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IMPULSIVITY: What the heck IS IT and how in the world do I CONTROL IT?

LESSON 1

OBJECTIVE:

At the end of this lesson students will be able to

- Define and describe an impulse, and identify the steps of impulse control
- Identify personal impulse control challenges and successes
- Recognize the problems associated with poor impulse control
- Recognize the benefits of using impulse control

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Dry erase board/chalkboard, dry erase markers/chalk, paper, pens (or pencils), small pieces of candy, and several games of checkers.

SCRIPT:

An impulse is the feeling, urge or temptation to do or say something. All of us have impulses. There is no shame in this. It's human. Impulses often come quickly before we have time to consider them. We might have impulses to show our anger; we might have impulses to avoid responsibilities; we might have impulses to talk at inappropriate times; we might have impulses to interrupt or intrude.

What is important, though, is asking yourself, "Am I in charge of my impulses or are my *impulses* in charge of me?" Being in charge of your impulses means that you know how to *stop* and *think* when an impulse hits you. It means being in charge of your life. Wouldn't it be great to be the boss of your impulses instead of having them be the boss of you?

RATIONALE:

There are actually many benefits of having good impulse control. Research tells us that people who have better impulse control do better in school (Nietfeld and Bosma, 2003), have more friends and get along better with their friends (Landau & Moore, 1991; McMurrin, Blair, & Egan, 2002; Patterson & Newman, 1993), and are better able to handle stress (Mulsow, 2001).

Some young people may not have heard the terms impulse or impulse control. While some students will be more familiar with the term "self-control," this book will focus on the phrase "impulse control" in order to better identify what aspects of the self is being controlled (i.e. urges, feelings, temptations, etc.). As in many school lessons, it is important to introduce relevant language at the beginning of a unit so that everyone has a common understanding during discussions.

In addition, it is important to introduce the skill steps of impulse control (stop and think) in the first lesson so that they can be applied to each subsequent learning unit. And, finally, this lesson will examine the benefits and consequences of using/not using impulse control in order to enhance motivation to learn all that is available in the following chapters.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What are some examples of impulses from your own life? (i.e. what impulses or urges do you have in the classroom? At home? With friends?)
- Have you ever gotten into trouble for acting on your impulses? What were the consequences?
- What do you think other young people think of those who don't use impulse control? Who do use impulse control?
- How do you stop yourself when you know that you have an impulse that might get you into trouble?

ACTIVITIES:

1

Explain to students that in 1984 there was a movie released titled *Impulse* and that the tagline for the movie was "Imagine what would happen if every desire, every urge, every passion, locked deep inside all of us ...suddenly exploded." Ask students to discuss what they imagine this movie was like and what the world would be like if this were true.

2

Write the following quotation from Aristotle on a dry erase board or chalkboard, "*I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies, for the hardest victory is the victory over self.*" Discuss students' perceptions and opinions of this line.

3

Give each student a pencil/pen and a piece of paper and direct them to interview an adult regarding impulsivity and impulse control. Ask them to obtain the following information: (1) what is an impulse that the adult has had in the recent past; (2) was s/he successful in controlling it or did it control her/him; (3) what were the person's feelings following the encounter with an impulse; (4) what were the benefits or consequences? Ask students to report their findings to the group.

4

Set one piece of candy in front of each student. Tell them that they can either eat one piece of candy now or, if they can wait five (5) minutes, then they can have three (3) pieces of candy. Wait 5 (five) minutes and reward those who have waited to eat with an additional 2 (two) pieces of candy. Ask students to identify the strategies that they used to delay gratification by resisting the impulse to eat the first piece of candy (i.e. looking away, reminding themselves of the reward, thinking about something else, etc.). Suggest to students that they can use similar strategies when they face other situations when they need to delay gratification.

5

Set up games of checkers for students (one game for every two students). Direct them to play according to the rules but to "talk out loud" as they consider each move. For example, a student might say, "If I move here, you might jump me so I think I will leave this piece here." Discuss how *stopping* and *thinking* helps to make better decisions.

