

# Say It Straight Curriculum

Say It Straight is a research-based education and training program that results in empowering communication skills and behaviors, increased self-awareness, positive relationships, personal and social responsibility and decreased risky or destructive behaviors, such as alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, violence, precocious sexual behavior and behaviors leading to HIV/AIDS. Since 1982, it has been successfully implemented in schools with 3rd-12th graders with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds in urban and rural settings, including the gifted and talented and students with special needs; with students in detention, on probation or in chemical dependency treatment; with college athletes; with families, organizations and communities; with adults in addictions treatment, aftercare and prison. The Say It Straight Foundation is dedicated to create sustainable Prevention Communities by developing Master Trainers who can train Say It Straight trainers in the community as needed.

Say It Straight trainers usually attend a 4-day Intensive Training of Trainers Workshop prior to conducting Say It Straight training (SIS) in schools and other settings (such as treatment, detention, organizations, prison, etc). At the Workshop they receive a detailed step-by-step Trainer Manual, different samples of age appropriate workbooks/journals, posters used in the training and different samples of age appropriate questionnaires (objective and subjective) used to evaluate the training. Three videos are available, 1. Say It Straight- In the Classroom, 2. Say It Straight- Student Support Group, and 3. Say It Straight- Family, Community. The Say It Straight Challenge game is also available.

This strength-based program is action oriented and integrates cognitive, affective and psychomotor modalities to maximize learning. The training is co-created by participants. They choose situations important in their lives that are played out as “**movies**” in which they play and experience all the roles. This process makes the training always relevant to the group and transcends age, gender, cultural and ethnic background, and organizational context. The training addresses questions such as: How do I say “no” to a friend? How do I say to my friends, “I’ve quit?” How do I say to a friend, “I care about you and I’m scared when I see what you are doing.” Young people and adults report similar concerns in situations with family, friends and at work. Letting participants co-create their training gives them a clear message that they have all the resources they need for change and the opportunity to connect to their own wisdom. Experiential learning is reinforced with workbooks/journals appropriate for different age groups.

The training allows participants to experience and practice their learnings in the training group, then implement their learnings in real life situations. During the training participants can replay real life situations as movies, discover how they feel and by getting feedback from the group, they discover the effect their behavior has on others. In this way, they can change their behavior to more positively influence the outcome. Specific exercises described below maximize the assimilation and implementation of behaviors that empower oneself and others.

**Say It Straight** training looks at interpersonal interactions in terms of three components: **I** (my needs, wishes, yearnings, feelings, beliefs), **You** (your needs, wishes, yearnings, feelings, beliefs) and **It** (the context within which we are relating). Participants discover ways to honor all three components. Both empowering and disempowering communications/behaviors are explored using **body sculptures** that intensify and make overt and concrete the internal experience of these behaviors. Following are examples of empowering and disempowering communications/behaviors.

Saying it straight is the honoring of all three components of an interaction and the congruence among what I say, how I say it, what I feel and what I think. I take ownership and responsibility for my feelings, thoughts and behaviors. When I say it straight, I can please someone without placating, apologize for something I have done rather than for my existence, give feedback, correct someone without blaming and give information without sounding like a computer. I can state my decisions without excuses and without putting others down. I can call a

“time out” without being inappropriate. I value my self and my needs and wishes (**I**), I value you, your needs and wishes (**You**) and I value the context of our interaction (**It**). When I am worried about someone I care about, I can express my caring, concern, support for the person (not necessarily for their behavior), my hope and commitment for change and a positive outcome.

