



Take Home Tips

When Students are Unresponsive

Here are five things parents and teachers can do when a child appears unresponsive.

- What:** Whenever possible, take a few minutes to sit quietly with your student. Allow the child to be quiet in your presence.
Why: This helps build trust.
- What:** Use non-directive or open-ended questions. Instead of “Why are you so quiet?” try “You’ve been very quiet lately. Would you like to tell me if something’s bothering you?” or “I get the feeling something’s wrong. Would you like to talk about it?”
Why: This approach gives the child the option to share and doesn’t exert pressure on him/her.
- What:** Don’t expect an answer immediately. It may take some time. Let the child know you are willing to listen when he or she is ready to talk.
Why: Giving a child time to respond shows you respect the child and are willing to be patient.
- What:** Take an indirect approach. Ask about a new book or compliment a hairstyle to get a conversation going.
Why: Talking about “nothing” can lead to talking about “something.”
- What:** Understand that silence may seem like defiance or stubbornness but it can also signify fear or uncertainty. Give children space in class to express themselves (as long as it’s appropriate and not disturbing other students) and follow up afterwards if the silence seems unusual.
Why: By not assuming that the child is being resistant or stubborn, you provide a safe opening for the child to share his/her fears and thoughts without fear of reprisal or reprimand.