



TOUGH CHANGE

Goal of Activity: The student will begin to learn how to transform burdensome experiences into experiences that are emotionally more productive and manageable.

Student Mix: boys and girls of similar age and grade

Group Size: four to six students

Suggested Time: thirty-five to forty minutes

Materials Required: magic box, container of coins, a \$100 bill, and a CD player with just the right assortment of songs and inspirational lyrics

Considerations:

This lesson really underscores the importance of encouraging students to actively seek help in their pursuit of tackling issues that continue to weigh heavily in their hearts and minds.

Using the concept of magic often gets the children's interest right away. Keeping their interest, however, is the real trick. Remember, you don't need to be a great magician to pull this activity off. All you really need is a jar of coins, a large enough cash bill to get their attention, and a

box with a divider in the middle with a dual lid that hinges in its center. Better yet, it's probably best just to devise your own magic box.

Know that you won't always have the right words to say when you think the student needs to hear just the right thing. Sometimes the best things we can say will be those magic phrases that are meant to encourage and support students in their discovery of answers to questions only they will eventually find.

Student Reflection:

I didn't know two of the kids in my counseling group today, but after introductions and check-in, I felt like I knew a little bit about them. I think it's easier for me to talk about myself when I know who the people in my group are.

Our group got started with Dr. Nick having us sit in order of our heights. Like, we had to have the shortest person in the group sitting in the chair to his left side. Sitting to the left of that girl was the next tallest person, and that kept happening all the way around the table until the tallest kid was sitting in the chair over by Dr. Nick's right hand.

For check-in, Dr. Nick wanted everybody to try and think about anything we've been part of that's been really hard or tough to deal with. Like, it might be something from last year or even something that's happening right now. Dr. Nick said it could even be something that's going to happen pretty soon!

He gave an example of something that happened to him last year. He told us about when his dog ran away from home, and he still misses him! He even showed us the picture of his dog that he keeps in his pocket. Now I knew what he was talking about when he talked about hard things to deal with.

The shortest girl in our group said she might be going to Missouri to live with her dad. This pretty tall kid said something about his brother's funeral like three or four years ago. The

tallest kid, named Brandon, still remembers the day his hamster crawled into their dryer and tumbled dried to death! Gross! He said the lint catcher was full of hamster fluff! Really gross!

I was pretty surprised to hear how much stuff most of the kids wanted to say about all those things. There were so many! Dr. Nick gave everyone a treat for doing such a great job talking about some really hard things.

Our counselor started our activity by putting a big jar of change on the table in front of us. There must have been over a thousand coins in that jar! One kid who got to hold the jar said it must have weighed like twenty pounds! Dr. Nick told us he used to carry lots of this change in his pants pocket but pretty soon couldn't anymore because it got to be too heavy. No kidding!

He looked pretty sad when he was telling us about all the change he had to carry for a long time. The way he said it made me feel a little sorry for him. One of the kids asked him why he kept so much change with him for so long, and Dr. Nick said he didn't know what else to do with it until his friend, Lowell, showed him a really cool magic trick. I love magic! Everyone wanted him to show us what the magic trick was.

Dr. Nick put the change jar into a big cardboard box. He covered the box with a cloth. He then spun the box around and around while saying magic phrases that hardly anybody else could hear.

As soon as he tapped his ruler on the box, he took the rag off the top of it. He opened the box lid and the coins were gone! He pulled out a hundred dollar bill! That was awesome! Everybody wanted it! Even though everybody wanted the money, Dr. Nick said he's the one who is supposed to carry it.

For fun, Dr. Nick said he was going to turn the money back into all that change. He placed the hundred dollar bill back into the box, covered the box with a cloth, spun the box around in the

other direction, hit the box with the ruler, and then showed us the jar of coins!

We were all still pretty amazed, but I was also starting to get a little suspicious. I wanted to look closer at that magic box, but the counselor kept me back. He said something about that believing is sometimes better than knowing. Our counselor then put the coin jar on our table. He said he wanted to show us some of the coins he had been keeping for all of those years.

Dr. Nick held up a nickel and asked us what it was. Brandon shouted out, "A nickel!" Dr. Nick said, "Well, it is a nickel, but it's also the time my family moved to a new town." He then held up a quarter and pointed to a girl who wasn't shouting and asked her what it was. The girl answered, "A quarter." "Yes, it is a quarter," said Dr. Nick, "but it's also the time my parents divorced."

The counselor then showed us a silver dollar and asked us to name it. Before anyone shouted out an answer, we talked first. One kid said it was a silver dollar and guessed that it was also something worse than his parents divorcing. We were right! Dr. Nick told us that the coin was about the time his grandmother died.

Dr. Nick told us that no matter how short, tall, big, or small we are, we all have change that we carry around with us all the time. A couple kids emptied their pockets and said they didn't have any change, but one kid did show us his pocket knife. Dr. Nick asked to hold the knife until after school.

The counselor went back and talked about some of the things we had talked about during check-in, like the girl who might move to Missouri. We had to think about how that could work out to be a good change for her. Meeting new friends, spending more time with her dad, having snow in the winter, and hanging out with her cousins could all be great changes for her!

For that one kid whose brother died, that was way harder

to figure out. Dr. Nick said that the two of them could probably figure out a way the boy could learn how to sometimes celebrate his brother's life instead of always being sad and missing him. Dr. Nick said that for some things like when somebody dies or bad things happen to neat kids and their families, some magic is just harder to learn than others.

After Dr. Nick gave everyone a couple coins for the changes we had talked about having to carry, he put those three coins he used to tell us about himself back into his own pocket. I got it now what he meant when he said that each one of us has our own change to carry! I really got it this time!

