

...why physical and emotional safety are important for students' success?

Many students carry high levels of stress and anxiety due to traumatic events and perceived threats to their well-being. This can make them feel unsafe in school. High stress and anxiety adversely impact cognitive functioning and thereby academic performance.

Physical Safety. This form of safety means freedom from physical harm or injury. Students today have to worry about physical threats from external sources (i.e. armed intruders, family chaos, dysfunction and abuse, neighborhood crime, homelessness, poverty, and racism) as well as internal threats from peers at school including physical aggression and maltreatment from peers who often use coercive strategies to address disputes and establish dominance.

Emotional Safety. This is a concept that grows out of the field of Social-Emotional Learning. Just as physical safety means freedom from physical harm or injury, emotional safety means psychological freedom from such things as harassment, bullying, threats, humiliation or embarrassment, and social isolation from peers. In other words, students who feel emotionally safe have a sense that they are accepted in the school and belong there.



Research consistently shows that physical and emotional safety interact with cognitive capabilities, and that students are most successful when they are in an environment where they feel physically and emotionally safe. When students feel physically and emotionally safe, they are also more likely to take ownership of their school's security and report concerns they may have about individuals or events that represent a possible threat to their own or others' physical and emotional safety. Schools where students feel safe are more likely to have a positive school climate that is associated with student engagement and bonding to school.



Acknowledgement: This project was supported by Award No. 2015-MU-MU-K003, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.