

# Be Positively Powerful



A Guide For Teens on Achieving  
Resilience and Empowerment

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.

# **BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL**

## **A GUIDE FOR TEENS ON ACHIEVING RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT**

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Embrace Civility

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ~ 1

CHAPTER 1. YOUR MARVELOUS BRAIN ~ WHICH DURING YOUR TEEN YEARS IS “UNDER DEVELOPMENT” ~ 7

CHAPTER 2. BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES ~ SEVEN POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT ~ 19

CHAPTER 3. POSITIVELY POSITIVELY POWERFUL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE ~ STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OTHERS WILL TREAT YOU BADLY AND TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND IF THIS HAPPENS ~ 41

CHAPTER 4. STOP, OWN IT, AND FIX IT ~ NOT BEING HURTFUL TO OTHERS AND FIXING THINGS IF YOU WERE ~ 57

CHAPTER 5. POSITIVELY POWERFUL CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS~ ENHANCING YOUR IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS IN A POSITIVELY POWERFUL WAY ~ 67

CHAPTER 6. BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL ONLINE ~ POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT WHEN USING DIGITAL MEDIA ~ 75

CHAPTER 7. POWERFULLY POSITIVE LEADERSHIP ~ BEING A HELPFUL ALLY AND A LEADER FOR POSITIVE CHANGE ~ 89

APPENDIX A. GUIDELINES FOR YOUR JOURNAL ~ 105

APPENDIX B. CHARACTER STRENGTHS SURVEY ~ 107

APPENDIX C. EMPOWERMENT ASSESSMENT ~ 109



# INTRODUCTION

It would be wonderful to promise that you will lead a happy and successful life. A life where you did not have any worries or sadness. You would never be treated badly, get into a fight with a friend, receive a grade lower than an “A,” or lose a game. Your family would always have a place to live and enough food. Your community would always be safe. No one would ever leave you or die.

Unfortunately, life does not work like that. As you walk down the path of life, sometimes bad things will happen. This is not fair. But this is what it is.

The objective of this book is to support your resilience when things get tough. Resilience is the ability to effectively respond when things get tough or when bad things happen to you. Resilience means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences. Resilience is feeling empowered even after something bad has happened. Being empowered is being strong and confident—getting past those bad things, learning from those bad things, and living a happy and successful life.

During your teen years, many of these challenges relate to relationships with your peers. Maintaining positive relationships and responding effectively when something goes wrong in these relationships will be the major focus of this book. This includes addressing the concerns of racism, homophobia, and challenges faced by teens in other minority groups.

The insight and strategies that are set forth in *Be Positively Powerful* are those that will help you be happy and live your best life—no matter what challenges you encounter on your path. The chapters in this book address the following:

**Chapter 1. Your Marvelous Brain ~ Which During Your Teen Years is “Under Development.”** This Chapter provides information about how your brain is developing through your teen years and into early adulthood. You will learn the key areas of your brain that guide how you make decisions and the greatest risks there are in your decision-making during the teen years. You will also learn what happens in your brain if you have experienced significant challenges and how your brain can actually fix itself.

**Chapter 2. Be Positively Powerful Strategies ~ Seven Positively Powerful Strategies to Achieve Resilience and Empowerment.** This Chapter will provide information and strategies you can use to increase your resilience, empowerment, happiness, and success. These are strategies that can help to reduce the potential that you will become emotionally distressed when facing challenges and increase your effectiveness in responding to these situations. These strategies include making

positive connections, reaching out to be kind, using your strengths, focusing on the good, being mindful, keeping your personal power, and thinking things through.

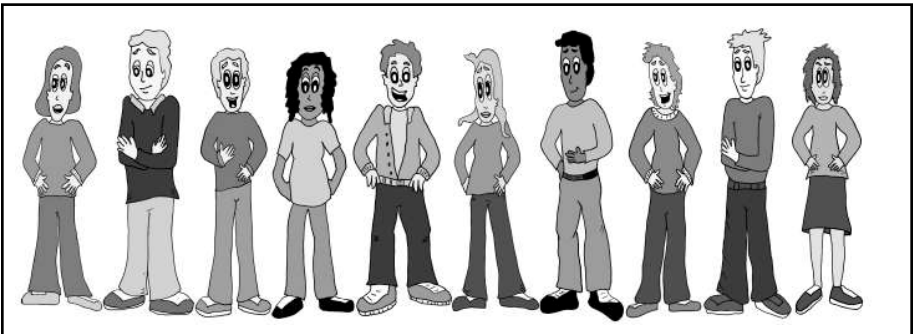
**Chapter 3. Positively Powerful Prevention and Response ~ Reduce the Likelihood Others Will Treat You Badly and Respond Effectively if This Happens.** This Chapter provides you with guidance on how to reduce the likelihood someone will treat you badly and respond in hurtful situations in a way that allows you to retain your personal power and achieve a positive outcome.

**Chapter 4. Stop, Own It, and Fix It ~ Not Being Hurtful to Others and Fixing Things if You Were.** This chapter will ask you to consider your personal values in relationships with others and whether you engage in hurtful actions. You will learn strategies for how you can respond if someone has been hurtful without engaging in retaliation and how you can remedy the harm if you have been hurtful.

**Chapter 5. Positively Powerful Personal Relationships ~ Enhance Your Important Relationships in a Positively Powerful Way.** More important relationships include with those with whom you consider your “best friends,” as well as dating relationships. This chapter will discuss strategies to enhance these relationships and to handle the grief process if your relationship ends.

**Chapter 6. Be Positively Powerful Online ~ Positive Engagement With Others When Using Digital Media.** There are aspect of the digital environment that can interfere with responsible, positive decision-making. This especially includes acting without thinking and being less attentive to the consequences of your actions. This chapter will provide insight into strategies to be positively powerful online.

**Chapter 7. Powerfully Positive Leadership ~ Being a Helpful Ally and Leader for Positive Change.** Many teens are excited about the possibility of stepping into leadership roles—leaders for positive change in your school, your community, and in the larger society. This Chapter provides strategies you can use to step in to help others if you witness they are being excluded or treated badly, as well as strategies you can implement with other students to foster civility and social justice.



# CHAPTER 1.

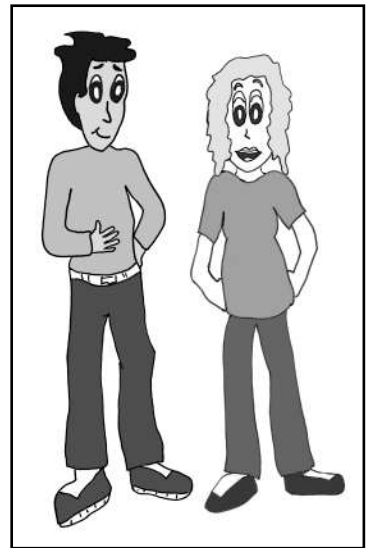
## YOUR MARVELOUS BRAIN

### WHICH DURING YOUR TEEN YEARS IS “UNDER DEVELOPMENT”

The teenage years are a great time for exploration and learning about the world around you. Your brain is still “under development.” Because of this, some challenges could arise in your decision-making—even if you are intent on making good decisions.

The teen years are a time for you to develop your own personal identity and move towards independence. Your brain is developing in the way it should to prepare you for adulthood.

You have an overwhelming desire to explore the world. You are also exploring essential questions about yourself—who you are, what skills you have, what directions you want to go in your life, and with whom you want close relationships.



As a result of how your brain is developing, you may be more likely to engage in behaviors that adults might consider to be “risky.” Taking risks is actually a normal part of teen development. Another term for taking risks is “exploration.” As a teen, you have a biologically driven need to explore. Through your explorations, you will acquire experience and become prepared to make the complex decisions you will need to make as an adult.

What is important, obviously, is that you do not take risks that could potentially cause harm to your safety and well-being, or the safety and well-being of others.

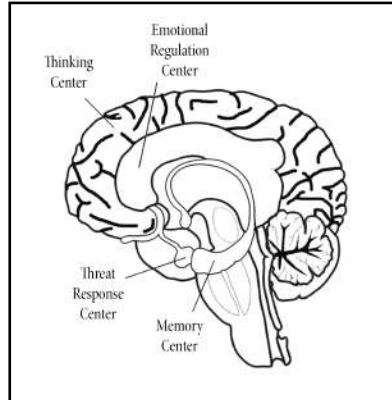
# KEY AREAS OF THE BRAIN

Let's first learn about the areas of the brain that are most involved with guiding the decisions you make and actions you take.

## PREFRONTAL CORTEX ~ THINKING CENTER

The prefrontal cortex or “thinking center” of your brain is located near the top of your head, behind your forehead. Your prefrontal cortex supports complex decision-making, planning skills, impulse control, and focused attention.

When this area of your brain is well developed and fully functioning, you are able to think clearly, be aware of yourself and others, evaluate situations, engage in effective problem solving, and make good decisions. You think things through before you act.



## ANTERIOR CINGULATE CORTEX ~ EMOTIONAL REGULATION CENTER

The anterior cingulate cortex or “emotional regulation center” of your brain is located next to the prefrontal cortex, but is deeper inside your brain. This area is responsible for regulating your emotions. Your emotional regulation center helps you to remain calm.

Ideally, your emotional regulation center is working closely with your thinking center. When this connection is working well, you are able to manage difficult thoughts and emotions without being totally overwhelmed. This fully supports your ability to evaluate situations and make effective decisions on how you will respond.

## HIPPOCAMPUS ~ MEMORY CENTER

Your hippocampus or “memory center” is located much deeper inside your brain. The hippocampus helps short term memories become long term memories. Remembering helps you to learn from your experiences. When you effectively learn from your experiences, you make better decisions the next time a similar situation arises.

## THE LIMBIC SYSTEM, INCLUDING THE AMYGDALA ~ THREAT RESPONSE CENTER

The limbic system is located way deep inside of your brain. This is in an older part of your brain. Your limbic system is focused on what is necessary for your physical survival.



One important part of the limbic system is the amygdala or “threat response center.” The most important job of the amygdala is to receive all incoming information—that is everything you see, hear, touch, smell, and taste—and answer one question: “Is this a threat?”

If your amygdala detects that a threat may be present, your whole body goes into a fight, flight, or freeze mode. Your amygdala is fully in charge. When this happens, stress hormones of adrenalin and cortisol rush through your body. Your heart rate, blood flow, and breathing all increase.

When your amygdala is in charge, your thinking center shuts down. It also becomes disconnected from your emotional regulation center. This response to a threatening situation is just what we want our brains and bodies to do when a physical threat like a dangerous wild animal is present. This response allows our bodies to respond effectively to that threat.

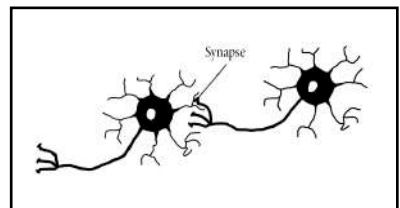
These days, the threats you face do not generally involve escaping wild animals. Many of the concerns you face require the ability to engage in effective problem solving. A problem is that it is not possible to engage in effective problem solving if you are feeling threatened. This is because your threat response center is activated and your thinking center has shut down.

Also, many of the concerns teens face are more constant—constant pressure for grades or persistent bullying. Your threat response center can get stuck on “threat mode” more consistently. If this is happening to you, this means that stress hormones are always present. As a result, you are hyper vigilant and have difficulties thinking clearly. If you continue in this state, you will experience significant physical and mental health concerns.

## NEURONS AND SYNAPTIC CONNECTIONS

The working parts of your brain are the neurons. Neurons are cells in the brain and nervous system that communicate with each other. Neurons send messages throughout your body.

Neurons form connections with other neurons that are called “synapses,” “synaptic connections,” or “neural pathways.” It is said that these neurons are “wired together.” Neurons send messages through these synapses that guide what you think about and how you respond.



Your experiences guide how your neural pathways are established. If you generally experience happiness and success, your neural pathways will be established in a way that will keep you on a happy and successful path. Unfortunately, if you are having more consistent negative experiences, your neural pathways will tend to keep your thinking focused on the negative experiences you had. This will undermine your happiness and success. It is however possible to rewrite your neural pathways. That is what this book weeks to help you do.

As your brain is developing during the teen years, it is engaged in synaptic pruning and the strengthening of your neural pathways. When someone prunes an apple tree, the weak and branches are removed. This results in a healthier tree, with strong branches to bear fruit.

Synaptic pruning is basically the same thing. This is a process that reduces the overall number of synaptic connections between neurons. Pruning reduces weak and unnecessary synaptic connections. This allows the more frequently used neural pathways to become stronger.

This synaptic pruning occurs in childhood, throughout your teen years, and into early adulthood. The pruning is being facilitated by what you are learning based on your experiences. Your ability to think and solve problems improves with age because the neural pathways that support this are being strengthened.

During the teen years, your brain develops in a manner that emulates the the way in which your brain evolved over centuries. The neural pathways in the older portion of your brain, including the limbic system and the amygdala, develop earlier. The neural pathways on your prefrontal cortex are the last part of your brain to mature. In fact, the pruning and strengthening in your your prefrontal cortex continues until you are around age 25. Even after this age, your brain is continuing to change and develop new and stronger neural pathways.

As your brain matures, the prefrontal cortex takes over greater control. You will have much greater ability to think things through before you act. Before the prefrontal cortex fully matures, the limbic system and the amygdala are often more in charge. This means you may be more likely to act in a way that is an emotional reaction, rather than thinking things through.

As your brain continues to develop and you have more experience, you will gain greater awareness, insight, and judgment. Every time you are involved in a new situation, you will learn from that experience and new neural pathways will be established. Your brain will store these memories in your hippocampus. The memory of each experience you have is stored. This helps to guide how you will respond to new similar situations.

As you get older, you will also become better at reasoning. You will be able to predict the future consequences of your actions better. This will support your ability to think and plan ahead. In addition to being better able to reflect on your own thinking, you will get better at detecting how others are motivated and how they are thinking and feeling.

It is possible to intentionally create neural pathways that can increase your resilience, empowerment, and happiness, as well as to enable you to more effectively engage in problem solving and action planning.

## **KEY DEVELOPMENT FACTORS**

### **MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

The changes that take place in your brain also involve what is called “moral development.” Moral development is the development of your personal values regarding how you will behave and interact with others. When you were younger, your moral reasoning was more focused on obeying rules to avoid punishment or to receive a reward from an adult.

As a teen, you are learning to make important decisions based on your own personal values. You are deciding what your personal values are, what you consider to be “right” and “wrong,” and how you want to present yourself in society.

You are also evaluating the behaviors of your friends, other peers, and adults to decide if you are comfortable with their values and behaviors. As you explore your personal interests and values, your friendships may change. This is to be expected.

## **PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

During your teen years, you have an increased interest in peer relationships. When you were younger, you were more focused on how you were perceived by important adults. During the teen years, your focus is much more on the how you are perceived by your peers.

Because of this you can also very susceptible to peer influence. Likely, the last thing you want is to be excluded by your friends or “put down.” You may be more likely to engage in risky or inappropriate actions if your friends are also engaging in those actions. If you go to a party where everyone is drinking, you will likely feel compelled to drink also—even if this is not what you think you should do.

This is one reason why it is very important to be careful when choosing which peers you want to have as close friends. Are they making the kinds of choices that are in accord with your personal values? Are they effectively thinking things through before acting? Are they making safe choices

# **GREATEST RISKS DURING TEEN YEARS**

## **ACTING WITHOUT THINKING, ESPECIALLY WHEN UPSET**

One of the greatest challenge you face during your teen years is acting without thinking. Your brain is developing the capacity to think and make decisions more effectively. You are exploring and taking risks. You will get into situations where you have no prior experience. You may find it hard then to decide what is best to do. You are also at much greater risk of engaging in impulsive actions if you act when you are upset.

If you act without thinking, you could cause harm to yourself or others—even if you do not want to cause such harm.

It is important that you learn to recognize when you are about to act without thinking and stop yourself. Wait until you have calmed down and thought things through before you respond in any situation. This will help you to protect your reputation and relationships.

What kinds of situations tend to make you upset? What steps can you take to avoid those situations? How can you recognize when you are in such situation? What plans can you make in advance for how you intend to remain in control of your actions?

## **FAILING TO PREDICT OR RECOGNIZE THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS ON OTHERS**

Your brain is learning to better understand how others think and feel. You may truly believe that you know what someone else is thinking or how they are feeling only to find out later that you were really wrong.

When you pay close attention to the reactions of others, you will be better able to predict and recognize what others are thinking and how they are feeling. This will also help you to recognize the consequences of your actions on others.

Knowing how someone else is thinking and feeling can be an especially challenging task when you are using digital media. When you are using digital media, you cannot see how others are reacting. This can make it much more difficult to accurately recognize how others think and feel. You also may not recognize the consequences of your actions on others.

Some good questions to guide your actions are: “What would my parent or other person I truly admire think about this?” “How would I feel if everyone in my school or community saw this?” “Would I say or do this if others I care about were with me in person?”

## **PLAYING “FOLLOW THE LEADER”**

Think of this situation: A popular student just posted something that is exceptionally hurtful about another student on social media. Will you play “follow the leader” and “like” this post or add a hurtful comment? How will you respond if several other young people post “like” or add hurtful comments?

You are highly motivated to gain peer acceptance and not be excluded. This may lead you to think that it is necessary to go along with what someone who appears to be a “leader” does—even if this is against your personal values. You may feel even more pressure to do this if other teens follow this person’s lead.

This is also the time when you are exploring questions about yourself. This includes what are acceptable qualities, values, and actions of those whose leadership you are inclined to follow.

When you see that someone has done something hurtful or is engaging in some other behaviors that are inappropriate, ask yourself: “Is this in accord with my personal values?” “Do I want to be a follower of someone who is hurtful or does things I think are wrong?” Decide what qualities in others you think are important at times that you are considering following their leadership.

## **JUDGING YOUR VALUE BASED ON ATTENTION FROM OTHERS**

Some teens appear to think that their value as a person is determined by how many friends they have. This is especially evident online. Some teens post outrageous material just to get attention. Some may be obsessed with how many “friends” they have or how many “likes” every one of their posts receive.

Ask yourself these questions: “What standards will you use to judge your personal value?”  
“What is more important to you, the number of your friends or the quality of your friendships?”  
“How do you want to measure your self-worth?”

# EXPERIENCING TRAUMA AND DISTRESS

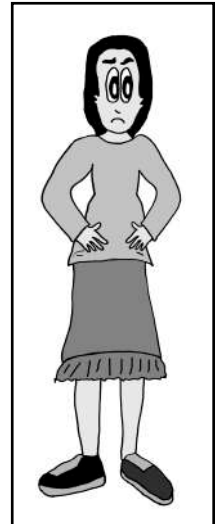
## TRAUMATIC EVENTS AND DISTRESS

Everyone experiences distressing or challenging situations from time to time. Learning how to effectively respond when things get tough is an important task in growing up. The more supportive the relationships around you, the easier it has and will be to handle situations that are more challenging.

A traumatic event is an event that threatens a person’s life, safety, or well-being or the lives, safety or well-being of people around them. A traumatic event is very stressful incident that has a significant, immediate impact on your emotional state. An ongoing traumatic situation is more chronic—ongoing distressing challenges. Both a traumatic event and ongoing distressing challenges are considered a form of trauma.

These are forms of serious traumatic events or distressing challenges some teens face:

- Emotional abuse by a loved or trusted one.
- Interpersonal violence, such as physical or sexual assault—or witnessing violence.
- A serious bullying or harassment incident or persistent, chronic bullying or harassment by your peers, siblings, or adults.
- Racism or homophobia in your school or community.
- Being rejected by your family because of your sexual orientation or identity.
- Exposure to community violence, including school shootings.
- Natural disasters or terrorism.
- Traumatic loss and grief after the death of a loved one.
- Medical trauma including severe injury, diagnosis and treatment of a life-threatening illness, or other serious medical procedure.
- Multiple, chronic traumatic events, including neglect, maltreatment, and witness to domestic violence.



While you are hopefully not experiencing these kinds of challenges or distress, it is likely you know others who are. The information in this next section may be helpful for you. Or it can help you better understand what is happening to others, so that you can support them.

## **FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE AND POSSIBLE THREATS**

Our brains developed with a natural tendency to focus on the negative—to focus on potential danger and risk. Why? Because this was necessary for survival. If you were a cave man, failure to note that a dangerous animal is close by could result in your death.

As was discussed earlier, if your brain detects that a threat may be present, your limbic system and amygdala take over. Your whole body goes into a fight, flight, or freeze mode. This response to a threatening situation is just what we want our brains to do when a threat is present, because this allows our physical bodies to respond effectively to that threat.

Your brain naturally looks for bad news, overreact to bad things, and does a really good job of storing memories of those bad things in your hippocampus so that you can avoid risk in the future. Your brain will naturally pay more attention to the bad than to the good.

Unfortunately, many young people encounter ongoing stressful situations. If you are experiencing distressing challenges, your amygdala is always on alert and your body always has higher levels of the stress hormones, adrenalin and cortisol.

What is also happening is that those neurons that keep “firing together,” to deal with the ongoing stressful situation, end up getting “wired together.” This results in your brain creating neural pathways that cause you to be even more focused on potential threats and bad things.

Instead of developing neural pathways that will support your success and happiness, your neural pathways are being formed in a way that seeks to ensure your survival in a dangerous world. These threat-focused neural pathways will cause you to be even more overreactive every time that any new challenging situation arises.

When your amygdala is over-activated, you can experience chronic stress, fear, and anxiety. You will also have a harder time feeling safe, calming down, sleeping, or learning.

Recall that your hippocampus is in charge of the storage and retrieval of memories, as well as telling the difference between past and present experiences. The increased stress hormones make it more challenging for your hippocampus to function well. This causes you to have more challenges in telling the difference between past and present experiences. Situations that might resemble prior hurtful incidents can cause more intense panic and fear—even though the current situation does not present a threat or that much of a threat.

Your brain has become filled with neural pathways that are trying to help protect you from danger. Painful memories can become reactivated by different “cues” from the outside world. This might be how someone looks at you or even being in a place where someone was hurtful to you in the past. You are always alert to when someone might be hurtful to you. You pay

closer attention to who is around you and where you are so that you are prepared to respond. You are hyper vigilant.

Your brain has less of an ability to figure out whether a current situation is actually threatening or to determine how threatening the situation actually is. Your brain may translate a minor hurtful incident as being a more significant incident. You can be more easily triggered by a situation that you perceive to present a threat, even when no threat is present.

When you perceive that you might be in danger, you are more likely to trigger. You may respond in a way that is an overreaction—an outburst. At these times, you are reacting, not thinking. This is because the chemicals in your brain are preparing you to fight or run from that dangerous animal. Your prefrontal lobe is not functioning. You are not able to think clearly.

