

**Keeping Schools Safe –
Exploring the Roles of Citizens and Police Officers**

Overview

Students will discuss the characteristics of good citizens/community members and good police officers, and explore the role of each in terms of school safety. Through role plays, discussion, and interaction with a visiting officer of the law, students will learn about the importance of school safety, explore and dispel stereotypes about police, and learn appropriate ways to deal with conflict, advocate for their rights, and be responsible citizens.

Grades

6-8

Activity Type

Group

Whole class

Materials

- Scenarios, attached
- Police officer or School Resource Officer (SRO) to serve as a resource person during the lesson

Duration

60-90 minutes (time varies depending on number of role plays performed and length of discussion)

Teacher Preparation

- Contact a Police Officer or SRO 2-4 weeks in advance of this lesson to explain the activity. Specifically, let the officer know that you will need him/her to assist in coaching the students who will play police officers in the lesson's role plays (they'll need to provide a little bit of "police strategy 101"). Also explain that you want him/her to address legal issues and school safety with students. It is important this person does not come to give a "speech", but rather is prepared to engage with the students as they work on, present, and afterwards, discuss the role plays. Having an officer present not only provides valued assistance and legal knowledge, but it also to give your students a chance to positively interact with and learn from a law enforcement officer.
- The scenarios that students act out deal with sensitive topics, such as gangs, weapons in school, and more. It is important students are prepared to address the topics respectfully in the preparation, presentation, and discussion of their role plays. Do not allow for a glamorization of violence in students' presentations. Ensure students understand that these are serious issues and the purpose of addressing them is to learn how they can all help to keep school safe. It is likewise important that teachers ensure time to debrief each role play, with the assistance and input from the officer, since much of the learning and prevention this activity sets forth occurs in the discussions.

Procedure

Exploring Citizens/Community Members and Police Officers

1. As a warm-up, ask students to discuss:
 - What are the characteristics of a good citizen or community member (of our classroom, of our school, and of our community at large)?
 - As students share, write their thoughts on a sheet of chart paper.

- Once students have extinguished their ideas, ask students to share what happens when a citizen/member of a community behaves badly – who might be called in to handle the situation? (Answers may include teacher, parents, principal, SRO, police officer, etc.)
 - Tell students you want them to now focus on SROs and/or police officers.
 - What are the characteristics of a good police officer?
 - Again, as students share, write their thoughts on a sheet of chart paper.
2. Once students have again extinguished all of their thoughts, give each student 4 colored sticker dots (available at any office supply store.) Tell students that you want them to review the two lists they created – one representing good citizens and the other good police officers. Tell them to consider which of the characteristics on each list are most important, in their opinion. After some moments of consideration, tell students to come up to the two pieces of chart paper and vote for their top 2 characteristics for both citizens and police. They will place 2 of their stickers on the citizen paper and 2 of their stickers on the police paper, sticking their dot beside the words representing what they feel are the most important characteristics of each. Once all students have voted, discuss:
- Are there any similarities between our two lists for good citizens and good police? Why do you think these same characteristics were repeated?
 - What major differences do you see?
 - What characteristics did we vote as being most important for a good citizen to inhabit? For a good police officer to inhabit? Why are these important?
 - Whose responsibility is it to keep our school safe? Explain.
3. Explain to students that they will be exploring the roles and responsibilities of police officers and/or SRO's, as well as the roles/responsibilities of members of their school and community, and how the behavior of these groups affects our safety. Introduce the police officer(s) to the class and allow him/her to respond to the list of characteristics of a good officer, a good citizen, and who is responsible for school safety.

Further Exploration Through Role Plays

4. Next, explain to students that they will be divided into groups and that each group will receive a scenario that they must act out in front of the class. Prepare students that the content of the scenarios they receive will deal with sensitive issues, such as violence and weapons. It is important that students are mature in how they deal with the content and stage the scenes. Tell students that the point is not to be funny and make classmates laugh in their presentations; rather explain that you expect them to present the scenarios as realistically and seriously as possible.
5. Share the following instructions:
- In each scenario, a conflict involving students occurs for which an officer will be involved.
 - Some of you will be playing students and community members, and some of you will be playing police officers.
 - Those of you playing students and community members will spend the next 10-15 minutes with your group figuring out how to stage and act out the role play I give you. The conflict should escalate to the point where the police need to be called. When you perform your prepared scene for the class and get to the point where you call an officer, two officers will enter the scene and work with you all to try and resolve the conflict. This means that from this point on, all of you will be improvising. Remember to be realistic!
 - There will be two of you per group that I will ask to play police officers. All of you playing officers will work with our visiting officer in an alternate location to get “police training 101.” You must be briefed on what to do when called, how to handle the situation (i.e., remaining calm and professional, deescalating the situation, etc.), entering the conflict scenario assigned to you, strategies for diffusing conflict (i.e. separating those involved and getting their stories independently from the other), options

for ensuring safety (talking it out, making an arrest, giving a citation, etc.) so that you know what to do once you are called to the scene.

- When we all come back together, the first group will perform their role play. Once they get to the point where the police are called, the two officers assigned to that scene will enter. All of the actors in that scene will continue improvising as the officers and citizens work to try and resolve the conflict.
 - At this point in the scene, if the actual visiting officer feels his/her “officers in training” need assistance, or he/she feels something unrealistic is taking place, he/she can yell “FREEZE.” All actors should stop what you are doing and remain silent while the officer offers commentary, advice, etc. Once he/she is finished speaking, he/she can instruct you to unfreeze and continue your scene.
6. Allow students to ask questions, remind the class of respectful group work expectations, and divide the class into 3-5 groups. (The number of groups you assign depends on how many of the 5 attached role plays you want to use; most groups will require at least 4 citizen actors, plus the two officer actors). As you hand out one of the attached scenarios to each group, select two students from each group to play the role of police officers for that scenario. Also provide them with a copy of the scenario. The students playing officers will then separate from their group. All students playing officers will take their copy of the scenario to work with the visiting police officer, who will explain basic police procedure and help prepare the student officers on how to deal with the scenario they will be called into.
 7. The teacher should monitor groups as they develop scenes. Allow for around 10 minutes for scene development.
 8. Once all groups are prepared, review your expectations for being a respectful audience member and participant. Remind students that each group will present their scene, which should end with the police being called. At this point, the two student police officers will enter the scene and try to resolve the situation. Remind students that from this point on, their actions and responses will be improvised. Also remind students that the goal is not to be humorous; the goal is to try and play their parts in a realistic interpretation. Point out that sometimes we giggle when we get nervous; tell students to try and keep this from occurring so that the role plays are presented and received respectfully.

As groups present and the student police enter the scene, other groups along with the visiting police officer(s) will observe. Once the student police have entered the scene and are acting out their response to the call, the visiting officer can call “Freeze” at any time to stop the scene and provide feedback, coaching, and suggestions.

9. After each role play, thank the actors by clapping loudly, and discuss (with the officers input) questions such as:

Scenario 1: Fighting After the Football Game

- What took place in this scene? Why did the argument escalate?
- Characterize the behavior of the students in this scene. Were they being responsible? Explain.
- Why did the adults get involved and call the police?
- How did the police address this situation? Do you feel the police should have done anything differently? Explain.
- How did this conflict escalate [or deescalate, depending on how the actors respond to the police]? How might things have turned out even worse?
- Was this a crime call or a service call? Were any laws broken at any point? If so, which laws? Would anyone have been arrested if this really happened and why?
- What other choices might the people in the scene have made (discuss positive choices and negative choices) and what might the consequences have been? Who in this scene could have made alternate choices that might have prevented the police from having to be called?

- How often do fights take place on our school grounds? Why do you think young people often respond violently? Why is resulting to violence an irresponsible choice?

