

## **A CULTURE OF COOPERATION HAS THE POTENTIAL TO INFLUENCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW NORMS IN A SOCIAL SYSTEM.**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents the reasoning and research behind a program for teaching the skills of reciprocal cooperation to middle and high school students. It uses a chart to show the place of cooperation in the continuum of human interactions. It offers a four-topic curriculum that was created for students in grades six through twelve but which can be adapted for younger students by substituting age appropriate activities and handouts and a chart with a simple rationale for each of the twelve essential components of reciprocity.

Teaching the skills of reciprocal cooperation seeks to empower students to break the bully-victim cycle by engaging their natural propensity for fairness. Essentially, it calls upon students not only to initiate nice behavior themselves, to notice when others are nice to them and respond in kind, and to avoid being nasty first. It also teaches them how and when it is safe to proffer in-kind consequences when someone is nasty to them.

As students engage in self-reflective discussions and come to incorporate the concept of reciprocity into their thinking and interactions, they find themselves changing in three ways. They become better able to prevent provocative incidents from escalating into violence. They feel better able to bargain as equals with those who victimize them through unfair or aggressive behavior. And equipped with skills to manage minor altercations, they feel safer and better able to concentrate on learning.

When the skills of reciprocal cooperation was field-tested as the *Live and Let Live*™ cooperation through reciprocity program at Kosciuszko Middle School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the author and her colleagues received positive anecdotal feedback. The program is theoretically sound, lacking only a plan for an outcome study and more schools willing to host it.

The author also offers an alternative method for teaching reciprocity in the form of a novel that demonstrates the concepts and skills in story form.

### **Introduction**

Teenagers have much going for them, not the least of which is their natural resilience. But they do need assistance to get through their school years unscathed by the various types of affronts, unfairness, and violence that they see or experience. Children's prolonged adolescence and dependence on authority clearly contribute to school violence. But our cultural obsession with competition and violence and our schools' failure to adequately promote cooperation also contribute to it. Because the schools are culpable and because they house, tend, and teach children for six hours a day, schools provide an appropriate environment for promoting change, in this case, from stressing competition through such things as grades, sports, and popularity to stressing cooperation through reciprocity. Indeed, our schools provide an appropriate environment for a culture of cooperation through reciprocity to take hold and become robust.

### **Current American norms**

Our dominant culture promotes the norms of competition, cheating, and violence.

Competition, by definition is winning at the expense of others. Our free enterprise system works on the assumption that competition encourages excellence. Companies compete with each other to produce a better product and they receive a larger share of the market when their product sells more than the product of their

competitors. However, as Alfie Kohn (1999) so aptly points out, competition doesn't necessarily result in a better product. Students compete with each other for grades. But, does that kind of competition result in better learning, and does it encourage the natural curiosity and love for learning that makes students life time learners? Alfie Kohn says an unqualified, no.

When winning becomes too important, cheating is to be expected. In *The Cheating Culture* David Callahan (2004) blames America's brutally competitive culture for a cheating epidemic. The increased pressure of job competition, the widening economic gap between winners and losers, insecurity, and the perception that everybody's doing it all account for a wide scale acceptance of the practice of cheating.

Competition, however, is like cholesterol. There's good cholesterol and bad cholesterol. Card games and board games have rules, they can be fun, and nobody gets injured. We can keep ourselves fit by participating in sports like tennis, golf, track, swimming, and the national sport of many other nations, table tennis from kindergarten to retirement.

Unfortunately we're addicted to the bad cholesterol. Competition laced with violence is the bad stuff. Our national sport is not table tennis; it's football. We're obsessed with the game. Football, boxing and wrestling require the use of physical force for winning. Using brute force is not simply a side effect of the game; it's an essential part of the game. The game cannot be won without it.

In baseball, basketball, and soccer, accidents and cheating may cause injuries, but physical force is not a requisite for winning.

When physical combat is required to win, the game becomes one that mimics warfare. The difference between football and warfare is only a matter of stakes. We spend billions of dollars and trillions of hours injecting our kids with the bad stuff. We teach our kids that winning is where the glory is, and winning by using physical force is the greatest glory of all.

