

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *A World of Choices*, Book 6 of the ***Discovering the Real Me*** series. In this book, you will find stories about kids approximately your age.

You may be a lot like the boys and girls in these stories, or know other children your age who are similar to them. You are very capable physically and plenty active, like the boy who plays baseball and the girl who plays soccer in the stories. You tend to like being in groups and on teams, because you don't have to stand out so much then, although some of you may like standing out—even showing off—like the boy in Chapter 3 of this book. But most of you want very much to fit in with and to be accepted by the group. Getting along well with others means so much to you that many chapters of this book are devoted to relationships with peers—that is, relationships with friends and classmates.

Friends are very important to you, and their ideas and styles and opinions may start to matter more to you than your parents'. And you have tons of things to talk about when you get together with your friends—more than you may be able to talk about with your parents. Still, your parents are very important to you, so there are several chapters in this book devoted to getting along with and understanding your parents.

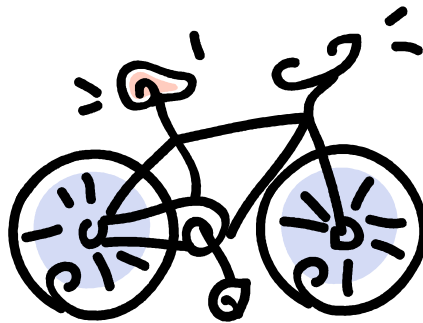
At your age, you know the difference between right and wrong, but you sometimes question authority. There are people you look up to when you need to make choices—they are your heroes or heroines, and you almost worship them. Since they are strong influences on your life right now, choose them wisely! As we say, there is a world of choices out there—some good, some not so good.

The kinds of attitudes you have will help determine what choices you make—and attitude itself is a choice. In this book, you will meet several students with "attitudes"—good and bad—and you will see how these attitudes affect their relationships with others and the choices they make in their lives. You will see the results of their attitudes and how some of them are able to change for the better.

Maybe the students in these stories are facing some of the same kinds of situations you are. See what you think of how they handle things, and use these stories—and the questions, exercises, and activities connected to them—to help you do better in making the world of choices that lies before you. Enjoy!

CHAPTER 1: The Voice

For so many years, Brian had been the ideal child. At least, that's what his mom told him! All through elementary school, he helped with chores around the house, took care of his growing baby brother, and showed respect to his parents. Whenever his dad came home from work and yelled, "Brian, get your bike out of the driveway!" he would run right away to remove his bike. Brian knew of the long hard hours his parents put in working, and he also knew that being helpful was the right thing to do. He loved his parents, and he showed it by doing what he could to help them.



Brian also knew that if he lied, cheated, stole, or cursed, his parents would somehow find out about it. They always did. Then they would set him back on the right path. His parents did not need to spank their son, and they seldom grounded him. A strong talk was all that was needed. You see, there was this little "Voice" in Brian's head that would remind him of the difference between right and wrong.

"Brian, stop looking at Mary's paper. Cheating is wrong," the Voice would say.

Or, "Brian, you know perfectly well that it was you who threw the baseball through the Johnsons's window. Go to their door and see what you can do to make up for it."

Without that pushy little Voice, Brian might have made some wrong choices or never corrected his mistakes. With it, he was one of the most liked and respected kids in the neighborhood and school.

But now that he was getting older, things were not so simple anymore. His friends were getting older too, and many of them were no longer content with being good. They wanted more "excitement" than that. Jokes, once harmless, silly and funny, now had to be at the expense of others, or dirty. Football was no longer for the sake of playing with your friends; you had to tackle the guy so he had a hard time getting up again. Even wearing clothes was more for showing off than just for feeling comfortable.

More and more, Brian found himself in situations where he had to choose between following what the Voice was telling him or just going along with whatever his friends were doing. The more he went along with the crowd and ignored the Voice, the smaller and softer it became. Meanwhile, the crowd was taking more and more risks. One day, two of Brian's friends got together and asked him if he would join them in breaking into some lockers of kids they didn't like. Without really thinking it through, Brian agreed to the mean-spirited prank. But a vice principal making the rounds caught the three classmates doing their misdeed and called their parents. Thus began the worst day of Brian's still-young life.

"Why couldn't I hear the Voice when I really needed it?" wondered Brian sadly. He was sitting in the principal's office, his hands folded in his lap, fighting back tears about the threats of suspension.

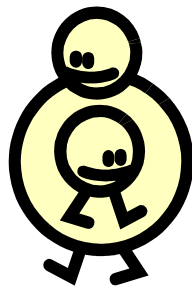
When his parents finally showed up, all he could say was, "Dad, I'm so sorry; I will never do it again."

His parents were very angry and disappointed. That hurt worst of all—the pain in their eyes, and the note of mistrust that came into their voices when they spoke to him now.

He asked his dad about the Voice and why he couldn't hear it when he needed it most.

"The more you listen to the crowd, the less you can hear the Voice," his father said. "I think, if you look over the last couple of months, you'll find that you were listening to the crowd more than listening to the Voice. So it got smaller and smaller."

"How do I make it strong again?" asked Brian.



"We'll have to go back to the way we made it strong in the first place," said his dad. "You have to listen to your parents and do what we say. You have to think about how we would react to something you are thinking of doing. And to help you, we'll be keeping a very close watch on you, and you won't regain your privileges and independence until we know we can trust you on your own again."

It was like being a little kid all over again! Brian sighed. All his friends were complaining that their parents treated them like babies. Brian guessed this is what they meant when they said that. But he also knew that the Voice inside him needed to grow some more again, and he vowed he would never let it go back to being small again.

Questions

1. When is the last time your conscience—or an inner voice— helped you make the right decision?

2. What feelings did you have, knowing that you made the right decision?

3. Did you ever feel guilty for not following your conscience?

4. What did you do to overcome those guilt feelings?

5. Have you ever been in the position of not knowing whether something was right or wrong, good or bad? How did that feel? How did that situation work out?

Exercise

- Think about the following situations, and see if you can tell what your own inner "Voice" says is right to do.
- You find a wallet in the grass. It has a name and address in it—the owner lives a block away from you. There's money in it. What should you do?
- You see some boys shoplifting CDs in the store. The manager has his back turned. What should you do?
- You knocked over the vase on the teacher's desk, breaking it. The teacher thinks Cindy did it. The teacher starts scolding Cindy. What should you do?

CHAPTER 2: An Attitude of Gratitude

Karen didn't think her mother loved her or even cared about her or her four brothers and sisters. All she knew was that her mom got up before she did each day, left her breakfast on the kitchen table, and caught an early bus for work. After school, Karen would let herself into their house—the key was hidden under the mat—and she would make a snack, do her homework, and heat up the dinner Mom left in the fridge. Many times Karen would not even see her mom until late at night, when she came home from her second job. Sometimes Karen would not see her for days on end, unless she stayed up late or got up really early.

On Saturdays, everyone would sleep in. Karen's mom would make heaping platefuls of pancakes with bacon and fried potatoes. Those times were great together.

But then there was laundry and grocery shopping for her mom to do, and she was busy again all day. Sundays were for church and housecleaning, but Mondays came soon enough, and that awful routine that Karen hated so much. Karen would play the same sad tape over and over in her mind: "Why can't Mom spend more time with me? She doesn't care about me at all."

Karen's mom knew how much her daughter and her other children hurt, but their father had left a big hole in the family when he left them years ago, and she had a big job filling it. There was laundry to be done, bills to pay, the kids' homework, clothes that needed mending, meals to cook, and oh, those long hours at work! Through all those difficult years, Karen's mom didn't complain. She promised herself, "The kids will never hear me gripe about my situation." But her long absences each day, year in and year out, were taking their toll.

Then one day, Karen's mom came home early and found her daughter sitting alone in a corner, sobbing.



"What's wrong?" her mother asked. "Why are you crying? Did someone hurt you?"

