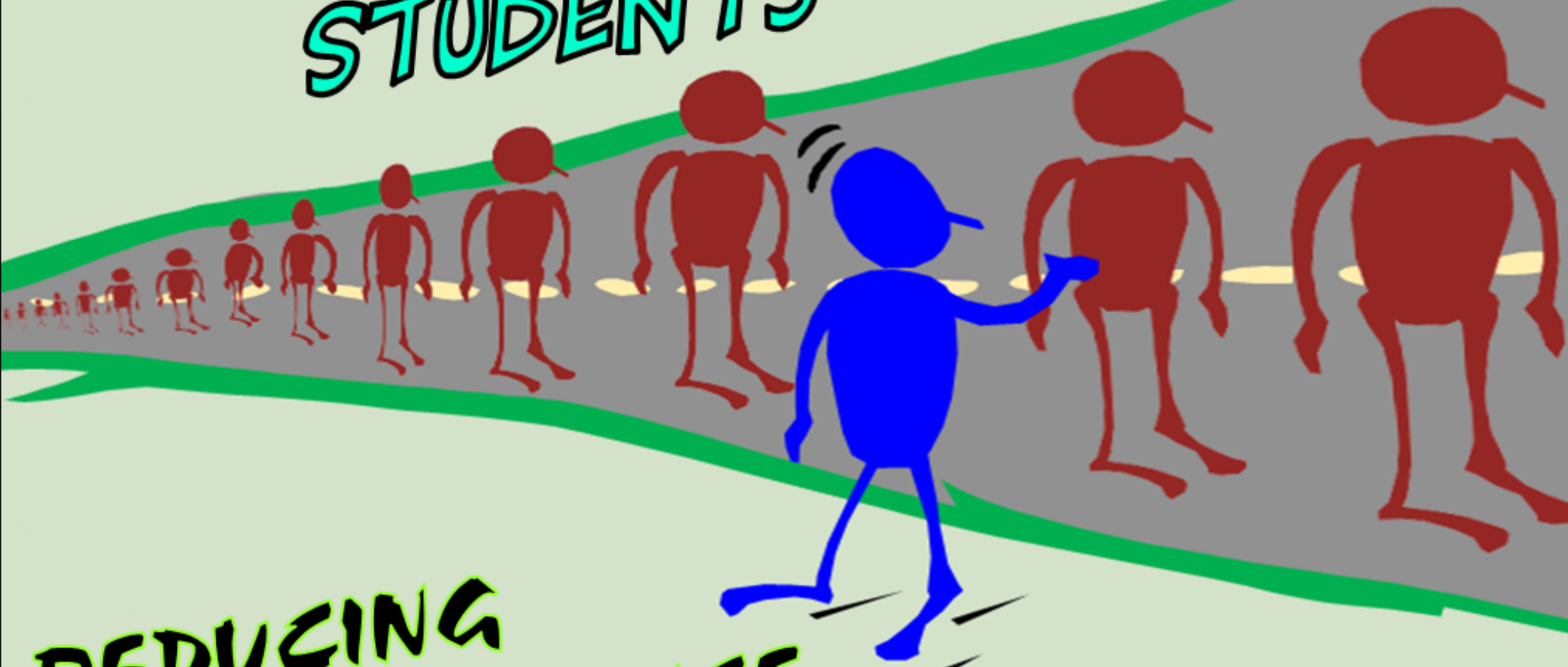


By Maria Sargent

"GANG-PROOFING" STUDENTS



REDUCING
THE INFLUENCE
OF INAPPROPRIATE
PEERS...

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The Main Issue to Consider

When we think about students and gangs, we automatically think about crime, drugs and teenagers, but the foundation of the problem really begins much earlier and can extend into adulthood. More importantly, to think about this issue in terms of only illegal activity is much too narrow for our purposes, so we will begin this unit by REALLY examining the foundation of this problem.....inappropriate social (peer) influence.

So, how does society influence our behavior? Let's take a look:

Early Childhood

- Influence on toys bought, cartoons, etc.
- Copying what others say and do

Middle School

- Influence on clothes, music and activities
- Strong desire to “blend in”/not stand out

High School

- Influence on clothes, music and activities
- Strong desire for “social approval”/be accepted

Adults

- Influence on clothes, clubs, activities, etc.
- Influence on public behavior (speech, etc.)

Illegal

- Influence leads to criminal activity by a group
- Drives membership in gangs/criminal groups

As you can see, if we really think about it, the social influence on our behavior begins early and can continue to some degree our whole life. What is the difference with gangs? The behaviors being encouraged are negative, that's all, but the main problem is the same....being unable to strongly adhere to our own beliefs, value codes, and behavior when confronted by outside influences.

So, in this unit, we will not be looking at gang behavior as much as the **reduction of the response to inappropriate peer influences**. This focus will provide the foundational skills needed to make sure our youth do not become involved in gangs in the first place and provide possible solutions if we do see them already going down this road.

To really understand the techniques we are going to use and the skills that need to be taught, though, we have to have a sense of the adult "end-skills" we would like them to have. I have found the best way to identify these skills was to reflect on my OWN behavior. If we understand how we manage to confront peer (social) influences in their adult form ----or fail to confront them----we can get a better handle on what we need to teach our students and which issues they may have during the process.



Learning from Our Adult Struggles

As adults, we would like to think we are past the peer-group mentality, but is that really the case? Take this quick quiz and see how well you manage to hold onto your own values in the face of social pressure:



Have you ever kept an opinion to yourself because others felt differently?



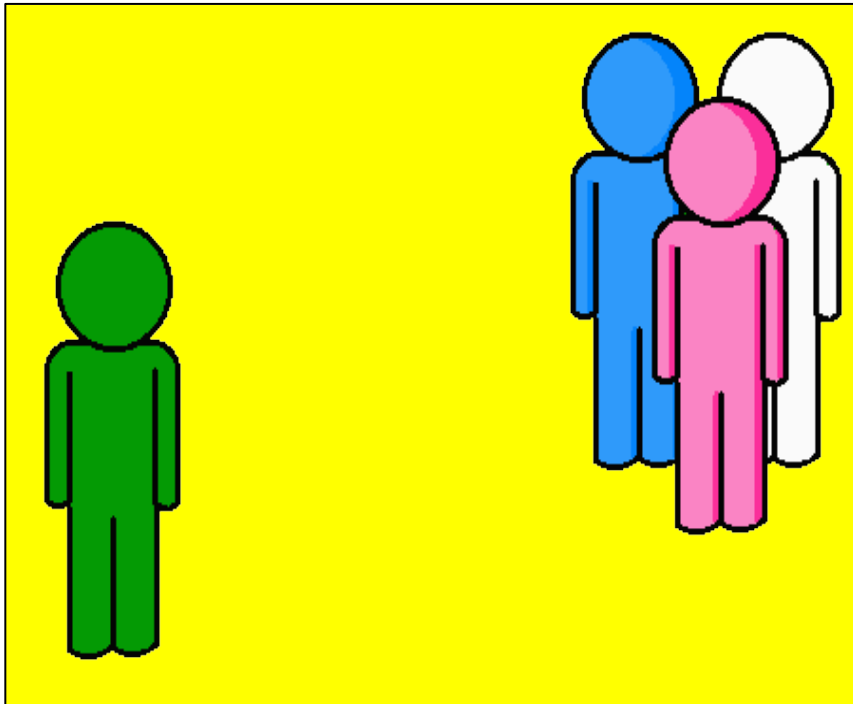
Have you ever hidden your religious beliefs or social values?



Have you ever worried about what people thought of you?

Now, I would dearly love to tell you that I passed this little quiz with flying colors, but it simply isn't true. I find my own behavior modified by social pressure much more than I would like to admit. It is something I am striving to change in my own life, getting a bit more of a backbone, but it is not easy. What makes this so hard even for us adults? If we begin to examine the concerns that keep US from standing firm against adult peer/social pressure, we will do a much better job of teaching this skill to our own youngsters 😊 We will examine these problems in both their adult and child form...

From the earliest days of our youth, we are unconsciously being molded to be members of a “group”. We pledge allegiance to our local football teams, embrace our school culture, follow the newest trends in toys and fashion, and eagerly wait for the newest shows on television or in the theater. There is nothing wrong with this to a degree, social cohesion maintains a society, but it does show that we can accidentally train our children to be a member of a “gang” (so to speak) from a very early age, if we are not careful.



Because this group behavior becomes so deeply engrained, we then begin to feel uncomfortable if we stand out as different. When you throw in the hidden values that establish a hierarchy for these groups (i.e. being wealthy, educated, physically fit, progressive, fashionable, diverse, sophisticated, etc.) you can begin to see how strongly behavior can be influenced by our social world.

What makes the situation a bit more difficult is the social pressure that comes with being perceived as outside of the “group”, in this case the “prestige” levels of society perpetuated in magazines, by media stars, in newspapers, and magazines. This causes even adults who should know better to live in fear of being labeled as discriminatory, insensitive, uncaring, or phobic (the new added suffix to every imaginable value concept in the world). In other words, if you are not part

of the mainstream social “gang” you will often pay, and pay dearly for it.

And you thought peer pressure was just for teenagers 😊

Take a look at how what is perceived as prestigious, correct behavior, and/or approved social activities influence both children and adults!

ISSUE

PRESTIGE

CHILDREN

- Strongest, biggest, oldest, prettiest, most athletic, coolest, best toys

ADULTS

- Most educated, wealthy, attractive, sophisticated, socially connected, fit, best “toys”

SOCIAL

- In popular group, on sports team, cheerleader, homecoming queen

- In social clubs, positions of authority, invited to parties, seen at social events

WORRIES

- Being seen as a geek, nerd, ugly, not popular, fat, poor, stupid, non-athletic, different

- Being seen as poor, unattractive, unfit, uneducated, non-progressive, not “diverse”, having a “phobia”

BEHAVIOR

- Avoid confronting bullies, ignore or join in gossip, avoid “geeks”, want to “blend in w/ crowd”

- Ignore or join in gossip, attracted to status/stars/wealth, modify behavior on social responses

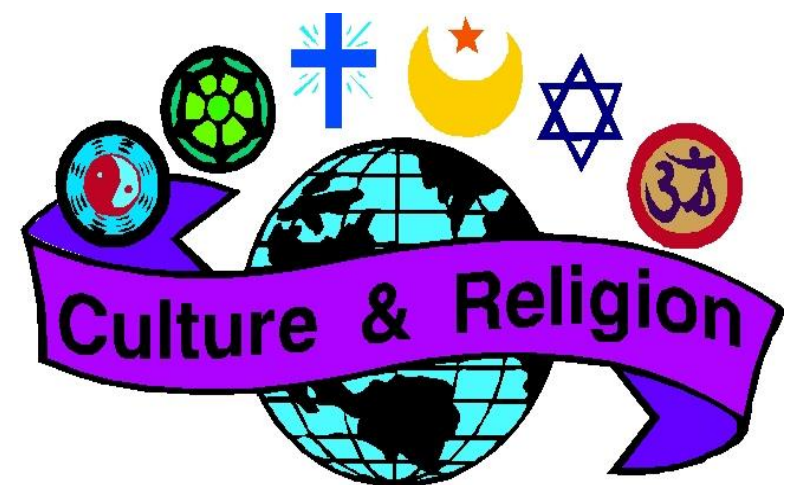
Yes, it is very clear that we adults have just as much peer pressure as youth. It may not be labeled the same, and the pressure used is often considered much more acceptable than the “teenage” variety, but it is really no different, if you think about it. The pressure you feel as an adult may encourage you to go along with behaviors you do not truly like, remain silent when you should speak, and bite your tongue when someone is criticizing or making fun of a cherished group, religious beliefs, or social opinion. In other words, we often are no better at standing up against our adult “peers” than the students we strive to teach!

So, what is causing us to cave in when we should know better? Once we identify these fears, we will obtain insight into what is holding our students back. I know my list includes...

1. Fear of losing public approval
2. Fear of being misunderstood and not given a chance to explain my belief
3. Fear of being unappreciated for who I am
4. Fear of being misconstrued and accidentally hurting friends, family, etc.

If we are to break this cycle, we must make sure that one of our goals involves removing these fears, and the only way to do this is to strengthen the value system so it can withstand the pressure of the social group. These resiliency skills CAN be taught and will form the basis of the rest of this unit.

Now, before we begin tackling this problem, a dose of reality for our current teaching environment. **You are limited in which values you can teach if you are in a public setting.** If you are teaching in a religious school or running this at home, you can use any value code you wish (see unit titled, *Value Code Shifting: Reaching the Hard-to-Reach Student* if this concept is unfamiliar), but if you are in a public school, you must use civic-based values such as responsibility, kindness, persistence, avoidance of illegal activity, etc. Those civic values are more than enough, though, to get this skill in place, so don't feel you are restricted. Since these techniques are so simple, they can then be easily shared with families who wish to extend the learning in this area to other values--- something I strongly encourage in today's world!



Value Code Connection

The first step in helping students resist peer pressure is to understand the value code they are using to determine what is appropriate and inappropriate. We will very briefly outline the four value codes here for those who are not familiar with the concept. For a more detailed description, please see the unit titled, *Value Code Shifting: Reaching the Hard-to-Reach Student*.

Students will use one of four value codes to govern their behavior. Let's first look at the code concepts:

	Religious /Spiritual	Traditional /Family	Legal /Civic	Personal
Beliefs	What is right or wrong based on a religion or spiritual belief.	How the family or people around them have traditionally behaved in the past.	What is considered permissible or illegal by law or civic rule (i.e. school, etc.)	What is personally believed to be right or wrong based on any number of factors.

As you can see, the influences that guide behavior are fairly clear. This does not mean that a person may not move between the various codes, but overall, the value code that is being used to make personal decisions about behavior can be figured out just by talking with the student briefly. While this is great information to have, it really becomes interesting when you begin to reflect on what this means.

Let's first take a look at what causes a person who is operating at one code to transgress that belief system either by performing a behavior that is not considered acceptable or by leaving that code level completely. We can see these "change agents" in the next figure:

	Religious /Spiritual	Traditional /Family	Legal /Civic	Personal
Beliefs	What is right or wrong based on a religion or spiritual belief.	How the family or people around them have traditionally behaved in the past.	What is considered permissible or illegal by law or civic rule (i.e. school, etc.)	What is personally believed to be right or wrong based on any number of factors.
Change Agents	<u>Undermined by....</u> *beliefs of family *laws and rules *personal beliefs	<u>Undermined by....</u> *laws and rules *personal beliefs	<u>Undermined by....</u> *personal beliefs	Cannot be undermined--it is personally controlled & changes constantly

As seen above, Religious/Spiritual code has many variables that can cause it to crumble. Any family belief, tradition, law, rule, or personal belief can weaken a person's resolve to hold to a religious or spiritual belief. In other words, it is hard for anyone, let alone a student, to hold to such a high level set of values.

As you work down the list, you can see that outside influences gradually lose their power. Traditional/Family code can be challenged by laws or rules to the contrary as well as personal opinion but Legal/Civic code is only undermined by personal beliefs---traditions and religion have no influence. Once you get to a personal value code, there isn't even that one influence left because there is nothing left to challenge it. You are left with either reverting back to a higher code level, something that is less likely, or substituting a new personal code.