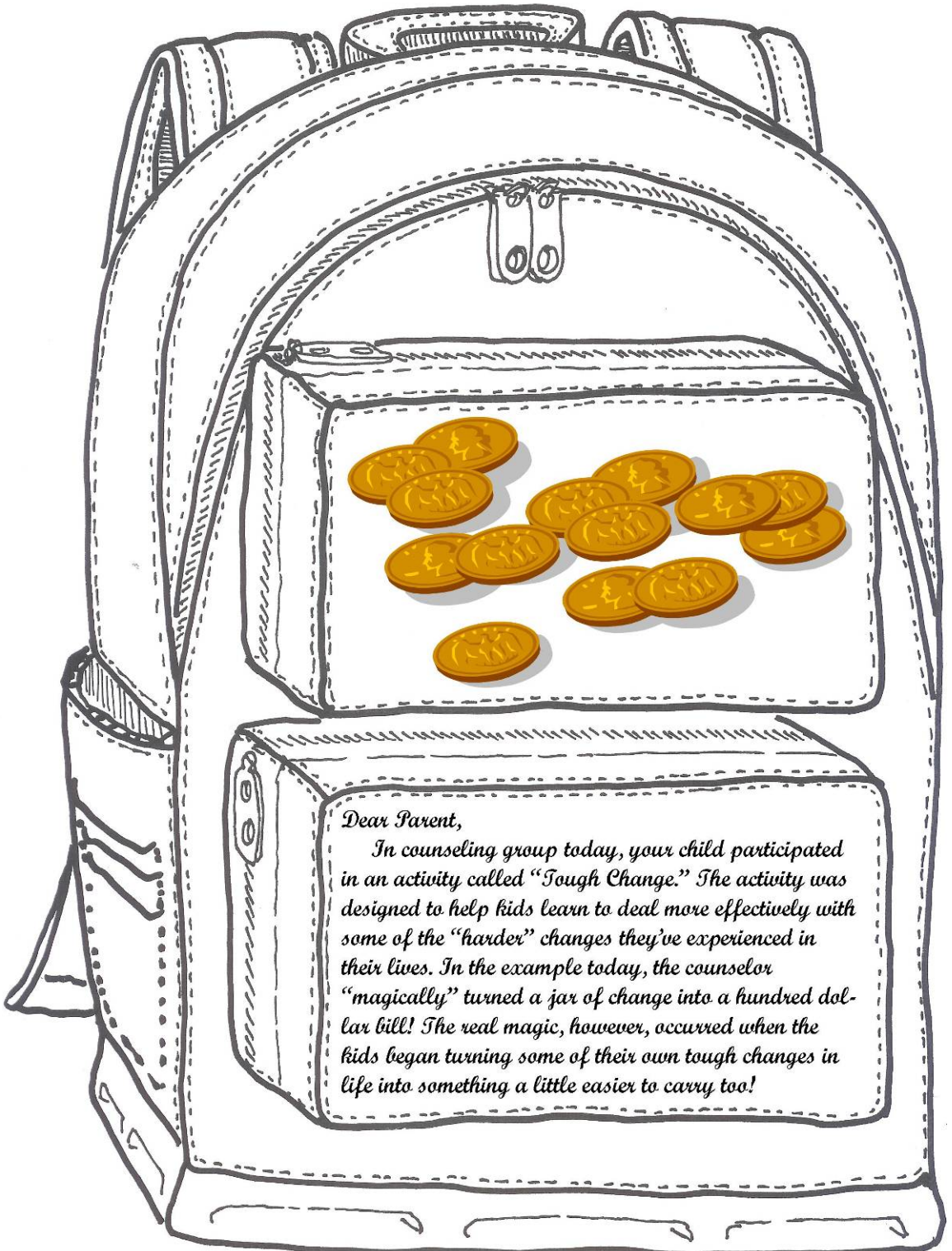
I was glad when the counselor taught us some magic phrases to use if we ever feel like all the changes we sometimes have to carry are getting too heavy. He said magic phrases can help us turn sad, worried, and scary things into thoughts and feelings that are a lot easier to think about and carry phrases like: "I won't back down," "Don't worry, be happy," "I've got the eye of the tiger," "I think it's about forgiveness even if you don't love me anymore," "On the wings of eagles I can find my strength," "When a problem comes along you must whip it, whip it good," "I believe it's time for me to fly," "Hakuna matata," and "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Dr. Nick said that some counselors, teachers, and parents are experts at knowing and saying magic things, and if we ever need any help, just to ask one of them. The counselor had written just some of those phrases on the whiteboard, and I had a lot of fun practicing saying those things out loud, over and over with the other kids in group. It felt like we were all chanting things at the same time and made it feel like all those phrases were really powerful!

Those were all pretty good magic phrases, but my favorite phrase was one our counselor used from a song he played on

his CD player. I think he said the song was called, "Don't Stop Believing."

Dr. Nick told us any magic phrase we use will work better when we add lots of effort and positive thoughts in turning our change into something easier to deal with. "After all," said Dr. Nick, "it's a lot easier to carry a hundred dollar bill in your pocket than a hundred dollars worth of change."



Dear Parent,

In counseling group today, your child participated in an activity called "Tough Change." The activity was designed to help kids learn to deal more effectively with some of the "harder" changes they've experienced in their lives. In the example today, the counselor "magically" turned a jar of change into a hundred dollar bill! The real magic, however, occurred when the kids began turning some of their own tough changes in life into something a little easier to carry too!