

MERRELL'S

Grades  
6-8

# STRONG KIDS

A Social &  
Emotional  
Learning  
Curriculum

SECOND EDITION



Dianna Carrizales-Engelmann  
Laura L. Feuerborn  
Barbara A. Gueldner  
Oanh K. Tran





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Second Edition*



# Merrell's Strong Kids—Grades 6–8

A Social & Emotional Learning Curriculum

Second Edition

by

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# Clear Thinking 1

## SEL Competencies Addressed in This Lesson



## Purpose and Objectives

This lesson teaches students an awareness and understanding of common thinking traps. In this lesson, students will

- Understand the influence of thoughts on emotions and behaviors
- Develop an awareness of their own thoughts
- Identify common thinking traps that affect behavior, thoughts, and emotions

## Materials Needed

- Supplements 6.1–6.2 (online download)
- Supplements 6.3–6.4 (online download and handout)
- Supplement 6.5 (online download)
- Supplements 6.6–6.7 (online download and handout)
- Supplement 6.8 (homework handout)
- Optional props (dark glasses, binoculars, and fortune cookie)
- Activity C sheet (volume slider)

## Teacher Notes

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## Running Short on Time?


Suggested stopping points: end of Activity B and Closure activity.



## Instructor Reflection

This lesson identifies thought patterns that can lead to overly pessimistic thinking and hinder well-being. In this program, these thoughts are called “thinking traps.” We all fall victim to thinking traps sometimes. At times, thinking traps help us deal with our situation in the moment or help us feel better about the situation in the short term, without really dealing with the problem or helping us see alternative or more realistic perspectives. To help you prepare for this lesson, see if you can identify some of the thinking traps in this lesson. Have you noticed these thinking traps in your own life? If so, what were the consequences? Did they affect your emotional state, your behaviors, and your interactions with others?

## Review


 5 MINS. Review the ideas (listed below) that were discussed in Lesson 5: Dealing with Anger.

- Anger is a necessary and a natural reaction.
- There are different ways to deal with angry feelings.
- Refer to the steps of the anger model.
- There are healthy strategies for expressing anger.

### Sample Script

*During our last meeting, we talked about ways to deal with your anger—what it looks like, what we do or say when we feel angry, and healthy ways of dealing with anger. We have a lot of choices for how we respond when we feel angry. We learned that, a lot of times, it helps to take a moment to think about our angry feelings before we do anything about them.*

## Introduction


 5 MINS. Introduce the lesson. Lead students in a focusing activity. Then, show students Supplement 6.1 and discuss how people have emotions and thoughts and how we can sometimes fall into thinking traps.



### Sample Script

*Today, we’re going to learn about the thoughts we have when we experience emotions.*

## Mindfulness-Based Focusing Activity

 3 MINS. *Let’s begin with an activity to settle our bodies and practice focusing our minds. Close your eyes or look at a point in front of you on the floor or on your desk.*

*Rest your hands comfortably on your desk or in your lap. Feel your feet on the floor or your hands as they rest. First, pay attention to your breathing for three breaths. [Pause] During this activity, you may notice that your mind wanders when you are trying to pay attention to one thing. It's okay and normal that your thoughts wander. For the next minute or two, focus on your breath. When you notice your attention wandering to your thoughts, you can say to yourself, "Oh, I'm thinking" and then bring your attention back to your breath. [Allow students about 2 minutes to practice.] Now, let's take two breaths together. [Pause.] When you finish letting out the second breath, slowly open your eyes. Now that we've observed our breathing and thoughts, we are ready to move on to our lesson.*

## Introduction (Continued)



Show Supplement 6.1 first, followed by Supplement 6.2. This activity illustrates that how we think about a situation can affect our emotions and behaviors.

### Sample Script

[Show Supplement 6.1.] *This is a picture of a snake. Imagine holding this snake in your hands. You can feel the weight of its body and cool skin on your hands. Notice your thoughts. What thoughts do you have when you imagine holding this snake?* [Ask students to share their thoughts, and seek a range of answers. They might find it interesting and wonder what kind of snake it is. Or they might recall memories about snakes.] *Now, notice your feelings. What feelings do you have?* [Ask students to share their feelings, and seek a range of answers. They might feel excited, scared, or disgusted. Then, lead them to make connections between their thoughts and feelings.] *If I have bad memories about snakes or I don't like the way they look, then I might feel disgusted or repulsed by the thought of holding the snake. However, if I find them interesting, I may feel excited or happy to hold the snake.* [Show Supplement 6.2.] *This is a person who studies snakes. How might she feel to hold the snake?* [Allow some speculation about how the scientist might feel.] *This is like everything in life! How we think about something can affect how we feel about it. Today, we will learn how our thoughts can affect our emotions and how we behave. In this lesson, we'll learn ways to be more aware of our thoughts and identify thoughts that might not be very helpful or healthy for us.*

