

Session 68: The Dignity Stance

courage • self-worth • calmness • assertiveness • self-control

Session 68 introduces the Dignity Stance, an effective assertiveness tool students can use when they are involved in conflicts or mistreated by others.

Students will

- learn to use the Dignity Stance in conflict situations
- understand how to act assertively rather than aggressively or passively

Materials

- chart paper and marker
- handout: "The Dignity Stance" (page 162)

Preparation. On chart paper, write the steps for the Dignity Stance (see page 162).

Introduction. Tell students that today they're going to learn about an important way to stand up for themselves when they're involved in a conflict, or when they want to prevent a conflict or stop one from getting worse: the Dignity Stance.

Review with students what it means to be assertive (strong and honest, yet respectful, saying what you need to say with confidence).

Say: **You can show *assertiveness* in the way you hold your body and how you speak. The Dignity Stance is one way to do this.**

Activity. Tell students that starting with deep breaths and a calming statement will make it easier for them to use the Dignity Stance. Spend a few moments taking deep, abdominal breaths together; remind students to say a calming statement to themselves as they breathe.

Direct students' attention to the chart you have created. Go through each of the steps of the Dignity Stance with the group.

Stand tall with your head held high, feet apart, shoulders back. Demonstrate the Dignity Stance. Ask students to stand and also take the stance. Scan the class for kids who may need coaching. Some students might stiffen their bodies while others may take an aggressive stance, maybe even balling up their fists. Others will stand tall with head down shoulders hunched. Give coaching where needed.

Take slow, deep breaths to keep your cool. Have students join in you in taking three slow, deep abdominal breaths. Remind them that they can do this "invisibly" (in a non-exaggerated way) and no one else will know they're doing it. Demonstrate how.

Keep your body language and facial expression neutral but strong. Emphasize that it's important to keep a *neutral* (nonemotional) expression that is strong but respectful. Demonstrate this for students. Then say: **Sometimes we have to act "as if." We need to act as if we are feeling brave, even if we're really scared. The more we act like we feel brave, the braver we will actually begin to feel. Our body language can help us look and feel brave and strong.**

Make direct eye contact. Demonstrate looking someone in the eye with confidence, not aggression.

Note: In some cultures, children are taught that looking someone in the eye is disrespectful. If you have students who have been raised to look downward or avert their eyes, let them know that, with many people, making direct eye contact is an important way to communicate respect and confidence. Help students identify when and how to do this comfortably.

Speak in a firm, steady tone of voice. Demonstrate with the following statement that can be used when facing an angry person: **"I know you're mad, but let's see if we can talk this out."** Have students turn to one another and make this statement standing tall, speaking in a steady, neutral tone of voice.

Select one student to join you before the group. Face your partner and say: **Now let's pretend you've just said something hurtful to me. First I'm going to take a deep breath and make my calming statement. Then I'm going to stand tall, look directly in your eyes, and in a firm, level voice I'm going to say how I feel.**

Still facing your partner, say: **"I find that insulting."** Now ask students to practice doing the same with the person next to them.

Walk away tall and strong. Demonstrate walking away tall and strong. Tell students that breathing deeply and repeating their calming statements will

help them walk away with poise and dignity. Now have them practice walking away tall and proud. Give coaching where needed, and if you see any aggressive or passive postures or gestures help students modify them.

Remind your students of the way Martin Luther King Jr. carried himself during civil rights marches. Even when people were yelling racist words and threats, he would consistently stand tall, walk strong and proud, and maintain a neutral facial expression. This is the finest example of the Dignity Stance that exists for all of us.

Discussion. Have students sit back down in the circle. Ask for two volunteers to come to the center. Ask one student to imagine the other has just called him or her a name. Have the recipient of the put-down assume the Dignity Stance, give an assertive I-message, then walk away tall and strong.

Ask students to give feedback. Did the person stand and speak assertively, not aggressively? Did the person walk away tall and strong (not wimpy or aggressive)?

Ask students to come up with other assertive statements that can be used in similar situations. They might be I-messages or simple statements, but they should always be firm and respectful. Some examples are:

- “That wasn’t funny.”
- “Not cool.”
- “I don’t need to listen to this.”
- “You’re wasting your time.”

Ask for more volunteers to come to the center of the circle, stand in the Dignity Stance, look the person in the eye, deliver a firm, steady response, and then walk away tall and strong.

Say: **If someone calls you a name or puts you down, the Dignity Stance is a way you can be strong and assertive without having to name-call back. You can walk away strong and brave, not scared and weak, just the way Martin Luther King Jr. did.**

Wrap-Up. Entertain questions and comments. Give students the “Dignity Stance” handout and suggest they tape it into their journal or onto the wall at home.

Extension. Suggest that students do the following visualization activity at home: **Tonight, while you’re lying in bed before falling asleep, practice some deep breathing and picture yourself using the Dignity Stance. See yourself standing tall and brave, looking someone who has insulted you in the eye, and speaking assertively. See yourself walking away tall and strong.**

The Dignity Stance

Stand tall with your head held high, feet apart, shoulders back.

Take slow, deep breaths to keep your cool.

Keep your body language and facial expression neutral but strong.

Make direct eye contact.

Speak in a firm, steady tone of voice.

Walk away tall and strong.