"You did, mom," Karen said, her voice breaking uncontrollably. "You have never cared about me. You'd rather go out all the time than be with me!"

Karen's mom put her weary but warm arms around her trembling daughter.

“Why, Karen, don’t you know that everything I do, I do for you? Ever since your father left, I have had to work two jobs. Don’t you think that I would rather be with you than anything in the world?” Then mother and daughter hugged for what seemed like an hour. Her mother's love seeped wordlessly into Karen's heart and filled up the broken and empty places.

From then on, Karen could only feel grateful to her mother for all she had done for her and the family. Now she understood what all those difficult days were about. And all the feelings of resentment and anger left her, like a fog disappears when the sun shines.

Karen started to help out more around the house, and she saw how that lifted the lines from her mother's forehead. It gave them a little more time to spend together, too.

"Thank you, Karen," her mother said.

"Thank *you*, Mom," said Karen.

Questions

1. If you were in Karen’s position, would you feel the same way she did about her mom?

2. Were there signs of love and care from her mother that Karen was choosing to ignore? What were they?

3. Was Karen right that her mother didn't love her or care about her?

4. Do you think Karen and her mother will get along better now?

5. By the end of the story, what is the main emotion Karen is feeling toward her mother?

6. When was the last time someone was grateful to you? What did it feel like? What were they grateful about?

7. Is showing gratitude to others a sign of weakness or a sign of strength?

8. Would you consider yourself a grateful person? How has this affected your feelings and outlook on life? Would you recommend it to others?

9. If you continued to do favors for someone and they never even said, "Thank you," how would that make you feel? Would you insist that they be grateful to you, or would you continue helping them out without their thanks, or would you stop helping them altogether?

Exercise

Thank each of your family members for something they do that you are grateful for.

CHAPTER 3: Getting off My High Horse

For as long as I can remember, I thought I was the best at everything. In fact, I was sure of it. Whether it was sports or schoolwork, I excelled, I thought. I was the hero in baseball, soccer, basketball, swimming, and I always got straight As in my classes with very little effort.

Yet I never really enjoyed all those “victories.” I was too wrapped up in myself. I thought that I was better than everyone else, and I wondered why they didn't admire me more for it. I tried and tried to tell them. But all I got from people was the remark that I had a “real attitude” about things.

I never understood what they meant until this year, when I had my nose rubbed in it big time. I was so wrapped up in playing the big shot that nothing else seemed to matter, even the loss of many friends. I thought they would like me if I was number one—and I always was, until the day Frederick moved into town.

Frederick was a great athlete. He was tops in baseball, soccer, track, and basketball—better than me. Plus, he always got the highest test scores in class. And to make matters worse, he would always brag about everything he'd won to anyone who was around.

When he found out that I used to be “top dog” at school, he would walk up to me in front of a crowd of kids and yell in my face, “Hey Jonesy, guess who got the only 100 on the math test, again?” Or, “Hey, Jonesy, sorry I outscored you in the basketball game! What did you get, 14 points to my 34?”



Was I ever embarrassed! It really hurt to be put down after being at the top of the totem pole for so long. And I could see in the other kids' faces the thought, “Hey, Jonesy, now you can see how all that showing off feels.” This hurt the most: having my classmates see that I couldn't take what I used to dish out to them.

So you see, after having my hat stepped on and handed to me regularly by someone bigger, smarter, and faster than I was, my attitude was adjusted to where you find me today—someone who no longer proudly boasts in other people's faces and who doesn't take his friends for granted. You see, you never know when someone is going to come along and do the same thing to you!

Questions

1. How much did Jonesy change when Frederick came to town?

2. Do you think Jonesy's change in attitude was sincere, or did he just do it out of pressure from Frederick's bullying?

3. Is there a way to change your attitude without having to go through everything that Jonesy did? What is it?

4. Why is attitude so important in our daily lives?

5. How would you describe your attitude?

6. Do you know people with good attitudes? Bad attitudes? How do you feel when you are around them?

Exercise

1. Think of a world where everyone has a bad attitude. Describe what it is like. How would you like to live there?

2. Now, think of a world where everyone has a good attitude. Describe what it is like. How would you like to live there?

CHAPTER 4: Tommy the Tortoise

My best friend, Tommy, should have known that he was not going to be the top student in the class. He should have known better than to even try, I thought. There were other eager students who could breeze through a textbook in a couple of hours and soak up most of the information.

There were still others who could go to the library, pick out several books that were advanced for their age, and somehow create a really great paper in a day or two. And then there were the kids—you know, the show-offs—who could ask questions in class that even the teacher had trouble answering. Don't you love those types?

I had to hand it to Tommy, though. Not only did he work hard and long on his schoolwork, but he took care of all the details, too.

"The devil is in the details," Tommy would say, as he tried to understand the new math that had bogged down most of the class.

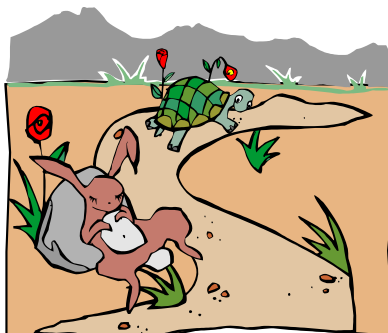
Many of the kids, including some of the "geniuses", would give up and run to older schoolmates and parents for help. Not Tommy. Tommy would roll up his sleeves and go over each and every detail in the math problem until he figured it out. He would look at the whys, why nots, and what ifs of each problem for a long enough time that, sooner or later, a solution to the problem would pop into his head. I mean, sometimes through sheer will power, Tommy would teach himself how to do a difficult problem.

"Why don't you just give up?" I urged him. "You're never going to beat all the really smart kids, like Christa. You're too slow."

"Slow and steady wins the race," said Tommy.

"Huh?"

"You remember that kid's story—the Hare and the Tortoise. Everyone thinks the hare will win a race between the two of them, because he's so much faster naturally. But he thinks he's so fast and impossible to beat, he takes a nap. The poor old tortoise that everyone laughed at winds up winning the race, because he just kept plugging along and didn't take a break." Tommy tapped his chest with his pencil. "I'm that tortoise!"



"Yeah, right," I said.

Whatever the assignment, Tommy plugged away day in and day out, giving equal attention to each and every one of his tests, quizzes, papers, and class projects. Some Saturdays when I asked him to go to the movies, Tommy would simply say, "Sorry, man, I'm working on a special project."

"Being top in the class?" I jeered. "Give up, Tommy. You're just not that smart." He may not have been the smartest kid in the class, but he was certainly the most determined. He just kept plodding on, working hard. The one to beat was Christa. She was so smart, we called her "the atomic brain." I thought it was hopeless for Tommy to even think of beating her out.

At the end of the year, they had an awards ceremony, where they named the top student in every class. We all sat there, bored stiff.

"Okay, Christa," I said. "Just go up there now."

"They haven't called my name yet," she said.

"So what?" I said. "You know you're it, so go ahead and get up."

To my shock, when they called out the top student, it was none other than Tommy Jones, my good friend!

"You beat Christa?" I asked him in disbelief.

"As the tortoise said to the hare," Tommy grinned. "Slow and steady wins the race!"

Questions

1. What was there about Tommy's method of studying that made it possible for him to get good grades?

2. Do you think all the sacrifices Tommy made were worth it?

3. Can you tell what kind of person is Tommy is from how he studies?

4. Do you think that Tommy had fewer friends than the other students in his class? Why or why not?

5. Do you think that studying so hard the way Tommy does builds character, or makes someone a better person? Please explain your answer.

6. Is Tommy the kind of person you would want for a friend? Why, or why not?

Exercise

Is there anything in your life you would like to accomplish, but that you just don't think you are good enough at? In general, if you work at something you will improve a great deal. Why not take your favorite dream and work toward achieving it? If it really isn't right for you, that will show in time. But you never know till you try! The only way to certainly fail at something is never to try it.

