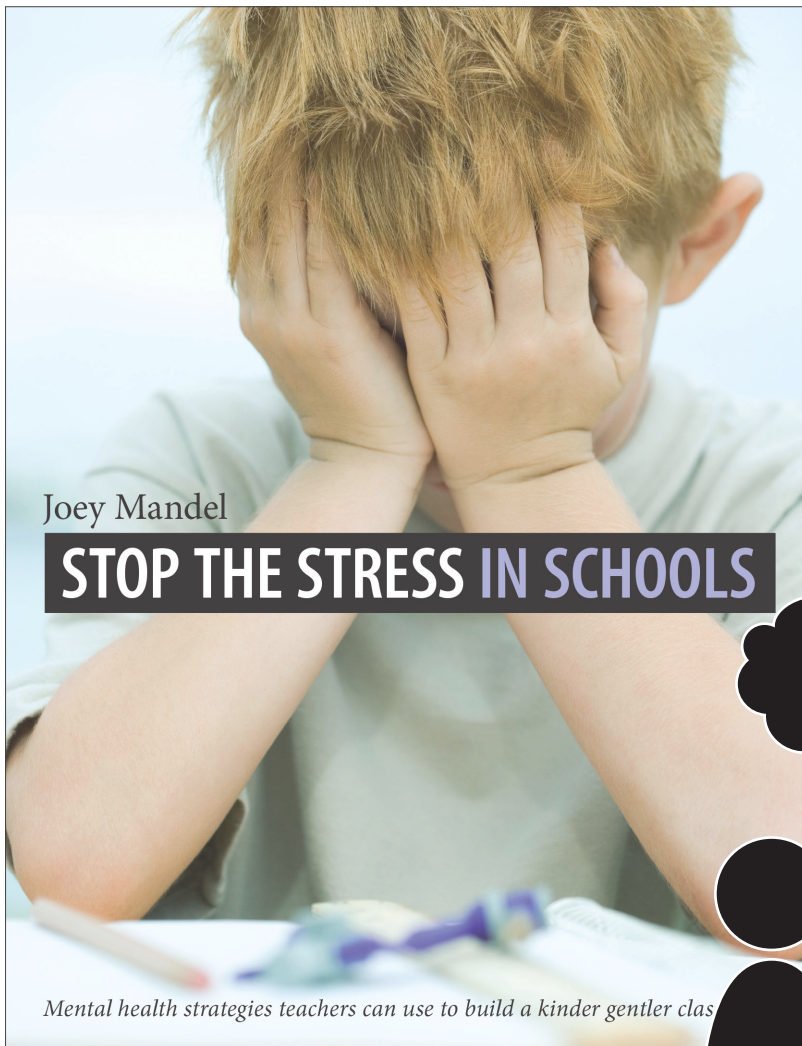


# Positive Response

Pembroke's Friday Freebie



Joey Mandel

## STOP THE STRESS IN SCHOOLS

*Mental health strategies teachers can use to build a kinder gentler classroom*



**Thought  
&  
Emotion**

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**The Positive Response Process**

For all teaching, we work side-by-side with students to guide them through the process of learning. It begins when we set up a task up so that the child is working in his/her zone of proximal development; i.e., just above the student’s level of proficiency. We support the child as he/she begins the task, moves through it, and completes it. Throughout this process, we are assessing and looking for times to pull back, times to step in, and times when we need to provide some form of prompt or guidance to support the process.

We can apply this process when a child is experiencing social-emotional struggles as well. Each time a student experiences stress from a trigger, we can be there to assist him/her in self-assessment, to create a plan of action, to calm him/her and the environment, to demonstrate understanding, and to guide the student through a task that targets the development of essential social-emotional character traits.

We want to engage in a process that builds relationships, allows teachers to focus on themselves, and allows them to teach students the necessary calming and mental-health strategies. A response is a deliberately positive approach. It considers the bigger picture and has relationship development, social-emotional skills, and character traits at its base. It supports a child’s learning through his/her strengths and weaknesses alike. Being perfect or the best at something is not a prerequisite for a teacher’s guidance through a positive response process—all types of mistakes are supported.

The Positive Response Process has five steps:

1. Give Feedback: Self-assess and set new goals to drive the process
2. Set Goals: Plan
3. Regulate: Use calming strategies
4. Engage: Be available, attend; show compassion, understanding
5. Support: Guide; do not direct, solve, tell, or lead

**Give Feedback**

Children need to have a good sense of their social-emotional abilities. But students often receive feedback at the end of a process and then move on to the next task, which can leave them unable to apply their learning again to the same, or a similar, challenge. They identify their strengths and challenges and then move on to something new, without connecting the feedback to strategies for working through the task. This makes the mastery of any activity or skill challenging. We want feedback on a previous activity or attempt to drive all goal-setting and criteria in the future in an appropriate way. Children should be able to ask themselves:

- *What worked and what didn’t?*
- *How am I doing?*
- *What do I need to work on?*
- *What is my challenge and what can I do to mitigate it?*
- *What did I do well yesterday and how can I apply that again today?*
- *Where did I struggle and what will I do in order to prevent the same pitfalls?*

**The point is not to always eliminate triggers from a child’s environment. Schools have rules, routines, and expectations, and so does the real world. Removing all things that upset a child will not help that child develop the skills needed to face those challenges.**

**Feedback is nothing but negative criticism if the student cannot do anything at the point at which the feedback is given.**

**If we begin with feedback and setting goals, we have already developed the process before we begin.**

**Set Goals**

We need to assist children in their goal-setting in a considerate and manageable manner. Children need a clear understanding of the goal and it needs to be attainable. Children use feedback to concentrate on the steps, skills, and criteria they will need to get through their next task or skill development. An important first step in goal-setting is verbalizing the process:

- identifying the strategy they would like to practice
- detailing the first steps they will take
- explaining to others what help they could use during challenging moments

**Goal-Setting Activity**

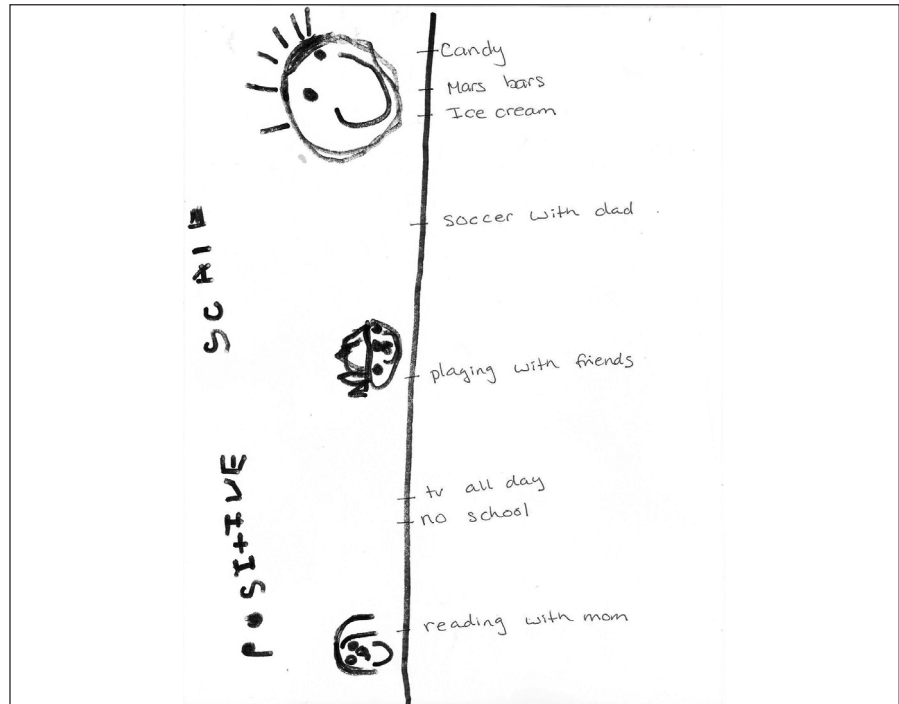
Creating a Positive Scale engages students in exploring what experiences, activities, actions, or material possessions make them happy. It is important for students not only to be able to identify the positives in their lives, but also to be able to rate these experiences, to distinguish between the things in life that truly make them happy and the things they might want desperately but will not bring them as much happiness.

1. Have students list what makes them happy.
2. Students put the list items in order of how happy the experiences make them.
3. Students chart experiences on a numbered line graph to show a scale of positive experiences.

The point of charting positive experiences is that, by visually arranging their perception of positive experiences, students can see them and reflect on them. They might also come to make changes to their charts as they begin to understand how experiences can change in importance.

It is important, however, to not make judgment or suggestions as you guide students through this activity. In the sample Positive Scale shown here, the student lists a Mars bar as more positive than playing soccer with her father. The teacher scribing for the student did not comment or suggest; she did not want to question the student's veracity or perception. Over time, we want to slowly assist students in understanding which rewards are meaningful and sustain us.

SAMPLE POSITIVE SCALE



Regulate

Too often, we calm students by solving their problems for them. Our aim in the Positive Response Process is to calm them so that they can solve their problems themselves.

To be regulated is to be in a calm state, emotionally and physically. If teacher and student are in the Flight, Flight, or Freeze state, stress reduction is impossible. To help children self-calm, we must first ensure that we, ourselves, are calm and regulated, that we are responding to them in a thoughtful and deliberate manner. We, and only we, are responsible for our own regulation and state of calm. No one else is looking out for it.

As teachers, we have an important role in teaching children to self-calm. We must

- stabilize the environment and create regulation for students by supporting them through self-calming techniques, without the expectation that they know how to do them independently
- understand that it will take a long time for all and a very long time for others
- slow the pace of interactions and draw our attention to a child's physical and emotional body language as we interact and engage with them. If our movements and those of the students are rushed and unstructured, then the child will be deregulated.
- take time to help students practice self-calming strategies, to increase their mental well-being and make them ready to learn
- make simplifications in activities and life as external ways to assist in students' regulation

Your guiding principle should be to calm students first, before supporting them through problem-solving. The problem-solving process happens much faster when children are calm.

The purpose of engagement is to provide positive support. It can be nonverbal or verbal, but it is based in positivity.

## Engage

The Positive Response Process requires us to be responsive and emotionally available to our students:

- to react thoughtfully to their behavior
- to notice their state of regulation, physiologically and emotionally
- to be attuned to their needs, not our own needs or the needs of the task
- to respond to their emotional reactions and physiological responses
- to guide them through their struggles, not problem-solve for them

### *Using Positive Self-Talk*

Throughout this book, you will find prompts that link to the life skills and fundamental concepts you are teaching students. Use positive self-talk daily in the moment with your students to link their negative struggles to the positive actions and underlying character traits that can help see them through. Positive self-talk prompts can be put on the announcements or made into posters, but they are most effective when they are repeatedly linked to an action a student can take in a recognizable situation. Place written messages of positive self-talk around the room for students to use, and use them yourself every time you struggle with stress.

## Support

Supporting involves helping a student in the application of social-emotional goals in the moment. When students are under stress, we can assist them in their performance of a skill-building activity or attempts at a social-emotional strategy by

- prompting them to use their preferred strategies
- cuing them to the first step in their process
- using positive self-talk
- using nonverbal reminders
- modeling effective techniques
- facilitating peer dialogue and communication so students support each other