

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

TRAIN-THE-TRAINER GUIDE

45-MINUTE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL WORKSHOP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
---------------------------	----------

45-MINUTE MIDDLE SCHOOL WORKSHOP

Workshop Outline	2
------------------------	---

Workshop Instructions.....	3
----------------------------	---

Activity Sheet.....	7
---------------------	---

APPENDIX

Sign-in Sheet	9
---------------------	---

Workshop Questionnaire.....	10
-----------------------------	----

Ongoing Support Contact Sheet.....	11
------------------------------------	----

Evidence Summary	12
------------------------	----

Lesson Samples.....	16
---------------------	----

Frequently Asked Questions.....	28
---------------------------------	----

INTRODUCTION

Community for Education Foundation (CEF) was founded in 1992 to ensure that all young people learn the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life. To achieve its mission, CEF developed the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program, which includes curriculum materials, teacher training, and ongoing support. Since its inception, Overcoming Obstacles has helped tens of thousands of teachers positively impact the lives of millions of students nationwide.

The *Overcoming Obstacles Train-the-Trainer Guide* includes a workshop outline, step-by-step instructions, and activity sheets, and is designed to help you facilitate an Overcoming Obstacles teacher training workshop. Through a teacher training workshop, educators will gain hands-on experience with the curriculum while learning about its methodology, content, and activity-based lesson format. This comprehensive guide will help you plan and execute an engaging, informative, and objective-based workshop that will equip educators with the training they need to effectively teach the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Min.	Activity	Description	Curriculum Page Numbers	Materials Needed
5	Welcome: What Is Overcoming Obstacles?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are given the history and an overview of CEF. • The purpose and goals of the workshop and a brief synopsis of the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum are presented. • Educators discuss how the program can be used to meet the needs of their school and students. 	<i>Program Overview</i> , pages i-v	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of the Workshop Questionnaire • Sign-in sheet
10	“People Bingo”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants recognize their individual strengths by playing a group interaction game. • This activity allows participants a chance to show off their positive traits and builds trust and cohesion. 	<i>Confidence Building</i> , pages 42-43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet • Pens
20	“Tall Towers/ Let the Contest Begin”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants compete in teams to build a paper tower and then discuss how they used skills such as communication, decision making, and goal setting to complete the activity. • This activity demonstrates the benefits of group work and the importance of cooperation to group success, while allowing participants to use problem solving skills to complete a task. 	<i>Module Six: Problem Solving</i> , pages 352-353	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 sheets of newspaper per group • Three feet of masking tape per group • Chart paper • Markers
10	Q & A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants are invited to ask questions they may have about the workshop or the curriculum. • Participants are reminded that the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum team is available via phone and email to answer questions and assist with implementation planning. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of the Ongoing Support Contact Sheet • Copies of the Frequently Asked Questions

WORKSHOP INSTRUCTIONS

Preparations

1. Allocate 25 minutes prior to the start of the training to prepare the space that will accommodate the expected number of attendees. This may involve rearranging the space to make it more suitable for team activities.
2. Prepare all of the materials, supplies, handouts, and equipment necessary for the training. Set the materials and handouts in a place where you can easily access them during the training. (To save time during the workshop, you may want to assemble all of the handouts into packets and distribute them to educators as they enter the room or leave a packet on every seat.)
3. Please note that full lessons from the curriculum relating to each activity are included in the Appendix. We encourage you to make copies of the lessons for those participants who may not have a curriculum set.
4. Write the bold-faced figures from the “Fast Facts” from the following page on the board. Please contact 212.406.7488 or info@overcomingobstacles.org for a PowerPoint presentation that includes these numbers, as well as for activity sheets and handouts. (See the Ongoing Support Contact Sheet for additional information.)
5. You might set the tone by preparing a selection of appropriate music to play while educators enter the room and/or during hands-on group activities.
6. Greet workshop participants as they enter and thank them for attending. If you are not working with familiar colleagues, be sure to introduce yourself. The use of name tags is encouraged.

Welcome

1. Distribute copies of the Workshop Questionnaire and pass around a sign-in sheet.
2. Welcome participants to the workshop. Ask participants to decipher the meaning of the numbers on the board. Comment that the numbers have no relevance yet, but will give an overview of Overcoming Obstacles and today’s workshop.

