



# Alternatives to Suspension

in Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Learning Environments

A TOOLKIT FOR  
ALBERTA SCHOOL  
LEADERS AND  
EDUCATORS



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Thanks go to the many school leaders who provided feedback and direction during the development of this resource.



**The Alberta Teachers' Association**

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SCHOOL LEADERS AND EDUCATORS

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# Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>5</b>	Trauma-Informed Practice	64
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>	Intergenerational Trauma	66
Toolkit Organization	10	Trauma and Resilience	67
<b>Anticipate</b>	<b>13</b>	How to Support Someone	68
Terminology	14	Who Has Experienced	
Legislation and Policy	16	Trauma	
Questions for Reflection	24	Shame and Guilt	69
Research Summary: Suspensions	25	Questions for Reflection	70
Questions for Reflection	27	Resources	71
School Discipline: Self-Inventory	28	<b>Respond</b>	<b>75</b>
Questions for Reflection	30	Restorative Practices	77
Decision-Making Model	31	Implementation Tip	78
Questions for Reflection	35	The Social Discipline	79
Resources	35	Window	
<b>Value</b>	<b>39</b>	Questions to Ask when	80
School Culture by Design	40	Physical and Emotional	
Questions for Reflection	42	Control Are Regained	
Resources	43	Instructional Practices	81
Classroom Climate and	45	The Role of Elders	82
Community Making		Mentoring	82
Understanding Student	45	Reflective Practices	83
Behaviour		Questions for Reflection	84
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	47	Reintegration	85
Questions for Reflection	49	Questions for Reflection	86
Resources	50	Resources	87
Self-Management and Regulation	52	<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>91</b>
Questions for Reflection	56	<b>Notes</b>	<b>92</b>
Resources	56	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>93</b>
Conscious Connection	59		
Holistic World View	60		
Questions for Reflection	62		
Resources	62		





# Introduction

Everyday classroom teaching is not what children will remember, but how you made a difference in their lives.

—Nita Ambani

There is a growing body of research into the use of school suspension. While the use of school suspension is authorized by the *Education Act*<sup>1</sup> and may be a viable consequence for negative student behaviour where other interventions have been ineffective, the rationale at the core of school suspensions and their efficacy is increasingly being questioned. Because of this emerging research, school communities are beginning to look at alternatives to suspension.

School leaders, teachers and support staff on the front line interact daily with students who exhibit challenging behaviours and who need direction and support. Those who look beyond behaviour and see the individual are more likely to create meaningful relationships and healthy learning environments. Each student is unique and each situation involves numerous factors to consider. The students may have varying levels of ability and a range of emotional, behavioural and intellectual influences to consider. This ability to connect with students in ways that allow them to feel heard and cared for is foundational to shifting the suspension paradigm.

Although this toolkit is accessible by all school staff, school leaders are its main audience. The overall intention of this toolkit is to support school leaders in determining when and if a suspension may be ineffective and/or harmful, and when it may be necessary and/or purposeful. This toolkit offers school staff ideas and resources that they can use to support students in developing new positive pathways of interactions in a school staff's pursuit of welcoming, caring, respectful and safe schools for all. This toolkit is not intended to provide answers, but rather to promote questioning and discussion about the use of suspensions and to propose alternatives.

In addition to the *Education Act*, Alberta teachers are guided by several other important documents. The Teaching Quality Standard (TQS),<sup>2</sup> the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS)<sup>3</sup> and the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)<sup>4</sup> are professional practice standards describing a set of competencies expected of all teachers and school leaders and leaders of school authorities. Of particular note in relation to this toolkit are the following:

- **TQS Competency 1: Fostering Effective Relationships**  
A teacher builds positive and productive relationships with students, parents/guardians, peers and others in the school and local community to support student learning.
- **TQS Competency 4: Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments**  
A teacher establishes, promotes and sustains inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcomed, cared for, respected and safe.
- **LQS Competency 1: Fostering Effective Relationships**  
A leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community.
- **LQS Competency 3: Embodying Visionary Leadership**  
A leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning and well-being.

- **LQS Competency 4: Leading a Learning Community**  
A leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning.
- **SLQS Competency 1: Building Effective Relationships**  
A superintendent establishes a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment by building positive relationships with members of the school community and local community.
- **SLQS Competency 4: Leading Learning**  
A superintendent establishes and sustains a learning culture in the school community that promotes ongoing critical reflection on practice, shared responsibility for student success and continued improvement.

The Alberta government's High School Completion Strategic Framework (HSC)<sup>5</sup> also guides provincial educators by seeking to address challenges that students across the province face in finishing high school. Through a coordinated, collaborative approach, educators can use strategies in the framework, such as engaging students and tracking progress, to help students overcome barriers to completing high school.

School leaders and teachers are also guided by and must adhere to the policies and procedures outlined by their school authority. These vary considerably throughout the province, and this toolkit does not include specific examples because we recognize that by including some, we would be excluding others.

As outlined in Alberta Education's *Supporting Positive Behaviour in Alberta Schools: A School-Wide Approach* (2008), since 2001, a number of Alberta schools have used a schoolwide approach to positive behaviour supports, often called *effective behaviour supports* (EBS). These schools report that when they teach students the skills and give them the support necessary to behave positively, a safe and caring learning culture flourishes. Alberta schools that implemented schoolwide behavioural change systems over a period of one to three years reported

- a 70 per cent reduction in office discipline referrals,
- a 40 per cent decrease in out-of-school suspensions and
- a 40 per cent reduction in expulsions.

A positive behaviour support approach helps schools create environments in which all students learn to cooperate and the likelihood of academic success for all students is increased (Alberta Education 2008, 3).

## Toolkit Organization

This toolkit is broken down into a series of chapters related to the exploration of suspensions and alternatives. Each chapter includes pertinent research, questions for reflection, and resources for school leadership and teachers. The chapters are meant to promote deeper discussion about discipline, relationships and school culture, all through the lens of the *Education Act*, which promotes learning environments that are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe for all.

Resources for further exploration are provided through a variety of media. Some involve lengthier presentations for in-depth study, while others are shorter and can be used to stimulate discussion or initiate possible actions. Quick reference symbols are found at the left margin indicating the type of resource, as follows:

W – Website

A – Article

B – Book

V – Video

T – Tool

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*Editor's note: URLs in this document were verified to be accurate at the time of publication. If a URL no longer links to the material cited, please search for the author and/or title by name.*





# Anticipate

Please allow every teacher to realize what awesome power they hold in their hands and that they are the doors through which whole new worlds of possibility can open for their students. That by understanding students, day to day, and not judging them or shutting out the many opportunities for their success teachers can, and often do, make all the difference.

—Sandi Redenbach

It is important to establish common understandings of the themes contained in the toolkit. In this section, we will explore terminology, pertinent legislation and policy, as well as the various roles that staff play in school discipline.

## Terminology

When having a conversation in the hope of creating a paradigm shift in practice, it is important that all parties approach that conversation with similar understandings of the terms and concepts.

This section provides a basic starting point for your growing understanding of these concepts, which are explored in detail later in the toolkit.

**School culture** is “the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school.”<sup>6</sup>

**Resilience** is an individual’s ability to overcome adversity and continue normal development. A more robust definition adds, “In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.”<sup>7</sup>

**Intergenerational trauma** is the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including lifespan, that emanates from massive group trauma (Klinic Community Health Centre 2013). “Because the impacts of residential schools are intergenerational, many Aboriginal people were born into families and communities that had been struggling with effects of trauma for many years. The impact of intergenerational trauma is reinforced by racist attitudes that continue to permeate Canadian society” (National Child Trauma Stress Network 2008, 47).

**Equality** aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives. Like equity, equality aims to promote fairness and justice, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things.<sup>8</sup>

**Equity** is defined as the quality of being fair, unbiased and just. Equity involves ensuring that everyone has access to the resources, opportunities, power and responsibility they need to reach their full, healthy potential as well as making changes so that unfair differences may be understood and addressed.<sup>9</sup> In other words, it involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives.<sup>10</sup>

**Self-regulation** refers to how people manage energy expenditure, recovery and restoration in order to enhance growth. Effective self-regulation requires learning to recognize and respond to stress in all its many facets, positive as well as negative, hidden as well as overt, minor as well as traumatic or toxic.<sup>11</sup>

### Types of stress

1. **Positive stress:** Small challenges that create “positive stress”—like meeting new people or starting the first day of school—are healthy for development because they help prepare young brains and bodies for the larger challenges they will meet in the future.
2. **Tolerable stress:** More serious events, like a natural disaster or losing a loved one, aren’t good for us. But if supportive caregivers buffer the individual’s stress response, these situations will not do lasting damage to the brain.
3. **Toxic stress:** This stress occurs when no supportive caregivers buffer an individual’s response to repeated negative experiences such as abuse, neglect, parental addiction or mental illness, violence inside or outside the home, bullying, and chaotic environments. Young children whose brain development has been disrupted by toxic stress are at a much higher risk for later physical and mental health problems, including a compromised immune system, chronic pain, aggression, hyperactivity, depression, anxiety or addiction.<sup>12</sup>

**Suspension** is the term used to describe an action by a school leader or teacher, authorized under the *Education Act* section 36, that temporarily denies a student access to one or more of the following:

- (a) school
- (b) one or more class periods
- (c) transportation provided under section 59
- (d) school-related activities

## Legislation and Policy

There are several pieces of legislation and policy that relate to school discipline, student conduct and teacher responsibilities that should be explored at the outset of this toolkit.

These documents provide the structures in which school conversations about suspensions will take place. Legislation and policy also provide both opportunities and limiting factors for the exploration of alternatives to suspensions.

The *Education Act* sets out the goals, roles and responsibilities of Alberta's early childhood services to Grade 12 (ECS–12) education system, and identifies the roles and responsibilities of the Department of Education, school boards, charter schools, private schools, school leaders, teachers, parents and students. Student conduct is also addressed in the *Education Act*, as are suspensions and expulsions. The *Education Act* articulates that students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self. School policy and school/classroom expectations are held within provincial legislation and school authority policies.

› **Student conduct is outlined in Section 31 and reads as follows:**

31. A student, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to
- (a) attend school regularly and punctually,
  - (b) be ready to learn and actively engage in and diligently pursue the student's education,
  - (c) ensure that the student's conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging,
  - (d) respect the rights of others in the school,
  - (e) refrain from, report and not tolerate bullying or bullying behaviour directed toward others in the school, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means,
  - (f) comply with the rules of the school and the policies of the board,

- (g) co-operate with everyone authorized by the board to provide education programs and other services,
- (h) be accountable to the student's teachers and other school staff for the student's conduct, and
- (i) positively contribute to the student's school and community.

› **Parent responsibilities are set out in section 32.**

32. A parent has the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be provided to the parent's child, and as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

- (a) act as the primary guide and decision-maker with respect to the child's education,
- (b) take an active role in the child's educational success, including assisting the child in complying with section 31,
- (c) ensure that the child attends school regularly,
- (d) ensure that the parent's conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment,
- (e) co-operate and collaborate with school staff to support the delivery of supports and services to the child,
- (f) encourage, foster and advance collaborative, positive and respectful relationships with teachers, principals, other school staff and professionals providing supports and services in the school, and
- (g) engage in the child's school community.

2012 cE-0.3 s32; 2019 c7 s9

› **Responsibilities of a school board are outlined in section 33, as follows:**

33(1) A board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

- (a) deliver appropriate education programming to meet the needs of all students enrolled in a school operated by the board and to enable their success,
- (b) be accountable and provide assurances to students, parents, the community and the Minister for student achievement of learning outcomes,

- (c) provide, where appropriate, for the engagement of parents, students, staff and the community, including municipalities and the local business community, in board matters, including the board's plans and the achievement of goals and targets within those plans,
- (d) ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board and each staff member employed by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging,
- (e) provide a continuum of supports and services to students that is consistent with the principles of inclusive education,
- (f) collaborate with municipalities, other boards and community-based service agencies in order to effectively address the needs of all students and manage the use of public resources,
- (g) collaborate with post-secondary institutions and the community to enable smooth transitions for students from secondary to post-secondary education;
- (h) establish and maintain governance and organizational structures that promote student well-being and success, and monitor and evaluate their effectiveness,
- (i) ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources,
- (j) recruit the superintendent and entrust the day-to-day management of the school division to the staff through the superintendent,
- (k) develop and implement a code of conduct that applies to trustees of the board, including definitions of breaches and sanctions, in accordance with principles set out by the Minister by order,
- (l) comply with all applicable Acts and regulations,
- (m) establish appropriate dispute resolution processes, and
- (n) carry out any other matters that the Minister prescribes.

- › Under section 33(2), the *Education Act* outlines the requirement for the board to “establish, implement and maintain a policy respecting the board’s obligation under subsection (1)(d) to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that includes the establishment of a code of conduct for students that addresses bullying behaviour.”

33(3) A code of conduct established under subsection (2) must

- (a) be made publicly available,
- (b) be reviewed every year,
- (c) be provided to all staff of the board, students of the board and parents of students of the board,
- (d) contain the following elements:
  - (i) a statement of purpose that provides a rationale for the code of conduct, with a focus on welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments;
  - (ii) one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the *Alberta Human Rights Act*;
  - (iii) one or more statements about what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means;
  - (iv) one or more statements about the consequences of unacceptable behaviour, which must take account of the student’s age, maturity and individual circumstances, and which must ensure that support is provided for students who are impacted by inappropriate behaviour, as well as for students who engage in inappropriate behaviour,

and

- (e) Be in accordance with any further requirements established by the Minister by order.

(4) An order of the Minister under subsection (1)(k) or (3)(e) must be made publicly available.

33.1 The Lieutenant Governor in Council may, by order, exempt an accredited private school or a class of accredited private schools from the operation of all or part of section 33. 2019 c7 s11

› **Sections 36 and 37 of the act deal with suspension and expulsion.**

Section 36(1) A teacher or a principal may suspend a student in accordance with subsection (2) or (3) if in the opinion of the teacher or principal

- (a) the student has failed to comply with section 31,
- (b) the student has failed to comply with the code of conduct established under section 33(2),
- (c) the student's conduct, whether or not the conduct occurs within the school building or during the school day, is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school, or
- (d) the student has distributed an intimate image of another person in the circumstances described in section 1(1.1).

(2) A teacher may suspend a student from one class period.

(3) A principal may suspend a student (a) from school, (b) from one or more class periods or courses, (c) from transportation provided under section 59, or (d) from any school-related activity.

(4) When a student is suspended under subsection (3), the principal shall

- (a) immediately inform the student's parent of the suspension,
- (b) report in writing to the student's parent all the circumstances respecting the suspension, and
- (c) provide an opportunity to meet with the student's parent, and the student if the student is 16 years of age or older, to discuss the suspension.

(5) A suspension may not exceed 5 school days, except in accordance with a recommendation for expulsion made by the principal under section 37.

Section 37(1) If a student is suspended in accordance with section 36, the principal may recommend, prior to the end of the student's suspension, that the board expel the student if

- (a) the student has displayed an attitude of wilful, blatant and repeated refusal to comply with section 31,
- (b) the student has displayed an attitude of wilful, blatant and repeated refusal to comply with the code of conduct established under section 33(2),

(c) the student's conduct, whether or not the conduct occurs within the school building or during the school day, is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school, or

(d) the student has distributed an intimate image of another person in the circumstances described in section 1(1.1).

(2) If the principal recommends expulsion under subsection (1), the principal shall

(a) immediately inform the board of the recommendation for expulsion, and

(b) report in writing to the board all the circumstances respecting the suspension and the principal's recommendation for expulsion,

and the student remains suspended until the board has made a decision under subsection (4).

(3) The student and the student's parent may make representations to the board with respect to the principal's recommendation to expel the student.

