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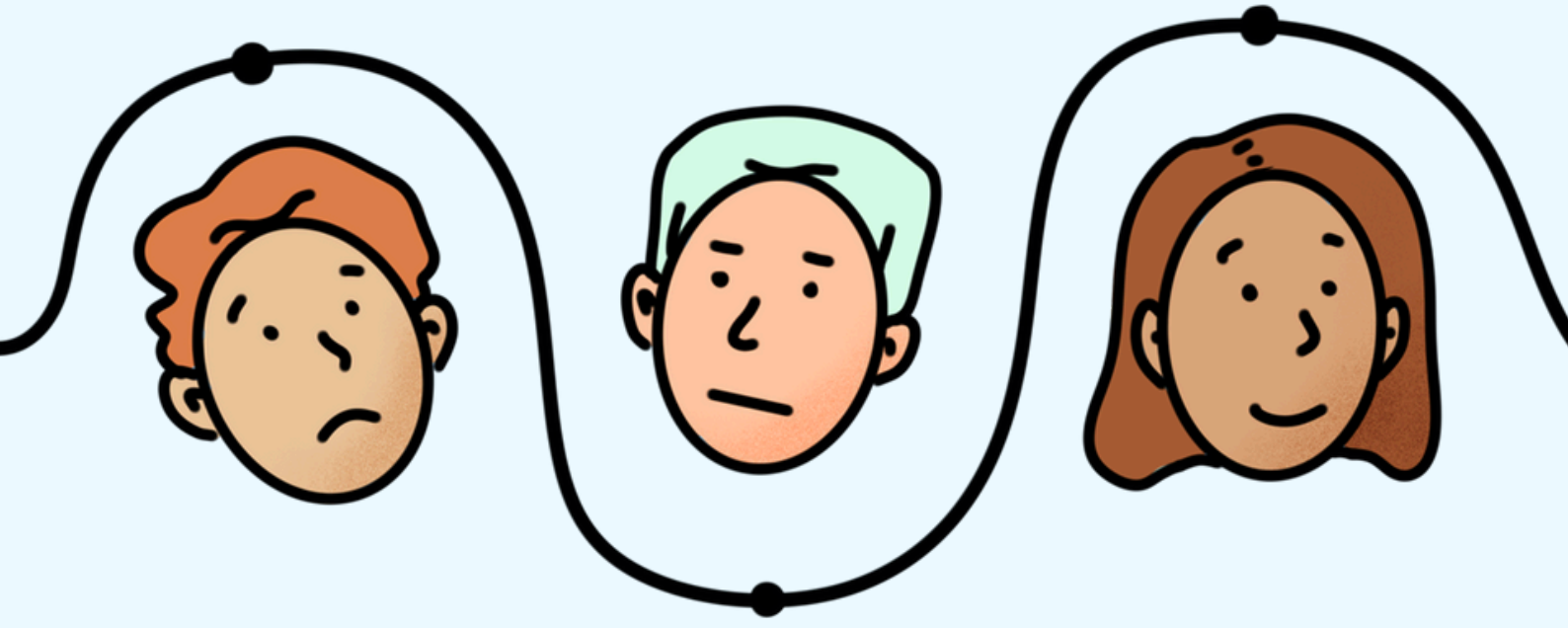
Respect guide: Strategies to support Psychological Safety in your school

Why respect matters

Respect is the cornerstone of psychological safety, creating an environment where students feel valued, heard, and safe to express their ideas without fear of judgment or ridicule. Respectful interactions between teachers, students, and peers promote a positive school climate where everyone is treated with dignity and fairness. This not only boosts emotional wellbeing but also fosters academic engagement and social development.

Research shows that when students feel respected, they are more likely to engage in their learning, share ideas, and take academic risks (Cook-Sather, 2015). Conversely, a lack of respect can lead to feelings of isolation, disengagement, and even bullying, which can significantly impact student outcomes (Thapa et al., 2013).

Respect is not confined to one part of the psychological safety framework - it is essential at every level. From Inclusion Safety to Challenger Safety, respect ensures students feel welcomed, supported in their learning journey, safe to speak up, and confident contributing their ideas (for more information about the "levels of Psychological Safety", see here). Without respect, psychological safety breaks down. By embedding a culture of mutual respect across all interactions and stages of learning, schools lay the groundwork for lasting trust, equity, and student empowerment.



Classroom strategies to promote respect



Set clear expectations for respectful behaviour

Why it helps:
Clear, consistent expectations for respectful behaviour create a framework where students know what is expected of them and how to interact respectfully with others. This reduces confusion and conflict and helps prevent bullying and disrespectful behaviour (Espelage & Swearer, 2011).

What to try:

- Create a classroom agreement with students on what respect looks like (e.g., listening when others speak, using kind words, respecting personal space).
- Post these expectations clearly in the classroom and refer to them regularly.
- Reinforce respect by acknowledging and praising students who model positive, respectful behaviours.



