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**ESTABLISH
ENCOURAGE
RESPOND**

**A FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE
LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**



ESTABLISH • ENCOURAGE • RESPOND (EER)

A Framework for Effective Learning Environments

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About This Resource:

The **Establish • Encourage • Respond (EER)** framework is a structured, practical approach to supporting student behaviour and learning. It integrates evidence-based classroom practices, trauma-informed principles, and a focus on coregulation and skill development.

EER is designed as a **teaching framework**, not a behaviour program, and is intended to complement—rather than replace—other evidence-based interventions.

Use of AI Tools

Artificial intelligence tools were used in the development of this resource to **support editing, generate illustrative images, and assist with research discovery** (e.g., locating relevant literature and sources).

All framework design, instructional content, interpretation of research, and written material were **authored and directed by Robert Vint**. AI tools were not used to originate, or independently generate the conceptual content of this work.

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Introduction5

 A Classroom Like Many Others.....5

 There Is a Better Way6

 Returning to the Classroom7

The Roots of Establish · Encourage · Respond.....9

 The EER Framework.....10

 Trauma-Informed Practice and Coregulation11

 Trauma-Informed Practice.....12

 Coregulation.....12

 Establish · Encourage · Respond as a Trauma-Informed, Coregulatory Framework.....14

A Brief Overview of EER Establish, Encourage Respond15

 Establish: Creating the Conditions for Learning.....15

 Encourage: Helping Expectations Become Reality.....15

 Respond: Teaching Through Mistakes16

 A Teaching Framework at Its Core17

Establish18

 Starting Over.....18

 Establish Expectations.....19

INTRODUCTION

A CLASSROOM LIKE MANY OTHERS

On paper, the classroom looked fine.

*28 students on the list. The lesson was planned. Materials were ready. The teacher had done what they were told to do—what experienced colleagues had advised: **be firm early, don't loosen up until October, show them who's in charge.** These were the strategies shared in hallways and staff rooms. The ones that were said to “work.”*

But by October, things were already unraveling.

Students talked over instructions. Small disruptions escalated quickly. Requests were ignored. Sarcastic comments became common. One day, a desk was overturned. Objects were thrown. On a few occasions, the teacher felt genuinely unsafe.

Each incident chipped away at confidence.

The teacher tried harder. Raised their voice. Tightened rules. Sent students out of the room. Followed school discipline procedures exactly as instructed. Yet nothing seemed to stick. Behaviour returned the next day—slowly it worsened. Relationships grew tense. Trust eroded. Teaching became less about learning and more about surviving each period without another incident.

By winter, the question had changed.

It was no longer “How do I fix this?”

It was “How long can I keep doing this?”

This teacher loved working with students. They believed in education. But no one had taught them how to build a classroom where learning and behaviour could coexist. Their training had focused on curriculum,



assessment, and planning—but not on the daily realities of managing behaviour in a room full of diverse learners with complex needs.

What they were experiencing was not a personal failure.

It was the predictable result of entering the classroom without a clear, evidence-informed framework for behaviour support.

We will return to this classroom.

Not because the story is unusual—but because it is familiar. And because, with the right knowledge and strategies, this classroom can change.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY

Classroom management is one of the most common—and least openly discussed—challenges in education.

It is a significant contributor to teacher stress and burnout, lost instructional time, and persistent learning gaps. Research consistently identifies behaviour challenges as a major factor in teacher emotional exhaustion and attrition. For students, ineffective classroom management can result in disengagement, exclusion, and repeated disciplinary responses that do little to support long-term success.

Despite its importance, many teachers receive limited explicit training in classroom management during their preparation programs. Instead, teachers often learn informally—by observing colleagues, inheriting school-based practices, or relying on strategies that “worked” elsewhere. These approaches are often inconsistent and difficult to apply across contexts.

When behaviour escalates, schools frequently rely on punitive or exclusionary responses. While these may stop behaviour temporarily, research shows they often fail to teach replacement skills, strain relationships, and disproportionately impact students who already experience barriers to success.

