

Teaching Tips and Expectations for the “*AT-RISK*” Teacher

Remember: These students WILL be disrespectful. These students WILL break rules. These students WILL do things you’ve never seen. That’s why they are “AT-RISK”. Try not to take these actions personally.

- **Lead by example.** When a student becomes angry, too often they expect you to match their emotional response. This may occur for a variety of reasons. No matter the reason, if you want to diffuse an angry or combative student, try lowering or even softening your voice. Make eye contact and ask the student to move outside the room with you. If you remove their audience, they will most likely calm down. Sometimes humor may serve as a calming effect in these situations. But be very careful not to come across as making fun of the student.
- **Keep your directions simple.** Nothing is more frustrating than not knowing what people want. When you give a directive, keep it simple but don’t give them the option to refuse. Don’t end a directive with the words, “OK?” or “ALRIGHT?”.
- **Redirect difficult students.** Once you have redirected a misbehaving student, walk away. This body language can signify that you expect them to follow your directions. Do not redirect a student openly or with an audience. If you present the misbehaving student with an audience, you will run the risk of jumping into a “power-struggle”. No one wins a “power-struggle”.
- **Stop talking about it.** Quit nagging, lecturing, or preaching. Use simple, one word reminders or warnings. Make sure that your expectations and consequences are clear. Quickly, get back to teaching. If your lessons are interesting or engaging, students will want to be apart of them.
- **Save your voice!** The more you yell, the less effective it becomes. These students will push you to your limit. When that happens, step back, calm down and think... don’t react.

- **A quiet student may not be a good thing.** During a lesson, if you notice that the students are quiet, ask a question that students should know the answer. If they don't answer, their minds are in another place. You must keep them engaged. Give them breaks every 15 min or so. A simple game of silent ball works great.
- **Greet students at the door with a smile, not a warning.** Create an atmosphere of hospitality and safety. Students should *want* to come into your room. If they know they are valued by you, they will be in your room in a more timely manner and with a better attitude. This combination will greatly increase your chances of having a good day.
- **Know when to hold'em and know when to fold em.** You must keep your finger on the pulse of your class. Some days curriculum will take a back seat to life lessons.
- **Be active.** These students are kinesthetic learners. Plan activities, take breaks, allow the students to move around if you want the hour to go smoothly.
- **Your job is two-fold.** In addition to covering the curriculum, you must also work to improve a student's behavior, attitude and/or outlook on their future.
- **You are the last line of defense.** It is your job to do everything within your means to correct behavior before you refer them to the principal. Once a student is removed from the room, we have lost ground. These students are used to being sent to the office. They are not used to having a teacher work with them despite their painful behavior.
- **Teach your students how to ask questions.** The At-Risk student typically does not ask questions during class. Whether out of fear of embarrassment or persecution from peers, these students will sit quietly as a teacher checks for comprehension. You must develop a classroom where students feel comfortable asking questions.