## Key Terms and Definitions




**5 MINS.** Use the Supplement 6.3 handout to define the key terms that will be used in this lesson.



### Sample Script

*Here are some important terms that will help us understand how our thoughts are connected to our emotions and behaviors. We'll define the words and discuss examples to understand what they mean.*

## Thoughts Associated with Emotions


-  **5-10 MINS.** Use Supplement 6.4 as a visual aid. You can use the supplement as a handout or use the board to write down thoughts. Recognizing our thoughts helps us understand our emotions.



### Sample Script

*When we feel emotions, we have thoughts that go with those emotions. Sometimes, we don't even notice what we are thinking and feeling because it happens so quickly, or we get used to certain feelings and thoughts. Or our thoughts and feelings can be an automatic reaction based on experiences we've had in the past. It's important to pay attention to both our feelings and our thoughts. With awareness and practice, we can get really good at noticing our thoughts and feelings. Then we can better understand how they can affect the way we act. This understanding can help us feel better, make better friendships, and enjoy our lives more!*

### Activity A: Thoughts Associated with Emotions


-  **5 MINS.** Using Supplement 6.4 as a visual aid, ask for volunteers to share three to five thoughts and emotions. An example is provided in the sample script. To help your students understand this connection, you might share an example from your own life. Using Supplement 6.4, model your thoughts, self-talk, and feelings. You can use the board to write down student responses and draw connections between the thought and the emotion.



### Sample Script

*Let's take a closer look at this. Think of a time when you felt embarrassed or awkward. What kinds of thoughts did you have? What kind of self-talk did you have? Did your thoughts and self-talk lead you to feel more embarrassed or more awkward? Or your thoughts might have led you to feel another emotion, like anger. Maybe your thoughts helped calm you down and manage intense emotions. Who would like to share another example?*

## Identifying Thinking Traps

-  **15 MINS.** Use Supplement 6.5 as a visual aid. Sometimes, the way in which we think about a situation is not always accurate and can lead to a trap.



### Sample Script

*Thinking traps are thoughts or patterns of thoughts that are either inaccurate or unrealistic interpretations of events. They can trap us and make us feel even worse or make the situation worse. They can lead us to feel like this person you see here, stuck in a trap! But, if we better understand these thinking traps, we can affect the way we feel about something. We can also change the way we react to something. Today, we will discuss eight common thinking traps.*

## Activity B: Identifying Thinking Traps 1

 5 MINS.



Use Supplement 6.6 as a handout to guide students in an explanation of common thinking traps. Consider using one of the examples from Activity A to begin the discussion. Provide students with the opportunity to ask questions for each thinking trap.

### Sample Script

*Sometimes, these thinking traps feel like they happen without us even noticing them until we're right in the middle, or stuck. But if we practice noticing these traps, we can get better at spotting them early, before we get too stuck. Let's look at the different thinking traps we might fall into from time to time.*

## Activity C: Identifying Thinking Traps 2

 5 MINS.



Use Supplement 6.7 as a handout and the optional props (e.g., dark glasses) to discuss the eight situations. Ask students to identify which thinking trap is being demonstrated by referring to the Common Thinking Traps handout (Supplement 6.6). Read each situation aloud, and encourage students to follow along on the overhead. After reading each situation, ask, "Which of the thinking traps is occurring in this story?" If students identify more than one thinking trap, lead them to the best answer, but also explain that we can get stuck in more than one trap at a time. Provide feedback as needed.

*Note:* If your students are struggling, provide other examples that are directly relevant to them. Alternatively, ask them to come up with examples of their own.

