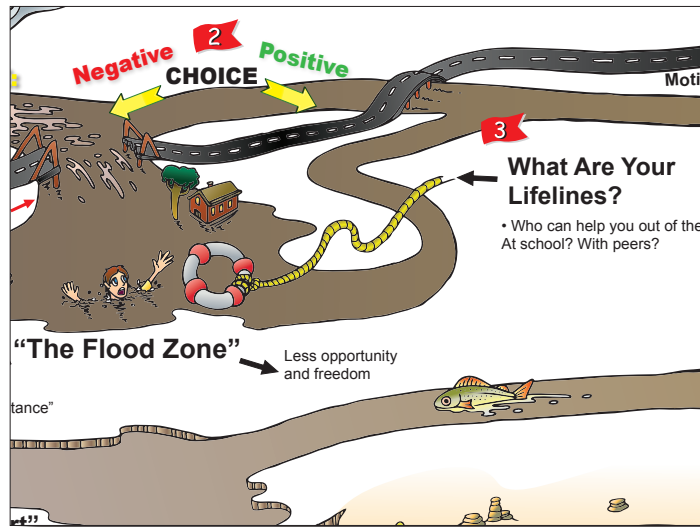


Surrendering the One-up Relationship

Remember:

“People are not motivated by programs, they are motivated by people.”

-Christian Moore,
WhyTry Founder



An Overview of the One-up Relationship:

The WhyTry Program emphasizes many hands-on interventions as tools to teach students life skills. However, we strongly feel that the key to creating change doesn't lie in the interventions alone but in the relationship you establish with students. The WhyTry Program asserts that lasting change and motivation is directly linked to a supporting relationship between the teacher/facilitator and students. One major barrier to facilitating a motivational and supportive relationship with an at-risk student is the presence of a “one-up” relationship.

What is the “one-up” relationship? You may have observed in your own conversations and relationships that one person is often “one-up” on the other or predominately in control. For example, have you ever had a conversation with a teacher, a mentor, or someone who is an expert at a subject that you are just beginning to learn? When you discuss that subject, you feel that they have the advantage because of their expertise and knowledge, whereas you are just beginning to learn the basics. They are “one-up” on you and are often in control of the conversation.

Quite often, students find themselves “one-down” in relationships with adults who have control in their lives. Often when a student sees an adult as “one-up” (or in control) of the relationship, they feel unimportant, or that what they want or think doesn't matter. Students feel that their ability to act for themselves is taken away. As a result, they have little motivation to make a change and are less likely to establish a trusting relationship with that person.

When you as a counselor, teacher or therapist surrender the “one-up” relationship, you show students that they have great value and worth as human beings. You show them that what they think is important. You give up the role of the authority figure and share it with students. You help them to see that they are the authority on themselves. You let them know that you believe in them and their potential. You demonstrate that you merely want to help them, but ultimately they are in control of their own lives. Remember the goal here is not solely to teach, but to tap into motivation. We have found that the most effective thing you can do to motivate students and build a trusting relationship is to surrender the “one-up.”

20 ways to surrender the one-up in a one-on-one setting:

1) You can always talk to me, even if you fail

Point out that they have value and worth because of who they are, not because of accomplishments or failures. Stress that if they don't reach the goals of counseling, it is OK to come back. You will still believe in them and not give up. Stress the importance of what they do after a mistake or failure.

2) Who is the real expert?

Let students be the experts on themselves.

They have lived their life for the past 12, 13, 14, or 15 years. Let them know you recognize their expertise and you need their help if change is going to happen. Emphasize that you work for them, they are the BOSS, and your job is to help them get the directions and resources to help make them happier. (i.e. "This may be the only time in your life that you have someone working for you with the goal of making life better for you, so take advantage of this.")

3) Find a ray of sunshine in the darkest clouds

Use the art of re-framing to be a detective and be creative in finding positive attributes in negative behaviors (i.e. Problem: The student refuses to attend school. Reframe: "I see some strength in resistance not to attend school. You are very headstrong. If you continue to be this headstrong with saying no to drugs, putting effort into passing a difficult class, not letting others walk on you, you will do some great things in life.")

