

# Questions that will help the Students

Harshika Ramasubramanian

Counselling Psychologist & Expressive Arts Facilitator

## 1. How can students build friendship with fellow classmates?

As students, especially if the student is new and the school environment is different from one they have been exposed to, it can be intimidating for the child to step forward and build a social circle. In such situations, the more outgoing students/students familiar with the environment can form a buddy system at the first day of school or beginning of the year. This helps break the initial ice and gets the first round of introductions going. This can further be made into a snowball effect thereby allowing the child to get introduced to other students and form a social circle.

Second and a simpler method could be, the student him/herself can try to initiate contact with the person sitting right next to them in class or standing next to them at an assembly. This gives them the opportunity to overcome the intimidation of being in a new environment and build step by step confidence to forming their own social circle.

Trying for teams and clubs, spending time out on other campus areas, volunteering to help with organizing events and projects, and most importantly to be yourself, all play a huge role in building friendships with classmates and other peers.

Third way could be teacher directed - ice-breakers on the first day of class is a great way to get the students to get to know each other and a fun way to begin school!

Small gestures come a long way - such as picking up a pencil dropped by a student if they are carrying too many things or helping with assignments helps in fostering friendship. Further, empathising and being sensitive to the situations of a classmate (be aware of the drama kings and queens though!), cheering them on when they are in self-doubt or feeling low, and most importantly respecting fellow classmates brings in a positive classroom and school environment and a sense of comfort, familiarity and connection.

Lastly, an important way one can build friendship with their peers is to recognise the diversity, differences and build an inclusive environment for their peers. This allows for a holistic interaction, different exposures, braving challenges together and learning to work together in different situations and overcoming those challenges. This in turn, exposes the personalities of the students to one another there by allowing opportunities to arise to form bonds.

## **2. How should they build good relationships with teachers?**

A teacher-student relationship according to me is the most important relationship children will build. This relationship is built during their prime childhood years all the way to their adult years. That is a long time and fostering a healthy teacher-student relationship can do miracles for students in the long run.

The first most important way to build the relationship with one's teacher is respect. Especially respecting the presence of the teacher. A teacher is a guide, a mentor and a facilitator. Accepting these facts about the teacher, respecting boundaries and ground rules of the student-teacher relationship and allowing the teacher to provide the guidance and knowledge is the starting point to building this relationship.

That being said, as with every relationship, the teacher-student relationship is also a two-way street. Just as students are required to put in the effort and come with understanding to build the relationship, so are the teachers. Each child is at a different developmental stage and within that developmental stage each child develops at a different pace and has a different level of understanding, mannerism and personality. It is a vast knowledge to hold for the teacher, nevertheless an important one.

An important aspect of building the teacher student relationship is dialogue/engagement – Providing space to the students to have an open dialogue about the pros and cons of class, teaching methodology, the teacher's behaviour, the teacher's in turn having a sit down (not a dressing down, mind you) with the students about their behaviour and participation, their strengths, areas of improvement and successes, concerns students may have, academic help, working through breaking of boundaries and ground rules, also plays a big part in building good teacher-student relationship.

As adults, the responsibility of building a healthy relationship is most of the time shouldered by the teacher. However, many times, that responsibility is shared by the students of the higher classes depending on their maturity levels. Yet, it is important for the teacher to communicate and recap expectations frequently. Give out hints and clues to encourage students. Provide constructive feedback to students and encourage their capabilities. Touch base with students for follow up and acknowledge post feedback successes. Establish classroom pride about positive behaviours and achievements. Make learning fun. As a teacher, I personally believe that, saying "sorry" to your students for a mistake made by you/teacher is a gesture to get the healthy relationship going. A holistic and inclusive approach from the teacher towards the students is a great way to ensure a good class environment and a smooth teacher-student relationship.

It is important for both the teachers and the students to keep in mind that the relationship will not form overnight. It is constant work from both sides with unwavering understanding and respect. It is also important to be aware of which side is relapsing or breaking the boundaries, acknowledge it and repair for a continued healthy relationship.

### **3. How can students balance their academic life and also follow their passion for extracurricular activities?**

Today's students have a lot of pressure academically and the competition in the outside world is increasing. However, in order to excel academically, they need to be engaged in non-academic activities as well. This stimulates their mind, creativity, increases stamina and also doesn't make everyday a monotonous routine. That being said, non-academic activities are always more interesting and intriguing to the children. To bring a balance the one element they need to be both aware and conscious of is "time." There is 24 hours in the day. 16 hours of awake time is a huge amount of time and easily balanced if children are guided properly on how to bring that balance.

