



# Teacher Relationships

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The Verdadera staff encourages you to discuss and explore the issues and stories, as the publication aims not only to offer an outlet for expression, but to improve our lives. Keep in mind that the emotions that flow through the text and the feelings behind the words could be those of your child, your classmate, or your best friend.

## Things to Consider:

- How has my teacher impacted my life?
- What kind of presence do I have in my teacher's class?
- What kind of perception do I have of my teacher? How do I think he/she perceives me?
- What do I do if I think my teacher and I are having misunderstandings? How do I fix it?

## STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

FOR as long as I can remember, there has been this one teacher that I have hated. I had him my junior year for math (I hate math!!) and I knew that I was doomed from the start. He was a really hard teacher and since I was laid back all of the time, we didn't get along at all. Every time he graded my test, he would always take off points on super trivial things. I mean, why would anyone take off 5 points, just because my line wasn't straight enough?! So, my frustration started to build up. I didn't want to confront him, knowing that if I did, he might grade even harder (is that even possible?) Either way, I tolerated him and his class till the end of the school year. However on the last day of class, I mustered up the courage to go up to him and

ask him why. And since it was the last day, he finally gave me an answer. He said, "You have potential. You truly do. Just work harder, and you'll go places." I remember being absolutely stunned at what he had said. He didn't hate me as I thought he had the whole year. In fact, he pushed me to be better, to constantly strive for more. At that moment, I knew that I didn't really hate him either. All this time, I was just afraid to come out of my comfort zone, and to push myself to the limit. Now, as a graduating senior, I sometimes go to his room and chat to him. Although I had hated him before, I now respect him for doing what I couldn't do all these years: strive for more.

**“It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.”**

**– Albert Einstein**

I have always been a shy person; I never talk much with anyone besides my friends. So whenever teachers say that a student should ask questions if they need help, I shy away from doing so. It's weird, you know, going up to a teacher and admitting that you didn't understand a concept. It makes it seem as if you're dumb and just don't get anything. But, ever since I went to my Bio class, I realized how wrong I was. My teacher is great. She always helps me, and I know that I can always ask her for help. I remember one day when we were studying the structure of DNA. It was difficult for me to grasp the content quickly. So I stayed in during lunch to ask my teacher if she could help me. Having this one teacher really helped me adapt to the environment at Monta Vista. It was very difficult going from a very shy girl who never spoke to her teachers, to a somewhat outgoing girl who can now ask teachers for their assistance. I think this is a common thing at Monta Vista. The teachers are always a bit intimidating at first, however you have to make sure that you know how to go and confront them, because the truth is that they are here to help us learn, succeed, and change for the better. It took some effort for me to take the first step, but I'm glad I took it. I'm much happier now than I was before, all thanks to this wonderful teacher I had my freshman year.

**“Every child should have a caring adult in their lives. And that's not always a biological parent or family member. It may be a friend or a neighbor. Often times it is a teacher.”**

**– Joe Manchin**

WHEN I found out that I had a certain teacher, I knew my gpa would be done for. I walked into that class with the mentality to expect the worst. I tried to drop down to a lower level, but the teacher would not let me. So, I was forced to suffer. Throughout that school year, I felt bad about myself and the confidence I had in my ability dwindled, as I found out that I was basically at the bottom of my class. I ended up hating my teacher for ruining my gpa. I was happy to never ever see him again when the year ended. Or so I thought. This year, I found out that I would be in their class again for a higher level course. I talked to my counselor about trying to get out of the class, but she convinced me to give it another shot. I am glad I made

that decision. I have gained this newfound respect for him. Perhaps it's because it is one of the easier classes. But I really got a sense of the kind of person he is after being in a more relaxed environment. The way he teaches, caters to the students and our needs. He makes class entertaining with his constant jokes and hilarious stories. He is the kind of teacher that gets to know his students on a more personal level, and that is something I admire a lot in a teacher. Even after all of the hardship that his class has caused me, I am happy to say that he is actually one of my favorite teachers.

**“A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning.”**

**– Brad Henry**

MOST people walk in to their classrooms, sit down, and leave when the bell rings. The amount of contact they have with their teachers is practically nonexistent. However, I have always been a little bit different. As long as I can remember, I walk in and say "Good morning!" and ask them how they are doing and then say "Have a good day! Take Care" as I am walking out. I have found that my teachers have played a huge role in my ability to shape who I am. A teacher's personality comes out through their teaching style and I am often inspired by the teachers here. Their endless passion and dedication to contributing to our society through the medium of education is inspiring. For me, as I shape myself into who I want to be, I find myself wanting to be more and more like my teachers and mentors.

