**MODULE 2**
**Class Title**: Thinking Outside the Box
**Aim of Lesson**: To learn to find creative solutions to life situations
**Category**: Interpersonal Skills
**Class Format**: Power point presentation & discussion

Greeting to students*) Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*
*(Taooz) Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*
*(Tasmiyah) Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*
*(Du'a) Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli*
(Surah Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

Slide 1:

Today, we are going to see how we use our imagination in different kinds of situations. I will be showing you some situations and then I want you to make up your mind. I want you to decide what kind of situation it is; that is, I want you to judge the situation. I want you all to look at each situation, and then I'm going to ask you what you think about it.

Slides 2-3:

Let's start. This is the first scenario: we see a man who is going shopping. Then what happens? He buys lots of wrapping paper and he has also got some beautiful stuff to decorate it with; he then packs a gift. What would you say about this man? What would you say about someone who goes shopping, gets a gift, wrapping paper and decorations, and then wraps it up very nicely? What kind of person is he?

Student: He puts in a lot of effort into what he's doing.

Teacher: Ok, anyone else?

Student: He is really creative.

Teacher: Ok, he's creative.

Student: He's caring.

Teacher: Yes, he's caring.

Student: He likes to give presents.

Teacher: Ok, he likes to give presents.

*Alhumdulillah*; very good. So you see we can label him as 'caring' because he is somebody who goes through a lot of trouble to please someone else, like you said. Right?

Slides 4-5:

Now, the second scenario; can you see this picture?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: There is a boy who is moving behind the sofa and a couple is sitting there. What do you think he's doing?

Student: Sneaking out. He doesn't want his parents to find out what he's doing.

Teacher: He is sneaking out. So what would you call this kind of a person? A sneaky person, right? Ok, let's label him 'sneaky'.

Slides 6-7:

Now, let's look at the third scenario. What do we see here? What is this? This is an airport. At the airport, what we see is a father who is lying down, in fact he's sleeping. He has four kids with him and they are just running around, making a lot of noise and being very rowdy. Now what would you think about this father and his children?

Student: Careless father.

Teacher: He is careless.

Student: Irresponsible.

Teacher: Ok, irresponsible.

Student: Inattentive.

Teacher: Alright, inattentive.

Student: Lazy

Teacher: Yes, lazy. So can we conclude that he's an 'indifferent father with rowdy children'?

Students: Yes.

Slides 8-9:

Now for the fourth scenario: what do we see here? There's a man who is surrounded by lots of microphones. So what kind of person would he be?

Student: A celebrity

Teacher: A celebrity. Yes. What were you going to say?

Student: Somebody famous.

Teacher: Ok, he's somebody famous.  Let's label this man as a 'famous celebrity'.

Slides 10-11:

Now look at this scenario here. This is something quite common. Someone is shouting at the girl. Who do you think she is?

Student: Her mother.

Teacher: Ok, an angry mom. So we feel that mom is generally the person who is always angry with us.

Slide 12:

Now let's evaluate what we've seen so far. What are the conclusions that we have drawn?

Slide 13:

In the first scenario that we talked about, there was a man who was shopping for presents and wrapping them beautifully. We labelled him as a 'caring person'. What tells us that this man is a caring person? How do we know? What if that man's intention is to please someone in order to get something out of that person? Is that possible? Sure, that's possible. So what we've actually done is label someone as caring, without actually knowing what the reality is.

Slide 14:

What about the second scenario? We decided that the boy was a sneaky sort of a person. What if that boy had actually seen some poor fellow on the road whose bicycle had a problem? Maybe he was sneaking out to help him while keeping it a secret, as charity should be done in a way such that your right hand shouldn't even know what has been given by your left hand, and vice versa. That can be the reason why he was sneaking out. Do you suppose that can be it? So again, without knowing what the reasons are, we have labelled someone.

Slide 15:

Next, the indifferent father and the rowdy children; isn't it possible that the father was just returning from the hospital where his wife had died, and the children grieved and confused, not knowing what to do, were just running around. They were trying to exhaust all the energy that was inside them.

Slide 16:

Now regarding the celebrity; the minute we see a microphone and cameras etc., all we can think of is celebrities. Isn't it? But you know, in the west especially, there can be many villains who would get media attention. For example, if a serial killer is caught, many people from the media will over the event. Sometimes, they even receive fan mail! Does this mean that they're good people? No it doesn't.

