



# Preventing the Unimaginable

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Prepared Originally

For

The Governor's School and College  
Security Conference

Connecticut, March 2008

# Physical Security Measures Used Exclusively



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- Physical security measures, although essential to overall school safety, when used **exclusively**, lead to such student perceptions as:
  - *They are **unsafe** in the school*
  - *The school is a repressive environment*
  - *The school is a hostile environment*
  - *Students are basically prisoners in the school*
  - *There is good reason to be fearful while at school*



# Absenteeism and Academic Success

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- Learning requires that **students** be in class **physically and emotionally**
  - Absent because of sickness
  - Absent because of “vacations”
  - Absent because of being fearful
  - “Opt out” to visit the nurse or guidance
- Learning requires that **educators** be present, available and use engaging and ethical methods

# U.S. Department Of Justice Research



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- Violence in middle and high schools
  - Largest proportion of violent incidents began with a relatively minor affront
    - Teasing
    - Name-calling
    - Exclusion
  - Escalation from minor affronts to more serious acts



# Dangerous “Weapons” In School: Direct Negative Impact on Learning

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- Words! The silent and most devastating weapons
  - Putdowns
  - Slurs
  - Threats
- Hurtful language heard daily by 90% of school community, most commonly:
  - Gender related
  - Non-heterosexual
  - Racial, and religious groups
  - Special education



# A Familiar Nursery Rhyme: Unfortunate Myth...And Reality

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“Sticks and stones can break your bones, but names will never hurt you.”

“Sticks and stones will break my bones...And Words CAN Hurt Forever.”

Words **DO** hurt



# Columbine As Crucible . . .

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- Since 1974, 65 school shootings have occurred:
  - 1970s 3 shootings
  - 1980s 5 shootings (1 per year from '85 – '89)
  - 1992 3 shootings
  - 1993 2 shootings
  - 1994 3 shootings
  - 1995 3 shootings
  - 1996 4 shootings
  - 1997 4 shootings
  - 1998 4 shootings
  - 1999 5 shootings



# ...And This Decade

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- 2000 4 shootings
- 2001 6 shootings
- 2002 2 shootings
- 2003 3 shootings
- 2004 0 shootings
- 2005 2 shootings
- 2006 4 shootings
- 2007 5 shootings
- 2008 3 shootings (to date)





# Prevention and Intervention

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- Prevention: to be ready, pro-active and anticipate circumstances that will hinder potential concerns **before** they happen
- Intervention: to enter in or come between two or more individuals or circumstances **after** something has occurred



# School Shooters: What They All Share

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- Five necessary (not sufficient conditions)
  - Marginalized by their peers; experienced horrific peer cruelty
    - Teased, ridiculed, excluded, threatened, physical abuse, etc.
    - Subjected to homophobic slurs
  - Under the “radar screen”
    - Marginalized by the adults who could have helped them
    - No caring adult they could count on
  - Personal problems
    - Mental health conditions
    - Family instability
  - Very rigid parameters (school climate) for being acceptable
    - Being “different” is not acceptable
  - Easy access to guns



It Doesn't Matter Where A Person Stands  
Religiously, Philosophically or Morally:  
Language That Hurts Must Stop

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“Whether a [boy or] girl is or isn't gay is less important than if and when homophobia is used as a weapon against a [boy or] girl to put [him or] her down and isolate [him or] her.”

Rosalind Wiseman, Queen Bees & Wannabes



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# Video Clip: 60 Minutes II



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**Voices of the Children:  
In Their Own Words**

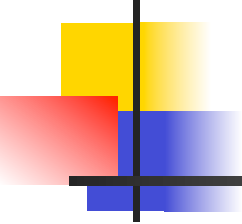


# Solving “Bullying” by Passing State Anti-Bullying Laws

1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
GA	NH	CO LA MS OR WV	CT NJ OK WA	AR CA RI	VT	AZ IN MD VA TX TN ME NV	ID SC AK NM	DE IA IL KA MN OH	NE KY UT FL	NC WY

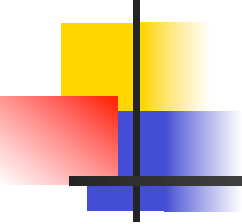
## STATES WITH LAWS UNDER CONSIDERATION

**MA MI MT NY WI**



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**Honor the “Spirit” (intent) of the law, not merely the “Letter” of the law to create truly physically, emotionally and intellectually safe and positive learning environments for every single school community member, student and adult alike.**



# Role Of Faculty/Staff: Essential Elements

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- Speaking up
  - Immediately
  - Consistently
- Vocal and visible to violations
  - Degrading/mean-spirited language
  - Slurs
  - Harassing conduct
- Intervening
  - Classrooms
  - Halls
  - Cafeteria
  - Bathrooms
  - Buses
  - Playing fields
  - Everywhere!



