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Community for Education Foundation was founded in 1992 to ensure that all young people learn the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life. To accomplish this mission, the organization created the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program, which includes curriculum materials, teacher training, and ongoing support.

The Overcoming Obstacles curriculum covers more than 20 topics, includes over 180 hours of instruction, and offers teachers the flexibility to select lessons based on theme, teaching time, and learning environment.

To date, tens of thousands of educators across the country have used the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program to positively impact millions of students’ lives.

**Curriculum Materials**

The Overcoming Obstacles curriculum is available at the middle school and high school levels. Both levels include standards-based lesson plans with objectives, time estimates, and activity sheets. Assessment questions and extension activities conclude each lesson.

Both levels of the curriculum include over 60 engaging lessons. They begin with the three fundamental skills on which all other skills can be built: communication, decision making, and goal setting.

After mastering these three core skills, students in both programs learn many other important concepts and skills, such as the following:

- Responsibility
- Respect for self and others
- Teamwork
- Maintaining a positive attitude
- Time management
- Study and test-taking techniques
- Problem solving
- Techniques for addressing bullying
- Stress management
- Conflict resolution

In addition to the concepts listed above, students in the high school program also focus on college and career readiness, and learn strategies that enable them to:

- Plan for a continuing education
- Complete applications for scholarships, grants, and loans
- Prepare employment applications and resumes
- Perform well in job interviews
- Develop financial responsibility
Based on the belief that good citizenship must not only be learned but also applied, both levels of the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum include Service Learning, which provides a step-by-step guide to developing student projects that foster active participation within their communities. Service Learning includes descriptions of each phase of a project, as well as lessons to guide students through each step of the planning process.

**Implementation**

Overcoming Obstacles can be implemented in a variety of courses and modified to fit individual school schedules. The curriculum materials can be used as a one- or two-semester course, in advisory programs or after-school settings, or integrated into core content areas.

The curriculum is organized into separate modules. Each module contains a sequence of lessons designed to develop specific concepts and skills, which are then reviewed and reinforced throughout the remainder of the program.

The modules are organized for planning purposes into four parts. The introductory modules in part I of the program provide a foundation for the introduction of the core skills of communication, decision making, and goal setting, which are presented in part II. These core skills in turn provide the basic tools that students will use in part III and during the service learning project in part IV.

The curriculum’s modular structure is deliberately flexible, and allows you to tailor the program to meet your students’ needs. Community for Education Foundation recommends that you begin the program with part I, follow with part II, and choose an order for the modules in part III that is appropriate for your students. Part IV addresses the variety of ways you can incorporate a service learning project into your instruction.

Each Overcoming Obstacles lesson is designed for use in a 50-minute class session, but can be condensed or expanded to meet your specific needs. For example:

- A single lesson plan might be divided into two or three 30-minute periods by expanding activities beyond their estimated time frames and extending class discussions.
- Extensions included at the end of each lesson offer follow-up activities that can be used alone to fill any remaining time in a class period or together to create an entire class period of their own.
- Two lesson plans might be used in sequence to meet the time requirements of block scheduling.
- The modules concerning specific skills (e.g., communication skills, on-the-job skills) may be used for one-semester courses that meet three times a week. Lessons from Service Learning may then be selected to fill out the remaining periods in the semester schedule.

You can also integrate the program into your core content classes by asking students to apply life skills to what they are learning. For example, you might have students apply the problem solving skills taught in the curriculum to word problems in their math classes. You might also have students use conflict resolution skills to find alternative solutions to wars they learn about in their history classes. Additionally, you might have
students investigate different forms of nonverbal communication across various cultures in their foreign language classes.

Individual activities and extensions can also be incorporated into daily lesson plans. For example, you might use the “What Stereotypes Do” activity from “Lesson 5: Avoiding Stereotypes” of Confidence Building in a lesson about the civil rights era in the United States.

You are encouraged to adapt and customize the lesson plans presented in this program to fit the dynamics of your classroom.

**Lesson Structure**

Each Overcoming Obstacles lesson includes step-by-step instructions for setting up and facilitating activities. Each lesson provides topics, discussion prompts, activities, and examples.

