

May 2021

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Case study: #RideTogether, A campaign for employee relations

How do you engage staff when everyone works remotely? Read about a district that developed an employee relations campaign to boost morale and raise employee confidence. The #RideTogether campaign was based on the classic four-step PR process: research, plan, implement and evaluate.

Lead with empathy

Empathetic leadership can help improve communications by ensuring that people will hear your messages. Empathy can diffuse tension at meetings, boost staff morale and build trust. Empathy means trying to understand others, refraining from judgment, recognizing emotions and listening carefully. It is the best way to approach sensitive and challenging issues.

Students need an inspiring graduation speech

A second graduation season during the pandemic is around the corner. These graduates deserve to be celebrated and recognized. As in-person events may be limited, schools should still plan to send off members of the class of 2021 with inspiring words for their future. Read tips to help write a speech they will appreciate and remember.

Teaching in the time of COVID: When a “drive-by” is good for families

It is not just what you communicate; it is also how you communicate. Face-to-face communication is one of the most effective ways to build trust and engagement, but the pandemic has limited opportunities for in-person contact. Read how one school uses a “drive-by” model to connect with families.

Update your communications plan

Summer is the best time to review your communications plan and make changes for the coming year. It is important to revisit your plan annually, especially after a period of disruption like COVID-19. Plan now and include input from all stakeholders. Be sure to identify your purpose, audience and resources.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: The Importance of Social Connections

Schools were focused on helping students learn social and emotional skills before the pandemic started. With more than a year of disruption and social isolation, the lessons are even more important. Parents can help their children by understanding social and emotional learning for building stronger connections to others.

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Case study: #RideTogether, A campaign for employee relations

Multnomah Education Service District's #RideTogether campaign is an employee/internal relations campaign for the 2020-21 school year developed using the public relations four-step process: research, plan, implement (execute and communicate) and evaluate. (See NSPRA Accreditation in Public Relations Study Guide: www.prsa.org/docs/default-source/accreditation-site/apr-study-guide.pdf.)

#RideTogether includes staff-focused video content, feature stories, updates, important information for families and employee engagement initiatives like staff-focused contests.

The public relations problem statement

In the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, educators reported concerns about reopening school buildings in an employee survey, and these concerns were echoed in local news media coverage. However, some families reported they wanted students back in their classrooms for in-person instruction, mainly citing a lack of resources to support learning at home. There was a disconnect in expectations among groups and a perception of decreasing confidence.

The goal of the #RideTogether campaign is to inspire and demonstrate competence and confidence in school employees who provide excellent education services and resource support to students and families.

Research

Preliminary research is the first step to designing a campaign because it creates a baseline that informs all aspects of the communications plan. A variety of formal and informal research collected and conducted in 2020 showed the school district needed to craft an employee relations plan that also reached the families of students during the 2020-21 school year.

We found:

- Trends in the media showed apprehension of educators returning to school buildings and frustrations from families about navigating comprehensive distance learning at home.
- Employee survey results on the school reopening plans were contradictory: open feedback comments showed themes that staff had concerns about reopening and a lack of confidence in the plan, but 30 out of 59 respondents selected “yes” in agreement that “the [reopening] plan reflects the safety of students.”
- In-house family surveys showed families had a strong preference for in-person instruction.
- Conversations with local school public relations leaders reflected similar results. The

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main concerns for most districts were around schools providing food, child care, mental health support, digital learning resources (equipment, internet access, etc.) and academic resources to families.

- Regional data from the state department of education showed a decrease in student enrollments in the region, especially in elementary schools.

This analysis revealed it was important to show the competence of school employees providing services and support to families and boost employee confidence at the same time, which is the goal of the #RideTogether campaign.

As the 2020-21 school year has progressed, showing how families and school employees work together to support students has been an even more important addition to the #RideTogether campaign.

