Defusing Power Struggles With Your Most Difficult Students And Parents

A Guide For Educators

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Introduction

The Real Problem

The biggest problems teachers and even parents face on a daily basis is dealing with confrontational students. The students who want to engage the teacher in power struggles. Power struggles with students produce fear and intimidation in the heart of the teacher. Students who engage in struggles with teachers disrupt the educational environment and reduce the confidence of the teacher to teach on a daily basis.

Defusing Power Struggles

Effective discipline can no longer be achieved solely through using authority. A typical school today has some students who have short fuses, and some who anger easily. Students today may make offensive statements and act in a hostile manner that can trigger a power struggle. Often, too much instructional time is lost because of minor disruptions that all too quickly escalate into classroom battles that destroy relationships and any positive climate that exists. To keep the focus on educational achievement educators must master how to avoid and diffuse power struggles. This practical book will present easy-to-learn methods of effective intervention that preserve students’ and teachers’ personal dignity. It will also explain why struggles occur and will give the reader techniques they can use to promote respect, and encourage student responsibility.
What Is The Origin of Power Struggles?

The answer to this question is very basic. In today’s society children learn at a very early age that they can say and do almost anything they want, and they can get away with it. Children are also keenly aware that if they put up a big enough stink that their parents will eventually give in and give them their way. By the time a child has finished the so called terrible two’s his/her parents may have already lost control of the child’s behavior and just walking the child through a store can be a nightmare. What is the problem? Why do so many young children enter school and think that it is okay to throw tantrums, or have very serious problems with compliance or disrespect? Why do so many very young children simple refuse to do what their teacher tell them do just because they don't feel like doing it?

Believe it or not society today needs to be held partly responsible for these children who enter school with this confrontational attitude that has teachers wringing their hands and wondering, what I am going to do with this child. The faulty theories and philosophies that have come out of our educational institutions along with permissive ideologies of so called child rearing gurus have promoted the idea that children need to be respected more than they need to be compliant and that the ground is level. To put it quite plainly we are now supposed to ask our children if they want to do things rather than tell them to do what we want them to do.

The one thing that the people in society seemed to have had etched in their minds over the course of the last 40 years is that children should have a choice when it comes down to what they say and what they do. Children become used to questions like, what do you want for dinner? What do you want to wear today? We're going out now, okay? Or, you can do 5 problems on this math page; you can choose the ones you want to do. Or even better, you can either sit down or get out of the room, the CHOICE is yours. Children don’t need choices; they need direction. Believe it or not they want to be told what to do. Giving a child a directive produces security in the mind of the child. It makes him aware that the teacher is in charge, and that there is only one way to do things and that’s the
teacher’s way. Choices produce insecurity and confusion. Young children do not have had enough knowledge built into their little brains to allow them to understand how to make correct choices. Once they are given choices that they don’t like, the struggles begin.
Choice Is Earned

The first item of business in preventing power struggles is to change our language. Teachers can’t ask children to do something. They must tell them. We have to move from the interrogative to the imperative. If the directive is not followed by the student, a consequence must be imposed on the child.

I am not an army man but my dad was, and he shared a lot of his military experiences with me. One thing that he told me was that the first thing that happened when he went into the service was that he had his head shaved and they took his clothes and replaced them with his army uniform. In order to get a furlough he had to be sure that he was responsible, respectful, and above all he had to be compliant with the wishes of his commanding officer. I asked him one day many years ago which one of the three behaviors mentioned above was the most important. He told me that in order to gain more freedom and in order to get what you want you have to be COMPLIANT first. You have to do what you are told to do, no ifs, ands, or buts. In this case, he explained that if he followed the rules, then he got his furlough.

The way this translates to our classrooms is that establishing an environment where our students are compliant or obedient should be our first order of business. Once a teacher has created a classroom in which students know the rules and the consequences, and the climate of the entire classroom is one of respect, then the teacher can gradually start to dole out freedoms, a little bit at a time. Instead, teachers today give children/kids all kinds of freedom and then they take it away when the children are non-compliant. This is exactly the opposite of what is supposed to happen.

If a child is told to do something and he doesn’t do it he needs to be held accountable. A child can’t be given unearned freedom. I say, no compliance, no freedom. If a child doesn’t have a compliant attitude, and he is not held accountable for his non-compliance, he will do and say just about anything that he wants to.
I like to use the illustration of a triangle to really make this concept of Compliance/obedience before choice/freedom understandable to teachers by using the visuals on the next two pages. On the first page is a triangle with the tip on the top. The tip of the triangle represents the amount of freedom that a child should have at a very young age. The tip of the triangle is extremely narrow; when a child is very young, the child should have very little choice. As you go down the triangle, the triangle becomes wider; as the child grows older and has learned to naturally be display a compliant attitude, more freedom will naturally be given, and the child will learn to make choices when he is mature enough to make the right choices. As this process occurs, the relationship that develops between the child and the teacher is not strained, so power struggles are at a minimum. The relationship becomes one that is genuine and there is a mutual and natural respect that develops between the teacher and the student. The teacher isn’t held hostage by controlling students and will not have to fear power struggles. As the child grows older and is respectful and responsible a trust develops that is conducive to the teachers being able to allow choice. Not only does the child now have choice, but because of the compliant attitude, the child now has the ability to make correct choices. This is what I call the inside out approach to change. The child realizes the benefits of his compliant attitude and develops the ability to do what he is told when he is told to do it without the teacher having to impose some type of extrinsic discipline. The child intrinsically realizes the benefits of compliance and the positive behavior is now a part of his character.
Keys to the Foundation of Character

Compliance and Respect

• From birth to the age of 7 or 8 we work in the tip of the triangle.
• Have clear goals, rules and procedures
• Build standards and principles into the child, and Teach Self-Control

At a young age adults need to restrain inappropriate behaviors and insist on compliance. We should lead by the power of our authority.

Children enter mental puberty around the age of 9 or 10
This is when they begin to think as an adult.

Between the ages of 9 and 13 behaviors need to be taught that stress respect, and responsibility. When the child understands authority and can self generate these behaviors he/she is now ready to have relational interaction with adults.
Character and Responsibility needs to be stressed at this age.
This is the optimal age to teach----------------------------- Responsibility

With teenagers - We lead by the power of our relational influence and look to help them understand relationships and friendships and the application of character in their life.

Relationship – Application
When Choice Is Given Without Being Earned

In the previous pages I just explained the ideal situation; unfortunately this is not what is happening today in our schools, or for that matter in society as a whole... On the next page you will see a triangle where the tip is on the bottom and the widest part is on the top. It is basically an upside down triangle. This upside down triangle represents the upside down way that has evolved in which we first give our youngest children choice without demanding any obedience. As time goes on our children gradually get out of control, and then we are faced with trying to regain some control or manage uncontrollable children. Because children were allowed to make any choices they wished, but never were taught to make correct choices, they will go through life believing that they can say and do anything they want. They will become confused when a teacher asks them to do something they don’t want to do. Later on in life, they will always have trouble dealing correctly with any boss or authority figure.

Abnormal relationships develop where children tell their parents exactly what they intend to do, and their parents’ authority becomes non-existent. In school children try to tell their teachers exactly what they intend to do, and then the power struggles begin. Any relationships between the child and the teacher become strained. Natural respect cannot develop between the teacher and the student when the student believes that the ground is level and that no one is in charge. The teacher then is held hostage by power hungry students and constantly fears power struggles that can easily occur. The trust that should exist never was allowed to develop, and the only response teachers can have is to become dictatorial in order to have any control in the classroom. The only other alternative the teacher can have in this situation is to constantly provide extrinsic rewards for positive behavior because students never developed any intrinsic motivation to do the right thing. Positive behavior will never become part of the child’s true character.
What We Do Now!!!! – Exactly The Opposite

FREEDOM AND CHOICES TO YOUNG CHILDREN – 2-9 TEMPER TANTRUMS, CRYING AND WHINNING. IT IS VERY EASY TO GIVE IN TO A CRYING CHILD!

