

A WILD FEELINGS CURRICULUM · HIGH SCHOOL

The Dignity Project

Helping students think critically, understand humanity, and make intentional choices

10 lessons | 60 minutes each | One big idea

> **Every person has inherent worth, including you.**

WILD FEELINGS

Grounded in Dr. Donna Hicks's Dignity Model

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Welcome to the Dignity Project

10 lessons. 60 minutes each. One big idea: Every person has inherent worth, including you.

What's this all about?

Being a teenager means figuring out who you are, where you belong, what matters to you, and how you want to show up in the world. It's exciting, messy, confusing, and sometimes really hard.

And young people are doing all of that while navigating friendships, social media, school expectations, family relationships, and a world full of adults who don't always model the behavior they expect from kids.

The Dignity Project gives students a way to make sense of it all.

Grounded in Dr. Donna Hicks's Dignity Model, this ten-lesson curriculum helps high school students understand a deceptively simple idea: Every person has inherent worth. That worth doesn't increase when we succeed or disappear when we mess up. And it's just as true for the people we don't like or agree with.

Of course, knowing that and knowing what to do with it are two different things.

That's where the real work begins.

What are we trying to help students do?

We're not trying to create students who are always nice, never argue, or make perfect choices. That's not realistic, and frankly, it's not the goal.

We're helping students become more thoughtful about themselves, other people, and the world around them.

Throughout the program, students practice how to:

- Understand themselves without tearing themselves apart. Recognize their emotions, question their assumptions, take responsibility for mistakes, and remember that being a work in progress doesn't make them less worthy.
- Understand other people without having to agree with them. Get curious about why people behave the way they do, recognize competing needs, and hold people accountable without reducing them to their worst moments.
- Navigate conflict without losing their dignity. Practice honesty, boundaries, disagreement, repair, and the ability to recognize when a situation is challenging them to grow versus asking them to tolerate harm.

- Question the world around them. Examine how social pressures, power, institutions, and incentives shape behavior. Sometimes the problem isn't just what one person did. It's what the environment encourages everyone to do.
- Make intentional choices when things get complicated. Consider different perspectives, examine consequences, recognize tradeoffs, and decide how to act when there isn't one obvious right answer.

What makes this different?

We're teaching critical thinking, not compliance.

Students are allowed to disagree. They're encouraged to question authority, including the adults and institutions teaching them. We don't ask them to forgive people who hurt them, share personal experiences, or arrive at a particular moral conclusion.

Instead, we use realistic situations, provocative questions, and guided discussions to help students develop their own judgment.

The lessons move from understanding themselves, to understanding other people, to examining the larger world, and finally to navigating complex decisions using everything they've learned.

We also introduce transcendent thinking, which is a fancy term for a very human capacity: looking beyond what happened in a particular moment to consider what it means for people, relationships, society, and the future.

And here's why that matters. Research by neuroscientist Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and her colleagues found that adolescents who naturally engaged in this kind of deeper thinking showed stronger development in the connections between brain networks involved in reflection and executive functioning. That development was associated with stronger identity development during adolescence and greater self-liking and relationship satisfaction in young adulthood.

In other words, helping young people think deeply about themselves, other people, and the world may support the very developmental work of adolescence.

That's why transcendent thinking isn't just one lesson in this project, it's woven throughout the entire curriculum. Using the Dignity lens is the vehicle for developing the skill. Questions about fairness, belonging, conflict, accountability, and human worth give students something meaningful to wrestle with. Instead of telling students what to think, we're helping them practice thinking more deeply about what it means to be human, how their choices affect others, and the kind of world they want to help create.

What does this mean for teachers?

You don't have to be a dignity expert to teach dignity.

You don't need to have the perfect answer to every difficult question, either.

The lessons provide the concepts, scenarios, discussion prompts, and teaching guidance to help you get started. Your job isn't to convince students to think exactly like you. It's to create a space where they can think more deeply, challenge assumptions, and practice making sense of complicated human situations.

Sometimes the best thing you can say is, "That's an interesting point. Let's think about it."

The big picture

We want students to leave with more than a vocabulary for dignity. We want them to have a way of thinking they can use long after the lessons are over.

Because the world is complicated. People are complicated. And our students are complicated, too.

None of that changes anyone's worth.

And when young people really understand that, they have a powerful starting point for building relationships, challenging injustice, taking responsibility, and helping create a world where more people get to matter.

The instructional spine

Each session follows Concept → Self → Skill. The questions become more complex as the context expands, but students continue to return to their own experience and understanding.

Session	Provocation	Thinking capacity
1. Your Worth Is Not Up for Negotiation	Can you do something terrible and still have dignity?	Separate identity, behavior, and accountability
2. Why Does That Bother Me So Much?	Why can a tiny comment ruin your entire day?	Recognize dignity triggers and examine interpretations
3. Everybody Wants to Matter	Can two people both feel disrespected without either one being wrong about how they feel?	Cognitive empathy and competing needs
4. Your Brain Has Entered the Chat	Why do smart people do ridiculous things when they're upset?	Examine protective responses and identify choices
5. The Nice Trap	Can being nice actually make you a worse friend?	Distinguish dignity from avoidance and relational aggression
6. Good People Can Do Harmful Things	Can you understand someone's reasons and still hold them accountable?	Evaluate intent, impact, responsibility, and repair
7. Healthy Heat	How do you know whether a relationship is challenging you or hurting you?	Distinguish productive discomfort from harmful patterns
8. Zoom Out	What are we missing when we decide a conflict is just about two people?	Transcendent thinking and systems analysis
9. It's Complicated. So Am I.	What if being confused about yourself isn't evidence that something is wrong?	Integrate complexity, self-compassion, and dignity
10. The Dignity Dilemma	What do you do when there isn't a clean answer?	Independent dignity-based prosocial critical thinking

Six curriculum-wide commitments

1 The dignity framework remains integrated.

The Ten Elements and ten existing Wild Feelings practices function as a shared vocabulary and toolkit. They are not twenty disconnected lessons or a set of behaviors students must perform to earn approval.

2 Dignity does not require reconciliation.

Boundaries, consequences, disagreement, distancing, and leaving harmful relationships remain legitimate options. Understanding someone's behavior never creates an obligation to tolerate it.

3 Students retain ownership of their inner lives.

Personal disclosure, forgiveness, emotional vulnerability, agreement, and moral conclusions cannot be required or graded. Fictional scenarios remain the primary vehicle for skill practice.

4 Transcendent thinking is deliberately developed.

Students repeatedly connect concrete events to human needs, relationships, systems, ethical meaning, and possible futures. Lesson 8 names the capacity explicitly, but it is cultivated throughout.

5 Institutions and authority are subject to scrutiny.

Dignity cannot become a demand for obedience or deference. Students must be able to challenge policies, educators, institutional power, and the contradictions between stated values and actual behavior.

6 Intellectual rigor takes priority over moral performance.

Scenarios must contain credible tensions, competing explanations, and consequential choices. Facilitators should reward inquiry and reasoning in discussion, not agreement with the adult's preferred answer.

Assessment philosophy

The Dignity Project is built around a transfer goal:

> **Students will independently use dignity-based prosocial critical thinking to navigate complex social situations, understand themselves and others, and make intentional choices that honor their own inherent worth and the equal worth of others.**

An assessment aligned with that goal must ask students to think, not simply repeat the curriculum's conclusions.

For example, asking a student to list the Ten Elements of Dignity might reveal familiarity with terminology. It tells us very little about whether they can navigate a complicated social situation.

Likewise, asking whether a student is more compassionate after the curriculum may produce a socially desirable answer without revealing anything about their reasoning.

The most useful evidence is how students analyze a situation when the answer isn't obvious.

What can and cannot be assessed

Appropriate evidence	Not appropriate to assess
Distinguishing evidence from assumptions	Whether a student feels worthy
Identifying competing perspectives	Whether a student discloses personal experiences
Examining intent, impact, and responsibility	Whether a student forgives someone
Recognizing power and institutional influences	Whether a student agrees with authority
Considering consequences and tradeoffs	Whether a student appears nice or compliant
Developing and revising a defensible judgment	Whether a student adopts the facilitator's moral conclusion

Participation in personal reflection should never be treated as evidence of emotional maturity.

A student who declines to share a personal experience is exercising a legitimate boundary, not failing to demonstrate growth.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Why the Elements of Dignity?

One of the hardest parts of a hard moment, for all of us, is that we don't know how to explain the hurt. And even if we could, we don't want to be vulnerable enough to try.

The ten Elements of Dignity solve both problems at once. When you hand someone the list and ask, "Which of these landed on you?", you take the cognitive work out of it. You take the shame out of it, too. Nobody is being asked to perform self-awareness under pressure.

> **The list says something before anyone says a word: There is nothing wrong with you. We all need these things. Which one hurts right now?**

When students don't have to hunt for the name of what's wrong, they get to the real conversation so much faster. And the real conversation is the only one that actually helps.

- Acceptance of Identity
- Inclusion
- Safety
- Acknowledgement
- Recognition
- Fairness
- Benefit of the Doubt
- Understanding
- Independence
- Accountability

The ten Elements of Dignity, from Dr. Donna Hicks

BEFORE LESSON 1

Quick Reminders



1

“I don’t know” is ok.

Adolescents are wired to disengage at the slightest hint of hypocrisy. They know we don’t know all the answers, so admitting when you don’t know something actually builds authority instead of eroding it. It also models exactly what we are trying to teach: reflecting and thinking before responding is something we are all learning to do.

2

Do not feel pressured to get through every activity.

The goal is to practice transcendent thinking, aka getting kids into philosopher mode. If that is happening, don’t rush the conversation. **The thinking is the whole point.**

3

If they think the scenarios are dumb, that is totally ok.

Don’t force it. Just pause, ask them why, and let them explain. Honestly, giving them the assignment, in that moment, to spend the rest of class making realistic scenarios to use in future lessons would be a totally awesome dignity-based lesson that still accomplishes all the goals of the curriculum!

LESSON 01

Your Worth Is Not Up for Negotiation

01

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

THE BIG IDEA

Everyone has dignity, even people we don't like, trust, agree with, or respect.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How do we live and work together when we don't all respect each other?

Lesson overview

We talk about respect constantly. We tell young people to show respect, earn respect, and treat others with respect. But what does respect actually mean? And who gets to decide?

This lesson invites students to investigate something they may have never questioned: Our definitions of respect aren't universal. They're shaped by our families, cultures, experiences, and social environments. What one person considers respectful, another might find offensive. And when people have different amounts of power, whose definition of respect gets enforced can have real consequences.

Students begin by examining their own assumptions through a Respect Inventory, then explore the distinction between respect and dignity using Dr. Donna Hicks's Dignity Model. Unlike respect, which can be earned or lost, dignity is the inherent worth every human being possesses, regardless of their behavior, beliefs, or circumstances.

But understanding that distinction is only the beginning. When we feel attacked, embarrassed, excluded, or disrespected, our instinct is often to protect ourselves, not to consider someone else's humanity. Students explore why these reactions are understandable and what it might mean to recognize another person's dignity even when we are angry, disagree with them, or believe they deserve consequences.

Finally, students tackle a complicated question: How do you build a healthy school community when you can't make everyone like, trust, or respect each other?

The goal isn't to convince students that everyone should get along or that dignity requires endless patience and forgiveness. It's to introduce dignity as a shared foundation for navigating disagreement, accountability, power, and conflict without making anyone's worth conditional.

Facilitator intentions

By the end of the experience, students will have had opportunities to:

- Examine how their definitions of respect have been shaped by family, culture, socialization, and personal experiences.
- Recognize how different expectations about respect can create conflict and reinforce unequal power dynamics.
- Distinguish dignity, which is inherent and equal, from respect, trust, admiration, and approval, which can change.
- Explore why perceived threats to belonging, status, or safety can make it difficult to consider another person's dignity during conflict.
- Consider how recognizing someone's dignity differs from agreeing with them, respecting their behavior, or excusing harm.
- Practice applying dignity-based critical thinking to a realistic school community dilemma involving competing needs, authority, accountability, and fairness.
- Begin developing their own understanding of what it means to recognize everyone's dignity without requiring universal agreement or mutual respect.

These are learning intentions, not performance requirements. Students are encouraged to question the framework, challenge assumptions, and develop defensible judgments rather than arrive at a predetermined conclusion.

○ The 60-minute experience

1 OPENING

Do you have to respect everyone?

7 min

Write on the board:

> "Everyone deserves respect."

Ask:

> "Do you agree with that? Like, actually? Everyone?"

Let students respond before complicating the question.

> "What about someone who's been a complete jerk to you?"

> "What about someone who lies all the time?"

> "What about a teacher who treats students terribly?"

> "Can someone lose your respect even if they've never done anything to you personally?"

> "Have you ever thought someone was being disrespectful, but they genuinely didn't see it that way?"

Then ask:

> "What if we don't even agree on what respect means?"

Tell students they're going to investigate that question.

2 RESPECT INVENTORY
Who taught you what respect looks like?

15 min

Part A Your definition

5 min

Give students a few minutes to complete their own Respect Inventory.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Respect Inventory

Finish these sentences:

I know someone respects me when they... _____

I feel disrespected when someone... _____

Growing up, I was taught that respecting adults means... _____

Someone earns my respect when they... _____

Someone loses my respect when they... _____

Something I think is disrespectful that other people might not care about is... _____

Students can keep their responses private.

Part B Compare notes

5 min

Invite students to compare a few answers in groups of three or four.

> "See if you can find something you all agree on, something you disagree about, and something that makes you go, 'Wait, really? You think that's disrespectful?'"

Bring the class back together.

> "What surprised you?"

> "Did anyone have a totally different answer from yours?"

> "Where do you think those differences come from?"

"If two people have completely different ideas about respect, who's right?"

Part C **Who makes the rules?** 5 min

Move into the bigger questions.

"Where did you learn what respect is supposed to look like?"

"Who gets to decide what's respectful at school?"

"Have you ever seen someone get called disrespectful just for disagreeing?"

"Can telling someone to 'show respect' sometimes be a way of telling them to shut up?"

"Are there things adults can do to students that students would get in trouble for doing to adults?"

Facilitator transition:

"So here's the problem. We talk about respect like everyone agrees on what it means. But we don't. Our definitions come from our families, cultures, experiences, and the people around us. And sometimes the people with the most power get to decide whose definition counts.

"That makes respect a pretty complicated thing to build a whole community around."

3 CONCEPT
Respect and dignity are not the same thing

10 min

Introduce Dr. Donna Hicks's Dignity Model.

Explain the distinction:

RESPECT

Respect is something people can earn or lose based on their actions, behavior, and relationships. What counts as respectful can change depending on the person, culture, or situation.

DIGNITY

Dignity is different. It's the idea that every human being has inherent worth. You don't have to earn it. You can't lose it. And nobody gets more of it than anyone else.

Then ask:

"Can you think someone is a terrible person and still believe they have dignity?"

> "What about someone who's done something really harmful?"

> "If everyone has dignity, does that mean everyone should get the same treatment?"

> "Can you believe someone deserves serious consequences without believing they're worth less as a human being?"

> "What's the difference between saying 'I don't respect you' and 'You don't matter'?"

Give students room to challenge the idea.

Push the thinking:

> "Here's where it gets tricky. If dignity means everyone matters, does that mean you have to listen to everyone's opinions? Even the ones you think are ridiculous or harmful?"

Let students debate.

Then ask:

> "So what do we actually owe each other as human beings, even when we don't respect each other?"

Don't resolve the question for them. It's a question they'll return to throughout the curriculum.

4 SELF
Why is this so hard when we're mad?

10 min

Introduce the situation:

> "Imagine someone shares something embarrassing about you in a group chat. People start laughing. You're furious.

> "Now imagine someone walks up and says, 'Hey, remember, that person has dignity too.'"

Pause.

> "How much would you want to punch that person in the face right now?"

Allow students to laugh or react. Clarify that the question is about the feeling, not acting on it.

Then ask:

> "Why is thinking about someone else's dignity probably the last thing on your mind when they've hurt you?"

> "Why does getting someone back sometimes feel so good?"

> "When someone embarrasses you, what are you actually trying to protect?"

> "Is it possible to know someone matters and still not care about their feelings in that moment?"

> "Do you have to feel compassion for someone to treat them with dignity?"

Facilitator explanation:

> "When we feel attacked, embarrassed, excluded, or threatened, our brains can get very focused on protecting us.

> "And honestly, that makes sense. Our brains are built to pay attention to threats, including threats to our relationships and our sense of belonging.

> "Sometimes that means we get angry. Sometimes we want revenge. Sometimes we decide we don't care about the other person at all.

> "Those reactions don't automatically make us bad people. They're part of being human.

> "But here's the interesting question: Just because our brains are telling us to protect ourselves, does that mean every way we try to protect ourselves is a good idea?"

Invite responses.

Then ask:

> "If treating people with dignity were easy when we're angry, would we even need to practice it?"

Connect back to the Respect Inventory.

> "Think about how differently people define respect. Now imagine two people who both feel completely disrespected, and both think they're justified in getting even.

> "What happens next?"

5

SKILL

The school where nobody respects each other

15 min

STUDENT SCENARIO

> *"Imagine a high school where things have gotten pretty tense.*
>
> *"Students say teachers are constantly embarrassing them in class, dismissing their opinions, and enforcing rules differently depending on who you are.*
>
> *"Teachers say students are rude, interrupt constantly, and challenge every instruction.*
>
> *"Students say, 'Respect is earned. You can't demand it.'*
>
> *"Teachers say, 'You don't have to like me, but you do have to respect me.'*
>
> *"Finally, the administration announces a new rule:*

'Everyone at this school must treat everyone else with respect at all times.'

> *"And almost immediately, people start arguing about what that even means."*

Part A What's actually going on?

5 min

In small groups, discuss:

- "Who's got a point here?"
- "What do the students mean by respect? What do the teachers mean?"
- "Is the new rule actually going to fix anything?"
- "What happens when a teacher and a student disagree about what's respectful?"
- "Who gets the final say? Is that fair?"
- "What else would you need to know before deciding who's right?"

