

How to SURVIVE Middle School



OMG!



SWATE

$$c = \sqrt{a^2 + b^2}$$



BULLYING

PRESSURE

DRAMA!!!



#nosefiecontrol



TESTING





How to SURVIVE Middle School



WELCOME

LINKS
TO OUR FUNDERS:
THE ARTS PRIZE
a program of



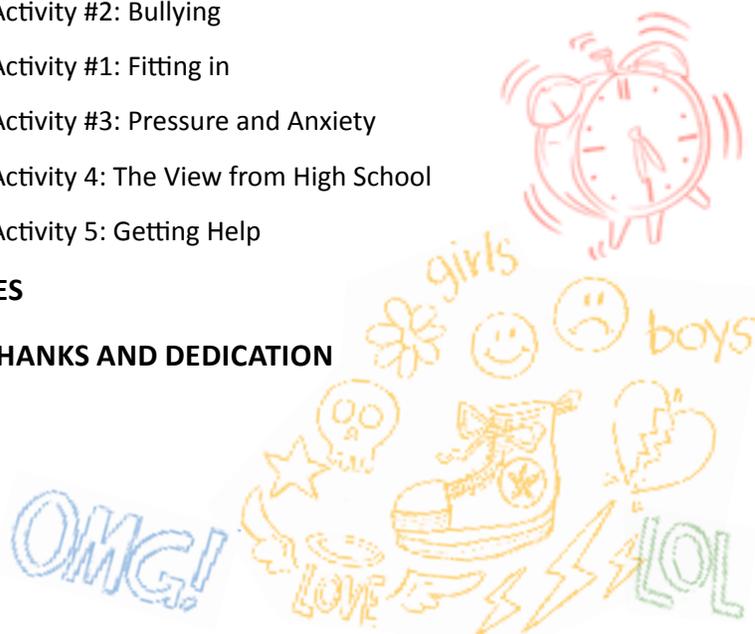
THE COLUMBUS
FOUNDATION



MONICA & DOUG
KRIDLER



- 4 ___ MEET ROBERT POST
- 5 ___ HOW TO SURVIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL. *Why is this show important?*
- 6 ___ HOW TO SURVIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL. *What happens in the show?*
- 9 ___ LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
- 10 ___ LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
- 11 ___ NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS ALIGNMENT
- 12 ___ LETTER TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS
- 13 ___ TEACHER INTRODUCTION
- 14 ___ LESSON ACTIVITIES
 - 14 ___ Lesson Activity #1 - Fitting in
 - 15 ___ Lesson Activity #2: Bullying
 - 15 ___ Lesson Activity #1: Fitting in
 - 16 ___ Lesson Activity #3: Pressure and Anxiety
 - 16 ___ Lesson Activity 4: The View from High School
 - 17 ___ Lesson Activity 5: Getting Help
- 18 ___ RESOURCES
- 19 ___ SPECIAL THANKS AND DEDICATION



ROBERT POST

Comedian Robert Post barely survived Middle School. Struggling because of various learning disabilities, he found that making people laugh saved him. In this brand new multimedia performance, kids talk to kids in a compelling, funny and educational show. Dealing with real issues affecting students today including social media, testing, bullying and peer pressure these video testimonials by kids and their advocates (along with a generous dose of Post's signature humor) is sure to resonate with school and public audiences alike.

One of Robert Post's childhood report cards in Columbus, Ohio, gave a hint as to how his future might unfold. Not amused by Robert's antics, his teacher created a whole new column of categories describing maladaptive



stretched Post's talents but also developed his knack for playful give-and-take with audiences. He crafted his signature style during intensive workshops with Tony Montanaro, the legendary performer and teacher who ran Celebration Barn in South Paris, Maine. Post credits Montanaro for "flipping the switch," helping him see how he could combine his love of character work, movement arts, and improvisation.

And so the antics spun on, in a career spanning more than forty years. The sketches that make up Post's one-man variety show – Post Comedy Theatre – have captivated audiences across the United States as well as in Canada, Mexico, Japan, Turkey, and Europe. He has appeared on the Today show, and he was invited to perform for children in Beslan, Russia, at the school that had been devastated by a terrorist attack in 2004. A PBS special on his work, "Robert Post – in Performance," won an Emmy. The list of grants and other awards that he's received is now much longer than his teacher's listing of maladaptive behaviors.



behavior. Happily for audiences around the world, Post stuck with antics. The result: a dazzling performance career that continues to defy categories.