### Sample Script

*Let's talk more about thinking traps. In your handout, there are example situations and we will identify the thinking trap in each situation. For example, Marcella made a little mistake in math class. She thought this little mistake was a HUGE deal. Class, what thinking trap is it if I feel like a small mistake is a big problem? [Binocular vision: You may choose to use the binoculars.] But Marcella didn't recognize that it was a trap, so she was still stuck! At the end of the class, she felt like the WHOLE class went HORRIBLY. She ignored the good things that happened. She ignored what she did well! Class, what thinking trap is it if I see only the bad things about something? [Dark glasses: You may choose to put on the dark glasses.] Yes, Marcella got stuck in dark glasses ALL day. As she was getting ready for bed, she thought, "Tomorrow's math class will be horrible, too." Class, what thinking trap is it if I predict something without enough evidence? [Fortune telling: You may choose to bring out your fortune cookie.]*

*So you see? If I didn't realize my thoughts were a trap, and I believed them, they could cause me to feel grumpy for days! How do you think the thinking traps of binocular vision, dark glasses, and fortune telling [show props] affected how Marcella acted with her friends that day? Her family? How do you think she acted in math class the next day?*

## Putting It All Together

 5-10 MINS. Use the following activity to practice the concepts discussed in this lesson.



### Sample Script

*Let's practice what we've learned by putting it all together.*

This activity uses the Supplement 6.8 homework handout and can be completed in small groups. If using small groups, have each group identify a note taker and a leader; the rest of the members are helpers. The members in the group can take turns being leaders and note takers until everyone has a chance being a leader and a note taker. The leader identifies a situation where he or she got stuck in a thinking trap. Leaders can also use situations they saw on television of someone stuck in a thinking trap. For each thinking trap, the helpers ask the leaders the following eight questions. The note taker records the answers.

1. What was the situation? What happened?
2. What were your emotions and physical feelings?
3. Was the emotion comfortable, uncomfortable, or both?
4. Where was the emotion on the slider?
5. What were your thoughts and self-talk?
6. What was your reaction?
7. What thinking trap were you stuck in?
8. Did your situation get better or worse?

## Closure

 2 MINS. Close the lesson using a brief breathing activity and a reflection on the lesson content.

### Sample Script

*Let's take a moment to regroup. Close your eyes and rest your hands in your lap. Feel your feet on the floor. Relax the muscles in your body and face. Relax and soften your stomach muscles. Counting to 3, take a breath in slowly. Inhale the air down into your lungs. Feel your chest and stomach expand like a balloon. [Pause.] Now, exhale, counting to 4. Feel your chest and stomach collapse as all the air exits your body. [Pause.] Again, inhale deep into your lungs so that your stomach expands [Pause.] and exhale. [Pause.] Take a moment to think about something you learned today that was important to you or you really liked. [Note to instructor: Pause for a moment to allow time for reflection.] Counting to 3, take one more deep breath in slowly [Pause.] and exhale counting to 4. [Pause.]*

## Tips for Transfer Training and Homework

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Use the ideas and activities in the following section to practice this lesson's content with your students at other times during the day. Also remember to precorrect, remind, and reinforce concepts from this lesson in activities throughout the school week and to encourage students to use the skills taught in this lesson across settings including home, the bus, the cafeteria, and the community.

### Additional Activities

- Ask students to be on the lookout for evidence of thinking traps they see on television shows or in books they may be interested in.
- Ask students to journal and record their thoughts and self-talk for a day or several days. Ask them to identify patterns and traps. Use the supplements in this lesson as guides.
- Have students make flash cards with the thinking traps and images on one side and example scenarios on the other side.

### Homework Handout



Pass out Supplement 6.8, Practice Situations Worksheet, and explain the instructions. Students will list situations where they got caught up in a thinking trap or they saw someone on TV get caught in a thinking trap. They will identify the thinking trap.

# Picture of a Snake



## Picture of a Herpetologist



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by Dianna Carrizales-Engelmann, Ph.D., Laura L. Feuerborn, Ph.D., Barbara A. Geldner, Ph.D., & Oanh K. Tran, Ph.D.



## Key Terms and Definitions



### Thoughts

These are ideas or opinions in the mind.

*Example:* The thoughts we have about something can affect how we feel about it and how we react to a situation. If I think something will be fun, like a bike ride, I am likely to feel more comfortable about it and seek it out. If I think something will be boring or too difficult, I may not feel comfortable about it and I may avoid it.

### Self-talk

The things we say to ourselves, self-talk can be negative, positive, or neutral.

*Example:* Self-talk can be helpful or encouraging (e.g., “I can do this!”) or discouraging (e.g., “I can’t believe I said that. That was a dumb thing to say”).

### Thinking traps

These are thoughts or patterns of thoughts that are either inaccurate or unrealistic judgments or interpretations of events.

*Example:* “My sister is always messing up. She can’t do anything right.” This is inaccurate and an unrealistic interpretation. Just like no one is perfect, no one messes *everything* up.

