

# Gaining Your Classroom

*without Losing Your Mind*

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SEL Strategies & Rethinking Classroom Communication

# Who Is This For?



You're an experienced educator looking to refresh your approach



You're a newer teacher still finding your footing



You want to build real connections with students — not just compliance



You believe gaining your classroom should never require losing yourself

# The Reality We Know

 Lesson plan is solid... then everything unravels

 A student shuts down. Another escalates.

 You go home exhausted, questioning yourself

 The next day starts and the cycle repeats

*The truth is — you're cut out for this. You just need better tools.*

# What Is SEL — and Why Does It Matter?

## Social-Emotional Learning

SEL is the process through which students develop and apply essential skills like:

- Self-awareness
- Emotional regulation
- Empathy & perspective-taking
- Responsible decision-making
- Positive relationship-building

These are not soft skills — they are the foundation for all academic and life success.

## Research Shows:

11%

Average academic gain for students in SEL programs



Reduced behavior problems & emotional distress



Improved attitudes about school and learning



ROI of \$11 for every \$1 invested in quality SEL programs

# SEL: Not One More Thing on Your Plate

*When implemented well, SEL isn't an add-on. It IS the plate.*

## Morning Check-ins



60-second emotional temperature check. Helps you spot who needs support before the day unravels.

## Restorative Language



Replace reactive commands with curiosity. "What happened?" opens doors that "Stop it!" slams shut.

## Co-regulation First



You can't regulate what you can't model. Your calm is contagious — so is your stress.

## Choice Architecture



Build in micro-choices throughout the day. Autonomy reduces power struggles before they start.

# Rethinking the Language of the Classroom

*Language is the invisible architecture of every classroom. Small shifts, dramatic results.*

✘ Instead of saying...

Stop talking

Why didn't you do your homework?

You're being disrespectful.

Sit down and be quiet.

☑ Try this instead...

I need your voice in just a moment.

What got in the way last night?

That tone isn't going to help us solve this.

I need everyone's attention right here.

# Restorative Practices in the Classroom



## Community Circles

Regular circle check-ins build a classroom culture of trust before any conflict arises. When everyone has a voice, everyone is invested.



## Affective Statements

"When X happens, I feel Y because Z." Model how to express emotion without blame — and watch students learn to do the same.



## Restorative Conversations

Replace punishment with problem-solving. Ask: What happened? Who was affected? What do we need to repair? What will you do differently?



## Reintegration

Returning students need a re-entry plan, not more isolation. A 2-minute private check-in prevents the next incident before it starts.



## Shared Agreements

Co-create classroom norms. Rules students help write are rules students feel responsible for keeping.



## Repair Over Punishment

Focus on repairing harm to relationships — not just applying consequences. This builds long-term accountability.

# You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup

*Teacher wellbeing isn't a luxury — it's a prerequisite for student success.*

## Name Your Triggers



Know what specific student behaviors activate your stress response — and have a plan.

## The Strategic Pause



3 breaths before responding to escalation changes everything. Model regulation by doing it.

## Protect Your Time



Set clear work/life boundaries. Exhausted teachers can't show up as the teachers students need.

## Build Your Network



Find one colleague who gets it. Professional isolation is as dangerous as student isolation.


# Building Real Relationships — Before You Need Them

## The 2x10 Strategy

Spend 2 minutes for 10 consecutive days talking with a challenging student about anything except behavior or academics. Research shows this one strategy can transform your most difficult relationships.

### Quick Wins That Work:

- ✓ Learn and use students' preferred names
- ✓ Greet every student at the door
- ✓ Find one genuine interest per student
- ✓ Acknowledge effort, not just outcomes
- ✓ Say sorry when you get it wrong



*Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.*

This isn't sentiment — it's neuroscience.  
A dysregulated brain cannot learn.  
Relationship IS the intervention.

# Community Circles: Your Most Powerful Daily Tool

## 1 Opening

Centering activity, breathing, or mindfulness. Sets the tone and signals: this is a safe space.

## 2 Check-in Question

One low-stakes question: "On a scale of 1-5, how are you feeling today and why?" or a fun prompt.

