



PROGRAM SUPPORT NOTES

The Empty Desk

Identifying and Assisting At-Risk Students

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For Teachers

Introduction

Psychologist Dr Carr-Gregg describes our students as "arguably the most vulnerable generation of students, in our history" with schools becoming "the front line in the provision of psychological 'first aid' to many young people". (ACER 2005) But how equipped are teachers and support staff in identifying which students are at risk, and at what point do we intervene?

This program, through the experiences of students, teachers, consultants and administrative teams, looks at strategic directions for the classroom teacher and whole school in supporting students who are at risk of not completing school. The causative factors of disengagement are examined and the behavioral manifestations are dealt with using simple and practical approaches that can be implemented in the classroom by any teacher at any educational level.

The support notes for this program provide a summary of the essential content provided in each chapter. Additionally, discussion questions for teacher professional development sessions and workshops are included, as well as helpful websites for accessing further information.

Timeline

00:00:00	Introduction
00:01:11	Identifying students at risk
00:06:04	Causes of disengagement
00:10:36	Inclusive strategies
00:16:44	Management strategies
00:21:14	Conclusion
00:21:49	Credits
00:22:17	End program

Related Titles

Teaching ESL Students in the Mainstream Classroom

Student-Centered Learning

Not in Our School – Creating a Non-Bullying Culture – Tackling Bullying Big Time Series

Counseling – A Guide for Teachers

Recommended Resources

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at600.htm>
<http://www.acer.edu.au/enews/2005/05/identifying-the-student-at-risk>
<http://www.michaelcarr-gregg.com.au/teachers.shtml>
<http://www.arp.sprnet.org/curric/atrisk/star.htm>
<http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9214/risk.htm>
http://www.yapa.org.au/openingdoors/early_school_leavers/needs_issues.php

Active Viewing Guide

Identifying Students At-Risk

- School provides an environment where most students form friendships, feel a sense of belonging within the school community and learn effectively.
- Students are at risk (STAR) of disengaging from schooling for a variety of reasons.
- STAR students may present negative or ambivalent attitudes, lack ambition or ability and experience tensions within the school community.
- Failure to achieve year 12 potentially places students at a lifelong disadvantage.
- Teachers who nurture strong relationships with their students will be best able to identify students at risk.

SIGNS – a combination of the following may indicate disengagement from schooling, providing they cannot be attributed to normal teenage behaviors:

- Changes in behavioral patterns
- Difficulty relating to other students
- Deterioration in quality of schoolwork or not submitting work
- Drop in interest or ambivalence towards learning activities
- General despondency, not reaching full potential
- Poor concentration
- Overreacting to situations normally managed calmly
- Withdrawn, lethargic or frequently feeling unwell
- Increasing distracting behaviors, argumentative with peers or teachers
- Angry, combative or overly sensitive to criticism
- Difficulty forming new positive relationships
- Literacy and/or numeracy levels falling below the age standard
- Poor grades with no signs of change or improvement
- Drop in attendance and punctuality indicates already disengaged or engaged elsewhere.

Causes of disengagement

Factors that need to be considered when discerning disengagement of students:

- Low ability (poor literacy and numeracy levels)
- Low sense of achievement (low satisfaction)
- Low socio-economic backgrounds may engender in students a survival mentality that does not include long term goals, such as education.
- Home life that is unsafe or in conflict causes stress.
- Poorly educated family who do not value education and fail to provide early development opportunities (educational toys, games, books)
- Parents with excessive work commitments leaving little time or energy to invest in children's mental, social and emotional development
- Live in regional or remote areas
- Student friendship groups that are disengaged or may abuse drugs or alcohol or engage in petty crime
- Parents that model negativity or adversary towards schooling institutions
- Refugees from difficult social/political situations who are traumatized or have lost family
- Experiencing racism or cultural misunderstanding or experiencing language barriers
- Psychological, physical or intellectual impairment

Inclusive Strategies

In the mainstream classroom, the challenge lies in implementing strategies for STAR students while maintaining a positive classroom environment for all students.

- Negotiate boundaries to suit the student but be fair to all students
- Provide inclusive classroom practices that encourage risk taking in learning
- Take opportunities to celebrate and share diverse social and cultural practices
- Nurture a sense of belonging for all students and promote inclusiveness
- Establish and maintain trust and respect between teachers and students
- Actively give positive feedback of students' good work or behavior
- Be prepared to listen to students' learning needs and act to enable them in their endeavors
- Be consistent in praising and giving constructive criticism
- Plan time for social interaction in class and sharing of stories

The Empty Desk

Identifying and Assisting At-Risk Students

- Provide meaningful learning opportunities that appeal to, and resonate with, students of all capabilities and backgrounds
- Broaden students' minds about a variety of cultural and social perspectives
- Plan a variety of learning tasks; such as self-paced and collaborative tasks that promote a number of skills and acknowledge students learn in different ways (use Gardner's multiple intelligences approach).

Management Strategies

Effective behavior management is essential to managing students at risk in the classroom and to creating a positive classroom environment.

- Teachers must provide immediate, consistent and respectful feedback regarding negative behaviors and their payoffs.
- Target behavior, not students, in a private forum calmly and promptly.
- Ensure each student is a participant in negotiations to allow them to own their behavior.
- Be sure to clearly state and explain to students a range of alternative, constructive positive behavior and their payoffs.
- Reflect on teacher strategies and be prepared to adjust unsuccessful approaches.
- Preventative measures may include identification of early warning signs of a student's misbehavior patterns and early, low-key intervention. Prevention may include quiet acknowledgement of positive behaviors – note in diary, contact parents or a simple smile with eye contact.

Support for teachers is absolutely vital in successfully identifying and managing at risk students. This may be in the form of:

- Professional Development courses addressing the specific needs of the school context such as:
 - Enhancing communication with parents
 - Building positive teacher-student relationships
 - Identifying drug/alcohol abuse in adolescents and getting help
 - Designing inclusive classrooms
- Teachers need to collaborate and develop consistent, effective procedures and policies to help at risk students. Whole school approaches can help to support teachers in this process.
- Internal staff expertise should be identified and utilized, including specialist teaching staff, counselors, social workers, and linked organizations in the local community.
- Time needs to be dedicated to communication with key stakeholders, including students, carers and parents, counselors, social workers and other organizations.

Extension Activities

Discussion questions

1. Discuss in small groups the current challenges you face in working with students at risk in your classes. What commonalities do you share as a group? What differences are identified?
2. What supports and policies are currently in effect in your school to help teachers working with STAR students? Where do you see potential for improvement on the current situation? How do you envision these improvements could be implemented?
3. What is one successful strategy you use for creating an inclusive classroom?
4. What is one successful strategy you use for giving positive feedback?
5. What is one successful strategy you use to motivate students to attend classes? To submit assignments?
6. Reflect on the opportunities you have to find out about a student's home life, or to interact with student's parents or carers. What obstacles can make this difficult to achieve? What strategies or practices have you tried that have helped you to enhance parental involvement or to understand more about student's home lives?
7. Select a general lesson or topic that you would typically teach in your subject area. Working with others in your department, brainstorm 5 to 10 different ways this content could be taught. You may want to consider multiple intelligences and learning styles among your students. Aim to come up with engaging ideas that you think could really appeal to the diverse needs of your students.
8. What personal changes can you make in your teaching to help STAR students you work with? Make a list of three strategies you plan to implement: one will be for the next teaching day, one for a week from now and one for a month from now.