Speak Up and Stand Up!

Social-Emotional Learning Objective: Assertiveness

Standing up for oneself without being unkind to another person is difficult, but it’s a skill today’s kids particularly need. Teach your students the differences between aggressive, passive and assertive responses with this engaging lesson.

Bullying can be anywhere — at school, on the playground, at home, or online. Learning how to be assertive is a life skill with invaluable, and even lifesaving, benefits.

• With assertiveness training, students learn how to have their needs met without being unkind to others. They are also more likely to share their thinking openly and ask questions.
• When students learn to be assertive, they are more likely to stand up to a bully.
• Learning how to be assertive can help children identify their feelings and express themselves.
• Children who have been taught assertiveness are more likely to value and trust themselves and believe they have rights.

Goal for the lesson: Show students how to be strong and to stand up for themselves and others.

Grade levels: Kindergarten–Grade 5

Suggested time needed: 45 minutes

Materials for each student: copies of the mini booklet pages, scissors, access to a stapler

Additional materials: three sheets of construction paper, marker, large sheet of chart paper, two copies of the “Sample Scenarios” page, student journals, paper

Why It Matters

• Assertiveness instruction helps children learn the right way to say no, which can help them feel more in control.
• Students become more responsible for their actions when they understand they can choose how to respond to a situation.
• Responding assertively in uncomfortable situations can foster positive interactions and enhance peer relationships.
• Teachers and students who are assertive help create a more positive classroom environment for learning.

Bottom line: Learning how to be assertive is a must for healthy social-emotional learning and living. When children learn to speak up and stand up, they embrace their own value and the value of others.

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In advance:

1. Label each sheet of construction paper “Aggressive,” “Passive” or “Assertive.” Post each sign in a different corner of your classroom. For younger students, use the terms “Be Mean,” “Give In” and “Be Strong.”

2. Prepare a class chart like the one shown below.

3. Cut apart the scenarios from one copy of the “Sample Scenarios” handout.

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Bell-Ringer Activity

1. Share the following with students: A classmate teases you, then calls you a name. What do you do? Direct each student to answer the question in his or her journal. For younger students, ask them to draw a picture that shows what they would do.

2. Provide time for students to share their responses. Explain that the lesson today will explore different ways students can choose to respond in situations that make them uncomfortable.

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Whole-Group Activity

1. Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever been in a situation with another person that made them uncomfortable. Invite a few students to share (including how they responded), cautioning them not to use any names.

2. Explain to students that people respond in one of three different ways when they are in uncomfortable situations. Display the chart you prepared and go over the definitions with students. Emphasize that there is no right way to respond to every situation and that students have a right to stand up for themselves.

3. After pointing out the signs in the corners of your classroom, read or display the first scenario on the “Sample Scenarios” handout. At your signal, direct students to go to the corner that names the type of response illustrated in the scenario. For extra fun, direct students to move to the corner in a certain manner, such as by skipping, marching, walking like an Egyptian, doing the Twist, etc. Then ask a volunteer in each corner to explain his or her choice. Repeat with the other scenarios on the handout.

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Whole-Group and Partner Activity

1. Review with students what it means to be assertive. Then explain that students can use different techniques to be assertive.

2. Distribute copies of the “Be Assertive, Be Strong!” mini booklet pages. Guide students to cut out the pages, stack them, and staple them together to make a booklet.

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3. Read and discuss the techniques in the booklet as a class.

4. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group one of the passive or aggressive scenarios cut from a copy of the “Sample Scenarios” handout. Challenge each group to use two different techniques from their booklets to rewrite the scenario and include an assertive response. Provide time for groups to share their responses.

**Exit Activity:** Ask each student to write an assertive response to this scenario: A friend is always borrowing money from you and not paying you back. Now he has asked you for money again. Have volunteers share their responses. For younger students, have each child tell you a way to respond that is not mean or giving in.

**Take-Home Task:** Instruct each student to discuss the following scenario with a family member and decide together how to respond in an assertive way: The zipper on the jacket you bought two weeks ago is already starting to fall apart. You take the jacket back to the store where you bought it to ask for your money back. What will you say to the store manager?
1. Heather and Maria pull Sheena aside and tell her they’re going to steal some money from Cory’s backpack. They want Sheena to be the lookout. Sheena nervously says, “I don’t think it’s right, but OK.”

2. Sean wants to hang out with Ian, but Ian wants to be alone. Sean tells Ian, “You are a terrible friend. It’ll be a long time before I ask you to do anything with me again!”

3. On the bus, Jayden starts teasing Mario, and then he asks his friend J.T. to join in. J.T. says to Jayden, “Hey, man, I don’t really want to be a part of this. Let’s look at your new comic book instead.”

4. During the math test, Noah whispers to Luke, “What did you get for number 7?” Luke doesn’t want to cheat, but he’s afraid Noah will get mad at him if he says no. With a sigh, Luke tells Noah the answer.

5. LaKeisha is hurt when her friend Allie ignores her during the soccer game. Later in the day, LaKeisha tells Allie, “I feel really sad when you won’t talk to me because I thought we were friends.”

6. Cinda gets mad at Julia for not sitting with her at lunch. The next day, Cinda corners Julia in the hallway. She says that if Julia doesn’t hand over her snack from home they are no longer friends.

**Answer Key:** 1. passive  2. aggressive  3. assertive  4. passive  5. assertive  6. aggressive
Be Assertive, Be Strong!

When you are assertive, you communicate your feelings or thoughts without being mean and without giving in.

You can be assertive by...

...saying “no” nicely.

- Hey, let me copy your homework.
- I’m not comfortable with that.
- Let’s go outside to play.
- No, thanks. I need to work on my science project.

You can be assertive by...

...asking for time to think.

- Can I borrow your bike on Saturday?
- I’m not sure. Can I get back to you after lunch?
You can be assertive by...

...saying what you need.

Hand over that book. I want to read it.

I need another day to finish it, then I’ll pass it to you.

...setting a boundary.

Let’s tell Maria she can’t sit with us.

No, I am not going to be mean to her.

You can be assertive by...

...using an “I feel” message.

I don’t want to go to the movies with you.

I feel sad when you change plans with me because I like hanging out with you.

If you are assertive and the other person responds in a mean way, you can

• Calmly walk away.
• Speak assertively to the other person.

Remember to do the following:

• Look the person in the eye.
• Keep your voice calm.
• Stand an appropriate distance from the person.
• Use the person’s name when speaking to him or her.

Use this sentence starter to help you give an “I feel” message.

I feel ___________ when
you ___________ because
I ___________.

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