### Examples of Disempowering Communications/Behaviors

- **Placating or People Pleasing** is characterized by valuing others (their needs, experiences, thoughts, feelings, etc.) over ourselves. Sometimes we say “yes,” even when our deepest yearning is to say, “no,” and “no” is in our best interest. When we placate, we discount ourselves (**I**), we count only others (**You**) and their wishes (**It**). This communication/behavior carries the seeds of **our ability to promote harmony, to compromise, to apologize**. The challenge is to allow these positive possibilities to emerge by also valuing ourselves, our needs and wishes.
- **Blaming or Bullying** is characterized by valuing ourselves (our needs, experiences, thoughts, feelings, etc.) at the expense of others. When we blame or bully, we count ourselves (**I**), we discount and demean others (**You**) and we count only our needs and wishes (**It**). This communication/behavior carries the seeds of **our ability to make decisions, to get things done, to lead**. The challenge is to allow these positive possibilities to emerge by also valuing others and their needs.
- **Being passive-aggressive or two-faced** is characterized by an external show of agreement that masks resentment, hostility and self-pity. Passive-aggressive communication is a combination of placating and blaming. The hidden resentment is usually expressed in some non-verbal way (i.e., voice tone, facial expression, or body language). Since the hostility is not overtly stated, we can always claim that our intentions were misunderstood. When we are passive-aggressive, we alternately discount ourselves (**I**) and others (**You**), our needs and wishes and their needs and wishes (**It**). We strike out at others when we think it safe to do so. The resentment that accompanies this communication/behavior can act as a reminder to us that we are trying to manipulate someone, rather than ask for what we need in a straightforward way. This communication/behavior carries the seed of **the first step to stand up for ourselves and put voice to our deepest yearnings**. The challenge is to assume responsibility for our behavior, let go of inappropriate control, and value our self, others and the issues rather than remaining stuck in grudges and resentments.
- **Being super-reasonable or playing smart** is characterized by an intense focus exclusively on facts and giving lectures without any consideration of feelings. This communication process is impersonal, and relies on statistics, logic, and outside authority. When we are super-reasonable, we disregard our feelings (the feeling part of the **I**) and the feelings of others (the feeling part of the **You**). We ignore that feelings play a part in what is happening (the feeling aspects of the **It**). This communication/behavior carries the seed that enables us to **solve problems by logical analysis and function efficiently under stress**. It helps us to be good lecturers. The challenge is to allow ourselves and others to feel and be vulnerable, without being defined by our feelings.
- **Being irrelevant, disruptive or spacing out** is characterized by a lack of focus, by disruption, frequent change of topic, humor at inappropriate moments or “spacing out.” When we are irrelevant, we would rather appear stupid, foolish or clumsy than take the risk of engaging meaningfully in a stressful interaction. When we are irrelevant, we discount ourselves (**I**), others (**You**) as well as the context of the interaction (**It**). This communication/behavior carries the seeds of **our sense of humor, our sense of spontaneity, our ability to examine a problem from a completely new perspective and to take “time out” to play and rest**. The challenge is to allow these seeds to flourish, to be light hearted, to take time out and still be able to return to the task at hand.

- The training is designed to facilitate experiencing, learning and practicing in the group, then implementing the learnings in real life situations. Maximizing the assimilation and implementation of behaviors that empower oneself and others is facilitated by specific exercises described below as well as by bringing the situations back into the group, playing them out, discovering the effect of one's behavior on oneself, and the effect on others by getting feedback from the group.