Scenario 2: FaceBook

- What took place in the scene? What events had lead up to this moment and contributed to Marisol's behavior?
- Characterize the behavior of the students in this scene. Why do you think Marisol reacted the way she did?
- Is this a realistic scene? Why do you think students sometimes bully others in this way?
- Why did the shoppers passing by call the police?
- How would you characterize the way the students responded to the officers? (Discuss the importance of being respectful and expressing yourself in a clear and professional manner, even if you are frustrated by the situation you are involved in. If students respond to police in an angry manner, the situation could escalate – even if they weren't doing anything wrong to begin with.)
- If you personally were in this situation (as a student, the passing shoppers, or the police) how would you have handled the situation differently?
- What other choices might the people in the scene have made (discuss positive choices and negative choices) and what might the consequences have been?
- Who in this scene was threatening the safety of others? Who in this scene was trying to ensure the safety of others?
- Were any laws broken?
- Why is bullying, in person and electronically, a very serious thing?
- If you are ever being bullied, what should you do? Who can you go to for help?
- If you are ever feeling depressed, or thinking about harming yourself, who should you go to for help?

Scenario 3: Gangs

- How would you characterize the students you saw in this scene? Who was negatively impacting the safety of others and why?
- In what way did Jack make a responsible decision? What was hard about his decision?
- Why do you think so many people glamorize gangs? In reality, what is gang life like?
- Had Jack made the choice to join the gang, how might his life have been negatively impacted?
- Whose responsibility is it to not let gangs gain power in your school?
- Evaluate the choice of Jack's friend to get help. Why was this a brave thing to do?
- Where do insults like "snitch" and "tattle tale" come from – meaning, who is usually hurling such insults and why? (It is the people doing bad things that use words like this to scare others into getting them into trouble.)
- What is the role of our SRO in our school?
- Why is it important to be brave enough to tell someone, such as the SRO or an officer, when inappropriate things are happening? If we don't do this, how will our school's safety be impacted?

Scenario 4: Weapons

- What took place in this scene? How would you characterize the students in this scene? (Ensure students address the characters in the scene that were teasing Maurice, as well as Maurice's choice to bring the knife.)
- Why did Maurice decide to bring a knife to school? How would you evaluate his decision?
- Would anyone have been arrested if this really happened and why?
- What other choices did Maurice have, other than resulting to bringing a weapon?
- Who could have prevented this from occurring? (Ensure students not only explore the obvious answer that Maurice could have made a better choice, but also discuss the students who were teasing him, fellow students who did nothing, teachers could have perhaps stepped in to stop the teasing from escalating, etc.)

- By bringing a weapon to class, and/or using a weapon against a fellow citizen, how are you negatively impacting your entire life?
- If you are being teased or threatened at school, what should you do?
- What is our responsibility to our fellow citizens if they are being teased or harassed?
- If you think a classmate has a weapon or is considering bringing a weapon, what is your responsibility?

Scenario 5: Locker Search

- What took place in this scene? What bad choices were made in this scenario and why?
 - How serious is the situation Keisha and Jasmine are in?
 - At what points could alternate decisions have been made? Explain.
 - Why is it hard to let an adult know when a friend is involved in risky behavior? Even though it is hard, why is it still important to be responsible and do so?
 - Whose safety was at risk in this scenario and why?
 - What are your rights in terms of searches at school? Outside of school?
 - If you have a friend who you believe is doing drugs, what should you do? Who can you go to for help?
10. After all groups have role played and discussed their scenarios, culminate with a closing discussion:
- What are the characteristics of a safe school?
 - What have you learned about school safety? Whose responsibility is it to ensure our school stays safe? In what ways can we ensure our school is safe? How can activities involving drugs, violence, gangs, etc. negatively impact our school?
 - What have you learned about police work? What role do police serve in our school and community?
 - Return to our initial lists of the characteristics of good community members and good officers. What specific examples from these roll plays evidenced these characteristics? What specific examples can you note where people were not exhibiting these positive traits?
 - What do you think might be the hardest part of police work?
 - How do you think fear affects police/community relations? (Think about the fear of both citizens and police.) What are police risking by doing their job each day?
 - What responsibilities do citizens have when dealing with police? What responsibilities do police have when dealing with citizens?
 - Why do some people your age have a negative impression of officers?
 - If you are confronted by an officer of the law, what is the best way to advocate for yourself and your rights?
 - If you ever feel that you are disrespected by an officer of the law, what should you do?
 - Why is it important that we – citizens/community members (of all ages) and police – all work together to keep our school and community safe?
11. Allow students time to ask questions of the police officer. Finally, have students review the two lists of characteristics they made during the warm-up and ask:
- Are there any characteristics you think should be changed or added after participating in this activity and why?