This is not a failure of teachers.

It highlights a lack of supporting teachers. Teachers need easy-to-use frameworks based on what research and practice have proven to work. Fortunately, these do exist.

There is hope.

RETURNING TO CLASSROOM



THE

It had been a bad few days.

Not the kind that end in dramatic incident reports—but the quiet, exhausting kind. Instructions ignored. A confrontation that escalated too quickly. A student refusing to enter the room. Another sent to the office. A lesson abandoned halfway through because the class never settled.

By the end of the day, the teacher sat alone in their classroom, staring at the whiteboard, replaying everything they should have done differently.

That evening, scrolling absentmindedly on their phone, they came across a website with a book that promised a solution.

Their first reaction was scepticism.

They had seen behaviour programs before—colour charts, point systems, complicated acronyms that promised change but required total overhaul. They didn't have the energy for that. Or the time.

But this felt different.

The language was clear. The tone was practical. And the framework was easy to remember:

Establish.

Encourage.

Respond.

E.E.R.

What stood out most was the idea that they didn't have to do everything at once.

This wasn't about fixing behaviour overnight. It wasn't about becoming a different teacher tomorrow. It was about starting somewhere—one small, intentional step at a time.

They downloaded the book.

They recognized themselves in the pages—the frustration, the constant reacting, the sense that strategies were being applied without understanding why they worked. And for the first time in a while, something shifted.

Not confidence yet.

But curiosity.

After this last week, trying something new didn't feel risky—it felt necessary.

They were cautiously optimistic.



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THE ROOTS OF ESTABLISH · ENCOURAGE · RESPOND

Like the teacher in the vignette and many others, I struggled to create an effective learning environment early in my career. And like many teachers, I was never explicitly taught how to do it.

The framework Establish · Encourage · Respond is my response to the teacher I was more than twenty years ago. It is not my advice, nor is it a collection of personal strategies. Instead, it is a framework grounded in science—one that organizes what research and practice have shown to matter in real classrooms.

Early in my career, I was fortunate enough, or perhaps desperate enough to return to university to learn more about classroom management and effective learning environments. I am deeply grateful that I did. That learning fundamentally changed my experience as a teacher. It gave me language for what I was seeing, tools for what I was struggling with, and a way to think about behaviour that went beyond reacting in the moment.



Establish · Encourage · Respond has its roots in evidence-based practices.

Since then, I have used these ideas in my own practice and in supporting other educators. Over time, patterns emerged. Certain principles mattered more than others. Certain strategies consistently made classrooms calmer, more predictable, and more humane.

This framework is a synthesis of that learning.

Establish • Encourage • Respond is grounded in decades of research across education, psychology, and behaviour science—but it is not a program, a script, or a one-size-fits-all intervention. The challenge for teachers is rarely a lack of strategies. Rather, it is the lack of effective strategies with a proven evidence base. And then, it is knowing how to organize, prioritize, and apply these evidence-based strategies consistently in the complexity of real classrooms.

This framework provides that structure.

Rather than introducing something entirely new, Establish • Encourage • Respond organizes research-supported practices into a clear, flexible, and sequential framework, where each step builds on the one before it.

THE EER FRAMEWORK

Establish • Encourage • Respond is a framework designed to organize evidence-based classroom practices—strategies that are supported by research and shown to be effective across diverse classrooms—into a clear, usable sequence. In education, evidence-based does not mean rigid or scripted. It means the practices are grounded in what has been studied, tested, and shown to improve student engagement, behaviour, and learning over time.



Teachers often receive well-intentioned advice from colleagues. The question is whether that advice is evidence-based.

This matters because classroom management is too complex to rely on guesswork, tradition, or strategies that “worked once.” Teachers need approaches that are dependable, adaptable, and grounded in something stronger than personal preference or school folklore. By organizing evidence-based practices into a coherent framework, Establish • Encourage • Respond helps teachers understand not just what to do, but when and why to do it—making classroom management more intentional, more effective, and more sustainable. In addition, it makes this large, sometimes confusing or complicated topic approachable. Below is a brief preview of the topics that will be explored in detail later.

