

Learning To Move Forward

A Social-Emotional Curriculum for
Reflection, Responsibility and Repair

Accountability
Teacher's Guide

Welcome to *Learning to Move Forward - Accountability, A Social-Emotional Curriculum for Reflection, Responsibility and Repair* — a curriculum built not just for teaching, but for healing. This resource is designed for young people who are learning what it means to take responsibility, rebuild trust, and understand the impact of their actions — often for the first time in a safe, supported space.

We know that many of the students we work with carry more than behavior challenges — they carry trauma, isolation, shame, and frustration. This curriculum meets them where they are and gives them the language, space, and structure to *move forward* — not perfectly, but with reflection, self-awareness, and practice.

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Charles Mathison, Ed.S., is a special educator and behavior intervention specialist who has spent over 25 years working with young people facing emotional and behavioral challenges. His experience spans clinical schools, residential treatment facilities, and specialized public school programs for students with emotional disabilities.

Throughout his career, Charles has focused on helping students move beyond punitive models and instead discover how reflection, language, and structure can lead to real emotional growth. *Learning to Move Forward* is the result of years of experimentation, student feedback, and research into what actually works — not just in theory, but in the day-to-day reality of working with kids who are often misunderstood or written off.

This curriculum reflects his belief that every young person deserves tools to understand themselves, take ownership of their choices, and build the kind of life they can be proud of.

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What This Curriculum Offers

Each module is focused on a core concept like accountability, restoring trust, cause and effect, and the impact of actions. These are not just behavioral concepts — they are life skills, taught through:






- Short stories with relatable characters and real situations
- Reflection prompts that connect behavior to thinking and feeling
- Journaling opportunities that allow students to explore growth privately or with support
- Group-friendly and one-on-one structures for maximum flexibility

Philosophy

This curriculum is designed around the belief that:

- Accountability is not about punishment — it's about understanding, owning, and repairing.
- Behavior is communication — and reflection builds self-regulation.
- Students need multiple ways to access and express their learning, including writing, drawing, speaking, and listening.
- Emotional growth is academic growth. When students gain tools to manage themselves, they are more available for learning and connection.

For Use In:

-  Inclusive classrooms (as part of SEL block or behavior intervention)
-  Small group counseling and restorative circles
-  One-on-one therapy or mentoring
-  Morning check-ins and journal routines
-  Suspension return meetings or accountability conferences

How to Use This Curriculum

This curriculum is designed for use in:

- ✨ Morning check-ins
- 📖 Journal writing
- 🧠 Social-emotional literacy lessons
- 👥 Small group counseling or restorative circles
- 👤 One-on-one therapy or mentoring
- 📚 Behavior intervention classes
- 👩🏫 Inclusive classrooms and special education settings

Academic Instruction Benefits

Supports Common Core, SEL Benchmarks, and Trauma-Informed Teaching

Area	How the Curriculum Helps
Reading Comprehension	Students practice identifying main ideas, summarizing, and retelling through guided story discussions.
Text Evidence	Students cite specific actions, choices, and consequences from the stories to support their answers.
Character Analysis	Students explore internal motivations, decision-making, and emotional development of the story characters.
Perspective-Taking	Promotes empathy and critical thinking by asking students how they would feel or act in the same situation.
Written Expression	Students write journal entries, letters, reflections, and goal-setting responses tied to story themes.
Oral Language & Discussion	Provides structured opportunities for students to practice speaking clearly and respectfully in group settings.
Vocabulary Development	Introduces behavioral and emotional language (e.g., "accountability," "trigger," "response") in meaningful contexts.
Cross-Curricular Integration	Supports ELA, health, and character education through real-world connections.

Critical Thinking

Encourages problem-solving, cause-and-effect reasoning, and moral reasoning through open-ended prompts.

Social-Emotional, Behavioral, and Therapeutic Benefits

Aligned with CASEL SEL Framework + Trauma-Informed & Restorative Practices

Area	How the Curriculum Helps
Self-Awareness	Students reflect on their own actions, feelings, and triggers through relatable stories and structured journaling.
Self-Management	Builds coping strategies, goal-setting skills, and routines through challenges and accountability trackers.
Social Awareness	Encourages empathy by exploring how others feel in the story, especially after harm or conflict.
Relationship Skills	Promotes respectful communication, repair of harm, and healthy conflict resolution.
Responsible Decision-Making	Reinforces that actions have consequences and helps students analyze better choices.
Behavior Modification	Provides a structured, repeatable framework for recognizing, reflecting on, and changing negative behavior patterns.
Restorative Practices	Offers a framework for making amends and rebuilding trust (e.g., apologies, reflections, and restitution).
Trauma-Informed Care	Gives students a safe outlet to explore difficult feelings without shame or punishment.

