for these students to be held back in kindergarten, due to inappropriate social skills and poor academic achievement (Darney, Reinke, Herman, Stormont, & Jalongo, 2013). The relationship between teachers and their students whom exhibit anti-social behavior and struggle academically is extremely important in helping him or her reach their highest potential (Forster, Sundell, Morris, Karlberg, & Melin, 2012; Tremblay et al., 1992).

As previously mentioned, research has proven that poor behavior is often related to poor parenting; poor parenting is due to poor parental coping skills with outside stressors (i.e., finances, family, etc.) (Stromshak, 2000). These parents are not necessarily focused on modeling appropriate behavior for their children, and instead are working to provide for the basic needs of their children, food, shelter, attire, and so on (Church et al., 2012; Fraser, 1996). For many, poverty is a culture where things like education may not be valued. While violence, substance abuse, mental illness, foster care, unmet health needs, poor occupational pathways, and aggressive behavior (physically and sexually) may be seen as normal (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Fraser, 1996; Focus Group, November 7, 2013).

### **CULTURAL AWARENESS**

However despite what stereotypes may suggest, there is not a correlation between poverty, inappropriate behaviors, and a person's ethnicity. In fact, research has shown that being a member of a minority group does not create disadvantage when

compared to the white poor. What creates this stereotype is that families of diversity will leave poor communities if financially secure. Families that are left in poor communities tend to gravitate towards similar locations within a city. Overall, this creates a gap between ethnic groups and merely adds to the stereotypes of families living in poverty (De Coster et al., 2007).

Despite having similar cultural backgrounds these areas typically lack several factors that contribute to a student's development. Contributors include a lack of role models for students, poor socialization skills, unstable parenting, and negative learned behaviors (Church et al., 2012; De Coster et al., 2007; Fraser, 1996; Stormshak et al., 2000). Each of these factors contributes to a student's overall development. Students typically learn behaviors through role modeling. When these role models are financially unsuccessful, exemplify poor coping skills, and have poor social interactions, students will mirror these behaviors. Unfortunately, if these developing behaviors are not caught at a young age students have an increased risk of entering the court systems and a cycle of negative impoverished behavior has been created (Brennan, Shaw, Dishion, & Wilson, 2012; Duncan et al., 1998; Fraser, 1996).

Poverty has its own distinct culture. These families are not defined by race but instead by their lifestyles and overall priorities. In 2012, children from low-income families had a 66.2% high school graduation rate. However, they still maintain a 20.0% dropout rate the fourth highest rated group in the state (Came & Ireland, 2012).

Research has shown factors such as, a community's socioeconomic status, level of violence, positive interactions within the community, and the overall level of safety all contribute to a child's behavior. One area of greatest influence is the level of violence within the home and community. These neighborhoods do not only have violence related to abuse but also related to the lack of parental supervision. For example, parents can be unaware of the type of media their children are exposed. Parents may not be aware of developmentally appropriate video games and media. It is becoming common knowledge that children who are shown violence in the media are likely to create this same violence in their play. Students that are most effected by the violence are those who are not developmentally able to comprehend the difference between reality and false realities (Blumberg, Bierwirth, & Schwartz, 2008).

In addition to multiple levels of violence, these areas and homes tend to have high levels of clutter and chaos. These factors both in the home and in the neighborhood greatly impact a child's behavioral responses (De Coster et al., 2007; Price et al., 2013). Homes tend to be dirty and disorganized, which can be the result of long work hours, multiple jobs, parental burnout, and just a lack of knowledge in how to keep a home clean. Many times the chaos from within the home climate can be translated into their lifestyles. Families of poverty are also not able to provide their children with resources, which allow for children to have appropriate social interactions. These families tend to have employment opportunities that limit their access to gaining resources and parental training (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

If one were to compare impoverished children in the United States (US) with the children living in poverty globally, there would be many similarities. For example, children in poverty tend to be smaller, die in infancy, have significant health issues (both

physically and mentally), and lack appropriate health care services (Bradley & Corwyn, 2012). However, unlike global poverty, children in the US have some access to school social workers and other resources, at least throughout the school year and only if the staff is aware of the students needs. School social workers and counselors have the ability to work with these students consistently through out the school year, which enables these children to receive resources that not only benefit their long-term well-being but their academics as well. Hopefully through the effort of teachers, school administrator's, school social workers, and school counselors, the community and culture influence of poverty can be overcome for many students (Philippo & Blosser, 2013).

## SECTION 3: HOW TO HANDLE CRISIS'S

*At every crisis in one's life, it is absolute salvation to have some sympathetic friend to whom you can think aloud without restraint or misgiving. - Woodrow Wilson*

Knowing how to handle a student in crisis is understandably difficult. Students may not be willing to share their feelings, they may share their feelings at inappropriate times, and they may not know how to communicate their feelings. For students of abuse, they may feel unsafe sharing their feelings, that they will be putting their siblings or other parent at risk by letting people know. For other students it could be a defense mechanism and school is a safe place where they do not have to focus on the issues at home and in their family. All of these behaviors and reactions can be limiting to a student's education and create barriers for students.

### SPECIFIC CRISIS

The crises our students are facing consist of:

- *Abuse*: Physical, mental, sexual and emotional trauma created by another person in the student's surrounding environment, this could include: family, friend, neighbor, and babysitter, anyone that seeks power over another individual in a harmful manner.
- *Neglect*: Adult in the home does not meet the basic needs of the student in their home. Neglect is the hardest form of abuse to identify and for Child Protective Services confirm.
- *Parental suicide*: Students who lose a parent/guardian to suicide can lead to children feeling lost, alone, and blaming themselves for the parent's death.
  - Child's age is a critical factor in how they handle the loss of a parent:
    - Less than 2 years of age – Children have little understanding of death and associate death with feelings of separation.
    - Ages 2-5 – Children struggle with the universality of death.
    - Ages 6-8 – Children understand that death cannot be reversed but think it only happens to the elderly.
    - Ages 8-11 – Children understand the meaning of death but only through how their parents explain the death (Baker & Sedney, 1996).
  - Student Behavior which could be seen in a classroom:
    - Preschool (up to 5): Aggression, anxiety, and regression in mental health and physical abilities.
      - Example: sleep disturbance, tantrums, reverting to a younger age, soiling of pants, etc.
    - School age (6-10): Denial, taking on a caretaker role, guilt, and phobias.
      - Example: "everything is okay," awareness of health.