Many point out that it's not just power and force that win the game. It's strategy and team work, and there are rules of fair play. The same, however, is true of warfare. There is strategy and teamwork. A soldier is expected to cover his buddy's back and to put himself in harms way to support another soldier. There are rules in warfare. In warfare, as in football, when winning becomes too important, cheating is expected. The difference between the two is only a matter of stakes.

Only the big kids, the strong ones are encouraged to play a game where might makes right. The rest of us participate vicariously while the big kids become heroes. We worship the winners. We pay professionals outrageous amounts of money to entertain us on Sunday afternoons and Monday nights. And the school team quarterback struts through the hall basking in the admiration of his classmates.

Ours is the only country that totally worships the team sport that *requires* the use of physical force (combat) to win. And our school children are among the most violent in the Western world.

Not so many years ago bullying was considered a normal part of growing up. Today we're more enlightened, and rightly so. However, hazing slips through the cracks in the same way that bullying did only a few years ago.

Many euphemisms are harmless. Hazing, however, is not one of them. Hazing is bullying, period. Hazing is the worst kind of bullying because the victims are sworn to silence and the authorities look the other way unless the hazing gets out of hand.

How is it that allowing oneself to be a victim of hazing is euphemized into a rite of passage? Victims are told to take it because some day it will be their turn to dish it out. So, not only is hazing sanctioned, it's a systematic way to insure that the practice of bullying, euphemized as a "tradition," will be passed from generation to generation.

About a year ago, the Board of Education in Bellmore, New York took drastic action against hazing when it cancelled the football season at Mepham High School because the hazing of football teammates got out of hand (Healy, 2003). Got out of hand? Younger boys were brutally sodomized by older ones. Witnesses refused to blow the whistle because they feared retaliation.

What motivates sanctioned bullying, called hazing, to escalate into heinous crimes against innocent victims? One answer is that the biggest, most macho boys are the only ones to make the football team. One cannot deny the adrenaline rush these boys experience as they come into combat with other players. The pressure is on for them to maintain their reputations for being tough guys.

Within this way of thinking, it sort of follows that hazing in the context of condoned physical violence would be violent. Further, it sort of makes sense that hazing by boys accustomed to the adrenaline rush that comes when physical violence makes them heroes is a set up for the escalation of violence in hazing.

A culture within which cooperation through reciprocity is the norm has the capacity to reduce the escalation of violence between people who encounter each other on a regular basis for a non-specified amount of time. The school provides an ideal setting for such a culture to evolve. The social skills necessary for communicating reciprocity can be acquired. Cooperation through reciprocity empowers students to treat others fairly in their own best interest without relying on authority to mediate in minor altercations.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs paradigm published more than 40 years ago seems like just plain common sense today. Maslow hypothesized that individuals could not reach their highest potential unless certain basic needs, the need for sustenance and the need to feel safe, for example, were met. It follows that students will be more likely to focus on learning when they are not hungry and when they feel safe in their schools.

The locked doors, metal detectors, locker searches, increased surveillance, zero tolerance, teach tolerance, psychotherapy, punishments, drug education, sex education, peer mediation, and instructing kids to seek help from authorities are good strategies for keeping students safe. But what do students themselves have to say about their own perception of being safe?

Two researchers from New York University recently surveyed more than 10,000 students between ages 10 and 18 and their parents about their perceptions of school safety. The survey found that 18 percent of urban students and 11 percent of suburban students reported feeling unsafe in their schools.

Admittedly, there are some circumstances that are beyond a student's ability to manage. But minor altercations can be dealt with on the spot. To feel safe, students need to know and understand the rules of fairness. They need to be empowered to act on their own behalf and they need a safe environment within which to practice the skills.

Human interaction occurs in a social context ranging on a continuum from cooperation to combat with compromise, competition and coercion between them. Each context has its own rules and norms. To some extent, the context within which an interaction occurs will determine the nature and the outcome of the interaction. For an analysis of the various interactions, see Table 1 in the Appendix.

## **Our Schools Do Not Adequately Promote Cooperation**

There can be no denying that our educational system operates almost exclusively in a context of competition. The practice of grading on the curve restricts the number of A's that can be given, and pits students against each other to get them. Teachers often reward students for reading the largest number of books, or constructing the largest number of words from a given set of letters. One person becomes an obstacle to another person's success. The competition to get into what are perceived as the best schools from pre-kindergarten to college is blatantly out of hand.

