

Tearing Off Your Labels

14. Sticks and Stones

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

Activity Type: Object lesson

Grades: K-12

Group Size: 2 or more

Time: 5 minutes

Introduction: “Sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never hurt me.” This old saying, as it turns out, is false. Being given an unfair label can be painful. Labels are sometimes given out of ignorant stereotyping or out of anger and frustration. Even when we don’t mean to hurt someone, once we have given them a label it is often very difficult to take it back. This activity is designed to help students understand how hard it is to take something back once it has been said. The only way to respect others is to think before you speak. This activity can also apply when teaching “Defense Mechanisms.”

Materials:

- Travel size tube of toothpaste
- Magic marker
- Overhead projector or Elmo
- Plastic knife
- Ruler
- Watch or clock with second hand

Activity:

Use a permanent marker to draw a series of lines vertically on an overhead transparency. The lines should be dark and approximately 10 inches long and about one quarter of an inch wide. Make about eight lines on the overhead. Choose a volunteer to help you with the demonstration. Give them a small tube of toothpaste. Explain that the object is for them to see how many inches of black lines they can cover with the toothpaste. Give them about 30 seconds, or until they run out of toothpaste. Then use the ruler to measure how many inches of the black marker line they were able to cover.

Next give the volunteer a plastic table knife. Explain that their challenge now is to see how much of the toothpaste they can fit back into their toothpaste tube in the same amount of time. Have them start scraping the toothpaste from the end of one of the covered lines. Once again, use the ruler to measure how much of the line they uncovered.

Processing the Experience:

- How many inches were covered with the toothpaste? Was it hard to get the toothpaste out of the tube?
- How many inches were they successfully able to uncover and get back in the tube? Why couldn’t they get more toothpaste back into the tube?
- If we compare our words to the toothpaste, how hard is it for us to take back something we said?
- Can our words hurt others? Explain.
- Can unfair or untrue labels get put on someone when we use unkind words or spread rumors?
- If words can hurt others what should we do before we speak?
- What should we do if we hurt someone else with our words?
- How can we stop a rumor once it gets started even if we didn’t start it?