# Picture of a Thought Bubble



# Picture of a Man Trapped in a Hole



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# Common Thinking Traps



### Binocular vision

Looking at things in a way that makes them seem bigger or smaller than they really are

*Example:* You have a small pimple on your face. You feel like that's all people see when they look at you.



### Black-and-white thinking

Looking at things in only extreme or opposite ways (e.g., thinking of things as being good or bad, never or always, all or none, friend or enemy)

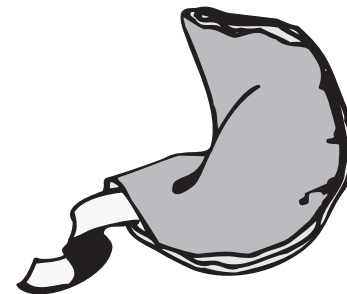
*Example:* You had one fight with your good friend. Now you think, "We always fight. She hates me."



### Dark glasses

Thinking about only the negative parts of things

*Example:* You met with your teacher. Your teacher said many good things about you. He also said your writing needs improvement. Now, you think all his comments were bad.



### Fortune telling

Making predictions about what will happen in the future without enough evidence

*Example:* You don't talk to the new student in class because you think she will not like you.

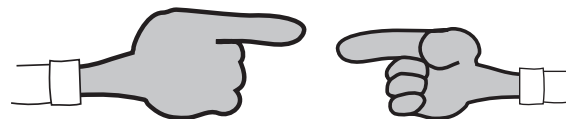
(continued)



**Making it personal**

Blaming yourself for things that are not your fault or thinking things are about you when they are not

*Example:* Your friend is irritable today. You think it's because she's upset with you even though you can't think of any reason that would make her angry at you today.



**Blame game**

Blaming others for things that are your responsibility

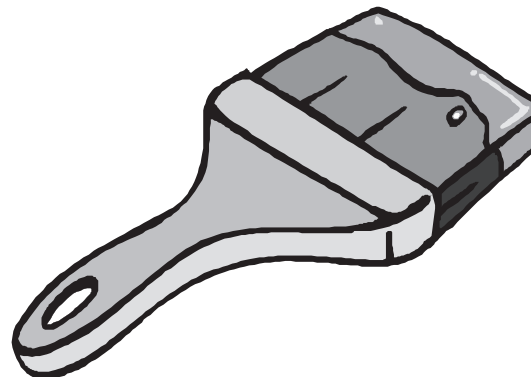
*Example:* You didn't follow the rules, so your parents took your music away as punishment. You think it's your parents' fault because they don't like you.



**All alone**

Thinking you have problems that no one else understands

*Example:* Your parents can't afford to buy you the pair of shoes you want. You think no one else has money problems in their family.



**Broad brush**

Judging something based on one experience with it

*Example:* You met one person from another country, and you thought that person was rude. Now, you think all the people from that country are rude.

## Example Situations



1. Michael's parents are getting a divorce. He thinks that this is all his fault because he has been getting into trouble lately.
2. Farah's teacher suggested that she run for class president. She decided not to run because she knew that no one would vote for her.
3. Marcella got a bad grade on a quiz. Now she thinks that she is the worst student in the class.
4. Ahmad's soccer coach gave him a lot of praise and encouragement in soccer practice. As Ahmad was leaving practice, the coach mentioned that Ahmad should practice his dribbling skills at home. Ahmad was upset about how poorly he played at practice.
5. Ling was grounded for not cleaning her room. She thought to herself, "I am always the bad kid. My sister Kimmy is always the good kid."
6. Latisha got in trouble because she shoved another student in the hallway. She doesn't think she should be in trouble because the other student gave her a mean look.
7. Caroline lost her favorite pet. She feels like no one else knows what it's like to lose something they care about.
8. Scott tried a Mexican dish once and thought it was too spicy, so he didn't like it. Now he thinks all Mexican food is too spicy.

# Practice Situations Worksheet



Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** List four situations where you got stuck in a thinking trap. For each trap, write down the emotion you experienced; where on the volume slider your emotion was; if the emotion was comfortable, uncomfortable, or both; what the thought was; and the name of the thinking trap. You can also use situations you saw on television of someone stuck in a thinking trap.

Situation	What was your (or the person's) emotion?	What did it (might it) feel like? Comfortable, uncomfortable, or both?	Where on the slider was your (or the person's) emotion?	What was your (or the person's) thinking and self-talk?	What type of thinking trap did you (or the person) get stuck in?
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

## Emotions Volume Slider

