



## How To Handle Students Who Push Your Buttons

By Michael Linsin

Maybe it's the way they interrupt you.

Maybe it's their disrespectful tone. Maybe it's their silliness or [side-talking](#) or affinity for misbehaving at the worst possible time.

Whatever it is, it bugs you. It gets under your skin. It prompts an internal dialogue you're not very proud of.

If you're like most teachers, you tend to focus on these students, on the one or two with an uncanny ability to push your buttons.

Day after day you find yourself lecturing and questioning them. You find yourself drawn into circular arguments with them.

You find yourself angry and frustrated and pointing out their transgressions in emphatic detail.

But here's the thing: These normal reactions are only making things worse. They're only encouraging more of the same behavior you'd love to avoid.

Like a moth to a flame, though, there you are mano a mano trying to outwit them, one up them, and put them in their place.

In quiet moments it seems silly and petty, but it's so very hard to resist.

Because somewhere in the back of your mind is the nagging feeling that if you can somehow lay bare the error of their ways, convince them of their wrongheadedness, and get them to say "uncle," then all will be well.

But it isn't true.

You see, what you need is not more focus on difficult students. **What you need . . . is less.**

You need a wide open perspective that includes all students equally. You need to take a step back and allow your [rules and consequences](#) to step in and replace in total *all* your efforts to try and change them.

In practice, you would no longer glare in their direction, engage them in discussion about their behavior, or allow your mind to wander into negativity.

You would no longer fixate on them, waste energy on them, or spend any more time on them than you would any other student.

**You would accept them for who they are.**

At first this may be a challenge, especially if you've grown accustomed to devoting an unequal amount of attention to them. But very quickly, within days, it won't be so difficult.

And here's the amazing thing.

When you stop focusing on individual students, and instead allow your classroom management plan to do its job, you'll discover that they no longer have the power to get under your skin.

Not only that, but soon after you begin using this disengagement strategy, a surprising thing will happen. One day out of the clear blue sky you'll find yourself smiling at them. Warm and genuine.

You'll find yourself enjoying them, seeing the best in them, and appreciating their uniqueness.

You'll discover that they're just a child, that they never really had any malicious intent, and that perhaps your imagination got the better of you. You'll wonder why you ever felt the way you did.

You'll also be free, gloriously free, to talk to them, laugh with them, and [build rapport with them](#) – with no strings attached.

**They too, will be changed.** No longer will they see you coming and gird themselves for battle. No longer will they resent you or *try* to push your buttons or pull you into their spinning orbit.

No longer will they take personally your accountability, but instead realize that breaking rules is entirely on them and therefore their responsibility.

Before long they'll begin admiring you and wanting to be around you.  
They'll listen to you. They'll be eager to please you and behave for you.

This is no pie-in-the-sky scenario. It's true and it's real.

And it works every time.

With every student.

No matter how annoying they may seem at the moment.