

Create a climate for learning

One of the most important things a new teacher must learn is how to create a climate for learning. This is both an attitude and a skill.

An effective teacher is a leader, not a boss—someone who can motivate students and show them why it's in their best interest to learn. The day-to-day reality, however, is that you're also coping constantly with minor annoyances, squabbles and other disturbances. How do you create and maintain a positive learning environment?

Experts agree that prevention is the key. Try these tips from your colleagues:

- **Create a supportive classroom.** Be approachable. Let students get to know you by sharing something about yourself, your family and your pets. Notice and acknowledge students; let them know that you care about them, respect them and believe they can succeed.
- **Be aware.** Good teachers know what's going on in the classroom at all times, so they can anticipate trouble and head it off—a quality sometimes referred to as “eyes in the back of your head.” Arrange your classroom to make this possible.
- **Structure the time in your class.** Students need a predictable schedule to feel safe. Start each class with an attention-grabber, such as a word of the day, trivia question or math problem— whatever enhances your curriculum.
- **Try to minimize students' frustration levels.** The most important behavior intervention may be an academic one. One of the best methods of ensuring a positive classroom climate is a well-structured, engaging lesson plan. Arrange lessons so that students can succeed if they work at it. Allow them to choose ways to satisfy the requirements of your class. You may eliminate many frustrations that lead to disruptive behavior.
- **Teach study skills along with subject matter.** Many students do not know how to study, develop an outline or use a reference book, and their frustration can boil over into behavior problems. Intentionally teaching these skills is a way to help experience academic success – which prevents frustration. For example, you might review graph-reading techniques and charting procedures in math or note-taking techniques in other subjects.
- **Give students specific ways to ask you for help.** Some students aren't comfortable asking you in front of the entire class. Others don't know any alternatives to yelling or interrupting. Arrange for students to give you a signal when they need help, such as putting a book on the corner of their desk or let them know they can meet with you briefly after class.
- **Be the one in charge. Students want you to be the adult, not the buddy.** They don't want you to tolerate disruptive behavior. Let each student know it is his or her responsibility to control his or her behavior. A good way to do this is model the positive behaviors—respect, empathy, engagement—you want to see in your students.



- **Know your stuff and admit when you don't.** The better you know your subject and pedagogy, the better your students will respond to your teaching. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and try to find the answer if it's relevant to the class. Admitting you don't know something models continuous learning – and it shows students it's OK to not know something.
- **Dress for success.** If you present a professional appearance, you'll get more respect from students, parents, administrators and colleagues.

Resources for new teachers

- Why Didn't I Learn This in College?
Second Edition, Paula Rutherford
Just ASK Publications, 2009
- The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher
Harry K. Wong and Rosemary T. Wong
Harry K. Wong Publications, 2009
- Classroom Management, www.nea.org/tools/ClassroomManagement.html
- Classroom Tips, www.aft.org/sites/default/files/ct-behaviormgmt0310.pdf
- Tools and Ideas, www.nea.org/home/ToolsAndIdeas.html
- Share My Lesson, www.sharemylesson.com
- TeacherTube, www.teachertube.com
Share classroom ideas, videos, docs, audio and photos.
- The Teaching Channel, www.teachingchannel.org
Lesson plans, tips, strategies and teacher videos.
- PBS Teachers, www.pbslearning.org