

Be the Change Follow-Up Plan

“Now that our school has experienced Challenge Day, what can I do to help sustain the positive changes?”

As a result of participating in Challenge Day programs, young people make a powerful commitment to be the change they wish to see in their schools. The sad reality is that all too often these motivated youth return to their school community and are immediately faced with difficult choices, intense negative peer pressure, an almost universal desire to fit in, and a strong fear of rejection. They need the support of the entire school community to create lasting change.

Challenge Day programs are a powerful catalyst for growing acceptance and compassion in schools and communities. Your Challenge Day is a first step to create awareness about ways we separate socially, and to learn tools that can help people bridge those divides. To quote our Challenge Day leaders, “the real work starts when you walk out of those doors.” Our vision is that the connection fostered in a Challenge Day room can be an everyday experience for every community. The Be the Change Movement is about creating the school, community and world of your dreams every single day. Thank you for “Being the Change” in our world!

Step 1—Create and sustain your student Be the Change Team

Real change can begin with the leadership of young people. Those who participated in Challenge Day will be longing for the type of caring support and connection they experienced during their Challenge Day event. They will also be ready to create positive cultural changes in their school environment related to kindness, acceptance, inclusiveness, and anti-bullying.

Creating a Be the Change Team is about creating an on-going culture of respect and acceptance, led by students themselves. We’ve prepared a guide that explains how to set up the team (or integrate it into an existing group or club) and provides sample weekly activities to engage participants. Challenge Day has the biggest impact when combined with the efforts and commitment of students, teachers and other community members in partnership with groups that may already exist on your campus: leadership groups, mentorship programs, peer-led clubs, and conflict resolution classes/groups.

You can access the free Be the Change Team Guide here:
http://www.challengeday.org/downloads/BTC_TeamGuide.pdf

Step 2—Lead by example and create a caring school community from the top

Hopefully you've had administrators and staff members participate in Challenge Day. The first step in creating socially and emotionally supportive administrators and staff is to give them an understanding of what their students are feeling and experiencing.

10 Ways that School Leadership Can Sustain Challenge Day

1. **Walk the talk—support and participate in Challenge Day from the top**
Challenge Day is an experience that can catalyze positive social and emotional environments in your school, but it does not stand alone. Also, young people deplore double standards. We can plaster our schools with positive slogans and posters, but the adage “actions speak louder than words” is incredibly apropos for schools. If adults are bullying one another, or worse yet bullying and harassing students—even when it seems like harmless teasing—the behavior needs to change there if we expect it to stop perpetuating among students as well. Having top administrators endorse Challenge Day and participate sends a powerful message about the importance of inclusion. Plus, you'll benefit from your own profound experience and learning an incredible amount about the emotional and physical experiences of your students.
2. **Allow teachers, coaches, staff, and resource aides to attend Challenge Day**
Teachers and other individuals on campus are better educators and more supportive resource personnel when they have an understanding of what the young people they work with are experiencing in their lives inside and outside of schools. They will also have a more informed understanding of the lessons and practices taught in Challenge Day so they can sustain them in the classroom. And they will have a profound experience themselves, increasing their self-acceptance and improving their peer and student relationships. In fact, some teachers have described Challenge Day as one of the best professional development workshops they've participated in even though it wasn't necessarily designed for that purpose.
3. **Hold a united vision for an inclusive and socially connected school**

We can't change only some parts, and expect the whole school culture to change. When we create a strategy to establish a culture of safety, inclusiveness, and care, we must be relentless in identifying the individual parts of the school environment that are not in alignment with that core value. Anti-bullying actions are not just for students, and not only in vulnerable places like restrooms. Like a leak in the dam, if bullying or harassment remains okay among adults like teachers and parents or in settings like gym and sports, our effort at cultural change is threatened with collapse. Has your school created core values that support how students, faculty, and administration relate to and support one another? Is the school relentless in incorporating these values into every decision and every setting?

4. Support the creation of Be the Change Teams

Creating a Be the Change Team is about creating an on-going culture of respect and acceptance, led by students themselves. When you create the right setting (we've provided you with a user-friendly guide) young people can be incredibly insightful about the programs and actions that create change because they are more in-tuned with the influences they respond to. When you support and encourage Be the Change Teams from the top, you provide those who participated in Challenge Day with the type of mutual caring support and connection they experienced during their Challenge Day event, and you encourage them to lead create positive cultural changes in their school environment related to kindness, acceptance, inclusiveness, and anti-bullying.

5. Host a Challenge Day Faculty Development Program for your teachers

The professional development workshops offer educators their own experiential engagement with social and emotional learning areas, and opportunity to strengthen bonds as a teaching community, increase self-awareness, gain insight into the neurological realities shaping student development, and design lessons using Challenge Day teachings. In this way, you help ensure that students who experience Challenge Day return to a socially and emotionally supportive classroom that reinforces the lessons learned.