Because your emotional regulation center has also been affected, even when you want to calm down and feel better, you just can't. You are likely to have greater difficulties with concentration and attention. You are less able to think clearly. Because of this, you likely will have a harder time learning and remembering what you have learned.

Because your brain is primed to look for the bad and potential threats, you may also not see the good things that are happening to you. If you are always worried about someone saying something hurtful to you, you may very well miss the fact that someone just smiled at you.

## ASKING FOR HELP

Teens respond to trauma and distressing challenges in different ways. This depends on the individual, as well as their past experiences, their levels of support and what is happening.

Experiencing a traumatic event or ongoing distressing challenges might leave a person with many questions about safety and control over their life. If you have been experiencing this and you have become emotionally distressed, it is important to talk with a trusted adult.

Sometimes, it is hard to recognize or acknowledge the symptoms of traumatic distress in yourself and to take action to get help. There are many ways that you can be helped, but the trusted adults in your life have to know how you are feeling. They might not always be able to figure this out, unless you talk with them.

The following is a list of the symptoms of traumatic distress. If you think that you are experiencing any of these symptoms, even just some of the time, please reach out to a trusted adult to explain what is happening.

- **Profound Sadness.** Feeling hopeless and empty and that no matter how hard you try, you just can't control your negative thoughts.
- **Hyper Vigilance.** Always feeling on alert to the potential that something bad may happen.
- **Guilt.** Feeling that that you are worthless and helpless.
- **Irritability.** Feeling angry, anxious, or restless.

- **Trouble Thinking Clearly.** Difficulties concentrating, making decisions, or remembering details.
- **Physical Symptoms.** Aches and pains, headaches, or digestive problems that do not seem to have any other medical cause.
- **Fatigue.** Feeling tired all the time and having no energy.
- **Loss of Interest.** Not interested in fun activities like hobbies or social interactions.
- **Sleep Changes.** Waking up too early in the morning, not being able to fall asleep, not sleeping enough, sleeping too much, or having frequent nightmares.
- **Appetite Changes.** Changes in eating habits, like eating too much or too little.
- **Self-harm or Risky Behavior.** Self-cutting and other forms of self-harm or exceptionally risky behavior that could result in harm.



- **Suicidal Thoughts.** Having thoughts of harming or killing yourself. If you're thinking about suicide, you need to get help immediately. The National Suicide Lifeline phone number is 1-800-273-8255. They are available 24/7 with someone you can talk to.

Experts in trauma do not generally recommend use of psychotropic drugs, such as drugs for depression or anxiety, in situations where someone experiencing traumatic distress. Taking these drugs does not help the person who is experiencing the distress effectively address the impact of the trauma. Use of such drugs can mask the harmful impact and can cause significant other problems.

If you are having challenges that you cannot face by yourself, talk with a trusted adult and ask this adult to help you find a counselor or therapist who has training in helping teens address the challenges of trauma and chronic distress.

## YOUR BRAIN CAN CHANGE

The level of challenges teens face in their life varies from teen to teen. The degree to which a teen is impacted by trauma or other distressing challenges can also vary. If a teen has feelings of self-confidence and positive connections with supportive others, it is less likely that the traumatic event or other distressing challenges will cause long term damage.

Even if you have experienced a traumatic event or another distressing challenges is possible to change your brain so that the harm that has been created can be overcome. You can rewire your brain to achieve greater resilience and empowerment and to overcome the damage past challenging experiences have caused in the way your brain functions.



Neuroplasticity is a term that describes the brain's ability to change. Your brain's neural pathways can form new connections. Neuroplasticity is possible because of the capacity of your brain's neural pathways to change their synaptic connections in response to new information and experiences.

Even if your neural pathways have formed in a way that keep your brain functioning in a hyper vigilant manner, with a focus on possible threats and a tendency to trigger, your brain does not have to remain in this way. Your brain can create new neural pathways that support greater calmness and happiness. By focusing on positive things that are happening in your life, you can change your brain.

The key important insight into changing your brain relates to how your brain focuses more attention on negative, rather than positive experiences. To rewire your brain to achieve greater resilience, empowerment, and happiness, it is necessary to maintain significant focused attention on the positive. This rewiring is not going to happen rapidly. This will require intentional focused effort on your part. But this is possible. You can rewire your brain to be happy.

## **POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH**

Post Traumatic Growth is positive change that results from having experienced more significant challenges. Many of the positive leaders in our society have become excellent leaders because of the traumatic challenges they faced when younger and how they had to grow to meet these challenges. This can be you.

Post Traumatic Growth can result in many positive benefits.

- New opportunities, opening up possibilities that were not present before.
- Closer relationships with people.
- An increased sense of connection with those who suffer.
- An increased sense of one's own personal strengths.
- A greater appreciation for life in general.
- A deepening of commitment to spiritual values.
- Increased actions that support social justice and a more kind, compassionate, and just society.

When you are experiencing challenges, look for the gems of insight you can gain that can help you to become an empowered person. Sometimes, our greatest enlightenment comes through the pain of our negative experiences.



# CHAPTER 2.

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

### SEVEN POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT

The objective of these Be Positively Powerful strategies is to support your resilience when things get tough and to increase your positive and happy feelings of empowerment.

Resilience means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences and the ability to feel happy and be successful, even after something difficult or bad has happened.

Becoming empowered is a process of becoming strong and confident—allowing you to control your life and make your own decisions.

Each of these Be Positively Powerful Strategies will help your brain to form neural pathways that will help you to become more resilient and empowered.

If you take the time to intentionally develop these inner strengths this can help you recover from pain you have experienced, cope with new challenges, maintain your emotional well-being, and move forward to a happy and successful life.



To build these strengths it is important you strive to focus on the positive. The goal is to increase the amount of time that you are focused on the positive things happening in your life, the strengths you are building, and the successes you are having.

When you intentionally focus on these positive experiences, your brain will develop neural pathways that will make lasting positive changes in how your brain functions. These positive focused neural pathways will support your ongoing success and happiness. By intentionally focusing on the positive, you are building the neural pathways in your brain that will support your positive future.

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL

The Be Positively Powerful Strategies that will be presented in this chapter are:

- **Make Positive Connections.** I will maintain positive connections with good friends and trusted adults.
- **Reach Out To Be Kind.** I will daily reach out to be kind to others. I know this will make them and me feel happier.
- **Use My Strengths.** I know that I have many positive strengths. I will use my personal strengths every day and when things get tough. I will build new strengths.
- **Focus on the Good.** I will focus on the good things that are happening to me and in my life. I will be thankful and express my gratitude.
- **Be Mindful.** I will take the time each day to sit quietly, be mindful, and achieve calmness and focus. If things get tough, I will take deep breaths and remain calm.
- **Keep My Personal Power.** I will stand tall and walk with pride. I will not allow what happens to me control how I think about myself or respond.
- **Think Things Through.** In any challenging situation, I will think things through to decide what is best to do.

## FOCUS ON BEING POSITIVELY POWERFUL

These Be Positively Powerful Strategies have been proven by research to work. But they will not work immediately. For these strategies to work will require constant repetition for a period of time. Only then will you start to see positive results.

There appears to be a “magic formula.” It is said that it takes five “positives” to undo one “negative.” Every time you have a negative experience or thought, strive to counter the negative neural pathway this may have established by focusing on five positive things.

## KEEP A DAILY JOURNAL

It is recommended that you obtain a notebook to keep as your Journal. For many of these strategies, it will be suggested that you either take specific actions during the day, accomplish certain tasks, or reflect on what happened. It is helpful to write this on paper, rather than in digital format. This appears to help rewire your neural pathways when you write on paper.

Appendix A provides questions that you can consider responding to every evening in your Journal.

## USE TRANSITIONS STRATEGIES

You can also use transition times to remind you to focus on certain positive actions. Transition times are the times when you are changing activities—like going from one class to another or leaving home to go to school. Some examples:

- One of the Be Positively Powerful strategies you will learn is to Keep Your Personal Power by standing tall—paying attention to your physical posture. Just before you get out of your seat to go to a new class, remind yourself to stand tall and walk with pride.
- Another Be Positively Powerful Strategy is to Be Mindful by maintaining calmness. When you sit down in your next class, take just a minute to breathe deeply to achieve mindfulness.
- Another Be Positively Powerful strategy is Reach Out to be Kind. Every time you look on social media site, take the time to positively comment on someone's post or to send a message of gratitude to someone.

What is happening in your brain every time you think to yourself, “stand tall,” take a minute to achieve mindfulness, or reach out to be kind, a new positive neural path way has been formed.

- **Try This “Smiling at People” Transitions Experiment.** Just before you leave a class rate how you are feeling on a scale from 1 to 5. 1: Not at all happy. 2. Not that happy. 3. Middling. 4. Sort of happy. 5. Really happy.
- As you walk through the hall to your next class, strive to smile at as many people as you can.
- As you enter your next class, rate how you are feeling now.

## MAKE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

I will maintain positive connections with good friends and trusted adults.

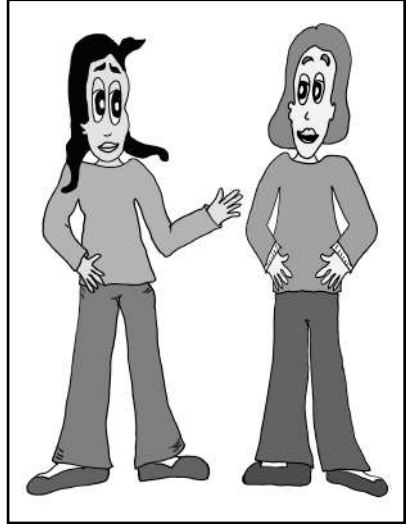
Positive connections with both good friends and trusted adults are important for your emotional well-being and happiness.

## MAKE GOOD FRIENDS

Having good friends can help you feel great about yourself and have more fun in your life. Having good friends also is very helpful if you are facing any challenges. Being able to get support from friends and talking through what has happened to decide what you might need to do can be exceptionally helpful.

To have good friends, you have to put forth the effort. No one is going to come knocking on your door to ask you to be their friend. When interacting with people, always remember to smile and reach out to be kind. Smiling is an invitation to others that you want to interact with them.

Make sure that you are not keeping yourself in a bubble. Present yourself as someone who wants to get to know other people. When you are around people, avoid focusing on your smart phone.



Be the friend that you want to have. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Be available to your friends when they need you. Make sure you are giving as much to the other person as you are getting from them. Be encouraging. Let your friends know that you believe in them and support them.

The biggest barrier to finding new friends is fear of rejection. The best way to deal with that fear is to not place a high priority on achieving closer relations with everyone you interact with. Just focus on getting to know others better and reaching out to be kind to them. If a friendship happens, this is great. If it turns out that this person is not interested in a closer relationship, that is also fine. You can both get to know each other—without any more extensive expectations.

The best way to find new friends is by engaging in activities that you are interested in. Get involved in this activity with the idea of enjoying the activity—and possibly making a new friend. Do not create pressure for yourself that you intend to make a new friend. Just enjoy being with people who have fun doing the same things you like to do.

Give your friends space. Everybody needs time by themselves. Don't expect too much of your friend's time and attention. Don't be offended if they turn you down because they are busy or need some alone time. If you keep up with your own interests and have a wider circle of friends you can share time with one or more depending on the circumstances.

Realize that friendship break-ups happen. This is a normal part of life. This does not mean that anything is wrong with either of you. If you have a friendship break-up do not allow your pain to turn to anger and attack. Let go of your feelings of hurt by forgiving the other person.

As hard as it may be, accept that the friendship is over, acknowledge it was meaningful, and take time to feel sad. Practice something kind to say about what happened if someone asks. Keep yourself busy doing things that you enjoy. Be open to meet new people.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategies**

- **Think About What Friendship Means to You.** What qualities would you like to have in a friend? Do you consistently act in this way with your friends and others?
- **Conduct a Friendship Audit and Create an Action Plan.** Who are your current friends? What interests do you share? What are the strengths of these friendships? What are any weaknesses? How can you build on these strengths? How can you make new friends? Create an action plan to increase your positive friendships.
- **Enjoy Your Interests to Find New Friends.** What are you interested in and what do you like to do? Is there a club at school you might want to join or a class you might want to take? Is there an after school center, program, or class you could go to?

### **CONNECT WITH TRUSTED ADULTS**

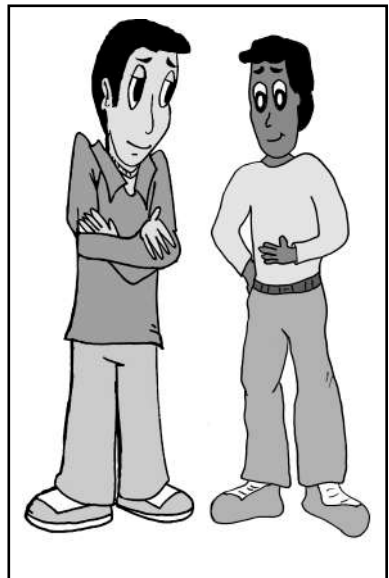
Trusted adults are people you can turn to when you have a problem, when something bad is happening to you, or when you have embarrassing or difficult questions you need to ask someone you can trust.

Trusted adults are also important for the positive times. They are someone you can learn from. You can share news of your successes and talk about your future plans.

It is generally best to be able to identify a number of trusted adults who you could talk to in different situations. Trusted adults may include your parents or guardians, a teacher, a school counselor, a coach or youth organization leader, a faith leader, and others.

To find trusted adults, it is necessary that you take the steps to reach out. Consider this a form of a quest—a quest to find some adults who you can trust to support you. Some helpful standards are:

- A trusted adult is someone you can talk with about anything, you feel happy being around, and who is a good listener.



- A trusted adult is someone you feel comfortable talking with about something that makes you feel uncomfortable, or confused or a problem you might be having.
- A trusted adult should be a good listener—someone who will listen to your opinions and ideas, seek to understand your perspective by asking questions, They will honor your feelings, rather than tell you to stop feeling the way that you do.
- A trusted adult should help you think things through and not immediately jump to their conclusion about what you should do.

Before you decide to share information that is more sensitive with an adult you are not yet sure you can trust, try having a conversation about something that is not really important or personal, but about which you may have a difference of opinion. After this conversation, ask yourself: Does this adult truly listen to me? Does this adult accept my opinions?

Then, imagine yourself revealing something difficult or embarrassing to this adult. How would you feel sharing this? Do you think this adult listen to you? Would this adult support you to think things through—or would this adult try to take over and tell you what to do?

If you start to share more sensitive information with an adult you are not yet sure you can trust, do so slowly. Be very watchful for warning signs. Is this person listening to you with an open perspective? Or are there signs that the person might be wrongly judging you—a questioning look, a defensive body posture, statements that include "should," or a disapproving tone?

If any of these warning signs appear, stop explaining the situation, wait for this person to make one statement of "what you should do," thank this person for their guidance, change the subject, and find a reason to leave. Then, find a trusted adult you can trust.

When you do find a trusted adult, you can reach out when things get tough. Also share your good news. If a trusted adult has been helpful to you, be sure to thank this person. A thank you note would be gratefully received.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategy**

- **Envision What You Want in a Trusted Adult.** Think of a conversation you had in the past with an adult where you walked away feeling that you were thoroughly heard and respected and the guidance and support you received made you feel empowered. What were the characteristics and qualities of the adult who you spoke with that led you to feel heard and empowered? What did this adult do that made you feel heard and respected? What did this adult do that made you feel empowered?
- **Conduct a Trusted Adult Audit and Create an Action Plan.** Do you have a sufficient number of adults in your life who you trust that you can talk to about serious concerns? If not, go on a quest to find one or several trusted adults. Create an action plan to make a good connection with several trusted adults.



# REACH OUT TO BE KIND

I will daily reach out to be kind to others. I know this will make them and me feel happier.

One of the best ways you can improve your relationships, reduce the potential of being treated badly, and improve your own happiness is to intentionally Reach Out to Be Kind to others many times a day.

Research has documented many positive benefits of being kind to others. Being kind to others:

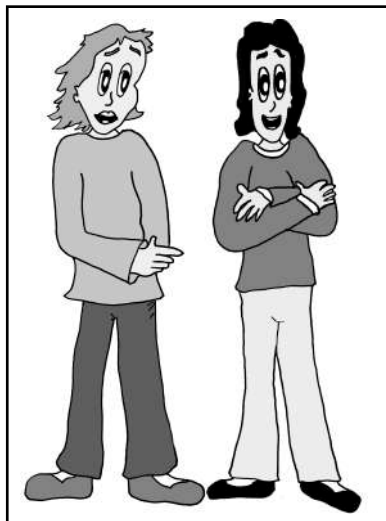
- Can significantly increase your happiness and decrease your feelings of separation.
- Can help you feel stronger and less depressed and will increase your feelings of self-worth.
- Makes you feel as good as if you were one to whom someone was kind.
- Encourages other people to be kind and, thus, can start a ripple of kindness.

Some researchers did an experiment on the benefits of acts of kindness. They had students rate each other on a measurement called “peer acceptance.” This is how well the students were accepted by their peers. The students were then instructed to intentionally engage in five acts of kindness to other students every day. One month later, the researchers conducted the peer acceptance measurement again. There was a significant increase in peer acceptance of the students who had regularly reached out to be kind.

Of course it is important to Reach Out to Be Kind to your friends. Is there someone you would like to become friends with? Reach Out to Be Kind to this person. Are there some other students in your school who you are not close to? Reach Out to Be Kind to them.

Is there someone in your school who is being excluded or treated badly? Reach Out to Be Kind to this person. Reaching Out to Be Kind to those who are excluded is a good way to get onto a path of engaging in social justice.

If you expand the kinds of students who you Reach Out to Be Kind to even further, this can have some significant benefits if people sometimes treat you badly but is not being hurtful right now? Reach out to be kind to this person. Or reach out to be kind to this person’s friends.



## Be Positively Powerful Strategies

- **Think About Kindness.** Think of a recent time when you Reached Out to Be Kind. How did the person you were kind to respond? How did this make you feel?
- **Use the Copper Penny Strategy.** Get five bright copper pennies and begin the day with those pennies in your left pocket. When you intentionally Reach Out to Be Kind to someone, transfer one of those pennies over to your right pocket. This will help you keep track. If it is easy to do this five times, increase to ten pennies.
- **Reach Out to be Kind Using Social Media.** Every day, make an intentional point of posting a positive or supportive comment on the social media posts of others—especially if any person posts about some challenge they are having. Don't just “like” the post. Take the time to write something warm and supportive.
- **Reach Out to be Kind During Transitions.** As you walk to a new class, Reach Out to Be Kind to a number of people. When you sit down in your new class, reflect on how you feel.
- **Try This Experiment.** On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the current quality of your relationships with your other students: 1. Not at all good. 2. Not that good. 3. Middling. 4. Sort of good. 5. Really good. Implement the Reach Out to Be Kind strategy at least five or more times a day. Do this for 30 days. Now rate the quality of your relationships with other students.
- **Write in Your Journal.** At the end of the day write in your Journal. Who did you Reach Out to be Kind to? What did you do to Reach Out to Be Kind? How did this person respond? How did this make you feel?

## USE MY STRENGTHS

I know that I have many positive strengths. I will use my personal strengths every day and when things get tough. I will build new strengths.

Two positive psychology researchers, Drs. Peterson and Seligman, led a team of 55 social scientists from around the world to identify and classify the core capacities that lead to goodness in human beings across cultures, nations, and beliefs. These are called “character strengths”.

The VIA Institute on Character has a free character strengths Inventory on its web site that you can complete (Search: VIA Character.) A brief version, developed with their permission, is provided as Appendix B.

Everyone has different character strengths. Either of these surveys will help you to identify your top character strengths.

One experiment the researchers did with this survey was to provide participants in a study with insight about their top five character strengths. The participants were then asked to use one of their strengths in a new and different way each day.

This strategy was found to have excellent success in increasing the participants' level of happiness and decreasing their feelings of depression.

On the VIA Institute for Character web site there is guidance on strategies you can use to build every one of these character strengths.



## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

This is the VIA Classification of Character Strengths as set forth on their website:

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge**—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.
  - **Creativity [originality, ingenuity]:** Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.
  - **Curiosity [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]:** Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.
  - **Judgment [critical thinking]:** Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.
  - **Love of Learning:** Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematic ally to what one knows.
  - **Perspective [wisdom]:** Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.
2. **Courage**—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.
  - **Bravery [valor]:** Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.

- **Perseverance [persistence, industriousness]:** Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks.
- **Honesty [authenticity, integrity]:** Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one’s feelings and actions.
- **Zest [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]:** Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.

3. **Humanity**—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others.

- **Love:** Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.
- **Kindness [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]:** Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.
- **Social Intelligence [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]:** Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

4. **Justice**—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.

- **Teamwork [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]:** Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one’s share.
- **Fairness:** Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.
- **Leadership:** Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the time maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

5. **Temperance**—Strengths that protect against excess.

- **Forgiveness:** Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.
- **Humility:** Letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.
- **Prudence:** Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.
- **Self-Regulation [self-control]:** Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one’s appetites and emotions.

6. **Transcendence**—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.

- **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]:** Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.
- **Gratitude:** Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.
- **Hope [optimism, future - mindedness, future orientation]:** Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.
- **Humor [playfulness]:** Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.
- **Spirituality [faith, purpose]:** Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategies**

- **Each Day Use One of Your Strengths.** Every day, pick a one of your character strengths to use in a new way.
- **Build a New Strength.** Look over the list of strengths and those you already have. Pick a new strength do you want to build. Create an action plan to build this strength.
- **Use Your Strengths to Be Mindful.** Being Mindful is one of the Be Positively Powerful strategies where you learn about the importance of self-regulation if you are becoming distressed. Write down a way that you could respond in situations that you know causes you distress that uses each of your top strengths. Practice these immediate responses that Use Your Strengths to use in situations where you are facing a challenge.
- **Use Your Strengths When You Think Things Through.** Think Things Through is another one of the Be Positively Powerful strategies. Knowing your character strengths can support you to effectively Think Things Through. When thinking about strategies to respond to challenging situations, identify strategies that Use Your Strengths.
- **Write in Your Journal.** At the end of the day, write in your Journal about the character strengths you used and what you did. Also note how this made you feel. When you report on a time when you used the Think Things Through strategy, be sure to identify which character strength you decided to use to respond to a challenging situation.

# FOCUS ON THE GOOD

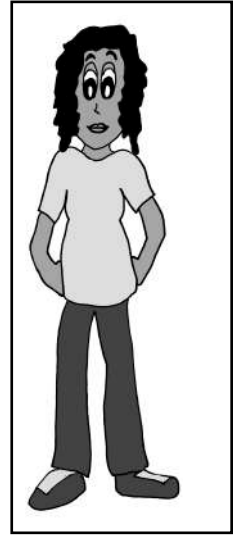
I will focus on the good things that are happening to me and in my life. I will be thankful and express my gratitude.

