

12 Strategies You Can Use Right Away

1. Cooperation Through Disagreements

Does this tip have anything to do with bullying? The answer might surprise you. Kids who have not been taught that they have a responsibility to comply with the rules of a family, a school, or society believe that they can say and do what they want. **One of the highest forms of maturity is the ability to cooperate even though you might disagree.** Bullies lack empathy and are never in tune with the expectations of others. Begin to hold kids accountable for non-compliance, and start to discipline for poor attitudes and insist on cooperation. Remember, kids don't always have to agree, just cooperate.

2. Disagreements With The Right attitude

Hmm. Now it's OK to disagree. Well kids are going to whether we like it or not. Giving your students a voice helps to reduce anger. **The idea here is that "attitude is everything."** Too often kids, when they disagree, will personalize the disagreement, resulting in name-calling or the berating of others. Often bullies will use their power to force their victim into submission. Teaching students the right way to disagree with each other builds confidence, boundaries, and maturity. It helps both the bully and the victim.

3. Rumors, Gossip and Complaining

Complaining about students in the faculty room does nothing to support the educational environment. Once you find other teachers who enjoy complaining about students, it becomes much easier to get into a routine of complaining to each other. This then makes it easier for other teachers to join right in. What usually goes along with this is a great deal of talk about how the student's lack of achievement or bullying and behavioral

problems in the classroom are caused by outside circumstances such as family or the child's intergenerational tendencies (e.g. "I had his father as a student and I am not surprised. He is just like him"). The problem is that you take the focus off of yourself and the things you can do to be part of the solution. Plus, if you're badmouthing your students, and other teachers are feeding right into it, you will walk back into your classroom with a greater dislike and additional reasons for having a negative attitude toward those students.

4. Stop Asking and Start Telling

Asking a student questions is a good thing. It gives you, the teacher, an idea of the student's knowledge base and, at the high school level, what his or her views might be on different topics. So questions are good unless you are asking for something that has an obvious answer. Then you are not asking questions, but you are telling the student to do something and giving him-her a command. Often we can fall into the trap of asking some "where," "when," and "why" questions to students. Things like, "Why are you late?" "Where is

your pencil?” or, “When are you going to sit down?” either don’t matter or require a consequence for being tardy, unprepared, or non compliant. It can be as innocent as stating, “We are going to do math now, okay?” When we should be saying; “Take out your math book and turn to page seven.” Bullies love to do what they want when they want to. So, stop asking and start telling.

5. Be a Good Listener

Be a good listener; this is easier said than done, because most people listen to respond, not to understand. There are 5 different types of listening. The first is Ignoring. We don’t mean to do this; it is really done mentally. Our minds are in another world when someone is speaking to us. The second is Pretend Listening. This, we do when

we want to get off the phone with someone and they don’t. You know the drill — “yeah right, right, sure,” and on and on. The third is Selective Listening. This, we do with a three year old. I mean if we listened to everything a three year old said, we would go out of our mind. The fourth is Attentive Listening; this is when we listen with our ears, our eyes, and sometimes our mind. The fifth type of listening, and the most important, is Empathic Listening. This is when we listen with our ears, our eyes, our body, our soul, and our spirit. We listen so well that we can mentally place ourselves in the conversation with the person we are speaking with. Victims of bullying need us not only to hear and listen to them, but also to understand them and feel their pain. Victims can, at times, believe that they are not taken seriously and then refuse to report to adults when they are bullied. They then start taking matters into their own hands, which can have devastating results. We all make time to listen to students when they want to speak with us. The question remains though, what type of listeners are we? Begin to practice empathic listening today. Do it with your own kids, your spouse, and of course, your students. It’s a habit we all need to get into.

6. The Three Types of Liars

Kids lie, adults lie, and we all bend the truth, fabricate, and embellish. We are all innocent until proven guilty; right? Sometimes when kids do things, that we didn’t see but the evidence is so strong and points to them as the guilty party, well they might be guilty until proven innocent. Tough to swallow, I know. Parents will always tell you that their son/daughter would never lie to them. Rightttttt! Well kids do lie sometimes they lie when it is just as easy to tell the truth. These kids are what I call **situational reactive liars**. They fear a reaction on the part of an adult andwill poke around to try and find out what the person wants to hear. The next type of liar is the **con artist**. This kid will tell you exactly what you want to hear and never ever deliver. As an adult we may be married or in a relationship with a person like this. Promise the moon and the rocket never leaves the ground. Their need to be liked is so strong, and they assume so many

responsibilities that they can’t keep up and ultimately give up. The final type of liar and the one that we deal with frequently is the **withholder**. When you question this kid he will provide you

all the information related to a situation but will leave out about 10%. This 10% is the information that will incriminate him/her. Why is it so important to understand these types of kids? Because we will as a teacher or administrator spend large parts of our day trying to disentangle situations that these kids were/are involved in and it will disrupt the climate of your classroom or your school.

