



Six Core Questions

at the heart of a positive
classroom community



The preschool and pre-kindergarten years are an exciting and important time in a child's life. The adults they interact with—both family members and teachers—have essential roles to play in making sure that children feel safe, cared about, liked, and listened to. **By intentionally creating and nurturing strong, positive relationships with children and their families, teachers help children build the social-emotional competencies that are the foundation for their success in school and in life.**



At the beginning of the year, as you start to learn about the children in your class and build relationships with them, you can lay the foundation for a positive classroom community by considering the **six questions** in this Guide.



What names do we need to know in our school?



What should we do if we feel sad or scared at school?



What are our rules?



When do things happen at school?



Who works at our school?



How can we make and keep friends?

The questions in this guide are essential ones to keep in mind as you establish an environment in which children feel **empowered to think, feel, explore, discover, learn, and grow**. These are questions that children may be wondering about, even if they aren't yet able to articulate them.

As the year continues, you can **strengthen your community by revisiting the questions**, especially as your learning environment changes.



Pose the questions to children in your class, rather than providing the answers right away. Answers often act as “stop signs,” but **questions are the green light** to discussion and help children develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Try the suggested activities included in this Guide to address each question and share the ideas with children’s families to reinforce at home.



Your approach to answering these questions will send many **positive messages** to the children in your class, such as...



This is a good place to be.



There are places you can be by yourself.



You belong here.



You can do many things on your own here.

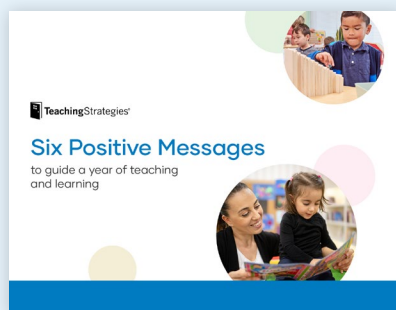


This is a place you can trust.



This is a safe place to explore.

RELATED CONTENT



Learn more about how to send positive messages in the eBook [Six Positive Messages to Guide a Year of Teaching and Learning](#)



QUESTION

1

What names do we need to know in our school?

One of the most exciting aspects of coming to school is **meeting new people**, including classmates, teachers, and families. There are many ways you can help children get to know each other.



QUESTION

1

What names do we need to know in our school?



- Invite children to **introduce themselves by sharing the name they liked to be called** and something they enjoy doing or learning. Learn this information in advance from families in case a child is reluctant to speak in front of the group. You can share on the child's behalf and ask for a simple, nonverbal confirmation of the child's choosing, such as a nod, smile, or high-five.
- **Record children's introductions** of themselves. Use this information to create your **first class book** of the year as well as some of your **first documentation** of children's current knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- Encourage children to **send you a drawing and/or a photo** of themselves doing something they enjoy.
- Invite children to **include photos or drawings of their families**. A family member can assist in labeling the drawing or adding a note about the photo.

QUESTION

1

What names do we need to know in our school?



- Incorporate children's artwork and other creations into your class discussions, asking children to talk about the people and activities in the pictures.
- Pay attention to children's interests and let them know if any classmates or adults who work with them in the classroom share those interests.
- Create photo/name cards for each child to refer to as they learn to write their first name. If possible, laminate them for durability, as children will have many reasons to refer to their photo/name cards throughout the year.



QUESTION

1

What names do we need to know in our school?

Silly Dance

106

Objective 34
Explores musical concepts and expression

Related Objectives: 1a, 2c, 3a, 4, 5, 9b, 11a, 15c

What You Do

1. Sing to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Invite a child to lead the others in a silly dance.

[David] does the [David] dance, [David] dance, [David] dance.

[David] does the [David] dance, and we can do it, too.

2. Repeat the song and choose another child to lead the dance. Substitute each child's name as he or she leads. Encourage children to copy the dance of the leader.

[Raiya] does the [Raiya] dance, [Raiya] dance, [Raiya] dance...

