

KENTUCKY CENTER FOR SCHOOL SAFETY



CONNECTIVITY FOCUS GROUP

Conducted by the Kentucky Center for School Safety
Eastern Kentucky University
Richmond, Kentucky

This two-hour facilitated discussion focused on identifying factors that help and hinder positive teacher/student relationships. Nine teachers/counselors from six Central Kentucky school districts participated. The session ended with each participant sharing a personal “success” story of connecting with a student.

Discussion Questions:

- **What makes you successful in “connecting” to students?**
 - Finding a niche for students who do not fit in
 - Setting high expectations; strong discipline; love – not friendship – relationship; setting limits; consistency; and flexibility
 - Accepting of best efforts (not just perfection)
 - Showing personal interest in activities outside the classroom
 - Maintaining a positive attitude at all times
 - Showing trust and respect
 - Exhibiting role model characteristics for day-to-day living
 - Getting to know parents & listening to them
 - Viewing classroom as a “family” (i.e. *our class/our school*)
 - Providing “personal ownership”
 - Creating a positive, fun atmosphere that automatically ensures a learning environment
 - Sending positive notes home to reinforce achievements
 - Focusing on the whole/total individual, not just in academic terms
 - Willing to be involved in & participating in extra-curricular activities
 - Using the words “our” & “mine”
 - Having a natural gift to connect
 - Exhibiting appropriate physical contact
 - Showing conscious, intentional personal attention & effort
 - Displaying genuine compassion & concern
 - Being consistent in mood and attitude

- Affording forgiveness for mistakes & willing to admit own errors
 - Conveying openness by body language and proximity
 - Sharing self in order to show that teachers are “human,” too
 - Recognizing positive achievements, no matter how small
- **What are the barriers that prevent staff from “connecting” with students?**
- Labeling/classifying/stereotyping of students (i.e. redneck, etc)
 - Failing to differentiate ability-levels
 - Scheduling of classes over short time frame (i.e. nine-week classes) that hinders ability to get to know students well
 - Judging students on appearance issues (i.e. style of dress, hairdo, etc.)
 - Making choices between time for students and time for family
 - Limiting quality time with students due to the accountability for testing
 - Lacking of teacher buy-in
 - Grouping/classification of age & grades currently used
 - Lacking intentional, individual student success plans
 - Lacking flexibility with individual student schedules to avoid repeating past negative experiences
 - Lacking enjoyment/enthusiasm about job
- **How can “unconnected” students be identified?**
- Observing those who play caretaker role for younger siblings
 - Knowing who has “pressure” at home to succeed
 - Using breakfast time to observe and interact with them
 - Taking special note of those who arrive early/leave late frequently
 - Having impromptu social interaction
 - Noticing those who isolate themselves in restrooms, etc.
 - Listing of those not involved in any activities
 - Identifying new students
 - Making use of written work
 - Recognizing that “middle-of-the-road” students often get lost in the shuffle & do not get the attention given to high achievers & low achievers
- **How can all school staff be more effective in “connecting” to students?**
- By involving staff as a group at extracurricular activities
 - By planning student activities at beginning of school year to observe students’ interaction with peers
 - By providing special attention to new students
 - By making students feel special with small rewards
 - By participating in mentoring training