

# COOL CAFE NEWSLETTER:

## Week #1: Meeting the Needs of Middle School Students

### THEME:

Let's get oriented to the Cool Cafe! Learn to create a positive lunch for everyone, promote meaningful conversations, foster friendships, and respond to challenges. Together let's promote student mental health. Positive Mental Health is feeling good and doing well.

### CONSIDER THIS!

**About Middle School students:** Students 11-14 have emotional brains that are developing rapidly with a lag in their brain's ability to regulate impulses. Adults can help youth think about their options, regulate impulses, and develop positive social relationships. Positive interactions during lunch can foster this development.

#### What Middle School students need in the cafeteria?

- Safe school climate — positive, healthy relationships with peers and conflict resolution skills in a bully-free setting
- Positive relationships with adults who listen, care and are positive role models
- Have their voices honored and a role in decision making to help them develop into responsible adults

### TIPS: CREATE A FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

#### Suggestions for Cafeteria Supervisors

- **How many supervising adults should be present?** There should be at least 1 adult for every 50 students. The more adults, the better! Adult presence is powerful in promoting positive behavior. Be creative in increasing the number of adults in the cafeteria. Examples:
  - Consider what perks you can give school personnel who eat in the cafeteria (free lunch?)
- **Set clear routines and rules** for entering and exiting the cafeteria, getting their attention, cleaning up personal space, and interacting with others. Reinforce these routinely. Provide precorrection to remind students ahead of time of routines/rules (e.g. 5 minutes before dismissal)
  - Use a consistent strategy for getting their attention such as 'alternating clapping' or using a chime.

### CAFETERIA RULES

Use an indoor voice  
Be polite, say please  
& thank you

Walk vs. running in  
the cafeteria

Clean up your eating area  
Be kind to others

- **Provide Active Supervision!** Active supervision is a proactive approach to monitor large groups, promote cooperation and reduce problem behaviors. Strategies:
  - **Be positive and caring to build rapport with students**
    - Smile and greet students (by name, if possible) when they enter the cafeteria.
    - Show a sincere interest in students' lives. Ask them questions while they wait in the lunch line (How's your day going? What did you do over the weekend?)
    - Be willing to help students open containers when they ask
    - Use humor and make jokes with students
    - Praise students who are following rules and who are kind to others
    - Build rapport with students with social, emotional, or behavioral challenges. A little support goes a long way in building trust.
  - **Work the crowd.** Active supervision involves continually moving around your assigned area and constantly observing students. Tune into both problematic behaviors (e.g. bullying, teasing) that need to be corrected and successful interactions that need to be praised.
  - **Hover and be observant without intruding to see and hear what is being said and done.** Notice what they're talking about (i.e. interests, activities), how technology is used, and who is an emerging leader.
  - **Tune into the 'loners' or those who fly under the radar (i.e. the quiet ones, less confident ones).** Show an interest in a tactful way. E.g. Sit next to them and ask them how they're doing and if they'd like the company of others. If so encourage them to join another table or other students to include them.
  - **Listen.** Consider getting informal feedback from the students by asking open-ended questions: 'What do you like about lunchtime?'; 'What would you change if you were the principal?'
  - **Celebrate successes:** Consider routinely giving a shout out to student successes or excellence (e.g. teams, classrooms, clubs).
- **Student seating guidelines.** Allow students to choose where they want to sit. Middle school students tend to want to sit with same-sex peers. It is developmentally appropriate to give them choices for who they would like to eat with, but it's also important to reinforce the importance of including everyone and reaching out to those who might be sitting alone.

## TIPS: CREATE A POSITIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- **Make the cafeteria as visually attractive as possible!** Consider the following:
  - Natural lighting is preferred over fluorescent lights. If the only option is fluorescent lighting, consider draping sheets or fabric over them in a swag across the ceiling
  - Tables and chairs should be clean and arranged to foster social interaction (i.e. round tables if possible and enough space between students)
  - Consider adding floor plants to create some green spaces.
  - Hang student art work throughout the cafeteria, so the students feel connected to the lunchroom. Post new art work routinely based on the season.

- **Tune into the sounds of the cafeteria**

- Too loud? Teach students to talk using an inside voice. Use strategies to teach volume control like ‘The Incredible 5-Point Scale’.
- Consider playing classical music in the background. Observe how students react.
- Floor plants and sound-proof panels can help absorb sound.
- If a microphone is used for announcements, make sure it has good sound quality.
- **Allow reasonable movement in the cafeteria.** Position garbage cans at the end of long tables or close to groupings of round tables. Allow students to get up to throw out garbage.

### Suggested Activities

- **Students:** Students reflect and talk about what makes a positive lunch experience in the cafeteria. Activity: Post-it pads with markers are placed at each lunch table. A large poster of an empty cafeteria room is attached to one of the walls with the title ‘How to Create a Comfortable Cafeteria’. Students are asked to discuss and then write a suggestion on a post-it note by answering the question: “To make this a Cool Cafe, if I had a magic wand, I would \_\_\_\_\_.” When they leave the cafeteria, they each put their note on the poster.
- **Supervisor:** For each day, talk to a student you don’t know and learn their name. By the end of the year, you’ll know all of the students!

### Resources

Brackett, S. (2010). Active supervision: Study guide. University of Pittsburgh.

Buron, K.D., & Curtis, M. (2003). *The incredible 5-point scale*. Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

Center, M. (2016). The cafeteria is your classroom: How principals could leverage lunch duty. *Edutopia*.

Whatcom Farm to School. Strategies for creating a positive cafeteria environment. <http://www.whatcomfarmtoschool.org>

Developed for Every Moment Counts ([www.everymomentcounts.org](http://www.everymomentcounts.org))

Every Moment Counts is committed to building capacity of all school personnel, families, and community providers to promote children’s mental health and contribute to prevention and intervention of mental health challenges through professional education, website resources, and coaching.

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