













Fear of failure

Evidence that fear of failure is an issue:

-  Student is likely to be cheating by copying others' work.
-  Self-apology often is threaded through conversations. "This is probably wrong, but ..."
-  Student gets angry when asked to do something unfamiliar or unexpected.
-  Stomach aches and headaches often signal a rise in anxiety.
-  Student may purposefully give the wrong answer or do a bad job.
-  Guessing that is off-handed rather than trying to get the right answer.
-  No effort to do the work.
-  Self-handicapping is common -- student forgets book, book bag, pen, gets in a big argument that upsets them so much they don't sleep that night, can't focus on the exam or eyes are too swollen to pay attention, so there is a built in excuse.
-  Use of substances is common -- getting drunk and hung over, the day before the big test or smoking marijuana to take away the pressure to study and succeed.

	<p>Ever try playing a video game? The best ones provide a learning curve that allows a player to advance and learn the game by playing. If a game does not do that, if the curve is too steep or it isn't intuitive enough for the player, then it isn't worth the quarter to keep trying. How about fixing something in the house or making a recipe. Don't you get someone to help or stop trying to do it alone if it keeps eluding you? We love to feel successful, to do things that give us a sense of satisfaction. Yes, sometimes we compare ourselves to others and want to compete, but what we really want is to feel good about our efforts and given a choice, we will use our free time to do things that work for us.</p>
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Solutions

- Use a placement test to establish the working expertise of the student.
- Safety is the key, here. When a student feels that success is possible, when trying has the potential for success, the student will work, and work hard. After all, we all love to feel competent.
- Motivation has a curvilinear relationship with difficulty. If a task is too simple, students will not give their best energy to the work. However, there is a dramatic dip in motivation when tasks become too hard. Most of us will stop trying to do things that thwart our efforts, that we cannot understand or that seems too difficult.
- Ask students to let you know when something is too difficult. Establish a support system to help them find a place where they can start and feel successful.
- Change grading systems to mastery, at least for the students who are overwhelmed by the typical tasks. Instead set up a non-competitive situation where the student moves sequentially through tasks and gets credit for accomplishment rather than being compared to peers.
- One step at a time still gets the work accomplished. It is surprising how useful it is to give a student just a bit of a challenge each day, to prevent the total failure and see how the student will keep working.
- Remember that there are many ways to learn, not just the linear, read a book, answer questions, take notes, way.
- Expect the student to reach areas where they go rapidly and make up for some time when it felt like crawling.
- During each day, provide opportunities that are the student's strength so s/he can feel hopeful and competent.



Self esteem

Evidence that internal messages is an issue:

-  Student is likely to contradict compliments.
-  Dressing may change to get attention, or may wear a coat all the time to hide self.
-  Student may refuse to stand in front of the class or do group reports.
-  Student may be unable to be wrong, regardless of what it takes to save face, including showing undue sensitivity to criticism or posing as egotistical when approached.
-  Every question is answered by the student, calling out, regardless of request to take turns.
-  Change in group identification, looking for a way to belong and be accepted.
-  The teacher's pet is almost always a person with low esteem.
-  Ingratiating comments and profuse thanking for teachers performing normal activities to be supportive of students.
-  Frantic, angry or defensive when error is discovered or mistake is made.
-  May be unwilling to be with peers and do things to stay in the classroom or be with adults..



Remember a time when you were in despair? There is a deep sinking feeling, an ache in your chest that seems so heavy, your jaws are clenched, you are fighting back the tears, and you see no way to get out of the situation. You mentally tick off the people who might help and it is all quite impossible. No one is there for you. No one believes in you and you have just done the stupidest, most unforgivable things. You are enraged, in grief, in pain, and it hurts so much you wish you could melt away. Now put yourself in a three year old body and grow like that for 12 more years.