Encourage active listening

Why it helps:
Active listening, where students make eye contact, nod in agreement, and paraphrase what others say, shows that their peers' ideas are being heard and valued. This contributes to a positive, collaborative learning environment and reinforces respect for others' opinions (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

What to try:

- Model active listening during discussions, repeating or paraphrasing students' ideas.
- Incorporate activities that require students to listen and respond thoughtfully, such as partner discussions or group work.
- Use strategies like "think-pair-share" to encourage deeper listening and reflection on peers' ideas.

We respect and
listen to one another



Create a culture of inclusion

Why it helps:
When all students feel included in discussions and activities, it fosters respect for individual differences and encourages empathy. Inclusion has been linked to improved self-esteem, better social relationships, and greater student engagement (Casquejo et al., 2025).

What to try:

- Incorporate a variety of perspectives and cultural backgrounds in your teaching materials.
- Actively encourage students to share their thoughts and ideas, and make sure everyone is given an opportunity to speak.
- Use group work strategically to mix students from different backgrounds and abilities, fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect.

Implement restorative practices

Why it helps:
Restorative practices focus on repairing harm and restoring relationships rather than punitive measures. This approach helps students feel that their emotional and social needs are being met, while also reinforcing the idea that mistakes are part of growth. Restorative practices encourage empathy, accountability, and respect for others (Skrzypek et al., 2020). Validating emotions during behavioural correction is crucial because it acknowledges students' feelings before addressing the behaviour, which builds trust and fosters a more supportive environment for change. When students feel heard and understood, they are more likely to accept responsibility and be open to learning from their mistakes.

What to try:

- Use circle discussions to address conflicts and help students express their feelings in a safe, structured way.
- Teach students restorative strategies for resolving conflicts, such as using “I” statements (e.g., "I felt upset when...") to express how they feel without blaming others.
- Validate emotions before correcting behaviour–acknowledge the student's feelings by saying something like, "I understand you're upset and we do not speak to people in our class in that way" - addressing both emotional experience and correcting behaviour.
- Encourage students to reflect on the impact of their actions on others and suggest ways to repair harm and rebuild relationships.



School-wide strategies to promote respect

Create an anti-bullying campaign

Why it helps:
School-wide campaigns to prevent bullying and promote respectful behaviour signal to students that respect is a top priority. These campaigns help create a shared understanding of what respectful behaviour looks like and reduce incidents of disrespect and bullying (Gaffney et al., 2021).

What to try:

- Launch a respect and inclusion campaign each year with clear messaging on bullying prevention.
- Host workshops, assemblies, or activities focusing on empathy, kindness, and respect for diversity.
- Encourage student leadership in organising activities and spreading positive messages about respect.



Encourage peer mentoring and support

Why it helps:
Peer mentoring programs build respect by allowing older students to model positive behaviours for younger students, fostering positive relationships and a supportive school culture. These programs contribute to student leadership, responsibility, and civic engagement and can reduce incidents of bullying or exclusion (Smith et al., 2015).

What to try:

- Establish buddy systems where older students mentor younger students, supporting their transition and social integration.
- Train mentors on effective communication, active listening, and how to encourage respect in all interactions.
- Recognise and celebrate the contributions of student mentors in fostering a respectful school culture..



Promote open communication between teachers and students

Why it helps:
When students feel respected by their teachers, they are more likely to engage in learning and trust that their voices matter. Open communication fosters respectful relationships and helps prevent misunderstandings that can arise from unclear expectations. Research indicates that teacher receptivity to student voice and providing opportunities for student input are strongly associated with improved student outcomes, including higher engagement, better grades, and reduced absenteeism (Anderson et al., 2023).

What to try:

- Encourage regular one-on-one check-ins with students to discuss their academic progress and emotional wellbeing. You can use Komodo student profiles to guide these conversations.
- Be open to feedback from students and show a willingness to make adjustments based on their concerns.





Promote digital citizenship and respectful online behaviour

Why it helps:
Teaching students the importance of digital citizenship and respectful behaviour online equips them with the tools to engage in healthy, respectful relationships in virtual spaces. It encourages ethical behaviour, online safety, and accountability in interactions with peers and adults (Ribble, 2015). In today's digital age, respect online is just as critical as in-person interactions, and it is essential to explicitly teach students how to navigate digital spaces with empathy and understanding. Addressing online respect helps students recognise the impact their words and actions can have on others, creating safer, more inclusive virtual environments

What to try:

- Provide lessons or workshops on digital citizenship that cover topics like online etiquette, respecting others' opinions, and managing online conflicts respectfully.
- Encourage students to engage in positive online activities, such as creating respectful content or commenting thoughtfully on others' posts.
- Discuss the consequences of disrespectful behaviour online and help students understand the long-term impact of their actions in digital spaces.

Fostering respect is integral to creating a psychologically safe school environment. By intentionally promoting respect, schools lay the foundation for strong relationships, positive academic outcomes, and a thriving, supportive community. This, in turn, ensures that every student feels valued and empowered to take risks, learn, and grow. However, if respect is not prioritized, it can lead to disengagement, a lack of trust, and a diminished sense of belonging. Students may feel isolated or unheard, which can result in negative emotional and academic outcomes, including increased bullying, higher levels of stress, and lower motivation. While challenging interactions are inevitable, especially when tensions run high, maintaining respect and psychological safety is essential for creating an environment where students feel safe, heard, and ready to thrive.

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