Alfie Kohn (1992), in *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, promotes cooperation as a panacea. He offers a plethora of excellent ideas to achieve a cultural change in the classroom. His model, however, is heavily dependent on altruism as a motive for cooperating with others. Certainly promoting altruism is commendable, but it's idealistic to expect altruism to become a norm. There will always be altruists and egoists.

## **Our Children's Prolonged Adolescence and Dependence on Authority**

Many educators, school administrators, psychologists, and social workers benevolently postulate that teachers and other school personnel need to be more vigilant and accessible. *They* should be accountable for the protection of students from the bullying of other students. However, look at it this way, even if authorities were on top of every incident of bullying, which is nearly impossible, many students would still not feel safe. Why? Because instead of being encouraged and empowered to act on their own behalf they are being told to rely on authorities to protect them.

A hundred years ago, people were expected to take on adult responsibilities when they were as young as twelve years of age. Self-reliance and mediating minor altercations without involving central authority were the norm. Our modern technological world requires a longer learning curve before our youth can be adequately prepared to deal with life as defined by Silicon Valley and the big city. The result is the creation of a whole, relatively new, segment of society—teenagers. Teenagers are people who are caught in kind of a limbo, between being adults, who have all the freedoms and the responsibilities of citizens, and being dependent kids, whose primary responsibilities are to study their lessons and follow the rules (LaCourt, 2003b).

Teenagers, not quite adults, not quite kids, and not quite jaded by the reality that life is not quite fair, might have an important edge for keeping minor altercations from escalating into violence. Given the opportunity, the skills, the encouragement to be self-reliant, a safe environment within which to practice those skills, and a culture that promotes and nurtures cooperation, they may be able to break the bully/victim cycle, at least in the simple context within which they live their everyday lives (LaCourt, 2003b).

## **Cooperation through Reciprocity: The Theory**

The notion that social order could be maintained through reciprocity is by no means new. "In the late sixth century BCE (Before Common Era), long before organized religions took it upon themselves to prescribe their own brands of morality, Confucius emphasized benevolence, respect for others, and reciprocity as the Foundations of Social Order (LaCourt, 2004).

In the early 1980's Robert Axelrod posed the questions: When should a person cooperate, and when should a person be selfish in an ongoing interaction with another person? He used a computerized version of a game called Prisoner's Dilemma (Rapoport 1965) to answer his questions. This game allows players to achieve mutual gains from cooperation, but it also allows for the possibility that one player will exploit the other, or

the possibility that neither will cooperate. A four line program (Titt for Tatt) submitted by Anatol Rapoport overwhelmingly produced more gains than any other submission (Axelrod, 1984).

Axelrod used game theory again to study cooperation in more complex systems. When noise was introduced into the environment, reciprocity with the addition of generosity and contrition still did the best when individuals knew they would be encountering each other on an ongoing basis for an unspecified length of time (Axelrod, 1997).

When reciprocal communication skills are acquired and used by members of a system, those members will be able to direct the evolution of a cooperative culture. Once started, a culture of cooperation has the potential for positive broad and long-range effects in social systems. As Axelrod (1984) writes, "The most promising finding is that if the facts of Cooperation Theory are known by participants with foresight, the evolution of cooperation can be speeded up."

The school provides an ideal environment for a culture of cooperation through reciprocity to thrive and become robust.

Reciprocity promotes cooperation in a context where individuals know they will be encountering each other on an ongoing basis for an unspecified length of time (Axelrod, 1984).

A cooperative environment reduces the number and severity of violent interactions between members of a social system (Axelrod, 1984).

Reciprocal interactions between members of a social system encourage the evolution of a cooperative culture (Axelrod, 1984).

The social skills necessary for the communication of reciprocity can be acquired. Behaving in a reciprocal manner does not require complicated mental or physical dexterity. Reciprocity does not challenge mainstream core beliefs or attitudes.

