

Puberty/Adolescence, Day 4: "Will I Fit In?"

Grades 9 and 10, Lesson #7

Time Needed

One class period

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Explain the importance of a feeling of belonging and list at least 3 functions of social groups (family, fraternity, club, team, friendship [group of two], etc.)
2. Recognize that ridiculing others does not help one to feel good nor to belong and that it is often based on ignorance or rumor.
3. Describe 3 characteristics of constructive friendships.
4. Describe 3 characteristics which distinguish **destructive** friendships from **constructive** ones.

Agenda

1. Explain the relevance of the lesson.
2. Discuss the concept of "belonging" or "fellowship" and use the *Where I Belong* Worksheet to make it concrete and personal.
3. Hand out and read aloud the *Put Down and Rumor Reference Sheet*. Discuss the issues.
4. In groups of four, complete *Friendship Worksheets 1-4*.
5. Summarize and assign homework.

Materials Needed

Classroom Materials (4 sets per class):

Friendship Worksheets 1-4

(You will need about four copies of each of the 4 worksheets, so that each pair of students can have one of the four. Copy *Friendship Worksheets* in 4 different colors; note that side 2 of each Worksheet is identical.)

Classroom Materials (one class set, which you can re-use in subsequent class periods):

Put Down and Rumor Reference Sheet

Student Materials (one per student):

Where I Belong Worksheet

Individual Homework Exercise: Friendship

Activities

1. Explain the relevance of this lesson within the unit:

*In lesson 6, we discussed the issue of being “normal”, because people often worry about whether they are like everybody else. They want to make sure they are OK. Well, most people (especially teens, but honestly almost everyone) **also** worry about belonging ... being part of a group, being liked. So our topic today is “**FITTING IN**” or “**BELONGING**” or “**FELLOWSHIP**”. (Write these terms on the blackboard.)*

2. Explain that the need to “belong,” the need for “fellowship,” is an innate one shared by many animals in addition to humans. Ask the class if they can figure out why there is such a biological need. (To protect a fairly vulnerable species, *humankind*, from extinction. . . family and community provide the safety of interdependence.)

Have the class brainstorm all the kinds of groups, formal and informal, to which a person might feel he or she belongs. Write their answers on the blackboard. They may include groups such as clubs, religious organizations, neighborhoods, schools, teams, communities, cultures and subcultures, ethnic groups, countries, etc. If “family” isn’t on their list, add it.

On another part of the blackboard, brainstorm some benefits a group might provide to its members and, if there are any, to society. For example, belonging to a church may provide members with companionship, a place to worship, and comfort in times of trouble. If the congregation took as its mission providing a shelter for homeless families, society would, in turn, benefit. You may end up with something like this:

SOME OF THE FUNCTIONS OF A GROUP:

(a) groups may help their members...

to make friends	to develop skills	to stay/get healthy
to grow spiritually	to feel needed	to have fun
to solve problems	to earn money	to have housing
to feel supported and cared about		to have clothes
to have the power to effect change		to have food
to get their needs for touch and affection met		
to feel a sense of history and connectedness with a culture		

(b) some groups help society by...

publishing important information	entertaining others
keeping cultural diversity alive	housing people who are homeless
challenging traditional prejudices	feeding people who are hungry
keeping members occupied (“off the streets”)	
influencing lawmakers or other authorities	
reducing drunk-driving deaths/injuries	

Point out that “family” is the **first** group within which most people feel their original sense of belonging. Explain that, as people approach adulthood, family often remains important to them; usually, belonging to other groups becomes increasingly important to them, as well. Identify the need-to-belong as very natural and healthy. (Remember to avoid the term “normal” -- see lesson 6.) Explain that a person’s task, in growing up, is to figure out how to *meet the need in constructive, healthy ways*.

Hand out the *Where I Belong Worksheet* and ask people to begin by filling in at least five groups to which they belong. (They are welcome to list more than five, of course, using the back of the Worksheet or a separate piece of paper.) Then have them use the list of functions on the blackboard and their own imaginations to complete the “functions” column of the Worksheet. Allow about five minutes, at most, for this. Collect the Worksheet.

