

# **What is You Can Do It! Education? Mission, Theory, Practice and Programs**

## **Mission of You Can Do It! Education**

You Can Do It! Education's (YCDI's) main purpose is to support communities, schools, and homes in a collective effort to optimise the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of all young people. Its' unique contribution is in identifying the social and emotional capabilities that all young people need to acquire in order to be successful in school, experience wellbeing, and have positive relationships including making contributions to others and the community (good citizenship).

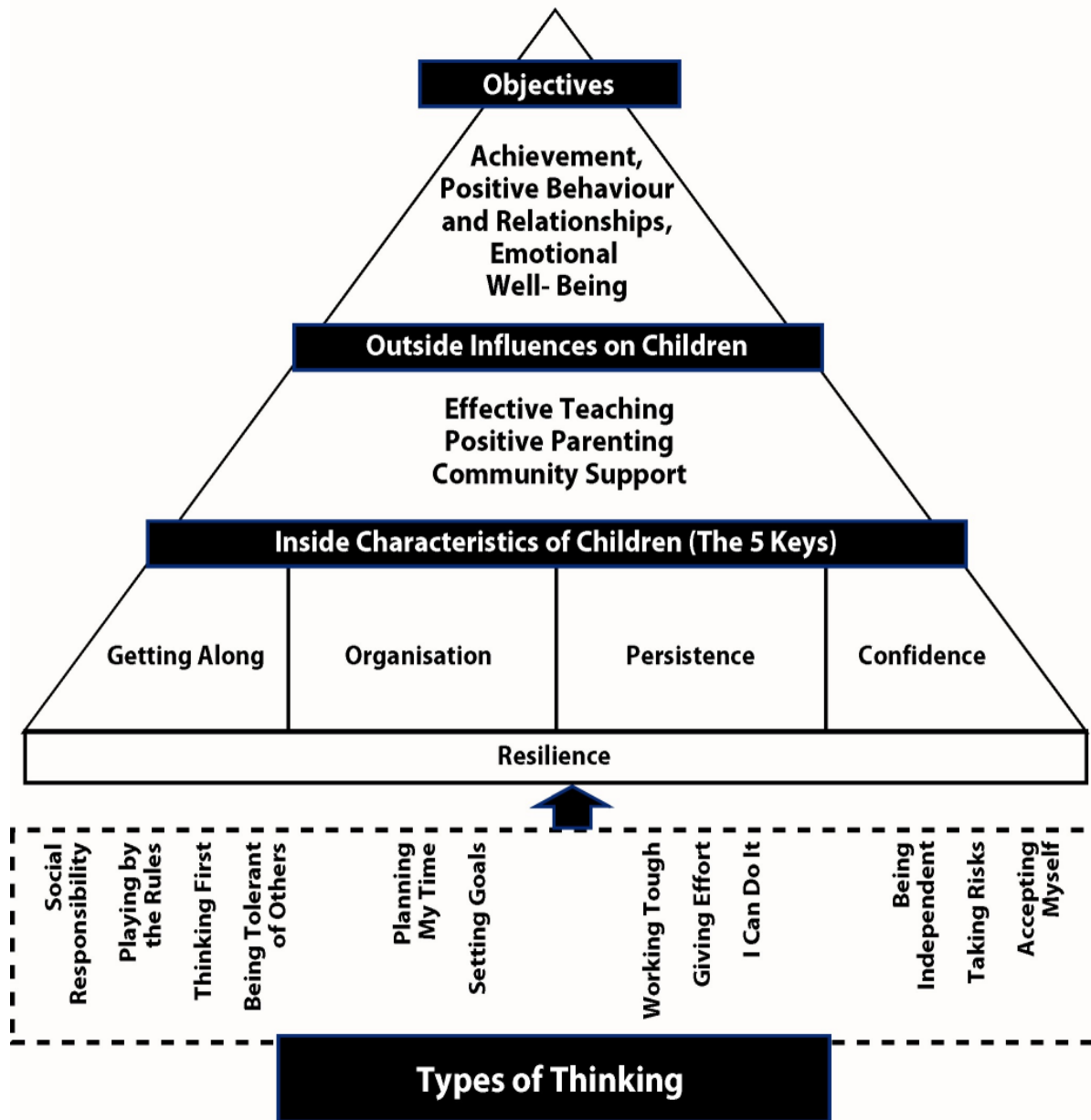
YCDI's mission is realised through the following beliefs and actions:

- YCDI's focus is on building social, emotional, and motivational capacity of young people rather than on their problems and deficits. It encourages prevention, promotion, and intervention efforts (school, home and community) in order to build the social and emotional strengths of young people.
- As a strength-building approach, YCDI also seeks to build the capabilities of adults (community, school, home) associated with positive outcomes in young people, including positive, caring relationships with young people, providing for their safety, high expectations for achievement and behavior, involving young people in decision-making and providing them with special responsibility, accommodating young people's interests, communicating and modeling of social and emotional capabilities including values and resilience, and a high quality academic program that provides young people with multiple opportunities for success.
- YCDI sees the development of social and emotional capacity of "at risk" and disadvantaged youth as a means to "level the playing field." However, it is clear that in order to change the developmental trajectory of young people with poor mental health (emotional, social and behavioral challenges) and learning outcomes and to accelerate their social and emotional development, it is vital that schools, homes and communities be transformed so that the responsibility for supporting and educating, including quality social and emotional learning experiences and caring relationships, is shared throughout the community.

## **Theory of You Can Do It! Education**

### Social and Emotional Learning for All Students: Prevention and Promotion of Success and Social-Emotional Well-Being

You Can Do It! Education (YCDI) has over the past two decades (e.g., Bernard, 1997a, 1997b, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Bernard & Cronan, 1999; Bernard, Ellis, & Terjesen, 2006; Bernard & Hajzler, 1987; Bernard & Joyce, 1984) evolved into a distinctive theory that defines and explains the social and emotional competences children and adolescents need to achieve to the best of their ability and experience social-emotional well-being (positive emotions and behavior; absence of significant emotional and behavior difficulties). Figure 1 below illustrates the main focus of YCDI's educational programs; namely the social and emotional characteristics of students (The Five Foundations) and supporting Habits of the Mind (Ways of Thinking) that all young people need to achieve the objectives which appear at the top of the triangle (see Table 1 following References).



**Figure 1. Goals of You Can Do It! Education for All Students**

The triangle illustrates that while the world (home, school and community) in which young people grow up in plays an important role in their supporting success and well-being, unless young people have the following social and emotional strengths, their achievement and adjustment will not be fully realized: Confidence, Persistence, Organisation, Getting Along and Resilience.

Below the triangle is a rectangle containing 12 positive Habits of the Mind (Ways of Thinking) that nourish and support the 5 Foundations. In YCDI, the patterns of thinking that enable young people to manage their own learning, emotions and behavior represented by the 5 Foundations are made explicit. Extensive theory and research of Albert Ellis, Martin Seligman and other cognitive-behavioural scientists reveals that what fundamentally determines how children achieve and adjust is the “mind-set” they bring with them to life’s experiences. Some bring with them a positive mind-set consisting of well-developed positive Habits of the Mind and associated patterns of positive thinking, feeling and behaving referred to as the “5 Foundations.”

Many of the Habits of the Mind are re-namings of Albert Ellis’ rational beliefs (e.g., Ellis & Bernard, 2006) in more child-friendly language. Other positive Habits of the Mind derive from other cognitive-behavioural

theories including cognitive therapy (e.g., Beck, 1993), attributional theory (e.g., Dweck & Elliott, 1983), learned optimism (e.g., Seligman, 1975, 1991), self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 1991), goal setting (e.g., Schunk, 1996), internal motivation (e.g., Spaulding, 1992), academic procrastination (e.g., Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). and interpersonal cognitive problem solving (e.g. Spivack & Shure, 1974; Spivack, Platt & Shure, 1976).

The range of YCDI programs are designed to help strengthen the five social-emotional strengths of all students.

