

Talk It Out: Messages for Grades 3–5

Companion to the Upper Elementary Teacher Guide



Six ready-to-lead mini-lessons that expand the “More messages to teach” page of the Upper Elementary Teacher Guide. Each one has a teacher script, likely student responses and how to answer them, a quick activity, and ways to extend the conversation. Six classroom posters are included.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 1 How to use this guide
- 2 Stereotypes Flatten People
- 3 Person-First Language
- 4 Included vs. Just There
- 5 Everyone Has Strengths
- 6 Things Have Changed
- 7 Words Can Hurt
- 8 Classroom posters

HOW IT WORKS

How to use this guide

Each message is a 10-minute conversation for morning meeting, advisory, or a writing warm-up. Students this age love to debate fairness. Lean into it!

1. Frame it

Share the idea with the **SAY** lines. Keep it real and specific.

2. Discuss it

Pose the question, then use turn-and-talk before whole-group sharing.

3. Apply it

Finish with the activity so students connect the idea to their own school.

TIPS FOR GREAT CONVERSATIONS

- Set norms first: listen to understand, disagree kindly, no names of real classmates in examples.
- Let students wrestle with the question before you give the answer.
- Use real-world examples: sports, media, games, school life.
- **Name inclusion when you see it**, and let students name it too.
- It's okay to say "I don't know, let's find out."

IF A STUDENT IN YOUR CLASS HAS DOWN SYNDROME

- Talk with the family first about how they'd like WDSH handled.
- Never use a student as the example or ask them to explain Down syndrome.
- If a student wants to share their own story, let them lead and set the pace.
- Keep health and IEP details private.

A SAMPLE WEEK OF TALKS

Mon

Stereotypes flatten people

Tue

Person-first language

Wed

Included vs. just there

Thu

Everyone has strengths + Things have changed

Fri

Words can hurt + Rock Your Socks!

THE LINE TO REPEAT ALL WEEK



"Awareness is knowing. Inclusion is doing."

MESSAGE
1

Stereotypes Flatten People

Students define stereotypes, including “positive” ones, and explain why they’re unfair.

10–12 MIN

MORNING MEETING

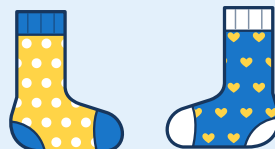
STICKY NOTES • CHART PAPER

STEP BY STEP

- Define it**
Write “stereotype” on the board.

SAY

A stereotype is an idea that everyone in a group is the same, like “all kids love video games” or “all grown-ups are boring.”



People are more than one idea.

Poster #1 (last pages)

- Test it on yourself**
Ask for stereotypes about kids their age. Are they true for everyone in the room?

SAY

Does every kid in here love the same food? Same sport? Same music?

- The “nice” stereotype**
Introduce the tricky part.

SAY

Some people say “people with Down syndrome are always happy.” It sounds nice, but it’s a stereotype. People with Down syndrome feel happy, sad, frustrated, and excited, just like everyone.

- Why it matters**
Discuss: what happens when people believe a stereotype about you?

SAY

Stereotypes flatten people. They make us see a label instead of a whole person.

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“But it’s a compliment!”

It sounds like one! But if people think you’re always happy, they might not notice when you’re sad or need help.

“Some stereotypes are true.”

Some people in a group might fit it, but not all. When we treat everyone the same, we miss who they really are.

“My cousin with Down syndrome IS always happy.”

It’s great that your cousin is joyful! I bet they also have other feelings sometimes, just like you.

QUICK ACTIVITY: FLIP THE STEREOTYPE

Groups get a stereotype card (about kids, athletes, gamers, grandparents). They rewrite it as a true statement: “Some... and others...”

TAKE IT FURTHER

Look for stereotypes in a book, show, or ad this week. Students bring examples to share.

Home connection: Ask your family: “Has anyone ever made a stereotype about you?”

MESSAGE

2

Person-First Language

Students practice person-first language and explain why the order of words matters.

10 MIN

ELA WARM-UP

SENTENCE STRIPS

STEP BY STEP

1

Two sentences

Write: “She’s a Down syndrome girl.” and “She’s a girl who has Down syndrome.”

SAY

What’s different about these two? Which word comes first?

2

Why order matters

Guide students to notice that the first puts the condition first.

SAY

Person-first language puts the PERSON first. Down syndrome is one part of her, not all of her.

3

Words that work

Share quick swaps: “has Down syndrome” instead of “suffers from”; “typically developing” instead of “normal.”

4

Rewrite

Partners rewrite three sentences using person-first, respectful language.

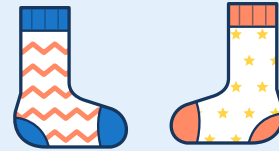
5

Wrap

Point to the poster.

SAY

The words we choose show how we see people.



The person comes first.