3. Explain that, sometimes, people have the mistaken belief that in order to fit in (to **belong**) they have to demonstrate that they are **not** friends with people who are somehow different. Ask the class:

How do people demonstrate that they aren’t friends with the loner, the nerd, etc.?

Answers: They may demonstrate this by teasing the person who is different, by spreading - or listening to - rumors about the person, by ignoring the person, even by pulling pranks.

Teasing, of course, isn’t always meant to exclude or distance one’s self from someone. Gentle teasing between close friends can be a gesture of closeness. And people should realize, too, that each culture handles teasing differently, and that a tease which might seem gentle and affectionate to a person raised in one culture, might seem cruel to a member of another culture. Often without meaning to, people may hurt, offend or infuriate a friend of another culture. The only way to avoid this is to keep in mind that there are some cultural differences in terms of teasing.

Still, **often**, teasing, rumors and other active or passive exclusion - behavior **is** intentional. That is why we have developed the *Put Down and Rumor Reference Sheet*. Hand it out and have volunteers take turns reading aloud from it. Discuss how ridicule feels:

when you are the object of the put-down
when you are a bystander
when you are the one doing the ridiculing.

Discuss, too, what a person can do as the object of a put-down or as a bystander, for emotional self-protection ... how one can **get the person to “knock it off”**, and/or, at least **recover one’s own dignity and self-esteem**.

Remember that it is inappropriate for a public school teacher to express a personal belief about controversial issues ... a belief that would probably offend some families. Thus, it isn’t appropriate to promote homosexual behavior or to suggest that heterosexual students should be gay, lesbian or bisexual. Neither is it appropriate to condemn homosexual behavior or to suggest that gay, lesbian or bisexual students should be heterosexual. Either of those values would offend some families. Instead, this Reference Sheet teaches that labeling one’s **self**, based on others’ assumptions, is unnecessary ... and that labeling and

degrading **others** is wrong (and doesn't enhance one's self-esteem or popularity anyway).

As far as sexual **behavior** is concerned, homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual, it is certainly appropriate in a public school setting to support and encourage abstinence. Abstaining from intimate sexual touch is clearly the safest alternative (emotionally, socially, physically and -- some would say -- spiritually) for school-aged youth.

4. Explain that one of the most important "groups" to which a person ever belongs is a tiny one ... the two-person "group" we call "friendship". The remainder of today's class will focus on the concept of "friendship" ... four aspects of it:
 - (a) What to look for in a friend -- Worksheet 1
 - (b) Examining **yourself** as a friend -- Worksheet 2
 - (c) How you go about starting friendships -- Worksheet 3
 - (d) How to tell whether a friendship is healthy (good for both of you) -- Worksheet 4

Next, divide the class into groups of one to four people. Give each group one of the four *Friendship Worksheets* (so that two or three groups have Worksheet 1, which might be blue; two or three have Worksheet 2, yellow; etc.). Allow them about ten minutes to complete their Worksheets. Collect them so that you can give people credit for participation and also so that you can read selectively from them at the start of tomorrow's class.

5. Summarize the lesson:

Everybody needs to feel a sense of belonging. Most people felt it for the first time within their families. As people become adults, other groups (in addition to family) assume increasing importance . . . including formal groups, such as religious affiliations or political parties, and informal groups, such as friendships and circles of friends. A person's job is to find ways to meet his or her need-to-belong that help society or, at least, show compassion for others ... because we're all in the same boat, all needing to fit in with our self-esteem intact.

Homework

Individual Homework Exercise: Friendship

Where I Belong Worksheet

NAME _____

DATE _____

PERIOD _____

SOME GROUPS I BELONG TO:

SOME OF THEIR FUNCTIONS:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Put Down & Rumor Reference Sheet

Why do people ridicule others (put them down)?