CHAPTER 5: Finding My Real Value

When Cassandra graduated from elementary school, she felt that the next step—high school—would be easy. You know, a real piece of cake. After all, she had good grades, wore the newest clothes, was class president as well as a cheerleader, and she had lots of friends. Everyone wanted to be around her. When Cassandra did something, anything, the kids would come up to her and say, “How was it? Did you have fun? Tell all!”

Being the center of attention not only made Cassandra feel important, it encouraged her to take on more responsibilities and accomplish more and more. And each time she increased her activity, her popularity with her classmates grew. Cassandra began to feel, you know, special.

And always her mom was there, smiling at the door as she went off to school, offering her support in so many ways.

But one day, things took a dramatic turn. While crossing the street near school, a car ran a red light and struck Cassandra in the crossing lane. She ended up in a wheelchair, unable to walk for months. She also suffered facial cuts that left her looking unlike the beautiful girl she once was.

And with two broken arms, doing homework seemed difficult, if not impossible. Each day involved doctor visits, treatments at home, and a lot of pain.

Cassandra’s whole world was shattered. Gone were the admiring crowd of friends, the top grades, those glances in the mirror that confirmed her good looks, and the numerous school activities that had won her so much admiration. Oh, at first, right after the accident, there were lots of calls and visits, and everyone expressed friendship and regard for her. But then the visits became fewer and fewer, and all people could talk about was the accident. They looked restless and bored when they visited her.



She didn't want people's pity. She felt like shouting out at them, "I'm the same person I always was inside! I guess you only liked what I was on the outside! But the inside is the real me—and I'm still here!"

More and more, she was alone.

Except for her family. Cassandra had always taken them for granted, but now they became like gold to her. They really loved her and wanted to take care of her in her time of difficulty. Not only her mom and dad and brothers and sisters, but her aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, grandparents—even some relatives she never heard of—showed up at the house frequently to help out, to spend time with her, and to bring her little treats to brighten her day. Not a day went by when someone didn't show up with a little surprise.

Even though her accomplishments came to a halt, Cassandra never felt as loved and valued as she did when her relatives applauded her halting progress toward recovery, when they didn't mind the cuts on her face, when they understood how helpless she was and didn't mind helping her—in other words, when they accepted her lovingly for who she was, even if she was injured. From that time on, she realized how precious were the people who loved her truly—for what she was inside. That part of her had never changed, and neither would their love.

Questions

1. Why do people feel “special” when they receive as much attention as Cassandra did?

2. What make you feel special? Is it one thing, or many things?

3. How long does that special feeling last? What makes it stop?

4. If you were in an accident like Cassandra, what would your reaction to it be?

5. Do you think Cassandra went back to her old way of thinking about her accomplishments once she healed from her injury? Why, or why not?

6. If you were visiting Cassandra at home when she was injured, what would you tell her to cheer her up?

Exercise

Imagine someone you admire very much. It can be a classmate, schoolmate, or a movie or singing star. Imagine him or her at the very top of beauty, accomplishment, and power.

Now imagine the person in Cassandra's situation—accidentally injured, in a wheelchair, probably having to be helped to go to the bathroom, and unable to do all the things you used to admire about him or her. What do you feel toward the person now? Do you think you would soon forget about the person? Do you think the person is still the same inside as they were before the accident? Do you feel he or she still has the same value as before the accident?

CHAPTER 6: Getting Along with Others

Maria didn't have a clue what was wrong in her life. With her flowing hair, pleasant smile, and big brown eyes, she was attractive enough, or at least so she thought. And with all the school activities and clubs she joined—most of which she headed—what possibly could be wrong? She was, after all, in control of every little detail that could possibly affect her. It made her feel safe, confident, and important.

For example, when Maria came into the lunchroom, she always had to sit in the exact same seat with her friends, even if it meant asking ever so politely for someone to move. And if that person didn't get up right away, Maria would start to say things that a young lady simply shouldn't. And if words did not work, then Maria would give the wayward student a little nudge. Usually, it did not get that far, and rather than be further bothered, the would-be fellow lunch mate left. Then Maria's conversation with her friends would continue as if nothing had happened.



But as time went by, Maria began to notice that she had fewer and fewer friends. She couldn't understand why the kids she had grown up with, some of whom had been with her since kindergarten, no longer wanted anything to do with her. It reached the point where half the time she was eating alone in the cafeteria. And when she walked down the halls and saw kids chatting, she noticed students avoiding her when she tried to say something.

Things got worse, until one day Maria saw a group of kids she used to call her friends chatting at a study table in the back of the library. They were half hidden by a bookshelf. Summoning up all the courage she had, Maria walked down the library aisle and ducked down behind the bookshelf, just next to, but hidden from, her friends. She was shocked by what she heard.

“What’s come over Maria? I want absolutely nothing to do with her anymore,” said Jenny, who used to be Maria’s best friend. “She has to be in total control of everything. Everything has to be the way she wants it. Maria has to pick the movie we see, who we sit with at lunch, what happens in the clubs she runs. She doesn’t care what anyone else thinks but her,” she added angrily.

When Maria had finished listening to each of her former friends criticize her along the same lines, she left the library in tears. She felt very much alone, frightened, and miserable. She had thought she had everything under control—but now she realized that she wasn’t in control at all. There was one thing, for all her maneuvering, she had not been able to control—other people’s hearts. Hearts had to be won. And, from what her friends had been saying, she had a long way to go to win theirs back.

Questions

1. How could it be that Maria had no idea that she was being so selfish? Couldn’t she see its affect on her friends? Do people sometimes not know how much they are offending others?

2. Why is it important to take other people’s ideas into account when you are making a decision?

3. Do you have any friends (don’t mention names) who act like Maria? How do you react to them? Do you try to change them in any way?

4. Do you see any of Maria’s behavior in yourself? What is it, and how does it make you feel?

5. How can selfishness affect a person, besides losing friends?

6. If a person thinks that they might be “selfish,” what can they do to stop being so?

7. What is the best way to make and keep friends? Which of these things have you tried yourself and how did it work out?

Exercise

What have you done to create and keep harmony in your relationships? Think about such relationships as those in your family, at school, and in your neighborhood.

CHAPTER 7: Mr. "Perfect"

Robert was a perfectionist. He would try to do his very best in all of his studies, in his relationships, in sports, in the clothes he wore, and how he combed his hair. He just had to do things perfectly. Everything had to be just right.

When he got to class, Robert would take the contents of his backpack and neatly arrange them on his desk. He would hang his coat in his locker, being careful to shake out any wrinkles. When he took a test, he'd erase any additional marks he made, and he would never turn in a paper or report without rereading it over and over.

"He's amazing. Robert puts one hundred percent into everything he does," his teachers would say. It's no wonder they thought highly of that. But the one thing everyone seemed to be bothered by was Robert's anger. Robert had a really bad temper that would flare up each time things did not go his way. Above all, he could not accept criticism, even when he really did make a mistake

If someone told him that he wasn't dressed properly, Robert would fly into a rage.

"What do you mean I'm not dressed right?" he would yell at the top of his lungs. "I'm dressed a whole lot better than you are," he would add, angrily shaking his fist in the air.

If someone so much as bumped into his desk, moving his things a little bit—or worse—knocking a book to the floor, Robert would yell at them, "Why don't you look where you are walking!" And he would call them names.



Even teachers would avoid correcting Robert, knowing that even one little constructive comment would set him off into a fit, disrupting class for several minutes until he could be calmed down. People often felt like it was easier to ignore Robert than to put up with all the venom he would spew forth. They figured he was too sensitive to deal with things, including offers of help.

