



FROM CHAOS TO CALM

By Rene Rohrer, M.A.
LEAP Facilitator & TAP Consultant
rrohrrer@ces.org

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How do you bring the calm to the chaos and bring the calm to your classroom?
What can you do when behaviors occur that challenge the calm and create a feeling of chaos?

Start from within to Start from a Good Place

Time and again, research has shown the power of positive thinking, the value of a growth mindset, AND the relationship between teachers' expectations and a student's success. As educators, there is an absolute need for us to reflect on our thinking, on our bias, on our beliefs, and on our own social emotional skills. We start with an understanding that our mindset matters, what we believe and model through our behavior, matters. What we communicate through our actions and body language matters. What we think about our students and their abilities matters. If we can start from within and reflect on our own beliefs, values, mindset, and behaviors then we can be one step closer to starting from a good place.

Tools and Strategies for Self-Reflection

- [Mindfulness for Teachers video](#)
- [Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue PROQOL](#)
- [CASEL Personal SEL Reflection](#)
- [Growth Mindset Survey](#)

Practice Empathy

Practicing empathy and empathic listening creates the space for prevention, regulation, and therefore learning. How we respond to a student's behavior can either escalate or de-escalate the situation. We know that adult responses that model calm and practice empathy are more likely to de-escalate or even prevent behavior. Seeking to understand what needs are not being met, or getting curious, not furious is the first step in being empathic, allowing you to get to the root of the behavior and help a student meet their needs and build social emotional skills. Practicing empathy allows you to build trust and to be better able to work through difficult emotions towards co-regulation and regulation, which means towards a student being ready to learn. What does empathy look like? It is us as teachers, getting to the students' eye



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level, in respectful proximity and with body language that communicates respect and provides felt safety. It is using language that is responsive, validating, and affirming of the students' feelings if not their behavior.

Here is a [great resource](#) for modeling empathy and providing sentence stems to clarify, actively listen, and affirm or validate a student.

Learning about and from your students

As you put in the effort to build relationships and community in your classroom you deposit into a bank that builds connections, trust, and capacity. Rita Pearson says, "Kids don't learn from people they don't like". While the goal is not to be a friend to your students, the goal is to create a sense of belonging, safety, and trust so that together you can have the capacity to work through tough days and tough emotions and come out ready to learn. What do those deposits in that "connection bank" look like? Those deposits look like consistency, predictability, active listening, positive language, having fun with students, creating safe spaces, getting to know them, asking about their lives, their interests, helping them find their strengths, and giving them opportunities for voice and growth.

An Ounce of Prevention

Being able to bring calm often means being prepared for moments of chaos and therefore preventing chaos. Being prepared can look like a lot of different things, whether being prepared with language or being prepared by adjusting the environment or being prepared by having some tools or strategies in place. Here are some great strategies for avoiding power struggles and preventing chaos.

1. **Use Positive Reinforcement** – use behavior specific praise or other positive "rewards" to reinforce the behavior that you want to see happening. A good ratio of positive reinforcement to every correction is 5:1.
2. **Use Controlled Choices** - Allow the student to take part in the decision-making process by offering choices limited by you as the teacher. For example, do you want to do math on the whiteboard or this graph paper? Do you want to work on your reading in the beanbag or under your desk?



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3. **Accept Approximations** – Recognize and reinforce any attempts to engage in the desired behavior or approximations towards that behavior. For example, if the demand is to complete a worksheet perhaps, I recognize the student’s effort when they sit at their desk with pencil in hand. How can I recognize and reinforce that effort to shape towards the behavior of work completion?
4. **Use a First/Then** – Chunk the desired task into smaller chunks and reinforce completion with access to a reinforcement following a less preferred activity. For example. First complete either number 3 or 7 and then you can have 2 minutes in the teacher chair.
5. **Reframe the Request** - Put a positive or creative spin on the original demand. For example, beat the clock, make it a game, use declarative language, or scatter tasks around the room to be discovered rather than given as a demand. This [article](#) by PDA Society has great explanations on common strategies to support refusal.

Remember that you are the adult in the room and that you can choose to bring calm, or you can add to the chaos. It is our behavior and our actions that can make all the difference for students. Take the time to self-reflect, to get to know your students, and to build your skill set and you will start from a good place.