- NO BOUNDRIES BETWEEN 10-13 YEARS OLD
- START SAYING AND DOING WHAT THEY WANT VERY ARGUEMENTATIVE-
- CONCERN DEVELOPS ON THE PART OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS REGARDING THE CHILD’S BEHAVIOR
- REBELLION, GRADES 9-12, NO SELF DISCIPLINE, OR SELF MOTIVATION
- POWER STRUGGLES, NO CHARACTER. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO RESTRAIN THE BEHAVIORS OF A REBELLIOUS TEENAGER
Why Choice Is So Dangerous

Giving children a choice is probably one of the more dangerous things that a teacher or parent can do in managing the behavior of a child. I have observed many schools and have been an administrator for 18 years of my educational career and I will tell you that this idea of choice just doesn’t belong. It has long term consequences on children that can affect them for a lifetime. Maybe the best illustration of this is the experience that I had with my oldest daughter Sarah. Let’s see what choice did for me and for her, and what her opinion of me was years after she was given a CHOICE.

I used to play baseball in high school and college. I even played in an over thirty league back in the mid eighties. When my child Sarah was born in 1991, baseball wasn’t something I thought she would ever be interested in. But when she was about six, I took her over to the park to hit some baseballs. She picked up the balls after I hit them, and she got up to bat. She hit a few balls, and she even ran the bases. Sarah had and still has athletic ability- good hand eye coordination, flexibility, strength and agility. Well, when Sarah was 7, she came to me one day and said, "Hey dad can I play soccer?" I said, "Sure." So I went out and bought her a soccer ball, shin guards, and cleats. I signed her up for the recreational league in town. I must admit I was pretty enthused. We practiced kicking the ball in the backyard, and we were both getting pretty excited about her first game.

Well, the Saturday of the first game came, so Sarah and I headed up to the soccer field. After some warm-up activities and a pep talk from the coach, the game started. To my surprise Sarah was in the starting line-up. She ran up and down the field for the first ten minutes or so, and she finally had an opportunity to kick the ball. She took her first kick, missed the ball, and landed flat on her back. She got up, and came crying over to the sideline and begged, "Don’t make me play anymore, Dad, I can’t do it." She refused to go back into the game. The game ended, and on the way to the car she continued to cry, "Don’t make me play Dad, please, I don’t want to." I mustered up all my courage and I said to her sternly, "You’re playing. You are playing. Now get in the car." She got in the car and we drove home. On the way home all I heard was a bunch of sniffling and
whining in the back seat. I didn’t have a very long ride home, but I can tell you this. She
wore me out. I was emotionally exhausted by the time I got home. We pulled up into the
driveway, and I sat miserably in the car as I watched Sarah get out and walk into the
house, sniffing and shaking as she walked through the front door. I sat stewing in the car
and said to myself, "Who wants to play soccer anyway, dumb game." I then attempted to
further rationalize my thoughts by saying to myself, "Soccer’s for boys anyway." I
walked into the house, stood at the bottom of the stairs and yelled up the stairs,
"SARAH." She sniffled her way through a "Yeah dad." I said, "Come down here." She
came down the stairs, and I said to her, "Look honey, you don’t have to play soccer, if
you don’t want to play. It’s ok with me." She said, "Oh thank you daddy." She gave me a
big hug and kiss and ran back upstairs.

Honestly, I felt like her hero. I was her knight in shining armor. I had just come through
for her, and given her exactly what she wanted. I was sure I had made the prudent
decision; I didn’t even have to ask her mother’s opinion. I figured what’s the big deal, no
harm done. I was content in the knowledge that I had allowed my six year old daughter to
make her own decision.

Well, I have another daughter named Grace (Grace is 6 years younger than Sarah) who
came to me when she was six years old and said, "Hey dad, can I play soccer?"

I said, "Sure honey." The same routine started again, the shin guards, the cleats, the
soccer ball, the practice, and finally the game. But this time, the outcome was much
different. Grace ran enthusiastically up and down the field from one end to the other. She
never got near enough to even touch the ball, but she had a great time. Grace came off the
field with a look of absolute joy in her eyes and said to me, "Boy that was fun Dad." She
played the first season, and had a ball. She played the next season and really improved a
lot. She wanted to score really badly, but didn’t have the opportunity. She still loved the
game. To her, every game was an event, an outing that ended with a snack and a
Gatorade, lunch, and a fun time spent with me.
While this was going on Sarah was into cheerleading, gymnastics, track, palates, and even a little weight lifting. She loved designer clothes, having her nails done, tanning, make-up, and just looking good. She watched her weight and understood that in order to look good, she had to spend a good deal of time exercising. She commented to me one time that some of her friends on her track team had less body fat than she did and that they could run faster than she could. It was just a passing comment but I remember her saying it, and I most definitely noticed that she was bothered by this.

One day Sarah and I drove over to the soccer field to pick Grace up from a soccer practice. We got to the field, and Grace got into the car sweating; her face was as red as a tomato. Sarah handed a Gatorade and a snack over to her in the back seat, and Grace just sat there, contentedly guzzling her drink. Sarah looked back at Grace, then looked forward, looked back again at Grace again, and then stared straight at me. She said, "Hey dad, why didn’t you make me play soccer?"

I said (defensively), "I wanted you to play. Don’t you remember? You kicked the ball once, missed it, and fell on your head. Then you begged me not to make you play again."

She answered me with, "SO? Why didn’t you make me?"

Now I was the one who was starting to sweat. I said, "You didn’t want to play. You wouldn’t let up until I agreed not to make you play.

Sarah then made a statement to me that I will never forget as long as I live. She said, "But dad, you’re supposed to be in charge."

Where had I gone wrong seven years earlier? At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do was to give in to what Sarah wanted. But it turned out that I hadn’t done what she needed me to do. I had allowed a six year old to decide whether or not she wanted to play soccer. What had she really needed at the time? She needed me to tell her that she was going to play soccer because I as the parent knew what was best for her, and I wasn’t going to give her a way out. She wanted me to be in charge, not allow her to be in charge. I unknowingly had let her down.
When I teach my graduate courses, I ask my adult students the following question all the time. How many things did your parents let you get away with as a kid that you wish you had never gotten away with? I usually get lots of stunned looks from my students.

Too often we allow our children to make choices and decisions that they have no business making. I see it all the time in supermarkets, stores, and malls, parents giving in when their children demand they buy something, or parents trying to coax their kids to stop crying or to stop running away from them. The children ignore their parents’ pleadings. Usually, the parents say something to their children like, "What do you want to do?" Well honestly, who cares what they want, they’re three years old!

