



Power struggle

Evidence that power and control are at issue:



Student says so - "You can't make me do that," "Oh yeah?", and it feels threatening.



You feel like "getting" the kid or using physical force to make your point, force obedience.



Anger surrounds these exchanges, and the teacher usually does whatever s/he must to win.



Student either lashes out or sulks; often talks to other students about unfairness, shows anger.



You are sending a student to ICE or expelling/suspending someone for bad behavior.



Remember your last skirmish? If you are able to assess it from outside the time, you can't remember exactly what you said, except for something that was too harsh, and you can't understand how you got to that "out of control" place. You are likely to be simmering underneath, and dreading the next confrontation. How does the kid feel? He or she probably feels the same way - dread, victimized, justified, fuming, miserable, and unwilling to be forced into a corner, no matter what it takes.



Solutions

- Students can do a lot of acting out, "winning" so to speak, that adults can't, so let the kid up off the mat, out of the corner. Refuse to keep exchanging blows in this lose-lose arena. Teachers cannot win, because the most power you have is to kick the kid out of your classroom. Winning that way is very costly. The student can hold a grudge, vandalize the school, talk about you behind your back, not go to school and lose out on educational and socialization experiences so necessary to be a useful member of the community.
- Regain your own sense of self and self control. It is easy to blame the student for how we feel, to bluster around about wanting respect and "kids these days..." The real issue is personal. Can you control yourself, or is the student going to be able to get you to play his game?
- Use the four "C"s to build a relationship with the youngster -- something unexpected, and the real thing the student actually needs from an adult, a model of how to behave, how to control self, how to remain calm.
 - 1) Choice - start framing tasks for this person so s/he can save face. It works with 2-year-olds and it will work with adolescents. "Do you want me to help you with the outline, or try it yourself?"
 - 2) Consequences -- the more natural the better. Get out of the punishment realm. It does not work, even if you had plenty of it and it didn't hurt you..... yes it did. You felt victimized and it taught you to act as you are acting now. Choose consequences - if you do not get your work done, you won't learn. How sad for you. If you are not able to work right now, you will need to do exercises to get yourself under control. It must be hard to have to fight your body for self control. . . etc.
 - 3) Care and concern - model how adults care for children and show your concern for this student. Keep using supportive words, actions, and positive thoughts for the student. It may be a long time before the student can be supportive in return, kind, appreciative. That is not the point. You model maturity, you show what self control looks like, you continue to be the adult and refuse to be drawn into a confrontation. Control yourself and don't allow the student to control interactions.
 - 4) Consistency -- this provides safety. It is not the same as "fair." It has to do with ritual, soothing certainty, the student knowing the boundaries. Set up a routine, and be certain it gives students the most time to learn and the safest learning community setting. Then teach all of it to students, explaining the "whys" as you go. As new students come into the class, have everyone explain the procedures and rules. Maintain it.



Ownership

Evidence that task commitment is an issue:



Student verbalizes complaints - "I already did this, already know this, this is dumb," etc.



Energy to get started working is missing and student must be reminded frequently.



Complaints that no one needs to know this or will every use it again.



Involved in something else and does not want to stop to do the new work.



Reference to grading is always about what the teacher will be awarding rather than what the student earns or deserves.



Remember how you felt at the last meeting when you were told about something you had to change and didn't want to do? Did you feel helpless? Angry? Thwarted? Did you feel like quitting? How about the last time you got "caught" doing something you knew could get you busted, but felt helpless to change --- like being late, not getting papers graded, stayed home because your child was sick, but had no days for that, so had to say you were ill? Bureaucracy lends itself to that - a feeling of impotence. Students learn best when they feel less fear and more power. It is a great motivator.



Solutions

- How do I encourage students to work hard for themselves; to get the ideas and knowledge instead of working for a grade? It is a tough question, and one you will want to incorporate in your classroom.
- Rethink your role. Are you a watchdog? Is it your job to report and punish when a student does not know something? Isn't that F you gave the student actually yours? Who failed? Why both of you!
- Use rubrics that give clear information about what is expected in an assignment. It is hard at first, but becomes a way of thinking about excellence. How will the student know what is enough, what is expected? The rubric spells it out for all of us. Students can learn to write rubrics and checklists.*
- Add mastery based assessment to your grading system and put students in charge of maintaining those records -- *strutting their stuff*.
- Work as a team member instead of the holder of the keys. Practice saying 'I don't know,' or turning questions around so student feel like they are empowered and not knowing is ok. Our current system has a built in penalty each time someone doesn't know something. We can change that.
- Think of yourself as a facilitator - someone who makes the improbable happen. Learning is a miraculous process and we transcend the moment each time a light bulb goes on for a student because of how we presented concepts and ideas. It is the true payoff for teaching! Get yourself more!
- Use the built-in excitement of students learning concepts through personal interest areas.
- When a teacher is the "guide on the side" instead of the "sage on the stage" the students do more work and make a stronger commitment to learning -- they are in the driver's seat that way.
- Remember that most students, most of the time, are learning all day long. It is directing that energy that can be the most effective tool..... get them to learn what the officials think is crucial while tailoring it to the things students are ready to learn about and developmentally prepared to consider.
- The teachable moment is real. Use them every time you find one, and make some by the interesting things you talk about and share with the class.



