

Modeling Love, Kindness and Forgiveness

[Love](#) is more than an emotion. As a character strength, love is the ability to create close, caring relationships with others. “Where kindness can be a behavioral pattern applied in any relationship, love as a character strength really refers to the way you approach your closest and warmest relationships” (VIA, n.d., pp.1) A study of sixteen educators found common ways that teachers and students commonly express love, kindness, and forgiveness(Haslip et al., 2019). Teachers showed love and kindness to children through “hugging, patting, high fives, and hand-holding” (Haslip et al., 2019, p. 537). Teachers expressed love through smiling, listening, providing activities and verbal affirmations. Teachers demonstrated forgiveness by letting go, giving children another chance, speaking positively, being understanding of circumstances, focusing on the positive, and not retaliating. Teacher kindness was often expressed either to a particular child or to the whole group(Haslip et al., 2019). As educators, recognizing the way we show love, kindness, and forgiveness to our students can help us be more intentional about how we support our students’ and our personal wellbeing. It can help us identify these strengths in ourselves and practice calling upon them when a negative situation arises.

This study also found that children often had to forgive peers and teachers for accidental and intentional incidents. The children forgave by accepting apologies and then “accepting the situation and moving on” (Haslip et al., 2019, p. 540). They also found that “child love and

teacher love closely mirrored one another” (Haslip et al., 2019, p. 542). As such, one way we can develop these strengths in our students is by explicitly modeling and teaching them.

Grade Level: All

Materials: None

Duration: Varies

Implementation: Possible suggestions include:

1. Greet students by name when entering the room and with a high-five, handshake or hug as appropriate.
 2. Verbally express forgiveness and understanding to students when they make mistakes.
 3. Use a positive and warm tone of voice in the classroom and smile often.
 4. Express love and compassion to individuals or groups of students through verbal praise and affirmations.
 5. Encourage students to use warm, kind language with their peers in and out of the classroom.
 6. Provide opportunities for students to show kindness to each other in the classroom.
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Does it work?

In the study mentioned above, it was found that when teachers model loving behaviors with their students, teacher-student relationships improve which is a key component of school wellbeing(Haslip et al., 2019). Demonstrating love, kindness and forgiveness in the classroom assists students in developing empathy and other prosocial behaviors, such as forgiveness (Haslip et al., 2019). A focus group study with 17 adolescents analyzed teacher behaviors that can either promote or detract from student wellbeing and positive student-teacher relationships(Krane et al., 2016). This study found that although student-teacher relationships are a mutual responsibility, students feel more comfortable and safe with teachers who demonstrate a kind demeanor, who are fair, respectful and trustworthy, and who handle conflict in a constructive way(Krane et al., 2016). Teachers can demonstrate kindness and positivity by simply smiling and welcoming

students to class. One student shared “I think it is important that the teacher smiles when he enters the classroom. He must greet the students and ask us how we are doing, and then the class can begin” (Krane et al., 2016, p.383). Many of the students shared that this helped them feel more positive and in a “better mood” at school(Krane et al., 2016, p.383).

An additional study of 675 high school students found that students who feel that their teachers care about them also have higher self-esteem, school engagement and a general sense of wellbeing (Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). In order to measure teacher caring, students completed an eight-item Caring Questionnaire which had students rate their homeroom teachers on how often they expressed empathy, care, concern and respect towards students. The results of this survey were then matched with additional surveys assessing students wellbeing, self-esteem and life satisfaction. The level of reported teacher caring was found to be significantly associated with self-esteem and wellbeing regardless of age or gender of the participants in the study(Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020). The researchers also shared that caring behavior is likely a precursor to quality student-teacher relationships(Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim, 2020).

References:

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WELLBEING
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*An Educator's Practical Guide to Improving
Wellbeing*

SYDNI FAWSON, MEGAN BATES AND
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