

Active Constructive Responding

Middle School

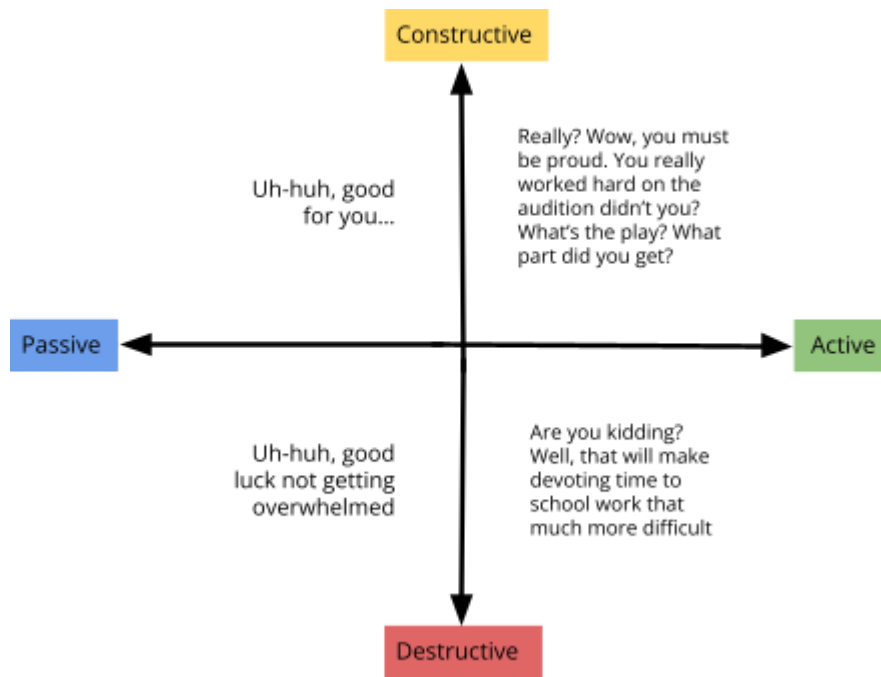
High school

Elementary Education



Intervention Overview

Active constructive responding encourages students to listen and respond to the successes of others in a positive way. Researchers have found there are four ways one can respond to the good news and positive events of others: active and passive destructive and active and passive constructive. Consider the model below regarding the four different ways you might respond to a student who just told you they earned a spot in the school play (adapted from Shankland & Rosset, 2017).



One way to help students practice active constructive responding (ACR) is to have what Peterson (2013) called “but-free days.” Rather than pointing out the downsides of someone's good news by using the word “but,” you and your students

could have an entire day devoted to avoiding this response and enjoying each other's positive experiences. Encouraging your students to practice ACR will help them experience increased positive emotion, decreased loneliness, and improved feelings of trust, commitment, closeness and stability in peer relationships (Gable et al, 2004).

Intervention Guide

Grade Level: All

Materials: None

Duration: 20-30 minute introduction, practice time as needed

Implementation:

1. Introduce to the class the four types of responses they could use to react to "good news" someone has shared (active and passive destructive, passive and active constructive). See examples in the model below.
2. Share examples of each of the responses either via video clips or role play.
3. For younger students, it may be best to introduce only active constructive and what happens when we include "but" in our responses to point out the downsides of someone's good news.
4. Have the students practice active constructive responding with their peers.
5. Throughout the school year, have dedicated "but-free" days where students are encouraged to practice active constructive responding throughout the day.

Does it work?

Though significant research has not been done on the impact of active constructive responding with children and adolescents, it has been used with the Geelong Grammar School's positive education model and has been shown to improve student wellbeing and relationships (Norrish et al., 2013; Seligman et al., 2009). Gable and colleagues (2004) assessed the impact of active constructive responding on the interpersonal relationships of dating and married couples. Couples who felt their partner responded to their positive events in an active constructive way also experienced greater levels of commitment, trust, satisfaction and intimacy. All other response patterns (passive constructive, active destructive and passive destructive) were associated with negative trends in these measures. Active constructive responding was also associated with a reduction in relationship conflict. (Gable et al., 2004).

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