

1. POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

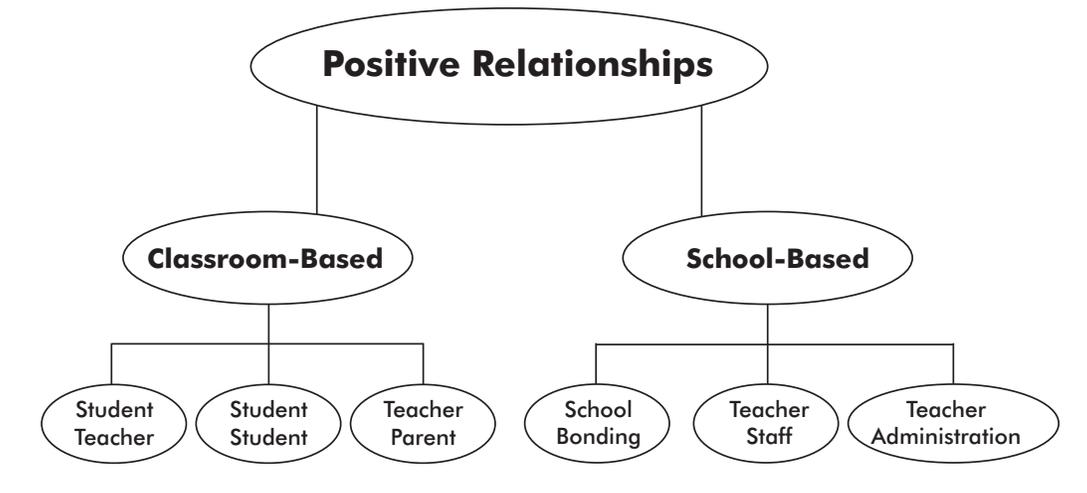
“The heart of the professional ideal in teaching may well be...a commitment to the ethic of caring. Caring requires more than bringing state-of-the-art technical knowledge to bear in one’s practice. It means doing everything possible to enhance the learning, developmental, and social needs of students as persons. The heart of caring in schools is relationships with others (teachers, parents, and students) characterized by nurturance, altruistic love, and kinshiplike connections.”

—Thomas Sergiovanni

Positive relationships are the foundation of any classroom-based and school-wide approach to positive behaviour supports. Resilience research shows that successful development and transformative power exist not in programmatic approaches per se, but at the deeper level of relationships, beliefs and expectations, and willingness to share power. Schools need to develop caring relationships not only between the educator and student but also among students, among educators, between educators and parents, and between administrators and staff. This will create a safe and inclusive classroom climate that invites and supports positive behaviour and skilled problem solving.

When teachers align their classroom management practices with the school-wide approach to positive behaviour supports, the effectiveness of both the in-class and school-wide supports and interventions for students with problem behaviours is enhanced. The support of other school staff and administration can also contribute to the success of a teacher’s classroom management planning and follow-through.

Relationships between teachers and students, among students, and between teachers and parents are all important contributors to the classroom environment. Positive relationships on a school-wide basis are equally important. Students and staff enhance the learning environment by creating a school community and by fostering positive relationships among staff members and between staff and administration.



Classroom-Based

Teacher–Student Relationships

The teacher–student relationship is extremely important and takes time and trust to build. Both parties must believe they are being treated with dignity and respect, and there must be a balance between the teacher’s role as classroom leader and his or her expression of interest in each student.

Students trust and respect teachers who establish clear behavioural expectations and meaningful goals for learning and behaviour, and who follow up consistently. Students know that their teacher cares about them and their individual needs when

- learning goals are flexible enough to accommodate differences between and among students
- an effort is made to understand each student’s individual interests, strengths, needs, learning preferences, and personality
- high (but realistic) expectations for **ALL** students are conveyed both in academics and in personal responsibility

Sample Strategies to Build Positive Relationships with Students



- *Demonstrate a personal interest in students.*

Take time in class and in the hallways or on the schoolground to talk with students about their lives outside of school.

- *Greet students at the door.*

Teachers can use this strategy to informally engage students individually, ask how they are doing, gauge their emotional state, have a brief conversation, and/or generally make them feel welcome.

- *Use students' names positively.*

Students of any age generally respond positively when a teacher smiles at them and acknowledges them by name, especially in the hallway or on the schoolground. This simple action lets students know they matter and are valued as individuals within the school community.

- *Use humour.*

Humour that heals (rather than hurts) is sensitive and good natured, defuses difficult situations, and brings people closer together.

- *Smile and show enthusiasm.*

Let students know when you are particularly enjoying the teaching role. Enthusiasm

"In effective classrooms there is an intellectual partnership between the teacher and students."
(Manitoba Education and Training, 1996, 3.4)

has been identified in many studies as the most significant characteristic of an effective teacher (Di Giulio). Enthusiasm can be shown in many ways: a "let's find out" attitude, a positive tone of voice, moving around the classroom, and sharing and articulating interest in the subject. Sharing your enthusiasm makes the classroom safe for students to express their enthusiasm too.