Real people are more likely to use trial-and-error behavior than detailed calculations based on accurate beliefs about the future. The evolutionary approach is based on the principle that what works well for a player is more likely to be used again, whereas what turns out poorly is more likely to be discarded (Axelrod, 1997).

It is acknowledged that there are some circumstances that are beyond a student's ability to manage without adult intervention, and some situations within which reciprocity is inappropriate and unsafe. The curriculum for the *Live and Let Live* bully prevention program (LaCourt, 2000) includes a section on personal safety. Please see Table 2 in the Appendix.

### **What Motivates Cooperation through Reciprocity?**

Unlike Alfie Kohn's collaborative model of cooperation which is highly dependent on altruistic motives, motives for reciprocal cooperation are realistic, they can vary on a continuum between altruism and egoism. It's in the best interest of both altruists and egoists to reciprocate both positive and negative interactions fairly regardless of motive.

There is ample documentation to support the superiority of the Titt for Tatt strategy of cooperation through reciprocity in game theory. But, would it work with real people in a real world? Kosciuszko Middle School in Milwaukee Wisconsin gave the author and two colleagues an opportunity to find out.

Equipped with a chart identifying 12 components of reciprocity, a belief in the potential for reciprocity to encourage a culture of cooperation, and a faith in the resiliency of adolescents, three marriage and family therapists from the suburbs met thirty 7<sup>th</sup> grade students from the inner city and their teacher. See Table 2

The author and her colleagues had much to learn. Like good therapists, they planned to join the students and gain their trust by demonstrating their understanding of problems as the students defined them. They were most eager to tell us what they thought in no uncertain terms, and all at once. They let us know in Spanish, in an English dialect foreign to the ears of three white ladies from the burbs, and in body language. They complained about restrictions placed on them and criticized administration's inability to keep the bullies in control.

On two occasions, the teacher had to rescue us. We had clearly lost control. She actually kicked us out of the classroom so that she could do whatever she had to do to restore order. Upon being invited back in, we encountered a much more docile group. However, their complaints were the same, albeit communicated respectfully and one at a time.

After class, we were the ones to receive the teacher's lecture. We finally did what we should have done in the first place, we listened to the teacher. She asked us what, exactly, did we hope to accomplish. When we told her we wanted to teach them some communication skills, she challenged us. "Well, then, teach them."

The first lesson we learned was that teaching is not the same as doing therapy. We took her advice, consulted our list of components and started at the beginning. "Be nice first."

From that point on we began thinking more like teachers. We developed lesson plans as we went through the list of the Twelve Essential Components of Reciprocity in order of their appearance in Table 2. These lesson plans were later incorporated in a formal curriculum for the *Live and Let Live*™ program. See Table 3 in the Appendix.

The best thing we did was to stay focused on the positive side of reciprocity until we were certain the students understood the most important lesson; reciprocity requires that a response to a gesture from someone be met with a gesture of like kind and degree. For example, when someone offers to share her/his lunch you are not required to do that person's homework for the rest of the semester. A simple "thank you" and an offer to share lunch under similar circumstances when the tables are turned is sufficient.

A high point in the experience for me came when we discussed the question, "Why not just be nice all the time and a boy answered, "Because that's not fair. Besides, that can get you in a whole lot of trouble. Some people take advantage." His answer prompted a discussion about being fair from the point of view of reciprocating both nice and nasty behaviors.

Time spent on the concept of reciprocating in like kind and degree to positive gestures paid dividends. When it came to reciprocating negative gestures, students demonstrated that they already understood that responding by escalating, or getting revenge was not in their best interest.

Another high point in the experience for me came when a girl in the class pointed out that reciprocity was just a fancy word for being fair.

And I breathed a sigh of relief when role-plays of escalation and revenge did not get out of hand. One sketch started with a girl snatching a piece of jewelry off the neck of another girl. The victim (in role play) hit the thief in the mouth and the girl who stole the jewelry called upon her friends to beat up the other girl who then called on her friends and half the class became involved in a make believe fight. I was relieved when I heard

the sound of laughter and saw the smiles erupt across the faces of the play-acting students. We applauded their performance.

These kids validated my trust in the resilience of adolescents.

