

# Solutions Newsletter

September 2023



Effective School  
Solutions

*Solutions* is a newsletter published by ESS for parents, guardians, and caretakers. Each issue highlights an important topic related to children's mental health and provides practical applications for parents in the home environment.

## Help Your Child's Teacher Maximize the Learning Environment

The start of each school year brings new challenges and priorities for teachers and their students. This year, as teachers continue their efforts to help students move past COVID-related mental health trauma and learning loss, many teachers are taking a step back to re-examine and refresh their classroom management strategies.

Besides learning about instructional methods and subject matter, teachers-in-training spend considerable time learning how to organize their classrooms and how to manage children's behavior to maximize learning. Much has been written about classroom management strategies, but there are certain recommendations that appear regularly on most lists. These include the **clear articulation** of rules and expectations; **consistency** in the application of consequences and in the adherence to rules and routines; **connection-building** activities by teachers that convey a kind, compassionate, and welcoming environment; **student involvement** in the creation and monitoring of classroom rules, expectations, and goals; and **classroom environments** that support self-regulation and learning.

Children need **clarity** and **consistency** to feel safe and to develop self-regulation skills, and these in turn allow for learning life skills, social competency, and academic material. The pandemic created major disruptions in the lives of most American children, upending predictable routines at home and at school. The adaptation to school routines unraveled for many older students, while kindergarten and 1st grade students fell behind in learning how adjust to the classroom. Likewise, as parents and educators scrambled to continue children's education during the various phases of lockdown and re-entry, there were numerous changes and pivots that repeatedly interfered with consistency.

As for **connection**, research consistently shows that school connectedness and a positive school culture reliably correlate with students' academic achievement, mental health, and overall well-being. Pandemic-related precautions had a major impact on both peer and teacher relationships, and this social disconnection, along with disrupted routines and pervasive fear and anxiety, left many students feeling helpless and disempowered. It is well known that **student choice and involvement** enhance motivation, making student empowerment in this post-pandemic period

an even more critical goal. Finally, pandemic stressors impacted the emotional regulation capacities of most Americans, so **safe and orderly classroom spaces** that do not contribute to dysregulation are essential.

It is, of course, the responsibility of your child's teacher to create a safe and welcoming classroom environment, but you can assist in this process. Below are some typical classroom management strategies and ideas about how parents can help:

- **Clear articulation of rules and expectations:** Ask your child's teacher(s) to share classroom rules and expectations so that you can review them as well, and actively discuss them with your child.
- **Consistent adherence to routines and application of rules/consequences:** Ask the teacher to post the day's schedule on the classroom webpage if possible; coach your child on ways to cope with change and transitions; help your child practice mindfulness/re-set methods used in the classroom. If the teacher informs you that your child is consistently breaking rules, help your child think through what might be going wrong and to problem solve.
- **Build connections with students:** Foster a strong teacher-student connection by encouraging your child to share questions and concerns with the teacher; quickly praise your child's efforts when informed by a teacher about positive behaviors and accomplishments.
- **Engage students in rule development and monitoring:** Ask your child to review classroom rules and expectations with you on a regular basis. Discuss how he/she can participate more fully in shaping classroom rules and goals.
- **Design a non-triggering classroom environment:** Inform teachers early on about your child's sensitivities, including sensory issues, social anxiety, difficulty with transitions/change, etc. Identify both friends and troubled peer relationships. Let the teacher know if there are self-soothing/re-regulating activities that help your child. Help your child practice classroom mindfulness and re-set routines at home to aid learning.