

Hope System for Elementary Schools

A Social-Emotional Learning Program

Kathlyn Tipton, Psy.D.

Preview

From the Introduction

Hope System for Elementary Schools is a systemic, school-wide, and classroom-based support program designed to foster resilience in traumatized children and support the developmental needs of all children. It is designed with child victims of abuse and neglect in mind in order to avoid over-generalization; however, the systems and procedures will help victims of many types of trauma. They are also best practices any school can implement in order to improve the wellbeing, psycho-social competence, and educational performance of all children. The basic tenets of fostering resilience are character, compassion, competence, confidence, and connection. These are inherent in good educational pedagogy and should not be “one more thing” to add to a long list of expectations on school staff (Thomsen, 2007). This is education at its best.

Trauma is experienced by our children and youth with alarming frequency and devastating consequences. For too many children, trauma steals their childhoods and violates who they are and who they will become. It is one of the biggest influences in the challenges educators face every day as they try to promote healthy development and achievement. Traumatic experiences of any kind can result in mental and behavioral health problems which impede adaptive functioning and result in a pattern of negative or hostile interactions and relationships, triggering adverse reactions and devaluation or rejection from others. Interpersonal trauma, violence in particular, often disrupts development and impairs children’s ability to appropriately relate to, interact with, and respond to those around them, or to regulate their emotions, in addition to potentially causing cognitive and learning problems or disorders when the trauma is chronic. Establishing a school environment that is safe, positive and supportive, paired with activities that promote healthy social and emotional development and improve behavior gives all students what they need to experience wellbeing and achieve to the greatest extent of their abilities. It also fosters the personal and social competence in traumatized children that they desperately need to find solid ground, learn to regulate themselves and relate to others, and gain hope for a positive future.

Wellbeing is increasingly becoming recognized as an important characteristic in motivating people towards success, improving health, strengthening relationships, and improving achievement and productivity across the lifespan. Wellbeing can be defined as good mental health, appropriate emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning in life. People who are well or healthy often look for new challenges, solve problems

Introduction

effectively, experience increases in creativity, learning, and productivity, and are better at managing adversity. Effective efforts at increasing wellbeing among youth include systems-level, school-based programs designed to nurture healthy development and provide safe, stable, positive environments, as well as activities that increase learning and achievement, safety, communication skills, and relational connectedness in individuals, and provide opportunities for service learning. (Howell, Coffey, et al., 2016)

William Nicoll with the Florida Atlantic University College of Education (2014) clearly defined, illustrated, and substantiated the need for applying a resilience-focused, systemic paradigm in developing and implementing school reform to improve academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment in all students using the concepts gained from resilience research. This manual presents a systemic support program for elementary schools designed to foster effective adjustment or resilience in child victims of trauma and to improve the wellbeing, competence, and performance of all children. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network reported that up to 40 percent of students have experienced or witnessed traumatic stressors (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015), which may be a significant underestimation due to unreported or unconfirmed events. Child abuse and neglect, together referred to as child maltreatment, is one of the more common and devastating forms of trauma, with staggering consequences to individual, classroom, school, and community well-being, resources, functioning, and productivity. Child maltreatment involves devastation in important relationships when those relationships are necessary for the child's survival, growth, and health; when they set the foundation and build the framework for the child's entire life. These children grow up in worlds of anger, violence, fear, rejection, and shame. There are maltreated children sitting in every classroom, throughout every school; they require safety, positive relationships, and effective intervention in order to attain adaptive functioning and achievement.

This program was developed based on current research on child maltreatment and its effects, as well as on the development and promotion of psychological resilience in children and adolescents within the context of the author's training and experience in school and educational psychology. The program seeks to establish positive school and classroom environment, present a social and emotional learning curriculum appropriate for all students, and target the specific needs of high-risk traumatized students. Research has clearly shown that a positive school climate significantly increases student achievement (Lee & Shute, 2010) and reduces delinquency (Lo, et al., 2011), and that universal social and emotional learning significantly improves student social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak, et al., 2011).

