

# **Teacher:** Posture and Respect

## What if a teacher's posture in the classroom helped build respect?

Helen teaches 5- to 7-year-olds. When you enter her classroom, you usually have to look hard to find her!

"I decided to make a deliberate effort to change my body language in the classroom while still maintaining authority. Fortunately, my knees and back enable me to do this! I sit in the circle with the class. If they are at their desks, I often will kneel beside a student to give assistance or feedback. If the children are seated on the floor at the front of the class in a listening activity, I sit on a child's chair in front of them.

"During one music lesson, I was teaching the concept of beat, and the piece of music was very regal and processional. The activity involved a child sitting in the center of the circle, wearing a crown and holding a 'scepter' (actually a broomstick covered in silver paper). I asked the child to pound the scepter on the floor in time with the beat. The rest of the class hit their hands on the floor in time to the beat. I took the first turn, wearing the crown and sitting in the center of the circle. The principal chose that particular moment to enter the classroom with a prospective school family on a school tour. I paused to explain to the visitors what the activity was about. The principal expressed his interest and delight, so I asked him to join in. The children were delighted at seeing him sitting in a circle among them, wearing a crown and pounding a scepter on the floor in time with the beat!"

## What's going on here?

Helen saw taking part and her body posture—and that of the principal—as a way of showing respect and modeling attentiveness to her students in the day to day operations of her classroom.

Helen engaged students by helping them experience teachers and principals as supportive and encouraging.

She reshaped her practice by modeling respect and being intentional about body language and the use of classroom space to change interactions (taking part, being on a child's level).

## How do I do this myself?

- Elementary example
- Secondary example

## What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Respect is essential for relationships to develop. Respect is when both parties are prepared to forsake their own needs and look to the needs of the other. Helen modeled this and encouraged respect by her own body language. This is not a denial of appropriate authority, but rather the recognition that Jesus redefined authority in terms of service. This typifies Christian love, ultimately modeled by Jesus. The Bible calls this loving one's neighbor as oneself. Helen gave the respect she wanted to receive. Some of our students have experienced failed relationships, and building good relationships at school can be part of the renewal process, bringing hope.

## What difference does it make?

The difference in this example is that Helen made changes that enabled eye contact and a different interaction to take place. When disciplining a young child, she either crouches down or they will both sit on a child's chair, so they can be at eye level. Sometimes, Helen will pull up two adult chairs for them both to sit on. If Helen is at her desk and a child comes to her desk to talk or to have work checked, she deliberately swivels her chair around so that her body is facing the child, facilitating eye-to-eye contact. All of this communicates respect and builds good relationships.

## Where could we go from here?

Look for opportunities for relationship building in your classroom. Are there other simple adjustments you could make to your physical presence so that your students will feel valued and see an example they can emulate? How could they think about their body posture in order to show respect for staff?

## Digging deeper

The word for respect in biblical Hebrew is related to bowing down. Respect and honor were shown by a physical position. We do not have the elaborate courtesies of other cultures, but we still can explore with students how we show respect by our body language. The Bible locates human worth in being made by and mattering to God. Because of this, people do not have to wait to earn our respect: respect is the basic response, since all deserve to be treated with dignity as God's children (1 Peter 2:13-17). Jesus said that what we do to others he treats as done to himself (Matthew 25:40).

Servants were the hired hands and slaves of Jesus's time. Jesus took this concept and gave it a new and radical meaning. He took a word that described a person under the authority of others and redefined it in terms of leadership and greatness. Christians describe Jesus as the "Servant King." He washed his disciples' feet, and expected his followers to be willing to act similarly (John 13:14-15). Jesus made it clear that in the kingdom of God those who are greatest are those who serve God and others. Leadership can be expressed in terms of servanthood without loss of authority.

## Explore similar examples

What if meetings with parents fostered hope?

What if circle time were about peace?

What if teaching were fueled by gratitude?



**Previous:** Teaching and Gratitude

What if teaching were fueled by gra...