

1) The student doesn't like me or want to talk to me.

This was a concern especially with middle and high school teachers. But it's not a deal breaker. If a student thinks it's a punishment to have a 2 minute conversation with you on anything they want to talk about, don't take that as a sign that this won't work and you should leave them alone. After all, it's not like you can avoid the kid—you're the teacher! You will have to interact throughout the day, and if you don't pursue relationship building, chances are good that the majority of your interactions will be impersonal/academic or negative...which means the chasm between the two of you will only grow wider.

Kids typically enjoy talking to people that they like and respect. So, focus on being that type of teacher in general and don't worry at first about winning over this particular student. Initiate and join more informal conversations with other students that are friendlier toward you. When challenging students see their peers participating willingly and realize that talking with kids is just naturally what you do because you genuinely care, they'll be more likely to open up.

It's okay if the student is suspicious of your motives for chatting, or is distrustful of authority figures in general. A full 2 minute conversation might not be possible at first. Don't give up. Try for one short, non-work-related, positive interaction a day, and build on that until you're having a full-fledged conversation on a regular basis. Making the effort to get to know a student and showing that you care is never a waste, even when you don't see results right away.

2) I don't have time to talk individually with kids.

You may not be able to create a structured, dedicated time for talking individually to students...and that can actually be a good thing. The 2×10 strategy doesn't mean pulling the child away from a task to corner him at your desk, then setting a timer and forcing the kid to bond with you for exactly 120 seconds. Relationship building works best when it happens naturally and authentically! You don't have to stop everything you and the child are doing to talk: just look for and seize opportunities during the school day.

Stand in the doorway when students enter the room and ask them how they're doing—not as a rhetorical greeting, but as a sincere question which you genuinely want to talk about. Chat as you're walking students to lunch, or waiting for busses to be called at dismissal. Talk briefly while kids are cleaning up and transitioning into the next activity. When you're starting or ending small group instruction, take a moment to talk casually. When you're assisting a child one-on-one (even just to look over their work and see if they're understanding the concept), say, "By the way, ___" and extend the conversation into a topic of interest to the child.

Another—and much bolder—approach is to use your instructional time for relationship building and do so unapologetically. When students are disruptive, we have no qualms about stopping the lesson to address what happened, help students problem solve, issue consequences, and so on. We dislike doing it, but we know it's necessary in order for the lesson to proceed smoothly afterward. Think about it—how many minutes a day are you spending on those off-task behavior discussions? Why not spend 2 pro-active minutes preventing the problems from occurring by building a rapport with challenging kids? Get the rest of the class involved in a warm-up activity

or other independent assignment and start a quiet individual conversation. If you don't have to stop your lesson 10 times afterwards to deal with misbehavior, you'll actually accomplish a lot more.

3) I don't know what to ask or how to start the conversation.

My best advice here is to avoid overthinking it. 2×10 should not be a big production where the child knows you are implementing a Very Serious Relationship Building Strategy as a Behavioral Intervention. You're just talking to the kid casually.

Observe the child and look for insights into his or her personality. Pay attention to what the child talks about with friends and the topics she writes about for assignments (even student-created sentences for spelling words can reveal something about the child's life and interests.) What sports teams, hobbies, and music does he mention? What can you tell about the child's personality and interests from the photos on her notebook or the after-school activities she joins?

Try to make authentic connections between the child's interests and your own. It only takes one common interest to start building a relationship. If you can't find one, don't force or fake the connection—kids (like all people) absolutely hate inauthenticity. Instead, seek to learn more. Say, "I noticed you like _____. I really don't know anything about that, but I'm curious about it because I know you enjoy it so much."

Also notice what the child does NOT enjoy and try to relate on that level, too. We all like finding someone else who *just doesn't get it* when everyone else is raving about a music video we thought was dumb or a sports team we hate. If you can genuinely be the "odd man out" with a student, a surprisingly strong bond might be formed.

Remember that you don't have to lead with a question, so it's okay if you don't know what to ask. Shy, distrustful, and non-talkative students will probably give you one word answers to your questions, anyway. Instead, share a little of your life and personality. Talk about your plans for the weekend, a great book you're reading, or a movie you'd like to see. Let the student see you not only as the person in charge, but as a *person*. After all, no one relates to an authority; we relate to people. Give kids a chance to learn about you and find their own ways to relate to and connect with you. When they realize you sincerely care about them, they WILL open up!