6. Create a service culture—track and recognize positive acts of change on and off campus

Challenge students to make at least one daily positive contribution on campus and document it. An act of change can be as simple as helping someone with their homework, sticking up for someone who is being teased, or eating lunch with someone new. An act of change can also be as significant as getting help to stop a fight on campus or volunteering for a cause. We encourage teachers to have students share their contributions either aloud or in pairs with partners. This

process can take little time, but can shift the classroom climate by moving students from a “victim” mentality to being recognized for positive contributions.

7. Notice—know your students and their out-of-school environments

School can often be a refuge for students who experience trauma and stress in their home, social, and work environments. School can be a hazard zone for others. The more you understand about your students’ circumstances outside of school, the more supportive your school can be for their social and emotional needs. Begin by talking with them and using the simple “If You Really Knew Me” tool – e.g., instead of saying what’s wrong with you or what’s up with you to a student, say “if we really knew you, what would we know?” Conduct a forensic analysis of your school population using publicly available data from sources like the U.S. Census – levels of income, single parent households, poverty, homelessness, medical issues, trauma and violence, gang activity, availability of positive youth development experiences in the community.

8. Offer restorative justice programs to resolve conflicts

Restorative justice programs that empower students to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups complement and strengthen Challenge Day programs by creating an ongoing culture of mutual respect, peaceful resolution, and reconciliation. The format brings students together in peer-mediated small groups to talk, ask questions, and air their grievances. The programs can help alleviate student conflicts and create more campus unity. Schools with restorative justice programs also see substantial reductions in suspensions and expulsions, increasing learning times, and students say they are happier and feel safer.

9. Practice empathy—remember there’s no such thing as a bad kid

During Challenge Day, we teach that each child is born with a heart filled with innocence, wonder, hope, and dreams. During childhood and adolescence though, young people can experience conditions that are hurtful or traumatic. These experiences result in creating defensive behaviors—shields from hurts and trauma—that can take the form of anger, hostility, withdrawal, joking, negativity, harassment, bullying and also self-destructive behaviors like eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and even suicide. In schools, teens who display these behaviors often fall into stereotypical categories of “bad” behaviors—clown, bully, pet, slacker, troublemaker, punk, gangbanger. Practicing empathy helps administrators understand the underlying experiences that shape behaviors by emotionally “walking in another’s shoes.” Begin by talking with students and using the simple “If You Really Knew Me” tool – e.g., instead of saying what’s wrong with you or what’s up with you to a student, say “if we really knew you,

what would we know?" You can also use the If You Really Knew Me Discussion Guide for classroom and group activities to gain empathic understanding of what your students are experiencing: <http://www.challengeday.org/mtv/>. These tools are great for relationships with teachers and staff as well.

10. Create social and emotional safe zones

Teasing, harassment, bullying, and even violence occur more frequently in zones where there are fewer peers and often less supervision—bathrooms, locker rooms, cafeterias, hallways between classes, and remote campus areas. Flip the campus culture by labelling and declaring them safe zones. This requires consistent monitoring and features like good lighting and operational privacy doors. Counselors, teachers, and coaches can also label spaces and offices as safe zones where students can talk about what they are experiencing. Some schools do this by posting signs with the "Challenge Day Hand Signal"—the international hand sign for "I love you." At Challenge Day, students are taught that the sign also means "I respect you" and "I've got your back."

Step 3—Help teachers create socially and emotionally supportive classrooms

Hopefully you've had many teachers participate in Challenge Day. The first step in creating socially and emotionally supportive teachers is to give them an understanding of what their students are feeling and experiencing.

We also provide Challenge Day professional development workshops specifically for teachers and other educators.

10 Ways Teachers Can Sustain Challenge Day

1. Attend a Be the Change workshop to gain social and emotional leadership tools
Just like there's no such thing as a bad kid, there's no such thing as a bad teacher. None of you came into this profession wanting to be demoralized or disengaged—you wanted to give the gift of learning to a young person. But you can't support students' social and emotional needs unless you take care of your own first. Challenge Day's Be the Change workshop is an opportunity to immerse yourself in Challenge Day philosophies and techniques for teamwork, connectedness, communication, and collaboration. It's also a workshop to achieve greater clarity

of purpose, freedom from emotional roadblocks, powerful social connections, and tools for creating your best possible life.

2. Make your classroom a put-down-free zone

Teasing, bullying and hazing, can be seen by young people as fun and harmless—a ritual of adolescence—rather than damaging to people emotionally and physically. Practice regular and consistent intervention against put-downs and teasing in your classroom, and especially refrain from contributing to or abetting any put-downs or teasing that may be going on. Remember that as an iconic influencer in a young person's life, teachers have the power to hurt or heal with your words. Students are remarkably sensitive to how they feel they are perceived by the adults in their lives, particularly teachers and other educators like principals, aides, and coaches. Role modeling is always a teacher's best teaching tool.