‘BULLY’ and ‘BULLYING’ are  
OUT!!!

“Mean” Is A Better Way To Go

*Any act of [cruelty] by peers [or adults] that compromises the safety of the person being targeted for that [cruelty] in any way has a tremendous and long-lasting negative impact on a student [or adult].*

*In various studies, 80-90% of students claim to have been harassed or abused by peers.*

*Fun is only fun if everybody involved agrees that it’s fun. Even without malicious intent, if it hurts, if it’s mean, if it excludes, if it frightens, it will impact a person’s sense of safety.*

*Jane Bluestein, Creating Emotionally Safe Schools*



# “Negligent Privacy”

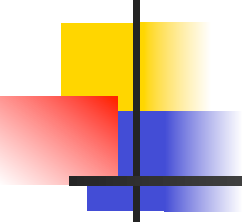
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“Negligent privacy occurs when those who supervise and monitor children do not remain vigilant and unwittingly provide the opportunity for victimization to occur. Negligent privacy can occur on a playground filled with second graders, in a crowded high school cafeteria, during a youth group camping trip or even 10 feet away from a teacher in a classroom. Simply put, negligent privacy occurs when adults are not paying close attention to children under their care.”

Weakfish: Bullying Through the Eyes of a Child by Michael Dorn, p. 62

Safe Havens International, Inc.

[www.safehavensinternational.org](http://www.safehavensinternational.org)



# Adult Modeling: *We Are All Models...We might As Well Be Good Ones*

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- Language Use
- Moral Behavior
- Demonstrating Compassion
- Elements of Respect
- Listening
- Mentorship, not Friendship
- Conflict Resolution
- Display of Common Courtesy

# Climates Of Respect: Safe Learning Communities



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Not an add-on: a **necessity**

Schools and community organizations should be modeling the best, not perpetrating the worst



# The Nature Of Respect

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- Respect is an *earned quality*:
  - *First*, Adult toward Adult
  - *Second*, Adult toward Child
  - *Third*, Child toward Adult
  - *Finally*, Child toward Child



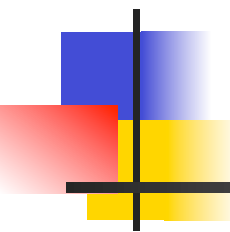
# The Elements Of Respect: What it *Looks, Feels and Sounds* Like

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Respect entails . . .

- Common courtesy
- Using given or chosen names (not street names)
- Real listening (not *just waiting to talk*)
- Willingness to address, rather than ignore, difficult issues
- Capacity for empathy/compassion/caring
- Treating others fairly and appropriately
- Being honest, forthright and trustworthy
- Understanding and accepting of differences
- Recognizing that everyone, including adults, are fallible
- Learning to give honest apologies

# The Power Of Connection To School



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“When students feel they are a part of school, say they are treated fairly by teachers, and feel close to people at school, they are healthier and more likely to succeed.”

“Improving the Odds: The Untapped Power of Schools to Improve the Health of Teens.” April 2002



# School Connectedness: Simple Measures

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- I feel close to people at this school
- I am happy to be at this school
- I feel like I am part of this school
- The teachers at this school treat students fairly
- I feel safe (*physically, emotionally and intellectually*) in this school





