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Special Lesson Plan for *Who Moved My Cheese? For Kids*

An A-Mazing Way to Change and Win!

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This special lesson plan focusses on the mental health needs of students who have experienced social isolation and multiple change in their lives. For additional information, reference the original lesson plan on the Project Cornerstone website, under materials.

This book was adapted by the author's twelve-year old son. Told as a parable, the four characters live in a maze and look for cheese to make them happy. Each character represents a different way to manage the changes and challenges they discover in the maze. How they find and eat the cheese defines their resiliency to change. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, recover from adversity or return to your original form. Resilience is built upon seven building blocks: competence, confidence, support, positive values, contribution to others, coping strategies and personal power. This book will help students understand that change happens and the changes can be out of our control. However, we can control how we react to the changes and there are different types of changes.

Asset Information:

This book builds assets from 7 of the 8 categories:

- **Social Competencies** -#32 Planning and Decision Making and #33 Interpersonal Competence
- **Positive Identity** -#37 Personal Power, #38 Self Esteem and #40 Positive View of Personal Future
- Support -#4 Caring Neighborhood and #5 Caring School Climate
- Empowerment - #10 Safety
- Boundaries and Expectations: #15 Positive Peer Influence and #16 High Expectations
- Commitment to Learning: #21 Achievement Motivation
- Positive Values - #30 Responsibility

Goals of the lesson are:

- Students will learn that change happens to everyone.
- Help students understand that people handle change in different ways.
- Teach students the different ways to deal with change.
- Discuss ways to build resiliency when experiencing change.
- Teach students that they control their reactions to change.
- Explore the move to middle school – what will be different, what will be the same, and how do they feel about the changes?

Conversation Starters

Don't be surprised if students listen more than talk at first. Students may also need time to debrief the past few years. If students start to talk about their experiences, your best reaction is to listen and encourage the discussion. It is ok to debrief with them their feelings about all the changes in their world and not do the lesson as planned. It might be necessary to read the lesson at another time or have the teacher read it instead.

Mindfulness

This has been a year dedicated to dealing with big changes. In addition to feeling a bit worried or anxious, you may also be dealing with frustration and disappointment due to changes brought on by the pandemic and other world situations. You can see where you want to be, but can't get there yet. Handling these emotions can be challenging. Here are some ideas to address frustration and disappointment:

- Try to keep emotions in check with deep breathing or movement activities (see self-care techniques above).
- Go for Plan B by finding something to be grateful for, even in tough situations or by journaling.
- Encourage the sharing of feelings.
- *Let it go* and focus on what you can do.
 - (Remember *Simon's Hook* and the hula hoop? Standing in the hula hoop reminds you that you can only control yourself and your reaction to things.)
- To encourage the skill of *letting it go* try this mindful activity.

Blowing Bubbles

Materials: bubbles and bubble wand for each student

1. Have students think about a feeling they need to *let go*.
2. Then, take a deep, slow, breath and exhale steadily to fill the bubble.
3. Encourage the students to pay close attention to the bubbles as they form, detach, pop or float away.
4. Let that feeling of disappointment or frustration drift off just like a bubble.
5. Have everyone blow a few bubbles.

Debrief:

1. How were you feeling before blowing bubbles?
2. What feelings did you let go?
3. How do you feel now after blowing bubbles?
4. What was it about blowing the bubbles that tapped into a *letting go feeling*?

Read Book/Narration

You may see/hear different reactions from the students during this lesson. Some students may be ready to go off to a new school, others may be feeling that they missed out on elementary school, and many fall in between.

Make sure students understand the vocabulary:

- **Parable** – A simple story that has a moral or a lesson to be learned.
- **Metaphor** – Represents something else. In this story, "cheese" represents what we want in our lives.
- **Maze** – Symbolizes the places where people look for what they want.

- **Change-** To pass from one phase to another.
- **Resiliency** – The ability to adapt to change.
- **Optimistic** – The assumption that things will turn out well or better than they are now.
- **Pessimistic** – The assumption that things will turn out badly or worse than they are now.
- **Proactive Thoughts** – This is a *growth mindset*. When shaken up, a person reacts calmly. They are cool and in control. They recognize they can't control everything, but they can control how they react to a problem. This *growth mindset* allows them to see challenges as temporary or fixable.
- **Reactive Thoughts**– This is a *fixed mindset*. A person reacts swiftly, impulsively and sometimes without thinking of consequences. When life shakes them up a bit, they explode because they are afraid of failing or don't have practice trying out new solutions. A *fixed mindset* makes challenges seem permanent and unfixable.

Now that we have seen some of our own reactions, let's read and find out how the characters of this book react to change. At this time, have the children relax, take a deep breath or two, and read *Who Moved My Cheese*. Mention that the author's twelve-year old son had the idea for creating a kid version of his dad's book for adults and helped him write it.

