

# Words Matter

Once something is said, it can't be unsaid.

What a person says or how they say it affects our self-esteem, confidence, anxiety levels and happiness.

Do people come away from a conversation with you feeling uplifted and better about themselves or feeling terrible?

People will always remember **HOW** you made them feel.



# Take a Breath

**1.**

## Take a Breath

**(STOP for a few seconds before responding)**

**2.**

**Ask myself 3 questions about what I am about to say:**

**\* Is this helpful?**

**\* Is this hurtful?**

**\* Will this cause unhappiness to the other person and/or myself?**

**3.**

## Rethink my response



# Scenarios



**Your little brother dropped and smashed your iPad after taking it without permission.**

**You see your friend has a new haircut that you don't think suits them.**

**You step-sister eats the last chocolate ice-cream in the pack and you haven't even had one ice-cream from the pack.**

**Your mother has taken your favourite jacket to the dry cleaners when you wanted to wear it to a party.**

**You find your best friend copying your homework.**

**The lady from next door wants to give you some tomatoes from her garden but you really dislike tomatoes.**

**Your best friend has accepted an invitation to a popular students' party, but you have not been invited.**

**Your aunt is insisting you go on a rope adventure course with her, but you are actually too scared to go. Your aunt keeps on at you about going.**

**Your brother hits you hard on the shoulder and your parent says, "Don't worry about it. Boys will be boys!"**

# Feeling Words



worried	proud	calm	happy	
brave	angry	scared	unhappy	
lonely	sad	guilty	shame	
anxious	depressed	excited	overwhelmed	
bored	frightened	shy	friendly	quiet
curious	embarrassed		safe	unsafe
relieved	jealous	frustrated	joyful	silly
forgotten	ignored	loved	interested	terrified
peaceful	annoyed	uncomfortable		surprised
disappointed		happy	confused	
confident	nervous	agitated	aggravated	

# ‘Take a Breath’ ACTIVITY

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For students 8 to 17 years

Approximate time needed: 40+ min (depending on the age of the students)

## **An activity to help students:**

- understand that our words and how we deliver them matter
- understand our words can affect another’s self-esteem, confidence, anxiety levels and happiness
- understand that our words can make others feel powerless
- realise that verbal abuse is unacceptable in all societies
- understand that verbal abuse can lead to other forms of abuse and control
- express their feelings and emotions in a more regulated way towards positive outcomes
- listen to another’s point of view with increased empathy, understanding and perspective
- learn to self-regulate

Through a series of role plays and then discussion questions guided by the facilitator, the overall objective of this activity is to have students, when responding to a challenging situation or conversation to:

- 1. Take a Breath** (STOP for a few seconds before responding).
- 2. Ask themselves 3 questions** about what they are about to say:
  - \* Is this helpful?
  - \* Is this hurtful?
  - \* Will this cause unhappiness to the other person and/or myself?

If the answers are as follows:

- \* Is this helpful? NO
- \* Is this hurtful? YES
- \* Will this cause unhappiness? YES

3. Then the student needs to **Rethink Their Response** in order to examine how their initial response will affect the other person i.e. the 'Receiver'.

**Rethinking Their Response** could look like:

\* expressing their reaction to the scenario in a more regulated way, e.g. 'I feel really angry right now that you broke my phone.' Which will allow the Receiver to respond with their perspective, e.g. 'I'm so sorry I broke your phone. It was an accident. I can pay for the repairs.'

In this way, both people get to express how they are feeling, listen to each other's perspective and thereby diffusing the situation.

\* ask what happened or why the Receiver did something, e.g. 'Okay. Tell me what happened.'

\* say nothing (which may cause the Receiver distress) or say, e.g. 'I am so angry right now. I will have to talk to you about this when I'm feeling calmer.'

*The responses above are suggestions only. Throughout the activity, it is hoped students will come up with their own ideas which they can discuss and record.*

## For this activity you will need:

- this lesson plan
- Poster A: Words Matter (or chart paper or whiteboard)
- Poster B: Take a Breath (or chart paper or whiteboard)
- Poster C: Scenarios (or sticky notes)
- Poster D: Feeling Words (extension)

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1. The facilitator introduces the lesson by presenting Poster A 'Words Matter' or writing the phrases below on a whiteboard or chart paper.

*Once something is said, it can't be unsaid.*

*What a person says or how they say it affects our self-esteem, confidence, anxiety levels and happiness.*

*Do people come away from a conversation with you feeling uplifted and better about themselves or feeling terrible?*

*People will always remember HOW you made them feel.*



In a sharing circle, unpack with students what they think each phrase means. Ask them to share examples when:

- someone's words did 'matter' and changed something for them
- someone's words made them feel uplifted or terrible
- they wished they could 'unsay' something they said to another
- they did upset someone and how they handled it or how they wished they had handled it
- someone's words encouraged them to do something they didn't think possible.

Provide the example of the writer, Clint Smith who tweeted in 2017:

*'I've said this before, but one of the only reasons I'm a writer is because I had a teacher in the 3rd grade who looked at my poem about clouds and said, "You can be a writer when you grow up." It stayed with me forever. Teachers, don't underestimate what your words can do for your students.'*

Discuss that it is not only teachers whose words can affect students, but everyone's words can affect another in a positive way or a negative way — but we do have the choice.