Planning

During the planning phase, which has been ongoing as the state and local COVID-19 guidelines rapidly shift, the public relations problem statement led to the campaign goal: to inspire and demonstrate competence and confidence in school employees who provide excellent education services and resource support to students and families.

The #RideTogether goal informed informational, motivational and behavioral objectives. All objectives included a measurement and a timeframe, as well as the tactics for messaging. Pro tip: Objectives also need to be realistic, so don't aim higher than what is reasonable.

This plan is based on fundamental PR principles, including understanding various audiences and objectives. A great resource that helped develop the plan for #RideTogether is Primer of Public Relations Research, Third Edition by Don W. Stacks.

Objectives, tactics and goals tend to get misunderstood and confused. Here is a summary and some examples of informational, motivational and behavioral objectives for our campaign:

- Informational objectives focus on visibility —increase visibility and awareness of staff activities to support families from 12% to 24% for the 2020-21 school year. Tactics: electronic news that is also shared on social media and the district website.
- Motivational objectives focus on what you want your target audiences to do — increase participation of principals, program leaders and staff in providing story leads and content for informational objectives. Offer opportunities for them to supply content in contests, submission calls and one-on-one communications with leaders to encourage staff participation. The goal was at least a 10% participation rate from district employees for the school year (64 employees out of 640 employees).
- Behavioral objectives focus on how you want audiences to change — for staff to feel good about the work they are doing, which can be measured with evidence of staff comments and shares on district social media. The goal was for a 10% increase during the 2020-21 school year.

Implementation

Implementation is based on activities or strategies to meet objectives and communicate messages to your audiences. There are ways to make this a two-way stream, such as asking for content to give employees a platform to share their own stories.

The #RideTogether campaign has several strategies throughout the school year.

Your First Week Back: a content call that gave staff a chance to share their experiences during the first week back to school via comprehensive distance learning and some hybrid learning modes. Tactics: The content sent in via Google Forms was used to create three videos shared via enews, social media and on the district website.

#SilverLining: a content call that gave staff an opportunity to share their silver lining to evoke optimism this school year. Tactics: A Google Form was sent out requesting content, which was used for a branded photo and quote combination for enews, social media and the district website.

#MyRideContest: staff was asked to share a photo and five words via Google Forms that show what gets them through the day as we #RideTogether and navigate 2020-21. The content was shared internally via Google Forms, and staff voted for three winners. Prizes were sent to the winners, and swag was sent to everyone who submitted content. The winning content and select entries were shared via social media.

#SelfCareShares: staff was asked to share what they do for self-care via Google Forms. Tactics: This strategy is in progress, and the content will be shared via enews video, on social media and on the district website.

General school, program and service enews: ongoing engagement and informational content. Tactics: multimedia messaging that shows how staff and families work together to support students, student photo essays in their own words and pictures, profile interviews with staff, community partners, families and students and other news as it is available. This content is distributed via enews, social media and on the district website.

Evaluation

Evaluation is ongoing to measure the effectiveness of a campaign:

- Are employees reading our enews? At what rate?
- Are they submitting content when we ask for it? At what rate?
- Who is voting on contests? How many employees participate?
- Are they responding to/engaging with content by sending email replies to enews, or by sharing and commenting on social media? Who? How often?
- Are administrators reaching out with more communications assistance requests? Who is reaching out and when? Do you see any trends?
- What are the social media metrics and enews metrics? Do you see any trends or emerging themes?
- Compare the rankings of all of this to last year: how has overall engagement increased?
- How can data tell the story that determines the effectiveness of this campaign, or any campaign?
- How have opinions shifted? Are there staff and family surveys that can report a change? What else can you use to measure change in behavior or motivation?

Regular evaluation of any communication plan will need to have flexibility and resiliency through the 2020-21 school year.

School buildings are reopening this spring. As school employees navigate the shifting environment of schools, communications professionals will continue to refine how they engage employees in a mindful and encouraging way. Fostering such a mutually beneficial partnership is the spirit of #RideTogether.

