

Communicating with Kids

Building relationships with students can be difficult. Especially if your students have experienced trauma in their home environments. However, as educators it is important to make those connections, and make an effort to communicate effectively.

Many educators pose the question - *Do you have any tips for teachers with concerns about certain students who may be struggling with talking about what's going on?*

Here are tips for every grade level, from our experts here at Boys Town:

K-3rd Grade

When children are struggling to talk about their feelings, it is important not to press them to share before they feel they can trust you. Start by planting seeds to build a strong relationship. Use active listening, be comfortable with silence and do activities that allow children to express their feelings in other ways (e.g., artistic expression, role-play, journaling and mediation exercises).

Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town's Common Sense Parenting

4th-8th Grade

Some tips include:

- Adults are often too quick to jump in with answers, to try to solve problems and to give advice to kids. But we get farther faster if we can be patient, listen, validate the child's feelings and let them do the talking. A good approach to building relationships is to let silence provide an opportunity or a platform for students to express themselves. So, instead of jumping in to try to solve problems, give students an opportunity to get to know you and come to trust you and your opinion.
- Another good way to build rapport is to discover and talk about common interests like music, sports, books or other subjects or activities you both might be interested in.
- It's important to be genuine and authentic. Sometimes we want to put on our adult hat (teacher, coach, parent, etc.) when really what kids want and need is somebody to be authentic with them. They are pretty good at spotting somebody who's not being genuine and that can really hinder your relationship.
- On a more subtle level, communicate availability. Either with language or just being physically present. This helps to send a message to the student that you are available.
- It is important to acknowledge when you might not be the right person for a kid. Sometimes we try to hang in there because we want to make it work and we know we can help, but it just isn't working.

It's okay to say, "You know what? This isn't a good fit. Let me find somebody that I know who will be."

Julie Almquist, Manager, Boys Town Behavioral Health Clinic

9-12 (Teens)

1. Set expectations for students regarding communication. Teach them to take responsibility to communicate circumstances affecting performance, mood and behavior.
2. Encourage a variety of means to communicate within what is allowed by the school – email, text, twitter, in person or voice mail.
3. Check with other teachers, coaches, aides, etc. to give all a heads up and enlist a team approach.
4. Involve parents, counselors and any other administrative staff right away.
5. Don't develop exclusivity with students as you may be in over your head and you will not always be available in their time of need.
6. Build an action plan with the team and discuss it with the student.
7. Keep parents informed (e.g., school card, emails, text, etc.).
8. Even if it seems that the situation has been resolved, continue to check back with the student at scheduled intervals and randomly as well.
9. Design lesson plans and develop learning experiences that draw students into the group.
10. Praise approximations. Empathize.

Linda McGuire, Boys Town National Hotline Supervisor

For more tips on better communication with your students, download our FREE resource guides:

[Grades K-3 Resource Guide](#)

[Grades 4-8 Resource Guide](#)

[Grades 9-12 Resource Guide](#)