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Grades 6-8: Social-Emotional Skills

By Tom Conklin

Help your students become socially-savvy through lessons on attitude, boundaries, and more.

Grades
6-8

SEL Sources Learn more about social and emotional learning.

Attitude Latitudes

Standard Met: McREL Behavioral Studies Standard 3

(Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance, and physical development affect human behavior)

What You Need: [Three worksheets: Introvert or Extrovert, Optimist or Pessimist, X-Y graph](#)

What to Do: Ask students what it means to have an attitude. Though they'll likely think it's a matter of having a good or a bad attitude, define attitude as one's "readiness to act or react in a certain way."

Have students describe how they act or react in different situations. Does their attitude change from situation to situation? Hand out the [Introvert or Extrovert](#) and [Optimist or Pessimist](#) worksheets for students to find out how they rank. Then, have them figure out their "attitude latitudes" on the third worksheet (an [X-Y graph](#)). Students will graph their introversion/extroversion score on the horizontal axis and their optimism/pessimism score on the vertical axis to land in one of four quadrants. You might use fictional characters from a book or movie to symbolize each quadrant. (I've used characters from Shrek. You're a "Donkey," for instance, if you're an extroverted optimist.) This will give students some insight into how they relate to other people and how they might harness their energies in the most socially beneficial way.

Brain Freezers

Standard Met: McREL Behavioral Studies Standard 3

(Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance, and physical development affect human behavior)

What You Need: [Worksheet and answer key](#)

What to Do: How often do your students think about their own thinking? Distribute the [Brain Freezers worksheet](#). Have students work individually or in small groups to answer all of the riddles as quickly as possible. (You might set a time limit, such as 10 or 15 minutes.) When students are done, ask them which riddles were difficult and which were easy. (They will likely say that riddles in the first column were easier.) Invite students to share their answers. As they do so, write the most common responses on the board. After reviewing the answers and explanations using the [supplied answer key](#), ask students if they have changed their minds about which riddles were easy. Elicit that the riddles in the first column seemed easy, but actually should have made them stop and think. Their wrong answers were the result of “fast thinking.” Conversely, the riddles in the second column seemed to require a lot of thought, when the solutions were actually simple; “slow thinking” likely bogged them down. Use this activity as an opportunity to talk about times that “fast thinking” or “slow thinking” got them in trouble: “Fast thinking” can cause you to jump to conclusions, while “slow thinking” can make you dwell too much on problems.

Setting Boundaries

Standard Met: McREL Behavioral Studies Standard 2

(Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function)

What You Need: [Boundaries worksheet](#)

What to Do: To most students, boundaries are the lines drawn between states or nations. Explain that boundaries also pertain to relationships—rules that tell us what we can and can’t do. Talk about the boundaries that apply in families, school, and society. Next, hand out the [Boundaries worksheet](#) and talk about the types of rules—rigid (hard-and-fast), clear (firm but appropriate), and fuzzy (inconsistent or nonexistent). Have students work in small groups to evaluate the boundaries -listed on the worksheet to determine the type of boundary described in each. Review the answers as a class and discuss what life would be like without boundaries. Are they frustrating but important to have? Work with students to create a list of classroom boundaries, organized by physical (respect one another’s space), behavioral (listen respectfully), and academic (turn in work on time).

What Sets You Off?

Standard Met: McREL Behavioral Studies Standard 4

(Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions)

What You Need: [What Sets You Off? worksheet](#)

What to Do: Managing emotional responses is difficult for many adolescents, who are still developing neurologically—the emotional centers of the brain develop more rapidly than the executive centers.

Hand out the [What Sets You Off?](#) worksheet. Have students recall a time when they got really angry and then write down “just the facts” about the incident. Students should detail three different experiences on the worksheet. Then, challenge them to look for

patterns as to what sets them off. Have they gotten angry at least twice over the same situation or with the same person? This can reveal that certain people or behaviors (e.g., teasing) act as triggers for them. Likewise, it will help identify “danger zones” for confrontations (the locker room, for instance). When you debrief students’ experiences, focus on the suggestion “Don’t react! Respond.” Discuss the difference (reaction is knee-jerk, while response is something you do after careful thought) and how a response might have de-escalated an encounter.

