

The Importance of Strong Relationship Skills

Cooperation is an essential skill that leads to building strong relationships in school, work, and play. When teachers encourage peer-to-peer collaboration, students build positive relationships that are linked to stronger academic performance and a more positive view of their school (Roseth et al., 2018), which affects every aspect of their lives.



What Is Cooperation?

Cooperation is fundamental to nearly all social relationships and plays a key role in forming positive friendships and cohesive social groups (Fehr & Schurteberger, 2018). In the classroom, it has the potential to transform students' learning experiences, as cooperative practices shift knowledge acquisition from being a passive process to a dynamic, creative, and generative experience that students actively engage with and build upon (Sharan, 2010).

Fly Five defines a cooperative classroom as one where “students establish new relationships and friendships, know how to avoid social isolation, and resolve conflicts while accepting differences and contributing to a positive classroom community.” Cooperation involves staying flexible and open-minded, considering multiple perspectives, and learning how to respectfully disagree with peers. For instance, when two students are assigned to work together, effective communication helps them build new relationships and contribute to a supportive classroom environment. As they develop these skills, they learn to collaborate on tasks while navigating challenges through problem-solving and exploring different conflict resolution strategies (Buchs & Butera, 2015). Ultimately, the ability to cooperate, communicate clearly, and resolve conflicts constructively is not only vital in the classroom but also essential for future success in the workplace.



Developing Cooperation Skills

Effectively working as both a group member and a group leader is essential for building strong relationship skills that foster social bonds and promote a sense of community (“The Cooperative Human,” 2018). These skills help individuals learn how to interact successfully with others and form lasting connections. In the classroom, students who cooperate with peers demonstrate clear communication and the ability to collaborate with team members. Educators can support this growth by encouraging cooperative learning, reducing unnecessary competition, and emphasizing effort-based goals over performance outcomes (Buchs & Butera, 2015). It is also important to recognize that everyone approaches tasks differently—and that’s okay! Developing the ability to work with others despite these differences is a cornerstone of strong relationship skills.

Working as a part of a group gives students the opportunity to simultaneously connect with others while taking on the necessary roles to get the work completed. This requires students to be flexible in both leading and supporting others. The ability to contribute as a leader and use personal strengths to work toward completing a goal are both important facets of cooperation. Students learn to change roles within a group, which promotes a productive and respectful group environment (Gauvain, 2018) and allows them to gain experience across different leadership roles. Being able to work as both a leader and a member of a group also encourages students to see that every role has importance and brings value to the team.



Connecting Cooperation With Relationship Skills

Developing cooperation skills directly impacts students' ability to foster strong relationships with their peers. When students cooperate as team members and leaders, they learn to listen to and respect one another's opinions. They also learn how to work together to achieve a common goal and contribute their skills and strengths to their role within the group. Some examples of skills that students develop as a result of working cooperatively with a team include:

- Building skills in management, planning, and problem-solving
- Managing others effectively
- Being able to share different perspectives with others
- Making sound decisions amongst peers

Each of the above skills contributes to a strengthened ability to foster positive relationships with others. As students build on their cooperation skills, they will be more equipped to handle conflict and work in cohesion, which sets the stage for positive interdependence among students (Grzimek et al., 2020). For educators, it is also important to set the conditions for group work through a carefully arranged social context, complete with constructive feedback and time for reflection and adjustments. (Gauvain, 2018).



These skills go hand in hand when it comes to leadership and group member roles. Together they form a foundation of connection, communication, and problem-solving that can help students succeed. These lifelong skills are essential for students and can help them in all aspects of their lives, from school to work and play. If students learn how to work together and lead effectively, they can be successful in anything.