

The Illustrated  
Guide to  
**TEACHER  
CREDIBILITY**





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Guide to  
**TEACHER  
CREDIBILITY**

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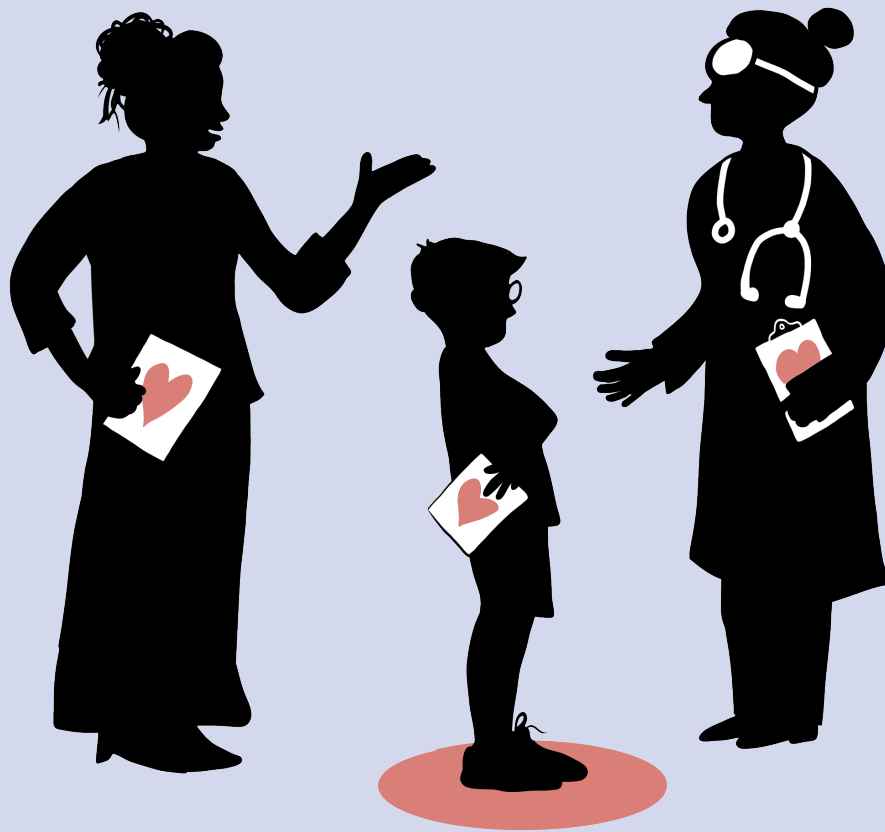
# INTRODUCTION

It started with a question: **Why do some strategies work better for some teachers than others?** Or more specifically, why is it that three teachers can implement the same strategy, lesson plan, or instructional materials, and have a different impact on students' learning? Let's say that three different teachers all agree that they are going to use a certain graphic organizer. And let's say that they all understand the tool to be used and provide very similar lessons for students. Why is it that some classes learn more than others? Our search for an answer led us away from a focus on the quality of the lesson plan, strategy, or instructional materials to a focus on the credibility each teacher had with students. Teachers who were more credible with their students had a much higher impact on their learning.



**QR Code 0.1:** Students talk about credible teachers  
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# TEACHER CREDIBILITY DEFINED



“The dynamic of teacher credibility is always at play.”<sup>1</sup>

**Teacher credibility** is the perception by students about their teacher’s competence, dynamism, trustworthiness, and immediacy.<sup>2</sup> A student’s ability to learn is influenced by whether the source (the teacher) is believed to be knowledgeable (competent), enthusiastic (dynamic), reliable (trustworthy), and accessible (immediate). In other words, learning is governed by the social and emotional perceptions that lie just below the surface. We have seen too many teachers implement what should have been effective instructional strategies, but they did not get the impact they hoped for.

