

# The Key to Building Relationships

## Surrendering the One-Up



***Surrendering the one up relationship is the key to motivating the difficult to reach student. It involves the following:***

- *Constantly and unconditionally communicating to the student that they have value and worth, regardless of their successes, failures or behaviors.*
- *Creating greater equity in the relationship between the educator and student.*
- *Acknowledging students as the expert in their own lives.*

The key to creating change doesn't lie in interventions alone, but much more so in the relationship you establish with students. One major barrier to facilitating a motivational and supportive relationship with students is the presence of a "one-up" relationship.

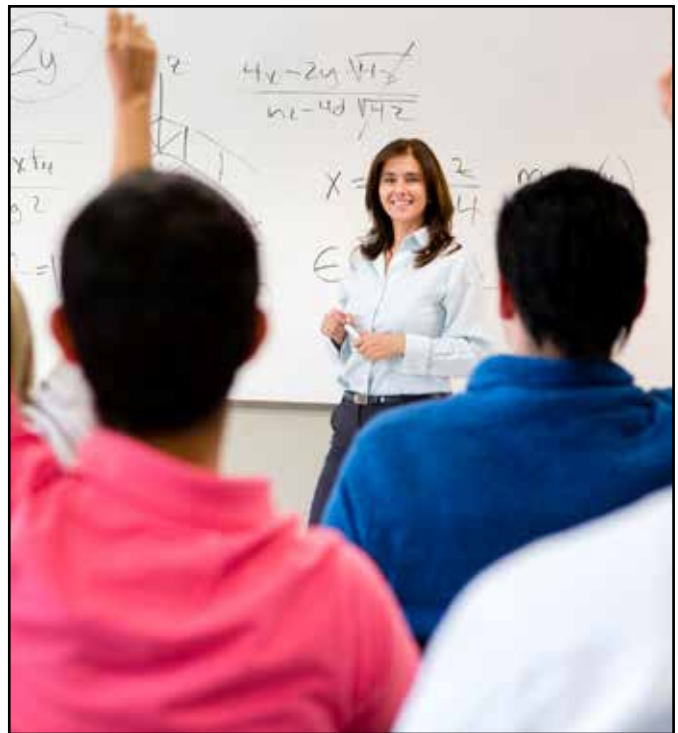
What is the "one-up" relationship? "One-up" relationships can exist anywhere. They often are representative of some sort of power dynamic or difference in authority. Sometimes one-up relationships can be the result of one person being considered (or considering themselves) an expert on a topic while the other person may be considered more of a novice. It can also be the result of a difference in age, experience, research, etc. One-up relationships are often the result of one person in the relationship having a title that indicates authority. For example a boss with a subordinate employee in a work setting or a teacher with a student in a classroom setting. One-up relationships will often result in at least one of the people feeling that they have less value within the relationship than the other and it can occur without the individuals even realizing it!

For students, they often find themselves "one-down" in relationships with adults who have control in their lives. Consider how much control adults have over students when they attend school. Students enter into a



building filled and managed by adults. Students enter into our classrooms and our offices. Often others decide what they should learn and how they should learn it. Adults, in many cases, determine so much of what happens to them in education. It adds to the one-up dynamic that is already there because of age, experience, title, and more. Furthermore, students bring their own trauma, emotional struggles, and challenges which contribute to their perception of being less than others.

Often, when a student sees an adult as “one-up” (or in control) of the relationship, then they feel unimportant, or that what they want or think doesn’t matter. Students feel that their ability to act for themselves is taken away. As a result, they have little motivation to make a change and are less likely to establish a trusting relationship with that person.



When you as a counselor, teacher or administrator surrender the “one-up” relationship, you are showing to students that they have value and worth as human beings. You show them that what they think is important. Your focus is less about your role as the authority figure and more about your students. You help them to see that they are the authority on themselves. You let them know that you believe in them and their potential.



Key Words:

**One Up Relationship:** Any relationship or situation in which the student feels they have less value or importance than the other person or perceive they have less value in the eyes of that adult compared to other students. Often as educators our title or position can communicate an imbalance of value in the relationship, despite how we may actually feel about the student.

**Surrender:** Surrendering does not mean eliminating rules, boundaries, expectations or accountability. It does mean to surrender a part of our will in favor of giving students’ voice and choice, being vulnerable with students, and making their wellbeing our focus.





# Surrendering the One Up Activities and Strategies for Educators

Surrendering the One Up Relationship is a set of specific strategies and activities that help educators build authentic, unconditional relationships that help all students feel understood, valued, and safe. When done effectively, Surrendering the One Up Relationship is the X-factor for motivating all student to action and seeing their potential.

Most strategies and activities we use to Surrender the One Up fall into three categories.

1. Strategies that help us create **student connection**.
2. Strategies that facilitate **student empowerment**.
3. Strategies that are **student centered**.

We have organized this list into these three categories and recommend you find strategies and activities from all three categories to implement into your practice.