- Adolescents: Hiding emotions, need to “fit-in,” depression, “acting-out,” and unfairness.
    - Example: running away, delinquency, drug use, risk taking (Baker & Sedney, 1996).
- *Depression*: In student’s, depression can take two forms. The first is long periods of sadness; the second is anger and aggression. These changes in behavior could be a result of a traumatic event or a significant loss. However, they could also be signs of a growing mental health concern. No matter the case, students that show signs of prolonged sadness should be carefully observed in order to find what could have triggered this behavior (abuse, bullying, loss, chemical imbalance, etc.).
- *Anxiety*: Student’s could be dealing with an insurmountable amount of pressure at home and at school and an inability to know how to cope with these feelings. Finding friends, self-confidence, grades, decision-making, etc. These students could show their anxiety through exploding with frustration, easily giving up on simple tasks, etc. As a teacher providing these students with tools that can help lessen their anxiety is beneficial. This could be as simple as changing your vocabulary, when referring to testing, or creating a safe and calming area in your classroom for students who are consistently anxious.
- *Chronic illness*: Students could be dealing with a diagnosis of a chronic or terminal illness, for either themselves or a loved one. In these instances normality may no longer be a reality for them. Students may no longer be able to attend school, they may have to make dietary changes, they may have to miss significant amounts of school, or they may have to lessen their level of activities or find alternative activities. Students may also be exhibiting many different emotions, anxiety, sadness, frustration, anger, etc. When teaching these students, it is important to keep their learning environment normal while working with the student to make sure their new needs are being met.
- *Social isolation*: Student’s, who have mental health concerns or have poor socialization skills and coping skills, could be at risk for isolation. These are the students that are identified as “loners” by their peers, are easily be overlooked by teachers and appear to be normal students to administrators. Unfortunately for some of these students, teachers notice these oddities too late. Teachers and administrators should be careful to not ignore the self-isolated students. Instead create open opportunities for them to learn socialization skills within the safety of a small group setting, in hopes of reversing their behavior.
- *Divorce*: Student’s, no matter what the age, will struggle when their parents divorce, especially if a custody battle beginnings. As a teacher it is important to create a stable and safe environment where students are able to openly talk to you about their fears.
- *Financial stress*: Although in an ideal home it is not the student’s responsibility to provide for their family or worry about financial matters, it will be something that arises within their life. Think about it this way, when you were a child, would you be focused on math if you didn’t know where you would be sleeping that night or

if you would have food over the weekend. Despite being an extreme example, for many students this their reality. As a teacher it is important to validate their feelings and then after a few moments encourage the student to give the lesson a try. Use it as an opportunity to talk to students about worries. The worries over things they can control and worries over things they cannot control. Gently work with these students to learn how to set aside some of his or her worries and focus on the tasks they have at hand.

- *Parentification*: This is when students are taking on the parent and adult role in his or her home. Depending on the home this could look different for many individuals, students could be taking care of their siblings, students could be taking care of their parents and students could be the primary breadwinner or manager of the home. Despite student's keeping this information secret and being reinforced by their parents to do so, eventually this information could be released and result in students being removed from their parents care, which could cause them a great deal of stress, knowing that their parent has no one taking care of them.
- *Death of a loved one*: Experiencing loss is difficult for any one but especially for students who developmentally cannot comprehend what it means to lose someone. This can result in devastation when an animals dies, as well as, inconsistent but ongoing grieving when a grandparent or parent passes away. As teachers its okay to let your students express their grief and emotions, in fact it's healthy, it may be beneficial to come up with educational strategies for them as to how they can cope with this loss.
  - See Parental Suicide

### **IN CLASS BATTLES: DE-ESCALATION TIPS**

Now that we have an understanding of the different crisis students could be facing. It is important to understand ways to deal with these in a classroom setting. When dealing with students that are easily triggered to anger de-escalating the student's behavior needs to be on the forefront of a persons mind. Typically, elementary schools are given one counselor/social worker who is responsible for the mental health needs of every student. This is compared to middle school and high schools, where do to bigger populations more mental health staff is hired. Because elementary schools have only one counselor or social worker, teachers in these settings will have less administrative support when dealing with crisis because most crises are dealt with in a triage type manor. Here are a few techniques, specifically geared to elementary teachers, which will help you safely de-escalate issues that may arise in your classroom. In a later section you will find classroom discussion guides and handouts that can be copied and used repeatedly.

#### **CRISIS INTERVENTIONS**

##### **Childhood Interventions (Kindergarten – 5<sup>th</sup> grade):**

- Abuse:

- Teach students the importance of staying resilient in the face of adversity (see *What is Resiliency* in Discussion Guide & Worksheets for Classrooms).
- Report any abuse or suspected abuse to: school social worker or counselor.
  - Follow district's/school's protocol when reporting suspected abuse.
  - To make a report call: Child Protective Services Hotline at 1-866-ENDHARM
  - All reports must be made no later than 48 hours after the abuse was disclosed.
- Consult with the school social worker or counselor at your school to develop a safety plan for the student in the classroom.
- Neglect:
  - Teach students the importance of staying resilient in the face of adversity (see *What is Resiliency* in Discussion Guide & Worksheets for Classrooms).
  - Report any abuse suspected abuse to: School social worker or counselor.
    - Follow district's/school's protocol when reporting suspected abuse.
    - To make a report call: Child Protective Services Hotline at 1-866-ENDHARM
    - All reports must be made no later than 48 hours after the abuse was disclosed.
  - Consult with the school mental health professional at your school to develop a safety plan for the student in the classroom.
- Parental Suicide:
  - Teach students the importance of staying resilient in the face of adversity (see Discussion Guide & Worksheets for Classrooms).
  - Section 3: Parental Suicide offers descriptions of behaviors your children could be demonstrating in your classroom, allowing for teaching methods to be adapted to fit the students new needs.
  - Discuss with the class how important it is for the grieving student to feel as if life at school is normal.
- Depression:
  - *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss looks at how people's feelings vary on a day-to-day basis and how that's normal.
  - It's important to monitor depressed behaviors and remain in contact with parents and school social worker or counselor to determine if the depressions are a chemical imbalance.
- Anxiety:
  - *Wilma Jean the Worry Machine* by Julia Cook (Activity and Guide book also available) helps students learn the difference in the types of worry the experience.
  - *Is a Worry Worrying You?* by Ferida Wolff and Harriet May Savitz helps students understand anxiety and worry.

- Try practicing breathing techniques with students who struggle with testing as a way to help them focus and relax (see Discussion Guide & Worksheets for Classrooms).
- Chronic Illness:
  - Have students create cards for student battling with illness and often missing school.
  - Show support to students dealing with illness, approved snacks, etc.
- Social Isolation:
  - Use team-building activities in the classroom as a way to help all students work together (see Discussion Guide & Worksheets for Classrooms).
- Divorce:
  - *Dinosaurs Divorce (A Guide for Changing Families)* by Marc Brown and Laurie Krasny Brown helps children understand how their parents still love them even if they do not live in the same home.
  - It's important to remind students that it is not their fault that their parents got a divorce.
- Financial Stress:
  - Have a discussion regarding worry, different types of worry. Explain the difference between adult worry and children worry (use books recommended in the anxiety section).
  - Parentification:
    - Have a classroom meeting discussing the adult responsibilities and child responsibilities. Remind students that things, such as, getting themselves up and ready for school, making sure their parents were up for work, is not their responsibility, etc.
- Death of a loved one:
  - *When Someone Very Special Dies* by Marge Heegaard helps students understand how to cope with death of a loved one.
  - Provide students an opportunity to write sympathy cards to the student, which are teacher approved.
  - Provide students with a safe place to express their emotions.
  - Remind your students that it's okay to grieve and show that they might be sad or hurting.
  - Parent death:
    - If a student losses a parent discuss with the class how important it is for the grieving student to feel as if life at school is normal.
    - Remind students not to bring up the loss but to be sensitive if the student is having a hard time adjusting.
    - Talk to the students close friends to remind them to support the student and be a listening ear if they need a friend.

