

Open•Up

Simon’s Hook

When teased, children often end up being hurt (emotionally, physically, or both), upset, and victimized. This activity will empower students so they can learn effective ways of handling the difficult situation of being teased or bullied and avoid being victimized.

Mental Health Highlight: Teasing is a concept that can be very confusing. After all, teasing can be light-hearted and fun, but it can also be physically and/or emotionally destructive. What may seem light hearted and fun to one person, may seem overly antagonistic or hurtful to another. And what might be hurtful to someone one day, may not be hurtful on a different day.

Although the issue of teasing is confusing and complicated, one point is clear: teasing is bad or wrong when the person being teased **perceives** the comments or actions as hurtful. Teasing is also bad or wrong when the person doing the teasing **intends** to hurt the other person.

Arguments are sometimes made that bullying develops “character.” While it’s true that students who successfully combat bullying behavior do develop good coping skills, it is important for a community (such as a school or a sports team) to recognize the overall negative impact of hurtful teasing. Communities built on positive, respectful behaviors can also help children foster excellent coping skills.

The story “Simon’s Hook” is most appropriate for younger students, but people of all ages need to develop skills to successfully confront teasing and bullying. To adapt this lesson for adolescents and young adults, focus on the overall message of this story, which is that it’s more effective to change one’s own response to bullying and hurtful teasing than it is to change the bully.

Primary Activity	Additional Activity	Open•Up Activity
 Words Have Power!	 Fishing Game  Role Playing	 Creating Posters  Journaling

Activity Key	
 Visual Arts	 Creative Movement and Music
 Experiential and Role-Playing	 Conversations and Discussion
 Creative Writing, Storytelling, and Drama	 Research/Service Projects

This activity was adapted from *MACMH’s Children’s Mental Health Classroom Activities*, Volumes 1 and 2, Combined and Revised.

Simon's Hook

When teased, children often end up feeling hurt, upset, and victimized. This lesson will empower students, helping them to avoid this tendency and to learn effective ways of handling these difficult situations of being teased or bullied.

—Adapted with permission from material created by the author of *Simon's Hook*, Karen Gedig Burnett, available on her website, www.grandmarose.com.

Objectives

- Describe how to change a situation by changing one's own behavior rather than trying to change someone else's behavior.
- Demonstrate skills that will help reduce the frequency of being a teasing target.

Materials

- *Simon's Hook* by Karen Gedig Burnett*
- paper to create posters
- drawing medium—such as markers, pastels, and colored pencils

*This book may be purchased from www.grandmarose.com. The website also features other books by Karen Gedig Burnett, a.k.a. Grandma Rose, as well as supplemental information for teachers and parents relating to each book.

Core Lesson

Introduce *Simon's Hook* by Karen Gedig Burnett. Depending on the grade level and maturity of your students, you may want to introduce the book with the notion that it may seem created for younger children because of the way it looks (pictures, characters, text), but that it contains a mature concept that will be meaningful to them at their current age.

Read the story up to page that ends with "They studied hooks and they learned," (the third page of the fish story). Stop and ask the class if they have any ideas about what the fish could do instead of biting the "teasing" hooks. Then read the list of suggested reactions the book offers as you write them on the board or on an overhead. Point out any book suggestions that match ideas that students had already offered.

Finish reading the story, and then use the following questions for discussion. The questions are listed to coincide with the different parts of the story.

People pages

When the kids tease Simon, what kind of things do they say?

Has something like this ever happened to you?

How do you think Simon feels?

Who is Simon complaining about?

If Simon keeps complaining, do you think that the other children will change?

What does complaining do for Simon?

How do you feel when you complain?

Fish story

On the first two fish pages are the fish upset by the hooks?

As you read each hook and fish reaction, ask the students: Did this fish bite?

One of the hooks says, "Ha! I've got you!" and the fish replies, "No you don't." Is this true?

One fish says, "Let me go." Who needs to let go?

How do you think these fish feel? Do you think they feel strong, happy, wonderful, and confident; or weak, sad, angry, and helpless?

The fish learn many different ways to swim free. On the rest of the fish pages, read each hook and fish reaction. Ask students:

Did this fish bite?

Did this fish get upset by the hook?

If they didn't bite, what did they do instead?

Finally, when the fish graduate, what did they pass?

What did they learn? Did all the fish learn not to bite?

At the end of the fish story, one fish warns another, "Now, now, honey, don't throw hooks back at them."

What does it mean to "throw a hook back?"

Why is it a bad idea?

Back to the people pages

When Simon is sitting with Grandma Rose, who does he talk about now?

Is Simon talking about the other kids' changing, or is he going to change?

When Simon sees his friends again, what kind of things are the children saying to him?

Are they still saying things about his hair?

Are they are still calling him "Lawn Mower Head?"

Are they still teasing him?

Is it really any different than before?

Have Simon's friends changed?

But this time what does Simon do?

How does Simon answer their teases?

How does Simon's new reaction change the outcome of the situation?

How do you think Simon feels?

Do you think Simon is having fun this time?

So what's different this time? What or who has changed?

Reiterate that the kids who teased Simon at the beginning of the story were still teasing him at the end. They didn't change. In the beginning Simon got upset about the teasing, but at the end he realized he had other choices—he didn't have to bite. So who changed? **Simon changed**. That's the way life is. You can't change others; you can only change yourself. If Simon would have waited for his friends to change, he may still be waiting, and he would still be unhappy. If we wait for others to be nice to us before we are happy, we will do just that—**WAIT**. And all that time, we're the ones who are unhappy.



Grace and Luis show what it's like to be "hooked" by hurtful teasing.