**Counseling
Support**

Can be used by therapists, social workers, and behavior specialists as part of treatment plans or goal tracking.

**Goal-Oriented
Behavior**






Uses progress trackers, reward systems, and “next step” reflections to support measurable growth.

Inclusion & Engagement Tips for Maximum Student Participation

Support every learner — emotionally, academically, and behaviorally.

This curriculum is designed to be flexible. Students may have different literacy levels, emotional capacities, communication styles, and behavioral challenges. The following tips help ensure that all students can participate meaningfully, whether one-on-one or in group settings.

If a student is unable or unwilling to write...

-  Offer drawing instead of writing: Let students sketch their response, such as a facial expression, a symbol, or a "comic version" of the story.
-  Use sentence starters: Provide prompts like “I felt ____ when ____” or “One way I can take responsibility is ____.”
-  Use stickers or stamps: Allow students to “vote” for how they felt or what they noticed using visual icons.
-  Scribe for them: An adult or peer can write what the student says aloud if fine motor or expressive language is a challenge.
-  Use audio journaling: Let students record their answers using a phone, tablet, or school-provided device.

If a student benefits from technology...

- ☒ Use text-to-speech readers: Copy/paste the story or journal prompt into a text-to-speech tool like Natural Reader, Google Read&Write, or built-in iOS accessibility settings.
 - ☒ Voice typing: Use voice-to-text features in Google Docs or apps like Otter.ai to let students “speak” their journal.
 - ☒ Digital versions: Offer the story and questions in Google Slides or a fillable PDF to support students with visual processing challenges.
-






If a student prefers to work alone...

- ☒ Give a choice board: Let them choose whether they want to write, draw, voice record, or use multiple choice for that day’s response.
 - ☒ Create a private reflection folder: Some students might feel safer reflecting when they know no one else will see their answers.
 - ☒ Pre-record the story: For students who find reading aloud or group participation overwhelming, offer an audio version of the story in advance.
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If a student is highly verbal but behaviorally reactive...

- ☒ Use short timed responses: Give them 2 minutes to “vent-write” or respond freely, then a 1-minute pause before revisiting what they wrote.
- ☒ Allow talking circles or pair-shares first: Let them speak before they write to help organize their thoughts and emotions.
- ☒ Offer calming tools: Provide access to fidgets, movement breaks, or regulation tools during reflection time.

Additional Universal Design Strategies

-  Repeat directions in multiple formats (spoken, written, visual)
-  Post a visual tracker in the classroom for group progress (use initials only)
-  Model a response using your own example from the prompt to normalize vulnerability
-  Let students co-facilitate: Have students take turns leading the story discussion or choosing the next story
-  Make it multisensory: Add audio, visuals, or physical movement (e.g., stand on one side of the room if you agree with a character's choice, other side if not)

Sentence Starters for Student Writing (Accountability Focus)

These can be used with journal prompts, story reflections, or as scaffolds during behavior processing. They're especially helpful for students who struggle to initiate writing. You can change them depending on the needs of the student.

♦ **Sentence Starters:**

- I chose to...
- I didn't mean to, but I...
- I knew it was wrong when...
- I could have handled it better by...
- I made a mistake when I...
- I take responsibility for...
- I realized that my actions...
- One thing I learned from this is...
- Next time, I will try to...
- I want to make things right by...
- I can tell someone is upset when...
- I felt _____ after I did _____.
- I didn't think about how it would affect...
- If I could go back, I would...
- I want people to see that I can...



Teacher Statements That Model or Teach Accountability

These are powerful phrases that educators can say during lessons, check-ins, or behavior conversations to model accountability language and set clear expectations.

♦ **Modeling Accountability:**

- “I made a mistake when I didn’t explain that clearly. Let me try again.”
- “I misunderstood the situation, and that’s on me.”
- “Let’s slow down and figure out where things went off track — and what we can own.”
- “It’s okay to mess up — what matters is what we do next.”
- “Even when we’re upset, we’re still responsible for how we act.”

♦ **Teaching Accountability:**

- “Taking responsibility doesn’t mean you’re bad — it means you’re strong enough to fix it.”
- “Blaming others keeps us stuck. Owning our part helps us grow.”
- “You don’t have to be perfect — just honest about your choices.”
- “Accountability starts with telling the truth about what really happened.”
- “We all mess up. What matters is how we clean it up.”

