

Forming Courageous Responses Using I-Statements

This lesson gives students strategies for responding to others in courageous and kind ways. Students will role play common scenarios they experience at school where someone says something unkind without thinking about how it will make the other person feel. Students practice responding to these situations using I-statements, and discuss at the end how to use calm breathing strategies to help control the physical response that can happen when we are put on the spot and need to respond to someone.

Kindness Sub-Concept(s)

Vulnerability, Humility

Lesson Timeframe

30-40 minutes

Required Materials

- Scenarios
- Hula hoop(s)
- Access to the Web for the linked material

Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.



DESIGNATED BY CASEL
AS A RECOMMENDED PROGRAM
FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.
See last page for details.

Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Discuss personal boundaries when responding to others.
- Use I-statements to give courageous and kind responses to others.
- Use belly or calm breathing techniques to help maintain a physical calmness when responding to others.

Teacher Connection/Self-Care

Have you ever heard the phrase, “pay it forward”? It refers to the action of a person doing an unrecognized good deed for a stranger on the premise that the receiver will in turn “pay it forward” by doing a good deed for someone else. Perhaps the person in front of you has already paid for your coffee order, or a positive note was left on your desk. These are both terrific examples of this simple yet powerful concept. This week, look for ways to respond with kindness by identifying three different ways to pay it forward to coworkers in some fashion. Spend some time brainstorming little surprises for those around you, adding a small note with the good deed that encourages them to keep the chain going by passing on a bit of kindness to another as well.

Tips for Diverse Learners

- Adjust the scenarios to best suit your group of students.
- Use props to help act things out if appropriate or beneficial for your group of students.
- Determine ahead of time if asking for volunteers or assigning roles is better suited for your students.



Share

5-7 minutes

In our last unit, we wrote “I Am” poems! What was that experience like for you?

Invite students to share.

Does anyone remember what their refrain line was? I am.....? If you can remember and want to share it, raise your hand.

Call on students to say their “I Am” line (not the full poem).



Inspire

5-7 minutes

We also talked about how it takes courage to be ourselves sometimes. Today we are going to talk about the courage to be kind to others. This might sound funny. Why would it take courage to be kind to others?

Invite student response.

Sometimes it is hard to be kind when someone treats you poorly. We might be tempted to be unkind back to that person. We might also be tempted to be unkind to someone who thinks, looks, or believes differently than we do. Sometimes we fear or dislike or are suspicious of things we don't know or understand. It takes courage to respond in a way that keeps us calm, focused, and mindful of the other person, and be kind to them and to ourselves.

I also want us to think about the word “boundaries.” Can anyone tell me what a boundary is? Invite student responses.

Good! Boundaries are markers that help define the edges of space or area. A clear boundary in our yards are fences. The four walls of our classroom are our boundaries. The white and yellow lines on the roads are boundaries for driving lanes.

Boundaries can help us know how to use courage with others. Here is what that means:

Invite a student volunteer to join you. Have that volunteer step into the center of a hula hoop that you have set on the ground.

Imagine this hula hoop represents your personal boundary. If someone is treating you poorly and is in your personal space, if they are picking on you, getting in your face, crowding you, or physically hitting or touching you, you should tell the other person assertively (with respectful force) to stop, and you should leave and get an adult to help you. This type of behavior requires an assertive response and the help of an adult. It isn't that you are being unkind, but you have the right to self-respect and personal safety and need to prioritize that. Does that make sense?

So, use the idea of a hula hoop to imagine your personal space boundary and remember to be courageous for yourself in that space, too.



Empower

15-20 minutes

Now we are going to practice having courage to respond to others in ways that are respectful of them and respectful for ourselves. These are situations where we are not being threatened or harmed physically; these are more like everyday situations where someone might have said something unkind or without thinking, and we have to respond. We always have two choices: 1) We can choose to respond with kindness and respect. Or, 2) We can choose to respond with a negative or sarcastic or unkind attitude.

Sometimes it doesn't feel like we have a choice, though, does it? Sometimes it feels like the only option is to get mad. Eleanor Roosevelt, former First Lady of the United States of America, once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Does anyone know what this means?

Invite student response.