Resolving Conflicts

Standard Met: McREL Behavioral Studies Standard 4

(Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions)

What You Need: [Two worksheets: What's Their Attitude? Part I and Part II](#)

What to Do: Introduce students to four communication styles: assertive (standing up for yourself and respecting others), passive (doing anything to avoid conflict), aggressive (standing up for yourself and not caring who gets hurt), and passive-aggressive (secretly angry). Give examples of these styles using characters from a book you’ve recently read in class.

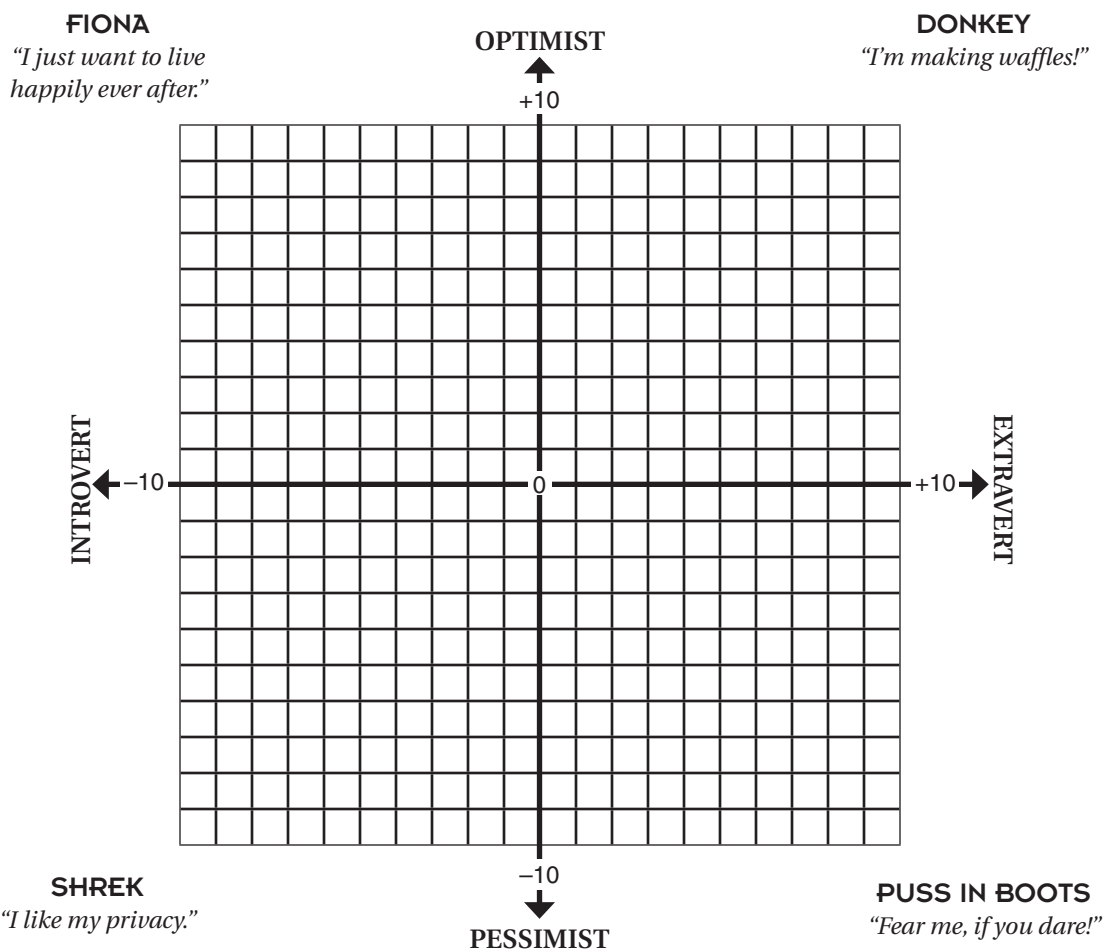
Hand out the first worksheet, [What’s Their Attitude? Part I](#), to learn how these different styles play out in

conflicts. Then, create a fictional disagreement, inviting student volunteers to role-play it. Dissect the conflict by identifying who was involved, what each person wanted, how the individuals communicated what they wanted, and if it was resolved, including who “won.” Talk about the different communication styles each actor exhibited.