"Getting Started" Prompts — A Gentle Entry into Accountability Work

Teacher/Therapist Guidance:

Before a student can take full responsibility for their actions, they first need to feel **safe enough to reflect**. For many students with emotional or behavioral challenges, especially those with a trauma history, jumping straight into personal reflection can feel threatening, overwhelming, or exposing.

That's why this first set of prompts is designed to create **emotional safety** by easing students into reflection through *imagination*, *observation*, and *storytelling* — not immediate self-disclosure.

Four Principles Behind These Prompts

1. Begin with less personal, observational, or hypothetical questions

These prompts invite students to reflect without having to talk directly about themselves. This reduces emotional risk and allows them to build confidence in sharing ideas.

2. Focus on storytelling or imagination instead of immediate self-disclosure

When students are asked what a character *might* do or how someone *could* feel, they are free to explore emotional themes at a distance. This approach builds reflection skills without pressure.

3. Ease students into reflection through characters, choices, or values





These prompts use indirect entry points — like what makes someone trustworthy, respectful, or responsible — to help students connect with the values that will later support their own accountability work.

4. Build safety before asking them to reveal emotions or mistakes

Once students are familiar with this process and see that reflection is about growth, not shame, they'll be more likely to engage with deeper prompts honestly and meaningfully.

Why This Works: Psychological Safety in Action

These warm-up prompts create safety and engagement by:

-  **Using imagination and metaphor** (e.g., “What if a cartoon character had a meltdown?”)
 -  **Letting students answer in third person or “what ifs”** instead of owning a moment right away
 -  **Building emotional vocabulary and empathy** through characters and scenarios
 -  **Creating a bridge to deeper journaling down the line**, especially in future modules
-

How to Introduce These Prompts

“You don’t have to write about yourself right now. These are just questions to help you think.”

“There’s no wrong answer here — just use your imagination or speak from what you’ve seen.”

“Later on, we’ll go deeper. But for now, you get to warm up your reflection muscles.”

Tips

- Allow drawing, storytelling, or comic strip responses for students who aren’t ready to write
- Offer sentence starters for reluctant writers: “A good leader is someone who...”
- Pair journal time with calm music, fidget options, or movement breaks to reduce pressure
- Model your own answers occasionally using fictional examples (“One movie character I think is a good role model is...”)

This section is about planting seeds. It's about helping students begin to think, feel, and imagine what accountability, growth, and emotional strength *might* look like — without demanding that they go there right away.



Getting Started Prompts

1. What makes a character in a story (book, show, or movie) seem like a “good person”? What do they do or say that shows their character?
2. Think of someone you respect. What do they do that makes you see them that way?
3. If you could make your own classroom or group rules, what’s one rule you’d include? Why would that rule matter to you?
4. If someone messes up and wants to earn back trust, what could they do to start repairing things?
5. When someone stays calm during a tough moment, what does that look like? How can you tell they’re staying in control?
6. Imagine watching a video of a group of kids helping each other. What might you see them doing or saying?
7. When someone gives you advice you don’t like, what are some ways to respond without blowing up or shutting down?
8. What are some signs that someone is angry on the outside but might be sad or hurt on the inside?
9. If a friend hurt your feelings but wanted to apologize, what would you want them to say or do?
10. What does being responsible look like when no one is watching? Can small actions show responsibility too?
11. Imagine someone feeling left out. What’s one small thing someone else could do to help them feel included?
12. Why do people sometimes make excuses instead of telling the truth? What are they trying to avoid?
13. Why might someone blame another person instead of admitting their part in a situation?
14. What are quiet ways someone can show they care about someone else — without using words?

15. Describe a leader (real or fictional) you admire. What do they do that makes others want to follow them?
16. If a cartoon character had a meltdown, what could help them calm down and fix things in the next episode?
17. What do you think it really means to “grow up” — besides just getting older?
18. How can someone fix something if they hurt someone’s feelings — even if they didn’t mean to?
19. If you had a “redo” card, what kind of situation would be a good time to use it? Why?
20. What’s something people might not know about you just by looking at you?

Owning My Actions — Prompts with Reflection Questions

Daily Prompts

Guidance: The teacher or trusted adult can modify the prompts below to fit the current needs of the student. For example, the pupil can write about past events for which the prompt is applicable. The trusted adult can cross out words on the prompt to customize it for the student. The teacher/therapist should model answering the prompts aloud to help the student feel safer about sharing.

◆ **Prompt 1:**

What's one thing I did today that I chose to do — even if someone else told me to?

