

High Need Students

This article is a summary of the types of high-need students that teachers may find in their classrooms. We have all of these types at our school, so it's important for teachers to be aware of what they will need to do to ensure learning by all students. And of course, education students will need to be familiar with this information for courses they may take.

I've simplified the material as much as possible for easier reading. The original source was "Classroom Management That Works" by Robert J. Marzano. It's probably on the reading list at most Teachers' Colleges. We have a copy here at the school.

High Needs Students

1. Passiveness

Passive students are driven by fear. There are two categories here; students who fear *relationships with others*, and students who fear *failure*. Students in both categories bring their fear with them from causes outside the classroom, and their behaviour is difficult to change.

Students who fear *relationships* are often shy and reserved. They have difficulty answering questions when called upon ... they don't want to participate. They may seem sad all the time. These students may be teased a lot by other students, and they are often ignored by their peers.

These students *may* be the victims of neglect, or physical or verbal abuse. They may be suffering from depression. Or they may just be incredibly shy.

Teachers need to be very patient with these students, and slowly build a relationship with them, creating trust. Using lots of positive reinforcement, and building a relationship both in and out of the classroom will help these students to feel secure enough to participate in classroom activities.

Students who fear *failure* are ones who believe that they can never be successful in school. They often don't turn in assignments, and the ones that are handed in are sloppy and incomplete. When confronted with their lack of effort, their excuse is often 'I can't do it', or 'I'm never going to get this'.

Teachers need to give a lot of positive reinforcement to these students, especially about the things that they can do well. For example, 'Just because you have trouble with math doesn't make you stupid. You are a very smart person'. Teachers should discuss assignments with these students one-on-one, and help them plan what to do. When completed assignments are returned, they should discuss what part of the planning worked, and what didn't.

2. Aggressiveness

Aggressive students fall into one of three categories: *hostile*, *oppositional* and *covert*.

Hostile aggressive students have poor anger control, poor impulse control, little empathy for others, an inability to see the consequences of their actions, and low self esteem. They often exhibit thrill-seeking behaviour, and a tendency to hang around with people who exhibit criminal behaviour.

Teachers need to realize that while the behaviour of these students may seem difficult to change, they are simply kids experiencing a great deal of inner fear and hurt. Parents may not be able to control their behaviour. These students may be angry a lot, and may be responsible for school vandalism. They are not easy to love ... and helping them requires a lot of effort.

Dealing with hostile students requires a whole-school solution. All teachers must work together to try to change the behaviours. A meeting with the student, parents and administration can help to set goals for the student and establish rewards for good behaviour, as well as to set out specific consequences for negative behaviour. These are all laid out on paper for the student, and everyone meets regularly to discuss the student's progress.

Oppositional aggressive students exhibit behaviours that are similar to, but milder than that of hostile students. Oppositional students are resistant to following rules. They argue with teachers, and frequently will use angry language. They criticize and blame others a lot. They often seem to do the opposite of what is expected, and seem to like the attention this brings them.

Teachers of oppositional students need to meet with them individually and discuss their behaviour. The teacher needs to be positive, in the sense that the focus of the discussion is on how to help the student control his behaviour and make things better for him and the class, not on punishment. The discussion will include a description of rewards for good behaviours and consequences for undesirable behaviours (all of which are described in specific detail). The student and teacher meet frequently to discuss his progress.

Covert aggressive students are often pleasant and polite, but always seem to be nearby when bad things happen. Their behaviour is never serious enough to get them into trouble, but their activities always seem to place them nearby when trouble occurs. They are instigators, but their behaviours often go unpunished. Often the things they do involve spreading malicious gossip, goading others into inappropriate behaviours, and teasing.

A teacher who suspects that a student might be covert aggressive needs to do a lot of observing, to document what the student is doing in very specific detail, with dates and times. Then she needs to meet with the student and make it very clear to him that she understands exactly what the behaviours are, and that they need to stop. *The specific inappropriate behaviours need to be made very clear to the student.* As with other behaviour modifications mentioned previously, the teacher and student should agree on a set of rewards and consequences, and meet often to discuss progress.

3. Attention Problems

This category includes both *hyperactive* and *inattentive* students.

Hyperactive students may suffer from attention deficit disorder, or may just exhibit some of the symptoms in milder form. These students have poor impulse control, and have difficulty remaining seated or working quietly. They often blurt out questions or answers. They have trouble taking turns, and often interrupt others. They are often bright students, but can never seem to get their work done.

Teachers need to place these students near to the teacher's desk where they can interact more easily with the teacher than other students. The teacher should discuss

each learning activity with the student beforehand, so that he knows exactly what is expected, and spend time near him while the others are working.

Inattentive students don't seem to pay attention. Often, they don't seem to be listening, and as a result, are easily distracted, and have difficulty organizing and completing activities. They get frustrated easily when working on assignments and give up early. They don't know how to study for tests. Often, they appear apathetic.

Teachers of inattentive students need to meet with them to discuss strategies to help with classroom attentiveness and study skills. They need to help them get started with their homework, and help the student find ways to deal with confusion.

4. The Perfectionist

In some ways, these students resemble those with obsessive-compulsive disorder. These students will put in long hours completing assignments, and seldom complain. They strive for perfection and high marks, even though those goals may be out of their reach. These students don't enjoy their success, and often criticize themselves and others. They may have low self-esteem. They equate high marks with being loved and appreciated, but when they can't do the work successfully, they often give up and make excuses.

The teacher should meet often with the student to discuss the student's attitude, and try to get him to see that his expectations for himself and others are sometimes unreasonable. Make it clear that it's OK to make mistakes, and that he can learn from them. Encourage him to help others in the class when he has completed his own work.

5. The Socially Inept

These students have difficulty making and keeping friends. Their behaviour seems to annoy others; they talk too much, stand too close to people, make silly or embarrassing remarks, and just don't seem to fit in. They are often well-meaning, but try too hard to be accepted, and are teased a lot. They don't understand why they don't fit in. This often makes them sad.

In order for a teacher to help this kind of student, she has to develop a relationship with a student to the point where she can sit down with him and talk about the specific behaviours he is exhibiting that are preventing him from making friends. The student has to like and trust the teacher for this to be helpful. The teacher can also make suggestions about things to try.

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Recognizing the sorts of behaviours that students bring to your classroom will go a long way towards maintaining a positive learning atmosphere and ensuring that all students learn. While writing this, I recognized at least one student in every category in my classes, and the insight I gained from it will help me be a better teacher. I hope it helps you too.