



# SPOTLIGHT ON LIFE SKILLS

170 Middle School Lessons  
© For A School-Wide  
Character-Development Program

Mar:co

Written By  
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## **SPOTLIGHT ON LIFE SKILLS:**

***170 Middle School Lessons For A School-Wide Character-Development Program***

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## How Well Did The Program Work?

Daily lessons grew into a year-long, school-wide curriculum for character development or an advisory program. Yearly evaluations by students, teachers, and administrators credit the program with helping our school become more orderly, creating a more positive school climate, and enabling students to prepare for academic and career success. Students:

- demonstrated improved skills for learning and greater understanding of the relationship between school success and future success in education and in the world of work.
- recognized the value of practicing the skills taught to create positive life-long habits. Most notable was the improvement, as communication skills developed, of interpersonal relationships between students and between students and teachers. A mere reminder that “That’s not *The Pikesville Way*” defused peer conflicts and unacceptable student behavior.

Teachers, administrators, and students have really bought into this program, which created a school language and a shared school culture. School pride grew as students realized that by cooperating with behavioral expectations, we could work as a team to create a school where everyone can feel comfortable and learn. Teaching skills and attitudes that will lead to school success creates a feeling of student empowerment. This tried-and-true program is as much a part of our daily school routine as taking attendance. It’s our school’s *Way*. Make it *The (NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL) Way*, too!

## Research-Based Program Evaluation

Our middle school has used this character-development/advisory program for five years. At the end of each year, students evaluate the program. Data collected from the 2008 school year indicate:

- 100% of students listed that the topics that were helpful
- 98% of students specified something about succeeding in school that they learned from the program
- 98% of students specified something about getting along with others that they learned from the program
- 98% of students specified something about themselves that they learned from the program
- 97% of students listed something they learned from the program that will help prepare them for high school
- 95% of students listed something they learned from the program that would help them succeed in the future at work

## Selected Student Evaluation Comments

“It is good learning different things that can help us in our futures.”

“It is a good way to start the day because it gets us thinking and ready for the day.”

“*The Pikesville Way* is like a tour guide to help you succeed in life.”

“I like that the day’s topic always includes an example.”

“*The Pikesville Way* helped us become respectful, responsible, cooperative, and accountable.”

“It is a good way for students to motivate themselves every day and make choices in life.”

## Day Two: Be A Middle School Champion!



**Spotlight on:** What makes a (NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL) champion?

**Introduction:** Do you realize that people who become champions have something in common? Champions earn fame and public admiration because they consistently do their best. World-class champions like Dr. Ben Carson, Michael Phelps, Tiger Woods, or J.K. Rowling (*Note: Change these names if others are more appropriate.*) have discovered how to use their talents to reach their goals.

**Discussion:** Think about what champions have in common.

- What must people do in order to become champions? (Champions work hard, practice, never give up, discover their talents, stay motivated, and believe in themselves.)
- Do you think talent or hard work creates champions? (A combination is needed. Abilities are not valuable unless they're developed through effort and commitment. CEOs of many major companies were average students who worked hard to excel.)
- How will believing in yourself and maintaining a positive attitude help you accomplish your goals? (Visualizing your success helps you stay motivated and increases your chances for success.)

**Summary:** Being a champion starts with a positive attitude and believing in yourself. Champions are not always famous or extraordinary. But all champions believe that if they work hard, they can accomplish their personal goal. When you believe in yourself and maintain a positive attitude, you strengthen your motivation, your ability to face challenges, and your chances to reach your goals.

**Today:** Practice saying to yourself *I have what it takes to be a champion!* Repeat this affirmation throughout the day. Remember: The first step in becoming a champion is believing you can accomplish any goal you set for yourself.

## Day One: Responsibility II



### Spotlight on: Recognizing responsibility

**Introduction:** Have you ever used *Wikipedia*? It's the largest online multi-lingual encyclopedia. Anyone may submit an article to be included in this Internet reference tool.

**Discussion:** Imagine you've decided to write an article for *Wikipedia*. Your topic is *responsibility*. Since you're in middle school, you feel you've learned a lot about being responsible and want to share your ideas with students all over the world. To prepare to write this article, think of an adult you consider a model of *responsibility*. Then answer these questions based on that person.

- What are some behaviors you would expect to see from a responsible adult? (A responsible adult gets to work on time, is organized and reliable, works hard, and meets deadlines.)
- How do these responsible behaviors help this adult achieve success? (He/she completes all work and earns the respect of his/her employer/other employees.)
- Why would this person be a good role model for students who want to be responsible? (This person exemplifies how responsible behavior contribute to career success.)
- Name one responsible behavior you share with this adult. (You get to school on time, keep your papers organized, work hard, and hand in assignments on time.)
- What one of this adult's responsible behaviors would you like to emulate? (He/she is seldom absent, brings needed materials, does quality work every day, and completes all work.)