WORKSHOP INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)

3. Begin the training by reading the “Fast Facts” below.

“Fast Facts”

- **3** hours is the typical workshop length, but today I have
 - **45** minutes, so let’s get started! Over the past
 - **21** years, Community for Education Foundation has helped thousands of educators teach more than
 - **3** million students the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life. The Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program has
 - **500** activities that engage students and teach over
 - **20** important life skills.
 - **[How often Overcoming Obstacles will be taught]** educators at your school will have
 - **[period length]** to build relationships with over
 - **[number of students in your school being taught Overcoming Obstacles]** students.
 - **212, 406, 7488** are the numbers you need to call the curriculum team you can trust to provide guidance and ongoing support.
4. Tell participants that the first activity will help them identify their individual strengths by engaging them in a group game. Then, begin facilitating the “People Bingo” activity.

Activity #1: “People Bingo”

1. Distribute copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet and pens.
2. Refer to pages 42-43 of the *Confidence Building* module for instructions on facilitating this activity.
3. Debrief the activity:
 - Ask participants whether they felt it was difficult to find people who could sign the various squares. Encourage them to support their responses with examples, and challenge participants to demonstrate the talents they signed their names to.

WORKSHOP INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)

- Discuss with participants the importance of having students identify their own strengths. For example, it encourages the class to build trust and rapport.
 - Ask educators to share how they would modify the activity to suit the needs of their own students and classroom dynamics.
4. After you finish your debrief, tell the participants that you will be organizing them into groups for a teamwork activity. Explain that a large part of the workshop will involve their participation in the same activities they will facilitate. This allows them to become familiar with the lesson materials, and provides them with a model for teaching the curriculum.
 5. Before having participants join their teams, share with them how you plan to organize the groups (e.g., by assigning each participant a number according to their seating arrangements). Then, begin facilitating the “Tall Towers/Let the Contest Begin” activity.

Activity #2: “Tall Towers/Let the Contest Begin”

1. Distribute the newspapers, masking tape, chart paper, and markers to each group.
2. Refer to pages 352-353 of *Module Six: Problem Solving* for instructions on facilitating this activity.
3. Debrief the activity:
 - Ask for volunteers to recall the three skills mentioned in the Overcoming Obstacles mission statement. If participants do not recall it, please state it again: to ensure that all young people learn the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life.
 - Now, ask participants to share examples of how they used the skills of communication, decision making, and goal setting during the “Tall Towers/Let the Contest Begin” activity.

WORKSHOP INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED)

- After you have called on several participants, explain that communication, decision making, and goal setting are the core skills of the Overcoming Obstacles program. The modules pertaining to these skills appear early in the curriculum so that students have a strong foundation for further life skill development.
4. Tell participants that the workshop is almost finished. Thank them for their time and let them know that they will now be able to ask questions regarding the workshop and/or curriculum.

Q & A

1. Distribute copies of the Ongoing Support Contact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions.
2. When facilitating the Q & A session, keep these considerations in mind:
 - Address all of the participants' questions and comments, and provide them with the most informed responses possible.
 - Do not be afraid to allow participants an opportunity to express concerns in a constructive way.
 - If a participant asks a question you cannot answer, be straightforward and let him or her know that you will provide the correct answer as soon as possible.
 - If appropriate, provide participants with your contact information so that you may support them throughout their implementation of the Overcoming Obstacles program.
3. Explain that in addition to the materials in the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum, more resources are available by visiting www.overcomingobstacles.org or by contacting CEF.
4. Remind participants that the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum team is available via phone and email to answer any questions and assist with implementation planning.
5. Encourage participants to take a minute to fill out the Workshop Questionnaire, which you will collect as they depart.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY SHEET

Bingo

Is good at math	Always works hard	Likes to join in activities	Can organize anything	Can use a computer
Speaks more than one language	Tells great stories and jokes	Is a good speller	Plays a team sport	Likes to read
Knows how to swim	Can play a musical instrument		Has a good memory	Is good at building or making things
Likes to make charts and graphs	Likes to figure out how things work	Likes to write	Likes to be in plays	Likes to help others
Is a good cook	Keeps a personal diary or journal	Likes to design posters and murals	Is a good artist	Is a great dancer

APPENDIX

WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE

45-MINUTE TEACHER TRAINING WORKSHOP

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL

Thank you for attending the Overcoming Obstacles teacher training workshop and taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your feedback is very important to us and will assist with the planning of future workshops. Please return your completed form to the workshop facilitator(s).

