

Week 2:

Empathy Skills



Empathy

Empowering Others

Objective:

- To develop skills in recognizing how others think and feel in different situations.
- To understand how we can positively or negatively impact others via our responses.

Materials: Worksheet : “*How would you feel, think & act?*” (see below)

SEL Home Activity:

Introduction: Read the following:

A young 9 year old boy, Gilbert, is struggling in school both socially and academically. Gilbert is listless and unhappy at school putting little effort into his schoolwork. He seldom completes assignments and does minimal schoolwork. Rather large and obese he avoids sport activities and is socially unpopular /Gilbert is almost two years older than most of his classmates and tends to sit by himself. He seems oblivious to everything and everyone around him. Classmates often make fun of him and play pranks such as filling his coat pockets with snow and hen laughing at him.

Gilbert’s teachers consider him to be absent minded with a poor memory and not attentive to class lessons. He avoids both school work and interactions with his classmates. He is usually daydreaming or otherwise non-attentive and off-task during school. One of his teachers said to him in a moment of frustration, “*Gilbert if we could open your head, we would not find any brain but merely a lump of white fat*”.

Step 1: Discuss:

How do you think Gilbert thinks and feels about himself, school, his classmates?

How do you think Gilbert felt after his teacher’s comments?

What might he have then thought about himself, school work, his teachers and his classmates?

What might a classmate do or say to help Gilbert?

What might they do to make matters even worse for Gilbert?

Step 2: Complete the “**How would you Feel/Think/Act**” worksheet for Gilbert’s situation:

Then, together share times when someone said something hurtful or unkind to you or to someone else.

- How did you feel/think about that individual?
- What would you have preferred they had said or done to be helpful?
- How would you have felt/thought about them if they had done so?
- What happens if we don’t show people that we understand how they feel and think?”

Step 3: For each situation noted above, complete a worksheet what comments and actions by classmates would be most constructive and helpful in this situation.

Closure:

Ask: Do you know what become of young Gilbert? It's a true story!!!

His real name was Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Do you know who G.K. Chesterton was? Take a minute to search the internet about GK Chesterton (famous British author). He has been referred to as both 'the greatest writer of the 20th century' and 'the most unjustly neglected writer of our times'. GK Chesterton wrote a weekly column in London newspapers for 43 years, 100+ books, 5 plays, 5 novels, 200+ short stories (including the famous Father Brown series), and 100+ poems. He also debated many of the best known intellectuals of his time.

So, what do you suppose turned his life around?

Answer: In his pre-teen years, Gilbert was befriended by another classmate, Edmond Clerihew Bentley. They met one another while at a playground and initially started some "rough housing" play. Exhausted, they both stopped and rested. Tired, they began to talk and get to know one another better. The boys discovered they shared an interest in literature and books. From then on, they formed a close, lifetime friendship sharing their favorite writers, books and ideas. This friendship and sharing of their interests in books had the effect of encouraging Gilbert's love of literature. Both boys would later become famous authors. Edmund was a famous author and humorist in his own career publishing under the name of E.C. Bentley.

Other Possible Family Learning Activities:

- Interview other family member regarding, "***Who in your life has encouraged you, lifted you up when you were down?***" Have them write a short story describing such encouraging incidents or persons from their life and share your stories together.
- Share a "family movie night assignment" in which the family is to watch together and discuss a movie involving caring, empowering acts: e.g., Rudy, Brian's Song, Finding Neverland, Play it Forward, Hotel Rwanda, Schindler's List, etc.
- Parents might write a short description of a time they observed their son/daughter acting in an understanding, caring, or empowering manner toward another person (e.g. friend, sibling, grandparent, neighbor, themselves, etc).
- Research or read about individuals who have who displayed empathy and taken action to help others in situations that were unfair or dangerous to others such as: Nelson Mandela, Paul Rosesabaagina, John Adams (Attorney in Boston massacre trial), John Quincy Adams (Attorney in Armistad trial), Mahatma Ghandi, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, and others.
- Research incidents in history of people who took empowering actions during the Holocaust of WW2 and made a difference in people's lives. Examples: Sir Nicholas Winton, Varian Fry, Kurt Gerstein, Wilm Hosenfeld, Berthold Beitz, Emile Schindler, Hans Hedtoft, Georg Duckwitz, Pinchas Tibor Rosenbaum, and other heroic bystanders of the holocaust.)