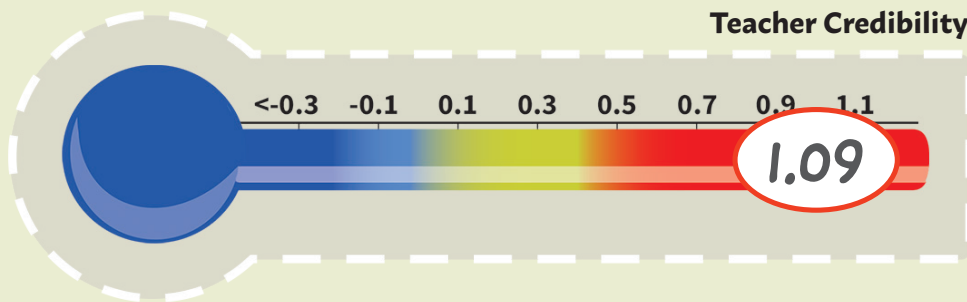
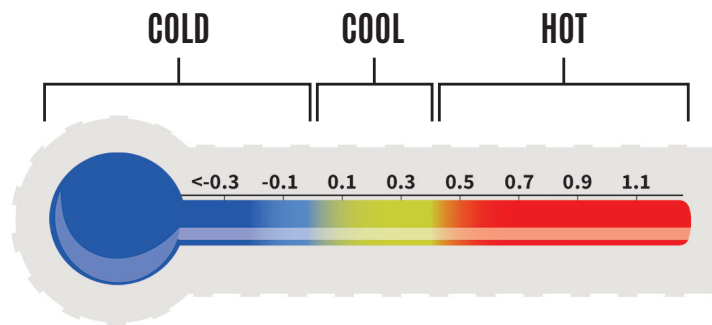


Teacher credibility is sometimes confused with the concept of **authority**. Being authoritarian does not build credibility. And simply asserting yourself as an authority will not ensure that students learn at high levels. We've all met people who clearly are experts, authorities as it were, in an area. But if we did not trust them, if they were not dynamic and willing to share, and if we did not feel a connection with them, we probably did not give them much of our attention and may even have disregarded what they said. The medical field calls this *bedside manner*; in education, it is called **teacher credibility**.

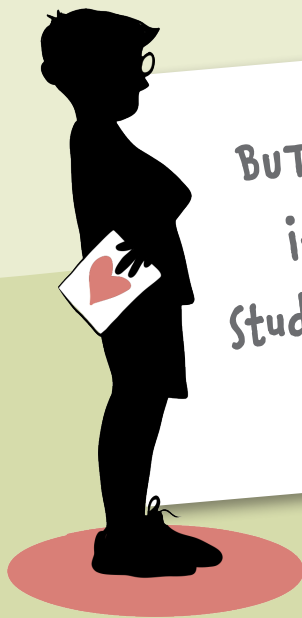
Importantly, teacher credibility differs from teacher–student relationships, which are also important. Teachers and students should have healthy, growth-producing relationships, in part because students learn more when these are present, and they are more likely to take risks knowing that the classroom is safe. It's hard to imagine that a teacher could be credible with students without a strong relationship. But teacher credibility extends to other areas, specifically trust, competence, dynamism or passion, and immediacy or perceived closeness.



An effect size is a measure of the impact of a specific influence on learning. John Hattie (2023) summarized more than 450 influences. The average of all influences is **0.40**, thus **those over 0.40 have the potential to accelerate learning.**

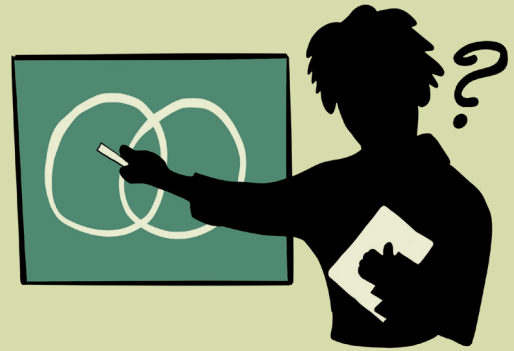


**The effect size of teacher credibility is noteworthy: 1.09.** In fact, teacher credibility is one of the most influential aspects of the teaching and learning process. And it's one that we can choose to improve.