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Building community throughout the year

- Help children learn **each other's names** by following the guidance in Mighty Minutes 103, "Abby Had an Anteater," or **Mighty Minutes** 106, "Silly Dance."
- Help children learn to recognize the **written names of classmates**. Follow the guidance of Intentional Teaching Experience LL47, "The Name Game," to help children have fun while demonstrating alphabet knowledge and matching initial letter-sounds to the names of classmates.



QUESTION

1

What names do we need to know in our school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Returning to school after an extended break

- Play games and sing songs that **incorporate children's names**.
- **Read class books** together as a group and reminisce about creating them.
- **Maintain the opening routine** to welcome children to the classroom each day.





QUESTION

2

What should we do if we feel sad or scared at school?

A key social-emotional skill is **managing feelings**. Take steps to help children learn to manage and express their feelings and to recognize it's okay to be sad or scared.



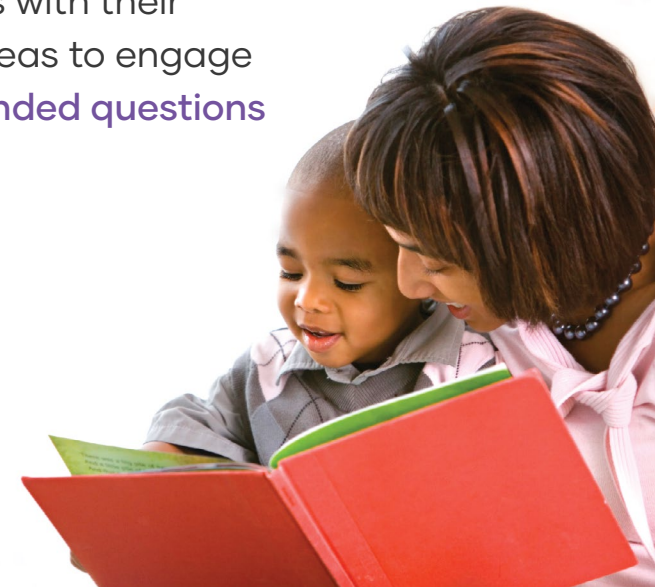
QUESTION

2

What should we do if we feel sad or scared at school?



- Let children know **it's normal to feel sad or scared sometimes** and that adults at school are there to help them.
- Talk with children about the many **positive aspects of school**, not just the scary ones.
- **Ask children what they're looking forward to** doing at school. Ask them to **think, talk, and draw about things that make them happy**.
- **Read books together that have rich social-emotional themes.** Help children identify the problem in the story, empathize with the characters, and sort out their own feelings.
- Recommend families read books with their children about feelings. Share ideas to engage children, such as **asking open-ended questions** about the books.



QUESTION

2

What should we do if we feel sad or scared at school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Building community throughout the year

- Even the most outgoing children **can sometimes feel overwhelmed or withdrawn at school**. Give children **alternative ways to communicate** when they don't feel like talking.
- If someone new joins the class mid-year, invite children to share how they felt **when they were new at school**. Ask children to share how they handled their own initial nervousness.



QUESTION

2

What should we do if we feel sad or scared at school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Returning to school after an extended break

- **Listen to children's concerns.** You may find that children and families experience separation anxiety, even if they didn't typically do so prior to the break. Children may cry when family members drop them off in the morning and may ask throughout the day, "When will my family come back to pick me up?"
- Remind children of areas in the classroom where **they can be by themselves** if they choose.
- Use **the power of dramatic play** to guide children through their worries and help them explore solutions to social problems.





QUESTION

3

What are our rules?

Creating **rules and procedures** establishes expectations for how you—and the children in your class—will build and maintain a caring, collaborative classroom community. How you create these rules sets the tone for your classroom.



QUESTION

3

What are our rules?

Big Rule, Little Rule

What You Do

Background: A classroom community is a safe place where children should be protected from physical and emotional harm. Therefore, the group needs a few basic rules that will create such a safe community. Involving children in deciding on the rules is a powerful way to convey a shared responsibility for life in the classroom community. Children are more likely to understand and follow rules that they helped establish.