As we discussed earlier, our brain naturally wires itself to focus more on negative experiences than positive ones. If you have faced a lot of challenges, you may have created many negative neural pathways. These negative neural pathways will cause you to more frequently focus on negative things.

Perhaps you have not done this. But perhaps you know someone who has. Do you know someone who always focuses on the “darkside” of life? This is likely because they have had lots of challenges and so have developed lots of negative neural pathways.

A problem is that when people often focus on the negative, more negative things are more likely to happen to them. The best way to maintain positive feelings is to focus on positive experiences and be grateful for those experiences.

You can rewire your brain to be more happy. When you intentionally Focus on the Good, this will help your brain build neural pathways to support your greater happiness. As a result, more positive things are more likely to happen.



Please take the time to watch a TedTalk by Dr. Rick Hanson called *Hardwiring Happiness*. (Search: hanson, hardwiring happiness, tedtalk.) Dr. Hanson outlines the research that proves that it is possible for you to rewire your brain to be more happy.

The approach Dr. Hanson recommends to use a focus on positive experiences to change your brain. Dr. Hanson calls this approach the HEAL method—Have, Enrich, Absorb, Link.

- **Step 1. Have a Good Experience.** Either notice that something good is happening to you or create a positive experience for yourself.
- **Step 2. Enrich It.** Keep thinking about this experience for at least 10 seconds or longer. Feel the positive experience in your body. Enjoy it. Think about how wonderful this is. Really take the time to feel good.
- **Step 3. Absorb It.** Think about this positive experience as being absorbed by you—traveling deep into your mind and warming your heart. Bring the experience deeply into your being.
- **Step 4. Link Positive and Negative Material Together.** This step is considered optional by Dr. Hanson. The idea is to strongly feel this positive experience, briefly bring to mind a negative thought, and then let go of the negative thought and just focus on the positive experience. If you try this, make sure not to let the negative thinking take over. Simply

hold the positive, then briefly, just for a second, reflect on the negative, and then return to the positive.

Strive to focus on five positive experiences for every negative experience or negative thought. This means that every time you experience a negative incident or think a negative thought, strive to shift your focus to five positive things. This can help to prevent the negative experience from becoming wired as a negative neural pathway. This can also help to undo negative neural pathways that have already been developed.

Researchers tried an experiment with a Focus on the Good strategy. They had the participants measure how happy they felt. They asked these participants to talk about something really positive that had recently happened and how this made them feel. They had the participants measure how happy they felt again. Their level of happiness went way up.

The researchers then tried something else. They had people reach out by telephone to express gratitude or thanks to another person. Their level of happiness went even higher.

The more you can maintain positive feelings about yourself, the less likely you will act in ways that demonstrates a perceived weakness that could lead to your being treated badly. Also, the less likely you will be to think badly about yourself if you experience a distressing situation or someone is hurtful. These strategies are discussed more in the next chapter.

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

- **Send a Note of Gratitude.** Send a private message or write a thank you note and sent this to someone to whom you are grateful.
- **Focus on the Good as You are Transitioning.** As you are getting ready to leave one class for another, stop and think about one thing that happened in this class that made you feel good. Enrich this feeling and absorb it.
- **Focus on the Good in Response to a Distressing Experience.** If you experience something distressing, pull out a notebook and a pen and write down five recent positive experiences or things you are grateful for. For each of these positive experiences, take a brief moment to enrich it and absorb it. Then, if you find yourself thinking about the negative incident again, look at what you wrote and intentionally shift back to positive thinking.
- **Write in Your Journal.** In the evening, when you are writing in your Journal, be sure to write down five positive things that happened to you during the day. The act of writing itself provides another way to enrich and absorb the positive experiences.
- **Try This Experiment.** Rate how happy you are feeling on a scale from 1 to 5. 1: Not at all happy. 2. Not that happy. 3. Middling. 4. Sort of happy. 5. Really happy. Take the time to write in your Journal five thoughts that focus on the good. For each of these thoughts go through the two steps of enriching and absorbing. Now rate how happy you feel.

# BE MINDFUL

I will take the time each day to sit quietly, be mindful, and achieve calmness and focus. If things get tough, I will take deep breaths and remain calm.

## PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

The practice of mindfulness helps people achieve calmness and focus. (Search: mindfulness.) The website for the organization Mindful defines mindfulness like this:

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. (<http://mindful.org>)

You can achieve greater mindfulness by routinely practicing meditation. The following are the simple steps:

- **Be in a Safe Place.** Sit or lie in a safe place where your body is well supported.
- **Ground Yourself.** If you are sitting, make sure your feet are on the floor. Whether sitting or lying, feel your energy go deep into the earth—grounding you there.
- **Reduce Visual Input.** Close your eyes or gaze downward. This will reduce the visual input that is present in your space.
- **Breathe.** Pay attention to your breathing. Take a slow breath in. Hold your breath for a short time. Release your breath out slowly. Repeat.
- **Be There.** If your attention begins to wander, which it often will, gently return your thoughts to a focus on your breathing.



That's it. Consider how long this activity might take—not long at all.

In fact, you can achieve mindfulness in a very short period of time—less than a minute. The more you intentionally practice being mindful, the more effectively you will prepare your brain so that it does not trigger when someone is hurtful or a challenging situation emerges.

You will also find that if you routinely practice mindfulness, you will increase your success in your academic studies. When you achieve mindfulness, this shifts your focus to your prefrontal cortex, which allows you to think more clearly and concentrate.

There are a lot of great meditation apps and videos online that you can check out. You can also use fidget spinners or a squeeze ball while you are meditating, or color a mandala.



If you have experienced trauma or distressing challenges, the neural pathways in your brain have been wired to be more likely to trigger if a difficult situation arises. Research has shown that the regular practice of mindfulness can reduce your tendency to trigger.

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

- **Practice Mindfulness at Home.** When you are at home, practice mindfulness. More extended periods of mindfulness or meditation can be helpful. You can find some longer mediation audios or videos online. (Search: free mindfulness meditations.)
- **Engage in Movement Mindfulness.** You may take a yoga or a tai chi class, which is considered “movement mindfulness.” There are also yoga and tai chi videos online. You could collaborate with other students to encourage your school to offer mindfulness movement activities during lunch or before school.
- **Walk in Nature.** A very excellent way to practice mindfulness is to take a walk in nature. As you walk, practice on regular in-breaths and out-breaths and calm your mind.
- **Be Mindful After Transitions.** A Transitions Strategy to routinely practice mindfulness in school is when you come into a new class and take your seat, take a few minutes to go through the mindfulness steps described above. Even a minute of mindfulness can help you to become calmed. You will be better able to focus and learn.

## KNOW HOW TO SELF-REGULATE

If you are faced with a challenging situation, it is exceptionally important that you are able to self-regulate to remain calm. Failure to effectively self-regulate could lead you to engage in an outburst that could cause harm to you or others.

When you frequently practice mindfulness, this will help to create the neural pathways in your brain that will allow your brain to self-regulate more effectively. This is why frequent mindfulness practice is so important.

If you have experienced a traumatic event or are experiencing ongoing distress, your brain is more likely to be hyper vigilant. You are more likely to have greater difficulties self-regulating. Therefore, you are more likely to become disruptive if you have become upset.

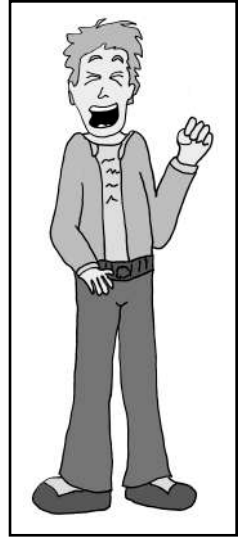
When you know that there is a higher risk you will trigger and engage in an outburst, this knowledge gives you the power to change what could happen.

Alternatively, if you do not normally trigger, but you know someone who does, you can use this insight to be on alert to the signs of emerging concern and reach out to help.

There are seven stages in an escalation that leads to a substantial disruption:

- **Calm.** You feel calm and relaxed.

- **Trigger.** Something happens that triggers you and you start to feel upset.
- **Agitation.** You become increasingly unfocused and upset.
- **Outburst.** You become out of control and engage in disruptive behavior.
- **De-escalation.** Having triggered and lost control, you now feel confused and embarrassed, but the severity of the outburst behavior has passed.
- **Recovery.** The time it takes for you to calm down and regain the ability to resume activities.



The key to effective self-regulation is to have a good idea of what triggers you, so that when something like this starts to happen you can Be Mindful of what might happen next and take steps to avoid going from a trigger to an outburst.

When you start to trigger, take a specific steps to self-regulate so that you do not become more agitated and have an outburst. Know when you might trigger and then Use Your Strengths to respond if this kind of a situation starts to happen

The mindfulness meditation approach set forth above is a good approach for self-regulation. You may not, however, be able to sit or lie down in a safe place. If you can walk away to get to a place where you can better self-regulate, this is best.

Make sure to ground yourself and align your body—stand tall. Slowly and intentionally breathe in, hold briefly, and then-breathe out. If your brain tries to shift your attention to the perceived threat, continue to strive to focus on your breathing.

After you have gotten yourself out of the immediate situation, you may also need to engage in some physical activity. When you trigger and start to get agitated, your amygdala caused your body to release stress hormones of cortisol and adrenalin. It is important to get these hormones out of your system. Vigorous physical activity is the way to do this.

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

- **Think Things Through, Use Your Strengths, and Be Mindful.** Take the time to Think Things Through to identify what situations most often cause you to trigger. Then, think about your personal strengths. How can you Use Your Strengths to self-regulate if something starts to trigger you? Envision this kind of a situation occurring and practice how to Use Your Strengths in such situations.
- **Get Permission From School.** If you have a history of triggering resulting in an outburst, you could talk with a counselor at your school to obtain special permission to remove yourself from any situation when you have triggered and are feeling agitated. You should have some kind of a permanent pass, so that no other staff person stops you from going to a place where you can self-regulate.
- **Write in Your Journal.** If you do trigger, be sure to write about this in your Journal. Write out what happened and how you handled the situation. Did you become agitated and engage in an outburst or were you able to self-regulate? Note specifically what happened before you triggered so that you can be alert to when this might happen again. Do a self-evaluation of your effectiveness. It is perfectly okay if things did not work out right. You are rewiring your brain and learning this self-regulation process. Decide whether there are strategies you might want to change in the future. It is most important not to focus on what you did that went wrong—but what you learned that can help you in the future. If you were able to self-regulate, congratulate yourself! Well done!
- **Connect with a Trusted Adult.** After you have gone through the journaling process, take the time to connect with a trusted adult. Share your thoughts and talk things through to get feedback on your thinking and plans for the future.

## KEEP MY PERSONAL POWER

I will stand tall and walk with pride. I will not allow what happens to me control how I think about myself or respond.

Do not allow anyone to take your personal power.

When you were a young child, you very likely said to a parent: “You are not the boss of me.” The drive for personal power and autonomy is very strong and important. This drive becomes even stronger when you are a teen.

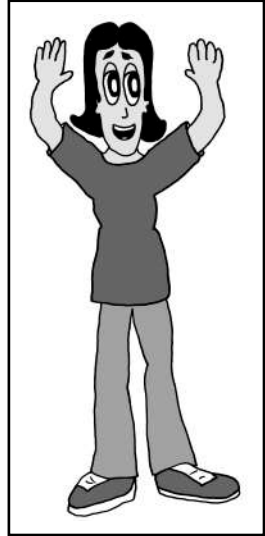
There are two strategies you can implement that can help you to better Keep Your Personal Power, especially in situations where someone is trying to take your power from you: Stand Tall and Control Your Thinking.

# STAND TALL

In both humans and other primates, standing tall with a very open posture indicates high power, whereas hunching over with your arms crossed over your chest reflects lower power. Many times, young people who are bullied maintain physical posture that demonstrate that they feel that they lack personal power.

Research conducted by Dr. Cuddy, a professor at Harvard School of Business, has demonstrated that adopting a pose that indicates power—a “power pose”—can result in increased feelings of confidence. An excellent TedTalk by Dr. Cuddy on Power Posing provides greater insight into this. (Search: Cuddy, power posing, tedtalk.)

Dr. Cuddy had one group of college students stand with power for a period of time and another group maintain a powerless pose. These students were then interviewed as though they were applying for a job. People who knew nothing about what the students did before their interview judged their performance on interview videos. These judges



strongly favored the students who had stood in a powerful position before the job interview.

What this study demonstrated is that holding a “power pose” before a challenging task allowed students to increase their effective performance. This showed that it is possible to “fake it” by assuming a power pose, which will then help a person “make it” by feeling more confident. You can do this also. When you hold yourself tall and in a position of power you will then start to feel more powerful.

## Be Positively Powerful Strategies

- **Try This Experiment.** Hold yourself in a position that indicates you have no power—shoulders hunched, arms crossed, head down. How does this make you feel? Now stand up tall. Shoulders back. Head held high. Arms out to your side or over your head in a celebration post, like you just won a race. How does this make you feel?
- **Practice Power Posing.** Every morning, when you get out of bed, stand for a few minutes in a position of personal physical power. Perhaps you can do this while looking at yourself in your mirror. Say an affirmation to yourself as you are standing tall. “I will stand tall and walk with pride throughout this day.”
- **Use These Transitions Strategies.** Remind yourself to stand tall and walk with pride whenever you step into school or go from one class to another. Also, whenever you are walking in an area where you previously have experienced any concerns, remind yourself to stand tall and walk with pride through this area.
- **If Something Bad Happens.** Your first response should be to stand tall and to breathe slowly and deeply to self-regulate.

# CONTROL YOUR THINKING

You will never be able to control when or if someone might treat you badly. You will never be able to control whether or if other bad things might happen to you.

But you do have the ability to control your thinking about how you feel about yourself and how you respond in these challenging situations. This is how you can Keep Your Personal Power.

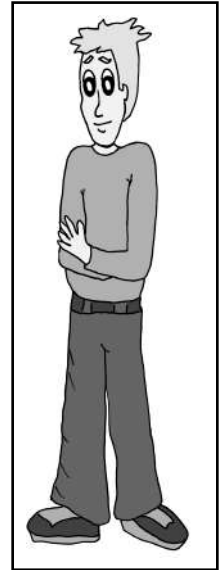
The key is to realize that harmful consequences are not just caused by the bad things that happen to us—but more because of our beliefs about those bad things. While we can't control what might happen, we can control our beliefs and our thinking. This controls the outcome and how we feel.

This is an old theory. The underlying principles of this theory comes from the ancient Stoic philosophers, as set forth by Epictetus, who in the first century A.D. stated: "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the views which they take of them."

Think in terms of an A-B-C-model developed by Dr. Ellis:

- A is the adversity or bad event.
- C is the consequence of how you feel or respond.
- But A is not solely responsible for C.
- B is your belief—what you think or believe about A, not merely that A happened.

Thus,  $A + B = C$ . While it is not possible to change A, it is possible to be in control of B, and thus have greater control over the resulting C.



Translation: We don't always have control over what happens to us. But we do have the ability to control what we think of ourselves and how we respond.

## Be Positively Powerful Strategies

- **Control Your Thinking.** If you are ever in a situation where someone has been hurtful or find yourself thinking about a past situation that occurred, think to yourself, "I will not give that person the power to control what I think about myself or how I respond."
- **Write in your Journal.** If you experienced a situation where someone was hurtful or something else bad happened, write about this. Write out what happened and how you handled the situation. Do a self-evaluation of your effectiveness in controlling your thinking. Decide whether there are things you might want to change in the future. It is most important not blame yourself. Rather focus on what you learned.
- **If Something Bad Happens.** Stand tall and to breathe slowly and deeply to self-regulate. Then, think to yourself, "I can't control what happens. I can control how I feel about myself and respond."

# THINK THINGS THROUGH

In any challenging situation, I will think things through to decide what is best to do.

When you gain effective problem solving skills you can become more resilient in figuring out how to respond if you are faced with any kind of a challenge. When you Think Things Through, this is the opposite of acting without thinking.

Knowing how to effectively solve problems provides the foundation for success in school, higher education, family life, and in your employment. It is also important to know how to Think Things Through as part of a team. When you develop your skills in goal setting and action planning and use these skills consistently, this can support your positive future.

## USE EFFECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

There are the steps that are necessary to engage in effective problem solving:

- **What is the Situation?** Step back from the situation and think about what has happened to make sure you have a clear understanding. Look at the situation from the perspective of others.
- **What Do I Want to Accomplish?** Determine what you would like to achieve or what outcome you desire.
- **What Strategies Could I Use?** Identify several different strategies or actions you could take to resolve the problem or respond.
- **Is Each in Accord With my Values and Does Each Use My Strengths?** Evaluate these strategies based on your own personal values and whether each strategy or action Uses Your Strengths.
- **For Each, What Might Happen?** Think about and try to predict or envision what might happen if you followed each of those strategies or actions.
- **What is My Best Choice?** After thinking through what might happen as a consequence of each strategy you thought of, then weight the pros and cons to decide which strategy or action would be the best to take.
- **How Should I Proceed?** Determine what steps to take to accomplish this strategy or action.
- **Did This Work?** Evaluate your effectiveness. Realize that the first thing you try might not work. Realize that this is totally okay



- **What Else Could or Should I Do?** Repeat this process if the first strategy or action did not achieve the desired goal or if you learned something that leads you to determine that some other action is necessary.

Many times it is helpful to Make a Positive Connection with a friend or trusted adult to Think Things Through. Do this especially if the first strategy you tried was not effective.

If you have a friend who is going through challenging times, you can help your friend to Think Things Through. You can also use this Think Things Through strategy as part of a team. Make sure your team has an accurate understanding of the situation and your objectives. As a team, generate and evaluate strategies. Decide on an action plan and implement this plan. Then, evaluate your results and determine next steps.

## **SET GOALS AND CREATE ACTION PLANS**

When you maintain a focus on your future and Think Things Through to engage in effective goal setting and action planning, this will help you to achieve greater resilience and the ability to achieve positive outcomes in your life. Strive to get into the practice of regularly setting goals and planning the actions you will take to achieve these goals.

Essential steps in effective goal setting are:

- Set goals that are motivating because they have value to you.
- Make sure your goals are specific and doable.
- Put your goals in writing.
- Make sure it will be clear when you have met your goal.

Then, plan your actions.

- Think Things Through to identify the steps necessary to achieve your goal.
- Decide what needs to happen first. Then, what has to happen next.
- Identify when each action step has been taken.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your actions.
- Change your plan of action you need to. You could also change your goal.

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

- **If Something Bad Happens.** Think to yourself, "I got this. I can Think Things Through to decide what is best to do."
- **Working With a Team.** Use the Think Things Through steps when working with a team on a project.
- **Engage in Goal Setting and Action Plans.** You may want to set goals for a day, for a week, or for a month or for even longer.
- **Write in Your Journal.** At the end of the day, in your Journal, think about what happened during the day and whether you faced a situation where you needed to engage in effective problem solving. Write about what happened and how you used the Think Things Through strategy. How did this work? Also in your Journal, set forth your goals and action plans. Focus on what you learned.

## TAKE THE EMPOWERMENT CHALLENGE

As indicated earlier, all of the Be Positively Powerful strategies have been demonstrated through research to be effective in increasing resilience and empowerment.

Will these strategies work for you? There is only one way to find out. This is by intentionally using these strategies for a period of time.

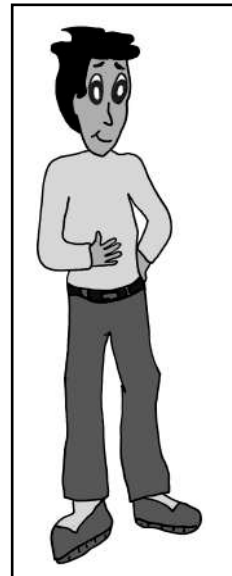
It will take some time for your brain to create new neural pathways to support your increased resilience and empowerment.

One way you can better determine whether these Be Positively Powerful strategies will work for you is to take the Empowerment Challenge.

In Appendix C of this book is a survey that measures your feelings of happiness, self-confidence, and empowerment. Complete the Survey now.

Then, diligently strive to implement the Be Positively Powerful strategies for the next four weeks. "Diligently" means "intentionally striving to do so." It is best to keep a nightly Journal through these four weeks to keep yourself on track.

Then, at the end of the four weeks, complete the survey again.





# CHAPTER 3.

## POSITIVELY POWERFUL PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

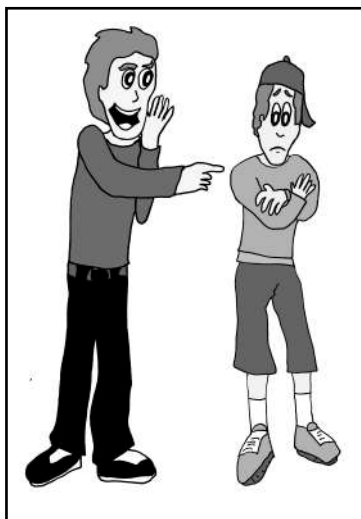
### STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OTHERS WILL TREAT YOU BADLY AND TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND IF THIS HAPPENS

In this Chapter, we will discuss how to use the Be Positively Powerful strategies to reduce the potential that someone might treat you badly and to respond effectively in situations where someone has been hurtful to you.

You may not often experience someone being hurtful to you. However, the insight in this chapter can also help if you need to support a friend who is being treated badly. This insight can also help if you want to become involved in your school in efforts to foster positive relationships.

Sometimes being treated badly is called “bullying.” The term bullying has become overused and now has multiple meanings. Some people think of bullying as anytime someone is hurtful. Principals will only call a situation “bullying” if in their opinion the situation meets district policy standards for suspending a student.

Rather than get into an argument over definitions, let’s start from a different perspective. No one likes it when someone is hurtful to them. So what we want to be able to prevent and effectively respond to are all situations where someone is being hurtful. These may be more minor situations that can be resolved quickly or these may be far more serious situations.



Someone could be physically hurtful. However, most hurtful situations involve ongoing acts of denigration and exclusion. Sometimes, one person is hurtful. This person may encourage others to join in. Other times, several people may be hurtful. These situations could be happening face-to-face, through digital media, or both.

Sometimes, people are hurtful to others based on that person's "identity." This means that the underlying basis for why someone is being hurtful is because this person has disabilities, a minority sexual orientation or identity, a minority race or religion, has come from another country, or some other distinctive difference. In many situations, this kind of hurtful behavior can be a form of racism or homophobia.