I’m not totally sure where this whole attitude has come from, but I have my own theory that Dr. Benjamin Spock had a lot to do with it. Spock’s first book, Baby and Child Care" was first published in 1946 just in time for the baby boomer generation. In his book he spoke about feeding on demand, respecting your children, the need for flexibility, and the lack of the necessity to worry about spoiling. The paperback sold more than 50 million copies and was translated into 30 languages. Critics of Spock claimed that he was "the father of permissiveness." In later years, Spock claimed that he never changed his basic philosophy on child care, that it was imperative to respect children because they’re human beings and they deserve respect. But he seemed to retreat somewhat from his teachings when he made statements such as "I’ve always said ask for respect from your children, ask for cooperation, ask for politeness. Give your children firm leadership." Years later, he became more moralistic and he said that parents should give their children strong values and encourage them to help others. This is only supposition, but I hypothesize that Spock may have decided that he didn’t like what he saw in society and realized that he may have played a part in the screwing up of generations. In later editions of the book originally titled The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, he stressed that children needed standards and that parents also had a right to respect. He stated in his book that parents were starting to become afraid of imposing on the child in any way.
I’m not claiming to be an expert on child rearing, but I do know that if children are reared on demand they will be demanding. If they are allowed to say anything they want they will be disrespectful. If they are not held accountable they will be irresponsible. And if there are no consequences for inappropriate behavior they will be non-compliant. Parents today always ask, what can we do with our kids today? My question is, what are we going to do with these parents?

Once I relinquished my natural right as a parent to make decisions for my children, I was never truly able to reestablish my parental authority. From the moment that my daughter convinced me to allow her to make the choice not to play soccer, she learned she had the power to make basically every decision that came along in her life whether large or small. And the saddest part of all of this for me is that she blames me because I wasn’t strong enough NOT to let her assume a role she was never designed to play in her own young life.

Dr. Spock has since passed away, and I think many of us looking for a new voice to offer us some solid advice to help us sort out the mess we are in today.
Respect

I was driving in my car one day and was staring at the five bumper stickers that were on the car in front of me. One of the bumper stickers made a lot of sense, it said, “If you can read this thank a teacher.” I never had to be reminded of this when I was a kid, I always thanked my teachers but, more importantly I respected my teachers. I didn’t have a choice I had to be respectful, I didn’t even think twice. I found out very early on as a student that before I had a chance to be successful academically I had to stay in my seat, not talk back, and do what I was told when I was told to do it. I realized that if I made any attempt to complain about my teachers my parents weren’t hearing it which really benefited me as a student. Today if a kid goes home and starts to complain about his teacher, instead of the parents saying do what you’re told, they can almost begin to complain right along with their kid planting seeds of disrespect in the child’s head that ultimately will interfere with the child’s academic success. Kids who sense a division of authority between their parents and the school go to school everyday with a poor attitude, and are being programmed for a lifetime of educational as well as employment related problems.

As a teacher and administrator myself I have watched the decline of respect in education today. It’s almost as if society wants to muzzle the teacher from saying what needs to be said to a student that will help the student improve academically. Teachers have to measure every word and if constructive suggestion is offered to a student by a teacher it is viewed by the student and his parents as an insult that is going to damage the kids’ self-esteem for a lifetime.

As a high school student I was no different than any other kid in school and I tried to get away with as much as possible and always looked to cut corners academically. I was a freshman in high school and I turned in a history assignment to my social studies teacher. This was an assignment that was assigned two weeks prior. I worked on it the night before it was due. Within a day or two the teacher handed the assignment back to the class. My assignment was not returned but, he asked to see me after class. I met with him
and he said to me, “What is this, is this all you are capable of, Jimmy you can’t b--- s----
a b---- s------.” I was shocked and embarrassed, and hung my head. Finally I looked at
him and said, “Can I do it over?” He said, “Can you, and are you capable of better
work?” I worked on it again with his help and turned it in again and received a B for the
assignment. I developed a tremendous relationship with this teacher, and respected him
because he didn’t feel as if he had to measure his words. I had a high regard for this
man’s opinion, and didn’t even think twice about trying this again.

Unfortunately if a teacher tries to do this today, the kid usually goes home, tell his parents
and a meeting is arranged to question or berate the teacher. The sad part is that this
allowed go on, and it is very common place in education and in society today. Schools
today are constantly on the hot seat to improve test scores, reduce the drop out rate, and
to be in compliance with federally mandated programs that provide government funds.
Everyday on the news deviant behavior is reported in schools with school shootings
almost becoming common place. Society wants to level the ground, and create an
environment where no one is in charge and authority figures can’t even offer constructive
suggestion to students and employees to help improve their performance, and are
muzzled by the same systems that judge their abilities. The only way students will be
successful academically is when everyone involved in the educational process learns to
respect the human delivery system, the teacher.
Teaching Respect

PRAISE – Begin a praise day and have all students write down something they like about another person in the class. It could start, “The nicest thing about you is” and have the students finish the paragraph. This encourages respect amongst students and makes it the norm in your classroom. One student gets a turn everyday. The teacher becomes quality control and filters out any negative comments. One student a day leaves with a folder of nice comments made about them. Of course teachers should use praise as a tool for motivation. Remember to praise character not achievement.

KEEP PROMISES – Students will wrap their life around promises you make to them. Make them very sparingly and very carefully. Consider all the variables and make sure you can control them. Don’t tell students they can bring candy to school for Halloween and then find out administration doesn’t allow it. Make promises and keep them.

SINCERITY AND HONESTY – Students can pick out a phony a mile away. Be sincere with your concerns and student abilities.

SAY HELLO – Say hello to all students this encourages communication and helps to break down any walls between you and the student and helps build a positive relationship.

CALL BY NAME – NO NICKNAMES OR DEROGATORY REMARKS
Don’t fall into the trap of calling students a name that their friends call them. Remember “Leave it to Beaver” his teacher did not call him Beaver she called him Theodore.

AFFECTION – Because of the fear of touching teachers have shied away from touching their students. We are not talking here about inappropriateness but rather a hand on the shoulder, a high five, or a pat on the back. This not only affirms but also makes the student feel that you recognize and are aware of them.

LISTENING – There are five types of listening, ignoring, pretend listening, selective listening, attentive listening and finally empathic listening. We all want to be empathic listeners. This is when we listen with our body posture and our eyes. We reflect back content and feeling. We don’t offer any advice but rather use listening as a means of strengthening the relationship. We want to avoid reading our own autobiography into the conversation.

2-3-4-5 X 10 – Every day for ten days straight have 2-3-4 or 5 minute conversation with one of your students just like you would with a good friend. Have several of these going on everyday. Around day eight the students will look to you for the conversation and develop a greater sense for you as a person.
LITTLE COURTESIES – The little things are the big things. Model what you want from your students.

RECOGNIZE EFFORTS – Recognize when a student does his best and focus on what he did that was right rather than what was wrong. Be positive and value the differing abilities of your students.
Responsibility

Educators today are under constant pressure to improve student test scores and to improve student overall academic performance. If a student’s standardized test scores are not up to snuff or if students have academic difficulty that can’t be explained the principal finds their way into the classroom for an observation, to try and find something wrong with the teacher’s instructional methods. The question that gets raised here is who is responsible for a student’s academic performance? I was not the very best student in elementary or in high school. I struggled just to get C’s and an occasional B and never in all my time as a student did anyone question how good my teachers were, instead I was questioned about what my responsibilities were as a student.

As an elementary student my father would know when marking periods were over and when report cards were issued. Once he had that report card in hand he would sit me down and go over my grades. Any grade that was below a C he would ask me what was going on in the class, and what my responsibilities were in order to raise my grade. I remember once I tried to pull a fast one and tell him that the teacher didn’t like me. He didn’t buy it and told me that the teacher doesn’t have to like you and you don’t have to like the teacher, my job was to work as hard as I could to understand what the teacher was teaching me. When I was a freshman in high school I failed Algebra I. I went home and told my father that it was no big deal, and that I would take it again in my sophomore year. He said to me, “No you won’t, you failed because you didn’t apply yourself.” I ended up in summer school, and it was the best thing that ever happened to me because the following year I got straight A’s in Algebra II, it was a breeze. He told me that he would give me all the help that he could give me but, if I fail I do it on my own, and of course if I pass I do that on my own also. He made me responsible for my own education and did not want to hear any excuses. I have a friend who has a son that I have known since he was 11 years old. I never heard him once complain about homework assignment, not having enough time to study, poor teachers, or that he didn’t understand something. He took responsibility for every aspect of his school work. I looked at his high school transcript when he graduated, there wasn’t one A, he earned all A+’s. He was
the valedictorian of his class, and he is now attending Dartmouth College. Before a kid can be successful as a student he has to be made aware by parents and teachers that it is his responsibility to be prepared to learn and to accept failure as an indicator that they are not putting forth their best effort.

