



## AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST, EPISODE 2 CREATING POSITIVE CULTURE

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode2>

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve for more than 20 years. I've worn lots of hats in special education, but my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

We are in the midst of a series on building teamwork for the classroom and if you joined us for the last episode, we talked about getting to know your staff and how to start building relationships. If you miss that episode, I'll put a link in the show notes for you. So, you can catch up today.


I'm back with a new tip for creating a productive atmosphere and culture in the classroom and really emphasizing how important that positive culture is. We all know how important it is and I've got some tips to help you create it. So if you've been teaching for a while, you probably have had unfortunately a situation in which the atmosphere or the culture of the school or the classroom were not what you wanted it to be, where it made everything more stressful. There was always an undercurrent of tension and you never really felt like you could rely on those around you. And that of course is the opposite of the kind of classroom or the kind of school culture that we want to create in which everyone is collaborating and working together. And no, we're not singing kumbaya, but I did just make it sound like that.

So today's tip focuses on how we create that atmosphere in the classroom. And it won't always be possible to completely set the atmosphere because

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the classroom is made up of more than just you. There are different people and it is definitely true that there are some individuals who can really just kill the mood and kill the culture.

And you find that you have to work around them, but your tone, your behavior, and your approach can make the difference between a classroom that people tolerate working in each day and one that includes a team of adults who are working together, focused on the good of the students. Now that is so much easier said than done. It sounds wonderful. Ideas of how you can help to set the tone for the classroom and make it what you want it to be and make it a positive atmosphere for everyone who works there.

The first tip is to be respectful, which goes back to last. The last episode, and I realize again like I with that, that it sounded sounds very trite, but it's also very true. If you don't respect your staff, they won't respect you. Now here's the kicker. If you have staff that you have difficulty respecting for whatever reason, and I've heard a lot of them in my career, I want you to imagine running your classroom without their support or without their hands at least a try.


Look at things from their perspective. Try to put yourself in their shoes. Imagine what it's like. They're not typically well paid. None of us, nobody in education is particularly well paid and your jobs including theirs are not an easy one. If you follow tip number one in the last episode, you got to know your staff. And part of this was getting to know other things that might be impacting their personal lives. And it's important to recognize that there can be things that have nothing to do with your classroom that are making someone difficult to deal with. And it's really important to remember that many people are going through a lot of stuff outside of school and you have no idea. Some of them are very good at compartmentalizing, some are very



good at keeping it out of their job and they don't realize how much it's impacting their demeanor, their interactions, their mood, all of those kinds of things that are what we read in order to determine if everything is okay.

So keep in mind that there could be a lot of things going on in the background. I've had a lot of teachers and paras that people have been concerned with and a lot of times there was a change in behavior. "Wow She was the best para we had. And this year, she's a mess." Well, chances are pretty good that there's something else going on in her family life. And so you have to remember that we don't all just exist at school. Sometimes that's hard to remember for some of us who do just exist at school and don't have as many outside impacts upon us. So you want to make sure that you understand that they may not feel comfortable talking about it, but there may be other things you're not aware of that are impacting them. Knowing that and, and trying to get a perspective that there may be things you don't know about can go a long way towards helping you have respect for them in some way. You don't have to respect everything about them.


Number two, you want to recognize that you are a type of supervisor. Now I recognize you are not their boss. You do not hire and fire. Now I have been a boss where I hire and fire and I have been a leader where I do not have that power at all and I will tell you there's actually very little difference between the two of them. Having the ability to fire somebody doesn't necessarily mean that you will or that it's the best decision or that it's the right decision. So recognize that you are a supervisor even though you are not their boss and you are a supervisor in that you have to lead without being in charge. You are leading your class, you are a leader, which by default makes you a teacher leader. But recognize that being a leader means leading, not bossing people around you will all be happier if you work together.



So ask for feedback from the staff. If you're a younger teacher who's working with older staff, which I know happens very frequently, especially with the turnover that we have, you are going to be in a situation where you really want to assert your authority and gain respect. You will gain more respect by asking for their input and their feedback. Overall, people will respect people who ask for their opinion more than someone who tells them what to do. So recognize that leading is not bossing someone around it is getting the team to work together. I would say at least once a month, if not more, encourage your staff to give you feedback about what is working for them and what is working for the classroom and what is not. Sometimes his feedback may be very hard to hear, but hearing it and addressing it is a whole lot better than letting it fester, which is what happens if you are the type of leader that no one wants to tell that there's a problem because then it festers under the surface and it taints your culture.

It, it makes it a much more negative place to be. So recognize that as a leader, it's your job to listen to your staff. It's your job to let them give you feedback. Sometimes that feedback may be about your behavior, but you can't change it if you don't know about it. So open yourself up and I know it's hard but and you can set some type of reinforcer system for yourself for it. You get, you know, ice cream or wine or whatever it is, even just a Pat on your back, but you need to be able to open yourself up and ask for what's working and what's not.

Number three share duties equally. Don't assume that just because they are a para or you are a speech pathologist and they are the teacher that doing the bathroom is duty is only their job. If you are a speech pathologist, there's a ton of communication that we can do in the bathroom. If you are a teacher, there's a lot of things we can teach in the bathroom. Being part




of the team and sharing the dirty work is part of building respect with people. They are going to respect you for what you do.

Number four is probably the thing that I say most frequently. Give more positives than negatives. When you're giving feedback, you probably know that when you're working with students, you should give at least four to five positives for every correction that you make. That's considered the golden ratio. Every time you give a correction, you should've given four to five positive statements about what they did well and there's research that shows that using that in the classroom creates more positive behavior. I have a secret that's not just for our students. Research shows that it works with business and it works with marriages. I know it's like crazy. Let's face it. Behavior is behavior is behavior, whether it's a kid's behavior and adult's behavior or an alien's behavior. I think so.

While I don't recommend giving an M and M to an adult each time they praise a student with a great idea as a great idea, making sure you share more positives than negatives is key to getting your staff aligned with you. And this doesn't just mean that you have to buy them presence constantly. That's not what this is about. Appreciation gifts are lovely, but what really works better is daily find one thing or two or three or four or five that you can praise them for doing. Now, again, you probably aren't going to say "that was a really great job fading your prompts, Nancy, awesome. High five." You might, I don't know, you may have that kind of relationship with Nancy, but you might say, "thanks so much for working for Bob to do that on his own." Instead of kiss your brain, it might be, give yourself a round of applause. Nancy that was really hard.

Clearly how you phrase it depends on you, the adult and the relationship that you have with adults. But just remember that a little positive goes a very



long way in building relationships and setting the tone for positive interactions in the classroom. So to sum up our four tips were be respectful, build respect for your staff. Find a way to respect them, develop empathy for them. Put yourself in their shoes.


Number two, recognize that you are a leader but not a boss. You are leaving the classroom but you telling people what to do is not going to lead them the way that you want it to.

And number three, share your duties equally. Don't assume that just because someone else's job is bathroom duty, share it and you'll earn respect.

And number four, give more positives than negatives in all of your feedback. Find positive things you can say.

One last bonus idea that I will share with you. One of the things I hear people say a lot, and I used to have my own consultants say to me, but I can't find anything positive. Okay then you're not looking hard enough is what I used to tell them and here's sometimes the positive things are not necessarily student related, but look at this person and see if their interactions with the student show that they really care about the student. When I was running a program, and if you've see me train, you've probably heard me tell this story before. But when I was running a program I had, we had a consultant who came in and he started his feedback off with, I'm just really impressed by how you've built a school here that clearly has so much invested and cares so much about these students.

Okay. Now as a young director in my head, this was the story I was telling myself, Oh my gosh, this is the only thing that he can think of to say that's




nice. He has to start with something good and the only thing he can say is that we like the kids. Like there's nothing else that we're doing right, and I was mortified.

Now, there were other things that he found that were right. Here's what I've discovered in the 20 years since then. That was not a small thing. I thought, "Oh my gosh." I took that for granted. I assumed we were all there because we cared about the kids. I assumed we all liked the kids and wanting what was best for them. I was wrong. And I will tell you that I've been in classrooms and I would say that is not the case.

So don't underestimate as minor as it seems to you, don't underestimate the fact that this person shows up and shows up for the students because that's huge. That's not a small thing because here's the key. You can't teach that. That is something they bring to the job. So if they have that, that's a positive right there.

So that's where you can start with your positives. No positive is too small. Everybody likes to be told that their dress is pretty. Everybody likes to know that their lipstick color is good. Everybody likes to know that they're looking thinner today. Whatever it is, it doesn't have to be student related but it does need to be positive. So look for those things and look hard to make sure that you've got more positives than negatives.

So hopefully that gives you some ideas. Hopefully that gets you started. And hopefully you will come to our Facebook group at special educators, connection.com there'll be a link in the show notes and join us and share your ideas about this cause. I would love to hear more about ways that you have addressed these issues and how you build culture in your classroom. Thank you so much for listening and tuning in for another episode of the Autism



Classroom Resources Podcast. I so appreciate you being here. I would love for you to subscribe on iTunes or your choice of player, and I hope to see you again in the next episode.

Bye guys.