This concept is critical to understand when working with youth who are operating at personal code. You cannot speak about what is right & wrong (i.e. Spiritual Code), what they "should" do (i.e. Traditional Code) or what is illegal/against rules (i.e. Legal/Civic Code) to these students. It has no meaning to them. *You must speak in personal code language!*

Based on this concept, which group then has the power to influence that code? Who is it that we are dealing with during our interaction? Let's take a look at each code one last time and see:

	Religious /Spiritual	Traditional/ Family	Legal /Civic	Personal
Beliefs	What is right or wrong based on a religion or spiritual belief.	How the family or people around them have traditionally behaved in the past.	What is considered permissible or illegal by law or civic rule (i.e.. school, etc.)	What is personally believed to be right or wrong based on any number of factors.
Change Agents	<u>Undermined by....</u> *beliefs of family *laws and rules *personal beliefs	<u>Undermined by....</u> *laws and rules *personal beliefs	<u>Undermined by....</u> *personal beliefs	Cannot be undermined--it is personally controlled & changes constantly
Power Group	The religious or spiritual group	The family or holder of the tradition	The legal system or rule enforcer	The personal group(s) valued

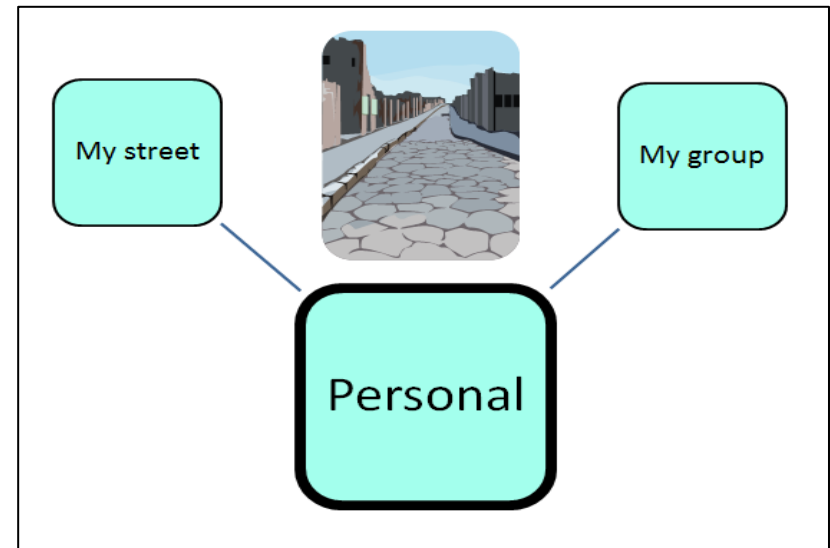
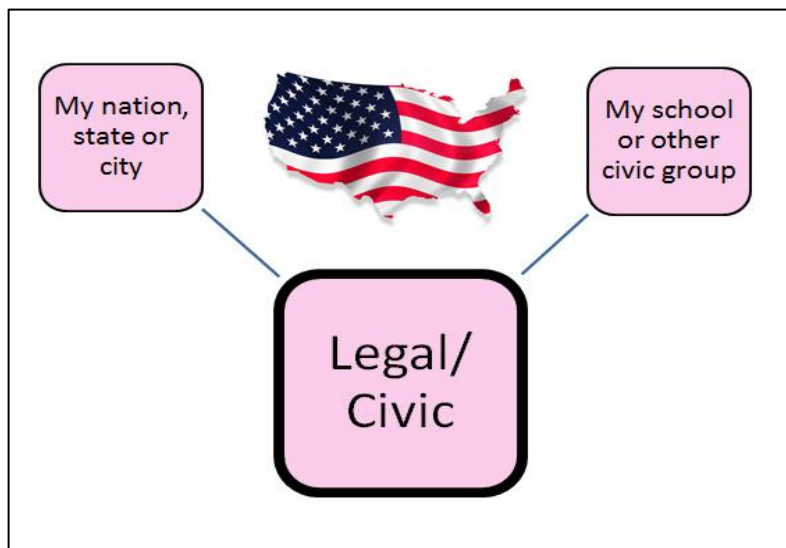
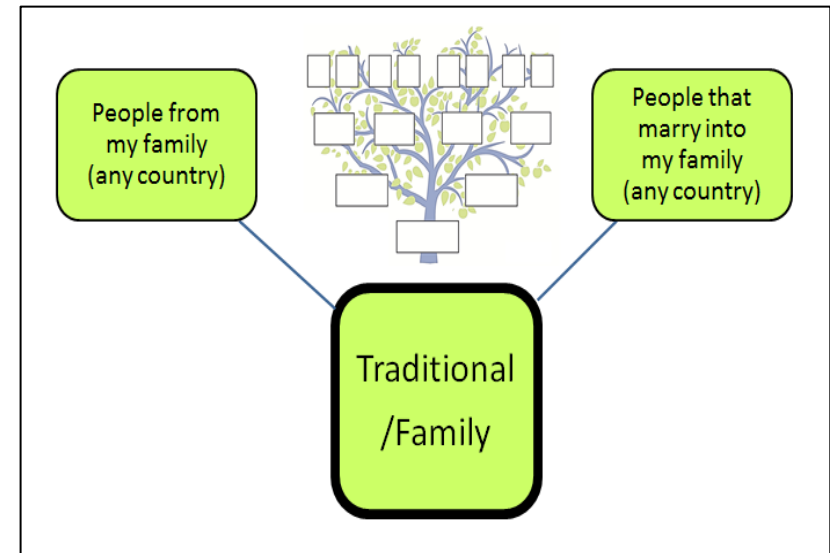
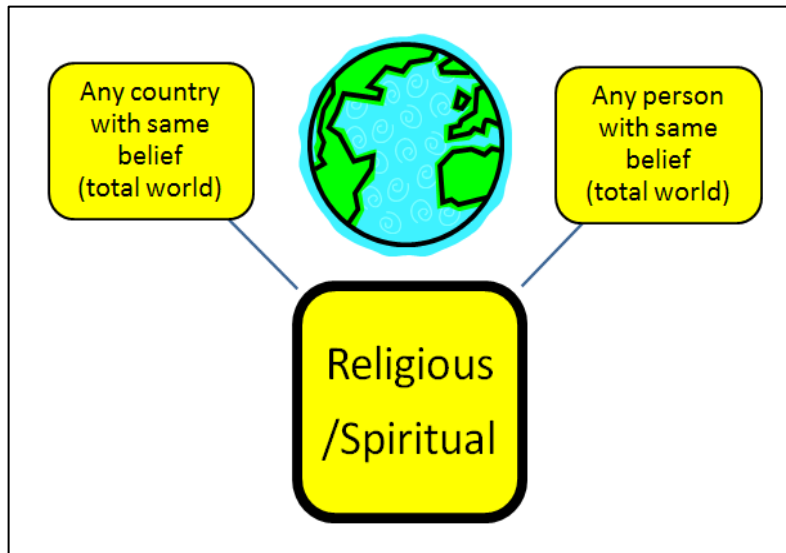
It is when you look at the issue in this manner that you begin to understand the power and influence of inappropriate peers and peer groups. They are the "religion", the "family" and the "police/law" for students operating at personal code. That is why they hold so much power.....and that is why they are so difficult to dislodge from a student's life. They hold the student's allegiance, and it is this allegiance that we need to break, or better yet, keep from developing in the first place. We will make that our first general intervention.

General Interventions



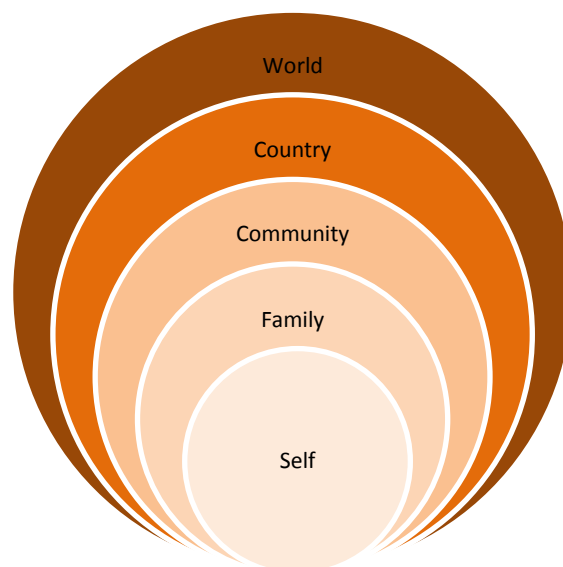
Switching Student Allegiance

So, how do you switch a student's allegiance to an inappropriate peer group? Let's first figure out the exact nature of each code's allegiances.



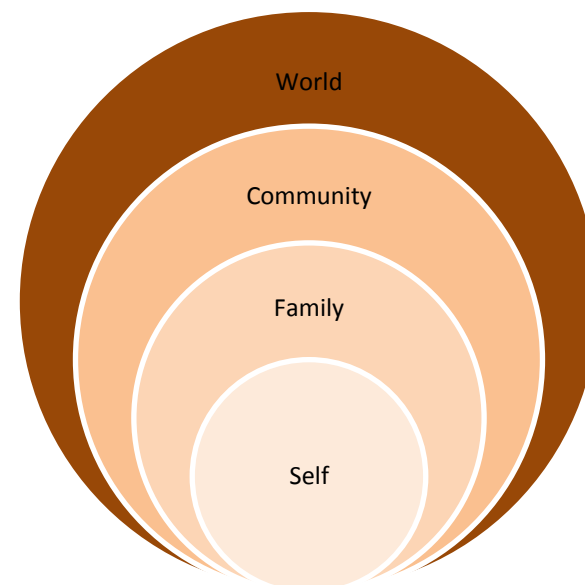
We notice that the scope of the allegiance becomes more and more narrow as we move from Spiritual/Religious code down to Personal Code, so one of the first techniques is to widen the student's understanding and perception of the world. It is important, though, that this is done completely. Let me explain...

The progression from personal to world view can be displayed in the following manner.



Some people, in their well-meaning attempt to widen the perspective of students, teach this concept but do not include all segments. This is a **very** common error in our current society.

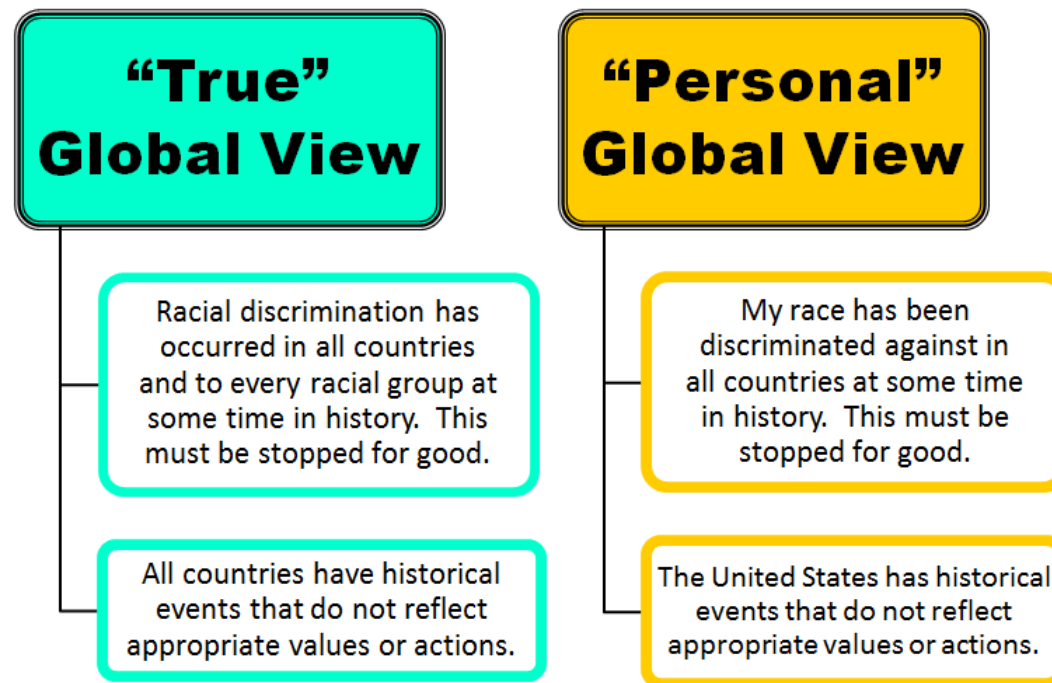
For example, you have many who feel that the only way to become diverse or develop a "world view" is to negate or remove the United States (the country) from the picture. This is not only illogical, it is ineffective and damaging. For some of our students, their country is the natural allegiance of their value code. Remove that, and you leave them with only personal code, and we have enough students operating at that level without artificially pushing them in that direction purposefully.



So, make sure to approach this concept in a complete manner. Our country has many, many values that are useful and praiseworthy. We need to provide these to our students with honesty about past errors but also pride in accomplishments. If this is done well, we automatically close the gap between the community and the world view. This is why many of our student first regain their perception of values by joining the U.S. military or military-based school programs. When they join, they automatically widen their perspective from their family, personal street, and/or group to include something beyond themselves and their immediate communities. They begin to value their country. For many, it may be the first time they considered the next higher value code (Civic/Legal) as being of worth and take pride in something beyond themselves and their immediate environment. They must understand their country before they can completely understand the country in relation t the world.

The Second Error

The second error is providing the full spectrum but using a personal code filter that negates the progress that should be made in terms of allegiance. When everything is filtered through personal code, the allegiance remains, well, personal. Let's take a look at this connection visually so the problem is clear:



It is clear that the progress that is made towards a widened perspective is immediately removed when the perception remains self-focused. The understanding is contained within the scope of the student's experiences, and for most, this can be quite narrow, often not even reflecting their country as a whole, let alone the world at large. This is why so many of our community initiatives to reduce bias and increase diversity fail and often make the problem worse. The people guiding these programs filter everything through personal events so the people involved begin to view the issue as *personal* transgressions everyone has made against *them* and lose their historical and global perspective about anyone else. The result is a reduced understanding that these concerns are more generalized and involve diverse groups. You lose the ability to solve "global" problems and end up with people trying to get others to solve THEIR personal problems. This shift from global, theoretical problems to personal, emotional concerns serves to enrage and will end up intensifying the problem rather than solve it ---all in all, not good!

How to Reverse the Trend

So, how do you reverse this trend and begin to widen the student's perspective, and by default, the allegiance of these students? The key is to provide outside experiences that allow them to understand first their community, then their country, and finally the total world. Here is a general list of concepts to address:

1. Explore general history
2. Explore wonderful features in the world
3. Explore unique and noteworthy people
4. Explore strengths (emphasize) and weaknesses (do not diminish but also do not over-emphasize)



A couple of special things to note:

- It is VERY important that these experiences be real as possible.
- Use as much media as you can. Students of this era respond much better to technology and the visual.
- Make the experiences meaningful by focusing on the present time (except for #1, of course)
- Keep the content age-appropriate. The younger the child, the more real and positive the content should be.
- Explore lost information and track down forgotten resources. We have lost way too much of our history!
- Above all, keep the content positive, celebratory and joyous. Past mistakes cannot be changed by rehashing them. Resilience requires the ability to learn from the past not endlessly wallow in it. Let's begin to reflect that concept in our lessons...