How would you Feel, Think, & Act?

Describe the situation:

*How do you think this child might have felt at that moment?
(List some of the possible emotions)*

*What might he/she have been thinking about his/herself and about others at that moment?
(List some possible thoughts)*

What did do you think he/she might do next when feeling and thinking this way?

What could YOU do or say that would be helpful in this situation?



Empathy

Fractured Fairy Tales

Objective:

- To develop skills in viewing situations from another's perspectives.
- To stimulate creative writing skills

Materials:

- Any a famous fairytale(s) book.
- Writing paper or computer for composing a story.

SEL Home Activity:

Introduction: Read the story of "*Little Red Riding Hood*". Then, read the Fractured Fairytale entitled, "*The Much Maligned Wolf*" (see below).

Activity: Have your child choose another common fairy tale in which there are clear "*good guy*" and "*villain*" characters (e.g., Cinderella, Three Billy Goats Gruff, Hansel & Gretel, etc.).

Now, have your child write a creative "Fractured Fairy Tale" re-telling the story from the perspective of the "villain" as in the '*Maligned Wolf*' story and what might be the other side of this story.

Place all the stories together into a family reading book for a free reading time activity.

Closure: Identify times when you've each felt misunderstood, wrongly accused, or felt nobody was willing to listen to your side of the story/conflict. Also explore incidents when you've observed others in a similar position. Explore together why it is important to hear both sides in a conflict".

Other Possible Family 'Homework' Assignments:

- Have other family members write a story about a time when they felt misunderstood or not heard and how they handled the situation. Share and discuss together.
- Invite other family members (parent, siblings, grandparents, aunt/uncles, cousins....) to write their own "Fractured Fairy Tales". Put all the stories into a three ring binder and share during family time (e.g., dinner, at bed time, or evenings)
- Find newspaper articles, news magazine stories, or watch television news stories regarding conflicts (between nations, political parties, labor/management, and so forth). Research via the internet the history behind the positions and issues on both sides of the issue. Write a brief synopsis together about the issue and the opposing perspectives and rationales for each position.

The Maligned Wolf

Hello boys and girls. I came today to share with you my sad story. You see, I am not really the person you see standing before you this morning. Rather, I am in disguise. I have had to disguise my true identity for years; quite unfairly I might add. The secret is that I am actually the Wolf who used to live in a forest far, far away. But, due to a most unfortunate incident one day, I have been forced to live in hiding, disguised to protect my safety. Would you believe that today, young children are taught in schools and by their parents that I am a Bad Wolf, an evil Wolf; and it is simply not true! Let me tell you my story.

It all started one bright spring morning. It was my job, as the largest animal in the forest, to keep watch and make sure the forest remained a safe, peaceful place for all the smaller animals. On this particular morning, I was cleaning up a campsite. Some careless campers had left their campfire still smoldering which could have led to a forest fire. They also had left quite a lot of litter about their camping spot which was not good for the environment. So I set about putting dirt on the smoldering embers and picking up their carelessly left litter.

Suddenly, I caught a glimpse of a stranger coming up the pathway. I hid behind a tree to see who it might be and to make sure it was not someone up to, well.. “no good” if you know what I mean. After all, it is my job to protect the smaller, defenseless animals of the forest. This stranger seemed to be quite mysterious and acted as if he or she didn’t want to be recognized. This made me a bit concerned and a tad bit frightened I’m not afraid to admit. This person wore a long red cape with a big hood over the head so nobody could see who it was. And, this person was carrying a mysterious basket with a cloth covering it so as to hide whatever was in the basket. “A terrorist with a bomb” was my first thought. I had to do something, and quick.

So, in spite of my fears and without concern for my personal safety, I jumped out from behind the tree and stopped this “terrorist”. “Who are you? And where are do you think you’re going with that mysterious covered basket?” I asked.

