

EP 5 FINAL Teaching Classroom TEams Giving Feedback.mp3

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SPEAKERS

Christine Reeve

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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.

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Welcome back. I am your host, Christine Reeve. And we are in the midst of a series on building teaching teams. And we are actually at the end at tip 5. And today, I'm going to get into one of the hardest parts about building teaching teams giving feedback, because as I've said before, let's face it, most of us didn't go into this job to supervise other adults. And we probably didn't plan on being a manager or leader or administrator; we just want to teach. However, ultimately, if you are the teacher, you are the one who's responsible for your classroom, you are responsible for the learning of your students. And you are responsible for making sure that your team is implementing the strategies to help the students learn, which I know is a little scary. But let's not think about that just yet.

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Because here's the thing. If you have done steps 1 through 4, giving feedback may still be necessary. But it doesn't always have to be difficult. I'm not saying that these steps are going to solve every problem, because I'd be lying. There are still going to be situations where you and the staff member don't see eye to eye. And you may need help from administration. But let's work to avoid those situations and think about how we give feedback to make it productive. Because I know that you want to work environment where things run like clockwork, but the classroom is made up of people. And people aren't always perfect. And they don't always do what we want them to do. And sometimes you have things that you need to address. And I know that you can do this, you just need the tools.

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So first, if you've done the first four steps, you've built a relationship with your staff. And you've developed a context of respect among them. And that's going to be huge when you ask someone to do something differently. Because remember that change is always hard. Change challenges us.

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Just like if your principal comes in and gives you feedback, it kind of jars you at first like, you're like, I thought I was doing a great job. What do you mean, I'm not doing this. You might feel very defensive. And you might feel the need to explain. So the next time someone gives you feedback, think about how that feels. And that's, of course, how other people feel when you give them feedback.

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It's jarring when someone tells you that you should do something differently, even if they're doing it very nicely. But if you have a respectful relationship with your principal, then you're probably going to think about the feedback. And you're probably going to really realize that he or she is suggesting something that will make things better. If you have a respectful relationship with the staff member that you're giving feedback to, that can happen as well.

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Now, if you don't have respect for your principal, you're either going to throw out the feedback, or you're going to realize that you have to implement it because she's your boss. And of course, that is not a choice that you have for your teaching team; you are typically not their boss. So it's going

to be very important that you gain respect through leadership of the team, rather than just expecting because you are the leader, people will follow you. So let's look at some of the things that we've also done.

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We've also created a classroom vision. And that means that when you give feedback, you could redirect back to that classroom vision. So start by talking about the vision, and then talk about what you see needing to be changed in order to reach that vision. So you might say,

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"When we were working together yesterday, I realized that we were doing a lot of the work for the student. I noticed you are really concerned that the art project be pretty for their parents. And I totally get that, because I've been there and done that in the past. But I've also realized that if we do everything for the student, it's not his art project anymore. And we also aren't working toward his being as independent as possible, which is one of the things that we had in our vision for the classroom. So I'm thinking that maybe we can brainstorm some ways to fade off some of that assistance."

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You might discuss it for a bit. And then you might follow up with,

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"I've done it too. And I hope that you will give me a sign when you see me helping a student too much, because it's so easy to do. I'm hoping we can get in the habit of decreasing our prompting, and using it more effectively. Is there a way that I can help with that? Anything I could demonstrate about fading prompts that you might find helpful, and you're going to be better off, if you give that option?"

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How can I help you rather than just do it because chances are if the person isn't doing it, they don't know how.

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Now another thing that we want to think about when we give feedback is making sure that we're

focusing on positives, not just corrective. Nobody wants to only be told what they're doing wrong. And you remember the 5 to 1 ratio that I talked about in Episode Two? That we should five positives, for every corrective item? That's still true. Now, we're not going to give them 12345. Now do this. That's not what I mean. Over the course of the day, you want to have at least five positives that you've given so that you can then give some corrective feedback within that context. So during the day, you want to actively look for the things that work and share those with the member, as well as corrective feedback.

