Classroom Management Approaches to Support School Connectedness

Teacher Caring and Support

School connectedness is the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Students who feel connected and engaged at school are less likely to report risky behaviors (such as early sexual initiation, substance use, violence, and suicide) and have more positive academic outcomes.[1-6]

Classroom management is the process that teachers and schools use to create positive classroom environments in face-to-face or virtual learning modes. Classroom management includes teacher- and student-led actions to support academic and social-emotional learning among all students.[7] Well-managed classrooms that incorporate positive behavior management strategies are one way that teachers and other school staff can build school connectedness.[8]

Which classroom management approaches and skills increase connectedness?

CDC researchers reviewed scientific papers on classroom management and identified six classroom management approaches that promote student connectedness and engagement. Strategies to support these approaches were identified through a structured review of web-based practice resources. Teacher caring and support is one of these approaches.

Teacher Caring & Support

Peer Connection & Support

Student Autonomy & Empowerment

Management of Classroom Social Dynamics

Teacher Expectations

Behavior Management

Teacher Caring and Support. Students who believe their teachers build strong, positive relationships with them and show that they care about them report feeling higher levels of connectedness to school and their peers.[9] Teacher caring and support has also been associated with improved student engagement in math and reading.[10] Students report feeling more connected to both their school and their peers when they feel that their teachers:

1 Go out of their way to help students.

2 Make time to talk about the things students want to talk about.

3 Help students to organize their work and catch up when they return from an absence.

4 Take personal interest in students.[9]

Building strong, supportive, trusting relationships with students may be particularly critical for students who are experiencing uncertainty or trauma (for example, due to the COVID-19 pandemic or from racial injustice and marginalization).[11, 12]

Teacher Caring and Support

These skills can help build caring, supportive relationships with students.

Skill	Example Strategies
Showing students that teachers and school staff care about them as people and are interested in their well-being	Set up regular check-ins with students.[13] Check-ins can be on a monthly, weekly, or daily basis (if feasible), can be done virtually or in person, and with students one-on-one (e.g., through short phone or video calls, text messages, emails, brief survey or worksheet) or as a group (e.g., asking students to share about important events in their lives, "one positive and one challenging" thing from their day/week).[14] In face-to-face and virtual settings, consider asking students to complete a "things I want my teacher to know" worksheet to collect student-specific information and build rapport. Ask students to provide their preferred name and pronouns if they are comfortable sharing.[15]
Demonstrating willingness to provide extra help to students when they need it	Help students organize their work and to catch up when they return from an absence.[9] For example, establishing a tracking system for students to record progress on missed or remediated work, re-assessing deadlines, or breaking tasks into small chunks that can be done over time. In virtual settings, use the "number three rule." If a student hasn't engaged by the third virtual activity of the day, consider reaching out with an individual "chat" message or phone call (to the student or parent) to check in and find out if there's something that is preventing them from completing or accessing instructional material.[16]

Skill	Example Strategies
Ensuring that students feel they are being treated fairly	Engage students in the process of determining consequences for breaking class rules and agreements, and provide consistent reminders (visually, verbally) so that students know what to expect.[17] Engage in trainings and activities that enable you to build awareness of your own (often unintentional) biases. For example: • Invite an observer to spend time in the class and provide feedback about whether specific students are invited to participate more frequently than others.[18] • Provide students with opportunities to offer anonymous feedback on their experiences in class and to offer their suggestions on ways to ensure students are treated with fairness. Establish systems for ensuring that all students have opportunities to engage in class in positive ways and avoid calling on students in ways that might appear punitive or unfair. For example, use index cards or another system to keep track of who has been called on and call on each student in the class once before the cycle begins again.[18]
Finding ways to include topics that students want to talk about	Solicit questions and requests from students on what they would like to learn about in class. For example, ask students to complete an "exit ticket" where they write down a question they have or a topic they'd like to discuss before leaving class.[19] In virtual classrooms, this can be adapted by asking students to submit an "exit tweet" (280 characters or less) via email.[20]
Listening and being responsive to students' ideas and input	Provide opportunities for students to choose reading or course materials from a number of options.[21] Ask students for their feedback on any new virtual learning platforms, apps, or instructional strategies. Make adjustments to incorporate their feedback as much as possible.[21]
Creating opportunities for positive interactions with students	Aim to maintain a "5-to-1 ratio" of positive to negative interactions with students. Positive interactions can include providing students with frequent encouragement or positive attention (for example, eye contact and a smile), and positive reinforcement or rewards for positive behaviors.[22] In virtual classrooms, consider greeting each student by name as they enter the virtual space, and/or choosing a handful of students to individually acknowledge after each session (e.g., at the end of the virtual session or with a follow up email).[23] Provide behavior-specific praise that acknowledges students' efforts and learning contexts (e.g., "You demonstrated great effort on completing all of the pre-learning work when I know that you are helping care for a younger sibling as well.").[23]

Skill	Example Strategies
Practicing restorative communication	Use restorative communication practices when harm to a relationship with a student occurs (e.g., due to a conflict, misunderstanding, or other negative interaction). Restorative conversations allow adults to demonstrate empathy, teach children how to resolve conflict, and give students a voice.[24] Restorative communication practices include: • Letting go of previous negative events • Taking ownership for the problem (when applicable) • Validating the student's feelings • Using collaborative problem solving to identify agreed-upon solutions • Expressing caring by separating the deed from the doer[22]

Tools and Templates

- American Psychological Association. Academic Caring of Adolescents- Demonstrating Care to Support Adolescent Learning.

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). How to Build Relationships Quickly.

- Edutopia. Building Community with Restorative Circles.

- Gay Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Pronoun Guide.

- Michigan's Multi-Tiered System of Supports Technical Assistance Center. Adapting Check-In Check-Out (CICO) for Distance Learning.

- Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Rewards. Distance Learning Resources.

- Responsive Classroom. The First 10 Days of Responsive Advisory Meetings: Purposeful and Engaging Plans in Response to COVID-19.

- Search Institute. Checklist: Building Developmental Relationships During the COVID-19 Crisis.

Reflection Notes

How do I currently do this?
What could I do to improve?

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