



PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

Activity Plan

ACTpa121

Project Skills:

- Youth will be able to meet and confidently interact with others.

Life Skills:

- social skills
- communication

Academic Standards:

- G.2 Career Development. Develop positive interpersonal skills necessary to be effective in the world of work.

Grade Levels: 7 -10

Time: 60 minutes

Supplies Needed:

Dress & Grooming Activity

- magazine pictures
- cardstock
- scissors
- glue

Handshake Activity

- 3" x 5" index cards
- typed scenarios
- glue

On-Line Image

Activity (optional)

- pre-recorded voice mail messages
- power point of various outfits and styles of grooming

Do Ahead:

- Recruit 1-3 youth to help you present this

BACKGROUND

As youth enter the middle school years, emphasis is placed on career education and working towards getting their first job. This interactive, experiential activity plan is designed to promote cognitive, emotional and social growth as they relate to job success. The specific activities are designed to ease the transition into adulthood. By learning skills which foster independence and confidence, youth will step further into the world by working and/or expanding their involvement in school or community.

Putting Your Best Foot Forward has been taught successfully as a youth/adult partnership, with the youth serving as discussion facilitators, passing out scenarios, modeling how to shake hands, reading scenarios, and, if the youth is comfortable, assuming adult roles when acting out scenarios. These activities can be successfully taught in a typical classroom setting, an after school program, a community-based educational program or as a 4-H club activity.

WHAT TO DO

Begin by establishing an important ground rule. Explain that you will be discussing topics related to personal style and that everyone will have a chance to share their own opinions. In order to learn from each other, you will need to have youth agree to listen to each other respectfully. Once consensus is reached, proceed with the activities.

Activity: Dress and Grooming (15 minutes)

Depending on the number of helpers and youth, divide the larger group into groups of 4-5. Mix genders when possible. Rotate the variety of pictures around to each group and have the helpers circulate and facilitate discussion using the following questions. [It is critically important to keep your own judgment to yourself to engage the youth in productive discussion.]

- What is your first impression when you saw this picture?
- What are the positive or negative things about this outfit?
- Is this someone you would buy something from? Why or why not?
- Would your impression be different if the picture was of the opposite gender?
- Does hair color or style impact your impression?
- Does the person convey an attitude? In what way?
- What would your grandma say?
- Would you introduce this person to your parents?

session.

- Type scenarios and glue on cardstock.
- Cut out magazine pictures of teens of various sizes, ages, genders in various kinds of dress. Mount the pictures on cardstock. [Avoid Hollywood stars. Select common youth to whom the audience can relate.]
- Purchase Hershey's Hugs & Kisses candy (optional)

Sources/Adapted From:

- Created by Colleen Pulvermacher, 4-H Youth Development Educator, UW Extension, Vernon County
- Get Into the Act! National 4-H Curriculum, <http://4-hmall.org/Category/4-hcurriculum-workforce-readiness.aspx>
- Reeves, E. (2009). *Do I Wear My Nose Ring to the Interview?* Workman Publishing.
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Career Development School Counseling Curriculum <http://dpi.wi.gov/ssp>

TALK IT OVER

Reflect:

- How did you feel about judging these pictures?
- Why do you think people have different ideas about what is appropriate or acceptable?
- How were each person's viewpoints the same? Different?
- What did you learn about yourself by doing this activity?

Apply:

- Think about your personal presentation. What does your style of dress and accessories say about you?
- Why is this important to know?

Activity: Handshakes (30 minutes)

The only appropriate touch in the business world is a handshake. Youth will find this is important as they receive awards, greet others, and introduce themselves. Make the following points to the youth:

- A handshake conveys confidence.
- As you enter adulthood you will have more opportunities practice meeting people and shaking hands with ease.
- Creating a positive impression in every situation is challenging and will come easier with time and experience.
- Everyone responds to situations differently and that's ok.
- Gestures can be misunderstood. Hugging to some is a show of affection and to others it is intrusive.
- It is important to be sensitive to cultural differences. Eye contact, for example, is considered disrespectful by some cultures, whereas most Americans view this as an important aspect of communication.
- Gender differences should be considered in handshakes. [Some teens will state they feel uncomfortable seeing two women shake hands, but not two males.]

