

Chapter 38

Building Positive Student and Teacher Relationships With Restorative Practice

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ABSTRACT

When there is a lack of a positive student-teacher relationships, students struggle with their behavior, motivation, and academics. When a teacher has a negative relationship with their students, their students disengage from the classroom and begin to question why school is an important component in their life. Creating a positive student-teacher relationship is a necessary component for an early-career teacher to make. When an early-career teacher works to create meaningful relationships with their students, their students show improvement with behavior, motivation, and academics. This chapter highlights how positive student-teacher relationships bring out the best in students and provides a research-based program that has shown positive results in transforming the classroom climate to a positive, safe environment because of positive relationships.

BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

It is Monday, and students are starting to file into the classroom. The teacher stands at the door, welcoming kids into the classroom. The students enter the classroom and quietly prepare for the day, except for Johnny. Johnny walks into the classroom with a bad attitude, throwing his backpack around, running into desks as students try to work, and refusing to prepare for the day. The teacher decides to ignore Johnny and let him be, thinking he can bring himself out of it. As the teacher begins whole group instruction, Johnny starts to act out, interrupting the lesson. This behavior is the third time Johnny has disrupted the classroom environment. The teacher decides to send Johnny to the office in hopes the instruction does not get interrupted again. Johnny is out of the classroom for the rest of the morning, missing multiple lessons, and not having any opportunity to speak for himself.

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In this scenario, the teacher displayed zero-tolerance in the classroom by sending Johnny to the office without addressing Johnny's needs. When teachers display zero-tolerance as a means for classroom management, teachers promote disrespect and distrust with students who struggle to make appropriate choices in the classroom (i.e., being respectful, kind, and empathetic) by ignoring the behavior instead of addressing it through conversation.

This chapter discusses how positive teacher and student relationships can significantly impact students' academic success at the elementary and secondary. When early-career teachers take the time to create a positive relationship with their students, it substantially affects the classroom climate. When early career teachers take the time to develop positive relationships, it begins a domino effect. Students begin to show improvement with their behavior, increase their motivation, and increase their grades. This chapter brings to light these impacts and explains how a tool like restorative practice creates an atmosphere in which students and early career teachers excel.

The Problem: When Positive Relationships are Lacking

Students who continuously get removed from the classroom tend to feel rejected by others around them, which leads to hating their peers and teachers (Beck & Malley, 2003). All too often, disruptive students do not have a positive relationship with their teachers and peers. The lack of a positive relationship mostly stems from the lack of time students spend in the classroom because they spend more time in the office, completing busywork and missing meaningful interaction with their teachers and peers. Beck and Malley (2003) explain that children do not lack the skills needed to succeed academically, but, instead, "feel detached, alienated, and isolated from others and from the educational process" (p. 1). Zero-tolerance policies have created this feeling of alienation in students because it secludes students and pulls them away from the classroom environment. With zero-tolerance, teachers do not build positive relationships with their students, which is needed to give struggling students the opportunity to succeed.

González (2012) explains that the more teachers remove students from the classroom, the more decline teachers see in the student's academic involvement and a decline in the relationship. This decline brings negative attitudes towards the educational experience. When not approached in a specific way, disruptive behaviors become a vicious cycle that does not improve through zero-tolerance policies and only causes a distant relationship between students and teachers. Claessens et al. (2017) found that when teachers approached students about disruptive behavior, and there was a negative relationship, those students would react to the redirection with objection and confrontation, in which the teacher would respond in the same way. This distant relationship fuels the path for a negative attitude regarding the teacher and the school environment. Early-career teachers experience challenges when working with students who possess a negative attitude towards education. Gonzalez (2012) explains how exiling students increases "the potential for separation, resentment, and recidivism" (p. 300). When students feel separation, resentment, and recidivism with their teacher, there is no room for positive relationships with peers and teachers. Instead, early career teachers need to work to make meaningful relationships with their students, especially those who struggle with their behavior.

The Power of Positive Relationships in the Classroom

Creating positive relationships with students is an essential step for teachers to take at the start of every new year. Often, the school becomes "the last bastion of hope where children can experience positive

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