



How To Respond To An Angry Student

by Michael Linsin on October 3, 2015

It happens, often without warning.

A student becomes so angry they verge on losing control.

They fume and seethe. They glare and tear up. They turn dark crimson.

Sometimes we know the cause of their infuriation and other times we have no idea.

The worst mistake is trying to get to the bottom of it too soon. Asking why they're upset almost always makes matters worse.

It brings their frustration to boil and can trigger [a temper tantrum](#) or ugly outburst. So too can holding them accountable for any accompanying misbehavior.

It's best to wait until the student has forgotten the incident – sometimes hours later – before addressing the cause or enforcing a consequence.

In the meantime, there are three ways to help calm them down and hasten their return to normal.

1. Move on.

The sooner you move on with your lesson, the sooner the student will be able to move on as well.

Calmly pretending that nothing happened – or that what happened wasn't a big deal – will take the attention off the student and release the tension in the room.

One reason students stay angry is because they're embarrassed. They can't get past it because everyone is watching them. Only by leaving them alone and shifting attention back to you and your lesson will they be able to calm down.

2. Reassure.

A reassuring word from you can make a big difference. It's important, however, that it doesn't require any response from the student. In fact, it's best to speak to them on the fly. Lingering will only cause more embarrassment.

As for what to say, just let them know you're giving them time and not making any judgments. Cruise by their desk and say, "No worries, Karla, I understand. We'll take care of it later. I promise."

3. Encourage.

I've found this strategy to be especially effective with students on the brink of losing control, when it appears their anger is escalating. It has a way of giving them exactly what they need to hear.

Internally, angry students are battling for self-control. They're trying not to behave in the way that every fiber of their body is compelling them to. If you can encourage them to win this battle, they often do – and quickly.

"Hang in there, Luis. Be strong. Be of good courage (or be brave). You can do it." Oddly, they'll know exactly what you're talking about.

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Our normal inclination upon seeing an angry student is to [rush to their side](#). But in the immediate aftermath it's best to step back and widen your perspective.

Like a first-responder who calmly surveys a chaotic scene, take a look around you first. Ensure the safety of the rest of your class before worrying about the angry student.

Pause a moment and let your calmness and equanimity envelop your classroom. Your students will take their cue from you.

Only after establishing control and removing tension will you consider your options for helping the student overcome their difficult moment.

Only then will you approach and impart your nourishing words. Only then will you act with the compassion of someone who has been there.

Because we've all been there.

We've all been filled with anger and on the edge of losing our cool. And in those moments, what we need is not a lecture, not 20 questions, and not accountability.

What we need is an angel to speak into our hearts.