Be aware of what is going on in the classroom that may have triggered the upheaval. If you are able to spot the warning signs of a student losing their temper or becoming upset then you may be able to avoid a potential breakdown in your classroom. Warning

signs will be different with each child; here are a few common warning signs that something might be wrong with your student(s):

- Outgoing students suddenly becomes withdrawn and socially isolate themselves from close friends.
- Students might start to wear more layers or long sleeve clothing to cover bruising.
- When interacting with students they might avoid eye contact and cower.
- They might be easily spooked (become physically uncomfortable if someone comes up behind them, or just always appear to be on edge)
- They might become avoidant when working

You are probably able to list more behaviors and warning signs than the few listed above, just remember it is important to pay attention to the changed behaviors. If not dealt with these crises in a child's life will become normal and they may not have the strength or ability to overcome them.

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If you end up finding yourself dealing with a student that has reached survival or crisis mode, here are some suggestions when dealing with this behavior:

- Remain calm when speaking to the student.
- Talk to the student in a clear and calm voice that has an authoritative tone.
- Use "I" messages when given students commands (ex. "I need you to do...").
- Get on the child's level as best as you can when speaking with them.
- Redirect the classes to focus on their work, if another student is melting down.
- Provide students with a safe and calm place within the classroom to calm down before returning to their activity.
- Provide your students with activities that relieve stress and tension: stress balls, etc.
- Use Motivational Interviewing (see Section 5) techniques to try and get the student to process what happened and what you need to do to find a solution.

If the student becomes violent:

- Remove either the student or the rest of the class from the room: do which ever is fastest and easiest.
- Stay at a distance from the child and allow them the chance to cool down, it may be best to just sit silently and not talk to the student.
- When student becomes calm, have them relocated to the mental health counselors or principals' office.
- If the student is unable to calm down have trained staff remove the student from the room so you can continue teaching.

Remember the school is a team and as a teacher you have people that are able to support you with your difficult students. Unfortunately, in an elementary school resources and staff members are limited so setting safeguards for you and your students is extremely important.

## **SECTION 4:** **WHAT IS POSITIVE DISCIPLINE?**

*Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each. - Plato*

Interventions, which are currently being used in schools, include: Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and Behavioral Management (BM) looking at children's specific behaviors and how to improve them within the educational setting. Overall, these interventions are primarily used for students with severe behavioral disorders, which impede their ability to remain successful in a general education setting. The strategies for this intervention include; the placement of students in an individualized learning environment with specialized teachers (Forster et al., 2012).

Although, these interventions have proven successful they are not accessible to all students. In order to receive an FBA and BM, a student must qualify for a behavioral or emotional Individualized Education Plan (IEP) through the special education program (Forster et al., 2012). If a student does not qualify for a behavioral IEP then schools are often left to find alternative interventions.

### **LOOKING AT THEIR STRENGTHS**

Despite the growing understanding we have on child development and appropriate discipline, many families still use corporal punishment when dealing with their student's behavior. This could mean that not only is your student dealing with negative attention at school but they are also dealing with negative attention at home. Now this is not to say that you should not report your student's negative behaviors at school to their parents, but be aware of the environment they may be entering when they get home. On the other hand you may have students whose parents pay little to no attention to their negative behavior or to the student in general. In fact their negative behavior in the classroom could merely be attention seeking, if they are desperately seeking adult interaction, praise, and general acknowledgement.

Research has found that interventions focusing on behavior corrections need all of the individuals in the student's life to be involved. All parties' need to enforce the same limits, model the same behavior, role play the desired behaviors, and reinforce the goal behavior (Fields, 2012). Fields (2012) found that students who have difficult behaviors in class are often the ones receiving the most attention and setting the tone of the classroom environment. Additional research shows it is ultimately the teacher's responsibility to learn how to manage disruptive behavior with positive reinforcement (Fields, 2012). Essentially, similar interventions work to help the students who do not qualify for behavioral resources through the district. Often the only behavioral intervention schools can offer students, families, and administrators are difficult to enter and only available to students with diagnosable and severe behavioral issues.

Otherwise students, parents, teachers, and administrators are given very little support when dealing with students who do not fit into a specific box.

Having some quick discipline tricks comes in handy as students and class's change, especially as you are working with students who are dealing with much bigger issues than previous generations.

Some research found that it was more effective for teachers to praise their student's positive behaviors and their strengths instead of focusing on their negative actions. Think about it this way, would you be motivated if you lived in a family, where you were only told that you were going to fail, where you were ignored, where you were told that you were worthless or going to amount to nothing? Of course not, to be truly successful one must be told that they are important and successful. Research found that focusing on a student's positive behavior was more beneficial than focusing on their negative behavior. However, they did discover that teachers were inconsistent in their praise and eventually stopped praising the students. It is important that student praise remains consistent throughout the year and does not lessen; this could lead to student's negative behaviors reemerging.

If your working with students whose negative behaviors are clearly attention seeking, simply ignore the student and their behavior, by doing this and rewarding the students for being on task the student can begin to see that if they comply to instruction they will receive a reward, approval, and attention. **DO NOT: announce that you are working on ignoring one particular student. This is not beneficial to the class or the student. In fact this tactic will only increase the attention seeking behavior, make the student feel labeled and out-casted, does not show that we need to accept everyone for who they are, and lastly, reflects badly on your teaching showing that you have no control of your classroom.**

### **IT'S NOT ALWAYS ADHD**

It's no secret that many people think the only thing schools suggest when dealing with negative behaviors is to get the student on Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) medication. It is important to remember that not all students suffer from ADHD. In fact it is now considered a neurological developmental disorder. Essentially, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders: Fifth Edition* (DSM-V) suggests that children who experience ADHD have an under developed brain due to lack of frontal lobe usage (Baving et al., 2000; *Highlights of changes from DSM-IV-TR to DSM-5*, 2013).

If every child that has the occasional blurt out, have a short attention span, have a little more energy, and are easily distracted were considered ADHD then the entire school, students, and administrators would be on ADHD medication. We all have moments or days where focusing is harder than others, we all have days where our energy level is a little more amped up. It in no way signifies that we have a neurological developmental disorder. In fact, it could very well mean the opposite, we could be overjoyed about an exciting event, we could be overly comfortable in our environment, we might have matured slower than our peers, or our parents might not have had

appropriate parenting skills. There are so many factors that contribute to a student's negative behavior that it is unfair to label them as a child with ADHD.

Now in all fairness there are some students who do have ADHD and where medication is specifically beneficial to their overall way of life. However, in order for the student to receive support for diagnoses it needs to come from a medical physician in addition to showing that their daily life is significantly impaired by their disability. If you are merely going off the fact that a student is on-task one day and off task another day, you may want to do some further investigating as to what is causing this behavior. For example, is it only during a certain subject that they are distracted? Is their parent in the military and they become more difficult when the parent is gone for long periods of time? Do students tend to be more restless at the beginning of the week and/or end of the school week? Does the student become more distracted after lunch?

These students also, are not always wanting to be the "problem student" they may not necessarily be seeking punishment and wanting to consistently be in trouble. Maybe there is an underlying issue for why they are struggling during certain subjects, maybe they just get tired after lunch and need to have more movement, maybe there are issues going on at home so it makes it difficult to concentrate. With all this in mind here is a list of developmentally appropriate suggestions for dealing with these particular students. Due to the majority of diagnosis for ADHD taking place when a student is in elementary school this list will focus specifically on students K-5<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF DISCIPLINE**

As many of us know there is a much greater buy in for elementary students when creating strategies that will shape the students behaviors. Note: Many of these ideas may overlap, what makes them developmentally different are the approaches, the vocabulary, and the interactions you use when working with your individual grade level.