Encouraging Responsibility

BE PROACTIVE NOT REACTIVE
Understanding you own values and expectations is critical if students are going to learn responsible behavior. Too often teachers react to students who fail to follow procedures, and the student may not even be aware of what the procedures are. Proactively teach students the behaviors you expect in your classroom.

AWARENESS
Try to get students to focus their attention on their own behavior and how it affects others. Never, never, ask why did you do that? Always ask, what did you do? Too often when a student is asked why they did something it gives them an opportunity to alibi their actions and use circumstances or another person as a reason for their irresponsibility. Asking what rather than why forces the student to focus on his own actions.

BALANCE RULES AND REGULATIONS WITH COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING
Influencing the choices that students make can be accomplished when a teacher balances rules and regulations and compassion and understanding. Too often teachers believe that a giving the student a good talking to takes the place of a meaningful consequence. The talking to needs to take place after the consequences has been imposed. The student should at this point be given instructions on how to be more responsible.

ASSUME NOTHING – TEACH EVERYTHING
When a teacher gives instruction he/she should never assume that all students heard the instruction, and more importantly that the students understood the instructions. Teach and re-teach procedures, behaviors, and courtesies that we want students to exhibit in your classroom.

MAKE A PLAN
Develop a plan with the student that encourages responsibility. Present the problem to the student and ask him/her what are we going to do about it?
Power Struggles and the Relationship Connection

The most powerful weapon that teachers can use in preventing power struggles is to build a positive relationship with their students. Now, this may not seem like it’s too hard to do, but it is hard to build a relationship with a student that you really don’t like. Oh, I know we all have been taught to say, “I really like you, but I don’t like your behavior.” In case you missed it is very hard to like someone when you don’t like their behavior because what are people if they are not a compilation of what they do? So let’s realize that kids do have a sixth sense and they really know if a teacher likes them or not. Understand that as a teacher you have to come clean and say to yourself, I really don’t like this kid, he is a wise guy, but how can I build a relationship with him that will make my life bearable when he is in the room. This conscious effort must be made because if you don’t like someone you normally shy away from even making any attempts to build a relationship with that person.

In order to build a relationship with students we have to have an idea about how the brain works. The brain is formed in three layers - the stem, which is where the brain goes for survival, the limbic system which is the mid brain where the emotions are located, and the top of the brain called the neo-cortex where learning takes place. All incoming information has to be filtered by the emotions in the limbic system before it can make it to the neo-cortex for processing and learning. The minute the brain is placed under any kind of stress, it downshifts and goes into the stem for survival. The stem provides the necessary adrenaline, increased heart rate, and more oxygen during times of stress. That’s why when a person gets placed under stress the heart rate and breathing rate goes up. The primary responsibility of the brain is the survival of its owner. The only two ways that a person survives is through the fight or flight mechanism. Once a person is placed under stress he will either run away, or will confront his attacker. Students who engage teachers in power struggles have learned early on in their life how to use the fight mechanism.

Often teachers have power struggles with students, and can't seem to understand why. The biggest reason for the problem is that the teacher has done something or said
something that feels like an insult to the student. The first time this happens, the student decides that the teacher doesn't like him or her. An emotional wall starts to form in the student's brain. Any time the teacher starts to teach or tells the student to do something, the information is blocked by what I call the emotional brick wall. The teacher now becomes one of the bricks in that wall. Any time any instruction is given by that teacher, the student's emotions recognize that the instruction is coming from someone who has caused him or her stress, and the information doesn't get processed properly. The teacher probably doesn't even know this is happening. If the teacher wants to have any hope of effectively teaching that student, he or she must get of the brick in the student's emotional wall. A good deal of thought, time, and energy must be spent at this time to break through the emotional wall.

**Getting off the Brick**

Often, teachers realize that they may have one or more students in their class who they may have power struggles with. Once the teacher recognizes that this problem exists, they need to ask themselves two questions. Do I want to spend my energy battling this student everyday, or do I want to do something that will ease the strain of having this student in the room and prevent the struggles from occurring. I think the answer is obvious. So what are the steps that need to be taken?

First, you need to acknowledge to yourself that the relationship you have with the student is very strained. Also, understand that in some way you may have contributed to the problem. Keep in the back of your mind that any negative comments you make to other faculty members concerning how you feel about the student may get back to the student, so try it a point not to talk negatively about any student you have. What is the expression on your face when you see the student enter the room? Do you express a feeling of relief when the student is absent, and do the other students in the class notice your sigh of relief when the student is not present that day.

The second thing that needs to be done is to schedule a meeting with the student alone. At this meeting discuss with the student your concern about his behavior, and ask the student
if you as the teacher have contributed to the poor relationship that exists between the two of you. Understand that the student will probably not say that you are the problem. Let the student know that if there is anything that you have done to contribute to this problem that you are sorry and ask for the student’s forgiveness. Yes forgiveness. Remember you are doing this to make your life more bearable. Your apology should be genuine. Keep in the back of your mind that you are trying to solve a pretty difficult problem here, and that you may have to go out of your own comfort zone.

Once this is done the student will now want to check things out to see if you are for real. He will engage you again and try to have another power struggle with you. Your attitude at the time of the next power struggle will communicate to the student that you are for real and then the brick with your name on it will be removed from the student's head.

Remember something, power struggles take two people, and if you're having a power struggle, then that is an indication that you are trying in your own way to are vying for power yourself. People can really only control one thing in this life and that’s himself. If we waste time trying to control others our own frustration will become obvious to the student and that will only make the power struggle become more intense.

Work on yourself, and ask yourself very plainly why am I having power struggles with my students? Maybe you’re having power struggles with adults as well. Try controlling the things that you can control and work on your own strategies for diffusing the struggles rather than complaining or blaming other factors for the problems that you are having.

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All incoming information must pass through the emotions before it can reach the neo-cortex for processing.

As the brain is placed under stress the need for survival becomes greater. It then downshifts into the stem. There are only two ways it can survive —— FIGHT OR FLIGHT. A person with the FIGHT mentality will develop conduct problems. A person with the FLIGHT mentality develops clinical problems. Conduct problems require respect, Clinical problems require responsibility
Instructional Influences That Stimulate Power Struggles

Power struggles usually occur in a classroom when a teacher is poorly planned. Materials for the lesson are not ready and the teacher allows for too much down time in the lesson. My suggestion here is to be sure that every minute is planned. Without thorough planning struggles are sure to occur. Often poor teachers are too focused on a letter grade rather than whether or not the students have mastered the material. Once a test is given and the majority of the class has received a passing grade the teacher moves on to the next lesson. The next lesson may be built on prior knowledge, and if all students didn’t have enough requisite information they will tend to day dream. Students can become frustrated when they don’t understand the material and try to create distraction in the class for the teacher and do what they can to interfere with the learning process. This can set the stage for a power struggles between the teacher and the student.
Crisis Management – The Best Stuff

Linda Albert (Cooperative Discipline) and Alan Mendler (Discipline with Dignity) both agree that the best way to handle a power struggle of crisis proportion is to use the correct language. Linda Albert refers to the language as fogging, and Allen Mendler suggests that teachers practice, Listening, Acknowledging, Agreeing, and Deferring (L.A.A.D). Both are reasonably the same, and can bring about the same desired result, a graceful exit for the teacher and the student while both parties save face in front of a classroom full of students.

