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Advancing Civility in Middle Schools



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Large group dynamics

Before the lesson starts, ask a teacher to be “mic runner” so we can have kids participate in the lesson. Be ready to implement a strategy for soliciting youths’ participation. For ex., (a) leaders can call out for a specific characteristic (e.g., if you have a red shirt on, stand up!); (b) give mic runner a bag of chocolate to give as reinforcer for participation; (c) have pre-printer numbers that the leaders randomly place on chairs around the room and then tell participants to look for their number; (d) ask teachers to write names of 1 – 2 students on a sticky note and give to group leaders; (e) have a special seat section for kids that self-select to participate; (f) call students out by their classroom (e.g., we need 3 volunteers from Ms. Brown’s class).

Possible materials:

- Chocolate/candy
- Printed numbers
- Tape
- Flip chart or other way to write words on a board / screen when eliciting student participation

Behavior management: If leaders are having difficulty gaining students’ attention, can bring the group back with simple interventions such as “if you can hear me, clap once; if you can hear me, clap twice”.

Important boundaries: Remember that you are working with children. Sharing phone numbers or friending youths on social media may be problematic. Please avoid these before, during, or after trainings. Parents and teachers will appreciate your good boundaries.

Content

I. Introductions

- a. Quick introduction of group leaders

II. Civility

- a. Introduce the concept of civility: What is it? What does it look like?

Gather quick words (2-3) from participants on what it means to be civil.

Group Leader can lead to answers by quickly demonstrating behaviors. For example, Group Leader can say *“If I’m in PE and want to be the Team Captain, should I ask my teacher like this?”* and then moves into teacher’s face and, using a loud voice, says *“I want to be the Team Captain!”*. When kids say *“no!”* then can ask, *“Why not? How should I behave?”* After a few words, can say: *“Right! Using a polite tone, asking rather than demanding, and keeping your body calm are all ways in which we are civil. Civility is about how each of us makes our community a good place to live!”*

Younger children may say things like *“civil war”* or *“civilization”*. Groups Leaders build on those answers to lead participants to the core concepts (e.g., *“Yes! A civil war is a war between civilians or citizens of the same country. So when we are at war, we lose civility, or the ability to get along!”* Then write on the board: get along).

It is important to avoid didactic teaching, or *“teaching that tells”*. It is preferred to engage experiential teaching in a way that elicits the correct answer from participants. It empowers participants (they know the answers!), increases participation and engagement, and cements learning more efficiently than didactic teaching.

- b. Civility Role Plays

- The structure for this section is wrong way / right way role play (WW/RW).
- Leaders seek to use leading questions to elicit the correct responses from children.
- Leaders then punctuate correct responses using the specific words from the civility contract.
- Role plays are active, following the demonstrate, differentiate, debrief structure. Prior to starting a role play, ensure that it is properly set up, letting the audience know who the specific people in the role play are and what they are about to see. Instruct them to pay attention to each of the actors and their words and actions.
- Be sure that the role play beginning and end are clearly evident.
- Go ahead, Be theatrical! 😊

- Pay attention to the agenda and work to stay on track, expanding or reducing role plays as needed to fit the content of the lesson. It is important to leave enough time to wrap-up the lesson.
- Role plays have specific names to facilitate Group Leaders' understanding of the role play. Please feel free to change names and situations as needed to carry the content of the session through (e.g., if you don't have a man and a woman to do a role play that requires both, you can tell your audience that you are pretending to be a boy named Johan").

WW/RW to introduce the concept of name calling:

1. Group leaders demonstrate WW:

Setup: Alie and Lesther are in the classroom. Alie needs a pencil.

Alie: *"Hey you! Fat guy with the glasses!! Can I borrow your pencil?"*

Lesther: [turns body away; ignores request]

2. Debrief:

- > *"Do you think Lesther wants to lend me his pencil?"* (no!)
- > *"Why not?"* (she's calling me names; she's not nice)
- > *"How do you think Lesther felt?"* (sad, hurt)
- > *"What do you suppose Alie wanted to do?"* (get his attention)
- > *"How can Alie get his attention and make Lesther want to share his pencil?"* (use his name)

3. Differentiate:

Let's see if Alie can do better this time.