Please respond to the following statements regarding your workshop experience by checking the box that best applies (strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The workshop was well organized.				
2. The workshop was a good way for me to learn the contents of the curriculum.				
3. The objectives of this workshop were clearly explained.				
4. The content covered is relevant to the needs of my students.				
5. The workshop activities were engaging.				
6. The pace of this workshop was appropriate.				
7. The facilitator(s) answered my questions regarding the curriculum and recommended additional resources.				
8. The materials, supplies, visual aids, and handouts provided during the workshop were very useful.				
9. The workshop helped me understand how I can modify specific activities to meet my students' needs and fit with the dynamics of my classroom.				
10. The workshop met my expectations.				

Please use the space below to write additional comments and suggestions regarding this workshop. If more space is needed, please use the back of this page.

PLEASE MAIL OR FAX COMPLETED FORM TO:

Overcoming Obstacles | 125 Maiden Lane, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10038 | Fax: (212) 406-7480

ONGOING SUPPORT CONTACT SHEET

The Overcoming Obstacles curriculum team is available to assist you via phone or email as you implement the program in your school. Ongoing support includes assistance with developing goals and objectives, recommended practices, supplemental activities, and teacher resources.

If you would like further information, please contact one of the members of the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum team:

Jason Urbanski
Director of Education Partnerships
212.406.7488 x124
jason@overcomingobstacles.org

Rossana Villaflor
Manager of Educator Support
212.406.7488 x110
rossana@overcomingobstacles.org

Natasha Terhorst
Coordinator of Education Partnerships
212.406.7488 x111
natasha@overcomingobstacles.org

Overcoming Obstacles
125 Maiden Lane, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10038
www.overcomingobstacles.org

Phone: 212.406.7488
Fax: 212.406.7480

Hours of Operation: 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM ET
Monday - Friday

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, Community for Education Foundation's Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program has helped millions of students improve their academic achievement, graduate from high school, and prepare for college and careers. Below are just some of the highlights.

California

In 1995, Community for Education Foundation received a grant from Los Angeles's Community Development Department to improve the lives of the city's youth through the Overcoming Obstacles program. Study of the program's effectiveness included parent interviews and examinations of 266 students' school attendance records, discipline records, grades, police records, and pre- and post-program surveys. Monitoring by the city consistently showed Overcoming Obstacles students moving from high-risk stages classified as "in crisis" and "at risk" to more self-sufficient stages such as "stable," "safe," and "thriving." Students at Manual Arts High School, which received Overcoming Obstacles through this grant, improved their grade point averages by 37%, reduced their use of violence by 75%, reduced their tardiness by 89%, and improved their school and family relationships. Of the programs administered through the grant, Overcoming Obstacles was ranked the highest.

In 1997, Markham Middle School in Los Angeles infused Overcoming Obstacles with an eighth grade English class. After participating in the program, 68% of the students improved their grades and class attendance, 60% improved their tardiness, and 60% improved their level of cooperation.

In 1998, John Muir Middle School in Los Angeles implemented Overcoming Obstacles in its seventh grade English class. Because of the program, 57% of students improved their grades, 42% improved their class attendance, and 57% had less reported tardies than the previous semester.

In 1998, the California State Senate passed a resolution to commend Community for Education Foundation for its positive impact on Los Angeles's students. That same year, Mayor Richard Riordan of Los Angeles issued a commendation to Community for Education Foundation for its work.

Georgia

During the 1996-1997 school year, 40 juniors and seniors participated in a daily Overcoming Obstacles class at West End Academy in Atlanta. At the conclusion of the school year, 96% of the juniors stayed in school, 85% of the seniors graduated from high school, and 95% of students stated that they would recommend the Overcoming Obstacles class to their friends because they considered it beneficial and relevant to their success.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

In 1997, Community for Education Foundation worked with a population of students with severe academic and social deficiencies in the Atlanta Public Schools system. At least 10% were one or more grades below what is normal for their age. Approximately 30-40% read well below the standard for their age, and at least 10% were illiterate. The course focused on job preparedness, resume writing, and financial planning. After completing the course, 95% of the students were employed with good ratings from their employers and/or were entering programs of higher education. One hundred percent were promoted to the next grade. Because of this work, the Georgia State Department of Labor recognized Overcoming Obstacles as the leading program for breaking the cycle of welfare dependency.

Illinois

In 2003, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) listed Overcoming Obstacles as a recommended classroom-based social and emotional learning program in its U.S. Department of Education-funded report, *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-Based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs*.