4 hours of study each day 4 hours of extra-curriculars seem to be the ideal balance isn't it? However, it isn't always like that. With tests, homework, meal time and travel time, children get all but 2 hours to themselves. Let's also not forget their playtime included in that. They essentially get their 1 hour per day of extra-curriculars. However, this is what the children can do to initiate the balance – they can choose. They have the choice of doing extra-curriculars every day or few days a week. They have the choice of doing just one or two extra curriculars or one too many. Depending on their choices, they can decide and be guided to equally spread out school work and curriculars. However, the choice of everyday curriculars and one too many will leave them exhausted. A fact that students need to constantly keep in mind.

Here a few tips students can use to bring about balance. I'm sure most of the children already know this, but a reminder never hurts does it?

- Goal setting.
- Plan the day or week along with the extracurricular.
- Create Visual triggers.
- Give a time to each activity right from studying to play to extracurricular to social media.
- Be picky about extra curriculars.
- Take breaks between studying.
- ASK FOR HELP! - Adults can help the children outline priorities.
- Time management – use extra time in school to complete all the work so as to get more time to do other things.
- Avoid procrastination.

### **4. How can teachers play a role in making the institute's atmosphere more welcoming for the students?**

Apart from building the teacher-student relationship, another important role teacher's play in the school and a student's school life is creation of positive classroom and school atmosphere. Outside of their homes, the maximum time students spend is in school for a good 14 years of their life. The kind of welcoming, responses and interaction they receive

each day from their teachers leaves a mark on them through their years of growing up. The institute's atmosphere also has a huge influence on the child's mental wellness, behaviour, participation, emotional wellness, self-esteem and growth.

A teacher is required to be aware of learning differences and difficulties, behaviour differences and difficulties and accordingly handle the child separately. This prevents labelling of the child, bad treatment of the child and rebellion from the child towards the teacher. However, the teacher should also learn to differentiate between the attention seekers and the students who genuinely need help. Both need to be handled positively yet firmly. Again, the point of boundaries and ground rules come into play.

Second, a teacher can give equal opportunity for responses and class participation. Encouraging children who are shy or introvert or nervous to speak out, spreads a sense of comfort to them, thereby giving them the confidence to try and participate.

Apart from the points emphasised for building student-teacher relationship, the following are few more initiatives teacher can take to make the institute's atmosphere welcoming:

- **Peer orientation and parent orientation about particular children if required** - This brings about inclusivity in the peer group as well as among the community.
- **Encouraging children to participate in events despite difficulty in their abilities.** This boosts their confidence.
- **Customising the classes or methodology in a way that makes learning inclusive** - Different children require different teaching methodologies. A holistic teaching technique reaches every student equally and learning is optimum!
- **Assign seats before school begins** - This ensures zero discrimination or embarrassing situations for children when they want to go sit in a particular spot in class. This is also preventing old friends saving seats for each other and keep away new students. It paves way for new friendships and inclusion of new comers in the school.
- **Use the students name** - This brings about familiarity and belonging.
- **Give students the tools they need** - It is okay if a student does not have a particular stationary. The teacher can keep stock and provide them with it. However, the teacher must later emphasise on (in a non-accusing manner) the responsibility of bringing to school everything that is required for a school day.
- **Emotional safety** - Create a safe space for students to open to each other and the teacher. This also brings about inclusivity to students who may feel they don't fit in.
- **Take their interests as an advantage and incorporate into class** - Customizing the class to the way children like it (majority of them and if it ensures catering to all children) will go a long way in the way they learn and retain the knowledge. This also shows the students that the teacher is listening to their opinions and ideas and involving them by putting their ideas into action.

- **Go the extra mile** - If a child needs extra attention, a teacher can do their best to give it by providing extra tutoring.
- Avoiding threats, punishments and favouritism.
- Show that it is okay to make mistakes and how one can learn from them. But also, remember to guide them on how to avoid such mistakes.

While there are some children who might take the inclusivity and friendly atmosphere for granted, with clear ground rules and boundaries and step by step processes, the institution can be made into a balanced and welcome atmosphere for students of all ages, backgrounds, personalities, abilities and capabilities.