

Reprioritizing Relationships: Using Teacher Professional Learning to Strengthen Classroom Connections



Key Evidence-Based Strategies

Building relationships with individual students

Intervention Strategy

Direct PL on Facets of Strong Relationships

Teachers can improve their ability to build strong relationships through explicit, direct skill-building about facets of positive relationships and associated concrete practices. Reflection on relationships with individual students, paired with change in practices, also improves dyadic relationships.

Example Practices

During class conversations, paraphrase students' comments to check for understanding and demonstrate active listening;

Affirm positive choices students make;

Reflect on which students would benefit most from efforts to improve TSRs;

Note students' strengths, especially those who might be marginalized by peers (e.g., because of ADHD);

Hold 1-on-1 student-led meetings to learn about students' goals and interests

Example Interventions/Programs

[Establish-Maintain-Restore](#), [Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management](#), [BRIDGE](#)

Intervention Strategy

Building Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Mindset Around TSRs

Bolstering teachers' confidence that they can successfully connect with students and improve relationship quality over time leads to better TSRs.

Example Practices

With colleagues, discuss successful past TSRs with challenging students to identify what enabled past successes

Note: Example Interventions/Programs represent example practices that correspond to the focal feature designed to improve TSRs that teachers might experiment with; these practices are not necessarily empirically verified.



Key Evidence-Based Strategies

Building relationships with individual students (continued)

Intervention Strategy

Improving Teachers' Emotional Well-Being

Teachers are better positioned to cultivate positive relationships with their students if they themselves are thriving. Mindfulness training and mental health support can create a better context for teachers to foster positive TSRs.

Example Practices

Develop mindful listening skills, practicing “noticing” emotions without reacting or judging

When facing classroom stressors, try asking mindfulness-inspired questions such as, “Is there a different way to look at this situation?”

Example Interventions/Programs

[Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education \(CARE\) for Teachers](#)

Intervention Strategy

(Re)shaping Teachers' Perceptions

Perceptions matter. Helping teachers more accurately understand, and empathize with, the experiences that students are having in their classrooms can improve the strength of interpersonal connections and reduce adverse disciplinary events.

Example Practices

Find common interests/values with each student and reference them during informal and curriculum-related conversations;

When frustrated by a student's action, come up with multiple explanations, at least one of which is charitable, and with which the student might agree

Example Interventions/Programs

[INSIGHTS](#)



Intervention Strategy

Improving the Disciplinary Culture

When teachers use restorative practices (as opposed to exclusionary discipline) to resolve conflicts, they strengthen relationships and build social connection in their classrooms. Restorative practices can promote multiple beneficial outcomes, including reducing disciplinary disparities and shrinking opportunity and achievement gaps.

Example Practices

Proactively identify students in need of extra behavioral support;
Engage in community-building circles to honor all voices and challenge traditional hierarchy;
Use responsive circles to address low-level behavioral incidents

Example Interventions/Programs

[Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility](#); [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#); [Restorative Practices Fact Sheet](#)

Intervention Strategy

Building Emotionally Supportive Classrooms

Teachers can enhance their capacity to cultivate warm yet demanding classroom contexts through participation in social and emotional learning programs and reflection-based coaching. These programs give teachers the opportunity to learn about and reflect on their use of practices that support effective classroom interactions.

Example Practices

Greet students by name;
Set aside regular times for community-building activities;
As class ends, ask students for “exit tickets” to better understand how students felt about a lesson, then reflect key themes back to students the following day;
Provide regular opportunities for students to exercise autonomy by making choices in academic and non-academic domains

Example Interventions/Programs

[Responsive Classroom](#), [My Teaching Partner](#), [Making the Most of Classroom Interactions](#), [4R's \(Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution\)](#), [MOSAIC](#), [CASEL](#)



Key Evidence-Based Strategies

Changing the Classroom Relational Climate (continued)

Intervention Strategy

Building Culturally Responsive Classrooms

When teachers learn about and embrace students' individual identities, they are more likely to form strong social bonds.

Example Practices

For each student, try to learn one aspect of the student's cultural background that is particularly important to them and one that is less important (as a means to building a nuanced understanding of how students identify with their culture);

Pair feedback with actionable next steps and affirmation that students can reach their goals;

Help students interrupt negative self-talk and disrupt stereotypes about themselves and others;

Build and explicitly share your belief that all students will succeed in your classroom

Example Interventions/Programs

[National Equity Project](#); [Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain](#); [Unearthing Joy](#)