



Getting a Student Back to “Ready”

Michael L. Harris, M.A., L.P. – www.FASDElephant.com © 2008

When a student (with FASD, PTSD, or severe abuse or neglect) becomes oppositional, upset, or angry, the goal should change from gaining compliance to getting back to ready.

If a student is not ready to learn because of arousal level (fear, anxiety, anger), a power struggle or power play will not teach the lesson that you want the student to learn.

Oppositional Child Behavior – “No!”

confronted by

Stronger, more forceful Adult demand – “You better do it!”

leads to

Increased child resistance, defiance, anger, and melt-down

AVOID THE ABOVE THE ABOVE PATTERN – IT LEADS TO DISASTER!

Try a new or different pattern by asking:

What does this student need to get back to “ready?” and follow these steps:

1. Validate the student’s feelings (and be genuine): For example, “You’re mad.” “Tough day, huh?” “I can see you’re upset.”
 2. Give choices and chances for the student to self-soothe: For example, give space, take a sensory break, deep breathing, use of humor (tactically), self-talk, other coping skills.
 3. If the student initially resists, validate again, state the limit gently, encourage coping, and offer assistance (if appropriate): For example, "I know you don't want to, but we have to keep you safe. Is there something we can do that will help you feel better? Do you need a five minute break?"
 4. Reconnect: For example, "I like how you turned your day around earlier this morning."
- Students like this cannot self-regulate on their own—if they could, they would. They cannot access their coping skills without reminders, prompts, coaching, moving down the arousal scale, and practice. Otherwise, they would because nobody wants to feel bad.
 - Believing it is a choice is a misattribution—and even if it were not a misattribution, it does not matter because that mindset can make the adult feel angry. We are never at our most creative or optimal decision-making when angry.
 - Be proactive—teach skills, practice them, and practice or role-play coaching them—watch for signs of a meltdown before it becomes full-fledged.
 - Always reconnect (but not before the student is in a positive or at least neutral mood). Many students have not learned securely that they will be okay or safe if they express anger. Reconnecting shows the student you are proud of them for coping and moving past the problem and into compliance.
 - Be low-key, matter-of-fact, and remain calm—a raised voice can *feel* abusive to an FASD (or abused) student.
 - Be creative, and ask, "What does this student need to get back to ready?"

Please see FASD Elephant™ Episode #012 (October 8, 2008) for additional information @ www.FASDElephant.com.