

HOW TO BUILD EMOTIONAL SAFETY IN THE CLASSROOM

1. UNDERSTAND IT: (listen to the podcast or read my blogpost on “Emotional Safety in the Classroom)

Learning happens *after* emotional needs are met.

2. PLAN FOR IT: (these are the systems and routines you can put in place before the year starts)

Start the year with Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Slow down and make sure the emotional needs are met before you introduce content, or parallel to the introduction of content. Don't stress the official curriculum just yet! Remember, learning happens **AFTER** emotional needs are met.

Structure your program and routines

Students thrive off of predictability. However, COVID has taken much of that away from us. Consider the predictability you can add into your classroom that is not classroom or distance specific. For example, can you start each class with a DO NOW, can you end each class with an exit slip? Do you have a system for student submissions of assignments that you can establish that is independent of location?

Establish norms:

What behaviors and expectations do you have for your students? Discuss these norms with your students and work through them. Some examples of norms are: supporting peers, making eye contact, and responsible use of technology. Establish norms that support each member as an active and vital member of the class.

3. BUILD IT: (These are the intentional actions that you can take every day to continuously encourage emotional safety for your students)

Recognize the trauma

No one saw this coming! Notice it, validate it, empathize with them, and then repeat.

Create a positive atmosphere

You are the guide, you are responsible for creating the safe space for your students to learn in. Use your personality, your routines, and your insight to create an atmosphere where **NO MATTER** what happens (COVID or non COVID related) they can rely on you, your interactions, and the positive environment to feel safe in.

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<p>Notice the particulars (Know your students)</p>	<p>In a distance classroom: "Hey, you brought your cat to class today!" and "I notice you're still wearing a blanket, is it cold in your house?" In the physical or distance space: "WOW, you must have really worked on your reading these past 5 months!" and "I notice you are engaging with your friends in such a positive manner!"</p>
<p>Practice emotional connections and promote social behaviors</p>	<p>You may have to review the basics with your students, as they are "out of practice! We accept one another, we encourage one another's learning. We do not make fun of each other. We are respectful of each other's time. We look at one another when they are talking.</p>
<p>Teach risk taking in the classroom and model making mistakes and being OKAY</p>	<p>Admit to being unsure. Optimal learning is driven by curiosity. However, curiosity is often stopped by fear. Encourage exploration, discovery and practice beyond one's comfort zone. With mastery, a student will feel encouraged to take risks again. In this way you can build confidence, satisfaction, and pleasure of learning.¹ You want to hear students saying, "I don't know if I am doing this right but I am going to keep trying." and "This is harder than what I am used to but I am ready and up for the challenge!"</p>
<p>Promote accountability</p>	<p>How much to push and how much to hold back will always be a challenge. Recognize that in every system, students will test the limits. Be prepared for this and give quick, helpful feedback. "You did not submit your HW last night."</p>
<p>Be predictable in your interactions</p>	<p>"Safety is created by predictability, and predictability is created by consistent behaviors. And the consistency that leads to predictability does not come from rigidity in the timing of activities it comes from the consistency of interaction from the teacher. If a schedule is consistent, but the teacher is not, there is no predictability for the child. Predictability in time means less to a young child than predictability in people."¹</p> <p>Set non-negotiables and always stay calm. Be predictable in YOU, as that you may not be able to control <i>where</i> you are teaching, but you <i>can</i> control your interactions.</p>
<p>Communicate</p>	<p>With uncertain times, students (and parents!) require clear and direct instructions and communications more than ever. Provide a safe space by communicating the whats, hows, and wheres. It is okay to communicate when you do not know something for sure, just be clear that it is going to be OKAY even if you don't have the specifics right now.</p>

[*https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/creating-emotionally-safe-classroom/](https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/creating-emotionally-safe-classroom/)