ACTIVITY 2

WHEN HOT BUTTONS ARE PUSHED

SKILL/S COVERED: Communication
APPROXIMATE TIME NEEDED: 50 minutes
AGE GROUP: 10-13 years old

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Impulsive behavior can be regarded as opposite to autonomous, self-regulated behavior
in which the student consciously makes choices and takes responsibility. Impulsive, emotion-driven actions underlie a wide range of problems, including eating difficulties, violence, and addiction. Given the negative consequences of many impulsive actions, it is important to learn how to manage them. Research findings suggest that becoming more aware of the action tendencies that are generated by an emotional state can be an effective way to reduce impulsive acting and communication.

AUTHOR OF THE TOOL/EXERCISE WITH REFERENCING LINK

Activity created by “Prof. Ivan Apostolov” high school. Based on the tool created by Dr. Lucinda Poole and Dr. Hugo Alberts.

GOAL

To help students identify what their triggers (hot buttons) are – and to effectively address them for self-regulation during communication.

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NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

This activity can be done a team of 3-4 students.
The common discussion is in class.

NECESSARY MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pens, pencils, crayons
- A large bulletin board or wall space in the classroom

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Step 1. Identify hot buttons

Divide the students into smaller groups of 3 or 4, and hand each small group a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to consider what triggers them -that is, what upsets them or ticks them off- in lift. Maybe they dislike being interrupted, or perhaps they get upset when they arrive home to find the kitchen a mess. These triggers are their personal "hot buttons". On their piece of paper, have one person from each group write down all hot buttons raised during this discussion. (Note, there is no need to write down who each hot button belongs to).

The following unfinished sentences can be posed to participants to help them identify their *hot buttons*:

- It makes me angry when...
- I do not like it when people...
- I feel offended when...
- I think it is rude to...
- At work, I wish people would...
- At home, I think it would be better if family members would...

Step 2. Understand personal reactions to hot buttons

Using the following questions to guide a group discussion, ask participants (still within their smaller groups) to share what they experience when a hot button has been pushed:

What happens in your body? Do you feel heat anywhere? Jittery? Sweaty? Does your heart beat faster? What emotions usually show up? Do you notice anger? Frustration? Annoyance? What thoughts go through your mind? "How inconsiderate!" "I am so over this!" "How rude."

Step 3. Express your reactions in communication

Ask students to express their reactions in: writing, drawing, shouting, singing.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS:

Bring the group together now for the remainder of the exercise. As a whole group, explore how people deal with their buttons being pushed in everyday life.

Ask the question, “What do you tend to do when your hot button has been pushed? How do you deal with it?”
On the board, write down every coping strategy that is offered by the group, whether it is a helpful strategy or not.

For instance, participants might say I walk away, I count to 10..., I put my headphones, I keep silent.
For debriefing in class:

- How was it to do this exercise?
- What did you learn?
- What coping strategy resonated with you? Have you tried this before?
- What steps can you take to prevent your and other people’s hot buttons from being pushed?
- How might you be willing to use what we discussed today in your life?

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION:

This activity can be broadened and extended to teach about “coping strategies” and how to handle communication with self-regulation. Here below is some guidelines:

As a group, discuss what makes these strategies useful, compared to those that are less effective. (The facilitator writes down the reasons why these strategies are effective on the board).

Discuss one coping strategy at a time, and rate (out of 10) how effective that strategy is in reducing their reaction to the button being triggered. (The facilitator writes down the effectiveness rating (out of 10) after each coping strategy on the board).

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