They believe that it will help them “fit in” ... that they have to show they are **different** from a particular person (and that they are “better”) in order to **belong**. That’s too bad ... because, in fact, it “trashes” both people’s self-esteem (the offender’s **and** the victim’s).

What kinds of things do people get teased about?

Some common ones in our culture are:

- being overweight (in somebody’s opinion)
 - having the “wrong” color of skin (in somebody’s opinion)
 - having an “unattractive” nose, lips, hair cut, or taste in clothes (in somebody’s opinion)
 - not being as smart as some people are or being “too” smart (in somebody’s opinion)
- *You’ve probably heard folks called “retards” or “brains.”*

What kinds of rumors get spread about people?

Some common ones in our culture are:

- that a person is gay or lesbian (or so someone thinks) –
You’ve probably heard some folks called “faggots”, “sissies” or “dykes.”
- that a girl has had sex with lots of guys (or so people say) –
You’ve probably heard some folks called “sluts” or “whores.”
- that a person has never had sex -- is a virgin (and in someone’s opinion this is bad)

But what do all those labels really mean?

Most of them, you already know. But here are definitions of a few terms that people often get confused about:

DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED: Some people learn things more slowly than others. They may be just a little different from others (like the child who doesn’t learn to talk until he or she is two or three) or very different (to the point that they can never learn to feed or dress themselves). “To retard” just means “to slow.” There are many different degrees of developmental disability ... or what some people prefer to call “developmental delay”.

GAY MAN or LESBIAN or BISEXUAL: Most men have relationships with women, because they want an intimate and emotional closeness of a woman. Some, though, find they want a close relationship to be with a man, instead. Likewise, some women have a life partner who is a woman. (Some people, of course, never fall in love with -- or choose to spend their lives with -- *anyone*.) People who notice that, most of the time, they love or feel attracted to others of their own sex may describe themselves as “homosexual” or “gay” or, if they’re female, they may prefer the term “lesbian”. Some folks may have intimate and emotional relationships with people of more than one gender. They may consider themselves bisexual. However, most people experience **some** feelings for people of their own sex and **some** for people of other sexes. A person doesn’t **have to** choose a label for themselves.

Put Down & Rumor Reference Sheet (continued...)

VIRGIN: A virgin is a person (of any gender) who has never had sexual intercourse. That includes over half of all teens and a fair number of adults. The word “*whore*” (often used to degrade a girl or woman who *isn't* a virgin) is actually a slang put-down for “prostitute”. A prostitute is a person who has sex for money.



Do people always belong to the group they get ridiculed about?

No. Of course not. They get stereotyped. A person may get put-down for being developmentally delayed even though she's at least as smart as her classmates, just because she's shy or because of what she wears. Or people may assume that a person is developmentally disabled, despite his intelligence, if he is physically-challenged (for example if he has cerebral palsy or a hearing problem).

A girl may be called a “slut” because some guy announced to his friends that she had sex with him. He may have wanted people to **think** he had sex so **he** wouldn't be called names. Other guys may have believed the rumor and tried to get her to have sex with **them**. If she turned them down, they may have felt hurt or embarrassed ... and tried to pay her back for their bad feelings by letting people think she had sex with them, too. And so the rumors grow.

A quiet, soft-spoken guy may be put down for being gay, even though he is in love with a girl. Or a girl may be teased for being a lesbian, because she is a good athlete, even though all of her crushes and fantasies involve guys. (People often confuse **sexual orientation** with **gender expression**. Being gay or lesbian has nothing to do with how feminine or masculine you are, or even who you have **or haven't** had sex with. It has to do with how you feel inside, who you feel most attracted to.)

Homosexual and bisexual behavior is controversial. Some people believe that all same-sex sexual touch is wrong. Others believe it's fine, as long as the individuals love and are

Put Down & Rumor Reference Sheet (continued...)

committed to one another. Some people believe it's OK for small children to play "doctor" with other kids of the same sex, but that same-sex touch is not OK for teens and adults. **We believe the safest choice for teens, whether they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight, is abstinence.** Whether you believe that same-sex touch is right or wrong, remember that ridiculing people and name-calling are destructive to *everyone*. Hearing prejudiced comments about gay, lesbian and bisexual people and seeing bias on TV and in movies can make everybody -- including straight people -- worry about how they act or dress; who they show affection to; or how supportive they are of their gay, lesbian and bisexual friends. Prejudice can also make people take sexual risks with someone of another gender just to try to prove that they're straight. And, of course, it doesn't prove anything anyway.