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I have a feedback form that I use as part of my classroom teams toolkit. And on the left side, it says what's working. And on the right, it has suggestions. When I supervised consultants at the university, we used this kind of forum. And inevitably, they came back and said they didn't like it. They said, "I don't want to use this form anymore." And I asked why. And a lot of times what they would say, ...(because we would often go into classrooms that had nothing, they had nothing curriculum wise, they had had no training)... they would come back and say, "Because I can't find anything that's working, nothing is working. And so I can't leave that blank." And I told them, then they weren't looking hard enough. And that's actually why the column in the form is to make you really look because sometimes you do have to really look hard. And I talked a little bit more about that in Episode Two.

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When I ran a program, I ran a program for elementary students with autism, we had a consultant that I really admired come in. And he started giving us feedback at the end of the day, after his observations. And he started by saying that we had built a school where it was very clear that everyone really cared about the students succeeding and cared about the students well being. And I have to tell you, that my first thought as a young administrator was, Oh, my gosh, that's all he could think to tell us is good in our program. I mean, I went through graduate school and clinical psychology before this, I knew how you get feedback. You tell them something positive, and then tell them what's wrong. I was so embarrassed; I was so upset that I thought that this was the only good thing that he could pull from our program.

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Now, since that time, I've been in and out of almost 50 school districts across the country. And I can tell you that that positive he started with is not small. Telling people that they care about the kids, and how much you admire that, is not a small thing, and it shouldn't be taken for granted. So if it's one of the positives that you start with, understand that caring about the kids is not a small thing. And you can't teach it. If someone doesn't have it, we have a bigger problem than skills

training. So even if that's some of the positive feedback that you're giving, that's huge, because you could build on that. If they care about the kids, we can build their skills to be able to do what we know is best for the students.

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And when you're giving the feedback, don't give a positive, negative, positive. Because really, we do that just to try to cover up the negative. We're trying to make it less obtrusive. We do it because we think it makes it easier, because we're trying to soften the blow of giving a correction or a suggestion. It's great to start off with a positive if you can. But you want to make sure that when you give the corrective feedback, and even when you give the positive feedback, that you're direct in what you are saying. You want the message to be clear.

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My new favorite Brene' Brown, has a great statement in her Daring Leaders Program that says "clear is kind." And what it essentially means is that we are not being kind to people by not giving constructive, meaningful feedback. And in this case, what I see it meaning, is that we may think that by not telling someone that they're doing something wrong, or by skirting the issue, that we're being kind, but really, we're just avoiding the problem. And we're not having the courage to confront it. Confronting it and giving people meaningful, constructive feedback is hard. It's hard work. And it takes a lot of emotional fortitude for us to be able to do that. But nobody has the opportunity to improve if they don't get corrective feedback, if they don't have someone tell them what they're doing wrong. Because how else would you know?

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Some of the best critical feedback I received came from my mentor in graduate school. And he was a no nonsense guy. And he didn't hold back. But I'm a much better clinician and behavior analyst because of it. My grad students have often heard me tell the story of when he handed back my dissertation proposal and simply said, there are 30 run on sentences in this paper, find them and fix them. And it wasn't quite as gruff as it sounds, but I was pretty mortified, I thought I was a pretty good writer. And what was even worse was I fixed them, or I thought I did, and I came back and he said, they're still there. And I had to look at him and say, then clearly, I don't understand what a run on sentence is. And I needed him to teach me. So I'll tell you, I finally learned what a run on sentence was; my writing is stronger for it. And my students are stronger for it, because I'm able to help them identify it.

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So not giving someone the opportunity to fix something, whether it's something that they're doing that is problematic in the classroom, or something that they're doing this making you angry or upset with them. They don't know it, if we don't tell them.

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If you work with higher functioning students with autism, you know that they need really direct messages, I will tell you that they're not that different than everybody else in that respect. People often don't get the oblique references to things that are problematic. You know, it's the old stereotyped husband says to wife, what's wrong? Well, if you don't know, I'm not going to tell you. But it's true, we do that a lot. We expect people to just know and they don't see things from our perspective. Because nobody sees things from anybody except their own perspective, their own eyes color, everything they see. You don't know how to correct it. If nobody told you that it's a problem, you don't even know you need to correct it. So if we don't give them clear kind feedback, then they're just going to keep doing it the same way every day.

