

Back to School (Secondary)

Overview:

Back to school is a hectic time for teachers and pupils. With so many stories to catch up on and so many schedules to coordinate, new students often feel lost and left out.

This lesson plan creates a welcoming atmosphere for new students through collaborative efforts of staff and students. Newcomers won't feel lost again with maps, important names and numbers, and other useful resources to help them find their feet and make new friends.

Why do people show consideration, kindness, compassion, and generosity to others? Some help because it helps them feel good. Some show concern because others do. Some show kindness to avoid embarrassment, to earn recognition, to relieve guilt, or because it hurts them to see other people suffering.

Genuine, selfless concern for others is a sign of ethical maturity. A big part of maturity is the ability to think and care about someone besides oneself.

The Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" translates the general principle of caring and concern into an operational standard that encourages people to maximize the good and minimize the harm done to others.

Stakeholders. Stakeholders are the people, groups, or institutions likely to be affected by a decision, word, or action. A person who wants to be ethical has a moral obligation to think about the effects his or her decisions will have on all stakeholders. The common, self-centered "It's my life and I'll do what I want" mantra fails to recognize that every person, group, and institution has a moral claim on the decision-maker.

Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will learn caring by:

- Identifying needs of new students by putting themselves in their shoes
- Creating Welcome Packs for newcomers and visitors to the school
- Participating in a Buddy program to create a caring school environment

Materials:

- Art material, paper as needed

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Procedure:

1. Starting a new year with new classmates can be a challenge for some students. If your class has a lot of new students, pair them up or group them with “old-timers.” If there are no new students, consider this as a preparation activity for when there are newcomers.
2. Ask the class: What can you remember about your first few weeks of school? It was probably overwhelming. Brainstorm different things that are new and hard to remember. Make a list on the board.
3. When you finish, tell the class to think of ways they can help new students feel less intimidated by all this information. Tell them they’re going to make a Welcome Kit to help new students feel at home.
4. Have the class map out the school areas. For younger students, make a big map that can be displayed. Make small cut-out figures representing the students. Move them about the map so the little ones can see the different places they need to go. Older students can have smaller maps put into a Welcome Pack that they receive on the first day.
5. Make a list of important names the students will need to learn (office staff, bus drivers, counselors, emergency personnel, etc.).
6. Do you have students with English as their second language? Perhaps you could make a list of common words used in the classroom or school. If you have several languages spoken in your class, make it a geography activity by learning about the different countries as you create the vocabulary list.
7. From the brainstormed list, make a few welcoming activities for newcomers (take them on a tour of the school, recognize them at a sports or other fun event, etc.).
8. Designate secret buddies. Have each “old-timer” be a secret buddy of a newcomer. Have them write encouraging notes or offer support before games or tests without letting the newcomer know who they are. Make sure all newcomers are involved in receiving support and have the secret buddies hand their letters or notes to the teacher. Do this the first few times to ensure the letters aren’t offensive, then let them introduce each other if they choose. Encourage them to make more spontaneous contact.
9. Keep in mind each class will be different. Make all students feel welcome, not just the newcomers. Do what you can to create a caring community that will last the entire year and beyond.

This lesson is part of a regular feature in Josephson Institute’s monthly e-newsletter, the Character Educator. To subscribe, visit the CHARACTER COUNTS! website: <http://www.charactercounts.org>

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McREL standards

Life Skills

Standard 1. Contributes to the overall effort of a group.

Level IV Benchmark 9. Contributes to the development of a supportive climate in groups.

<http://www.mcrel.org/Standards-benchmarks/>