"They talk" vs. "I talk"

In the beginning of the story, Simon complains about those other kids: "Why do they make fun of me? Why don't they leave me alone?" This is **THEY TALK**. **THEY TALK** goes like this: **THEY** did this. **HE** did that. I can't be happy because of **HER**. Why can't **THEY** be different? ***THEY TALK** focuses on the other person.*

At the end of the story, Simon focused on his own actions. He said, "They can tease me all they want. I won't bite. I can be a free fish, too." He stopped complaining about **THEY** and focused on **I**—himself. This is **I TALK**. **I TALK** goes like this: What can I do? Sure, they aren't nice to me, but what are **MY** choices? When you focus on what you can do, you stop waiting and take action. And because you take action, things change. ***I TALK** focuses on your own choices and actions.*

Tell students to remember that when people are not acting the way we want, we can get mad and say, "If only they were different, nicer, more thoughtful, more considerate, then I would be happy. If only they would change then my life would be better." This is **THEY TALK**. But just like Simon, we can't wait for other people to change. They may never change. We have no control over them. What we do control is ourselves. We change ourselves: the way we act, what we say, where we go, and how much we listen. Like Simon, *when we change, other things change too.*

NOTE: Explain that in this story Simon just had to learn to laugh and not pay attention or get upset about what the children were saying. Often that works. *However*, there are times we may need to tell people how we feel, ask them to stop, stand up for ourselves, or tell someone in authority what is happening. The important thing to remember is that we always have choices. If we don't like the way things are going, we can change what we do. *When we change, our life changes.*

Activity

Tell the class that there will now be a special language to use within the classroom or with their friends when teasing occurs. *They* can use phrases and questions inspired by the fish in *Simon's Hook* to remind classmates of the concepts learned from this lesson; *you* can help children recognize their choices and personal power by simply asking a question or making a comment.

Explain that they are going to create posters of the phrases to display in the classroom as reminders. Each student will be responsible for one phrase or question. You can let them choose their phrase or have them draw from a hat. You could use the starter list below and create more phrases as a class so there is one phrase for each student, or you could use each phrase twice.



Lauren and Kendall show what it's like to refuse to bite the hook of hurtful taunting.

Hand out the paper and have each student write their chosen phrase on it, in large letters, so the phrase covers the entire paper. Then have them color in their letters. Encourage them not to get too decorative so the words stay legible.

When the posters are done, hang them around the room (and in the hallway if possible) as a reminder of their choices. Encourage your students to see themselves as strong and free fish with many choices, no matter what hooks another person uses.

Starter List

Did you bite?

Did someone throw a hook at you?

How can you swim free?

I see a hook.

There are many fisherman today.

Someone's been fishing.

Oh, and you bit.

How could you avoid that hook?

Were you caught?

The fish are biting today.

Additional Activities

📄 Creating Posters – Have students create posters that feature concepts from the story. Here are some examples: knowing you have choices; refusing to get “hooked”; ways to stay free; and concentrating on your actions rather than the actions of others that you cannot change.

🐟 Fishing Game – You will need the following materials for this activity: Fish Pattern copied on heavy paper, pencils, 1-foot lengths of yarn, tape, markers, crayons, and other decorating medium.

Have each student cut out 2 construction-paper fish from the patterns included. Tell them to write a “hook” (teasing phrase) on one side of each fish, then decorate the other side of the fish as they please with markers or crayons. They can use the ideas from the book or write a teasing phrase that they have experienced. Have them paper punch a hole through the “eye.”

Then demonstrate how to fold the fish on the dotted line, toward the decorated side, at a 90° angle. This should result in the “hook” being face down when the fish is sitting on a table, with the face of the fish sticking straight up.

Have each student prepare a fishing pole by tying a length of yarn around a pencil. Tie a paper clip that has been slightly bent out (to make a hook) at the end of the yarn.

Place all the fish on a table. Each student will take a turn “hooking” a fish, reading the teasing phrase, and “freeing” the fish by using one of the five response skills suggested in the story. Free fish should be thrown in a special spot designated as an ocean (for example, mark off an area on the floor). Watch carefully for students who “throw a hook back” out of habit. If this happens, throw the fish back on the table and have that student try again until he or she gives a “free fish” response. Continue until there are no more fish on the table.

You may want to make a classroom mobile out of the fish to keep the memory of the lesson alive in the classroom.

 **Role Playing** – Role play scenes from the playground, lunchroom, and classroom, letting students rotate roles as teasers and “free fish.” Brainstorm and role play possible reactions or solutions to a problem. Often when faced with difficult situations children freeze or react instinctively and impulsively. They don’t know what to do. By helping them think through and act out possible reactions ahead of time, they can draw from these when needed. Developing a repertoire of possible reactions helps them feel more empowered. Sometimes you might even try proposing silly solutions. If you can make this activity fun and even a little absurd, it helps a child develop a light-hearted view of the problem and learn not to take it so seriously.

 **Journal Activity** – Tell students to reflect on the following:

Is there someone they complain about? Maybe it’s their friend, classmate, brother, or sister. Now, have them think of one thing they can do differently in their relationship with this person over the next week. It might be that they are either extra kind or ignore the person. Perhaps they try laughing instead of getting upset. Maybe they stand up to the person. The point is for each student to take the initiative and make a change—not to wait for their friend or sibling to change.

Have students privately write down the situation they thought of and what they want to try as a new response. Remind them of this goal a couple times during the week to help them to remember to try it. Have a class discussion a week later and invite students to share their situation and results.

Fish Pattern

(To accompany the Fishing Game—an Additional Activity for *Simon's Hook*)

1. Cut out on solid line.
2. Paper punch hole through circle.

