

# Strategies and Lesson Plans Virtual Relationship Mapping

Grades 6 - 12

Making Caring Common

**Caring Schools Network 2019 - 2020**

Updated March 2020

# Overview

## Recommended time

- 1 hour virtual meeting (if possible)
- Follow-up as needed
- Varying times that school adults will dedicate to a student in need

## Materials

- Online spreadsheet with students' name
- Emails of staff and faculty

## Advance preparation

- Email your staff and faculty the sheet with a description and purpose of the activity. Provide instructions within the email, or on a separate attached document.
- Schedule an online meeting with the entire staff or in groups (i.e. grade levels).
- Ask that all adults in the school attend the virtual meeting, including teachers, counselors, coaches, support staff, and others.
- Ensure that the online document is able to be accessed and edited by all staff and faculty members.
- Ensure appropriate security settings on the sheet so that it's only accessible to school adults.

## Objectives

- To identify students who do (or do not) have positive and stable relationships with adults in school
- To connect at least one adult in school to every student who does not currently have a positive and trusting relationship with an adult

## Why this matters

There may be nothing more important in a child's life than a positive and stable relationship with a caring adult. For students, a positive connection to at least one school adult – whether a teacher, counselor, sports coach, or other school staff member – can have tremendous benefits that include reduced bullying, lower dropout rates, and improved social emotional capacities.

Rather than leave these connections to chance, relationship mapping invests time in making sure that every student is known by at least one adult.

During a private meeting, school staff identify youth who do not currently have positive connections with school adults. Those students are then paired with a supportive adult mentor within the school. Adults may also choose to pay special attention to “at risk” students as these connections may be particularly important for students who are having a hard time at home or in school.

## Other considerations

### *Scheduling*

This activity is best scheduled in October (once staff have gotten to know students and their needs a little bit) and then again in March (in order to assess progress and make any adjustments before the end of the school year).

### *Scale*

In smaller schools, this activity may be conducted for all students at once. In larger schools, consider conducting Relationship Mapping in grade-level teams.

## Extending this strategy

Given that adults’ perceptions may not always align with students’ perceptions, it may be useful to also have students identify the adults they feel connected with. You may choose to adapt the adult relationship mapping activity by listing all of the adults in school and have students respond to an online survey identifying the adults they feel connected to. Alternately, you could use an online or paper survey to poll students about the number of school adults they would go to if they were having a hard time or had a personal problem. Comparing student and adult perceptions may provide valuable information to use in ensuring that all students feel connected to at least one adult at school.

## Step 1: Virtual Mapping (20-30 minutes)

Enable all faculty and staff to edit the relationship mapping spreadsheet in advance of the meeting, and ask that they carefully consider their relationships with each student. Here is an email template you may consider using:

*Dear Staff and Faculty,*

*Attached is a link to an online Relationship Mapping Spreadsheet: [\[link here\]](#)*

*The purpose of this activity is for us to see which students have positive relationships within our school, especially students whom we perceive as “at-risk.” This document will be used to make sure each student feels connected to at least one adult in our school.*

*Please place an ‘x’ to the left of the name of any student with whom you have a positive, trusting relationship and whom you believe would come to you if they had a personal problem.*

*Place an ‘x’ to the right of the name of any student you believe may be at risk for academic, personal, or other reasons.*

*Write your name under the “Faculty Match” next to students with whom you’ve noted you have a positive relationship.*

*It is okay to place both red and yellow x’s next to the same student’s name.*

*Pay particular attention to students you teach or work with, but look at the full list to identify any students with whom you may have developed relationships.*

***\*\*Please note: Do not press <enter> or <space> when adding x’s to the Positive Relationship or At Risk columns. Doing so will produce an inaccurate count.\*\****

***MCC Tip:*** *Make sure that staff and faculty have sufficient time to spend “mapping” in advance. This may mean spreading the mapping over several days or providing online support for teachers while they are mapping.*

The diagram below shows how a completed sheet will appear. List all students. Ask adults to review the names of students on the list, and place an ‘x’ in the appropriate columns.

