




SOCIAL AWARENESS

Power Words



TEACHER NOTES

Every person has experienced the power of someone else's words that hurt or helped. This lesson focuses on helping students create common language they can use to actively work toward eliminating putdowns and increasing supportive peer-to-peer comments. An atmosphere of trust and caring is essential for students to feel safe disclosing discouraging or hurtful words they've heard and to be willing to publicly share the language that they personally value and that helps them feel respected and supported by others.

Although students will still need to draw on their own self-management skills to self-regulate from a discouraged state to an empowered one, it will help to be doing so within a community of learners who are all overtly dedicating themselves to using the power of words in positive, constructive ways.

Choose between the Power Words student handouts (p. 7 or p.8) based on your comfort level and what best fits your group. Writing personal lists on the Power Words Handout of only the positive words and phrases helps to move students directly into a strengths-based mindset. Writing their own lists on the T-Chart Handout that includes hurtful or discouraging words provides a safe space for students to record words or phrases they have personally experienced but don't want to say publicly. If you use this handout, collect them so that you can gain an understanding of your students' experiences.

If you return these lists to your students, have them cut the T-chart in half and publicly throw away all of the Discouraging Word sides, keeping the Encouraging Words side to students for subsequent use. Or, you can start fresh with the next Power Words lesson, with students recalling and writing only the encouraging language.



DURATION: 30 minutes

GOALS: [Teacher and Student Goals](#)

MATERIALS:

- Board or wall chart for teacher's model, capturing student ideas
- ENCOURAGING [Power Words](#) Handout for each student
- Optional: [T-Chart Power Words](#) Handout if more appropriate to your group



MAIN POINTS: Introduction (3 minutes)

- Explain to students that it's natural to feel some frustration when trying to learn new things, make friends, or work cooperatively on a lesson, and that people of all ages often experience discomfort or disequilibrium (not yet knowing) when we are learning something new. The language we use with ourselves and others during those times powerfully affects our learning and how we feel about ourselves. (Share a personal experience of your own.)



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- Talk with students about what kinds of words are encouraging and help us feel like we can learn, and what kinds of words are discouraging and can get in the way of new learning or cause hurt feelings.
- Guide students toward understanding that positive self-talk can be instrumental in helping them stick with challenging new experiences.

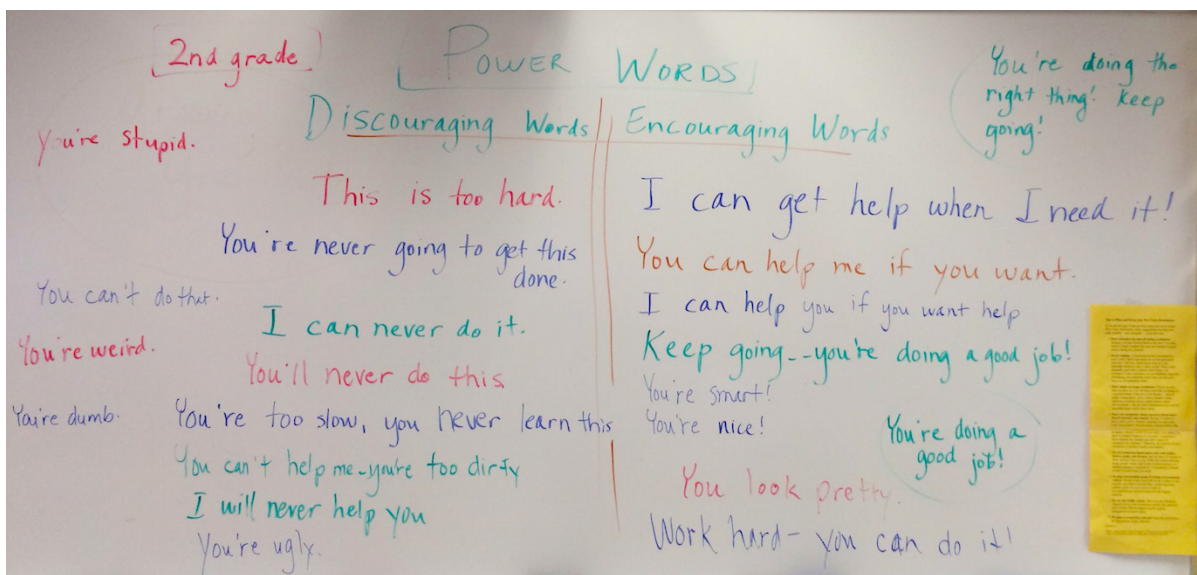
GUIDING LANGUAGE

One of the important things in our lesson today will be thinking together about what it feels like when we are trying to learn something new. When we don't know how to do something yet, it can feel like it's really hard. Maybe even frustrating and confusing. That's the feeling of learning something new, and it's called "disequilibrium." (Share a personal example of your own.)

