23 Ways to Show You Care (1 of 12)

1. Ask them for advice

Being asked for advice on a topic you know about is a great compliment and we all love to be able to show how much we know. There are some fairly generic topics for boys and girls – asking a teenage girl for advice about make-up, hair styles, decent clothes shops in town and, dare I say it, ‘shoes’ (sorry, I know it’s sexist but stick with me) will generally create some interest and serve as a conversation starter.

Similarly, most boys will respond to questions about football/sport in general and technical issues. There aren’t many kids who won’t jump at the chance to give you advice on the music you should be listening to, or the best computer game to buy.

These are sweeping generalisations – I’m aware of that. Taking the time to find out particular strengths of individuals and asking them advice on these specific topic is obviously better.

2. Have MASSIVE expectations

In the same way that Pygmalion’s high expectations became a self-fulfilling prophecy and turned a lifeless statue into a beautiful living being, the thoughts and beliefs we hold about our students can have quite dramatic effects on them. Start by giving them positive labels – try referring to them all (yes, even the ‘really’ challenging ones) as ‘top students’, ‘excellent workers’ or your ‘favourites’ and you might find it makes them feel more positively about themselves... and behave accordingly.

Constantly remind them that they ARE capable, they ARE good role models, they ARE likeable, they ARE wonderful, they ARE helpful, they ARE worthy of success and that they CAN improve providing they are willing to put in the effort.

Children need to know that someone in authority believes in them and they need to feel that people care about them, understand them and like them.

3. Give them something special

Lending a cheap pen to a student who has forgotten to bring their equipment to the lesson sends a very clear message: ‘I don’t trust you enough to give you a decent pen and I don’t think you deserve one.’ Giving them a special gift, token or a loan of a personal or treasured item communicates different feelings. Students respond to us in the way they feel they’re being treated – treat them with contempt and they will...
respond with indignation. Giving them the clear message that you trust them and value them will evoke positive feelings which result in an entirely different reaction.

“Our response has crucial consequences ... it can create a climate of compliance or defiance, a mood of contentment or contention, a desire to make amends or to take revenge.”

(Chesterton, 1924)

4. Perform Random Acts of Kindness

If you’ve seen the film Evan Almighty (a funny and surprisingly good film with some powerful messages 😊) you’ll know that the word ARK stands for Acts of Random Kindness.

Try performing random acts of service or appreciation for your students to make them feel special and then stand back and watch what happens. You can increase the effects by adding an encouraging note for them to ‘Pay it Forward’ (another great film).

This is an excellent way to change a student’s negative attitude and can help create a more caring and nurturing environment. One of the greatest ways to increase self-esteem is to serve, help or express sincere appreciation to another person because one of our powerful ‘needs’ is the need to contribute or actually feel needed. This is the perfect way to satisfy that need.

Here’s an example which is not for everyone but very powerful none the less... The idea is to go out of your way to be of total service to your students. Treat each student as a high paying guest in a top restaurant for the whole lesson – greet them, seat them and wait on them with a constant supply of nice pens and equipment, drinks of water if they want them, offers to move seats if they are uncomfortable, a smorgasbord of sweets to choose from (presented on a cake stand, of course) etc.

You could even dress up for the occasion and drape a wine waiter’s towel over your arm. This isn’t a strategy for every lesson, nor for every group you teach but as an impromptu way of saying ‘thank you’ to a group who have made positive changes or an attempt to break the mood state of a difficult group it takes some beating.

At the very least you should take a moment to greet each of your students by name as they enter the classroom or arrive at the door. These first few moments are important in setting a pleasant and friendly tone and making the effort to speak to each individual shows you care and are interested in them.
5. Do your research – show you’re interested in them

Kids are experts at judging us. They can tell from a mile off if we like them and have their interests at heart or if we’re simply turning up for the lesson because it’s part of the job. They read our body language, they read our facial expressions and they seem to know on some deep level exactly what we think of them. The sure-fire way to kill a relationship with a student is to give signals that you really don’t care about them or perhaps even don’t like them. So many teachers do that and it’s so sad - for both parties.

Showing you care is something that effective teachers do subconsciously but it is a learnable skill. An obvious first step would be to make sure you learn their names. This has to be done as soon as possible; not only does it make classroom time much easier to manage, it is also the most important word the students hear. I’m saddened when I think back to the students whose names I hadn’t managed or bothered to learn in my classes. As the year drew to a close there were still students I was referring to as ‘you’ with a pointed finger. What message does that give? “You’re not important enough for me to bother learning your name.” It’s quite shocking and disheartening when you look at it like that.

