

Everything you say and do is having an impact on others.

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Character Pillars



Respect



Responsibility



Caring

Intent vs. Impact

BACKGROUND

One goal of good communication is for our intent to be in line with our impact. Sometimes we are successful in doing this, and sometimes we are not. When the intent and impact of our communication are out of sync, it can cause confusion that can lead to all kinds of problems.

Making decisions responsibly and building relationships with others requires that we think of not only the intent but also the impact of our words. It is hard to prioritize impact over intent. The truth is, impact often plays a much larger role in communication.

For more on intent versus impact, see the *Scientific American* article titled “‘But I Didn’t Mean It!’ Why It’s so Hard to Prioritize Impacts over Intentions” (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/psysociety/e2809cbut-i-didne28099t-mean-ite2809d-why-ite28099s-so-hard-to-prioritize-impacts-over-intents/>).



SCHOOL

Elementary



OBJECTIVE

Students will learn the difference between intent and impact and brainstorm ways to bring them into alignment.



MATERIALS

- Balled-up sheet of paper
- Trash can
- *Positive Intent/Negative Impact* handout (a copy for each student)

Procedures

- 1 Write the following definitions on the board, and answer any questions the students might have about the terms.

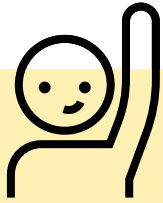
intent:

Something that you plan to do on purpose

impact:

Having an effect on someone or something

- 2 Take a sheet of paper and crumple it up. Tell the class that your intent is to get the paper in the trash can. (Do your best to miss.)
- 3 When the paper hits the floor, ask the students if your intent was carried out. What happened instead?
- 4 Let some students shoot, but make sure they know they get one shot and if they miss they will have to take responsibility for missing. They should pick up the paper and put it in the trash can. Remind the students that it is okay to miss and it is important to take responsibility for it!



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How do you feel when you do or say something that was taken the wrong way?
- 2 How do you feel when you have been hurt and you find out the person didn't mean it that way?
- 3 Can you always control your impact on another person? Why or why not?
- 4 Can we always control what happens after we say or do something?
- 5 What can you do before speaking or doing something to make sure you have the impact you want? (Possible responses: pause before speaking or acting, think about the possible impact.)

Procedures (continued)

- 5 Explain that in life, and as with people, there is often a difference between what you mean to do or say and what actually is heard or happens. Even though our intent was to get the paper in the trash can, we missed, and now we have to go clean up our mess.
- 6 For the sake of modeling, pretend the following example happened to you. You were excited about learning and often called out answers during class. You meant to share your knowledge with the class but what actually happened is that other students did not have a chance to think about the answers and learn on their own. You were not a bad person for being excited about learning, yet the impact was that other students got frustrated.
- 7 There are two parts to intent versus impact. Explain both parts to the students, and have them answer the questions based on the previous example.
 - Sometimes we do or say something that we think is fine, yet someone else feels bad because of it. What can we do when this happens? (Possible responses: listen to people's feelings about the impact, apologize for hurting feelings or stop yourself mid-sentence.)
 - We can also prevent negative impacts before we act. What are some things we can do? (Possible responses: take a few breaths before answering to allow time for others, count to 10 before raising your hand or raise your hand only three times a day by choosing the answers that are the most important to you.)
- 8 Divide the students into small groups, and distribute the *Positive Intent/Negative Impact* handout. Review the instructions, and have them complete the handout.
- 9 Once all groups have finished, review their responses and lead a large group conversation using the discussion questions.

Putting into Practice

HABITS

- ✓ When conflicts occur in the classroom, encourage the students in conflict to clearly share their intent and impacts with one another. Direct students to practice active listening skills and have good will towards one another.
- ✓ When interpreting a literary text, prompt students to consider characters' intent and impact.

JOURNAL PROMPT



We all sometimes say or do things that hurt others unintentionally. Describe a time when this happened to you. How did it feel to be misunderstood? What (if anything) did you do to help the other person feel better? What changes did you make in your words or behaviors after that?





ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

LESSON HANDOUT

Positive Intent/ Negative Impact

Directions: Read the scenario as a group. Fill in the columns.

