

Working with Difficult Students Education Week

Here are three things you must first determine before you can effectively deal with the problem:

- 1. Who is this student as a person? What does he like/dislike? Are there any struggles he is currently facing at home or at school? Knowing this information is vital.*
- 2. Is the student struggling academically or socially? These types of struggles often mask themselves behind mischievous behavior. On the flip side, is he being actively engaged and challenged in your classroom?*
- 3. What does the student attribute his behavior to when you speak with him privately? Simply asking a student why he behaves a certain way can reveal a lot. If the student answers by saying, "I don't know," then vow to help him figure it out.*

Next question: Is the student convinced that you care about him? If not, you're going to have to work at changing that perception. Students often misbehave when they feel their teachers don't care about them. It doesn't mean the teacher doesn't care. It often means the student simply has not been convinced that the teacher cares.

Once you determine what's causing a problem--and you've convinced a student that you care and want to help him--you're on your way to actually helping him.

Here are a few suggestions for dealing with a misbehaving student:

- 1. When you speak with the student privately, give an example of his behavior, reasons the behavior was inappropriate, and a more appropriate way to handle the situation next time. Don't assume that students always know how to behave appropriately.*
- 2. DON'T take the student's behavior personally. The second a student knows he's pushing your buttons, you've given control to him. He knows it, and the whole class knows it. Hide your buttons!*
- 3. Remember that no one repeats a behavior unless he's receiving some kind of reward for it. Find out what that reward is. If it's simply attention-seeking, give him attention - but not when he misbehaves. Rather, start shifting positive attention his way.*
- 4. Set the student up for as much success as you can. Notice everything good he does. Assign appropriate responsibilities to him. Make him feel important.*
- 5. Offer your private time to him, at recess or at some other time if you don't have "recess" at your school. Say, "Right after lunch, I'll give up my free time for you. We'll talk about what's going on and put our heads together to come up with a solution." This trick works wonders! It takes about 30 seconds, because the student doesn't want to miss his free time. Remember, you're not taking away his time--you're giving him yours.*

One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch! Every teacher has been dealt that dreadful hand which includes a difficult student. How do you handle those students, so their behavior does not impact the learning of others? Here are some hints and tips to get you started!

Find something positive to say, and send a brief email home to the parent/guardian praising the "moment in time." The parents of difficult students usually receive negative feedback. When you get the parent on your side, the student often follows!

Prevent the difficult student from having the power! Be firm. When the confrontation begins, keep your voice at an "inside voice" level, and force yourself not to yell or scold. When you scold, the class often takes the side of the student, and then you have lost the power battle. Instead, ask the student to stay after class, and speak with him or her privately. Be polite and use "I" messages. Even the most difficult student can have empathy. Sometimes getting that student to see your side will help you all year long.

Be proactive and not reactive. If a consistent pattern develops, you need to nip it. In private, give the student a warning that you will need to get administration involved. Visit administration in advance and explain your situation. Chances are, you are not the first teacher to have problems. Tell the administration that you are going to call if the problem happens again, and you will be sending the student out. Let them know to just hold that student until you call to have the child returned to your class (let the student worry a little). Frequently, the "scare" is enough to stop the behavior, and the student knows you mean business. The bonus of this action is that the rest of the class knows too!

Constantly circulate the room, and land near the desk of the difficult student. This idea sounds so easy, and it works! It is way more difficult to cause trouble when the teacher is close by!

Have a sense of humor. Not everything the difficult student does is done purposefully. Do not blame that student for all negative behaviors in class. Sometimes, a little laughter and gentle, but respectful, sarcasm can be very effective.

Be flexible. As much as you need to be consistent and fair, students are not cut from the same mold. Have a heart! You may need to realize that the student is dealing with a situation outside of school that does not allow him or her to bring a best self to class.

Never forget; you are the role model. You cannot expect a classroom full of well-behaved students if you, as their leader, are not above reproach. The students who are the most difficult are usually the ones with the most baggage. They likely need your compassion and support. Gaining their trust and respect is of the utmost importance.

For further reading:

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_ga_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/04/response_dont_fear_students_who_challenge_class_chemistry.html?r=1803477254&preview=1

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_ga_with_larry_ferlazzo/2016/04/response_working_with_difficult_students_-_part_two.html