***Important Questions to Ask Your Students***

**Discovering your students’ answers to these questions can help you create positive conditions for learning.**

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**Resilience and motivation come from having a sense of purpose, believing you have value to others, and engaging in acts of service that confirm that value. When these point in a positive direction, children gain momentum and positive accomplishment; when they don’t, we see downward spirals and increasing distance from college, career, community, and life success.**

**There are some things we should know about all of our students because knowing them will greatly influence our teaching (and parenting). They reflect the conditions necessary for students to learn, be happy, feel relevant, and be resilient.**

**Understanding who students are on a deep level also helps us be more understanding and supportive. In his article “**[**Improving Teacher Empathy to Improve Student Behavior**](http://www.drrobertbrooks.com/improving-teacher-empathy-improve-student-behavior/)**,” psychologist and school-climate expert Robert Brooks explains that teachers increase their empathy by asking themselves, “What words do I want my students to use to describe me?”**

**The following questions can and should be adapted for youth of all ages because they are as relevant to college students as they are to preschoolers. Knowing the answers tells us what we need to know to help create positive conditions for learning.**

**QUESTIONS TO ASK RIGHT AWAY**

**These start-of-school questions can be written out on index cards—ask children to write their answers on the other side, perhaps doing one per day during the first week of school.**

* **What helps you feel welcomed?**
* **How do you like to be greeted?**
* **What strengths do you bring to classrooms? The school?**
* **What do you like most about school so far? What would you like to see changed?**

**Another approach with these questions is to make a survey and have students provide responses; these can be anonymous or not. A more interactive approach is to use a morning meeting format and start the school day by having students discuss their responses to several of these questions in small groups and then share their group’s responses with the class.**

**QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN RELATIONSHIPS**

**These settling-in questions can be addressed in similar ways as the start-of-school ones, during the second and third weeks of school.**

* **When do you feel competent? How often?**
* **When do you feel you are being listened to?**
* **When do you feel your voice is respected?**
* **When do you feel cared for and about?**
* **When do you get a chance to be a leader?**
* **When do you feel most safe/unsafe?**
* **When do you laugh at school?**

**QUESTIONS TO USE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

**Use these questions throughout the school year, followed by supportive discussions, to continue to get to know your students, build their reflection skills, and positively influence their resiliency.**

* **What is your contribution to the school?**
* **Who believes you can succeed?**
* **What happens in school that makes you afraid? Frustrated? Defeated?**
* **When do you feel challenged and supported?**
* **What inspires you in school?**
* **Who helps you bounce back from setbacks?**
* **Who is always happy to speak with you?**
* **When do you feel it’s OK to make a mistake, or show that you don’t know something or how to do something?**

**GROWING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST**

**It often takes a few weeks before students get a clear sense of their answers to the initial questions. By then, they will know who believes they can succeed, and who is happy to speak to them and help them bounce back. (And during those first weeks, students will notice you hard at work becoming one of those reliable and trustworthy adults in their lives.)**

**The more we know about our students, the more we can help them find answers to these questions, which will allow their energies to be better directed toward building resilience and their growth as learners.**