**Activities that Illustrate the Virtue of Hopefulness**

from *10-Minute Life Lessons for Kids*

**Sink or Swim**

Group size: 2 or more

Age: 5 and older

Materials: clear glass bowl filled with water

Modeling clay (not Play-Doh, or other clays that will float

Roll clay into four balls, three of them small and one a little larger (about the size of small and big marbles). Drop each one into the bowl of water and watch them sink. Tell the children that each ball represents a person and that most people at certain times in their lives feel discouraged, burdened by life's problems, or lonely. [In a word, Hopeless.] Just like the clay balls, they will sink into a sad state of discouragement. With younger children, it is good to pretend the clay balls are individual people with names, and talk about why each person might be feeling low or dejected. ("This is Sandy, and her pet dog has just run away from home, and she has not been able to find him...") As you roll each ball before you drop it in the water, mention the fact that if we are all 'rolled up' in ourselves, it is impossible to look outward and see other's needs.

Now take the large clay ball out, and start reshaping it as you talk about changing your attitude. Mold it into the form of a simple canoe. Discuss how it is possible to help change others' attitudes about life just by changing our own attitude and being a positive influence on those around us. By stretching and shaping ourselves, by staying flexible and receptive to the feelings of those around us, we will be more likely to be in a position to help others in times of need.

Put the 'boat' in the water and watch it float. Now take each of the small balls and put them inside the boat. Ask the children what can happen when one person changes his attitude and decides to become more positive and hopeful. He can help lift the burdens of others and can be an example to them of the strength that comes with optimism [and hopefulness].

**Rocks in your Socks**

Group size: 2 or more

Age: 4 and older

Materials: small pebbles, small pieces of candy

Begin by giving each child a small piece of candy, preferably one that will last a few minutes as they suck on it. Now have them place a small pebble inside one or both of their shoes and put the shoes back on. With the candy in their mouths and the pebbles in their shoes, go outside with them and take a short walk or have them walk around inside of the house several times.

After the walk, ask each child to talk about his or her experience. What did he feel during the walk? What was he thinking? In most cases, the child will dwell on the discomfort of walking and will not say anything about the good taste of the candy.

Ask the children how this can be compared to our experiences in life. Do we sometimes focus on the difficulties and problems we have (the pebbles and rocks) and forget about all the good things around us (the sweet candy)? What do we talk about more during the day -- the things that bother and worry us or the beauty of the day and the nice things that people do for us? Do we spend more time wanting things we do not have or being grateful for waht we have?

To reinforce this idea you might show your children the proverbial half-empty / half-full glass demonstration. Fill a clear drinking glass half full of water. Ask each child to tell you whether she thinks the glass is half full or half empty. After they respond, compare this to the way in which people look at the world around them. Some people have a positive attitude about life, always looking for the good side of things and are grateful for the blessings they enjoy in life. They are the ones who are seeing the glass as being half full. Other people have a more negative attitude, focusing on what they do not have in life, and they tend to see the glass as half empty. Ask the children which of these two types of people would generally be happier. What kind of attitude to you have? Are you a complainer or a complimenter? Can you change your attitude if you decide you want to?

**The Heat is On**

Group size: 2 or more

Age: 5 and older

Materials: 2 pieces of white paper; and iron and ironing board; lemon juice or milk;

pointed instrument like a toothpick, small paintbrush, hairpin or pencil eraser.

This is an activity that amazes kids and is one that they'll want to show all their friends -- it leaves a lasting impression! For it to be effective, you need to prepare the materials before you demonstrate it to the children.

You are going to create invisible words on the papers. Dip the point of a toothpick into the milk or lemon juice and with it, carefully write in big letter the words, "I can" on one paper, and "I can't" on the other. (For very young children, draw a simple happy face on one paper and a sad face on the other.) Let the liquid dry. You won't be able to see the words. Turn your iron on so it will be hot for the activity.

Now you are ready to begin. Show the two papers to the children and ask if they can see any difference between them. Tell them that the papers represent two people who are very different from each other, but that you cannot really tell the difference from looking at them. They thing that sets these people apart is their attitude; one person is positive, hopeful, and has self-confidence, believing that she can overcome most obstacles in life, and the other person is negative, pessimistic, and feels hopeless.

With younger children it is more effective to make up a story to go along with the demonstration. You might say something like, "This is Emily and this is Jackie. From the outside they look the same, but they are different on the inside. Emily believes almost anything is possible; she is happy and pleasant most of time. Jackie is grouchy and whines a lot. She gets discouraged and does not think she is good at much of anything..." Continue the rest of the demonstration within the framework of the story.

Discuss the fact that our attitudes are not overly apparent in some of our day-to-day activities; both optimists and pessimists (Emily and Jackie) can do well in school, can have close friends, can develop their talents, etc. Both kinds of people can get by in the world, although the ones with a positive attitude will be much happier and most fulfilled in life. But all of us, at some point in life, will face certain situations that will try our patience -- inconveniences, hardships, and challenges, that will weigh upon us and bring out our true nature. At this point, you should press the hot iron on one of the papers, keeping it pressed down for 15 to 20 seconds. Then repeat the process with the other paper.

As you show the two papers with their newly visible messages, tell the children that in the heat of our difficulties, our true attitude will manifest itself and be a determining factor in whether or not we can overcome the obstacles in our lives. Ask the children whether they can tell the differences between two people who have different attitudes. Ask whether any of the children have any friends, teachers, coaches, grandparents or cousins who have especially positive attitudes. What is it like to work on a project or play a game with that person? How do you feel about those people? What kind of person do YOU want to be?

**In and Out of Focus**

Group size: 2 or more

Ages: 6 and older

Materials: none

This is another activity that can be done anywhere, anytime, and without preparation. It can be adjusted to any location or situation.

Ask the child to look around and identify as many circular objects as she can find (buttons, the sun, a clock, shoelace eyelet, lamp shade, a ball, a dish, an orange, and eyeball, etc). Or give a specific number -- ask her to identify six things she can see that are round.

Now ask her to look around and find as many rectangular-shaped things as possible (a sign, a table, a wall, a television, a building, a window, a candy bar, a block, a book). You can continue with this activity as long as you can keep the child's attention. Other categories to look for might include:

square things black things

triangle-shaped things moving things

green things living things

After you have done several of these, ask the following questions:

* When you were looking for circles, did you take special note of rectangles?
* When you were looking for green things, did you at the same time, count the black things?
* When you were concentrating on finding living objects, did you count up how many non-living objects you saw?

The answers to these questions will be 'no' for most people. Now discuss the idea of 'focus'. We tend to see those things on which we are focused. If we are focused on circles, we will find circles; if we are looking for triangles, our eyes and minds will pick out triangles.

Discuss the fact that the same principle applies to our lives: If we are focused on our problems, and the negative things in our lives, we will continue to see only those things. If we focus on our good qualities, our blessings and the things that bring us happiness, we will have a more positive outlook on life.

Ask the children how we can apply this same principle to the way in which we view our family and friends. Is it possible to look for the bad in people? Is it also possible to look for the good in others? Which will make you a happier person? What will focusing on the good in others do for you? What will it do for the other person? What kind of person do you like to be around -- one who sees the good in others or one who constantly talks about the faults of others?