Session 3 – Sticks and Stones:

Language and How We Use It

Key themes:

The impact of our use of language and words. Why respectful language and challenging harmful speech is important

Key Questions:
- Why do words matter?
- What kinds of words make people feel small or ashamed?
- How does sexist language show up in school and online?
- What can I say to stop hurtful speech respectfully?
- How do I want others to speak about me?

Curriculum Links: click here
Delivery guidance: click here

Aim – Pupils explore and reflect on the importance of language when it comes to our ideas about ourselves and others. They will reflect on why the words we use and hear are important and the impact of words. They will discuss vocabulary that they have heard online.

Ground rules:
- **Confidentiality:** We might talk about personal things, people will share their views, opinions or experiences. This is a safe place for you to be open and honest. We need to know that the things people say doesn't get talked about outside this room

- **Respect:** Discussions need to be respectful, allow people the chance to talk, don't talk over each other. Don't speak about other people in the group or in school.

- **Tolerance:** There will be lots of time to discuss, ask questions and express opinions. We may not always agree and this is ok.

- **Fun:** This is meant to be fun, we will talk about some things that will make you want to laugh, we will be able to be silly at times and laugh at each other. However, if it becomes unkind or rude then I will stop us. We need to know when to stop as some of the things we talk about will be important and serious.

Warm up – The power of words

(Why this? – This activity focuses on helping pupils begin to explore how words impact us. Even in something as simple as a basic activity, a commentary of negativity or positivity is likely to impact our experience, ability and motivation)

Activity – Show the pupils a list of **negative** words associated with performance and memory.

Then show them the image of items to memorise – give them 15 seconds to memorise as many as possible. Change the slide, **PAUSE for a few seconds,**
Then give the pupils 30 seconds to write down as many of the items as they can.
While they do that read the negative script:

"This is a really hard task – you won't be able to remember many items.

"It's really tricky to remember them, and I wouldn't be surprised if most of you forget a lot."

"You are probably finding it really frustrating – you might just want to give up"

"You won't get many, it's really hard to remember, nobody will do very well"

"I'd give up if I was you – we have forgotten, they've gone right out of our heads"

"You are probably pretty tired, maybe next time you'll do better but it is hard"
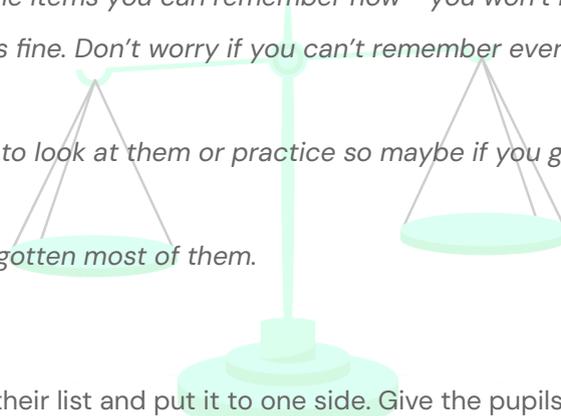
"You've probably got all the items you can remember now – you won't remember any more"

"If you want to stop, that's fine. Don't worry if you can't remember everything — it's probably too hard for most people."

"You hardly had any time to look at them or practice so maybe if you get three that would be good"

"We have probably all forgotten most of them.

"Its really tough"

Ask the pupils to fold up their list and put it to one side. Give the pupils a moment and then read through the positive words. Repeat the activity. This time use the positive script:

"Alright, I can't wait to see all the items you remember!"

"Think about the picture you saw – what was in the top row, what was next, what can you see?"

"I know you can do this! You have loads of time! Just focus!"

"You're doing really well. I can see you paying attention and remembering lots this time"

"You will remember way more this time"

"Every item is there in your brain waiting for you to remember, and I believe each of you can remember them all."

"Keep going, you've got this! I'm really impressed with how focused you are. You're doing great!"

"Don't stop trying, your brain can do it!

"Take a deep breath and don't panic, they will come into your mind as you think."

Reflect & Discuss – How many did the pupils get each time, which time was easier to concentrate, how did they feel during the first attempt compared to the second?