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Lead with empathy

“Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection.”
– Brené Brown

As we enter year two of the pandemic, the need for empathy is apparent. Families are looking to school leadership to improve student success and increase equity in schools. Empathy in leadership can diffuse tensions at school board meetings, boost staff morale and lead to building trust in the community.

When a parent or staff member is upset, it may be easier to sympathize and offer a solution or direct them toward a silver lining. More important than having the answers is actively listening without judgment and understanding how they feel. Empathy doesn't mean being nice or agreeing with the person. An empathetic response will show the person your care and concern about their experience.

What is empathy?

Author and researcher Brené Brown defines empathy as an important way to connect with people. Empathy is feeling *with* people when they are struggling. It is a way to show them you understand, and they are not alone. It is not sympathy, which is feeling bad *for* people.

According to Brown, who studies human connection, there are four attributes of empathy:

Perspective taking refers to trying to understand another person. It requires putting aside our own experiences, biases, values and seeing the world as they see it.

Staying out of judgment means refraining from comments that invalidate their experience or make them feel wrong, such as, “that’s not that serious,” or “I don’t know why you’re getting so upset about it.”

Recognizing emotions means acknowledging their feelings and maybe realizing you have had a similar experience. You could say, “I would be frustrated, too, in your place,” or “I’m sorry. That must have been really hard.”

Communication means telling them you understand what they are feeling. You might, for instance, say something like, “I’m so sorry this happened. I’ve been there, and it’s hard,” and “tell me more.” www.k12insight.com/trusted/empathy-isnt-sympathy-schools-need-understand

Showing empathy is not easy. According to Bruna Martinuzzi, an educator, author and speaker who specializes in emotional intelligence, empathy is like a muscle that gets stronger the more we use it. She suggests the following tips to help you practice empathy:

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Listen. Listen with your ears, eyes and heart. Pay attention to others' body language, to their tone of voice, to the hidden emotions behind what they are saying to you, and to the context.

Be fully present when you are with people. Don't check your email or look at your phone.

Don't interrupt people. Don't dismiss their concerns offhand. Don't rush to give advice. Don't change the subject. Allow people their moment.

Tune in to non-verbal communication. This is the way that people often communicate what they think or feel, even when their verbal communication says something different.

Practice the "93 percent rule." When communicating about feelings and attitudes, words account for only 7 percent of the total message that people receive. The other 93 percent of the message that we communicate when we speak is contained in our tone of voice and body language. Reflect on how you come across when you communicate with others about your feelings and attitudes. www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_75.htm

Empathy in conversations about race

Understanding and practicing empathy can help diffuse tension around sensitive or challenging issues, including understanding and addressing race issues. School districts are adopting anti-racist policies, discussing the value of diversity in school leadership and forging connections with communities of color. These events have created important race-related discussions that can become heated without empathy. How do we connect with people who are different than us?

Talking about race or someone's experience with racism is often uncomfortable. According to business coach Tamaan Wilkinson, "Many people have not learned to 'be with' uncomfortable emotions — their own or others. They haven't learned how to feel, and make room for, uncomfortable feelings. Instead, they avoid, skim over or minimize those feelings and, as a result, they block empathy."

Wilkinson believes that the worst thing you can say is, "I know how you feel." In conversations about race, it is unlikely that you have the same lived experiences as the other person. Instead, she recommends these empathetic responses:

- "That sounds tough. How are you feeling?"
- "I really don't know what this feels like. Could you tell me?"
- "What has it been like for you?"
- "What do you need right now?"

Wilkinson believes that sympathy is not what is required in conversations about race. "What's needed is compassionate empathy, the type of empathy that moves you to right action." <https://bit.ly/3mirK2w>

Resources

Brené Brown on empathy

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw

"Test Yourself for Hidden Bias"

www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias

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Students need an inspiring graduation speech

Graduation ceremonies and celebrations were upended last year when the pandemic started in the spring. In-person events were canceled, and remote events were new to everyone. Now we are all more familiar with connecting digitally, but we are also tiring of exclusively virtual communication.