We were on our way. We had a positive experience with the students. They demonstrated that they were quite capable of cooperatively reciprocating and evaluated the program in very positive statements on the feedback form. Their teacher validated our perceptions that the students did indeed "get it". Their guidance counselor wrote us a letter stating that she had seen some very positive changes in the class we had worked with.

### **Conclusions**

The *Live and Let Live*™ bully prevention program is theoretically sound however it needs a well-developed plan for an outcome study and schools willing to host the program.

In addition to the curriculum presented here, this author offers the option of leading a reading and discussion of the principles of cooperation through reciprocity in story form.

### **Appendix**

Table 1. Human Interaction Continuum  
 [Copyright, 1998, Marilyn LaCourt]

	Cooperation	Compromise	Competition	Coercion	Combat
Information	Shared, clear, honest	Shared, clear, honest	Equals power; sometimes distorted to increase the odds of winning	Equals power; sometimes distorted for the purpose of winning	Equals power; distorted for the purpose of winning
Winning and losing	Mutual; no losers	Equal; winners and losers take turns	Winning—at the expense of others	Winning—psychologic al destruction of others	Winning—physical destruction of others
Cheating	No concept	No concept	Tolerated	The norm	The norm
Intention	Mutual gain	Fairness	Winning	Destruction	Destruction
Mistakes	Acknowledged and forgiven	Acknowledged and forgiven	Acknowledged	Costly and guarded; used to benefit one adversary	Deadly and guarded; used to advantage one adversary
Loss	Neither perception nor concept	Acceptable; turn-taking agreement	Limited by rules	Unlimited: psychological destruction	Unlimited: injury, death, destruction
Norm	Fairness	Fairness	Fairness controlled by rules	No concept of fairness	No concept of fairness
Winners/losers	Winners only	Winners and losers	Winners and losers	Villains and victims	Villains and victims
Discussion	Winning can be achieved only when no one loses. Collaboration is the norm. Projects and games are structured to achieve a better answer or product.	Agreement to win. Agreement to lose. Games don't seem to fit into this context unless they are for mutual or equal benefit, as in cooperation.	Includes card and board games and some sports: tennis, golf, racing, and basketball. Accidents and cheating may cause injuries, but physical force is not a requisite for winning.	No prescribed end to games; often no exit is allowed. Often involves unevenly matched players. E.g., <i>Gas Light</i> and <i>Dungeons and</i> <i>Dragons</i> ; the object is psychological destruction to gain an advantage.	In the extreme, combat ends with death: injury and destruction. Winning requires a minimum of personal injury to some players. Includes sports with required physical contact: boxing, wrestling, football.

Table 2. Curriculum: Teaching skills needed to create a culture of cooperation based on reciprocity  
 [Source: Curriculum for the *Live and Let Live* Bully Prevention Program, Copyright, 2000, Marilyn LaCourt]

Topic 1 of 4: Understanding the concept of cooperation		
Objective	Activity	Outcome/Evaluation
Understand the similarities and differences between collaborative cooperation and reciprocal cooperation.	Participate in a collaborative cooperation game.  Engage in group discussion.  View a video of the movie, <i>Babe</i> , and identify incidents of reciprocal cooperation	Completion of a worksheet defining terms: cooperation, collaboration, and reciprocity  Verbalizing examples of collaborative and reciprocal cooperation in everyday life
Understand the difference between cooperation and competition.	Engage in group discussion.  View a video of the movie, <i>Lord of the Flies</i> , and identify incidents of competition.	Completion of a worksheet identifying strategies of competition and cooperation  Identification of situations where competition and cooperation are appropriate and inappropriate
Understand the concept of fairness in reciprocating nice gestures.		
Understand the concept of fairness in providing consequences for both nice and nasty gestures.		
Understand the difference between consequences and revenge, consequences and punishment, and consequences and retaliation.		
Understand how reciprocity works.	Hand out: "The Twelve Essential Components of Reciprocity."	Identification of the twelve essential components of reciprocity, and verbalization of examples of each
Topic 2 of 4: Establish the value of cooperation		
Objective	Activity	Outcome/Evaluation
Understand that cooperation is the same thing as being fair.	Hand out "Life's not fair."	Listing of fair and unfair treatment in everyday life
Understand the negative outcomes of escalation in coercion and combat.	Discuss war, domestic violence, psychological abuse, coercion, bullies, and gangs. Engage in group discussion of why there are no winners in the escalation of violence in <i>Lord of the Flies</i> and how that escalation could have been avoided.	Listing of the outcomes of different kinds of escalation in different situations and an explanation of how everybody loses  Examples of how escalation could have been avoided through reciprocity
Understand how retaliation and revenge are not fair.	Hand out material on feuds.	Verbalization of examples from personal life experience of retaliation and revenge

