

Student Relationships

General Advice

- Helping students learn to relate to each other well can be a daunting and exhausting task. But it's an important one. In these formative years, they are building relational habits that will stick with them for the rest of their lives. You can be a loving adult who helps to shape them in the way of Jesus.
- Sometimes the best approach is to address issues head-on with the whole group. Have a class meeting and discuss your concerns with the whole class. Ask them to share their ideas for getting along. Give them practical, actionable steps.
- Require that offended students report complaints respectfully. You can even practice how this looks. Loudly proclaiming grievances in front of the whole class is not an option.
- Remember to care about a hurting child's heart. Listen carefully to the core pain behind the anger or tears and affirm that how they feel matters. Genuine care with words like, "I am so sorry you felt disrespected," or "What she said about you is not true," help to heal heart wounds. Everyone needs to know that what they feel matters, including children.

Ways to Be Proactive

- Set expectations of how students are expected to treat others early in the year, and review throughout the year. This may include things like the following:
 - Respect others. This includes respecting their property, contributing to a learning environment free from distractions, refraining from rude jokes or names, and honoring a variety of ability levels within classmates.
 - Respect yourself. Avoid "I can't" negativity, complaining, and self-ridicule. This makes it hard for others to enjoy being around you.
 - Respect teachers/authority. Teachers will make mistakes at times, too; give them grace.
- Be aware of the dynamics within your classroom and monitor hotspots accordingly. Sometimes a teacher being present is all it takes to prevent issues.
- Younger students may benefit with role-play to show how they should interact with each other at recess. You could use another adult, a doll, or pictures to help with the role play. Explore questions such as:
 - How can we include others?
 - What can we do if someone is left out?
 - How can we be a good friend?
 - What do good friends do?
 - What can I do if I want to play with someone?

Responding to Conflict

- It's a good idea to address any cliques that form. Create an environment that encourages class-wide interaction and champion inclusivity over separation.
- As much as possible, limit discussions about disagreements to those involved. If your schedule allows, plan that students have something they can work on independently after they come in from recess, such as penmanship or a fact sheet. This gives you time to deal with recess issues when they arise by stepping out of the classroom with those involved.
- Pursue direct interaction between the offended and the offender. Follow the Matthew 18 directive and facilitate discussion between students who have had a relational rift. Be sure you are hearing both sides of the story. This may happen one-on-one before the group discussion, or you might relate aloud what you heard the offended student say to you and ask the child if you accurately conveyed what he is feeling. When speaking to the offender, it works much better to approach him with, "Can you tell me what happened?" rather than assume Child A told the full story.
- Require eye contact during apologies. This is an important life skill and helps to usher in the correct heart posture. Also have students verbalize the underlying offense such as, "I am sorry for not respecting you," rather than a meager "Sorry." It is okay to wait until later in the day or even the following day to apologize. The Shepherd actively speaks to their hearts and He alone can prepare them to speak out of genuine repentance.
- There are times to step back and allow students to work things through themselves. Sometimes an adult getting too involved in children's conflict can actually make the situation worse. A lot of wisdom is needed in deciding when to engage. You might just call two students to you and say, "I noticed you had a disagreement. I trust the two of you to be able to figure it out. If you can't, I'm here to help."
- Compel students to take personal responsibility for their own actions. Phrases that may be helpful include:
 - "I know that's what he did, but we're talking about you right now."
 - "I'm sorry she treated you that way. That wasn't okay. But you're not responsible for her actions. All you can control is how you respond."
 - "Right now I want you to only say what you did wrong. Who is strong enough to start?"
 - "Jesus knows you better than you know yourself, and He knows the way to true life and happiness. And so if He says responding in love to those who hurt us is the best way, then we need to take Him seriously. What do you think loving Student B looks like in this situation?"
- Guide students in finding concrete, actionable steps towards resolution. Give them practical ways they can respond in love to those they are struggling to relate to. Suggest proactive ways they can be kind, appropriate ways to respond when feeling angry, or ideas for how to relate well to a difficult individual.

Sources

- Building Relationships by Nathan Yoder: [Building Relational Skills - The Dock for Learning](#)

- Getting Along by Arlene Birt: [Getting Along - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Transforming Squabbles by Betty Yoder: [Transforming Squabbles - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Helping Young Girls Deal with Relational Drama by Meghan Brubaker: [Helping Young Girls Deal with Relational Drama - The Dock for Learning](#)