

Are You Too Warm OR Too Demanding?

Working in schools can be stressful!

These articles are intended to help the great people who work in schools.

Key points

Staff in schools need to be 'Warm yet demanding'

Too warm and the students may walk all over you and too demanding and the students may choose not to respond

Think of it as a continuum - warm at one end and demanding at the other

A discipline plan provides a framework so that we can thoughtfully respond to unacceptable behaviour

Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Our ability to connect with students has a direct impact on our stress level and happiness. Behaviour management guru Bill Rogers uses the term Warm-Demanding to describe the ideal demeanor of staff in schools.

Rogers argues that our interactions with students should be characterised by a balance between the 'warmth' that shows we care about them as individuals and the 'demanding' that shows we have expectations of them and their behaviour. I find it helpful to see this as a continuum.

I have worked with staff in schools who have been too far to one end of the spectrum. Some staff have presented as being 'too warm'. They are clearly very keen to be friends with students and work very hard at building rapport. At times it has appeared that the staff member was afraid to do anything that would jeopardise the friendship and the student 'liking' them. To them retaining the friendship seems to be the highest priority. The staff member therefore had very limited control. In that situation the student is setting the tone.

I have also worked with staff who are 'too demanding'. I'm sure you know the "Don't smile until Easter!" approach. Staff members at this end of the spectrum display an attitude which could be described as harsh. There is no warmth displayed or any effort to build rapport with the students. They are very demanding, have very high expectations of students and could be interpreted as aloof. Whilst they make their expectations explicit to students, they are at risk of being unrealistic and disconnected from the students.

The ideal situation is an appropriate balance between warmth and demanding. The warmth is necessary to connect with students, have a good rapport and a relationship where students know you care about them and their learning. In this situation the student is more likely to respond by doing their best. Being demanding is also important as students need clear expectations and boundaries so that they know what is expected of them and rise to those expectations. The balance of warm, yet demanding is as relevant at the front office as it is in the classroom.

Rogers advocates teachers developing a discipline plan to keep the focus of our classroom leadership on our core business – teaching and learning, rather than on student behaviour itself.

While most teachers make focused and careful plans for *day-to-day* teaching, Rogers advocates giving the same reflection, consideration and planning to *day-to-day* discipline. We know there will be distracting behaviour occurring in our classrooms as the social mix of students find 'their place' and the students 'measure' our leadership of the class.

A discipline plan is essentially a conscious framework for how we thoughtfully address the typical range of distracting and disruptive behaviours that can occur in any classroom. In the heat of busy, teaching and management moments, we do not have the luxury of time to think about an appropriate, helpful, discipline strategy and language.

To find out more read Bill Rogers' "Making A Discipline Plan" from Thomas Nelson publishing.

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