

Hope Strategies for the Elementary School Class

A Classroom Toolbox for Developing Social-Emotional Competence

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Preview

Hope Strategies for the Elementary School Class is a selection of tools for educators in the form of classroom-based support strategies and lesson plans. The hope and purpose are to foster social-emotional competence and wellbeing in students, starting at the elementary-school ages. This approach to skill development is built upon and driven by research and professional experience in guiding and supporting educational, social, and behavioral growth in students of all ages, with a focus on children and youth who struggle with the effects of serious trauma and other disabling conditions.

The classroom support and teaching methods and strategies in this compilation are designed for the benefit of all students, but with special attention to the needs of traumatized children. The trauma-informed nature of the procedures and the introductory discussion in this manual focus mostly on child victims of abuse and neglect in order to avoid over-generalization; however, there is substantial overlap with the manifestations and outcomes of other types of serious trauma among children, as well as the needs of children struggling with other forms of adversity or disadvantage. Beyond trauma and adversity, these are also best practices for all educators in their work to improve the wellbeing, psycho-social competence, and educational performance of all students.

Every attempt was made to develop this selection of strategies and lessons in such a way that they are as time- and resource-efficient as possible. The author strove to design procedures that work into the classroom routine with minimal disruption to instructional time, and that use materials and resources already available in most schools. Making sure students attain healthy development in all respects is imperative for classroom participation and academic success. Addressing the needs of the whole child is inherent in good educational pedagogy. Doing so should not be “one more thing” to add to a long list of expectations on school staff (Thomsen, 2007), as long as attention and respect for both the abilities and the limitations of educators is consistently maintained. This is education at its best.

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Introduction

Healthy social-emotional development and wellbeing are imperative needs among all students, regardless of any other individual, family, or community characteristics. In conjunction with effective family and social support systems, they provide developing children essential building blocks for quality of life and life satisfaction throughout their lifespans – even more than academic achievement. They are also critical, baseline needs for academic achievement, making it accessible for the students, since even the best instruction, classroom, and curriculum cannot compete against social-emotional dysfunction. None of us can function effectively in any setting – home, school, work, social and community events, etc. – if we cannot communicate, socialize, work with others, resolve conflicts, regulate our emotions and behavior, etc., no matter how much we know or how high our intellectual abilities. Both research and real-life applications have made it clear that social-emotional learning in the educational setting enhances student learning, motivation, and behavior; classroom climate and management; academic outcomes; and lifespan achievement.

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 effectively, experience increases in creativity, learning, and productivity, and are better at managing adversity. Effective efforts at increasing wellbeing and social-emotional competence among youth include school-based programs and procedures 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)

The methods and strategies provided in this manual are tools for educators to use in their work to support healthy social-emotional development and wellbeing among all children, while at the same time knowing that the students who struggle the most with these life and learning skills tend to be traumatized children. These tools were developed based not only on research, training, and experience in supporting typical child development and educational performance within an educational and school psychology framework, but also on current research in child maltreatment, its effects on the developing child, its influences in the school setting and across social systems, and effective school-based support. This approach also centers on applying what is known about the development and promotion of psychological resilience in traumatized children and adolescents.

Instead of providing scripted lesson plans that end up being a “one size fits none” effort, each lesson plan is designed to allow flexibility and promote both creativity and individualization for teachers. The lessons and strategies are to be adapted by each teacher according to the developmental levels and needs of his or her unique students and classroom. This allows the lessons to be relevant and meaningful within the specific

cultures of the community, school, and classroom. There are also suggestions and guidelines for establishing the supportive, empowering classroom environment all students need, with special attention to conditions and concerns specific to diverse, disadvantaged, and traumatized children.

Hope Strategies for the Elementary School Class

There are three components to Hope Strategies:

- I. Developing a Supportive, Empowering Classroom Environment
- II. Fostering Individual Protective Factor Characteristics
- III. Social-Emotional Lesson Plans (9 total)

Each component, as established in the research, is imperative for the success of all students, while also giving maltreated and other traumatized children what they need to achieve normal development and become productive members of society.

Components I: A supportive, empowering classroom environment also promotes optimal achievement in addition to providing students with the social experience, social-emotional learning, and support necessary for developing interpersonal competence, self-confidence, and a positive attitude.

Components II and III provide strategies for teaching and reinforcing protective factor characteristics and social-emotional skills identified in the research as important for healthy development, wellbeing, achievement, and resilience:

Component II: Autonomy
Internal locus of control

Component III: Goal setting
Social skills
Appreciation of diversity
Problem-solving/conflict management
Self-regulation

Following these components, this manual includes chapters discussing concerns and needs specific to traumatized students, basic cultural considerations for teachers, and ideas for looking beyond the classroom in working to promote growth, health, and positive outcomes for students. The appendices at the end of this manual include suggestions for those who wish to pursue further recourse in support of their students by:

- I. Learning more about positive behavior support in the classroom,
- II. Reviewing a sample worksheet for developing a positive behavior support plan

- III. Acquiring information for families on positive behavior support in the home that can be given to them in handout form
- IV. Learning about and reviewing additional information and resources available in books and online websites