Reflection Questions:

- What was the action I chose?
- How did I feel about choosing to do it?
- What happened because of that choice?
- Did it help or hurt me or someone else?
- Would I make the same choice again?

◆ **Prompt 2:**

Was there a moment today when I blamed someone else for something I did?

Reflection Questions:

- What happened in that moment?
- Why did I try to shift the blame?
- What would've happened if I had owned it?
- How did blaming someone affect them?
- What can I do differently next time?

Stories to Think About

The stories in *Learning to Move Forward* are short, relatable, and emotionally safe entry points for students who may struggle with direct confrontation, traditional behavior talks, or personal reflection.

Each story features students like Jayden, Talia, and others navigating real-life situations — peer pressure, lying, blame, taking initiative, and more. These stories offer students a chance to think, reflect, and talk about behavior without being put on the spot about their own lives (at first).

Why Use These Stories?

- They reduce defensiveness and build emotional distance
 - They allow students to practice reflection before making it personal
 - They model accountability, honesty, and growth in ways students can relate to
 - They help build language for feelings, choices, and repair
-

Tips for Using the Debrief Questions

- Start with a read-aloud or let students follow along silently. Some students prefer listening; others like seeing the text.
- Let students talk before they write. Verbal processing often helps organize thoughts.
- Use the questions flexibly — you don't need to ask all of them. Pick 2–3 that fit your students' readiness.
- Accept multiple kinds of answers — writing, drawing, discussion, or even pointing to choices
- Model a response first if students are hesitant. Use a fictional example or a time *you* learned something.

What These Questions Are For

These debrief questions help students:

- Practice thinking through consequences
 - Understand different points of view
 - Explore emotional responses
 - Build vocabulary for reflection
 - Prepare for their own behavior conversations later
-

Optional Approaches

- Let students act out a better version of the story (role-play or comic strip)
 - Invite them to write a letter to one of the characters with advice
 - Ask them which character they relate to most and why
 - Use “replay and rewrite”: “What’s one moment you’d do differently if you were in that story?”
-

Summary

These stories give students something powerful:
A way to see themselves without being called out,
A way to grow without being judged,
And a way to imagine who they could become

Story 1: "The Dare"

Theme: Peer Pressure + Accountability

Jayden sat on the edge of the picnic table behind the school, surrounded by a few boys he didn't usually hang out with. One of them, Marcus, tossed a lighter from hand to hand. "Just one time," Marcus said, holding out a cigarette. "Come on, Jay. Don't be scared. Everybody's done it." Jayden hesitated. He saw Talia walking across the field and catch his eye—she gave a small shake of her head. But he didn't want to look soft. He lit the cigarette and took a drag, coughing immediately. The boys laughed and cheered, but Jayden just felt sick.

Later that afternoon, the assistant principal called Jayden into the office. Talia had reported the incident, worried for his safety. "I messed up," Jayden admitted before anyone even asked. "I didn't even want to do it—I just didn't want to be the only one who said no." Mr. Ramos, sitting in the corner of the office, nodded. "That's a big thing to admit. You took the first step by being honest. The next step is thinking about who you really want to be when no one's watching."

Jayden was suspended for a day. He texted Talia later that night: *"You were right. I just didn't want to feel left out. I'll do better next time."* She replied, *"We all mess up. Just don't let it change who you are."*

Debrief Questions – Story 1: "The Dare" (Peer Pressure)

1. What happened in the story?
2. What made Jayden go along with the cigarette even though he didn't want to?
3. How did Jayden show accountability afterward?
4. What role did Talia play in how the situation unfolded?
5. What does Mr. Ramos mean by, "Who you really want to be when no one's watching"?
6. How can standing up to peer pressure be a form of taking accountability for your future?

Story 2: “The Missing Homework”

Theme: Lying + Accountability

Jayden slumped in his seat as Ms. Larkin walked by collecting homework. He had forgotten to finish the assignment—again. His mind raced. “Maybe I can say I left it at home,” he muttered to himself. When she reached his desk, Jayden looked up. “I actually did the homework, but I left it on the kitchen table,” he said confidently.

Ms. Larkin nodded slowly but didn’t look convinced. “Okay,” she said, moving on. Later that afternoon, Mr. Ramos called Jayden to his office. “Ms. Larkin called me,” he said. “She doesn’t think you did the homework at all.” Jayden looked down. “I didn’t,” he admitted. “I just didn’t want her to be disappointed again.” Mr. Ramos leaned in. “Sometimes, telling the truth feels harder than lying. But honesty is how we earn trust—and keep it.”