Slide 17:

What about the angry mother. Just by looking at that picture, how can you be sure that it is a mom? Maybe it was a teacher; maybe it was a friend's mom, not that child's mother but somebody else's mother. It could have been anybody. But the first thing we conclude is that it must have been her mom.

Slide 18:

So we see, actually, these are our own labels that we've put on others. Isn't that so? Agreed? What we need to realize is that we should not be putting labels on people. Attaching labels to people is just like putting them into boxes. Can you imagine yourself sitting inside a box?!

Slide 19:

There is a proverb which says 'No matter how thin a slice you cut, it will always have two sides'. You see there are always two sides to everything. Always two sides, but we always end up looking at just one side of the story. We always need to realize that somebody else on the receiving end will also have a story. If you have a story, the other person will have their own story.

Slide 20:

According to a great early Muslim, Hamdun al-Qassar, we should "Make seventy excuses when a bad thought enters your mind about a Muslim brother." (Bayhaqi)

Every time a bad thought enters our mind about someone, we should make seventy excuses in favour of that person. Just by seeing that the boy is sneaking out, we shouldn't think that he is up to something bad. That is not the way a Muslim thinks. Every time you see somebody doing something wrong, try to make excuses for him or her. But how many excuses are we supposed to make? Believe me, by the time you are able to make five or even three excuses, you will be saying, "OK, just forget it; it doesn't matter. Whatever she was doing, it's up to her. It's ok, I'm sure she is doing it for a good reason".

Judging people in this way is extremely, extremely important, as well as beneficial. This is the kind of mentality that develops trust in a society. But in reality, trust is disappearing from our society. Nobody is prepared to trust anyone anymore. You go to the *bazaar*, and ask how much an item is for. The shopkeeper knows that you are going to ask him to reduce the price. Knowing this, he's going to quote a price which is on the higher side to begin with. He expects you to haggle with him. He knows this, so he'll quote a price that will make you haggle. This is the mentality that we have all developed.

Slide 21:

Allah (*swt*) has said in the Quran, "O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins. (Surah Al Hujurat 49: Verse12)

Slide 22:

Now let's imagine that somebody puts a label on us. In the situations we discussed earlier, we were talking about labelling other people. Now let's suppose it is you who has been labelled 'lazy' by somebody in your house. Does anybody call you lazy?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Who?

Student: My mom.

Teacher: So what do you do? What is your reaction? What should you do? Generally when your mother tells you that you are being lazy, what is your reaction?

Student: Nothing

Teacher: Nothing. You just continue being lazy because you yourself have also accepted this label. You think, "If this is what she thinks of me, then that's how I'll behave." Isn't that so?

So you see why it's so important to think positively about other people? Otherwise, we can be the cause of someone's negative attitude and behaviour: "If that's what you think of me, then this is how I will be." This can be the resulting attitude.

Slide 23:

When you are being labelled, you do feel badly, whether you say so or not. You become uncomfortable, you feel dejected, you become depressed, and you may be scared. Sometimes you may feel utterly hopeless and confined, as if you're sitting inside a box. Just imagine that you're sitting inside a box. It doesn't feel good, does it? You know that you have been put inside that box by another person.

Slide 24:

There are two types of boxes. One is created by others; when other people put a label on us. The other box is created by us, by ourselves. Sometimes, we create our own boxes. We limit ourselves, and think that there are certain things we just can't do: "I can't do this; I can't be that kind of a person." etc. Effectively, there are two types of boxes: one which is created by others, when other people put a label on us; and a second one which is created by ourselves, by putting labels on our own selves.

Firstly, let's talk about the box which is created by others. Whenever someone has put a label on you, what has been the result? Just take the example of somebody calling you lazy. Think very objectively. You said your mother calls you "very lazy". Do you think you're lazy?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Yes! *Alhumdulillah*! I'm so glad you recognized this! You see, when you accept this label, then only will you try to improve yourself. If you don't accept it, you will never try to change. You will never bother about improving.

Slide 25:

At such a time, it's best to put aside all your feelings regarding this label. Whether you're feeling angry, hurt or any other emotion just put them aside. Think objectively and analyze the label; you have to realize that if somebody is calling you this, then there has to be a good reason for it. It's probably not the only occasion when that person has called you this. It can be ignored once, but if someone says it every day, then you must find out why. If everyday somebody calls you lazy, then you have to ask yourself why that may be.