## 3 Core Content

Brief discussion, celebration, or concern related to the community. Keep it focused.

## 4 Closing

A word, gesture, or affirmation to end. Creates ritual and belonging every single day.



*Time needed: 5–7 minutes. Impact: All day long.*

# Your Next Steps — Starting Tomorrow

## TOMORROW

1

Greet every student at the door by name

2

Try one rephrase from the language chart

3

Do a 60-second morning check-in with your class

## THIS WEEK

1

Identify one student for the 2x10 strategy

2

Start a community circle (even 3 minutes counts)

3

Find your regulation trigger — and a coping plan

## THIS MONTH

1

Establish a classroom circle routine

2

Co-create class norms with your students

3

Build your professional support network

# You became a teacher to make a difference.

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*Let's make sure you have the tools —  
and the energy — to do exactly that.*

Gaining Your Classroom without Losing Your Mind

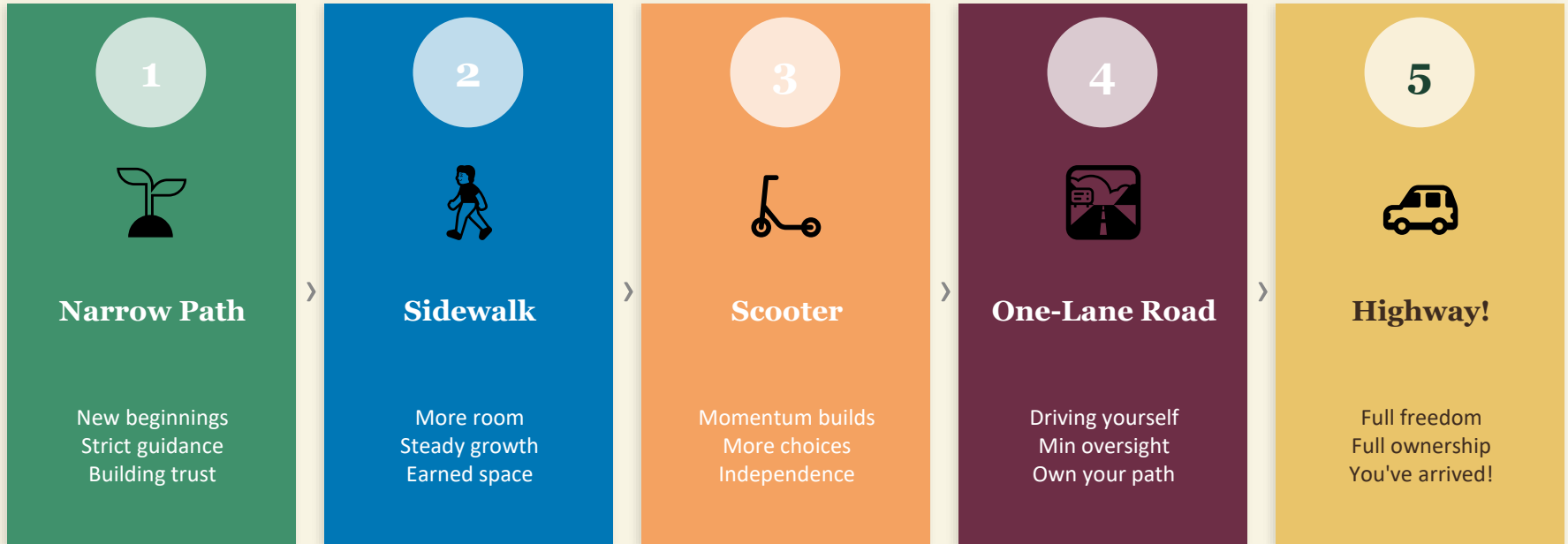