(4) The board shall, within 10 school days after the initial date of the suspension, make a decision

(a) to return the student to school, class, a course or courses, transportation provided under section 59 or a school-related activity, or

(b) to expel the student.

(5) The board may expel a student under subsection (4) only if the principal has recommended that the board expel the student.

(6) If a student is expelled under this section, the expulsion takes effect immediately following the board's decision under subsection (4)(b).

(7) The board may establish rules or conditions for an expelled student respecting the circumstances in which the student may be enrolled in the same or a different education program.

(8) An expulsion or any rule or condition under subsection (7) may apply to a student beyond the school year in which the student was expelled.

(9) When a student is expelled under this section, the board shall immediately notify, in writing, the student's parent, and the student if the student is 16 years of age or older,

- (a) of the expulsion and any rules or conditions that apply to the student, and
- (b) of the right to request a review under section 43.

(10) When a student is expelled under this section, the board shall

- (a) ensure that the student is provided with a supervised education program consistent with the requirements of this Act and the regulations,
- (b) ensure that the student is provided with supports and services in accordance with section 33(1)(e), and
- (c) make all reasonable efforts to ensure the attendance of the student in accordance with section 7.

Principals' responsibilities are set out in section 197:

197 A principal of a school must

- (a) Provide instructional leadership in the school,
  - (a.1) provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.
- (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with courses and programs of study prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act,
- (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school,
- (d) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister.
- (e) direct the management of the school,
- (f) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds during activities sponsored or approved by the board.
- (g) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves,
- (h) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students,
- (i) evaluate the teachers employed in the school, and
- (j) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out the duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board.

The Alberta Teachers' Association Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers,<sup>13</sup> which applies to teachers and school leaders, states in section 2 that

Teachers have the right to expect standards of pupil behaviour necessary for maintaining an optimal learning environment and have the responsibility to use reasonable methods to achieve such standards.

Further, the Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Professional Conduct (for teachers and school leaders) dictates that, in relation to pupils,

1. The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background.  
and
4. The teacher treats pupils with dignity and respect and is considerate of their circumstances.

Both of these Alberta Teachers' Association documents are in line with all guiding human rights legislation and align philosophically with the *Education Act* in the desire for schools to be welcoming, caring, respectful and safe for students and staff alike.

Legislation and policy provide a framework to work within, while remaining broad enough for schools and school authorities to interpret and enforce in their specific contexts. However, a cursory view reveals similarities among and between documents:

- Respect for self, others, and property
- Emphasis on academic participation
- Cooperation with authority
- Following the rules



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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1. Do your school and school authority provide opportunities for students, staff and families to cocreate the discipline expectations of your school and school authority?
2. Are the discipline expectations expressed in people-first language?
3. How do your school and school authority communicate the discipline expectations to students, staff and families?
4. Are the school and school authority discipline expectations clear and easy to understand?
  - a For new teachers?
  - b For new families?
  - c For young children?
  - d For students with varying cognitive abilities?
  - e For English language learners?
  - f For students/families from diverse cultures?
5. Are student codes of conduct easy to locate for students, staff and families?
6. How well do you think your students and their families understand the discipline expectations of your school and school authority?
7. How often are the aforementioned expectations critically reviewed with students and their families to ensure ongoing awareness and understanding?

## Research Summary: Suspensions

In some cases a suspension may be helpful as a deterrent, but in most cases its efficacy in bringing about positive behaviour change is limited, so schools need to use suspensions judiciously.



Quin and Hemphill (2014) reported that “when asked how much did being suspended help solve the problem before the suspension, 73% of previously suspended participants selected either ‘not at all’ or ‘a little bit’. Conversely, 27% reported that it had either helped ‘a lot’ or they had ‘learnt a lesson and will not be suspended again’” (p 56). Bear (2012) indicates that a single suspension for some students may be helpful, in certain circumstances, if it brings immediate corrective action. Multiple suspensions would be an indication that the process is not working and is ineffective.

At one point, zero-tolerance policies were adopted to increase the level of safety in schools. Behaviours perceived to be threatening to students and the school setting were to result in stringent consequences to the offenders. The unintended consequence of these policies was the increased numbers of suspensions for a broader array of infractions involving defiance, demonstrating lack of respect and poor attendance (Skiba et al 2011). Suspensions were dispensed for minor incidents, class disruptions and dress code violations rather than for more serious issues that were associated with safety (Losen and Martinez 2013). Skiba, Arredondo and Rausch (2014) found that if administration and staff were proponents of zero-tolerance policies and held favourable views of suspensions, it was more likely that the number and length of suspensions would be higher in such schools.

Researchers have delved into the many aspects of the employment of suspensions, obtaining a variety of findings. The level of exclusionary discipline is higher for boys (Wallace et al 2008) and students with special learning needs (Vincent, Sprague and Tobin 2012). Students with the greatest need for a supportive school experience are the ones most likely to be excluded (McElderry and Cheng 2014).

When suspended students are barred from school, their relationship with the school may change, leading to an increased risk of antisocial behaviour (Hemphill et al 2006). The likelihood of greater wrongdoing increases when a child is unable to establish a connection within the school walls (Catalano et al 2004). Students who have been suspended are more likely to be involved with law enforcement

“

*A single suspension for some students may be helpful, in certain circumstances, if it brings immediate corrective action.*

*Multiple suspensions would be an indication that the process is not working and is ineffective.*

”

(Martinez, McMahon and Treger 2016). “Discipline sanctions resulting in exclusion from school may damage the learning process. Suspended students may be ... less invested in school rules and course work, and subsequently, less motivated to achieve academic success” (Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010, 60).

Repeated suspensions may increase the chance of failing and lead to a higher dropout rate (Arcia 2006; Peguero and Bracy 2015). When students are absent they miss school and receive less instruction (Epstein and Sheldon 2002). The time that is missed from schooling affects students because they cannot learn academically or socially. Those who have been suspended, and who do not drop out, usually have lower levels of academic success (Noltemeyer, Ward and Mcloughlin 2015). Repeated/chronic discipline referrals and suspensions can be predictors of negative life outcomes such as adult unemployment and incarceration.

Exclusionary practices are contrary to the connections and healthy relationships that are the antidote for the negative impact of suspensions. In a study and review of data by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009), school connectedness was defined as “the belief by students that adults in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals” (p 3). Early research in this area of study found that school connectedness was a strong protective factor for all students and decreased the levels of destructive behaviour, including substance abuse, high-risk behaviour, violence and absenteeism (Resnick et al 1997). Excluding students interferes directly with the opportunity to develop and maintain a sense of school connectedness.

Follow-up research to the work by Resnick et al by McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum (2002) found that connectedness was lower in schools that frequently suspended students for minor as well as more serious infractions. Students felt less safe in schools with zero-tolerance policies. The authors concluded that “four school attributes—classroom management climate, school size, severity of discipline policies, and rates of participation in extracurricular activities—explain a significant percent of between-school variance in school connectedness. Not only are these four factors amenable to change, but evidence suggests that schools have successfully changed these factors” (p 146). There is growing evidence that connectedness to school is important for academic outcomes and student well-being (Bond et al 2007; Denny et al 2011).

The previously mentioned research illustrates the importance of connectedness. In contrast, there are negative outcomes linked to the use of suspensions in an educational setting.

The use of suspensions has been questioned and, as Bear (2012) indicates, suspension often fails because of the following reasons:

- It can reinforce negatively the very behaviours for which students are suspended.
- It fails to teach desired or replacement behaviour.
- Its effects often are short term.
- It fails to address the multiple factors that typically contribute to a student's behaviour.
- It may produce undesirable side effects.
- When used often, it creates a negative classroom and school climate.
- It is likely to result in loss of valuable instructional time and increased exposure to negative role models.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does this research align with your experiences in schools?
2. Think of students who you know have had multiple suspensions. Reflect on whether or not their behaviour has improved or declined over time. How does this align with/contradict the above research?

## School Discipline: Self-Inventory

The discipline belief self-inventory is a tool that can be used by teachers, school support staff, school leaders and school authority-level school leaders to reflect on the discipline beliefs they hold.

This can be used as a starting point for conversations about current practice and future directions. This tool could also be adapted into a Kahoot! or Poll Everywhere activity to use in group settings to solicit feedback from all participants. Using one of the interactive platforms allows all participants to voice their beliefs in an anonymous and low-risk manner.

Please review the statements and choose the descriptor that best represents your belief.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Comments/ Notes
1. Suspensions work to deter further infractions					
2. Students should be given similar lengths of suspensions based on similar infractions. (For example, smoking on school property—first offense = 1 day out of school)					
3. Restorative, reflective and instructional opportunities should be part of the consequence/ intervention.					
4. Suspensions are important for setting an example.					

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Comments/ Notes
5. Parents, teachers and other stakeholders need to be involved in the discipline process.					
6. Suspended students should be sent home instead of keeping them at school.					
7. Discipline should be used as a teaching opportunity.					
8. There is not enough time to do alternative discipline.					
9. Interventions can be used in lieu of suspensions.					
10. The act of suspending a student should be limited.					
11. School leaders show support for staff when they suspend students.					
12. Suspensions get parents' attention and help curb misbehaviours.					
13. Suspending students keeps school safer and improves learning for others.					



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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1. Do your answers sometimes contradict each other? If so, why do you think that is?
2. Are your disciplinary beliefs based on pressure from others? If so, who and why? How can this be addressed?
3. When answering these questions, did you sometimes feel like you required more information or thought, “It depends on the situation”? What does that indicate to you?
4. What cultural shifts need to take place in your school to reduce the number of suspensions used?
5. What role can the wider community play in re-envisioning how suspensions are used in your school?

## Decision-Making Model

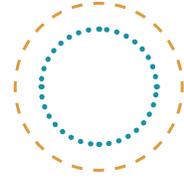
Though there may be circumstances in which a suspension is necessary, there should first be an examination of the causes and alternative responses.

The next section details a decision-making model that gives alternatives to suspension and may help to avoid the need for suspensions.

When beginning to redirect the use of suspensions, the work by Chin et al (2012) is instructive. Their “Decision Making Guide: Choosing an Appropriate Alternative to Suspension” is a good starting point. It allows teachers and school leaders to work through assessing the situation and offers directionality to address the problem.

Their decision-making model offers a guide that school leaders and teachers can use in selecting actions and procedures for supporting students who have exhibited a challenging behaviour. The first step in the model is an assessment. This is an opportunity for the staff and the student to reflect on the behaviour and circumstances. The assessment is used to determine “whether the behavior is due to ‘defiance/ making bad choices,’ ‘skill/ability deficit,’ or ‘social/emotional need’” (Fenning et al 2012, 106). Based on the assessment, actions are taken to support the student. If the behaviour is a result of “bad choices,” the actions may involve interventions such as behaviour contracts, natural consequences, a self-management plan, debriefing/reflecting assignments, a restorative conference and/or parent involvement. If the behaviour is assessed as being a “skill or ability deficit,” then actions could include a self-management plan, social-emotional training and/or parent involvement. If the assessment determines that there is a “social/emotional” need, then a plan of action could include counselling, a self-management plan and/or parent involvement.

Chin et al (2012) also provided a set of research-supported strategies to use as alternatives to suspensions. These include self-management plans, debriefing and reflecting assignments, behaviour contracts, natural consequences, individualized social-emotional training/ learning, counselling, and parent involvement.

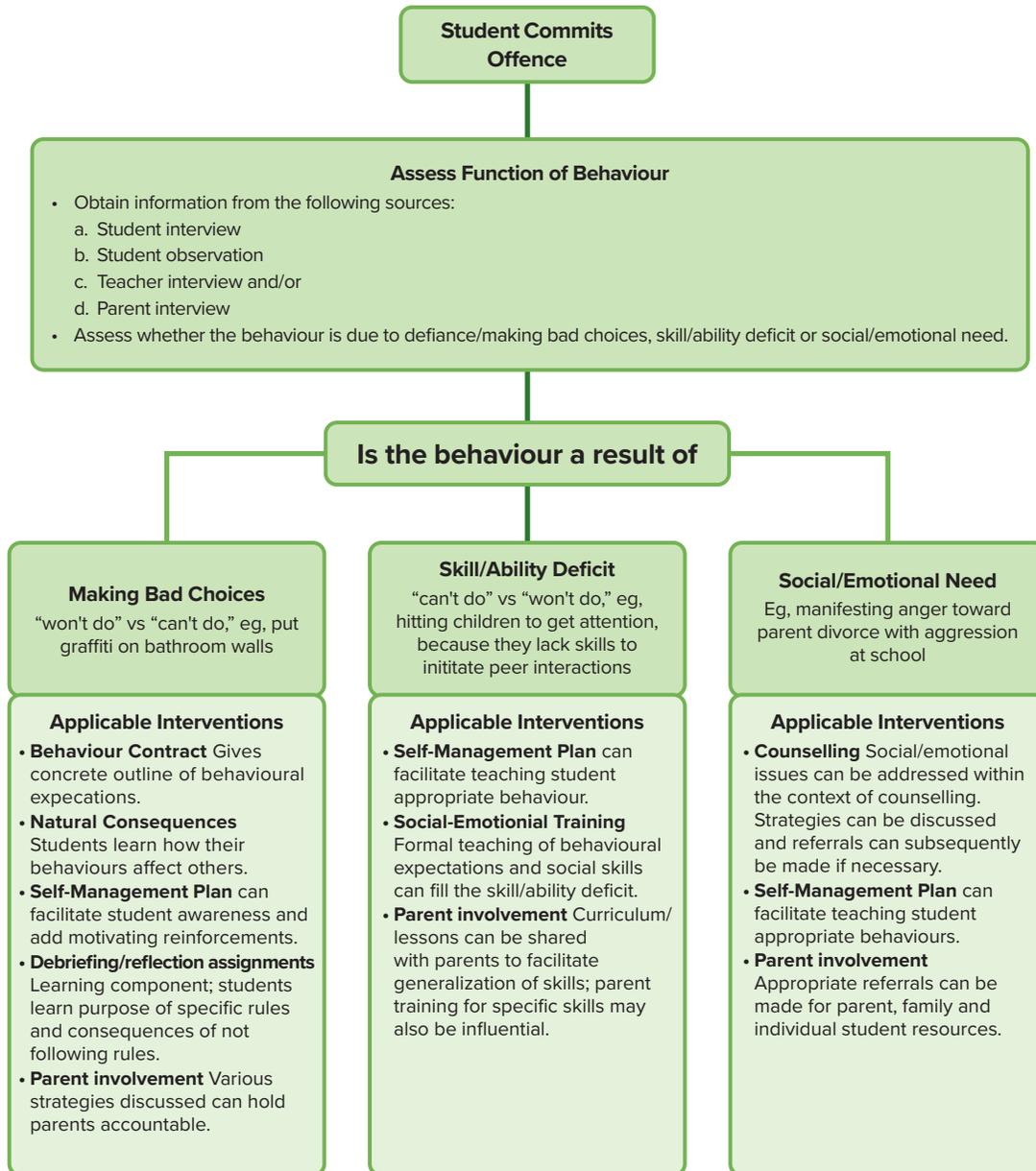


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*He drew a circle  
to shut me out.  
Heretic, rebel,  
a thing to flout.  
But love and I  
had the wit to win.  
We drew a circle  
that took him in.*

—Edwin Markham,  
“Outwitted”

”



Adapted from Chin et al 2012

Note that the staff involved should take care to assess whether or not each situation warrants the debriefing and reflection part of the process to take place immediately or later in the process. Often times, heightened emotions immediately following an incident can impair cognitive abilities, thus affecting a student's ability to express their emotions in writing. Wherever this phase occurs in the process, it ideally takes the form of a conversation between the student and the appropriate staff member.

