

Teach 4 the Heart Podcast Transcript

Episode 337—The Best Way to Handle Student Arguing

Linda Kardamis (00:01.326)

Student arguing can be so frustrating and discouraging for teachers, but we don't have to be frustrated and discouraged by this. Let's dive into exactly what we can do and also how we should process student arguing. Well, welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. Why are we here? Because we don't believe that our spiritual walk and teaching profession should exist in two separate domains. Rather, the hope we have in Christ should change how we approach everything, not just at home, but at school as well.

So join us as we explore both the spiritual and practical sides of key teaching challenges, integrating them together so we can succeed at teaching, glorify God, and make a lasting difference in our students' hearts and lives. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation.

I don't have to tell you that students arguing can be really frustrating. It can also be really discouraging, right? I mean, you kind of have these two aspects about it. One is it's causing this chaos in the classroom.

And then the other side, can be really devastating to us as teachers and be really hard to deal with personally. So what I wanna do today is kind of tackle it on both fronts. I wanna start by talking about how should we as teachers deal with arguing on the inside? Meaning how should we process it when our students are arguing with us? What should our heart attitude be? And what kind of mindsets and attitudes should we bring to the table when students are arguing with us?

And then after we talk about that, then I'm gonna go and talk about the outside, meaning how do we actually respond when students are arguing and give a few really practical suggestions in that regard. Okay, so first we're gonna kind of dive into our hearts and then we'll get really practical once we've done that heart work at the beginning. So let's start with the inside, okay? What is going on on the inside in our own hearts and our minds when a student argues with us? Well, I don't know about you, but there's a lot.

few different things that can happen that actually are not that great and actually make it more difficult to handle. One thing is that we might find ourselves taking it really personally and feeling really upset or hurt that a student is arguing with us. And that is

understandable, but it's also that that's not really good. It really, it really makes it difficult to handle the situation because we're upset and we're hurt.

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Another thing that might happen is we might find ourselves getting defensive and that might come out in a few different ways. Depending on your personality, when you get defensive at arguing, that might cause you to feel like you need to fight back and kind of really argue back and get really in an argument with a student. Or, this is more what happens with my personality, you feel like I need to explain. I remember myself, especially my first year of teaching,

I had these sixth graders, I was teaching middle school, so sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and I'd have these sixth graders that would always argue with me about like, know, so and so shouldn't have, they should have gotten in trouble, I shouldn't have gotten in trouble, why are we doing this, why are we doing that? And for some reason I felt like, I need to explain everything to them. And so I would, like, it was becoming a habit almost every day, I would let them stay after class and like tell me why, you know, they didn't like what I was doing and I would try to explain to them why I was, it was ludicrous.

But once again, was that kind of that need to be like, I need to defend or I need to explain to these kids why I'm doing what I'm doing. And then that was not that was not the case. That was not a good way to handle it. As I said, we might find ourselves getting an argument. We might feel really frustrated or defeated after arguments. So these are all things that like are not the way we want to handle it. So how what should we do? What should we do when arguing kind of strikes at our core?

Because that's what can happen on the inside. It can feel like the arguing almost threatens us with not just the question of, what do I do in the moment? But also like it's almost getting at the core of our being. It's leaving us feeling really frustrated or discouraged. So let's talk about our mindset and how we do want to approach it when students are arguing and honestly all the time. So first I think we need to develop a confidence

in the role and authority that God has given us. So in other words, you are a teacher in a classroom, God has placed you there, and you are the authority in that classroom. Okay, now, authority is not a popular word these days, especially in our culture, but it is a biblical concept. I think of Romans 13, one. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

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Now the context of this verse is clearly talking about governmental authorities. However, this principle applies beyond just that immediate application. Notice that Paul says, there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. In other words, we see all throughout scripture, once again, it's counter-cultural these days, but the principle of authority, God has put authority into lives. And as a teacher, you are an authority over those students.

Now you might be thinking, okay Linda, so what does that have to do with arguing though? Does that mean I need to defend my authority? Actually, I'm gonna say almost the opposite in that. Sometimes when students are arguing, we feel that our authority is being threatened. And what I wanna encourage you with is to realize that your authority cannot be threatened because it is God given. Because your authority doesn't come from your students or even from your principal, it comes from God who's placed you in that classroom.

Nothing can threaten that authority. Now, I'm not saying we don't need to deal with all these issues. We absolutely do and we'll get to that. But that confidence in our soul, that no matter how rudely my students are arguing with me, that actually doesn't threaten my authority. My authority is firm and fixed because it comes from God. That confidence is just that recognition that like this arguing doesn't actually threaten it. I need to be confident in the authority I have and then act.

in compassion out of that authority. I hope that's making sense. This confidence should allow us to interact with our students from a place of loving and caring authority that's not threatened, but instead desires to help them learn how to properly relate to authority. In other words, our response is not about us and needing to defend my authority. It's about

the students and teaching them how they should relate to authority. And that really does change it because it takes it from being a defensive, I'm fighting for me, and to I'm confident in the authority God has given me and now I'm interacting for your benefit, which is what authority should be, right? Authority should be for the benefit of those that are under them, not because I'm threatened and I need to hold on to my authority.

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Okay, there's a lot more that we could dig into there, but I hope that that gives you some things to think about. Maybe encourage you to talk that over with a friend or hop in our Facebook group and we can dive into it deeper there, but that concept of being confident in our authority. Number two, confident in our worth and identity in Christ. So similar to the idea of being confident in our authority where arguing shouldn't threaten our authority, arguing also shouldn't threaten our worth. Our worth and our identity

does not come from what students think of us, does not come from how they treat us. Our worth and our identity and all of that comes from Christ. We talked about this recently, but I'm gonna say it again because it's so important. In Christ, who are we? Well, we are God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, Colossians 3.12. We are members of God's household, Ephesians 2.19. We are declared righteous. We are citizens of heaven, Philippians 3.20.

We are accepted and brought near. We are God's children. We are free from sin. We are servants of God. We are His ambassadors. We'll link to this list along with the references that go with it if you want to dive deeper into those. But recognizing this is who I am regardless of how my students treat me. That means if my students are arguing with me or even treating me horribly, that doesn't affect my worth as an individual before God.

Okay, so we have to, if you're finding that when we are confident in who God says we are, that helps us have a little bit thicker skin and not be so hurt as easily, do not get defensive as easily. And is this just like a one time, like, I know my identity is in Christ, now I won't feel hurt anymore. Absolutely not. This is something where the more we meditate on it, the more the truth sink into our heart.

But often in the moment when we find ourselves feeling really hurt, we have to remind ourselves these things. We have to build ourselves back up on the truth so that we can rest confident and say, no, I'm not threatened by this arguing. My authority isn't threatened. My worth isn't threatened by my students arguing with me. And I don't have to be defensive. And I don't have to be upset. I can be confident in who I am and then interact with them out of that love.

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out of that confidence. So once again, when we're confident of who we are in Christ, it helps us to not get caught up in being defensive or hurt personally. But instead realizing, hey, these kids or these teens, they're struggling. They need to learn. They have a lot to learn. And I can show them Christ and be concerned with their well-being and less about me and how I'm being treated.

So number one, confident in the role and authority God has given us. Number two, confident in our worth and identity in Christ. And then number three, confident in our calling to love and teach them. So we are called to love our students, to teach our students, and that includes teaching them not just subject matter, but also how to properly respond and relate to their classmates and to us as their teacher. So I wanna be clear, when I'm saying we don't need to be threatened by how our students treat us,

That's true, we shouldn't let that affect us, but I'm not saying that means that we let our students treat us horribly and we do nothing about it, because that would not be loving and caring to them, right? What they need is to someone to teach them what is right

and wrong. How is the proper way to interact with peers? What is the proper way to interact with authority? Okay, but once again, do you see the difference between...

interacting with our students because I got to defend myself and my authority is threatened and it's kind of about me versus no, I'm confident in who God has made me and who I am in him. And so I'm interacting with my student for their benefit to teach them how they need to relate to authority. It's totally different and totally reframes the way we handle it and it guards our hearts and also helps us be more effective in our interactions with our students.

