

# Acting with Purpose™ AT HOME

Units 1 and 2

Dear Parent,

We have been learning a lot about the idea of “Whole Body Listening.” The concept of Whole Body Listening has been around for more than 25 years. Susanne Poulette Truesdale first wrote about the concept in 1990, and it has been a valuable tool for teachers and learners ever since.

Basically, Whole Body Listening means that we use our whole bodies, not just our mouths and our ears, when we communicate with one another. Listening is not just hearing information, but communicating back to the speaker that you are paying attention and are interested in what they are sharing. Your student is learning that body language plays a critical role in all communication, and that they can learn tools to control what messages they send non-verbally.

Group activities in the classroom helped everyone learn the importance of social space and eye contact. Students also practiced thinking about the different needs of everyone in the group, and managing the responsibility that comes with power in a group dynamic. These games were a lot of fun, and they allowed students to practice truly listening with their eyes, their bodies, their brains, and their hearts.

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class. You might ask questions like:



***I hear you're learning about Whole Body Listening at school. Can you tell me what that means to you? Can you give me examples of how you listen with different parts of your body?***

During everyday interactions with family members, you can practice giving specific feedback in a positive, affirming way, saying things like:



***I love how you are giving me your eyes when I'm talking to you. It makes me feel like you really care about what I'm saying!***



***Your body is telling me that you're thinking about your game right now. It would really help me if you could listen to me with your brain and your eyes so I would know you're hearing what I'm saying.***

Ask your children to show you how they played “Name Game,” “Pass the Power,” or “Pass the Hand Clap.” This will give them ownership in the activities and create a powerful tie-in to what they're learning at school.

**Thank you!**

# Acting with Purpose™ AT HOME

Units 3 and 4

Dear Parent,

Recently, students have been learning the importance of understanding who makes up their community. They've been learning about the responsibility each one of us carries to create and maintain a Positive Learning Community. We are building and expanding on our practice of Whole Body Listening skills to learn about fellow students and to demonstrate honor and respect in our responses to each other.

Students worked in pairs to learn things about each other in an interview called “Three Important Things.” This helped students understand the experiences and perspectives of other students in the class, and to learn what’s different and unique about ourselves and one another. Students interviewed their partners, recorded their responses, and shared information in a group. This challenged them to remember details about friends and gave them practice taking risks and sharing information about themselves.

We also engaged in an activity in which all members of the group had to take responsibility for one another to be sure everyone was included. The activity was called “Everyone has the Power,” and it reinforces the concept that ***With great power comes great responsibility.***

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class.

You might ask questions like:



***I see that you're learning about positive communities at school right now. Can you tell me why that's important? Have you learned anything new about someone in your school community that you didn't know before? Has anything surprised you?***

Encourage your student to think about “community” in different contexts, and ask:



***Who are the members of our community at home?***

Ask your children to show you how they played “Three Important Things.” This will give them ownership in the activity, and create a powerful tie-in to what they're learning at school.

**Thank you!**

# Acting with Purpose™

## AT HOME

A note about Mindfulness

Books, media, and public programs about “mindfulness” and its impact on mental and physical health abound in today’s world. But what exactly is it?

Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of several books on mindfulness, says that it is the practice of paying attention in a particular way—on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment. It is not a religious practice, although it is compatible with many spiritual, sacred, and philosophical traditions. More than anything else, the practice of mindfulness is a practice of compassion toward oneself and others.

A wealth of scientific research has revealed that mindfulness can positively impact a person’s physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Physical health benefits, including lowered blood pressure, reduced chronic pain and improved sleep function, are well-documented. In a review of empirical studies on the effects of mindfulness on psychological health, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) confirmed that mindfulness is positively associated with increased overall well-being, as well as improved regulation of emotions and behavior.

For all these reasons, mindfulness is a key concept and a powerful cornerstone of this learning series. In our classroom, mindfulness exercises encourage students to engage fully in the present moment and appreciate the moment they’re in... “Right here and Right now.” This helps students learn to quiet their minds, focus on their breath, calmly observe their surroundings, and let go of tension.

Mindfulness practice helps children sharpen their perceptions of the thoughts of others, manage their stress, and regulate emotional responses to social encounters. Simply put, by focusing on the here and now, people who are mindful tend to get less anxious and worried about events they cannot control, and respond more calmly to adverse events.