Ask for a volunteer to demonstrate the appropriate way to shake hands – thumb to thumb, one-two, release. Do it again with eye contact. Have everyone in the room shake hands with at least 5 other people. Helpers should mingle with youth shaking hands appropriately. Ask: How did it feel to shake hands? What was easy? What was awkward? What about limp handshakes, vice-grip handshakes?

Using the following scenarios, look at situations where a handshake may or may not be appropriate. Have the youth form groups of 3-4. Instruct each group to discuss the following situations and the many ways they could respond. [Reinforce the rule of respect, and listening to each others' ideas.]

1. At a sports awards ceremony, you and your parents are approaching the volleyball coach, with whom you don't exactly get along. Surprisingly, the coach has her arms out to hug you. What do you do? [Possible responses are: Usually, youth will

- Wisconsin Workforce Development
<http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/>

acknowledge that an awkward situation like this has happened to them. They have followed the adult lead by returning a light hug or not hugging them at all. Affirming the awkwardness of the situation is key for the helper].

2. You're receiving an award at an assembly. The presenter is a teacher you don't like. How should you approach this situation? [Possible responses are: accept the award without making eye contact; just get the award and get it over with; or roll your eyes when you go up for the award. Challenge the youth by asking about the relationship with this presenter. Is he/she also a coach, potential employer, friend of your parents, the National Honor Society advisor, etc. and help the youth understand that a split-second decision to blow someone off may not be a good option in the long term].
3. You turn around at church to shake hands and Edna Getagrip is there to give you her vice grip handshake. What do you do?
4. You are at a restaurant for a job interview. The manager doesn't offer his hand for a handshake. What do you do?

If there is sufficient time, have the groups trade scenarios. After 5 minutes, call the groups back into one large group for discussion.

Reflect:

- Which of these scenarios was the most challenging? Why?
- Why was this activity important?

Apply:

- How will your new skills help you?
- What are some other situations when you will need to use the skills you learned today?

Activity: On-line Image (10 minutes)

Much has been said about on-line image and youth will glaze over when you bring up this topic again. A good way to engage them is to have them consider status updates often seen on social networks, e-mail addresses and voice mails. Read these scenarios with plenty of animation to get the point across. If you have a theatrical youth in your class, have them read the statements. Discuss which ones are appropriate and which ones reflect poorly on a person. Examples: (add your own, too)

Status Update:

- just chillin
- Support Our Troops!
- got new shaving cream – hope it works, nothing else in my life has!
- I wanna cowboy Casanova
- staring at the door has never been so much fun
- I'm a troublemaker. Never been a faker. Doing things my way.

Also consider e-mail addresses:

- hotbabe123
- stud001
- get2beme

Also consider voicemail messages:

- This is Char...you know what to do babe...
- Yea? Yea? This is Ron. I'm not talking to you.
- This is Leo. Do your thing and maybe I'll get back to you.
- Sally here. Where are you? Miss you...

Technology can be a great way to promote yourself. Consider using technology to cast yourself in a positive light.

TALK IT OVER

Reflect:

- What does your on-line image say about you to your friends, your family, teachers, or future employers?
- What do people learn about you from your on-line image? Does that information put you in a positive light?

Apply:

- What advice would give to someone who wants to establish an on-line social network?
- Why is this important?

End the session by telling the youth that they'll never get a second chance to make a first impression. Always Put Your Best Foot Forward!

ENHANCE/SIMPLIFY

Enhance for Older Children: Record actual voicemail messages you've heard and play them for group discussion. Prepare a PowerPoint of various outfits and styles of grooming (including tattooing and piercing) for discussion. [Do not include Hollywood stars that youth cannot relate to].

Simplify for Younger Children:

Limit number of scenarios, number of people to practice handshaking with and pictures discussed.

HELPFUL HINTS

If parents are in attendance, invite them to participate in the activities.

All of these activities can be adapted for the amount of time available, size of the group, age of the group.

As the session closes, I tell the class that I am certainly all for hugs and kisses (offer them the Hershey's Hugs and Kisses candy) but not when I'm are trying to make a positive impression!

ADDITIONAL WEB LINKS

Ohio State Youth Workforce Preparation <http://youthsuccess.osu.edu/>

Extension's Role in Preparing Youth for the Workforce: A Challenge to Extension Professionals,
<http://www.joe.org/joe/2010august/comm1.php>

Preparing youth for the 21st century knowledge economy: Youth programs and workforce preparation
http://www.robertbownefoundation.org/pdf_files/2009_asm_spring.pdf

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