

CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR K–12 STUDENTS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC CLASSROOM

By Rolanda Clark

I am concerned with teaching and providing support for my homeschool students and for those who will attend school in a traditional and/or remote setting, post-pandemic. Due to COVID-19, as well as racial tensions in America, we will need to work to create safe spaces for students.

Abraham Maslow's (1943) Hierarchical Theory of Human Needs identifies these needs for humans as physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Author Katie Horne (2019) of Digital.com explains, "The order in which the needs classifications are listed is not a coincidence." Each need has to be met in order to reach the final level of self-actualization, where creativity and problem solving occurs. Being safe is a prerequisite for students, and if this need is not met, relationship building, academic achievement, and problem solving cannot occur effectively.

Author Phyllis L. Fagell (2020) provides a list of strategies that educators should use to help students cope with the effects of the pandemic, along with examples and tips to follow. Four of those seven tips are featured below.

1. Prioritize relationships. This reminds your students that they are important to you. Try asking questions such as, "Might your friends share the same concerns?" as well as listening to and validating them.

- 2. Tamp down the pressure.** Students may be concerned with grades and performance as transitions are occurring with their learning. Ensure students that, again, they are a priority over their schoolwork. Facilitate questions and concerns with assurances of their good efforts.
- 3. Empower students.** Allow students to have some autonomy in their learning, such as in serving others by way of good deeds or using additional resources they might have on hand for things such as writing letters or sewing masks.
- 4. Stay moored in the moment.** Practice mindfulness techniques to encourage students to process their feelings.

You can access the additional tips using this link. **7 Ways Educators Can Help Students Cope in a Pandemic** (bit.ly/HelpCope).

While many students have the necessary supports needed at home, other children could be without such reinforcements, even as new headlines are occurring and instructions are communicated daily. Prioritizing students' well-being precludes teaching while simultaneously meeting their needs and preparing them for the learning environment. Effective strategies will reinforce the feeling of belongingness and relationship building when times are questionable and students are still reeling from the effects of the pandemic. As students transition back into the classroom from remote learning, teachers can use strategies that foster open, age-appropriate discussions and open-mindedness. 🍎

References

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