

Peer Praise Notes

A sense of peer acceptance is a key component of developing positive peer relationships in children and adolescents (Nelson et al., 2008). Youth who feel accepted by their peers also exhibit more prosocial behaviors and interactions (Nelson et al., 2008). In a study of nearly 14,000 middle school students, Buchanan and Brown (2008) discovered that having a high level of peer support improves students' psychological wellbeing, especially boosting self-esteem and happiness. One way to increase a sense of peer acceptance and support within the school environment is through a peer praise note intervention. For this activity, teachers or school leaders will instruct students to write short, positive notes to their peers. This peer praise activity has been shown to improve peer relationships and trust, increase prosocial behaviors among socially withdrawn students, and boost self-confidence (Nelson et al., 2008).

Grade Level: All

Materials: Paper, writing utensil, envelopes

Duration: 3-5 minutes daily

Implementation: 1. Introduce the activity and model an effective praise note.
2. Instruct students to spend a few minutes writing a positive note to one of their peers (if you are concerned some students may be left out, assign students to specific peers)
3. Peer praise notes can be anonymous if preferred.
4. Collect the notes, review them for appropriate content, and redistribute them to the students they were intended for.
5. Repeat this activity a few times weekly, or as desired, and invite students to write to a different peer each time.
6. You could also provide students envelopes to collect the notes they receive.

Does it work?

The peer praise note activity was first studied by Nelson and colleagues (2008), with a few small classes of adolescent students. Three students in particular were observed for changes in their socially withdrawn behavior, as well as their involvement with the class and their peers. Each day students were instructed to write a note of praise to a fellow student, while being encouraged to write about a different student in the class each time. The notes were briefly reviewed for content and then given to each student prior to peer activity time each day. This exercise continued for three weeks. Each of the three socially withdrawn students observed in this study demonstrated significant increases in prosocial behavior and positive interactions with their peers both during and following the peer praise note intervention. The teacher reported that the activity appeared to improve students self-confidence and gave all students in the class a safe and comfortable way to share their thoughts and feelings about

their peers (Nelson et al., 2008, p.11).

In an alternate version of the peer-praise note (PPN) intervention, elementary school students were assigned to serve as “peer-praisers” on the playground during recess times at a suburban, Title I elementary school in the Western US (Teerlink et al., 2017). These peer-praisers were assigned to hand out notes, called “puma paws” for the school mascot, to students who exhibited behavior that was responsible, respectful, and safe during recess (Teerlink et al., 2017, p.117). Students who received peer praise notes were then publicly recognized by their classroom teachers and school administrators throughout the week and had the opportunity to be entered into a school-wide drawing for prizes. Researchers then measured the impact of this intervention of student behavior as well as students’ approval and acceptance of the activity. It was found that during the implementation of the PPN intervention, office disciplinary referrals decreased, particularly during recess time. Student surveys following the intervention indicated that students enjoyed the activity and that it helped improve peer relationships (Teerlink et al., 2017).

References:

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