A *functional behavioural assessment* (FBA) is an approach that can be used to help determine the reasons behind a student's inappropriate behaviours and make decisions to address them in the most effective way. Student-led FBAs can help with problem-solving challenging behaviours. The premise of an FBA is that interventions are only successful when the root causes of the behaviour are known and worked through. It is only when school staff gather and evaluate information about student behaviour that they understand the function of the behaviour (what is the student gaining or avoiding?) and can teach and reinforce new replacement skills and behaviours. Functional behavioural assessments involve collecting data to determine the behaviour(s) that requires change, determining the reason for the behaviour(s), possible interventions and alternative behaviour(s) to teach that will meet the same function or need for the student.

To encourage staff to reflect on alternatives and to begin exploring other possible actions, a short article by Peterson, "Ten Alternatives to Suspension" (2005), provides other possible courses of action and discusses how school context can be important in shifting the approach to students. Peterson's suggested alternatives to suspension are set out below.<sup>15</sup>



**1. Problem solving/contracting**

This process assists students to identify alternative behaviour choices, reminds them to engage in the problem-solving process, and should include reinforcers for success and consequences for continuing problem behaviours.



**2. Restitution**

In-kind restitution gives students the opportunity to help to restore or improve the school environment in a way that addresses the problems caused by the student's behaviour (for example, in cases of vandalism, students can work to repair things they damaged).



**3. Mini courses or skill modules**

These should be on topics related to the student's inappropriate behaviour and should be designed to teach the student to have increased awareness or knowledge about the topic, with the intention of facilitating behaviour change.



**4. Parent involvement/supervision**

School leaders should engage parents in ways that promote increased involvement in their child's schooling.



**5. Counselling**

School leaders and teachers can connect students with additional supports or individual counselling from trained professionals, such as a counsellor or school psychologist.



**6. Community service**

School leaders and teachers can facilitate programs that permit the student to perform supervised community service outside of school hours.



**7. Behaviour monitoring**

Closely monitoring behaviour and academic progress by way of self-charting of behaviours or feedback sessions for the student will permit rewards to be provided for successful performance.



**8. Coordinated behaviour plans**

Create a structured, coordinated individual behaviour support plan that focuses on increasing desirable behaviour and provides alternative behaviours.



**9. Alternative programming**

Programming should be tailored to student needs and may include alternatives such as short- or long-term changes in the student's schedule, classes or course content and offering an independent study or work experience program.



**10. Appropriate in-school suspension**

If there is no alternative, an in-school suspension can include academic tutoring, instruction on skill building related to the challenging behaviour (for example, social skills), and a clearly defined procedure for returning to class contingent on student progress or behaviour.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What decision-making model do you use in your school?
2. Which of the alternatives to suspension provided by Peterson, if any, have been implemented at your school, and to what level of success?
3. What factors do you feel limit your ability to implement alternatives to suspension? How can these be overcome?
4. Could you foresee a scenario where suspensions at your school become obsolete?

### Resources

<b>A</b>	<p>Childs, K, D Elfner, H Kincaid, G Peshak, and A Nicholas. 2016. "The Relationship Between School-Wide Implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Student Discipline Outcomes." <i>Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions</i> 18, no 2: 89–99.</p> <p>In this study from Florida, the authors examine effects of implementing the schoolwide positive behaviour interventions and supports program in over 1,000 schools and the subsequent reduction in the total number of school suspensions in these schools.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Gross, O. 2016. <i>Restore the Respect: How to Mediate School Conflicts and Keep Students Learning</i>. Baltimore, Md: Brookes.</p> <p>Unresolved conflicts in schools can create barriers to learning for students. Gross introduces a 50-minute mediation method that can be applied to conflicts between students or between students and teachers. Resolving the conflict and restoring the relationships within the school community are key to keeping students engaged in learning.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Hannigan, J D, and J E Hannigan. 2016. <i>Don't Suspend Me: An Alternative Discipline Toolkit</i>. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin.</p> <p>Noting that suspensions do not achieve their aim of improving behaviour, Hannigan and Hannigan present ideas for alternative discipline strategies that are more likely to improve student behaviour.</p>

#### LEGEND

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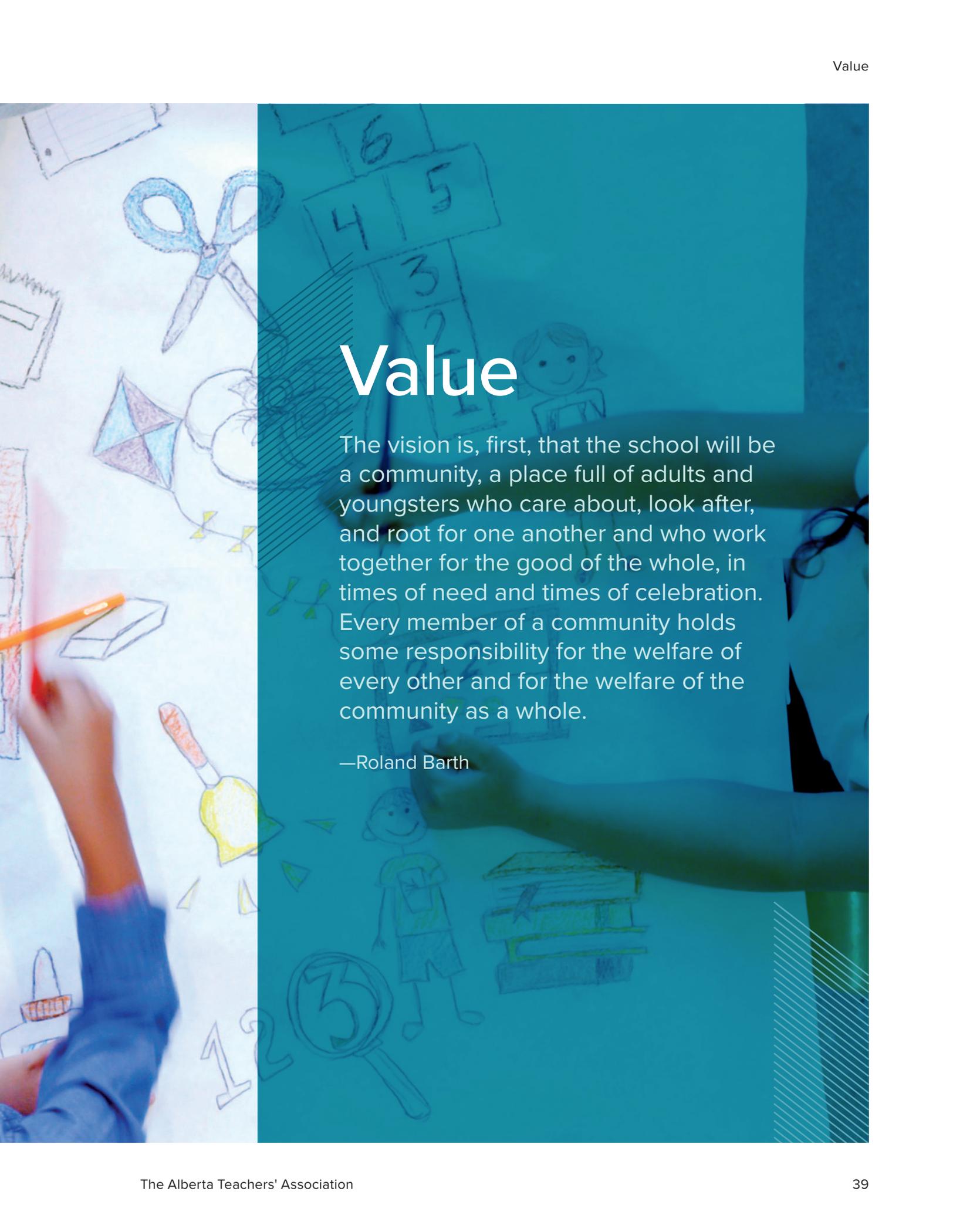
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Losen, D J, and J Gillespie. 2012. “Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School.” Los Angeles, Calif: The Civil Rights Project UCLA. <a href="https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/upcoming-crrr-research">https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/upcoming-crrr-research</a> (accessed November 11, 2018).</p> <p>Noting an extreme disproportionate application of school suspensions to male students of African-American ethnicity in the US, the authors consider if suspensions are being used to push students out of education all together. Noting that lifetime earnings and future community stability are affected by leaving school prior to graduation or completion, the authors suggest that alternate discipline strategies be used to encourage reconnection to the school community.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Mendez, L M. 2003. “Predictors of Suspension and Negative School Outcomes: A Longitudinal Investigation.” <i>New Directions for Youth Development</i> no 99 (September): 17–33.</p> <p>Concerned about the overuse of school suspensions in zero-tolerance schools, the author tracks students who were suspended in elementary school through to the end of high school to determine what effects the suspensions had on their academic success. The research shows that students who received out-of-school suspensions were much more likely to receive future suspensions, had poor academic performance and were less likely to graduate on time.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Noltemeyer, A L, R M Ward, C Mcloughlin, and M Vanderwood. 2015. “Relationship Between School Suspension and Student Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis.” <i>School Psychology Review</i> 44, no 2: 224–40.</p> <p>The application of policy regarding school suspensions must be grounded in evidence-based research. The authors of this analysis have gone through several studies to determine the effect of school suspension on overall academic achievement by students.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Vanderhaar, J, M Munoz, and J Petrosko. 2014. “Reconsidering the Alternatives: The Relationship Between Suspension, Disciplinary Alternative School Placement, Subsequent Juvenile Detention, and the Saliency of Race.” <i>Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk</i> 5, no 2.</p> <p>Looking at the linkage between out-of-school suspensions and time spent in the juvenile justice system, the authors confirm the overrepresentation of minority and low-income students in the group of students experiencing out-of-school suspension and subsequent juvenile detention prior to Grade 12.</p>

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# Value

The vision is, first, that the school will be a community, a place full of adults and youngsters who care about, look after, and root for one another and who work together for the good of the whole, in times of need and times of celebration. Every member of a community holds some responsibility for the welfare of every other and for the welfare of the community as a whole.

—Roland Barth

## School Culture by Design

School culture is created either intentionally or unintentionally. The most impactful thing leaders can do is to craft and manage culture to produce dynamic schools (Schein 2004). Peterson and Deal (1998) define culture as

the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools. This highly enduring web of influence binds the school together and makes it special. It is up to school leaders—principals, teachers, and often parents—to help identify, shape, and maintain strong, positive, student-focused cultures. Without these supportive cultures, reforms will wither, and student learning will slip. (p 28)

Where positive school cultures exist, trust and collaboration blossom and the foundation is laid for successful change and school improvement on all levels. The culture of a school and the connections made with its staff can be positive, life-altering forces for its students. Humans have a basic need to be a part of something, and for some students school provides their only opportunity to experience a sense of belonging. Schools that take a whole-school approach and proactively create opportunities for students to make connections notice a reduction in challenging behaviour. Having a supportive and inclusive culture creates strong relationships and engagement, thereby reducing problematic student behaviours, and enables better solutions for managing and responding to behaviour incidents, including a reduction in suspensions.

Action toward students is heavily influenced by culture. In creating a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment, messages are sent both overtly and subtly. Students know and understand the intention of the adults, and staff are conscious of the ways things are done. Deal and Peterson (2009) discuss how school culture is created and manifested. Things that contribute to fashioning its fabric include

- what hallways and classrooms look like,
- relationships among staff and how staff collaborate to improve the school,
- partnership between staff and administration,
- relationships with parents and the community,
- how newcomers are treated,
- explicit teaching and modelling of behaviour, and time for students to practice expectations,
- how students who are struggling are addressed,

- embedded social emotional learning,
- restorative practices (proactive universal strategies, such as classroom circles),
- trauma-informed practices (proactive universal strategies, such as understanding brain development and stress reactions for all students, not only those who experience trauma), and
- how successes and accomplishments are celebrated.



“

*If a school does not stand for something more profound than raising achievement levels, then it probably does not make a memorable difference to teachers, students, or partners.*

—Terrence E Deal

”

Culture is the glue that holds the school together. It sets the tone for the way things are done and crafts expectations. The school leader plays the most critical role in shaping the school culture. School leaders who lead with the intention of supporting staff and students produce a culture of caring and growth. Whenever and wherever this takes place, good things are happening in those schools.

Perhaps the greatest thing to remember about school culture is that it is intentionally built and cultivated. It is sustained through words and actions, with the willingness to re-evaluate when necessary. Positive school cultures recognize the inherent value of all people included in the school community and the work that goes into its creation.

Cotton (1990), in summarizing findings from more than 20 researchers, provided the factors for schoolwide plans that effectively managed student behaviour. The research stemmed from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, but is still apropos for examining effective school environments if the phrase *welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments where diversity is respected and a sense of belonging is fostered* is used to describe schools. Schools that have made a conscious effort to create such an atmosphere have the following elements:

- Commitment, on the part of all staff, to establishing and maintaining appropriate student behaviour as an essential precondition of learning. There is a school-wide emphasis on the importance of learning and intolerance of conditions that inhibit learning.
- High behavioural expectations. Staff members share and communicate high expectations for appropriate student behaviour.
- Clear and broad-based rules. Rules and procedures are developed with students, are clearly specified and are made known to everyone in the school. Student engagement increases and creates a sense of ownership and belonging. Widespread dissemination of clearly stated rules and procedures, moreover, ensures that all students and staff understand what is and is not acceptable.

- Warm school climate. A warm social climate, characterized by a concern for students as individuals, is key. Teachers and school leaders intentionally connect with students, taking an interest in their personal interests, goals, achievements and problems, and support them in their academic and extracurricular activities.
- A visible, supportive school leader. School leaders tend to be very visible in hallways and classrooms, talking informally with teachers and students, speaking to them by name and expressing interest in their activities.
- Delegation of authority to teachers. School leaders take responsibility for dealing with serious infractions, but teachers are responsible for handling routine classroom expectation infractions. School leaders assist teachers to improve their classroom management skills by providing ongoing supervision and support to staff.
- School leaders support professional learning in areas such as restorative practices, trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning.
- Close ties with communities. Researchers have generally found that effective schools have an elevated level of communication and partnership with the communities they serve. These schools have high parent involvement in school functions, and communities are kept informed of school goals and activities (Cotton 1990, 3-4).



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does your school intentionally work on positive school culture?
2. How frequently is the school's culture revisited and reflected upon?
3. Do school staff have a common understanding of your school culture?
4. What opportunities exist for students to contribute to building a positive school culture?
5. What opportunities exist for students to engage in collaborative leadership roles in your school?
6. Does your school integrate explicit social skills instruction that demonstrates the behaviour expectations of your school and school authority?
7. Are students' positive behaviours consistently recognized and reinforced?
8. What barriers exist to changing the culture of your school?

