

Unit 3, Freedom of Speech

Meeting 1, Get the Principle

Meeting Summary

This unit is comprised of one meeting.

Students discuss the importance of taking responsibility for their own speech.

Key Points

- ★ It's easy to speak without thinking, and “mindless” or careless speech can hurt others and ourselves.
- ★ Mindful speech is a universal concept. Every ethical culture and each of the world's major religions offers guidelines on how people should treat and speak to one another.
- ★ There are ways each of us can take greater responsibility for our speech.

Preparation and Materials

- ★ Photocopy one **Mindful Speech Self-Assessment** handout for each student.
- ★ Photocopy one **Questions to Consider** handout for every two students.
- ★ Photocopy one **Golden Rules of Mindful Speech** handout for each student.
- ★ Photocopy the individual **Golden Rules of Mindful Speech** quotations in **Addendum II** and post on walls around the room.

Vocabulary

Mindful speech

“Golden Rule”

Self-assessment

Activities

Mindful Speech Self-Assessment

- ★ Sample introduction:

Think about all of the different people you talk to every day: friends, family members, teachers, people you think you're better than, people you have to be respectful towards, people who have power over you. I'd like to invite each of you to take a close look at your own habits of speech.

- ★ Give one **Mindful Speech Self-Assessment** handout to each student.
- ★ Ask a student to read the instructions aloud. Students complete the handout quietly on their own.
- ★ Do not debrief at this point. Move directly to the following discussion.

Mindful Speech: Dyad and Group Discussion

- ★ Students work in pairs. Give one **Questions to Consider** handout to each pair and explain the activity. Sample lead-in:

I'm going to pose these 7 questions aloud, one at a time, and give you a few minutes to each take a turn explaining your answer to your partner. Listen carefully to each other with no interruptions.

- ★ List of questions:

- 1) In what situations are you the most comfortable talking and speaking your mind? Why?
- 2) When are you most likely to blurt out something without thinking?
- 3) Think of a time you said something that you later regretted. Imagine that you can go back in time to the instant before you spoke. What do you wish you'd said instead?
- 4) Are you more likely to tell others what you really think and feel or what you think they want to hear? Explain.
- 5) Think of a time you said something mean or negative to or about someone else. What was the effect of your words on the other person, and on you?
- 6) Does being mean serve any purpose? Why are people mean to one another, anyway?
- 7) Think of a time you said something kind or positive to someone else. What was the effect of your words on the other person, and on you?

- ★ Pose the first question and allow pairs several minutes to answer. Alert students when it is time to trade roles.
- ★ After each question, ask for student volunteers to report back to the group. Document main points on the board or newsprint.

Teaching Point 1: As you debrief question (1), ask students also to describe situations in which they are the least comfortable talking and speaking their minds.

Teaching Point 2: As you debrief question (6), raise the following discussion points, as relevant:

- ★ The right to say mean things is typically not protected in school because, mean speech doesn't serve our educational mission.
- ★ Out in the world, however, it's not against the law to "dis" someone else. In fact, it's not even against the law to use a racial slur.
- ★ Do you think that there should be a law against "mean speech?" If so, how would you define "mean?"
- ★ Ask students to take a second look at the **Self-Assessment** they filled out at the start of class. Then pose a final question for students to consider quietly to themselves:

Is there anything that you would like to change or improve about your speaking habits?
- ★ Ask if anyone would like to comment.

Golden Rules of Speech

- ★ Point out that every ethical culture, each of the world's major religions, and many individuals have come up with guidelines to help guide us in our speech.
- ★ Ask if anyone has noticed the quotations posted on the wall: What have you noticed? Is there one quotation that you particularly like? How come?
- ★ Distribute the **Golden Rules of Mindful Speech** handout for students to take home and read on their own.

Unit 3, Meeting 1 – Student Handout

Mindful Speech: A Self-Assessment

Speech is the most basic way we communicate with each other, yet it's so easy to speak "mindlessly" - without thinking first. Circle your answers for the following six questions.

Be honest. **This page is for your eyes alone.**

1) How often do you gossip about others?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

2) Can you be trusted to keep a secret?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

3) Do you interrupt others when they are speaking?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

4) Do you try to keep from telling lies, even small ones?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

5) Do you apologize when you are wrong?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

6) How often do you think about what you're going to say before you open your mouth to speak?

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

Unit 3, Meeting 1 – Student Handout

Questions to Consider

- 1) In what situations are you the most comfortable talking and speaking your mind? Why?
- 2) When are you most likely to blurt out something without thinking?
- 3) Think of a time you said something that you later regretted. Imagine that you can go back in time to the instant before you spoke. What do you wish you'd said instead?
- 4) Are you more likely to tell others what you really think and feel or what you think they want to hear? Explain.
- 5) Think of a time you said something mean or negative to or about someone else. What was the effect of your words on the other person? And on you?
- 6) Does being mean serve any purpose? Why are people mean to one another, anyway?
- 7) Think of a time you said something kind or positive to someone else. What was the effect of your words on the other person? And on you?

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Golden Rules of Mindful Speech

Below find quotes regarding the Golden Rules of Mindful Speech. Please see [Addendum II](#) for each quote listed on its own page, suitable for photocopying and posting around the room.

I wish I had a neck as long as a giraffe so I would have that much time to consider what I was about to say before it came out of my mouth.

[Attributed to Hazrat Ali, an early Muslim leader](#)

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

[The Golden Rule, Judeo/Christian tradition](#)

A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that.

[Dorothy Day \(1897-1980\)](#)

Pause before you speak and ask yourself two questions about what you are about to say: “Is this true? Is this useful?” If your words don’t meet both criteria, it’s wise not to say anything at all.

[Buddhist tradition, concept of “wise speech”](#)

Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

[James 1:19, The Bible](#)

I have often regretted my speech, never my silence.

[Publius Syrus \(First Century, B.C.\)](#)

The music that can deepest reach, and cure all ill, is cordial speech.

[Ralph Waldo Emerson \(1803-1882\)](#)

Three people are damaged by gossip: the gossip, the listener, and the victim. One simple comment can travel far, damaging everyone in its wake.

[Jewish proverb](#)