

# Life Skills Curriculum

## Greene Street Friends School

### SIXTH GRADE LESSON MAIN IDEAS

#### **Life Skills Mission Statement**

At Greene Street Friends School, we seek to develop the whole child, and the Life Skills curriculum highlights our commitment to the social and emotional growth of children. Through a scope and sequence across grade levels, the program creates a common vocabulary for feelings identification, feelings articulation, self-advocacy, and conflict resolution. We believe in the importance of proactively empowering students' emotional growth and healthy decision-making. The curriculum seeks to enhance our school community through the use of common images, vocabulary, and concepts delivered both formally and informally throughout the school year.

#### **Seeing Our Roles**

##### The Sky's The Limit

When we get to know other people we learn more about ourselves and what we can do. This lesson opens discussion around the topic of real and perceived limits. Noticing the limits we place on ourselves and on others allows us to break out and move beyond those limits, opening up a sense of possibility.

##### Safe Place

Everyone needs to feel safe in a learning environment. In any given group, there need to be guidelines that make it safe to take risks and talk constructively and positively about topics that might otherwise divide the group or leave individuals feeling isolated. These guidelines allow people to feel safe expressing their identity and their individuality. For example, our classroom is a safe place to talk about race, religion, gender, family structure, and more.

##### Group Give and Take

Every person has a balance of energy and groups do as well. Individuals can take or receive energy from a group, depending on the actions they choose. Everyone needs to take and give energy to the group at times. There can be imbalance when many people are simultaneously taking energy from the group.

##### The Other Three R's

Understanding the variety of our roles, relationships, and responsibilities lets us begin to move between them more easily and more independently. In this lesson, students recognize their many roles and relationships, as well as the way they have choices in some areas of responsibility but not in others. Thinking about these "other three R's" also gives us insight into our own sense of identity.

##### Voices and Choices

When we don't speak up about something, others interpret our silence as agreement with the loudest idea or as tacit (unspoken) approval. Not speaking up has impact on the individual and the group. Consider the impact and then decide whether silence works or not. This lesson leads the group through a mock class meeting -- some students don't participate even though they have valuable information to share, and then the group evaluates the impact.

#### **Relationships and Socializing**

##### From The Outside In

We rarely have just one feeling at a time, but some feelings take center stage. Acting out of surface feelings leads to reactions rather than decisions, affecting our relationships and reputations. "Fight or flight" feelings lie deepest, are hardest to share, and trigger the "outer" feelings. Examining our own multiple emotions gives insight into the feelings beneath the surface and helps us make decisions that work. Realizing that others also have layers of emotion enables us to show empathy and work through conflicts.

##### Tweens 1: Early Signs of Change in Friendships

It is natural for relationships or friendships to shift and change over time. There are often signs that these shifts are happening. If we are observant, we can notice these signs and that can add to our sense of perspective. It is helpful to articulate feelings about the changes in our relationships when we observe them, and to gather information about their causes.

#### Tweens 2: Causes of Change in Relationships

When relationships or friendships shift, our perception of the cause may not match the true cause. We might take something personally that actually has more to do with logistics. Gathering information can empower us to learn about the situation instead of making an assumption about the reasons for changes.

#### Catching Clique-y Behavior

Cliques are not often as extreme as they are portrayed in the movies, but clique-y behaviors can place pressures or limits on friendships in unhealthy ways. Even friendship groups that have previously been positive can start to notice the emergence of clique-y behavior. Identifying and discussing this before it grows can help friendship groups stay flexible and open.

### **Decisions That Work**

#### Reactions and Decisions

Reactions are actions we make without stopping to identify a feeling or think through impact. The feeling is there, but we don't pause to recognize it. Reactions tend to come from our "fight or flight" response. Decisions have feelings that are identifiable at the root, and they involve a process of discernment, even if it is quick. We can learn strategies to help ourselves make decisions that work for ourselves and others.

#### Technology and Emotions

Technology provides outstanding tools and resources for use in our relationships, as well as our learning. There are numerous benefits and challenges to communicating through technology. In this lesson, students share some of the rewards and pitfalls they encounter with technological communication, as well as their connections to emotions. They are also reminded of specific skills, such as using wait time and choosing the proper medium for a message.

#### Reactions and Decisions With Technology

One of technology's assets is speed, and this can make acting (or reacting) on impulse a real temptation. In this lesson, students work through possible reactions and decisions based on scenarios involving technology. They also evaluate the impact of potential reactions and decisions.

#### Rumors Online - What's My Role?

Rumors and gossip can spread rapidly through electronic communication. When we read gossip or rumors without doing or saying anything about it, we are bystanders giving silent approval to what's happening. There are ways to identify the source of the information we receive and make thoughtful decisions about what to share with others.

#### Decisions About Energy

We start with a certain amount of energy in a given day. Some decisions will add to our energy and some will take away from it. Making an energy wheel helps us analyze the ways we spend our energy, and then we can

### **Tweens Mission Statement**

With an emphasis on empathy and respect, the Tweens Program at Greene Street Friends School aspires to prepare students for the changes they and their peers will experience throughout puberty. Through proactive lessons, activities, and discussions with trusted adults, we will provide practical and important information. It is our belief that open communication between home and school contributes to the healthy emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development of our Tweens.

make decisions about how we would like to change our energy allocations. Setting goals to make the change actually happen can be the next step.