The following pages outline the lessons’ structure and organization.
Starter (3 minutes)

Ask students if they know who Indira Gandhi was. Explain that she was the prime minister of India from 1966 to 1977. She was elected again in 1980, but was assassinated during that term. Tell students that she once said, “You can’t shake hands with a clenched fist.”

Write Gandhi’s words on the board and invite volunteers to explain what she meant. Have students make a fist. Focus on the image of a clenched fist, and explore the feelings that this image represents.

Say, “Emotions—and the behaviors they produce—are important elements of conflicts. Today, we’re going to talk about how emotions and behaviors contribute to conflicts in negative and positive ways.”

Part I: Under the Surface (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize that anger is a general word that describes many different underlying feelings and emotions.

1. Students consider an analogy.

Ask a volunteer to draw a picture on the board of an iceberg floating in water. If the picture does not show the portion of the iceberg that is below the waterline, have another volunteer add to the picture.

Through discussion and adjustments to the picture, guide students to arrive at something that looks like a large inverted V, with about 1/8 of the image above the line that represents the surface of the water. Point out that the largest part of an iceberg, about 7/8 of it, remains hidden from view beneath the water.

Explain that conflict is like an iceberg, and that we often only see the anger and the blame that follow—the smallest part of the picture. At the top of the iceberg, write the words “anger” and “blame” on the board. Point out that these two emotions are usually the most visible elements in conflicts.

2. Students expand their vocabulary of feelings.

Ask students to think about times when they felt angry and to name underlying feelings that contributed to that anger. Suggest that they think of words that could complete the following sentence: “I felt angry because I was...” Without commenting record responses in the portion of the iceberg below the waterline.

Comment that the picture can get more complicated than what is shown on the board. Distribute copies of the “Sometimes I Feel...” activity sheet (#1) and give students time to read through the words. Suggest that as students read, they should place a minus sign by emotions that could intensify feelings of anger.

Part II (not pictured) is a follow-up activity designed to develop or practice the concept or skill introduced.
Lesson extensions are supplemental activities related to the lesson topic. Students are offered multiple opportunities to respond to quotations, conduct research, develop technology skills, write journal entries, or work on additional projects.

Activity sheets (not pictured) are designed as practice tools for the concepts presented in each module. They help students define ideas and terms, and practice the skills taught in the lessons. Activity sheets can be found at the end of their respective modules. A glossary of terms is provided with each module.

### Questions for Assessment

1. List three reasons why miscommunication occurs.
2. Imagine that you are trying to read, but another person nearby is being very quiet, using an I-message. Then, describe how you could assertively ask that person to be quiet, using an I-message.
3. List three reasons why using I-messages is an effective way to communicate.

### Extension: Using Quotations

**Quotation:** “Some people have foreign accents—until they laugh.” —Bill Keane, creator of *The Family Circus*

**Activity:** Have students discuss the meaning of this quote and draw their own cartoons depicting similar realizations about the common ground that exists among all people.

### Extension: Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

**Activity:** Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with a large piece of butcher paper. Have each student draw pictures showing positive and negative conflicts on a portion of his or her group's paper. Display the papers around the room. Have students circulate the room and view each group's paper. Discuss what makes a conflict positive or negative.

### Extension: Writing in Your Journal

**Activity:** Have students write about things they like and things they don't like about their best friends.

Discuss why we tolerate the weaknesses in people we care about. What can students learn from accepting and tolerating their best friends?

### Extension: Homework

**Activity:** This week have students make a chart noting situations in which they hear people speaking rudely to each other (e.g., in stores, while waiting in line). Have them include the time of day, the place, the people involved, and what the conflict seemed to be about. Tell them that they should not get involved in the conflicts.

Have students present their findings to the class. Ask, “Did you find people to be mostly polite or mostly rude?”

### Extension: Additional Resources

**Activity:** Show students a photo of Guernica by Pablo Picasso. Explain to students that this enormous work was painted in protest of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in Spain. Picasso directed that it be returned to Spain when the country became a democracy, which happened after Franco’s death. Discuss the painting with students. Have them make a list of adjectives that describe how the painting makes them feel.

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