Culminating Activities

- Have students brainstorm ways they can individually assist in keeping their classroom and school safe. Students can develop a “School Safety Campaign”, creating posters on school safety to display around the school.
- Develop a student lead “thank you” campaign for local law officials. Allow students to brainstorm ways they can show local police appreciation (i.e. write letters, create a mural, etc.)

Scenario 1: Fighting After the Football Game

Your group will act out a skit in which a fight breaks out after a football game.

Chris and his friend Tyrone are leaving the football game when they see a verbal confrontation taking place between two other students, Larry and Jeff. It appears that the two guys are arguing about which team is better. Chris and Tyrone go to the same school as Jeff and are good friends with him, so they go to see if Jeff needs help. The argument escalates, with Chris, Tyrone, and Jeff all arguing with Larry. Soon, some of Larry's friends hear the argument and come to Larry's aid. As more students get involved, the argument escalates.

A teacher and his/her friend leaving the game come upon the large group and fear that a fight is eminent. The teacher tells his/her friend to call 911 and heads over to try to break up the argument. While his/her friend is on the phone with the police, the group starts to push and scuffle. It appears the teacher is pushed down amidst the chaos.

Roles: Chris and Tyrone
Jeff
Larry, who is fighting with Jeff
Other kids who join in the fight
A teacher and other adults who witness the escalating argument and call the police

911 Caller: "Police, come quickly! There is a big argument in the school parking lot. Some guys are starting to push one another around, and I'm afraid someone's going to get hurt!"



Scenario 2: FaceBook

Your group will act out a skit that shows how the bullying a student has experienced (via FaceBook and in person) has become too much for her to bear.

Over the past few months, Marisol has been having a hard time with some girls at school. Lisa and Steph are constantly making fun of her, from saying mean things about her appearance, to spreading false rumors about her through text messages and FaceBook. The only thing that has kept Marisol going are the FaceBook messages she receives from Alex. She's had a crush on him for over a year, but it always seemed that Alex was too popular to give her the time of day. She almost couldn't believe it when he started sending her flirtatious messages on FaceBook a few weeks ago. In his most recent message, he invited her to meet him at the mall Saturday night. However, when Marisol shows up at the mall, Alex is surrounded by Lisa, Steph, and several other kids from school, all of whom are laughing. Steph takes a picture of Marisol's confused expression and tells Marisol that Alex never had any interest in her - he only sent the messages pretending to like her because everyone thought it would be funny to lead her on. The girls tell her they are going to post the embarrassing picture they just took on FaceBook tonight, and Alex tells her she's crazy if she ever thought he'd want to go out with her. Marisol, who can no longer contain her tears, becomes frantic and tells the group that she can't take this anymore.

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, who pass by while shopping, see Marisol crying and the other kids laughing. As they approach to see if they can help, they hear Marisol tell the group that none of them will ever have to worry about seeing her again. As Marisol turns to run from the group, Mrs. Roberts sees her pull a bottle of pills from her pocket and head into the mall bathroom. When she goes to try to follow Marisol and check on her, the bathroom door is locked. She tells her husband to call 911, and begins to ask the rest of the kids what is going on.

