



Touch Points in Our Classrooms and Schools: Through Procedures, Routines, Rituals and Transitions

Touch Point Practices and Strategies

- Creating a friend-in-need system could be helpful so each student has a buddy or even another adult in the building to go to when they begin to feel agitated. For the friend-in-need system, teachers ask students to select one or two peers or adults at the school who they trust and feel comfortable with if they need to take a break and be in another environment or talk through those challenging moments. This is preventative discipline and a way for students to have options when they begin to feel negative. These calming strategies are taught ahead of time and become a part of our procedures and classroom agreements or guidelines.
- Validation is a powerful way to calm an agitated and angry student. It's calming to be understood and felt by another. Some things you can say to help a student feel validated:
 - "That must feel awful."
 - "You seem really angry."
 - "You seem really frustrated."
 - "What a difficult situation you're in."

Validation opens the door for teacher and student to discuss choices and consequences and to create a plan of action for the next time there's a conflict.

- *My colleague Michael McKnight shares, it is critical that a teacher's brain should resemble a thermostat rather than a thermometer when it comes to disciplining a student.* What does this mean? Like a thermostat, the teacher needs to maintain a steady temperature throughout a moment of conflict, with a goal of creating conversation and a plan of action with a student who understands their choices and the consequences of those actions. The teacher needs to model the behaviors they want to see and to model self-care and respect during the discipline process.
- At the district, school, department, grade, or classroom level, we can create these

accommodations for our students who walk in ready to fight, flee, or shut down.

- A change of seating arrangements can sometimes help a student feel safe and focused. This placement or seat may need to be in the back of the classroom or against a wall so there is a felt support and the student can see everything around them and in front of them.
- This next step takes some work: Educators start by identifying students coping with ACEs—looking at chronic discipline issues can help educators know which students need a sense of connection and help with self-regulation. For each of these students, identify one or two adults in the school with whom the student feels comfortable and safe. This kind of mentor relationship is a touchpoint in times of anxiety or dysregulation, and a powerful accommodation that provides a sense of safety for self-regulation and secure connection.
- Meeting with this mentor every week provides an opportunity for a check-in, during which students can share and discuss their challenges and successes. 20 Discussions might cover points like these:
- Strengths to Help Me with My Goals-Students can use a morning meeting time or a bell work time at the beginning of class or period to list their strengths which may need a touch point from a trusted adult or classmate to assist in weaving and re appraising the student's focus to the positive side of an experience. Below are a few examples!
 - I love to learn. I'm seen as a leader and good friend by others.
 - I have a great imagination.
 - I notice everything.
 - I am good at sensing others and nonverbal communication.
 - Interests and Areas of Expertise- Students list their areas of expertise, passions and strengths and this can best be completed with a friend or an adult who can brainstorm ideas with the students.
 - I love art.
 - I am interested in animals, especially cats.
 - I have a pet-sitting service.
 - I am good at soccer.

Activators/Triggers- People or Experiences that Irritate, Anger or Upset Me

What are some experiences, events, sights, sounds, smells, relationships, or people that cause you to feel anxiety or other negative emotions? With an adult or classmate, begin to create a personalized list of regulatory strategies that feel calming in moments of growing, anger, anxiety or frustration.

- With a classmate, begin to create and set up a personalized routine of self-regulation accommodations before there are conflicts and behavioral challenges. For example, start with a list of quick breaks—getting a sip of water, taking a walk, taking three deep breaths, drawing or using a favorite art form, moving to a quiet area, or journaling—and have the student choose two or three items from the list that they will employ in times of dysregulation and growing frustration.
- It is key that these steps be taught and discussed ahead of time so that when the student does get upset, they don't have to make a tough decision about what to do—they have only two or three choices, which they selected for themselves in a moment of calm.

Nervous System Aligned Bell and Morning Work

Rituals are so important to all of us as they create predictable and structured experiences that feel safe.