Because of this, over the years, Robert's grades and standards declined. It wasn't that they were really going down; it was that they were not changing and growing, like everyone else's. Robert was just staying the same. As school got harder and harder in the higher grades, he could not keep up, because he wasn't ready to change and grow. That made Robert all the more angry. It took less and less to set him off, and more and more people avoided him. He was scary, they thought, with that bad temper ready to explode at any moment.

"I'm afraid of him," some people said.

But inside, it was Robert who was really afraid.

Questions

1. Is there ever any good reason to become angry, or does it always mean we are out of control?

2. Is there anything that Robert could have done to prevent himself from getting so angry?

3. When you get angry, how do you act verbally and physically? Describe one such situation.

4. Do you know someone who is angry a lot? Can you talk reasonably with them when they are angry? Why, or why not?

5. Does being angry help you to accomplish more or less? Explain your answer.

6. Do you think that underneath your anger or other people's anger, there might be hurt—or fear?

7. With all his perfectionism, what does Robert seem to fear?

8. Do you think that Robert thinks he is good enough—flaws and mistakes included—or is he afraid he's really no good inside?

Exercise

Are you a perfectionist? Mark the following statements true or false about yourself.

1. I can't trust anyone else to do it as well as I can, so I'd better do all the work myself.

2. If I made a mistake in the morning, I am likely to think about it several times during the day, feeling upset with myself about it.

3. I'm afraid to perform in front of others because I might make a mistake.

4. It's hard for me to ask for or accept anyone's help. I should be able to do things myself.

5. I look down on others who do not have the same high standards I do.

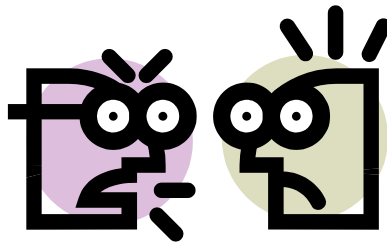
The more "True" answers you marked, the more of a perfectionist you are. Maybe you need to be kinder to yourself! Remember: Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone needs others' help and advice sometimes. Everyone falls short of their goals at times.

CHAPTER 8 Respect Me!

Joe “King Kong” Keller and Sammy “Superman” Smith did not get along. Each day in the halls, students had to put up with Joe and Sammy pushing, shoving, and slamming each other against their lockers. Once, Joe switched student sandwiches from one lunch bag to another.

“Wait until Sammy finds out he has Carla’s chopped egg and onion sandwich! He hates eggs and onions,” he said, chuckling to himself. Sammy retaliated by taking Joe’s lunch entirely.

And there was the name-calling—to say nothing of the dirty tricks. Joe would put chewing gum on Sammy’s seat, a “Kick me” sign on his back, or sneak a fly into his drink. Sammy would do more of the same, to the point where none of their classmates wanted anything to do with these two kings of conflict.



The situation boiled over one day when the two battling students started their antics in the school cafeteria. Tables were overturned, food got dumped on the floor, and the peaceful lunch period of the other students was disrupted. For the first time, Joe and Sammy’s ugly, running feud was out in public, not hidden among students in the hallways, at recess, or on the playing fields.

Interestingly, none of the teachers, administrators, or even the boys’ parents seemed aware of what was going on. But several concerned students volunteered information to Ms. Lewis, the school’s guidance counselor. They remembered what Ms. Lewis had told their class the opening week of school.

“If any of you have conflicts among yourselves, please come see me to discuss them before they become heated arguments or fights,” she insisted. “We all need to work together to make this a better school.”

The students who reported the feud only regretted that they had not done so much earlier. But do you know what? After several sessions with Ms. Lewis, Joe and Sammy were able to resolve their conflict. It all turned out to be a matter of respect. Neither one felt respected by the other.

It was hard to learn to treat each other with respect, but they could do it. They learned that, even if you have disrespected someone in the past, it is not too late to begin acting right toward him or her. Some say Joey and Sammy are now the best of friends!

Questions

1. What is a “conflict” and how does it happen?

2. What are some ways to avoid a conflict? Is it possible to avoid a conflict before it even starts? How?

3. Can anything good come out of a conflict? If so, what is it?

4. What are some ways to show respect for others? What are some ways to show disrespect?

5. How can you tell if you are creating a conflict yourself? Can you create a conflict and not even know it?

Exercise

Break into groups of three or four with your classmates. Describe to one another a conflict you have had in the past week. Conflicts can be arguments, disputes, fights, or misunderstandings that involve your family, friends, neighbors, and students. (Please do not mention names.) Tell the type of conflict it was, what started it, something about the other person/people involved, and what happened during the conflict (angry words, actions, etc). Tell whether the conflict was finally resolved, and if so, how. Finally, tell whether, looking back, you might have been able to resolve the conflict faster or even avoid it entirely.

CHAPTER 9: The Cramers Get it Right

What's wrong with this picture?

It's a quiet Saturday afternoon in the community. At the Cramer house, two of the children, Bob and Al, are happily playing the latest video game on their Playstation 2. Earlier, they watched a rental movie, and later, they will go to the mall to hang out. The third Cramer child, Samantha, is packing a lunch and filling a canteen with nice, cold lemonade for herself. Soon, she'll be off to a picnic in the park she has arranged with some of her school friends. She can hardly wait to go paddling on the park pond. She loves to dip her feet in the cool water. Such fun!

The children's mother, Mrs. Cramer, has been, since the early hours, washing, drying, ironing, and folding the family's laundry. Their father, Mr. Cramer, is in the front yard, mowing the long grass in the hot summer sun. He is hot, tired, and thirsty from having to work so hard on his day off.



What is wrong with this picture?

What's wrong is that the Cramer family responsibilities do not seem to be properly shared among the five family members. On the one hand, you have the three Cramer children having the time of their lives on a Saturday, while their parents are working hard for the sake of the family. Do you think the parents are happy to be working so hard when they might like a little time to enjoy themselves too?

Instead of so much entertainment, Bob and Al could have played video games *or* watched the rental movie (instead of both) and used the extra time to help their father mow the lawn.

Samantha could bring her father some of that nice, cold lemonade. She could also help her mother with the laundry.

Let's change this picture. Mr. Cramer puts the lawnmower down. Mrs. Cramer puts the laundry basket down. Bob and Al come into the kitchen. Samantha puts away the food and drink she was preparing. They all sit down at the kitchen table.

Together, the Cramers create a schedule of household chores for the weekend: who does, or helps with, the laundry, dishes, cooking, cleaning, garbage, yard work, etc., and when it gets done. Mom and Dad Cramer look very relieved!

The phone rings. It's for Samantha. Her friends can't come to the park for another couple of hours.

"That's okay," she says. "That gives me time to help with some chores around the house."

It turns out, that's why her friends can't come right away—they too have to help around the house.

Bob says, excitedly, "Dad, will you show us how to run the lawnmower?"

Al says, "Yeah! Will you—please?"

Their dad agrees. The kids have even more fun that Saturday than usual because they feel very grown-up helping around the house—and their parents are in much better moods!

Questions

1. How much time do you think that children should have to spend on household chores during the school week and on weekends?

2. Do you think that children spend too much time on entertainment like video games, computers, and movies? If so, what kind of limits would you place on your child if you were a parent?

3. Do you think that parents should have the final say in planning meetings about household chores? Why, or why not?

4. Is it possible for a child to take on too much responsibility? Give an example.

Exercise

Scientists have proven that children who do chores in their family home and yard are healthier, happier, have better relationships and more friends, as well as more financial success later in life than children who never had to help their families. Make a list of chores, with your parents' help, that you could start doing on a regular basis. Your parents will be happy, and you will be making a better future for yourself!

Chapter 10 What's Precious to Me

My name is Naji, and I am in the eighth grade at one of the local secondary schools in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Boys my age in St. Thomas usually do not complete any schooling beyond age fourteen. Not me! I am going to beat the odds.

I love school. I love everything about school, including math, science, and technology. But mostly, I love English classes, because they allow me to read, and I love to read. I read anything I can get my hands on, including books, newspapers, and my famous prized possession— my Webster’s Dictionary.