Some Statements That Diffuse Power Struggles

Listening
“You must really be upset right now Joe and you are in no mood to listen, I’ll respect that.”

Acknowledging
“Tom if I understand you correctly, you are telling me that you are not planning to do what I asked. Did I get that right?”

Agreeing
“Sarah you are right about that, I can’t make you do things. The real question is can you make yourself do it and be proud of your work”

Deferring
“John I have no idea why you would say that right in front of the class and I am embarrassed. Let’s talk later to avoid a fight.”

Fogging

Perhaps the best technique that Cooperative Discipline suggests is something that is called a fogging technique. Fogging involves responding to inflammatory statement as if they are of little or no importance. It is the opposite of active listening and communicates to the student that you are not going to be manipulated by insults. Cooperative Discipline suggests many effective fogging techniques.

Agreement with the Student

Change the Subject

State Both Viewpoints

Refuse Responsibility

Dodge Irrelevant Issues
Deliver a Closing Statement

Call the Student’s Bluff

Take a Teacher Time-Out

Remember there are different types of fogging techniques: Agreement with the Student, Change the Subject, State Both Viewpoints, Refuse Responsibility, Dodge Irrelevant Issues, Deliver a Closing Statement, Take a Teacher Time Out. You can also just ignore the statement and not react or say anything at all.

If The Student Says:

I don’t know why I have to be in the dumb class anyway?

State Both Viewpoints – “This class may be dumb for you but, it is very important for me and for the rest of the class, now open your book”

You’re the meanest math teacher I’ve ever had.

Agreement: “I will admit I am tough on you, but you will learn a lot in this class.” Or ignore the statement completely and move on.

Who ever told you that you know how to coach?

Tip – Anytime a student starts to question you about something understand that you don’t have to answer the question. Answering the question starts to put you on the defensive. I have always found that the best way to answer questions from students that are designed to start a power struggle is to ask the student a question in return.

The response from the teacher in this scenario should be: Who have been some of your other coaches? Or you can also change the subject, by telling a joke or asking the student if he saw the game last night.

I can’t learn anything the way you teach.

Refuse Responsibility: “It’s not my teaching that I am worried about, it’s whether or not you are learning anything, let’s look at what we can do together.”

This class sucks.

Agreement: “You’re right it does, this is a tough subject.”

I sure wish I didn’t have to be doing this stupid science experiment right now.

State Both Viewpoints: It may be stupid to you but it is very important to me to make sure you learn this material, and then Refuse Responsibility: You will do fine if you put your mind to it.

I can’t wait for the bell to ring. This class is driving me nuts.
Tip: Most students believe that once the bell rings that they can just get up and walk out of class. Let them know that the bell is for me not for you, and that I (the teacher) will dismiss you. Too often students believe that when the bell rings that that means they can walk out of the classroom. The teacher is the one that grants permission for the students to be dismissed.

You’re not fair – nobody else gives us weekend assignments

Dodge Irrelevant Issues: Don’t bite, ignore if possible. If you choose to start justifying why you give weekend assignments you will lose and probably give in. Fairness has nothing to do with the work that has to be completed.

You can’t make me redo this report just because the paper got messed up on the bus.

Agreement: “You are right I can’t make you redo the assignment. The question is can you make yourself redo it and be proud of your work?”

Who needs to learn this dumb stuff anyway?

State Both Viewpoints: “It may be dumb to you but it is important to me and to the rest of the class. Take out your book.”

I told you that I’m not staying after class just because I was ten minutes late.

Tip: This type of scenario usually occurs in high school during the last period of the day. Now, you can call the students bluff and say, “So what you are saying is you don’t want to make up the 10 minutes and get it over with now, you would rather spend 1 hour in central detention? I’ve observed many teachers who try to block the door when the student decides to leave the room to stop the student from leaving when they were told that they had to stay after class. The teacher stands in the doorway and the student brushes by the teacher, the teacher then ended up in my office stating that the student pushed him/her and want to file a police report. Do yourself a favor and let the kid leave and then write a discipline referral on the student. Don’t be foolish and believe that you can stop the student from leaving the room. The story will get twisted when the student speaks to his parents and they will accuse you of grabbing the student.

It’s your fault I did so bad on the science test. You didn’t give us enough time to review.

Tip: Use the redo retake principal here. Most students who blame the teacher for doing poorly never really review or study the material anyway. What I have used over the years is what I call redo retake. Tell the student that you will let them retake the test. Give them a copy of the test and have them do it at home. Sometime within a day or two the student should retake the test. The same test that he was told to complete at home. Unfortunately what I have discovered is that most kids do poorly on the retake also. It’s not that they didn’t have time to review; they never made the time to review. What has happened here is the responsibility for the student’s poor grade lands squarely on his lap.
Delivering Closing Statement

A closing statement is delivered to make the student aware that the conversation is over, and that there will no further discussion.

Some Closing Statement Might Be

“Open your book and turn to page…….”

“Are you finished?”

“You’ve mistaken me for someone who wants to fight.”

“We can continue this discussion after class if you like.”

“Unless you have something else to add, this conversation is over.”
What Can Teachers Do On a Daily Basis Do To Prevent Power Struggles In Their Classroom

During the first month of school Identify potential power seekers in your classroom, and be on guard when the student starts to become disruptive or challenges your authority.

Maintain documentation for students who you have identified as possible power seekers, and use this information when you have a conference with his/her parent.

Stay in close touch with parents, other teachers, and administrators regarding the behavior of these students. There is power in numbers. The chances are good that if the child is a power seeker the parent will be also. If more than one teacher identifies the problem you will have less trouble with the parent.

With young children (up to 9 years old) give commands as much as possible. Don’t ask a student if they want to do something or allow choice. Tell them what to do and expect them to do it.

Start building a positive relationship with these students using the following techniques:

- Say hello to these students everyday
- Use the 2 by 10
- Talk to these students in areas outside of your classroom
- Work on seeing life from the students perspective
- Be Kind and courteous at all times
- Have clear expectations
- Show personal integrity – Don’t try to build a synthetic relationship with the student
- Apologize when necessary

Keep first things first – Remember the relationship that you build with this student will determine the amount of learning that will take place. If the relationship is poor the chances are pretty good that respect is not present and the student is not getting anything out of your teaching. Stay off the brick.

Use the Instruction, Warning, and Correction method when you discipline. Have a private conversation with the student to make them aware of what he/she is doing wrong. Teach the student the proper time and place to speak with you. During the conference make the student aware that you would not embarrass him/her in front of the class and that you expect the same consideration from them.