- Welcome to the Day, May I take Your Order? I have shared this touchpoint many times, but this past year, we have added menus! As an administrator or teacher, I am going to begin with two or three individuals at a time (students and staff) and hand them a menu asking, “I want to work for you today and I would like to know what you would like to order! We may be out of some of the items, but please choose a couple of entrees off the menu and I will try my best!” We begin this point of connection by preparing our staff and students ahead of time so they know that they can eventually reach out to all students and staff taking everyone's order!! Here are a few of the examples you could create for your menus for staff! Be creative and think outside the box as you build touch points of connection! The truth is we work for people we like and small moments of connection with a caring adult can have tremendous benefits for our children who carry in pain from relational loss, abandonment and varying forms of adversity. From the words of Dr. Bruce Perry, “We expect “therapy” – healing- to take place in the child via episodic, shallow relational interactions with highly educated but poorly nurturing strangers. We undervalue the powerful therapeutic impact of caring teacher, coach, neighbor and a host of other potential co-therapists.”

take out (stress) menu



APPETIZER - BITE SIZED SUPPORT

Frozen Free Time

Hot tomato soup with my favorite school supplies

Gourmet crackers and chocolate with a specialty coffee/caffeine boost of choice

MAIN COURSE - FILLING PORTIONS OF SELF CARE

Filet of Conversation with a person of your choice

Italian pasta with "solution" filled meatballs and an "extra support" sauce

Fried Chicken Basket with a side of time in the reset amygdala staff area

DESSERT - SWEET RELIEF

Banana Split Sunday topped with my Favorite Sweet Snack

More time to plan Cherry Pie

Validation Chocolate Chip Cookies

Red Velvet Lesson Plan Pass



Who is Your Wise Self?

- Guided visualizations invite our imagination to begin changing the neural structures in our brains! When we implement guided imagery, we activate the right hemisphere of the brain which is responsible for one of many mental processes. 22 (Childhood Disrupted 192,193. My Wise Self- Guided imagery is a powerful healing and connection technique. From the text, Childhood Disrupted journalist Donna Jackson shares a technique called “Wise Self,” that we are implementing in our classrooms and schools. Who is your “Wise Self” that gives the younger version of you or the version of you right now soothing comfort and acceptance?
- Is this a person? What do they look like? Is this an animal? What do you imagine your wise self-doing to calm you and to bring you some joy? What words of comfort does your wise self-share? Our fifth-grade class spent a couple of weeks working on this touch point as we designed, discussed and listed comforting words our “Wise Self” might share with us especially during a difficult time! Below are some of the images that our students created as they imagined and drew their “wise selves! Each week we visited our wise selves to check in to see if we needed to add any comforting words, phrases or if our wise self-needed to share comforting and soothing words with another? This practice could be a week, semester or a yearlong activity! Feel free to modify, add to or create a “Wise Self” moment each day with staff and students!



New Classroom Roles and Responsibilities

We see students survive every day. We ourselves survive every day -- a class, a test, a conflict, a relationship, adversity, and challenges that lead to feelings of isolation and unpredictability. Many students that we see daily bring a degree of their stress into our classrooms. Thankfully, many of them also have supports in their lives that allow them to manage this stress in a productive manner.

Many of our most struggling students do not have the support, touch points and the consistent emotional availability of a caring adult! They live in a state of chronic toxic stress, which changes the brain, literally placing it in a survival mode. In this state, the brain loses a sense of direction and purpose and it feels nearly impossible to problem solve when adversity takes over and the stress feels overwhelming. We walk into our classrooms feeling disconnected from one another, the learning, and our purpose. 23 When we feel shame, anger, sadness, or any negative emotion over an extended period, our brains begin creating neural pathways that ignite habits of feelings in response to the thoughts that call forth these emotions. This self-centered focus on survival greatly inhibits learning. Stressed brains resist new information.

The following "classroom professions" I am redefining as touch points and they can change as needed and are presented as guidelines and ideas for exploring and adapting at all grade levels. These class responsibilities and roles are vitally important in secondary education as well, as we are providing opportunities for our students to experience co-leadership roles rather than being passive recipients of rules, lectures, and dispensed knowledge. Many of these will be familiar to the readers, but I have added new roles and classroom professions giving

students and staff a felt sense of purpose and mastery. If I am an administrator in a school, these roles would be shared by staff as well as students.

1. Giver

This student's responsibility is to give encouragement, affirmation, and acts of kindness throughout the day. The giver may use post-its, create signs, deliver spoken messages, or communicate hopefulness by any means.

2. Storyteller

Storytelling could take many forms, such as seeking books to share, or integrating vocabulary or content words into a story. Younger students might create a story with pictures. Older students could work with journal stories, writing, sharing, turning them into screenplays, or submitting them for publication. Your storyteller may develop an iMovie or blog for the class. He or she could create a class story with classmate's names and school projects or weave any content into this context for learning standards or subject matter. The brain adheres to stories!