Alie: *"Excuse me, what is your name?"*

Lester: *"Lesther"*

Alie: *"Lesther can I borrow your pencil?"*

Lesther: *"Sure."* [Hands her a pencil.]

4. Debrief:

- > *"Do you think Lesther wants to lend me his pencil?"* (probably)
- > *"Why?"* (Alie is being nice)
- > *"How do you think Lesther felt?"* (respected)

CO-LEADER: Make sure you write on the board: "Use names"

WW/RW to introduce the concepts of kind, respect, curious, open minded:

1. Group leaders demonstrate WW:

- > Set up: Kids are at lunch and talking. There's a new kid, Paulina, in the class.

Jeisianne: *"Hey Paulina! What ward do you belong to?"*

Paulina: *"Um, my family doesn't go to church."*

Jeisianne: *"Aw, that's too bad."* [Jeisianne turns away from Paulina and starts talking to someone else]

Paulina: [Sits quietly. Stares at food.]

2. Debrief:

- > *"Paulina, how do you feel after this conversation?"*
(sad, I wish we could continue talking; and I'm also a little embarrassed that I don't go to church, maybe worried I won't belong in this new school)
- > *"Jeisianne, you were trying to be welcoming, but something got in the way. How are you feeling after this exchange?"*
(Awkward. I wanted to know more about Paulina but didn't know what to ask; I wish she went to church because there are some fun gatherings coming up)

To kids:

- > *"Is Jeisianne being curious about her friend?"*
(somewhat, but she got stuck)
- > *"What could she say to be more curious?"*
(e.g., what does your family do on the weekends?)
- > *"Is Jeisianne being respectful?"*
(yes/no – potentially see disrespect in the assumption. Or unsure)
- > *"Where did you see respect?" "What did you notice about her voice and her face?"*
(her voice, her facial expression)
- > *"Even if Jeisianne is being respectful, Paulina isn't quite feeling included. What could Jeisianne do differently?"*
(She can ask different questions)

3. Differentiate:

Let's see if Jeisianne can do better this time.

Jeisianne: *"Hey Paulina! What ward do you belong to?"*

Paulina: *"Um, my family doesn't go to church."*

Jeisianne: *"Oh!? What do you do on Sundays?"*

Paulina: *"We visit my grandma and have a special dinner."*

Jeisianne: *"Really?!. We do that on family night too."*

Paulina: *"Oh! When is family night?"*

4. Debrief:

- > “So are these new classmates getting to know each other now?” (yes)
- > “So they do different things on Sunday and they can still be friends.” “What did Jeisianne do that helped them become friends?” “What did Paulina do?”
(they are learning about each other; **elicit responses** that lead to: kind, respect, curious, open minded)

CO-LEADER: Make sure you write on the board: “Kind, respect, curious, open minded”

WW/RW to introduce the concept of ask questions:

1. Group leaders demonstrate WW:

Set up: Kid is at home listening to mom and her neighbor, Judy, talk.

Mom: *“Hey Judy, so good to see you! You seem upset. Are you OK?”*
 Judy: *“Oh yes, I’m OK. I was just at Walmart and everybody there was speaking Spanish. You’d think we were in Mexico! They should just speak English.”*
 Mom: [in neutral tone] *“It’s hard to be around people and not understand them.”*
 Judy: *“This is America for goodness sake! I gotta go. See you later.”*
 [Judy leaves]

2. Debrief:

- > *“Judy is frustrated. What do you think she’s frustrated about?”* (elicit a few answers; kids may not sure or maybe they can identify that she’s frustrated that she doesn’t understand).
- > *“Is it OK to speak Spanish at Walmart?”* (elicit answers; kids likely will not be very clear;
- > Leader summarizes: *Kids are saying yes, no, I don’t know. We’re not really clear, are we?*)

3. Differentiate: Let’s see what you can do as a kid in this situation to learn more. Now, after Judy leaves the person playing Judy is going to be Mom’s kid.

