

Introducing Optimism

Option 1: Adversity Analysis

Set-up:

Have students prepare to write. You will ask students to write down at least three sentences they would think to themselves after they hear each of the following adversities:

Scenario 1. You have failed at something in class. Note, “failure” for some of you may be not passing a test, whereas some of you might feel like you’ve failed if you receive less than a certain grade or percent.

Scenario 2. You were in a long-term relationship for at least three months. You really cared about that person – maybe even said the “love” word. But, the person breaks up with you.

Scenario 3. You are about to interview for something important – such as a job that you really want or a program/college you want to attend.

Scenario 4. You make a major mistake in a sport or hobby that affects the overall performance (such as messing up a major note in a song or missing a critical play in a game).

Make sure students are writing in first-person. Pause them and model an example if needed.

Non-example: “I would be really angry”

Better Example: “I can’t believe that happened. I always screw up in this class.”

Debrief:

After writing, have students discuss their responses with others, noting commonalities and differences between their own responses and each others'. Lead a discussion in which students explore how their thoughts might influence their actions.

Then, introduce them to the ABC model, teaching them the difference between optimistic and pessimistic thoughts. Have them analyze their written thoughts before teaching them the value of optimism and how to dispute pessimistic thoughts.

Option 2: Anagram Experiment

Set-up: This experience replicates a common experiment in which learned helplessness is induced.

Each student will be given an envelope that contains individual words on slips of paper (See Anagram Lists). Within each envelope there will be some words that can not be rearranged into anagrams. The anagram list from Group A only has a few impossible anagrams, while the list from Group B has only a few solvable anagrams.

You can either have all of them try from Group B, or give half of them Group A and the other half Group B to create more of a “control group vs. experimental group” experience.

Directions:

Do a couple whole-group examples of anagram words so students understand how they work.

Ex: “Sit” → “Its”
“Scar” → “Cars”

“In a moment, you will be given an envelope with slips of paper. On my command, one-at-a-time, you will grab a single slip of paper. Once you pull your word, you will write down a single, one-word anagram that uses each letter and forms a new word. When you have written down your anagram, you will stand up and wait for the next round. We may move onto the next round before you finish. Do not place your slip of paper back in the envelope; simply leave it aside when we move onto the next round.

Important: This is a SILENT, INDEPENDENT challenge. Do not speak nor look at other

peoples' words.”

Complete as many rounds as you need in order to observe a variety of responses from students (sighs of frustration, giving up, etc.).

After students complete a few rounds, have them immediately write down what was running through their minds during the experience. Push them to write down at least 3-5 sentences that ran through their mind at various points in the experience.

Debrief:

After writing, have students discuss their experience with others. Lead a discussion in which students explore how their thoughts affected their actions and how their response to this event is similar and different to how they act in other areas of their life (school, sports, relationships, etc.).

Then, introduce them to the ABC model, teaching them the difference between optimistic and pessimistic thoughts. Have them analyze their written thoughts before teaching them the value of optimism and how to dispute pessimistic thoughts.

Anagram Lists

Group A (Mostly solvable)

Group B (Mostly impossible)

are	light
acre	concrete
dare	satiated
evil	impossible
flow	essential
used	creation
gust	function
earnest	catered
impossible	slope
satiated	alerted