



ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH, INC

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STRATEGIES TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH

DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

Developed by Nate Terrell, LCSW and Anita Foeman, Ph.D.

- 1) Develop caring and trusting relationship with all students so that you have the credibility necessary to positively impact their behaviors, attitudes, etc. Students have an uncanny ability to sense how teachers feel about them and reflect this perception in their behavior.
- 2) Figure out what disruptive students are attempting to communicate through their behavior and help them find more effective ways to express and/or meet their needs for power, safety, fun, freedom and belonging.
- 3) Focus on discipline which teaches students how they can improve their behavior and connects them to adults rather than punishment which may work in the short run, but generally does not change behavior over the long term because it reinforces a failure identity and leads students to feel shame, anger, etc.
- 4) Understand the desperation cycle students experience and learn how adults can intervene to end it.
- 5) Nip inappropriate behaviors or conflicts in the bud before they escalate.
- 6) Never do anything which causes students to feel put down, shamed or cornered such as criticizing, yelling, threatening, etc. These strategies may work in the short run, but backfire in the long run because of their toxic emotional impact.
- 7) Always remain calm and develop the ability to “go to the balcony” when confronted by challenging student behaviors to assess the situation and figure out the most effective response.
- 8) Do not engage in power struggles that usually escalate student anger, disrespect, etc. and put them in a no-win situation. Instead, give students viable choices that build their sense of self-control and mastery.
- 9) If possible, isolate students who are behaving inappropriately or experiencing conflict since they may be trying to impress their peers with their angry words, toughness, etc. Students usually calm down in the context of one-on-one discussion with an adult who is willing to listen.
- 10) Disarm disruptive students by responding to them in a calm manner, agreeing with any valid points they are making, saying something unpredictable, etc.

- 11) Allow upset students ample time to “cool off” when they are upset. Understand that they may be unable to engage in effective dialogue or problem-solving when they are in a reactive, “fight or flight” mode.
- 12) “Change the game” by pointing out to disruptive students how their behavior is not working for them or you.
- 13) Persuade disruptive students to get “on the same side” with you against the problem.
- 14) Collaboratively develop an effective “game plan” with disruptive students which enables them to improve their behavior, resolve the problems they are having, achieve their goals, etc.
- 15) Teach students strategies they can use to achieve internal self-regulation when they begin to feel out of control such as visualizing a peaceful place or favorite activity, taking deep breaths or removing themselves from the situation.
- 16) Develop creative and natural consequences to help students who behave inappropriately such as having apologize to anyone they mistreated or write an essay about how they intend to improve their behavior.
- 17) Teach students how to use cognitive strategies to identify and change the thoughts, beliefs, etc. which may be creating their inappropriate behaviors or conflicts.
- 18) Use role-play to teach students effective social, anger management and conflict resolution skills.
- 19) Help students understand how they will benefit from improving their behavior, resolving conflicts more effectively, etc.
- 20) When students have seriously violated the rights of others, implement restorative justice to create a forum within which victims can describe how they have been hurt, perpetrators can take full responsibility for their inappropriate actions and all the parties involved can agree on how amends can be made and justice can be served.
- 21) Teach students about the consequences of not changing their behaviors, attitudes, etc. in the immediate and/or long term future.