For more information on developing a cohesive classroom, see Chapter 3, Classroom Climate and Culture in *Success for All Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction A Resource for Kindergarten to Senior 4 Schools* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996).

Noncontingent Positive Reinforcement

Stephen Covey describes noncontingent positive reinforcement as being like deposits in another person's emotional bank account. Many students, and particularly those with behaviour challenges, have emotional bank accounts that are close to empty. To help these students feel more connected, teachers need to help them build their emotional bank accounts.

Noncontingent positive reinforcement is unconditional and independent – that is, students do not have to demonstrate specific behaviours in order to earn it. It can be as simple as smiling at a student at the beginning of class, asking a student who enjoys attention to write key words on the board during a class discussion, or allowing time for personal stories. Ensure that noncontingent reinforcement is appropriate for the student's age, interests, and personal preferences.

Noncontingent reinforcement is an essential component of the teacher-student relationship. It forms the foundation for trust and security, and provides bonding and connections that teachers and students need. It helps students learn that demonstrating respect and caring is a natural aspect of human interaction.

Patricia Sequeria Belvel and Maya Maria Jordan describe noncontingent reinforcement (38–41) by saying it

- sets the stage for intrinsic motivation
- forms a foundation of trust
- fosters a sense of security
- creates a comfortable climate
- creates a positive association with the teacher
- increases the probability of cooperation
- models positive actions for students to emulate

Proximity

Teachers who move around the classroom and teach from various areas and near different students

- send the message that they are actively involved and aware of all behaviour in the room
- build a sense of connection with students and communicate that the teacher is interested and available
- provide equal access to the teacher for all students
- have more opportunities to prevent negative behaviour and/or quickly deal with problems

Effective Communication

A number of variables affect how students perceive and respond to a teacher's communication (Rhode et al. 61). To effectively communicate expectations and requests to students,

- use polite requests rather than questions (e.g, "Please start your work.")
- move close to students when giving directions – the optimal distance is approximately one metre
- look students in the eye (consider cultural differences and do not insist on eye contact if it makes the student uncomfortable)
- use a quiet voice
- give students at least 10 seconds to respond before repeating a request or adding a new request
- ask only twice, and then follow through with a correction; the more often a request is made, the less the likelihood of gaining cooperation
- make only one request at a time
- remain calm and unemotional
- make more start requests ("do") than stop requests ("don't") (If the majority of requests are not start requests, consider clarifying behavioural expectations and using stronger prompts.)
- verbally reinforce students when they demonstrate cooperation – this will increase cooperation in the future

Verbal Limits

When students are not meeting classroom behavioural expectations or following agreed-upon procedures, describe the appropriate behaviour with a neutral body posture and tone of voice, and without using students' names. Belvel and Jordan have described how setting verbal limits has four basic forms:

1. **Prompt with questioning intonation:** "Everyone has their math book open?" Say this declaratively, as a prompt, not a question. If you ask a question ("Will you open your books?"), you may receive an answer you don't want.
2. **Hint:** "Everything should be off your desks." This statement includes everyone in the room.
3. **"Excuse me":** For example, to respectfully break habits of interrupting, you could say, "Hold on for a minute, Mel. We can't hear you because someone else is speaking."
4. **I-message:** Saying "I need" or "I want" is stronger and more assertive than the other verbal limit-setting techniques (e.g., "I need everyone to sit down."). (174)

Student–Student Relationships

Building and fostering relationships among students creates a feeling of community, which can make a difference in the behaviour and learning of each and every student in the class. Students need to learn to

- recognize the strengths and skills that each individual brings to the classroom
- look for opportunities to build on those skills and support each other in areas of need
- respect and show appreciation for each other, which includes listening to one another and disagreeing in appropriate ways

Sample Strategies to Build Positive Student-Student Relationships



- *Use flexible grouping.*

Create regular opportunities for students to learn with and from all of the students in the class, rather than just their best friends or the students they feel most comfortable with. This approach fosters a climate of acceptance and openness to the varied strengths, interests, and challenges among students in the class. Ensure students have opportunities to work independently, with different partners, in small groups, and in larger groups throughout the school day.

- *Teach skills for cooperative learning.*

Most students with behaviour and social difficulties find cooperative group work challenging. They need specific instruction about roles, responsibilities, and the expected outcomes of group tasks.

- Teach specific roles such as recorder, timer, reporter.
 - Adapt individual students' roles and responsibilities to accommodate their needs and strengths.
 - Directly teach specific formats for different tasks, such as how to brainstorm a list of ideas or how to interview a partner.
 - Provide visual or written organizers for each task.
 - Use timers and clocks when there are specific time requirements.
 - Initially assign cooperative work that involves brief and preferred tasks, and then gradually move into longer times and more complex tasks.
- *Teach a vocabulary of appreciation.*

Explicitly discuss, demonstrate, and model how to give positive feedback to other students and how to graciously accept compliments and positive comments.