The dictionary opens up a whole new world for me—the world of words and definitions. I love to find out the origin of words, how the words are put together, and how they are properly pronounced.



Most young boys my age on the island are not interested in school. They are more interested in ways of making a quick buck, even if that means robbing someone to get it.

In St. Thomas, there is a high unemployment rate. There is also a lack of technology, educational resources, and there is poor school attendance. My father didn't get past the sixth grade. He had to drop out of school to help his mother take care of the family. My mother didn't get past the third grade. My older brother, Clover, was in jail because he tried to rob a grocery store. Because he had little education, he couldn't get a job, so he thought that might be a good way to get money.

My mission in life is to change that pattern of lack of education in my family. I have decided I am going to be different. I want a future, and I look forward to making a better life for myself. My dream is to become a college professor in the United States.

My mother had to work for two months just to be able to save enough money to purchase a Webster's Dictionary for me. My mother knew I loved books, so she wanted to buy me a book that I could use forever, even though she had to work extra hard at her low-paying job. I knew I would use this dictionary forever, even when I went away to college.

I carry my Webster's Dictionary everywhere I go. It means everything to me, because my mother gave it to me, and because it is my ticket away from the despair of St. Thomas.

One day I was rushing to get home to show my mother my report card, which was all As. I knew my mom would be proud of me. As I ran, I realized that my backpack felt much lighter.

"Oh, no! I forgot my dictionary at school!" I cried.

I ran back to school, which was over two miles away, because I had to have my dictionary at all times. Plus, my mother had worked so hard to get it for me, and it was my responsibility. By the time I got back to school, it was almost dark.



I asked one of the janitors, "Excuse me, sir. Would it be possible for you to open my classroom so I can get a book I left in there?"

The janitor responded, "Boy, you'd better go run home now. It will be dark soon, and this is no place for a young boy to be after dark."

I begged him to let me into my classroom, and he finally allowed me to go in and grab my dictionary. Thank God, it was still there.

I grabbed the dictionary and kissed it and hugged it and ran out of the classroom, yelling to the janitor, "Thanks again for letting me in!"

Even though I had miles to walk before I made it home, I felt like I was walking on clouds, because I had my prized dictionary.

Because I am so familiar with the dictionary, I am able to read better than a lot of my teachers at school. Everyone is impressed with my ability to read, write, and interpret information.

I often tell my teachers, "I can't take all of the credit for my success, because if it were not for my Webster's Dictionary, I would not know all this information."

You'd better believe that I take good care of that dictionary! I have a future ahead of me, and I am going to make my dream of becoming a college professor come true. Then I will bring that knowledge back to St. Thomas and educate my people.

Maybe I will be able to bring lots of dictionaries!

Questions

1. Do you think Naji is a responsible person? Explain your answer.

2. Do you think he will make his dream come true? Why?

3. How does Naji feel about himself? Is he a happy, confident person?

4. Would there be any reasons you might not want to be considered a “responsible” person? If so, why?

5. List and name some of the rewards you have received for being a responsible student/person.

6. In what ways can being an irresponsible or responsible student affect your self-esteem?

7. Do you consider it important for your family and friends to be responsible? In what ways?

Exercise

Think about a time when you were responsible for an item. Describe the item, and why it was important for you to take care of. Now think about a time when you were irresponsible with an item someone trusted you with. What was the outcome? How did you feel afterwards?

Chapter 11: My Role in the Family

Penny has just found a new pen pal, Molongi, who lives in a small country in Africa. In this letter, Penny is writing to Molongi about her family.

Dear Molongi,

Thanks for your letter. Africa sounds exciting and free. I bet no one is fussed about homework much, are they? In my family, I am not allowed to watch any TV until I finish all my homework for the day and read some of my library book. DRAG!!! Then, after I watch my cartoons, I have to help Mom with the chores...you know, set the table, feed Snappy (our cat).

What chores do you do, and how much pocket money do you get for it? I'm saving mine for the new Nintendo game that has come out. I should have enough money to buy it by the end of this month. I can't wait.

You know, I love my family, but they can get annoying too. Take my little brother, for example. I love him, but he thinks all my things belong to him. Mom says I am his elder sister, so I have to share so he learns how to share, and I have to be loving to him so he learns what true love is. I wonder if my older brother, Jason, had to go through this with *me*. He is such a cool brother. He twirls me around real fast and lets me beat him up. He even pretends it hurts, to make me laugh. I just adore Jason. I would never want to do anything to embarrass him in front of his friends.

I have to go now. My dad is coming home from work soon, and I want to be ready for him. He gives the best bear hugs when I have a cool drink ready for him. He likes Ginger Beer the best. He says I am his "princess". Mom pretends to be jealous and comes over and tickles us both.

There he is now...

Write back soon.

Love,
Penny



Molongi replied pretty quickly. She was fascinated by Penny's letter.

Hello, Penny,

I loved reading about your family. It sounds a bit like mine when my mom and dad were alive. I can remember my dad twirling me around too and calling me "Queen of the Monkeys" because I used to climb all over him.

Now I have to be like a mother to the younger ones and my little cousins, too. But my grandmother works really hard so I can have an education. I stay up late and do my homework when the babies are sleeping. If I can be a teacher when I grow up, I won't have to work in the fields, like my grandmother and my older brother, to feed everyone. My schoolwork is the one chore I love doing, because it is for my future and to provide for my family. And I get to write to you. Maybe we can meet one day.

But I love playing out in the fields too and climbing trees. I take the little ones out and teach them things out there so I can play with them. Carrying the water from the well is the hardest of all. When my brother is not too tired, he helps me, but it is a woman's job, so I have to do it.

Penny, what is Nintendo?

We are so lucky to have Grandmother. I rub her feet at night the way my mom used to do when she was here. I hope she doesn't miss her daughter too much. My mother and father took good care of all of us before they got sick. They took care of grandmother, too. She says they made sure we always had good food, but, more importantly, they gave us their values and morals so we can be good people. I remember them teaching us at night.

It's late now, and my candle is pretty low.

I'm sending you a drawing of my grandmother.

Love,
Molongi



Questions

1. How do you think the girls felt when they read each other's letters?

Molongi _____

Penny _____

2. In what ways were the girls' roles in the family similar, and in what ways were they different?

Similarities _____

Differences _____

3. What was it that Penny loved about her brother, Jason? What brotherly qualities do you think he displayed toward Penny?

4. Molongi does not talk about her brother in the same loving terms. Why do you think that is? How do the two brothers appear to be different toward their sisters?

Exercise

Write a letter to an imaginary pen pal, describing your family and how you see your relationships with other members of your family. Include things like your responsibilities, your duties, and things that you do for your family out of love for them. Draw a picture of your family.

Chapter 12 My Best Friend?

Susan Swartz is my best friend, but she has one problem: she can't seem to keep up in math. I am a math wizard, and I practically get a 100% on all of my math tests. By the way, my name is Melodie, and because Susan is my friend, I tutor her in math to help her get better grades on the tests. Sometimes my assistance works, but other times it is almost like I haven't helped her at all.

Well, our big midterm math test was coming up—the one that is supposed to be fifty percent of our math grade. It was going to be easy for me, because we had been working on it all since the beginning of the school year. But for Susan, it was a different story.

“Susan, do you want to come over this weekend so I can help you to get ready for the math midterm next Tuesday?” I asked.

Susan replied, “Sure. I just have to get permission from my parents first.”

I loved helping my classmates, and since Susan was my best friend, it made it easy for me to want to help her.

The next day in class, a few of my friends and I were quizzing each other on math.

Susan came up to me to ask, “What are you doing?”

Another one of our math classmates, Kenya Robinson, replied, “We’re just trying to get ready for this big midterm next week. Would you like to join us, Susan?”

Susan responded, “No, I think I will get ready for the test on my own.”