Solutions

- Esteem is complex. It has a being and doing component to it. So we cannot just mend the pain and sense of loss by saying something off-hand to let the youngster know we care.
- Trust is essential, and difficult to build. These youngsters do not have a reason to believe us or think that we are any different than the adults who have let them down. Build trust without expecting it to be reciprocated.
- Expect the student to test you and your sincerity by testing the things you do to reach out. Many people believe giving love is enough. For students who have been wounded, the more plausible you become as a person who likes them, the more suspect you are. They have an ambivalent position of loving themselves against all odds and in spite of how others have treated them mixed in with a belief that they deserved the cruel treatment and names given to them are getting treated better than they deserve. We don't just break through that polar ice cap in one spot and succeed. The student fills that hole in and feels a breach rather than a break-through.
- Help the youngster replace the survival mode with more functional patterns of relationship.
- Teach students about world view, that we can choose how we view things and that our minds are very resilient.
- Though the first thought may be negative, we can rethink the input and reframe our own way of perceiving.
- Safety, safety, safety. The more safe we feel the faster we can grow. If there is a blow-up, reassure the youth rather than giving up. The blow will be huge and the student will hit bottom hard, so be gentle, patient, and increase the sense of safety.



Lose focus

Evidence that distractibility is an issue:



Student is chatting during lecture or teacher directions for work.



Disorganization is evident, with forgetfulness common.



Student spends time looking around the room, out the window, on the floor, poking in desk.



Makes lots of careless errors - forgets to capitalize, to put in a period, does wrong function on a math problem.



Has difficulty staying on task with limited attention to task, even when interested.



Says, "what was the question?" as tries to be involved in class but losing the thread.



Answers the question with an off subject comment, usually followed by students laughing and teacher gruffly remarking about it.



Remember going into Wal-Mart to pick up one item, and getting so involved that you bought \$40.00 worth of things you didn't even know you wanted and still forgot the item you went in to get? If this has ever happened to you, then you know what it feels like to lose focus. Of course, if it happens too often, or you get really thwarted, you probably began to feel edgy and anxious. Sometimes, if there are too many interruptions, you may even feel a sense of anger pushing to the surface. Imagine living like that every minute of the day! It is just inconceivable to have so little control of your life, your moment in time.



Solutions

- Physical activities actually help the student stay more focused and maintain a higher state of mental alertness, so give the students some type of manipulatives that go with the lesson.
- Mnemonic devices help maintain and consolidate a series of ideas, so complete each lesson with some graphic, emotional based idea that helps the student gather the facts, put them into a collection of some kind and then repeat a couple of times for storage. Example - the idea of the octopus to show a time in American history has become famous. It works because it is graphic and has strong feelings attached. Spelling has many - there is a rat in **separate**. **Every good boy does fine** helps us remember the names of music notes on the lines of a staff - **e g b d f**. Students may not be able to generate them, but if they are catchy, they will notice, care and store.
- Let students dictate answers to a buddy, and make a deliberate choice to allow bullets rather than whole sentences..... succinct, helps summarize, fewer pieces to stay focused on and recall, brings focus back to the subject repeatedly, someone is cueing the focus by writing down the answers.
- Provide guide notes with fill in the blank short answers to go along with a lecture.
- Stop and consolidate frequently
- Stand closer to the student area and give supportive cues as talking.
- Have the student jot down ideas on a white board,
- The newest Think Pads (IBM) provide a place for notes to go directly into the computer. It is a great tool, and could help the student jot down ideas and revisit them later, using bullets and ideas to complete homework. Give alternative assignments to long material.... example - instead of writing a term paper, have student make and illustrate a comic book that brings strings of ideas together and makes a point.
- Develop guided lecture notes, hard copy, not overhead, since that adds a second or third step to note taking -- looking up, sustaining focus, making meaning and then getting it back to the desk top or into the notebook.



Upset

Evidence that student is unable to work because of an immediate crisis:



Student appearance is different than usual - may seem very distracted, eyes rapidly shifting, nervous gestures, often either clammy and pale or red and blotchy looking; agitated or ready to explode.



Leaves to go to the bathroom frequently or complains of digestive upset.



May put head down and collapse onto the desk or be unable to sit down or settle at all.



Wads up papers, breaks pencil, slams books into desk or on the desk surface.