Content

- Developing a Positive School Climate
- Developing a Supportive, Empowering Classroom Environment
- Fostering Critical Protective Factor Characteristics
- Lesson Plans:
 - Goal Setting
 - Social Skills 1: Essential Communication Skills
 - Social Skills 2: Making and Keeping Friends
 - Social Skills 3: Assertiveness
 - Appreciation of Diversity
 - Problem Solving/Conflict Management (lower and upper levels)
 - Self-Regulation 1: Recognizing and Expressing Emotions
 - Self-Regulation 2: Self-Calming Strategies
 - Self-Regulation 3: Controlling Anger and Aggression
- Establishing Support Systems
- Supporting the Family
- Special Considerations for Trauma Survivors
- Basic Cultural Considerations
- Informational Appendices:
 - Positive Behavior Support in the Schools
 - Sample Behavior Support Worksheet
 - Behavior Intervention for Parents (handout)
 - Resources for Staff

Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson 2: Social Skills: Essential Communication Skills

Social skills training is divided into three lessons to be spread out over three months. If you decide to mix up the nine lessons for the year, be sure to complete this one before Making and Keeping Friends, Assertiveness, and Problem-Solving/Conflict Management. Communication skills form the foundation for those skills, along with the foundation for all of our interactions. Without good communication skills, it is very difficult to work with others, socialize, get your needs met, and be an effective member of this society.

Key Term:

1. **Communication:** verbal and nonverbal expression to send messages, and awareness and comprehension through listening and watching to receive and understand messages.

Procedure:

1. **Introduce and define the terms:** Communication skills: the ability to listen to and talk with other people with understanding and without conflict.
2. **Establish and define the problem being addressed:** Discuss why communication skills are important (brainstorm with the class – they help us understand each other and get along; they help us learn; they help us keep friends; they help us solve problems, etc.) and what happens when they are not used. Solicit examples of poor communication and good communication – include examples of your own.
3. **Set the lesson goal:** We are going to learn the most important communication skills:
 - a. Listening without interrupting. As the students get older, elements of active listening should be introduced as follows:
 - i. Young children: listening without interrupting, changing the topic midstream, or running away.
 - ii. Middle childhood: maintaining appropriate eye contact to demonstrate interest, and matching your facial expression to the feelings of the speaker to demonstrate empathy.
 - iii. Older children: at appropriate pauses and conclusions either briefly paraphrase what was said or state what you think the speaker is

Essential Communication Skills

feeling with a questioning voice in order to make sure and show that you understand

- b. Talking with your listener in mind (responding to your listener's concerns, giving your listener equal opportunity to talk, talking about shared interests, no insulting, good manners, stranger vs. casual acquaintance vs. close friend, etc.)
- c. Paying attention to nonverbal communication (eye gaze, facial expression, body posture, etc.)

The emphasis for younger children should probably be on the first two, with nonverbal communication added on in later grades.

4. **Teach the procedures:** Explain to the class what each one means. Discuss with the class why each is important – how they help, what happens and how you feel when someone does not do them (seek student input). Relate a few examples for each skill.
5. **Discuss and practice their application:** Engage the class in a discussion of exactly how and when they can go about using these communication skills. Develop scenarios with the students that relate to their daily lives. Role plays can be effective for older children, while puppets or stuffed animals are good tools for practicing communication skills with younger children.
6. **Make a plan:** Plan with the class how they are going to learn these skills (e.g., practice with friends and family) and how progress is going to be evaluated (e.g., weekly class check-ins).
7. **Make a poster:** Make a poster illustrating or listing the essential communication skills to hang in the class as a reminder for the students. Have the students create and illustrate mini posters for their notebooks.
8. **Give the assignment:** Give the students a specific assignment for learning and practicing these skills (e.g., intentionally do each one at least twice per week when you are talking with a friend or family member – pay attention to how it feels for you and how your listener responds). Have the students go home and teach the communication skills to their family members.
9. **Weekly follow-up:** Check in with the class at the end of each week to discuss progress. Throughout the month, look for opportunities to reinforce these skills.

Essential Communication Skills

10. **Conclusion:** At the end of the month, engage the class in a discussion about their experiences and how they can keep doing them every day. Continue to look for teachable moments and to reinforce the skills whenever possible.

Communication Skills

What do you like to do?

LISTEN WITHOUT INTERRUPTING

TALK WITH YOUR LISTENER IN MIND



NOTICE BODY LANGUAGE



NOT HAPPY

HAPPY

