

# NEED MORE COPIES OR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON THIS TOPIC?

Need more copies of this book? Want your own copy? Need additional resources on this topic? If so, you can order additional materials by using this form or by calling us toll free at (800) 733-6786 or (812) 336-7700. Or you can order by FAX at (812) 336-7790, or visit our website at [www.nesonline.com](http://www.nesonline.com).

Title	Price*	Quantity	Total
Building Classroom Communities	\$ 9.95		
Anger Management	24.95		
Adventure Education for the Classroom Community	89.00		
Discipline with Dignity for Challenging Youth	24.95		
Motivating Students Who Don't Care	9.95		
Power Struggles	11.95		
Reclaiming Youth At Risk	23.95		
Teaching Self Control	27.95		
Teasing and Harassment	9.95		
The Bullying Prevention Handbook	23.95		
SUBTOTAL			
SHIPPING			
Continental U.S.: Please add 6% of order total. Outside continental U.S.: Please add 8% of order total.			
HANDLING			
Continental U.S.: Please add \$4. Outside continental U.S.: Please add \$6.			
TOTAL (U.S. funds)			

\*Price subject to change without notice.

- ☐ Check enclosed    ☐ Purchase order enclosed  
☐ Money order    ☐ VISA, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express (circle one)

Credit Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## SHIP TO:

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Institution Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ FAX \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_



National Educational Service  
 304 West Kirkwood Avenue, Suite 2  
 Bloomington, IN 47404-5132  
 (812) 336-7700 • (800) 733-6786 (toll-free number)  
 FAX (812) 336-7790  
 e-mail: [nes@nesonline.com](mailto:nes@nesonline.com) • [www.nesonline.com](http://www.nesonline.com)

## Introduction

---

# The Beginnings of a Belief System

*Most people have no time to settle into the essence of a place or the essence of a person and recognize the beauty in that place or person. All living things have it. All living things emanate such grace and beauty, but you don't get energy from it unless you recognize it and honor it. . . . It is not just what you say to the people around you, but what you think.*

—Chris Schimmoeller, *A Dance With the Woods* (p. 27)

MY FIRST TEACHING EXPERIENCE was with a fourth-grade class created after the first 6 weeks of a new school year. Two large classes were divided into three manageable ones, and I was hired to teach the new class. The other two fourth-grade teachers chose nine children from each of their classes to go into the new one. You can probably guess what happened. On my first day, I found myself working with 18 young people who were feeling rejected, angry, disappointed, and stupid. I temporarily put my plan book aside and focused my efforts on reconnecting the students to school. Together we sat in a circle and talked about the difficulty of being taken from one class, with all its familiar routines, and

being plunked down into a new one. I shared my own misgivings about moving into a new community, teaching in an unfamiliar school, and having my own class for the first time. It was the beginning of an unintentional community-building process. I learned more in that first hour about teaching and making connections than I had in my previous 2 years of graduate school training. Over time we grew into a solid, supportive classroom community where students listened to each other and worked together. Each person felt as if he or she had a place and purpose.

Since that time, as a teacher and then workshop facilitator, I have been in search of ways to replicate what happened spontaneously in my first class. This book is an attempt to share some of what I have found. Teachers, after all, interact daily with young people and can have a profound impact on their lives. The ways in which they communicate with their students, the messages they deliver, and the lessons they teach can help create emotionally coded experiences that make lasting imprints. Such imprints can have a direct effect on a student's self-perception. If the imprint is positive and validating, the emotional memory of the imprinted moment will be positive. If, on the other hand, a child experiences a negative and hurtful event (especially in front of others), that child will feel hurt or scared whenever something happens that is reminiscent of the original event. The child may continue to experience the pain, fear, or anger over and over again long after the original event has passed.

Family counselor John Bradshaw speaks and writes on the impact of parents on children's core beliefs and sense of personal power. He uses the metaphor of a doorknob and its location to illustrate what happens to young people as they deal with the

world. He imagines the child in a room with a single door for escape. If the doorknob is located on the outside, the child is not in control over what happens to him or her. If another person wants to turn the doorknob and open the door, it is opened, whether or not the child wants that to happen. Likewise if someone else wants to keep the door closed, it stays closed. The child copes and deals with each situation as best he or she can. However, if the doorknob is located on the inside, the young person can determine if and when the door opens.

When social skills are taught (asking for help, working with others, making friends, making decisions, and solving problems, for example), children have access to the doorknob. The more skills a child has and the more positive experiences or memories that child affiliates with those skills, the more personal power the young person will accrue.

We can help our students develop their personal powers if we work to create a sense of community and connection within the classroom through the teaching of social skills. By consciously teaching social skills and applying them in the classroom setting, the teacher is building a sense of community through shared experience and honorable action. It should particularly be our goal to help produce children who are *resilient*—young people who demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in the face of life's challenges. This book offers guidance in doing just that.

Section 1 deals with the notion of a classroom community and offers suggestions for turning a group of students into a true community of learners. Section 2 spells out the components of what I refer to as a "Culture of Caring." Section 3 provides the practitioner with a variety of group processes and team-building

experiences designed to strengthen and maintain the classroom community, while Section 4 focuses entirely on teaching empathy as a social skill in a unit format. Together these four sections will emphasize how to name, teach, and transfer specific social skills while creating an emotionally safe and unified classroom environment.

## Section One

---

# The Classroom Community

*This is the bright home  
in which I live,  
this is where  
I ask  
my friends  
to come,  
this is where I want  
to love all the things  
it has taken me so long  
to learn to love.*

—David Whyte, *The House of Belonging* (p. 6)

## ESTABLISHING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

### What Is a Classroom Community?

A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY IS A PLACE where students feel safe both emotionally and physically, where they feel supported, and where they feel enthusiastic about the discoveries each new school day will bring. It is a place where every individual is honored and where a sense of interdependence is built into the culture. David