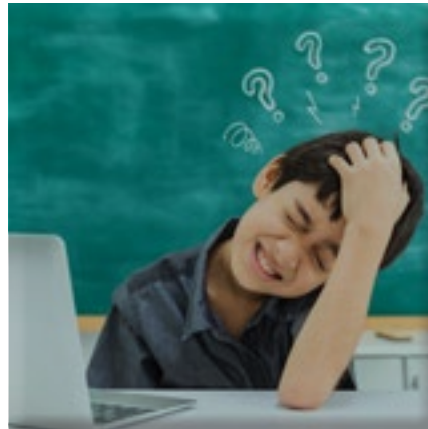


Positive School Experiences



Positive school experiences refer to students' (a) constructive relationships with educators and other personnel (e.g., counselors, front office staff, lunchroom staff), (b) sense of overall belongingness and acceptance, and (c) feelings of being supported when facing adversity. Collectively, these perceptions significantly predict academic success (including grade-point average and state standardized test scores) and positive behavioral functioning.

Other modules in this curriculum also target aspects of positive school experiences (e.g., positive peer relationships, standards/self-criticism). Nonetheless, facilitators can use this module to address other prominent factors that strongly predict how a student feels valued by their school.

This module slightly departs from other modules in that the primary focus is on building relationships between the student and the facilitator and group (whether that is the classroom or as a Tier II intervention group). Research shows that connecting with even one positive adult changes a student's perceptions of their school experiences. In addition to the primary lesson plan, several supplemental lesson plans are provided that incorporate strategies from other modules.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Discuss factors that contribute to optimal school experiences (in small group format)
- Develop measurable and reachable classroom goals to promote optimal school experiences
- Practice skills to reach classroom goals


MATERIALS

Other Videos for Facilitators: Why Are We Doing This?

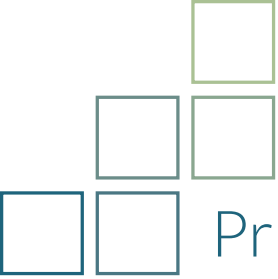
Every Child Needs a Champion 

Change it Up! Creating a Positive School Environment 

Every Opportunity 

What Happened When Teachers Found out How Students Felt About Them 

Teachers Tell Students How Special They Are 



Primary Lesson (all ages)

Time: One class period; 15 minutes for initial lesson and the remaining time for discussion

1. Students sit in a circle in the middle of the classroom room. Students are given a series of note cards, which they will write on for each question presented by the facilitator.


Facilitators can present this topic to the class using the following script:

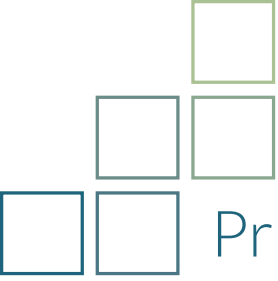
Sometimes school can be stressful. It can certainly be challenging. During these stressful moments it may seem that your schoolwork is all that matters. This is not the case. While your learning is important to all of us, we value you as a person. We take how you view your school experiences very seriously. If you don't have positive school experiences you may find it difficult to focus on your schoolwork.

I am committed to understanding you as a person by listening to you and learning about you. Equally important, all of us will learn a little more about each other. Please know that you can share as much or as little as you like about you, but we will respect everyone's contribution.

I will also schedule individual time with you throughout the year, so that I get better sense of things that are going well for you and things that you may be struggling with.

On these cards [hand out at least 5 notecards for each student], ***I want you to write down a question I will give you on one side, and write your response on the other side. I will give you time between each question.***

2. Facilitators can select at least 5 (or more) questions that are most relevant to their interest and goals (adopted from ). Note that some of the questions are student specific (meaning more personal) and some are classroom/school specific. The facilitator should select an equal amount of questions from each category. NOTE: One of the questions must be **“If you had the power to create two new rules for this class, what would they be? The rules can be anything as long as they provide a positive learning experience for you and your classmates”**



Primary Lesson (all ages)

04

Other questions can be:

- At the end of the [quarter/semester/year] when you leave this class, what words would you want your classmates and me to use to describe you? Why?
- At the end of the [quarter/semester/year] when you leave this class, what words would you want use to describe me? Why?
- What helps you feel like you are a part of this [classroom/school]?
- When do you feel most safe/unsafe?
- What makes you laugh at school?
- What are some ways I can understand you better?
- What is the best way to challenge you? For example, do you like to be called out in class? Do you like unique tasks created just for you?
- Who right now believes that you can succeed?
- What inspires you in school?
- How do you bounce back from frustrations?
- How will I know that you are struggling with your classwork?
- When do you get a chance to be a leader?

