

How to Talk to Your Teacher Lesson

Let's face it: Students inevitably get angry at their teachers. They will at some point feel their teacher is unfair. Sooner or later, they will disagree with us.

Knowing that all students will experience this at some time (some more than others, and more often in those middle school years), I have found it effective to teach kids how to talk to their teachers, and even how to disagree with them.

From the first day of class, one of my mantras to students is, "I will always listen to you and give you my time if you are polite to me. If you feel I am being unfair or you disagree with my decision, you may always ask to talk about it." I explicitly let them know that often I won't be able to talk to them right then, but I promise that I'll make time later.

In terms of building connections with kids and teaching them healthy ways to resolve conflicts, we must give them some power to pursue their ideas and an outlet to express their feelings. This is a powerful lesson, but we must be secure enough to give students a voice. We must also be firm as we model for them that though we care about their ideas, it does not necessarily mean they will get their way.

Lesson Procedures

1. Introduction: Ask the class, "Have you ever had a teacher who you felt was unfair?" At this point, all the students' hands will be waving wildly in the air. Discuss the topic.
2. Ask the kids, "So, when something like this happens, what do you do?" Discuss their responses.
3. Introduce the mantra: "I will always listen to you and give you my time if you are polite to me. If you feel I am being unfair or you disagree with my decision, you may always ask to talk about it."
4. Role-play a number of scenarios:
 - a. A student doesn't like his assigned seat.
 - b. A student doesn't think she should have to stay in at recess to make up work.
 - c. A student doesn't like his new team.
 - d. A student feels like you pick on her.
5. Have students practice asking to talk with you. Ask them what this should look like and sound like? When should they ask?
6. Demonstrate a proper response to their request.
7. Prep them on the following possibilities:
 - a. You may or may not agree with them when you talk.
 - b. You are in charge, so the students might not get their way. But you will consider their ideas.
8. Close the discussion. Students will ask questions and express concerns. Inevitably, they will want to know if they will get into trouble if they disagree with you.

We put ourselves out there when we offer this lesson to our students, but we build healthy relationships and provide them with conflict-resolution skills. Most important, kids feel more connected to their classroom, their teacher, and their school, because they have a voice.