New Jersey

In 1997, Elizabeth High School implemented Overcoming Obstacles as a stand-alone class for repeat ninth graders. Low attendance was a significant factor in the poor school performance of these students: over 40% exhibited a history of acute absenteeism. At the conclusion of the class, 80% of the students were promoted to the 10th grade and more than half improved their attendance by over 50%.

Jersey City Public Schools' Fifteen Together high-school dropout prevention program used Overcoming Obstacles as its sole curriculum. In 1999, students at the program's four participating high schools took pre- and post-program surveys that measured their commitment to staying in school and their mastery of the life skills taught through the Overcoming Obstacles program (e.g., communication, decision making, goal setting, conflict resolution). Of the 214 students surveyed, 71% showed marked increases in their scores from pre- to post-program. Within the first three years of the Fifteen Together program, the number of school district dropouts fell from 14.9% to 9.3%. In 2002, the American School Board Journal presented Jersey City Public Schools with its Magna Award for the success of the Fifteen Together program.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

In 2007, the Transitional Road to Attending College (TRAC) program used Overcoming Obstacles to improve Jersey City's high school retention rate. TRAC focused on teaching the city's incoming freshmen the communication, decision making, goal setting, teamwork, and conflict resolution skills they would need to excel in high school. Data on the program's implementation of Overcoming Obstacles was based on students' responses to pre- and post-program tests and sorted by classroom. The following is a sampling of one classroom's results:

- 76% of students said that they were excited about their studies (an increase of 20% from the time of the pre-program test)
- 85% of students reported that they found it easier to keep commitments (an increase of 65% from the time of the pre-program test)
- 86% of students said that they had a clear picture of what they wanted to do in the future (an increase of 19% from the time of the pre-program test)

New York

In 2000, the New York City Department of Education chose Overcoming Obstacles as a leading substance abuse prevention program and recognized it as a leading school-to-career program.

In 2001, the New York City Department of Education reported the following benefits from its implementation of the Overcoming Obstacles program: increased student punctuality, emergence of student leaders, student camaraderie, longer student attention spans, greater work completion, and recognition of self-defeating behaviors.

In 2003, Overcoming Obstacles was the recipient of the Superintendent's Conflict Resolution Award for helping Brooklyn and Staten Island high school students succeed academically.

In 2008, the Children's Aid Society of New York City reported that academic achievement improved markedly at the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics as a result of the Overcoming Obstacles program.

In 2010, the New York City Department of Education began introducing the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program to all of its 850 public middle schools and high schools. In a press release issued in 2011, Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott expressed his gratitude for the Overcoming Obstacles program, praising it for helping New York City's educators address bullying, create supportive learning environments, and prepare their students for college and careers.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

Based on the success of the New York City Department of Education's implementation of Overcoming Obstacles, Yonkers Public School District joined the Gifting Initiative in 2012.

South Carolina

Charleston County School District implemented Overcoming Obstacles in a districtwide high school advisory period during the 2010-2011 school year. The district reported that Overcoming Obstacles helped students experience many improvements, including stronger leadership skills, increased self-confidence, and better time management skills. Based on the success of its high school advisory program, Charleston County School District expanded its use of Overcoming Obstacles into its middle schools in 2011. In a 2012 interview with NBC, Dr. Nancy McGinley, superintendent of Charleston County School District, named Overcoming Obstacles as one of her primary strategies for bringing positive change to two of the county's priority schools.

Because of Charleston County School District's success with Overcoming Obstacles, 32 schools across South Carolina's Barnwell, Beaufort, Berkeley, Calhoun, Darlington, Horry, Jasper, Newberry, and Richland counties joined the Gifting Initiative in 2012.

LESSON SAMPLES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW..... i

PART I: CREATING A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

GETTING STARTED 1

1. Who Are You?
2. What Is Overcoming Obstacles?
3. Working in Teams
4. Setting Expectations

CONFIDENCE BUILDING 33

1. Giving and Earning Respect
2. Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses
3. Staying Healthy (*two-session lesson*)
4. Clarifying Values
5. Avoiding Stereotypes
6. Developing Personal Power

PART II: ACQUIRING CORE SKILLS

MODULE ONE: COMMUNICATION..... 99

1. Understanding Nonverbal Messages
2. Listening
3. Speaking
4. Being Assertive (*two-session lesson*)
5. Expressing Opinions Constructively

