

(3/4/26) **This continuing education resource is from the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

### Featured

**(1) Are Teens experiencing a “grind” culture and is it affecting their Mental Health?**

**(2) Improving Students’ Relationships with Teachers**

**(3) Reengaging Disconnected Students**

And, as always, you will find

**(4) Links to more resources**

**This community of practice Practitioner is designed for a screen bigger than an Iphone.**

### **For discussion and interchange:**

**>Are Teens experiencing a “grind” culture and it it affecting their Mental Health?**

Schools and families are often blamed for pressure on students to succeed, compete, and achieve. Research has suggested that excessive pressure can lead to unrealistic expectations and strivings for "perfection" and that this can have a negative impact on interpersonal relationships (e.g., attachment, intimacy), mental health, and functioning at school.

From: *Teen "Grind" Culture and Mental Health*

“The researchers surveyed 1,545 U.S. teens in the fall of 2023, asking about six areas in their lives that are potential sources of negative pressure,....

The findings reveal that young people are indeed feeling squeezed; 81 percent of respondents struggled in one of six domains while more than half felt negative pressure in three or more. This provided a detailed picture of how teens experience so-called “grind culture,” which they described as “this sense of always needing to be productive, to be striving in all these different areas, even at the expense of your health,”....

Among the teenagers surveyed,

> 56 percent felt “game plan” pressure, or the feeling that they have to have their future path clear and set.

> 53 percent experienced achievement pressure, or the push to earn impressive grades or excel at sports.

Other pressures included the need to look their best (felt by 51 percent of those surveyed); pressure to be seen as having a robust social life (a concern for 44 percent); friendship pressure, or the need to be available to support friends (41 percent); and activism, or the push to stay informed and do good for their community (32 percent). ...

Social gaming, or online games that kids play with others, on the other hand, were described as a kind of release valve, distracting teens from the pressures they faced. And even though social media apps often amplify pressure, for some teens they can also reduce it....

Interestingly, 19 percent of the teens surveyed did not experience pressure in any of the domains identified in the study.... They tend to get more sleep, are more likely to spend time outdoors, and tend to have more open schedules. In their unscheduled time, they are less likely than other students to watch a lot of television, less likely to say they use the internet ‘almost constantly,’ and are only half as

likely to be in the top 25 percent of social media users. In general, the researchers found that more self-care is also associated with a lower likelihood of feeling burned out.... Self-care practices, supported by previous research, that can restore well-being and ward off burnout include getting seven or more hours of sleep a night, exercising an hour or more each day, spending time in nature, hanging out with a friend, and engaging in creative projects....”

For more on this, see our Center’s discussions:

>[\*About Pressures on Affluent Students Related to University Admission\*](#)

>[\*Understanding the Mental Health Challenges of First-Generation College Students\*](#)

And for more on youth culture, see our Quick Find on

>[\*Youth Culture & Subgroups\*](#)

### **For discussion and interchange:**

#### **>Improving Students’ Relationships with Teachers**

While the hope is that all students will develop an ongoing, collaborative, trusting relationship with their teachers and other school staff, this is especially important for students experiencing learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Schools are in a better position to facilitate learning when students ask for help and share feelings and thoughts – positive and negative. This is more likely to happen when teachers convey warmth, caring, openness, and authenticity. There’s a lot of talk about school climate, and these are matters that a school’s staff must consider in that context.

From: [\*Improving Students’ Relationships with Teachers to Provide Essential Supports for Learning\*](#)

“Improving students’ relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for both students’ academic and social development. ...

Positive teacher-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn (assuming that the content material of the class is engaging, age-appropriate and well matched to the student’s skills). ...

#### **What do good teacher-student relationships look like and why do these relationships matter?**

Teachers who foster positive relationships with their students create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meet students’ developmental, emotional and academic needs....

Positive teacher-student relationships contribute to school adjustment and academic and social performance....

Positive teacher-student relationships — evidenced by teachers’ reports of low conflict, a high degree of closeness and support, and little dependency — have been shown to support students’ adjustment to school, contribute to their social skills, promote academic performance and foster students’ resiliency in academic performance.

Teachers who experience close relationships with students reported that their students were less likely to avoid school, appeared more self-directed, more cooperative and more engaged in learning.

Teachers who use more learner-centered practices (i.e., practices that show sensitivity to individual differences among students, include students in the decision-making, and acknowledge students’ developmental, personal and relational needs) produced greater motivation in their students than those who used fewer of such practices. ...

#### **How to develop positive relationships with your students:**

- > Show your pleasure and enjoyment of students.
- > Interact with students in a responsive and respectful manner.
- > Offer students help (e.g., answering questions in timely manner, offering support that matches students’ needs) in achieving academic and social objectives.

- > Help students reflect on their thinking and learning skills.
- > Know and demonstrate knowledge about individual students' backgrounds, interests, emotional strengths and academic levels.
- > Avoid showing irritability or aggravation toward students.
- > Acknowledge the importance of peers in schools by encouraging students to be caring and respectful to one another. ...

