

RELATE

Relate: Help me know that you are with me, not against me.

The Expert's Chair

Communicate that the student's knowledge of their own life matters.

WHAT IT IS

When a student comes into your office or counseling space, intentionally give them the more comfortable or prominent chair - perhaps even your own chair. Tell them that because the conversation is about their life, they are the expert on the subject. Then take the other chair yourself.

"Nobody in this room knows more about being you than you do. You are the expert on your life, so I want you to sit in the expert's chair."

The chair itself is not the strategy. The strategy is intentionally giving up a small symbol of status or privilege to communicate the student's importance.

WHY IT WORKS

Many students who are struggling spend much of their day in the one-down position. Adults decide where they sit, what they need to do, what they did wrong, and what happens next. This simple reversal changes the opening experience. Instead of beginning with "I am the adult with the answers," it begins with "You possess knowledge I need if I am going to understand and help you."

WHAT IT COMMUNICATES

"You matter here. You know things about your life that I do not know, and I want to learn from you."

TRY THIS LANGUAGE

"Nobody knows more about being you than you do. You are the expert on your life, so I want you to sit in the expert's chair."

KEY MOVE

Give up a small symbol of status to make room for student voice and expertise.