

SURVIVAL SHEETS™ #1

Establish Strong Student-Teacher Relationships

OVERVIEW

Strong, appropriate relationships make nearly every other part of teaching easier. When students trust you, classroom management improves and instruction goes more smoothly. Trust comes from consistency and genuine care, and it disappears when adults are inconsistent, reactive, or fake.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING CHECKLIST

A good teacher doesn't need to do all of these to build quality relationships. Any combination of them will help.

- **Greet students at the door by name.** Start each day by welcoming every student as they enter.
- **Talk to students in informal moments.** When they're working independently – just go through and have normal human conversations. Some researchers call this the *2x10 strategy*: spend 2 minutes per day for 10 days in a row having personal conversations with students about their interests.
- **Be authentic and share your personality and life.** Share age-appropriate personal stories about yourself. But avoid oversharing.
 - Knowing that you play video games and enjoy *Star Wars* can build relationships. Knowing that you are considering a divorce is TMI.
- **Learn and use student names.** Learn how to pronounce their names accurately and use them often.
- **Give students chances to express themselves.** Ask them to tell you about their likes/dislikes and how they spend their personal time. And when they tell you, listen.
- **Avoid multitasking when a student is talking to you.** You may need to reply to that email or grade that paper – but don't do it when the student is trying to build a relationship with you.
- **Follow through.** Do what you say you'll do. Follow-through is absolutely essential.
- **Give authentic feedback.** Students want to hear *your* reaction, not an AI's. Using AI to make things easier is fine; overreliance is inauthentic and will hurt your relationship.
- **Correct privately.** There is more on this in Survival Sheet #8, but public correction is a relationship destroyer.
- **Repair after conflict.** Sometimes even the best teacher makes mistakes. Apologize one-on-one and move on. Repairing involves a short conversation – it does not mean backing down or ignoring boundaries.

TIPS/TRICKS

- **Be yourself.** Kids (especially adolescents) are quick to spot inauthenticity.
- **Respect students' personalities and interests.** You won't always like what they like. That's okay but keep it positive. It works to say, "I prefer dogs to cats," but "I hate cats" alienates all the cat lovers.
- **Give relationships time to develop.** Trust is built through consistency over time.
- **Don't confuse being liked with being trusted.** Students can enjoy you and still not respect you.
- **Choose strategies that you can use consistently.** The checklist above consists of tools, not requirements. If something feels forced, it probably won't last.
- **Build relationships evenly.** Don't only work with the tough kids or the achievers. Make sure every student in your room receives similar amounts of your attention.