

# Circle of Control

This lesson explains the difference between what we can control and what is beyond us. Students learn how to use the Circle of Control as a way to take control of what they can when a situation feels overwhelming. It also encourages them to help others when they feel upset about what's happening around them.

## Caring Sub-Concept(s)

Helpfulness, Kindness

## Lesson Timeframe

35-40 minutes

## Required Materials

- ☐ Cardstock or thick paper
- ☐ Laminator or Tape
- ☐ Writing/coloring utensils

## Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.

## Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Identify the Circle of Control and what it represents.
- Use the Circle of Control to identify actions they can control in every situation

## Teacher Connection/Self-Care

Clear boundaries matter. Make an effort today to leave work at the school. You can't pour from an empty cup.

### Tips for Diverse Learners

- Allow students to draw pictures to illustrate what they can and can't control if writing is an issue
- Have students pair up and go through the activity together
- Complete a sample and post it on the smartboard for reference



## Share

3-5 minutes

Play "Follow My Clap" by doing a clap and repeat of patterns. Examples might include:

- Loud, Soft, Loud, Soft
- Loud, Loud, Soft, Loud Loud
- Soft, Loud, Pause, Soft, Loud, Pause

After you are done ask the students the following questions:

- What part of this activity were YOU in control of?
- What part of this activity did you have no control of?

*Yes, even with a simple activity like this clapping exercise you can only control so much. The patterns I chose, the participation of others near you and the speed at which I clapped were all out of your control. However, you were able to control your own behavior. Today we are going to explore this further.*



## Inspire

7-10 minutes

### Video Clip and Discussion

*Today we are going to learn about the Circle of Control. In every situation there are actions you CAN control and many others that you cannot. Sometimes we get stressed or overwhelmed about things that are out of our control. However, worrying about this only makes you feel worse, not better. Let's watch the video to learn more:*

#### Circle of Control Video:

[https://youtu.be/L9zwdUyp9G0?si=tcqZ\\_hb3CK7WrI\\_5](https://youtu.be/L9zwdUyp9G0?si=tcqZ_hb3CK7WrI_5)

#### Synopsis from Video if you cannot access:

The Circle Of Control is a therapeutic tool that helps kids & teens notice the things in their life that are inside and outside of their control. If we put our time and energy into things we CAN control, it helps us to better manage anxiety and stress, and improves our mental health. On the other hand, if we can recognize the things in our life we CANNOT control, then it can help us to come to terms with, and better cope with these things.

3 Ways To Free Yourself From The Worry And Stress Of Things You Cannot Control Are:

1. Acceptance
2. Letting Go
3. Using Coping Skills

After watching the video, ask the following questions:

- What is the Circle of Control?
- What is one thing you can control every day at school?
- What are some ways you can calm down when you are worried about things you cannot control?



## Empower

20-25 minutes

*Now that we have learned about the Circle of Control, Let's work through a sample before creating our own for future use.*

Draw a circle on the whiteboard/smartboard and label the inside with "Circle of Control". On the outside, away from the circle, label it "Things You Cannot Control".

As a class, walk through the activity using the topic, "Getting to school on time."

#### **What can YOU control to make sure you get to school on time?**

(Examples might include- lay out my clothes the night before, have my backpack and homework packed, set my alarm, pack my lunch the night before, etc.

**What can you NOT control that might affect your ability to get to school on time?**

(Examples might include- parent running late, bus not coming on time, traffic, etc.)

Although there are many things outside of your control, making sure you have done your part is vital to ensuring you are on time. However, sometimes those things outside of your control can and do affect you.

**What is one way you can cope if you are going to be late and it is beyond your control?**

(Answers might include- take deep breaths to calm down, close your eyes, listen to music, etc.)

Now that we have completed an example, each person will use cardstock to create their own Circle of Control for personal need.

- Have students draw and label their Circle of Control in the middle of the paper.
- Have them write the phrase- Things I cannot control on the top left of the paper, far outside the circle.
- Laminate the paper if possible or cover it with tape so it is sturdy.
- Identify a personal location for each student so they can access it as needed.
- Put a sample in your calming area in the classroom for future use.



## Reflect

5 minutes

*Not having control can be extremely difficult, especially as you grow up. However, even as children, there are always some aspects of a situation you can control. When you feel overwhelmed or stressed, back up and ask yourself, "What is in my Circle of Control?" "Am I doing all of these things?". If the answer is yes, work through your coping strategies to manage those areas you cannot control.*



## Extension Ideas

- Have students complete another "Circle of Control" example for a situation that they struggle with at home or school.
- Go deeper into coping strategies. Identify 3-5 specific ones that students can use in school and practice them as a group.



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AS A RECOMMENDED  
PROGRAM FOR SOCIAL  
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LEARNING.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs.

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>

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