

## Redirecting Behavior By Offering A Positive Challenge: A Classroom Example

“Everyone wants to be valued. Everyone wants to know that they are loved not because of what they do, but because of who they are.”

A positive challenge can be a powerful tool to redirect undesired or unproductive behavior that has become habitual or a distraction in the classroom. Learners often do not recognize the habit forming, and without intervention the behavior may continue or even progress to a total shutdown. The use of a positive challenge begins with building a relationship. As the relationship grows, both parties are able to call on each other to compromise toward a greater result.

Emotional strands are added to the relationship through:

- Conversations
- Support/Encouragement
- Listening to the concerns/complaints of the other.

Educators can draw upon these strands of the relationship to promote positive behavior and attitudes within the learners, resulting in a climate of respect.

In working with learners of a variety of ages and skill levels, there seems to be one consistent strand. Everyone wants to be valued. Everyone wants to know that they are loved not because of what they do, but because of who they are. Having this foundational belief, an educator can reach those who others would call unreachable. This tiny step can reap great rewards for both parties.

The following example explains the positive challenge approach.

Characters are renamed for confidentiality.

Teacher: Ms. Jones

Student: Jack

Jack was new to the area and to our school.. As per procedure, the principal brought him to our classroom to introduce him. Jack was predictably nervous just staring down at his shoes. I met him with a smile and a handshake, and told him I was anxious to learn about him and to share some activities the class would be experiencing over the next few weeks.

Our class attendant took over, also welcoming Jack with a smile and a handshake, and showed him where to sit. Our procedure for the class attendant was to see to the needs of our new member for the first day. They would sit together at lunch and the attendant would be available to introduce Jack to each new teacher and classroom during class changes. Providing emotional support was felt to be critical in creating an initial strong relationship. We wanted him to know, "You can depend on us!"

Jack began to relax as we followed the 8 Expectations for Living and recited our class creed (Fresh Start Creed) daily. I intentionally passed by Jack's desk often, touching its corner, and making eye contact with him. I reminded him we were glad he chose to join our class and knew he would be a great asset to our team!

One day as I passed his desk, he looked me in the eye and said, "Ms. Jones, I think I can make this a good year!" I smiled and replied, "Jack, I believe you can." I wanted to shout, "YES!!!" but with difficulty maintained my professional composure.

Jack was an intelligent but shy young man. He was becoming more social but still quiet and reluctant to push himself academically. He usually completed a portion of his work, and then left the remainder unfinished. After a few days, I approached his desk when I noticed he had stopped working on a math assignment and mentioned the class had 15 minutes left to work on this assignment. I asked the question, "How many problems have you completed?"

He stated, "I finished 4."

Then I initiated a challenge. "Jack, you completed 4 problems in 8 minutes." That's a good pace. How many problems could you do in 5 minutes?"

He smiled and said, "I think I could do 2 or 3."

"That's great, Jack! I be back in 5 minutes!" I replied.

At the end of 5 minutes I passed his desk and asked, "Well, how did it go?"

Jack smiled and said, "I finished 5 more!"

We had a silent party with lots of smiles! In the following days Jack was able to raise his grade to a C and had a great start, making the Teacher's Honor Roll (for B's or

above) the following semester. The efforts we made to build a positive relationship had definitely set the tone for growth and a great year.

#### Fresh Start Creed

We are a TEAM bound for success.

Every day is a Fresh Start!

Yesterdays failures and disappointments are behind us.

We can make a difference by our choices and the promises we keep, Today!

We are in this together! Let's make it a great day!