Kenya said, “Okay.”



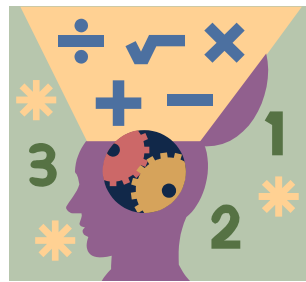
I knew that it wasn't that Susan didn't need the help—I knew she was just too embarrassed to show her flaws in math to anyone else but me. She hated test results, because everyone would talk about their math test grades. When they would ask Susan about her test grade, she would just lie and tell them she got another “C”, but in actuality she probably got a “D” or an “F”.

I called Susan on Thursday night to see if she had asked her parents about coming over on Saturday to prepare for the math midterm. She told me her parents said it was okay, so I told her we could study all day, with breaks to play, and my mom would make us lunch.

I was excited about helping Susan, so I woke up extra early on Saturday morning to get the dining room table prepared. I had our math textbook, some extra worksheets that I made copies of from class, scratch paper, and plenty of pencils. Susan was late. Once she arrived, I directed her to my dining room table, where I had everything set up.

Susan said, “Before we get started, Melodie, can I ask you a question? Actually, it is a favor.” Because she was my best friend, I responded, “Ask away.”

To my surprise, Susan asked, “Melodie, I can’t learn all of this math stuff in one day. Can I just sit behind and cheat off your test? You are a wizard at this stuff, and we are best friends, aren’t we?”



I had to think about this decision carefully, because I am Susan’s best friend, but I knew that this was totally against my values and beliefs. I can’t cheat; nor can I let another student cheat off me. That would be wrong; plus, it’s not fair to me because I did properly prepare and study for the test, and she didn’t. Why should I give my work away?

I said, “Susan, I am sorry I can’t help you. If you were truly my friend, you wouldn’t ask me to do something so dishonest. Why do you think I have gone so far out of my way to help you in math? I could have suggested cheating long ago if I thought that was the best way.”

Susan at first looked dazed and confused, but in the end, she understood. We studied together for most of the day, and I was able to teach her quite a bit.

The last thing I said to her was, “I hope you realize I am being a true friend to you.”

Susan waved in a friendly way, so I knew she was not mad.

On Wednesday morning—the day after the big math midterm test—the students in the class were anxiously awaiting the results of their tests. I wasn’t worried about my grade, but I was worried about Susan’s. I got my test back, and it had a big 100% and an “A+” beside it. Then Susan got her test, and to her surprise, it had an 83% and a big “B” next to that. I gave her a high five and reminded her that hard work really does pay off.

Questions

1. Has anyone ever asked you to help him or her cheat? What was your response?

2. Have you ever had the experience that, through hard work, you could be successful at something you had never succeeded at before?

3. Do you think Melodie is a good friend to Susan? In what ways?

4. Do you think Melodie did the right thing? Why?

5. If you had been in Melodie's place, would you have let Susan cheat?

6. Now that Susan has asked Melodie to let her cheat, do you think Melodie will trust Susan quite as much as she did before? Will Susan's acceptance of Melodie's answer and her hard work help Melodie trust her again?

Exercise

Imagine the following scene:

You and a friend volunteered to paint a fence in the back of the school. You've worked hard, gotten sweaty, told other friends you couldn't play with them, and even postponed lunch in order to finish. The fence looks great! A third friend of yours comes up and stays with you a while, not working but just talking.

Now the principal comes out of the school building. He is very happy with the painted fence. He praises and praises you.

Then he says, "As a special reward, here's some ice cream."

Your third friend, who didn't do any of the work, has been smiling at all the praise and gladly takes an ice cream cone.

He didn't do any of the work, but he's willing to take the rewards. It's a little like cheating.

What should you do in this situation?

Chapter 13: Far Away Friend

It was less than a week before the National Debate Competition that was to take place in Barcelona, Spain. This was extremely exciting, because I would be able to put my six years of conversational Spanish to good use. Plus, coming from Billings, Montana, going to a foreign country was the highlight of my entire life. Also, all of my classmates from the debate team would be joining me on the trip. I was the captain of our school debate team, and we had won the state and regional competitions, which was why we were able to compete in Spain.

I had been corresponding for almost six months with the captain of the team from the school that was to host us in Spain. His name was Javier Benetiz, and he appeared to be a cool guy with similar interests to me. We both enjoyed hiking, soccer, and reading mystery novels. I just could not wait to embark on this new adventure—and to meet Javier in person!

When we arrived in Spain, everything was different from what we were used to. The other students kind of stared at us because they knew we were not from their country. They were also surprised at how well we spoke Spanish!



One of the students approached me and said, “Como te llamas?”(**What is your name?**)

I replied, “Me llamo es Timothy.Y tu?” (**My name is Timothy and you?**)

The young lady responded, “Me llamo es Cecilia. Donde estas?” (**My name is Cecilia. Where are you from?**)

“Nosotros estamos en Montana.” (**We are from Montana**). I continued “Nosotros estamos en El Spain para un grande competicion de debate.”(**We are in Spain for the big debate competition**).

After we arrived at our host school, I finally got a chance to meet Javier face-to face. He was as cool as he seemed in his letters. He was so excited to take us around to meet everyone. I felt like I'd known him a long time.

After we ate lunch, it was time to practice.

“Cuantos horas tu equipo practica para semana?”(**How many hours does your team practice each week?**) Javier asked.

I responded, “Mi equipo practica para diez horas para semana, y tu?”(**My team practices for about ten hours a week, and yours?**)

Javier replied, “Mi equipo practica para veinte horas para semana”(My team practices for **twenty hours a week.**)

“Wow, ellos practican mucho!”(**Wow, all of you practice a lot!**)

I loved every minute of being in Spain. I loved the culture, the food, and the people were very friendly.

I asked Javier, “Que tiempo es un competicion en manana?”(**What time is the competition tomorrow?**)

Javier responded, “El competicion espara a la ocho hora en el dia.”(**The competition starts at 8 in the morning**).

The debate competition was amazing. Schools from twelve different countries were represented. We had an unstoppable team, with my team from Montana plus Javier, Rosa, and Manuel from Spain. They were an excellent addition to our team; plus, they had been in the debate competition for the last two years, and this was only our first year.



Even though we didn't win first place, second place felt just as good, because we met new friends and learned more about another culture. After the competition, we only had one more day left in Barcelona, so Javier and I tried to spend as much time together as possible. We talked about him coming to visit me one day in Montana, and then I could introduce him to all of my friends, and he could learn a little bit about my culture.

“Que es su sujeto favorito en escuela?” asked Javier. (**What is your favorite subject in school?**)

“Mi sujeto favorito es Espanol,” I responded. (**My favorite subject is Spanish.**)

Before my classmates and I were heading to the bus to leave Spain, Javier had one last question to ask me and that was, “Que canciones tu tienes en su I-pod?”(**What songs do you have on your I-pod?**)

I showed him, and then we stood in front of the bus, feeling a little uncomfortable. It was hard to say goodbye to someone I had become such great friends with in such a short amount of time. What could I say to him? By the sad look on his face, I knew Javier was finding it hard to think of things to say, too.

Finally, I said, “Muchas gracias para tu hospitality. Yo no puedo tu visites mi en Montana.”(**Thank you very much for your hospitality, and I can’t wait for you to visit me in Montana.**)

Javier brightened up and gave me a big smile. Then we hugged. I felt like we were brothers. For some things, you don't need to say any words in any language!

When the bus started up and drove off, we waved and waved to each other until we couldn't see each other any more. But I know I'll always have a friend in Spain!

Questions

1. What are some of the qualities you look for in a friend?

2. Are your friends in middle school more important to you than the ones you had in elementary school?

3. What is the difference between a friend and an acquaintance?

4. Can you be popular and not be a good friend? What is more important to you—being popular or being a good friend?

Write a newspaper ad for a friend: "Friend Wanted." What kind of person do you like as a friend? Would you like to be friends with Javier, or with the boy who is telling the story, or both? Why? What qualities of character do they show? Write these into your ad for a friend!

