



Strategy Tool: Avoiding Power Struggles

Example

Planning for possible power struggles with students is necessary so that you can prepare your response ahead of time. An important aspect of planning for such events is to reflect on and examine some of your own personal triggers that might prompt you to engage in a power struggle. As you plan for how to address power struggles, revisit the [Dodging the Power-Struggle Trap](#) article for specific tactics to use.

Triggers: Everyone has things that get under their skin and can cause them to have an emotional response. Understanding and recognizing those triggers is the first step in preparing for avoiding power struggles.

Some of my personal triggers are:

- Students talking back to me in front of the class when given a direction and refusing to do work
- Students bullying or picking on each other

If there is a particular student or group of students that you find yourself being triggered by, think about them specifically and how you would address an attempt at a power struggle.

Disengage: It takes two people for a power struggle to occur. Removing yourself from the situation can sometimes be enough to avoid such an incident.

I will disengage from the student and help myself appear calm by:

Not engaging in a long-winded discussion with the student about their behavior. I will be brief and direct in my acknowledgement of their non-compliance.

Example: "I've made a request from you and I hope you choose to comply." (I will make sure my tone and mannerisms are calm and I will not engage in front of the entire class if possible.)

Interrupt: Once the student's emotions and behavior begin to escalate, you can sometimes alter the direction of the event in a positive and respectful way.

I will interrupt the student's escalating behavior by:

I will offer this student an opportunity to take a break in order to cool down. I have set up an area in the classroom where she can sit and draw or just lay her head down. I will make sure there is a time set so that she is not missing instruction for more than 5 minutes.



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Deescalate: If disengaging and interrupting techniques don't work to diffuse the situation, helping a student calm down so that you can eventually address the incident is the last step.

I will help the student calm down and manage their intense emotions by:

Based on past experiences with this student, I know she needs a face-saving tactic. I will ask her, "Is there some way we can work this out so that you can get back to work?" If she responds with a comment to try to engage with me more, I will calmly repeat my question and ignore her attempt to "get at me."

Plan to Address Incident: After the power struggle has been avoided and dealt with, you may still need to address the behavior that caused the event to occur. Think about whether any consequences are necessary and if the relationship with the student needs to be addressed.

At the end of class, I will ask the student privately to meet with me, as long as she is calm. I will employ active listening to encourage the student to talk with me and hopefully open up about what is going on. I will ask her for her suggestions on how to address the situation and involve her in deciding on an appropriate consequence if needed.