



ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGE

When things get hard what happens?



OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore their own ideas on how to overcome challenge
- Students discuss common ways that people overcome challenge
- Students will assess their own/groups responses and behaviors to a challenging activity

MATERIALS

- Poster paper or whiteboard
- Hula-Hoop, tent pole, or other lightweight rod
- Notecards
- [Coping Skills Handout](#) (optional)

TIME

- 45 min

LESSON INTRO

This lesson begins with a short group discussion and then moves into a challenging student activity where students are asked to notice their own responses to challenge.

LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. Display the essential question: Why do some people overcome challenge with grace and courage while others become bitter or give up easily?
2. Allow a moment for students to quietly think about this question. Acknowledge that some students may already have answers in their minds, and they will spend some time discussing it later during the lesson.
3. Lead a group brainstorm about how people generally respond or react to challenging situations, or in other words: Things that people do when confronted with difficulty or stress.
4. Encourage students to think about themselves, or people that they have observed who have encountered challenging life experiences or moments during the day.
5. Try to get a mix of both positive and destructive examples. Examples might include: depression, listening to music, exercising, smoking, deep breathing, leaving the situation, talking to a friend, etc...
6. Explain that the brainstormed list could be categorized as “coping strategies”. Scientists define “coping” as strategies humans use when they encounter a difficult or stressful situation.
7. Explain the next activity (Helium Hoop) this way:
Next I am going to ask you to complete a very challenging task. I know it's hard, and I'm giving you a challenge because I want you to notice what behaviors come up in the group, and how your body feels



when you are being challenged. I wonder if anyone will use any of the coping strategies from the list we created, or if you'll discover others.

8. Gather students to participate in the Helium Hoop/Stick activity. This is a seemingly simple task but can be very frustrating for participants. Students will likely need to restart multiple times and this can lead to feelings of challenge, stress, and frustration.
9. Allow students to struggle! That is the point of this activity.
10. Explain that the object of Helium Hoop is to lower the hoop or rod to the ground.
11. The rule is that everyone's finger must always stay in contact with the hoop. Pinching or grabbing the hoop is not allowed - it must rest on top of the pointer finger.
12. If anyone's finger loses contact with the hoop or rod, the group will restart.
13. Line up the group in two rows that face each other, or around the hoop.
14. Ask students to point their index fingers and hold their arms out. Lay the rod or hoop down on their fingers. Ensure that students fingers are straight, and the hoop is just resting on their fingers.
15. Before you let go of the hoop, get the group to adjust their finger heights until the Helium Hoop is horizontal and everyone's index fingers are touching the hoop.
16. Reiterate to the group that if anyone's finger is caught not touching the hoop, the task will be restarted. Let the task begin....

Warning: Particularly in the early stages, the Helium Hoop has a habit of 'mysteriously' floating up rather than coming down, causing much laughter, surprise, and frustration. A bit of clever humoring can help - e.g., act surprised and ask what they are doing raising the Helium Stick instead of lowering it!

17. Allow time for students to work through this activity. They may or may not actually complete it—which is ok either way. Remember, the point of the activity is for students to notice how they are responding to challenge.

If needed, pause midway through the activity to reset. Reflect on the challenges, successes, and strategies that students have used.

VARIATIONS

1. If the conversation on coping strategies and response to challenge is gaining traction with students, utilize the Coping Skills Handout. Center discussions around when/how these strategies could be useful.
2. After students attempt the activity once, have them identify several behavioral changes that will help them improve. Have students attempt again. Do they follow the advice they gave themselves? How? Why or why not?



FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

1. Check out these videos to support your understanding of how to effectively run the Helium Hoop activity: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIVKwQ8HJXE; www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCvj-Pgfycw
2. You should be able to see students' responses to frustration during the activity. Take notes so you can bring this up in the debrief. Refrain from managing poor coping strategies in the moment. You will use behaviors as a point of reflection later on.
3. Sometimes students will blame others during the activity or reflection time, consider if it is relevant to have a discussion of blame:

It is usually easier to see what other people are doing wrong rather than recognizing how you can adjust to the group. If the topic of blame comes up in your discussion you can volunteer this information.

- How did the group react when one side of the hoop went up while one side stayed low? (Possible responses you might hear could be to accuse the other side, yelling at the other group to 'do it like them', etc.)
- What is a definition of blaming?
- Why do you think we blame so quickly?
- Think of some strategies the group could do or say to counteract the blaming tendencies.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Once the Helium Hoop activity is over, circle students back around the coping list you created earlier. Reflect using the questions below:
 - Go Around Question: Share one word to describe how the group accomplished this activity
 - Go Around Question: Share an emotion you felt during this activity
 - What did you notice about how you/your body responded to challenge during this activity?
 - What behaviors did you notice about how the group responded during moments of frustration?
 - Recall back to the list of ways people respond to challenge. Are there any other items to add to the list based off what you observed during Helium Hoop?
 - Ask students to share what were helpful or productive responses to challenge during that activity. These could be personal strategies that student used, such as breathing, or a group strategy such as calling a pause and checking in. The goal is to acknowledge the ways that students were productively responding to challenge.
 - What can we learn from this discussion to begin to answer our essential question? Ask students to think about ways that people respond that promote "grace and courage" versus "bitterness or giving up".
2. Invite students to pick a strategy from the "Response to Challenge" or Coping Strategies list that they could see themselves using in the future. Allow students to spend some time designing a reminder note card that they can post to remind themselves of a useful "challenge response".

NOTES

- **Educational Standards:** CASEL: Self-Awareness, CASEL: Relationship Skills, P21: Creativity and Innovation, P21: Leadership and Responsibility, P21: Flexibility and Adaptability, CCRS:SL6 Adapt Speech