1. Before you discuss classroom rules with the children, think about what rules are absolutely essential to you. These rules may include maintaining physical safety; respecting the rights and feelings of others; and caring for the classroom environment and the objects and materials within it.
2. Lead a discussion with children that guides them to think about possible problems and identify some key classroom rules as solutions.
3. Restate children's ideas in positive terms so children know what to do rather than focus on what not to do.
A child says, "No hitting or pushing." The teacher restates, "So we should make sure we touch people gently."



4. Limit the number of rules to three or four, and keep them simple, e.g., be safe; be kind to others; take care of the classroom.
5. Post the rules in the meeting area, where you can review them with the children.
6. When enforcing the rules, use the "big rule, little rule" strategy. This strategy pairs one of your three or four main classroom rules (the big rule) with a specific behavior (the little rule) you want to encourage.
"Be kind to others. Use a quiet voice in the Library area."
"Be kind to others. Keep your hands to yourself when you're feeling angry."
"Be safe. Keep your bottom in the chair when you're sitting."
"Be safe. Walk inside the building."
"Take care of our classroom. Put the puzzle back on the shelf when you've finished using it."

- **Offer guidance on day one to keep children safe.** In the days to come, include children in the process of creating rules. Give children some time to experience school, learn their classroom, and feel ownership before asking them to help set rules.
- **Ask them to share their ideas** for being kind to each other, taking care of their toys and other belongings, and making sure everyone has a chance to learn, grow, and play.
- **Group rules into "Little Rules" and "Big Rules."** The Big Rules are the classroom's several main rules, while the Little Rules are specific guidance related to the Big Rules. For example, the Big Rule might be "We stay safe," and a related Little Rule is "We walk when we are inside."

LEARN MORE

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Guided Edition.



QUESTION

3

What are our rules?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Building community throughout the year

- Point out to children when you notice them being **kind, helpful, or supportive** toward each other. For example, you might say, "Luis, I noticed how kind you were to Lila and Dontrell when they were sad. Thank you for making our community a better place."
- Occasionally **revisit the classroom** rules to check in with the children about how well they believe the rules are working.
- If a new child joins the class mid-year, **invite children to explain** the Big Rules and provide some examples of related Little Rules. Also make sure that new families **receive a copy of your classroom rules** to help them better understand the classroom community and how it functions.

QUESTION

3

What are our rules?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Returning to school after an extended break

- Always **revisit your Big Rules** after returning from an extended break. Ask children for **examples of Little Rules** that help make their classroom a good place to be.
- Tell children about any **changes made to either the physical environment or your schedule** and ask if they have ideas for any new procedures that could better support their classroom community. For example, if your recent break was because of inclement weather, you may have to adopt new procedures to help children prepare for outdoor play. Children may suggest giving them more time to transition between indoors and outdoors.





QUESTION

4

When do things happen at school?

Your **daily schedule** affects how well children function within the school day. Young children crave consistency and structure. While your schedule will depend on the length of your day and state and local requirements, the fundamentals of creating an effective schedule are the same.



QUESTION

4

When do things happen at school?



- Use both words and pictures to create **a poster-sized version of your schedule** that children can easily see. If your schedule is written on strips of paper in a pocket chart, consider turning over each part of the day as it is completed to **help children keep track of time**. This practice is especially helpful at the beginning of the year, as children become accustomed to the schedule.
- Include a **mix of active, high-energy activities and quiet, focused experiences** throughout the day.
- Create a balance between **teacher-led and child-led experiences**.
- Include **large blocks of uninterrupted time for play**, both indoors and outdoors.



QUESTION

4

When do things happen at school?