This year, many schools are planning to hold in-person events for graduation, that most important rite of passage and an essential recognition of completing 12 years of school. All of that hard work deserves a hearty pat on the back — literally and virtually.

Students benefit from the appreciation of their efforts and the traditional formal graduation event that closes one chapter and prepares them for the next. If you are out of practice or want some inspiration, here are some tips and sample speeches to help you send off your students.

Tips for your own speeches

Graduation speeches are usually reserved for the superintendent, principal, board chair of assigned director, valedictorian, and/or special guest. Brevity should be your guide. Students and their families are excited about this event, but they appreciate speeches that are both inspiring and concise.

These tips can help you plan comments that are brief and celebratory:

Share wisdom from your own experience. What do you wish you had known as a young adult? What have you learned that you can pass along as food for thought? Be honest and even confessional.

Organize tips into a brief list of advice. Think in bullet points. Use humility and humor if that fits your personal brand.

Follow the show-don't-tell rules of storytelling. Use your own stories about education, career and life that changed your life or your outlook. Give examples, and be authentic. Avoid generalities and platitudes. Students are more likely to listen and benefit from your advice if it is genuine and relatable.

Use your own strengths. Students can benefit from learning about our failures, and they can benefit from hearing how we leveraged our strengths to improve our lives or advance in our careers. Talk about what you know, not about what you think they should know. If you aren't sure, ask your network for observations about your strengths. You may learn a lot about yourself.

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Put it in writing

Graduation ceremonies can be overwhelming. Students may not hear what you say in the moment, but they may appreciate the chance to reflect on your words of wisdom later. Be sure to post your comments to your school or district website or social media channels. You could even include speeches in your printed program.

Start with a really good title. Have fun and capture attention with a catchy title that makes them want to know more. A few examples are:

- Things I shouldn't have done but glad I did
- How adulthood is like a carnival roller coaster
- What was I thinking? (a personal favorite)

Provide food for thought. The ceremony should be personally meaningful to students. Help them reflect by including questions to help them think about their future:

- Who are the people who influenced you positively this year and in your past?
- What strengths help you overcome challenges? What are the things you want to leave in the past as you face your future? Name three to five habits, practices or beliefs.
- Name three to five dreams, goals or aspirations you want in your future life.

Give advice, but keep it simple

Graduation speeches should include advice. After all, this is the boundary between childhood and adulthood, isn't it? Share what you know, but keep it light:

- Learn from your mistakes, but try to find new lessons if you continue to make the same mistakes.
- Take care of your health. Appreciate your ability to sleep soundly through the night. Someday it won't be so easy.
- Treat everyone like you'll be working for them someday, because you might.
- Find something bigger than yourself to contribute to. We are all part of a community.
- Take time to breathe. Try to remember that everything will be ok — one way or another.
- Express your pride in your students. Gratitude is impactful and motivating. Sometimes we forget to say that we are impressed, proud and grateful. Repeat as needed. Include individual and class achievements, such as the number of students going to college, receiving scholarships and awards, and contributing community service hours.

Sample speeches to inspire you

Writing speeches can be daunting. It may help to check out inspirational speeches from other schools or notable guest speakers. Here a few from last year, also a pandemic graduation.

Dear Class of 2020, YouTube Originals Speeches by

- Barack Obama
- Beyoncé
- Collin Jost
- John Mulaney
- Katie Perry
- Lady Gaga
- Mariah Carey

www.youtube.com/results?search_query=dear+class+of+2020

16 Best Graduation Speeches That Leave a Lasting Impression
www.teenvogue.com/story/best-graduation-speeches-examples-ideas

Graduation
Speech

The 21 greatest graduation speeches of the last 60 years
www.vox.com/a/greatest-graduation-speeches

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Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant

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Teaching in the time of COVID: When a “drive-by” is good for families

Direct communication, face-to-face interaction, is the most effective way to communicate, especially in schools. Families must trust school staff in order to believe them and partner with them to support students. And trust is built on relationships with communication and engagement.

