

insights

Five forgotten skill sets that contribute to student success

by Michael Grose



At a time when we hear a great deal about growth mindsets, good mental health habits and creating digitally savvy students, we can easily overlook the skill sets that form the building blocks of long-term school success. These are skill sets that are also easily forgotten when we narrow our focus onto numeracy, literacy, performing arts, STEM and other academic areas.

While all these other mental skills and academic areas are important, the skills I want to focus on here are ones that can be taught, or at the very least drawn out, alongside every other skill when we as parents and teachers know what to look for.

Following are five skill sets that contribute massively to overall student success and contentedness at school.

1. Friendship skills

The ability to get along with others is hugely important for children and teenagers. Those students with a strong set of friendship skills are easy to like, easy to relate to and easy to play with. The skills they possess include knowing how to win and lose well, how to approach others to join in a group and how to lead rather than boss.



2. Organisational skills

The ability to organise your time, your space, your items and other aspects of your life is a massive plus for any student. The best way to help children who are organisationally challenged is to introduce them to systems and processes to help them organise themselves. These processes include the use of visual reminders, anchoring (i.e. linking new behaviours to habitual behaviours) and the mapping out of activities.

3. Optimism skills

It may seem strange to see optimism as skill set, but as leading psychologist Professor Martin Seligman discovered through his research, optimism can be taught. Seligman found that while some children are more inclined by nature to see a glass as half empty than half full, all children are capable of developing an optimistic explanatory style through exposure and direct teaching. The skills of optimism include being aware of self-talk, reframing negative events into positive events and the practice of perspective-taking.

4. Coping skills

Kids will generally face a number of challenges during the course of their school lives including overcoming the disappointment of not being picked on a team, working their way through difficult learning situations and dealing with rejection. The impact of these challenges will depend on each kid's own spirit, the support they receive and their coping skills. The good news is that coping skills can be taught or, at the very least, encouraged if adults know what to focus on. Coping strategies include parking problems for a while, normalising difficult situations and accepting and moving on. Some kids will use coping strategies quite naturally, while others need parental and teacher input to help them cope with even seemingly minor challenges.



5. Relaxation skills

The ability to relax and get away from it all is vital for the maintenance of mental health, which in turn affects a student's ability to perform. Many of today's kids live with pressure. That pressure needs to be released through relaxation and play, otherwise it can lead to anxiety and other mental illnesses. The ability to relax and unwind is paramount to your child's school success. Relaxation techniques include mindfulness and meditation, participating in hobbies and enjoying creative pursuits.

These skills are part developmental and part environmental. That is, kids will naturally develop many of them as they mature but the skills also need to be nurtured environmentally. They need to be recognised, encouraged, taught and modelled by adults who children and teenagers respect and admire. That makes parents and teachers 'Very Important People' in the process of acquiring them.



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