Poster #2 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“It’s just words. Who cares?”

Words shape how we think about people. Try it: would you rather be “the short kid” or “Jordan”?

“Is it wrong to say Down syndrome?”

Not at all! It’s the correct name. We just put the person first: “a boy with Down syndrome.”

“What if I say it wrong?”

That’s okay. Just fix it and keep going. Trying shows respect.

QUICK ACTIVITY: SENTENCE SURGERY

Hand out sentence strips with non-person-first phrases. Teams “operate” by cutting and rearranging words to put the person first.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Add a “Words That Work” chart to your word wall.

Home connection: Teach your family the

♥ difference between “a Down syndrome kid” and “a kid with Down syndrome.”

MESSAGE
3

Included vs. Just There

Students tell the difference between presence and real inclusion, and name inclusive actions.

12 MIN

MORNING MEETING

CHART PAPER (T-CHART)

STEP BY STEP

1 A story

Tell a short scenario.

SAY

Imagine a new student joins recess. They're on the playground, but nobody passes them the ball, invites them into the game, or learns their name. Are they included?

2 T-chart

Make two columns: "Just there" and "Included." Brainstorm what each looks like at lunch, recess, and group work.

3 The big idea

Circle the difference.

SAY

Inclusion isn't just being in the same room. It's being invited, heard, and part of the team.

4 Our school

Ask: where at our school might someone be "just there"?

SAY

What could WE change?



Included, not just there.

Poster #3 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"They can sit with us if they want."

That's a start! Inviting them, saying "Come sit with us," is what makes it inclusion.

"They don't want to play."

Maybe! Or maybe they don't feel invited. Try asking and see.

"It's the teacher's job."

Teachers help, but kids decide who gets invited at lunch and recess. That's your superpower.

QUICK ACTIVITY: INCLUSION MOVES

Students each write one specific "inclusion move" they'll try this week on a sticky note and post it on the chart.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Check in on Friday: who tried their inclusion move? What happened?



Home connection: Share with your family one "inclusion move" you tried this week.

MESSAGE

4

Everyone Has Strengths

Students recognize that everyone, with or without a disability, has strengths and challenges.

10 MIN

MORNING MEETING

INDEX CARDS

STEP BY STEP

1

Strengths & challenges

Share one strength and one challenge of your own.

SAY

I'm great at organizing. I'm terrible at remembering names!

2

Everyone has both

Students write one strength and one challenge on an index card (private).

3

People with Down syndrome

Share without singling anyone out.

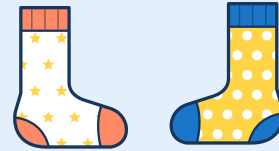
SAY

People with Down syndrome are actors, athletes, artists, business owners, and great friends. They have strengths and challenges, like everyone.

4

Strengths cards

Draw names. Each student writes a specific strength they've SEEN in that classmate.



Everyone has strengths.

Poster #4 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"I don't have any strengths."

I disagree! I've seen you... Strengths can be kindness, humor, or hard work.

"People with disabilities can't do much."

That's a stereotype. People with Down syndrome work, compete, create, and lead.

"Being funny isn't a real strength."

It totally is! Making people laugh helps them feel like they belong.

QUICK ACTIVITY: STRENGTH SPOTLIGHT

Each day, spotlight three students' strengths cards (with permission) during closing circle.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Create a hallway "Strengths Wall" for 3.21 week.



Home connection: Tell each family member one strength you see in them.

MESSAGE

5

Things Have Changed

Students learn that not long ago many kids with disabilities weren't allowed in public schools, and connect it to fairness.

12 MIN

SOCIAL STUDIES

BOARD OR SLIDE

STEP BY STEP

1

Imagine it

Ask students to picture the scenario.

SAY

Imagine if your school told some kids, "You can't come here because of how you learn."

2

It really happened

Share the history simply.

SAY

Not that long ago, many kids with disabilities in the U.S. weren't guaranteed a spot in public school. In 1975, a federal law began to change that.

3

Then vs. now

Compare: life expectancy for people with Down syndrome was about 25 in 1983; today it's about 60. Ask: what might have helped?

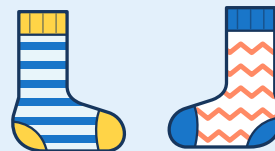
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Fairness talk

Discuss why learning together matters for everyone.

SAY

When we learn together, we all get to know each other and grow.



Things have changed, and we can keep changing them.

Poster #5 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"That's so unfair!"

It was. People worked hard to change it: families, teachers, and people with disabilities themselves.

"Why did people do that?"

Many people didn't understand disabilities, and some had unfair beliefs. Learning changes minds.

"So everything's fixed now?"

A lot has changed! But there's still work to do, like making sure everyone is included, not just present.

