**Lesson 2 resource**

**Activities on taking responsibility for your actions, feelings, choices and decisions.**

The activities in this handout are from the DARE to be You curriculum and are for use with program participants. They are designed to be utilized in order to build awareness; however, individual activities can be used to emphasize particular points.

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**Activity:** TAKING RESPONSIBILITY \*

**Purpose:** Students gain perspective of having choices in everyday activities in which they feel powerless.

**Materials:** Paper, Pencils, flipchart and markers or blackboard and chalk.

**Procedure:** This activity and discussion encourages participants to look at their personal levels of internal control.

*One way to initiate thoughts of internal control is by an activity called TAKING RESPONSIBILITY. Think of three things you do on a fairly regular basis that you really don’t like to do. These should be things you feel you have to do, that you feel trapped into doing. Write these out using the format, “I have to,…” for each situation.*

Give your own examples or use these:

*I have to drive a friend somewhere, I have to attend certain family events, I have to get up at 6:00, but I would like to sleep until 9:00. A list for younger kids might include, I have to go to school, I have to make my bed.*

*What kind of feeling do you have when you say “I have to…?” (usually angry, discouraged, powerless, or out of control.)*

*Now, cross out the “have” in each sentence and put the word “choose.” (Use your examples on the board or flipchart to demonstrate.) How many of you agree that you choose to do the things on your list? (Many people may argue they have no choice. Wait to pursue the point.)*

*Let’s look at our statements another way. Select your least favorite situation. Think of seven alternatives—other choices—you could make in that situation. It may appear difficult to think of seven choices, because your mind works quickly and discards ideas almost before you notice them. This happens especially if you think they are unacceptable or would not work. List those ideas even if you might normally discard them as unusable. Be creative and think of new possibilities.*

Give a personal example, or use this one.

Example Choices Outcomes

I choose to I could refuse.

help my parents I could disappear.

 I could say I would and

just not do it

I could make up an excuse

I could get a friend to help.

See if anyone wants to share their example. If so, write it out. If you have an example, have the class list possible outcomes for each choice. Mark an “A” besides choices that are acceptable considering the outcomes. Cross out the unacceptable choices.

Ask how many students found an alternative in their own example that they would choose instead of the action they listed in the “I have to” statement. Occasionally someone thinks of a new idea that would really work. Usually this does not happen, but it can be an added benefit. Ask the participants to check off all the alternatives that they would make a choice not to do, usually for good reasons.

In looking at their original statement, ask if they now agree that they may be making the best possible choice to reach the outcomes or results they want.

*It is a very powerless feeling if a person has never thought of any other alternatives or realized that they have actually made a choice and probably a good choice. It increases a person’s sense of internal control to realize s/he may not like a certain activity, but s/he has the power to make a choice. No unknown outside force compels us to make our choices.*

*If people feel they “have” to do something, they portray a very powerless, out-of-control and unhappy frame-of-mind. If they realize that in a powerful way they are making a choice, it leads to a more positive attitude. They are in control, and they are making the best choice in the situation. Even if they don’t find pleasure in the activity, it undoubtedly serves a worthwhile purpose.*

*SUMMARIZE: The purpose of the activity is not necessarily to decide on a different action or find a new possibility; however, that sometimes is a nice side benefit. Its purpose is to change the way we view and think about the choices we make.*

* *No one physically forces us to have a certain behavior – we have a choice.*
* *We may be doing what we are doing because it is the best choice in the circumstance.*
* *We can get rid of the “trapped, passive, out-of-control” feeling that comes with saying “I have to.”*
* *It is important to look at our choices. Are our actions good choices or should a change be made? Are we trapped because we haven’t taken the time to find a better choice?*

*When applying this idea with friends and others, watch for times when they blame actions on siblings or fiends, “he made me do it.” To help others realize that their actions are their choice helps them accept responsibility for their choices and be more in control.*

*There are several STRATEGIES that help others develop a sense of internal control. When using these strategies, it is important to remember that young children cannot develop- mentally assume true internal control. This ability does not develop until early teens; however, we can lay the groundwork for the feeling of having a powerful influence on one’s life. We can set patterns for self-responsibility in very young children and continue to build as the child matures. Here are some practical steps.*

1. *Natural consequences: people feel more powerful in their own lives if their actions bring results that are logical outcomes.*
* *If a child forgets lunch or homework, what is the natural consequence? (If someone “bails” them out or gives them special attention and reinforcement for not being responsible, it may give them a false sense of the consequences of their actions.)*
* *If a child picks a fight or insults another kid, what is the natural consequence? (If an older friend rescues the child from the other kid the child gains a subconscious feeling that “I can act badly and not suffer.”)*
1. *Give choices.*