Discussion

- Why did the characters have to change?
- How did each character feel and/or react?
- Which mouse showed the most resilience? Which showed the least?
- Think about the mice. Are you like Sniff, Scurry, Hem, or Haw?
- What do you do when your cheese is moved?
- How does self-care help in dealing with worries?

Classroom Activity - Pros/Cons with Feelings Discussion

Materials: Chart on poster paper or white board, marker, ABC Comprehensive Tool Kit
 Discuss with the students the pros and cons of going to middle school.

- Start with the cons first to debrief the negative.
- Capture the feeling associated with the statements.
- Talk about coping strategies for these worries - use the ABC Tool Kit to help.
- In order to more easily accept change, it's critical to understand the pros/cons as well as the feeling associated with each.
- Ask the students, "Are there any other pros and cons?" and keep asking until the answer is no.

This discussion can take 30 minutes and please let it. The students may have a lot to share. Also write down ABC tools that students can use to help with this change and their feelings. Be aware that some students are very excited about their upcoming change and others may be dreading it and many may have mixed feelings.

Cons of Middle School	Con Feelings	Pros of Middle School	Pro Feelings

Cons of Middle School	Con Feelings	Pros of Middle School	Pro Feelings

If some students are overwhelmed by this discussion because of all of the change they will be facing soon, please bring up the concept of "shrinking the change". This is from the book *Switch* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath. Have them think about just one part of their change to middle school and let the others go for a while. For example - focus on just the first day of school and what that means to them, on the first week, etc.

Self-Care Techniques

Big changes can lead to worry and anxiety. Going to middle school is a big change, but remember that in this past year you have dealt with many big changes. So, take a moment to consider what techniques you have used to take care of yourself as you've faced all these changes.

Take a poll with students. Have them close their eyes and give a thumbs up when you ask: Which of these self-care techniques would you like to use?

- deep breathing
- yoga
- sleeping 7-8 hours a night
- taking a nap
- physical activity such as: dancing, riding a bike, walking, karate, hiking, skate boarding etc.
- talking/texting/zooming with a friend
- journaling your feelings
- listing what you are grateful for
- practicing mindfulness/meditation
- Talk to someone. Share feelings with a parent, teacher or friend. You may find others share your concerns.

If time allows, do a few deep breaths with the students or a yoga pose to help everyone de-stress and focus on the lesson.

Virtual Activity-Worries in Time

Materials: two pieces of paper, pen or pencil, paper towel roll or envelope, markers

1. On one piece of paper list the things you are worried about regarding starting middle school. These can include any concerns about dealing with the pandemic as well.
2. On the second piece of paper write what you are looking forward to about middle school.
3. When you've finished, roll the papers and place inside a paper towel roll or seal them in the envelope.
4. On the roll or envelope write "Open in February (one year later)". Decorate the paper towel roll or envelope and give to your parent to save in a special place.
5. Then in February one year later, open up your paper towel or envelope. You will look at your lists to remember what your concerns and hopes were when you made the lists.
 - a. Do you have the same worries now?
 - b. Did things you were looking forward to happen?
 - c. How did your expectations compare to reality?

Happy Brain, Worry Brain

Materials: construction paper, markers, crayons, magazines, colored pencils

- Fold a piece of construction paper in half. Label one side "Happy Brain" and the other side "Worry Brain".
- Have student write, make a collage or draw things that fit into each category.
- Have them include some self-care techniques that they thought about in the beginning of the lesson.
- This activity allows students to identify their worries. It's also a great way to help develop coping skills by identifying what makes them happy.

Closing

Watch the video Top 10 Tips for Starting Middle School

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riKfkQjSr4w&list=PLBsUra9Uf_ExO43-KYk1qU0i3lkFzBqaB&index=2

Three Minute Huddle

Today's lesson talks about change and the different ways to manage it. It is important to be resilient and bounce back from adversity. Remember:

- Change happens to everyone.
- People handle change in different ways.
- Learning different ways to handle change makes us more resilient.

Everyone has an initial reaction or response when change occurs, but we may react some ways sometimes and other ways other times, depending on other things that are going on in our lives. All of these reactions are OK. Just some are more effective for dealing with change.

Recognize yourself – be aware of how you're reacting – are you acting like Sniff, Scurry, Hem or Haw? Think about the ABC tools you have learned in elementary school. Pack them up and bring them in your middle school backpack!

YOU have the control over how you react. You don't have to follow your first instinct. Choose to react in ways that will let you deal with change most effectively.

Extensions

- Take a virtual tour of the campus while students are in session.
- Invite 6th graders and/or teachers to create a panel and make a presentation to talk about their transition to middle school. This could be virtual or in-person. Leave time to answer any questions.

If you are interested in participating in the Project Cornerstone Middle School Social and Emotional Program at your child's middle school, please contact us at info@projectcornerstone.org