#### **DO PROVIDE...**

##### **Kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade:**

- Set clear expectations and rules creating a structured environment.
- Have a comfortable room temperature.
- Use comfortable lighting/sounds.
- Maintain consistency during classroom transitions and when giving directions to students.
- Give students snack breaks throughout the day.
- Have quiet time where entire class has a few minutes of rest time after lunch.
- Use Brain Breaks:
  - Have students get into groups based on numbers, colors, letters, etc.
  - You can also Google: 'Brain Breaks' for further websites, blogs, and video ideas.
- Take wiggle breaks this allows for your class to stand up and get all the wiggles out, for a few seconds, in a controlled manor before returning to an activity.
- Reward those students who display positive behavior with stickers. Do not reward children displaying poor behavior until behavior changes.

- Speak gently and yet sternly to students who are being disciplined. Remind them of the expectation, how they broke the expectation and discuss with them what they can do differently next time to meet that expectation.
- Teach cause and effect in the classroom. Consistently remind students that their behavior and actions affect other people in either positive and/or negative ways.
- Teach empathy in the classroom.
  - Define what empathy is (i.e. “Understanding how someone else may be feeling”), what it looks like (i.e. asking someone if they would like a hug, etc), what it sounds like (i.e. “I am sorry your...”)
- Work on developing your students coping skills (i.e., if you get mad you should...; if you get sad you should...).

### 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade:

- Set clear expectations and rules creating a structured environment.
- Have a comfortable room temperature.
- Use comfortable lighting/sounds.
- Maintain consistency during classroom transitions and when giving directions to students.
- Give students snack breaks throughout the day.
- Use Brain Breaks:
  - Have students get into groups based on numbers, colors, letters, etc.
  - Have students split into teams and are quizzed on upcoming test information; students must stand in a line.
  - You can also Google: “Brain Breaks” for further websites, blogs, and video ideas.
- Extra recess can be earned by having students maintain a positive behavior throughout the day.
- Reward those students who display positive behavior with a special reward or prize.
- Only acknowledge positive behaviors within the classroom. Do not let extremely negative behavior go undisciplined, but do not focus simply on the negative students.
- If you have students that struggle with staying on task, have them become someone’s accountability partner.
  - Accountability partners are students who exemplify mature behavior and are not easily distracted in their learning. Their role is to provide students, who struggle staying on task with support and encouragement.
  - Accountability partners can be used to: help students follow along during instruction, be aware of changes in their behavior, be able to answer any extra questions students might have regarding an assignment, etc.
- Create a team/family environment in your classroom, where monthly special activities can be earned, if everyone in the class maintains the same behavioral standard.
- Teach students the importance of using “I” messages: “I feel this way when you do this...” “I feel this way when you say this...” “I feel this way when you act like

that...” Remind students that using an “I” message to tell others who you are feeling is much more effective than simply saying, “you make me so...”

- Teach empathy in the classroom:
  - Define what empathy is (i.e. “Understanding how someone else may be feeling”), what it looks like (i.e. giving someone a hug who is upset, etc), what it sounds like (i.e. “I am sorry your...”)
- Develop and define students coping skills, help them realize what their triggers are in stressful and upsetting situations so they can avoid the negative behaviors that may result.
- If behaviors are consistent, punishments should be harsher after several documented occurrences.
  - Suspensions are appropriate, if the child is able to see them as a consequence and not as a way to get out of school.

### DON'T DO...

#### Kindergarten – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade:

- Punishments such as, physical time outs, manual labor, public mockery, etc. are not appropriate for the classroom settings.
  - Timeouts should not be done in a manner where students are called out in front of their peers and told to stand in the corner.
  - Manual labor should only be done if a student has made a physical mess in the classroom.
    - Students should only clean up the mess that they made, they should not have to clean up others messes or be given inappropriate cleaning tools.
  - Student’s negative behaviors should not be mocked or made fun of, this only adds fuel to the fire.
- Student’s poor behavior should not be minimized if they are severely disruptive to the learning environment (i.e., uncontrollable screaming, throwing objects, and tantrum behavior).
- Students should not be sent out to the hallway unsupervised for punishment.
- Students should not be sent to a buddy classroom more than 4+ times a day.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade:

- Punishments such as, physical time outs, manual labor, public mockery, etc. are not appropriate for the classroom settings.
  - Timeouts should not be done in a manor where students are called out in front of their peers and told to stand in the corner.
  - Manual labor should only be done if a student has made a physical mess in the classroom.
  - Students should only clean up the mess that they made, they should not have to clean up others messes or be given inappropriate cleaning tools.
  - Student’s negative behaviors should not be mocked or made fun of this only adds fuel to the fire.

- Student's poor behavior should not be minimized if they are severely disruptive to the learning environment (i.e., uncontrollable screaming, throwing objects, and tantrum behavior).
  - Students should not be sent out to the hallway unsupervised for punishment.
  - Students should not be sent to a buddy classroom more than 4+ times a day.
  - Students should not be able to manipulate their way out of getting punished.
- Suggestions:
- Build discipline based student histories
  - Do not let negative home life sway your decision. You are probably the most structured and stable adult they have in their life.
  - Do not use sarcasm with students in regards to their behavior (this can be misinterpreted by the student).
  - Do not let continually disrespectful/inappropriate behavior go unattended (i.e., talking back, inappropriate language, sleeping in class, better than you attitude, etc.)

Although some of these interactions may seem obvious, in the heat of a stressful moment you might forget what is appropriate discipline. Teaching, is not an easy career path, you spend 8 hours in a classroom with 30 children and have little to no down time. You are consistently having to problem solve and do not always have time to logically make decisions. Having some go to reminders can be beneficial in the heat of the moment. The list of "does" is meant to also be a list of preventative safeguards to hopefully avoid negative behaviors altogether.

Remember this is not an exhaustive list and all students are different but hopefully this list will work as a steppingstone and reminder for appropriate discipline. Think about it this way. Your student is someone's child, would you want to come to school and see your child standing outside of the classroom for no apparent reason? Would you want to see your child on their hands and knees using baby wipes to wipe the floor, without knowing why? Probably not, when in doubt with discipline, consider how it will affect the student but also how it will look to parents and other staff members.

## **SECTION 5:** **HOW TO MOTIVATE YOUR STUDENTS**

*Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it. - Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Thus far the focus has been on dealing with the negative behaviors of students. Now we are going to transition into how to support, motivate, and care about these students. Typically, a student's social emotional learning is overlooked in classroom settings because of all the educational demands placed on them at the federal level. For some students, who come from poverty, struggle with mental health issues, are culturally diverse, and/or may be living in a negative environment (i.e., gangs, drugs, alcoholic parents, abuse guardians, neglect, illegal immigrant, etc.) they may never see themselves succeeding academically.