The creator of Post Comedy Theatre and Post from the Road (who did make it through elementary school) discovered the joys of the stage at Ohio State University, where he studied theater and dance before hitting the road with a touring mime and improv troupe. The experience of traveling up and down the East Coast in an old milk truck that served as a tour bus, performing everywhere and anywhere, and passing the hat for payment, not only

Post juggles – literally (he can keep the balls in the air) and figuratively, balancing his performance schedule with educational programs in schools, master classes, workshops, and stints as a director. He has directed for opera and ballet companies as well as for schools and universities. He has also served as a visionary coach and mentor for individual performers, much as Tony Montanaro helped him find his own vision. His wide-ranging travels have led to Post from the Road, a delightfully quirky video series featuring his encounters with – and bemused observations on – the weird and wonderful byways of American culture.

HOW TO SURVIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

“An absorbing, authentic, and fun program to help students ride a roller-coaster time in their young lives – brought to you by an acclaimed performer and comic genius who started out absolutely hating school.

“Never in my educational career have I seen a large group of middle school students so deeply engaged in a presentation. Mr. Post’s show How to Survive Middle School was sensational, entertaining and engaging while giving middle school students a voice. Mr. Post was funny and connected closely with the students in the audience. The message from the students who were interviewed was clear and delivered a very impacting punch.”

-Joshua Guthrie, Jefferson 6-8 Principal

“How to Survive Middle School was just the right balance of personal stories, video-recorded student interviews and Robert Post’s hilarious brand of physical humor to keep our students fully-engaged from beginning to end. The interviews discussing how middle school students struggle from time to time were authentic, and so was their development of compassion and acceptance for one another.

***-Rachel M. Sorce, Executive Director
South Milwaukee Performing Arts Center, WI***

“Your blending of humor, mixed in with the incredible insights of the students in your videos, really hit home with so many of our students.”

-Jeff Johns, McGuffey 6-8 Teacher

Nobody has to tell teachers and principals how hard middle school students struggle to define themselves and fit in. New freedoms and new expectations, changing bodies, roiled emotions, gossip, dating, painful self-consciousness and nagging insecurities, the sense of being judged and being labeled: it all adds up to a time of confusion and pressure.

And today that pressure can be unrelenting because of social media. These kids are glued to their bright little smartphone and laptop screens, which seem to fill every minute of every day with banter and barbs. The unending stream of commentary too often veers into teasing and even vicious bullying.



There’s no simple formula for helping middle school students navigate this stretch of their lives. But Robert Post, a performer who captivates audiences nationwide with his hilarious one-man variety show, has created a new program that brings middle school kids and their deeply felt concerns right to center stage. “How to Survive Middle School” starts with a 55-minute show that blends fun and entertainment with honest talk about social and emotional issues – and then follows up with lesson plans and activities that teachers can use to help students handle these issues with greater confidence and control.

The real power of this program – and what has most impressed educators familiar with it – is the way it gives voice to the students. Interspersed with Post’s entertaining skits are short videos in which middle school kids speak candidly about the pressures and worries they face. Teachers speak candidly as well, underscoring how deeply they care about their students. The final video features high-school students looking back and talking about how they “survived” their middle school years, and reassuring the younger students that they, too, will survive.

BRINGING THE KIDS TO CENTER STAGE—AND GIVING THEM VOICE

PRESS LINK: [Warren Tribune Chronicle Review](#)



For the students in the audience, it's absolutely absorbing, because it's authentic. The videos bring into the open, in students' own words, issues that every middle school kid can relate to. Those in the audience see that they're not the only ones worried about things like how smart they seem, whether their friends really care about them, or whether they're judged by the clothes they wear. They also see that their teachers are there for them, ready to help. Above all, they see that it's OK to talk about these concerns.

In this way, "How to Survive Middle School" opens up a crucial conversation. And that's an enormous step, because too often students bottle up their worries and emotions. The follow-up lesson plans and activities keep the conversation going. As a result, students who might feel helpless amid the pressures in their lives instead realize that they can grasp and deal with those issues, and that they can turn to their teachers for support. The program gives teachers a powerful tool to promote social-emotional learning.



How to Survive Middle School - The Show

The show moves at a fast pace, in nine parts:

1. It opens with a video that first showcases Post's life performing and touring on the road. The video transitions to middle school students and teachers introducing the struggles of finding one's path and individual gifts and talents and ends with students introducing Robert before he appears live on stage.
2. Then Post comes out on stage to pick up the theme, talking about how hard school was for him because of his learning disabilities. He points out how desperately adrift he felt until he began to appreciate his unique talents. He talks about how he came to appreciate his own imagination, and demonstrates that by performing portions of some of his works. The life lesson: we all have gifts, and we can all create a life that's uniquely ours.
3. Next comes a video about the realities of life in middle school. Post has filmed wide-ranging interviews with dozens of middle school students, and excerpts from those interviews form the heart of the show. In this section, the kids talk about the various social and academic pressures that pervade their lives, from dress and dating to state-mandated tests and the expectations of parents. Middle school is "drama, drama, drama," says one – and these videos show how that's true. Teachers appear as well, showing that they understand the welter of pressures students face.