To wrap up, have students complete the questions at the bottom of the worksheet and on the second worksheet ([What’s Their Attitude? Part II](#)) to anticipate how they might best act during a conflict. Refer back to these win-win solutions the next time a disagreement occurs in class.

Adapted from Social & Emotional Learning: Essential Lessons for Student Success.

What's Your Attitude Latitude?



TIP

For added support, you might use fictional characters to symbolize each of the four "attitude latitudes." I've used characters from the movie *Shrek*. (You can pick others that your students might find appealing from other sources, such as the Harry Potter or Hunger Games series.) On my graph, a student who scored -4 on Worksheet 2 and +3 on Worksheet 3 would be placed near the middle of the "Fiona" quadrant.

Once the graph is complete, students will see how they relate to each other according to their optimism/pessimism and introversion/extraversion traits. Use this information when having students work in teams throughout the school year—you might not want your "Donkeys" teaming up all of the time, and you should be aware that some "Shreks" will need to be prodded into working with their more outgoing peers. Collaborating with fellow students who do not share their attitudes offers young teens great opportunities to develop their social skills.

WORKSHEET • 3

Optimist or Pessimist?

Read each statement. Circle the number that reflects how well the statement describes you.

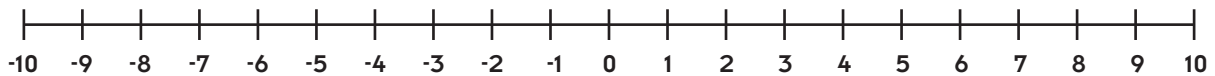
	No way!		That's me!	
1. Things usually turn out for the best for me.	1	2	3	4
2. It's easy for me to relax.	1	2	3	4
3. If something can go wrong, it will!	1	2	3	4
4. My future's so bright, I've got to wear shades.	1	2	3	4
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.	1	2	3	4
6. I always keep busy.	1	2	3	4
7. I hardly ever count on things going my way.	1	2	3	4
8. It doesn't take much to get me angry.	1	2	3	4
9. I do not get my hopes up.	1	2	3	4
10. When all is said and done, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad things to happen.	1	2	3	4

HOW TO SCORE THE SURVEY

- Cross out questions 2, 5, 6, and 8. They are fillers.
- Add up the answers to questions 1, 4, and 10. This is your O score. O = _____
- Add up the answers to questions 3, 7, and 9. This is your P score. P = _____
- Subtract your P score from your O score. (*The answer may be a negative number.*) Then circle your answer on the number line below: _____

Pessimist

Optimist



WHAT'S YOUR ATTITUDE? _____

WORKSHEET • 2

Introvert or Extrovert?

TRUE or FALSE

Write T (True) or F (False) next to the following statements.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ___ 1. Some people might say I'm boring. | ___ 10. I'd rather hang out with one friend than go to the mall with a group. |
| ___ 2. If you have a problem with me, tell me to my face. | ___ 11. I hate it when people look over my shoulder when I'm doing something. |
| ___ 3. I work well as part of a team. | ___ 12. I hate writing in a journal. |
| ___ 4. I speak before I think. | ___ 13. I hate to be alone. |
| ___ 5. People tire me out. | ___ 14. I am going to be rich and famous. Seriously. |
| ___ 6. I almost never pick up when my cell phone rings. | ___ 15. I don't say much unless I really know you. |
| ___ 7. I make people laugh. | ___ 16. I'm a good listener. |
| ___ 8. I can text, play a video game, and help my brother with his homework—at the same time. | ___ 17. When it's my birthday, please don't make a big deal out of it. |
| ___ 9. My dream weekend? Just kicking back, with nothing at all to do. | ___ 18. I really, really do not like homework. |
| | ___ 19. I focus on one task at a time. |
| | ___ 20. I'm a thrill-seeker. |

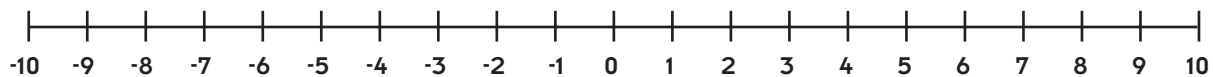
HOW TO SCORE THE SURVEY

- Give yourself 1 point each time you answered True for: 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 18, 20. Add up those points. This is your *E* score. E = _____
- Next, give yourself 1 point each time you answered True for: 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19. Add up those points. This is your *I* score. I = _____
- Subtract your *I* score from your *E* score. (*The answer may be a negative number.*) Then circle your answer on the number line below: _____

Introvert

Ambivert

Extrovert



ARE YOU AN INTROVERT?

