

Lesson 9: Habits of Excellence: Resilience

PURPOSE

To help students understand and practice habits of excellence, especially the habit of resilience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Understand what habits are and how to develop excellent habits.
2. Understand the habit of resilience.
3. Find motivation to practice resilience.

VOCABULARY

- Habits: behaviors acquired through regular practice which make it easier to do something
- Resilience: an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- [Video](#): How To Form a Habit – Develop and Maintain Good Habits
- Failures are Opportunities for Learning worksheet
- Find the Silver Lining in Negative Situations worksheet
- One Nice Thing Each Day worksheet
- Resiliency Self-Assessment Questionnaire

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Recall the characteristics of a true friend and the differences between Aristotle’s three types of friendships, as well as the examples for each type. Recall the definition of freedom for excellence that the students learned in earlier lessons and the importance of pursuing excellence in everyday life.

Step 2: Recall that in Grade 6, the students learned about habits and how to develop excellent habits. Ask the students if they can recall what habits are and explain that the more someone performs a certain action, the more that action becomes ingrained as a habit. Habits are actions that we perform consistently so that they become natural for us. We perform habits with little effort once we’ve acquired them.

Write the definition on the board:

Habits: behaviors acquired through regular practice which make it easier to do something

Habits can be either excellent or non-excellent. For example, studying regularly, trying to avoid gossip, and being kind to people are excellent habits, while smoking, gossiping, or regularly skipping homework are non-excellent habits.

With habits, we are never just keeping an equilibrium. Habits require regular practice. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. The opportunity lies in the fact that no one is born with either excellent nor non-excellent habits. Habits are always developed through practice and learning. The challenge lies in the fact that it is often difficult to develop excellent habits. Excellent habits are much harder to develop than non-excellent ones. Just think about how much harder it is to study regularly than to just lie in bed or check your phone. Developing new, better, habits requires motivation, the power to think and to choose and perseverance.

Another reality is that habits become a part of who we are. So, it is not just that we become better or worse at something, but that our habits also shape us, as persons. For example, a person who never lies and actively pursues the truth becomes a truthful person, and the person who regularly lies, after some time, becomes a liar himself. Someone who is consistently generous to others becomes a generous person, and the opposite is true of someone who is selfish and thinks only of what pleases themself.

SUMMARIZE SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF HABITS:

- Habits can be both excellent and non-excellent.
- Habits require regular practice.
- No one is born with either excellent or non-excellent habits.
- Excellent habits are much harder to develop than non-excellent ones.
- Excellent habits become a part of who we are; through them we become excellent.

Step 3: One of the greatest human challenges is to develop excellent habits. Even if we know that some behaviors are more or less excellent, changing our habits and choosing the excellent thing is still hard and we often fail. Sometimes it feels as though we are very good at developing non-excellent habits, and not very good at developing excellent ones. Developing excellent habits is like pushing a giant rock up a hill, while developing non-excellent habits is so much easier, like rolling a tiny rock downhill.

For this reason, in this lesson, we will try to learn from certain ideas in psychology and use them to develop excellent habits. Introduce the students to the science of developing excellent habits by showing them the [video: How to Form a Habit - Develop and Maintain Good Habits](#).

After watching the video, share the key takeaways and discuss them with the class:

- Our habits are usually a loop of cue, action and behavior.

Cue triggers a behavior, and action leads to a reward, such as a positive feeling after we accomplish something.

- Beware of your behavior: know the causes of actions you are doing
- The hardest thing is the beginning: once you start it becomes easier
- Prepare your environment: put the browser on the relevant page, remove distractions, prepare your working clothes, etc.
- Start small, even ridiculously small
- The most important thing is to start doing, it gets easier over time
- First do the hardest task (e.g. in the morning and then reward yourself)
- Be consistent and you will succeed

Step 4: Introduce students to the Greek myth of the Hydra. There is an ancient Greek myth about a creature called Hydra, a monster with nine heads. Hydra is especially dangerous since she spits fire and, more than that, the monster's secret power is that when a single one of her heads is cut off, another grows back in its place. Some myths state that for each head that is cut off, two or more grow back instead of one!

This story of Hydra can be useful as an image of becoming stronger despite setbacks. We may not need nine heads, but in order to cope with life's inevitable obstacles, we will need resilience.

Write the vocabulary definition on the board:

Resilience: an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change

Highlight that everybody faces difficulties, challenges, losses, and failures in life. That is the law of life. The examples are numerous: physical illness, difficulty in school, family problems, conflict with peers, etc. The difference lies in how a person responds to these challenges and hardships.

All resilient people share some common traits:

1. They see failures and mistakes as opportunities for learning
2. They have a strong identity and a positive view of themselves
3. They have learned to be grateful for all good things in life, big and small alike
4. They have built quality relationships with friends and family
5. They always manage to find something positive in difficult situations
6. They have a strong sense of meaning and purpose

It is important to understand that building resilience is not easy and it is a quality that is developed through practice, in the same way that we develop other excellent habits. The good news is that everyone can develop resilience, regardless of the difficult situations they find themselves in. There's a saying that one should "live life every day like a turtle." Why? Because to get anywhere, a turtle has to stick its neck out and take a risk.