## Resources

<p><b>T</b></p>	<p>Alberta Education. 2015. <i>The Walk Around: A School Leader's Observation Guide</i>.  <a href="https://education.alberta.ca/media/3114867/the-walk-around-school-leader-revised.pdf">https://education.alberta.ca/media/3114867/the-walk-around-school-leader-revised.pdf</a></p> <p>This tool is designed to assist school leaders in gathering information about the extent to which the school they lead is a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment. Using this tool, in conjunction with <i>The Walk Around: Teacher Companion Tool</i>, may reveal practices that are working well and should be celebrated and maintained. It may also expose gaps between the perceptions of school leaders and teachers, pointing to areas requiring attention or improvement.</p>
<p><b>T</b></p>	<p>Alberta Education. 2015. <i>The Walk Around: Teacher Education Tool</i>.  <a href="https://education.alberta.ca/media/3114866/walkaround-teacher-revisions.pdf">https://education.alberta.ca/media/3114866/walkaround-teacher-revisions.pdf</a></p> <p>Similar to the tool listed above, this one is designed to gather information from teachers about the extent to which the school is a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment. It provides insight into four aspects of the school environment: physical appearance, social climate, success in learning, and home–school–community relations.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Cavanagh, T, A Macfarlane, T Glynn, and S Macfarlane. 2012. "Creating Peaceful and Effective Schools through a Culture of Care." <i>Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education</i> 33, no 3: 443–55.</p> <p>The authors discuss how schools can deliberately create a culture of care that makes everyone aware of the impact of values in making people feel safe and as though they belong.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Graves, G. 2013. "SUSPENDED!" <i>Scholastic Parent &amp; Child</i> 20, no 7: 25–31.</p> <p>Graves demonstrates how zero-tolerance policies in elementary schools have created cultures of fear for students. She discusses how changing policies in some schools to a positive behaviour support model is reducing discipline issues and increasing academic performance for many students.</p>
<p><b>B</b></p>	<p>Gruenert, S, and T Whitaker. 2017. <i>School Culture Recharged: Strategies to Energize Your Staff and Culture</i>. Alexandria, Va: ASCD</p> <p>A useful book about the rewards and challenges of changing a school culture from the culture you have to the culture you want.</p>

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W – Website  
 A – Article  
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<b>B</b>	<p>Heg, A, and A Dovico. 2018. <i>The Limitless School: Creative Ways to Solve the Culture Puzzle</i>. San Diego, Calif: Burgess.</p> <p>Culture is invisible but omnipresent, argue the authors as they analyze ways to change this largely unconscious driver of school success or failure. Suggesting a nine-pillar approach, they emphasize the engagement of stakeholders as a key to reshaping a school culture into a culture that is inclusive and inviting.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Losen, D J. 2014. <i>Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion</i>. New York: Teachers College Press.</p> <p>Arguing that school culture is in part responsible for the practice of suspending minority and low-income children from school at far greater rates than their white and middle-income counterparts, Losen suggests changing school culture as a way to ensure equity in disciplinary measures.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Reno, G D, J Friend, L Caruthers and D Smith. 2017. “Who’s Getting Targeted for Behavioral Interventions? Exploring the Connections between School Culture, Positive Behavior Support, and Elementary Student Achievement.” <i>Journal of Negro Education</i> 86, no 4: 423–38.</p> <p>Although no academic improvement in students was found in this study of the effects of implementing schoolwide positive behaviour interventions and supports (SW-PBIS), it was noted that male students, minority students and low-income students were identified as needing behavioural supports at a much higher rate than other students. The authors look at the role that school culture played in these outcomes.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA). 2017. <i>Respectful Schools—Online Toolkit</i>. <a href="http://respectfulschools.ca">http://respectfulschools.ca</a></p> <p>Developed by the Alberta Teachers’ Association in collaboration with various partners, the Respectful Schools Online Toolkit provides curriculum-related activities, lesson plans and resources that help teachers demonstrate concepts like fairness, equity and inclusion.</p> <p>The toolkit highlights and serves three distinct audiences—parents and community, teachers and school leaders, and education leaders. It contains resources, articles and real-world best practices related to human rights and human rights education.</p>

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## Classroom Climate and Community Making

Classrooms are microcosms of the school and, as such, the creation of a positive school culture should be mirrored in all classrooms, including virtual classrooms.

A significant influencing factor on student achievement is that of classroom community making. The creation and nurturing of welcoming, caring, respectful and safe classroom communities should occur in tandem with the creation and nurturing of a positive school culture.

The use of effective classroom community making strategies is not about implementing a single program, but needs to be placed in the context of the learning that is taking place in schools (Osher et al 2010). Kelly and Prigmore (2009) assert that many students are not coming to school ready to learn and we should not make any assumptions. “Teachers will not be effective as instructional leaders unless they connect with students on a human level, accept students with ‘unconditional positive regard,’ set appropriate limits and communicate high expectations. Relationships are a keystone to well-run classrooms” (p 32).

Teachers play a vital role in creating relevance and connection in engaging students. Involving students in cocreating behavioural expectations, procedures and rules is one strategy that facilitates the connection between students and teachers. The process empowers students, helping them to feel a sense of autonomy in the classroom environment, and thereby increases engagement. In addition, when teachers link instruction to the everyday experiences of students there is a higher level of engagement. This, too, offers the potential to improve classroom behaviour (Christle, Jolivette and Nelson 2005).

### Understanding Student Behaviour

Before suspension is considered, school personnel, parents and students can take proactive actions to minimize the possibility of a suspension. Research clearly shows that relationships and a sense of belonging (Resnick et al 1997; McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum 2002) are essential to school experiences and are of particular



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*Sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound formative effect on the life of a student.*

—Paulo Freire

”

importance for individuals or groups that have been marginalized or feel marginalized (McElderry and Cheng 2014). Schools that created positive environments, had staff who knew the problems, had credible solutions, worked together and used their collective knowledge to address challenges in the school provided the greatest levels of connectedness (Christle, Jolivette and Nelson 2005).

*Collaborative and proactive solutions* (CPS) (Greene 2014) and the collaborative response model (CRM) (Hewson, Hewson and Parsons 2015) are two proactive strategies that provide the structure for schools to work to create proactive solutions that help limit suspensions. Both models are based on early assessment and intervention at an early stage and collaboratively working with all stakeholders to create solution-focused approaches. They offer the opportunity to change paradigms because “we cannot keep doing things the way we always have and continue losing kids on a scale that is truly astounding” (Greene 2014, xii).

*Collaborative and proactive solutions* (CPS) focuses more on the individual student and is used after an incident (or series of incidents). The process helps students work through what is going poorly. Greene offers three shifts that are required to change the paradigm of how the issues around challenging students are addressed: “a dramatic improvement in understanding the factors that set the stage for challenging behaviour in kids, creating mechanisms for helping these kids that are predominately proactive instead of reactive, and creating processes so people can solve problems collaboratively” (Greene 2014, xiv).

The *collaborative response model* (CRM) that Hewson, Hewson and Parsons propose is tied to a cultural shift in many schools and can be used as a whole-school approach. The intent of their work is to create “an inclusive framework, focusing on how schools can ensure structures and supports are in place to respond to unique student needs in ways that value an individual school’s context” (Hewson, Hewson and Parsons 2015, 10). This is accomplished through planned and structured meetings in which all the stakeholders are at the table, so that everyone who has a role to play in supporting a child can offer input and assistance. Through the use of multi-tiered intervention, strategies are identified that assist students.

The work of Greene and of Hewson, Hewson and Parsons emphasizes the use of collaboration and expertise to put in place supports for students early, so that escalation does not take place. Using these approaches increases the potential to redirect students and reduce the number of suspensions.



“

*As a consequence of fostering relationships and a sense of belonging, academic performance, too, flourishes.*

—Bob Costello

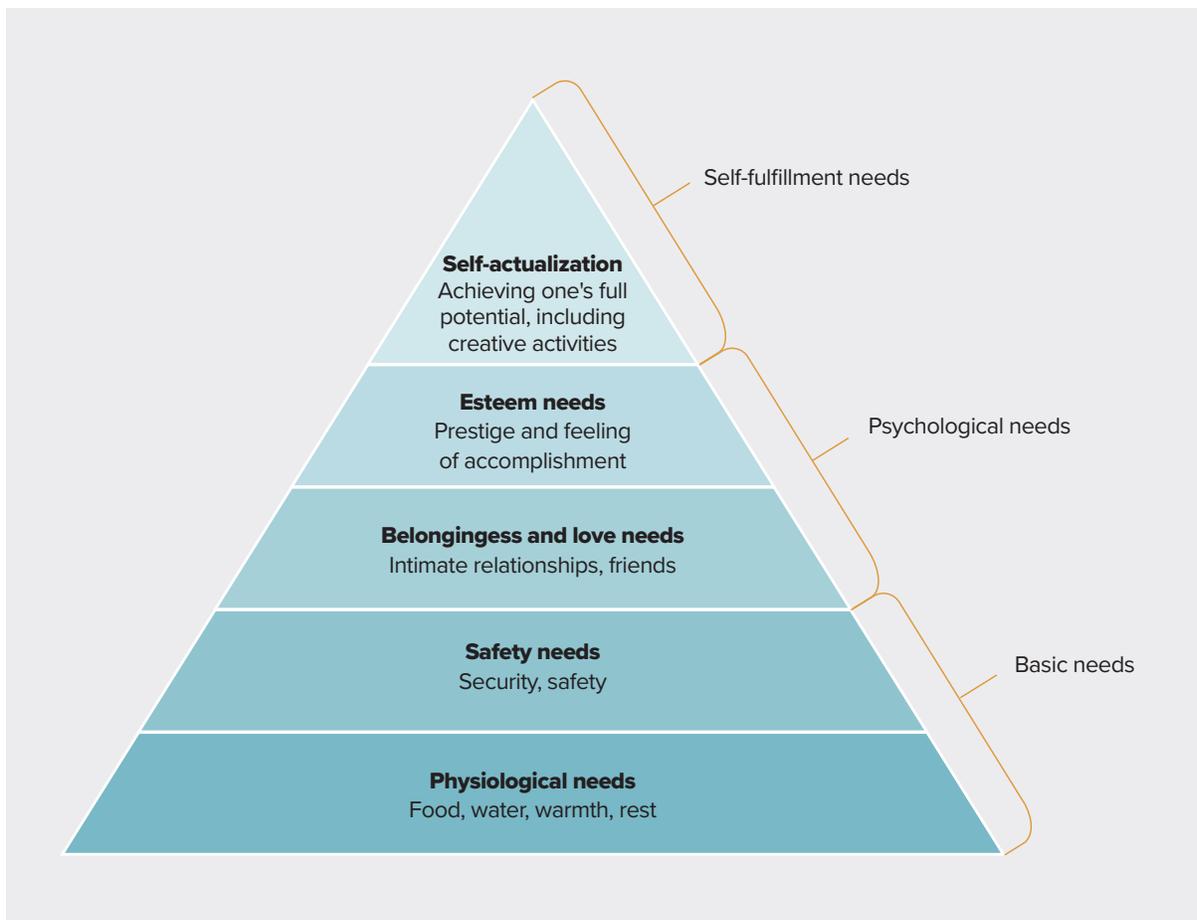
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## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One of the foundational texts that preservice teachers are often asked to read while completing their education degrees is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs.<sup>16</sup> According to Maslow, human needs align themselves in a hierarchy:

1. Physiological needs
2. Safety and security needs
3. Belonging and affection needs
4. Esteem and self-respect needs
5. Self-actualization needs

Maslow envisioned this as a pyramid:



Within this model, it is understood that the upper needs will be difficult to meet if the bottom needs are inadequately addressed. In the context of schools and classrooms, academic achievement and appropriate behaviour cannot be expected to be present if the students' basic needs are not being met. This is also the case if they do not feel a sense of safety and belonging in the school environment. In this light, the language of the *Education Act* becomes even more potent in striving for schools that are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe, and where diversity is respected and a sense of belonging is fostered.

This model speaks to the emphasis that this toolkit places on understanding the needs of students through effective, positive relationship building. It shows the entwined relationship between the needs of the self and the needs of the community, and the potential for transformation within schools once those connections are understood and honoured.

Students who become emotionally overwhelmed or irritated in a situation may express their emotions in aggressive or angry ways. This is not by choice, but rather because their emotions may be overriding the rational and logical part of their brain. The limbic system in their brain may have taken over, preventing them from accessing learning and memory of more appropriate responses. These behaviours are best handled by de-escalating the situation as quickly as possible in order to help the student return their emotions to a normal level. Once that state has been achieved and maintained for a period of time, a discussion can occur about behaviour and expectations.

**Phrases that help de-escalate:**

- Let's talk about this in a few minutes.
- I see where you are coming from.
- I want to help you.
- What would help you right now?
- Talk to me. [And really listen.]

**Actions that help de-escalate:**

- Model personal self-regulation.
- Maintain your calm.
- Maintain neutral tone and body language.
- Lower your voice.
- Give a choice.
- Give personal space.
- Use active listening.

- Offer the person a drink or to take a walk.
- Show empathy.
- Don't take items or personal property.
- Evaluate the student using HALT. (Is the student hungry? Angry? Lonely? Tired?)
- Give time for the student's emotional flooding to subside. *Emotional flooding* is a term used to describe that state of heightened emotional/physical/mental arousal in which a person's situation can be compared to that of being under water. In this state, the person cannot think, hear, communicate or act clearly and rationally. They need to have time to let the waters subside before a logical and rational conversation can occur.



“

*Culture is the most powerful source of leverage for bringing about change in school—or any organization—for that matter.*

—Thomas J Sergiovanni

”



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does your school or school authority support the development of or refinement of classroom community-making skills?
2. How often are students involved in cocreating behavioural expectations, procedures and rules within classrooms?
3. What opportunities exist for students to contribute to positive classroom communities?
4. What opportunities exist for students to engage in leadership roles within their classrooms?
5. How do school staff engage students within classrooms?
6. Do teachers embed explicit, evidence-based, authentic social skills instruction into their teaching practice that reflects the behaviour expectations of your school and school authority?
7. What kinds of de-escalation and proactive strategies does your staff use?
8. What processes are in place for staff to be proactive and help students as early as possible when behaviour concerns are identified?

## Resources

<b>T</b>	<p>Alberta Education. Learning and Teaching Resources Branch. 2008. <i>Supporting Positive Behaviours in Alberta Schools</i>. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education.  <a href="https://education.alberta.ca/media/464616/supporting_positive_behaviour_individual.pdf">https://education.alberta.ca/media/464616/supporting_positive_behaviour_individual.pdf</a></p> <p>This resource provides information on how to develop an integrated system for schoolwide classroom and individual support.</p>
<b>T</b>	<p>Sautner, B, K Blain, and P Highet. 2009. <i>Supporting Positive Behaviour in Alberta Schools Workshop Facilitator Guide (Teachers and Administrators)</i>. Edmonton, Alta: Alberta Education.  <a href="http://www.engagingalllearners.ca/ls/supporting-positive-behaviour-in-alberta-schools/documents/facilitatorguideeducationalassistants.pdf">www.engagingalllearners.ca/ls/supporting-positive-behaviour-in-alberta-schools/documents/facilitatorguideeducationalassistants.pdf</a></p> <p>This guide contains a series of activities to facilitate the implementation of the Supporting Positive Behaviours program.</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>Wamsley, M. 2014. <i>Introduction to Ronald Morrish's Real Discipline</i>. (3:38 minutes)  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rish5NiQeRM">www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rish5NiQeRM</a></p> <p>This video summarizes the work of Ronald Morrish in his book <i>With All Due Respect</i>. It looks at discipline as a process, not an event, and something that teaches, not punishes. It returns the responsibility for the situation to the individual.</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>Wamsley, M. 2014. <i>Ronald Morrish's Real Discipline</i>. (6:15 minutes)  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPwvyg-CvjA">www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPwvyg-CvjA</a></p> <p>This short video looks at three key principles in Ronald Morrish's book <i>With All Due Respect</i> and explains them. The steps include training for compliance, teaching behaviours and expectations, and managing choice.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>PolicyWise for Children and Families. 2019. Supporting Every Student Learning Series.  <a href="https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/">https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/</a></p> <p>The Supporting Every Student Learning series is intended to support professional learning opportunities for school and school authority leaders in creating or enhancing welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that support student success and well-being. The series provides access to information on research and evidence-based practices through recorded TedTalk-style presentations and conversation guides, with links for further information. Learning sessions are available on brain development, effects of bullying on children, supporting refugee students, trauma-informed practice, restorative practices, whole-school approach, social-emotional learning, and sexual orientation and gender identity in Canadian schools.</p>

