

How do I Tutor Difficult Students?

Tutoring difficult students is all about encouraging them to learn, boosting their confidence and getting the very best out of them. Patience and understanding are key.

Tutoring is a very satisfying job, but it can be a challenging one too. Getting the best from your students feels fantastic, but there is no denying, some are much easier to work with than others. In this article we look at some of the most commonly found “difficult” students. So read on for tips and advice which will help you to cope with the challenges they bring.

How do I deal with shy or nervous students?

There are several reasons students may be shy or nervous. It could be a personality trait, a lack of confidence, or that they feel they are under too much pressure. To get the best from them then it is up to you to discover exactly what their requirements are. This gets easier as you get to know the student and, as you are spending a lot of time alone with them, then you should be able to build an affinity with them. This will help them to feel at ease and then the nerves will lessen.

Some more tips that will help:

Make the student feel safe. Many students are scared to give an answer in case it is wrong. Let them know that a wrong answer brings no shame. It helps you to know what they do and do not understand.

Encourage the student whenever they do well. Receiving praise for their knowledge is a great boost and increases their enthusiasm.

Find their interests and use these to motivate them. Even the dullest subjects can be livened up with lessons based on topics the child finds engaging.

How do I deal with unmotivated students?

Students who do not appear to want to learn can be very frustrating for a tutor. When you are employed to teach one then it can be tempting to give up on them. But if you can motivate them and make a success of your task then the satisfaction is immense.

As with shy children, there could be many reasons unmotivated children behave as they do. It could be that they feel overworked, having to see a tutor after a full day at school. They might have taken a dislike to education after bad experiences in the classroom. Whatever the reason, it's up to you to find out and use this information to tailor the lessons to them.

Here are some tips which might help:

Challenge them to improve. Humans are innately competitive. We can use that to motivate students. For example, set a test and challenge them to complete it more quickly than last time, or to get a better score.

Find out what does motivate the child (football, computers or whatever) and use this as a base upon which your lessons are structured.

Make them feel good about co-operating. Praise and encourage them when they do try. If they believe that you believe in them then they are much more likely to want to work.

How do I deal with low-ability students?

“Low-ability” is an inaccurate term. Every student has their own strengths and even ones who struggle to learn can be taught, with the right level of commitment from them and from their tutor. So many children are written off because they are seen as stupid but if we see them as requiring more effort then getting the best out of them is achievable and incredibly rewarding.

As with most students, praise is a great tool. But rather than praising their intelligence it is better to praise their efforts. It is only through hard work that less gifted children can succeed, so when they put in the graft make sure they know how pleased you are.

Some more tips:

Be enthusiastic about your lessons. If students see their time with you as “fun” then they are much more likely to enjoy learning.

Do not accept poor work. If you know they can do better then let them know that is what you expect. If they feel proud of their work then that in itself is a motivator.

Make sure you progress. Many tutors make the mistake of not moving onto more difficult work because they fear the student will not be able to grasp it. But it is up to you to guide them through the subjects they do not understand.

How do I deal with badly behaved students?

Now we come on to the worst kind of student – the troublemaker. Thankfully, these are rare for private tutors due to the one-on-one nature of lessons, but they do happen. As a tutor it is your job to get the best from every student, so please do not immediately give up on a “bad” child. There will be reasons for their behaviour – a bad home life, grief, bad experiences at school and many other possibilities. Whatever the cause of their anger, if you can channel it in the right direction, then even “bad” children can be turned around.

Communication is the key. Talk to the child and try to build a rapport with them, if they see you as a friend rather than an enemy then the bad behaviour will cease. You should talk to the parents as well. They may be able to cast light on the cause of disruption, and they should also have similar rules on discipline at home that you apply in the classroom.

Some more useful tips:

Be polite and “ask” rather than “command”. We all expect to be treated with respect and this applies to children as much as to adults.

Set an example. Children learn how to behave by copying adults. Aggressive or disruptive children will have learned this from the adults around them. Show them that adults can be kind as well as cruel.

Recognise good behaviour and praise them for it. You may not feel that “normal” behaviour should be rewarded, but praising any positives you see will encourage repetition of them in the future.

How do I deal with high-ability students?

High-achieving students are the dream of many tutors. They put in hard work and effort to do well in school. Gifted students are something different. They are blessed with great intelligence, but this does not necessarily mean they will work hard. Sometimes they will not finish their work because

they are not done “perfecting” it, or they may be unenthusiastic because the work is not hard enough for them and they become bored.

The secret to getting the best from gifted students is to challenge them. Find out which areas they already excel at and which they do not. It’s the latter you should be concentrating on. Also, do not be afraid to set them work which is considered “above” their level. This will require them to try hard and study if they want to succeed – exactly what their lessons at school have been lacking.

So there we have it – some of the more difficult students you are likely to encounter, and how to deal with them. Tutoring is all about encouraging children to learn, boosting their confidence, and getting the very best out of them. Hopefully the advice in this article will help you to do just that.