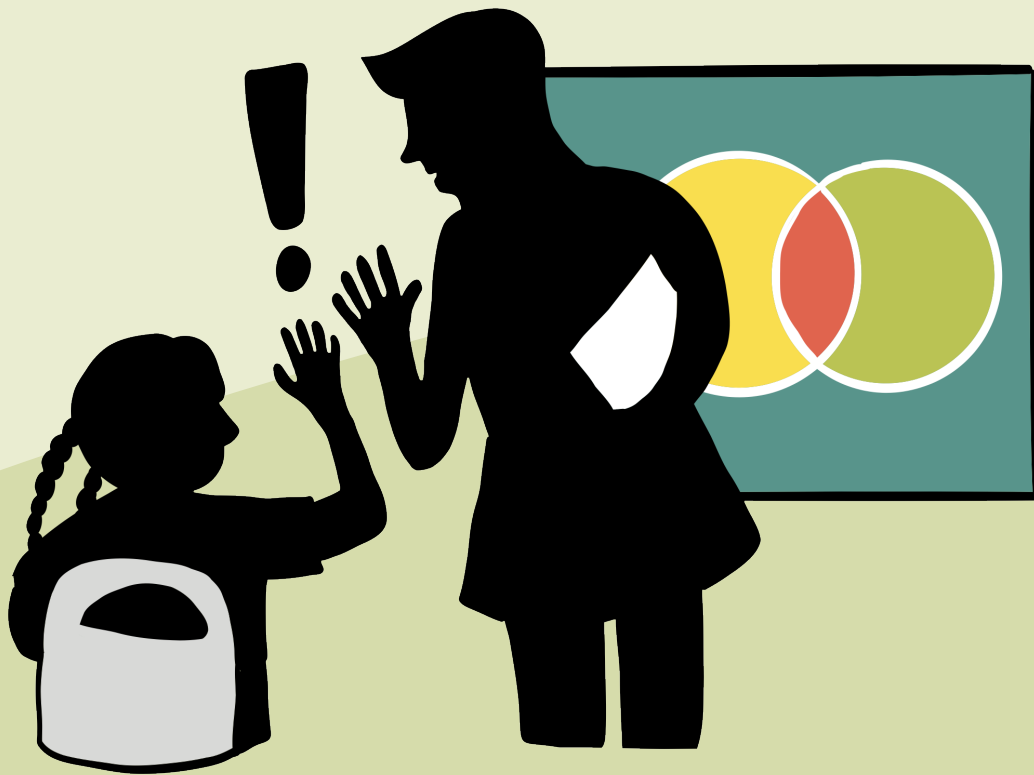
BUT we don't get to decide if we are credible with students. **Our students decide if we are credible.**

When a teacher is *not* perceived as credible, students tune out. They fail to show up; they fail to complete tasks; they fail to engage with peers; they fail. And quite frankly, we can't afford for students to do so. We need students to engage, to trust their teachers, and to choose to participate in their learning. The four aspects of teacher credibility—trust, competence, dynamism, and immediacy—can help do just that.



Consider the following success criteria that will be the focus of this illustrated guide:

- I can develop routines and procedures that ensure that trust is maintained so that students know we have a healthy, growth-producing relationship that allows them to take risks in their learning.
- I can demonstrate my competence using familiar routines and acknowledge new learning, building students skills as they develop confidence in their own learning.
- I can create a dynamic learning environment in which students see value in their learning knowing that I care deeply about them and their learning.
- I can find ways to maintain immediacy with students, ensuring that I am relatable and vulnerable.
- I can support others in developing and maintaining their credibility.



In this book we focus on the four dimensions of teacher credibility and provide actionable ways that you can maintain and improve your students' belief that they can learn from you. We offer several tools and ideas, all illustrated for ease of access, so that you can maximize the impact you have on your students. And some day, those students will return and ask you, "*Do you remember me?*" and you will because you had a profound impact on their development.



**QR Code 0.2:** Teachers talk about credibility  
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Notes on...

# INTRODUCTION

A large circle with a thick, hand-drawn border and horizontal lines inside, serving as a writing area.