4. Post emerges to introduce and perform one of the first pieces he ever created. The creation of “A Rather Unfortunate Evening for Burglar Burt” was a breakthrough where Post finally began to uncover his gifts. The work was a tribute to the comic genius of Sid Caesar, an artist Post watched repeatedly on television as a child. Post demonstrates that he finally learned that his learning differences became a huge advantage when it came to inventing his unique style. Next he performs a tango with red long johns, telling the hilarious story of how he created the dance that eventually led to a performance on the TODAY Show.
5. The next video focuses squarely – and honestly – on social media. Again, the power and authenticity come from real students and teachers talking about how social apps like Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr almost addictively draw kids to their smartphone screens throughout the day. The students speak, quietly but movingly, about the unfairness and cruelty of online teasing, and they talk openly about how bullying has led some kids to cut themselves or even attempt suicide. Teachers add to the conversation, talking about their worries and frustrations in the face of this inescapable force in the lives of their students.
6. After the video about social media bullying, Post lightens the mood by performing “Shticks” where he takes three sticks and shows how hard work and a healthy imagination can create a tour de force out of the simplest props.
7. The next video brings in the high school students, discussing their own memories of middle school. They’re just a little bit older than the students in the audience, and they’ve experienced the very same pressures. They can identify. They convey the message, in a way that teachers can’t: You can cope! You will survive!
8. Post then performs his final piece, “Pasquale’s Kitchen,” showcasing a dynamic and wacky chef whose catch phrase reflects the theme of the show: Let your light inside you guide you.
9. The final video and end of the show is a series of photos of a very diverse array of middle school students. On stage Post talks about his struggles in school but he closes with the message that all of us have something unique and amazing inside of us – a gift unique to each individual. The ending is uplifting and celebratory – leaving the students with a feeling of hope and possibility.







INTRODUCTION TO DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

[Download a customizable letter from Robert Post's Website](#)

Middle School is a huge turning point for a student. It is a great opportunity to meet new friends and continue to learn more about the world, others, as well as yourself. But, it can also be a time of fear. Transitioning from a young adolescent to a teenager is already filled with enough physical changes, and trying to navigate middle school today doesn't make it easier. In addition to physical changes, middle school students are going through major changes in intellectual, social, emotional, and moral changes.

It isn't enough to just help students with the layout of the new school, how to open their locker, and where to find their classrooms - schools need to help students on ***How to Survive Middle School!***

In a school's rush to teach under the new accountability systems, the proactive, overt strategies to help students to transition to middle school have diminished. Studies have shown that schools that do not have a solid framework to address transitioning to middle school experience increases in absenteeism, lower grades, and decreases in motivation, self-esteem, and creativity.

Many schools still use the same routines and strategies to orient students and parents in the midst of significant societal changes. With the increasing use of social media and what students are experiencing at earlier ages, it is vital that schools provide honest, relevant support for students and families.

As a person who struggled when he was in middle school and has made a living in helping people, Robert Post created a powerful show to help schools address the issues students are facing in middle school. It's not just a show to entertain them in middle school; it's a forum to allow schools to help students find their voice and believe in themselves.

While schools are rushing to find time for cramming more instruction to meet requirements for state testing, we encourage you to learn more about Robert Post and his work to help students to Survive Middle School!

[add contact information and/or websites to videos, program, etc.]

Sincerely,

Xxxxxxxx

INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

[Download a customizable letter from Robert Post's Website](#)

[insert address]

[insert date]

Dear [insert name],

The responsibilities of the middle school principal and school continue to increase each year. As state standards and accountability measures escalate the stress and need for more time in the school day, there are also the added changes happening to middle school students each year. With the demands on the changing social-emotional needs with each student, the questions and issues of bullying, social media, and other pressures continue to escalate.

While all middle schools have embedded programs to address middle school issues for students, staff members feel ill-equipped to open dialogue to support students with their social-emotional needs. In turn, middle school students don't always feel comfortable talking about their feelings and real questions with just anyone. In order to address the real needs for our students to really support them at this critical age, we need a way to open dialogue in a safe place.

As a person who struggled when he was in middle school and has made a living in helping people, Robert Post created a powerful show to help schools address the issues students are facing in middle school. It's not just a show to entertain them in middle school; it's a forum to allow schools to help students find their voice and believe in themselves.

