



Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

Feel Safe

A safe and inclusive school is one in which all children experience learning environments that are safe from violence, bullying, and harassment; promote acceptance and a sense of belonging; and support progress towards achieving appropriate personal, social, emotional, and academic goals.



Why is it important?

- Safe schools provide fair and supportive conditions that allow students to develop to their full potential (Morrison et al., 1994).
- Student perceptions of feeling unsafe are predictive of negative student outcomes like attendance and problem behaviour (Bowen & Bowen, 1999).
- School safety and order are crucial antecedents of student learning (Cornell & Mayer, 2010).

In Practice

Schools should ensure the development of a set of whole-school policies and interventions that emphasize prevention strategies. Effective school safety entails clear schoolwide guidelines and efforts to instill a sense of belonging at school.

1. Clear schoolwide guidelines



What can schools do?

Schools should aim to create a formal structure to address safety considerations in the school and develop an awareness of those systems.

- Outline school safety procedures in strategic planning documents to ensure that there is transparency among school staff around existing school safety protocols as well as anticipated improvements.
- Take steps to reduce the prevalence of bullying by ensuring that there are clear consequences which are consistently enforced (Pepler et al., 1994).
- Involve the greater school community by soliciting ideas and support in relation to safety considerations, reinforcing the idea that school safety is everyone's responsibility.



In the Classroom

Educators can support school safety by adopting procedures that allow for shared control of the classroom and the reinforcement of positive behaviours.

- With student input, draft a set of rules and accompanying class pledge, creating accountability standards for classroom conduct and shared ownership over the classroom.
- Focus on preventative measures and, when misbehavior occurs, focus on teachable moments rather than punitive consequences.
- Recognize acts that violate school safety rules and be willing to step in when they occur.

2. Reinforce a Sense of Belonging at School



What can schools do?

Cultivate a school culture where every student feels valued, accepted by their peers and cared for by their teachers and other adults in the school.

School personnel can bolster perceptions of belonging among students by doing the following:

- Develop a plan for inclusion, like an IEP, for vulnerable and at-risk students.
- Continually reinforce the theme of inclusion with inclusive activities and events and recognize student and staff efforts that support inclusion.
- Ensure new students have an ally on school staff who can advocate for them.
- Initiate a survey to capture student voice and inform school leadership of areas of concern regarding school safety, for instance the OurSCHOOL Survey.



Teacher Reflection

School safety starts with positive relationships. The school environment becomes a safer and more caring environment when teachers do the following:

- Cultivate student-teacher relationships to help facilitate a strong sense of belonging at school and model the skills required to make positive friendships.
- Introduce a mentorship program or peer support plan aimed at improving peer relationships.
- Set strategies for those who are alienated or at-risk by regularly checking-in with vulnerable students and setting success plans.

References

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