

A Guide to Creating a Safe Inclusive and Supportive Classroom

*(Strategies and lessons for building trust, respect, and
inclusivity for primary school learners)*



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Re-Imagining New Communities believes that education is a powerful tool for peacebuilding and social change. Thus, we hope this guide serves as a valuable resource for educators and contributes to the creation of safe, inclusive, and supportive classrooms across Kenya and beyond.

Thank you!

ABOUT RE-IMAGINING NEW COMMUNITIES

Re-Imagining New Communities is a Peacebuilding and communication organization that fosters peace and social change by empowering children, religious leaders, and communities through education, research, and participatory dialogue. Our interventions are sustainably tailored to suit and address a community's needs to collectively build a harmonious, inclusive, and resilient environment that is nurturing and secure for all.

Our focus on schools and children stems from the belief that early education is crucial for cultivating a culture of peace and understanding in any society. When we promote safe, supportive, and inclusive classroom environments, we are instilling values of respect, empathy, and cooperation among young learners and between learners and educators. Therefore, this foundational work in schools aligns with our broader peacebuilding objectives, where children who grow up in nurturing and respectful environments are more likely to contribute to peaceful communities as adults.

Learn more about Re-Imagining New Communities

To gain a deeper understanding of our mission, programs, and the impact, visit our website: www.rncommunities.org. If you need further assistance with implementing or customizing this Guide to better suit your school's needs, our dedicated training team is here to help. We offer personalized support to ensure that you can effectively apply the principles and strategies outlined in the guide. For inquiries, guidance, or to request a consultation, you can contact our training team directly at hello@rncommunities.org. Re-Imagining New Communities conducts regular training sessions and workshops for educators which provides in-depth knowledge of the principles of safe and supportive

classroom environments and offers hands-on training on how to implement the strategies and practices discussed in the guide.

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We look forward to supporting you in creating safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments that foster the holistic development of every child.

INTRODUCTION

It is important to note that children are very critical members of the society. Their formative years are critical for shaping their values, attitudes and behaviors. By focusing on primary schools, this guide aims to 1) teach children the principles of non-violent communication, empathy, and respect from a young age, 2) ensure that every child, regardless of background, feels valued and included, which helps reduce conflicts and promote social harmony within their school communities and 3) equip children with the social and emotional skills needed to navigate challenges and contribute positively to their well-being and communities.

Understanding that every child deserves to learn in a conducive and friendly way that supports their well-being and development is essential for fostering their holistic development. Having the right atmosphere not only ensures the physical and emotional safety of a child but also encourages a sense of belonging and community. This leads to the child feel valued, respected and motivated to engage in the learning process, hence collaborating with their peers, and developing critical social and emotional skills.

Therefore, when schools establish a foundation of trust and mutual respect, this can create a positive learning space where every child has the opportunity to thrive. Adopting and implementing strategies that promote safety and support involves a comprehensive approach that addresses various aspects of the classroom experience which may include; creating clear behavioral expectations, fostering open communication, and implementing proactive measures to address bullying and conflict.

Thus, this guide is designed to equip teachers with the right understanding in building a classroom culture that not only enhances academic achievement but also nurtures the well-being and personal growth of each learner.

The guide has been developed after Re-Imagining New Communities' extensive engagement with primary school teachers through its Children-Led Community Peace Labs program (CLCP-Labs) through which the organization has partnered with over 30 primary schools across five different counties of Kenya namely Kakamega, Nairobi, Vihiga, Uasin Gishu, and Kajiado.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Conventional Pedagogy vs. Non-conventional Approaches

In most countries especially the developing ones, conventional pedagogy was often characterized by rote learning and strict discipline, a holdover from colonial education systems designed to produce obedient individuals rather than critical thinkers. While rote learning can create an orderly classroom, its effectiveness as a pedagogy has been challenged. Studies show it can potentially stifle creativity, curiosity, and emotional development, leading to disengagement and a lack of enthusiasm in learning.

On the other hand, modern educational methods- nonconventional approaches are rooted in scientific research and focus on the holistic development of learners. These child-centered approaches recognize the importance of addressing the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of learners to create a conducive environment for learning. It emphasizes on key features among them,

- a) Active learning - which encourages active participation by the learner through discussions, problem-solving, and hands-on activities,
- b) Emotional support and,
- c) Inclusivity - which ensures that there is diversity and respect for all learners, fostering a sense of belonging and community.

SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM GUIDE

Creating a safe and supportive classroom environment is essential for effective learning as it nurtures the psychological and emotional well-being of the learners, especially from ages 5- 13. A safe classroom is built on trust, support, respect, and understanding modeled by teachers.

This guide is designed to support primary school teachers with the skills and knowledge to support learners' needs.

Objectives of the guide

1. Support and inform educator on how to create an inclusive and stimulating classroom environment that promotes active participation and collaboration.
2. Provide clear procedures and practices that ensure the physical safety of learners, and fosters mutual respect, trust, and a sense of community among the learners.

Factors Impacting a Learning Environment

Creating an effective learning environment involves taking into consideration various factors that influence learners' ability to learn and thrive.

These factors include;

Physical Factors;

- a. Ensure that the classroom is clean, ventilated, well-lit, and organized.

- b. The classroom layout and seating arrangement should allow learners to interact and move.
- c. Accessibility for learners with disabilities. This shouldn't be optional but a mandatory requirement.

Psychological Factors;

- a. Encourage open dialogue and active listening.
- b. Creating a sense of safety so that learners feel physically safe from harm.
- c. Creating an environment where learners feel psychologically safe to express themselves without fear of ridicule or punishment.
- d. Clear rules and consistent enforcement to maintain order and fairness.
- e. Positive discipline strategies that promote learning from mistakes.
- f. Balancing the difficulty of tasks to match learners' abilities and avoid overwhelming them.
- g. Encouraging a belief that abilities can be developed through effort and perseverance.

Emotional Factors;

- a. It is providing a supportive environment where learners feel valued and understood.
- b. Addressing learners' emotional needs and offering help when they face challenges.

- c. Creating a sense of community where every learner feels they belong.
- d. Promoting inclusivity and respect for all learners.
- e. Building strong, positive relationships based on mutual respect and trust.
- f. Showing empathy and understanding towards learners' experiences and emotions.

PILLARS OF A SAFE CLASSROOM

Building trust between learners and teachers

Trust is the foundation of a safe and supportive classroom. When learners trust their teachers and peers, they feel secure in expressing themselves, taking risks, and engaging fully in learning activities.

How to build trust

- a. Consistent, respectful, and honest communication.
- b. Creating a predictable and stable classroom environment.

Supporting learners' needs

Every learner has unique academic, emotional, and social needs.

How to support learners' needs

- a. Academic Support
 - Offer additional help for learners struggling with coursework, such as additional reading resources.
 - Differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs, such as language differences, learning disabilities, or socio-economic challenges.
- b. Emotional and Social Support
 - Build a classroom community where learners feel connected.
 - Encourage peer support and mentorship programs.

c. **Respecting Differences and Boundaries**

- Celebrate cultural diversity and individual uniqueness.
- Teach and practice consent in interactions and activities.

Respecting learners' differences

Respecting differences fosters an inclusive environment where all learners feel seen and valued. Acknowledging and valuing the diversity of learners' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives is crucial.

How to respect differences

1. Teaching about and celebrating cultural diversity.
2. Encouraging open-mindedness and empathy among learners.

Honoring Learners' boundaries

Respecting learners' personal and emotional boundaries is key to creating a safe learning space.

How to honor learners' boundaries

- a. Understand and honor their comfort levels in various situations, such as group work or personal sharing.
- b. Ensuring that all interactions are consensual and respectful, fosters a culture where learners feel safe to assert their boundaries.

TIPS FOR A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM

1. Establish clear rules;
 - a. Clearly define classroom rules and expectations.
 - b. Involve learners in creating these rules to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility.
2. Smile and be approachable;
 - a. Greet learners with a smile.
 - b. Maintain a positive demeanor to create a welcoming atmosphere.
3. Showcase learners' work;
 - a. Display learners' work around the classroom (charts, art, craft).
 - b. Celebrate their achievements to boost confidence and motivation.
4. Use of Music
 - a. Use appropriate music during transitions or quiet work times to create a calming environment.
 - b. Give learners a chance to suggest songs of their choice to foster inclusivity.
5. Build empathy;
 - a. Engage in activities that promote understanding and empathy among learners.
 - b. Encourage the sharing of personal stories and experiences respectfully.

