

INTRODUCING CHALLENGE

Discussion and group activity provide opportunity to assess behaviors around challenge.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will explore their own ideas on how to overcome challenge
- Students discuss common ways that people overcome challenge
- Students will assess their own and groups responses and behaviors to a challenging activity

MATERIALS

- Poster paper or whiteboard
- Hula-Hoop, tent pole, or other lightweight rod
- Notecards
- Coping Skills Handout (optional)

TIME

45 min

LESSON INTRO

This lesson begins with a short group discussion and then moves into a challenging student activity where students are asked to notice their own responses to challenge.

LESSON STEP BY STEP

1. Display the essential question: why do some people overcome challenge with grace and courage while others become bitter or give up easily?
2. Allow a moment for students to quietly think about this question. Acknowledge that some students may already have answers in their minds, and they will spend some time discussing it later on during the lesson.
3. Lead a group brainstorm about how people generally respond or react to challenging situations, or in other words: Things that people do when confronted with difficulty or stress.
4. Encourage students to think about themselves, or people that they have observed who have encountered challenging life experiences or moments during the day.

5. Try to get a mix of both positive and destructive examples. Examples might include: depression, listening to music, exercising, smoking, deep breathing, leaving the situation, talking to a friend, etc...
6. Explain that the brainstormed list could be categorized as “coping strategies”. Scientists define coping as what humans do when they encounter a difficult or stressful scenario.
7. Explain the next activity (Helium Hoop) this way:
Next I am going to ask you to complete a very challenging task. I know it’s hard, and I’m giving you a challenge because I want you to notice what behaviors come up in the group, and how your body feels when you are being challenged. I wonder if anyone will use any of the coping strategies from the list we created, or if you’ll discover others.
8. Gather students to participate in the Helium Hoop/Stick activity. This is a seemingly simple task but can be very frustrating for participants. Students will likely need to restart multiple times and this can lead to feelings of challenge, stress, and frustration.
9. Allow students to struggle! That is the point of this activity.
10. Explain that the object of Helium Hoop is to lower the hoop or rod to the ground.
11. The rule is that everyone’s finger must always stay in contact with the hoop. Pinching or grabbing the hoop is not allowed - it must rest on top of fingers.
12. If any finger loses contact with the hoop or rod, the group will restart.
13. Line up the group in two rows that face each other, or around the hoop.
14. Ask students to point their index fingers and hold their arms out. Lay the rod or hoop down on their fingers. Ensure that students fingers are straight, and the hoop is just resting on their fingers.
15. Before you let go, get the group to adjust their finger heights until the Helium Hoop is horizontal and everyone’s index fingers are touching the hoop.
16. Reiterate to the group that if anyone’s finger is caught not touching the hoop, the task will be restarted. Let the task begin....

Warning: Particularly in the early stages, the Helium Hoop has a habit of ‘mysteriously’ floating up rather than coming down, causing much laughter, surprise, and frustration. A bit of clever humoring can help - e.g., act surprised and ask what they are doing raising the Helium Stick instead of lowering it!

17. Allow time for students to work through this activity. They may or may not actually complete it—which is ok either way. Remember, the point of the activity is for students to notice how they are responding to challenge.

If needed, pause midway through the activity to reset. Reflect on the challenges, successes, and strategies that students have used.

VARIATIONS

1. If the conversation on coping strategies and response to challenge is gaining traction with students, utilize the Coping Skills Handout. Center discussions around when/how these strategies could be useful.

2. After students attempt the activity once, have them identify several behavioral changes that will help them improve. Have students attempt again. Do they follow the advice they gave themselves? How? Why or why not?

FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

1. Check out these videos to support your understanding of how to effectively run the Helium Hoop activity:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=WIVKwQ8HJXE
www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCvj-Pgfyw
2. You should be able to see students' responses to frustration during the activity. Take notes so you can bring this up in the debrief. Refrain from managing poor coping strategies in the moment. You will use behaviors as a point of reflection later on.
3. Sometimes students will blame others during the activity or reflection time, consider if it is relevant to have a discussion of blame:

It is usually easier to see what other people are doing wrong rather than recognizing how you can adjust to the group. If the topic of blame comes up in your discussion you can volunteer this information.

