

NOVEMBER

# Behavior Management

in the age of COVID-19



**REACH**

Recognizing. Educating. Adapting.  
Connecting. Helping.



# Behavior & Classroom Management

in the age of COVID-19

**In the educational environment, teachers, administrators, counselors, and social workers utilize various strategies for classroom and behavior management. From establishing rules and expectations to building deep and valuable relationships with students. Educators are charged with creating safe, nurturing, and productive environments where students can learn and grow.**

Fostering interpersonal relationships offers students immediate social connections and experiences while learning. However, the onset of COVID-19 created a unique and very complex set of circumstances that completely changed the educational landscape. Many students shifted to distance learning while educators taught virtually or with an educational hybrid model where they split time between home and the school building for the first time.

While teachers continue to meet children where they are, literally and figuratively, they are also working diligently to build lessons that will engage students virtually, facing the challenges of managing online classrooms, hybrid classrooms and, in some cases, students returning to the school building full-time. Inconsistent or unclear behavioral and academic expectations between home and school may create strife. There are also factors that impact

a student's ability to learn that teachers may not be able to gauge or see from afar, such as lack of sleep, food insecurity, responsibilities for other siblings, or an unsafe home environment. These early intervention signs are much easier to detect when your students are in the same room as you.


Behavior management during a pandemic brings with it new, unimagined stressors for all parties involved, but with a trauma-informed approach and a little collaboration, educators can bring structure to the virtual world, as well as in-person, which will allow them to continue to open the doors of possibility for young minds.

In this document, we will explore five areas of concentration for successful behavior and classroom management in the ever-changing educational environment: Safety, Connectedness, Consistency, Relationship Building, and Redirection & Restorative Practices.

## Safety

For many kids, school is a safe haven. It is the place where they are cared for and protected the most. Anticipate student defiance as a method of re-establishing control in a time where many students may feel victimized or disempowered. Educators should develop ways to empower them and provide positive support to rebuild trust. Also, keep in mind that the familiarity of school has been stripped away from most kids. They may have known exactly what to do when they walked into your class—whether it was sitting silently until the bell rang, or picking up their assignment from the front of the classroom, or moving through the hallways—but these daily norms have changed or been canceled due to COVID-19. Still, creating a safe space for kids should address their social and emotional needs as well as their academic needs.

- Give students the space to share their experiences and their needs without feeling judged and show them that school is a place where they can feel heard, cared for and safe from harm.
- Encourage students to connect with other adults, including counselors, social workers, and/or trusted adults.
- Make learning as predictable as possible. Not knowing what is coming next can be disconcerting for kids who feel unsafe.
- Validate students' feelings rather than dismissing them.
- Greet students when they enter the virtual school or walk into the classroom. Show them you are happy to see them.
- Be public and purposeful about inclusion and diversity so the whole community knows that all are welcome and that bias words and actions are unacceptable.
- Be approachable and invest time in them before shifting into problem-solving gear.
- Most importantly, never take what a student says or how they act personally.

