

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

(Narration appears in italics throughout this lesson.)

Lesson # 8

The Power of Choice

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 their thinking 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: Share the following famous spiritual verse with your students.

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;

The courage to change those things I can;

And the wisdom to know the difference."

Ask students to rate how this verse makes them feel by choosing a word that describes that feeling. Then Ask students to write the answers to these questions in their journals. Finally, ask for volunteers to share their examples with their classmates.

Ask students to reflect on the meaning of the verse in these ways.

- 1. What is an event in student's life that is not possible to be changed?***
- 2. What is something in the student's life that might be changed, but with difficulty?***
- 3. What does the last part of the verse mean when it asks for "the courage to know the difference?"***

Mini-Lesson: The Power of Choice

Tell students that, as we learned about our choices in feeding the evil wolf or feeding the good wolf, the choice we make increases our feelings and actions in that direction. Explain to students that, although we do not always have a choice in the outcome of events (moving to a new place, losing a friendship through changing feelings between people, losing a grandparent, divorce, distance learning as a result of CoVid 19), we always have a choice as to how we feel and choose to approach those events.

Scientists tell us that seeing difficult events or challenges in our lives as “unable to be changed” is a choice that prevents us from seeing all of the possibilities that are available to us. When we are overwhelmed, we can see difficult events as permanent, affecting all of our life, and beyond our power to do anything about.

Explain to students that we always have a choice in how we respond to something, even difficult events that happen in our lives. We may not be able to change the outcome, but we can decide how we will respond. An angry response can be changed with a pause and choosing to think about different paths of the problem. For example, as we grow sometimes our friends change and decide not to be friends with us anymore. Of course, we are going to feel sad about this and, indeed, we should. While feeling sad, explain to students that it is often helpful to use the “Just Breathe” tool.

Once we have used the “Just Breathe” tool, we can begin to consider what options are open to us. What do we want to have happen? What tools are we able to use to get ourselves to that desired outcome? If we take the example of losing a friend because they have decided not to be friends with us, we can choose to deal with our anger with a tool (listening to music, taking a walk, talking to another friend about the situation), and then have the courage to dial back the anger and begin rebuilding our sense of ourselves with positive actions (practicing gratitude for the good things in our lives, making a list of our positive attributes, thinking about joining a new activity – a sport, band, trying out for a play). Explain to students that we often get “stuck” and practice old patterns of responding or being that do not help us. A challenging time is a good time to develop some new patterns of responding and to help the new patterns get “hard-wired” into our brains.

Activity: Triptych of Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions

Ask students to take a sheet of paper from their journals and fold it in thirds. On the first panel, have students draw a picture of an upcoming challenging event in their lives. Tell the students to use colors and shapes that would best communicate their exact feelings about this event.

Now, ask students how they would like to be feeling about the event after it has occurred. What colors and shapes best represent this outcome? Ask students to create this image on the third panel of their triptych.

Tell students that they are deliberately leaving the middle panel blank while they complete and first and last panels. Now ask students to fill in the middle panel of the triptych by choosing actions that would make the third panel more possible. Draw or write several possible actions in the middle panel.

Explain to students that they have been working with the tools of Optimism (TIE). Optimistic people see challenges as Temporary (T), Impacting only a small part of their lives (I), and Able to be changed with Effort (E).

We are going to watch a video that will help us understand the Power to Choose. What choices does the boy make? In what ways do they change his life? Thoughts? Feelings?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjqiU5FgsYc>

Next Lesson: Resolving Conflicts/Bullying