

Helping Hand

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Healthy Relationships

School Connectedness

The connection students feel to their school can largely impact their academic success. Students who feel positively connected to their school have better attendance, grades, test scores, and stay in school longer. More than that, according to the U.S. Department of Education, these students are less likely to experience emotional problems, engage in risky behaviors such as substance use, or become involved in violent activities.

As educators, it's our job to build a safe and supportive learning environment that fosters positive relationships. Below are some ways staff and students can work to increase school connectedness.

Adult support. When students feel supported by school staff, they're more likely to be engaged in school. School staff is more than just teachers and administrators; it includes janitors, lunchroom servers, coaches, office assistants, and counselors. School staff can show their support by dedicating time, interests, and attention to students. This lets students know they're invested in their future and care about their success.

Belonging to a positive peer group. Students are influenced by the behaviors of their peers. Students that have positive and stable peer networks are more likely to feel connected and engaged. Providing opportunities for students to connect during and after school can help foster these positive relationships.

Commitment to education. Students should believe school is important to their future and that the adults at school are dedicated to their educational success.

School environment. Feeling like you're in a safe and healthy environment enhances the feeling of connectedness. This can be the physical environment, such as how clean a place is, but also the psychosocial climate. This includes having policies related to discipline, opportunities for students to have meaningful participation, and how well a teacher manages the classroom.

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Career Building

Strong Character

As educators, parents, and guardians, our job is to prepare our children to become responsible citizens and productive members of society. While it's important they have a strong academic foundation, it's also essential they learn what it means to have strong character. Not only does instilling the following characteristics prepare students for their future careers, it helps them be better people.

Compassion. We can promote compassion by helping children think about how others feel. Children develop compassion by practicing acts of kindness toward others.

- Talk about the point of view of others, whether it's another student or a character in a book or on TV. You can ask questions such as, "How do you think that person is feeling right now?"
- Give others the benefit of the doubt. If a student complains to you that someone shoved them in the hall, explain that sometimes people are in a hurry and don't pay attention to where they're going. However, be sure not to ignore potential bullying.

Self-discipline. Part of self-discipline is the ability to set a realistic goal or plan, and then stick with it. It involves keeping promises and following through on commitments.

- Talk to your students about setting goals. Then help them break these goals into smaller tasks that can be accomplished one at a time.
- Celebrate successes in the classroom, no matter how small. This helps build confidence and a sense of competence that can carry over into other tasks.

Good judgment. Children begin to build strong character by learning about what is right and wrong or good and bad, and then making judgments based on these distinctions. Making good judgments requires thinking about the consequences of our actions and not acting on impulses.

- Teach children to stop and think before they act. Have them practice taking three deep breaths before doing something that might get them in trouble.
- Encourage children to think about what their actions may lead to, and who else their actions may affect.
- Remind your child that different places or situations have different rules. For example, how you behave in church is different than how you behave at a football game.

Other characteristics to build include: honesty and fairness, respect for others and yourself, a sense of responsibility, standing up for your beliefs, and caring about your community.

Children learn most by seeing people act on and uphold these values in their lives. Make sure you're setting a good example for your children, whether in the classroom, out in public, or in your own home.



Unity is strength...

When there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.

- MATTIE STEPANEK

Thinking Well

Counselor Collaboration

One of the many benefits of being an educator is having a team of professionals available to help your students excel. School counselors and social workers are an excellent resource and partner for teachers. Here are some ways to collaborate for student success.

Counselors can help you understand the whole student.

When you notice changes in a student's behavior or grades, a counselor can help you gain a more complete understanding of the issues behind the behavior.

Help getting to the root of an issue. When a child acts out, instead of sending him or her to the principal's office or disciplining them in class, have the student meet with a social worker. They can help understand the underlying issue that's causing the student to act out and work to lessen the problem. Sending a student to detention can lead to more behavioral problems.

A fresh set of eyes. If you're having problems getting through to a student, or find the strategies you've tried aren't working, a counselor can provide a new perspective and fresh ideas.

Social workers provide you with support. Working with students that have individualized education plans can sometimes feel like more work, especially when you have a whole classroom to worry about. But remember, these treatment plans are in place for a reason and it's in the best interest of the student to follow them.

Explore career options. A school counselor can help students understand how their academic work connects to specific careers.

Design professional development that meets your needs.

In-service days are a great opportunity for counselors and teachers to collaborate and develop solutions to school-wide problems.

Excelling Academically

A Successful Transition

As you know, some students really struggle with the transition from elementary to middle school. If you've identified some students in your classes that could use a little extra help, reach out to them! It could be something you work on with the student one-on-one, or maybe you involve their guardian or guidance counselor. Help facilitate academic success with these tips.

Encourage using a planner

Staying organized and knowing when homework is due is one of the biggest obstacles to school achievement for middle school students. When giving an assignment, use a verbal reminder such as, "This assignment is due Friday, get out your planner and write it down now."

Set up a study-buddy system

Have students exchange phone numbers and e-mail addresses so they can contact each other with questions about assignments.

Collect ALL assignments

Too often students don't turn in homework if they're not 100% done with it. You know that's a big mistake. Explain that getting a partial score is exponentially better than getting a zero. Then try your best to collect what they have done.

Contacting the Parents

If you're truly concerned about a student, reach out to their parent or guardian. Here are two ways you can work together to help a struggling student:

REPORT ON THEIR PROGRESS

For students who need extra help, fill out a daily progress report or send an e-mail to their guardian. It's a great way for them to monitor their child's progress. They can use your words to establish a reward/consequence system, if they choose.

ASSIGNMENT/PLANNER CHECK

Similar to a progress report, you can check students' planners daily to make sure they're writing their assignments down correctly. Initialing it will help inform parents of what homework their child needs to be doing. Go one step further and have the child's guardian sign-off when work is complete.



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Staying Fit

Finding Time to Exercise

It seems like today we're spending more time at work. It's easy to use the excuse, "I don't have time," when it comes to exercising. But there are plenty of ways you can incorporate activity into your day.

- Trade out your chair for a stability ball – sitting on a stability ball for just 30 minutes a day will help strengthen your back and core.
- Stretch during passing time.
- Walk around while you teach. It can help keep students on task and engaged while you fit in some extra steps.
- Take the stairs whenever possible.

As an educator, you have great resources at your workplace that most business people don't have – a gym, fitness room, track, and maybe even a pool. Take advantage of them! If that's not quite your style, utilize the halls and go for a walk (the weather can't be your excuse any more). Try using a pedometer to keep track of your steps – it might help motivate you to get more steps in each day.

Fitting in a total of 30 minutes of some kind of physical activity each day can help you feel more alert and refreshed at work, and put you in a better mood. It can also reduce some common discomforts, such as low back pain, carpal tunnel, eyestrain, and headaches.



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