



Pathways to Peace

Instructor Guide



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Purpose of Pathways to Peace

Pathways to Peace aims to recognize and activate the potential of students to be peacemakers and positively impact the climate of classrooms. The lessons and activities will give participants the opportunity to practice and commit to the seven Principles of Peace: love, unity, faith, hope, courage, justice, and forgiveness. Pathways to Peace was designed to center students who have been deeply affected by murder, trauma, grief, and loss.

Peace education is a social literacy and primary violence prevention strategy. Many prevention efforts have the effect of demonizing individuals and neighborhoods as bad, violent, and dangerous. These lesson plans come from a strictly asset-based approach to peacemaking and encourages students to recognize that their communities are rich with loving families, survival strategies, healing capacity, and the possibility of peace. We want to emphasize starting peace rather than stopping violence; these lesson plans are focused on healing and transforming rather than “fixing” or “saving.” Peace education programs like Pathways to Peace have been proven to increase resilience, reinforce positive behaviors, promote social responsibility, and deepen relationships between participants to prevent future violence.

Pathways to Peace is a vehicle to make schools safer learning environments by creating space for educators and students to acknowledge the pain of grief and loss, build skills for peaceful living, and reinforce the belief that peace is possible. The Annual Mother’s Day Walk for Peace is an opportunity for schools and community organizations to practice community service learning and be in solidarity with others practicing the same skills and principles.

History of the Peace Institute

Since 1994, the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute (PI) has worked on the front lines to provide support, expand services, and develop resources for families of homicide victims and the broader community. The PI currently responds to referrals after nearly every homicide in the city of Boston and is a leading advocate for survivors of homicide victims across Massachusetts. These innovative, survivor-led programs and services continue to foster a culture of peace and shape statewide trauma-response and violence prevention policy.

Clementina Chery, the PI’s CEO and President, co-founded the organization in response to the murder of her son Louis David Brown. Louis was a sophomore in high school and a dedicated peacemaker. Because of her own traumatic experience in the aftermath of her child’s murder, Clementina wanted to assist other families as they navigated funeral arrangements, the criminal justice system, and the grieving process. She saw a gap in the service delivery system for survivors of homicide victims and recognized an urgent need for community-centered pathways to healing.



The PI continues to be led by individuals who are personally affected by violence. The PI believes that all families, regardless of the circumstances, deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion. The PI's visionary work is rooted in the conviction that peace is possible through actively practicing the seven principles of peace. This approach fundamentally shifts the view of communities as a "place where murder happens" to a place where people are leading the peace-building process.

The PI has over twenty years of experience developing and delivering peace education. The PI has worked with UMass Boston and the Harvard School of Public Health to create and evaluate extensive curriculum and teacher's guides for every grade level. This curriculum and further technical assistance from the PI can be made available those schools interested in extending their commitment to peace education.

Role of Instructors in Pathways to Peace

Instructors are critical to the success of any curriculum. The PI is deeply grateful for instructors who are taking the initiative and making the commitment to prioritize peace education. Pathways to Peace activities and lessons may challenge instructors to embrace new teaching methods, classroom set up, and learning tools. These activities and lesson plans were designed specifically to pivot away from the typical classroom model where the instructor provides knowledge to students and answers are either "right" or "wrong." Instead, these activities ask the instructor to create a nurturing, supportive space where students can tap into their own thoughts and feelings, practice new ways of communicating, and share their lived experiences.

To create buy-in among students, instructors must model a willingness to "try on" new things, be vulnerable, and participate alongside students. Instructors can also lead by example by embracing the Principles of Peace and motivating colleagues to do the same. This could mean an increased focus on social justice or service learning or a stronger commitment to including social-emotional learning activities in lesson plans. This is also an opportunity for instructors to deepen their analysis of the root causes of violence and the ways violence impacts their students. The Peace Institute is available to support schools seeking to engage further in this work.

While the curriculum deals with grief and trauma, instructors are not being asked to use clinical methods or provide therapy to their students. This is only an introduction to peace education. The activities allow for self-reflection, creative expression, and thoughtful discussion. Sometimes discussion may bring up emotions that students are not able to express or manage alone; instructors should make a plan to connect students with additional support if needed.



Grief and Trauma in the Classroom

The experience of traumatic loss has a major impact on students' ability to be successful in school. Trauma may cause students to have difficulty developing connections with others, react in heightened or withdrawn ways, and to feel additional stress and anxiety on top of the ordinary pressures of school. It can be helpful to remember the effects of trauma as **"F.A.R.R. reaching"**—trauma limits students ability to focus, attend, recall, and retain information. When students are carrying the heavy burden of trauma, it affects the climate of the classroom.

