

***A Blueprint  
for  
Creating a Positive, Safe  
and Caring School Climate***

## ***A Blueprint for Creating a Positive, Safe and Caring School Climate***

This Blueprint is an organized checklist of activities which have been shown through a search of "best practices" to be the most effective in creating a school environment in which students feel safe and which in turn discourages negative school behaviours, such as violence and bullying. Research studies have also shown that when students feel safe and secure, academic performance improves measurably.

The Blueprint encourages schools to become conscious of how each activity they engage in contributes to and enhances a safe and caring school climate. The Blueprint's format allows schools to quickly identify their areas of strength. It also permits a school staff to note gaps or areas of weakness.

Although not all schools will be able to carry out all of the activities suggested, most already are engaged in a good array of these and they are encouraged to look to see where the gaps are. Schools need to understand why they are doing what they are doing so that worthwhile activities are not dropped just because people are tired of doing them. A resource list is provided so schools can enhance their repertoire for becoming safe havens.

This Blueprint is based on developmental principles which take into account that the human brain takes many years (mid-twenties or longer) to fully mature. Children, by definition are immature and, therefore, cannot act like adults, EVEN if we teach them skills. Because they are children, our students will from time to time act "inappropriately". More focus on correction or teaching is not necessarily the answer. Instead, our students need help to minimize the effects of their immaturity. And so this Blueprint puts the focus on what the adults in a school can do to help children to function better.

When speaking of a positive school climate what is meant is that the all aspects of the environment (physical, emotional and academic) indicate to the students that they are in a place where they can feel protected from hurt and shame. Ultimately, it is in the hands of the adults in the school to ensure that every child can feel confident that when they approach an adult, they will be helped.

This means that adults should be aware that often the most effective intervention with a student is simply listening to their frustration and upset. Or it may mean that the adults need to analyze the situation and rearrange the environment or circumstances to help keep children out of trouble. As children mature, they will naturally be able to more easily follow society's conventions.

Finally, when deciding upon a course of action, school staffs should look at the "cost-effectiveness" of any particular intervention. Some programmes and activities are easy to implement and are relatively inexpensive. Others require large investments of time, money and staff time before they can be implemented. Some interventions will provide long-term gains, others will be effective while they are being implemented, but the gains will not last. Because children are immature, putting the emphasis on programmes that work at getting the children to change may not be the best use of time and effort, especially if the programme is costly.

Staff development, so that the adults become better equipped to understand children's needs may be a more effective use of scarce resources.

Eva de Gosztonyi, Psychologist, Co-ordinator, Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management [edegosztonyi@rsb.qc.ca](mailto:edegosztonyi@rsb.qc.ca)  
[www.cebm.ca](http://www.cebm.ca)

A sincere *Thank You* to the following for their input and suggestions: Tara Lee Lavallée, CQSB; Sandy Astles, ESSB; Daphna Leibovici, EMSB; Nathalie Constant, LBPSB; Shawnee Chartrand, RSB; Justine Dansereau, SWLSB; Mireille Abadie, MEES.

***"When a flower doesn't bloom you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower." - Alexander den Heijer***

1) SCHOOL CLIMATE:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Making the school look welcoming and attractive				
Building school spirit through assemblies, school song, school mantra, school slogan, mascot				
Monthly school-wide “themes”				
Development of a Positive "Code of Conduct" – <i>“How we act in our school.”</i>				
Opportunities for parent involvement				
Community partnerships				

2) OWNERSHIP AND BELONGING:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Safe School Teams including students and parents				
Multi-age group activities - "House" system				
Student Leadership/ Student Council				
In-school special projects e.g. <i>The Plant Project; School Radio station; Arts Smart;</i>				
<b>Lunchtime Activity</b> Groups based on student interests				
Cross Age/Grade Buddies (e.g. Reading)				
Volunteer/community involvement programme				
Student-to-student "Peer" Mediation /Helping Hands/Peace Keepers/Big Wheel/Kids Helping Kids (with strong adult mentorship)				
Student-to-student Mentors (High School)				
Student-to-student Tutoring/Student-to-student Helper programme				
Parent/Community Involvement				
Extra-curricular and/or after-school activities				
School-wide activity, e.g. mural painting				

3) CLASSROOM CLIMATE:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Deepening student-teacher relationships in and out of class				
Greeting activity with students – individual and group				
Practicing and maintaining classroom routine, ritual and structure				
Learning through project-based activities				
Class Meetings/Conseil de coopération/Circle Time/Talk Time/Tribes				
Calming Practices: 60 seconds/Mindfulness/Music/Lights				
Social Emotional Learning				

4) STUDENT- ADULT RELATIONSHIPS:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Daily greeting of all students by all adults				
Assigned student greeters (larger schools)				
Assigned bus and parent greeters				
Opportunities for adults and students to have fun together e.g. monthly activity afternoons				
Creating spaces where adults can provide structure and support during unstructured time ( <a href="#">Nurturing Support Centre</a> /Intervention Room)				
Promoting relationships with substitute teachers, Lunch Monitors, the secretary, volunteers etc. through introductions and match-making				

5) BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Using developmental and trauma informed interventions				
Provision of a " <b>Quiet Corner</b> " in the classroom – where students can go if they need time to deal with emotions				
Provision of <a href="#">alternative and structured activities</a> at recess and lunch supervised by adults or older students				
Permission for moments to "escape" e.g. short walk, drink of water, active hallway				
Provision of a space for Safe Eruptions, e.g. <a href="#">Emotions Room</a>				
Provision of a space for calming, e.g. Sensory Room				
Organized playground and yard activities (e.g. <i>Ma cour: un monde de plaisir!</i> )				
<a href="#">Nurturing Support Centre</a> – an alternative for students who cannot manage the regular classroom at certain times				
Opportunity to "work" with caring adults				
Provide the opportunity to practice appropriate behaviours, e.g. "Do Overs" (3.v)				
Use of alternatives to discipline and suspension such as Restorative Justice Practices (for select students)				
Avoiding the use of the agenda or digital behaviour programmes to report on a student's behaviour				

6) SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVES	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Information sessions for students, parents, teachers and school staff				
On-going staff sessions to instruct adults about how to respond to a student report of bullying				
Organized playground and yard activities (e.g. <i>Ma cour: un monde de plaisir!</i> )				
<b>Lunch-time and recess</b> activity groups				
Increased supervision of key areas				
Assigning “at-risk” students to adults for extra support				
Using the “Method of Shared Concern” to intervene in a potential situation				
Anonymous reporting system				
Social Emotional Learning initiatives				

7) CREATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
Positive calls and notes to parents				
<a href="#">Before School Starts Phone calls</a>				
<a href="#">Before School Starts</a> visit with parents and child in difficulty				
<a href="#">Progressive entry</a> for K with parents				
Welcoming a Challenging Student Mid-year				
Avoiding the use of the <a href="#">agenda</a> or <a href="#">digital behaviour programmes</a> to report on a student's behaviour				

8) MEETING ACADEMIC NEEDS:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
a) Systematic teaching of literacy skills in all classrooms				
b) Providing literacy materials that are of high interest to students struggling with literacy - Science				
c) Use of Daily Five to structure teaching time				
a) "Pre-teaching"				
e) Learning through projects				

9) Meeting Basic Needs:	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
a) Breakfast and/or Lunch programs				
b) Ensuring physical and emotional safety of students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anti-bullying initiatives</li> <li>- Staff commitment to helping students who are having difficulty be it behavioural or academic: "Coaching" vs "Consequencing"</li> </ul>				
b) A <a href="#">Nurturing Support Centre</a> in the school for the student to go when not able to cope e.g. OASIS, "The Pit"; Sensory Room; Planning Room; Emotions Room				

10) Staff Knowledge and Skills	Doing	Planning	Not now	Comments
<p>a) Workshops to increase knowledge of children's challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding students from a Developmental perspective</li> <li>- Understanding the effect of <a href="#">trauma and stress</a> in child development</li> <li>- Understanding and supporting ADHD</li> <li>- Understanding <a href="#">Aggression</a></li> <li>- Understanding the Teen Brain</li> <li>- Dealing with the Bullying dynamic</li> <li>- Understanding the <a href="#">Oppositional</a> Child</li> <li>- Explosive Child</li> <li>- Language problems</li> <li>- Autism Spectrum Disorders and other syndromes</li> </ul>				
<p>b) Workshops to increase skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Method of Shared Concern – intervening in the bully dynamic</li> <li>- Classroom Meetings</li> <li>- <i>Second Step</i> and <i>Steps to Respect</i></li> <li>- Non-Violent Crisis Intervention CPI or Behaviour Management Systems BMS</li> <li>- Neufeld Distance Education Courses: Teachability Factor, Bullies, Making Sense of Aggression, Making Sense of Anxiety, Counterwill, Science of Emotion (contact Eva de Gosztanyi for more information)</li> </ul>				
<p>c) Commitment to modeling, teaching, and supporting positive social behaviours of all students as part of educating children (acting as a BEHAVIOUR COACH)</p>				

**REFERENCES**

1. **Class Meetings: "Class Meetings: Building Leadership, Problem-solving and Decision-Making Skills in the Respectful Classroom"** Donna Styles, 2001 Pembroke Publishers ISBN 1-55138-134-6 [www.pembrokepublishers.com](http://www.pembrokepublishers.com)
2. **Gordon Neufeld: [www.neufeldinstitute.org](http://www.neufeldinstitute.org) Hold On To Your Kids** - Gordon Neufeld, Ph. D. and Gabor Mate, M. D. Knopf 2013.
3. **Other Books of Interest:**
  - i. **Educating Oppositional and Defiant Children** - Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall, ASCD 2003
  - ii. **The Explosive Child** - Ross W. Greene, Ph.D., Published by Quill, Harper Collins Publishers 2001 (2nd Edition)
  - iii. **The Boy who was Raised as a Dog** – Bruce D. Perry, PhD. & Maia Szalavitz, Basic Books 2006
  - iv. **Why Students Underachieve** – Dr. Regalena Melrose
  - v. **Secrets of Discipline for parents and teachers** and **With All Due Respect: Keys for building Effective School Discipline**, Ronald G. Morrish available from [www.realdiscipline.com](http://www.realdiscipline.com)
4. **Method of Shared concern: <http://www.kenrigby.net/11e-Shared-Concern-Method-How-it-Works>** The Method of Shared Concern is an intervention procedure for working on bully/victim problems in schools. Write Eva de Gosztanyi for a manual for implementing this strategy.
5. **Non-violent Crisis Intervention: [www.crisisprevention.com](http://www.crisisprevention.com)** CPI's *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® program is known worldwide for its innovative, holistic philosophy of providing care, welfare, safety and security for staff and those in their care during crisis moments.
6. **Roots of Empathy: <http://www.rootsofempathy.org/>**
7. **Lincoln High School in Walla Walla WA, tries new approach to school discipline — suspensions drop 85%** Stevens, J. E. (2012a) from: <http://acestoohigh.com/2012/04/23/lincoln-high-school-in-walla-walla-wa-tries-new-approach-to-school-discipline-expulsions-drop-85/>
8. **Making Space for Learning: Trauma Informed Practice in Schools**, Australian Childhood Foundation [www.childhood.org.au](http://www.childhood.org.au)

**CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT: [www.cebm.ca](http://www.cebm.ca)**