

# Contributing Good

## Clear vs. Murky

### Purpose

You will need a clear vessel (tall vase works best) filled with water and a pack of liquid food coloring. I will oftentimes pull a desk up next to my seat for the demonstration.

Students must come to discover that their actions have an impact on others. There is a huge responsibility that comes along with being a part of a classroom community. One challenge with behavioral needs in a classroom is the power the behavior of one student has to change the tone, safety, and outlook of an entire room. While it is still early in the year, this is a good lesson to introduce because it lends verbiage to later conversations if/when the situation occurs. Remember, these lessons should have a positive vibe, not feel like a trap. Look to the end of the lesson for how a student can be given a reminder using this example.

### Teacher Work

*Without an introduction, get up from the circle, fill the vessel from the sink, and return putting in the middle of the circle or on a desk pulled into the circle.*

*"This represents our classroom. I'm going to pass around the talking piece, and please share what you think I mean when I say that this glass vase is like our classroom."*

Don't give away if a student guesses the right thing – listen intently to each answer. Nod your head instead of offering a comment. I will allow kids to skip for think time, but come back to them at the end.

*"Have you ever heard of a 'fresh start' or a 'blank slate'? Some of you started to make a guess as to what I was thinking. Every day, it's like I come in and fill up this vase with fresh water. Every day starts off totally clean and pure and ready to go. When you walk in the room, you know how it feels calm and ready? That's the clear kind of feeling. Now, watch what I do next."*

Put one dark-colored drop of food coloring into the vase. It looks really cool when it falls and morphs around in the water. Let kids take it in – they always like this part.

*"Who would like the talking piece to take a guess as to what the food coloring in the water may mean when I am thinking about the clear, calm classroom?"*

I take a couple of answers this time – mostly just because time is running out. Try to honor anyone who would like to share.

*"Sometimes, for what could be lots of different reasons, someone in the classroom makes a choice that impacts all of us. Sometimes, people do things that damage the community. Things like laughing at someone for what they are wearing or pushing past people to hang up your backpack damage the clear and calm vibe of the classroom. Look at it now. Is the water clear? No... it's tinted. Contributing damage to the classroom has some bad effects. It can make people feel angry or upset. It makes it difficult to get to the important business of learning when we are feeling unsafe or upset. Notice, it can't really be cleaned out.*

*Now, what would happen if someone else or the same person makes another damaging choice?"*



Add another drop into the water, either the same color or a different one. Let it slowly fall to the bottom. Share some more examples of damaging behavior that are appropriate for your class and grade-level. Avoid calling out a specific behavior done by one student so far this year. You can make a general example if an issue is wide-spread (like cutting in line or taking without asking). Each time you give an example, put another drop in the water. It only takes about 5 drops to turn the water very dark.

*“Small choices that hurt others can really add up. We can’t easily reach into the water and take out those damaging choices. It’s now something we all have to live in and handle. It gets murky. A community that feels like this is not a nice place to be – for any of us. It’s our job to try to make things better when we make a choice that hurts others. We can’t totally clean it up, but working to restore our relationships, or make things better, is important in our classroom. Also, you’re in luck. Every day, I do this.”*

Get up, dump, rinse, and refill the vase with clean water.

*“While the damage is not completely gone, every day we get a new chance because of forgiveness. We must all remember that each day, we have the chance to bring good into the community, to make people feel awesome, to build others up, and to live in this kind of space (gesturing toward the vase). Every single one of us has the job of preserving this, trying really hard not to do damage.”*

To end, pass around the talking piece. Ask for a way they can contribute good to the classroom, ways they can build people up (or fill buckets), or just check in to see what they think after the lesson. Choose a question where you can definitely hear from each student.

## Closing

Starting today, the clear vase of water is added to the centerpiece. You may want to switch to a plastic container as the students become responsible for filling it and adding it to the center. I don’t bring out the drops anymore. We keep the clear water as a reminder of our goal.

This is important!

When using this lesson to address problems in the classroom, avoid pointed accusations. If a student is exhibiting damaging behavior, don’t say, “That was a drop!” or “You’re making the water murky.” Try to frame it positively. I would sometimes pull a student making damaging choices aside and say, “Remember our goal of keeping the classroom clear? Contribute good stuff instead.” It is important to use the lessons as reminders, but never to shame or punish. We need their participation in the circle for more teaching to come.

