



Suggestions for Working With Challenging Students

“Children are our future, and we should strive to do the best that we can for them. We must be our children’s best advocates. We must have faith in all children. When our children see that we do believe in them, the sky is the limit. Teachers and parents make it possible for children to dream and set goals for themselves. There is no career, in my opinion, as noble as the teaching profession. We shape the minds of our children for tomorrow. As stated by Aristotle, “Those that know, do. Those that understand, teach.” [384-322 BC].

1. **Vision:** How important it is to have vision for your students! We all know that no one rises to low expectations; therefore you must set your expectations high for all of your students. I always try to encourage all of my students by letting them know that I believe in them. Sure they may need some help along the way. Sure they may stumble and fall; but offer them a helping hand by allowing opportunities for them to see that they can achieve what may have seemed to them impossible. “Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.” Jonathan Swift
2. **Goals:** One of the first things I do at the beginning of each semester is I have the students write a five paragraph essay stating their goals for the year. When students put their goals in writing, they have a higher probability of achieving them. The students’ essays remain hanging in the room as a reminder throughout the semester. “A man without a goal is like a ship without a rudder.” Thomas Carlyle
3. **Character:** Posted in the classroom is a poster that I have made with the character traits that we as teachers are responsible for teaching our students. I have each trait defined and it is the focal point of the room. When students break rules, I shift classroom discussion to the character traits. We discuss which trait could have prevented the broken rules. We discuss how character evolves through life’s experiences. “Character is a long-standing habit.” Plutarch
4. **Active Learners:** I am an advocate of Edgar Dale’s Cone of Learning (1969), which emphasizes engaging students in the learning process as opposed to being a passive learner. This practice enables children to interact socially, and it gives them the opportunity to solve problems and work cooperatively. Since it is the school’s responsibility to prepare children with the skills necessary for living and becoming productive members of society, it is essential that children be involved physically with hands-on activities, for children learn best by being actively involved in the learning process. “Our life is composed greatly from dreams, from the unconscious, and they must be brought into connection with action. They must be woven together.” Anais Nin
5. **Kindness:** When I asked students at the beginning of the school year to share with me the one trait that they admired most in teachers, kindness was the overwhelming response. “Too often we

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continued

underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” Leo F. Buscaglia “Kindness is a language, which the deaf can hear, and the blind can read” Mark Twain

6. **Understanding:** While meeting and greeting students at the door as they arrive to class I am able to gain an acute understanding of the students’ moods through facial expressions as well as their body language. This is an opportunity to diffuse situations before they erupt like a tinderbox. “Understanding human needs is half the job of meeting them.” Adlai E. Stevenson
7. **Respect:** I find that when I treat my students in a respectful manner, they are willing to do what I ask of them. Respect does not just happen with challenging students. Respect must first be earned. When they see their teacher acting in a respectful manner, they give it back in return. “The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.” Ralph Waldo Emerson
8. **Caring:** Getting to know challenging students on a personal level is essential for building a positive rapport with them. When students see you making an effort to learn about them, they know that you care. When they know that you care, often they will give you some insight to where they are coming from. “To lead yourself, use your head; to lead others, use your heart.” John Maxwell
9. **Model:** It is essential to be a role model for your students. Even the most challenging students will try their hardest when they see you leading others by setting examples through your actions. “Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means.” Albert Einstein
10. **Cooperative Learning Groups:** I find that there is one tip that helps me achieve all of the other tips mentioned above: that is setting up cooperative learning groups in your classroom. I spend a lot of time at the beginning of the school year establishing cooperative learning groups. The students learn what each role is responsible for and they help one another very nicely. Most importantly they interact with students they might not necessarily work with otherwise as well as learn how to work together as a team. “All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work.” Calvin Coolidge

“Challenging students need to have teachers with never ending faith to truly believe that each student can be successful. Inspiring these students can be the most fulfilling aspect of teaching that you may ever need to keep the ebb and flow of your career.”





As a struggling student, please consider the following:

C all on me when you know I know the answer.

H ave a big heart.

A lways encourage me.

L eave me alone when I am not pleasant.

L et me know that you care.

E ngage my mind with positive role models.

N ever give up on me.

G ive yourself a break.

I nsults are never welcome.

N ewcast my success.

G ive me your best.

As a struggling student, know that I am:

S pecial

T ender at heart

U npredictable

D own hearted

E asily discouraged

N oncompliant, nonchalant at times.

T ermporamental

S ensitive in ways you often may not see.