Step 5: To further examine the six characteristics of resilient people listed above, go around the room and assign students numbers 1, 2 and 3. Give each student the worksheet that corresponds to the number they were assigned. Worksheets are listed below:

1. [Failures are Opportunities for Learning](#)
2. [Find the Silver Lining in Negative Situations](#)
3. [One Nice Thing Each Day](#)

Give each student five minutes to complete their worksheet, then go to the next round. If a student does not manage to fully complete one of the worksheets, they can finish at home. In the next round, the students with number one move to number two, those with number two move to number three, etc. Go through three rounds so each student can have some time in class to work on each exercise.

After everyone finishes, ask the students if they'd like to volunteer to share what they learned about themselves or found helpful in doing the exercises. Since several answers may be personal, stress that students do not have to share their answers unless they would like to.

Motivate the students to use all of these tools in their lives going forward. Encourage them to take a few minutes each week to write out these exercises and think about the difficulties and challenges of the past week through the lens of resilience. Challenge them to see the positive side of those difficulties and make a plan to do something nice for a new person each week.

Step 6: Summarize. Recall the definition of habits and the ways in which we can develop excellent habits. Highlight the importance of resilience and the characteristics of resilient people. Motivate the students to practice the habit of resilience.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Give students the [Resilience Self-Assessment Questionnaire](#) and encourage them to assess their level of resilience at home. If they regularly practice developing resilience with the tools developed in this lesson, suggest that they can retake the test after two months to see if their results have improved.

1. FAILURES ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Think about three failures you experienced in the last year. What did you learn?

Example:

Failure: *I got a really low grade in math class the first part of last year.*

A Lesson I learned: *I went to extra help during my lunch hour and did practice problems for homework every night and by the end of the year my mark went up by a whole grade.*

It made me better because: *I wasn't really trying in math and was just thinking that I wasn't good at it. But, once I worked really hard I showed myself that I could be good at math.*

1. **Failure:**

A lesson I learned:

It made me better because:

2. **Failure:**

A lesson I learned:

It made me better because:

Repeat this practice of reflecting on challenges each week and see how your ability to learn and grow from failure improves.

2. FIND THE SILVER LINING IN NEGATIVE SITUATIONS

Think about three difficulties or challenges that you faced in the past year. Next, think about whether there was anything positive about them:

NEGATIVE SITUATION 1:

Positive things about it:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

NEGATIVE SITUATION 2:

Positive things about it:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Repeat this practice for every negative situation that you experience in the coming week. See if your ability to find the positive in difficult situations improves.

3. ONE NICE THING EACH DAY

Think about a person in your life that you'd like to improve your relationship with. It could be a classmate, a friend, a family member, or anyone else with whom you would like to have a quality relationship. Then think about one nice thing that you will do for him or her each day next week and write it down. These can be small things, such as giving a compliment, sharing a candy, or anything else that you think the person would appreciate.

DAY 1:

DAY 2:

DAY 3:

DAY 4:

DAY 5:

DAY 6:

DAY 7:

At the end of the week, reflect on your relationship with that person and whether it has improved at least a bit.

RESILIENCY SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE ¹

Rate yourself from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree):

- I'm usually optimistic. I see difficulties as temporary and expect to overcome them.
- Feelings of anger, loss and discouragement don't last long.
- I can tolerate high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty about situations.
- I adapt quickly to new developments. I'm curious. I ask questions.
- I'm playful. I find the humor in tough situations, and can laugh at myself.
- I learn valuable lessons from my experiences and from the experiences of others.
- I'm good at solving problems. I'm good at making things work well.
- I'm strong and durable. I hold up well during tough times.
- I've converted misfortune into good luck and found benefits in bad experiences.

Convert your scores with the following key:

Less than 20: Low Resilience: You may have trouble handling pressure or setbacks, and may feel deeply hurt by any criticism. When things don't go well, you may feel helpless and without hope. Consider seeking counsel or support in developing your resiliency skills from a trusted friend or relative. Connect with others who share your developmental goals.

20-30: Some Resilience: You have some valuable pro-resiliency skills, but also plenty of room for improvement. Strive to strengthen the characteristics you already have and to cultivate the characteristics you lack. You may also wish to seek some outside coaching or support.

30-35: Adequate Resilience: You are a self-motivated learner who recovers well from most challenges. Learning more about resilience, and consciously building your resiliency skills, will empower you to find more joy in life, even in the face of adversity.

35-45: Highly Resilient: You bounce back well from life's setbacks and can thrive even under pressure. You could be of service to others who are trying to cope better with adversity.

¹ Developed by Al Siebert, PhD from The Resiliency Center in Portland, Oregon. This quiz is adapted from The Resilience Advantage (2015).