# 2

# The Path to Freedom

*A Classroom Management Philosophy*

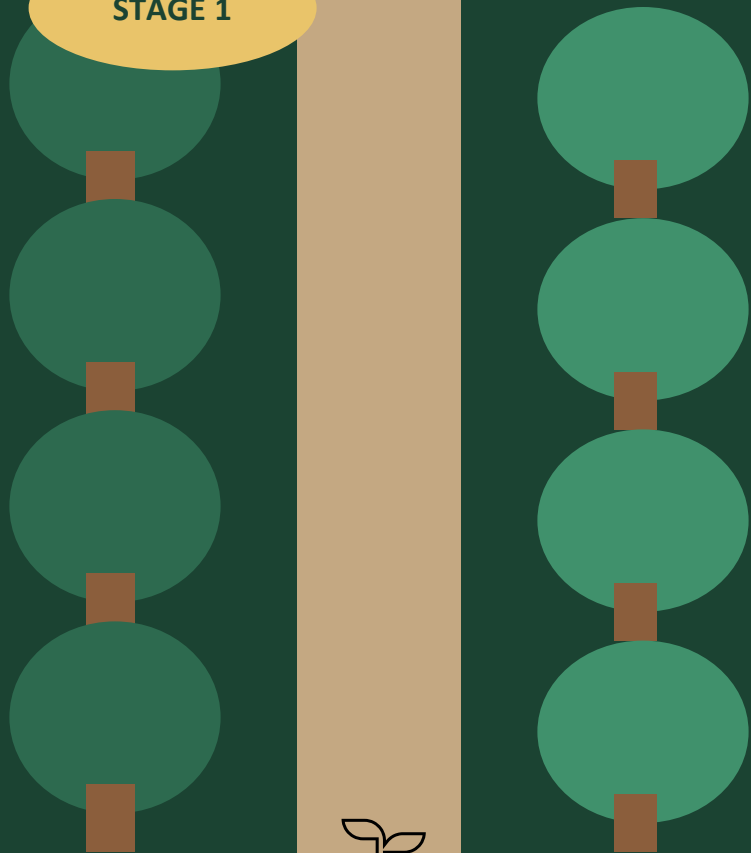
# The Path to Freedom & Responsibility

Our classroom journey mirrors the real world: freedom grows as wisdom and responsibility are demonstrated. Students don't start with a highway — they earn it.



*Every student can reach the highway — the path is theirs to earn.*

## STAGE 1



# The Narrow Path

## *Where Our Journey Begins*

### **Brand New Beginnings**

We walk together on a narrow path — close, guided, and intentional. Not much room to wander.

### **Learning the Way**

Rules, routines, and expectations established. Every student learns the boundaries of our community.

### **Trust is Being Built**

Responsibility is earned step by step. Consistent choices lead to greater freedoms.

### **The Path Widens for Those Who Earn It**

Show wisdom. Show care. Show consistency — the road ahead opens for you.

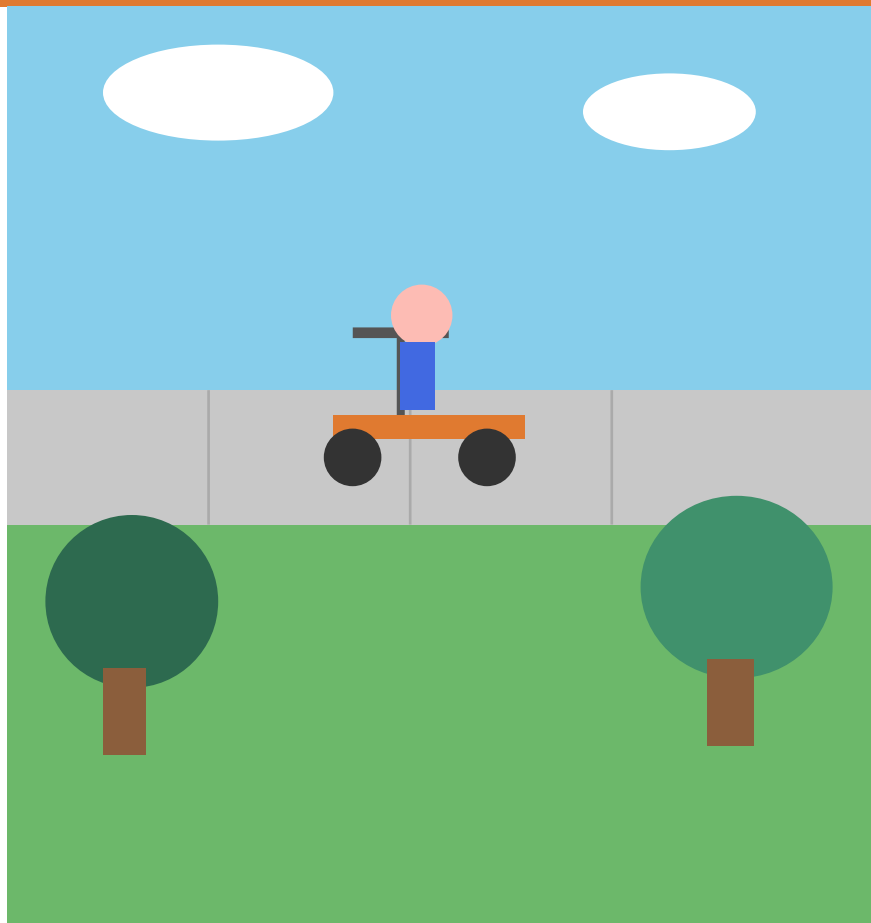
## Now You're Moving!

