## Introduction

A protective factor for students in high poverty urban areas is having a strong relationship with a caring adult. SEA students who have a strong relationship with staff members are more likely to have positive academic and social- emotional outcomes. Staff members who have strong relationships with students will be able to lead stronger programming and will be more effective in helping students reach their goals.

## Overview

Here are some easy and effective best practices to build relationships with students.
- ❏ Get to know each student
- ❏ Build relationships with families
- ❏ Support staff in understanding students
- ❏ Build trust during programming
- ❏ Have "change" conversations

## Get to Know Each Student

It's important the we get to know all of our students at different levels -  not just academically or on court, but personally and socially as well.  Getting to know all of your students helps build a trusting relationship.  It's also important that students get to know you and see you outside of your academic or coach role.

- ❏ **Icebreakers**- Use fun icebreakers to get to know each student.  Use them throughout the whole year since students' interests and hobbies are always changing. Make a mental note or write down what students have shared; you can use this information to create a stronger connection with students throughout the year.
- ❏ **Art-** Through art students are able to express things that are not easy for them to express verbally. The art students create can be used as a conversation starter.  Ask open- ended questions about the art project.  Students also feel more comfortable talking if they are engaged in something else while talking.
- ❏ **Field trips**- Take students to a place that's important or interesting to you. This will allow them to get to know you on a more personal level.  Share appropriate stories and memories why this place is important or interesting to you.
- ❏ **5-minute meeting**-  Take five minutes at the start of each year to sit down with each student and get to know them.  Learn about their interests, hobbies, family and school life more in-depth.  Ask permission to take notes so that you can remember important things they have shared.  Students will appreciate that you took time to get to know them.
- ❏ **Interest in students' lives outside of the program:** Take interest in students' interests, even if you don't share the same interests.  Attend school events, squash matches, other

extracurricular activities that they may be involved in.  Offer that they can give you an "assignment" to learn about something they're interested in, and come back to them with what you've learned. They will see that you care for them as people, in addition to just squash players and students.

❏ **Informal times**: Take advantage of informal times to strike up conversations with students. Great opportunities of informal times include immediately before/after practice, walking between activities, mealtimes,  field trips, bus rides, school pick-ups, and tournaments.


## Build Relationships with Families

Students with involved families earn higher grades and test scores, have better social skill and show improved behavior.

❑ **Learn names**- Make it a priority at the start of each year to learn each student's guardians name.

❑ **Home visits**- Home visits help builds relationships with families.  It can give staff a different view of the student's home life.  Home visits can establish positive contact and communication with families.  By visiting families in their home environment, it allows the family to feel more comfortable.

❑ **Communicate often-** A level of trust between the guardian and staff must exist in order for open communication to occur.  The more you communicate with the guardian the easier it will be to build trust.  If there is an issue with a student, staff should notify the guardian right away as well as explain ideas and interventions on how to fix the issue.  Once a plan has been agreed upon,  make sure to keep the guardian informed about the students' progress.

❑ **Make positive phones call home**- Most parents get sick of hearing unpleasant news about their child.  Pick three to four students per week and contact their parents with something positive and try not to include anything negative during the conversation.

❑ **Use technology to connect**- For families that change phone numbers often creating a work Facebook account can help you stay connected.  Besides using Facebook to connect with parent you could also use texting, emails and program websites.

❑ **Host family events**- Hosting family events and celebrations helps to create a sense of community within your program.  Some ideas Mid- year/end of the year award ceremonies, school year kickoff party and family game nights.

❑ **Volunteering opportunities**- Create volunteer opportunities where parents can feel empowered and more connected to the program.  Have parents volunteer if you are hosting a tournament, create a parent council, or involve them in planning program events.

## Support Staff in Understanding Students

In addition to individual staff outreach efforts, the program overall might consider some of the following ways of helping all staff evaluate students' connectedness to staff members and other caring adults.