Make it clear that you "condemn" the negative behavior, but you would rather put your energy into looking at positive attributes, skills, and talents that they have the potential to use positively, than the negative behaviors that students and parents are obviously already aware of. (i.e. "This problem has been going on for a long time. Let's focus on it from a different perspective. What are the positive attributes here and how can we channel them in a more positive direction?")

4) Connect on a topic

Work hard in finding any topic of joint interest. It can be very simple, as you both like TV, you both like a certain food, you both like to sleep, etc. It can be music, sports, or your best or worst class in school. Have them teach you about a topic they have a passion for and you don't understand really well, or a popular trend. The important thing is that you are sincere in topics of interest to them.

5) Who am I? Why should you talk to me?

It is often easier for people to share their world and their inner feelings with someone they know. Sharing something about your life and your experiences helps lower students' anxiety to share and trust (i.e. At the beginning of a first group or session: "You have only known me for five minutes and you may share some difficult things. Let me introduce myself a little and you can ask me a few questions if you want.") Remember to share things that are appropriate and you feel comfortable revealing about yourself. (i.e. "I have 11 siblings so I am comfortable with a lot of family challenges.") Use humor. Maybe share an embarrassing moment or a story from the past or when you were their age. Share enough of your world so they are comfortable letting you in theirs. Make a real effort to smile often and offer some sincere compliments at first. This communicates acceptance and helps lower their anxiety. (i.e. "I really respect you coming to see me today when you really didn't want to be here, this shows me you have a lot of strength.")

6) Call 9-1-1, I'm in shock!

Emphasize that you strongly believe that they will overcome their problems, and especially that they learned from the mistake and they won't repeat it. Take the assumption that the presenting behavior will not occur again, and focus conversations on the changed future, not the mistakes of the past. As you do this, remem-

ber principle number one, that they have value and worth whether they have success or failure. Create an atmosphere where students would feel like they would have to call 9-1-1 for you because you would be in shock if they repeated the problem. Let them know that there is no question that you believe in their ability to overcome the problem.

7) Why you wake up in the morning

Try to understand what motivates students. Create an environment where they feel free to express what is most important to them and what motivates them to do well. Listen carefully and respect what they share, no matter how insignificant it may seem. Emphasize that you really respect what motivates them as long as it doesn't hurt themselves or others. Often what motivates them are really simple things like a sport, a friend, baseball cards, a game, etc. Don't downplay simple things that motivate them. These things may be big in their world.

8) He/She got game

Identify past accomplishments or successes that they have. Brainstorm with them the skills they currently have to overcome the problem. Point out positive attributes that you have observed that they may not be aware of. (i.e. "I have observed you are good at expressing your feelings, communicating, problem solving, having a good attitude in a difficult situation, etc.")

9) Why I do what I do

Let students know that you sincerely want to understand why the extreme behavior occurred. What did they benefit or gain from acting out? Once you understand why it may have occurred, let them know you want them to have their needs met, but in ways that are more positive and longer lasting (i.e. A student may say, "I stole from the store because my parents are always fighting and they are discussing getting a divorce.") Remember it is healing for a student to express why they do something and have an adult understand why it happened even if the adult doesn't agree with the behavior. We all want to be heard and understood; this often helps prevent negative coping strategies.

10) Take a guess, then understand

Take a guess at how they are feeling and give them permission to correct you if you are wrong.

You're feeling _____ because _____.

Put yourself in their shoes the best you can. How are they feeling right now? (i.e. "Now if my guess is wrong, please help me truly understand.")

11) Succeed, then celebrate

Create a goal or homework assignment in counseling that you know students can achieve, then really celebrate and emphasize it when they do. Small successes that are noticed are great reinforcers. We are often more likely to work harder and follow through with people who notice our small successes.

