



CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR SEL TO THRIVE



School Climate and Social and Emotional Learning

The relationship between a healthy school climate and SEL growth is interactive and depends on the contributions of all educational stakeholders. Creating a positive and nurturing environment sets the stage for SEL to flourish (Osher & Berg, 2018). Although the notion of a school climate may feel slightly intangible, educators, school leaders, and students can work together to create a positive environment for all. To foster a climate where SEL can thrive, take the following steps:



- **Assess the existing climate** (Zakrzewski, 2013). Have a class meeting and discuss existing feelings, experiences, and expectations within the classroom/school. Giving students a voice allows them to feel heard and ensures that they have a say in how their classroom community runs.
- **Create a shared vision.** Generate a collective set of positive norms, values, and standards for the classroom/school. Some topics to analyze may include how safe students feel at school, how supported students feel, the nature of relationships among students and between students and adults, and how connected students feel to their community (Kostyo et al., 2018).



- **Brainstorm a list of “yes behaviors”** that contribute to a positive school climate. These behaviors can include supporting and helping each other, using positive and kind words, and setting and respecting classroom and individual boundaries. Display the “yes” behaviors prominently in the classroom, and refer to them when needed to remind students that they are responsible for creating a supportive, caring classroom for everyone.



- **Create an accountability system** where students can hold themselves and others responsible for positively contributing to their school community. Consider leaving a comment box in the classroom where students can anonymously provide feedback about what’s working and what isn’t. Class meetings can provide a forum for all students to speak candidly, which can be teacher-facilitated for younger grades and gradually evolve into student facilitated sessions as students get older.

Creating the conditions for students to grow their social and emotional competence is an essential aspect of education. Students must feel safe, supported, and valued in their school and classroom community, and when we take deliberate steps to create a positive school climate and foster a growth mindset in each and every student, they will be ready to develop their SEL skills in nearly any situation.



References

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