



Building Connections in the Classroom

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School Connectedness is the belief by students that peers and adults in the school support, value, and care about their individual well-being as well as their academic progress.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022

Why Take the Time to Build Connections?

Educational Outcomes

- More likely to have higher grades
- More likely to have higher test scores
- More likely to have better school attendance
- More likely to graduate high school

Health Outcomes

- Less likely to engage in risky behaviors
- More likely to engage in positive health behaviors
- Less likely to have emotional distress and thoughts of suicide among adolescents

Students are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors and succeed academically when they feel connected to school.



Building Connections is an Essential Trauma-Informed Response

- Positive childhood experiences can help mitigate the effects of adverse childhood experiences.

Forming connections and building relationships is one way we can provide positive childhood experiences for students.


Increasing School Connectedness

Adult
Support

Positive Peer
Group

Commitment
to Education

School
Environment



Tips for Enhancing Adult Support in the Classroom



Adult Support

Intentionally dedicate time, interest, attention, and emotional support.

- Students are more likely to engage in school and learning when they feel supported.



Introduce Yourself to Students and Families at the Start of the Year

- Email
- Letter
- Short video



Positive Greetings at the Door

1. Stand just inside or outside the door
2. Greet each student by name
3. Have a short, positive interaction with the student
4. Direct the student to the first activity



Establish-Maintain-Restore

- A research-based system for building healthy student-teacher relationships
- Research within schools and found to be effective

(Cook et. al., 2018)

Establish

“Bank time” with students

- Schedule one-to-one meetings

Welcome students to the classroom

- Positive greetings at the door
- Icebreaker questions

Use positive communication techniques

- Open-ended questions and reflective listening
- Validations statements
- Expressions of enthusiasm or interest
- Compliments

Encourage student-led activities

Maintain

Take notes of positive and negative interactions with students

- Aim for a five-to-one ratio

Regularly check in with students

- Ask how they are doing
- Ask what support they need

Acknowledge good behavior

Restore

Let go and start fresh

- Give students a chance to start each day with a clean slate

Take responsibility for actions

- Apologize, when needed
- Consider what to do to prevent the problem in the future

Show empathy

- Recognize that students may have a different perspective on what happened

Focus on the solutions, not problems

- Find a solution that everyone feels fair

Separate the deed from the doer

- Avoid labeling students as, “problem students”



Meeting Students Where They Are At

- Look for and point out their strengths
- Avoid judgement and remember their absolute worth
- Provide choice, when possible
- Ask questions and listen
 - Learn what their barriers are
 - Learn what interests them
 - Learn what motivates them

How Would You Connect With This Student?

Jay is a quiet sophomore who is not involved in any extracurricular activities at school. He will occasionally turn in homework assignments and does not participate in class unless specifically called on.





Tips for Promoting Positive Peer Group Connections in the Classroom



Positive Peer Group

Provide opportunities for students to find positive peer groups they can identify with.

- Students with friends are more likely to feel connected to their school.



Skill Building

Some students may not have the skills for creating and maintain friendships.

- Take the opportunity to teach students social skills such as:
 - Communication
 - Relationship-building
 - Conflict-resolution



Include Opportunities for Peer-to-Peer Connection During Academic Activities

- Cooperative problem-based learning
- Debates
- Simulation activities
- Other group work

Begin with reminding students of the classroom norms and expectations.



Restorative Practices and Circles

Restorative Practices

- The science of relationships and community
- A meaningful learning process about:
 - How to build and sustain relationships
 - How to restore relationships when things go wrong

Restorative Circles

- Build connections
- Build community
- Allow space for all to be heard
- Respond to problem behaviors
- Deliver course content



Restorative Practices and Circles Training Requests

[USBE Student Services Training Request Portal \(TRP\)](#)

prevention@schools.utah.gov

Consider

What activities or practices you would like to implement to promote positive relationships between students?





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Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be.

- Rita F. Pierson



Questions?

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