Communication is much harder, but also much more important, in a remote or hybrid learning environment. Schools have been innovative and creative with new outreach efforts. Speaking to families at a distance in a “drive-by” format is a quick way to check in and show care and concern for students.

Drive-in communications at a K-5 school

“Talking in person — even from a car — makes the kids just light up,” said Brett Gaboury, library teacher at EAGLE Charter School in Salem, Oregon.

That’s partly why this K-5 school of 144 students hosts parades full of curbside smiles, virtual hugs, free resources and funny themes as a safe break from comprehensive distance learning.

It is an effective outreach tactic throughout the year or to mark special occasions or recognitions. As you prepare for summer break, consider this idea as a great send-off for kids.

How it works: Staff pick a monthly theme, dress accordingly and set up tables appropriately spaced around the parking lot to greet families in a steady stream of cars during a designated time. Consider planning for a once-per-month event to kick off the weekend. Staff can get “flex time” to make up for the extra hours worked.

Practical origins: Drive-bys started as a COVID-induced solution to collect laptops, library books and other borrowed items at the end of the 2019-20 school year when pandemic closures were in full swing and kids used Zoom for remote classes. “The idea was so popular, we continued with a fun theme each month,” said Principal Dr. Marie Ballance. Examples: March was “Green Day” for the environment; the parent club handed out seed kits to plant, and they put out a box for donations to the humane society. February was Friendship Day, and April 1 was “tell us a joke from your car” day.

They love a parade: The new tradition has turned into a raucous parade of kids (in masks) who often poke through sunroofs, hang out windows or hold pets (even bunnies) in their laps for teachers to greet. Some families are timid, often seeing staff for the first time —

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then light up when connections are made when the staff of this small school recognizes ALL kids, including siblings, from virtual classes.

Not just for fun: Each grade level stakes out a table, so families can chat from cars, get school supplies and treats, buy “EAGLE gear,” or simply make social connections. “When we started this, I found my music participation dramatically increased the next week,” said teacher Janet Romine. “It gives me a different perspective on a child, a chance to say, ‘I haven’t seen you in class’ or actually see how little and young they are! Seeing families this way also quietly tells her “who is supported — and who needs extra help,” she added.

Parent club connects: “This gets us as close as we can to spoiling our kids and talking to parents!” said Parent Club President Melinda Watson. “We are such a small community. We’re used to being together, so this is one way to keep that feeling.”

Added benefits: “Families love this; it gives everyone a chance to shout “love you!”, see new families, stay in touch with older siblings who graduated, and meet the teacher they’ll have next year,” Ballance said. As this principal greets cars, you quickly notice that she remembers everyone with something personal about them, or how they’re doing in school... similar to how principals used to stand at the door to greet kids coming and going... a scene we all look forward to again.

Contributed by Shannon Priem, APR, former public information director for the Oregon School Boards Association (and current board chair for EAGLE Charter School).

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Update your communications plan

You spent a lot of time developing your district's communications plan, and it has served you well this past year. But with a new school year looming, it's time to give it another look.

Communication plans are not a one-and-done proposition. They need to be revisited annually to make sure they continue to address the communications needs in your district. As new issues arise, you need to incorporate strategies to address them. As circumstances change, you may need to tweak or add new elements to your plan.

The "secret sauce" in a good school communications plan is to involve those groups you want to communicate with, especially parents. Often districts talk "at" parents, rather than "with" them. They are good at sending out newsletters, emails and social media posts that provide information but don't allow for two-way dialogue. While those types of communications have their place, it's important that communication plans also include strategies for listening to parents and reacting to what you learn from them. That goes for staff too. By doing so, you show them that you value their experience, ideas and opinions and take their concerns seriously. That helps build strong relationships and gives you an ear to the ground to know what your various audiences think and feel about their schools.