Depression The world breaks everyone, and afterwards, some are strong at the broken places. - Hemingway

Evidence that sadness or despair is an issue:



Student is lethargic, seems to force self to walk, seldom moves around the classroom at will.



Posture is often "bent" or crumpled with little extraneous movement.



Affect - the way the face looks - is sad, maybe in pain. We seldom look carefully at these youth, in fact we often ignore them and fail to realize how much they are hurting.



Students who are verbal tend to complain of missing sleep, have dark circles under eyes.



Appetite is affected. Most students either gain a lot of weight or lose weight.



Drugs -- yes peers can be the cause of starting, and part of that is to ward off a sense of alienation or not belonging. It is a cruel form of angst. Drugs also are a way to self medicate. In our current communities, drinking a six pack of beer is more acceptable than seeing a therapist or being in counseling. Most of these substances dull the senses, bringing momentary respite, or allow us to act out our feelings without taking responsibility for them. Many times drug abuse is a symptom of depression.



Remember back to your adolescence? Most of us don't really. We remember a few experiences, but we lived through it and seldom spend time reminiscing. It was a painful time for most of us, and we suffered. In retrospect, it was silly to be suffering and languishing over such trivia, but at the time, it often felt life and death. One of the greatest pains comes from not belonging or feeling ignored and devalued. Our body changing and the hormones that helped make that adult body only added to the tragedy of it all. For the person experiencing the sadness it is real.



Solutions

- Acknowledge the sense of loss, whether a pet, a contest, a low grade, not getting on the team, losing an election, or more serious family and life losses as real and listen carefully if the student will open up.
- Remember to entice rather than force steps up from the doldrums.
- Address the lack of energy as genuine rather than minimizing it, and support the student's efforts to try something rather than badgering them for laziness.
- Take hints of suicide seriously and get the student support for the psychic distress
- Ask the student to mentor another in an activity to heighten the stimulation
- If possible, use music in the classroom to lighten the mood and feel of the day
- Give the student an opportunity to set up and personalize a unit of study, helping to add stimulation and personal interest to the subject
- Honor the student for even getting dressed and getting through a day. Many adults would not make it to school if they were as sad as some of our youth are.
- Reconsider your position on crying and give students permission to express sadness.
- Place a rocking chair in the classroom to enhance self soothing
- When possible, use journal entries to give students an opportunity to vent in a private, personal way.
- Enact and work through some of the issues - diorama, write a play and have others help perform it, read a book where the protagonist had the same kinds of issues. Illustrate a series of comic strips that deal with the irony, the pain, the human conditions involved and gain resolution.
- Provide a personal connection, smile when passing the desk, catch eye and wink, high five, wrinkle nose.....

Symptoms of Depression

Use this list to recognize the symptoms for depression. If a student has several symptoms, please get them support

Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying Teens may show pervasive sadness by wearing black clothes, writing poetry with morbid themes, or a preoccupation with music themes of hopelessness. They may cry for no apparent reason.

Hopelessness Teens may feel that life is not worth living or worth the effort to even maintain their appearance or hygiene. They may believe that a negative situation will never change and be pessimistic about their future.

Decreased interest in activities; or inability to enjoy previously favorite activities Teens may become apathetic and drop out of clubs and activities they once enjoyed. Not much seems fun anymore to the depressed teen.

Persistent boredom; low energy Lack of motivation and lowered energy level is reflected by missed classes or not going to school. A drop in grade averages can be equated with loss of concentration and slowed thinking.

Social isolation, poor communication There is a lack of connection with friends and family, gatherings and events. Teens who used to spend a lot of time with friends may now spend most of their time. Teens may not share their feelings with others, believing that they are alone in the world and no one is listening to them or even cares about them.

Low self esteem and guilt Teens may assume blame for negative events or circumstances; may feel like a failure and have negative views about their competence and self-worth. They feel as if they are not "good enough."

Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure Believing that they are unworthy, depressed teens become even more depressed with every supposed rejection or perceived lack of success.

Increased irritability, anger, or hostility Depressed teens are often irritable, taking out most of their anger on their family. They may attack by being critical, sarcastic, or abusive. They may feel they must reject others to escape rejection.

Difficulty with relationships Teens may suddenly have no interest in maintaining friendships.

Frequent complaints of physical illnesses, such as headaches and stomachaches Teens may complain about lightheadedness or dizziness, being nauseous, and back pain, headaches, stomachaches, vomiting.

Frequent absences from school or poor performance in school Children and teens who cause trouble at home or at school may actually be depressed but not know it. Because the child may not always seem sad, parents and teachers may not realize the behavior problem is a sign of depression.

Poor concentration Teens may have trouble concentrating on schoolwork, following a conversation, even watching TV.

A major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns Sleep disturbance may show up as all-night television watching, difficulty in getting up for school, or sleeping during the day. Loss of appetite may become anorexia or bulimia.

Talk of or efforts to run away from home Running away is usually a cry for help.

Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior Teens who are depressed may say they want to be dead. If a child or teen says, "I want to kill myself," or "I'm going to commit suicide," always take the statement seriously and seek evaluation and support from a child and adolescent psychiatrist or other mental health professional.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse Depressed teens may abuse alcohol or other drugs as a way to feel better.








Self-Injury Teens may show emotional tension, physical discomfort, pain and low self-esteem cutting.

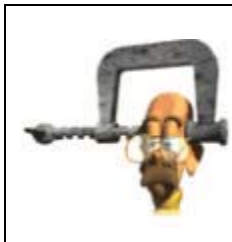
Help: There are local services. Let your school counselor know of your concern immediately. The school nurse can also assist in finding services and evaluating the seriousness of the student's behaviors.



Hopelessness *Our happiness in this world depends upon the affections we are enabled to inspire.*
- Duchesse de Praslin

Evidence that a sense of futility is an issue:

-  Student is unable to attempt an assignment.
-  Student's face has a blank look -- often called a flat affect
-  Posture of student suggests s/he almost can't bear to move, walk. Adults have a long history of not seeing this. Several students in your school feel this way. Take a day to start looking for the youngsters and noticing how they look and move about.
-  Almost always isolated, not even attempting peer contact.
-  May have bursts of energy when they do the "Jim Carey" funny guy *schtick*.
-  Appearance often suffers - lack of hygiene, clothes have food spots, or same day after day.
-  What do you look for? Presence, affect, pose, posture, responsiveness.



Remember a time when you were faced with a mountain of work? For me it was when my house was flooded the second time. I could hardly drag myself up in the morning and every move took so much energy. My teens walked around like zombies. The first flood, they stayed buoyant, but with this one, they couldn't find the energy to wear clean clothes. I was so sad, every job I did felt pointless. You are likely to have something in your own life like that. You felt unloved, like every act was futile, and like there was no point - divorce, loss of parent or pet, tragedy....



Solutions

- This is a deeper place than depressed. Many of the same self-soothing things will help here, too.
- Counseling -- good help -- is important. A sense of inner anger and grief exists and needs to be touched.
- Forcing a student to talk about or share this may make the teacher an enemy. Be fully present and caring, but give the student space and time, as you help get a task started or carried to completion
- Deep grief can take up to six months to resolve itself. Many times we know a child lost a parent or sibling and we give them a week or two to get over it, then decide it's time to "buck up" or "get back on the horse." It takes far longer. A divorce often hurts for years and for some, a death is never resolved. Life does go on, but sometimes the recognition of that is to painful, only adds to the futility. Gentle support and listening speeds resolution.
- Sometimes this is a very mercurial time, with roller coaster emotions. Embrace those frenetic moments and give the student things to do that build on the sense of accomplishment.
- Sit with the student, one on one to get assignments going, then slip out when the momentum moment occurs.
- If the student stops working, slip back in and pick up the pen, chatting and then helping the student get back into the work. Skipping the one that was the work stopper and coming back to it can be a useful technique
- Exercise really helps - music that the students move to for a couple of minute, silly songs.
- Putting on lotion can bring some students out of the slump, at least for a short period.
- This can dramatically affect self-esteem. Some students experience a loss of self during this time and struggle to gain strength to breathe, to move, to go on. We may not be able to understand, but we can care.
- Review material on how to help a student who is suicidal. Youth die every year, and students who are Native American have one of the highest rates of trying and succeeding.
- Remember that substance abuse may be tied to this. Students may self medicate to block the pain.