7. Begin To Understand What Freedom of Speech Really Is

I can say what I want to say, when I want to say it. I guess that is true. I will add one additional line: **“with a consequence.”** Let’s face it you can’t scream “fire” in Macy’s unless there is a fire. Otherwise, you will probably get arrested. **Freedom of speech is not the freedom to say what you want, but the wisdom to say what you ought.** Chasten a student about his language or negative attitude when he talks to someone, and his/her response will probably be “I don’t care.” Rest assured he will. Get him/her to break this bad habit now, or one day it will cost him his job or maybe his marriage. Words need to be fitly spoken; even the truth needs to be delivered in a kind, caring way with the desire to help, not to hurt. Only a fool will utter his whole mind, burning bridges and leaving once positive relationships in a wake of turmoil and pain. Teach your students to say what is on their mind with the right attitude and the right motive. You will be improving the school climate and gearing them for lifelong success as adults.

8. Learn How To Defuse Power Struggles

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

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.”

9. Use Praise Effectively

Research suggests that praise is supposed to be given to children on a 1–9 ratio, for every one constructive suggestion, there should be nine words or statements of praise. But, those nine must be specific and communicate exactly what the student did. Often, teachers go overboard giving general, rather than specific, praise. An example of general praise would be when a teacher tells students, “nice job.” Specific praise would be, “Excellent opening and closing of essay,” or “Excellent use of figurative language, and transitional words and phrases,” or “Nice job addressing all elements of the question.” You are praising for something specific because you want the student to be aware of what it is you want them to continue doing. Plus, the praise is much more meaningful and believable when something specific is attached to it. Praise given at the right time and for the right thing will build a respectful and responsible classroom environment.

Tip – No amount of praise will work if respect is not present in the relationship. Use the 2x10 approach in the section on teaching respect along with praise to foster a strong and more relaxed school/classroom climate.

10. Rules First Then Compassion and Understanding

We talk too much in the discipline process. Often a child or even a young adult will believe that the good talking to was the consequence attached to his/her behavior. In reality we were trying to soften the kid up so we could lower the boom with the consequence. It usually doesn’t work and a situational reaction occurs and then we have to start all over only now we have a power struggle on our hands. Do yourself a favor; impose the consequence and then show the compassion by asking pertinent question about the kid’s behavior. By doing this we will get the kids attention with the consequence and we will be in a better position to practice empathic listening.

11. Handle Confrontations Wisely

Confrontations—no one likes them. As a matter of fact, most people avoid them at all cost. The reason is because as children, we were never taught how to deal with them and never developed the ability to disagree with the right attitude. (See Tip: January 3, 2012). Dr.

Robyn Odegaard, author of *Stop The Drama! The Ultimate Guide To Female Teams*, really hits the nail on the head when it comes down to conflict and confrontations. She defines a term that all of us need to be familiar with. Productive Conflict: This is the act of addressing and handling a disagreement or misunderstanding using an established set of healthy communication guidelines, which lead to resolution. Dr. Odegaard states that when we are involved in a disagreement, we have to create enough space in the conversation to allow for disagreement. This is wise guidance, and I support her research and findings. Conflicts that are left only partially resolved can lead to passive aggressive behavior and avoidance. Our students need to learn this term and work on developing the ability to resolve conflicts in a productive and respectful manner and disagree with the right attitude. You can order Dr. Odegaard's book here: <http://stopthedramanow.com/>

12. Take Care of Yourself

With the onset of the Anti Bullying Bill of Rights Act in New Jersey, and the potential for anti-bullying laws to go nationwide, teachers are required now, more than ever, to hold students accountable for harassment, intimidation, and bullying. Are teachers the only ones responsible to quell this epidemic plaguing our country? Sometimes, you might feel that way. The problem has been around since Cain and Abel, and our society and culture has allowed the problem to grow to the monstrous proportions seen today. Schools provide the venue for those who bully to carry out their dirty work. Schools are no longer just a place to teach basic skills and to prepare students academically; they are now required to teach character, ethics, and to a degree, morals. With this added responsibility and accountability, teachers can become drained of their physical and emotional energy. They lose sight of the fact that the quality of their performance is based upon their own wellness and how secure they feel in their position. We strive to provide a safe learning environment for our students, and we as teachers deserve the same. The children of this country have been placed in our hands from 6–12 hours per day and may spend more time with teachers than they spend with their parents. As exhausting as it might be, this is what we signed up for. So, we have to strike a balance and take care of the golden goose (ourselves), because we are the ones who are laying the golden eggs. If we kill the goose as the farmer did in Aesop's Fables, we will lose the riches that go along with the good life.

I have written about the dimensions of life before in *The New 3Rs in Education: Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships*, and it is worth repeating here. I reference Stephen Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In his book, Covey describes seven habits that, if incorporated into a person's life, will motivate and inspire him/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 here.

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 “renewal.” 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, what we are trying to do is make ourselves stronger for them. By practicing Covey’s four dimensions that are explained below, a person will become more liberated emotionally and will be able to fight the stresses of life to become 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. In reality, can just take a walk or do a few calisthenics, and we will start to see 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 DVR, and other devices, 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 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 per 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, 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. Yes, 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 that 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 we love 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.