Introduction – Harmful or Helpful! – Hearing harmful words about ourselves over and over can have really harmful effects, they can weigh us down **BUT** positive words can be just as powerful in building us up.

The words we use and hear matter, they impact our:

- **Emotions –** people say words can't hurt us but it's not true – the words we use and hear about ourselves and others have real power to cause pain, damage or happiness and self-esteem.
- **Relationships –** The words used by us or others can damage our relationships with others, we can ruin friendships with our words more often than our behaviour
- **Performance –** Just like the activity we did, it's been proven that negative language from others and ourselves has a serious effect on our performance.
- **Thoughts –** Hearing negative language impacts our mental health in negative ways. It will also impact our thoughts towards others and in the end how we behave towards them

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Definition – **"Self-esteem"**– "Self-esteem is how much you value and believe in yourself. It's how confident you feel about who you are and what you can do. Our self-esteem is impacted by the words we use to think about ourselves"
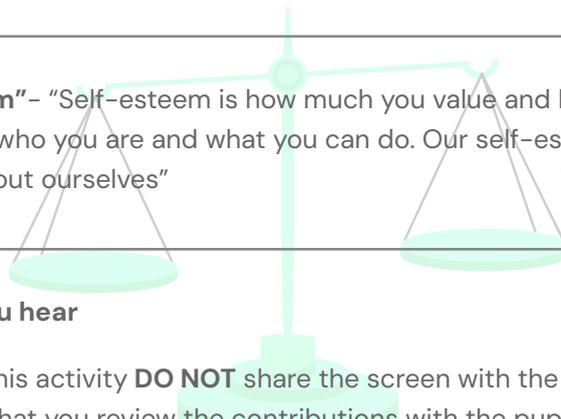
Vocab Grab & Where you hear

(Teacher note – During this activity **DO NOT** share the screen with the class as pupils contribute. It is **NOT** recommended that you review the contributions with the pupils during the session. Instead review the language the pupils have shared with key staff; consider the most common vocabulary and the kinds of vocabulary – is it swearing, sexual, misogynistic, homophobic or transphobic, violent, racist etc – *see* **"What if"** for further guidance.*)*

Vocab Grab

(Why this? – This activity provides a space for pupils to openly and anonymously share any harmful language that they have been exposed to. It provides important insight for the school about the kind of language pupils are hearing and encourages pupils to feel safe in sharing their experiences)

Activity – Provide a way for pupils to anonymously share language they have heard that they feel was harmful, inappropriate for their age or that they did not understand. This can be done using post it notes or online collection tools such as:

Padlet: https://padlet.com/ (A free website where you can create a "blank board". Pupils can scan a QRcode and enter words anonymously)

[Mentimeter: https://www.mentimeter.com/](https://www.mentimeter.com/) (A free website where you can create a wordcloud. Pupils can scan the qr code and enter words anonymously)

Explain to the pupils that you will not be discussing the language they have shared in this session but they should feel safe to share experiences of language they feel is harmful or inappropriate. This helps the teachers and parents to understand more about the kind of language pupils are hearing.

Their contributions to the "vocab grab" will be reviewed by staff and some of the language may be discussed in later sessions.

Where you hear

(Why this? – This activity focuses on creating a space where pupils can share about some key sources of harmful language. This allows for pupils to notice shared sources for harmful language and vocabulary)

Activity – Repeat the "vocab grab" activity, this time asking pupils about the kinds of places they have heard harmful or inappropriate language. Encourage pupils to consider both online and face-to-face experiences.

Review the findings after the session –

Consider any language you may wish to address in further RSE sessions with the pupils.

Take note of any particularly concerning language (ensure this is recorded for monitoring purposes – *see* **"What if"** for further guidance.)

