



Disagreeing Appropriately

Teacher Notes

“Disagreeing Appropriately” is a skill that empowers students with the ability to stand up for themselves in a way that is respectful and dignified. As students reach adolescence, this skill is essential because developmentally “normal” disagreements become more common between students and their teachers, parents and peers.

When you teach this lesson, some ancillary instruction about *when* and *where* to disagree is helpful, especially as it relates to the classroom. In addition, a logical progression or link from this lesson can be made to the skill of “Accepting Decisions of Authority.” Students need to be reminded that disagreeing with someone, even when done in a mature and appropriate manner, does not guarantee that the other person will change his or her opinion or decision.

Proactive Teaching Interaction

Introduce the Skill

Start your discussion by using a video clip from a movie, television show or news program that depicts a disagreement – a coach arguing with an official, a lawyer arguing with a judge or friends arguing with each other. Have students reflect on the behaviors they saw and the language they heard, and then ask them to write a brief summary describing a situation where they had a disagreement at school or home.

As a class, discuss these experiences and then brainstorm reasons why it's important to know how to disagree appropriately. Reasons can include:

- Avoids shouting matches and hurt feelings

- Helps you remain calm and respectful
- Makes it more likely that opinions will be taken more seriously
- Shows maturity

Describe the Appropriate Behavior or Skill Steps

Disagreeing Appropriately

1. **Look at the person.**
 - Again, you do not want to “stare down” or glare at the person you’re arguing with.
2. **Use a pleasant voice tone.**
3. **Say “I understand how you feel.”**
 - An empathy statement communicates your willingness to try to understand and respect the person’s point of view.
4. **Tell why you feel differently.**
 - Explain your point of view.
5. **Give a reason.**
 - Use facts or experiences to support your viewpoint.
6. **Listen to the other person.**
 - The more respect you show, the more respect you will receive.
 - Be willing to “agree to disagree.”

Give a Reason or Rationale

By learning how to disagree appropriately, you can avoid angry arguments and unpleasant situations that can arise when others do not share your opinion. Knowing how to explain your feelings or attitudes in a calm and respectful manner creates a positive environment where everyone feels comfortable to express their thoughts. Other benefits of knowing how to disagree appropriately include:

- Your opinion may be taken more seriously if you can clearly explain your position and offer supporting reasons.
- Others will be able to understand your position, and the issue or problem may get resolved more quickly without hurting anyone’s feelings.
- When you show respect to whomever you disagree with – teacher, coach, friend, sibling, parent, etc. – he or she will be more willing to listen to you.
- Others will see you as someone who is reasonable, mature and thoughtful.

Suggested Activities

Language Arts: Have students think about disagreements they have had with others and write a fictional conversation that incorporates skill Steps 3, 4 and 5. Older students, for example, can create a conversation they would have with a boss who scheduled them to work every weekend for a month. Younger students can create a conversation they would have with a teacher who did not give them full credit on an essay question. Have students read their conversations aloud and, as a group, discuss how well their conversations reflect the skill.

Government: Use the history of the Olympic Games to showcase how nations, athletes and others express disagreement in real and symbolic ways. Examples to cite include the 1968 Mexico City Olympics and the “Black Power” salute, the 1972 Olympics and the assassination of Israeli athletes and the 1980 and 1984 boycotts. Have students research the motivations behind the salute, assassinations and boycotts, and then discuss whether or not the Olympics are an appropriate venue for expressing political and social grievances.

Science/Math: Relate the experiences of Galileo and Copernicus to the skill of “Disagreeing Appropriately.” Explain to students that mathematicians and scientists like Galileo and Copernicus were instrumental in developing new ideas and solving many of the “mysteries” of the universe. However, prior to their discoveries and those of others, the ideas of Aristotle were considered scientific fact. Not only were Aristotle’s ideas accepted as fact, the church treated his theories as laws. Those who disagreed with these laws were called heretics and persecuted for their beliefs. Copernicus and Galileo were jailed and others were harmed because their views contradicted the teachings of Aristotle and the “laws” of the church. Many people who read their writings disagreed with Copernicus and Galileo simply because they contradicted the beliefs of the church, not because they disagreed with the science or reasoning behind their theories and ideas.

Have students reflect on the experiences of Galileo and Copernicus and then discuss how people living in that time could have disagreed in more appropriate ways. You also can discuss how disagreements can lead to better science and scientific truth.

History/Social Studies: When discussing or teaching the American Revolution, have students read James Lincoln Collier’s *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. Use the war and the fictional tale of the Meeker family to highlight how people respond to conflict and the potential it has to tear them apart. Have students create scenarios where the colonists and the British resolve their differences without resorting to war, and then discuss how realistic or plausible those alternative scenarios are.

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Suggested Role-Plays

Teacher Note:

Have students select one of the following scenarios to role-play in class.

1. Your basketball team loses the game because of a last-second foul. You think the referees were unfair and favored the other team. Show how you would respectfully disagree with the referee's call.
2. You earned second place in the school's essay contest, but you think the winner cheated on his essay. Show or describe how you would disagree with the results.
3. The teacher hands back yesterday's quiz. Your answers to questions 3 and 4 are marked as incorrect. Your neighbor, who had the same answers as you for those questions, has his answers marked correct. Describe how you would approach the teacher and dispute your grade.
4. Your parents won't let you see any of your friends over the weekend because you didn't finish your chores. You think the punishment is too harsh. Show how to appropriately disagree with their decision.
5. Your parents want you to go to bed at the same time as your brother (or sister), who is two years younger than you. Show how you would tell them you think you should be allowed to stay up later.

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Think Sheet

Name _____ Date _____

Why is it important for you to know how to disagree with others in an appropriate way?

1. Look at the person.

2. Use a pleasant voice tone.

Who is the person (teacher, sibling, parent, friend, etc.) you have the most disagreements with, and is it difficult for you to disagree appropriately with him or her? Explain.

3. "I feel..."

4. Tell why you feel differently.

5. Give a reason.

What words or actions can you say or do to keep a disagreement from turning into a shouting match or fight?

6. Listen to the other person.

Part of disagreeing appropriately involves using an empathy statement. What are some examples of empathy statements you can say during a disagreement?

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Suggested Role-Plays

Why is it important for you to know how to disagree with others in an appropriate way?

How can the skill of **Disagreeing Appropriately** help you at school?

How can the skill of **Disagreeing Appropriately** help you at home?

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