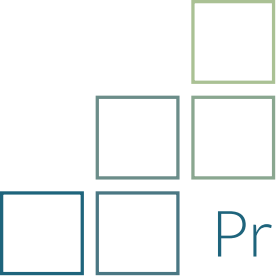
Facilitators should give about 3 minutes for each question.

Let's discuss some of your responses.

3. Facilitators should focus on the classroom/school-specific questions only (the individual questions can be shared with the facilitator during their individual meetings). Students are invited to share their responses (but they are not required to). At this point, facilitators are merely active listeners and recorders. Using the white board, facilitators will first write down the responses from the students, seeking only to clarify or rephrase responses but not questioning or being critical of them. For example, to the question regarding the power to create two new classroom rules, it is expected that some of the suggestions will be unreasonable or unattainable. The facilitator should simply write it down. It is important that students feel that they have active input and it reinforces the notion that the facilitator is validating their opinion.

You provided some great responses to my questions. And I see some overlap in your responses. [facilitator underlines key concepts that promote positive communication and a sense of belonging for students. These concepts include:

- Fairness
- Positive Communication
- Non-Judgmental
- Inclusion
- Respect for Differences
- Kindness



Primary Lesson (all ages)

The facilitator can emphasize each concept by using a student's example or one of their own. Doing so reinforces behaviors that will be encouraged in the classroom and those that will not be tolerated.

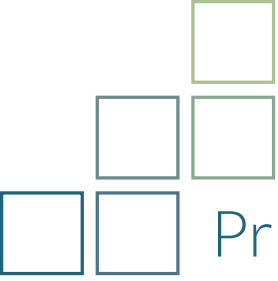
I would like to turn to the first question I asked, which was ***“If you had the power to create two new rules for this class, what would they be? The rules can be anything as long as they provide a positive learning experience for you and your classmates”.*** ***Now some of these suggestions won't work*** [the facilitator crosses off the rules that would not work in the classroom, and explains why]. ***Of the ones that I did not cross off, I would like you to meet in small groups and rate them in order of importance***

4. The facilitator should randomly select 2-3 students to meet in these discussion groups. Discussion groups should be more than 10 minutes, after which the entire group convenes, and a consensus is reached. The facilitator then takes the top two rules and displays them prominently on the white board

Now that we have agreed to the two classroom rules, please take this sheet [facilitator hands out the Our Special Classroom Rules to each student]. ***It is one thing to agree to these rules, but it is another thing to make them truly our own. Look at the top row*** [An example is provided to guide facilitators and students]. ***You will see an example rule in the first column. In the next line of this column, write down the first classroom rule you have voted on. In the next column, you will see it labeled as “strategies”. So for the rule in the first column, you see how those students will celebrate achievements as a group. Now, think of strategies for the first classroom rule. What strategies will you all adopt?*** [facilitator writes down participants' suggestions, and each participant lists them in the open Strategies box]. ***In the third column, let's look at the goal(s) that the students listed to celebrate achievements. What are the goals you want to list in that column for your rule*** [facilitator writes down participants' suggestions, and each participant lists them in the open Strategies box]. ***For this final box, this is more personal to you. Think of what you will do to ensure that the classroom goal is met. Please write this in your box but do not share with others. This is your own way of making this rule your own.***

The facilitator then completes the next line for the second agreed-upon rule.

5. Facilitators then periodically revisit with the class to discuss progress on classroom or school-specific rules. If the goals have been sufficiently met, the facilitator then selects the next two rules on the list and returns to point #4.



Primary Lesson (all ages)

6. For the student-specific goals, students can share their responses to the group, but it is important that facilitators schedule 10-minute, individual meetings with students during the week. These meetings can be held during free/down time. The purpose of these meetings is to better understand the motivations and needs of their students. Teachers take note of this information and frequently refer to it. For responses that indicate some difficulties (e.g., the student states that they do not have a chance to practice leadership skills), the facilitator can refer to the Leadership module in this curriculum, or insert a classroom “leadership rule” vis-à-vis points #3 and #4.
7. The facilitator will periodically check on progress through classroom discussions and/or with individual students. Classroom discussion should be held no later than two weeks apart. Individual meetings should be held no later than 7-10 school days apart (depending on the size of the group).



Supplemental Lessons (all ages)



Time: 15 minutes per exercise, either in class or outside of school

Materials: A private journal

“I Own It”

A significant factor in positive school experiences is personal accountability, that is, accepting responsibility for one’s actions. Students who take action to create their positive experiences report higher levels of school satisfaction, agency, and self-confidence. Thus, it is important that students take ownership of their own actions regardless of when the outcome was positive or negative.

