



## Why You Need A Good Relationship With Difficult Students

By Michael Linsin

Most teachers have a less-than positive relationship with difficult students – although it isn't always evident to those around them.

Indeed, the teacher may not yell, scold, or berate them in front of their classmates, but that doesn't mean there isn't resentment churning under the surface. It doesn't mean the teacher doesn't secretly hope they'd move out of the neighborhood.

Difficult students are accustomed to cold-war relationships with teachers. They're used to the quiet tension, the heavy sighs, and the obligatory smiles. They know when they're disliked or merely tolerated. The disconnect is palpable.

But to truly *change* their behavior, to eliminate disruptions, drama, and disrespect from your classroom, merely refraining from hurtful methods isn't enough. You must cultivate a harmonious relationship with them, one they'll come to appreciate and cherish.

Here's why:

**A good relationship provides leverage.**

If you don't have a favorable relationship with difficult students, if they're unhappy with you and dislike being in your classroom, then your ways and means of accountability aren't going to mean much to them. They just won't care.

Time-out means nothing to a student who resents their teacher. It means nothing if there isn't a clear difference in experience between being a valued member of your classroom and being separated from it.

The leverage you need to compel them to behave comes from [your likability](#) and general pleasantness. When they like you and trust you, they'll want to please you. This is the only surefire way to influence their behavior.

### **A good relationship softens the heart.**

Students don't listen to people they don't like. None of us do. If your words are to have any effect, if they're to matter and penetrate deep enough to make a difference, they must come from someone your students look up to.

Your steadfast refusal to let misbehavior get under your skin opens an initial line of communication. It frees the Gordian knot and makes building a good relationship possible. It makes them receptive to [your humor](#) and friendliness.

Difficult students *expect* you to glare at them. They expect sarcasm. They expect you to be like all the rest. They may even feel they deserve it. So when you roll into the picture offering kindness and forgiveness, it softens their heart and draws them like a magnet into your circle of influence.

## **A good relationship removes ugly labels.**

Your willingness to joke, to say hello, to look at them and smile, to bond over your mutual interests, to choose to like them – with no strings attached – proves to difficult students that they're wanted and welcome and have all the privileges that come with being a member of your classroom.

This is a powerful message most difficult students have never received. It's a message that profoundly impacts how they view themselves and their world. You see, difficult students are weighed down by highly impressionable labels like *behavior problem*, *goof-off*, and *troublemaker*.

They have an irresistible inclination to fulfill those labels, to become what is reinforced day after day. But when they're treated like everyone else, those ugly labels begin to slide off their shoulders. They lift and scatter like a dense fog reveals a sunny day.

And once difficult students begin to feel like everyone else, once their identity shifts from the margins of your classroom to Grade-A stamped and approved member, they begin behaving like everyone else.

## **It's Starts With You**

Having a good relationship with difficult students is a choice you make that is 100% in your power to control. But it must come from you first. It must be pure altruism, with zero expectation of receiving anything in return.

Which means that you may very well endure [hurtful disrespect](#) in the beginning. You may endure silliness, shunning rudeness, and even cruel behavior. You may have to swallow hard and remind yourself of your mission and why you really became a teacher.

You have to make a daily commitment that no matter how egregious the misbehavior, you *will not* take it personally. After all, it's coming from a hurt and confused child. It's coming from a boy or girl who desperately needs you to step forward, grab their hand, and lead them out of the mire.

But once you get through this stage, you'll have an opportunity few teachers have had before you. You'll have an opportunity to make a mark that will endure long after they leave your classroom.

You'll have an opportunity to climb through the rubble, walk unchallenged past their defenses, and speak in both word and example directly into their heart.

You'll have an opportunity to make a true connection.

And change their life.