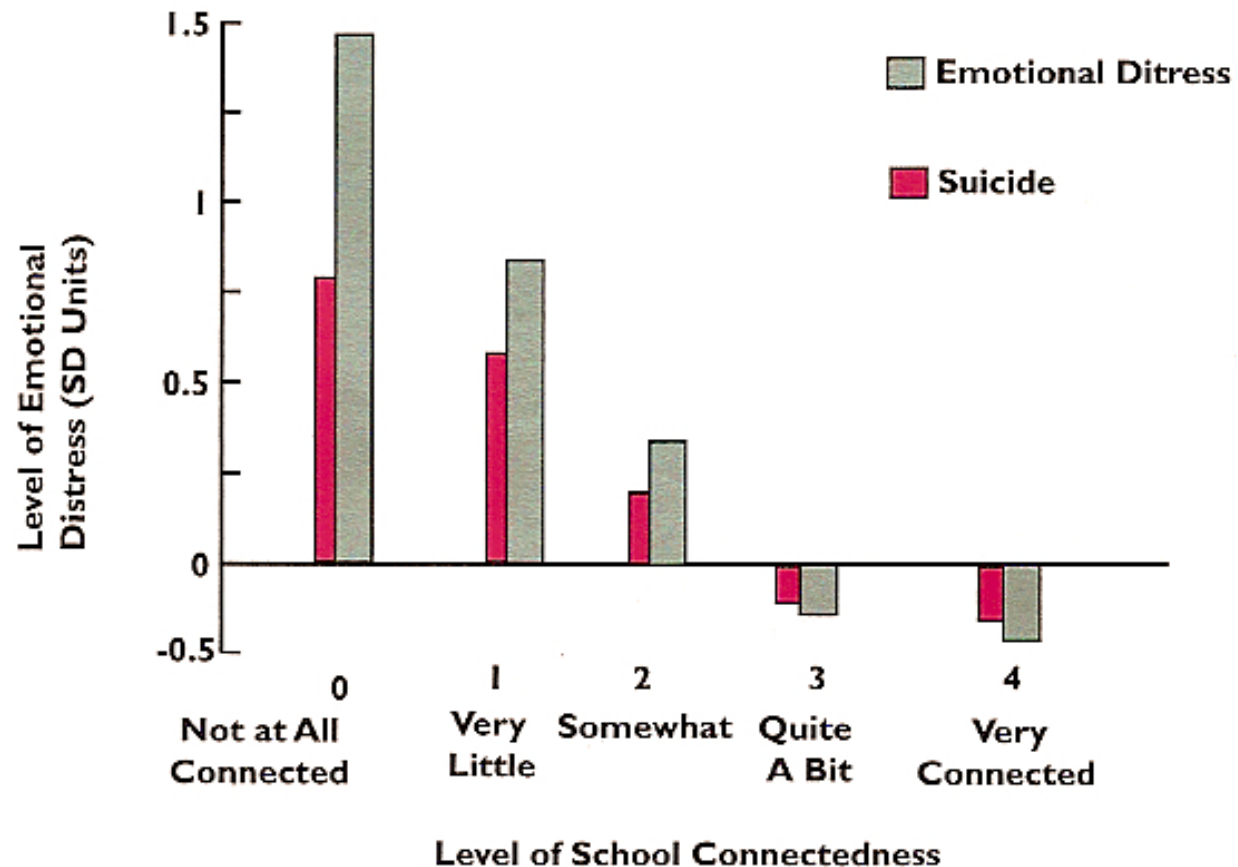
# Connections To School

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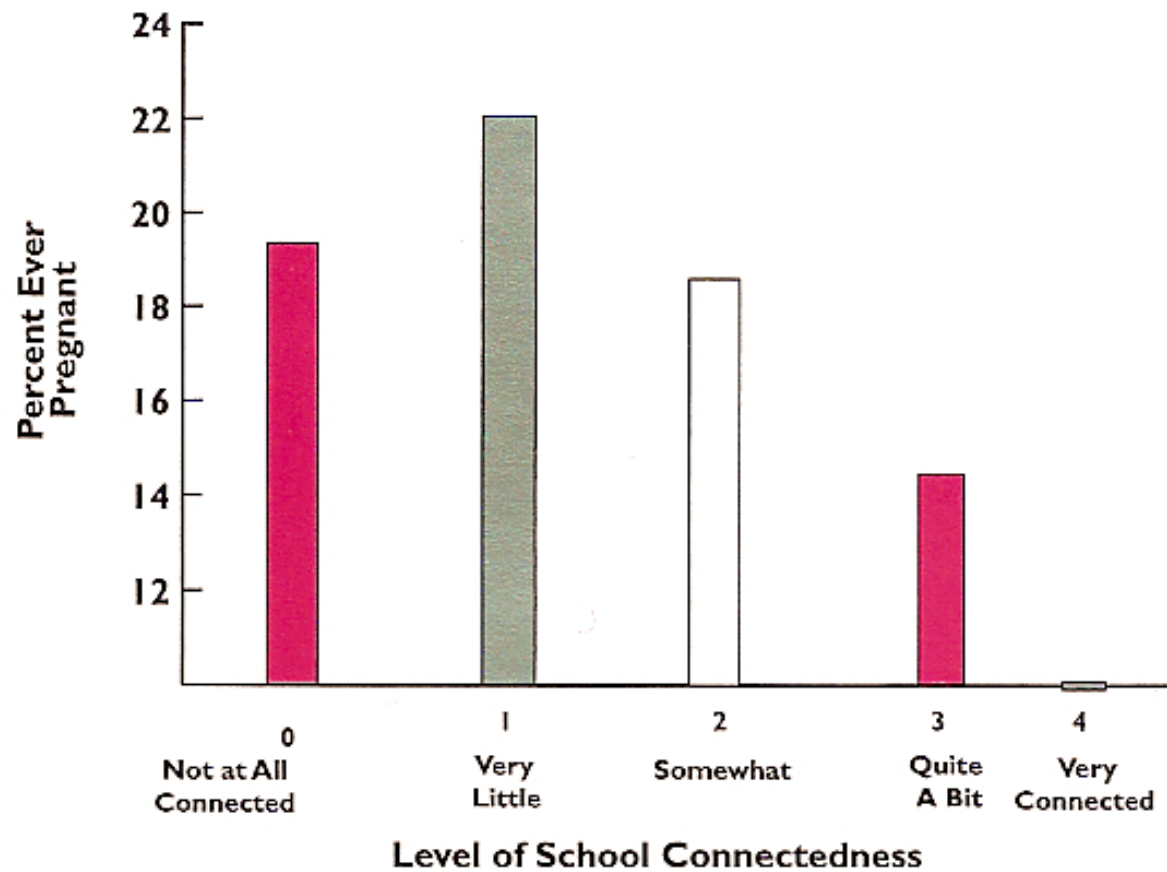
Research from [The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health](#) has shown a [strong](#) association between [school connectedness](#) and every [risk](#) behavior studied.

- Students who feel connected to school are less likely to use substances