### LEGEND

- W – Website
- A – Article
- B – Book
- V – Video
- T – Tool

<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Education. 2019. Instructional Supports.  <a href="http://www.alberta.ca/instructional-supports.aspx">www.alberta.ca/instructional-supports.aspx</a></p> <p>This website provides a variety of resources and supports to help meet the needs of individual learners.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Jigsaw Learning. 2019.  <a href="http://jigsawlearning.ca/">http://jigsawlearning.ca/</a></p> <p>This website has information about the collaborative response model, which is a framework to assist schools and school leaders in the establishment of effective systematic structures to support the needs of all learners. Jigsaw Learning supports students, educators, schools and systems by recognizing that learning is a continuous and ongoing process: learners will truly understand when they have the background knowledge and skills that demonstrate readiness. As such, the support provided by Jigsaw Learning is built on the premise of building capacity, promoting independence and ensuring sustainability.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Claassen, R, and R Claassen. 2015. <i>Making Things Right: Activities that Teach Restorative Justice, Conflict Resolution, Mediation, and Discipline that Restores. Includes 32 Detailed Lesson Plans with Prepared Projections and Handouts.</i> 2nd ed. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace.</p> <p>With lesson plans that range from 5 to 50 minutes in length, this book provides teachers with useful tools to use in teaching students to become peacemakers in their classrooms and to understand how restorative justice works.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Gage, N A, T Scott, R Hirn and A S MacSuga-Gage. 2018. "The Relationship Between Teachers' Implementation of Classroom Management Practices and Student Behavior in Elementary School." <i>Behavioral Disorders</i> 43, no 2: 302–15.</p> <p>Deciding to study the effect of classroom management practices on students learning, the authors were unsurprised to learn that in classrooms where management practices are low, student engagement in learning is also low.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Hulac, D M, and A M Briesch. 2017. <i>Evidence-Based Strategies for Effective Classroom Management.</i> New York: Guilford.</p> <p>Effective classroom management skills can make a teaching career, while lacking those skills has broken many teaching careers. The authors base their step-by-step strategies for classroom management solidly in the results of educational research.</p>

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A – Article  
B – Book  
V – Video  
T – Tool

<b>A</b>	<p>Kearney, W S, P A Smith and S Maika. 2016. "Asking Students Their Opinions of the Learning Environment: An Empirical Analysis of Elementary Classroom Climate." <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> 32, no 3: 310–20.</p> <p>Noting a lack of research focused on student perceptions of class climate, the authors developed a classroom climate evaluation instrument that measures students' perception of their own engagement in learning, peer relationships, and teacher support.</p>
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- A – Article
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- T – Tool

## Self-Management and Regulation

In order for students to be successful at learning and social interaction, they must have well-developed executive function and self-management skills.

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, executive function and self-regulation skills “are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully” (2015). Well-developed executive function and self-regulation skills enable students to set goals; organize materials; manage time; initiate tasks and see a plan through to the end; manage emotions, impulses, responses and actions; and show empathy toward others. “Executive function and self-regulation skills depend on three types of brain function: working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. These functions are highly interrelated, and the successful application of executive function skills requires them to operate in coordination with each other” (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015). Students who experience toxic stress and adverse experiences often have underdeveloped executive function and self-regulation skills.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has produced a framework that outlines five competencies for social and emotional learning;<sup>17</sup> it is a useful tool for educators to help cultivate intrapersonal and interpersonal competence in students.



“

*How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.*

—Anne Frank

”

### **1. Self-awareness**

The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts and values and how they influence behaviour. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.” Self-awareness includes

- identifying emotions,
- accurate self-perception,
- recognizing strengths,
- self-confidence and
- self-efficacy.

### **2. Self-management**

The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in different situations—effectively managing stress, controlling impulses and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals. Self-management includes

- impulse control,
- stress management,
- self-discipline,
- self-motivation,
- goal-setting and
- organizational skills.

### **3. Social awareness**

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports. Social awareness includes

- perspective-taking,
- empathy,
- appreciating diversity and
- respect for others.

#### **4. Relationship skills**

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed. Relationship skills include

- communication,
- social engagement,
- relationship-building and
- teamwork.

#### **5. Responsible decision-making**

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration for the well-being of oneself and others. Responsible decision-making includes

- identifying problems,
- analyzing situations,
- solving problems,
- evaluating,
- reflecting and
- ethical responsibility.

Executive function and self-regulation skills are not innate. School leaders, teachers and other school staff can support the development of executive function and self-regulation skills through explicitly teaching knowledge and skills to manage emotions, build positive relationships, set goals and make decisions. Teaching executive function and self-regulation skills helps provide a school environment that is welcoming, caring, supportive, safe and predictable. These skills develop over time and flourish in the presence of a positive, predictable environment and relationships that are caring, trusting, dependable and growth promoting.

As children progress through the school years and into adulthood, there is a higher expectation for them to be able to manage themselves appropriately. If these skills are not properly developed, they are considered to be lagging. When a student cannot meet the demands, they often react with misbehaviours that are concerning and draw negative attention.

Ross Greene, author of *Lost at School*, has created a tool that can function as a starting point to identify a student's lagging skills. This can then be used as a

place to begin conversation and make plans to assist the student in learning these skills. The ALSUP (assessment of lagging skills and unsolved problems) can be accessed at [www.livesinthebalance.org/sites/default/files/ALSUP%20Rev%2011-12-12%20pdf%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.livesinthebalance.org/sites/default/files/ALSUP%20Rev%2011-12-12%20pdf%20(2).pdf).

## Coregulation and Adult Social Emotional Learning

Self-regulation develops through interaction with caregivers such as parents, teachers, coaches and other mentors. Further, self-regulation development is dependent on predictable, responsive and supportive environments. When teachers coregulate, or tune their responses to the various needs of individual children, they support the skill of self-regulation in a group setting. The supportive process between caring adults and children, youth or young adults that fosters self-regulation development is called *coregulation*.

According to Rosanbalm and Murray (2017) there are three broad categories of support that school staff can provide to children, youth and young adults that will help them to develop foundational self-regulatory skills and expand these skills to meet increasingly complex regulatory need.

### 1. Provide a warm, responsive relationship.

- Display care and respect.
- Communicate, through words and actions, an interest in the individual.
- Provide coaching for complex problem solving and decision making.
- Provide comfort and empathy during times of strong emotion; prompt and support coping strategies.

### 2. Structure the environment.

- Provide clear rules, structure, boundaries, and consequences to incentivize good choices.
- Provide opportunities to make decisions and self-monitor behaviour.
- Monitor and limit opportunities for risk-taking behaviour.
- Give time and space to calm down in times of conflict, including self-talk and relaxation.

### 3. Teach and coach self-regulation skills

- Model conflict resolution strategies.
- Model, monitor and coach self-regulation skills across different contexts.
- Model a personal ability to self-regulate.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Are school leaders and teachers modelling and providing direct instruction in and opportunities for students to practise executive function and self-regulation skills?
2. Do school staff have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to support students effectively in developing executive function and self-regulation skills?
3. Is there a coordinated effort to reinforce executive function and self-regulation skills across classrooms, schoolwide and with families?
4. What processes are in place to monitor, evaluate and adjust the schoolwide implementation of teaching executive function and self-regulation skills?
5. Reflect on your ability to regulate your own thinking, emotions and reactions over the course of a day. How well are you able to? When do you struggle?

## Resources

<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Education. 2019. Social-Emotional Learning. <a href="http://www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning.aspx">www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning.aspx</a></p> <p>This website offers an overview of social-emotional learning, foundational ideas, examples and resources.</p>
<b>T</b>	<p>Safe and Caring Schools &amp; Communities. Toolkit: Supporting Social Emotional Learning. <a href="http://safeandcaring.ca/resource/toolkit-supporting-social-emotional-learning/">http://safeandcaring.ca/resource/toolkit-supporting-social-emotional-learning/</a></p> <p>The Society for Safe and Caring Schools &amp; Communities is a centre for knowledge that fosters effective networks and partnerships to improve the quality of life for all Alberta children. Their Toolkit for Social-Emotional Learning includes information about choosing literature to support social-emotional learning; choosing one-time events to support a comprehensive approach; choosing student materials to support social-emotional learning; choosing school-based programming interventions; and five simple steps for evaluating school-based programming interventions.</p>

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W – Website  
 A – Article  
 B – Book  
 V – Video  
 T – Tool

<b>A</b>	<p>Shanker, S. 2014. <i>Broader Measures for Success: Social/Emotional Learning</i>. Toronto: Measuring What Matters, People for Education.  <a href="https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MWM-Social-Emotional-Learning.pdf">https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MWM-Social-Emotional-Learning.pdf</a></p> <p>This 2014 monograph by Stuart Shanker, DPhil, of York University, focuses on the importance of and methods for measuring social-emotional learning.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). 2019.  <a href="https://casel.org/">https://casel.org/</a></p> <p>The CASEL website highlights current social-emotional learning research and offers an online library of related resources. CASEL is focused on building district-level support for social and emotional learning.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Cook, C et al. 2018. "Addressing Discipline Disparities for Black Male Students: Linking Malleable Root Causes to Feasible and Effective Practices." <i>School Psychology Review</i> 47, no 2: 135–52.</p> <p>The authors tested the effectiveness of the Greet-Stop-Prompt technique in developing better relationships with black male students, who are often singled out for disciplinary referrals to the school leader. This proactive classroom management technique, along with a self-regulation technique for teachers to reduce bias, was found to reduce behavioural referrals by two-thirds.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Kenney, L, and R Comizio. 2016. <i>70 Play Activities for Better Thinking, Self-Regulation, Learning and Behavior</i>. Eau Claire, Wis: PESI.</p> <p>Disguising learning as play is always an effective way to engage students in learning the most important lessons. The 70 play activities in this book are focused on self-regulation in group activities.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Korinek, L, and S H deFur. 2016. "Supporting Student Self-Regulation to Access the General Education Curriculum." <i>Teaching Exceptional Children</i> 48, no 5: 232–42.</p> <p>Children with disabilities often have limited self-regulation repertoires and need to expand these skills to be successful in general classrooms. The authors point out ways that teachers can structure classroom time and use teaching practices that help children develop these skills while in a general classroom.</p>

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<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Jung, L A, and D Smith. 2018. “Tear Down Your Behavior Chart!” Educational Leadership 76, no 1: 12–18.</p> <p>Behaviour charts are used in a belief that they can help students learn to self-regulate. However, Jung and Smith argue that emotionally punishing a child about behaviour does not create new aptitudes such as self-regulation, but rather either forces compliance or creates negative attitudes. They suggest using relationships and discussions to help students solve behaviour issues and thereby build self-regulation skills.</p>
<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>Reilly, N. 2015. Anxiety and Depression in the Classroom: A Teacher’s Guide to Fostering Self-Regulation in Young Students. New York: Norton.</p> <p>Reilly grounds this book in recent psychological research focused on depression and anxiety disorders and shapes it into an easy-to-use tool for classroom teachers. She provides straightforward examples and activities for teachers to use to help children learn to self-regulate at school.</p>
<p><b>W</b></p>	<p>The University of British Columbia. 2019. Social and Emotional Learning Resource Finder. www.selresources.com/</p> <p>This website provides three main sections: Learn, Apply and Assess. In the Learn section, readers learn about what SEL is, why it is important and the evidence that supports the promotion of social and emotional competence in children and youth. The Apply section contains links to a broad range of programs, curricula, lesson plans, activities, books, videos and other resources for promoting social and emotional competencies in children and youth. The Assess section focuses on the importance of evidence-based practices, which involves using programs, lessons and activities that have been shown to be effective as well as evaluating the effectiveness of your own efforts.</p>
<p><b>V</b></p>	<p>Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. 2014. Executive Function (3:51 minutes). Palix Foundation. www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/executive-function</p> <p>This video discusses the importance of executive function, or the air traffic control system of the brain.</p>

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- W – Website
- A – Article
- B – Book
- V – Video
- T – Tool

## Conscious Connection

Lieberman (2013) discusses the importance of connections and how their absence in a social environment such as a school setting can have adverse effects on a child. Sometimes this absence can be passed on to children through intergenerational trauma. The human brain reacts to the social pain that can result from poor interpersonal relationships in a similar way to that of physical pain. This is even illustrated by our language, which is filled with metaphors: “His heart was broken,” “You hurt my feelings,” or “My heart aches.” Trust and respect are crucial elements in the establishment of relationships with students. A trusted teacher may be a significant guide in a child’s life (Steinberg 2008) and is an essential component of a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.

Human beings have a greater willingness to engage when they feel respected, acknowledged and heard. If teachers convey respect and empathy to students, it is likely to create positive interactions (Okonofua, Paunesku and Walton 2016). Okonofua, Paunesku and Walton further clarify that teachers view respect as cooperation. In contrast, students view respect as “a basic recognition of your humanity.” For students, this includes “remembering a student’s name (and pronouncing it correctly), not speaking down to them or embarrassing them in front of their peers, and expressing interest in their perspectives” (Sparks 2016). With a simple intervention of having teachers read and respond about good student–teacher relationships, Okonofua, Paunesku and Walton (2016) were able to measure changes in teacher attitudes toward students. Through using an intervention of reading and discussing empathy, the teachers demonstrated greater empathy with them.

Feeling a sense of belonging is a fundamental need. As humans, we are wired to be social beings, to make connections and belong (Ryan and Deci 2000). Teachers should continuously work on fostering inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcome, cared for, respected and safe.<sup>18</sup> Students will flourish if an environment contributes to their sense of belonging. A child’s brain and body are continually monitoring to see if he or she belongs, staying in a constant state of alertness, making “learning, reflection, planning, and creative problem-solving harder” (Supin 2016). “What counts and what leads to positive growth and development from pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 and beyond is caring relationships and supportive learning rigor” (McCombs 2014, 264).



“

*Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be.*

—Rita Pierson

”

Recall the previous discussion of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (page 47 of this toolkit). Relationships are crucial to human development and inform a student's ability to partake in the community in healthy, meaningful ways.

Attachment and bonding are necessary for healthy relationships. Suspension conflicts with attachment theory. Attachment starts with early bonding with parents, and the degree to which it takes place can be a predictor of school success (Moss and St-Laurent 2001). Attachment and bonding may be impacted through intergenerational trauma, creating a negative effect on the child or adult's ability to engage and connect. Bergin and Bergin (2009) refer to *attachment relationships* as behaviours in children that show a preference for a person when threatened or upset and in need of security. Attachment provides feelings of security, so that children can explore freely. While all children seek to feel secure, attachment helps them balance this need with their innate motivation to explore their environment. Attachment also forms the basis for socializing children. As children and adults are drawn together and interact harmoniously, children adopt the adults' behaviour and values (p 142).

Relationships are a key aspect of the educational experience, and it is the positive teacher/student connections that make a substantive difference in lives. Demonstrating caring, understanding, honesty, openness, sensitivity and respectfulness was perceived by students as having the greatest impact in the creation of these bonds (Poplin and Weeres 1994).

Authentically engaging in similarities influences the notion of belonging. Gehlbach et al (2016) examined the degree of commonality between teachers and students and the creation of social bonds. Teachers can increase student success and achievement when they genuinely express interest and engage in the student interests. Students who typically faced more challenging circumstances at home, at school and throughout their community responded with a greater sense of connection with the teacher, demonstrated student success and, over the semester, their grades trended to a higher level.

## Holistic World View

Educational success requires holistic approaches for all students, including Indigenous students. "Recognition of culture[s], language[s] and identity is an integral part of well-being" (OECD 2017a, 49). The framework used in this toolkit is one way to represent a holistic world view. A holistic framework may include physical, mental, emotional



“

*How do we create an educational environment where trust exists?*

*We must offer trust freely first, without the requirement of earning it.*

—Ryan Steele

”

and spiritual components, and each of these areas may need to be nurtured within your classroom and school environment. It is important to be responsive to the needs of the child and learn how to respectfully and authentically nurture the whole child.

