

WHY CAN'T I DO WHAT I WANT?

A Program on Rights & Responsibilities:
They Go Hand in Hand

Ages 9-14



by
Dr. Terrence Webster Doyle

based on the
Education for Peace Series books
by Dr. Terrence Webster-Doyle

If You Lived as a Child in the '40s, '50s, '60s or '70s, How Did you Survive?

Looking back, it's hard to believe that we have lived as long as we have. As children, we rode in cars with no seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pickup truck on a warm day was always a special treat.

Our baby cribs were covered with bright colored lead-based paint. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors, or cabinets, and we drank water from the garden hose, not from a bottle. When we rode our bikes, we did not wear helmets, and many of us hitchhiked to town.

We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then ride down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times, we learned to solve the problem.

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one could reach us all day — no cell phones. We played dodgeball, and sometimes the ball would really hurt. We got cut, broke bones, broke teeth, and no lawsuits came from these accidents. They were accidents. We had fights and punched each other and got black and blue and learned to get over it. No one was to blame, but us.

We ate cupcakes, bread and butter, and drank sugary soda but we were never overweight... we were always outside playing. We shared one grape soda among four friends, from one bottle, and no one died.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendo 64, video games, 99 channels on cable, videotaped movies, personal computers, or Internet chat rooms. We had friends. We went outside and found them. We rode bikes or walked to a friend's home and knocked on the door, or rang the bell or just walked in — and talked with them, without asking a parent or guardian — by ourselves.

We made up games with sticks and tennis balls, and ate worms. Although we were told it would happen, the worms did not live inside us forever. Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment. Some students weren't as smart as others, so they failed a grade and were held back to repeat the same grade. Tests were not adjusted for any reason.

Our actions were our own. Consequences for behavior were expected; there was no one to hide behind. The idea of parents bailing us out if we broke a law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law.

The '40s-'50s-'60s-'70s generation has gives us some of the best risk-takers, problem-solvers and inventors ever. The past 50 years have produced an explosion of innovative people and ideas. We had freedom, bondage, failure, and success, and we learned how to deal with them all — before lawyers and government regulated our lives for what they call "our own good."

If you're among this generation's risk-takers — congratulations. You remember when our own good was something we fought for and believed was our responsibility.

— *Anonymous*

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Atrium Society TM
PO Box 816
Middlebury, Vt. 05753
atriumsociety@gmail.com
www.youthpeaceliteracy.org

LESSON 1:
Think Free Thoughts!
My Right! My Responsibility!

1. Ask students the following questions. Encourage them to give quick, alert answers! You have only 15 minutes per lesson!

- Do you believe you have the right to think free thoughts?
- What gives you this right? Are you born with it? Why do you think so?
- Do you think that everyone in the world has the right to think free thoughts?
- Do you think that those of us who have the right to think freely take it for granted?

2. Ask students:

- Do you think that every human being is entitled to certain rights?
- Do you think that many people forget that every right carries certain responsibilities?
- If we have the right to think freely, what responsibility do you think this right carries?
- Is it our responsibility to allow others to think freely — even if their thoughts conflict with ours?
- What does it mean to allow others to think freely? What action must we take to allow others to think whatever thoughts they choose?

Activity 1: Fill in the Blank *I Think the Worst!*

✓ Ask students:

1. Have you ever thought of getting back another person, even though you don't have the "right" to do so?
2. Did you have this thought because this person offended you, or hurt you, in some way?
3. Does it feel good to think this kind of thought, even though you would never consider actually doing harm to this person?
4. What if you learned that this person has sometimes thought of getting back at YOU? Does this feel good, too?
5. Do you think that other person is entitled to think this thought, even though it makes you uncomfortable?

✓ Tell students:

1. This is how it works! If I want the right to think freely — about anything at all — then I must allow others to think freely, too.
2. The right to think freely carries with it the responsibility to allow others the same right as I have.
3. Let's practice! Who wants to volunteer? *(When you get a Volunteer, ask him or her to fill in the following two blanks. Read the words that precede (1), and allow the Volunteer to fill in the first blank. Then, read the words that precede (2) and allow the Volunteer to fill in the blank:)*

"The reason I have the right to think freely about (1) (food, love, sports, poetry) is this : (2)_____"

4. Now ask the Volunteer to choose the name (1) of someone he or she disagrees with, argues with, has issues with, doesn't understand! Then, do the same thing:

"The reason I believe (1)_____ has the right to _____ is this: _____"

5. How does it feel to stand in the other person's shoes and contemplate what it's like for him or her to think freely?