Is climate change real???

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What does work FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE (and any other school-wide initiative)!

“Implementation research: a synthesis of the research” Dr. Dean Fixsen, et. al.

• NURTURING TRAINING
  • All staff involved
  • Skill based training
  • Practice based coaching
  • Practitioner and program evaluation with intentional continuous improvement
  • Facilitative administrative practices

• SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM
  • Staff members who represent the diversity of staff & students
  • All grade levels, departments, and specialty staff
  • Key administrator who will allocate time and resources
  • Staff who are respectful and respected
  • The team regularly reviews data, supports discussion on practical details, and guides decision making to improve the climate
  • Consider having parent and community members

Quality School climate information is readily available

• National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments
  https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-and-healthy-students/school-climate

• National School Climate Center
  https://www.schoolclimate.org/
Disconnected

even in schools with quality climate initiatives, some students are especially challenged on very personal levels

What are some of the reasons that students struggle to feel connected, to do well at school, and to be happy?

“Reclaiming Youth At Risk: Our Hope for the Future”
Brendtro, Brokkenleg, & Van Bockern

• BELONGING: Feeling attached to your family, group, “tribe”, class, school, etc. in ways that you experience loving, friendly, intimate, gregarious, cooperative, and trusting interdependence.
• MASTERY: Gaining competence as you learn and achieve skills and knowledge. Experiencing creative problem-solving through personal motivation and persistence.
• INDEPENDENCE: Having confidence in yourself to be responsible and accountable. Exercising self-discipline, managing your feelings effectively, and showing leadership in your personal decisions.
• GENEROSITY: Relating to others in ways that are caring, empathic, supportive, and loyal. Being altruistic, willing to help others.

Anxiety: our “you are at risk” warning system

• The #1 mental health challenge
• 13% of kids
• Difficulty engaging academically & socially
• An intense temperament that requires careful handling
• Genetics play a significant role
• Types of anxiety
  • Separation anxiety
  • Selective mutism
  • Phobias
  • Social anxiety
  • Generalized anxiety
Early onset bipolar disorder

- Difficulties in infancy
- Precocious, bright, and creative
- Severe separation anxiety
- Night terrors, Fears of death
- Raging, tantrums, oppositional behaviors
- Sensitivity to stimuli
- Inflexible
- Peer problems, including bullying & COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS
- Suicidal ideas
- Red flags: A history of mood disorders and/or alcoholism in the family

Asperger’s syndrome: *high on the spectrum*

- 1 in 68 students, 1 in 52 boys
- Persistent challenges in communication & relationships
- On a continuum from mild to severe
- A pervasive developmental disorder – symptoms from early childhood
- Significant impairment in academic, social, & behavioral functioning

Communication challenges that get in the way of connections with others

- Responding inappropriately in conversations
- Difficulty getting into or out of conversations
- The “little professor syndrome” – no clinically significant delay in language
- Confusion:
  - non-verbal language
  - concrete/literal language
  - figures of speech
  - metaphor, simile, exaggeration, humor
Social interaction problems

• Difficulty building friendships appropriate to their age
• Absence of sharing enjoyment, interests, or achievements with others
• Persistent, restricted, & intense interests to the point of boring and annoying others; delays in social reciprocity
• Problem-solving social and behavioral issues
• Delayed development of relationships

School challenges

• Wants consistency – Rules - Inflexible, rigid; anxiety and stress increase when things change
• Trouble stopping or starting something
• Lack of compliance with directives
• Preoccupations with parts or objects
• Dislikes gross & fine motor activities
• Easily confused with complex assignments
• Trouble organizing auditory information
• Difficulty figuring out what is most important
• Disorganization
• Distraction
• Stress due to perfectionism

The “2X10” plan for building connections
• Have a 2 minute conversation with the student about anything EXCEPT SCHOOL – sports, TV, jokes, video games – whatever they might talk about
• Do this 10 days in a row
• Making small talk can increase academic engagement in students who need & seek attention

A connection with a caring adult is the most important key to resilience
For students who are selectively mute, or very guarded about talking

- Building the “Communication Bridge”
- A variety of “lanes” crossing the bridge
- Written notes
- Gestures
- Non-verbals
- Low verbals through a friend
- Low verbals to others
- Moderate verbals
- Accept & nurture all lanes crossing the bridge!