“Such [holistic] approaches require meeting the needs of the whole child, including health, nutrition, transportation and intensive academic support where required” (OECD 2017a, 53). Schools and classrooms serve to support students’ holistic growth and “[f]or Indigenous students’ experiences to change, the practices of teaching and learning also need to change” (OECD 2017b).

In a study conducted by the OECD (2017a), Indigenous students indicated that they want

1. to learn about their cultures, languages and histories;
2. to have teachers who care about them and expect them to succeed; and
3. to feel safe and included at school.

This understanding informed the work of Larry Brendtro, Steve Van Bockern and Martin Brokenleg, who each have significant experience working with at-risk youth. Their work, combined with aspects of Indigenous world views, led to the development of a model to help build self-esteem in students. They assert that “because normal and dysfunctional behaviour have the same roots, we prevent and remedy student behaviour problems by meeting developmental needs” (Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern 1990). These developmental needs are based on four key components for developing positive self-esteem—significance, competence, power and virtue. Martin Brokenleg showed how the model mirrors traditional teachings in some Indigenous cultures. The four developmental needs Brokenleg identifies are belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. This work relates to needs outlined in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (see page 47) and understanding student behaviour.

These connections led to the development of the Circle of Courage, which emphasizes the proactive nature of positive relationships and a supportive school culture (Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern 1990). The creation of positive social bonds helps encourage prosocial behaviour. This requires that adults provide caring, guidance and support to students. It also requires that school leaders and staff make a concerted effort to engage families in their children’s education.



“

*When students know teachers care about them they will stick with school even when things are hard I carry this knowing as a teacher...*

—Lulu Marshall,  
Warrior Women

”



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do your school and school authority promote belonging, mastery, independence and generosity in your school community?
2. How do you ensure that every student in your school is positively connected to at least one adult?
3. Do all the adults in your building model respect for students, staff and parents? In what ways? If not, how is that addressed?
4. How are the school and school authority working to support students by developing positive, trusting relationships with families and communities?
5. How are individual families encouraged and supported to play an active role in their children’s education?

### Resources

<b>V</b>	<p>White, B, Jr. 2017. <i>CMS Teacher Barry White Jr. Has a Special Handshake with Every. Single. Student.</i> (1:59 minutes). Live Media.  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeMSzBvhZBk">www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeMSzBvhZBk</a></p> <p>In this video, the impact of positive, individual connections is demonstrated.</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>Borba, M. 2016. <i>Empathy is a Verb.</i> (17:53 minutes). TEDx Talks.  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVTiplEG91s">www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVTiplEG91s</a></p> <p>Borba outlines the importance if empathy and how it can be manifested in students.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Education. 2019. Social-Emotional Learning.  <a href="https://www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning.aspx">https://www.alberta.ca/social-emotional-learning.aspx</a></p> <p>This website offers an overview of social-emotional learning, foundational ideas, examples and resources.</p>

#### LEGEND

- W – Website
- A – Article
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- V – Video
- T – Tool

<b>A</b>	<p>Borba, M. 2018. "Nine Competencies for Teaching Empathy: An Educational Psychologist and Parenting Expert Offers Advice to School Leaders." <i>Educational Leadership</i> 76, no 2: 22–28.</p> <p>Seeing empathy as the key to reducing stress in students and improving their academic performance, Borba describes nine keys for teachers and school leaders to use to develop empathy in students.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Daly, B, and S Suggs. 2010. "Teachers' Experiences with Humane Education and Animals in the Elementary Classroom: Implications for Empathy Development." <i>Journal of Moral Education</i> 39, no 1: 101–12.</p> <p>The use of classroom pets to teach empathy and support the socio-emotional development of students is discussed.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Nickerson, A B. 2018. "Can SEL Reduce School Violence?" <i>Educational Leadership</i> 76, no 2: 46–50.</p> <p>Nickerson argues that teaching empathy to students is the key to reducing school violence and creating a caring school environment. She discusses efforts in several American schools to create programs for social-emotional learning.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>OECD. 2017. <i>Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students</i>, Paris: OECD.</p> <p>This report seeks to identify promising strategies, policies, programs and practices that support improved learning outcomes for Indigenous students and to build an empirical evidence base on Indigenous students in education. The study investigates four areas in Indigenous education: well-being, participation, engagement and achievement in education. These outcomes are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and each is essential for the success of every student.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Stockman, A, and E Feig Gray. 2018. <i>Hacking School Culture: Designing Compassionate Classrooms</i>. Highland Heights, Ohio: Times 10 .</p> <p>Presenting case studies of teachers who are succeeding in creating student-centred, compassionate classrooms, the authors provide concrete ways for teachers to start building empathy and compassion in their students immediately.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Warren, C A. 2015. "Scale of Teacher Empathy for African American Males (S-TEAAM): Measuring Teacher Conceptions and the Application of Empathy in Multicultural Classroom Settings." <i>Journal of Negro Education</i> 84, no 2: 154–74.</p> <p>Empathy is theorized to improve the education practitioner's professional interactions with students of color. Warren has studied practising teachers' beliefs about empathy's utility, relevance and application to their work with Black male students. This can be easily applied to work with other racially visible students.</p>

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A – Article  
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V – Video  
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## Trauma-Informed Practice

The effect of adversity and trauma on the developing child has become the focus of much recent research. Adversity and trauma are often used interchangeably, but there are differences.



“

*The greater a child's terror, and the earlier it is experienced, the harder it becomes to develop a strong and healthy sense of self.*

—Nathaniel Branden

”

*Adversity* refers to the situation or event one experiences, while *trauma* refers to the negative long-term effects on one's health and well-being. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are defined as “highly stressful events or situations that occur during childhood and/or adolescence. It can be a single event or incident, or prolonged threats to a child or young person's safety, security or bodily integrity. These experiences require significant social, emotional, neurobiological, psychological and behavioural adaptations to survive” (Brennan et al 2019).

Everyone encounters adversity and trauma at some point in their lives; however, not all people experience it in the same way. For some, adversity and trauma can have limited impact, while for others the impact can be significant; reactions can be diverse. Adversity and trauma can arise from various instances, including intergenerational trauma; the loss of a loved one; bullying; natural disasters, such as the Slave Lake and Fort McMurray fires and the floods in southern Alberta; war; violence; poverty; child abuse and neglect; or an accident or illness, among others.

Students who grow up in stable, attentive and emotionally supportive homes can also experience trauma; however, these students are more likely to have developed a normal stress response and be well regulated. This resilience is due to protective factors such as parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and the social emotional competence of children. This creates the basis for positive learning experiences. When home life is the opposite and children experience adversity and trauma, students may respond in a way that demonstrates that they are in a constant state of alarm and unable to concentrate on their work in the classroom. “Because of this, they will pay more attention to the nonverbal cues of a teacher such as tone of voice, body posture and facial expressions. Unless teachers adopt regulating practices for those students such as meditative breathing or rhythmic motor activity, these children will remain in the alarm state, impairing cognitive learning” (Perry 2016).

“This illustrates the contagious nature of human emotions. If you are not calm, it’s impossible to calm someone else. Modeling a personal ability to co-regulate is important for fostering self-regulation in students. And rhythm is one of the most powerful methods of relaxing ourselves. Key neural networks change their activity in response to repetitive, rhythmic activities—dancing, drumming, singing. Even children who have not experienced trauma will use rhythm to regulate. When a child bounces his leg, or taps his pencil on his desk, it may be aggravating to his teacher, but it is often soothing to the child. If you want children to pay attention and learn, it is important to allow them to move in ways that keep them focused. For some kids, I recommend desks that literally rock. I’ll have other kids walk on a treadmill or pedal a stationary bike while doing their homework” (Perry 2016).

By being trauma informed, school leaders, teachers and other staff can help students deal with the adversity and trauma that they have already experienced and help other students to be prepared for adversity and trauma that may come in their lives. Trauma can be mitigated at school when children feel safe and connected to a teacher or other staff member. It is not necessary for school personnel to be aware of specific details of a student’s trauma to be trauma informed, and to be trauma informed does not mean that staff must treat students’ symptoms of trauma. Part of a trauma-informed approach is a shift in perspective from “*What is wrong with you?*” to “*What happened to you?*” All staff at trauma-informed schools use a holistic approach to support the well-being of students and support a variety of potential pathways to growth. This includes understanding the prevalence of trauma and committing to learning to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma, how trauma affects students, and recognizing and addressing the unique needs of students affected by trauma. School staffs that are trauma-informed have great power in sending the message that “We are keeping you here because we want you to be safe.” Suspensions can jeopardize this message.

Reactions to trauma can interfere with learning and behaviour, and children coping with trauma often do not conform to classroom expectations. It is imperative to understand the impact of trauma on the brain and that the challenging behaviour demonstrated by students can often be explained by the altered state of the brain, which can be caused by toxic stress. Prolonged activation of a toxic stress response has profound impacts on the brain’s architecture and therefore on learning. The sustained activation of stress hormones experienced with toxic stress in early childhood can reduce neuroconnections in the areas of the brain dedicated to learning and reasoning at the time when new connections should be developing. This is also true when adults experience toxic stress—it also reduces neuroconnections that the adult never gets back—their brain actually shrinks.

When supports are unavailable for trauma-affected students, they may demonstrate challenging behaviours, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will receive suspensions. Sometimes students can demonstrate challenging behaviours even when supports are in place because of the impact the trauma is having on their brain. Key universal supports are integral to a trauma-informed school. They include, but are not limited to, providing

- a safe space for students to go,
- a trusted person on staff,
- compassion,
- choice and control for students,
- collaboration among staff, students, families and outside organizations and
- instruction in social-emotional competencies.

A trauma-informed approach can increase academic achievement, reduce the frequency of challenging behaviour and reduce the number of suspensions (Eilers 2019).

## Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma is usually seen in a family in which the parents or grandparents were traumatized, and each generation of that family continues to experience trauma in some form. Direct survivors of these experiences often transmit the trauma to later generations when they don't recognize or have the opportunity to address their issues (Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute nd).

Many Indigenous people in Canada continue to deal directly and indirectly with the effects of systemic racism, colonization, forced relocation and forced assimilation. In particular, the impacts of the Indian Residential School system in Canada, the Sixties Scoop, the *Indian Act* and more have had devastating and long-lasting impacts on Indigenous peoples within Canada.

The impact of intergenerational trauma is felt at individual, family and community levels:

Individual Impacts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Reduced sense of belonging</li> <li>• Self-hatred</li> <li>• Shame and guilt</li> <li>• Isolation/alienation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger toward school and parents</li> <li>• Acting aggressively</li> <li>• Internalized racism</li> <li>• Fear of authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-destructive behaviours (substance abuse, gambling, alcoholism, suicidal behaviours)</li> <li>• Loss of ability to express affection in healthy ways</li> </ul>

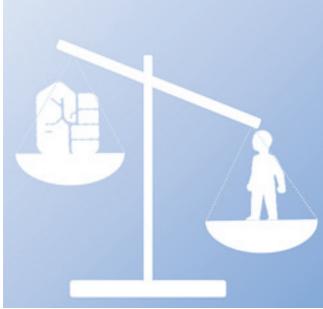
Family Impacts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with parenting effectively</li> <li>• Unresolved grief</li> <li>• Family violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of language</li> <li>• Loss of culture</li> <li>• Loss of traditional child-rearing practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of stories</li> <li>• Loss of traditions</li> <li>• Loss of identity</li> </ul>
Community Impacts		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of connectedness with self, family, languages, traditions, cultural history and ceremony</li> <li>• Loss of togetherness and collective support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of communal raising of children</li> <li>• Loss of support from Elders and Knowledge Keepers</li> <li>• Lateral violence</li> <li>• Communal violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of control over land and resources</li> <li>• Dependency on others</li> <li>• Lack of initiative</li> <li>• Increased suicide rate</li> </ul>

## Trauma and Resilience

School staff have a strong desire to assist in the development of resilient students who will enter the wider world with skills to weather any storm. Resilience, or an individual's ability to overcome adversity and continue their normal development, arises from students feeling valued, worthy and connected (Morrison 2011).

The Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (AFWI) uses a scale to provide a powerful visual metaphor. A child sits in the middle of the scale, with positive supports and negative experiences placed on opposite ends. The positive supports are also known as *protective factors* and can include things like caregivers and access to social supports, as well as prenatal health, nutrition, health care, positive early interactions, and so forth. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see page 47), these would be the first three levels: physiological needs, safety needs and love/belonging. The other side of the scale accumulates the negative experiences, or *risk factors*, and toxic stress that can tip the scale in a negative direction. These good and bad experiences stack up over the course of the child's development.

Being trauma informed helps educators and caregivers to understand the results of the scale being tipped in either direction. An individual's scale becomes a predictor of wellness outcomes, so the early additions to the scale in childhood are important. When the scale is tipped in the positive direction, the accumulation of positive experiences is more likely to enable a person to experience good health, academic success, healthy relationships and longer-term achievements. Conversely, when the scale is tipped in the negative direction and loaded with the



negative experiences of toxic stress, a person is more likely to experience stress-related illnesses, mental health issues, maladaptive behaviour or addiction. In the school context, these outcomes may become apparent in adolescence.

These adverse experiences in early childhood development are one factor in the development of resilience. There are many people who thrive despite challenging childhoods, and those who struggle despite good caregivers, strong communities and many positive experiences. The other predictive factor is that of genetic inheritance. The Alberta Family Wellness Initiative describes this as “the starting position of the fulcrum, or the balance point, of the scale” (AFWI 2018a), which can demonstrate how some people are more sensitive to the effects of toxic stress, while others are able to endure significant stress without experiencing lasting harm.

Thankfully, research has shown that the position of the fulcrum is not static. Over time, supportive, caring relationships can help to shift the fulcrum, to aid in tilting the scale in a more resilient direction. This, in turn, encourages the strengthening of brain architecture, which leads to the person being better prepared to cope with and recover from significant stresses throughout life.

## How to Support Someone Who Has Experienced Trauma

1. Create safety—trauma survivors prefer predictability and may not respond well to surprise. Provide structure, stability, and caring, reliable adults for the student. Part of an agreed-upon plan with the student, parents and school staff may include processes to follow when self-regulation is difficult. This may include a “safe space” that is away from others and gives the person time to decompress and regain control of emotions and responses.
2. Build positive relationships with the individual that demonstrate caring and empathy. This will help a student regulate the nervous system in times of stress.
3. Follow the “Golden Rule”—if you want to be listened to, understood, respected and treated with dignity, do the same for the students.
4. Allow choice and collaborate when possible. Denying choice and control can be a trigger to survivors.
5. Be aware of language—avoid words that are judgmental (for example, *never*, *always*, *overreacting*) and do not oversimplify the situation by referring to it as “what happened” or “the issue” or “the problem.” Call it what it is—trauma.

(Echo 2018)

## Shame and Guilt

Tomkins (2008) found that people who experienced trauma often acted out due to feelings of shame or guilt. Shame is a natural emotion, but when it is internalized, it can be associated with psychological conditions such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation (Tangney, Steuwig and Mashek 2007). Shame is inevitable for learners who struggle to meet the challenges of the classroom. Shame is difficult to deal with because the focus is on the person's own distress and leads to destructive behaviours; it is feeling bad about oneself. This can be perpetuated, and perhaps normalized, in communities where everyone is suffering from shame and guilt.



“

*There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.*

—Laurell K Hamilton

”

### The Compass of Shame

Adapted from Nathanson 1992



Nathanson (1992) illustrated possible behaviours with the four coordinates of what he called the “compass of shame”:

- withdrawal (isolating oneself, running and hiding),
- attacking self (self put-down, masochism),
- avoidance (denial, abusing drugs, distraction through thrill seeking) and
- attacking others (turning the tables, lashing out verbally or physically, blaming others).