The framework is presented in the order that teachers should address each element. Establish first, then encourage, and then respond. It is hard to respond to misbehaviours if students and adults don’t agree on what those are. This approach keeps the program manageable; it also facilitates its delivery. Teachers can add in the elements of the program as they work through it, reducing their workload and improving their ability to implement. Teaching is complicated and demanding, and even though EER promises to help make teaching more effective and even easier, it can’t do this all at once. EER is designed to help teachers not overwhelm them.



Establish • Encourage • Respond (EER) is a framework rather than a single intervention. Each stage serves as a container for organizing and selecting evidence-based practices and interventions.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE AND COREGULATION

Trauma-informed practice and coregulation have become central concepts in education for good reason. Research and lived experience consistently show that students learn best in environments where they feel safe, understood, and supported by regulated, responsive adults. As awareness has grown around the impacts of trauma, adversity, and chronic stress on learning and behaviour, it has become increasingly clear that any effective behaviour framework must be consistent with these principles—not in name only, but in practice. Approaches that rely on control, unpredictability, or punitive responses risk undermining

regulation and safety, particularly for students who are already vulnerable. Establish • Encourage • Respond is intentionally designed to align with trauma-informed and coregulatory approaches, embedding these principles into concrete, everyday practices that educators can use reliably. Rather than competing with or replacing these frameworks, EER operationalizes them—making the work of creating safe, regulated, and supportive learning environments practical, consistent, and sustainable.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Trauma-informed practice begins with the understanding that many students have experienced trauma or ongoing adversity, and that these experiences can significantly affect learning, behaviour, and relationships. Rather than asking “What is wrong with this student?”, trauma-informed approaches ask “What has happened, and what does this student need to feel safe enough to learn?” At its core, trauma-informed practice seeks to create environments that are predictable, emotionally safe, and relationally supportive. It does not aim to treat or remediate trauma—that work belongs to clinical and therapeutic contexts. Instead, trauma-informed practice focuses on reducing harm, avoiding re-traumatization, and ensuring that everyday school experiences do not inadvertently escalate stress or fear for students who are already carrying a heavy load.

Importantly, trauma-informed practice is proactive rather than reactive. It emphasizes consistent routines, clear expectations, respectful communication, and strong adult–student relationships as protective factors. These conditions benefit all learners, not only those with identified trauma histories, while offering particular support to students who are navigating heightened stress, emotional dysregulation, or mistrust of adults and institutions. When schools adopt trauma-informed practices, they shift from control-based responses toward environments that prioritize dignity, belonging, and regulation as foundations for learning.

COREGULATION

Coregulation refers to the process by which an adult supports a student’s ability to regulate emotions, behaviour, and attention through calm presence, attuned responses, and supportive interactions. Before students can self-regulate, they must first experience regulation with another person. Coregulation is not about fixing emotions or eliminating distress; it is about providing stability, predictability, and emotional safety so that students can gradually develop their own regulatory skills. In classrooms, coregulation shows up through tone of voice, body language, pacing, proximity, empathy, and consistency—often long before any explicit strategy is taught.

Effective coregulation involves adults staying regulated themselves, especially during moments of escalation. It includes practices such as offering reassurance, slowing interactions, reducing demands when needed, validating emotions without reinforcing unsafe behaviour, and guiding students back to a state where learning is possible. Over time, repeated experiences of being regulated with a trusted adult help students internalize these skills. Coregulation is therefore not a single strategy but an ongoing relational process that shapes how students experience safety, authority, and connection in school settings.



Trauma-informed practice and coregulation are foundational elements of the EER framework, reflecting both their importance and their everyday reality in classrooms.

ESTABLISH • ENCOURAGE • RESPOND AS A TRAUMA-INFORMED, COREGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Establish • Encourage • Respond (EER) brings trauma-informed practice and coregulation out of theory and into daily classroom action. Rather than offering abstract principles, EER provides concrete, observable practices that help educators create safe environments, reinforce regulation, and respond effectively when challenges arise. The Establish component focuses on predictability, clarity, and relational safety—key conditions for both trauma-informed environments and coregulation. Encourage emphasizes proactive support and reinforcement that strengthens regulation and engagement before problems escalate. Respond offers guidance for handling behaviour in ways that maintain dignity, reduce harm, and support re-regulation rather than punishment.

By organizing practice into clear, usable steps, EER makes trauma-informed and coregulatory approaches doable in real classrooms with real constraints. It acknowledges that educators are not therapists, while still recognizing the powerful role schools play in shaping students' daily experiences of safety and connection. Through EER, trauma-informed practice and coregulation become not just values to aspire to, but practical tools educators can rely on—consistently, compassionately, and effectively.



EER turns trauma-informed and coregulatory approaches into clear, usable practices for real classrooms.



A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EER ESTABLISH, ENCOURAGE RESPOND

ESTABLISH: CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Establish is the foundation of the EER framework. It actually explores two important parts of establishing: establishing expectations and establishing relationships.

Students cannot meet expectations that have not been clearly taught, modelled, and reinforced. Establish expectations focuses on explicitly teaching expectations. Establish relationships focuses on intentional relationship-building. Strong teacher–student relationships are consistently linked to improved engagement, behaviour, and academic outcomes.

Without this foundation, even the best strategies struggle to take hold.

ENCOURAGE: HELPING EXPECTATIONS BECOME REALITY

Once expectations are established, the next question is:

How do we help students meet them?

Encourage focuses on promoting and strengthening expected behaviour at two different times: Before and After.

Encouraging before: This is what teachers do before behaviour occurs to set students up for success. In research, these are

Establish



Encourage



often called antecedent strategies. These strategies that occur before the behaviour will be referred to as Antecedent strategies, preventative strategies or even just before strategies. They describe proactive supports such as reminders, structure, and instructional design.

Encouraging After: This is what happens after behaviour occurs to make it more likely to happen again. In research, this is called reinforcement. Reinforcement does not mean candy, prizes, or bribes. From a behavioural science lens, it actually describes a simple relationship between two things. When an action or behaviour occurs and something happens after that makes the thing more likely to happen again— that is reinforcement. Perhaps a more teacher-friendly explanation is that it means responding to expected behaviour in ways that make it meaningful—through feedback, attention, autonomy, and connection.

Encourage shifts classroom management from reacting to problems to actively building the behaviours that support learning.

RESPOND: TEACHING THROUGH MISTAKES

Misbehaviour is inevitable.

Students are learning. They make mistakes. Respond focuses on how to respond in ways that teach, rather than punish. The Respond portion of EER answers the question, what do I do when? It is inevitable that as a teacher you will encounter situations where prevention didn't work and you can't respond by encouraging. So what do you do when a student won't stop calling out? A student is disrespectful? There is a fight? This part of the framework presents a rationale and a set of guidelines to help you take the guesswork out of how to respond. However, it only does this after the first two elements of EER are in place. After we have taught students what is expected, created a relationship with them, and put supports in place to promote and recognize those behaviours we want to see. In this section, calm, consistent, and instructional responses are prioritized; this helps prioritize learning and relationships while also acknowledging that misbehaviours, especially serious ones, cannot go unaddressed .

Respond



A TEACHING FRAMEWORK AT ITS CORE

At its heart, Establish • Encourage • Respond is about teaching.

We do not only teach math and reading.

We teach behaviour.

We teach social skills.

