

ACTIVITY DURATION:

- **Prep Time:** 10-15 minutes
- **Implementation Time:** 10-15 minutes

CHECKING IN

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

At the beginning of your school day, you might have a routine of greeting and asking your students how they are doing as they file into the classroom. Asking someone how they are doing is usually seen as a considerate gesture, however, it has become a somewhat monotonous habit in our daily lives and we often don't put much weight, time, or attention into the answer someone gives. This now surface-level interaction has taken away a chance for someone to be seen, heard, and have their feelings validated.

With this activity, we want to flip the script and return to taking a moment to give genuine space and care for people to convey how they are truly feeling. This activity, called **Checking In**, gives middle schoolers an opportunity to share and reflect on their feelings and validate their experiences, while also recognizing that others might be feeling the same as well.

You will present six jars to your class—each representing a different feeling—that include popsicle sticks, and one other larger jar that represents your classroom community. Students will take a moment to decide which jar/stick reflects how they are feeling at that moment and will take a popsicle stick from one of the smaller jars and place it in the larger community jar. The action of choosing a particular popsicle stick helps students to practice recognizing and acknowledging how they are feeling. Along with this personal reflection, this is also a chance for students to see that they are not alone in their emotions, and it offers an opportunity to build empathy for those who might be struggling. As a teacher, this is a time for you to witness and understand how your students are doing. This information may aid you in deciding how to approach the day or interact with your class.

SUPPLIES:

- **Colored Popsicle Sticks (approximately six sticks per student)**
 - We recommend having six different colors of popsicle sticks, each one representing a different feeling. If you don't have colored popsicle sticks specifically, you can always color any plain ones with a marker. Or, if you are interested in purchasing some, we recommend [these!](#)
- **Six Medium- to Large-Sized Jars or Containers** (preferably big enough to hold multiple popsicle sticks)
- **1 Large Jar or Container**
- **Tape**
- **Feelings Labels (see page 7)***
- **Feelings List (see page 9)***
- **Activity Instructions Sheet (see page 6)***
- **Copy of the "Who You Can Talk To" sheet* with information about where a student can find an adult to talk to—whether that is you or other trained individuals at the school (see page 8)**

**TWLOHA Provided*

ACTIVITY PREP INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Select a day that you would like to implement the activity. We recommend introducing and familiarizing the students with the activity the day before (avoid introducing it on a Friday and implementing it on a Monday).
2. Once you have decided on a day, locate a spot in your classroom to host the activity that is accessible. A possible place may be near the classroom door so students can participate as they enter. Try not to put it in a location that makes students feel like they are in the spotlight when participating in the activity.
3. Next, gather the supplies listed above.
 - To create the feelings jars, print off page 6 that features the provided **Feelings Labels** found on the last few pages of this document. Cut the labels out and tape one to each jar or container. If you would like, you can even color the labels to match the color of the designated popsicle sticks to make it easier for students to identify a feeling. Once the jars are done, place the colored popsicle sticks in their designated jar.
 - The jars, along with a printed copy of the **Feelings List** and the **Activity Instructions Sheet**, can be placed in the spot you have selected to host the activity. The Feelings List features other words/phrases that can represent each of the feelings labels that can help students who might struggle to identify their feelings decide on how they are feeling.
 - When carrying out this activity, anticipate a variety of emotions to be expressed and the possibility of some students needing someone to talk to beyond the activity. That's why, along with the jars and the list, we suggest filling out a copy of the **Who You Can Talk To Sheet** with the names and places students can go to talk to someone qualified at the school.
4. Make sure to read through all of the instructions beforehand.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS:**Introducing the Activity the Day Before You Implement It:**

The the day before you implement the activity, introduce it to your students by using the script below as a guide:

*This activity we will be doing is called **Checking In**. Every day before class starts we will be observing and acknowledging our feelings to see how we are doing that day. In the classroom, you will find some jars and popsicle sticks. Each jar will be labeled with a different feeling. When you walk into class each day this week, take a moment to check in with yourself and observe how you feel. Then take a popsicle stick from the jar that you think best reflects that feeling and place it in the biggest jar.*

The big jar represents our class as a whole—a community of people. Not only will we be acknowledging how we ourselves are feeling, but we will also get to see how other people are feeling. It is a chance to remind us that we are not alone in our emotions or struggles. There might even be someone who is struggling right now that we aren't aware of. So along with noticing shared feelings, we can also build compassion and empathy for classmates.