COMMON COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

- I can’t do anything right!
- I’ve got to do EVERYTHING right!
- Everyone is against me…
- Everyone always laughs at me!
- This will never help!
- Nothing good ever happens to me!
- I know you were talking about me!

Many students with mental wellness challenges have Cognitive distortions: an irrational impact of many mental wellness challenges; extreme thinking; dramatic misperceptions of what’s really happening

- Cognitive behavioral therapy is effective at helping students recognize and change irrational thoughts.
- CBT is the most research supported counseling practice
- CBT can also be encouraged in the classroom
  - Rational Emotive Therapy books be Dr. Jerry Wilde
  - Class & school wide CBT curriculum: “Creating Opportunities for Personal Empowerment” by Dr. Bernadette Melnyk
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Fight, Flight, Freeze, Appease

- Stress: fight/flight
- Adrenaline & cortisol flow
- Logic & focus: diminished
- Reacting, not responding
- Chronic stress: high blood pressure, increased heart rate, muscle tension

Relaxation response: health promoting; improved ability to plan & respond; More focused thinking

- Breathing: 3/5/7
- Bio feedback calming card
- Engage your logic: write, draw, or color
- Mood support dogs
- “fidgets”

For students too often emotionally aroused:

triggering the Relaxation response
For students who lack social, behavioral, friendship, or problem solving skills: teach Social Skills

"The use of appropriate social skills involves an immensely complex chain of rapidly occurring interpersonal events. For youth, especially those suffering from mental health disorders that dramatically limit their emotional and cognitive functioning, correctly performing these skills at the right time can be an overwhelming task."

Boy’s Town Press
“Treating Youth with DSM-IV Disorders”

- Name it
- Show it
- Practice it
- Use it in real life
- Give feedback
- Individual, small group, whole class

Smart Words for Anxious Kids

Reassurance & logic don’t always help
- “It’s going to be OK. Trust me.”
- “There’s nothing to be scared of.”
- “Let me tell you why you don’t need to worry.”
- “Stop being such a worrier!”
- “I don’t understand why you’re so worried.”

Hear, acknowledge, Inform.
- Validate: “I can see that you’re scared.”
- Relax first. Visualization. Breathe. Then say, “Feelings are always real, but they’re not always facts.”
- When the student is relaxed, explain the evolutionary basis for worry.

Anxiety in the Classroom

What you might see
- Frequent erasing, starting over
- Refusing to get started
- Worry about a test
- Resisting participating in discussions or interactions
- Student appears more relaxed with a classmate
- socially/emotionally wanting to be “invisible”

How to respond
- Praise effort, not perfection
- Small grades, extra credit options
- Incorporate interests & expertise
- Avoid “random calling on”
- Encourage partnering
- 2-minute power pose drill (class wide)
### Strategies & accommodations

#### Off task/daydreaming; highly anxious
- Proxemic support: move around the classroom constantly
- 1:1 hurdle encouragement; the “zig zag” walk
- Stop and encourage, redirect, praise

#### Seriously not a “morning person”
- Nothing too intense for the first period or two
- Take important tests later in the day
- Consider a later starting time

### Strategies & accommodations

#### Significant mood swings
- Identify a “safe” adult to go to
- Identify a “calm-down” place
- Have an “escape plan”, e.g. therapeutic bouncing
- Identify mood triggers and work on coping skills
- Journaling to gain insights
- For serious mood issues, have a backup plan, e.g., intermittent medical homebound

#### Perfectionism
- Model that perfection isn’t the goal
- Don’t use “perfect papers” as models
- Reduce worry over writing quality by using a computer
- Cut the student well before transitions; allow completion of an activity without undue pressure for the next
- Be careful not to reinforce “perfect” work

### Strategies & accommodations

#### Peer troubles
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Peer support
- Social skills training
- Opportunities for successful leadership

