

TEACHER COMPANION • MORE MESSAGES TO TEACH

Advisory Talks: Middle School

Companion to the Middle School Teacher Guide



Six ready-to-lead advisory conversations that expand the “More messages to teach” page of the Middle School Teacher Guide. Each one has an opener, a script, how to handle what students might say, a quick activity, and a follow-up. Six posters for your room are included.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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HOW IT WORKS

How to use this guide

Each talk runs 10–15 minutes in advisory or homeroom. Middle schoolers care deeply about fairness, fitting in, and their online lives, which is exactly where belonging is won or lost.

1. Hook it

Open with a real-life scenario or question students actually face.

2. Discuss it

Pair-share first, then whole group. Honesty over “right answers.”

3. Commit to it

Close with a small, specific action students can take this week.

TIPS FOR GREAT CONVERSATIONS

- Set norms: no real names in examples, disagree respectfully, what’s shared stays here.
- Use anonymous responses (sticky notes, polls) for sensitive topics.
- Resist lecturing. Ask more than you tell.
- Connect to their world: group chats, lunch tables, teams, and games.
- Model it: share your own mistakes with language or inclusion.

IF A STUDENT IN YOUR CLASS HAS DOWN SYNDROME

- Talk with the family and student before your 3.21 week.
- Never ask a student to speak for all people with Down syndrome.
- If a student wants to share their story, let them set the terms.
- Keep health and IEP details private.

A SAMPLE WEEK OF TALKS

Mon

Friendship, not charity

Tue

Ask before you post

Wed

Self-advocacy

Thu

Clubs & sports + Words as insults

Fri

Everyone has a story + Rock Your Socks

THE LINE TO REPEAT ALL WEEK



“Belonging is built by what we say, who we include, and how we treat each other.”

MESSAGE

1

Friendship, Not Charity

Students distinguish between “helping” someone and being their friend, and reflect on how each feels.

12 MIN

ADVISORY

STICKY NOTES

STEP BY STEP

1

Scenario

Read aloud.

SAY

A student sits with a classmate with Down syndrome at lunch every day because a teacher asked them to. They're nice, but they never talk about anything real or hang out outside school. Is that friendship?

2

Pair-share

What's the difference between being kind and being friends? List ideas on sticky notes.

3

Name it

Sort sticky notes into “kindness” and “friendship.”

SAY

Friendship is mutual: shared interests, inside jokes, choosing each other. Nobody wants to be someone's service project.

4

Flip it

Ask: how would YOU feel if someone was only nice to you to get credit?

5

Commit

Students name one interest they could share with someone new.



Friendship, not charity.

Poster #1 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“I’m doing a good thing though.”

You are, and kindness matters! The next step is friendship: finding what you actually have in common.

“We don’t have anything in common.”

Have you asked? Music, games, sports, shows... most people share more than we assume.

“People will think it’s weird.”

That’s real pressure. What would it take for our school to make that not weird?

QUICK ACTIVITY: COMMON-GROUND BINGO

Students find classmates who share interests (a favorite game, food, song) and sign each other's squares. Debrief: who did you find common ground with?

TAKE IT FURTHER

Encourage students to join or start clubs built on shared interests, open to everyone.



Home connection: Ask a grown-up about a friendship that surprised them.

MESSAGE
2

Ask Before You Post

Students think about consent, dignity, and digital footprints when posting about others, especially people with disabilities.

12 MIN

ADVISORY OR HEALTH

A FEW EXAMPLE HEADLINES (TEACHER-CREATED)

STEP BY STEP

1

Hook

Ask for a show of hands.

SAY

Has anyone ever had a photo or video posted of them that they didn't want out there?

2

The viral problem

Describe the pattern without showing real videos.

SAY

Some viral videos show people with disabilities at their prom or on a job, framed as "heartwarming." Sometimes the person never agreed to go viral.

3

Discuss

What's the difference between celebrating someone and using them for likes?

4

Create a checklist

Build a class "before you post" checklist: Did they say yes? Would they like how they look? Would I want this posted about me? Who benefits?

5

Commit

Students write one rule they'll follow before posting about anyone.



Ask before you post.

Poster #2 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"But the video was nice!"

It might be! The key question is whether the person got to choose. Everyone deserves control of their story.

"Everyone posts everything."

A lot of people do. You can be the one who asks first. That's leadership.

"What about 3.21 photos?"

Great question! Feet photos, asking first, and first names only are all respectful ways to share.

QUICK ACTIVITY: POST OR PAUSE?

Read quick scenarios (a group photo, a funny moment, a teammate's win). Students hold up POST or PAUSE and explain.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Post the class checklist by the door, and use it for your 3.21 Social Campaign.



Home connection: Make a family "ask before you post" rule together.