Don’t try and have the last word if a power struggle is brewing. Ignore the student’s comments as much as possible and remain unimpressed with their comments. If someone in the class says, “Are you going to take that?” your response should be, “He has mistaken me for someone who wants to fight.”
Stop Asking Questions and Start Giving Commands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STOP ASKING</th>
<th>START SAYING</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We’re going to do math now, OK?</td>
<td>Take out your math book and turn to page ….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, why are you out of your seat?</td>
<td>John, sit down NOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you late?</td>
<td>You are late, see me after class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your problem today? What do you want to do?</td>
<td>I need you to stop doing, and then start doing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where is your pencil?</td>
<td>You are unprepared, and assign consequence – Give student a pencil so he can do his assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you hit John?</td>
<td>You hit John, and assign consequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where were you for the last ten minutes?</td>
<td>You were out of the room too long, assign consequence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What five math problems do you want to do?</td>
<td>Do problems 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie, Why are you talking to Lauren while I’m teaching?</td>
<td>Susie, start focusing, and listen to what I’m teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you kids talking on line?</td>
<td>Everyone face forward, stand quietly and get ready to leave the room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where is your homework, you didn’t turn it in?</td>
<td>You did not turn your homework in, you will be staying in for recess</td>
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<tr>
<td>John, where do you get that kind of language?</td>
<td>John, profanity and vulgarity is unacceptable in this class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who do you think you are talking to with that tone of voice</td>
<td>I don’t know who you think you are talking to, but I will not be spoken to that way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How come your project is three days late?</td>
<td>Your project is late, I will be lowering your grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, why is your head down during class</td>
<td>John, pick your head up and open your book</td>
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</table>

Establish your expectations so your students know what you want in advance, and deliver your statement with a leadership posture.
### Comments That a Teacher Avoids by Making Statements Rather Than Asking Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers Says:</th>
<th>Typical Student Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoid Saying These So...........</strong></td>
<td><strong>You Don’t Get These</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re going to do math now, OK?</td>
<td>I hate math, I don’t want to do math</td>
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<tr>
<td>John, why are you out of your seat?</td>
<td>I had to throw something in the garbage (even though out of seat behavior is not allowed in the classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you late?</td>
<td>My mother woke me up late</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your problem today? What do you want to do?</td>
<td>School is boring, I don’t want to be here</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where is your pencil?</td>
<td>I loaned it to Jim yesterday, he never gave it back</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did you hit John?</td>
<td>Yea, I hit him, he hit me first, or the student will lie and deny that he did it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where were you for the last ten minutes?</td>
<td>The principal stopped me in the hall (meanwhile the principal talked to the student for 10 seconds)</td>
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<tr>
<td>What five math problems do you want to do?</td>
<td>I don’t want to do this page, it’s too hard, can I do another page?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie, Why are you talking to Lauren while I’m teaching?</td>
<td>I needed to tell her something, God, calm down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are you kids talking on line?</td>
<td>He pushed me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is your homework, you didn’t turn it in?</td>
<td>I did it, but I left it in my room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John, where do you get that kind of language?</td>
<td>Bob, talked that way and you didn’t say anything to him</td>
</tr>
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<td>Who do you think you are talking to with that tone of voice</td>
<td>I didn’t like how you spoke to me</td>
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<td>How come your project is three days late?</td>
<td>You didn’t give us enough time</td>
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<tr>
<td>John, why is your head down during class</td>
<td>I know this stuff – leave me alone</td>
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Anytime teachers ask questions like this they open the door for the student to transfer responsibility to someone else or to some circumstance and away from him/her.
The 2X10 Documentation Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic of Conversation</th>
<th>Length of Conversation</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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Expectations and Procedure Checklist

Classroom Procedures - Do Students Know What Is Expected of Them for Routine Operations?

Directions: Review the following procedures and check the ones your student will need to know and practice.

A. Beginning the class

- How should students enter the room?
- What constitutes being late (in the room, in the seat)?
- How and when will absentee slips be handled?
- What type of seating arrangements will be used (assigned seats, open seating, cooperative group seating)?
- How will the teacher get students' attention to start class (the tardy bell, a signal such as a raised hand or lights turned off and on)?
- How will students behave during Public Address (PA) announcements?

B. Classroom Management

- How and when will students leave their seats?
- What do students need in order to leave the room (individual passes, room pass, and teacher’s permission)?
- How will students get help from the teacher (raise hands, put name on board, ask other group members first)?
- What are acceptable noise levels for discussion, group work, seat work?
- How should students work with other students or move into cooperative groups (moving desks, changing seats, noise level, handling materials)?
- How will students get recognized to talk (raised hand, teacher calls on student, talk out)?
- How do students behave during presentations by other students?
- How do students get supplies they are missing?
• How and when do students sharpen pencils?
• How will students get materials or use special equipment?

C. Paper Work

• How will students turn in work (put in specific tray or box, pass to the front, one student collects)?
• How will students turn in makeup work if they were absent (special tray, give to teacher, put in folder, give to teacher's aide)?
• How will students distribute handouts (first person in row, a group member gets a copy for all group members, students pick up as they enter room)?
• How will late work be graded (no penalty, minus points, zero, "F," use lunch or recess to finish, turn in by end of day, drop so many homework grades)?
• How and when will students make up quizzes and tests missed (same day they return to school, within twenty-four hours, within the week, before school, during lunch or recess, after school)?
• How will late projects such as research papers, portfolios, and artwork be graded (no penalty, minus points, lowered letter grade, no late work accepted)?

D. Dismissal from Class or School

• How are students dismissed for lunch?
• When do students leave class for the day (when bell rings, when teacher gives the signal)?
• Can students stay after class to finish assignments, projects, tests?
• Can the teacher keep one student or the whole class after class or school?
• What do students do during fire and disaster drills?

E. Syllabus or Course Outline

• How students are made aware of course objectives?
• How students are made aware of course requirements?
• Are students given due dates for major assignments several weeks in advance?
• Are students told how they will be evaluated and given the grading scale?

F. Other Procedures

You may need to introduce procedures related to recess, assemblies, guest speakers, substitute teachers, field trips, fire drills, teacher leaving the room, etc. List other procedures that are needed.

From What To Do With the Kid Who…: Developing Cooperation, Self-Discipline, and Responsibility in the Classroom, 2nd ed., by Kay Burke. See the LessonLab Skylight Bookstore for information on other books for teachers or to find specific information about Kay Burke and this book.

Why Is Having Consistent Consequences So Important?

The consequences must impact the child so that she/he perceives that she/he will definitely lose something of real value or “consequence.” Remember, a child looks at life from two points of view - what am I going to gain, or what am I going to lose. If the consequence is not perceived in terms of being a meaningful loss, then there will be no incentive in the future for the child to stop negative behaviors.

The consequences must be imposed consistently and fairly to all, no matter who the child is. It is sometimes very difficult to impose consequences when one is dealing with either students who are typically “the good kids” or typically “the really bad kids.” We can feel hesitant about imposing consequences on “the good kids” because we may have developed such positive relationships with them that it becomes difficult to discipline them. We may not want to be seen as “the bad” guy by them. It may be very tough to impose consequences on bullies because we ourselves can feel intimidated or even “bullied” by them into a form of submission. Unfortunately, it becomes easier to ignore behaviors that we are cognizant we shouldn’t be ignoring. We may actually be worried about a potential negative reaction from the bully if we call her/him on the behavior, so we look the other way. When we look the other way, it becomes extremely obvious to others including the victim and any bystander. What we are doing in this instance is becoming an unwitting bystander or collaborator ourselves. By our silence, we are in essence condoning the behavior we know is hurting an innocent person. The hurtful behavior will certainly not change, and it may in fact become worse or more potentially damaging, because we (who are in a position of authority) are in a sense giving the perpetrator permission to continue. In a worst-case scenario, we may openly blame the victim rather than the bully. We must become very aware of our own weaknesses, insure that our good judgment prevails, and we must be strong enough to be fair.

This system will be most effective if your Board of Education approves of it in advance. Inevitably, when you try to impose tough consequences, parents will object.
If your Board of Education stands behind your program and everyone is on the same page, you will find that the efficacy of this program will be much greater.

