

Activity to Use Positive Intent for Hurtful Words

Role-play the following scenes with a partner. Address the victim first to teach assertiveness and then address the aggressor with positive intent to create a teaching moment. After the role-play, check in with each other using the questions below.

Scene 1: James calls Kareem “gay” when he shows up wearing pink socks.

Scene 2: Melissa calls Sheila “stupid face” when she answers a math problem incorrectly.

Scene 3: Several boys are chanting, “Girls suck!”

1. Did you go to the victim first? Did you ask, “Did you like it?” or did you Oops and say, “How did that make you feel?”
2. Did you empower the victim by giving the exact words to say or did you ask, “What could you say?”
3. Did you offer positive intent to the aggressor with, “You wanted ____?” or did you start with, “Why did you ____?”
4. Did you set the limit and relate the aggressor’s actions to hurtfulness/safety or did you launch into a lecture?
5. Did you ask the aggressor to practice the skill right away?
6. Did you encourage both students at the end? What words did you say?

Flip and Reflect: Moving From Complaints to Solutions

There is a difference between the intensity of an upset emotional state and everyday complaining. Since the right prefrontal lobe processes negative emotions, it is the center of basic complaints and pessimism. Everyday complaining, “Can you believe the amount of paper work we have?” is different than emotional upset, “I hate this paper work. There is no time to teach. This is the most ridiculous policy ever!” Positive intent phrases “You wanted _____.” or “You were hoping _____” are perfect for flipping everyday complaining into possible solutions.

When coping with complaining parents, co-workers or students, “So you _____” and “So you were hoping _____” help us flip the statement from what they don’t want to what they do want and reflect it back to them. It’s also helpful to use this phrasing to transform our internal speech when we’re the ones complaining. The following are examples:

Complaining Parents

Parent: My child never brings home homework. I don’t know what is going on in your classroom.

Teacher: So, you want to stay in touch with your child’s progress.

Complaining Coworkers

Coworker: Parents today. I can’t get them to return a call, sign papers or do anything!

Teacher: You were hoping the parents would work with you this year.

Complaining Children

Student: Do we have to do this? It’s boring.

Teacher: You were hoping we could do more science.