And now a list of activities to consider for some of this content:

History

- Newspapers and manuscripts from different eras
- Books on etiquette and living conditions from different time periods
- Fashion from different time periods
- Cookbooks and foods from different time periods
- Media (television, music, radio, dances, etc.) from different time periods
- Recreating any of the above is especially effective

Amazing Features

- Virtual tours of museums, famous houses (i.e. White House)
- Point-of-view rides (i.e. all Disney and Universal rides are in this format on YouTube)
- Full shows from Broadway, etc.
- Tours of parks, safaris, zoos and other locations
- Amazing technology, robots, computer advances and other technological wonders

Amazing People

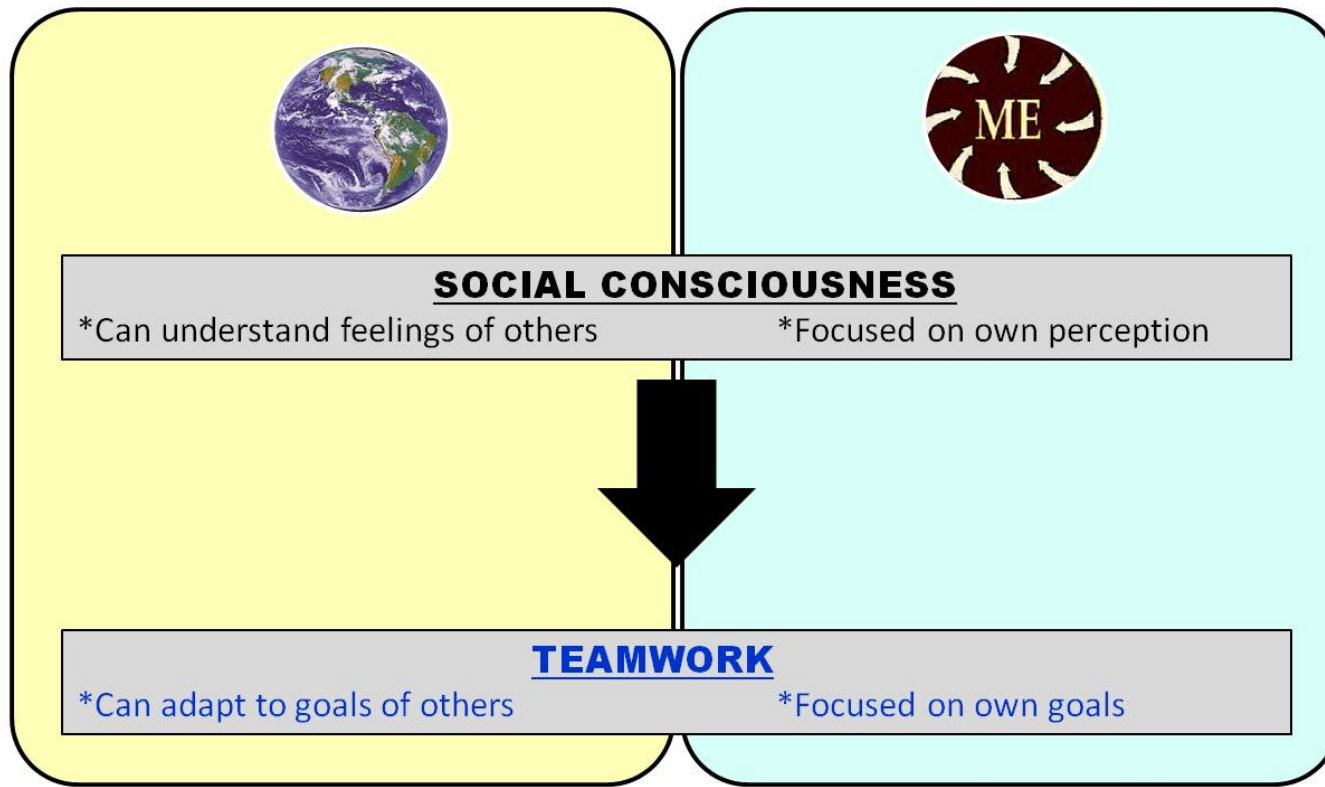
- Documentaries on famous people (make sure they are interesting ones)
- Documentaries on regular people and their everyday lives and events
- People who have been forgotten by history (i.e. Oscar James Dunn (1860's)-first elected black lieutenant governor of a U.S. state (Louisiana); William Cooper Nell (1816 –1874) journalist and author who wrote *Colored Americans of the Wars of 1776 and 1812* and *Patriots of the American Revolution*; the seven African Americans elected to the 41st and 42nd U.S. Congress (1872)--- Currier and Ives have a wonderful drawing of them, etc.)

The list for strengths and weaknesses is so age-dependent, I will leave that to you. Regardless, of the topic, though, this should be done first for your local community. This will have the most meaning to your students. Then repeat this list looking at your own state, then the United States, and then the world in general. Your goal is to excite the students about the world around them, inspire them to greatness, and allow them to view the world with admiration, hope, and joy. If you accomplish this goal, the inappropriate peers in their personal lives lose their power----the students can see beyond them and understand that the world holds much more than the two blocks around their home!

Flipping Perception from Self → Group

The technique just reviewed will begin to help the student note the world around them and give them expanded spheres to consider, but this *cannot be fully accomplished unless they are looking outward rather than inward*. This will become the center of our next general intervention.

The first variable to consider is the form of perception. Early childhood, by its very nature, is very egocentric. The child is the center of the universe. As the student gets older, though, this narrow view should begin to widen, but in this era, that change in perspective is being delayed longer and longer, if not permanently skipped for good. This is a much more of a serious problem than first meets the eye. Let's see how this issue affects development of social consciousness:



In short, if you remain locked in an egocentric view, it becomes virtually impossible to understand the feelings of others. In turn, if you are focused on your own perception, you can only visualize your own goals and beliefs. Teamwork is reduced because the goals of other people, or the group as a whole, become difficult to comprehend and usually have little to no value when measured against personal gain.

Some would ask if this was true, how could a student who is stuck in personal code become so committed to the group/gang mentality. The answer is simple. Personal code is driven by individual beliefs that directly benefit the person. These personal values have no connection to religion, tradition, or legal perspectives as a whole. The person may pick-and-choose some values that are seemingly “religious”, etc. in nature, but the key is **THEY** are picking and choosing. They never give those value decisions over to another entity.

So, it is not so much that the individual adopts the gang’s goals, it is that they, as individuals, make the decision to *temporarily embrace the goals of the gang that they think will benefit them personally.*

This is a subtle but important difference, and it explains why seemingly committed gang members and gang-related “friends” so easily turn on each other at a moment’s notice. Most young people involved in gangs are still really only and completely committed to self. If there is an opportunity to steal, act on anger, reduce a criminal charge by shifting blame to another, or some other similar behavior, if that action will benefit them personally, it is readily embraced. The group’s goals rarely supersede the individual’s goals, even if it involves murdering a close gang associate. The overarching goal is personal gain...

Interventions to Establish Social Consciousness


So, the goal is to flip the perception from self to the group so social consciousness can be developed. This will lead to a greater understanding of values at the higher levels of the value code. The higher levels (religious/spiritual, family/tradition, and legal/civic) all require this group perception, and it would be impossible to attain them without the ability to think in these abstract terms.



Please know that this type of intervention takes time and must be as concrete as possible. The unit titled, *Reducing Aggressive Play*, has many ideas for directly teaching gentleness, empathy, and social consciousness to younger children. If you have not had a chance to look at it, take a moment to do so. I am sure you will find something you might like to try, or at least a new awareness if working with older students. Meanwhile, here are some other techniques to consider:

1. Explore the “struggles” of famous people and see the reality of their lives (see Appendix A for more slides like the example at right). The goal is to help the student understand that greatness is not a smooth process and that success is usually preceded by failure, often multiple episodes of failure. Help them understand that resiliency and determination are key skills to develop.
2. Finding commonalities among different groups (using food, celebrations, and other daily life experiences) is very effective. For younger children, you should start with holidays and celebrations of students in their own classrooms and schools and then work out to other cultures and countries that are beyond their everyday experience.

**Went home,
locked himself
in his room,
and cried
after being cut
from his
high school
basketball team.**



Michael Jordan

Older students benefit from the reverse process, especially if you are working in an area that has various neighborhood/gang allegiances. Begin by having them see how people in other countries go to school, become trained for jobs, find spouses, and experience other life events. After those experiences, you can then work backwards into different communities, groups, and cultures closer to home that may be more “sensitive” in nature. The goal is to help the students understand that feelings, hopes, and desires are universal in nature and cross not only different countries but also (eventually) different community groups, gangs, and nearby schools. Just seeing these students and their struggle to get to school is enough to provide a new perspective on education and how it is valued in other locations in the world.

One wonderful example is this group of children who are determined to obtain an education. To get to school they must make a ½ mile trip that involves two hours of walking and a climb up the side of a mountain on homemade ladders: <http://www.cnn.com/2016/05/27/europe/china-children-education-climb/index.html> . The trip is so difficult and their desire for an education so profound that they only visit home a few times a month. When we see something like this, even we adults are taken back at what other people face in the world. I guarantee your students will find it surprising and memorable as well.



3. Lastly, any book or experience that allows a student to understand the perspective of others is useful. Some books to consider include: *How It Feels to Fight for Your Life* and *How It Feels to Live with a Physical Disability*, *Olympians*, *Just As I Am: Americans with Disabilities*, to name a couple.
4. Also consider using simulations to develop awareness of disabilities. There are tons of resources on the internet. Some locations also have regional special education resource centers that will actually come into your school and provide the experiences to your students. Here are some resources to get you started:
 - ❖ <http://www.thejanusschool.org/simulations.html>
 - ❖ <http://www.starkey.com/hearing-loss-simulator>
 - ❖ <http://www.hear2learn.org/CICSSim/index.html>
 - ❖ <http://successforkidswithhearingloss.com/demonstrations#Cochlear>
 - ❖ <http://webaim.org/simulations/>
 - ❖ <http://www.teachingvisuallyimpaired.com/simulation-activities.html>
 - ❖ <http://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/english/intl/z15/z15009gl/z1500917.html>

If any of these links break, which occurs often, just search for simulations. There are many to choose from!

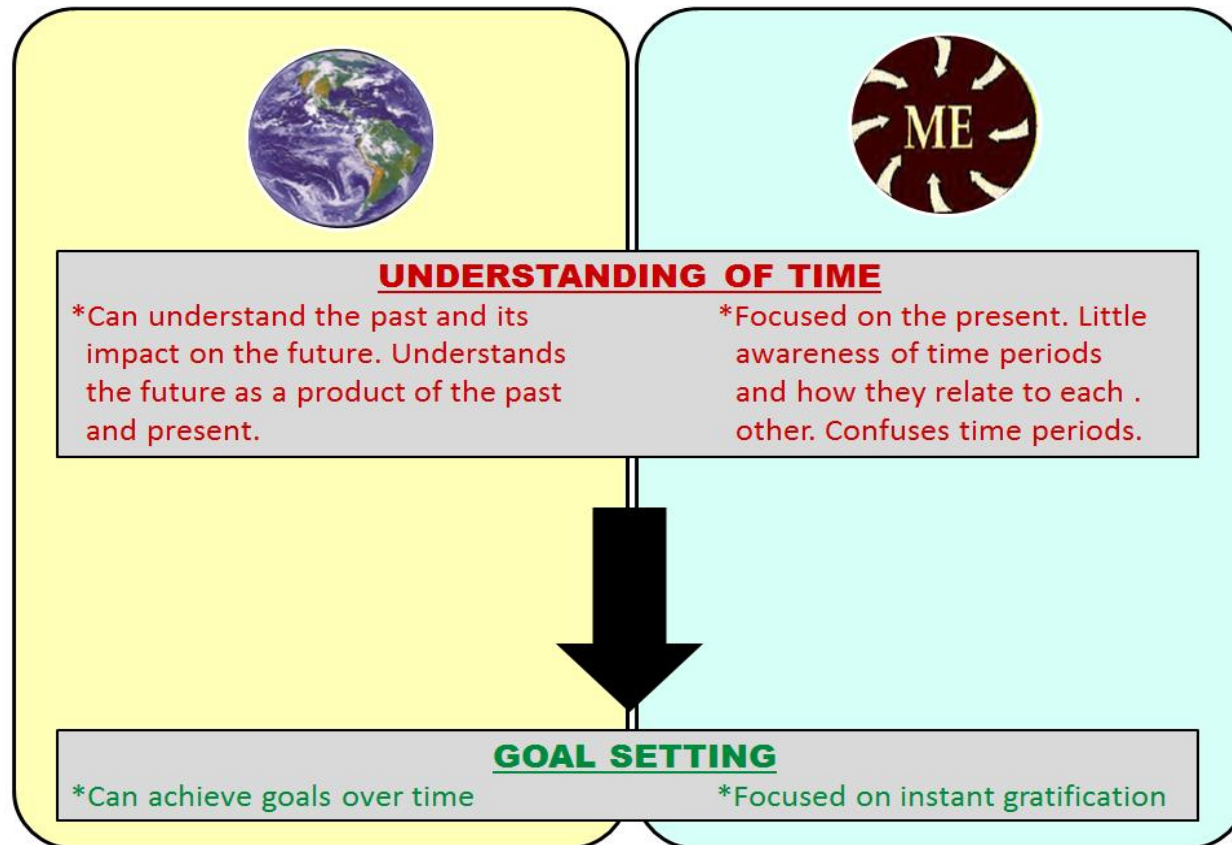
NOTE: The latest “flavor-of-the-month” is to have an issue with disability stimulations. I guess people just get bored and need to find something to criticize in ANY education activity 😊

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH USING THESE ACTIVITIES! Yes, you do need to make sure that these experiences are followed by examples of how these disabilities are overcome so you do not generate “pity”. But, as long as your goal is to develop understanding of a disability and then admiration and empathy on how these challenges were overcome by everyday people, you are on solid ground. The only way such experiences can harm disability awareness and fail to develop empathy is when they are used incorrectly...

5. Lastly, consider developing your own photo essays using inspiring situations or activities that are close to the students’ daily experiences. Documenting a student preparing for the Special Olympics in your area, a group of teenagers in a special education class getting ready for their prom, someone learning to adapt to a visual impairment, an elderly person managing after a stroke, a young student recovering from a traumatic brain injury, a bowling league or athletic group that includes students with disabilities, etc., etc. can really help students come to understand the feelings and perspectives of others...and best of all, it is happening in their own backyard. If you have an especially “hardened” group of students, I suggest starting with experiences that involve very young children. They will find it easier to feel empathy for that group than peers closer to their own age or the elderly.

Flipping Perception from Past → Present → Future

The next variable is a bit more subtle but even more critical when developing interventions. This variable is the ability of the student to understand and use time. Let's take a look at the same graphic now dealing with that second concept:



If a student is unable to take the perspective of another and is fixated on their own lives, they also lose the ability to perceive anything that is happening outside their immediate frame of time. The past only has meaning as it relates to their present moment (i.e. The “what have you done for me lately?” attitude). This is why close “friends” or relatives of gang members remain at risk at the hands of a fellow gang member. The past, even a long and intimate past with a blood relative, is easily discarded when “present” circumstances change. The present trumps the past.

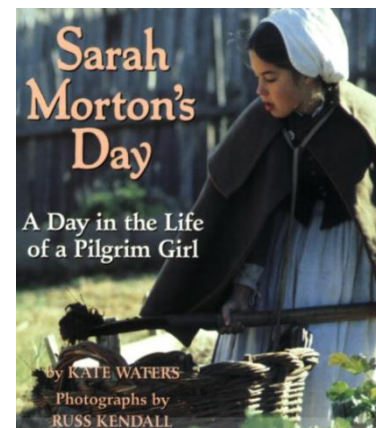
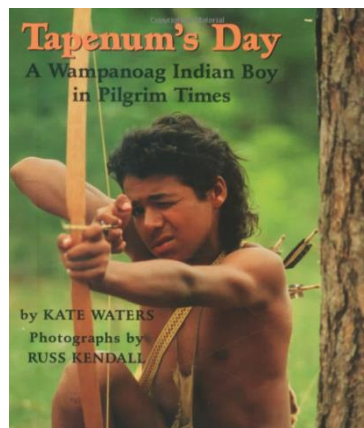
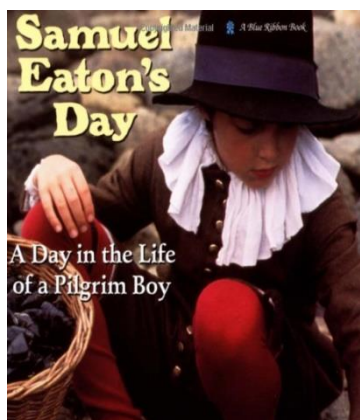
Another common problem that stems from a lack of “time” understanding is using the personal value codes of the current time to judge and interpret behaviors of the past. This leads to the misguided action of “cancelling people” who do not subscribe to the current world’s understanding of appropriate behavior and/or “erasing history” (or historical figures) based on a perceived injustice, even if that perception of justice never crossed the mind of people during that era.

The reverse is also true. The future, even a bright future (e.g., a football scholarship that could lead to a NFL career), is casually discarded for seemingly low-level gains (i.e. stealing a few hundred dollars, a baggie of weed, etc.). No “future” goal, no matter how enticing or assured, can ever trump a personal gain in the present, even if that gain is minimal in comparison to the gain that is possible with delayed gratification.

Interventions to Perceive Goals over Time

So, the goal in this set of interventions is to flip the student’s perception from present to another time period. It is usually easier for these students to look backward than forward, so that is the best place to begin. Here are some interventions that will help a student **develop a sense of the past to the present:**

1. I find it best to begin with experiences that are totally removed from any bias the students may have. This means that you want to steer clear of racial topics (i.e. slavery), religious topics (i.e. the holocaust), or anything else that might trigger “personal” code feelings. The use of “diaries” or historical events can be very effective if you need neutral ground to get the ball rolling. For younger children, you can use one of the many photo-essay books (i.e. *Samuel Eaton’s Day: Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy*, *Tapenum’s Day: A Wampanoag Indian Boy in Pilgrim Times* and *Sarah Morton’s Day: Day in the Life of a Pilgrim*).