When we are truly learning, we may not feel all the way in control or might be feeling unsure. When you first were in kindergarten, you might have thought, "Count to 100!!! What? That's so hard." But then you practiced and got to be really good at it. Then... "I have to learn to add all these numbers? No way! I don't know how to do this! And then, "Oh, okay, now I've got it..." And then, "What?! Subtraction? Cancel? Carry numbers?! I'm confused! I'll never get this!"

But then you ask questions and you practice, and of course, you get it down. And then along comes multiplication! You get the idea.

The feelings when we are first learning something are often confusion, uncertainty, and frustration. They're a natural part of the learning process, whether it's learning about school subjects, or learning about getting along with people. It really helps to try to get comfortable with those feelings, so they don't slow us down. The words we tell ourselves when we're having those feelings are especially important. That's why we call them Power Words. What we tell ourselves and what others say to us has the power to discourage us or encourage us.






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MAIN POINTS: Group creation of T-chart (10 minutes)

- Co-create a chart of “Power Words” that can help or hinder students’ ability to focus on and complete challenging tasks.
- Write the heading “Power Words” on the board. Underneath that, make a T-chart with “discouraging words” written over the left column, and “encouraging words” over the right. (For younger students, you can use “Hurts” and “Helps”)
- Ask students to think about words they’ve heard in the last couple of weeks that have been discouraging and encouraging. Start by making a list of the discouraging ones.
- Use the “Quick Pick” strategy, having students call on one another. Record their answers on the board under the appropriate heading.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Think about some words or phrases that you’ve heard when you’re trying to learn something new that make you feel discouraged or make you feel like you just can’t do something.

Write responses on the left side of the T-chart. As students give their answers, pause and give a heartfelt response, especially to the words that seem to be strongest (such as “stupid,” “idiot,” etc.).

I’m so sorry that anyone has ever had that said to them. That’s a very harsh word. That could be so hurtful and discouraging...

It’s important that students hear some compassionate, reassuring responses to these words as they show the courage to share their experiences.

I understand that some of us might have said things like this, too, without thinking about it, but we’re getting to an age now where we’ll want to be more aware of what we say and how it might feel to others.

Now, think about words and phrases that you find encouraging, words that help you keep going when you feel frustrated or unsure, and that remind you to believe in yourself.

Record responses on the right side of the T-chart.



MAIN POINT: Individual “Power Words” charts (9 minutes)

After the chart on the board is complete, give students the Power Words Handout (p. 6 or p. 7) and have them write their own positive Power Words, or copy some from the group chart, or both.



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GUIDING LANGUAGE

Now that our group chart is complete, everyone will make their own positive Power Words list that shows the encouraging words and phrases that you think will really work for you. You can copy the words from the board that are true for you, or write your own ideas, or both.

POWER WORDS	
DISCOURAGING	ENCOURAGING
You're ugly.	You're nice
You're stupid!	you're cool
You cannot do it!	you're so smart
You are a baby!	you're doing good

POWER WORDS	
DISCOURAGING	ENCOURAGING
this is to hard	You can help me if you want to
you're never going to get this done	you're smart
you're stupid	you're nice
you're never doing this	you're doing a good job!
you're dumb	I can help you.
you can't be that I will never help	you look pretty

Main points: Reflection (3 minutes)

As students complete their lists and prepare to turn them in, remind them as needed to put their name on them, so you'll be able to return them (and so you will be able to reflect on each student's experiences).

Have students share an example or two from their encouraging words list with others.

Remind students of the power of a fresh start, regardless of what words they and others may have used in the past.

GUIDING LANGUAGE

As you finish writing your list, let's remember that even though some of us may have heard some of these harsh words in the past, or said them to ourselves or to others, now that we've talked about this, we all get a chance to start over. We can forgive others, and forgive ourselves for saying discouraging things. We can try to say more encouraging things next time. And remember that if we hear something hurtful, we can try to not let it in. It's important that we give ourselves, and others, a fresh start.