The inward-focused “centering” that happens with mindfulness can help children be less preoccupied with self-doubt, and more available to make meaningful connections with others. This can have a profound impact on social skill development and social understanding for all students. If you’d like to deepen your child’s learning about mindfulness, you might ask questions like:



***I hear you’re learning about mindfulness at school. What does the word “mindfulness” mean to you? Can you tell me about some of the mindfulness exercises you’re doing?***



***How do you feel before and after you do a mindfulness practice? How do you think being “mindful” can be helpful in other parts of your life?***

The mindfulness practices we are doing at school can also be done at home, and we strongly encourage it. Ask your child to lead you through one of the classroom practices. When practiced regularly, mindfulness can nurture all the relationships in your family!

# *Acting with Purpose™* AT HOME

Units 5 and 6

Dear Parent,

Our focus right now is on the power and importance of observation in communication. We learned about observation and how it helps us communicate better at school, at home, and at play. Particularly for kids with social and behavioral challenges, strengthening this vital skill can measurably improve their success in group activities.

We explored how many things can we learn when we carefully observe our environment and the people around us with great care. Students had a lot of opportunities to expand their non-verbal communication skills. In observational activities like “Mirrors” and “Silent Line-Up,” the students gave a lot of attention to their partners' information and actions, and matched their own actions in response.

When we practiced activities that remind students that we use our eyes both to get information and to give information, everyone also developed and practiced their skills at self-awareness and self-regulation.

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class. You might ask questions like:



***I read about some of the activities you're doing at school to learn about observation. Which of these games did you like the best?***



***How does observation make you a better communicator? Are you seeing a positive effect?***

It's always a great idea to let your child be the teacher while you are the learner. Ask your student to show you how to play “Mirrors,” a game in which two people look at each other very directly, while one of them pretends to be a mirror. Think of it as if you were standing in front of a full-length mirror! The idea is for the person starting the action, and the person copying the action, to match as precisely as possible.

In “Mirrors,” the people who are moving have to move in very particular ways to make their motions easy to match. The people acting as mirrors have to focus and watch their movements very closely. Practicing this together will give your child a sense of ownership of the activity, and will give you an opportunity to understand what your child is learning in school.

**Thank you!**

# *Acting with Purpose™* AT HOME

Units 7, 8, and 9

Dear Parent,

We have arrived at an exciting moment of our journey. You may have wondered why this program is called *Acting with Purpose™*. Well, now we've introduce students to the Actor's Tools! These are the tools we use to give information to people around us about our thoughts and feelings—our Face, Body and Voice.

The activities focused on what we communicate with our facial expressions, movements, and the tone and volume of our voices. “Pass the Face,” a popular group activity that involves “passing” a specific facial expression around a circle of students, helps students practice offering and receiving constructive criticism, while honing their powers of observation and self-awareness. Similarly, In “Pass the Voice,” students created and “passed” a distinctive sound around a circle and explored how vocal variations (like volume and tone) communicate feelings and thoughts.

We have also been starting to use all our Actor's Tools together in some complex activities that combine facial, vocal, and body movements to communicate messages.

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class.

You might ask questions like:



***Can you tell me about some of the Actor's Tools that you're learning about at school? How would you use your Face to communicate information? What about your Body?***



***Do you think that one of these Actor's Tools is easier for you to use than the others? Which one is easiest for you. Why do you think that might be?***

You might also pick a familiar routine in your household, like getting ready for dinner or completing a daily chore. Have your student help you choose the task you'll do together, so that they will buy into it. Then proceed to do the task together, but use only one of your “Actor's Tools” to communicate. For example, decide to set the table using only your eyes to communicate with each other. Be sure to debrief afterwards to talk about what went well and what was challenging about the Actor's Tool you chose!

**Thank you!**

# *Acting with Purpose™* AT HOME

Units 10 and 11

Dear Parent,

We are continuing our exploration of the Actor's Tools by learning how our Face, Body and Voice convey emotions and compassion. First, students used facial expressions and body posture to share information about emotions. Knowing that discussing feelings can sometimes be tricky (both for kids and adults), we use a poster as a conversation-starter to support the activities. Once students were comfortable with “emotions-friendly” language, they practiced acting out and interpreting feelings in an activity called “I See You're Feeling.” This really helped students understand the concepts of compassion and empathy and the way that these ideas are related but also distinct.

We brought a lot of attention to the importance of creating a sense of safety in social interactions. In “3 Balls 1 Circle,” everyone had to use their Actor's Tools to give and receive information so that no one would be injured and the activity would be successful for everyone. As a group, we talked about how this game resembles having a conversation, because we need to make sure that a conversational partner is ready to receive information before we give it.

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class.

