Avoiding Gossip and Rumor

Materials:

- Worksheet

Brainstorm: Have you ever been a victim of gossip or rumor? Do you think gossip and rumors are a problem at our school? Why or why not?

Discuss: The simplest definition of gossip is talking about a person who isn't present. While that doesn't sound so bad, the issue with gossip is that it can quickly turn into talking about personal, private, or unflattering information that may result in the person feeling shame or embarrassment. There are many different ways to gossip. Gossiping includes saying unkind things, speculating, or guessing about something you don't know to be true, or sharing private information about someone else. Let's look at an example "I think James is funny. I love hanging out with him," The speaker is talking about James but is not saying anything unkind or private about him. The speaker is simply stating that they enjoy his company and explaining why. The statement is made to share something positive about James, and if he overheard it, he would likely feel good about himself. Now, let's look at another example, "I saw James going to the principal's office this morning. I bet he's in trouble for something," This an example of gossip becoming hurtful or harmful. In this statement, the speaker is sharing private information because not everyone saw James go into the principal's office, and no one needs to know that he was there. In addition, the speaker is speculating about what they saw. There are many reasons that James could be going to the principal's office, and to talk about it in this way is encouraging others to negatively speculate about something that doesn't involve them. In addition, if James overheard the statement, he may
feel embarrassed or even ashamed.

Dive in! Let's look at an example of how gossip works and why it can be so hurtful. Raise your hand if you have ever played the game Telephone? When you play Telephone, one person whispers a sentence to the next person, who then whispers what they heard in the ear of the next person. This continues until the last person receives the message and tells the group what they heard. In a typical game of Telephone, the sentence changes from the first person to the last person as each

player whispers what they heard. Gossip works in a similar way. Person A starts the gossip by spreading it to Person B. Person B tells Person C, but the story has changed slightly in the retelling. Person C tells Person D, and once again the message changes. This process repeats as long as the gossip continues to spread, and before long the story has changed completely. These are 2 of the reasons gossip can be so hurtful. First, it spreads. Person A might think they are just telling Person B, who happens to be a very good friend. But before long Person B shares it, and it ripples out from there.   Second, gossip can change a story. Person A might think they are sharing some innocent information, but by the time it filters through all the other people who hear it, the information can change drastically into someth**in**g hurtful that can even damage someone's reputation.

Activity: Today, we are going to use a strategy to determine if information that we hear is something that we should pass on or not. It's called the THINK strategy and you should THINK before you speak.

- Is it True?
- Is it Helpful?
- Is it Important?
- Is it Necessary?
- Is it Kind?

If the information doesn't meet all 5 criteria, then you just don't pass it on.

Reflect on the scenarios on the worksheet. Using the THINK criteria to Pass it On or Keep it to Yourself.

Reflect: If I gossip about people behind their back, how might this affect my friends' perceptions of me? How does it affect my self-perception?

Extend and Enrich

When might gossip be good? Gossip as a social skill
https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/psychologists-say-gossiping-social-skill-here-s-how-know-if-ncna1056941
Time Magazine https://time.com/5680457/why-do-people-gossip/
National Library of Medicine https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34427874/

For Further Study

Misinformation and social media:

British Journal of Developmental Psychology

https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjdp.12368

Stanford University

https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:fv751yt5934/SHEG%20Evaluating%20Information%20Online.pdf

Scientific American article Schooled in Lies by Melinda Wenner Moyer

https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/schoolkids-are-falling-victim-to-disinformation-and-conspiracy-fantasies/

New York Times article YouTube, the Great Radicalizer by Dr. Zeynep Tufekci

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html

Professional Development:

In thinking about my own participation in gossip, do I use the information that I receive for good? Am I using the THINK strategy?