MODULE TWO: DECISION MAKING 137

1. Making Decisions—Big and Small
2. Gathering Information
3. Identifying Options
4. Weighing Options and Consequences
5. Making a Choice

MODULE THREE: GOAL SETTING..... 189

1. Defining Goals (*two-session lesson*)
2. Stepping-Stone Goals
3. Taking Action
4. Persevering

PART III: DEVELOPING RELATED SKILLS

MODULE FOUR: MANAGING PERSONAL RESOURCES 233

1. Developing a Positive Attitude
2. Being Accountable
3. Handling Stress
4. Managing Your Time
5. Taking the Initiative

MODULE FIVE: STUDYING EFFECTIVELY 277

1. Getting Organized
2. Following Instructions
3. Using Appropriate Resources
4. Taking Notes
5. Writing Reports
6. Taking Tests
7. Learning How You Learn Best

MODULE SIX: PROBLEM SOLVING 331

1. Defining Problems—Big and Small
2. Identifying Options
3. Considering Pros and Cons
4. Finding Solutions

MODULE SEVEN: RESOLVING CONFLICTS 363

1. Understanding Conflicts
2. Identifying Emotions in Conflicts
3. Controlling Emotions in Conflicts
4. Using Communication Skills Effectively
5. Creating a Win-Win Situation
6. Resolving Conflicts

MODULE EIGHT: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE 417

1. Adapting to Change
2. Handling Peer Pressure
3. Getting Along
4. Playing by the Rules
5. Presenting Yourself

PART IV: DEMONSTRATING THE SKILLS**SERVICE LEARNING 459**

1. Introduction
2. Getting Started
3. Designing a Plan
4. Finalizing the Action Plan and Getting Approval
5. Taking Action
6. Assessment

LESSONS

1. Introduction to Service Learning
2. Designing an Action Plan
3. Gathering Information and Making the Commitment
4. Formalizing and Finalizing the Action Plan
5. Giving Presentations
6. Taking Action
7. The Big Day
8. Self-Assessment
9. Public Assessment

LESSON

IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES 2

A G E N D A

- Starter
- People Bingo
- Some of Both
- Make Them Work for You
- Conclusion
- Questions for Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognize that each individual has personal strengths.

Students will identify their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Students will identify ways in which they can use their weaknesses to their advantage.

Materials Needed

- Two copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet (#2) for each student (Parts I and II)

Starter (3 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer to play a quick game of catch. Tell the volunteer that he or she may use only one hand to catch. Gently toss a piece of chalk to the student. Then, ask him or her the following questions:

- Which hand did you use to catch the chalk?
- Why did you use this hand rather than the other one? (If the student replies that he or she is right- or left-handed, ask what this means.)
- If one of your hands is dominant, or stronger, does this mean that your other hand is useless or worthless? Why or why not?

Remind students that everyone has strengths. Point out that everyone also has some weaknesses; however, just like the less dominant hand, weaknesses do not need to be obstacles. Tell students that they will identify their individual strengths and will explore the relationship between strengths and weaknesses.

Part I People Bingo (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize their individual strengths by playing a game involving group interaction.

1. STUDENTS LISTEN TO THE GAME'S DIRECTIONS.

Distribute copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet (#2), and allow time for students to review it. Then, give the following directions:

- Move around the room, and ask your classmates to sign their names in a square that describes one of their strengths. For example, if a square reads “knows how to swim,” find a classmate who knows how to swim and ask him or her to sign that square.
- Your goal is to get bingo. That means that you must fill five squares in a row with names. Completed rows may read across, down, or diagonally.
- A person's name cannot be in any winning row more than once.
- When you have filled a row with signatures, call out, “Bingo!”
- If you sign your name to something, you may be asked to prove it.
- You have five minutes to play.

2. STUDENTS PLAY THE GAME.

Tell students to begin, allowing them to move freely around the room.

After five minutes, quickly poll the class to see how many students are just one square away from bingo. Decide whether to allow an additional minute or two before ending the game.

3. STUDENTS DISCUSS THE ACTIVITY.

Ask students if they found it difficult to get signatures for the various squares. As volunteers respond, encourage them to support their responses with details and examples. Allow students to challenge one another. For example, if a student has signed his or her name to the square that reads “speaks more than one language,” the student may be asked to say a few words in another tongue. This often allows students a chance to show off their strengths, and further encourages the class to build trust and a positive rapport.