## SECTION 1

# TRUST

**Trust:** noun. \ˈtrəst\

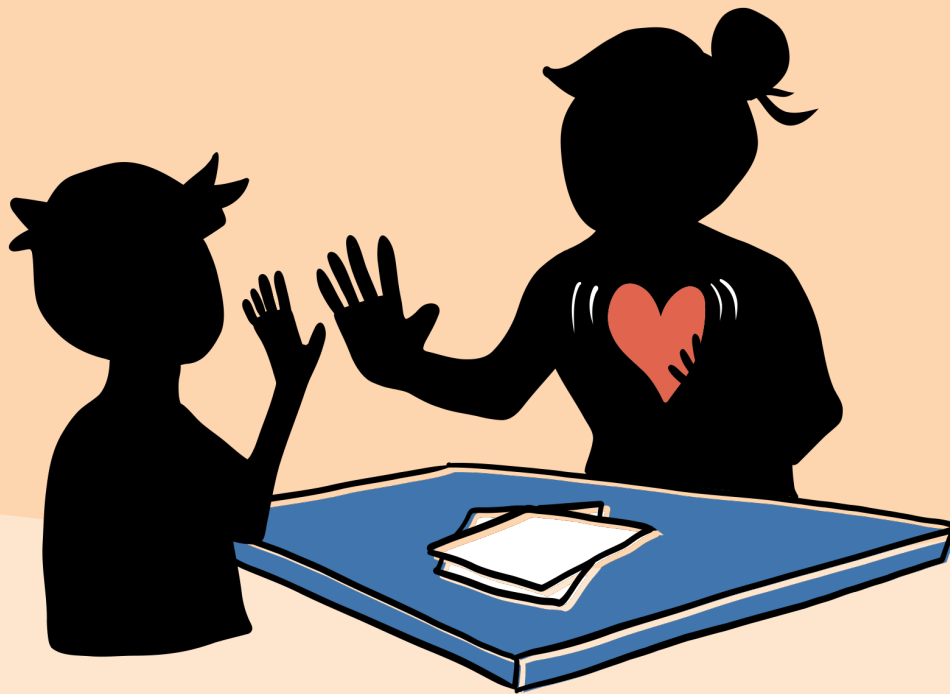
- 1: assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.
- 2: one in which confidence is placed.

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Trust Discussion  
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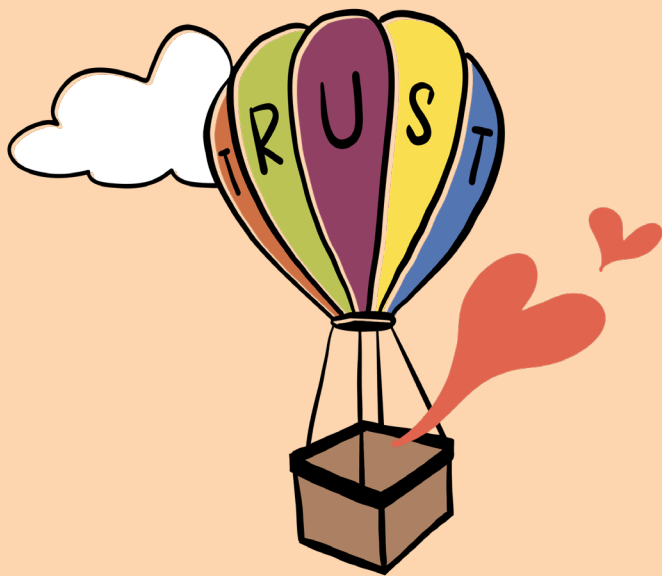
Students need to know that their teachers really care about them as individuals and have their best academic and social interests at heart. Students also want to know that their teachers are true to their word and are reliable. Students need to trust their teachers. And this goes in all kinds of directions. For example, students want their teachers to be honest. Lying to a student damages trust. Of course, there are topics that are off-limits, but not being truthful reduces credibility. Students know when their work is not stellar and wonder why we say it is. They see it in our faces when we refuse to answer a question.

*But trust is more than truthful responses.*

**It's also about healthy, growth-producing relationships.** Strong student-teacher relationships make it safe for students to take academic risks. When the relationships are strong, and students know what to expect from their teachers, they are more likely to ask for help, share their ideas, and try to do hard things. Students want to know that you care and that you will support them to meet and exceed their expectations. They want predictability in their relationship with their teachers and value the mentorship you provide.

A simple definition of trust involves truth and reliability of information. But when it comes to complex organizations like schools, the definition of trust is more complex. We have adopted the following definition of trust: **“Trust is an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open.”**<sup>1</sup>

This definition acknowledges that we must be vulnerable if we are to develop trust. And that goes for students as well as our professional peers. But for now, we will focus on trust between students and teachers.



