

“Best Advice” for Teachers

The advice given to me as a new teacher was that *a good teacher does not forget what it's like to be a child*. A child's biggest desire is to gain acceptance and understanding from others. If a child feels comfortable in his educational setting, he will thrive academically and socially. His self-confidence and thus his esteem for himself and others will be invaluable tools in the learning process. A child wants to be understood by his teacher and accepted by his peers. When the educator remembers this, the student's world of learning opens and becomes an ongoing process.

Deena Cole
Chapel Hill Christian School
Akron, Ohio

Find a way to laugh with your students every day! When you misspeak or make another type of error, laugh at your mistake, pointing out the mistake to your students (if necessary). They are probably smiling at each other already! Share a joke or cartoon that pokes fun at you, your students, or the current subject. A good giggle helps any day get better. Keep a small bulletin board of cartoons. Soon you'll have contributions from everyone: parents, other teachers, office staff, etc. Read aloud a funny story to introduce a new concept. The students will not miss the point, and they will listen. Invite a guest to come dressed as a character to give an exaggerated presentation of current material. The students will be fascinated to discover what was true in the presentation and what was make-believe.

Dianne Auckland
Plumstead Christian
Plumsteadville, Pennsylvania

My first year of teaching elementary school was 1985. Some things have changed since then. Some things have not. One thing that has remained constant is that *all children are gifted*. I'm sure you've heard the saying about never meeting a mother who didn't have a gifted child. There is some truth to that. Of course not all children are gifted in the same ways. Nevertheless, be not mistaken—all children are gifted. I've seen it for many years with no exceptions.

A few children are gifted academically, those that read grade levels beyond their own or those that can crunch numbers with the best CPAs around. But academic giftedness is applicable to a relative few. I had a first grader who had great difficulty understanding phonics, but she was the first one to run to a child who needed comfort and place her arms around him, letting him know it would be okay. She was definitely gifted in encouragement. I've had students who were gifted in athletics, kindness, compassion, leadership, servanthood, music, art, and many other areas.

Over the years I have enjoyed watching my elementary children grow in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but it blesses me greatly to watch their unique giftedness bloom and expand. Yes, over the years I've noticed all children are surely gifted. That is why I, though in a "normal" classroom, can say without hesitation, I teach only gifted children.

Linda A. Plum
Chapel Hill Christian School
Akron, Ohio

On my first day of teaching my special class of seven hearing-impaired children, the room was arranged, my lesson was well prepared, the materials were ready, and I was on my way to a successful day. At first I had my students' attention, but one by one their minds and bodies began to wander. They moved around the room, pulled toys off the shelves, and slapped one another. I just stood there without a clue about what to do. I did not want to hurt their feelings or create a negative atmosphere.

After 20 minutes of chaos, my supervisor arrived. She instantly brought order to the class and finished the lesson. Afterward, we had a discussion about the purpose of a classroom. She wanted to know why I allowed the children to take control of the learning environment. I told her that I loved the children and did not want to hurt them in any way. She frankly defined *love* for me. *Love has order, the students' respect, discipline, a well-prepared lesson, and an acute awareness of the students' needs.* Until I was able to love in those terms, I would be unsuccessful as a teacher. Since then, I have spent 25 years defining *love*.

Donna Hores
Bethesda Christian School
Fort Worth, Texas

The best advice I received as a new teacher was shown, not spoken. A seasoned teacher took me under her wing and modeled what a prepared teacher looks like. Though there are many components of being a prepared teacher, the one that has been tried-and-true for me is this: *Never leave at the end of each day until your room is completely ready for the next day.* Lesson plans are prepared and laid out, materials are complete and accessible, the new day's information is neatly written on the chalkboard, and the room is tidy and ready to welcome the children. Then I can leave for the day, knowing I am prepared for tomorrow, whether for myself or for a substitute. What a great way to end the day! What a great way to begin the day!

Nancy Berman
Bethesda Christian School
Fort Worth, Texas

The best advice I received as a new teacher was *to be organized and to plan, plan, plan, and plan some more*. It is better to have more planned than I can accomplish in a class period than to run out of things to do. The secret to good classroom management is planning and organization.

Freda Chadwick
Bethesda Christian School
Fort Worth, Texas

The advice that made the most impact on my teaching was to *give ownership to the children for their behavior*. In disciplining children, I learned to say “you have chosen” instead of telling them only about the punishment for what they had done. For example, I now say, “Billy, you have chosen to get up and walk around the room when it is seat-work time, so you have chosen to lose five minutes of recess time.” I had taught for a few years before I received this advice, and I had often gotten into those conflicts with the children who placed blame on me for their punishment instead of taking the responsibility. This practice places responsibility right where it should be—on the student.

Jane Bucy
Kingsway Christian School
Avon, Indiana

I realize your focus is teaching, but I received a pertinent observation from Dr. Roy Lowrie when I was sitting in one of his classes in 1978. He told me, a young administrator-hopeful, “If you want to make money in Christian school administration, you can do so by moving from school to school. But *if you notice some school is really growing and developing, you will find that someone has given their life to that school.*” I now understand this observation more fully because I have watched many schools over the years and have just completed my thirty-first year at Houghton Academy.

Philip G. Stockin
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