**Summary:** Observing responsible adults has taught you a lot about how to be responsible. You know that responsible adults mean what they say, complete their work on time, keep their business papers organized, and do their best on the job every day. Responsible adults such as parents, teachers, neighbors, and relatives earn respect because responsibility is a trait respected at home, at school, and in the workplace.

**Today:** Continue to observe how adults demonstrate responsibility. Imitate some of those behaviors. Practice behaviors that will demonstrate that you're a responsible student.

## Day Two: Respect



**Spotlight on:**     **Respect for yourself**

**Introduction:**     Being respectful of others begins with learning how to respect yourself. Respect begins on the inside. When you feel proud about your choices, your behavior, your accomplishments, and the kind of person you are, you respect yourself.

**Discussion:**     We respect something of value. Each person has many valuable qualities. To have self-respect, you must recognize what makes you special. Think about what you respect about yourself. Today is your chance to recognize your positive qualities. Today is your chance to brag.

Say something positive about yourself when you answer these questions.

- What makes you a good son or daughter?
- What are your two best qualities?
- Why would you pick yourself for a friend?
- Why would a teacher pick you as a student?
- What positive contributions do you plan to make to the world?
- What can you do today to increase your self-respect? (Be polite and friendly, do quality work in class, and use self-control to make responsible choices.)

**Summary:**     Before you can respect others, you must respect yourself. When you recognize your own value, it will be easier for you to admire others and treat them with respect. When you respect yourself, you'll be more likely to set high expectations for yourself and work hard to reach your goals. When you respect yourself and believe you have value, you earn the respect and friendship of others.

**Today:**     Remind yourself: *I am a valuable person. I must respect myself before I can expect others to respect me.*

## Day Three: Cooperation I



### Spotlight on: The power of cooperation

**Introduction:** If you've ever watched doctors and nurses perform surgery on TV or in a movie, you've seen how surgical teams work together during an operation. Each person in the operating room has a special skill and job to do, but all members of the surgical team work together to make sure the surgery is successful. When the surgery is completed, they congratulate each other for each person's part in helping the patient. Surgery is a team effort. Working cooperatively builds team spirit in any profession. Successful partnerships increase self-respect and respect for others. Successful partnerships create new friendships and pride in shared accomplishments.

**Discussion:** In order for people to work successfully in groups, cooperation is essential. Have you ever considered the importance of working well with others?

Imagine that you work for an advertising company and your job is to select a slogan that would point out the benefits of cooperation. Explain to the other members of your advertising team how the following statements explain the power of cooperation:

- *All for one and one for all.*
- *Two heads are better than one.*
- *Three helping each other will do as much as six men working alone.*
- *An army of one*
- *There is no i in team.*

**Summary:** Students must cooperate with others because they work as members of many groups throughout the school day. Cooperation is a powerful tool. It's the key to working successfully with others, whether you're completing a group project, leaving the cafeteria in an orderly way, or boarding the bus safely. By working cooperatively with others, you do your part to make our school an orderly and positive place. The ability to cooperate with others is a life-long skill that will be valuable in all school, family, and work settings.

**Today:** Do your part to build team spirit at (NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL) by working cooperatively with others. Remember that we share the common goal of learning together in a positive school atmosphere. When you cooperate with other students and teachers, you're following *The* (NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL) *Way*.

## Day Three: Apologizing/Forgiving



### Spotlight on: **Accepting an apology**

**Introduction:** In tennis, the person who is serving hits the ball over the net. The opponent tries to hit the ball back to the server. If the opponent did not attempt to return the serve, there would be no game. We could compare the server in the tennis game to a person making an apology. We could compare the person who needs to return the serve to the person who accepts the apology. If the apology isn't accepted, the game (or relationship) may be over.

**Discussion:** Just as there is an art to *making* an apology, there's an art to *receiving* an apology.

- Why should someone who is hurt or angry be willing to listen to an apology? (It gives the person who is hurt or angry an opportunity to express his/her feelings, shows respect for the person making the apology, is a chance to resolve the conflict, and shows maturity and politeness.)
- What should a person do when receiving an apology? (He/she should be a good listener, make eye contact, remember how difficult apologizing can be, and not interrupt.)
- How should a person respond to an apology? (He/she should express feelings about the other person's mistake, ask that it never happen again, accept the apology, thank the other person for initiating the apology, and acknowledge that apologizing is hard to do.)
- Can you think of a time someone apologized to you? How did you feel before, during, and after the apology?
- Do you think it is more difficult to apologize or to receive an apology? Why?