Annette Baier, a New Zealand philosopher, made an interesting observation about trust when she wrote, *“We inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted.”*<sup>2</sup> Trust becomes obvious when it is scarce. As educators, we need to ensure that trust is not scarce or polluted, because this damages our credibility and thus student learning. Trust should be in the air, all around students, so that they can learn. To accomplish this, we need to attend to five elements:<sup>3</sup>

# 5 ELEMENTS OF TRUST



**Benevolence:** Confidence that one's well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted party. Assurance that others will not exploit one's vulnerability or take advantage even when the opportunity is available.



**Honesty:** The trusted person's character, integrity, and authenticity. Acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. Not distorting the truth in order to shift blame to another.



**Openness:** The extent to which relevant information is shared. Openness signals reciprocal trust.



**Reliability:** Consistency of behavior so that others know what to expect. Others have a sense of confidence that their needs will be met in positive ways.



**Competency:** The ability to perform as expected and according to standards appropriate to the task at hand.

# BASICS FOR BUILDING TRUST



## LISTEN

Provide students a chance to explain, especially when they make mistakes academically or behaviorally. Consider what students say before making the next decision. Dismissing, ignoring, or embarrassing a student will compromise their trust.

## SHARE RESPONSIBILITIES



Students appreciate being asked to be responsible for some aspects of the class operation and organization. It shows that you trust others with important tasks and you earn trust in return. Showing you trust your students is a sure way for them to trust you.



## SHOW APPRECIATION

Students who feel recognized by teachers generally respond in positive ways. Students want to be noticed and valued. Praise for their actions goes a long way in building trust. And specific praise builds their competence.

## SHOW FAIRNESS



For many students, fair is about getting the same as everyone else. Adults recognize that this is not necessarily the case, but students expect teachers to be fair. When there is a need to differentiate, teachers should offer general explanations and ensure that students are receiving the support they need.



**QR code 1.1:** Classroom talks about fairness  
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# A MEASUREMENT OF TRUST



If you want to get a sense of the level of trust in your classroom or school, you can use the *Student Trust in Faculty Scale*.<sup>4</sup> This tool is very brief, which makes it useful for student administrations. The goal of the tool is to “capture student perceptions and recollections of teacher behavior, which allow for judgments to be made about their relative openness, benevolence, reliability, competence, and honesty” (p. 264).

Data are powerful but need to be used wisely. Focusing on trust is much like studying the roots of a plant. Without care, the examination can damage or destroy the very thing you are trying to learn about.<sup>5</sup>

**Before** you collect these data, ask yourself these questions:

- **What is our purpose for gathering these data?**
- **What is the scope of the data collection?**
- **Who will gather the data? By when?**

**HOW**

- **WHAT CAN I LEARN?**
- **HOW CAN I INCREASE MY TRUSTWORTHINESS?**

**What**

- **WHO?**
- **WHEN?**

**Why**

- **PURPOSE?**
- **SCOPE?**

**After** you have the data collected, ask yourself these questions:

- **What did I learn about trust in my classroom or school?**
- **How can I increase my trustworthiness with students?**
- **What can I learn from my colleagues about trustworthiness?**

It is important to administer this assessment confidentially so that trust is maintained. Students should be told that their participation is voluntary and that they will suffer no penalty for not completing the survey. They should also be told that they may skip any items they are uncomfortable answering. *The scoring directions are in the **appendix**.*

<b>STUDENT SURVEY</b>						
		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
<b>1.</b>	Teachers are always ready to help.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>2.</b>	Teachers are easy to talk to at this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>3.</b>	Students learn a lot from teachers in this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>4.</b>	Students at this school can depend on teachers for help.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>5.</b>	Teachers at this school do a terrific job.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>6.</b>	Teachers at this school really listen to students.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>7.</b>	Teachers always do what they are supposed to do.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>8.</b>	Students are well cared for at this school.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>9.</b>	Teachers at this school are good at teaching.	①	②	③	④	⑤
<b>10.</b>	Teachers at this school are always honest with me.	①	②	③	④	⑤

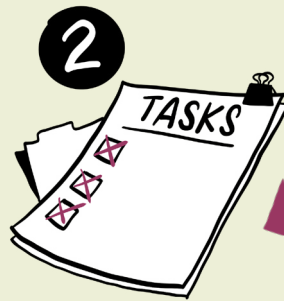
Source: Adams & Forsyth (2009).

# TAKE ACTION

If you, or you and your colleagues, want to take action based on the data collected and analyzed, consider the 6 steps of action planning.