#### Over stimulated in PE class
- Access to water and rest
- Consider less competitive options
- Consider adaptive P.E.
- Give a less physical role, e.g., score-keeper
Strategies & accommodations

Medications
- Educate yourself on the effects of medications; work closely with the student, family, and doctor
  - "Medication Fact Sheets: A Behavioral Medication Reference for Educators," by Timmerman
- Thirst: personal water bottle, water breaks, bathroom breaks, educate staff
- Sleeping: Provide a brief napping place
- Cognitive dulling: breaks, extra time, decrease workload (including homework)

Attention challenges
- Sit close to the teacher
- 1:1 check-ins
- Schedule breaks
- Find quiet work areas
- Find a study partner

Strategies & accommodations

Difficulty completing assignments
- Back-and-forth notebook between home and school
- Reduced homework/extended deadlines
- Recorded books
- Art and music (therapy)
- Extended test time
- Tutoring to catch up from absences

Difficulty changing routines
- Train students in routines, including specific steps for transitions
- Post combination photo/word schedules
- Advance notice about changes in the routine (e.g., subject change, substitute teacher)

Disorganization
- Set up an organization folder with clear & bold directions on it
- Email or fax assignments home
- Prompt the student before going home: Check in & check out
- Provide 2nd set of books for home

Stressed/confused in class
Organizing and prioritizing
- Highlight critical information, graphic organizers
- Pre-teach important concepts
Completing assignments
- Reduce writing requirements
- Allow alternatives—audio, video, keyboards

Strategies & accommodations

Sleeping
- Provide a brief napping place

Cognitive dulling
- Breaks, extra time, decrease workload (including homework)
Strategies & accommodations

Students who get anxious with verbal directives & instructions

- Social stories with photographs and graphics

“Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment with openness and curiosity.”

Mindful Schools
Mindfulness in schools
https://www.mindfulschools.org/

Strategies & accommodations

Executive function skills

- Cognitive & emotional skills for self-management
- 8 skills: Inhibition, Shift, emotional control, Initiation, Working memory, Planning/organization, Timeliness, Self-monitoring
- EXTERNAL supports are essential

Brain health

- Eliminate toxins – alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, drugs
- Protect your head – avoid “rush” activities
- Diet – more protein, less carbs
- Intense aerobics – heart rate up, 30-45 minutes a day, 5 days a week
- Avoid excessive video games...max 30-45 minutes a day
- Sleep

Strategies & accommodations

Negative self perception

- Getting rid of automatic negative thoughts – Cognitive Behavior Therapy; Rational Emotive Therapy
- Learning about biological interventions: Medication, nutrition, exercise, sleep
- Coaching – external support with goals
- Learning how to counter stress: breath control, relaxation skills

Finding & highlighting student strengths

- Get better at naming strengths
- Power capes
- Learn about “Neurodiversity”
  - Dr. Thomas Armstrong
  - “Neurodiversity in the Classroom”
  - “You’re Smarter Than You Think”
- The power of stories
  - “The Pact”
- Strength stones
For students who feel so different than others, embarrassment and a feeling of not being understood is common.

Reducing stigma

- Use the compassionate nature of kids
  - The Children’s Story Project
  - Children’s MH Week
  - Students speaking to leaders
  - “Directing Change” program & film contest

- Photo Voice
- Student focus groups
- Students are key to reducing bullying
  - “Power differentials” are often at play: Gender identity, race, gender, disability, emotional/mental health, socio-economic and/or cultural differences

- EYES: Empowering Youth Engaging Schools
  - education@schoolclimate.org

School wide practices that enhance positive climate

- Learning challenges
  - The #1 tool for positive behavior is students feeling competent with learning
    - “Visible Learning for Teachers” - John Hattie
  - This book is highly recommended as a guide for teaching practices that are strongly supported by tons of research.

- School wide practices
  - School wide Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports
    - [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)
  - Restorative Justice
  - Trauma Informed Schools
    - [https://traumasensitiveschools.org/](https://traumasensitiveschools.org/)