

## What Are We Responsible For?

### Some Tips

### Thoughts

What is the definition of the word “worry”? Any thoughts? Worry occurs when we assume a responsibility that we were never meant to have. How often do we worry about things that are just out of our control? I do it all the time. But, what responsibilities are ours and ours alone? **We are all responsible for our thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, and motives.** As teachers, we need to teach our kids about these areas. For the next five sections I will be sharing tips on how to teach these responsibilities to our students. We teach in two ways: through direct instruction and by example. How can I be an example for my students to help them to always evaluate their thoughts? **Instead of asking them “What were you thinking?” after a bullying event, ask them daily “What do you have on your mind today?”** Begin an open dialogue with your students. A technique I really like that I learned from Dr. Allen Mendler, author of *Discipline With Dignity* is called the 2X10 exercise. Take a student that is a known bully and have a 2–minute conversation with him as you would with a friend. Ask a question or two about other classes that the student is in, or maybe discuss a sports team you know that he/she is interested in. Do this for 10 days straight. What will happen around the eighth day is that the student will come to you for the conversation. You can then begin to peek into the thought life of this student. You may make a new friend.

### Words

I can say what I want to when I want to. I guess that’s freedom of speech. I guess we can post or text anything we want to as well. Kids have been sold this. What kids need to understand is that they can say, post, and text whatever they want, **WITH CONSEQUENCES.** Just because we are thinking something doesn’t mean we have to say it. Our students need to evaluate their words and what damage those words can do to others. The tongue weighs about 2 ounces; yet, it can control the events of our life. Healthy confrontations, debates, and constructive suggestion are good qualities of communication that we all should develop. Spewing, spreading rumors, gossip, and hurtful statements will only create a school environment that is void of morals, trust, and integrity. Teach your students that if they are going to say something that could prove hurtful, to just wait 30 minutes. This wait-time will allow them to evaluate the cost of their words and avoid the guilt that they will experience for hurting another person.

We are all just a compilation of what others have said and done to us. Remember, victims suffer because of verbal abuse. Words truly can cut deep into the heart of person.

## **Actions**

Actions do speak louder than words, for sure, if you follow the pattern, thoughts lead to words and words translate into action. That is unless, of course, you are a bag of wind and never follow through on anything you say. Kids, though, get placed on the battlefield of the bully/victim dynamic through their words, and get pressured into taking action. Of course, this all starts in their thoughts. The more that gets said, the more action has to be taken. Most of the time, these actions are taken out of impulse, leading to serious problems among bullies, victims, and other students who they are friends with, creating discipline problems for teachers, administration, and the school's bullying specialist. Always keep your hand on the pulse of your classroom, and your school, and listen for threatening words that you know could lead to a bullying event. At this point, the child's or teen's thoughts have escaped the confines of his secret life and have now become public. STOP HIM NOW, before you have a bigger problem to deal with.

## **Attitudes**

The sources of the most painful offenses are not usually actions, but attitudes. People who offend others unintentionally are judged with less severity than those who intend to hurt. Even in law, the intent behind a crime is a factor in assessing the guilt of the one who stands before the judge. This is one area that is the most difficult to change in ourselves and in our students. We ask our students to do things all the time, and they should comply with our request. But really, it's not as much about the compliance, but more about their attitude when they comply. Are they resentful and angry, and is it like pulling teeth to get them to cooperate with even the smallest task? Character is truly what a person does when no one is looking. A bully will always act when no one is looking. They will deny their hurtful actions and blame others for their behavior. Begin correcting the attitudes of your students; by doing so, you will prepare them for a better future. But, more importantly, you will help them to evaluate the intent of their actions.

## **Motives**

Do you ever watch CSI (Crime Scene Investigation)? I do, occasionally. I am amazed how all of the evidence that is collected can point directly at the suspect in question, but they just can't seem to figure out a motive. They need the motive to convict the person of the crime. We all know what the motive of a bully is, right? Power. They want to have power and control over a smaller or weaker person. How do you change the motive of a bully? By being the strongest and most influential person in the classroom. That's right, you, the teacher have this ability. You don't need to use power; you need to use your influence. When your students realize that you are in charge their motives change from wanting to hurt others, to wanting to help. They have met their match. Remember, it is not about the influence of your power, but rather the power of your influence.