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Take some private think time and reflect on things you learned or are more aware about, from this lesson. (Pause.) What ideas are important to you, that you want to be sure and remember? (Pause.) I'll call on the first person, and then that speaker will choose someone to take the next turn. (Use the [Quick Pick strategy](#).)



MAIN POINT: Closure (3 minutes)

As students leave for the day (or turn in their papers), give each a turn to say aloud to you one encouraging word or phrase. Repeat it back along with a high five or handshake.



EXTENSIONS

The words shared in this lesson generally evoke strong emotions, so for subsequent extension lessons, do a quick Group Brainstorm of only encouraging words (positive Power Words) to launch the new activity.

- Follow up the next day by briefly reviewing the previous lesson and having students create a fresh, personal “Power Words” list. Then each student chooses one or more phrases that are particularly motivating for them, makes “Power Words” bookmarks, and decides where they would most like to keep them. Ask, “Where would you like to get some extra encouragement?” Students might choose a science or reading book, a writing folder, or to be allowed to tape it to their desk.
- Create a class bulletin board of motivating language, which can be referred to at the start of guided or independent practice on a new concept or task, by having each student choose a favorite Power Word phrase and write it on a strip of paper.
- Create a class poster highlighting times when individuals or the group could use their Power Words for encouragement. Prompt students to use Power Words in their group interactions to encourage others.
- On a regular basis, invite students to pull out their Power Words bookmarks at the beginning of the day or class period, choosing a particular word or phrase to use as personal self-talk while they work and play with others.
- Intentionally use Power Words (modeling referring to the list) when guiding lessons. Have students “turn and talk” with a partner, sharing encouraging words as the lesson begins or progresses.
- If your school holds SEL Family Nights, families could make placemats or posters for their home, highlighting Power Words the whole household agrees to use with one another.



SOCIAL AWARENESS

Teacher / Student Goals

Social Awareness: The capacity to interact with others in ways that show respect for their ideas and behaviors, recognize our impact on them, and use cooperation and welcoming behaviors in social situations.

TEACHER: Social Awareness Goals

My students are aware of:

- The importance of contributing positive language to group efforts
- Strategies for coping with and helping to eliminate insults and mean comments

I am aware of my individual students' abilities to articulate the difference between discouraging and uplifting comments

The environment I create supports my students' growth related to verbally expressing positive support by and between individual students

STUDENT: Social Awareness goals and demonstrated behaviors

Students will:

- Develop their understanding of the power of words to influence attitude. ("I can help myself refocus and stick to a task, even when I feel discouraged.")
- Develop in their ability to say and write specific language they can use for positive self-talk and encouragement toward others. ("I can shift my attitude about difficult work or situations by thinking about and using Power Words.")

DESSA SOCIAL AWARENESS INDICATORS

Note: Highlighted indicators are directly addressed in this lesson.

I can:

Cope well with insults and mean comments
Get along with different types of people
Act respectfully in a game or competition
Respect another person's opinion
Contribute to group efforts
Resolve a disagreement
Share with others
Cooperate with peers or siblings
Forgive somebody who hurt or upset me

Name _____

POWER WORDS

Encouraging words that help, not hurt

Name _____

POWER WORDS

(Hurt) Discouraging Words

Encouraging Words (Help)




SOCIAL AWARENESS

Quick Pick Strategy

“Quick pick” is a strategy to engage participants in calling on one another. It’s particularly effective during sharing times, group discussions and when the teacher/facilitator is publicly recording on the board or a chart (writing responses to brainstorming; webbing ideas from the group, and so forth).

Among the many benefits of the quick pick strategy are:

- Shared responsibility for the flow of group discussions
- Building a bond among participants as they use one another’s names to call on each other in a welcoming and respectful way
- Providing an alternative to “teacher/facilitator choice” for who speaks when
- Promoting healthy risk-taking and leadership opportunities



GUIDING LANGUAGE

During our discussion (or sharing time), you’ll be calling on one another. When you have something you’d like to contribute, please raise your hand. The person who shared last will call on the next speaker. Remember to give everyone a chance before calling on anyone for a second time.

Please be sure to use one another’s names when calling on each other. If someone raises their hand and you’re not sure of their name, it’s fine to go ahead and call on them and ask to be reminded of their name.

Also, it’s nice to say “Thank you” to the person who called on you to speak.

I’ll start...

Give a topic of discussion or sharing. Ask who would like to contribute. Model calling on someone by using their name, making eye contact, and using a friendly, welcoming tone of voice. Participants continue the pattern, calling on one another until you let them know that *“The next person called on will be the last one for this topic.”*