Part B You're in charge now

7 min

Tell students:

- "Congratulations. You're now in charge of fixing the school culture.
- "There's just one catch: You can't make everyone like each other. You can't make everyone agree. And you definitely can't make everyone respect each other.
- "But you can build a school where everyone's dignity matters.

> "So what would that actually look like?"

Have groups come up with three principles for how people should treat each other.

Their ideas need to work even when:

- A student thinks a teacher is completely wrong.
- A teacher needs to deal with a student who's disrupting class.
- Two students genuinely can't stand each other.
- Someone does something harmful and needs to face consequences.

Ask groups to share their ideas.

Invite other students to challenge them.

> "Would that actually work?"

> "What happens when someone breaks your rule?"

> "Who decides what's fair?"

> "Does your rule protect students and adults equally?"

Part C Now make it harder

3 min

Add this complication:

> "There's a student who keeps making cruel comments about another student. They've been warned multiple times, but they won't stop.

> "The student being targeted says, 'I don't care about that person's dignity. I just want them out of my class.'"

Ask:

> "Is that a reasonable thing to want?"

> "What should the school do?"

> "Would removing the student who keeps making the comments violate their dignity?"

> "What would it look like to hold that student accountable without humiliating them?"

> "Can you protect one person's dignity while giving another person serious consequences?"

End with:

> "Maybe a school doesn't need everyone to respect each other. Maybe it needs everyone to understand that nobody's worth is up for debate. Would that actually change anything?"

Allow students to challenge the premise.

6 CLOSING
What changed in your thinking?

3 min

Return to the statement from the beginning:

> "Everyone deserves respect."

Ask:

> "Still agree? Would you change anything about that statement now?"

Then invite students to consider:

> "What changed in your thinking?"

They may write privately, discuss, or simply reflect.

Close with:

> "Here's what makes this interesting. You're going to spend your whole life around people you don't agree with. Some of them you won't like. Some you won't trust. Some will genuinely hurt you.

> "And sometimes, you're going to be the person who gets it wrong.

> "The question isn't whether we can all get along.

> "It's whether we can figure out how to live together without making someone's worth depend on whether we like them."

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

The lesson should remain an inquiry rather than a demand for agreement.

Protect these distinctions:

- Dignity is inherent, equal, and cannot be lost.
- Respect, trust, admiration, and approval can change.
- Recognizing dignity does not require forgiveness, reconciliation, or tolerating mistreatment.

- Anger and protective impulses are normal human experiences, but they do not automatically justify harmful behavior.
- A school can recognize everyone's dignity while maintaining boundaries, enforcing consequences, and protecting people from harm.
- Students must be free to question whether authority figures and institutions are acting consistently with the principles being taught.
- Students should not be required to disclose personal experiences, demonstrate compassion toward someone who harmed them, or adopt the facilitator's conclusions.

WHAT'S NEXT

Looking ahead to Lesson 2

Lesson 1 established that our dignity doesn't change, even when someone treats us badly.

Lesson 2 asks a new question:

> "If nobody can take away your worth, why can one stupid comment still ruin your entire day?"

Students will explore the Elements of Dignity, why certain experiences get under our skin, and how understanding our reactions can give us more choices about what happens next.

LESSON 02

Why Does That Bother Me So Much?

02

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Something can threaten my sense of worth without changing my actual worth.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Why do some experiences get under our skin more than others?

Facilitator overview

In Lesson 1, students examined the distinction between dignity and respect, and practiced separating mistakes from judgments about their worth.

Lesson 2 introduces the ten Elements of Dignity as a language for understanding why certain experiences feel personally threatening.

Rather than telling students which experiences should upset them, we invite them to investigate why the same event can affect different people in dramatically different ways.

Students will explore dignity triggers, examine the interpretations that intensify emotional reactions, and practice using the Elements to understand an experience before deciding how to respond.

Materials

The Wild Feelings ten Elements of Dignity handout, scenario cards below, paper or a private writing space, and a board.

Use the existing Wild Feelings language for the Elements rather than inventing a replacement framework.

The 60-minute experience

1 OPENING

Same comment, different reaction

0–7 min

Present this scenario:

> A teacher says to a student in front of the class, "You usually have better ideas than that."

Ask students:

> Is that a compliment, criticism, encouragement, embarrassment, or something else?

Invite several interpretations.

Then add information one piece at a time:

- The student worked on the idea all weekend.
- The teacher has a reputation for being sarcastic.
- The student usually feels respected by this teacher.
- Other students laughed when the teacher said it.

After each detail, ask whether their interpretation changes.

The intellectual move: Students begin to recognize that events do not arrive with one universally agreed-upon meaning. Context, prior experiences, relationships, and perceived threats influence interpretation.

Avoid declaring which interpretation is correct.

2 CONCEPT Your dignity has an alarm system

7–22 min

Introduce the idea of a dignity alarm as a metaphor for what happens when we perceive that something important about our worth or standing is being threatened.

Explain:

> "Your dignity doesn't disappear when someone embarrasses, excludes, or dismisses you. But it can certainly feel threatened. And that feeling can shape what you think happened and what you want to do next."

Distribute the ten Elements of Dignity.

Give students a few minutes to read them and identify which might be involved in the opening scenario.

Possible interpretations include:

- Acknowledgment: The student may feel their effort was overlooked.
- Recognition: The student may feel their contribution was diminished.
- Safety: Public criticism may make participation feel risky.
- Understanding: The student may believe the teacher misunderstood their intention.
- Fairness: The student may perceive a different standard being applied to them.

The point is not to identify the single correct Element.

Ask:

> "How might identifying what feels threatened change the way someone understands their reaction?"

Then introduce a crucial distinction:

A feeling is real. Our first explanation for that feeling may be incomplete.

A student can genuinely feel embarrassed without knowing whether the teacher intended embarrassment.

And the teacher's intentions do not automatically erase the impact.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Dignity alarms are a useful interpretive metaphor, not a clinical diagnosis or a claim that every emotional reaction has one biological cause.

Avoid using the Elements to tell students what they really feel. The Elements offer possible interpretations, not labels adults impose on students.

3 SELF What sets people off?

22–32 min

Introduce three everyday experiences:

- **A** Someone makes a decision that affects you without asking for your input.
- **B** You contribute an idea to a group, but someone else gets the credit.
- **C** Your friends make plans in front of you without inviting you.

Ask:

> Which of these situations might bother different people most, and why?

Then invite a private reflection:

> "Are there particular Elements of Dignity that you tend to notice quickly when they feel threatened?"

Students may consider themselves or a fictional character.

Do not collect responses or ask students to rank their vulnerabilities publicly.

After a few minutes, introduce this possibility:

The things that bother us most can sometimes tell us something about what matters to us.

Invite students to consider how that information might be useful without treating every uncomfortable feeling as proof that someone else has done something wrong.

4 SKILL

What happened, and what story did I tell?

32–55 min

This is the primary thinking practice.

Present the following fictional situation:

STUDENT SCENARIO

Left on Read

Sam sends a message to a close friend asking whether they want to hang out over the weekend.

The friend reads the message but doesn't respond.

Several hours later, Sam sees that the friend has posted photos from an outing with other people.

Sam immediately thinks:

> *"They don't actually care about me. I'm always the backup friend."*

Sam starts drafting a message:

> *"Don't worry about responding. Clearly you have better people to spend time with."*

Part A Separate observation from interpretation

7 min

Ask students to identify what Sam actually knows.

Then ask what Sam is assuming.

Use a simple distinction:

What Sam knows	What Sam is interpreting
The message was read	The friend doesn't care
There has been no response	Sam is the backup friend
The friend posted photos with others	Sam was deliberately excluded

Ask whether Sam's interpretation is possible, certain, or unsupported.

The answer is not that Sam is necessarily wrong. It is that Sam doesn't yet have enough information to know.

Part B Use the language of dignity

8 min

Ask students which Elements might help explain Sam's reaction.

Inclusion, acknowledgment, recognition, and understanding may all be relevant.

Then ask:

> If Sam understood what felt threatened, would that automatically tell Sam what to do?

It shouldn't.

Recognizing a dignity concern is the beginning of interpretation, not the end of decision-making.

Part C Generate options

8 min

Invite students to propose three possible responses:

- One that reacts immediately to the perceived threat.
- One that avoids addressing the situation entirely.
- One that creates room for more information while protecting Sam's dignity.

Encourage students to develop their own language.

An example of the third might be:

> "Hey, I saw your post and felt a little left out. Are we good?"

But students should be free to challenge whether that response fits the relationship or situation.

Complicate the scenario:

> What if this has happened repeatedly for six months, and Sam has already brought it up twice?

Ask how the new information changes the options.

This is essential: Curiosity is not an obligation to tolerate repeated mistreatment.

Students should be able to recognize that boundaries or stepping back from the friendship may be appropriate.

5 CLOSING
What changed in your thinking?

55–60 min

Return to the opening scenario.

Ask:

> What changed in your thinking about why certain experiences bother people so much?

Offer two additional private reflection questions:

> What might change if I could recognize which part of my dignity feels threatened before deciding what someone else's behavior means?

> Can something feel personal without necessarily being about my worth?

Close with a distinction rather than a motivational statement:

Feeling threatened and being worth less are two very different things.

Facilitator adaptation notes

Organizations can replace the teacher-comment or group-chat scenarios with locally relevant situations. They should preserve the opportunity to distinguish events from interpretations, identify dignity concerns, and consider multiple possible responses.

The facilitator should not use this lesson to tell students they are overreacting, misinterpreting events, or responsible for making mistreatment feel less painful.

The purpose is to expand students' interpretive options, not dismiss their experiences.

What we're deliberately practicing

Students are beginning to develop a sequence they will use repeatedly throughout the curriculum:

What happened?

What might it mean to me?

Which dignity concerns might be involved?

What else could be true?

What choices do I have?

This is not a rigid script students must follow in every conflict. It's a scaffold for developing more flexible thinking.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 3

Lesson 2 has focused on understanding our own reactions.

Lesson 3 begins expanding the lens:

> What happens when someone else's need to matter collides with mine?

That's where we begin explicitly practicing cognitive empathy and exploring how two people can experience the same conflict differently.

And it is where our central principle becomes increasingly important:

My need to matter does not diminish anyone else's right to matter.

LESSON 03

Everybody Wants to Matter

03

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

My need to matter does not diminish anyone else's right to matter.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What happens when two people's needs to matter collide?

Facilitator overview

In Lesson 1, students explored the distinction between their worth and their behavior. In Lesson 2, they investigated why certain experiences feel threatening even when their inherent dignity remains unchanged.

Now we introduce a complication: Everybody else is walking around with the same fundamental needs.

People want to be included, understood, recognized, taken seriously, and able to influence what happens to them. These needs don't disappear when people disagree. In fact, disagreements can make them more visible.

This lesson introduces cognitive empathy, the ability to consider another person's perspective, motivations, and experiences without necessarily sharing their feelings or agreeing with their conclusions.

Students will investigate how people can experience the same situation differently, how competing needs can create conflict, and how understanding another person's perspective can expand the choices available to us.

The goal is not to teach students to agree, compromise, or prioritize everyone else's needs over their own.

It is to develop the capacity to hold multiple human perspectives in mind without abandoning their own.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Explore the developmental importance of autonomy, belonging, purpose, and mattering.
- Distinguish cognitive empathy from agreement, approval, or forgiveness.

- Recognize that multiple people can have legitimate dignity concerns within the same conflict.
- Practice identifying competing needs without reducing people to villains or victims.
- Consider responses that acknowledge everyone's dignity without requiring everyone to get what they want.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity reference sheet, scenario cards, board or projector, and optional paper for private thinking.

The 60-minute experience

1

OPENING · PROVOCATION

Who's being unreasonable?

0–7 min

Present the following situation without additional context.

A high school student wants to go to a party on Saturday night.

Their parent says no.

The student responds, "You never trust me."

The parent responds, "You haven't given me a reason to."

The argument escalates.

Ask:

> "Who's being unreasonable?"

Let students take positions. Some may immediately identify with the student; others may argue that the parent has a point.

After a few responses, ask:

> What information would you need before you could make a fair judgment?

Invite students to generate questions rather than answers.

Possible questions:

- Why did the parent say no?
- Has the student broken agreements before?
- What kind of party is it?
- Is the student usually allowed to make decisions independently?
- Has the parent explained their reasoning?

Then introduce two additional facts:

1. The student has followed every agreed-upon curfew for the past six months.
2. The parent recently learned that an older sibling lied about where they were going and ended up in an unsafe situation.

Ask:

> "Did the new information change your judgment? Why?"

Do not resolve the disagreement.

The purpose is to demonstrate how quickly we form judgments with incomplete information.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Don't frame the parent as automatically justified because they are the adult, or the student as automatically justified because they want autonomy.

Students should be free to question whether the parent's decision is fair, even after understanding the parent's concerns.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA

Everyone is trying to matter

7–22 min

Return to the opening situation.

Ask:

> What does the student want beyond simply attending the party?

Students might identify independence, trust, inclusion, or the opportunity to make decisions.

Then ask:

> What might the parent want beyond simply controlling the situation?

Students might identify safety, responsibility, trust, or reassurance.

Introduce four developmental needs that are particularly salient during adolescence:

Autonomy

Having meaningful influence over decisions that affect your life.

Belonging

Feeling included and connected to people and groups that matter to you.

Purpose

Feeling that your actions connect to something meaningful.

Mattering

Feeling that you are significant, that your presence and contributions count.

Explain that these needs are human, not exclusively adolescent. But adolescence is an especially important period for exploring identity, social belonging, independence, and meaningful contribution.

The complication: Two people can both have understandable needs and still disagree about what should happen.

Return to the Dignity Elements.

Ask students which Elements might be relevant to the student and parent.

For example:

Student	Parent
Independence	Safety
Fairness	Accountability
Understanding	Understanding
Recognition	Benefit of the Doubt

These are possible interpretations, not definitive diagnoses of either person.

Introduce cognitive empathy

Define it for students:

Cognitive empathy is the ability to work out how someone else might see or understand a situation, even when you disagree with them.

Clarify three distinctions:

- Understanding someone's perspective does not mean agreeing with it.
- Recognizing someone's dignity does not mean accepting their behavior.
- Considering another person's needs does not require sacrificing your own.

Ask:

> "If you understand why someone did something, does that make what they did okay?"

Let students debate the question.

The key intellectual move is separating explanation from justification.

3

SELF · MAKING MEANING

What do we assume about other people?

22–32 min

Present four familiar interpretations of behavior:

> "They're ignoring me because they think they're better than everyone." "She's controlling because she always needs to be in charge." "He only disagrees because he wants attention." "They don't care about the group because they never contribute."

Ask:

> What do all four statements have in common?

Students may recognize that each statement claims to know someone else's motivation.

Introduce the distinction between observing behavior and assigning motive.

We can observe that someone interrupted, withdrew, refused, or failed to contribute.

We cannot always know why.

Ask:

> "Why are we often so confident about what other people are thinking?"

Allow room for humor and disagreement.

Invite students to consider privately:

> Think of a time someone misunderstood your intentions. What did they assume about you that they couldn't actually know?

Alternatively, students may consider a fictional example.

Then ask a broader question:

> If people sometimes misunderstand our intentions, what does that suggest about how confidently we should interpret other people's?

This is an opportunity to introduce intellectual humility without suggesting that all interpretations are equally plausible.

FACILITATOR NOTE

Cognitive empathy is not endless excuse-making. Sometimes behavior provides strong evidence of a person's intentions, especially when patterns repeat.

The skill is recognizing the difference between what we know, what we infer, and what we still need to understand.

4

SKILL · PRACTICING COGNITIVE EMPATHY

Two people, one conflict

32–55 min

Introduce a fictional situation.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Group Project Takeover

Four students are working on a major group project.

Jordan has been organizing the work, assigning tasks, and reminding everyone about deadlines.

Casey is increasingly frustrated.

During a meeting, Casey says:

> *"You act like you're everyone's boss. It's exhausting."*

Jordan responds:

> *"Someone has to make sure this actually gets done."*

Casey stops participating.

Jordan tells the other group members that Casey is lazy and impossible to work with.

Part A Build two plausible interpretations

7 min

Divide students into pairs or small groups.

Ask them to construct two accounts of the situation:

> Jordan's perspective: What might Jordan be worried about, trying to protect, or hoping to accomplish?

> Casey's perspective: What might Casey be worried about, trying to protect, or hoping to accomplish?

Require each interpretation to be plausible based on the scenario, not invented certainty.

Students may suggest that Jordan is concerned about grades, responsibility, and being let down. Casey may be concerned about autonomy, respect, and having a meaningful voice.

Then ask:

> What important information is missing?

Part B Identify the dignity concerns

6 min

Using the Elements of Dignity, students identify what might be at stake for each person.

Possible examples:

Jordan	Casey
Accountability	Independence
Recognition	Acknowledgment
Fairness	Fairness
Understanding	Understanding

Ask:

> "Can both people have legitimate concerns while both are also contributing to the problem?"

Explore Jordan's gossip and Casey's withdrawal without automatically treating the behaviors as equally harmful.

The goal is to hold complexity without collapsing into "everyone is equally wrong."

Part C The new information

5 min

Reveal additional details:

> Jordan has been doing most of the work because two other group members repeatedly missed deadlines.

> Casey previously offered to design the presentation, but Jordan rejected the idea without discussing it.

> Casey has also missed two planning meetings without letting anyone know.

Ask students to reconsider their interpretations.

> What changed? What didn't?

> Does understanding Jordan's frustration excuse calling Casey lazy?

> Does understanding Casey's frustration excuse missing meetings?

This is where students practice separating understandable needs from accountable choices.

Part D Find a third option

5 min

Present two possible outcomes:

Option A: Jordan stays in charge, and Casey is expected to cooperate.

Option B: Jordan steps back completely, and Casey takes control.

Ask:

> "Are those really the only two options?"

