

4.2

CREATING A PREDICTABLE AND PLAYFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



2 hours 15 minutes



Markers, pens, flipchart, Classroom Wellbeing Portfolios, Handout 1: Parachute Activity and Handout 7: Daily Routines for the Classroom



By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe how creating a safe learning environment promotes mental health and wellbeing
- Demonstrate strategies for predictability and structure in the classroom
- Develop a plan for creating a safe learning environment.



Introduction



30 minutes



None



Pairs, whole group

➔ Display the learning objectives for the session. Invite a participant to read them.

➔ THINK–PAIR–SHARE (individually think about each question, discuss with a partner, then share what you discussed with the full group).

- What strategies do you already use (or have participated in as a student) to create **predictability** in the classroom?

Examples: setting out classroom rules, class timetable, following the same order of classes every day, writing the daily agenda on the board



Use the “raise hand” function to participate in class discussions

- What strategies do you already use (or have participated in as a student) to create **structure** in the classroom?

Examples: Starting every day with a morning circle or using a song or play-based activity to transition between lessons



Allow participants to think silently for one minute, then divide them into small group breakout rooms for three to five minutes to share and post their ideas. Create a virtual board so that all participants can see them.

- Invite a participant to write all the “shared” strategies they use to create predictability and on a flipchart or whiteboard and structure them.
- Explain how creating a safe learning environment promotes children’s wellbeing and helps to prevent their emotional and psychological responses escalating.

Say, for example:

“Predictability and structure are always important for children to grow and develop in a healthy manner, and are even more important in a conflict situation. Children may have lost a sense of control over their lives. Their family/home life may have changed. Parents may be away fighting in the war, members of their family may have been killed, they may have had to move. Previously safe spaces such as playgrounds, places of worship and even their own homes may have been destroyed or temporarily shut down. Schools and classrooms can provide a safe space for children to express their feelings and process what is happening around them. Learning spaces can provide a space where they’re physically separated from the violence. Perhaps more importantly, learning spaces and communities can create psychological safety, where children can safely ask



questions, make mistakes, learn and grow. Although physical safety may be out of teachers' control, they can help to create and maintain psychological safety for their students. Creating a safe classroom environment – whether physical or virtual – that is predictable and supportive is especially important for children during conflict. It is also important to ensure that the physical or virtual classroom environment brings some joy and playfulness back into children's lives. Daily routines and structures can and should be playful. In this session, we will talk about how to create a predictable, structured, playful and emotionally safe physical or virtual classroom environment for children."

- Ask participants what we've done to create predictability throughout the training?

Examples: setting ground rules, showing the daily timetable and plan, introductory and closing routines (like the Parachute Activity)

- Explain that all the things they've done can be recreated with their students.

Key Points

- In the face of disruption, creating routine and a sense of normality provides some structure for children to develop healthily.
- Schools and classrooms can provide a physically safe space, especially when other safe spaces have been destroyed or interrupted. Children's family/home life may have changed – parents fighting, deaths, etc., they may have had to move, playgrounds, religious institutions, etc. may have been destroyed or temporarily shut down. Schools and classrooms can also provide a safe space for children to express their feelings and disengage from the frightening reality in what were previously safe spaces.
- Schools and virtual classrooms can provide psychological safety for students by creating a nurturing environment where children can feel secure talking to their teachers about their feelings, asking for help, and engaging in learning – even if they make mistakes.
- Teachers may be the most trusted/safe adults left in children's lives. Parents and caregivers may not be with their children or may be unable to provide their child with physical or psychological security because they are facing their own difficulties.
- Predictability and structure are important for children to grow and develop healthily, and are even more important in crises.



Practice: Calm Corners



15 minutes



Flipchart/cards, markers



Pairs or whole group

- ➔ Explain that it's important that all students feel safe in the classroom, whether in person or virtually. It's the teacher's responsibility to create this sense of safety, both physical and psychological.
- ➔ Throughout the training, participants will learn many different strategies to create a safe learning environment. However, even in a generally safe environment, students may have a strong reaction to something happening in or outside the class and need to step away from their classmates and the ongoing activities to become calm. During conflict, it's especially important to provide a calm, safe space where students can remove themselves away from the main activities or their peers.

- ➔ Either in person or virtually, classrooms can create a "calm corner". Calm corners are semi-private spaces within the class that allow the student to let their teacher and classmates know that they need some time to themselves.
- ➔ To set up a calm corner, you need to consider:
 - The physical space (e.g., is there a soft cushion for the child to sit on?)
 - Privacy, while still allowing the teacher to see the student (e.g., with bookshelves or other dividers on 2–3 sides)
 - Cues or tools to help in the calming process (e.g., a visual reminder of the calming strategies the class has learned, calming objects like stuffed animals, Play-Doh or a stress ball)
 - How to introduce the students to the calm corner so that using it feels safe (i.e., introduce it early in the year, include it in your class rules).
- ➔ Ask participants to discuss, in pairs or as a whole group, how they can address these four aspects of a calm corner. To continue the conversation, ask:
 - What objects will they need?
 - How can they help students to feel safe in the space?



4.2 Creating a Predictable and Playful Learning Environment

- ➔ After the discussion, explain that calm corners can be adapted to the virtual classroom. Ask participants for ideas about how they might do this.
 - If they need help coming up with ideas, you can propose the following. Students can opt to turn their camera off, and maybe send the teacher a specific emoji to communicate that they need some space to calm down. If they have a virtual classroom platform, they can create a “calm corner” that includes resources, such as a reminder of calming strategies they have learned, videos of mindfulness activities, colouring activities, etc.
- ➔ Whether in person or virtually, it’s a good idea for the teacher to check in with students after they’ve used the calm corner. The check-in should be open-ended, and an invitation for the student to share only if they want to. They should never feel pressured to share how they’re feeling or why.



Practice: Daily Classroom Routines



1 hour



Flipchart/cardstock, markers , Handout 1: Parachute Activity and Handout 7: Daily Routines for the Classroom



Whole group, small group, whole group

➔ Explain that a routine is a set of regular, predictable practices that occur in the same order at the same time. They can and should be playful and meaningful for the students.

- To be **meaningful**, classroom routines and teaching methods should relate to students' lived experiences. By engaging and expanding on something they already know, children are better able to engage with what's going on around them and learning.
- Daily routines also offer emotional check-ins at the beginning and end of each day.
- Additionally, daily routines should be **playful**. Remind participants of the five characteristics of play: meaningful, joyful, socially interactive, actively engaging and iterative. Think about how you can create playful routines that reinforce one or more of these characteristics.
- For example, daily routines can include a time when students know they can stop and play a game, such as the P.O.W.E.R. activities that will be discussed in later sessions.

➔ Discuss "daily classroom routines" as a whole group and write them on a flipchart or whiteboard. What routines have you seen, used or could use in the classroom?



Daily routines in virtual classrooms are also important and can be a fun way to engage students and maintain a sense of community, even from a distance – e.g., having one student per day play a song of their choice during transitions.

Examples of daily classroom routines include:

- Parachute Activity (see Handout 1)
- Song or other creative way to start and end the class/day
- Morning Circle Time (see Handout 7)
- Starting each day with a "do now" activity as students come in (see Handout 7)
- Ending each day with what they liked/didn't like (Rose, Thorn and Bud – see Handout 7).

➔ Divide participants into small groups of three to five. If there are teachers from different grades/age groups, group them by the grade they teach. If they all teach similar grades, they will all create routines for that age group.



Assign groups to breakout rooms on a virtual platform. Encourage participants who will be teaching remotely to develop virtual/remote routines.



4.2 Creating a Predictable and Playful Learning Environment

- ➡ Ask each group to decide on their favourite classroom routine for their age group and prepare to present it to the full group.
 - ➡ Bring all groups back together, and get each group to demonstrate their routine. Add any that are missing to the “daily classroom routines” flipchart.
- ➡ Reflect as a group:
 - What did you like or dislike about some of the routines?
 - How can routines incorporate the five characteristics of play (meaningful, joyful, socially interactive, actively engaging and iterative)?
 - How will routines differ depending on who is in the class (grade, age, diversity, displacement, level of and exposure to conflict)?



Practice: Class Timetable



20 minutes



Flipchart/cards, markers



Whole group, individual

- ➔ Explain that another way to create predictability is to create a class timetable.
- ➔ Ask participants to reflect individually about how differently they feel when they know the training schedule for a day compared with when they don't.
- ➔ Show examples of class timetables. Ask participants to identify what they do and don't like about the different timetables.
Examples: colourful and clear is good, lack of pictures is bad for young children, etc.
- ➔ Discuss as a group:
 - Why is knowing the daily/weekly timetable important?
 - What are the components of a good timetable?
 - How can the timetable reinforce joy and playfulness?

➔ Provide each participant with a flipchart page or, along with markers and other materials.



Provide a template on PowerPoint, Google Slides or something similar for participants to fill in and illustrate/decorate their timetables.

➔ Explain that now participants will be able to create a weekly timetable for their classroom that includes routines.

Key Points



Students may not know what is going to happen at home or in their communities, so providing a predictable timetable creates a sense of normality and support.



Given their recent experiences, not knowing what is coming next may have negative implications for children.



A good timetable should follow a consistent structure and include enough detail for students to know what to expect each day.



Children will be more engaged with a timetable if it's visually pleasing and/or if they have participated in illustrating it. Creating and decorating/illustrating a timetable can be used as a classroom activity early in the school year.



Conclusion



10 minutes



Markers and pens, Classroom Wellbeing Portfolios



Whole group review, individual drawing/writing

➔ Recap what you've discussed (ask questions of the group or invite one or two participants to provide a recap).

- Create calm corners – a physical space where students can go to remove themselves from the class when they need to.
- Display the class timetable.
- Develop classroom routines that are done at the same time every day.

➔ Invite participants to take five minutes to add notes in their Classroom Wellbeing Portfolio.

- What strategies will they use to create predictability, safety and play in their classroom (physically or virtually)?
- What will they include in their calm corner?
- How will they create and display the timetable?
- What routines will they implement in their classroom?