You might ask questions like:



***I read that you're learning a lot about feelings and emotions in your "Acting with Purpose" program. What's that like for you?***



***Can you teach me how you use the Actor's Tools to express how you're feeling? How can we all use Actor's Tools to help us understand one another here at home?***

Use “I see You're Feeling” language to prompt a dialogue some time when your child is visibly experiencing positive or negative emotions. For example, if your daughter's brow is furrowed and she's biting her nails, you might say “I see you're feeling concerned about something. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?” Similarly, you might ask your child, “Can you see that I'm feeling really frustrated right now? How are my face and body telling you that I feel this way?”

Asking questions and inviting comments and conversation in this way gives your student permission to express their feelings while reinforcing that we all communicate important emotional information without even speaking.

**Thank you!**

# Acting with Purpose™ AT HOME

Unit 12

Dear Parent,

We are now working on a really important skill—namely, thinking flexibly!

Students learned how our brains can be rigid or flexible, just like our bodies. We begin to explore what it means to think flexibly in a social situation. Several of the group activities challenged students to stay flexible so that the whole group would be able to experience success.

Flexible thinking, or “cognitive flexibility,” is a crucial skill. People with flexible thinking are able to observe a social situation, sum up what is happening, and modify or vary their responses to be successful in different social settings and with different conversational partners. Students who lack flexible thinking often struggle in relationships because they have difficulty seeing through the lens of other peoples’ feelings and experiences. In this way, flexibility in thinking is directly linked to other key social skills, including perspective-taking and empathy. It’s also hard for students without cognitive flexibility to be willing to participate in non-preferred tasks.

If you’d like to deepen your child’s learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we’ve been practicing in class. You might ask questions like:



***What does it mean to you to “think flexibly?” How is having a flexible brain like having a flexible body? Is it hard to think flexibly at school sometimes?***



***Can you give me an example of a time when you did something that you really didn’t want to in order to be flexible in a situation with your friends?***

Consider building a “Flexibility Wall of Fame.” You’ll need assorted Post-It notes and markers. Every time a family member does something that demonstrates flexibility (like sharing something, not getting first choice, or handling an unexpected change of routine really well), write it down on a sticky note. Then post the note on a designated wall at home, ideally in a central location like the kitchen or dining room.

As your Wall of Fame grows, praise your children by pointing out all the different ways that they demonstrate flexible thinking (and the kindness and consideration of others that goes along with it). Sharing this activity as a family allows conversation about everyday challenges to open up in a welcoming and non-threatening way, and reminds your child that everyone—including parents—needs to practice flexibility in day-to-day life.

**Thank you!**

# *Acting with Purpose™* AT HOME

Units 13, 14, and 15

Dear Parent,

Your student is now very familiar with the Actor's Tools (Face, Body and Voice) and is learning how to control and use them to communicate emotional information. We've been exploring how the tone and volume of our voices can convey feelings and emotions. The students especially enjoyed playing "Zip Zap Emotions," an energetic activity in which they exaggerate their expressions to show others what a feeling looks like.

The students have been taking responsibility for using their Actor's Tools to communicate increasingly complex information. They have practiced portraying three different character traits at the same time, which is a lot more challenging than communicating just one emotion or trait at a time! In "Emotion Machine" and "Exaggeration Circles," students practiced using their Actor's Tools as a team to benefit the whole group. These activities were great springboards for discussion about how we express and interpret different degrees of emotions.

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class. You might ask questions like:



***Which one of the Actor's Tools that you're learning to use at school are you most comfortable with? Is it easier to use your face (or your body or your voice) to communicate your feelings?***



***Tell me about some of the activities that you're doing... how does it feel to act out really big emotions? Can you think of a time when you expressed yourself at home in a really BIG way?***

Try to incorporate your student's emotions-training and self-reflection skills into your dialogue at home. Use exaggerated facial expressions when you use words conveying emotions and ask, "Does my face match my words?" Point out when there seems to be a conflict between what someone communicates with their different Actor's Tools. For best results, use your own actions to demonstrate first! For example, you could say, "I just told you with my voice that I was interested in your project, but since I was texting when I said that, I was sending you a different message with my body. I'm going to fix that so you know I'm really listening to you."

**Thank you!**

# Acting with Purpose™ AT HOME

Unit 16

Dear Parent,

We have arrived at another key moment in our classroom journey! After developing a diverse tool kit of acting and social skills, students are now learning how these tools equip them to be strong and compassionate leaders and build healthy relationships with their peers.

Students are developing an inclusive understanding of what leadership means and how everyone can be a leader in a different way. Although we frequently associate leadership with the qualities of being an extrovert, our group is learning that quiet students can also be leaders. They demonstrate leadership by observing, reflecting, and venturing a comment or a guess, even when they are scared to speak.

