

5 PAINLESS WAYS TO HELP STUDENTS FEEL SPECIAL

[Taken from "Group's Active Learning Update" 1995.]

One characteristic shared by all students, no matter how young or old: They need to feel important and accepted. Here are 5 easy ways to help students find a comfortable niche in your class...and feel accepted as they share themselves.



1. Treat students as individuals. Learn names. Birthdays. Ask questions. Discover what's unique about each student. The effort pays huge dividends: Students are far likelier to listen to and respect someone who knows and cares about them. A plus:

Active and interactive learning offer many open windows into what your students think and feel. You'll quickly get a sense of who your students are as individuals.

2. Give students the vote. Everyone likes to be considered when decisions are made. While not everything is up for negotiation, be sure students have the chance to make choices. Even very young children can make choices between clear alternatives.

3. Give students responsibilities - that matter. During recent field tests of one of Group's new programs, elementary-aged children chose duties to perform within small groups...and the kids loved it. Not only were tasks cheerfully completed, but also because everyone had a special role, discipline problems all but disappeared. What tasks can you delegate to students to build their sense of belonging and importance? Caution: Be certain students are capable of completing their responsibilities, and that tasks are actually significant. Kids dislike busy work, etc.

4. Celebrate achievements. Keep an eye out for birthdays... school awards... achievements... completion of a tough project... any significant event in students' lives. Then celebrate with a plate of cookies and prayer of thanks [depending on your schedule of Church School and Liturgy.] You'll help students know they count.. and that in your class they're special!

5. Show up - or send a note. Gather kids' extra-curricular activity schedules and surprise them by showing up at games, concerts, or other events. Can't make it? Send a quick note a week before the event and remind students that you're thinking of them.