Facilitators can present this topic to the class using the following script:

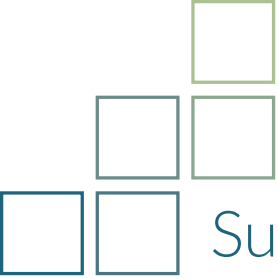
One of the key skills we will work on is accepting responsibility for our actions. Has there ever been a time when you observed someone make a mistake but then blamed someone else? Has there ever been a time when you were blamed for something you didn’t do? How did it feel? Let’s turn this around: has there ever been a time when you made a mistake but blamed someone else for it? What happened next? [facilitator invites discussion]

Accepting responsibility for our own actions may not feel good at times, but it is a mark of your growth as a person. It is also a mark of a leader, which you all are. For this exercise, you will complete the “I Own It” worksheet. When I say “own it”, I mean that you accept responsibility for your behaviors and take steps to correct it.

I want to emphasize that your focus is on your behaviors, not someone else’s. There are plenty of times when a problem occurs that is not entirely your fault and blame can be shared. You may feel justified that nothing was your fault. However, if you were involved in any way, your actions contributed. Focus on what you did/said that contributed to the problem.

There are many times that you have done something very well that has helped others, and that too should be recorded. In other words, you also “own” your positive actions. This sheet helps you examine the actions you took that positive influenced others.

Students are instructed to review their actions over the past 24 hours (or since the last time they completed the worksheet). Students continue to record their actions each day and can share their sheets during their ongoing 10-minutes sessions with the facilitator (see Primary Lesson). The goal for the student is to learn from their mistakes, that is, what was viewed as an issue for them was successfully addressed in a later entry. Students can write in their private journal the lessons they learned about themselves (and others) over the course of the year.



Supplemental Lessons (all ages)


Informal Learning Opportunities

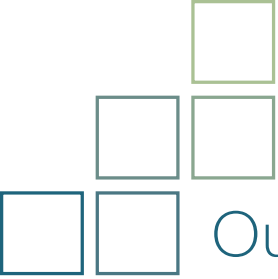
Perspective taking is also a significant factor in positive school experiences. All too frequently, students pigeonhole facilitators into a category that precludes seeing them as human being. To address this, one student each week will be randomly assigned to meet with the facilitator for 10 minutes each day. These meetings will be during non-instructional times that are conducive to both parties. Typically, these meetings will occur prior to or after school, or perhaps during lunch. The purpose of these meetings is for the student to understand the facilitator at a deeper level. Facilitators can share with the student their observations about their day, some of the successes and frustrations that they faced over the course of the school day, and their goals for students for the following day. Students can share their school day with the facilitator. The point of the exercise is to keep the discussion open and without any set agenda so as to create insightful “learning moments” for students.

“Feeding the Hungry Bee” (ongoing).

This activity can benefit shy or reticent children using the power of social praise. Often, second-hand compliments (i.e., overhearing someone say something nice about them) are more powerful than direct compliments. Facilitators can notify the class that points will be given to those who “catch each other being good”, that is, identify an action or statement by a peer that was prosocial or helpful to another. The student who demonstrated the behavior will receive points as well. These points will be traded in for special rewards. The teacher then identifies 2 “secret sharers” who are instructed to specifically focus on the shy/reticent student. These secret sharers will rotate every two weeks, which eventually will lead to the targeted child assuming the role.

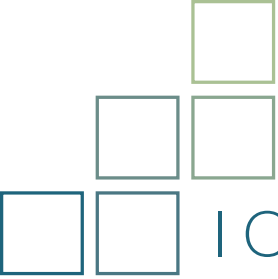
Create peer mentoring opportunities (ongoing)

In this independent project, each student is paired with a younger, targeted student and serve as role models. The opportunities for mentoring can range from academic tasks (reading or math) to arts and science activities and beyond (see ). Peer mentors would keep track of their experiences a diary that describes the advantages and challenges of being a mentor, and what they learned about themselves in terms of perspective-taking, empathy, and active listening skills.



Our Special Classroom Rules

CLASSROOM RULE	STRATEGIES	GOAL	WHAT I CAN DO TO HELP
e.g., personal and academic achievements will be celebrated weekly	15 minutes every Friday before lunch, students will either report or their peer will report an achievement for them	Every student will have at least one achievement publicly acknowledged per month	I will present an achievement by another student at least twice per month



I Own It

10

Think about how the past 24 hours have been for you. There were likely times when you did or said something that helped you or someone else. There may also have been times when you did or said something that did not really help you or someone else. This worksheet will help you by focusing on things you can keep doing (if you did something good). The worksheet can also help you consider different strategies (when things didn't turn out well).

Name: _____

Date: _____

TIMES THAT I DID WELL!	WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE REASONS?	WHAT I CAN DO TO KEEP THIS GOING

TIMES THAT I DID NOT DO SO WELL	WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE REASONS?	WHAT I CAN DO TO IMPROVE THE NEXT TIME