At this point, you have to be very truthful and very honest about the whole thing. You have to be completely truthful to yourself, "Am I really this way?" You have to analyze yourself, by yourself. Nobody else can do this for you. But you have to be extremely honest. You have to realize that you need to accept the label as real or reject it.

So what do you think now? You yourself admitted that you are lazy and that is the reason why your mother calls you lazy. So what should you do now?

Firstly, you need to accept this label. Next you need to try to change yourself, and finally you must forgive your mother for labelling you. When someone labels us, we tend to hold a grudge against them for doing so. Some kind of dislike develops in our heart for that person. With the knowledge that we're going to change ourselves for the better, we should be grateful to them for showing us our flaws.

Remember, "A believer is the mirror of the believer" (Abu Dawood) and that "The deen is sincere concern" (Muslim & Nasai), according to two well know ahadith.

Thus, if someone tells us for our own benefit, then instead of being upset with them, we should accept their label gratefully. Shouldn't we? Thereafter, we need to move on with our life and make the appropriate changes.

Slide 26:

Now for the tricky boxes: the boxes that we create for ourselves. These are much more difficult to detect, the labels that we put on ourselves.

If you find yourself saying, "I can't do this," it means you have put yourself in a box. You have put limits on yourself that nobody else has put on you. For example, if somebody feels that they just can't swim, no matter what, there is a problem. If there's a medical reason, then that's something different. Otherwise, where there's a will, there's always a way!

The minute you realize that you say a lot of 'I can't' sentences, you have to accept that you have put yourself in a box. You must also know that Allah (*swt*) has made life as a challenge. Whatever difficulties there are, you need to overcome them. You

need to rise up to them. You need to realise that if there is something that is worthwhile and which will add more value to your life, you need to overcome the difficulties and your fears to acquire them.

You must overcome the 'I can't do this' attitude. You need to believe that you are the best creation of Allah (*swt*). Believe that you can do better. Take small steps towards your goal. Give your best. Focus on your efforts and not on the results. Know that your efforts will eventually be rewarded, *in shaa Allah*. Remember to make lots of du'a, as well as seek guidance and help from Allah (*swt*), along the way.

If you yourself have put yourself in a box, then you have got a lot of things to do. You can't be a lazy person anymore. You have to really get down to work because now you have to realize that this change can add real value to your life.

Slides 27-30:

Just step back and look at all the labels in your life. Evaluate the labels and make the required changes. You must realize that all these boxes, whether they are created by other people or by us, they are actually very fragile. You just have to make some effort to try and get out of the box. Whatever labels have been put on you, evaluate them and make up your mind that you are going to change yourself. Once you do that, *in shaa Allah* you will be able to get out of it, with the help of Allah (*swt*). Don't keep yourself in the boxes that have been created by others or by your own self. By doing so, you'll only limit your own growth and success.

Slide 31:

Moving on, if I ask you what is the harm in putting a bad label on someone, what would you say? We just talked about the whole thing. When you put a bad label on someone what's the harm?

Student: We are judging them for what they may not...

Teacher: Yes, we are judging them, for something that they may not be.

Student: We are taking them for granted.

Teacher: Yes, we are taking them for granted.

Student: You are saying stuff that you don't really know the reality about.

Slide 32-33:

Teacher: Absolutely! Furthermore, you're unable to see that person's good points. That is the first thing. By having put a negative label on somebody, you will not be able to see their positive side, no matter what. Most importantly, bad thoughts for other people are from *Shaytan* and we know that *Shaytan* whispers in our hearts and goes away when we remember Allah (*swt*). So this shows that when we have bad thoughts about other people, we are closer to *Shaytan* and forgetful of Allah's remembrance. This is why it is so important to think positively about others.

Otherwise, *Shaytan* will take charge of our thoughts which will then convert into actions. Thinking bad of other people may seem like a small thing, but it is actually not. It also makes us very heavy hearted; it fills our hearts with a heavy burden.

Slide 34:

Besides just labelling others negatively, we also spoke about putting good labels on other people. In the scenario at the very beginning, we said that man was a 'caring person'; that was a good label. So what's the harm in putting the good label on somebody? Is there any harm at all in putting a good label on somebody? Yes?

Student: When we put a good label on someone, we are unable to see their bad points.