So I hope that's starting to make a little bit of sense. And once again, this isn't something that's just click. Everything is great now. It takes time meditating on these truths, reminding ourselves about them, talking about them with friends and colleagues. And you're welcome. Like I said, hop on over to our Facebook group, talk about it there. You can join us at [teachfortheheart.com slash Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/teachfortheheart). So we've talked a lot about our inside, right? How do we think about this on the inside? We need to be confident in the role and authority God has given us.

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confident of our worth and identity in Christ, confident in our calling to love and teach our students. And I will say before we move to the outside and what to do practically, I want to just invite any of you that are saying, Linda, wow, you're sharing a lot here, but I need to dive deeper into that. I need some help. How do I feel confident in Christ? I easily get upset. I easily feel defeated.

I want to invite you to join us in Hope Renewed, which is just our brand new program that we've been working on and developing. And we're so excited to have it ready for you guys now. And it is all about how to have that confidence, how to have hope in Christ, how to take our struggles to him. And I think you'll really find it helpful. So you can get more info about that at [teachfortheheart.com slash hope renewed](https://www.teachfortheheart.com/slash/hope-renewed).

So that's all about the inside. Now, what about the outside? So how do we actually handle it on the outside when students argue? So a couple practical notes. First of all, you do not have to argue. So remember how I said I found myself arguing with those sixth grade boys every day after class? I did not need to do that. I did not need to explain to them everything I was doing. Once again, this goes back to that attitude, Like I was letting them...

question that authority over and over and over. I didn't owe them an explanation. I didn't need them to trust, to believe I was doing everything right. So we don't have to argue. We don't have to explain ourselves. Sometimes students benefit from an explanation, but a lot of times they don't. A lot of times they're just stirring up trouble.

They're just complaining and they don't always need an explanation. And also I will say it takes two to argue. If one person is arguing, but you refuse to argue back,

The argument cannot continue. So I just love Love and Logic's advice on this, which is just to use a pocket phrase, which are phrases we can kind of pull out of our pockets. We like to call them here at Teach for the Heart. And to say something like, I care about you too much to argue. Restate whatever the expectation is or whatever's happening and turn around and walk away. So for example, a student comes to you and goes, you know, Mrs. Cardemus.

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I know I was supposed to do my homework, but I got home late from the game and I was tired and I didn't do it. Can I please have more time?" And you say, know, hey, Joe, I care about you too much to argue. I give full credit to work that's turned in on time, but I look forward to giving you partial credit when you turn it in tomorrow. Turn around, walk away, conversation is done. And if they keep arguing, you just restate it. You just restate the same thing again. And once again, walking away, just basically not engaging in it.

So I encourage you to try that out. Try out that pocket phrase, I care about you too much to argue, and just moving away and realizing that we don't have to argue with our students when they're doing that. Now one piece that makes this work though, this is very important, is having clear expectations and reinforcing them consistently. Because if we don't have clear expectations for our students,

that's going to actually evoke more arguing because they're not going to understand, they're not going to know where the line is. So it is very important to have clear expectations, to hold students accountable, to kind of hold that line because that makes it so much easier not to argue with them. Because if the line is really unclear and they don't know where it is, that is going to invite more arguments and more confusion from your students. And it's going to be harder to just say, this is the expectation and walk away because the expectations are so inconsistent.

So if you are struggling with that, with having clear expectations, with knowing how to keep that line and to hold it consistently, I would invite you to take our free training on how to reduce disruptions at teachfortheheart.com slash free, or jump right to our all-in-one solution where we help you put together a plan to clarify expectations and hold that line and know how to respond in different situations with your students.

