

The Level

Purpose: To promote counseling awareness through a classroom activity designed to help students: 1. Determine Priorities, 2. Identify variables, which in abundance can compromise priorities and 3. Practice balancing priorities (family, school, friends, music, and sports, etc.)

Materials: 4 foot level, “cool” dark colored sunglasses, two-three plastic bags, weighted materials such as wooden blocks, play-doh, or rolls of toilet paper not to exceed total of one-two pounds,) sheet of paper/ pencil, and “S” shaped hooks or wire coat hangers for “hanging” the bags on the level.

Time: 20 Minutes.

Key Concepts: Figuring Out Priorities, Feeling Off Center, Becoming Level Headed, Well Balanced, Counter Force (making things worse by over reacting/over responding.)

Procedure:

I) Introduce/Re-introduce self to students.

Inform students that you’re in their classroom to do an activity that demonstrates some reasons why people get into counseling. Counselors may also be referred to as psychologists, therapists, and social workers and can be seen by people of all ages like moms, dads, uncles, and aunts.

II) Ask students to have a small piece of paper and pencil to write with. Have them look around and make sure their neighbors have materials too. It’s better to offer materials to those in need rather than having those in need have to ask.

Instruct: Number your paper from one to three. I’m going to ask you to write down your top three priorities. First though, let me explain what I mean...

Paraphrase: “If you don’t know what I mean by the word “Priority,” think about what’s important to you. (This is a good time to coach the kids on the importance of family, school, friends, faith, etc.) Many of us spend lots of time with Family doing things, going places, and more, so that’s probably important to us and that could be one of our priorities. I know all of you spend lots of time at school every day and even more time at night doing school stuff so that could be one of your priorities also. Many of you spend lots of time with your friends in person, on the phone, texting, writing notes, on the weekends, and more. Your friendships might also be one of your top priorities. But we can’t always use time to help figure out our priorities. For lots of people religion/church is important but we may only spend an hour or so their each week or just a few minutes a day in prayer but that still may be very important. I know many of you enjoy sports and music too and those could also be a priority for you. So, for now just write down your top three priorities and we can talk more about those and other priorities later. Once you’re

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finished, put your pencils down because that's all the work we're going to be doing today in our activity."

III) State: "Without shouting out, standing up, blurting, or busting out, I'd like each of you to remain seated and point to the "shyest" person in the room. (Select one and invite the shy volunteer to come to the front of the room.)"

Show the level to that volunteer and ask "Do you know what the name of this thing is? If necessary give clues as needed. For more fun while explaining what the level is and does, instruct the volunteer (shy person) to stand still while you lay the level across his/ her head trying to balance it on top their noggin. Inform class that this is a tool their teacher may or may not use to help determine if students are "level headed" or not (smile.)

Ask the Shy kid if it will be alright to give him/her something to make him/her look really cool (cooler than he/she already is.) Provide student with a pair of really big and dark sunglasses (be sure to cover the inside of the glasses with "non-transparent" tape.) The other kids in the class will not know immediately that the glasses have been tampered with=) **If student is already wearing glasses and or declines to wear the "new" glasses, determine if it's acceptable to have the student horizontally hold the level across the top of his/her head. This method also allows the student to participate keeping him/her "blind" to the centering point. If student continues to decline this alternative method in participation...recruit a less stubborn but equally shy student =)*

Ask shy kid to then hold the level out at arm's length and at eye's height while trying to get the air bubble lined up/centered between the two lines in the view box. Praise, direct, and encourage as needed.

Allow student to rest his/her arms for a moment. Start process over and this time tell student you are going to add some "pressure" to the level. Once glasses are in place, arms extended and level at eye height, hang one plastic bag containing weighted materials on the end of the level. (I often use a modified coat hanger or "S" shaped hook to connect the bag to the level.) Again, ask student to say "Now" when he/she believes the air bubble is lined up between the two lines within the view box. At this point, do not coach the students in their attempts at centering the level. After a student says "Now," I'll often say "No, but you were VERY close!" Be sure to keep the activity moving! Note that you may have to remind the student audience verbally or with a kind gesture not to interfere with the volunteer's efforts...no clues!

After the Shy student has taken his/her turn, have him/her now choose who he/she thinks is the "Bravest" student in the room. Shy kid then sits down and the next student comes forward. Provide the "Bravest" student the glasses and level, and then instruct student to hold level out at arms distance and at eye height. As student begins the process of centering, add a weighted to either end of the level. (You may have to hold a sheet of paper in front the student's glasses in case he/she is trying to look out the sides, up or underneath the glasses.) Again, support the

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student to find that balancing point but do not give any clues. **Some kids may actually find the perfect balancing point. Praise them for it (some people can figure how to balance and center their lives without the help of a counselor)!*

Repeat process. Have the Bravest student then select a member of the opposite gender who he/she considers to be “Strong.” Repeat process using Smart, Funny, Kind, and Cool labels for kids. Kids will also like seeing their teacher try the activity as well.

In bringing the activity to a close, make sure to verbalize and demonstrate the following points:

1. Kids & grown-up see counselors/psychologists/therapists for lots of reasons. Sometimes the reason may have to do with figuring out what their priorities should be or with learning how to keep their priorities balanced. **This is a good time to have all the kids hold up their list of priorities for everyone in the classroom to see. Walk around the room reading many of their responses as you go.*
2. Hold up one of the plastic bags and ask if “video games” ever made keeping priorities balanced difficult to do? Hold up another plastic bag and ask if watching too much “TV” ever made keeping priorities balanced difficult to do? Brainstorm and call on volunteers for other “things” that pull us and our family members away from keeping our priorities in balance.
3. Hold the level at a drastic angle. Tell kids that lots of people begin feeling this way (tilted level) which usually means: frustrated, angry, sad, worried or sometimes scared when things with family, school, faith, sports, or friendships aren’t centered/balanced.
4. Ask, “How many of you have ever felt this way (display the tilted level) about your families? Or friendships?”
5. Raise your hand if you ever felt out of balance like (tilt level other way) by having too many priorities to take care of ?
6. State: “As you get older, (rotate level clockwise and back counterclockwise) you might notice how your priorities may begin to change or replaced by different or newer priorities.”
7. Paraphrase: “No matter if you’re Brave, Smart, Strong, Funny, or Shy it seems we all need help sometimes in getting our priorities back in balance.” Even if you’re super cool (hold up sunglasses) or whatever else, you still might have a hard time seeing things *clearly*. Counseling helps kids and grown-ups not only figure out what our priorities need to be by “seeing clearly” (begin removing tape from glasses) but they can also help us to see how some other things we may enjoy doing (video games/TV/etc.) pull us away from balancing our biggest priorities like families, friendships, and school. After all, it’s a great feeling being centered, balanced, and acting level headed again.”