Roles: Marisol
Lisa, Steph, and other classmates who tease Marisol
Alex
Mr. and Mrs. Roberts

911 Caller: "We are at Southpoint Mall and there seems to be some trouble with a group of kids. One young lady appeared to be really upset and has locked herself in the first floor bathroom with what appeared to be a bottle of pills. We are afraid she may try to hurt herself."

Scenario 3: Gangs

Your group will act out a skit in which a gang begins to threaten a student during lunch time in the cafeteria.

Several students who belong to a gang have been trying to get Jack to join them. For several weeks they have been finding him in the hall and after school, explaining how he would be well taken care of if he joined their gang, and how he would never have any trouble from any other students since all members of the gang “have one another’s back.” Jack is afraid of the gang members and doesn’t want to participate in any of the illegal activity he thinks they may be involved in.

Today during lunch, after getting his food and taking a seat with a few friends, he is again surrounded by several gang members who ask him what his problem is. They’ve grown tired of Jack avoiding them and refusing to join. They surround him and begin to harass him, calling him names and shoving him around. One of the gang members snatches Jack’s tray of food and dumps it on his head. Jack is afraid and tries to back away. When one of the members grabs Jack by the throat and threatens him with violence while the others circle around them, one of Jack’s friend’s goes to find the SROs for help.

Roles:
Jack
3-5 gang members
Jack’s friend who goes to the SRO for help

SRO Request: “Officer Bradley! Officer McLean! There are some kids who are trying to start a fight in the cafeteria. I’m afraid they are going to hurt my friend Jack!”



Scenario 4: Weapons

Your group will act out a skit in which a student brings a knife to school.

There are several students who have been picking on Maurice since the start of the school year. Maurice has grown sick and tired of it, and not knowing what else to do, he takes his father’s large fishing knife and puts it in his book bag.

During a group activity in Math class, Maurice is put in the same group as two students who always pick on him. As soon as his teacher is out of earshot, they begin to make fun of him. Maurice then pulls the knife from his bag and begins to yell at his group members to leave him alone and that he has had enough. His teacher whispers to another student to run and get the SRO while he/she carefully approaches Maurice to ask that he put the knife down. Maurice refuses and his group members are scared.

Roles:
Maurice
1-2 students in Maurice’s group who tease him
Other students working in groups
Teacher
Student who goes to get SRO

SRO Request: “Officer Smith, a kid in my class has a knife!”



Scenario 5: Locker Search

Your group will act out a skit in which a student has drugs at school.

Jasmine and Keisha have been friends since elementary school. Lately, Jasmine has been acting different – her grades are slipping and she doesn't seem to want to hang out with Keisha. One day at school, Jasmine asks Keisha to store a bag for her in her locker. Keisha begins to tell Jasmine how it's not fair that she's only now talking to her when she wants something, since she feels like Jasmine has been ignoring her for weeks. Jasmine tells Keisha that she's sorry – she's just been really busy. Jasmine tells Keisha that if she can store her bag in Keisha's locker, she promises they'll hang out this weekend. Keisha doesn't have a good feeling about this, but agrees to do it. Jasmine rushes off and tells Keisha she'll meet her after school to get her bag back. Once Jasmine is gone, Keisha peeks inside the bag and sees that it is full of baggies of marijuana. She doesn't know what to do, but decides to store Jasmine's bag for now, shoving it in her locker.

Meanwhile, Jasmine didn't notice a teacher who turned the corner as she opened the bag. The teacher thought he/she saw drugs, but isn't sure. As Keisha finishes locking her locker and turns to head to class, the teacher confronts her. Keisha says there are no drugs in her locker – she doesn't know what the teacher is talking about. The teacher grows frustrated with Keisha's responses and attitude. He/she uses his/her cell phone to call down to the office and request that the SRO come up to the hall.

Roles:

Jasmine
Keisha
Teacher
Other students in hall (optional)

SRO Request: “Hi, I'm up on the second floor hall. Could you please send Officer Richards up? I think a student is storing drugs in her locker.”