

5. Words to Use in Class – Informational and Non-pressuring

This is the fifth in a series of Autonomy-Supportive Behaviours that teachers can use in the classroom. Remember: You're not responsible for creating motivated students; you're responsible for creating an environment where students can motivate themselves.

What you say in class has a big influence on the motivation of your students. How do you speak in class in a way that helps to build a motivating climate?

What?

Informational and non-pressuring language is communication that's diagnostic, flexible, non-evaluative, and helpful to the student. Use your verbal and nonverbal communication to minimize pressure and convey choice and flexibility.

Non-pressuring – Avoid the use of pressurizing words ('should', 'must', 'have to', 'got to').

Informational – Provide special insights and tips that students need to better understand and solve problems they face.

Why?

Non-pressuring language **maintains a positive teacher-student relationship**. When students don't experience 'control' from you, they're in a better position to self-manage their engagement, behavioural, or performance problems and be responsible for them.



When?

Informational and non-pressuring language is useful in almost all your communication with students, especially **when you give feedback, talk about requirements, and address students' negativity** (for more information on this, read 4. How to Handle Students' Negativity).

It's also useful when you ask students to engage in learning activities, discuss strategies to try, ask students to take responsibility, comment on their progress, and generally converse with them.

How?

Your language gives students the chance to take responsibility in solving their problems.

When facing a problem like poor performance or attendance:

Address the problem in a non-pressuring way, while preserving students' sense of ownership and responsibility for regulating their own behavior and solving their problems.



I notice that you made a surprisingly low score on the test.
Do you know why that might be?

How did you feel about how you did on the test?

Help the student to make progress in diagnosing the problem and solving it. Most of the times, they understand.



If they can point out the cause of the problem, turn your effort to their willingness to cope with the problem

I performed poorly because I didn't study.
My attendance is poor because this class is unbelievably boring.

Do you know why that might be?

If they think you're the problem, acknowledge and accept their negativity. Ask what you can do to help.

You're boring. You're unfair.

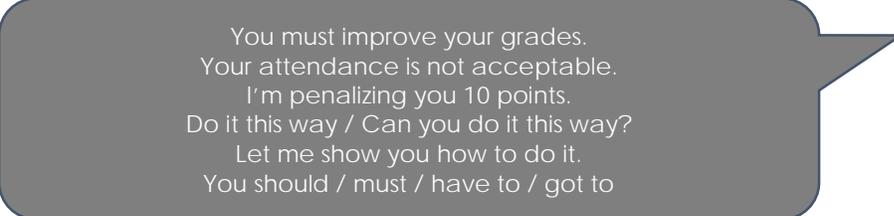
Okay, thank you for being honest. What can I do to be less boring / more fair?

If they think the cause is within themselves, provide informational insights that're outside their experience.

I don't know. I practice a lot but I still don't get it.

Well, I taught a student who had the same difficulty. She practiced very hard but didn't do well. Guess what? She decided to study with a friend, and it really helped her. Maybe you can think about this strategy too.

Avoid pressuring the student verbally or nonverbally toward a solution or desired behavior you think is right.



You must improve your grades.
Your attendance is not acceptable.
I'm penalizing you 10 points.
Do it this way / Can you do it this way?
Let me show you how to do it.
You should / must / have to / got to

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