Our discussions and activities have helped students see that an important aspect of leadership is having the courage to try something that's hard for you. When they show that kind of courage, they are leading by modeling, and empowering other students to do the same. "Follow Me" is a favorite game in this unit, as it uses dance moves and music to help students practice leadership skills. We are always reminded that "with great power comes great responsibility."

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class. You might ask questions like:



***What does it mean to you to be a good leader? How do you feel when it's your turn to be the leader in a group activity, like "Follow Me"? What parts of being a leader are easy for you and which parts are hard?***



***Your teacher says, "With great power comes great responsibility." What does that mean to you?***

Together with your child, brainstorm a list of famous leaders from history and contemporary society (some examples include Harriet Tubman, Julia de Burgos, Mahatma Ghandi, Harvey Milk, Rosa Parks, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi, Bella Abzug, Winona LaDuke, and Nelson Mandela).

As a family, learn more about some of these leaders. Then discuss what tools seem to help people lead and become inspiring to others. In these discussions, try to steer the conversation to focus on the ways that skills like communication, compassion, and empathy are important for leadership.

**Thank you!**

# *Acting with Purpose™* AT HOME

Units 17 and 18

Dear Parent,

In the final lessons in this series, students learned how to apply their Actor's Tools to work as a group. They really fine-tuned their understanding of how their choices and actions impact, and are influenced by, others. I think they brought their Whole Body Listening skills to the next level, really tuning in to the details of someone's non-verbal communication to get information.

Some of our activities allowed students to explore the power of slow motion. This helps them relax their bodies and minds, and it also lets them reflect on and control the messages they send with their actions. We also returned to the key concept of thinking flexibly, and students further explored how to use Actor's Tools to observe a social situation, sum up what is happening, and determine their responses accordingly.

If you'd like to deepen your child's learning, here are some things you can do at home to extend the ideas we've been practicing in class. You might ask questions like:



***You've been learning a lot at school about the different ways that our bodies and faces communicate. Has anything surprised you in this process?***



***What do you think is the biggest lesson you've learned about communicating with others?***

Try to expose your thinking process verbally whenever you are thinking with flexibility and empathy. As adults, our self-regulation and decision-making thoughts often happen intuitively and silently. As a result, kids don't see how often we flexible thinking in our interactions with them and others. You can make "Thinking Out Loud" a habit to model empathy and flexibility for your child in your day-to-day interactions.

For example, with a younger child, you might say, "I really wanted mint-chocolate chip ice cream because that's my favorite. But we only have enough money for one kind of ice cream. I'm going to buy chocolate instead, because I know that everyone in the family likes chocolate." With an older child, you could say "I really want to go for a run right now, but I can see by your face that you're feeling lonely. Can we get some fun exercise together instead? Maybe we could go for a walk or a bike ride."

Use phrases like "I see you're feeling..." to notice out loud someone else's feelings. Point out and honor those moments when your family members takes the time to observe someone else's feelings and adjust their behavior accordingly. Teaching and talking about these skills explicitly can help students recognize empathy and flexible thinking in their own actions, and boost confidence in their own ability to think like a leader and make strong social choices.

**Thank you!**

# *Acting with Purpose*<sup>™</sup> AT HOME

Dear Parent,

I am pleased to tell you that our classroom has completed the entire learning series! Throughout this hands-on learning adventure, all the students have learned how to take supported social risks, observe and respect other peoples' perspectives and needs, and use self-awareness and body language to navigate tricky social situations.

Although our classroom work with the curriculum is complete, your student has just begun a life-long journey of social emotional learning. Remember that for this powerful program to have a lasting impact on children's social and academic success, they'll need to keep using their Actor's Tools! Encourage this by keeping your *Acting with Purpose*<sup>™</sup> handouts and incorporating the language, concepts, and practices into family conversations whenever possible. Here are some things you can do at home to support and extend your child's social emotional learning:

-  Use affirming, positive language to point out and applaud your children when they demonstrate empathy, compassion, and/or leadership skills, especially when you notice they are taking risks to do so!
-  Refer frequently to Whole Body Listening and non-verbal communication in your interactions in the family. Notice and point out the messages and information you get from one another through body language. This will help develop and fine-tune your child's perspective-taking and self-awareness skills.
-  Encourage children to use mindfulness and self-reflection as ways to center themselves and make smart choices.

**Thank you!**

**P.S.** The role of parents and family members in supporting a child's social-emotional learning is vital, and your perspective on this process is highly valued.

The developers of *Acting with Purpose*<sup>™</sup> would love to hear what the **AT HOME** activities were like for your family. What pieces worked well for you? Which parts could use some tweaking?

Please go to [www.positivelearningcommunities.com](http://www.positivelearningcommunities.com) to let the authors know about your family's impressions and experience with the curriculum.