SCENARIO	What is the intent?	What can you do to take responsibility for the negative impact after it happens?	What can you do to prevent the negative impact in the first place?
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1 You are excited about a playdate with your friend. You start talking about it in front of some other friends who were not invited. They get quiet and look down.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

2 You are playing foursquare at recess and hit someone in the face with a ball. You win and are excited. The person you hit has a big red mark on their cheek.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

3 Your friend talks about being embarrassed when he tripped and fell in the hallway. You laugh but notice he is not laughing with you.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

4 You are working on a project with a group. You know the topic very well and you are telling everyone what to do. You notice people looking at each other and rolling their eyes.

_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____



SCHOOL

Middle/High



OBJECTIVE

Students will learn the difference between intent and impact and brainstorm ways to bring them into alignment.



MATERIALS

• *Positive Intent/Negative Impact* handout (a copy for each student)

Procedures

- 1 Write the following definitions on the board, and answer any questions the students might have about the terms.

intent:

Something that you plan to do on purpose

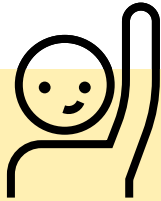
impact:

Having an effect on someone or something

- 2 Ask students to think of a time when someone stepped on their physical toes. Was it at home? On public transportation? Ask the students, “What was the person doing when they stepped on your toes?” Take a few responses.
- 3 Ask the students, “Was it their intent to step on your toes?”
- 4 Explain that even if it was not their *intent* to step on your toes, the *impact* was that it still hurt. One way to understand the importance of intent versus impact is that someone may not have meant to hurt you but still did. Sometimes the impact is unintended, accidental or even the opposite of what you would have hoped. There is often a difference between what you meant and what was experienced by the other person.

NOTE

Model intent versus impact by sharing a time when your intent did not match the impact. Example: You told a joke that was meant to be funny, but you ended up hurting someone’s feelings.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What are some factors that contribute to how others interpret your actions?
- 2 What could happen to someone else's feelings when the impact is not our intent?
- 3 How do you feel when you do or say something that was taken the wrong way?
- 4 How do you feel when you have been hurt and you find out the person did not mean it that way?
- 5 What can you do to make sure your impact matches your intent?

Procedures (continued)

- 5 Two things can happen with intent and impact. Explain both parts to the students, and have them answer the questions based on the example of stepping on someone's toes.
 - We will realize we hurt someone *after* we act. We will say or do something that we do not think is harmful, but the person on the receiving end feels bad. What can we do when this happens? (Possible responses: listen to people's feelings about the impact, apologize for hurting them, stop yourself from getting defensive.)
 - *Before* we act, there are things we can do to prevent a negative impact. What are some things we can do? (Possible responses: be aware of your surroundings to avoid hurting anyone, do not rush or allow other people to go first when there is a crowd.)
- 6 Divide the students into small groups, and distribute the *Positive Intent/Negative Impact* handout. Review the instructions, and have them complete the handout.
- 7 Once all groups have finished, review their responses, and lead a large group conversation using the discussion questions.

Putting into Practice

HABITS

- ✓ Start a daily intention journal. Have students spend two minutes each morning setting an intention for the day. Close each day with a two-minute written reflection evaluating the impact of their intent.
- ✓ When you find a student having a negative impact on their classmate, find out what their intent was and remind them of intent versus impact.

JOURNAL PROMPT



We all sometimes say or do things that hurt others unintentionally. Describe a time when this happened to you. How did it feel to be misunderstood? What (if anything) did you do to help the other person feel better? What changes did you make in your words or behaviors after that?





MIDDLE/HIGH
SCHOOL

LESSON HANDOUT

Positive Intent/ Negative Impact

Directions: Read the scenario as a group. Fill in the columns.

SCENARIO	What is the intent?	What is the impact?	What can you do to take responsibility for the negative impact after it happens?	What can you do to prevent the negative impact in the first place?
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1 You are excited to hang out with a new friend. You start talking about it in front of some other friends who were not invited. They get quiet and look down.

2 You are playing volleyball in gym class, and the winning spike hits someone in the face. Your team wins, and you are excited. The person you hit has a big red mark on their cheek.

3 Your friend talks about being embarrassed when he tripped and fell in the hallway. You laugh but notice he is not laughing with you.

4 You are working on a project with a group. You know the topic very well, and you are telling everyone what to do. You notice people looking at each other and rolling their eyes.

5 Every day at lunch you are starving. You run to the lunchroom as soon as the bell rings and head straight for the pizza. You grab two slices and go to pay, when you realize there is a long line that you just cut.