The goal of all of these exercises is to give the student a sense of time passage combined with a sense of accomplishment. You want to emphasize how problems were identified at both the individual level and the geographic level (i.e. country) and how these issues were overcome with time. Make sure to keep the lessons hopeful (i.e. lessons learned). You want to develop the belief that they can replicate what they have seen and extend this same “hope” to overcome problems that have developed in more recent time periods or the present.

It is also very useful to have the students draw comparisons between their own lives and the living conditions of the past. Too often our students become so immersed in their own daily lives and problems that small issues and inconveniences become overinflated in their minds. In other words, a mistake in their cafeteria lunch order can draw a reaction so extreme that you would think that major bodily injury had occurred.

As student become older, the topic of perspective and value system can be broached. Each of these stories reflects the writer’s understanding of that time and their value system. History is definitely influenced by “who writes that history”, but that is a side concept for this set of activities. For now, your goal is developing a sense of time. If you become too immersed in the “accuracy” of the information, seeking pure fact, you are missing the point *that it is impossible for that to be determined since your own assessment reflects YOUR value system and perception.* LOL A resource you would assess as “accurate” is one that another person would dismiss in a moment as being flawed. Diversity is the key. Give students many, many perspectives---that is the safest avenue.

2. Once you can develop the sense of time in large increments, you can begin to help students define smaller and more personal increments. It is best to begin with examples you can completely control. Once you begin to move into life histories of family members and the children themselves, you run the risk of ending up with negative situations rather than positive ones. If you are worried that this will be the case for your students, I suggest avoiding personal life stories completely. There are so many wonderful examples in the community; you will be able to find people of inspirations from all races, countries, religions, and walks of life. The main thing is to keep the students *hopeful* and motivated.

For example, in my own community there is a wonderful man with an amazing personal history. The story of how he made it from the mines of China to become an art professor and exhibitor in the United States is beyond inspiring,

The Power of Local “Heroes”



- ❖ Living during current time period
- ❖ Provides a real example
- ❖ Linked to the local community



<http://yansun.us/index.html>

and best of all, it is contemporary. Students can read this man's story, see his art and come to understand that "heroes" still exist in the modern world (http://yansun.us/Cross_culture_Essay.html). This is the type of person you should search for in your own community. Their example will have more of a positive impact than any history lesson will ever manage to inspire!

Let's finish this section with some interventions that will help a student develop **a sense of the present to the future**. These interventions work best if they are provided in a specific order. You want the initial work in this area to be very concrete and within the student's value code. So, definitely feel free to jump around based on your own perspective, but when in doubt, following this sequence should help keep the activity positive and attainable.

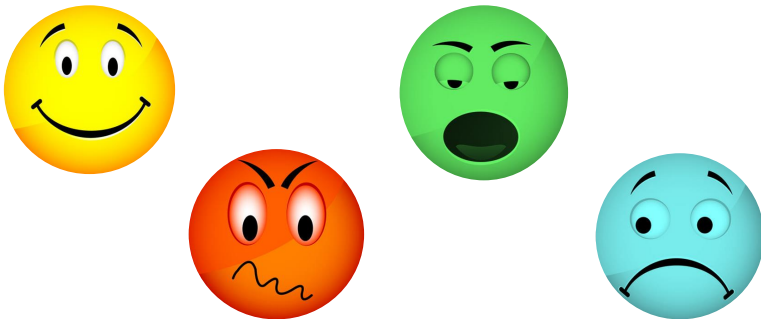
- 1. Have the student set a school-based goal that can be easily and quickly accomplished in the classroom.** This can include remembering to complete a simple task (e.g., put a period at the end of each sentence), learn a new skill (count to 20) or correct a simple problem (clean a messy desk). Make sure to have the student write down the goal in some form (writing, pictures, etc) and then evaluate the accomplishment. Even though this seems like over-kill for these small, quick little goals, you are teaching a contract format that will be useful down the road, so remember to include this sequence even if it seems unnecessary right now.
- 2. Have the student set a goal that can be easily and quickly accomplished during free time and/or at home. This goal should be personal code in nature so the student is motivated.** There are many small things that can be included in this activity. Consider having the student research a new football play, create a new cheer, learn about the latest computer game, track the statistics for a baseball team, review a new movie---anything that is of interest to that individual student. Make sure to set the goal formally (draw or write it) and review that contract at the end by examining some type of product. This can be a simple "product", by the way, (e.g., telling you what they have learned) or a much more formal product such as a class presentation or paper. Just make sure the activity is meaningful and positive for the student.
- 3. Have the student set a goal (classroom or personal-based) that will take a few days to accomplish.** At this point, you are beginning to lengthen the amount of time required to set the goal. This level of intervention can go on for some time. As the student becomes more accomplished, you can lengthen the time to a week.
- 4. Have the student set a moderate goal (classroom or personal-based) that will take one to two weeks or more to accomplish.** At this point you should help the student set "*benchmarks*" to track their progress over time. Check-in

during the first few attempts at this level should be daily or every-other-day to ensure the student is progressing well. This process can continue over time and include larger goals, extended periods of time and different levels of benchmarks as you see fit. The goal is to have the student learn how to set personal goals over time and accomplish them successfully. Eventually this work will lead into discussion about the future, life goals, job interests and other long-term dreams....all critical skills for expanding the value perspective beyond the immediate time period. As you begin to assist students in working towards more intense goals over a longer period of time, make sure to develop the following concepts and skills:

LEADERS MUST BE DIFFERENT



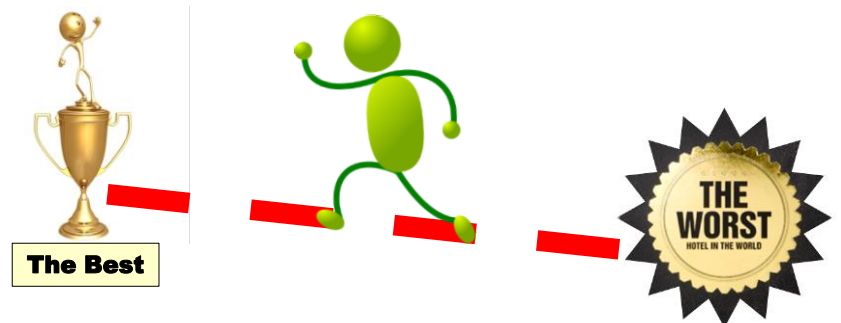
**NO ONE CAN "OFFEND ME"
OR "MAKE ME ANGRY"
I CONTROL MY OWN EMOTIONS**



ONLY SHORT-TERM GOALS LEAD TO LONG-TERM SUCCESS!



**I AM NOT THE BEST...
BUT I ALSO AM NOT THE WORST**



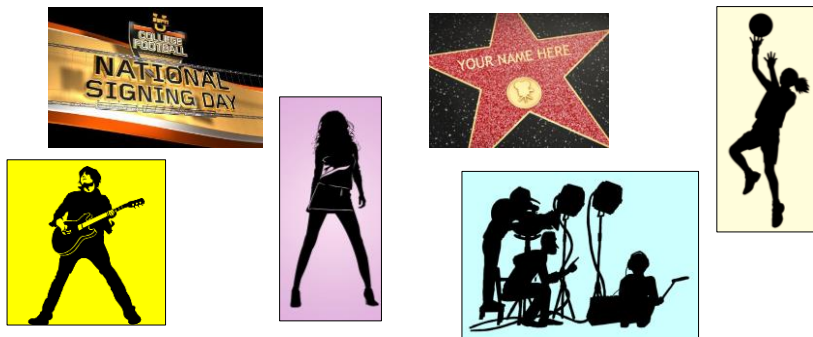
**I MUST FOCUS ONLY
ON MAKING PROGRESS**



**STOPPING AND
THINKING WILL HELP ME
MAKE GOOD DECISIONS**

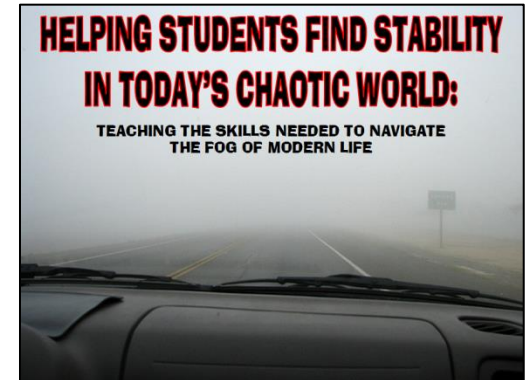


**DREAMS DO NOT
ALWAYS COME TRUE
..I MUST HAVE A PLAN "B"**



Copies of these slides can be found in the Appendix for your use.

Also, take a look at this document (under the BEHAVIOR tab) for a more complete set of concepts and activities for all age groups, from the early childhood years through high school.



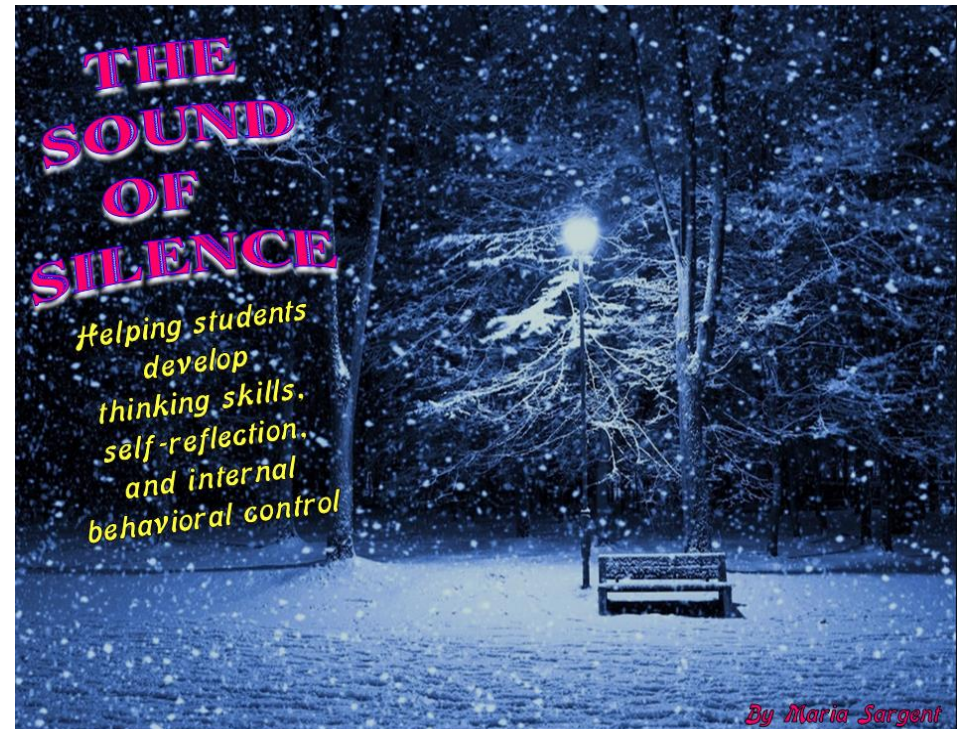
Establishing the Foundation for Internal Reflection

Hopefully, the previous sections gave you some initial ideas to consider. So, we will now turn our attention to the last global intervention segment to target: developing the ability to self-reflect. If you have children who are also struggling with quiet bodies, impulse control, and other attention issues, you may need to work on these skills prior to working on quiet thinking. Please see the unit titled, *Teaching Impulse Control* on www.Neuro-Teach.com , for ideas on how to develop these skills before proceeding with the rest of this section.

1. Learning to think quietly.

The first skill to be developed is so critical and so weak in today's society that I have written a whole document to address the issue. This is the ability to remain in silence long enough to think. If this idea intrigues you (which I sincerely hope it will), please see the document pictured to the right at www.Neuro-Teach.com . It can be found on the website under the BEHAVIOR tab.

To summarize the concepts from this document, suffice it to say that a student who cannot stop the noise of the world long enough to think will not be able to reflect and make decisions. Given the constant noise in today's world (phones, music, television, etc.), it is very clear that many of our students are not familiar with silence and are missing this critical skill.




So, before we can give students something to reflect on, **we must develop in them the ability TO reflect**, and this means we may have to help them learn to tolerate and then use silence. I think one of the most fascinating aspects of this skill is that the word "tolerate" is key for many of the students. They are totally uncomfortable with silence, and when faced with it, they will begin to hum, drum on their desks, or somehow break that vacuum. It is almost as if they have to cover

up or “drown out” their own thoughts. Quite an interesting thing to witness, and even harder to break. I hope some of the solutions provided in that manual assist you if your are working with students suffering from this modern “disease”.

2. Reflecting on the size of the world

Another foundational skill is giving the student a sense of the size of the world in relation to their own “small presence”. This understanding helps them to put their problems into perspective and reduce over-response to small issues and over-allegiance to small geographic areas (i.e. their street). I have found that one of the best ways to do this is to help them understand earth dimensions using startling facts. Here are just a few to get you started. I am sure you will find many more!



Alaska has more than three million lakes over 20 acres in size.

Antarctica has as much ice as the Atlantic Ocean has water.

Assuming population density of NY, the earth's 6.8 billion people could fit in the state of Texas!

The deepest lake is in the former USSR (Lake Baikal), and it's 400 mile wide and mile-deep depth could hold all five of the next largest lakes (The Great Lakes).

The area of the world's oceans is 139 million square miles. (frame of reference: Texas has 266,874 square miles)

The Sahara Desert has a surface area of about 3.5 million square miles. (roughly 1/3 of the U.S.)

3. Ability to manipulate concepts in the mind

A lost skill is the ability to hold a concept in the mind and manipulate it systematically. This is a critical skill that requires both simple and advanced memory. Once a student can use their memory efficiently, they have a much better chance of using logic (the last skill in this sequence) when confronted with a problem. So, here are some “old” activities that used to establish this skill in our students. If you do not currently use them, consider trying a few!

- A. Memory games that expand over time (e.g., going on a picnic game)
- B. Memorizing short poems and then progressing to longer “pieces” and plays
- C. Mental math: computing simple to complex math problems in the head (addition up to multiplication or division involving several steps)
- D. List memorization: memorizing presidents, countries, dates, etc. in order (advanced tasks including starting the “list” in the middle and/or reciting it backwards)

4. Ability to reflect on the logic behind what is seen and heard.

This next skill will take time and constant reinforcement because it is lacking in many adults. It will be well-worth your time to develop this ability since it will safeguard your students against those who wish to incite them to rage, hopelessness or promote foolish concepts that have no basis in reality. Let’s take a look at subsets in this category:

A. *THE WORLD IS MUCH WORSE TODAY THAN IN THE PAST*

You would think that this belief would be discounted immediately as having no bearing in fact, but you would be surprised at how many people agree with this statement. Is it true that we have problems, in some cases major problems, that need to be corrected? Oh, yes.... but, the reality is that many people enjoy a much higher standard of living and degree of freedom in the present time than in the past, especially in the United States. So, while we do not want to ignore valid concerns and calls for improvement, false inflation of our problems is not valid either. We have made great headway in many areas, and there is no reason to believe that it will not continue. Your lessons on history should help combat this hopeless and inaccurate belief!

B. *THE UNITED STATES IS THE SOURCE OF THE WORLD’S PROBLEMS*

Again, simple examples that show how the U.S. assists the world’s people should suffice to begin to turn this strange and inaccurate belief around. Can the U.S. do an even better job on the world’s stage? Sure, but that said, there is a REASON why people will sacrifice their homes, belongings, and even their lives to get to this country, and that is

because of the opportunity and freedom it provides. So, do your best to tackle false statistics with true facts (e.g., The U.S. has higher infant mortality than any other country----No, we measure the population of “live births” differently from many other countries. In many countries, what we count as a live birth is categorized as “never born alive”, thus causing the “incident rate of deaths” to appear lower). Help the students view their country with admiration for what has been achieved and with hope for what yet remains to be accomplished. Do not negate problems and the need for improvement, but do not artificially inflate or focus on them either.

C. I CANNOT ACHIEVE BECAUSE I AM.....

This problem takes many forms and includes disabilities, race, poverty, religion, personal appearance, family structure and a host of other issues. Where the problem is not based in reality, combat the issue with facts. Where it is a *true* obstacle, combat it by providing concrete and real-life examples of those who have overcome these same or similar odds. **Do not allow the students to make excuses based on life experiences.** People have historically overcome much larger odds than anything we currently experience in modern life.