**2. Say, "I want you to imagine I am about xx years old (make the age to suit the students you are teaching) and my little sister asked to wear my favourite windcheater and I said 'Yes'. After she wore it, she washed it with some bath towels and then put it in the drier, where it shrunk to half its size. How might I be feeling?"**

Discuss responses. Say, "That's right! I'm feeling pretty angry, and what I want to say to her is: 'You are so annoying and I'll never ever lend you anything every again! Don't come anywhere near me.'

Discuss how the little sister will be feeling with this response and how I might be feeling.

Present Poster B 'Take a Breath' to the students. Say, "That might be what I **want** to say but this is what I actually **need** to do to reduce the distressing fallout from my response." Point to the poster and say,



"I need to:

- 1. Take a Breath** (STOP for a few seconds before responding).
- Ask myself **3 questions** about what I am about to say:
  - \* **Is this helpful?**
  - \* **Is this hurtful?**
  - \* **Will this cause unhappiness to the other person and/or myself?**

Now place Post-it Notes with answers to the above scenario (and my response) beside each question:

- \* Is this helpful?
- \* Is this hurtful?
- \* Will this cause unhappiness?

**3.** Say, "Now I need to:

### **Rethink My Response"**

Ask students for their ideas on what my response should be if I had 'taken a breath' first. Guide the conversation so the outcomes are something similar to below.

My response could be that I:

- \* express my reaction in a more regulated way, e.g. "I'm really angry at you right now. And I'm really upset my windcheater is ruined."

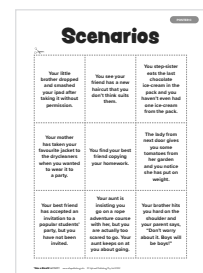
\* ask my sister what happened. (Hear her story and allow her the space to say how she might try to make amends.)

OR

\* express how I am feeling and that I need time and space to think about this when I'm calmer.

Reiterate in this scenario that I have a choice in how I respond. Say, "We all have choices in how we respond. By 'Taking a Breath', I am thinking how my response might affect my little sister but also myself. I need to ask myself these questions: 'Will my sister come away feeling terrible, ashamed and guilty? And might I feel terrible for yelling at her and saying hurtful things?' Or can I make a more regulated choice where both of us come away feeling like we have both been heard."

- 3. Provide pairs of students (or highlight a pair to role play in front of the group in a sharing circle) with one of the 10 scenario cards on the poster 'Scenarios' (or write each scenario below on Post-it Notes if you don't have access to the poster). Say, "Each pair please find a quiet space and read out the scenario. One person can be the 'Speaker' and one person can be 'Receiver' i.e. the person who will 'receive' the verbal response from the Speaker."**



*Your little brother dropped and smashed your iPad after taking it without permission.*

*You see your friend has a new haircut that you don't think suits them.*

*Your step-sister eats the last chocolate ice-cream in the pack and you haven't even had one ice-cream from the pack.*

*Your mother has taken your favourite jacket to the dry cleaners when you wanted to wear it to a party.*

*You find your best friend copying your homework.*

*The lady from next door wants to give you some tomatoes from her garden but you really dislike tomatoes.*

*Your best friend has accepted an invitation to a popular students' party, but you have not been invited.*

*Your aunt is insisting you go on a rope adventure course with her, but you are actually too scared to go. Your aunt keeps on at you about going.*

*Your brother hits you hard on the shoulder and your parent says, "Don't worry about it. Boys will be boys!"*



Ask students to refer back to the 'Take a Breath' poster when working out their responses. Older students could be encouraged to take notes, e.g. what they would initially **like** to have said and what they **actually** said as these will be needed in the Reflection discussion.

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**4. REFLECTION: Bring all pairs back into the circle to share their responds, experiences and outcomes.**

Here are some questions you could ask to help stimulate discussion. However, allow time for students to share their experiences unprompted.

**To the Speaker:**

*What did you actually want to say to the Receiver?*

*What might you have said last week when you were not aware of the 'Take a Breath' poster.*

*What did you actually end up saying?*

*Would silence have been the best option?*

*Would coming back when you had calmed down been the best option?*

*How did you feel at first, before you spoke?*

*How did you feel after you spoke?*

*How do you think the Receiver felt after you spoke?*

*How might you have felt if you had been the Receiver and before the Speaker spoke?*

*How might you have felt if you had been the Receiver after the Speaker spoke?*

**To the Receiver:**

*What were you expecting the Speaker to say?*

*How might that have made you feel?*

*How did you feel after the Speaker spoke to you?*

*Were you able to express your point of view, i.e. Did you feel heard?*

If time, some pairs might like to role-play their 'initial response' and then their response after they 'Took a Breath'.

Have all students reflect on what they have learnt from this activity. They could write down five key points they have taken away from the task.

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**Extension**

If time allows, present Poster D 'Feeling Words'. Discuss each word and ask students when they may have felt this way. The aim of the poster is to extend students' vocabulary around feelings and emotions to help them better express how they (or another) may be feeling in a situation or scenario. There is space at the base of the poster to add more words students may come up with themselves.