MUST HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUALIFICATIONS:

[illegible]

Chapter 14: Handling a Hurricane!

It was the morning of August 29, 2005—a day I will never forget! I thought I would be getting ready for school as usual, but this day would be like no other.

My name is Tyrel, and I used to live in the lower ninth ward in New Orleans, Louisiana. That was before Hurricane Katrina totally destroyed our home, causing the water to rise to the second story. We had to move the entire family—myself, my grandmother, my mother, my dad, and my three younger sisters—to the roof of our house. This was most difficult for my grandmother, who was confined to a wheelchair. As the men of the house, and the only ones with muscles, my dad and I had to lift my grandmother to the roof to join the rest of the family until help arrived.

Hurricane Katrina really stressed me out.



I began to ask my mother and father questions like, “How long do you think we will be on this roof?” and “What school will I go to now?” and “Where will we go?” It was a situation where you didn’t even know where your next meal was coming from—or if you’d get one. You kept the thought in the back of your mind, “Will my family make it out of this alive?”

We did make it out alive. My family later was transported to Houston, Texas, which would be our new home. We were loaded onto several school buses and brought to Texas. My family didn’t know a soul in Texas, but we felt fortunate to make it out alive, because we had heard of and seen so many people who did not.

We stayed in a shelter in Texas for two months, and then we finally settled in our new home. It was now time for my sisters and me to start school.

I was nervous about starting a new school in a new place. My younger sisters were excited about making new friends.

“Tyrel, are you ready for school yet?” my mom asked from the kitchen.

I was ready. I said, “You know, I still wonder what happened to my friends back in New Orleans, like Malcolm and Nick.”

"Tyrel," Mom said. "I know you miss your friends back home, but Houston is our new home now, and you will have to make new friends. Baby, I know it will not be easy to start new, but we all have to start over. Your dad and I have to find jobs, and we definitely need to find medical treatment for your grandmother. We all have to adjust, but we will make it. We are survivors."

My father pulled me to the side before I got on the bus for school and said, "Tyrel things will be okay, son. Just be yourself, and people will love you."

"Dad, what about the football season? I will probably have to rejoin for a new team," I said. "Tyrel, stop stressing yourself out. The best news is that our family is safe. You never know why things happen, but they do, and the most important lesson is not what happens to you, but what you do about it," my dad responded.

Ten minutes later, the school bus arrived to pick me up for school. The school was located about fifteen miles outside of Houston.



When I got on the bus, everyone looked and stared like I was from another planet.

"Hey, I think that is the new kid," said one.

"He was in Hurricane Katrina."

One big guy in a soccer team jersey said, "Here. You can sit here next to me."

He must have been the captain of the team or something, because everyone acted impressed.

At this point, a lot of kids started introducing themselves to me and said I was like a "hero" to have made it out alive from Hurricane Katrina.

"What was it like?" they all wanted to know. They shuddered when I told them about waiting and waiting on the roof, hungry, scared, watching the water rise toward your crippled old grandmother, and wondering if it was going to swallow your whole family up. Not to mention thinking about all you had that was ruined in the watery house underneath you!

They told me that my new school was collecting clothing, money, and canned goods for the people who were relocated to Houston as a result of Hurricane Katrina and who, like us, had lost everything. I knew from this point forward that I didn't need to be stressed out anymore. I was going to be all right. I had friends!

Questions

1. Tyrel was pretty stressed about all he had gone through in Hurricane Katrina. What was he stressed out about after his family settled into his new home?

2. Did he need to worry about that?

3. Do you think his parents were more stressed out than he was? Why or why not?

4. What is the most stressful time you have ever gone through?

5. Did friends and family members help, like in Tyrel's case?

Exercise

One of the best things to reduce stress is to exercise! If you can't do a few exercises when you are under stress (you are in class, for instance), take twenty deep, deep breaths.

Try this now. Count them. Twenty. Concentrate on the tension of holding air in and the release of letting it out. After twenty deep breaths, you should feel less stressed.

Friends and family are also great ways to reduce stress. They say that just telling someone about your problems cuts your problems in half! Appreciate your friends and family as supports for your life.

Chapter 15: Quit Picking on Me!

The students in Mrs. Garrison's class were a little more wild than usual. Mrs. Garrison had called in sick, and they had a substitute—Mr. Faulkner. All the kids thought Mr. Faulkner was easy, and they were set to take full advantage of that.

Mr. Faulkner took attendance, being careful not to pronounce the students' names wrong, as he had done the last time he had substituted. That had been a big laugh. He was doing pretty well until he got to Akmed. All the kids waited, almost holding their breath.

Mr. Faulkner gave it his best try: *"Awwk-Meed Shaa-bazz."*

"Here!" Akmed said loudly, to try to stop all the laughing. It was bad enough to have a foreign name everyone made fun of. Then to have a teacher say it wrong, too!

"All right, all right," Mr. Faulkner told the class. "It was just a little mistake."

Just a little mistake, thought Akmed. Well, it might seem that way to Mr. Faulkner, but to him it was one more incident of being laughed at.

"There's Akmed over there, using the water fountain," said Tommy, one the bullies. Akmed tried his best to steer clear of Tommy and his gang, because they were always bothering him at school, but it wasn't always possible.



"Don't use the water fountain, guys, it probably has some foreign germs on it," Tommy said, while some other kids laughed.

Akmed felt terrible. He might be from another country, but he never considered himself all that different from anyone else. His family was very patriotic. His father always talked about how much they owed their adopted country. But no one understood that.

Akmed had one friend at school named Ramona, who was also from another country. She felt sorry for Akmed, because she had been treated with the same bullying behavior when she first moved to the area. Ramona was strong-willed and had a sharp tongue, which she turned on the bullies whenever she could. That seemed to make them leave her alone. She also made other friends because people had realized she was not so different after all.

Now Ramona fit in, and she was confident enough to say to Tommy, "Leave Akmed alone. He didn't do anything to you."

Tommy mumbled something. He thought Ramona was pretty, and he didn't want to invite any more comments from her either.

Then he said, under his breath, to Akmed, "I'll see you after school sometime." He nodded at Ramona. "Without your bodyguard."

Sometimes Akmed wished he didn't have to go to school at all. The teasing was awful. It happened all the time, but he couldn't get used to it. The students would make fun of his accent and his traditional attire, not to mention his family's standards about music and dancing.

"Have you seen the latest video, Akmed?" someone asked.

"I can't watch music videos," Akmed responded. "My parents won't let me."



When the other students laughed and made fun of him, Ramona said loudly, "My mom said she wished she could be as strong as your parents are! Maybe I'd get better grades then." Ramona shrugged helplessly. All her friends laughed. No one understood how someone as clever as Ramona could get such poor grades.

"Come on, Akmed, my smart friend," she said. "You come help me with my math."

As Akmed went off with Ramona, the laughter and teasing stopped. Akmed was grateful to Ramona. Maybe with her on his side, there was hope after all.

Questions

If you are unsure whether your words or actions are bullying to someone else, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are my actions or words hurting someone else's feelings?

2. Are my actions or words hurting someone else physically or making them feel afraid of me?

3. Would I want someone else to treat me the way I am treating him or her?

4. Am I unfairly taking my anger out on another person?

5. Am I trying to control someone against his or her will?

Exercise

Become a "Bully Reporter" for a day. Document on a piece of paper each bullying incident that you witness. Write down the date, time, who was the bully, who was the victim, how you think you should handle the situations, did anyone tell an adult, etcetera.

Chapter 16: Peacemaking

Inside Mr. Jackson's class, the students were anxiously waiting to hear the news that he had to share with them.

