



# SOCIAL SKILLS, SECURITY, & STUDENTS

By Elli Ramirez



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Social disconnection seems almost ubiquitous among students today. If you are a school teacher, you've probably encountered this problem in the classroom with those you're teaching. Many people have attempted to diagnose the issue and identify why students are experiencing so much social disconnection. The *why* is not the purpose of this download. The purpose is to help you—a teacher—as you navigate the social awkwardness that your students may be experiencing.

As you well know, low emotional intelligence and a lack of conflict management skills can lead to students experiencing:

- Social anxiety
- Increased loneliness
- Anger management issues
- Communication barriers
- A lack of healthy boundaries, cooperation, and empathy

Teachers are in the position of not just teaching students academic information, but creating environments where students can thrive academically and socially. According to Christian psychologist Kathy Koch, all people have five base-level core needs:

1. **Security**—A core desire for people you can depend on and feel at peace with.
2. **Identity**—Confidence in who you are and freedom from the past.
3. **Belonging**—A group of people who lovingly accept you and whom you can serve.
4. **Purpose**—A reason to live that is fueled by a lasting hope.
5. **Competence**—A fulfilling sense of success that helps you to pursue growth.\*

The social awkwardness and disconnection that students experience is likely a multi-level issue. These core needs are like peg holes that God added to our spiritual and emotional makeup, and are God's invitation to joyfully connect with him and with others.\*\* Experiencing wholeness in these areas will hopefully help students to socially and academically thrive in your classroom. Let's explore some practical ways to immerse your students in God's truth to help them experience wholeness.

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\* Koch, Kathy. *Five to Thrive: How to Determine If Your Core Needs Are Being Met (and What to Do When They're Not)*: (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020), 17-22.

\*\* Koch, 16.

## RESOURCE SUGGESTIONS FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT CORE NEEDS:

- *Five to Thrive: How to Determine If your Core Needs Are being Met (and What to Do When They're Not)*
- *8 Great Smarts: Discover and Nurture Your Child's Intelligences*



# 1. Intentionally Create an Atmosphere of Security & Belonging

It will be difficult to provide well for students' core needs unless (1) teachers and administrators experience wholeness in Christ and (2) there is an environment of joy, security, and belonging in your school.

If you are an administrator, pray through these questions. Ask God to show you where you can intentionally invest more in your teachers and to see if your school has a sense of joy, belonging, and security. If you are a teacher, similar questions could be asked about your classroom:

- As an administrator, do you know your teachers' likes and dislikes, what they do for fun, where they went on summer vacation? Do you take the time to *know* your teachers and make them feel cared for?
- Do you take the time to *connect* with your teachers on a frequent basis to get to know them better (or do you only connect with them when you need something)? Do your teachers feel a sense of belonging and connection with you?
- Do you seek to *provide* resources for your teachers to meet their needs? Do they feel a sense of belonging in your community and feel empowered to accomplish the tasks they've been given?
- Do you *protect* your teachers? Do they feel safe to do their best—even if they fail? Or are your teachers living in a sense of fear of your judgment?
- Do you provide security for your teachers by *remaining relational* and person-centered when problems arise? Or do you withdraw from a personal relationship causing teachers to lose their sense of security when a problem arises?
- Are you someone that your teachers fear when a problem arises or someone that they feel safe with to *trust*?

## RESOURCE SUGGESTIONS FOR CREATING ATMOSPHERES OF JOY & BELONGING:

- *RARE Leadership: 4 Uncommon Habits for Increasing Trust, Joy, and Engagement in the People You Lead*
- *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation*
- *Lead, Develop, Care: Shaping a Different Kind of Leader*

## 2. Implement More Engaged Learning Strategies

Engaged learning is not synonymous with “chaos,” but it can be with “joy.” In the book *The Other Half of Church*, a brain scientist writes that our brains trigger joy when we are face to face with someone happy to see us.\* Students who do not respond well to teaching are likely “experiencing: low levels of joy, isolation, a lack of loving community, poor identity formation, and unhealed trauma.”\*\* Create a joyful atmosphere of connection to help your students learn. Give students the opportunity to joyfully connect to establish a sense of security in your classroom. Students can feel a sense of belonging and competence (two core desires) when they have something to contribute to that is bigger than themselves.

For example, an activity called “think-pair-share” can give students the opportunity to process information deeply while connecting with each other: Imagine a history classroom full of 1st grade students learning about the famous baseball player Jackie Robinson. Have students take 2-3 minutes to draw a picture of something that Jackie Robinson did in his life that inspires them. After the 2-3 minutes is up, have students pair up and share their pictures with each other and discuss what the life of Jackie Robinson taught them. This activity gives them a sense of belonging in learning and in conversations with their peers.

Another engaged learning activity is called “whiteboard splash”: In a science classroom of 3rd grade students, draw on the whiteboard one column for each animal kingdom. After teaching about the animal kingdom, have each student pick one of their favorite animals. Next, instruct students to help each other sort the animals into the correct kingdoms, writing the names of their favorite animals on the board. This activity gives students a chance to connect with each other, engage in learning, and cultivate a sense of belonging. When you—the teacher—know one of their favorite animals, it could help students experience a sense of personal connection and identity in being known.

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\* Wilder, Jim and Michael Hendricks. *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020), 51-76.

