

# **REVERSING UNDERACHIEVEMENT**

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**Presentation Handout**

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## **WHY DOES A STUDENT RESIST LEARNING?**

- 1. Poor Self-Image As A Learner** - when a child doesn't not feel competent and capable of learning, they will often times refuse to receive guidance and assistance.
- 2. Fear Of The Unknown** - anxiety is a major obstacle for students and fear is one of frequent antecedents to one feeling anxious. Students like to be comfortable and something unknown can create learning resistance.
- 3. Lack Of Relevance Or Connection Of The Activity** - it is important for people to have an understanding of why they are learning things. Students desire to make a life connection from the classroom to their communities. Too often, concepts are taught in classrooms because it is part of the curriculum without helping the students with life applications of the material.
- 4. Material Is Not Presented At Their Learning Level** - we have a wide variety of learners in our classrooms today with a wide range of levels of understanding. A student will shut down when they begin to feel 'dumb', 'stupid', or 'unable to learn.' We must help the student make sense of the content within the curriculum.
- 5. Students' Dislike Of Teachers** - if a student doesn't like or connect with the educator on a personal level, learning will be stifled. At times, parents may sabotage learning due to negative feelings toward a school or teacher. Other times, the educator may not have found successful ways to engage and connect with the student(s).

## UNDERACHIEVEMENT...WHAT TO AVOID

- ❖ Intensifying The Teaching- when the child resists, saying it more won't help. It will only press the child toward oppositional responses. Our tendency might be to push harder, but often times softening the approach will reduce the anxiety in the student.
  
- ❖ Lecturing- if they don't get it the first time, reminding them of their lack of success such as, "I told you so," and "this will happen" will only build resentment. Logical approaches haven't worked in the past, why would they now? More words only create more confusion. Find a way to be seen as an ally and not an adversary. Ask them for their opinions and ideas.
  
- ❖ Rewarding- avoid making the reward the focus. There are natural by-products of achievement...let those natural occurrences take place. However, an additional incentive may be helpful for some children. Teach intrinsic concepts to children such as the feeling of success, the understanding that it is the right thing to do, or the importance of treating others kindly. While the external rewards are okay, unless they make a connection internally, the effectiveness will be limited.
  
- ❖ Punishing- be careful that our own frustration level doesn't get to the point that we push consequences onto the child in order to "teach them a lesson." They will not usually "get it" anyway and will create more oppositional behaviors. Whether you call them consequences or punishment, the child needs to make a connection between the actions and the results. Give them examples, share stories, and help them to get outside of their own world.

## **STRATEGIES TO REVERSE UNDERACHIEVEMENT**

1) **Replace Fear With Trust** - broken trust creates fear. Emphasize the importance of truth, honesty, and forgiveness. Avoid discouraging the truth with negative statements.

2) **Encourage Negotiation** - teach skills of negotiation. Avoid falling into the trap of thinking people are manipulating when they may just need to be taught correct methods of compromise and negotiation.

2) **Be Dependable** - children depend upon us. Show them consistency. Do what you say and say what you mean. If something needs to be changed or postponed, explain it to them and the trust relationship will carry you through. Help them find predictability in you.

4) **Be A Role Model** - they are watching you all the time. Even when you don't think they see (in the community, hallway, lunchroom, at sporting events, church, etc.), they notice your actions. How do you speak to others? Do you help out? Are you negative, sarcastic? How do you treat your family, friends, children?

5) **Use Peer Supports And Mentoring** - Do you find ways for students to work together? Do you use peer tutoring, mentoring, and supports? Often times, a student can learn from another student when they have been resistant to you.

6) **Find Times To Laugh** - school should not feel too serious and overwhelming. Lighten up the atmosphere with jokes, funny anecdotes, smiles, and kind words. Each child should receive some sort of encouragement each day in your classroom or setting.