6. Group Work;
 - a. Facilitate group projects and cooperative learning activities.
 - b. Assign diverse groups to promote collaboration and appreciation of differences.
7. Model vulnerability;
 - a. Share appropriate personal experiences and challenges.
 - b. Show that it's okay to make mistakes and learn from them.
8. Practice kindness;
 - a. Model acts of kindness in everyday interactions.
 - b. Recognize and commend acts of kindness among learners.

NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC)

NVC supports a learning environment where all learners feel heard, valued, and able to express themselves without fear of judgment or retaliation. It helps to reduce misunderstanding and conflict among learners and between learners and teachers hence promoting a peaceful and cooperative classroom.

Pillars of NVC.

1. **Compassion** - Involves being empathetic and caring towards others' suffering and needs. Compassionate communication seeks to alleviate pain and promote well-being by offering understanding, support, and kindness. It encourages a deep sense of connection and empathy.

How to practice Compassion

- a. Offer support and assistance when a learner is in need.
 - b. Be patient and gentle in your communication.
 - c. Show kindness and care in all interactions.
2. **Respect** - Is valuing each learner's feelings, needs, and perspectives. Respect creates a safe space for open and honest communication.

How to practice respect

- a. Listen actively without interrupting.
- b. Validate learners' feelings and experiences.
- c. Maintain a non-judgmental attitude.

3. **Understanding** - Goes beyond just hearing words; it involves empathetically comprehending the emotions and needs behind those words. It means trying to see situations from learners' perspectives and recognizing their experiences and emotions as valid.

How to Practice Understanding

- a. Ask clarifying questions to gain deeper insights.
 - b. Reflect on what you hear to ensure accurate understanding.
 - c. Show empathy by acknowledging learners' emotions.
4. **Acceptance** - Acceptance fosters an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued. It entails acknowledging and embracing the differences and uniqueness of each individual. It means letting go of the need to change others and instead focusing on appreciating them as they are.

How to practice acceptance

- a. Embrace diversity and differing viewpoints.
 - b. Avoid trying to impose your beliefs or solutions on the learners.
 - c. Recognize and honor individual differences among your learners.
5. **Appreciation** - Involves recognizing and expressing gratitude for the positive qualities and actions of others. It helps build positive relationships by focusing on strengths

and contributions rather than flaws and shortcomings. Appreciation encourages a supportive and uplifting atmosphere.

How to practice appreciation

- a. Regularly express gratitude for learners' contributions.
- b. Highlight positive aspects of learners' behavior and character.
- c. Encourage a culture of mutual appreciation.

Stages of NVC

According to Rosenberg and Chopra, 2015, there are four stages to NVC, they are;

1. **Observation** - describe what you see or hear without judgment.

Example: "I noticed that you raised your hand several times during the discussion."

2. **Feeling** - Express how you feel about the observation.

Example: "I feel concerned because your ideas were not acknowledged."

3. **Need** - State the need that is connected to your feelings.

Example: "I need everyone to feel heard and respected in our classroom."

4. **Request** - Make a clear and specific request.

Example: “Could we ensure everyone has a chance to speak by taking turns?”



PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE SAFE CLASSROOM

1. Physical Environment
 - a. Arrange seating to facilitate eye contact and interaction.
 - b. Ensure the classroom is clean, well-lit, and organized.
2. Psychological Safety
 - a. Encourage open dialogue and active listening.
 - b. Validate learners' feelings and experiences.
3. Emotional Support
 - a. Provide resources for learners experiencing stress or anxiety.
 - b. Create a 'safe space' where learners can go if they need a break

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg- https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/71730.Nonviolent_Communication
- Inclusive Education <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254> offers strategies and practices for creating inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive.
- Classroom Management- <https://edutopia.org/article/classroom-management-resources/> A collection of articles, videos, and resources that provide practical tips and strategies for effective classroom management.
- <https://www.wgu.edu/blog/15-tips-creating-safe-learning-environment2202.html> .
- <https://youaremom.com/children/what-should-you-know/tips-for-raising-your-child/non-violent-communication-with-children-keys-and-recommendations/>
- <https://www.usip.org/public-education/educators/peacebuilding-toolkit-educators-high-school-edition>
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NOTES



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