

# Initiative

Character... It starts with me!

## LOOKING AT INITIATIVE THROUGH THE EYES OF TRAUMA

NOVEMBER 2013

### I WILL:

- Do what is right before being told
- Not put off until tomorrow the things I can do today
- Contribute to the success of the whole team
- Be a part of the solution rather than the problem
- Look for ways to help others

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## Vs. Idleness

### Recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it

*By Jodi Landers*

None of us display initiative *all* the time. Sometimes a lazy day is just what the doctor ordered. Imagine it's a cold, rainy Saturday morning and there's a great movie on TBS. You and I know you'll probably be in your pajamas until noon. (Although, I envision most of you grading papers, while the movie's on.)

Initiative is a multi-faceted characteristic. It requires the ability to recognize and relate to another's need; i.e., empathy. Ideally, empathy prompts action based on that recognition. And, to top it all off, action before anyone asks. Sounds like this may be difficult for a lot of people, not only children.

Every child needs guidance when learning to be gentle and not "hit the doggie". However, if I am a child who experiences trauma, recognizing a need outside of my own could be detrimental to me. Research has shown that the primary function of the human brain is to ensure survival. If I stop paying attention to my own safety for even a moment, I could be in danger. While I might risk greatly for my own benefit, I probably wouldn't for the benefit of others. When my primal need for survival walks in, my empathy for others walks out.

This month, you may find that initiative is taught more effectively in smaller steps. For starters, try a few activities that just focus on the recognition of need. For younger children, use picture cards and ask what the needs of the people or animals on the cards might be. Keep in mind that you are driving at a sense of empathy. There are no wrong answers. This activity is allowing students to search their minds for ideas. They are essentially "writing the script" or caption based on needs, for each picture. For older students, read scenarios aloud and have them talk about the needs of different people in the situation. Most young people are visual learners, so use a visual aide, like a scene



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from a movie, if possible. It is important to reassure students who suffer trauma, that just seeing the needs of others in no way puts them in danger. Repeated comments about pictures or scenarios that include violence or neglect may speak to what is going on inside that child and outside of school. Listen for these.

Once you feel that your students have an idea that other beings have needs, begin working on what they can do to ensure that needs are met. It might prove more applicable to introduce new pictures or scenarios where students could actually provide assistance. For younger students use visuals depicting a child who's fallen down on the playground, an elderly person putting on her coat, an injured animal or just ducks in a pond. Ask for ideas about the needs observed and what students might do to help. For older students, talk about different places people work where the primary focus is helping others; a homeless shelter, an animal shelter, a school, a nursing home, etc. You can also discuss the roles of different clubs and fund raisers at their schools. Again, reinforce to certain students that there is no risk to their safety when helping Grandma put her coat on or feeding ducks in the pond.

The final step is introducing the idea that initiative involves doing things without being asked. Start by expressing to students that many of the people who help others do it because it is kind, generous and often just the right thing to do. Also add that many people work as volunteers and offer their time because they want to help someone who is less fortunate than they are. You will find that children of trauma are often those "less fortunate" one's and cannot fathom helping someone else "for free". Their mantra is "Why should I help someone else when no one helps me?" Sadly, to a certain degree, they're right. Some students can relate to doing something because it "makes their heart feel good". At some point in their lives, empathy and initiative have been taught, maybe by you.

Remember, if you keep doing what you've been doing, you'll keep getting what you've been getting.

Peace-  
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