As someone who has a learning disability, it is necessary for me to advocate for myself. This was difficult for me to acknowledge but my teachers stood up for me. They acknowledged that I didn't learn conventionally and that our relationship needed to shift to become more personal. Since then, every teacher I have had I have had the pleasure of having a personal relationship with. I genuinely appreciate their presence in my life and their willingness to help me learn and grow in the way that I need to. Our teachers help us towards being the future and I could not be more grateful for the experiences I have had with mine.

**“The dream begins with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you to the next plateau.”**

**– Dan Rather**

I don't understand my teachers. Last year, I had gone to my math teacher's room to ask a question about homework. When he showed me the steps to do the problem, I became even more confused. He had just showed me his method of approaching the problem and then left me all by my own to do it. I was frustrated, extremely frustrated when I walked out. I believe that teachers should have a more understanding approach with students and teach them in a friendly manner so they understand. They must not let them solve their own problems rather they should frequently ask the students whether they understand the concepts. If this happens, I believe my relationship with teachers will be more cordial.

**“The one exclusive sign of thorough knowledge is the power of teaching.”**

– Aristotle

To be honest I don't think that most Monta Vista teachers really care. They're intelligent and I know they're good teachers (sometimes), but I don't think they really care about us as people. Who can blame them? teachers aren't parents. I understand that. But I can still remember going up to fifth grade teachers and telling them about how I thought I was stupid or that I couldn't find any friends, and they would always care and at least try to be wise or kind. now that I'm all grown up and I'm in a school with 2500 other kids, I don't feel like I can ever talk to my teachers. I don't even like to ask academic questions anymore because I'm just another face in the crowd, and so many teachers are irritated by questions even if they say “ask questions! be curious.”

My freshman geometry teacher didn't know my name until the last week of school. you get used to not being noticed or fighting for attention. I'm uncomfortable when I approach my teacher now, because I doubt if they really want to be here in a room of teenagers, trying to get us to shut up. and also because the idea of telling them about my life is just horrifying: it's funny how teachers are your best friends when you're in elementary school, especially for me. And now I don't know what to say around them. I have to keep myself in check because I think: maybe they'll have to write a rec letter for me one day and I have to be the good academic kid. I have to be the straight-laced MV kid all the time because that is what people expect, so every teacher exchange is just polite and “smart.” I miss the

days when teachers had enough time to have random conversations with you or when it was ok to talk to your teacher like a friend. Now, it's probably just me, but everything feels so rigid, and every class is just about grades and grades and kissing up. and then we turn around and complain about our teachers the way I imagine teachers complain about us. maybe it's just that as a teenager, adults are suddenly less cool, but I doubt that. I think that maybe MV teachers are just as jaded and busy as we are.

**More stories found at [www.mvhsverdadera.org](http://www.mvhsverdadera.org)**

# A WORD FROM THE PROFESSIONAL

Rayna Lombard, LMFT

Improving students' relationships with teachers has important positive and long-lasting implications in students' academic, emotional and social development. The focus in this article is to explore what is a healthy relationship between a student and a teacher, why it matters, and how to cultivate these supportive and caring relationships at school.

What does it mean to be an effective high school teacher? How do their different teaching methods and personalities impact students' academic performance, social/emotional development, and enjoyment of learning? Whether you're a math, science, social studies or English teacher, there are educational resources to help you apply research on teaching and learning; find exciting lessons and activities; and stimulate interest and increase achievement, enhancing teacher-student relationships. With incidents of bullying on the rise in middle school, it is especially important for students of all ages to feel comfortable enough to ask questions without feeling inadequate and talk about issues they are struggling with in class, at home or with their peers. People in general don't open up emotionally unless they feel they can TRUST their teacher, guidance counselor, school psychologist, outside therapist, parent or any other adult authority figure.

In general, students who have closer, more positive and supportive relationships with their teachers tend to attain higher levels of achievement and have better self-esteem than those students with negative attitudes toward learning and more conflictual relationships with teachers. When they feel an appropriate personal connection to a teacher, students are more likely to have ongoing, meaningful communication. In turn, those students tend to receive more guidance and encouragement from their teacher. When trust develops for a teacher, there's generally more involvement and enjoyment in academic learning, plus students display better classroom behavior.

Good teachers who also incorporate the roles of supportive mentoring or coaching with their students generally have less resistance to learning, absenteeism, disruption during class and more motivation, to succeed and enjoy learning. Since teachers and staff are the mature experts in the teacher-student relationship, they need to take the lead and be responsible for cultivating good relationships with their students. Positive, supportive teachers draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to succeed especially if the subject matter and their presentation is engaging, age appropriate, and academically challenging "enough." These teachers tend to focus more on relevant learning, applying the subject matter to real life rather than the attitude that standardized testing and high grades alone guarantee success in life. This approach deemphasizes and more practical problem-solving activities and applying classroom learning to real life situations that have relevance. There is more than just teaching to maximize test results and boosting the percentage of college attendance after graduation. Expecting all students to excel in highly competitive academic coursework leaves many bright students lost at school. More "holistic" hands on teaching methods and vocational studies usually have better results

even for more intellectually advanced students. Giving all students more choices in what they want to learn and how they best learn promotes more interest and excellence in education.

