

Playbook: Educator

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Educators and school staff are uniquely positioned to be trusted adults in the lives of youth given their consistent and structured contact with them throughout formative developmental periods. These touchpoints help educators and school staff observe changes, offer guidance, and create environments where students feel seen, safe, and valued. Their distinct role bridges home, school, and community contexts, positioning them as accessible mentors and role models whose influence enhances rather than replicates the influence of other trusted adults in the lives of youth.

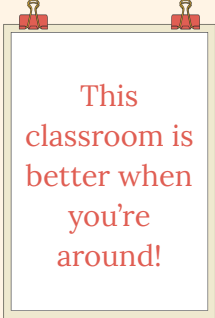
Create the environment.

1. Establish a safe, respectful, and empowering classroom and school culture.

- Co-create classroom norms that reflect shared values like respect, kindness, and responsibility. Invite students to shape school culture and share feedback with school leadership.
- Display messages that reinforce core beliefs (e.g., “This classroom is better when you’re in it” to affirm “I matter”).
- Model fairness and consistency to show students they are valued and capable.
- Connect classroom rules to bigger life lessons such as seizing the opportunity to learn and the long-term benefits of learning, keeping the classroom community safe and healthy, and that following the rules helps them engage with the world outside of the classroom.
- Offer opportunities for students to positively influence school environment (e.g., student councils, advisory groups, peer mentoring and mediation programs)
- Advocate for students when there are additional services they can benefit from or when they can benefit from teacher or staff involvement.
- Increase students’ sense of agency in communicating their needs. Find ways for them practice this in everyday situations, such as learning how to write a professional email, how to request something or advocate for themselves in conversation, or how to offer a genuine apology and ask for forgiveness when they have hurt someone.

2. Create rhythms of self-awareness, connection, and belonging.

- Invite students to reflect on how their actions align with their values and personal growth.
- Use consistent classroom rituals (i.e. morning huddles, daily check-ins, reflection circles) that signal that every student matters, stability, and opportunities for honest discussions in a safe environment.
- Incorporate reflection activities such as gratitude sharing or silent journaling with prompts about growth, purpose, or resilience.
- Keep a growth portfolio for each student to track and share moments of resilience and contribution.
- Celebrate students’ unique talents and effort that have contributed to the collective success of the class.
- Model humility, kindness, care, empathy, nurturance, and authenticity, as it is important for students to experience these facilitators of connection from educators.
- Apologize and ask forgiveness when needed to build trust.



This
classroom is
better when
you're
around!

SET THE TONE

“In this room, everyone’s voice carries weight. Even different opinions are valued. It’s okay to take risks here, because trying and failing is part of learning.”

“The expectations we have created together will help us all even beyond this school, because they help us grow into the kind of people who build trust with others and build community.”

SET THE TONE

“Let’s build some traditions as a class – maybe weekly shoutouts or reflections – so everyone has a chance to be seen and appreciated.”

“Before we leave today, share one thing you learned about yourself.”

“I know life outside of these school walls can be a lot, but I want you to know you have support here through myself and other resources available at the school.”



1. Normalize honest dialogue and listen deeply.

- Integrate brief check-ins focused on students' personal growth, challenges, or successes.
- Start class with a quick share, like one word or sentence about how students are feeling.
- Use a question box for anonymous student inquiries and respond weekly.
- Create space for personal storytelling of moments of resilience or overcoming challenges, encouraging active listening and presence among peers.
- Discuss common stressors (e.g., doing poorly on a test, worry prior to a test, or trying out for something new like a sports team, club, or council), strategies for gaining awareness on feelings as stress triggers (e.g., body sensations, thoughts), and share healthy coping strategies as a class.

2. Speak truth courageously and with respect, compassion and hope.

- Share hard truths about risks, boundaries, or consequences with empathy, reinforcing students' ability to grow and make wise choices.
- Discuss real-world case studies to explore short- and long-term consequences.
- Balance affirmations (e.g., naming a strength) with accountability when giving feedback.
- Use role-play to help students practice handling peer pressure and risky situations.
- Invite guest speakers to share stories of resilience and spark honest dialogue.
- Facilitate respectful debates to build empathy and evidence-based thinking.

3. Explore purpose, meaning, and values.

- Lead students through a "values exploration" exercise where students choose their top five personal values. Ask them to save their list somewhere they will remember and reference the list in future discussions and/or assignments.
- Assign a "passion project" tied to something meaningful to them (e.g., music, advocacy, community service, faith), with a presentation on their experience.
- Encourage reflection on moments of feeling most alive or strengths they admire in others and may want to grow in themselves. Have them talk about it in pairs or share with the class.
- Recognize and share each student's unique contributions and how they enrich the classroom.

"I may not have all the answers, but I'll always take your questions seriously."

"Let's pause. What I hear you saying is.... Did I get that right?"

"The truth is, choices have consequences – but so does courage, and you have it. I believe you're capable of making decisions that honor the person you want to become."

"This may feel uncomfortable, but leaning into it helps us grow and understand each other better. Let's practice slowing down and asking questions in a curious way. Even when we disagree, the way we treat each other matters – it's what makes our community strong."

"What are 3 things you need to start doing now to move towards the person you want to become in five years?"

"You are really strong at putting together arguments for or against a case. Have you thought about how you might use this in your future?"

"Purpose does not have to be grand – it just has to mean something to you and can start with something as simple as how you show up for people in your everyday life."

1. Co-create meaningful and purposeful learning experiences.

- Ask students how a project can be designed to reflect what matters to them.
- Let students lead assignments or project planning with educator guidance and connection to purpose.
- Link class work to shared values or future aspirations.

2. Be an active participant in students' worlds and interests.

- Attend student events or ask about their extracurricular activities.
- Integrate real-life examples from students' experiences into lessons.
- Invite students to present aspects of their outside life that are connected to classroom learning.
- Co-create safe after-school activities that reflect student interests or guide students in developing community-based activities or supporting community outreach events that align with shared values.

3. Foster collaboration, responsibility, and skill-building.

- Assign and rotate leadership roles and responsibilities, and invite student reflection on personal growth.
- Design group projects that emphasize teamwork, accountability, and reflection.
- Challenge students intellectually and debrief on strategies and lessons learned.
- Encourage peer recognition through shout-outs and gratitude sharing.
- Highlight positive coping strategies (e.g., listening to calming music) and their impact on peer relationships.