So, all we can do is work to develop initiative and resiliency skills so our students are not swayed by the conditions that we *all* experience to some degree in our non-perfect lives. We must end this tendency towards victimhood and excuses. This does not mean there is no room for assistance, support, and empathy, this is a valid need in many cases, but the goal of such support should be to move the person beyond the obstacle, not sit there and contemplate it for the rest of their life. If we are ever to assist our otherwise very talented students in recognizing their own value and worth, we must help them focus on what they can do and can become. They are not served by overly ruminating on the negative events that have occurred in their or someone else’s past! These past transgressions cannot be changed...only the future is within their control. Only use history to improve the future.



Of course a necessary piece of this is logical thinking itself. Logic is an area of study that used to be part of our curriculum but has faded from most schools. Here are some activities and books to help you recapture this set of lessons for your classroom:

- ❖ http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Building%20Thinking%20Skills%C2%AE (skill series that directly teaches logic)
- ❖ [http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Printable Logic Puzzles for Kids](http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Printable_Logic_Puzzles_for_Kids)
- ❖ <http://www.fallacydetective.com/articles/categoriescategory/thinking-tools/>
- ❖ <http://www.fallacydetective.com/articles/read/logic-on-the-web>
- ❖ <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/math/logic/puzzles/>

Cognitive Skill Games Using Logic

- ❖ <http://classicallegacypress.com/logic1.htm>
- ❖ http://www.learninggamesforkids.com/logic_games.html
- ❖ <http://www.teachchildren.com/ep-504.html>
- ❖ <http://www.teachchildren.com/criticalthinkinggames.html>
- ❖ <http://www.jumpstart.com/parents/activities/critical-thinking-activities>

Development of Values

The last general concept to be addressed before covering specific interventions is the development of a value base to use in personal reflections. This can be a touchy subject, so be sure that you know the parameters of your workplace and then share the techniques with your families so they can continue the lessons at home in their own value codes.

1. Recapturing lost goals and values

Somewhere along the way of trying to be inclusive, we began to eliminate values deemed to be too spiritual or religious in nature. We developed a fear of labeling something right or wrong and began to establish the concept that all values are open to interpretation. In other words, there is no truth, there is only a person's perception of the truth. This is not only illogical, but incorrect. Just reflect on the following:

**You achieve a 98% on a quiz but receive an "F" in the class.*

**Your car is hit from behind while you are stopped at a stop sign, but you are the one to receive the ticket.*

**Your football team scores more points, but the other team is listed as the winner.*

**You set down your purse to put on your coat, and someone takes it....and is allowed to keep it.*

**You work to finish all parts of a project, and a person who did not participate at all gets the credit as the author.*

**You are beat up by someone, and no one considers that action to be a problem.*

In all of these cases, you would be upset because there IS a universal set of values that establishes right from wrong. These beliefs are based on logic and are part of our society. Anyone who tries to make the case that all values are "relative" should not be argued with, just allow them to experience a scenario like the ones listed above and see how fast they change their beliefs about all values being open to interpretation 😊

So, what are these values that most of us have floating around in the back of our head but may no longer discuss or reflect on in our daily lives, let alone our classrooms. Here is just a partial list to consider:

“Lost” Value Concepts

empathy
reverence
sacrifice
tedious
honesty
wisdom
self-control
honor
benevolence
generosity
sacrifice
persistence
effort
ethics
rectitude
peace
mercy
cheerful
positive

sufferance
chastity
diligence
patience
humility
temperance
charity
justice
generosity
compassion
selflessness
courage
respect
zeal
fortitude
integrity
forbearance
endurance
decisive

compassion
bravery
loyalty
trustworthy
citizenship
dedication
fairness
responsibility
caring
modesty
altruism
passion
determination
consideration
obedience
politeness
kindness
friendliness

...and related, just a partial list of problems that we used to discuss:

“Lost” Problems to Avoid

envy	corruption
pride	temptation
avarice	hostility
pessimism	steadfast
boasting	bias
self-absorption	spite
conceit	hostility
anger	antagonism
discrimination	intimidation
sloth	greed

As you can see, there is a great deal of discussion about appropriate behavior that can occur in today's classroom without ever wading into value codes that would cause an issue for our diverse groups of children. We used to do a great deal of this type of work in our rooms...what happened? Definitely something to consider changing. I sincerely wonder how many of our older students even know some of these vocabulary words! Just pick and choose wisely for your group of students.

2. Recognizing appropriate and inappropriate “sense of entitlement”

An equally critical topic, but one that is often avoided at all costs, is the honest understanding of entitlement. Now, this is one that can easily evolve into a spiritual discussion, so if you are in a secular classroom, be careful. That said, though, there is nothing wrong about discussing this at a civic level, and it SHOULD be discussed with older students in some manner.

Here are some concepts to address:

- A. What is a person “entitled” to?*
- B. Who is responsible for providing these entitlements?*
- C. How are both the receiver and the giver protected?*
- D. When is this assistance helpful?*
- E. When can this assistance become harmful?*
- F. How do you help someone who is demanding help long after they should be independent?*



I have found that these discussions at the younger level should revolve around classroom issues (e.g., someone struggling with math facts, learning to write a paragraph, spelling, etc.). It helps the student understand the problem and keeps the discussion from becoming an attack on families that have become multi-generational in terms of public assistance.

Older students can address these issues at a more advanced level, but again, I would suggest avoiding “civic” entitlements like welfare, fuel-assistance programs, free phones, etc. as the base of the discussion and focus on youth-related situations they can relate to in their own lives. Some that I have used successfully include helping someone on a sports team develop a skill, dealing with a friend who is afraid to learn to drive, managing a friend who spends their money casually then always hits you up for a “loan”, dealing with someone who never does their homework and wishes to copy what you have done, etc.

Anything that hits the concept but deals with the issues within the context of the students' lives is useful. You can then link these discussions back to the value words and problems that were presented in the previous section.

3. Reflecting on how you can have a meaningful life

This last segment pulls the whole sequence together and ensures that the work you have done is not misconstrued or feeds into hopelessness. Let's first reflect ourselves on what we have covered. Here are the areas we have targeted so far:

- A. We must help student's develop an allegiance to something other than their personal family or group.
- B. We must help students understand how vast the world truly is and how limited their place is in relation to the world's history and geography.
- C. We must help students understand history and how it can be used to understand the past and to set future goals.



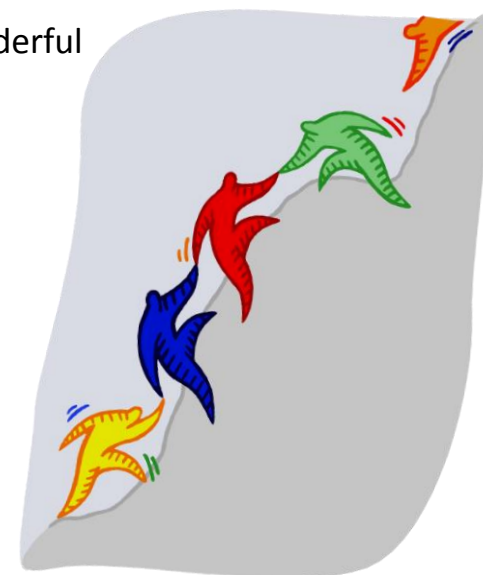
- D. We must help students use quiet reflection and logic to think about their life and choices.
- E. We must help students use values to measure their choices and determine whether they are appropriate.

Now, the last skill is to help the students figure out how to take that very small place they occupy in history and the immense geography of the world and **make it meaningful**. Without this last step, a person can feel insignificant and helpless. They can feel they have no value nor can impact such a vast world. Definitely this last skill is critical for the success of your goals!

So, how do you bring this full circle? You do it by having the students reflect on the most wonderful things that have occurred in their own lives.

Here are some questions for them to consider:

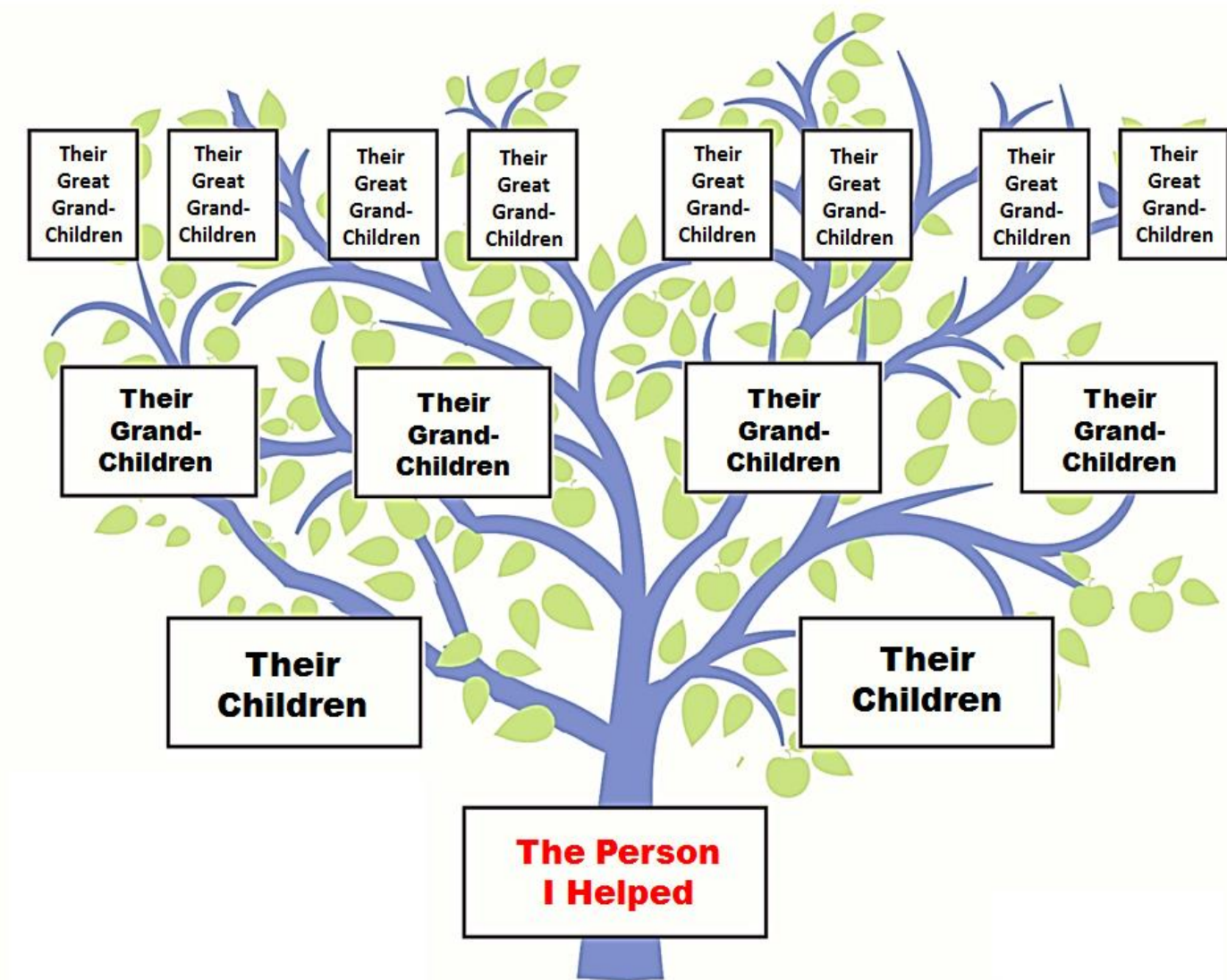
- A. What is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me in my life?
- B. How did this wonderful thing happen?
- C. Who made this wonderful thing possible?
- D. How did this person come in contact with me?
- E. If this person had not come in contact with me, would this wonderful thing have occurred?



Your goal in this series of questions is to help the student understand that it is not the government, vast organizations, or community agencies that make good things happen in someone's life--- **it is the PEOPLE within those groups who make the magic happen!** In almost every case, those wonderful events can be linked back to an individual who took the time, effort and initiative to help them. Regardless of whether that person was known, unknown, a family member, friend, or stranger, it is the individual that is usually the catalyst for making someone else's life better.

...and this is what makes a person's life significant and the effort worthwhile. Yes, the world is vast, and you are only one out of billions of people, but that doesn't matter. One person can make life better---one person can produce change. Yes, maybe the change you created does not extend beyond the single individual who has been helped, but does that matter to that person? All they know is life is better, and YOU made it happen.

Help your students understand that they have the power to change a life and to understand how that one little change can multiply over time and impact generations of people to come. There are many books out there for younger children that show how a single action can effect the world over time (e.g., *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*), but there is little for the more mature student. Even if you have to create hypothetical scenarios on your own, the concept is well worth pursuing. This is what will allow your students come to value their place in the world and feel like they have a reason to live. It can also be useful for us professionals to reflect on when the day has been unusually difficult 😊





**GENERAL
INTERVENTION
LESSON SERIES**

Lesson Series to Systematically Develop Social Consciousness and Empathy

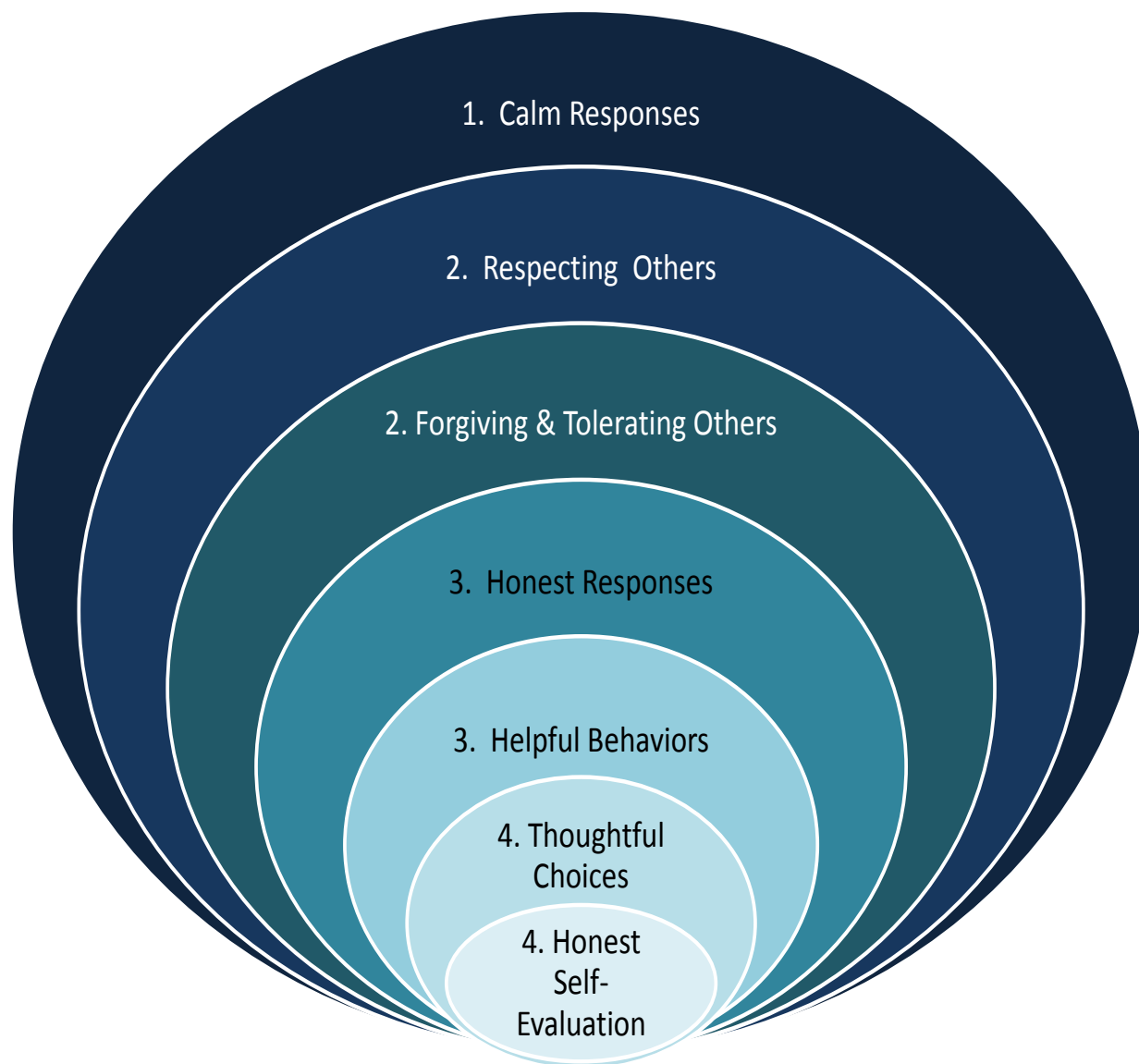
We will conclude this general intervention section with a set of systematic lessons to move students to higher levels of social consciousness and empathy. If you use this process, please keep in mind the value code level of your working location. This will guide the language you use as you move through the series of reflections and questions. You will also need to reflect on several other items to use this series well. These include:

- 1. What is the Value Code of this working location and the diversity of codes in the room?**
-When in doubt, use secular language and personal code.
- 2. What is the time that should be spent on this activity?**
-Take into account the age and developmental level of the students involved.
- 3. Do I need to visually cue this process?**
-When in doubt use the cue...it cannot harm if present but may harm if needed but absent.
- 4. How do I help students who are really struggling with this skill?**
-Keep reading---specific interventions for individual students follow this section!