**Summary:** Understanding how difficult it is to make an apology, be a respectful and attentive listener when someone apologizes to you. Show respect to the person apologizing by looking at him or her, listening without interrupting, and being patient. It's important to thank the person for taking the time to apologize. If you accept the apology, say so. If you're not ready to accept the apology, state that you need more time to think about things. Keep the door open for future communication.

## Day Three: Success In School Prepares Students For Success At Work



### Spotlight on: **Being punctual**

**Introduction:** How many times do you think you could be late to work before your employer decided to replace you? Employees are expected to be punctual and to be responsible enough to be ready to work at the time they're expected to begin.

**Discussion:** As a student, you're expected to get to school on time. You're expected to arrive at each class and be seated at your desk, completing the drill, before the late bell rings.

- Do you know anyone who is always late when you have plans? How do you feel about this person's lateness?
- What steps can students take to avoid being late to school? (You can set an alarm, get up earlier, or ask your parents to wake you.)
- What prevents some students from getting to class on time? (They're socializing, not walking directly to their next class.)
- Why is it important for students to arrive on time for class? (They can get materials organized, complete the drill, and write down homework assignments.)
- What is the consequence being late for class? (You won't complete the drill, might get detention, and will miss instruction and opportunities to ask questions before class begins. The teacher won't see you as dependable.)

**Summary:** Every minute of learning time is important. Students who come to school on time and arrive at class before the late bell rings show that they're responsible, reliable, and trustworthy.

**Today:** Take the most direct route to class. Be seated and ready to work before the late bell rings.

## Day One: Coping Skills II

### Spotlight on: Tolerance

**Introduction:** Many adults don't like music teenagers enjoy. Many adults criticize rap music, hip hop, or *Top 40* songs. They stereotype all teen music as vulgar or violent. If adults gave teen music a chance, they might enjoy some of the songs and messages. Just think what adults might miss by not being willing to step outside their comfort zones to experience something new.

**Discussion:** Being open to different ideas is part of being *tolerant*. Tolerant people respect the beliefs, appearances, limitations, and lifestyles of other people, even when they differ from their own. *Tolerance* is the *ability to be patient and understanding*.

- Explain how you show tolerance by:
  - respecting opinions other students contribute during class discussions, although you disagree. (This shows acceptance of individual differences, understanding that each individual has the right to his/her opinion.)
  - making an effort to get to know someone who wears different styles than you. (This shows that you don't judge a person's worth by outside appearances and that you value everyone's right to personal choice.)
  - being patient when a classmate has trouble understanding what you think is easy. (This shows that you understand that everyone has personal strengths and weaknesses, accept individual differences, and don't judge others.)
- Think of a friend who practices a different religion or belongs to a different race than you do. How has this friendship been a positive experience for you?
- Why does being tolerant sometimes take courage? (You may stand alone. Speaking up for someone who is different may be a challenge.)
- Why is tolerance important throughout our school, community, country, and world? (The world is diverse. Lack of tolerance causes conflicts, anger, and dangerous situations. Everyone's rights must be protected to ensure a peaceful society.)

## Day One: Friends/Peer Pressure



### Spotlight on: **Choosing a diverse group of friends**

**Introduction:** Have you ever seen twins so identical that you couldn't tell them apart? Even people who look exactly alike don't always think or act like one another. Appreciating ideas that differ from our own shows respect for others.

**Discussion:** Reading can teach you about different cultures, religions, and experiences. You can learn about other points of view by talking with people from different backgrounds. Developing friendships with people from different religions, races, or backgrounds can be more than just fun: It can be educational and enrich your life.

- What can you learn by getting to know people who are different from you? (You can learn that people are more alike than different and about different cultures/customs/holidays/values.)
- In what ways are most people alike? (Most people want to belong and be respected, dream about future achievements, and care about family.)
- What basic needs do people have? (We all need to feel safe, happy, and loved and to have, food, clothing, and shelter.)
- Why do you think people may be reluctant to get to know people who aren't like themselves? (They may feel awkward about stepping out of their comfort zone and worry about misunderstandings, stereotyping, and saying the wrong thing.)
- How does learning to respect differences help prepare you for your future at school, in college, at work, and in your community? (Learning to respect differences prepares you to interact with a diverse group of students, co-workers, and employers; increases your comfort level and knowledge about others; and prepares you to live in a global society.)
- Why is it important to understand and respect differences? (Understanding and respecting differences builds character and increases compassion and empathy.)

**Summary:** At (NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL), you'll meet students of different races, cultures, and backgrounds. Each day gives you a wonderful opportunity to appreciate differences. Learning to respect differences at school will help prepare you to live