Summarize the discussion by observing that the activity sheet has 24 different squares on it, each listing a different skill or strength. Point out that everyone has strengths, which is why each student was able to sign his or her name to at least one square.

In the event a student claims that he or she felt unable to sign any square on the sheet, remind the class that it’s impossible to measure all of the skills and strengths that people have—the sheet listed only 24, which is a small number. If pressed, tell the student that he or she kept the commitment to be in class today, and that keeping commitments is a very valuable strength.

Part II Some of Both (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students will identify their individual strengths and weaknesses.

1. STUDENTS IDENTIFY THEIR PERSONAL STRENGTHS.

Distribute new copies of the “Bingo” activity sheet. Ask students to reread each square and to consider whether it lists one of their strengths or traits. If so, have them write their name in the square. If not, ask them to put an X across the square.

Point out that students have begun to identify personal strengths. Allow time for students to add additional squares across the bottom of the chart, indicating other strengths or skills they have.

2. STUDENTS IDENTIFY THEIR PERSONAL WEAKNESSES.

Explain that even the most talented, respected people have weaknesses or areas in which they don’t excel. Share a weakness of your own with the class; perhaps you are not a great speller, you can’t carry a tune, or you have trouble memorizing things. Write your example on the board.

Invite volunteers to provide examples of their personal weaknesses. Record their responses on the board. If students have difficulty offering examples, refer them to the boxes they left blank on the second “Bingo” activity sheet. The recorded list of weaknesses needs to include only a few examples.

Tell students to use the backs of their activity sheets to list some of their weaknesses.

Part III Make Them Work for You (20 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify ways to use weaknesses to their advantage.

1. STUDENTS EXPLORE HOW TO TURN WEAKNESSES INTO STRENGTHS.

Refer to the list on the board, and challenge students to convert these weaknesses into strengths. Model the thinking process for them by addressing your own example first. For example, you might say, “I’m a poor speller, so I have to proofread carefully. But when I proofread, I usually catch other mistakes, too. This makes my writing stronger than it might be if I were a good speller.”

Ensure that students understand the technique of changing their attitudes in order to convert a weakness into a strength. Explain that this technique will be useful throughout their lives. Provide examples of situations in which converting a weakness into a strength is especially useful (e.g., when being teased, during an interview).

2. STUDENTS CONTINUE BRAINSTORMING IN SMALL GROUPS.

Encourage students to brainstorm ways that one of the weaknesses listed on the board can be restated as a strength. If students cannot reasonably convert a weakness, focus the discussion on identifying ways to overcome it.

When the brainstorming session is complete, divide the class into groups of four or five. Explain that within each group, students should brainstorm ways to convert the weaknesses each student has listed on the back of his or her activity sheet. Remind students that if they cannot find ways to convert a weakness into a strength, they should brainstorm ways to overcome it. Suggest that each group appoint a volunteer to take notes on the strategies created to address their individual weaknesses.

3. STUDENTS SHARE THEIR STRATEGIES.

Invite a volunteer from each group to share some strategies that the group developed. Be sure to affirm students’ efforts and to encourage supporting ideas from other students.

Conclude the discussion by pointing out that knowing what you’re not good at is actually a real strength. Successful people focus on doing what they’re best at, and make sure to work with others who are strong in the areas in which they are weak. That way, everyone is doing what he or she is best at.

Give examples of this strategy, such as the following:

- Actors often work with business advisors who are paid to manage their finances efficiently.
- Athletes work with coaches who are talented at strategizing.
- Doctors specialize in a particular area, and work with other specialists to treat patients most effectively.

Conclusion (20 minutes)

Ask students if this process was easy or difficult. Ask them to name a few of their classmates' strengths. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Everyone has strengths. It's important to identify your own strengths so that you can focus on using them.
- Everyone also has weaknesses. It's important to identify your weaknesses so you can create strategies for overcoming them or using them to your advantage.
- Successful, respected people can always identify both their strengths and their weaknesses. It's what enables them to focus on doing what they do best, and to work with others who have strengths in areas in which they are weak.

Questions for Assessment

1. Why is it important to be aware of your own strengths?
2. List three of your personal strengths (or three things that you are good at).
3. What are some ways you can turn a weakness into a strength?

FINDING SOLUTIONS

A G E N D A

- Starter
- Tall Towers
- Let the Contest Begin
- It's Personal
- Conclusion
- Questions for Assessment

Objectives

Students will gather information they need in order to complete a task.