3. Noticer

This job is to notice what is going well and right. It is the antithesis to tattling or snitching.

4. Kindness Keeper

This student would record all of the kind acts performed throughout the day or week. The kindness keeper reflects on these kindnesses and shares with the class periodically.

5. Resource Manager

The resource manager suggests ideas, resources, or ways to solve a problem or locate information, either academically or behaviorally.

6. Collaborator

This is one role that could be assigned for acting outside the classroom. Maybe there is another teacher, staff member, or student in the school that needs an emotional, social, or cognitive boost? At department and all-staff meetings, the collaborator would share ideas that promote student-to-teacher or student-to-student relationships or bridging in- and out-group biases that happen when we only perceive differences.

7. Architect

The architect is the designer, builder, or creator? How could you highlight this role in your classroom or school?

8. Artist

The artist could have many responsibilities with visual arts, music selections, and any creative endeavor the class would like to design or share.

9. Neuroscientist

This role shares a topic each week about the brain and how it relates to content, a standard, stress and brain neuroplasticity. There are so many applications for this new role!

10. Graduate Assistant

This role co-teaches, co-plans or co-writes assessments with the teacher, administrator taking on responsibilities that a co-teacher would have in a classroom.

Enjoy these new roles while collecting the perceptual data through surveys, observations, and feedback from one another as the roles change and modify, providing us with the interests, passions and strengths of one another that we did not notice before. Building community, collaboration, and points of connection happen all day and every day when we integrate these touch points into our procedures, routines and rituals!

My Brain/ My Garden

What type of thought seeds are you planting? Are they seeds of anger? Are they seeds of kindness? These are the questions that introduce this instructional practice of collaboration and learning from one another. Let's plant a garden in our classroom as we tend to the garden of our minds and explore what happens! What will we grow? How will we tend to the plants and what do we do with the weeds? For



the past year, we have been exploring this analogy and students of all ages have enjoyed this group activity! It lends discussion about brain architecture, neuroplasticity, connection and the seeds we plant to create regulation and emotional well-being. We began this activity a year ago with middle school students and the staff joined in! Two weeks ago, in our fifth-grade classroom, we observed our own minds and discussed what types of thoughts and feelings we have planted and what could we do if the weeds (continual negative thoughts and feelings) were overwhelming the garden! We began with these discussion points, brainstormed together and began collecting our thoughts and ideas in our brain journals.

- Our gardens need water, sunlight, and good rich soil.
- What is the soil of your mind/ garden like? What type of environment and experiences feel nourishing and good to you?
- Our gardens may need some shade and a protective enclosure.
- Who or what experiences watered your mind/ garden this week? What types of experiences or persons fill you up and bring you hope and encouragement? Are you getting enough water?
- Who and what experiences are your sunlight? Who can see the best and brightest in you when you or others cannot? Are you getting enough sunlight?
- Sometimes we need a little shade and quiet. Are you getting the shade, the quiet, and reflections you need?
- What places help you to feel safe? What people?
- What sounds feel good to your brain? What types of rooms or outdoor areas?
- Who protects you? What do you do to self-protect? Do you need to repair the fence or enclosure that is your protection?
- How can school and your classmates help your garden to grow and flourish?

- What are the weeds in the garden of your brain? Are you pulling them out by the root? Why is this important?

We will plant lavender gardens this spring and keep track of their care and our brain's care. We will chart and track our brain states making sure that we are aware of the water, sunlight, nutrients and shade we need to flourish! We know our gardens will change over the next few weeks and months and our attention to them will be a touchpoint to share with each other.

Noticing

Two By Ten/ One By Thirty/ Thirty by Ninety

The Two-Minute Relationship Builder

Sarah McKibben

What if instead of going head-to-head with your most challenging student, you created an ally in him? During the 2013 ASCD Conference on Educational Leadership, presenter Grace Dearborn shared a strategy for making that happen: the "Two-by-Ten."

Dearborn explained that by spending two minutes a day for 10 consecutive days getting to know a disruptive student, teachers can begin establishing an initial connection. Historically referred to as the "two-minute intervention" by researcher Raymond Wlodkowski, the Two-by-Ten strategy is a way to not only break the ice but also form the foundation for a sustainable relationship—and better classroom behavior.

