



## How To Earn Back The Trust Of A Student You've Hurt Or Disappointed

By Michael Linsin on March 5, 2016

I recently heard a story from a teacher who confronted a group of students playing in the hallway.

When one student denied involvement, she grew angry.

She raised her voice and laid into him.

She **pressured him** to admit his wrongdoing and promise not to do it again.

Then she turned and stomped off.

The problem—besides making several critical accountability errors—was that she got it wrong.

The student had nothing to do with it. It was a case of mistaken identity.

He happened upon the scene at just the wrong moment.

When a few students approached her later to set the record straight, she realized her mistake and felt terrible, but was unsure how to fix it.

How do you even approach a student you've wronged so thoroughly?

How do you make amends and earn back their trust?

It's a thorny problem, but one that is bound to happen if you teach long enough.

The truth is, when you mess up, **lose your cool**, or otherwise treat a student unfairly, it's best to handle it with honesty and humbleness.

It's best to pull the student aside, look them in the eye, and apologize.

Here's how:

### **Be real.**

It's a mistake to be lighthearted or overly friendly with the student you've hurt or disappointed. Trying to gloss over or downplay the incident will only make things worse.

It's a serious matter, and your attitude should reflect how you feel. Your earnestness will communicate more than the words you use.

**Be direct.**

An apology is the only honest and reliable way to erase any resentment the student may be feeling toward you. But it must come with no strings attached.

Any attempt to explain yourself or justify your actions will only weaken the impact of your words and the effect of your apology.

**Take responsibility.**

The student must see that you own your mistakes, that you take responsibility in the same manner you expect from your students.

To that end, admit that you messed up, that you handled it poorly or shouldn't have said what you said. Take no more than 30 seconds, and then say the critical words: "I'm sorry."

**Move on.**

It's normal to want to receive an acceptance of your apology. It makes you feel better and helps relieve your burden. But it's best to move on without waiting for one.

This doesn't mean that you must immediately walk away. It means that you should pause only a beat or two before turning and walking the student back to their seat.

Students – and people in general – are more likely to accept an apology, and therefore truly forgive, when there is no pressure for them to do so.

**Don't mention it again.**

As soon as the conversation ends, put the situation in your rear-view mirror. When the student sees that you've moved past it, they tend to follow suit. It's an implicit reminder that we all make mistakes.

Your apology is an important lesson and a model for how they should handle themselves when they're on the other side of the equation – which is bound to happen sooner rather than later.

Say your peace once, and then get on with it.

**You, A Better Teacher**

By confessing our mistakes, by apologizing when we're wrong and taking responsibility when we hurt others, we become better people and better teachers.

It shapes us, humbles us, and empowers us to behave with greater integrity. It causes us to become more mindful of our surroundings, widening our perspective and sharpening our observational skills.

It gives us that moment of pause we all need to keep from [rushing in](#) and making judgments without having all the facts.

It's a stark reminder of how important it is not to take misbehavior personally, but rather to allow a well-defined classroom management plan to do our talking for us.

To allow it to teach the hard lessons.

While we build relationships.

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