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Practical Ways to Build Mutual Trust

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Trust Exercises

‘You can discover more about someone in an hour of play than in a year of conversation’

Plato

Trust exercises sit comfortably alongside long established frameworks for trust building such as ‘circle time’. They are used in the theatre to quickly establish mutual physical trust between actors. In the classroom they build physical and emotional trust practically, actively and without words. Trust exercises:

- Actively involve pupils in using strategies to promote trust
- Immediately identify barriers certain children have to giving and receiving trust
- Create moments of crisis and success that give a strong focus for reflective talk
- Throw up questions and ideas about self discipline
- Encourage pupils who rarely work together to do so and build trust
- Allow children to take risks in a controlled environment
- Are fun and thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding

When you lead a session establish some rules about appropriate physical contact and routines for starting and stopping the exercises. I usually ask pupils to sit out immediately if they are reckless and find an opportunity to remind them of the rules, whilst giving lots of quiet encouragement to pairs who are working well. The safety of students is the highest priority. Establish your learning ritual early and implement it vigorously. When the atmosphere in the room is really focused, the exercises are tense, exciting and revealing. It is a good idea to start with the first activity and build up in small steps, perhaps using each one as a rung on a 'ladder of trust'.

Some of the activities outlined below can be run in a classroom, others need more space. The origins of these exercises can be found in Clive Barker's 'Theatre Games'.

**Initiate a 'stop' signal for the whole group and between students. Try a shortened countdown in case you want to stop them quickly and encourage*

*students to use their partners name as well as 'stop' e.g. use 'Ewan stop' to differentiate commands from pairs working nearby. **

1. Leading the blind

In pairs, A and B, students lead each other using a tie or piece of string. A holds the string in both hands with eyes tightly shut while B slowly leads him around the room, avoiding contact with the rest of the participants. A's are attempting to give trust by keeping their eyes open and B's are receiving trust and trying to use it responsibly. Experiment with shorter and longer leashes, leading around objects and in controlled conditions over/under/through obstacles.

2. Trust Cars

Again in pairs, A with eyes shut and B leading but this time from behind – A is the 'car' and B the 'driver'. To begin with there are three agreed signals: hand on the left shoulder turn left (and keep turning until the hand is removed), hand on the right shoulder turn right and flat hand placed (gently!) between the shoulder blades to stop. As the exercise develops students will naturally develop other ideas for useful controls. B 'drives' A around the room, trust is seen to be broken if B opens his eyes.

3. Walking into walls

A and B stand opposite each other 7/8 meters apart. With eyes closed A will walk towards B and only stop when the command is given. If the

command is late, or A walks too fast the two will collide. Model the exercise to show how long it takes for the command to be registered and the walker halted. Extend this exercise for responsible students so that the walker speeds up or is heading towards the wall rather than his partner.

Weave in some key questions for the children to talk about in preparation for the exercises or as reflection:

- How do we give trust?
- How do you receive trust?
- What stops trust building?
- What helps you give and receive trust?
- What can you do to encourage trust?
- What kinds of trust do we need in the classroom?

Example of 'Ladder of Trust':

Give each pair a copy of the ladder. When they are able to show you a safe model of the

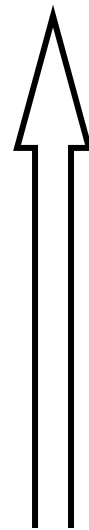
exercise then they can move onto the next exercise:

Running into walls

Walking into walls

Jogging into partner

Walking into partner



Trust cars, over obstacles

Leading the blind – no leash, just voice

Trust cars

Leading the blind – long leash

Leading the blind – short leash

Once the children have mastered some basic trust exercises you might be

interested in some

more advanced trust exercises. Pivotal trainers are able to come in and model

these; they

need to be explained physically rather than read and interpreted:

- Group 'falling'
- Paired 'falling'
- 'Push me, pull me'
- Leaping into arms
- Falling into sea of arms
- Group lifting
- One arm lifting