*Give those you help non-life-threatening or harmless choices and let them experience the consequences. These can be choices on how to handle a situation, what a younger sibling might wear, how a person in a group might finish a project or when to schedule an appointment.*

* *You are helping a group of children. They make a suggestion you do not think will work. What should you do? Let them try it and learn for themselves. You may give advice but don’t force them to change.*
* *A friend chooses to play around instead of doing his homework. Suddenly he is stuck. What should you do? Don’t pitch in and do his work at the last minute.*
* *When a young friend makes a mistake. What should you do? Don’t make a habit of covering the mistakes of a young friend.*

*If children do not learn “choice-making skills” until they are teens they are at risk. The situations they face as adolescents may be life-threatening. They need practice using skills to make the proper choices as young children.*

*An example: You are working with a group who are putting on a performance. Some of them assume everything will fall into place without extra practice or double-checking. You may advise them it isn’t going to come together without extra effort, but don’t rescue them. Allow them to experience the confusion.*

*This can be very difficult to balance as their success or failure reflects directly upon you. You must look at the long-range effects of your actions and decide whether it is more important to have a successful event in the short-term or to help the students learn important life skills for the long-term.*

*Some discussion activities help develop “choice” skills. Have students talk about the alternatives and consequences in different situations.*

1. *Role Model “Taking Responsibility for Actions”*

*Continue to develop personal “internal control.” Teens with a good sense of internal control provide powerful patterns. If you catch yourself saying “they made me,” change that pattern! Show others that you “choose” your actions and feelings.*

1. *Be Flexible*

*It is important to set limits, but it is equally important to allow for flexibility within the limits. Be willing to negotiate, but have some predefined consequences.*

*Negotiate win-win solutions. This means finding solutions that meet both your needs and the needs of the persons(s). This is important because it gives*

* *A model for letting both sides win without feeling powerless if they compromise.*
* *The realization they can influence decisions if it is important to them. If a person feels they never get their way, they will never believe they can control their lives.*
1. *Discuss who is ultimately responsible for a person’s life.*

**Discussion:** Have participants discuss different times when they have been affected in positive ways by choices and flexibility and in negative ways by the lack of the above strategies.

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**Activity:** I CHOOSE….

**Purpose:** This activity will introduce the concept that people can choose their feelings.

**Materials:** Paper and Pencils.

**Procedure:** When the group first meets, ask everyone to write on a slip of paper three different ways they feel at that moment. Use the format, “I feel…” From several aspects of one’s life a person will feel several ways, e.g., I feel joyful, I feel frightened and I feel nervous. Ask them to rewrite their feelings statement so that they say, “I choose to feel…” (They do not have to put why they feel that way.) Tell them you want them to think about whether or not they have any control over the way they feel. You optionally can discuss their feelings at the end of the meeting or class. Discuss if they are happy with the feelings and would like to take control. Reinforce that everyone can have control over their feelings and change those feelings. Many people are very resistant to admitting they have control, but this brief exercise will expose them to the concept.

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**Activity:** VICTIMS AND VILLAINS

**Purpose:** Participants accept responsibility for their own feelings.

**Materials:** Paper and Pencils.

**Procedure:** Participants will evaluate their control over personal feelings in given situations – how much they control their own feelings or allow these feelings to be controlled by others. Divide the participants into groups of three or four. It is especially helpful if you and two other people can circulate between the groups to watch for pitfalls: people trying to “fix” each other’s problems by giving advice or one person dominating with a lengthy story. Help the students think of examples, and have participants identify their feelings. Have the participants work through the situations step by step.

*Step 1: Identify a Victim Role. Think of a recent incident when you felt someone was unfair, cruel or took advantage of you- a time when you were particularly upset. Write it down. For this purpose, do not use an extremely emotional or personal example.*

*In your group, you are each to take turns playing a “victim.” Explain your situation to your companions. Stay in the role of a victim. That is, describe what people did to you and how they made you feel.*

 *“He made me so made when he said that about me.”*

 *“She made me so angry when she borrowed my shirt without asking.”*

 *“The clerk really upset me. He took advantage of me and overcharged me.”*

 *“My parents are driving me crazy.”*

 *“My boyfriend (girlfriend) upsets me so much that I eat too much and am getting fat.”*

