

Safety eBook Excerpt

Safety—Knowledge and Information

For students' healthy development it is critical that they experience a sense of both physical and emotional safety. Programs focused on student learning must promote strong safety measures. When we look at "higher brain function", those skills associated with 21st Century work place skills (critical thinking, decision making, team work, analysis of information) are diverted when any person feels physically or emotionally threatened.

A sense of safety is key in afterschool programs because we embrace the Three R's: relationships, relevance, and rigor. If we expect children to work with partners, in small groups, or on teams, we must ensure that this social environment is safe for all students. If we expect youth to speak up and share what is important and relevant to them, they must be sure that there will not be ridicule. If we expect youth to take risks and push the envelope when it comes to learning new things and push themselves to new heights, they must be safe within the group. Students are far more willing to take risks when they know that when they fail they will still be accepted by the group.

When programs are designed to promote a sense of safety, students feel more secure and trusting of others, the staff and their peers. Students are more likely to tell staff what they are thinking and feeling and as staff gains a deeper understanding of student opinions and wants, staff can better meet the needs of children and youth. It also serves to reduce "acting out" behaviors and underlying anxiety.