Your Words Matter

7th Grade Counseling Lesson Family Guide

Lesson Overview

Recently, our 7th-grade students participated in a counseling lesson focused on empathy, communication, and creating a supportive school community. Students anonymously shared hurtful statements they have heard or experienced. Together, we examined how these words impact our learning environment and discussed how each student has the power to shape a positive middle school experience.

The Weight Others Carry:

We don't always know what someone else is going through. A comment we think is "harmless" might be something a classmate hears often at home, experiences from others, or feels deeply self-conscious about.

Intent Vs. Impact

Intent is what you meant to say or do; Impact is how it actually made the other person feel. Even if our intent was to make a joke, the impact can still be extremely hurtful.

Tone, Facial Expessions & Body Language

Words are only part of what we communicate. Non-verbal cues heavily influence the impact of our message:

- Saying "Great job," while rolling your eyes turns an encouraging phrase into a harmful remark.
- Saying "I'm fine," with crossed arms and a harsh tone signals frustration or hurt.
- Saying "Just kidding," after a comment, paired with a laugh, often magnifies the hurtful impact rather than softening it.

The Anatomy of A Meaningful Apology

We all make mistakes and sometimes say things we regret. When that happens, owning it is essential. A real apology focuses on accountability and changed behavior—without an adjustment in actions, an apology loses its meaning.

✓ Effective Apologies Include:

- Saying specifically what you did: Acknowledge the exact behavior.
- Taking full responsibility: Own the mistake.
- Making it right: Commit to not repeating it.

Example: "I teased you about your shoes and that was rude. I'm sorry, and I won't do that again."

× Effective Apologies Avoid:

- "Sorry you feel that way." (Blames the victim)
- "Sorry, but you did... first." (Deflects blame)
- "It was just a joke!" (Minimizes impact)

Remember: The other person may need time and isn't obligated to accept an apology right away.

Being An Upstander, Not A Bystander

Laughing at a hurtful comment is participating in the harm, even if you didn't say anything directly. We encouraged students to take active steps:

1. Speak Up	2. Check On Them Later	3. Tell a Trusted Adult
Directly and safely telling someone to stop can be scary, but it is one of the most effective ways to defend a peer.	If speaking up in the moment isn't possible, checking in with a classmate afterward lets them know they aren't alone.	If targeted behavior is repeated or persistent, report it to a teacher, counselor, or administrator. Reports are kept confidential.

Continuing the Conversation at Home

- Ask open-ended questions: "What was one thing from the counseling lesson on words and apologies that stuck out to you?"
- Discuss Intent vs. Impact: Share a time when you meant to be funny but accidentally hurt someone's feelings, and how you resolved it.
- Explore body language together: Talk about how small gestures (eye rolls, tone of voice, posture) change the meaning of everyday sentences.
- Practice effective apologies: Talk through the difference between a sincere apology and an "excuse" apology.

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