Having gathered feedback on the stark realities facing middle school students today, Robert Post has found a way to address these issues by incorporating his story, sharing the story of other students, and having a little fun along the way.

While schools are rushing to find time for cramming more instruction to meet requirements for state testing, we encourage you to focus on the foundational needs of each student and learn more about Robert Post's work to help students to Survive Middle School!

[add contact information and/or websites to videos, program, etc.]

Sincerely,

Xxxxxxxx

NATIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

As an educator, we realize the responsibility to ensure the time in school is maximized to ensure students are being exposed to high-quality content aligned to academic content standards at the appropriate grade level.

In preparing his performance and supporting materials for future classroom learning, a variety of national content standards have been incorporated. While your state may have specific standards adopted for a particular content area, there is alignment between the national and these specific state standards.

The National Health Education Standards were analyzed and incorporated into Robert Post’s show as well as the lesson activities. The standards provide a framework for curriculum development and selection, instruction, and student assessment in health education:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Standard 1 | Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health. |
| Standard 2 | Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors. |
| Standard 3 | Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information, products, and services to enhance health. |
| Standard 4 | Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks. |
| Standard 5 | Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health. |
| Standard 6 | Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health. |
| Standard 7 | Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks. |
| Standard 8 | Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health. |



The National Core Arts Standards were also reviewed to address the materials addressing: Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts. The specific standards and structure can be found at: <http://nationalartsstandards.org/>

The **How to Survive Middle School** program was aligned to these standards based on four Artistic Processes and corresponding Anchor Standards modeled below:

👍 PROCESS #1: Creating

- **Anchor Standard 1:** Generate & conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
- **Anchor Standard 2:** Organize & develop artistic ideas and work.
- **Anchor Standard 3:** Refine & complete artistic work.

👍 PROCESS #2: Performing / Presenting / Producing

- **Anchor Standard 4:** Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- **Anchor Standard 5:** Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- **Anchor Standard 6:** Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

👍 PROCESS #3: Responding

- **Anchor Standard 7:** Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- **Anchor Standard 8:** Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- **Anchor Standard 9:** Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

👍 PROCESS #4: Connecting

- **Anchor Standard 10:** Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- **Anchor Standard 11:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding

Based on the grades 6-8 standards, students will have the opportunity to create, perform/present/produce, respond, and connect their experiences with the topics addressed in the program with their self-reflection and interaction with peers and adults.

DEAR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF [INSERT SCHOOL NAME],

[Download a customizable letter from Robert Post's Website](#)

We realize a transition to middle school is difficult for most students. In addition to preparing students in reading, math, science, social studies, and all the wonderful electives we offer, we also realize the need to provide support in each child's social-emotional learning. And, because we care about the whole child, we have partnered with Robert Post to come to our school for a show on "How to Survive Middle School".

The core message of this show is that there is something unique and amazing in all of us. For many kids, middle school is every bit as tough as it was for Robert. Even for those who are smart and successful in school, this time is a confusing one. Robert's performance, incorporating his personal story, shows students that, however uncertain life may seem right now, they can accomplish things that will belong to nobody else. Moreover, it reassures every kid that, just as Robert had his brother and uncle, there are adults who care about *you*, who see the unique gifts that *you* have, and who want to help you make them your own.

In addressing the social-emotional issues of our students, we realize each child will respond differently. That's why we believe it is important to engage parents, as well as students, prior and after the show. We will be talking informally with the students to prepare them. We also have planned activities after the show to help students to self-reflect and help empower them make it a great middle school experience!

Prior to the show on [insert date], we encourage you to talk with your child and ask them questions about their current experiences, feelings, and attitudes. Below are a few questions to help you get started. The questions aren't magic or need to be asked in order, they are just meant to get the conversation started:

1. What's the best thing you like about middle school?
2. What has been the biggest adjustment from elementary school?
3. Who is someone you go to when you have great news to share?
4. Who is someone you go to when you are feeling sad?
5. What is your biggest hope when you finish middle school?

Sometimes, students need additional support at school to help "survive middle school". If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact your child's school counselor [insert name] and [phone number].

Thank you for your partnership in helping your child to find success at [insert school name].