Mom: *“Hey Judy, so good to see you! You seem upset. Are you OK?”*
 Judy: *“Oh yes, I’m OK. I was just at Walmart and everybody there was speaking Spanish. You’d think we were in Mexico! They should just speak English.”*
 Mom: [in neutral tone] *“It’s hard to be around people and not understand them.”*
 Judy: *“This is America for goodness sake! I gotta go. See you later.”*
 [Judy leaves, role-player becomes Mom’s kid]
 Lisa: *“Mom, why is Judy so upset about people speaking Spanish at Walmart?”*
 Mom: *“It’s hard for Judy to be around people that are different from her. People speak many languages all over the world and I think it’s great that you get to see some of that right here at home!”*

4. Debrief:

- > *"So, is it OK to speak Spanish at Walmart?" (yes!)*
- > *"Do you think Judy thinks it's OK to speak Spanish?" (no)*
- > *"So, that's kind of confusing ... some people think it's OK and some people don't. How do you know who is right? What did Lisa do?" (ask questions; ask questions of lots of different people).*
- > *"When we look at our civility list, what can help us make our decision about who to believe?" (prompt discussion on open-mindedness, kindness, respect)*

CO-LEADER: Make sure you write on the board: "ask questions"

WW/RW to introduce the concept of stay in the conversation, say what we're thinking and why:

1. Group leaders demonstrate WW:

Set up: Nahomi is at Salif's house for a playdate. They've agreed to play the video game Mario Kart.

Nahomi: *"I want to be Mario!"*

Salif: *"No, I am Mario because I am a boy. Shouldn't you be Princess Peach?"*

Nahomi: *"You should be Toadstool because you're kind of a troll."*

[The two sit there staring at each other with arms crossed]

2. Debrief:

- > *"How is this game going for Nahomi and Salif?" "Is it going well?" (not so well)*
- > *"They seem like they are stuck. How can you tell?" (they're not talking; arms crossed; name calling)*
- > *"How can they get unstuck?" (talking to each other; working it out)*

3. Differentiate:

Let's see if these two can get unstuck.

Nahomi: *"I want to be Mario!"*

Salif: *"No, I am Mario because I am a boy. Shouldn't you be Princess Peach?"*

Nahomi: *"Why?"*

Salif: *"Because you're a girl. Don't you want to be a girl character?"*

Nahomi: *"No. I chose Mario all the time and it didn't turn me into a boy in real life. You can be Princess Peach and you won't turn into a girl."*

Salif: *"That's true. But I love being Mario. How about we take turns being Mario and see who is a better Mario?"*

Nahomi: *"OK! Game on!"*

4. Debrief:

- > *“How is this game going now?”* (better)
- > *“What did Salif say when Nahomi asked why she couldn’t be Mario? (“because you’re a girl”).*
- > *What did Salif ask to keep the conversation going? (Don’t you want to be a girl character?). So Salif was curious and asked a question to keep the conversation going.*
- > *What did Nahomi say in response?”* (gave a reason)
- > *“So, they listened to each other and gave reasons for why they wanted what they wanted. What did they decide to do?”* (they agreed to take turns)

CO-LEADER: Make sure you write on the board: “stay in the conversation; say what you’re thinking and why”

III. Review

- a. *“What did we learn about civility?”* [Point to writing on board.]

IV. Civility Contract

One thing we can do today is agree to practice civility with each other in our classrooms. We have a poster for each of your teachers to put in your classroom. Right now, we are just going to summarize each of the points and see if you agree to follow these steps. If group leaders are running short on time, read all steps and then do the call out for “ayes”.

- i. *Step 1: Call people by their names*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*
- ii. *Step 2: Be kind and respectful*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*
- iii. *Step 3: Keep an open mind*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*
- iv. *Step 4: Be curious*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*
- v. *Step 5: Ask questions*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*
- vi. *Step 6: Be in the conversation*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*
- vii. *Step 7: Say what you’re thinking and why*
 - > *All those in favor, say “aye!”*

END OF LESSON

Information About This Manual



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