❏ **Relationship map:** In a staff meeting, create a list of all your students and have staff fill in / share small things they've learned about each student (if they have siblings, other sports they play, their hobbies/interests, etc.). Look over the list to identify students who staff member do not know as much about and prioritize getting to know those students better.

❏ **Intake forms:** Programs can also create an "intake form" for each student that helps staff members ask questions to get to know the student (see StreetSquash Intake Form). Staff should discuss how to manage confidentiality of information shared by students.

❏ **Risk and protective factors**: Outline general risk/protective factors for all students living high-poverty, urban neighborhoods, and train staff in these factors. In addition, staff might consider talking about the student's individual strengths (sense of humor) protective factors (strong relationship with mother), and risk factors / challenges.

## Build Trust During Programming

Here are a few ways to prioritize relationships and build trust with students when leading programming.

❏ **Rituals and routines**- Rituals are actions, activities, or ceremonies repeated on a regular basis that have specific meaning or significance and that reinforce desired behavior. Rituals create a sense of safety and community, provide structure, and set clear expectations. Rituals can help build trust if used effectively. Make sure that students understand the significance of the rituals and that you are consistent. Rituals help students know what to expect, which in turn helps them feel calm, competent and ready to take part in programing.

  ❏ High fives / handshakes when they leave or enter the classroom
  ❏ Giving each student an individual greeting
  ❏ Have students share something about their day
  ❏ Opening meeting going over what will happen during the session
  ❏ Closing meeting summarizing what happened during the session
  ❏ Shout-outs where students can recognize other students, staff, or volunteers for their contributions (working hard, supporting a struggling teammate, helping with a homework assignment, etc.)

❏ **Clear, shared expectations:** Collaborating with the students to create expectations can make students feel empowered. Define expectations at the start of each school year. Have a discussion with the students. Ask them what they think they should and shouldn't be allowed to do and why. When students help create the expectations, rather than being told what to do, they feel more ownership and are more likely to follow those expectations.

- ❏ **Verbal check Ins-** If you notice a student seems a little off, pull him / her aside as soon as possible to check in with him/ her.  Take the opportunity to speak with students during pick up/drop off, during academic sessions, or any free time you may have.  Use open-ended questions to help the students open up and pinpoint the issue.  Even asking questions such as how are you doing today,  or how was school today can really get students to open up.  After hearing from the student, you can help the student create a plan on how to address the issue, or bring it to your Program Director if you need additional support.

## Having "Change" Conversations

As you develop strong relationships with students, they will open up to you and trust you to help them work through challenges they face. At times, they will come to you to discuss something that they're struggling with (problems with a teacher at school, challenges at home or with friend, etc.), and at times you will go to them with something that you think needs to change (negative behaviors, low attendance, a drop in grades, etc.). Here are some tips for talking with students about things that need to change.

**Motivational Interviewing**

If you have a student that is struggling to make a behavior change, an effective tool to use is motivational interviewing.  Motivational interviewing is a collaborative conversation that strengthens a person's own motivation and commitment to change.  Motivational interviewing is student-centered, prompting behavior change by helping students explore and resolve uncertainty they may have about making the change.

- ❏ **Four Principles of Motivational Interviewing**
    - ❏ **Express empathy** - Empathy lets students know that you are listening and genuine.  By expressing empathy, you show that you are able to see the world through your student's eyes, thinking about things as the student thinks, feels and experiences things.  Using an empathic approach allows the student to feel heard and understood, and in turn they are more likely to be honest and share their experiences.  Resist the urge to give advice to the student unless it is requested by the student.
    - ❏ **Develop discrepancy**- Change is motivated by a discrepancy between the students' perceived goals and values versus their current behavior.  It's important the student is the one to identify reasons for the behavior change.
    - ❏ **Roll with resistance**-   It's very normal to feel nervous about making a behavior change.  Resistance occurs when the student feels pushed to do something he or she is not ready to do.  Signs of resistance include arguing, interrupting, and denying there is a problem.  Having students define the problem and develop their own solutions  will help limit the students' resistance to making the change.