<p>Understand how being nice all the time isn't fair.</p>	<p>Discuss the roll of the patsy.</p> <p>Discuss how victim behavior invites bullies to abuse people.</p> <p>Hand out material on being nice.</p>	<p>and their negative outcomes</p> <p>Verbalization of examples of how reciprocity could have prevented those negative outcomes</p> <p>Explanation of why reciprocity is fair</p>
<p>Understand motives for cooperation.</p>	<p>Discuss motives for being nice and the appropriateness of all motives from altruism to self-interest.</p> <p>Discuss motives for providing consequences.</p>	<p>Identification of personal motives for being nice</p> <p>Listing of reasons for giving appropriate consequences</p>

**Topic 3 of 4: Demonstrate the acquisition of communicating reciprocity skills**

Objective	Activity	Outcome/Evaluation
<p>Show a willingness to cooperate. Be nice first.</p>	<p>Discuss what constitutes being nice. Who decides that a given gesture is nice? Did the person you were nice to know that you were being nice?</p> <p>Give students a list of all their classmates, and have them write something nice about each one.</p>	<p>Something nice done for a good friend; description of what happened</p> <p>Something nice done for a family member; description of what happened</p> <p>Something nice done for someone one doesn't know very well; description of what happened</p> <p>Description of reasons for doing nice things</p>
<p>Show a willingness to cooperate. Never be nasty first.</p> <p>Notice when someone is nice, and be nice in return.</p>	<p>Discuss the consequences of being nasty.</p> <p>Compile the list of nice things said about each student, and give each student his or her personal list.</p> <p>Discuss the reciprocation of nice gestures in terms of their kind and degree.</p>	<p>Examples of how being nasty without provocation got you in trouble</p> <p>Description of what happened when someone was nice to you</p> <p>Role play the reciprocation of nice gestures in terms of their kind and degree</p>
<p>Provide appropriate consequences when someone is nasty.</p>	<p>Evaluate the intent of an affront. Was it an accident, or was the intent to do harm?</p> <p>Discuss fairness in degree and kind of response.</p>	<p>Description of a time when someone hurt you accidentally, including how you knew that it was an accident</p> <p>Description of a time when someone hurt you intentionally, including how you</p>

	<p>Discuss the difference between retaliation and consequence.</p> <p>Discuss the difference between punishment and consequence.</p> <p>Discuss the difference between revenge and consequences.</p> <p>Hand out “Reciprocity encourages cooperation.”</p> <p>Observe spontaneous incidents of appropriate consequences for both nice and nasty behaviors, and use these as good examples.</p> <p>Designate as a class project: developing a handout titled, “Examples of Reciprocity.”</p>	<p>knew that it was intentional</p> <p>Description of a time when someone punished you or retaliated unfairly [Add a second clause here.]</p> <p>Description of a time when someone took revenge, including the result</p> <p>Description of a time when someone responded to your wrongdoing with a fair consequence [Add a second clause here.]</p> <p>Role play about giving and receiving appropriate consequences</p> <p>Description of times when appropriate consequences successfully stopped a potential escalation of violence or feuding</p> <p>Two sample hand outs on appropriate real-life examples of reciprocity</p>
<p>Live in the present. Don’t hold grudges.</p>	<p>Hand out “Consequences need to be given in a timely manner.”</p> <p>Discuss the topic: Grudges set us up to be nasty without provocation.</p>	<p>Identification of how holding grudges can get you in trouble</p> <p>Identification of how holding grudges is negative, even when you don’t try to take revenge</p>
<p>Realize that people make mistakes. Apologize and be forgiving.</p>	<p>Hand out materials on apologies.</p> <p>Discuss apologies, the components of a perfect apology, recognizing and accepting an imperfect apology.</p> <p>Observe spontaneous apologies, and use them as good examples of cooperation.</p>	<p>Identification of the important components of the sincere apology</p> <p>Role play about giving and accepting apologies</p> <p>Description of apologies given and received in your personal life</p> <p>Description of a time when you accepted an imperfect apology</p> <p>Description of how giving and accepting an apology prevented the escalation of violence and coercion</p>
<p>Realize that, with cooperation, everybody wins. Don’t be envious.</p>	<p>Hand out “One person’s good luck is not necessarily your bad luck.”</p> <p>Discuss the handout.</p> <p>Identify individual successes of your classmates and celebrate those successes.</p>	<p>Contribution to the class project: “Things I’ve done that I’m proud of” and “Good luck I’ve had that I’m thankful for”</p> <p>Offers of congratulations to your classmates on their accomplishments and celebrations of their good luck</p>