You can join us in Classroom Management 101 and you can get those details at teachfortheheart.com slash cm101. So number one, you don't have to argue. Use that pocket phrase. I care about you too much to argue and just move on, especially when you know a student is just complaining and they really, you know, no, I just need to

stick to my guns in this one. To balance that out though, my second piece of advice is this. Sometimes we need to listen, okay?

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In other words, there's a lot of times when students are arguing where they're just arguing because they're complaining, because they don't like it, and we just need to hold the line and we don't need to give it a lot of time. We just need to move on. But there are other times when students have a genuine concern and we actually need to listen to them. And we'd need to give them space to come talk to us respectfully. And let me start here with a tip. One way to kind of distinguish between...

Is this a genuine concern that a student has that's bothering them that they don't feel is fair and we need to talk this through and this is just arguing and complaining is to ask a student to come talk to you on their own time. So if you say, back and talk to me at lunch or at recess or after school, then if they're just complaining, they're probably not gonna make that effort to do it. If they have a genuine concern, then they will.

So you might say something like, you might adapt if you're kind of like, this might be something that I need to talk about. You might adapt your pocket phrase to say, I care about you too much to argue, but I'm always happy to listen to concerns when you share them respectfully. Let me know if you want to come have a respectful conversation at lunch. Okay. So that says, I'm not going to argue with you, but if you want to talk about this respectfully, I will listen to you.

And then when that happens, if a student does do that, it is important to listen. To listen and try to understand, even if what they're saying feels super unfair and like bizarre, to really try to understand where are they coming from. If they made the effort to come talk to you, there is a concern there in their heart. So trying to understand why are they upset? Is there any validity to it?

And maybe even if it's not that you would change what you're doing, but is there like an underlying concern that I need to address? Is there a fear there? Is there a misunderstanding? Is there something that they're worried about that I could address? Because when we listen and we really understand where our students are coming from, where their heart is, then a couple of different things could happen. Sometimes we might actually change what we were going to do. We might change something. We might change a policy or how we're going to handle it now that we understand it.

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That's one possibility. The other possibility, though, is no, we need to stick to our guns. But since we now understand the student's fear or their concern or what they're thinking, then when we go back to them and explain, this is what we're going to do, we can do that. We can address their actual concern and their actual fear.

So it might seem that these two pieces of advice I gave are in contrast to each other. Don't argue, you don't owe them an explanation and listen and care for them. But I really believe they go well together and it really is a matter of reading the situation, right? There are many times when students simply are complaining, they're just arguing for the sake of arguing, for the sake of causing chaos or just complaining. And then there are genuine concerns. So learning to distinguish between them, like I said, asking them to come talk to you later is a great way to do that. And then making sure that

Another great pocket phrase is, listen when you talk respectfully. That's another great phrase to help students recognize, hey, you can bring genuine concerns to me, but they should be brought respectfully. And arguing and being rude is not respectful. Wow, there's probably so much more we could say on this topic, but I hope this is giving you some good tools to deal with arguing. And once again, if you feel like you want more help diving into the inside and into your own heart and how to process it,

Love to have you in Hope Renewed, teach4theheart.com/hoperenewed. If you'd like more help, how do I deal with the practical classroom management and actually handling all of these situations and keeping that line clear, we would love to have you in Classroom Management 101, teach4theheart.com/cm101. Or you can start with our free training, how to reduce disruption so you can actually teach, that's at teachfortheheart.com/slash-free. All the notes and the links from this episode you can get at teachfortheheart.com/slash-three.

And we will have everything over there. Well, thank you guys so much for being with us. If you've enjoyed this episode, we would love for you to share it, subscribe, leave a review, all those things help more teachers find this podcast and are just a great blessing to us as well. Well, thank you guys so much. This episode has been brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own.

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and don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. I look forward to speaking with you again soon. In the meantime, teach you remember God is at work in you and through you, and he's using you to make a difference. Keep your eyes on him and teach for the heart.