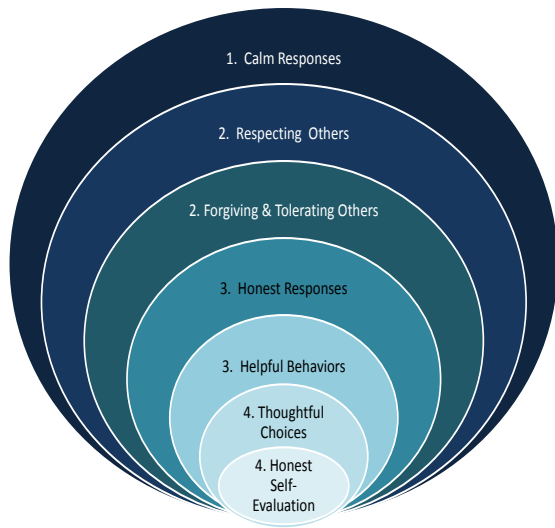
Lesson Levels

To run any lesson series well, it is essential to understand the final goal or product anticipated. In this case, we are trying to use all of the techniques previously described to move the students to higher levels of reflection and management of personal/social relationships. This type of analysis will prepare them to combat inappropriate peer influences since the student is able to quickly discern what a choice will mean both in terms of personal impact and the impact on others around them, even if only family members. This slight hesitation, a momentary delay before “following the crowd”, may be just enough of a pause to help a student make a better choice. Many professionals avoid these discussions because they are so value-code based, but now you understand how to manage personal codes without moving into religious discussions, so that fear is removed. So, I STRONGLY urge you to begin to do some of this work in your room. Our students need to practice this skill **before** it is needed during a difficult peer situation. It will be worth the few minutes of time and effort that is required on a daily basis.

Here is a visual of your overall goal. The student will move from the outside level (1. Calm Responses) to the highest level (4. Thoughtful Choices and Self-Evaluation):



Now that you have an idea of the whole framework, let's work through the levels one-by-one...



Overall Lesson Notes: You will never have a total room of students who are on the same level, and some students may NEVER reach Level Four while in your care. For this reason, you should move through each level in EACH lesson. We want the students to reflect all the way to Level Four even if their reflections are incomplete. It is like layers of an onion with higher and higher results being achieved over time. We want them to work up to Level Four even if they are still struggling with the calmness of Level 1. If they practice, they will eventually get there! Know that this process will probably take only five minutes at most, but feel free to adjust the time based on those four questions back on page 43. The process must reflect the abilities of your room. Do what you need to do to make it effective!

Level 1- Calm Responses:

At this level, the student is learning how to calm their body and mind enough to even think through the later questions. Begin by guiding the students to do the following:

1. **Take three deep breaths from stomach** (*not diaphragm*)
2. **Systematically relax body** (*you can walk them through doing this from their head down to their toes*)
3. **Focus on my voice** (*make sure they are attentive to the degree possible for that student---bring them "back" as needed. I suggest using a gentle and prolonged touch or pat on shoulder, etc. instead of talking to students losing focus so you do not disrupt the thoughts of the others.*)

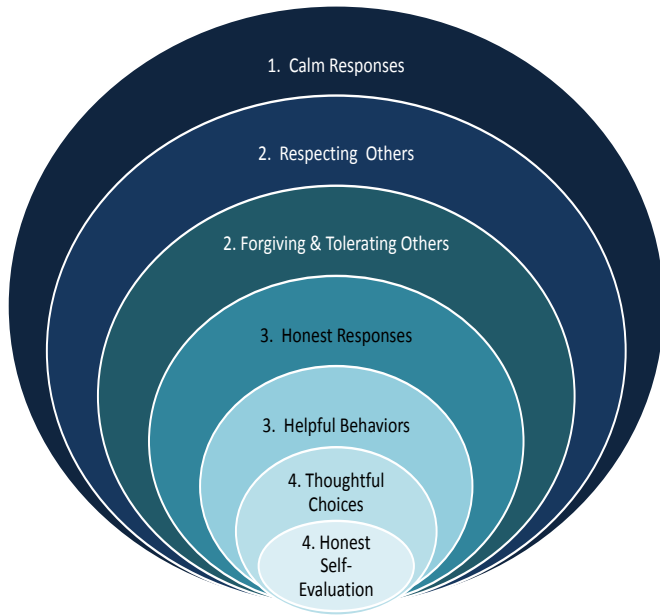
Level 2- Respecting Others:

and//

Level 2- Forgiving and Tolerating Others:

Next, have the student reflect on how they are managing socially. Do this by walking them through these questions. They should just reflect quietly on their own (this is why that manual on Silence is so critical to this process)

1. **How have I been responding to people (friends and family)?**
2. **Why did I respond that way?** (*..was I angry, scared, embarrassed, etc.*)
3. **Am I hurting anyone with my actions?** (*encourage them to forgive themselves for their mistake and figure out what the OPPOSITE or correct response would be*)
4. **Is anyone hurting me or making me anxious or afraid?** (*encourage them to realize that these people also have emotions that may have driven THEIR behavior (...anger, embarrassment, etc.) so they should also be forgiven.*)



Level 3- Honest Responses:

and//

Level 3- Helpful Behaviors:

Now the students need to think about how to handle the issues they discovered in Level 2:

1. **How strong are you?** *(Encourage them to think back to a moment or event where they were happy and making great choices. See, they CAN do it because they did it before!)*
2. **Are other people able to make changes?** *(Remind them that they NEVER know what people are thinking or feeling so they should let go of the opinions of others. It doesn't matter much whether they make changes because YOU are changing. Do not allow them to determine what is right and wrong for YOU.)*
3. **Am I able to make changes?** *(Make sure they have a positive self-image and hope in the future. They need to realize that they WILL figure this out...that they WILL be okay!)*

Level 4- Thoughtful Choices:

and//

Level 4- Honest Self-Evaluation:

Finally, have the student make a plan for the next time period depending on when you are running this sequence (i.e next day, the recess coming up, the weekend, etc.)

1. **What is my plan for the next time this situation comes up?** *(Encourage them to come to you if they are being hurt and need help, can't figure out a solution, or have been stuck trying to fix the problem for a long time..)*
2. **When will I try to find five minutes to practice relaxing and thinking silently?** *(You can skip this question if you are running the silence program from the Sounds of Silence: Helping Students Develop Thinking Skills, Self-Reflection, and Internal Behavioral Control manual. You will ensure those moments of silence occur 😊)*
3. **What is the skill I need to learn most and why?** *(Encourage them to identify a goal and relate it to their personal code/vocation---i.e. I need to keep from getting angry so football teams will be willing to give me a scholarship). Have the students write or draw them if appropriate for their age and developmental needs.)*

Closing Notes:

Clearly this process hinges on many factors, some of them outside your control. First, if the students are not able to think silently, you already have a huge barrier. In some cases, I run the Silence program for a long time before even attempting this level of thought.

You must also really reflect on when this would work best for your group. Some students do better “anticipating” what to do in situations, so that group might benefit thinking things through prior to difficult time periods like lunch or recess. Others need to reflect after situations so they fully understand them. These concrete thinkers have to make mistakes, unfortunately, before they can realize the full sequence of cause and effect. That group might do better reflecting right after lunch or recess, or even at the end of the day. If the length of time is too long between their plans and attempts to try them out, the visual cues (i.e. the writing or drawing of their goals) can really help. Just have them pull them out at the beginning of the day or prior to difficult times to remind themselves what they had planned as their solutions.

Lastly, this process may uncover some difficult situations or identify students with severe social skill deficits. Make sure to follow up with these children and/or seek outside social and mental health professional help as appropriate. Many children really need intensive assistance to make progress.

In closing, know that you can find a single-page sheet of these questions in the Appendix to facilitate running this sequence in your room.

Direct Interventions



Directly Teaching Weak or Missing Skills

We have now covered a vast array of general techniques to use to develop the skills that will assist the student in withstanding peer pressure, but what about the student who needs direct intervention? What can you do?

This section will provide some direct interventions for you to try. You can do much of this work in the classroom, but this is one skill that is best developed in the home since the value base for that family can be more freely discussed. So, make sure to try the classroom interventions provided, but also take the time to pass on this information to the families involved. They can often move faster and establish the skills more comprehensively than you can in a classroom setting.

Identifying and Teaching Peer Management Skills

Here is a list of skills to consider teaching:

1. How to say no
2. How to withstand peer pressure and teasing
3. What to do if you are in a “difficult” situation
4. What to do if you are in a “dangerous” situation
5. How to get help quietly and quickly

All of these skills should be taught in realistic situations and using the student’s current life experiences. This may include social

stories, role playing, checklists, creating contingency plans, and other personal strategies. For example, it is better to establish a real texting code (i.e. *Mom, I’m sick at 240 Broad Ave*) that is a pre-arranged signal to a parent that the student needs help to get out of a problem situation at a certain address than talking about them hypothetically doing it later. Come up with real strategies that can be used immediately in daily life. NOTE: this work may need to be done in conjunction with the parents or caregivers, depending on which tool you are creating.



Another set of basic skills involves helping the student reflect on whether they are being led in the wrong direction by a peer group. There are two checklists that may be used when considering these questions (and can also be found for your use in the Appendix):

<u>Am I running with the wrong group?</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are they friends my family would worry about?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are they friends who have been in legal trouble?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do I meet them late at night or in hidden places?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Could I include my family in the things they do?

<u>Am I allowing a peer group to control me?</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have I ever gone along with my group's plans even though I really didn't want to?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have I ever been afraid about what my group was doing?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have I ever wanted to go home to avoid my group's plans?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do I hide what I do with my group from my family members?

If they answer “yes” to any of the questions, they will need assistance to consider what to do to change their situation. This may require helping them switch peer groups, supporting them while developing new friends, and learning to withstand shunning by their previous friends.

If they are leaving a true gang (i.e. jumping out), you will need assistance from others as well (i.e. the local gang unit in your police department, social worker, counselor, etc.). Jumping out of a gang is even more dangerous than being jumped in and should not be done without professional guidance that goes well beyond the classroom. Mental health agencies and professionals in criminal justice and social work have vast experience with this very issue and MUST be used to safeguard both the student and their families!

Systematic Gang-Proofing Program for the School

Running a “gang-proofing” type of program is a bit tricky since the values that you may need to discuss stem from the student’s perception, and these may differ across your room. This doesn’t mean you can’t run this in your classroom, it just means that it may fall short of an individual child’s needs. That said, what CAN you teach in your room? Here is a list of concepts to consider:

- ❖ I will not let other people make me feel bad about myself.
- ❖ I know what is right and wrong in my classroom, and I will not let someone change my mind.
- ❖ I know what I should do and not do in my school, and I will do that even if my friends make other choices.
- ❖ I am brave enough to help my friends even when others are treating them badly.
- ❖ I am not afraid of my peers and their opinions....they do not control me.

Now, that is all lovely, but how in the world do you teach this? Here are the steps to take:

1. Practice the skills in the general population of the school.

The best way to begin working on this is to use simple, easy-to-find examples in the children’s daily lives. For younger students, this may simply mean following a direction to be quiet in the cafeteria or lining up quietly after recess. I assure you, there will be more than enough examples of “inappropriate peer behavior” around them to make it a worthwhile first exercise! Even for older students, this may be the best way to initiate this skill. Using concrete and non-threatening, non-social situations (e.g., complying with dress code, using correct staircase, staying off grass, etc.) may help them begin to comply when peers are not doing so. This “physical” level can help them build confidence, and as silly as it may sound, give them practice in being “different” from their peers, something this age group avoids like the plague---LOL

2. Report back on success using general classroom discussions.

At first the “reporting back” should be success-focused. Were they able to follow directions? Have them tell you how wonderful they did. Keep the discussion oriented on how they managed the task. You want to build a momentum for the positive at this point. Dealing with the struggle comes shortly after... Here are the skills to emphasize at this stage:

- Knowing the rules
- Understanding the reason for the rule
- Helping adults by following the rule
- Self-control
- Delaying “gratification” (what I want to do)
- Thinking for self
- Diverting my attention
- Being a leader, not a follower

3. Have them report on how they struggled and overcame that struggle, but keep the discussion classroom based. Move quickly past individual issues and bring the discussion back to general concepts for now.

Now, you can begin to have the students more deeply discuss less-than-positive results. Have them detail where they failed and how they got back on track. This is the place to begin to deal with the following concepts:

- Recognizing when I fail
- Stopping to think
- Changing my direction
- Correcting mistakes
- Becoming a leader for the good
- Not being afraid to be different



4. Work with the general group to solve chronic errors and develop missing skills.

As you move through the third step, you will begin to see where your students need help. Maybe they easily forget the rules---well, then develop a cue or a “reminder” (i.e. a cue, signal, reminder leader, etc.) to help them. Maybe they begin by complying but forget over time----then appoint key people to be the “examples” for the beginning, middle, and end of an event. You will know best what is needed and how to proceed. Even having a 30-second recess break where a whistle is blown and the children gather with the peer behavior leader for that day can be useful. The children love having this role, and the quick, “How are we doing? Were working on not arguing? Everyone OK?” type of sequence can really help keep a group moving in a positive direction. Of course, adjust the content, number of breaks, need for visual cues, and all of those other dozens of details to suit your needs.

5. Work with INDIVIDUAL children to solve chronic problems or develop missing skills.

At this point, you are developing individual interventions, so the techniques will mirror any other behavior program. Make sure to read the document pictured below if you are not familiar with positive behavior support:



That document will outline how to cue a behavior and directly teach it in real-life activities or play. Just know that some students may do better if this type of skill is attached to their own value code, and depending on their value code and the code of your school, this intervention may be better run in the home. Regardless, you can target this globally, to a degree. Some skills to consider include: the good and bad of being popular; how to withstand teasing; how to control impulses; ways to regain calm when angry; what to do if ignoring does not work, etc. TEACH the needed skills. If this is not done, consequences and reinforcements will do little to solve the problem.

Systematic Gang-Proofing Program for the Home

As you can see, you can develop many basic skills in your classroom, and for many children, that is the most you can do, but when possible, please try to include the parents in this work. This is when you can REALLY impact a student's development long-term. So, let's begin. For ease of reading and copying for your parents, I will now write as if I am addressing a parent-audience...

Gang-Proofing Children

So, you are considering running, for lack of a better description, a “Gang-Proofing” program in your home. Wonderful--- it is one of the best things you will ever do for your children! But, be warned, this work can be a bit painful emotionally. Don’t be frightened away---I just mention this so you can pick the time and place to begin this program. You need to make sure all adults in your immediate family are on the same page and that you can take the time to provide the emotional support your child may need during this process.

How do you run this type of program? Well, you are going to systematically place your child in situations that require them to withstand peer pressure. That is where the “emotional pain” comes in. When your child begins to stand their ground, there may be teasing and even some bullying. But the reality is, if they can’t learn to ignore someone teasing them about simple, things like not wearing certain clothes, they will also cave when someone is calling them a “baby” for not trying cigarettes or drugs. Best we practice this skill when they are young with small things so they are ready when the big situations come around---and these big situations will come around, I assure you!