- How did the group react when one side of the hoop went up while one side stayed low? (Possible responses you might hear could be to accuse the other side, yelling at the other group to 'do it like them', etc.)
- What is a definition of blaming?
- Why do you think we blame so quickly?
- Think of some strategies the group could do or say to counteract the blaming tendencies.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Once the Helium Hoop activity is over, circle students back around the coping list you created earlier. Reflect using the questions below:
 - Go Around Question: What is one word you would use to describe this activity?
 - Go Around Question: What is an emotion you felt during this activity?
 - What did you notice about how you/your body responded to challenge during this activity?
 - What behaviors did you notice about how the group responded during moments of frustration or difficulty?
 - Recall back to the list of ways people respond to challenge. Are there any other things to add to the list based off of what you observed during Helium Hoop?
 - Ask students to share what were helpful or productive responses to challenge during that activity. These could be personal strategies that student used, such as breathing. Or a group strategy, such as calling a pause and checking in. The goal is to acknowledge the ways that students were productively responding to challenge.
 - What can we learn from this discussion to begin to answer our essential question? Ask students to think about ways that people respond that promote "grace and course" versus "bitterness or giving up".
2. Invite students to pick a strategy from the "Response to Challenge" or Coping Strategies list that they could see themselves using in the future. Allow students to spend some time designing a reminder note card that they can post to remind themselves of a useful "challenge response".

NOTES

Educational Standards: CASEL: Self-Awareness, CASEL: Relationship Skills, P21: Creativity and Innovation, P21: Leadership and Responsibility, P21: Flexibility and Adaptability, CCRS:SL6 Adapt Speech

60+ Positive Coping Strategies

Diversions:

- Write, draw, paint, photography
- Play an instrument, sing, dance, act
- Take a shower or a bath
- Garden
- Take a walk, or go for a drive
- Watch television or a movie
- Watch cute kitten videos on YouTube
- Play a game
- Go shopping
- Clean or organize your environment
- Read
- Take a break or vacation

Social/Interpersonal Coping:

- Talk to someone you trust
- Set boundaries and say “no”
- Write a note to someone you care about
- Be assertive
- Use humor
- Spend time with friends and/or family
- Serve someone in need
- Care for or play with a pet
- Role-play challenging situations with others
- Encourage others

Cognitive Coping:

- Make a gratitude list
- Brainstorm solutions
- Lower your expectations of the situation
- Keep an inspirational quote with you
- Be flexible

- Write a list of goals
- Take a class
- Act opposite of negative feelings
- Write a list of pros and cons for decisions
- Reward or pamper yourself when successful
- Write a list of strengths
- Accept a challenge with a positive attitude

Tension Releasers:

- Exercise or play sports
- Catharsis (yelling in the bathroom, punching a punching bag)
- Cry
- Laugh

Physical:

- Get enough sleep
- Eat healthy foods
- Get into a good routine
- Eat a little chocolate
- Limit caffeine
- Deep/slow breathing
- Stretch

Spiritual:

- Pray or meditate
- Enjoy nature
- Get involved in a worthy cause

Limit Setting:

- Drop some involvement
- Prioritize important tasks
- Use assertive communication
- Schedule time for yourself

Source: <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/coping-skills-worksheets>





ALTERNATE ENDING: PERSONAL HISTORY

Students work through a flowchart that helps them reflect upon their own proactive choices and responses to challenge, as well as consider how it could have ended differently.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze their personal response to a life challenge
- Students will identify which character strengths they utilized to overcome challenge

MATERIALS

- Alternate Ending handout (one per student)
 - Leadership Qualities list from a previous session
- AND/OR
- Leadership Qualities Handout (several copies for the group or displayed)

TIME

20 min

LESSON INTRO

This activity walks students through the process of analyzing their own choices and responses to challenging situations.

Students are asked to infer leadership traits that they exhibited in those responses. Then, students think through an alternate response that they could have chosen based on contrasting characteristics.

ALTERNATE ENDING: PERSONAL RESPONSE STEP BY STEP

1. Post the class Leaders Are chart from a previous session, OR post or printout the Leadership Qualities handout for students to use as a resource during this lesson.
2. Explain to the class that this activity will help them to think of how they have responded to challenges in the past.

3. Pass out the Alternate Ending handout.
4. Begin by asking students to think about a challenge that they have encountered that they responded to well—something that they are proud of.
5. The teacher should prepare to share one of his/her own personal examples of a challenge as a model for the activity along with the students.
6. Walk the students through the flowchart in this order...