Well, as it turns out, it was a young girl...maybe 12 or 13. She gave me some song and dance about going to her grandmother’s house at the other side of the forest. She said her grandmother was ill and she was bringing some goodies for her to eat. I checked the basket and sure enough it was full of tea, chicken soup and other goodies for her grandmother. I tried to explain to her that she needs to be more aware of how she acts and dresses when going through the forest. I told her she looked and acted like a terrorist up to some evil act and it would frighten the small, defenseless animals that lived here. But, this little girl seemed to not care less. She gave me an attitude, you know, rolling eyes, big sigh, etc., etc... And with that she went on her way.

I decided this little girl needs to be taught a lesson about being aware of her environment and how her behavior affected others. So I took a short cut through the forest and arrived at her grandmother’s house ahead of her. Her grandmother being a forest dweller herself, understood my position when I explained the situation to her. Together, we came up with the idea of playing a little trick on little miss red riding hood in order to teach her an important lesson.

So grandmother hid in the closet while I dressed up in her nightgown and nightcap and then laid in the bed pretending to me grandmother. Very soon, in came Little Miss Red Riding hood, (without even politely knocking on the door first, I might add). She said something about bringing some goodies to eat that her mother had prepared. But then, quickly added, “Oh grandma, what terribly big eyes you have”. Now, do you start to see what kind of girl she really was? Not two minutes into her sick grandmother’s house and she’s making nasty, critical comments about her grandmother’s eyes! Unbelievable! Well, I always was taught to “make lemonade from lemons” so I tried to nicely deflect this criticism by saying, “*All the better to see you with my dear*”. Not bad, eh?!

But, what did this little “*Deary*” do next? Why she just fired off yet a second insult at whom she thought was her poor, old, sick grandmother. “*What awfully big ears you have, grandma*” . Now, I think we are all seeing that this little girl was not such a nice, considerate person at all. Imagine, not two minutes in the door and twice insulting your own grandmother. But, again I tried to make this positive by replying, “*All the better to hear you with my dear*”. I thought surely this would be the end of her insults. But, no!!! The next words out of her mouth were yet a third insult. “*Oh, grandma, what big, ugly teeth you have!*”

Ok, now this is where I lost it. I know I should have handled this better and not blown my top. But this kid was so self-centered and insulting; even to whom she thought was her own sickly grandmother. You have to understand that I come from a very poor wolf family. My parents could not afford to take me to the orthodontist for braces, retainers and so forth when I was young. I’ve always been quite self-conscious about my large, uneven teeth. So this comment just hit me where it hurts the most. I jumped out of the bed and yelled, “*All the better to eat you with!!*”

Now, let’s face it. This is a dumb statement! Everyone knows wolves don’t eat people. But this kid just started screaming and throwing a right good “Hissy fit” right there in the cabin; running from room to room screaming. At this point, I calmed down and tried to explain to her what was really going on, but that just seemed to make matters worse and she only screamed louder.

Just then, the door burst open and this huge, burly lumberjack came flying into the room with his axe, screaming that he’d save her. Never, did he even bother to ask, “What’s the problem?” No, I knew right away I was in big trouble!! The girl screaming hysterically; me, a wolf, chasing her and this crazed, gung-ho lumberjack smashing his way through the door like some Rambo dude to save the day. I just knew this was not going to end well!

The lumberjack swung that axe and split me open across the middle. I fell to the floor and decided to act as if I were dead. When the lumberjack went over to calm the girl down, I slowly crept out the door and crawled back to my den. It took weeks to heal. And to this day, everyone is told that I am the bad guy, the Big Bad Wolf... Nobody has ever asked to hear my side of the story!! Has that ever happened to you??

By the way, I’ve still not forgiven that grandmother for staying in the closet. Why didn’t’ she come out when things went bad and help me? I still don’t understand her just standing there and “not getting involved”. If only she had stepped up and said something, this whole bad situation could have been avoided.

Well, that’s my story. To this day, I have to go around disguised as the person you see before you today. Children everywhere are taught that I’m a dangerous, evil person. Who knows what they’d do to me if they found out I was the much maligned wolf from the untrue story of Little Red Riding Hood. Thanks for listening to my sad tale; I appreciate your taking the time to listen to my side of the story.

Nobody else ever has!