Students with Behavioral, Emotional and Achievement Difficulties: Eliminating the Social-Emotional “Blockers”

Unique to YCDI theory is the identification of not only five social and emotional strengths that contribute to positive student outcomes, but also of the following five social and emotional difficulties (“the 5 Blockers”) that contribute to extreme under-achievement, behavior problems and low levels of social and emotional well-being: Feeling Down (depressed), Feeling Anxious, Procrastination (feeling lazy), Not Paying Attention-Disturbing Others and Feeling Angry-Behaving Poorly.

The definitions and descriptions of the 5 Blockers include reference to different negative Habits of the Mind (“blocker thinking”) that contribute to the five negative patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving referred to as the 5 Blockers (see Table 2 following References.).

YCDI theory takes cognizance of the view of Albert Ellis that all human being have a propensity for both rational and irrational ways of thinking (Habits of the Mind) and that in order to help young people achieve positive outcomes and avoid negative outcomes parents and teachers need to help restructure negative, irrational patterns of thinking into more positive, rational ways of thinking.

The relationship of the 5 Blockers to negative outcomes of young people is represented in the Barrier Model (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The 5 Blockers Leading to Negative Student Outcomes: The Barrier Model

The goal of You Can Do It! Education is to provide teachers and parents with things they can say and do including use of activities from Program Achieve (see lesson 4 in *Ready, Set, You Can Do It!*) to weaken the 5 Blockers. Activities from Program Achieve introduce students of all ages to not only the five keys to their success and well-being but also to the five blockers.

## **You Can Do It! Education Practices and Programs**

Over the past decade, Michael Bernard and his colleagues have developed a four-level approach to providing all young people with the social-emotional capabilities needed for success and well-being and for helping to reduce the social-emotional difficulties associated with negative outcomes in children and adolescents.

### **I. YCDI Student Social-Emotional Learning Curricula Programs**

Over the years a variety of curriculum programs (lessons with activities) designed to be taught to classroom groups of students by teachers, counselors, psychologists and other educators have been written, evaluated and revised that focus on developing students' Positive Mindset (the 5 Foundations) and eliminating students' Negative Mindset (the 5 Blockers). Chief amongst these are:

*The You Can Do It! Education Early Childhood Curriculum* (ages 4 – 7)

*Program Achieve: A Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum* (6 vols. grades 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, 11-12)

### **II. YCDI Classroom and School-Wide Methods**

#### a. You Can Do It! Education Classrooms (good teaching practices)

A variety of practices have been developed for teachers in order to infuse and integrate the 5 social-emotional Foundations into their daily teaching including: the “resilient classroom”, use of behaviour-specific feedback, explicit communication/visual display of 5 Foundations and 12 Habits of the Mind, regular formal assessment of student progress in demonstrating 5 Foundations, instruction in how the 5 Foundations can aid students in achieving academic targets, and weekly goal setting that targets increases in one or more of the 5 Foundations. For more information, refer to:

*Providing All Children with the Foundations for Success, Well-Being and Positive Relationships*  
*The YCDI Images CD Resource Program* (over 100 colorful illustrations for display)

#### b. Developing a School-Wide Culture of Achievement and Emotional Well-Being

Some of the different components of full-scale implementation of the YCDI system include:

1. YCDI parent education (e.g., classes, school-home communication, parent-teacher-student conferences surrounding 5 Foundations)
2. YCDI images presented/displayed throughout school grounds (e.g., illustrations, signs, artwork that communicate explicitly and implicitly 5 Foundations and 12 Habits of the Mind)
3. Professional learning/staff development opportunities for learning about YCDI
4. Regular assessment of students' social-emotional capabilities)
5. Incorporation of social-emotional competence as part of behavior management planning
6. Early identification and intervention for students identified as delayed in social-emotional learning

### **III. YCDI Parent Education**

YCDI views school-home collaboration as a key for promoting student achievement and social-emotional-behavioral well-being. A variety of parent education programs (e.g., "Investing in Parents") have been developed based on what the research indicates as the actions that parents can take at home that support their children's achievement in school. The material in these programs form the basis of parent information sessions including back-to-school nights, parent education classes and school-home notes. Two of the most well-received YCDI parent talks are:

*The Seven Capabilities of Highly Effective Parents  
The Keys to Children's Success and Well-Being*

#### **IV. YCDI Programs for Students with Behavioural, Social, Emotional and Learning Difficulties**

For students identified with social-emotional and learning difficulties, YCDI has developed programs that focus on strengthening one or more of their social-emotional competences. Ideally, identified students would spend time in 1:1 or small group counseling/mentoring where they would receive in addition to relationship support, direct instruction/coaching in the use of their social-emotional competencies in different areas of their lives. Additionally, their teacher(s) and parents would receive support from school personnel and things they can do to strengthen the young person's social-emotional competence. For more detailed information, refer to:

*The You Can Do It! Education Mentoring Program  
Strengthening the Social and Emotional Capabilities of Young People with Achievement and  
Behaviour Problems: A Guide for Working with Teachers and Parents*

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## **Table 1. The Five Core Social and Emotional Capabilities (“5 Foundations”) Supporting Positive Social-Emotional and Achievement Outcomes**

**Confidence** means knowing that you will likely be successful and that people will like you. It means not being afraid to make mistakes or to try something new. It means looking and sounding confident. Examples of confident behaviour are raising your hand in class to answer a hard question, doing hard work without asking for help, sharing a new idea with a teacher or the class, starting a conversation with a new classmate and standing up straight and speaking with a firm voice.

### **Positive Habits of the Mind that help develop a young person’s Confidence include:**

- **I Can Do It** - thinking that I’m more likely to be successful than I am to fail.
- **Accepting Myself** - not thinking badly about myself when I make a mistake.
- **Taking Risks** - thinking that it’s good to try something new even though I might not be able to do it.
- **Being Independent** - thinking that it’s important to try new activities and to speak up even if my classmates think I’m silly or stupid.

**Persistence** means trying hard to do your best and not giving up when something feels like it’s too difficult or boring. Examples of persistent behaviour are continuing to try even when school work is hard, not being distracted by others and checking work when it’s finished to make sure it’s correct.

### **Positive Habits of the Mind that help develop a young person’s Persistence include:**

- **I Can Do It** - thinking that I’m more likely to be successful than I am to fail.
- **Giving Effort** - thinking that the harder I try, the more successful I will be, and knowing that success is not caused by external factors (luck, ease of task), but by internal factors (effort).
- **Working Tough** - thinking that in order to be successful in the future, I sometimes have to do things that are not easy or fun in the present.

**Organisation** means setting a goal to do your best in your school work, listening carefully to your teacher’s instructions, planning your time so that you are not rushed, having all your supplies ready and keeping track of your assignments’ due dates. Examples of organised behaviour include making sure you understand the teacher’s instructions before you begin work, having all your school supplies ready at a neat desk, recording your assignments and their due dates, and planning when you’re going to do your homework so that you have enough time.

### **Positive Habits of the Mind that help develop a young person’s Organization include:**

- **Setting Goals** - thinking that setting a goal can help me to be more successful at a task.
- **Planning My Time** - thinking about how long it will take me to do my schoolwork and planning enough time to get it done.

**Getting Along** means working well with teachers and classmates, resolving disagreements peacefully, following the rules of the classroom and making positive contributions to school, home and the community including protecting the rights of others and looking after the environment. Examples of getting along behaviour are being helpful when working in a group, listening and not interrupting when someone else is speaking, talking rather than fighting when someone acts unfairly, not breaking classroom rules, helping others in need, volunteering for a worthy causes and cleaning up the environment.

### **Positive Habits of the Mind that help develop Getting Along behaviour in a young person include:**

- **Being Tolerant of Others** - accepting that everyone acts unfairly towards others some of the time, and not making overall judgments of people’s character (“good person,” “bad person”) based on their differences or behavior.
- **Thinking First** - thinking that when someone treats me badly I need to think about different ways I can react, the consequences of each, and the impact of my actions on the other person’s feelings.
- **Playing by the Rules** - thinking that by following important school and home rules, I will live in a better world where everyone’s rights are protected.
- **Social Responsibility** - thinking that it’s important to be caring, to try hard to do my best, to be fair to others, to make sure that everyone has the freedom to say what they think and feel without fear, to be honest and tell the truth, to have integrity by making sure that I do what I say I am going to do, to respect others and have nice manners, to act responsibly by making good choices, sorting out problems without fighting, caring about nature and other living things, and to be understanding and including others who are different.

