

# AUTISM NEWSLETTER

## EXCERPTS FROM “BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS: WHAT BRAIN SCIENCE SAYS”

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Students' brains are hard at work every moment of the day, learning skills and connecting new information with old. Those same brains are also constantly processing information when it comes to their relationship with you, their teacher.

Positive student relationships are fundamental to success. When students feel supported, they're more likely to engage in learning and have better academic outcomes. Plus, when students have positive interactions with teachers, they have fewer behavioral problems. These relationships are more important — and more challenging — than ever in uncertain times, like during the coronavirus pandemic.

### 1. Positive relationships build motivation.

**The brain science:** Positive relationships are built on positive interactions. Each of these interactions has a powerful effect on the brain. When you authentically praise a student or have a positive interaction, the student's brain releases dopamine. This creates a cycle. You provide positive feedback. The student's brain releases dopamine. The student feels good and is motivated to feel that way again. You give more praise — sparking the release of more dopamine. And the cycle starts all over again.

**How to do it:** To build a positive relationship, you need to have more positive interactions than negative ones. More specifically, researchers recommend having five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. Positive interactions could include greeting students by name at the start of class, giving praise for working hard, or asking about a student's pet.

### 2. Positive relationships create safe spaces for learning.

**The brain science:** Social activities like talking and laughing cause the body to release the hormone oxytocin. This helps us to bond with others. Those bonds create a feeling that's often called “psychological safety.” When students feel psychologically safe, they're more likely to participate in class discussions, ask questions, try to do an assignment even when it's hard, or talk in a tone of voice that's appropriate for the situation.

**How to do it:** You can build psychological safety for students by praising the effort rather than the outcome. It's also helpful to reassure students that certain skills are really difficult. You can let them know it's OK if they answer incorrectly or fail sometimes. Modeling how you respond to your own failures can be a powerful lesson as well.

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### 3. Positive relationships build new pathways for learning.

**The brain science:** What you've heard is true: Tapping into students' background knowledge will help them learn new information by activating neural pathways in their brains. Developing a new neural pathway is like forging a new trail in the forest. It takes time, work, and a lot of repetition to develop the new trail. And it makes sense to start where another trail already exists.

**How to do it:** Ask your students about their hobbies and interests so that you can reference their background knowledge when needed. It can help you individualize instruction by connecting that knowledge to the new information you're teaching.

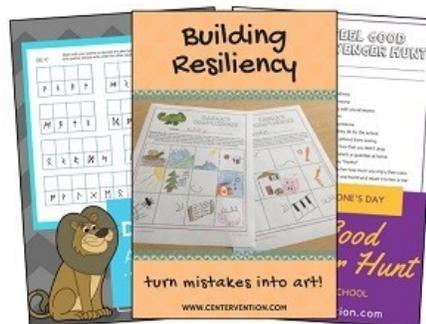
### 4. Positive relationships improve student behavior.

**The brain science:** Research supports the idea that early relationships and interactions, including those with teachers, play a central role in shaping children's behavior and social skills. Whether you know it or not, your students are likely mirroring your behaviors. Your words and actions matter.

**How to do it:** Start by thinking through what behaviors and social skills you're modeling for your students. For example, you likely already model social skills like turn-taking, cooperation, and empathy on a daily basis. You can take it a step further and explain the behaviors you're modeling. The next time you're feeling frustrated, tell your students how you're feeling. Talk about how you deal with frustration, such as taking a few deep breaths.

To read the entire article click <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/empathy/brain-science-says-4-reasons-to-build-positive-relationships-with-students>

## Social - Emotional Skills Activities Free Resources from Centervention.com



## VISUAL DURATION MAPS

A visual duration map is designed to visually represent passage of time or steps completed, followed by immediate reinforcement.

A visual duration map is useful for:

- Increasing tolerance for waiting
- Reinforcing specific responses
- Enhancing longer periods of participation
- Increasing predictability of expectations

Steps for use:

- Present the visual duration map and identify the task or activity the student will work to earn.
- Reinforce the student and fill in the circle when the student is doing expected behavior. Verbally tell the student specifically why he/she is being reinforced (the circle is being colored in). Example: (1) You did a great job staying in your seat during math, go ahead and fill in a circle! (2) Wow you got your workbook out right away. I am going to give you a circle - only 2 left until we play legos!
- When all of the circles are colored in, the student should immediately receive the task or activity he/she has earned.

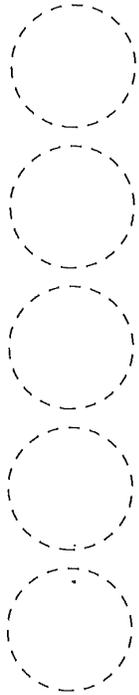
Tips:

- The student may be rewarded for any positive/desired behavior:
- Displaying expected behaviors such as sitting appropriately, raising their hand, using a quiet voice, having a quiet body, etc.
- Completing work
- Using kind words
- Following directions (even a simple direction like come here, walk with me)
- Trying hard
- The length of time, moving along the map, is variable. Staff can decide how long the student is able to tolerate the activity.
- If the student is working well and tolerating the activity, the time between reinforcement (coloring in the circles) can be extended.
- If the student is having difficulty, the time can be shortened in order to help the student be successful.

The student engaged in challenging behavior before earning their reward. Now what?

- Continue to use the duration map to redirect the student's behavior
- Consider giving simple instructions such as sit up, walk to your seat, close your notebook. This will tell the student positive behaviors they SHOULD do that can earn circles toward their reward, rather than continuing the challenging behavior they are currently engaged in.
- Show them the map as a visual reminder of what they are working for.

I'm Working For...



I'm Working For...

