

5. Caring School Climate

Every place has a climate, even a classroom

The way young people feel about going to school and how well they learn is directly tied to what kind of “climate” their school has. If a school feels “warm” in a caring way, it’s easier for students to learn. But if safety at school is a problem or relationships between students and teachers are tense, it’s more difficult for everyone to focus on learning. A healthy climate enables students, teachers, staff, and parents to all take pride in their school. Caring School Climate is Asset 5 of Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets, the qualities, experiences, and relationships that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Here are the facts

Research shows that young people who go to school where the environment feels caring and encouraging get better grades, have healthier relationships, get into less trouble, and are interested in and better able to reach their dreams. Only 29 percent of young people say their school provides a caring, encouraging environment, according to Search Institute surveys. Maybe we can’t stop the rain, lower the humidity, or make it snow, but we do have the power to change the climate at our schools.

Tips for building this asset

Young people come in contact with a lot of different adults during the day. One person’s attitude—good or bad—can significantly impact how students feel about themselves and interact with others at school. For young people, the day may start with a greeting from the bus driver. When school secretaries, counselors, teachers, coaches, custodians, parent volunteers, and others take time to relate to young people in a positive, caring, and supportive way, school is a great place to be.

Also try this

In your home and family: Talk with your child about the “feel” of his or her school. Advocate through the PTA or school leadership for caring relationships, as well as high academic expectations. Both are important!

In your neighborhood and community: Volunteer at your local school. If students or faculty express negative or ambivalent mindsets, ask them why. Do your part to improve the climate by keeping a positive, sunny attitude.

In your school or youth program: On the board or on a large piece of paper, sketch a map of your school. Have students or participants mark the places where the climate feels warm and caring. Brainstorm ways to move a “warm front” into “cold” places.