Slides 35-38:

Teacher: *Alhumdulillah*, yes that's one important point. But more importantly, we tend to put such people on a pedestal. We think that they are such perfect people that they can't do anything wrong. Our expectations of them become very high. Then, when they do something wrong, we become extremely, extremely disappointed. Since our expectations of them are very high to begin with, when they make mistakes (which is perfectly natural for all of us) we become deeply disappointed.

Slide 39:

So what have we learned? What lesson have we learnt here? First, we need to realize that everyone can make mistakes. Each one of us needs to realize that we can make mistakes, and so can others. When we realize that all people make mistakes, we develop a very important character trait: tolerance.

Slide 40:

Now, a very strong word of caution here; this is an extremely important point**.** Always remember that we can make excuses for other people's mistakes, but we should never ever do the same for ourselves. If we've done something wrong, we shouldn't be coming up with seventy excuses. Do you understand this? In fact, we shouldn't even be making one! We should accept our mistake, which is the first and most crucial step to fixing it. However, when anyone else makes a mistake, we should overlook it and forgive them.

Realize that it is not anyone's right to make mistakes. Mistakes should always be avoided under all conditions. One should not be casual and insensitive about making mistakes; we all have to put in our best. One must put in their best effort and then leave the outcome to Allah (*swt).*

Slide 41:

In concluding, what is the basic and essential message of this class? Basically, the whole idea is that we need to think outside the box; we should not be putting ourselves or others, in a box. Let's see if you have learned something from this. I am

going to be showing you some slides now, and let's see whether you can think outside the box.

Slide 42:

Can all of you see this?  Can you guess what this is?

(Students tried guessing but could not.)

No? No one? Should I give you the answer? "Life is too short." Do you get it now?

Slide 43:

Let's try the next one.

Student: We can make mistakes.

Teacher: No, it's a pair of overalls. Ok, alright.

Slide 44:

This is really nice. I'll give you a hint. The word 'second' is written sixty times.

Student: "Hang on a minute."

Teacher: "Hang on a minute." Absolutely!

Slide 45:

Ok. What about this one?

Student: 'Grab something'?

Teacher: Hmm. You've got half of it. I'll give you a hint: to read the word grab, in which direction do you need to read?

Student: From bottom to top.

Student: Up

Teacher: Yes! So put 'up' and 'grab' together and what phrase can you come up with?

Student: "Up for grabs!"

Teacher: Yes!

Slide 46:

Ok, what about this? This is a really nice one. The quotation is really nice. Let's see if you'll get it. What is a group of lions called?

Student: A ‘pride’.

Teacher: ‘Pride’, yes. What happens in autumn?

Student: “Pride goes before the fall.”

Teacher: Yes, absolutely! “Pride goes before the fall.”

Slide 47:

Now this is my favourite. It says things in the centre and at the end it says “packages, packages, packages”.

Student: “Great things come in small packages.”

Teacher: Very good, very good. This shows “Great things come in small packages”. You guys are getting really good at thinking outside the box, MashaAllah!

Slide 48:

Now, this is another one of my favourites.

Student: The word ‘one’ is written many times.

Teacher: Yes, but is it spelt correctly?

Student: No, it’s not.

Teacher: So what does that mean? Make a phrase.

Student: “No one’s perfect.”

Teacher: Good! Now this is quite simple. Isn’t it? Agreed?

Slide 49:

Student: “Hiccups.”

Teacher: “Hiccups.” Absolutely! *Alhumdulillah*.
Can anybody tell me what we’ve learnt today?

Student: Not to judge anyone.

Teacher: Absolutely! *Alhumdulillah*.

Student: Not to take things for granted.

Teacher: Yes; not to take things for granted.

Student: All people have two sides.

Student: No one's perfect.

Teacher: Yes, no one's perfect. *Alhumdulillah.*

Student: To think outside the box.

Student: Don't underestimate yourself.

Teacher: Don't underestimate yourself.

Slide 50:

*MashaAllah*, you've picked up good lessons today.

One last but important lesson: the reason why we should make seventy excuses for someone is because of the overriding assumption about all humans and their actions. That is, that they are sound and free of error. This is considered our operating certainty; we should look at everyone's words and actions based on this certainty. After this, if we find something that makes us doubt them, we still aren't permitted to leave this certainty. We shouldn't judge them based on mere doubts or misgivings that we may have.

(Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*