All of these categories are considered in the United States and in many countries to be what is called a "protected class." Students who are members of these classes receive protection under civil rights laws from "discriminatory harassment" based on their membership in one or more of these classes. Schools have important obligations to protect students against discriminatory harassment by other students and by staff. More on how to document and make a report to get this stopped on this is later in this Chapter.

Sometimes students are hurtful based on the fact that the target is perceived to be "different" in some other way. Students may be targeted because of their appearance, size, interests, or some other difference. Unfortunately, differences on this basis is not considered to be "protected."

## **ABOUT HURTFUL BEHAVIOR**

It will be helpful for you to understand the different reasons students may be hurtful. In this section, I am referring to "these students." However, "these students" who are hurtful could be you. Or "these students" could be someone who is being hurtful to you. Or you could witness "these students" being hurtful to someone else.

A popular stereotype is that the students who engage in bullying are "problem students." There are students who have experienced serious trauma and other distressing challenges and could be hurtful to others. These are students who have themselves likely been abused or neglected at home and have been denigrated and excluded at school.

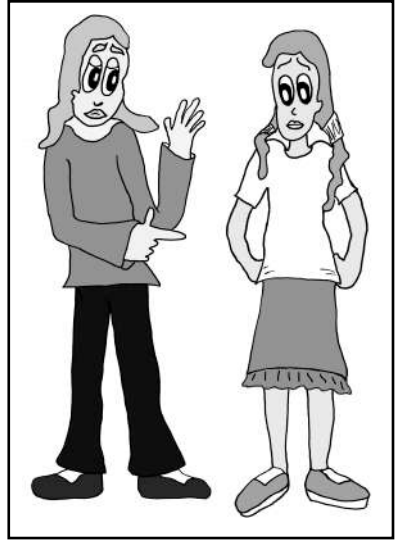
These students may be being hurtful as a way to get back at those who have been hurtful to them or they may be striving to find some way to be in control or gain some amount of personal power. They feel life is often out of their control. They are fighting back against a "world" that has caused harm to them and are trying to get into a position of sufficient power to stop what is happening to them. These are hurt students being hurtful.

Being punished will not change the hurtful behavior of these students. They need comprehensive support to recover from the trauma or distressing challenges they have experienced.

If a student such as this is being hurtful to you, it is more possible that the principal will try to do something about this, because the principal already knows this student has challenges.

It is, of course necessary that this student be held accountable and to stop treating you badly. However, please tell the principal that you want to see this student being supported, not simply punished. Punishing students for being hurtful does nothing to stop the hurtful behavior. Punishment is very likely to increase the potential of retaliation.

Especially in middle schools and high schools, students who have challenges are not the ones who are most frequently treating others badly. Students who are more often the source of hurtful behavior are the higher social status students. They are often considered “popular” and “cool.” These are students who perceive they have a “privileged” and “entitled” social status in your school.



These are not hurt students being hurtful. They are powerful students being hurtful to achieve and maintain dominance and social status. They will denigrate and exclude students who they consider “different.” They also will engage in battles with rivals or those who they perceive to be rivals.

These hurtful students are socially skilled and they generally have great empathy. It seems they know exactly how to stab another student in the back and twist the knife ever so slightly to make that student feel miserable—without alerting attention from school staff. What they lack is compassion.

These students are also very careful. They generally do not engage in hurtful behavior in obvious ways in front of school staff. They are hurtful in more minor ways that staff do not notice or cause school staff to simply ignore their behavior. They do not create substantial disruptions.

Realize that what these students are trying to do is show off their personal power to others by being hurtful to those whom they cast as “different” or “weird.” The most important reasons for their actions may have little to do with the student they are targeting—unless they perceive that student to be a rival. Their actions are designed to get attention from other students who are the witnesses—to prove their power to those students.

A pattern that can emerge is that these high status students will pick on lower status students whom they are pretty sure can be triggered into an outburst. This angry public outburst is their “reward”— this affirms their power to themselves and to other students. When a student who is being treated badly in this way finally gets angry and triggers, the student is often the one who is disciplined, rather than the student who was being hurtful, because this targeted student created a substantial disruption.

This is entirely unfair, but often happens. This could be what is happening to you. This is why it is so important for you to learn how to Be Mindful and self regulate, as well as to Keep Your Personal Power.

If you witness this kind of a dynamic involving another student, it would be really helpful if you would tell your principal what you have seen. You should request that your report remain confidential, so that the powerful student who is being hurtful will not know you reported this.

Another problem that schools may not recognize is that sometimes school staff are being hurtful. Usually when school staff are hurtful they engage in a form of a micro-aggression. They subtly say or do things that denigrate or exclude a student, certain kinds of students, or certain kinds of people. Often, who are targeted have greater challenges, are racial or religious minorities, or have a minority sexual orientation or identity. Sometimes, school staff do not even recognize that they have unacceptable biases and are being being hurtful.

If you witness this dynamic, it would also be helpful to report this to your principal. If you are reporting on the hurtful behavior of school staff, it likely would be safest to do this with a group of students who can all describe what you have witnessed. Better yet is to capture a video of this staff abuse on your smart phone.

Not all students who are seeking positions of leadership in the school engage in hurtful behavior to do this. Some students become leaders by fostering kindness, inclusion, and social justice. In Chapter 7, strategies will be shared on how students can more effectively be engaged in activities to foster civility and be more active in reaching out to stop the hurtful behavior when they witness it. Several students saying, “Stop this. We don’t treat people that way in this school” can be extremely effective in stopping such hurtful behavior.

## **HURTFUL BEHAVIOR AS A POWER GAME**

If you are being treated badly, it is helpful to think of hurtful behavior as a kind of a “power game.” The student who is being hurtful is trying to obtain “power points” from you. Students who are hurtful think that these power points will help them to rise in your school’s social ladder.” In many schools, this, unfortunately, is an effective strategy.

If you respond to being treated badly in a way that demonstrates the perception that you are upset or that this has bothered you by looking sad, having an angry outburst, or retaliating, you will lose “power points” to this hurtful person.

It is exceptionally important to Be Mindful and self regulate and Keep Your Personal Power—no matter how upset you feel inside. Always remember: When someone is hurtful to you, they are revealing who they are—not who you are.

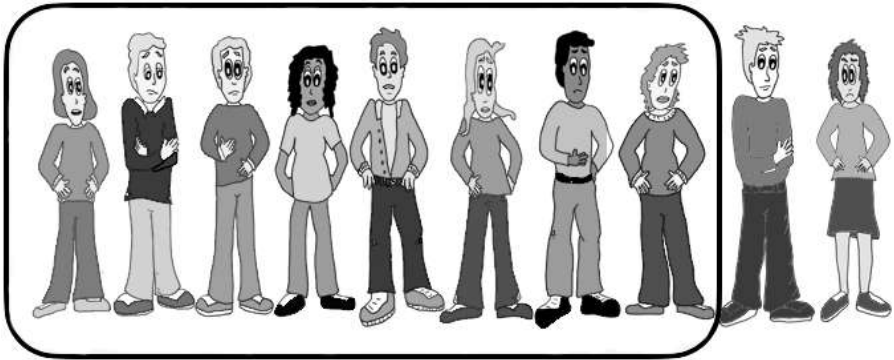
When you use the Be Positively Powerful strategies on a daily basis, your brain can form the kinds of neural pathways that will increase your effectiveness in self regulating and Keeping Your Personal Power in responding to these kinds of situations.

# WHAT STUDENTS THINK

While it is true that some students think that those who engage in hurtful behavior are “cool” and “popular,” the vast majority of students do not like to see students being hurtful to others. They truly admire those who step in to help when they see someone being treated badly.

I conducted a survey of teens. I asked teens what they thought when they saw someone being hurtful. The vast majority, about 8 teens out of 10, said they really did not like to see this happen. If someone is being hurtful to you and other students are around, realize that the vast majority of them really do not like to see this happening:

One problem is that many of these students may be too afraid of the power of the person who is being hurtful that they do not think it is safe for them to step in to help.



This survey also found that teens truly admire other teens who:

- Are respectful and kind to others.
- Reach out to help someone who has been treated badly.
- Try to include those who have been excluded.
- Tell someone being hurtful to stop.
- Help someone who was hurtful decide to make things right.
- Help other students resolve an argument or conflict.
- Were treated badly, but stood tall and responded in a positive way.
- Were hurtful, but stopped and made things right.
- Make sure they have consent to engage in actions in a relationship.
- End a relationship without “drama” or attack.
- Tell an adult if a situation is serious.

Teens clearly do not admire those who:

- Think it is cool to put others down.
- Say disrespectful and hurtful things to others.
- Laugh when seeing someone being treated badly.
- Support their friend in being hurtful.
- Engage in battles with those they perceive as rivals
- Create drama to get attention.
- Encourage the exclusion of students they consider different.
- Join in when someone else is being hurtful.

Teens tend to have mixed feelings about those who ignore hurtful situations involving others. This is likely due to messages teens have received about not getting involved. Certainly, ignoring a hurtful situation is far better than supporting the person who is being hurtful or laughing. Positive ways to step in to help when you witness someone being hurtful are discussed in Chapter 7.

In addition, teens appear to have mixed feelings about retaliation. The likely reason for this is that in some parts of society, retaliation is considered to be acceptable. Retaliation is discussed more in Chapter 4..

## **BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES**

The Be Positively Powerful strategies can help to reduce the likelihood that others will be hurtful to you, increase your effectiveness in responding, reduce the potential this will cause you significant distress, and increase the likelihood that others will step in to help.

### **MAKE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS**

Having some good friends, even just one, can make a huge difference in giving you the support and strength to get through these hurtful situations. Your friend can help you to understand that the other person is the one with the problem, not you. Your friend can also help you to think things through to figure out what to do in response to this situation.

Having some trusted adults is also helpful for both of these reasons. This is why it is so important to find some trusted adults who you can trust will support you and your desires for how to respond—and not just take over. If an adult starts to step in to “take care of things,” be insistent that you remain in significant control of how this situation will be resolved. It would be far better in most situations for any adult who is helping you to support you in the background. You can try a strategy and then report back to discuss the results and make additional plans.

## **REACH OUT TO BE KIND**

The Reach Out to Be Kind strategy is the most powerfully positive approach to reduce the likelihood that others will treat you badly and increase the potential that others will step in to help if you are being treated badly.

The absolute best thing that can happen to you if someone is hurtful is for another student or students to quickly respond to the one who is being hurtful to tell this person to stop. By consistently Reaching Out to Be Kind to students in your school, this will increase the likelihood one or more of these students will step in to help you if they see someone treating you badly.

A more sophisticated strategy you could try is to identify the more socially powerful students in your school who are consistently kind and respectful. You may not want to form a friendship with these students, but you can identify them and occasionally Reach Out to Be Kind to them. Socially powerful, kind and respectful students are the most likely students to publicly tell a student who is being hurtful to stop—because they have the power to do so without coming under attack. If you have occasionally Reached Out to Be Kind to these kinds of students there is an increased chance they will help.

Reaching Out to Be Kind to a person who treated you badly in the past, but at a time is not being hurtful, can help to reduce the potential this person will be hurtful to you in the future. Reaching Out to Be kKnd to the friends of a person who has been hurtful to you in the past can increase the potential they will tell their friend to “stop.”

## **USE MY STRENGTHS**

When you Use Your Strengths every day, you will feel more powerful. This will increase your underlying level of “power points.” When you feel more powerful, this increases the likelihood you will present yourself as feeling that you have personal power. This reduces the likelihood that others will treat you badly.

In addition, if someone is treating you badly in an ongoing way, take the time to Think Things Through to determine how you could use each of your key strengths in response to this person. Practice using each of these strengths just between you and your mirror in your bedroom. Then, if this person is hurtful again, you have several practiced Use My Strengths strategies to choose from in response. This will give you greater feelings of confidence.

## **FOCUS ON THE GOOD**

The person who treats you badly wants you to feel bad. This is how this person takes your power. When you Focus on the Good, this creates neural pathways that reduce the power of another person to cause you to feel bad. By Focusing on the Good, you increase your ability to Keep Your Personal Power.

## BE MINDFUL

The person who treats you badly wants you to overreact to appear weak and helpless. If you publicly overreact, this also attracts the attention of other students. These other students are able to see that this hurtful student caused you to lose control. In the minds of those who are hurtful, this proves their power over you to others.

When you have the ability to Be Mindful, self-regulate, and not react as if something is wrong when someone is hurtful to you, you can Keep Your Personal Power.

The reason for the continued practice of Being Mindful is to form the neural pathways in your brain so that when you need to remain calm and self-regulate in a challenging situation, you can more effectively do so.

## KEEP YOUR PERSONAL POWER

The person who is treating you badly is trying to take your personal power. When you Keep Your Personal Power by standing tall and walking with pride, people are much less likely to even think of being hurtful to you. When you control your thinking and do not give the power to others to make you feel bad, you are able to Keep Your Personal Power.

## THINK THINGS THROUGH

Sometimes, when someone is being hurtful, you have to quickly Think Things Through to figure out how to get out of a dangerous situation. Other times, after someone has been hurtful and you have walked away, it is necessary to Think Things Through to decide whether there is anything you need to do in response to this. You can also Think Things Through in advance to plan strategies Use Your Strengths in common situations.

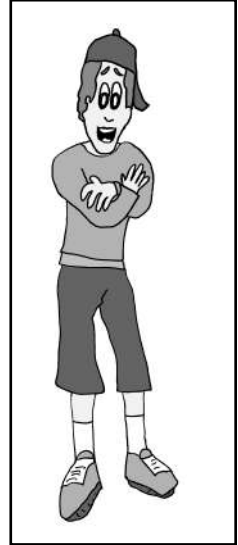
# APPLYING THE BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES TO EFFECTIVELY RESPOND

Here is the combined process to use the Be Positively Powerful strategies to immediately respond in situations where someone has been hurtful to you:

- **Be Mindful.** Ground yourself and take deep breaths to self-regulate. Make sure you do not show a negative reaction.
- **Keep Your Personal Power.**
  - Immediately Stand Tall. You might envision a white bubble of protective light all around you, blocking any negative energy from this person getting through to you.



- Control Your Thinking. Immediately think to yourself, “I am worthy. I deserve respect. I choose not to give that person the power to make me feel bad. That person is showing who they are, not who I am.”
- **Think Things Through**. Quickly decide what to do at this immediate point in time. Options will vary based on the people, situation, and environment.
  - Assert Yourself with Care. In some situations, it may be appropriate for you to directly say something the student being hurtful. If you respond verbally—keep it short and powerful—Use Your Strengths in a positive way. More information on this strategy is below.
  - Ignore This Person. If you choose to simply ignore this person, Keep Your Personal Power, stand tall, hold your head high, and walk away with pride. If you are in a place where you cannot leave, envision the other person as being not present. Try to start a conversation with someone else.
  - Walk to a Safe Place. If you can, walk to a place where there is a school staff member who would be in a position to witness any continuing harm and step in to help. But do not talk to that staff member in front of other students, because this may be interpreted as “tattling.”
  - Capture and Report. If the hurtful conduct is through digital media, capture the post and report abuse to the site. Then, keep your hands off the keyboard until you are certain you have self-regulated and thought things through.
- **Make a Positive Connection**. As soon as possible, Make a Positive Connection with a friend or trusted adult to describe what happened, receive support, and jointly Think Things Through about what additional responses might be necessary at this time.
- **Document What Happened**. This is a very important action for you to take that will be helpful to allow you to Keep Your Personal Power. Write down what happened, where this occurred, and who else was present. Specifically note if any staff member witnessed this and what this staff member did. Perhaps ask anyone who witnessed what happened to write a short description of what they saw. You may be able to get this to stop without reporting to the school. But if you do eventually report this to the school, this immediate documentation will be helpful. Make sure you capture any hurtful material posted online.
- **Focus on the Good**. Think about five recent happenings that made you feel really good. Take out a pen and paper and write down five things. Take the time to enrich and absorb these good feelings. If you start to feel bad, look at your list of good things.
- **Reach Out To Be Kind**. Consider starting a Positivity Ripple. This is described below.



## ASSERT YOURSELF WITH CARE

If you want to communicate with the person who is being hurtful to tell this person to stop, it is likely best if you assert yourself using private digital messaging, rather than in person. There are several reasons for this:

- When using digital communications, differences in personal power are less significant. You can write from a calm position of power and not an emotional outburst or reaction.
- You can take the time to write a message carefully before you send it and before you respond to what is written back to you. You can also gain “invisible” assistance from a friend or trusted adult in writing these messages.
- You can communicate to this student privately, hopefully without this student’s supportive friends being around. However, this person could share your message, which is why you have to be really careful about what you write. Write as if your message will be made public.
- If this student responds in a negative manner, you are not yet again in a public situation with someone saying disparaging things to or about you in front of witnesses.
- You can gain effective evidence! These digital communications can be preserved and shown to your principal, parent, or trusted adult. This is another reason you need to be careful in what you write, so that you look like the responsible person.



This last reason, collecting digital evidence, is most important. When you use any form of digital communication media, realize what you send or post can be permanently retained. Even if you are distressed and angry, make sure that your communications are always respectful and balanced because evidence of how you are communicating will also be retained. Your message needs to be strong, but not at all aggressive. Envision you are showing this message to an adult whose opinion you truly value. Write the message in a way that shows you as honorable and seeking a positive resolution.

If you can gain digital evidence to support your claim that this person is being hurtful to you, this can be very helpful in getting this to stop, especially if this student is one who school staff do not think causes problems.

To get effective digital evidence, start your message like this: “Today you (describe what happened in sufficient detail). I would ask that you stop treating me in the way you are. Please stop doing this.”

If this student does not correct what you have said about what happened, then you have obtained solid evidence from this person of what really happened. This will avoid the “they

said—you said” argument. If the person denies this happened, indicate that you do have evidence from others and repeat again your request that they stop doing this.

If this student made a mistake and did not intend to be hurtful or was sorry afterwards, reaching out in this way could lead this student to decide to make things right.

If this student intends to continue to be hurtful, you will likely get a harmful message back. Prepare yourself for this and do not overreact. This also will be very helpful evidence to share with the principal, if this student does not stop being hurtful.

Do not continue these messages beyond one or two. Either this approach will work relatively quickly or not. If this does not seem to be working, end your communications by saying, “Well, I just thought I would try to get this to stop.” If the person continues to send hurtful messages do not respond. But definitely save the messages. They will be helpful to show an adult.

In addition, after these communications, keep watch for this student’s public posts. If this student publicly posts anything about you after this, be sure to capture this also. Then file an Abuse Report with the site to get this removed.

If it is necessary to give this string of messages to the principal, you will have evidence to document that what happened and this person’s response to your calm request that they stop. Remember that it is essential your communications always remain respectful, because you may need to share these communications with an adult at some time.

## **START A POSITIVITY RIPPLE**

Remember the key to positivity through a Focus on the Good. A focus on five positive experiences can help to undo the harm of one negative experience. If you “go low” after a negative incident, you lose power to the person who was hurtful. But if you go positively powerful you can gain even greater personal power.

A story of a real incident demonstrates the power of responding in a positively powerful manner: A high school student, Caitlin Prater-Haacke, was under attack on Facebook. Someone had even sent her a message telling her she should kill herself.

Instead of “going low” by getting into an argument online or feeling really bad, she got a bunch of Post-It Notes, took out some markers, and started writing. The next day, she posted positive messages Post It Notes on every locker in her school. (Search: cyberbullying, positive post it notes, caitlin. Be sure to watch her TedTalk video.)

Think in terms of personal power games. Who won this power game? Who got the most power points?

You can use a similar strategy. You can create a Positivity Ripple. You can also bring in your friends to make this an even more positively powerful ripple.

Think of when you toss a small stone into water. What happens? The impact of the stone sends ripples across the surface of the water. These ripples go far beyond where the stone entered.

The way you respond if someone is hurtful can create a positive ripple effect that can lead to positive change. You can also inspire positivity in other—because one good act inspires countless others—and the results of that positivity may very well ripple back to you.

These are some ways you could start a Positivity Ripple:

- **Gratitude Meme.** As soon as possible, find and post meme on your social media profile about gratitude. (Search: gratitude meme.) Then, publicly list things you are currently grateful for and note the people you are grateful to have in your life. If anyone asks you why you are doing this, simply reply, “Well, I learned today that there needs to be more positivity in the world.” Ask others to add in the comments the things they are grateful for.
- **Positivity through Personal Messaging.** Send a personal message to five or more of your friends. Write this to them: “I am starting a Positivity Ripple. Please write to five or more of your best friends and tell them what you appreciate about them. What I appreciate about you is ... Let’s see how big of a Positivity Ripple we can create.”

This Positivity Ripple can also be done in person or by writing notes to five people. However, likely it is more powerful to do this on social media, because many others are more likely to see this. These others will realize that the person who was hurtful has totally failed to make you feel bad and take your personal power.

## INSIST YOUR SCHOOL ADDRESS CONCERNS

To better insist that the school take your concerns seriously will require that you effectively document all of the hurtful incidents that are happening, as well as the harmful impact this is having on you. This is why it was earlier suggested you document each incident. If you did not do this at the time, do it now.

Schools should respond effectively to stop hurtful behavior that is serious, persistent, or pervasive. This includes more minor incidents that are ongoing or widespread.

## DOCUMENT WHAT IS HAPPENING

The following is guidance on how to document what is happening:

- **Describe how you have been treated badly by other students while at school.** This could include bullying, discriminatory harassment, or sexual harassment. If there are frequent hurtful acts, describe a sufficient number of these incidents. Especially describe the more serious incidents, incidents where staff were present, incidents that were

reported, and incidents where there were witnesses. Identify witnesses who are likely to report honestly. Identify the student or students being hurtful, as well as their supporters.

