

Berkshire District Attorney's Office

Bullying Prevention and Social and Emotional Learning Initiative

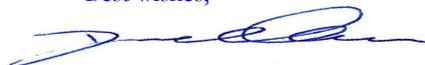
Educator Newsletter

Fall 2015

Dear Educator:

This newsletter is intended to support your efforts in creating a positive school climate by providing you with information on prevention programs and activities that are current and relevant to students' own life experiences. We look to research and evidence-based approaches to promote school climate change including mentorship, positive role models, supportive peer groups, and interactive teaching methods. We hope you find the information useful and that the research, lesson plans and resources support your efforts to sustain a welcoming and creative learning environment.

Best wishes,



David F. Capeless

Why Self – Compassion Trumps Self—Esteem

Researchers are discovering that self-compassion is even healthier than self-esteem. A growing number of studies show that increasing self-esteem is counterproductive and actually breeds negative outcomes such as narcissism. People with high self-esteem are more likely to compare themselves to others to feel better about themselves.

For many years we have been taught to believe we “just need to boost their self-esteem” to help children, and we are now learning that self-esteem programs do not build their competence. In many cases high self-esteem is associated with exaggerated or inaccurate self-concepts, making self-improvement difficult. Psychologists have found that kids who behave like bullies tend to have high self-esteem, but are worried that their failures or shortcomings will be exposed. Children who bully do so to take the attention away from aspects of themselves about which they are ashamed.

Self-compassion allows a person to have kindness towards their own difficulties and therefore have positive effects on their well-being: showing less anxiety,

depression, rumination and perfectionism. Self-compassion also motivates personal growth while having an accurate view of oneself. Psychologist [Kristin Neff](#) of the University of Texas at Austin finds that self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation of comparison to others and therefore has few negative characteristics often associated with self-esteem.

Dr. Kristen Neff: 3 Elements of Self-Compassion

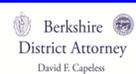


In academic environments self-compassion allows students to be more adaptive to academic failures, and see joy in learning rather than promoting self-worth through achievement. The three components of self-compassion – self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness – can easily be fostered

through exercise in a classroom. Visit the [National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children \(TLC\)](#) for some examples of activities to promote self-compassion within your classroom.

Dr. Neff and fellow researcher Christopher Germer, PhD, developed the [Center for Mindful Self-Compassion](#) offering resources and opportunities for training for Mindful Self-Compassion. One such intensive training will be at [Kripalu in Stockbridge, MA, October 11-16](#).

A moment of self-compassion
can change your entire day.
A string of such moments can
change the course of your life.
—Christopher K. Germer



7 North Street
PO Box 1969
Pittsfield, MA 01202
Phone: 413-443-5951
Fax: 413-499-6349

www.mass.gov/berkshireda

Newsletter published by
Community Outreach & Education staff

Kim Blair, Editor
Contributors:
Carol Mulcahy
Cheryl Penna

Inside this issue:

Special Insert:

Building a Positive School Climate.....2 & 3
Why Address LGBT Issues with Students...4
Character Day Information.....4
Share My Lesson 4

Building a Positive School Climate

A positive school climate is associated with academic achievement, effective risk prevention efforts and positive youth development. Many components of a positive school climate are the same for building a child's resilience: caring relationships and positive role models. These outside supports allow a child's inner strengths, self-control, thinking skills, confidence, positive outlook, and responsibility to grow. Building resilience has important benefits in life, which include reducing the chances of being bullied or being able to cope with the experience of being bullied. Providing opportunities for students to develop **empathy, compassion and gratitude**, to name a few, nourishes students' character and ability to live successfully.

How is Empathy Being Developed in Schools?

1. **Support for teachers:** Regular staff meetings to create a more supportive environment.
2. **Validation and trust:** Making sure students have a voice and that all voices are heard.
3. **Power of teamwork:** Assign students to teams; they learn to work together and create close bonds.
4. **Grade on character:** A question like, "What makes a good friend?" can be broken down into learning outcomes with performance targets.
5. **Practice emotional literacy:** Learning what feelings are and how to read them on people are important tools in life.
6. **Befriend "others":** Help students initiate relationships with students who are different, have a disability or are new.
7. **Students as "changemakers":** Students are guided to identify school problems and come up with possible solutions.
8. **Service learning:** Grade-wide service learning projects.

Resources:



Cultivate Compassion

The science of compassion is a growing field of academic research. While this scientific research is in its infancy, early findings show us that being compassionate can improve health, well-being and relationships. Compassion makes us feel good, activating pleasure circuits in the brain, and it can be increased through exercise and practice. Adults and children alike can work on building compassion with some of these tips:

1. **Look for common ties:** Seeing oneself as similar to others increases feelings of compassion.
2. **Calm our worries:** When we let our mind be fearful from seeing another's pain, we are less able to show compassion.
3. **Encourage cooperation over competition:** Choosing our words carefully when instructing students to play a community game Vs. some other competitive name encourages better cooperation.
4. **Don't allow for blame:** When we blame others for their misfortune, we feel less concern for them.
5. **Curb inequality:** When people feel status over others they feel less compassion.
6. **Model kindness:** It's contagious!

Resources:



Building a Positive School Climate

Practicing Gratitude

Practicing gratitude increases students' positive emotions and optimism, decreases their negative emotions and physical symptoms, and makes them feel more connected and satisfied with school and with life in general. Our brains need to feel gratitude in order for us to want to be at work, and the same goes for students.