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We want to give clear, constructive feedback that focuses on what the person needs to be doing, not what they need not to do. So just like with our students, tell them what you want them to do. And that's kind because it gives the person a chance to grow, and build their skills and be more successful. Also, when you're giving that feedback, and you may have heard this in the example that I gave, use we statements, and I statements rather than you statements, I rarely I find myself saying you are doing this, because almost every mistake I see people make, I know I've made it one time or another. And that gives me the opportunity to say "we often do this," Recognize that you may have made that same error and probably have at some point, and that you see how easy it is to do. acknowledge that you might understand why they're doing what they're doing. And ask how you can work together to make both of you better.

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And finally, whenever you're giving feedback, always bring it back to the students, the students have to be the center of everything we do, we have to make decisions about what we do by determining how it helps the students. And we need to remind everybody that we are collaborating to help them.

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Change is hard, self changes even harder, it's hard for you to get used to having to have difficult conversations with other people. It's hard for other adults to change the way they do things. So

don't expect change to be immediate upon that feedback. Because it's a habit that they're going to have to change. And it's not an easy thing. So don't give them all of the things that they need to change at once. Give them one and let them get used to it, come back later and give them another.

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So give them time, try to give them as much space as possible to absorb what you've said, to think about the feedback and follow up on it. Don't respond to the defensiveness that you may get at first because remember, when your principal gave you feedback, you may have gotten defensive too. So you want to give them time to get past that and think about what you've said. And then you can follow up with it. And don't overwhelm them with too many things at one time.

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So let's go back through a little bit of what I've talked about. Just to sum up, if you've done the four things that we've talked about about in the series, thus far, you have a context of respect, you've created a classroom vision. And you can refer back to that vision when you give your feedback. So it's clear that you're making a statement about how to make the classroom what you want it to be. You want to give feedback with positives, not just corrective; you want to make sure that you're using your positives throughout the day. And that when you give the negative, you give it clear, but kind, clear is kind according to burn a brown. And when we give constructive feedback, we need to give it clearly people need to really understand what it is that we're telling them we want them to do. We can't beat around the bush, we need to give them the opportunity to follow through on that. And when we give the feedback, use we statements, include yourself, ask them to give you feedback. Because if they give you feedback, they're going to be more willing to take feedback from you. When we are collaborating. That's how it works, versus my dictating what's going to happen.

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Finally, make sure that you're you're paring down the number of things that you're asking them to change at once. Don't give them everything at once; pick one thing and let them work on that for a bit. And finally, again, this isn't going to solve every problem between adults in the classroom, and probably nothing will. And if it doesn't work, if all the strategies are not effective, you probably will have to have the administration involved in some way. The good part is that you'll have a written zoning plan, you'll have strategies that you've been able to demonstrate what you've done giving clear directions building a relationship, outlining the vision, giving feedback, you may have observation forms that you've shared that feedback and writing so that you can follow up. All those things will be important when you have to move if you have to move to that

administrative component. But hopefully these steps will help you build a productive classroom team that collaborates together for the good as a students.

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And if you're looking for more ideas about those steps, you can find it in the Building Classroom teams toolkit, which has the visions, the zoning plans, observation forms and more examples to help you with all of that. But if you haven't listened to episodes, one through four, go back and listen to them as well because they will walk you through that. And I will also put a link to Brene' Brown's Daring Classrooms. The blog post with this all you need to do it to find all of the episodes as well as the Related Links is go to autismclassroomresources.com/episode5. Thank you so much for joining me. If you liked this podcast, I would love for you to subscribe. I would love for you to share it with your friends. If you want to leave a review on your platform, please do so. If you have suggestions for what I should talk about in the future, please let me know and I'll be back next week with a new topic to talk about. Thank you for your time. Bye, guys.