As a teacher, your job is to not write these students off as the rest of society has done, but to take a stand for them. To build resiliency in them, to remind them they can achieve any goal through perseverance and determination. Without even knowing it you are the foundation of a child's academic success, you are a stepping stone in their career path, on their decision to pursue higher education, you are the cornerstone of whether or not they can provide a better, safer, and happier environment for their future families. You could be the first person to show them compassion, build on their strengths and give them a reason to have a dream.

### **WHAT DRIVES YOUR STUDENTS?**

It's no secret that each and every one of your students is different. Not only do they have different cultural and community backgrounds, but also varying drives, passions, and motivators. Working in a school gives you a unique position to expand on your student's motivators, passions, and strengths. Unfortunately for some students, expanding their motivation and passion, means their passion and motivation needs to first be discovered. If we are able to tap in to a student's motivation, we will not only give them a drive for success, but we can create a more peaceful learning and teaching environment.

There are two primary reward focuses motivating your students. Having a basic understanding of reward systems can help you find what drives your students desire for success. First of all, there are intrinsic rewards versus extrinsic rewards. If you have students who are driven by intrinsic rewards, typically, they are motivated by activities that they find enjoyable and instill within them a sense of worth. Intrinsic rewards could also be geared toward relationship building. For

example, students might be driven by how they are viewed by others, such as teachers,

#### **INTRINSIC REWARDS**

- Participating on a sports team.
- Participating in an arts program (i.e., dance, music, painting, etc.).
- Earning satisfactory grades.
- Receiving affirmation or praise for working hard.

peers, family, etc. Although these students are easy to teach long term, if students continue to seek motivation through how others view them, they can forget what makes them truly happy and instead develop a lost sense of self worth if they do not consistently receive the appropriate affirmation and support from individuals.

On the other hand, students who are motivated through extrinsic rewards are

#### EXTRINSIC REWARDS

- Receiving stickers or small trinket.
- Receiving school reward points.
- Receiving large token after completing a goal.
- Receiving public acknowledgement for accomplishments.

focused on avoiding punishment and receiving praise and tangible rewards. Although, it may be difficult to initially find what tangible rewards motivate different students, they are often easily motivated if they receive immediate gratification. Unlike students that have intrinsic motivation, these students may struggle with the concept of delayed gratification or verbal praise. They may need direct connection between the expectation and the consequences. For example, students must complete four pages of math to receive a reward, however if they are unable to complete four pages,

then there might some form of consequence. On the other hand, harsh consequences should only occur if the students demonstrate off task behavior.

After determining what motivates your students, you can begin to learn what they consider to be their passion. For example, if you have a student who is intrinsically motivated through participation in sports, giving sport focused examples for that student, could be beneficial for their learning. Or if you have an extrinsic reward student who you discover is motivated through video games, keeping video games inspired stickers on hand could be helpful, or working with students' parents to create a take home behavior chart which earns them video game playing time after school.

Whatever positive motivators you find for your students, use this information to your advantage. As we all know students that are motivated are more likely to succeed academically and beyond. Do not merely overlook your students motivation but embrace them, if not only to benefit the students, but also make your teaching environment calmer and more focused on everyone's desire to learn.

### **MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING**

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a newer skill being applied in classrooms but the concept has been in use in the mental health world for quite some time. The concept of MI comes from substance abuse recovery programs; essentially the goal is to change negative behavior to positive behavior and the whole change is client-driven. In terms of using this in a classroom, you are wanting your student's negative behaviors to decrease so their positive behaviors can increase while simultaneously increasing their success socially, emotionally, and academically.

When using MI there are two important acronyms to remember when interacting with your students. The first is OARS: (1) Open-ended questions, (2) Affirmations, (3) Reflective listening, (4) Summary statements. The second is FRAMES: (1) Feedback, (2) Responsibilities, (3) Advice, (4) Menu, (5) Empathy, and (6) Self-efficacy (Sheldon,

2010). By applying these two acronyms when interacting with your students you will be opening up gateways for in-depth discussions, boosting your students communication skills, and building a safe place for students, who may not otherwise feel safe.

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The following is a step-by-step guide on how to incorporate MI into your interactions with students on a day-to-day basis.

### STEP 1: USING OARS

1. *Open-ended questions*: When asked correctly students cannot respond with a “yes” or “no” answer. These questions tend to be information seeking and used to collect data about a situation, event, etc.
  - a. Open-ended question: “What happened when...”
  - b. Closed-ended question: “Did you...”
2. *Affirmations*: These are used to empower your students and are meant to be genuine and sincere statements that build a student up and do not tear them down.
  - a. Do not make your tone of voice overly excited or supportive, where you are coming off as insensitive; but do not be too sarcastic or snide sounding in tone either.
3. *Reflective listening*: When done correctly students are hearing where their inconsistencies or struggles may be in their thinking. In addition, it shows them that you are focused on what they are saying and want to help them steer their ideas in a positive direction.
  - a. “It sounds like you were saying that you were studying for the test by only studying missed vocabulary words, but your not sure that was enough?”
  - b. “If I am hearing you right, you want new ways to help with doing your homework but you’re not sure what to do?”
4. *Summary Statements*: These are used to end a conversation with a student, they reflect back what you discussed and the main ideas while allowing for the student to make any clarifying comments or solutions (Sheldon, 2010).
  - a. “So we discussed that you want to work on improving your math grade and that you realized you’ll need help accomplishing this goal.”

### STEP 2: USING FRAMES

1. *Feedback*: All behavioral feedback should be given to students in a nonjudgmental factor. As a teacher you need to be able to clearly define how the accepted behavior was broken and what steps need to take place to fix the behavior.
2. *Responsibility*: Phrasing things so that students are able to see that their actions contribute to their behavior, or vice versa, will give students the ability to make the choice on if they want to take responsibility in changing their actions/behaviors.
3. *Advice*: As a teacher you have the unique opportunity to give students, your outside perspective and advice. However, remember that your advice always

comes with a take it or leave it clause. Do not force your students to take your advice as the end all solution.

4. *Menu*: Provide students with multiple choices and solutions to problems. This not only gives them a sense of autonomy but also works on decision-making and critical thinking.
5. *Empathy*: Humanizing yourself to your students is okay. Allow them to know that you can see they are trying to change, despite how hard it might be.
6. *Self-efficacy*: Don't be a high school cheerleader, but show your students that you support them and encourage them to be successful in their goals and aspirations, no matter how small (Sheldon, 2010).

Although, MI may seem simple and you very well may be using it in your classroom already, by purposefully using it as a framework for interacting with your students. You will not only develop a better understanding of your students but also will be modeling good communication skills for your students to use later in life.

#### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

*Motivational Interviewing for Effective Classroom Management: The Classroom Check-Up Guide* by Wendy M. Reinke, Keith C. Herman, & Randy Sprick  
*Motivational Interviewing for Educators*: [www.motivationalinterviewing.org](http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org)

### **TEACHING CHARACTER**

Consider this for a moment: you may be one of the few people who exhibit positive character traits for students to model. Essentially the character traits that you demonstrate (verbally and through your actions) to your students on a day-to-day basis could be the only positive values they experience. One way to make sure your influence will fully impact your students is to set aside time for class meetings. These meetings can take 10 to 15 minutes and are able to facilitate a discussion amongst the entire class focusing on specific character traits that are important. For example, topics such as resiliency, empathy, honesty, acceptance, hard work, caring, compassion, respect, etc. are great conversations when talking with students about character development.

