

SET YOUR DEFAULT TO ...

KINDNESS
FOR HARMONIOUS
RELATIONSHIPS AT SCHOOL

CONTEXT

The Anti-Bullying and Violence Awareness Week at School was created in 2012 as part of the Government Strategy Against Bullying and Violence in the Schools. It takes place each year at the beginning of October and coincides with the International Day of Non-Violence, decreed by the United Nations for October 2.

The theme selected for the 2017 edition is *Kindness is the key to harmonious interpersonal relationships at school*. The Week will have its official launch on October 2, 2017.

Link with the Policy on Educational Success: Mission: To socialize, to prepare students to live together in harmony: “In a pluralistic society such as ours, schools must act as agents of social cohesion by fostering a feeling of belonging to the community and teaching students how to live together. This means that they must transmit the heritage of shared knowledge, promote the fundamental values of democracy and prepare young people to become responsible citizens. They must likewise prevent exclusion, which jeopardizes the future of too many young people.” (25)

Link with the Policy on Educational Success: Challenge 5, An inclusive, healthy, safe, stimulating and creative environment, Orientation 5.1, “Offer a welcoming, safe and caring living environment that fosters discussion, communication and enriching personal and social relationships.” (57)¹

UNDERSTANDING THE THEME

What does kindness mean?

- It is a desire to strive for the good and happiness of others.
- It means viewing others in a caring, understanding and non-judgmental manner, wanting them to feel well and being vigilant on their behalf. (Catherine Gueguen, [Translation])
- It is being generous toward others, attentive to their needs, wanting what is good for them and clearly and consistently demonstrating that we feel this way. (Claire Beaumont, [Translation])

In the context of this year’s theme, kindness refers to **small, everyday actions that are imbued with good will and kindness and are a part of taking care of ourselves, others and our environment.**

Words associated with kindness: friendliness, respect, empathy, openness, patience, attending to, supporting, welcoming, helping, accompanying, soothing, preventing, etc.

1. Québec, Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, *Policy on Educational Success* (Québec, 2017) 25 and 57.
http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PSG/politiques_orientations/politique_reussite_educative_10juillet_A_1.pdf

Kindness is a crucial component of healthy relationships in school. The *Chaire de recherche sur la sécurité et la violence en milieu éducatif* recommends working to promote a safe, positive and caring school environment with a view to preventing violence and bullying. Other researchers have demonstrated a strong correlation between a positive environment and the quality of learning, academic success and the level of victimization at school (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale - Direction générale de l'enseignement scolaire/Observatoire International de la Violence à l'École, Le "climat scolaire" : définition, effets et conditions d'amélioration, E. Debarbieux et al., (Paris, 2012) <http://www.cafepedagogique.net/lexpresso/Documents/docsjoints/climat-scolaire2012.pdf>).

THE WEEK'S OBJECTIVES

- To promote kind behaviour and harmonious interpersonal relationships.
- To enable adults and students to express themselves in a constructive and kind manner, and to act as models of harmonious interpersonal relationships at school.

Anti-Bullying and Violence Awareness Week at School is an opportunity to explore the theme *Kindness is the key to harmonious interpersonal relationships at school* and to act in such a way that educational activities throughout the year stem directly from it. If they are to have positive effects, these activities must respect, among other things, certain criteria of effectiveness that can be viewed by clicking on the following link: [Documentations Semaines thématiques 2015 et 2016](#).

These activities must be part of a comprehensive, systemic process designed to help schools reflect on and take action against violence, promote healthy and caring relationships, and create a safe and positive school climate. This process, proposed by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, will allow the school team to think collectively about its values and its commitment to and promotion of interventions to foster harmonious interpersonal relationships in school.

WHAT'S IT LIKE AT SCHOOL

IDEAS FOR EXPLORING THE THEME WITH STAFF

- Look at the theme of kindness and harmonious interpersonal relationships at school:
 - with the entire school staff
 - during a cycle team meeting
 - in a working committee, particularly the one dealing with the prevention of bullying and violence
- Use various mobilization strategies, such as:
 - presenting the staff with the theme, the effectiveness criteria and the links to the Policy on Educational Success
 - presenting and analyzing the data derived from your school's profile with respect to the classroom climate
 - discussing the perception of the classroom climate in your school and its repercussions on the staff and students
 - defining various actions that could have a positive impact on the quality of interpersonal relationships for all parties

Examples of activities to start reflection with the school staff

- Look at different definitions of kindness in interpersonal relationships.
- Use examples from daily life to show kindness in relationships at school, between adults and with the students.
- Find, in a magazine or on the Internet, an image that illustrates kindness in relationships and explain the reasons for selecting the image in question.
- Commit to acting kindly toward a colleague in the course of the day.