## **Knowing Ourselves**

### Tweens 3: Our Changing Brains

Tweens and Teens go through intellectual changes in addition to physical ones. These changes often impact relationships with family and peers, as well as decision-making processes. Awareness of the nature of these changes helps individuals navigate through them.

### Exploring Identity Development

Every person experiences an ongoing process of identity development. Our connections with domains of identity can deepen or fade over time. These changes are natural, and recognizing that can help us as individuals and in our relationships with others. In this lesson, students watch individuals in PBS documentary clips speak about their identity development. Students then reflect on their own sense of identity, as well the difference between self-identifying and being cast into an identity by others.

### Helpful Hawk

Students will discuss what it means to be a "Helping Hawk" at school, at home, and in the community. The lesson's theme will connect with the school's yearly testimony (simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality). The class will set a goal together and track progress, regression, and results.

### Affirmations and Balance

Studies show that people need to hear seven pieces of positive pieces of feedback to balance against one negative one. Learning to graciously receive affirmations and hold onto them helps us to boost our energy and build up our resiliency, because when we feel discouraged we can pull them out as evidence of our strengths. People in a group have strengths that work in balance with each other, and giving each other affirmations creates a positive, trusting, and healthy learning environment.

## **Empowerment**

### Preplanning Pitfalls

We all have our pitfalls during the day or week - times when our energy lags, our decisions are shaky, or our emotions feel hard to express or manage. If we pay attention to the factors that contribute to these pitfalls, which might be related to care of ourselves (food, exercise, sleep, etc.) we can make decisions that work. In this lesson, students practice tracking their energy and emotions in order to detect a pattern of pitfalls. They then strategize how to overcome those pitfalls.

### Creating Your Own Reputation

Our many actions, words and decisions create a reputation for us in the group and community. We should learn to shape our reputation by making decisions with awareness of impact, rather than letting our reputation shape our actions. Shifting a reputation is possible and involves setting and meeting goals by following through on actions.

### The Elephant in the Room

Often, big problems go unaddressed and unresolved in groups. These problems can be like elephants in the room - everyone knows they exist, and they move around them or even feed them, but no one speaks up to outwardly recognize the elephant or problem itself. This has impact on the functioning and culture of the group, and it is everyone's responsibility to deal with the elephant in the room.

### Tweens 4 : Gender Stereotypes

Males and females alike suffer when people promote and perpetuate gender stereotypes. We all need to break out of the boxes that stereotypes create. When we understand the stereotypes that exist, we can empower ourselves to break free of them.

## **Resiliency**

### Resiliency Road

Resiliency enables us to handle stress, bounce back from adversity and face new challenges. It comes from a combination of factors. Everyone has some resiliency, and everyone can develop and build resiliency “muscles.” There are specific behaviors that make roadblocks to resiliency and certain behaviors that speed it along.

### Role Casting and Regression

Role casting is predicting how people will behave based on past behavior. It’s a kind of stereotyping that makes people feel trapped in a reputation. Middle School is a time when people often try to break free of role casting by trying different ways of behaving. Sometimes they backslide or regress to the old behavior that gave them the reputation. It’s our responsibility to give them room to change and not lock them into one particular role in the group.

### Relaxation

Stopping to identify the causes and signs of stress can help us recognize what we are experiencing. Practicing strategies for physical relaxation can reduce stress and increase resiliency. Everyone should have some strategies that work and learn how to discern when to use them.

## **Healthy Choices**

### Testing You Out

Friends sometimes test us out by suggesting behavior that is risky, uncomfortable, unsafe, or just a change from what your family expects. You need to be aware of these tests when they start out, because they get bigger and you can’t go backwards once you go along. Learn some tools to choose from when steering through these situations.

### Setting Boundaries

We all need to know how to tell others when their actions make us uncomfortable. Setting these boundaries empowers us to be advocates for ourselves and prevents conflict or risky behavior further down the road.

### Natural and Artificial Highs

Some people use substances to create an artificial high, but these substances are unhealthy or dangerous and the high disappears quickly. Artificial highs leave a person unsatisfied and they lead to addiction. Everyone’s body can create its own natural high, which is simply a good feeling we get from doing an activity we like, and these natural highs last longer and actually have good impact on our bodies. Everyone faces decisions about what substances to put into their bodies, and understanding the qualities of artificial versus natural highs helps us to pre-plan for those decisions.

## **Transition and Closing**

### Vocabulary Review Games

Students play Life Skills vocabulary games as a way of reviewing key terms and concepts, including: addressed / resolved, advocacy for self and others, bystander, multiple emotions, energy, feelings articulation, impact, matching messages, reactions, regression, resiliency, trusted adult, and more.

### 100 Ways We Find and Keep Balance

It’s important to be conscious of balance that works for us in when we make decisions. Reflecting on ways we find and maintain balance helps us make decisions that work for us. Celebrating growth builds our resiliency because we can take the positive recognition forward to use when we have challenges.