Grade	Count	Positive Relationship	Student	At Risk	Count2	Faculty Match
7	5	xxxxx	John Doe	xx	2	Sara Jones Laura Deene
7	7	xxxxxxx	Maya Lee		0	Heather Locke Kate Liang
8	0		Riley Collins	xxxxxxx	7	
8	4	xxxx	Logan Stein	xx	2	Johnathan Seymour Erica Jeffries

**MCC Tip:** If possible, aggregate the data before holding the conversation. Once everyone has had a chance to complete the map, ask that folks wait until the summary portion of the strategy before they analyze the list. This can help everyone focus on the conversation, and reviewing the results toward the end of the strategy can be more effective.

## Step 2: Reflective Meeting (60-75 minutes)

### Framing (15-20 minutes)

Encourage each staff member to think of a positive relationship he or she had with a teacher or other school adult when he or she was a student. Ask them to spend two minutes writing down how this relationship affected them.

***MCC Tip:** Another resource to frame the conversation might be research findings about why positive relationships are important for students and for schools. Check out the Making Caring Common website for examples.*

Next, ask staff to think of a positive relationship they have had with a student. Ask them to spend two minutes writing down how they believe this relationship affected the student.

Ask for two or three volunteers to share first how they were affected by positive relationships in school:

- Who were the relationships with? What made them meaningful?

Ask for another two or three volunteers to share how they believe students were affected by positive relationships with them:

- Who were the students? How did the relationships form? What made them meaningful?

### Reflections (20 minutes)

If the map (or summary sheet) has not been shown or was locked during the meeting, the facilitator of the meeting can share their screen or ask staff to spend five minutes silently reviewing the sheet on their computer screens. Ask staff and faculty members to review the document in silence for five minutes, and consider the following two questions:

- What interesting or surprising details do you notice?
- What questions or reflections does the map evoke?

Next, ask three volunteers to share what they learned and what they wondered about.

***MCC Tip:** Reviewing the map in silence is useful for people who want to think about what to say before they say it.*

## Action planning (20 minutes)

The meeting facilitator (most likely an administrator) can read aloud the names of those students with no mark in the positive relationships column (i.e., students who have no yellow x's). Ask staff volunteers to reach out to these students. Next to the names of their respective students, make a record on the Relationship Map of the staff member who volunteered. For those students in need and who are not initially matched with a staff volunteer, the facilitator should assign a coupling based on matching interests, schedules, etc. If the school has available counselors, those individuals might serve as the key adults in charge of either matching with or matching up students in need of an adult. Prompt staff to think about the following questions:

- What possible factors contribute to some students having more x's in the yellow column than others?
- What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to increase the number of caring adult relationships our students have?
- What can you do, as an individual, to increase the number of caring relationships we see in this school?

Next, the meeting facilitator can highlight students that staff have identified as at-risk (i.e. students who have red x's). Even if these at-risk youth also have yellow x's, it may be appropriate to identify additional staff who can connect with them. You may also want to encourage staff members to contact one another about this student should they have concerns or suggestions. Prompt staff to consider the following:

- What possible factors contribute to some students having more red x's than others?

- What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to reduce the number of red x's for students?
- How can staff work together to develop a climate that fosters meaningful connections among all students and school adults?

***MCC Tip:** Depending on the size of the school, you may decide to have staff reach out to students with only one yellow 'x' as well. If there's time, the facilitator may want to ask staff to comment on their reasons for placing red x's next to students' names. You might ask: What risks did staff identify? What kinds of support would be most effective? This can help match the right supports to students in need.*

For those students with a noticeably greater number of red x's and no yellow x's, it may be worthwhile to consider assigning them multiple mentoring adults.

Refer to [Appendix 3: Questions for Reflection](#) at the end of this document as a guide to producing meaningful, reflective discussion.

## Closing (5 minutes)

Re-emphasize the benefits of this activity – that fostering positive relationships with caring adults is critical for students' academic, social, and emotional lives – and express appreciation for the commitment of staff to prioritize these relationships at this school. Make sure to sincerely thank the staff for their participation in the Relationship Mapping exercise and the conversation.

***MCC Tip:** To assist with follow-up, mark a reminder on the school calendar for four weeks after the reflective meeting and then again four to five months after the initial reflective meeting. Do this immediately after the reflective meeting ends.*

## Step 3: Follow-Up (30 - 60 minutes)

### 1st Follow-Up

Approximately four weeks after the first reflective meeting, reconvene all staff who committed to reaching out to disconnected students (those without yellow x's and those with red x's). This will provide participating school staff with a supportive community with whom to share the challenges and successes of connecting with students. During these conversations, facilitators should find out two things:

- Was a connection made with each student?
- Did the student respond positively?

If a connection has not been made, have the group discuss ways to overcome challenges and strategies for making connections with students. If a connection was made but the student did not respond positively, the facilitator and staff member – perhaps in conjunction with a school counselor – can discuss alternative strategies.

### 2nd Follow-Up

One to two months after the reflective meeting, reconvene staff members who committed to reaching out to students to determine if connections have been sustained and if progress has been made.

**MCC Tip:** *In addition to these two formal follow-up activities, administrators should be mindful of conducting regular informal check-ins with staff and students.*

## Appendix 1: School Testimony

“While our school had traditionally really excelled in academics, the social and emotional life of the students had not been as big a priority. We’d heard about the idea of ‘relationship mapping’ and decided to give it a try. When we were done, there were definitely some students who had no x’s, or very few x’s, next to their name. Among those kids, we were all very surprised to find academically high-achieving students, as well as kids who were struggling socially. We made plans as a school to engage all the students who were disconnected from the adult community. In addition to making sure that their advisor reached out to pull the kids in, for each child we identified at least one other adult in the community, usually a teacher or a coach, who would take steps to build a sustained, meaningful relationship as well.”

- Doug Neuman, School Counselor

Buckingham Browne and Nichols School

Cambridge, MA

## Appendix 2: Activity Variation for Large Schools

In schools that are very large or where there may be concerns about confidentiality, it may be desirable to do the mapping part of this activity through an online system. Here are some tips for doing this: using a survey or online system to which all staff have access, list the names of all students organized by grade level and last name. Next to each name provide two check-boxes: One to indicate that the staff person logging in has a positive and trusting relationship with this student, another to indicate that the staff person believes this student may have significant personal, academic, or other risk factors.

- Have staff login securely to the survey or system and complete the survey prior to the Reflective Meeting.
- Assign an administrator, instructional technology staff member, or other staff member to review the results and flag those students who were identified as not having a positive relationship with any staff member as well as those identified as facing significant risks. Print out a list of these students and bring this list to the whole-staff Reflective Meeting.
- Follow instructions for Step Two: Reflective Meeting above.

## Appendix 3: Questions for Reflection

We suggest using these questions throughout the process, but especially during the Reflective Meeting as the group is summarizing findings and making action steps:

- Which students or groups have the greatest number of yellow x's? That is, which students are most connected to adults? Why would this be?
- Which students or groups have the greatest number of red x's? That is, which students are most at risk? What are the likely reasons for this?
- What barriers are keeping the disconnected students from having positive relationships with adults? Consider structural barriers, staff-imposed barriers, student-imposed barriers. How could we overcome these barriers?
- Which adults are best positioned to reach out to disconnected students? Why?
- What strategies might be most helpful in reaching out to disconnected students? How can we individualize our efforts and tailor them to specific students?
- What challenges are we most likely to encounter in reaching out to disconnected students? How can we address them? Can we engage other students in the process?
- Beyond reaching out to specific students, what else can we do to change our school culture so that all students feel connected to adults in the future?

**The following resources provide additional information and suggestions for connecting to students:**

Sears, N. Building Relationships with Students. National Education Association. Retrieved from [www.nea.org/tools/29469.htm](http://www.nea.org/tools/29469.htm)

Swain, C. (2011). The care and support of teenagers. Education Leadership Online, 68. Retrieved from [www.ascd.org/publications/educationalleadership/jun11/vol68/num09/The-Care-and-Support-ofTeenagers.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educationalleadership/jun11/vol68/num09/The-Care-and-Support-ofTeenagers.aspx)

Warshof, A., & Rappaport, N. (2013). Staying connected with troubled students. Education Leadership, 71(1). Retrieved from [www.nancyrappaport.com/downloads/Educational%20Leadership%20-%20Staying%20Connected.pdf](http://www.nancyrappaport.com/downloads/Educational%20Leadership%20-%20Staying%20Connected.pdf)