- **WHAT WAS YOUR CHALLENGE:** Model for the students a life challenge that you overcame well. Write a short description of your challenge in the appropriate box. This could be something like *“Mother became ill”* or *“Lost a job”*.

Once you share your example, ask students to write in their own personal challenge on their handout.

- **HOW DID YOU RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGE:** Model for the students how you responded to your personal challenge. Write a short description in the appropriate box. This could be something like *“Visited her 3x a week, organized other family members visiting hours, and made sure she was eating healthy”* or *“Set a schedule to job search for an hour a day, picked up a shift at my daughter’s school”*.

Ask students to write in their own personal example on their handout.

- **CHARACTERISTICS:** Model for the students the 3 positive traits that you used in your response to challenge. This could be something like *“Patience, Optimism, Dedication”*. Write your examples in the characteristics box.

Ask students to write in their own personal examples—point out the Leadership Qualities list as a resource for students to find characteristics that speak to their actions.

- **OPPOSITE CHARACTERISTICS:** Contrast three opposite characteristics that you could have used in an alternate reality. These should be the negative alternates to your three positive characteristics. Something like *“Anger, Blaming, Unresponsive”*.

Ask students to write in their own examples. Emphasize that this is an imaginary exercise. They are thinking in an alternate universe for the next section of the flowchart.

- **RESPONSE WITH OPPOSITE CHARACTERISTICS:** Create a hypothetical reaction that could have happened from those traits. Infer how you could have responded, if you were to use the opposite characteristics that you listed. This might be something like *“Blamed my family for not doing more”* or *“eat ice-cream and complain to my friends”*.

Write your example in, and have students fill in their own chart.

- **NEW OUTCOME WITH OPPOSITE CHARACTERISTICS:** Inferring from your imaginary response, write in the fictional outcome of the challenge. This might be *“My family and I grew resentful of each other”* or *“I did not spend time applying for new jobs or networking and suffered financially”*.

Ask students to write in their own example.

VARIATIONS

Invite students to pair-share their Alternate Ending map with a friend.

FACILITATOR TIPS AND NOTES

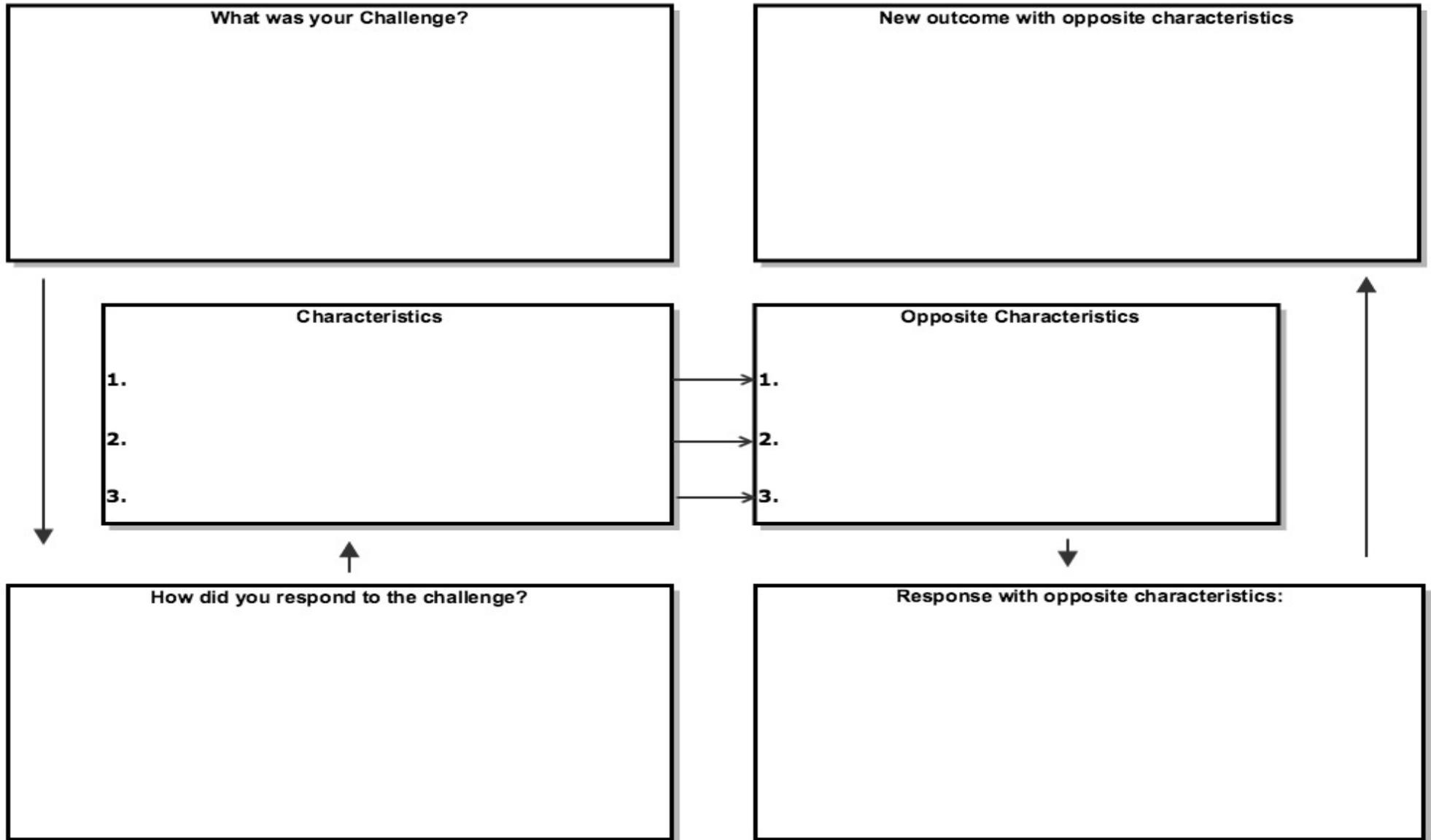
1. You should walk through the alternate ending organizer yourself—before the session--to come up with a personal example that you can share with your group.
2. Consider sketching out the Alternate Ending graphic organizer onto the whiteboard to guide students through the sheet.
3. Before students engage in this activity, it may be helpful to brief them about how this will be shared, if at all. Decide whether or not you would like to require your students to share the results of this activity. It may provide powerful moments of depth that lead to accountability and trust-building among your group. However, be cognizant of sustaining a safe atmosphere among your group. Students may not be ready to share at this level.

