

You may be wondering ...

How can I support students with their handling of potentially difficult content in the Identity Project after they leave my classroom?

Proactive Coping Strategies

Proactive coping strategies directly address stressors and can include things such as talking to the person to address misconceptions, feeling proud about yourself and your background, or talking to someone about what happened.¹ The use of proactive coping strategies in adolescence, relative to other strategies, has been linked to better self-esteem, fewer depressive symptoms, and better academic outcomes.¹

Applying Identity Project Learning

It is completely normal for students to feel a range of emotions in response to difficult conversations about race, ethnicity, and identity. The good news is that implementing the Identity Project in your classroom fosters students' identity development and prepares them to handle challenging situations after they leave your classroom. For instance, the adult-facilitated sessions provide students with examples of how to productively and respectfully engage in conversations about race and ethnicity with others. In addition, lesson activities help increase students' self-confidence and understanding about their group membership, which helps them navigate future conversations related to their background. Collectively, these experiences promote and facilitate students' use of proactive coping strategies.

Let's explore how you can empower students during the Identity Project and enhance their proactive coping skills.

IN THE CLASSROOM

To encourage students' identity development, teachers can...

- Convey empathy and validate students' feelings, perspectives, and experiences.^{3,4}
- Provide time and space for students to process their emotions through activities like talking circles or journaling.⁴
- Support students if they are interested in engaging in action through establishing opportunities and resources.^{4,5}
- Encourage students to research the many positive things their group has achieved and explore counter-stories that dispel stereotypes.²



To help students develop proactive coping skills, teachers can...

- Brainstorm how students might respond to discrimination or prejudice:²
 - Talk to the person who caused harm to clarify stereotypes or misconceptions
 - Practice self-affirmation (How do you feel about your group? What do you know to be true?)
- Encourage students to identify and seek out other adults or peers with whom they feel comfortable and safe talking about these topics (e.g., counselor, parent, mentor).⁵
- Help students practice self-care strategies such as exercise, meditation, breathing exercises, listening to music, singing, dancing, cooking, creating art, reading, and spiritual practices.⁵



Key Takeaway:

The work that students do throughout the Identity Project to explore their ethnic-racial background and gain a clearer sense of what it means to them ultimately empowers them to navigate difficult situations addressing race and ethnicity in a way that can enhance their proactive coping skills.

References and Articles for Further Reading:

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