Strategies and Lesson Plans
Relationship Mapping
Grades 6 - 12

Making Caring Common
Caring Schools Network 2022-23
Updated January 2023
Overview

Recommended time

- 30-60 minutes preparation for staff meeting
- 1-hour initial staff meeting
- Follow-up as needed in smaller cohort
- Varying times that school adults will dedicate to a student in need

Materials

- Meeting space for an all-staff meeting that is not accessible to students on the day of the meeting (alternatively, this session can be conducted online)
- Individual laptops or computers for the mapping activity (we recommend this over using a smaller device, like a phone, as the mapping involves reviewing a list of students)
- Relationship Map (an online spreadsheet with students’ names)

Preparation

- Make a copy of the Relationship Map, and enter all students’ names and grade level.
- Check the sheet’s access. Ensure that the online document can be accessed and edited by all staff and faculty members, and ensure appropriate security settings on the sheet, so that it’s only accessible to school adults.
- Schedule an all-staff meeting to conduct Relationship Mapping. If possible, ask all adults in the school to attend, including teachers, counselors, coaches, support staff, and others.

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 late fall, once staff have gotten to know students and their needs a little bit, and then again in late spring to assess progress and make adjustments before the end of the school year.

Extending this strategy

Given that adults’ perceptions may not always align with students’ perceptions, it may be useful to also have students identify adults they feel connected with through Reverse Relationship Mapping. To access the Reverse Relationship Mapping Strategy, please reach out to the Making Caring Common team.
Step 1: Preparing the Map (30 minutes)

Make a copy of the Relationship Map, and enter student names and grades. Before the staff meeting, ensure the online document can be accessed and edited by all staff and faculty members and ensure appropriate security settings on the sheet so that it's only accessible to school adults. **Be sure that staff does not work on the mapping activity until the meeting date.**

Schedule an all-staff meeting to share the purpose of, and conduct, Relationship Mapping. If possible, ask all adults in the school to attend, including teachers, counselors, coaches, support staff, and others.

**MCC Tip:** We highly recommend conducting the mapping exercise together during an all-staff meeting to ensure that all staff members understand the purpose of the mapping as well as directions. This will also ensure that the highest number of staff members participate.

Step 2: Staff Meeting & Mapping (60-75 minutes)

Framing (10 minutes)

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

**MCC Tip:** Another resource for framing this conversation would be research findings about why positive relationships are important for students and for schools. See the Making Caring Common website for examples.

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

Then, 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?

Next, share the purpose of the Relationship Mapping strategy – to identify students that may need extra support and ensure that all students at your school are anchored to caring adults.

**Mapping (10-20 minutes)**

Share the prepared Relationship Map with all staff, and explain the following directions (also found in the spreadsheet).

1. Carefully review student names. Pay particular attention to students you teach or work with directly, but look at the full list to identify any students with whom you may have developed relationships.
2. Check one box under “Positive Relationship” next to 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.
3. Check one box under “At Risk (general)” next to the name of any student you believe may be at risk for social-emotional, personal/home, or other reasons.
4. Check one box under “At Risk (academic)” next to the name of any student you believe may be at risk for academic reasons.
5. **NOTE:** It is okay to check boxes under more than one category for the same student. (I.e., a student can have positive relationships AND be at risk)
6. **NOTE:** Please check only one box under each column for each student. Do not check more than once for either “Positive Relationship” or “At Risk” for each student.**

Refer to the image below for an example of a completed Relationship Map.

![Relationship Map](image-url)
Give staff 10-15 minutes to complete the mapping exercise. Check in after 10 minutes to see how much more time staff needs and if they have any questions about the mapping process. Be sure that everyone completes the mapping exercise before moving to the next section.

**MCC Tip:** In larger schools you may decide to spend the remainder of the meeting completing the Relationship Map. If so, find a meeting time within the next week or two to continue the meeting with the reflections and action planning sections below.

**Reflections (15 minutes)**

Ask staff to carefully look at the map. Ask them to review it in silence for five minutes, thinking about two things:

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

**MCC Tip:** Reviewing the map in silence is useful for people who like to think a bit before they speak.

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

Share the quick analysis of your schools map (on the right side of the chart, under the directions box), sharing how many students do not have a positive, stable relationship with a school adult as well as how many students are listed under risk categories.

**Action planning (20 minutes)**

The meeting facilitator can read aloud the names of those students who do not have any positive relationships with an adult. Ask for staff volunteers who can reach out to, and build connections with, 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 after the meeting based on matching interests, schedules, etc. Prompt staff to think about the following questions:

- What possible factors contribute to some students having more positive relationships than others?
- What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to increase the number of positive relationships for students?
- What can you do, as an individual, to increase the number of students who are connected to school staff?
• For volunteers who will connect with students, how can you begin building these new connections?

Next, the meeting facilitator can highlight students that staff have identified as at-risk. Even if these at-risk youth also have positive relationships, identify staff to connect with them. Prompt staff to think about:

• What possible factors contribute to some students having more checks under ‘at-risk’?
• What kinds of school-wide changes can be made to reduce the number of students at risk?
• How can the staff work together to develop a climate that fosters meaningful connections among all students and staff?

**MCC Tip:** Depending on the size of the school, you may decide to have staff reach out to students with only one check under ‘positive relationships’ as well. If there is time, the facilitator may want to ask staff to comment on their reasons for labeling students as ‘at-risk’ as part of action planning: 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 counts (at-risk) and no yellow counts (positive relationships), 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 discussions.

**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 three to four months after the initial reflective meeting to reconvene all staff who committed to connecting with students. 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 or at-risk students. This will provide participating school staff with a supportive community with whom they may share the challenges and successes of connecting with students. During these conversations, facilitators should lead a discussion using the following questions:

- Was a connection made with each student?
- How did the student respond?
- What strategies are working well? What are some challenges in making connections to these students?

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 dots, or very few dots, 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: Staff Email Template

Adapt the email template below to share the purpose of Relationship Mapping prior to the staff meeting.

Dear [enter school name] Staff,

To continue to build a positive school community and ensure that all students are connected to school adults, our school will engage in Relationship Mapping this year.

This activity aims to identify which students could use additional positive relationships in our school, especially students we perceive to be “at-risk”. The information we gather will help to ensure each student feels connected to at least one adult in our school.

Here’s what we’ll do together during the Relationship Mapping session:
1. Review the list of student names,
2. Check the box under ‘Positive Relationship’ for students you have trusting relationships with and whom you believe will come to you if they had personal problems,
3. Check the box under ‘At-Risk’ or ‘Academic Risk’ for those students you believe may be at risk for academic, personal or other reasons, and
4. Match students with caring adults using the information we gather together.

We will be meeting to learn about Relationship Mapping and create our school map on [enter meeting date and time].
Appendix 3: Questions for Reflection

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

- Which students or groups are most connected to adults? What are the likely reasons for this?
- Which students or groups 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, and 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:

