

ACTIVITY DURATION:

- **Prep Time:** 10-15 minutes
- **Implementation Time:** 15-20 minutes

TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

Middle school is a time and age when many students begin to struggle with their mental health and wellness. They might have a hard time with things like positive self-talk and coping skills, making it tough to work through difficult situations and feelings.

While these things can be hard for all of us, most of us have learned that kind words of encouragement and positive affirmations can create a shift in our mindset or attitude. We know there is power in receiving an uplifting message. And sometimes when we hear the words we need, it becomes easier for us to slip into positive self-talk for ourselves. It can help create the belief that we will be OK. Learning this skill can be incredibly powerful for middle school students.

This activity, ***Take What You Need***, aims to help students create moments of hope and find encouragement easier when they are in a hard place. To start, your students will help create a container of positive words and affirmations to take from whenever they need to be lifted up. The object of the activity is to create an intentional space for students to go to when they are stressed, discouraged, or struggling and be met with something encouraging. Offering a space and resource for students to hear/read/see these words from their peers, teachers, and even themselves can be a powerful opportunity to find what they need at that moment.

Positive messages can be hard to come by in a world that feels focused on the negative. It can be second nature to exist within a pessimistic mindset when things aren't going well, and that can have a lasting effect on our mental health and wellness. Especially when this mindset finds us at such a young age and becomes harder to navigate. By instilling these uplifting messages in students, it helps set them up for helpful habits down the road.

SUPPLIES:

- **Words of Encouragement Slip Sheet (see page 7)***
- **Words of Encouragement Example Sheet (see last page)***
- **Container Label (see page 6)***
- **1 Medium-Large Container (a jar, empty cup, etc.)**
- **Whiteboard/Chalkboard or a Projector Screen and Writing Tools**
- **Scissors**
- **Tape**
- **Pencil/Pen**

**TWLOHA Provided*

ACTIVITY PREP INSTRUCTIONS:

1. **Decide what day you will be implementing the activity.**
2. **Locate a spot in your classroom to host the activity.**
 - This needs to be an easily accessible spot for students, but preferably not at the front of a classroom where students might feel anxious or hesitant to participate.
3. **Gather your supplies.**
 - For the container, you can use anything that will be able to hold most, if not all, of the responses from your students.
 - For the container label, print off the provided label, cut it out, and tape it to the container.
 - For the **Words of Encouragement Slip Sheet**, each student will need to have their own copy. On the paper, you will find cut-out lines that you will follow along to turn the piece of paper into slips. You can find this sheet on the last few pages of this document.
 - To help students write words of encouragement and kindness, we have included a list of examples. You can find this list on the last page of this document and you can either write the examples on a whiteboard or project them onto a screen the day of the activity. **Students do not need a copy of this sheet.**

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS:**Introduction:**

On the day of, you will first introduce the students to the activity. You can use the following to help:

*This activity is called **Take What You Need**. Together as a class, we are going to create a container filled with words of encouragement and positive affirmations that we can take from whenever we need to read and receive something uplifting. Sometimes things in life can be heavy to manage, stress and anxiety can weigh you down and you just need to know that things are going to be OK. So together we are going to create this resource that you can take from whenever you desire a boost. This container will be located [insert where you are keeping the container] starting tomorrow for you to access it whenever you need.*

Writing Words of Encouragement and Filling the Container:

1. To get the activity started, pass out a copy of the **Words of Encouragement Slip Sheet** to each of your students and have them take out a pen or pencil. During this time, make sure to have the examples from the **Words of Encouragement Example Sheet** either written out on a whiteboard or projected on a screen.
2. To start writing out words of encouragement, have students look over the examples and pick their favorite phrase or word from the sheet and write it in the first blank space on the slip sheet. *Make sure they are writing between the cut-out marks on the paper.*
3. Students will come up with 4 phrases or affirmations of their own. Have them write each one in the remaining 4 spaces on the slip sheet.
 - To help students out in writing words of encouragement, along with the examples, you can take some time to discuss what words of encouragement or positive affirmations might be. You can ask students questions like:

“When you were feeling sad or having a hard time, what did a friend or a family member say to you that helped you to feel better?”

