



UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
Institute for Human-Animal Connection



Cool to be Kind

*“It’s ok to show your soft side and be kind.”*

Upper Elementary School

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**Subjects:**

Humane/Moral Education; Comprehensive Health

**Grades:**

3 - 6 (upper elementary)

**Objectives:**

- By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:
  - Take responsibility for their own critical thinking towards ways in which being a caring citizen can be “cool”
  - Understand how empathy and compassion are “cool” characteristics
  - Identify the reasons that having empathy and compassion are cool, and essential to our happiness and health, and for thriving communities (*depending on age level appropriateness, “nice” and “caring” may be used in place of “empathy” and “compassion”*)

**Background Information:**

This lesson helps students become more aware of their individual beliefs about what makes someone “cool” and what makes someone “uncool.” Often, students define “coolness” based on what media and popularity displays. This may be based off of external characteristics or possessions, and may not always take into account a person’s internal qualities, or the way in which the person chooses to interact with others. Students will explore their individual attitudes and beliefs toward “coolness” and where these beliefs come from through these discussions. Students will have the opportunity to discuss as a class the various internal and external traits that often define “coolness” in U.S. society today. Students will then be challenged to discuss “coolness” based on how a person behaves, and in further relation to characteristics like empathy and compassion toward other people and toward other animals. Students will be presented with posters of celebrities with companion animals along with stories about how they care for their companions. Students will then be asked if these celebrities are “cool,” now knowing how they are kind to animals. The class will be able to discuss the importance or “coolness” of kindness and compassion in their lives (at school, at home, in relationship to their friends, family, classmates etc).

Recent research on domestic violence has indicated that there is a strong correlation between interpersonal violence and animal abuse. A study conducted by the Chicago Police Department in the

early 2000s found that 65% of humans who were arrested for animal crimes were also arrested for physically hurting another person (HSUS, n.d.). Inspiring more compassion toward animals often translates into kindness towards humanity.

**Time Needed:**

30-45 minutes

**Materials:**

- Butcher paper, flip chart paper, or classroom board to write on
- Printer paper (one per student)
- Pencils; markers
- Stencils, stickers (optional)
- Show Your Soft Side posters (one per student)

**Introduction (10 min):**

1. Introduce oneself and explain that today we will be talking about what it means to be “cool”
2. Ask students what they think it means to be cool. Consider using the prompts below.
  - What is the definition of “cool”?
  - What do they think makes a person cool?
  - What does "cool" look like?
  - What does it sound like?
  - Is it the way a person looks, or the way they dress?
  - Is cool based on your character? Is it based on your actions?
  - Is it based on who you hang out with?

**Activity (10-15 minutes):**

1. Give each student a piece of paper and ask students to draw individually what they think society thinks “cool” looks like.
  - a. Encourage students to consider both actions and qualities (teachers give examples)
  - b. This may require teacher support and/or scaffolded materials (e.g. a stencil or a pre-printed hand-out)
  - c. Encourage children to both draw and/or include language (adjectives, etc.)

**Discussion:**

1. Bring the group of students back together, and ask for three students to share their drawings with the class.
2. As students share, the teachers will record responses on the whiteboard, taking care to separate internal vs. external qualities (using two columns)
3. Teachers will ask students what similarities and differences they notice across the recorded responses. Teachers will record on the whiteboard the “themes” that the students notice.
4. Teachers can then use the below questions to guide their discussion to explore the concept of “cool”:
  - a. Is it “cool” to cry?
  - b. Is it “cool” to be kind?
  - c. Is it “cool” to litter?
  - d. Is it “cool” to have a kitten/puppy?

- e. Can a person still be “cool” if they are nice and caring?
  - f. What if a big, tough, muscular looking man has a kitten that he loves - is that “cool”? Why or why not?
5. Next, display the Show Your Soft Side posters. Discuss how these media images of celebrities, many of which are viewed as muscular and tough, are showing kindness to animals in the photographs. Discuss how the posters are the celebrities with their companion animals, and how these celebrities have come forward to talk about how much they care about the animals in the photographs. Are these people still “cool”? Are they “cool” in a different way than how you viewed them before? How?

**Exit Ticket:**

1. Ask students to answer the following questions on the back of their drawing (in 2-3 sentences):
  - a. What “cool” qualities do you share with the celebrities on these posters?
  - b. How are you going to show your “cool” qualities at home and school?

**Evaluation:**

Students will be evaluated based on their participation in the discussion and lesson, as well as their completion of the exit ticket activity.

**Common Core Standards:**

- **Reading, Writing, and Communicating:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level appropriate topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1)
- **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:** Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4)

**Extension Activity #1 (15 – 20 minutes):**

**Ask** students to write a paragraph on a piece of paper about who they think is the coolest person they know and why. Have students focus on how that person acts, rather than how they look. If time permits, allow students to share their examples with the class.

**Bibliography**

HSUS. (n.d.) Animal Cruelty Facts and Statistics. Retrieved 11/7/2018 from [http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/abuse\\_neglect/facts/animal\\_cruelty\\_facts\\_statistics.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/abuse_neglect/facts/animal_cruelty_facts_statistics.html)

Common Core State Standards Initiative. 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>