

10 Suggestions for Handling the Disruptive Learner

1. First, recognise that the disrupter has two needs that aren't being met: attention and success. This learner yearns for both. This learner may have brothers and sisters with whom he/she finds it difficult to compete in positive ways - often because the learner doesn't think he/she can.
2. Don't respond to this learner's inappropriate and immature behaviour with rejection. Rather, give him/her responsibilities that will offer direct involvement with you.
3. Initiate a private conference when problems arise.
4. Don't wait until this learner's behaviour has reached crisis proportions before you act.
5. Above all, never forget that it's important that you and the learner agree on the exact behaviour that needs adjusting. It must be clear exactly what behaviour is disturbing - and to whom.
6. Convince this learner with the 'Citizenship' technique. Remember that disagreeing with your rules does not make a learner wrong, bad or insubordinate. However when good citizens disagree with a rule, they don't defy it. They simply try - and maybe even keep trying - to get it changed. This is what the disrupter needs to be taught about class rules.
7. If a learner speaks out abruptly or causes a quick disturbance, be careful about using a sarcastic retort or 'jumping down his/her throat: Often it's more effective to use calm to regain calm. Simply pause; then after a moment say, "We can't have such outbursts in class." This technique gives the learner a chance to view his/her behaviour objectively, regain composure, and continue appropriately.
8. Whenever possible, allow this learner a choice - even if it's over minor points such as how to do an assignment. Also, don't demand that he/she do things in a certain order. Rather, allow the learner to develop autonomous decision-making. You'll find the learner's frustration level will decrease if you do.
9. Often these learners won't talk. As a result you may have emotions which range from doubting your fairness to frustration. Try this technique for getting the learner to speak. Ask for advice rather than information ~ and the learner may loosen up. Beginning with, "What should we do about this?" will often get interaction rather than silence.
10. Never reject an entire class because of the actions of the disrupter. If you do, you're in for trouble. Whenever a class thinks that you don't like them, the learner-teacher relationship may be impaired to the point that you can't be effective. Don't indicate that the class as a whole doesn't have your

confidence because the disrupter hasn't earned it. Ideally, you should never punish the class for the actions of a few.

Some common misjudgments in managing the disrupter which may intensify the problem:

1. Making threats in anger and exasperation that can't be carried out.
2. Disallowing any explanation that the learner may have for his/her disruptive behaviour.
3. Sending him/her to the office continually.
4. Ignoring the disrupter.
5. Giving him/her negative attention.