The next day, Jayden stayed after school to redo the assignment. He handed it to Ms. Larkin himself. “I didn’t tell the truth yesterday,” he said. “But I’m owning it. Here’s the homework—this time, for real.” She took it and smiled. “Thanks for being honest.”

Debrief Questions – Story 2: “The Missing Homework” (Lying)

1. What happened in the story?
2. Why did Jayden lie to Ms. Larkin?
3. What did Mr. Ramos help Jayden realize about trust and honesty?
4. What does it mean that Jayden turned in the homework the next day and admitted the lie?
5. Have you ever lied to avoid disappointment? What happened?
6. How does accountability play a role in fixing a situation after a lie?

Short Scenario Rewrite Exercises

Guidance for Teachers, Therapists, and Support Staff

Using the Short Scenario Rewrite Exercises

The *Short Scenario Rewrite Exercises* are a flexible, trauma-informed tool to help students move beyond impulsive or defensive behavior and begin **rethinking their choices** through story, reflection, and imagination.

These exercises support emotional growth by allowing students to:

- Revisit familiar situations in a safe, non-punitive way
 - Imagine new outcomes without fear of judgment
 - Practice taking ownership and exploring cause and effect
 - Develop empathy, communication, and problem-solving skills
-

How to Use These Exercises

You can use these activities:

- **After a behavior incident** as part of a reflection or restorative process
- **In group settings** where students discuss common challenges together
- **In counseling sessions** for deeper emotional processing
- **As a writing activity** during SEL, advisory, or life skills classes

They are also ideal for students who:

- Struggle to talk directly about their own actions
- Benefit from working with fictional but relatable situations
- Need structure to process emotions and consequences

Tips for Implementation

- **Let students read the original story first** if they haven't already. This builds connection with the characters and gives them context.
 - **Use sentence starters or model a sample answer** if the student is unsure how to begin.
 - **Emphasize that this is not about “fixing” the story**, but imagining how things could go differently. It's a rehearsal for growth.
 - **Encourage multiple formats:** writing, drawing, speaking aloud, or role-play.
 - **Validate effort, not perfection.** If a student struggles to rewrite the story in a “better” way, focus on what they noticed and what they would try next time.
 - **Revisit the rewritten story later** and ask: “Do you still agree with how you rewrote this?” This supports accountability as an ongoing process.
-

Sample Discussion Prompts to Pair With the Rewrites

- “What would be the hardest part about making that choice in real life?”
 - “What might change if someone responded the way you rewrote it?”
 - “Have you ever done something similar to the new version? How did it go?”
 - “What’s one sentence you could use in real life when you’re in a situation like this?”
-

Optional Modifications

- Use visuals or comic-strip templates for students who prefer drawing
- Allow audio recordings for students with writing barriers
- Let students act out the “rewrite” in a calm, private setting
- For higher-level students, ask them to rewrite the scenario from a *different character’s point of view* (e.g., the teacher, peer, or bystander)

Story 1: *The Dare* (Peer Pressure)

What happened: Jayden gave in to peer pressure and smoked a cigarette even though he didn't want to.

Rewrite Prompt:

Rewrite this story so Jayden makes a different choice — one that stays true to what he wanted, even under pressure. How could he have said no and still kept his self-respect?

Sample Response:

Jayden looked at the cigarette, shook his head, and said, "Nah, I'm not into that." One of the boys laughed, but Jayden added, "You do you, but I'm not messing up my lungs." Talia walked by and gave him a quick thumbs up. Jayden felt proud, even though he was nervous at first.

Story 2: *The Missing Homework* (Lying)

What happened: Jayden lied about doing his homework to avoid disappointing Ms. Larkin.

Rewrite Prompt:

Rewrite the moment when Ms. Larkin asked for Jayden's homework. What could he have said that was honest, even if it felt uncomfortable?

Sample Response:

When Ms. Larkin got to his desk, Jayden said, "I didn't do it. I forgot, but I'm not going to lie. I'll try to get it to you by the end of the day." She nodded and thanked him for being honest.

Story 3: *The Broken Trust* (Apologizing)

What happened: Jayden forgot to do his part of a group project and blamed Talia.

Rewrite Prompt:

Rewrite the moment Jayden showed up without the video. What could he have said or done to take responsibility and repair the situation sooner?

Sample Response:

Jayden walked into class and saw Talia's face. "I didn't finish the editing," he said. "I know we're presenting today, and I let you down. I'll take the blame when we present — it's not on you." Talia was still frustrated, but she nodded and said, "Thanks for owning it."