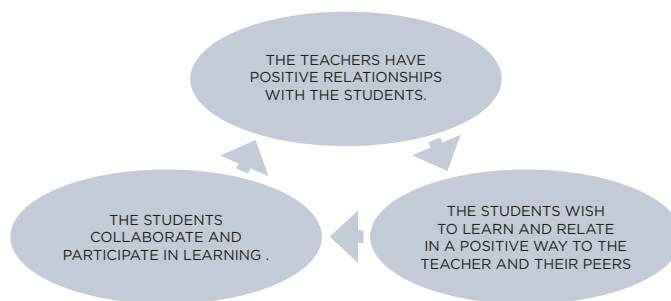
Examples of action to mobilize all stakeholders

- Make connections between the theme and various projects throughout the year.
- Encourage the sharing of achievements.
- Work in conjunction with resource people (researchers, resource people from the school board or community, etc.).
- Use a variety of tools to promote the Week (information bulletins, intercom messages, emails).
- Define kindness in relationships as a key value and make relevant links to the values represented by the school's educational project.

The importance of serving as a model

Link with the Policy on Educational Success: “Educators’ personal and relational skills have an impact on children’s overall development.” (17)

The reciprocal influence of positive relationships in the classroom (PREVNet)



Adults who are in daily contact with students play a major role in modelling behaviour. Children begin learning by imitating others and by generally observing the people around them. In complex work situations or delicate professional circumstances, adults may find it difficult to always be consistent models. As a result, they may overlook, downplay or simply forget about the possible effects of the attitudes they convey in their interactions with both colleagues and students. However, learning about the use of positive strategies for self-expression and socialization is largely influenced by interactions that students see or participate in. Therefore, it is important that adults consider the quality of their interpersonal relationships if they want to create a healthy climate in the school environment.

How to be a model

- By behaving in a civil manner: saying thank you, excusing oneself, waiting one's turn, etc.
- By showing empathy: listening, understanding, helping, etc.
- By taking time to, for example, change an activity to facilitate group discussion, talk to a student after a break, etc.

Taking care of myself

Before we can take care of others, we have to be able to take care of ourselves. Our own “empathy glass” must be full if we want to be in a position to help others.

Examples of questions to ask:

- How am I doing today? Am I inclined to be pleasant in my dealings with others? Or am I in a situation that makes it difficult for me to be kind to other people?

If this is the case, I need to think about changing my mood or attitude.

Taking care of others

Students as well as adults can take care of other people and they can do so in a variety of ways, depending on the person involved, his or her age and how comfortable or competent they feel acting in a given situation.

Example of an activity that provides the opportunity to take care of others:

- Participate in a draw and pick the name of a person you are going to take care of during the Week. Get to know the person a little, speak kindly to him or her and make some small, thoughtful gestures.

IDEAS FOR APPROACHING THE THEME WITH SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

For secondary school students, the theme *Kindness is the key to harmonious interpersonal relationships at school* can be illustrated using the expression **Set your default to...** sympathetic, welcoming, kind, inclusive, open, pleasant, collaborative, generous, attentive, etc.

Examples of activities

- At the start of class, ask a student to complete a sentence beginning with the words “Set your default to...” using an adjective that expresses a positive and kind attitude. At the end of the period, ask the students to say who succeeded and what they did.
- Ask the students’ committee to choose an adjective that expresses a positive and kind attitude and have the students use it describe the Week (e.g. Set your default to... helping others, listening, sharing).
- During a class discussion or when writing in a journal:
 - Ask the students to describe the positive effects of kind behaviour on themselves and others.
 - Ask the students to say how they look after themselves and others.
 - Ask them to say who or what elicits kind behaviour from them, and how this happens.
 - Ask them to say which kind words or actions give them the most pleasure, and where they come from.
- Write a letter promising oneself to perform at least one kind act each day. Read the letter at the end of each step and make observations or any needed adjustments.