Sincerely,

[insert principal name]

Principal

TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Robert Post created “How to Survive Middle School” for very personal reasons. If you’ve seen the show – if you’ve seen any of his shows – you know that he’s an amazing performer who exudes joy, confidence, and a love for what he does. But Robert was so miserable in middle school, so confused, wounded, lost, and alone, that he couldn’t even talk about his memories until just a few years ago. In part because of a learning disability, school was torture. Robert’s biggest fear was having to stand at the chalkboard to answer a question, which he inevitably got wrong. He believed the whole class could see how dumb and lazy he was – a humiliation that deepened when he had to stay after school, repeating the right answer, to no effect.

$$c = \text{Sqrt}(a^2 + b^2)$$

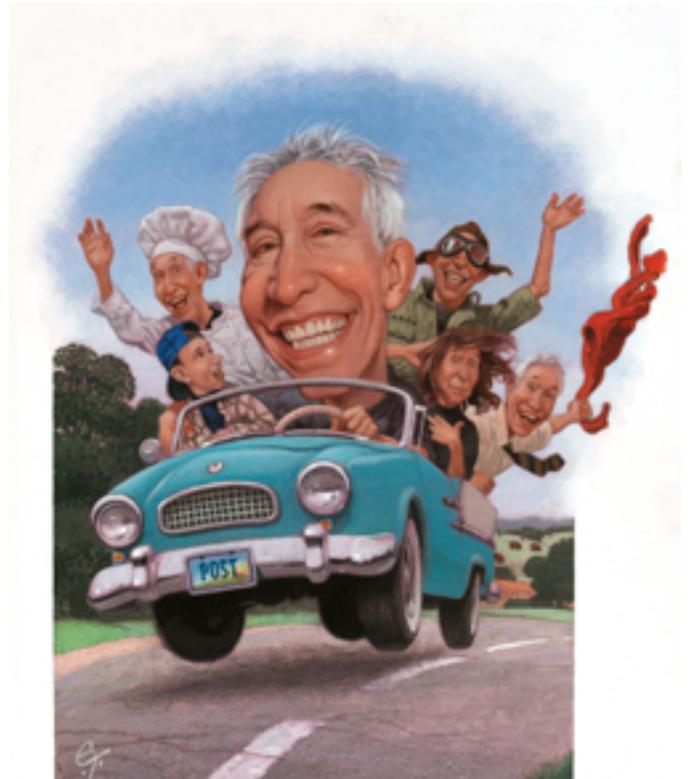


Doug & Robert Post

But Robert was lucky. He had an older brother who helped him with homework, telling him, “There’s nothing wrong with you; we just have to figure this out.” He had an uncle who said to him: “I don’t know what you’re going to do with your life, but whatever it is, you’re going to be great.” And he had an inkling that there was something special inside him. He knew that he could be funny and that he had a quirky imagination. He was mesmerized by the talented performers who took the stage on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. He discovered that when he latched onto something, he could work at it for hours. By the time he was in college, he was able to recognize and focus on his own talents. He saw that the funny characters and voices which

he had invented as a kid, to get out of trouble when his mother was angry, might reflect unique gifts: gifts that could lead to a performing career.

The core message of this show is that there is something unique and amazing in all of us. For many kids, middle school is every bit as tough as it was for Robert. Even for those who are smart and successful in school, this time is a confusing one. Robert’s performance, incorporating his personal story, shows students that, however uncertain life may seem right now, they can accomplish things that will belong to nobody else. Moreover, it reassures every kid that, just as Robert had his brother and uncle, there are adults who care about *you*, who see the unique gifts that *you* have, and who want to help you make them your own.



LESSON ACTIVITIES

The true power in the message of the show is the conversations that happen after the show. Robert Post is going to definitely make everyone laugh, but he will also touch a nerve with students at times. It's important for such a sensitive topic as this to debrief with students and continue conversations that help them to self-reflect and talk about their feelings.

There's no magic to the lesson activities. They don't need to be completed verbatim in a set amount of time. The fundamental core to their success is allowing conversations to take place. Feel free to adapt them in the moment based on the needs of the students and your personal comfort. If necessary, classes can be combined to co-teach them, but we highly recommend keeping them in small groups to build a tighter community of trust and open dialogue.



LESSON ACTIVITY 1: FITTING IN

Background

"What can I do – what can I be – to fit in?" Whether they articulate it or not, this question makes itself felt, day after day, in the emotional lives of many middle school kids. Sixth grade plunges students into a new world of harsh judgments – about their body type, their clothing, whether they're "smart" or "dumb," how many friends they have, whether they're cool enough. At school and home – and online – they carry the burden of needing to be liked and feeling that they have to do what others want. And all of this takes place when they're going through the physical and emotional changes of puberty; when their brains are not developed enough to withstand the daily barrage of gossip and criticism; and when they feel tugged between their desire for more independence and their continued reliance on adults.