- Further describe or identify from above any hurtful incidents that occurred in front of staff members or that you reported to a staff member. Describe how that staff member responded and whether this made things better or worse.
- **Describe how you have been treated badly by other students from this school or other schools in the district when using digital media, either while at school or outside of school.** Describe how these hurtful digital acts are related to what is happening in school and are impacting how you are feeling while at school—more below.
- **Describe any situations where a school staff member has denigrated, bullied, harassed, or sexually harassed you.** This includes “micro-aggressions”—brief verbal or behavioral acts where school staff communicate negative prejudicial insults or denigration, especially directed towards you, other students, or people who are like you.
- **Describe in detail how, as a result of these hurtful acts, you are feeling and the distressing impact this is having on you.** This can be after each act or in general. Are you having upsetting memories of what has been happening? Do you feel distressed just thinking about going to school? Do you find that you are avoiding or trying to avoid thinking about things that can bring up memories of how you are being treated? Are you feeling anxious, sad, angry? Do you have negative thoughts about yourself, other people, school, the world? Do you sometimes blame yourself? Do you find that sometimes you are upset or become aggressive? Are you engaging in impulsive or self-harmful behavior? Do you feel like you constantly have to be on guard because someone might be hurtful to you? Do you have difficulties concentrating? Do you have problems sleeping? Are you having headaches or stomach pain or other unexplained feelings of physical discomfort?
- **Describe in detail how as a result of these hurtful acts, you have been unable to concentrate, learn, and/or participation in school activities.** This also can be after each act or in general. Have you skipped school one or more days, skipped a class one or more times, had difficulties concentrating in class, found it hard to complete assignments, received lower grades, or not felt comfortable participating in class discussions? Have you avoided riding the bus, certain areas of the school building, using the bathroom, using the locker room, or going into the cafeteria? Have you avoided participating in school clubs, participating on a sports team, or attending school activities?
- **Describe any aspects of the school environment that appear to be reinforcing the way you are being treated badly by others.** This may include district policies, school practices, statements made by staff, curriculum choices, books or lack of books in the library, as well as overall aspects of the school climate. This could also include offensive graffiti that is not quickly removed. Any micro aggressions by staff are also relevant.

## INSIST ON A COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION

Once you have this documentation, present it to your principal or assistant principal. Ask the principal to review this documentation and then meet with you to discuss how to ensure an effective response. It will likely be helpful to include your parent or caregiver in this meeting.

In the United States and in many other countries, students receive protection under civil rights laws against discrimination based on race, native origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation or identity, and disability. Students receive this protection if they are a member of this class or are being treated badly based on a perception they are a member of this class.

It is a requirement of schools to effectively respond to stop discriminatory harassment that has created a hostile environment. If you are a member of a protected class or are being treated badly because you are perceived to be a member, this hurtful conduct is serious, persistent, or pervasive, and the result is that your learning and participation in school activities has been interfered with, your school is required to take steps reasonably calculated to stop the harassment, remedy the harm to you, and correct the environment.



If you have a disability and are receiving services on an Individual Education Plan or a Section 504 Plan, the school is required to address these concerns within an IEP or 504 Plan meeting and create a plan of action that includes these components. This means that this situation must be resolved by a team, not just a decision of the principal. This Team must include your parent. Insist that you also be included.

If you are a member of a protected class, look for information on how you can contact someone at your school district who is responsible for responding to discriminatory harassment. Provide your documentation also to this person.

What the school should do if you are experiencing serious, persistent, or pervasive hurtful conduct is conduct a comprehensive investigation to determine what is happening and then take steps that are reasonably calculated to:

- **Stop the Hurtful Behavior and Prevent it from Recurring.** Simply imposing discipline on the hurtful student is not sufficient to accomplish this. Stopping hurtful behavior and retaliation will require ensuring the hurtful student and this student's supporters accept personal responsibility, take steps to remedy the harm to you, and make a written commitment that they will avoid any additional harm—with the knowledge that ongoing

monitoring will occur and more significant disciplinary and other consequences will be imposed if they fail to abide by these commitments. Some students who are being hurtful may need additional supports to help them address their challenges.

- **Remedy the Harm.** Ensure that you are protected and provide you with assistance in recovering from the harm that has been done to you. This should include both any emotional support and remedying any academic harm. If your grades have suffered, you should be provided with academic support and the ability to improve your academic standing. You should have an appointed staff ally you can talk to about how things are going. A protection plan may need to be implemented in some areas of the school. The student who is being hurtful may need to be removed from a class or group you are in or a team you are on. It is not appropriate to remove you from a class, group, or a team.
- **Correct the Environment.** Correct any aspects of the school environment that may be contributing to the situation. This may include correcting staff who are treating you in a disrespectful manner or ignoring how you are being treated by students. This will absolutely include other efforts to increase inclusion.
- **Engage in Monitoring and Support.** Engage in ongoing monitoring of the situation and support for you to make sure that the hurtful way you are being treated has stopped.

Be assertive with your school. They must not ignore the chronic, ongoing situations that involve multiple, but less serious hurtful behavior. These are the kinds of situations that can cause significant emotional harm.

Insist that you deserve a comprehensive intervention regardless of whether or not you are a member of a protected class. You may be able to file a complaint with your state department of education or with the federal government if your school does not take steps reasonably calculated to stop other students from treating you badly. (Go to: <https://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/federal/index.html>. Or search: stopbullying.gov, federal laws)





# CHAPTER 4

## STOP, OWN IT, AND FIX IT

### NOT BEING HURTFUL TO OTHERS AND FIXING THINGS IF YOU WERE

Nobody is perfect. We all make mistakes. Sometimes, we trigger and are hurtful. Sometimes, we might engage in actions that are more intentionally hurtful to others.

If you are more frequently treating others badly, you may be in a situation where you feel out of control—you may be angry, feel powerless, and want to gain some level of control. Perhaps, others have frequently been hurtful to you, so you are being hurtful to them back. Perhaps you have experienced trauma or other challenges and, as a result, you trigger and become out of control. When you are out of control you may be hurtful to others.

If this describes you, the Be Positively Powerful strategies will assist you in overcoming these challenges. One of the best things you can do is to make a positive connection with a trusted adult who can provide you with support to stop the challenging or hurtful things that are happening to you—so that you no longer engage in hurtful behavior

Alternatively, you may be inclined to think that denigrating and excluding those who you consider to be “different” or “weird” is a way for you to be ranked high on your school’s social ladder. You may think that others will respect you if you demonstrate your power over others in this way.

You may not even think you are being hurtful. You may rationalize that you are just maintaining “social order.” Or you may be hurtful to those who you consider to be rivals for personal power or are interested in a close personal relationship with someone you are interested in.



Unfortunately, in our society, it is quite possible to gain dominance and personal power by treating others badly. Obviously, there are plenty of examples of powerful adults who engage in such actions.

## TWO TYPES OF LEADERSHIP

Not every student wants to be perceived to be a “leader,” but some do. If you want to be perceived to be a leader, what kind of a leader will you be?

There are two paths people can take to achieve a position of leadership. Some students consistently strive to be kind and respectful and contribute to a positive school community. Other students strive for status—visibility, dominance, and power. Those who strive for status often denigrate those they perceive as “different” or engage in battles with rivals.

Researchers have looked into these differences in styles of leadership in the business environment. Bosses who demonstrate dominance leadership lead through coercion, intimidation, and manipulation of rewards and punishment. Employees may act in compliance with these kinds of leaders and view them as powerful. But they do not like them.

Bosses who focus on building positive community gain respect by displaying knowledge, skill, and talent and by being a useful and compassionate member of the community. People often look up to compassionate leaders, respect them, and view them as role models.

There are two different outcomes for these two kinds of leaders. Those who strive to be kind and respectful and who contribute to a positive climate generally lead happy and successful lives. They also live longer.

Those who strive for dominance and status most often end up suffering from anxiety, depression, and other challenges. They end up being less happy and, in the long term, less successful. They may be respected, even admired, but they are not liked. They end up in relationships where others serve them, but not where others truly care about them. They also die at a younger age.

Consider those students who are perceived as leaders in your school. Which students have achieved leadership status by denigrating and excluding others? Which students are demonstrating leadership by being consistently kind and respectful and contributing to the development of a positive school community?

You have the power to make your own choices in life. If you chose to live a life where you seek dominance in a way that brings pain to others, you will figure out a way to do this. However, you can also choose to walk a path of compassion, kindness, and respect. In so doing, you will live a life that brings you much greater happiness and success for you and for those around you.

Remember from the survey, students do not admire those who think it is cool to put others down, say disrespectful and hurtful things to others, laugh when seeing someone being

treated badly, support their friend in being hurtful, engage in battles with those they perceive as rivals, create drama to get attention, encourage the exclusion of students they consider different, or join in when someone else is being hurtful.

The vast majority of students really do not like to see people treat others badly. If you are hurtful, look around you. You may think you are gaining social status. But if you are being hurtful, most of those watching do not like what you are doing and do not admire your actions.

## RATIONALIZATIONS

People like to think of themselves as “being good.” So when they engage in hurtful or inappropriate behavior, they most often create what are called “rationalizations”—excuses they tell themselves or others to justify that their behavior was appropriate. Even when it clearly was not.

The four common rationalizations are:

- **Spin It.** A more neutral term is used to describe the action as not that bad. “I was just joking around.” “It was a prank.” “This is just locker room talk.”
- **Deny Personal Responsibility.** This can occur when someone else can be blamed. “Everybody does it.” “It wasn’t my fault.”
- **Deny the Harm.** The harm that was caused is minimized. “What happened wasn’t that bad.” “They are just overreacting.”
- **Blame the Other.** Those who are targeted are blamed. “They deserved it.” “They don’t belong here” “If they would stop (describe behavior), this wouldn’t happen.”

If you listen carefully you can hear these kinds of rationalizations used —by students, staff in schools, as well as in society.



Listen to yourself and think things through if you have been hurtful. If you have been hurtful, do you maintain that what you did was appropriate or excusable by using one or more of these rationalizations?

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Are you biased? The answer to this question is “yes.” All of us are biased in one way or another. We have all learned through our past experiences to make rapid judgements about others. Our bias lives in our unconscious. It resides in our Hippocampus. It has come from our

experiences through culture and our family of origin. Our early experiences, including watching those around us, has shaped our bias.

Biases can be both positive and negative. However, when our biases result in thoughts or actions that harm the well-being of others—simply because of who they are due to the color of their skin, the nature of their healthy sexual interests, the size of their body, and the like—it becomes time to reconsider our biases.

Sometimes, we engage in hurtful biased ways without even recognizing this or thinking we are acting in a biased manner. We may discriminate against another. Or view or treat one group in a more favored manner.

If we want to go to school, participate in organizations, and live in a world that is inclusive and peaceful, we all have to learn to identify and question our unconscious biases that are hurtful to others.

Howard Ross is a professional who has worked a lot on issues of bias. His suggestions for steps to deal with hurtful unconscious bias are helpful. These have been modified slightly to fit within the Be Positively Powerful model. Many of these actions fall into the process of Thinking Things Through.

- **Tell the Truth to Yourself.** Be willing to admit that you have unconscious biases and that these biases do impact how you treat others.
- **Investigate Yourself.** Look at how you make decisions. Look carefully to see if there are any clear patterns in your behavior that indicate a hurtful unconscious bias.
- **Stretch Your Comfort Zone.** If your investigation reveals that you may have some hurtful unconscious biases about a certain group or groups of people, make a conscious effort to learn more about such group or groups. Be open to changing your mind.
- **Become Curious About Individuals.** If you perceive you may have some stereotyped views about a group of people, get to know an individual from within that group. Reach Out to Be Kind to this person. Obviously, one individual does not equal an entire group. However, you will likely be surprised to find out how much you share in common.
- **Expand Your Sources of Input.** If much of your thinking about certain groups of people have come from one or several limited sources, research and talk with others. Gather insight from a wider group of people. Talk with a trusted adult. (However, if that trusted adult communicates in a hurtful way about others, you will likely want to find a more helpful trusted adult to talk with.)
- **Remedy Any Harm You Have Caused.** If, or when, you realize that you may have caused harm to another due to hurtful unconscious bias, remedy the harm to this person. Then, Think Things Through to identify patterns in your behavior that you want to change for the future.

# BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES

If you are about to be hurtful or have been hurtful, you can choose to Stop, Own It, and Fix It. This is how the Be Positively Powerful strategies relate to this choice.

## MAKE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

Recall that during your teen years, you are highly influenced by your peers. You are going through a process of deciding what your personal values are and how your relationships with others are supporting those values.

Do your current friends support you in being the best positive person you could be, or not? Do you need to make some new friends? Or should you perhaps lead your friends to more positive interactions with others? Are the trusted adults in your life willing to challenge you if you are engaging in actions that cause harm to others? Are they supporting you in becoming the best person you can be?"

If you have experienced trauma and other distressing challenges in your life, you are at increased risk of becoming connected with others who spread hate and engage in violence. You may feel that you have finally found some people who like you and want to include you.

Please consider this more closely. These are likely hurt people who are hurting others. People who are spreading hate and encouraging violence are not striving to provide you with love and support. They are seeking to take your power and encouraging you to walk down a path that will never bring you happiness and success.

Do a friendship audit that focuses attention on the values and qualities of your friends. If you have become attracted to people who are spreading hate, consider carefully whether you this is the life you truly want to live.

Christian Picciolini went to his first white supremacist skinhead meeting at age 14. He was a lonely child who was often bullied. He was swept into the movement and eventually became a leader. He decided to leave the skinhead movement and turn his life around. He now helps people disengage from hate groups through an organization he leads, Free Radicals Project. (Search: Picciolini, free radicals project.)

## REACH OUT TO BE KIND

If you are frequently or occasionally treating others badly, the practice of reaching out to be kind can be helpful to shift the manner in which you are interacting with others. Especially focus on how it makes you feel when you Reach Out to Be Kind and how people respond when you do.

## **USE MY STRENGTHS**

The character strengths that were identified are the ones that leading scientists believe lead to goodness in human beings across cultures, nations, and beliefs. When you Use Your Strengths, you are less likely to want to try to take power from others by being hurtful to them.

## **FOCUS ON THE GOOD**

When you Focus on the Good and are feeling grateful to others, you will be less inclined to want to mess up those positive feelings by being hurtful to someone.

## **BE MINDFUL**

Sometimes, teens are hurtful to others because something bad has happened to them. They trigger and act fast without thinking.

Practicing Being Mindful every day to build neural connections that support calmness and knowing how to self-regulate when something starts to trigger you are important strategies to stop yourself from being hurtful.

## **KEEP YOUR PERSONAL POWER**

When you can Keep Your Personal Power by standing tall and controlling your thinking, then you will feel less inclined to strive to take someone else's power by treating them badly.

## **THINK THINGS THROUGH**

Think Things Through about your personal values. Why you would choose not to be hurtful? How can you respond if someone is hurtful to you, without engaging in retaliation?

# **STOP**

## **FOCUS ON YOUR PERSONAL VALUES**

Why would you choose not to be hurtful to another? These reasons might include:

- How you would feel if someone did this to you or to someone you care about.
- How you would feel about yourself because of how this reflects on you.
- Whether it is against your personal values to be hurtful to others.
- How you would make the other person feel.
- What your mom, dad, or other adult whose opinion you value would think.

- What your friends would think.
- How being hurtful might damage your reputation, relationships, and opportunities.
- That you might get into trouble.

All of these reasons are good reasons. Just like we all have different character strengths, we all also have different reasons why we would not want to be hurtful to others.

## AVOIDING RETALIATION

Why would you choose not to be hurtful to someone who has been hurtful to you? When you know that people can change, you have the power to respond in a powerfully positive manner, rather than doing something that will reflect badly on you or be hurtful to another.

A Cycle of Hurt starts when someone has been treated badly or perceives that they have been treated badly,. This leads that person to engage in retaliation, which is often followed by retaliation by the other person—and on and on this goes. Everyone ends up being hurtful and feeling bad.

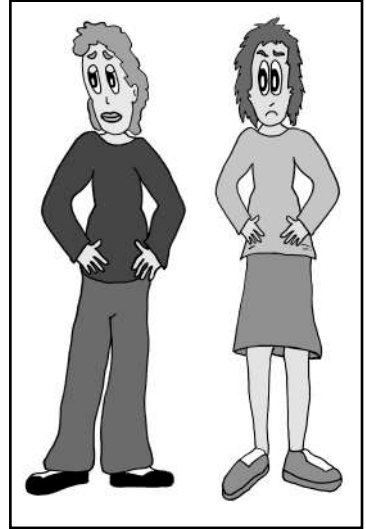
Obviously, retaliating against someone who has been hurtful—whether by a person, a group, a political leader, or a country—is something that happens quite frequently in our global society.

Is this what you like to see happen? There are some who will tell you that if someone is hurtful to you and you do not fight back, you are a wimp. Many times, young adults are sent to war—to risk their lives, kill others, be wounded, be killed—because the leaders of one country are engaging in retaliation against the leaders of another country. Is this how you want to see our global society function?

Mahatma Gandhi tried to warn about this. "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind." Think also of the leadership of Nelson Mandela. He showed the world that revenge was not the answer to years of injustice. He led his country on a path of forgiveness and unification. He said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies."

It is so important to regularly practice the Be Positively Powerful strategies. If you regularly use these strategies this will reduce the potential that you might trigger and engage in retaliation. If someone has treated you badly and you feel like retaliating, this is a strategy to use to avoid doing so and still Keep Your Personal Power:

- **Be Mindful.** Think: "I can be mindful and in control of my actions."



- This helps you to give yourself the time to Think Things Through, rather than acting without thinking.
- **Keep Your Personal Power.** Think: “I can choose not to let this other person control how I feel about myself or act.”
  - Remember, you can not control what happens to you. You can control how you feel about yourself and how you respond. By recognizing this, you realize that you can maintain control of your actions and not act in a way that is against your personal values.
- **Focus on the Good.** Think: “I know that people can change and just because someone was hurtful does not mean they will continue to be hurtful.”
  - Knowing that others can change, especially if you respond in a calm and controlled manner, can give you hope that even though things are not nice at this point in time, the matter can be resolved.
- **Think Things Through.** Think: “I can Think Things Through find a positive way to respond that will stop what is hurtful from happening to me.”
  - The way in which you respond will vary depending on the situation.
- **Make Positive Connections.** Think: “I will connect with someone who will support me in doing the right thing.”
  - Connect with a friend or a trusted adult to think things through to find a positive way to respond that avoids retaliation.

## OWN IT AND FIX IT

If you have made a mistake and were hurtful to someone, realize that you can change, make better choices, and make things better for one to whom you were hurtful. You can Own It and Fix It.

If you Own It and Fix It, this will also reduce the potential that this person will retaliate against you. In addition, if you Own It and Fix It and others learn that you did this, it will help to repair the damage you did to your reputation by being hurtful.

The bottom line is that if you were hurtful to another, you also harmed yourself. By Owning It and Fixing It you are both fixing the situation for another and redeeming yourself. Here is a way to do this.

- **Realize That You Can Change.** Know that you can make better choices. You can make things better for one to whom you have been hurtful.



- **Think Things Through.** Think about what you did and what you were trying to accomplish.

- **Think about the rationalizations you might have made.**

- Did you think of this as just a joke, when it really was not? Did you think that since everybody does this it is okay for you to be hurtful? Did someone else encourage you? Have you suggested to others that this person is overreacting? Did you think this person deserved to be treated badly?

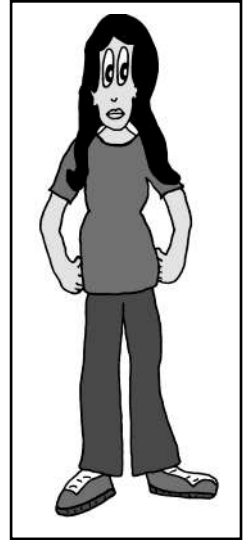
- **Dig deeper and think about what is going on inside of you.**

- Figure out what led you to treat someone badly. Were you trying to get attention? Did you think this was a way to prove your dominance or establish social status? Were you retaliating? Did you trigger? Did you act without thinking?

- **Own It.** Own it by acknowledging that what you did was wrong. Even if you were retaliating because someone treated you badly, your hurtful response was also wrong. If you accept personal responsibility that what you did was wrong, hopefully the other person will also.

- **Fix It.** Fix it by taking steps to make things right. Acknowledge to the other person that what you did was wrong. Acknowledge to your circle of friends that what you did was wrong. Tell both the person you were hurtful to and your friends that you are making a personal commitment not to be hurtful again. Ask the person to whom you were hurtful if there is any other way you can make things right.

- **Make a Positive Connection.** If things are not right for you, make a positive connection with a trusted adult to ask for guidance on how you might get the help you need to make positive changes in your behavior and obtain the support you need to do this.



## JOURNALING STRATEGY

If you have been hurtful to others and want to change this behavior, you can reflect on your progress in doing so in your Journal. At the end of the day think about any time when the way you treated another might have not been in accord with how you want to treat others.

- What happened that contributed to your being hurtful?
- Did you accept personal responsibility and take steps to make things right?
- Are there any more actions you need to take to remedy the harm and ensure positive relationships?



# CHAPTER 5

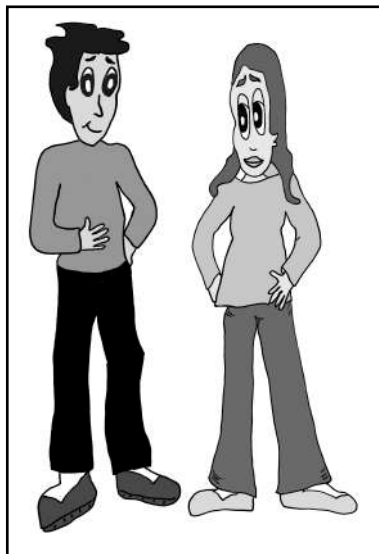
## POSITIVELY POWERFUL CLOSE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

### ENHANCING YOUR IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS IN A POSITIVE WAY

Healthy relationships are important for everyone. This is why Make Positive Connections is the first strategy in the Be Positively Powerful strategies. In this chapter we are going to discuss how to use the Be Positively Powerful strategies to help form healthy close personal relationships.

When we talk about healthy close personal relationships, this includes relationships with best friends, as well as dating partners. Healthy close personal relationships provide opportunities for many positive experiences that benefit your well-being. It takes energy, time, and care to develop healthy close relationships.

During your teen years, you become strongly focused on forming close personal relationships with a special friend and with dating partners. Relationships made during these years can become very special. However, as you grow and discover who you are and the path you want to take in your life, these relationships will also grow and change.



Sometimes, they will end. Realize that during your teen years, you are in learning mode. You are learning how to form, grow, change, and end close personal relationships. The lessons you learn during your teens years will help you form, grow, change, and end close personal relationships throughout your life.

## **FOUNDATIONS OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

Our emotional health and well-being depends heavily on our ability to form close personal relationships. Dating relationships are different from friendships because they include expressions of physical affection that may range from hugging, kissing, or holding hands to sexual intercourse. Even if you are in a dating relationship, you should first and foremost be good friends.

Healthy relationships start with effective communication, honesty, respect, sharing, and trust. A healthy relationship should be based on the belief that both members of the relationship are equal. Decision making about issues related to the relationship should be shared equally.

It is important to maintain the freedom to be yourself. As part of being yourself in a relationship with one important person, this also means taking care of the other important relationships in your life. Maintain your individual identity and continue to do the things you enjoy.

Sometimes, when people start to date they want to spend all of their time with each other. It is important to also spend time with your family and other friends. These family members and other friends can be a valuable source of support, especially if you experience difficult or stressful times in your dating relationship or if your dating relationship ends.