MESSAGE
3

Self-Advocacy

Students learn what self-advocacy is and why people with disabilities speaking for themselves matters.

12 MIN

ADVISORY OR SOCIAL STUDIES

BOARD

STEP BY STEP

1 Define it

Write “self-advocacy” on the board.

SAY

Self-advocacy means speaking up for your own needs, choices, and rights.

2 Personal connection

Ask: when have you had to speak up for yourself (with a coach, teacher, or parent)? How did it feel?

3 People with Down syndrome lead

Share the idea.

SAY

Many people with Down syndrome are self-advocates: they speak at conferences, testify to lawmakers, run businesses, and lead organizations. The disability rights movement’s motto is “Nothing about us without us.”

4 Why it matters

Discuss: why is it important to hear from people directly instead of only from others talking about them?

5 Commit

Where in our school could we ask students what they need instead of assuming?



Let people speak for themselves.

Poster #3 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

“Can people with Down syndrome really do that?”

Yes. Many self-advocates speak publicly and lead. Assuming they can’t is exactly the stereotype they’re fighting.

“Isn’t it nicer to speak for them?”

It comes from a kind place, but it can take away someone’s voice. Ask first, then support.

“I’m bad at speaking up.”

Lots of people are! It’s a skill. Practice with small stuff first.

QUICK ACTIVITY: PRACTICE THE ASK

Pairs practice a self-advocacy script: “I learn best when... Could we try...?”

TAKE IT FURTHER

Look up self-advocacy work from organizations like the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) or Special Olympics.



Home connection: Share one thing you advocated for yourself this week.

MESSAGE

4

Inclusion in Clubs & Sports

Students look at who gets to participate in school activities and learn about unified, inclusive models.

15 MIN

ADVISORY

LIST OF SCHOOL CLUBS/TEAMS

STEP BY STEP

1

Quick audit

Project a list of your school's clubs and teams.

SAY

Look at this list. Who gets to join each of these?
Who might not feel welcome?

2

Barriers

Brainstorm barriers: tryouts, fees, transportation, "it's not for kids like me," no one they know.

3

Unified models

Introduce the idea.

SAY

Unified sports pair students with and without intellectual disabilities as teammates. Everyone plays, and everyone matters to the team.

4

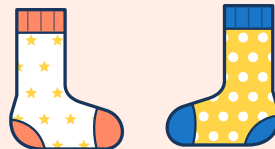
Brainstorm fixes

Groups pick one activity and propose one change to make it more inclusive.

5

Commit

Could any idea become a real proposal? (Connect to the School Belonging Audit.)



Is everyone on the team?

Poster #4 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"It's not fair to competitive players."

Competitive teams still exist. Inclusive options add more ways to play. It's not either/or.

"They can just come to games."

Watching is great! But being ON the team is different. What might that feel like?

"Our school already does this."

Awesome! What's working, and who's still missing?

QUICK ACTIVITY: PITCH IT

Groups give a 30-second pitch for their inclusive idea. The class votes on one to take to student council.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Invite your school's unified sports coach, or a Special Olympics representative, to talk to students.



Home connection: Ask family: what clubs or teams did you wish you could join as a kid?

MESSAGE
5

Words Used as Insults

Students understand why disability words used as insults hurt, and practice responding as upstanders.

12 MIN

ADVISORY

SCENARIO CARDS

STEP BY STEP

1

Set the tone

Be calm and direct.

SAY

We're talking about words people use as insults, like the r-word, "that's so special ed," or calling something "lame."

2

Why they hurt

Explain the shift.

SAY

The r-word used to be a medical term. Now it's an insult. When people use it for something "dumb," they're saying people with intellectual disabilities are bad. People hear that, even as a joke.

3

Anonymous poll

How often do you hear these words at school? Show results.

4

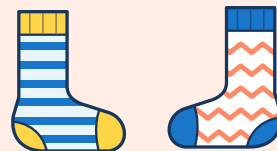
Upstander scripts

Practice low-drama responses: "Not cool, man." "Can we not use that word?" "My cousin has Down syndrome, so that hits different."

5

Commit

Which response feels realistic for you?



Words shape how we see people.

Poster #5 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"It's just a joke."

Jokes land on real people. If it wouldn't be funny with someone with a disability standing there, it's not a joke.

"I can't control what others say."

True, but you can control what you say, and one person speaking up changes a lot.

"Isn't this just being too sensitive?"

It's about respect. Plenty of other words make the point without hurting anyone.

QUICK ACTIVITY: GROUP CHAT ROLE-PLAY

Groups get a fake group-chat screenshot where someone uses a hurtful word. They draft the reply they'd actually send.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Run a "Spread the Word" style pledge campaign for respectful language during your 3.21 week.



Home connection: Talk with your family about words you've heard at school.