- ❏ **Support self- efficacy**- Change is most likely to occur when a problem is recognized and the student believes in his or her own ability to do something about it. You can support self-efficacy by focusing on previous successes and highlighting skills and strengths that the student has already achieved.
- ❏ **Motivational Interviewing Skills**
    - ❏ **Reflective listening**- Use statements to elicit more talk from the students particularly about the change they are thinking of making. Use non-judgmental restatement, clarification, enhancement, or expansion of what your student has said.  (Example: It sounds like you're saying you're angry because your friend let you down. Is that right?)
    - ❏ **Open-ended questions**- Encourage students to talk about thoughts and feelings. Open ended questions require more than a yes or no response.  Start the question with "How," "What," or " Tell me more about" (Example: What negative consequences have you experienced from＿＿＿＿?, Can you tell me more about how you have been feeling lately? How have things been at home?)
    - ❏ **Affirmations-** Use responses that notice, recognize, or acknowledge strengths, abilities, effort, actions or effort towards change. (Example: Thank you for your hard work today in academics.  I appreciate you sharing your feelings with me. I know it's not always easy talking about how you feel.)
    - ❏ **Summarizing-** Summarize the conversation by going over thoughts or feelings that your student has shared, acknowledging where they may still have some ambivalence about change, and review what steps, if any, they want to take moving forward. If they aren't ready for taking any concrete steps, wrap the conversation up and help them transition into another activity.  (Example: To make sure I'm understanding this correctly…. So, let me see if I've got this right…... So you're saying... is that correct?)
    - ❏ **Follow-up**: After having an initial conversation with students, follow up with them to hear updates. Don't wait for them to come to you. They have already opened the door, so it's now your responsibility to check in with them. (Example question: I remember last time we spoke you mentioned ＿＿＿＿＿ just checking to see how things are going and if there is anything I can do to help?)

**Decisional Balance Sheet**

A Decisional Balance Sheet helps students consider the pros and cons of their current behavior and the pros and cons of the change.  Often student have never stopped to think about the negative aspects of the behavior.  Asking the student to think about the pros and cons can create internal motivation to make change.

## Decisional Balance Worksheet

When we think about making changes, most of us don't really consider all sides in a complete way. Instead, we often do what we think we "should do," avoid doing things we don't feel like doing, or just feel confused or overwhelmed and give up thinking about it at all.

*Thinking through the Pros and Cons of changing is one way to help us make sure we have fully considered all reasons to change.*

Without this process, it is easier to "hang on" to old, ineffective ways. Below, write in the reasons for changing a problem that you can think of in each of the boxes.

| | Benefits/Pros | Costs/Cons |
|---|---|---|
| C H A N G E | | |
| N O C H A N G E | | |

**SMART Goals**

Smart goals stand for Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-limited. Working closely with students to create specific achievable goals can help students who may feel discouraged or overwhelmed with specific challenges they are confronting. Create a specific plan that holds both you and the student accountable for what they are working towards. Make sure

to reevaluate the plan every week to make sure the student is on target to meet the goal.  If the student is having time meeting the goal, it's okay modify and make changes to the goal.

## Additional Resources

- ❏ Motivational Interviewing:
    - ❏ [Motivational Interviewing with Adolescents Powerpoint](#)
    - ❏ [Brief Intervention: Stages of Change and Motivational Interviewing](#)
    - ❏ [https://www.bcm.edu/education/programs/sbirt/index.cfm?pmid=25042](https://www.bcm.edu/education/programs/sbirt/index.cfm?pmid=25042)
    - ❏ [Motivational Interviewing Worksheets](#)
    - ❏ [Blank Decisional Balance Worksheet](#)
- ❏ Classroom Rituals:
    - ❏ [Creating a Peaceful Climate in Your Classroom](#)
- ❏ Art Therapy Ideas:
    - ❏ [Art Interventions](#)

## SEA Shared-Drive Resources

- ❏ [SquashBusters Home Visit Guide](#)

*This guide was written by Emily Chernick at Capitol Squash, with support from the 2017-2018 Academic Leadership Committee.*