However, as teachers these 10 to 15 minute classroom meetings focusing on character development may be unrealistic with Common Core Standards. The following are some lesson outlines that can be used to generate discussion but still will allow for academic instruction:

#### General Outline:

- Define general character trait and have an open discussion about what this character trait looks like and how it affects students.
- Carry over the discussion of character into journal writing, allowing for students to write, objectively, in a narrative, compare and contrast, creative writing, or other writing style.

Some basic resources:

- *Howard B. Wigglebottom Series* by Howard Binkow
  - Free Video Version: <https://wedolisten.org/media/>
- Smartboard Activities: <http://exchange.smarttech.com/index.html#tab=0>

Starter List of Character Trait Books:

- Empathy:
  - *Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learn About Empathy* by Dr. Bob Somson
- Acceptance:
  - *The Crayon Box That Talked* by Shane Derolf
    - Print out crayon templates (see Discussion Guide & Worksheets for Classrooms) and have students do a self-portrait within the crayon and display your class's work on a bulletin board.
- Kindness
  - *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud
- Hard Work
  - Create a writing assignment for students to write about someone they think has had to work hard to be successful and why.
- Respect
  - *My Mouth is a Volcano* by Julia Cook
- Forgiveness
  - *Lily's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes
- Honesty
  - *The Empty Pot* by Demi
- Fairness
  - *How to Behave and Why* by Munro Leaf

School Wide Intervention:

- Character building assemblies – Teachers select one student from their class who best portrays that month's character quality. Assemblies can then be held once a month or every other month where these students are presented with awards from the principal to reinforce the positive characteristics being shown.
- Posters and quotes regarding the monthly trait can be displayed throughout the school building.

**SUGGESTION:** teachers can base their classroom meetings regarding character traits off the school's monthly character focus.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hopefully, as you went throughout this reference guide you were able to identify students who may benefit from some of the interventions mentioned. We all know that students come with their own strengths and areas of growth that need to be accommodated for, in your teaching. Every student is in charge of their overall success in academics, in sports, in arts, in career development, etc. However, despite all students being in control of their success, not all students are provided with the tools and skills appropriate for achieving success. This makes it the schools job to identify these missing tools and work with students to help develop proper coping skills, positive character, and the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Understanding a student's development and environmental influences, are beneficial when handling crisis, discipline, and motivating your students overall success.

As a teacher, you play a pivotal role in your student's life, not only as an educator but also as a role model. Your students watch you cope with stress and deal with frustrating students, parents, and co-workers. This is especially true for younger students. Essentially, you have as much influence on your student's behavior as their parents. What if all staff made the commitment to model good coping skills, work to create calm environments, and empathize with the outside stressors students face on a day-to-day basis? Think of the school environment it would create. What would happen to future generations if we remembered to look at students holistically, instead of focusing only on their academics?

When you are able to see your students as individuals and appreciate the differences they bring, it can create beautiful mosaic of culture, values, and ideas, which should be celebrated. You are the driving force behind your students and as they see you accept everyone that walks through your classroom door, acceptance will spill over not only into the lives of your students, but spill over into the community and last for generations to come.

## **DISCUSSION GUIDE & WORKSHEETS FOR** **CLASSROOMS**

The following are classroom activities/discussion with some corresponding worksheets to be utilized in the classroom.

## **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES/DISCUSSIONS FOR ALL** **AGES**

The following are starter lesson plans created for teachers to use during classroom meetings. Please feel free to make changes these lesson-plans in order to better accommodate the specific developmental needs of the class. Additionally, these lessons are designed for sharing and distributing to other teachers and school administrators, do not hesitate to photocopy these lessons.

## RELAXATION BREATHING TECHNIQUES

ALL GRADE LEVELS:

Theme: Calming yourself

Before students engage in an anxiety driven activity practice relaxation breathing. Have the students close their eyes, breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth.

Three types of breathing:

1. Smelling the flowers: Have students imagine they are sniffing beautiful flowers breathing in deeply through their nose and back out through their mouth.
2. Snake breathing: Have students take in a long deep breath through their nose and exhale slowly out their mouth making a hissing sound like a snake.
3. Bunny Breathing: Have students take in three short breaths through their nose, like they are a bunny sniffing for food, then a long exhale out their mouth (useful for when students are having trouble finding their breath after being worked up).

## WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

ALL GRADE LEVELS

Theme: Identifying Resiliency

Worksheet:

Start your classroom discussion by going over your class meeting rules. Remind your students that this is a safe place and anything that is said in the classroom is not supposed to leave the classroom.

Begin your discussion by saying, *Sometimes people have lots of bad things happen to them, maybe they were bullied at school, maybe they lost their job, maybe they had to move to a smaller house. But even if bad things happen we can't just let it bother us, we need to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and move on.*

*Okay, so now I need you to put your thinking caps on. Can you think of anything that might bounce back when you try and squish it (answers may include: marshmallows, fruit snacks, gummy candy, springs, squish balls, etc.)? After a few answers pull out some items that bounce back when you squish them. Make sure one of the items you have are gummy bears. Then say, Can you see how when I squish the gummy bear it will bounce back when I let go? Sometimes people get squished just like this gummy bear; things like hurtful words, worry, or scary things can squish us and we might not feel like we can handle all the pressure and we might feel like we want to crumble/break. Can you think of anything that might crumble/break (answers may include: crackers, wood, plastic, etc)? After a few answers pull out some teddy grahams and show the students that if a teddy graham is squished it will break or crumble. Then say, what do you think would be better, if you bounced back or you broke? So which would you rather be, a gummy bear or a teddy graham? If we want to be a gummy bear, what are some things we can do to bounce back when we feel like we are getting squished? How can we help friends that might be getting squished? Conclude by either transitioning to have your students complete the worksheet or another independently assigned work, having students write a song, poem, rap, or create a picture regarding resiliency. End the discussion by reminding students that you are there to support them if they feel like they are being squished and you want to help them be able to bounce back.*

# DEFINING CHARACTER USING YOUR SENSES

Grade Level: K – 5<sup>th</sup>

Theme: How do we see, hear, and feel character?

Give your students a character trait and have them describe it using their senses.  
For example:

## RESPECT

| <u>What does it look like?</u>   | <u>What does it sound like?</u>                                    |
|--|--|
| Opening doors for people<br>Not talking when others are talking<br>Listening to adults<br>Following directions<br>Etc. | “Please”<br>“Thank you”<br>Using kind words<br>Not yelling<br>Etc. |

You can end by asking them how it makes them feel when they show or see that character trait.

## LET'S LEARN ABOUT FEELINGS

Grade Level: 1<sup>st</sup> and up (could be adapted for Kindergarten)

Theme: Feelings

Book: *The Great Big Book of Feelings* by Mary Hoffman

(Optional) Worksheet:

Begin by reading the book *The Great Big Book of Feelings* to students. Generate a discussion with students regarding feelings and why it's important we communicate these feelings with other people. Start by asking questions like:

- *Why do think that it's important we have feelings?*
- *How do people show their feelings?*
- *Why do you think people have a hard time showing their feelings?*
- *What would be some good ways to practice sharing their feelings?*
  - Generating a discussion on "I" messages could be useful at this point.