"Class, you know it is that time of year again for the big middle school Bake Off!"

The class cheered. They got to eat the entries in the contests! The boys were especially happy.

"Kathryn, I know you definitely want to enter the contest," said Mr. Jackson. "Those cookies you made for the bake sale sold out in just a few minutes."



"Yeah, your cookies are to die for," chimed in Michelle Williams, a very popular, athletic girl.

Kathryn smiled. It was nice to be praised by someone like Michelle. Although Kathryn was funny, smart, nice, and pleasant-looking, she had no self-confidence at all. It was because she was just a bit overweight.

"A woman should have some curves," her father said to her. "You're fine."

But Kathryn felt self-conscious to be so much more developed and womanly-looking than the other girls.

Mr. Jackson stepped outside the classroom to speak to another teacher, and the class immediately broke into many conversations.

"Yes, I suppose Mrs. Humpty Dumpty will enter the contest," said Alexis. She was part of Michelle's "clique" but not as nice as Michelle. She was one of the popular, pretty, fashionable girls who looked down on others. Alexis sneered. "She obviously knows quite a bit about the kitchen!"

Kathryn's cousin, Ralph, said, "Are you jealous, Alexis, because Kathryn's got a better figure than you do?"

Everyone hooted.

Luisa, Kathryn's best friend, said, "Everyone, we shouldn't be putting each other down. Alexis is *beautiful*, and everyone knows Kathryn bakes great cookies!" Luisa was the peacemaker in the school. She didn't allow students to pick on others and felt everyone should be friends. Plus, what she had said was true.

Alexis and Kathryn peeked at each other to see if the other was still mad. Neither of them was. Alexis was satisfied to be called "beautiful" and Kathryn was happy to be defended by family and friends.

Luisa prodded Ralph, "Apologize to Alexis."

"She should apologize to Kathryn," said Ralph.

"Ralph," said Luisa warningly.

"Sorry," Ralph said to Alexis. "I shouldn't have said that."

"Well, I put down your cousin," admitted Alexis. She looked at Kathryn. "Sorry." Kathryn gulped and nodded.

Luisa sat back with a satisfied smile on her face.



Mr. Jackson came in angrily. "What's all the noise in here? Luisa, what happened? I heard arguing."

"Nothing, Mr. Jackson," said Luisa sweetly. "We settled it."

He nodded. Luisa often did settle things, so he trusted that everything was all right.

Two weeks passed, and Kathryn was getting ready for the Bake off. She was making special cookies for the competition and used her friends to be her taste testers. On the day of the Bake off, Kathryn was nervous and excited at the same time. The judges' results came in. Kathryn won first place!

When one of the judges was pinning Kathryn's first place ribbon on her, Alexis came up to her and said, "Congratulations, Kat. Your cookies were the best."

Happily, Kathryn told Alexis she had a few more cookies that she had put to the side. Kathryn gave Alexis the extra cookies.

Alexis responded, “Hey, Kat, a few of us are going to the mall after school tomorrow. Would you like to join us?”

“Sure, but I’ll have to ask my mom first,” said Kathryn. Kathryn even liked the way Alexis shortened her name and called her “Kat”. From that point forward, Kathryn started calling herself “Kat” and thought it was cute.

Kathryn still thanks Luisa for stepping in and being the peacemaker, because Kathryn gained a new friend—Alexis!

Questions

1. Do you agree or disagree: When you get into a conflict with someone it’s okay to call names and hit the person. Why or why not?

2. What’s bad about violence?

3. Have you ever gotten into a disagreement because you were actually upset about something else? What happened? How did you feel afterward? What did you learn from that?

4. Do you think there is something wrong with someone who walks away from a fight or disagreement?

5. What are the benefits of resolving conflicts in a peaceful and positive way?

6. What did you think of Luisa's efforts to make peace? Would Luisa be a good friend to have?

Exercise

Here is an example of a true/false to find out if you are a peacemaker:

True / False

1. I treat other people the way I would like to be treated. _____
2. I am open-minded and reasonable. _____
3. I consider the feelings of all people who will be affected by my decisions and actions.

4. I take responsibility for what goes on in my community. _____
5. I participate in community service. _____
6. I help take care of the environment. _____

The more "Trues" you marked, the more of a peacemaker you are!

Explain your choice for the following statement:

I think I (am/ am not) a good citizen because:

Chapter 17: A Good Friend

As Jacinta walked by the rows of neatly kept houses in her new neighborhood, she felt nervous. Today was really going to be something. After all, it was her first day at a new school, and that meant meeting all kinds of strangers—kids and teachers—in a building she was unfamiliar with.

Would everyone be able to tell she didn't know anyone and didn't know where she was supposed to go? Would she be able to make friends?

She kept remembering what her mother said while she was combing her hair that morning: “Just mind your manners, listen to your teachers, and don’t hang out with the wrong kids.”

Jacinta knew about the manners and listening part, but what did her mother mean by the “wrong kids”? At this point, Jacinta felt she would be glad to be hanging out with any kids at all!

Besides, this was a nice neighborhood. How bad could the kids be?

It wasn’t long before this question was answered. While sitting in class, Jacinta heard two boys talking. One said he left his lunch on the bus. The other whispered that he could easily take another classmate’s lunch out of the closet. Jacinta felt disturbed, because this was the first time she had heard two people scheming to steal. Should she do anything about it?

Jacinta wondered. She wasn't sure. She felt funny and bad when she thought about it, so she just tried to forget about it. But it stayed with her, in the back of her mind, all day. It spoiled her feelings about her new school. Was this a place where it was okay to steal?



After morning classes, lunchtime finally came. Jacinta looked forward to having lunch with Susan, a nice girl in class who had asked her to sit with her in the lunchroom. However, walking into the noisy, crowded cafeteria, Jacinta noticed one of the boys she had overheard. He dumped the contents of a bag lunch onto a tray, threw the empty bag in the trash, and quickly ate the food. As she sat down to eat, Jacinta heard another student complaining that his lunch had “disappeared” from the closet.

“His lunch was stolen!” Jacinta thought. But what was she to do? Confront the thief with what he had done? Tell the student whose lunch was stolen what had happened? Tell a teacher? Do nothing? She felt funny and bad all over again as she looked at the hungry boy.

"What's wrong?" Susan asked her.

Maybe Susan would laugh at her for making a big deal out of nothing. Maybe that was just the way things were at this school. Maybe everyone was used to it.

Miserably, Jacinta told Susan what was bothering her.

Susan said, "You should go tell the lunchroom supervisor." She nodded her head firmly to urge Jacinta to do it. "I'll go with you. Come on."

The lunchroom teacher first made sure the boy without a lunch got fed. Then she called the boy who had stolen the lunch to go to the principal. He gave Jacinta and Susan a dirty look as he passed, which Susan shrugged off.

"I don't care about the opinion of someone who'd steal somebody else's lunch," Susan said.

When Jacinta went home and told her mother all about her first day at school, her mother was proud.

"You did everything I told you to. And especially you chose a good friend—Susan!"

Jacinta felt proud too. She was glad she had told. It had gotten rid of the funny and bad feeling she had every time she looked at the hungry boy whose lunch was stolen.

She couldn't wait until tomorrow when she could be at her new school again—she was already beginning to love it—and with her new friend Susan.

Questions

1. What good thing happened to Jacinta on this first day in a new school?

2. What bad thing did she witness?

3. What do you think Jacinta should have done?

4. What would you have done?

5. What was the right thing to do?

6. What role did Jacinta's mother play in her daughter's first day at school?

7. Was it healthy for Jacinta to keep what she knew about the lunch theft to herself?

8. Is Susan a good friend for Jacinta?

Exercise

Sometimes we need the help and support of other people as we face challenges. What is the biggest challenge you as a student are facing? Are you winning the challenge? Figure out who—friends, parents, coaches, or teachers—could help you meet this challenge better, and approach them about it.