"It's a motivator, it's a management strategy, and it's a formally researched way [to turn a student from a negative to a positive influence]," says Rick Smith, founder of [Conscious Teaching](#), who often presents the method with Dearborn. Smith says Two-by-Ten gives a disruptive student what he is seeking in the first place: a positive connection with an adult.

"Safety is a fundamental human need and if kids don't feel it, they're going to ask for it," he says. "Oddly, the way they sometimes ask for it is to act out." Although it may seem like they are trying to sabotage your classroom, a student is more likely communicating the message "Would you connect with me, so I can let down my guard?"

Targeted Attention

Lisa Kitzmann, a 3rd grade teacher at Eldridge Elementary School in Hayward, Calif., used Two-by-Ten to address the outbursts that were occurring frequently in her classroom. When Eldridge gained a mix of new students because of local school closures, behavior issues in the Title I school escalated.

Although Kitzmann, who refers to herself as a "teddy bear teacher," already connects with students daily, she says the strategy "really helped me target the kids I was struggling with and

give them more structured attention."

Curiosity motivated Kitzmann to study the efficacy of Two-by-Ten for her master's thesis. Over the course of a year, she used the strategy on four students (three separate times) and teamed up with a teacher's aide to collect data based on daily observation checklists (which tracked disruptions such as talking with peers, interrupting the teacher, and not following directions) and the number of "red alerts" or behavior referrals sent home to parents.

Kitzmann ultimately found that the students she worked with were "less disruptive, changed their attitudes, and had a stronger drive to succeed in school" after exposure to the Two-by-Ten strategy. In addition, the class as a whole was "running more smoothly."

Still, it was a learning process for everyone, Kitzmann explains. Some of the students were more receptive to the conversations than others, but most tended to warm up to the attention by the second week.

A Deeper Connection

Keeping the content of the conversations PG-rated and centered on the student's personal interests is essential to making the strategy work, Smith asserts. Teachers can use an interest inventory to ask questions or just "focus on whatever the kid is talking about to his friends or what he's wearing—his sneakers, backpack, anything at all," says Smith. "If he has a Packers jersey on, that's a sure clue."

The discussions, however, should extend beyond the typical "how are you today, nice to see you," says Kitzmann. Even talking about what the student shared in class or wrote about in an exercise does not have the same effect as when teachers probe more deeply. "The focus of Two-by-Ten is just getting to know the child outside of school," she says. "Find out what his favorite food is, what his favorite hobby is, how did his baseball game go, etc. If [your approach is] authentic, the child will know it."

When a student is especially "resistant and shutdown," Smith recommends striking up a conversation with one of the student's friends within earshot and eventually drawing that student in, even if it takes several days.

Stealth Planning

Two-by-Ten is "one of the most powerful relationship-changing strategies I know," writes Allen Mendler in *When Teaching Gets Tough* (ASCD, 2012). Mendler suggests that, at least for the first few days, teachers build the time into their lesson plans when other students "are engaged in an assignment or project that requires less ... direct teaching."

Kitzmann initiated her conversations outside of class when she could more subtly approach a student. "I would do it walking out to recess, walking beside the student to music or PE, checking in on them at lunch, or walking out with them at the end of the day."

Smith advises, especially at the secondary level, that teachers learn the student's schedule and "position yourself in the hall [during passing periods] so [that] you happen to run into him 'by mistake.'" The planning may take a lot of foresight, he says, "but if that kid turns himself

around in your class, it will have been worth it."

Allotting time for shorter conversations can also be beneficial as long as they occur *every day* (not counting weekends) because consistency is what "allows the walls to come down," Smith continues. Thus "half a minute a day for 10 days is better than one 20-minute conversation because [the student] needs that ongoing connection to relax."

Where the Magic Happens

"Does Two-by-Ten solve everything? No," Kitzmann is the first to admit. Although the strategy is not a remedy for disruptive behavior, "in 10 days, you establish enough of an understanding that helps you relate to a child or get a relationship going."

By taking the time to ask the right questions, you learn a lot about the student and often begin to "see the child in a different light," Kitzmann elaborates. "In every experience, I have been surprised by what a student shared, or what they taught me, or how they inspired me."

"Once you make that extra step to connect with a kid, you get results," Kitzmann affirms. "And after the 10 days, the tendency is to keep the momentum going. It just continues; it's natural."

Adds Smith, "You have to remember that the teacher is often pretty guarded as well, initially, because the kid has been acting out. And then as you connect heart-to-heart, that's where the magic happens."