



## Strategies for Creating a Positive Learning Environment

**What to do:** Use these strategies to create a program environment that nurtures the whole child.

**Why it matters:** A sense of physical and emotional safety and belonging supports learning and development — and helps keep students coming back to your program.

### 1. Building interpersonal relationships.

- Use positive language when addressing students.
- Share appropriate personal anecdotes that show you can relate on matters big and small.
- Make notes to yourself on exchanges, and revisit those notes before the students arrive so you can demonstrate your investment in them.
- Reflect the good you see in students' choices. Be there to actively listen when they need you.
- When dealing with discipline, ask the students what they learned and how they can do better next time, and agree on an appropriate consequence. Focus on the behavior. Reassure the student that you love having them there — it's the behavior that needs to change to make a safer environment for everyone.

### 2. Greet students personally as they enter the program space every day.

- Make eye contact with students and demonstrate verbal excitement to see them. Show interest, ask questions so you can follow up, be genuine, and show compassion.
- Light up with enthusiasm when students arrive. Give every student positive human contact and show that you care about each one as a person.
- Make no exception for students with behavioral issues. Assure them that each day is a fresh, new canvas and that today will be great. Catch them doing something good, and give them a positive response. If you draw attention to the interactions you want, negative behavior may wane.

### 3. Use verbal cues and physical actions to create positive interactions.

- Develop special verbal cues or physical actions that encourage positive student–adult interactions and trust. For example, to welcome students when they arrive, you could use a special handshake or dance movement. To recognize a student's success, you might use a high five or a fist bump. Encourage student input in creating these cues and actions.
- Create an amusing call and response for students that engages their active listening skills and participation.
- Have music playing as students enter and make it fun, like you're announcing the arrival of a star athlete or celebrity.



#### 4. Communicate and collaborate with all team members.

- Participate in staff meetings and team-building activities.
- Share best practice tips and ideas with colleagues.
- Celebrate team successes.
- Host an event where different teams or committees share their work and look for ways they might collaborate.
- Write and share positive notes on the good work team members are doing.

#### 5. Create a safe and consistent environment for students.

- Provide clear goals for behavior and learning so students know what's expected of them.
- Engage students in a warm-up or personalized learning activity as soon as they arrive.
- Point out where to find any special materials and resources for the day's activities.
- Establish and follow routines and procedures.
- Remember that "safe and consistent" doesn't mean "boring." Order makes room for new ideas, like a leadership academy where students learn to support and coach one another.

#### 6. Recognize the efforts of peers, students, parents, and community members.

- Create events that showcase program successes, and spotlight the contributions of students, staff, families, and community members. Bring rewards and treats to show appreciation for everyone involved.
- Create a community day, where students' families and community members can celebrate the work students have done. Partner with a local grocery store or restaurant to get food donations, and publicly acknowledge the donations.
- Thank each person for their unique contribution, no matter how large or small.

#### 7. Allow students to get to know you.

- Share memorable events, funny stories, favorites, accomplishments, disappointments, and life lessons, as appropriate. Students enjoy learning about the adults in their lives.
- Give students a mock quiz about program staff. Let students make guesses before you reveal the answers. Or you could play "Two Truths and a Lie," where they guess which of three stories is a lie.
- Hold a trivia day where you divide students into groups and have them compete to answer questions about each other correctly — and join in!
- Make time for one-on-one chats, and give your full attention to let them know you're someone who cares about them.

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