Fear of not fitting in, of being "different," can lead students to encase themselves in an emotional armor. They keep out the hurt, but at the expense of living in a kind of denial. Because they're afraid that other kids won't accept them as they really are, they present a false front, thereby hindering their ability to blossom into their individuality. Robert's show and this activity is designed to help give kids the confidence to shed the armor and understand they are not alone.

Instructions:

"Today, we will be talking about a fear middle school students tend to have in fitting in. Often, students think they are the only ones feeling like they don't belong or feel a certain way. Please clear off your desks with only a writing utensil and paper. I'm going to read 10 statements. After I read each statement, place a check on your paper if you have ever felt that way while in middle school. You can cover your paper with your hand if you would like; this will be confidential. Don't put your name on your paper. At the end of the 10 statements, I will collect your paper. No one else will see your paper. Once I have all the papers, I will tabulate the numbers. While we won't know which of the 10 statements each person marked, let's get a better idea whether you are alone.



1. Sometimes, I feel like I don't fit in anywhere.
2. Sometimes, I feel like no one gets me.
3. I have felt angry when someone made fun of me at school.
4. I have been bullied through social media.
5. I wish I had more friends.
6. I wish people knew the real me.
7. I feel like I have to pretend to fit in.
8. Some of my classes are hard
9. I have been made fun of for how I look.
10. I am scared to go to high school.

After the students marked the number of statements they identify with, please collect the papers. To help students feel safe, walk around and collect them from each student. Then, create a scatterplot on the board to reveal how many students marked 1 statement, 2 statements, and so on.

Debrief with the students their reactions to the data. Ask the students which questions they feel middle school students tend to think are hard - be careful making statements that ask a particular student what he/she marked. As conversations take place, remind the students they aren't alone. The goal is for students to share their feelings with a trusted adult whenever they feel down.

BULLYING

LESSON ACTIVITY 2: BULLYING

Background

Bullying has always been part of the intense social life of middle school students. But today "social life" includes the 24/7 torrent of words and pictures on social media, which allows for truly appalling cruelty because the bullies can remain anonymous, hidden behind a smartphone screen. Using fake accounts that render them invisible and untraceable, posting attacks that can't be proven because the app automatically deletes them after a moment, the cyber bullies feel totally uninhibited. They say things they would never say to a person's face, sometimes with devastating results. The news provides all too many stories of young bullying victims driven to hurt themselves or even commit suicide.

Robert's show has two important goals here. One is to tell kids: you're not alone; there are a lot of people who care deeply about you and want to help. The other is to open dialogue – to encourage the students to come out of their shells. It's revealing and helpful, for example, to watch the final video of Robert's show, when former middle school bullies, now in high school, admit that it was fear which drove them. They knew what they were doing was wrong, and they feel guilty about it now, but at the time they were terrified of being outcasts themselves. That's why they bullied others. Here, too, but in a different way, the message is: you're not alone.

Instructions:

"Bullying can be defined as: an unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. It's important to understand the definition of a bully and examples of specific bully behaviors. Sometimes, we use other words to define our behavior and actions towards others like 'teasing' or 'joking', but when an incident takes place it can meet the definition of bullying. Our district/school has the following stance on bullying: [insert district/school policy or rules on bullying]. By understanding the definition and example, we can better realize what it looks like, so we can make sure it doesn't happen."

On a board, write down the following in three columns: Verbal Bullying, Social Bullying, Physical Bullying. Ask students to list specific examples of issues in each of the columns. Feel free to probe to get them to be specific. Here are some examples if needed:



| Verbal Bullying | Social Bullying | Physical Bullying |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teasing ● Name-calling ● Inappropriate sexual comments ● Taunting ● Threatening to cause harm | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leaving someone out on purpose ● Telling other students not to be friends with someone ● Spreading rumors about someone ● Embarrassing someone in public or on social media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hitting/kicking/pinching ● Spitting ● Tripping/pushing ● Taking or breaking someone's things ● Making mean or rude hand gestures |

"In our school community, it's important we recognize bullying behaviors, so we can help each other not to bully others. Not only should we pledge not to bully others, we need to look out for each other. So, if you "see something, say something" to a trusted adult. Like we learned at our last activity, we all need to work together to fit in."

PRESSURE

LESSON ACTIVITY 3: PRESSURE & ANXIETY

BACKGROUND

For middle school kids, pressure comes from all sides. In school, there are more serious academic demands, more testing, more freedoms and responsibilities. On the social scene, there's the continual drama of making friends and finding a comfortable niche, plus peer pressure – to look and act cool, to date, to drink or take drugs. Often, kids feel pressured to be someone different from who they really are. At home, they can be themselves, but parents seem to send mixed signals, treating them like children but expecting them to act more grown up.