Component III

Social-Emotional Lesson Plans

This selection consists of nine lessons, designed to provide direct instruction in critical protective factors, life skills, and social competence. Each plan is formatted with the expectation that the lesson will be shared with the class at the beginning of the month, and then followed with weekly, shorter check-in and reinforcement sessions as the students manage their own learning process with self-directed practice and reinforcement activities through the remainder of the month. The nine lesson topics are as follows:

- 1. Goal setting
- 2. Social skills:
 - a. Essential communication skills
 - b. Making and keeping friends
 - c. Assertiveness
- 3. Appreciation of diversity
- 4. Problem-solving/conflict management
- 5. Self-regulation:
 - a. Recognizing and expressing emotions
 - b. Self-calming strategies
 - c. Controlling anger and aggression

The lesson plans are fairly general. There is a tremendous range of developmental characteristics as well as a unique cultural climate within each elementary school classroom. Each lesson plan needs to be tailored to the developmental level of the students and the specific needs of the class, as well as the instructional style of the teacher. Separate, scripted lesson plans for each grade level were not developed due to the high level of variability among individual classrooms at any grade level, within and between schools and districts. The needs of a third-grade classroom in an affluent suburban community are much different than the needs of a third-grade classroom in a low income, poverty-ridden urban community, and socio-economic level is just one variable among many that contributes to making each classroom unique. The understanding and creativity of each teacher are what allow this to work. Tailoring the lessons to the needs of your students, putting a little of yourself into them, and flexibly incorporating the input of your students during the lessons makes them far more relevant and meaningful to the students, and enhances their engagement, learning, and buy-in.

Some guidelines for lower and upper level lessons are provided as starting points. Keep it fun and stay at their level. At all levels, be open and responsive to the social beliefs, attitudes, and expectations demonstrated by your students – that is the world in which they live in and must apply these skills.

Be creative. Allow up to one hour at the beginning of each month for any lesson, depending on the endurance of your students. It is an interactive process, so most students will be able to stay engaged with a longer lesson. These lessons may be challenging for some teachers – the teacher becomes at least as much a facilitator as teacher, a different role than that which some teachers are accustomed. The basic procedures for being a facilitator are as follows:

1. Do not lecture – set the stage with an introduction to the concept being presented and then engage the class as a whole in a group discussion and activity.
2. Ask open-ended questions and incorporate student input into the process.
3. Encourage everyone to participate and make sure everyone has a chance.
4. Make sure everyone respects and listens to each other without interrupting – every student's input is valuable and is not to be judged. It helps to establish basic rules for participation ahead of time and post them where they can be seen. Avoid abstract words such as "respect," instead defining the behavior in specific, observable terms.
5. Correct anything that is inappropriate.
6. Draw conclusions as a group.
7. Be a role model.

One of the most important functions of the teacher is to be a role model. If you need help with ideas or procedures for implementing the lesson plans, consult with your school psychologist and fellow teachers.

The general instructional process for the lessons is as follows:

1. Introduce and define the terms.
2. Establish and define the problem being addressed (use teacher and student scenarios).
3. Set the lesson goal (include student input).
4. Create a plan:
 - a. What will be learned.
 - b. How it will be practiced.
 - c. How progress will be evaluated.
5. Teach the procedure. Encourage student input – they know what is socially acceptable among their peers, and if they help develop the procedure, they are much more likely to want to implement it.
6. Discuss its application.
7. Make a poster presenting or illustrating the lesson for the classroom. Sample illustrations are provided. Illustrations are recommended for the lower levels, and may help at the upper levels as well. After the lesson, hang the poster in your classroom to refer to and review during the next month.
8. Have the students make an 8½"x11" mini poster listing or illustrating the concepts from the lesson. They can put these mini posters in personal notebooks, especially if you engage your class with multiple lessons, so they are accessible, easily

stored, and can be shared with their families. Also add to the notebook any other individual products from the lessons. Some students might need extra help setting up and maintaining their notebooks.

9. Give the assignment for practice during the month. In addition to practice in school, the assignment should include teaching the concepts or procedures to their family members.
10. Throughout the month, review the concepts and procedures at regular intervals, watch for teachable moments and praise successes.
11. Continue to reinforce the target behaviors throughout the year with reminders, praise, and social recognition.

Materials Needed

1. An overhead projector for each classroom.
2. A presentation easel with poster paper and a set of colored markers for each classroom.
3. Drawing and writing paper, pencils, and crayons or markers for all students.
4. A notebook in which loose leaf papers can be secured and organized for each student, preferably one with a cover on which the student can draw.
5. Two stuffed animals or puppets for each kindergarten through second grade class (puppets can be made by students).

Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson 2: Social Skills: Essential Communication Skills

Social skills training is divided into three lessons. Communication skills form the foundation for all social skills, along all social interactions. Without good communication skills, it is very difficult to work with others, socialize, get your needs met, maintain relationships, or 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 feeling with a questioning voice in order to make sure and show that you understand.
 - b. Talking with your listener in mind. This includes 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 (e.g., eye gaze, facial expression, body posture)

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.
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.