*You may expand your situation, but stay in the role of the victim. (Limit each description to one or two minutes. People love to describe their victim roles and could take 20 minutes each.)*

*For the purpose of the activity, follow the instructions. Do not “fix” a problem by offering advice or asking questions. Discuss the situations outside of the activity time if you wish.*

*The two listeners in each group must make sure that each victim stays in the “victim” role and blames all feelings on someone else.*

*Step 2: Name the Villain. Have each person name the “villain” in each example. The “villain” is the person or thing on whom you are placing the blame for how you feel and what you do.*

*Step 3: Identify Feelings. Have each person indentify the feeling(s) in the situation. In the store clerk example, the feeling was anger with the clerk on the first or most obvious level. Usually there is another underlying feeling. In this case, it might be frustration with oneself for allowing the situation. (Other underlying feelings may include hurt or frustration at being out of control of the situation.) Most examples will have underlying feelings.*

*Step 4. Question Benefit of Reaction. Look at the feelings and decide whether or not those feelings or emotional reactions have any benefit for you. (For example, anger might be beneficial if it motivates you to make a change. It might not be beneficial if you just carry it around, and it uses up emotional energy.) Is the person so important that they deserve power over your feelings? Take responsibility for you were feeling, not the incident. Many situations we cannot change. But your feelings and reactions to the incident are factors you may control. “This feeling is my reaction to his situation.”*

*Other feelings, life grief, cannot be easily released but must be acknowledged so healing can occur. People think that by denying or covering their feelings they have gone away. This is not true.*

Share the analogy of our emotions being like our physical body. Both feelings and wounds can become infected and cause more pain if they are not acknowledged.

 *Step 5: Acknowledge that the feeling is your response to the situation. For example:*

 *“I let myself get upset when my boyfriend is grouchy. I handle my frustration by eating.”*

 *“I didn’t confront the clerk when she overcharged me. Now I am upset with myself.”*

*“I am allowing my parents to irritate me. I have chosen to be annoyed instead of to change or accept the situation.”*

*Step 6: Villain List. When the above steps are completed, make a list of ten people, things and events you keep as personal villains. These are people or things on which you blame your actions and feelings. You won’t have to share these unless you wish. Examples of “people villains” can be spouses, parents, friends and family. Examples of “thing villains” can include school, money, government and your health.*

Draw a stick figure puppet on the board or flipchart. Attach ten strings to the figure. Have the participants do the same. Have each person write in a villain on each of the strings. Ask the group if they want to give their villains enough power to pull their strings. Have them each identify at least one from whom they would like to take back their “string.” Have them “cut” that string on their drawing. Many people may want to “cut” several strings.

**Discussion:**  What emotions did you feel as a victim? Were those emotions hiding other feelings? How did the feelings change when you looked at them with this activity?

Discuss that some negative feelings are healthy because they can cause action, but others are harmful. Sometimes the person or event isn’t really very important or the situation can’t be changed. To let go of anger in those cases may reduce stress. At the minimum, each person should be able to look at their feelings and make the choice.

You may conclude the discussion like this.

*It is certainly true that unfair or cruel things happen to us, but it is our choice how we respond. And most important, no one can “make” us feel a certain way if we choose not to be affected. On the other hand some people are important enough to us that feelings take a long time to change.*

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**Activity:** RESCUING

**Purpose:** This activity increases awareness of personal Victim, Rescuer and Persecutor roles.

**Materials:** Paper and Pencils.

**Procedure:** Explain the different roles. The Rescue Game has three different types of participants: a Rescuer, a Victim and a Persecutor. The Victim usually assumes the attitude, “I cannot help myself;” the Rescuer usually assumes the attitude, “People cannot be helped or help themselves” and the Persecutor usually assumes the role, “It’s your fault that you cannot be helped.”

People often assume different roles depending on with whom they are interacting. An example of the switch in these roles is a nurse whose favorite role may be Rescuer with the patients, but may turn to Victim when dealing with a doctor. A mother may be a Rescuer with a child and a Victim with a husband or nurse. A father may be a Persecutor with a son, and yet a Victim when it comes to an alcohol problem. People can assume each role because it is comfortable or because they unwittingly are forced into the role.

Families can be primary influences in putting members into Victim positions. A parent that acts as either a Rescuer or a Persecutor may force a child into the Victim role. Forcing a child into the role of a Victim robs a child of his/her personal sense of control or power. It reinforces the child’s belief that s/he does not have control of his/her life and cannot do for him/herself. The parent is a Rescuer or Persecutor when that parent robs the child of power, and the parent does things for the child that the child is perfectly capable of doing for him/herself.