Establishing mutually acceptable boundaries based on personal values is important in any relationship. Romantic partners should never pressure each other to do things they have not agreed to do. Mutual respect means not only giving respect to a partner, but also expecting respect for oneself. Your relationship should help to promote individual growth of each of you.

Sometimes when teens want to be in a relationship with someone, they are hurtful to others who are friends with this person. A person who is hurtful to others to gain a relationship with you is not a good choice. This person is demonstrating they can and will be hurtful to achieve what they want—which will likely ultimately include being hurtful and controlling over you to get what they want.

## **COMMUNICATION: ESSENTIAL TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

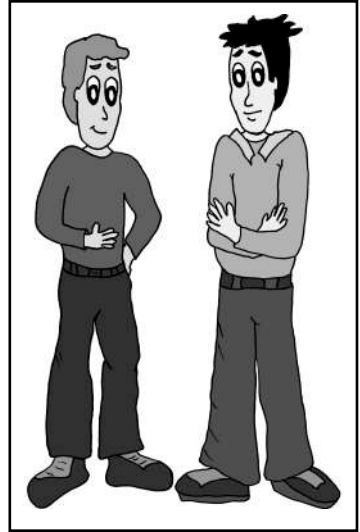
A healthy relationship cannot not exist without effective communication. Effective communication is necessary to resolve conflict, solve problems, and make decisions to help your relationship grow.

Being able to express your values, opinions, feelings, and dreams is important in any meaningful relationship. Effective communication is a shared responsibility that involves both

sending and receiving messages. This requires being able to express yourself verbally and engaging in active listening. This requires the ability to Think Things Through together.

Communication in relationships can sometimes become complicated. Communication about important things takes place at an emotional level. This is because emotional issues are attached to your likes and dislikes, your opinions, and your wants and needs.

Communication about really important issues is generally best done face-to-face. In this way, each person is able to rely on the full range of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication to fully understand what the other is saying and to communicate their own thoughts.



In today's age of digital communications things have changed. Many young people spend an extended amount of time communicating with friends and dating partners via digital messaging. This form of communication can have heightened risks because your ability to focus on non-verbal cues has been eliminated or reduced.

This means it is more important to make sure you are communicating clearly. If you have any questions or concerns about what another person really meant, ask for clarification.

## **HEALTHY OR UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

These are the characteristics of the healthy relationships:

- Being caring and loyal. Trusting your friend. Communicating your feelings and desires.
- Supporting your friend during challenging times. Holding shared beliefs and values.
- Sharing common interests and goals. Recognizing and respect differences in each other.
- Accepting and respecting each other's individual needs. Being honest with each other.
- Listening to each other. Using respectful language. Understanding the other person's wishes and feelings. Being willing to compromise. Enjoying being with each other.
- Laughing together. Showing that you care.

### **EVIDENCE OF AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**

The evidence that you are involved in an unhealthy relationship is when this person:

Makes degrading and insulting comments. Ignores your interests. Seeks to isolate you and prevent you from spending time with family and other friends. Tries to dominate, control, and direct your behavior and your activities. Engages in threats and intimidation. Encourages you to participate in unwanted, harmful, or illegal behavior. Is physically abusive, such as slapping, pushing, punching you. Demands nude images, which may then be shared with others. Engages in sexual assault, including unwanted touching or coerced sex. Takes or controls your money or your spending. Exploits you to get what they want. Engages in a highly conflicted manner by being hurtful and then showing lots of care.

## CONSENT

Consent is an important concept in any close relationship. For any joint activity you intend to engage in with your close friend or dating partner, consent is necessary. Consent must be:

- **Informed.** Make sure both of you fully understand all of aspects of the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “how.”
- **Freely Given.** Do not pressure, trick, or threaten someone into saying “yes.” Do not pretend someone has said “yes” when you know they cannot or did not do so. If you feel someone is trying to coerce you to get you to say “yes” when you do not want to, this is a clear sign of an unhealthy relationship.
- **Active.** Expect consent to be active and understandable—an affirmative expression of agreement. Do not assume passive resistance to be consent.
- **Reversible.** If someone says “yes,” but then changes their mind and says “no,” respect the “no” and stop. If you said “yes” and then changed you mind, clearly say “no.”
- **Enthusiastic.** If you thought consent had been given, but then your partner does not appear to be happy and excited, stop and check in.

## TIMES OF DIFFICULTY

People who form close relationships generally start out with very good intentions. Sometimes, disagreements and conflicts will arise. Conflicts are not necessarily negative. You can both grow and gain new skills through the process of resolving conflict.

In all relationships, people experience times of difficulty. Often communications can create difficulties. One or both of you may have difficulty expressing what is on your mind.

There will be times when you disagree. If you need to communicate with your friend or partner about an issue of concern or disagreement, take time to think about how you really feel and

why. This way you can express your thinking clearly. Decide what is negotiable and what is not. Know where and when to compromise and when you think it is important to stand your ground. Don't discuss issues of concern in public.

Sometimes, problems arise because the people in the relationship have different expectations for the relationship or have become distracted with other issues. Sometimes, without any fault on the part of either, the two people in a relationship are simply determined to walk their own path—which will interfere with the continuation of the relationship.

Some of the issues or concerns that arise in a relationship are controllable. Other concerns are not under the control of either person. Certainly, if one or both of you are acting in ways that are unhealthy, a relationship break-up is recommended.

## RELATIONSHIP BREAK-UPS

Relationship break-ups are a normal part of life, especially during your teen years. This is because both of you are exploring who you are, what your personal values are, how you want to present yourself in society, how you want to fit in, and what your future path is.

For a time, your values and interests may match. But this can change. When this changes, relationships frequently come to an end. A relationship may also come to an end when it is unhealthy or when one person is hurtful to the other.

When a close relationship comes to an end, both of you will go through a period of grief due to your loss. Five stages of grief have been found to be universal—experienced by people from across many cultures at a time of loss.

The five stages of grief are:

- **Denial and Isolation.** The first reaction to a loss situation is to deny the reality of the situation. “This isn't happening, this can't be happening,” people often think. It is a normal reaction to rationalize overwhelming emotions. For most people, this stage is a temporary response that helps to mask the pain.
- **Anger.** In this stage, the reality of what has happened is more evident and the pain emerges. The first response to this pain is most often anger. Your anger most likely will be directed at the person you have broken up with. It may also be directed at others who you think might have played a role. Staying too long in this stage can create challenges for everyone. Acting on your anger can cause even greater concerns.
- **Bargaining.** In reaction to feelings of grief, there is often a desire to seek to regain some level of control by going through “If only” thinking. “If only I had (fill in the blank) this would not have happened.
- **Depression.** At the depression stage, you will feel sadness and regret. This is the stage when you are coming to accept the reality and preparing for the separation to be real.

- **Acceptance.** This stage is identified by a feeling of calm. You are not necessarily happy, but you have accepted the pain of loss and are ready to move on with acceptance.

People spend different lengths of time working through each stage. People feel each stage at different levels of intensity. The five stages do not occur in any specific order and you may find yourself going back and forth between different stages.

The fact that people go through these grief stages in a different manner can increase the challenges if you both must be present in the same physical location or if you share mutual friends. If one of you is in a state of anger and the other in a state of denial or bargaining, conflict may occur.

Everyone grieves differently. Some grieve in a more external manner and others process things more internally. What you feel like doing is what is right for you. Be gentle with your former friend or partner.

These are Be Positively Powerful strategies to grieve the loss of a relationship:

- **Make Positive Connections.** Be open to meeting new people and trying new activities to meet new people. It is best not to seek to form a new close relationship while you are still grieving.
- **Reach Out To Be Kind.** Acknowledge any actions you took led to the end of the relationship and apologize, if possible. Practice something to say about what happened, if someone asks, that will not cause any further harm to the other. Reach Out to be Kind to others.
- **Use Your Strengths.** Think about your key strengths and how you can Use Your Strengths to move forward into new positive relationships.
- **Focus on the Good.** Keep yourself busy doing things that you enjoy. Whenever you feel stuck in the grieving process, especially anger and depression, Focus on the Good things that are happening in your life.
- **Be Mindful.** While it is understandable that you are angry, strive not to act on that anger and engage in attack. Be Mindful and self regulate, especially if you are feeling angry.
- **Keep Your Personal Power.** While you can't control what happens, you can control how you feel about yourself. Strive to let go of your feelings of hurt, so that you can move on. Deciding to forgive another person is a positive act for the one who engages in the forgiveness. This is a way to let go and Keep Your Personal Power.
- **Think Things Through.** Think Things Through to determine whether there are any patterns in your actions or selection of friends or relationships that you want to change. Decide what you are going to do to move on that will bring you happiness.



# DISRUPTED RELATIONSHIPS

If you have experienced a disrupted relationship in the past with a parent or other loved one or if you have experienced significant bullying, it is likely you will have greater difficulties forming close relationships or dating partnerships. The reason for this is that due to the prior challenging relationships you experienced, your brain is likely wired more for protection than for close connections.

Fortunately, it is possible to rewire your brain to allow for the formation of positive close relationships. To do so, it is helpful for you to have a better understanding of the dynamics.

When you have had a disrupted relationship, the neural pathways in your hippocampus—your memory center—have become wired in an unhealthy and unloving way. The underlying message you may begin to believe about yourself is that you are unloveable—that the reason you are being treated badly is because there is something wrong with you.

When your brain has wired itself to see yourself as unloveable, you will begin to see evidence of this in your interactions with others. What you think about yourself will color how you perceive the actions of others and your relationship with them. As a result, you may have developed a significant fear of rejection. Realize that your brain may be interpreting nice or neutral actions with another person in a negative manner.

Also, you are likely to be more apt to trigger and overreact when things do not go your way. You may also be more inclined to simply walk away, rather than stay within a relationship that has gotten into a rocky patch.

It is also possible that you will become involved with another person who also had a disrupted relationship in the past. This could lead to double the challenges.

Remember the primary message of this book: you can rewire your brain. Despite what has happened to you, you can become resilient and empowered. You can do so in the context of close personal relationships. This is how to use the Be Positively Powerful strategies to accomplish allow yourself to build close personal relationships.

- **Make Positive Connections.** Especially if you have had a disrupted relationship with a parent or important family member, seek to establish a strong relationship with a trusted adult. Find a caring adult who you can talk with about these challenges, so that this adult can support you as you are in the process of seeking to develop a close personal relationship. As you are forewarned that you may misinterpret intentions



and actions of another, ask this adult to help you with this. Also ask this trusted adult to help you Think Things Through if a relationship gets into a rough spot.

- **Reach Out to be Kind.** The intentional, daily practice of Reaching Out to Be Kind will help to create a “kindness shield” around you. When you are treating others with kindness, they will respond with kindness. This will help you to demonstrate to yourself that you are not unloveable.
- **Use My Strengths.** When each partner in a relationship has identified and intends to Use Their Strengths, both of you will become more empowered. You can discover ways to use your different strengths in a compatible manner.
- **Focus on the Good.** This strategy is most important. For every time you felt let down, that an important person was not there for you, this created a negative neural pathway. The best way to rewire your brain to get rid of these negative pathways is to make a consistent and intentional practice of Focusing on the Good.
- **Be Mindful.** As you will be more apt to trigger and engage in an outburst, daily practice to Be Mindful is essential. Like having a Focus on the Good, this helps to build positive neural pathways. You can also look for meditations that specifically focus on letting go of negative connections or “cords” you have with the people who let you down. (Search: meditation, releasing cords.)
- **Keep Your Positive Power.** Everyone deserves to be treated with respect and kindness. If you have gotten into a close relationship that is not healthy and you are not being treated with respect and kindness, seek assistance in removing yourself from this relationship.
- **Think Things Through.** The important first step in Thinking Things Through is having an accurate understanding of the full situation. Because of what you have experienced, you may have greater difficulties in doing this because you may believe yourself to be unloveable. Make sure that you have an accurate understanding of the situation before you identify positive strategies to handle this situation.

# CHAPTER 6

## BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL ONLINE

### POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT WHEN USING DIGITAL MEDIA

The Be Positively Powerful strategies can also support positive engagement with others when you are using digital communications and social media.

### THINK BEFORE YOU POST ~ REMEMBER, WHAT YOU DO REFLECTS ON YOU

When you use digital media, anything you post or send is recorded in a digital format. What you post or send can be widely disseminated, without your control. This is true even if you post on a social media page you have designated as “private” or if you have messaged just one friend. If what you have posted or send goes public, this can affect your reputation, relationships, and opportunities—in a good way or a bad way, depending on what you posted or sent.

Always remember that what you do when sending or posting using digital media will reflect on you. Sometimes, what you post or send can have a significant impact. Be exceptionally careful not to post or send without thinking. If you are upset, keep your hands off your smart phone or computer until you have become calm.

When you Think Things Through about what information you might post and how, recognize that there are different kinds of personal information. There are different risks associated with disclosure:

- **Personal Interest Information.** This includes information about your interests and activities. This is generally safe to share on social media pages where you have prevented totally public access, if you are communicating within a safe online community site, or sending a message to friends.



- **Personal Contact Information.** This includes your address, phone numbers, and e-mail address. This information could make it easier for an unsafe person to find you. This information should not be posted or shared without parent permission. With your parent's permission, it is safe to provide this information on web forms for necessary purposes, such as a purchase. Only share this information where you are sure that your privacy will be protected.

- **Financial Identity Information.** This includes any personal identification or financial account information. This information can be used for identity theft. This information should only be shared on secure web sites with your parent's permission.

- **Sensitive or Damaging Personal Material About You.** This includes material that can make you appear vulnerable, demonstrate that you make bad choices, or that you want to be kept secret. This information could be used to manipulate you or disseminated to harm your reputation, relationships, and opportunities. This information should generally never be posted or shared publicly or privately. However, there are times when this kind of sensitive information may be shared with care on a secure professional emotional support site.

- **Sensitive or Damaging Personal Material About Others.** This includes material that could harm reputation, relationships, and opportunities of others. This information should never be shared in a digital format, publicly or privately. One exception to this is if you become aware that someone is seriously distressed and may be considering engaging in actions that could cause harm to themselves or others. In this situation, you should absolutely provide this information to a responsible adult.

- **Damaging Information About You Posted by Others.** This is information that could harm your reputation, relationships, and opportunities. File an Abuse Report with the site to get this material removed. Tell a responsible adult.

- **Threats.** Never post material that someone might think is a threat. Realize that teens have been arrested for posting material they claim was a joke, but others saw as a threat. Always report to a responsible adult if someone has posted information that could be a threat. If the threat is real, someone could get hurt.

- **Sexual Images.** Sending a sexual image of yourself to another creates a high probability that at some time that image will be distributed publicly. This will likely damage your

reputation, relationships, and opportunities. While you may think that the person you might send this image to will respect your privacy, remember from the last chapter that close personal relationships often end. When a relationship ends, anger is a predictable reaction. When a person is angry and has a sexual image of the other person that can be quickly posted, this is something that often happens. If you receive a sexual image from another, do not send it further. Especially if you are over the age of 18, you must be careful. Asking for or sending these kinds of images of someone who is under 18 is considered trafficking in child pornography. Teens have been arrested and prosecuted for exchanging sexual images.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategies**

Think Things Through about the image you want to create of yourself through your online presence.

Do you want others to look up to you and respect your values? What image of yourself do you think will best serve you for what you want to do in the future? If you want to go to college, get a great job, or attract a wonderful partner, what personal standards do you intend to follow at this time so that anyone looking at the history of your online presence will see evidence of the high quality person you are?

Create a statement of what personal standards you will abide by when you post or send material using digital media. Consider how you can incorporate Reach Out to be Kind and Focus on the Good into your statement of personal standards.

## **KEEP YOUR LIFE IN BALANCE ~ AVOID ADDICTIVE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES**

The addictive use of digital technologies is a concern for some teens. You will experience greater happiness and success if you keep your use of digital technologies in balance with other important life activities—spending time with friends, engaging in activities you enjoy, doing your homework, helping out at home, and spending time in nature.

Indicators that your use of digital technologies might be out of balance include:

- Spending more time using digital media than you had planned.
- Burying your head in a smart phone when you are with other people.
- Using social media late into the night, when you should be sleeping.
- Being preoccupied with and thinking about what you could be doing online—when you are not online.
- Arguing with your parents about time limits or sneaking around these limits.

## Be Positively Powerful Strategies

Think Things Through to determine what strategies you can use to keep the time you spend using digital devices and digital media in balance with other important life activities.

Focus also on the quality of your digital activities, in addition to the amount of time you are spending. Spending time engaging in digital activities that are helping you expand your insight and is contributing to your life and future. Engaging in these kinds of activities are preferable to time spent with activities that have no essential merit.

If it is possible that you may not be a good judge of how much time you spend using digital media. You might want to ask some friends what they think. Or you could keep track of your time using digital media.

What are your personal standards for how you will keep your life in balance and not spent too much time using digital media? How will you assess the value of your online activities? What strategies will you use to make sure you are following your standards?

# CONNECT SAFELY ~ INTERACT SAFELY WITH OTHERS ONLINE

## INTERACT SAFELY WITH FRIENDS, FRIENDS OF FRIENDS, ACQUAINTANCES, AND STRANGERS

There are differences between public and private communications in digital media environments in terms of the kinds of people you may interact with in these environments and the risks associated with these interactions.

Have a discussion with a parent or caregiver about the kinds of people you should interact with using digital media. As you grow older, you will increase your interactions with people online who you do not know in person. The kinds of people you may interact with may include:

- **Friends.** These are people you know well in person.
- **Friends of Friends.** Friends of Friends are people who a personal friend of yours knows well in person and can vouch for. This does not include people who a friend of yours has “friended” on their social media page. Your friend must know this other person in person.
- **Acquaintances.** Acquaintances are people who you have met in person, but really do not know very well.
- **Strangers.** Strangers are people who neither you nor any of your friends know in person. Personal friends of yours could “friend” someone they do not know on their social media page. This person is still a Stranger.

People who you communicate with online who you do not know well or at all are almost always totally safe, wonderful people who can enrich your life. One of the wonders of the Internet is the ability to connect with other people from throughout the world with whom you share interests.

However, it is also possible that you could begin to communicate with someone who presents danger. Someone may try to establish a relationship that could jeopardize your safety. Realize that the concern is not “online strangers.” A person who presents concerns could be an Acquaintance, a Friend of a Friend, and sometimes even someone who you know and originally might have thought of as a friend.

Many social media sites suggest that you “friend” people who have an established a friendship link with one of your friends. Please realize that your friend may have established a friendship link with someone who is actually a Stranger. Before you send or respond to a friendship request check with your known friend to see if they really know this person.

When you become a young adult, you will establish many more friendship links with Acquaintances and Strangers. This may be people who you meet in person and decide you want to know better. These may also be people who you meet in digital communities where you share an interest.

Recognize when you are interacting with people who you do not know well in person, they could tell you things about themselves that are not accurate. You would likely have greater difficulties detecting this because of the lack of an in-person connection.

## **DETECTING AND AVOIDING DANGEROUS PEOPLE ONLINE**

You may communicate with a person online who is dangerous and a threat to your safety. These people are sexual predators or people who are trying to entice you to join hate groups. You may be at risk or a friend of yours may be at risk. It is important to know the danger signs for yourself or a friend.

You might think that the people who present danger will show this by doing something that immediately makes you feel uncomfortable, like asking you to send a sexual image or to meet in person. Sometimes, dangerous people do act just like this. Savvy teens can usually detect and avoid these dangerous people.

The far more dangerous people start their relationships by being very friendly—overly friendly. They will work very hard to become your best new friend. They will seek to convince you that they think you are the most amazing person they have ever met. When someone is being overly friendly, it may not be as easy to detect that they might present danger.

Always be extremely wary of anyone who is overly friendly, offers you gifts or opportunities, keeps telling you how wonderful you are and how happy they are to have met you, always takes your side, and tries to distance you from your other friends or family.

A person who behaves like this is trying to manipulate you. This process is called “grooming.” Both sexual predators and people trying to lure young people into hate groups engage in grooming.

You are being groomed to do something that would otherwise be against your values. It is generally only after a dangerous person has taken the time to form a relationship with you that they will they start to engage in behavior that would more obviously raises concerns. They may have convinced you to send them a sexual image. Now they will threaten to publicly post this image if you do not do other things they want you to do.

If you are interacting with someone online who makes you feel even a bit uncomfortable, do the digital version of “walk away.” You may need to leave the room (the site or page). You may need to lock your door (block the person). If this person tries to “follow you” (will not stop trying to communicate) or threatens you, tell a responsible adult to get more help.

If you become aware that this kind of a person is communicating with a friend, seek to convince your friend to take these protection steps. Your friend may not be able to detect or understand the concerns because of the actions this dangerous person has taken to gain control of their thinking.

You should also tell a responsible adult, if you or a friend of yours has been interacting with someone who is dangerous. Even if you have done some things you now think are embarrassing, tell a responsible adult. Any actions you took were being manipulated by someone else.

If you have been sufficiently savvy to detect the risks congratulate yourself. Other teens might not be so savvy and attentive to the concerns. Your reporting could help those at higher risk.

## MEETING IN PERSON

If you are older and you have gotten to know someone online, you may want to arrange to meet in person. This may be a Friend of a Friend, an Acquaintance, or even a Stranger.

There are important safety steps to take if you plan to meet in person with someone you have gotten to know through social media. These include:

- **Make Sure You Know Enough About This Person to Assess Their Safety.** Only arrange for a meeting if you have communicated for some time with this person—enough time to be able to get a good sense of their personal values. Engage in a thorough assessment of their profiles, pages, and communications so that you have a good idea that they can be trusted. Have a very savvy trusted friend also provide an opinion.
- **Discuss Your Plan to Meet With Your Parents or Caregivers.** Let them see this person’s profiles, pages, and communications. Show them why you think this person is safe and trustworthy. Ask for their insight and guidance.
- **Plan a Meeting in a Public Place With Your Friends Present.** The public place could be at the mall or a coffee shop. It is advisable to have a parent or caregiver close by.



- **Have a Well-designed Escape Plan.** Create a “code word” that you can say or text to a friend or to your parent that communicates the message “get me out of here.”
- **Never Leave The Public Place With This Person.** Take time after this meeting to Think Things Through and determine how you want this relationship to progress.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategies**

Think Things Through and talk with your parent or caregiver, as well as with a trusted adult, to determine your standards for the kinds of people you will interact with using digital media and how you will handle situations that may present some unknowns or risks

Also, Think Things Through with friends, especially friends who you know make good choices in establishing relationships with others. Ask your friend to review the profile and postings of someone you are interacting with who is not known well by either of you in person. Your friend may see something that you are not currently seeing.

If you think a friend of yours might not be making a good choice in their decisions about interacting with others online, talk with your friend.