For more information on flexible grouping and cooperative learning, see

- **Chapter 5: Flexible Grouping** in *Success for All Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction A Resource for Kindergarten to Senior 4 Schools* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996).
- **Chapter 4: Differentiation in the Multilevel Classroom** in *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 1996).

Home-School Partnerships

It is important to recognize that for many students the significant adult in their life may not be their parent. Families have many different structures and styles.

Students will feel safe when they see the adults from the two parts of their lives – school and home – come together to focus on their interests. When teachers and parents communicate regularly and work collaboratively, they are more likely to develop a degree of trust. Then, if a concern arises, they are more inclined to respect and support each other.



For additional information on home-school partnerships, see *Working Together: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2004).

www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/documents.html

Sample Strategies to Build Positive Home-School Partnerships



- *Involve parents and students in learning conferences.*

Many schools are replacing parent–teacher interviews with a conference format that more actively involves both students and parents.

- *Share good news with parents.*

Communicate with parents about what is going well and the positive things the student shows an interest in. A phone call is especially powerful. Electronic communication is preferred by many parents.

- *Recognize and support the multicultural needs of Manitoba families.*

School social workers, family liaison workers, and/or interpreters can assist in building positive relationships.

“Teachers who welcome parents into their classroom for purposeful and meaningful reasons extend this feeling of belonging.”
(Brownlie and King 39)

- *Recognize and support parents who have special needs.*

Student services administrators can assist schools to ensure needs are met.

- *Utilize media/technology to communicate with parents.*

Schools may use leader boards, email, blogs, wikis, websites, school newsletters, or student agendas.

School-Based

School Bonding

Most students become emotionally attached and committed to their school and classroom. To be engaged members of the school community, students need to see the school—both the physical building and the community of people inside—as safe and welcoming. They also want to feel pride in their school and to play a role in making the school a positive place. They want to be active and valued members of the school community.

Fostering a relationship between students and their learning is also a critical element of successful school bonding. Students need to see value in what they are being asked to learn. They need to feel they have a connection to their learning and some control over the learning process. Teachers should provide flexible and meaningful learning goals that encourage students to take ownership of their learning.

Staff can promote school bonding by having students work with each other across grades. For example, they can organize cross-age activities such as buddy reading, and plan school-wide special events, assemblies, and multicultural celebrations.

Sample Strategies to Increase School Bonding



- *Create opportunities for responsibility and leadership in the classroom.*

Rotate responsibilities on a regular basis, such as feeding the class pet, assigning the role of ‘head chef’ in a foods and nutrition class or the squad leaders in physical education class.

- *Display samples of student work.*

Display drawings, writing exercises, or completed projects in a prominent place in the classroom. Rotate the displays frequently and ensure that at some point during the month each student has at least one piece of well-done work completed and displayed.

Figure 3 on the following page shows an example of a display case showcasing the work of students who are enrolled in Food Services at Kildonan East Collegiate, River East Transcona School Division.



Teacher-Staff Relationships

Colleagues can offer encouragement and advice. Professional learning communities (PLCs) offer opportunities for colleagues to network and work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning.

- Join in a school-based or divisionally based professional learning opportunity
- Initiate a school-based professional learning opportunity on a topic that interests you with colleagues at your school
- Join an association or organization that offers local professional learning opportunities
- For more information on professional learning communities, what they are, and how to start them, see the following websites:



- www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html
- www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/proflearn/
- www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/wncp/ch7.pdf

Fostering positive relationships with all staff members is an integral part of a positive classroom approach. Students watch adults as they interact with each other. When we model positive social interactions, students learn how to respect others.

- Partner with a teacher at a different or same grade/subject area on a unit of study (i.e., math with woodworking)
- Partner with a teacher within a course/subject area on a project (i.e., automotive with Ecology [science] to build an eco-friendly car)

Teacher-Administrator Relationships

When dealing with classroom behavioural issues, teachers need to be able to access the expertise and support of the entire school staff, and especially the school administrator.

The role of the principal is to support the teacher's authority, not replace it. Open communication, knowledge of best practices in classroom management, and respect for diverse teaching styles are key to an administrator's ability to effectively support teachers in the development and maintenance of strong classroom management practices.

School administrators are also in a position to support effective classroom management practices by

- facilitating schedules to encourage and accommodate collaborative planning and problem solving
- following through on agreed-upon office referral protocols so that individual problem behaviour is dealt with fairly, consistently, and in a timely manner
- communicating with teachers about classroom management practices and issues, formally and informally
- offering both formal and informal encouragement and positive reinforcement to school staff who demonstrate strong and consistent classroom management
- being available and willing to help individual teachers identify issues and develop solutions for classroom behaviour problems, on an as-needed basis, using a process such as the 30-Minute Behaviour Intervention Meeting (see Tool 10)
- supporting and/or initiating professional learning communities
- making targeted professional development opportunities available for all school staff