Agitation is real and continued, while efforts to intervene are ineffective or worsen things.



Resists talking about the situation, or explodes if pressed or cornered.



Often uses words like "not fair" and "hate" while muttering.



Cannot settle into work or focus attention on classroom activities because of agitation.



Ever have the principal or a co-worker comes into the room early in the day and starts up on an issue? It could be our tardiness, a pay cut, a or rumors of an emerging problem. We can get perturbed and have a difficult time moving beyond the immediate insult or issue. Sometimes we fume about it for hours. Certainly, when we enter the classroom, we are no longer in the mood to teach. Those strong feelings can leak into the way we treat students, create discontent and ruin our whole day. That same kind of thing can happen to students. We may even cause it, sometimes.



Solutions

• The Compassionate Response

1. What need was (he, she, I) trying to meet with that behavior?
 2. What beliefs or awareness influenced the behavior?
 3. What pain, hurt or feelings influenced the behavior?
 4. I wish this hadn't happened, but I can work to understand.
 5. I accept (myself, him, her) for the attempt to meet needs.
 6. It's over and I can let go of all of it.
 7. Nothing is owed for this behavior. - adapted McKay & Fanning, 1987
- Give the student time to collect self and self soothe rather than feeding the disquiet.
 - Remember that our brains are set up to pool all the blood in the response section, the medulla oblongata when we are upset, and memory, critical thinking, reasoning are shut down. It helps with fight and flight responses, and the student must settle down to get blood up to the learning and reasoning sections of the brain . . . so let that be a priority.
 - This is not the time to give a direct order unless it is a matter of imminent danger. It is likely to create a bitter and opposing reaction. If necessary it should be given sharply and in one or two words. "Get down!" "Stop now!" The brain will process this as helpful. Warnings, threats and anger will likely result in oppositional and defiant actions.



Substance abuse

Evidence that alcohol or drugs is an issue:



Student is unfocused, disheveled, unconcerned about appearance.



There is frequently an odor that goes with different substances. Get close enough to check



There is no ability to get outside the self to understand or recognize the needs of others.



Eye movements are telltale, as is the level of focus, ability to fully attend to the conversation.



Movement and muscle tone is altered, usually in less control, though some substances, like speed, may increase movement and activity.



Look for evidence of a hang-over, including nausea, flu-like symptoms and inability to cope with noise, lights, food smells.



Recall a time when you were drugged - either intentionally or through medical procedure. Try to think about what worked and what was upsetting. These same sorts of feelings and responses will belong to the student. You probably remember that being looked down on or judged was ineffective and increase alienation. The consequences, firmly applied with support and kindness, sympathy, concern, probably helped the most.



Solutions

- Get medical attention for the student immediately. Allowing a student to "sleep it off" is tacit permission. Even authorities make mistakes about diabetic coma and inebriation, so get help.
- **SADD** is a student based organization that can help with interventions and give the student a peer group without substance abuse. **MADD** is a parent based group with similar goals.
- Involve the student in counseling. Consider medical services, as well. Many youngsters are self medicating.
- Get involved with other teachers and local law enforcement to develop a policy on drug and alcohol use that involves a one day consequences rather than suspension. Suspension gives the student free time to engage in substance abuse, again, almost a form of tacit permission.
- Involving the family is uncomfortable, but also important. This is the place that has the most power over the youngster's after school time.
- Peer counseling is extremely effective. Consider setting up a group who learns those skills and utilize this as a way to give immediate attention to students who are abusing substances.
- Do some research about the problem in your area. Alcohol and marijuana are the most frequently abused substances for the average youngster. Specific drugs may be in use, like 'meth' crack or huffing.
- Students who are on medications need close supervision. Many incidents of not swallowing and then selling or sharing drugs has been documented.
- If you go with zero tolerance, remember that it is the drug use you are irradicating, and increase your support and concern for the student, staying away from judgment, alienation, censor.
- Utilize appropriate guest speakers to help students recognize the value of trusting self and learning to cope with and temper own emotions.