Teachers and other school staff should be aware of and sensitive to the shame students may carry. Strategies to alleviate student shame include

- teaching social-emotional learning and modelling empathy,
- talking to a student privately about their indiscretions,
- normalizing feelings of shame by sharing vulnerabilities with students,
- reframing the vulnerability of shame as having courage to take risks and
- giving feedback in a way that build student confidence.

Guilt, in contrast to shame, is about a specific behaviour and not the entire self; it is about rectifying or making amends for a bad behaviour. “Empirical evidence evaluating the action tendencies of people experiencing shame and guilt suggest that guilt promotes constructive, proactive pursuits, whereas shame promotes defensiveness, interpersonal separation, and distance” (Tangney, Steuwig and Mashek 2007, 350).



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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1. How can a focus on fostering resilience lead to a decrease in suspensions in your school?
2. What programs/activities are in place to build resilience in members of the school community?
3. How can the strategies above be helpful with all students?
4. How trauma informed is your school staff?

## Resources

		<b>LEGEND</b>
<b>V</b>	<p>Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. 2013. <i>How Brains Are Built: Core Story of Brain Development</i>. (4:04 minutes). Palix Foundation.  <a href="http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/how-brains-are-built-core-storyof-brain-development">www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/how-brains-are-built-core-storyof-brain-development</a></p> <p>This video presents the core story of brain development in an accessible and visually engaging format.</p>	<p>W – Website  A – Article  B – Book  V – Video  T – Tool</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. 2014. <i>Brain Architecture</i>. (2:35 minutes). Palix Foundation.  <a href="http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/brain-story-concepts-brain-architecture">www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/brain-story-concepts-brain-architecture</a></p> <p>This video demonstrates the important relationship between brain development and early childhood experiences.</p>	
<b>V</b>	<p>Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. 2014. <i>Brains: Journey to Resilience</i>. (7:44 minutes). Palix Foundation.  <a href="http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/brains-journey-to-resilience">www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/brains-journey-to-resilience</a></p> <p>Learn about positive, tolerable and toxic stress, resilience and the resilience scale.</p>	
<b>W</b>	<p>Trauma Sensitive Schools. 2019. Videos—Trauma-Sensitive Schools.  <a href="https://traumasensitiveschools.org/videos/">https://traumasensitiveschools.org/videos/</a></p> <p>This section of the Trauma-Sensitive Schools website contains a number of short videos that deal with all aspects of trauma and learning, and creating trauma-sensitive schools. This page also contains links to additional reading and resources.</p>	
<b>W</b>	<p>PolicyWise for Children and Families. 2019. Supporting Every Student Learning Series.  <a href="https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/">https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/</a></p> <p>The Supporting Every Student Learning Series is intended to support professional learning opportunities for school and school authority leaders in creating or enhancing welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that support student success and well-being. The series provides access to information on research and evidence-based practices through recorded TedTalk-style presentations and conversation guides, with links for further information. Of particular interest for the topic of trauma and resilience are the learning sessions available on brain development, effects of bullying on children, trauma-informed practice, restorative practices, whole-school approach,; and social-emotional learning.</p>	

<b>A</b>	<p>Supin, J. 2016. “The Long Shadow. Bruce Perry on the Lingering Effects of Trauma.” <i>The Sun</i>, November: 4–13.  <a href="http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/491/the-long-shadow">www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/491/the-long-shadow</a></p> <p>In this article, the author interviews child psychiatrist Bruce Perry about trauma and the impacts it has on children and youth. Through the article it is made clear that Perry believes that nurturing healthy children begins with helping them to feel connected and safe and giving them time to pause and reflect.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>George, G. 2011. “Navigating Beyond the Compass. Shame, Guilt and Empathy in Restorative Practices in the School Setting.”  <a href="http://www.rpforschools.net/pdfs/Navigating%20beyond%20the%20Compass_Ver2.pdf">www.rpforschools.net/pdfs/Navigating%20beyond%20the%20Compass_Ver2.pdf</a></p> <p>This paper reviews the existing research related to the Affect Theory and the Compass of Shame, and then continues to relate to new research and the implications for school communities about how they could use this research to help encourage moral development in their students.</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>Kaufman, J. 2013. <i>A Trauma-Informed School—The Components</i>. (2:53 minutes). Treatment and Services Adaptation Center.  <a href="https://traumaawareschools.org/articles/view/9563">https://traumaawareschools.org/articles/view/9563</a></p> <p>This brief video introduced the concept of trauma-informed practices and how they are relevant to every school. Excerpted from an interview at CBITS Summit 2013 in Santa Monica, California.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Education. 2019. Trauma-Informed Practice  <a href="http://www.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice.aspx?utm_source=redirector">www.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice.aspx?utm_source=redirector</a></p> <p>This site provides a wide variety of information about trauma-informed practices and how schools can successfully implement them.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Trauma-Aware Schools. 2019. Treatment and Services Adaptation Centre.  <a href="https://traumaawareschools.org/">https://traumaawareschools.org/</a></p> <p>The Treatment and Services Adaptation Center website provides support resources to schools and educators. They promote early intervention strategies to create supportive and nurturing school environments. Their work is supported by a team of clinicians, researchers and educators who are respected authorities in the areas of school trauma and crisis response.</p>

**LEGEND**

- W – Website
- A – Article
- B – Book
- V – Video
- T – Tool

<b>A</b>	<p>Garrett, K. 2014. "Childhood Trauma and Its Effects on Health and Learning." <i>Education Digest</i> 79, no 6: 4–9.</p> <p>Written by a pediatrician, this article explores adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the impact of trauma on a child's brain development, and the use of in-school suspension time to work with students who have been exposed to chronic stress and trauma.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Goodwin, B. 2017. "A 'Special' Answer for Traumatized Students." <i>Educational Leadership</i> 75, no 4: 78–79.</p> <p>Reviewing recent research into ACEs, Goodwin notes that 30 per cent of children over 12 have experienced two or more ACEs and that these experiences dramatically increase the likelihood of problems developing in their experiences with school. However, of these students, those who demonstrated resilience were much more likely to be successful in school. How schools can help students build resilience is discussed.</p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Iachini, A L, A F Petiwala and D D DeHart. 2016. "Examining Adverse Childhood Experiences among Students Repeating the Ninth Grade: Implications for School Dropout Prevention." <i>Children and Schools</i> 38, no 4: 218–27.</p> <p>The author explored the question of whether students at risk of dropping out of school had experienced ACEs. Of 13 students, 11 had experienced one or more ACE. Of these students, 10 had displayed disengagement behaviours during or after the experience and were continuing to struggle in school. Implications for dropout prevention programs are discussed.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Steele, W. 2017. <i>Optimizing Learning Outcomes: Proven Brain-Centric, Trauma-Sensitive Practices</i>. New York: Routledge.</p> <p>Steele argues that it does not require additional work for educators to adjust the learning climate for students, as it just requires a change in the approaches to building that climate. Included are practical ideas and web resources to support teachers.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Souers, K, and P Hall. 2016. <i>Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom</i>. Alexandria, Va: ASCD.</p> <p>Souers and Hall present useful information about trauma and its effect on the brain in an easy-to-read format. The end of each chapter has reflection questions for teachers prompting them to think about whether or not their classroom (and the teacher) is truly trauma sensitive.</p>
<b>V</b>	<p>KPJR Films. 2015. <i>Paper Tigers—One High School's Unlikely Success Story</i>. (1h 42min)  <a href="https://kpjrfilms.co/paper-tigers/">https://kpjrfilms.co/paper-tigers/</a></p>

**LEGEND**

W – Website  
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# Respond

As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation—either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course.

—Martin Luther King Jr

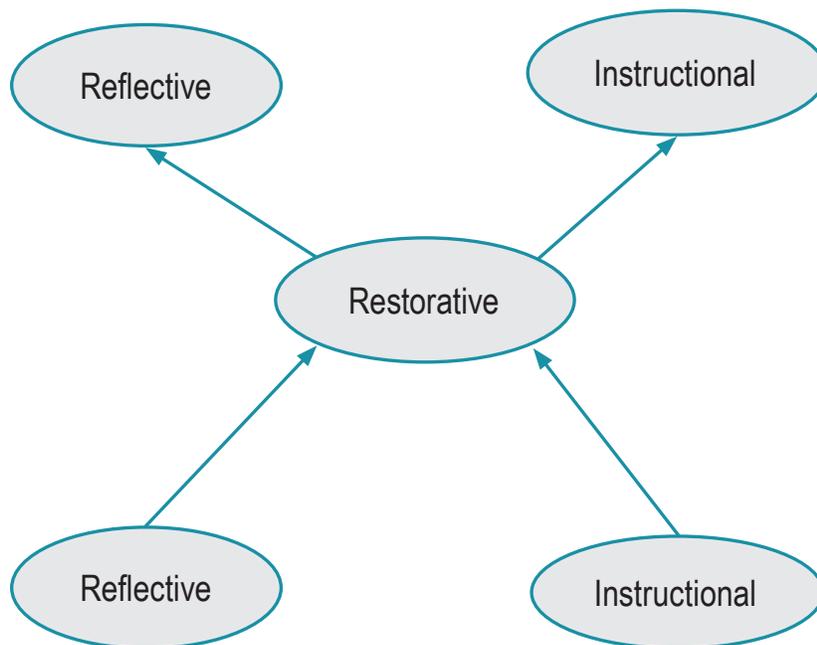
When we begin to look at discipline, we must first review what the term means. The root of the word *discipline* comes from the Latin *disciplina*—instruction given, teaching, learning, knowledge. With this in mind, responding to an incident in an alternative/innovative discipline model means that the school leader/teacher should include restorative, reflective and instructional components. Ideally, one will include any combination of these components, but the process may involve moving through all three components at various times and returning back to them again as needed.

For the purpose of this toolkit, we will define restorative, reflective and instructional as Hannigan and Hannigan (2016, 18) did:

**Restorative:** Provide opportunities for the student to restore relationships between themselves and stakeholder(s) they have affected due to the behaviour incident.

**Reflective:** Provide opportunities for the student to reflect about the decisions made that led to the discipline.

**Instructional:** Provide learning opportunities for students that target the function of the behaviour and help them learn the skills needed so as not to engage in such behaviours again.



## Restorative Practices

Restorative practices emerged from the restorative justice model. It is a mindset that moves away from adherence to rules and the punishment of transgressors by exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension.



“

*A student struggling to read is not sent home and expected to return reading fluently, so why is it that a student struggling to behave is sent home and expected to return behaving decently?*

—Jessica Hannigan

”

*Restorative Justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible.*

—Zehr 1990

**ZERO TOLERANCE** **RESTORATIVE**

1. Does the practice address harms, needs and causes?
2. Does it adequately attend to the needs of those harmed?
3. Are offenders encouraged to take responsibility?
4. Are all relevant stakeholders involved?
5. Is there an opportunity for dialogue and participatory decision making?
6. Is the practice respectful to all parties?

The shift is from one of punishment to one of accountability and making amends. The student hears the voices of those who have been harmed and must then arrive at the means by which recompense may be made in a meaningful way. The student has the opportunity to exhibit remorse, empathize with the wronged parties and experience personal growth.

Through this process, students become more aware of the impact of their actions on others and they learn strategies to monitor future behaviour. Additionally, relationships within the school community are strengthened and a greater sense of safety for all is established.

Traditional Approach	Restorative Approach
School rules are broken	People and relationships are harmed
Practice focuses on establishing guilt	Practice identifies needs and responsibility
Accountability = punishment	Accountability = understanding impact and repairing harm
Justice directed at the offender; the victim is ignored	Offender, victim and school all have direct roles in the process
Limited opportunity for expressing remorse or making amends	Offender is responsible for harmful behaviour, repairing harm and working towards positive outcomes Opportunity given to make amends and express remorse

(Fix School Discipline 2018)

## Implementation Tip

A good general rule is that about 20 per cent of a school’s restorative practices respond to conflict, while 80 per cent are proactively creating shared cultures and building strong relationships. This approach cultivates a climate where destructive responses to conflict are less likely to occur (Yusem et al nd, 2).

The purpose of restorative practice, outlined by Wachtel (2013) is to

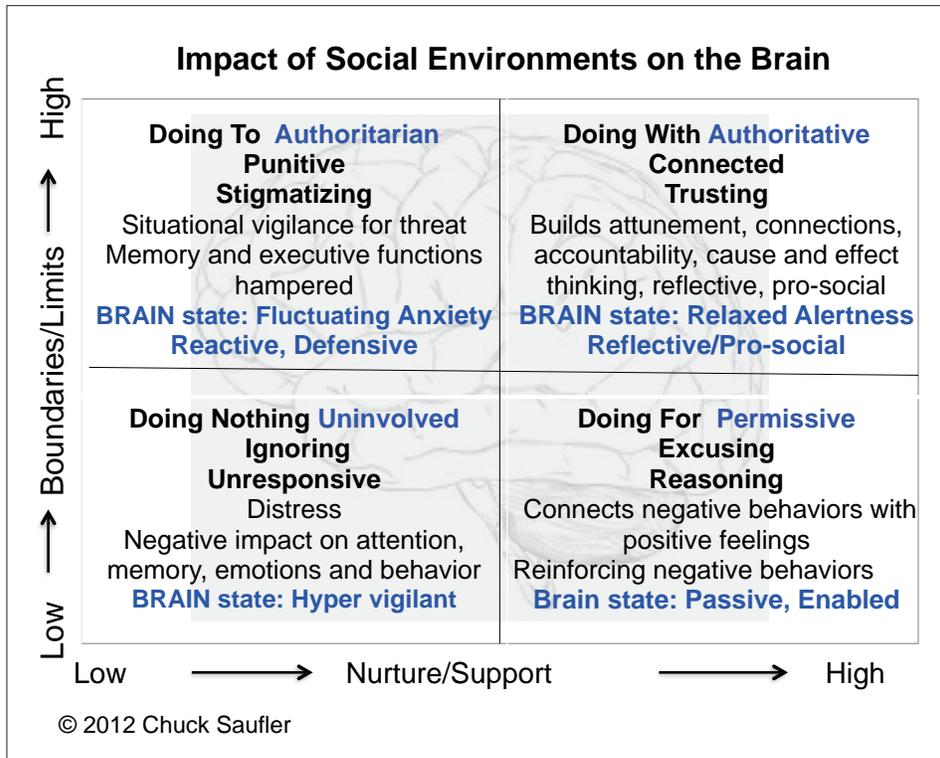
- improve human behaviour,
- strengthen school community,
- restore relationships and
- repair harm.

Wachtel (2013) uses the social discipline window to graphically illustrate four approaches to maintaining social norms and behavioural boundaries, with the goal being a high level of support and a high level of control, creating an authoritative state.

## The Social Discipline Window

The fundamental unifying hypothesis of restorative practices is that “human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than *to* them or *for* them” (Wachtel 2013). Each window in the diagram below represents a different combination of support and control, or accountability.

A punitive strategy, seen in the *Doing To* window, involves high control and low support. This is an authoritarian zone where punishment is the strategy employed. There is a high expectation for behaviour but little support given, and a student may develop a posture of “anxious vigilance.”



Adapted from Chuck Saufier, *Safe Schools for All*, 207-751-4160, 2012

A neglectful strategy, seen in the *Doing Nothing* window, involves low support and low control or expectations. School leaders and/or teachers who take this approach use a “do nothing” strategy and hope that the student will cease the inappropriate behaviour on their own. When this approach is taken, a student may develop a “reactive, defensive” outlook.

When a permissive strategy is used, as in the *Doing For* window, students’ excuses are accepted or excuses are made for them by staff. When this approach is taken, the student experiences a high level of support from staff but high expectations of behaviour are missing. In this case the student may develop a passive or enabled outlook and seek attention through negative behaviours.

