

LIFE SKILLS AT HOME: PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Overcoming Obstacles' Life Skills at Home: Parents and Caregivers with Younger Children is a collection of activities you can use to teach your child how to cope with stress, stay positive, set goals, listen effectively, and more.

Overcoming Obstacles is a nonprofit publisher of elementary, middle, and high school life skills curriculum materials that are research- and evidence-based, award-winning, and free. The organization was founded in 1992 and since that time has helped hundreds of thousands of educators in all 50 states and around the world teach over 70 million young people the skills they need to achieve success. Research shows that when students are taught the Overcoming Obstacles curriculum, grades and graduation rates go up, bullying goes down, and young people are better prepared for college and careers.

Our goal is that every child receives a life skills education. If you find the activities in this handbook useful, please recommend it to your family and friends. And for more free resources, visit overcomingobstacles.org/library.

LISTENING

The Golden Rule *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Tie good listening skills to “The Golden Rule.”

Start by asking your child if he or she becomes frustrated when speaking to someone who is not listening (the answer should be yes). Next, tell your child about “The Golden Rule” (treat others as you wish to be treated). Once knowledge of the rule has been established, you should then ask your child how it relates to listening (for example, if I want others to listen to me, then I should be willing to listen to what others have to say).

Simon Says *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Play a game to learn about the importance of listening.

Tell your child you are going to play a game and then lead him or her in a session of “Simon Says.” At the end of the game, discuss how good listening was important to playing the game.

Think About It *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Help your child learn about good listening.

Discuss with your child why listening is important. Then, share with him or her what good listening looks like: head (brain) is thinking about what is being said, eyes are looking at the person who is speaking, ears hear what people are saying (if you are deaf, you listen with your eyes, using sign language and lip reading), mouth stays closed, heart cares about what is being said, hands and feet are still.

Riddles *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Practice active listening with your child by playing games.

Read these three short riddles to your child, one after the other, allowing your child time to try to guess each answer: (1) What goes up and doesn't come back down? (Your age); (2) What belongs to you but is used more by others? (Your name); (3) What is so delicate that saying its name breaks it? (Silence). After the three riddles have been discussed, ask your child if it was important to listen closely to the riddles to solve them.

Transcribe *(15 minutes)*

Purpose: Through listening to a favorite song, your child learns about active listening.

Ask your child to select a favorite song that has lyrics. Then ask your child to write down the lyrics of that song as it plays. When the song is over, compare your child's lyrics sheet with the actual lyrics of the song (these can usually be found online). Discuss with your child whether the activity was easy or difficult. Did he or she have to listen to the song differently than usual (active listening, more focus on the words)? Why?

EMPATHY

In Their Shoes (10 minutes)

Purpose: Your child develops empathy for others by experiencing a difference in his or her own life.

Ask your child to consider things in life that he or she has but others may not (food, clothing shelter, health). Tell your child that sometimes it's hard to be grateful for the things that we have and that we don't always realize how important they are until we lose them. Illustrate this by having your child experience life in "someone else's shoes" (as someone else may live). You can place a blindfold over your child's eyes for a minute, or have him or her place an arm behind the back and try some basic daily tasks using just his or her other hand. Ask your child to consider how life would be different with this one change.

Giving Back One Day (60+ minutes)

Purpose: Help your child develop an understanding for others through community service.

Together with your child, plan a day of community service that involves helping others (for example, volunteering at a local food bank or an animal shelter). At the end of the day, discuss with your child impressions of the experience.

Your Turn (20-30 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child develop empathy by understanding what it takes to care for the family.

Tell your child that he or she is going to help you with dinner tonight. Before you begin to cook, describe the necessary steps that go into preparing for a meal (deciding on what to eat, shopping for ingredients, setting the table). Then, lead your child through the process of cooking the meal and ask if he or she will please help you clean up after dinner. These activities will give your child a better appreciation of the effort that goes into meal time.

How Far You Go In Life (10 minutes)

Purpose: Read a quote to your child to help him or her learn about empathy.

Read this quote by George Washington Carver to your child, "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these." Discuss the quote with your child.

COPING

De-Stress *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Teach your child calming techniques.

Tell your child that sometimes doing a simple exercise can help people deal with stress. Then ask your child to stand and follow your instructions. Direct him or her to breathe slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. Demonstrate this technique dramatically so your child can see how you take time with each breath and are intentional in how you breathe. Do this five times together. Next, tell your child to make his or her body very rigid and tight, as if the whole body is one big, straight board. Demonstrate. After your child holds this position for a few moments, say, "Now make your body very loose, like a wet noodle." Demonstrate by loosening your body and wiggling all around, letting your arms jiggle. Tell your child to make his or her body tight again, and loosen and jiggle. Do this a few times. Conclude by asking your child if he or she feels a difference.

Unwind *(60+ minutes)*

Purpose: Create a stress-free afternoon for yourself and your child.

Share with your child that it is important to find time each day to de-stress. Help your child identify things that he or she finds relaxing (drawing, journaling, playing an instrument, listening to music). To help you both cope with the stresses of life, plan an afternoon of fun for you and your child at least once each month doing an activity you will both enjoy (going to a park, the zoo, or a movie).

