

Lesson Plan: Forgiveness

Grade level: 1st

Subject: Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Duration: 60 minutes

Montana Whole Child Competencies:

- **MTSEL.K-12.1.a** Identify, understand, and link emotions, thoughts, and values and recognize how they influence behavior across contexts.
- **MTSEL.K-12.5.a** Demonstrate caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and name their own feelings
- Identify how holding onto negative feelings (and grudges) physically affects their bodies.
- Define forgiveness in Grade 1 terms: Choosing to put down heavy feelings so our hearts can feel light again.
- Problem-solving conflicts with peers

Materials:

- Chart papers
- Markers
- A visual printout of an empty "backpack"
- A full backpack

Lesson Outline:

1. Initial Engagement: (5 minutes)

- Open the lesson with either a short class discussion or a think-pair-share activity: *"Think of a time when you forgave someone's mistakes. How does that make you feel?"*

2. Explicit Instruction: (5 minutes)

- Gather students on the rug or comfortable seats, forming a big circle. The teacher will stand in the middle, then put a heavily weighted backpack on dramatically. Walk around clumsily, sigh, and act tired, annoyed, mad, etc.
- Think aloud for the class, asking them to pay close attention to what you are doing and saying. Engage in dialogue around this modeling. Ask for student input or stories if they have any (they always do).
- Explain the meaning of carrying this heavy backpack:
 - *My shoulders hurt, I'm grumpy, and I can't play or run around easily because I'm carrying all this weight. This is exactly what happens to our hearts inside school when we hold onto a grudge. A grudge is when someone makes us mad, cutting us in line or taking our toy, and we carry that mad feeling around for part or all of the day.*
 - *You can have something happen at home too and then bring those feelings to school. Sometimes I come in carrying the feeling of anger or sadness if something happened at home, and it makes learning in school hard. Sometimes I come to school in a good mood, but then something with a coworker feels frustrating, and my "backpack" feels heavy. It wears us out!*
 - *When we have a big feeling, it is often 'with us' after the event that made us feel that way is over. Just because you aren't at home anymore doesn't mean the fight you had with your mom isn't still on your mind and making you feel upset.*
 - *To make our "backpack" and hearts feel lighter and be ready to learn and go through our day, we need to think about forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn't mean what they did was okay. It just means we choose to take the heavy backpack off so we can have a better day."*

3. Guided Practice: (15 minutes)

Teach students a grade-appropriate way to check in with their feelings, and strategies to move forward from conflict, rather than hold onto it and let it affect their school day or friendships.

- **Stop and Breathe:** *"When your feelings get hurt, push your belly out with a deep breath to calm your heart and brain. You can also use other coping skills we have worked on this year, such as asking for help, asking to take a break, using a sensory tool, etc."*
- **Change the Story:** *"Remind yourself: My day is not ruined just because one bad thing happened."*
- **Drop the Heavy Pack:** *"Intentionally open up your hands, drop your shoulders and choose an activity/choice that brings you happiness, which could also be asking a teacher for help to talk through the scenario."*

4. Collaborative Activity: (15 minutes)

Divide students into groups, with each group consisting of 4-5 students. Provide each group with a chart paper and markers. Ask each group to draw a line down the middle of the chart paper. Label one side "The Heavy Choice (Grudge)" and the other side "The Light Choice (Forgiveness)". To provide an example, map out one highly realistic situation. Give the students the scenario, then both choices. Have them sort which one was the 'heavy' choice or the 'light' choice.

- **Scenario:** The Recess Soccer Cut-In

The Problem: You are dribbling the ball at recess, and another student runs up, kicks it away, takes the ball to go play with himself, and doesn't say sorry.

The Heavy Choice: You spend the rest of recess stomping your feet, refusing to play, planning how to get them back.

The Light Choice: You take a deep belly breath. You use your words, or I feel statements: ("I was using that ball, I felt frustrated when you took it without asking, could you please give it back?"), and then you choose to let the anger go so you can enjoy the rest of recess with your other friends.

- After providing this example, students will work collaboratively to identify light and heavy choices for different scenarios. Some examples of scenarios:
 - Someone accidentally bumps your elbow during art time, and your marker leaves a giant streak across your paper.
 - Someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line, and now you're stuck at the very back, worried you won't have time to eat.
 - A classmate overhears your middle name and starts teasing you about it in front of the group.
 - You ask to join a kickball game at recess, and a friend says there's no room, even though you can see an open spot.

5. Independent Application: (15 minutes)

- Provide each student with an "Empty Backpack" worksheet (this may be a blank sheet of paper or a worksheet with a backpack outline or image). Have the students draw or write one "heavy feeling" they have carried recently (e.g., "My brother broke my Lego" or "Someone made fun of my name").
- Have students share what they drew and have them explain a light choice they could have made or did make; how they could have let down that big feeling to make their day get back on track. Alternatively, let them share how they didn't let those feelings go and how the rest of their day went. Negative impact examples are also beneficial. If students cannot identify one on their own, the teacher may provide an example to support their thinking.

6. Closing and Ongoing Practice: (5 minutes)

- Post the forgiveness strategy poster(s), or a backpack visual/anchor chart, somewhere visible in the classroom for students to reference going forward.
- Use real conflicts that come up naturally in the classroom as opportunities to practice these strategies in the moment with students, reinforcing today's lesson beyond just this one activity.