Students will collaborate with others and use problem solving skills in order to complete a task.

Students will apply problem solving skills to their own lives.

Materials Needed

- 15 sheets of paper (stock white or newsprint) for each group of five students (Part II)
- One three-foot strip of masking tape for each group of five students (Part II)

Starter (3 minutes)

State that students have been working on solving problems for the last three lessons. Ask, “If you had a difficult problem to solve, would you feel more comfortable solving it now than you would have at the beginning of the year?” Ask students to explain their answers.

Acknowledge that knowing how to do something usually makes us feel more able and confident about doing it. Explain that today students will continue strengthening their problem solving skills by solving more problems.

Part I Tall Towers (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students gather information they need in order to complete a task.

1. STUDENTS CONSIDER A CHALLENGE.

Begin the activity by telling students that they are going to participate in a contest to see who can build the tallest tower. Explain that everyone will use the same materials and will have the same amount of time to work.

Ask students to help you clear space for the contest by moving all chairs and desks to the front, back, and sides of the room. Tell students to leave as much open floor space as possible for the contest.

Stand back and allow students to work. If necessary, remind students not to block the door of the classroom or to pile chairs or desks dangerously high.

2. STUDENTS ASK QUESTIONS IN ORDER TO GATHER INFORMATION.

Ask students if they are ready to begin. (*Students should answer no.*) Have students identify the first thing they should do when faced with a problem. (*Students should respond: gather information.*)

Tell students to ask you questions about the contest’s rules, which are listed below:

- Students will work in teams of five to build towers.
- Each group will be given 15 sheets of paper and some masking tape. These are the only materials that can be used.
- Towers must be freestanding—they cannot be taped to desks or any other objects.
- There will be 10 minutes allotted for work.
- The tallest structure that can stand on its own will win.
- The winning group does not have to participate in cleanup.

Part II Let the Contest Begin (25–30 minutes)

Purpose: Students collaborate with others and use problem solving skills in order to complete a task.

1. STUDENTS FORM GROUPS AND ORGANIZE TASKS.

Divide the class into groups of five. Give each group 15 sheets of paper and a strip of masking tape. Suggest that students discuss options and then try them out in order to consider pros and cons before using the tape.

2. STUDENTS BUILD TOWERS.

Start the contest and observe students as they work. After 10 minutes have passed, announce that time is up. Have the class decide on the winning tower or towers, and then instruct students to put the room back in order. Observe their ability to work together.

3. STUDENTS DISCUSS THE ACTIVITY.

Ask students to describe the winning strategies. Through questions and comments, guide students to describe what worked and what didn't work. If necessary, help students realize that the towers with the strongest bases were most successful.

Point out that students used all the steps of the problem solving process in order to solve this problem. Ask students to explain how each step was used. (*Students should mention the following: They gathered information when asking questions about the contest. They identified options when considering how the tower could be built. They considered pros and cons when they tried the options. They made a decision when they chose an option and built the tower.*)

Have students identify the skills they relied on in order to participate in this contest and build the towers. Through discussion, help students realize that in addition to decision making and problem solving skills, they also used goal setting, planning, and time management skills, as well as their abilities to follow instructions and work together as a team.

Part III It's Personal (10–15 minutes)

Purpose: Students apply problem solving skills to their own lives.

1. STUDENTS REFLECT ON THEIR LIVES.

Explain that students will begin to solve one more problem before they leave class today. Ask them to think about what is happening in their lives. Suggest that they think about the following:

- Problems they may have with friends
- Problems or obstacles they are facing in trying to reach a goal
- A past problem

2. STUDENTS IDENTIFY A PROBLEM.

Tell students to take out a sheet of paper and identify the problem they would like to solve or specify the unsolved problem from their past. Remind them to take their time and properly identify their problems. Remind them that identifying a problem accurately is often half the battle.

Have students begin to list possible options they could employ in order to solve the problems they identified. Explain that they have the remainder of the class period to think about the problems, list options for solving them, and weigh pros and cons for each option before deciding on a solution.

Assure students that they do not need to work out the problem before the end of class—especially if they need to gather any information. Invite students to talk with you if they need help.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students if they think that successful people are usually good problem solvers. Invite volunteers to explain their answers. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Use all the steps of the problem solving process when facing a problem: gather information that's needed, identify as many options as possible, weigh the pros and cons for each option, and decide on the best solution.
- The best solution to a difficult problem is a thoughtful one, so take the time to think it through.