As you can imagine, people in general don't function as well when they are disrespected, criticized, pushed too hard or not feeling they matter. Teachers are more respected and well-liked when they understand students' individual learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic...), abilities, "processing and learning difficulties or "disabilities." Students who experience more anxiety, anger, hurt, and self-doubt when teachers (and parents) stress too much competitiveness, high grades and future career success need to learn how to protect themselves from negative communication and build their self-confidence. With the help of caring teachers that recognize innate intellectual interests, abilities and talents, students are more open to learning their lessons, in class and in life! Let's give our students a good reason to work hard and want to participate fully in fulfilling their potential to succeed!

Teachers fostering friendly, positive relationships with their students create classroom environments more conducive to learning and meeting students' developmental, emotional and academic needs. Being psychologically aware of what developmental stage high school students are going through bridges generational and hierarchical gaps in understanding what challenges individual students are dealing with. Anyone in a relationship with a high school student will find this information helpful.

### **Middle Adolescence, Approximately 14 – 18 years of age**

#### **Physical Development:**

- Puberty is completed
- Physical growth slows for girls, continues for boys

#### **Cognitive Development:**

- Continued growth of capacity for abstract thought
- Greater capacity for setting goals
- Interest in moral reasoning
- Thinking about the meaning of life

#### **Social-Emotional Development:**

- Intense self-involvement, changing between high expectations and poor self-concept
- Continued adjustment to changing body, worries about being normal
- Tendency to distance selves from parents, continued drive for privacy and independence
- Driven to make friends and greater reliance on them, popularity can be an important issue
- Feelings of love and passion

**Adapted from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent's Facts for Families. © 2008**

My intention is not to find fault with teachers or other important adults working closely with students. Ultimately students are responsible for doing their part in cultivating good relationships with teachers. By high school, even high achievers have internalized and exhibited some habitual problematic (painful) behavior patterns and negative thought processes. As young children we may have been exposed to being judged,

criticized, unsupported (“victimized”) or overly supported (“enabled”) at home and/or at school, *even if there was no harm intended*. As a result, we make negative core decisions (I’m not OK, not good enough, not worthy, unlovable, don’t deserve happiness....) affecting our self-esteem and behavior. Over time our relationship with ourselves (ruminating on internal unconscious negative thoughts) and in turn our relationships with other people become conflicted or non-existent. We are stuck in survival mode, not feeling like listening even when it would benefit us, not trust ourselves or others, and having sabotaging thoughts and behaviors that become our capital “T” Truth. We don’t understand why we aren’t happy with ourselves or about life. We may even become depressed, anxious, rebel or act out painful sabotaging behavior, abuse drugs/alcohol, become self-destructive or even dangerous.

What can students do to cultivate better relationships with themselves (their psychological/emotional foundation) and their teachers? Some Monta Vista High School students have “weighed in” wholeheartedly on this topic. These opinions and insights based on personal experiences may or may not resonate with other students, teachers, staff, counselors, psychotherapists and/or parents, but do provide us with valuable insights to open up discussions that hopefully will lead to cultivating better relationships between everyone involved. It is obvious that the Monta Vista High School Community in general promotes good teacher-student relationships and has recognized there is always room for improvement. The goal here is to create and thrive in an atmosphere of mutual respect, positive interactions, and academic excellence, even if that isn’t cool in some circles. I want to personally and professionally thank those students who were vulnerable enough to teach us what situations frustrate or upset you, what works for you, and what life lessons you are learning through your educational experiences.

According to the student entries on this subject, they feel most supported when they can drop in to talk to their teachers during tutorial or office hours. Asking questions in class may be uncomfortable for some, although asserting yourself in class is in general a good practice. In reality there really are no stupid questions. If you fear looking dumb or feeling embarrassed in class, you may be speaking up for ten other people in class who didn’t have the courage to ask for what they needed! If **you** show respect, are caring, and show gratitude toward others, you usually will receive the same response. Sometimes teachers don’t do or say what you want to hear. They may be hard on you or make “mistakes” that may personally affect your and your grades. Remember, teachers are people with feelings, too, are doing the best they can at the time, have challenges and problems to deal with on an every day basis. Your job as a student is to learn how to deal with real life through your high school experiences. Take advantage of finding positive solutions to deal with stressful situations and people, resolve resentments that are festering through forgiving yourself and others, and make the most out of the time you have there. Accept yourself where you are now, learn how to manage both your inner world and your interpersonal relationships, your LIFEWORK. Not only will you reap financial and social rewards, but also you will KNOW, FEEL and HAVE true fulfillment in your career and personal life, true success.

## About the Professional

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