ACTIVITIES:



Explain to students that you will be reading several scenarios where students had various kinds of impulses. At the end of each scenario ask students to describe the consequence(s) and the benefit(s) of either following the impulse or saying “No” to the impulse.

- Maria is the goalie for her soccer team. At the last minute of the game she missed a ball and the other team scored and won the game. Maria felt angry and embarrassed. She had the impulse to kick the goal post. What would be the consequences of giving in to this impulse? What would be the benefits of *not* giving in to this impulse?
- Jeremy needed to ask his mother if he could go to a friend’s house but she was on the telephone. He had the impulse to interrupt her. What would be the consequences of giving in to this impulse? What would be the benefits of *not* giving in to this impulse?
- It is February and Marco is tired of the school grind. His best friend, Carlos, is going to skip class in the afternoon and walk down to a store. Marco has the impulse to join him. What would be the consequences of giving in to this impulse? What would be the benefits of *not* giving in to this impulse?
- Uniqua’s math teacher doesn’t seem to like Uniqua. In fact, Uniqua feels like this teacher picks on her all the time. One day in class the math teacher blamed Uniqua for talking when she really wasn’t. Uniqua had the impulse to yell at her teacher. What would be the consequences of giving in to this impulse? What would be the benefits of *not* giving in to this impulse?
- Matt just started skateboarding. One night when he had a lot of English and History homework to do, a bunch of his friends were meeting with a guy who was teaching them some trick skating maneuvers. Matt had the impulse to skip his homework and go skateboarding. What would be the consequences of giving in to this impulse? What would be the benefits of *not* giving in to this impulse?

HOW TO USE REPRODUCIBLE SHEETS:

Reproducible Worksheet 1.1

Impulses in Context, asks students to identify specific impulses that they struggle with in the classroom, at home, and in the community. Self-awareness can decrease impulsivity by making students aware of triggers or weak spots.

Talk about it. Ask students how easy or difficult it was to identify impulses that they struggle with. Ask students to share some of the impulses that they identified. Point out similarities between students in order to create a sense of support within the group.

Reproducible Worksheet 1.2

In the Doghouse with Impulses, asks students to think about different ways they have had trouble for acting on impulses. Prior to this exercise students may not have connected negative consequences with their acts of impulsivity and, therefore, may not have seen impulsivity as problematic. Recognizing a problem is the first step in changing the problem.

Talk about it. Ask students if they can think of additional ways that they have had trouble with impulses that they acted on. Discuss how this exercise may have motivated them to work on the problem.

Reproducible Worksheet 1.3

Think about the Consequences, asks students to match impulses on one side of the page with potential consequences on the other side of the page. Taking time to consider potential consequences for certain actions can assist students in behaving less impulsively.

Talk about it. Ask students if they can think of additional consequences for any of the impulses that were described. Discuss how frequently students take time to consider consequences before acting on an impulse. Discuss any obstacles that keep students from taking time to consider consequences.

Reproducible Worksheet 1.4

Benefits of Impulse Control Scramble, helps students continue identifying ways in which impulse control can improve the quality of their lives. Students are asked to unscramble each word and to read the phrase that describes a benefit of having impulse control. The five benefits that are listed are as follows: (1) Stay out of trouble, (2) Make more friends, (3) Feel good about yourself, (4) Make good choices and (5) Get better grades.

Talk about it. Ask students if they can think of additional benefits for practicing impulse control. Discuss which benefits are more motivating and less motivating for students.

Reproducible Worksheet 1.5

Rating My Impulse Control, uses a Likert scale to examine students' performance on specific behaviors that require impulse control (i.e. waiting, asking before borrowing, controlling temper, listening, making good choices, etc.). This is an excellent tool for self-evaluation and for helping students identify specific behaviors that are in need of further work.

Talk about it. Ask students if they completed this page impulsively or if they took time to stop and think about each response. Ask students to share those areas where they are both strong and weak regarding impulse control. Discuss ideas for how to improve weak areas.

