



## Overcoming Obstacles with Optimism

### Materials:

- Worksheet

### Brainstorm

What is one of the biggest challenges you've had to face in your life? Accept student responses and follow up with clarifying questions.

### Discuss

**Obstacles** are challenges that we face. They are things that block or prevent us from moving forward or making progress. Sometimes obstacles can be external, such as having to move to a new school or your parents getting divorced. Other times obstacles are internal, such as mental or physical illness, learning difficulties, or stress. Regardless of whether obstacles are internal or external, most people face them at one time or another. Some obstacles are minor and cause only small disruptions in your life, like getting a bad grade on a test. But other obstacles are more major and can cause huge disruptions in your life, like dealing with grief after the death of a friend or family member. What are some common internal and external obstacles that high school students face?

### Dive in!

We can't control the obstacles we will face in life, but we can control our response to those obstacles. Luckily, you already have many of the tools that you need to overcome obstacles. We have talked about problem solving, stress management, and healthy living. Another way to overcome obstacles is by practicing optimism. **Optimism** is an attitude of confidence. It helps you to believe that even though a situation may be challenging or troublesome, it will work out. That doesn't mean that you're not affected by obstacles and you don't feel unpleasant feelings when you're facing obstacles, but it means that you choose to have a positive outlook. When you have optimism, you believe that you can handle almost any obstacles and that things will be OK. In fact, research supports that people who are more optimistic tend to handle stress better and tend to use more appropriate self-regulation strategies than people who have a pessimistic attitude. When optimists face obstacles, they are more likely to think about realistic



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solutions to their problems and understand that their situation is temporary (“I can overcome this; I’ve got this!").

### Activity

Distribute copies of the worksheet to each student. Have them start by taking the optimism quiz individually. When done, ask students to count the number of “A” responses and the number of “B” responses. Students with more “A” responses are optimistic. Those with more “B” responses are pessimists. Then, review the first scenario with students. Identify a pessimistic response first and then follow it with an optimistic response. Continue with the other two scenarios.

### Reflect

Discuss with the class how common idioms about optimism (see examples below) exemplifies an optimistic view. If timer permits, students can also make up their own!

- The glass is half full.
- Every cloud has a silver lining.
- When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.
- There is a light at the end of the tunnel.
- When one door closes, another one opens.

### Extend and Enrich

Have students research a famous person who has had to overcome significant obstacles in their life and either create a timeline, multimedia presentation, poster, or write a biography describing important events that led to the person’s success. Some examples of famous people who faced challenges are Michael Jordan, Stephen Hawking, Maya Angelou, Alexander Hamilton, and Richard Branson.

### For Further Study

- Aperture, *Educator Guide to Optimistic Thinking*:  
[apertureed.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Optimistic Thinking EdSERT Aperture-Education-320-1.pdf](https://apertureed.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Optimistic-Thinking-EdSERT-Aperture-Education-320-1.pdf)
- Edutopia, *Tips for Teaching Realistic Optimism*:  
[www.edutopia.org/article/tips-teaching-realistic-optimism](https://www.edutopia.org/article/tips-teaching-realistic-optimism)
- Reachout.com, *Classroom Resources*: <https://schools.au.reachout.com/>



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## Professional Development

Are you an optimist, pessimist, or realist? Take the (just for fun) test at [www.buzzfeed.com/alexandrorrico/are-you-an-optimist-a-realist-or-a-pessimist](http://www.buzzfeed.com/alexandrorrico/are-you-an-optimist-a-realist-or-a-pessimist) and then reflect on the findings. Was it what you expected? What would you like to change?