**1. Set a reasonable and measurable goal.** What do you want to accomplish and by when?



**2. Identify tasks.** What steps will be required to reach the goal?



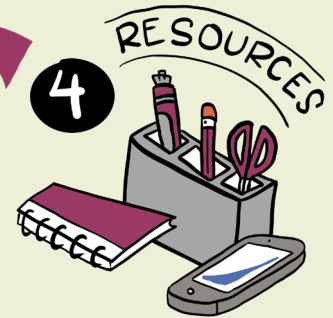
**3. Prioritize tasks.** We tend to identify too many tasks and get overwhelmed. Which of the tasks will yield the most useful results?



**6. Monitor and revise.** Reality will hit and you may need to revise the plan. When you monitor the tasks and their impact, you'll know when to revise.



**5. Set deadlines.** Create a timeline that you can follow. Don't expect immediate success, but note the completion of each milestone.



**4. Allocate resources.** What will it take, in terms of time, effort, or money, to complete the tasks?



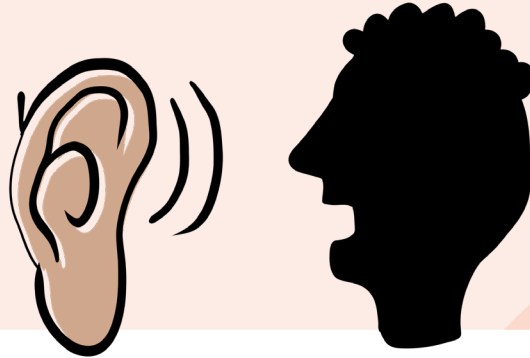
**7. Celebrate!** Too often, we forget to recognize our accomplishments. Achieving a goal is cause for celebration and will build our individual and collective efficacy.

# REGAIN TRUST WHEN IT HAS BEEN DAMAGED

**Trust is easier to gain than regain.** Thus far, we have focused on creating and maintaining trust. But sometimes trust is violated or broken and needs to be rebuilt. Some of the ways that trust can be rebuilt include the following:



**Apologize.** When you make a mistake, own it and apologize. Yes, especially to students. We are all human and we all make mistakes. An apology can go a long way toward rebuilding trust.

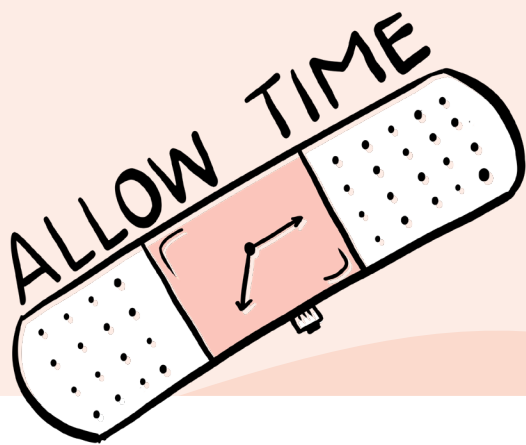


**Listen.** When trust has been broken, it is time to listen more intently. You have to learn where the hurt lies so that you can address that hurt. Recovery begins with acknowledgment. Sometimes, students need time to vent. If you broke trust with students, they will need some time to vent to move past the hurt. Of course, you are still the adult, and there are parameters about student conduct. You may want to invite a colleague to mediate the conversation.



**Make amends but not promises you cannot keep.** Your goal is to make things right, but in doing so, don't make the problem worse by making a promise you can't keep. Amends can come in a range of ways, from direct approaches such as fixing physical damage to indirect approaches such as providing time.





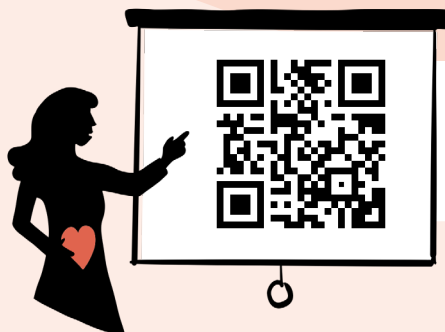
**Allow time.** As the saying goes, “Time heals all wounds.” Sometimes, depending on the damage done, you might need a light touch with a student or group of students. Don’t shy away from them, but recognize that it may take some time for them to trust you again.



**Be reliable.** Once trust is violated, it is human nature to look for additional evidence that the person is not trustworthy. Redouble your efforts to be reliable. Follow through on your promises.