“What are some things that you say to your friends when they are feeling down?”

“What’s a nice thing that you can say to someone?”

“What is something encouraging that you need to hear right now?”

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED):**Writing Words of Encouragement and Filling the Container (CONTINUED):**

4. Once students have finished writing, collect their sheets. You will then cut out the slips of paper from their sheets. ***While you are doing this make sure to review what the students wrote to edit out/remove anything that might be considered unhelpful, inappropriate, or triggering. This can be done whenever you have the availability, but it must be done before you set the container out and make it available to students.***
5. Fill the container with the reviewed and cut out strips of paper. If you have any slips of paper that can't be placed in the container due to it being full, we recommend placing those additional slips somewhere safe so that they can be used to refill the container when it gets low.
6. Finally, place the container in your designated spot for students to take from.

Wrapping Up:

Once you have finished creating this container, ask students how they felt about the activity.

"Did you find writing words of encouragement easy or difficult?"

"Did it take you long to think of kind or positive things to write?"

"Did it feel difficult to write kind things?"

"What kind of feelings can the container help with? When you're struggling? When you're feeling down?"

You can even take one of the pieces of paper out and read it aloud to your students. Give your class a moment to take in the words, then discuss with them how it felt to hear that specific encouragement. You can even share with your students how you felt when hearing the words.

"What did it feel like to hear that encouragement or positive affirmation?"

"Does it ever feel hard to receive encouragement or a positive affirmation from someone?"

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

After spending some time talking about the activity, don't forget to tell students where they can find the container in your classroom. We encourage you to make this container available by the next time your students are in the classroom (after you have edited out any unhelpful or triggering messages that shouldn't be included). Whenever you make the container available to students, remind them to utilize it and take what they need whenever they need it. You, as the teacher, can even take the first step and show them that it is OK to take from the jar by selecting one of the slips of paper for yourself. Seeing an adult take that step to care for themselves can be inspiring for students.

As students begin to engage in this resource, pay attention to how many are utilizing the resource and how they are responding to it. *Do you see a change in their mood? Is there a day during the week when they are using it the most? How can you show more encouragement to your students?*

The objective of the activity is for the container to empty as your students take the words that they need. As your container empties, make sure to refill or replace it with more words of encouragement that you might have had left over. And if your students completely empty out the container, we encourage you to repeat the activity in order to refill it with new statements.

TAKING IT A STEP FURTHER

If you are interested in taking this activity a step further, you can have students create their very own containers with positive words of encouragement and affirmations. Students will need their very own container to fill and a label for it.

To fill the containers, you can have students write out words of encouragement again on the Words of Encouragement Slip Sheet and then collect papers to review them again. After reviewing the slips, you can cut them out and have them available for students to grab a few to put in their personal containers. Students can then keep their containers in their lockers, backpacks, at home, or wherever they can use them when needed.

CONTAINER LABEL



**TAKE WHAT
YOU NEED**

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT SLIPS



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

YOU ARE LOVED.

I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE.

**YOUR STORY
IS IMPORTANT.**

**YOU DESERVE
KINDNESS AND LOVE.**

**YOU MAKE
TODAY BETTER.**

I'M PROUD OF YOU.

**YOU ARE AMAZING JUST
THE WAY YOU ARE.**

**YOU'RE NOT IN
THIS ALONE.**

**THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE
FOR BETTER DAYS.**

YOU ARE ENOUGH.

**YOUR FEELINGS
ARE IMPORTANT.**

**THE WORLD NEEDS
YOUR LOVE.**

**YOU DESERVE THE
SPACE YOU OCCUPY.**

YOU LOOK GREAT TODAY.

**YOU ARE CHOSEN
AND WANTED.**

**BELIEVE IN YOURSELF,
YOU CAN DO IT.**

IT'S OK TO ASK FOR HELP.

**THIS IS WHAT YOU ARE GOING
THROUGH, NOT WHO YOU ARE.**

IT'S OK TO MAKE MISTAKES.