MESSAGE

6

Everyone Has a Story

Students see people with Down syndrome as full people with accomplishments, interests, and goals, and connect it to their own stories.

15 MIN

ADVISORY OR ELA

DEVICES (OPTIONAL)

STEP BY STEP

1

Hook

Ask everyone to write one thing people would be surprised to learn about them.

2

More than a label

Connect it.

SAY

Everyone is more than what people see first. People with Down syndrome are actors, athletes, artists, business owners, advocates, employees, and friends.

3

Explore

Pairs research one person with Down syndrome using a reputable source (NDSS, Special Olympics, or a news story) and find three things about them beyond Down syndrome.

4

Share

Pairs share one surprising fact. Notice: were the stories about the person or only about their disability?

5

Commit

Students start their Real-life Profile (Take-Home Kit).



Everyone has a story.

Poster #6 (last pages)

IF A STUDENT SAYS...

YOU CAN SAY...

"Is it all just 'inspiring' stories?"

Great eye. Look for stories that focus on what the person does and says, not just how others feel about them.

"I didn't know people with Down syndrome did that."

That's why this matters! What assumptions changed for you?

"Can I profile someone I know?"

Only with their permission, and their family's. Let them tell their own story.

QUICK ACTIVITY: TWO TRUTHS AND A SURPRISE

Students share two ordinary facts and one surprising fact about themselves. Classmates guess the surprise.

TAKE IT FURTHER

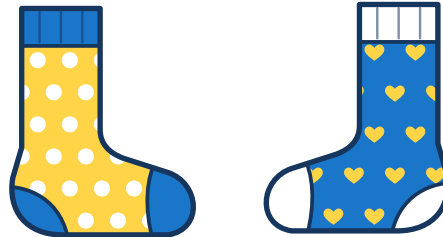
Create a hallway "Everyone Has a Story" display with the finished student profiles.

Home connection: Interview a family member about their story (see the Family Interview in the Take-Home Kit).

Advisory posters

Print on cardstock, cut in half, and post the week's topic. The question at the bottom makes a great exit ticket. ✂

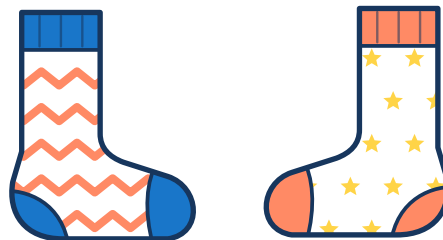
POSTER 1 · FRIENDSHIP, NOT CHARITY



Friendship, not charity.

What makes someone a real friend instead of just being nice?

POSTER 2 · ASK BEFORE YOU POST



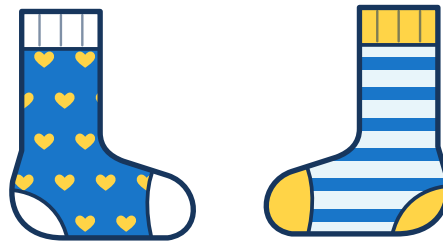
Ask before you post.

Would you want this posted about you? Did they say yes?

Advisory posters

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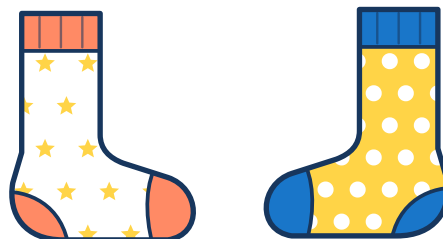
POSTER 3 · SELF-ADVOCACY



Let people speak for themselves.

When do you speak up for yourself? Who do you let speak for you?

POSTER 4 · INCLUSION IN CLUBS & SPORTS



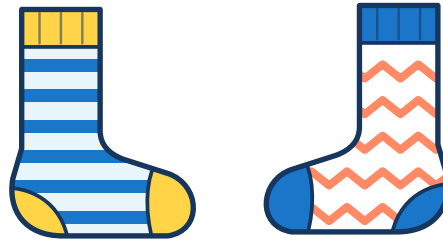
Is everyone on the team?

Who's missing from our clubs and teams? What would change that?

Advisory posters

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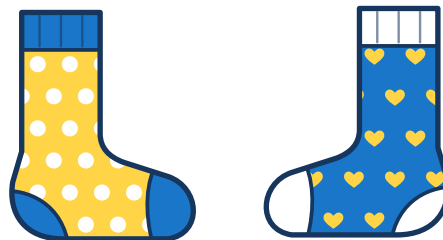
POSTER 5 · WORDS USED AS INSULTS



Words shape how we see people.

What will you say the next time you hear it?

POSTER 6 · EVERYONE HAS A STORY



Everyone has a story.

What would people be surprised to learn about you?