

## Social & Emotional Learning Exercise: Junk Thoughts #1

A person's ability to identify and replace "junk" thoughts is a critical skill for self-regulation. In this lesson, we will teach students about thinking errors (aka Junk thoughts) and ask them to *use* them in response to a situation.

### Lesson Plan:

1. Introduce the Skill: Tell the student that today's lesson is about identifying "junk" thoughts and today we are actually going to use junk thinking in order to get better at identifying them. It may be a surprise to you that some thoughts are great and others are not very helpful.
2. Ask for Input: Ask the student to identify what he or she thinks "junk" thoughts are. Have the student give you examples.
3. Teach the Skill: Tell the student you have 4 junk thoughts you will teach them today. Give them the name and see if they can guess what the junk thought is:
  - Blaming (Acting like someone else is responsible for the problem)
  - Catastrophizing (Acting as if the world is ending because of the problem)
  - Denial (Acting like the problem does not exist)
  - Minimization (Acting like a problem is not important)
4. Now tell the student it is time to practice the junk thoughts. Again, the plan is to practice them so you can *catch* yourself using them, not so that they can actually use them. Set the scenario. For example: It's time to turn in homework and the student did not have it. You could also use a scenario where the student failed a test. You be the teacher and ask the student where is their homework. Then have the student try out each of the thinking errors:
  - Blaming
  - Catastrophizing
  - Denial
  - Minimization

You can point out that each of these errors lets the student off the hook for the mistake. Maybe this helps them feel better in the moment, but it also takes away their power to see the problem and make a change that could help them out.

Also ask the student to predict when and where they might be tempted to make each error.

If you feel like the student is very defensive and may not want to do this exercise, you can have them try this out by analyzing the behavior of an imaginary student.

### **Homework**

Ask the student to see how many times they can catch themselves wanting to use one of these junk thoughts during the week. Have the student try to track their junk thoughts up to at least 10 times this week. The more they catch themselves the better. Make sure they know to “celebrate” each catch they make, and never to beat themselves up for using the error.