Invite students to develop another approach that takes both people's concerns seriously.

They might propose shared responsibilities, agreed-upon deadlines, explicit decision-making roles, or involving the teacher if the group cannot resolve the conflict.

Students do not have to reach a harmonious resolution.

The question is whether their proposed approach recognizes the dignity and legitimate needs of everyone involved while addressing actual behavior.

5

CLOSING · REFLECTION

Understanding isn't surrender

55–60 min

Return to the opening party scenario.

Ask:

> If you could help both the student and parent understand one thing about the other's perspective, what would it be?

Then offer the recurring reflection:

> What changed in your thinking?

Students may reflect privately, discuss, or simply consider the question.

End with one final provocation:

> "Is it possible to understand someone completely and still disagree with them?"

Leave space for students to consider the distinction rather than resolving it for them.

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 2 helped students recognize the difference between events and their own interpretations.

Lesson 3 adds another layer: their interpretation is not the only one that exists.

THINKING TOOL

Cognitive Empathy Scaffold

1. What do I know actually happened?
2. How am I interpreting it?
3. How might someone else understand the same situation?
4. What needs or dignity concerns might be involved?
5. What remains uncertain?
6. What choices become possible when I consider more than one perspective?

The scaffold isn't intended as a worksheet students must complete in every conflict. It gives them a structure for practicing increasingly sophisticated reasoning.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

The group project can be replaced with a situation involving friendships, extracurricular activities, student leadership, athletics, or another relevant context.

Preserve the ambiguity and the competing needs. Avoid scenarios with an obvious villain and an obvious hero, because they offer little opportunity to practice cognitive empathy.

Also protect three important distinctions:

- Empathy is not agreement. Students may understand someone's motivation and still reject their behavior or decision.
- Dignity is not equal power. In situations involving authority, understanding the authority figure's perspective does not make their decision fair or legitimate.
- Complexity is not equivalence. Two people can contribute to a conflict without carrying equal responsibility for the harm.

No personal disclosure is required, and students do not need to demonstrate compassion toward anyone who has harmed them.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 4

We've now established that conflict can involve multiple legitimate needs and interpretations.

But there's another complication.

Even when we know how to think through a situation, we don't always do it when we're upset.

Lesson 4, Your Brain Has Entered the Chat, will investigate why emotional arousal can narrow our attention, increase defensiveness, and make it harder to access the thinking skills we already possess.

The next capacity is not simply understanding conflict. It's learning how to create enough space to choose what to do with that understanding.

LESSON 04

Your Brain Has Entered the Chat

04

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Our reactions are shaped by what we feel, what we believe, and what the world rewards. We can learn to examine all three before deciding what to do.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION If the world sometimes rewards people for violating dignity, why should we choose differently?

Facilitator overview

We ask adolescents to manage their emotions, think before they speak, and treat other people with dignity.

Meanwhile, they watch adults insult strangers online, humiliate opponents, spread outrage, and sometimes gain extraordinary attention, status, and power by doing so.

They see public officials, celebrities, influencers, and other authority figures engage in behavior that would result in consequences at school.

Students are not imagining this contradiction.

And if we teach emotional regulation without acknowledging it, we risk sending an intellectually dishonest message: Follow these rules because adults say they're important, even when adults don't follow them.

This lesson takes the contradiction seriously.

Students investigate why intense emotions can narrow thinking, why reactive behavior can feel rewarding, and how social environments can encourage escalation. They examine how power changes the consequences of behavior and practice making intentional choices without assuming that dignity will always be rewarded.

The goal is not to teach students to be calmer than the adults around them. It is to help them become more deliberate about how they use their own power.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Examine the gap between the behavior society claims to value and the behavior it sometimes rewards.
- Understand how emotional arousal can influence attention, interpretation, and decision-making.
- Distinguish impulsive reactions from deliberate aggression and socially rewarded behavior.
- Recognize how dignity concerns, status, belonging, and power can influence responses to conflict.
- Practice evaluating immediate rewards, longer-term consequences, and available choices.
- Explore why dignity-based action can include confrontation, boundaries, protest, and accountability rather than silence or compliance.

Materials

Board or projector, Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity reference sheet, scenario cards, and optional paper for private reflection.

No current political posts or named public figures are required. Facilitators may use carefully contextualized, verified examples if appropriate for their setting, but the lesson must remain open to examining powerful people and institutions, including those students encounter locally.

The 60-minute experience

1

OPENING · PROVOCATION

Why do adults get away with it?

0–8 min

Present two situations.

Situation A: At school

A student publicly insults another student, mocks their appearance, and encourages others to pile on.

The incident is reported to school administrators.

Situation B: In public life

A powerful adult publicly insults an opponent, mocks their appearance, and encourages an audience to ridicule them.

The incident attracts widespread attention.

Ask students:

> "What consequences might each person face?"

Invite students to name a range of possibilities.

For the student: discipline, social consequences, loss of trust, increased popularity, or retaliation.

For the adult: public criticism, applause, greater visibility, loss of support, increased influence, or professional consequences.

Do not assume the student will always be punished or the adult will always escape consequences.

Write the possibilities in two columns.

Then ask:

> "What does it teach young people when adults are rewarded for behavior they're told not to engage in?"

Allow students to name the hypocrisy directly.

Follow with:

> "Does having more power make someone more responsible for how they behave, or less?"

> "Who gets to decide which behavior is acceptable?"

> "Are those standards enforced equally?"

Resist the temptation to reassure students that good behavior is always rewarded.

It isn't.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Students may name the president, political leaders, school administrators, parents, teachers, influencers, or other public figures.

Do not redirect them simply because the examples are politically uncomfortable.

Invite students to examine specific conduct and its consequences rather than requiring agreement about a person's overall character or politics.

The facilitator is also subject to the same dignity principles being explored. Students must be free to question whether the school itself applies its standards consistently.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA

Your brain is trying to help. Sometimes badly.

8–20 min

Begin with:

> "Why do intelligent people sometimes make terrible decisions when they're upset?"

Invite students to suggest explanations.

They may identify anger, embarrassment, fear, impulsivity, revenge, wanting attention, or wanting to win.

Explain that emotions and reasoning are not separate systems taking turns controlling us.

When we experience something as threatening or highly significant, our attention, interpretations, bodily responses, and priorities can shift.

Under emotional intensity, we may focus more strongly on immediate protection, relief, or action. It can become harder to consider alternative explanations and longer-term consequences.

This does not mean the brain's reasoning systems simply switch off. Nor does it mean that strong emotions necessarily produce poor decisions.

Four common protective responses

Introduce these as useful descriptive patterns rather than fixed personality categories.

Fight

Arguing, attacking, blaming, escalating, or attempting to regain control.

Flight

Leaving, avoiding, disengaging, or escaping the situation.

Freeze

Going blank, becoming overwhelmed, or struggling to respond.

Appease

Agreeing, placating, or setting aside one's preferences to reduce conflict.

Ask:

> "Are these reactions always bad?"

Encourage students to identify circumstances in which fighting back, leaving, pausing, or accommodating might be protective.

Then introduce a complication.

Not all harmful behavior is impulsive.

Someone might lash out because they're overwhelmed.

Someone else might insult another person because they have learned that doing so earns attention, strengthens loyalty, or establishes dominance.

And sometimes both things are happening.

Ask:

> "How would you tell the difference between someone losing control and someone using aggression strategically?"

Students may suggest looking at patterns, timing, audience, repeated behavior, and what the person gains.

Clarify that we cannot reliably infer someone's internal state from one incident alone.

Connect to dignity

Return to the Elements of Dignity.

When someone feels excluded, humiliated, dismissed, or powerless, their reaction may reflect concerns about Inclusion, Safety, Recognition, Independence, or other Elements.

But identifying what feels threatened does not automatically tell us which action will be most useful.

An emotional reaction can alert us that something matters without determining what we should do next.

3

SELF · MAKING MEANING

What works now, and what works later?

20–30 min

Present four familiar behaviors:

- **A** Someone embarrasses you, so you make a joke at their expense.
- **B** You receive criticism, so you immediately attack the person who criticized you.
- **C** Someone upsets you, so you ignore them until they apologize.
- **D** You disagree with someone powerful, but you pretend to agree because you're worried about the consequences.

Ask students to choose one behavior to investigate.

They can discuss in pairs or consider the questions privately.

Question 1: What might this behavior accomplish immediately?

It could provide relief, attention, status, protection, a sense of control, or a way to avoid consequences.

Question 2: What might it cost?

It could damage relationships, reinforce a harmful pattern, create consequences, or require someone else to absorb the harm.

Question 3: Does the behavior work?

Introduce the concept of workability, drawn from emotional agility.

A response can work for one goal and undermine another.

A public insult might attract attention but damage trust. Silence might preserve safety in the moment but allow a harmful pattern to continue.

Ask:

> "Works for what? For whom? At whose expense? For how long?"

Invite students to consider whether there are situations in which they feel pressure to respond in ways that don't match what matters to them.

They may reflect privately or use a fictional example.

No personal disclosure is required.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Don't imply that the person facing harm is responsible for fixing an unfair environment through better emotional regulation.

Sometimes the most important change needs to happen in the group, institution, or system rather than in the individual experiencing the harm.

4

SKILL, PART A · ANALYZING POWER AND INCENTIVES

The double standard

30–42 min

Present two fictional situations.

SCENARIO A

The Student

A student publicly mocks a classmate online.

Other students join in. The original poster gains followers and becomes more popular.

The targeted student stops attending school for several days.

School administrators discipline the student who started the posts.

SCENARIO B

The Public Official

A prominent public official repeatedly mocks an opponent online.

Supporters celebrate the posts. The official gains attention and influence.

Critics argue that the behavior encourages harassment and makes public debate more hostile.

The official faces criticism but retains their position.

Divide students into small groups.

Ask them to investigate four questions.

What is each person gaining?

Consider attention, status, influence, belonging, control, or approval.

Who pays the price?

Consider the target, the audience, the institution, and the broader community.

How does power change the consequences?

Who can enforce rules? Who can challenge them? Who is protected?

If the behavior is rewarded, why choose differently?

What reasons exist beyond avoiding punishment or gaining approval?

Bring the group back together.

Invite competing arguments.

Some students may argue that refusing to engage in aggression is a disadvantage in environments that reward it.

Others may argue that responding with similar aggression reproduces the very conditions they object to.

Both positions create opportunities for deeper inquiry.

Ask:

> **"Can a behavior be effective at gaining power while still violating dignity?"**

> **"Does the fact that something is rewarded tell us whether it is worth doing?"**

> **"What responsibility do institutions have when their rules and incentives contradict their stated values?"**

Do not demand consensus.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This discussion must not become a demand that students respect authority simply because someone holds a position of power.

Students should be free to criticize leaders, school policies, institutional hypocrisy, and unequal enforcement.

Encourage evidence-based distinctions between criticizing someone's decisions, challenging their legitimacy, and denying their inherent human dignity.

Political disagreement is permitted. Harassment or personal attacks against classmates are not.

5 SKILL, PART B · PRACTICING INTENTIONAL CHOICE
The screenshot

42–55 min

Now bring the lesson back to a situation where students can practice making choices.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Screenshot

Alex shares something personal with Morgan in a private conversation.

Later, Alex discovers that Morgan took a screenshot and sent it to a group chat.

Someone in the group posts a laughing reaction.

Alex confronts Morgan.

Morgan says:

> *"Relax. It wasn't that serious. You're being dramatic."*

Alex feels humiliated and furious.

Alex wants to post screenshots of Morgan's private messages in retaliation.

Part 1 Understand the reaction

4 min

Ask:

- What does Alex have a legitimate reason to be upset about?
- Which Elements of Dignity might be involved?
- What could retaliation accomplish immediately?
- What could it cost Alex or others?

Establish that Morgan's behavior has already created a real problem. This is not simply a misunderstanding that Alex needs to think more positively about.

Part 2 Separate feeling, urge, and choice

4 min

FEELING

> "I'm furious."

URGE

> "I want to expose Morgan."

CHOICE

> "What will I actually do?"

Explain that feelings, urges, and actions are related but not identical.

We don't always choose what we feel or what impulses arise. We can often develop greater influence over what we do next.

Ask:

> "What would Alex need in order to make a deliberate choice rather than act on the immediate urge?"

Part 3 Find a response that works

5 min

Ask students to generate several options, including responses that:

- Establish a clear boundary.
- Seek accountability.
- Protect Alex from further harm.
- Challenge Morgan without retaliating against someone else's dignity.

Possible responses include confronting Morgan directly, seeking support from a trusted adult, requesting that the screenshot be deleted, reporting the privacy violation, or distancing themselves from the friendship.

Students should also consider whether retaliation might escalate the situation or expose Alex to additional consequences.

Then introduce one complication:

> Morgan refuses to apologize. The screenshot continues circulating. Other students are joining in.

Ask:

> "What changes when the problem is no longer just between two people?"

Students may recognize that Alex needs institutional support, collective intervention, or other protective action.

This is an important distinction.

Dignity-based action does not mean handling mistreatment quietly or alone.

6 CLOSING · REFLECTION, NOT EVALUATION

Why bother?

55–60 min

Return to the opening contradiction.

Ask:

> "If the world sometimes rewards people for violating dignity, what makes dignity worth practicing?"

Allow several responses without resolving the question.

Then offer the recurring reflection:

> What changed in your thinking?

And a final question for private consideration:

> "What changes when we stop asking only whether a behavior works and start asking what kind of world it helps create?"

Students may reflect privately, discuss, or simply consider the question.

Close with:

You cannot always control what the world rewards. But you can investigate what your choices reinforce, challenge, or make possible.

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 4 adds an important dimension to the first three lessons.

Previously, students practiced distinguishing dignity from behavior, examining interpretations, and considering other perspectives.

Now they examine how emotional intensity and social incentives influence which choices feel available, attractive, or worthwhile.

THINKING TOOL

The Expanding Thinking Scaffold

1. What happened, and what do I actually know?
2. What am I feeling, and what might feel threatened?
3. What interpretations or perspectives am I missing?
4. What does my immediate reaction promise to accomplish?
5. What is this environment rewarding or discouraging?
6. Who benefits, who bears the costs, and how does power affect the situation?
7. What response serves my goals without unnecessarily violating anyone's dignity, including my own?

These are thinking moves, not a required worksheet or a test of emotional maturity.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

Organizations can replace the fictional public official with an example involving a celebrity, influencer, school leader, business executive, or other powerful adult.

However, adaptation must not erase the core contradiction: institutions and authority figures sometimes reward, excuse, or engage in behavior they condemn in others.

Facilitators should preserve the opportunity to examine unequal power and inconsistent accountability.

The lesson must not become a partisan loyalty test, a demand for obedience, or an argument that emotional regulation means remaining silent in the face of injustice.

Students can practice dignity while expressing anger, criticizing authority, challenging institutional decisions, organizing collectively, or refusing to participate in harmful situations.

For the screenshot scenario, facilitators should follow school safeguarding procedures if students disclose actual harassment, privacy violations, or threats.

No personal disclosure or emotional performance is required.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 5: The Nice Trap

Lesson 4 examined the ways people can gain power, attention, or status through open aggression.

But there's another way dignity gets violated, and it's often harder to see.

Sometimes a group looks perfectly friendly on the surface while resentment, exclusion, gossip, and indirect hostility operate underneath.

Sometimes people are so afraid of being seen as mean that they never address harm directly.

And sometimes institutions value politeness more than honesty because politeness is easier to manage.

That brings us to Lesson 5:

> Can being nice actually make you a worse friend?

We'll investigate the difference between niceness and dignity, why conflict avoidance can create harm, and how to disagree or confront someone without abandoning their humanity or our own.

LESSON 05

The Nice Trap

05

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Being nice and honoring dignity are not always the same thing. Sometimes treating people with dignity requires honesty, disagreement, boundaries, and the willingness to make things uncomfortable.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Can being nice actually make you a worse friend?

Facilitator overview

Students are frequently encouraged to be nice, avoid drama, get along, and treat others the way they want to be treated.

Those expectations are often well-intentioned. But they can create a problem.

When maintaining harmony becomes more important than addressing harm, conflict doesn't necessarily disappear. It can move underground.

People agree publicly and complain privately. They avoid difficult conversations and quietly exclude one another. They say "It's fine" when it isn't. They mistake politeness for safety and silence for agreement.

And sometimes the person who finally names the problem gets labeled as the one creating the drama.

This lesson examines the difference between niceness, kindness, and dignity, with particular attention to indirect aggression, conflict avoidance, and the social costs of telling the truth.

Students will explore why people avoid confrontation, how apparently friendly groups can become hostile, and what it takes to disagree or establish boundaries without denying anyone's inherent worth.

The goal is not to convince students to become more confrontational.

It's to help them recognize that discomfort is not automatically harm, and harmony is not automatically health.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Distinguish niceness, kindness, and dignity without treating them as mutually exclusive.

- Recognize how gossip, exclusion, and indirect hostility can operate beneath apparently friendly group dynamics.
- Examine the social incentives that reward silence and punish disagreement.
- Consider how dignity can require honesty, boundaries, and accountability.
- Practice expressing disagreement without attacking someone's identity or worth.
- Distinguish productive discomfort from situations in which direct confrontation may be unsafe or inappropriate.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheet, board or projector, scenario cards, and optional paper for private reflection.

The 60-minute experience

1

OPENING · PROVOCATION

Who's actually causing the drama?

0–8 min

Present the following situation.

A group of friends has been complaining privately about one member, Riley, for weeks.

They think Riley dominates conversations, makes decisions for everyone, and gets upset when people disagree.

Nobody says anything directly to Riley.

Instead, they create a separate group chat to vent.

Eventually, another friend, Devon, says:

> "This is getting ridiculous. If we have a problem with Riley, we should actually talk about it."

Someone responds:

> "Why are you trying to start drama? Can't we just keep things chill?"

Ask:

> "Who's creating the drama?"

Invite competing interpretations.

Students may identify Riley, the group, Devon, or several people.