If you think your friend is making a dangerous choice and your friend’s safety may be at risk, tell an adult who can help. It is better to risk angering your friend than risk something really bad happening to your friend.

## **PROTECT YOUR FACE AND FRIENDS ~ USE SOCIAL MEDIA SAFELY AND RESPONSIBLY**

Your use of the Internet and social media offers significant benefits for social, educational and creative activities. Social media allows you to creatively demonstrate your personal identity and maintain ongoing connections with friends and with those who share your interests.

Most teens rely on digital devices to watch videos, download music, play games, and communicate with friends. Many of you are also using the Internet to help with school work.

As you know, what you post on your page and on the pages of others will be used by others to form an impression of you. This impression can impact your reputation, relationships, and opportunities. The material you post or actions you engage in may also place your friends or others at risk of harm or could invade their privacy.

The process of “friending” will lead to increasing digital friends. Establishing a friendship link to an unknown or unsafe person could potentially result in harm to you—or a friend who mistakenly thinks that you know and trust this person.

The social media sites or apps you use have Terms of Use to which you agree when you establish a page on the site. These Terms of Use that prohibit actions that could cause harm

to others or the site. Social media sites have protective features that give you control over who can access your information or send messages.

These sites and apps also have Abuse Report systems and ways to block people with whom you do not want to interact. Be sure you know how to use these protection tools.

Sometimes, young people do not want to report abuse. They think that something bad might happen if the person who is being abusive finds out they have reported.



Realize that there are several reasons why it is perfectly safe to file an Abuse Report. Unless you say something, the person who is engaging in abusive behavior will never know that you did this. This is why reporting abuse is safe and advisable:

- Abuse Reports are confidential. No one will ever know who reported.
- The sites themselves also are using artificial intelligence approaches to detect and block/remove objectionable material. The abusive material could be detected by a machine. The person who posted this will not be able to tell.
- If the harmful material is publicly posted, anyone can report.

All of these factors means that the person who you reported will not know that it was you who reported the abuse. This means it is very safe to report abuse if someone is being hurtful to you or to anyone else.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategies**

If someone is ever hurtful to you when using digital media, Be Mindful and self regulate. Then Keep Your Personal Power by capturing the evidence and filing an Abuse Report.

Reach Out to be Kind to others by filing an Abuse Report if you see that someone has posted something hurtful about them.

# READ WITH YOUR EYES OPEN ~ ASSESS THE CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF PEOPLE

When you are participating with others using digital media, your ability to assess the credibility of the information you find is more challenged. It is also more challenging to assess the safety and trustworthiness of the people you interact with if you do not know them in person.

Any individual, organization, or company can post information online. The intentions of posting such information may vary. Sometimes, a variety of individuals, organizations, or companies with different motivations may be contributing to the information presented. There is no mechanism to assure the credibility of such information.

Especially with any activities associated with politics or any controversial issues, there are now well-documented efforts throughout the world to post and push the dissemination of inaccurate information that is designed to influence voters or disrupt social cohesiveness.

It is important to understand the dangers in relying on appearance, high ranking in search returns, number of followers, or numbers of tweets as a basis to assess credibility of information or trustworthiness of people. All of these factors can easily be manipulated by anyone seeking to deceive.

When you are seeking to assess the credibility of information or trustworthiness of people there are some helpful steps. None of these steps are definitive in and of themselves.

- **Importance.** Determine how important it is that the information you are relying on is credible and safe. the importance of determining credibility and safety. Determining the time of a movie showing is less important than assessing the safety of medical information. How important is this information? How important is it that you assess the safety of a person you are interacting with?
- **Path.** Identify the path to the information. Did you go to look for this information using a search engine? Or did this information “pop” into your timeline. It is probable that the information you search for using good search terms on a credible search engine has higher credibility. Do you have a logical connection to this person? Or did this person just mysteriously appear?
- **Source.** Evaluate the source of the information. Is this information from a credible news organization? If you are reading information from a news source that is known to have some bias one way or the other, it is probable that you should check with a number of news sources before making a final determination of credibility. If you are interacting with someone who you do not know in person, keep in mind that there are challenges in evaluating their trustworthiness simply because you lack the ability to check this out.

- **Potential for Bias.** Look for evidence of interest and potential bias in the information itself. Read critically. Seek to identify signs of potential bias of information or held by someone you may be interacting with. Pay special attention to signs of hatred towards certain groups or individuals.
- **Manipulation.** Look for evidence of attempted manipulation. Is the information being presented in a way that is seeking to encourage you to take some action to support whoever is providing the information? Are you being asked to sign on to a commitment to an issue or action? Does this appear to be a person is seeking to manipulate you to take some action? Is this commitment to actions that support a just and positive society or an effort to divide?
- **Consistency.** Determine the consistency of the information. Look to see if the same or similar information is present on different sites. If you are assessing the trustworthiness and safety of someone you are communicating with, determine whether what they say to you is consistent over time or on other posts they have made.
- **Evaluation.** Conduct a substantive evaluation of the information or person. Is the information being provided consistent with what you already know to be true? Do the postings of someone who you may not know well in person appear to support the conclusion this person is trustworthy?
- **Consultation.** Ask the opinion of others, especially friends and trusted adults.

### **Be Positively Powerful Strategies**

When you Think Things Through, the first and very important consideration is that you have an accurate understanding of the situation. Reading with your eyes open is an important strategy to ensure you have an accurate understanding that is based on information you obtain online. Assessing the trustworthiness of people you interact with online is essential to protecting your safety.

## **EMBRACE CIVILITY ~ FOSTER POSITIVE RELATIONS IN DIGITAL COMMUNITIES**

Unfortunately, sometimes people become hurtful when they are communicating using digital media. This is usually called “cyberbullying.” This is basically the same as the hurtful behavior discussed earlier. The common reasons young people engage in cyberbullying appear to be:

- **They Want Attention.** They think that by posting hurtful things about another person this will attract a lot of attention to them.
- **They Want to Achieve Dominance and Social Status.** They think that they are showing themselves to be “popular” and “cool” by denigrating someone as “weird” online.

- **They Failed to Think Things Through.** They triggered and acted without thinking and posted something hurtful . They may not know how to stop, own it, and fix it.
- **Someone has Been Hurtful to Them and They are Retaliating.** This kind of retaliation can lead to a “flame war” where several or even many people post hurtful things about others.

## BE SAVVY

These are savvy strategies you can use that can reduce the potential that someone will be hurtful to you when using digital media.

- **Don’t Post or Send Any Material That Others Could Use Against You.** If what you are about to post or send could be used against you in a hurtful way, stop yourself.
- **Don’t Join In and Be Hurtful When Someone Else Has Started To Do So.** Don’t like hurtful material that has been posted. Don’t add a supportive comment to a hurtful post.
- **Disagree Respectfully.** It is perfectly appropriate for you to post and discuss controversial issues. Be respectful to those who hold contrary positions.
- **Walk Away.** If a discussion gets heated and people are getting angry, walk away. Realize that no one “wins” a digital argument. Find something else to do with your time.
- **Spread Positive Energy by Focusing on the Good and Reaching Out to be Kind.** Be known as the one who consistently posts positive images and kind statements. Every day take an establish yourself as someone who is consistently kind and positive, the less likely you will be treated badly and the more likely others will defend you if you are.

### Be Positively Powerful Strategies

If someone has been hurtful to you, these are strategies you can use to keep your personal power and respond in a positive manner, as was discussed in Chapter 3. However, as this is a digital environment, there are some additional suggestions:

- **Be Mindful.** Do not do anything significant and keep your hands off your keyboard until you have calmed down sufficiently to Think Things Through.
  - Capture the Posts or Messages. The reason to capture the posts or messages is that they could disappear. You might need to have these as a record.
  - Report Abuse. If hurtful material was posted in a manner where others could see it, file an Abuse Report on the website or app. The person who posted the hurtful material would have no way of knowing whether you reported or others did.

- **Think Things Through.** Think Things Through to decide what else you need to do.
  - No Further Action. Assuming the website or app responds to your Abuse Report by taking the post down, this alone may resolve things.
  - Ask a Friend. You might ask a friend to step in and try to stop the harm or resolve the situation through digital mediation or conflict resolution. Alternatively, you could ask a friend or friends to post a message demanding that this person stop.
  - Own It and Fix It. If you have been hurtful to this person, you may need to own and fix what you have done.
  - Tell This Person to Stop. You might choose to calmly, but firmly, tell this person to stop. Recall the guidance in Chapter 3 on how to do this and retain the evidence.
  - Ignore. You may simply ignore what happened. You could combine ignoring what happened with posting some really positive material—communicating that this person was unsuccessful in getting you to feel bad.
- **Make a Positive Connection.** If the strategies you try do not get the hurtful situation to stop, this is the time to talk with a trusted adult. Ask the adult to first try to help you by providing “invisible guidance.” Invisible guidance is assistance provided to you, without anyone else knowing an adult is helping you. It is very easy for a trusted adult to provide you with “invisible guidance” when you are using digital technologies. If this does not resolve things, then an adult may have to intervene more directly and become “visible.”

## BE A HELPFUL ALLY

Young people who witness cyberbullying are in the best position to get this to stop. While those who are hurtful think that by doing so they can improve their social status, true leaders are the people who are kind and compassionate and step in to help when the witness hurtful situations including online situations.

Knowing what to do that will be effective and protect your safety, especially from retaliation, will help. Realizing that other young people really do not like to see this kind of hurtful behavior occurring and admire those who step in to help may increase your motivation to help.

## Be Positively Powerful Strategies

These are some steps you can take to be a Helpful Ally in cyberbullying situations.

- **Reach Out to be Kind.** Reach out privately to the person who has been targeted. Tell this person that you have seen what is happening and do not like this. Tell them you are a supporter and will do what you can to help and to get this to stop. Remind this person of the need to Be Mindful and Think Things Through. Offer to discuss the possible options for response.
- **Report Abuse.** File an Abuse Report on the site or app. Reach out to mutual friends, tell them what is happening, and ask them to file Abuse Reports. The more Abuse Reports that are filed, the faster the hurtful material will come to the attention of the company and be taken down.
- **Tell the Person to Stop.** If you feel personally powerful, you can also step in publicly. Privately tell your friends that you are going to calmly post a message of support for the targeted person, a statement that the hurtful post is not acceptable, and a request that the person who was hurtful take the post down and stop. Ask your friends to quickly “like” or positively comment on your post.
- **Report Concerns.** If these actions have not stopped the harm, help person who is targeted contact a trusted adult who can provide “invisible guidance,” or step in to help more visibly, if necessary. If things are really bad and this person is concerned about reporting, consider reporting yourself, especially if the person being targeted is emotionally distressed.





# CHAPTER 7.

## POWERFULLY POSITIVE LEADERSHIP

### BEING A HELPFUL ALLY AND A LEADER FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

The more positively empowered you become, the more you are likely to want to engage in actions that will help others who are facing challenges or being treated badly. The more likely you will want to be to work with others to create a positive environment in your school and elsewhere in your community.

This Chapter is focused on how you can use the Be Positively Powerful strategies to be a Helpful Ally if you witness situations where someone is being treated badly or is being excluded.

This chapter also provides guidance on ways you can become a leader and work with others to better support social justice, a positive school community, and other positive change.



# **BE POSITIVELY POWERFUL STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERED POSITIVE LEADERSHIP**

The Be Positively Powerful strategies provide a great basis for you to become an empowered positive leader. This is how to use these strategies for to be a leader in your school—and hopefully in society. We need more young leaders in society at this time.

## **MAKE POSITIVE CONNECTIONS**

Establish friendships with other teens who want to make a positive difference in their communities and the world. This will greatly enrich your life. Expand your friendships to include people who are different from you and may be outside of your typical circle of friends.

When seeking to establish relationships with trusted adults, look for adults who are engaged in empowered positive leadership and working for social justice. You can learn from them.

## **REACH OUT TO BE KIND**

Being consistent in Reaching Out to be Kind to many others is the foundation for engaging in social justice and positive leadership. Help others to find the magic of a practice to consistently Reach Out to Be Kind.

## **USE YOUR STRENGTHS**

As was discussed in the introduction to this concept, social scientists from around the world to identify and classify the core capacities that lead to goodness in human beings across cultures, nations, and beliefs. These character strengths are the strengths of empowered positive leaders. Focus on how you can build and Use Your Strengths in your efforts to create a more positive and just community in your school and in society.

## **FOCUS ON THE GOOD**

An empowered positive leader Focuses on the Good and encourages others to do so also.

## **BE MINDFUL AND KEEP YOUR PERSONAL POWER**

As an empowered positive leader you will, from time to time, need to take a stand for social justice. You may need to call the attention of others to concerns that need to be addressed. As a result of your leadership in addressing important concerns, you may come under attack. Being Mindful by remaining calm and Keeping Your Personal Power when this occurs will increase your leadership influence.

"If you can keep your head when all about you

Are losing theirs and blaming it on you, ..."

These are the first two lines of Kipling's poem "If." This poem is all about keeping your personal power. It is suggested you read the entire poem. (The last line does require some gender updating.)

## THINK THINGS THROUGH

In today's society, we are in need of leaders who can effectively Think Things Through to develop new strategies to address concerns. Part of empowered leadership is also engaging collaboration with a team of others to Think Things Through together.

- Make sure your team has a commonly held understanding of the situation you are seeking to address and your group objectives.
- Work as a team to identify, evaluate, and select strategies.
- Create an action plan and make assignments for responsibilities.
- Make sure you have a plan to evaluate the effectiveness of your actions.

## BEING A HELPFUL ALLY

When you witness hurtful behavior or other concerns, you have a choice. You can be a:

- **Hurtful Participant.** Who joins in or supports the harm.
- **Passive Observer.** Who ignores what is happening or walks away.
- **Helpful Ally.** Who steps in to help.

Helpful Allies can help in a variety of ways:

- **Reach Out.** Reach Out to Be Kind to the person being hurt or left out. Help friends resolve conflict.
- **Say, "Stop."** Publicly or privately tell the person being hurtful to stop.
- **Report Concerns.** Tell an adult who can help.

When teens do step in to help, they are often very successful in getting the hurtful situations to stop. Many teens say they want to step in to help. But when bad things happen, far too few actually do step in to help.

Research has shown that teens are more willing to step in to help if they feel they believe others will be supportive of their efforts, they have sufficient personal power to do so safely, and they have effective skills.

Recall the survey that was mentioned in Chapter 3. Students truly admire those who are respectful and kind to others, reach out to help someone who has been treated badly, try to include those who have been excluded, tell someone being hurtful to stop, help someone who was hurtful decide to make things right, help other students resolve an argument or conflict, and tell an adult if a situation is serious.

Students were asked what words they would use to describe those who step in to help. These were the most frequent words used:

Awesome **Brave** Amazing Nice Confident Strong  
Kind Friend Responsible **Caring** Respectful Hero  
Leader **Courageous** Smart Admirable

So you must realize that when you do step in to help, others will be supportive of this!

If you are in a situation where a student you witness being hurtful has a high social status and appears to be quite powerful, you may not feel as though you have sufficient status or power of your own to publicly challenge this person. Even though you might think others would be supportive if someone told this person to stop, your assessment might be that this would not be something safe for you to do.

Trust your gut feeling on this. If you do not think publicly intervening would be safe for you, you may be right. However, there are some really good ways you can be a Helpful Ally that do not require you to take public actions. These private strategies are safer and just as effective.

In fact, the research has shown that those who have been treated badly feel much better if just one person says to them, "Hey, I saw that and I really didn't like it. Is there something I can do to help?" The person who was treated badly will truly appreciate your kind words.

You can also provide "invisible guidance" to this student. You can privately help this student Think Things Through to identify strategies to seek to get the harmful conduct to stop. You can ask some of your friends to also help—so as a group of kind people you have more power than the one person being hurtful. You can report your concerns to an adult who can help.

Having effective skills to step in to help both publicly or privately can increase your willingness to do so. What is most helpful is that there are a lot of different ways you can be a Helpful Ally. The following are some of the ways. You also likely have other good ideas.

## REACH OUT

If you see someone being treated badly, but are afraid to reach out to help, think of this:

- How I would feel if someone treated me badly and no one reached out to me?
- How I would feel about myself if I could have reached out to help, but didn't?

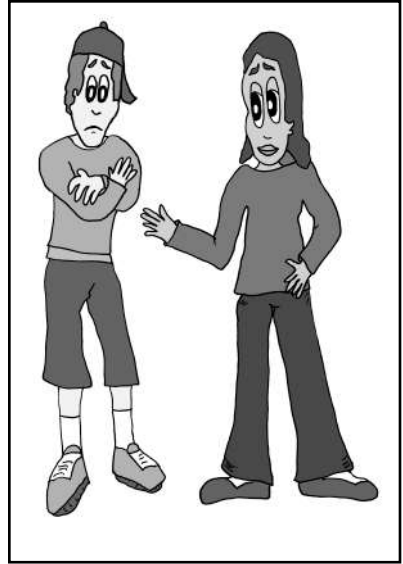
What are some other reasons why you would want to reach out to help? Take some time to consider your answers to these questions.

## WAYS TO REACH OUT TO BE KIND

These are some general ways you could reach out to help:

- Talk to the person being treated badly privately. Tell them that you did not like what happened and you want to help.
- Post an anonymous friendly note on this person's locker.
- Text them to make sure they are okay.
- Smile and say, "hi" when you see them.
- Ask them to join you for lunch.
- Offer to go with them to report to an adult.

What are some other ways you could reach out to be kind?



## ENGAGE IN REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Knowing how to listen reflectively is an excellent skill to have. When you listen reflectively to someone who is upset or facing challenges, this provides them with a very warm feeling that someone cares.

Reflective listening requires focusing completely on what the other person is both feeling and saying. Then in your statements you reflect back to the person to make sure you fully understand. You are striving to show this person that you are trying to perceive their world as they see it.

When you learn how to engage in effective reflective listening, this will fully support your effectiveness in your relationships and your future work environments. In addition to the material presented here, there are helpful videos online. (Search: reflective listening.)

To engage in effective reflective do this:

- Give your full attention to the person who is speaking, while maintaining eye contact.
- Show that you paying attention by nodding as they are talking.
- Observe non-verbal cues, as well as verbal cues, from the person.
- Try to figure out the needs and feelings behind what the person is saying.

Don't do this:

- Interrupt the person to tell your own stories or change the focus to yourself.
- Give advice, try to cheer the person up, judge, or change the subject.
- Look at or pay attention to others while the person is sharing their feelings with you.

When you are reflective listening, it is important to pay attention both to the content of what this person is saying, as well as their feelings. Identify their feelings both from their words and their body language.

Then, when you comment back to this person, you use words that conveys your understanding of both their feelings, as well as what they have said.

Here is the basic way to reflect: "I understand you are feeling (describe their feeling) because (describe substance of what they said happened). You could simply mirror back to them what they have said using their own words. It is more effective to use slightly different words.

When you start to engage in reflective thinking with someone who is upset, realize that they are most likely functioning as guided by their amygdala, their threat response center. They are not fully engaging their anterior cingulate cortex, their emotional regulation center, or their prefrontal cortex, their thinking center. In other words, they may have "flipped their lid."

When you engage in reflective thinking when someone is upset, is that they will likely respond by going deeper into their feelings and thoughts. The safety that you provide by being fully attentive to their feelings, will allow them to shift from threat response mode to emotional processing and thinking mode.

You can actually watch this happen. It is really cool. A person you are interacting with is really upset. You can tell based both on their words and body language. You then pay attention and reflect back to them how you think they are feeling and why. They will become slightly calmer and will keep talking. You reflect back again. They will become more calm.

This may take some time, depending on how upset they were at the start, but over time, as you continue to reflect back to them when you sense they are feeling and thinking, they will be able to calm down and think more clearly.

Once they have become and you think that both you and they fully understand what the situation is, then you can shift into Thinking Things Through. Summarize what they have said the situation is. Then, ask them to think about several strategies they can use to address the challenge. Make absolutely sure they have reached a point of calmness before you ask them to think about strategies.

## **STEP IN TO HELP IN HURTFUL SITUATIONS**

If you see someone being treated badly, think about whether it is safe for you to do anything at that point in time. It may be possible for you to safely help the person leave the situation. This is how you can do this safely:

- Take a deep breath and stand tall.
- Totally ignore the person being hurtful. Go up to the person being treated badly. Start a conversation about something totally unrelated to the hurtful situation. "Hey, what do you think of that new assignment?" "Good to see you. Are you going to the game tomorrow?"

- Continue to ignore the person who is being hurtful. Invite the person being treated badly to walk away with you. “Let’s go to my locker. I have something to show you.”
- If possible, go to where an adult is present. Do not talk to this adult. This may be translated as “tattling.” Just go to a place where an adult is more likely to see what is happening and step in.
- When you are in a place to talk, then engage in reflective listening. You can also help the person who was being treated badly Think Things Through to figure out what else to do.

## HELP A FRIEND IN DIFFICULT TIMES

If a friend is going through difficult times, encourage your friend to use the strategies that have been recommended in this book. These are some other ways you can help:

- Keep in frequent contact both in person and through digital messaging. Send your friend positive memes just to let them know you are sending positive thoughts their way.
- Take the time to listen with attention and without judgement. Help your friend to Think Things Through to decide what to do.
- Tell your friend they are not alone, that help is available, and that things will get better.
- Invite your friend to participate in fun activities.
- Help your friend to Focus on the Good. This could include a focus on the good things that are happening, as well as what they want to do in the future.
- Help your friend reach out to a responsible adult if things do not get better quickly. Offer to go with your friend to talk with this adult. If you have serious concerns about your friend’s well-being, you should talk with a responsible adult.

## HELP OTHERS RESOLVE CONFLICT

If you have some friends who are engaged in a conflict, you can help them to resolve this. You can help them Think Things Through together. Here is a process for resolving conflict:

- Ask them to Be Mindful and breathe deeply to be calm.
- Tell them that you are going to help them understand how each other is feeling and then develop a strategy to resolve the situation that both agree to.
- Use your reflective listening skills. Ask each to explain what happened and how this made them feel. Reflect back to the first person saying, “I hear that you are feeling \_\_, because \_\_.” Then, ask the other, “Do you understand how \_\_ is feeling and why?” Continue with this second person, ask what their perspective is of what happened and how this made them feel. Reflect this back to them, “I hear that you are feeling \_\_, because \_\_.” Then, go back to the first person and ask, “Do you understand how \_\_ is feeling and why? Repeat

this process for as long as you have to. Your objective is to help both become calm and gain an understanding of how the other feels and why.