Finding out your students’ likes/dislikes and hobbies and passions is an essential part of relationship building – what are you going to talk about with them if you don’t know what interests them? Researching their background and finding out what is going on in their lives is also crucial – not only does it generate empathy (it’s harder to be hostile to a young boy who you discover is routinely neglected by an abusive father) – it could also provide vital information which could help avoid blow-ups, or could be used as an effective aid in de-escalation.

I’ve included a questionnaire you can use to find out your students’ interests but you could also try playing occasional ‘getting to know you’ games and activities at the start of the day/lesson or as a break during lesson time. You’ll find suitable games later in this ebook.

6. Give them responsibilities

Often, our most challenging students are those with the greatest leadership potential; giving them a responsibility is very fulfilling for them and saves them trying to gain notoriety in less appropriate ways.

Responsibility can take many forms – from being in charge of certain equipment through to monitoring and supporting more vulnerable members of the class (such as victims of bullying) or allowing students the opportunity to grade their own work and choose lesson activities.
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Giving students responsibility sends a message that you trust and value their judgment and their personality traits.

7. Give them choices

Give students several options on a project or assignment and allow them to choose which one they would prefer to do. One of the least empowering strategies a teacher can use is to constantly dictate and give orders in the classroom. Students get fed up of being told what to do and not being allowed to exercise free choice. Choice is empowering – it gives a feeling of autonomy and freedom and therefore increases intrinsic motivation. It also shows you care and know enough about them to know that they will appreciate a certain option.

8. Share your life

Invite your students into your world by sharing pictures and stories from your own life – your friends, pets, hobbies, trips etc. By letting them into your world, there is more chance they will let you into their world.

Opening yourself up to students like this can be daunting but it is during the times when we reveal more about ourselves – our emotions, thoughts and beliefs – that relationships truly start to develop. Think about it – you can’t build trusting relationships if all you talk about is curriculum and school life.

Group sessions which encourage discussion about personal hobbies/interests, sharing of photographs and stories about life outside school are a non-threatening way to bring a class together and let the students get to know you better.

The picture I’ve shared here is from a canoe trip to Loch Moidart and if you’re a reader of my behaviour blog (www.behaviourneeds.com/blog) you’ll know that I practice what I preach and regularly share my life with my readers – purely because it helps build connections and enables visitors to share in my life.

Incidentally, when I shared this particular picture with a particularly hard-to-reach group of 15 year old boys it opened a whole new world of communication. I knew they were all interested in fishing because I got them to fill in a Record Card Questionnaire when they first arrived but when they discovered it was also one of my hobbies we suddenly had a lot to talk about.

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9. Say it with a card.

Cards, notes and letters show more consideration and appreciation than words.

If it’s their birthday, go a step further than saying ‘Happy Birthday’ – make them feel special and give them a card. (Physically posting it home gets bonus points)

If they are ill, go a step further than marking them absent on the register – send a ‘Get Well’ card. And when they try particularly hard or do something especially nice, why not give them a 'Thank You' card?

10. Create a Classroom Community

The more you can include students, give them a voice and make them feel part of the school/class community, the more they will feel and act as if they belong there. It is far easier to reject and opt out of something you don’t feel part of than it is to turn your back on something you’ve helped create.

Ideas for this could include:

- Create a photo board with pictures taken of the class involved in various activities throughout the term.
- Have games and puzzles for kids to experiment with while waiting for class to start.
- Designate a display board as the ‘Graffiti Wall’. Put up a background of painted brickwork and give each student the opportunity to define their own name or ‘tag’ in graffiti lettering and stick them up on the wall. Students of all ages love this activity. You can give them ideas by looking at graffiti samples online and downloading ready-made letter templates in various designs for them to copy.
- Have a reading area in the room complete with comfortable chairs and plants etc where students can read their magazines and books in free time. colour or pictures to your room
- Provide an area for students to put up notices, adverts, invitations, certificates, letters, samples of work etc.
- Invite students to create a class ‘coat of arms’.
- Create a suggestion box for students to suggest ways to make the classroom better.
- Create a class competition against another class instead of competing against each other individually. This allows the students to work together with a common goal and is a great way to get students to support each other, and create class unity.
11. Give them regular challenges

Challenges can be set with individual students on an academic/work related issue:

“People looking at your past scores will assume you’re going to get a C in this next test. How about we put a plan together to prove them wrong?”

...or they could be set for a whole group:

“In the staff meeting this morning all the staff were told that not one class has achieved 100% attendance for a whole term. How about we work together to prove them all wrong?”

Finally, challenges can add fun to the curriculum:

“I’m betting there isn’t a person in this room who can eat four dried crackers in under one minute!”

My favourite A-level Biology teacher set that last challenge to us one day at the start of a module on digestion. It was messy and chaotic but I still smile when I think about it – more than twenty years later!