Then complicate the question:

> "What if Devon is the first person who has said anything uncomfortable out loud?"

> "Is Devon creating conflict or revealing conflict that already exists?"

> "What does the group gain by keeping the problem private?"

Allow students to challenge the assumption that direct confrontation is always preferable. Perhaps Riley has previously retaliated against people who disagreed.

Ask what additional information would matter.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Don't resolve this by declaring that gossip is bad and direct communication is good.

Students should investigate why people gossip, what it accomplishes, what harm it can cause, and when a direct conversation might be ineffective or unsafe.

The distinction between seeking support and recruiting people into hostility will become important.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA

Nice isn't the same as dignified

8–23 min

Begin with a question:

> "What does it actually mean when someone says, 'Just be nice'?"

Invite students to identify different possibilities.

It might mean:

- Don't deliberately hurt people.
- Be polite.
- Avoid conflict.
- Don't embarrass anyone.
- Don't challenge authority.
- Make other people comfortable.
- Treat people with consideration.

Ask whether these expectations are always compatible.

Then introduce three concepts.

Niceness

Often concerns how behavior appears to others: politeness, pleasantness, friendliness, or avoiding visible conflict.

Niceness can be genuine and valuable. It can also conceal resentment, fear, or exclusion.

Kindness

Concerns acting with care for another person's well-being.

Kindness can involve comfort and support, but it may also require honesty or difficult feedback.

Dignity

Concerns recognizing and honoring the inherent worth of every person, including ourselves.

Dignity does not depend on whether an interaction feels pleasant or whether everyone agrees.

Explain that these are working distinctions for discussion, not three universally fixed psychological categories.

Niceness and kindness can express dignity. The problem arises when appearing nice becomes more important than how people are actually treated.

Test the distinction

Present four situations.

Situation	Nice?	Dignity-honoring?
You compliment someone's presentation even though you know they asked for honest feedback.	Possibly	Depends
You privately tell a friend their joke was hurtful.	Maybe uncomfortable	Potentially
You smile at someone in person while encouraging others to exclude them.	On the surface	No
You refuse a request and explain your boundary respectfully.	Not necessarily pleasing	Potentially

Invite students to disagree with the categories and defend their reasoning.

Ask:

> "Can you make someone uncomfortable while still treating them with dignity?"

Then:

> "Can you make someone feel comfortable while participating in something harmful?"

Introduce relational aggression

Explain that aggression is not always loud or direct.

It can also involve damaging someone's relationships or social standing through exclusion, rumor-spreading, social manipulation, or other indirect behavior.

These patterns are sometimes called relational aggression.

Relational aggression is not limited to any gender, and not every instance of exclusion or private conversation is aggression.

The important questions involve intention, pattern, power, and impact.

Return to the opening scenario.

Ask:

> "At what point does privately discussing a problem become organizing against someone?"

> "What's the difference between getting advice from a friend and building a coalition against another person?"

Connect to the existing Wild Feelings practice Avoid Insecure Connection Through Gossip.

Discuss how criticizing a shared target can create a quick sense of belonging within a group, even while damaging someone else's belonging.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Students must be able to seek advice, disclose mistreatment, document harmful conduct, and report abuse without having those actions mislabeled as gossip.

The question is whether a conversation seeks understanding, support, protection, or accountability, versus whether it uses another person's humiliation or exclusion to create connection.

3 SELF · MAKING MEANING
What does it cost to disagree?

23–33 min

Present these situations.

- **A** Everyone in a group is laughing at a joke you think went too far.
- **B** A friend asks whether you agree with their interpretation of an argument. You don't.
- **C** A student leader makes a decision that seems unfair, but questioning it might make you unpopular.
- **D** An adult asks everyone to be respectful but dismisses students who challenge a school policy.

Ask:

> "Which situation might be hardest to speak up in, and why?"

Students can discuss the situations generally without identifying personal experiences.

Explore possible costs:

- Losing approval or social standing.
- Being labeled difficult, dramatic, or disrespectful.

- Damaging a valued relationship.
- Experiencing retaliation.
- Being misunderstood.
- Feeling isolated.

Then ask:

> "Who gets to be honest without paying a social price?"

Invite students to consider how popularity, authority, group status, and institutional power can influence who feels able to disagree.

This is an important connection to Lesson 4.

Sometimes people avoid conflict because they lack courage.

But sometimes they avoid conflict because they have accurately recognized that speaking up carries real risks.

Those are not the same situation.

Private reflection

Offer students a choice:

> What might someone sacrifice when they prioritize being liked over being honest?

> What might someone sacrifice when they prioritize being right over preserving another person's dignity?

> How could someone decide whether a difficult conversation is worth having?

Students may consider a fictional person or reflect privately. No sharing or submission is required.

4

SKILL · PRACTICING DIGNITY IN DISAGREEMENT

Say the uncomfortable thing

33–55 min

Introduce a fictional situation.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Group Chat Nobody Talks About

A group of six friends has a group chat.

Over the past month, three members have started making plans without including the others.

When someone asks about it, they respond:

> *"It's not that deep. We're allowed to hang out with whoever we want."*

That's true. Nobody is obligated to invite everyone to everything.

But the same three friends have also been making jokes about the excluded members in a separate chat.

One friend, Avery, finds out.

Avery wants to confront the group but worries about becoming the next person everyone talks about.

Another friend says:

> *"Don't say anything. You'll just make it worse."*

Part A Identify the actual problem

5 min

Ask students to distinguish among three behaviors:

1. Choosing to spend time with some friends and not others.
2. Making jokes about excluded people in a private chat.
3. Dismissing concerns when someone asks about the situation.

Ask:

> "Which behaviors are ordinary social choices, and which raise dignity concerns?"

Students may disagree about where the line falls.

Encourage them to identify the Elements of Dignity that might be involved: Inclusion, Acknowledgment, Fairness, Understanding, and Safety.

Introduce an important distinction:

Recognizing someone's dignity does not entitle them to unlimited access to your time, friendship, or attention.

People are allowed to choose their relationships.

But those choices can still be carried out in ways that humiliate, manipulate, or deliberately exclude others.

Part B Examine four possible responses

7 min

Present four options.

Option A: Keep the peace

Avery says nothing and continues acting as though everything is fine.

Option B: Fight fire with fire

Avery starts a new group chat to mock the three friends and turn other people against them.

Option C: Address the behavior

Avery tells one of the friends, "You can hang out with whoever you want. But making jokes about people behind their backs and then acting like nothing's happening isn't okay with me."

Option D: Establish distance

Avery decides the group no longer feels trustworthy and begins investing in other friendships without attempting a confrontation.

Ask students to evaluate the options.

> **Which responses protect Avery's dignity?**

> **Which recognize the dignity of the other students?**

> **Which create opportunities for accountability?**

> **Which carry risks?**

> **Does Avery owe the group a confrontation before deciding to leave?**

Avoid declaring one universally correct response.

A direct conversation may be appropriate. So may establishing distance.

The context matters.

Part C Practice disagreement without humiliation

7 min

Invite students to rewrite the following statements.

The challenge is not to make them nicer.

The challenge is to preserve the substance of the disagreement without attacking the person's inherent worth.

STATEMENT 1

> **"You're such a fake person. Nobody can trust you."**

STATEMENT 2

> **"You always make everything about yourself."**

STATEMENT 3

> **"You're literally the reason this entire group is falling apart."**

Students can work individually or in pairs.

They should preserve the legitimate concern rather than dilute it into vague politeness.

For example:

> "When you share things I've told you privately, I don't feel like I can trust you with personal information anymore."

Or:

> "I want to be part of decisions that affect the whole group. When you decide everything without asking, it makes me less interested in participating."

Invite students to critique the revised statements.

> "Do these responses actually address the problem, or do they just sound better?"

This distinction matters.

A statement can be perfectly polite and still avoid the truth.

Part D Add a complication

3 min

Reveal:

> Avery previously tried to raise concerns with one of the friends. That person shared the conversation with the entire group and mocked Avery for being sensitive.

Ask:

> "Does Avery still owe this group another honest conversation?"

Invite students to consider boundaries, safety, trust, and the difference between courage and unnecessary exposure to harm.

The intended insight is not that students must confront people regardless of the consequences.

It is that they have more options than silent compliance or retaliation.

5 CLOSING · REFLECTION, NOT EVALUATION
Is keeping the peace always peaceful?

55–60 min

Return to the opening scenario.

Ask:

> "Can someone be the first person to name a problem without being the person who caused it?"

Invite students to revisit their initial interpretations.

Then offer the recurring question:

> What changed in your thinking?

Students may reflect privately or discuss.

Close with one final provocation:

> "If everyone in a group is being nice, what evidence would you need to know whether everyone is actually being treated with dignity?"

Leave the question open.

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 5 adds an important distinction to the skills developed in Lessons 1–4.

Students have practiced separating worth from behavior, examining interpretations, considering perspectives, and making intentional choices.

Now they must recognize that a response can appear socially acceptable while still causing harm, and a response can create discomfort while honoring dignity.

THINKING TOOL

The New Thinking Moves

1. What is the actual problem, rather than simply who seems upset?
2. Is the conflict being addressed or merely hidden?
3. What social rewards or risks are shaping people's choices?
4. Am I seeking support, or building connection through someone else's humiliation?
5. Can I communicate a difficult truth without attacking someone's worth?
6. Is direct confrontation appropriate, or would a boundary, distance, or outside support be more protective?

These questions are not a required worksheet. They are tools for making increasingly sophisticated judgments.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

Organizations may adapt the friendship scenarios to student government, athletics, performing arts, classrooms, extracurricular organizations, or school policy disputes.

However, preserve the central tension between apparent harmony and actual dignity.

Avoid presenting politeness as proof of moral character or direct confrontation as the only courageous response.

Students must remain free to question authority, identify institutional hypocrisy, and challenge expectations that prioritize adult comfort over legitimate student concerns.

The lesson should also avoid treating every uncomfortable interaction as an opportunity for growth. Some situations involve harassment, coercion, discrimination, or ongoing harm. In those cases, safety, support, and boundaries may take priority over dialogue.

No personal disclosure, reconciliation, forgiveness, or public vulnerability is required.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 6: Good People Can Do Harmful Things

Lesson 5 examined what happens when people avoid naming harm, disguise it with politeness, or respond indirectly.

But naming harm creates another challenge.

What happens when someone insists they didn't mean it?

What if their intentions really were good?

And what if understanding their reasons doesn't make the consequences disappear?

Lesson 6 will investigate the relationship between intent and impact, the difference between accountability and shame, and the possibility of repair without requiring forgiveness.

The next provocation: "If you didn't mean to hurt someone, how responsible are you for the harm you caused?"

LESSON 06

Good People Can Do Harmful Things

06

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Understanding why someone caused harm does not erase the harm. Taking responsibility does not erase their dignity.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION If you didn't mean to hurt someone, how responsible are you for the harm you caused?

Facilitator overview

> "I didn't mean it like that."

> "It's just a joke."

> "You're taking it the wrong way."

> "I was only trying to help."

These statements appear in conflicts everywhere, from high school friendships to workplaces, families, and public institutions.

Sometimes they're sincere. People genuinely misunderstand one another, make mistakes, or cause harm they never anticipated.

Other times, explanations about intent become a way to avoid taking responsibility for impact.

And sometimes people are so afraid of being labeled a bad person that they become more invested in defending their identity than understanding what happened.

This lesson explores a difficult question: How do we hold people accountable for harm without reducing them to the worst thing they've done?

Students investigate the distinction between intent and impact, examine why accountability can trigger defensiveness, and practice responding to harm without relying on either shame or excuses.

They will also explore the limits of repair: apologizing does not guarantee forgiveness, understanding does not require reconciliation, and acknowledging someone's dignity does not mean restoring trust.

The goal is not to teach students how to deliver a perfect apology.

It's to help them understand what responsibility actually requires when intentions, consequences, and relationships become complicated.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Distinguish intent, behavior, impact, and responsibility.
- Recognize why people may become defensive when their actions cause harm.
- Explore the difference between accountability and shame.
- Consider when good intentions matter and when they are insufficient.
- Practice responding to harm without minimizing its impact or condemning someone's identity.
- Examine why repair, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored trust are separate possibilities.
- Consider how power affects whose intentions are believed and whose experiences of harm are taken seriously.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheet, board or projector, scenario cards, and optional paper for private reflection.

The lesson draws particularly on the existing Wild Feelings practices Remember Intent and Impact Are Different, Take Responsibility, Try Not to Blame and Shame, Stay Open to Feedback, and Avoid Taking the Bait.

The 60-minute experience

1

OPENING · PROVOCATION

Does intent matter?

0–8 min

Present this situation:

A student is giving a presentation.

Their friend notices they're nervous and decides to make a joke to lighten the mood.

The joke gets a huge laugh.

Unfortunately, it's at the presenter's expense.

The presenter becomes embarrassed, loses their place, and struggles through the rest of the presentation.

Afterward, the friend says:

> "I was trying to help you relax. I didn't mean to embarrass you."

Ask:

> "How much should the friend's intentions matter?"

Invite students to take different positions.

Some may argue that intent matters enormously because the friend was trying to help.

Others may argue that the embarrassment matters regardless of the friend's intentions.

Then ask:

> "Would your answer change if the friend knew the presenter hated being joked about in public?"

Allow students to reconsider.

Add one more detail:

> The presenter had specifically asked the friend not to make jokes during the presentation.

Ask:

> "What changed about the friend's responsibility?"

Students should begin to notice that intent, available information, foreseeable consequences, and previous boundaries all matter when evaluating responsibility.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Avoid turning this into a contest between "intent matters" and "impact matters."

Both can matter, but they answer different questions.

The aim is to develop more precise reasoning about responsibility, not teach students to repeat a slogan.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA

Four things we keep confusing

8–23 min

Introduce four distinctions.

Intent

What someone was trying to accomplish.

> "I wanted everyone to relax."

Behavior

What someone actually did.

> "I made a joke about my friend during their presentation."

Impact

What happened as a result, including how other people were affected.

> "My friend felt embarrassed and struggled to finish."

Responsibility

What someone can reasonably be expected to acknowledge, address, or change.

> "I need to recognize what happened and consider how to make it right."

Explain that these concepts are related but not interchangeable.

A person can have good intentions and cause harm.

A person can cause harm without intending to.

A person can also claim good intentions while knowingly ignoring the likely consequences of their behavior.

And not every negative feeling or disappointing outcome establishes that someone acted wrongly.

The task is to investigate what happened, not assume that intent or impact settles the entire question.

Why accountability can feel threatening

Connect to Lessons 1 and 2.

Ask:

> "Why might someone respond defensively when they're told they hurt another person?"

Students might identify embarrassment, fear of punishment, shame, fear of losing relationships, or the belief that admitting a mistake means admitting they're a bad person.

Return to Lesson 1's distinction:

> "I did something harmful" is not the same claim as "I am inherently bad."

Introduce the difference between accountability and shame.

Accountability asks:

> What happened?

> What was my part?

> What needs to change?

> What repair is possible?

Shame can sound like:

I'm terrible.

Everyone will hate me.

I can't admit this.

There's no point trying.

Explain that shame and accountability are not mutually exclusive emotional experiences. Someone may feel ashamed while taking responsibility.

The important distinction is whether the response focuses on addressing behavior and harm or becomes a global judgment about someone's worth.

Ask:

> "Why might it be easier to take responsibility if you don't believe your worth is on trial?"

The Elements of Dignity

Invite students to identify which Elements might matter to the presenter and the friend.

The presenter may be concerned about Safety, Recognition, Understanding, or Acknowledgment.

The friend may want Benefit of the Doubt or Understanding.

Ask:

> "Can we give someone the benefit of the doubt while still holding them accountable?"

Explore the possibility that recognizing a person's intentions and requiring them to address their impact are compatible.

3 SELF · MAKING MEANING

Why is 'I was wrong' so hard to say?

23–33 min

Present four common responses to being told you've caused harm.

- **A** "You're being too sensitive."
- **B** "I guess I'm just a terrible person, then."
- **C** "Well, you did the same thing to me last month."
- **D** "I didn't realize it affected you that way. Can you tell me more?"

Ask:

> "What might each response be trying to protect?"

Students might identify reputation, self-image, control, fairness, or the desire not to feel ashamed.

Then ask:

> "Which responses make it easier to understand what happened?"

> "Which responses shift attention away from the original concern?"

> "Can a response sound accountable without actually taking responsibility?"

Invite students to consider why people sometimes respond to criticism by attacking, minimizing, withdrawing, or making themselves the victim.

Connect to Lesson 4's exploration of protective responses.

Private reflection

Offer students these questions:

> Why might admitting a mistake feel more threatening than defending it?

> What would have to be true for someone to feel safe enough to acknowledge they were wrong?

> Can someone take responsibility without agreeing with every criticism made about them?

Students may reflect privately or consider a fictional person.

No disclosure is required.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Avoid implying that every accusation is accurate or that the accused person must accept someone else's interpretation without question.

Staying open to feedback means considering it seriously, not surrendering independent judgment.

4 SKILL · PRACTICING ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPAIR

The apology isn't the point

33–55 min

Introduce the following fictional scenario.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Recommendation

Maya and Jules are applying for a competitive student leadership program.

They're close friends.

Maya asks a teacher for advice about the application. During the conversation, the teacher asks whether Jules would be a good fit for the program.

Maya says:

> *"Jules is really talented, but sometimes they don't follow through on commitments."*

Maya believes this is honest and fair. Jules has missed several deadlines on a project they worked on together.

Later, Jules learns that the teacher mentioned Maya's comment during a selection meeting.

Jules isn't selected.

Jules confronts Maya:

> *"I can't believe you talked about me behind my back. I thought you were my friend."*

Maya responds:

> *"I didn't say anything that wasn't true. I was just being honest."*

Part A What actually happened? 5 min

Ask students to distinguish what they know from what they don't.

Known: Maya shared concerns about Jules's follow-through. The teacher repeated the concerns during a selection meeting. Jules wasn't selected.

