

## Teaching tough kids in the classroom

Every teacher deals with at least one "tough kid" in his/her classroom. Maybe the student ignored your instructions or laughed at your attempts to utilize the classroom essential agreements steps. We all have at least one story to share, and for some of you, teaching a tough kid is a daily challenge. It seems that no matter what teaching techniques you try, nothing changes their behavior.

I've had my share of teaching some tough kids. Teaching these students pushed me to be a better educator and a more empathetic person. I would like to share some of the methods that have reduced misbehavior in my classroom.

### 1. Set the Tone

I strongly believe that a student's misbehavior in the past does not necessarily equate to future indiscretions. At the beginning of the school year, teachers talk to each other and ask questions. They inquire about who works well together, who should not sit next to each other... Not surprisingly, teachers would share the names of the same students that were their "tough kids." I look forward to having these students in my class instead of dreading it.

Usually during the first week of school, I would try to have individual conferences with these tough kids. I'd take this as an opportunity to clear the air and wipe the slate clean. Often, these students can feel disrespected because their teachers already have preconceived ideas about how they are the troublemakers. Explain that you respect them and have high expectations for them this year. Lay the foundation for the student's understanding that you believe in him or her, because you might be the only one who genuinely does.

### 2. Be a Mentor

Some of the toughest kids to teach come from very difficult home situations. Inconsistent housing, absentee parent(s), lack of resources, and violence are only a few examples of what some of these students have to face every day. When Kids are neglected at home they can act out in school to receive attention, good or bad.

Your role as a teacher is to help students develop academically and socially. Show them you care about them, not just their grades. Be empathic and proactive. The key to being a good mentor is to be positive, and available. One year with a great mentor can have a lasting, positive impact on a tough kid's life.

### 3. Connect

In general, tough kids don't have anyone encouraging them or taking an interest in their lives. Part of being a great mentor is your ability to connect with these kids. Have a real conversation with them about their future or dreams. Talk about their interests - music, movies, sports, food, friends, siblings, etc. Find a way to connect so they can relate to you. Show a genuine interest in what they have to say. Once you've made a positive connection and the student can trust you, you'd be surprised how fast they might open up to talking about anything in their lives.

### 4. Be prepared, expect it all!

Be trustworthy. Once students start to trust you, remind them that you believe in them even if they make a mistake. Explain that you're disappointed in their actions and that you know they can do better. Don't write them off. Tough kids are used to be dismissed as hopeless. Instead, show them that you care and are willing to work with them. Students might say things out of frustration or boredom they don't usually mean. Try to deal with their misbehavior in the classroom instead of sending them to the office. These are the moments when they need a positive mentor the most.

Students come from a variety of cultures and home environments and these 4 techniques that I mentioned barely scratch the surface of how you interact with difficult kids in your classroom.