It's not surprising that kids feel anxious, that they're confused about their identities. They wonder: who is the "real me"; how can I be true to myself? Often their instinct is to mask this vulnerability and push adults away. They may pretend that they don't need or want guidance; they may even take dangerous risks. Robert's show, coupled with follow-up activity, seeks to break down these barriers, encouraging the students to open themselves up while supporting teachers in their efforts to show care and offer help.

INSTRUCTIONS:

"Everyone you know is feeling pressure or anxiety about something—a test, the sporting competition, or an argument with a friend or family member. You and 3 other classmates decide to help others to manage their anxiety by forming a company, called Pressure Solvers, to give advice to other students in your school. A stressed-out person can write you a letter, and you'll respond by providing suggestions for dealing with the stress. Start by reading the letters on the handout. Choose one and write a letter back to them to help them out. In your response, make sure to:

- 👍 *Identify what's causing the person's stress;*
- 👍 *Provide one or two ways for reducing stress;*
- 👍 *Offer a suggestion for avoiding stress in the future."*

Work with student groups to guide them in talking with one another and ensuring they have practical strategies to address each of the three areas above.

Dear Pressure Solvers,

I am so stressed! I barely have a minute to relax all day long. Before school, I go to tennis practice, and after school, I work on the school newspaper and have violin lessons. On Saturday mornings, I volunteer at my church. Then the rest of the weekend, I try to catch up on the schoolwork that I didn't have time for all week. I never see my friends, and I always eat on the run. I'm starting to have headaches and stomachaches. What should I do?
From Suzie

Dear Pressure Solvers,

ARGH! Everything is going wrong. I have a social studies project due at the end of the week and it will take me forever to do because social studies class is hard for me. To make things worse, my best friend isn't speaking to me right now, and I'm not sure who else I can turn to who would just listen to me. With so much pressure, there are some days I just don't want to get out of bed.
From, Kevin



Dear Pressure Solvers,

My parents are getting a divorce, and I'm really anxious about it. I can't stop thinking about what's going to happen to my family. I don't feel like hanging out with any of my friends, and I don't think there's anyone I can talk to who will understand what I'm going through. When someone does try to talk to me, I snap at them and tell them to leave me alone. I have no clue why I do it! I don't know what to do to get this knot out of my stomach.
From, Shahed



Dear Pressure Solvers,

All of my friends are going to a party on Saturday. I hear there might be alcohol. My parents would freak out if they knew I went there, but I also don't want to disappoint my friends. I'm afraid of being called names if I don't go to the party. On top of all this, I have homework and to study for tests! It is so hard to focus! Help!

From, Rajat

DRAMA!!!

LESSON ACTIVITY 4: THE VIEW FROM HIGH SCHOOL



BACKGROUND

This is an enormously valuable part of Robert's show because of the reassurance it offers, and teachers can build on it to open up conversation and keep dialogue going. All of the high school students whom Robert interviewed had fresh memories of middle school; they could deeply relate to what middle school kids are going through. And every single one pointed out that life got much better in high school. High school students begin to become more comfortable with who they really are, and so the anxieties about superficial things like clothes fade. It's easier to find like-minded people and build firm friendships. People feel less "different," because differences are more accepted and seem less threatening. Even the bullies have lost their power, either because they too have grown and changed or because others simply don't have time for them.

Using the testimony of these high school students, teachers can help their kids in middle school see that things will indeed get better. Life in high school means more freedom to choose classes, more choices about extracurricular activities, stronger bonds of friendship, and above all a greater sense of being comfortable in one's own skin. This part of the program offers middle school students an authentic, compelling, and optimistic look at their own future – a future that lies very close.



INSTRUCTIONS:

"Sometimes, it is hard to look in the future to see that things can get better. When we are faced with immediate challenges, it sometimes feels difficult to see how experiences can make us better with the proper vision. Having a clear vision of the future can be an extremely important motivator to yourself and help clarify the things that are important to you. Today, you will be creating your own Vision Board - a graphic with pictures that represent what you want to accomplish, how you want to feel, and want you hope to experience when you are in high school. Having a Vision Board can be a powerful way to display your goals and keep the proper view of choices you will need to make."

Depending on how much time you want to allocate to this activity, it can be done in 30 minutes or over the course of weeks. You can ask students to bring in or have magazines in which they cut out pictures. Make sure to preview the magazines for suitable pictures. Then, you just need glue, poster board, markers, and scissors.

You can also have students create their posters digitally by creating a collage from photos on the internet. While it is appropriate to do this activity online, the power of the Vision Board is to have a printed display to put in their homes. If students cannot print their completed board, we recommend using magazines.