**Movies, sculptures and specific verbal and non-verbal exercises lead participants to:**

- 1. Explore sameness, diversity and uniqueness.** Rooting diversity in our common humanity and uniqueness in diversity and sameness, promotes harmony, community and teamwork. **It opens the door to strong joint solutions.**
- 2. Explore sameness with people we are in conflict with.** Promotes an understanding that opens the door to strong joint solutions. It leads to empathy and compassion when we most need it to find a peaceful solution to conflict. Peace within, peace between, peace among.
- 3. Connect to their inner resources and their deepest yearnings.** This is accomplished by means of sculpting the body into postures that make concrete and overt the internal experience of the different communication processes/behaviors (people pleasing, blaming, bullying, being passive-aggressive, lecturing and ignoring feelings, being irrelevant, spacing out, saying it straight). The kinesthetic feedback helps people connect to their deepest yearnings, the fears that lead them to betray these yearnings and the resources they have to honor themselves and others.
- 4. Discover the seeds of strength in disempowering communications.** This is done within the sculptures and accompanying guided visualizations. Discovering the "nuggets of gold", even in disempowering behaviors, helps participants honor and integrate all that they are, transform what needs changing and let go what is no longer needed. For example, by counting ourselves in addition to counting others we transform placating into the ability to negotiate and compromise; by counting others in addition to counting ourselves we transform bullying or blaming into the ability of personal and social responsibility. Indeed, transforming all the disempowering behaviors into empowering behaviors, leads to positive leadership.
- 5. Discover their deepest yearnings that remain hidden while they shift from one disempowering process to another.** This is accomplished having small groups of participants engage in all the disempowering communications at the same time and letting them discover what is happening on the inside as they are confronted with all the disempowering behaviors from others.
- 6. Discover the rules usually learned in childhood** that lead to ineffective, disempowering communications (knee jerk reactions) and transform them into guidelines for healthy living. This is accomplished by recognizing the rigid rules that operate in our lives (especially under stress) and discover through the process of "rule transformation" the resources we have within ourselves that help us transform them into effective guidelines. This also provides the opportunity to experience the meaning of responsibility, namely, who is able to respond, not who is to be blamed.
- 7. Discover the strengths in their roots.** A multi-generational sculpture and guided visualization lets people experience the strength in their roots. The more difficult our ancestors lives were, the more strength they had to have for us to be here today. This helps people move from shame and blame to personal and social responsibility and appreciations.
- 8. Explore the pull of conflicting needs or wishes.** Discover the resources within to resolve the conflict and set priorities.

**9. Move from relationships of submission-dominance to relationships of equal value (not necessarily equal function)** to bring harmony to the internal environment, create conversations of discovery by empowering ourselves and others to be good listeners and good communicators, minimize conflicts in relationships and maximize the possibilities of positive outcomes.

**10. Practice effective, empowering communications/behaviors in difficult situations that explore personal and social responsibility, and develop empathy, conflict management skills, positive leadership abilities and high self-esteem.** This is accomplished within the context of **movies** in which participants alternate playing all the parts and give each other feedback on the effect they have on each other and what happens to them as they take care of themselves in disempowering and empowering ways.

**11. Discover their resources that already are part of them.** This is accomplished with the necklace of resources and the dance of inclusion that help them develop positive relationships based on trust, trustworthiness, empathy and the courage to be real.

**The number and length of SIS training sessions** depends on group size, age and setting (such as school, community, treatment, prison, etc.). In the classroom, basic SIS can be accomplished in eight to ten class sessions. With young students, some of the training components can be implemented in follow-up training in subsequent years or more sessions can be added during the year. In any group, the trainer has to be sensitive to the existing issues in the group. For instance, one teacher did the exercise on rooting diversity in our sameness several times because of multi-racial composition of her classroom that led to racial issues. With adults or families, the training can be done in a weekend retreat format. The trainer manual addresses these issues and gives specific instructions on how to conduct the training with different age groups and in different settings. In an adult treatment setting, the training has been done in 16 to 25 hours, because of differences in group size.

**Fidelity of Implementation** is insured in several ways.

1. The Training of Trainers Workshop has practice sessions in which participants practice how they will deliver the training and are supervised as they do that.
2. Each participant receives a step-by-step Trainer Manual and sample workbooks used with the population(s) they will be training. They learn how to use both of these resources during the workshop.
3. The workbooks/journals provide a cognitive component to the experiential training and also assist the trainer to cover all the necessary material that is part of Say It Straight Training.
4. Objective questionnaires are administered before and after Say It Straight Training to assess the effectiveness of a Trainer's training using statistical analysis. The trainers review the questionnaires during the training workshop and receive a written protocol on how to administer the questionnaires.
5. A subjective questionnaire is administered after the training to give participants the opportunity to state in their own words what they learned, what was most important, least important, etc.
6. Trainers can videotape their training and send the videotapes to the Say It Straight Foundation to receive feedback on their work.
7. Someone at the Say It Straight Foundation is always available to answer questions a trainer may have as they are beginning to implement the training.

Usually following the curriculum addresses and resolves the issues in a group as they arise, the trainer needs to be sensitive to the needs in the group that may require additional time for a specific activity.