Unknown: Whether Maya's comments affected the decision, whether Maya expected the teacher to repeat them, whether the teacher accurately represented the comments, and whether Jules had an opportunity to respond.

Ask:

> "Who might bear responsibility here, and for what?"

Students may identify Maya, the teacher, the selection process, or some combination.

Avoid assuming Maya caused Jules's rejection.

This is a key opportunity to distinguish a possible contribution to harm from proven causation.

Part B Good intentions aren't a complete defense 6 min

Divide students into small groups.

Ask them to examine Maya's response:

> "I didn't say anything that wasn't true. I was just being honest."

Invite students to consider:

- Is telling the truth always enough to justify sharing information?

- Does the context in which Maya shared the information matter?
- What responsibility might the teacher have?
- What might Jules reasonably want Maya to acknowledge?
- What would Maya need to understand before deciding how to respond?

Connect to Lesson 5.

Honesty is important, but honesty does not automatically make every disclosure appropriate.

Students should consider the difference between truthful feedback, confidential advice, gossip, and information shared in a consequential decision-making process.

Part C Develop an accountable response

7 min

Ask students to imagine Maya wants to respond without either denying Jules's feelings or falsely accepting responsibility for the entire selection outcome.

Present three responses.

Response A: Defend the intention

> "I was being honest. It's not my fault you didn't get picked."

Response B: Take responsibility for everything

> "I'm a horrible friend. I ruined your chances. I'll never forgive myself."

Response C: Acknowledge what is known

> "I understand why you're upset. I did share concerns about your follow-through, and I didn't think through how that information might be used. I don't know whether it affected the decision, but I can see why it damaged your trust in me."

Ask:

> "Which response is most accountable? What would you change?"

Students should be free to critique Response C.

For example, some may argue that Maya should not apologize for providing an honest assessment when asked directly.

Others may argue that Maya should have considered the consequences of sharing information about a friend.

Invite students to develop a response that reflects their reasoning.

The aim is not to memorize an apology formula.

It's to practice acknowledging what one actually did, taking responsibility for what one reasonably could have known, and remaining open to information without inventing certainty.

Part D Repair is not reconciliation

4 min

Introduce a final development:

> Maya apologizes for not considering how the information might be used and offers to clarify the context of her comments with the teacher.

> Jules responds:

> "I appreciate that, but I don't think I can trust you the same way anymore."

Ask:

> "Has Maya's attempt at repair failed?"

Invite different interpretations.

Then introduce four distinctions:

Accountability: Acknowledging and addressing one's responsibility.

Repair: Taking steps to address harm where possible.

Forgiveness: A personal process or decision that cannot be demanded.

Reconciliation: Rebuilding a relationship, which requires willingness and appropriate conditions.

Ask:

> "Can someone take responsibility even if the other person never forgives them?"

> "Can someone forgive without restoring trust?"

> "Can a relationship end without either person's dignity being diminished?"

Emphasize that repair does not guarantee restoration of the previous relationship.

5 CLOSING · REFLECTION, NOT EVALUATION

Can you be accountable without being ashamed?

55–60 min

Return to the opening scenario.

Ask:

> "If someone causes harm without intending to, what determines how much responsibility they should take?"

Encourage students to consider what was foreseeable, what the person knew, what choices they made, and what repair is possible.

Then offer the recurring reflection:

> What changed in your thinking?

Students may consider privately:

> What might change if people believed they could admit wrongdoing without losing their worth?

End with a final provocation:

> "If accountability is about what we do next, why do we spend so much time arguing about whether someone is a good person?"

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 6 builds on the distinctions developed across the previous five sessions.

Students have practiced examining dignity, interpretation, cognitive empathy, emotional reactions, social incentives, and the difference between niceness and honest conflict.

Now they are learning to evaluate responsibility without collapsing a complex situation into either blame or excuse-making.

THINKING TOOL

Accountability Thinking Scaffold

1. What happened, and what evidence do we have?
2. What was the person's intention, and how do we know?
3. What impact occurred, and what remains uncertain?
4. What could the person reasonably have anticipated or prevented?
5. What responsibility belongs to the individual, and what responsibility belongs to others or the institution?
6. What repair is possible, and what cannot be undone?
7. What boundaries or consequences might remain appropriate even after accountability?

These questions are tools for inquiry, not a required assessment.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

Organizations may adapt the recommendation scenario to athletic team selection, student government, extracurricular leadership, employment, or other consequential decisions.

Preserve the uncertainty around intent, impact, and causation. The scenario should not have a single obvious villain.

Facilitators must not imply that people who experience harm are responsible for forgiving, reassuring, or reconciling with those who harmed them.

Students must also remain free to question the teacher's conduct and the fairness of the selection process. Institutional authority does not automatically establish legitimacy.

Avoid using accountability as a euphemism for public humiliation or forced confession. Likewise, avoid using the language of dignity to excuse repeated harmful behavior.

No personal disclosure, apology, forgiveness, or emotional vulnerability is required.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 7: Healthy Heat

Lesson 6 explored what happens when someone causes harm, whether intentionally or unintentionally, and how accountability and repair might work.

But not every uncomfortable interaction is harmful.

Sometimes disagreement, criticism, frustration, and challenge are necessary parts of learning and relationships.

Other times, those same experiences become patterns of humiliation, coercion, or mistreatment.

And the difference isn't always obvious.

Lesson 7 will investigate the distinction between productive discomfort and genuine harm, including the role of resilience, distress tolerance, boundaries, and the freedom to leave relationships that repeatedly violate dignity.

The next provocation:

> "How do you know when something is helping you grow versus teaching you to tolerate being treated badly?"

LESSON 07

Healthy Heat

07

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Discomfort is not automatically harm. Enduring harm is not automatically growth. Learning to distinguish the two helps us make decisions that honor our dignity and the dignity of others.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How do you know when something is helping you grow versus teaching you to tolerate being treated badly?

Facilitator overview

> "Get comfortable being uncomfortable."

> "Don't be so sensitive."

> "Growth happens outside your comfort zone."

> "Stand up for yourself."

> "Don't quit when things get hard."

Adolescents hear all of these messages. Some are genuinely useful. Others can become excuses for mistreatment, particularly when delivered by someone with more power.

A coach might challenge an athlete to do something they didn't think they could do. A teacher might offer difficult feedback that ultimately improves a student's work. A friend might tell an uncomfortable truth.

But a coach might also humiliate an athlete. A teacher might use embarrassment as a management strategy. A friend might repeatedly criticize someone and call it honesty.

The existence of discomfort doesn't tell us whether an experience is healthy. Neither does the claim that someone is trying to help.

This lesson asks students to investigate what distinguishes productive challenge from harmful treatment, and how context, consent, power, patterns, and consequences shape that distinction.

Students will practice tolerating manageable discomfort without automatically escaping it, while also recognizing that resilience does not require enduring humiliation, coercion, or repeated violations of dignity.

The lesson draws on the Wild Feelings practices Learn to Sit in Discomfort, Stand Firm in Your Worth, Practice Belonging to Yourself, and Take Responsibility.

The goal is not to make students tougher or more compliant.

It's to develop the judgment to know when to persist, when to challenge something, when to seek support, and when to leave.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Distinguish discomfort, challenge, conflict, and harm.
- Explore how power, choice, context, and patterns influence whether an experience is constructive.
- Recognize that emotions provide important information but do not always establish what an experience means.
- Practice tolerating manageable discomfort while remaining connected to their values and goals.
- Examine the difference between resilience and the normalization of mistreatment.
- Consider boundaries, advocacy, support, and leaving as legitimate dignity-honoring responses.
- Question how institutions use language about toughness, resilience, and growth.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheet, board or projector, scenario cards, and optional paper for private reflection.

○ The 60-minute experience

1 OPENING · PROVOCATION

Is this making you stronger?

0–8 min

Present two situations.

Situation A

A coach pushes an athlete through a difficult training session.

The athlete is exhausted, frustrated, and convinced they can't finish.

The coach says, "You can do more than you think."

The athlete completes the workout and feels proud afterward.

Situation B

A coach repeatedly singles out an athlete in front of the team.

When the athlete makes a mistake, the coach mocks them.

The coach says, "I'm preparing you for the real world. You need thicker skin."

The athlete begins dreading practice.

Ask:

> "Which coach is helping their athlete grow?"

Students may identify the first situation as productive and the second as harmful.

Then complicate the comparison:

> "What if the athlete in Situation A is injured and the coach knows it?"

> "What if the athlete in Situation B eventually becomes the team's best player?"

Ask:

> "Does a positive outcome prove that the method was acceptable?"

Invite disagreement.

Some students may argue that difficult experiences can produce meaningful growth even when the treatment is harmful.

Others may argue that the outcome does not justify the behavior.

Introduce the central problem:

> "If discomfort can be useful and harmful experiences can sometimes produce growth, how do we tell the difference?"

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Avoid presenting the two situations as a simple good-coach/bad-coach test.

The intellectual work begins when students recognize that outcomes, intentions, and feelings alone are insufficient to determine whether treatment honors dignity.

Do not suggest that students should push through injury, unsafe conditions, or humiliation to demonstrate resilience.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA

Discomfort isn't the same as harm

8–23 min

Begin with:

> "What are some uncomfortable experiences that might actually be good for us?"

Students might identify:

- Receiving honest feedback.
- Admitting a mistake.
- Trying something unfamiliar.
- Having a difficult conversation.
- Learning a challenging skill.
- Hearing a perspective that contradicts their own.

Then ask:

> "What makes those experiences different from being humiliated, threatened, or mistreated?"

Introduce three working concepts.

Discomfort

An unpleasant feeling that may accompany uncertainty, disagreement, effort, embarrassment, or challenge.

Discomfort can be useful, neutral, or a signal that something needs attention.

Productive challenge

An experience that stretches someone's abilities or understanding while providing reasonable conditions for learning, agency, and support.

Productive challenge can be difficult without requiring humiliation or degradation.

Harm

Injury or damage to someone's physical, psychological, social, or relational well-being.

Harm can occur intentionally or unintentionally, and it can arise from individual behavior or institutional conditions.

Clarify that these are not perfectly separate categories.

A genuinely challenging experience can cause distress. Harm can occur even in settings intended to support growth. People can disagree about the severity or meaning of an experience.

The goal is not to create a universal formula for determining harm. It is to develop better questions.

Five questions that help us investigate

1 What is the purpose?

Is there a meaningful learning, safety, or relational goal? Is the challenge connected to that goal?

2 How much agency does the person have?

Can they ask questions, express concerns, make choices, or seek support without retaliation?

3 How is power being used?

Is someone using authority to support growth, or to control, intimidate, or humiliate?

4 Is this an isolated event or a pattern?

Has the person raised concerns before? Does the behavior continue despite its impact?

5 What happens to dignity?

Does the experience preserve the person's worth, voice, and humanity, even when their behavior or performance is challenged?

Ask:

> "Could two people experience the same challenge differently without either person being dishonest?"

Connect to Lesson 3's cognitive empathy work.

People bring different histories, capacities, relationships, and circumstances to an experience.

A challenge that is manageable for one person may be overwhelming or unsafe for another.

That difference matters.

Resilience versus endurance

Introduce a distinction:

Resilience is not the ability to tolerate unlimited mistreatment.

Resilience can involve persistence, flexibility, recovery, seeking help, setting boundaries, changing strategies, or leaving an unsafe environment.

Ask:

> "Why do we sometimes praise people for enduring situations that should have been changed?"

Invite students to consider the role of institutional convenience.

Sometimes it's easier for a school, team, workplace, or family to tell someone to become more resilient than to address the conditions causing harm.

Connect to the Wild Feelings practice Stand Firm in Your Worth.

Recognizing your inherent dignity means you don't have to prove your worth by enduring humiliation.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Do not equate feeling uncomfortable with being unsafe. Equally, do not use this distinction to dismiss a student's report of mistreatment.

In real situations involving possible harm, adults should investigate and respond appropriately rather than requiring students to prove that their experience meets a classroom definition.

3

SELF · MAKING MEANING

What are we taught to push through?

23–33 min

Present four familiar messages.

A "If you quit, you're letting everyone down."

B "Don't take criticism so personally."

C "Real friends tell each other the truth, even when it hurts."

D "Life isn't fair. Get used to it."

Ask:

> "When might each statement be useful? When might it become harmful?"

Encourage students to identify the conditions that change the meaning.

For example:

> "Don't take criticism so personally" might help someone separate feedback from identity.

But it could also be used to dismiss repeated humiliation.

> "Real friends tell each other the truth" might support honesty.

But it could also be used to justify cruelty.

Ask:

> "Who benefits when someone accepts a difficult situation without questioning it?"

Sometimes the person benefits through growth.

Sometimes the group benefits through cooperation.

Sometimes the person with more power benefits because they don't have to change.

These possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

Private reflection

Offer students the following questions:

> How might someone tell the difference between avoiding a challenge and protecting themselves from harm?

> What makes it easier or harder to question someone who has authority over you?

> Is there a difference between being strong and proving you're strong?

Students may reflect privately or consider fictional examples.

No personal disclosure is required.

4 SKILL · PRACTICING JUDGMENT AND BOUNDARIES
Stay, speak up, seek support, or leave?

33–55 min

Introduce the following scenario.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Debate Team

Cameron joins the school's competitive debate team.

The coach has a reputation for producing excellent results.

During practices, the coach frequently challenges students' arguments, interrupts weak reasoning, and asks difficult follow-up questions.

Cameron initially finds the experience intimidating but begins improving rapidly.

Over time, however, the coach starts making personal comments.

After Cameron struggles during a practice round, the coach says:

> "Maybe debate just isn't for people who need everything handed to them."

Several teammates laugh.

Cameron feels embarrassed but also worries that speaking up will make the coach think they aren't serious about improving.

A teammate says:

> "That's just how the coach is. Everyone goes through it. Honestly, it makes you better."

Part A Separate challenge from treatment

5 min

Ask students:

- Which parts of the coach's behavior might support learning?
- Which parts raise dignity concerns?
- What information would help distinguish demanding instruction from mistreatment?
- How might the coach's authority influence Cameron's options?

Encourage students to distinguish challenging an argument from making a degrading judgment about a person.

Connect to Lesson 1.

> "Your argument is weak" and "You are weak" are not the same claim.

The first evaluates a performance.

The second attacks identity.

Ask:

> "Can the coach be effective at teaching debate while also treating students in ways that violate dignity?"

Allow students to explore the possibility that both are true.

Part B Investigate the conditions

6 min

Divide students into small groups.

Ask them to examine the situation using the five questions introduced earlier:

Purpose, agency, power, pattern, and dignity.

Then introduce additional information:

> Cameron asks the coach privately whether feedback could focus on the argument rather than personal comments.

> The coach responds:

> "If you can't handle a little pressure, maybe you don't belong here."

> Over the next few practices, the personal comments continue.

Ask:

> "What changed about your understanding of the situation?"

Students may identify that the coach has been made aware of the concern and has continued the behavior.

The pattern matters.

The power imbalance matters.

The dismissal of Cameron's concern matters.

Part C Evaluate the available choices

7 min

Present four possible responses.

Option A: Stay and tolerate it

Cameron decides the benefits of debate outweigh the discomfort and stops raising concerns.

Option B: Challenge the coach publicly

Cameron confronts the coach during practice and argues that personal humiliation is not legitimate feedback.

Option C: Seek institutional support

Cameron documents the comments and speaks with a trusted administrator or another adult who can address the situation.

Option D: Leave the team

Cameron decides the environment is not worth remaining in and pursues other opportunities.

Ask students to evaluate the options.

> Which options protect Cameron's dignity?

> Which might create opportunities for institutional accountability?

> Which carry risks?

> Does leaving mean Cameron lacks resilience?

> Does staying necessarily mean Cameron is making the wrong choice?

> What responsibilities does the school have, regardless of what Cameron chooses?

Encourage students to develop additional options, such as collective advocacy, involving families, requesting a different coach, or proposing changes to the team's feedback culture.

The goal is not to identify one universally correct choice. It's to recognize that students should not have to choose between personal growth and being treated as fully human.

Part D Practice tolerating useful discomfort

4 min

Introduce a contrasting scenario:

> Cameron joins a different debate team.

> The new coach challenges Cameron's reasoning, points out weaknesses, and expects revisions.

> The feedback is direct but focused on the argument.

> Cameron still feels embarrassed and defensive when receiving criticism.

Ask:

> "What might Cameron do differently in this situation?"

Invite students to suggest responses that allow Cameron to remain engaged with the challenge without interpreting criticism as a verdict on their worth.

Possible approaches include:

- Asking for a specific example.
- Taking time to process feedback.
- Separating criticism of the argument from criticism of the person.
- Trying the revision before deciding whether the feedback was useful.
- Disagreeing with the coach's interpretation and explaining why.

Connect to the Wild Feelings practice Learn to Sit in Discomfort.

The skill is not enduring anything that feels bad.

It is developing the capacity to remain engaged with a meaningful challenge when the conditions are sufficiently safe and respectful.

5 CLOSING · REFLECTION, NOT EVALUATION

Who gets to define resilience?

55–60 min

Return to the opening coach scenarios.

Ask:

> "Can someone become stronger because of a harmful experience without that making the harm acceptable?"

Invite a few responses.

Then offer the recurring reflection:

> What changed in your thinking?

Students may also consider:

> What questions could help someone decide whether to persist through discomfort or protect themselves from harm?

End with one final provocation:

> "When an institution tells people to become more resilient, how do we know whether it's helping them grow or avoiding responsibility for changing?"

Leave the question open.

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 7 brings together several of the capacities developed in the previous sessions.

Students are now practicing the ability to distinguish the experience of discomfort from the conditions that make an experience constructive or harmful.

They are also learning to examine power, patterns, and institutional responsibility rather than treating every challenge as an individual problem to manage.