It is recommended the findings are shared with parents in a general communication with all parents within the cohort – find a template [here](#)
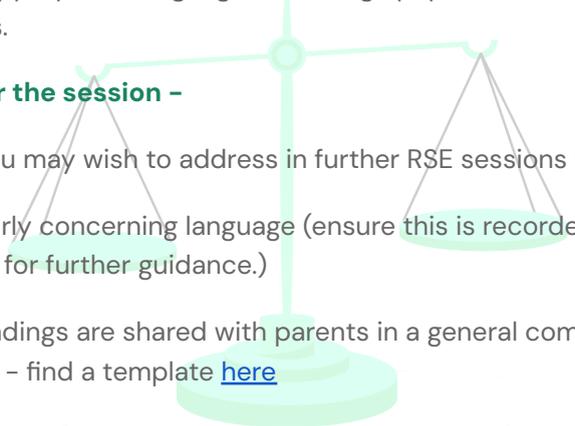
Drop a comment

(Why this? – This activity begins to introduce to how online spaces are often a source for harmful language and how "disinhibition" means that we are more likely to use or hear harmful language online)

Activity – Talk about posting online – why is it important to get likes /subscribers /followers /comments

Show the pupils a mock up of a social media post. Look at the post itself and discuss – who posted it? Why?

Look at the comments and discuss – are the pupils surprised by the comments? Have they seen similar things online? How will the comments make the user feel? Why do you think people post these comments?

Discuss the other mock up posts and create space to allow pupils to talk about their views and experiences

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Definition – "Disinhibition"– saying or doing things you normally wouldn't, because you feel less worried about the consequences. Online, people sometimes feel braver or act differently because they're behind a screen, not face to face. This can lead to unkind or unwise behaviour, like trolling, making comments, using language or sharing images that you wouldn't in person.

Reflect – What would the world be like if we chose to use positive words towards ourselves and others? What would social media be like without trolling or negative comments or content?

Discuss – What if we chose to tell people positive comments? How does it feel to say positive things to people? How does it feel to have positive things said to us? (talk about embarrassment and discomfort as well as the positive impact of kind comments.)

Pupils, staff or both could consider giving compliments and positive comments to each other.

"What if" – Vocab Grab

This session may provide a space where pupils share offensive, vulgar or inappropriate language they have heard. As the activity is anonymous it must be taken into account that individual children cannot be identified

What if...
Someone shares language which is offensive (radicalised, misogynistic etc)
Someone shares language that raises safeguarding concerns

Key things to think about:
- Remember that just because pupils repeat offensive or harmful language or views does not mean they understand this language or hold these views
- The safeguarding concerns raised by this activity have, at least, made you aware that someone within that class is possibly at risk and this can be monitored.
- The emphasis is on creating and maintaining a culture and space where pupils feel safe to share, having experienced the chance to share may lead to pupils at risk seeking further support.
- The presence of offensive or concerning language allows for further intervention and teaching

Response suggestions:
- Ensure the results of this activity are recorded and plans to monitor any groups where concerning views or safeguarding risks might be present.
- Ensure there is follow up with pupils, in the following session thank pupils for their contributions and honesty. Explain to pupils the purpose of the activity and the follow up from the school and encourage pupils to speak to staff or parents about language they hear online (rather than google).
- Ensure safeguarding staff and senior leaders are involved in reviews and aware of the sessions taking place
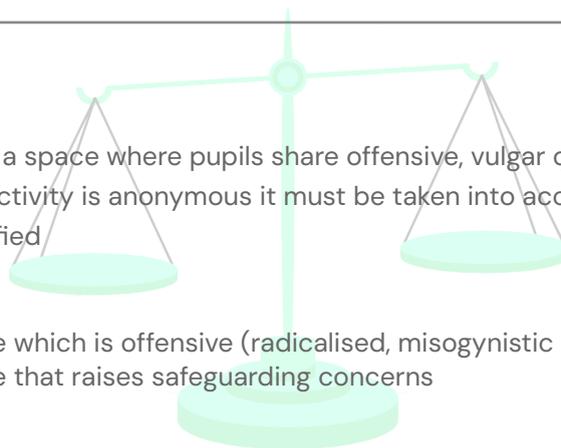
- Ensure feedback is shared with parents to raise awareness that such language is present within the cohort. Encourage parents to speak with their children about this and offer further support.