## Student Connection

**I know your name:** One of the most simple yet effective strategies. Greet each student as they enter or leave your class by name. Shake their hand or give them a high-five. Use their names as you see them in the hall. Find opportunities to talk with them and every time--use their name.

**Two Truths and a Lie:** Share two true stories about yourself and one false one. You can use pictures or just explain them. Have the class try and guess which one is false. Go into more details about each story after they guess and find out the answer.

**Music Playlist:** Create a class playlist of songs that your students submit. This can just be fun upbeat music that they choose or if you want to increase relevance you can even ask them for music that has

deeper meaning or has influenced them in some way.

**We Decide the Warm Up:** Start the day with a warm up activity. The activity doesn't have to have a purpose other than to have fun with each other. This can be a simple game you play every day for 5 - 10 minutes. This can be a mindfulness activity or a song you listen to. Choose something different on a regular basis and then allow your students to decide how you will start the day.

**Story of my Life:** Invite students to think of the title of a book about their life. What would that title be? Why? Always be prepared to share your own first. You could even invite students to create the cover of that book artistically.

**You Complete Me:** Have several heart shapes cut out from paper. Each heart has a unique design on it. Cut each heart in half and randomly distribute the halves to the students. Students then have to go throughout the room looking at all the other students heart until they find the other half of the one they have with matching design. Once they find the other half of their heart they ask each other some preassigned get to know you questions.

**Dress It Up:** Dress up for the class. You can either dress up very professionally or classy. You can also dress up from a time period, persona, or theme.

**Getting to Know You:** Spotlight a student at the beginning of class for a few minutes. You can share success, interests, passions, dreams, etc.

**Advise Me:** If there is a situation in your life that would be appropriate or fun for your students to give you advice on... give them the opportunity. Tell them you need help deciding something. Maybe its what breed of pet to get or what to name a child. Maybe its where to take one of your children for their birthday or what present to give your significant other.

**I'm Not Perfect:** Find opportunities to share mistakes you make. Openly share the feelings and emotions you have as hard things happen or as you stumble and fall. It is important for students to see they are not alone in the feelings and experiences they have.

**I Owe You:** Anytime you make even a simple mistake with a student like mispronouncing a name or calling a student by the wrong name (because sometimes we get old and forget), respond by saying... Oh I'm so sorry. I owe you a candy bar. Then bring them a candy bar.

**My Business Card:** Give each of your students a business card you design that says... I'm here for you. Put your name. Email. Office hours. It's a reminder they carry with them that you are there!

**Have I Got Something for You:** Give students a personal token or gift. It can be a positive quote or object that serves as a reminder of some idea that you have been teaching them.

**Show and Tell:** Share personal stories and information about yourself through objects or pictures so that students can know you and feel you are approachable. Give students an opportunity as well.

**Service Project / Giving Back:** Have the class come together for a service project of some kind. The project should be focused on supporting and building up the community. As the instructor or teacher, take this opportunity to work closely alongside the students.



**Check In Forms:** Create Google Check in Forms with student check in questions that you have them fill out from time to time. **Personalized Wallet:** Help students create an origami wallet: <https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/origami-wallet>. Then have them draw a self a picture or representation of themselves or write some positive characteristics of themselves on the wallet. Use this as a way to learn more about the students.

**Listening for Meaning:** Select a song that is appropriate for your classroom or office (preferably a song that the students haven't heard before). Listen to the song together with the intent of listening to the lyrics and describing what they mean to you. Then let the student pick a song that they like and listen to it together. Describe what the lyrics mean to you and then what the student thinks they mean to them.

**Always Aware:** Pay attention to your students. Specifically take note of new things they wear or bring to class. Ask about them or compliment them. The fact that you are aware and notice those differences will demonstrate you care as well as give you something to talk about in the future.

**I Will If You Will:** Set a class goal regarding something your class would like to work toward... (assignment completion, attendance, service to others, etc). If the class reaches the goal, be willing to do something embarrassing or out of the ordinary as the reward. Perhaps you'd dress up like a character, be hit with water balloons, taped to the wall, eat a smoothie of strange ingredients, etc.

## Student Empowerment

**You Give the Grade:** Allow students the opportunity on an assignment to grade themselves. You may want to tell them what criteria you would use for grading, but ultimately they get to decide.

**You're the Leader:** Allow students the opportunity to lead in different situations during the class. Examples include starting class, running an activity, teaching something, doing projects, etc.

**You've Got the Blues:** Tell the class that you realize that life can be challenging at home, school, or with peers. Because of that, you will give them a specific number of BLUE cards they can cash in at any time for dropping an assignment or a quiz, getting extended time on a test or larger assignment, etc.

**Classroom Design Theme:** Put your students into groups and let them come up with a theme and blueprint for decoration and design for your classroom or office. Use some of their elements so that the students feel like they have ideas represented in the overall design of the classroom decor or even your door to your room or office.

**Passion Presenter:** When you have learned about your students, bring in an outside presenter that is either a professional or expert on one of the interests and hobbies of your students. The guest can do a presentation that can be informative or fun for the students and hopefully build