

Defense Mechanisms

3. *Black and White*

Spatial Requirements: Regular classroom setup: little or no space required

Activity Type: Object lesson

Grades: K-12

Group Size: 2 or more

Time: 10 minutes

Introduction: We have all heard that there are two sides to every story. In reality, there are usually at least three: your side, their side, and the facts. Because we see everything through the filter of our own experiences, we might respond completely differently than another person to the same event. If we are able to acknowledge this, however, we can push aside our preconceptions and be better able to see the real problem. This activity reinforces this idea, while helping students put themselves in another person's shoes. When we try to see another's point of view rather than simply arguing our own points, it will become easier to utilize positive defense mechanisms and resolve conflict.

Materials:

- 1 black piece of paper and 1 white piece of paper, glued together so that one side is black and the other white.

Activity:

Have two students come to the front of the class, face each other, and close their eyes. Bring out the paper (do not let them see the paper beforehand). Hold the paper between the two students at eye level so one student sees the white side and the other sees the black side. Have them open their eyes and ask each student, "What color do you see?" Then ask the class why they are giving different answers when they are both looking at the same piece of paper. After brief discussion, read the following story.

Driving By

Once a family decided to take a nice afternoon drive. While they were driving along a road enjoying the day, they saw a young man a little ways ahead of them, lying in the ditch off to the side of the road. They could barely see him because the grass was so tall. They could also see a bike lying next to him. As they drove a little closer, they could see he would rise up slightly each time a car passed by and throw an object in the direction of the car. As they got up next to him, they saw him wind up and throw a rock directly at their car. The father sped up as he passed, trying to get by without being hit by the rock. But the young man's aim was good, and the rock hit the side window of their car. The window smashed into pieces and the children sitting in the back screamed and ducked down as low as they could. The family drove down the road a couple of miles when the father spotted a police car. They signaled to the police officer to stop. They all pulled over to the side of the road and the family told the police officer what had happened to them and what they had seen. They told him that back on the road a few miles there was a young man who was hiding in the grass and throwing rocks at cars as they passed by. They asked the officer to investigate the situation and arrest the young man for breaking their car window and putting their family in danger.

Stop reading and ask students to raise their hand if they think the officer should arrest the young man. Continue reading the rest of the story. Tell the students that now they will hear the young man's side of the story.

The young man had a job delivering newspapers. He was riding along his route delivering papers as usual, when a large truck slid on some gravel at the turn of the road. In an attempt to avoid getting hit by the truck, the young man swerved. He lost control of his bike and hit a large rock at the side of the road. Upon impact, the young man flew off his bike and flipped into the air. He landed awkwardly at the bottom of the ditch, and one of his legs was badly broken. He was knocked unconscious for a while. When he awoke, his leg hurt so badly he could barely move. For hours he tried to pull himself up the side of the ditch. For nearly an hour he tried to get the attention of passing cars by waving in the air, but he was so well hidden in the weeds that no one stopped. His leg was bleeding and he was becoming very weak. At last,

in desperation, he tried to throw rocks at passing cars, hoping to get someone to see him and stop. Unfortunately, most of the cars were going so fast that no one noticed. When a car finally came by that was driving slower, the boy gave it his best shot. He was relieved when the rock hit the car, but disappointed when the car sped off.

Processing the Experience:

- How does this new information affect what you were thinking about the young man who was lying in the weeds?
- Are both people in this story telling the truth?
- How can two people see the same event and feel differently about it?
- Can two people with different stories both be right?
- What is the difference between “listening” to someone and “understanding” someone?
- Why is it important to see things from another person’s point of view?
- How can considering the other person’s point of view help us use better defense mechanisms?