The **TOOLBOX**

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ADULT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE PANDEMIC
FOR PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

TOOL: Prevention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Elementary school professionals

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals

DESIGN

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COMITÉ QUÉBÉCOIS POUR LES JEUNES
EN DIFFICULTÉ DE COMPORTEMENT

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ADULT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS DURING THE PANDEMIC – FOR PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

TOOL: Prevention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Professionals

– Details: E.g. Teachers, psychoeducators, special education technicians, any other preschool or elementary school professionals.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

– Elementary school professionals (working with 6-12-year-old children)

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

– Adult-child bond
– Positive adult-child relationships
– Need for reassurance and warm connections
– Behaviours: opposition, withdrawal of the child, crying

SPECIFIC GOALS

– To understand the importance of adult-child relationships in schools.
– To understand the potential impact of the pandemic on adult-child relationships in schools.
– To develop basic strategies for developing and maintaining positive adult-child relationships in schools

DESIGN

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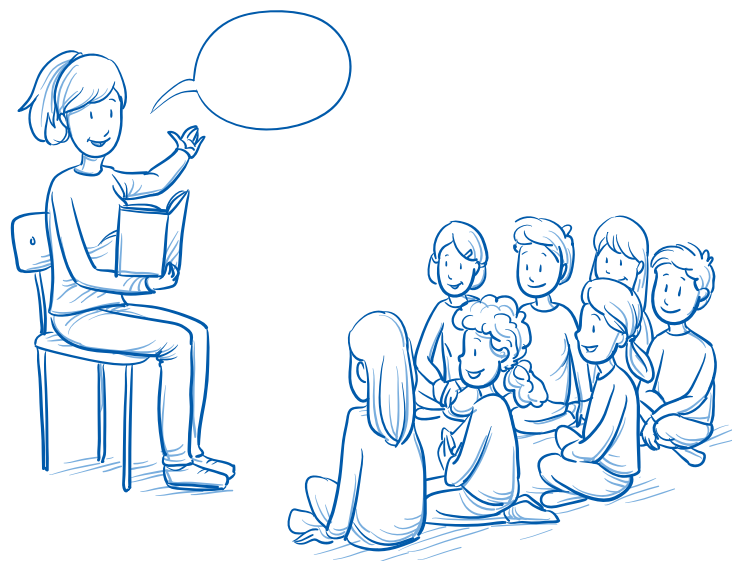
Building positive relationships is an essential practice in schools. This consists in providing support to students in addition to creating meaningful relationships, enabling children to develop in a pleasant, positive environment. If they feel recognized and appreciated for who they are, they will be more inclined to learn and show more respect for the teachers' instructions. Gradually, they will develop a sense of security in their environment (1).

However, the current situation is causing many disruptions in students' routines. Above all, it's important to remember that certain children are more sensitive to the situation than others. It's important to be aware of this and **respect each individual's pace and fears**.

In this context, it's essential to develop quality relationships with students. To do so, teachers should be responsive to the needs expressed by children through their behaviours. They should try to interpret the meaning of and adjust to children's behaviour within a reasonable period of time (2).

It's also important to keep in mind that committed teachers will be considered to be genuine by their students; this will foster mutually positive relationships. Students will also be more inclined to seek help if necessary (2). In addition, teachers who have positive, warm (2) and supportive interactions (3) with students will have a better chance of developing positive relationships with them.

Ultimately, teachers who allow students to make choices in their learning and who use encouragement rather than punishment will help develop independence; this influences the quality of the relationships (2).

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POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

At the beginning of the year, take time to get to know the children (strengths, interests, challenges, etc.) and determine with them how the classroom should be run. Given the current situation, it might be appropriate to reassess school expectations for children to allow them to get used to how things work. This will also give teachers time to develop positive relationships with them (1).
– For example, ask them about their favourite interests and activities and then tailor learning activities to them.
– Listen to your students' personal experiences.
– Whenever possible, focus on individual activities.
– Have discussion periods with your students, for example, discuss weekend activities. It might be worthwhile to plan more elaborate discussions after long holidays.

To avoid undue pressure, praise students' achievements and efforts. Ultimately, keep in mind that it's the learning process that counts and not the result itself (4). For example, failure to perform a task that beforehand was considered "easy" could have an impact on students' sense of competence and on their trust and relationship with you (5).
– Praise good behaviour.

Try to individually help each student learn and take time with them, depending on their needs. To do so, ask students if they need help, move around the classroom, stop by each student to check for potential questions, etc. (2).

Try to display a positive, warm, respectful attitude and active listening (1)
– Maintain eye contact with students.
– Use humour, praise good behaviour, smile.
– Greet students when they arrive in the classroom.
– Listen to what children want to express and, if necessary, ask questions to understand better. This will allow children to feel respected by adults.
– Share some personal experiences with students. This will help build positive relationships.
– Whenever possible, allow children to correct mistakes.

Try to vary teaching methods in order to reflect everyone's interests and strengths (2) and allow students to choose tasks; this will promote students' autonomy and motivation (2).

If a greater effort is needed with certain children with whom the relationship is more difficult to develop, allow time for individualized attention with them. During this time, simply be there for them and provide support without necessarily focusing on teaching (2).

Be consistent and coherent. This means informing students about the important rules to be followed and the consequences if the rules are not followed. This strategy increases their sense of security (2).

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STRATEGIES WHEN DISTANCING AND USING PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (5)

Communicate frequently with students in class using a variety of methods. Synchronous methods allow live discussion over the phone or video conferencing; asynchronous methods allow delayed communication via email or pre-filmed video.

– Ideally, use synchronous communication, as it allows real-time contact with teachers. This makes it easier for preschool and elementary school students to continue their learning while maintaining a relationship with teachers. However, the ideal is still in-person teaching, since, despite required distancing, students can socialize in person with others and better recognize the components of non-verbal communication.

– When communicating synchronously with preschool students, it's recommended to include visuals (videos, books, images, etc.) and sound elements (teacher's voice, etc.). It's also best to encourage learning through play.

– During communication, ask students questions and find out about their well-being. They will then feel respected; this will help develop or maintain positive relationships.

– During the first videoconferencing meetings, take the time to explain to students or parents how the platform works. To provide students with all the tools possible, it's suggested that parents be sent a written document that summarizes how it works. At the beginning, establish the basic rules to be followed during meetings and clearly explain the expectations and limitations.

It's suggested that synchronous meetings be scheduled each week with the entire class to allow students to see each other and chat, without necessarily discussing educational concepts. Use this time to chat and catch up with everyone.

Invite specialists to join some synchronous meetings (e.g. the physical education teacher to get the kids moving). This will allow children to gradually find their bearings, even if it's distance learning.

Pay attention to students' non-verbal communication. Identify what you perceive; ask students questions.

When wearing protective equipment, it's recommended to personalize interactions by calling children by their first name and establishing eye contact with each child individually.

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