

Six Tips: Some practical strategies for increasing the chance of a successful student-teacher conversation about behaviour

Accompanies cards Bill handed out called :

Six tips: for better conversations with students about behaviour

Slide 1

6 strategies for having those follow-up chats with kids after we've perhaps asked them to leave the room, or just 'worn their antics' for 50 minutes and made a decision to have a follow up conversation after class with them away from an audience.

One thing I hope crystallised is that there's a *relational art* to this – for some teachers it's really natural and for others like me, we have to work on it – work in an explicit framework.

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Summary of the six tips

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Decide to be the adult in the conversation

Before you catch the student, have a chat with yourself! How do you get along with this kid?

- Is there a relationship in place with this kid that will smooth things out a bit?
- Do I have to strategically make some friendly small talk with them before I get into the hard conversation with them?
- Is this student likely to take some responsibility for their behaviour, or might they duck, weave, lie, deny, struggle to own up, and blame me?
- If they do this, can I work through it without getting defensive or abusing my rights as a teacher/adult?

Remind myself: He/She is just a kid!

- Struggling with the adolescent developmental tasks, socially clunky, worried,
- I am a grown up with a bachelor's degree, mortgage, income – they can't take that from me no matter how they speak to me!
- I was a cocky teenager once – I came out the other end – I've been there, done that!

I am going to take hold of this meeting and show this kid I want to work with them!

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None of us want to have a student to take a picture of us and then put it on the internet, BUT, we could be the best teacher in the world and have this happen to us because relationships with kids won't always go smoothly!

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Show them you like them as a person, if you don't like them, try like hell to fake it! There's too much at stake!

Further things to consider:

Sometimes, because displaying fury and hostility has got kids what they've wanted in the past, kids can become stuck at being angry to show their displeasure or to get their way.

Educators who do best intuitively know that their students' emotional stability is keenly connected to theirs, and to remain effective they avoid being caught up in the vortex of emotional chaos which often surround these children.

Develop systems that support them to automatically remove themselves as they approach the point of no return, and later reward them for doing so!

Develop exit procedures; these are ways for students to remove themselves from the situation with dignity before their emotion spills over.

In the meantime teach and demonstrate that you will remove yourself, and the class, if you must. It is not foolproof, but it's a start.

In calmer times, discuss with angry kids why anger is used.

Is it a behaviour they believe gets them what they want?

Does it make them feel powerful, embarrassed, pitied or remorseful?

You may be able to work on this, and make headway without support, but more often support is vital from the school system itself, parents and input from professional counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists.

The objective is to gradually disarm anger as the preferred way to function. This often takes more time than is appreciated, perhaps years.

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How to use 'affective statements'. These are the least formal restorative justice approach with kids. They are fast, friendly, challenging for kids and effective. They are the best way to challenge a student on their behaviour but convey you like them at the same time.

When you get good at these, you will improve, or transform your relationships with the challenging kids you teach.

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The Restorative Practices continuum, showing affective statements.

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Professor Robert Chaildini's research found that if people believe we like them, they are much more likely to like us in return. The payoff, they are more likely to trust us and comply with our instructions. If you are interested, Google him and find out about the other principles of ethical influence.

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Conveying to an adolescent student can be dicey business because kids are so sensitive to how they look to their peers. Although they have a deep yearning to be liked and acknowledged by teachers, they have to balance this need with not looking *too friendly* with teachers – that's just uncool! There are some sensible ideas to help you do this without embarrassing the student or yourself!

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To explain this one at depth, you need some background in Affect Script Psychology. What is easy to understand however is that when we have a tough conversation with a kid about their behaviour, we trigger the emotion of shame in them, and us! The student may not look ashamed to us as they bite back, deny, defend themselves or act cocky, but rest assured, these behaviours are seated in the distress that shame has triggered.

The research: If a kid can't like themselves or feel liked by you, your words of advice will just make them more ashamed and they will NOT be able to change their behaviour. They will only spiral deeper into their unhelpful patterns.

They will defend themselves by going to any one of the 4 poles on the compass of shame. They might get into broad behavioural patterns of socially withdrawing, they might get into self-loathing, attacking themselves, they may get into avoidance of shame – showing off, being fake, substance abuse or the last option, when nothing else relieves the shame-pain, they will turn the tables and try to reduce the self-esteem of another by attacking them (attack other) through put downs, bullying, violence...

This area requires some further reading to better understand.

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The criminology research confirms this stuff!

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Using questions shows our willingness to let them speak. Don't cut them off / interrupt / contradict – even if you don't agree – this is the road to destruction – we are modelling to kids when we interact in this way.

Get ready for the likely scenario that they will:

- Have not have seen the incident the way we did
- may blame us or others for their behaviour
- Maybe stretch the truth, sanitize, sugar coat, perhaps completely lie and deny!

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These are called affective questions – they make up what we call the ‘individual conference script’. You see the *individual conference* at the 2nd stop on the restorative practices continuum.

We call this style of interaction ‘Socratic style’. When we ask questions, instead of lecturing kids, we are engaging completely different neural circuitry, and in doing so, strengthening more empathic and considerate thinking styles. We are *conscience building* as we ask kids to consider the effect of their choices on those around them. The rule of thumb: **ask, not tell.**

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This shows where in the continuum that this questioning style sits on the scale of possible restorative responses to behaviour.

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There are many reasons kids will have a different version of the facts – kids are not always lying if their version of events is different to ours. When there is a difference in perception between theirs and ours, we have an incredible opportunity to teach kids how to handle these types of moments. If we blow it, they will think we are calling them a liar! If we do believe they are lying, do we HAVE to call them on it? Can we rescue their dignity by sidestepping a little? Can we respectfully maintain that we just saw it differently and leave it there?

I’ve seen teachers make the deadly mistake of hammering kids on small parts of the story that really have little impact on the bigger picture. The casualty – the relationship and the kid’s learning in that teachers class from then on.

Remember – undying good will helps kids take responsibility

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When naming the problem behaviours – really name them. Describe what you saw. Avoid the broad and abstract labels on the slide. Tough kids have been stitched up by these terms for years and they glaze over when they hear them. They do not help kids change behaviour because they don’t give kids clear mental pictures of what parts of their behaviour are tripping them up. If they don’t know, they can’t change it.

If it is about how they looked or what they did, ask them if you can show them what they did and how it looked by modelling (acting it) in front of them. Always ask permission and don’t try for an Oscar. Bill Rogers models this well in his DVD program “Cracking the Challenging Class”. Have a look at it!

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Admit your mistakes. This is the best of restorative behaviour. Kids won’t normally chastise you for this; they will respect you for it.

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Blokes especially – be really aware of your posture, position and proximity to students when you have these conversations. If you activate their threat centres, it’s all over. You will send a kid into defensive brain chemistry and they cannot process what you say from then on because their brain has switched to protection mode and they are in fight, flight or freeze mode.