

Creating a Positive Climate

Markers of a Positive Classroom Climate

Positive classrooms are marked by responsive teachers who manage behavior and attention challenges as well as the social and emotional needs of individual children.

Strategies for cultivating a positive climate include:

- + Using behavior-approving language more frequently than redirecting
- + Eliminating damaging forms of redirection
- + Giving specific praise
- + Maintaining a pleasant affect and tone when interacting with children

Why Children Need a Positive Classroom Climate

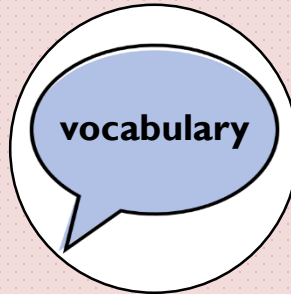
Highly positive interactions with teachers have lasting effects on children's academic achievement, social competence, and self-regulation. A positive classroom climate allows children to feel valued and safe, to interact more with teachers and peers, to take academic risks, and to more deeply engage in learning.



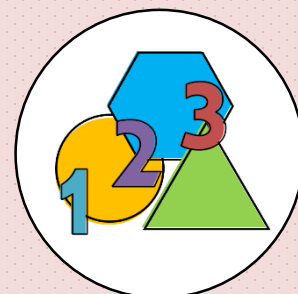
Children who experienced emotionally supportive pre-k classrooms showed much stronger gains in:



Emergent Writing Skills



Vocabulary



Early Math Skills

This was especially true for children who entered pre-k with skills lower than their peers!

In a previous Vanderbilt University research study, children who experienced preschool settings with

- more positive peer interactions and
- teachers who had a more positive emotional tone
- spent more time positively reinforcing behavior

...had **significantly greater social competence** and **fewer problem behaviors in first grade!** (Spivak & Farran, 2014).



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Maximize Behavior Approvals & Use Meaningful Praise

Keeping it positive: Behavior approvals **reinforce** a particular behavior. These messages can come in the form of verbal comments, facial expressions, or physical contact with the children (e.g., high fives, hugs, pats on the back).

THE CHILD HEARS:

“I like what you’re doing and I want you to keep doing it.”

Praise is most effective when it is **meaningful and concrete**. Praise should be specific to children’s actions, efforts, accomplishments.

When possible, focus on effort as opposed to ability – this encourages children to focus on the process, rather than achieving the “right answer”.

“I like the way you are **thinking**.”

“It was **so kind of you to work together to solve the problem** of having too many friends in the art center!”

“You must have stacked the blocks **very carefully** to make that tower so high!”

What **messages** are you sending about which actions and traits are **most valued** in your classroom?

“Wow, that puzzle was tricky but **you stuck with it!**”

Limit Redirections & Eliminate Threats and Sarcasm

THE CHILD HEARS:

“I want you to do something different from what you are doing.”

Behavior redirections are messages meant to **disapprove** of or **change** the child’s behavior. These can come in the form of verbal comments, facial expressions, or physical contact with children. Statements do not have to be angry or negative in tone to be a redirection.

Some **redirection is necessary for running a safe classroom**. The goal here is for children to receive **comparatively more positive, affirming messages** about their behavior.

“I said stay in your space, Jonathan.”

“Please put a bubble in your mouth, Jesse.”

“Trisha, are you making a good choice?”

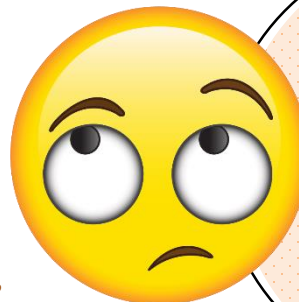
Examples of Threats and Sarcasm

“I just *love* repeating myself.”

“We are all going to sit here and wait until Mark is ready.”

“You must not want to go to the playground today, Keisha!”

“If you’re not bleeding or on fire, then I don’t want to hear from you.”



Threats and sarcasm are **disrespectful** and **potentially damaging** to children. These are **inappropriate** forms of redirection.

Creating a Positive Climate

Teacher Affect/Emotional Tone

The teacher's tone of voice and facial expressions **convey specific messages to children** about how teachers feel about them, the teacher's interest in activities, and the teacher's attitude toward other children in the classroom. However, sometimes it can be difficult to be aware of one's affect. **The following are indicators of teacher tone. Even the slightest awareness and effort to develop a more positive tone can make a difference!**

POSITIVE	Vibrant	Strong positive interaction – genuine excitement for teaching
	Pleasant	Shows positive interest – smiling, eye contact, eyebrows raised, leaning forward
	Neutral	Shows no facial expression – neutral affect, “resting face”
NEGATIVE	Negative	Negative affect — frowning, headshaking, negative gestures, eye rolling, sighing; may use mild threats
	Extreme Negative	Strongly negative affect – sarcasm, yelling, insults; physically dragging/pulling child

Five Ways to Improve Teacher Tone

- Show enthusiasm for activities.**
Children take their cues from the teacher. If the teacher is barely singing “5 Little Monkeys” with a flat affect, children might assume that the teacher is bored by the song and so it’s not worth their attention either.
- Match words with tone and facial expressions.**
If the teacher is praising a child, the teacher should be smiling and looking interested. In describing an exciting new material the teacher wants children to use during centers, the teacher’s expression must convey a high level of interest.
- Engage in dramatic play and story reading.**
Taking on a pretend role in a dramatic play scenario or using a character voice during a read-aloud can be an easy way to incorporate a vibrant tone.
- Develop a positive “listening” face.**
Children are encouraged to participate in discussions when the audience looks interested! Teachers can do a self-check during sharing time and consider eye contact, posture, and facial expressions. Do they say to a child, “**That is so interesting — please tell me more!**”?
- Model pleasantness and respect.**
Teachers who respond pleasantly to children’s requests for attention provide a powerful model for children as they interact with adults and each other. Teachers must remember to say “please” and “thank you” with children, just as they would with a peer or co-worker.