

## Students, Teachers, and Help-Seeking Behavior

There are many evidence-based practices that school professionals can use to provide effective support to military-connected students coping with situations such as a parental absence or a geographic transition. However, these strategies may be challenging to implement if identifying students who need support is difficult or if students do not feel comfortable asking for support. Although few studies address ways for school personnel to either identify students who need help or encourage help-seeking behavior in their students, there are some best practices:

**Try to display friendliness or trustworthiness:** Overall, the literature suggests that school-age students are often resistant to ask for help (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). However, those who do seek support are typically more likely to turn to family members or peers than teachers (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Fallon & Bowles, 2007). According to current research, there are various emotional and social factors that impact student help-seeking behaviors. One study found that students value “friendliness” and “trustworthiness” in a person when they are looking for support (Kendal, Keeley, & Callery, 2011).

**Focus on empathizing:** One sample of students felt that even though peers are not as trustworthy as adults, they still would be hesitant to seek help from an adult such as a teacher because teachers appear to be more focused on problem-solving rather than empathizing (Kendal, Keeley, & Callery, 2011). While objective advice and recommendations might be practical while providing support to students, this study suggests that students are likely to appreciate compassion and strong listening skills that demonstrate understanding when they seek help. This allows students to feel more comfortable talking through their own goals and needs, which provides more background information, allowing teachers to provide more targeted, student-specific feedback.

**Build quality and meaningful relationships with students:** Another study found that when presented with various hypothetical situations regarding school violence, students appeared to base their willingness to seek help on the quality of their relationships with their teacher, rather than their beliefs in their teacher’s ability to help (Yablon, 2010). This indicates that your connection and bond with your students plays an important role in their motivation to ask for your support.

**Manage your own stress:** Research also shows that teachers’ level of stress can have a negative impact on their relationships with their students, which may ultimately alter students’ help-seeking thoughts and behaviors (Yoon, 2002). Therefore, be sure to track your own stress levels. Further, remain aware of how your stress and coping impacts your interactions with others, not only in one-on-one conversations but also while lecturing or providing instruction to the entire class.

While this research can inform practice, there is still a lack of information regarding the dynamics of students asking for emotional help and teachers recognizing the need to provide this kind of help. Studies have indicated that students have a tendency to seek help from sources other than teachers; therefore more researchers focus on evaluating those relationships, creating a scarcity of research in this area. Provided that there is little information regarding school personnel and their ability to encourage students’ help-seeking behaviors, it is an area that warrants further investigation.

## References

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