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Check Your Mood at the Door

What is it?

A tool that helps us identify issues that might affect student learning by having students assess and describe their moods as they enter the classroom each day*

What are the benefits of using this tool?

Students' moods can change at the drop of a hat. Even the peppiest, most well-behaved student can be brought down by a fight with a friend, a poor performance during a big game, or being grounded. Check Your Mood at the Door provides a quick and easy way to assess students' moods on a day-to-day basis. (Students express how they're feeling using a simple rating scale that's posted near the entrance to the classroom.) The goal is to identify moods that might affect students' behavior or learning capacity, so that we can respond accordingly. Besides preparing us to head off potential problems and teach more effectively, inviting students to tell us how they're feeling each day sends the valuable message that we care about our students as individuals.

What are the basic steps?

1. Develop a three- or four-point scale that students can use to rate their moods as they enter the classroom. Scales can be words only, pictures only, or a blend of words and pictures.
2. Write out your rating scale on large poster paper. Post the scale on the door of your classroom or right near the entrance on a wall or bulletin board.
3. Review the rating scale with your students. Explain that you're interested in knowing how they're feeling each day, and that you'd like them to use the scale to share that information with you when they enter the classroom.
4. Stand near the door when students enter the room each day. Ask students to "hit" the portion of the scale that corresponds to their current mood using a high-five motion.
5. Probe the causes of particularly good, particularly bad, or different-than-usual moods (see sample language below). You can do this either as students enter the room or in a more private setting.
Sample language: You don't seem your usual upbeat self. Is anything going on? Do you want to share? Can I help you in any way?
Sample language: You seem particularly happy and excited today. Did something special happen? Is there anything you want to share?
6. Respond to what you learn in Step 5. Look for ways to improve students' moods and/or head off potential behavioral problems. You might, for example, offer a down-in-the-dumps student some words of sympathy, some extra support, or some extra slack in class.
Tip: Respond to good moods as well as bad ones (e.g., help a student celebrate a happy moment, or capitalize on a student's good mood to get that student engaged and involved in class).

*This tool was inspired by the work of our colleague, Beth Knoedelseder.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To assess and respond to students' moods on a daily basis
- ✓ To identify and address potential behavioral problems in a proactive way
- ✓ To convey the message that we care about our students as individuals

EXAMPLE: A middle school teacher found that adding expressive cartoon images to her previously words-only rating scale made the scale easier for students to relate to and more fun for them to use.

HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?			
 Fantastic!	 Pretty good	 OK	 Not so good

Teacher Talk

- ➔ If you prefer, you can have students express their moods using descriptive words (e.g., *grumpy*, *confused*, *happy*) rather than a rating scale. *Happy Hippo, Angry Duck* (Boynton, 2011) is a great book for introducing younger students to different types of moods and words for describing them.
- ➔ Pay extra attention to extreme or long-term attitude issues, as they can be signs of bigger-picture or potentially serious problems.
- ➔ The physical act of hitting the door (or a bulletin board) is fun for many students and can, in and of itself, be a good stress reliever or mood booster. If you'd rather get a snapshot of the entire class's mood at once, give students sticky notes and have them "stick the door" rather than "hit the door."
- ➔ For variety, invite students to expand on their initial ratings in writing rather than orally. A classroom journal that only you (not students' classmates) will read works well for this purpose.
- ➔ Discuss the impact that moods can have on students' engagement level, behavior, and academic performance. Teach students that they have the capacity to control and change bad moods, and discuss specific strategies for doing this. Here are some possibilities:
 - Talk through problems with someone you trust (e.g., teacher, friend, parent, counselor, coach).
 - Do something to get your mind off whatever is bothering you.
 - Don't dwell on all the things you need to accomplish; make a to-do list and get started!
 - Ask your teacher for help with classroom-specific problems like not understanding the material.
 - Focus on the good things in your life rather than the bad ones.
 - Talk to yourself using positive and action-oriented language (e.g., "I won't let that person's comments get me down!" or "I can get better at this if I keep practicing").
 - Put your problems aside—literally—by writing them on index cards and putting the cards in a box. (*Note:* Students can do this individually or as a class. If you create a class box, periodically pull problems out—don't say who they belong to—and discuss strategies for addressing them.)