Good! This means that we always have a choice. No one gets to make us feel bad or upset unless we give them permission or power to do that. That doesn't mean that it is wrong to get upset or to feel angry or to feel sad. That is part of being human. But we can choose how we let those feelings affect how we respond to others. It can take a lot of courage to respond with kindness and respect when we don't feel that kindness and respect are being shown to us. It also takes practice, so that is what we are going to do now.

We are going to role play several different situations where one person says something to another person and the other person needs to respond. Here is how I want our responses to start. "I..." - Okay? Begin your response with "I." We are going to practice using "I" statements which helps keep our response focused on ourselves and on our feelings and ideas and not on blaming the other person. You could begin with, "I feel...", "I disagree...", or "I think...", and then continue on. Using I-statements is a powerful way to let the person you are speaking with know that you are still in control of your mind, emotions, and body.

Consider doing this activity as a large group to help guide responses and ensure appropriate behavior is being modeled.

Call for a student volunteer and hand them a role play scenario. You role play the part of the protagonist with the student to help drive the situation and outcome. You can switch between who is the antagonist and who is the protagonist, though it is recommended you play that role first, to model appropriate responses. After each scenario, ask the follow-up questions. Do not show the protagonist the scenario ahead of time; the response should be authentic and not pre-planned, though it is wise for the teacher to examine all the situations in advance. A single exchange is required, though if you have time and interest, you could let the scenario play out for several dialogue exchanges.

Scenario 1:

Antagonist: [To the protagonist] When we go outside for recess, you can't play on our kickball team. You aren't good enough.

Protagonist: **Insert response**

Follow-up questions:

- What was the unkind word or action?
- What was kind or unkind about the response?
- What, if anything, could have been done differently or more kindly?

Scenario 2:

Antagonist: [To the protagonist] What did you bring for lunch? Looks disgusting!

Protagonist: **Insert response**

Follow-up questions:

- What was the unkind word or action from the antagonist?
- What was kind or unkind about the protagonist's response?
- What, if anything, could have been done differently or more kindly?

Scenario 3:

Antagonist: [To the protagonist] You got a C on that? That was so easy! My little sister could've aced it!

Protagonist: **Insert response**

Follow-up questions:

- What was the unkind word or action from the antagonist?
- What was kind or unkind about the protagonist's response?
- What, if anything, could have been done differently or more kindly?

Scenario 4:

Antagonist: [To the protagonist] I heard you didn't make the team. Loser!! Guess that means you're on the little kid squad!

Protagonist: **Insert response**

Follow-up questions:

- What was the unkind word or action from the antagonist?
- What was kind or unkind about the protagonist's response?
- What, if anything, could have been done differently or more kindly?

Scenario 5:

Antagonist: [To the protagonist] Why do you have to go read out in the hallway with Ms. Baker. Don't you know how to read?

Protagonist: **Insert response**

Follow-up questions:

- What was the unkind word or action from the antagonist?
- What was kind or unkind about the protagonist's response?
- What, if anything, could have been done differently or more kindly?



Reflect

5-7 minutes

Spend a few minutes talking about how those initial lines (from the antagonist) made each protagonist feel. What feelings or emotions or physical reactions happened inside? Maybe they felt their face get hot. Maybe a lump welled up in their throat. It can be challenging to overcome or to control those automatic physical responses, which might make us panic and launch right into an unkind defense. Discuss some strategies for calming down so they can think clearly before responding. Do some deep belly breathing exercises or practice counting slowly and backward from 10 to give the brain time to settle before speaking. You can find some breathing strategies for kids here: <https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/coronavirus/resilience-is-mindfulness-calming-exercises-for-kids/>

Remind students of the Roosevelt quote; ask students to explain it again and ask if they have a new understanding of the quote. Let students know you will be looking to observe courageous responses to others in the coming week!



Extension Ideas

- Send the Roosevelt quote home with students and ask them to explain the meaning to their parents/guardians. Have parents/guardians write down their student's explanation and sign it, and then ask students to return the slip by a certain date as either part of a morning meeting, as an exit ticket, or for some kind of reward or prize.



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AS A RECOMMENDED
PROGRAM FOR SOCIAL
AND EMOTIONAL
LEARNING.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (**CASEL**) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the [CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs](#).

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>

**“No one can make you feel
Inferior without your consent.”**

—Eleanor Roosevelt, Former First Lady of the United States

Student explanation:

Parent / Caregiver / Guardian Signature