



Developing your skills



How to deal with a problem student?

At some point in your career, you may have to deal with a student who may be difficult to deal with and cause disruption. Some students may be just stressed and can be calmed down fairly easily using the right tools. But someday you might have a student who is a bully, maybe even hostile and dealing with them takes more effort. Although each case will be different, these notes are designed for you to build an awareness of how you may deal with such students.

HOW TO HANDLE A PROBLEM STUDENT?

When faced with problem students, ranging from dissatisfied to down right angry, you may not be sure of how to react. The important thing to realise when dealing with an upset student is that you must deal with their feelings then deal with their problem. In most cases, it will be worth your while to face that angry student and get the situation resolved as quickly as possible.

Acknowledge their anger quickly

Nothing adds more fuel to a fire than having his or her anger ignored or belittled. The faster you verbally recognise their anger, the better.

Empathise

Using empathy is an effective way to deal with the student's feelings. Empathy isn't about agreement, only acceptance of what the student is saying and feeling. Basically the message is "*I understand how you feel*". Obviously this has to be a genuine response, otherwise the student will realise if you're insincere and feel patronised.

Make it plain that you're concerned

Tell them you realise just how angry they are. Let them know that you are taking the situation seriously. The student wants to know that you care and that you're interested in their problem.

Don't hurry them, be patient

Let them get it all out. Never try to interrupt or shut them up. In many cases, the best move is to simply listen. They'll wind themselves down eventually. In some cases, they'll realise they blew the situation out of proportion and feel foolish for it. They are then likely to accept nearly any solution you offer.

Stop saying sorry

Sorry is an overused word, everyone says it when something goes wrong and it's lost its value. If you need to apologise, have a specific reason. It's far better to say "*I apologise for X*".

Keep calm; don't let them get to you

Most angry people say things they don't really mean. Learn to let those things pass and take them up after you've solved the present challenge, but only if you feel it's necessary to do so.

Ask questions

Your aim is to discover the specific things that you can do to correct the problem. Try to get specific information about the difficulties the problem has caused, rather than a general venting of hot air.

Get them talking about solutions

This is where you will learn just how reasonable this student is. By the time you get to this step, their anger should have cooled enough to discuss the challenge rationally. If it hasn't, tell them you want to



Developing your skills



schedule a later meeting, even if it's in an hour, to come up with some reasonable solutions. Let them do the rest of their fuming on their time.

Agree on a solution

After you know exactly what the challenge is, you're in a position to look for some kind of action that will relieve the challenge. Propose something specific. Start with whatever will bring them the best and quickest relief. Don't get into a controversy over pennies at this time.

Agree on a schedule

Once you've agreed on a solution, set up a schedule for its accomplishment. Agree to a realistic time frame that you know you can handle. The biggest mistake you can make is

to agree to something that cannot be done. If you do, you'd better be ready to face another bout of this person's anger when you don't come through.

Meet your schedule

Give this schedule top priority. You've talked yourself into a second chance with this student, so make sure you don't blow it.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Learn Direct](#)
- [Mind Tools](#)
- [Management skills](#)