

DEALING WITH PRESSURE— Lesson Plan

Introduction:

Pressures are a normal part of life. Entering middle school and becoming a teenager brings a whole batch of new pressures. Most kids suffer the brunt of adolescence during their middle school years. We are not just talking about cracking voices, body hair, and zits. Not only does one start to think about doing well in the classroom, other thoughts include body changes, trying to figure out who you are, and then there is the issue of trying to separate from one's parents. Adolescence is the time when one naturally feels ill at ease.

Discussion — Middle school for many kids mark the beginning of some of the most stressful years of his/her life. It is the time when kids are trying to find their true identity. They want to conform, but also wonder if it is OK to be a little different. It is a time when one feels naturally ill at ease. It is the time of one's life when friends matter most. There will be times when one stands alone. Standing alone can be better than changing who you are to fit in with the popular crowd. It is common for longtime best friends to drift apart and when that happens the one left behind may feel abandoned. During the middle school years, hormones race through the adolescent's body which can turn their emotional world upside down. During this stage the adolescent starts to push away from their parents, test the bounds of their own individuality, and search for a measure of independence. Yet, because they are still kids they need a great deal of care, affirmation, and guidance. Emotionally, adolescents are on a nausea-inducing thrill ride, hitting highs and knee-knocking lows. Here are some positive, healthful ways of dealing with pressures: take time out and do something else for a while - exercise, read, see a movie, or listen to music; talk to someone - friends, parents, a teacher or counselor; ask for help; take a fresh look; brainstorm new solutions; don't be overly critical of yourself; give yourself a break and think of your past accomplishments and good qualities; learn your limits and don't take on more than you can handle; put things in perspective because pressures usually pass; write in a journal; and last, but not least, use your sense of humor.

1. Is all pressure bad, or can some pressures be good?
2. How do you tell the difference between good and bad pressures?
3. Do you think pressure sometimes affects the way you make choices? In what way?

Activity:

Close your eyes. *“See” in your mind’s eye a beautiful beach. The sun is shining warmly, the breeze coming from the ocean is soft and warm, palm trees are overhead and a few seagulls circle about. Imagine walking barefoot in the warm sand, feel your feet sink in the sand with each step. Walk toward the water’s edge and let the water roll over your feet. Jump in the water; it is warm, gentle and very refreshing. Come out of the water and walk to your big beach towel, lie down and relax. Rest for a while in all the peace and beauty surrounding you. Imagine how it looks, how it sounds, how it smells. Breathe in deeply the warm ocean air, stay as long as you like. When you are ready to leave, go to the edge of the water and throw in anything that has been bothering you, anything you wish to be rid of in your life, anything you are feeling sad or angry about, anything you worry about (e.g. problems at home, violence in your neighborhood, bullies, death of a loved one, issues with friends). Picture it as a big rock, a chain, a heavy bag over your shoulders, or any image that helps you see it as undesirable. Throw it in the ocean as far as you can. Watch it sink and get taken by the waves. When the “visit” is done, be thankful for the release of the burden, the problem, the worry; then walk peacefully back through the warm sand.*

Allow time for students to debrief and share about where they went in their visualization and what they felt about the experience/technique. This can be done in pairs, small groups or sharing with whole class. Sample guiding questions:

1. Where did your visualization take you?
2. Do you feel more calm/relaxed after going through this exercise?
3. What did you see, hear, feel, smell during your visualization/did anything
4. in particular stand out?
5. What was it like throwing your burdens into the water?
6. How does it feel to be back in the classroom?
7. Is this technique/exercise something you might do in the future to calm down, relax, and reduce your stress?

Conclusion:

Although middle school may present many pressures and stressors along the way, one can meet those challenges by using a number of techniques. Develop those techniques that will help you learn how to deal with stress and pressure. Take charge of a situation; don't let it take charge of you. Develop that swagger and allow personal accomplishments motivate you. Learn to have fun again. Focus on your strengths and forget your weaknesses. Sometimes it is best to take a step back and learn to let things play out. Enjoy things in your life!