**Strengthening Communication for a Supportive SMILE Community**

Since a key expectation of the SMILE program is that all club members can work with each other with respect and equity, we developed this session to focus on activities that help students engage with one another as well as a larger network of students from SMILE clubs around the state during challenge events. We have heard from some teachers that you would like additional strategies and activities to help students in your club break out of cliques and better communicate with each other. We hope that you can use one or more of these activities to prepare your students for the upcoming challenge events and as a result it might also build community within your club.

1. **Happening Handshake**

Directions:

Divide the students into three groups. Instruct one group that they will give strong handshakes, another weak handshakes (a very limp grasp), and the third group will not extend their hand. Now, invite the students to mingle and greet students from other groups.

Debriefing Questions

1. What did you notice?

2. What **emotional impact** would these handshakes have on you?

3. Might this emotional impact affect **future interactions** with that person? How?

4. What **signals** did you receive from the verbal and non-verbal greetings that you received?

5. What did you think the person’s **intent** was?

6. Are there other reasons for someone to give a handshake like the one your received other than what you initially thought?

7. Have you experienced similar variations in verbal and non-verbal greetings in real life? How did they affect your feelings towards others? How did they affect the **way you treat** others?

*Adapted from the Center for Social and Emotional Education:* <http://www.schoolclimate.org/educators/documents/CultivatingCaringLearningCommunities.pdf> (scroll to 4th page)

1. **Mirroring:**

Directions:

* Ask the group to form pairs. One partner is Person A and the other is Person B.
* Invite Person A to begin the activity by making motions. Inform the group that the Bs will mirror Person A’s actions. The goal is for your partner to be successful in mirroring you.
* After one minute, invite pairs to exchange roles: Person B will lead while Person A mirrors.
* After one minute, begin the 3rd round: now invite the pairs to mirror one another but not to signal to the other person when they will switch roles and exchange the leading and mirroring.

Debriefing Questions:

1. What was the experience of **being the leader** like for you?

2. What was the experience of **being the follower** like for you?

3. What role did you feel more comfortable in?

4. What was the experience like in the 3rd round when there was **no clear leader**?

5. When did you experience **discomfort**? How was your discomfort related to cooperation?

6. Have you experienced a similar type of discomfort when **trying to cooperate with others in our SMILE club or at SMILE events**? When? How might you **overcome** this discomfort?

7. How can this activity help you **understand issues related to cooperation**?

8. How does our level of **patience** impact our ability to cooperate?

*Adapted from the Center for Social and Emotional Education:* <http://www.schoolclimate.org/educators/documents/CultivatingCaringLearningCommunities.pdf> (scroll to 3rd page)

**3. Following Directions from Differing Perspectives:**

Directions:

Give each of your students a blank sheet of paper. Ask them to close their eyes or at least deviate their gaze away from the paper in their hands. Ask them to follow your instructions without asking questions:

* Fold the paper in half, tear the top right corner
* Fold the paper in half again, tear the top left corner
* Fold the paper in half again and tear the bottom right corner
* Now open up the sheet of paper. If you all followed my directions, theoretically we should all see the same pattern.

In reality, you should see many different designs around the room. Although we all heard the same directions, we interpreted them in different ways. You can use this activity to explain that we all come from different perspectives, and it’s hard to know how those perspectives will affect the way we interpret any given situation.

Group Debrief:

1. Do we all have the same pattern on our unfolded paper? Why or why not?

2. Why do you think we interpreted the directions differently?

3. What elements of your lifes/personality might affect the way we listen to and follow directions? *Culture, history, experiences, understanding of words, style of communication, level of distraction or focus, etc.*

4. How can this activity help you understand issues related to communication and different perspectives?

**Other Activity Ideas (from Teaching Tolerance):**

**Communication:**

<http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/communication-total-impact-your-message>

This activity is about the power of non-verbal communication and how it may differ in different communities or cultures. Students first learn about the differences between verbal and nonverbal behaviors and examples of how typical non-verbal gestures have different meanings in other cultures. Then students communicate in situations with a partner using only body language.

**Cliques in the Classroom (for ES, MS, HS separately):** <http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/cliques-schools>

This activity is designed to help students understand why cliques are more harmful than friendship groups. Elementary school students complete an activity sheet about exclusivity and the feeling of being left out, and then discuss ways to welcome and include others. Middle school students complete a survey to see whether they succeed and welcoming new friends and reflect on cliques in their school/community. High School students discuss their own experiences with cliques and identify clique-like groups in the animal kingdom.

*Note: SMILE-specific Handouts for activities will be available on SMILE Blog*