



# Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

## Positive Relationships

Positive relationships refer to students' relationships with their peers that help them form positive social connections and meaningful participation within the school. Positive peer relationships promote engagement and a sense of belonging, while negative peer experiences are associated with school disengagement (Juvonen, 2007).



### Why is it important?

- Peer relationships provide camaraderie, emotional support and also play a key role in student identity development (Parker & Asher, 1993).
- High quality interpersonal relationships contribute to students' academic motivation, achievement, and engagement (Martin & Dowson, 2009).
- The absence of peer connections can negatively affect students' perceptions of themselves (OECD, 2013).

## In Practice

The social aspects of the school experience are fundamental to student engagement and well-being. Fortunately, through a safe and caring school climate, relationship building skills can be successfully taught within the school setting.



### What can schools do?

Schools can take the following steps to establish a welcoming school environment:

- Task a motivated team of teaching staff and school leaders to lead the implementation of strategies designed to promote safety, well-being and positive relationships, while also monitoring the impact of those whole-school interventions.
- Prioritise student well-being and adopt social emotional learning programs designed to teach students the skills needed to effectively interact well with others, develop and maintain healthy relationships, and learn how to effectively work in groups.
- Implement a variety of interventions intended to strengthen the development of positive relationships, including cooperative instruction, teaching pro-social values, such as compassion, respect, and acceptance, and offering extracurricular activities inclusive to all students, irrespective of age.

When embedded within a school culture, these strategies support the development of positive peer relationships (McGrath & Noble, 2010).



### In the Classroom

The classroom becomes a more caring environment when teachers do the following:

- Foster a classroom climate of acceptance and support by regularly modeling empathy, open communication and respect.
- Introduce a mentorship program or peer support plan aimed at fostering the social skills needed to form positive peer relationships.
- Provide daily opportunities to practise relationship building skills through small group work and student-led discussions in regularly shuffled groups.
- Cultivate student-teacher relationships by doing regular check-ins with students to ensure they feel supported and provide encouragement and guidance as needed.
- Encourage acts of kindness. This can take many forms including volunteering and community outreach or as simple as being complimentary and inclusive with peers.
- Promote conflict resolution skills to resolve issues by incorporating problem-solving and perspective sharing opportunities into classroom lessons.

## References

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