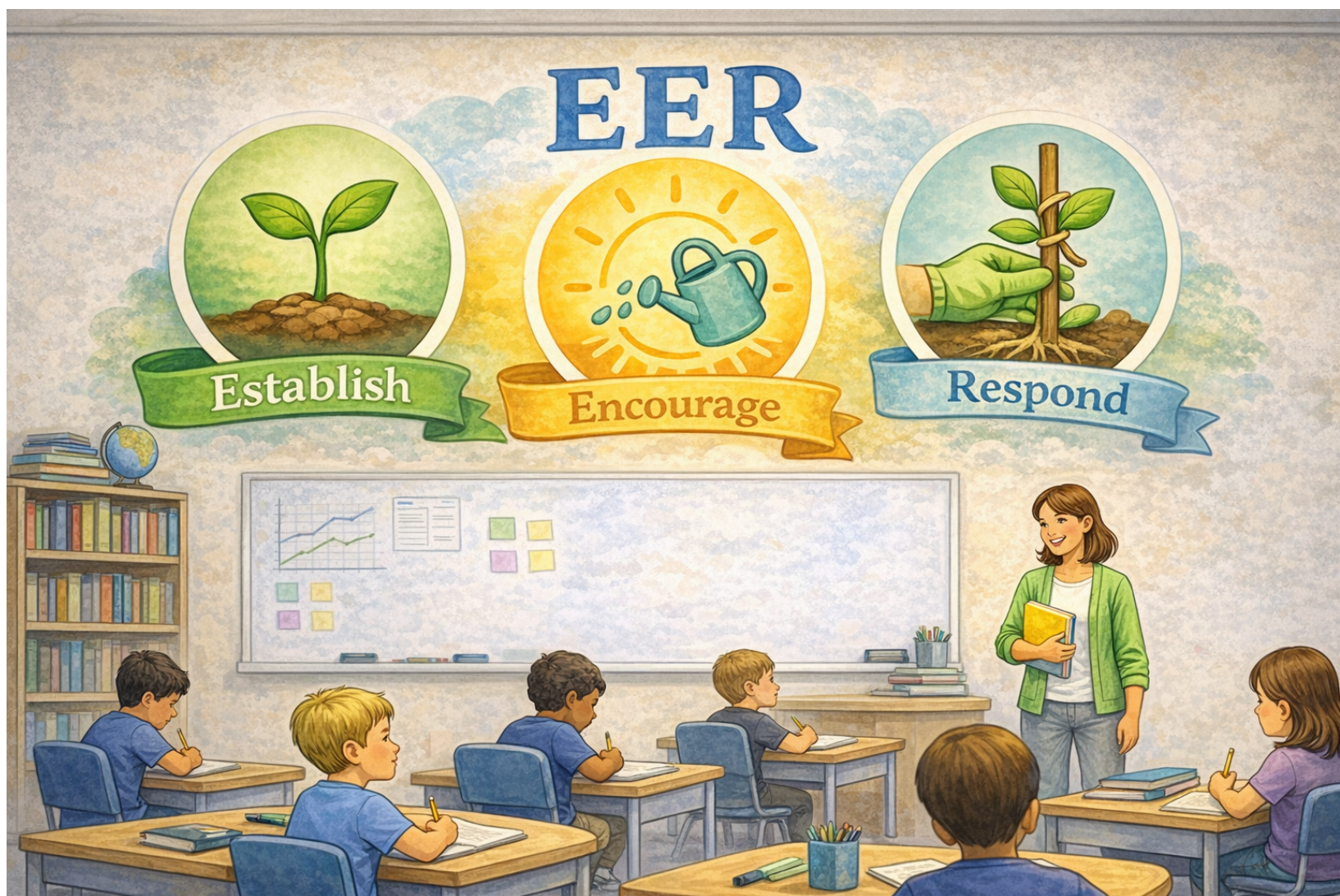
We teach how to belong in a learning community.

This framework becomes an always-present curriculum—one that supports learning, strengthens relationships, and makes classrooms more sustainable for teachers and students alike.

We will follow the classroom presented at the beginning of this book as these ideas unfold.

Because change is possible.

And teachers deserve tools that work.



Rather than being an add-on, the Establish • Encourage • Respond framework becomes an always-present curriculum—supporting learning, strengthening relationships, and making day-to-day classroom life more sustainable.



ESTABLISH

STARTING OVER

One afternoon, after redirecting the same student for the third time, frustration crept in.

