

School mission statement and core values - matching words with actions. How to use Aggression Replacement Training© in team building.

There is no such thing as a perfect team inside or outside of school. In principle, it's safe to say that every team will go through a crisis at some point and many will break as a result. But some teams perform incomparably better than others - both in terms of communication, productivity, and alignment with the mission and vision of the place.

What's their secret? What can be done to help your team build an environment that not only supports the people who build it but also helps to create a coherent image of the place where we invite students and parents? What needs to be done so that the values the school tries to represent and communicate to the outside world become a practice in everyday school life? And finally, why is it worth seeking answers to these questions at all, and how can Aggression Replacement Training© help?

THE "WHY" - VALUES AND TEAMBUILDING in schools

Common goals of team development are to increase morale and motivation, improve team performance, improve communication between team members, and build trust and empathy. It is necessary if you want to make team members feel more confident and positive about their work and improve cooperation or defuse conflicts.

Experience and research show that values-based contracts are a much better foundation for teams to build good relationships and consequently communicate values coherently to the outside world.

When we use our values to make decisions, we make a conscious decision to focus on what is important to us. When values are shared, they strengthen internal cohesion in the group.

Jamil Zaki, Ph.D. Department of Psychology at Stanford College hypothesizes in his research that when a group that is important to the individual holds a value, the individual's values change.

Zaki has developed a three-dimensional model that describes the contexts that influence or drive an individual's values:

1. The range between risk and safety constitutes the first dimension. People choose between an established value and an unproven prospect. We tend to be relatively risk-averse, so we prefer the benefit of the present above the greater danger of the future. We notice dopamine system activity when people choose a safe choice over a dangerous one while making decisions regarding a known value.
2. As opposed to social isolation, the second component is social connectivity. As was previously noted, pleasing others is gratifying. But researchers have also discovered that gaining the approval of others is satisfying in and of itself.
3. Social comparison is the third dimension that influences values. We derive value from being good, but also from being better than others.

What does this mean for us in terms of team building with values in schools? What should we focus

on when creating a contract based on team values?

- What dimension will be most evident in our group contract?

- What needs are we trying to meet?

- What difficulties is our team trying to overcome? (it is important that we try to name them for future social skills training).

The HOW - from personal values to team values to the school social contract.

Chain of action social contract - what does it look like?

1	HOW DO YOU DEFINE WHAT THE VALUE IS? WHAT VALUES, IMPORTANT IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT, CAN YOU SUGGEST? TEAM BRAINSTORM	1. REFERENCE TO THE MISSION AND VISION OF THE ORGANISATION
2	WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FOR ME TO BUILD A TRUSTING, EMPATHETIC AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH MY COLLEAGUES AND STUDENTS? CHOOSE 10 VALUES.	2. PERSONAL VIEW
3	RANK THE CHOSEN VALUES - THE MOST AND THE LEAST IMPORTANT FOR ME.	3. WHAT ARE MY NEEDS BEHIND THOSE VALUES?
4	WHAT DOES THE GROUP VALUES HIERARCHY LOOK LIKE? QUALITY AND QUANTITY ANALYSIS.	4. DOES IT SUPPORT THE VISION AND MISSION? DOUBLE CHECK. IF NOT - DOES THE VISION AND MISSION MEET THE TEAM AND LEADER'S EXPECTATIONS AND CAPABILITIES?
5	TRANSFER INTO PRACTICE - WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO, TO REALIZE THESE VALUES?	
6	TRANSFER INTO PRACTICE - HOW ARE WE GOING TO DO IT? WHICH SOCIAL COMPETENCIES DO WE NEED TO SUCCEED?	5. WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL NORMS AND COMMON BEHAVIORS IN OUR SCHOOL/ ORGANISATION? WHAT EXPECTATIONS DO WE HAVE OF EACH OTHER?
7	SHORT TERM FEEDBACK.	
8	EVALUATION, INTERVISION, LONG TERM FEEDBACK.	
9	ADJUST IF NEEDED.	6. TWO OR THREE BEHAVIOUR STATEMENTS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED FOR EACH VALUE.

Step 1 - Create a safe environment for discussion.

The most common mistake is for a team leader to announce and promote the values to the team. Through discussion, your team will clarify what the values mean and how they can be applied and modeled in daily work. It is important to prepare the team and create a safe environment for conversation. To this end, we usually start by implementing the Anger Regulation Training© and later the elements of the Moral Reasoning Training© (especially thinking traps and character traits)

Define.

A value like "honesty" may mean something different to each team member. To a teacher, it may mean always saying everything they think. To another person, it may mean putting up a few signs about things they disagree with and trying to avoid confrontation at all costs. It is important to take some time and try to define the shared values as precisely as possible.

The best way to explain your values is to give examples of what the value looks like in practice. We do not have to agree on everything, but we should try to find a definition that most members of the team can agree on.

You need to decide.

In creating the value list, we use qualitative and quantitative analysis. From what we end up with, we select only the top 3-5 values that are most important to support your team's purpose.

This is also the moment to check if the values are in line with the mission and vision of our institution. If not, this is the moment to reflect as this could be very useful feedback for the school management about the reality of the school image and the daily work of the teachers. Your team members have most likely perceived many norms (positive and negative) that you did not know existed before.

The next step is to work out the group-specific behaviors that we agree on and that should reflect the application of our values in everyday school life. At this point, it is important to identify the specific social skills we need as a team to ensure that we apply these behaviors in a prosocial and non-aggressive way. For that, we incorporate Social Skills Training© to select specific skills that the team can practice as needed (e.g. asking for help, responding to failure, dealing with others' anger, expressing one's feelings, dealing with conflicting messages, or preparing for a difficult conversation). This is exactly where the "magic" happens. The values we want to teach, promote, and practice gradually become visible in the everyday life of the school community by being exemplified by the teachers.

Finally, review and revise the text later. As a rule, we try to gather short (every week/every month) and long-term (six months/a year) feedback from team members on how the actions we have defined as our team values are now visible in our daily work. What creates a successful, healthy work environment today may change in a decade, a year - or even six months. Do not be afraid to adjust your contract as your team sees fit. Supervision and/or even intervention would also be very helpful in understanding why some measures we have agreed on are not yet visible in our team life.

So what can a social contract look like in a school setting?

Let us take a look at the short version of the social contract in one of the Polish high schools.

The school's mission statement says: "We are a friendly school that provides harmonious and thorough development of the student's personality and talents to prepare them for life in the world around them. We encourage collaboration between the family, the school, and the community when it comes to how the childrens' living conditions and their education interact"

The 5 most important team values for the teachers were:

Honesty, Communication, Collaboration, Support, Development.

In their social contract, these values include:

Honesty

I express my emotions openly and without criticism, and I make every effort to manage my impulsiveness.

Communication

I quickly notify my team so that we can work together to resolve the issue if a student/parent, another instructor, or another team member does not treat me or another teammate with respect.

Cooperation

My main objective is the academic and personal growth of our students. To support kids' success, I will always be willing to collaborate with team members.

Support

I promise to call for assistance before I drown, giving my team enough time to respond and assist before a problem develops.

Development

I am not trapped in schemes. I strive to be an artist in education and not just an educational employee.

Working on a values-based social contract can change the quality of school relationships in the teacher-parent-student triad. By naming specific behaviors that should be behind the values and working through them with the help of Social Skills Training©(why not ART. As a whole here?), we can avoid the typical difficulties - everyone knows the values but no one applies them. We have a mission and a vision for the school, but our daily work is far from it. A social contract based on the values of the team and even the whole school community can be one of the tools that actually, through practice, change the image of our institution.