



RESPOND- ING TO CRITICISM

Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can hurt so much worse!
This lesson helps the girls realize how powerful their words can be, how to tell
the difference between helpful and hurtful criticism, and how to handle both.

INTRODUCTION

Ask the class if criticism is good or bad, and why.

Discuss the following quote:

“In order to avoid criticism, DO nothing, SAY nothing, BE nothing.”
– Elbert Hubbard

Materials

index cards

ACTIVITY 1

Explain the difference between Constructive Criticism and Mean-Spirited Criticism

Constructive Criticism is meant to help you do something better or be a better person. It is informative and specific, but encourages you in the end.

Mean-Spirited Criticism is meant to make you feel bad about yourself. It is not meant to help you.

Read the following examples of criticism (or make up your own) and ask the girls to decide which are mean-spirited and which are constructive.

- This paper seems like it was written by a second grader. (mean)
- It's great that you are an honest person, but sometimes you hurt people's feelings with your honesty. You could try not telling people everything that is wrong with them, and point out the positives instead. (constructive)
- You have a good strong opinion, but when you interrupt and talk over people it's disruptive to the whole class. Could you save your comments until the end? (constructive)
- Don't be so lame. You let people walk all over you. (mean)
- You are such a nice person, and that means people may take advantage of you. Try standing up for yourself. (constructive)

Ask the girls for examples of mean and constructive criticism.

Go over the following ways to think about criticism. Talk about how you could put each one into practice.

Tip #1: Consider the source of the criticism. Is this someone you respect or someone who does not have your best interest in mind? If it is someone you respect, really think about whether the comment has any truth to it.

Tip #2: Ask yourself, could this person be criticizing something in me because she really dislikes that about herself? You'd be surprised how often this is the case.

Tip #3: Imagine the criticism is a gift. Put it your pocket, and carry it around for a couple days. After a little time has passed, see how the criticism feels. If you think it might make you a better person, accept it as a gift. If not, throw it away!

ACTIVITY 2

Gather in a circle on the floor.

Label a flip chart sheet or the whiteboard: Positive Responses to Criticism. As a group, brainstorm ways to respond to mean-spirited criticism. The purpose of this activity is to come up with responses that will disarm a bully, not engage her in conflict.

After the brainstorm, see if your group missed any of these ideas:

Possible reactions to mean-spirited criticism:

Make a joke or laugh it off.

Gently confront - Ask the person why she said it.

Point out that the comment was really mean. Look innocent and unhurt while doing this.

Agree lightheartedly.

Ignore and walk away like it's no big deal.

Ask questions.

Pretend you can't hear.

Tell them calmly to quit it.

If the situation is serious – tell a teacher you feel bullied. You are not in this alone. An adult can always help if you can't handle it on your own.

STOP HERE! The next activity takes at least 45 minutes to do, including discussion time, and cannot be interrupted. If you do not have 45 minutes, play games or do skits, and SAVE this activity for next time.

For many girls, this is the most important lesson of the curriculum and the hardest to teach because it deals with some pretty heavy emotions. If the girls don't take it seriously, it won't work. Before doing this next activity, stress to the girls the importance of being somber for this. This is an opportunity for some girls to face their worst fears and get stronger, and we can all help each other.

Encourage girls as they do this activity, to keep a neutral expression, make eye contact, and stand up straight.

Let the girls know that for this next activity they will have to be brave. This is a hard thing to do and they should support each other.

ACTIVITY 3

Set the tone by sharing a heartfelt, personal story of a time you were hurt by someone who bullied, criticized, or made fun of you. Describe the situation and how it felt.

Go around the circle and ask if anyone is willing to share a story about an experience they had. No names! No one will be forced to share, but hopefully they will all feel comfortable opening up.

You may choose to do this next exercise anonymously or not.

Pass out index cards. Ask each girl to write down the most hurtful thing that someone has said, or could say, to her.

If your group would be comfortable reading their cards out loud, go around the circle and have each girl read what is on her card. You may discuss briefly the importance of the card to each girl.

If your group would not do well with this, gather the cards, shuffle them, and read them aloud anonymously. Don't pass the cards out again because the girls may know each other's handwriting.

Teacher Tip

This exercise works better when the girls are willing to share their worst fears, but we know this kind of vulnerability won't work in every group. You can make a decision on anonymity based on how well your group has gelled to this point.

Once the cards have been read out loud...

Line the girls up against a wall facing you. Collect the cards if you don't already have them.

Call one girl forward. Either read her card to her, or if you chose the anonymous version, read her any card.

The girl standing before you must respond to your mean-spirited criticism using one of the positive responses you just brainstormed.

Make sure the girls respond to the criticism without name-calling, becoming aggressive, or otherwise giving the bully what she wants. The purpose of this is to essentially "blow off" the criticism to get it to stop.

When everyone has gone, remind the girls the purpose of the lesson is to be able to respond positively. We can teach other people to treat us well by not bowing down to a bully's level.

DISCUSSION

Who were you especially proud of during that activity?

How does it feel to be hurt by someone you trust and had built a relationship with?

Do you have a responsibility to protect other girls at your school? How do you do that?

How does a leader handle criticism?

Discuss reasons why some people become bullies, or become very critical or mean.

Do you know a story of a bully who was hiding her pain or embarrassment? Discuss.

The next time someone tries to hurt you with criticism, remember this mantra: A bully gets bigger when I feel smaller.

Thirteen **30**

Tell about a time when someone criticised you and you took it well.

Homebound: Tonight, ask your mom or dad, "Did you ever stick up for someone being teased or bullied?"

