# ☼ | Classroom Examples of SCARF

David Rock offers the SCARF model to explain the domains of human social experience that activate reward or threat circuitry in our brains. These domains are interrelated and are at play simultaneously. As educators, we must reduce students' experiences of threat, which interfere with their ability to reason and learn. Below are examples of teacher actions that may cause a student to experience threat in each domain, along with possible responses to minimize threat and maximize an experience of reward. Note what sounds familiar and what you question.

| Domains of Human Social Experience | Teacher Action | Student Response | Possible Responses to Reduce Threat |
|---|---|---|---|
| **STATUS:** Sense of Being Valued | Actual or perceived differential treatment related to discipline, patterns of participation and student support<br><br>Few opportunities for a student to share what is important to them in their work<br><br>The model of what success looks like is narrowly defined - only certain types of student work, language and action are celebrated and rewarded | *"I have too far to go to be successful – it's not possible to learn this or pass this class."*<br><br>*"The teacher doesn't believe I'm smart or that I can learn."*<br><br>*"You don't know me or like me, so I'm not going to learn from you."*<br><br>*"If I can't be good at school, I'll be good at something else."* *(being the clown, being tough)* | Involve student in goal setting, sharing the distance to the goal and a reasonable plan for how they will get there.<br><br>Offer specific, actionable feedback in relation to how student did before or to common standard or goal, rather than comparison to others.<br><br>Allow regular opportunities for students to reflect on their own progress<br><br>Ensure opportunities for all students to participate in class activities and discussion.<br><br>Support students to take leadership roles in class |

| Domains of Human Social Experience | Teacher Action | Student Response | Possible Responses to Reduce Threat |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CERTAINTY:** Pattern recognition - ability to predict the near future | Unclear criteria for academic and behavioral success<br><br>Inconsistent mood, tone or reaction - facial expression or tone that doesn't match what is said<br><br>Assumptions of background knowledge or experiences that aren't accurate (which lead to lessons that don't connect to student schema)<br><br>Lack of clear learning goal<br><br>Little routine in classroom | *Seemingly reacts the "wrong" way to teacher demands*<br><br>*"I don't have any idea what is going on!"*<br><br>*Frustration*<br><br>*Off task behavior* | Build classroom routines<br><br>Deliver instructions in a variety of forms and check for understanding<br><br>Break large projects down into smaller pieces with frequent opportunities for checking progress<br><br>Provide models of student work<br><br>Be reflective about emotional triggers for you and the student |
| **AUTONOMY:** Feeling of having choices and input | Students offered little choice or input about how or why they are learning something new or completing a task<br><br>Student opinions and ideas are silenced or ignored<br><br>Student time is controlled, with no opportunity for self-direction | *"I can't move forward without checking first with the teacher."*<br><br>*"My interests or experiences don't matter here."*<br><br>*"You are trying to control me or make me someone I'm not"*<br><br>*"I have no say in what happens to me so I'll start to exert control where I can."* | Involve students in the creation of their learning space, classroom routines and norms<br><br>Provide opportunities for choice among assignments, topics, product and how students spend their time<br><br>Allow student choice to feel safe and within clear boundaries |

| Domains of Human Social Experience | Teacher Action | Student Response | Possible Responses to Reduce Threat |
|---|---|---|---|
| **RELATEDNESS:** Social group belonging | No sense of community or opportunities for students to connect beyond the content

Lack of cultural synchronization misreading facial expressions, tone, language

Teacher has difficulty finding ways to connect with student

Classroom culture focused on competition rather than collaboration | *"I don't fit in here. No one knows or can understand my experience."*

*"We are not alike and I don't trust you, so I'm going to shut down or fight back."*

*Going through the motions of school without feeling connected to the people or the place.* | Have students share personal stories and experiences to find commonalities

Create opportunities for small group collaborative learning, buddy system

Build rapport and trusting relationships with students

Build routine of appreciations of student contributions |
| **FAIRNESS** | Actual or perceived differential treatment related to discipline, patterns of participation and student support

Whole class is punished based on actions of one student

Teacher not following school dress code or rules. | *"You are just going to fail me anyway – it doesn't matter what I do."*

*"You think you're better than me."*

*"You always blame me, but he started it!"*

*"You always pick on me."* | When possible, explain why and how decisions are made (especially when differential treatment is necessary)

Involve students in decision making

Teach students to see situations from multiple perspectives |