- When they are both calm and understand the other, ask them to Think Things Through to find solutions that would allow them both to be happy. Use the Think Things Through process to come up with several strategies from each person that might work.
- Help them agree what they will try first and if this does not work, what they will try next. Make sure they have a “back-up plan” if the first thing they try does not work.
- Ask them to “shake hands” on their agreement.
- Check back later with both, separately, to see if things are okay.

## SAY “STOP”

### IMPORTANT SAFETY GUIDELINES

Publicly telling someone who is being hurtful to stop can be more risky. It can especially be risky if this person has high social status or is powerful in other ways. These are important strategies if you are thinking about publicly telling someone who is being hurtful to stop:

- **Keep yourself safe.** If it is not safe to say “stop,” do not do so.
- **Work with others as a team.** If you have friends present, several of you can more safely intervene to tell the person being hurtful to stop.
  - It is even easier to work with others as a team when using digital media. Privately message several friends and plan your strategy. One of you can volunteer to post a message that says, “this is not okay.” Then your other friends should reply or comment similar “you should stop this” messages. Your brave actions as a team will likely encourage others who are not even on your team to also say “stop.”
- **Strive not to increase attention to the one who is being hurtful.** Keep your comments short. Do not denigrate this person. Do not get into an argument. Do not retaliate. Simply say that they need to stop. If this does not resolve the situation, walk away and find an adult who can step in to help.

### WAYS TO SAY “STOP”

These are some general ways you could say “stop:”

- “How would you feel if someone did that to you?”
- “This really isn’t funny.”
- “We don’t do stuff like that in this school.”
- “Why are you doing this?”



- “Please walk away and chill out.”
- “Please use another word.”

What are some other ways you could tell someone “stop?”

## HELP A HURTFUL FRIEND STOP, OWN IT, AND FIX IT

You may be in a situation where a person you consider to be a friend is the one who is being hurtful. In this kind of a situation, there are two things you might think about:

- What your friend is doing and the harm this is causing to another person.
- What others will think of you if they know your friend is being hurtful. They may think badly of you for supporting your friend. Your reputation and other relationships may be at risk.

You can encourage your friend to accept personal responsibility and to make things right—to Stop, Own It, and Fix It—by using the strategies set forth in Chapter 4. You can help your hurtful friend accept personal responsibility, stop being hurtful, and make things right. Here is how to do this:



- Ask, “How would you feel if someone did that to you or to me?” “What would (name an adult whose opinion you think they value) think about what you are doing?” “What do you think other students think about you doing this?”
- Ask, “Why do you think what you are doing is okay?” Listen for rationalizations like, “It was just a joke.” “Everybody does it.” “That person is overreacting, it was not that bad.” “That person deserved it.” Challenge those rationalizations as excuses for their wrongful actions.
- If your friend is being hurtful because the other person was hurtful to your friend, encourage your friend to find a more positive way to respond. Ask, “How can you resolve this situation without retaliating?”
- Encourage your friend to accept personal responsibility. Ask, “Are you willing to Own It?”
- Encourage your friend to Think Things Through to figure out a way to make things right. Ask, “How can you Fix It?”

You will also have to decide how you will respond if your friend refuses to Stop, Own It, and Fix It. What are your thoughts on continuing a relationship with someone whose values around how they should treat others may not be in accord with your own?

# REPORT CONCERNS

## HIGH RISK WARNING SIGNS

It is important for all teens to pay attention to these High Risk Warning signs that indicate someone may be at higher risk for self-harm, suicide, or being seriously hurtful to others. The High Risk Warning Signs are if this person is:

- Talking about wanting to die, be dead, hurt themselves, kill themselves, or kill or hurt others.
- Feeling very hopeless and helpless, especially for a period of time.
- Emotionally distressed, anxious, on edge, or unusually angry.
- Struggling to deal with a big loss or significant challenge in their life.
- Angry and has been showing off or talking about weapons.
- Under serious attack by others, including an online attack.
- Engaging in risky or self-harm behaviors, such as cutting or burning themselves.
- Being abused or treated badly by an adult or is at risk of getting together with an adult who may be dangerous.
- Appearing to be withdrawing from people and activities they enjoy.
- Saying “good-bye” for no apparent reason.

## WHEN TO REPORT CONCERNS

You should report to a trusted adult if:

- Someone you know is demonstrating any of the High Risk Warning Signs.
- You or someone else tried to get a hurtful situation to stop and this has not worked.
- It is not safe to do something about a serious situation by yourself.
- Your “gut” is telling you something is wrong. Always “trust your gut.”

## HOW TO REPORT CONCERNS

If you need to report concerns, you should make sure that you tell the whole story to the best of your knowledge. Who is involved? What has happened? When and where this is happening? Why this is happening, if you know?

If there is evidence of concerns that is online, capture an image of this to show to the adult. Do not expect that an adult to whom you may report this will be able to find the material online by themselves.

Tell an adult who can help. The adult you should tell may vary based on the situation. If the first adult you tell does not respond in a way that you think will resolve the concern, tell another adult. Keep telling until someone responds in an effective manner.

- If at school, tell a principal, counselor, or staff member.
- If with a youth group, tell a staff member.
- If online, save the digital postings, and file an Abuse Report on the site. Then, also report and provide the digital evidence to an adult locally.
- If the situation is possibly really serious and someone could get hurt, call 9-1-1.
- If you are not sure, talk to your parent, caregiver, or other trusted adult.

What are your thoughts on the importance of teens reporting serious concerns to an adult who can help?

## **EMPOWERED STUDENT LEADERSHIP FOR KINDNESS, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

### **AUTHENTIC YOUTH VOICE**

Ensuring authentic youth voice in your school is essential. Authentic youth voice where students are involved in leadership roles in your school's effort to create a positive environment where everyone is respected and kind. Authentic youth voice is also important in other community organizations you are involved in.

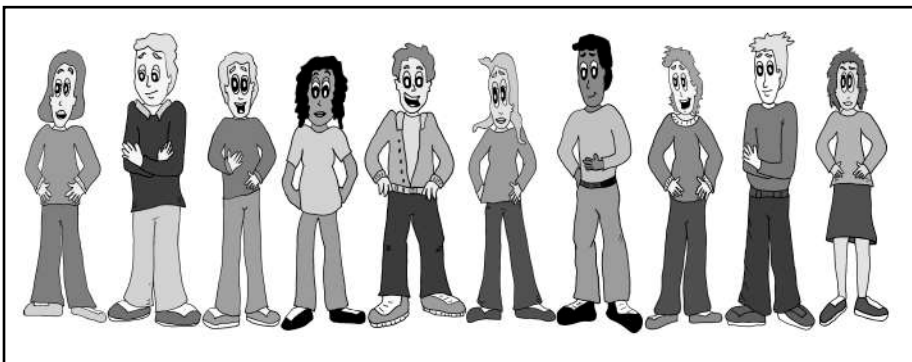
A school's commitment to authentic youth voice ensures meaningful student involvement. This requires that you are treated as allies and partners with adults in addressing all aspect of school climate. Meaningful youth voice requires that your school continuously allow students to present your own ideas, opinions, experiences, and knowledge to improve your school's climate.

This also requires that you receive the training and are given the authority to create real solutions. You can Be Positively Powerful by stepping forward within your school to ensure greater authentic youth voice.

Several organizations are providing excellent guidance and resources to both school leaders and students on ensuring authentic youth voice in schools.

- **inspireED**. As part of the Emotion Revolution, a collaboration between the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Facebook, and Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation, tens of thousands of high school students were asked how they felt in school and how they hoped to feel. inspireED, believes that young people's voices matter. The inspireED resources were designed by teens, educators, and social emotional learning experts. They empower students to work together to create more positive school climates and foster greater well-being in their schools and communities. (<https://inspired.fb.com/>)

- **SoundOut School Consulting.** This is a service initiated by Adam Fletcher who is an early pioneer in the promotion of Youth Voice. The web site contains many helpful free and low cost information resources. (<https://soundout.org/>)
- **WestEd.** WestEd provides resources to assist in increasing student voice for school leaders. They state: “Listening to student voice—that is, listening closely to what students say about their school experiences—can help educators understand topics or problems and rethink practices to inform school improvement efforts.” (<https://www.wested.org/resources/speak-out-listen-up-tools-for-using-student-perspectives-and-local-data-for-school-improvement/>).
- **Student Voice: The Instrument of Change.** An excellent resource is the book *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change*. This book states: “When you take time to listen, you’ll find that students’ aspirations can drive your school toward exciting new goals. And when students know they’re being heard, they develop self-worth, engage meaningfully in their own academic success, and become purposeful in their educations.” (Qualgia, R.J. & Corso, M.J. (2014) *Student Voice: The Instrument of Change*. Corwin Press.)
- **Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Usable Knowledge.** An article on this site, on “Giving Students Voice,” recommends these important principles: “Regularly solicit student feedback. Engage students in studying and assessing their school. Include authentic student representation on leadership teams. Invite students to any discussion related to their own learning. Consider young people as stakeholders and partners in their schools. (<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/08/giving-students-voice>.)
- **Student Voice.** An organization called Student Voice provides excellent resources. Here is what they have to say: “Through our core initiatives, Student Voice aims to illustrate the state of schools today, as well as identify student-centric and student-created solutions to address the systemic inequity in the American education system. This inequity manifests itself as a disparity in access to opportunities and resources across schools nationwide, specifically as it relates to socioeconomically disadvantaged students and school districts. At Student Voice, we believe all students have the right to hold educational institutions accountable to them as partners in shaping their foundational experiences. Students must



have a more powerful voice in order to combat the systemic inequity.” ([https://www.stuvoice.org/.](https://www.stuvoice.org/))

## STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Work with your school's leadership team to establish a Student Leadership Team. You should choose a great name for your team.

Make sure you are including a diverse group of students on this team. In every school, there are different groups of students who have come together based on interests and activities. Make sure that someone from every social group in your school is involved. Be sure students with disabilities, or other students who are often excluded, are included on the team.

Participation in a Student Leadership Team should be open to all students who are interested. However, it is helpful to start with care to ensure every social group has a representative. Make sure that members of one or several social groups do not take over. Encourage your school to set up a process where students can nominate someone to serve on this Student Leadership Team. Students should also be able to nominate themselves.

Make sure the nomination form specifically seeks to identify the students who are consistently kind and compassionate. The form should questions about times when the nominated student showed leadership in a kind and compassionate way to those outside of their social circle.

These are just some of the kinds of kindness, inclusion, and social justice activities a Student Leadership Team could be engaged in doing:

- **“Welcome to School” Display.** Create a display at the entrance of the school that promotes the concepts of kindness, inclusion, and social justice for all students.
- **Daily or Weekly Announcements.** Make a daily or weekly public school announcement related to kindness and inclusion. Here is an example of what a member of the Student Leadership Team could say:
  - “Hi. I am \_\_\_ a member of the (name of your team) promoting respect, kindness, and inclusion. Here is your quote of the day: “If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Please take a moment today to reach out to be kind or help someone decide on a positive path. And remember to say thank you to someone who reaches out to be kind to you. We are having a meeting of the (name of team). Remember, membership on this team is open to anyone who makes a commitment to be respectful, kind, and inclusive and who wants to help our school community live by these values.”
- **Random Acts of Kindness Campaign.** Launch a campaign to encourage all students to engage in random acts of kindness. The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation site has lots of activities to promote kindness. (Search: random acts of kindness foundation. A search on “kindness, schools” will yield additional ideas.)

- **Posters, Screen Savers, Bookmarks, or T-shirt Design.** Hold a poster, screen-saver, or book-mark contest to develop kindness images to spread throughout your school.
- **Quote Competition.** Encourage students to find and submit a quote by a famous person that relates to respect, kindness, inclusion, and that promotes stepping in to help. The quotes can be used in announcements. They could be turned into posters and the like. Students could vote on their favorite quotes.
- **School-wide Kindness and Inclusion Events.** Participate in kindness and inclusion events that are promoted by other organizations. These are some examples:
  - Beyond Differences. Beyond Differences, promotes a number of wonderful activities to help students promote social inclusion. (Search: Beyond Differences.) These are events that take place on one day and include No One Eats Alone, Know Your Classmates, and Call It Out.
  - GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) No Name Calling Week. GLSEN hosts a No Name Calling Week generally mid-school year. (D+Search: GLSEN, no name calling.) Their web site has excellent resources to support this effort.
- **Mindful Space or Mindful Movement.** Set up a physical space in the school where students can go to practice mindfulness. Set up a mindful movement yoga program for students to participate in during lunch or before school.
- **Wall of Thanks.** Create a bulletin board area in the school as a “Wall of Thanks.” Provide ample “sticky notes” and pens nearby. Encourage everyone in the school community—students, staff, and parents—to regularly write personal messages of gratitude to others or for anything they are personally thankful for.
  - To expand on this activity, members of the Student Leadership Team could pick out a few messages each day to read over the intercom in the morning.
- **Celebrating and Building Strengths.** Encourage your school to have students complete the VIA Character Strengths survey discussed in Chapter 2.
  - Encourage all students to create a name plate for their locker that sets forth their key strengths.
  - The VIA Character site contains many other activities and approaches that can be used to promote the different strengths. Your team could lead a campaign to focus on one character strength each week.
- **Community Service Day.** Set up one afternoon a month where students go into the community to provide service to others.
- **Flash Dance.** Create a flash dance to promote kindness and inclusion. Look for videos on this. (Search: anti bullying flash mob.)

## OTHER SOURCES OF INSIGHT

There are a number of additional excellent organizations online that have wonderful programs, or resources that could be integrated into school activities promoting kindness, inclusion, and social justice. Among the best are:

- **Greater Good Science Center.** The Greater Good Science Center has excellent resources on supporting a meaningful happy life. (Search: greater good science.) They also have a news letter. Sign up to receive this news letter and create activities related to the insight that is provided.
- **Teaching Tolerance Resources.** Southern Poverty Law Clinic's excellent Teaching Tolerance program has a wealth insight and resources for activities that can easily be student led. (Search: teaching tolerance.)
- **One and All.** One and All is a site established by Harvard Graduate School of Education that focuses on Strategies to Protect Students, Reject Bullying, and Build Communities Where Everyone Thrives. (Search: harvard, one and all.)

## TEEN PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Many teens are experiencing challenges in mental health. Due to lack of sufficient funding, most schools do not have enough counselors.

Since the 1990s, adult peer support programs have been established in communities. These peer support programs train people who have experienced challenges to provide support to others who are experiencing those same challenges. Research has found such programs to be highly effective.

In the few instances when student peer support programs have been implemented in high schools these programs demonstrated excellent effectiveness in addressing the emotional distress of students. Through these programs, students are trained to provide support to their peers. There is no reason these programs could not also be implemented in middle schools.

While this approach is just starting to be discussed as part of a solution, you could ask your school to initiate this kind of a program. You will likely be able to find an adult peer support program in your community that could provide you with guidance and support.

Do not let the fact that no one has even done this before in schools in your community or state stop you. Be Positively Powerful. Step forward with proposed idea to help make life better for the students in your school and community through a peer support program.





# APPENDIX A. GUIDELINES FOR YOUR JOURNAL

It is recommended that you get a hardbound journal to write in as you begin to implement the Be Positively Powerful strategies. Write in your Journal every evening.

It can take some time to change the neural connections in your brain to allow you to achieve greater happiness and success. You should not expect to achieve success immediately. Try to make a commitment to keep this Journal for at least 40 days. Then, make a decision about whether you want to continue writing in your Journal.

It is best to combine your Journaling with the Empowerment Assessment in Appendix C.

These are some questions you can respond to for some advanced planning:

- Who are the trusted adults you can connect with, including in your family and outside your home? How can you maintain frequent contact with these adults? Do you think it would be helpful to have another or more trusted adults? What steps can you take to establish a relationship with a new trusted adult?
- Who are your important friends? How can you maintain frequent contact with your important friends? Do you think it would be helpful to have another or more friends? What steps can you take to establish a relationship with a new friend?
- Complete the short character strengths inventory in Appendix B or the longer one at <http://viacharacter.org>. What are your top five character strengths? What character strengths would you like to increase?
- What kinds of situations might make you feel distressed? What steps can you take to self regulate if you feel distressed?

Here are some thought-starters. Feel free to modify these suggestions and expand on what you write about.

- Did you Make a Positive Connection with a friend today? If so, who was this and what did you do or talk about?
- Did you Make a Positive Connection with a trusted adult today? If so, who was this and what did you do or talk about?

- How did you Reach Out to be Kind to others today? (Goal is reaching out to at least 5 people.) What did you do? How do you think this made this person feel? How did this make you feel?
- How did you Use Your Strengths today (Goal is to intentionally use a character strength you have or are developing at least 5 times a day.) What character strength did you use? What did you do? How do you think this worked? What did you learn?
- How did you focus on the Good by paying attention to positive experiences? (Goal is to intentionally focus on at least 5 positive experiences a day.) What were the positive experiences? Why did these experiences make you feel happy?
- Did you take several minutes at least 5 times a day to Be Mindful? Did you engage in one longer session of meditation or yoga?
- Did you have to self-regulate in response to a more challenging situation? What happened that triggered you? If so, describe the situation. Were you able to self-regulate? If you were, how did this work? What did you learn? If you did not, what did you learn that you can use to make positive choices the next time this occurs?
- Did you have an experience where you needed to Keep Your Personal Power by standing tall and controlling your thinking? If so, describe the situation, describe how you responded, describe how this worked, and describe what you learned?
- Did you have an experience where you needed to intentionally Think Things Through to identify a strategy to take in response to a situation that occurred? If so, describe the situation, describe the strategies you considered, the strategy you chose and why, describe how this worked, and describe what you learned?
- Did you set a goal for today or for this week and decide on several action steps to accomplish this goal? If so, describe your goal and action steps, describe what happened, and describe what you learned? What goal do you want to achieve tomorrow? What actions steps do you need to take to accomplish this goal?

# APPENDIX B. CHARACTER STRENGTHS SURVEY

Think about who you are as a person. Indicate whether each strength is very much like you, often like you, at times like you, not often like you, or not at all like you.

Strength	Description	Very Much Like Me	Often Like me	Some Times Like Me	Not Often Like Me	Not At All Like Me
Creativity	I like to think of new and better ways of doing things.					
Curiosity	I am always asking questions and love to discover new things.					
Judgment	I look at all sides of an issue to come up with the right answer.					
Love of learning	I love to learn new things.					
Wisdom	I am considered wise because I evaluate things from different perspectives.					
Bravery	I speak up for what is right, even if others do not agree with me.					
Persevere	I finish what I start, even if it becomes difficult.					
Honesty	I speak the truth and I take responsibility for my feelings and behaviors.					
Zest	I live life as an adventure filled with excitement and energy.					
Love	I value the close relationships I have with others.					
Kindness	I enjoy helping others, even if I do not know them well.					
Social intelligence	I pay attention to the motives and feelings of others.					

Strength	Description	Very Much Like Me	Often Like me	Some Times Like Me	Not Often Like Me	Not At All Like Me
Teamwork	I always do my share and I work hard for the success of my group.					
Fairness	I treat all people in a fair and just manner.					
Leadership	I am good at providing leadership and direction when I am with a group of people.					
Forgiveness	I am willing to forgive someone who has done something wrong.					
Humility	I am humble and let my actions speak more than my words.					
Prudence	I am careful about what I do and strive not to do things I might later regret.					
Self-control	I pay attention and am always in control of what I do and say.					
Appreciate excellence	I appreciate the beautiful and wonderful things in life.					
Gratitude	I pay attention to the good things that happen to me and express my thanks.					
Hope	I believe that good things are coming to me now.					
Humor	I like to laugh, smile, and see the good in all situations.					
Spirituality	I feel my life has a higher purpose that fits within the larger meaning of life.					

Realize that people have different strengths and that you can choose to build new strengths throughout your life.

Looking over this list, what do you think are your five most important strengths?

Looking over this list, what are the strengths you would most like to develop

These Character Strengths were first included in Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This inventory of strengths was developed based on material from the VIA Institute on Character. A more comprehensive survey of personal strengths is available on their web site. © Copyright 2004-2014, VIA Institute on Character. All rights reserved. <http://www.viacharacter.org>. This Inventory was created and is disseminated with permission.

# APPENDIX C. EMPOWERMENT ASSESSMENT

Below are a number of statements about happiness, resilience, and empowerment. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

Please read the statements carefully. Don't take too long over individual questions. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The first answer that comes into your head is probably the right one.

## FIRST SURVEY

Complete this survey before you start to use the Be Positively Powerful strategies.

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
I am generally pleased with the way I am.				
I feel that my life is rewarding.				
I have warm feelings towards most people.				
I wake up in the morning feeling rested.				
I am committed and involved.				
Life for me is generally good.				
I am satisfied about most everything in my life.				
I am generally happy.				
I usually have a cheerful effect on others.				
I can find time for everything I want to do.				
I feel that I am in control of my life.				
I can do most things if I try.				
I can work out my problems.				
If I start to get distressed, I can calm myself.				
I find it easy to make decisions.				

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
I have fun with other people.				
Others are there for me if I am having a challenge.				
I am generally optimistic about my future.				
If I have a challenge, I can use this to grow.				
I feel my life has meaning and purpose.				
The fact that my life has meaning makes me happy.				
Every day means new hope for me.				
Add the numbers in each column.	Add up the 1's:	Add up the 2's:	Add up the 3's:	Add up the 4's:

Now comes the math. Note that each column has a number—1, 2, 3, 4. For every check you placed in each column, add up the numbers for that column. So if you placed 8 checks in column 4, this would be 32. Then, add all of the numbers together. Then divide by 22, because there are 22 statements. What is your current empowerment score? \_\_\_\_\_.

## 40-DAY WEEK FOLLOW UP SURVEY

After you have diligently tried to implement the Be Positively Powerful strategies for 40 days, complete this survey again. (You do not have to implement the strategies perfectly every day.)

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
I am generally pleased with the way I am.				
I feel that my life is rewarding.				
I have warm feelings towards most people.				
I wake up in the morning feeling rested.				
I am committed and involved.				
Life for me is generally good.				
I am satisfied about most everything in my life.				
I am generally happy.				
I usually have a cheerful effect on others.				

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
I can find time for everything I want to do.				
I feel that I am in control of my life.				
I can do most things if I try.				
I can work out my problems.				
If I start to get distressed, I can calm myself.				
I find it easy to make decisions.				
I have fun with other people.				
Others are there for me if I am having a challenge.				
I am generally optimistic about my future.				
If I have a challenge, I can use this to grow.				
I feel my life has meaning and purpose.				
The fact that my life has meaning makes me happy.				
Every day means new hope for me.				
Add the numbers in each column.	Add up the 1's:	Add up the 2's:	Add up the 3's:	Add up the 4's:

Now, do the math again. Add up the numbers in the columns and then add all of the numbers and divide by 22. What is your empowerment score now? \_\_\_\_\_