**Resilience** means knowing how to stay calm and being able to stop yourself from getting extremely angry, down, or worried when something “bad” happens. It means being able to calm down and feel better when you get very upset. It also means being able to control your behavior when you are very upset so that you bounce back from difficulty and return to work or play.

**Examples of Resilience:**

- when someone treats you unfairly, inconsiderately, or disrespectfully, you can stop yourself from getting too angry and lashing out
- when you make mistakes, do not understand something, get a bad school report, or are teased or ignored, you can stop yourself from getting very down and withdrawing
- when you have an important test or activity to perform, you can stop yourself from getting extremely worried
- when you want to meet someone new, you can stop yourself from getting extremely worried
- when someone is putting pressure on you to do the wrong thing, you can stop yourself from getting extremely worried about what that person will think if you stand up and say “no”

**Resilience Skills to Strengthen Resilience**

- Finding something fun to do
- Finding someone to talk to
- Relaxation
- Exercise
- Being assertive
- Changing negative to positive self-talk
- Not blowing things out of proportion
- Figuring out how to solve the problem

**Rational Ways to Think to Increase Resilience**

- **“It’s Not as Bad as You Think It Is”** thinking – for example, “It’s not the worst thing that could happen to me.”
- **“I Can Stand It”** thinking – for example, “I don’t like it, but I can stand it.”
- **“Accepting Myself”** thinking – for example, “When I make mistakes or people don’t want to be around me, I know that I am not a loser. I am still me, capable and likeable.”
- **“Taking Risks”** thinking – for example, “It’s OK to make mistakes when learning new things.”
- **“Being Independent”** thinking – for example, “I don’t care that much what people think of me. It’s important to do what I want and to be me.”
- **“I Can Do It”** thinking – for example, “I’m more likely to be successful than to fail.”
- **“Being Tolerant of Others”** thinking – for example, “When people do the wrong thing or when they are different from me in custom or appearance, I do not condemn them as being bad or inferior.”
- **“Working Tough”** thinking – for example, “To achieve success, everyone has to do things they do not feel like doing.”

## **Table 2. The Five Core Social and Emotional Difficulties (“5 Blockers”) Leading to Low Levels of Social-Emotional Well-Being including Under-Achievement Outcomes**

**Feeling Very Down** means that when something negative happens to you – such as when someone is mean to you, you have a break-up with a friend, you have not achieved a good result in your school work, sport or other extra curricula area, and you feel very unhappy – you can, at these times, feel lonely. You might feel hopeless and inadequate believing that everything is bad and will always stay that way. Sometimes, if you feel very down for a long time, you can lose your motivation to work, lose your appetite, and find it hard to get out of bed.

### **Negative Habits of the Mind that Lead to Feeling Very Down include:**

- **Self-Downing** – thinking that I am a total failure or useless when I have been rejected or have not achieved a good result.
- **Needing to be Perfect** – thinking that I have to be successful in everything important I do and that it’s horrible when I’m not.
- **Needing Approval** – thinking that I need people (parents, teachers, peers) to approve of what I do and that, when they don’t, it’s the worst thing in the world.
- **I Can’t Do It** – when I have not been successful at something, thinking I am not good at anything and never will be; thinking that when someone I like or respect seems not to like me, there is nothing I can do to make things better.
- **Giving Up** – thinking that I have no control over what happens to me (good or bad) and that there is little point in trying anything because I’ll never be successful.

**Feeling Very Worried** means that you worry a lot about whether other people like you and what your friends and others think about you. You can also feel anxious about your school work or other achievements and you can spend a lot of time worrying about mistakes or having to do things perfectly.