**Forgive yourself.** As we noted before, we are human and, as such, fallible. But sometimes we forget to forgive ourselves. That is not to say that we ignore the consequences of our actions, but rather that we come to terms with them and learn to forgive.



**QR code 1.2:** Teacher meets with student to repair relationship  
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# USE TRUST TO BUILD TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

To paraphrase the late educator Rita Pierson, young people don't learn from old people they don't like.

In addition to our collective personal knowledge about the power of humane, growth-producing relationships, there is compelling research evidence to support this. We have already noted that teacher credibility has an effect size of 1.09, which is impressive. But if we just consider teacher-student relationships, the effect size is 0.47, still above average and likely to further accelerate learning. There is a distinction between teacher credibility and teacher-student relationships. The former operates in one direction and lies within the student's perceptions. The latter is bidirectional, as both teacher and student participate in its development. These are not unrelated to one another, and in fact trust is foundational in relationships.

*Positive relationships between teachers and students are among the most commonly cited variables associated with effective instruction. If the relationship is strong, instructional strategies seem to be more effective. Conversely, a weak or negative relationship will mute or even negate the benefits of even the most effective instructional strategies.<sup>6</sup>*






The Search Institute has created a Developmental Relationships Framework. Their model has five major components (expressed from the perspective of an individual student):

1. **Express care**—Show me that I matter to you.
2. **Challenge growth**—Push me to keep getting better.
3. **Provide support**—Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.
4. **Share power**—Treat me with respect and give me a say.
5. **Expand possibilities**—Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.



## The Developmental Relationships Framework

Young people are more likely to grow up successfully when they experience developmental relationships with important people in their lives. Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Search Institute has identified five elements—expressed in 20 specific actions—that make relationships powerful in young people’s lives.

Elements	Actions	Definitions
 <p><b>Express Care</b> Show me that I matter to you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Be dependable</b>.....Be someone I can trust.</li> <li>• <b>Listen</b>.....Really pay attention when we are together.</li> <li>• <b>Believe in me</b>.....Make me feel known and valued.</li> <li>• <b>Be warm</b>.....Show me you enjoy being with me.</li> <li>• <b>Encourage</b>.....Praise me for my efforts and achievements.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Challenge Growth</b> Push me to keep getting better.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Expect my best</b>.....Expect me to live up to my potential.</li> <li>• <b>Stretch</b>.....Push me to go further.</li> <li>• <b>Hold me accountable</b>...Insist I take responsibility for my actions.</li> <li>• <b>Reflect on failures</b>.....Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Provide Support</b> Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Navigate</b>.....Guide me through hard situations and systems.</li> <li>• <b>Empower</b>.....Build my confidence to take charge of my life.</li> <li>• <b>Advocate</b>.....Stand up for me when I need it.</li> <li>• <b>Set boundaries</b>.....Put limits in place that keep me on track.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Share Power</b> Treat me with respect and give me a say.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Respect me</b>.....Take me seriously and treat me fairly.</li> <li>• <b>Include me</b>.....Involve me in decisions that affect me.</li> <li>• <b>Collaborate</b>.....Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.</li> <li>• <b>Let me lead</b>.....Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Expand Possibilities</b> Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Inspire</b>.....Inspire me to see possibilities for my future.</li> <li>• <b>Broaden horizons</b>.....Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places.</li> <li>• <b>Connect</b>.....Introduce me to people who can help me grow.</li> </ul>	

NOTE: Relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, with each person giving and receiving. So each person in a strong relationship both engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.

Source: The Developmental Relationships Framework is copyrighted by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN ([www.searchinstitute.org](http://www.searchinstitute.org)) and used with permission.

Note that each of the major components has actions and definitions. For example, one of the actions is to advocate. *Stand up for me when I need it.* This is one of 20 actions, all of which are powerful. Consider each of the factors from the Developmental Relationships Framework. **Use the scale on the right** to estimate the number of students who believe that you demonstrate each factor.

<p><b>Express care</b>—Show me that I matter to you.</p> <p>no students      few students      most students      all students</p>
<p><b>Challenge growth</b>—Push me to keep getting better.</p> <p>no students      few students      most students      all students</p>
<p><b>Provide support</b>—Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.</p> <p>no students      few students      most students      all students</p>
<p><b>Share power</b>—Treat me with respect and give me a say.</p> <p>no students      few students      most students      all students</p>
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Source: The Developmental Relationships Framework is copyrighted by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN ([www.searchinstitute.org](http://www.searchinstitute.org)) and used with permission.