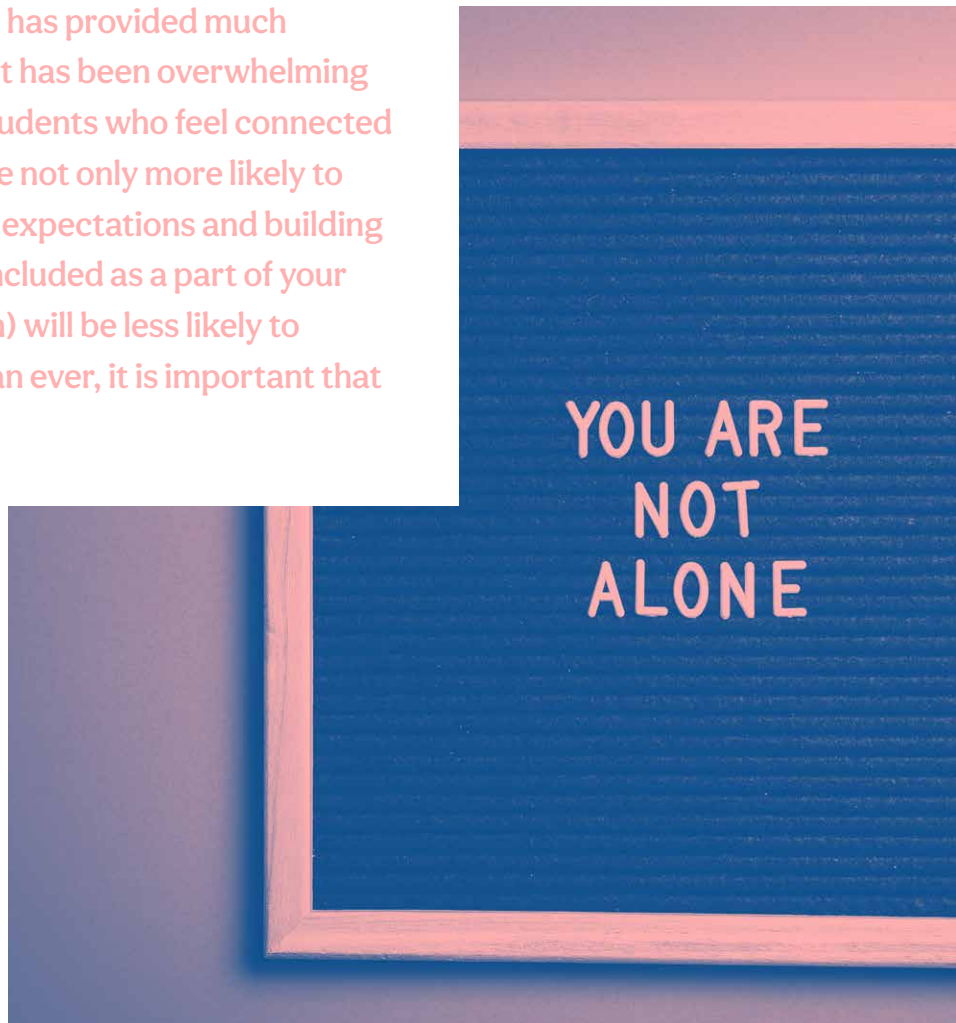


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## Connectedness

The separation created by the pandemic has provided much needed solitude for some but for others it has been overwhelming and caused increased or new anxiety. Students who feel connected or a part of the classroom community are not only more likely to participate, but also to follow classroom expectations and building rules in the process. Students who feel included as a part of your learning community (virtual or in-person) will be less likely to disrupt the flow of things. Now, more than ever, it is important that all students feel like they belong.

- Institute a morning meeting or a community meeting where students get to check in with you and share with one another. Ask the question “how are you feeling, honestly?” and make space for your students’ answers.
- Show interest in your student’s well-being and their personal lives. Engage in one-on-one conversation whenever possible.
- Facilitate conversations among your students during class times by using icebreaker activities. Help kids connect to one another and see they are not alone. Allow them to discuss the good things they are doing and experiencing during this time.
- Encourage and demonstrate positive feedback and limit any exclusionary behavior that may cause a student to feel left out or ridiculed.
- Incorporate play in your lessons like making videos or creating memes or turning a test or a quiz into a game.
- Consider creating opportunities for students to work together in small groups online or over the phone or establish a homework buddy system.
- Reconsider disciplinary policies that limit student voice or create student isolation.





## Consistency

The adjustment period of moving from in-person learning to virtual learning and back again may be particularly difficult for students who have had inconsistent structure. You can help navigate the transition by establishing clear expectations while also using patience. Routine will either allow students to exhibit some independence or will keep them focused and on track, depending on the needs of the student. Consistency can help avert many behavioral challenges.

Classroom routines and norms, such as morning check-ins or afternoon check-outs, will not only establish consistency but will also structure a sense of safety for students, which can mitigate behavioral challenges before they begin.

Allowing students to participate in writing the classroom expectations will give them ownership of the process and will also help them feel more responsible for holding one another accountable.

Once expectations are established, communicate them regularly, especially as a method of redirecting unwanted behaviors.