An easy way to do this is to hold regular "listening" sessions. It could be the superintendent, principal or school board members who invite parents, staff or other groups to come for coffee and snacks and share whatever concerns or ideas they may have.

Another strategy is to include one or more parents on every committee or task force that the school board appoints. This provides an avenue for parents to actively participate in discussions around important issues in the district.

With COVID-19, the need for clear, consistent communications became more critical than ever. New information became available almost daily, but districts were challenged by restrictions that didn't allow for face-to-face gatherings. So districts found new tools for communicating with patrons, including Zoom and Google Meet. A pleasant surprise was that school board meetings that previously drew a handful of patrons often had dozens and sometimes hundreds of attendees.

Many districts plan to incorporate Zoom meetings into their communication plans even after school boards and other groups are able to meet fully in person. It can be a way to be more inclusive and include parents and others who may not be able to attend an in-person meeting because of child care or other issues but would still like to engage with the district.

A key step for districts will be to evaluate the effectiveness of any new communication tools they used this past year and survey different audiences (parents, staff, community, etc.) about their preferred communication channels and frequency of communications. That

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will help districts tailor their communications using tools that patrons are most likely to actually use.

Communication is not a “one-size-fits-all process,” so districts cannot rely on just a single communication method to reach all of their audiences. Some parents are glued to social media; others never use it. Some like visiting the district website. Not all parents can be reached in the same way, so it’s important to develop a few reliable communication tools and then let patrons know that these will be the tools used for reaching out.

Why develop a communication plan?

Having a written communication plan helps you do thoughtful, strategic planning and stay focused throughout the year. It’s not meant to be a static document that just sits on a shelf. It needs to be updated regularly to reflect the changing needs in your district. The time you spend on developing and updating your plan at the start of school can save you time later on because you’ll know exactly what you need to do at any point during the year.

Another benefit of a written plan is that it gives you a structure for deciding what you want to do and who you want to target for your communications. Each group of stakeholders has unique characteristics. Through planning, you can identify the most effective ways to communicate with them.

There are several key steps to developing a communication plan.

- 1. Identify the purpose of your communication.** What you say (and the tool you use to communicate) depends on what you’re trying to accomplish. Are you trying to educate the public about a bond measure? Increase parent engagement? More actively engage families of color? Once you’re specific about what you are trying to accomplish, you will be able to better target your audience and methods of communication.
- 2. Identify your audience.** You’ll need different messages for different groups, and you may need different channels and methods to reach each of those groups. What does your intended audience read, listen to or watch on TV? Where do they gather? It’s important to place your message where they’ll see it and believe it. For instance, those aged 60 and older tend to like printed materials and are likely to read materials that come in the mail as well as articles in the newspaper. Younger adults are more likely to read electronic posts. Hispanic families often tune in to Spanish-language radio and television stations. By being strategic in placing information, you won’t be continuously pulled in different directions.
- 3. Consider your resources.** What do you have the money to do? Do you have the people to make it possible? If you’re going to spend money, will the results be worth the expense? Your communication plan should take into account how much you can spend and how much staff time it is reasonable to use. There are a variety of communication tools available, some that cost nothing more than your time, such as presentations to community groups or posting on social media. Other expenses are specific to your targeted audience. Did you budget for food and child care? Experience shows that Hispanic families turn out in higher numbers if food and child care are provided. Those considerations should be part of your planning process.
- 4. Evaluate.** Review your strategies at least annually to make sure they are producing the results you desire.

It takes work to develop a good communication plan, but the payoff is worth it. Good communications help build understanding and trust, and those are key elements in building positive partnerships with parents and other patrons.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant



The Importance of Social Connections



**May
2021**

INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Students' emotional health is getting attention. Many schools have Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs to help students learn skills to manage their feelings. This can help improve academics and behaviors.