Consequences Your School May Adopt for Chronic Defiance or Violent Behavior

(The consequences you decide upon must be communicated clearly, posted visibly, sent home to parents)

1. Letter of apology to be written by the student to the teacher and the class

2. The student must make a contribution in some positive way to the teacher and the class in general.

3. Morning or afternoon school detention, suspension, Saturday school, in-school suspension.

4. Possible reporting of incident to parents or police with possible charges filed and police report filed.

5. Removal or suspension from sports teams, band, chorus, forensics, etc. for a minimum of 30 days. For example, even if student is on the football team, and this incident occurs before or during the football season, student will still be suspended from team for a minimum of 30 days.

6. Student is barred from going on a planned upcoming field trip.

7. Student is barred from attending an upcoming classroom party such as a Halloween party, or other holiday party. Instead, student must go to the office or another classroom during the party time.

8. Student is barred from prom.

9. Mandatory parental supervision of child (in the school) every day for one week for some part of the school day.
Power Struggles with Parents

Whether it’s between the teacher and the student, or between the teacher and the parent, the struggle creates a very uncomfortable situation for all parties involved. Power struggles with students are something that is going to happen and as teachers we know this, and seek out ways to try and prevent them or manage them in the most effective way possible when they occur in our classroom. Power struggles with parents are much more uncomfortable for the teacher and can create fear, anxiety, tension and pressure. If teachers engage in one or two of them and manage them incorrectly they will lose their confidence in managing future struggles. They may also lose the respect of the parent, and will have further difficulty with the parent’s child who is in their classroom.

Here are some tips for managing power struggles between the teachers and the parents:

If parents have poor communication skills themselves and are used to getting what they want by raising their voice and using intimidation, that is exactly what they will do during a parent teacher meeting. So, the first challenge that a teacher has is to overcome the fear of being yelled at. If teachers are fearful of parents raising their voice at them, and it is a fear that has come from their childhood, they will begin to feel like a 5 year old at the meeting. No one and I mean no one should ever be verbally abused during a parent teacher conference. If the parent is on the attack, and is becoming abusive, insulting, and down right rude, use this statement, and don’t be afraid to use it: “I’m sorry, I am not used to being spoken to this way, please calm down or we will have to have this meeting at another time.” Usually that will calm down a parent. If it doesn’t work, and the parent continues to disrespectful to you, politely end the meeting, and dismiss yourself.

Get all the facts prior to the meeting and stick to them There is no question that there are kids that we just don’t like. During the first few weeks of the school year a teacher can usually determine what students are going to give them the most trouble. Keep a diary of their behavior. The diary should consist of behaviors that are observable and countable. An example in your diary would be, I asked Tim for his homework on 1/17/08 and he responded, "I could care less about any of your stupid work." You record every one of
the unacceptable behaviors down. During the conference, refer to the diary, and read from it to the parent. People can't argue with recorded facts. Besides, you can be pretty sure that if this student has said these things to you, then he or she has probably said similar things to his or her parent.

During the conference listen well, and don’t try to interrupt when the parent is in the middle of any tirade. You will only be accused of being argumentative. Try to understand the parent's position as wrong as it might be and remain calm. Try to find out exactly what the parent wants. Rephrase it and then say, "So if I do____________ and____________ that will solve the problem?" Usually the parent will say yes, that’s what I want. Then say, "Let me see what I can do. Can I get back to you in a day or two?" At this point you are buying time to talk to your supervisor. By the way, if the struggle is something that you anticipate is going to happen during a parent meeting or conference, see if your supervisor can be present at the meeting.

It is important during conferences with antagonistic parents that you develop physical rapport with them. Basically, look carefully at how the parent is sitting, and then try to match it yourself. Follow the parent's body movements, and then adopt that movement yourself. It is a proven fact that physical rapport is developed before verbal rapport. Matching the body posture of the parent will relax the parent and diffuse any initial tension that may exist between you and the parent.

Lastly, be proactive and don’t wait for a struggle to occur. Work on these techniques when you are calm. If you know your personality and know that confrontations make you uncomfortable, rehearse your lines and practice getting into physical rapport with someone who will work with you. If you try some of these techniques, you will find that conferences with difficult parents will go more smoothly.
Successful Parent Teacher Conferences

There are two types of parent teacher conferences – **Planned and Unplanned** here is a checklist for both:

**Planned**

1. Do I know what I am going to talk about, and can I express my concerns objectively.

2. Do I have documentation to support my concerns about the student’s academic or behavioral difficulty?

3. Am I ready to listen and understand as much as I want to be understood?

4. Do I understand the principles and benefits of being in physical rapport with the parent?

5. Do I have work samples available for review to support my concerns?

6. Have I kept a behavioral log that documents the child’s episodes of disrespect, irresponsibility, non-compliance and any other type of behavior that is disruptive to the classroom? (For example bullying)

7. Do I know how to overcome objections without becoming defensive?

8. Is my classroom neat, and organized?

9. Am I ready to make suggestions to the parent that will help the child improve academically and behaviorally?

10. Do I know how to end the conference on a positive note?

**Tip:** If the conference becomes confrontational with the teacher and the parent disagreeing, find a way to get to yes. Once the teacher and the parent even remotely agree end the conference as quickly as possible.
Unplanned

1. Don’t act surprised.

2. Parents that greet you early in the morning or well after school are not there because they are happy about something. Be Ready

3. Be prepared for the parent to begin by raising their voice

4. Ask them to come into your room and excuse yourself for a minute. This allows the teacher to let someone else know what is going on.

5. Sit in clear view of the parent, not behind a desk.

6. Be ready to let the parent speak, don’t interrupt.

7. Get to the root of the problem as fast as possible and ask the parent; what do you want to have happen or what would you like me to do?

8. Agree in principle only not in content. A comment like: I see your concern works well.

9. Don’t argue

10. Plan to meet again. This gives you a chance to be more prepared, and be able to overcome objections.

Tip: When conferencing with parents do not fall for flattery, or begin to engage in any type of personal conversation. Maintain a professional relationship.
Taking Care Of Yourself

Teachers on a daily basis are placed under undue stress and tension. The workload may seem like it is never ending. Just when they think that they have it under control a memo appears in their mailbox giving them another assignment that creates more anxiety. Daily, teachers feel less and less appreciated and often just feel like they want to give up. They leave school exhausted both physically and emotionally, and often when they get home they don’t even have the energy to devote to their families or their personal lives. The pressure from the job creates such stress that they lose their focus on their diet, and begin to eat the wrong foods. They become so lethargic that exercise isn’t even a consideration. Because of exhaustion they stop reading for enjoyment, and conversations with their loved ones become just small talk that has no real substance. They tend to lose sight of the relationships in their lives that mean the most to them and are with their loved ones physically but not emotionally. They tend to live day to day just trying to survive and are not even thinking of what the real big picture of their life purpose really is.

Stephen Covey’s book The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People describes seven habits that if incorporated into a person’s life will motivate and inspire him or her to achieve balance. The habits are: Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, Put First Things First, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand then to be Understood, Synergize, and Sharpen the Saw. The seventh habit, Sharpen the Saw, is particularly relevant.

