



Handling Frustration in the Classroom, by Dr. Brad Schwall, www.coolkidschannel.com

Teachers and students all have a range of moods and spend more hours in the day together than with their own families. Naturally, students and teachers must deal with frustrations and anger together. How can teachers handle anger as professionals and how can they help students deal with their frustrations in order to keep the focus on learning?

Anger often arises from unmet needs:

- Students disrupting learning interferes with our need for respect and cooperation.
- Teachers have pressures on them from many different directions.
- Students may be facing challenges at home or with peers.
- Students may be struggling academically and act out in response to the struggles.

To turn an interaction involving anger from a problem-focused interaction to a solution-focused interaction, we can follow steps for handling frustration in the classroom whether a teacher or student is dealing with anger.

Teacher Frustration

Psychological consequences are ineffective, model disrespect, and are detrimental to parent trust for teachers and schools. Psychological consequences for undesirable behaviors include:

- Shaming
- Comparing students making poor choices to students making good choices
- Condescending comments
- Empty threats
- Yelling

Often students reflecting with each other on interactions with teachers when the teachers were frustrated involve the student describing the teacher's reaction more than the facts of the incident, the poor choice the student made, or understanding of the consequences caused by poor choices. The *Cool Kids* resources teach students the Cool Rule, "Stay Cool," but teachers may use this skill in dealing with their own frustrations in the classroom.

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1. Stop and get calm.

When teachers' emotions escalate, students' emotions may escalate. Thinking rationally leads to calmness. To calm down, think:

- "This is a problem that can be solved."
- "I am going to get calm so that I may think rationally."
- "What comments or response to the child could I make that I would feel comfortable making in front of the child's parents?"

2. Think about how I feel.

Thinking about what you are feeling and wanting to happen helps you think rationally, respond constructively, and communicate effectively.

- What is your feeling?
- What events led to that feeling?
- What would you like to happen?

3. Talk, work it out, or drop it.

Talk: You can tell the student what you would like to happen. Say, "I would like..." Be direct about what you would like to happen. Avoid criticism or questioning. Describe what you want the student to do. School discipline plans must be implemented with calmness. A calm, but firm response to undesirable behavior ensures that the focus remains on the consequence of the behavior rather than the frustration of the teacher.

Work it Out: You can "Work it Out" by brainstorming solutions that might prevent the problem from happening again or help in resolving the current problem. Focusing on the problem keeps you from focusing on personality and helps you respond constructively to the situation.

Drop it: Or, you can drop it. You might choose to ignore the issue and avoid entering an argument.

Student Frustration

When students are frustrated, either guide them through the steps to the Cool Rule “Stay Cool” or give them a “Stay Cool Think Sheet” to complete.

- Help them communicate what their frustration is about.
- Help them decide whether they need to tell the person what they feel, brainstorm solutions to the problem, or just drop it and not do anything else about it.

Say, “I can tell you are frustrated. Tell me what you are feeling. Do you need to talk about it? Is there a problem you can brainstorm solutions to? Or, is it not that big of a deal and you could just drop it?”

Talk: Encourage the student to describe calmly what he or she is feeling.

Work it Out: Guide the student to brainstorm solutions to the problem.

Drop it: Help the student determine whether the situation is important enough to address or something that he or she could forget about.

Responding to Parents Who Are Angry

- Say something positive about the parent’s child.
- Repeat in your own words what you understand that the parent is wanting.
- Think of solutions that may be of help.
- Ask, “What do you think I can do that might be helpful?”
- Focus on what the parent is wanting for the child and on goals for the child.
- Avoid making statements that you cannot substantiate.
- Affirm the parent for being an advocate for his or her child.
- Encourage the parent to continue to be involved in his or her child’s education.
- Follow up with the parent.

Cool Kids provides resources to help school counselors, teachers, and principals create positive learning environments. The videos, lessons, games, songs, and activities teach children the *Cool Rules* that help students succeed in school:

- Stay Cool
- Work it Out
- Give Respect
- Get it Done
- Be Confident

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