

Student Activity | Agree to Disagree

Happiness Skill: Human Connection

Time

Two 30–45-minute sessions

Overview

In this activity, students explore how to disagree respectfully. After reflecting on the last time they took part in an unproductive argument, student pairs will read and annotate an article that provides suggestions for productive disagreements. Then, the class will participate in a simulation to apply what they have learned. Next, the teacher will lead a group discussion in which students consider how respectful disagreements build human connection and contribute to sustainable happiness. Finally, students will create a personal goal for conducting respectful disagreements in the future by focusing on a strategy to help them overcome destructive anger and explaining the brain science behind this choice.

Objectives

Students will:

- Explore, explain, and apply principles that enable respectful disagreements.
- Consider the correlation between human connection and sustainable happiness.
- Explain the brain science behind anger.
- Create an attainable goal for holding respectful disagreements and strengthening the skill of human connection.

Materials

- Scrap paper, one piece per student
- Five Ways to Have Better Conversations Across Difference [article](#), one per student
- Tip Sheet, one per student
- Scenario Cards (15 copies), cut out in advance
- How to Overcome Destructive Anger [article](#), one per student
- Respectful Disagreements Goal Sheet, one per student

Standards

[National Health Education Standards](#)

- Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- Standard 6: Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.

English Language Arts Common Core State Standards

- Reading:
 - R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Speaking and Listening:
 - SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Resources

- [Neuroscience of Anger](#)
- [Amygdala Hijack: When Emotions Take Over](#)
- [Anger Management](#)
- [LG Experience Happiness: Human Connection](#)
- [Happiness is Being Socially Connected](#)

Procedure

Session 1:

1. Engage students by encouraging them to think about the last time they had an *unproductive* argument. Explain that when an argument is unproductive, it tends to happen again and again because it is never resolved. Unproductive arguments leave both sides feeling frustrated or angry.
2. Invite students to either describe this argument to the person next to them or spend a couple minutes independently jotting details about this argument on a piece of scrap paper. Then invite a few students to share what their argument was about and why both sides left the argument feeling negative emotions. Remind students to be sensitive and not mention names.
3. Distribute one copy of the *Five Ways to Have Better Conversation Across Difference* article to each student. Instruct them to read the article with a peer. As they do, they should annotate (underline or highlight) one or two important details that could be used to help someone better understand each of the five ways to have a better disagreement.
4. Once pairs have read and annotated, bring the class back together. Distribute one Tip Sheet handout to each student, and review the strategies and accompanying tips together. As you do, discuss why each strategy is important and encourage students to consider any additional details that they annotated that would help them employ each one. Tell students to write these additional tips in the space provided below each strategy.
5. Next, distribute a couple Scenario Cards to each pair. Instruct pairs to use their Tip Sheet, to role-play how to have a productive and kind disagreement around the situations provided. Explain that in a productive disagreement, both parties walk away feeling respected, believing their opinion was heard, and with a mutually agreed upon solution.

6. Bring the class back together and explain that productive disagreements can contribute to our happiness (even though it is a disagreement) because they help build human connection. Tell the class that they will explore this further during the next session!

Session 2:

1. Begin by explaining and/or reviewing that there are six sustainable happiness skills we can work on to improve our overall happiness: human connection, mindfulness, positive outlook, purpose, generosity, and gratitude.
2. Lead the class in a group discussion around the following questions:
 - Ask: What *is* human connection?
 - Ensure students understand that human connection refers to our relationships with others: friendships, family members, significant others, and peers.
 - Ask: Why do you think human connection contributes to sustainable happiness? Think about your own life!
 - Explain that those with close bonds with others are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem, and even problems with eating and sleeping.
 - Ask: Based on what you have learned, how could respectful disagreements contribute to sustainable happiness?
3. Go on to explain that one barrier to having respectful disagreements and sustainable happiness is our response to anger—and the anger we feel has a lot to do with our brains.
4. Tell students that our brain’s amygdala is the first part of our body to respond to anger. Located near the base of our brain in our temporal lobe, our amygdala responds quickly to emotions and is responsible for our fight or flight response when we experience anger, fear, or stress. In fact, when we feel strong emotions, the amygdala can respond so quickly that the areas of our brain that are better at reasoning, like the pre-frontal cortex, don’t always have time to kick in. In order to respond to our anger logically and thoughtfully, our frontal lobe needs a chance to process what has happened.
5. Distribute one *How to Overcome Destructive Anger* article and one Respectful Disagreements Goal Sheet to each student. Review the directions provided on the Respectful Disagreements Goal Sheet, and then encourage students to work independently.
6. If time allows at the end of the session, encourage volunteers to share their goals and explain how this goal will help promote their sustainable happiness. Then, instruct students to keep this goal sheet in a location where they can refer to it often. In the weeks to come, try to check in on your students’ progress and encourage them to modify their goals as needed, create new goals, and celebrate successes!

1. Listen to their story.

Tips:

- Learn about their background so you can understand why they think the way that they do.
- _____
- _____

2. Try not to take things personally.

Tips:

- Instead of reacting with emotion, ask questions like: "That's interesting, what makes you say that?" Or: "Tell me more."
- _____
- _____

3. Be a bridge, not a barrier.

Tips:

- Think about how you usually defend yourself, and try to change your reactions so you are more open to listening.
- _____
- _____

4. Lean into discomfort.

Tips:

- Be present and don't interrupt. Try to understand the other person before you say your part.
- _____
- _____

5. Set norms.

Tips:

- Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements.
- _____
- _____

Scenario: You recently became a vegetarian, and your parents are convinced you won't be one for long. You frequently get into fights before dinner because they still expect you to eat meat.

Roles Needed:

- One student
- One parent or other adult

Scenario: Your best friend recently became close with someone else. They spend a lot of time together and this makes you jealous. You were supposed to go to the mall together this weekend, but your best friend just told you that he can't because he is busy.

Roles Needed:

- Two students

Scenario: You worked really hard on an essay, and you are excited to get it back to see what your teacher thought. The grade is *much* lower than what you believe it should be.

Roles Needed:

- One student
- One teacher

