Currently, educators and parents alike are concerned about school safety and student violence. In this article we will look at ways to shape schools where quality learning is encouraged, safety is not a concern, and violence is avoided. To do this educators should consider bundling positive cultures and climates, ensuring effective instructional environments, and developing approaches to coping with crises.

Build Positive Cultures, Climates, and Effective Instructional Environments

Most writers find that unsafe schools are often also places where the culture and climate for students is negative, oppressive, and based on fear (Zummo, 1998). In these schools, one often finds autocratic educators, student alienation, uninspired teaching, and a lack of school spirit and identification. These schools are often toxic to teachers as well as students (Deal & Peterson, 1998). This combination is a dangerous mix that can foster student misbehavior. Thus, one of the first things a school must do is to make its culture one of respect, fairness, and attention to the needs and concerns of students while increasing the quality of teaching so that students are excited and motivated about learning.

Approaches for Coping with Crises:

One of the more thoughtful approaches to preventing and dealing with serious behavioral problems in schools comes from Gilliam (1993). In his model, he notes a number of actions educators can take to help reduce crises. He suggests that educators should:

1. State discipline rules about aggression clearly to foster trust and a sense of safety.
2. Establish consequences and processes ahead of time so everyone knows them.
3. Deal with infractions unemotionally and professionally.
4. Avoid unreasonable threats or becoming enmeshed in power struggles with students.
5. Make behavior expectations clear and check to make sure that students understand them.
6. Remain calm and composed even in stressful situations.
7. Focus on the behavior, not the individual, or the person's reasons for breaking the rules.
8. Do not argue with students over the rules or the consequences; avoid trying to have "the last word."
9. Always try to intervene with the behavior before conflict develops.

(Gilliam, 1993 in Zummo, 1998)

By establishing a culture and climate that is positive and supportive of student respect and learning, schools can become places where students feel connected. Additionally, though, educators should make their procedures, consequences, and actions clear, respectful, and professional.

References:


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The activities reported in this document were supported by the U.S. Department of Education under #S283A50012-95B funded by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), and by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER), School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of OESE or of WCER.