You've been walking the walk — now it's time to ride. A scooter on the sidewalk means you have momentum. You move faster, cover more ground, and have more autonomy.

### What this looks like in class:

- More choice in how you demonstrate learning
- Greater independence during work time
- Trusted to make smart decisions without reminders
- Leadership opportunities begin to emerge

*⚠ The sidewalk still has edges — stay on the path!*






# Stage 2 & 3 — Sidewalk to Scooter

## STAGE 2

### The Sidewalk

*More room to walk — still guided by the curb.*

You've proven you can handle the narrow path. Now there's a wider sidewalk — space to breathe and explore within a defined structure. The edges are still there, but you've earned extra room.

-  More independence in movement
-  Consistent choices opened this door
-  Structure remains — freedom grows within it

## STAGE 3

### Scooter on the Sidewalk

*You've been walking — now you're riding!*

A scooter on the sidewalk means momentum. You move faster, cover more ground, have more autonomy — and the sidewalk still has edges.

- More choice in how you demonstrate learning
- Greater independence during work time
- Trusted to make smart decisions
- Leadership opportunities emerge

STAGE 5

# THE HIGHWAY



*Maximum Freedom. Maximum Responsibility.*



You've arrived. The highway is the reward for a year of good choices, proven wisdom, and earned trust. You move with speed and purpose.

# Stage 4 & 5 — Road to Highway





## STAGE 4



### The One-Lane Road

*Bigger world. Bigger responsibility.*

A full lane — you're driving now. The road is defined but open. You manage your time, your work, and your choices with minimal oversight. Your actions affect others.

-  Driving yourself with minimal guidance
-  Real accountability for your choices
-  Your decisions affect those around you
-  Eyes on the highway ahead





## STAGE 5



### THE HIGHWAY

*Maximum Freedom. Maximum Responsibility.*

You've arrived. The highway is the reward for a year of good choices, proven wisdom, and earned trust. You move with speed, direction, and purpose — and you are trusted to do so.

-  Full freedom of movement and choice
-  Self-directed with teacher as coach
-  Role model for other students
-  Ready for whatever comes next


# How Students Move Up — and What Brings Them Back

## ↑ Moving to the Next Stage

- ✓ Consistent positive behavior over time
- ✓ Demonstrating responsibility without reminders
- ✓ Showing respect for classmates and teacher
- ✓ Completing expectations with quality and care
- ✓ Handling challenges with maturity and grace

## ↓ Moving Back a Stage

*This isn't punishment — it's a reset. The path back up is always open.*

- ! Repeated choices that disrupt the community
  - ! Not meeting expectations after reminders
  - ! Breaking trust with teacher or peers
  - ! Showing the current level isn't the right fit — yet
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# The Road Ahead

*is Yours to Earn*

 Path

 Sidewalk

 Scooter

 Road

 Highway!

