



Tips for Developing Positive Student Relationships

Collected and developed by: Kathy Bennett, ASW, De Anza Health Center

Things You Can DO:

- Develop relationships with your most challenging students. Say hello to them daily and say that you are glad to see them, even if you are frustrated with them.
- Let him or her know even when you are frustrated, you still care.
- Ask about his or her interests, hobbies, strengths, successes, etc.
- Put the student in a helping role. This can be something small like running items to the office or other small tasks you need done in class. If you create respect agreements in your class he or she can help remind the class to be respectful. You can ask for their feedback about class, school, and his or her opinions about things.
- Try to praise and appreciate students who may not be appreciated or given recognition. Make up awards that fit that student such as, "Made it to my class on time all week" or other creative ideas.
- Keep a log about your relationship with that student. Once you start trying different ways to connect, you will note the progress you make and what works.
- Try not to take behavior or words personally. Most of our student have trauma histories and have flight, fight, or freeze responses. Many of our high need students have experienced child abuse, domestic violence, community violence, sexual abuse, or have lost important people in their lives or other traumas. They may react in fear, anger, or anxiety if they feel triggered by authority, certain sensations, tight spaces, crowded rooms, yelling or many other circumstances. They are still learning to cope with these symptoms.
- Many students experienced trauma at young ages so they may react from this developmental age. To empathize, imagine his or her child self not being safe, feeling scared, being abandoned by care givers, or not getting needs met. They have teenager bodies and may be defiant, but they have emotional wounds they are working to process.
- Student may be projecting onto you. This means that they may not be able to express anger or hurt to family or perpetrators of abuse, so they project this anger onto adults or students without knowing it. It is a way they are trying to process trauma. This is not personal, it just happens when a student feels triggered.
- Have positive relationships with teachers and other adults helps student heal trauma!
- Developmentally, teens are at the stage where they search for their identity, focus on peers, and challenge adult views. We help them to this is respectful ways.
- If you have a very challenging student, remember one thing you like about them. You can write this word down on a note card (without the student's name) and look at it when you feel frustrated.
- Use our Restorative Justice coordinator if you want to address student behavior or issues you have with that student.

Things You Can SAY: Remember little things go a long way. Many students don't hear things like:

- “It’s good to see you. How are you doing?”
- “I was thinking about something great you said...”
- “Your opinions matter to me..”
- “I noticed you seemed upset earlier. Are there some feelings you want to share with me? I am open to hearing them.”
- “It seems like we got off on the wrong foot. How can we make this right?”
- “I would like to hear more about what it is like for you to be in my class. If there is something we can change, let’s work on it together.”

For challenging behavior in the class, you can give the following a try when you get the student alone:

- “Today in class you yelled at me. Is there something else going on?”
- “When you disrupt the class, I feel distracted and disrespected. What are you thinking and feeling when that is happening? What do you need in that moment?”
- “If you are feeling overwhelmed and angry, maybe we can work something out where you step outside for a few minutes, draw, or put your head down and do some breathing. What helps when you need to be calmer?”
- “I really want us to show each other respect. What are ways we can do this?”

Things to Keep in Mind:

Remember why you began this career and what feeds you each day while a work. When you create more positive interactions with students, your job satisfaction will improve, and students will respond positively. Bring the parts of your personality out when you can with your students. You will feel more comfortable and your students will respond. Make it fun for yourself and your students when you can.

Take good care of yourself! We work with high need student with intense trauma histories. Create rituals to leave work at work, do things that feed your spirit, creativity, and mind. List things you can do to be good to yourself at night and on the weekends. Renew hobbies, start new ones, see friends, spend time with family, see nature or other things that can help you feel space from work. Support groups and individual therapy are a great resource. Try and prevent burnout before it happens.

Remember how special you are for doing this work. You may not be told enough, but you are appreciated!

Keys to Respectful Teaching:

Choices, empowerment, personalized learning, “dignity of expertise”, letting student’s lead when possible.

****We are not able to change a student’s behavior, but we can change our own behaviors and how we interact with them.****