  - Students who feel connected to school experience less emotional distress
  - Students who feel connected to school engage in less violent or deviant behavior
  - Students who feel connected to school are less likely to become pregnant

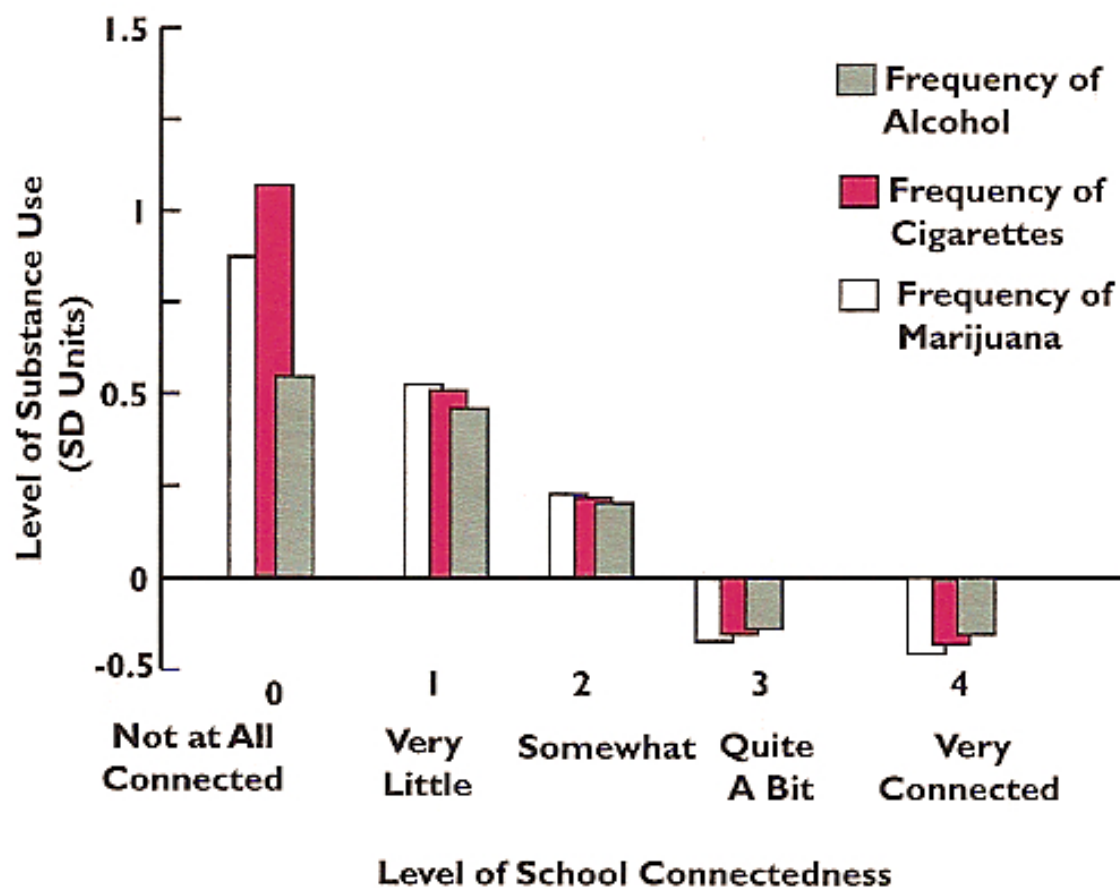
## Students Who Feel Connected to School Experience Less Emotional Distress



