



Using Establish-Maintain-Restore to Build Psychological Safety

Establish-Maintain-Restore (EMR) is a research-supported system of strategies and tools used by teachers to build effective relationships with students. Critically, even though EMR itself has research supporting its use (see the accompanying article for one example), it includes elements that are all individually supported as well. Many of these strategies and tools actually come from how to build healthy adult relationships and fostering safety and connection between friends, family, and life partners.

Given that, EMR can just as easily be used to build **psychological safety**. As a reminder, psychological safety can be understood as staff feel that they have time and space to bring up concerns and praises, that they have the actual skills to communicate and receive feedback effectively, and that they have input into actual changes made within the system. This is achieved through normalizing challenges that all (especially leaders) are facing, engaging in open feedback processes throughout the school, demonstrating what actions are taken as a direct result of feedback, incorporating regular team-building time and activities, and encouraging staff to take risks (e.g., what they prioritize, what instructional strategies they try, what solutions they offer to larger problems).

EMR helps build psychological safety through a concentrated effort on building, maintaining, and restoring relationships. Here is how it is done.

Understanding the phases

EMR divides staff relationships into three stages: the Establish stage, the Maintain Stage, and the Restore stage. The **Establish Stage** is straightforward and involves using explicit strategies to build healthy relationships with staff members. A key thing to remember is that we all naturally establish relationships all the time, but some are more successful than others, and some never become established, and some take explicit work. Those that form naturally and those that form through work look no different behaviorally. We do the same things. But there might just be *something* that makes one relationship require more focus. That is where the strategies discussed in the accompanying article help. The Banking Time concept that it discusses is especially useful.

Once a relationship is established, we slightly adjust the same strategies we naturally or intentionally use in order to **maintain** that relationship. It is here where psychological safety begins to develop. Within the bounds of an established relationship, staff can freely share their thoughts, provide and receive feedback and support, offer ideas and solutions knowing that some may like and some may not like their ideas and solutions, and yet the relationship will remain. This is particularly critical for leaders (both formal like principals and informal such as veteran teachers) as the power difference between leaders and the rest of staff can be tension on the relationship. Ongoing, purposeful maintenance is important.

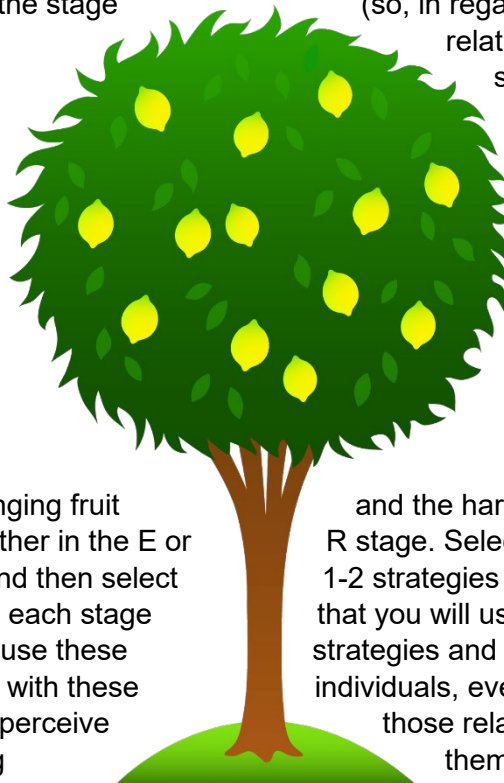
Eventually, though, all relationships go through some damage and need to **restore** the relationship. Although it can be uncomfortable and feel like something wrong has happened, this is actually a normal part of healthy relationship development. Once one or both parties in a relationship recognize the relationship can be damaged, they can use a variety of strategies to acknowledge and repair. This process *also builds psychological safety because it demonstrates being able recognize boundaries and rebuild them without uncertainty of the status of the*

relationship. Review the strategies in the accompanying article when it is time to rebuild the stage.

Monitoring the stages

This can be done for any staff member and especially for leaders. Identify all staff within a school and write down their names. Next to each name, write if you, personally, feel like you are in the E, M, or R phase of the relationship with them. If we think we have never really formed a solid relationship with someone, that is most likely an E. If there was a relationship at one point, and it feels less open or feels lacking, that might be an R stage relationship. Value your own perspective on the relationship; two staff members may have different opinions on the stage of their relationship and psychological safety cannot be built until both agree on that perspective.

From there, identify your “low hanging fruit”. These are staff members you connect with easily and naturally, regardless of the stage (so, in regards to R, you are able to quickly recognize when the relationship needs to be repaired and can do so easily and which are the hard-to-notice a pattern. Are the between these two religious beliefs? Do they team? Spend some time biases and see which building a culture with reach fruit. See if you can gender identity differences groups? Racial/ethnic or not like your favorite sports checking your personal might be barriers to psychological safety).



Action steps

Once you have your low hanging fruit from the first group that is either in the E or either in the E or R stage. And then select EMR document aligned with each stage Set an intention and goal to use these effects. Continue to connect with these be difficult for you, until you perceive M stage. Continuing building staff in the E or R stages to process.

and the hard-to-reach fruits, select 1 R stage. Select 3 from the second group 1-2 strategies from the accompanying that you will use with these staff members. strategies and then do so. Watch the individuals, even those that might naturally those relationships have moved to the them, while also identifying new connect with and repeat the

If everyone is continually committed to building a strong, connected culture, then the other components of psychological safety can follow.