- Provide many opportunities for children to safely work out their thoughts, ideas, emotions, and developmental needs through **unstructured, imaginative play**.
- Give lots of chances to practice **low-risk decision-making**, for example offering choice time when children can select from different activities.
- Let families know about your **daily and weekly schedules** and the **variety of experiences** that children will engage in.
- Use teacher-facilitated **large-group time to build community** (such as with a welcome song) and **to drive your study forward** (for example, to introduce new concepts, vocabulary, and materials). Use **small-group time for focused exploration** of topics and discussions.



QUESTION

4

When do things happen at school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

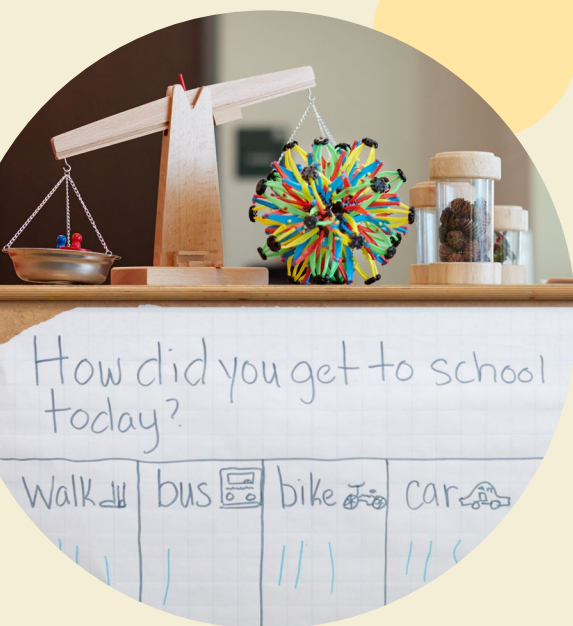
Building community throughout the year

- Whenever possible, alert children and families to **upcoming changes in the schedule**. This can be especially helpful for children who have difficulty adjusting to change.
- While consistency is important, never be afraid to **adjust the schedule if your current one isn't working well**. Invite children's ideas for improvement. For example, they may need less clean-up time as the year progresses. Ask them how they'd most like to spend the newfound "extra" time.
- If a new child joins your class mid-year, make sure you **review the daily schedule with both the child and their family**. If you have discontinued some of the time-keeping processes used in the beginning of the year (such as pointing to or turning over each part of your written schedule as it is completed each day), consider returning to them for a while to give the child a chance to become accustomed to the schedule.

QUESTION

4

When do things happen at school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Returning to school after an extended break

- Remind children and families of times in the regular schedule that they may **need to prepare for**, such as returning books to your school library on a specific day of the week.
- Make a game, song, or chant out of **reviewing your daily and weekly schedules**.
- Invite children to talk about what they did **during their time away from school**.
- Create **a class book titled A Day in Our Classroom** using photos of the children engaged in different parts of your typical day. Revisit the book whenever you return from an extended break. You can also refer to this book if a new child joins your class mid-year.
- Expect that some procedures that were carried out as well-established routines prior to the break may now require prompting or extra time to complete. Lean into **the power of a gentle reminder** to help things run smoothly once again.



QUESTION

5

Who works at our school?

Build positive relationships between children and other **adults in the school**.

There are many ways you can help children get to know the people who work in the school and learn what their jobs are.



QUESTION

5

Who works at our school?



- Share **recent photographs** of important people at school, their roles, and how children may interact with them.
- Include **"headshots"** that provide the clearest images of people's faces.
- Include **full-length photographs of anyone who wears special work clothing** (such as custodians, crossing guards, and healthcare workers) to help children associate those individuals with their uniforms.
- Make a **memory game** or a matching game out of your photographs of school helpers.



QUESTION

5

Who works at our school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Building community throughout the year

- If there are mid-year staff changes at your school—such as among office staff, meal preparers and servers, or specialists and therapists—make sure to **introduce the children to these new adults. Invite the adults** to tell the children something about themselves, such as their hobbies or what they enjoy most about working with children. **Add their photos to your display or class book about school helpers.**
- Share your study topics with your school helpers and **invite them to participate** in the same ways that you engage children's family members.