Topic 4 of 4: Personal safety—being able to recognize danger and take proper precautions for personal safety

Objective	Activity	Outcome/Evaluation
Appraise situations for safety.	Provide the hand out: Times when reciprocity is not called for.	Identification of situations in one’s personal life when providing a consequence was not safe
Identify appropriate action to take in an unsafe situation.	<p>Discuss road rage, being outnumbered, and power imbalance.</p> <p>Engage in class discussions about the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of appropriate authorities for dealing with dangerous situation</li> <li>• Alternative actions to take when reciprocity is not safe</li> <li>• Ignoring an offender, running away, getting immediate help, and reporting the incident to the appropriate authorities</li> </ul>	<p>Development of a personal safety plan</p> <p>Listing of authorities one would be willing to contact for help when one is in a dangerous situation, and statement of why each authority is appropriate</p> <p>Listing of appropriate alternative actions one would be willing to take when reciprocity is not safe</p>
Agree to follow a safety plan.	Discuss each person’s safety plan, and make suggestions as needed.	Indication of approval of the plan and agreement to follow it

Table 3. The Components of Reciprocity

[Source: Twelve Essential Components of Reciprocity, Copyright, 1999, LaCourt]

### Why is cooperation important?

When people cooperate, good things happen and everybody benefits. There are many good examples of how cooperation benefits us all. Cars are equipped with turn signals to make it easy for drivers to cooperate. Drivers can let other drivers know when they're going to change lanes. Everyone benefits because there are fewer accidents. In cooperation, everybody wins.

Cooperation means associating with others for mutual benefit. In Cooperation, everybody wins. The opposite of cooperation is trying to win at the expense of others; for one to win, another must lose.

When people try to win at the expense of others, and winning becomes too important, bad things can happen. Cheating can be expected, altercations are likely to escalate into feuds. Violence, abuse, coercion, destruction, and even death can become the consequences. Then nobody wins. There's a lot more to cooperating than just being nice. Cooperation requires people to be nice and to be fair. In cooperation, people need to be accountable for their actions, both the good ones and the bad ones. *Reciprocity* holds people accountable in a fair and respectful manner.

The opposite of cooperation is trying to win at the expense of others.

There are many good reasons why people are nice to one another. Some are nice because it just makes them feel good to be nice. Others are nice because they want something in return. But, there is more to cooperating than just being nice. People need to be held accountable for their behaviors, both the good ones and the bad ones. Reciprocity holds people accountable in a fair and respectful manner.

Reciprocity means being fair, and responding in like manner.

Reciprocity encourages cooperation when people encounter each other on a regular basis for an unspecified length of time.

### The Twelve Essential Components of Reciprocity

- Be Nice First.
- Notice when someone is nice and be nice in return.
- Provide consequences when someone is nasty.
- Never be nasty first.
- Be Fair. Don't escalate nasty behaviors.
- People make mistakes. Be forgiving.
- Accept an apology and give a second chance.
- Give an apology when you do something wrong.
- Everyone wins. Don't be envious
- Live in the present. Don't hold grudges
- Seek help when you need it.
- Your personal safety is the most important thing.

#### Number One: Be Nice First

Starting off on the right foot lets others know we are willing to cooperate, and invites them to cooperate in return. It's easier to be nice to people we like, but it's just as important to be nice to people we don't know very well or don't like very much. It would be a lot to expect for us to like every person we meet. We don't have to be overly nice, or be good friends with everyone, but we do need to let them know we are willing to cooperate.

#### Number Two: Notice when someone is nice and be nice in return.

We have to pay attention because we don't always notice when someone is being nice, especially if it's someone we don't know very well, or don't like very much. Being polite and kind to others in return for politeness and kindness can help build cooperation, and avoid nasty interactions that can lead to violence.

Why not just be nice all the time? Being nice even when others treat you badly or bully you;

- sets you up for being treated badly or being bullied more and more often
- encourages bullies to exploit you and others
- leaves the job of reforming the bullies to others
- keeps the bullies from getting the rewards of mutual cooperation

**Number Three: Provide consequences when someone is nasty.**

First we have to judge whether the person was being nasty on purpose, or if it was just an accident. If we think it was just an accident, we have to check it out by asking the person if he or she meant to be nasty. If we are sure the meanness or nastiness was intended, then we have to let them know their behavior will not be tolerated. We can let them know by being nasty to them in return.

Remember being nasty in return is not revenge or punishment. It's a message that says I will not tolerate this kind of behavior from you.

**Number Four: Never be nasty first.**

Being nasty first sets up a negative course. It tells the other person that you are not willing to cooperate with them and it invites that person to be nasty to you in return. Even when you don't like someone, you do not have the right to be nasty without being provoked.

**Number Five: Be Fair. Do not escalate nasty behaviors.**

It's not fair to punch someone if all they've done to you is call a name. A fair thing to do is no worse than what was done to you. Just calling a name in return would be fair. It's not fair to steal a dollar from your little brother if all he's taken from you is a piece of gum.

Remember, being nasty in return is not revenge or punishment. It's just a message that says I will not tolerate this kind of behavior. You will not be allowed to get away with it. There are lots of ways you can let people know they will not be allowed to treat you badly. If you can't think of a way that will fit a particular situation, ask someone to help you think of something.

**Number Six: People make mistakes. Be forgiving.**

Make allowances. Did you ever yell at someone who didn't deserve to be yelled at because you were just having a bad day? If people yell at you when you don't deserve to be yelled at, you still need to let them know they have offended you. Having a bad day is no excuse to take it out on someone else. However, after you have let them know, you might want to consider giving them another chance to be nice at another time.

**Number Seven: Accept an apology and give a second chance.**

When people say they're sorry, there is no need to let them know they have hurt or offended you. They already know it. Give them another chance.

**Number Eight: Apologize when you do something wrong.**

We all make mistakes. When you know you're wrong, say so. Letting others know that you are aware of what you have done to hurt or offend them can avoid a consequence for you. The best apology is clearly connected to what you did without disclaimers. Lengthy explanations for your behavior tend to sound like excuses, and therefore insincere.

**Number Nine: Everybody wins. Don't be envious.**

When someone else has good things happen, it just means there are more good things happening. When more good things happen you are more likely to have good things happen to you.

**Number Ten: Live in the present.**

Don't hold grudges. Holding grudges keeps us in the past and sets us up for being nasty when we're not provoked. Escalation of violence is more likely to happen when we try to get revenge.

**Number Eleven: Seek help when you need it.**

Reciprocity is usually the best way for you to handle differences and disagreements between yourself and others, and to promote cooperation. However there are times when a situation has escalated beyond your control. There are times when you might be in physical danger, or times when the same person bullies you repeatedly. When this happens seek help from a trusted adult.

**Number Twelve: Your safety is most important.**

If someone is bullying or abusing you and you cannot get help from an adult, the best thing to do is to avoid contact with that person completely. There are times when reciprocity is not the best option. When another driver on the freeway cuts in front of you reciprocating by cutting in front of that driver could endanger your life, the life of the other driver, and the life of innocent people in other cars.

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## Biography

**Marilyn LaCourt, M.A.**, is the Director of Coaching & Consulting Solutions, LLC. The company's mission is to collaborate with individuals; families and organizations seeking to solve problems of living in non-pathology oriented approach to problem solving. She was one of the founders of the Brief Family Therapy

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