THINKING TOOL

The Healthy Heat Thinking Scaffold

1. What is uncomfortable, and what might be harmful?
2. What purpose is the challenge supposed to serve?
3. Does the person have meaningful agency, support, and opportunities to raise concerns?
4. How is power being used?
5. Is the behavior an isolated event or a repeated pattern?
6. What options exist beyond silent endurance or immediate withdrawal?
7. What responsibilities belong to the individual, and what responsibilities belong to the institution?

These questions are tools for judgment, not a diagnostic checklist or a formal assessment.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

Organizations may adapt the debate team scenario to athletics, performing arts, academic programs, student leadership, employment, or another relevant setting.

Preserve the distinction between demanding feedback and personal degradation.

The facilitator must not imply that students need to prove resilience by remaining in harmful relationships or environments.

Equally, the lesson should not imply that every difficult interaction is harmful or that avoiding discomfort is always the most protective response.

Students must remain free to question school policies, adult authority, and institutional expectations.

If students disclose actual harassment, coercion, discrimination, threats, or abuse, facilitators should follow appropriate safeguarding procedures rather than treating the disclosure as material for classroom debate.

No personal disclosure, forgiveness, reconciliation, or demonstration of emotional toughness is required.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 8: Zoom Out

Across the first seven lessons, students have explored dignity through personal identity, emotional reactions, relationships, conflict, accountability, and boundaries.

They have also begun to recognize that individual choices are shaped by larger environments.

A student may be harmed by a coach, but the school may have created conditions that allow the behavior to continue.

A person may use aggression to gain status, but a social environment may reward that aggression.

A group may exclude someone, but its norms may make honest disagreement feel dangerous.

So what happens when we stop looking only at the people involved and begin examining the systems around them?

Lesson 8 introduces transcendent thinking explicitly.

Students will practice moving beyond immediate events to consider broader patterns, social conditions, ethical implications, and possible futures.

The next provocation:

> "What if the problem isn't just the people involved, but the system that taught them how to behave?"

LESSON 08

Zoom Out

08

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Individual choices matter, but they don't happen in isolation. Understanding the larger forces shaping human behavior helps us make more thoughtful judgments and imagine different possibilities.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What if the problem isn't just the people involved, but the system that taught them how to behave?

Facilitator overview

By this point in the curriculum, students have practiced examining their own reactions, considering other perspectives, distinguishing intent from impact, and evaluating conflict through the lens of dignity.

They have also begun to notice something important: people make choices within environments that shape what feels possible, acceptable, and rewarding.

A student may publicly humiliate someone because it earns social status. A coach may use intimidation because the school rewards winning above everything else. A group may avoid confronting harmful behavior because belonging depends on maintaining the appearance of harmony.

Those choices still matter. But looking only at individual behavior can prevent us from understanding the conditions that produce and reinforce it.

This lesson explicitly introduces transcendent thinking, drawing on the research of Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and colleagues.

Transcendent thinking involves moving beyond the immediate details of an experience to consider broader meaning, patterns, social conditions, ethical implications, and possible futures.

It is not simply thinking positively, seeing the big picture, or agreeing that everything is connected.

It is the capacity to ask what an event reveals about people, the world, and the kind of future our choices might help create.

Students will practice moving between individual behavior, group dynamics, institutional systems, and larger questions of human dignity.

The goal is not to convince students that systems explain everything or that individuals are powerless.

It is to develop their capacity to hold personal responsibility and systemic influence in mind at the same time.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Understand and practice transcendent thinking as a form of complex meaning-making.
- Distinguish immediate events from broader patterns, incentives, and institutional conditions.
- Examine how systems can reward, discourage, or normalize particular behaviors.
- Consider how power influences whose dignity is protected and whose concerns are dismissed.
- Explore the relationship between individual accountability and institutional responsibility.
- Imagine how different choices, norms, or structures might change future outcomes.
- Recognize that understanding complexity can expand rather than eliminate personal agency.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheet, board or projector, scenario cards, and paper or a shared space for mapping connections.

○ The 60-minute experience

1 OPENING · PROVOCATION

Is the problem the person or the system?

0–8 min

Present this scenario.

A high school has a serious problem with students cheating.

Teachers are frustrated. Administrators introduce stricter punishments.

Students caught cheating receive zeros and disciplinary consequences.

But cheating continues.

When students are asked why, some say:

> "Everyone does it."

> "If you don't get good grades, you don't get into a good college."

> "Teachers care more about scores than whether we actually learn."

> "I'm not risking my GPA when other people are using AI to do the work."

Ask:

> "Who is responsible for the cheating problem?"

Invite students to identify individuals, groups, and institutions.

Some may argue that students are responsible for their choices.

Others may point to academic pressure, grading systems, competition, or inconsistent enforcement.

Ask:

> "Can students be responsible for cheating while the school is also responsible for conditions that encourage it?"

Then introduce a complication:

> The school announces that it will reward the teachers whose students achieve the highest test scores.

Ask:

> "How might that change what happens next?"

Allow students to consider both intended and unintended consequences.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Do not turn the discussion into a lecture about academic dishonesty.

The intellectual challenge is to examine how individual choices interact with institutional incentives.

Students must be free to criticize grading policies, college admissions pressures, school leadership, and other systems without being accused of excusing cheating.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING TRANSCENDENT THINKING

Thinking beyond what's right in front of you

8–23 min

Begin with a question:

> "What can we learn about a society by looking at the behavior it rewards?"

Invite examples.

Students might identify popularity, competition, academic achievement, athletic success, social media attention, wealth, or public influence.

Then introduce the term:

Transcendent thinking

Transcendent thinking is a way of making meaning that moves beyond the immediate facts of an event to consider broader personal, social, ethical, and future implications.

It involves asking not only what happened, but also why it matters and what it might mean beyond this moment.

Research by Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and colleagues has examined how adolescents engage in this kind of meaning-making. Longitudinal findings have linked adolescents' transcendent thinking with patterns of brain development and later psychosocial outcomes, although those associations do not establish that teaching this particular exercise causes those outcomes.

For this curriculum, students will practice transcendent thinking by deliberately changing the scale of their questions.

THINKING TOOL

Four Levels Of Inquiry

1. The event

> **What happened? What do we actually know?**

A student cheated on an exam.

2. The people What might the people involved be experiencing, valuing, or trying to protect?

The student fears failure. Other students want a fair process. The teacher wants to know what students understand.

3. The system

> **What norms, incentives, structures, and power relationships shape the situation?**

Grades determine opportunities. Competition is intense. The school rewards measurable performance.

4. The meaning and future

> **What larger questions does this raise about human beings and society? What might happen if the pattern continues or changes?**

> **What happens when achievement becomes more important than learning? What kind of school culture do these incentives create?**

Explain that this is a teaching scaffold, not a claim that transcendent thinking always follows four discrete stages.

The important move is to connect a specific event to broader meaning.

Zooming out does not mean abandoning the details. It means using the details to investigate something larger.

Test the idea

Return to the cheating scenario.

Ask:

> "What would we miss if we only asked whether the student deserved punishment?"

Then ask:

> "What would we miss if we only blamed the system and ignored the student's choice?"

Encourage students to identify the limitations of both approaches.

Introduce a central distinction:

Explaining why a behavior occurs is not the same as excusing it.

Connect to Lesson 6's work on accountability.

A student can be responsible for cheating while the institution remains responsible for examining the conditions that make cheating more likely or attractive.

Connect to dignity

Ask students to identify which Elements of Dignity might be implicated in the cheating scenario.

Possibilities include Fairness, Accountability, Recognition, Independence, and Understanding.

Then ask:

> "Whose dignity might be overlooked if we focus only on punishing the student?"

And:

> "Whose dignity might be overlooked if we ignore the impact of cheating on everyone else?"

This is where dignity becomes a framework for examining competing human concerns within a larger system.

3 SELF · MAKING MEANING
What stories does the world teach us?

23–33 min

Present four familiar messages.

- **A** "If you work hard enough, you'll succeed."
- **B** "The people with the most followers have the most influence."
- **C** "Winning is what matters."
- **D** "People get what they deserve."

Ask students:

> "What assumptions about people and the world are hidden inside these statements?"

Invite them to consider which statements might contain useful insights and which might obscure important realities.

For example:

> "If you work hard enough, you'll succeed" can encourage persistence.

But it can also obscure unequal access to opportunities, resources, and support.

> "Winning is what matters" can motivate excellence.

But it can also encourage people to justify harmful methods if the outcome is successful.

Ask:

> "What happens when a society repeatedly tells people that their value depends on what they achieve?"

Connect to Lesson 1.

Students may recognize that external rewards and social expectations can shape how people understand their own worth.

Private reflection

Offer students a choice:

> What is one message about success, belonging, or worth that young people regularly encounter?

> What might that message encourage people to do?

> What might it make harder for people to notice?

Students may reflect privately or analyze a fictional person's experience.

No personal disclosure is required.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Do not assume students share the same social experiences or beliefs about success.

Invite competing interpretations. The aim is to investigate cultural messages, not prescribe a single critique of society.

4 SKILL · PRACTICING TRANSCENDENT THINKING

Follow the consequences

33–55 min

Introduce the following scenario.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Viral Video

A student records a classmate having an emotional outburst during an argument at school.

The video is posted online.

It spreads quickly.

Thousands of people view it. Some mock the student in the video. Others argue that the student deserved to be exposed because of how they behaved.

The student who posted it gains thousands of followers.

The school announces that it is investigating the incident.

Meanwhile, other students begin recording conflicts in hopes of creating their own viral moments.

Part A Start with the event

4 min

Ask students to identify what is known and what remains uncertain.

Known: A video was recorded and posted, it spread, people reacted, the poster gained followers, and other students began recording conflicts.

Unknown: What caused the original argument, whether the recording captured the full context, whether the student consented to being recorded, and how the incident affected the people involved.

Ask:

> "Why might those missing details matter?"

Connect to Lesson 2's distinction between observation and interpretation.

Part B Move beyond the individuals

6 min

Divide students into small groups.

Ask them to examine the situation at four levels.

THINKING TOOL

The Zoom Out Map

Event

> What happened?

> What remains uncertain?

People

> Who is affected?

> What might they be experiencing or trying to accomplish?

System

> What rewards, norms, rules, or power relationships influence the situation?

Meaning and future

> What larger questions does this raise?

> What might happen if the pattern continues?

Invite students to consider how social media incentives, school norms, peer status, privacy expectations, and audience behavior interact.

Ask:

> "Who benefits when someone else's worst moment becomes entertainment?"

Then:

> "Who has the power to interrupt that pattern?"

Students may identify the original poster, viewers, friends, school leaders, platform companies, or other groups.

Encourage them to consider different levels of responsibility rather than assuming everyone has equal influence.

Part C Change one part of the system

7 min

Ask students to imagine that the school wants to reduce incidents like this.

It proposes a new rule:

> Any student caught recording or sharing a conflict will receive an automatic suspension.

Ask:

> "Will this solve the problem?"

Students may argue that the rule could deter some behavior.

Others may point out that it could discourage students from documenting genuine mistreatment or seeking help.

Ask groups to propose one change that addresses the problem without creating unnecessary new harms.

They might consider:

- Clearer distinctions between documenting harm and posting for entertainment.
- Student-developed norms around privacy and consent.
- More accessible ways to report harmful behavior.
- Responses that address the social rewards of public humiliation.
- School practices that reduce incentives to turn conflict into spectacle.

Then require students to complicate their own proposal.

> "Who might benefit from your change? Who might be disadvantaged? What unintended consequences could follow?"

This is the central skill.

Students aren't merely identifying a problem. They're considering how interventions might reshape the conditions that produce it.

Part D The future question

5 min

Ask students to imagine two possible futures.

Future A: Recording and publicly sharing other people's embarrassing moments becomes increasingly normal.

Future B: The school community develops stronger norms against turning other people's vulnerability into entertainment.

Ask:

> "What might each future mean for how students experience safety, belonging, and trust?"

> "How might those norms influence the kinds of adults students become?"

> "What would have to change for Future B to become more likely?"

Then introduce the deeper transcendent question:

> "What does this situation reveal about what happens when human dignity competes with the desire for attention and status?"

Allow students to develop their own conclusions.

5

CLOSING · REFLECTION, NOT EVALUATION

What kind of world are we practicing for?

55–60 min

Return to the opening cheating scenario.

Ask:

> "How does your understanding of the cheating problem change when you examine the people, the institution, and the incentives together?"

Invite students to identify what became more complicated.

Then offer the recurring reflection:

> What changed in your thinking?

Students may also consider:

> What is one question you now know to ask when a problem appears to be about one person's behavior?

Close with:

> "Every system is made of people making choices. But the systems we create also shape the choices people make next."

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 8 explicitly names and practices a form of thinking students have been developing throughout the curriculum.

They have learned to distinguish worth from behavior, examine interpretations, consider perspectives, understand emotional reactions, evaluate social incentives, recognize hidden conflict, reason about accountability, and distinguish healthy challenge from harm.

Now they are integrating those capacities into transcendent thinking.

THINKING TOOL

The Transcendent Thinking Scaffold

1. What happened, and what do we actually know?
2. What might the people involved be experiencing, valuing, or trying to protect?
3. What patterns, incentives, norms, or structures shape the situation?
4. How does power influence whose dignity is protected or threatened?
5. What does this situation reveal about larger questions of human behavior, belonging, fairness, or society?
6. What might happen if the pattern continues?
7. What different choices or conditions could create another future?

This scaffold is not a checklist students must complete or an assessment of their moral development.

It is a way to help them practice moving between concrete events and broader meaning.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

Organizations may replace the cheating or viral-video scenarios with issues relevant to their community, including school policies, public discourse, athletics, social media, environmental decisions, or institutional practices.

Preserve the opportunity to examine both individual and systemic responsibility.

Students must remain free to question the institutions teaching the curriculum, including the school's own rules, disciplinary systems, and incentives.

Avoid using systems thinking to erase individual accountability. Likewise, avoid reducing systemic problems to the moral failings of a few individuals.

Do not require students to adopt a particular political interpretation of a social issue. The learning experience should support evidence-based reasoning, cognitive empathy, and thoughtful consideration of competing perspectives.

When students propose changes, invite them to consider tradeoffs and unintended consequences rather than rewarding only idealistic solutions.

No personal disclosure or predetermined moral conclusion is required.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 9: It's Complicated. So Am I.

We've spent the past several lessons expanding our understanding of other people and the world.

Students have investigated why people behave in ways that seem irrational, how competing needs create conflict, how institutions shape behavior, and why simple explanations often fail.

But there's one more place to apply that complexity.

Ourselves.

We can recognize that other people's choices are shaped by their experiences, relationships, emotions, opportunities, and circumstances.

Yet when we examine our own mistakes, contradictions, or uncertainty, we may abandon that same nuance.

We can understand why other people are complicated while treating our own complexity as evidence that something is wrong with us.

Lesson 9 brings the curriculum back to its starting point: inherent dignity.

But now students return with a more sophisticated understanding of human behavior.

The next provocation:

> "If you can understand why other people are complicated, why is it so hard to extend that same understanding to yourself?"

LESSON 09

It's Complicated. So Am I.

09

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Being human means being complicated, contradictory, and unfinished. Understanding ourselves with the same curiosity and complexity we extend to others makes growth possible without requiring us to earn our worth.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

If you can understand why other people are complicated, why is it so hard to extend that same understanding to yourself?

Facilitator overview

Over the past eight lessons, students have practiced examining human behavior with increasing sophistication.

They've learned that behavior is shaped by emotions, interpretations, relationships, social incentives, power, and institutions. They've considered how people can have good intentions and cause harm, how conflicting needs can coexist, and how the circumstances surrounding a decision can complicate our judgments.

We've asked them to resist reducing other people to simple categories.

Now we turn that same intellectual rigor inward.

Adolescents are developing increasingly complex understandings of who they are, what matters to them, and where they belong. They may notice contradictions in themselves that once went unquestioned.

They can be confident in one setting and deeply uncertain in another. They can value honesty and still lie. They can care about belonging while resenting the pressure to fit in. They can make choices they regret and struggle to understand why.

These contradictions can feel like evidence that something is wrong.

But complexity is not a character defect.

This lesson explores the relationship between identity, self-judgment, self-compassion, and accountability. Students will practice examining their own behavior without collapsing it into a verdict about who they are.

Importantly, we are not asking students to adopt a uniformly positive view of themselves, excuse their mistakes, or disclose personal struggles.

We are inviting them to apply the same intellectual standards to themselves that they've learned to apply to everyone else.

The goal is not to feel good about every part of yourself. It's to recognize that you can be a work in progress without being a problem to solve.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Examine why people tend to simplify their own identities, especially after mistakes or rejection.
- Distinguish behavior, emotion, circumstance, identity, and inherent dignity.
- Recognize how apparently contradictory qualities can coexist within one person.
- Explore self-compassion as a way of responding to difficulty without abandoning responsibility.
- Practice applying cognitive empathy and transcendent thinking to their own experiences.
- Consider how social expectations shape identity and self-judgment.
- Recognize that uncertainty about who they are does not diminish their worth.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheet, board or projector, fictional scenario cards, and optional paper for private reflection.

This lesson draws particularly on the existing Wild Feelings practices Practice Belonging to Yourself, Stand Firm in Your Worth, Stay Open to Feedback, Take Responsibility, and Beware of False Security.

○ The 60-minute experience

1

OPENING · PROVOCATION

Which version is the real you?

0–8 min

Present this fictional student.

Meet Jordan.

Jordan is confident and funny around close friends.

In class discussions, Jordan rarely speaks.

At home, Jordan is impatient and easily frustrated.

At work, Jordan is responsible and dependable.

Jordan cares deeply about fairness but recently stayed silent when a friend made an unfair comment about someone else.

Jordan thinks of themself as a good friend but has been avoiding a difficult conversation for weeks.

Ask:

> "Which version of Jordan is the real Jordan?"

Invite students to consider whether one version is more authentic than the others.

Some may argue that Jordan's behavior with close friends reveals their true personality.

Others may argue that people behave differently depending on context.

Ask:

> "Does behaving differently in different environments make someone fake?"