QUESTION

5

Who works at our school?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Returning to school after an extended break

- Review your display or class book about school helpers.
- Take a walking tour through your school and say hello to the adults working throughout the building.





QUESTION

6

How can we make and keep friends?

Some of the greatest joys of school are **social aspects**, such as making friends and getting to spend time with them each day. You can help children learn to build relationships and become part of a group in a number of ways.



QUESTION

6

How can we make and keep friends?

Just Like Mine

02

Objective 11
Demonstrates positive approaches to learning

a. Attends and engages

Related Objectives: 3a, 5, 9a, 13, 22a, 29

What You Do

1. Ask the children to look at their clothing.
2. Invite one child to stand. Select one distinguishing feature on the child's clothing and tell the children what it is. Say, "[Child's name] has [stripes] just like mine."
3. Ask the child to find someone else whose clothing has the same feature and gently touch him or her on the arm.
4. Have children think of special greetings when they find others with matching clothing items, e.g., give a high five or shake hands.
5. Repeat the game with other children and different clothing features.

- Play variations of Mighty Minutes 02, "**Just Like Mine!**" Select one child and point out something about him or her: "John's shirt has stripes." The other children wearing shirts with stripes can respond by saying, "Just like mine!"
- Try playing "**I Do, Too!**" Select one child and point out something about her: "Carla likes to play T-ball!" The other children can respond by saying, "I do too!" or "Not me!"
- **Point out when you hear things children have in common**, such as shared interests or favorite pastimes, to help them make connections.
- Invite children to think about **ways they're alike and ways they're different**.

LEARN MORE

The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Guided Edition.



QUESTION

6

How can we make and keep friends?



ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Building community throughout the year

- Provide **opportunities for children to work and play with a variety of classmates**, including daily opportunities for children to choose who they will work with. Refer to the guidance found in Intentional Teaching Experience SE14, "Playing Together." Observe how each child interacts and socializes with other children.
- Help children practice how to **enter a group, ask a peer to play with them, and ask a peer for help**.
- Use dramatic play and open-ended questions to help children **work out social problems on their own**, rather than always solving problems for them.
- **Point out positive depictions of friendship** in the books you read to the class.
- Leverage meal and snack times to engage in **friendly, relaxed conversations**.

QUESTION

6

How can we make and keep friends?

SE26

Making a Mural



What You Do

Background: A child's developing ability to interact well with others begins with simply playing next to other children. Providing controlled situations for the child to work and play comfortably with other children helps to build confidence in social situations. Painting a mural cooperatively offers children an opportunity to demonstrate how they can think and work creatively while still meeting classroom expectations.

1. Provide materials for painting a mural, e.g., large paper, tape, paint, paintbrushes, smocks. Attach the paper to the wall and set out the paints within reach of the children.
2. Explain to the children that they will create a large painting on one big sheet of paper.

3. Decide on the mural's focus. You may wish to use a study-related topic.
4. Designate a painting area for each child and explain to the children that they should not paint over each other's artwork.
5. As the mural is created, ask the child to point out his classmates' creations.
"Rory, let's look at the mural and see what the other artists have added."
6. When the mural is complete, reflect with the children about how well everyone's ideas blend together. Talk about how different the mural would look if only one person had painted it.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Returning to school after an extended break

- Children may need **extra time to socialize and reconnect with classmates** when returning to school after a few days away. Follow their lead and adjust your schedule accordingly.
- **Reread a book** that is a class favorite that depicts characters as friends.
- Consider planning a **group project** to which any child who wants to contribute may do so. Refer to the guidance in Intentional Teaching Experience SE26, "Making a Mural," for ideas on a large-group art experience.



Now it's your turn!

- By creating **positive relationships and a strong classroom community**, you help children build social-emotional skills that are the foundation for their success in school and in life.
- The ways that you guide children to discover answers to these six core questions—both at the beginning of the year and as the year progresses—helps them know that **they are the most important part of a very special community**.



Get more ideas
for building
community
and supporting
your school,
children, and
families.

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