

20 Everyday Strategies

Study Guide



Helping Students To Become Their Personal Best

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Introduction

I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or deescalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.

- Haim Ginot, Professor of Psychology

I first read this statement by Haim Ginott about twenty-five years ago and believe that it is more important now than ever before for teachers to work on building and maintaining a positive climate in their classrooms. Discipline problems have never been more difficult to manage, and students seem to lack any fear or regret on the part of the student when consequences are imposed. Incidences of student disrespect are rampant and irresponsibility seems to have become very common place. Most states now require schools to implement anti-bullying programs, and in fact have mandated that school districts take a tough stance in dealing with bullying and harassing behaviors.

Teachers at times can be at a loss and not know where to begin. Daily student behavior problems take their toll on physically and emotionally on the teacher and on the students in the classroom. If behavior problems such as disrespect and irresponsibility are not dealt with consistently, with students being held accountable the classroom climate will deteriorate and it will eventually become impossible to teach.

Strategies to deal with disrespect and irresponsibility are something that all teachers need, but there just never seems to be one available at the time of student misbehavior. Consequently, the classroom climate can be negatively affected. This book offers 180 strategies that teachers can use to improve their classroom climate and improve student respect and responsibility.

If we were to recall a teacher who we felt had a positive influence on us during our student days, we are most likely to think of a teacher who had made us feel comfortable and through the teacher's ability to make us feel comfortable, we are able to learn what we have been given to learn. Modern cognitive research also shows that the brain cells would shrink in the face of a hostile environment as for example when we feel fear or unsafe. On the other hand, the same brain cell would grow and develop if the environment is safe and comfortable. A teacher, therefore, ought to be aware that the classroom climate is the most important condition for learning to take place. The teacher must cultivate positive attitudes and perceptions about learning among the students.

The creation of safe, non-threatening and conducive environment to learning is a pre-requisite to good teaching. A teacher must make the effort to create such an environment.

The teacher would have to ask several questions to achieve this goal. For example, the teacher must ask what makes the students feel accepted in the class. Acceptance here, refers to acceptance not only by all the teachers teaching that class but also the student's peers.

The teacher must also ask what makes the student comfortable. Is there order in the class? Do students know where to look for things? Do they know the classroom procedures? Do they know what is expected of them when they come into the classroom and when tasks are given? A well-run classroom will give the student that feeling of stability and focus.

There are also many things that the teacher can do to make the classroom a less threatening and intimidating place. A classroom should be a safe place for learning. The student must be free from not only physical hurt but also, and perhaps, more importantly, hurt from the words of their peers and teachers. I believe all of us know that words can harm the confidence and motivational level of students more than perhaps physical threats. Unfortunately, threats and intimidation are quite often the norm in classrooms all over the world.

The teacher also must seriously attempt to make the learning as suitable as possible for the learner. Students like to see relevance. Teachers must make the extra effort to connect for the students what they are learning to their own lives. If the students' perceptions of the learning is that it has little relevant to them, they are less likely to be interested or motivated to learn. Furthermore, as I have mentioned in a previous posting, making the connection for students is actually teaching for transfer.

The teacher must also ensure that the learning is not too difficult for the student. The teacher should stretch the student but the stretching must not be done at the expense of learning being done in progressive and logical steps. The teacher must make sure that bridges are made during lessons so that the student can understand easier the new content. Scaffolding becomes important in the teaching and learning. The student should feel that the learning is manageable and that it does not require a quantum leap in the mental processes.

Teachers who are mindful of their students' perceptions and attitudes towards learning will find that their students will be more enthusiastic and motivated to do well in class. Teachers can make or break students. That is how powerful a teacher can be.

Section I

How Teachers Can Help Students Become Their Personal Best

Strategies will be identified with the letter **S**. So **S-1** would be strategy one. This just makes it easier for the teacher to know how to reference each strategy.

S – 1

Introduce yourself, and give the students some background about who you are and establish your authority in the classroom.

Let's face it all kids K-12 have all kinds of questions about their teacher. Students always wonder if you are married, have kids, where did you go to college, and how long have you been teaching. Before the school year starts make a list of things that you feel comfortable sharing with your students. Don't share extremely sensitive information or information that your students would feel uncomfortable hearing (Like, I am going through a divorce right now) but understand that your students have as much of a desire to learn about you as you do about them. While you are talking to the students establish your authority. You are establishing boundaries for conversation and behavior.

S - 2

Learn your students' names the first day of school

Learning your students' names is the first step in knowing who they are. Calling students by name communicates respect, helps them feel recognized as individuals, and helps to draw out and include shy students in class discussions. Here are a few ideas for getting to know your students' names.

