

Relational Strategies List

The following presents strategies, behaviors and pedagogies that have been found to encourage students to enter into a positive learning relationship. The effectiveness of these strategies is based upon a teacher's personality and teaching style. What works for one teacher may not work for another. Yet, research (Reichert & Hawley, 2014) has shown that these strategies can be learned and improved upon.

Strategies for Building Positive Learning Relationships with Students

Student Centered Instruction – “You Have Value”

1. Discussion based instruction (Harkness Table, etc.)
2. Inquiry based activities (science labs, etc.)
3. Adapting class material to be relatable or pertinent to students (like dating issues and Romeo/Juliet).
4. Modifying lessons/methods in response to student performance and appraisals.
5. Games/contests/performance (creating poetry, performing a play students wrote, etc.)
6. Always respectfully address students at all times. Role model for students the behavior you want them to demonstrate.
7. Greet/exchange words with each student every day.
8. Be sensitive that your class is not the only obligation a student has each day.

Clear Expectations – “I Want You to Succeed”

1. Teacher role models the learning process (reads assigned passages, memorizing same material, does the assignment, writes part of their own paper, etc.)
2. Provides a clear study guide or instruction on to prepare for an assessment. A rubric or another example is shared to provide students a clear understanding what is expected.
3. An organized syllabus showing the course of study. This would include any online bulletin boards which would have resources such as homework or other information.
4. Assessments should not have surprises or have material not covered or assigned as part of the class.

High Expectations – “I Believe You Have Great Potential”

1. Teacher being well prepared and using all of class time effectively. Students need to be held accountable to produce in a firm and fair manner.
2. Students should be challenged by a project/paper to go beyond their comfort zone. This creates a tension/anxiety relational teachers take into account and provide support/admonishment that the student can do it. *Challenge without overwhelming.*
3. Classroom management needs to be strong. The teacher must create an environment where students know the expectation is to learn. There should be a clear set of behavioral expectations.
4. Maintaining a standard and showing mastery of the subject material.

Teacher Authenticity – “I Enjoy Teaching You”

1. Sharing personal experiences/stories that relate to material covered in class.
2. A teacher sharing their passion for their subject and their story of how they became a teacher.
3. Reaching out and meeting a student's need.
4. Locating and cultivating a common interest (cars, TV shows, favorite books, hobbies, sports)
5. Attending an extra-curricular event the student is a participant (sports, play, etc.)
6. Collaborating with students to develop a unique and novel way to learn material (Old West, monopoly, Star Trek or any current social trend that would capture their interest).
7. Showing vulnerability (acknowledging a mistake, showing appreciation for a student's success, listening to a student's challenges and being present and supportive for them).
8. Accommodating a certain level of opposition (“don't sweat the small stuff”).
9. Being available and initiating individual help and counsel.

Avoiding Relational Breakdowns List (The DO List)

1. DO be respectful to students. Address them properly, compliment when appropriate and treat them how you want them to treat you.
2. DO be motivated and prepared to teach your class. Your students need to come first.
3. DO be attentive to student needs. Your class material is important, but a student in crisis is more important.
4. DO be proactive in helping a student when you have the time/ability to do so. Make the extra effort.
5. DO encourage your student with praise or and don't hold grudges. Every day is a new day.
6. DO have good classroom management skills. You need to effectively manage your classroom.
7. DO prepare engaging lessons where the student and the teacher interact.
8. DO be clear in your communication with students. Deadlines, due dates, assignments all need to be understood.
9. DO communicate and role model a culture of inclusivity in your classroom.
10. DO use class time effectively.

Signs of a Relational Breakdown

The signs below are often seen or heard but are not always considered within a relational context. We have placed them here for you to consider them as symptoms to a core issue a teacher may not consider – the health of the teacher-student relationship.

When a student:

1. Can't or isn't learning material consistently.
2. Intimidated into silence and doesn't participate.
3. Isn't connecting with the teacher anymore, not on the same page.
4. Is becoming more of a problem each day.
5. Is apathetic, makes excuses and careless, reckless rationalizations ("the teacher's out to get to me").

When a teacher:

1. Is at the end of their rope ("I just don't know what to do anymore").
2. Is becoming more and more angry/frustrated every day.
3. Finds themselves dealing with outrageous and irrational excuses/rationalizations frequently.
4. Finds themselves reflecting often about interactions with the student and feeling guilty/regretful they can't be more effective with the student.

Keys to Transforming Broken Relationships (Shift in Thinking)

Research (Reichert & Hawley, 2014) was conducted with over 600 teacher and 600 students from 30 different schools concerning relational breakdowns. Below are traits found in situations when the broken relationship was repaired.

1. Determining to do something about. Doing more than just writing up the student or reporting them to school administration.
2. Extending themselves beyond required classroom protocols in order to better get to know and understand the student (i.e., attending the student's games or performances, arranging individual meetings and help sessions outside of class, initiating contact with parents, other teachers, and guidance or learning specialists).
3. Being willing to make **multiple, repeated efforts** to reach the student in order to establish easy communication and trust, even when such efforts involved altering or discarding earlier approaches to establishing the relationship.
4. Appreciating that some students have adopted unfortunate, often unconscious and self-defeating postures in relation to schools and teacher. Realize they are demonstrating the life skills they have learned that works for them at home and other places.
5. Realizing that, with such students, a focus on schoolwork and compliance with school norms and expectations only elicits stronger resistance and self-defeat.
6. Focusing first on non-scholastic matters, to build relational capital, and creating a relational context in which the student might come to recognize and lay more conscious claim to his own will to succeed.
7. Reflecting on and rising above their own reactions in order to position themselves more strategically in the relationship. Seek out help from others (peers, parents, coaches) that is positive.