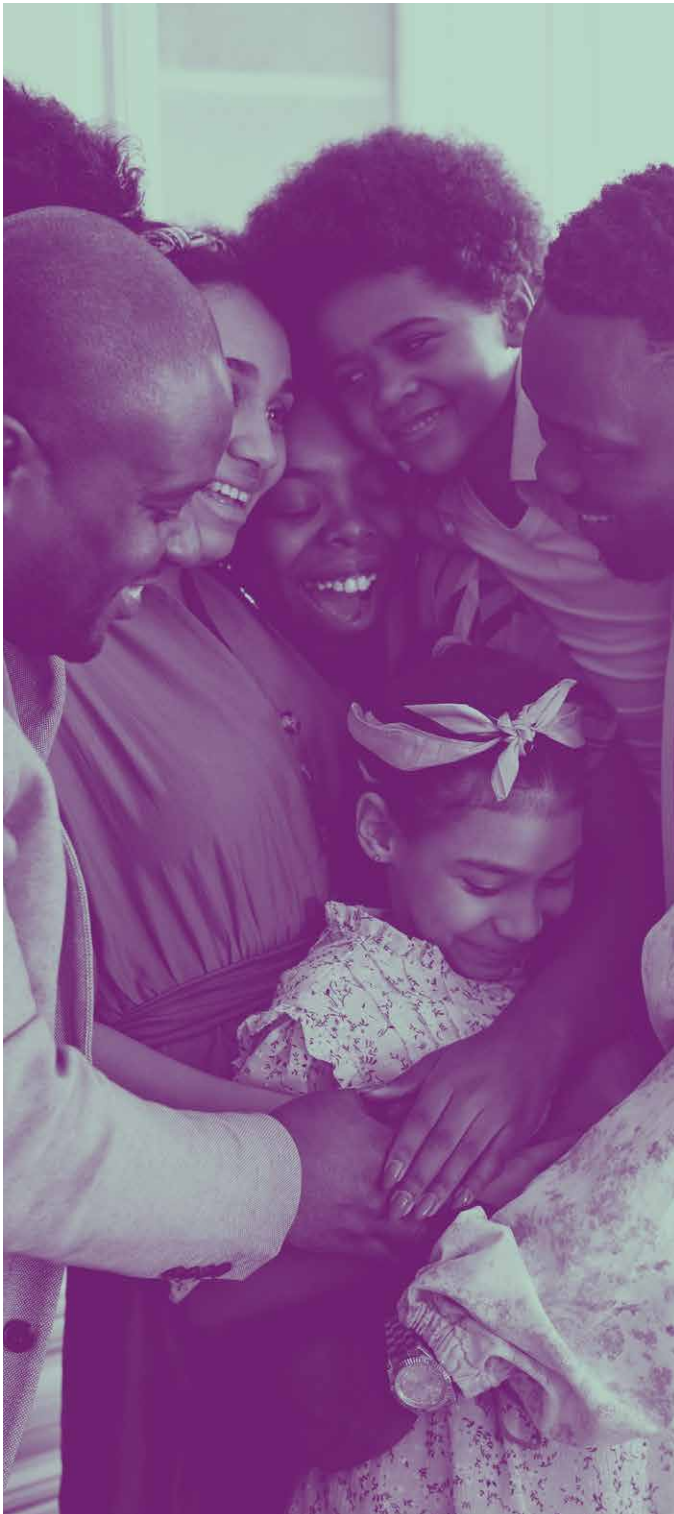
Post agendas or schedules in advance and establish routines in your teaching so students know what to expect. For example, starting every morning with vocabulary or ending every class with a teaser for the next class or allowing students to do a free-write every Friday establishes routine.

Do what you say you are going to do.

Create clear discipline policies that are fair and equal for all students, but also build a reward system that will honor good behavior.

# Positive Relationships

Strong relationships with and between students and their families promote resilience among students and educators. Relational rituals have equal, if not greater, importance in creating structure for students than explicit behavioral and learning expectations.



- Consistently nurture positive relationships in the classroom through ice breaker activities, conversations, writing, and other methods of relationship building.
- During virtual instruction, monitor chat and posting functions and immediately address harmful language or behaviors. In the classroom and in-person, be a part of the classroom discussions and redirect any conversations that may cause harm.
- During virtual learning, use tools like a brief escape break, or suspending chat and discussion board functions to give yourself time to mitigate the harm of a behavior on other students. Shifting the lesson during in-person learning can mitigate potentially harmful situations.
- Model and normalize the expression of emotions. Promote self-awareness by using a feelings chart or other opportunities for students to name their feelings verbally or non-verbally. Stress the importance of acceptance when it comes to how others feel.
- Share your own stories. A little transparency goes a long way.
- Reach out to students and their families regularly and give equal, if not more time, to share and discuss positive outcomes and experiences at school.

# Redirection & Restoration

Recognize that behaviors are likely the symptom of deficits in regulatory skills and a prolonged adjustment period. When a student acts out, it has nothing to do with who you are, but rather it is a reaction to a circumstance not within the control of the child.