- Take a few moments and have the students introduce themselves to their neighbors. Then have each student introduce a neighbor to the class, along with one interesting fact about him or her.
- Have the students create "business cards"—4x6-inch index cards with specific information about themselves in each corner of the card—as individuals and as learners (i.e., brief bio info, something they know a lot about, some of their strengths as learners, etc.)—and use these to make introductions in small groups. Afterwards, you may collect them to learn more about your students.

S - 3

Allow students the time to get to know each other.

Let's face it kids at the elementary and middle school level just don't walk up to each other and start a conversation about their interests. Sometimes high school students are also too shy to speak because of negative past experiences, and fear of ridicule. As the teacher it becomes your job to help break the ice during the first week of school and give your students an opportunity to get to know each other. The internet is full of games, activities and ice breakers that can be used. In the appendix there will be activities to help your students get to know each other with helpful websites.

S – 4

Create Classroom Rules ASAP.

1. Discuss Need for Rules

Have students pair with a partner to discuss this question “Why do we need rules in the classroom?”

2. List Rules

Number students on each team from 1 to 4. Ask Student #1 to take out a sheet of paper and write a classroom rule that they think is important. (Encourage them to keep the rules stated in a positive manner instead of starting with the word “don't.”) Have them pass the paper to Student #2 who adds a rule. Students keep passing paper and adding rules until time is called.

3. Select Best Rules

Designate a Reader on each team to read the list of rules back to the team. Have students work to select their top 3 rules and clarify the wording of those rules.

4. Compile Class List of Rules

Designate a Reporter on each team. Let each team contribute their best rules to a class list. Write each rule on the board or overhead as the Reporter reads it. Avoid duplication on the class list.

5. Vote for Top Six Class Rules

Through discussion and/or voting, reduce the list to no more than six classroom rules.

6. Post Rules

Create a class wall display or bulletin board of the rules. Allow each team to make a small poster (12” x 18”) of one of the rules. If you have more than six teams, let one make a title card for the display.

Al though it is good for students to help in establishing classroom rules, please always remember that you as the teacher have the final word on classroom rules and their enforcement.

S – 4a

Create Classroom Procedures ASAP.

Here is a partial list of classroom procedures that should be taught to your students. In the appendix of the text you will find a comprehensive list of classroom procedures. You will be surprised at the number of procedures that need to be followed by your students on a day to day basis. Below is just an example of procedures just for the beginning of a class period..

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?

Click [HERE](#) For More Procedures

S –5

Send a letter home to the parents introducing yourself.

Teachers normally don't meet the parent until "Back to School Night" or if there is a problem in school with their child early in the school year. The school principal normally sends out a letter to the parents in August welcoming the children back to school. Rather than wait until back to school night send a letter home to the parents letting them know how thrilled you are to be their child's teacher. Encourage the parents to give you a call or stop in and say hello.

S – 6

Early in the school year give students the benefit of the doubt if a rule is broken.

Often when a student breaks the rules during the first few weeks of school we as teachers can react, and want to prove that we are not push over's. At the beginning of the school year children need constant instruction on rules and procedures. Use a process of instruction, warning, and correction. **The steps for this process can be found in the appendix of the book.**

S – 7

Get into the habit of greeting your students every day. Don't only say hello when they enter the classroom but in other areas of the school as well, such as the cafeteria or the playground.

Children love to be noticed; when you take the time to recognize and pay attention to them it helps to begin building meaningful relationships.

S – 8

Begin to practice something called the 2 by 10.

Once you have identified some of the more problem students in your room try to have a 2 minute conversation with these students for 10 days straight. This helps the student feel important and believe that you are not seeing him for the behavior problem that he may think he is. [Discipline With Dignity](#)

S – 9

Practice telling students what to do and stop asking questions.

Teachers have fallen into the trap of giving students choices, and asking to many questions. During the first month of school tell students what to do and assert your leadership as an instructor. This works very well with students K-5. It builds security and prevents student learning anxiety.

See the appendix for more information about this valuable technique click [HERE](#)

S – 10

Make all of your students aware that they are in a safe and secure environment.

All people want to feel safe and secure; your students are no different. Post the following guidelines in your classroom and review it frequently with you students.

- **We don't call names, tease or put people down.**
- **When we do things as a group we make sure everyone is included and no one is left out.**
- **We make new students feel welcome.**
- **We listen to each other's opinions.**
- **We treat each other with kindness and respect.**
- **We respect each other's property (School property too.)**
- **We look for the good in others and value the differences.**

Guidelines taken in part from [The Bully Free Classroom: Over 100 Tips and Strategies for Teachers K-8](#) by Allan L., Ph.D. Beane

S – 11

Provide Positive Attention

Provide all your students with as much positive attention as possible. Make it a point to say something positive about your student's everyday. This will encourage positive behaviors to continue and make your students aware that you notice them when they do things that are respectful, and responsible.