12. Celebrate successes

Take opportunities to draw special attention to successes that students have, whether it be an individual or a group effort. Bring treats, a cake, have a party, let them listen to music, or have some other reward from you that shows you recognise their efforts.

13. Show understanding

Tell the class that you realise that life can be challenging at home, school or with peers and that you are aware how life can throw up problems for young people. This shows empathy and respect for their challenges and that you care about their personal lives. You could take it a step further (after all, actions speak louder than words):

Give each student a laminated blue card. “This is your ‘blues’ card; whenever you get ‘the blues’ you can trade your card by cashing it in for a treat. You get one card per term/month/week so use it wisely. It’s just to show I’m aware of the issues you face.”

‘Treats’ could include a one-day time extension for homework submission, a 10% boost to a test score, a Willy Wonka Golden Ticket, a pass for forgetting to bring equipment etc.
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14. Give something back... together

Have students work together for a service project of some kind. The project should be focused on supporting and building up the community (eg, gather clothes for the homeless, food drives, blood drives, plant trees, litter removal etc).

Bonds can be built and strengthened very quickly during such projects, with everyone (including the class teacher) working towards a worthwhile goal. When students learn to turn outward in service we often see several positive benefits including: less depression, increased gratitude, self-esteem and motivation.

15. Let them grade you

Tell the students that your job is to help them succeed. In effect, you work for them which makes them your boss! That means they should be able to grade you in terms of your performance in teaching and helping them.

Explain to them the criteria for getting an ‘A’ grade as a student, and then ask them to give you their criteria for getting an ‘A’ grade as their teacher. Write their suggestions down and pin them up next to the board. Ask them to grade your work at various times, perhaps the end of each lesson or at least once a week. Students should be encouraged to give you constructive feedback along the way.

16. Use ‘Referral Marketing’

If you are struggling to make connections with a particular student but you know of a colleague who gets on very well with them, get your colleague to introduce you. Businesses use referral marketing all the time – because it works. If the student trusts the judgment of your colleague, a joint meeting can be set up where the three of you can sit down and discuss ways to help the student succeed. Barriers normally come down after this initial meeting.

17. Give them time

Break times and lunch times are a fantastic relationship-building opportunity. A friend and colleague of mine would never venture into the staff room in his free time. Instead he spent break times and lunch times in his room with his door always open.

Students came in to play chess and board games or just to chat; he rarely had a problem with classroom
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management. His reputation as being ‘there’ for the students had spread throughout the whole school and they all knew him to be fair. He was greatly respected for that.

18. Work on your reputation

Reputation is key in relationship building: students talk, your reputation spreads. Do you ever wonder why some teachers can walk into a room of tough students and get them all silent without even saying a word? It comes down to their reputation. If you show that you are there for the students, are willing to listen to them, interested in them and available for them, they grow to respect you. And the more students in school who feel like this about you, the wider and faster your reputation spreads.

Eventually you can get to the point in school where the vast majority of students respect you, trust you & like you and from this point forward, peer pressure becomes your ally. Few students want to upset the trend by doing anything in class to annoy you. Building relationships becomes easier as students are swayed by the majority – and actually WANT to be on your side.

Of course, we are not only concerned with the majority. Sadly, some students do get left behind and choose not to run with the rest of the pack. It is these who often resort to causing problems in order to get attention or to attack a system they feel is against them. These students need extra attention and support.

19. Connect with the written word

Marking work can be a chore but it’s also another opportunity to connect; to strengthen bonds or to initiate communication with students who don’t like talking.

The comment in the picture, for example, was a note I placed in the work file of a boy who was visiting his father for the first time in several months. He was apprehensive about the visit so writing the words “Good luck on Saturday” was just a quick, personal way of giving him a bit of support. Often students respond to written comments by writing replies and a ‘Post-It Conversation’ develops. As does the relationship.

Here’s another example along the same lines. It’s part of a post I found on a forum several years ago from a parent who was very worried about her fragile, withdrawn young daughter, Holly, who was starting at a new school...
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We waited anxiously for her to return home that day and asked her the inevitable question: "What do you think of your new teacher?"

"Oh, she seems pretty nice. Her name’s Miss Daniels. She laughs and smiles a lot and she said she liked my new shoes."

Each day that week, Holly shared tales of Miss Daniels. She seemed to be enjoying school again. She smiled at supper and she laughed when getting dressed for school. She ran excitedly to the school bus. We were cautiously optimistic.

Friday evening, Holly went to her room to do her homework. Within five minutes she ran to the kitchen, beaming.

"Look Daddy,” she said. “Look what Miss Daniels sneaked into my book.” Miss Daniels had secretly placed a note between the pages so it fell into Holly’s lap when she opened the book. It read:

"You had a great first week Holly. I think this will be a good year for both of us. See you Monday.
Miss Daniels
PS I love your shoes!"