You are energized by being alone.
 You think before you speak.
 You put up with social situations.
 You like to think things through.

Being an introvert is NOT necessarily the same as being “shy.”

ARE YOU AN EXTRAVERT?

You are energized by other people.
 You “shoot from the hip.”
 You enjoy social situations.
 You like to talk things out.

Being an extrovert is NOT necessarily the same as being “hyper.”

WORKSHEET • 5

Brain Freezers

How fast can you answer these riddles?

<p>1. A video game console and one video game together cost \$110. The game console costs \$100 more than the video game. How much does the video game cost?</p>	<p>5. A horse meets a priest, who then disappears. Where does this take place?</p>
<p>2. It takes 5 machines 5 minutes to make 5 widgets. How long does it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets?</p>	<p>6. What is one common question that you can never honestly answer “yes”?</p>
<p>3. How many of each type of animal did Moses take on the ark?</p>	<p>7. A police officer saw a truck driver going the wrong way down a one-way street. The officer did nothing when he saw this. Why not?</p>
<p>4. Your mother has three children: April, May, and . . . what’s the third child’s name?</p>	<p>8. A man is pushing his car and stops in front of a hotel. He then realizes that he is bankrupt. Why?</p>

COLUMN 1

1. Answer: \$5. Most students will quickly provide the intuitive answer: \$10. But it's wrong. If the game cost \$10, then the console cost \$10 + \$110, or \$120. The correct response is \$5 ($\$5 + \$105 = \110). If your students got the wrong answer, tell them they are in good company. More than half the students at prestigious universities like Harvard, MIT, and Princeton come up with the same wrong answer (Kahneman, 2011, p. 45)!

2. Answer: 5 minutes. Most students will answer 100 minutes. Point out that the rate stays the same, regardless of the number of machines at work.

3. Answer: None, since Noah built the ark. Note: This riddle is so common in psychological studies that the effect it illustrates is called "The Moses Illusion" (Kahneman, 2011, p. 73).

4. Answer: The student's name. This is a variation of the Moses Illusion mentioned above, in which the context primes a quick response that happens to be wrong. Be prepared for an avalanche of "June" responses.

COLUMN 2

5. Answer: A chessboard. Unlike "Moses Illusion" riddles, students are challenged here to provide a context for the action. They will wrack their brains and usually guess "a fairy tale," or "Middle Earth," or some variation of a fantasy story. The actual solution is both simple and prosaic.

6. Answer: "Are you asleep yet?" Students will attack this challenge, assuming that there are any number of possible answers. There are not, and you will probably get a wide variety of unsatisfying answers that students know are wrong but will share anyway.

7. Answer: The truck driver was walking, not driving. Riddles such as this illustrate how we work to come up with overly complicated narratives to explain evidence. With this riddle, expect your students to come up with elaborate stories to explain why a police officer would be so careless, such as the driver was rushing to the hospital, or was friends with the police officer. (One boy I worked with suggested that the two of them were accomplices in a bank robbery!)

8. Answer: The man was playing Monopoly. Like the previous riddle, this one will spur all kinds of imaginative stories to explain the situation. The simple solution will provide a real "ah-ha!" moment to your students.

WORKSHEET • 8

Boundaries

Boundaries are rules that tell us what we can and can't do. There are three basic kinds of boundaries.

RIGID:

These are strict and do not change. You might not know why these rules are rules . . . but you do know that you have to follow them!

CLEAR:

You understand these rules. Clear boundaries can change, too. Some things that were "out of bounds" when you were younger might be okay now.

