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:
  o D: defer judgment of ideas
  o O: off beat, original ideas are welcome
  o V: vast number of ideas
  o 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:
  o What were some of the “feeling words” you shared?
  o What were some of your solutions for dealing with people who use put-downs?
  o Why do put-downs hurt your feelings?
  o What are some important social skills to use when you brainstorm?
  o How did your group members help each other to brainstorm or problem-solve during this activity?
  o How did you feel when you remembered getting put down?
  o How do you feel when you put down another person?
  o How did you help your group reach a solution?
  o 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)