If you choose to discuss "I" messages remember to focus on the difference in how you are expressing your feelings. Here are some simple examples:

- *"You make me so mad!"*
- *"I feel mad when you talk to me in class and it gets me in trouble."*
  
- *"You make me feel sad!"*
- *"I feel sad when you don't play basketball with me."*
  
- *"You make me so mad!"*
- *"I feel so mad when you call me names or make fun of me."*

After the class discussion have students write about their feelings. This could be done in several ways: journal writing, compare and contrast, informational report, etc. Suggested feelings could consist of: happy, sad, embarrassed, angry, confused, surprised, furious, etc. Suggested ideas include: having students explain what the feeling is, what causes the feeling, how to communicate the feeling, and how the feeling could change, etc. Students can then share their report with the rest of the class.

## INTENTIONAL VS. ACCIDENT

Grade Level: 1<sup>st</sup> -5<sup>th</sup>

Theme: Intentionally hurting others vs. Accidentally hurting others

In your class meeting it could be helpful to go over the difference between intentionally hurting someone and accidentally hurting someone. You might start your class meeting by saying something like:

*Do you know what it means to do something on purpose? What does it mean? Do you know what it means to do something on accident? What does that mean? Hmm...it sounds like there might be a difference in those words, let's see. If I were to run into (someone's name) do you think that was on accident or on purpose? What if I walked up and pushed someone? Do you think I did that on accident or on purpose?*

*Well it is important to see there is a difference between doing something on accident and doing something on purpose. Let's pretend you're walking down the hallway with all the other students, when you get to school, and someone bumps into you. Do you think that was on accident or on purpose? Now what if you were running out to recess and you didn't know the line stopped and you ran into someone? Did you do that on accident or on purpose? What if you saw a new kid in class and they had on funny glasses and you started laughing at them, on accident or on purpose? What if you got really mad at someone and called him or her a bad name? Did you do that on accident or on purpose?*

*It's important to remember that what we do and say will have an effect on other people. So if we were to accidentally bump into someone what should we say? What if we did it on purpose? Hmm...maybe we just shouldn't have called them a name or laughed at them, or tripped them or pushed them.*

This could be a good time to touch on the different choices we can make, good and bad choices, and how we control ourselves when bad things happen to us. Should we fight back or move on? Also this could be a great time to talk about when students need to tell adults when inappropriate things occur. You can talk about how *telling a grown up someone bumped you in the hallway when you came to school might not be a big deal, but if someone hurt you, slapped, punched, kicked, yelled at, etc. and they did it on purpose then you need to tell a grown up immediately.*

If you want to continue talking about on purpose and accidents split your class up into teams and give them different scenarios that they have to decide which was on purpose or which was on accident. Additionally, you could have students discuss how the individuals in the scenario may be feeling. For example, how might the person who accidentally bumped into someone feel (embarrassed, ashamed, etc.) compared to someone who completed an intentional action (mean, impatient, etc.)? Let the students direct the discussion and focus on ways to make the classroom a more compassionate environment.

# CHARACTER PORTRAITS

Grade level: 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and up

Theme: Identifying the character qualities of others.

Materials:

- Camera
- Dry-Erase
- Dry-Erase Markers
- Stool

Activity:

- Each student sits in front of the Dry-Erase board.
- Remaining students write character traits that describe the student seated in the chair.
  - All words and phrases must be positive.
- The teacher then takes a picture of the student seated in the chair.
  - Pictures could be done in color or black and white.
- Pictures can be printed for each of the students and displayed throughout the classroom.
  - If every class participates, pictures of students could be displayed throughout the school.

Discussion Questions:

1. How did this make you feel?
2. Did you learn something new about yourself?
3. Do you see yourself how others see you?
4. Do you see yourself differently now?

**\*\*Make sure necessary photograph permission slips are signed if needed.**

This activity can also be done by having students take an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper with their name on it and taping it to their backs and allowing students to write on the sheet of paper.

**\*\*One important note regarding this activity is that all writing must be positive and anonymous, this way students feel comfortable opening up about their classmates, especially if they have a tendency to be shy.**

# TOWER BUILDING

Grade level: 4<sup>th</sup> grade and up

Theme: Team-building and communication

Materials:

- Gum Drops
- Marshmallows
- Toothpicks
- Stirring Straws

Activity:

- Divide your class into groups ranging from 4 to 10 students.
- Have students use the materials to construct three towers.
- Rules for Tower 1:
  - Students must work together to build a tower and no one is allowed to talk and everyone must be involved in constructing part of the tower.
  - Students will be penalized 1 minute for every time they are caught talking or if not everyone is allowed to participate in the group.
  - When the 10-minute period is completed the group with both the highest and sturdiest tower standing wins.
- Rules for Tower 2:
  - Students must build a tower with no restrictions, except that everyone must participate.
  - When the 10-minute period is completed the group with both the highest and sturdiest tower standing wins.
- Rules for Tower 3:
  - Students must build a tower, but only one person is allowed to talk at a time. Everyone must participate.
  - Students will be penalized 1 minute for every time multiple people are caught talking or if not everyone is allowed to participate in the group.
  - When the 10-minute period is completed the group with both the highest and sturdiest tower standing wins.

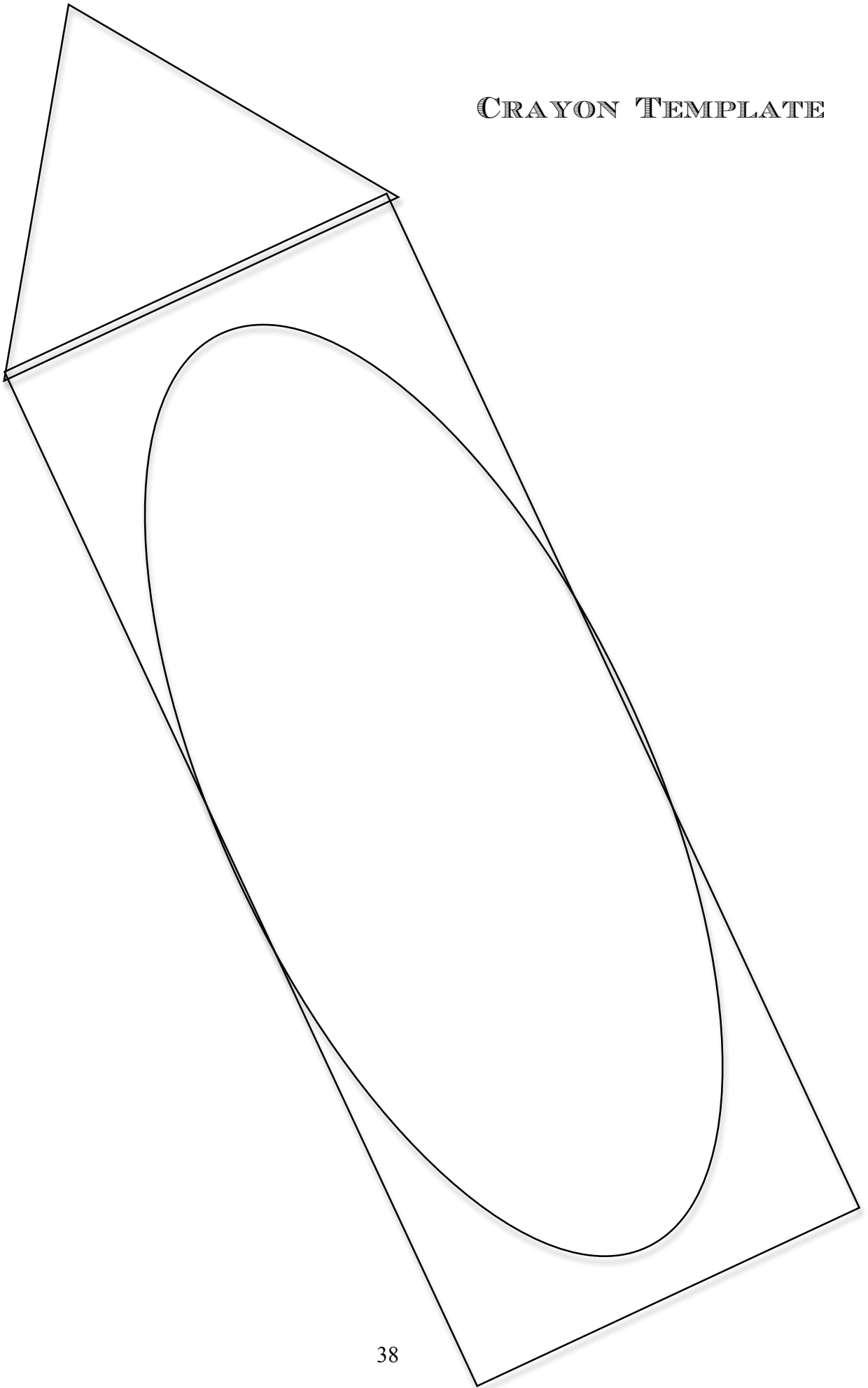
Discussion:

- Have the class come back together and generate a discussion:
  - Which tower was the easiest to build? Why?
  - What did you learn about the members of your team?
  - What did you learn about yourself?
  - How can you apply this same situation to other team projects?

## WORKSHEETS

The following worksheets have been created for teachers to use in their classroom when working with students. Please feel free to photocopy and share these resources with other teachers and school professionals.

CRAYON TEMPLATE



## “I” MESSAGES

Let’s learn how to use “I” messages. Read the following examples and write the “I” message that best fits the situation.

1. You are working on an art project when your friend reaches over and grabs one of your crayons without asking. You were getting ready to use that crayon and it makes you angry that they took it without asking.

**What should you say?**

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2. At recess you and your friend are playing basketball. All of a sudden someone from your class comes up and starts talking to your friend. The classmate says that you aren’t important and just need to go away because no one likes you.

**What should you say?**

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3. You are playing by yourself at recess and someone comes and invites you to play with them.

**What should you say?**

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4. Can you make your own problem and “I” message?

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**What should you say?**

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## WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

**Resiliency is:**

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Today you talked about how when a person is resilient they are able to bounce back when they get hurt. We talked about how gummy bears can bounce back but teddy grahams crumble. Can you think of other things that bounce back under pressure and things that crumble under pressure?

**Resilient Objects**

**Objects that Crumble**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

**When have you felt squished?**

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**What did you do?**

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**What can you do to be like a gummy bear?**

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# **DISCUSSION GUIDE**

(For individual or trainer use)

This section is a training outline for teachers and school staff. However, a training may not be applicable, this section can be used to generate roundtable discussions amongst grade teams, administrative teams, and specialists. Trainings could be done in a PowerPoint format and be broken up and changed to fit the exact needs and population of your students.

## Section 1:

- Focus on Erickson's 8 Stages of Development and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and how those can be seen in the classroom.
- What do children who have missed developmental stages look like as compared to their peers?
- What is the correlation between the two theories?
- How can teachers and schools plan ahead when trying to account for a child's developmental needs?

## Section 2:

- Review the socio-economic status of your catchment area and how this will affect your student's educational buy-in.
- How can teachers offset the negative impacts of a child's community?
- How can teachers maintain awareness of the outside factors to a child's negative behaviors?
- What other cultural information may be relevant for teachers to know, given your specific population?
- Role-play scenarios for teachers dealing with parents of different religious, cultural, and/or economic levels, where education may or may not be highly valued.

## Section 3:

- Discuss the major crisis students are facing in your school.
  - Military families, gang violence, substance abuse, etc.
- Role play scenarios of different crises and the student-teacher interactions:
  - Examples:
    - 5<sup>th</sup> grader's parents recently divorced.
    - Kindergarten student was just placed in foster care.
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> grader's older brother committed suicide.
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> grader punched classmate after classmate called them a name.

## Section 4:

- Discuss the effects of positive discipline verses negative discipline.
  - What are strategies for avoiding negative discipline?

- Break into grade teams and discuss different positive discipline techniques each teacher uses in their classroom.

#### Section 5:

- Review the two foundational acronyms for Motivational Interviewing.

#### OARS:

- *Open-ended questions:* When asked correctly students cannot respond with a “yes” or “no” answer. These questions tend to be information seeking and used to collect data about a situation, event, etc.
- *Affirmations:* These are used to empower your students and are meant to be genuine and sincere statements that build a student up and do not tear them down.
- *Reflective listening:* When done correctly students are hearing where their inconsistencies or struggles may be in their thinking. In addition, it shows them that you are focused on what they are saying and want to help them steer their ideas in a positive direction.
- *Summary Statements:* These are used to end a conversation with a student, they reflect back what you discussed and the main ideas while allowing for the student to make any clarifying comments or solutions (Sheldon, 2010).

#### FRAMES:

- *Feedback:* All behavioral feedback should be given to students in a nonjudgmental factor. As a teacher you need to be able to clearly define how the accepted behavior was broken and what steps need to take place to fix the behavior.
- *Responsibility:* Phrasing things so that students are able to see that their actions contribute to their behavior, or vice versa, will give students the ability to make the choice on if they want to take responsibility in changing their actions/behaviors.
- *Advice:* As a teacher you have the unique opportunity to give students, your outside perspective and advice. However, remember that your advice always comes with a take it or leave it clause. Do not force your students to take your advice as the end all solution.
- *Menu:* Provide students with multiple choices and solutions to problems. This not only gives them a sense of autonomy but also works on decision-making and critical thinking.
- *Empathy:* Humanizing yourself to your students is okay. Allow them to know that you can see they are trying to change, despite how hard it might be.
- *Self-efficacy:* Don't be a high school cheerleader, but show your students that you support them and encourage them to be successful in their goals and aspirations, no matter how small (Sheldon, 2010).

- Role-play a conversation between teacher and students using the acronyms.
- Discuss as a school the best strategies for implementing character education into your school setting.
  - Posters throughout the school, school wide assemblies, etc.
  - Here are a list of recommended character traits:

ACCEPTANCE  
CARING  
COMPASSION  
COURAGE  
EMPATHY  
ENCOURAGEMENT  
FAIRNESS  
FAITHFULNESS  
FORGIVENESS  
HARD WORK  
HONESTY  
INTEGRITY  
KINDNESS  
LOVE  
LOYALTY  
PATIENCE  
RESILIENCY  
RESPECT  
RESPONSIBILITY  
SELF-CONTROL  
STEWARDSHIP  
TRUSTWORTHINESS

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