**Do's:**

Make an effort to get to know and connect with each student in your classroom. Always call them by their names, find out information about their interests and strive to understand what they need to succeed in school

Make an effort to spend time individually with each student, especially those who are difficult or shy. This will help you create a more positive relationship with them

Be aware of the explicit and implicit messages you are giving to your students. Be careful to show your students that you want them to do well in school through both actions and words.

Create a positive climate in your classroom by focusing not only on improving your relationships with your students, but also on enhancing the relationships among your students

Be aware that you are modeling behavior for your students, whether intentional or not. ...

**How to cultivate positive relationships in your classroom**

- >Knowing a student's interests can help you create examples to match those interests....
- >Knowing a student's temperament can help you construct appropriate learning opportunities....
- >Notice the way that you give feedback to your students....

Are you giving students meaningful feedback that says you care about them and their learning...?

In your conversations, are you focusing on what your students have accomplished...?

Does your body language, facial expression and tone of voice show your students that you are interested in them as people? ...

**Make sure to provide social and emotional support and set high expectations for learning.**

Supportive teacher-student relationships are just as important to middle and high school students as they are to elementary students. Positive relationships encourage students' motivation and engagement in learning. Older students need to feel that their teachers respect their opinions and interests just as much as younger students do. Even in situations where adolescents do not appear to care about what teachers do or say, teacher actions and words do matter and may even have long term positive (or negative) consequences.

**How to improve relationships with difficult students**

Try to find a time or place when you can have positive discussion with the problem student.

Notice and mention the positive behaviors they exhibit...

Difficult students require more energy on your part. For example, you may need to spend time with them individually to get to know them better — to understand their interests as well as what motivates them. This will not only allow you to tailor your instruction to their interests and motivation, but the time spent will also allow them to develop trust in you. ...

**Self-System theory**

Self-System theory emphasizes the importance of students' motivation and by doing so, explains the importance of teacher-student relationships. Students come to the classroom with three basic psychological needs — competence, autonomy and relatedness — all of which can be met in a classroom through students' interactions with teachers and with the learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Classroom practices that foster the feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness are likely to produce the engagement and motivation required for academic learning and success.

- >Competence refers to a student's need to feel capable of academic work.
- >Autonomy suggests a feeling that he or she has some choice and ability to make decisions.
- >Relatedness implies that a student feels socially connected to teachers or peers.

Positive teacher-student relationships help students meet these needs. Teachers offer feedback to students to support their feelings of competence.  
Teachers who know their students' interests and preferences, and show regard and respect for these individual differences, bolster students' feelings of autonomy.  
Teachers who establish a personal and caring relationship and foster positive social interactions within their classrooms meet their students' needs for relatedness (or social connection to school). Taken together, effective teacher-student relationships confirm to students that teachers care for them and support their academic efforts....  
Teacher-student relationships contribute to students' resiliency. Often, we assume that hard-to-change factors such as class size, teacher experience or availability of instructional supplies are crucial for predicting student achievement. In fact, these factors are not as important as having positive relationships....  
From early childhood through adolescence, positive teacher-student relationships appear to complement the other important relationships in students' lives...."

For more on this, see our Center resources. For example:

- >[\*Improving Working Relationships Inside the Classroom\*](#)
- >[\*Learning Supports: Enabling Learning in the Classroom\*](#)
- >[\*Talking with Kids When Assisting with Learning\*](#)
- >[\*Talking with Kids\*](#)

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Just as folks often wonder what's going on in a youngster's head, there are times when kids wonder what adults are thinking and feeling. Times when youngsters are curious about that are among the best times for an adult to share thoughts and feelings with them. Such sharing is an opportunity to show youngsters that it's all right for people to share what's on their minds and can provide a good model for how to do it. Of course, such sharing must be done in a way that will help (not interfere) with relationship building.

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What did you learn  
in school today?



Teacher told the class patience is key — And, unfortunately, I'm pretty sure I'm the reason she said that.

## **For discussion and interchange:**

### **>Reengaging Disconnected Students**

**B**y this point in the school year, it is painfully evident that too many students are not doing well and are potential dropouts. Commonly heard laments from teachers:

>They could do it if they only wanted to!!!

>These are smart kids, but they just won't do the work!

Some of these students are passively disengaged and seem bored or burned out; others are actively disconnected – often to the point of acting out at school or not attending. Disengaged students reflect low and negative intrinsic motivation. When students disengage, staff become frustrated, and this can have a negative effect on their relationship with disconnected students. But, of course, since giving up on these students is no option, the focus needs to be on reengagement.

School staff need to take some time to talk about **WHY?** and **WHAT TO DO?** about reengaging disconnected students (and families).

