

# THE RESILIENT TEACHER

*How do I stay positive and effective when  
dealing with difficult people and policies?*

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**MENDLER**



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teach according to a prescribed script or method that doesn't work for some or even all students. The teachers may want to try something different but believe they will be criticized and perhaps punished if they step outside the box. If you find yourself in this situation, the first thing you should do is to check with your colleagues or supervisors to make sure that there isn't a more effective way of implementing the policy. If you can't find a more effective way, your best course of action is to show support for the policy, but also to ask for a trial period for trying a different approach. The following five-step process that can get you the support you seek to sidestep a problematic policy:

1. Begin by identifying and expressing examples of the policy's effectiveness.
2. Identify the students for whom the policy is a barrier to success.
3. Suggest an alternative approach.
4. Express why you think your alternative approach might work better than the original policy, or simply ask permission to implement it.
5. Ask for support during the trial period, which should last at least two (and preferably three) weeks so that you can properly assess the effectiveness of the alternative policy.

You can easily address all five steps in a single statement. Here's an example:

I understand the policy and I think it can work under the right circumstances. [*Offer an example*]

getting students' scores up. I'll do my best, but I will not sacrifice either my own or my students' well-being. I need to remind myself that the only way to really get my kids to do better is to get them excited about learning, and the only way to do *that* is by maintaining my energy and optimism. I need to continuously focus on challenging both myself and my students to do better each day. When improvement doesn't happen, I'll see this as analogous to a baseball player having a bad game rather than a bad career. Tomorrow is a new day and a new game.



## **When Supervisors and Colleagues Are the Problem**

### **When Somebody Takes Credit for Your Work**

It sometimes happens that colleagues take credit for work that you've done or they neglect to acknowledge your contributions. If you are enjoying the benefits of the work, it might not be worth the hassle just to get recognized, especially if you have already established a good reputation. You know the contribution you made, so feel good about that. Most people recognize when someone is grandstanding, so it's usually best to avoid raising the issue in public, although

helps to take a few deep breaths and a quick walk. If you can do that more often to calm yourself, that would be great, because I hate sending you to the time-out room. When you are there, you are missing the lesson, and I miss you being with us. Can you think of some other things you could do to calm down?

If the student doesn't offer an alternative, conclude with a statement along the following lines: "Let's keep getting together like we are right now. If you think of something better that can keep you in class when you get upset, please let me know, and I'll do the same."



## **When Parents Are the Problem**

### **When Parents Are Doing Their Children's Schoolwork**

Be sure to assign homework that students can at least begin to work on successfully in class. Because parents are motivated to do their kids' work by the prospect of higher grades, another effective solution is to check for homework completion, not grade it.

At every opportunity, be sure to let parents know that you value effort over achievement. Tell them how long they should expect their children to work on assignments at home;

who cares so deeply. If you think discussing this issue with the principal is necessary, I hope you'll do that. In fact, I'll let him know that you might be calling. Thanks for coming in and letting me know your concerns.



## Problems That Cross Categories

### When You Are Blindsided by Feedback

One day early in my career, as I was busy tucking things away for the summer, I had a parent show up in my classroom unannounced. Despite my repeated requests to meet with her, this was the first time she set foot in the classroom.

“I just want to say that you are the worst excuse for a teacher I know,” she said. “Did you enjoy making my child feel miserable all year long?”

With that, she abruptly turned and left without waiting for an answer. I was completely dumbfounded; I had no idea that she felt this way, and I felt I had let her child down. A few days later I called the parent to discuss things further, and I was prepared to apologize for whatever I might have done to upset her. Although she never answered the phone, the experience taught me to be more proactive about seeking feedback from administrators, students, and parents. Here are some ways of seeking feedback from others so that you're not blindsided by criticism: