



How To Handle Friendship Drama

Friendship drama. The very words can make you shudder.

Tears, jealousy, hurt feelings, histrionics, he said-she said . . . although it's the last thing you ever want to deal with, you simply can't ignore it – because it will dominate the lives of whoever is involved to the exclusion of everything else.

It will throw your classroom into upheaval. It will bring your schedule to a halt. It will cause you to waste time pulling students together for powwows, forced apologies, and hash-it-outs.

You'll find yourself stuck trying to untangle a laundry list of slights, dirty looks, and misunderstandings – while the business of teaching and learning gets shoved into the background.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

What follows are three simple guidelines – or truths about friendships – to help you quickly cut through the muddle and get to the heart of the issue.

In doing so, it will bring your students face to face with the consequences of treating friends with anything less than kind respect.

1. You don't have to be friends.

When meeting with students (friends) who aren't getting along, it's important to remind them that as members of your classroom they must treat everyone with respect – best friend and acquaintance alike. It isn't a choice. It's **a class rule** you will strictly enforce.

However . . . they don't have to be friends. In fact, perhaps they should rethink their friendship.

"If someone isn't nice to you, or is untrustworthy and talking behind your back, then you shouldn't be friends with that person."

This stops them cold. It is a simple solution they can see right in front of them. But here's the key, where the power lies: Most students don't want to lose friendships, and thus begin to understand that there are consequences for not appreciating them.

2. If you choose to be friends, then be nice.

The next logical extension of guideline number one is that if they want to remain friends, then they have to apologize, forgive each other immediately, and start being nice.

"If you decide to remain friends, then you have to begin this minute being kind to each other."

It's important that you don't give them another choice in the matter – which is a truism of friendships. They either let bygones be bygones and remain friends, or they don't and go their separate but respectful ways. It's that simple.

3. You can't force someone to be your friend.

If one or more students isn't ready to commit to a renewed friendship, that's okay. You can't force students to be friends. And neither can they force it on each other. True friendship doesn't work that way.

"Although you deserve to be treated with respect, and I want to know if you're not, you can't force anyone to be your friend."

Here again, what this does is open your students' eyes to the truth that friendships aren't set in stone and should never be taken lightly. They must be nurtured and cherished.

Note: The guidelines are meant to put students on the spot, advance past the hurtful accusations, and get straight to the heart of the matter: Either be nice or dissolve the friendship.

Life Lessons

Our greatest calling as teachers is to impact our students for a lifetime, **to be that one teacher they'll always remember** – who imparted not just knowledge of reading and writing, but of life lessons they can carry with them into adulthood.

The three guidelines above may seem harsh at first glance, but in practice they are wonderfully compassionate and instructive. They encourage fuller and richer friendships, fewer cliques, and greater sensitivity to how our words and actions affect others.

They empower students to seek healthy relationships, and to hold one another accountable for them. They teach the often-overlooked value that simply being nice will fill one's life with true and trusted friends.

And they do so in an extremely efficient manner – so you can get back to teaching.

It's important to note that if you teach these guidelines to your entire class, proactively, you'll have few if any friendship problems the rest of the year.

No more complaining and arguing. No more tears and dramatics. No more distractions from learning.

Just the important, enduring lesson that friendships are special and sacred .

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And are never to be taken for granted.