The important point is that people don't even necessarily belong to the groups they get teased about. We don't mean to imply that it would be OK to ridicule these people if they *did* belong to the particular group in question. We're simply saying that people need not label *themselves* just because others ignorantly mislabel them.

Putting other people down
or spreading rumors about them
does **not** help a person fit in !

Actually, research shows that certain kinds of people *fit in almost anywhere*:

- They are generally people who like themselves (have a lot of self-confidence).
- They may laugh at themselves occasionally, and certainly know how to laugh at life, but they don't need to ridicule others.
- They're honest, and they stand up for themselves, without trying to hurt others.

Put-downs and rumors are destructive. They cause a lot of unnecessary grief and pain. They really don't help the offender's self-esteem or make him or her more popular.

Friendship Worksheet 1: What to Look for in a Friend

NAMES OF THE PEOPLE COMPLETING THIS WORKSHEET: PERIOD _____

DIRECTIONS: List, below, **at least 8** things you believe a person ought to look for in a friend. For example: You might believe you should look for people who:

- ...like to do some of the same things that you like to do*
- ...laugh at the same kinds of things you laugh at*
- ...take you seriously*
- ...would tell you if you had an open zipper, a spot on your clothes, bad breath, a smudge on your face, or food between your teeth*



We (I) think you should look for people who:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Friendship Worksheet 2: Examining Yourself as a Friend

NAMES OF THE PEOPLE COMPLETING THIS WORKSHEET: PERIOD _____

DIRECTIONS: Make up a “test” a person could take, to find out whether they would make a good friend. Your test should include **at least 8** questions you believe a person ought to ask him or herself. For example: You might believe a person should ask:

- ...Do I usually like myself?*
- ...Do I get jealous very often?*
- ...Can I be trusted with other people’s money?*
- ...Would I tell a friend if he or she had an open zipper, a spot on the clothes, bad breath, a smudge on the face, or food between the teeth?*



We (I) think you should ask yourself:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Friendship Worksheet 3: How You Go About Starting Friendships

NAMES OF THE PEOPLE COMPLETING THIS WORKSHEET:

PERIOD _____

DIRECTIONS: List **at least 8** things a person could do or say to open a conversation with an acquaintance in order to start a friendship. For example, you might think a person should:

- ... smile at the person they want to get to know
- ... mention good things they've noticed about the person
- ... invite the person to "hang out" after school
- ... eat lunch with the person and introduce them to other friends



We (I) think a person should:

1. _____
- _____
2. _____
- _____
3. _____
- _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Friendship Worksheet 4: How to Tell if a Friendship is Healthy

NAMES OF THE PEOPLE COMPLETING THIS WORKSHEET: PERIOD _____

DIRECTIONS: Make up a “test” a person could take, to find out whether a particular friendship is healthy (to find out if it’s good for both people). Your test should include **at least 8** questions you believe a person ought to ask him or herself. For example: You might believe a person should ask:

- ... *When I’m around this person, do I ever feel used or put down?*
- ... *Do I do things for the other person simply out of guilt or pity, and not because I genuinely want to?*
- ... *Do we listen to one another?*



We (I) think a person should ask him or herself:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

Individual -- or Two-Person -- Homework Exercise: Friendship

You can work alone or with a partner.

Find one or more
Poems, Songs, Photos, Drawings, or Quotations
that illustrate your philosophy of friendship.

Turn them in with a one-page (50 to 150-word)
explanation.

If you choose to turn in a song (or songs), you can...
either write down the lyrics and turn them in **or**
make a tape or CD of the actual songs to turn in.