

# The Invisible Weight We Carry

## Purpose

Especially early in the year, it can be difficult to both build trust and relationships while also holding students accountable for hurtful behavior. This lesson is designed to help address how our words and actions can positively or negatively affect our peers.

## Teacher Work

Gather your students in a circle meeting. Skip the centerpieces because this lesson involves student demonstration. Pick your demonstration volunteer carefully. It should be a student who can 1, sustain the weight of a heavy backpack, 2, participate without being overly silly, and 3, not call attention to a student displaying the undesired behaviors in the class. Have the student wear the backpack partially filled with dictionaries.

“This backpack represents feelings that we carry. These feelings are invisible, but everyone of us has them. We fluctuate between feeling weighed down and feeling weightless. There are some mornings when we come to school already feeling weighed down. The stress of our morning can physically make us feel uncomfortable. Maybe you were running late to school, and mom was stern with you, or you had a hard time finding an outfit to wear and you’re feeling uncomfortable in your clothes. Throughout the day, people can say and do things to make you feel even more weighed down. ‘You’re stupid.’ (Add a book to the backpack.) ‘You’re annoying.’ (Add another one.)

We all have things that we’re already worried about. And these are called sensitivities, if someone talks about something that we’re sensitive about, it could carry more weight (gesture to a dictionary) than something we’re not sensitive about (gesture to a book). For example, if you’re feeling uncomfortable in your clothes and someone says to you, ‘That shirt’s weird,’ that comment is heavier for you. (Add a dictionary this time.)

There are also things that people can say to remove the weight you carry, and actually can make you feel a little bit better. ‘Do you want to come play a game with me?’ (Remove a book.) ‘I like sitting at your table. You’re a good friend.’” (Remove another.)

## Student Work

“Turn and talk to the people around you. Count across your fingers coming up with 5 things that you could do or say that would remove the weight from someone’s backpack. Come up with the nice things you can do or say to support each other instead of add to their struggles.”

## Closing

After giving some time to talk, and traveling around to support great conversation, ask for a speedy share round. Record these ideas on a poster or chart paper.

### Materials:

- 1 backpack
- 5 dictionaries or large books
- a couple books of varying sizes