Gone But Not Forgotten *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Help your child cope with the loss of a loved one.

Explain to your child that grief is an emotion that best runs its course when expressed rather than hidden. Discuss the positive memories associated with a loved one now gone. Have your child share farewell remarks.

GOAL SETTING

One Step At A Time (10 minutes)

Purpose: Work with your child on goal achievement.

Have your child select a long-term goal to accomplish within the months to come. Then work with your child to create a series of smaller (stepping-stone) goals to reach the long-term goal. Use the “On Your Way” activity sheet ([download here](#)) to map out the goal and write the steps in a calendar. Check in periodically with your child to assess progress and provide advice or assistance as needed. Once the goal has been accomplished, have a celebratory treat in mind (favorite meal, special dessert, or whatever you think your child would like best) and surprise your child with it.

Consider This (10 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand that success comes from hard work.

Ask your child to name someone he or she admires (a family member, community member, author, athlete, or musician). Now ask your child if he or she believes that his or her favorite was always talented and successful. Tell your child that everyone has to start somewhere and that mastery comes with practice, effort, and determination. Every famous author has a series of poorly written rough drafts, every athlete has a history of misses and mistakes, every musician has songs that don't succeed. Conclude with a discussion around the idea that to begin the path toward mastery of a skill or craft, one must first accept that the start will be filled with challenges.

If (10 minutes)

Purpose: Provide your child with an inspirational poem to help in goal achievement.

Read the poem “[If](#)” by Rudyard Kipling to your child and ask what it means to him or her. Lead your child to understand that self-confidence, sensitivity to others, and the drive to never give up are valuable attributes to have in achieving your dreams. Print the poem for your child and suggest that he or she post it somewhere it can be seen every day.

Perseverance (10 minutes)

Purpose: Teach your child about the importance of perseverance.

Read this quote by Michael Jordan to your child, "I have missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I have lost almost 300 games. On 26 occasions I have been entrusted to take the game-winning shot, and I missed. I have failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Ask your child to read the quote, then write a brief reflection on what he or she feels the quote means and how it may connect to his or her life. After about five minutes of reflection, ask your child to share with you what was written. Then tell him or her, "Did you know that Michael Jordan did not make his high school basketball team? What if he had let that stop him? What if he had not persevered?" Allow your child time to respond.

You Have Already Persevered! *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Help your child better understand the skills needed for perseverance.

Discuss with your child things that he or she has done that have taken perseverance (for example, going from crawling to walking, riding a bike, doing math, playing a musical instrument or sport). Create a list of these events along with a description of what is needed to persevere and demonstrate success (for example, practice, have patience, ask for help, keep trying).

BULLYING PREVENTION

No Friends (15 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child understand how it feels to be a victim of bullying.

Ask your child to imagine that he or she will spend an entire school day without speaking to, sitting with, or hanging out with friends. Give him or her time to fully understand this scenario. Then explain that people who are bullied often feel alone and may have only a few friends. Why does your child think this is? To conclude, discuss how it would feel to be by oneself for a day and ask these questions: Would you ever want to feel like that? Would you want other people to feel like that? What are some ways you could ensure that your classmates and friends don't have to experience this loneliness (for example, inviting them to hang out with you and your friends, asking them how they are doing)?

What Do Bullies Do? (15 minutes)

Purpose: Help your child identify and pledge not to copy the actions of bullies.

Ask your child, "What do bullies do?" Give him or her a few minutes to think quietly. (Responses may include intimidate others, start rumors, shove someone in the hallway.) Then ask that he or she write in a journal from one or more of the following points of view:

1. someone who was bullied,
2. someone who bullied another person,
3. someone who witnessed a bullying incident, and
4. someone who intervened in a bullying incident.

Discuss these experiences with your child. If you learn that your child has been bullied, contact your child's teacher and school principal. If you learn that your child has bullied another, encourage him or her to apologize to the person (it's never too late to say you are sorry) and pledge never to bully again.

A Place At The Table (10 minutes)

Purpose: Have your child consider what it feels like to not be included.

Ask your child to write about a lunchroom situation where a group of students will not let another person sit at their table. Have your child address these questions: (1) How would you feel as a person already sitting at the table? (2) How would you feel as the person trying to sit at the table? Conclude by asking what is the best resolution to this situation (for example, joining that person for lunch, or convincing your friends to let him or her sit with all of you)

An Important List *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Work with your child to consider how bullying could prevent him or her from accomplishing their goals.

Ask your child to imagine a world where people aren't affected by what others think, where they can be themselves, make decisions, and express themselves without fear of being mocked or judged. With this in mind, have your child create a list of all of the things that he or she would attempt, do, or accomplish without fear of ridicule (try out for the school play, start a new club, wear a favorite sweatshirt or sweater to school, become friends with a new person). Conclude by sharing the importance of not letting bullying stand in the way of dreams—encourage your child to tell a teacher and you if he or she is ever bullied.

The Silence Of Our Friends *(10 minutes)*

Purpose: Help your child understand the importance of friendship as well as the responsibilities and expectations that come with it.

Read this quote by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to your child, “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” Ask your child to think about the meaning of this quote and write in a journal what he or she thinks Dr. King would have to say about bullying.