

# 3 Tips for Building Rapport with Children

## 1. Make first impressions count.

For students who don't like school, our first impression is already fighting a negativity bias. Our opening moments with students therefore matter a great deal. Try the following first-impression trifecta for connecting with new students:

- ***Shake hands with everyone.*** Even though students give odd looks, making the effort to shake hands with each person shows a willingness to connect on a personal level. It also gives me an initial read on their receptiveness and personality.
- ***Give respect.*** Showing students—explicitly and implicitly—that we respect them is key. Many students today don't give respect without getting it first. (We can complain all we want about that shift in culture, but that won't get us anywhere). It is my job to be the bigger adult and *model* giving respect.
- ***Lead with positive emotion.*** As a speaker, I know that the first few minutes of any talk should be building rapport, using humor, and learning about the listeners. I also know that my resume means nothing to kids—they care more about my authenticity than my accolades. My goal as a speaker is to get as many smiles as I can in the first 30 seconds.

## 2. Know who's a “cat” and who's a “dog.”

This is a concept from The Quantum Learning Network” about using “cats and dogs” as an analogy to consider interactions with different personalities. It is not meant to stereotype students; it is simply a starting point for being more intentional with our efforts to build rapport.

- **Traits of “Dog” personalities:** Forgiving of errors, value attention, responsive to praise, social, playful, expressive facial expressions
- **Traits of “Cat” personalities:** Skeptical, observant, warm up to others on own terms, loyal when trust is established, neutral facial expressions when around groups, not as responsive to praise or overt positivity

### **Bringing it to tutoring:**

Take a moment to consider whether a certain student seems more like a cat or a dog. Then, experiment with these approaches:

#### ***Strategies for Dog Personalities***

- Provide opportunities for dogs to model, demonstrate, or share whole-group whenever possible.

- Think quality of positive interactions over quantity, such as a longer, positive conversation one-on-one.
- Ask them questions to give them a chance to share about their world, their interests, and their expertise.
- If behavior needs to be managed, opt for one-on-one pre-briefing or after class conversations.

### ***Strategies for Cat Personalities***

- Give quick, low-key compliments but don't linger for a response.
- Ask him/her for thoughts in one-on-one situations.
- Use written or after-class praise instead of public praise.
- Think quantity of positive interactions over quality, but space out interactions over time.
- Be particularly attentive and curious when a cat does approach you or open up.

## **3. Assume nothing, learn everything.**

Every reaction is symptom, not a cause.

Doctors know to *investigate* symptoms to understand causes. Tutors must do the same. No matter how many versions of a “type” of student, each life is different. Out of all the rapport-building strategies, one encompasses them all: Curiosity.

### **Bringing it to tutoring:**

Try “obser-questions.” The obser-question involves describing an observation, but following up with a question to learn more. They work best in one-on-one conversations. And, remember that vocal tone can make or break the interaction: Make sure your vocalics display true curiosity rather than judgment or condemnation. Examples:

- I noticed you slam your books on the desk when you walked in. What was on your mind?
- You seem to pay attention really well, but when I ask you to work independently, you talk more than work. Help me understand why that is.
- I'm noticing you've written words all over your arm, including the F-word, big and bold. Talk to me about that a little bit.