*When you walk into class tomorrow, take a moment to participate in the activity. The jars will be found **[insert your activity location]**. This is an opportunity to challenge yourself and maybe even get out of your comfort zone. If you are having trouble deciding on what feeling to select, a piece of paper with a list of different words/phrases that can describe each of the feelings can be found nearby to help you decide.*

Lastly, when we do this activity you might put a stick in the big jar that represents sadness or anger. While you might be feeling this way in that present moment, remember that those feelings may resolve or change before the end of the day because how you are feeling now is not permanent. Feelings and emotions ebb and flow. But if you find yourself needing or wanting to talk to someone about particular emotions, there will be a paper with the names of people you can reach out to at our school who can help.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED):**Introducing the Activity the Day Before You Implement It (CONTINUED):**

If your students are struggling to understand the activity, do a few practice rounds with them. You can do this by picking an emotion that you, the teacher, might be feeling, and placing a popsicle stick in the big community jar—or have students pick a popsicle stick to place in the big jar whether they are feeling that feeling or not. Doing this can also help students move past any awkwardness they might be experiencing. Also, a student may be feeling anxious about participating if they are worried about their peers knowing something vulnerable about them, so do your best to approach the activity without room for shame or judgment.

While we hope for students to participate in the activity each day, we know that this might be difficult for some. Encourage students to engage in whatever way feels most comfortable—even if this translates to observing the jars and acknowledging to themselves how they are feeling without selecting a popsicle stick to place in the large community jar.

First Day of the Activity:

Before your students arrive, we suggest that you be the first participant to help encourage your students to follow suit.

As students begin to participate, make a note of what you are seeing. *Are students saying they are feeling happy? Are some feeling sad or upset?* You will probably witness a variety of responses.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED):**Wrapping Up**

After class has started or before class ends, thank students for participating and ask them to continue participating each day that the activity is available. Most importantly, no matter what feeling a student has selected, acknowledge their experiences. Even if only one person conveys that they are struggling, validate their emotions and vulnerability. You can say something like, "Thank you all for being open and honest about how you are feeling. Your feelings are valid, no matter what you are feeling." And be sure to revisit the **Who You Can Talk To Sheet** throughout the activity.

At the end of the school day or before the start of another day, reset the activity by emptying the community jar and placing popsicles in their designated containers. If you are carrying out this activity with multiple classes, reset prior to the arrival of a new group.

You can do this activity as frequently as you would like. The more you host the activity and talk with students about their emotions, the more likely they are to feel less alone and reach out.

TAKING IT A STEP FURTHER

If you are interested in going a step further, you can have a community jar for each day of the school week so that you can compare and contrast what students express throughout a full week. Some students may identify as being happy and change to feelings of sadness the next. You might notice that a student is consistently saying they are not doing well. These observations can allow you to learn more about your students' mental health and the support they are in need of.

CHECKING IN

1. Before class begins, **take a moment to check in with yourself** and observe how you feel.
2. Then take a popsicle stick from the jar with the label that you think best reflects how you are feeling.
3. **Place that stick in the bigger jar.** The big jar represents our class as a whole—a **community of people**. Not only are we acknowledging how we ourselves are feeling, but we will also get to see how other people are feeling. It is a chance to remind us that *we are not alone in our emotions or struggles*. There might even be someone who is struggling right now that we aren't aware of. So along with noticing shared feelings, we can also build compassion and empathy for classmates.
4. **If you are having trouble deciding on what feeling to select**, a piece of paper with a list of different words/phrases that describe each of the feelings in detail will be nearby to help you.

*If you find yourself needing or wanting to talk to someone about particular emotions, you can look at the **Who Can I Talk To Sheet** next to the activity and find someone here at the school you can reach out to whenever you need help.*

FEELINGS LABELS



HAPPY

SAD



ANGRY

CALM



SCARED

EXCITED

WHO YOU CAN TALK TO

If you are feeling a big emotion, experiencing something that feels hard to handle or is upsetting, or maybe your mental health is in need of some care—here are some people you can talk to and spaces you can get help from at our school.

And even if you are doing well—you can still go to these people and spaces to talk about mental health regardless!



NAME:

LOCATION:



NAME:

LOCATION:



NAME:

LOCATION:

FEELINGS LIST

HAPPY

JOYFUL
CONFIDENT
CHEERFUL
GLAD
ACCOMPLISHED
THANKFUL
CHIPPER

SAD

HURT
LONELY
FRAGILE
GUILTY
EMBARRASSED
DISAPPOINTED
ABANDONED
EMPTY
LOW ENERGY
BLUE
DOWN
GRIEVING
GLUM
BORED
TIRED

ANGRY

BETRAYED
JEALOUS
ANNOYED
LET DOWN
HUMILIATED
FRUSTRATED
UPSET
GROUCHY
GRUMPY
IRRITATED
ENRAGED

CALM

RELAXED
DON'T FEEL STRESSED
FINE
PEACEFUL
CONTENT
HOPEFUL
CHILL

SCARED

AFRAID
NERVOUS
HELPLESS
WEAK
ANTSY
TENSE
JITTERY
FRIGHTENED
STRESSED
ANXIOUS
WORRIED

EXCITED

SURPRISED
NERVOUS
THRILLED
OPTIMISTIC
ENTHUSIASTIC
BRAVE
ENERGETIC