

## Positive Instructional Strategies for a Relationship-Centered Classroom

Lions Quest lessons use positive instructional strategies to

- 1) create a relationship-centered learning community that is student-centered, consistently safe, engaging, caring, cooperative, and well-managed;
- 2) teach, model, and reinforce SEL skills.

These strategies are modified within the lessons to be developmentally appropriate at each grade level. They are used for the purposes discussed on the following pages when teaching any part of a lesson including instructional phases in the core lesson, Building Skills Beyond the Lesson activities, Applying Across the Curriculum activities, Community Connection activities, Family Connection activities, and Building Skills Beyond the Lesson activities. They are particularly important in supporting the specific purposes of the designated instructional phases.

Using instructional strategies that promote SEL become powerful levers that will transform the classroom into a relationship-centered learning community that is stimulating, thought-provoking, highly interactive, and deeply meaningful for students and facilitators alike. The facilitator and students create a safe and nurturing learning community in which students feel seen, heard, known, and valued and develop bonds of mutual support. The learning experiences are a laboratory for both teaching and learning the social and emotional competencies and skills and reinforcing them through daily modeling and practice. When students feel safe and are able to focus on learning while developing skills of critical thinking, problem solving, and reflection in a supportive and collaborative environment, their academic achievement can improve significantly. Ultimately, with consistent use of the following instructional strategies, students build the capacity to “walk the SEL talk” as these skills and behaviors become habits that positively impact all areas of their lives academically, socially, and emotionally.

### Setting up the physical environment

**Student-centered seating** Interactive activities call for students to be able to see each other in a circle or work in small group settings to build the inclusive classroom and facilitate cooperative work. Desks can be arranged in cooperative table setting where students can do both individual and group work.

**Student work** In each unit, several lessons involve student work that can be displayed in the room to demonstrate the student-centered classroom and the skills they have acquired.

**Visual aids to reinforce skills** All major skills are displayed on charts or posters after they are taught and posted either on the wall or on a chart stand where the facilitator can easily refer to them throughout the course.

## Uses for Positive Instructional Strategies

Positive Instructional Strategies can be used to

- set up the physical environment;
- establish a safe, nurturing, comfortable environment;
- introduce a lesson in the Discovering phase;
- introduce new skills and concepts in the Connecting phase;
- set up a successful guided practice in the Practicing phase;
- encourage reflection;
- apply skills and concepts to new situations in the Applying phase.

## **Establishing a safe, nurturing, comfortable environment**

**Facilitator language** All facilitator language is invitational, relational, nurturing, inclusive, and engaging. The facilitator's words make all students feel seen, heard, included, and valued.

**Modeling** In every word and action in the lessons, the facilitator is demonstrating high levels of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. When the facilitator makes an error, he or she apologizes and makes the situation right. Not only does this allow for correction, it models respectful communication and problem solving.

**Greeting and addressing all students by name** The facilitator greets students at the door, addresses them by name, and says goodbye as they leave the class. The personal connection builds relationships and creates bonding between the facilitator and students.

**Establishment and ongoing use of Shared Agreements** To support and sustain the relationship-centered learning community, the facilitator guides the development of Shared Agreements with students in Unit 1, Lesson 2 and then reinforces them daily. These agreements make students' expectations for a respectful classroom explicit, motivate students to take ownership for upholding them, and reinforce SEL skills daily as they are used. The facilitator also identifies a safe and respectful way to address situations when students break the agreements. One method is having the students help monitor the behavior by having a signal if the agreements are being broken, such as a hand signal or a word like "focus" that they can say to the group in general to draw attention back to the agreements.

**Eliminating "Put-Down" statements** Put-downs are defined as statements and actions that diminish a person using hurtful language or direct insults. When put-downs occur in class, the consequence is for students to offer three "Build-Up" statements that can be offered in person, written and delivered directly to the target student, or given to the facilitator to check if the statements are truly "Build-Up" statements before delivering them.

**Establishing a "Get Quiet" signal** The facilitator establishes a respectful signal to indicate when one activity is ending and another is about to begin. This signal can be raising a hand while students do the same and draw their conversation to a close, or it can be a bell, chime, or physical signal such as hand clapping or a gesture. It allows the facilitator to manage group work activities without raising their voice or talking over others. The facilitator may also want to announce how much time remains in the activity so that students have time to finish their thoughts or last sentences. This models the value of every voice while simultaneously models time management.

**Low-risk to higher-risk activities** The lessons move from low-risk to higher-risk activities in the curriculum as students become more respectful of each other and skilled in their interactions and the learning environment becomes safe for deeper learning. For example, the interactions go from low to higher risk as students talk to one person, then a few people, and then in front of the whole group. Within a lesson, activities begin low levels of risk that deal with facts and simple preferences and move to practice in giving personal opinions or other responses that might require more personal risk and investment after modeling and checking for understanding.

*In every word and action in the lessons, the facilitator is demonstrating high levels of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.*

*The lessons move from low-risk to higher-risk activities in the curriculum as students become more respectful of each other and skilled in their interactions and the learning environment becomes safe for deeper learning.*

**High levels of engagement** Students are invited to interact with all students in the class through structured conversations and cooperative group activities in each lesson that make it safe for students to continuously reach out and communicate with different people throughout the course.

**Multiple modalities** To create a safe classroom, all learning requires several modalities to reach all students. Lions Quest lessons include reading, writing, speaking, listening, singing, drawing, and movement through the four phases of the lesson. They also include energizers and cooperative games to keep the students engaged and interested. The Applying Across the Curriculum section of each lesson engages students in applying their SEL skills in academic and other subject areas.

**Inclusive environment** The lesson activities are structured so that all students are participating fully. The facilitator makes sure that every student is part of a group, has an opportunity to speak, and contributes to the final product, decision, or learning outcome of each lesson.

**Humor** While skills are being taught and modeled, the tone of the class is humorous and fun when appropriate. This makes it possible for students to take risks and try new behaviors. The message to students is that it is okay to try things, make mistakes, and carry on with good humor while trying their best.

**Student voice and choice** The lessons give students choices so that they become adept at asking for what they need, speaking up, saying what they mean respectfully, sharing preferences, weighing in with facts and opinions, choosing approaches to learning activities and deliverables, and reflecting with others on what they are learning.

**Adjusting to student needs** The facilitator is present and pays attention to student reactions, need for clarification, and need for change in activity and addresses the need immediately.

**Focus on the positive** Learning SEL skills can be challenging, and students often struggle with demonstrating them in the early stages. The facilitator builds their courage and confidence by focusing on the positive skills and qualities that are emerging and seeking opportunities to praise those efforts equitably.

**No war stories** The Lions Quest programs teach students the skills to be socially and emotionally competent and to make healthy choices in challenging situations. They are NOT counseling programs nor are they designed to have students reveal real-life problematic situations. The facilitator establishes the guideline at the beginning of the course that students are not to gossip or divulge personal, family, friend, or otherwise confidential information when discussing class topics. Students speak for themselves and not specifically about people who are or are not in the room. Students are directed not to name persons when providing examples. The facilitator makes clear at the beginning of the school year that students are not to share highly problematic situations with the class. Those situations need to be taken to a counselor or shared with the facilitator out of class time. The facilitator lets students know about the obligation to share that information with a trained professional.

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