“What should you be doing right now?” The teacher asked.

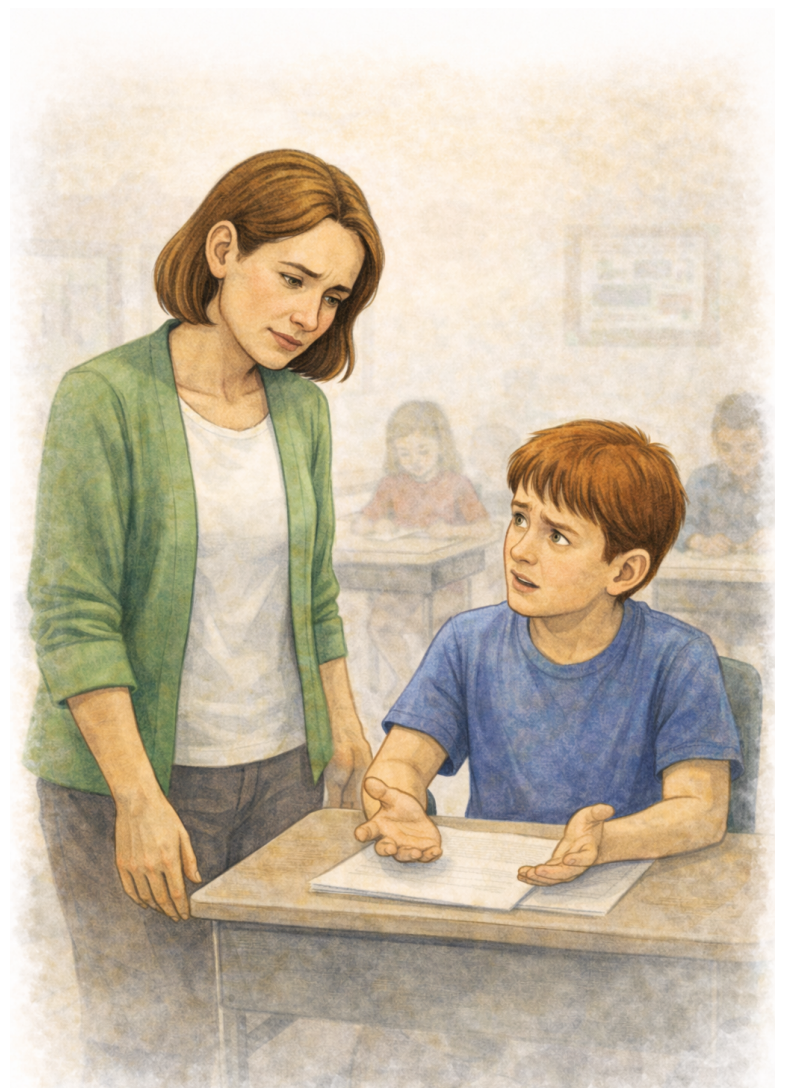
The student shrugged.

“I don’t know. I have no idea.”

It stopped the teacher cold, because this student wasn’t being disrespectful. They were telling the truth. The look on the student’s face was genuine. They truly didn’t know.

Later that evening, the teacher sat down and tried to write out their classroom expectations. The list grew quickly: Be respectful. Be a learner. Stay on task. Participate. Follow directions. Try your best. Clean up. Be quiet. Don’t run. Well run in the gym. No arguing. Ask for help. Try your work on your own.

Looking at the list, a new frustration emerged. Some expectations were vague. Others overlapped. Many meant different things in different situations. What did “be a learner” look like during group work? In the hallway? During an assembly?



“What should you be doing right now?” ...The student shrugged. “I don’t know. I have no idea.” ...this student wasn’t being disrespectful. They were telling the truth.

What if the problem wasn't just student behaviour?

What if the problem was clarity?

Returning to the framework, the teacher realized expectations didn't need to be complicated. Was there a better way to set expectations s. One that was easy, clear, and would help the teacher see more of the behaviours they wanted to see?

ESTABLISH EXPECTATIONS

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