In order to fully realize her passion to teach to the totally engaged, or 'awake' learner, Dr. Kerry Howells has developed a unique approach over the past two decades where traditional teaching and learning practices are enhanced by greater attention to practices of gratitude. Read more about her approach at www.gratefulness.org/readings/howells_education1.htm or through her book, *Gratitude in Education: A Radical View*. Also watch her TEDx Talk: [How thanking awakens our thinking](#).

Jeffrey Froh is a pioneering researcher of gratitude in youth. He and his colleagues have developed and tested a gratitude curriculum for elementary schools, which can be found here: http://people.hofstra.edu/jeffrey_j_froh/Gratitude%20Lesson%20Plans_Final_10.26.10.pdf

Building Students Resilience to Steer Through Adversity

Developmental psychologist, Edith H. Grotberg, Ph. D., writes in her publication, [A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit](#), that with resilience, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs. Grotberg states that children sometimes need outside help in times of trouble, but not always. Children do need sources of support in their lives - trusting relationships, structure and rules, role models - however, many are not given encouragement to be autonomous in the area of problem solving.

Autonomy, the ability to act independently and have control over ones own environment, comes from the sense that one has accomplished something successfully. This belief of self-efficacy - confidence in one's behavior and ability to overcome obstacles - will influence how children think and feel about themselves. If children are allowed to navigate some experiences on their own, this can help them develop a strong self-efficacy belief. Children will also learn that not every conflict is resolved in their favor, and dealing with this disappointment can be seen as an opportunity to set new goals and move forward. Fostering this development is so important in helping children cope and overcome stressors such as conflict and bullying.

While conflict may be an inevitable part of group dynamics, bullying is not, and each requires a different response. When methods for conflict resolution are used as bullying intervention strategies, it can lead to damage or even dangerous situations for the target. Reminding ourselves of the different characteristics between the two can help.

NORMAL CONFLICT	BULLYING
Equal Power	Imbalance of Power
Happens Occasionally	Happens Repeatedly
Not Purposeful	Purposeful
Equal Emotional Investment	Strong Emotional Reaction of Target
Not Power Seeking	Seeking Power & Control
Remorse	No Remorse-Blames Target
Effort to Solve Problem	No Effort to Solve Problem

Why Address LGBT Issues with Students

Homophobia is present in many schools and communities, sometimes presenting itself in our earliest learners. Behaviors begin to appear, such as name-calling and isolation, and are often a result of misinformation and negative stereotypes. Early introduction of the topic helps young people understand bias and prejudice and learn to use respectful language.

Failing to address inclusion and acceptance in our environment creates invisibility and difficulty for students who are gendervariant, questioning or identify as gay or lesbian. It also hurts all students as they try to learn in an atmosphere of fear and tension, afraid to explore their own lives because of worry about disapproval and rejection. Creating inclusive curriculum and instilling a classroom of respect improves the educational experience of all students.

There are a number of places to find guidance on including LGBT issues into your lessons. The [Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's](#) website



provides lessons and ideas for download and allows you to connect with professional development opportunities.

[Groundspark's Respect for All Project](#) facilitates the development of inclusive, bias-free schools and communities by providing media resources, support and training to youth, educators and service providers.



Teaching guides [It's Elementary](#) and [That's a Family](#) are also available through our



Resource Library. Call the District Attorney's Office to take one out on loan.

Local resources are available when LGBT students come to you for help if they feel unsafe. The Elizabeth Freeman Center launched its LGBTQ Access Project to increase safety and access to services for LGBTQ victims of domestic and sexual violence in Berkshire County.



24 hour hotline 1-866-401-2425

September 18, 2015, is the 2nd annual Character Day, which launched last year. Two new films will premiere this year along with discussion materials for all ages. Signing up takes 2 minutes! www.letitripple.org/character_day

Share My Lesson Offers Valuable Tools

[Share My Lesson](#) is a place where educators can come together to create and share their very best teaching resources. Developed by the American Federation of Teachers and TES Connect, the largest network of teachers worldwide, this FREE platform allows access to high-

quality teaching resources. In this online community you are encouraged to share your lessons and be inspired by others.

There are over 300,000 teaching resources to choose from by topic and grade level and you can look for the

Common Core State Standards logo to find those that are aligned to the K-12 standards.

Sign up is free on their website for access to these resources. Follow them on [Facebook](#) to receive updates when they add to their site.



Additional Online Resources

www.common sense media.org—Digital literacy and citizenship resources for educators as well as many parent resources.

www.ConnectSafely.org—Social media safety tips for teens and parents, the latest teen tech news and many other resources.

www.cybertipline.com—(1-800-THE-LOST)—Resource to report cybercrimes.

www.facinghistory.org—Civic responsibility, tolerance, and social action resources for educators.



www.net smartz.org—The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) Internet Safety resource and education program targeting children K—12, parents and educators.

www.pacerkidsagainstbullying.org—Multiple classroom toolkits for all grade levels.

www.stopbullying.gov—Official US Government website devoted to bullying prevention.

www.stopbullyingnow.com—Author and educator Stan Davis' website to help adults prevent bullying.

The District Attorney's **Community Outreach and Education Program** works in partnership with schools, offering educational and enrichment programs which address the pressing social, legal, safety, and health issues facing schools, students and families.

For information on student, school staff and parent presentations call the District Attorney's Office at 413-443-5951.