Let’s get started. Here are the steps you should follow...



1. Pick a POPULAR item or activity that your child is NOT permitted to use or do.

Your first step is to pick something that your child will have “to stand against”. It just needs to be something that they are not permitted to do (e.g., going to the mall along, going to a certain store, seeing a certain movie, reading a certain book series, wearing certain clothing or shoes, etc.). It doesn’t even have to be something you disagree with for this program. The only requirement is whatever you choose must be noticeable or popular enough that your child’s friends become aware that your child is “not allowed to do that”.

NOTE: If for some reason the choice you make is not noticed by their peers, or they get no pushback on it, you may have to pick something else. For example, my daughter dearly loved a bow but all of a sudden decided that she could no longer wear it. When I asked her why, she said she loved the bow but was afraid that the other kids wouldn’t like it and would call her a baby if she wore it. PERFECT. What a great way to practice this skill. Unfortunately, she went to school in that darn bow....and came back glowing. Everyone loved it and wanted to get one too. Brother! She had a great day, but it didn’t exactly help me with what I was trying to achieve. I needed her to have to deal with holding her ground when her friends did NOT support her. Needless to say, I had to go to Plan B on that one. So, if this happens to you too, just choose something else 😊

2. Enforce the rule against the object or activity.

Now, this is where all your skills as an adult come into play. For example, this was the conversation with my daughter about that bow:

- ❖ Mom, I don’t want to wear that bow today!
 - ❖ Why not? You love that bow?
- ❖ I DO love it, but I think the kids at school will think I look like a baby...
 - ❖ Do you love that bow?
- ❖ Yes.
 - ❖ Then, why would you let the kids at school change your mind or tell you what to wear and do?
- ❖ I don’t know.
 - ❖ Well, listen, you need to be able to do what you think is right. You have to be brave! So, you HAVE to wear that bow to school today---and I will be checking to make sure you do. Let’s talk about what to do if the kids do call you a baby. Let’s make a plan.
- ❖ Tears.... 😊

In other words, your children are NOT going to love you during this program. There will be some tears, some anger, and a great deal of argument. It is hard for children to understand this skill, and even harder to use it. How hard? Let me tell you something that JUST happened to me recently----maybe divine intervention to help me write this last section. LOL

I recently went to a show at a large theatre. The performance had been advertised as a fun, dance-filled romp through a circus. Since it was a “coming-of-age” type of theme, I figured there would be some semi-adult concepts, so I was prepared for something beyond *Sound of Music*, but I was NOT prepared for what I saw. The show included simulated sex on stage, direct ridiculing of religion, a full-blown and extended S & M scene---complete with music, to name just a few little tidbits. Needless to say, I was shocked, but I was mostly dismayed to see the audience and their reaction. Parents were simply horrified and trying to desperately shield their children from the “circus” playing out on stage. They didn’t leave the show, though, and I think that bothered me most of all. What an example for their children. They were teaching them to just quietly tolerate things that are not quite right. Not good!

In response to what I saw, I decided to write a letter taking the venue to task for hiding the “adult” content of this show, especially when they KNEW the audience would include children, given the circus-related theme. The problem? Well, I actually had a moment (... a long moment) of hesitancy as I was getting ready to send that letter. Wow---what an example illustrating our discussion about adult peer pressure! Now, I DID send the letter and managed to get that very, very large organization to modify their website, but it was surprisingly hard for me to do that....and I do this for a living!



So, be ready to experience a bit of “struggle” yourself. Your children will leave you crying, afraid, and ready to fall apart. Okay, that is fine, and no, you are not destroying them for life. Support them.... assist and teach new skills, but DO NOT GIVE IN. If you do this well, maybe your children won’t have the hesitancy I experienced as I was about to hit the send button for that letter 😊

3. Talk about the skills they must develop and create a plan for rough moments.

So, you have your plan in place, and your child is now out there doing or not doing something that will set them apart from their peer group. What do you do to help them? You TEACH...

Some skills to teach include the following concepts:

- ❖ Being BRAVE and not letting people change who I am
- ❖ Being a LEADER and having people follow what I am doing instead of a “bad” leader
- ❖ Using SOLUTIONS when I am being teased or bullied
- ❖ Finding HELP when teasing or bullying is getting out of hand
- ❖ Knowing THAT I AM IN CHARGE OF ME and I won’t let my friends control my thoughts or actions

Included in this plan may be direct support for a difficult situation. Again, let me share an episode with one of my own children....

My daughter was a quiet child and tended to be a follower. I knew that this was something I needed to break before she got older. Being a “follower” in today’s world is simply bad news for children! The situation came to a head when a friend, and I use that term loosely, began to bully someone else in their group. My daughter’s approach to this was to stay quiet and out of the way, because she thought if she said something, the bully might turn on her. She wanted to help her friend and hated what was going on, but she lacked the courage to take action. I had to help her understand that “doing nothing” made her “part of the bullying”. She was actually nearly as guilty as her friend. That said, the reality was, if she DID say something, she very likely COULD become a target. So, I had to help her.

So, we made a plan. We decided exactly what she was going to say and even practiced saying it. Then, we picked a day when she was “finally going to do it” (in her words 😊), and I promised her that I would be parked right across the street where she could see my car during that recess and took off work to do so. This helped her feel safe and ensured that an adult would be around if things got ugly. In other words, I provided the support she felt she needed to handle that issue.

You can do the same thing. Maybe you can’t be there physically; maybe it is going to be a phone call before they step out on their own. Maybe a teacher needs to be alerted to what is going on and how the child is going to handle it. You decide what you need to do to help your child come up with a contingency plan and then use it. The main thing is, children often need us when standing up to a peer group for the first time, and unfortunately, you may not be able to rely on the adults around them to step in and help, especially if they are unaware of the situation. So, make that plan! It really can increase their (and your) success...

4. Then wait for the pressure to fade and eventually disappear.

This stage can take some time. I have run these with families where it took 8-10 weeks for the pressure to even begin to die down. That is fine. Keep at it and eventually thing will change. Eventually, your child will begin to notice two amazing things:

- A. Their friends accept that “they don’t do that” without comment and will often leave them out of plans for that type of event or activity.

- B. Some friends will begin to copy their actions and follow what THEY are doing.

Having their peers slowly join “their side” will often come as a surprise to the child. They forget what is going on, and the new rule becomes part of their life. Then, all of a sudden, they will be reminded of the situation and will realize that the problem has not only faded away, it has maybe disappeared for good or others have joined them. This is lovely, especially the realization that they have become a leader....just a leader that is going in a different direction. All children need friends, and it is nice for them to understand that they do not have to sacrifice their values to have them.



Please know that as you move through this stage, it may become clear that your child truly needs NEW friends. If this is the case, you will have to help them accomplish this goal. You may need to help organize new activities, invite people over to your house, talk with teachers, and a host of other things to ensure that they break the ties with the old group and begin to establish a new circle of friends. Organized activities can work wonders here. A child involved in a music club, dance classes, a sports team, or who becomes part of a committee ends up with a ready-made group of possible friends. This can be very useful if your child needs to move off in another direction and away from an old peer group.

Special Things to Note

Here are a few things to note about running this program in your home:

1. Try to run this before age 10. It is easier to teach this skill before the “peer group” becomes too strong.
2. You can run this with older children, just be ready for more grief. They will fight you a bit more, and it may take longer for the behaviors to get into place.
3. If you are running this with teenagers or children already truly involved in gangs, it may take a change in residence and environment to get this to really work. The peer group is too strong at that point to be easily replaced. If you need to work with especially difficult situations or your child is in a gang, you should contact your police department, social work agency or mental health facility for assistance. They will guide and support you as you attempt to reclaim your child from the streets. This is a safety issue, so please follow the advice to seek outside support!
4. Depending on the child, you may have to run this multiple times and using different situations.
5. Personality plays a strong role here, and regardless of your work, your child may tend to be more of a follower than a leader. If this is the case, make sure to take this into account as your child gets older. Just closely watch their peer group and develop plans for situations that they feel they cannot control.



Skills That Will Protect and Inspire Over Time

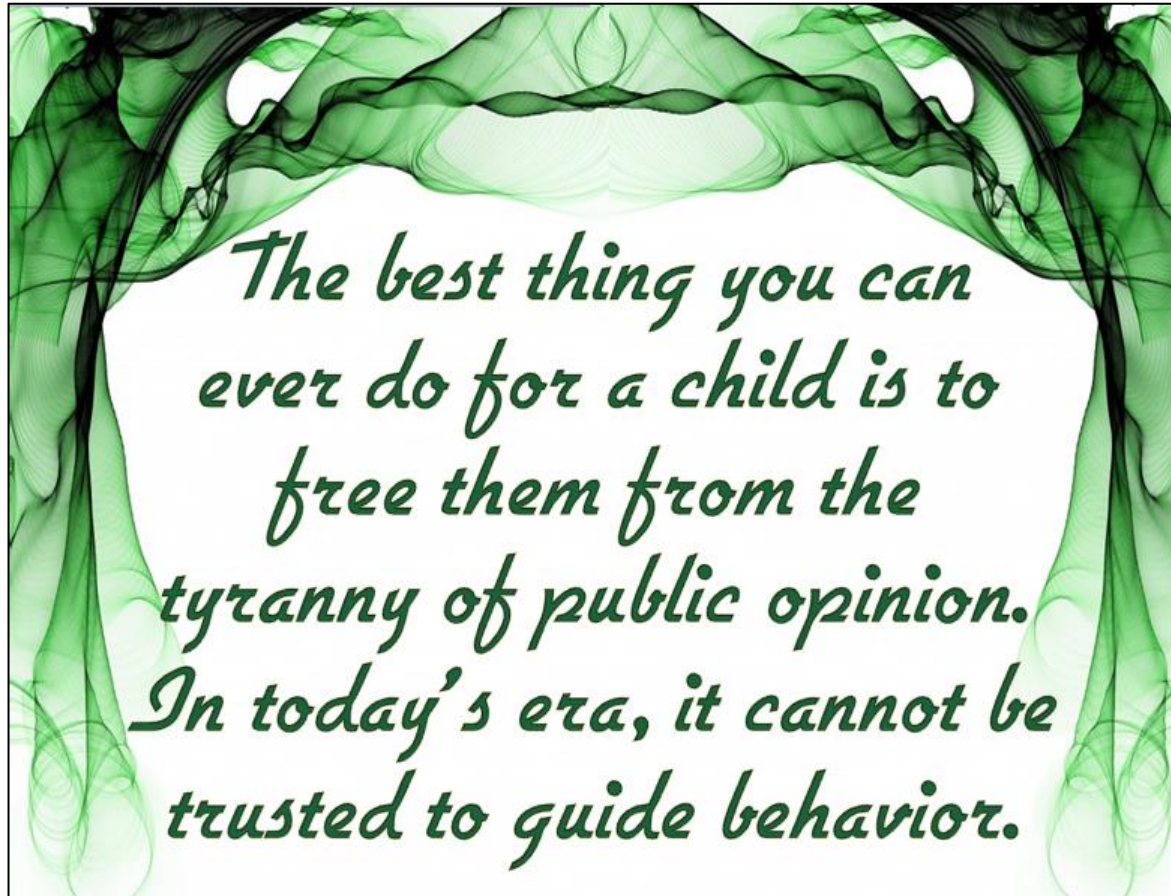
Let's revisit one more technique prior to closing this set of interventions, the use of silence introduced back on page 30. As pointed out, setting aside time for internal reflection is useful for all children and **must be a priority** during the school day. Whether it is a morning reflection time prior to the day's tasks; a periodic "check-in" first thing in the morning, before lunch, and at the end of the day; or an activity always associated with a specific class that is included in all students' schedule (often the only way to get a silent period into a junior or senior high school), having some type of "silent period" is critical.

Most students will progress in their ability to first tolerate and then use this silence to monitor goals and behaviors, but this Direct Intervention group may need some help. The best way to assist these students is to isolate some of the concepts they may need help working through. You can begin the process but please understand that students who are really struggling may need professional counseling to complete the process. Here are the topics to consider:

- 1. I can only change the "present"** (*I cannot change my past...only use it to change the future*)
- 2. I am a "good" person** (*I can remember when I was doing the "right thing"...even if it was long ago*)
- 3. I must evaluate myself fairly** (*I am not the worst.....I am not the best.....I am somewhere in the middle*)
- 4. I must focus on the progress I am making** (*I should not overemphasize the mistakes I have made*)
- 5. I must reflect silently on my own every day** (*I cannot allow my friends to direct my behavior*)

Closing Thoughts

Like any technique, you will have to adjust all of this based on your student's needs. And, of course, there is so much more you can do. I am sure you will be able to use the minimal content provided in this document and take it so much further than I did.... The main thing is, you are TRYING to combat this issue, and that effort puts you light years ahead of the rest of the world! Do the best you can, keep trying to make a difference, and know that with a little bit of work, you can actually teach this skill. Will it save all children? Of course not----there is free will. But, that said, you can at least make the streets work a bit harder to claim a student, and if all else fails, at least you have provided them a memory of a different way of living their life that may help pull them back if they do go the wrong way and hit bottom. Beyond that, no more can be expected of any adult or professional. In closing, remember...



APPENDIX

**‘Losing hair,
can't sing,
can dance
....a bit‘**

Notes from first
movie screen test



Fred Astaire

**Dismissed
from
drama school
for being
“too shy”**



Lucille Ball

**Cartoons
turned down
by yearbook
committee**



Charles Schultz

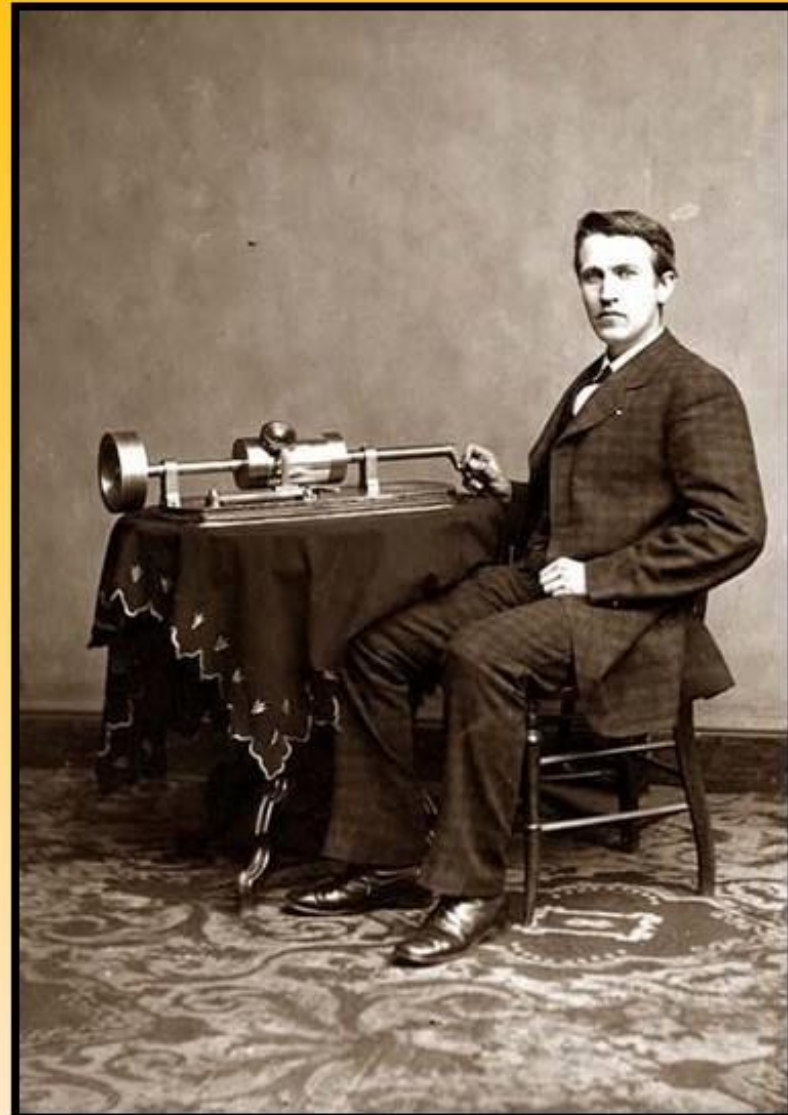
**Went home,
locked himself
in his room,
and cried
after being cut
from his
high school
basketball team.**