> "Can someone genuinely value fairness and still fail to act fairly?"

> "What evidence would you need before deciding Jordan is dishonest, insecure, courageous, or kind?"

Then introduce a complication:

> Jordan recently wrote in a private journal:

> "I don't even know who I really am. I feel like a different person everywhere."

Ask:

> "Is Jordan discovering a problem, or noticing something complicated about being human?"

Resist resolving the question immediately.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Avoid implying that every contradiction is harmless or that all behavior is equally acceptable.

The question is whether contradictory behavior proves a person's identity is false, or whether it invites a more careful investigation of context, choices, values, and growth.

Students should not be asked to describe their own identities or contradictions publicly.

2 CONCEPT · UNDERSTANDING THE IDEA

You are not a single story

8–23 min

Begin with:

> "Why are we so quick to turn something we did into a statement about who we are?"

Invite students to identify examples of identity-based conclusions.

Someone fails an exam and concludes they're stupid.

Someone gets rejected and concludes they're unlikable.

Someone makes a selfish decision and concludes they're a terrible person.

Someone struggles with a new skill and concludes they're simply not that kind of person.

Ask:

> "What gets lost when we turn one event into a complete explanation of a person?"

Four things we often collapse into one

Behavior

What someone did.

> "I avoided a difficult conversation."

Emotion

What someone experienced.

> "I was afraid of losing the friendship."

Identity

How someone understands who they are, including their values, relationships, experiences, and sense of self.

> "I think of myself as someone who values honesty."

Dignity

The inherent worth someone possesses regardless of their behavior, emotions, identity struggles, achievements, or mistakes.

> "My worth is not determined by whether I handled this situation well."

Explain that these categories interact, but they are not interchangeable.

Behavior can reveal something important about our habits or values.

Emotions can influence our choices.

Identity can evolve as we learn and experience new things.

But none of these changes whether we possess inherent dignity.

Complexity is not the same as hypocrisy

Return to Jordan.

Ask:

> "Is Jordan a hypocrite for valuing fairness but remaining silent when a friend behaves unfairly?"

Invite students to explore different interpretations.

Perhaps Jordan was afraid.

Perhaps Jordan didn't recognize the unfairness until later.

Perhaps Jordan's commitment to fairness is less developed than Jordan believes.

Perhaps Jordan made a choice that contradicted a genuine value.

These explanations do not make the behavior irrelevant.

They help us understand it more precisely.

Introduce a distinction:

A contradiction can be evidence that something needs attention without being evidence that your entire identity is fraudulent.

Ask:

> "What becomes possible when someone can acknowledge a contradiction without immediately defending or condemning themselves?"

Students may identify learning, repair, changing behavior, or becoming more honest about their motivations.

Self-compassion is not self-excuse

Connect to Lesson 1.

Self-compassion involves responding to difficulty or failure with understanding rather than harsh self-condemnation.

It does not require pretending that mistakes don't matter.

Present three responses to the same mistake.

Self-condemnation

> "I messed up. I'm a terrible person."

Self-excuse

> "It wasn't really my fault. Everyone does it."

Self-compassion with accountability

> "I made a choice I regret. I can understand why I made it, take responsibility, and decide what to do differently."

Ask:

> "Which response makes it easiest to examine what actually happened?"

Students may recognize that both condemnation and excuse-making can interfere with honest reflection.

Condemnation can turn the situation into a verdict about identity.

Excuse-making can prevent responsibility.

Self-compassion can create enough psychological room to investigate the mistake.

Importantly, this is not a guarantee that self-compassion will always feel comfortable or produce immediate change.

Return to transcendent thinking

Connect explicitly to Lesson 8.

Students have practiced moving from an event to the people, systems, and broader meaning surrounding it.

Now ask:

> "What happens if we use that same thinking when the person we're trying to understand is ourselves?"

Consider Jordan's silence.

The immediate event is that Jordan didn't challenge an unfair comment.

A broader inquiry might consider Jordan's fear of exclusion, the friendship group's norms, past experiences of disagreement, and the kind of person Jordan hopes to become.

This does not erase the choice.

It places the choice within a more complete understanding of the person making it.

3 SELF · MAKING MEANING
Who taught you what you're supposed to be?

23–33 min

Present four statements.

- **A** "I'm the smart one."
- **B** "I'm the funny one."
- **C** "I'm the responsible one."

D "I'm the difficult one."

Ask:

> "How might each identity help someone? How might it trap them?"

Invite students to consider how labels can provide belonging, confidence, recognition, or a sense of stability.

Then explore how those same labels can become restrictive.

The smart student may avoid difficult challenges because failure threatens their identity.

The funny student may feel pressure to turn every situation into a joke.

The responsible student may struggle to ask for help.

The difficult student may begin interpreting every conflict as confirmation of a fixed identity.

Ask:

> "Who gets to decide which version of you counts?"

Students may identify parents, peers, teachers, social media audiences, institutions, or themselves.

Then ask:

> "What happens when the identity other people reward is no longer the identity you want to live inside?"

Connect to the Wild Feelings practice Practice Belonging to Yourself.

Belonging to yourself does not mean ignoring other people's perspectives or refusing to change.

It means recognizing that your worth and identity are not entirely determined by external approval.

Private reflection

Offer students a choice of questions:

> What expectations might make it difficult for someone to change?

> How could a label that once felt positive become limiting?

> What would it mean to allow yourself to be more complicated than other people's expectations?

Students may reflect privately or analyze a fictional person's experience.

No personal disclosure is required.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Avoid asking students to identify their own limiting labels aloud.

For some students, identity-related expectations involve sensitive family, cultural, social, or personal experiences.

The lesson should create intellectual space for exploring those dynamics without requiring disclosure.

4

SKILL · PRACTICING SELF-COMPASSIONATE CRITICAL THINKING

Give yourself the complexity you give everyone else

33–55 min

Introduce the following scenario.

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Person I Thought I Was

Sam has always thought of themself as someone who stands up for other people.

Sam believes fairness matters and regularly criticizes people who stay silent when someone is treated badly.

One day, a popular student makes a cruel joke about a classmate.

Sam laughs along.

Later, Sam feels terrible.

Sam thinks:

> *"I'm such a hypocrite. I guess I'm not actually a good person. Maybe everything I believe about myself is fake."*

Sam avoids the classmate afterward because the whole situation feels embarrassing.

Part A **What happened versus what Sam concluded** 5 min

Ask students to separate the observable behavior from Sam's interpretation.

> What happened?

Sam laughed at a cruel joke and did not challenge it.

What did Sam conclude?

That Sam is a hypocrite, a bad person, and fundamentally dishonest about their values.

Ask:

> "What evidence supports Sam's conclusion? What evidence might complicate it?"

Encourage students to avoid two easy responses.

One is to reassure Sam that nothing bad happened.

The other is to accept Sam's harsh identity judgment as the full truth.

Ask:

> "Can we take Sam's behavior seriously without agreeing with Sam's conclusion about their worth?"

Part B Use the Zoom Out method on yourself

7 min

Invite students to investigate Sam's situation using a modified version of the Lesson 8 scaffold.

THINKING TOOL

The Self-Compassionate Zoom Out

Event

> What did Sam actually do?

> What responsibility remains?

Experience

> What might Sam have felt, feared, or wanted in that moment?

Context

> What group norms, social incentives, or pressures might have influenced Sam?

Meaning and future

> What might Sam learn about their values?

> What could Sam choose differently next time?

Ask:

> "Does understanding Sam's fear of exclusion excuse the behavior?"

Students should recognize that understanding can increase precision without eliminating accountability.

Then ask:

> "What might Sam miss if they spend all their energy deciding whether they're a good person?"

Possible responses include the classmate's experience, opportunities for repair, and the social pressures that influenced the situation.

Part C Rewrite the internal conversation

6 min

Present Sam's original thought:

> "I'm such a hypocrite. I guess I'm not actually a good person."

Ask students to develop an alternative response that meets three conditions:

- It does not deny or minimize what Sam did.
- It does not turn the mistake into a judgment about Sam's inherent worth.
- It identifies something Sam can investigate, repair, or change.

For example:

> "I acted in a way that doesn't match what I believe. I need to understand why I went along with it, consider how it affected the other person, and decide how to respond differently."

Invite students to critique the response.

> "Does this sound like accountability, or does it let Sam off the hook?"

> "What would make the response more honest?"

Encourage students to develop language that feels credible rather than artificially reassuring.

The goal is not positive self-talk.

It's accurate self-understanding that leaves room for responsibility and change.

Part D Add the difficult part

4 min

Reveal:

> Sam apologizes to the classmate.

> The classmate responds:

> "I thought you were different. I don't really want to talk to you right now."

Ask:

> "What does Sam do with that response?"

Invite students to consider whether Sam can respect the classmate's boundary without turning the rejection into proof of worthlessness.

Connect to Lesson 6.

An apology does not guarantee forgiveness.

Repair does not guarantee reconciliation.

Someone else's disappointment can be legitimate without becoming a final verdict on who you are.

Ask:

> "Can Sam accept the consequences of their behavior and still belong to themself?"

5

CLOSING · REFLECTION, NOT EVALUATION

What if you're allowed to be unfinished?

55–60 min

Return to the opening question:

> "Which version of Jordan is the real Jordan?"

Invite students to revisit their initial interpretations.

Ask:

> "What if the answer is that Jordan is all of those versions, and still becoming someone?"

Students may agree, disagree, or complicate the idea.

Then offer the recurring reflection:

> What changed in your thinking?

And a final question for private consideration:

> "What becomes possible when you stop treating every contradiction as evidence that something is wrong with you?"

Close with:

> "The world is complicated. People are complicated. You are complicated. None of that changes your worth."

The thinking capacity we're building

Lesson 9 returns to the central idea introduced in Lesson 1, but students now have a much more sophisticated set of tools.

They have practiced distinguishing observation from interpretation, understanding competing needs, recognizing emotional reactions, evaluating social incentives, identifying relational aggression, reasoning about accountability, examining power, and thinking beyond immediate events.

Now they apply those capacities to their own identities and choices.

THINKING TOOL

The Self-Compassionate Thinking Scaffold

1. What actually happened, and what am I concluding about myself?
2. What emotions, needs, fears, or expectations might have influenced my behavior?
3. What social or institutional pressures might be relevant?
4. What responsibility belongs to me, and what is outside my control?
5. What can I learn without turning the experience into a verdict on my worth?
6. What repair, boundary, or different choice might be possible?
7. What would it mean to allow myself to keep developing rather than demanding a finished identity?

These are tools for inquiry, not requirements for personal disclosure or measures of self-esteem.

Facilitator adaptation and safeguards

Organizations may adapt the fictional scenarios to academic pressure, athletics, friendship conflict, social media, family expectations, or other developmentally relevant contexts.

Preserve the distinction between behavior, identity, and inherent dignity.

The lesson should not imply that students must feel positively about themselves, forgive themselves immediately, or resolve uncertainty about their identities.

Avoid treating identity exploration as a problem to correct. Students may have legitimate reasons to question labels, expectations, relationships, and institutional messages.

Self-compassion must not be used to minimize harm or erase responsibility. Likewise, accountability must not be used to justify shame or humiliation.

Facilitators should not require students to disclose personal mistakes, identity struggles, family experiences, or emotional vulnerabilities.

Students may question the curriculum's premises, including whether inherent dignity is a useful concept for understanding human worth.

WHAT'S NEXT

Bridge to Lesson 10: The Dignity Dilemma

Across nine lessons, students have developed an increasingly complex understanding of dignity.

They've explored what it means to possess inherent worth, how emotional reactions and social incentives shape behavior, how competing needs create conflict, how accountability differs from shame, and how individual choices interact with larger systems.

They've also returned to themselves with a more nuanced understanding of identity and growth.

But real life rarely presents us with situations where every value points in the same direction.

Sometimes honesty threatens belonging.

Sometimes protecting one person's safety limits another person's independence.

Sometimes accountability conflicts with loyalty.

Sometimes the choice that honors one Element of Dignity creates tension with another.

And sometimes every available option carries a cost.

Lesson 10 brings the curriculum together through complex dilemmas that resist easy answers.

Students will practice using dignity-based prosocial critical thinking to examine competing values, uncertainty, power, consequences, and possible actions.

The goal is not to prove that they've learned the correct moral conclusions.

It's to give them the opportunity to practice the kind of judgment they'll need when no one is telling them what to think.

The final provocation:

> "What do you do when there isn't a clean answer?"

LESSON 10 · FINAL LESSON

The Dignity Dilemma

10

Facilitator guide · High school · 60 minutes

CENTRAL UNDERSTANDING

Dignity does not eliminate difficult choices. It gives us a way to think more carefully when values conflict, consequences are uncertain, and no available choice is perfect.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What do you do when there isn't a clean answer?

Facilitator overview

Over the previous nine lessons, students have developed an increasingly sophisticated understanding of themselves, other people, and the world. They've explored inherent worth, emotional reactions, belonging, social incentives, accountability, boundaries, institutional power, and the complexity of human identity.

Along the way, they've considered why people sometimes behave in ways that hurt others, how our own reactions can influence our judgment, and how the systems we create can either protect or undermine dignity.

The final lesson brings these ideas together through a complicated scenario involving an anonymous social media account that exposes genuine misconduct while also causing serious harm. As the situation unfolds, students encounter competing concerns about privacy, consent, fairness, loyalty, authority, accountability, and institutional responsibility.

There is no obvious villain, and no solution will satisfy everyone.

Students will need to consider the experiences of people they instinctively sympathize with alongside those whose choices they find difficult to defend. They'll also need to distinguish between understanding someone's behavior and excusing it, recognizing someone's dignity and agreeing with them, and following a rule and acting ethically.

Rather than introducing new concepts, this lesson asks students to draw on the thinking capacities they've developed throughout the curriculum. The facilitator's role is to complicate assumptions, introduce new information, and encourage students to develop and revise defensible judgments without steering them toward a predetermined conclusion.

Students may disagree with one another, revise their positions as new information emerges, or finish the experience with questions they haven't resolved. Each of these outcomes can reflect meaningful engagement with the material.

The goal is not to produce students who always know the right answer, but to help them develop the intellectual habits necessary to think carefully when the answer isn't obvious.

Facilitator intentions

Students will have opportunities to:

- Integrate the dignity-based critical-thinking capacities developed across the previous nine lessons.
- Recognize situations in which legitimate needs, values, and dignity concerns conflict.
- Distinguish established facts from accusations, interpretations, assumptions, and unknowns.
- Examine how relationships, social incentives, institutional power, and personal experiences shape judgment.
- Consider multiple perspectives without treating all perspectives as equally credible or all actions as equally harmful.
- Investigate ethical tensions surrounding privacy, consent, recording, public exposure, and accountability.
- Evaluate the consequences and tradeoffs of different decisions, including unintended harms.
- Develop, defend, and revise a judgment while acknowledging uncertainty.
- Reflect on how their thinking about dignity, themselves, other people, and the larger world has changed.

Materials

Wild Feelings Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheets, board or projector, scenario cards or slides revealed in stages, paper or digital space for group recommendations, and optional paper for private reflection.

The existing ten dignity practices are available as an integrated toolkit rather than a checklist students must complete.

○ The 60-minute experience

Time	Activity
0–5 min	Opening: Who gets to decide what's fair?
5–13 min	The account everyone follows
13–23 min	Everybody has a version of the story
23–33 min	You're on the advisory council
33–44 min	New information changes everything
44–50 min	Make a decision you can defend

50–60 min	Reflection: What changed in your thinking?

1

OPENING · PROVOCATION

Who gets to decide what's fair?

0–5 min

Write on the board:

> **"Sometimes breaking a rule is the right thing to do."**

Ask students to take a position.

> "Agree or disagree?"

Invite a few responses before complicating the question.

- "Who gets to decide when breaking a rule is justified?"
- "Does it matter who made the rule?"
- "What if the rule is supposed to protect people?"
- "What if following the rule means someone keeps getting hurt?"
- "What if everybody starts deciding for themselves which rules are worth following?"

Allow students to disagree and explain their reasoning.

Then introduce the experience:

> "Over the last nine lessons, we've talked about dignity, fairness, accountability, belonging, and why people do the things they do.

> "Today, you're going to deal with a situation where all of those ideas collide. You'll have to make decisions about people whose actions you might understand, even when you don't agree with them.

> "And as you learn more about what happened, you may find that the position you felt pretty confident about at the beginning gets harder to defend.

> "Your job isn't to figure out what answer I want. It's to decide what you think should happen, explain your reasoning, and be willing to reconsider when the situation changes."

2

ESTABLISHING THE DILEMMA

The account everyone follows

5–13 min

STUDENT SCENARIO

The Anonymous Account

An anonymous Instagram account called @TheReceipts has become one of the most followed accounts at a local high school.

It started with screenshots of students making cruel comments about classmates in a private group chat, but before long, the account was featuring all kinds of accusations.

One post exposed a popular student who had been harassing classmates online. Another accused a club president of taking credit for other people's work. A third featured a teacher who repeatedly made humiliating comments about students during class.

Some posts included screenshots or audio and video recordings taken without the knowledge or consent of the people being recorded. Others relied on anonymous submissions that couldn't be independently verified.

The account became popular almost overnight, particularly among students who felt that certain people had been getting away with things for years because they were popular, had influential parents, or were favorites of the administration.

Now, at least from their perspective, people were finally being held accountable.

And some things actually changed.

A teacher was investigated after students posted a recording of inappropriate comments made during class, while a club president stepped down following accusations of taking credit for other people's work. Students who had previously felt ignored began coming forward with their own experiences.

But the account also started causing problems.

One student was accused of cheating on their partner, and the accusation spread widely before anyone verified it. The story turned out to be false.

Another student stopped coming to school after being featured on the account. Meanwhile, teachers began worrying that students were recording every interaction in hopes of catching something worth posting, and students started wondering whether private conversations with friends might eventually become public.

Nobody knew who was running @TheReceipts.

Initial reaction

Ask:

> **"Is this account making the school better or worse?"**

Invite students to take positions and explain their reasoning.