### **Negative Habits of the Mind that Lead to Feeling Very Worried include:**

- **Needing to be Perfect** – thinking that I have to be successful in everything important I do and that it’s horrible when I’m not.
- **Needing Approval** – thinking that I need people (parents, teachers, peers) to approve of what I do and that, when they don’t, it’s the worst thing in the world.
- **I Can’t Be Bothered** – thinking that life should always be fun and exciting, and that I can’t stand it when things are frustrating, boring, or uncomfortable.

**Procrastination (“Feeling Lazy”)** means that you put off doing tasks and chores because they are frustrating, boring, or hard even though you see the disadvantages of delaying. You give up easily after having started something that is difficult or boring to do. You may rush to finish your work so that you can do fun things.

### **Negative Habits of the Mind that Lead to Procrastination include:**

- **I Can’t Be Bothered** – thinking that life should always be fun and exciting, and that I can’t stand it when things are frustrating, boring, or uncomfortable.
- **Having No Goals** – thinking that it’s pointless to have any goals associated with being successful for anything I do.
- **Planning Time Poorly** – thinking that it’s pointless to plan my time; thinking that things will somehow get done; thinking, “When is the latest I can start?” when approaching some chore or task that isn’t fun.
- **Needing to be Perfect** – thinking that I have to be successful in everything important I do and that it’s horrible when I’m not.
- **Needing Approval** – thinking that I need people (parents, teachers, peers) to approve of what I do and that, when they don’t, it’s the worst thing in the world.

**Not Paying Attention - Disturbing Others** means that you may have trouble paying attention for a long period of time, listening and following instructions, and may find yourself easily distracted. You may or may not have a lot of energy with the result that you may be fidgety, move around the classroom at inappropriate times, or talk excessively, and you may have difficulty working or playing quietly. You may blurt out answers, interrupt others, begin an assignment without waiting for instructions, and have trouble waiting your turn.

**Negative Habits of the Mind that Lead to Not Paying Attention - Disturbing Others** include:

- **Acting Without Thinking** – (this Habit of the Mind can be defined by the absence of reflection about different ways to handle interpersonal conflict, the consequences of different course of action and how someone else will feel after you have chosen to act in a certain way)
- **Being Intolerant of Others** – thinking that people should always treat me fairly and considerately and in the way I treat them, and when they do not, I can't stand it and they are totally bad.
- **Having No Goals** – thinking that it's pointless to have any goals associated with being successful for anything I do.
- **Planning Time Poorly** – thinking that it's pointless to plan my time; thinking that things will somehow get done; thinking, "When is the latest I can start?" when approaching some chore or task that isn't fun.
- **I Can't Be Bothered** – thinking that life should always be fun and exciting, and that I can't stand it when things are frustrating, boring, or uncomfortable.
- **Self-Downing** – thinking that I am a total failure or useless when I have been rejected or have not achieved a good result.
- **I Can't Do It** – when I have not been successful at something, thinking I am not good at anything and never will be; thinking that when someone I like or respect seems not to like me, there is nothing I can do to make things better.
- **Giving Up** – thinking that I have no control over what happens to me (good or bad) and that there is little point in trying anything because I'll never be successful.

**Feeling Very Angry - Misbehaving** means that you may lose your temper easily when faced with people who block you from getting what you want. You may act defiantly towards people in authority. You may break important rules at home and school even if property is destroyed or people get hurt.

**Negative Habits of the Mind that Lead to Feeling Very Angry - Misbehaving** include:

- **Being Intolerant of Others** – thinking that people should always treat me fairly and considerately and in the way I treat them, and when they do not, I can't stand it and they are totally bad.
- **Acting Without Thinking** – (this Habit of the Mind can be defined by the absence of reflection about different ways to handle interpersonal conflict, the consequences of different course of action and how someone else will feel after you have chosen to act in a certain way)
- **Being Intolerant of Limits** – thinking that I should be able to do what I want, that nobody should be able to tell me what to do, and that I can't stand having to follow rules.
- **Social Irresponsibility** – thinking that I only have to be concerned about me and that it is not important to be a good citizen and to help make contributions to my community. It also means that I do not need to concern myself with others who are less fortunate, nor do I need to be sensitive to the feelings of others, act honestly, and to treat others – especially those from different backgrounds – with respect.