\*\* Wilder, 42.

### RESOURCE SUGGESTIONS FOR BRAINSTORMING ENGAGED LEARNING IN YOUR CLASSROOM:

- *Beyond Biblical Integration: Immersing You and Your Students in a Biblical Worldview*
- *Bring it To Life: Christian Education and the Transformative Power of Service Learning*
- *Total Participation Techniques: Making Every Student an Active Learner*

### 3. Intentionally Encourage Healthy Conflict Management

Healthy relationships provide a sense of security, identity, and belonging to students who may otherwise feel outcast or ignored. Unfortunately, healthy relationships can go bad when conflict arises. As one pastor told me, without forgiveness relationships always go bad. Forgiveness has the power to reconcile and restore relationships that are otherwise broken. Understanding a biblical theology of conflict management and forgiveness can help you maintain healthy relationships and assist you in coaching students who are facing similar conflicts.

For example, imagine addressing a group of middle school students who are in disagreement about what to do for a group project. You can tell from across the room that they are having trouble agreeing on something, or you notice that someone is abusing power in the group. Walking over to address the students you decide to teach them the [PAUSE principle](#) before the disagreement becomes a relationship-damaging conflict:

**Prepare** (pray, get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)

**Affirm relationships** (show genuine concern and respect for others)

**Understand interests** (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)


**Search for creative solutions** (prayerful brainstorming)

**Evaluate options objectively and reasonably** (evaluate, don't argue)

In this situation PAUSE could look like:

- **Prepare**—Have everyone in the group take a moment to develop their opinions by writing down their ideas for the group project.
- **Affirm relationships**—Go around the circle and allow everyone to share their ideas, affirming things that would be beneficial about everyone's ideas.
- **Understand interests**—Make sure everyone understands why others think their ideas are important to consider (of course, this step should remain brief as to make time for everyone to share and not monopolize the time).
- **Search for creative solutions**—Taking everyone's ideas into consideration, could a new idea be formed that preserves the most important values for the group? Think outside the box, maybe there is an idea that no one has considered.
- **Evaluate options objectively**—Without arguing, talk kindly and honestly about the pros and cons of each idea that has been presented and come to a helpful decision about what the group should do.

Teaching students these basic relational skills will help them to navigate difficult situations and work through differences in a helpful way.



**RESOURCE SUGGESTIONS  
FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT  
AND CULTIVATING HEALTHY  
RELATIONSHIPS:**

- [\*Resolving Everyday Conflict\*](#)
- [\*The Peacemaker\*](#)
- [The Slippery Slope of Conflict – What Is Your Response to Conflict?](#)
- [Getting to the Heart of Conflict](#)
- [Relational Peacemaking](#)



**SOME HEROES MAY  
INCLUDE:**

- Mathematics: Blaise Pascal
- Physics: Arthur Compton
- Literature: Flannery O'Connor
- Athletics: Eric Liddell
- World Languages: Mesrop Mashtots
- History: Eusebius of Caesara
- Fine Arts: Antonio Vivaldi



## 4. Give Students Heroes

Introducing your students to heroes that will inspire them helps students cultivate a desire to serve others, gives them a sense of purpose, and encourages them to find things that they can become competent in. Moreover, it encourages personal growth.

For example, imagine a high school mathematics class that has chosen to search for “mathematical heroes” for the year. During one class period the hero is Isacc Newton. Newton contributed greatly to the field of mathematics *and* theology. During this class period one student stands up and briefly shares what they learned that week about Newton, answering questions about his life that connects his work to the students’ lives. For example, they could explain how Newton’s work on laws of motion—acceleration and deceleration—has assisted in space travel and the invention of motorized vehicles. Here are a few questions to consider:

- What was this person’s family life allegedly like?
- What obstacles did this person overcome in their past?
- What is a mistake this person made that you can learn from?
- What people were they looking to serve/help? Why, what hope did they have in the outcome?
- Did this person experience success in their lifetime?
- What did this person produce that still affects us today?
- What about this person is something that you would like to emulate?
- What could this person teach you about living a life for God’s glory (even if they aren’t a Christian)?
- What did this person cultivate, create, cure, or curb?
- How does this person’s work fit in with God’s design for the world?

## Conclusion

There are a plethora of strategies and tactics to help your students grow in social connectedness and wholeness. To encourage your students to thrive both socially and academically, four areas have been unpacked. First, intentionally create an atmosphere of security and belonging. Second, implement engaged learning strategies. Third, encourage healthy conflict management. And fourth, help students cultivate a vision for the future by giving them heroes to learn from.

The vision is to foster an environment where students can flourish and thrive as the individuals God created them to be. As [Proverbs 22:6](#) says, “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”

Let these suggestions spark your imagination for what your classroom could be like and what you can do to get it there! May your students experience the joy of the Lord during their time at your school.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Elli Ramirez is a M.A. in Philosophy of Religion student at Palm Beach Atlantic University in Florida. She is passionate about helping to equip and support rising generations to embrace God's truth and champion a biblical worldview. By working in the Publishing and Content Group at Summit Ministries she helps to create and acquire products and resources that equip students. Elli and her husband Victor live in Colorado Springs. When she is not working you can find her spending time with friends and family, going on road trips, reading a good book, hiking in the mountains, or camping.*