QUICK ACTIVITY: THEN & NOW CHART

Students write one "then" and one "now" fact on a class T-chart, and add one "next": something that should still change.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Invite a grandparent or older staff member to share what school was like when they were young.



Home connection: Ask a grown-up: "Were kids with disabilities in your classes growing up?"

MESSAGE

6

Words Can Hurt

Students understand how disability words used as insults hurt people, and choose better words.

10 MIN

MORNING MEETING

PAPER FOR A CLASS LIST

STEP BY STEP

1

Set the tone

Be calm and direct.

SAY

Today we're talking about words that some people use as insults, and why they hurt.

2

The r-word

Explain without saying it repeatedly.

SAY

The r-word used to be a medical word. Now it's used as an insult, and it hurts people with intellectual disabilities and their families, even as a joke.

3

The test

Share the poster question.

SAY

Would you say it if the person were standing right next to you? If not, choose a different word.

4

Better words

Make a class list of words to use instead when something is frustrating: "annoying," "ridiculous," "frustrating."



We choose better words.

Poster #6 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"I didn't mean it that way."

I believe you. But words can hurt even when we don't mean them to. Let's pick a better one.

"Everyone says it."

Lots of people do, and that's why it's important for us to change it. We can lead.

"What do I do if I hear someone say it?"

Try: "Hey, that word hurts people. Can you use a different one?" Or tell a trusted adult.

QUICK ACTIVITY: UPSTANDER PRACTICE

Pairs role-play what to say when a friend uses a hurtful word. Keep it kind: correct, don't shame.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Post the class "better words" list by the door.

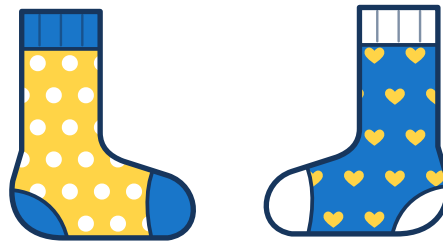


Home connection: Talk with your family about what to say if you hear a hurtful word.

Classroom posters

Print on cardstock, cut in half, and post the message you're teaching. Revisit the question at the bottom during the week. ✂

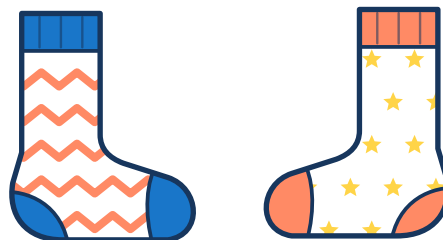
POSTER 1 · STEREOTYPES FLATTEN PEOPLE



People are more than one idea.

Is it fair to say everyone in a group is the same? Even if it sounds nice?

POSTER 2 · PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE



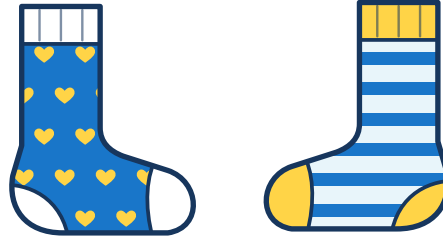
The person comes first.

Say “a person with Down syndrome,” not “a Down syndrome kid.”

Classroom posters

Print on cardstock, cut in half, and post the message you're teaching. Revisit the question at the bottom during the week. ✂

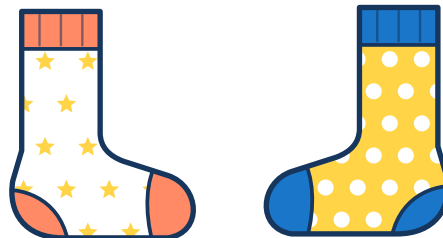
POSTER 3 · INCLUDED VS. JUST THERE



Included, not just there.

What's the difference between being in the room and being invited in?

POSTER 4 · EVERYONE HAS STRENGTHS



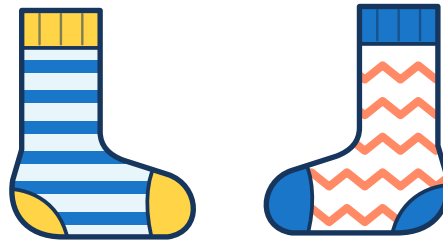
Everyone has strengths.

What's one strength you've seen in a classmate this week?

Classroom posters

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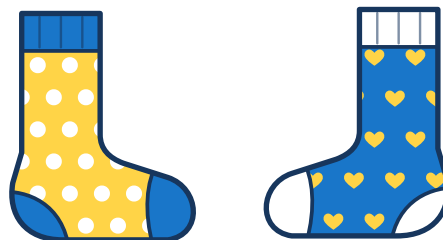
POSTER 5 · THINGS HAVE CHANGED



Things have changed, and we can keep changing them.

Why does it matter that kids of all abilities learn together?

POSTER 6 · WORDS CAN HURT



We choose better words.

Would you say it if the person were standing right next to you?