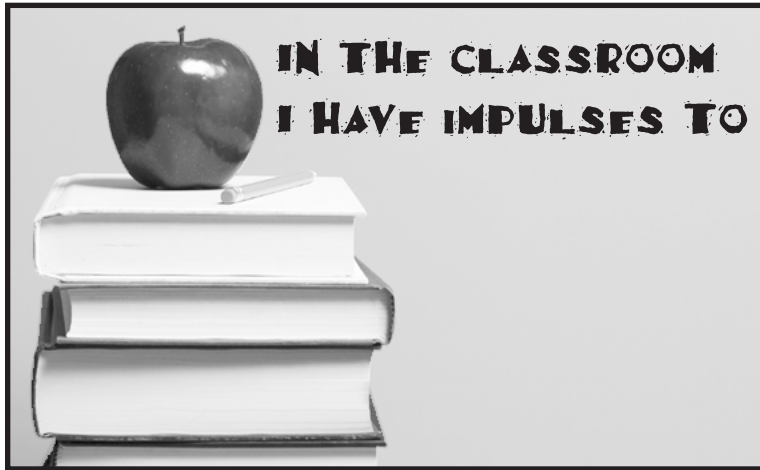
Reproducible Worksheet 1.6

Impulse Control Remote Control, asks students to *stop* and *think* about various impulses. They are asked to decide if you should PAUSE to take in more information, REWIND to think about and learn from situations from the past, or FAST FORWARD to think about potential consequences.

Talk about it. Discuss the three (3) strategies of taking in more information, thinking about what has been learned from the past and thinking about potential consequences. Ask students to identify which of these strategies they use the most frequently and which one they need the most work on.

IMPULSES IN CONTEXT

Look at the pictures below and write down as many impulses as you can think of in the classroom, at home and in the community.





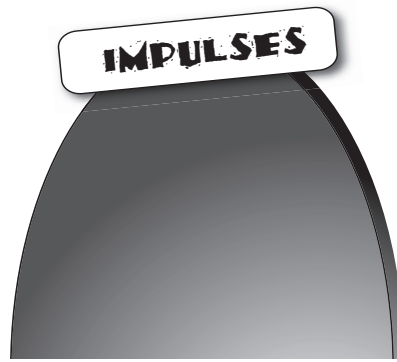


'IN THE DOGHOUSE' WITH IMPULSES

Have you ever had trouble for following your impulses without stopping and thinking first?

YES NO

Check the ways that you have had trouble:



GROUNDED FROM DOING THINGS

GROUNDED FROM PHONE OR COMPUTER....

YELLED AT.....

SENT TO YOUR ROOM.....

HAD A GRADE LOWERED

SENT TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

HAD PEOPLE ANGRY WITH YOU

LOST FRIENDS

GOT IN-HOUSE SUSPENSION AT SCHOOL

GOT SUSPENDED OR EXPELLED

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THINK

ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES

Read the descriptions of impulses in the boxes on the left. Consider what might happen if a person does not *think* about the consequences. Then read the consequences described in the boxes on the right. Match the possible consequences on the right with the actions on the left by drawing a line to connect them.

Kenyatta told Yolanda that she had a crush on Daniel. Yolanda has the impulse to tell another friend who also likes Daniel.

S/he could get caught and be given an 'F' for cheating. S/he would also feel very embarrassed.

Oscar sees the answers to the history test laying on his teacher's desk when she is out of the room. He has the impulse to look at it and copy down some of the answers.

S/he might embarrass the other person and hurt the other person's feelings. Other kids might see her/him as a bully.

Sara is spending the night with Leela. In the middle of the night Leela suggests that they sneak some of her parents' alcohol and drink it. Sara has the impulse to do it.

S/he might be wrong. Kids might get angry with her/him for being rude and making accusations without proof.

Jeremy just had one of his games stolen. He sees another kid playing the exact same game. He has the impulse to accuse him of stealing his game.

Other kids might think that s/he is a poor sport or make fun of her/his outburst.

Anna struck out in the softball game and is feeling embarrassed and frustrated. She has the impulse to throw the bat down.

S/he would be creating a conflict between two friends who she enjoys being with at the same time.

Bernardo sees Ricky's new haircut which he thinks looks silly. He has the impulse to laugh at him.

S/he could get caught and get in trouble from two sets of parents. She could also be forbidden to hang out with her friend any more.