Michael Jordan

**“Too stupid
to learn”**

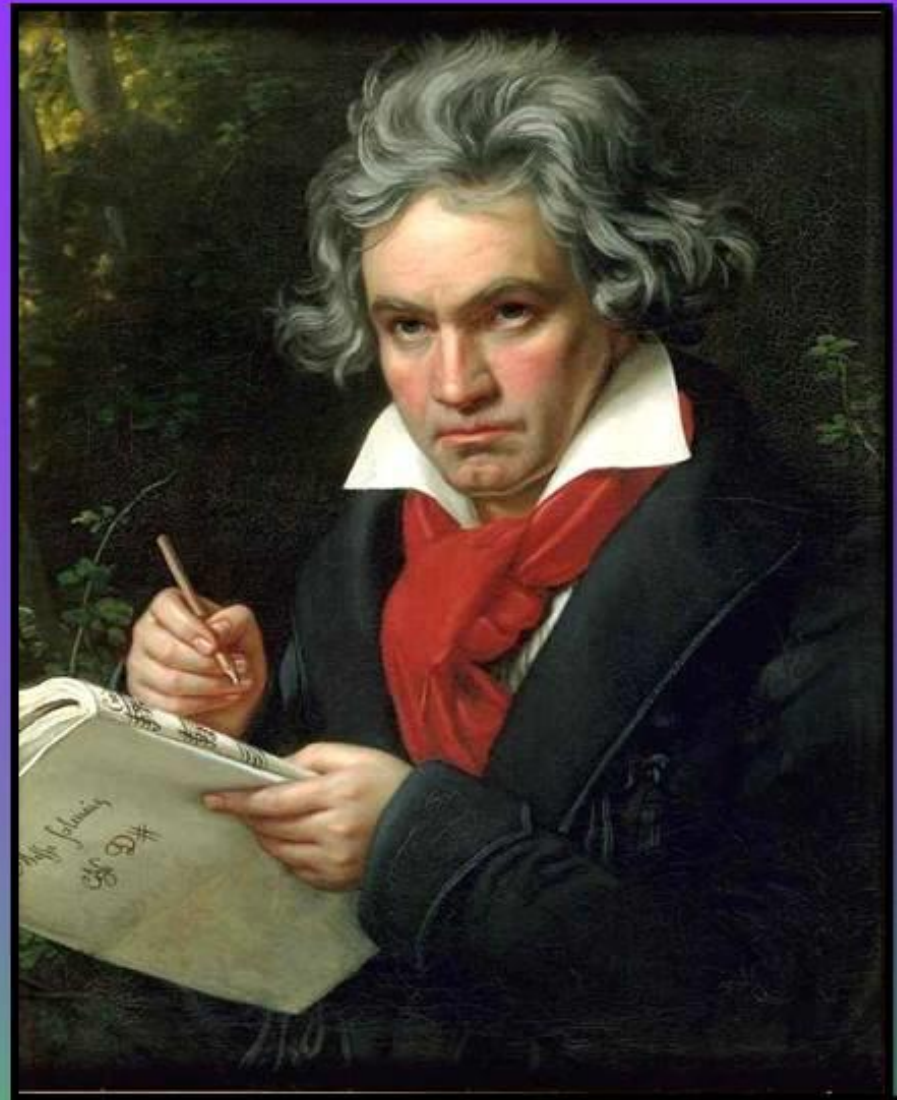
**Fired from
first two jobs
for being
'nonproductive'**



Thomas Edison

**“Hopeless
as a
composer”**

**Childhood
Music Teacher**



Beethoven

**Fired for
“lacking good
ideas and
having no
imagination”**



Walt Disney

**You ain't goin'
nowhere, son.
You ought to go back
to drivin' a truck.“**

**Words heard as
he was being
fired after his
first performance.**

**Jimmy Denny,
Manager of the Grand Ole Opry**



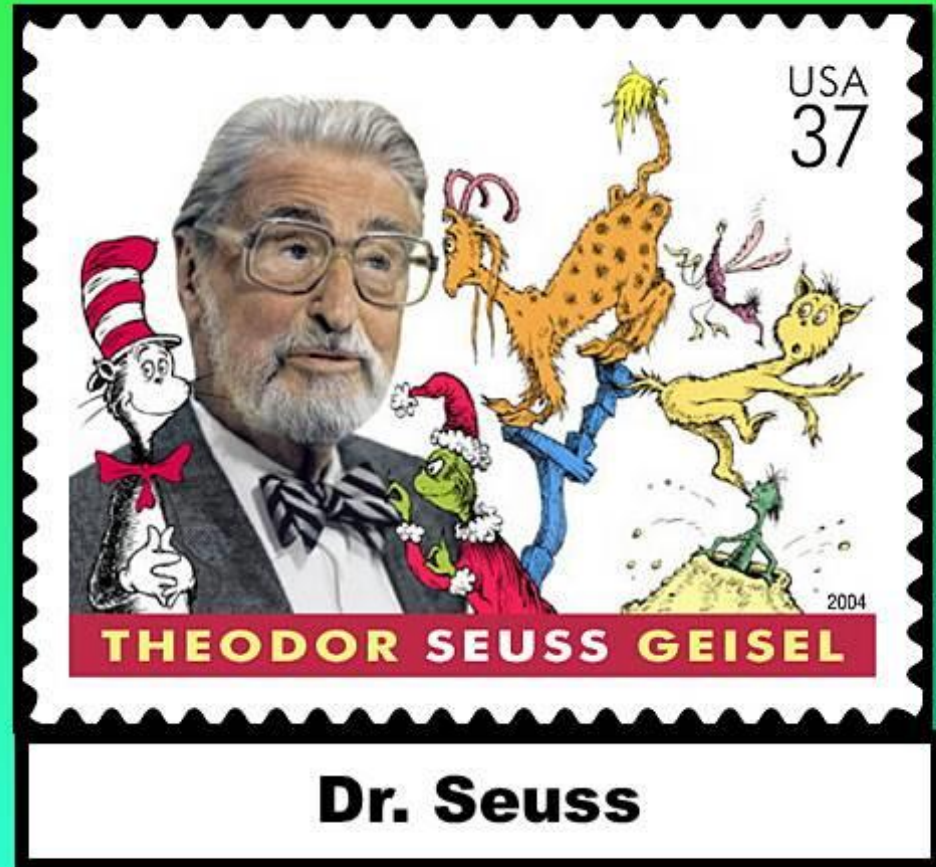
Elvis Presley

**One year
into her contract,
she was dropped
by 20th Century-Fox
because they
thought she
was unattractive**

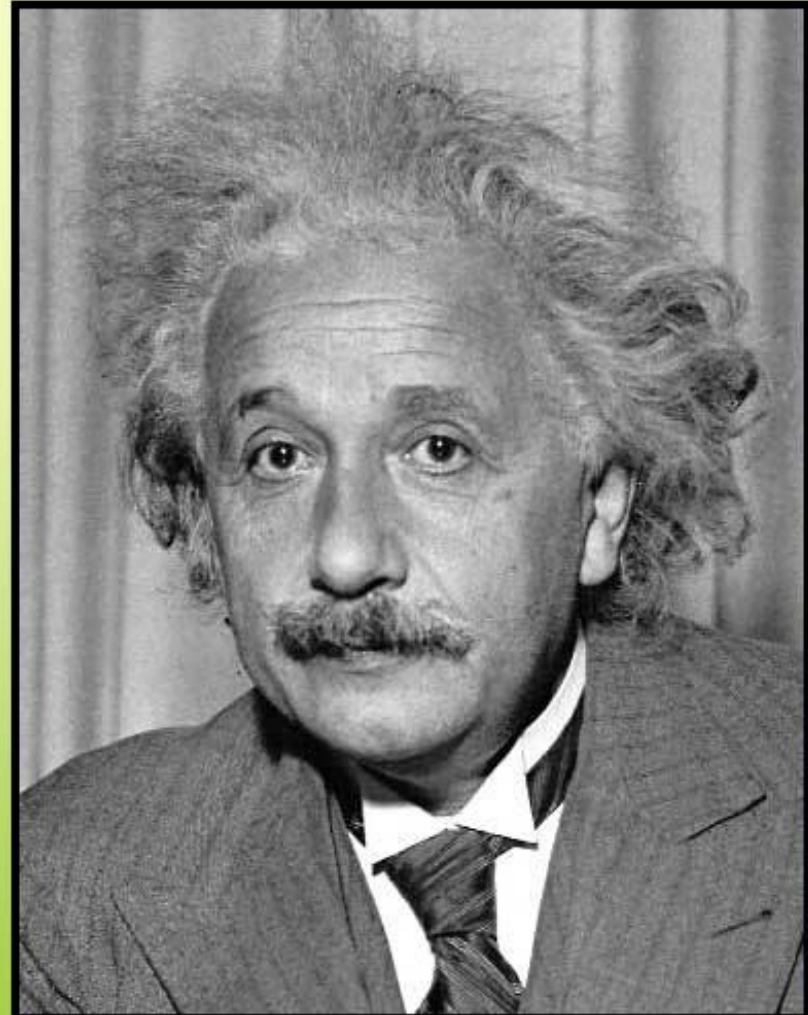


Marilyn Monroe

**27 publishers
rejected
his
first book
(...Mullberry Street)**



- *Did not speak until 4**
- *Did not read until 7**
- *Parents thought him "sub-normal"**
- *Teachers described him as "mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in foolish dreams"**
- *Expelled from school**
- *Failed admission test to the Zurich University**



Albert Einstein

**Demoted from
her job as
an on-air evening
news anchor on
WJZ-TV in
Baltimore
and was told
that she wasn't fit
for television**



Oprah Winfrey

Turned down
by the
Decca Recording
Company.
Their comments...

“We don’t like
their sound”

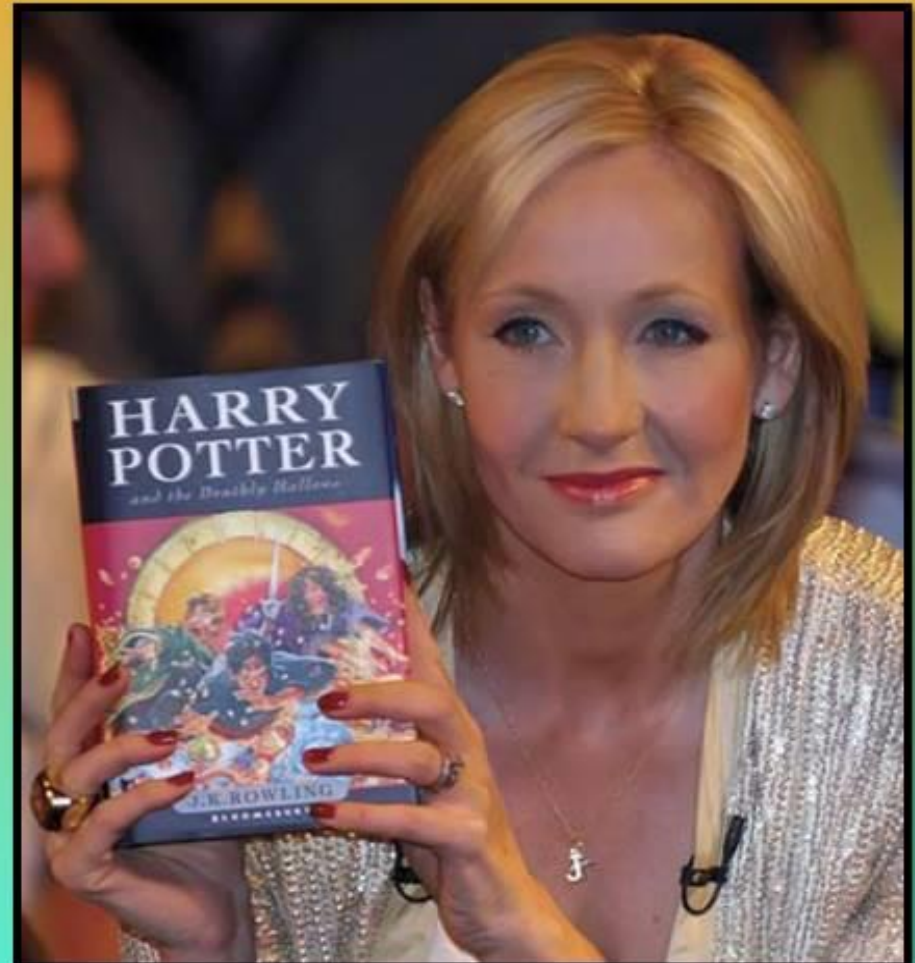
and

“Guitar music
is on the way out”



The Beatles

**Rejected by
12 major
publishing
houses
before being
accepted
by a
minor house**



J. K. Rowling

**LEADERS MUST
BE DIFFERENT**



**ONLY LONG-TERM
GOALS LEAD TO
LONG-TERM SUCCESS!**



**NO ONE CAN "OFFEND ME"
OR "MAKE ME ANGRY"
I CONTROL MY OWN EMOTIONS**



I SHOULD BE FAIR TO MYSELF

I AM NOT THE BEST...

BUT I ALSO AM NOT THE WORST



The Best



**I MUST FOCUS ONLY
ON MAKING PROGRESS**



STOPPING AND THINKING WILL HELP ME MAKE GOOD DECISIONS



**DREAMS DO NOT
ALWAYS COME TRUE
..I MUST HAVE A PLAN "B"**



Am I allowing a peer group to control me?

Have I ever gone along with my group's plans even though I really didn't want to?

Have I ever been afraid about what my group was doing?

Have I ever wanted to go home to avoid my group's plans?

Do I hide what I do with my group from my family members?

Am I running with the wrong group?

Are they friends my family would worry about?

Are they friends who have been in legal trouble?

Do I meet them late at night or in hidden places?

Could I include my family in the things they do?

Lesson Questions for Social Consciousness and Empathy

Level 1- Calm Responses:

1. **Take three deep breaths from stomach** (*not diaphragm*)
2. **Systematically relax body** (*you can walk them through doing this from their head down to their toes*)
3. **Focus on my voice** (*make sure they are attentive to the degree possible for that student---bring them "back as needed. I suggest using a gentle and prolonged touch or pat on shoulder, etc. instead of talking to students losing focus so you do not disrupt the thoughts of the others.*)

Level 2- Respecting Others: and// Level 2- Forgiving and Tolerating Others:

1. **How have I been responding to people (friends and family)?**
2. **Why did I respond that way?** (*..was I angry, scared, embarrassed, etc.*)
3. **Am I hurting anyone with my actions?** (*encourage them to forgive themselves for their mistake and figure out what the OPPOSITE or correct response should be*)
4. **Is anyone hurting me or making me anxious or afraid?** (*encourage them to realize that these people also have emotions that may have driven THEIR behavior (...anger, embarrassment, etc.) so they should also be forgiven.*)

Level 3- Honest Responses: and// Level 3- Helpful Behaviors:

1. **How strong are you?** (*encourage them to think back to a moment or event where they were happy and making great choices. See, they CAN do it because they did it before!*)
2. **Are other people able to make changes?** (*remind them that they NEVER know what people are thinking or feeling so they should let go of their opinions. It doesn't matter much whether they make changes because YOU are going to. Do not allow them to determine what is right and wrong for YOU*)
3. **Am I able to make changes?** (*make sure they have a positive self-image and hope in the future. They need to realize that they WILL figure this out...that they WILL be okay!*)

Level 4- Thoughtful Choices: and// Level 4- Honest Self-Evaluation:

1. **What is my plan for the next time this situation comes up?** (*encourage them to come to you if they are being hurt and need help, can't figure out a solution to the problem, or have been stuck trying to fix the problem for a long time..*)
2. **When will I try to find five minutes to practice relaxing and thinking silently?** (*You can skip this question if you are running the silence program from the Sounds of Silence: Helping Students Develop Thinking Skills, Self-Reflection, and Internal Behavioral Control manual. You will ensure those moments of silence occur ☺*)
3. **What is the skill I need to learn most and why?** (*Encourage them to identify a goal and relate it to their personal code/vocation---i.e. I need to keep from getting angry so football teams will be willing to give me a scholarship). Have the students write or draw them if appropriate for their age and developmental needs.*)