

# Responding to Harmful Behaviors

## PURPOSE

Students will discuss and understand that words and actions have an impact on others. The impact can be positive, negative or neutral. We will examine our personal responsibility around making responsible choices and owning the impact of the choices we make. We will determine how to respond to harmful behavior using self-agency, self-advocacy and self-regulation. The goal of this lesson is to acknowledge and address peer conflict and harmful social interactions.

### Teacher Tip

Be very explicit about centering the discussion around small to medium sized harmful behaviors. The script below will provide specific examples.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Describe small to medium sized “harmful behaviors” and the impact and intent that may be connected to the behavior. Discuss practices that can support a person on the receiving end of a harmful behavior like bullying.
- Describe productive and healthy ways to respond to harmful behaviors including self-advocacy, self-agency, and self-regulation. Discern which practice is most appropriate as a means to working through specific unwanted social behaviors.

## LENGTH

45 minutes

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



**Self-Regulation**



**Interpersonal  
Awareness**

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Responding to Harmful Behaviors Brainstorm handout
- Writing utensils and paper

## CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

Settling Activity (3 minutes)

[PAUSE]s can be up to 10 seconds each.

### Guiding Language

- *"Let's settle ourselves so we are focused and ready for learning. Sit comfortably and either close your eyes or find a place to rest your gaze."*
- *Recall an appreciation you have for a person or learning process in the classroom.*  
[PAUSE]
- *Notice any sensations you feel on the inside as you recall this appreciation.*  
[PAUSE]
- *If you notice a pleasant or neutral sensation, allow yourself to stay with it for a moment. If you notice an unpleasant sensation, allow yourself to shift to some place that feels better.*
- *You can also shift to grounding.* [PAUSE]
- *When you're ready, shift your attention from this internal awareness back to our group."*

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## PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 10 minutes

Harmful Behavior, Impact and Intent

- *"How do our words and actions have an impact on others?"*

Provide time for students to reflect and share with a small group or partner. Ask a few groups to share their insights.

- *The impact of our behavior can be positive, negative or neutral. Today we are going to focus on small to medium behaviors that are considered harmful. Harmful behaviors have a negative impact on others. There are many different kinds of harmful behaviors. They can be expressed through words, actions, or inactions.*
- *One example of a harmful behavior is bullying which is something that is done intentionally and repeatedly. Other harmful behaviors can be brief, hostile manipulations, or derogatory comments. An example of a brief harmful behavior couple be a one-time negative slight such as pointing out a person's differences in a negative light. For example: Johnny, why are your ears so big? Can you hear noises from the other side of the building with those ears?*
- *How do harmful behaviors impact others?*

Provide time for students to reflect and share with a small group or partner. Ask a few groups to share their insights.

- *When a person or group of people are on the receiving end of harmful behaviors they can experience feelings of pain and a lack of safety. They are negatively impacted by the behavior and are very likely to experience higher levels of stress.*
- *Sometimes these behaviors are done on purpose, with the intention to be hurtful or disparaging. Sometimes they are*

*thoughtless and not intentional, and the impact of the behavior does not match the intent.*

- *How might practicing resiliency skills help the intent of our actions and behaviors match the impact of them?*

Provide time for students to reflect and share with a small group or partner. Ask a few groups to share their insights.

- *When we practice resiliency skills it is easier for us to make choices with more awareness and compassion which allows the intention of our behaviors to more closely match the impact they have on others."*

#### How to Work Through and With Harmful Behavior

Activate prior knowledge by asking students what they know about the terms self-regulation, self advocacy and self agency. Provide the definitions below.

- **"Practice Self-Regulation. Self-Regulation is the ability to navigate one's emotions, one's nervous system, and one's behaviors so as to promote well-being and avoid harm to oneself and others.**
- **Self-Advocacy is the ability to communicate one's needs and to speak up for oneself. Self-advocacy supports individuals in being able to make personal decisions that promote their wellbeing.**

- **Having Self-Agency means you have the capacity to take action. It is often viewed in terms of "personal agency" which is the ability to control personal actions and assume responsibility for the consequences of our actions."**

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#### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 20 minutes

Below is one example of a harmful behavior a person might experience. Please feel free to use an example that is more relatable to your students.

##### Trigger or Stressful Event

In a conversation with a group of students, some friends, and others acquaintances, PJ is asked: "No, where are you *really* from?"

##### Bumped to the High Zone possible reaction

PJ feels insulted and set apart, and a surge of anger rises up inside. PJ responds rudely to the questioner and walks away, seething.

##### Bumped to the Low Zone possible reaction

PJ feels all of their energy draining away and negative self-talk starts. ("I don't truly belong anywhere..." or "Why aren't my friends speaking up? Maybe we aren't really friends at all...")

##### Return to the Resilient Zone possible action

After realizing they felt sick to their stomach, their throat was tight and dry, and that they felt insulted, PJ uses the grounding strategy of

pressing their feet firmly against the floor, and brought a personal resource to mind, picturing their grandfather who is skilled at giving direct responses. PJ pauses to decide whether they want to respond in the moment, whether it feels safe to do so, and how they think they'll feel later, if they don't. PJ looks directly at the questioner and in a calm and firm voice says, "Like I've already told you, I'm from (our city)."

### Debrief Question

**"Why might being asked where you're really from feel like a harmful or aggressive comment to some people?"**

**Are there other productive ways PJ might also have responded that represent self-agency and self-advocacy?"**

### Information and Guidelines for Today's Group/Partner Work

- **"Every one of us has probably unknowingly said or done something that was harmful or hurtful to another person(s).**
- **Feelings may come up as we're brainstorming these examples for both you and your partner.**
- **We are coming up with general ideas of unkind acts. We are not sharing something we've personally been involved with.**
- **We are not trying to solve the underlying problem of harmful behavior.**
- **We are focusing on identifying strategies that can help people get out of the high**

**or low zone, and return to the Resilient Zone.**

- **Be kind to one another. Be respectful. Be open to hearing what your partner is saying.**
- **If you notice feelings and sensations connected to being defensive, give yourself a moment to shift to a skill to be solidly in your Okay Zone, and then return to the conversation.**
- **If you notice feelings of anger or resentment, give yourself a moment to honor where those come from, shift your awareness to a skill that helps you come back to your Okay Zone and then return to the conversation."**

### Instructions

Part 1

- **"Work together to identify examples of small to medium-sized harmful behaviors a person might encounter by writing a short statement.**
- **Name how a person might recognize they are getting bumped out of their Resilient Zone.**
- **Identify several strategies for how to return to the Resilient Zone in an intentional way.**
- **Record your findings on this document.**
- **Pair with another group and share your statement, scenarios and insights."**

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 10 minutes

### Grounding

- *"Before we come back to the whole group, take a moment to check in with yourself through silent reflection. How are you feeling, physically [PAUSE], emotionally? [PAUSE]*
- *What thoughts are running through your mind? Notice all of this sensation information without judgment. Join me if you'd like to, in taking a minute to ground or to resource."* [PAUSE]

### Reflective Prompt (Written and/or Verbal)

- *"How do the practices of self-regulation, self-advocacy, and self-agency compliment one another?*
- *How can we be more effective in dealing with stressors when we use a combination of all three?"*

### Closing Statement

- *"The strategies we are learning will not stop us from having uncertainty in our lives, or from experiencing unfairness, unpleasantness, or hurtful or destructive situations.*
- *What these and other intentional strategies can become, when practiced and practiced over time, is an effective tool for reclaiming our own power in a stressful moment to return to our personal resilience zone."*