Then ask:

- "Why do you think so many people follow it?"
- "What is the account giving students that they weren't getting before?"
- "Is there a difference between recording something to prove it happened and recording something to embarrass someone?"
- "Does someone have a right to know they're being recorded?"
- "If you need evidence that someone is treating you badly, should you have to ask their permission?"
- "What happens to a school when everyone starts worrying that their worst moment might end up online?"

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Resist the temptation to resolve the discussion too quickly. If students focus exclusively on the harm caused by the account, invite them to consider the genuine problems it has exposed and why students might have turned to it in the first place.

If students defend the account without reservation, direct their attention toward the people who were falsely accused or publicly humiliated.

The goal is to establish competing concerns without suggesting that every action or perspective is equally defensible.

3 INVESTIGATING PERSPECTIVES
Everybody has a version of the story

13–23 min

After several parents complain about @TheReceipts, the school calls a meeting to discuss what should happen next.

Introduce the following perspectives.

PERSPECTIVE

Riley, a student featured on the account

Riley's private group chat messages were posted, revealing that Riley had mocked a classmate's appearance and encouraged other people to exclude them from a party.

The screenshots are real, and Riley admits sending the messages. However, Riley argues that the account has made the situation much worse.

> *"People are sending me horrible messages now. They're doing the exact same thing they're accusing me of doing."*

Riley's friends explain that Riley has been going through a difficult time at home and hasn't been acting like themself.

The student Riley targeted sees things differently.

> *"Everyone keeps talking about how Riley feels. Nobody cared how I felt until those screenshots came out."*

PERSPECTIVE

Ms. Alvarez, an English teacher

Ms. Alvarez has consistently encouraged students to report harassment through official school channels, although she also knows that many students have raised concerns without seeing meaningful action.

> *"I don't agree with what this account is doing, but I understand why students don't trust us."*

She's concerned that shutting down the account without addressing the problems it exposed will reinforce students' belief that the school cares more about protecting its reputation than listening to them.

PERSPECTIVE

Mr. Bennett, a history teacher

Mr. Bennett was recently featured on the account after a student secretly recorded an argument in his classroom.

In the recording, he tells a student:

> *"If you put half as much effort into your work as you do making excuses, you might actually pass this class."*

The video has been viewed thousands of times, and students have been debating whether his comment was an example of a teacher humiliating a student or simply losing patience during a difficult interaction.

Mr. Bennett insists that the recording leaves out what happened beforehand, including repeated disruptions and personal insults directed at him.

He's furious.

> *"Students are allowed to make mistakes. Apparently teachers aren't. And now I have to wonder whether someone's recording me every time I open my mouth."*

Several students agree with him and believe the recording was unfairly shared. Others say Mr. Bennett has been publicly embarrassing students for years, and the recording is the first time anyone has taken their complaints seriously.

PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Chen, the principal

Dr. Chen believes the school has a responsibility to protect students and staff from harassment, particularly now that several families have threatened legal action and teachers are demanding stronger protections.

Some students have also reported feeling afraid to come to school because they don't know whether they'll be featured on the account next.

The school's handbook prohibits recording or distributing classroom conversations without permission, except where an approved exception applies. Dr. Chen wants the account shut down and the recording policy enforced.

However, the school recently reviewed several complaints featured on the account and found that some had been handled inconsistently.

Dr. Chen acknowledges those mistakes.

> *"We have to rebuild trust. But we cannot allow anonymous accusations and secret recordings to become our disciplinary process."*

Small-group investigation

Ask students to discuss:

- "Who do you find yourself agreeing with?"
- "Whose concerns are easiest to dismiss?"
- "Does it matter that Mr. Bennett didn't know he was being recorded?"
- "Would you feel differently about the recording if he'd been accused of something more serious?"
- "Does a teacher have a different expectation of privacy while teaching than a student does in a conversation with friends?"
- "If the recording is accurate but leaves out important context, how much should people trust it?"
- "Is Dr. Chen protecting students, protecting teachers, protecting the school, or some combination?"
- "Who has the most power here? Who has the most to lose?"

Push the thinking:

> "Can a recording be both legitimate evidence and a violation of someone's dignity?"

> "Does having the right to record something necessarily mean you should post it?"

> "Does breaking a school rule automatically mean someone has acted unethically?"

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Encourage students to distinguish established facts from allegations and interpretations, paying particular attention to whose accounts they instinctively trust.

If students begin explaining away harmful behavior because they sympathize with someone's circumstances, invite them to consider the difference between understanding why something happened and deciding whether it was acceptable.

Likewise, remind students that recognizing the legitimacy of someone's complaint does not automatically establish that their preferred response is fair or proportionate.

4

DEVELOPING A JUDGMENT

You're on the advisory council

23–33 min

The principal has asked a student advisory council to recommend how the school should respond.

The administration is considering three options.

OPTION A

Shut it down

The school announces that students identified as operating or contributing to @TheReceipts may face disciplinary consequences and that its policy against unauthorized recordings will be enforced.

Students are directed to use official reporting channels instead.

Teachers support this option because they want protection from public accusations and secret recordings. Some students, however, argue that the school is trying to silence criticism and prevent students from collecting evidence of mistreatment.

OPTION B

Stay out of it

The school decides not to pursue the account's creator and instead addresses individual incidents when they violate school policies.

Some students support this approach because they believe the account is exposing important problems that would otherwise remain hidden. Others, including students and teachers who have been targeted, argue that the school would be abandoning its responsibility to protect them.

OPTION C

Change the system

The school establishes a new reporting process, reviews past complaints, and creates a committee of students, teachers, and administrators to examine how concerns are handled.

It also proposes developing a new policy governing the recording and sharing of incidents at school.

However, the account remains active while those changes are developed, leaving some students hopeful about meaningful reform and others frustrated that people continue to be publicly exposed while the school promises to improve.

Your task

In groups, students become members of the advisory council. They may select one of the proposed options, combine elements of several, or develop an entirely different response.

Their recommendation must address the following questions:

1. "How do you protect people who have been harmed without creating more harm?"
2. "When, if ever, is it okay to record someone without their knowledge?"
3. "Should there be different rules for recording someone, sharing the recording with a trusted adult, and posting it publicly?"
4. "What happens when students don't trust the adults who are supposed to protect them?"
5. "How do you hold students and teachers accountable without treating every accusation as automatically true?"
6. "What responsibilities do school leaders have when their own decisions helped create the problem?"

Tell students:

> **"You can't just say everyone deserves dignity. You have to explain what that actually means when people want different things and somebody has to make a decision."**

Give groups time to develop and record an initial recommendation, which they will revisit after receiving new information.

5 REVISING A JUDGMENT
New information changes everything

33–44 min

Reveal the next development only after groups have made an initial decision.

NEW INFORMATION

The school identifies the student running @TheReceipts.

It's Cameron, a junior who started the account after repeatedly reporting harassment against a younger sibling.

The school investigated those complaints but concluded there wasn't enough evidence to take disciplinary action. Cameron says the account was the only way to get people to pay attention.

There's some truth to that claim. Several posts exposed genuine problems that the school had previously ignored, and some students finally saw their complaints taken seriously.

But Cameron also admits that certain accusations were published without being verified. As the account became more popular, the number of likes, comments, and shares increasingly influenced which stories Cameron chose to feature.

Then another detail emerges.

Ms. Alvarez knew Cameron was running the account.

Although she didn't create the account or submit posts, Cameron had confided in her several weeks earlier.

Ms. Alvarez says she encouraged Cameron to stop publishing unverified accusations and offered to help students bring their concerns directly to administrators. She also chose not to tell the principal who was behind the account.

> *"I was trying to keep a student's trust. I also knew that if I immediately reported Cameron, students would see it as another example of adults protecting the institution instead of listening to them."*

Mr. Bennett is furious.

> *"So a teacher knew this was happening and said nothing while students and staff were being publicly attacked?"*

Dr. Chen is now considering disciplinary action against both Cameron and Ms. Alvarez.

And then the school discovers something else.

The recording of Mr. Bennett wasn't the first recording students had made of him.

Several students had previously submitted audio recordings to an assistant principal, claiming they demonstrated a pattern of humiliating comments in his classroom.

The assistant principal told them the recordings couldn't be considered because they violated school policy, and no further investigation was conducted.

Eventually, one of those students sent a recording to @TheReceipts.

The assistant principal defends the original decision.

> *"We have rules for a reason. If we start accepting secret recordings whenever someone feels wronged, where does that end?"*

The student responds:

> *"So we were supposed to prove what was happening, but we weren't allowed to collect the proof?"*

Reconsider your decision

Ask:

> **"Okay. Now what?"**

Give students a moment to react before returning to their groups.

- "Was the assistant principal right to reject the recordings?"
- "Could the school have investigated the complaints without accepting or distributing the recordings?"
- "If a rule makes it harder to expose harmful behavior, does that make it a bad rule?"
- "Should a teacher's authority change how we think about students recording them?"
- "Does Mr. Bennett deserve protection from being secretly recorded even if the students' complaints are legitimate?"
- "Is there a difference between using a recording to get help and using it to get someone publicly humiliated?"
- "Should Cameron face consequences for posting the recordings?"
- "Should Ms. Alvarez face consequences for not identifying Cameron?"
- "Should the assistant principal face consequences for dismissing the earlier complaints?"
- "What if the school enforces the recording policy against students but does nothing about the conduct captured in the recordings?"

Push the thinking:

> **"What happens when the rules designed to protect people also make it harder to hold powerful people accountable?"**

> **"Who gets to decide when breaking a rule is justified, and what happens if everyone starts making that decision for themselves?"**

Ask students to revisit their original recommendations in light of the new information. They may maintain their position, revise parts of it, or develop an entirely different response, provided they can explain their reasoning.

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

The purpose of this reveal is not to make students abandon their initial judgments, but to give them an opportunity to examine whether those judgments remain defensible as the situation becomes more complicated.

Students who maintain their positions should be asked to explain how they have accounted for the new information, while students who revise their positions should be encouraged to identify which facts or considerations changed their thinking.

Neither consistency nor revision is inherently evidence of stronger judgment. The quality of the reasoning matters.

6 INTEGRATED CRITICAL-THINKING PRACTICE

Make a decision you can defend

44–50 min

The principal needs a recommendation by the end of the day.

Each advisory council must address:

- What should happen to Cameron?
- What should happen to Ms. Alvarez?
- How should the school respond to Mr. Bennett's conduct and the assistant principal's handling of the complaints?
- What rules should govern recording, sharing, and publishing incidents at school?
- What needs to change so students and teachers can raise concerns without relying on public exposure?

Tell students:

> "You aren't going to make everyone happy, and there's no guarantee that your decision won't have consequences someone finds unfair or harmful.

> "But you do need to explain how your recommendation recognizes the dignity of everyone involved, including people whose behavior you believe deserves serious consequences."

Groups complete four statements:

Our recommendation is…

We think this because…

The strongest argument against our recommendation is…

We might change our minds if…

Invite groups to share their decisions, encouraging classmates to question the reasoning behind each recommendation rather than simply announce whether they agree.

Conclude the activity by asking:

> **"If everyone in this situation has dignity, why is it still so hard to figure out what's fair?"**

Allow the question to remain unresolved.

7

REFLECTION · CLOSING REFLECTION

What changed in your thinking?

50–60 min

This is the final reflection of the curriculum. Give students a moment to step out of their advisory council roles and consider not only the decisions they made, but how they arrived at them.

Part A Return to the dilemma

3 min

Ask students to think back to their first reaction when they heard about @TheReceipts.

- "Who did you immediately sympathize with?"
- "Who did you immediately blame?"
- "Did you find yourself giving someone more benefit of the doubt because you liked them, or less because you didn't?"
- "Was there a moment when new information made your original position harder to defend?"
- "Did anyone change their mind? What changed it?"
- "Did anyone become more certain of their position? Why?"

Students may respond aloud or reflect privately.

Part B Zoom out

4 min

Explain:

> "At the beginning of this course, we started with a pretty simple idea: Every human being has dignity.

> "Over the last ten lessons, though, we've seen how complicated things can get when we try to put that idea into practice, especially when people disagree, hurt each other, or have different ideas about what's fair."

Invite students to consider:

- "What have you learned about why people do things that hurt other people?"
- "Has anything changed about how you think about people you disagree with?"
- "What about people who do things you think are genuinely wrong?"
- "Has anything changed about how you think about your own mistakes?"
- "When you look at a situation like @TheReceipts, how much of the problem belongs to individuals, and how much belongs to the systems they're part of?"
- "What questions are you asking now that you might not have asked before this course?"

Students do not need to address every question. Invite them to choose one that seems worth exploring further.

Part C **Final reflection** 3 min

Return to the question that has appeared throughout the curriculum:

> **"What changed in your thinking?"**

Invite students to consider how their thinking has developed since Lesson 1, whether about dignity, respect, belonging, accountability, conflict, human behavior, or the complexity of other people's lives.

Some students may recognize significant changes in their perspectives, while others may find that the course has helped them articulate or strengthen beliefs they already held. Both are worthwhile subjects for reflection.

Offer one final prompt:

> **"What's one question about people, dignity, or the world that you're going to keep thinking about?"**

Students may write privately, and no personal disclosure or public sharing is required.

Closing

> "There's something I hope you take from all of this.

> "Understanding people doesn't mean you have to agree with them, and recognizing someone's dignity doesn't mean you have to like them, trust them, forgive them, or allow them to hurt you.

> "It also doesn't mean every decision is going to be easy. Sometimes you'll have to make choices without knowing everything, and sometimes you'll look back and realize there was something important you missed.

> "But recognizing dignity gives us a different place to start.

> "People are complicated, the world is complicated, and you're complicated, too. None of that makes anyone less worthy of dignity.

> "You don't have to have everything figured out. What matters is that you keep asking questions, paying attention, and being willing to think again."

Facilitator guidance

Protect the complexity

This lesson should not become a debate about whether social media, school rules, or student activism are inherently good or bad. The account has exposed genuine wrongdoing while also causing harm, and the school's legitimate responsibilities coexist with consequential mistakes in how those responsibilities have been carried out.

Students, teachers, and school leaders occupy different positions within the community, with different levels of authority, obligations, and opportunities to influence what happens next.

Avoid false equivalence. Recognizing everyone's dignity does not require treating every action as equally defensible or giving every person's interests identical weight in a particular decision.

Avoid predetermined conclusions

Students should be free to argue for disciplinary consequences, institutional reform, a combination of approaches, or another defensible response.

They may conclude that Cameron should be suspended, that the school should change its policies, that Ms. Alvarez exercised poor judgment, or that the administration has failed to accept sufficient responsibility. Other students may arrive at different conclusions after considering the same information.

The facilitator should focus on the quality of students' reasoning rather than rewarding agreement with a preferred moral position.

Treat recording and consent carefully

Recording an interaction and publishing that recording are distinct ethical decisions. A recording may preserve evidence of mistreatment, while sharing it publicly can create additional harms involving privacy, reputation, safety, and context.

Students should examine the purpose and circumstances of a recording, the expectations of the people involved, the reliability of the evidence, relevant power relationships, and the foreseeable consequences of different uses.

Applicable recording and privacy laws vary by jurisdiction and circumstances, and a school policy does not determine legality by itself.

The lesson should not suggest that students must secretly record incidents to be believed or that educators may disregard safeguarding and reporting obligations in order to preserve trust.

Keep the Elements of Dignity available

Students may consult the Elements of Dignity and How to Practice reference sheets as they develop their recommendations.

However, the facilitator should avoid turning the scenario into an exercise in matching each person's experience to a particular Element. The framework is intended to support students' judgment by helping them notice concerns they might otherwise overlook, not to replace the process of reasoning through a difficult decision.

Make space for disagreement and uncertainty

Students may revise their positions, strengthen their original convictions, or become less certain as the scenario unfolds. Each response offers an opportunity to examine how evidence, assumptions, relationships, and values influence judgment.

Encourage students to explain the reasoning behind their conclusions, consider the strongest objections to their positions, and identify what additional information might cause them to reconsider.

Students should not be required to disclose personal experiences, agree with classmates, or describe how they would respond to actual situations involving harassment or mistreatment.

The final learning intention

The curriculum does not end by asking students to demonstrate that they have become better people. Instead, it invites them to recognize the complexity of human behavior, think critically about the choices available to them, and consider how their judgments affect the dignity of others and themselves.

The final measure of learning is not whether students arrive at a particular answer, but whether they can examine their assumptions, engage seriously with complexity, and recognize how their thinking has developed.

The final question is not "Did you get the right answer?"
It is "What changed in your thinking?"

TO CLOSE

What this curriculum is actually teaching

There is a temptation, when creating a dignity curriculum, to end with a declaration about how students should treat one another.

Be kind. Show respect. Include everyone. Make good choices.

Those messages aren't necessarily wrong, but they don't capture what we've spent ten lessons building.

We are not simply teaching students to behave better. We are helping them become more sophisticated thinkers about what it means to be human.

Students are learning that people can be complicated without being worthless. That emotions are meaningful without always being reliable guides to action. That understanding another person does not require agreement. That power and institutions deserve scrutiny. That accountability can coexist with compassion. That discomfort is sometimes necessary, but humiliation is not a prerequisite for growth.

And that they can question the world they've inherited without losing sight of the humanity of the people within it.

The curriculum's central transfer goal remains:

> Students will independently use dignity-based prosocial critical thinking to navigate complex social situations, understand themselves and others, and make intentional choices that honor their own inherent worth and the equal worth of others.

The final lesson does not prove that students have achieved this goal. Ten hours of instruction cannot guarantee how someone will act in every difficult situation.

But it can give students a language, a set of distinctions, and repeated opportunities to practice a more deliberate way of thinking.

And perhaps the most important understanding they can carry forward is this:

The world is complicated. People are complicated. You are complicated. None of that changes your worth.

That isn't the end of the thinking.

It's where the thinking becomes possible.



None of that changes anyone's worth.

WILD FEELINGS

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