

HOW to Assure Educators that Inclusion and Safety Can Co-Exist

Inclusion and Safety Are Not Opposites

For many educators, the idea of inclusion can feel at odds with the need for safety. When students exhibit behaviors that challenge or overwhelm, it's natural for fear and frustration to surface. But safety and inclusion are not mutually exclusive—they can, and must, co-exist.

This handout offers seven practical ways school leaders can acknowledge those fears, reinforce a shared vision, and provide the tools, support, and structures educators need to feel confident—not just compliant. Because when teachers feel safe, supported, and equipped, students do too.

1. NAME THE FEAR AND FRAME THE VISION

- **Acknowledge concerns:** It's crucial that administrators validate educators' real and emotional experiences around student behavior.
- **Frame inclusion as a shared responsibility:** Help educators see that inclusive classrooms are built collaboratively, and that support will be ongoing—not one-off.
- **Reinforce the "why":** Connect safety efforts to a larger vision of equity, student growth, and inclusive values. Make it clear that no student is disposable.

2. PROVIDE PROACTIVE, ONGOING TRAINING

- **Offer tools, not just platitudes:** Educators need actual strategies—like [de-escalation techniques](#), behavior supports, and trauma-informed practices—not just encouragement.
- **Use real-life scenarios:** Role-play and discussion of challenging but common situations (e.g., aggression, elopement, shutdowns) help build confidence.
- **Differentiate PD by role:** Give staff practical tools specific to their classroom realities.

3. MODEL A “WE’RE IN THIS TOGETHER” MINDSET

- **Stay visible and accessible:** Admins should be on the floor, not just in the office. Respond quickly when called and follow up to show care.
- **Use team-based planning:** Develop clear [student support plans](#) as a team—including teacher voice and concerns—and revisit those plans regularly.
- **Create rapid-response protocols:** Teachers should know whom to call, how help arrives, and what happens next—no ambiguity.

4. CLARIFY WHAT SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

- **Portable supports:** Make sure the right supports (e.g., sensory tools, choice boards) and the humans providing the support, follow the student into general education—not vice versa.
- **Inclusive behavior plans:** Ensure Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) emphasize support in inclusive environments.
- **Collaborative data collection:** Engage educators in collecting and reviewing behavior data to refine strategies, not to build cases for removal.

5. DRAW CLEAR SAFETY BOUNDARIES—WITHOUT EXCLUSION

- **Safety ≠ segregation:** Make it clear that responding to unsafe behavior doesn't require removing the student permanently.
- **Use temporary breaks as teaching tools:** If a student needs to step out, treat it as a short reset, not an exile.
- **Communicate consequences clearly:** Create a consistent, transparent discipline structure that applies to all students, including those with IEPs.

6. SHIFT FOCUS FROM MANAGING STUDENT'S BEHAVIORS TO TEACHING THEM TO SELF-REGULATE

- **Shift the lens:** Instead of assuming a student is acting out, recognize their behavior as a response to stress.
- **Respond to needs:** Instead of thinking the student wants something, recognize they need something.
- **Support before instruction:** Don't try to teach while a student is in a reactive state; help them regulate and return to readiness first.

7. CELEBRATE WINS AND SHARE STORIES

- **Highlight** moments of growth, regulation, and teacher creativity with students who once displayed unsafe behaviors.
- **Showcase** educators who've developed strong, trusting relationships with students previously viewed as "challenging."
- **Use** these stories to shift mindsets from fear to possibility.