**South Row School**

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January 2018

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

In November and December in the 3rd and 4th grade classrooms, I presented a lesson on effective ways to communicate with others to solve problems. The *Second Step* lessons taught by their teacher in their classroom includes a lesson(s) on effective communication… as well as a lesson on the difference between Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive communication. My classroom lesson supports and expands on this information.

In the lesson that I presented to your children in November and December, I explained the differences between Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive communication as well as presented a way of communicating using “I-Messages”. The children then participated in role plays to practice identifying the three different communication styles; namely, Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive. I also asked them to predict the response that they would get from others when using each communication style.

Why is understanding the difference between Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive communication and the use of

“I-Messages” important? It is important for children to know that they have a choice in how they respond to others, particularly when they are resolving a conflict. They can choose to respond with Passive, Aggressive, or Assertive communication. Put another way, they can Give-In, Be Mean, or Be Strong.

Children meet situations every day where they need to decide how to balance their interests with the interests of others. For example:

* You want to be alone, but a friend wants to be with you. What do you do?
* A classmate teases you or calls you a name. How do you respond?
* Your younger brother keeps bothering you when you are trying to do your homework. What do you say to him?
* Your family is having a conversation around the dinner table, and you have an opinion that you would like to state, but everyone is talking very fast. How do you get people to listen to what you have to say?

Although we are partial to having children learn to be assertive, there really isn’t one right way to respond to the many complex situations that children (or adults) face every day. As the students discussed with their classmates, sometimes we might agree to “Give In” and let a friend join us even when we really want to be alone. We may see that our friend is feeling sad and may just want to spend some time with us… or our friend has something important to tell us. Sometimes, we may really need to get our point across to someone who is bothering us and they might experience our communication as “Mean”.

The point of this classroom lesson is to help children learn to be more flexible in their thinking knowing they have a choice in how they respond to others. Often, children (and adults) fall into the habit of being Aggressive or being Passive instead of learning how to be Assertive when they communicate. Communicating with others in an Assertive manner is not only “Being Strong”, it is usually the most effective way to solve problems by communicating our feelings and our needs without blaming others.

 Page 2

Children in the 3rd and 4th grade can begin to learn the skills to speak in an Assertive manner, such as using

“I-Messages”. “I-Messages” are effective because they do not blame others but say how you FEEL about a situation. They start with the words “I feel” (instead of “YOU always \_\_\_\_\_\_”, for example). An “I-Message” has three parts:

1) How you feel, 2) Why you feel that way, and 3) What you would like to see happen or change. *It is* *important to eliminate the word “you” when you are using an “I-Message”*. *And, we need to use a calm tone of* *voice*. The simple pattern that the students practiced was:

“I feel\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

 (sad, upset)

when \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ don’t \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

 (my friends, other people, kids at recess) (include me)

I want to be included in what you are playing at recess.”

Using “I-messages” takes some time to learn, but with practice students (and adults) can learn to use them to open a conversation and begin problem solving with a peer, sibling, or parent. Students are often amazed that a peer listens to them when they use a calm tone of voice, are Assertive, and start a conversation with an “I-Message”. Students feel proud that they can stay calm and begin to solve conflict situations.

References

Gordon, Thomas

[www.thomasgordon.com](http://www.thomasgordon.com)

Gordon Training International

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