REFLECTION & WRAP UP

1. Invite students to share their map, if they would like to. Acknowledge the choices they each made to respond positively to a life challenge.
2. Celebrate student's proud moments of overcoming a challenge with a tasty treat and a celebratory feel! Emphasize the skills and strengths that each student brings to difficult times.

NOTES

- **Educational Standards:** CASEL: Self Awareness, P21: Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, P21: Initiative and Self Direction, CCRS:SL2 Integrate and Evaluate Information



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

able	dark	honest	reliable
active	decisive	hopeful	religious
adventurous	demanding	hopeless	respectful
affectionate	dependable	humorous	responsible
afraid	depressed	ignorant	rough
alert	determined	imaginative	rude
ambitious	discouraged	impatient	sad
angry	dishonest	impolite	safe
annoyed	disrespectful	inconsiderate	satisfied
anxious	doubtful	independent	secretive
apologetic	dutiful	industrious	selfish
arrogant	eager	initiative	serious
artistic	easygoing	innocent	shy
assertive	efficient	integrity	skillful
athletic	encouraging	intelligent	smart
attentive	endurance	jealous	sneaky
bad	energetic	judgment	sorry
beautiful	enthusiasm	justice	spoiled
bold	exciting	kind	stingy
bored	expert	knowledge	strange
bossy	fair	lazy	strict
brainy	faithful	lively	stubborn
brave	fearful	lonely	sweet
bright	fearless	loving	tact
brilliant	fierce	loyal	talented
busy	foolish	lucky	terrified
calm	friendly	mature	thankful
careful	frustrated	mean	thoughtful
careless	fun	messy	thoughtless
cautious	generous	miserable	tired
charming	gentle	nervous	tolerant
cheerful	giving	nice	trusting
clever	gloomy	obedient	trustworthy
coarse	good	obnoxious	unfriendly
concerned	graceful	peaceful	unhappy
confident	grateful	picky	unselfish
confused	greedy	pleasant	useful
considerate	grouchy	polite	warm
cooperative	grumpy	popular	weak
courageous	guilty	positive	wild
cowardly	happy	precise	wise
cruel	harsh	pretty	worried
curious	hateful	proud	young
dangerous	healthy	quiet	
daring	helpful	rational	

