

PEACE POWER TOOLS

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Systematic Widespread Handshakes, Smiles, Acknowledgement, Affection

Summary:

Systematic widespread handshakes, smiles, acknowledgement for simple presence, and affection are pleasant greetings with or without physical contact as appropriate. Pleasant greetings are no-cost cultural practices, which can be easily understood and quickly imitated. These pleasant verbal or physical gestures can be incorporated into skills programs emphasizing modeling, coaching, and behavioral rehearsal with feedback. Successful programs encourage a daily-ritualized program of behavior to be engaged in throughout the day. *Systematic* use is important; for example, greeting children with a handshake at the classroom door every day leads to improved behavior.

Resources Needed:

- None

Implementation Steps:

- Engage in greetings (i.e. handshakes, smiles, acknowledgements and affection) frequently at least on a daily basis.

Variations:

- Discuss, model, and rehearse greetings and acknowledgement with youth. (Videotapes may be of use here.)
- Provide feedback and offer suggestions for improvement. Encourage participants to identify positive behaviors as well as the areas in need of improvement.
- Give participants homework, encouraging further use of social skills outside of the group.
- Follow up positive actions with acknowledgements.

Rationale and Evidence Base:

Substantial evidence shows that recognition is a very powerful principle, and several studies indicate that consistent, simple friendly greetings and handshakes or other physical contacts improve student behavior. This can be particularly crucial for youth who more often engage in problem behavior, who often receive less consistent acknowledgement. (In some instances private or subtle nonverbal expressions can be more meaningful than public acknowledgement.) Physiological research indicates that touch can increase serotonin and dopamine levels, thus preparing students for learning and appropriate socialization. Cross-cultural research shows that the low levels of violence in France could potentially be related to high levels of positive touching among youth, with the converse being true in the United States where most touch among peers tends to be aggressive. (While caution is necessary to avoid inappropriate contacts, the importance of affection and touch from adults and peers, including for preteens and teens, has been well established.) Instruction and practice of desirable social skills in a regular class setting can help improve the peer relationship among children who experience peer socialization challenges. As with all forms of recognition, systematic use of handshakes, smiles, acknowledgement, and affection should be developed in collaboration with those involved. This will help ground principles within the cultural context of those involved, curtail myths based on inaccurate assumptions, and ensure that types of acknowledgement and affection appropriate to the situation are learned.

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