

# Communicating with Students

## K- 3 Resource Guide



### How to use this guide:

The **Communicating with Students Resource Guide** is a tool for educators. This guide will help to improve communication with students, grades K-3.

In this guide, you will find specific questions about communication, answered by a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health<sup>SM</sup> to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting<sup>®</sup> program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline<sup>®</sup>.



Building relationships with students can be difficult. Especially if your students have experienced trauma in their home environments. However, as educators it is important to make those connections, and make an effort to communicate effectively. This guide offers tips and tricks to make communicate easy and effective.

**Note:** Resource Guides are also available for grades 4-8 and 9-12.

For more information, visit [boystowntraining.org](http://boystowntraining.org)



# Communicating with Students

## Getting Students to Open Up

**Rather than “good” or “fine,” how do you get students to open up about their school day?**

If you don’t want a closed-ended answer (“Fine,” “No,” “Yes,” “I don’t know”), avoid asking students close-ended, generalized questions about their school day – especially ones like, “How was your day?” Instead, ask them to share stories, events and even a “wish list” about their day. Use questions like:

- “What do you wish would have happened at school today?”
- “What was the funniest thing that happened at school today?”
- “Tell me what caused you the most anxiety today.”

These types of questions will lead to follow-up questions that help reveal to you your student’s school interactions, both good and bad. It is also important to listen without judgment.

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town’s Common Sense Parenting*



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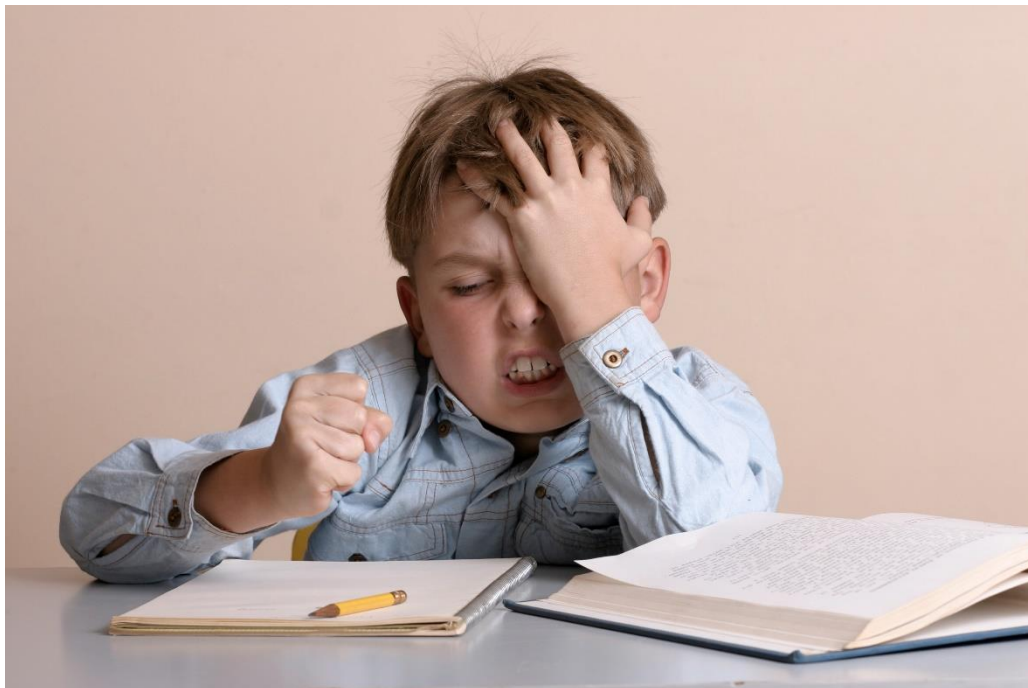
## Signs my Students are Having a Bad Day

### **What signs stand out to teachers in the classroom when students are having a bad day?**

When children are having a bad school day, an observant teacher can see signs right away when they enter the classroom. Early warning signs may come in the form of “rumbling” behaviors. These are behaviors that are more subtle and not like the child’s normal behaviors.

For example, when a child who usually responds to you when you greet the child does not respond back, or a student who usually participates in class lays her head down on the desk. Calmly and quietly address rumbling behaviors as soon as you observe them. When you address the behavior immediately it reduces the chances of it getting worse and spiraling out of control.

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town’s Common Sense Parenting*



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## Stress and Anxiety

### **What tips would you give to teachers to recognize stress and anxiety in their students?**

A key is to know how the child normally behaves. A noticeable difference in a child's behavior may indicate there is a problem. Keep in mind every child is different and their responses to stress will be different. When children are stressed or anxious, their behaviors may look different from how adults react to stress. Some children giggle when they feel uncomfortable, others are instantly angry at everything and some children withdraw and isolate themselves.

You should ask for help from the school psychologist if you have concerns.

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town's Common Sense Parenting*





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## Building Relationships and Trust

**It is important for every child to have an adult to talk with. When it comes to building relationships and forming trust, what tips do you have to cultivate that relationship?**

Building meaningful relationships in your classroom is based on time, trust and mutual respect. You may not be able to cultivate a relationship with every child in your classroom because personalities play a part in who will or will not gravitate to you.

You can, however, consistently build understanding, empathy and convey genuine care with each student by simply noticing them and acknowledging their efforts.

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town's Common Sense Parenting*



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## Getting a Struggling Student to Talk

**Do you have any tips for teachers with concerns about certain students who may be struggling with talking about what's going on?**

When children are struggling to talk about their feelings, it is important not to press them to share before they feel they can trust you. Start by planting seeds to build a strong relationship. Use active listening, be comfortable with silence and do activities that allow children to express their feelings in other ways (e.g., artistic expression, role-play, journaling and mediation exercises).

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town's Common Sense Parenting*



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## Behavioral Issues

**Do you have any suggestions for developing and building relationships with kids who already have behavioral issues, or issues keeping them from communicating?**

Children with severe behavioral problems may also find it extremely difficult to share their feelings with others. It may be helpful to take a child who struggles with getting to know others on a sort of “ride along” or “listening tour” with you. By riding along, they will not feel the pressure of having to interact.

Instead, you can model communication skills during friendship activities. By having them go along to listen and watch how you talk and get along with others, they can observe how you observe cues, wait to speak without interrupting and share appropriate topics.

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town’s Common Sense Parenting*



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## Addressing Trauma

### **What tips can I offer to students to address things like loss, stress, and difficult emotions?**

Some of the best medicine for loss or stress can be found in good old fashion care and kindness. Children, like all of us, will experience ups and downs. What is most helpful during difficult times is to have a trusted adult who can teach children how to handle and cope with their emotions and make good choices.

It is important to never underestimate the power of a little praise, and a few minutes of genuine concern and kindness can help a child weather almost any emotional storm.

*Bridget Barnes, Director, Boys Town's Common Sense Parenting*





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Contact us!

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