

Social and Emotional Learning in the Time of Distance Learning: An Online Resource for Educators Concerned About Children's Coping Skills

Lesson # 3

The Power of the Ways We Think

(Narration appears in italics throughout this lesson.)

Always begin your class meeting with a Check-In.

A check in is a very important part of each session/lesson/meeting. "Checking in" with each other involves naming and acknowledging feelings, and is a great way to connect members of the group with each other, creating a sense of community. Checking In allows students to pause at the beginning of a session and, by naming their feelings, free up cognitive processing power for engagement in the session. Research has suggested that the check-in activity builds empathy among group members and strengthens group connections. Students are permitted to pass. If time is a problem, hand signals can be used by students to participate in the check in (thumb up, thumb horizontal, or thumb down).

Today's Check-In: Ask each student to rate how they are feeling today. Then ask each student to consult their journal and share a pattern they have been observing since the last Social and Emotional Learning lesson. Ask students to share if they are reconsidering that pattern. Brainstorm ways to support the student in changing that pattern.

Lesson # 3: Understanding the power of the "ways we think."

Explain to the students that our patterns of behavior become the "ways that we think." These "ways of being" become strong neural pathways in our brains, or habits. The longer we behave in a certain way, the deeper the pathway becomes. Very deep neural pathways take a lot of time and practice to change. For example, if someone begins to keyboard (type information on the computer keyboard) with only two fingers, they become quite fast and good at this practice. They can become so good that they do not have to look at the keys. If they want to change that habit and begin to use the home keys because they take a class that requires them to do this, they must focus very carefully on their finger placement, noticing it and paying attention to the placement of their fingers. Gradually, after much practice, the new "habit" of using the home keys becomes a strong neural pathway and the student can input without paying attention to the placement of their fingers.

(You can use a story of your own here, adjusting it to the age of the child. Some examples might be: learning to swim a stroke properly when the student has been “doing it his/her own way; learning to play the xylophone as a member of an elementary school band, when the student has been banging on it non-musically as a toddler; learning to properly hold a pencil when the child has been holding it in an inefficient position.) You may also offer an example from your own life here.

Watch the Video: The Power of Words

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-itm-001&hsimp=yhs-001&hspart=itm&p=Power+of+words+video#id=0&vid=bca7865233bebe7669cf6d97ad957287&action=click>

Ask students to write in their journals what they noticed about the power of words in the video. Why were the words the girl wrote on the blind man’s cardboard sign so powerful?

Word Power Exercise:

Today, we are going to talk about 3 types of words we use every day without thinking about them. These words can become habits or patterns in our lives without our becoming aware of this happening. Our neural pathways can become so practiced that we don’t even think about the words we are using in our responses to others. See if you can discover what is meant by “Victim,” “Dictator,” and “Ally” words. Can you notice yourself using words in each of these ways?

Words are very powerful and often we use them without thinking about their effect. When we focus our attention on the power of the words we use, we can notice the effect our words have. Words can cause us to “give up our power” (Victim Words like: “I can’t;” “I don’t know how;” “I’m not good enough – at soccer, spelling, playing the piano, reading, writing). How do you feel when you use “Victim” words? How does it make you feel when other people use them?

Words can also cause us to take over others, sometimes in a good way or sometimes in a bullying way (Dictator words like: “Do it or else;” “I don’t want to hear any more;” “You are stupid;” “We are done here.”-ending discussion and refusing to listen to the other person.) How do you feel when you use “Dictator” words? How does it make you feel when other people use them?

Words that allow us to share opinions, listen to each other, and connect our emotions to our thinking help us to develop ways of listening to others that allow conversation, discussion and an exchange of ideas. We are we practice these skills we are becoming an “Ally” and

learning skills to manage our behavior. How do you feel when you use “Ally” words? How does it make you feel when other people use them?

Now let’s focus on ourselves for the thinking questions at the end of today’s lesson. Please write your answers in your journals.

- 1. What is one word or phrase that you would like to start using?**
- 2. What is one word or phrase that you would like to stop using? What can you use instead?**
- 3. What do you think would happen if you used Ally words more often in your family? In your class? With your friends? With other students that you feel are hard to get along with?**
- 4. Can you make a commitment to change one of your ways of thinking this week? What will you focus on changing?**