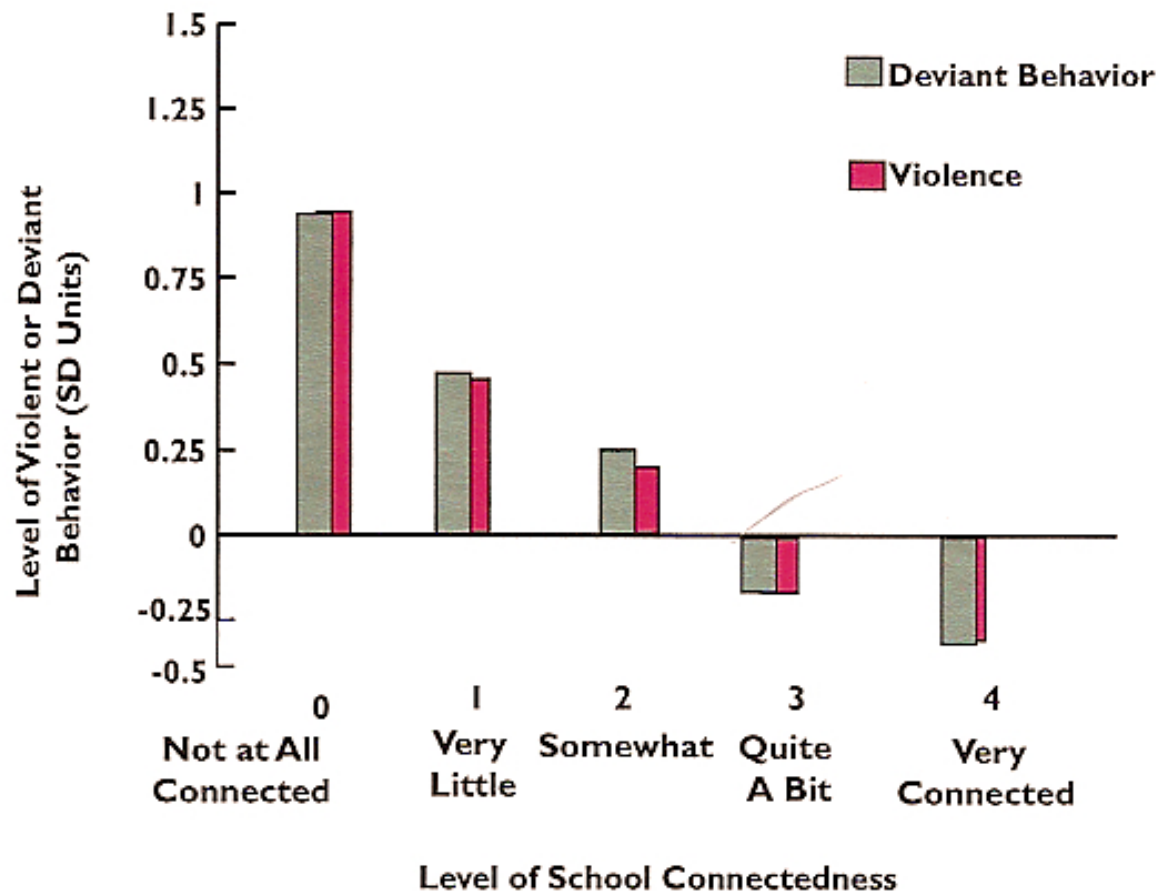
## Students Who Feel Connected to School Are Less Likely to Become Pregnant