Take a look at your responses. What do you notice? What are your strengths and opportunities for growth? Are you willing to share your responses with a trusted peer and solicit advice?

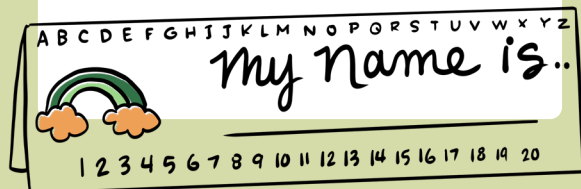
## TAKE ACTION

using the action plan process, what is your goal for improving or maintaining positive, growth-producing relationships with students?

# FOSTERING HEALTHY, GROWTH-PRODUCING RELATIONSHIPS

Some of the ways that we have seen teachers develop healthy, growth-producing relationships with students include these:

**Knowing their names and how to pronounce them.** This may seem obvious, but students often report that their teachers don't know their names. Make a commitment to learn all your students' names. Make sure you pronounce their names correctly as well.



**Say hello and good-bye to every student every day.** There are any number of ways to do this. Looking at each student and greeting them conveys that the student is valuable and worth your time. Some teachers invite students to choose their greetings, such as a handshake, high-five, or hug (if allowed in the district). Others stand at the door and greet each student as the student enters the room. We find that more teachers say hello individually than good-bye.

EVERY STUDENT EVERY DAY!



**Speak with respect.** Again, this may seem obvious, but we have lost count of the number of times we have heard harsh or sarcastic words come from a teacher. It damages relationships and prevents students from bonding with the adult who is there to teach them. *Your words are powerful.*

**QR code 1.3:**  
Teacher greets students by name  
[qrs.ly/sjg86sm](https://qrs.ly/sjg86sm)





**Know their interests and attend extracurricular events.** Students will play harder, dance better, and sing louder when you are in the audience. You are a superhero, and they are thrilled when you are present at their events. We have lost count of the number of times a student finished a game or performance and ran up to a teacher, asking the teacher to meet their parents. We also notice that students whose parents can't

attend stand proudly next to their teachers. Remember to attend events that are outside of your personal interests. Dominique is a big sports fan, but you can also find him visiting the chess club, the anime group, and every play and poetry slam that students are part of.

**Monitor nonverbal communication.**

Estimates are that more than half of our communication is nonverbal. It's not just the words we use with students; it is also our body language. And students are always paying attention to the messages we send. Eye rolls, crossed arms, and defensive stances send powerful negative messages to students about the approachability of an adult and whether this adult is one to trust and value.

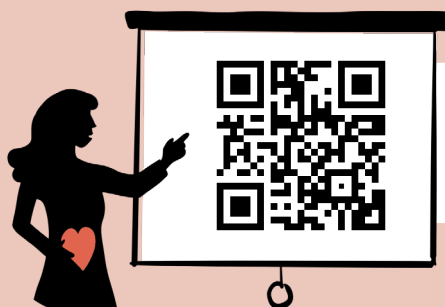


**Share your world.** No, not necessarily your entire personal life, but your world. Young students are surprised to learn that you buy groceries and sometimes even eat out, just like they do. They want to know more about you, and you should share aspects of your life appropriate for school.

We made that seem really easy.  
And it is. It's a choice.

We can focus our energy on developing relationships with students because we know it matters. Or we can ignore the evidence of the social and emotional dimensions of learning at our own peril.

Simply said, trust matters for students and colleagues, and it is foundational to the relationships we establish. These relationships are a grist for learning. They make it safe for students to take risks and chance being wrong. And they help students develop into productive members of their communities. Yet, they are only part of what makes a teacher credible. Relationships and trust are worth the investment and pay dividends for years, especially when a student returns and asks, ***Do you remember me?***



**QR Code 1.4:** Strong teacher-student relationships  
[qrs.ly/rzg86sn](https://qrs.ly/rzg86sn)



Notes on...

# TRUST

A large circular area with a thick, hand-drawn maroon border. Inside the circle are horizontal lines for writing. A decorative maroon swirl is attached to the bottom left of the circle's border.