

10 Ideas to Create a Happy Classroom



1. Create tribal classrooms

Humans are an innately tribal and social species. We operate best, learn the most and are happiest when we feel safe, secure and connected to others.

So, greet your students at the door with a smile. Get to know your tribe and what makes them tick. Make everyone feel welcome and that they're part of your team. Show your tribe how to take good care of each other. A happy classroom is built primarily on positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

2. Be still

Growing evidence shows that mindfulness can help children improve their mental health, attention and even metacognition. Create moments of stillness in your day when you and your class pause and focus on your breathing. Each time the mind wanders away from the breath, gently bring your attention back to the breath. Every time you bring your attention back to the breath after it has wandered, you strengthen the parts of the brain in charge of attention and emotional regulation.



3. What went well?

The human brain is like 'Velcro for bad and Teflon for good' according to psychologist Dr Rick Hanson. This negativity bias helped keep us alive on the savannah as our ancestors, who could spot dangers quickly and avoid them, survived and passed on their genes. But a practice known as 'What went well?' can help rewire that bias and level the playing field. At the end of each day, get your students to write down three things that went well for them. Ask them to share their good things with a partner. Repeat often to rewire that bias!



4. The stretch zone

Learning new things is a key facet of a happy life. When we're engaged and interested in our work, we feel and do better. But if the work is not challenging enough, we get bored, and if it's too challenging, we get overwhelmed. Aim for that elusive sweet-spot by challenging your students, encouraging risk-taking and embracing mistakes. Get them outside their comfort zones and into 'the stretch zone'. This is where neuroplasticity is maximised and the most learning takes place.



5. Flow

When the challenge of a task matches our skill level, when the task has clear goals, and when we're able to really focus on what it is we're doing, we are likely to experience 'flow' – an optimal state of psychological being. Time rushes by, we lose sense of ourselves and it feels deeply satisfying. Children who experience flow regularly show deeper learning, greater long-term interest in subjects, and higher levels of wellbeing. Create the right conditions so your class can lose themselves in their work!

6. Play to their strengths

Character strengths are the core parts of ourselves that shape our personality and motivate us. Strengths like creativity, love of learning, honesty and perseverance are malleable and we can grow them through practice. Studies show that when we use our strengths in novel ways, we are significantly happier. Start to spot the strengths of your class and task them with using them in their school work and at home.

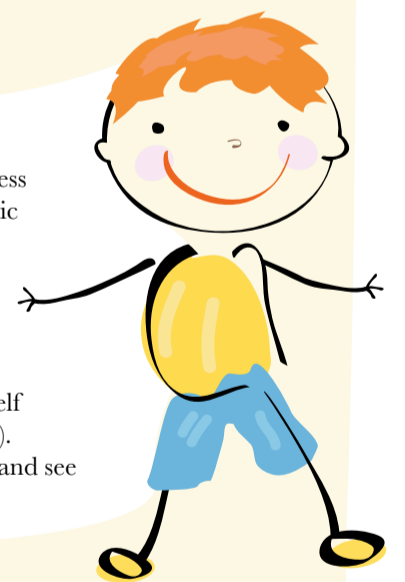
7. Practise kindness

Humans are hardwired to be kind. When we are kind to others, the reward centre of our brain lights up! Kindness is contagious too and it even helps make us healthier and strengthens our hearts. The best way to spread it is to be kind yourself. Teachers who use kind words and are polite, respectful, patient and well-mannered have children who emulate them. You could even encourage your children to carry out random acts of kindness by hosting a 'Kindness Week'.



8. Be optimistic

Optimists are happier, have better health and are less likely to suffer from depression than their pessimistic counterparts. But how can you help students be optimistic when things aren't going their way? A key is to let them know that the problem is temporary (it won't last forever), that it is specific (it affects one area of their life but other areas are going well) and it isn't personal (don't blame yourself as other external factors would have been involved). Help students challenge their negative self-chatter and see their situation from a more hopeful perspective.



9. Get moving

Exercise is one of the single biggest things we can do to boost our physical and mental health. Fitter students perform better academically and have better body-image and higher self-esteem. You could get your class to do 'The Daily Mile' where they jog or run a mile every day. Or simply break up lessons with a round of star jumps, burpees, or a few laps of the playground. Studies show that children make better progress in active lessons. Get your class out of their chairs and moving more!



10. Walk the talk

To create a happier classroom for your children, prioritise looking after yourself. Be a positive role model for wellbeing. When you walk the talk, your message will feel authentic and your class will follow your lead. So, pace yourself, have fun with your class, set clear boundaries for work, ask for help when you need it, and carve out time to do more of what makes you happy. Ultimately, a happy teacher makes a happy classroom.