- Focus on re-engaging students who have been disengaged from learning rather than removing them from the classroom.
- Implement restorative circles to promote healing and repairing relationships.
- Communicate regularly with parents and guardians regarding the expectations for virtual and in-classroom learning.
- Partner with other teachers, counselors, and social workers to ensure the social and emotional needs of students are met while working with students to continue to learn in the classroom setting.
- Ask kids what's going on and determine together how to proceed.



## Leadership & Organizational Supports

**Cultivating a safe and secure environment, building positive relationships, and ensuring a feeling of connectedness within the school community is the responsibility and the privilege of all who work in that community. However, empowering and supporting faculty and staff through the process is a critical component to success.**

- Acknowledge and address staff concerns and allow them to be a part of the process when establishing rules and expectations.
- Offer reassurance on a regular basis.
- Give your time. Listen. Have conversations. Visit classrooms as a method of relationship building and not simply for evaluation purposes.
- Encourage self-care, including setting boundaries and taking time off when needed. Lead by example.
- Establish a work community that focuses on the principles of trauma-informed care.



## Safety:

**Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how racial, ethnic, religious, sexual, or gender identity may impact safety through the lifespan.**

## Principle in Action:

- Ensure physical and emotional safety, recognizing and responding to how racial, ethnic, religious, sexual or gender identity may impact safety through the lifespan.
- Acknowledge concerns about physical and emotional safety. Whether we believe fears are warranted or not isn't ultimately important; we must work to create a sense of safety for everyone.
- Invest in high quality benefits for behavioral health through insurance and Employee Assistance Programs.

## Trustworthiness:

**Foster genuine relationships and practices that build trust, making tasks clear, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and creating norms for interaction that promote reconciliation and healing. Understand and respond to ways in which explicit and implicit power can affect the development of trusting relationships. This includes acknowledging and mitigating internal biases and recognizing the historic power of majority populations.**

## Principle in Action:

- Practice transparency. The constant feeling of being left out of information or decision-making can be emotionally taxing and can make educators feel as if they aren't an important part of the process.
- Approach frontline staff with the belief that it's the role of the building and district leaders to earn trust and be worthy of it. Proactively address power dynamics and work collaboratively to find solutions.
- Maximize choice, addressing how privilege, power, and historic relationships impact both perceptions about and ability to act upon choice.
- Create opportunities for staff members to have agency. As schools navigate the challenges created by COVID-19, it is especially important to identify and communicate clearly where educators have choice.
- Listen to staff members about their concerns about school discipline, behavior management, and the needs of the student population. Eliminate sources of stress and honor what they say will help.

## Collaboration:

**Honor transparency and self-determination. Seek to minimize the impact of inherent power differentials while maximizing collaboration and sharing responsibility for making meaningful decisions.**

## Principle in Action:

- Challenge yourself to share your power in decision making, even when it feels risky. Create opportunities to work, learn, and fail together. Own challenges together but also own successes together.
- Find your staff members who are trusted members of the community and encourage their partnership as you work to establish an environment of collaboration and help.
- Eliminate practices that create unhealthy competition between departments or between teachers and establish opportunities for educators to build relationships with one another.



## Empowerment:

**Encourage self-efficacy, identifying strengths and building skills which leads to individual pathways for healing while recognizing and responding to the impact of historical trauma and oppression.**

## Principle in Action:

- Encourage and celebrate when staff find innovative ways to engage students in the classroom and when they are implementing restorative solutions to behavior challenges.
- Celebrate diversity and inclusion, loudly and boldly, and empower members of the school community who promote and encourage those values in the educational setting.
- Explore new ideas or improvement suggestions when faculty and staff bring them to the forefront of the conversation.

## Equity:

**A state of being in which an individual's outcomes are no longer predictable by race or another demographic factor. The process of giving individuals what they need, not just what's "equal."**

## Principle in Action:

- Proactively and openly address the role that racism and bias may play in creating a traumatizing environment for staff and students. When engaging in shared anti-racism and anti-bias work, consider the emotional impacts of doing so for staff of color or staff with marginalized identities as well as for students. Do not wait for them to share their concerns or discomfort to take action in supporting their well-being.
- Ask questions like,
  - Are we culturally aware, culturally sensitive, and culturally competent?
  - Are we considering power differentials and how they affect our community members?
  - Am I being an authentic role model in considering equity in all facets of decision-making?

**Behavior management in the school setting can be challenging but working together as a community to cultivate safety, security, and a welcoming environment for all is a part of any school's trauma-informed journey. If you want to learn more about what you can do to support your school's trauma-informed work, visit [reach4mo.org](http://reach4mo.org) or [awcommunities.org](http://awcommunities.org).**