Maybe she did that for every child in the class but the point was that it made our fragile little girl feel special and it helped turn her around.”

20. Empower them by teaching them new skills

We can show caring for a student by empowering them with skills to overcome their difficulties. I often use the example of a student who seldom, if ever, hands in homework. Does ranting at them make them correct their behaviour and do the required work? Could it be that the lack of effort is intensified by a lack of skills rather than pure belligerence?

Spending some time teaching this student some time management skills will show a deeper level of caring than a detention ever could and may even help them get their homework in on time.

Students who frequently break rules and seem unwilling to follow rules need support and education as much as they do discipline. Constantly and repeatedly punishing them for things they do wrong does not address the underlying issue – it doesn’t show them how to do it right. Training them as mediators and ‘buddies’ to other students, for example, can help them see their own problems in a different light and can lead to startling behaviour change. As well as that, it often leads to a deep connection to the member of staff who takes the time and effort to reach out to help them.

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21. Show **trust** in them.

People often ask me on our live courses “how can I get respect from these kids?” or “how can I get them to trust me?”

We tend to ‘get back’ whatever we ‘give out’, so if we want trust we can start by giving it.

Here are three ways to give trust (and get it back):

**Trust Strategy #1: Give them a responsibility.**

Often the children who cause us the most problems are those with leadership potential. Or they may just be crying out for attention. Either way, giving them a responsibility shows we trust them and it builds bonds. Give them equipment to look after, delegate admin tasks to them, put them in charge of noise levels in the classroom etc.

Oh, in case you’re wondering, the cartoon is a picture of some ‘Shusshers’. These loyal and helpful souls are hand-picked on our live courses because they are highly skilled at ‘shusshing’ the rest of the participants when they make too much noise. I think the ‘Shusshers’ quite like it, everyone else thinks it’s quite amusing and the trainer gets to save his/her voice for another day. Everyone’s a winner with responsibilities. 😊

**Trust Strategy #2: Lend them something of value.**

How many times does your most challenging student forget to bring a pen to the lesson? Instead of handing them a chewed old Bic pen from the ‘pen graveyard’ why not use this as an opportunity to build the teacher/student relationship. Lending them a tatty, chewed, broken cheap pen says ‘I don’t think very much of you’ but taking them to one side and saying “this pen was a gift from my son. I’m going to trust you with it because I want you to learn how to look after things and I want you to write well today” gives an entirely different message.

(Before you say it, I’m fully aware students should bring pens to lessons and that lending a pen to them may encourage them to forget one next time – it’s just a suggestion).
22. Get **them** to do **you** a favour

Psychologists give us lots of clever ways of striking up bonds very quickly with people such as mirroring body language, altering our facial expressions, using the same tone of voice, giving compliments, offering to do nice things for them.

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etc.etc. but 18th Century politician Benjamin Franklin found an alternative, counter-intuitive approach which was equally, if not more, effective.

To cut a long story short he had been trying to connect with another politician but wasn’t able to. The other man wanted nothing to do with him. Franklin knew that this man happened to have a certain rare book in his personal library and he asked if he could borrow it from him. Surprisingly, the man’s attitude to Franklin changed completely from that moment on...

“When we next met in the House, he spoke to me (which he had never done before), and with great civility; and he ever after manifested a readiness to serve me on all occasions.”

Franklin attributed his success to a simple principle – if you want to increase the likelihood of someone liking you, get *them* to do *you* a favour.

I found this in a fascinating book called ‘:59 Seconds’ by Professor Richard Wiseman and if you think about it, it makes perfect sense – when you do someone a favour it draws you towards them; helping people gives us a sense of being needed or wanted, it feels good.

If you want to employ the ‘Franklin Effect’ ask a troublesome student to help you sort something out with your car, choose an outfit for an upcoming party, pick a CD for your own child’s birthday, decorate your house, do your ironing...

23. Talk with them

Relationships can’t grow very fast without dialogue. Indeed, conversation is far and away your very best relationship builder. The thing is, there are different *levels* of conversation and the *level* at which we communicate will dictate how fast relationships with students develop.

In this pyramid the most basic level of communication is the ‘Gossip Zone’. This is the area of playground chatter and banter. Conversations about football scores, latest soap opera happenings and politics take place at this level.

At the second level we talk about facts and we give out information. Most teacher-talk in the classroom takes place on this level.
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Finally, we have the top level where emotions and feelings are discussed. Inspirational leaders and great teachers communicate on this level and they inspire their listeners because this is the level where deep connections are made.

Relationships can develop very quickly when communication involves feelings and emotions. Try sharing your feelings with your students and you may find they respond to you more positively. Laugh with them, joke with them and if you’re down, explain why – it will encourage them to do the same.