THEORY

Using simple concepts from children’s books can provide great metaphors for life skills learning for children and adults alike. My favorite example of this is the popular children’s book, *New York Times* bestseller, *Have You Filled A Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud. The premise of the book uses the metaphor of a bucket that we all carry around invisibly, which needs to be filled with the kind acts of others and also towards yourself. A smile, a good deed, a kind word, a kiss, a hug, helping someone, are all examples of bucket filling.

IMPLEMENTATION

Using the metaphor of a bucket, you can use the following worksheet to reinforce the importance of filling buckets instead of being a bucket dipper. A Bucket Dipper is a person who is unkind and takes away positive feelings with negative behavior, being inconsiderate, making rude comments, etc. When we have negative self-talk and undermine our sense of well-being, we also are serving as our own Bucket Dippers.

- With children, reading the book will help set the stage.
- With adults, mentioning the lessons of the book and having a copy on hand to show them will suffice.
- There are many other sequels to the book and depending on the population you might also use another book from the series.
- For follow up activities and handouts, refer to the bucket filler site to get many resources, activities ideas, etc. based on this concept. [http://bucketfillers101.com/bucket-lessons.php](http://bucketfillers101.com/bucket-lessons.php)
- Discuss with the group how the buckets are filled and how they are dipped into - make a list on the board.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Bucket Filling</th>
<th>Examples of Bucket Dipping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Saying hurtful comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliments</td>
<td>Criticizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being considerate</td>
<td>Being inconsiderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering help</td>
<td>Being unhelpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing positive emotion</td>
<td>Being rude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Not sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugging and kissing</td>
<td>Hitting, punching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have each member write on separate note cards something nice and positive about each person in the group and put it in their respective buckets.

I purchased a heart punch at a craft store for clients to write their compliments for each other on the hearts. This limits the time you need to spend cutting with scissors. You can also purchase flower and star punchers.

This can spur a discussion about compliments, and how nice it is to compliment someone and reward the positive.

Discuss the difference between real, quality compliments rather than superficial ones. A quality compliment says something about the person and what you appreciate about them, not focusing on the superficial such as “I like your shirt.”

This can be a segway to talk about how to take compliments assertively. You might make the point that people with low self-esteem have a hard time taking compliments, and often take compliments non-assertively with some self-disparagement, poor eye contact, and might even talk the person out of the compliment! You might want to have a short exercise in which each group member compliments the next person with a “quality” compliment as described above and have members practice how to take compliments assertively, with good eye contact and showing self confidence.

The focus on bucket filling and giving and receiving compliments emphasizes the importance of kindness to self and others in building relationships and developing compassion towards self and others.

We all have buckets that need to be filled with loving and caring, positive messages. We also carry buckets with negative messages when people say hurtful things to us or we say hurtful things to ourselves.

Ask the group if they tend to be bucket fillers or bucket dippers to themselves and to others. Many times people are much kinder to others than they are to themselves.

Have them reframe or replace any negative messages they carry. This bucket activity helps group members’ focus on holding and carrying around positive thoughts, to fill their own buckets as well as those of others!

You might find it helpful to ask the group members what they need to say to themselves to fill their own buckets with kindness!

Use the accompanying activity worksheet to help group members learn practical ways they can be expert bucket fillers!

An interesting variation to the bucket theme is to have some flat rocks and markers along with the paper punched shapes. On the rocks instruct them to write negative thoughts about themselves and on the paper punched hearts and stars, etc. write positive messages about themselves. The negative thoughts on the heavy rocks symbolize how negative thoughts weigh us down and make our hearts heavy, whereas there is always room for more light hearted and less cumbersome positive messages.

PROCESSING

Processing with the group using real-life examples of bucket filling and bucket dipping is important to help them relate personally to this concept of the invisible bucket. While processing this activity, recognize that we all are worthy and deserving of love and kindness. Everyone is responsible for being kind to others as well as themselves, and not be a bucket dipper to themselves or others. Putting the actual rocks in a bucket will help group members feel the weight of their negative thoughts!
Today I Am Going to Be a Bucket Filler!

These are names of two people who have buckets I want to fill with kindness. These are the things I plan to do to fill their bucket with kindness and why I want to do this.

**I am filling a kindness bucket for:** __________________________________________________________

What I plan to express ________________________________________________________________

What I plan to do ________________________________________________________________

Why I want to do this ________________________________________________________________

**I am filling a kindness bucket for:** __________________________________________________________

What I plan to express ________________________________________________________________

What I plan to do ________________________________________________________________

Why I want to do this ________________________________________________________________

**I will also fill my own bucket today as I think of positive thoughts about myself and will do something positive for myself.**

They are: __________________________________________________________________________

My positive thought to myself is: _________________________________________________________

I will do something I will be proud of: _______________________________________________________

This is an example of a healthy choice I can make for myself: ___________________________________