“Social and emotional learning (SEL) is important because it provides a foundation in areas such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and decision making. Students learn positive strategies that enable them to better succeed in school, and later in their careers and life in general.”
(<https://blog.teachersherpa.com/2017/01/03/social-emotional-learning>)

Many schools started SEL lessons before the pandemic. Now, students who are learning remotely or in a hybrid format have an even greater need for emotional support because of isolation and loneliness that leads to anxiety and depression.

Loneliness

Teens and young adults are feeling greater effects of the pandemic than other age groups. An article in the Harvard Gazette states that the downward spiral of isolation hit this demographic hard, with 61 percent of survey respondents age 18-25 reporting feeling lonely frequently or almost all the time. <https://bit.ly/2PesGJb>

Building connections

Connections are essential for a sense of belonging and identity for teens and young adults. According to a study cited by the Michigan State University Extension Service, “29 percent of a teen's waking time was spent with friends and 23 percent of their time was spent with classmates and peers of the same age, but not necessarily friends. Less than five percent of time was spent alone with parents. Another study found that only 31 percent of children have best friends who serve as a positive peer influence.” <https://bit.ly/3lWAAmw>

It is essential to build and maintain strong social ties and connections to others. This sounds simple, but it's not easy for some people, especially now. If it were easy, nobody would feel lonely. Successful friendships require having, at a minimum, the following social and emotional skills:

- Regulation of our own negative emotions;
- An understanding of other people's emotions and perspectives;
- Sympathy and support for friends in need;
- Feelings of security and trust toward other people;
- The ability to handle introductions and participate in conversations;

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- The ability to cooperate, negotiate and compromise;
- An understanding of how and when to apologize; and
- A willingness to understand and forgive other people's mistakes.

<https://www.parentingscience.com/kids-make-friends.html>

Maintaining friendships and connections

Children begin to build relationship skills when they are young, generally with support from parents through playdates and school experiences. By the time they are in their teens or young adulthood, people should have many years of friendship experience under their belts, but most of us could use improvement tips from time to time. Here are a few from Psychology Today that may help older kids:

- 1. Be honest.** Superficial relationships don't last. Solid friendships are based on honesty and feedback from someone you trust and respect.
- 2. Repair misattunements.** Sometimes we mess up. Good friends know how to build up and tear down their friends. Be careful with what you say, even when you are upset, in order to maintain trust and protect the friendship. When you make mistakes, apologize.
- 3. Make time and show appreciation.** Don't take friendships for granted. Show gratitude for them, make time to connect and check in, show interest and try to understand the issues they are focused on.
- 4. Alter your expectations and don't make assumptions.** Our friends are only human. Adjust your expectations to avoid disappointment. Don't assume to know what they are thinking and understand that they may not reciprocate friendship exactly as you do. If you show appreciation through gifts, they may not reciprocate, but it doesn't necessarily mean they do not value the friendship.
- 5. Choose compassion over cynicism.** Compassion helps us focus on treating others kindly. We know our friends well enough to understand their worst traits. Remember kindness and compassion rather than cynicism and negative personality traits.

Resources

The Science of Making Friends: Helping Socially Challenged Teens and Adults

UCLA Peers Clinic: <https://bit.ly/3dhPccq>

How to Help Girls Cope with Friendship Conflicts and Bullying

Huffington Post: <https://bit.ly/2PDUwPa>

Social Media and Friendships

Pew Research Center: <https://pewrsr.ch/2PACkpy>

6 Ways to Help Your Child Develop Better Friendships

Psychology Today: <https://bit.ly/2PbccSd>

How to Help Your Child Make Friends

WebMD: <https://wb.md/2NZsLjx>

Teen Friendship Workbook

Whole Person Associates: <https://wholeperson.com/pdf/TeenFriendshipWorkbook.pdf>