



## How To Help Difficult Students Who Act Out Due To Emotional Turmoil

Many difficult students behave the way they do because they've experienced – and often continue to experience – emotional turmoil associated with a deplorable home life.

Verbal and physical abuse, poverty, neglect, drug and alcohol use in the home, and other sources of emotional pain and trauma can cause them to act out in school. The anger they feel, the loss of control, the unfairness, the confusion and frustration . . . these churning and roiling feelings they can't outrun spill out in torrents of silliness, cruelty, defiance, and disrespect.

Sadly, when they walk into many classrooms, what they find makes matters worse. Without a solid understanding of effective classroom management, it's only natural for teachers to fall into hurtful methods like yelling, scolding, and lecturing that only add to their internal chaos.

Throw in inconsistency, vague expectations, and a stressful room environment, and difficult students have precious little chance of improving their behavior or healing the scars they so demonstratively carry with them.

To reach them, your classroom must be a shelter in the midst of the storm. It must be a place that makes sense, that settles frayed and tattered nerves, that provides a sanctuary of grace, peace, and truth in an often ugly world.

It starts with a clean, organized room environment – which is a physical representation of the order and control so many difficult students don't have at home. It has a calming effect that makes them feel safe and valued. Done right, their shoulders will drop when they enter your classroom, their very seat becoming a refuge.

To affect both academic and behavioral progress, building and maintaining rapport and a trusting relationship is key. Your steadfast refusal to take their misbehavior personally. Your pleasant demeanor and calm presence. Your humor, your smiles, and your decision to see only the best in them.

These simple actions tear down walls and cause them to want to please you and get to know you better, which in turn gives you powerful leverage to influence their behavior.

When they do act out you must be able to hold them accountable without causing friction or resentment. To that end, your classroom management plan must be your only source of accountability. Finger-wagging lectures, dressing downs, sarcastic remarks, and other signs of taking misbehavior personally only work against you and add to their emotional pain.

Letting your plan do its job, however, without your judging input, frees them to accept responsibility while allowing your relationship to remain strong – both of which have wonderful restorative value.

Sharp routines, smooth transitions, and clear expectations of every minute of the school day keep your classroom moving forward and your students engaged and busy fulfilling the tasks and challenges you place before them. It's therapeutic to be lost in work, to have purpose thrumming throughout the day. And it's comforting to always know what is expected.

Shoring up these few basics of effective classroom management isn't difficult, for any teacher, and it will do wonders for you and your entire class. But for your most difficult students, sagging under the weight of a thousand hurts, it can be life changing.

Indeed, they may have great challenges at home. They may bring with them armloads of baggage. They may be sullen and angry and seemingly out of control. But they're not a lost cause. They're not just to be endured. They're not to be battled, resented, or put under your thumb.

Rather, with the right classroom management approach, they can begin to heal. They can begin to see themselves and their future in a different light. They may still carry pain in their heart, but if you can be a constant source of stability, purpose, and harmony in their life, they *will* do better.

They will enrich your classroom.

And they will thrive.

Also, I'll be taking next week off to enjoy Thanksgiving with family, but will be back with a new article on December 7th.