3. Allow class time for students to empty their emotional balloons

The Challenge Day balloon theory offers students a way to express feelings and emotions in positive ways. The theory we teach during Challenge Day is that we all have a place inside us where we store unexpressed emotions and feelings that we call our emotional balloons. If students don't learn healthy ways to empty their balloons, they begin to "leak out" as teasing, yelling, violence and avoidance behaviors like drugs and alcohol. Making time for students to empty their balloons—to talk about their life experience—can make a huge difference. Students who have healthy outlets for emotional expression—who empty their emotional balloons regularly—feel better, have stronger relationships, and think more clearly and learn more easily.

4. Model the behaviors you wish to see in your students

In Challenge Day, we teach the Gandhi saying, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Establish a set of three core values for yourself as a teacher. Then, hold yourself accountable to modeling them in your teaching, your actions, and your relationships with students and others. Open-mindedness is a key ingredient of critical thinking and learning. Does your teaching style alleviate bias and cultivate inquisitiveness and curiosity? Also, emotions are contagious. If you're enthusiastic, compassionate, respectful, and engaged, your students are more likely to be too. Conversely, if you are unhappy, mean, disrespectful, and disengaged, your students are more likely to be that way too. A good practice is to remember your favorite teachers and incorporate some of their qualities into your own teaching styles.

5. Teach and model attentive listening

The gift of listening is the best gift you can give another person. All too often, young people are talked at or given advice instead of being listened to. Teachers don't always have to fix problems or try to relate to students' experiences. If students need advice, they will often ask for it. Teachers can be a caring resource—and encourage more disclosure—by gently soliciting conversation (the *If You Really Knew Me* Guide referenced below offers great prompts), listening attentively with interest, maintaining eye contact, and being respectful.

6. Incorporate cooperative learning practices into the classroom

Cooperative learning practices include forming teams and groups. This helps transform a classroom of cliques into an inclusive one. It also prevents isolation and alienation. In Challenge Day, our activities are conducted in a circle for a reason. Circular seating is inclusive and egalitarian. It's also interactive because it's more difficult for withdrawn and disengaged people to remain that way when they're in a circle. The trick is to practice inclusion even when forming teams or groups. Practice timed sharing in groups and teams to prevent the same people from dominating time and attention

7. Practice empathy—remember there's no such thing as a bad kid

During Challenge Day, we teach that each child is born with a heart filled with innocence, wonder, hope, and dreams. During childhood and adolescence though, young people can experience conditions that are hurtful or traumatic. These experiences result in creating defensive behaviors—shields from hurts and trauma—that can take the form of anger, hostility, withdrawal, joking, negativity, harassment, bullying and also self-destructive behaviors like eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, and even suicide. In classrooms, teens who display these behaviors often fall into stereotypical categories of “bad” behaviors—clown, bully, pet, slacker, troublemaker, punk, gangbanger. Practicing empathy helps teachers understand the underlying experiences that shape behaviors by emotionally “walking in another's shoes.” Begin by talking with students and using the simple “If You Really Knew Me” tool – e.g., instead of saying what's wrong with you or what's up with you to a student, say “if we really knew you, what would we know?” You can also use the *If You Really Knew Me* Discussion Guide for classroom and group activities to gain empathic understanding of what your students are experiencing: <http://www.challengeday.org/mtv/>.

8. Incorporate *If You Really Knew Me* viewings and discussion guides into classrooms

Challenge Day offers twelve discussion guides that are paired with the episodes of *If You Really Knew Me* featured on MTV. These guides have been created to help students, teachers, families and other people connect after each episode. The episodes of *If You Really Knew Me* are highly relatable to teens and track the experience of different individuals—jocks, nerds, cheerleaders, emos, outcasts—before, during, and after a Challenge Day. Discussion guides and episodes are located here: <http://www.challengeday.org/mtv/>.

9. Solicit student input for classroom norm setting and enforcement

Teachers are aware that students often embrace rules better when they contribute to creating them. Design the ideal classroom with your students by brainstorming norms for attitude, behavior, participation, and safety. Be sure that all students who are expected to respect the norms are part of their creation. Invite students to assist in enforcing norms.

10. Practice inclusiveness

One of the best ways to build inclusiveness is to conduct an audit of your own personal judgments and biases. We all have them. Take an inventory of your judgments and biases at the end of the school day for a week. It sounds simple, but exclusion is the enemy of inclusion. Who do you sit where in a classroom and why? Who do you call on most frequently and who not and why? Who gets excluded and why? What examples do you use in your teaching? Who or what gets excluded and why? What students do you feel positive and negative about and why? How do you act differently toward them? What types of feelings do they invoke? In the next week, conduct a daily audit of how well you've transformed your own biases and judgments into inclusion. Important tip: also practice modeling, attentive listening, and cooperative learning above.