12) Let them sit in your chair

This is a symbolic way to let them know you respect their expertise on themselves. (i.e. You could say "I want you to sit in my chair because you are going to play the biggest role in solving your problem. You are the expert, so you should sit in my chair. You could ask, "If you were me, what advice would you give you?")

13) Challenges equal opportunity

Using the visual metaphor of the river and dams, teach students how their challenges can be converted into positive motivation by:

- using self-talk that focuses on what they have control over
- relationships that motivate them
- a passion, purpose, or interest
- a support system

Show empathy for the challenge, but stress that it can be a great resource if they turn it into positive motivation. Communicate to them that you believe they can channel the challenge.

14) Take a picture of their world

Obtain a basic understanding of their three main environments of home, school, and peers from their own perspective. What do they see as the biggest challenges at home and school?

What do they like about their home life? What is unique about their family life? Let students express to you what type of peer group they hang out with (i.e. jocks, goths, skaters, emos, nerds, etc.). Try not to judge, but find out what they are expressing and why. Let them express what they like about their friends. Overall, try to understand their relationships - good or bad - and why they are important to them.

15) Number one rule

Emphasize to students that since you care about them, and you value and respect others as human beings, your number one rule is they don't hurt themselves or others emotionally or physically. Emphasize the importance of self-respect, and how doing some type of service for others can be healing. Stressing that you care about how they treat themselves emotionally and physically lets them know you care. Stress the importance of positive self-talk for emotional health, eating, and sleeping well for their physical health. Stressing basic life skills shows you care. Nurture them.

16) Tear off the labels

Surrender the one-up relationship by stressing to students you want to help them tear off any negative labels. Tell students that you want to help them to prove anyone wrong that has given them a negative label. Separate students as individuals with worth from their negative labels. Emphasize that their actions may have caused the labels they have been given by others, but those labels are not who they really are. Help them understand that they control those labels by how they live up to them.

17) Be the spokesperson

Often when students are going through a difficult time, they refuse to listen to those that care about them the most. Sometimes this occurs because they feel like they are letting down parents, teachers, friends, etc. If students are listening to you and connecting with you, be the spokesperson for people who care about them. (i.e. "Look, Mom and Dad get overwhelmed when you do drugs. We both know they really love you and it hurts them to see you hurt yourself. Give them a little break and be more

patient with them. They really do want to see you happier. Give them a chance to help you.") Being the spokesperson can help open the door for people who care about them to also surrender the one-up relationship. Teach these skills to people who care about the at-risk students.

18) You direct your play

Empower students to come up with ways they want to spend their time in counseling. Emphasize that the only rule is the time spent and activities have to somehow tie back into or focus on how to overcome the presenting problem, or focus on what they are doing to overcome the problem. (i.e. Give them three to five different choices they could do that hour, like art therapy, play therapy, music therapy, games, activities, etc.) Giving them a choice in the session gives them some power and control, and communicates to them your confidence in them and respect for them.

19) Lay out the red carpet and welcome mat

Send a very clear message at the beginning of your time with them that you really want to be with them in that moment. Through your actions and by how you turn outward and reach out to students, stress that you are excited that they are in your office working on their challenges. Remember that some students' presence in your office may be a small miracle for them. If needed, become an actor for the first five minutes. Act like it's Christmas morning and they are that favorite bike you've been wanting for the last six months. Although acting excited may be difficult for you, especially at times when you as a counselor or therapist are tired and burned out, you will soon become re-energized by the response you will get from students when they feel truly welcomed and they connect with you. Remember, no one wants to be someplace where they feel like they are a burden and not welcomed.

20) Offense And Optimism Moves The Ball

- Emphasize to students that when you are trying to overcome a problem you want to be on the offense, because the offense has the ball and is in control. They are deciding what things happen.

On defense things are usually happening to you.

