



HELPING STUDENTS TO DO BETTER NEXT TIME

"It is the highest form of self-respect to admit our errors and mistakes and make amends for them. To make a mistake is only an error in judgment, but to adhere to it when it is discovered shows infirmity of character."

—Dale Turner

OVERVIEW

Students list ways they can fix situations where they said or did the wrong thing and then generate ideas for how they make sure they don't engage in the behavior again.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning of the year when the class is practicing classroom rules/guidelines
- When students are having a difficult time knowing how to handle situations where something is said or done that hurts another student
- When students are not sure about what they can do to keep themselves from breaking classroom or school rules

TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- Chart paper and markers or whiteboard
- Optional: Paper and pencils for students

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Create a list of ways to make amends when they say or do the wrong thing
- Create a list of things they can do to avoid wrong behaviors in the future

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Things we regret saying or doing often fall into one of the following two categories according to researchers:
 - **Moral:** Issues of harm towards another person, sharing or fairness, and human rights, all of which tend to be a universal experience.
 - *Questions for students to ask themselves:* Did this hurt someone else? Was someone else upset because of what I did?
 - *Examples:* hitting a sibling, saying mean things to another student, refusing to share
 - *How we might respond:* Moral transgressions often elicit strong emotions, so practicing mindfulness can be an effective way to calm those emotions before acting. For example, a teacher who made a comment in a staff meeting that negatively affected some of their colleagues might take a few deep breaths before apologizing or speaking out next time.
 - **Conventional:** Issues of rules and traditions intended to help schools and society run more smoothly, most of which vary by context.
 - *Questions for students to ask themselves:* Is there a rule at school about this? Would things be easier if everyone followed this rule?
 - *Examples:* speaking out in class without raising one's hand, calling a teacher by his/her first name, using phones in class to be on social media
 - *How we might respond:* Conventional transgressions usually require us to just remember what the rule was or take steps so that we won't do it again. For instance, someone who forgot to take out the trash before pickup-day might write themselves a reminder note and post it on the fridge. Or a student who has trouble resisting her phone in class might pack it away in her backpack so that it's less accessible.

- (For more information on these categories, please read the “Research Behind It” section.)
- Reflect on a time when you said or did something you regretted. How might you categorize your action based on the two areas above?
- What actions did you take in the moment, if any, to correct your words or behavior?
- What might you do or have you done to prevent yourself from doing this again, making sure your preventative efforts match the type of transgression?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

- **To better understand this practice, please read the “Reflection Before the Practice” and the “Research Behind It” sections first.**
- **Responding to moral offenses** [actions that hurt others or are unfair]: Ask students to brainstorm as a whole class, in small groups, or with a partner: *What are some things that we might do or say that make us say, “Oops, I wish I hadn’t done that? Something that hurt or harmed another person, maybe was mean or unfair to someone?”* Some examples might be not sharing materials, hurting someone, or not letting someone play with you.
- Record students’ answers on chart paper or a whiteboard.
- **Responding to conventional offenses** [actions that break rules or norms]: Ask students to brainstorm as a whole class, in small groups, or with a partner: *At home or at school, are there any rules that a person might break and say, “Oops, I shouldn’t have done that,” or “I should fix that”?*
- Add students’ responses to the chart paper or the whiteboard.
- Choose one example that is a **moral** offense and discuss as a whole class, in small groups, or with a partner: *Why do you think a person should not do this? [because it is harmful or unfair to another person] How do you think the person who was harmed feels? How do you think the person who harmed the other person felt just before they did it? How do you think they felt afterwards?*
- Ask: *What could the person who did this do or say to make things better?*
- Record students’ responses on chart paper or a whiteboard.
- Ask: *What could the person who did this do to make sure they don’t do this again in the future?*
 - Record students’ responses on chart paper or a whiteboard.
 - Possible suggestions:
 - practice mindfulness (take a few deep breaths to calm down before acting)
 - substitute behavior; for example, if you get upset easily and want to hit something, have a stress ball/ or a pillow to hit instead.
 - avoid the situation
 - consider how the other person feels
 - remind oneself to not do it again
 - think of the consequences
 - practice self-control, like walking away or ignoring the other person’s behavior
 - use words to compromise or find a solution rather than fists
 - let go of anger and negative thoughts
 - think of a positive, opposite behavior, such as being kind
 - ask an adult for help

- Choose another example that is a **conventional** offense and discuss as a whole class, in small groups, or with a partner: *What rule is being broken here? Why should we not break this rule? Is there ever a time when we should not follow this rule?*
 - [Note to teachers: In elementary school, students are still learning the purpose of rules because they don't understand how rules affect systems; hence, they may be inconsistent in how they deal with conventions. For example, they may think rules need to be followed because the teacher or principal says so and everyone does it, or they will see that someone broke the rule, so the rule is arbitrary and doesn't have to be followed.]
- Ask: *What could a person do to fix the situation?*
- Record students' responses on chart paper or a whiteboard.
- Ask: *What could a person do to make sure they didn't break the rule again in the future?*
- Record students' responses on chart paper or a whiteboard.
 - In addition to the possible responses listed above, students might also add:
 - take practical steps to improve one's behavior
 - remind oneself to remember the rule or to not engage in the behavior again
 - practice self-control, such as keeping thoughts to oneself
 - do something else to re-direct one's attention; for example: If you want to say something in class-- write it down instead first (this helps with impulse control).
- If you have extra time, have small groups or partners choose another offense from the brainstormed list and write down ideas or do role plays that address 1. why we shouldn't engage in this behavior, 2. how to make amends in the moment, and 3. what can be done to prevent this happening again in the future. Have students share their ideas or perform their role plays for the class.

CLOSURE

- *As we go through our day, notice when you or someone else says or does something wrong and think about what could be said to make the other person feel better or to fix the situation. Let's keep adding ideas to these lists and discussing them at Circle Time.*

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice if students are more often taking it upon themselves to make amends when they say or do the wrong thing rather than relying on adults to tell them what to do?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Scientists have found that students as young as six [actively make amends](#) for their misbehavior, in addition to focusing on personal improvement and learning to avoid wrong behaviors. Studies show that children are also capable of [aligning their method of repair](#) with the type of offense, whether [moral or conventional](#) in nature.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Developing [students' self-efficacy](#), or the belief that they can succeed in a task, is critical to healthy child development. Hence, when students are directly involved in rectifying their own misbehavior along with adjusting their shortcomings, they are cultivating a sense of agency around their ability to resolve difficult social interactions and growing their identity as capable social and moral agents.

Rather than directly telling students how to behave and fix their misbehavior--as some school-wide curricula and programs do--adults should engage students in discussions that help bring out students' natural propensities for assessing their own behavior and self-correction.