



Cheat Sheet: Develop Productive Student-Teacher Relationships

- 1 Student-teacher relationships are foundational to student success and matter more than many realize. John Hattie's meta-analysis examined hundreds of influences on student achievement and found that quality student-teacher relationships have a greater impact than professional development, student study skills, and parental involvement.
- 2 Quality student-teacher relationships are ones that facilitate student learning and allow students to bring their full selves to class each day.
- 3 Building quality relationships requires that teachers exhibit both genuine concern for their students' wellbeing and high expectations for all students' success.
- 4 Relationships too low in either may result in indifference, or those too high in expectations and lacking in concern may be overly disciplinary or simply friendly if the inverse is true.
- 5 Ideal student-teacher relationships are high in both concern and expectations. They are ones in which the teacher consistently signals care through body language and gets to know students on a personal level through frequent informal conversations. The teacher also maintains appropriately high academic standards for all students. Students whose teachers consistently exhibit these behaviors are more likely to succeed academically and emotionally.
- 6 Many teachers struggle to replicate these two conditions in a virtual classroom for three reasons: 1) body language is harder to read and convey over a screen, 2) there's limited time for informal student-teacher interactions, and 3) teachers can inadvertently compromise expectations to accommodate students' need for flexibility.
- 7 Below are four strategies to overcome these challenges and improve the quality of student-teacher relationships:

Strategy 1: Intentional Nonverbal Communication Cues

To convey the cues that students need to feel connected to teachers, focus on both your positioning and nonverbal signals. First, always position your camera to show as much of your upper body as possible; this may require a portable microphone to allow you to back up from the camera and make your hand gestures visible to students. Second, be intentional about upper body language. For instance, convey positive reinforcement with virtual "high-fives" or "applause." And signal active listening by mimicking direct eye contact by placing the speaker's "box" as close to the computer camera as possible.

Strategy 2: Digital Journaling

Maintain informal interactions with students outside of class through a shared digital journal. Assign students a weekly non-academic prompt and reply with comments and questions to create an ongoing dialogue. Limit student responses to 100 words to make reading and replying more manageable.

Strategy 3: "Take 5" Wellbeing Check-In

Quickly gauge how students are doing by taking a wellbeing check at the start of class each day. Ask students to hold up their hands and show on a scale of one finger to five fingers whether they're having a rough day or a great day. Allow students to share their number in a private chat option if preferable. Follow up with students who hold up fewer than 3 fingers within 24 hours.

Strategy 4: Student Expectations Assessment

Even while allowing for flexibility, signal high student expectations by intentionally reframing class language. For instance, praise student effort, not performance outcomes. Offer choices, not mandates. And scaffold questions to help students arrive at the correct answer before asking another student to respond. Use EAB's assessment to evaluate if your language is adequately conveying the high standards you hold for students.