

BEING ACCOUNTABLE

A G E N D A

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Objectives

Students will recognize the importance of accountability in their lives.

Students will define “accountability.”

Students will explore the positive consequences of being accountable for their actions.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of accountability.

Materials Needed

- Dictionary (Part II)
- Deck of playing cards (Part III)

Starter (5 minutes)

Ask for a show of hands from students who have maintained good attendance records in school so far. Congratulate these students, and thank them for their quick response. Then, ask for a show of hands from students who have pretended to be sick at some point this year in order to avoid going to school.

Pause briefly, and then acknowledge that few of us have a problem owning up to actions that are praiseworthy, but it's often more difficult to own up to actions that are not commendable or are mistakes. Explain that taking responsibility for our actions is the topic for today.

Part I The Blame Game (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize the importance of accountability in their lives.

1. STUDENTS CONSIDER A DILEMMA.

Ask students to think about what they would do in this situation:

You and a few friends cut through some yards on your way home from playing football in the park. You start tossing a ball back and forth to each other. Suddenly, the ball goes sailing through a neighbor's window. What do you do?

2. STUDENTS BRAINSTORM ACTIONS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES.

Invite students to speculate on what they could do next. Write their responses on the board. If necessary, prompt students to think beyond the impulse to run away. As students suggest options, follow up with questions in order to elicit the consequences of each one, as well as options that haven't been considered. For example, ask such questions as the following:

- If you did that, what would happen next?
- Would that result in a positive or a negative outcome for you?
- What if the neighbor saw what happened?
- What if someone who was there tells a different story?

Continue writing responses. Draw arrows to connect courses of action to their respective consequences. For courses of action that do not involve taking responsibility, draw convoluted paths whose courses aren't very clear.

If students do not mention taking responsibility for their actions in some way, guide them to consider and discuss such options now. Your paths for these options should be shorter, more direct, and easier to follow than the convoluted paths.

3. STUDENTS EVALUATE THEIR RESPONSES.

Invite students to compare and contrast the paths of action on the board and to draw conclusions about them. Students should recognize that admitting a

mistake, or taking responsibility for their actions, is a more direct and honest approach that is more likely to result in positive consequences.

Ask students to identify options listed that could be considered excuses in some way. Then, ask if students would agree that excuses are just ways to deflect blame onto something or someone else, usually to avoid admitting a mistake or taking responsibility for one's own actions.

Point out that it's easy to start playing the "blame game." Tell students to avoid this trap because it destroys motivation and can become a goal in itself—a goal that produces negative results.

Part II Me, Myself, and I (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students define "accountability" and explore positive consequences of being accountable for their actions.

1. STUDENTS DEFINE "ACCOUNTABILITY."

Write the word "accountable" on the board, and ask students to explain what they think it means. Prompt ideas by asking students if they think it would be a compliment to be described as accountable.

Through questions, prompts, and the use of a dictionary (if necessary), guide students to conclude that "accountable" can be defined as "being responsible for one's actions or work." Point out that the words "accountable" and "responsible" are synonyms, or words that have similar meanings.

2. STUDENTS EXPLORE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACCOUNTABILITY.

Say, "If you are accountable for your actions, people will think that you are trustworthy." Write the word "trustworthy" on the board. Ask students to explain what this word means. If necessary, have a student look up this word in the dictionary. Then, guide students to understand that "trustworthy" means "being reliable."

Challenge students to identify and discuss other consequences of being accountable, responsible, and trustworthy. Invite a student to write responses on the board. Through questions and comments, prompt students to generate a list that includes consequences at home, at school, and in their relationships with peers.

3. STUDENTS DRAW CONCLUSIONS.

Focus attention on the list, and ask questions such as the following to help students draw conclusions about the consequences of being accountable for their actions:

- Of the consequences listed, which would you say are negative? (*There should not be any. If students identify some as being negative, challenge them to explain their answers, and ask if any other students support this thinking.*)

- If the consequences are all positive, is choosing to be accountable a good or bad decision? (*Students should respond that the decision is a good one.*)
- Do you think it is difficult for people to be accountable for their actions? Why?

Tell students that whenever they are in a situation in which they must account for their actions, they should ask themselves, “Who is responsible for my actions?” The answer should always be, “I am.”

