



# Creating a Safe Learning Environment

## *Lesson Plans*

### Overview & Purpose

Use this sequence of 10–15 minute activities to address back-to-school fears and open the door for social and emotional development in your classroom.

### Day 1: Set the Tone

If you want your students to take risks and feel comfortable sharing their emotions, they must trust that no one will tease them or laugh at them. Your efforts in this area will pay huge dividends as the year progresses.

**Adapt this script to the needs of your students:**

1. Today I want to welcome you to your new classroom and talk about making it a safe place. It is great to have all of you here. I look forward to a wonderful year.
2. I need your full attention right now, because this is very important. Making sure you feel safe is so important to me that I'm going to act like a tiger if any one of

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you is ever teased or ridiculed in this room. Each of you has a tiger energy inside that helps you stand up for yourself and for others. (Maintain a focused, intense look on your face that says you mean business—“the eye of the tiger.” Your tone of voice, body posture, and facial expression need to be strong and assertive.)

3. I will do everything to protect all of you and empower you to protect yourselves. I will teach you how to stick up for yourselves and other students in this school.
4. If you feel that you are being disrespected or mistreated by anyone in this school, I want you to come and talk to me or write me a note. I promise I will deal with your concerns.
5. This classroom is a safe place, and I want you to feel safe here every day. (The first day is critical for setting the tone that your classroom is a safe place.)
6. How can we all make this room a safe space? (Lead a discussion of ideas.)

## Day 2: Acknowledge Fear

Students appreciate comments and stories about their teachers' fears, concerns, and challenges. Your honesty and openness eases their own fears, helps them relax, and builds connection in the room.

*Supplies needed:* Jars or containers, pieces of scrap paper

### **Adapt this script to the needs of your students:**

1. (Hand out small jars and pieces of scrap paper.)
2. Today we are going to identify fears we have about the new school year.
3. Like all of you, I had my own fears as a student. I can remember \_\_\_\_\_ . (Share fears and concerns that you had as a young student.)
4. Even now, I still have fears as a teacher. For example, I \_\_\_\_\_ .
5. You likely have fears like me, but to address them, you first must identify them.
6. On your desk are pieces of scrap paper. On each one, please list a fear you have about this school year.
7. Now fold each one of your fears, place it in the jar on your desk, and say, “I can let this fear go for now.” Store the fear jar out of sight, and I’ll do the same.
8. By putting the fears in a jar, you can place them aside for a moment and shift your focus to something else.

9. As the year goes on, you can revisit your jar, adding to it or taking away old fears. If one of the fears goes away, rip it up—it will feel good.

## Day 3: Share Fears

When students can voice their fears and concerns in a place where they are heard and acknowledged, they will relax and begin to build trust. By sharing fears out loud, students will begin to see that they have a lot in common with their fellow classmates and with their teacher. As a result, they will feel safer and more connected.

*Supplies needed:* Journals or notebooks

### **Adapt this script to the needs of your students:**

1. Today we are going to continue to focus on building safety and connection in our classroom by sharing our fears.
2. Take out your journals and write down any fears or concerns you have in the classroom—perhaps you fear getting up in front of the class, giving the wrong answer, being teased, or \_\_\_\_\_. Take 3 minutes to list your fears. (Option: Allow students to generate their lists with a partner.)
3. Now let's share some of the fears you came up with and see how many we all share. (Write the fears on the board or on a large piece of paper that can be posted in the classroom. If students aren't comfortable sharing out loud, have them hand in their lists anonymously. Write some of the fears on the board.)
4. Good job. We have a very complete list of your fears and concerns.
5. Let's spend a few minutes looking at this list and talking about what we need to feel safe in our classroom.
6. Thanks for sharing today. We all have fears, don't we? Let's do our best to help each other feel safe and connected in this room.
7. I have your back. If you are scared for any reason, please talk with me before or after school, at lunch or recess. Write me a note or send me an email. We can work together to find out what you need to feel safe.

