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## Using This Book in an Empowering Way

Part I of this book (chapters 1 through 7) offers activities that help students transform school into a context for values-consistent behavior. These activities help students discover the elements of empowerment: exploration, motivation, participation, openness, willingness, empathy, and resilience. Chapter 1 covers exploration, which begins with curiosity; chapter 2 covers motivation and helping students find reasons for doing their schoolwork; chapter 3 addresses participation and helping students create opportunities to enact their values; chapter 4 is about openness to sharing one's values; willingness to serve one's values when it's difficult to do so is addressed in chapter 5; empathy, which allows us to treat others according to our values, is explained in chapter 6; and chapter 7 covers resilience and helps students treat themselves according to their own values. The activities in part I help students increase the influence of their values and reduce the influence of unhelpful judgments about themselves, others, and school itself. By accepting difficult thoughts and feelings as a normal part of living in accordance with their values, students are empowered to find meaning and purpose at school.

While part I is about what students themselves can do to connect school to their values, part II (chapters 8 through 13) is about what teachers can do to empower students through various aspects of their work. Those aspects include dialogue with students, partnerships with parents, collaboration with colleagues, curriculum development, and self-directed inquiry, as well as practicing the values that are important to you.

In contextual behavioral science, something is good when it *works* in a particular context—not because it fits a predefined image of what's good (Biglan & Hayes, 1996; Fox, 2006; Hayes, Hayes, & Reese, 1988). We encourage you to approach this book's strategies and activities flexibly so they work for your students and school. We hope the freedom to do what works for your classroom empowers you to empower your students.



# PART I

## Activities That Empower Students

The activities in this part of the book empower students to transform school into a context for values-consistent behavior. The chapters are:

- **Chapter 1**—“Exploration: Empower Students to Become Curious About Their Values”
- **Chapter 2**—“Motivation: Empower Students to Make Their Values the Reason for Doing Schoolwork”
- **Chapter 3**—“Participation: Empower Students to Create Opportunities to Enact Their Values”
- **Chapter 4**—“Openness: Empower Students to Share Their Values”
- **Chapter 5**—“Willingness: Empower Students to Serve Their Values Even When It’s Hard”
- **Chapter 6**—“Empathy: Empower Students to Treat Each Other According to Their Values”
- **Chapter 7**—“Resilience: Empower Students to Treat Themselves According to Their Values”

We wrote the activities as scripts to give you a sense of what they might sound like, but we hope you *won't* memorize and follow them. Instead, adapt them so they work for you and your students. Convert handouts into slides, have students use tablets instead of paper and pencil, or use digital sharing tools. Extend parts that seem important and cut parts that don't. Decide which activities to use and in what order. We don't intend these activities to be a curriculum; we mean for you to incorporate them into *your* curriculum.

Each activity includes ideas for how to follow up and create variations. Most are ways to account for students' needs and interests, overcome obstacles, or use the activity in particular situations that commonly arise in schools. Sometimes there are ideas for content-specific variations, but all activities are intended for any middle or high school class in any subject. Again, we hope you'll come up with your own creative variations that work for you and your students.

Each activity also includes a discussion of challenges that might come up. In general, students might seek approval from each other or from you, stay attached to their beliefs about themselves, or avoid

unwanted feelings like fear, embarrassment, or hurt. These behaviors are all forms of psychological rigidity that can easily prevent students from clarifying their values and acting on them (Hayes et al., 2012). If these activities are to empower students to transform school into a meaningful and vital place, we don't want students to subvert that process by creating more rigid rules for themselves or finding new reasons to avoid school. Just notice those reactions and move on.

We have not experienced high school students, who are older, being generally less willing to participate in the activities presented in this book. The teacher's psychological flexibility, the relationships among the students and with the teacher, and the teacher's ability to adapt the activity to the students' needs rather than rigidly follow the directions make the difference.

We wish we could indicate how many minutes each activity will take so you could plan accordingly, but the time required depends on whether you choose to do all of the activity or just some parts, how much time you devote to discussion and reflection, your previous experience with this sort of work, and many other elements of the context. Instead of trying to figure out how long an activity will take and then setting aside that much time (or deciding not to do the activity because it takes too long), we recommend deciding first how much time you're willing to allocate to an activity and then adjusting and adapting it so it fits that time. We also hope that empowering your students to enact their values at school will be worth the time you make to do it.

Many of the activities are intentionally playful. Students might fly paper planes, make stickers, sing, draw on paper plates, or roam around the school. Or they might use goofy metaphors: time becomes beans, failures become soggy clothes, hiding their prejudicial thoughts becomes sitting on their hands. If you think your students will find these activities too goofy—and then feel insulted and shut down—you can try acknowledging the weirdness or making up a different version that feels a little less weird. (We include suggestions for how to do this.) But the playfulness serves a purpose. It helps students relate differently to their experiences at school and creates room for discovery and behavior change. You might be surprised by how much your students, even the older ones, enjoy and benefit from play.

As playful as the activities are, they also represent serious encounters with values and vulnerabilities. Teachers who use these as cute activities to fill time can actually do more harm than good. You can establish an atmosphere of safety, trust, and compassion before attempting these activities *and* through doing them. You can serve as what some psychologists call a *secure base* for your students—that is, a “nurturing place to return to when things become overwhelming” (Kolts, 2016, p. 40). Listening, affirming risks, normalizing hesitation, and interrupting moments of disrespectful behavior can help students trust you and the environment you're creating.

Finally, most activities assume the teacher's active participation. You, too, will fly a paper plane, make stickers, sing, draw on a plate, and roam around the school. You'll also do a fair amount of sharing—even when the students are keeping their experiences private. That's hard when you're the authority figure or when you're used to putting students at the center. But the only way they'll know it's okay for them to be vulnerable is if you are. We address your vulnerability at the end of every chapter.