Every choice you make is a step down the path.  
Wisdom, responsibility, and consistency unlock the next stage.

# 3

# Every Day Matters

*Key Highlights from the Attendance Lesson*

# What Is Chronic Absence?

That's just  
**2 days  
per month**

**18+**

days per year

**= Chronic Absence**

Includes ALL  
absences  
**excused &  
unexcused**

*New Mexico has one of the highest chronic absenteeism rates in the nation — over 30% of students. Every adult in the building has a role to play.*

# The Domino Effect of Absence

*Missing school doesn't just mean missing a day — it starts a cycle that's hard to break.*



# By The Numbers — The Academic Impact

**10%**

of instructional time lost  
with just 2 absences/month

**25%**

lower reading scores  
for chronically absent students

**3×**

more likely to drop out if  
chronically absent in middle school

**50%**

of content missed when absent  
just 1 day per week

# It's Not Just About Grades



## Social Connections

Friendships, belonging, and social skills develop through daily interaction. Absent students miss these irreplaceable moments.



## Opportunities

Sports, clubs, internships, and college applications all require a demonstrated commitment to showing up.



## Life Skills

Reliability, accountability, and persistence — the skills employers value most — are built through daily attendance habits.



## Future Success

Chronic absence in middle school is one of the strongest predictors of high school dropout. The pattern starts early.



## Community

Your presence strengthens our classroom. Your absence creates a gap that affects everyone around you.



## Mental Health

Staying connected to school routines supports emotional stability — especially during difficult times at home.

# Real Challenges Behind Absence

*These are real challenges — not excuses. Understanding them is the first step to solving them.*

## **Transportation**

Bus routes, car issues, or long distances make getting to school genuinely difficult for many families.

## **Health Issues**

Chronic illness, mental health challenges, or lack of healthcare access keep students home more often.

## **School Climate**

Bullying, not feeling safe, or disconnection from school culture makes students not want to return.

## **Family Factors**

Homelessness, housing instability, or family responsibilities (like caring for siblings) prevent attendance.

## **Cultural & Community Events**

Traditional, ceremonial, or community obligations deserve recognition and planning, not punishment.

## **Disability & Access**

Students with IEPs or 504 Plans may face unique attendance barriers requiring individualized support.

# Our Role as Educators

**1 Build a classroom worth coming to** If students feel welcomed, seen, and connected — they want to show up. Relationships are attendance interventions.

**2 Notice and act early** After 2–3 absences, make contact. Frame it as concern, not accusation: "I missed you and I'm glad you're back."

**3 Communicate without shame** Families don't need blame — they need a partner. Lead with empathy and curiosity, not judgement.

**4 Use data consistently** Track patterns. Know which students are trending toward chronic absence before it becomes chronic.

**5 Connect to the whole school** Attendance is a school-wide culture issue, not just a classroom one. Celebrate improvement at every level.

# Partnering with Families – Relationships Over Punishment

## DO

- ✓ Lead with genuine concern for the student
- ✓ Ask open questions: "What's getting in the way?"
- ✓ Offer solutions and school supports proactively
- ✓ Celebrate attendance improvements, however small
- ✓ Build ongoing relationships before problems arise

## DON'T

- X Lead with threats or consequences
- X Assume families don't care
- X Make families feel judged or blamed
- X Only call when things are bad
- X Use attendance as a punishment tool

# Every Student. Every Day.

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*When students walk through that door, something important happens. Make sure they know you noticed — and that you're glad they came.*



Greet every student at the door by name — every day



Review your attendance data weekly. Know who is trending toward risk.



Make the call before it's urgent — day 2 or 3, not day 18



Celebrate improvement publicly. Attendance culture is built on recognition.

# Gaining Your Classroom without Losing Your Mind

*The Path to Freedom & Responsibility*

*Every Student. Every Day.*

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SEL + Communication: Language and relationship come first.

Freedom is earned: The path to the highway is paved with consistent choices.

Presence matters: Every day a student shows up is a win worth celebrating.