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## Getting Off to a Strong Start: Tips for Establishing Rapport

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Good rapport begins the moment that students walk into your classroom. It doesn't just happen automatically, though. In addition to having a positive attitude and wearing a smile, consider acting upon any of these ideas that have worked for many.

- **Make your students feel wanted.**  
In the week before the school year begins, take a few minutes to phone all the students in your class and welcome them to your room. The time spent is well worth the strides made in establishing rapport later.
- **I know your name.**  
Children want you to remember their names. Use each student's name as frequently as possible. For example, when handing back a paper, say "Here's yours, Jane," or "Thank you, Corey." Play a couple of name games. For example, you might learn as many names as possible, then have students switch desks and see how well you can remember. Children love to see that you are trying to learn their names and also understand that you are human and make mistakes.
- **Smile. You're on candid camera.**  
Children want you to know who they are. On the first day of school, have students make colorful name tags (or have them already made for young students). Let them get into small groups (less threatening than on their own) and pose in any manner they wish for photographs. Develop the pictures quickly, and you can have all their names learned by the next day. Meet them at the door day two, and greet them by name. Use the pictures later for "class captions." (See page 30.)
- **Here's looking at you, kids ...**  
Children need to know you care! Start by letting them know you like them, feel excited and privileged to be their teacher, and are there for them for the entire year. Really look at them while you talk.
- **Welcome to the room.**  
Children love treats. Fill a brown paper bag with tiny treats (for example, erasers, candies, pencils, and pencil sharpeners) and allow each student to pick a welcome-to-our-room prize.
- **Share and share alike.**  
Your students want to know about you. Prepare a talk about yourself, including details on hobbies, funny anecdotes, humorous calamities ... whatever you think may interest them. Share this and then ask students to share something of themselves. Don't make the sharing mandatory this early in the year, though; accept some students' need to "pass."

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## More Tips for Establishing Rapport

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Establishing rapport is such an important part of effective teaching that here are more good ideas to consider.

- Two heads are better than one.  
Children often like talking about other children more than about themselves. Let students get into pairs. Use your professional judgment about whether to allow free choice or to tell them to turn to the person behind them. Ask students to find out something interesting about their partners, then share this with the rest of the class.
- T-charts reveal likes and dislikes.  
Children enjoy expressing their likes and dislikes. Display a T-chart that illustrates *your* personal likes and dislikes that do *not* have to do with school. Depending on student age, your chart can be on an overhead, on a poster board, in words, or in pictures. For example, under the Like column, you might have *chocolate ice cream, rainbows, and butterflies*. Under the Dislike column you might have *toothaches, asparagus, and cold weather*. The students instantly learn something about you; they can then create their own T-charts.
- Show students you're human and ask for help.  
Every teacher has a few foibles in the classroom. Early in the year, share a few of yours, and actively solicit students' help. For example: "I have trouble keeping my desk tidy and I need you to help me with this by not putting your work here." "I sometimes don't hear you if your voice is tiny; I need you to be patient and speak a little louder." Admitting such problems doesn't make you appear weak or less of a teacher; it shows that you respect the students' ability to help.
- Finish that thought.  
Children enjoy simple sharing games, such as completing open-ended sentences with whatever comes to mind. Go around the room doing this and keep the sentences simple. You begin all the sentences; students repeat the stem, then add the endings. The same stem can be used several times in succession for fun comparisons, or even with the entire class. Not only does this create an atmosphere of sharing and amusement in the classroom, but it may even provide you with initial insights about your students. Here are a few examples:
  - My favorite color/animal/food/game is
  - When I go home today I will
  - I like/hate/care about/wonder about
- Fill a Fun Box.  
Students cherish their Fun Box, a box filled with an assortment of comics, easy readers, magazines (especially at Junior High level), mazes, coloring books (especially the new design and fantasy ones), joke books, decks of cards, and puzzles. The Fun Box is a must in every classroom. Students quickly learn that when they have completed their work, they may select something from this box. Ask students what they want to see in the Fun Box. Getting their input encourages a sense of ownership.

# Fun Box: Student Worksheet

Check the items you would like to see in the box. Rank your five favorites, with 1 being your most favorite.

1. comics

Suggest names \_\_\_\_\_

2. joke books

3. maze books

4. coloring pages

5. colored markers

6. drawing paper

7. deck of cards

8. magazines

Suggest names \_\_\_\_\_

9. small hand-held games

10. puzzles

11. word searches

12. other suggestions \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to contribute any items to our Fun Box? If so, what?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What restrictions do you think should apply to use of the Fun Box?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_