
Summary – Building Strong Relationships

Summary

In this video, you explored building relational connections with students.

You learned what strong relationships are, why building strong relationships with students is important, and how you can build strong relationships with your students.

What are strong relationships?

- Strong relationships are safe relationships.
- Strong relationships are the foundation that allows students to feel relaxed, take risks in learning, and have a positive school experience.
- Strong relationships are based on people communicating with each other. When building strong relationships, there is a focus on nonverbal behavior and repetition of safe interactions with students.
- Some examples of non-verbal communication include:
 - Body posture;
 - Eye contact;
 - How fast someone speaks or moves; and
 - The volume or tone of their voice.
- Someone’s non-verbal signals can be enough to help another person feel safe and comfortable. Some of these relational safety signals are:
 - Projecting a sense of calmness;
 - Giving full attention in an unhurried way; and,
 - Conveying friendliness and warmth.

Why is it important to build strong relationships with students?

- When educators build strong relationships with students, students feel safer, calmer, and ready to engage fully in academic and social opportunities.
- Students need school-based relationships so they can feel safe enough to practice regulation while in school, and these regulation skills help students to be successful academically and socially.
- Students who have experienced trauma and chronic stress are less likely to process verbal information and more likely to rely on non-verbal signals.
- Educators should project non-verbal signals of calmness, attention, and friendliness to all students; this way, any student can feel safe enough to build a strong relationship with them.

How can you build strong relationships with students?

- Be present.
 - Use active listening techniques like nodding your head, smiling, and making eye contact to demonstrate to a student that you’re interested in what they have to say.
 - Put aside your own needs and what you are going to say next and really tune into what the student is trying to say.
- Be patient.
 - Establish a class protocol for practicing patience, like giving students additional time to process their thoughts, manage their feelings, and organize themselves so they are ready to respond during class.
 - Set up the expectation that everyone takes a patient beat at specific moments to create a safe environment that supports building connections.

- Be parallel.
 - Work and play alongside students, physically.
 - Being side-by-side instead of face-to-face can feel less threatening and help students develop a sense of safety.
 - As you work in parallel, stay aware of both verbal and non-verbal signals that the student is ready to interact with you.
- Convey high expectations.
 - When built on a foundation of strong relationships, your high expectations show your respect for your students and your belief in their potential as learners.
 - When you have "high expectations," you make sure that each student is challenged to reach their full potential.
- Keep interactions going.
 - Look for ways to interact and keep conversations going, such as asking open-ended questions that start with "How" or "What."
 - Repeat positive interactions in which students are having back and forth dialogues with you to help students build the complex skills they need for reading others' signals.

Mythbuster

MYTH: Strong relationships are primarily based on whether or not people like each other.

TRUTH: Strong relationships are based on people communicating with each other, both in verbal and non-verbal ways.

Go Do It!

Building strong relationships takes time and practice. Throughout the next week, work on implementing one of the suggested methods for building strong relationships with students. Consider simple ways you can use this method to help create a safe environment. What opportunities already exist for you to intentionally integrate your chosen method? Which opportunities happen naturally during your work with students? As you work on using this strategy, consider the ways you see it building strong relationships.