**The 7 Rules Of Handling Difficult Students**

If you’re like most teachers, two or three students take up most of your time.

On the days when they’re absent, or pulled from your class, everything goes smoothly.

Teaching is more fun. You’re more relaxed. And you can cruise through your lessons without interruption.

Hooray!

But when they’re sitting in class, which seems like *all* the time, they can make you want to pull your hair out.

Unfortunately, the frustrations you feel dealing with difficult students can cause you to make mistakes.

The following is a list of 7 rules–all don’ts–that will help you avoid the most common pitfalls, and turn your most difficult students into valued members of your classroom.

**Rule #1: Don’t question.**

It’s normal for teachers to force explanations from difficult students as a form of accountability. But [asking why and demanding a response](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2010/03/27/classroom-management-mistake/) from them almost always ends in resentment. And angry students who dislike their teacher never improve their classroom behavior.

**Rule #2: Don’t argue.**

When you argue with difficult students, it puts them on equal footing with you, creating a “your word against theirs” situation. This negates the effects of accountability. It also opens the floodgates: everybody will be arguing with you.

**Rule #3: Don’t lecture, scold, or yell.**

Lecturing, scolding, and yelling will cause *all* students to dislike you, but when you direct your diatribe toward one particular student, it can be especially damaging. Creating friction between you and your most challenging students virtually guarantees that their behavior will worsen.

**Rule #4: Don’t give false praise.**

Teachers often shower difficult students with praise for doing what is minimally expected. But because these students can look around at their fellow classmates and know that it’s a sham, false praise doesn’t work. Instead, give only [meaningful, heartfelt praise](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2010/11/27/how-to-praise-students-and-influence-behavior/) based on true accomplishment.

**Rule #5: Don’t hold a grudge.**

“Every day is a new day” should be your mantra with difficult students. They need to know that they have a clean slate to start each day–and so do you. To that end, say hello, smile, and let them know you’re happy to see them first thing every morning.

**Rule #6: Don’t lose your cool.**

When you let students get under your skin and you lose emotional control, even if it’s just a sigh and an eye roll, you become less effective. Your likeability drops. Classroom tension rises. And when difficult students discover they can push your buttons, they’ll try as often as they can.

**Rule #7: Don’t ignore misbehavior.**

Given that there is an audience of other students, ignoring misbehavior will not make it go away. It will only make it worse. Instead, follow your classroom management plan as it’s written. If a difficult student breaks a rule, [no matter how trivial](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2009/06/18/broken-windows-theory-and-classroom-management/), enforce it immediately.

**It’s About Relationships**

What if the two or three (or more) difficult students in your classroom admired you? What if they looked up to you, respected you, trusted you, and liked being in your company?

What if they embraced whatever you had to say to them?

Your success in helping them change their behavior would go through the roof, and you’d have peace in your classroom. The fact is, everything hinges on your ability to build relationships with your students.

Your classroom management plan merely nudges them in the right direction. Done correctly, it gets students to look inward, to self-evaluate, and to feel the weight of their transgressions. But by itself, it can only do so much.

It’s your relationship with your students that makes the greatest difference.

When you build trusting rapport with them, [which anyone can do](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2010/10/09/classroom-management-is-easy/), you then possess a tidal wave of influence that can change their behavior, improve their academic performance, and profoundly impact their lives.