The following is an excerpt from The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People:

“Suppose you were to come upon someone in the woods working feverishly to saw down a tree. “What are you doing?” you ask. “Can’t you see?” comes the impatient reply. “I’m sawing down this tree.” “You look exhausted!” you exclaim. “How long have you been going at it?” “Over Five hours,” he returns, “and I’m beat! This is hard work.” “Well, why don’t you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen the saw?” you inquire. “I’m sure it would go a lot faster.” “I don’t have time to sharpen the saw,” the man says emphatically. I’m too busy sawing.”
Sometimes we are so busy working that we just don’t take the time for ourselves and our family. In his book, Stephen Covey explains that people should spend time in what he calls “renewel.” Renewal is when we preserve and enhance the greatest asset we have, which is ourselves. Unfortunately, sometimes our family may just think that we are taking time away from them when in essence we are trying to make ourselves stronger. By practicing Covey's four dimensions that are explained below a person will become stronger and be able to fight the stresses of life and be a better parent, spouse, son, daughter, and yes, even teacher.

**The Physical Dimension**

The physical dimension involves caring for our physical body including eating right, and getting enough rest and exercise. If we think that we don’t have enough time to exercise, understand that we don’t have the time not to. Often we will think that in order to get the right exercise we have to join a gym and hire a trainer. We can just take a walk or do a few calisthenics, and we will start to get results. Better yet we can take a walk with our children, and enjoy a good conversation along the way.

**The Mental Dimension**

We don't read enough for pleasure, or for enrichment. For some reason when we graduate from college we stop doing any serious reading or research. Too often our time is spent watching television and not enough time is spent in our mental development. I know some folks who get cranky and despondent if they don’t see their favorite shows on certain nights. With the advent of TVO, we can record just about anything we want for future viewing. We can get so caught up in television that we lose sight of other things we can do with our minds. Our minds are like muscles and have to be developed and worked on or they will atrophy. We need to find things that we like to read and that inspire and encourage us. Then we should make a commitment to try and read a book a month. Keep in mind that books on tape are in the public library as well.
The Social/Emotional Dimension

If we come home worn out from the day, we may not have the energy to devote to the key people in our lives. Often these key people (husband, wife, son, and daughter) can feel short-changed by the lack of time and attention that we give to them. Too often we come home and want to talk about some snot nosed kid who gave us a hard time that day. That is not the conversation our loved ones want to have with us. Oh, they do want to hear about our day, but they also have a desire for us to have an equal interest in their day. Remember one thing, the school we are working in can run with us or without us. We may believe we are indispensable at work, but that is an absolute fallacy. We can be replaced - and we may not even be missed. But can our family run without us? You know the answer. Your family needs you and you need them. There isn’t a person alive who on their death bed stated that they wished they had spent more time at work. We must focus on giving the people who love us the time they deserve. Then they will give us their blessing when we go off to work.

The Spiritual Dimension

The Spiritual Dimension is a very private area for most people. Many people have their own method of feeding their soul. Some folks communicate with nature, read inspirational literature, or spend quiet time alone in prayerful meditation. The great reformer Martin Luther said, “I have so much to do today that I will have to spend three hours praying instead of two.” I have come to realize that there is a spiritual connection that all people want, but that many people do not do enough to develop it. The spiritual dimension often gets ignored, and that can leave a large void in a person's life.
James H Burns Associates
The Bully Proof Classroom
Anti Bullying Specialist
Educational Consultant
Keynote Speaker

Programs In-services and Keynotes available to schools with custom programs available based upon school needs.

Anti Bullying/School Climate Control

This in-service provides teachers and administrators with 12 Strategies to help improve classroom/school climate, how to develop respect, responsibility and compliance in students, how to teach students character qualities they will need for life-long success, strategies that help bullies and targets improve their coping skills, how to develop a code of conduct that can be effectively communicated to all students, how to be more effective in changing student behavior, and the importance of getting and keeping everyone working on the same school goals.

Defusing Power Struggles With Difficult Students and Parents

Effective discipline can no longer be achieved solely through using authority. A typical school today has some students who have short fuses, and some who anger
easily. Students today may make offensive statements and act in a hostile manner that can trigger a power struggle. Often, too much instructional time is lost because of minor disruptions that all too quickly escalate into classroom battles that destroy relationships and any positive climate that exists. To keep the focus on educational achievement educators must master how to avoid and defuse power struggles. This practical workshop will present easy-to-learn methods of effective intervention that preserve students’ and teachers’ personal dignity.

Motivating Difficult and Hard to Handle Students

There is a direct relationship between motivation and discipline. The hard to motivate are often hard to discipline. Teachers are becoming increasingly more frustrated and are asking what we do with students who are not prepared, don’t care, will not work, and are on track for failure as adults. Finding tools and strategies to increase motivation can solve many behavior problems. There are many things educators can do to reawaken motivation in students who have lost interest and perhaps hope. This seminar helps teachers develop techniques that build respect, increase responsibility, and develop greater compliance in students who are hard to handle. It helps teachers overcome the strong emotional frustration that saps their energy and ultimately leads to burnout.

KEYNOTE TOPICS

A series of one hour keynotes that are presented by The Bully Proof Classroom; these keynotes cover a variety of topics that will be sure to entertain your staff and leave them with something to think about. Your teachers will gain new insights on some difficult topics and leave believing that all their efforts are truly appreciated. Some of the topics include:

Experience Counts
Five critical compromises we have made as a society and in education

Fear the greatest motivator

How rumors and gossip affect the school climate

Can you handle the truth?

Anti Bullying Coaching

Kids who are bullied often are at a loss when it comes to what to say and how to act when they are confronted by someone who is attempting to verbally, emotionally, or physically attack them. This is not uncommon and can even happen to adults. How many times have you left a situation where you felt intimidated and said to yourself; "The next time he/she says that to me I am going to tell them......" This happens all the time and we only wish that we had the courage, the quickness, and the savvy to
say something or act in a way that commands respect. This is a skill that can be learned by kids and adults and but it requires some coaching and we here at The Bully Proof Classroom are offering this service to schools, students, teachers, and parents. This is not counseling or therapy, but a method to help students and yes even adults how to develop confidence when confronted in their words, actions and attitudes.

Books Available

www.bullyproofclassroom.com
amazon.com/author/jhburns

1. The New 3Rs in Education: Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships
2. Anti Bullying 101
3. School Climate Control
4. Defusing Power Struggles With Your Most Difficult Students and Parents
5. The Anti Bullying Handbook
6. Classroom Kryptonite
7. Our Schools Are Filled With Kryptonite

Since 1977 Jim Burns has been working with students who have learning disabilities and behavioral problems. He has almost 40 years of experience working as an administrator, teacher, college instructor, and seminar leaders. He is committed to helping administrators, parents, and teachers establish standards of excellence and help them build successful relationships with their staff, students, and children. He has been awarded the Degree of Doctor of Humane Letter by Gratz College in Pennsylvania for his over 20 years of work in the area of anti bullying. He has written and designed The Bully Proof Classroom, a graduate course that is now offered at The College of New Jersey in partnership with The Regional Training Center. This course is endorsed by the NJEA. He has also written “Anti Bullying 101.” A book that provides teachers, administrators, support staff and parent’s 101 tips on how to achieve permanent help in dealing with unruly behavior and can be used as part of any anti-bullying program. He is available for on sight in-services and keynotes and can be reached at 1-732-773-9855 or jamesburns55@gmail.com
Books by Jim Burns:

*Defusing Power Struggles With Your Most Difficult Students And Parents*

A book based upon the in-service of the same name. This book offers proven methods for preventing power struggles.

*Anti-Bullying 101*

This book provides 101 anti bullying tips that will prove to support any anti bullying program.

*Our Schools Are Filled With Kryptonite*

Fifteen essays that describe what is actually weakening our schools.

*The New 3R's in Education: Respect, Responsibility, & Relationships*

A great book that describes how to teach respect, encourage responsibility and how to help kids develop meaningful relationships.
All books can be purchased direct by visiting The Bully Proof Classroom Online Academy or on amazon.com