Part III Owing Up to It (20 minutes)

Purpose: In order to express an understanding of accountability, students create and act out solutions to dilemmas.

1. STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THE ACTIVITY.

Divide the class into four groups by having students each draw one card from a deck of playing cards. Stack the deck so that the groups are evenly divided. Have groups form in the corners of the room by card suit (i.e., all the hearts in one corner, all the diamonds in another, and so on).

Explain that each group will be given a dilemma to solve. As a group, students are to discuss possible solutions, and then choose a solution to act out for the class. Suggest that groups create characters and a short script to follow. Tell them that each group will have two minutes for their performances.

2. STUDENTS CREATE SOLUTIONS TO THEIR DILEMMAS.

Explain that the “red” groups—the hearts and the diamonds—will each work on the following scenario:

You borrowed an MP3 player from a friend. While you were eating, you spilled soda all over the player. While you were trying to clean up the mess, you sat on the headphones and broke them. Now, your friend wants the MP3 player back. What will you do?

The hearts will work on excuses, or responses, in which they are *not* accountable for their actions. The diamonds will work on responses that show accountability.

Have the “black” groups—the clubs and the spades—work on the following scenario:

You have a big project due tomorrow. The assignment was given two weeks ago, and your teacher has been checking every other day to make sure that everyone is working on it. You’ve reported that you’ve chosen your topic and have begun to work on it, but you really haven’t. This project will count toward most of your grade, and there’s no way you can finish it in one night. What will you do?

Tell the clubs to work on excuses. Have the spades work on responses that show accountability.

3. STUDENTS ACT OUT THEIR SOLUTIONS.

Invite the clubs to perform their solution, followed by the spades. Then, do the same for the hearts, followed by the diamonds.

If time permits, prompt a brief discussion of the performances by asking questions such as the following:

- How did you feel when the performers gave excuses?
- How did you feel when the performers were accountable for their actions?
- Which responses did you find to be more reliable?

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to explain why being accountable is a strength. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Being accountable for your actions means taking responsibility for them, whether the actions are positive or negative. After all, your actions belong to you.
- Being accountable and reliable shows that you are a mature person, worthy of trust and respect.

Questions for Assessment

1. Define what it means to be accountable for your actions.
2. In what ways can being accountable be difficult? What are some ways you can overcome these difficulties?
3. List three benefits of being accountable for your actions.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Extension: Using Quotations

Quote: “He who upsets something should know how to put it back again.”
–Sierra Leonean proverb

Activity: Discuss how this proverb relates to everyday life. Have students draw cartoons showing responsible and irresponsible ways to handle situations (such as the “Goofus and Gallant” feature in *Highlights* magazine).

Extension: Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Activity: Ask, “How are players kept accountable in team sports?” Divide the class into small groups. Have each group research rules and the penalties for breaking rules in a sport of their choosing.

Have groups present this information to the class, using charts, illustrations, or demonstrations to highlight key points.

Extension: Writing in Your Journal

Activity: Have students describe a situation in which they got into trouble and tried unsuccessfully to explain their way out of it. Have them describe how owning up to their mistakes would have affected the outcome. Students may also write about a time when they were accountable for their actions and how that made them feel.

Have students share their work in small groups.

Extension: Using Technology

Activity: Have students research greeting card sites on the internet. Have them look for examples of apology cards, and then design their own for situations in their own lives.

Have students keep the cards on hand for use as needed. Discuss how apologizing for our mistakes is a form of accountability.

Extension: Homework

Activity: Lack of accountability is a big theme in sitcoms; small deceptions often turn into major disasters. Have students watch their favorite sitcom and write a paragraph that includes the main plot, whether the main characters were accountable for their actions, and the consequences the characters faced.

Have students report their findings in class. Make a list of the sitcoms’ problems and how they were resolved. Discuss the behavior observed.

Extension: Additional Resources

Activity: Facilitate the “Yo, Dude! What’s Up?” and “What Did I Do?” activities on pages 143–148 of *Help Me Decide! Learning to Make Good Choices* by Anne A. Boyd and James R. Boyd.

Have students discuss the importance of being mindful of and accountable for their actions.