**WHY?** Factors away from school can affect engagement, but at this time, the focus mainly is on some common school-related reasons. For example, it is a common finding that some students are

- not experiencing sufficient success in learning, so they give up;
- not having a good relationship with the teacher, so they react/resist;
- not connected with a supportive group of friends, so they feel isolated/alienated.  
(For many students there is nothing more important than feeling connected to peers at school.)

**WHAT TO DO?** Teachers and support staff need to work as a team to build a positive relationship with difficult students (e.g., identify and build on strengths, re-establish mutual respect). Support staff often have the opportunity to get to know these students and can take the lead in helping others see what is "special" in a student who hasn't yet made good connections with teachers and peers.

**For teachers and student/learning support staff, the following are a few specific practices to discuss about starting to turn things around.**

(1) **Individual Conferences:** Open up a **dialogue** and listen to what the student dislikes and likes about school and work toward establishing a **working relationship**.

Schools need to assist teachers by facilitating time for them to conference individually with each student who has been having problems. In some cases, the student's parents need to be included. Student support staff can play a role in arranging such conferences and then covering the teacher's class while the teacher holds the conferences.

The conferences can cover

- (a) why there has been a problem (without getting into a "blame-game"),
- (b) exploring new ways the student thinks could make things better for all concerned,
- (c) arriving at some mutual agreements (not one-way "contracts").

(2) **Opportunities for Immediate Changes of Image:** For students who have acquired a negative reputation, it is critical to develop some immediate opportunities for them to take on some attractive, positive roles (e.g., special monitor, photographer for the school newspaper, part of the design group for the school's website).

- (3) ***Accounting for Individual Differences in Both Motivation and Capabilities***: Engagement is about motivation and especially intrinsic motivation. This involves attention to a student's feelings of self-determination, competence, and relatedness to significant others. A focus on minimizing threats to such feelings can play a significant role in reengagement as can maximizing such feelings. Accommodations may be needed with respect to presentation of material, workload and nature of feedback, and more.
- (4) ***Use Natural Opportunities to Enhance a Student's Positive Connections with Peers***: Some students need just a bit more help in connecting with other students in a positive way. Teachers working with student and learning support staff can capitalize on a range of opportunities both inside the classroom, schoolwide, and in the neighborhood to address these problems. Consider how the school is promoting social and emotional development and plan ways to enhance the focus on such matters in class, during breaks, before and after school, during lunch, at student activities. Use volunteers, aids, and/or other students to provide additional supports. Such supports can provide opportunities to enhance peer relationships as well as learning. Think about such activities as cooperative learning and team play, groups of students engaged in project learning, students involved in service learning in the community and in other positive activities when not in school.
- (5) ***Keep Making Them Feel Cared About and Positively Special***: Teachers and support staff need to keep making focused efforts to bond with these students and help them reengage in positive activities and learning. Again, use volunteers, aids, and/or other students can enable steps in providing extra support.

Think about embedding concerns about engagement and reengagement into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports. See

>***Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions***

>Chapter 5. "Classroom Behavior Management: It's Not Just About Controlling Kids; It's About Engaging and Re-engaging Them in Learning" – In ***Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide***

>***Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School***

>***Motivation, engagement, re-engagement***

### >**Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

>>**Planning for Protests at K-12 Schools**

>>**Friends Can Help to Aim High: Peer Influence and Selection Effects on Academic Ambitions and Achievement**

>>**Beyond traditional models: A qualitative study of barriers and facilitators to rural teen mental health**

>>**How Can School Governance Be a Model for Democracy? (Podcast)**

>>**Thinking Clearly About the Goals of Education (podcast)**

>>**Biting, kicking, wandering the classroom: Teachers say there's a rise in misbehavior even among the littlest kids**

>>**Lawsuits Test New Legal Theories About What Causes Social Media Addiction**

>>**How Districts Scale Instructional Improvement That Lasts**

>>**Leveraging Positive Youth Development to Build and Sustain a Young Adult Workforce**

### A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars and Podcasts, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

- 3/5 Building belonging in school
- 3/9 Understanding childhood grief and loss
- 3/17 Too many initiatives, not enough alignment
- 3/18 Strengths based resilience
- 3/24 Student voice and advocacy
- 3/31 Improving relationships with staff and students
- 4/15 Supporting Grief-Sensitive Classrooms

*How Learning Happens* (Edutopia's series of videos explores guiding all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become engaged learners).  
*Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth* (Webinar recording)

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### To Listserv Participants

- Please share this resource with others. (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)
- Let us know what's going on to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 140,000 on our listserv.)

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

*Looking for information?* (We usually can help.)

*Have a suggestion for improving our efforts?* (We welcome your feedback.)

**We look forward to hearing from you!** Contact: [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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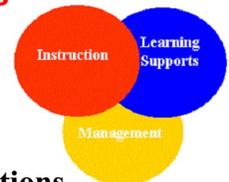
### National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

**Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.**

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info to [ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:ltaylor@ucla.edu)



**THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER\***

***THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND  
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!***

**Send resources ideas, requests, comments,  
and experiences for sharing  
[Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

\*Who Are We? Our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.