

Strengthening **Teacher–Student Relationships**

The Foundation for **Attendance, Behavior, and Engagement**

Research consistently shows that strong teacher–student relationships are one of the most powerful factors influencing student success. Students who feel connected to caring adults at school are more likely to:

- Attend school consistently
- Stay engaged in learning
- Demonstrate positive behavior
- Persist through challenges



Building these connections intentionally can transform both student outcomes and school culture.

Why **Relationships Matter**

Many students who struggle in school feel they are constantly being **corrected, judged, or misunderstood.**

When students feel they are always “in trouble,” they may **begin to withdraw** from school entirely.

Strong relationships communicate a different message:

- **You matter.**
- **You are capable.**
- **Your future is important.**

This sense of belonging can be a powerful motivator for students who might otherwise disengage.



This approach helps students feel respected while still maintaining clear expectations.

Moving Beyond **the “Power Struggle”**

One important relationship-building concept used in the WhyTry approach is called “Surrendering the One-Up Relationship.” Rather than relying on authority alone, educators intentionally build trust by:

- **Listening to students’ perspectives**
- **Showing empathy during challenges**
- **Offering guidance rather than control**
- **Helping students take ownership of their choices**

The Impact of Strong Relationships

Research shows that positive teacher–student relationships are associated with improvements in:

- Academic engagement
- School attendance
- Grades and academic performance
- Student behavior
- School climate



When students trust the adults around them, they are far more willing to accept guidance and stay connected to school.



Building a **Culture of Connection**

School leaders play an important role in helping staff build stronger relationships with students. Practical strategies can include:

- Trauma or instability at home
- Negative peer influence
- Low self-confidence
- Academic frustration
- Disconnection from school

These efforts help create a school culture where students feel supported and motivated.

See It **In Action**

Tulare County Office of Education is implementing resilience-based strategies that help educators strengthen relationships with students and improve school engagement. Attend their session ***“Reengaging Students Through Resilience: How Tulare County Is Improving Attendance, Behavior, and School Connection,”*** at this conference to learn more about how these strategies are being used in real schools.

Get Our **Staff Culture & Relationship Toolkit**

Scan the QR code to receive free resources including:

- Relationship-building strategies educators can implement immediately
- Activities that help students feel valued and connected
- Ideas for improving school culture and engagement
- Tools for supporting educators and reducing burnout



Scan the QR code to access the toolkit and **enter our conference drawing**. You'll also be entered to **win a WhyTry Curriculum Pilot and Training** for your school or district.