

Reaching I-Don't-Care and Underachieving Students

By now I hope that some baby steps have begun to make a difference. Even if behavior has relapsed, don't give up. Remember that it takes about six months for a behavior to change! So at the end of this year, connect with next year's teacher to share what you've tried, what worked, what didn't, where you've seen some inroads. Don't be too hard on yourselves. We bully ourselves when we say, "I could have done better". The point is progress, not perfection!



It's wearying to hold these students accountable for their actions, their attitude or their lack of work. But it's unloving not to do so, because later in their lives they might meet a truly unloving or unsympathetic person who *will* hold them accountable (e.g. a judge, a parole or police officer). It can be exhausting to appear as if we like the unlikable ones, but if we want to motivate these children to learn and to achieve we have to communicate the message to their brains that someone likes them and cares about their needs. Adults are no different from children in this respect. We'd rather work for an encouraging, supportive, empowering principal than a controlling, critical one! Children like to see the same positive traits in a teacher.

As you prepare for next year consider techniques such as:

- ...asking students to repeat your directions step by step.
- ...during group work place four or five children together rather than pair-share.
 - Tell them who starts the discussion; the rest participate clockwise. At the end of the discussion ask each child to state what was said by *someone else* in the group. It's not as intimidating to report on another's response.
- ...put fewer problems on a page
- ...tell the child to pick 4 or 5 sentences/problems to complete
- ...work for a set amount of time (increase it a couple of minutes as the week goes on).

These students need to learn replacement behaviors for inappropriate ones. When someone refuses to read aloud in a reading group, supply a card from a pre-made

stack of alternate behaviors: “I pass” or “May I read silently?” You may be tempted to think that allows them to win! Well, they weren’t reading aloud before. Now at least they might be reading if only silently.

As small positive steps accumulate, create a success folder. This contains all the positive things the child has done, said, written or achieved. Even if you wouldn’t choose the same item as the child, that’s fine. Success is not about *being* the best, but *trying* your best.

Yes, it’s vital to take care of our students. But it’s just as vital to take care of ourselves. So this summer (and often during the school year), take time for yourself. Guard some *alone* time, read fiction, sleep better, and always remember our mantra...

