



Lesson Plan

Level:	Kindergarten to Grade 4
Duration:	30 minutes or longer. Discussion that arises through exercise can lengthen the time.
Theme Objectives:	MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage students to pay attention to their own mental health and well-being.• Encourage students to have positive attitudes and behaviors toward those living with mental health issues or illnesses.

PREAMBLE for TEACHERS:

ROBERT BLY's "A little book on the human shadow" makes reference to an invisible sack that everyone carries around. When we are born, we are at our purest and the invisible sack is empty. As we move through life, genetic makeup and environmental triggers can slowly start to shadow our purest selves as the invisible sack grows with negativity, repressed feelings, anger and defeat... The larger the sack grows, the heavier it becomes to carry and the more it drains us of our energies – physical, social, intellectual and emotional. Using the metaphor of the invisible sack, the following lesson plan will serve to heighten awareness of invisible baggage that fellow students may carry around, and how we inadvertently contribute to the filling of that sack through our daily actions.

REQUIREMENTS

2 to 3 student volunteers (ensure diversity)

It's important for the teacher not to appoint students to participate. Volunteering is critical to ensure that students do not feel targeted throughout the exercise.

- 3 similar-sized cloth grocery bags
- 1 canned good brought in from every student; to be requested by the teacher the day before.
- A few canned goods brought in from the teacher in case extra cans are required.
- At the end of the exercise, all canned goods can be collected and donated to a local food bank.

STEP 1 DISCUSSING FEELINGS and EMOTIONS:

- Brainstorm with the students various kinds of emotions (e.g. sad, lonely, frustrated, excited, nervous, successful, left out, etc.)
- What do these feelings look like? Have the students mime these feelings.
- For the younger students, you could use photos.
- How do these emotions affect other parts of our body? (e.g. upset stomachs, crying, sleeping...) Are the emotions always visible?
- How often do we have these feelings? Do feelings change? How often? Are we all affected the same?
- What emotion makes us feel our best?
- Who can help us overcome emotions that seem too great for us to handle?

STEP 2 VOLUNTEER STUDENTS:

- Ask for three student volunteers to come to the front of the classroom.
- Give each of the three students a cloth shopping bag that they will carry over their shoulder.
- All other seated students become active participants in the exercise and will require their canned good.
- This exercise can also be undertaken in a circle, or weather permitting, outside in the warmth.

STEP 3 ASSUMING CHARACTER IDENTIY:

- Ask the three volunteer students to assume the identity of their favourite character and to describe that character to others (i.e. a Disney princess like Cinderella, Dora the Explorer, a Muppet, Harry Potter, etc.)
- Ask the seated students to add their input into the characters' descriptions.
- Now that the fictitious characters have been established, ask the following questions to the seated students:

Assuming: 1 character is Cinderella; 1 character is Dora the Explorer; 1 character is Sidney Crosby the hockey player. The teacher asks:

DO YOU THINK THAT CINDERELLA, DORA AND SIDNEY CROSBY SOMETIMES GET SAD?

- Some students will answer YES, and then you could request those who answered YES to state why?
 - As reasons are provided (i.e. Sidney Crosby loses a game; Cinderella works hard or her stepsisters are mean; Dora is sick, or lost, etc...), students proceed to put their canned good in the appropriate sack of the student volunteer assuming that character.
 - Students who say NO will require clarification that everyone gets sad sometimes.



DO YOU THINK THAT CINDERELLA, DORA AND SIDNEY CROSBY SOMETIMES GET LONELY?

- Same process repeats and sacks keep filling up with canned goods.

Alternatively, it will be necessary at some point during the exercise to demonstrate balance and show that all feelings are acceptable:

DO YOU THINK THAT CINDERELLA, DORA AND SIDNEY CROSBY ARE HAPPY ON MOST DAYS? WHY?

- Similar process repeats but this time a canned good is removed from the sack.

DO YOU THINK THEY SOMETIMES GET A TUMMY ACHE, OR CRY, OR WORRY ABOUT THINGS? WHY WOULD THAT BE?

- Separation anxiety, social anxiety, new situations and people, can all be scary to children who have a variety of anxiety disorders.
- Same process repeats and sacks keep filling up with canned goods.

DO YOU THINK THAT SOMEONE WAS EVER MEAN TO CINDERELLA, DORA AND SIDNEY CROSBY? WHY?

- At this age, socialization and belonging are critical to self-esteem and confidence.
- Same process repeats and sacks keep filling up with canned goods.

HOW WOULD THIS MAKE CINDERELLA, DORA OR SIDNEY CROSBY FEEL?

- Same process repeats and sacks keep filling up with canned goods.

WHAT COULD YOU DO TO MAKE IT BETTER?

- This type of question leads to the removal of canned goods.

STEP 4 WRAPPING UP:

- At the end of the exercise, you may find that some sacks are fuller than others. Ideally this will happen.
- Explain to students how every day we wake up and most days we are happy and energetic, and our 'invisible sack' is empty.
- Some days we are worried, or sad, or not feeling so great because of an event that happened at school or at home or with a friend or with our parents. On those days, our invisible sack can be heavier, which makes us sadder.
- Just like super-heroes who have special powers we can't see, sometimes our friends at school have an invisible sack that's heavy to carry that day. On those days, we should try extra hard to smile at that friend, and help them out by sharing and including them in what we do.
- When someone is sad, the nicest thing to do is be a friend.



STEP 4 Wrapping up – CANNED GOODS:

- Once the exercise is finished, request that all students take their canned goods and place them in the cloth bags. Explain how these canned goods will be donated to the local food bank.
 - Finish off the “Not Myself Today” exercise by stating that those in need of food bank assistance are experiencing many of the negative feelings and emotions discussed today. Their problems may not be visible and may be weighing very heavily upon them.
 - So we all need to be a friend.

For additional information and resources:

- [“Not Myself Today” Campaign](#)
- [“Kids Have Stress Too! \(KHST\) Can Help! Fact sheet, Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [“Fast Facts about Mental Illness in Youth”, Canadian Mental Health Association](#)
- [“When Something Wrong, “Ideas for Teachers”, Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation](#)
- For additional information on [“Teen Mental Health”](#) visit the website.

This lesson plan was developed by a teacher, a youth and a parent.

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