## Students Who Feel Connected to School are Less Likely to Use Substances



## Students Who Feel Connected to School Engage in Less Violent or Deviant Behavior





# Success For Students In School

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Single most important factor  
determining success is  
students' perception that their  
*teacher(s) like(s) them*



# Factors Associated with School Connectedness: *SCHOOL CLIMATE & CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT*

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The single strongest association with  
connectedness was *school climate*

Kids feel engaged when the classroom environment  
is seen as a **safe** place

- 1) Physically
- 2) Emotionally (no peer cruelty/bullying)
- 3) Intellectually/academically (no ridicule  
for taking academic risks: not to  
feel a failure...this is often the least  
attended to)



# Factors Associated with School Connectedness: SCHOOL POLICIES

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- No single school policy was associated with connectedness
- A climate of harsh discipline is associated with lower school connectedness
  - It is possible to write policies to make connectedness *not* happen
- Zero tolerance policies tend to be unevenly applied
- The more punitive the policies, the less connected students feel





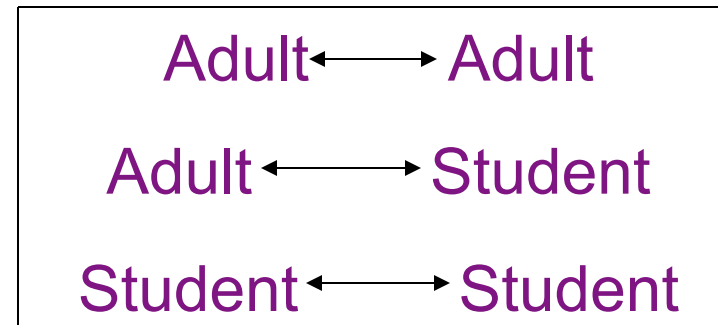
# Factors Associated with School Connectedness: THE SCHOOL

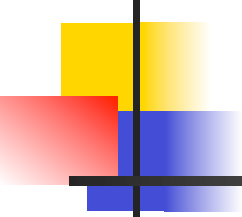
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- School size mattered (larger than 1,200 students matters)  
...classroom size did not
- School type is not associated with connectedness  
...public, private, parochial
- Location of school is not associated with connectedness  
...urban, suburban, rural

# The Quality of School Climate: It is *All* About Relationships

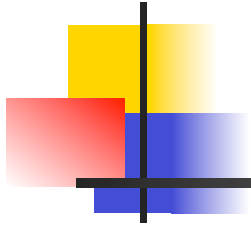
- Determined by: ***how well the people within the school treat each other***
  - Physically
  - Emotionally
  - Intellectually
    - Actions
    - Verbal and non-verbal exchanges
    - Tone of voice
    - Using inherent power advantages





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A Positive and Respectful School Climate is one that is ***physically, emotionally and intellectually safe*** for ***all*** school community members... which is the antithesis of a school that is “violent”



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The “Golden Rule” as the  
ultimate measure:

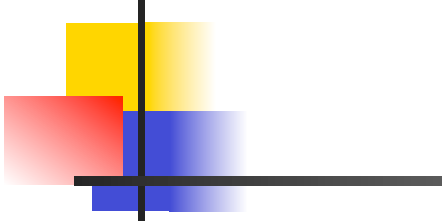
*Treat others the way in  
which you would wish to be  
treated*

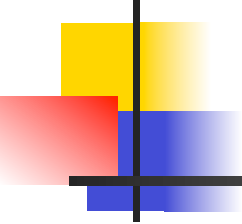


# Even Better...

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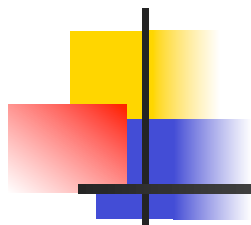
The *Platinum* Rule:  
Treat others the way  
*they wish you would*  
*treat them*





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We can create these kinds of schools, but only if we demonstrate leadership – only if we stand up and speak up for civility and respect. We can create schools where every single child and adult feels respected and valued.



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