- Emphasize that you believe they have a lot of good offensive talent to attack the problem and you want to be their partner on offense in attacking the problem.
 - Emphasize that you are an “offensive counselor.” You are not going to just sit passively by and let the problem beat you up. You are going to attack it together.
 - Stress that it takes a team sometimes, and if they get tired, you are going to push and not give up.
- Stress that there are always challenges with overcoming problems, but when you are on offense you must remain optimistic that you can score and beat the problem, or you will lose energy.
 - Emphasize that “No” and “I can’t” are banned from your office.
 - Spend the last five minutes of counseling brainstorming possible optimistic outcomes of the problem. (i.e. How will life be different when the problem is gone?)

22 ways to surrender the one-up in a group setting:

When we first created the WhyTry Program, our primary application was in a therapeutic one-on-one setting. Today we see WhyTry used in many ways that involve teaching lessons to groups in a classroom setting. As we received feedback from several of our customers using the program in these settings, we realized that surrendering the one-up relationship with an entire classroom full of students presents a different set of challenges than those that you see in a one-on-one setting. With this in mind, we sought the advice of many teachers and counselors that were using WhyTry. We asked them for their ideas on how to surrender the one-up relationship in a group or classroom setting. Here are some of our favorites:

1) I know your name

Greet each student as they enter or leave your class by name. Shake their hand or give them a “high-five.” We feel that this is a great way to make each student feel important when they are called and recognized by name. It really sends a message that they are important to you and that you care about them.

2) They are all A and B students

Make a comment like, “All I see in this class are A and B students,” and then treat them accordingly until they prove otherwise. This is kind of like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Often when we give them expectations and treat them accordingly, they rise to the occasion. Sometimes students are labeled negatively so often that

they feel like they are already failing before the semester begins. It can be refreshing to a student to be labeled in a positive way.

3) Show and tell

Share personal stories and information about yourself, so that students can get to know and feel that you are approachable. When you share information about yourself, you are inviting them into your world. This often makes it easier for them to let you into their world.

4) Have I got something for you

Give them a personal token or gift. It can be a positive quote or an object that serves as a reminder of some idea that you have been teaching them. This can be a very simple way

to give them a symbolic reminder that you value and care about them. It can also be a great way to reinforce something that you have taught them or would like to emphasize.

5) Random act of service

Perform a random act of service or appreciation for a student with an encouraging note to pay it forward. This can be an excellent way to change a student's negative attitude towards the class and can help create a more caring and nurturing environment. One of the greatest ways to increase self-esteem is to serve or express appreciation to another person. This is true whether they are the recipient or the giver of the service.

6) You are the teacher and I am the student

Give assignments or projects where the student can be the expert or teacher. Give them the opportunity to instruct you and the other students in the class. This is a great way to help students leave their comfort zone, improve social skills, build leadership skills, and gain self-confidence. Teaching something can be one of the best ways to learn and retain difficult concepts and information.

7) You give the grade

Allow students the opportunity on an assignment to grade themselves. You may want to tell them what criteria you would use for grading them, but ultimately let them decide. This sends a message to students that you trust and value their judgment. We have found that when we do this, often students will be more fair in their judgment than if you were grading them yourself.

8) You make the call

Give students several options on a project or assignment and allow them to choose which one they would like to do. Students are so used to being told what to do. When you give them the freedom to choose their assignment, this often empowers and motivates them to put forth a greater effort.

9) Come together

Create a class competition against another class. Instead of competing against each other, this allows the students to work together with a common goal. Create a reward for the winning class. This can be a great way to get students to work together, support each other, and create class unity. There seems to be more energy and focus when there is a shared purpose among the group of students. Even a very simple reward in this case can serve as a great motivator.

10) Share your passion

Share one of your hobbies, interests or passions and invite the students to do the same. Students become enthusiastic about class when they have the opportunity to share what they love and spend their time doing. It helps them to associate the passion that they feel for those things with the feelings of being in class. It can also be a very great way for class members and the instructor to get to know one another better. When you know what is really important to a student then you are on your way to establishing a good relationship.

11) This is a hallmark moment

Give a positive personal note at some time during the semester to each student. It could be mailed home or given to them personally. This is one of the best ways to send a sincere message outside of class that you care for a student and believe in them. Remember, "A student doesn't really care how much you know until they know how much you care."

12) Getting to know you

For about three or four minutes at the start of class, spotlight a member of the class. You may want to have them fill out a questionnaire to gather information. Have a class member read about that individual and then have the class try and guess who it is. This is just another great way for students to feel comfortable in the classroom environment and like they are a part of the group.

13) My class is your class

Create a student-friendly environment. Make your class environment convey the feeling that you are interested in them and care about them. Research suggests that if you create a warm and caring environment, attendance and student performance will increase. Ideas for this could be:

- Create a photo board with pictures taken of the class throughout the term.
- Have games and puzzles for kids to experiment with while waiting for class to start.
- Add some color or pictures to your room.
- Create a suggestion box for ways to make the classroom better.

14) Ask them

Ask students questions that allow them to express their interests and ideas. Ask them what they like best about school. Ask them about their favorite teachers in the past and why they liked them. This gives you an opportunity to see ways that you can improve as their teacher. When people are given the chance to express their opinions, it shows that you value their ideas and what they have to say.

15) Our class against the world

“Let’s prove them wrong.” Discuss what others think are limits to what the class can achieve, then set a goal to prove them wrong. (i.e. The principal says that we’ve never had this class get all “Bs” or higher, or that we’ve never had a class get 100% attendance, etc.) Encourage the class to work together to prove them wrong and then have a celebration when they do.

16) You’re my leader

Allow students the opportunity to lead in different situations during the class. When you give someone a responsibility, they will usually rise to the occasion. Many youth are used to being put down. This can be an effective way to build up an individual and put them in a positive light in front of other students. It also gives you an opportunity to show confidence and trust in them as their teacher.

17) Celebrate success

Take opportunities to draw special attention to successes that students have, whether it be an individual or a group effort. Bring treats, a cake, have a party, let them listen to music, or have some other reward from you that shows recognition of their success. This can be a key to keeping students and groups motivated and focused on a common goal. We have seen youth put forth an incredible effort for even a simple reward (such as a piece of candy). It can also add to the fun and enjoyment that students feel about class, which enhances learning and improves attendance.

18) Dress it up

For a special lesson or just for fun, dress up for the class. Wear a tuxedo, a costume, a suit, a dress, or some formal or different attire that shows that this class is important and worth the extra effort on your part. This can also be a great way to add variety to a lesson and help to keep students’ attention.

19) You’ve got the blues

Tell the class that you realize that life can be challenging at home, school or with peers. Because of that, you will give them three (or less) blue cards that they can cash in at any time for dropping an assignment or a quiz, getting extended time on a test or larger assignment, etc. This is a great way to show that you have empathy for the challenges that they have. It lets them know that you understand them and care about their personal lives. It allows you to put their interests first.

20) Service project/ Give something back

Have the class come together for a service project of some kind. The project should be focused on supporting and building up the community (i.e. gather clothes for the homeless, gather food for a food drive, participate in a blood drive, plant trees, pick up litter, etc.). As the instructor or teacher, take this opportunity to work closely alongside the students. When students learn to turn outward in service, we often see several positive benefits, including less de-

pression, increased gratitude, self-esteem, and motivation. In working with them in a service activity, you are in a sense teaching them to surrender the one-up relationship with others.

21) True or false

Share two true stories about yourself and one false one and have the class try and guess which one is false. Allow the class to get to know you a little better. This is a very simple way to allow the class to know that you are human and approachable. It can be a fun way to make a game of your own story and background.

22) You're the boss/I work for you

Tell the students that this school was built for them. That makes them the boss. It's ironic that you are always grading them when they are the real boss here. Give students the criteria for getting an "A" grade in your class. Later, ask students to give you the criteria for an "A" grade as their teacher. Ask them to grade your work so far and at different times during the semester.