

Social and Emotional Learning

Lesson Title: Perfectionism Games

Grade Level: High School

Project and Purpose

Students participate in improvisation games that teach strategies for dealing with perfectionism.

Essential Question

What are some strategies to help us embrace making mistakes?

Materials

- A line through the middle of the classroom. This can be created by a natural line (perhaps a line created by tiles) or by using paper or painter's tape to extend from one end of the room to the other
- Space in the room for pairs to work and to form a large circle

Teacher

1. Explain that today's session will use games to explore the concept of perfectionism.
2. The first game is "Toe the Line." Point out the line in the room and divide the group in half, each group lining up against a wall facing the line. Tell students that you will make a statement, and if they 100% agree, they will place their toes on the line. If they 100% disagree, they will remain where they are. Any feelings in between may be expressed by standing close to the line or close to the wall. After each statement, you will ask students to find someone near their position on the line to have a 30 second conversation about the statement. When you call "Next!" students will step away and listen for the next statement.

Statements to use:

- I only raise my hand to answer a question in class when I know I have the right answer.
- I don't like to start a task unless I understand every single step of what we are supposed to do.
- Starting my homework usually takes me a while.
- I prefer printing to cursive handwriting.
- I am usually satisfied with the grades I earn.
- If I get a poor grade, I get very upset.
- I tend to work slowly on tests and projects to make sure my work is extremely neat and there are no mistakes.
- I often start my work over from the beginning if I find a mistake.
- If I don't know an answer, I am comfortable guessing.
- I hate being wrong.

3. Ask students to make a circle (or an oval, depending on the room) and discuss how some of these statements help people recognize if they are perfectionists. Sometimes just knowing others around you feel the same way about perfection can give you some support. Asking for help is very difficult for perfectionists in general, but look who else was near you during these statements and think about how you might work together to solve some perfectionism issues next time.
4. For the next game called “Ta-daaa!” students will work with a partner, someone they trust. Give them a count of 10 to find a partner and stand facing each other with enough space to move around a bit.
5. Explain that people who are perfectionists are often afraid of making any kind of mistake. This winds up hindering that person’s ability to problem solve and creativity — two of the top characteristics sought by employers. Therefore, this game is going to concentrate on celebrating mistakes.
6. Have everyone in the group practice saying, “I blew it! Ta daaaaa!” Encourage saying it with enthusiasm and as much volume as the space will allow.
7. The partners will work together to create a big, flamboyant bow to go with the phrase, one that takes prideful ownership of whatever mistake happens. Say the phrase, then do the bow. Give them time to practice (1-2 minutes) and then ask volunteers to share their phrase-bows with the group.
8. Ask partners to quickly discuss how doing something this silly might help them deal with the emotions that come with making a mistake.
9. Gather the group back into a very wide circle for game #3, “Group Counting,” a game that most people cannot win the first time they play. The goal is to count as high as you can get, starting at the number one, one person at a time, taking a step into the middle of the circle as the number is shouted. Anyone in the circle can shout out the next number and take a step into the circle. The trick is that if more than one person says a number at the same time, you have to start over again. Nobody may cue another person to go; all number shouts outs must be made without a signal.
10. Instead of groaning when someone “messes up” and the group inevitably has to start over, everyone yells “We blew it! Ta daaaaa!” and happily starts over. Nobody is ever chastised for making a mistake or criticized for messing up; all mistakes are celebrated. Consider discussing strategies to be more successful that follow the standard rules.
11. When success is finally achieved—if ever—groan because the game is over...

Conclusion

Gather back as a group and discuss how these games exposed your own attitudes toward perfection. With their partners from Ta-daaa!, ask students to contribute a reason for a class list of why it’s okay to make mistakes. Their list might include but is not limited to:

- Mistakes make us think harder and try harder
- Everyone makes mistakes, including very smart people, parents and teachers
- Getting things wrong gives us another opportunity to do it again, which helps us be better
- Getting things wrong develops patience and persistence – two skills that are more important than getting things perfect
- If you are making mistakes it might mean you are working at a good speed (not too slowly)
- Lower grades/mistakes mean other people can help us which is good for relationships