S – 12

Recognize Efforts

Teachers today are challenged more than ever by the inclusion movement and the demands of their school district to differentiate instruction. This academic diversity can create a planning nightmare that can be very labor intensive. A classroom filled with students who are academically 3 or more years apart can create frustration for the teacher, as one group of students understand certain concepts while others just don't get it.

Therefore, it is extremely important for teachers to recognize the efforts of all their students, especially those that don't catch on as fast to basic instruction. A student who is recognized for efforts will try harder at learning the material that is being taught, and will develop seek to please the teacher all the more. These students will be far more respectful and responsible. It might also help if grades are separated by effort and

achievement so the students understand that you are recognizing their attempts to learn the material no matter how small the effort is.

S – 13

Be a good listener

Learn how to be a good listener. Often with the business of teaching teachers tend to forget some of the small things that need to be done, like listening when students speak to them. Let's face it kids want to talk all the time; the hallway, the cafeteria, at dismissal, on the playground, and after and before school. These can be the busiest times of the day for a teacher and it is almost impossible to really listen and hear what a student is saying to you. I know that more than once because of my haste I have agreed to things I should never have agreed with just because of expediency. If something appears to be important to a student, or if a question is asked when you are on the fly, ask the student to speak to you when you know you will have quiet time. This not only gives you a chance to really listen, but makes the student aware that you view what they have to say as so important that you really want to listen to their concern. Students in grades 6-12 like to be heard. Listening correctly communicates to a student that you are interested in what is on his/her mind. Sometimes these students will disagree with you. Let them know that it is okay to disagree, but they still have to cooperate with what your requests are.

Click [HERE](#) for a podcast on being a good listener

S - 14

Assume nothing and teach everything

Teachers often believe that when they give instructions that the whole class heard them and more importantly understood them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Students may give the appearance of paying attention when in reality their mind could be on another planet. With that in mind it is important to get into the habit of developing what I call the **Instruction – Warning – and Correction** process. When instruction is given to students be aware that they might have heard them but didn't quite understand them. With that in mind, rather than react when students don't follow the instructions provide a warning to the student and clarify your request. If the student still doesn't follow directions you can assume that the child was being willfully disobedient and a consequence should be imposed to make your point.

Click [HERE](#) for a short podcast on this topic

S – 15

Keep Students Busy and Challenged

Busy students are far less likely to exhibit disruptive behavior. Be sure that students are working at appropriate levels; boredom and frustration often lead to students' acting out. This requires that teachers take planning seriously, and are ready at all times to provide work to students during down time in the classroom.

S -16

Be prepared for the unprepared

It doesn't do anyone any good for the teacher to kick up a stink when his/her students are unprepared. Having students give the teacher a shoe as collateral for a pencil creates a circus atmosphere and takes away from instructional time. Have a set of pencils and paper handy in order to provide supplies for the unprepared.

S – 17

Create ways to make students feel capable

With the advent of inclusion and the comingling of different student academic ability levels teachers can have a tendency to lower student expectations. By accepting less, to often that's exactly what the teacher gets; less effort and poor quality work. Although the work presented may be at the student's academic ability level the student must still be held accountable for quality work. By accepting poor quality work and allowing the student to hide behind a disability only makes the student feel less capable and instills in the student the I can't mentality. Teachers should respect a student's performance level and at the same time work to make the student believe that he/she is capable of much more.

S – 18

Establish a connected feeling in your classroom

Children in general like to feel connected to something; a family, a sports team, or a club are just some basic examples. Students who enter your classroom want to feel connected to you as the teacher and to the class and to individual classmates as well. Students who feel excluded from the class usually become behavior problems and end up connecting with the wrong group and believe it or not this is how cliques and gangs are formed. Help students get connected to the class by involving all students in activities, prevent students

from bullying one another or picking on their weaker classmates, create school projects that all students feel that they are a part of, value student differences, and appreciate each student participation no matter how small it might be.

S – 19

Make sure all students are contributing members of the classroom

With cooperative learning being so popular sitting and working in groups can prevent individual contributions. Grade group work and be aware of the amount of work each student was responsible for. All work done in groups should receive a group and an individual grade. Make your students aware that they not only have a responsibility to contribute to the class but, to their families, and society as well.

S – 20

Teach your students how to solve problems on their own

If you are an elementary teacher, you know how often your students come up to you to check in to see if they are on the right track while working on an assignment. Students also like to make reports about the problems they are having with other students, or sometime just to rat out someone that they don't like as a means of revenge. Speak to your class about working on assignments independently first, and make them understand that it is okay to make mistakes. Also, teach your students the difference between ratting and reporting. Let them know that you want to be made aware of problems that they may be having with students who are affecting them through the use of fear and intimidation, causing them to feel as if they are being bullied. This is reporting. Ratting is when students just want to get someone in trouble and are always at the teacher's desk telling on another student for things that you as the teacher can figure out on your own.