Have each participant spend about five minutes writing down some aspects of their lives where they play the three respective roles, because they choose to do so (also with whom). Some examples for a child might be:

**Victim:** “I don’t have time to put away my laundry, Mom.”

**Rescuer:** “She was just trying to help me.” (protecting younger sibling)

**Persecutor:** “You should be able to do your homework, but you just don’t seem able. I’ll have to help you.” (with a school friend)

After that is done, have the participants spend a few more minutes thinking of situations in their lives when they have been forced into being victims (as opposed to their first examples where they chose the role), rescuers and then persecutors. Have them write out the circumstances.

**Victim:** Your family does not allow you to make decisions on how to spend your allowance.

**Rescuer:** Your friend can’t finish his homework, so you give him yours to copy.

**Persecutor:** Your sister won’t put away your things she borrowed without you nagging at her.

**Discussion:** Now have the group discuss the following questions: Think of how you felt being a victim in the first situation. Where you comfortable? How does that compare with the second situation where you were forced to be a victim? Why is there a difference? How would you feel if people would not let you be a victim? Why? How do you feel when you are forced to be a victim?

If you wish to expand, follow the same line of discussion for the Rescuer and the Persecutor. Participants will usually feel very comfortable in the Victim roles that they choose and not really want to change. Awareness of the roles will have some impact on participants decisions to become victims in the future.

The outcome of these activities is to become aware of the times we may force people into roles in which they are uncomfortable or may feel trapped in roles by others.

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**Activity:** I CAN’T…I WON’T

**Purpose:** This activity increased awareness of self-responsibility

**Materials:** None

**Procedure:** Have the participants think of three or four “I can’t” statements they commonly use. (I can’t lose weight, I can’t get there on time and I can’t get along with…) Ask them to consider their school life, their social life, their home life, etc., as possible areas from which to draw these statements. Ask the participants to turn to a neighbor for a partner. Have them take turns saying their “I can’t” statements.

After a few minutes, ask them to go back and repeat all the statements they just said with one change: replace the word “can’t” with the word “won’t” or “I don’t want to.” Explain to them that the words “I won’t” may not feel right to them the first time they say them, but it is like going into a clothing store and trying on a coat - it may not fit you, but you won’t know until you try it on. Saying it doesn’t mean you are stuck with it forever. It is simply an experiment to discover how we experience ourselves differently after saying “I won’t” instead of “I can’t.” Ask them to repeat exactly what they said before, except for the substitution of “won’t” for “can’t,” and take the time to be aware of how they experience saying each statement. Again, give them about five minutes to do this.

**Discussion**: Bring the group back together and ask them what they experienced as they did the exercise. Did they experience any difference between saying “I can’t” and “I won’t?” Usual responses will include such statements as: I felt more powerful when I said, “I won’t.” I felt like “ I can’t” was a copout. I felt like I was more in charge with “I won’t.” When I said “I can’t,” it was as if there was some outside force controlling me. With “I won’t” I realized that the decision to do it or not do it was all in me. I sounded whiny when I said “I can’t.” “I won’t” sounded truer to me.

Ask them to consider whether their “I can’t” statements are statements of something that is impossible or whether it is something possible they simply refuse to do. Ask them to become aware and affirm their power of refusal. “I can’t” implies being unable, crippled and controlled from the outside. “I won’t” affirms the responsibility of their actions. Often this reaffirmation of responsibility leads to the transformation of an “I can’t” to an “I will.”

After you have used this exercise, ask your participants who say “I can’t” to repeat whatever they have said with the words “I won’t.”

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**Activity:** KNOT KNOWING\*

**Purpose:** This is a communications and self-responsibility activity. It will help to solve breakdowns in communications, personalize “I messages” and accept feelings.

**Materials:** None

**Procedure:** Have participants think of two or three experiences they have had when communications were broken because of an inability or unwillingness to talk with someone else. Have everyone brainstorm metaphors for the way they honestly felt: cold wars, dead ends, ice, knots. Participants can draw a picture, write a poem, or tell a story about how this feels.

**Discussion:** Discuss feelings, what can be causes and cures, brainstorm practical solutions or role play practical solutions. You can use this activity to lead into “I Messages.” Have participants write “I Messages” for their personal situations. Optional: Role play with each other. Ask: Would “I Messages” help untie knots?

\* All activities are from DARE to be You curriculum and are for your use with program participants, not for redistribution.

\*\* Taken from Sue Miller’s Whole Mind Works.