



PUT DOWN THE PUT-DOWNS

"We rise by lifting others."

—Robert Ingersoll

OVERVIEW

Students reflect on and listen to the feelings generated by put-downs (hurtful names and behavior), and brainstorm approaches to ending this problem in the classroom.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When you observe a pattern of put-downs being used in your classroom
- Anytime throughout the school year

TIME REQUIRED

- 40 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencils

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Build community inclusion
- Use active listening skills to become aware of what it feels like to be put down
- Share the personal experience of receiving a put-down
- Practice brainstorming to develop a group solution to this problem

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think of a time when you received an insult or a “put-down”. How did it make you feel and how, if at all, did you respond?
- Notice how you feel and react when you hear or see students and/or colleagues put down each other. How does this affect school climate and morale?
- What is your reason for doing this practice? How is it relevant, helpful, or unhelpful to students’ lives? Would they agree with you?
- This practice might bring up uncomfortable emotions for some students; it also requires students to work in groups. Have all students received training in social-emotional skills such as emotion regulation, teamwork, and collaboration to help them with this practice? If not, how could you and/or other students provide them with support?
- How can you use this practice to help students understand and recognize [microaggressions](#), or subtle insults—whether intentional or unintentional—directed at traditionally marginalized groups?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

- Have students meet in small groups of 4-5 students (3-4 students in upper elementary).

- Lead a brief discussion about put-downs (hurtful names and behaviors), asking them to define and give examples of put-downs.
- Review the Tribes' DOVE rules for brainstorming:
 - D: defer judgment of ideas
 - O: off beat, original ideas are welcome
 - V: vast number of ideas
 - E: expand, elaborate on ideas
- Have each group select a recorder.
- Ask the groups to brainstorm put-downs that people use in the class or school.
- Have each group make a list of the feelings they have when they receive a put-down.
- In groups, allow each student to choose to share a time when a put-down really was hurtful.
- Ask the groups to brainstorm: "What could we do to help each other put down the put-downs?"
- Have each group present their list to the class.
- Have the class select two or three ideas for ending put-downs.
- Invite students to reflect on one or more of the following questions:
 - *What were some of the "feeling words" you shared?*
 - *What were some of your solutions for dealing with people who use put-downs?*
 - *Why do put-downs hurt your feelings?*
 - *What are some important social skills to use when you brainstorm?*
 - *How did your group members help each other to brainstorm or problem-solve during this activity?*
 - *How did you feel when you remembered getting put down?*
 - *How do you feel when you put down another person?*
 - *How did you help your group reach a solution?*
 - *What personal qualities can you use to carry out the solution?*
- Close by inviting students to offer statements of appreciation (and recognition of each other's gifts): "Thanks for...." or "One thing I liked about what you said was...."

EXTENSIONS AND/OR ACADEMIC OPTIONS

- Approach the cause and effect of put-downs from the lens of a particular time in history, for example, during the women's suffrage movement or during the civil rights movement.
- Encourage students to research how and why certain terms are derogatory.
- Watch a sitcom and have students tally put-downs, then discuss.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked or didn't work for you in doing this practice? How did the students respond to the practice? Would you change anything for next time?
- Are students noticing when put-downs occur and addressing them? Has the class atmosphere become more respectful?
- Did students discuss how this practice might be relevant, helpful, or unhelpful to them? If so, how?
- Did students use social-emotional skills to engage in this practice? How did their SEL skills allow them to participate meaningfully in this practice?
- Were microaggressions used as examples of put-downs? If so, are students better able to recognize and address them?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Microaggressions (a form of put-down) are subtle experiences of discrimination that communicate hostile or negative messages to persons of marginalized groups. For example, showing surprise that a person of color is attending college, or catcalling a woman who is walking down the street, or saying to someone who is gay “you don’t act gay.”

People on the receiving end of microaggressions, including [teens](#), have been found by researchers to experience greater levels of depression, anxiety, lower levels of [self-esteem](#), [sleep quality](#), and [physical health](#), and increased [levels of cortisol](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In schools where microaggressions go unchecked, both the physical and mental well-being of students and adults are threatened, creating an unsafe learning environment where people [feel they don’t belong](#).

Proactively teaching students (and adults) how to recognize, handle, and ultimately prevent microaggressions can go a long way in cultivating positive school and classroom climates in which all forms of diversity are [honored and valued](#).

SOURCE

Tribes Learning Communities is a community building process—a culture and active learning pedagogy. For information about the entire curriculum, see www.tribes.com.

Gibbs, Jeanne. (2007). *Discovering Gifts in Middle School: Learning in a Caring Culture Called Tribes*. Windsor, CA: CenterSource Systems. (Additional books are available for elementary and high school levels)