It is only with a restorative approach, seen in the *Doing With* window, that empathy is practised, relationships are maintained and a person can adopt a disposition of “relaxed alertness.” A restorative approach requires humility on the part of staff members as they demonstrate that they do not have all of the answers and are willing to problem solve with a student who is struggling to make positive choices.

Restorative practices repair relationships that have been harmed. “Human beings are happier, more productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behaviour when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* or *for* them. This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging *with* mode” (Wachtel 2005, 87).

The Center for Restorative Practice<sup>19</sup> states that the aim of restorative practice is to build, repair and maintain resilient communities around inclusive networks of right relationships. This description draws emphasis to the fact that restorative justice is a process that members of the community take part in from start to finish. Further, restorative practice also includes skilful, intentional conversations that confront harm in a way that separates the *wrongdoer* from the *wrongdoing* and invites strengthening relationships through making things right. When contrasted with suspension, restorative practice allows the student to remain part of the school community while growing in empathy and understanding, and furthers the goals and aims of a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe school.

## Questions to Ask when Physical and Emotional Control Are Regained

If restorative practice is an approach that you would like to try with your students, consider the following restorative questions to open a dialogue with the student who caused harm.

The questions encourage the student to develop empathy for those who are harmed, while leading the student to conceive of appropriate restorative action.

1. What happened that brought you here?
2. Why did it happen?
3. What were you thinking about when it happened?
4. What have you been thinking about since?
5. Who do you think was harmed in this event (people, property, relationships, other)?
6. What could happen because of that harm?
7. What can be done to make it as right as possible?
8. How can you make sure it never happens again?
9. How can we help you?

It is important that school leaders and staff not only work with individual students to create a plan to ensure that the same challenging behaviour is not repeated, but also to support the student by explicitly teaching and modelling alternative behaviours and providing opportunities to apply the behaviours. This approach allows for taking into account the student's age, maturity and individual circumstances, which is required by the *Education Act*.

## Instructional Practices

In order to help the student and work to change their behaviour, instruction of some kind needs to be a part of the process after a disciplinary incident.

These practices are ones that help the students learn skills that they lack, understand the feelings of others, raise awareness of social issues and grow as humans.



### Some examples of effective instructional practices include

- providing opportunities for the student to have conversations/ interviews with school leaders, teachers and counsellors,
- allowing the student to shadow/visit other staff/classes to gain an understanding of their work/situations,

- having the student do research related to a topic that was central to the incident in order to help them gain a better understanding of the impact of their actions. (for example, cyberbullying, vandalism, harassment, cheating and so on),
- building capacity in the student by having them mentor younger students,
- having the student plan and organize a presentation, campaign or assembly focused on the topic of the incident,
- connecting the student with a mentor and
- involving Elders or community members of significance to work with the student.

## The Role of Elders

The term *Elder* refers to someone recognized by their community for having attained a high degree of understanding of First Nations, Métis or Inuit history, spirituality, traditional language, cultural teachings, ceremonies or healing practices. Elders have worked and studied with other Elders to earn the right to pass on this specialized knowledge and give advice on personal and community issues. Elders are highly revered and respected role models and mentors for all people. They embody Indigenous culture through their words, actions and being.

Elders play an integral role in building, maintaining and nurturing culture. They are a resource for Indigenous youth, and should be an essential part of restorative practice in schools and the wider community. More information is available in the ATA publication *Elder Protocol* (ATA 2018).

## Mentoring

Mentoring is a proactive relationship building strategy to support student well-being and success. Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP) (2019)<sup>20</sup> defines mentoring as “the presence of a caring individual who provides a young person with support, advice, friendship, reinforcement and constructive role-modelling over time.” Not only do mentoring programs benefit individual students, they also enhance school culture.

Alberta Education<sup>21</sup> describes numerous benefits of mentoring, including, but not limited to

- building students’ sense of belonging within the school community,
- enhancing attendance and motivation to learn,
- helping individual students feel more connected and valued in their school community,

- helping students learn about and value diversity,
- encouraging individuals to get to know one another, identify common interests and concerns, and recognize one another's strengths and contributions,
- modelling and teaching the skills essential to healthy relationships,
- strengthening school bonds,
- enhancing students' feelings of safety and belonging, and
- decreasing bullying behaviours.

Mentoring can take various forms, both formal and informal, and in school and out of school. Common mentorship programs within schools include cross-grade partnerships, volunteer readers, Study Buddy programs, and others.

## Reflective Practices

Reflection is intended to give the student time to consider the event and the implications of their actions.

This process should occur when both student and involved staff are in a calm state (refer to questions outlined in the previous section "Questions to Ask when Physical and Emotional Control Are Regained"). Ideally, the teacher/school leader engages in a conversation with the student instead of having the student complete a questionnaire/reflection sheet about the incident. Often, these sheets create more frustration and escalate the student's behaviour for several reasons, including the fact that heightened emotions affect cognitive abilities and that the student may lack ability to effectively express in writing the emotions they experienced.



### Reflective practices include

- interviews in person with the student to deepen their understanding of the impact of the action and how it makes others feel when the behaviour happens,
- monitoring and checking in with the student and others involved,
- agreed-upon processes with other stakeholders (parents, teachers, peers and others) and
- conversation about understanding of behaviour in the bigger, societal context.



## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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1. Does the school's decision-making model incorporate restorative, reflective and instructional components?
2. What would need to shift in your school culture to allow for the effective use of restorative practices?
3. Are there any suspension scenarios that would not work with a restorative practice model? Why or why not?
4. How do restorative practices reflect what the research says about the power of relationships?
5. What are other examples of instructional and reflective practices that could be used?
6. These processes all take considerable time. What long-term impacts will this time investment have on the members of your school?
7. What opportunities exist for students to participate in mentoring programs in your school?

## Reintegration

The goal of the reintegration process is to support the student's ability to be successful in school after a suspension (whether it was in school or out of school).

After exploring all other proactive strategies and alternatives, a suspension may still take place; however, it is imperative that it not be perceived as an end in itself. The only way suspensions can be effective is if there is follow-up. At a minimum, there should be a reintegration conference, the purpose of which is *not* to revisit the precipitating incident, because a revisiting of the issue is not productive beyond the acknowledgement that the incident took place. The power in a reintegration conference is to set goals and objectives for the student to re-enter the school and experience success, and determine strategies that may help the student achieve these goals. With a plan in place that includes all stakeholders (child, parent, teacher, school leader, counsellor and/or other agencies) the needs of the student are addressed and a focus is placed on a positive and successful school experience. The reintegration plan should be reasonable and achievable.

Once proactive strategies are in place that the student has helped determine, there should be a reduced need for suspensions. In cases where a suspension is necessary, it is critical to examine the underlying factors and to have a plan and support in place for the student's return to school.



### Reintegration Meeting

Reintegration meeting participants should take into account

- the circumstances related to the student's suspension,
- the student's prior academic and discipline history and
- the severity of the disciplinary incident that led to the student's suspension.



### Reintegration Plan

The purpose of the reintegration plan is to

- discuss the supports and services available to the student,
- identify supportive interventions that will be in place when the student returns to school,

- determine how the plan can aid the student as they take the necessary steps to remedy the situation that led to the suspension, and
- plan supportive interventions that support academic and social-emotional success, and keep the student engaged and on track.

Topics that may be addressed in the plan include

- academic strategies,
- behavioural strategies,
- communication processes,
- resources for the student,
- resources for parents and
- other services/supports in the community such as law enforcement, counselling and so on, as the situation necessitates.



“

*It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.*

—Frederick Douglass

”



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are the procedures for reintegration after suspension at your school? What are potential pathways for improvement?
2. What are the limiting factors to implementing the proactive strategies mentioned? How might they be overcome?

## Resources

<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Education. 2018. "Restorative Practices—What Are Restorative Practices?" <a href="http://www.alberta.ca/restorative-practices.aspx?utm_source=redirector">www.alberta.ca/restorative-practices.aspx?utm_source=redirector</a></p>
<b>A</b>	<p>Alberta Teachers' Association. 2018. <i>Elder Protocol</i>. Walking Together Project. <a href="http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For%20Members/ProfessionalDevelopment/Walking%20Together/PD-WT-16g%20-%20Elder%20Protocol.pdf">www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For%20Members/ProfessionalDevelopment/Walking%20Together/PD-WT-16g%20-%20Elder%20Protocol.pdf</a></p> <p>The Alberta Teachers' Association publication <i>Elder Protocol</i>, from the Stepping Stones series, provides information about the protocol to follow when inviting an Elder, knowledge keeper or cultural advisor to participate in your meetings or events.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Follestad, B, and N Wroldsen. 2019. <i>Using Restorative Circles in Schools: How to Build Strong Learning Communities and Foster Student Wellbeing</i>. London, UK: Kingsley.</p> <p>Understanding that the community needs to be just as involved in resolution as the victim and the offender, the authors explain the benefits of starting larger conversations about healing and building relationships in the school community.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Hansberry, B, and C-L Hansberry. 2018. <i>How to Do Restorative Peer Mediation in Your School: A Quick Start</i>. London, UK: Kingsley.</p> <p>A useful book for teachers to train students in the practice of restorative peer mediation—which means that students will have the skills to deal with some smaller issues even before they are concerning enough to reach a teacher's desk.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Hopkins, B, ed. 2016. <i>Restorative Theory in Practice: Insights into What Works and Why</i>. London, UK: Kingsley.</p> <p>A practical book that uses evidence from educational research to determine the best practice in restorative justice for teachers and school leaders.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Kelly, V C, and M Thorsborne, eds. 2014. <i>The Psychology of Emotion in Restorative Practice: How Affect Script Psychology Explains How and Why Restorative Practice Works</i>. London, UK: Kingsley.</p> <p>A great book for those who are leading restorative practice in their schools. The authors explain exactly how restorative practice works psychologically and therefore give implementers the tools to explain the practice to reluctant adopters.</p>

### LEGEND

W – Website  
A – Article  
B – Book  
V – Video  
T – Tool

<b>B</b>	<p>Smith, D, D Fisher, and N Frey. 2015. <i>Better than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Positive Classroom Management</i>. Alexandria, Va: ASCD.</p> <p>One of the most popular books in the ATA library! The authors argue that a system of classroom management that works from punishments and rewards does not create long-term results as effectively as a system in which students are empowered to act directly when they see poor behaviour.</p>
<b>B</b>	<p>Sellman, E, H Cremin and G McCluskey, eds. 2013. <i>Restorative Approaches to Conflict in Schools: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Whole School Approaches to Managing Relationships</i>. London, UK: Routledge.</p> <p>From the perspective of cross-cultural studies, the authors look at restorative practice in several cultures and as a world view. They offer ideas for implementing restorative practice and the cultural challenges within schools that implementers may face.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Engage: Restorative Practices. 2019. "What We Do."  <a href="http://engage-rp.com/what-we-do/">http://engage-rp.com/what-we-do/</a></p> <p>Engage promotes, teaches, coaches and supports the use of restorative principles, practices and processes, both as a proactive way to build healthy, productive communities and as a way to resolve situations where harm has been caused. Engage has particular expertise in sections of Alberta's Education Act, supporting welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments, and they can assist with revising policies and practice to align with these expectations.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>PolicyWise for Children and Families. 2019. Restorative Practices.  <a href="https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/restorative-practices/">https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/restorative-practices/</a></p> <p>A series of three sessions, the Restorative Practices webpage provides three recordings and three conversation guides on the topic.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>IIRP Canada. 2019.  <a href="https://canada.iirp.edu/">https://canada.iirp.edu/</a></p> <p>IIRP Canada works with schools, facilities, community programs, workplaces, faith groups and families, with a focus on strengthening relationships and repairing harm as a way of building community.</p>

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<b>W</b>	<p>Alberta Mentoring Partnership <a href="https://albertamentors.ca/">https://albertamentors.ca/</a></p> <p>The Alberta Mentoring Partnership is a mentoring resource that provides creative tools and resources that will help you support mentoring relationships between students and positive role models.</p>
<b>W</b>	<p>Government of Alberta. 2019. Student Mentoring. <a href="https://www.alberta.ca/student-mentoring.aspx">https://www.alberta.ca/student-mentoring.aspx</a></p> <p>This site provides an overview of mentoring, foundational ideas of mentoring, steps for how to implement mentorship, examples of what mentoring might look like in schools and quick facts about mentoring.</p>

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# Concluding Remarks

The culture of a school and the connections made with its staff can be positive, life-altering forces for its students.



“

*Yesterday is gone.  
Tomorrow has not yet come.  
We only have today. Let us begin.*

—Mother Teresa

”

Humans have a basic need to be a part of something, and for many students school provides their only opportunity to experience a sense of belonging. The well-being of students must be approached from a holistic perspective; whole-school approaches that promote learning environments that are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe for all are fundamental to student success.

The exclusionary nature of suspension can inhibit and/or damage positive connections between students and school staff and alternatives. The enforced absences of a suspension may

rob students of feelings of security and an arena in which to thrive. While suspension is a viable consequence in some circumstances, “providing a continuum of supports and services consistent with the principles of inclusive education” (*Education Act* section 33[1][e]) ensures that the needs of individual students are being considered, can be much more effective in changing students’ behaviour and can keep relationships intact.

Educators have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the students in their care. As Christa McAuliffe said, “I touch the future. I teach.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Province of Alberta. *Education Act*. Statutes of Alberta, 2012 Chapter E-0.3.

<sup>2</sup> [https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739620/standardsdoc-tqs\\_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf](https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739620/standardsdoc-tqs_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739621/standardsdoc-lqs\\_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf](https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739621/standardsdoc-lqs_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739619/standardsdoc-sqs\\_fa-web-2018-02-02.pdf](https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739619/standardsdoc-sqs_fa-web-2018-02-02.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.alberta.ca/high-school-completion-strategic-framework.aspx#:~:text=The%20Alberta%20High%20School%20Completion,given%20the%20opportunity%20to%20succeed](http://www.alberta.ca/high-school-completion-strategic-framework.aspx#:~:text=The%20Alberta%20High%20School%20Completion,given%20the%20opportunity%20to%20succeed)

<sup>6</sup> “Is Your School’s Culture Positive or Toxic?” [www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin275.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin275.shtml)

<sup>7</sup> “What Is Resilience?” [www.resilienceresearch.org/](http://www.resilienceresearch.org/)

<sup>8</sup> “Distinguish Between Equity and Equality.” <http://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/distinguish-between-equity-and-equality/>

<sup>9</sup> “Defining Equity.” <http://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/define-equity/>

<sup>10</sup> “Distinguish Between Equity and Equality.” <http://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/distinguish-between-equity-and-equality/>

<sup>11</sup> “Self-Regulation.” <https://self-reg.ca/self-reg/>

<sup>12</sup> Alberta Family Wellness Initiative. “Types of Stress Responses.” [www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/stress](http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/what-we-know/stress)

<sup>13</sup> [www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Teachers-as-Professionals/IM-5E%20Declaration%20of%20Rights.pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Teachers-as-Professionals/IM-5E%20Declaration%20of%20Rights.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Teachers-as-Professionals/IM-4E%20Code%20of%20Professional%20Conduct.pdf](http://www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Teachers-as-Professionals/IM-4E%20Code%20of%20Professional%20Conduct.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> The full Peterson article is available at <https://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/182/over5.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Maslow’s hierarchy of needs describes human motivations and their influence on behaviour. See Maslow 1954.

<sup>17</sup> <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>

<sup>18</sup> [https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739620/standardsdoc-tqs\\_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf](https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739620/standardsdoc-tqs_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com/restorative-schools.html](http://www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com/restorative-schools.html)

<sup>20</sup> <https://albertamentors.ca/>

<sup>21</sup> [www.alberta.ca/student-mentoring.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/student-mentoring.aspx)

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