FUZZY:

These are "rules" that aren't really rules at all. A fuzzy boundary might be one that says that anything goes. Or it might be a rule that is strict one day, but totally ignored the next day.

Here are examples of boundaries. Write R (Rigid), C (Clear), or F (Fuzzy) next to each boundary.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ___ "Beware of Dog!" | ___ "I'm not going steady with anyone until high school, at the earliest." |
| ___ "You kids stay off my lawn!" | ___ "YOLO!" (You only live once.) |
| ___ "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." | ___ "You must be this tall to ride the roller coaster." |
| ___ "Mi casa es su casa." | ___ "The more the merrier!" |
| ___ "Your curfew is 9:00 p.m. sharp!" | ___ "Keep Out!" |
| ___ "Good fences make good neighbors." | ___ "You can have the Internet password after you have done your homework and cleaned your room." |
| ___ "This movie is rated PG-13. Parents are strongly cautioned. Some material may not be suitable for children under 13." | ___ "Any friend of yours is a friend of mine." |

What are your boundaries? _____

Does your family have any boundaries? _____ Who sets them? _____

What kind of boundaries do you find most frustrating—rigid, clear, or fuzzy? Why? _____

WORKSHEET • 12

What Sets You Off?

Think of times that you have been angry. Really, *really* angry. Fill in the blanks for each anger incident you remember well.

WHERE did it happen? _____ WHEN did it happen? _____

WHO made you angry? _____

WHAT did that person do to set you off? _____

HOW did you display your anger? _____

WHERE did it happen? _____ WHEN did it happen? _____

WHO made you angry? _____

WHAT did that person do to set you off? _____


HOW did you display your anger? _____

WHERE did it happen? _____ WHEN did it happen? _____

WHO made you angry? _____

WHAT did that person do to set you off? _____

HOW did you display your anger? _____

 Do you see a pattern? How can you change the pattern? _____

WORKSHEET • 19

Conflict Resolution (Part I)

Everyone gets into conflicts. It happens when you want something, and another person wants something else. How well can you resolve a conflict? Your attitude has a lot to do with it.

Here are four types of attitudes and how they each resolve conflicts.

Aggressive

I WIN/YOU LOSE

Never give in.

It's not enough that you win, the other person has to lose.

Passive

YOU WIN/I LOSE

Always give in.

To keep the peace, you ignore your own needs.

Passive-Aggressive

I LOSE/YOU LOSE

Usually give in, but figure out a way to sabotage the other person.

You don't really care if you win, as long as the other person loses, too.

Assertive

I WIN/YOU WIN

Compromise in order to get most of what you want.

You stand up for yourself, but you want the other person to be satisfied, too.

A. Which of these attitudes is best for resolving conflicts so that they stay resolved? Why?

B. Which of these attitudes is the hardest to deal with? Why?

C. Which attitude is the hardest one to keep if you are in a conflict? Why?

WORKSHEET • 19

Conflict Resolution (Part II)

Here are some typical conflicts people have. See if you can find a win/win solution for each one. Write your solution or jot down some notes on this page.

1. George has been playing a video game for ten minutes and is in the middle of a challenging level. Ashley comes in and says that she has to leave for the dentist in a half hour. She's nervous and wants to relax by playing a dance game on the game system.

2. Kelly is studying for a huge set of tests later in the week. Her little sister has the bedroom next to hers and is listening to annoying music at top volume on her stereo.

3. Morgan's daily chore is to do the dishes after dinner each night. She just learned that she has a part in the school play and will have to rehearse at night, right after dinner. Morgan's mother works hard all day and is too tired to do the dishes. Morgan really wants to be in the school play.

4. Jenesis spends the hours after school at the library because her mother works. Some older girls from Jenesis's school hang out outside the library smoking cigarettes. When Jenesis refuses to join them, they begin to tease her. Jenesis doesn't want to go to the library anymore because of them, but her mom wants her to stay there, since the library is a safe place.

5. Austin's best friend, Pete, is going through a hard time. His parents have split up, and Pete has been doing poorly in school. He was suspended twice for acting up in class. Austin wants to be there for his friend and asks his parents for permission to have Pete come to their house for a sleepover. Austin's mom is okay with the plan, but his dad refuses, saying that Pete is a bad influence.