Keep in mind the goal is not to create a poster for their life, job, or dream vacation. It needs to express their feelings, attitudes, hopes, and dreams of their high school experience in order to make connections to the next stage in their life.



LESSON ACTIVITY 5: GETTING HELP

BACKGROUND

Among middle school students, it's just accepted that if you're struggling with problems, you figure them out alone or with trusted friends. Kids are fiercely protective of their budding independence and feel that friends "get it" in a way that adults can't. This isolation can leave them dangerously unprepared when pressures build to the point of crisis.

It may be hard for the kids to accept that teachers are not in fact clueless and that teachers hold them in their hearts. "How to Survive Middle School" achieves its honesty and authenticity by giving voice not only to students but also to teachers. It shows that, whatever the issue – fitting in, social pressures, bullying – teachers know what's going on in their students' lives. They understand, empathize, and care. And they want to help.

The message that emerges in this program, again and again, is that if you reach out, you'll find help. The single most important goal of "How to Survive Middle School" is to convince kids that communication is vital and will make a difference. It encourages them to seek out caring adults – teachers and coaches, principals and counselors, parents and other family members. It encourages them, as well, to get involved in activities like sports, the arts, or volunteer groups: places where they can pursue their own interests, experiment with new possibilities, and thus fashion their own identities with friends who share their values.

INSTRUCTIONS:

"There's a huge misconception that as we get older we shouldn't need help from others. No matter what, it's okay to get help from others. As a school community, it is important that each and every student is able to identify an adult and friends they can go to for help.

Take out a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side, take a few minutes to list adults and students in your life you went to for help last year. On the right side, list adults and students in your life you went to for help this year. It's okay if the list is completely different; and, it's okay if the list is the complete same."

Walk around the room and help prompt each student to identify at least one student and adult on each side of the paper. After students have had time to write down names on both sides, discuss as a class the following question starters to help students to think through their support system.

- ❓ **What qualities do you see in the people you chose and why you chose them?**
- ❓ **What things tended to shift in the people who changed from last year to this year?**
- ❓ **How could you make your support system even stronger?**



RESOURCES

- **Schools:**
 - [CASEL.ORG in the Classroom](#)
 - [CASEL.ORG in Schools](#)
 - [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
 - [Moving from the Middle School](#)
 - [Smooth Sailing to Middle School](#)
 - *Owning Up*, by Rosalind Wiseman.
 - [Incoming! Tackling the Transition to High School](#)
 - *Working with Kids Who Bully*, by Walter B. Roberts, Jr.
 - *Teaching the Whole Teen*, by Rachel Poliner & Jeffrey Benson.
 - [Transitioning Young Adolescents from Elementary to Middle School](#)
 - *Coming of Age: The Education and Development of Young Adolescents*, by Kenneth Brighton
- **Students:**
 - *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Create Your Best Future*, by Amy Neward & Milton Boniuk
 - [StopBullying.gov for Teens](#)
 - *Wonder*, by R.J. Palacio
- **Parents:**
 - [CASEL.ORG in the Home](#)
 - [StopBullying.gov for Parents](#)
 - [Tips for Parents on a Successful Transition to Middle School](#)
 - *The Pressured Child: Helping Your Child Find Success in School and Life*, by Michael G. Thompson.
 - *Childhood Unbound: Saving Our Kids' Best Selves - Confident Parenting in a World of Change*, by Ron Taffel.
 - *Queen Bee Moms and Kingpin Dads: Dealing with the Difficult Parents in Your Child's Life*, by Rosalind Wiseman & Elizabeth Rapoport.



SPECIAL THANKS:

VERY SPECIAL THANKS to the Schools Participating in this Project:

[New Albany Middle School](#), New Albany OH

[Starling STEAM PK-8 School](#), Columbus OH

[Willard PK-8 School](#), Warren OH

[Phoenix Middle School](#), Worthington OH

[Briggs High School](#), Columbus OH

[Canal Winchester High School](#), Canal Winchester OH

[Indianola Informal K-8 School](#), Columbus OH

[New Albany High School](#), New Albany OH

[Warren G. Harding High School](#), Warren OH

[The Columbus Association for the Performing Arts \(CAPA\)](#) & Rich Corsi, CAPA's Vice President for Programming

[Diverse Media Zone, Inc.](#)

[Ohio Alliance for Arts Education](#)

Daniel Laskin, Writer

[Dr. Neil Gupta, Content/Resources](#)

[Lisa McLymont, Design](#)

Visit [robertpost.org](#) for photo & video credits

This show is dedicated to my brother, Doug (Dr. Douglas M. Post). I couldn't have survived middle school without his support.