Questions for Assessment

1. Describe a problem you have faced this week. It does not have to be a big problem. It can be something like a quiz you took in school or a game in which you competed. Describe how you used or did not use the problem solving process. If you did use any of the steps, were you aware of it at the time?
2. List three skills you have learned in this course that can help you solve problems. Explain how each skill can help you.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why was the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program developed?

The 1992 United States Department of Labor SCANS Report, *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000*, outlined the skills employees would need to succeed in the 21st century and how employers and communities could ensure that young people learn these skills. In response to this, Community for Education Foundation (CEF) developed the Overcoming Obstacles Life Skills Program, which includes curriculum materials, professional development, and ongoing support.

CEF continually expands the curriculum through the recommendations of our Educational Advisory Council, the input received from teachers of Overcoming Obstacles, and the revisions based on the needs of students as identified through surveys.

Since its inception, Overcoming Obstacles has helped thousands of educators teach millions of students the communication, decision making, and goal setting skills they need to be successful in life.

2. In which settings can Overcoming Obstacles be taught?

Overcoming Obstacles is taught in a variety of settings, including advisory periods, after-school programs, peer mentoring initiatives, and infusion into core content classes. Educators can contact CEF for assistance with creating implementation plans that meet the needs of their schools and students.

3. What skills and topics are covered in the curriculum?

Beginning with essential communication, decision making, and goal setting skills, Overcoming Obstacles covers over 20 important topics, including:

- Anger management
- Being a positive influence
- Bullying prevention
- Career preparation*
- College preparation*

* Included in the high school level only

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- Confidence
- Understanding diversity
- Financial management*
- Leadership
- Personal health
- Responsibility
- Self-esteem
- Service learning
- Stress management
- Study skills
- Time management

4. What types of students benefit from Overcoming Obstacles?

Our program will benefit your entire student body, no matter their struggles, talents, or circumstances. Through Overcoming Obstacles, students who are experiencing academic and social difficulties will be able to improve their time management, goal setting, and study skills. Students who have already excelled academically will be able to learn and practice confidence, independent thinking, and leadership skills. Through life skills instruction, all of your students will improve their attendance, behavior, and chances for graduation.

5. What is included with ongoing support?

Educators can contact CEF for information on best practices and help with implementation planning, which includes assistance with lesson selection and suggestions for tailoring the curriculum to your students' needs.

* Included in the high school level only

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

6. What are the differences between the high school and middle school curricula?

Both the middle school and high school curricula incorporate the same philosophy, pedagogy, and structure. The curricula cover similar topics, such as problem solving, conflict resolution, and stress management, but do so in an age-appropriate manner. The middle school curriculum presents skills that are relevant to the needs of younger adolescents. The high school program reinforces and develops the same skills with applications that are relevant to the needs of teenagers, and includes lessons on continuing education, employment, and financial responsibility.

7. Are curriculum materials available at the elementary school level?

While *Overcoming Obstacles* is only available at the middle school and high school levels, CEF can help educators select and modify activities to meet the needs of upper-elementary students.

8. Does the curriculum have to be taught in a specific order?

With the exception of the *Getting Started* and *Looking to the Future* modules, the modules can be taught in any order and prioritized according to topic.

9. How much personal information should I disclose to my students when facilitating a group discussion or activity?

We recommend that you only be as forthcoming as is appropriate within your school. The *Overcoming Obstacles* curriculum materials create a positive environment that encourages student-centered discussions; the conclusions and questions for assessment included at the end of every lesson provide a guide to facilitating these discussions.

10. What should I do if a student does not want to participate?

If a student is hesitant to participate in group activities or discussions at first, allow him or her time to sit back and observe, and then offer another invitation to join the group. Like many adults, some students may not feel comfortable talking about themselves in group settings or participating in team activities. If the student still expresses reluctance, let him or her know that everyone's participation in the group is vital and work with him or her to identify solutions. When students realize that the activities are engaging and build on their strengths, they often join in and become enthusiastic participants. *Overcoming Obstacles* will help students discover a different side of themselves, and it is your role as lesson facilitator to help them start the process.

Tel: (212) 406-7488 Fax: (212) 406-7480 Toll Free: (877) 840-9606
info@overcomingobstacles.org | www.overcomingobstacles.org

© 2011 Community for Education Foundation, Inc.