In 2015, Boston lost 38 souls to homicide. Research shows that for every one lost, there are 8 to 10 immediate family members who are left to grieve. This means that in Boston, there is a minimum of 376 – 470 new survivors who are in need of support. Many of these survivors are children and youth.

The Peace Institute has worked extensively in a Dorchester middle school piloting peace education and found that 41% of those students reported that they have lost either a family member or someone they consider close to them to violence. When the Peace Institute asked students who had experienced a traumatic loss how often they worried about violence affecting them, 66% of that group said "all the time." Clearly, there is an urgent need for Pathways to Peace and other peace education.

It is impossible to start peace without acknowledging the pain of traumatic loss. Schools are an essential part of the healing process. While diagnoses and clinical care are not within the schools' purview, school staff are in a position to be caring adults who de-stigmatize trauma, nurture a supportive environment, and create opportunities for students to engage in creative, collective problem solving to address violence. All students have a need to feel accepted, supported, and understood—especially students who are struggling to cope with traumatic loss.

All students, regardless of circumstance, deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion. A key part of the peacemaking process means believing in the potential of all young people to be peacemakers. When we overlook the impact of structural oppression on students' daily lives and feed into "good kid" and "bad kid" essentialism, we set young people up to fail. Pathways to Peace is an opportunity to channel the hope and courage necessary to see substantive change in the culture of classrooms.



Fundamentals for Instructors

Hopefully, Pathways to Peace will give instructors some tools to add to their toolbox and become better equipped to serve students experiencing grief and loss. Here is a list of some best practices to support:

Avoid correcting or minimizing feelings: Reinforce to students that all feelings are valid; there are no “right” and “wrong” or “good” and “bad” feelings. Students cannot control their feelings, and they are responsible for controlling their actions. While you may or may not relate to what a student is feeling, those feelings are real for them. It is unhelpful to tell students how to feel; it is more useful to explore with students why they feel a certain way and how they can cope with that feeling. Additionally, it can feel disingenuous to say “I know just how you feel”—all of our experiences are unique.

Actively participate: Peace education curriculum is most impactful when instructors are willing to do the activities, offer personal examples, and engage in discussion alongside students. This conveys the value of the work to students and will help deepen connections in the classroom.

Notice what activities bring up for you: Many instructors have experienced or been exposed to trauma themselves. As you are preparing for lessons or facilitating activities, notice what is coming up for you and be sure to take care of yourself and your feelings. It is difficult to support others who are grieving if you are not aware of or willing to address your own grief.

Be aware of competitive grief: Sometimes when students are invited to share their experiences with traumatic loss, they feel pressure to have it “the worst” or feel it the most. Students may feel a connection between experiencing loss and having credibility with fellow students or a need for validation. This may manifest as a competition between students. This is usually a sign that a student needs additional attention and support. If you notice this happening, it is important to validate that the student’s loss is significant. Remind students that people feel loss and express grief differently. While no loss and no one’s grief is more important than another person’s, violent death can have a very different impact than other deaths.

Affirm peacemaking behavior: Acknowledge when students decide to show courage by being honest and vulnerable. Encourage students to appreciate each other. Recognize leaders who are having a positive impact and motivating other students to participate. Notice and affirm students when they are exhibiting the Principles of Peace.

Establish a safe space: When you are facilitating Pathways to Peace activities, properly prepare students for the lesson. Take the time to allow students to settle in, take a deep breath, and remind students of the purpose of Peace Month and the Principles of Peace. Remind students each person deserves dignity and compassion.



Be realistic: While these lessons and activities have the potential to be transformative, it is not going to solve everything. Students will not suddenly shift all their behaviors and be able to avoid all conflict. Be realistic about the potential of Pathways to Peace activities and be willing to continue doing peace-building work. While we can shift the culture of the classroom, students may still be facing pressures and challenges outside of school.

Differentiate between intent and impact: It is possible to be well intentioned **and** still say or do hurtful things. Help students distinguish between what they meant to do/say and the impact what they said/did had on other students. Encourage students to give each other honest, constructive feedback. Support students moving beyond excuses for behavior (*“that’s not what I meant!”* *“I didn’t mean it like that!”*) and toward recognizing and taking responsibility for harm they cause others regardless of their intentions so that everyone can feel valued and included.

How to Use Pathways to Peace

The Peace Institute has created several tools for teachers who want their classes to participate. We have put together a Pathways to Peace Activity Book that list social-emotional learning activities that teachers can pick and choose to supplement material they are already teaching. We have also written Pathways to Peace Example Lesson Plans, which consist of five 45-60 minutes lessons. The lessons offer a wide range of engaging activities to suit students with different learning styles. There are also handouts that teachers can copy for their class.



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