

Cut Them Some Slack

We rarely know what is going on in other people's lives.

Whilst we might be frustrated by the behaviour of our students (and at times by our colleagues or boss) we rarely know all of the information about what is going on in their lives. We don't necessarily know about health issues, financial issues or other challenges they, or their family, are currently facing.

We don't necessarily know when they have had a sleepless night or an argument before coming to school.

Many of our students also have additional demands placed on them. Many students are coping with cancer in their families, living with chronic sickness, surviving the death of a loved one, the break up of a family, helping at home as if they were the adults or working part time to help ends meet.

Some students are babysitting younger siblings or caring for their parents, cooking, cleaning or working. They are doing what they can; stressing over what they can't. Sometimes the only control they have is what they choose to do or not do, how they behave or misbehave, the school assignments they complete or don't complete.

Think about the students in your school and how they are coping. Talk with them. Most importantly, listen to what they say and really hear how they feel. Be there to help them cope and you'll help them succeed. In some situations, you may be the only consistent, reliable adult in their life.

Remember that their behaviour is not necessarily about you.

At times we can be too quick to judge our students (and also our colleagues). By jumping too quickly to conclusions we do them an injustice. Just as we can become tired at this time of the year, our students can also be running low on reserves.

Instead, try to be less judgmental and cut them some slack. That doesn't mean that you have to be 'soft' and lower your expectations. Being consistent and reliable is far more helpful than being unpredictable.

However cutting them some slack means you need to resist jumping to conclusions. Look for other reasons or explanations. Open the channels of communication and extend assistance, where appropriate.

We never know everything that is happening in another person's world!

Working in schools can be stressful!

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

Key points

Often we don't know what is happening in other people's lives

Many students also have additional demands placed on them

It is important that school provides an environment of stable, consistent support

Try not to be judgmental and cut them some slack

I have just three things to teach: simplicity, patience, compassion.

These three are your greatest treasures.

Lao Tzu

Steve Francis MScM, BEd, DipT

Steve Francis is an expert in work-life satisfaction and is the author of three books, 'Time Management For Teachers', 'A Gr8 Life...Live it now!' and 'First Semester Can Make or Break You!'. He was a Principal for 20 years. Steve lives in Brisbane with his wife and two school aged children.

